

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 81 Autumn 2020

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**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

Welcome to the Autumn edition of our branch newsletter.

The Butterfly Year It has been a great season for butterflies, with excellent numbers of Peacocks, Small Heaths and several others. Our organised butterfly activities have been less successful. Only a few butterfly walks took place with reduced numbers. Reports of those which did take place start on [page 8](#) We now also have videos of some butterfly and moth events, which can be accessed from the new Videos page on our branch website. <https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/youtube-new.php>

Sadly we had to cancel our new members day in July. We have set a date for next years Members Day and AGM on Saturday 27th March. We have reserved the Civic Centre at Welwyn in the hope that we will be able to meet there. We are putting together a contingency plan to hold the event online. So save the date and we will be in touch by early March with more information.

Financial Appeal Butterfly Conservations head office has been hit hard by the virus as conservation activities and funding sources have dried up. Eleven paid staff have been made redundant and others placed on furlough. The Branch Committee took the decision to transfer £5,000 from our branch funds to provide support. I know several of us have already given personal donations and I would be very grateful to any of you who is able to donate. This can easily be done via the national Butterfly Conservation website https://butterfly-conservation.org/hope_in_nature

Big City Butterflies This is our project to employ two staff focussed on conservation and education projects in several London Boroughs. Progress has been slow as the grant giving bodies have paused activity during lockdown. We are hoping for more news in December when we plan to open a financial appeal to members. We will be in touch by email nearer the time. Keep an eye on the Home page of the Branch website for more information.

<https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/index.php>

Branch Matters Two new books have been published relating to butterflies in our area. Reviews of both are included from [page 25](#). Brian Legg, the lead author of The Butterflies of Heartwood Forest is kindly donating half the profits to our branch and we have already

received £368. Welcome to Alex Lewis, who has taken on the role of Press Officer and already achieved a great write up on Heartwood butterflies in the Herts Advertiser newspaper and Hertfordshire Life magazine. In the Spring we heard the sad news about the death of John Hollingdale, a founder member of the branch committee and long serving treasurer. Shortly afterwards we learnt of the death of Trevor James, an outstanding naturalist who worked closely with Brian Sawford to achieve the publication of the first Herts butterfly atlas. They will both be missed and tributes are on [pages 4 & 5](#).

Keeping in touch Most organisations I join or have an interest in send me a large number of emails. We don't do that and send only three communications a year. You can choose to keep in touch in between times in three ways.

1. All news is on the Home page of the Branch website. The sightings page has had over 25,000 hits this year
2. There's always lots to read on the Branch Twitter account
3. And Facebook hosts pages for both the branch and the Herts & Middx moth group

Links to each of these are on the back page.

Your Newsletter—PLEASE READ

Resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on both BC finances and social distancing requirements, the Branch Committee have decided that, by default, our newsletters will be made available as pdf files on the Branch website, with members sent a link. The newsletters can be read from the website, or copies downloaded for personal use.

You still have the option to receive hard copy newsletters, but you must now actively opt-in to receive these, by contacting the editor (details on back cover). Only those opted-in will receive paper newsletters. Please only opt for receipt of paper copies if it is impractical for you to read them in electronic format.

Members for whom BC does not hold an e-mail address will by default continue to be sent paper copies.

Gone, but not Forgotten..

John Hollingdale

It is with great sadness that we record the death of John Hollingdale, one of the founding members of the Herts & Middx Branch. John took on the role of Treasurer when the Branch was formed in 1995 and continued to serve us in that role until he stepped down 20 years later in 2015 (handing over 2 large boxes containing all the records of financial transactions throughout that period). The gestation period for the Branch had lasted several years (it was formed in a split of the then much larger London Branch) and our former Branch Membership Secretary and Vice-Chair Margaret Noakes remembers first meeting him in 1989 when he answered a call for volunteers to help form a new Branch. She recalls being immediately drawn to his quirky sense of humour, a feature that remained with him for all the years that he served on the Branch committee. John was also adept at challenging what was perhaps received wisdom and whether one agreed with him or not it did make you think about your position and about its justification.



During the period 1995-1998 he also organised the Branch field trip meetings, while in later years he had taken on the role of Health & Safety Officer. John devoted a considerable amount of his time to the Branch. As well as the Committee roles, he was always willing to help out on the publicity stall and he would often spend a whole day at e.g. the Rickmansworth Canal Festival, Herts County Show, Harrow Fair etc, sometimes in vile weather! Our current Chair, Malcolm Hull remembers that their last trip out together was to Ruislip Woods - although John's health was already failing, he struggled on and they were successful in spotting Purple Emperor, in those days a rare sight in London. Malcolm recalls John talking about his early years butterflying and how the spread of buddleia bushes on bomb sites in London after the war had led to some fine butterfly spectacles in urban locations.

John was passionate and knowledgeable about many aspects of natural history and conservation. Although we knew him primarily through his interests in lepidoptera, he was for many years the Voluntary Warden of Stanmore Country Park, had been the Secretary of Harrow

Nature Conservation Forum and was involved in other groups such as Harrow Friends of the Earth and Friends of Headstone Manor Park. He was actively involved in many ways for each of these groups, including leading walks and running stalls at community events.

John regularly ran moth evenings at Stanmore Country Park, and his reports of many of these have appeared in past editions of this newsletter. He had a great interest in moths and each year Andrew Wood would receive a number of cotton wool lined matchboxes, each with a dead moth for identification in it. Colin Plant has a similar experience – “Right to the end he continued to send me his unidentified micros for naming, usually in match boxes and, frustratingly, in envelopes sellotaped on all four edges making opening impossible without tearing any enclosed paperwork! This steady trickle of moths added many dots to the distribution maps for Middlesex, so making an important contribution. He will be missed.”

Our thoughts are with his wife Margaret, herself a former Branch Committee member, and their family. John was a lovely man – knowing him was a privilege and we will remember him with fondness.

Trevor James 1947 – 2020

Hertfordshire lost its foremost naturalist on 5th June, with the death of Trevor James after some years’ battle with cancer. Trevor was one of the most likeable people you could hope to meet, as well as being a hard-working recorder and organiser. He was important in the first Hertfordshire butterfly surveys of 1984-6 & 1995-9, and on the conservation subcommittee in the early days of our Branch.

