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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

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ISSUE 2

MAY 1995



### Spring Promise By Malcolm Newland

I remember reading in a newspaper last year that a periodic upwelling of a current in the Indian Ocean virtually guaranteed a wet winter followed by a glorious summer for the U.K. this year. Certainly April has made a grand start which the spring butterflies have taken full advantage of. All the hibernating species have been seen on the wing with Brimstones, Peacocks and Commas in

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encouraging numbers. Early records have been broken with male Orange Tip seen on the 3rd April, Speckled Wood on the 7th and Green Hairstreak on the 12th. Brian Sawford has even had Humming Bird Hawk Moth reported! Field trips and transect walks are under way so fingers crossed for a long and enjoyable butterfly season.

Our first indoor meeting as a separate Branch was well attended with some of our members having travelled from the farthest corners of our area and their efforts were well rewarded when Ian Small, Vice-Chairman of our National Society gave his talk "A Chalkland Paradise". This covered the flora, fauna and history of Porton Down a unique "time-warp" where clouds of butterflies can still be seen. Amply illustrated with high quality slides the lecture whetted our appetites for the field trip which is planned there next year.

Finally a full field trip programme has been organised for the summer (See pages 10 and 11) which we hope will be well attended by our members.

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**Butterfly Line**  
**0891 884505**

**Regular updates. Latest News.**

All profits are used for the conservation of butterflies and their habitats. Calls charged at 49p per minute at peak rate and 39p per minute at all other times.

## Aldbury Nowers Transect walks

By Martin Baker

*Martin Baker, is a Conservation Officer with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and below details the results of transect walks, carried out on the Trust's reserve at Aldbury Nowers (Duchie's Piece), near Tring, which is renowned for it's butterflies.*

1994 completed three years of transect walks, recording butterflies, at the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust's Aldbury Nowers Nature Reserve. 1994 proved to be the most successful year for recording yet, with more transects being walked and more weeks covered than in previous years.

The annual index figures (the total number of butterflies of each species seen on the transects, including estimates for unrecorded weeks) are shown in the tables on pages 4 and 5.

These figures are also represented in a relative index form, which measures the percentage of butterflies seen compared with a base year (1994 for most species).

The figures for the three years, show some interesting changes, though it is too early to pick out real trends. Overall 1994 was a far better year for butterflies than 1993, with more butterflies recorded and numbers of important species such as Duke of Burgundy, Brown Argus, Green Hairstreak and Marbled White increasing; this in spite of some very poor weather in the early part of the year.

1994 was the best year so far for the Browns, with numbers of Ringlet, Meadow Brown and Marbled White all significantly higher. Some worry had been expressed about the numbers of Marbled White, due to the pressures of several successive drought years combined

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### Albury Nowers Annual and Relative Index Figures

Species	Annual Index			Relative Index		
	1992	1993	1994	1992	1993	1994
Small/Essex Skipper	30	25	36.5	82.2	68.5	100
Large Skipper	25	29.5	19.5	128.2	151.3	100
Dingy skipper	0	1	1.5	0	66.7	100
Grizzled Skipper	0	2	1.5	0	133.3	100
Brimstone	149	161.5	146.5	101.7	110.2	100
Large White	145	139	94	154.3	147.9	100
Small White	124.5	64.5	87	143.1	74.1	100
Green-Veined White	38.5	3	8.5	452.9	35.3	100
Orange Tip	12.5	23	15	83.3	153.3	100
Green Hairstreak	9	12.5	28	32.1	44.6	100
Small Copper	18.5	7	2.5	740	280	100
Small Blue	0.5	0	0	100	0	0
Brown Argus	28.5	9.5	35	81.4	27.1	100
Common Blue	80	99	88	90.9	112.5	100
Holly Blue	2.5	0	0	100	0	0

Species	Annual Index			Relative Index		
	1992	1993	1994	1992	1993	1994
Duke of Burgundy	5	1	3.5	142.9	28.6	100
Red Admiral	1.5	3	1.5	100	200	100
Painted Lady	3	0	2.5	120	0	100
Small Tortoiseshell	11	7	9.5	121.1	73.7	100
Peacock	96.5	26	12	804.2	216.7	100
Comma	4	0	0	100	0	0
Speckled Wood	34	34	37.5	90.7	90.7	100
Wall	4.5	4	7	64.3	57.1	100
Marbled White	82	123.5	172.5	47.5	71.6	100
Gatekeeper	149.5	123	132.5	112.8	92.8	100
Meadow Brown	225.5	292	407.5	55.3	71.7	100
Small Heath	53	20.5	28	189.3	73.2	100
Ringlet	68.5	186.5	288.5	23.7	64.6	100
Dark Green Fritillary	1	0	0	100	0	0

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with intense rabbit grazing. Their increase is therefore particularly pleasing and the areas of longer turf being retained in the second grazing compartment should continue to help this species.

