

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 79 Autumn 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chair's Report	<u>2</u>
Can you Spare a Few Hours?	<u>3</u>
Obituary	<u>5</u>
Adonis Blue at Therfield Heath	<u>6</u>
Greenwood Park Update	<u>8</u>
Big City Butterflies Update.....	<u>10</u>
View from Afar (Part 2).....	<u>11</u>
Field Events Overview.....	<u>12</u>
2019 - A Painted Lady Year	<u>19</u>
Distinguishing Between the Blues	<u>21</u>
Branch e-links	<u>23</u>
Contact Details.....	<u>24</u>



Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

Early indications are that this summer has been quite a good one for butterflies. Numbers of many species seemed to be up. Painted Ladies and Red Admirals did particularly well and were seen in many locations, though perhaps not as numerous as other parts of England.

The 39 species recorded this year so far include Camberwell Beauty, Brown Hairstreak and Adonis Blue. I was thrilled to see an adult Brown Hairstreak in our Branch area for the first time when I visited Ickenham, Middx in August (see [page 18](#)). Seeing Adonis Blue at Therfield Heath was also an exciting first, but tarnished somewhat by the realisation that this is likely to have been an undocumented release, which probably won't result in a long term population. A report on the Adonis Blue sightings and comments from BC Head Office appears on [page 6](#).

Work on our two main projects has really taken off during the last six months. There's been a big increase in our activity in London, thanks to the first phase of our Big City Butterflies project, run jointly with the three other BC branches in London and BC head office, with funding from Heritage Lottery Fund. May Webber our Project Development Officer reports on activities and the next steps to grow the project to fruition on [page 10](#).

Our Small Blue Project has also progressed well with the construction of the new chalk bank in Greenwood Park, St Albans completed in the Spring. Wildflowers have begun to grow and more seeding and planting is planned throughout the autumn. See [page 8](#) for more details.

I always enjoy following the progress of the butterfly year through the sightings page of the Branch Website. News of every new species emergence is posted the same day, often accompanied by great photos sent in by branch members. I'm grateful to Peter Clarke who dedicates his time to running the page and to everyone who takes the time to send in their reports. This year there have been reports of most of our butterfly walks and moth events plus the addition of a news page covering all the local butterfly news.

I also took to Twitter and found many more interesting reports and comments from around the UK and beyond. You can follow the branch account at https://twitter.com/Bc_HertsMiddx and also link to other wildlife groups, BC branches and individuals for videos, photos and news. If you've not tried it before why not give it a go? It's easy to get

started, just search for <https://twitter.com/home>

Date for the diary:

Next year's **Members' Day**, which will incorporate the AGM, will be held on **Saturday 28th March, 2020**. The venue will again be the Civic Centre in Old Welwyn.

Full details of the day's programme will be circulated closer to the event, but will include the usual mix of lively informative talks, the keenly-contested photographic competition and the opportunity to meet fellow members and the Branch committee.

Can you Spare a Few Hours to Help ?

Our Branch continues to step up efforts to conserve butterflies and moths. As well as two major projects (Big City Butterflies and Small Blue), we are just completing our five year survey of butterflies as part of the Butterflies for the New Millennium project in the two counties and much more. If you could spare even a few hours to help with any of the tasks below, please do get in touch. Previous experience is not essential; we will provide any training needed. Contact details are all on the back page of the newsletter.