He was an all-rounder, editing the Hertfordshire Natural History Society Bird Reports 1979-84, becoming Recorder for vascular plants from 1980, and was beetle Recorder from 1984 until his death. He collated more than one million biological records over this period, an average of 70 a day.

He became Hertfordshire chairman of the British Naturalists Association, and then chairman of the H.N.H.S. 1994-6. He went on to become important at the national level, working for the National Biodiversity Network 2001-2013 in setting up the NBN Gateway. He was awarded the Gilbert White Award for wildlife recording in 2018, and received a British Empire Medal in the New Year’s Honours list of January 2020. For me, his enduring legacy will be the publication of

not one, but two massive and beautifully illustrated tomes: the “Flora of Hertfordshire” in 2009, and the “Beetles of Hertfordshire” in 2018.

As a friend and naturalist, he will be irreplaceable. He leaves behind his wife Christine, who is also a naturalist and Secretary of the Herts B.N.A., and their son Edward.

Recording Your Butterfly Sightings, by Andrew Wood

We get over 40000 butterfly records each year for Hertfordshire and Middlesex and every single one, whether a rare or common species is welcome. These records help us and scientists nationally to track how species are doing and if there are any worrying (or optimistic) trends that need to be acted upon. Insects are very important for this work as they often breed several times in a year and are very sensitive to environmental and climate change and can provide an early warning system faster than groups such as mammals or birds.

With the widespread ownership, first of desktop and laptop computers, tablets and in more recent years smartphones there are an array of routes for recording what you see and I thought it would be interesting to outline the methods available and how the records get to us. Basically there are specific surveys and routes for more general recording.

Dealing with general recording first of all there are now three online routes:

- iRecord App (Android and Apple). A free app that lets you record virtually any organism you see, it takes a location from your phone gps and allows photos to be taken and added to the record.
- iRecord Butterflies (Android & Apple). A very similar app but limited to butterfly species
- BNM Online portal. An online portal for recording butterfly sightings

All of these feed into the online verification system of iRecord which is where verifiers (for our area me) look at records and decide whether to accept or reject or query them. Most will be accepted but records that are for unusual species, species at unusual locations or unusual times of the year will be queried either by your getting an email from me or if you are someone who looks at notifications on the system through a notification message. Generally I try to check, at least, daily. Records

that have a photo attached are very helpful but also point up some common confusions:

Meadow Brown/Gatekeeper/Small Heath

Holly Blue/Common Blue

Holly Blue/Small Blue

Large/Small/ Green-veined White

Large/Small/Essex Skipper

Brimstone/Clouded Yellow

Comma/Small Tortoiseshell/Large Tortoiseshell/Peacock/Painted Lady

Moths that are easily seen by day such as Box Tree Moth and Jersey Tiger which are shoe-horned into being a butterfly such as a White Admiral or Red Admiral or Fritillary

If a photo is clear I can redetermine these errors to the correct species. Based on errors where photos have been included I would reckon that overall about 5% of these species are wrongly recorded, that equates to about 250 mis-identifications if 5000 records are submitted in a year but as most are for common species and the errors can happen either way the actual effect on accuracy is probably too small to worry about in a large dataset.

There are also several specific schemes which enable records to be added online:

- Butterfly Conservation Migrant Watch (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/recording-and-monitoring/migrant-watch>) – this concentrates on collecting records of two common migrants - Painted Lady and Hummingbird Hawk-moth
- Garden Butterfly Survey (<http://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/>) enables you to record butterflies that visit your garden over the year. You can create an account, and submit your sightings.
- United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (<https://www.ukbms.org/>) co-ordinates two particular surveys:
- Butterfly Transects (<https://www.ukbms.org/>). A methodology for long term recording over the 26 weeks between April and September. Please contact me if you would like to know more.
- Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/recording-and-monitoring/wider->

[countryside-butterfly-survey](#)). This involves making a minimum of two visits to a randomly selected square near you between May and August to count butterflies along two 1km survey lines running roughly north-south through the square. Please contact me if you would like to know more.

- Report your sightings by email to the Branch's sightings page. Peter Clarke who manages the website kindly adds your records to a database so that I can easily extract them and add them to our dataset.

I also receive records via email, phone and on paper lists and all of these are equally valuable, if taking a bit more time to process. There is also the danger of operator error (mine!) when transcribing them from phone calls or paper lists.

However you record your sightings they should get to me (as long as you don't keep them to yourself, of course) as the Branch Record collator and they will be valuable for scientific analysis locally and nationally.

Butterfly Walk Reports

25th May – Heartwood Forest to look for Small Blue and other Spring Butterflies, by Malcolm Hull.

Lockdown requirements led to the unusual situation of me walking my first public butterfly walk of the season on my own!

I decided to film the butterflies so others could see them and the results are available to view on the Videos page of the Branch website

Luckily it was a warm sunny day and the butterflies were plentiful. Small Heaths dominated the route uphill from the car park, with Burnet Companion, Mother Shipton, Cinnabar and Brimstone butterfly also putting in an appearance. A Small Blue was also seen to the north of Langley Wood, an area where there have been several sightings this year and last. This suggests a colony exists in this area, which is just over half a mile away from the main colony in Valley Field, which is west of Well/Pudler's Wood.

The route provided a good opportunity to survey the high points in these woods and plan vantage points for Purple Emperor spotting later in the season.

Entering Valley Field, the first impression is just how different the grassland is in this area. Growing on a poorer chalky soil and with plenty of the semi-parasitic Yellow Rattle, the grass is much less vigorous, with plenty of small patches of bare soil apparent. This is the perfect environment for Small Blue and its food plant Kidney Vetch to flourish. The Branch invested £500 sowing Kidney Vetch, Birdsfoot Trefoil and other wildflower seeds in this area in 2018. The results were readily apparent with Kidney Vetch now plentiful in the meadow. For once, Common Blues lived up to their name and were plentiful. Small Heath continued to be seen in good numbers and there were dozens of Grass Rivulet, a day flying moth which is not particularly widespread in Herts. Its larval food plant is Yellow Rattle, which explains its success at this site. Slightly disappointingly, only two more Small Blues were seen but I'm confident that the habitat and its management is now right and expect their numbers will expand. The warm Spring meant that the traditional June lull in butterflies came early this year. The only other species recorded were Silver Y. Grass Veneer, Small White and Green-veined White.

