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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

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ISSUE 6

MAY 1996



### So Much for Global Warming? By Malcolm Newland

Perhaps by the time you read this issue the weather will be more spring-like, but at the end of March winter is very reluctant to release it's grip. My garden butterfly records show the worst start since 1987 with hibernating species understandably reluctant to put in an appearance. Things are well behind in the garden pond too with plenty of paired frogs but no sign of spawn, nineteen days after the previous latest date. The birds however, do seem to be making a start with their nest building activities. Robins are using an old

## **Hertfordshire and Middlesex**

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kettle which I can see from my window and Blue Tits have been in and out of the nest box. Starlings and Collared Doves are tidying up the garden by removing all the loose twigs to use for nesting materials. During the most severe weather a male and female Blackcap were regular visitors to the bird table and a Goldcrest also displayed a liking for peanuts.

I had the moth trap out on the 23rd of March and had three March moths, Small Brindled Beauty (my first) and two Common Quakers. Winter Conservation work continued at our regular site and our visit to Standalone Farm on February 25th saw four members turn out in the rain to complete the planting of the hedge with a further eighty six shrubs and trees. David Marsh hopes to fence the meadow and have it grazed by sheep.

Our first indoor meeting of 1996 was held on a Saturday afternoon to see if this was a more convenient time for our members but as the attendance was about average this would not appear to be the case. Colin Plant and his young assistant provided a very entertaining introduction to the moths of Hertfordshire and Middlesex with maps, slides and specimens. He demolished the "differences" between butterflies and moths before pointing out that in many foreign languages moths were described as "butterflies of the night".

You should all have received a copy of the branch Butterfly Report for 1995. It has been very well received and represents a lot of effort by many people. Many thanks to all the contributors, the recording sub-committee and in particular John Murray and Michael Healy, who have done an enormous amount of work. We are looking for sponsorship to make future reports even better and the more recorders we have the more tetrads we can cover.

The field trip season will soon be upon us but family commitments in Australia will mean that I miss out on many this year. My

### **Porton Down Field Trip**

A field trip has been arranged to Porton Down, Wiltshire, which is one of the best butterfly sites in the country.

The date is 11th August 1996 and places are limited so PLEASE BOOK in advance by phoning Ian Small (see back page) before the end of July.

The site is MoD owned and names of those attending must be given in advance, so those that don't book will not be able to attend

hope is for a more "average" summer with plenty of warm sunshine but enough rain to keep the flowers and larval foodplants growing.

Terry Rodbard organised our first sales table at our last indoor meeting and our branch will have stands at the Capel Manor Spring Gardening and Country Show on the 13th and 14th of April and the Hatfield House Festival of Gardening on the 22nd and 23rd June where we will be putting the case for conserving butterflies and trying to enrol new members as well as having a sales table.

Finally a couple of appeals for help: we have been asked if any of our members would assist with setting up a Transect walk at Bedfont Lake Country park around the 200 acre landfill site. If anyone can help please call Barry Embling on 01784 423556. Also one of our members who is a housebound senior citizen, enjoys talking about butterflies with fellow enthusiasts. Anyone able to visit him in the Finsbury Park area please telephone me and I will put you in touch.

## Butterfly Photography

by Ian Small

The popularity of butterfly photography has never been greater. Gone are the days when the only way to remember these beautiful insects was go out with a butterfly net and capture specimens for the cabinet. Nowadays, the memories can be taken home in the form of a photograph, leaving the insect unharmed in the wild. However, as many people find out when they first try photographing these subjects, it is not as easy as it perhaps seemed at first glance.

There are many potential variables which the photographer has to balance - the degree of magnification required for the butterfly to be a reasonable size on the photograph, the amount of available light, the speed of the film and the necessary depth of field required in order for all (or most) of the butterfly to be in focus. Once you have mastered control of all these you just have to learn the best places and times to go looking for particular species and, perhaps hardest, acquire the patience of a saint !

