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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

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ISSUE 5

FEBRUARY 1996



### Can Spring Be Far Away? By Malcolm Newland

I never cease to be amazed by the ability of our native butterflies to survive the winter in their various stages. Predation apart, they have to cope with being frozen, thawed, frozen again, windblown and saturated by rain. Yet enough pull through to the spring and start the whole process off again.

Plant casualties are a certainty after a hard winter and the gaps that these create can be filled with a range of nectar and larval food

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plants thus boosting the chances of seeing more and perhaps different butterflies in your garden.

A varied programme of field trips and indoor meetings has been arranged and I hope that there is something of interest in it for everyone. We are holding two indoor meetings on Saturday's this year to see if this is more convenient to our members.

It will be greatly appreciated if as many of you as possible participate in the recording of butterflies and moths so that we can fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the status of our remaining species in our counties. This information is vital if we are to act to help any which are threatened with local extinction.

Butterfly Action Weekend on the 25th and 26th November 1995 suffered from atrocious weather on the Saturday with heavy rain soaking the intrepid members who braved the elements. Nevertheless, we managed to complete the work which we had planned at Standalone Farm, Letchworth. Approximately 60% of the young trees and shrubs forming the recently planted hedge had survived the summer drought. We filled in the gaps with fresh cuttings before heading home to dry off and pray that we had managed to avoid catching the flu or worse.

On Sunday the rain was sporadic and lighter for the task at Stanmore Country Park but fewer volunteers turned up. However, two open areas were joined by the removal of a number of small trees and it should now be easier for the butterflies to fly from one to the other.

Details of conservation tasks are given on page 23, please try and support these, as work of this nature is vital to maintain suitable habitat for many of our butterflies. In particular an additional event has been arranged for Standalone Farm, near Letchworth, after the poor weather in November, to complete the hedge we have been creating.

## 1995 Butterfly Report

By Brian Sawford

The effects of the year's interesting weather upon our butterflies has yet to be fully evaluated, indeed it will probably not be until the end of 1996 that a fuller picture can be established. Spring warmth, followed by a cold spell, then a long hot and late summer and mild autumn combined to produce a string of tantalising records as well as producing many concerns for the future of several species. The following accounts have been put together from a rather brief overview of submitted records and I apologise for any omissions.

Small, Essex and Large Skippers had a good year and were all present in increased numbers. Not so Dingy Skipper, which appears to have suffered serious decline, this should be a priority for future recording of both sites and status. Grizzled Skipper is also under imminent threat of local extinction.

Orange Tip had the most protracted season on record with both earliest, (8th April) and latest, (18th July) flight dates being superseded. Two possible records of Wood White received from Broxbourne Woods and near Markyate cannot be fully accepted due to lack of substantiating data. Good descriptions and photographic evidence are required for this species.

Large, Small and Green-Veined Whites were generally present in good to very good numbers although some observers suggest lower than usual in some places. Such disparities show the value of quantitative recording, such as transect monitoring, on specific sites over longer periods of time.

Green Hairstreak is usually regarded as under-recorded, but in 1995 the only notes were of 'a few' at Albury Nowers and 'a single' at Tring Park, both on 7th May. This species needs close monitoring.

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Purple Hairstreak on the other hand had an excellent year with good numbers reported from many sites, including several observations of specimens at low levels, with a single even seen on a road in London.

Small numbers of White-Letter Hairstreak were recorded in the St. Albans area. Detailed checks should be carried out in other parts of our area for this is a seriously declining species. A possible Brown Hairstreak was reported 'flying across' School Lane, Bricket Wood on 4th September. This area needs close scrutiny to assess whether or not this species can be adequately accepted onto our area's list.

The status of Small Copper gives rise for considerable concern, although there were a number of sightings from late summer into early October,

Common Blue was apparently seen in good numbers, although summer desiccation of larval foodplants will probably affect 1996 populations. Following drastic declines in Holly Blue numbers associated with parasitic infections, populations show good signs of revival more especially in southern sectors of our area. Notable reports from Central London. Hopefully, these increases will multiply in 1996.

Closer monitoring is required from all Brown Argus sites, notably on the Chalk where populations appear to be in decline. Away from the Chalk, records were of maximum 9 at Rye Meads on 20th July, a pair in in copulo near Tewin and a single at Stanmore Common. Observations of larval foodplant(s) would be welcome for the non-Chalk sites.

