

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



**HERTFORDSHIRE AND
MIDDLESEX BRANCH**

**NEWSLETTER
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Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

2016 was not a very good year for butterflies, with numbers of most species well down. But 2017 has got off to a much brighter start. By the time of our Members Day on 25th March over 400 butterflies from 8 different species had been reported to the sightings page of the Branch website. And these included first sightings of Speckled Wood, Orange Tip and Small White, all at quite early dates.

If you are new to the Branch, do visit the sightings page at <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/sightings-new.php> to keep track of what's on the wing as the season unfolds. You will pick up some good tips about the butterflies which are about and where they have been seen. Please do send us your records as well.

Its also been a good start to the season for the Branch, with a great attendance at Members Day (see report [page 3](#)). Publication of the Butterflies of Hertfordshire & Middlesex Book at the end of last year was a tremendous achievement. We've had great feedback and a full review is included at page 13. This is by far the most authoritative account of our local butterflies which has ever published and it is largely based on the sightings reported by Branch members. The Branch hold a small stock that are still available at the pre-publication offer price of £20 + p&p, or they can be collected from my home in St Albans by prior arrangement. The full RRP is £34, so this represents a substantial saving. Once this stock is sold, the book will be available via the Herts. & Middx Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation, NHBS Amazon and other outlets.

Our Branch finances are in good shape, although the rising cost of postage means that this now accounts for nearly 25% of our annual expenditure. Everyone has the option of receiving these newsletters either by email or post. So please do have a think and let us know if you are willing to join the list of people who receive newsletters by e-mail. This will not affect your annual report, which will continue as a hard copy publication. *Please contact Ian Small*

Our 2017 programme of butterfly walks is included with this newsletter and an updated list is on the walks and talks section of the Branch website. This years events includes new walks at Hounslow Heath, to see Green Hairstreaks and at Cassiobury Park in Watford. There's also a chance to visit our very own butterfly nature reserve at Millhoppers Pasture near Tring. We have also listed some nearby walks organised

by neighbouring Branches where there are interesting sites and species to be seen. Feel free to turn up at any of the walks. Most are free and don't require pre-booking (for those that do, this is mentioned in the publicity). All are welcome, so feel free to bring along family and friends. Its a great opportunity to meet others with an interest in butterflies and I've seldom attended an event without learning something new.

I hope you all enjoy a great butterfly season

Members Day, by Ian Small

Members' Day was held on Saturday 25th March at the Welwyn Civic Centre and was attended by almost 60 people. The Branch Chair, Malcolm Hull, welcomed everyone, and got the day's proceedings underway with the Branch AGM. This was followed by a short poetry reading of her poem 'Chrysalis' by one of our members 'Sapphira', who is actively involved in fundraising for the Society (see separate piece on [page 9](#)). She is photographed (right) with Richard Harrington, one of our main speakers (details below).



The March of the Emperor, by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

This was an entertaining overview of the painstaking efforts that Liz and Andrew have been to in order to record the advancing distribution of the Purple Emperor. Together, they have recorded this magnificent insect in 23 10km squares and mapped no less than 39 assembly areas, where the males congregate to compete for mating success. Through hours of observation, their research had shown them that these areas were routinely at the highest points in an area of woodland. Careful scrutiny of ordnance survey maps combined with field observation identifies likely candidate areas. These are rarely easily accessible, and so Liz and Andrew have perfected the technique of observing these areas through binoculars, often from 2-300 metres away, while sitting comfortably in a portable chair! Experience has taught them that the greatest likelihood of witnessing the butterflies is around 1pm.

Nevertheless, thinking of Purple Emperors as restricted to these woods would be wrong, and Liz and Andrew consider them to be 'in the landscape. Indeed, much to her surprise, Liz even recorded one flying over her garden while having a family barbecue!

Members Photos

Three members showed photos. Andrew Wood concentrated on a selection of butterfly and moth photographs, mostly taken locally, including of one moth (*Tetramoera langmaidi*) for which the only recent records are from his garden; the only other record for this species is from Southsea, Hampshire in 2008. Roger Gibbons then impressed everyone with another fine selection of his butterfly photos from southern France. Ian Small then followed with a selection of butterfly and moth photos from Northern Peru, ranging from 4000m up in the Andes to down on the edge of the Amazon basin. The abundance and diversity of lepidoptera in this region are amazing, and left us wondering about the evolutionary processes leading to a butterfly having pink fluffy legs!

