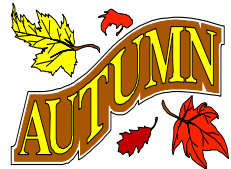


HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 27

SEPTEMBER 2001



**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION** SM

White Letter Hairstreak First...
by Gavin Vicary

I can hardly believe that the summer is almost over and that the transect season will soon come to end. This year seems to have flown by and the only butterflies I seem to be seeing at the moment are a few whites, red admirals and speckled woods

My greatest effort has gone in to recording moths this year. I have run a mercury vapour light regularly and so far I have had 170 different species in the garden and I am hoping to get close to 200

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

by the end of the year as the moth season lasts longer than that of butterflies. In addition there have been lots of other insects at the light including hornets, orange ladybirds and a variety of different beetles.

I have also been paying more attention to the micro moths and have so far identified about another 20 species of these. Some of them are very intricately marked and very attractive. I never really thought that I would be able to do the micros, but like anything, if you take it one step at a time, it is possible.

The number of moths of course far exceeds the number of butterflies and many of them are just as attractive or if not more so. Usually at Patmore Heath I record between 22 and 24 different butterflies depending on how good a season it is for migrants. As I have not seen clouded yellow or painted lady this year the total was going to be at the bottom end of the range.

In August, however, a very tatty white letter hairstreak was seen in the garden nectaring on golden rod, which is the first time I have seen this butterfly here and so was something of a bonus. Four years ago I planted a disease resistant foreign variety of elm in the garden to see if it would attract white letter hairstreaks. The tree is still only about four feet tall and I haven't seen them on it, but I will pay particular attention to it next year to see if any more turn up.

I hope you have all seen plenty of butterflies and moths this year. Please send your records to us for inclusion in the annual branch report. Finally I hope I will see many of you at the branch AGM in November where there will be an opportunity to show some of your slides if you would like to bring them.





Annual General Meeting

This year's Branch AGM will be
on Wednesday, November 7th
at 8pm prompt

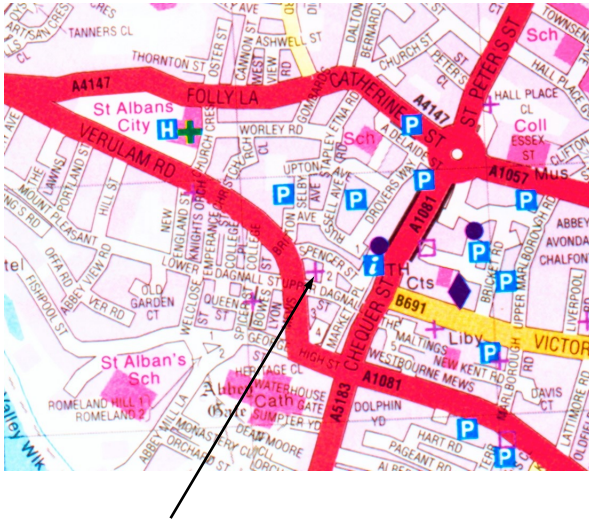
Cross Street Centre,
Upper Dagnall Street,
St. Albans.
(map on next page)

The AGM will be followed by
refreshments and
members' slides

**...so bring along a few of your best butterfly and
moth slides to share with us, and make us all
jealous.**

If you haven't joined us on previous occasions, don't be put
off. We try to get the formalities over with as quickly as
possible so that we can get on with viewing the slides
members bring. As long as the subject matter is Lepidoptera
then it doesn't matter if it is butterfly or moth, adult, larva or
egg, UK or foreign - we usually have a grand mixture of all
of these. See you there....

Venue for Branch AGM.....



Cross St. Centre, St. Albans

Strange But True....

On Wednesday 12th September, Nick Sampford saw a **male Orange Tip**. It was in Bishops Stortford, nr St Mary's School, and Nick saw it 10 feet away for maybe two minutes. He didn't believe it either ! He concluded that, being a bright sunny morning, the butterfly had concluded that it was Spring !



Butterfly and Moth Records for 2001

Butterfly Transects

If you have walked a transect this year please submit your records to John Murray (address on the back of this newsletter) in the usual way. The usual **deadline of 9th November** applies, but the sooner after week 26 has finished the more time it gives for data analysis. It will also help if you can complete the summary sheet as well as sending in the weekly sheets. Electronic files as spreadsheets or using Butterfly Conservation's Transect Walker Software are equally welcome (Transect walker can be obtained from BC Headquarters or it can be downloaded from their web page at <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/>)



Butterfly Records These should be sent to Dr John Murray, **before 9th November 2001**. Late November / December sightings should be sent or telephoned through to John before the end of the year.

Moth Records These should be sent to Colin W Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts, CM23 3QP **before 31st December**. Colin's home telephone number is 01279 507697 and he can be contacted by email on Colinwplant@compuserve.com. Colin makes all relevant records available to the Branch.

