

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER
ISSUE **60**

Winter 2010/11

Fisherman's tales -The One That Got Away. by David Chandler

Sometimes we tell tales of our own mini-adventures in our daily lives and hear of the same people seeing the first Orange Tip each Spring, so it is easy to believe that we embellish our little stories so that they appear more dramatic. However, I have a tale to tell that feels very real to me but, I hope, may not seem too far fetched to you.

On the eighth of July this year I attended the Chilterns Area of Natural Beauty Grassland Management Outdoor Day at Pegsdon Hills in Bedfordshire. The day began with a visit to a NNR at Knocking Hoe, a very special piece of chalk downland with some very scarce and special downland plants. The site's grassland includes a wide range of characteristic chalk downland plants such as rockrose, dwarf thistle, clustered bellflower, lady's tresses and hoary plantain. There are also

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large populations of pasque flower, fleawort, burnt-tip orchid and the very rare spotted cat's-ear and moon carrot. We sighted a singleton Dark Green Fritillary and I found my first Chalkhill Blue of the season and the party enjoyed this early emergence. I also was shown the ground-pine by Graham Bellamy the warden which was found in an odd patch of much sandier soil that was deposited by glaciers in the Ice Age.

As we returned on foot to Pegsdon along the Chiltern Way we went past farming land in the countryside higher level stewardship scheme linking the SSSIs along that part of the Chiltern ridge. At Chickenhoe, on the ground next to the edge of a field of broad beans, a large butterfly was disturbed by the party's passing. It was a little bigger in size and was the square-ish shape of a Red Admiral but was far more orangey. My first thought was "that's a very big Small Tortoiseshell", then I mused "it's the wrong shape" and then "could it be?" The butterfly circled twice and landed briefly and I chased it back down the path to get a second sight; however it flipped up again and disappeared down the steep slope of Chickenhoe where I could not follow it. I rejoined the group on route to Pegsdon. Three others had seen the butterfly with me but none were butterfly people, a lady from the wildlife trust thought "it could be!" when I described what I saw. So had I seen a Large Tortoiseshell?

At lunch I found Herts. & Middx committee member Nigel Agar and told him my story. A few days later he went to look for the butterfly and got a fritillary-like sighting at Chickenhoe, but, like me, he could not get a positive confirmation. Nigel did see a Large Tortoiseshell in the 1980s and said it was "fritillary like" when he first spotted it. Myself, I have never seen a Large Tortoiseshell in the wild in Britain but have seen them live at London Zoo and have seen similar nymphalids in QZN, South Africa.

So, I think I know what I saw, but I have no proof as I was not carrying a camera.

Strangely, Herts. & Middx committee member Ian Small had photographed a tatty Large Tortoiseshell in April 2009 at nearby Pegsdon Hills and Graham Bellamy told me that Knocking Hoe was one of the butterfly's last known haunts in Bedfordshire before it died out. So the mystery remains unsolved like the fisherman's tale.

INDOOR MEETINGS REMINDERS

[Saturday, 29th January - Branch AGM and Members' Day.](#)

Full details of this meeting are provided in the Annual Review, which is enclosed with this newsletter. A map and directions were given in the previous newsletter.

[Saturday 5th March - Spring Meeting.](#)

Morning: A walk around Therfield Heath will be led by Sharon Hearle, the East of England Regional Officer for Butterfly Conservation, Meet at 10.45am at the Sports Pavilion car park. Directions: From the A505 just west of Royston, take the exit to Royston (old road) that runs beneath the Heath; the car park is approx 1km on the right. By public transport, the nearest train station is at Royston, on the London Kings Cross to Cambridge Capital Connect line. Attendees should bring a packed lunch for eating in the afternoon venue (available from 1pm) or plan to visit a local pub for lunch.

The afternoon meeting is being held in the Eldon Room, Royston Methodist Church, Queens Road, Royston, SG8 7AU A map and directions were provided in the previous newsletter. In the first part of the meeting our guest speaker will be Sharon Hearle who will be talking to us about her work, in a talk provisionally entitled : 'Big Brecks and White-spotted Pinion Projects'. (Please check the website or call Liz Goodyear for any late changes.)

Following a tea break, there will then be an opportunity for members to show images of butterflies and moths that they have taken during 2010. Many of our members particularly enjoy this annual event, particularly if the weather is cold outside, as it allows us to share memories of warmer times and look forward with anticipation to the impending Spring and Summer months. If you would like to show your images, then please make a small selection (usually 10 - 20) and e-mail them in advance to Andrew Wood (address on back page of the newsletter) of the meeting so that he can pre-load them onto the laptop used to project them.

