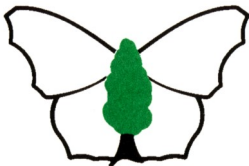


HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 28

DECEMBER 2001



**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION**SM

Keep and Eye Out...

by Gavin Vicary

Suprisingly, I am still hearing reports of butterflies being seen on the wing as I write these notes at the end of November. It will be interesting to see how the latest sightings are affected this year when the Butterfly Report is published.

It has been such a mild autumn that I was told by Head Office that 17 different species had been reported nationally in early November. These included some unusual sightings such as second

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

brood Grizzled Skippers in reasonable numbers as far north as Shropshire. Similarly, in our branch region, I understand that there have also been a number of unusual moth sightings for the time of year with species normally associated with Spring turning up now.

No doubt this will all be used as further evidence of global warming. I have become fairly cynical about this as historically there must have always been periods of unseasonal weather. Recording the weather is now more common place and the equipment more sophisticated such that anyone who studies the mass of data produced for long enough must sooner or later be able to find a new record for this, that, or the other. The result being that the phenomenon becomes hyped up and over exaggerated.

An example of this became apparent to me recently when the local river burst its banks and flooded the three roads in to Patmore Heath so that we were virtually cut off for nearly twenty four hours. There was lots of speculation blaming global warming when in fact some of the older residents can remember the same thing happening thirty years ago. Last time it happened everyone accepted that this was just something that happened very infrequently when there was exceptional rain fall, this time there was lots of excitement about global warming!

An equally cynical friend of mine regularly tells me another ice age is coming; I suppose only time will tell.

The recent AGM was again well attended and as usual the slides that members brought along to show were of an exceptionally high standard.

A final reminder to send butterfly and moth records to John Murray if you would like them included in this years report.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New year to All.





Saturday 19th January: "Nature Photography"

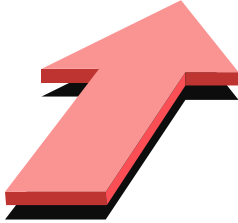
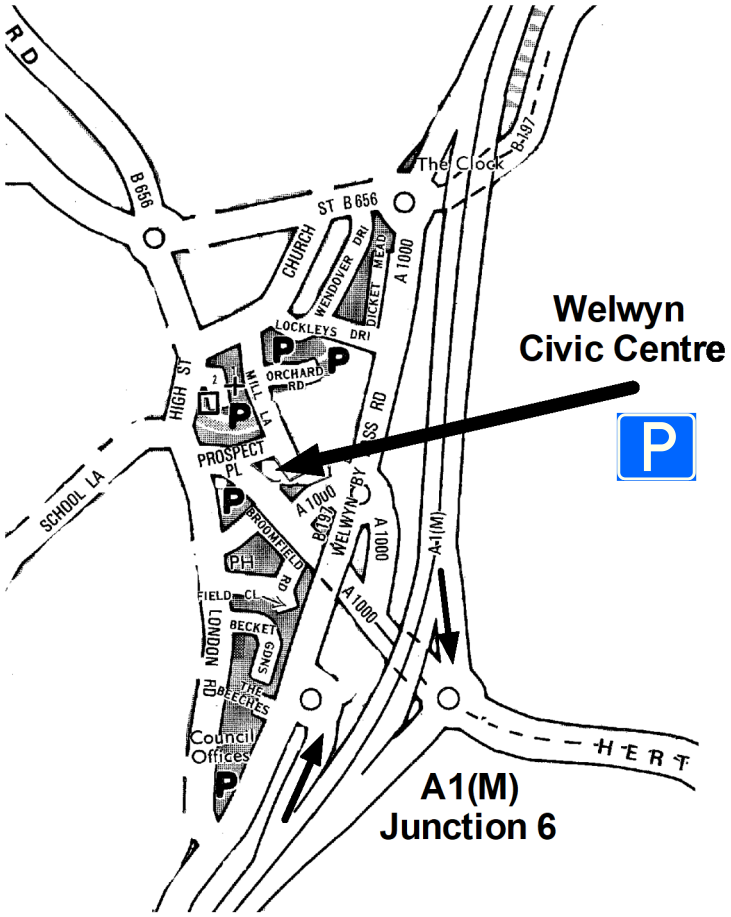
Saturday 16th March: "Images of 2001"

Both talks will be given by Les Borg, ARPS, one of this country's leading professional natural history photographers whose work has featured in many major publications, including the front cover of RSPB "Birds" magazine.

