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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

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ISSUE 3

AUGUST 1995



### In Full Swing By Malcolm Newland

Apart from the dismal start to June, it hasn't been a bad year so far and looking at my records, most species appear to be present in above average numbers and about a week early. One exception being the Red Admiral which has been scarce in my part of the world. A worrying factor is that the countryside is very parched and many larval foodplants look very sorry for themselves. Shades of

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1976 but, with our unpredictable weather anything can happen.

Our last indoor meeting on April 21st, at the Harrow Arts Centre, was attended by seventeen members who enjoyed Clive Herbert's illustrated talk on the Butterflies of Barnet. Since then the field trips have been in full swing with only a couple spoiled by the weather and it has been good to see so many new members supporting them.

I am pleased to report that the appeal for a sales officer was answered by Terence Rodbard and in due course we will be able to offer members a range of goods at indoor meetings and outdoor events, thereby, helping to raise funds for the Society.

Preliminary talks will take place in the autumn with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, to discuss possible re-introductions of butterflies lost to the branch area, if suitable habitat exists. More news on this as things develop.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and carry on recording!

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

**Regular updates. Latest News.**

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

### **Branch A.G.M**

Our first Annual General Meeting will take place on the 18th October 1995 at 8.00pm in the Cross Street Centre, St Albans.

It is hoped the formal proceedings will last about an hour, thus leaving plenty of time to see slides from members (no more than five slides per person please).

The Cross Street Centre, is located in Dagnall St. near St. Albans town centre.

### **A Day at Chelsea**

**By Maggie Vicary**

We had just finished our evening meal, when the phone rang, surprisingly, it was Dennis Newland of Surrey Branch "twisting arms" to obtain helpers for the Butterfly Conservation stand at the Chelsea Flower Show. Naturally, both myself and my husband jumped at the chance to help at such a prestigious event, especially, as there would be time to look around the show afterwards.

The day came and I must admit to a certain feeling of regret when the alarm went off at 5.30am! We arrived, however, with enough time to become accustomed to the items for sale before the gates opened at 8.am

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Surrey Branch had certainly put on a good show, with plenty of butterfly items for sale, such as posters, mugs and scarfs as well as educational booklets and cards to cater for all tastes, which soon drew a brisk trade. In addition, there was an excellent show of butterfly larval food and nectar plants including Cowslips, Violets, Strawberry, Sweet Rocket, Vipers Bugloss, Valerian, Ragged Robin & Heartsease to name but a few.

The aim of the stand was to increase public awareness of the society and publicise the plight of butterflies and their habitats as well as generating funds through the goods for sale. To this end many membership and garden survey forms were handed out with several people actually paying subscriptions to join the society over the course of the week. A free educational pack was also given to several teachers, for use in school and colleges. Sponsorship forms for a cycle ride in aid of The Prees Heath Appeal were handed out with these so that the students could also make a contribution.

When we had completed our stint, we handed over to two more helpers and went off to look around. The show was very impressive with vast displays of colour that prompted ideas to try in your own garden. Horticultural colleges and study groups were well represented with lots of information ranging from improvement of soil structure to biological pest control.

In the marquee, some favourite stands that jump to mind were the sweet pea stall and one that consisted only of masses of strawberry plants; the massive clumps of enormous strawberries really made my mouth water! Outside there were many splendid gardens that attracted crowds of people. The VE day and lockkeepers gardens were particularly attractive and made it feel as though we had stepped back in time. All in all, it was a very successful and enjoyable day that I would recommend to anyone who is given the opportunity.

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## **Field Trip Reports**

### **BARTON HILLS 23/4/95 - Malcolm Newland**

Billed as a field trip to see Pasque Flowers and Spring Butterflies, it almost lived up to it's name except that Butterflies should have read Butterfly! A puzzling result as it wasn't a bad day weatherwise with sun and high thin cloud at times, although, there was a fairly stiff north easterly wind.