City Transect, by Phil McMurdie.

Introduction and purpose

The purpose of this transect was to identify whether the city of London and specifically the areas around EC1-2 i.e. Liverpool Street, Barbican and associated districts are capable of supporting any butterfly populations.

The transect – details of the area

Green spaces in and around the City of London are a rare commodity, small spaces such as Finsbury Square and Finsbury Circus are managed by the Corporation of London and provide city workers with an aesthetic respite to the high rise office blocks and structures that dominate the city. In addition to the Barbican Estate which is a largely residential area comprised of tower blocks and ornamental gardens. This transect has been designed to walk through as many “green spaces” as possible that are located in the area.

The route

The walk follows a circular route starting and finishing at Broadgate Arena

The following Landranger reference is given being the central point for the circuit

TQ324818

O/S References:

OS X (Eastings): 532464; OS Y (Northings): 181877

1. Broadgate to Bunhill Burial Ground.

The transect starts at the Broadgate arena, and takes continues across to Finsbury Circus, an area dominated by managed flower beds. The walk continues down Chiswell Street and onwards to the Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. This is a highly significant cemetery with its impressive London Plane trees, flower beds (and some Buddleia growing on some of the walls). The Burial ground is also the resting place for several notable persons, including: Daniel Defoe (author of Robinson Crusoe), William Blake (painter, poet and engraver), John

Bunyan (author) and two tombs bear the names R Cromwell and H. Cromwell.

2. Bunhill to Barbican.

Once a circuit of the cemetery has been completed the walk continues westward down Dufferin Street and on to Fortune Street Park. This is another small green space, where managed gardens offer any wandering Lepidoptera a resting place and nectar opportunity. Buddleia, lavender and snowberry have been observed to be frequented this year by Large, Small and Green Veined Whites, whilst Holly Blues were seen around the snowberry bushes. The walk continues along Fann Street past the residential flats, several of which have superb gardens, primarily based upon planted pots which have often proved to be the best area for butterfly sightings. One small area known as the Fann Street Wildlife garden, initially held out hope that it might be a small haven in this otherwise concrete jingle, however not only is it closed off to the public but throughout the year (to September) remained completely unkept, and one lone Grey Squirrel apart was devoid of any wildlife as far as I could see, certainly no butterfly sightings for the whole year.

3. The Hanging Gardens of the Barbican.

The Barbican Estate is a residential estate based around several multi story terrace blocks grouped around a small lake and green squares. Throughout the elevated walkways there are planted beds in addition to the residents hanging baskets etc, planted extensively with Geranium, Pelargonium and other basket type plants, which to great credit did look superb throughout the summer. Although likely to be of limited use to any passing Lepidoptera.

4. Barbican back to Broadgate

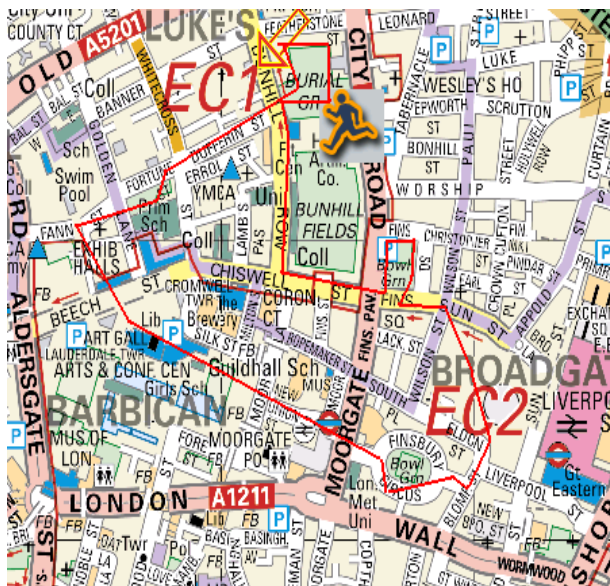
Once through the elevated walkways of the Barbican, the walk moved across Moorgate and through Finsbury Circus, many a good lunch hour has been spent sat in the well stocked gardens in the sunshine, admiring several butterflies, this part held great hopes of boosting the final count throughout the season. These gardens surround the City of London Bowls Club, until the whole area was dismembered by the

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coming of the London Crossrail project. One hopes that once the project is completed they will be returned to their former glory. Hence this part of the walk is now a fenced off building site. Once through Finsbury Circus the walk returns back to Broadgate.

