

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER ISSUE *59*

Autumn 2010

Working in Concert to Have a Truly Effective Conservation Strategy

by David Chandler

On Saturday 26th June I attended the Essex Wildlife Trust's AGM at the Trust's working farm head office of Abbots Hill Farm, Great Wigborough near Colchester.

The principal speaker was Chris Packham, whom most of you will know from the BBC's Springwatch programmes, and some of you will recall was the keynote speaker when our Branch jointly hosted the BC National AGM at Silsoe in Bedfordshire.

Chris spoke with passion for about an hour on his vision and about how he feels we are falling short in Britain in our conservation efforts. Chris talked about how conservationists need to engage with big

corporations to positively influence their business activities towards conservation; to lobby politicians whom he feels are not taking the matter seriously enough; to work internationally with like-minded foreign conservation groups - where shared species like the cuckoo migrate to and fro; to work together with conservation agencies, landowners and farmers to help build green corridors through our fragmented patchwork of nature reserves and, most urgently, to engage the youth of the country who, evidenced by the tiny proportion of them in the audience present at the lecture, need to be roused from their cyberspace-filled bedroom chambers to go out in to the wild to feel, smell and get stung in order to experience the environment - Otherwise, in a few years conservationists may die out.

In the gardens afterwards I caught Chris' ear and spoke with him about my West Country visit to the Bath & West show where I heard directly from David Attenborough about BC's Big Butterfly Count campaign in conjunction with Marks & Spencer. Chris thought that this project was a very good idea in that it not only moved BC down the road of corporate co-operation to bring the name of BC a wider adult audience but also engaged their children through campaign characters like M&S' Colin the Caterpillar, who was charming children at the Bath & West show.

Big Butterfly Count Success

The Big Butterfly Count was run in conjunction with M&S, who actively promoted it through a selection of their larger stores, and there was considerable press coverage to draw it to the public's attention. For those who missed it, details are on the website <http://www.bigbutterflycount.org> from where you can still download the butterfly identification guide. Results to date show that almost 10,000 people submitted records of nearly 200,000 butterfly sightings during the week. The Small White was the most common butterfly overall, very closely followed by the Large White and the Gatekeeper. It was a very close race for the top spot. Nearly half (47%) of all the butterflies and moths counted belonged to these three species.

The high counts of the Large and Small White butterflies comes as little surprise, as these are very common species in almost all habitats (especially gardens) and both had a good year in 2009. The

outstanding performance of the Gatekeeper, on the other hand, is a very pleasing result as this butterfly has suffered a run of extremely bad years and populations were at a low ebb. 2010 has clearly been a good year for the Gatekeeper, particularly in comparison to its close relative the Meadow Brown, which is normally the more abundant by far of the two. Gatekeepers were seen in the highest numbers in fields and other rural habitats, as well as from the centres of major cities such as London. Further details of the results, including an interactive map of the sightings, are available on the website.

Annual General Meeting – Saturday 29th January 2011

The Branch Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 29th January 2011, at St Hilda's Church Hall (the small hall), Stanwell Road, Ashford, TW15 3QL. This is the first time we have held an AGM in this part of Middlesex and we hope that many of our members living in this area will be able to attend. Our guest speaker will be David Redhead from the Upper Thames Branch. David's specialist subject is the Brown Hairstreak and in his words he said 'he could talk for 5 minutes or 5 hours about the butterfly' - we have suggested an hour! We hope that members from Upper Thames and Surrey branches will join us.

Following the success of the walk last spring to our Millhoppers Pasture Reserve we have arranged for a guided morning walk around nearby Bedfont Lakes Country Park starting at 10.45pm. More details and full programme will be available in the next newsletter and on the branch website. An opportunity for members to show off their butterfly and moth photos from 2010 will be available at our spring meeting on Saturday 5th March 2011.

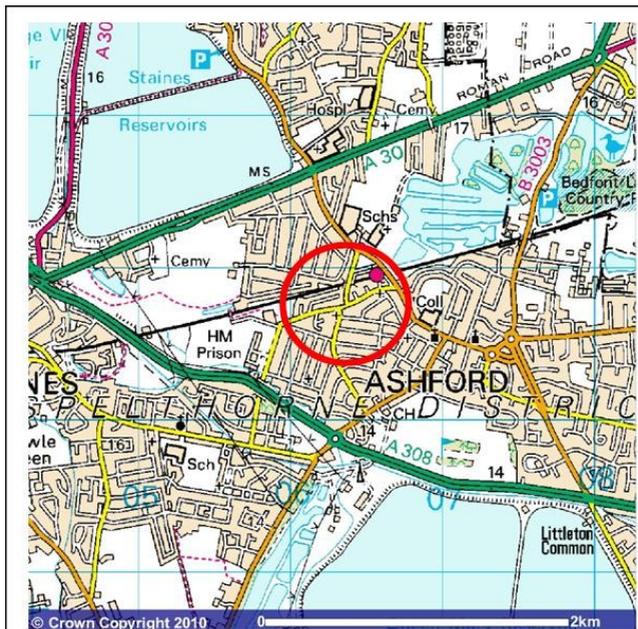
St. Hilda's Church Hall is on Stanwell Road. The nearest station is Ashford (South West Trains from Vauxhall or Waterloo) which is an approx. 12 minute walk away.

