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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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MARCH 2001



**BUTTERFLY  
CONSERVATION**<sup>SM</sup>

**Food for Thought.....**

**by Gavin Vicary**

We recently had a very enjoyable trip to the Natural History Museum in London for a behind the scenes look at the entomology section.

The collections that they hold are truly immense consisting of some 28 million specimens of which approximately 8 million are butterflies and moths. The majority of the collections were compiled many years ago when collecting was considered more acceptable,

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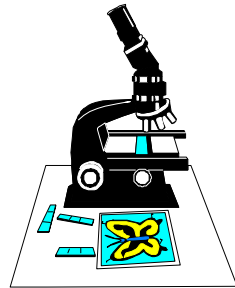
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indeed, the oldest collection that we saw was approximately 300 years old. Nowadays, of course, photography is much more advanced giving a means of recording butterflies, that most of us consider more acceptable.

I was surprised at the number of staff in the department which appeared to be in the region of 100, The work carried out appears to concentrate on maintaining the collections in good order and arranging them systematically for use to support research.

An aspect that caused me some deliberation was the amount of work that goes into differentiating very similar species. Even groups of butterflies, thought to be the same species in old collections are now sometimes split into different species by analysing minute features using powerful microscopes. Advances in genetic techniques will presumably also assist in splitting closely related species.

The curators felt that many researches were spurred on by this as there was the opportunity for discovering a species previously unknown. From a recording point of view, this seemed to me to pose difficulties and disincentives for recorders as the more similar species there are, that cannot be separated by the naked eye, the more difficult recording becomes. Fortunately, however, the British Butterflies and macro moths were believed by the curators to be so well researched that few if any new discoveries are likely to be made.



I have become familiar with this problem since I became interested in macro moths and started running a light trap in my garden a few years ago. This enabled me to record the moths that have been attracted and the data is also useful regarding Patmore Heath Nature Reserve which is close by.

Whilst our native butterflies, with the possible exception of the Small and Essex Skippers can all be separated with the naked eye, several macro moth species cannot and I was therefore confronted with a decision at an early stage, as to how I recorded species that I could not tell the difference between merely by looking at them. The pug moths are the most prominent example of this, but this issue becomes even greater with other groups of insects, such as the lacewings, which I have subsequently been put off studying because of these difficulties.

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My own personal view is that I would not want to differentiate species that cannot be separated by the naked eye as I would not want to kill specimens and examine them under a microscope. Thus, I cannot for example tell the difference between november, pale november and autumn moths which I am happy to record together as they all look the same. Some entomologists however, would consider this unacceptable and might not accept the records as they do not go down to species level.

Thus, there is a dilemma depending on your point of view. Perhaps the answer is wider acceptance that different people will want to record to different levels and guidelines on the similar species enabling us all to contribute our records to the level we chose. Rob Souter had an article in an early edition of this magazine which highlighted the macro moths that are very similar and might be useful to anyone currently struggling with this dilemma.

In this edition you will find details of our other field trips for this year. You will notice that we have combined many of these with neighbouring branches enabling new links to be forged and hopefully increased attendances.

Our reserve at Millhoppers will soon be undergoing some work to remove silt from the pond which over many years has become very silted up. This is being done very carefully by British Waterways in order to give some open water whilst not disturbing plants such as the Marsh Marigold.

At the same time a new wooden bridge is being installed. This will be sturdier than the one it is replacing and will have hand-rails enabling easier passage over the stream and a far greater degree of safety. Much of the cost of this has been funded by grants which John Noakes has put a lot of time and effort into obtaining.

The preliminary meeting of the new conservation committee went very well. It was well supported and attended by senior figures involved in conservation in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. I am sure that it will result in closer collaboration between different conservation bodies and result in an increased amount of much needed conservation work to be carried out.

As I write this Foot and Mouth disease is just taking hold in Britain which may well have serious conservation implications over the

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coming weeks. Grazing is an important feature of many nature reserves and it is to be hoped that the consequences from this outbreak are not too severe.

John Murray is well on the way to producing the branch annual report, which will no doubt hit our doormats in the near future. The Millenium Atlas is on sale and I have already seen it and its implications being discussed on national news which can only be good publicity for our society and the plight of our butterflies.

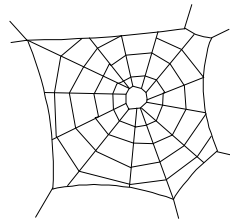
Finally, don't forget that up to date information can be obtained on our branch website which is being updated by Liz Goodyear.

