

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION** SM

Duke of Burgundy Dilemma....

by Gavin Vicary

Since the last newsletter we have become aware of an attempted introduction in Hertfordshire of one of our rarest butterflies; the Duke of Burgundy.

Introductions and reintroductions are emotive issues and are often the subject of heated debate. The difference between the two is that a reintroduction is to a site where the butterfly was previously known to exist. This would usually be done where conditions have

changed such that they do not suit the butterfly and it dies out. If the habitat is then restored to conditions that the butterfly requires and natural recolonisation is unlikely then a reintroduction might be attempted. A well known successful example of a reintroduction has been seen recently with red kites by the RSPB. An introduction on the other hand is to a site from where the species has not previously been known and this is often considered to be less acceptable.

When I first joined the branch, I was keen to see the declines in our butterflies reversed and it seemed to me that reintroductions were a good idea. My opinion has subsequently changed for a number of reasons. My main concern involves unwittingly introducing something detrimental to our flora or fauna as part of the attempt. There are many examples of this, the most well known probably being the introduction of Dutch elm disease. This was caused by a virus originating from foreign stock that was then spread by a small beetle and resulted in the virtual disappearance of mature elms from our countryside.

It also seems to me that small isolated colonies of a butterfly have little chance of being viable in the medium to long term from a genetics point of view. In-breeding in such a colony would ultimately almost inevitably lead to its extinction. There are many other considerations that must be made including the origin of the donor stock - there is no point in an introduction if as a consequence the donor site becomes extinct.

The policy of the national society puts the emphasis on habitat management and natural recolonisation rather than attempting reintroductions. This seems to me to be the best way forward because habitat is of course the key to maintaining biodiversity. To this end, the focus of my own effort now goes in to maintaining and restoring a local heathland nature reserve which is now a rare and declining habitat as is the wildlife that it is found on it.

For some time another introduction has been suggested in our branch area involving the Heath Fritillary. This is clearly an issue that is going to come up periodically and I will leave readers to form their own opinions. In the meantime we will monitor the Duke of Burgundy situation with interest.

On a lighter note I am writing these notes at the end of a fortnights holiday in Portugal. The first week was spent on a working farm in central Portugal where the vivid displays of colour from an array of

wildflowers around the endless olive groves and cork oaks have been a memorable sight.

On the butterfly front, I was surprised to find that most of the butterflies that I saw were ones that could also be seen in Britain. Of the 15 different butterflies found on or around the farm only Green-striped Whites and Marbled Skippers were butterflies that I would not have been able to see at home. Some of those seen, such as Swallowtails are much more common here however and so it has been good to see them when at home considerable distances would have had to have been travelled to find them.

The different birds seen have also been very enjoyable. My two young children have been fascinated watching a pair of nesting white storks from the veranda, using a telescope lent to us by the owner of the farm. We have also seen Montagu's and hen harriers, vultures, bee-eaters, hoopoes and little bustards to name but a few. The only disappointment has been that the great bustards have stayed firmly on their nests and out of view. We have also been fortunate enough to see a large oscillated lizard basking in the sun a few feet away. This is a magnificent bright green lizard with blue spots that is well worth seeing.

The undoubted butterfly highlight of the holiday were two Scarce Swallowtails, one of which co-operated by posing for photographs. These were seen in public gardens high up in a fortified mountain town called Marvao near the Spanish border. After visiting Lisbon, we spent a couple of days in the Algarve where we saw the Geranium Bronze; this butterfly originates from Africa but has spread around southern Europe on cultivated pelargoniums. A few years ago it also turned up on imported plants in Britain and was reported on national news but does not appear to have become established.



Finally I must end on a very sad note. I was shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the premature death of one of our former committee members, Gerry Rirsch. Gerry was one of the nicest people

you could wish to meet and I am sure all our thoughts are with her family at this sad time.



It's a Girl, by Malcolm Newland

Those of you who were at the last AGM may remember that I showed a slide of an Orange Tip chrysalis surrounded by Honesty seed pods. The plant was a large but solitary specimen which had come up next to a redundant wheelbarrow filled with various flowers in the middle of a small lawn. I had noticed a plump caterpillar munching away at the developing pods but didn't spot the pupa until August 15th. Clearly it hadn't read Jeremy Thomas's book, which states that the chrysalis is almost impossible to find, having been formed among dense vegetation away from the food plant! So there, out in the open, it remained all winter as bits of dead Honesty fell off or blew away, somehow escaping the attention of the numerous wrens which explore every nook and cranny of my garden in their frantic search for food. Or perhaps they just don't taste very good.

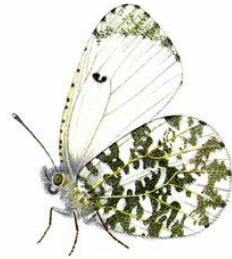


Come the Spring I began to pay more attention to the pupa and was concerned that it had fallen victim to some disease as it looked quite

lacklustre.