I hope that you can join Andrew Steele and I to experience this amazing site next year

12th July—Cassiobury Park, by Peter Fewell and Rick Vickers

The butterfly walk went ahead on Sunday 12th July with the help of Friends of Cassiobury Park. Quite frankly It would not have happened at all without the help of Peter Jenkins who chairs the Friends of Cassiobury Park under the circumstances of this wretched virus. We limited numbers to 10 including Rick and myself. We had our voluntary warden with us who is first aid trained as well as Penny who works for the NHS. Peter Jenkins was also in charge of risk assessments so all safety angles were covered. It was with regret that I couldn't invite other Butterfly Conservation members but I felt under the circumstances I could not do it any other way.

We took the Cassiobury's famous Lime Avenue route which is of interest for local historians and a much better route for elderly and disabled people into Whippendell Woods. It wasn't long before Rick spotted the first Purple Hairstreak and we saw more in the canopy of the oaks. A Peacock flew over and we then spotted a Silver-Washed Fritillary gliding across the brambles. Red Admiral, Comma and a couple of Speckled Wood were seen and a Holly Blue made an appearance. A Ringlet, Large Skipper, Large White and another Silver-

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Washed Fritillary were also seen there. Not bad going for the first 15 minutes into the walk!

A little further along the Lime Avenue there is a wide path that leads down to the canal. This area was stripped back a few years ago and is now full of thistles and other wild flowers. Small White, Green-Veined White, Small Skipper, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and a Brimstone were added to the list there. More Purple Hairstreaks in the Oaks as well as a few other species already mentioned at that point. We then proceeded down into Whippendell Woods taking the steeper path to the right of the signposted map of the woods. Eventually you come to a cross point of paths with a triangular patch of grass in the middle with a tall patch of bracken on the right hand side. It is here that a lot of White Admiral activity had taken place in previous weeks. We waited without success but did see Holly Blue, more Purple Hairstreaks and a couple of Commas. White-Letter Hairstreaks have been seen there in the last two seasons but there was only a single possible sighting this time.

Not put off by the lack of White Admiral there we continued in the same direction along the path to 'Camilla Oak' as I call it, the most reliable spot of all for seeing White Admiral in Whippendell Woods! After a short walk you come to a fork in the path; taking the left path you keep going until you reach a fallen birch tree and a bramble patch on the right hand side with another short path skirting around it. Here we saw a White Admiral low down putting on a delightful show of their classic gliding flight allowing most of the group to photograph. It looked as though it was even considering landing on one of the group! Two were spotted there. Silver-Washed Fritillary and other already mentioned species seen too. (If any member wishes to see White Admiral in Whippendell Woods during their flight time sit on the fallen birch watch and wait!)



White Admiral
Photo © Peter Fewell

Heading back up the hill and along the Lime Avenue, numerous butterflies were spotted including a Purple Hairstreak which came down to the ground; although seen by a few of the group it went skyward before we could photograph it.

Despite looking, the only emperor spotted was a dragonfly. In all, 16 species were seen on the walk, plus a Painted Lady, Essex Skipper and a Marbled White were seen before the walk started bringing the total seen to 19. One species lacking from our list is the Small Tortoiseshell and I have seen far more White Admiral, a species on the BAP list, than this much loved common species. I can only hope this is down to being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Purple Hairstreaks have made a remarkable come-back after a poor season last year. Peacocks though may well be declared butterfly of the year as they are having a great season.

18th July - Heartwood Forest, by Malcolm Hull

Our first organised butterfly walk of the season was successfully completed, both target species seen and following Covid19 guidelines. But the day got off to a cloudy start, with just a few Ringlets, Meadow Browns and whites on the wing. Small Skippers and Essex Skippers were the next to be seen as small glimpses of sun appeared, quickly followed by Gatekeeper, Marbled White and Peacock. A small blue butterfly was spotted and identified as a Holly Blue. As we climbed the hill, we looked out for likely Purple Emperor highpoints in Langley Wood and other woods visible on the skyline. Arriving at the highpoint in Pudlers Wood, we soon saw a large butterfly in the trees, which turned out to be a Red Admiral. But we were soon rewarded by the sight of a Purple Emperor, which flew across the path at a height of about 20 ft and settled in an oak, overlooking the area of the Magical Wood which is dominated by Sallows. It stayed there for several minutes, taking short flights and perching in prominent positions we could all see clearly through binoculars. Proceeding along the track east of Wells/Pudlers Wood we saw several more butterflies including Large White, Brimstone (male & female) and Commas. Examples of both standard and *Hutchinsoni* forms of Comma perched alongside each other demonstrating the clear differences between them. Andrew Neild led us to the area of the "Dog Pond" where he had seen Purple Emperors during the past week. A Holly Blue was seen taking moisture/salts at the edge of the pond. Purple Hairstreaks were plentiful on the adjoining oaks. And then a second Purple Emperor was seen flying around the oak adjacent to the pond.

We then continued our circuit of the wood into Valley Field searching for chalk grassland species. The Birds-foot Trefoil was plentiful, but the weather remained firmly cloudy. Common Blue (male and

female), 6-spot Burnet and Shaded Broad-bar added to our total of species. We found areas of Kidney Vetch in flower, but instead of the expected Small Blue our next species was Clouded Yellow, my first for the year! Walking on round the wood we saw a Pyramidal orchid and a Speckled Wood. Arriving back at the high point the clouds were thicker than ever. The walk ended but a few of us stayed on to look for tree top Emperors but with no luck. Instead we were treated to several views of the magnificent day flying moth, Oak Eggar bombing round our heads at great speed.

Andrew Steele then led us to the area where he recorded second generation Small Blues last week. Sure enough there were several small butterflies on the Birds-foot Trefoil. The first two were Brown Argus and then, a Small Blue. A great return to butterfly walks at a brilliant butterfly site. Read more about it in Brian Legg's new book (see book review on [page 25](#)).

