

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



**HERTFORDSHIRE AND
MIDDLESEX BRANCH**

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Chairman's Report, by Andrew Wood

I'm writing this on August Bank Holiday Monday having just come back from a walk in the Bramfield and Waterford area outside Hertford. The garden thermometer says it has not topped 15 degrees today, it's cloudy, windy and thoroughly Autumnal. Ivy is already in full flower and being visited by wasps, flies and the odd Red Admiral, Field Maples are turning pink and the garden fruit tree leaves are turning yellow. All thoroughly Autumnal, yet it is still Summer. This sums up 2011, with each season coming in before its allotted time. Spring and Summer seemed to come early and with that many unusually early butterfly records. Several species such as Purple Hairstreak and Large Skipper were on the wing weeks earlier than normal and there were early records on the "big three" woodland species; Purple Emperor, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary. Marbled White and Brown Argus popped up in lots of new places and the early Spring seemed to suit them.

However a cause for concern that was highlighted in our 2010 report - the Peacock - has been seen in only in small numbers as an adult and very few larval nests were reported. Very few migrant butterflies have reached our area, only the Red Admiral has been around in any numbers and we now have to wonder if some of them are the offspring of over wintering adults.

This year has seen remarkably few hot sultry nights and this overnight coolness means that since the Spring moth numbers have been very low, at least in my garden. Notably low or absent have been many of the hawk-moths. The beautiful pink Elephant hawk-moth has been particularly rare in my garden. Yet the Horse Chestnut leaf miner which only appeared in England in 2003 has proved it can survive hard winters and has yet again caused early leaf browning and fall in Horse Chestnuts across our area.

Of course, as more records come in, the picture may change and all will be revealed in the 2011 Report which will go into production towards the end of the year. I received a number of complementary comments about the new format and I hope we will be able to continue to enhance it for the next edition.

It is also gratifying to record that our Branch membership is now within a few of 700, a record number. However that does mean more work for your committee. We have been able to run, often with other organisations, many field meetings this year, maintain our web pages and offer advice to many enquirers. However one area where more help would be very welcome is in promotional activities. Your Branch is invited to attend events across our area but we have had to turn down many invitations. It would be great if there were members who could get involved in this or get involved in many of the areas that the Branch is involved in. Please contact me or our Branch organiser Liz Goodyear (details on the back page) if you are interested in helping your Branch.

Herts & Essex High School Sell Butterfly Cakes

Earlier this year, Year 9 (13-14 year olds) of the Bishop's Stortford based Herts & Essex High School ran an Eco-fete, with the aim of raising money for charities whilst enjoying themselves and also learning about Enterprise.

Louisa Marriot, Madeleine Joel, Natasha Herring, Chloe Randall, Elizabeth Massie & Amandeep Degun got together and decided to run a stall selling cakes and giant cupcakes with a butterfly theme, with the money raised going to Butterfly Conservation.

They started planning a few weeks beforehand to ensure that the day and the stall were successful and BC sent posters and banners to decorate the stall with a butterfly theme.

At break-time the first customers arrived and the giant cupcakes were so unusual that they raised around £30 in the first 10 minutes and all remaining cakes were sold over lunchtime, raising a total of £204.50.

Afterwards, Tony Moverley, Branch Treasurer of the Cambs & Essex Branch, went along to the school to talk to the children about butterflies and to receive a cheque for almost £200. Many thanks indeed to the Herts & Essex High School for their generous donation which has been split equally between the Cambs & Essex Branch and our Branch.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Aldbury Nowers for Spring Butterflies. Saturday May 27th 2011, by David Chandler

It was a warm and sunny afternoon with blue skies and white cumulus clouds but it was also windy so some found butterfly photography tricky. Eighteen members and guests attended and amongst the group were several new faces whom were new to the hobby and were excited at the thought of seeing some butterflies for the first time.

Beginning in the lower field below the reserve proper, we saw a Brown Argus, Common Blue, Small Heath, Brimstone, Orange Tip and Green Veined Whites. We walked along the boundary path through the light scrub, past the small area of impoverished chalk down loved by summer-season Chalkhill Blues to the far west corner of the reserve where we were rewarded with sightings of Holly Blue, Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper and Small Copper all nectaring on the abundance of yellow & blue flowers in this sheltered sunny spot. We also spotted a common lizard in the short sward which was a pleasurable rare reptile sighting.



