

# HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

# NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 88      Spring 2024

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chair's Report.....	<a href="#">2</a>
Garden Citizen Science Project - Can You Help? .....	<a href="#">3</a>
Members' Day 2024 - A Brief Overview .....	<a href="#">4</a>
Recording the Butterflies You See.....	<a href="#">8</a>
Four Hairstreak Species on a Transect in Southall .....	<a href="#">10</a>
Brown Hairstreak Egg Search .....	<a href="#">13</a>
Brilliant Brown Hairstreaks ! .....	<a href="#">14</a>
Brown Hairstreak Searching .....	<a href="#">18</a>
Branch Website Upgrade 2024 .....	<a href="#">19</a>
Hibernating Butterflies.....	<a href="#">21</a>
Join the Dark Side.....	<a href="#">22</a>
Notices .....	<a href="#">23</a>
Committee Contact details & Online Links.....	<a href="#">24</a>

*In the pdf version of this document, active hyperlinks are displayed in bold blue font - clicking on this will take you directly to the source. For those reading the printed version, the full internet location is either obvious in the link or is detailed next to it.*



**Butterfly  
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



---

**Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull**

---

I love this time of year with Spring in the air and the butterfly season stretching ahead.

It was good to see so many of year at this years Members Day at our new venue in Chiswell Green. Fortunately, the weather held up for our trip to the butterfly bank! Thanks so much to Liz Goodyear and all who helped with the organization - see full report on [page 4](#).

Do join us one of our many butterfly walks or moth events. The walks are usually fairly slow and easy and suitable for all ages. There's always a well-informed walk leader to show you the best spots to see butterflies and help brush up your identification skills! There is usually no charge – the full program will be on the website and circulated to members.

It's been a brilliant start to the year with Brown Hairstreak returning to Herts after a 25-year absence – we have 3 articles starting on [page 13](#).

We are asking all our volunteers to sign up to Assemble, BCs new volunteer database. The initial reason to register is so that you continue to be covered by the BC insurance policy while undertaking any tasks. But the system offers much more information and access to events and opportunities. More information can be found on these web pages I know many of our active volunteers have already registered, but all members are welcome. Its simple to use, just follow this link. <https://volunteer.butterfly-conservation.org/signup/peu5bts>

Finally, a word of thanks, firstly to John Murray, who has stood down from our committee after an amazing 29 years. Most recently our Moth Officer, John was previously our Butterfly Recorder and produced our Annual Reports for nearly 20 years. John did much to inspire recording in the Branch and the quality of the reports he produced were the envy of most other Branches. I was pleased to say thankyou in person at Members Day and give John a Richard Lewington print of a Puss Moth (and its caterpillar) as a sign of our appreciation. Thanks also to Ele Johnstone, who has been our Engagement Officer on the Big City Butterflies Project for the last three years. Ele is moving to a new job this month and we are currently recruiting for a replacement (details on BC website). She has brought real energy and enthusiasm to the task, helping to make the project a big success.

## **Garden Citizen Science Project - Can you Help?**

Are you interested in helping to save important flower-visiting insects all from the comfort of your garden?

My name is Morgan Morrison, and I am a PhD student at Royal Holloway, University of London. I work on pollinator conservation and citizen intervention and am looking for volunteers for the second year of the citizen science study called 'Optimow'. This study will be looking into how you can manage your gardens to help bees, butterflies and other pollinators. In the study you will be given a mowing frequency to follow and then you will count pollinators in your garden each week. The study will take 15-25 minutes a week.

This is the second year of the study. In 2023, we had an amazing 180 participants and saw a 75% increase in pollinator numbers in one of the groups!! We hope to build on this work, so we have robust advice to give members of the public about managing their lawns to help pollinators.

If you are interested in taking part, you can sign up using the following link to the **Google form** for more details and to register your interest.

[<https://forms.gle/scmLF3h1XvoHTkcSA>]

Any questions, don't hesitate to drop me an email at [morganmowing2023@gmail.com](mailto:morganmowing2023@gmail.com)

Please note: This email has been created for the study and is not my academic email. If you're apprehensive to click unknown links please Google 'mark brown lab optimow'. This will provide you with information.

Thanks in advance,

Morgan Morrison

Twitter: [@morgsmorrison73](https://twitter.com/morgsmorrison73)

## Members' Day 2024 - A Brief Overview, by Ian Small

Members' Day was held on 6th April at Greenwood Park Community Centre, close to St. Albans, and was attended by about 50 people.