The twelve members who attended set out from the parking area just after 11 a.m. along the edge of a field with woodland and a stream to the right. We were soon in the English Nature Reserve and the woodland edge was colourful with it's Bluebells, Celandines, Sloe Blossom, Cowslips and Violets. We looked in vain for Butterflies here and then climbed to the top of the hill and down various valleys for over an hour until at the foot of the hill in a partially scrub covered area we located our lone Small Tortoiseshell. Further along on the side of the chalk downland we found the first of the Pasque flowers which were present in small numbers.

Discounting the theory that the Butterflies were celebrating St. George's Day, it was felt that rain the previous day had contributed to their absence. Nevertheless, it was an enjoyable walk in a beautiful area and we saw plenty of other wild life including Skylark, Yellowhammer, Kestrel, Partridge, Ring Ouzel, Chiff Chaff, Meadow Pipit, various types of bee identified by one of our knowledgeable members, and a Common Heath Moth.

### **SCRATCHWOOD 14/5/95 - John Hollingdale**

Over a dozen members met by a little cafe, at Scratchwood on the

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A1, to try and find the Grizzled Skipper. This butterfly had been recorded from the area during the last decade. The weather forecast had not been promising but, conditions were almost ideal for the majority of the visit.

The site consisted of approximately ninety five percent dense woodland with almost total tree cover; not promising for any butterfly spotting. Adjacent to this, however, was a slope where The Countryside Management Service, with the help of many volunteers, had, over the past ten years, cleared a strip about 100 yards wide. In this clearing and another smaller, more established one nearby, we spotted at least nine species of butterfly including; Common Blue, Orange Tip, Green-veined White, Small White, Large White, Speckled Wood, Peacock and Comma. We thought at one point that we had found the elusive Grizzled Skipper, but the consensus of opinion was that it was a moth, probably a Common Heath.

We then decided to investigate the motorway embankment, where the Grizzled Skipper had been seen in the past. We made our way across the woodland and a couple of fairways belonging to the Mill Hill golf club. On the way, a rather irate golfer shouted at my daughter, Sarah, just because she picked up his unattended ball. Have these people no sense of humour! We arrived at a pond in sight of the embankment, only to find an old Victorian rubbish dump that was now covered with nettles. We tried to cross it but, gave up because part of it was impenetrable. At this time, the cloud cover had increased and we decided to call an end to the hunt.

Since the field trip, one of our members, Paul Jeffries, has seen the butterfly at Scratchwood, confined to small areas adjacent to the golf course fairways and also the motorway embankment. Now that we have confirmation of Grizzled Skipper on this site, a more discrete search

is probably called for, together with permission from the golf club and no offspring likely to pick up stray balls!

### **Tottenhoe Quarry 20/5/95 - Brian Jessop**

The trip led by Greg Herbert of Beds & Northants Branch started at 11.00am. We soon saw our first butterfly; a Speckled Wood. We had reached an area where Duke of Burgundy might be expected before seeing our next species, a Wall Brown followed shortly after by our first Dingy Skipper. A little further on our first 'Duke' was spotted, which caused a lot of interest as this had been the target species. In all, three Duke of Burgundy plus four Dingy Skippers were seen.

We moved on to an old railway track where one Small White, three Small Blues and a Small Copper were seen. A few moths were also observed, including, two Cinnabar, one Brimstone and a Burnet Companion. On the return journey nothing else was seen, which was disappointing but it was still a most rewarding and enjoyable walk. Our thanks to Greg Herbert.

### **SALCEY FOREST 4/6/95 - John Hollingdale / Brian Jessop**

I was not feeling very bright, trundling up the motorway on a gloomy Sunday morning. I had arrived home at 1 a.m that morning from our holiday in France and thought that the trip would be a waste of time as no-one was going to turn up.