Photographs We would also be very pleased to receive photographs of butterflies, moths or Herts & Middx habitats that you would be willing to see published in the Annual Report (no fee! but all photographers credited) or on the Branch website. Prints (either donated to the branch or loaned for copying) or electronic files (TIFF format minimum of 300dpi.for print, JPG format minimum of 75 dpi for web use.) are fine. If you want to send an electronic file please send on a diskette or CD as files of publication quality make very large email attachments. Please send pictures to Andrew Wood (address on the back of the newsletter).

**Butterfly
Computer,**

**Mapping
by**



**Records
Michael Healy**

by

I now have a rather crude

program for

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

converting mapping records from a text file into the official Levana format. Each line of the file should represent a single species and should consist of the following fields, separated by tab characters -

Day
Month
Map reference (4 or 6 figure)
Location
Species
Count

The species can be given as the English version, unabridged, or the Latin name with one letter for the genus, or (simplest) the Levana abbreviation - see the list below.

As an example,

```
14 7 TL123123 Somewhere LW 7
25 8 TL234234 Somewhere else Peacock 44
25 8 TL234234 Somewhere else Small Tortoiseshell 6
```

I shall assume that all records are for Hertfordshire (not Middlesex) unless otherwise stated - please do not mix the two counties in the same file.

The file name should indicate the observers name and the year, with a serial letter if necessary eg WOOD01a.txt. Files can be sent on disc to M Healy, 23 Coleridge Court, Milton Rd., Harpenden, AL5 5LD or by email (as attachments) to mjrhealy@compuserve.com.

English Name	Latin name	Levana form
Small Skipper,	T. sylvestris,SS	
Essex Skipper,	T. lineola,	ES
Large Skipper,	O. venata,	LS
Dingy Skipper,	E. tages,	DS
Grizzled Skipper,	P. malvae,	GS
Clouded Yellow,	C. croceus,	CY
Brimstone,	G. rhamni,	B
Large White,	P. brassicae,	LW
Small White,	P. rapae,	SMW
Green Veined White,	P. napi,	GVW
Orange Tip,	A. cardamines,	OT

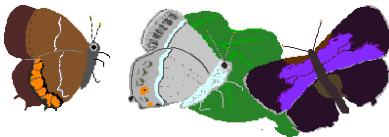
Green Hairstreak,	C. rubi,	GH
Brown Hairstreak,	T. betulae,	BRH
Purple Hairstreak,	Q. quercus,	PH
White letter Hairstreak,	S. w-album,	WLH
Small Copper,	L. phlaeas,	SC
Small Blue,	C. minimus,	SB
Brown Argus,	A. agestis,	BA
Common Blue,	P. icarus,	CB
Chalk Hill Blue,	L. coridon,	CHB
Holly Blue,	C. argiolus,	HB
Duke of Burgundy,	H. lucina,	DB
White Admiral,	L. camilla,	WA
Purple Emperor,	A. iris,	PE
Red Admiral,	V. atalanta,	RA
Painted Lady,	C. cardui,	PL
Small Tortoiseshell,	A. urtica,	SMT
Peacock,	I. io,	P
Comma,	P. c-album,	C
Dark Green Fritillary,	A. aglaja,	DGF
Silver Washed Fritillary,	A. paphia,	SWF
Speckled Wood,	P. aegeria,	SPW
Wall Brown,	L. megara,	WB
Marbled White,	M. galathea,	MW
Gatekeeper,	P. tithonus,	GK
Meadow Brown,	M. jurtina,	MB
Ringlet,	A. hyperantus,	R
Small Heath,	C. pamphilus,	SH

New House Park - Urban Wasteland? by Charles R Smith



New House Park is a 1970s housing estate off London Road, St.Albans. Between it and Aylett's Nursery on the North Orbital Road are the remains of four fields. "Remains" is perhaps too strong a word because one of them is maintained by Herts C. C. and a local residents group, but the other three have been completely neglected for many years. When I first knew them two were farmed arable fields growing a variety of crops, and two were well used and maintained private sports fields. They were all abandoned over twenty years ago and soon became flower rich grassland. Different grasses and flowers appeared in the different fields, including many attractive to butterflies. Nettles and bramble spread out rapidly from the hedgerows. There were soon good numbers of the common butterfly species, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell, all three Skippers, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, and Common Blue, with occasional finds of a number of other species and lots of grasshoppers.

Over the years there have been changes including two large incursions of gypsies who left piles of tarmac, building rubble and half buried pieces of metal still hidden in the long grass. There are now a lot of bushes and trees with the former rugby pitch now a ten foot high forest of mainly oak trees. Other areas are almost impenetrable hawthorn thickets, and most of the open grassland has become dominated by the taller grasses, tall umbellifers and creeping thistle to the detriment of the smaller butterfly food plants. Interestingly a former cricket square is still recognisable by its finer grass species and different small flowering plants. There have been butterfly bonuses such as several buddleia bushes and large areas of bramble which attract many butterflies. The hedgerow trees include oak and ash and regenerating elm which keeps dying back. I first noticed Purple Hairstreak in 1991 and White-letter Hairstreak since 1997 but both had probably been there earlier. Speckled Wood first arrived in autumn 1988 and numbers have increased each year since.