Small Blue was considered as possibly extinct in our area and with just a single individual reported it seems that this species may soon be lost from our list. Chalkhill Blue numbers were quite healthy at Therfield Heath reflecting appropriate conservation management, as

at Hexton Chalk Pit. As with Common Blue, effects of drought upon populations in 1996 is anticipated with concern.

Duke of Burgundy had a poor year and, with the possible effects of the drought, there are concerns over the future of this species now restricted to a single site.

White Admiral appeared to be down in numbers and possibly lost from some sites. A single in a wood, seemingly good for breeding, near Markyate may have been a wanderer, although future fieldwork could hopefully prove otherwise.

Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma were all present in good numbers in late summer and early autumn. Over forty Peacock graced a single Buddleia davidii by Letchworth Museum on 26th July and a single, the last sighting of the year, circled the congregation in Letchworth Central Methodist Church after a candle-light 'Christingle' service at 19.30 hours on 18th December. Hopefully, good numbers of these commoner Nymphalids will survive hibernation to provide significant Spring '96 records and the basis for healthy summer populations.

The well documented influx of Camberwell Beauty into Britain saw two occurrences in our area with 'a single plus 27 Painted Lady in a Buddleia forest' at Hitchin on 4th August and a single at Brentford during mid-August. There are suggestions that Camberwell Beauty may have gone into hibernation in this country, so keep observant in early '96.

A single Pearl-boarded Fritillary, minus one hind wing, observed in a Markyate garden on 8th July in possibly the most interesting record of 1995. Not only is it the latest flight date for Hertfordshire but also the only sighting for the County since the demise of the Bramfield Woods colony in 1978. Where did the specimen come from?. Captive bred releases cannot be ruled out, but first the

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generally under-studied countryside of Markyate should be carefully looked at for some surprises may the forthcoming!

The only reports of Silver-Washed Fritillary received were of single males at Bricketwood on 23rd June (the earliest to date) and St. Albans on 3rd August. In the knowledge that captive bred stock have been released in the Bricketwood area in the past, both sightings should be regarded with caution. The overall status of Silver-washed Fritillary in our region must be regarded as critical to its survival.

Speckled Wood generally had a good year with peak numbers in August and numerous late sightings well into October. As always when numbers are high, range expansion is noted, especially into North Hertfordshire. Whereas very few observations of Wall Brown were forthcoming despite the hot dry summer which, from historical documentation, once seemed to favour this species. Habitat loss and degradation appear to be the major factors potentially leading to local extinction of the Wall. Similarly a paucity of Small Heath records suggest further declines, although Ringlet populations are apparently healthy in most parts of our area.

Marbled White was seen in good numbers with, like Speckled Wood, evidence of some range expansion including a remarkable sighting of one at Oughtonhead Common near Hitchin on 12th July. A dwarf specimen was reported from near Tring.

Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper - large populations were recorded from all of our area. Interestingly, in contradiction to a suggestion published in my 'Butterflies of Hertfordshire', there were no very early appearances of either species despite what turned into a long period of warm weather and drought! However, several Meadow Browns seen near Luffenhall on 8th October extending the recorded flight period for this species by 7 days.

It is clear from what has been outlined above that much still needs to be undertaken to attempt to begin to understand the dynamics of our butterfly populations. It is obvious for many species that time is running out and, unless action is taken now, some species may become locally extinct within a year or so. Active conservation is necessary and an essential part of this is good and thorough recording. The imminent 'Millenium Atlas' project will provide the ideal opportunity for anyone with an interest in butterfly conservation to participate. the Herts and Middlesex Group is organised and ready to cope with any abundance of records provided by its recorders. Unlike the previous project, which resulted in publication of 'The Butterflies of Hertfordshire', computer documentation will be available which should help to considerably enhance evaluation of vast numbers of records quickly so that, hopefully, more relevant conservation measures can be swiftly implemented.

Far from invalidating data collected in the past, requirements for 'The Millenium Atlas' really enhance its importance. Fieldworkers should make themselves aware of former distributions and attempt to check out as thoroughly as possible 'old sites' for , as 1995's crop of records indicate, some surprises are still to be found. The traditional 'hot-spots' will continue to attract plenty of recording, so we should try to properly survey the more generally neglected parts of our area. Personal experience of 'tetrad-bashing' for my book certainly led me to discover some fine tracts of countryside holding not a few wildlife surprises. Blank tetrads and, in particular, open circles depicted in the distribution maps published in 'The butterflies of Hertfordshire' should provide good ideas for the planning of field recording excursions for the next few butterfly seasons.