Refer to figure 1 – map showing the route walked.

Figure 1 - map of the route walked - see red line of pathway.



2010 Results

Clearly in an area dominated by concrete, tarmac and glass, suitable green space and butterfly habitats are at a premium, therefore the 2010 results reflect a highly intensive urban landscape, where little if any butterfly food plants prevail. Most if not all sightings are of wandering individuals as opposed to breeding populations. Therefore the thoughts of myriads of purple hairstreaks dancing in the sunlight upon the oak trees around London Wall or Silver Washed Fritillaries nectaring upon plants in the hanging gardens of Barbican would be pure fantasy. Indeed a sighting of anything at all is often a bonus.

However all is not lost as some sightings offered hope, several sightings of Holly Blues at Fann Street upon the Snowberry offer hope of breeding, indeed one was clearly seen egg laying. The presence of Buddleia at several of the sites in addition to some of the ancient parts of London Wall was found to support nectaring individuals of Peacock and Comma, however always as singletons. Whilst the residential gardens along Fann Street and the Barbican Estate provide some opportunities for butterflies. The total numbers of butterflies seen for 2010 will not compare in the slightest to any transect conducted in an area not so totally dominated by concrete, with no skippers, browns etc to boost the counts, however a total of 124 butterflies were seen during 2010 across 8 different species, the most abundant of which were the Small Whites, then Large Whites,.

Species	Total Count
Small White	52
Large White	33
Holly Blue	14
Green-veined White	10
Peacock	4
Comma	3
Red Admiral	3
Small Tortoiseshell	2
Total = 8 species	124 butterflies

Conclusion.

Whilst the City of London offers the butterfly few opportunities to colonise and breed, the presence of wandering individuals offer hope that with sympathetic planting of several of the small green spaces, butterflies and other wildlife can still be found in such a concrete desert.

Butterfly World, Chiswell Green, Herts – Transect Report 2010, by Malcolm Hull

2010 was the first full year of butterfly recording at the outdoor area of Butterfly World. Fourteen UK butterfly species were identified, two more than in 2009, when recording only covered a four month period from June to September.

Common Blues were the star of the show with 437 records, over 60% of all the butterflies seen. This is a widespread but not particularly common species in the St Albans area and it is unusual to see more than a handful of individuals at any particular site. Counts at Butterfly World peaked at 64 for the Spring Brood on 5 June and 71 for the second brood on 22 August. Numbers of Common Blues at Butterfly World were more than ten times higher than those recorded in 2009. The success of this butterfly is directly linked to the success of its larval food-plant, which is dominant in the chalk bank and meadow areas of the site (transect sections 4 & 5).

Three new species were recorded this year – Orange Tip, Holly Blue and Marbled White. Of the twelve species recorded in 2009, only one, Small Skipper, was not recorded in 2010. So over the two years 15 UK species have been recorded from the site. This compares to a total of 27 species recorded in St Albans District most years.

Numbers of most species recorded at Butterfly World were well down on last year. In fact Meadow Brown was the only other species to show an increase in the numbers recorded in 2009 and it is likely this species is now breeding on the site. In 2009, the Butterfly World Transect recorded the highest totals for Small Tortoiseshell & Painted Lady out of all 40 transects in Herts & Middx. Painted Lady numbers declined from 264 in 2009 to only 12 in 2010. Small Tortoiseshell declined from 69 to 9. These massive declines may both be linked to a reduction in immigration, and also to the wet conditions in July and August. In 2009, many of the sightings of these two species were of adults nectaring on buddleia. The summer rain means far less butterflies are attracted to buddleia as there are many more nectar sources in the wider countryside.

In addition to the native butterflies, several day-flying moths were

recorded including Silver Y and Six- Spot Burnet. An Orange Swallowtail (*Papilo Thoas*), native to America, was recorded flying round outside the new butterfly breeding house on 26 June. Reports of Wood White and Silver-studded Blues could not be confirmed and are likely to be due to mis-identification.

As the site matures, it is likely that the number of butterfly species will increase. Grassland Skippers & Browns can be expected to colonise as the populations of grasses expand. Woodland species are less likely to colonise, but most of those which are represented in the district may become occasional visitors. The huge expanses of Kidney Vetch may succeed in attracting Small Blue, a species considered extinct in Herts, but which now appears to be re-establishing itself within the county. Continued transect monitoring will demonstrate the benefits to butterflies from this unique project.

Many thanks to Clive Farrell for permission to walk the transect and to Mandy Floyd for walking it on the weeks I couldn't manage.