## BRANCH WEBSITE

by Liz Goodyear

When Rob Souter moved away from the area, I suddenly found myself looking after the website! Before I say anymore though, I must thank Rob for creating such an excellent site. If you are interested in the butterflies of Hertfordshire or Middlesex and are connected to the Internet, then the site should be worth a look, and can be reached at <http://www.hmbutterflyconservation.org.uk/>

I can type and have grasped some aspects of the computer skills needed but I am still learning! It is hard work, mistakes are made on a regular basis, and I have nightmares about "rainbow lines" and "file transfer protocols!" Here I must thank Andrew Middleton for his help and most of all patience. He is what is best described as custodian of the site and anyone looking at the links will see his own site address hidden under the credits. Andrew has his own popular website for North London bird and wildlife news, which is also well worth visiting at



<http://freespace.virgin.net/a.middleton/localbirds.htm>

Although the Branch website provides publicity for Butterfly Conservation, it is primarily a place to promote our own Branch, and

as such I feel it is important that the site is active. If nothing changes for weeks on end, people will not bother to look at it on a regular basis. Just before Rob moved away he created a “recent sightings” page, to which I have made a few changes, and this is where I am asking every branch member for help. We all know that not everyone is connected to the Internet, but if as the season progresses you get anything especially interesting to report, an early sighting, a late sighting, large numbers or something unusual, then please tell me. If you ring me on 01920 487066, I can put the item on our website, and return news of other sightings, and in this way you can share news even if you don’t have an internet connection. If I am not in please leave a message, but I will need to know the butterfly species and numbers seen, date of sighting, location, and of course your name, address and telephone number. Please don’t be confused if you find yourself connected to my answer phone, which will tell you have rung a catering business! I will also be happy to receive scanned butterfly or moth photos to brighten up the page.

I have also set up another new page about butterfly recording, which will hopefully encourage more people to take up the practice. The page explains how to record butterflies, it gives various recording options, and most importantly, an online version of the recording form has been designed, which can be printed off from your own computer. It is not exactly the same as the original form that John Murray created but both he and Michael Healy are happy to use it. The form has only 10 columns and is printed in A4 “portrait”(please follow the online printing instructions though). So the recording form is now available anytime via the Internet, and this should reduce the need to ask John for copies or get photocopies made oneself! Full instructions are given on the web page as to how to fill it in. Eventually I hope to include some photos to help with the identification of some of the less easily distinguished butterfly species e.g. Small and Essex Skipper, which may be of help to some people.

If you have any comments or suggestions as to how our branch website could be improved please ring or email me – I will be happy to hear from you.

# **B**utterfly Plants in Your Garden, by Malcolm Hull

This Spring and Summer we'll be growing and selling thousands of butterfly friendly garden plants. Buddleia, ice plant, red valerian and field scabious all provide valuable nectar sources. Bird's-foot trefoil, honesty, sorrel and sweet rocket also act as caterpillar food plants. And there are many more available from our constantly changing list. You can:

- ☺ Buy butterfly plants from our stalls. A list of dates and locations confirmed so far is set out below. Please note some of these events charge an entry fee.
- ☺ Buy direct from our butterfly gardeners – you collect. Ring Alan Downie or Liz Goodyear for prices and availability.
- ☺ Help us sell plants to others and spread the butterfly conservation message by volunteering for a spell helping at the stall. This entitles you to free access to some interesting gardening and environmental events. If you'd like to help or just know more about what's involved, ring Malcolm Hull

All contact details are listed on the back cover.

Events confirmed so far this year include:

<b>Friday 6 – Sunday 8 April</b>	Capel Manor Spring Gardening & Country Show, Bullsmoor Lane, Enfield
<b>Saturday 12 May</b>	Waterford Heath Nature Reserve, nr Hertford
<b>Saturday 9 - Sunday 10 June</b>	Harrow Festival, Headstone Manor Ground, Pinner View, North Harrow
<b>Saturday 23 – Sunday 24 June</b>	Hatfield Festival of Gardening, Hatfield House, Hatfield
<b>Saturday 7 – Sunday 8 July</b>	Ealing Countryside Weekend, Berkeley Fields, Horsenden Hill, Greenford - FREE