The very good year that Green Hairstreaks had on the reserve and the return to good numbers of the Brown Argus were both very welcome, as was the continued sighting of the occasional Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper at the Pitstone and of the reserve. Hopefully, continued clearance work will encourage the spread of these skippers back onto the reserve in larger numbers.

1994 saw more Duke of Burgundy butterflies recorded on the transects than in 1993, though fewer than in 1992. Unfortunately, grazing pressure by rabbits has been intense this year and have resulted in very few large cowslips on the reserve. However, our surveys have shown that overall numbers of Cowslips remain constant. The measures now being taken to control the rabbit population should result in the recovery of the grassland, larger Cowslips and hopefully an increase in the population of this species on the reserve. No survey of eggs was carried out this year, but once again Dukes were seen flying in the clearings in Strawberry Woods adjacent to the reserve, and signs of typical caterpillar feeding damage were observed on Cowslips.

Finally, if anyone new is interested in recording transects in 1995, please contact me at the Wildlife Trust Office in St. Albans; new recorders are always welcome. Also, if anyone is interested in surveying Cowslips and looking for Duke of Burgundy eggs, or signs of feeding damage, could they also contact me at the Wildlife Trust.

With continued monitoring, hopefully, we will start to see real trends in butterfly numbers emerging, and we will be able to continue to manage the reserve for the benefit of its butterflies.

## **Observations of a Butterfly Gardener**

### **By Malcolm Newland**

Back in 1986, I started keeping records of butterflies seen in the garden. Just the date, species seen, numbers present and what plants they were seen on. Although, the sightings mainly relate to weekends when I have the time to look they are still quite useful, having provided me with a list of earliest and latest dates for each butterfly, rough trends in population levels, and more importantly show which flowers are the real butterfly "magnets".

Over the years, twenty two species have dropped in to sample the various nectars and I am ever hopeful of adding to the total.

Last year, butterflies were recorded on sixty different flowers (I didn't know I had that many!) and the "top ten" were Buddleia Davidii, Forget-me-not, Privet, Scabious, Wallflower Bowles Mauve, Lychnis Coronaria, Chicory, Phlox and Sweet Rocket.

Don't be afraid to experiment, if something looks as though it might be a good butterfly plant, give it a try. Last year I had Chicory and Anise Hyssop in bloom for the first time and they both attracted butterflies with Chicory being particularly successful. The only drawback was that it grew to over six feet tall!

### **Sales Officer Needed**

The branch urgently need someone to organise sales goods at shows and meetings etc. Anyone interested please contact Malcolm Newland on 0144 267200.

**A Welcome Migrant**  
**By Douglas Heath**

The SAGA all started when my next door neighbour rushed into our kitchen and deposited her washing on the table and exclaimed "You like bugs don't you, well there is a big one in this lot". Not knowing what to expect I gingerly lifted the corner of a towel and there, clinging to a red shirt was a huge grey moth, wings folded in the delta position hiding the striking pink bands on it's abdomen. My immediate reaction was that this was a *Convolvulus Hawk Moth*, I had caught many of these as a boy in Africa. I then became very excited as it slowly dawned on me that in the motherland this was indeed a prize. My next door neighbour enquired whether it was to be set free, but, with the onset of a likely frost and the fact that this moth was a female, I suggested the best possible course of action was to keep her inside a cardboard shoe box with a few strands of bindweed and she may lay some eggs.

The next morning as I opened the lid I noticed, singly laid, clumps of bright green eggs - 37 in all, she had been busy. Alas, the next night she gave up and died it must have been all too much after her long flight, but she had completed her biological duty! Looking after 37 hawk moth larvae seemed to me a daunting prospect so I entrusted half to Dan a fellow "bug" enthusiast. My brother assured me he would help with a few larvae if all became too much. Well it didn't only one of my clutch hatched and Dan managed to double this figure with a healthy two, so, 3 out of 37. Not a good omen.