Both talks will take place at the **Welwyn Civic Centre, Old Welwyn, Herts. 14.00 for 14.30** (map on following page)

Admission by voluntary donation.





A 'Must-Have' Plant For Your Butterfly Garden, by Malcolm Newland



Devotees of gardening programmes on the telly will be aware that *Verbena bonariensis* is a plant which is very much in the vogue, and with good reason. A native of South America, it is a tall (4-5ft) perennial, producing lilac/purple flowers continuously from June to October. Its similarity to *Buddleia*, at least in colour, has not been lost on our

butterflies, and it is obviously nectar-rich.

Since 1999, when I first started to grow it, the following species have been attracted:-

Brimstone, Comma, Common Blue (distinctly uncommon where I live), Holly Blue, Meadow Brown, Painted Lady, Peacock, Red Admiral, Large and Small Skippers, Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood, White-letter Hairstreak (not normally associated with gardens), Green-veined-, Large-, and finally Small White.

Only the Gatekeeper would seem to be immune to its charms.

Although hardy in all but the most severe winters, it dislikes waterlogged soil, and on heavy ground it is best to cut it down and dig it up in the Autumn, replanting it in a pot containing potting compost. In the Spring, cuttings can be taken from new shoots. Alternatively, it can be easily grown from seed but you will have to wait a little longer until the resulting plants bloom. If you don't have the facilities or the inclination to raise seedlings then you should find it at your local garden centre in May - or better still at one of our sales events !

If you haven't already discovered the joys of *Verbena bonariensis*, make it one of your New Year Resolutions to find a space for at least three in your herbaceous border. You know it makes sense !

Branch AGM - Held on 7 November in St Albans

The following are extracts from the minutes of the Branch AGM.

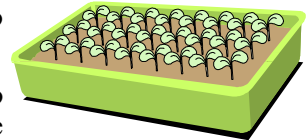
Chairman's Report

Gavin Vicary reported the year had been unusual, there had been the devastating effect of the foot and mouth epidemic, which he hoped, was now under control. The closure of footpaths had caused difficulties with recording. A very mild October had allowed many interesting butterfly and moth reports, and 17 species had to date been recorded in November.

Gavin told everyone that he had been Chairman for 5 years, he was hopeful that someone would volunteer to take over next year. The Branch was formed in c1990 and he had been reviewing the original objectives, which he felt we had achieved.

Newsletter - Gavin thanked Ian Small for producing an excellent newsletter, which now extends to 500 copies per issue, double the original figure. Ian spends tremendous time getting each issue compiled and printed.

Raising Funds – thanks were extended to Malcolm Hull, Alan Downie and Malcolm Newland for arranging sales events and growing plants. The funds raised reflect the amount of hard work that everyone puts in to helping at these events.



Branch Report – a lot of hard work goes into producing the Annual Report, thanks were extended to John Murray, Andrew Wood and Michael Healy. Gavin commented that trends were appearing from transect records and that this was a basis for future conservation.

Field Trips/Talks – John Stevens was thanked for producing a comprehensive field trip programme and talks were been arranged for the Spring. Les Borg would be giving two talks in January and March 2002. It was hoped that they would be well attended. Foot and mouth had affected the 2001 Field Trip programme and it was planned to continue working with neighbouring branches when organising next year's trips.

Conservation Sub Committee – this had been reactivated at the

beginning of the year. The committee had proved successful and several people from other local conservation bodies were attending. Individual species were being targeted and the committee would try to follow the excellent example that Christine Shepperson set when working on her 3 year Grizzled Skipper survey.