## Millenium Atlas Launched.....*Editor*

As many of you will have seen from highly favourable press reviews and articles, the Millenium Atlas has been launched. Many of you have contributed to this through your recording efforts over the past five years, and the results show that your efforts have really been worthwhile. For those who have not yet purchased a copy, or who have not seen the results, I reproduce below the key conclusions from the work:

### HEADLINE RESULTS

- 1 Declines continue unchecked:** many butterflies continued to decline in the final decades of the twentieth century. Worst hit = High Brown Fritillary (77% decline since 1970s), Wood White (62 % decrease), Pearl-bordered Fritillary (60 % decrease) and Marsh Fritillary (55 % decrease). The recent declines of the Large Heath, Silver-studded Blue, Duke of Burgundy and Dingy Skipper are also of serious concern.
- 2 Almost all the declining butterflies are ones which require ‘special’ habitats** e.g. chalk and limestone grasslands, coppiced woodlands, heathland, etc. They are termed habitat specialist butterflies. Butterflies that occur more widely in the landscape (wider countryside species) have generally fared better.
- 3 Declines of common butterflies:** there is increasing evidence that some common species are not as common as they used to be. At the national scale their distributions have not changed much, if at all, but at the local level there are far fewer colonies than in the past. Species thought to be affected include the Common Blue, Small Copper and Small Heath.
- 4 Butterflies head north:** 15 species (a quarter of the British butterfly fauna) have bucked this trend and are expanding. Top of the list of ‘winners’ are the Essex Skipper (139% increase since the 1970s) and Brown Argus (108% increase), followed by the Holly Blue, Comma, Purple Hairstreak, Marbled White, Speckled Wood and Ringlet all of which have expanded by more than 50%. All of these butterflies (termed wider countryside species) use habitats which are still relatively common in the countryside and in urban areas e.g. hedges, roadside verges, field margins and nettle patches.
- 5 Long-term changes:** The Butterflies for the New Millenium



(BNM) survey shows that over the past 200 years, 34 of our 59 species have undergone substantial declines, including five that have become extinct and 15 that have been lost from over 50% of their range.

- **Causes of butterfly declines:** Main causes are habitat destruction (particularly because of the intensification of agriculture and the planting of conifer forests), changing habitat management (e.g. decline of coppicing and decline of livestock farming), and the subsequent fragmentation and isolation of the butterfly habitats that remain (leading to further colony extinctions and lower chances of recolonisation).
- **Causes of range expansions:** Main cause is climate change. Wider countryside butterflies have been able to move through the modern landscape, finding places to breed even in intensively farmed or urban areas. They have been able therefore to track the shifting patterns of climate, and take advantage of warm weather over the past few decades. In contrast, the habitat specialist butterflies have not been able to move through the landscape because many of the remaining fragments of their habitats are simply too small and too isolated to be colonised.

## KEY CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS

**Butterflies are still declining!** Despite major advances in conservation in recent decades, butterflies continue to decline and the main cause (habitat deterioration) has not been tackled. A range of new measures are needed to prevent further decline and extinction including: wholesale reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (and forestry practices), greater protection of special sites and full implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).

**Many ‘new’ colonies of rare butterflies located:** Because of greatly improved recording effort and coverage during the BNM survey many thousands of new sites have been discovered for scarce (and declining) species. For example, many previously unknown colonies of our most threatened species such as the Chequered Skipper, Northern Brown Argus and Pearl-bordered Fritillary have been discovered in Scotland, Marsh Fritillary and Wood White colonies in Ireland, High Brown and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Wales and Large Heaths in northern England. There are undoubtedly further

finds to be made in relatively under-recorded parts by continued recording.

**Butterflies as indicators** of subtle changes to habitats and the climate. It is clear from the BNM survey that the distributions of butterflies are changing very rapidly, perhaps more rapidly than other groups for which data are available, such as birds and flowering plants. This speed of response coupled with ease of recording and popularity make butterflies good indicators of the quality of the countryside.

**Landscape-scale conservation:** Advances in our understanding of butterfly populations and the threat posed to habitat specialist species by changing climatic conditions point to the need for a new landscape-scale approach to conservation. This will focus on the protection of groups of nearby habitat fragments and the extension and interconnection of the existing network of nature reserves, so that species are able to move through the landscape.

**Local conservation action:** The huge BNM database provides detailed information about the locations of butterfly populations. This is essential to feed into conservation strategies such as Butterfly Conservation's Regional Action Plans, local authority Structure Plans and Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The data can also be used to inform the development-control process, and, of course, to direct conservation action through habitat management and protection.