Numbers of butterflies recorded on the transect index at Butterfly World

Species	2009 Total	2010 Total
Small Skipper	1	0
Brimstone	3	1
Large White	320	56
Small White	173	122
Green-veined White	29	8
Orange Tip	0	20
Common Blue	36	437
Holly Blue	0	5
Red Admiral	7	6
Painted Lady	264	12
Small Tortoiseshell	69	9
Peacock	34	13
Comma	5	2
Marbled White	0	1
Meadow Brown	5	24
Total Number of Butterflies	946	716
Total Number of Species	12	14

Waterford Heath Work-Party 10th Nov 2010, by Steve Kiln

Waterford heath is an old disused gravel pit just north of Hertford. It is made up of 2 pits separated by Vicarage Lane which goes down to Waterford. We were working on the south pit, on the eastern bank which gets the afternoon sun and is a good spot for Grizzled Skippers.

Andrew Middleton and I ran a small work-party for Butterfly Conservation (BC) earlier in 2010 in the north pit, to clear saplings; it was during this that we decided to try and run a larger work-party in late Autumn in the south pit. In order to get a decent number of volunteers we decided to ask a group called 'the Wednesday Volunteers' to help - they do various conservation work around East Herts and are reliable. The pits are owned by LaFarge, a gravel company; currently they are jointly leased but management of the site is limited. The future of the pits is uncertain but there are plans for a long lease by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife trust (HMWT) and they are currently drawing up a management plan. Within the new plan the site will be managed for the benefit of Grizzled Skippers in particular, and the HMWT warden Andy Brown provided useful equipment and helped with the task.



Grizzled Skipper at Waterford Heath
Photo © Ian Small

Grizzled Skippers like a mixed habitat - they like bare ground, they lay their eggs mainly on creeping cinquefoil, and low lying bramble, they nectar on wild strawberry and need some areas of larger scrub for shelter and to roost; a combination of all of these should be present.

The idea in this work party was to clear two areas on the eastern bank which was overgrown with scrub; this bank catches the sun from late morning to late afternoon. This work would be repeated every year on different parts of the bank in rotation to maintain a mixed habitat. LaFarge had promised to skim the site next year to produce some bare earth areas ideal for this butterfly. We also wanted to keep some scrub for the songbirds in

particular the whitethroats, lesser whitethroats, chiffchaffs and garden warblers present in summer.

At 9.30 we planned and marked out the areas to work on and the area for a bonfire. We were reluctant to have a bonfire but there was nowhere to put the masses of blackthorn and hawthorn scrub and the ash was taken away afterwards. It was a cold start to the day but we had a good turnout with 21 volunteers, 15 Wednesday volunteers and 5 from butterfly conservation (a disappointing number). After a cold start, the weather warmed up and by afternoon we were in bright sunshine - the best day of the week by far. The group made good progress with the cutting down the scrub which was then dragged to the fire. We painted the trunks of the scrub to discourage its regrowth. We also cleared many bushes which were beginning to block the path on the bank. Andy Brown brush cut some of the thin scrub near the settling ponds where the Grizzled Skippers used to be to encourage their return there. We also removed a large dangerous tree from a path on the north pit with a chain saw. The volunteers, who were like a swarm of locusts, then moved on to remove scrub from a third area. At lunchtime, a photographer from the Hertfordshire Mercury took photos of the Wednesday group who were runners up for Mercury green award this year. In mid-afternoon when everything was cleared up it was impressive what the work party had achieved, we look forward to more BC members next year.

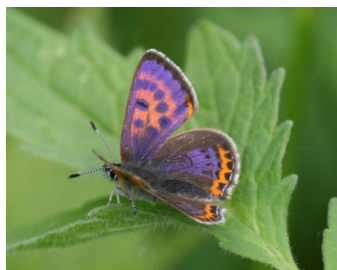
The Beautiful Violet Copper, by Clive Burrows

Having been lucky enough to have seen all but one of Europe's copper species, there was always one that had proved elusive. The Violet Copper, with a restricted range and habitat requirements make it hard to find. It flies in marshy meadows in wetland habitat. The ongoing loss of this kind of habitat through drainage, threatens the existence of this butterfly. It is a local butterfly with scattered colonies through central and northern areas of Europe. It can be found on the wing from May onwards and depending on altitude can be seen through to July.