Travelling by car: From the M25 southbound, exit at Jct 13 taking the first exit A30 (Staines Bypass). At the Crooked Billet Roundabout continue forward on the A30 until you reach the Bull Dog traffic signals, turn right onto Town Lane (B378) and Stanwell Road,

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

continue forward until you see St. Hilda's church on the right. (Off road parking is available).

Map of location of St. Hilda's Church Hall, Ashford



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Spring Meeting –Saturday 5th March 2011

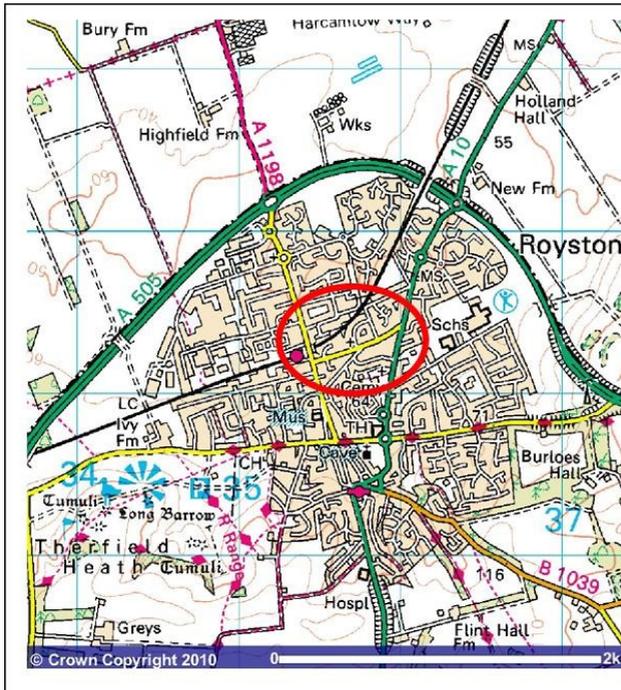
The Spring Meeting will be held on Saturday 5th March 2011, in the Eldon Room, Royston Methodist Church, Queens Road, Royston, SG8 7AU. Like Ashford this is a new venue and we hope that many of our members living in this area will be able to attend. The guest speaker will be Sharon Hearle, our Eastern Regional Officer. Sharon will be talking about the projects she is currently working on in the Eastern Region. Following the tea break we invite members to show off their butterfly and moth photos from 2010. We hope that members from Beds & Northants and Cambs & Essex branches will join us.

A walk around Therfield Heath has been arranged for the morning. More details and a full programme with times will be available in the next newsletter and on the branch website. Royston Methodist Church is on the north side of Queens Road and is a short distance from Royston Station (First Capital Connect from London Kings Cross).

Travelling by car:

Queens Road is a one-way street and quite narrow. From the A10 turn into Mill Road which will lead to Queens Road - the entrance to Mill Road is also quite small – please follow the map for directions! There is on street parking - ideally park just before the hall in Victoria Crescent.

Map of Location of Royston Methodist Hall



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BUNKERS PARK, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD – 2009

**The effects of a mid-June haylage cut on the breeding success of the
Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) on Bottom Field**

By Michael Pearson

The original management plan for Bunkers Park, drawn up in 1997, made provision for the grassland areas of the park, including Bottom Field, to be cut for a late hay crop during mid – late July. This late cropping date was to allow ground-nesting birds, such as skylarks, to fledge young; and for meadow herbs to set seed. The effects of this regime on the breeding cycle of the common blue butterfly were also considered. During the following years Bottom Field was usually cut before the end of July, but in some years weather conditions delayed the cut until into August; no cut was carried out in 2001 because of foot & mouth restrictions.

Butterfly Conservation Habitat Condition Pilot Study 2004.

