

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 15 SEPTEMBER 1998



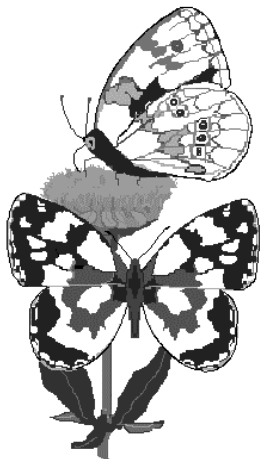
**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION**

**Not All Gloom....
by Gavin Vicary**

I hope that you have all seen plenty of butterflies this year despite the poor weather. It will be interesting to see how our butterflies respond to this change from the run of hot dry summers that we have experienced in recent years.

The Opening Day and Members Day at our reserve, Millhoppers Pasture, both went well and we were fortunate to have fine weather on both occasions. A total of 23 species of butterfly have now been recorded, the highlight being Marbled White which was seen

Hertfordshire and Middlesex



regularly during July and August. A series of work parties are planned throughout the autumn and winter and I hope these will be well supported (see page 26). They are good exercise and an essential part of carrying out the management required on the reserve.

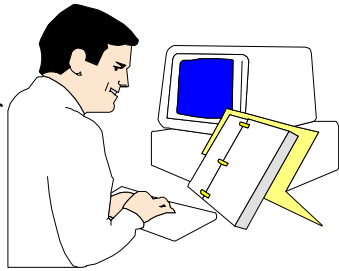
I hope to see members at the AGM in October (see 'advert' on page 5). The formal business should not take long and then there will be an opportunity to view members slides which in previous years have been most enjoyable. I am sure that this year as well as there being plenty of slides of butterflies and moths there will also be some of Millhoppers and some from Chelsea. One of our members, Vincent Judd is going to bring some photographs he has taken of exotic butterflies in far flung corners of Asia and I am sure it will be a very interesting evening.

Unfortunately, I must end on a sad note. Lyndsay Newland wife of our previous Chairman Malcolm died recently and I am sure all of our thoughts will be with Malcolm and the rest of Lyndsay's family at this time.



Editor's Notes - by Ian Small

Firstly, I wanted to apologise for the very poor quality of the photographs in the last edition. The master copy of the newsletter was fine, but the reproduction process was not up to the job of copying the greyscales. This is because we do not use a conventional photocopier for the newsletter, as this would be potentially very costly for the Branch (over £200 per edition, plus all the materials and postage costs). Rather, we use something called a Risograph, which is owned by Butterfly Conservation, and operated for us by Roger Sutton in Somerset. This is a much cheaper process and, as Roger does not charge for his services, this reduces our costs to under £50 per edition.



In future, I will try to avoid using grey-scale illustrations, unless the contrast is very high. Where they are essential, I will arrange to have that page photocopied separately. I hope that the deficiencies did not detract from your enjoyment of the newsletter.

Please don't forget that in order to produce this newsletter, I need input from you. There has been a noticeable drop in the number of contributions this time, and I hope that this is just the effect of bad weather at home and being on holiday. Please write and let me have any tips you want to pass on if you have found somewhere good to watch butterflies. Don't worry if its not local - I am sure that you are not the only people who travel, and many of us are keen to get recommendations from others who have found somewhere good.

The Christmas edition of the newsletter will be 15 November.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

How Good are your Transects ? by Michael Healy

All transect-walkers - or perhaps only number-obsessionals like me - ask themselves how repeatable their counts are: what would happen if, at the end of a walk, they went round again. To throw some light on this, I recently walked a 2 km stretch of disused railway line (the Nicky Line at Harpenden, Hertfordshire, between T1124147 and TL114135) five times in each direction on a clear sunny day between 1030 and 1445. The results were as follows-

Trip no	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Start time	1027	1051	1117	1142	1208	1233	1300	1325	1349	1412
Temperature (C)	24	26	25	26	25	25	25	24	23	24

Small / Essex

Skipper	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	5
Large Skipper	0	2	8	3	6	2	1	4	6	4
Large White	3	4	4	3	6	9	3	6	2	5
Small White	24	24	19	27	27	28	22	31	30	21
Green-veined White	5	3	2	2	6	6	4	5	1	7
Small Tortoiseshell	1	2	4	2	0	2	2	0	1	1
Gatekeeper	1	7	5	9	4	10	7	8	6	5
Meadow Brown	6	11	14	10	13	12	17	8	10	12
Total	40	53	58*	57	64	71	58*	65*	57*	60

