

Butterfly
Conservation

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE **49**

MARCH 2007

Personal Reflections on the Branch's AGM in Harrow from your Chairman by David Chandler

My first task is to give a vote of thanks to Dan Hoare for a splendid presentation on his work for the society to the members and those friends from the Harrow NHS who were present. I also wish to record my appreciation to Liz Goodyear for running a well organised AGM and for her prompts that kept me on track. These were especially valuable because our previous Branch committee meeting, where we discuss all the arrangements for the AGM, had been cancelled because of the big winter storm.

I wish to apologise to those of you present who caught me having a quick 40 winks during Dan's presentation but I do have a valid excuse

and it was nothing to do with the quality of the speaker's talk. In the eighteen hours up to the time of the meeting since I'd left my workplace in Canary Wharf on Friday teatime, I had driven 250 miles up and down the M1 in difficult driving conditions, first for a Beds and Northants branch meeting in Bedford, and, then on Saturday morning, I had to go and rescue my son who lives in Corby who had crashed his car and needed my urgent help in getting new transport in time for work on Monday. So I was exhausted by the time I got to Harrow at 2pm.

It was perhaps inevitable that with the hall all "nice and cosy" and dark that I took a little nap - I really hadn't a dog's chance of staying awake! That said I think my rest did me good, for I feel I was on far better form for the second half of the meeting.

It was interesting to hear that many of the attendees were local Harrow people and that the Branch's policy of moving the AGM around our region was a very popular move. I also have to put on record a personal big thank-you to Vera who spoke in very positive terms about the quality of the various reports, presentations and how convenient it was to people like her who cannot travel far from home for us to visit her neighbourhood.

In addition, the filing of our Branch officer reports beforehand and me trying to keep the formal part of the meeting as brief as possible all helped to make it a much slicker show.

Anyway, despite my small gaff, I felt the AGM was a success and everyone enjoyed it.

The Role of the Regional Officer

The following is a brief synopsis of the presentation given by Dan Hoare at the AGM (compiled from my notes, and with apologies for any inaccuracies! - editor)

Dan explained that he has worked for BC for 5 years now, and is one of 50 staff now employed in various roles. He has a very varied range of responsibilities, covering raising awareness, supporting volunteers, generating income and, of course, conserving Lepidoptera and their habitats. The region he covers is vast, encompassing Kent, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and part of our Hertfordshire & Middlesex region. His time is divided between surveys, monitoring, research, preparation of management plans, and supporting Branches e.g. in their liaison with other organisations,

landowners etc. The key foci are the implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans and providing support for things Branches can't do by themselves.

Dan went on to illustrate these activities by describing the work undertaken under the Threatened Woodland Species project, with particular focus on the Heath Fritillary and the Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the Blean Woods complex in Kent. These woodland sites do not remain suitable for long without coppicing. However, this woodland is divided between many different owners, and co-ordinating their efforts to ensure a common understanding of requirements, and co-ordination of their different activities has been a major undertaking. The key habitat requirement is for the caterpillars in early Spring - they need warmth, provided by leaf litter, violets and shelter all within a few centimetres. Based on learnings from other sites, BC has been able to recommend management changes, so that the owners coppice smaller blocks, closer together from year to year. This will help to maintain a continuity of habitat for the butterflies, and maximise the chances of them finding suitable egg-laying sites. Dan described how he had been able to take landowners and managers around their section of the woodlands pointing out to them that the places they have seen the adult butterflies is where the nectar is, not necessarily where they are laying their eggs. By showing them what good egg-laying habitat is they are better able to secure a future for the butterflies on this important site.

In the remainder of his talk, Dan referred to other butterfly species which are undergoing worrying declines, notably the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the Duke of Burgundy. The latter is suffering a very worrying decline in numbers, and will be the focus of more attention from now on. Much of its preferred habitat, scrubby downland, has been lost, either when it was opened up for other species e.g. Adonis Blue, or as a consequence of increased rabbit grazing pressure on the larval foodplants.

Dan also described a conservation project on Woodland Moths, in which BC will work together with the Forestry Commission, and his work on the Straw Belle Moth. This species, which needs a long chalk downland sward, with a mixture of dead grass, live grass and herbs, has been restored to the North Downs of Surrey and Kent.

Overall, this was a very informative and interesting presentation, which was well received by all present.