The female was caught on Sunday 18th September and all three larvae hatched in 8 days. Later all three were fed on bindweed (*convolvulus arvensis*). Dan kept his two safe, at 80°C in an inhabited iguana tank, mine was kept in an ice cream tub above the kitchen cupboard (the warmest and most humid place I could find ). All grew rapidly and on



the 16th October moulted from a light apple green to a dark mottled brown. I introduced *C. Sepians* and mine seemed to relish this as much as *C. arvensis* and both were on their last legs as there had been a sharp frost at the beginning of the month. On the 25th October mine stopped eating and became irritable, wandering around the tub, I added some potting compost and off it went a burrowing.

I unearthed my female pupa two weeks later and saw at first handed the odd shaped "tongue" case not unlike the handle of a Grecian urn, one could have hung it on a nail like a key. I took my female pupa over to Dans to join his two males and on the 15th December the first male hatched closely followed by his brother and at last his much larger sister. All three were kept in a large net cage with some *Ipomea* plants, we hoped to generate another generation but such incestuous behaviour was not on the agenda and despite being fed with a 5% honey solution within a few days all three youngsters had passed away. Sad, but one consolation was we both had our own memories of real English *Convolvulus* hawk moths to remember this saga by. The reason I think, for this welcome migrant from Africa to my garden in **PIRTON, HERTFORDSHIRE**, was the planting in spring of one of her favourite flowers *Nicotiana affinis*, the white tobacco plant and of course the red shirt.

### Newsletter Articles Needed

Please send articles to the editor (see back page). The deadline for the August issue is 15<sup>th</sup> July 1995

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

### 1995 Progr

The field trip programme is open to everyone, there is  
If you have any queries on the above

20/5/95	Totternhoe Quarry	With Beds and Northhants for Duk
4/6/95	Salcey Forest	Meet in the car park of this Northh
18/6/95	College Lake	The reserve car park lies off the B
2/7/95	Galleyhill Essex	An afternoon excursion (4.00pm) to Waltham Abbey A112 to Parklands
9/7/95	Bricket Wood	Meet in Smug Oak Station car park
15/7/95	Tewin Orchard	Moth and Badger evening. Please b
23/7/95	Stanmore Common	A meeting in Middlesex to see the
30/7/95	Hexton Chalk Pit & Pegsdon Hills	This field trip has been arranged to The trip will be led by Brian Sawfo
6/8/95	Hillingdon trail	More Middx. Butterflies. Meet at t
20/8/95	Watlington Hill	Meet in Oxfordshire at 11.00am in
18/10/95	A.G.M. with Members slides	Our first Annual General Meeting. plenty of time to see slides from m
14/11/95	Heath Fritillary Re-Introduction	A joint meeting with the Letchwort for a talk on "The Re-introduction
24/11/95	Butterfly Action	Maintanance of the hedge and mea
25/11/95	Weekend	Conservation at Stanmore Country

## **Time of Events**

need to book, just turn up on the day at the location given.  
John Hollingdale on 0181 863 2077

Burgundy. Meet 11.00am at Totternhoe picnic site. Map 165 SP 987218

Donshire forest at 11.00am to see Wood White. Map 152 SP 794516

Meet at 11.00am to see the Small Blue. Fee £1.00. Map 165 SP 932136

White Letter Hairstreak in this woodland. Map 166 TL 395029

For 1 mile turn into Galleyhill Road then Shinkins & 100yds to "Lake John".

11.00am to see White Admiral. Map 166 TL 135020

See page 13 for details

flies on the common. Meet in Warren Lane at 11.00am. Map 176 TQ 159935

coincide with Butterfly Week. Meet at the Wendy House, Hexton Village Hall.  
 and start at 11.00am. Map 166 TL 107307

eastern end of Glebe Avenue, Ickenham at 11.00am. Map 176 TQ 086857

car park on top of the hill to see Silver Spotted Skipper. Map 175 SU 709936.

hoped the formal proceedings will last about an hour, thus leaving  
 rs. In the Cross St. Centre, Dagnall st. near St. Albans town centre 8.00pm

uralists at the Letchworth Settlement, Nevells Road at 7.30pm  
 e Heath Fritillary in Essex" by Ken Ulrich