I found my way into the main car park and to my surprise recognised at least two people immediately. A very helpful and knowledgeable Forestry Commission ranger pointed us in the right direction and so, about eight of us, armed with the Salcey Forest leaflet dispensed by the car park ticket machine, set off on the 'Lesser Spotted Woodpeckertrail'

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to find the forest road where the Wood White had been seen earlier in the week.

The trees along the forest road had been cut back for at least ten yards on each side to create the right habitat for butterflies. After about ten minutes walking, the sun showed itself briefly and a white butterfly appeared. We followed its flight like hawks and when it landed, identified it as a Wood White. The journey had not been in vain. In the two hours that followed we saw about a dozen of these butterflies most of which were roosting on grass stems and flowers; ideal for photography. Four Common Blues and a couple of Green-veined Whites were also seen.

One member had his two eagle-eyed children with him, who found the following moths, which, he then identified; adult Common and Silver Ground Carpets and the larva of Dunbar, Burnet and Drinker moths. The last being a very impressive furry creature almost three inches long. I would like to thank him for his expertise and also Mr Collier of the Norfolk branch for identifying the many birds we heard. A very successful day considering the weather.

### **COLLEGE LAKE 18/6/95 - Malcolm Newland**

As luck would have it, our trip coincided with the start of the real summer weather and hopes were high when the eight of us began our walk around the BBONT nature reserve created out of an old Castle Cement chalk pit. We were not disappointed for within a few minutes we found Common Blues, fresh Large skippers and the target butterfly, Small Blue. The sides of the path were covered with large patches of the foodplants Kidney Vetch and Bird's Foot Trefoil growing among the various grasses. Further along in an area which had been grazed, the Small Heath was present and it wasn't long before we came across



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Brown Argus. A solitary Large White and a pair of male Brimstones added to our tally.

We then called in at one of the hides around the lake to look at some displays of fossils found during excavations and posters giving details of the history of the site. As we moved on, a female Common Hawker dragonfly was observed and the first day flying moth we could identify a colourful Cinnabar. We were glad to have a moth book (Skinner) with us when the attractive Latticed Heath was spotted and in the same area our first Meadow Browns of the day turned up. Taking the path along the foot of a steep slope covered in Kidney Vetch we expected to see Small Blues in greater numbers, but unfortunately, they were not forthcoming. We did see a fresh Small Tortoiseshell, however, which completed our tally of species and as we continued past the arable weed centre we found another Brimstone resting on the ground.

A walk through the wildflower garden completed our visit during which we had also seen Common Spotted and Bee orchids, Common Blue Damsel Flies by the dozen, Heron, Crested Grebe and a pair of Hares.

As we were so close to Aldbury Nowers, those of us who were able to spare the time, walked the transect there and we were struck by the drop in numbers of butterflies seen compared with College Lake. We put this down to the warmer micro climate of the chalk pit which was noticeably less windy advancing emergence times by several days. One different species was found at Aldbury Nowers a single Green Hairstreak.

A very enjoyable trip rounded off in spectacular fashion with a display by the Red Arrows who were attending a nearby air show at R.A.F. Halton.

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### **TEWIN ORCHARD 15/7/95 - Rob Souter**

I am pleased to report that the branch's first mothning event held at Tewin Orchard on 15th July was a successful evening with 12 members attending. Michael Clarke, who lives at and runs this Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust reserve, welcomed us by giving some background information on the site and the badger hide. Colin Plant, the London area moth recorder, then set up 2 skinner traps for catching moths, running mercury vapour lamps from a generator.

Everybody spent an hour at the hide waiting for badgers whilst waiting for it to get dark and for moths to begin emerging. With little activity from the hide apart from a couple of Muntjac deer by the woodland edge, half the group went to check the light traps. A few moths had already arrived whilst others flew in at a constant rate enabling us to identify them and for Colin to tell us a bit about them. Meanwhile the badger watchers saw a fox and two badgers near the wood.