Small Copper
Photo © Ian Small

We then moved back along the main ride in the reserve proper towards the south-end lower field. En route we caught sight of Large and Small Whites. Having seen and photographed all four of our main target species already, the group decided not to go into the lower meadow and so we continued the walk to the upper slopes where some of the chalk downs have been scarified for Skipper and blue butterfly food-plants.

As we walked up through the wooded slopes we were rewarded by spotting a single Speckled Wood dancing in the dappled sunlight. Once we reached the upper meadow where Dingy and Grizzled

Skippers are found, we walked around the top of the hill but mysteriously found them there only in small numbers along with the odd Small Heath.

We decided to return back towards the cars by the public footpath that follows the base of the scarp slope and what a delightful surprise awaited us at the foot of the slope. To my plain pleasure the previously scarified slope had been colonised by down-land specialist plants like horse-shoe vetch, trefoil, creeping cinquefoil, forget-me not, sorrel, rock-rose and wild strawberry. However, even more satisfying, the butterflies had found the newly created habitat and were there in good numbers.

It was a pure delight to see that the habitat work on the site had worked so well and that the butterflies had followed the new green corridor that we had created for them.

My thanks to Malcolm Hull for his help with guiding the group and his knowledge of the site's ecology as we walked around the site. And my congratulations to all those who came along to witness such an enlightening and satisfying ecological discovery.

Ruislip Woods, Wednesday 29th June 2011, by Steve Pash

Twenty-one people assembled at 10.30 in Ruislip Lido car park on a lovely sunny morning. We headed around the southern edge of the Lido into Park Wood and walked the length of the Pylon ride, across Grubb Ground and on to the St Vincent's end of Park Wood. It was a long walk but we were rewarded by the sight of 2 male Purple Emperors. One settled for 10 minutes at the top of an oak in a small clearing, giving everyone the opportunity to see it through my telescope. We also saw several White Admiral, Comma, Purple Hairstreak, Large and Small Skipper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Large, Small and Green-veined White, Holly Blue, male Brimstone (seen by one of the group) and Five-spot Burnet moth. We also saw a Hobby, Southern Hawker Dragonfly and what we took to be a Violet Ground Beetle. We arrived back the cars at about 13.45. Most people headed off but Ched George and I explored the fields next to the Lido car park. Ched counted 30+ Marbled White and similar numbers of Ringlet. plus Large and Small Skipper, Meadow Brown

and Purple Hairstreak. Then to Poors Field where I saw my first Gatekeeper of the year. Ched left and I went to check on the nesting Common Terns on the Lido. As I was watching the terns, I noticed a Humming-bird Hawk moth feeding on Lucerne.

Bentley Wood, Sunday 5th June 2011, by Ian Small

Over a dozen members attended this 'away' trip to the renowned Bentley Woods complex on the Hampshire / Wiltshire border for a trip organised by Malcolm Hull, but led by Dan Hoare. Dan, one of Butterfly Conservation's Regional Officers, had been leading the flagship South East Woodlands Project which spanned as far as these woods, and the purpose of the trip was to see woodland butterfly conservation in action.

It is fortunate that we attended with that intention, for the rain gods chose the day to have a party. Although we started off in merely overcast and threatening conditions, these soon deteriorated, with the result that very few Lepidoptera were seen. Of particular note was a remarkably early White Admiral and an Argent and Sable moth. The latter is very rare, but is benefitting from the management being undertaken in the woods to safeguard the breeding habitat of the Spring Fritillaries, the Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered, both of which have strongholds there.

We all learned a lot from Dan, who presented each of the attendees with copies of the BC publication on Woodland Management for Butterflies and Moths. Sadly, the rain proved relentless and we agreed to call it a day by mid afternoon.

Those who visited the site the previous afternoon were rewarded by seeing some Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, a Marsh Fritillary and also a Grizzled Skipper.

Horsenden Hill, Saturday 25th June, by Andy Culshaw

Considering the weather, this trip went well. We had about a dozen participants and although we didn't see the sun once, we did manage about 4 White-letter Hairstreaks including one, albeit slightly tatty individual, that I was able to scope and everyone got a good look at. We had to put quite a lot of time in for the Hairstreaks so there wasn't much

opportunity for looking around. Nevertheless we did manage a few lepidoptera in one of the meadows, including a some Marbled Whites and a relatively early first Essex Skipper of the year, which we potted and were able to show to most of the group. Despite the torrential downpour overnight, we did get quite a few moths to the trap to show off before the walk.