**Post-industrial and urban habitats:** One finding has been that butterflies have fared relatively well in some urban areas, notably London. Here species such as the Gatekeeper, Ringlet and Brown Argus that were restricted to the leafy outer suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s have moved into more urban, central areas. In many parts of Britain, former industrial sites such as quarries, old mine workings and disused railways have been found to support often higher numbers and diversity of butterflies (and other wildlife) than nearby farmland. Many new colonies of nationally declining species such as the Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper have been found on 'brown-field' sites. Indiscriminate redevelopment of such land in preference to building on 'green-field' sites could do more harm than good for regionally important butterfly species.

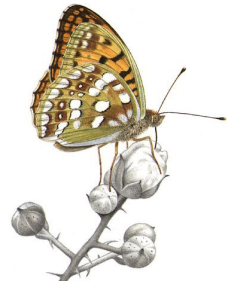
**Rebuilding habitats:** Members of the public, gardeners, land owners, local authorities and, especially, farmers can do simple, cheap

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things to help rebuild the wildlife-rich landscape of the past. For example, leaving roadside verges, areas of parks, field margins and rough bits of land to 'go wild' (at least during the summer) can provide habitat for many butterfly species, including some that are declining. There are an increasing number of grant schemes that can help interested land owners manage their land more sympathetically. Butterfly Conservation can provide advice on simple measures that will improve land for butterflies and a host of other wildlife.

**Biggest Losers Since 1970-82 in Britain and the Isle of Man  
(measured as % loss of 10 km squares recorded in 1970-82)**

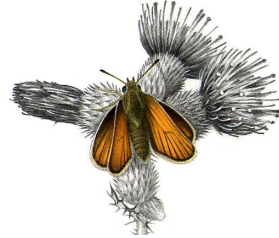
SPECIES	DECLINE
High Brown Fritillary	77 %
Wood White	62 %
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	60 %
Marsh Fritillary	55 %
Large Heath	47 %
Silver-studded Blue	44 %
Duke of Burgundy	39 %
Dingy Skipper	39 %
Small Pearl-bordered	39 %
Grayling	38 %



*High Brown Fritillary*

**Biggest Winners Since 1970-82 in Britain and the Isle of Man (measured as % increase in total number of 10 km squares recorded)**

SPECIES	INCREASE
Essex Skipper	139 %
Brown Argus	108 %
Holly Blue	89 %
Comma	79 %
Purple Hairstreak	78 %
Marbled White	66 %
White Admiral	56 %
Speckled Wood	54 %
Ringlet	53 %
Orange-tip	43 %



*Essex Skipper*



**Grizzled Skippers 2000, by Christine Shepperson**

**Introduction** The Herts Grizzled Skipper survey ran from 1998-2000. It was carried out against a background of drastic decline in Grizzled Skipper observations in the early 1990's (detailed in John Murray's annual reports). Many Branch members contributed and the recording team, of between 21 and 28 volunteers in each year, covered a wide geographical area, especially in 1999, when the last year of the Millennium survey involved wide ranging explorations of the County. During the survey a total of 129 sites were visited in 124 tetrads in 19 of the Herts 10km squares.

The main aims for the 2000 season were to confirm the continued survival of the Grizzled Skipper colonies at established sites in the County (such as Aldbury Nowers, Broxbourne Woods, Waterford Heath) and to search for new colonies.

**The way the survey worked** Before the start of the first survey season in 1998 a list of sites thought to have the potential to support

Grizzled Skipper colonies was drawn up. It included places with a previous history of Grizzled Skipper records and other sites geographically close to the historical locations, where the habitat was likely to be suitable. After each season the list was reviewed to remove unsuitable sites and add more promising ones. The up to date list was sent to all the volunteers at the start of the 2000 season as a basis for their field trips and they were also encouraged to look for new sites with the characteristics of a good Grizzled Skipper habitat namely:

- A sheltered , but not shaded situation
- An abundance of spring nectar plants
- An abundance of a key larval food plant (e.g. Wild Strawberry, Creeping) growing in short herb-rich turf or on bare ground
- Patches of ranker vegetation and scrub/woodland edges

Traditionally such habitats were found in woodland rides, clearings and glades or in unimproved grassland with patches of scrub. Grizzled Skippers are still found at these types of site; the colony at Broxbourne Wood is in a large glade and at Aldbury Nowers the Grizzled Skipper is found on unimproved chalk grassland. However, the extensive loss of such habitats, not only in Herts, but across all the butterfly's main range in Central and Southern Britain, has played a major part in the decline of this species. Many of the new places explored during the survey were recently created artificial sites, such as disused gravel pits (which are not hard to find in Hertfordshire) or other mineral workings and railway lines. (These must be observed from adjacent paths not by trespassing on railway property.) The conditions suitable for the Grizzled Skipper frequently occur at such sites, although often only temporarily, unless the site is managed.