On April 17th I saw my first male Orange Tip of the year in the garden but still no sign of movement on the Honesty. A week later though the markings on the wings could be clearly seen through the now almost transparent chrysalis and there was no orange visible.

On the morning of April 27th, a very blustery and showery day, I wrongly assumed that no self-respecting butterfly would emerge so I did some gardening. Having finished, I had another look and there was the imago hanging next to the empty case with its limp wings being buffeted by the wind. Gradually they expanded but one of the forewings had a large 'bubble' in it, similar to those seen on some potato crisps. I had never seen anything like it before but it eventually disappeared leaving wing apparently undamaged.



The maiden flight was delayed by bad weather until the following afternoon, when “my” female Orange Tip disappeared, hopefully to breed and produce a new generation of visitors to the garden.

Data Protection, by Margaret Noakes, Membership Secretary

I'm sure most of us have some (perhaps vague) understanding of the Data protection Act. But how does it apply to Butterfly Conservation?

Head office holds our membership details, which it passes on to me as your branch membership secretary. The policy of Butterfly Conservation is that this information is not passed on to anybody outside the organisation, which obviously applies to this Branch and all Branches throughout the country.

I hope this clarifies our position.

Small Blues and Kidney Vetch in Hertfordshire, by Andrew Palmer

As you are aware from the introduction to the last newsletter, particular vulnerable or scarce butterfly species are being targeted by the branch to ensure that the recording and conservation effort necessary to ensure these butterfly's thrive is undertaken in a co-ordinated manner. I have volunteered to focus upon the Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*). The delightful little butterfly is special to me as it is a butterfly that we appeared to lose in Hertfordshire only to be rediscovered. As a result we have been given a second chance to ensure that it does not disappear from the county for good. In addition, if we help the Small Blue we will have to protect its sole larval food plant, Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), which is also in rapid decline in the county along with the habitat that supports both species. The conservation effort that is needed will therefore have wider benefits for the biodiversity of Hertfordshire (Small Blue is unlikely to be found in Middlesex due to the lack of suitable habitat and Kidney Vetch and there have been no recent records).

To begin the process of protecting a species we need to establish the basic facts of where it is, how many there are and what threats it faces. I appreciate this article will be too late for much, if not all, of the butterfly's first generation. Nevertheless I hope members of the branch will find time to look out for both Small Blue and Kidney Vetch within Hertfordshire. Any sightings should be sent directly to me so that I can do my utmost to ensure this information is used to best effect. Of course all records will also be forwarded to the appropriate County Recorders. The following description of the butterfly's life cycle and habitat requirements may help with the recording effort.

Status

Although it is one of Hertfordshire's rarest breeding butterflies the Small Blue is still fairly widespread within the Thames Region (mainly across the Chilterns and the Berkshire Downs). There is only one known Hertfordshire breeding site currently. Whilst the butterfly is considered to be relatively sedentary, the proximity of good populations in neighbouring counties may provide opportunities for recolonisation given suitable habitat management particularly in north-west and west Hertfordshire.

Adult

Emergence of Britain's smallest resident butterfly typically begins in mid-May with peak numbers flying in early June with a few lasting into July. A small second generation may emerge in late-July/August and fly until early September. Recent Hertfordshire records have spanned 20th May to 29th June and 9th to 21st August.

The



male upperside and underside

wingspan may vary between 20-30mm but on average is 24mm (1"). Both sexes have dusky-brown (pattern-less) upper-wings edged with white, although the male is distinguished by a dusting of silvery-blue scales near the body. The under-wings resemble those of Holly Blue, being silver-grey with small black spots (consisting of an uneven row near the outer-edge of the wing and a few isolated spots nearer the body). The flight has been described as weak and fluttery and is only likely to be confused with Brown Argus (the orange spots on the wing surfaces of this species are characteristic). The adult will use Kidney Vetch, Bird's-foot Trefoil and Horseshoe Vetch as a nectar source.

Egg

The tiny pale blue, disk-like egg is laid singly within the flower heads of the sole larval foodplant, Kidney Vetch in June. These usually hatch within one to three weeks. If looking for eggs on the heads of Kidney Vetch please do so very gently.



Larva

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

The young pale pinkish-grey caterpillar burrows into the flower to feed on developing seed tissue, but by late-July (when it is most likely to be found) it lives openly on the seed-head. Damage, in the form of a series of holes in the base of the flowers, is a telltale sign that the caterpillars have been present. The full-grown caterpillar leaves the plant in high summer to hibernate until the following April in soil crevices or beneath surface vegetation.



Pupa

The tiny chrysalis which forms in April and May, despite being at ground level, is almost impossible to find.