### **Standalone Farm**

Anyone wishing to help continue the hedge planting we have been carrying out, see page 23 for details of the next date.

## **The Millenium Atlas 1995-1999**

**by John Murray**

The Herts and Middlesex branch are contributing to the Millennium Atlas project, a nationwide survey of British butterflies, by undertaking an intensive mapping programme of butterfly distribution and numbers within the two counties. This will be combined with the efforts of other branches throughout the British Isles to produce a detailed country-wide atlas of the distribution of each species in the 5 years 1995 to 1999.

Our survey covers the whole of Hertfordshire and Middlesex together with the southern borders of the Watsonian Vice-County of Middlesex, so that all of north west London down to the Thames is included in the survey, from the Blackwell Tunnel in the southeast to Shepperton and Staines in the southwest. The project officially started in 1995, and we are currently compiling a comprehensive report of 1995 butterfly records received, to be separately published and sent out to members in March. This will be the first of a series of reports to be published annually from now on.

### **How can you help?**

We are urgently in need of records, so if you would like to contribute to this major undertaking, we should like to hear from you. We are pleased to receive butterfly records from anyone at any time; the minimum requirements for a record are:

1. butterfly species
2. date seen
3. place seen and
4. number seen.

plus of course your name, address and telephone number. Records should be sent to John Murray (address on back page).

Make sure of the species; get a good view of the butterfly, preferably at rest before noting it down. Remember that a smallish white butterfly is not necessarily a Small White, but could also be a



Green-veined White, female Orange Tip, or even a small specimen of a Large White. Try and give a grid reference if you can; or at least a clear description of where you saw it, such as a street name, pub or other identifiable landmark, as well as the nearest town or village. A town name alone is not sufficient; "St. Albans" for example could cover at least ten different 2Km grid squares. A six-figure (100 metre) grid reference is best of all.

It also saves us an enormous amount of time if you can use the recording forms that will be supplied; these have been re-designed this year to meet the needs of the project and are described on page 12.

### **Start in the back garden**

The best place to start recording is in your own back garden or an open space near you. We are interested in the commonest butterflies as well as rare or unusual species, so record all the butterflies you see. We are also looking for thorough geographical coverage, so don't just restrict yourself to Nature reserves or wild areas, check out towns as well. It is amazing how buddleia plants have spread up walls and even high on buildings in Central London; examination of these in the flowering season should give a representative sample of butterflies in the area.

### **Tetrad bashing**

We are aiming to get records for every single 2km square (known as a tetrad) in the entire area, so try and record butterflies in tetrads nearby. Borders of tetrads are marked as the even numbered grid lines on Ordnance Survey maps; if you are not sure where tetrad boundaries lie in your area then contact me for information. Each tetrad should be revisited at intervals throughout the year as the different species of butterfly emerge; monthly visits should cover most species. The end of July and the first half of August are particularly important, as the largest number of species are on the wing at these times. However, many of our rarer species are on the wing in May and June, when butterfly numbers are generally lower.

Find out where the tetrad boundaries are on a journey you regularly

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take, for example on the way to and from work. Stop off at likely open spaces, Buddleia bushes in town, woods, rough road verges etc. in each tetrad on the way home on warm spring and summer evenings and note the butterflies you see; vary the route home every once in a while to cover different tetrads. If you see no butterflies in a particular tetrad despite warm sunny weather, we'd like to know that too. Part of the aim of the project is to detect areas poor in butterflies.

If you would like to take responsibility for covering several tetrads, then please let me know so that you can be assigned places that are in urgent need of coverage.

### **High speed mapping**

Once you have got the hang of things, you might like to try the methods used extremely effectively by Jon King in 1995. He covers great distances through Hertfordshire and Middlesex on his bicycle, speaking his observations into a tape recorder. He records the changing grid squares every time he crosses from one grid square to the next. He stops frequently, sometimes every 30 metres, to check species identity. To carry out surveys of this kind, you will need to make constant reference to the appropriate Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 map. Try and stop for reasonable periods in each tetrad; many of the rarer species (Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, Duke of Burgundy etc.) are difficult to see and could be easily missed or misidentified from a bicycle.