19th July- Bricket Wood Common, by Malcolm Hull

The start of second HMBC butterfly walk of the year coincided with poor weather. It was an hour before we saw our first butterflies, a Gatekeeper and a Ringlet. These were followed by splendid views of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth, nectaring on thistles, a Purple Hairstreak in the oak canopy, three more Gatekeepers, Grass-veneer moth and Cinnabar moth caterpillars. Unfortunately the sun did not shine and we missed our target species. Better luck this afternoon at Potwells, North Mymms, where I saw two Silver washed Fritillaries, Marbled White, Peacock, Comma, Small/Essex Skippers, Holly Blue and the usual whites and browns. Arriving home in St Albans I found a Small Tortoiseshell on my buddleia, possibly the start of a new generation, plus Peacock, Red Admiral and Large White.

Moths in Hertfordshire and Middlesex, by Andrew Wood

The Herts and Middx Moth Group has long had a website but the lockdown gave me the opportunity to revise the Moth Guide which forms the major content of the site. It has information from published articles and later updates on all of our moths together with distribution maps, flight charts and photographs. It is updated regularly as new information arrives, as unlike butterflies there are several new species of moth added to both county's lists each year.

Please take a look at <http://www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk/>. Use the Name search box to put in any moth name to see what its local status is. If you want to see all our Tiger or Hawk-moths just put those words in the Name search box and they will all appear.

Lockdown Lures, by Liz Goodyear

Back in March 2020 when it became apparent we were set to have our freedom drastically restricted, I started thinking ahead! Survival would require keeping busy by utilising my existing interests!

When renovating my ageing home-made wooden moth trap, I went onto my favourite supplier's website and did some browsing of what they had available and started looking at their pheromone lures. Lures were originally developed for the agricultural and horticultural industries to help deal with devastating insect pests by attracting the male insects before mating and work by mimicking the pheromone 'scent' that a female might produce as part of the mating process. However, they have also been developed to attract some of the rarer moths, in particular Clearwings of the family *Sesiidae*. They are day-flying moths, and as they resemble a hoverfly or wasp they are rarely recorded, with most classed as being 'Nationally Scarce B.' Several lay their eggs on stems or tree stumps or roots and some larvae burrow holes into the wood to feed and subsequently pupate and then emerge during the main summer months.

Of the many lures available I chose their 'Classic Six', plus a plastic 'lure container' which comprised a fitting (resembling a tiny basket) for the lure, a mini bucket and funnel which you could hang up in your garden. I also decided to purchase the Emperor Moth lure. Lockdown could commence and as it was it wasn't long before my birthday – I could treat myself!



As the moths have different flight periods and daily flight times might vary, I needed to search the internet to find out when to use each specific lure. Warm sunny days work best, and the lures mustn't get wet! You do have to be extremely disciplined to avoid cross contamination, and need to keep them completely separate, and when

not in use put them in the freezer. In Herts & Middx there are 10 clearwing species that could be attracted.

The first experiment was with the Emperor Moth and in this case because the moth is so big, you can't use the special container so I simply put the lure in the mini lure basket and hung it on the washing line! This spectacular day-flying moth (only the male flies during the day) emerged quite early and reports started to appear on social media at the beginning of April, but nothing



Male Emperor Moth
8th April 2020 © Liz Goodyear

appeared in my garden. I would sit there patiently watching the washing line for hours. Suddenly at 16:25 on the 7th April, 2020, this manic insect started bombing my washing line. The next day I tried again and at around the same time a new individual arrived (I know this because it was in better condition); I was able to capture it and improve my photographic skills. Although not wishing to over-use the lure, I tried again on 9th April and on this occasion there was a moment when three Emperor Moths were flying around the lure which was an amazing sight. It seems for my garden in Ware, based on wind direction the late afternoon was the best time.

My next attempt wasn't until the end of May with the lure for the Yellow-legged clearwing. Well, it turned into a disappointing day, especially when reading on the Herts & Middlesex Moth Group Facebook page that others were striking lucky. The next day, I had better luck but this wasn't a Yellow-legged - it was an Orange-tailed, another clearwing which feeds on Guelder Rose, Wayfaring Tree and possibly Dogwood (Plant 2008) and is known to come to the same lure!



Orange-tailed Clearwing
16th June 2020
© Liz Goodyear

The Currant Clearwing was the only clearwing I had previously seen in my garden and as the name implies feeds in Blackcurrant and Redcurrant stems. When using the lure for the Yellow-legged, I suddenly saw a Clearwing by the Redcurrants (no lure). The lure for the Currant Clearwing was therefore the next out of the freezer, and on



Curren Clearwing
30th May 2020 © Liz Goodyear



Red-belted Clearwings
31st May 2020 © Liz Goodyear

two occasions the moths came up to the lure. I learned to be patient and to use a small pot to remove the moth from the container so that it could be photographed before releasing it again. (Using a net to cover the container as you opened it to stop the clearwing from flying away was particularly useful!)

I next decided to try out the Red-belted Clearwing lure – this clearwing uses old apple trees and since we have a huge old Bramley apple tree in our garden I was pretty sure I would have some success. Guidelines suggest the morning for this species and by 11:00 I had recorded four different individuals. There was simply no need to use the lure again so back it went in the freezer.

Although there are no modern Large Red-belted Clearwing records in our Branch area (they use silver birch stumps cut the previous year) the lure is also known to attract Red-belted - the 2 species are separated by the colour of their palps (orange in the Red-belted and white in the Large Red-belted) – this was remarkably easy to see but it involved ensuring examination of every individual! The first time I used the lure on the 16th June I caught and checked seven Red-belted within a really short space of time. The next day there were 22 individuals! I checked each one - no simple matter but luckily the net came in very handy and I was able to confirm they were all Red-belted. No Large Red-belted were ever recorded.

For several weeks I had been taking out the Six-belted Clearwing lure for daily walks. This clearwing uses the roots of some vetch species and in particular Bird's foot Trefoil. It was highly unlikely to be attracted to the lure if left out in the garden so it was necessary to take

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it to the habitat. I think I started too early so had slightly lost interest but on the 28th June, after reading of a un-lured sighting in Wheathampstead, I took it out with me to a disused pit, hung it up over some Bird's foot Trefoil just after 11:00 and walked away; I had only walked a few yards when I turned round and saw it had immediately attracted a clearwing – which needless to say was Six-belted –in total in only a brief time I had recorded five.

I was now starting to run out of lures, but I still had the Red-tipped lure in my freezer. The distribution for this moth is very restricted with only a handful of post-2010 records for Hertfordshire, so I was far from hopeful. However, having left the lure unattended, on my return from a walk there in the container was a Red-tipped (18th July) – I couldn't believe how lucky I was becoming.