Marbled White was first seen in 1995 and became established with numbers of residents in 1999. The first Ringlets were seen last year but have not reappeared yet. Wall

finally disappeared in 1990 and I have not seen White-letter Hairstreak since 1997.

I started a Transect Walk in May 1996, but was rather too ambitious with the route which visited all the best spots as I knew them then in all four fields. It is one of the longest walks on John Murray's list and I now wish it was shorter. However all went well (except the weather) until July when there was a sudden super-abundance of Skippers. I found, as others have done, that it is impossible to count them and identify them at the same time so I cheated. I only counted them as a mixed bunch and then, since I live next door, went back when it was cloudier or duller and they were less active, to identify a representative sample in each area. To my great surprise John Murray not only accepted this, but approved it (see Newsletter 11, Sept. 1997 page 5). Fortunately from my point of view Skipper numbers have decreased since then. Small Skipper dramatically declined in 1998 when Hogweed took over in its main established areas, while Essex Skipper numbers have been decreasing steadily most years. Since the Transect started, 26 species have occurred, most of them every year. Recently, with the increasing tall vegetation and scrub, species such as Common Blue, Small Copper, Small Heath and Brown Argus have declined, and of the nettle butterflies Comma and Peacock are thriving while Small Tortoiseshell has almost disappeared



I have enjoyed the experience of walking this transect and noting the changes. The changes in the flora have been greater than those for the butterflies but not all of them have been to the butterflies advantage.

All illustrations provided by Charles Smith - Ed.



Butterfly Sales – a Tale of Two Halves, by Malcolm Hull

Like most other butterflying activities, the year got off to a dreadful start for the butterfly sales stall. Our first five shows were cancelled due to foot & mouth or floods and by early June the mountain of unsold butterfly plants was growing rapidly!

Something had to be done and fortunately we found some new events to attend, taking us into previously unvisited territory in places as diverse as Dollis Hill, Ruislip and St Albans Gardens of the Rose.

Attending a summer show or environment fair can be great fun. We sold a lot of plants, tee shirts and books raising around £1300 so far for branch funds. But for me, the best bit is the people who stop to chat. The old lady who bought birds foot trefoil plants last years telling me about the blue butterflies they've attracted to her garden. The delight on the face of a child seeing the live moths we displayed at St Albans Farmers market. The man from Mill Hill reporting a colony of Wall Browns on his allotment; an American lady from Colorado who has attracted 12 species of hummingbirds to the flowers she grows in her garden.

Many thanks to everyone who has helped during the year, especially our butterfly gardeners Alan Downie, Malcolm Newland and Liz Goodyear. DON'T FORGET that branch members can order butterfly plants direct from our gardeners by phone at anytime. Contact details on back cover for Alan and Liz, Malcolm is on (01442) 67200.

Forthcoming stall events:

Sunday 7 October - National Nature Reserve Open Day, Broxbourne Wood, Pembridge Lane, nr Brickendon 11am - 4pm

Saturday 27 October - RSPB Conservation Fair, The Great Barn, Bury Street, Ruislip from 10am - 4pm. Admission free

THINKING ABOUT CHRISTMAS PRESENTS YET? Probably not, but you may be by 7 November when the sales stall will be at the branch AGM (see details p3) offering a wide range of butterfly literature and other gifts (but not plants), Remember all profits go straight into branch funds to help with our conservation work.

Butterflies of the Falklands, by Margaret Noakes

I had always regarded our British population of butterflies as being somewhat limited, but an enquiry at the museum in Stanley revealed, amazingly, that the Falklands islands has only one regular breeding species.



The reason for my enquiry was because of a visit that we paid to the Antarctic in January 2001. I can never resist the possibility of finding butterflies, if possible, wherever I am in the world. *I'm sure just the odd few will recognize my disease!* Can the butterflies of the Falklands be considered British I wonder? But back to my amazement; why should I be so amazed?

By all accounts the islands are constantly windblown; butterflies dislike wind. They thrive best when temperatures are high (at least for the adult stage). Summer temperatures in the Falklands can reach 20C but a consistent period of 20C or more is rare. The likelihood of the beleaguered butterflies to mate and follow the normal course of development is therefore limited. Nectar sources are also limited; there are only 164 species of flowering plants, many of which survive in windy exposed places. Fortunately the gardeners of Stanley provide additional nectar sources by planting their gardens with colourful flowering plants; Lupins were abundant when we were there.

The one regular breeding species is the Queen of the Falklands Fritillary (*Issoria cytheris cytheris*), shown on the stamp. Like so many of our British Fritillaries, the larval food plant is believed to be a violet (*Viola maculata*). Recent evidence suggests that the species survives the winter as a young caterpillar. Why, I wonder, can that species survive where others cannot?