For most British species, which are relatively small, in order to obtain a photograph where the butterfly occupies at least half of the photographic frame, it is necessary to use substantial magnification. Remember that the negative size is 24 x 36 mm (unless you are using large format), and that the wing-span (fully open) of a common blue is about 35 mm, and you will see that in order to obtain an image that fully fills the frame, then the image must be life-size (1:1). This takes you properly into the realms of macro photography, and this magnification is difficult to achieve successfully in the field (as opposed to the studio) without a fair amount of kit and lots of experience. For most use, aiming at an image half of this magnification (1:2) is usually an acceptable compromise. However, even this normally means using a relatively expensive macro lens on your camera. These come in different magnifications (e.g. 50 mm,

90/100 mm or 200 mm), where the increasing focal lengths allow you to achieve the desired magnification at greater distances from the subject (very useful if you don't want to knock it of its perch while you photograph it). Unfortunately, increased focal length also equates to increased cost. I personally use a 90 mm macro lens, which allows a 1:2 image (i.e. half life size) to be obtained at about 12 inches (30 cm) from the subject. Apart from allowing you to achieve the necessary magnification, these lenses also allow a lot more light to fall on the film than do all but the most expensive telephoto lenses, which do not open wider than about f4. Thus, with telephoto lenses the image in the view finder is then a lot darker, and hence it is more difficult to focus. Further, most telephoto lenses will not achieve a magnification greater than 1:4 (i.e. a quarter life size). Whilst this is acceptable for e.g. a shot of a peacock with its wings open, it will not be particularly successful if you are trying to capture the underwing of a green hairstreak.

If you cannot afford a macro lens, then a reasonable compromise is to fit an extension tube to either a standard or a telephoto lens. These are cheap, and usually come in a set of 3 different sizes - the bigger the size, the greater the magnification. They work by increasing the distance of your lens from the film thereby allowing the rays from the object to have diverged to a greater extent by the time they reach the surface of the film. The down-side is that the amount of light which now reaches the film is substantially reduced, thereby darkening even further the image in the view finder, and making it even more difficult to achieve the necessary depth of field.

The depth of field is the 'front to back' range of your image which is in focus at your operating aperture (the narrower the aperture of the lens, the greater is the depth of field). One of the greatest problems with any sort of macro photography is that as you increase the amount of magnification, the effective depth of field decreases proportionally. Thus, without the lens 'stopped down' to a small aperture (i.e. a high f-stop), you may only have 2mm or so of the

image in focus. (Even if you are photographing a butterfly with its wings open, from straight above, you will find that the antennae are out of focus even if the wings are not.) This is the fundamental conundrum to be solved if you wish to achieve successful photographs of butterflies. I will try to outline the various strategies which can be used..

In order to achieve enough depth of field for a 1:2 image, you are likely to need to stop down the lens to at least f11, and preferably to either f16 or even f22. As you narrow the aperture in this way the amount of light falling on the film decreases and so you need to take further steps to ensure that you obtain sufficient exposure of the film. The first is to use a faster film (i.e. with a higher ASA number) which requires less light in order to be correctly exposed. However, this too has a drawback, as in general the faster films also exhibit a more grainy image. In your strive for perfection, you should use the slowest film you can (most professionals use Kodachrome 25, but I use a 50 ASA film). The next approach could be to increase the time of exposure of your photograph but, as butterflies are rarely still for long, this is not often successful. The other approach is to add more light to the subject and this is why many photographers have equipped their cameras with flash systems appropriate to macro photography. These can comprise either single or double flash units, or a ring flash. Single flash units can make harsh photographs with distinct shadows, which is why the double flash system has a number of advantages. Here, one of the flash units is the main flash, whilst the other acts as a 'fill in' in order to illuminate those areas in shadow from the first unit. Ring flash can be quite successful, but can also produce quite a flat image.

With any flash-enhanced system, you have to be careful with your choice of subject, in order to avoid the 'black background' syndrome. Usually there are no problems if your butterfly is on the ground or on a low-growing plant. If it is at the top of a flower spike with only sky visible behind it, then the resultant image will

have a black background and hence will not look natural. With any of these systems, you need to run your own test films to check out the appropriate exposure settings with your system.