Patrick Barkham – The Wonder of Butterflies

Patrick gave a lively and entertaining talk covering the influence of butterflies on his life and on the lives of others. His earliest memories are of seeing butterflies in his garden. From an early age, growing up in Norfolk, he would spend time in the field with his father. He described them searching an area near Holme for the Brown Argus, which had not been seen in the area for 10 years, and the effect it had on him when they discovered it – it became his favourite butterfly.

His passion for butterflies led in 2009 to him embarking on a quest to fulfil his boyhood dream of seeing all the British butterflies, and made it a real challenge by trying to do so within a single year. The story of that year is described in his book 'The Butterfly Isles', and episodes from it were shared with the audience. These included the good fortune of having sunshine on the Isle of Wight to be able to see the Glanville Fritillary, then the awesome sights of thousands of Painted Ladies arriving on the south coast. His time with Matthew Oates and the 'butterfly breakfast' laid out to tempt down the Purple Emperor with various foul-smelling fish pastes, leading to sighting no less than 57 of them in a single day. Patrick's dedication to his task of seeing all the butterfly species also had its low points, leading to his 'being dumped' by phone while on a rather bleak, windswept and damp Cumbrian hillside. That story too, however did have 2 happy endings

– Patrick did encounter his target of the day (Large Heath), and is also now happily married to the same lady!

Patrick summed up the great pleasures people derive from butterflies as follows:

- the great places that looking for butterflies takes you
- being there opens your eyes to your surroundings
- looking for butterflies causes you to linger and you therefore start to see things you would otherwise have missed
- you never fail to come back from your trip feeling better than when you departed

Patrick's final message was that butterflies really still need our help – he pointed out that the decline in butterflies in urban habitats (69%) was much greater than in the countryside (45%), which he put down to the fact that gardeners use more chemicals than farmers! Unfortunately, wildlife gardening is still pursued by only a minority of gardeners. We can all help by avoiding sprays and weed-killers, and providing nectar sources, shelter and larval foodplants, e.g. ivy and a few nettles.

Richard Harrington – The Butterfly Collection

Richard began his talk with a brief introduction about himself, starting with his childhood in Dorset. He recounted his anticipation of the groceries arriving each week, so that he could see which butterfly card would be included with the Brooke Bond tea! A trip to the local seashore with a small pond net gave him the opportunity to catch a butterfly in it while on the way – it was a Large White. Richard's passion for insects did not wane – he has recently retired having spent his career working at Rothamsted on the Insect Survey. That has involved him in a wide range of scientific projects aimed at rationalising pest control and on conservation strategy.

Throughout these years, Richard says he has dabbled in 'silly verse', and with retirement he decided to produce a poem for each of our British butterflies. Plans are underway for these to be published as a book, which Richard hopes may be available for next Christmas. Richard's recitations began with the Purple Emperor, his poem entitled 'The Emperor's New Clothes', with subsequent species selected in turn by the audience. Where appropriate, Richard provided an introductory

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commentary e.g. for the Green Hairstreak – whose latin name *Callophrys rubi* translates to ‘beautiful eyebrows’ ! The audience were kept well entertained throughout with the variety of approaches taken for the different species, their very clever word usage and their humour e.g. for the Small Copper, the poem was entitled “Evenin’ All”, which those of us of a certain age will forever associate with the 1960’s TV program ‘Dixon of Dock Green’. Richard’s final poem addressed all those rare migrants, and was entitled ‘You’ll be Lucky’.

Throughout the day, members voted for their favourites in the different categories of the photographic competition, which attracted 86 entries from 17 entrants. The winning photos are shown below.

A very enjoyable day was had by all who attended. Many thanks to all who came – your purchase of raffle tickets, donations and purchases from the sales stall raised over £400 on the day.