Behaviour

Small Blues live in small close-knit colonies where Kidney Vetch is present, usually in warm dry sheltered grassland hollows. Just a couple of plants may be sufficient to support a colony, which often fly and breed in the same few square metres of ground year after year. The only known Hertfordshire site comprises an area smaller than most bathrooms and the butterflies rely on less than half-a-dozen Kidney Vetch plants.



Colonies are generally likely to number less than 30 individuals during the peak flight period and in recent sightings in Hertfordshire five individuals were the most seen in any one day. The males, especially, perch for long periods on tussocks and small shrubs basking with their wings half-open only flying briefly to intercept a passing female. The females spend much of her time around Kidney Vetch flowers selecting prominent plants growing in sheltered depressions. All of these factors conspire to make it is very easy to overlook the butterfly.

Where to Look

Typical sites are likely to comprise sheltered, sparsely vegetated south-facing sides of abandoned chalk and lime pits and disturbed chalk soils on downland, road and rail embankments.

Despite formerly being more widespread the species is likely to be

restricted to the chalk escarpment in the north and west of the county in a zone a few miles either side of a line drawn between Royston and Tring. This area corresponds with the greatest distribution of Kidney Vetch, although today the plant is increasingly rare. This is likely to be due to scrub encroachment and lack of ground disturbance that is occasionally required to prevent it being overwhelmed by grass species. Ideally sites should be grazed, although excessive grazing, by rabbits for example, is detrimental as the flowering heads are eaten along with eggs and caterpillars.

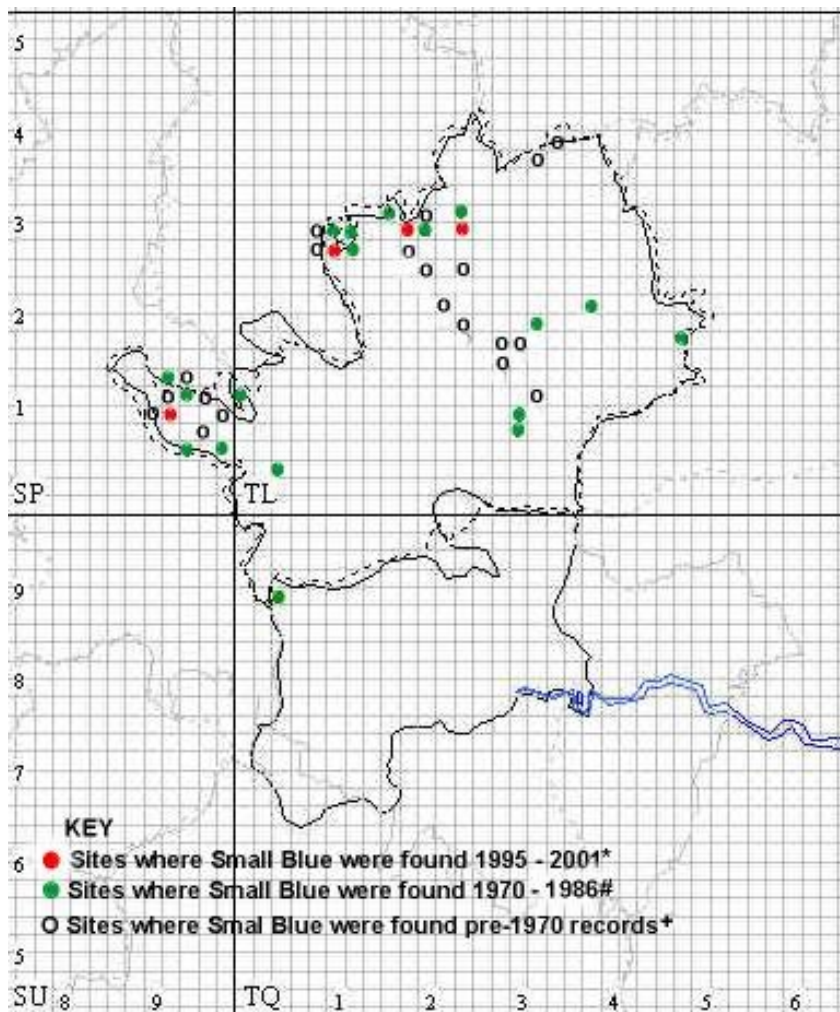
In the last ten years the few sightings of this butterfly have been largely limited to the Hitchin/Letchworth/ Weston area with single records from Hexton and Tring. These are the areas most likely to hold undiscovered Small Blue colonies. Elsewhere Kidney Vetch is very sparsely and widely distributed in the centre and west of the county and any group of plants, no matter how small, should be inspected for eggs, caterpillars and adults at the right times of year.

Given the rarity of Small Blue in the county and the significant decline in recent years in the distribution of Kidney Vetch we are keen to receive information on both species. If you see either please record the place (preferably with a six-figure Ordnance Survey grid reference), the date, time, number, habitat and any other information that may assist us in protecting these species.

