



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

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Painted Ladies Galore By Malcolm Newland

After the Camberwell Beauties and Monarchs hit the headlines in 1995 it was the turn of the Painted Lady to provide a welcome talking point this year with a huge invasion in early June. I have seen the caterpillars feeding on thistles and a fresh butterfly in the garden on June 20th so numbers could remain pleasingly high until the first frosts. Marbled Whites too appear to be having a very good season but I have yet to see a single Large White!

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Members have enjoyed some very productive field trips although the flight times of some species were affected by the late arrival of the summer weather.

Following the field trip to Kensal Green Cemetery we have been pleased to donate a number of plants to further enhance the delightful butterfly garden and I enjoyed helping Tim Freed to put them in.

Our branch has attended four "shows" with displays, sales goods and plants. This has given us an opportunity to talk to many members of the public and explain what we, as a Society, are doing in an effort to halt the decline of many of our species. A special thanks to all those who helped to run the stands.

I know that several members have caught the incurable "moth trappers bug" which will add to our rather sparse knowledge of the status of some of our local moths. My own tally now stands at 123 positively identified moths including the green form of the Burnished Brass, a particularly lovely creature. Also the arrival of an Essex Skipper on July 23rd which was feeding on *Lychnis Coronaria* in the garden has taken my butterfly list to 24.

A colony of Small Blues has been reported in the Roughdown Common area of Hemel Hempstead, good news indeed as the butterfly is extremely scarce in Hertfordshire.

As the butterfly watching season draws to a close I will make my annual plea to those members who are able to help with the very worthwhile task of winter conservation work. In the absence of our own reserve at the present time please join in with our friends in the local Wildlife Trusts on a site near you (see page 14). Failing this give some thought to turning part or better still all of your garden into your very own mini wildlife reserve. Believe me the results can be dramatic. There are many good books on the subject but I can recommend "How to make a Wildlife Garden" by Chris Baines.

A New Nature Reserve

By Michael Healy

Owing to John Murray's absence on a professional visit to Mount Etna, I had the privilege of representing the Branch at a ceremony on June 17th to mark the designation of the Broxbourne Woods complex as a National Nature Reserve.

The woods, covering no less than 740 acres, are managed in a collaboration between Hertfordshire County Council and The Woodland Trust. A glass of champagne and an al fresco lunch were followed by speeches from representatives of the three bodies concerned and then a short guided walk visiting part of Wormley Wood, including an area that had recently been coppiced.

Broxbourne Woods will be well known to our East Hertfordshire members, notably for their White Admirals (a report on a Branch visit on July 14th will appear in the next Newsletter -- the warm weather in mid-June promises well for this butterfly). There has also been a sighting of a Purple Emperor from this region in the last couple of years. I recommend a visit to members from elsewhere in Hertfordshire and Middlesex who do not know this lovely part of our Branch area. There are car parks at TL324071, 328069, 327065 and 333065. I have to confess, though, that on a fine warm sunny day I saw not a single butterfly!

Butterflies and Moths on E-Mail

Members with access to e-mail may be interested in an American bulletin board which has several subscribers from the UK and other Western European countries. Its address is LEPS-L@YALEVM.CIS.YALE.EDU. To subscribe to it, send an e-mail message not to this address but to LISTSERV@YALEVM.CIS.YALE.EDU with the test SUBSCRIBE LEPS-L your name.

West London Butterflies

by Tim Freed

On 15th July this year I had the unexpected delight of observing a male White-letter Hairstreak in the woodland area of Holland Park. I had been watching freshly emerged hutchinsoni Commas when at about 10.30 am a darkish butterfly caught my eye as it flitted about before coming to rest on a leaf of great bindweed about 50 cm away from me. To my complete amazement it proceeded to bask laterally revealing its identity.

Some wych elm and abundant suckering English elm were growing in the immediate vicinity. It would seem likely that this species has persisted here albeit undetected for many years. Enquiries reveal that there have been no known introductions; the nearest recorded colonies have been in Battersea Park and Brompton cemetery (now believed to be lost). The Purple Hairstreak is also present in the park and I observed good numbers of them flying around the tops of tall ash and oak growing in the woodland area this July.

There has also been evidence of Painted Lady breeding in the park this year, with freshly emerged adults appearing at the end of July. This brings the total number of butterfly species recorded in Holland Park to 18, a very healthy figure for such a central site. No doubt the recent improvements to habitat diversity such as leaving thistles, nettles and other plants growing along the woodland avenues as well as the creation of specific wildlife areas and ponds have all helped this to come about. The occurrence of Essex, Small and Large Skippers which I have also recorded this year is most probably a direct response to these changes.