created by the branch at Standalone Farm near Letchworth

## A Butterfly Search

By Norma Dean

L	I	A	T	W	O	L	L	A	W	S	K	P	V	C	P
C	O	M	O	N	A	R	C	H	L	S	E	I	R	O	U
S	H	G	I	E	P	V	H	A	U	K	W	T	E	M	R
Y	C	A	B	B	A	G	E	W	H	I	T	E	P	M	P
D	P	P	L	N	S	L	X	Y	O	P	Z	G	P	A	L
A	K	E	C	K	W	B	A	D	V	P	M	N	O	T	E
L	I	N	A	E	H	O	S	R	E	E	A	A	C	S	E
D	P	O	L	C	V	I	R	M	I	R	S	R	T	U	M
E	O	T	K	F	O	G	L	B	X	M	I	O	L	P	P
T	Q	S	J	N	A	C	K	L	W	I	D	B	R	O	E
N	Z	M	B	L	I	X	K	M	B	O	Y	A	K	U	R
I	R	I	N	G	L	E	T	I	V	L	D	W	D	K	O
A	D	R	D	M	O	I	Q	A	L	E	U	A	B	E	R
P	G	B	I	R	X	E	A	O	C	B	V	E	E	S	R
E	T	S	M	A	L	L	H	E	A	T	H	W	B	M	S
L	L	E	H	S	E	S	I	O	T	R	O	T	E	V	A

Painted Lady

Tortoiseshell

Peacock

Meadow Brown

Orange Tip

Cabbage White

Small Heath

Purple Emperor

Holly Blue

Skipper

Red Admiral

Brimstone

Chalkhill Blue

Swallowtail

Copper

Ringlet

Monarch

Comma

## **Moths**

**By Rob Souter**

With spring firmly upon us, this is a good time to look for moths as well as butterflies. We have lined up a number of things to get involved in and I am sure you will be hooked on moths in no time.

### **Moth Projects**

I am hoping to start running regular projects that members can help with. They will be kept simple so that everyone can contribute and regular updates will appear in future newsletters.

### **Day-flying Moths Project**

For the first project, I would like to ask members to look out for and record day-flying moths they see within Herts and Middlesex, whether in the garden, during butterfly surveys, or walks in the country. These species are under-recorded since they do not usually get attracted to light traps. A recording form with a list of species that are likely to be encountered in the Herts and Middlesex area has been included in this newsletter. If you could complete this form and return it to me at the end of the season, you will be contributing to our knowledge of the status and distribution of day-flying moths in the branch area.

### **Light trapping events in summer 1995**

The branch has organised its first mothning evening, to be held on Saturday 15th July thanks to Michael Clarke and Colin Plant. The event, at Tewin Orchard, will combine a chance to see the diversity of moth species flying on a typical summers evening at a number of traps set up around the site, and to watch badgers and other nocturnal wildlife from a hide.

Michael owns the land and invites groups to see the local badgers on a regular basis. Colin, the county moth recorder, is happy to supply the

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light traps and will be on hand to offer his expertise in identifying the moths we catch.

Meet at the Plume of Feathers pub in Tewin (between Welwyn and Hertford) at 9 pm so that we can get into the hide half an hour before dusk. We will then wait till about midnight to see the badgers followed by a look at the light traps to see which moths are being attracted.

The event is obviously a late affair due to the time of year and the very fact that most moths (and badgers) do not emerge until after dark.

Since the hide only accommodates 10 people, places are restricted and offered on a first come, first served basis by contacting me in advance.

### **Light traps**

As promised in the last issue, I have put together some brief information on the types of light trap that are available for those members who would like to take a more active interest in attracting and identifying moths. The information comes from an article in British Wildlife by Paul Waring (Vol.5 No.3)

### **Robinson Trap**

Performance Nightly catches of 500-1,000 moths possible.

Advantages The best trap for obtaining and holding large catches. Can be left running overnight, unattended. Ideal for operation in the garden, with moths released unharmed the next evening.

Disadvantages Requires a mains electricity supply or portable generator. More expensive than Skinner or Heath traps. More bulky than Skinner trap. Bulbs hot in use, easy to crack or break and expensive.

Cost About £310

### **Skinner Trap**

#### Performance

As good as the Robinson trap at attracting moths but not so good at holding them unmanned.

#### Advantages

Easy to make at home from metal or wood. Catch can be inspected by lifting plastic side without disrupting operation. Less bulky than Robinson trap.

#### Disadvantages

Not designed for unattended, all-night operation and not so good at holding moths, especially after dawn, as Robinson trap. No rain shield for bulb, although could be made. Requires a mains electricity supply or portable generator. Bulbs hot, fragile and costly.

#### Cost

About £225.

### **Heath Trap**

#### Performance

With the original Phillips AC unit only about a quarter of the number of moths and half the number of species caught per night compared with the Robinson Trap. About half these numbers with the present pulsed DC units.

#### Advantages

Very portable. Packs flat and can be operated from small 12V batteries. Can also be run from the mains. Fluorescent tube light is cold in operation and so will not explode in rain. Can be left unattended at night. Cheapest and most versatile option for the beginner. Small catchment area an advantage in monitoring work as results will be more site-specific.