Winner UK Butterflies category :
Large Skipper at Dancer’s End, by Sue Taylor

•



Winner UK Moths category:
Poplar Hawkmoth, by Tim Alps



Winner Behaviour Category:
Convolvulus Hawkmoth, by Roger Millard



Winner Non-UK Category:
Malachite (*Siprocta stelenes*), taken near Tarapoto, Peru, by Ian Small



Winner Non-Adult Category:
Early instar caterpillar of one the Blue Morphos (*Morpho cisseis*), taken near
Tarapoto, Peru, by Ian Small

Fundraising Appeal, by Sapphira

I would very much like to encourage the wider community of Butterfly Conservation fans to participate in our World Record Attempt for Mental Health Awareness, it's called #BurlesqueAPeel.

What:

Can you peel a glove in record time? Join Sapphira's Showgirls for #BurlesqueAPeel - it's a RecordSetter World Record Attempt for the 'Fastest Burlesque Glove Peel Relay' in London on Saturday 13th of May. This burlesque dance school is supporting World Bipolar Day, Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day because their founder, Sapphira, overcame bipolar and reinvented herself through burlesque and is now committed to sharing joy as an entertainer and fundraising for worthy causes to #StopStigma. **The fundraiser is for both Sane and Butterfly Conservation.**

You can be a novice to burlesque, you just need to peel a glove, it's that simple!

Butterfly Items:

The fundraiser is supported by Maxim, singer for UK band The Prodigy who is donating a print from his Lepidoptera art range and Maskerade is donating a beautiful butterfly crown headdress.

Date: Saturday 13th May (Mental Health Awareness Week)

Time: 12pm - 3pm

Where: Juju's Bar & Stage, Ely's Yard, 15 Hanbury Street, E1 6QR (London)

Registration Donation: £10.10

Register Online:

www.sapphirasshowgirls.com/burlesqueapeel

Please donate online if you can't attend:

www.virginmoneygiving.com/sapphirasshowgirls

Follow us on

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www.twitter.com/sapphirashowgls

Brown Hairstreak in Middlesex, by Andrew Wood

Since the last sightings of this species in Bricket Wood Common in the 1990s we have had reports of tantalising glimpses of this rare butterfly in our area.

It is great to be able to report that, thanks to Surrey Branch member Stephen Reisbach, we have a positive record of Brown Hairstreak in Middlesex. A small number of eggs of this nationally rare species were located in the Middlesex part of Richmond borough. There have been records of it spreading northwards through South West London and it looks as if one brave female has crossed the Thames to the north side. The local council ecologist is aware of this finding and we are assured that maintenance will not be done that could damage the blackthorn and the eggs.

The bright white pin head sized eggs are laid near twig or thorn junctions and can be found through the winter, larvae and pupae are not easy to see once the tree is in leaf. If you are in Richmond, the southern part of Hounslow or Spelthorne please keep a look out near Blackthorns (sloes) or nearby Ash trees in late Summer to see if you can find this small orange/brown butterfly.



Several of us including Stephen Reisbach, Paul Taylor, Andrew Wood, Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton have made searches for eggs and blackthorn in the area since the sighting but no further records have come to light so this may be an isolated incident, but with your help we may be to see adult activity in this area. Some areas to check with noticeable stands of Blackthorn are

1. Hampton Common around TQ12707118
2. The north bank of the River Crane, from approx TQ13527275 eastwards to Kneller Gardens at TQ14837326.
3. The footpath along the northern edge of Fulwell Golf Course (TQ13937236 to TQ13317216).
4. Sunbury area: a good stand at TQ09656910 and TQ09726884 in a field north of the London Irish Rugby Ground; and some stands along the southern side of the ground, parallel to School Walk, from approx TQ09466824 to TQ10076862. There are also a couple of smaller stands along the northern edge of the ground, from approx TQ09836873 to TQ09746869

5. Hanworth Park, the northern edge in the area of TQ114726
6. Hounslow Heath general area

The Middlesex area of Richmond contains huge green areas in Bushy Park and Hampton Court Palace Park but these seem to be blackthorn free areas, maybe due to deer grazing and so seem unlikely to be good area for searching.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of Stephen Reisbach for finding the eggs and for some of the site information in this article.

(There is an article on the Brown Hairstreak in Surrey on [page 19](#).)