Benfleet Downs, Thursday June 30th 2011, by David Chandler

Blue sky with white clouds bubbling up over the Thames estuary met the assembled group as the hour for the walk came. Eleven people (Den & Ian Black, John Lepley, Paul Hudson, Tony Moverley, Nick Akens, Peter Purze, Rodney Cole, Dave Matthews, Mr Holland & I) turned up for the field trip; a good turnout for midweek event.

We cautiously descended the slippery muddy path from the St Mary's Road entrance to the park and we immediately saw two Purple Hairstreak on a small Oak affording a good view of their undersides to all the party. Continuing down, at the bottom of a flight of steps we turned right into a small ride with sucker Elms on each side where we immediately found White Letter Hairstreaks flitting around the tops of the branches. It was good to see the target species so soon after the start of the walk

The sunlight had warmed up the ride sufficiently for grassland loving butterflies like the Meadow Brown and Ringlet to appear. We then saw Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Peacock, Holly Blue, Small Skipper and Commas. Further along the ride we found White Letter Hairstreaks lower down nectaring on Bramble blossom. Everyone was enjoying the spectacle and good photographing opportunities presented themselves to the group because the White Letter Hairstreaks were docile.

Then, all of a sudden, there was a shout, "come and look at this, it's a Silver Washed Fritillary". At first we couldn't believe our ears as this butterfly has not been recorded on the Benfleet Downs transect and it's sighting would be a "first" if confirmed. Fortunately, the big orange butterfly settled on a large bramble patch and we were able to confirm the sighting to be a superb male Silver Washed Fritillary.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

After everyone had a good look at the Silver-washed Fritillary, still excited, we moved on. We all then had an interesting impromptu debate about a “Gatekeeper” that turned out to be a small and oddly marked Meadow Brown - after quite a long period of deliberation.



Silver-washed Fritillary
Photo © John Lepley

At the end of the narrow ride the path opens up into a flower meadow and here we found Large Skipper, Essex Skipper and Marbled White. We then walked on along a ride locals call Adder Alley, for obvious reasons, and looked at large Oak tree where Purple Hairstreaks are found and saw three there. We then diverted off the transect route and passing through a section of downs grassland, arrived at the viewpoint where we could see all the way to Leigh on Sea and over to North Kent.

Turning back, retracing our steps to the transect route it became overcast and fewer butterflies were seen. We then walked parallel to our outward route and passed along a long straight ride where I have found the Wall in August in its dryer sunny sheltered places. At the far end of the ride we rejoined the narrow ride leading back towards the steps and our cars. Finishing with a flourish, we found the two Purple Hairstreaks on the small Oak again and by the top of the steps, a Red Admiral.

Sixteen different species of butterfly were seen on the walk plus a Humming Bird Hawk moth and a slow worm. All in all, quite a good total for the day.

Bricket Wood Common, near Watford, Sunday 10 July 2011, by Malcolm Hull

Silver-washed Fritillary, Purple Emperor and White Admiral provided the highlights of our annual branch trip at this site. Silver-washed Fritillary males patrol up and down along the main ride, making an accurate count difficult, but I reckon we saw at least 15 individuals, including some females. Everyone got a good view of this species, which had its best year here since it re-appeared at the site in 2004. White Admirals were not so numerous with around 10

sightings, again mostly along the ride where they like to nectar on Brambles and pose for photographs. This species had an average year, in recent years numbers have been more stable than in the past.

The Purple Emperors were less obliging and only visible flying high up above the canopy in Mutchetts Wood. We had only three brief glimpses, quite possibly the same individual male, between 1 – 1.45pm. Great news to record this species from the site for the second year running. It was recorded on at least 5 other occasions during the flight season, both at this master tree area and also down low along the ride, where both Clive Burrows and Brian Knight managed to photograph one. This was particularly encouraging as our winter work party had concentrated on habitat improvement works in the ride.

Apart from these three woodland superstars, we were treated to a wide range of more common species. Marbled White and Ringlet both had very good years and were present in large numbers. Purple Hairstreak, Red Admiral, Large, Small and Essex Skippers, Peacocks, Brimstone, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and the three Whites made up the numbers. Moths included Common Carpet and a Broad Bordered Yellow Underwing.