A second possible / probable breeding butterfly species has yet to be identified beyond the probable genus level, which may be *Parachilades*. There are more records of this pale-coloured, white-fringed 'blue' at Port Stephens (SW of West Falkland) and near Hill Cove (N of West Falkland), from the late 1950s and late 1980s, respectively.

A regular visitor, the Southern Painted Lady (*Cynthia carye*) was

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

particularly abundant in 1999/2000 when it bred on Pebble island - nettle (probably introduced *Urtica dioica*) being the larval food plant. [It was in the previous year (1998) that large numbers of our Painted Lady (*Cynthia cardui*) arriving from Europe and even further south, led to many records of their breeding in Britain.]

In February 2000 (late summer) the first Brazilian Painted Lady was identified from a specimen found on the flowers in the garden at Government House. Phil Ackery (British Museum of Natural History) identified it as *Cynthia braziliensis*. Six more were recorded on East Falkland between February and April 2000...miles from South America where its larval food plant are members of the compositae. Retrospective examination of slides taken by Robin and Nick Woods from November 1999 indicated that both the Southern- and the Brazilian- Painted Ladies were present a few months earlier, in mid-November, suggesting a possible immigration of both species at that time. Caterpillars were seen on nettles (*Urtica urens*, also introduced) and eggs were also found on Yellow Orchid (*Gavilea littoralis*), but it is not know whether these were from the Southern or Brazilian Painted Ladies.

Sadly I did not see any of these butterflies and have yet to discover what the recorders have identified in the late Falkland summer of 2001.

So perhaps we should be grateful that we have just a few more species than the Falklanders.

Editors note - I am advised by Robin Woods of Falklands Conservation, who provided additional material for this article, that no Painted Ladies, of either species, were recorded during the 2000 / 2001 summer



Brazilian Painted Lady



Southern Painted Lady

Warming Effect on UK Wildlife

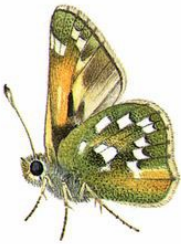
The following article is a report of a presentation at the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting held in Glasgow, in early September. The text is taken from BBC News Online, written by Helen Briggs.

Climate warming is changing the face of the British countryside, scientists said on Wednesday 5th September. Butterflies are moving northwards as the climate gets more benign and exotic fish are swimming closer to southern shores.

The next generation of British schoolchildren could see new butterflies arrive from Europe, said Chris Thomas, professor of conservation biology at the University of Leeds. A marine biologist predicted that southerly fish such as sea bream would become commonplace off Devon and Cornwall.

Already there is evidence that some butterflies are adapting to warmer climates by adopting new habitats, Professor Thomas told the British Association Science Festival in Glasgow.

'Expanding north' Some butterflies had changed their physiology as a result of climate change, he said. A butterfly called the Silver-spotted Skipper, previously confined to sunny south-facing slopes was now able to take up new pastures as temperatures got warmer. In the past two decades, the butterfly had expanded its range, he said. It had developed bulkier muscles for flight, with a 10-20% increase in muscle mass.



Another butterfly that had been steadily spreading north since 1990 was the Speckled Wood. Experts believe the butterfly will have colonised most of England and Scotland by the year 2099.

"A range of species which used to be solely in the south east are expanding north," said Professor Thomas. He said butterflies such as the Black-veined White and the Mazarine Blue, last seen in Britain 100 years ago, could reappear in the UK.

"There might already be continental species that could get a foothold in south-east England if they got across the channel," he said. "We

would expect to see some continental species coming in. Predicting when that might happen is difficult."

A Cloud of Butterflies....

The following was sent in by Brian Sawford, and comes from the Transactions of Hertfordshire Natural History Society, Volume 2 (3), dated 1881. Brian comments that he missed it during the data trawl for his book!

A Cloud of Butterflies – On the 18th of July, as Mr. P Proctor was driving from Leighton Buzzard to The Hoo, Great Gaddesden, he was stopped by an agricultural labourer, who told him that he had better go round in another direction as “the road was blocked by butterflies.” Mr. Proctor treated the story as a hoax, and drove on. On reaching the lane between the “Cross-Hands” public house and Hudnal Common, he was quickly undeceived; a cloud of common white butterflies, supposed to have been the large white cabbage-butterfly (*Pieris Brassicae*) presented a dense fluttering mass, extending twenty or thirty yards along the lane. Mr. Proctor describes them as appearing “as thick as a swarm of bees” and states that it was with difficulty that he forced his way through them. – *John E. Littleboy, Hunton Bridge.*

It just goes to reinforce how much the countryside has changed in the last 120 years. This article would suggest that the Large White, which we still think of as a ‘common’ butterfly, could actually be considered to be really rather scarce compared its former glory ! Perhaps we need a reserve.....or should that be a cabbage patch ?