When the other half of the group checked the light traps even more moths were recorded. An unexpected visitor was a Purple Hairstreak butterfly which gave us a chance to see this tree top species at close range. We had one Poplar Hawkmoth and about 40 other common macro-moths and several micros. Colin and his friend Charles Watson provided us with their expert knowledge to identification pointers and told us that one moth caught was noteworthy as it is associated with ancient woodland. During this time the badger watchers saw a fox and

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a badger feeding just in front of the hide. The badger was suffering from some nasty wounds after being caught in a snare.

In addition to mammals and lepidoptera we saw a couple of bats and Tawny, Little and Barn Owl were heard, the latter having been bred and released from Michael's barn. The event wound up at 1 a.m. with everyone having experienced some good views of nocturnal wildlife.

We are now encouraged to arrange further, similar events, in the future.

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## Puzzle Corner

The following anagrams can be re-arranged into the names of well known butterflies;

Peter Ekage

Rowan Grubs

Hamlet Wedrib

Leslie Orms-Shallott

Keith Rangersear

Pearl Clomps

Reginald Karryfilter

Geriant Po

Thelma Lash

Dora Mownweb

Daniel Dapty

Adam Ridler

Belinda Sou

Albert Mac Blueyew

The answers to the above are given on page 17.

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### **Moths**

**By Rob Souter**

For this issue I have edited an article written by Colin Plant, London area recorder for Lepidoptera, with whom the branch is liaising with on moth recording in Herts and Middlesex. Colin is self-employed as an entomological consultant and has years of experience with moth recording.

#### **Butterflies or Moths: Why not do both?**

How many of us take it for granted that we know what a butterfly is, without really stopping to think. Just what does make an insect a butterfly rather than a moth? Here are some common questions.....

Butterflies are brightly coloured aren't they? Well, so are a great many moths!

Butterflies fly by day don't they? So do a great many moths!

But are the day flying moths also brightly coloured like the butterflies? Yes - many are!

Ah, but don't butterflies have clubbed antennae? Yes - and so do some moths, especially brightly coloured day-flying ones!

So, what is the answer? Well, it is all a matter of opinion. Both butterflies and moths belong to the insect group called Lepidoptera - a word derived from Greek roots and meaning "scale-wings". Scientists arrange the list of Lepidoptera so that the most primitive (in evolutionary terms) come first and the most advanced come last. Butterflies (at least in Great Britain) are the group of Lepidopterous

families falling between the moth families Pterophoridae and Lasiocampidae. Generally speaking, moths listed before the butterflies are regarded as "micros" and those after as the "macros" or larger moths. This artificial division into micro, butterfly and macro is based on the preferences of collectors in Victorian and Edwardian times. Modern collecting - both scientific and for pleasure - is still largely based on these three divisions.

Collecting butterflies, at least in Britain but perhaps not in certain other countries, is today largely an un-necessary and perhaps anti-social activity, though it is necessary for the study of many other insects, including some moths. Accept, for the moment, however, that past collecting of butterflies has yielded certain benefits to conservation, but equally be aware that such collecting gives only limited data. In the same way, the study of such an artificial group as the butterflies yields some useful data but this information is equally limited and capable of development.

To look at the entire Lepidoptera of a particular site will allow far more information to be amassed for the site. Like butterflies, the moths have specific requirements in terms of habitat, food, climate, etc. Many of them are so specific that they can be used as indicators of habitat quality and so are of great benefit to conservation. And, of course, there are a lot more of them - just over 2300 in Britain, of which about half are micros and the other half macros. Finding some of our moths can be as easy as spotting butterflies; in fact I'll bet you have all seen them and perhaps even wished you knew their names. Common day -fliers in our area include such animals as the Small Yellow-underwing, the Mother Shipton and the Burnet Companion, and these can often be seen flying rapidly about flowers and other vegetation in bright sunshine. Identification is less easy however, and in most cases you may find you need to net the insect for a closer look before releasing it again.