New interpretation boards erected by the St Stephens Parish Council and the Countryside Management Service explain the importance of the habitat and how it is being restored, with particular emphasis on butterflies. There have been significant habitat improvements in recent years and the current regime of management in the rides and clearings has encouraged a long term improvement in butterfly numbers.

Heartwood Forest, near Sandridge, Sunday 31 July, by Malcolm Hull

This was our first field trip in a new location, but attracted around 40 people, thanks to publicity from the site owner, the Woodland Trust. The habitat is unusual, as the Trust are transforming an area of arable fields and small woods into a major 1,000 acre forest. The project is still at a very early stage, but already thousands of young trees have been planted in the last two years. No unusual woodland

butterflies have yet been recorded, but the site clearly has potential to attract more species. Currently the woodland edges provide the best habitat areas, particularly the south side of Langley Wood and the area west of Pudler's / Well Wood, where there is some chalk grassland with light rabbit grazing. A single Small Heath was recorded in this area. Other butterflies spotted on the day included Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral, Purple Hairstreak, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Small Skipper, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Large, Small and Green-veined White. Moths included Vapourer, Six-spot Burnet and Blood vein. The planting regime includes plenty of open space within the new forest and we were particularly impressed by the large open meadow, covered with Bird-foots Trefoil. The site promises to provide a great habitat for a wider range of butterflies in years to come and Andrew Steele is walking a regular weekly transect to help us record how the site develops.

Butterfly World, Chiswell Green, Sunday 7 August, by Malcolm Hull.

Despite unpromising weather forecasts, 18 hopefuls turned up for our second field trip to this site. It is now three years since it opened and the meadows and gardens are maturing into a unique habitat combining nectar rich gardens with meadows full of chalk grassland plant species. To date 23 native species have been recorded on the site.

We were rewarded with several prolonged sunny spells and some unusual butterfly sightings. Top of the list was **second brood Small Blue**, seen in the large area of Kidney Vetch on the chalk mound antennae. The first individual was nectaring on Bird's Foot Trefoil and stayed still long enough for us all to get a good look and many photos. One, possibly two other individuals were seen by others along the antennae. Another unusual sighting was the Scarlet Peacock, a South American species, escaped from the nearby tropical greenhouse. Numbers of Common Blue (37) were well up on the previous week, though 6-spot Burnet moths (70) were down. Despite the hundreds of flowering buddleias, we saw only a single Red Admiral nectaring on them – this certainly was not a good year to see butterflies on buddleia. Small Tortoiseshell, Essex Skipper, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Small White made up the numbers.

The Small Blue sighting is highly unusual in St Albans District and the first confirmed since Colin Everett's sighting in Verulam Park in 2004. The habitat quality at Butterfly World is significantly better than either Aldbury Nowers or Tower Hamlets Cemetery, the two other locations in our branch area where Small Blue has been reported this year. The site includes large areas of both Kidney Vetch, the larval food plant and Birds-foot Trefoil, a favourite nectar source and would seem to offer the best long-term prospects of success for this endangered species in our area.

2011 Records Needed (and any you have for older years)

In order to get records ready for our database and the national databases we need to get in all casual and transect records by November 9th. Records in any format are welcome, but what saves us most work and avoids rekeying and therefore the possibility of errors creeping in. is to receive electronic records. The ideal format is a spreadsheet with the following columns.

Andrew Wood	TL353152	Lower Bourne Gardens, Ware	07/03/2011	Comma	1
	TL353152	Lower Bourne Gardens, Ware	07/03/2011	Small tortoiseshell	1
	TL345107	Balls Wood	02/03/2011	Brimstone	1

If you are using Transect Walker to input your transect records and emailing to BC, please remember to cc me in so that we can add the information to our database. **Please send your records to Andrew Wood (details on the back cover.)**

Second-Brood Dingy Skipper

Malcolm Hull reports that on Friday 5 August in Northfield Road, Tring, he had the rather interesting observation of a second-brood Dingy Skipper, just inside the Herts border between Aldbury Nowers and Pitstone. In fact, he saw at least three if not four individuals at the site, one of which he managed to photograph. As far as he is aware, there is

no previous published record of the second brood of this species in Herts.

