

Butterfly
Conservation

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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MARCH 2005

Bulldozers and Chalk Grassland do Not Mix.

by David Chandler

As most of the branch will be aware from my announcement at the AGM, for personal reasons, I will be moving to Watford later this year and leaving my Bedfordshire house. I will be much less active in "The North" and have time to become the Herts & Middlesex branch committee's county fritillary co-ordinator. But before I move, please crave my indulgence writing on something that happened recently just over the border in Bedfordshire but, I feel, is of such importance to conservationists that I think the lessons learned from it should also be mentioned this side of the county border too.

I must tell you about the dreadful happenings at the Smithcombe part of the Sharpenhoe & Moleskin National Trust site when overzealous contractors took it upon themselves to take a bulldozer to some

ancient chalk grassland, when they should have just been trimming back a hedgerow and removing peripheral scrub with hand-tools. I discovered the bulldozer on the site when I went to look at the winter sheep grazing regime in late December and immediately informed the National Trust.

I visited Sharpenhoe on Sunday February 6th to have look at the damage caused by these contractors and was dismayed to find that in between the time I had notified the National Trust that I had seen a bulldozer on the site and the time they literally "stopped it in it's tracks" another 100 meters of hedge and chalk downland had been wiped out. Some small reparation work had been done at the top of the site where the Dark Green Fritillary's breeding plant the violet once grew but at the site's lower end, near the wild strawberry patch, the Dingy Skipper's breeding ground, I could see none - just flattened ant-hills. At the margins of these damaged areas I spent about two hours rebuilding ant-hills & replacing the turf that had been peeled away from the subsoil by the action of the caterpillar tractor turning around in far too wide circles. This all must have appeared highly amusing to the dog-owners & walkers passing by, who would stop & look at a strange grown-up appearing to be making mud-pies in the drizzly rain

Subsequently I heard from the warden that the contractors had been allowed on the site without National Trust or English Nature's supervision and, as a result, in total a L-shaped swathe of chalk grassland about 350 metres by 25 metres had been seriously damaged. English Nature have visited the site and I hear were "very concerned" by what happened. The National Trust have echoed this and promised that the error will not be allowed to happen again. I returned to the site on a much sunnier Sunday February 13th and took some photographs so that I have a visual record for posterity.

Looking forward, the damaged area forms most of section 4 part of my butterfly transect walk and I've been using Transect Walker software to record my observations there over the years, so I hope conservationists can use the historic records for comparison as the site recovers. I informed the conservation professionals at Butterfly Conservation's head office and the National Trust that it might be useful to use some of the past data from Transect Walker on, what I believe will be, the two most badly affected butterfly species breeding in transect section 4. I suggested to them that historic data from the section of Dingy Skippers & Dark Green Fritillaries numbers could be used as a benchmark to monitor and measure future population



Flattened Anthill

changes as Smithcombe gets back to normal.

In closing, on the positive side, if there is one in this debacle, the modest Small Blue population in section 4 may now increase. The butterfly may benefit from increased Kidney Vetch growth in the scarified areas, because its breeding plant is one of the first plants to recolonise damaged

chalk-rich soils, but we will not know the answer to this for about three years because the plant is bi-annual and patches of new Kidney Vetch will not start to appear until 2006/7.

John Whiteman - an Appreciation, by Andrew Wood

I first met John when he started to walk transects at Elthorne in the Brent Valley in Ealing. We had a number of conversations and it soon became clear that John was interested in wider matters of conservation than just counting butterflies. When the Trent Park transect needed a new walker John volunteered to undertake this despite it entailing a long Piccadilly line journey from Acton to Cockfosters each week. The records of a Silver Washed Fritillary at this site led to John joining the Conservation Committee as the Fritillary species coordinator. It is a sad irony that the records of Fritillaries in our area have broken records during 2004.

As one got to know John more one realised just how dedicated to conservation he was, as well as the Elthorne and Trent Park transects John also participated in the two transects at Horsenden Hill in Middlesex and one for the Upper Thames Branch in the Bernwood Forest complex. John was also a practical conservationist getting up at the crack of dawn in summer to attack the Giant Hogweeds growing in the Brent valley near his home, before the sunshine was strong enough to cause the unpleasant sap burns that this invasive plant can cause. We discovered that John was also undertaking a conservation degree at Reading University. Despite all his commitments he also took on for some of the 2002 and all of the 2003 season the entering of transect data into our standard recording spreadsheets that help to produce the Branch Annual Report. He had also agreed in 2003 to take over the collation of the branch butterfly database from Michael Healy.

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Liz Goodyear remembers happening to say to John that she was looking for a leader for a field trip in Middlesex and on another occasion a venue for a winter meeting in Middlesex. The next thing she knew was that John had offered to lead the trip and in the case of the winter meeting, a few days later she received a phone call with a list of suitable venues. John championed Middlesex for us made a tremendous contribution to the branch.