Please send any records of Small Blue and Kidney Vetch to: Andrew Palmer, Ashwood, 13 Lords Avenue, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM23 4PB or by e-mail to arpalmer@talk21.com

A distribution map is on the next page....

Distribution Map for the Small Blue
Cupido minimus



The Wall Brown, by Richard Bigg

I have volunteered to co-ordinate information on the above species as an initial action in endeavouring to establish the reason(s) for its decline in Hertfordshire / Middlesex.



The Wall Brown, usually referred to as the Wall, was a common butterfly 30-40 years ago, and still is in some areas. In Herts / Middx however, (and in neighbouring counties) for reasons not really known, it has become a rare event to see one.

A number of different types of grasses form the larval food plants and the butterfly favours sparse clumps in areas of bare or stony ground. It needs fairly high temperatures (25 - 30°C) for flight and the males will bask on bare ground, particularly a south-facing bank, to raise the body temperature. Look for such conditions in a sheltered area. There are two flight periods, the first May / June and the second late July and August.

Please send any records to me at: 91 Fordwich Rise, Hertford, SG14 2DF.

Records should include:

- 1 Name and address of observer
- 2 Name / location of site with respect to nearest town / village.
- 3 Six figure O.S. map reference
- 4 Date and time of day
- 5 Temperature and /or statement of weather conditions
- 6 Type of terrain in the local area where the butterfly was actually seen

Moth Recording in the London Area, By Colin W. Plant, London Moth Recorder

In 1978 I was appointed London Moth Recorder by the London Natural History Society. Plotting existing London moth records onto maps soon revealed that there were huge areas where nobody had ever recorded a single moth! This was, presumably, a legacy of the old way of doing things - everyone went to the “classic” localities to collect their series of specimens and few people ever looked for moths in new places. A recording programme was introduced, records were submitted and the book *Larger Moths of the London Area* was born in 1993. It listed 715 macro moth species. The distribution maps were drawn using the DMap computer programme but the rest of the data was stored manually. Nowadays, data can be easily and rapidly entered into complex databases with user-friendly interfaces such as Map Mate or Lotus Approach. These can then be used to draw maps, plot flight period charts and do many other things. Interestingly, although the book is becoming a little old, very little in it is yet out of date. Incoming records since publication have been religiously hand-spotted in red on the maps in my own copy of the book and it is fascinating to discover that the *patterns* of distribution have hardly changed for most species.



Red-green Carpet *chlorochysta siterata*. Photo © Perry Hampson

A few species are becoming more restricted or are spreading, for example the Red-green Carpet has recently invaded London from the west after an absence of a hundred years; the Square-spotted Clay looks poised to do likewise from the north-east. Formerly restricted species such as the Black Arches, previously confined to oak woodland on the periphery of London, have started to extend their range and can now be found in association with oaks in the urban zone of the Capital.

It is very pleasing to see so many new people gaining an interest in moths and moth recording. That awareness now needs to be given a direction. We are in a position to achieve far greater and more detailed coverage than ever before. With modern computer technology we can interpret the data in a variety of new ways that were not possible previously. In addition, there are equally variable new demands made

by the end-users of data and with the imminent formation of the Local Biological Records Centre for London it is likely that recorders will need to store far more detail for each species record.

Volunteers needed!

We are looking for volunteers with computers who would be willing to type in the tetrad notations for London moth records from 1993 to 2000 into the existing DMap data file. We can then generate revised distribution maps for all species. These will be published on paper and should also be freely available on the Internet.

We also need people with light traps in their gardens to count moths on a regular basis and submit their records annually for analysis. However, if you are not in a position to provide such detail do not worry; all records are of use. Note the date and location of every moth sighting (preferably giving a six-figure grid reference), and send all London records to me. As London Recorder I am only able to enter accurate records onto the database, so there may be occasions when I get back to you and ask you to tell me more about a particular record. I am always very pleased to look at live moths, dead moths or photographs (but in some cases moths cannot be identified from a photograph alone).

It is very important to record information in a standard way. Recording forms can be downloaded from <http://www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk>, or I can supply paper copies (the forms were designed for Hertfordshire moth recording but are fine for use in the London area). Those who have access to the Internet can either print out copies from the website to mark up or else underline recorded species using a word processor and e-mail the filled forms to me direct.

I am the Hertfordshire County Moth Recorder as well as the London Moth Recorder so please send all your moth records for these areas to me.

If you are interested in helping to update the 'Larger Moths of the London Area' distribution maps please contact Emily Funnell, Butterfly Conservation's London Development Officer. You need to have access to a computer. All volunteers will be credited, and will be given a copy of the updated distribution maps.