Millhoppers Reserve – A lot of hard work goes into the Reserve, John & Margaret Noakes need more support, and grazing was being considered, possibly funded by the Branch. Brian Jessop reported that whilst John & Margaret were away, he had spoken to Keith Slade of Tring Park, who had said he could make available 4 calves to graze on the Reserve. There should be government funding available. It was agreed that this was excellent news!

Gavin thanked all the other committee members for their hard work and reminded everyone that it is all voluntary. A National Regional Representative was being appointed by Butterfly Conservation, to cover part of our area (London) which would be a great support.

Michael Healy, asked that Ian Small should be thanked for all his hard work in producing such an excellent newsletter. Everyone present agreed.

Treasurer's Report

Copies of the Financial Statement were passed to all members present. John Hollingdale reported that subscriptions continue to rise and sales had increased by £260. The cost of producing the newsletter was reduced, thanks totally to Ian Small's hard work. Room hire costs were down since the committee now meet at John Murray's house.

The Millhopper's Pasture Report and the Membership Secretary's Report were read (reproduced on pages 8 and 12, respectively).

Millhopper's Annual Report, 2000/2001, by John Noakes (Reserve Manager)



By autumn 2000, the reserve was looking good. We had cut the grass and removed it in the two main sections. The dried grass had been thrust into the blackthorn scrub to rot down. Several sycamores had been taken out as they were beginning to dominate parts of the reserve. At that stage we had high hopes of a good next season and felt we were getting on top of the grass issue.

Then came the foot and mouth outbreak, which has had such widespread impact on all areas of rural life. Cattle were present on the adjacent land and I promised the farmer that we would cease accessing the reserve before Dacorum officially closed the footpath.

The result has been no maintenance and no recording. Furthermore, members will remember we had received grants from the Environment Agency (EA) and Countryside Management Service (CMS) to excavate two ponds and a new bridge. We also had received £500 as an anonymous donation towards this work. It was not possible to carry out the pond work as when the restrictions were lifted the summer was upon us, making it inappropriate to embark on this project.

However, the EA agreed to let us carry over this grant to the following financial year but not so the CMS. We would have to renegotiate.

The bridge was constructed by Priory Construction; this at a cost of £1863.55. It is a good secure structure and will safely carry grass cutting machinery. The total EA grant was £2400, leaving £536 banked with the Millhoppers Management Fund. This fund also retains the anonymous donation made specifically to do the pond and bridge project.

Unexpectedly in early June this year we had an objection to our pond project from the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC). This was surprising since we had been repeatedly requesting this organisation to visit the reserve to carry out a botanical survey without any response. In their interjection they considered we would be losing

a specific habitat, which included several grasses, hosting certain beetles together with other flora. They also stated there were no maps indicating previous ponds.

This put us in difficulties as our local butterfly conservation advisor had drawn up plans, which had been agreed by the conservation officer at EA. Senior residents of Long Marston do remember ponds at Millhoppers even if not supported by official records. However, we were reminded by HBRC that their support helped persuade Dacorum to let us have sufficient funds to acquire the reserve in the first place!

Clearly a site meeting to attempt to resolve this difficulty was essential. This took place on 14th June with representatives from the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC) and Butterfly Conservation (BC). A compromise scheme whereby only one side pond would be constructed and the water level elevated by a simple sluice was considered as a possible way forward. In addition, the overall issue of grazing was raised by HBRC members. John Noakes informed them that he had made several attempts to instigate this without success from at least four farmers. He requested practical help from HBRC on this subject.

BC members asked for a written management plan within a defined timescale in order to go back to the EA for approval so work could commence later in the year.

However, the decision was taken to have a further meeting this time with the conservation officer from EA together with the previous participants. JN requested that a land drainage expert from EA should attend as there were unexplained interruptions of water supply and installing a sluice may have implications for downstream farmers.