Publicity Contact – Liz Goodyear	We need a press officer who can help draft and distribute news and event info to the press and social media. We don't yet have an Instagram account and would like to get one started.
Practical Conservation Contact – Paula Reid	Join our monthly work parties at our own butterfly nature reserve at Millhoppers Pasture, near Tring. More help is always appreciated with managing hedges, cutting grass, clearing streams and much more.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Events Contact – Malcolm Hull	Our publicity stall is a great way of sharing information and gain support by attending events - usually in the Spring and Summer. We currently get to 3 or 4 events each year but with extra volunteers on the stall and organising behind the scenes we could do more. Can you help with an event in your area? Examples of events we'd like to attend next year are the Rickmansworth Festival in May and the Herts and Middlesex Festival of Wildlife at Panshanger Park near Hertford in July. And maybe somewhere near you?
Big City Butterflies Contact – May Webber	May Webber needs help identifying suitable project sites and to have support at events.
Four spotted moth project Contact – John Murray	We need volunteers to help record and conserve our rarest moth species in 2020.
Health and Safety Officer Contact – Malcolm Hull	We currently have a vacancy for this role. It involves providing guidance to help us keep safe while helping butterflies and collecting information for records
Joining the Committee Contact – Malcolm Hull	This involves attending around five evening meetings a year, contributing ideas and helping to run the branch. Potential new members are welcome to join for a trial period to find out more about what is involved.

<p>Recording Contact – Andrew Wood</p>	<p>In Hertfordshire, we are still keen to re-establish the transect at Wood Lane, Pirton and some help is requested with 5 butterfly transects in the London Boroughs of Harrow and Hillingdon, namely Gutteridge Wood, Lake Farm, Minet Country Park, Roxbourne Rough and Belmont Railway. Volunteers for the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey squares of TQ1492 and TQ1593 in Harrow Weald and Bentley Priory/Stanmore Common will be needed next year. 2020 is the start of the new five year recording period of the Butterflies for the New Millennium project, so we shan't be setting any specific targets but would like to encourage all recorders to visit as many sites as possible to get the mapping process started!</p>
<p>Big Butterfly Count Contact Malcolm Hull</p>	<p>Butterfly Conservation's most high profile event of the year usually held in July, with over 110,000 people participating in 2019. We need help publicising it, distributing leaflets, telling your family/friends and of course, taking part.</p>

If you have any additional skills not mentioned on this list and would like to help the Branch – please contact Malcolm Hull!!

Richard Bigg, by Liz Goodyear

We are sad to report the death of Richard Bigg, a long standing member of Butterfly Conservation, on 26th June 2019 after a short illness. I first met Richard in the early 2000s when our branch formed a Conservation Sub Committee and he was one of its first committee members. At the time Richard was living in Hertford and his interest in butterflies and conservation led him to set up the Waterford Heath North transect in 2000. He also volunteered to be the species co-

ordinator for the Wall butterfly which at the time was on the verge of extinction in our branch area. Despite the lack of sightings being reported he still took on the job with determination and continued in the role for several years even after he moved away.

In 2006 he moved to Essex to be nearer his family - this was certainly Cambridgeshire & Essex Branch's gain as he quickly volunteered to walk a transect there and became the Essex Conservation Officer for the Branch. He loved the success of the Heath Fritillary Project in Essex which he supported in every way he could. Essex Butterfly Recorder, Rob Smith said "To see Richard, into his eighties, working on the steep slopes of Devil's Dyke a few years ago was quite remarkable and I know that he was still moth-trapping until very recently."

Butterfly Conservation has lost a very dedicated member and our condolences go out to his family.

Adonis Blue Sightings at Therfield Heath, Royston by Malcolm Hull and Andrew Wood

On August 20th, Ian Watts and his daughter, Isabel, age 11 visited Church Hill at Therfield Heath looking for Chalk-hill Blues. "It looked quite different" said Ian "I thought maybe it was an aberration of Chalk-hill or Common Blue. It was very fresh and the black lines crossing the white border were very clear." After a few minutes it flew off, though Isabel managed to find it again and Ian took a photo. On that day Ian and Isabel saw just a single male, but subsequent reports included both males and females with a maximum total of 28 reported. Numbers appear to have peaked by the end of August and by 8th September Martin Johnson reported a minimum of 6 females and 1 male. Breeding behaviour was seen and photographed, but not egg laying.

These records are surprising, as this species has been absent from Herts since 1959. This site is one of the most intensively recorded in Hertfordshire with a weekly transect having been walked in almost every year since 1988 and there have never been any records of Adonis Blue in this time. The nearest established colony is 50 miles away along

the Chiltern ridge in Bucks. It seems unlikely that the butterfly could have reached this location on its own. Branch recorders in neighbouring counties had received no reports of Adonis Blues spreading in our direction. It seems most likely that this is an undocumented release.