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Many micro-Lepidoptera are also on the wing during the day, but their identification is even more tricky and, in some cases, depends on examination of the genital structures under a high-power microscope - micros are not recommended to the beginner or for anyone with no real experience of pinned specimens in museums.

Most larger moths, on the other hand are quite easy to name once you have got a bit of practice, and it will not be necessary to collect for identification purposes. But getting started is always a problem - especially if you don't want to collect specimens for someone else to look at. The best way to learn any natural history is, of course, in the field with an "expert".

### **Field Trips**

To enable members to get field experience with an "expert", Colin Plant invites BC members to attend two events he is running this summer.

1. The first at Wandsworth Common, on 26th August starts at 2.30 p.m. for day work and at 7.30 p.m. for the moth-trapping. Bring your own transport as the event will continue until long after the tubes stop running. Meet at the Nature Study centre at grid reference TQ 272734 - at the junction of Dorlcote and Baskerville Roads. It would help if you could phone Colin if you are coming (01279 507597).
2. Members are also invited to a public moth-trapping session at Parkland Walk Nature Reserve, Islington, north London on the evening of Tuesday 22nd August. Details are not yet fixed so please phone Colin after 1st August for details.

## The Return of The Holly Blue

By Gavin Vicary

The Holly Blue is an attractive, small butterfly, that can be found almost anywhere in England or Wales. It is, however, subject to remarkable population fluctuations. This can result in it being very common one year and then extremely scarce the next.

In recent years, the Holly Blue has been going through one of its periods of scarcity, with very few records sent in, since the summer of 1992. Looking back at my own records, I have seen this butterfly on only three occasions in the past two years and one of those was on holiday in Guernsey. 1995, however, has been a totally different story. I now almost expect to see Holly Blues on my transect walks, with half a dozen seen on one occasion and I also find that it is a regular visitor to the garden. Other people, I have spoken to, reveal similar trends, indicating that it is indeed becoming more plentiful, once again.

The reason for the population fluctuations is thought to be caused by parasitism of the Holly Blue by a tiny species of wasp. These *Inchneumonid* wasps have no other known host and are therefore, totally dependant on the Holly Blue. They inject their eggs into young Holly Blue larvae. These then grow and pupate in the normal way except that at the end of pupation, the young of the wasp emerge instead of the adult butterfly. When the populations of the Holly Blue and the wasp are low, the butterfly numbers can build up quickly so that it becomes common for a couple of years. This in turn allows the parasite numbers to increase until there is also a population explosion of these as well. The result of this is that nearly all the Holly Blue caterpillars are then parasitised and the butterfly population crashes closely followed by that

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of the wasp and so the cycle continues.

Hopefully, there should be plenty of Holly Blue butterflies for the next couple of seasons and members may wish to keep an eye out for them (and of course send their records to Brian Sawford). The species is usually double brooded being on the wing from the end of March to June and again from July to the middle of September. The summer brood is usually the largest and in exceptional years there may be a small third brood at the end of October.

The Holly Blue is relatively easy to identify and any Blue butterfly seen fluttering around the tops of tall scrubs or hedges or in gardens is likely to be a Holly Blue. In flight it appears pale blue and is unmistakable at rest. It usually lands with its wings closed and there are no orange markings as with most of our other blues instead, there are just a series of black dots on the underwing. Occasionally, the wings may be opened slightly, revealing the violet blue upperwings with their dark borders that are particularly prominent in the females.

The Holly Blue does not live in discrete colonies, like our other blues, but instead is fairly mobile which explains why it is often seen in gardens. Another interesting trait of this butterfly is its ability to alternate the foodplant used depending on availability and the time of year. No other British butterfly is able to do this with the following foodplants known to be used at different times; Holly, Ivy, Gorse, Spindle and Dogwood.

I am sure readers will agree the Holly Blue is a fascinating part of our fauna and will look forward to seeing them before they, no doubt, become scarce once again.