Lucky the Long Tailed Blue Butterfly, by Mandy Floyd

Back in October 2016 I found a packet of Sugar Snap Peas in the fridge that was well out of date and needed composting. I had earlier been reading about the problem that farmers in Kenya have with Long Tailed Blue Butterflies laying their eggs on the pea flowers, and that sometimes caterpillars are found in the pea pods when they arrive in the UK. I thought I would just check my packet and amazingly there was a small caterpillar moving around, the hole it had eaten its way out of, clearly visible on one of the pods.

This was rather exciting as I now had the chance to hopefully watch this caterpillar pupate and then become a butterfly. I placed the caterpillar in a large plastic pot with several of the pea pods and covered it with a breathable cling film lid. Very quickly the caterpillar turned into a pupa. I kept checking the pot and after about 2 weeks I was excited to find a butterfly inside the pot!

I fed it with some late flowering sweet peas and some slices of fresh orange, it was great to watch it so close up and I took some videos of the butterfly loose indoors. It was really fascinating watching it clean itself and I loved it when it started folding and unfolding its proboscis like a spring coiling in and out.



There was no chance of finding a mate for this butterfly and I was reluctant to release it as the weather was rather cold, but while it was alive the butterfly gave family and friends a lot of pleasure.

I called the butterfly 'Lucky'. Lucky to be alive and we were lucky we didn't eat it!!

Churchyard Butterfly Survey, by Andrew Wood

In both counties, churchyards can offer a green haven in both built up areas and areas of intensive agriculture.

We would like to find out more about what lives there and run an ongoing survey that would be easy for volunteers to carry out.

We would like members to adopt a local churchyard and visit at least four times a year, at key flight times, to record butterflies that you see there.

We will share this information with each church in the hope that it might provide pointers for butterfly-friendly maintenance and more information about local diversity.

The survey has the support of Brian Cuthbertson the Head of Environment and Sustainability in the London Diocese and Judith Taylor who coordinates St Albans diocese Living Churchyards scheme.

If you are interested in taking part please contact Andrew Wood (details on the back page). More information and recording forms will be available from the website or can be posted out to you.

The Arrival of the Oak Processionary Moth in Hertfordshire and Middlesex, by John Murray

The Oak Processionary moth was first recorded in this country when an immigrant from the continent was found in Cornwall in 1983. Since then, about 40 further immigrants of this species have been recorded in southern England. Its peculiar name refers to the caterpillar, which is highly gregarious, living in prominent “nests” and later moving about in a striking nose-to-tail procession which can be more than a metre long, looking like a slowly moving snake.

In 2006, the first caterpillars were seen in west London, and since then it has become established as a breeding species, and is expanding its range around London and into parts of Surrey. In addition, the species was accidentally introduced in Berkshire, Leeds & Sheffield, though the northern populations have died out. In our area, nests have been found in Middlesex at Osterley Park, Hampstead Heath and Camden. In Hertfordshire, apart from a single male that arrived in a garden light trap in Totteridge during 1979, almost certainly an immigrant example, our first records are from Cuffley, where more males arrived

at a garden light trap during 2015. The first breeding records in the county are from Watford and Bushey, during 2016.

The arrival of a new moth species is normally a cause for celebration, but the Oak Processionary is treated as a pest species in some parts of Europe, because large populations have the potential to defoliate trees and leave them open to other pests and diseases. Also, like some of our other hairy caterpillars, the hairs can cause irritation to the skin of people and animals, and in some individuals, allergic reactions such as sore throats, breathing difficulties and eye problems. Last year the press caught on to this, and a few sensational articles appeared about “Poisonous caterpillars” or even “Killer caterpillars”.

The Forestry Commission are particularly concerned about this species, and have an informative website at <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/oakprocessionarymoth>. Control of the moth is actively being undertaken in this country, mainly through the use of spraying affected trees with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). Unfortunately this kills the larvae of all moths and butterflies on the tree, not just those of the Oak Processionary. These control measure could have devastating effects on over 300 harmless moth and butterfly species if carried out on a widespread and intensive scale. In addition, there were two cases of aerial spraying to control the moth, but assurances have been given that no further aerial spraying is planned. A more measured approach is the careful removal of nests (Hampstead Heath and Camden), or the hand spraying of nests (Watford).