The Table below gives a sample of the list of potential sites sent to the 28 volunteers in the observing team in spring 2000. I have included in this sample most of the sites which did not get a visit in 2000. Although the survey is finished there is an ongoing need to establish whether there are any undiscovered sites to be found, so readers who visit any of the places listed might be lucky and find a new colony....

The list was put together from a variety of sources, including OS Maps, information held at County hall, personal communications from members of the recording team etc. It has not always been possible to

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SITE	TETRAD/	HABITAT
Amwellbury Quarry	TL31L TL357127	Disused gravel pit. Sandy. No official access. Bare and grassy.
Balls Wood/ Hertford Heath	TL31K TL344105	HMWT nature reserve. Mixed wood, wide rides and acid heath. The HMWT have coppiced here at the south end of the wood.
Baldwin's Wood,	TQ010990	Some rides with W Strawberry
Bayford /	TL30E/J	Footpath from Bayford along railway to Brickendon
Berrybushes	TL00Q	Where footpath goes along E margin of the wood there are areas of Wild
Berrygrove wood	TQ19J	Woodland mainly deciduous. G skipper recorded there in 1992
Blagrove	TL33G	HMWT Reserve. Neutral grassland on Chalky boulder clay, springs and
Cheshunt Park	TL30M	Gravel pit, across former small woods S of Wormleybury. Some active
Chorleywood	TQ037970	Sheltered NR some Wild strawberry
Danemead wood	TL30N/P	HMWT reserve, scrub woodland and wildflower meadow, small area of
Easneve estate	TL 377137	Small chalk pit and parkland by R Ash
Hadham Towers	TL41I	B'way to Stanstead Hill starts at HCC Depot, runs below wooded slope. W
Highfield Wood	TL30P	Part of Broxbourne woods complex
Highwood	TL22W	
Hoddesdon	TL30N/T	Three small pits one poorly restored/unrestored, one being worked, one
Langleybury,	TQ072995	In-filled Gravel pit off Old House Lane, between wood & M25. Possible
Panshanger	TL21W	Disused gravel pit and active workings
Panshanger estate	TL21R	Parkland with active gravel workings and disused pit. Possible area on
Rickneys quarry	TL318156 TL326159	Active gravel pit near Waterford, several footpaths. Bare/grassy strips around edge. Some W Strawberry on N side adjacent to Bardon Clumps in
Rookery Wood	TL22V	A wood from which gravel was extracted. Some replanting. Wide rides.
Round Hill Wood	SP90J	Large open area in beech, pine, oak and silver birch woodland. Wild
Stotfold Rd	TL203318	Chalky land beside railway, not accessible but visible from road.
Watton at Stone	TL21Z	Adjacent to the railway line S of Watton. Track is in steep cutting here. Can
Westmill	TL31N	Footpath bounded by low hedges, grasses, wild flowers, skirting disused/
West Hyde lakes	TQ035914	Used for fishing. Grassy, flowery areas with

establish ownership and access rights. So if anyone decides to visit a site these aspects should be considered.

I do not think the list adequately covers potential sites in the west of the county around the existing excellent sites at Aldbury Nowers and Tring Park. This is an area with potential and would be worthy of more exploration.

To avoid duplication of effort and to pinpoint areas that still needed coverage the recording team were asked to return forms indicating the sites they were likely to survey in 2000. They were also asked to complete recording forms for every site visit, as well as sending their records to John Murray in the usual way. There were sections for description of the site, habitat and larval foodplants species present, to build up site profiles. At the end of the season completed forms were sent to our Branch and Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust, who both supported the survey from the outset and to whom all results have been reported.