His efforts and work are sadly missed.

Dame Miriam Rothschild, DBE, FRS. Born August 5, 1908 she died on January 20, 2005, aged 96

The following is mostly abstracted from the obituary which appeared in The Times:

A scientist of scholarship and distinction, Dame Miriam Rothschild was known primarily for her writings on butterflies and fleas, though she also published more than 300 highly technical papers on subjects such as bird behaviour and parasitic castration. Her lyrical writing, in particular in *Butterfly Cooing like a Dove*, published in her eighties, is in the best tradition of authors who combine science, literature and a sense of wonder. “Nobody has really thought about what is so satisfying in nature,” she once said, “but people really do benefit from contact with plants, animals, birds and butterflies. Without them we are a deprived species.”

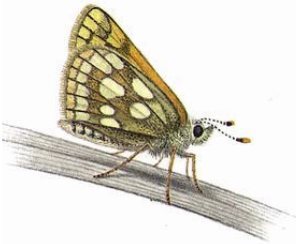
As a child she had her own vegetable patch, as well as a cactus collection in a miniature greenhouse, and she went on to win prizes at Chelsea for orchids. But later she returned to her childhood love of wild flowers, allowing them to reclaim much that had been artfully denatured by Edwardian garden planning. Greenhouses that were once devoted to exotic fruit were turned over to the cultivation of wayside flowers. “One day the penny dropped,” she said, “and I realised with dismay that wild flowers had been drained, bulldozed, weedkilled and fertilised out of the fields, and that we now had a countryside reminiscent of a snooker table.” Gardeners, she proclaimed, should not battle against nature — the endless struggle to keep the weeds down — but should allow it to flourish. She began her first meadow garden in 1970 and eventually 150 acres were filled with wild flowers. In her zeal she even planted a bypass with primroses and cowslips, ladies’ smocks and buttercups, to brighten the verges and encourage butterflies.

She was a tremendous friend to the cause of conservation, which came entirely naturally to her. She pioneered humane livestock methods and campaigned against the widespread use of insecticides. The tone was set in *The Butterfly Gardener*, which opened with the words: “I garden purely for pleasure. I love plants and flowers and green leaves and I am incurably romantic — hankering after small stars spangling the grass.”

Born in 1908, Miriam Louisa Rothschild reached the scientific heights despite — or, as she delighted to say, because of — having had no formal academic instruction (her eight doctorates of science were all honorary). She claimed to have been “self-non-educated”, but this understated the remarkable experience of her childhood, much of it spent at Tring Park, the Wren house at the foot of the Chilterns which was the country seat of her grandfather

Her father was given a 1,200-acre rural estate near Oundle, where he built Ashton Wold, and renewed the village of Ashton, bringing running water to the residents and organising village events. Later, Miriam Rothschild, who lived there until her death, rehabilitated the watermill to supply electricity to the house, and established the National Dragonfly Museum there. The village pub was named “The Chequered Skipper”, as the last English colonies of this species came from the nearby countryside.

Twenty seven people attended the winter indoor meeting and Branch AGM, held in St. Thomas’ Church Hall, Oakfield, Enfield on 15 January. The first part of the meeting was an excellent presentation, given by Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation’s Survey’s Manager and one of the lead contributors to the *Millennium Atlas*. Richard’s talk reviewed recent trends emerging from all the surveys and transects undertaken by Society members and others, and explained how this was being used to better understand both conservation requirements and the effects of particular conservation strategies. In addition, the impacts of climate change on expanding the geographic range (both northwards and to higher altitude) of some species, while apparently restricting the range of others, particularly those associated with cooler, higher habitats. The crucial role of continued monitoring and submission of data was emphasised. There was a lively discussion after the talk.



**Winter Indoor Meeting and Branch AGM,
15 January**

Following a brief interval, with refreshments provided by Liz Goodyear and much appreciated by those present, the formal proceedings of the AGM took place. In his Chairman's address, David Chandler thanked the Committee for their time, support and effort during the year and described the successful efforts in promoting conservation, species monitoring/recording, improving inter-conservation group co-operation and in the running of the national AGM. Targets for the coming year would include the promotion of learning about butterflies, particularly to younger members, and this will be aided by our successful lottery grant application for equipment and funding for associated publicity material on Hert.' Woodland Butterflies.

John Hollingdale gave his Treasurer's report, covering the year to 31 March 2004, and acknowledged that the increase in sales revenue, to over £3,000, was attributable to the hard work of Malcolm Hull and Alan Downie.

John Murray gave a brief presentation on butterfly trends in our area in 2004 (see also page 19). Species that had not fared well included Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper and Common Blue, while 'winners' included Brown Argus, Essex and Dinky Skippers and the Small Tortoiseshell. John reported that Michael Healy, who had been responsible for data entry since this was begun in 1995, had expressed a wish to retire. John Whiteman had started to take over this role but sadly died in September. Andrew Wood will now be responsible for the database, and Keir Mottram will be responsible for transect data.