### **First and last sightings**

With the present global warming, it is important to know how butterfly behaviour is adapting to climate change, and whether butterfly activity and breeding seasons are being extended. We are therefore issuing a new form this year especially for early and late records. For each species, note down where and when you first see the butterfly in the year, the last time and also the maximum number of each species seen at one time. This could be the largest number in your garden at one time, or the largest number seen on a site survey or transect walk. If the latter, note the length of time the walk took.

### Transects

Transects should only be carried out by experienced observers who can recognise most of the common butterfly species on the wing. The method consists in walking the same route at least once a week between April and September under standard meteorological conditions of temperature, wind and sunshine, and noting the numbers of each species of butterfly seen within a set distance from the observer. This method gives information on the variation in butterfly numbers within the season, and from year to year. It is the main method by which declines in species can be quantified, and as such is extremely important.

A transect walk involves committing an hour or so per week through the spring and summer months. If you can make this commitment, then select a route near you that traverses as many different habitats as possible, taking about 30 to 60 minutes. Walk the transect on your own. The route should always be walked by the same person, as different people can differ enormously in the amounts of butterflies they see. However, if you have to miss a week due to holiday or illness, it is better it should be covered by someone else than not covered at all. If a missed week cannot be avoided, walk the transect twice another week. If more than one week in succession is missed, then the statistics cannot normally be used in any subsequent analysis.

The transect season always starts on April 1st, whatever the day of the week it falls on and runs for twenty six one week periods until the 29th September. For a given week, the transect can be walked on any day, preferably between 10.45 a.m. and 3.45 p.m. when the temperature is above 13°C and the wind is not too strong. There are some weeks, particularly early in the season, when these meteorological conditions cannot be met. Again it is better to walk the transect when it is a bit too cold or too cloudy rather than not to walk it at all.

Always walk the transect at about the same pace, paying attention to flower heads and other likely perches. As the weeks and years progress you will get to know the favourite haunts of certain species and look out for them there. Some species such as Small and Essex Skippers are

impossible to distinguish on the wing, and few people can satisfactorily distinguish Small/Essex Skippers. Only note a Small Skipper or Essex Skipper if you get a good look at the underside of the antennae and can clearly see the Orange/Brown or the Jet Black tips; under all other circumstances record it as a Small/Essex Skipper. As long as these procedures are strictly followed, then the real numbers of each species can be later determined proportionately.

### **Submission of records**

Records of visits to tetrads should be submitted on a mapping form similar to the old "casual sightings" form, that will be sent out with the 1995 report. Please try and submit these at intervals throughout the spring and summer, rather than all at once at the end of the season. This helps us to spread the workload of entering the records onto the computer database throughout the year. Secondly there will be a new form for first and last sightings and maximum numbers of each species you see (enclosed with this issue). Finally transect forms and a transect information package will be available on request. Don't forget to include written descriptions of unusual sightings, and anything of general interest you have noticed, such as interesting behaviour, unusual habitats, trends or changes from previous years etc. Please photocopy the forms, if you do not have access to a photocopier I can supply further copies.

Transect and first and last sighting forms, on the other hand, should be submitted in October when the butterfly season is over. All records must be submitted to John Murray before 9th November 1996 for inclusion in the report. Please telephone through any sightings of late butterflies in November or December to me before the end of the year.

Remember that as well as being a fascinating and rewarding pastime, butterfly watching is one the few areas of science where the amateur can contribute in a substantial way to our understanding of the environment. This in turn can be a most important factor in increasing our knowledge of how to protect and preserve it for ourselves and our descendants.

## A Winged Wonder

By Malcolm Newland

The sudden and unexpected return of summer temperatures on the 8th October together with a southerly breeze gave rise to the optimistic thought that something special might turn up in the garden. By day the odd Comma, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell ventured in to top up on nectar from the last few Buddleia Davidii and Hebe "Great Orme" flowers or the newly opened Michaelmas Daisies, but nothing remarkable.

It had been a few weeks since I had assembled my Heath Robinson Moth trap consisting of an old mercury vapour light bulb hung on a clothes horse with a sheet draped round it so on the balmy night of 9/10th October I set it up and checked it periodically for visitors. Business was not brisk! Only one Barred Sallow up to 11 p.m. when I had to drive to Watford to pick up my son who had been having a "jam session".

When I returned, I checked the trap more in hope than conviction to find a magnificent fresh Convolvulus Hawk-moth clinging to the sheet. It was the first live specimen I had ever seen and I was amazed by it's size, glorious colours, huge eyes and proboscis, which was impressive even when it was curled up. On reading-up on the moth I learned that it has been recorded from the Mediterranean to Iceland and the muscles in the thorax (the size of a small finger nail) are capable of sustained flight over 1,000 miles in just a few days. In 1945 more than 500 specimens were recorded in the British Isles, but this was exceptional.