In August 2004, as part of a Butterfly Conservation pilot study into the habitat requirements of the common blue, Bottom Field was surveyed at the peak of the 2nd brood flight period, for grass height and food plant frequency. In 2004 Bottom Field had been cut throughout, with no areas left uncut, on, or around, the 22 July. The study's final report comments:

The most extensive site, Bunkers Park, has supported a relatively medium – large population along the butterfly transect in recent years. It is easy to see why this site is very good for Common Blues, as it supports a high (100%) herb cover, a mean turf height (6.2cm) within the preferred range and a high frequency of food plants (93%) and nectar (92%) across the sward. Ungrazed seed heads required for roosting occur locally (25% frequency).

2006 Change of timing for the hay cut.

In June 2006 the farmer contracted to cut Bunkers Park requested that he be permitted to bring the grass-cut forward to mid-June, when it would be termed “haylage”, in order to optimise the commercial & nutritional value of the crop as cattle feed. Some concern was expressed that this earlier date would, in many years, coincide with the

peak 1st brood flight period of the common blue; and could have a consequent on the 2nd brood numbers later in the year. Approval was given, however, for the change, subject to there being in Bottom Field 10m wide strips left uncut to provide undisturbed long grass areas for the 2nd brood common blues to come to maturity.

Years 2007-2008.

Adverse summer weather during these two years led to severe falls in common blue numbers; to the extent that any valid assessment of the effects of the changes to the timing of grass cutting proved impossible.

Year 2009.

Bottom Field was seen to be being cut during the transect visit of 24 June. This was 10-14 days after the peak of the common blue's 1st brood flight period, so most females could be assumed to have already deposited their eggs when the grass was cut. At the time of the cut, the larval food plant, birdsfoot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, very widely distributed throughout the sward, was in full flower, with an average herb height of 25-30cms.

Bottom Field was cut to leave three, nominally 10m. wide, uncut strips running down the hill, parallel to Bunkers Lane. Two of these strips were through the centre of the meadow, the third was immediately inside the hedge bordering Bunkers Lane, coinciding exactly with Section 2 of the transect route. Other, smaller areas were not cut, amounting in all to about one third of Bottom Field being left uncut.

2009 Results.

Common blue numbers for the whole of the Bunkers Park site showed a significant recovery during 2009 over the two previous years, but still well below the average annual count for the 5-year period 2000-2004. The peak of the 1st brood flight period occurred during the first two weeks of June. This inevitably meant that the common blue caterpillars would not have been able to pupate before the meadow was cut a couple of weeks later.

The first of the 2nd brood common blues was recorded on 16 July with the peak of the flight period being reached in mid-August, some four weeks later. The 2009 season was effectively over by the end of August, although a single common blue was seen on 12 September.

Discussion.

At the beginning of the 2nd brood flight period, during late July/early August, it was noticeable that the newly emergent common blues were almost exclusively to be seen flying through the long grass seed heads of the uncut strips; suggesting that this was near where they had emerged. At this stage the trefoil in the uncut areas was already past its peak flowering, and setting seed. In contrast, trefoil in the cutover areas had still to reach the full flush of its 2nd flowering; the flower clusters being still largely in bud.

As 2nd brood numbers rose through August, it became clear that the common blues were increasingly to be seen over the cut areas, but usually quite close to the long grass. In the second half of August common blues could be seen over all parts of Bottom Field.

On 19 August a sample assessment of the condition of the trefoil in Bottom Field was carried out. In the uncut strips trefoil flowering was just about over for the year, but with some flower colour still remaining. However, the trefoil that had been cut in June was in full flower, with a height of 10-15cms, overtopping the slower growing sward grasses underneath.

In 2009 common blues were recorded on all nine sections of the Bunkers Park transect route. The two sections with the highest counts were Sect.2 in Bottom Field (27.5% of total sightings); and Sect.7 (14.8% of total). The habitat factors shared in full by both these two sections, but only to a much lesser extent by the other seven sections, are: a 3m. wide close-mown ride, between wide uncut verges with a rich herb content, including a high proportion of birdsfoot trefoil, along the full length of the section route. These conditions present a near-optimum habitat for the common blue.

[Note: Because of the growth of the young trees in Chambersbury Wood, transect Sect.7 is likely to become less favourable as a common blue habitat over the coming years.]

Conclusion

The habitat requirements for the common blue include for there to be a combination of shorter grasses, together with longer grasses with seed heads, containing plentiful amounts of birdsfoot trefoil, the larval food plant and nectar source. Given that a haylage crop will be taken in mid-June, these conditions can best be met, in respect of Bottom Field, by continuing the present cutting programme, whereby a proportion of the meadow is left uncut each year. A June cut will undoubtedly reduce the potential numbers of 2nd brood common blues reaching maturity. However, the earlier 2nd flowering of the cut trefoil during August should go along way to safeguarding the over-wintering generation, so helping towards the next year's breeding potential.