Membership Secretary's Report, by Margaret Noakes

I was reading the reports that I have produced over the last number of years and wondered how I could make them more interesting. Because of the very nature of my job numbers become somewhat significant and there seems to be no real way of changing that.

We now have 560 members at the last count; that figure could alter at any moment but it does seem to indicate a gradually increasing membership (550 in 2003, 532 in 2002). 2004 saw a change in the way Head Office notified me of membership details, no longer telling me of renewal dates of members but only of lapsed members, new members and any changes of address. All this information has been



Common Blue - a 2004 loser?



Small Tortoiseshell - a 2004 winner?

given to me on a monthly basis for all the twelve years I have been membership secretary so the change has been fundamental. Certainly it makes for far less work but has greater potential for 'cock up.' We will see!

50 new members joined us in 2004 and we welcome them and look forward to seeing them on some of our activities over the next year. 37 new members joined us in 2003 and 33 in 2002.

But head office lapsed 48 members in 2004, 30 in 2003 and 33 in 2002. It would be good to know why we lose members, particularly as each member is written to on two occasions before they are finally lapsed. Just in case you are wondering whether this includes a change of address, these figures I assess separately. Perhaps we are not providing what long term members need or interest in butterflies wanes. Certainly members that joined as a result of the campaign 'Gardening for butterflies' have dwindled away hugely. I can't help feeling that as we plan around the counties more people will find different venues more accessible and members will feel more involved.

We still have members in both Germany and Singapore as well as many other counties around England. They are all most welcome. If you are ever nearby please get in touch and we will be happy to show you the best of Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Margaret expressed her wish to stand down as membership secretary at the next AGM.

Millhoppers Reserve Report 2004, by John Noakes

Working parties

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We had four working parties during the year. The main tasks involved cutting down some large elder bushes in the area beyond the pond. They were dominating a fair area of grassland making grass cutting difficult. There are plenty of these bushes outside the fence, so we are confident that we are not depleting the berries for birds later in the year.

A large limb of a black poplar had fallen and this was "chain sawed" into manageable pieces and stacked near to the fence.

Grass cutting and raking was carried out on one occasion. Problem plants as always have been nettles, hogweed and encroaching blackthorn scrub.

Paths were cut around the reserve on at least two occasions to enable visitors to safely visit and reduce invading blackthorn.

Grazing

A contract was established with Keith Slade, as we had done last year, to introduce cattle to the reserve in early autumn. This time three young Belgium Blue cows were brought into the reserve in late September and remained for six weeks. The period was short, as it was not thought the grass to be of sufficient quality for them without supplementary feeding. The Grazing Plan is as follows:

Aim

- To manage the site to encourage butterflies with a particular emphasis on grassland species.
- To encourage other wildlife on the reserve.

By:

- ⇒ Reducing the sward height by springtime to approx 6-9" in order to encourage finer grasses and nectar plants, allowing any potential seed bank to germinate and emerge
- ⇒ Browsing back blackthorn scrub and any other shrubs and small trees.
- ⇒ Trampling down vegetation at stream margins to create a marsh and pond area.

Animals

- To introduce no more than ten cattle at suitable times between September and March.
- Initially four cattle will be introduced and their affect monitored.
- The breed will be Belgium Blue x Holstein Friesian, no more than two years old.

Monitoring

A recent botanical survey has not been carried out but an attempt will be made to monitor the impact of grazing by seeking advice on how and who should carry out the task.

Good News

The impression is that there are more nectar grassland plants in the compartment beyond the pond.

Transects were carried out every week bar two from April to September. Twenty species were recorded and the results sent to John Murray. The details are set out in the Group's Annual Report.

There was a general increase in numbers particularly Ringlets. Meadow Browns at times were too numerous to count, and Common Blues, Small Coppers and Essex Skippers were all seen mating. The number of Painted Ladies was down, but this was also the case elsewhere.

The final good news is that there has been no further vandalism.

Safety

A preliminary Risk Assessment (available upon request - please contact the editor) has been carried out and a Risk Management Strategy produced - provided below:

Access to the reserve is from a public footpath. Two internal styles should be maintained in a secure state preferably with wire netting to avoid slipping.

Paths. To maintain where possible peripheral paths and attempt to cut back thorns, branches and stumps. Badger/rabbit holes can unpredictably appear. Cutting paths can minimize these hazards by making them more visible

Structures. Currently the bridge is secure but fixing wire

netting as with the styles, would reduce slipping.

The stock fencing has recently been erected (2003) is considered secure and safe.

Stream. The stream and pond are shallow and this is not considered to be a problem.