Unusual White Admiral behaviour, by Paul Why

For a few days around 1st July I'd been on a Purple Emperor hunt at Broxbourne Wood, and at around 1pm on that day I was shown a White Admiral by Alan Storey, a visitor from Lancashire who'd found it.

From a distance it seemed that the butterfly was trapped in a blackberry bush, struggling to escape the clutches of the wasp, but on closer inspection it was clear that the wasp was dead (presumably having been caught by the spider), and the butterfly was feeding on it. There weren't many threads of web left, and these two were swinging and twisting about in mid air

It was a warm, dry day, and I would guess from the tatty state of the web that the wasp had been trapped a day or two earlier, yet the butterfly must have been finding some kind of moisture in its corpse, as it was busy feeding for some time

I took numerous photos over a period of ten minutes or so, then I resumed my Emperor hunt. When I passed the bush on my way back later the butterfly had gone, but the wasp was still dangling there. Thomas and Lewington say that White Admirals take "the dissolved salts in dung in the early hours of the morning". The above was observed just after 1pm.

My sightings of White Admirals are quite few and far between, so I'm not at all sure whether this is frequent behaviour. Thoughts from those more familiar with this species would be welcome.

Andrew Wood adds, In 16 years of observing White Admirals at Balls Wood I have never seen this behaviour, though I have



seen them grounded and taking salts on muddy ground and moisture from dew covered grass.

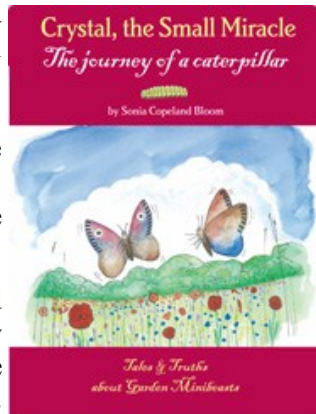
BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION PRESS RELEASES

Bloom Backs Butterflies

Hollywood star Orlando Bloom has backed efforts to save the UK's threatened butterflies by sponsoring a book aimed at helping children engage with the natural world.

Bloom, 34, who has recently become a father, has sponsored *Crystal, the Small Miracle*, a children's book about butterflies. The Lord of the Rings actor, who is currently in New Zealand filming *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, said: "Butterflies are powerful symbols of the beauty and vulnerability of nature."

Crystal, the Small Miracle, mixes fact and fiction to chart the life story of a butterfly from tiny egg to fully formed butterfly. The "faction" book was written by Orlando's mother, the celebrated author Sonia Copeland Bloom and is published by Butterfly Conservation.



Orlando, who is married to Australian model Miranda Kerr, added: "I am delighted to back Butterfly Conservation and their efforts to ensure that these wonderful insects are conserved for future generations to enjoy.

"The story of *Crystal, the Small Miracle*, written by my mother for children everywhere, reflects her own love of butterflies as well as her passion for children to be educated about the insect world in general." Sonia Copeland Bloom, from Canterbury, Kent, explained: "The transformation of caterpillar to chrysalis and then butterfly is one of nature's greatest miracles. "After witnessing it myself, I wanted children everywhere to share this incredible experience.

“Too many adults do not appreciate insects and are unnecessarily scared of them and their children can be affected by this. Young children usually love little creatures - until they are put off them.”

Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation added: “Sadly butterflies and moths are declining rapidly in the UK and around the world. They need our help like never before. “I hope that Sonia’s appealing story can stimulate a love of butterflies that will inspire young people to care about their future. The world needs butterflies and butterflies need us to take care of that world.”

Sonia Bloom is also the author of the children’s book series Tales and Truths about Garden Minibeasts which aims to spark a new interest in insects and garden creatures. More information is available on www.soniacopelandbloom.com

Crystal, the Small Miracle, is available from www.butterfly-conservation.org at a price of £5.00 or £5.99 including postage and packaging.

It is also available from the Natural History Museum’s Book Shop, from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History’s Gift Shop, from Waterstones or online from www.amazon.co.uk

Cold Summer Hits UK **Butterflies**

16th - 31st July

UK butterflies have suffered following the coldest summer for 18 years, the world’s biggest butterfly count has revealed. More than 34,000 people took part in the Big Butterfly Count 2011, seeing 322,000 butterflies and day-flying moths. But the survey, by wildlife charity Butterfly Conservation, found that the average number of individual butterflies seen per count was down by 11% compared with last year’s figures.