I planned a trip using train travel hoping to find the butterfly in Luxembourg. We set out in the early days of June this year on the Eurostar through France and into Brussels. A couple more changes of train took us across Belgium and down into Luxembourg. The

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woodland valleys were beautiful as we entered Luxembourg and headed up towards a winter snow resort area. Unfortunately the rain had followed us all the way down from London, but the following forecast was for better weather so I remained hopeful. We settled into our hotel in the town and awoke to a cool, clear sunny morning. I had arranged to meet a local man, of tremendous knowledge and we set off up to a small village. We soon arrived at a protected area and moved through some light woodland into some damp meadows. On the way a small meadow was pointed out as a very good possibility for the species. It was loaded with the foodplant but very wet with standing water. I decided to have a look later once the sun moved around to it. Back in the open pastures a couple of meadows had the foodplant of *Bistort* present and I decide to look here. Initially with the air temperature still cool the butterflies were slow to move. With patience they started to take to the air. Green-veined Whites were everywhere, here loving the damp habitat. After around an hour I saw my first ever Violet Copper. With A quick flight it thankfully stopped regularly to feed from the flowers of *Bistort*, *Forget-Me-Not* and *Buttercup*. Now I could get a close look, a quite stunning butterfly. It's wings would light up with beautiful violet and orange tones as it moved angles.



Violet Coppers - male (left) and female (right)
Photos © Clive Burrows

I was to spend a couple of hours in these meadows and saw 7 different individuals. After a packed lunch in the field and a single Map butterfly I headed back to the small boggy meadow we passed in the morning. It was very hard to access but as soon as I saw a Violet Copper present I knew it was worth it. How true that was, despite getting soaked and muddy feet-wise the small meadow was alive with

the species. Some beautiful deep violet males along with the more orange marked females were active, fighting over their favoured 'perches'. I even found a mating pair settled low down on a leaf.

I returned back to the hotel with so much seen in the 5 or 6 hours in the field. Feeling lucky too have seen a butterfly so beautiful. Of all the butterflies I've seen throughout Europe for sheer beauty this butterfly will always be in my top three.

Patmore Heath Field Trip 12 September 2010, by Gavin Vicary

Five members met me on a sunny afternoon for a walk around Patmore Heath. I explained how it was owned by Albury Parish Council and was also a Site of Special Scientific Interest a designation for protected and special areas of the UK.

We had an enjoyable time and saw Small Copper, a very worn Brown Argus, Small Heath, Common Blue, Small White, Large White, Red Admiral, Comma and Speckled Wood along with Latticed Heath and Silver Y moths.

There were also lots of dragonflies still around, particularly Ruddy and Common Darters. The recent wet weather had resulted in a flush of lots of different fungi of which we were able to identify some of the more common ones. One of the people who came on the walk was a former heathland specialist from English Nature and she was very knowledgeable, showing us all lots of the rare and uncommon plants that occur at Patmore Heath. We also saw green woodpeckers and a kestrel which "posed" for pictures on a tree stump a short distance away for a very long period.

As we moved across the heath I explained how for centuries it would have been grazed and how this along with the very sandy soils had resulted in a very diverse range of plants and animals that had adapted to live under these conditions. One of the plants that was growing very abundantly was sheep sorrel the foodplant of the small copper butterfly for which the site is a stronghold in Hertfordshire.

Everyone seemed pleased to look at the two different flocks of sheep on the heath. They were doing a great job of tucking into the all the

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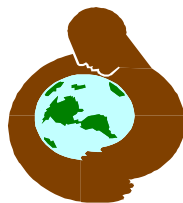
oak and birch saplings that would soon shade out many of the rarer underlying plants if they were allowed to grow unchecked. The heath was once completely open, without the tree cover that exists today. Animals stopped grazing the heath around the 1940s, and over the next 70 years scrub and trees began to invade it.

We looked at the conservation work that had been carried out during the last winter and at the ponds which were mostly dry at this time of year. We discussed their importance for wildlife and how there was debate as to whether they were ground water fed or had clay puddled into them and also looked at some of the capped wells which some people believed indicated that ponds relied mainly on the level of the water table for their water.

I think and hope that everyone had an enjoyable afternoon and found Patmore Heath an interesting and enjoyable place to visit.

WINTER CONSERVATION TASKS

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: 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 sallows 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 sallow bushes.

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

Purpose: Management of rideside sallows 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.



Copy Deadline for the Spring Newsletter will be
20 February 2011

NB it helps the editor if you can submit an electronic copy of your article (but don't worry if you can't). Send contributions by post (details on back cover) or by e-mail to ian-small@virginmedia.com

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