Trees. These have recently been reviewed by a tree surgeon (2003) and have had necessary work done to ensure their safety and conservation.

Cattle. These are introduced for a period of time from late summer to winter. Their husbandry is the responsibility of a local farmer and are visited at least twice weekly. The site has been made secure with stock fencing. The breed used has been chosen for their usefulness and friendly disposition.

Visitors. Ideally we should have a notice board welcoming visitors, pointing out the main features and any major hazards. Vandalism has deterred us from doing this but we will consider a main notice board just within the reserve.

We will be working on a leaflet to provide more comprehensive information.

Invited groups, particularly children, should have an accountable adult who should be aware of any hazards within the reserve and be responsible for the groups safety.

Dog owners are requested to keep their animals on a lead as cattle are on the reserve at times. Furthermore dog mess is unpleasant to visitors and volunteer workers alike.

We request all litter is taken home. Cans, bottles and plastics are of danger to cattle and others.

Volunteer Workers. All those using tools and machinery should be experienced.

Only those with an up to date experience certificate should operate chain saws.

Protective gear, such as goggles, hard hats, ear muffs, gloves etc. should be worn as per manufacturer's advice.

Alcohol should not be consumed over the period of operating power tools and machinery.

Dogs and children should not be near working machinery and should be supervised by an accountable adult who will take responsibility for their care.

Due care should be taken when having bonfires.

Insurance. Appropriate insurance is already in place through Butterfly Conservation for both voluntary workers and visitors alike.

Any professionals contracted to work on the reserve should be adequately insured and provide evidence of their competence.

Review Regular reviews will take place on an annual basis when this statement will be appraised and updated where needed.

Furthermore we took part in the Reserve Survey reporting to John Davis. Members will remember he presented his overall findings at the Butterfly Conservation A.G.M. hosted by ourselves.

Other News

A recent footpath trail has been produced by the local Countryside Management Services (C.M.S.) The trail passes through Millhoppers and a leaflet produced highlights our Reserve. A map indicating the route is displayed outside Wilstone's Village Hall.

The C.M.S. has also put in another stile to improve access for visitors.

Future

Our Management for the Reserve now needs to be updated and this will be presented to the Group ahead of next year's AGM.

AGM, continued...

The AGM concluded with the election of Committee members. John Stevens has relinquished his position as Branch Organiser and has chosen to leave the Committee. Liz Goodyear was elected as Branch Organiser. Ann Piper was elected to the Committee, having been a co-opted member since last year.

After the formal proceedings, there was a display of butterfly and images provided by members. Andrew Wood provided a number of shots of moths which had appeared in his moth trap, and Andrew Middleton talked us through a number of his Purple Emperor images - most notable of which was the 'rain' sequence which was also shown at the national AGM - in which a Purple Emperor was shown sitting

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tight on a branch throughout a particularly intense rain shower. It would have been enough to send most mere humans dashing for shelter!

Winter Meeting, 19th February, Welwyn Civic Centre, by Liz Goodyear

A packed hall listened intently to Alan Downie telling everyone what plants they should grow in their gardens to encourage butterflies and moths to visit. It was really nice to see so many new faces.

Alan was able to show many of his own photos of butterflies using the branch's new digital projector – the photos brightened up a cold winter's afternoon. We then stopped for refreshments, which allowed everyone present to look at and buy some of the many plants available on the sales stand or to just have the opportunity to chat to other members. After the break Roger Gibbons delighted everyone with his superb photos of butterflies that he has photographed in Southern France. Many of us find telling the various British "blues" apart difficult – be warned there are even more in France to choose from!

Thank you Alan and Roger.

We hope to continue our programme of winter meetings next year with one in south west Middlesex and again any help with finding a suitable venue in this area of the branch would be a great help.

TRIPS AND MEETINGS, 2005

In addition to the meetings detailed in the leaflet enclosed with this newsletter, members are also invited to the following:

Ryewater Nursery – Saturday 2nd July

Martin Down and Vernditch Chase – Sunday 3rd July

As we were going to press for the last newsletter, we were still finalising the details of the special weekend to help celebrate our 10th Birthday to Ryewater Nursery in Dorset.

We can now confirm that the visit to Ryewater Nursery will be on Saturday 2nd July and that the Wiltshire Branch have arranged a special field trip to Martin Down and Vernditch Chase on the Sunday for our branch members who have decided to make a long weekend of the visit. Ryewater Nursery is a 100 acre estate owned by butterfly expert, Clive Farrell. It is a giant nature reserve with extensive

wildflower meadows, lake, woodland and a withy bed. There is also a very large organic vegetable garden and tropical greenhouses. This is a private visit and Clive has offered to provide tea and cakes at the end of the day. This is a very special treat for our branch and we hope many members and friends will come along. We would like to thank Clive for his hospitality.