#### Disadvantages

Only catch about 50% of macro-moth species on the wing on any one night. Non-standardised design. Recent models only catch half the number of moths as

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the earlier models when battery operated.

Cost                      About £58 plus £25 for a mains unit

### **The Sheet Method**

Performance        Use any light source but most effective with MV light. Moths aren't held and must be boxed.

Advantages        Good for social moth-trapping and teaching parties as everyone can see moths as they arrive. Useful if large numbers of other insects such as beetles are arriving as they might damage the moths in a trap.

Disadvantages    Cannot be operated unattended or in the rain. Time consuming. More difficult to count moths and risk of moths escaping on busy nights.

Cost                      Really just the price of a bulb.

### **Moth Recording**

Whether you use a light trap or just have moths landing on the windows of your house, you should be able to help contribute to the recording of moth species in the branch area. A list of likely species has been included with this issue, with species of most interest highlighted. The list has kindly been compiled by the county moth recorder, Colin Plant, who admits it is not comprehensive. If you can complete the form as instructed and return it to me at the end of the season then you will be helping contribute data for a distribution atlas.

Colin has also offered to identify photographs of moths etc. as long as you enclose a S.A.E for the return of the results.

His address is Colin Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts CM23 3QP.



## Early Fliers

By C. M. Everett

A continued run of fine, warm weather in early spring has resulted in eight species of butterfly on the wing in the Bricket Wood and Garston areas by the end of the first week in April.

The first species to put in appearances were Peacock and Comma on March 11th. Commas in particular have subsequently been very numerous. These were followed by the first Small tortoiseshell feeding on flowers of Viburnum at Watford Junction station on the 12th, and a Brimstone in the unlikely setting of North Watford on the 23rd. So far so good, but no surprises. From April 1st onwards, however, there have been multiple emergences of small Pierids. The two species are hard to separate when on the wing, and it was not until the 7th that I was able to confirm the presence of both Small and Green-veined Whites in the Garston area. The exceptionally mild autumn of last year, when I observed the last Nymphalid on November 19th and a *Syrphus ribesii* (hoverfly) on December 13th, and the fairly gentle winter which followed, will have played more of a part in this than the spring weather.

Speckled Woods were out by April 7th, although in 1990, the last year of comparable weather at this period, they had emerged as early as the 1st, as had the Holly Blue. The latter has since declined markedly, of course, and I would be pleased to see any at all this spring.

The most outstanding observation I have made to date, however, was of a male Orange Tip in Garston Park on April 3rd. Brian

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Sawford's book gives the earliest ever for Herts as April 13th (in 1961), and my own first dates for this species vary between the 20th and 29th of April. All this augurs well for the remainder of the spring and, let us hope, for the summer.

### **Records Needed**

In recent years the number of butterfly records received for Hertfordshire and Middlesex has dwindled.

Members are therefore requested to send in records of the butterflies they encounter in their gardens, parks, beauty spots, nature reserves etc. All records are very useful, even if you can't identify all the species just send in those that you do recognise.

Please use the forms sent out with the last newsletter. Extra forms can be obtained from the editor.

### **Prees Heath**

Cheshire branch members, Alistair Noakes and Chris McFarling (assistant producer of The Great White shark) are cycling from John O'groates to Lands End to raise money for the Prees Heath Appeal (see enclosed leaflet).

The event will take place in July/August over Butterfly Week when they will be visiting a number of key sites. If you would like further details please ring Alistair on 01516 252819.

## A41 Update

By Margaret Noakes

The response to my article in the first edition of our newsletter was surprising, with interest being shown at Ministry, Local Authority and Media level. But what has actually been achieved in the intervening 3 months?

Communication between the landscape architects and myself has been regular, with some understanding being shown at my anger and frustration. Whatever the internal politics, some attempt has been made to retrieve the situation. The trees have now been removed from The Ridgeway path area, as has the mulch. All the cutting has now been completed and the cuttings removed. Many thanks to Jonathon Billingsley

The original intention to use specific wild flowers seeding mixes has had to be abandoned. Two seasons of naturally invading species makes this impossible. The best that can be done is to cut twice this year, remove the cuttings and see what comes up.

So much for butterfly conversation on the A41!

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## Membership

Membership rose from 243 when the Herts and Middx Branch was formed to 270 at the moment.

If you know of anyone who would like to join Butterfly Conservation please write to the Head Office of the national society at PO Box 222, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6EY. Membership fees are £14.00 plus £5 for each branch joined. Concessionary rate £12.50.

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