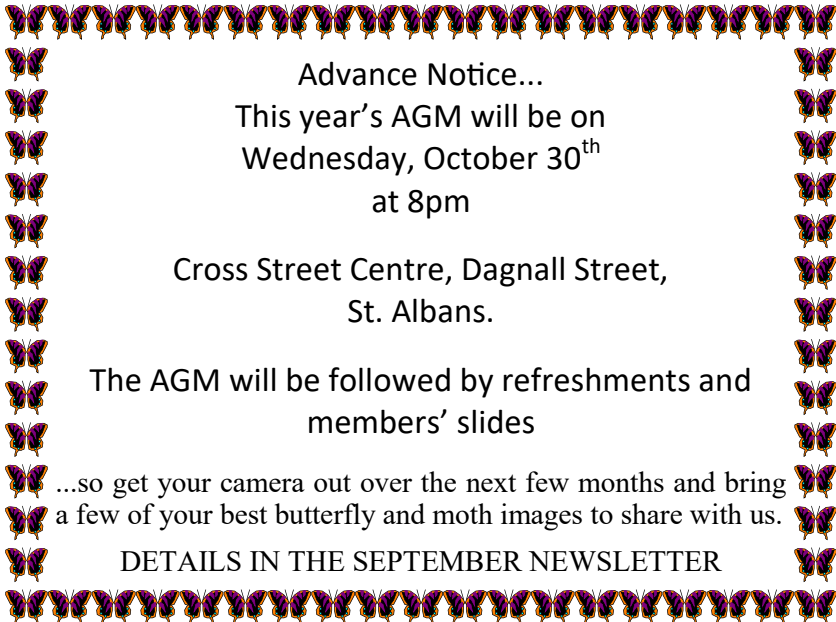
Contacts

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Colin W. Plant, London Moth Recorder, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3QP. Colinwplant@ntlworld.com

Emily Funnell, London RDO, Butterfly Conservation, 94 Lion Lane, Haslemere Surrey GU27 1JH. Tel: 01428 654343. efunnell@butterfly-conservation.org

Andrew Wood, Herts & Middx Moth Recorder, 93 Bengoe Street, Hertford, Herts SG14 3EL. Andrew@comma.freeserve.co.uk



Advance Notice...

This year's AGM will be on
Wednesday, October 30th
at 8pm

Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street,
St. Albans.

The AGM will be followed by refreshments and
members' slides

...so get your camera out over the next few months and bring
a few of your best butterfly and moth images to share with us.

DETAILS IN THE SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

Where Were Those Butterflies? by Michael Healy

An essential part of any butterfly record that is to be included in the Annual Report is a National Grid reference. A grid reference is a group of figures which identifies the bottom left (south-west) corner of a grid square marked on the Ordnance Survey (OS) map. The figures are preceded by two letters (TL for most of Hertfordshire; SP in the west and TQ for the south and for Middlesex) which define a big 100km x 100km square. There is one important rule - Easting comes before Northing, just as they do in the dictionary. This means that the numbers taken from the top or bottom of the map come before those taken from the sides.

The grid reference can be given on various scales.

a) A 2km x 2km square is called a tetrad. This is the scale used for the maps in the Annual Report, for reasons of space on the page, but it is too coarse for most recording purposes. A tetrad reference is usually given as two single digits defining a 10km x 10km square plus a single letter for the actual tetrad - a good description is given in Brian Sawford's book. A simple method is to give the 4-digit reference for the square (with both components even numbers) and to follow it by a letter t.

b) The 4-digit reference which defines a 1km x 1km square is the most useful, especially if you are recording on the move. The necessary numbers can be read directly from the 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 OS maps. They are also shown in the OS Street Guides and (if you look carefully) in the London A-Z. The recipe is

Find the point you want on the map.

Take the nearest grid line on the left and read off its two digits from the top or bottom of the map.

Take the nearest grid line below and read off the last two digits from the side of the map

c) A 6-figure reference identifies a 100m x 100m square. You will need to estimate the 3rd digit of each component; this is easiest using the 1:25,000 scale map or the Street Guide.

Here are a few examples - you might like to find them on the map.

TL 138 143 - My garden in Harpenden

SP 900 149 - Millhoppers Reserve

TQ 365 823 - Tower Hamlets Transect

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Aldbury Nowers, May 18th, by David Chandler

A small group of 10 showed their tenacity and were rewarded for their patience in waiting for the sun to emerge on Saturday 18th on the joint branch field trip to Aldbury Nowers (Duchies Piece) nr Tring Herts.

Starting in drizzle, respecting Michael Pierson's personal wish not to even begin, the party first went for a walk along the Icknield Way path through the woods above the site and was rewarded in seeing a family of Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Orange Tip eggs on Garlic Mustard and muse the mysterious puzzle of why Nowers' snails like tree climbing. We found a roosting Brimstone and disturbed another and wondered if that one adult species would be the sum total of our day's efforts. However, eventually, the weather brightened and the sun came out and (pretty late on in the afternoon) we descended to the main butterfly area where were rewarded with, considering the weather, some reasonable butterflying.