Butterfly Behaviour, by Brian Jessop

Whilst recording Miswell Lane public footpath transect, I noticed a Speckled Wood that looked as if it was trying to mate with a dead leaf ! On approaching nearer, to within a couple of feet (0.6 m) I realised that what I thought was a dead leaf was, in fact, a female Speckled Wood, just lying on her side, with legs unattached to the leaf. The male kept butting her and touching her with his antennae, while vibrating his wings and creating a minor dust storm. He did this until the female fell off the leaf and down into the undergrowth. The male immediately followed her. Then she flew up and the male gave chase until they disappeared into the hedgerow further down the lane.



This was the first time I have witnessed this behaviour or courtship, so I was surprised and pleased to witness the same thing again further along the footpath.

Why do females lay on their sides as if dead? Is it part of the courtship or a rebuff? I would be pleased to read of any comments by other members in our newsletter.

Breeding Habits, by Richard Bigg

On my daily walk to the local newsagent to get the paper, I pass a line of trees and shrubs which hang over a low wall. On a bright sunny morning towards the end of May I observed a mass hatch of caterpillars from a silky web on one of the trees / shrubs. Not particularly noteworthy in itself as it's fairly common to see such an event. What has struck me, however, is that this is the third year in succession I have seen this happening. Not only that, but it has occurred on the same tree and the same branch, as near as I can tell the exact same spot. Is it possible that this moth (I guess it is a moth but I don't know what sort) returns to its place of birth to lay its eggs? Is such a habit a known phenomenon? In the bird kingdom some species return year after year to nest in the same place but does it occur with insects? Any expert



opinion? This year I returned with my camera but although only a couple of hours later, most of the swarm had dispersed (see photo on previous page). Obviously, timing has to be near perfect to see this event at all.

Buddleias by Night, by Andy Barker

I'm sure everyone enjoys seeing butterflies like Red Admiral, Peacock and Comma nectaring on Buddleia, but moths like nectar too. The day-flying Silver-Y moth is often seen in abundance on flower-rich chalk downlands, but it is also a common species in your garden. You may see a few around your Buddleia by day, but also have a look around dusk. My Buddleia is flowering well in late August and in the evening I usually find a handful of Silver-Y's buzzing around the flower spikes. With a small torch they can be observed in detail.

Many other moths also enjoy nectaring on Buddleia. Whilst some will be seen at dusk or in the early evening, others will appear late into the night. You may view moths as less attractive than butterflies, but that is totally unjustified. Some of the moths I've seen at night on my Buddleia or other nectar-rich shrubs such as Escallonia and Hebe include the Willow Beauty, Yellow Shell, Mother of Pearl and Brimstone Moth, to mention just a few. Look them up in a book and you'll agree they are beautifully marked, although this is perhaps not true for species such as the Lesser Common Rustic, which I also see nectaring.

I'm sure many of you send in records of butterflies seen in your garden, but why not also help us understand more about the status and distribution of moths in the region by sending in a list of your garden species. Even if it's just the big or distinctive ones that you're sure about, every record helps. Everyone must have seen a moth at the window, attracted to the porch



Yellow Shell *Camptogamma bilineata bilineata*. © Ian Kimber

light, or at rest on a tree or fence-post, so why not start compiling a list and sending your records in. I recorded over 60 macro moth species last year without the aid of a moth trap, so why not have a go? If you're a beginner, start off with the big and obvious moths or those

with distinctive or unusual wing markings. Many of them will appear in the most basic books on moths and insects so you should find them without too much trouble. If you read up about the species you see you'll be amazed at some aspects of their life history. For example, the Orange Swift, a moth that often turns up inside our house on warm August evenings, takes three years to complete its life-cycle. So if you want to develop your interest and further your knowledge, do a torchlight survey of your Buddleia and check out the moths at your porch light.

Andy is Head of Conservation for the Hampshire Branch, and lives in Eastleigh, Hampshire, but is also a member of the Herts and Middx Branch – editor.



**Copy Deadline for the December Newsletter will be
15 November 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 or send an article by post - address on back cover

Being the winter edition, it would be good to include your articles about sunny summer trips, perhaps to foreign shores, so that we can dream of warm weather and exotic butterflies.

I will endeavour to have the newsletters in the post by Christmas.....

A Talk by Clive Farrell, June 17th, 2001, by John Hollingdale

Clive Farrell is the former owner and creator of the London Butterfly house at Syon House, Isleworth, Middx. Members of the now defunct London Branch might remember the working parties in the British section of this venture. Arthur Moppet, one of our more venerable members was the instigator of this British section and has corresponded with Clive since then. He has been instrumental in persuading Clive to come up to London to give a talk to the Selbourne Society. This was advertised on the Branch web site but I hadn't been given enough notice to enable details to appear in the newsletter.