*Plus singletons

Trip 3	Common Blue
Trip 7	Speckled Wood
Trip 8	Red Admiral
Trip 9	Marbled White

The first trip gives a somewhat lower count than the others, in accordance with the standard instruction not to undertake transect walks before 1100. There is a slight tendency for the even-numbered northbound trips to give higher counts than the southbound ones - the line runs approximately north-south and it is easier to count the butterflies with the sun at your back. Apart from this, the counts, both for the total and for the commoner species, are reasonably consistent. It is in fact, using a rather simplistic statistical argument, possible to make a rough estimate of the fraction of the total population which is included in the counts, assuming this to be constant over the period. If this fraction is very small, statistical theory suggests that the variance of the counts (the

square of the standard deviation) is expected to equal the mean. If all the butterflies are seen on every occasion, all the counts will be the same and the variance will be zero. Between these extremes the expected variance is given by the mean times $(1 - f)$ where f is the fraction observed. Applying this argument to the overall totals and to the counts for *P rapae* and *M jurtina* (omitting trip no 1) gives $f = 0.51, 0.32$ and 0.42 respectively, suggesting that the total population might be between two and three times the numbers actually observed. Even apart from the over-simple statistical model, these figures should not be taken too seriously, since an estimated variance based on no more than 9 observations is necessarily very imprecise. It is of some interest that a regular transect walk the following day, under similar weather conditions, gave a total count of 87, including 37 Small Whites and 20 Meadow Browns. On the evidence, this represents a real increase in the population over 24 hours.

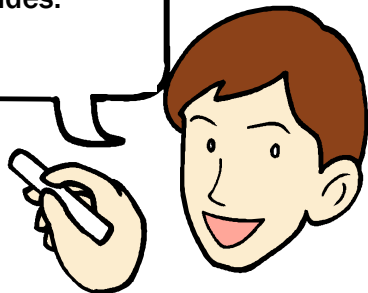
BRANCH AGM

WEDNESDAY 4th NOVEMBER, 8 pm

Cross St Centre, Dagnall St, St Albans.

Formal proceedings will be followed by refreshments and members' slides.

PLEASE COME



Small Blue Re-Discovered in Hertfordshire, by Stuart Pittman

Whilst exploring a familiar patch in North Herts. on 8th August, Mike Watson and I were amazed to discover three male Small Blues (*Cupido minimus*).

These diminutive butterflies were on the remnants of an old railway embankment which still retained some of its original chalk flora, most notably in this instance Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*). A visit later in the day confirmed a further two butterflies, both females, photographed ovipositing on the yellow florets of the foodplants.



Always a local butterfly in Hertfordshire it was considered on the verge of extinction, with the only other record since 1990 being that of a singleton at Hexton chalkpit in 1995.

It is encouraging to note that this partial second brood generation is evidence (unless one countenances a deliberate introduction) that the species must have been overlooked on previous site visits !

Owing to the colonies often being small and discrete, the fact that experienced field-workers came upon it by serendipity only adds to the pleasure of exploring one's local patch.

This should be an incentive to us all to continually walk and observe our local terrain, for who knows what other invertebrates lurk there !

Millennium Atlas update, by John Murray

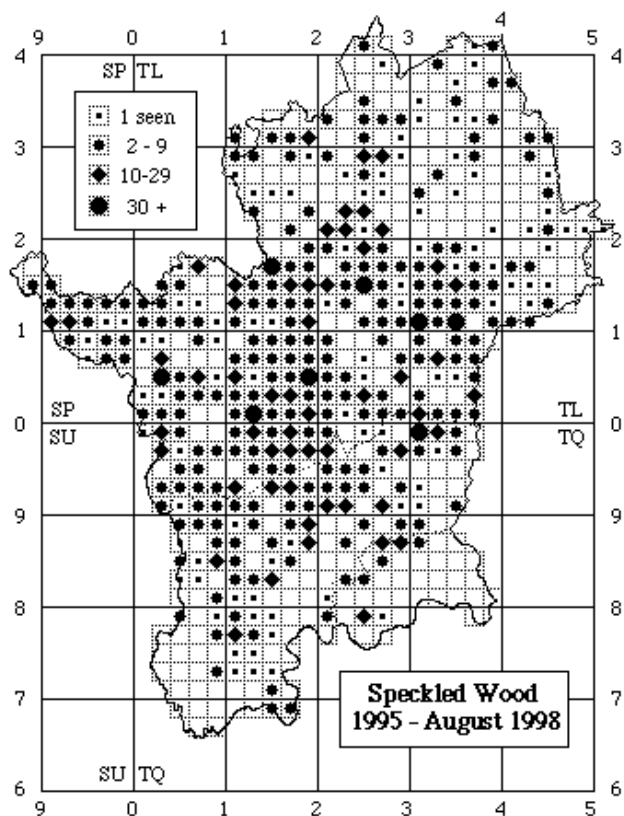
This summer, a lot more contact has been maintained with recorders during the course of the season, so that the least-visited squares are covered and unnecessary duplication avoided. Species-targeted mapping described in the last Newsletter has also been successful in ensuring regular visits throughout the season. More than 20 members have taken responsibility for seeing that a poorly-recorded group of tetrads near them are visited at critical times of the year, and the result has been a much more even coverage. One species, the Green-veined White, has now been recorded in every single tetrad in Hertfordshire, though there are still many gaps in Middlesex. Most recorders have yet to send in any recording forms for 1998, so hopefully these gaps will be largely filled in for this and other common species. Contact with recorders has most easily been kept up through Email. If you are on Email and want to receive progress bulletins on where to record, please send an Email request to John Murray at j.b.murray@open.ac.uk