Male Adonis Blue at Therfield
Photo © Colin Alderman

The progressive emergence of such a significant number of

Adonis Blues suggests that the release was carried out by releasing pupae, rather than adult butterflies. Releases usually have only a low possibility of developing into viable long term populations. We contacted Dan Hoare Director of UK Conservation at Butterfly Conservation

“Maintaining suitable habitat on a big enough scale to support viable populations of Adonis Blue and other habitat specialists is a challenge under any circumstances. Butterfly Conservation supports reintroductions in some cases in line with our policy (available from our website), but they are not a quick fix. Understanding why a species was lost initially, and being confident a site or landscape is now suitable and can be maintained into the future, is vital. In this instance neither the landowner or Natural England were consulted ahead of the apparent release, and that is rarely a recipe for success. We also don’t know where the butterflies were sourced from, as that can have a negative impact on the source population.”

Church Hill is chalk downland site, managed using sheep grazing and rich in Horseshoe Vetch, the larval foodplant for the Adonis Blue. Superficially, the habitat appears suitable, although the Adonis Blue lifecycle is closely associated with ant species and we don’t know if these are present. However the Adonis Blue got there, the site will be

keenly monitored next May when a Spring brood might emerge. Long term, the prospects of its survival at this site aren't good, due to the remoteness from other Adonis Blue colonies.

It would be useful for us to have more information about the circumstances surrounding the suspected release. If anyone knows more about it, please contact either of us, any information provided will be treated in complete confidence.

Greenwood Park Update, by Malcolm Hull

This Spring we successfully completed the construction of new Small Blue habitat close to the former Butterfly World site in Chiswell Green, St Albans.

Photos of the construction are on the new section of our website at https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/GreenwoodPark_31May2019.pdf

In the Spring we planted Birds-foot Trefoil and seeded part of the bank with Kidney Vetch. More planting and seeding is planned for the autumn.

Over the summer, children from the nearby Killigrew School visited the site to plant Kidney Vetch plants which they had grown from seeds. Mandy Floyd and I were able to show them some of the butterflies which were flying in the park. The School had run a butterfly poster competition and the top ten winning entries are now on display at the site. We had excellent press coverage in the local St Albans newspapers and were able to show the site to those who attended our New Members Day.

It will take a few years until the vegetation matures and we are hopeful that the local population of Small Blues will find their way to the site. There have been several sightings around the village. Dr Phil Sterling, BC's Building Sites for Butterflies project officer and I saw the first Herts Small Blue on 30th April – possibly the earliest date for a siting of this species in our area. Professor Chris Thomas, President of the Royal Entomological Society also reported a siting from their garden.

The Branch are still on the lookout for more sites suitable for encouraging the spread of Small Blues. Do get in touch with me if you

think of somewhere suitable, or if you'd like to help with Greenwood Park or other projects. Many thanks to everyone who has volunteered to help so far, particularly Mandy Floyd who has organised the plants and seeds, liaised with the School and walked the new transect, also Emily Bagnall who has designed the permanent display boards which we plan to erect in the autumn. Drafts of these excellent designs can be seen on the branch website at

https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/SmallBlueDisplayBoards_GreenwoodPark.pdf

Thanks also to the site owners, St Stephen Parish Council who have been supportive throughout the project, the Heritage Lottery Fund who have provided the finance and all the Butterfly Conservation staff who have provided help and advice.



Clifford Mullett,
Mandy Floyd and
Chris Newman
planting the Butterfly
Bank in Greenwood
Park



One of the display
posters made by pupils
at the Killigrew
School

Big City Butterflies Project Update, by May Webber

Big City Butterflies has had an overwhelming amount of support across London during this development phase. The summer months have been incredibly busy for the project, with the majority of our consultation taking place with our target groups and delivering the trial activities. Trial workshops included: habitat management training (x2), surveying and monitoring training (x3), basic identification workshops (x2). These trial activities have been delivered to various audiences from council staff to Friends of Groups. After each session I have sent a survey and the feedback has always been positive with everyone commenting on the fact they now have a far greater positive attitude towards Lepidoptera, a particularly great thing for PR towards moths! Trial activities also included walks and talks which have been very well received.