## **Puzzle Answers**

The Anagrams on page 11 can be rearranged to give the following butterflies;

Gatekeeper	Orange Tip	Brown Argus
Small Heath	Marbled White	Meadow Brown
Small Tortoiseshell	Painted Lady	Green Hairstreak
Red Admiral	Small Copper	Adonis Blue
Dark Green Fritillary	Camberwell Beauty	

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## **Membership**

**By Margaret Noakes**

I would like to welcome all new members to our newly formed branch, including those who have found themselves now 'north of the River' after the splitting of the old London Branch and those that have joined Butterfly Conservation for the first time.

Inevitably, there are minor teething problems at the beginning of any new system. If you are new and your name does not appear, please don't be offended - you are welcome just the same

New branch members from - Jan - July 1995 are as follows;

Ms. V Adams; Mr J Baher; Mr E Bell; Mr I Brown; Mrs V Carter; Ms M Dobson; Mrs G Duncan; Mr R Finney; Mrs D Furley; Mr T Goody; Mr K Gray; Mr & Mrs Grist; Mr P Gore; Mr & Mrs G Herbert; Ms G Hoare; Mr A Hutchings; Mr & Mrs D Hulks; Mr B Jessop; Mr H Lansdown; Mrs J Leon Hardt; Mr E Lumsden; Mrs S Morton; Mrs I Newberry; Dr W Parish; Mr B Peck; Mr D Price; Mr D Ransom; Mr D Rodbard; Mr S Sheppard; Mr A Smith; Mr D Soper; Mr M Spittal; Mr W Starr; Mr C Street; Mr G Thore; Mrs J Titcombe; Mrs P Travers; Mr G Ward; Mr J Wells; Dr Whitman

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## **Strange but True**

**By Douglas Heath**

A few weeks ago, whilst talking to my father on the phone, he mentioned that he had seen the Large White, *Pieris brassicae*, on the wing in his garden, in Cape Town, South Africa. I did not wish to offend or disbelieve a man who not only initiated my love of Lepidoptera, but who now has a few *Lycinids* named after him and is an F.R.E.S., but I felt that I had to ask for proof.

Well it arrived yesterday in the form of an article on the Large White in South Africa from a local entomological magazine.

Although no one is sure how they arrived, it seems *P. brassicae* has established itself in and around Cape Town where it feeds on *Nasturtium* (*T. majus*).

If any one is interested in the article please let me know (01462 711326) and I will be happy to supply a copy.

One strange, although unlikely conservation thought struck me, if all of our Large Whites died out for some reason, then we could re-introduce using South African stock!

### **Newsletter Articles Needed**

Articles are urgently needed for the next newsletter, so, if there are any budding authors out there, please send them to the editor by the 14th October for the November edition.

**Diary**

- 20/8/95 Watlington Hill. Meet in Oxfordshire at 11.00am in the car park on top of the hill to see Silver Spotted Skipper. Map 175 SU 709936.
- 7/9/95 A joint talk with the London Wildlife Trust by Tim Freeth at the Ecology Centre, Holland Park at 7.30pm.
- 7/9/95 Butterflies. An illustrated talk by Malcolm Newland to the the Herts and Middx. Wildlife Trust local group at Berkhamstead Boy's School, Mill St. Berkhamstead. 7.30pm.
- 18/10/95 Our first Annual General Meeting. It is hoped the formal proceedings will last about an hour, thus leaving plenty of time to see slides from members. In the Cross St. Centre, Dagnall St. near St. Albans town centre 8.00pm
- 14/11/95 A joint meeting with the Letchworth Naturalists at the Letchworth Settlement, Nevells Road at 7.30pm for a talk on "The Re-introduction of The Heath Fritillary in Essex" by Ken Ulrich
- 24/11/95 Butterfly Action Weekend. Maintenance of the hedge and meadow created by the branch at Standalone Farm near Letchworth.
- 25/11/95 Conservation at Stanmore Country Park
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## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

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