Several members have already indicated they would like to come and intend to have a long weekend in Dorset to fit around the visit to Ryewater, perhaps staying with friends or camping. For this reason, I spoke to the Dorset Branch about trying to arrange a field trip on the Sunday – in turn they spoke to the Wiltshire Branch and they have arranged a special field trip to Martin Down and Vernditch Chase for us. Again I would like to thank both these branches for being so helpful.

For members who are travelling down on the Friday and would like to fit in another butterfly trip, Silver-studded Blue can also be seen. Arthur Bryant of Dorset Branch is happy to give details of sites where they can be recorded and would be delighted to receive some additional records. If sufficient people want to visit a particular site he has offered to show you round his transect!

Programme

It is suggested that all members travel independently to Dorset either on Friday or Saturday morning. Offers of car sharing would be welcomed.



Public Transport (Ryewater) – the nearest station is Sherborne, which is about 6 miles away. At the time of writing this article there is an hourly service from London Waterloo (South West Trains), which takes just over 2 hours. Unfortunately the summer timetable for July is not available but it would be necessary to get to London Waterloo just after 8am to get to Sherborne in time. We intend to have arrangements in place to meet people off the most suitable train.

On **Saturday 2nd July** we will meet at RYEWATER NURSERY from 10.30 am and start the visit at 11 am. Clive Farrell has offered to provide tea and cakes at 4 pm after which time it is envisaged that most people will go their separate ways. Please bring your own picnic lunch.

Directions: Ryewater Nursery (map reference ST664105). From London take M3 and then A303 (not A30). Come off the A303 at the main Wincanton exit (also signposted in smaller letters “Sherborne”) then follow signs to Sherborne. From Sherborne take the A352 road south. About 5 miles from Sherborne pass through the village of Longburton. Half a mile after Longburton turn left at signpost indicating Boys Hill and Holwell. Then take the first left road and Ryewater Nursery is then 500 yards along the right hand side (the first habitation you reach). Conversely from the south (Dorchester) turn right about a mile before Longburton.

Sunday 3rd July

MARTIN DOWN AND VERNDITCH CHASE

Joint with Wiltshire and Herts & Middlesex Branches

The day starts with a walk across Martin Down hopefully to see the first Dark Green Fritillaries of the season. After returning to the car park for lunch we cross the A354 into Vernditch Chase to look for White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary as well as a wide variety of woodland species.

Meet 11.00 am or 1.30 pm at the car park off the main A354 Salisbury to Blandford Road, map reference SU 037201.

Contact is Brian Dicker on 01963 32453.

The trip to Ryewater Nursery is open to all Butterfly Conservation members and their friends but **BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL**. Please contact Liz Goodyear (Tel. 01920 487066 or Email elizabethgoodyear@talk21.com) **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE** if you would like to join us. Please also indicate whether you would like to join the Wiltshire Branch at Martin Down on Sunday and details of the Silver-studded Blue sites for the Friday.



INVITATION FROM THE UPPER THAMES BRANCH

For many years Frank Banyard of the Upper Thames Branch have arranged “AWAY VENTURES” for their branch members. These are always very well attended and very popular and we are delighted to be invited to join them.

June 7th - 9th ~ Isle of Wight Away Field Meeting

The trip is based at Castle Haven, on the extreme south coast of the island and local B&B is available. The target species is the Glanville Fritillary, but there is host of spring and early summer other butterfly and moth goodies by day and night to see. Probable cost for two nights including shared travel to the island, about £30.

June 14th - 16th Norfolk Broads Away Field Meeting

The target species will be the Swallowtails but of course there are many other things of interest, more butterflies, moths, dragonflies, birds, and plants. On the journey up there might be a chance to visit a Heath Fritillary site in Essex.

B&B accommodation with evening meals at local hostelries. B&B about £25 per night and shared travel available.

If anyone is interested in joining Upper Thames Branch at these away ventures please contact Frank Banyard direct for full details. E-mail Frank@banyard57.freereserve.co.uk or telephone 01494 672310

Upper Thames have also invited branch members to join them at two [Brown Hairstreak fieldtrips](#) in August and September – details will not be published on the website or our field trip leaflet so please keep a note of these dates now.

Both meetings are at Whitecross Green Wood reserve, near Oxford.

Saturday 6th August

Whitecross Green Wood. Bucks/Oxon border. Meet: 9.30am at Reserve entrance car park, just off Murcott to Boarstal Road. OS SP600150 [Map 164]. An earlier start than usual for this meeting to observe the morning flight of the males. Bring binoculars! Morning meeting, but much else to see afterwards in reserve and nearby Oaken Wood.

Leader and contact: David Redhead ~ 01865 772520.

Saturday 3rd September.

Whitecross Green Wood. Bucks/Oxon border. Meet: 10.30am at Reserve entrance car park, just off Murcott to Boarstal Road. OS SP600150 [Map 164]. This is a chance to see the species and particular egg laying females.