The Common Blue butterfly was the biggest loser with numbers down by 61%. The survey also revealed something of a North/South divide for one species with three times as many Small Tortoiseshell recorded in Scotland than in England.

Hopes had been high for a bumper butterfly summer after parts of the UK basked in a record-breaking warm, dry spring. But the balmy conditions gave way to chilly temperatures and prolonged spells of rain as the summer of 2011 became the coldest since 1993. Butterfly activity is impaired by low temperatures and heavy rain so they are unable to fly, feed, find mates or lay eggs during bad weather.

Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation Surveys Manager said: “The fantastic response of the UK public to Big Butterfly Count 2011 has given us a detailed snapshot of how butterflies fared this summer. Twice as many counts were carried out this year as in 2010. “Unfortunately, the results show that it was a poor summer for butterflies with many species showing declines compared to last year. “The dismal summer weather, the coldest for 18 years, is undoubtedly to blame, although many butterflies have suffered long-term declines as a result of destruction of their habitats by human activities. “In bad summers, butterflies need all the help they can get from people to maintain their breeding areas.”

Big Butterfly Count 2011 - Top 10 UK Species Ranking

- 1 Gatekeeper (52,368 seen)
- 2 Small White (47,944)
- 3 Large White (42,822)
- 4 Meadow Brown (32,183)
- 5 Red Admiral (25,400)
- 6 Peacock (23,212)
- 7 Speckled Wood (16,341)
- 8 Green-veined White (12,893)
- 9 Small Tortoiseshell (12,298)
- 10 Six-spot Burnet moth (10,932)

Butterflies are key indicators of the health of our environment so the Count results could help provide vital information to help secure their long-term survival. The Gatekeeper was the most commonly seen species this year, up three places from 2010, but numbers of butterfly were also down by 12%. The Count also revealed that numbers of Small Tortoiseshell stabilised this year after a recent severe decline. The perennial garden favourite – the Red Admiral also enjoyed a fantastic summer with numbers up by 98%

For the second year running, the Big Butterfly Count took place in partnership with Marks & Spencer as part of its Plan A commitment towards sustainable farming. Richard Gillies, M&S Director of Plan A said: “We’d like to thank all of our customers and employees for taking part in this year’s Big Butterfly Count, it’s great to see that twice as many people took part compared to last year. “We hope the results and the Count will help to raise awareness about how important butterflies are to the environment.”

Spring in Provence, by Ian Small

This year we decided to take a Spring break and chose to join a Naturetrek trip to Provence. This was a general natural history trip, covering plants and birds in addition to butterflies. The guides and locations were excellent and gave us the opportunity to see a wide range of different habitats and environments. We went at the end of April (joining the two holiday weekends, and missing the Royal Wedding), and were based for most of the week in the small town of Sault, but travelled south to St Gilles for the final two nights to allow us to spend time birdwatching in the Camargue. The butterfly list for the week was not extensive, only 23 species, but that isn’t at all bad for April, and included three species that were new to me.

The first of these highlights was the Provence Orange Tip (or so it is called in the Lefranchis book on Butterflies of Europe, while the Collins Guide (Tolman & Lewington) classifies it as a subspecies of the Morocco Orange Tip. While this delightful insect is clearly related to our own species, the ground colour of the male is a beautiful pale yellow, rather than white. The underside green markings are fewer, showing much more of the ground colour than the UK species. Males patrol in search of females in exactly the same way.



The second ‘tick’ was most unexpected as I was not previously aware that it

existed! I had naïvely thought that all Ringlets were Summer and Autumn species. It was late afternoon and we were visiting a site known for the dwarf *Narcissus requienii* when we set up a Spring Ringlet. This is a rather rare and local species, and we were very lucky to see it, as it was not previously known from that location. It is one of the larger Ringlets, and is heavily marked on the upperside of both fore- and hindwings. The ring of dark spots each has a white centre and all are set against a pale to orange background border. The underside is unusual in having pale veining against a fairly uniform brown background. Our specimen chose to fly to roost under a broken anthill, among moss, roots and dead grasses, and almost disappeared against this background.