Child examining moth trap contents at Eltham Palace

There is a clear demand for specific information on Lepidoptera in London. Everyone is very keen to encourage caterpillars and always asking what the best larval food plants to plant are. This is something I always emphasize – you must garden for larval food plants, not just for the adults! One smaller part of Big City Butterflies engagement is the delivery of school workshops. These went very well, teaching over 100 pupils. We have also secured involvement for the delivery project from select schools. One is even purchasing chalk in order to build a wildflower mound in the playground!



Attendees at the Gladstone Park butterfly walk

With the project spanning 17

boroughs, there are lots of potential green spaces to work in. This has meant finalizing project sites has been a hefty task! Each borough has a flagship site where there is a strong Friends of group, toilets/café and a site that is already known to support many different species. I have had lots of support from the 4 BC branches that fall into London and they have helped immensely with site selection.

The main focus for me now is writing up the project plan and completing the budget plans. Lots of letters of support have been received from partner charities, organizations and volunteer groups which puts us in great stead for our second round application.

View from Afar..... (Part 2), by Brian Cassie

In the previous newsletter, we included a letter from Brian, who despite living in the north-east of the USA, in a Life Benefactor of Butterfly Conservation. This is his follow-up letter...

Hello fellow Butterfly Conservationists,

I am writing on the eve of August from Foxboro, Massachusetts in New England. It has been a very warm summer in the northeastern U.S. The butterfly watchers here are hoping for slightly cooler weather and a good late summer/fall butterfly flight.

In my town, there is an area of water department property with an historically good matrix of fields with rather poor soil that supports Wild Indigo, the foodplant for two very good butterflies - the rather uncommon Wild Indigo Duskywing and the state-endangered and candidate for national listing Frosted Elfin.

This spring and summer, inspired by the wonderful projects of Butterfly Conservation, I initiated a project here; namely, to improve the project site habitat by removing vegetation that was restricting Wild Indigo growth and spread. The primary focus of the work was pulling Sweet Fern shrubs and after many, many visits to the site (usually in the early morning with my two dogs along) and the extraction of almost 17,000 plants, I am delighted to report that the fields are looking splendid. The Wild Indigo Duskywings appear to be doing well in their second flight and hopefully the caterpillars of the spring-flying elfins are finding much to munch on.

I have you to thank for your continuing splendid efforts to help

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

conserve butterflies and their habitats. How could I read about so many of your projects and not get involved myself? Got a few wasp stings along the way and two callused index fingers but it was well worth it!

Should any of the readers find themselves visiting the Boston area, please let me show you some of our butterflies....and perhaps even a Wild Indigo patch or two.

Editor's notes: the Wild Indigo Duskywing (Erynnis baptisiae) is a very close relative of our own Dingy Skipper (Erynnis tages) while the Frosted Elfin (Callophrys irus) is a hairstreak in the same family as our Green Hairstreak (Callophrys rubi) (see images below).



The Wild Indigo Duskywing (left) and Frosted Elfin (right)

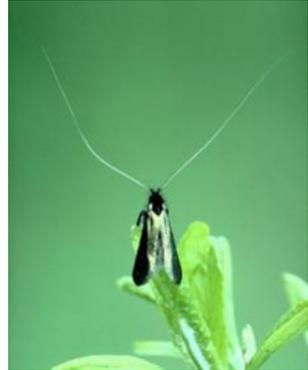
Field Events Overview, by Ian Small

Summary reports of many of our 2019 Branch-run field events (over 20 so far) are provided in the Sightings section of the Branch website (<https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/sightings-new.php>), so rather than replicating all of that, instead here is a summarized overview. Where applicable, this includes extracts from more detailed reports sent to me - thanks go to all the leaders and of course to all those who attended.