Our Chair, Malcolm Hull, welcomed everyone and provided a comprehensive review of the extent of Branch activities over the previous year. He spent some time describing our preferred methods by which members should record their butterfly sightings, which are described in the article by Andrew Wood on [page 8](#). Malcolm described the extensive progress made in our area as part of the Big City Butterflies project. These include the establishment of 12 new recording and monitoring schemes, direct improvement of the habitat at 12 sites plus the provision of site management advice at over 20 other sites. Community engagement has involved over 10,000 people, including over 1000 children through school workshops and the planting of school grounds.



Malcolm went on to talk about the Wild Spaces Project. Wild Spaces can be large or small - it is simply a space enhanced to help butterflies and moths. Different types of Wild Space include planters on a balcony, a wilder area in a private garden or an improved community space (e.g. public park, churchyard or allotment). Wild

Spaces is open to everyone – you don't need to be an expert to take part. There is a mobile-friendly website with lots of bitesize information and ideas to try. For more information, visit [www.wild-spaces.co.uk](http://www.wild-spaces.co.uk).

Malcolm then talked about landscape-scale projects, where BC work with partners to create connections between fragmented habitats, thereby enabling butterfly populations to move between sites and avoid becoming genetically isolated. Examples included the Beane Valley, where work is focussed on protecting the Grizzled Skipper, and the Chilterns where the project is working on a network of sites between Hemel and Tring. This project aims to support species such as the Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and the Green Hairstreak. Work is also ongoing to develop three additional landscape-scale projects i) North Herts for Small, Adonis and Chalkhill Blues as well as Four spotted moth ii) North and West London Urban Fringe for Brown and White-letter Hairstreaks and

Purple Emperor, and iii) Inner London – to provide a continued focus once Big City Butterflies has finished.

Following the re-election of four committee members, Malcolm went on to pay tribute to John Murray, who is stepping down from the Committee. John was a founding member of the Branch, and authored our Annual Report, covering the fortunes of both butterflies and moths, for many years until taking on the role of Moth Officer, which he has held since 2011. Malcolm presented John with a gift in gratitude of his service.



John Murray

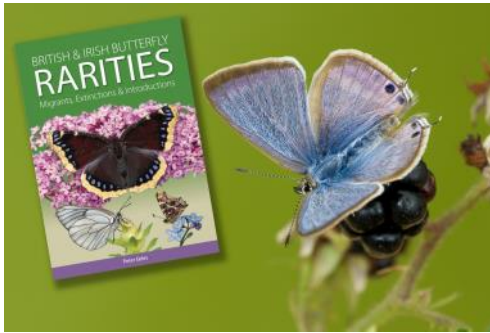
The next session was an opportunity to meet Martin Spray CBE, the recently-appointed Chair of Trustees of Butterfly Conservation. Martin has an impressive pedigree in conservation circles. Among other roles, he was Chief Executive of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) for 13 years and spent 16 years as Chief Executive of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. He is also the Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link (an umbrella group of multiple conservation organisations). Rather than give a presentation, Martin introduced himself and described his life-long passion for butterflies and all wildlife, before inviting questions from the audience.



Martin Spray

As Greenwood Park is the location for the creation of our first chalk bank, creating habitat for Small Blues, Malcolm gave a presentation describing the history of the project, culminating in the sighting of the first Small Blue there in July 2023. It was a female, so we hope it laid lots of eggs which will develop into adult butterflies this year. Malcolm went on to describe the creation of two further chalk banks, at Spring Bank and at Warners End, both in Hemel Hempstead. Following the lunch break, members were shown the chalk bank and display board at Greenwood Park.

Our keynote speaker after lunch was Peter Eeles, who spoke to us about the subject of his latest book - British & Irish Butterfly Rarities. Peter began by breaking these down into different categories, before



going on to further explain each and give examples.

The bulk of our butterflies (59 species) are either resident or common migrants (e.g. the Painted Lady). A further 23 species are either rare migrants (e.g. Camberwell Beauty), vagrants (e.g. the Monarch) or extinctions (e.g. Black-

veined White). No less than 29 other species are classed as adventives - in other words there is no way they could have got here by their own means - most will have arrived as immature stages packed with food or horticultural products (e.g. the Geranium Bronze). A further 10 species are simply classed as questionable historical records e.g. having been mis-placed in a collection.

A phenomenal amount of work has gone into the collation of all the information in Peter's book and several examples were included within the well-illustrated presentation. Among those discussed, the former distribution of the Black-veined white and the documentation of its demise led to the conclusion that its UK extinction (probably in 1923) was already a result of climate change, with the trend to warmer, wetter autumn and winter weather having a detrimental effect on survival of the larval stages.