A few weeks before this capture, I read online that my supplier was now selling a brand new lure for Lunar Hornet Moth, a large clearwing which, as its name suggests, resembles a Hornet. I had been unable to purchase the Hornet Moth lure so this was the second best thing. Whereas the Hornet Moth uses poplar (of which there is a lot near me) the Lunar Hornet uses willow/salix and I have for many years had a piece of cut willow wood with a bore hole made by the caterpillar– no mean feat! When the vial finally arrived, it was put to use immediately. I was watching it on the washing line but as I was going out to take the container down (it's a big moth and doesn't go into the funnel easily), I realised the vial was missing. Frantically searching for

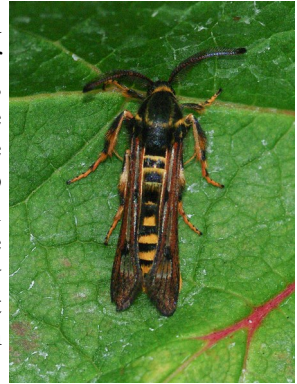


Red-tipped Clearwing
18th July 2020



Lunar Hornet moth, 20th July 2020
Both photos © Liz Goodyear

it (having waited so long to receive it), I found it on the ground and next to it – a Lunar Hornet Moth! I did take the lure out for walks but I was surprisingly unlucky, only once attracting a definite individual and a possible second one at a different site buzzed me but so quickly it could just as easily been a real Hornet. In the meantime I had been trying the lure for the relative newcomer, the Raspberry Clearwing with little luck until one evening at around 18:00 one finally came into the lure on 17th July!



Raspberry Clearwing
17th July 2020
©Liz Goodyear

So here I was with an almost a full set of Clearwings after only a few weeks of trying, what next? On the evening of 20th July I suddenly remembered the Sallow Clearwing lure; after ordering it I realised that it had not previously been recorded in or near Hertfordshire so had just left it in the freezer. This moth it is only known to fly in even-numbered years so if I didn't use the lure this year, it would sit in the freezer until 2022! With nothing to lose, I put it out on Tuesday 21st July 2020 and then went for one of my daily walks. I got home just before 16:00 and to my utter amazement there was a clearwing in the trap!!! What was it? I carefully took the container indoors and managed to retrieve the moth and place it in a pot. I got my trusty identification book out and looked at the clearwing pictures, and to my mind it looked like a Sallow Clearwing. I managed to get some photos without letting the moth escape and posted the pictures on the Moth Group FB page and everyone came back with positive comments except for one person who asked about the underside. A confusion species could have been Currant Clearwing and I was starting to doubt my identification. To cut a long story short, a couple of days later I was able to take the moth to Colin Plant (Hertfordshire & Middlesex Moth Recorder) on his return from holiday. Colin looked at the moth, got out his books and said he thought it was correctly identified. To be absolutely positive, he also checked any potential European species to eliminate them. Finally, the confirmation came through, that my clearwing was indeed Sallow Clearwing and was a Hertfordshire (and Middlesex) first, in fact an east of England first! I should at this point mention; that whilst researching the moth on Twitter, I had uncovered several recent reports of the moth being recorded in Warwickshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire



Yellow-legged Clearwing
2nd August 2020
© Liz Goodyear

so this newly produced lure had been dramatically changing the distribution map of this species in a matter of days. Paul Williamson in south Hertfordshire was also successful in recording the Sallow Clearwing a few days later after purchasing the lure, but there doesn't appear to have been many other reports. I did try again a few times, but never with any success – I just assume I was incredibly lucky but that was the story of my clearwing summer.

So was this the end, well no because I started to see continued reports of Yellow-legged Clearwing coming to lure. I had purchased a fresh lure some weeks previous and so had another go, and at 17:00 on 1st August, a clearwing arrived but no, it wasn't the target nor Orange-tailed – it was Raspberry – this just shows how important it is to clean the container and lure basket between using different lures - that lure hadn't been used for two weeks and everything had been washed! On 2nd August I put the container out again, and just happened to look late afternoon, and could see a Clearwing showing interest so I stood by the container and waited and was able to capture it and pot it. I went upstairs to use the computer, came back down and there was another clearwing in the container!!! Just like buses you wait two months for Yellow-legged Clearwing and then two arrive!!!! I washed the equipment put all the lures back in the freezer for another year and packed up!!! Overall, I saw and photographed 9 Clearwings in one year, increasing my garden moth list by 7 macro species and the County list to 11 Clearwing species! Certainly a fascinating way to spend lockdown!

There is a lot of information available on the internet and in particular specific recording guidelines which ought to be read before considering using these lures to attract specialist moths.

https://www.angleps.com/A_Brief_Guidance_Note_on_the_use_of_Pheromone_Lures_for_Recording_Moths.pdf

Reference: Plant, C.W. (2008) The Moths of Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire Natural History Society.

2020 – A Year we Won't Forget (although we would like to),
by Roger Gibbon

In a normal year, I would be heading to southern France in early April for the spring months. But 2020 was (and still is) far from a normal year and lockdown/quarantine necessitated a change of plan. It did offer the opportunity to make a couple of visits to places I hadn't been to for some fifteen years, to Whipsnade Downs and Glapthorne Cow



female Duke of Burgundy
© Roger Gibbons

Pastures in Northants on dates on which travel was permitted in line with lockdown rules. The trip to Whipsnade on 18 May was for Duke of Burgundy and it was a pleasure to see them there again and thriving. It was clearly a way into their flight period as most of the males were showing signs of wear, but this one female posed for the camera battling against the windy conditions.

Glapthorne is well known as a site for Black Hairstreak, a species that is highly elusive at the best of times. This was an early year and so we took advice and went there on 2 June. Well, there aren't many upsides to Covid-19 but facilitating this trip was certainly one of them, with large numbers – we estimated at least fifty – active in the morning.