Across these events, no less than 34 different butterfly species have been seen, with the only notable absentee being the Green Hairstreak,

which was reported from multiple locations, but just not on one of the field trips. This was more than counterbalanced by the recording of the latest addition to our list of resident Branch species – the Brown Hairstreak.

The events began in Stanmore Country Park at the end of April. The group gathered despite the weather forecast, which predicted a howling gale, 100% cloud and temperatures of down to 12C; not good for spotting butterflies. This was a pity as the leaders had already noted 8 butterfly species on the previous very warm weekend. However, on the day, no butterflies were seen although one of the long antennae micro-moths, *Adela reaumurella*, was spotted hanging on to an oak twig. The absence of butterflies was compensated for by the bluebells and other flora, an interesting feather moss and a fledgling Nuthatch.



Adela reaumurella
Photo © Charles Baker

The May trips yielded good sightings of the Spring-flying Skippers – the Grizzled and Dingy Skippers – plus glorious Orange Tips and first-brood Common Blues and Brown Argus. The trip to Bovingdon Brickworks (courtesy of the Box Moor Trust) was typical - overnight rain meant everything was a bit damp, and despite the forecast saying there would be some sunshine - on arrival there was not. However, this proved a great bonus as it meant the resident Dingy Skippers were still roosting and a pre-walk search located several for everyone to see and take photos. These and the early-June walks are good for seeing a range of day-flying moths and those seen included Burnet Companion, Mother Shipton, Latticed Heath, Yellow Shell, Cinnabar Shaded Broad-Bar, and the Mint moth (*Pyrausta aurata*). A moth evening at Stanmore Country Park yielded, amongst others, Brimstone moths, Lime Hawk moth, Maiden's Blush and Nut-tree Tussock. Also in May, 30 people attended the launch of our new butterfly bank at Greenwood Park, Chiswell Green (see article on [page 8](#)).

The June trips were also often subject to adverse weather forecasts, recent rain or even continuous light rain, but all went ahead and enabled target species to be observed. The moral of the story is 'don't



Small Blue
Photo © Ian Small



Marbled White
Photo © Ian Small

be put off by the weather forecast'. Highlights in June included the sightings of Small Blues at events in Heartwood Forest, near Sandridge and in Letchworth– it is easy to forget that until just a few years ago this was a species that had been lost from our region. The Big City Butterflies event at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park had two butterfly walks plus an overnight moth trap. Silver-washed Fritillary was among the butterfly highlights, while the invasive Box Tree Moth attracted much attention and discussion. By the end of the month, the summer species were really abundant, with hundreds of Marbled Whites and Meadow Browns about for the Heartwood Forest visit.

With July comes the peak of the butterfly season, and with it, the peak number of field trips to offer members the opportunity to witness the range and abundance of local butterfly species. At the beginning of the month, the search is on for butterfly royalty – the Purple Emperor.

The annual trip to Ruislip Woods NNR began well, with numbers of Meadow Brown, Marbled White and Small Skipper much improved on last year's visit, presumably indicating better conditions than those following the 'Beast from the East' last Spring. However, it became apparent that a local High School was holding its annual Sponsored Walk with groups of pupils using several of the tracks. This caused some concern as one group in front was heading straight for the next destination. Following the failure of everyone, except the Leader, to see a White Admiral last year, a small diversion of the usual route had been planned. It was with some trepidation that the Leader caught up

with three young girls who had stopped and were pointing at a butterfly in the vegetation – a White Admiral! Not all the group saw this particular specimen but, with patience, all has good views of one of the at least two present. Following the ascent to the top of Park Wood, at about 2pm the first sighting of a Purple Emperor was had; one of at least two present. While most sightings were the usual ones of the butterflies chasing around the tree tops; one obliged by perching on a leaf in full view. Although there was to be no sightings of Silver-washed fritillary on this occasion, they were seen when the walk was repeated 10 days later.