Clive has done what some of us would perhaps like to do if we had the wherewithal. He is changing 100 acres of Dorset farmland into a nature reserve. On an 18 acre field he added to the original 10 acres he began by ploughing it and then sowed the bare earth with a wild vegetation mix (flowers and grass) but because the fertility of the soil was too high this experiment was abandoned after three years. The conclusion that he came to was to move the topsoil, place it into a bank in the shape of an 'R' and then chisel plough the clay subsoil. This he continued for a further five years. He then obtained the permission to cut an unimproved meadow with a forage harvester and sow the resultant mix of flower and grass seeds and the accompanying vegetation onto the clay subsoil. The banks were planted with hedgerow shrubs to provide shelter for the flowering meadow. The letter 'R' was chosen as it provides slopes facing all points of the compass. This field and other meadow land is cut in June, not September. This practice has restricted the more vigorous plants and had the effect of opening up the sward to enable the lower growing plants to flourish.

Today, this field has 197 species of plants growing in it and Dingy Skippers and Green Hairstreaks have returned. Clive's research uncovered a young naturalist's records of this particular area in the 1960's, which showed Duke of Burgundy and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary being present at that time. Part of the rest of the estate is being managed to pave the way for reintroduction of these butterflies.

Another area of the estate has been turned into a wetland habitat with areas of basket willows and reeds growing and also open water areas created. Clive has a coracle which he paddles around the lake in the shape of an 'S' and one day he was rewarded with the sight of a

Bittern rising from a reed bed and flying over to a reed bed nearby. As he said there are not many records of Bittern in north Dorset.

Finally, in another set of fields, he is creating the old ridge and furrow of yesteryear. The furrows will be sown with plants that prefer damp conditions and the ridges the reverse. Along the edge of this field he has planted a 220 metre Buddleia hedge. However, this is not your common *Davidii*, but one grown from seeds obtained from the Beijing area of China. The shrub is smaller than *Davidii* with pale blue flowers and a very sweet scent. It has proved very attractive to butterflies and moths. I have three cuttings provided by Clive that I hope will take.

Clive talked about many other features of his estate, but they are too many to mention here. I would respectfully suggest that if you are anywhere near Sherborne in Dorset do try to visit this haven. Clive's address is Ryewater, Folke near Sherborne. Please telephone Clive to arrange a visit; the number is 01963 210645.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Bookham Common, Surrey – 4th July, By Malcolm Hull

So near and yet so far, the butterfly paradises of Surrey are less than an hours drive from Herts. But that's on a good day and this one wasn't. So after two and a half hours crawling round the M25 I arrived at Bookham Common well after the joint trip with Surrey Branch had started.

As I jumped out of the car a magnificent Silver Washed Fritillary (SWF) swooped past. The sun beat down as I choose the main path and hurried to find the guided walk. This is a large National Trust site and gives the impression of being carefully managed. Wide grassy rides filled with wild flowers and surrounded by shrubs provide a much better habitat than the dark overgrown paths on my own transect on Brickett Wood Common, St Albans. Pausing briefly to inspect White Admiral and Comma I soon came across a party of around 40 butterfly enthusiasts lead by Howard Whiting.

The following 2 hours were the best of the whole summer. SWF (18) was the most common butterfly. I was told it has been spreading and

becoming more numerous throughout the county in recent years, now inhabiting all suitable woodland and found even on the northernmost border and into London. This was news to me as I'd thought that all fritillaries were rapidly declining. With such success in Surrey will it spread into Herts or Middx? (*Two Silver-washed fritillaries were reported from North Enfield at the end of July...editor*)



White Admiral (8) were a good deal more common than in Brickett Wood (where I only had one sighting all year). I was shown how the females like to lay on shoots of honeysuckle straggling in the shade. Bookham is managed to ensure there is always plenty of suitably shaded plant. This was very interesting and may explain the decline in Brickett Wood, where thinning of trees in the White Admiral's key site has allowed the honeysuckle to flourish. Unfortunately there is now much less shaded honeysuckle which might be suitable for laying on.



A large dark butterfly high overhead was confidently identified by others as a Purple Emperor. It was gone as soon as I saw it and was the only one seen before lunch. Around 1.30 we went up a hill on a narrow path to a group of six old oaks about 50 feet high. With necks craned it was not long before Purple Emperors could be seen elegantly gliding between the trees. Their appearance was like a large, slightly elongated White Admiral, with no hint of purple visible. They appeared in ones or twos making short flights between the oaks and an adjoining Hornbeam. The most in the air at any one time was five and in 40 minutes we had around 50 sightings. Expert birdwatchers in the group focussed binoculars on individuals at rest, who remained at treetop level at all times.

Other species seen included Meadow Brown (19), Ringlet (6), Comma, Large White (2), Small Skipper (3), Large Skipper, Speckled Wood, Purple Hairstreak,, Red Admiral, Essex Skipper (4), Small White, Green Veined White (2). All in all a fantastic trip and a location well worth the trip. The drive home took less than an hour!

Herts & Middx Moth Evenings, by Andrew Wood

On **Thu 9th August** along with the Herts Countryside Management Service we ran two lights in **Broxbourne Woods** between 20:30 and 22:30. Despite it being a cold night after an atrocious day about 15 people attended and we recorded the following species:

Black Arches, Angle Shades, Riband Wave, Tawny Barred Angle, Purple Thorn, Copper underwing, Pebble Hooktip and Lesser Broad Bordered yellow Underwing.