Tying Things Together, by Margaret Noakes

It was time to put together some information about our Reserve in Hertfordshire, Millhoppers, which would possibly take the form of a leaflet and a board on the reserve itself. We had been thinking about an information board on Millhoppers for a considerable time but were concerned about vandalism and money! Certainly fly tipping had

The url for the Branch website has changed. It is now:
<http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>

proved to be a lot less and damage to gates and fences seemed no longer to be a problem. And money could possibly be applied for through 'Awards for All' a grant giving body that have strict criteria that we could possibly fulfil.

Almost a year ago the money estimated to provide an information board and 2000 leaflets was applied for and after a 3 month wait, we eventually heard that we had been awarded £3000. The planning was intended to coincide with an exhibition at Tring Museum on the butterflies of Herts. and Middx. which is highlighted in the following article. The whole project has taken nearly a year to put in place. Do come to Millhoppers this summer and why not bring the children/grandchildren to Tring Museum. They could even have a go at the competition!

Among the leaflets accompanying this newsletter you will find a copy of the new Millhoppers Reserve leaflet.

The Butterflies of Hertfordshire – Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum, Akeman Street, Tring, HP23 6AP



– 10th March to 22nd April 2007

Following on from the success of the Butterflies of Hertfordshire exhibition at Ware Museum last spring, Margaret Noakes asked the Zoological Museum at Tring, if they would be interested in holding a similar event there this year. We were absolutely delighted when they said yes - however, it quickly became apparent that our display panels, which we used last year would not be suitable for this very prestigious exhibition. As a result, the Natural History Museum kindly agreed to design nine new panels for us using Brian Sawford's superb photos and to print them as well. All we had to do was to write the text and arrange for them to be foam mounted and laminated! Two cabinets have also been set up with some exhibition items. During the exhibition, the museum shop will be selling sales items supplied by the branch.

The Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum is on Akeman Street, Tring. It is open daily 10 – 5 (Monday to Saturday) and 2 – 5 (Sunday) and entry is free. The museum has its own carpark but this can be quite busy at peak times. To coincide with the exhibition Brian Sawford will be giving a talk at the Museum on Thursday 19th April. (7pm-8pm). There is a charge and booking is essential - please ring the museum to book your place on 020 7942 6171.

We would like to thank all the museum staff for helping us arrange this very important exhibition and in particular Alice Dowswell for her enthusiasm and help throughout the months leading up to the exhibition. The Natural History Museum has also arranged all the press releases and on Saturday 10th March, the exhibition was highlighted in the Family Section of the Guardian Guide.

Important information: The exhibition is on the first floor and unfortunately can only be accessed by using the stairs. **There is no lift or disabled access to this level.**

A Country-Wide White-letter Hairstreak Recording Project [2007 – 2009], by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

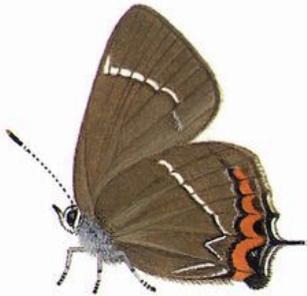
Whilst the White-letter Hairstreak (WLH) has been identified as a Candidate UK Priority Species, it is also a rather elusive arboreal butterfly that may not be recorded effectively by either casual observation or transect. The experience of a number of recorders in England and Wales is that both WLH, and the species' larval foodplant elm, are often more common than is generally appreciated. Following on from our experience in both Hertfordshire and Middlesex in 2007, where we were both able to find White-letter Hairstreak in numerous 2km squares, we decided to develop a nationwide project which was launched in March 2007, which we hope will test the true national distribution of this species.

Full details of the project and a wealth of associated information can be found at <http://w-album.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>; the project is quite simple. Over 200 10km squares have been randomly selected across and beyond the species' recorded range ~ actually, 4 have been taken from each 50 x 50km block. Then, a single target 1km square has been randomly selected within each 10km square. The resulting map is a key element of the website resource and has up-to-date details of progress and results. The project will run from 2007-9, giving plenty of time to develop our skills and complete the survey, and we also hope that it will encourage further recording at a local level alongside this project. Our branch covers quite a small area of the project and due to our own interest our 'local' squares have been completed but this doesn't stop anyone visiting one of the squares outside our patch or for Branch members that live outside the two counties from volunteering to target somewhere near to them.