A further example collated the autumnal timing of most UK observations of the Monarch with transatlantic weather patterns. The analysis strongly suggests that the Monarchs travel directly to the UK from North America, having been caught on their southerly migration and blown off course by strong westerlies, driven by depressions in the Atlantic.

Peter was followed by Liz Goodyear, who gave 2 presentations. The first focussed on advice for submitting records of moth sightings. Members who regularly use a moth trap will likely know to send a spreadsheet of their observations to the county moth recorder, Colin Plant, at the end of the year. For casual observations, and especially for observations of day-flying moths, then Liz drew attention to the recently revised website of the Herts Moth Group, which is well worth a visit at <https://hertsmidxmths.uk>



The site is highly interactive, allowing you to search for and see images, the current distribution and sightings information for any particular species, or even see which species should be flying that night where you live. Entering your sightings information is straightforward using the online entry form, and all validated entries are included into the county database.

Liz's 2nd presentation was about 'Brilliant Brown Hairstreaks', which you can read about in her article starting on [page 14](#), one of three articles in this edition describing the remarkable advance of this wonderful butterfly into our Branch area.

Following the afternoon interval, the raffle was drawn and there was a slide show of some excellent lepidoptera images submitted by members, with those present able to provide some commentary and background.

Members' Day ended with some closing remarks from Malcolm Hull.

Many thanks are due to those who provided much valued help and assistance on the day, especially non-committee members, particularly with serving and providing refreshments (Mandy Floyd and Ann Piper) and with clearing and cleaning the meeting room after the meeting (Leslie Williams). Thanks also to our speakers and to everyone who attended and made it such an enjoyable day.



## Recording the Butterflies You See, by Andrew Wood

With spring underway I thought it would be a good idea to set out the ways that you can submit records of the butterflies that you see.

First of all its important to say that we are interested in all records of any butterflies that you see even if they are seemingly common and well distributed species. This enables us to have data rather than just anecdotal evidence of potentially concerning changes which can happen quite quickly in butterflies.

Many people are already using a variety of phone apps and websites that allow easy inputting of butterfly records.

- **iRecord** - An app available on Apple and Android phones and on the desktop which lets you record any wildlife you see.
- **iRecord Butterflies** - A similar app from Butterfly Conservation but limited to butterflies.
- **iNaturalist** - An app with worldwide coverage for wildlife recording. It does tend to use North American common names for some widespread species, but it does encourage the inputting of photographs which is useful. A feature is that it lets other users confirm your id or suggest an alternative one. This has plusses and minuses in that if an inexperienced user makes a suggestion and others pile in to support it, then that can lead to some odd but well supported identifications.
- **BNM online portal** - This is a desktop application available through BCs national website and provides another route to putting in butterfly records.

These all feed into a system called iRecord which I, as the butterfly verifier for Herts and Middx can easily view and either accept, reject or query. Rest assured that over 99% of records are accepted. The main reason I have for querying is where an unusual species is recorded or something that is noted flying at an unusual time or is present in unusual numbers. The main rejection reason is a vague location. These apps allow you to pinpoint a location on a map and it is important that this is as accurate as possible. Unfortunately, I have to reject records that are marked as "London" or cover a large area such as some of the London parks where they may cover several square kilometres.



If you record butterflies in the following schemes, I will also receive them as an iRecord verifier so there is no need to enter them again:

- Big Butterfly Count
- Garden Butterfly Survey
- BTO Garden Birdwatch
- BTO BirdTrack

I also see all records reported through the UK Butterfly Monitoring Schemes' Transects and Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (both BC and BTO squares).

In the old days of paper recording, I had to transcribe thousands of records into spreadsheets and these new systems mean I don't have to do this, helping to eliminate transcription errors and making our data as accurate as possible. I am still happy to accept records sent in as spreadsheets (please avoid pdf and Word documents, as these have to be transcribed.) If you don't wish to do this, records on paper, in emails or text messages are still OK too.

However I do NOT monitor information posted in Facebook, Instagram, X or other social media apps. I am a volunteer and just do not have the time to do this.

**NOTE** that sightings uploaded to our Branch website via the News feed (which has replaced the old 'Sightings' page - see [page 19](#) for an article about the new website layout) **are not** forwarded to me. Members should separately upload these to iRecord Butterflies or one of the other apps mentioned earlier to ensure that the information reaches me and is added to our database.



### Four Hairstreak Species on a Transect in Southall, by Peter Edwards

Andrew Wood asked me to provide some context regarding my recording of all four Herts and Middlesex Hairstreaks while carrying out my UKBMS transect in Norwood Green in 2023.

The transect is 1.7km long and traverses a range of good habitats. I started it in 2019 to help me understand better the wildlife of this part of the Brent River Park (BRP)\*.