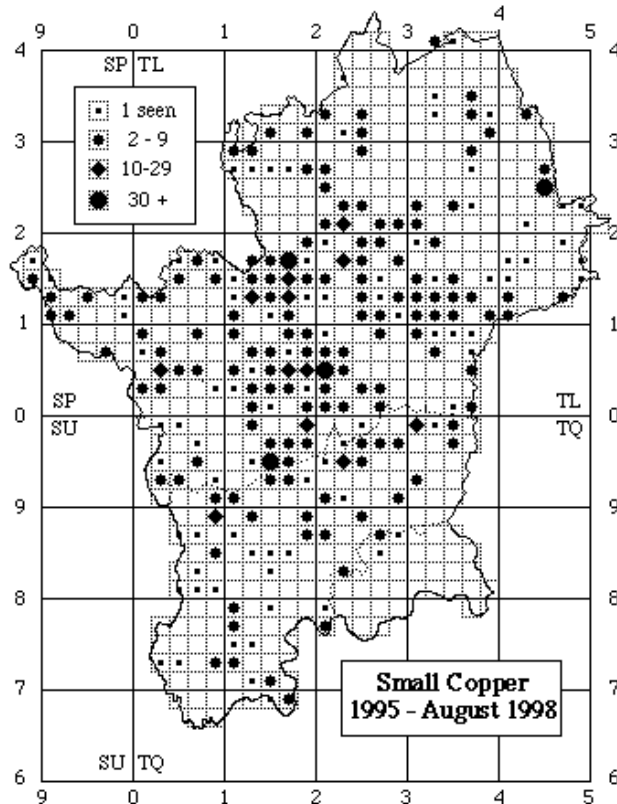
The flight season of most species is almost over now, but one species still very common in most places is the Speckled Wood, and if it follows the same pattern as last year will continue to be on the wing until the end of October. An updated distribution map of the Speckled Wood is appended which shows large gaps in north Hertfordshire and south Middlesex. Now is the time to check whether these gaps are due to lack of recording at the appropriate season. Pick some blank squares near you from the map and record what you find. Also shown is an updated Small Copper distribution map, which shows a similar distribution but with even larger blank areas. This also can be found on the wing into November in favourable years when a third brood occurs.

Please send in your records on recording forms in the usual way to Dr John Murray, "Field End", Marshalls Heath, Weathampstead, Herts AL4 8HS, by NOVEMBER 9th AT THE LATEST.

(2 image files to go with the above article)

Hertfordshire and Middlesex





Local Publicity, by Terry Rodbard

As your new Publicity officer I am trying to get a press release into as many Herts & Middx papers as possible. If you have a local paper which you feel has a good coverage in your area would you please just contact me and give the name and telephone number. This would help me and give you a chance to help spread the word about the exciting year that we are having. In particular as regards Millhoppers and our work with Three Valleys Water. I look forward to hearing from you..

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Although the prolonged bad weather has severely disrupted the field trip program this year, here are the accounts of two which were successful: (a not-so-successful one is described on page 24!)

Field Trip to Therfield Heath (2 August), by Terry Rodbard.

Although threatened by the weather a small group of us (4!) met in the carpark of Royston Sports Club. After weaving our way through various groups in pre-training, and a more serious group of archers! we made our way to the chalk areas rising gently away to the back of all this activity. But there suddenly were the Chalkhill Blues that we had come to see. Many were mating and most offered good photographic opportunities. Only fairly common species were otherwise observed but seeing so many ChalkHills Blues had made the trip really worth it and we were only sorry that our group was so small.

Patmore Heath Field Trip 16 August 1998, by Gavin Vicary

Ten members met me in good weather for this trip to the very east of our branch region.