Common Blue
Photo © Ian Small

The exact extent and disposition of the uncut areas of Bottom Field can be left for annual agreement.

Welsh Wave in Wembley: first record of this macro moth in Middlesex, By Debbie Pledge

I have been trapping regularly at home since the start of 2010, after my successful first year in 2009.

On Monday 2 August 2010 I decided to run the moth trap. I wasn't sure the weather was in my favour (a chance of rain) but I thought I may as well give it a go – how glad I am now.

I got five new species for my back garden list. The first four were: Yellow Shell, Spectacle, Sallow Kitten and *Pyrausta aurata*. The fifth did not fall into the trap but landed on a lit patio window when I was outside emptying the trap. I thought it looked interesting and made a dash to grab it - how glad I am now.

I was unable to identify my mystery moth other than to say it was a

geometrid. I went to bed, and the following morning took some photos in good light before going to work. That evening we had dinner at a friend's house. I was itching to get home to have another go at the ID, but managed to make polite conversation. It was a late night with the books but after some time I hit on the ID: Welsh Wave (*Venusia cambrica*). I looked at the distribution and realised I might have something interesting on my hands: Welsh Wave is found in upland habitats where it's food plant – Rowan – grows. In addition to Wales, this includes Devon, Somerset, the north Midlands, Scotland and Ireland. Most definitely not Wembley. (See the Moths Count Maps page at <http://www.mothscount.org/> for a distribution map of this species). I release all my moths after taking a photo but something told me to hold onto this specimen - how glad I am now.

After getting home from work on the Wednesday I uploaded the best photo to my iSpot page and emailed Colin Plant, the Herts and Middlesex Moth Recorder. Colin was naturally sceptical as this moth was so far out of it's range. I found some more photos online and they all matched mine, and we had an exchange of emails.



Welsh Wave (*Venusia ambrica*)
Photo © Debbie Pledge

Before sending my moth to Colin I decided to make an appointment to visit the Angela Marmot Centre for UK Biodiversity at the Natural History Museum on 11 August. I wanted to see their Welsh Wave specimen to make sure I wasn't mistaken. It seems a shame to live in London and not take advantage of this fantastic institution. The synoptic collection for Welsh Wave was ready for me, and there were microscopes and reference books to use.

I was able to ask one of the researchers to take a look at my moth and he agreed with me. For a definitive opinion he called the Curator, Martin Honey, who was able to come downstairs. He too agreed but asked for some time to look at it more closely. We had a brief

speculation on how this moth ended up in Wembley. Unassisted migration seemed unlikely as this species is not known to either wander or migrate. We mentioned accidental methods, including transport by lorry or train perhaps in one of the earlier lifecycle stages.

I went back as planned at the end of the day to collect my moth. I met Martin again and he explained that he knew Colin and they had an exchange of emails that day. Colin had accepted my record and confirmed it was a first for Middlesex. Martin asked if I would donate my specimen to the Museum. I agreed to do so and signed a form to this effect. Martin planned to relax and set the moth and send me some photos. He had done a little research into the Welsh Wave, and a reliable recorder had used the Atropos website to enter details of a Welsh Wave trapped in their garden in Densole, Kent on 7 August.

Colin later emailed to describe my Welsh Wave as an important, unexpected and as yet unexplained record. I confirmed the date, location and type of moth trap, which Colin has turned into a short Note which will hopefully be in the September edition of the Entomologist's Record (<http://www.entrecord.com/>). The reader will have noticed the number of 'good' decisions I made earlier which combined to help me trap the Welsh Wave. It demonstrates yet again that you never know what is out there, but if you keep trying you might be pleasantly surprised.

Lightning Strikes Twice, by Ian Small

A few years ago (25 June 2005 in fact) I had a Red-belted Clearwing in the garden. As clearwing moths are rarely seen without the use of pheromone traps I considered myself very lucky, and resigned myself to not seeing one in the garden again. I got quite a shock, therefore, when I found another when I came home from work on 17 June this year. It was perched on a hawthorn bush about 10 feet from where the last one was seen. Although hawthorn can be used as a foodplant,



*Red-belted Clearwing
Photo © Ian Small*

the bush in question wasn't there on the previous occasion. However, we do have a crab apple in the garden, so perhaps that is occasionally being used. The specimen I saw was not fresh (the wing nearest the camera was damaged) but perhaps it was a male attracted into the garden by the naturally-released pheromone of a female.