If you come across what you think are Oak Processionary caterpillars or nests, be careful not to handle either; caterpillars can eject hairs as a defence mechanism. If it is a windy day, it is best not to approach closely, as the hairs can be carried on the wind. Oak Processionary is a notifiable pest, so note down the locality as accurately as possible, and ideally take a photograph if it is safe to do so and send it to myself (j.b.murray@open.ac.uk) and the County Moth Recorder Colin Plant (colinwplant@gmail.com) for initial confirmation.

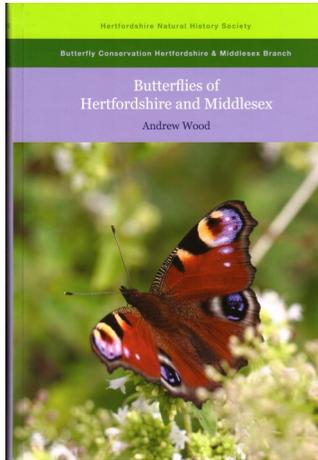
BOOK REVIEW: “Butterflies of Hertfordshire & Middlesex” by Andrew Wood (2016)

Published jointly by Hertfordshire Natural History Society and Butterfly Conservation Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch.

The author, and others involved in the production of this book have done a great job in making such a wealth of information so accessible

to the reader. Without doubt, this beautifully designed and lavishly illustrated account has set the bar very high for all future county butterfly books.

At £34, it is at the higher price end for county butterfly books, but with 266 pages in full colour, I would nevertheless regard it as good value. For anyone interested in butterflies and living in the area, it is undoubtedly essential reading. The A4 size is bigger than most county butterfly books, but understandably matches the previously published “Moths of Hertfordshire”.



The book includes a useful 20pp review of the various habitats and landscapes found across the two counties, including an assessment of the butterfly potential of each. The succeeding species accounts, contribute more than 140 pages, and are beautifully illustrated with numerous photos of each butterfly and their life stages. The informative text, including ‘tips for seeing the species’, is accompanied by distribution maps for different recording periods. This coupled with tabulated data, and graphs based on 50-60 butterfly transects walked annually, has been used to summarise changes over time. Although some of the trends for rarer species are based on limited data, there is no doubting that the data have been used to great effect to highlight changes in status and phenology. We all know there have been declines, but it was encouraging to read about the spread of species like Speckled Wood, Marbled White, Brown Argus, Silver-washed Fritillary and Purple Emperor.

The 52-page section on “Places in Herts and Middlesex to see butterflies”, provides an outstanding gazetteer, covering no fewer than 51 sites. The maps, habitat photos and information in this section are probably the best of any county butterfly book, providing an open door to some wonderful places. Without doubt this is an incredibly thorough, highly informative, attractive and eminently readable book. I am very pleased to give it my strongest recommendation.

Andy Barker (January 2017)

Where we Particularly Need to Record in 2017, by Andrew Wood

| 2 km Square | 2 km Square | General Location |
|-------------|-------------|---|
| SP8816 | SP81Y | North of Long Marston (part square) |
| SP9814 | SP91X | North of Little Gaddesden (part square) |
| TL0600 | TL00Q | West of Hunton Bridge |
| TL0612 | TL01R | South east of Flamstead |
| TL0814 | TL01X | Between Flamstead and Kinsbourne Green |
| TL1006 | TL10D | Gorehambury |
| TL1418 | TL11P | East of Peter's Green |
| TL1622 | TL12R | East of Kings Walden |
| TL2406 | TL20N | Woodside |
| TL2606 | TL20T | Wildhill |
| TL2238 | TL23J | Caldecote (part square) |
| TL2436 | TL23N | Newnham, west of Bygrave |
| TL3632 | TL33R | South east of Buckland/north of Wyddial |
| TL3840 | TL34V | East of Royston (part square) |
| TL4212 | TL41G | South east of Hunsdon |
| TL4216 | TL41I | Perry Green |
| TL4416 | TL41N | Allen's Green |
| TL4418 | TL41P | Green Tye |
| TL4620 | TL42Q | West of and western Bishops Stortford |
| TQ2098 | TQ29E | North east of Borehamwood |
| TQ3694 | TQ39S | Ponders End/Lea Valley (part square) |