Initially the contents of 3 light-traps run on the heath the previous evening were examined. It had been a cool night and so the number of moths was lower than expected (see report on page 22). Over 20 species had been obtained however, with Ruby Tiger, Buff Arches and a Copper Underwing perhaps the most attractive ones.

As we moved across the heath I explained how for centuries it would have been grazed flat and that the wildlife found there such as heath bedstraw, common sorrel, devils bit scabious, harebells, green woodpeckers, common lizards, Small Copper and Small Heath butterflies thrived because they had adapted to the conditions that grazing created. Lack of grazing earlier this century exacerbated by the decline of rabbits due to myxomatosis allowed a lot of trees and scrub to develop to the detriment of those species that require heathland conditions to survive.

Heathland is now a rare habitat in Hertfordshire, particularly acid grass heath like that at Patmore, and the few remnants that remain should be conserved. I pointed out that several of the older people who live around the heath could remember when there were no trees at all which caused some surprise as some of the oaks are very large and people do not realise, as I did not when I first moved there, that these trees are less than seventy years old.

The Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust who manage the site have cleared some areas of trees which has allowed the typical heath plants to come back and there are regular work parties through the winter to clear small areas. Sadly a brief reintroduction to grazing has again been allowed to lapse with the result that there is a constant problem with scrub encroachment .

We stopped at a number of the ponds on the site, all of which had just about dried out.

Several dragonflies were seen including the scarce Ruddy Darter and a newly emerged Migrant Hawker that posed for photographs whilst drying out its wings. Discussion took place as to whether the ponds would always have dried out and I informed the party that there was some argument locally as to whether this had been the case and that water take up by the trees, water abstraction nearby, rupturing of the clay base either by tree roots or de-silting operations and the run of dry summers were all the subject of heated local debate.

A total of ten species of butterfly were seen on the trip; Small Copper, Large White, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Green-veined White, Small Skipper, Purple Hairstreak, Brimstone, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper. Small Copper was perhaps the most numerous and I hope that the members who came along enjoyed the visit.

A Red List for Hertfordshire Butterflies by John B. Murray

A new Red Data book is being prepared by the Hertfordshire Natural History Society, and the following is a first draft of the section on Butterflies. I would be grateful for any comments members may have on this article, and particularly any sightings of the rarer or fast-declining species. I would also be grateful for any sightings or reminiscences prior to 1970, or of any sources for this period. Our New Millennium Survey is incomplete and continues until 1999, so the following account is preliminary may have to be modified as further sightings come in.

A new Red List for British Butterflies has recently been published (Warren et al 1997) that includes evaluation of threat due to rate of decline, as well as number of decads in which the species is found nationally. Since the information is available for Hertfordshire, this procedure has been followed here, as an addition to the ordinary list.

RED LIST STANDARD CATEGORIES

1. National Red Data Book species:

Only 3 butterflies exist in these categories: the Glanville Fritillary, the Swallowtail and the Lulworth Skipper, (all RDB3) none of which are found in Hertfordshire.

2. Nationally Scarce (Notable) species:

One such species is found in Hertfordshire: the Purple Emperor *Apatura iris*. There have been four individuals seen since 1983, all Males: one in 1994, two together in 1996, and one in 1997. All were sighted within a mile or two of each other and are probably from the same colony. Nationally it is found in 66 decads (=notable B).

3. Hertfordshire Rare Species:

Green Hairstreak

Recorded in 8 tetrads since 1995, three sightings being of singletons which may not represent a colony. This leaves 4 sites: Aldbury Nowers, Tring Park, Highdown and Telegraph Hill.

Brown Hairstreak

Known only at one site: Bricket Wood. Imago last seen 1995, one egg only found 1996, not recorded in 1997. May already be extinct, but is notoriously difficult to observe and could possibly survive unrecorded at other sites.

Rob Still



Small Blue

One individual only recorded at Hexton Chalk Pit in 1995, and 3 in North Hertfordshire 1998. Until the discovery of the latter 3 at the same site this year it was considered extinct as a breeding species in the county.

Chalkhill Blue

Recorded in 11 tetrads since 1995, but 3 were singletons, apparently wanderers, and others were on the edge of colonies. Three colonies definitely survive: Therfield Heath, Telegraph Hill and Hexton Chalk Pit, and there is a possible fourth in the Aldbury Nowers/Tring area. This species has expanded since the 1980s; Telegraph Hill and Hexton Chalk Pit have both been recolonised since 1990. All three colonies had good numbers (60 to 80 maximum on transect counts) in 1996 and 1997.

Duke of Burgundy

One colony only, at Aldbury Nowers, close to extinction. A few were seen there in 1995, one possible in 1996, none at all in 1997, and one in 1998.