Leader and contact: David Redhead ~ 01865 772520

Happy Retirement Brian, by Liz Goodyear

We would like to wish Brian Sawford a Happy Retirement. Brian retired at the end of February and to mark the event a party was held at the Hitchin Museum attended by family, friends and colleagues.

For 40 years Brian has worked for the North Herts District Council as their Countryside Officer (that was his most recent job description anyway) and during that time he was responsible for the North Hertfordshire Museums Natural History Collection and Archive. In 1987, he published the Butterflies of Hertfordshire, which is nationally recognised as a very important butterfly atlas. The recording contribution that took place for the book produced distribution maps for the first time in Hertfordshire and was the start of the modern recording effort that is now undertaken by the branch.

To celebrate his retirement a special exhibition went on display at the Hitchin Museum. The display also included photographs of the district and its wildlife that had been taken by Brian over many years. It was a truly remarkable photographic exhibition.

We don't think Brian will have a quiet retirement, as it was quite obvious at his retirement party that several taxonomic group recorders were trying to encourage Brian to do some recording for them this summer!

Wall Brown – 2004 Season Report, by Richard Bigg, Species Co-ordinator

Summary

The weather remained fairly cool during the early part of the season, temperatures only getting above 20 degrees infrequently. It was not until well into July that the mid and upper 20's were reached for any length of time. The Wall Brown is a butterfly that seems to need the higher temperatures to become active, so perhaps it is not too

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surprising that there were no sightings during this early period. There were in fact only five individuals recorded at two sites, and these right at the end of July.

2004 Reported Sightings

23 July - Peter Todd recorded 4 seen on his transect at Standalone Farm near Letchworth. TL209338

31 July - Nick Sampford reported seeing one at a garden center near Buntingford. TL367294



Action for 2005

Reported sightings of this butterfly over the last five years have been well scattered over the Herts / Middx area with only two locations showing any consistency. The extreme North-West border is one, and an area just to the north of Ware is the other.

Apart from Standalone Farm where four were seen, [and the Highdown Transect in the 2000 season] all other sightings have been singletons. It would be useful if we could concentrate searches on the two locations in suitable weather conditions, during the periods mid-May to mid-June, and late -July into August in an effort to try to determine whether any sort of colony exists.

The tetrads concerned are:-

NW border - TL12E, TL13F and K, TL23B

Ware - TL31G, M, N and S

If there are any volunteers who could visit these during the above periods please let me know which you are able to cover and I will try to avoid duplication.

Mapping Success, by John Murray



For those of you who were not able to make it to the Annual General Meeting, our mapping of the distribution of butterflies in Hertfordshire and Middlesex from 2000 until 2004 achieved 99% coverage of the tetrads allotted to us. Thankyou for your concerted efforts, particularly over the past two years, which have helped us to fill in the gaps.

The initial news is that although many species have expanded their range, overall there seem to be fewer species recorded in many areas than there were in the previous five year mapping project 1995-1999. There is still much statistical work to be done on whether this really represents a contraction in range, or whether those areas were not so frequently visited as in 1995-1999. Final conclusions will be in the Annual Report.

It is clear that many areas, essentially those where recorders live, get very good coverage without any effort, and that others need to be targetted. To save the mad rush and to try and get a more even coverage throughout the next five years 2005-2009, it has been decided to appoint Decad Co-ordinators for those 10 km squares that are habitually poorly covered.

Decad co-ordinators will not have to visit the tetrads themselves - many decads already have recorders, transects or good butterfly sites in them that are well covered. All the tetrad co-ordinator will have to do is to try and make sure that the poorly-recorded tetrads (on average about 12 sites) get at least one visit per year, by contacting local recorders, or filling in themselves where necessary.

The Top Ten decads (excluding those already taken) are, in order of importance:

1. TQ 07
2. TL 33

3. TQ 29
4. TQ 28
5. TL 23
6. TQ 19
7. TQ 38
8. TQ 09
9. TL 42
10. TQ 17

If any of you could act as co-ordinator for any of these tetrads, I will send you a map, and a list of which tetrads need the most attention. Further details will be posted on the website from time to time.

READERS' LETTERS

Introductions, from Michael Pearson

I have read with interest the articles and correspondence in recent HMBC Newsletters about the (re-)introduction of Heath Fritillary to Middlesex. I am not, in any way, able to express an opinion on the specific issues raised in this discussion; however, Charles Smith, in his letter in the December Newsletter (Issue 40), does raise an interesting general question regarding introductions. Referring to Bunkers Park, Hemel Hempstead, he writes: "This is a man-created flower rich grassland with introduced plants. Why no introduced butterflies once their food plants have become established? It seems an ideal site for monitored experiments." I have monitored the butterflies on Bunkers Park since the park's beginnings in 1996, and would strongly support any proposal for such an experiment, should it be considered as being within Butterfly Conservation policy guidelines on introductions.