2 km squares with no records 2015-2016

part square = some of this area is in adjacent counties

Look at an ordnance survey map to see exactly what access is available. The first reference e.g. TL1622 is the 1 km square in the bottom left corner in the block of 4 that makes up a 2 km square. The

iRecord Butterflies

Butterfly Conservation have a Smartphone app called *iRecord Butterflies* - it is completely free and is available for Apple and Android devices.

iRecord Butterflies will guide you through the identification of any butterfly than you see in the UK. You can compare you own photo with those from the app's extensive image library, filter species by colour, pattern and size, and see distribution maps and identification tips for each butterfly species.



The *iRecord Butterflies* app is much more than just an aide to butterfly identification. It provides an easy, single-step route to contributing your butterfly sightings to Butterfly Conservation's national recording scheme. Such sightings (termed 'records') provide the essential foundation for much-needed conservation work to help the UK's declining butterflies.

The national butterfly recording scheme has collected millions of sightings stretching back several centuries and these enable us to see how butterflies are faring and to target conservation effort at those most at risk of extinction. The records can also be used by scientists to understand the impacts of climate change and other environmental issues on our butterfly populations. The records underpin the management of important butterfly sites, help protect habitats through the planning system and enable Butterfly Conservation to produce regular State of the UK's Butterflies reports, local and national atlases and Red Lists of priority species.

Simply by sending in some basic information about the butterflies that you enjoy watching, even if just from your garden, you can make a real contribution to their conservation. Once you've identified the butterfly, simply enter a few simple pieces of information, such as the number that you saw and a place name (important so that the sightings can be checked on maps) and submit. The app will automatically calculate where you are (using the GPS in the Smartphone) and provide a grid reference for your sighting.

If you haven't yet used this, why not give it a go? - it's very convenient and user-friendly.

A European Perspective, by Roger Gibbons

The Butterfly Conservation European Interests Group (EIG) is approaching the tenth anniversary of its formation. It has grown rapidly from small beginnings and now has over 400 members, reflecting the growth in interest in the species of Europe, through a range of activities from family holidays to organised commercial tours.

Membership of the EIG is easy for BC members, just completing a simple form (downloadable from the web site) and paying an extra £10pa on the annual BC subscription. The EIG has an annual AGM, often held in conjunction with a BC branch AGM, and a very information-rich web site: www.bc-eig.org.uk. The web site has details of butterfly-rich locations in most European countries, with maps and species you can expect to see. The EIG also publishes a biannual illustrated newsletter, some forty A4 pages of trip reports, species conservation plans, identification guides for tricky species, etc. Back issues of the newsletter are available to download from the web site.

The EIG also offers an identification service where you can upload your photo(s) and relevant details such as when and where, and EIG experts will give you their opinion. This is not always as simple as it sounds as there are many tricky *Erebia* ringlets (of the same family as the UK's Scotch Argus and Mountain Ringlet), not to mention the fourteen species of Pyrgus Grizzled Skippers which all look almost identical. You can also contribute to the compilation of distribution databases by sending your records from European visits.

In short, the EIG provides an answer to nearly all questions on European species. I am the EIG nominated representative on the BC Herts & Middlesex Committee and I'm happy to give advice and suggestions to Branch members on places to go and species to see, especially on France, which is my specialist area. I can be contacted on gibfam@ntlworld.com.

In celebration of its tenth anniversary, the EIG is publishing a bumper fifty-page newsletter issue with articles on a variety of species and locations. I was persuaded/coerced to write an article on one of my favourite families, the Heaths. In the UK we only have the ubiquitous and rather under-appreciated Small Heath and the localised Large Heath of northern cool damp climes. But in France, there are nine

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different species which have adapted to a variety of terrains, from cool damp bogs, to high Alpine locations, and hot and dry regions of Provence.

The “damp” Heaths, which include Large, Scarce and the erroneously-named False Ringlet are severely threatened by habitat destruction, especially land drainage. The Alpine species include the Alpine Heath and Darwin’s Heath, the latter being the subject of much debate as it hybridises with both Alpine Heath and Pearly Heath.