So where does this leave the budding butterfly photographer ? Confused, I should think. With so many variables to play with it is not surprising that there is no 'correct answer' as to the system or equipment to use. Ultimately, the solution which you choose will depend on how seriously you wish to pursue this hobby. If you only want to be able to photograph the butterflies on your buddleia in the garden, then almost any camera will provide you with an acceptable image. One useful tip when photographing many of the paler-coloured butterflies is to under-expose the photograph by about half of an f-stop. This works because butterfly wings are quite reflective and hence fool your camera's metering system. This may be difficult if you have an 'auto-everything' camera, but many makes do allow you to adjust the exposure either directly, or to manually adjust the film speed (ASA) setting.

If you want to be more serious in your butterfly photography I would strongly recommend investing in a macro lens for your camera. The optics in these lenses are of very high quality and will result in sharper images just for that reason, plus they allow you to achieve good magnifications in the field and give a very bright viewfinder display to aid focusing. You then need to decide on choices for film to use. Whilst print film is very flexible, and you can get away with some exposure latitude, the tonal range is not as great as slide films (although if you do not already use slides, you may be put off by the cost of a projector and screen!). The speed of the film will depend on what you are photographing and where. Whilst you may need flash to photograph small butterflies in most UK summers, you may be able to use a slightly faster film without flash if you are somewhere on the continent.

So, what do I use ? Well, I have a 90 mm [continued on page 17]

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## A Holiday in Corfu

by Brian Jessop

We left Luton Airport and the weather was not very warm, so we were looking forward to some sunshine. We arrived at our Hotel, in Rhoda on the North Coast of Corfu, in the early hours of the morning. After unpacking we had a couple of hours sleep and rose in time for breakfast; continental of course and then set about looking around Rhoda to find the best shops so that my wife could do some shopping! By midday, however I was keen to get started on my main reason for coming to Corfu, to look for butterflies and moths.

The sun was hot with temperatures in the high eighties and low nineties. Armed with my hat, binoculars and camera, off I went along the coastal road. I could not believe my eyes, I had only gone about two hundred metres when I saw a Wood White and then another. In fact they were everywhere and even more common than the abundant Meadow Browns.

On either side of the road there were uncultivated fields with a few olive trees in and I was dying to explore them, but finding a way in through the barbed wire fence was a problem! Eventually I found an opening and followed a tractor path for a few metres seeing Wood White, Cleopatra's, Meadow Browns, Small Whites and several Skippers feeding on field-scabious. As I walked further along the track more Small Skippers and Small Coppers were also seen.

As the fields opened out on either side many wild flowers were observed; Field-Scabious was in abundance with Knapweed, Thistle, Clover, Poppy, Bramble and many others that I did not recognise. I could not believe my eyes regarding the butterflies, there were too many Painted Ladies to count, Cleopatra's, Swallowtails, Scarce Swallowtail, Clouded Yellows (including Helice Form), Bath White, Meadow Browns, Large Whites, Marbled Whites, Small Heath, large, Small, Mallow, Pigmy, Hungarian and Lulworth Skippers, Spotted Fritillaries, Common Blues, Holly Blues, Great Banded Graylings, Brown Argus,



### Field Trips Corrections

The remaining field trips and indoor meetings are given on pages 10 and 11. Please note that due to a computer breakdown the programme was typed rather quickly for despatch with the last issue of the magazine and contained two mistakes;-

The field trip to Kensal Green Cemetery starts at 11.00am not 10.00am as previously stated.

The Poorsfield trip has now been cancelled and replaced by the trip to Porton Down.

and one solitary Red Admiral. I walked along the track until the fields came to an end and shrubby woodland started. Here long tailed blue was seen in small numbers and one Sloe Hairstreak.

On other walks Peacocks were observed, plus a total of three Common Gliders. The only other notable sighting came while laying by the pool, a butterfly flew over that looked like a Camberwell Beauty but I was not totally sure and so have not included it as a definite record.

The six Spotted burnet Moth was quite common including a few aberrations. Some had enlarged red spots encircled with cream, whilst one specimen was all black except the usual six spots on the front wings were much reduced in size and were partially white.

All together there were 29 different species seen and 27 of them were in the field mentioned above. There were also lots of birds and dragonflies plus a few snakes and turtles. A wonderful holiday for butterflies and wildlife.