A further site meeting occurred on 30th August – on this occasion with representatives from the Environment Agency (EA), HBRC and BC. The BC members suggested an alteration to the previously agreed plan whereby only one side be excavated to a level of no more than 450cm and some form of sluice be erected to raise the general water level. This was not acceptable to the HBRC member. His view was that unless grazing was established the open water would rapidly be re-colonised. In his view no work should be done until cattle were introduced. Furthermore the animals themselves would create some form of pond habitat. He was adamant that he could not support our project. The EA members although attempting to be mediators and

neutral suggested we should go along with the HBRC view.

As stated earlier, BC has attempted on numerous occasions to get grazing on site. Farmers are not prepared to risk cattle on this isolated insecure site. The area is small and they can see little gain for their endeavours. We felt we had not moved on at all. As HBRC had made this interjection at this late stage it was felt that they now should give urgent help to obtain grazing through their contacts.

The outcome of the meeting was;

- 1 The HBRC representative would arrange a site meeting with John Noakes (BC), Manager of Millhoppers and a farmer to attempt to introduce grazing.
- 2 EA would explore the problems of water supply and consider the possibility of raising the water level in the future.

Returning again to the grass management issue. As a result of a season of “neglect” nettles are again rampant, hogweed, cow parsley and columbine are colonising the second compartment. A lot of work needs to be done to eliminate these plants whether animals are introduced or not. We can only carry on with our previous regime of cutting and raking with the hope that grazing be introduced at some future date.

A working party on 3rd October cut and cleared the area between the gate and marsh area on what was the first management foray of the year. A second working party is planned for 14th October. Following the work the BC members had a useful site meeting with the HBRC representative and Keith Slade, a farmer who manages the grazing at Tring Park. He gave us advice re fencing that would be required if we had cattle or sheep on the reserve. He would not commit himself to provide grazing for us but is considering the possibility. If indeed this did take place, it would be possible to apply for a stewardship scheme grant, to cover the costs. It could also be applicable to maintenance work on the black poplar trees.

We await, with a little hope on these developments.

Sadly it has not been possible to do any transect recording this year; the first year since acquiring the Reserve in 1998. We have seen large numbers of Browns, including Ringlet and Marbled Whites together with Dragonflies, including Migrant Hawkets, Southern Hawkets and

Common Darters. In spite of the lack of spring cutting there has been a mass of ladies bedstraw and devil's bit scabious is colonising well. What flowers were present in the spring it is difficult to assess, but certainly the sweet violet, marsh marigold and meadow sweet show evidence of their presence earlier in the year. Perhaps next year will be a better year?



Migrant Hawker dragonfly
Aeshna migrata
by Martin Fowler

Membership Report November 2001, by Margaret Noakes (Membership Secretary)



Devil's bit Scabious
Succisa pratensis

The changes that I indicated in last year's report (that of automatic membership to a local



Marsh Marigold
Caltha palustris



Sweet Violet
Viola odorata

branch when joining Butterfly Conservation) has continued to have a our membership.

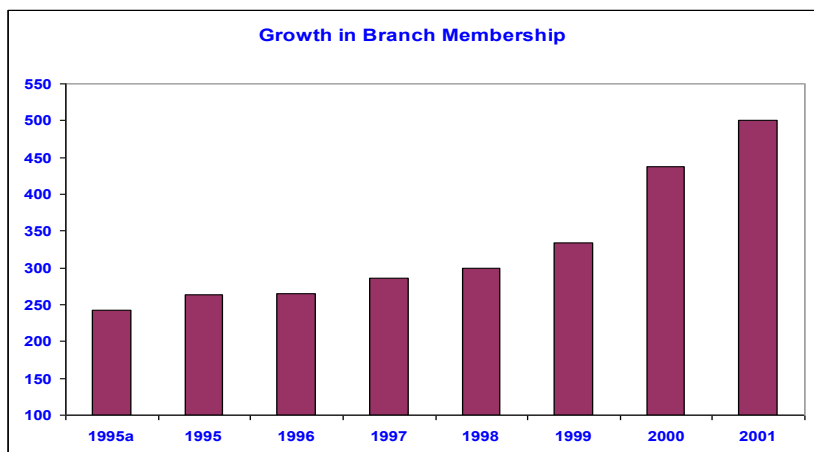
significant affect upon

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

We now have reached the 500 mark, which highlights the huge geographical area of our Branch from Royston in the north east, Bishops Stortford in the east, Tring in the west, Twickenham in the south west and Westminster in the south.