Dark Green Fritillary

Seen in 5 tetrads since 1995, but only one small colony (probable) in Tring Park, with another possible in the Aldbury Nowers area.

Silver-washed Fritillary

Difficult to assess because of known persistent unapproved releases at Bricket Wood up to 1995. Singles seen at Hemel Hempstead in 1994 and St Albans in 1995 may have been from this source. One

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

possible colony may survive in the Knebworth area on the basis of a probable sighting in Newton Wood in 1996 and one male and two others north of Codicote in 1997.

DECLINING BUTTERFLIES

(1) Nationally declining:

Following relevant categories of decline used for birds by Batten et al (1990), Warren et al (1997) have carried out a threat analysis of British butterflies on the basis of how much they have declined in numbers over a period of years. Those found to be rare or declining are assigned 3 classes, high, medium and low threat, defined as follows:

(a) High: extinction in Britain distinctly likely, or considerable reduction in range or number of colonies (e.g. 20% in 25 years) if the level of the factor continues at the present rate without intervention.

(b) Medium: local contractions in range or small reductions in number of colonies (e.g. >10% in 25 years) likely if the factor continues to operate without alteration.

(c) Low: secondary factors that might be worsening threats from other causes.

Warren et al. (1997) list 37 butterflies that have declined in range nationally between the two periods 1940-1969 & 1970-1982. Of these, 16 species have been recorded in Hertfordshire since 1995:

Table 1: % declines in national range of threatened butterflies

Species		% decline in U.K.
Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>	26%
Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>	31%
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	25%
Brown Hairstreak	<i>Thecla betulae</i>	31%
White-letter Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium w-album</i>	22%
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	25%
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	27%
Chalkhill Blue	<i>Lysandra coridon</i>	17%
Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>	26%
White Admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>	34%
Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura iris</i>	38%
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>	38%
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaia</i>	29%
Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	30%
Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	20%

Since the most recent survey of British butterflies nationally was completed in 1982 (Heath et al 1984) the above data is inevitably out-of-date. Some species have continued to decline at these alarming rates, others' decline appears to have been arrested, and some have recently expanded their range. A more appropriate analysis is to look at the data from Hertfordshire alone.

(2) Species declining in Hertfordshire

Our county is fortunate in having a thorough tetrad survey carried out between the years 1984 and 1986 (Sawford 1987). This is probably one of the most complete tetrad surveys ever carried out, and for this reason was chosen by Thomas & Abery (1995) for a study on the effects of estimating butterfly decline from maps of different sized sampling units. Additional records going back to 1970 were included in a series of maps of species distribution in Sawford's work, so that we have an excellent knowledge of the distribution of all Hertfordshire butterflies between the years 1970 and 1986. Earlier surveys were not carried out so systematically, but nevertheless a complete summary of all Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

lepidoptera was published shortly before the war (Foster 1937), which is useful in estimating minimum declines of some species.

More recently, a more detailed survey including numbers of butterflies seen was instigated in 1995 and is planned to continue until 1999, as part of a nationwide audit of butterfly species organised by Butterfly Conservation under the title "Butterflies for the New Millennium". Although not yet complete, all tetrads except eight have so far been visited (1995-97), so a reasonable idea of the distribution of most species may now be attained.

Taking 1978 as the middle year of Sawford's sampling period, and 1996 as the middle year of the present survey gives us an 18 year time difference from which to estimate species declines in range, simply by comparing numbers of tetrads in which the same species of butterfly was seen in the two periods. These declines can then be converted to declines over a 25 year period to conform with the categories defined by Warren et al (1997). It is also possible to get some idea of declines over a longer period, by comparing present distribution with that described by Foster (1937), mainly for the years 1900 to 1937, for which a date of 1920 is given in Table 2.

Many of the 1920 figures are approximate, since Foster (1937) simply lists localities, some of which cover many tetrads. He has not listed localities for the commoner species, so tetrads for the Dingy and Grizzled Skipper are little better than guesses. Foster describes the Dingy Skipper as "Recorded from all districts, often common", a phrase almost identical to his description of the Peacock butterfly: "Recorded from all districts, sometimes common". The Peacock is now found in every tetrad. Foster describes the Grizzled Skipper as "Recorded from all districts, frequently common on chalk". Both sightings of the Pearl-bordered Fritillary in 1996 are presumed releases, though there is no direct evidence of this.