**1996 Events**

Everyone is welcome at the following events. Please try and support them.

- 12/5/96** Butterflies in **Kensal Green Cemetery**. Meet at the East entrance.
- 19/5/96** **Pulpit Hill**, Buckinghamshire for **Duke of Burgundy**. Meet at 10.00 am.
- 26/5/96** A search for **Grizzled** and **Dingy Skippers** at **Bramfield**, Hertfordshire.
- 9/6/96** A trip with Upper Thames Branch to **Pitstone Hill/Ivinghoe** Wood.
- 23/6/96** Meet at **Alton Gate** on the east of Monks Wood, for **Black Hairy** Woodpecker.
- 13/7/96** A **Moth evening** at **Marshall Heath**, HMWT Nature Reserve. Leave for the B653 for an 8.30 pm start (TL 160148).
- 14/7/96** A joint meeting at **Broxbourne Woods** with the British Naturalists' Club. **Admiral** (TL 324071).
- 28/7/96** **Dark Green Fritillaries** at **Dancers End**, Buckinghamshire. Meet at Chequers (TL 903097).
- 11/8/96** PLEASE BOOK for Porton Down in Wiltshire (see page 3) the following day.
- 25/8/96** Meet in the car park of Royston Sports Club at 11.00 am for a walk to **Royston**.
- 15/9/96** Another search for the elusive **Brown Hairstreak** at **Bricket** Wood.
- 16/10/96** A.G.M. at the **Cross Street Centre**, Dagnell Street, near St Andrew's. Interval followed by members slides.
- 23/11/96** Dr Andy Barker gives an illustrated talk "**Butterflies and the**".
- 10/12/96** **Quiz Night** at **The Letchworth Settlement**, Nevells Road with a prize for the raffle.

programme

in where possible. There is no need to book just turn up on the day  
ce on the Harrow Road near Kilburn at 11.00 am (TQ 232825)  
Longdowne Hill car park at 10.00 am (TQ 832046).  
ordshire. Meet in the car park at 10.00 am (TL 282165).  
acon. Meet in the National Trust Car Park at 10.00 a.m. (SP 963159).  
rstreak at 11.00 am. This is six miles north of Huntingdon (TL 206805).  
on the Harpenden to Wheathampstead Road. Park in Marshalls Way off  
alists Association. Meet int the car park at 10.00 am to look for **White**  
et at 11.00 am at the reserve entrance near the Prime Ministers residence  
will be done on a first come first served basis  
walk round **Therfield Heath**, looking for **Chalkhill Blues** (TL 348404).  
ood. Meet in Smug Oak Station Car Park at 11.00 a.m. (TL 135020).  
bans town centre starting at 8.00 pm. Official business then refreshments  
**habitats in Europe"** at 2.30 pm in **Harpenden Conservative Club**.  
Letchworth Naturalists Society. 7.30 pm start. Bring food, drink and a

## **Moths**

**by Rob Souter**

For this issue I have reported on the moth records I've received from last year. The notable species seen are listed below;

Bird's Wing - Tewin - In Britain confined to midlands and south-east England.

Bordered White - Tewin - Widely distributed and common. Serious forest pests.

Convolvulus Hawk-moth - Hemel Hempstead - Regular migrant to Britain from Africa.

?Galium Carpet - Hemel Hempstead - Widespread in Britain. Associated with chalk regions.

?Great Oak Beauty - Hemel Hempstead - Locally distributed in England. Stronghold in New Forest.

Humming-bird - Hemel Hempstead/Markyate - Migrates annually to Hawk-moth British Isles from Europe.

Large Emerald - Bishops Stortford Occurs throughout the British Isles

Nut-tree Tussock - Hemel Hempstead/Tewin - Widely distributed.

Pine Hawk-Moth - Tewin. Confined to southern and eastern England.

? Plain Wave - Hemel Hempstead - Widely distributed in England and southern Scotland.

Privet Hawk-Moth - Stansted Airport, Pirton - Widely distributed in southern Britain.

Small Elephant Hawk Moth - Pirton - Widely distributed in Britain.