We saw, close-up a lovely female Holly Blue posing with her wings open and chased a Green Hairstreak and three other Hollies' through the bushes. Large, Small & Green-Veined Whites made an appearance, and, towards the end of the walk, getting on for 4 o'clock, at the bottom of the site near the big briar bush where the Grizzled & Dinky Skippers can sometimes be found, a solitary Speckled Wood made an appearance before we all went happily back to our cars. Patience was rewarded.

In the end the trip was a success, but sitting in my car in the rain at 1.30pm I would not have thought it

Field trip to Ivinghoe Beacon, Bucks. 18th May, by Nick Bowles

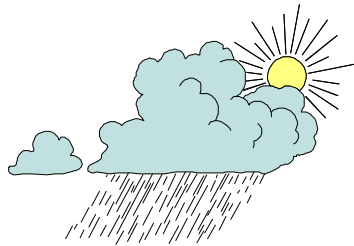
Despite the reputation I suspect my field trips are gaining, there were takers for this walk – 4, which exceeded the number of species seen by 1. The weather was appalling. There was a weird combination of drizzle in a stiff breeze; the reason that so many fly their model gliders there became clear. Ivinghoe is open to all and any wind, from every quarter. To further lower our spirits the temperature which was hovering at about 9°C seemed to carry a tangible menacing threat that it was about to plummet.

Our intrepid party were warned about the history of my guided walks and given the chance to leave.

All decided to give it a go, which was a great testament to optimism (or to misplaced confidence in the leader).

We examined several points where I was able to say, “on a better day you would see x, y and z here”. We stumbled across Small Tortoiseshell larvae just before a partially frozen Green Hairstreak gave up the will to live and fell out of a hawthorn. Duly examined lying upside down on the path, it was placed back onto a windswept leaf. Finally, on the route back to the car after a fruitless search of a buckthorn for Brimstone larvae, we found several Orange Tip eggs.

Ivinghoe Beacon can be an excellent site and not just for butterflies. Even in winter or late in the evening, when few butterflies are around, it is an excellent place to go for a walk. But, probably all who dared to attend that day would agree that it not at its best in a cold and persistent drizzle.



Moth Evening Reports Andrew Wood

I have run two events in the last couple of months. The first in association with Cranford Park in West London was washed out by heavy rain following a cool and windy day. The event was due to start at 20:30 and the rains arrived at about 20:15. The only moth recorded was a White Shouldered House Moth found sitting on a tree trunk.

The second in association with Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust Stevenage Group was run at Pryors Wood on 18th May. Despite an earlier thunderstorm the evening was mild and humid to drizzly. Unfortunately apart from myself and Andy Holtham from the HMWT local group there were no other attendees. Just over 20 species were recorded, Green carpet and Common Swift were the commonest species.

We have another event in association with the Countryside Management service at Pishiobury Park near Sawbridgeworth on July 11th at 20:45

Bengeo Moth Diary Andrew Wood

I have been photographing moths on film for about ten years, but the acquisition of a digital camera has meant instant results and the ability to publish these pictures on the internet. So this year I have started a site called Bengeo Moth Diary which documents what I have found in the garden during the year with photographs and a few lines of text. As of 1st June there are about 105 species illustrated. My aim is to help others to see what is around in a typical Hertfordshire garden as the year progresses and to also illustrate the diversity of moths that can be found in suburbia. The page is linked from our branch's homepage.....

BRANCH WEBSITE

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

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

A Note about Membership, by Margaret Noakes

We have increased our membership hugely over the last few years and are delighted to welcome all those who have joined us.

Some members find themselves on the borders of other Counties and unless they request otherwise are joined to the County Branch in which they live. This can cause difficulties for some who, living outside Herts. or Middx, want to be a member of our Branch, or equally would find it more convenient to be a member of a nearby Branch. In that case it is always possible to change, or better still, be a member of both Branches.

We are working closely with our neighbour branches and have organised a number of joint events and would love you all to participate

So do come along.

There are so many names out there (over 500) to whom we cannot attach a face and very much want to meet.

Singapore, by Brian Jessop

While visiting Sentoza Island in Singapore some years ago now, I paid a visit to a small wildlife park which boasted a small butterfly enclosure. On entering, butterflies all around began to fly about. One in particular caught my attention. As it settled on the concrete ground, it immediately began to walk backwards very quickly, for about a third of a metre and stop, which gave the illusion that the rear end was the front end! When it flew off again, it looked like it had flown off backwards! I disturbed it a few times to confirm I was not imagining it and it did the same each time. Predators must find this confusing – I certainly did. It is a wonderful and unusual defence against predators.

Has anyone else seen or heard of this most unusual behaviour? Or does anyone know what species it might be? I would very much like to know.