My one regret is that I did not observe it taking nectar as apparently the proboscis is 3.5 inches long! Still I will have the memory of my surprise guest and the whirl of it's wings beating as it flew away until the Spring brings hope of more winged wonders.

## **Moths**

**By Rob Souter**

As yet I have only had a few members return their moth recording sheets for both the day-flying moth survey and general survey and so can not report on the results at this time.

The limited amount of trapping I did this year using a Robinson trap in a garden in Tewin amounted to a list of 66 species, including 5 species of hawkmoth. Notable species included 2 Bird's Wings in June, a widespread species in Europe but in Britain is confined to the midlands and south-east of England, 2 Bordered Whites in early July, a species which holds its wings above its body at rest like a butterfly, and 2 Pine Hawkmoths in late July, also widespread in Europe but in Britain confined to southern and eastern England.

I had reports sent in of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth seen in north London in March and of a Six-belted Clearwing at Bayfordbury, near Hertford in July but I'm sure there were many other interesting sightings in such a good year. So please, let me know what you've seen by returning your recording forms or dropping me a line about any noteworthy species recorded in the branch area.

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

**Regular Updates. Latest News.**

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

## Butterfly Hill

By Bill Geenty

It must be all of four years, since the General Manager of John Lewis, Park Royal asked me to enhance a huge hill of spoil, that had been dug out for their new distribution centre, for the benefit of butterflies, employees and local residents. I'm certain he put butterflies first, hence the name which immediately sprang to mind; Butterfly Hill and which has directed my habitat creation and conservation activities since that day.

Originally I thought that the task of recovering the then existing overgrown, run down, weed infested environment would take at least five to six years. At the end of four years, however, we have a habitat which is attracting larger numbers of butterflies but not, as yet, any increase in species. The essential groundwork has been completed and over the next few years it will be a matter of making sure that nature doesn't run riot and cover the various attractive slopes with scrub.

The steep slopes on three sides of the hill militate against machine operation except for a heavy duty strimmer. This is no bad thing because the grass needs to be cut to three or four inches (difficult with any sort of light weight machine) and then cleared which can only be done by hand in any event. The slopes lend themselves to the encouragement of grasses and wild flowers and the south and west slopes have the added attraction to butterflies in that they are particularly sunny. However, the west slope faces the prevailing wind and additional plantings of native trees have been made in an attempt to create more shelter.

A planting of Buddleia (Butterfly bush) in several colours makes a cheerful show for a few weeks from about mid July which follows the eye catching yellows of gorse and broom from February. The

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earliest Wild flower is Coltsfoot which was used as a cough cure in the middle ages and produces its flowerheads as early as January and the leaves by April or May. Unhappily, this particular plant seems to be spreading rather rapidly thereby curtailing the available space for other wild flowers which are slowly beginning to increase in variety and numbers.

The greater part, of the far from level, top of the hill, is kept mown to provide an area for partners to have lunch or breaks relaxing in the open air, when the weather permits. The unmown area is cut once a year after seeding has taken place and contains many different grasses, Clovers and other wild flowers such as Birds Foot Trefoil. There are no ground-nesting birds to worry about and although there have been signs of field mice and voles the growth is cut to about three of four inches to give adequate cover for over-wintering caterpillars and also encourages early spring growth as food for them.

In addition to the grassland habitat there is an equal area of woodland which is thick with bramble and other unwanted growth. Clearance has opened up this wooded area to allow more light and sunshine giving an improved habitat which now sports more grasses, wild flowers and young pollards providing nectar and foodplants. More work needs to be done over the next five to six years, but meanwhile an annual clearance of new, unwanted bramble and other plants will be necessary.

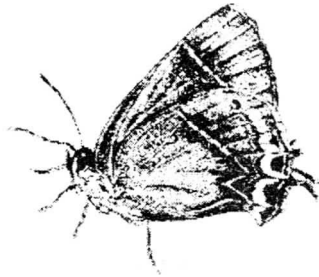
During the past year local residents asked for more plants be considered for an area between a high retaining wall and a security fence which runs along the back of their properties. This long, but narrow, slice of land was planted with a mixture of bushes and trees when the distribution centre was completed but was left almost untended for three of four years. Nature, being what it is quickly created its own version of wilderness which has now been reclaimed and some replacement planting completed. More climbing plants and



supporting wires have been added and this piece of land now makes an interesting addition to Butterfly Hill and the woods.