Sections 1 to 7 traverse two old neutral hay meadows (now cut and collected by a forage harvester). Both meadows are rich in native plants, Lesser Knapweed and 3 species of buttercups are abundant. Both meadows have very informal meandering bushy and brambly margins, with a wide belt of oak, ash, bullace, plum, gean, blackthorn, sycamore and hawthorn behind. The SW side is bordered by the broad dense band of naturally-regenerated native trees and shrubs on the banks of a branch railway line. Section 8 is a hedge-lined broad track. The recently-saved Warren Farm meadow is on the other side (Southwest) of the line, and the wider Osterley Park is just beyond.



Section 9 starts on a raised horse-grazed pasture then enters secondary woodland. 10 to 12 are in the species-rich small ancient woodland known as Long Wood. This is mostly of oak, hazel, hornbeam and native bluebells, with alder and willows bordering a stream in Section 12 and a small marsh adjacent to 11.

On Section 6 there is a dense long-established blackthorn belt (present for at least 60 years and about 200m x 40m) , which abuts the River Brent just below where it receives the Grand Union Canal proper. I refer to it as my 'Blackthorn Wood'. It is tall, beautiful, and thankfully largely impenetrable to humans.

It was on the blackthorn-sucker outgrowths from that Wood that I was very pleased to see, on 20th August, a male Brown Hairstreak sunning itself. It was about 1m up on a blackthorn leaf. I had excellent views for several minutes. Despite keeping a special look out for the 6 weeks following I didn't make any more sightings of adults. However, during a dedicated 1.5 hour search this March of the many suckers nearby (accompanied by a very observant local naturalist teenager) we (or rather he did first!) found one obvious egg, at Section 7. This was 1.2m up on the underside of a tiny branch junction. It had a small hole on one side, - proving that their parasites were being sustained locally, which is sort of positive. A day later I found another egg nearby, it was undamaged.

Just 2 days earlier a fresh female was spotted by Barbara Mulligan, my wife and myself, it was sunning itself on a leaf near the ground. This was on our allotment just 300m away in Hanwell (on the other side of the canalised River Brent). This was the very first that we had seen locally. Several more were seen on the allotments over the following two weeks. So, yet another colony for London.

Prior to this I was aware of the colony on Horsenden Hill, 5km to the N. The Hill has fair connectivity with the Brent River Park (the busy A 40 being the only sterile barrier). I shall be out searching many of the other local blackthorn colonies in BRP this year!

Prior to this, on 2nd July, on the border of Long Wood, I made my first transect record of White-letter Hairstreak, initially it was glimpsed on bracken. I walked a few metres to a small elm sucker and there it was, in good condition, at eye level. Another first for my transect route. Recent local records already existed for Wyke Green, 800m distant, plus Warren Farm (500m) and near Lock 96 of the Grand Union Canal, just 250m away.

On June 11th, in meadowland on Section 3, an erratically flying insect flew across my vision. It landed on a nearby large hawthorn bush, where I was very pleased to get a good 2-minute view of what turned out to be a Green Hairstreak. It then flew to the top and I watched it through binoculars for a further 3 minutes. Excellent luck.



Green Hairstreak  
Photo © Ian Small

Prior to this, the only London Borough of Ealing records I knew of were from the early 80's, - on the border of Perivale Wood, and in June 2021, when Barbara and myself spotted (and she imaged) a perfect one on a dogwood bush, on those Hanwell allotments again.

Needless to say Purple Hairstreak is found on many oaks on route and nearby, the maximum number seen on one tree being 25 (evenings), just a few are recorded during transect times.

4 Hairstreaks on one transect, - what next? the Black? The mysterious colony at Epsom is really not very far away!

The 2023 addition of these three species has increased the total number of butterfly species recorded on my transect from 26 to 29. Looking back at my 58 year local area list of 30 there I see that just 22 species were present in that same area in 1965. Remarkably between 1994 and 2022 the area gained 6 species, in chronological order they were (and still are):- Gatekeeper, Brown Argus, Ringlet, Marbled White, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary. The latter was added in 2021. Wall is the only loss known to me over those 58 years. See Colin Plant's 1987 'The butterflies of the London Area' for very telling comparisons. The total number for the OS tetrad containing the transect's core was a mere 15 species then. Not only that, none of the 8 surrounding tetrads exceeded 19 species. So, some things have improved!

These days it is especially heartening to see increases in species diversity in any insect group in any locality. The same cannot be said of numbers of individuals - my best tally on the transect was 314, of 17 spp, on 27/6/2019. I have had nothing nearly as good since.