(Please copy any replies to the editor so that we can share the information with other Branch members....)

White-letter Hairstreak and Dutch Elm Disease, by Andrew Brookes (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch)

Readers will no doubt be aware that the White-letter Hairstreak is a species that is uncommon in our area but is more widely, if sparingly, distributed across the southern half of the UK. Its larval foodplants are elm species, especially Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) and English Elm (*U.procera*) but the spread of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) throughout the 1970's and 1980's destroyed the vast majority of these two trees and



Female White-letter Hairstreak

it was at one time feared that the butterfly would become extinct. However, the effects of the disease have not been quite as bad as was initially feared and the W-IH has managed to recover at least some of its former populations. The article below is reproduced with permission from the latest newsletter of Hampshire branch of BC:

THE HYBRID ELM PILOT STUDY IN THE SOUTH EAST AREA

The pilot study into the adaptability of White-letter Hairstreaks to disease-resistant elm hybrids is finally under way. By mid-February, 40 Dutch and German-raised trees had arrived, all bare-rooted. Fortunately permission had already been secured to plant most of the elms immediately at two high-security MoD establishments: the Defence Munitions depot at Gosport, and Horsea Island, part of the HMS Excellent complex at Portsmouth. Both sites appear ideal, already harbouring elms and colonies of the Hairstreak, yet well protected from the attentions of vandals or browsing animals. The third location chosen is a long-disused chalkpit on the north side of Ports Down. Again, the site hosts elms and hairstreaks, indeed the existing trees are something of a mystery. At least 70 years of age, they are neither Wych nor English elm, although their survival is probably attributable to their isolation in an arable wasteland sparing them the attentions of itinerant disease-carrying beetles.

The majority of the hybrids planted are Dodoens and Clusius, both featuring the native Wych Elm *U. glabra* and its close relative, the

Himalayan or Kashmir Elm *U. wallichiana*, in their ancestry. Cloned in the Netherlands, neither has ultimately proven impervious to Dutch Elm Disease [DED], although they are significantly more resistant than our native species and often able to fully recover from an attack. The third hybrid obtained, New Horizon, is of exclusively far-eastern parentage. Developed by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, New Horizon is a cross between the Siberian Elm *U. pumila* and the Japanese Elm *U. japonica*. Raised under licence in Germany, it has been introduced to the UK this year by Hillier Nurseries. It has so far proved to be one of the most DED-resistant hybrids, but the inclusion of Siberian Elm in its parentage may lead to other problems in the UK. This elm enjoyed considerable popularity in the USA by virtue of its extraordinary growth rate. It was planted extensively in shelter-belts across the Prairies in the aftermath of the Dustbowl catastrophe. However, having evolved in a cold, arid and largely windless environment, it has proven vulnerable to numerous ailments when grown in a temperate climate, particularly wind damage. The fate of its hybrid on the often wet and windy Solent coast will be of particular interest.

Also included with each clump of these trees is a single specimen of the Chinese Elm *U. parvifolia*, raised by the author from seed collected in Yunnan province. A small, attractive tree, it has been long established in several British botanical gardens.

Sod's Law dictated that after the hybrids were ordered, a new clone, the first to be released by the Dutch for many years, became commercially available in the UK. Named Columella, it is of similar parentage to the other hybrids raised in the Netherlands but very fastigate, resembling the Lombardy poplar. Claimed to immune to DED, having survived inoculation with the fungus and remained completely unscathed, Columella represents an important breakthrough. Unable to purchase the new hybrid this winter, it was of some consolation to learn that our distribution of the superb Elm Conservation pamphlets produced by Cheshire & Peak Branch had prompted Gosport Borough Council to buy 38 Columella elms for planting at their Wild Grounds nature reserve. We hope to purchase this new hybrid ourselves later this year and establish it alongside the others to provide a direct comparison. Meanwhile in Portsmouth, the city council is experimenting with the New Horizon hybrid on Southsea Common, sadly a rather unlikely butterfly habitat.

The study is of course an essentially long-term affair; the earliest any hybrid has been known to flower [and become potentially attractive to gravid Hairstreaks] was at the age of ten years. Monitoring in the near future will therefore be confined to measuring the performance of the trees in a variety of soils and microclimates.

There have been two further developments since the article above was originally compiled:

- 1 The EU-funded *GenRes78* programme to find a DED-resistant clone amongst the European species of elm has ended in failure. Over 300 clones were tested; a few specimens of Field Elm *Ulmus minor* revealed some resistance, but not enough to warrant further research.
- 2 Better news has emerged from Holland with the commercial release of a second DED-immune hybrid, clone 812. The significance of this clone lies in its derivation from entirely European species. Unilaterally named *Lutece* by the French *Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique* [INRA, accommodating their equivalent of the Forestry Commission], they are planting it by the thousand. Currently only cultivated by two French nurseries, it is not yet available in the UK, although our Group has been promised a couple by INRA.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER UPDATE

January - May 2002

Emily Funnell (London RDO)

I started my new job as London Regional Development Officer in January 2002. The first few months were spent setting up a regional office and finding out about butterfly and moth conservation work in the London region. Meeting all the Butterfly Conservation branches in the region was given high priority, in order to find out about the work the branches were doing and to find out what support the

branches wanted from me.