One thing is for sure, I will be checking the bushes very carefully in June from now on !

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Stanmore Country Park, 26th June, by John Hollingdale

About 14 people gathered for our summer walk and, for a change, the sun was shining. What we were hoping to see were Ringlets and Marbled Whites. Alas we didn't spot either.

A few Meadow Browns had emerged and the ever present Speckled Woods were encountered throughout the reserve. One Large Skipper was found in a small clearing and several Common Blues were seen in the larger meadows. A couple of Whites flew past us without settling. The last butterfly encountered was a freshly emerged Comma. We scanned some Elm for White-letter Hairstreaks but didn't spot any.

The only moth species seen were several Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnets

However the postscript to this was, on the next Wednesday as I was doing a spot of sapling birch removal, I spotted a Ringlet in an area of the Park that I hadn't seen them in before. They were also flying in the meadow I expected to find them in the previous Saturday. It looks like this walk will be a week later next year.

Horsenden Hill, 26th June, by Andrew J Culshaw

Saturday's joint LNHS/BC walk on Horsenden Hill was again successful in locating White-letter Hairstreak. About 24 people took part in the walk - probably about as big as we would like it to get! I had a pre-walk recce around the 'usual' spots for the Hairstreak and located a minimum of 16, flying strongly from about 8.45am in the warm conditions. On the walk itself, we managed a minimum of 10,

but none particularly low down. As usual, though, we had the telescope with us and this enabled everyone to get decent looks of at least one Hairstreak. Otherwise, the variety of butterflies was a little poor. Meadow Brown numbers definitely seem down on what we would expect for this time of year. We did manage 5 Marbled White on a couple of meadows. All of the 'small' skippers we netted were Small and there were decent numbers of Large Skipper. Other than that, the odd large White, Speckled Wood, Narrow-bordered 5-spot Burnet and Burnet Companion were around.

Immediately after the walk I had a Purple Hairstreak on the Horsenden West transect and the next day (27th) I had 5 White-letters, 3 Marbled Whites and a brimstone around the Farm/east side of the site during a brief visit.

Benfleet Downs, 15th July, by David Chandler

Heavy rainclouds had passed over the Thames estuary earlier in the morning and the rain associated with them had stopped, but it was still grey and overcast as the hour for the walk came. Five people (Den & Ian Black, Pamela & Guy Schooling and John Smart) bravely turned up despite the inclement weather. Fortunately, as we carefully descended the slippery muddy path from the St Mary's Road entrance to the park, the weather began to brighten up. We immediately saw a Red Admiral.

At the bottom of a flight of steps we turned into a small ride with sucker Elms on each side, here on fine days can be found White Letter Hairstreaks flitting around the branches and, sometimes on occasions at lower levels, nectaring on bramble blossom.

Unfortunately it was far too windy and no White Letter Hairstreaks were found. However, a glimmer of sunlight had warmed up the ride sufficiently for grassland loving butterflies like the Meadow Brown and Ringlet to appear. We then saw Gatekeeper, Large White, Small White, Small/Essex Skippers and a Comma.

At the end of the narrow ride the path opens up into a flower meadow and here we found Large Skipper and Marbled White, a butterfly new to Den Black, which posed in the weak sunlight with its wings open so

nicely that we all stopped to admire it.

We then walked on along a ride locals call Adder Alley, for obvious reasons, and looked at large oak tree where Purple Hairstreaks live, but we saw none today because of the strong wind. Next, turning back parallel to our outward route, we passed along a long straight ride where we found Peacock and Green Veined White. In August I have found the scarce Wall along this ride in its sunny sheltered spots.

At the far end of the reserve we then walked around the large flower meadow but only found butterflies at the base of the hill where the hedge gave shelter from the wind.

Returning to the top of the meadow we rejoined the narrow ride leading back towards the steps and our cars. Along this path we saw Speckled Wood and, right by the steps, a possible singleton White Letter Hairstreak whisked away in the breeze. However, as I was the only one who caught a fleeting glimpse, there is a chance that my “sighting” was more in hope of seeing the target species than in reality!

Fourteen different species were seen on the walk, a respectable total on a dank day.

Aldbury Nowers, 26th July, by David Chandler

It was a warm and sunny afternoon with blue skies and a patchwork of fluffy white clouds; ideal for finding and observing butterflies at close quarters. Seventeen members and guests attended and amongst the group were some welcome new faces.

After my initial introduction when I spoke to the group about some of the new conservation ideas I had heard about at a Chris Packham lecture on the previous Saturday, we proceeded up through the set-aside meadow at the base of the reserve to be immediately rewarded by a magnificent show of abundance when scores of Meadow Browns, Marbled Whites and Ringlets rose in living clouds as we walked.