We are fortunate to have members from other counties - 4 from Essex, 2 from Surrey, 5 from Hampshire and others from Cambridge, Bedford, Norfolk, Oxford, West Sussex and Lincolnshire. It is particularly good to have members from other branches and we are delighted to have them taking an interest in our Branch.

Approximately 25% of our Branch members have a postal address encompassed by the London area and there is an increasing membership from the Twickenham and Uxbridge area. Clearly the bulk of our membership comes from the centre of the county and we are addressing the issue of where meetings should be held. If any members have any views on this issue I should be glad to hear from them. A warm welcome to all those have joined us in the last year



Regional Action Plan Priority Species for 2002, by Andrew Wood

At the Conservation Committee meeting in September we agreed that we should build on the success of the branch surveys of Grizzled Skippers (led by Christine Shepperson) and Purple Emperors (led by Liz Goodyear). To do this we identified a number of other species whose status in Hertfordshire and Middlesex is either uncertain or declining. So for 2002 we are asking all members and observers to particularly look out for the following species:

Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, White Admiral, Fritillaries (principally Dark Green and Silver Washed) Wall Brown

Some of these species have long been restricted or rare in our area, others are known to be in decline.

Each species will have a co-ordinator who will be responsible for collecting data and advising willing volunteers of what to look for (we need to consider eggs, larvae, pupae and habitats) as well as adults. They will also try to ensure that all likely sites are visited at appropriate times to try to draw up a good picture of the status of these butterflies in our area. We hope that the data collected will help us to understand the reasons for the status of these insects and if good sites are found enable us to open dialogue with land owners to try to ensure that areas are conserved or developed to help the butterflies found there.

The existing surveys mentioned above have uncovered new sites and raised the profile of these butterflies and we hope that the same can happen for the new list of species. To help recorders we will be issuing an information sheet with co-ordinators names and notes on each species, its habitats and known sites.

We have volunteers so far for Green Hairstreak (Gavin Vicary), White Admiral (Andrew Wood) and Fritillaries (John Whiteman) and we hope to have a full set of co-ordinators after the next Conservation Committee meeting on December 10th. Please contact me if you would be interested in being a species co-ordinator in helping in any way.

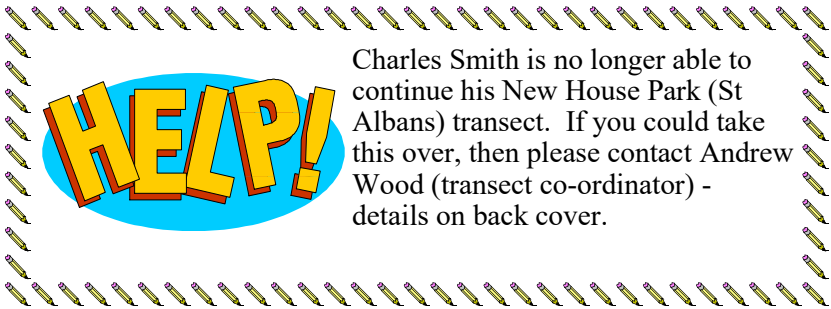
Hertfordshire Mineral Extraction Review, by Andrew Wood

Hertfordshire County Council recently started a public consultation exercise on its revised mineral extraction strategy for the county. The issue of mineral extraction is an important one for Butterfly Conservation as many of our most interesting sites e.g. Hexton Chalk Pit and Waterford Heath are examples of habitats created by mineral extraction. However such sites only came into being after many years of commercial use and we need to be aware of the possible damage to sites as they are now.

Many of the identified sites, not surprisingly, are near existing or former mineral extraction sites, mainly in southern and eastern Hertfordshire. They are broad areas identified as potential sites for extraction subject to consultation rather than firm plans. However it is important that we look at the maps and proposals to see whether areas of important habitat that we are aware of locally are affected. If they are we need to take this opportunity to comment on the plans.