The sighting of a Ringlet in the Gardens of the Royal Masonic Hospital in Hammersmith is equally exciting. This information was passed on to me by Neil Anderson who spotted the specimen

nectaring on cosmos on 22nd July. Only the day before, he had seen a male Gatekeeper, yet another 'first' for the same site! Neil is mystified as to how the Ringlet came to be there - a very unusual sighting for central London. A small Conservation Area exists in neighbouring Ravenscourt Park where grass is allowed to grow tall and additional wildflower seeds have been sown here to attract butterflies and other invertebrates. It is possible that the Ringlet, like its relative the Gatekeeper has begun to advance into this part of central London along the green corridors linking it with known breeding sites to the south and west.

The Gatekeeper has shown up again this year in Kensal Green Cemetery, where I first observed it in July 1994. During the same week, Neil Anderson also recorded three specimens from neighbouring Wormwood Scrubs. Scores of Painted Ladies arrived in the cemetery at the beginning of June and these produced adults at the end of July. Spear thistle was the only recorded larval foodplant here, though I observed creeping thistle being used for ovipositing at Horsenden Hill.

Butterfly Line

0891 884505

Regular updates. Latest News.

Profits are used for the conservation of butterflies and their habitats.
Calls cost 49p/minute peak rate and 39p/minute at other times.

Shrubs for Butterflies

By Malcolm Newland

The following have all proved their worth in my garden over the years. *Viburnum fragrans* is still flowering when the over-wintering butterflies emerge from hibernation and seems particularly attractive to Commas and Small Tortoiseshell. *Daphne Mezereum* has highly perfumed flowers and I have seen it visited by Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshell in April. During May the Lilacs with single flowers often attract passing butterflies. In June my large *Cotoneasters* *Cornubia* (red berries) and *Rothschildianus* (yellow berries) produce masses of white blossom which are often attended by early Red Admirals. The dwarf Munstead Blue variety of Lavender not only pulls in the Whites but I have also seen Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Skippers and Meadow Brown on it.

Privet if allowed to flower is a butterfly magnet and may also lure the Privet Hawk Moth. Bramble flowers too are superb attractants and I have got round the problem of prickly stems by growing the cultivar "Merton Thornless". A Silver Washed Fritillary was photographed on it in 1994 and Holly Blue seems very fond of it. Holly Blue is also partial to the flowers of *Caryopteris* Heavenly Blue. Hardy Fuchsias such as "Tom Thumb" and "Mrs Popple" may be used as a larval food plant by the Elephant Hawk Moth. All the Hebes are worth growing but I have found "Great Orme" and "Autumn Glory" the most successful and of course the *Viburnum Fragrans* mentioned earlier. If you have the space grow some berry bearing Holly, the variety J.C. Van Tol is self-fertile, and Ivy for the Holly Blues or how about a Purging or Alder Buckthorn for Brimstone.

Flower Pots Needed

If any members have any small plant pots spare please bring them along to events as the branch can use them.

Moths

by Rob Souter

For this issue I have gleaned information from "The Larger Moths of the London Area" by Colin Plant (1993) on rare and notable macro-moths in the branch region, and on species whose identification can cause confusion.

Rare and Notable Moths in Herts and Middlesex

This is a list of the moths in the London area which have Red Data Book Status (RDB). They are listed under the categories assigned by Plant (1993) which indicate their status in the London area. The RDB status of the moth follows its name in parentheses.

NATIONAL RED DATA BOOK CODES (RDB)

- R1 Species in danger of extinction. Known from less than five 10-km squares in Britain.
R2 Species which are vulnerable and likely to make it to category R1 if causal factors continue to operate.
R3 Nationally rare species, present in 15 or less 10-km squares in Britain.
Na Nationally notable species, known from 30 or less 10-km squares in Britain.
Nb Nationally notable species, known from 100 or less 10-km squares in Britain.

CATEGORISATION (after Plant 1993).

Category 1B: Species widespread and common across the entire London area except the truly urban areas of east London and Middlesex where there are few or no gardens.

Currant Clearwing (Nb)

Category 2B: Species widespread but rather locally distributed in the rural fringes and parts of suburbia with large gardens.

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Barred Hook-tip (Nb)

Category 2D: Species distributed on chalk.

Brown Scallop (Nb)

Category 2E: Species only locally distributed but which can be quite common where they occur.

Least Carpet (Nb)

Buttoned Snout (Nb) ('expanding')

Category 3: Very local residents. recorded in more than 10 but less than 30 tetrads in London area.