Black Hairstreak
© Roger Gibbons

They tend to stay out of camera range except for the bramble bushes in the centre of the site, but I was fortunate to be able to snap this (I believe) female that appeared to be taking honeydew or some similar secretion from a leaf at head height. There appears to be a white egg in the foreground, which I did not notice at the time, but I don't think it is a Black Hairstreak egg as I suspect their eggs are laid on twigs not leaves.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

In a normal year, I would make a trip of several weeks around the Alps or Pyrenees in July for the endemic high altitude species. It is broadly a meander from south to north, finishing at Calais. Many of the altitude species are widespread across this area but others are endemic to specific regions, or even specific mountains. A lot of research and planning goes into the trip in the winter months, in an effort to be in the right places at the right times for certain species. It is rather pot luck, as the flight periods can vary significantly according to the spring weather. However, the quarantine regulations changed everything, quite sensibly, although my target areas of the southern French Alps had a very low incidence of Covid and the remote regions I was aiming for, even less. When the incidence of Covid dipped and the government withdrew its advice against travelling to France, a hastily revised itinerary was put together for a trip from north to south, and so I left leafy Hatfield on 4 July.

I had a few misgivings about the wisdom of travel, but I have to say that I was very impressed with the level of seriousness regarding Covid everywhere I went. Masks everywhere, distancing, cleaning, with sanitisers everywhere, it was clear that the French took the risk very seriously indeed. Maybe not the case on the south coast in August, but the Alps in July were very reassuring.

My first major stop was at a site adjacent to a dam at 2200m altitude for a rare and very localised species in France, Asian Fritillary (*Euphydryas intermedia*), which seemed restricted to a patch of Alpenrose, even though that is not the larval hostplant. They were visible in the morning, settling with open wings to warm up, as the male shown, but were almost nowhere to be seen later in the day. The pattern illustrates that they are part of the same family as the Marsh Fritillary (*E. aurinia*).



male Asian Fritillary
© Roger Gibbons

In the same region, a visit to a site where two years ago I counted 52 different species within a 100m radius. I “only” managed 36 species this year, but the highlight was a common species – a Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*), but the uncommon aberration *taras*. It was

only the third time I have ever seen *taras*. This species has been split into Grizzled (*malvae*) and Southern Grizzled (*malvoides*) by the taxonomists but it is not clear where the dividing line occurs, and there may well be an area of overlap in range. It was not as explicitly marked as other extreme examples of *taras*, but here is a convenient photo of *taras* on the right as compared to the normal form on the left.



Grizzled Skippers: normal form (left) & f. *taras* (right)
© Roger Gibbons

Some species are happy to fly at 2000m altitude or thereabouts, but for others it has to be higher. Possibly the highest (or equal highest) flying species is the Sooty Ringlet (*Erebia pluto*) which is generally 2500m or above. The nominate form of male *pluto* is completely black, no markings at all on either the upperside or underside. I think it shares this only with the Pyrenean form of the Yellow-spotted Ringlet (*E. manto constans*) which is decidedly devoid of spots, yellow or otherwise. Not only does *pluto* fly at high altitude, it also just flies up and down rocky scree, so seeing it is tricky and getting a photo even more so. My favourite spot to see pluto is near the summit of the Col de la Bonnette at 2700m. However, the scree at this spot isn't above, it is below. So peering over the edge of an almost vertical scree with a drop of several hundred metres isn't



Sooty Ringlet
© Roger Gibbons

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

recommended in the health and safety manual. However, with patience, a lot of patience, they do occasionally come over the top of the scree. And so it was, after 90 minutes of waiting, a couple engaged in courtship came over the top and settled briefly roadside for a few seconds and they may have stayed longer if it had not been for passing motorbikes that plague this part of the world. Reacting quickly, I did manage to get this photo, this is the male, with the female just beyond it. OK, it is only a black smudge, but it's the best black smudge I have ever got.

The weather in the Alps can be very capricious, often the morning starts brightly but clouding over at lunchtime and frequently developing into a storm. This was the case at Bonnette, so I dropped down the south side to a village at around 1500m which I have been to many times, where the weather was more conducive to butterflies

being on the wing. I decided to walk along a track adjacent to the Tinée river leading toward Bonnette and was surprised and delighted to spot a Southern Swallowtail (*Papilio alexanor*) just at the edge of the river valley, the river being some 30m below. It was clearly at the end of its flight period, having lost one section of hindwing. Of the three species of Swallowtail in France, this is the rarest by a great margin, being very localised. It also has the



Southern Swallowtail
© Roger Gibbons

distinction of being (I think) the only species to roost with open wings, as this one was. The Tinée valley was a traditional stronghold of *alexanor* in the long distant past and I had understood that it no longer flew there, so this experience was very satisfying for more than one reason.

Continuing south to the Mercantour about one hour north of Nice. It is exceptionally verdant and rich in species here, not least because there is a rainstorm most afternoons. At a favourite spot at 1000m altitude there is a zig-zag track of about 1km on a hillside, where I have visited every year for the past twenty years and have personally recorded 111 species there. Not all at the same time, as they all have different flight



Southern Comma
© Roger Gibbons

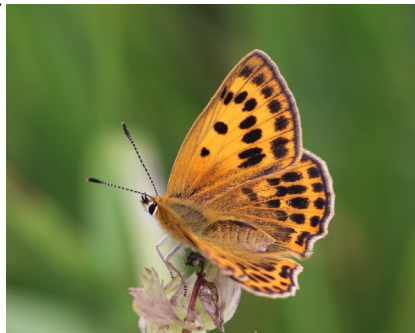
periods. But in July, there is a chance to see the rather rare and highly localised Southern Comma (*Polygona egea*), usually only one at most, and this year I got lucky. It is very similar to the Comma on both upperside and underside, and here is an underside snapped as it nectared on a flailing Lavender bush on a windy day. I think its underside camouflage is even more convincing than its common cousin.



Meleager's Blue
© Roger Gibbons

At the same site is the iconic species of blue, Meleager's Blue (*Polyommatus daphnis*), famed for its slightly serrated hindwing which is clear in this male, although the serrations are more pronounced in the female. It is rarely seen in more than ones and twos and sadly its iconic status makes it a target for collectors who do still occur in France, albeit their numbers diminishing and latterly the conservation bodies are becoming more active in stamping out collecting.

In the same area, several species of Copper are reasonably common. The so-called Scarce Copper (*Lycaena virgaureae*) was originally named, presumably, by an English lepidopterist, on the grounds that it may have been scarce compared to (perhaps) the Purple-edged Copper (*L. hippothoe*), but it really isn't scarce at all. The male is a fiery orange-red across the whole of the upperside,



female Scarce Copper
© Roger Gibbons

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framed by a strong black border, but my vote goes to the female of this species. The strong black markings on the orange-red background make it one of the most appealing of the Coppers.