On **Sat 11th August** along with the Cranford Park rangers we ran four lights and sugared trees for National Moth Night at **Cranford Park in West Middlesex** (sandwiched between the M4 and Heathrow Airport) between 20:30 and 23:00. About 35 people attended, including a good number of children who enjoyed racing around the sugared trees looking for moths. We recorded 28 species:

Macro moths - Large, Lesser Broad Bordered and Least yellow Underwings, Copper and Svensson's Copper Underwing, Old Lady, Dunbar, Orange Swift, Straw Dot, Cloaked Minor, Flame Shoulder, Common carpet, Lychnis, Shuttle Shaped Dart, Brimstone, Yellow Shell, Single Dotted Wave, Common Rustic, Flame carpet, Poplar Grey, Cabbage Moth, Small square Spot.

Micro moths: Mother of Pearl, Water Veneer, *Cydia splendana*, *Agapeta hamana*, *Pandemis corylana*, *Agriphila straminella*

On **15th September** we ran a joint meeting with the Stevenage group of the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust at Pryors Wood on the north east edge of Stevenage. The start time of 7pm was marked by a heavy downpour and strong winds. Despite this and a rapidly dropping temperatures 15 people attended. 13 species were recorded:

Agapeta hamana, Common Marbled carpet, Spruce carpet, Brimstone, Flame Shoulder, Large Yellow Underwing, Square Spotted Rustic, Smoky Wainscot, Common Wainscot, Lunar Underwing, Svenssons Copper/Copper Underwing (too worn to distinguish which), Pale Mottled Willow, Silver Y

Moth Evening at Stanmore Common, June 16th 2001, by John Hollingdale

This event was an attempt to establish if Clay Triple-lines was present on Stanmore Common. I have found it in woodland about a mile away so I was hoping that it could be here too. I had already found a

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

group of beech trees in the main ride so the light was set up in the shadow of the biggest tree.

The weather being damp, it was me and one other hardy soul who stood by waiting for the moths to arrive. Moths did appear, but only very occasionally and after 2 ¼ hours and a very interesting conversation about a wide range of topics, we decided to call it a day, or should that be night. By this time ten species of macro moth had appeared, the most common being 10 specimens of Marbled White-spot. Other moths included Brindled White-spot (3) and a very fresh Lime Hawk-moth. This was a disappointing result as the previous evening I had had 47 moths of 22 species in nearby woodland. Clay Triple-lines did not appear

Help Required at Horsenden Hill, Perivale, Middx.

The London Borough of Ealing wildlife rangers are seeking someone to do some moth recording on Horsenden Hill, Perivale, Middlesex. In any of our members are interested, please phone Rachel, on 020-8903-3945

FIELD TRIP REPORTS FROM UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Reproduced below are the reports of a couple of the field trips hosted by the Upper Thames Branch, to which our members were invited. Sadly, very few attended, but here you can see what you missed.

Great Railway Journey / North Downs - 4th August, by Jim Asher

We parked up and met at Dorking Deepdene station for a joint field trip with Surrey and Herts & Middx branch, starting with a short train journey to Gomshall (on time - how many field trips achieve that?), 5 miles to the west. A total of 22 people turned out.. Jeffcoate's Law (Stephen was leading the trip) declares that the number of species seen must be greater than the number of people turning out, so the target was made clear at the start.

From Gomshall, we took an uphill lane to join the North Downs Way. Before we started climbing, we found the unusual sight of about 12 Commas around a small group of plants . By the time we had reached the top, we were already up to 18 species (and out of breath!).

This part of the Downs has a combination of extensive deciduous woodland interspersed with several open downland areas. Effective scrub management and grazing (by the National Trust) maintains good habitat and we saw many Silver-spotted Skippers, Chalkhill Blues and one Dark Green Fritillary, along with several sightings of the Lace Border moth, a rarity mostly confined to the North Downs and Kent. Gail Jeffcoate found us a Silver-spotted Skipper egg, the skill partly attributed to her 'magic' HB pencil (egg dousing rod?).

Lunch was enhanced by a magnificent view across from the Downs to a well-wooded landscape. As we came down the scarp further along, we had a classic view of the spread of the North Downs towards and beyond Dorking, close to that in Plate XVIII of E.B.Ford's 'Butterflies'. Although we found Silver-washed Fritillary, we looked in vain for second-brood Adonis on the Denbies slopes above Dorking, although a splinter group alleged sightings of females (which of course were disputed by the rest!).

Given that we recorded 25 butterfly species (Jeffcoate's Law intact),

enjoyed magnificent views and a serious walk, and that it did not start raining until we were back at Dorking (with deluges to the west) it can safely be described as a successful trip. I can now endorse Frank's recommendation that this is a trip not to be missed!