Red-belted Clearwing (Na) ('undeserved')

Yarrow Pug (Na)

Oak-tree Pug (Nb)

Great Oak Beauty (Nb)

Brindled White-spot (Nb)

Lead-coloured Drab (Nb)

Poplar Lutestring (Nb)

Reddish Light Arches (Nb) ('extinct north of the Thames')

Shaded Pug (Nb)

Waved Black (Nb)

Wormwood (Nb)

Category 4: Extremely local residents. These are the real rarities on the London list. None is recorded in more than ten tetrads since 1980, and few are likely to move upto category 3 in the foreseeable future. The presence of one of these species as a resident on a site would warrant appropriate steps being taken towards the conservation of their particular requirements.

Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth (Na) ('Broxbourne Woods only')

Heart Moth (Na) ('Surrey only')

Hornet Moth (Na) ('Hampstead Heath only 'current' record')

Light Orange Underwing (Na) ('Broxbourne Woods only')

Lunar Hornet Moth (Na)

Orange-tailed Clearwing (Na) ('Broxbourne Woods only')

Pale-lemon Sallow (Na)

White-spotted Pinion (Na) ('almost certainly extinct in London area')

Large Red-belted Clearwing (Na)

Campanula Pug (Na) (only 3 Middx. records)

Golden-rod Pug (Nb) (only 1 middx. record)

Bordered Gothic (Nb) ('only old records for Herts and Middx')

Chalk Carpet (Nb) ('Surrey only')

Goat Moth (Nb) ('endangered')

Juniper Carpet (Nb) ('recolonising because of cultivated Juniperus')

Large Thorn (Nb) ('Essex only')

Mocha (Nb) ('Kent only')

Ruddy Carpet (Nb) ('Surrey/Essex only')

Square-spot (Nb) ('Surrey only')

Yellow-legged Clearwing (Nb)

Alder Kitten (Nb) ('Surrey only')

Orange Footman (Nb) (Epping Forest only)

Lead-coloured Pug (Nb) ('only 1 recent record in Middlx')

Ochreous Pug (Nb) (probable vagrant')

White Marked (Nb) ('formerly at Whippendell Wood in Herts')

Four-spotted (R2) ('Surrey only')

Balsam Carpet (R3) (only 3 records 30-40 years old')

Category 7A: Species which have not been recorded in recent years in the London area. Former London residents, now presumed extinct.

Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth (Na) ('last

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

recorded 40 years ago')

Triple-spotted Pug (Na) (*'one record for Middx over 40 years ago')*

Small Chocolate Tip (Nb) (*'only very old records for Herts')*

Sword-grass (Nb) (*'last record 50 yrs ago')*

Common Fan-foot (Nb) (*'last recorded 40 years ago')*

Pimpnel Pug (Nb) (*'only 3 old records for Middx')*

THE PROBLEM WITH MOTHS.

Anyone who has attempted to identify and record moths will soon be of the opinion that "the problem with moths is too many of them look the same". Even though you can have the moth you are trying to identify in one hand and Skinner's superb 'Moths of the British Isles' in the other, it may take an age to single out which species you have and in some cases you may still be wrong.

Unfortunately there are a number of confusing species that look extremely similar to another (usually related) species. With practice it is possible to distinguish these species. In a few cases the only reliable way to separate identical species is by examination of the genitalia which is a common way of identifying many micro-moths (in case any of you were thinking of trying to record this group as well).

Therefore, I thought it may be useful to give lists of confusing species identified by Colin Plant and given in his book

'Larger Moths of the London Area'.

This is a list of moths whose positive identification requires microscopic examination of the genitalia to separate them from similar species.

November Moth/Pale November Moth/Autumnal Moth.

Dark Dagger/Grey Dagger.

Marbled Minor/Rufous Minor/Tawny Marbled

Common Rustic/Lesser Common Rustic.

The Uncertain/The Rustic.

Saltern Ear/Ear Moth.

Sloe Pug/Green Pug.

All Pugs (except Toadflax, Foxglove, Mottled, Netted, Lime-speck, Freyer's, Tawny-speckled, Bordered, Brindled).

This is a list of moths whose identification is regarded as being difficult (especially for beginners).