In 2000 there were 28 members of the recording team and 48 separate visits were made to the 10 sites where Grizzled Skippers were found. At least 63 field trips were made to 41 sites where recorders were unsuccessful in locating the target species. (The number of unsuccessful visits was actually considerably higher as 3 of these sites are transect walks, which get regular visits and several recorders did not send in a detailed list of 'nil returns'. )

**What the survey found** During the 2000 survey 21 of the recording team observed Grizzled Skippers at 10 sites in 9 tetrads. A total of 83 Grizzled Skippers were seen over a flight period of 41 days from the first sighting at the South Pit at Waterford Heath on 7 May to the last record at Tring Park on 16 June. As for each year of the survey the spring weather was not ideal for the butterfly. Cool, cloudy, rainy

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conditions prevailed for much of the flight period. The best weather consisted of some intermittent warm, sunny spells in May. The Table below shows the sites where the Grizzled Skipper was recorded in 2000.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Grid Reference and/ or Tetrad</b>
Digswell Railway Cutting	TL250165: TL21N
Welwyn North Stn	TL248157: TL21M
Tring Park	SP930105 : SP91F



## REPORTS FROM THE GRIZZLED SKIPPER SITES

**Waterford** –The first sighting of the season was of a single butterfly here on 7 May. Jack Doyle carried out a transect on the South Pit this year and reported two Grizzled Skippers on 14 May. He saw eight on 16 May, in an area with abundant Wild Strawberry growing in open conditions adjacent to the path that runs parallel to the railway. Richard Bigg walks a transect on the North Pit and had a confirmed view on 20 May. Apart from a further sighting by Alan Downie on 3 June these are the only records for the North Pit. As nine were reported last year, when it was not being regularly walked, the colony seems to have contracted, a situation to which the poor weather no doubt contributed.



**Welwyn North Station and Digswell Railway Cutting** – On 7 May Tom Gladwin found 20+ on the railway bank north of the station and 7 between the Digswell tunnels. Railtrack plan to quadruple the line here. Ecologists from Welwyn Hatfield Council and the Herts Biological Records Centre participated in the Consultation exercise and prior to development Railtrack must provide an Environmental Statement, including (hopefully) an ecological impact assessment of the potential effect on the Grizzled Skipper sites (which may not be deleterious if it involves creation of large areas of disturbed bare ground).

**Tring Park** – Brian Jessop walks a transect here and reported Grizzled Skippers over a large area at 3 main locations along the west-facing escarpment. He considers this year's results quite good considering the weather. He saw the first on 13 May. On 25 May he found 3 (both on and off the transect route) another on 27 May and a final sighting of 3 off the transect route on 16 June. The discovery of Grizzled Skippers at Tring Park in 1999 was one of the highlights of the survey. This is a superb site for butterflies and, hopefully, one with a fairly secure future.

**Burydell** – Before the 2000 season Grizzled Skippers were last recorded at this disused Gravel Pit in 1996. It is a sheltered site with

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flat grassy areas, banks and hollows. In 1998 the site was grazed by sheep and had large areas of short turf and an abundance of Creeping Cinquefoil. This year no sheep were seen and most of the site had scrubbed over. However, due to heavy rabbit grazing Creeping Cinquefoil was still reasonably common. On 13<sup>th</sup> May a single Grizzled Skipper was seen in a large patch of Cinquefoil. It was encouraging to find them again at this site.

**Frogmore Hall Pit, Aston** – Two Grizzled Skippers were seen here on 14 May and on 24 May Trevor Chapman found one near the gap in the hedge on the west side, where Creeping Cinquefoil was common and three more nectaring on Forget-me-not at the north end on the south facing slopes. On 3 June Alan Reynolds found three and on 8 June, in hot sunshine Trevor saw one feeding on Buttercup. Frogmore Hall Pit is an important site for Grizzled Skippers and other groups such as Great Crested Newts. At national level BC is negotiating with the landowners, Lafarge, to manage the site for wildlife.

**Aldbury Nowers** - The first sightings at Aldbury Nowers this year were on 15 May. Alan Downie led a field trip there on 21 May in overcast and rainy weather. Alan & Stephen Downie, Liz Goodyear, Brian Jessop and Malcolm Newland were in the party and managed to find four Grizzled Skippers roosting on plants with their wings retracted (and looking smaller than ever). Charles Smith found two Grizzled Skippers at Aldbury Nowers on 22 May.