The final new species for me was nevertheless very familiar-looking – it was the Provence Chalkhill Blue. This is superficially very similar to our own species (there are slight differences in ground colour), but the major difference of course is that this one flies in Spring. It somehow seemed rather odd for us to find this on May Day.

There were of course other delightful experiences, beyond just the ‘new’ species. Perhaps the most abundant butterfly was the Scarce Swallowtail, and we came across a dozen of them mud-puddling together after lunch one day. Other species encountered included Mallow Skippers, Baton Blues, Glanville and Marsh Fritillaries, Duke of Burgundy and Sooty Copper, plus a Spanish Festoon which the leader managed to net as it zoomed past. Sadly it was too frisky to allow close inspection and we let it continue its journey. Another walk turned up a mature caterpillar of the Emperor Moth, a large and striking green colour with rows of yellow and black tufts.

To imply that butterflies were the only highlights of the week would be misleading. Over 120 bird species were seen or heard, and several hundred plant species uncommon or absent from the UK. Bird highlights included a pair of Egyptian Vultures, a long-tailed tit building its nest with spider’s webs, and the most wonderful selection of herons, egrets and flamingos down in the Camargue. All in all, a great week which we would heartily recommend.

Natural England Grant Cuts - Call for Help from BC Head Office

The following letter was written by our Chief Executive, Martin Warren, to all Branch Chairmen. Your Branch Committee are responding, but you may wish to as well.

I am writing to ask for the help of you and your Branch in fighting the severe cuts we have had to our Species Recovery Grant from Natural England. I am sorry that we feel we have to take this action, but having discussed it with senior staff and key Council members, we feel that it is vital to make our voice heard.

For the last 16 years we have received a grant from NE (and its predecessor) for work to save our most threatened butterflies and moths. Under these grants we wrote our first Species Action Plans and Regional Action Plans which have guided BC's conservation effort for the last 15 years, in harmony with government priorities of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). We have also employed some wonderful expert staff who have conducted vital research on species, given advice to landowners of hundreds of key sites, written species accounts and management guidelines, developed landscape projects, raised millions of pounds for conservation, and supported our volunteer network in a myriad of ways.

For reasons that have not been properly explained, NE have decided this year to greatly reduce their grant to BC from £300K pa to £40K, the latter just to work on a small number of very rare moths. This amounts to a cut of 85% to our core work, which is part of the 30% cuts that NE are facing over the next 3 years, they made around 400 people redundant this April and another 400 will have to go next year. However, they have made disproportionate cuts to our grant and a big cut of at least 50% to their Species Recovery Programme.

At least one of the factors driving this is the new England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS) which puts much less emphasis on species conservation and more on habitat conservation and landscape/ecosystem. We have pointed out in the strongest possible terms that such initiatives will not work for threatened species without specialist input of our staff and volunteers, but so far this has fallen on deaf ears. The cuts have put BC in a very difficult position and we had to make 2 conservation staff redundant earlier this year. We are using our

financial reserves to retain as many staff as possible this year, but may have to make more redundancies next year if we cannot replace this £250K of lost income. Although membership has increased well this year, to around 17,000, much of this has been for half price offers and does not bring us in a great net income in the short term.

We are working with other species NGOs to raise our concerns at Ministerial level (eg RSPB, Plantlife, Buglife, Amphibeian and Reptile Conservation) but feel we need to express the same concern at local, grassroots level. The new EBS says that it wants to work in partnership with NGOs, and increase the engagement of local groups (the Big Society), but the cuts seem to be sending out a completely opposite message.

Hence we are asking you to write to your local MPs expressing your concern about these cuts and how they will risk further decline of threatened species and disempower local volunteers such as yourselves. *(A template letter that you can use and adapt as you wish is available from the newsletter editor.)*

We are still having talks with NE and have some strong support from senior conservationists who have written on our behalf. However, your action will be extremely helpful to underline the strength of feeling from our volunteer community.



**Copy Deadline for the Winter Newsletter will be
30 November 2011**

NB it helps the editor if you can submit an electronic copy of your article (but don't worry if you can't).

Files can be sent by e-mail to
ian-small@virginmedia.com

or send an article by post - address on back cover

Don't be shy - tell us about any interesting sightings you have had, or new places you have visited, or even whether you saw any Small Tortoiseshells or Peacocks on your buddleia this year - I didn't!.

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