At Northaw Great Wood, it was warm (about 22C) and not too windy. It wasn't long before a single Purple Emperor left its perch and flew over the oak but it took a while for it to return and make several flights; then perch in view of all those below, leaving everyone very satisfied. However, it got better when he was joined by a second Purple Emperor, and several chases and clashes were observed before the singleton took control of the oak tree and perched up, occasionally making a solitary flight to check its surroundings. Purple Hairstreaks were also flying with one being chased by the Purple Emperor

While sightings of this elusive species are often through binoculars, as males clash in the tree-tops, just occasionally, they come to ground (usually attracted by something noxious!), where they can be viewed and photographed in all their glory. Just such an occurrence took place on the Bricket Wood Common field trip. (Again, the weather, and the weather-forecast, were not good!) Indeed, both male and female Purple Emperors came to ground, and each could be coaxed into the hand – a very rare occurrence indeed – probably once-in-a-lifetime! (see photographs) Other notable sightings on the same trip were White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary and Purple Hairstreak. All three of these were also seen at the Ball's Wood event, and the latter two species at the Norton Green trip.



Branch Chair Malcolm Hull with Purple Emperor in hand
Photo © Colin Meager

Hertfordshire and Middlesex



Male (top left) and female (top right) Purple Emperors,
plus one in hand, at the Bricket Wood Common field trip
All photos © Colin Meager

The middle of July saw the major moth trap event with the Woodland Trust, at Heartwood Forest. Five traps were run and 1786 moths (466 macro and 1320 micro) trapped and identified, representing 130 different species (69 macro, 61 micro). Oak Eggar was the first substantial moth in the trap, with both males and a female seen during the evening. The multitude of micros, including many grass veneer, appeared along with more exotic large Elephant Hawk-moths, Drinker moths, Black Arches, Swallow-tailed, Brimstone, Ruby Tiger, Peach Blossom and many more.

Our annual “New Members’ Day” event was held this year at Greenwood Park, Chiswell Green (members who have been with the Branch for up to a year are invited to attend). This event is aimed at those who have recently developed an interest in lepidoptera, and combines a series of brief explanatory talks with the opportunity to look at moths trapped the previous night and a walk to assist in field identification. The location was chosen to allow those present to see the newly-created chalk bank, built to attract Small



John Murray, Branch Moth Officer, with attendant Black Arches moth, at New Members’ Day

Blues following the closure of the nearby Butterfly World site. The kidney vetch appeared to be taking well, despite the efforts of the local rabbits! A good selection of 14 butterfly species were seen, plus Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars.

Our field trips to Therfield and to Hexton Chalkpit are targeted at the Chalkhill Blue, whose numbers peak in the second half of July. Therfield in particular did not disappoint, with over 100 males seen during the 2-hour walk (including a cluster of 9 on some fresh dog poo – it’s not just Purple Emperors that have questionable tastes!). Dark-Green Fritillaries were also seen on both these trips, with at least a couple pausing to pose for photographs at Therfield. Among the 20 butterfly species noted at Therfield there were some fresh Common Blues, plus 6-spot Burnet and Cinnibar moths.



Chalkhill Blue
Photo © Ian Small

At Millhoppers’ Pasture, the reserve wardens had conducted a moth count on the previous evening and had kept back several of the more attractive species for the visitors to see. The

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

moth trap had attracted 59 species of moth altogether, and several Poplar Hawkmoth, a Privet Hawkmoth, a Clouded Border, a Purple Thorn, a Yellow Tail and a Cinnabar moth were amongst those admired during the visit. During the walk around the reserve, 13 species of butterfly were seen.



Poplar Hawk-moth
Photo © Iain Leach

Unfortunately, the Festival of Wildlife event at Panshanger Park was badly impacted by the weather, limiting the butterfly sightings to a few common species, but there was much more going on to keep everybody interested.