Clearly with Hertfordshire having large stocks of sand and gravel we cannot object to all development. Indeed in some areas the end result of extraction may be a habitat gain, but we need to be aware of what is being proposed and ensure that our views are represented to try to ensure that the outcome is positive for wildlife habitats.

Copies of the document are available from Herts County Council's Environment Department, district/borough council offices, local libraries, or from the HCC web site, www.hertsdirect.org/mineralslocalplan.



Appointment of a Greater London Regional Development Officer (GLRDO) for Butterfly Conservation

The importance of the Regional Development Agencies is becoming clearer, in terms of strategic planning, funding, partnerships and influence. Butterfly Conservation, like many other conservation organisations, feels that it is important to align itself with these new bodies. Following the receipt of a grant from the Bridge House Trust and a generous private donation, the Society has been able to move forward with the recruitment of its own Regional Development Officers. The Greater London post covers part of the area of our Herts. & Middx. Branch, together with part of the area of the Cambs. & Essex Branch.

Emily Funnell will be taking up her duties as GLRDO on 2nd January 2002. Emily has been working at the Natural History Museum developing and managing invertebrate conservation projects under the BAP. Prior to that she worked at WWF as Senior Project Executive on volunteer support and the strategic development of campaign materials.

Her main contact with the four Greater London branches will be by way of regular meetings of (to be formed) Branch Advisory Groups, on which John Stevens has volunteered to be our representative. Emily will be keen to meet all members of Branch Committees she will therefore be advised of our Committee meeting dates. Her role will of course only cover Middlesex as far as we are concerned. Rather than being much involved in conservation matters or the Regional Action Plans, it is currently envisaged that she will concentrate her efforts on "raising awareness" and developing membership, but we will wait until we meet her and hear her ideas.

The Millennium Atlas of Suffolk Butterflies, by Richard Stewart, has just been published by Suffolk Naturalists' Society, Ipswich, 2001. It is a full colour hardback of 144 pages. ISBN 0-9508154-6-2. Size 210 x 148 mm. Price £10.00 + £1.50 p&p.

Available from SNS, c/o Ipswich Museum, High St., IPSWICH, Suffolk, IP1 3QH. Please make cheques payable to 'Suffolk Naturalists Society'.

British Butterflies in Decline

The following is taken from a press report (BBC Online, 31 October), arising from the Society press release timed to coincide with the publication in the journal Nature (Vol. 414, p65), of a major article arising from the analysis of data contained in the Millennium Atlas. The paper is entitled "Rapid responses of British butterflies to opposing forces of climate and habitat change", and the lead author is Martin Warren, the Society's Director of Conservation.

Loss of habitat and climate change are having a devastating effect on British butterflies, say conservationists. According to a nationwide study, three-quarters of species have declined over the past 30 years.

The main factor is the destruction of habitat, say experts from wildlife charity Butterfly Conservation and three UK universities. Wild meadows, ancient woodland, and moors where butterflies breed have been lost to farming, they say.

With the recent rise in temperatures across the UK, one would think the prospects for heat-seeking butterflies were good, but three-quarters of the 46 butterfly species studied have been found to be in decline.

"Britain is right on the edge of the range of a lot of butterflies which are more at home in warmer parts of Europe," Richard Fox of Butterfly Conservation, in East Lulworth, Dorset, told BBC News Online.

"We would expect most species of butterfly in Britain to have done well in the global warming that we have seen over the last few decades.