Probably the best way to proceed is to visit the target 1km square during April or May when the green/yellow seed discs can be abundant on elm, so that some fairly healthy elm of any kind can be found as easily as possible. With a little practice, elm can be found throughout the year, as can in season the eggs, larvae and sometimes

pupae of WLH. However, it may be that elm cannot be found at 1km, so the next step is to look at the standard 2km tetrad holding the 1km target, then finally the 10km square, beginning the search as near as possible to the 2km square. Please keep the co-ordinators informed regarding observers intending to survey specific squares, elms found and WLH confirmed, or not. Please, don't try to find only a specific species of elm or worry if you can't identify the type – the butterfly doesn't appear to be bothered!

The project is designed to be simple, so we suggest looking for strong male activity over elms and also adjacent ashes, maples and limes etc, where males can be very numerous and active, chasing and clashing



Female White-letter Hairstreak
Drawing by Richard Lewington

around the canopy, especially as the morning warms up, or through the late afternoon. Be aware that this activity, in the south at least, is strongest and most easily observed in the first week or two of the flight period, and whilst many records of nectaring WLH come through July, this tree-top activity is at its height during late June & early July, and can often be seen from mid June in the south of England. At first, some observers may be unsure as to whether the small dark butterflies seen are actually WLH, but confidence will

grow with experience, and it is quite usual to find strong colonies on single healthy trees. Early in the season, confusion with the slightly larger and more silvery Purple Hairstreak and the orange/brown Vapourer moth may be reduced as these tend to fly a little later, whilst Black Hairstreak may be seen near blackthorn within its restricted range.

In its simplest form, the project aims are :

- an unbiased survey of the national distribution and range of WLH
- to give a simple percentage presence for WLH at 1km, 2km or 10km (or absent)
- to find the degree to which elm is populated by WLH within its range

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It may be the project will identify regional and habitat differences in terms of both elm and WLH.

For example, suitable elm may be more limited in broad habitat types such as suburbia, moorland, upland, marsh or intensively managed farmland, or where elm has been devastated by Dutch Elm Disease. If robust elm, preferably with some flower buds or seed, isn't found at 1km or 2km, then for analysis please suggest a reason, which may indeed be just chance absence. Yet it may still be possible to find elm at the 10km level in valleys through uplands, or in parks in highly urban areas, and will such trees hold WLH? Searching must only involve land that has public access so again if there is no public access that can be stated as a reason.

We would like the project to enthuse observers from all parts of the country, whether you are presently a White-letter Hairstreak fiend or not, and that participation will be enjoyable, rewarding and widespread. Anyone who is really keen might even look at areas when on holiday or visiting different parts of the country. All contributions will be most welcome. One other important point, is that although we will be co-ordinating this project, all records must be sent to the relevant county recorder – this information can be obtained from Head Office.

Although this project is website based, we can post a map and further details to anyone who would like to know more but doesn't have access to the internet.

Co-ordinators

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Tickbox Twitchers, by David Chandler

Around ten years ago I became acquainted with a pair of BC members who came from somewhere near Milton Keynes. The pair were friends whom, I hear, went bird-watching together and they soon became regular attendees on field trips that the Branch arranged.

After two years they ceased coming to organised field trips and when I asked one of them why, he replied: “Now I’ve seen all the rare species in this Branch area and I’m off to find some pastures new”. Both remained Branch members for a couple of more seasons after that, but then disappeared, never to re-appear, into the territory of Upper Thames Branch.

In all my experience as a Branch officer this was the most blatant example of butterfly twitching I’ve ever come across. I’d like to think that the Branch field trips were consistently interesting and that their birding heritage made the pair behave in that way.

Of course we all like to see the rare butterflies and I’m pretty sure many of us have a goal to see all the UK species but I personally don’t think it should be done in quite such a rush. I feel that I’ve got plenty of years left in me to see those species I haven’t seen yet.

I was with my Essex schoolteacher lady-friend the other day who obviously knows I’m a butterfly expert, because she teases me about it quite often. She asked me quite a pointed question that focussed my mind on the topic once again. She quizzed me with: “I suppose you, being a bugs expert and all that, have seen every butterfly species in the UK?” I replied: “Well, in fact I haven’t seen five species yet.” The retort was immediate. “Really, which ones?” Having to think quite quickly so as not to lose face, I came back. “Scotch Argus, Small Mountain Ringlet, Large Heath, Lulworth Skipper and Glanville Fritillary” The follow-up question was obvious: “Why?” “Well,” I replied, “they are either in far away in difficult to get to places or are rarities found in discrete locations”.