Readers may be wondering if all the work has done anything for butterflies. I think the answer must be yes judging by the large numbers of them flying about on the day I write of their activity. So far this season there have been sightings, since April, of Speckled Wood, Common Blue, Small White, Holly Blue, Green Veined White, Orange Tip, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Large White and Comma. Clearly Butterfly Hill is beginning to meet the hopes expressed so succinctly four years ago. It is particularly pleasing to note the increase in numbers of those species present, which are associated with both woodland and grassland habitats. In the case of the Holly Blue there is a particularly suitable area, in which stands of holly are growing next to an ivy covered wall, both of which satisfy this butterfly's food plant requirements.

The next step is to lay pathways through the woods and grassed slopes, in the form of nature trails, which Partners may like to use from time to time and which could be made available to local schools. All this fits very well with the recently announced face lift of open spaces to be given to the Park Royal area by the "Park Royal Partnership" comprising local businesses, local authorities and Training and Enterprise Councils.



## **Hampstead Heath**

**by Paul Jeffrey**

On 25th July, I had a leisurely walk around Hampstead Heath in glorious weather. Despite it being the peak of the butterfly season, I didn't expect to see much, but I ended up with fifteen species. Although none of these were particularly out of the ordinary I still had a few surprises.

I didn't expect to see four Gatekeepers in three different locations, but that surprise dissipated later in the week when I found them appearing in many strange places. I didn't expect to see a couple of Coppers either, but was prepared for Red Admirals following a recent immigration. The only likely species that were missing were the Purple Hairstreak and the Large Skipper, which, for the first time I can remember, has outlived the Small.

Thinking back to my familiarity with the Heath in the sixties, the things that strike me are that then I would not have expected the Small or Essex Skippers nor any of the Satyridae, not even the Meadow Brown, however the Wall and Small Heath were there at that time.

It may be that I now know the Heath more intimately and can find Common Blues and Commas, but there is no doubt that butterfly populations do change over the years and that is part of their fascination. Islands of countryside within towns do hold appeal, and sometimes surprise us.

### **Newsletter Articles**

Articles for the May issue should be sent to the editor by 10<sup>th</sup> April 1996. This deadline is slightly earlier than usual.

## Enfield Butterflies

By Phil MacMurdie

I have been recording butterfly populations in detail within the Hilly Fields area of North Enfield for the last three years, with casual records before then. Observations are made on a weekly basis from April through to October. The Transect Walk encompasses a variety of habitats including; Oak woodland, a stream section, irregularly maintained open grassland, a small wooded lane and a railway embankment with further deciduous woodland. Land use adjacent to the walk mainly consists of arable farmland, a cricket club and an aquatic nursery.

Twenty five species have been recorded with varying degrees of abundance. Past highlights include White Letter Hairstreak (1993), Large Tortoiseshell (1994), and Purple Hairstreak (yearly). Anyone requiring full details of the walk please send a S.A.E. (address on back page).

### 1995 Results

During 1995 a total of 28 transect counts were made, generally on a weekly basis. Details of each transect were recorded in a field note book, prior to being transferred to a database for analysis. In comparison to 1994 and 1993 results show an overall increase in numbers seen, yet the total species recorded is slightly down to 19 during 1995, compared to 1994 (21) and 1993 (22). However, 1994 saw two species represented by single sightings only, no species are represented by singles in 1995.

The most worrying result so far has been the disappearance of the Wall Brown. Once a common sight before I began keeping more detailed records, there have been no records for over four years and it must, unfortunately be considered extinct from the area. The reason for this may have been that three years ago grass and bushes

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along a footpath where Wall Browns were particularly abundant were cut so severely that few butterflies were seen for some time. Speckled Woods gradually re-colonised as did Meadow Browns, however with no adjacent colonies the chance for Wall Brown re-colonisation is unlikely, without reintroduction. This provides an object example of how careless management can soon wipe out fragile populations.

On the positive side 1995 has seen the return of the Small Copper, absent during 1994 and only a single sighting in 1993. This year has witnessed a resurgence in numbers, notably during late August and September. Having surveyed Sorrel within the area abundance appears to be greater than in the past, so hopefully this upward trend will continue for the foreseeable future.