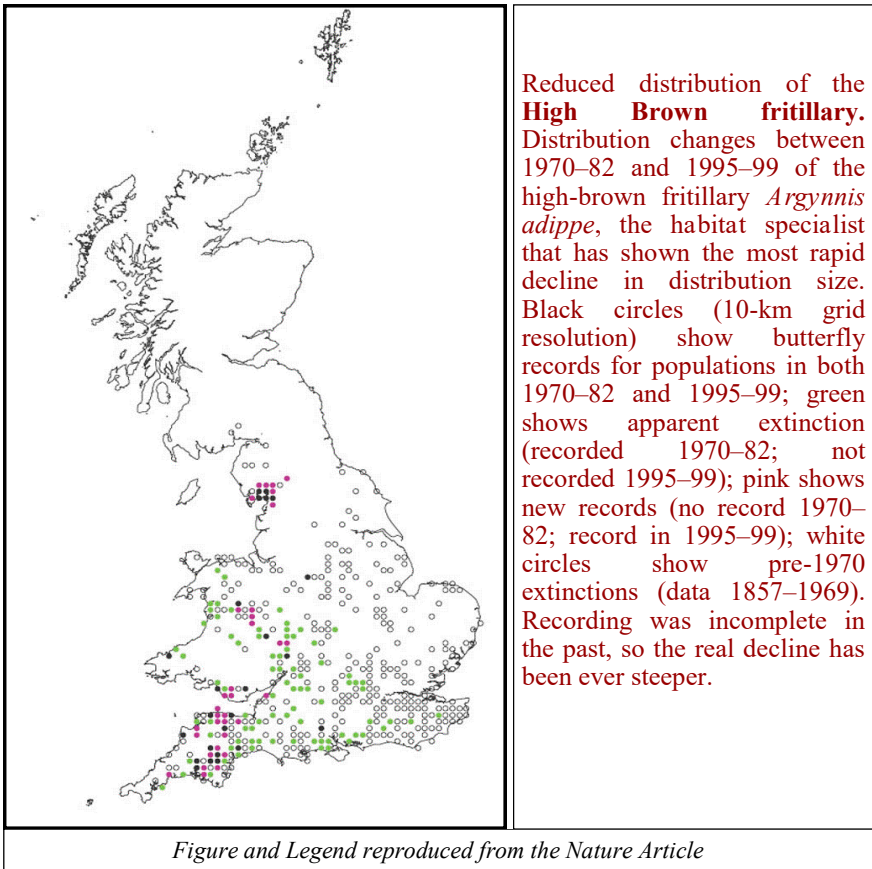
"The negative effect is due to the loss of habitats - such as flower-rich grasslands, ancient woodlands and heaths - which has greatly outweighed the positive effects that we expected from the warming climate."

Records show that spring and summer in Britain has warmed by 1-1.5 C, in the past 25 years. Meanwhile, intensive agriculture has eroded 70% of semi-natural habitats since 1940. Both factors have had an impact on butterflies, say scientists. While some species, such as the Comma butterfly, have been able to spread further north to take advantage of warmer temperatures others have been unable to adapt. Experts are warning that the countryside will look very different to

future generations.

"Unless we actually do something about the destruction of wildlife habitats in Britain, many species, including some butterflies, will become rarer or extinct and we will have failed to preserve our native wildlife heritage for future generations of people to enjoy," Mr Fox told BBC News Online.

"Changing habitat and global warming will lead to fewer species," he added. "Many of the special, rare ones will go."



BRANCH WEBSITE

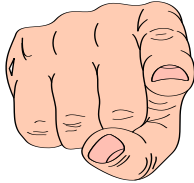
Don't forget - you can send in your observations, (e.g. your latest sightings from this year, or earliest sightings next year), find out what others have seen, and check up on the details of Branch events on line, at:

<http://www.hmbutterflyconservation.org.uk>

...for instance, you could have seen that Malcolm Newland had a Red Admiral nectaring in his garden in Hemel Hempstead on 19 November, a sighting which has just been trumped by Andrew Wood, who saw one in Ware on 26 November. To date that is the latest butterfly record of the year in Herts & Middx - unless you know better....!

**Copy Deadline for the March Newsletter will be
25 February 2002**

Your Newsletter Needs YOU



Without your contributions, it is getting very difficult to provide the interesting and varied content which we all want. Please make a New Year Resolution to contribute an article next year. NB it helps 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. Photos can be scanned and returned to you.

Merry Christmas & Best Wishes for 2002



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. Fourth Sunday of the month, starting again in January. 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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