There were Large, Small & Essex Skippers flying in smaller numbers in the field, a solitary Small Tortoiseshell and a Large White.

As the lowest point of the reserve proper the we saw our only

Brimstone of the day. We walked along the path through the light scrub, past the small area of impoverished chalk down, where Chalkhill Blues can be found in August, to the lower paddock where we were immediately rewarded with a sighting of a very faded Painted Lady.

We then moved across the main ride to the south-end lower field, where on last year's field trip I saw a Dark Green Fritillary. I explained to the group that the best place to catch a glimpse of this butterfly was to wait near a purple headed knapweed and that three days earlier I had seen over an hundred DGFs flying at one of their breeding sites over the border in Bedfordshire. So although I was hopeful we might get a sighting of a wandering male DGF, I was not certain. As it turned out we did not encounter a DGF, but we did spot the Small Heath in low numbers, and a first for me this year, a solitary Gatekeeper spotted by Adam in a hawthorn hedge near the style.

The group then decided that they would like to continue the walk to the upper slopes where the chalk downs have been scarified for blue butterfly food-plant promotion.

As we walked through the wooded slopes we were first rewarded by Speckled Woods and then, magically, a rare sighting of two Silver Washed Fritillaries flying with a Comma. The SWFs did not land to nectar on the bramble but passed at waist height by most of the members of the group who were waiting in line on the pathway and so give us a positive identification. This sighting was very exciting and to new butterfly observers like Steve & Sara, this must have been a very special moment indeed.

After this exciting moment, we proceeded past the upper meadow where in spring Dingy & Grizzled Skippers may be found, then around the top of the hill and returned back towards the cars by the public footpath that follows the base of the scarp slope.

On our way back we saw a Red Admiral and a Small White and just before the end of the walk I showed the party a small patch of Kidney Vetch in the corner of the lower meadow and talked about our Branch's efforts to get the Small Blue more fully established on the site because, at present, we only get sporadic sightings at Aldbury.

My thanks to Wendy (of Upper Thames Branch) and Michael Pearson for their informed advice when asked as we walked around the site and to all who thanked me for an enjoyable day.

Daytime Mothing—Hundreds of Species to See!

[This article was first published in the Sept 2010 Moths Count newsletter. To read other articles, go to their website: www.mothscount.org.]

If you don't have the equipment or opportunity to find moths by light-trapping at night, don't despair. Guy Meredith, a moth recorder from Gloucestershire, extols the virtues of mothing by day.

There are *hundreds* of species which can be found in the daytime as adult moths: those that normally fly in the daytime, those that will fly if disturbed from vegetation, and some more which often rest during the day in visible positions such as tree trunks. Since concentrating on moth recording in 2002, I have found 757 species during the daytime in Gloucestershire or just over the county border. 602 of these species were found as live adults: 179 macros and 423 micros. The remaining 155 species were found mostly as larvae or as identifiable leaf mines made by the tiny larvae of some micro-moths. In 2009 alone I found 470 species in the daytime, 350 as adults, and there are still plenty of species which I haven't yet found, even some quite common ones!

For anyone starting out in daytime moth-recording a book covering the macro-moths is essential, but you will soon find that this doesn't cover many of the species that are commonly seen. There are books and websites giving just a selection of micro-moth species, but this can lead to incorrect identifications if you are unaware of similar species which are not illustrated. Specialist books are available which collectively cover all the various moth families found in the UK, but some of these books seem quite expensive. Seem expensive? Well yes, individually they can cost a lot more than a book covering all the macros. If you think of it in terms of entertainment though, each book should give you many years of use so a price comparable with going to a big concert or sporting event lasting just a couple of hours is actually very good value for money.

Rather than trying to cover all micro families from the outset, it is easier (and less expensive initially) to build up over several years. It's

probably best to start with the Pyralids, because this family includes the commonly-seen "grass moths" and several other conspicuous day-flying groups such as the colourful little moths in the genus *Pyrausta* and the China-marks which can be found in wet areas. In addition to books you will probably need a digital camera with a good close-up macro mode, a fine-mesh net, some specimen tubes and a small magnifying lens (x10). Catching and keeping specimens for identification (even if you later release them) is necessary for many micros and a few of the macros. Wing markings may be sufficient but you can't carry all the necessary books in a rucksack! Of course, don't collect specimens at a site unless you have permission to do so. So few people search specialised habitats for micro-moths that there could be a lot of scope for finding species that are new to your area, or which haven't been recorded for several decades.