It has seemed to me that most introductions, up to the present, have only been considered as a matter of last resort; in those instances where the target species, either is already locally extinct, or is so close to extinction as to be beyond the point of no return. Also, proposals for the introduction of a particular species to a particular site do often lead to fierce debate on the ethics of introductions in principle, and the eventual dropping of potentially valuable projects through undue

scientific caution.

It is my opinion that, in these days of climate change, habitat loss and degradation, and accelerating urbanization, butterfly numbers and species diversity can only deteriorate unless more is done at local level to help preserve the existing butterfly populations. It is in this context that I would like to see BC policy on introductions broadened to include the increased use of controlled introductions, together with appropriate habitat enhancement measures, as an available management tool to support local populations of commoner species.

Bunkers Park, and similar sites with a high proportion of artificial landscaping, are more open to active management for the specific benefit of butterflies, than are those sites with predominantly natural, or semi natural, landscapes which themselves need to be conserved. Bunkers Park could be a valuable test site for the introduction of commoner, non-endangered species, with the prime aim of raising the profile of butterflies within the community.

I finish with a simple example. My Bunkers Park transect seldom records more than one or two Brimstones in a year; this is almost certainly because there is no buckthorn planted in the park, or in the surrounding gardens. A programme of buckthorn planting, followed a few years later by an introduction of Brimstones, could potentially

lead to a significant increase in the numbers of this attractive species and to the value of the site as a popular place to see butterflies



Re: Introductions from Paul Jeffery

Your correspondence about introductions is very interesting, and generally I would approach the activity with great

circumspection. However, there are two suggestions that I think deserve consideration.

The first is to establish the British Swallowtail in the flooded gravel pits around London, that is assuming Milk Parsley could be firmly established first. If so, such a showy butterfly in a prosperous residential area would enhance interest in butterflies and the habit of *britannicus* only to lay on Milk Parsley should keep it separate from

the odd European vagrant.

The second idea is to liberate some of the showy residents in civic flowerbeds, with foodplants in pots immediately behind; these pots could be netted and if appropriate removed after the flight period. *Polyommatus icarus* (the Common Blue) strikes me as ideal for a dry run, but one would have to make sure that any species treated like this was already resident in the area.



I'll look out for Heath Fritillaries on my transect in Roxborough Rough which is not far from Ruislip Woods, but I have never known this insect to wander far. I am quite familiar with the butterfly as I discovered the Cornish locality back about 1950.



New South-East Regional Officer - Dan Hoare

I have recently been appointed as South East Regional Officer for BC, and started in this role at the beginning of January, so would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. As many of you will know I have worked at BC's Head Office in Dorset for two years, initially as a Conservation Assistant and then as Conservation Officer (Species). What these titles essentially mean is that I have been working with the national conservation teams on both butterflies and moths, gaining experience of the way the Society works and getting involved in a wide

range of projects across the country. I have now moved to the South East Regional Office in Surrey to join Anna Bell, your Assistant Regional Officer, and continue the great work Anna and my predecessor, Emily Funnell, have achieved. I am looking forward to meeting many of the Hertfordshire & Middlesex Branch members in the near future and getting to know the area.

The role of BC's Regional Officers continues to develop, and as well as implementing Species and Regional Action Plans, supporting and encouraging volunteers, advising on habitat management and raising awareness of butterflies and moths, we are becoming increasingly involved in 'landscape-scale' projects as a way of delivering our conservation objectives. You will no doubt have heard this phrase being used more often, reflecting the growing realisation within conservation that habitat management is needed over whole landscapes to secure the future of many of our rarer species. Collaborative projects with conservation partners can look at ways of restoring and re-connecting our fragmented landscape, for example by carefully planning management across a whole network of woodland or downland sites, improving conditions for butterflies and moths as well as for other wildlife.

BC is currently developing landscape projects targeting our priority species and key habitats in the south-east and across the country. This approach presents tremendous opportunities for us to influence conservation action across large areas and deliver real gains for many of our most vulnerable species. Branch members and volunteers can contribute greatly to such projects, by getting involved in recording and transect monitoring, providing contacts with landowners or assisting with management tasks. There is much vital and exciting work to be done in the region, and I am very much looking forward to working with you over the coming months.

*Butterfly Conservation, c/o Surrey Wildlife Trust, School Lane,
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e-mail: dhoare@butterfly-conservation.org

**Forthcoming Sales Stalls and Sales Goods,
by Malcolm Hull**

A full selection of butterfly attracting plants, together with a range of books and butterfly information will be available from our sales stall at the following events. An updated list of sales events will be kept on the branch website at www.hmbutterflyconservation.org.uk

Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 March – Rye Meads Wild Garden Weekend. RSPB Rye Meads Nature Reserve, Rye Road, Stansted Abbots 10am – 4.00 pm each day. Admission Free

Friday 8 – Sunday 10 April – Capel Manor Spring Gardening Show. 10am – 5 pm each day, Bullsmoor Lane Enfield. Admission charge – adults £5 Friday, £6 Sat/Sun, concessions.