Generally speaking, the percentage declines per 25 years show little change for the two periods 1920-96 and 1978-96 for most of the declining species, indicating a steady decline. Green & Brown Hairstreak, Small Blue and Dark Green Fritillary show declines during the past twenty years only, whereas for Chalkhill Blue and White Admiral the decline seems to have been arrested recently. Altogether, the picture is a sorry one, with 9 species now showing

Table 2 changes in range within Hertfordshire of threatened butterflies

Species	No. of tetrads seen				% 25-year declines:
	1920	1978	1996	1978-96	1920-96
Dingy Skipper	350?	39	9	82%	94%
Grizzled Skipper	300?	36	11	76%	92%
Green Hairstreak	18	22	8	71%	35%
Brown Hairstreak	3	4	1	81%	46%
White-letter Hairstreak	21	59	92	increase	
Small Blue	12	15	1	95%	82%
Brown Argus	18	36	127	increase	
Chalkhill Blue	18	9	9	0%	30%
Duke of Burgundy	4	2	1	58%	56%
White Admiral	6	25	16	44%	71%
Purple Emperor	4	2	3	no significant change	
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	25	1	(2)	?83%	
Dark Green Fritillary	14	17	4	82%	51%
Silver-washed Fritillary	18	13	2	88%	77%
Marbled White	6	30	70	increase	

declines greater than the national average (High threat), and 2 species with no recent change. However, it is encouraging to report that 3 threatened species are increasing their range in Hertfordshire at the present time, all of them quite substantially.

It should be emphasized that this list refers to nationally threatened species only, so does not include the Wall butterfly, which has shown the most dramatic decline in range in Hertfordshire, most of

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

it over the past 7 years.

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- Warren, M.S., Barnett, L.K., Gibbons, D.W. & Avery, M.I. 1997. Assessing National conservation priorities: an improved Red List of British butterflies. *Biological Conservation* **82**, 312-328.

An Endemic Moth in Hertfordshire? by Rob Souter.

Whilst recently looking through various books concerning moths, I came across references to a species of moth for which only four specimens are known to science. What is most interesting is that they were recorded in Hertfordshire and have been found nowhere else, in other words a Hertfordshire endemic. The information below is taken from Heath and Emmet (1983).

The type locality for the Autumnal Snout *Schrankia intermedialis* (Reid) is Broxbourne Woods. The description was made from two males taken at mercury vapour light in this Hertfordshire woodland on 21 and 22 October 1971 (Reid, 1972), close to a damp tract with predominant ground flora of *Carex pendula* and bracken, with bramble in drier areas. No further specimen was found there despite regular trapping for three years and also later visits; but a third specimen was caught on 4 October 1973 in a damp copse at Bayfordbury, within two miles of the original site. This was found in a trap left overnight, and the captor has suggested that the

species, unlike its congeners, may fly only very late. Another male was caught in Broxbourne Woods on 1 October 1982. This species has not been recorded from anywhere else or been found in old collections. Nothing is known about the female or early stages. This species appears superficially to be intermediate between the White-line Snout *S. taenialis* and the Pinion-streaked Snout *S. costaestrigalis* whilst it differs from both species in the male genitalia.

Colin Plant, county moth recorder has no further information on this species although he says that debate continues, periodically, over whether or not it is a valid species or a freak hybrid between the other two.

Since it flies in October, perhaps only late at night, is the size of a micro, and of similar appearance to the related species mentioned, it may be no surprise that there are no other records. However, since I have access to the Bayfordbury site I may attempt to trap for this species this Autumn.

References:

Heath, J. and Emmet, A. M., (1983). *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol 10. Harley Books, Colchester.

Reid, J., (1972). Lepidoptera distribution maps scheme: guide to the critical species, part VII: the genus *Schrankia* Herrich-Schaffer (Lep. Noctuidae, Hypeninae) including the description of a new species. *Entomologist's Gazette*. **23**: 221-225.

The Moth Page, by Rob Souter, Branch Moth Officer

Moth events.

I have continued to get around with the light trap this summer, recording moths at a number of sites with a range of different people. Here is a summary of the advertised events and some of those arranged at short notice.

Millhopper's Pasture 19th June and 24th July.

I have only managed to record the moths at the new branch reserve near Long Marston a couple of times so far this year. On both occasions I was joined by Margaret and John Noakes, and by several of the local people who helped secure the site as a local nature reserve.

On both occasions 29 species were caught. The moth community reflects the habitat since as well as the ubiquitous hedgerow species, the species caught are associated with poplars and willow, and with wetland vegetation.

The most abundant species were Clouded Silver in June, and Common Footman and Smoky Wainscot in July. Other common and widespread species of interest were Figure of Eighty, the Nutmeg, the Drinker, Poplar Grey and Straw Dot.

In June the interesting species were Scorched Wing, whilst in July two Round-winged Muslin and a White Satin moth were caught.