Orange Underwing/Light Orange Underwing

Large Emerald/Light Emerald

Plain Wave/Riband Wave

Balsam Carpet/Large Twin-spot Carpet

Dark-barred Twin-spot/Red Twin-spot Carpet

Wood Carpet/Common Carpet

Common Marbled Carpet/Dark Marbled Carpet

Treble-bar/Lesser Treble-bar

Peacock Moth/Sharp-angled Peacock

Great Oak Beauty/Pale Oak Beauty

The Engrailed/Small Engrailed

Common White Wave/Common Wave

Sloe Carpet/Early Moth

Alder Kitten/Sallow Kitten/Poplar Kitten

Lesser Swallow Prominent/Swallow Prominent

Marbled Brown (voucher needed if recorded North of Thames)

Scarce Footman/Common Footman

Lunar Yellow Underwing (voucher needed)

Stout Dart/Double Dart

Triple-spotted Clay/Setaceous Hebrew Character

The Gothic/Feathered Gothic

The Champion/The Lychnis Marbled Coronet/Varied Coronet

Clouded Drab/Lead-coloured Drab

Chamomile Shark/The Shark

Tawny Pinion/Pale Pinion

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Dark Chestnut/The Chestnut
The Sallow/Pink-barred Sallow
Copper Underwing/Svensson's Copper Underwing
Beautiful Golden Y/Plain Golden Y
Reddish Light Arches/Light Arches/Clouded-bordered Brindle
Dark Spectacle/The Spectacle

Also some melanic forms of species e.g.
Common Lutestring/Common Marbled Carpet

Factors such as these are enough to make the majority of people 'leave moths for the experts'. However, there are a large number of readily identifiable species, many of which we wish to know more about where they occur. For example, most of the clearwing moths are nationally notable species and these can be seen during the day even in gardens and on allotments. So keep plugging away and send me your moth records.



Mother Shipton moth

Talks and Trips

"Wildlife Photography on a Budget"

On the 24th April at our Cross Street Centre venue in St. Albans, Brian Pettitt, despite only getting back from holiday on the Continent that morning, gave a highly entertaining talk.

He commenced with a potted autobiography before showing a series of slides covering a wide range of wildlife subjects. Common faults were highlighted with good advice on how to take better photographs. Brian showed us a range of camera bodies, lenses, monopods, tripods and other accessories and stressed that you do not need to spend a fortune on equipment with second-hand bargains available. His humorous delivery and anecdotes were well received but I am not sure if grasshoppers really get cramp after two jumps! Again it was a pity that the evening was not better supported by our membership as it was felt that the topic was of particular interest.

Bramfield Forest by Terry Rodbard

Ian Small, Michael Healy, and myself were joined by a group from the British Naturalists Society for a walk around Bramfield Forest on the 26th May. The bright patch of sky upon which we had pinned our hopes soon disappeared over the horizon and steady rain persisted throughout what was however, a most pleasant walk.

Bramfield is a mature forest and has many areas where butterflies may well be seen. Our success that morning was in identifying the eggs of the Orange Tip near the flower head of garlic mustard, and the singular appearance of an Oak Long Horn Moth.

Sales Goods

There will be a sales stand at the indoor events given in the diary on page 15.

Conservation Dates

Conservation work is one of the most important activities of the society as loss or neglect of suitable habitats is one of the major reasons for the decline in many of our butterflies as well as other wildlife.

Below are a series of dates across Herts and Middlesex where you can help with essential management that maintains the correct conditions on these sites for the wildlife that inhabits them. Several of the dates are run by the HMWT on their nature reserves

1. **Therfield Heath TL335400.** First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thompson 01763 241443
2. **Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP952131.** Third Sunday of each month. Meet 10.00a.m. in the lay-by, near Tring Station
3. **Hertford Heath TL 354111.** Details ring Anthony Oliver 01992 583404.
4. **Fir and Pond Wood TL276011** - Third Sunday of each month from 10.00a.m. - 1 p.m. Meet in the lay-by opposite the Oshwal Centre in Coopers Lane Road, east of Potters Bar.
5. **Stanmore Country Park** . Times from John Hollingdale on 0181 863 2077.
6. **Hillingdon Area** - Several local sites require volunteers. Details from Dr Taylor on 0181 868 0207

Diary

- 15/9/96** Another search for the elusive **Brown Hairstreak** at **Bricket Wood**. Meet in Smug Oak Station Car Park at 11.00 a.m. (TL 135020).
- 16/10/96** **A.G.M.** at the **Cross Street Centre**, Dagnell Street, near St Albans town centre starting at 8.00 pm. Official business then refreshments interval followed by members slides.
- 23/11/96** Dr Andy Barker gives an illustrated talk "**Butterflies and their habitats in Europe**" at 2.30 pm in **Harpenden Conservative Club**.
- 10/12/96** **Quiz Night** at **The Letchworth Settlement**, Nevells Road with Letchworth Naturalists Society. 7.30 pm start. Bring food, drink and a prize for the raffle.

Membership

Membership currently stands at 262. 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)

The newsletter is produced by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch of Butterfly Conservation. It is produced quarterly and the deadline for the next issue is 10th November 1996.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

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