Then I fell into the obvious trap that was opening up in front of me. “Really” Kathryn said, “then you could take me around the country staying in some very nice hotels and you could go bugging [her words not mine] to see the last five and I can see the sights”.

It was a double-edged move. Yes, I would get to go to some lovely places like Scotland, The Lake District, The Cheshire Mosses, Dorset

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and The Isle of Wight but I'd also have to commit to five weekends away in being both a regular tourist as well as an eco-one!

I haven't said yes to Kathryn's proposal yet, but the butterfly season's clock is ticking away and the first trip to The Isle of Wight in May will soon have to be booked up.

I have a slightly different method of watching butterflies. I follow my own familiar seasonal timetable where each year I look forward to seeing as many of the different butterflies that emerge in my region. I like to try and see at least 30 species in a season in the counties of Herts, Middx, Beds, Northants, Bucks and Essex which are all fairly local to where I live. Last year (2006) I saw 37 species, one of my best-ever scores.



*Glanville Fritillaries on the Isle of Wight
Photo © Ian Small (June 1989 !)*

Each year I start my quest over again and seeing a new season's butterfly is like meeting up with an old friend. I may have seen them all before, but each year is slightly different weather wise and I feel my method is more scientific than the tick-box twitching way.

Butterflies of Spring, by Malcolm Hull

Spring is the busiest season for the butterfly gardening and sales team. New plants are being grown at our butterfly greenhouse in Smallford and we hope these will be ready for the Capel Manor Spring Gardening Show in April. Details of this and some of our other forthcoming events are set out below. In 2007 we've already attended a whole range of events, including the Lee Valley Bird Fair and Notcutts Garden Centre, raising nearly £1,000 for Butterfly Conservation Funds. Our new range of seeds for growing butterfly attracting plants featured in the December Newsletter has proved very popular. Most varieties are still in stock, though quantities of some are now low. Check the website or ring Malcolm Hull for the latest availability.

The new laminated guide to Day Flying Moths (£3.00) sold out, but is now back in stock. As always a full list of sales goods is kept in the sales section of our website at <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>. If you do not have web access and would like to receive a paper copy by post, please contact Malcolm Hull.

This months featured book is Butterflies of Europe by Tristan LaFranchais. This A5 size field guide of 350 pages is probably now the most reliable identification aid to all the Butterflies of Europe. Featuring 409 different species, it includes 1,300 full colour annotated photos showing both the upperside and underwings. Early lifecycle stages of some species are also shown. Enthusiasts committed to identifying similar species will be interested in the diagrams depicting male genitalia and instructions on how identification can be achieved in the field, without the need for killing specimens.

By far the best feature of the book is its up to date distribution maps. The current range of each species is shown for an area covering the whole of Europe (excluding all the countries formerly part of the Soviet Union, but including the Baltic states). This is a real boon. For example when faced with a Grayling, there is choice of 35 different species, all of which have similarities! It is a great help to be able to see that most of them occur only within a limited range. I'm off butterfly spotting in Hungary in June and this book will be one of the first items I pack..

A complete list of all our current sales goods is kept on our website or available from Malcolm Hull. All orders should be addressed to Malcolm Hull (for contact details see back cover) adding 10% for postage & packing.

Working for Butterflies and Moths, by Malcolm Hull

Forthcoming Sales Stalls:

Friday 13 – Sunday 15 April – Capel Manor Spring Gardening Show
10am – 5 pm each day, Bullsmoor Lane Enfield. Admission charge –
adults £5 Friday, £6 Sat/Sun, concessions.

Sunday 21 April – Bricket Wood Common Open Day
11 am – 3 pm Smug Oak Green, Lye Lane, Bricket Wood

Saturday 19 May – The Commons Nature Reserve – Conservation &
Countryside Day – at The Commons LNR, Welwyn Garden City –
details to be confirmed

Saturday 19 & Sunday 20 May – The Rickmansworth Festival
10.30am – 5.30pm each day, The Aquadrome, Harefield Road,
Rickmansworth. Admission charge

Saturday 26 May & Sunday 27 May – Herts County Show
The Showground, Dunstable Rd Redbourn. Admission charges apply

Sunday 29 July – Chilterns Countryside Festival
National Trust Estate, Ashridge, near Tring. Admission Free. A
special event to mark Save our Butterflies Week. Details to be
confirmed