**Widow Bushes** - Widow Bushes is a small privately owned wood on the Woodhall Park Estate. It lies beside the railway line from Hertford to Stevenage. Between the wood and the railway is a sheltered triangle of grass and scrub, which supports Wild Strawberry. The site is strategically placed between the Grizzled Skipper sites at Waterford and Frogmore Hall Pit. The railway links the site with Waterford Pit and provides a potential linear corridor for the butterfly. This ‘railway’



factor led Brian Sawford to identify this as a place with Grizzled Skipper potential. Mr R Abel-Smith of the Woodhall Park Estate gave permission for site visits in May 1999 and 2000.

Brian and I visited on 15 May in brilliant sunshine. As we entered the

grassy triangle Brian immediately found a Grizzled Skipper and then a second one close to the railway. Both were nectaring on Wild Strawberry. It was very pleasing to find Grizzled Skippers at Widow Bushes and the discovery adds weight to Brian's theory that railways may provide a haven in times of decline and a linear corridor for colonising suitable habitats nearby. At a later site meeting limited conservation management was agreed for winter 2000/2001 and our thanks go to Mr Abel-Smith for permission to visit the site and carry out this work. (It is not possible for Branch members to visit this site without written permission from the landowner.)

**Broxbourne Woods** - In Broxbourne Woods scrub was growing prolifically in the glades this year and records were disappointing. Denis and I visited the two glades on 6 and 13 May. Despite fine weather on each occasion and a thorough exploration we failed to find any Grizzled Skippers. It was not until 29 May that we found two in the south glade. The only other record was from Richard Bigg on 8 June. The Countryside Management Service, who manage the site are planning some scrub clearance for this winter, which should improve the habitat for the Grizzled Skipper.

### **Nil Returns**

Unfortunately, despite intensive searching, the Grizzled Skipper was not found this year at Dawley Warren, near Welwyn Garden City, nor at Telegraph Hill, near Hitchin, although it had been reported from both sites in 1999. Many other sites were explored by recorders without success. Although this is always disappointing I would like to thank all these observers for their efforts and they are acknowledged at the end of the article.



### **Summary**

All sites where Grizzled Skippers were recorded in both 1999 and 2000, except Waterford South Pit and Welwyn North, showed a drop in total numbers this year. This is a pointer towards lower overall populations. The numbers at Waterford North Pit and Broxbourne Woods showed particularly drastic drops (from 9 down to 2, and from 13 down to 4 respectively). In the case of Broxbourne the number of

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visits to the site was lower this year (3 visits during the flight period compared with 6 last year). This might well explain the difference. However, the very noticeable invasion of scrub in both glades is also likely to have been a factor.

### Conclusions

During the 3 year survey the recording team have scoured a wider area of the County for the Grizzled Skipper than has ever been achieved before and produced results that will be valuable for the conservation of the species in Hertfordshire. Apart from the team specifically searching for this species our Branch has a strong team of regular recorders who send John Murray casual records and results from transects. Any Grizzled Skippers found on their field trips would also have been noted and added to the survey data. Although determined efforts have been made to find them the number of sites and tetrads where colonies were found during the survey has not surpassed the high watermark achieved in 1997. I think this shows that the species is genuinely very vulnerable in Herts and that its scarcity is not just due to its elusiveness and a lack of early season observers.

Although some new sites for Grizzled Skippers were found (e.g. Stubbings Wood, Welwyn North, Widow Bushes and Tring Park) there was not a large increase in the number of known colonies and some sites (like Stubbings Wood) produced no further records after the initial one. Most new sites were near established ones; Stubbings Wood and Tring Park are not far from Aldbury Nowers; Welwyn North is close to Digswell Railway cutting and Dawley Warren; Widow Bushes lies between Waterford and Frogmore Hall. Historical Grizzled Skipper sites also provided records, showing that it can survive several years at a low level and elude visiting recorders, only to reappear later. For example, Charles Smith saw a Grizzled Skipper at Telegraph Hill in 1993 and a few were seen again in 1998 and 1999. At Burydell a Grizzled Skipper was recorded this year after a 3 year gap.