I took a photo near Bordeaux in 1998 that I thought at the time was just an “ordinary” Ringlet (the species we have in the UK), but it was only in 2006 that I realised that it was actually a False Ringlet, much, much scarcer, and a species I had never seen before, and not again until 2015. Here is a recent photo, so you can see how easy it was to make the mistake.



My highlight of 2016 wasn't in fact a butterfly. Some lepidopterist friends in the south of France had been given a caterpillar of an Oleander Hawk-moth which they reared, and called us on the morning it hatched. Here is a photo of the breathtakingly beautiful pristine moth.



More Unusual Butterflies in Hertfordshire and Middlesex, by Andrew Wood

In the Spring 2014 I wrote an article called Unusual Hertfordshire Butterflies looking at butterflies in stained glass in local churches. Since then I have found some more:

If you are visiting Heartwood Forest you are very close to St Leonard's Church in Sandridge. Here there is a window of 1992 produced by Hertfordshire's Chapel Studios featuring watery scenes and an emperor/admiral type butterfly.



In Middlesex the Roman Catholic church of St Mary in Cadogan Street features glass showing rural scenes and in one of them there is a butterfly/moth looking rather like a Speckled yellow moth. This is by Paul Quail and dates from 1989.



Also in Middlesex, in Whitton is a window in St Philip & St James that features Large Whites as a decorative border. It is by Lavers & Barraud and dates from 1862



Bookham Commons Trip on 23 August 2016, by Peter Clarke

Encouraged by reports of sightings of several Brown Hairstreaks in the past week at Bookham Commons coupled with a good weather forecast I made the decision to visit the site. I arrived at the north end and parked at the Hundred Tunnels Car Park (TQ12106 56731) east of the Hundred Pound Bridge at about 1030 am. Some useful guides

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were available to pick up to find my way round. I wanted to go west to Banks Common which is where some of the hairstreaks were recently seen. While walking on the paths I searched for blackthorn in the hedgerows and tall ash trees in particular for my target species. I soon realised however that I lost my way and ended up at the Plains car park, not far from the Bookham railway station!

I traversed the plains on my return to the car. Not many butterflies were seen at all except for the odd Speckled Wood - perhaps the heat was getting to them. I entered the Isle of Wight Plain where I spotted a 'white' feeding on some fleabane. On closer inspection the butterfly turned out to be the helice form of a female Clouded Yellow which, fortunately, wasn't too active to allow me to take a couple of photos. I have not seen the helice form before so I was thrilled to find it. I understand that 5-10% of female Clouded Yellows are of this form.

After a quick lunch in the car, I succeeded in finding Banks Common and the hedgerow on the north side. By now, the air temperature was above 30 degrees so it was not too surprising that few butterflies were active. However, a small area of tall grasses and flowers on the right side of the footpath attracted a number of Brown Argus, Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper. Meanwhile I was still scouring the hedgerow. There was a fairly tall ash tree out of the hedge on which I scanned with my binoculars for Brown Hairstreaks but to no avail. I was beginning to feel despondent now but I carried on then I examined a blackthorn under a willow about 30 yards further west. Something fluttered around me, and an orange butterfly alighted in front of me about four feet high on this blackthorn. Yes! A fresh female Brown Hairstreak - my first ever close-up view of one. It was incredibly tame as it crawled down one of the stems probably to lay her eggs then it went back up to rest on a leaf for at least quarter of an hour.



Where I walked, none of the hedgerows are predominantly blackthorn in contrast to many of those in Hertfordshire. Apparently, just a few blackthorn thickets here and there are enough to support colonies of

the Brown Hairstreak at the common. Furthermore, in Surrey, increased egg counts over the last few winters imply that the species may be expanding north and west. Perhaps it will reach Middlesex in a few years.

A most memorable day with those two magical moments; just to think that if I didn't get lost in my morning walk I might not have been so lucky.

Insect and Bird Migration, Rothamsted Research, by Roger Gibbons

I attended the above conference held at the very impressive Rothamsted Conference Centre on 13 October. The event comprised four ten-minute presentations followed by a Q&A session lasting some twenty minutes, and plenty of opportunity to talk to Rothamsted people before and after. It was very well attended, with some 200 attendees. It was quite timely, given that Rothamsted were a principal participant in the BC programme on Painted Lady migration screened a few days previously.