China Mark
Photo © Guy Meredith

You don't need to be an expert to find such species, you just need to spend time out in the countryside.



Pyrausta aurata
Photo © Ian Small

Reading up on species you've not seen can pay dividends, but about half of my finds are by chance, including some UK rarities. Anyone can make such finds, but you will only know you have a "good record" if you are able to identify the specimen or if someone else, such as the County Moth Recorder, is able to do this for you. Most moth-ers tend to think of their hobby as a primarily nocturnal one, but get out there in the sunshine and you'll be amazed at what you can find.

Butterflies of Madeira, by David Chandler

In July 2010 Kathryn & I went on our annual summer holiday to Madeira. The island of Madeira is a volcanic archipelago some 320 miles off the coast of Morocco and is approximately 620 miles south west of the mainland of its home country of Portugal.

Madeira, as a volcanic island, has a distinctive habitat from those in mainland Europe or Africa and the butterflies that endured a long distance migration, or were somehow transported there, have survived to colonise the island. When adapting to their new habitat, these species over time usually develop some skills or characteristics that distinguish them from their European or African relatives and this natural selection means Madeira has several unique sub-species that can only be found on the island.

I must confess that I was concerned that when we booked the holiday that there would not be many butterflies on the island for me to look out for and to some extent I was proved correct. Much of the island is highly cultivated in terraces ranging from pineapples and bananas on the lower slopes, maize and tomatoes on the middle levels to runner beans and lettuce on the upper slopes up to just below the tree-line. There were, however, parks and gardens and some small wild places between the cultivated areas on the lower and middle slopes where butterflies could be found and, above the tree-line where the countryside was more natural, butterflies became more numerous.

The countryside was very verdant and reminded me more of South Africa than Europe with Acacias and Jacaranda trees, Hydrangeas growing wild and typical southern hemisphere plants like Agapanthus and Birds of Paradise flowers.

Over my week on the island I found Small Whites, Speckled Woods, Long-tailed Blues, Langa Short-tailed blues and a few Monarchs around the coastal places of Santana, Funchal and at the end of the cable car ride at the pretty village of Monte.

At the intermediate levels around Curral das Freiras, Faial and Santo da Sierra there were more Speckled Woods, Clouded Yellows, Brimstones, African Migrants, Red Admirals and a some more Monarchs. I also thought I saw a “fritillary” of some sort.



Madreia Grayling
Photo © Dave Chandler

At the highest levels above the clouds at places like Paul da Sierra and Pico do Arieiro there were scores of Graylings and many other “browns”; unfortunately as I was on an organised tour, the minibus did not stop in the places where the most butterflies flew.

Even though the terrain has frighteningly narrow roads with sheer drops, if I ever go back to Madeira on holiday, I shall hire a car, because having independent travel is the only realistic way that I should be able to find and have the time to have a closer look at Madeira’s special butterflies.

In a total of 20 butterflies’ species recorded to Madeira, 4 are endemic species and 2 endemic subspecies to Madeira Islands.

Endemic (resident) species to Madeira

Madreia Large White *Pieris brassicae wollastoni* - probably extinct
Madreia Brimstone *Gonepteryx madeirensis*
Madreia Grayling *Hipparchia madeirensis*
Madreia Speckled Wood *Pararge xiphia*

Endemic subspecies to Madeira

Madreia Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas phlaeoides*
Indian Red Admiral *Vanessa vulcanica*

Resident species to Madeira Archipelago

Small White *Pieris rapae*
African Migrant *Catopsilla florella*
Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*
Lang's Short-tailed Blue *Leptotes pirithous*
Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*
European Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*
Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui*
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*
Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

Rare migrants or Dubious Records to Madeira Archipelago

Pale Clouded Yellow *Colias hyale*
Diadem or False Plain Tiger *Hypolimnna misippus*
Tree Grayling *Hipparchia statillinus*
American Painted Lady *Cynthia virginensis*
Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*
Plain Tiger or African Queen *Danaus chrysippus*

Reminder.....

Please remember to submit your butterfly records for the year to John Murray, preferably before 9th November. Sightings made later than then can be submitted by phone or e-mail. John's contact details are on the back page.

Brown Hairstreak Sightings in Welwyn Garden City

There have been a couple of sightings of Brown Hairstreak in Welwyn Garden City this Autumn. The site was about a mile from where this species had been seen last year. A further search for eggs laid on blackthorn has provisionally been scheduled for Sunday 28th November. Further details will be on the website or can be obtained from the leader, Malcolm Hull (both sets of details on back page) nearer the time.