The final July field trip was targeting our newest recorded species – the Brown Hairstreak at Ickenham near Ruislip. Egg searches in the winter at this previously unknown site had shown that the species to be well established there, leading to optimism that an adult might be seen during the flight season. The Brown Hairstreak is somewhat similar to the Purple Emperor because the males like to find particular trees (in this case usually ash) where they can seek out females and in doing so, clash with other males. Despite heavy cloud and a good breeze, seven people came, probably more in hope than expectation (the previous day had also been very wet). However, patience was rewarded, and a small number of Brown Hairstreak were positively identified, although they were making things difficult by flying in the same trees as Purple Hairstreaks. About a dozen other species were recorded during the day, and a fast-flying Lepidoptera was put down to be a Gypsy Moth.



Brown Hairstreak at Ickenham
Photo © Andrew Middleton

Chalkhill Blues were still flying in good numbers and in good condition for the joint field trip (with Beds & Northants Branch) to Sharpenhoe Clappers in early August. Indeed, there were still some Dark-green Fritillaries about, together with some freshly-emerged Brimstones. In all about 600 butterflies were seen (half of them Chalkhill Blues) and 19 different species.

The date of the Stanmore Park moth event (23rd August) was chosen to see if the Oak Processionary moth had arrived at this reserve. Three weeks earlier, at Fryent Country Park, the white sheet was swarming with them despite the 'men from the ministry' attempting to get rid of them a few years earlier – fortunately, none were recorded on this visit. A nonchalant fox met the leader in the car park and just carried on looking for food as though he didn't exist! Of the eighteen species of macro recorded, the following were the outstanding ones; Black Arches, Old Lady, Six-striped Rustic, White Point and Jersey Tiger of which there were three. It seems to have been an outstanding year for Jersey Tigers as a lot of people in Harrow have reported them. About a dozen Hornets were also attracted to the light.

REMINDER – our final 2019 field trip will be a winter Brown Hairstreak egg search at Stafford Road Open Space on Sunday 1st DECEMBER 2019. Full details are in our previously-circulated events list, on the Branch website, and will be available on the national website at <https://butterfly-conservation.org/events>.

2019 - A Painted Lady Year

The incredible inter-continental migrant, the Painted Lady had an excellent year and was the stand-out winner of Big Butterfly Count 2019. Every year, successive generations of Painted Ladies spread northwards from Africa, crossing the Sahara Desert and then the Mediterranean Sea to breed in central and northern Europe during the summer, with their offspring making return journeys southwards to avoid the winter cold - a round trip of some 7,000 miles. The number that reach our shores varies greatly from year to year, with periodic years of great abundance termed "Painted Lady Years". This natural phenomenon last occurred in the UK in 2009 (and prior to that in 2003 and 1996).

2019 has turned out to be a Painted Lady Year. Large numbers arrived

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

in mid- and late June, laying eggs and producing a new 'home-grown' generation of butterflies that emerged during big butterfly count. In addition, at the end of July/start of August, when the Count was well underway, enormous numbers of Painted Ladies arrived on the coast of eastern Scotland and north-east England, producing spectacular scenes of clouds of butterflies for local observers. The arrival of these immigrant insects, probably heading south from Scandinavia, can clearly be seen in the map of total Painted Lady numbers recorded during big butterfly count 2019. Having reached the east coast of Britain, the butterflies then spread inland, as shown by the high numbers seen throughout the Central Belt of Scotland and in North West England and North Wales.



Painted Lady distribution and abundance during Big Butterfly Count

Painted Lady came top overall in big butterfly count 2019, and was also the most numerous species recorded in each of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Its previous best performance in the Count was coming 13th in 2018 and it is typically one of the least frequently seen of the 19 target species. Some 420,000 Painted Ladies were counted, making up over one quarter of all the butterflies in the 2019 event and more than twice as many as the next most abundant species (the Peacock).

Numbers in our Branch area remained generally low for most of the summer, as evident from the map of abundance during the Big Butterfly Count (19 July - 11 August), although numbers did pick up significantly through the rest of August, lasting into September.

Distinguishing Between the Blues, by Ian Small

Following the article in the previous edition about our Whites, I was asked to provide a similar brief guide to our blue butterflies. The information is mainly from the Butterfly Conservation website.