Treble Bar - Pirton

Treble Lines - Tewin

Orache Moth - Bishops Stortford - Exceedingly rare immigrant

Dewick Plusia - Bishops Stortford - Exceedingly rare immigrant

Last year I sent our recording forms listing moths that may be found in the Herts and Middlesex area. The above information is from the 8 returns that I have received to date, although most were obviously from members who do not have access to a light trap.

With the exception of the last two records supplied by the county recorder, none of these notable species are particularly rare but consist of species that are migrants, have affinity to threatened habitats or have been in decline in our region. Those marked with a question mark are species for which identification would need to be confirmed by the county recorder.

### **Day-flying moths**

Last May I invited members to record sightings of any day-flying moths they encountered in their gardens or during walks in the Herts and Middlesex area. 5 people returned their forms and the results are given below;

Six-spot Burnet - Tring Park, Hadly Common, Bayfordbury

Emperor Moth - Bishops Stortford

?Light Orange Underwing - Balls Wood,

Hummingbird Hawkmoth - Tring, Hemel Hempstead

The Vapourer - Bishops Stortford

Mother Shipton - Aldbury Nowers

Silver Y - Tring, Hemel Hempstead

Obviously, with such limited data it is hard to draw any conclusions as to the abundance or distribution of these species.

I would like to thank those people who took time to join in with the moth surveys and would like to encourage the rest of our members to keep an eye out for moths in 1996. I will not be sending out recording forms this year but please phone or write to request a general moth

recording form.

### **Moth trapping Events**

The branch has arranged a moth trapping evening for the 13th July at Marshall's Heath near Wheathampstead. It is being run by Dr. John Murray who has been trapping here regularly for a few years. I hope as many members as possible attend as I'm sure you will have an enjoyable evening.

We also hope to run other events as many members have shown a strong interest in moths and wish to learn more. This may have to wait until the branch is equipped with portable light-trapping equipment.

Colin Plant the county moth recorder will also be leading some events for other groups and BC members are most welcome to attend. I hope to have more details in coming weeks.



## Easy Butterfly Gardening

### By Malcolm Newland

Here are my suggestions of things to plant if you want an easy to maintain border of hardy, nectar-rich flowers which have consistently attracted butterflies on my clay soil. Once established they will provide a source of refreshment to passing butterflies from spring to autumn. Apart from dead-heading (unless you want to save the seed), and cutting down faded stems at the end of the season, little after care will be required. All are perennial unless otherwise mentioned. Of course, the list is by no means exhaustive and if I have omitted anyone's favourite, sorry! I will look at shrubs in a later issue.

#### Spring

Hyacinths are regularly visited by butterflies which have emerged from hibernation. Remove developing seed capsules to ensure good sized blooms the following year and allow the leaves to die right back. Cowslips, primroses and polyanthus provide a colourful display at the front of a border and often attract early visitors. Forget-me-nots and honesty are both butterfly magnets and providing that you sow their seed two years in a row as they are biennials, you will have them for ever. Orange-Tip caterpillars are sometimes found feeding on the seed pods of honesty.

Erysimum, Bowles Mauve flowers virtually non-stop from spring to autumn and although it does not appear to produce seed is easy to propagate from cuttings. The highly scented sweet rocket is an ideal subject to grow near the back of the border as it can get quite tall. It has a long flowering season especially if the dead spring flowers are removed to encourage new growth. Take care though as Orange-Tips and Whites often use it as a larval food plant and the caterpillars can be found on the developing seed pods. It is a short-lived perennial but will self-seed readily.