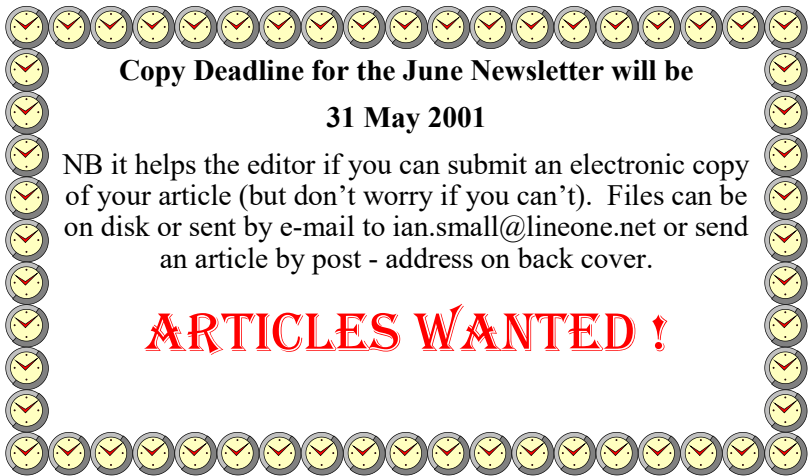
The recorded flight period in 2000 was shorter than 1996, 97 or 99 but longer than the very poor 1998 season. Except for Waterford South Pit and Welwyn North the maximum numbers seen at any site is also lower. The data available therefore seems to indicate that results this year were less encouraging than in 1999. The two additional sites in 2000 were at Widow Bushes in Woodhall Park and Burydell, which

had its first sighting since 1996. It was disappointing to lose two sites this year (Telegraph Hill and Dawley Warren) but very encouraging to find a new one and re-establish an old one. Taken overall the year 2000 was less successful than 1999.

Over the course of the three year survey the Grizzled Skipper has been recorded in 12 tetrads. If records from 1996 and 1997 are added this rises to 17 tetrads compared with the 38 tetrads recorded in the survey for Brian Sawford's 'The Butterflies of Hertfordshire' published in 1987. The decline therefore appears to be both real and steep. It is clear that there is still a lot to do if we are to halt and reverse the decline of the Grizzled Skipper in our County. Now the survey has finished the results must be used to achieve this aim. Our Branch has recently set up a new broad-based Conservation Committee. This very welcome move will offer an appropriate forum for considering the findings of this Survey and implementing actions needed to try to halt and reverse decline of the Grizzled Skipper in Hertfordshire.

**Thanks and Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all those who took part this year and over all 3 years of the survey. Many people put in a lot of concentrated effort, often in unfruitful areas. The success of the project is entirely due to the efforts of the survey team.



**Copy Deadline for the June Newsletter will be**  
**31 May 2001**

NB it helps the editor if you can submit an electronic copy of your article (but don't worry if you can't). Files can be on disk or sent by e-mail to [ian.small@lineone.net](mailto:ian.small@lineone.net) or send an article by post - address on back cover.

**ARTICLES WANTED !**

## **Overwintering Monarchs Killed in Environmental Tragedy**, by Ian Small

As I compile this newsletter, the tragic news has today been reported of the death of more than 22 million Monarch butterflies. It is hard to comprehend such numbers or such catastrophic loss.

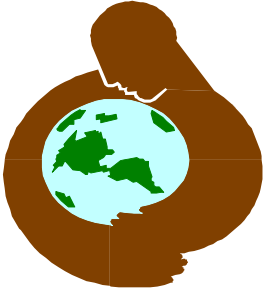
The butterflies were overwintering in the forests of Michoacan state, 70 miles west of Mexico City, to which they migrate every autumn to escape the winter cold in North America and Canada.



Ironically, it appears that prolonged exceptionally cold weather in this region of Mexico has killed them.

Initial reports had suggested that the deaths were the result of insecticide use by loggers, who have caused the destruction of 44% of the native forests of the region since 1971. Consequently, the Mexican government had last year set aside over 125,000 acres of forest as a sanctuary for the butterflies. However, analyses conducted on the dead butterflies had shown no indication of pesticide involvement in their deaths.

The loss of such immense numbers of Monarchs could have major consequences. Their annual migration northwards from Mexico in Spring, and southwards again in the Autumn is, to my mind, one of the wonders of the world. Yet this could be threatened, at least in part, by the events unfolding in Mexico. We must all hope that sufficient numbers have survived to allow the population to recover quickly. I for one will be following this story closely.....



## 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.

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.

**DUE TO FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE, PLEASE CHECK WITH ORGANISERS BEFORE TRAVELLING AS WORK MAY BE CANCELLED**

**Millhopper's Pasture SP 900149.** Fourth Sunday of the month. Meet at 10.30 am. John and Margaret Noakes need your help. (01296) 660072.

**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. For details ring Alan Strawn (new reserve warden) on (01442) 232946

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

**Fryent 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

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