The blue butterfly most likely to be seen in a garden or park is the **Holly Blue**.

The Holly Blue is easily identified in early spring, as it emerges well before other blue butterflies. It tends to fly high around bushes and trees, (usually at least 3-4 feet above ground, often higher) whereas other grassland blues usually stay near ground level. It is much the commonest blue butterfly found in parks and gardens where it congregates around Holly (in spring) and Ivy (in late summer). Wings are bright blue on the upperside; females have thick black borders to the wing edges but there is only a thin black line in the males. Undersides are pale blue with small black spots which distinguish them from Common Blue. The Holly Blue is widespread, but undergoes large fluctuations in numbers from year to year.



Male Holly Blue
Photos © Iain Leach

The **Common Blue** is found in a variety of grassy habitats. The brightly coloured males are a conspicuous violet-blue colour but females are more secretive. The colour of the upperwings of females varies from almost completely brown to predominantly blue but the colour is variable within local populations with some striking examples. Unlike Adonis and Chalkhill Blues, the dark veins do not extend into the white fringes of wing margins.



Male Common Blue
(left). Photo
© Peter Withers

Female Common
Blue (right).
Photo © Iain Leach



Hertfordshire and Middlesex

The undersides of Common Blues show a series of marginal orange lunules and a pattern of black-pupilled white spots. The ground colour is noticeably darker in the female than the male, as shown here. Female Common Blues may be hard to distinguish from Brown Argus, and a guide to their separation will be included in a future newsletter. Common Blues can be found in a variety of habitats, where the main larval foodplant is Birds-foot Trefoil.



Common Blue undersides, male on the left.
Photo © Ivan Lynas

In contrast to the Holly Blue, which is often seen in April and early May, Common Blues first emerge later in May and in June. Both species are multi-brooded and can be seen during later summer months.

The **Small Blue** is our smallest resident butterfly and is easily overlooked, partly because of its size and dusky colouring, but partly because it is often confined to small patches of sheltered grassland where its sole foodplant, Kidney Vetch, is found. When sitting with wings closed, it is about the size of the average thumbnail. The undersides are pale blue with a pattern of black spots (see photo on [page 14](#))



Photo © Andrew Cooper

Males set up territories in sheltered positions, perching on tall grass or scrub. Once mated, the females disperse to lay eggs but both sexes may be found from late afternoon onwards in communal roosts, facing head down in long grass. The butterfly tends to live in small colonies and is declining in most areas, which is why its re-colonisation of parts of our Branch area is so important and why we are doing all we can to encourage it e.g. at Greenwood Park (see [page 8](#)).

The **Chalkhill Blue** is a widespread butterfly over the calcareous grassland in southern England and occasionally visits gardens. The male is paler blue than other blues and has a broad grey border. It is larger than any other blue butterflies seen in our region (see photo on [page 17](#) and the Branch emblem on the front cover). Females are brown, similar to Brown Argus, but larger with bolder markings.

At some sites (e.g. Therfield Heath and Hexton Chalkpit) many hundreds may be seen in August, flying just above the vegetation, searching for females. Large numbers of males may also congregate on animal dung and other sources of moisture and minerals. Females are much less conspicuous, being duller in colour, more secretive in their habits, and spending less time than the males in flight. The sole foodplant is Horseshoe Vetch.



Female Chalkhill Blue
Photo © Tamás Nestor

Until a few weeks ago, we would not have considered the **Adonis Blue** a local species (see article and photo on [pages 6-7](#)). The males have brilliant sky-blue wings, while the females are chocolate brown and far less conspicuous. Both sexes have distinctive black lines that enter or cross the white fringes of the wings. It shares the same larval foodplant as the Chalkhill Blue, but is instead double-brooded, with flight seasons in May-June and August-September.

The remaining UK blue butterfly species (Large, Silver-Studded and now Long-tailed) are not present in the Herts. & Middx Branch area.

Branch website: <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>
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Copy Deadline for the Spring Newsletter will be
28 February 2020

Files can be sent by e-mail to
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