### Summer

Ox-eye daisy flowers prolifically but spreads rapidly if unchecked. Corncockle is an annual arable weed now virtually eradicated by farmers. It produces very large seeds for it's size and in damp summers they often start to germinate whilst still in the seed pods. Several varieties of scabious grace my borders including field, Devil's-bit, and Fama blue. They all attract butterflies but Devils-bit has the edge for the abundance and colour of it's flowers. Phlox (paniculata) not only attracts butterflies but Angle Shades moth caterpillars can often be seen munching away near the tops of the plants where they are well camouflaged. Lychnis coronaria, purple toadflax, purple loosestrife, marjoram, red and white valerian, purple cornflower and anise hyssop are all highly recommended and provide interest and nectar over several weeks. Annual candytuft will come back year after year and being low growing is particularly suitable for the front of the border. In contrast the very tall teasel is one for the back of the garden but must be sown two years running to provide a succession of biennial plants. It can be invasive but in some years most of the seeds are eaten by flocks of colourful goldfinches. On damp soils hemp agrimony is on a par with buddleia in attracting any species around. Greater knapweed and hardheads or black knapweed are visited by a wide range of butterflies but hardheads are highly invasive and I would recommend dead-heading them. Perennial sweet peas can be allowed to climb up and through shrubs at the back of the garden to provide colour when their "supporters" have finished blooming. Although the flowers do not look an "easy to get at" source of nectar I have recorded several species on them and they are a particular favourite of the Brimstone.

### Autumn

Ice plant (sedum spectabile), michaelmas daisy, both tall and dwarf, and rudbeckia are all indispensable as the butterfly season draws to a close and the over-winterers have a final top-up of nectar.

[from page 7] macro lens which I set manually to f16, a double flash system and 50 ASA slide film. Except for larger objects, I leave this set at its maximum magnification (1:2), and pre-focused to the appropriate distance. Then, rather than re-focusing the lens for each image, I move the camera until the subject is in focus and then press the button. (I have never used an autofocus camera - if you have done so successfully why don't you write in with your experiences. I would worry that unless the butterfly were the major part of the picture area then the autofocus would be difficult to control.)

Don't be fooled by thinking that this equipment guarantees good results every time - it doesn't. You still have to put yourself into the right places at just the right times to get the best photographs. Please remember, however, that even though you are not going out with your net catching butterflies, you can still cause considerable damage to a butterfly colony unless you are careful in the way you use your camera. There is no point in getting a great photograph if in the process you trampled out all the available food plants where the females would have laid their eggs. Always watch where you put your feet.

Butterfly photography can be a tremendously rewarding hobby. Don't be afraid to experiment until you find something that works for you. Happy snapping.....

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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.

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## **Surrey Butterfly Festival**

**By Shirley White**

After the great success of our 1994 Butterfly Festival, Surrey and S.W. London Branch of Butterfly Conservation have arranged to hold another Butterfly Festival for 1996.

The festival will be held in association with the Field Studies Council on Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st July, at Juniper Hall, Mickleham, Dorking, from 11 am until 6 pm.

Each day guides will take visitors to local butterfly habitats. There will be slide presentations by experienced lecturers on butterfly conservation and a photographic workshop on photographing Butterflies.

There will be live exhibits of British butterflies, eggs, caterpillars and chrysalides as well as displays featuring the biology of butterflies, conservation, prints, stamps and books. An exhibition and sale of paintings and drawings of butterflies and their habitats. Sales stands selling gifts featuring butterfly motifs. Nectar and caterpillar food plants will be on sale - all grown by society members. There will be attractions especially for the children. Refreshments will be available on both days.

As part of the Festival there will be a Photographic Competition for 35mm colour slides of adult British Butterflies in a natural setting. Entries will be judged by the warden of the Field Studies Centre Mr. John Bebbington FRPS. First, second and third prize winners, which will be on show, will receive £50, £20 and £10 respectively.

Copies of rules and entry forms (which must be returned by the 1st June) for the competition can be obtained by sending an SAE to Dennis Newland, 27 Furze Lane, Purley, Surrey CR8 3EJ

## **Newsletter**

The newsletter is produced by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch of Butterfly Conservation, which is a national society concerned with the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats.

It is produced quarterly and the deadline for the next issue is 10th August 1996, this issue has been put back by one month as this will be more convenient considering the timing of the A.G.M. and the yearly butterfly report. PLEASE NOTE the editor has moved, the new address is given on the back page.

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## **Membership**

Membership currently stands at 258. 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)

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## **Holiday**

We have received details of a holiday being arranged in France about 50 miles in land from La Rochelle. A small party of people will visit this area in July and experienced naturalists will lead trips to the best sites in the area for butterflies.

Anyone interested please phone Chris Doncaster on 01582 712433.

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