I met a wide range of other organisations and individuals in the region to publicise the appointment of a London Officer for Butterfly Conservation, to find out about Lepidoptera conservation work in the region, and to develop partnerships. Organisations and individuals contacted include the London Wildlife Trust, English Nature (London), the Greater London Authority, the National Trust, Forest Enterprise, Barnes Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, the London Biodiversity Partnership, the Downlands Countryside Management Project, The Natural History Museum, Sutton Ecology Centre, Squires Garden Centres, Richmond Butterfly Group, Central Royal Parks Wildlife Group, London Underground, local authorities and the London butterfly and moth recorders.

A key objective for me is to ensure that Butterfly Conservation's Regional Action Plans (RAPs) are implemented in the London area. I have met with all the branches in my region individually to discuss what work they are doing on RAPs. This has given me a good overview of RAP work taking place in London and has identified gaps where RAP targets are not currently being met. I will work to 'plug' these gaps. Projects are being developed for priority species, for example I am setting up a project on the Buttoned Snout moth in London. This will involve local moth experts, London Underground and Railtrack staff, and other relevant groups for example allotment associations.

Another priority for me is to give advice on butterfly and moth conservation issues in the London region. I am doing this in several ways, for example I represent Butterfly Conservation on the London Biodiversity Network and input to specific London Habitat Action Plans (HAPs). I have identified London HAPs which are of particular importance to Lepidoptera, for example private gardens and chalk grassland, and have become a member of the steering groups for these HAPs. I have also collected information on good butterfly and moth sites within 1km of the M25 from the branches, in order to input to habitat management plans being drawn up on behalf of the Highways Agency.

I have been working to raise awareness of Butterfly Conservation in London. This has been achieved by working with local and regional media, and by organising Butterfly Conservation events (and



Buttoned Snout moth *Hypena rostralis*
- the subject of a project in London
© David Green / Butterfly Conservation

supporting branch events). For example, I have organised events to promote National Moth Night and Garden Butterflies Count in 2002. I have developed a good working relationship with Squires Garden Centres, and have got them to promote Garden Butterflies Count at all their stores. I will be running a butterfly-gardening themed stand at one of Squires' summer shows this year, and have planned other butterfly gardening-themed

events with them for 2003.

I sent out a press release to London newspapers publicising the appointment of a London Regional Development Officer soon after my appointment. Several papers covered the story, effectively raising the profile of Butterfly Conservation in the capital. I have given presentations on the work of Butterfly Conservation in London to the Surrey and Southwest London Branch and to London Wildlife Trust volunteers.

An important part of my work is to increase Lepidoptera recording, monitoring and research in London. This is being achieved by working closely with branches to recruit new volunteers, and by running training courses on surveying and monitoring skills. I am working with other organisations to maximise training opportunities and to develop joint conservation projects. For example, I recently trained London Wildlife Trust volunteers in butterfly transect skills and encouraged them to consider setting up butterfly transects or helping out with existing transects in their area.

To summarise, my main areas of work are;

- supporting branches
- implementing the RAPs (including setting up specific species-based projects) in London
- providing advice on Lepidoptera conservation issues in London

- increasing Lepidoptera recording and monitoring in London
- increasing awareness of (and support for) Lepidoptera conservation in London
- education
- publicity
- promotion of specific Butterfly Conservation projects (e.g. Garden Butterflies Count).

As the position of Regional Development Officer is a relatively new one, it is likely that the job will evolve over time. I have really enjoyed working with Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteers so far, and have been impressed by the amount of enthusiasm for butterfly and moth conservation work in London.

EXTRA FIELD MEETING

Sunday 11th August 10.30 onwards.

Greenham Common. Berks. Our second visit to this 500ha (1200acre) common this year. 28 butterfly species have already been recorded at this site, but there is much still to be visited. Extensive heathland but with many other types of habitat supporting a vast range of insects, birds and animals.

Meet at Control tower car park off Burys Bank Road, itself off old A34 at top of hill south of Newbury. Tower Car Park is 11/2m, rt. at new roundabout. SU 401651 OS 174.

From east, go north from A4 across Railway at Thatcham, 1st.R into Burys Bank Road.

Picnic lunch. Leader: David Redhead 01865 772520

Copy Deadline for the September Newsletter will be

25 August 2002

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

ARTICLES WANTED

**- WRITE AND TELL ME WHAT YOU'VE SEEN
THIS YEAR**



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. 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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