Hawk-moths were seen in July but were not caught and identified.

Interest in recording was promoted amongst the local attendees, and in future they may take on recording at this site to help build a more complete list of moths.

Broxbourne Woods 25th July.

The high point of the mothing year was a superb evening at Broxbourne Woods Nature Reserve. It is with regret, however, that only 3 people attended.

A Skinner and a Robinson trap were run in the main ride down from the car park and the total count was an impressive 42 species in 3 hours. These included some noteworthy species.

The notable species were Oak Eggar, Birch Mocha, Pine Hawk-moth, Rosy Footman and Black Arches. These are very local residents usually only found in older woodlands since their larvae feed on various species of tree.

Other local but more widespread species recorded, that are also associated with woodland, were Large Emerald, Tawny-barred Angle, Slender Brindle, Minor Shoulder-knot and Lunar-spotted Pinion.

A large number of the Drinker moth were attracted to the light and almost became a nuisance since they arrived in a steady stream and crashed around the trap and trappers, and so had to be potted up to get them out of the way.

Those attending had a great evening and it is unfortunate that more people were not able to make it.

The Commons Nature Reserve 6th August.

At the request of Peter Oakenfull, reserve warden, following a daytime BC meeting at this reserve for butterflies, I met up with Peter and others for a mid-week night of moth trapping. The reserve, on the south side of Welwyn Garden City consists of a series of meadows, fens and woodland areas with a hedge-lined stream running through it.

25 species were caught on a clear night with a full moon. The most abundant species were Ruby Tiger, Smoky Wainscot and Common Carpet.

Notable species included a Black Arches, whose larvae feed on oak, and a worn Round-winged Muslin, the larvae of which feed on algae growing on reeds and other wetland vegetation.

I plan to return here in the coming months and again next year to help build up a species list for the site.

Patmore Heath 15th August.

Gavin Vicary and myself were joined by Charles Watson on the night



Oak Eggar

Lasiocampa quercus

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

before a BC meeting at Patmore Heath to record moths and provide something to show those arriving in the morning.

Two Skinner traps were run near two of the heaths ponds. It was a cool night and numbers were generally low. A total of 23 species were recorded which was far lower than the incredible record of 113 species of macro-moths caught here in a night by Charles and Colin Plant a few years ago.

The only species of note was the Copper Underwing since there was no previous record of this common species for the site.

4 additional species were caught at Gavin's garden light trap just off the heath and included Rosy Rustic and the Phoenix. A further 3 species were seen during the walk around on the Sunday. This included the Mouse moth which was found hiding in the reserve notice board.

Totteridge Fields 18th August.

After having to cancel a meeting here in July, due to unsettled weather, this mid-week event went ahead with 12 local people attending, including the reserve warden, Ann Brown.

Again both a Robinson and a Skinner trap were run and a total of 23 species were caught between the two traps.

The moths were largely common and widespread species but included Scarce Footman, a more local species which appears to be more abundant than Common Footman this year. Both Swallowtailed and Brimstone were recorded but these were the moths and not the butterflies of the same name.

Ann Brown reported that the Chimney Sweeper, a black, day-flying moth, was again recorded on the site, seen in June. This species is restricted in distribution since the larval foodplant, Pignut, is usually only associated with old grassland.

Future Events.

Moth recording sessions will go on into October and even November, as although the number of species declines, many are only around at this time of year and include some notable species (see pages 18-19).

Thanks to *Butterfly Line* Informants, by Nick Bowles

Since it began, *Butterfly Line* has raised in excess of £10,000

If you have used the service, you'll know that the line provides feedback on the butterflies (and day flying moths) that members have reported during the previous week. It gives predictions of the end of broods and the likelihood of fresh specimens for the keen photographers among us.



Then, more awkward to compile as it depends heavily on the weather, there's a guide to the areas of the UK most likely to provide specific sightings, or the best range of sightings in the coming week.

The 'Line' is evidently helpful. It gets plenty of positive feedback. Compliants are rare but include the occasional moan that the exact locations of rare species are not given, or that members' local area wasn't mentioned. Invariably because the 'Line' received very little data from that district the previous week.

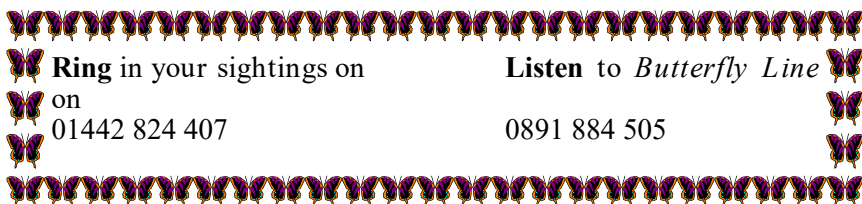
The £10,000 raised is due to help given by ordinary Branch members, phoning through brief details of their sightings. Even details of common species seen in the garden are helpful. They all contribute to a comprehensive weekly review of our butterflies fortunes. So, if you are already contributing to this record database, a big **thank you** for helping raise that £10,000.