Moving back north, to eastern France and the damp region to the east of Lyon to a site that we visited last year and chanced upon Alcon Blue (*Phengaris alcon alcon*) when we were looking for something else. As sometimes happens, the second prize turns out to be better than the first prize, as *alcon* is a rather rare and localised species. Last year we saw one male and one female, but this year there were three females peppering the Marsh Gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*) with eggs. This is one female underside – the resemblance to its cousin, the Large Blue, is fairly clear – and a rare glimpse of the upperside as it opened up momentarily.



Alcon Blue
© Roger Gibbons

Finally, a stop off in the département of Ain in the east of France produced an interesting selection of species which I would not have expected to fly together. One that took my eye was this Silver-spotted Skipper (*Hesperia comma*), notable because the white markings were rather small and slightly off-white, making it very different to the more normal *comma* flying there.



Silver-spotted Skipper
© Roger Gibbons

And back to the UK. The total number of species seen on the trip was 140. I appreciate that I have been very lucky to have been able to make a trip that would not have been possible for most people this year. There are some advantages to being retired and able to head off at very short notice. Hopefully next year things will have returned to normal, or at least a degree of normality that enables us to get out in the open and in the company of butterflies.

Book Reviews, by Ian Small

Heartwood Butterflies

Authors: Brian Legg, Andrew Steele, Jim Paterson and Steve Parkes

ISBN 978-0-9927994-7-2 (2020)

£4.00

This is a wonderful 44-page booklet, describing in detail each of the 30 species of butterfly recorded to date at Heartwood. Heartwood Forest is located between Sandridge and Wheathampstead. The 350 ha (850 acre) site was purchased by the Woodland Trust in 2008 and although most had previously been arable farmland, 18 ha (44 acres) comprised ancient semi-natural woodland. Extensive planting of trees, grasses and wildflowers has led to the development of a diverse natural habitat which is proving to be a haven for butterflies.



The book describes the establishment and routes of 2 recording transects, the data from which provides the material for this book. Following a graphic display of the flight times of all the recorded species, the butterflies are then presented by family. For each family (e.g. Skippers, Browns) there is a 1-page overview which includes for each species within the family a chart detailing the numbers seen annually on each transect route since 2010. This is then followed by a full page allocated to each species, all lavishly illustrated with photographs, not only of the adults, but also of the egg, caterpillar and

pupa of each, not to mention a photo of the larval foodplant. This is complemented by a brief description covering identification, lifecycle and frequency and distribution, this latter being accompanied by a graph illustrating the flight times and abundance on each of the 2 transects.

The final few pages include a look to the future, speculating about which additional butterfly species may colonise Heartwood in the coming years, and also illustrate several day-flying moths which can also be encountered during a visit.

The design and layout of this book (attributed to Steve Parkes) deserve special mention – it is rare to pick up any publication where you instantly feel that the design works well. Given the amount of information packed into each page, everything is clear and accessible. Graphics and text are well integrated and the use throughout of photographs rather than drawings really conveys each species to the reader.

This is a booklet that is of value to anyone interested in butterflies, regardless of whether they know or will be able to visit Heartwood Forest itself. The concise, pictorial descriptions of each species, their lifecycle, foodplants and flight periods make this a valuable handy reference guide, which would be especially useful to anyone who has only recently developed an interest in butterflies and is keen to learn more.

Copies (only £4) can be obtained from Carpenters Nursery, Sandridge or from Wheathampstead Post Office. Alternatively, e-mail Brian Legg, the compiler of the book at: brianjlegg@gmail.com All profits are shared between the Woodland Trust and Butterfly Conservation.

Do You Really Expect to See Butterflies in August – A Personal Diary

Author: David Chandler

ISBN: 978-1-5272-5076-5 £12.50 paperback; £9.99 e-book

Over the years, David has been Branch chairman of two different Butterfly Conservation Branches (our own Hertfordshire & Middlesex Branch and Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire); more recently, he acts as an ordinary member of BCs Cambridgeshire & Essex Branch. In this biography he writes of his life with butterflies and how his job, his

**DO YOU REALLY
EXPECT TO SEE
BUTTERFLIES
IN AUGUST?**

A Personal Diary



DAVID CHANDLER

marriages, his job moves and his membership of Butterfly Conservation have all shaped his life and his scientific knowledge in both the UK and when visiting relatives abroad in Australia and South Africa.

The title of the book is a question that he was asked by his brother, when he arrived to visit in Australia in 1995 – it was mid-Winter there with few butterflies expected. Since 1989, David has regularly chronicled his butterfly observations both locally in the UK and when travelling abroad, and many of the resulting articles have appeared in the

newsletters of the BC branches he was associated with. This book represents over 30 years of these publications and notes, and is David's attempt to chronicle the sad decline in even our common British butterflies that has evolved over that period.

The book is divided into 5 main sections – Muses, Field Trips, Butterflying Holidays, AGMs Magazines & Regional Events, and Science, Workparties and Scientific Analysis. The individual articles within each section are all brief (1-2 pages) so the book can be 'dipped into' e.g. to read a series of related articles. There is much of interest here of a historical perspective allowing the reader to compare today's experiences with those from the past 30 years. If I have one minor quibble with the book, it is that each chapter is organized in reverse chronological order i.e. with the more recent articles first and going progressively back in time. My personal preference would have started with the more historical observations and progressed to the present day. Throughout, David's passion for butterflies and their conservation shines through, and the articles often include little anecdotes that bring the episodes to life.

David has self-published this book and has a small number of paperback copies available (first-come, first-served) which he can send to interested members in return for a donation of £12.50 to Butterfly Conservation. (Please contact the newsletter editor – details on back cover – who can forward your message to David.) Alternatively, it is now available as an e-book on Amazon Kindle for £9.99 (of which about £7.20 will be passed to BC after Amazon's fees). (Amazon

Link:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=DO+YOU+REALLY+EXPECT+TO+SEE+BUTTERFLIES+IN+AUGUST&i=digital-text&ref=nb_sb_noss

[Note that the book has been published in the name of David KL Chandler as there is another David Chandler in Cambridge that publishes nature books with the RSPB and it was necessary to differentiate.]