Brimstone Breeding Success (or not ...), by Ian Small

We have a couple of Alder Buckthorn bushes in our garden, specifically planted to attract female Brimstone butterflies into the garden to lay their eggs. Last year (2009), these proved very attractive and we had several dozen eggs, and were able to watch the resultant caterpillars grow to full size. They all disappeared very quickly over a few days, and we were never sure if the birds had just been waiting for a particularly large lunch, or if they had managed to go off and pupate.

This year, however, things have been very different. The weather, I am sure, played a significant part. Due to the very long cold winter, it seemed much later before the buds on the bushes broke, and it is that stage when the eggs are normally laid. We didn't see a single Brimstone in the garden around this time. We never did see any eggs, but we did find half a dozen caterpillars a few weeks later. However, in contrast to the previous year, none of these survived, and were presumably taken by birds while still quite small.

I would be curious to know if others also noticed this change in fortunes, or if 'my' Brimstones were just unlucky this year.

National Society AGM and Members Day - 20 November 2010

The national AGM and Members Day of Butterfly Conservation is this year being hosted by our neighbours, the Cambs. & Essex Branch, on Saturday 20th November in Churchill College, Storey's Way, Cambridge CB3 0DS.

The main AGM will take place in the college's Wolfson Hall on Saturday morning, followed by talks from several renowned speakers. There will also be the opportunity to browse some specially selected stalls selling nature, butterfly and moth wares. The day will conclude with the annual Marsh and Volunteer Awards Ceremony followed by a presentation by Kate Carver, Project Manager of The Great Fen Project.

The Members Day is always very enjoyable and Branch members are strongly encouraged to attend. The 'formalities' are kept to a minimum and the talks are always informative and inspiring.

Butterfly World / Gardener's World

Butterfly World in St. Albans remains open during the Autumn, with a range of activities, including many aimed at children during half term week. Details of these can be found at:

<http://www.butterflyworldproject.com/media/whats-on/>

During August, the site was featured in an edition of BBC's Gardener's World program, when the presenter Carol Klein met up with Ivan Hicks, who designed and planted the meadows there to attract butterflies. Those of you who have visited the site will know how stunning those meadows can be. The interview focussed on the plants Ivan had chosen to attract butterflies and other wildlife. If you are interested, and perhaps want to see what tips you can use for your own garden, the episode is still available to watch using the BBC iPlayer, at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00thyb5>

WINTER CONSERVATION TASKS

For the first time in several years we are delighted to be involved with several winter conservation tasks that are being arranged to improve site conditions for a specific butterfly. These have been planned in conjunction with other conservation groups in Hertfordshire. A list of Conservation Groups working in the branch area is available on the branch website at

<http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/conservation-new.php>



Date: Wednesday 10th November 2010
Site: Waterford Heath
Meet: Vicarage Lane carpark TL317150 [Map 166]
Start : 10am to finish 3-4pm (bring packed lunch)
Equipment: Bring work gloves and loppers, bow saws if you have them.
Task: Clearing an area of the bank of undergrowth, bushes etc and clearing paths.
Contact: Steve Kiln, (E.mail steve.kiln@sky.com) or Andrew Middleton (0208 245 0847/07866654056)
Purpose: To help Grizzled Skipper

Date: Sunday 9th January 2011 with Countryside Management Service
Site: Bricket Wood Common
Meet: Layby in School Lane, Bricket Wood TL133006 [Map 166]
Start : 10am - 2pm (bring packed lunch)
Equipment: Gloves and tools will be provided
Task: Thinning around willow bushes
Contact: Malcolm Hull (01727 857893).

If weather is too poor for task to proceed on that date an alternative will be arranged – contact Malcolm Hull or watch website for updates.

Purpose: Management of rideside willows for the benefit of Purple Emperor

Date: Wednesday 16th February 2011

Site: Wormley Wood NNR

Meet: TL316047 [Map 166]

Please note that the meeting point might change, at the time of publication the Woodland Trust intend to allow access from the southern entrance.

Start : 10am to finish 3-4pm (bring packed lunch)

Equipment: Bring work gloves and loppers, bow saws if you have them.

Task: Thinning around willow bushes.

Contact: Laurence Drummond (07748358454,
E-mail Laurence.d@hotmail.co.uk)

Purpose: Management of rideside willows for the benefit of Purple Emperor

If you think you can help or would like to have more information please speak to the named contact for each task. We are also planning a task at Broxbourne Wood NR sometime in the new year organised with Countryside Management Service for Purple Emperor. Details when known will be posted on the branch website. Everyone is welcome although children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a parent or appointed adult. No dogs please.



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Branch website: <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>