If you hadn't previously provided information, you could ring details

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

through on 01442 842 407. *Butterfly Line* want to raise the next £10,000 even faster and at the same time, reflect the situation in all parts of the UK even more accurately.

If you phone in your sightings in the evenings, Nick is often prepared to chat about butterfly-related topics. At other times, expect to get an answer-phone.



Ring in your sightings on
on
01442 824 407

Listen to *Butterfly Line*
0891 884 505

Victims of the Weather, by Norma Dean

The following is the report of a field trip, affected by this 'summer's' weather !

Westbrook Hay, 12th July 1998

Westbrook Hay covers about 30 acres of land owned by the Boxmoor Trust. Planning permission has been granted for the Trust to convert an old barn, situated near the entrance, into a visitor's centre.



We had been looking forward to showing members around the site, but unfortunately it was pouring on the 12th. Dennis sat in the car whilst I, sheltering under my butterfly umbrella, kept a look out by the roadside just in case anyone decided to come. About an hour later, after drinking our coffee, we went home as there was not sign of the weather improving.

When we returned to the site 5 days later, the sun was shining and we counted 84 Marbled Whites as well as a large number of Meadow Browns and Burnet Moths.

Aerial Courtship or Escape Procedure, by Stuart Pittman

Many butterfly observers have witnessed courtship behaviour on the ground. This often shows females taking defensive measures to discourage the unwanted suitor, perhaps because they have already been mated.

I had always presumed that aerial courtship displays like those often observed in Purple Hairstreaks *et al* were the precursor to full mating high up in the canopy.

However, the opposite could also be true as the female flees dozens of feet in a manoeuvre called *ascending flight*. If the spurned male is persistent the resulting aerial courtship can last several minutes.

Just as a tale of dramatic conflict is often more intriguing than one of monotonous harmony, these conspicuous rejections often attract the butterfly watcher more than the fleeting courtships that lead to mating.

Camberwell Beauties, by Ian Small

The following is taken from an account by Andrew Wood, posted on the internet earlier this year:

‘After a pretty dreadful April in the UK I had a surprise in Regent’s Park (TQ 286826) in London today (4 May). We were walking through the spring bedding in the south-east of the park when we saw a large dark butterfly fly up from behind a bench, my son shouted “Camberwell”, and it was a Camberwell Beauty. We were able to follow it for about 200m as it settled briefly a couple of times before flying behind a shelter, where we were able to see it over an open area a few minutes later. The weather was warm and sunny and the park busy.’

That makes 3 years in a row that this species has been seen in our area in Spring. As most migration to the UK occurs in late summer, these observations are probably overwintered specimens. Why not keep your eyes open for a very large dark butterfly this Autumn ????



Millhopper's Pasture, SP 890149 Lots of help is needed over the winter on our first reserve. First meeting is on **4th October**, when we have to use strimmers to cut the grass and then rake it up. Then, on **22nd November**, we will be cutting back some of the blackthorn. There will then be further meetings from **Jan - April, 4th Sunday of each month**. Details are available from John and Margaret Noakes (01296 660072).

Members are encouraged to come along to help us preserve and optimise this site. Please bring any useful tools, but especially good gloves and footwear, and of course a packed lunch !



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Branch AGM - 4th November 1998 , 8 pm. See advert on page 5



Conservation Dates

Conservation work is one of the most important activities of the Society, as loss or neglect of suitable habitats is one of the major reasons for the decline in many of our butterflies as well as other wildlife.

Millhopper's Pasture - details on page 26.

Below are a series of dates across Herts. and Middlesex where you can help with essential management that aims to maintain the correct conditions on these sites for the wildlife that inhabits them. Several of the dates are run by the HMWT on their nature reserves.

Therfield Heath, TL 335400 First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thomson (01763) 341443.

Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP 952131. Third Sunday of each month. Meet 10.00 a.m. in the lay-by, near Tring station.

Hertford Heath TL 354111. For details ring Anthony Oliver on (01992) 583404.

Frynt Country Park - details from Leslie Williams at the Brent Ecology Unit on (0181) 206 0492

Patmore Heath TL 443257. Meet at 10.00 a.m. on the last Sunday of each month. Further details from Gavin Vicary (01279) 771933

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

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