The Lycaenids in general had a fine season, Common Blue numbers have been up on previous years, (+25% compared to 1994), with consistent late summer sightings of mating pairs and females egg laying. However, the Trefoils have suffered from the drought and also chewing by Common Blue caterpillars and the ubiquitous larvae of the Six Spot Burnet. The Holly Blue was also more abundant, following several years of scarcity, 1995 has provided a good emergence particularly in the second brood, which as the article in the August newsletter mentioned will hopefully last several seasons.

Purple Hairstreak has also had a good season, indeed the individuals seen may only be the 'Tip of the iceberg' in relation to the total population. Sightings are generally individual adults either in the woods, basking on low Oak boughs, or adults flying across the North Enfield Cricket Club outfield. Oak is the most frequent tree within the woods, accounting for approximately eighty percent of the trees, one of which is a 400 year old protected specimen.

Of the other families the Pierids also showed increases in numbers, with Large and Small Whites being particularly abundant, Green-

Veined Whites also showed an increase although not to the same degree as the previous two species. The springtime species, the Orange Tip showed a small decline although probably not significant.

The Nymphalids provided a surprise with abundance significantly lower, Comma was seen sporadically in singles and twos, from April to June. Peacock showed low numbers until July saw a recovery. Red Admiral was more consistent, especially in Autumn feeding off of fallen apples. The Small Tortoiseshell also suffered, the likely cause being the absence of suitable Nettles upon which to breed and Painted Lady following the trend of her cousins was absent for the first time since I began recording.

The Satyrids generally had an excellent year. Gatekeepers were first sighted on 15th July and peaked two weeks later being seen until 20th August. Meadow Brown, followed a similar pattern peaking in mid July although first sightings were made on the 18th June. Both species showed a rapid build up followed by an explosion in numbers, probably due to the consistently warm weather, resulting in almost simultaneous emergences, as opposed to the more usual staggered emergence and lower peak numbers.

My own personal favourite in this area is the Speckled Wood. First described in the nineteenth century, by Moses Harris as the Enfield Eye because his original observations came from rural Enfield. First brood numbers were slightly up on previous years with second brood as consistent, but the third brood in mid-summer was extraordinary, a peak count of 44 recorded on August 20th and steady recordings continued into October with the favourable weather an undoubted factor. This should herald another strong record for 1996.

The other grassland group, the skippers, were consistent with previous seasons, the three skippers present, Large, Small and Essex, emerging generally a week earlier than usual but the flight period being of shorter duration.

### **Recorders Needed**

Anyone wishing to carry out a transect walk in the branch area please contact John Murray (see back page).

John has forms prepared for use on such surveys and will gladly discuss the procedures involved.

He will also be able to advise on any sites in your area that would particularly benefit from a transect walk or from where rarer species might be searched for.

### **Membership**

Membership has been steadily increasing since the branch was formed and currently stands at 267 subscribing members. This makes us about tenth largest of the thirty or so branches but we still have along way to go to catch Hampshire and Isle of White with a massive 700+ members!

If you know of anyone who would like to join Butterfly Conservation please write to the Head Office of the national society at PO Box 222, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6EY. Membership fees are as follows;

Ordinary Membership    £14.00 plus £5 for each branch joined.

Concessionary rate       £9.00.

Joining Fee                £6.00 (waived when paying by direct debit)

## 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 maintains 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

1. **25/2/96 Standalone Farm, Letchworth TL210336.** Meet at the entrance off Wilbury Way at 10.00am
2. **Therfield Heath TL335400.** First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thompson 01763 241443
3. **Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP952131.** Third Sunday of each month. Meet 9.30a.m. in the lay-by, near Tring Station
4. **Fryent Country Park -Kingsbury/Wembley.** Conservation every weekend. Details ring Leslie Williams 0181 206 0492.
5. **Fir and Pond Wood TL276011** - Third Sunday each month from 10.00a.m. - 1 p.m. Meet in the lay-by opposite the Oshwal Centre in Coopers Lane Road, east of Potters Bar.
6. **Stanmore Country Park.** Times from John Hollingdale on 0181 863 2077.
7. **Hillingdon Area** - Several local sites require volunteers. Details from Dr Taylor on 0181 868 0207
8. **Sherrardspark Wood - Welwyn Garden City.** Details ring Grebe House on 01727 858901

## **Hertfordshire and Middlesex**

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### **Committee Members**

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