Saturday 21 & Sunday 22 May - Three Rivers Canal Festival & Environment Fair. 10.30am – 5.30pm each day, The Aquadrome, Harefield Road, Rickmansworth. Admission charge

Saturday 28 May & Sunday 29 May – Herts County Show. The Showground, Dunstable Rd Redbourn. Admission charges apply

Saturday 24 September – The Commons LNR Conservation and Countryside Day. The Commons LNR, Welwyn Garden City. Admission Free

The full list of mail order sales items is attached to this newsletter (see the back of the quiz sheet).

In addition, we also have Packets of Seeds, as detailed below:

Butterflies can be quite choosy about the plants they visit and tend to prefer traditional garden plants and native wildflowers. These are often hard to find in shops or garden catalogues. All are freshly packed during 2004 and we suggest a donation of approximately 50p per pack. Our current stock includes:

Anise Hyssop
Aster - single
Corncockle
Cosmos Daisy – Pink
Cosmos Daisy – Red
Cupids Dart
Dahlia Coltness Hybrid – Flame Red
Evening Primrose – Biennial

Fleabane
Forget-me-not
Foxglove – pink/red (wild)
Garlic Mustard
Globe Thistle
Helichrysum
Hemp Agrimony
Honesty – Purple
Honesty – White
Knautia – Burgundy
Knautia – Mixed Blue & Burgundy
Knautia – Pink
Knautia – Blue
Lavender – Dwarf Munstead Blue
Lychnis coronaria
Nicotiana sylvestris
Pasque Flower
Poppy – Large annual double purple
Poppy – Welsh
Red Campion
Red Valerian – pink
Runner Beans
Scabious – tall pink
Sweet Pea – Perennial
Sweet Rocket – white
Sweet William
Teasel
Verbena bonariensis

For any of these, please contact Malcolm Hull (details on back of newsletter).

Better Butterflies Video/DVD

A video/DVD exclusively made for Butterfly Conservation by West Country Branch member Gareth Trezise and Richard Brock (who produced *Life on Earth* and *The Living Planet* with Sir David Attenborough).

Beautifully narrated by Barry Paine, this video/DVD explains the work of Butterfly Conservation and shows all of our very special butterflies and some of our moths, and the beautiful places where they survive.

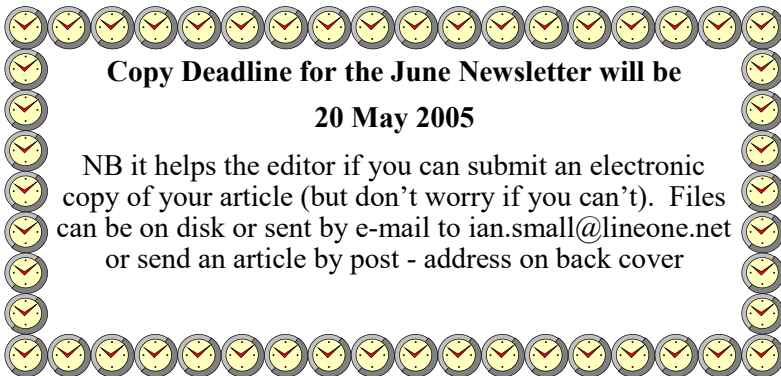
It indicates what is happening to butterflies and moths in a changing world and a changing climate, and suggests how they can be helped in the future. It follows the fortunes of the endangered Marsh Fritillary across Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England through the year.

Especially recorded for the video/DVD is a 3-minute foreword by our President Sir David Attenborough.

Proceeds from the sale of the video/DVD will go to Butterfly Conservation's highest priority conservation projects aimed at saving our most threatened butterflies and moths.

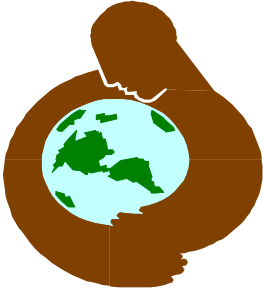
To order your copy either send a cheque to Butterfly Conservation's Head Office for £12.00 plus £2.00 P&P or telephone them on 0870 7744309 to pay by card.

Thank you all in advance for your support



Copy Deadline for the June Newsletter will be
20 May 2005

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



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.

Millhopper's Pasture SP 900149. John Noakes is compiling a list of people to call on when help is needed. If you would like to be included, please let me know, on (01296) 660072.

Therfield Heath, TL 335400 First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thomson (01763) 341443.

Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP 952131. No conservation activities are planned at present. Please contact Michael Pearson (details on back cover) for further information.

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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