Visit to Hazely Heath, Hampshire, by Peter Fewell

Hazeley Heath is situated along the B3011 off the A30 at Hartley Wintney grid ref SU756578 and is partly managed by the local council and the RSPB. Rick Vickers and I first went out to this site on the 6th July 2019 to find the Silver- Studded Blue - a species we had not yet seen at the time despite looking at Thursley Common in Surrey and other sites in previous years. It was a delight to find some males in 2019 in this lowland heath habitat. It is a fascinating place to visit in it's own right, known for birds such as the Dartford Warbler and Nightjars. As well as the butterflies, there are some interesting bee species to be discovered and other invertebrates which inhabit this kind of habitat.

What is immediately impressive is the diversity of plants that grow there, some familiar such as teasel, brambles and the heather of which we were particularly looking for to try and find Silver-Studded Blue (it's the larval foodplant). Wild parsnip, weld and burdock were buzzing with bees in the upper parts of the site. These upper parts appear to be more chalky than the lower parts where the heather grows. Other species of butterfly to be found at Hazeley Heath include Marbled White, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Large and Small Skippers, Holly and Common Blues, Comma and several other of the more common species. Gatekeepers were doing particularly well on the August visit this year.

It was the 8th August 2020 when we returned to Hazeley Heath and it was a hot one. We were hoping to find the Silver-Studded Blue again but knew we may be too late, as a lot of butterflies were emerging earlier than usual this year. A blue flew over the heather which turned out to be a Holy Blue and another later turned out to be a Common Blue. Alas no Silver-Studded Blues seen this year but the other

butterfly we were hoping to find was present - the Grayling, which generally does well in this type of habitat. After seeing the first few we took a walk along a wooded path bringing us out to a recent clearing. Birch stumps with a few patches of heather and a couple of standing birch trees. Looking like a likely spot we began walking through and it wasn't long before Grayling were spotted. They are well camouflaged in a clearing such as this, especially when perched on birch and birch is a good place to look for them in open sunny spots. A pair came and landed in front of me, briefly displaying an act of courtship with the female opening her wings. It may well have been an act of rejection, but from what I've read it is supposed to be the males that usually do this. However the abdomen was not raised as in other species showing rejection. Perhaps this female was trying to tempt a reluctant male. Unfortunately at the time I had my camera setting to a slower shutter speed and the photos came out horribly overexposed. With some computer manipulation to make the photo a little better it does at least show the upper wings. Although Graylings always rest with their wings shut, a photo of the upper wings can be done if you come across a courting pair. Hopefully you will have your camera settings right! These butterflies will frequently land on you in these situations which adds to the experience of finding them.

Like so many other locations, on the first visit it is fairly straightforward to find your way in. Finding your way out can be a bit of a problem with paths that look similar and familiar at the same time. It took us about an hour to find the car on the first visit. We fared a little better this year and only got briefly lost along a similar looking path. Nonetheless I could think of much worse places to get lost in, Hazeley Heath is well worth a visit.



Graylings © Peter Fewell

**Unusual Peacock Migration in 2019, by Andrew Neild
(FRES; Scientific Associate of the McGuire Centre,
University of Florida)**

The following was observed by one of our members and initially reported in the newsletter of the Suffolk Branch (vol 76, Autumn 2019)

I am a member of Herts & Middlesex BC, spending my annual 2 weeks holiday here in Aldeburgh, where I've been visiting (and lived as a kid) since the late 1960s.

I mention this to emphasise a point – I have never in my life seen so many Peacock butterflies – dozens and dozens, as reported also on your sightings page by others. I noticed the same at Minsmere. In fact, most butterflies on buddleia are peacocks. I've seen very few other nymphalids ...

Now for the explanation on the hottest day last Thursday (25th July), I spent about twenty minutes on the beach and noticed a few Peacock butterflies coming off the sea, but never paid much attention as I was distracted by my family. The next day, with an hour on my hands, and my brother and niece, we noticed that the Peacocks were all coming at right angles to the beach, from the sea – clearly migrating. We saw all of them from about 50 metres out, and up to 25 metres either side of us.

We estimated one per minute over that one hour, and as I say, on a front across the beach of say 50 metres. This represents a staggering number of butterflies coming ashore: conservatively 1200 specimens per kilometre of coastline per hour. Given the large numbers at Minsmere, it seem safe to assume that the front extends at least to there, and presumably much further afield, both south and north.

Every so often a small wave of 4-5 Large whites would also come in. We also noted a lot of small flies, and a couple of very large dragonflies. Overhead we spotted large numbers of swifts flying very high, massed over the beach, clearly enjoying the feast.

To be honest, I was initially sceptical and of the opinion that the butterflies were just confused Suffolk specimens that had drifted off to sea, but it quickly became obvious that this was not the case. The butterflies were flying in directly from the sea, and because of their white colour, the *Pieris* could be seen much further away, probably up

to 200 metres distance. There can be no doubt they were migrating.

The weather conditions on Friday when we observed this were interesting – it was very hot, and sunny, the sea was calm, and there was a light breeze coming off the Suffolk coast. At around 5 pm this suddenly changed – a light cold breeze kicked up off the sea, onto the land, the sea became a little choppy, and almost immediately we saw no more butterflies. I have no idea if the butterflies had timed their departure to avoid the cold breeze, or if the breeze itself was enough to seal their doom at sea ...

It was fascinating that the only species migrating were Peacock and Large White; and I confess I was not aware of any reports for the migration of either species.

Subsequent to this report, Bill Stone, the Suffolk Butterfly Recorder responded “Your observations reflect what others saw further north (Minsmere/ Kessingland/ Lowestoft) particularly with large numbers of Peacock along the beaches and slightly inland.”

*..to which Andrew commented “that's 40kms or so from Aldeburgh. I conservatively estimated 1200 specimens per hour per kilometre of coastline in Aldeburgh - if the same number were coming ashore all the way to Lowestoft, that's nearly **50,000 per hour(!)**, and it's highly likely the front was much longer.*



Copy Deadline for the March Newsletter will be

28 February 2021

Files can be sent by e-mail to
ian-small@virginmedia.com
or send an article by post - address on back cover

What have you managed to see in spite of the Covid-19 restrictions? It would be fascinating to add some other observations to those in this edition.

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