The first presentation focussed on bird migration, particularly over the Netherlands and the North Sea. The second presentation discussed insect migration and the tracking and monitoring technologies, and was to some extent oriented toward tracking insects as pests and their impact on crop yields.

The third presentation was by Dr Jason Chapman, who was featured on the BBC programme, and was getting closer to our main area of interest, being about nocturnal moth migration. It followed the travels of the Silver Y moth, a regular migrant each year from the Mediterranean region as it is unable to breed in the UK. Dr Chapman explained that the moth, being relatively small, uses wind currents and can only fly in favourable conditions. It had been discovered that it makes the return migration at surprising high altitudes of around 400-800m.

The fourth presentation by Dr Chris Jones focussed on how and why insects generally, and butterflies in particular, make such long migrations and how they navigate over thousands of kilometres to places they have never been before. Dr Jones explained that there were three key components: a compass, a clock and an energy source. They navigate using the sun for direction, but as the sun is in different positions according to the time of day, they can adjust using their

timing mechanism which resides – surprisingly – not in the brain, but in the antennae. From what is known of this mechanism, it appears to be extremely complex. The energy source is derived from fats in the form of lipids, rather than the carbohydrates that we would normally consider to be the energy source; lipids have the advantage of being high in energy content and low in water content and therefore lighter.

In the Painted Lady (PL) programme, a Spanish researcher had presented the hypothesis that they (PLs) migrate to escape predation, which is a major hazard and is responsible for the demise of the vast majority of caterpillars. One of the major groups of predators are tiny parasitic wasps of the *Cotesia* genus. The PL breeding grounds are in the region of the Atlas mountains in Morocco and when breeding conditions are suitable, a mass migration north (and to a lesser extent east) is triggered. The PLs that arrive in the UK are not necessarily the ones that left Morocco as they stop to breed along the way and our PLs are likely to be second or third generation.

Much research is currently being undertaken on the relationship between parasitism and migration, as this is clearly a very complex inter-relationship.

In a relatively short presentation it was clearly not practicable to explore all of these factors, especially as the event was primarily to showcase the work of Rothamsted. I did have the opportunity to ask one question and later to talk to Drs Chapman and Jones after the event. My question was that all butterfly species suffer from predation to a greater or lesser extent, but only relatively few are migratory and many species are particularly sedentary, and their populations do not seem to suffer proportionately. So if migration is a way of escaping predation, why don't more (or all) species do it? It seems that migration is wired into the DNA of certain species that have evolved this mechanism. There is apparently evidence that non-migrating populations of certain species have been wiped out, and studies have been carried out in migrating and non-migrating populations of the North American Monarch butterfly.

So it would appear that migration offers a distinct survival advantage.

I asked Dr Jones after the event what determines the periodicity of the mass migrations. He said that this was down to the suitability of breeding conditions in Morocco. I accept this but I must admit I don't find it entirely convincing, not that I would question the expertise of the top professionals. Nevertheless I do wonder what conditions can

result in such a massive population spike, when the population sizes of other species vary only within much more limited parameters.

Alan Beale

Late in March we heard the sad news that Alan Beale had died peacefully after a short illness.

Alan had assiduously walked the 5 transect routes on various parts of Therfield Heath, near Royston, since 2003.

The data he collected, and other information that he sent, has been invaluable in monitoring the fluctuations of butterfly species there, particularly the iconic Chalkhill Blue.

On a personal note this information, and some papers he drew my attention to, were very useful in my drawing up the Chalkhill Blue chapter in the recently published Herts and Middx butterfly book.

Alan had a deep knowledge of Therfield Heath's natural history. And as well as recording butterflies at Therfield Heath Alan was also until recently an active member of the Royston Wildlife Group and the RSPB Hitchin and Letchworth Local Members' Group. We offer our condolences to his wife, children and grandchildren.

I am grateful to Martin Johnson for letting us know about this sad news and for some of the information in this short note.

Sadly we now need to recruit volunteers to cover this important site. If you are interested in surveying here please contact Andrew Wood who will be happy to give more information and offer training.



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Files can be sent by e-mail to
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