Sunday 2 September – Epping Forest Festival 2007
11.00am – 4 pm, Chingford Plain. Admission Free

Saturday 15 September – St Albans Market
8.30 am – 5pm, Stall in the City Centre market, St Peters St, St Albans
(location likely to be in front of the Old Town Hall) Admission FREE

For more information about butterfly sales and how to order by post,
contact Malcolm Hull by phone, e-mail or letter

Moths use a Biological Gyroscope to Steady their Flight

Previous studies have found two-winged insects, such as house flies or mosquitoes, use gyroscope-like sensors to control their flight. Their hindwings are modified into club-shaped, mechanosensory "halteres". So how do 4-winged insects, like moths or butterflies manage? According to a recent report in Science [(2007) 315: 863] and summarised by BBC news online (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6342769.stm>) moth antennae contain gyroscope-like sensors to help them control their course through the air.

Up until now, moths' wobble-free flight remained a mystery - especially because their love of low light meant they could not rely on visual cues. The scientists demonstrated that a structure at the base of the antennae senses when the body starts to pitch or roll and relays this information to the brain.

People detect imbalances through information from the inner ear system or their eyes and can straighten themselves. Insects need to know that information too, and when the light is low, and the visual cues are hard to see, they have to depend more on a mechanosensory system.

The researchers uncovered the secrets of hawk moth (*Manduca sexta*) flight control by looking at what happened when the insects' antennae were removed. Monitoring the antennae-less moths in a dimly lit flying chamber, the team discovered the moths' flight was extremely unsteady: they collided with the walls, flew backwards or crashed to the floor. However, when the antennae were glued back on, the moths regained their agile grace.

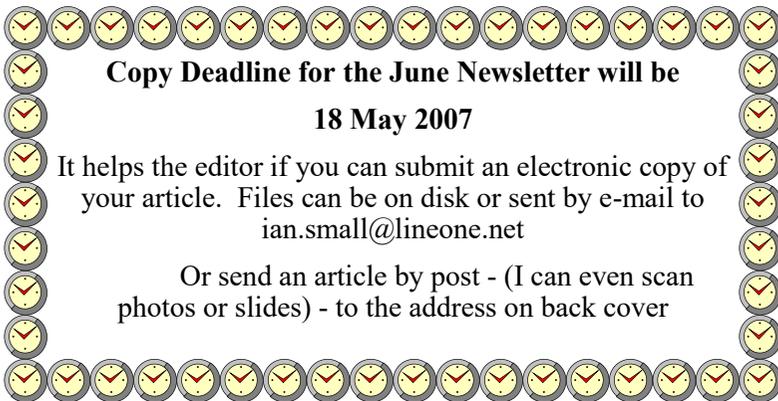
The researchers found that a structure called Johnston's organ, which is found at the base of the moths' antennae, was the key. Using vibrations from the antennae, which remain in fixed positions during flight (as previously reported in the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly), the organ can detect when and where the moth's body moves in relation to its antennae. In essence, it is behaving much like a gyroscope on a ship or plane that gives the vehicle a frame of reference to move within. Further investigation revealed the Johnston's organ then sends this information to the brain so the moth can shift its body back to the correct position.

The researchers said their findings are likely to apply to other flying insects with similar anatomies, such as butterflies.

Earliest Butterfly Sightings in Herts & Middx 2007 (so far !)

The following are taken from the Branch website:

- Red Admiral:** **1st January** (!), by Robert Calff near Enfield Town and by Bob Cripps near Abbots
- Speckled Wood:** **20th January**, by Ray Williams in Tring (it was alive, but in a pile of dead leaves)
- Brimstone** **1st February** by Ian Edwards between Ware and Stanstead Abbots
- Comma** **5th February** in Watford by David Chandler
- Peacock** **19th February** by Steve Lane at Rye Meads
- Small White** **12th March**, by Tony Clancy at Coppetts Wood.



Copy Deadline for the June Newsletter will be
18 May 2007

It helps the editor if you can submit an electronic copy of your article. Files can be on disk or sent by e-mail to ian.small@lineone.net

Or send an article by post - (I can even scan photos or slides) - to the 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. Several of the dates are run by the HMWT on their nature reserves.

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 him 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.

Hertford Heath TL 354111. For details ring Jackie Clark on (01992) 446609.

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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