Bernwood Forest and M40 Compensation Area - Monday 27th August, by Mike Wilkins

Not everybody went away for August Bank Holiday as about 25 people, including two visitors from Herts & Middx turned up on a warm, sunny morning.

Butterflies were thin on the ground as we started off down the main ride but we were soon intrigued by a hornet, not often seen these days. Speckled Woods were soon in evidence as were Common Blues, one of the commonest butterflies of the day. Single Painted Lady and ones or twos of Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell were spotted. A few Silver Ys but no other moths were about.

Several rows of conifers had been removed from the sides of the rides earlier this year in an effort to improve the wood for butterflies. Although it looked a mess in places, with brushwood left on the ground, the increase in light was considerable. The brushwood has been intentionally left to allow machinery in, so avoiding damage to the rides when thinning the conifer blocks later on. It will be interesting, over the next few years to see if the management has the desired effect.

White butterflies mostly just whizzed past but all three were finally identified as well as Brimstone. A sharp eye finally spotted a Purple Hairstreak half way up an oak tree and, with difficulty and a lot of 'just on the leaf to the right of the gap above the dead branch' type of instructions, all managed to see it. As the walk progressed we became almost blasé about them. Dragonflies, mostly unidentified, were much in evidence and we saw several more hornets as well as columns of wood ants crossing our path.

At last we reached the end of the wood and turned off to the Compensation Area. Before the noise level got too high I gave a brief introduction to the history of the site and our involvement in the monitoring of the butterflies over the past eleven years. Before we entered the reserve we were able to look at a Copper Underwing moth roosting in the jamb between the gates, a good approximation of the

loose bark under which they usually rest. This is a regular site.

One of our reasons for coming here was to look for Brown Hairstreak, this being one of the best sites in the area. Very quickly an egg was found in the angle of a blackthorn twig with another nearby on the same stem. We made our way through to the area which had been planted up with sculptured blocks of blackthorn and smaller amounts of willow, wild rose and other native shrubs. The areas in between were sown with a wild flower mix obtained from the Bernwood Meadows reserve.

The shrubbery has grown up well, providing a screen from the traffic noise, so was judged a good place to stop and have our sandwiches while scanning the oak trees and blackthorn at the edge of the wood. Several Purple Hairstreaks could be seen fluttering along the tops of the oaks. We were interrupted when several stragglers announced that they had found an adult Brown Hairstreak. We all jumped up to look at a fine female at knee level. Soon, another was found and digestion was not aided by interruptions to look at four or five different individuals, all females.

We finally dragged ourselves away, having also found single Brown Argus and Small Copper. About half of us opted to look at Bernwood Meadows for more Brown Hairstreaks and on the way another was seen at the edge of another meadow as well as more Purples. Having seen one more Brown at the edge of Bernwood Meadows we made our way back to the start.

About 18 species were seen in total by at least one person. Many, such as Small and Large Skipper, Small Heath and Comma were only singles.

**UPPER THAMES BRANCH, MEMBERS DAY AND ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING,
Saturday 10th November 2001
THE FITZWILLIAM CENTRE, BEACONSFIELD, BUCKS**

PROGRAMME

- 10.30 Doors open - Registration and Refreshments
Entries for Photographic Competition
- 11.00 Introduction and Welcome Frank Banyard
- 11.10 Habitat Management at RSPB Otmoor. Neil Lambert
- 11.50 Disappearing Fritillaries. Ken Willmott
- 12.30 Lunch
During the lunch break there will be an opportunity to vote in the
Photographic Competition, and participate in the Quiz
- 2.00 **Annual General Meeting of Upper Thames Branch**
- 2.30 Do Caterpillars have intelligence? Barry Fox.
- 3.20 On being a National Moth Officer David Green
- 4.00 Tea. During tea there will be the draw for the raffle. (if you would like
to donate a prize, that would be very much appreciated?)
- 4.30 Review of Conservation Progress at Holtspur Bottom and other key sites
- (Bernwood/Aston Upton?)
Nick Bowles
- 5.00 Of Field Trips Past and Yet to come. Frank Banyard
- 5.10 Quiz results Jim Asher
- 5.25 Photo Competition Results David Fuller
- 5.40 Closing Remarks Frank Banyard

Displays and stands.

Admission to the AGM is free. A donation of £3 towards the cost of refreshments and facilities for Members Day would be appreciated.

Herts & Middx Branch members are invited to attend. It is always an excellent occasion which is strongly recommend by those of us who have attended in the past.. If any member plans to attend, it would be appreciated if they would let Frank Banyard (01494.672310) know in advance so that he can adjust the catering accordingly.



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.

Millhopper's Pasture SP 900149. A work party will be taking place on Oct 14th 2001 at 10.30am. with no further work parties planned until Jan 2002, when we shall return to our normal pattern of the 4th Sunday in the month at 10.30 am. **But** the work still needs to be done. We should be delighted for any offers of help during the autumn months Could we have a **bumper** turn out on Oct 14th, please. Do let us know if you can come by ringing Margaret or John on 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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