*\* The BRP has effectively been a regional park in all but name since 1976. It includes most of the open land on either side of the River Brent from Hanger Lane S to Brentford, a distance of c. 7 km. The excellent Countryside Management regime started in BRP and Horsenden Hill in 1984 has been very good for wildlife generally. Despite personnel changes and cutbacks it is still largely one big interconnected nature reserve. Blackthorn with sucker outgrowths are common throughout, - perhaps partly due to the Covid 19 effect, and Council cutbacks. The importance of rotational cutting will be stressed by The Brent River and Canal Society (who proposed the BRP in 1973) and who continue to speak up for its welfare.*

**The following three articles all chart the efforts of our members to follow the remarkable story of the expansion of the range of the Brown Hairstreak into our Branch area**



Brown Hairstreak  
Photo © Paul Cools

### **Brown Hairstreak Egg Search at Stafford Road Open Space, Ruislip, by Ian Watts**

On Sunday 14th January 2024, 13 volunteers joined a small handful of regulars at the Stafford Road Open Space in Ruislip to help with the annual egg survey for the Brown Hairstreak. Postponed from the original date because of potential snow, the new date proved to be a very fine day to be out searching. Most of the volunteers were new to the task but it took barely a minute to find the first egg and show exactly what it was that we were looking for. In fact, the first Blackthorn bush that was searched contained 10 eggs and, spreading out, the volunteers soon got into their stride with egg finds coming thick and fast. In the public Open Space area, it seemed that almost all of the Blackthorn contained at least an egg or two and every attendee had success finding eggs.

In only a couple of hours or so of searching, a total of 103 Brown Hairstreak eggs (plus one Purple Hairstreak egg) were found, an excellent result that is consistent with the record number of adult sightings last summer. The Ruislip site seems to be going from strength to strength.

Alongside the volunteer egg search, Malcolm Hull, Liz Goodyear and Nick Furtek met with Ricky, an enthusiastic representative of TfL, to search for eggs on the adjacent TfL-owned land that is not accessible to the general public. A total of 15 Brown Hairstreak eggs were found, reinforcing how much this beautiful butterfly species is now part of the wider Ickenham and Ruislip landscape.

**Brilliant Brown Hairstreaks ! by Liz Goodyear**

Wow what a season for egg searching! For those that came to the Members' Day you will know about the amazing increase in distribution of the Brown Hairstreak this winter - thanks to several determined egg searching volunteers!

Rohan Harris will tell you his own story but the season started for me and a few others performing egg rescue operations, at two sites. One where we knew the hedges were due for their rotational annual flail and at another site where a large area of blackthorn/prunus was being cleared. Saving, storing and relocating eggs as close as possible to the donor site proved a new experience for our Branch and required a lot of planning and research with at present unknown results.

At the beginning of December we arranged to hold our now annual 'egg searching training morning'; I was going to be away so Ian Watts with Nick Furtek had agreed to manage the event. So there I was in relatively sunny New Zealand when I started to receive emails saying the weather forecast was snow, but the situation was being monitored – the event was postponed although it didn't snow in the end and was rearranged for 14th January – with an extremely successful morning. (See Ian Watts' article on [page 13](#).)

A few days before that I had helped Ian search for eggs at Claybury Park, a site in the London Borough of Redbridge (old Essex) that was found by Andrew Middleton in December 2022. Over a couple of visits Ian and I increased the 2023 total of 8 eggs to 25 scattered across most of the site. The first visit wasn't helped by the fact that despite the forecast saying it would be a nice day, it started to snow – not a good combination!

Ian then offered to help me look for eggs at Saffron Green Open Space; a site just north of Barnet but just into Hertfordshire. For many years this site was thought to be where a



A Brown Hairstreak egg  
on Blackthorn  
Photo © Rohan Harris



Hertfordshire Brown Hairstreak egg might turn up using the A1 as a conduit and as a result has been searched most years since the first eggs were recorded close to the Thames! Unfortunately the searching was still unsuccessful, however in the meantime, Rohan had now found eggs at Stanmore Country Park just over a kilometre from the Hertfordshire border but in this case following the M1 as a corridor.

Finding potential sites has required a lot of research and just as Rohan has also done, looked at a lot of maps and studied aerial images, so on the 2nd February, Ian and I agreed to meet at Aldenham Country Park which is close to Elstree in Hertfordshire. Our plan was to walk from there towards Stanmore Common and then return via Elstree. As with nearly every egg searching day we had to contend with mud but the other problem was that there was very little blackthorn/prunus until we reached the ditch that forms the Hertfordshire/Harrow/Middlesex boundary. We searched and searched the Hertfordshire side to no avail, then crossed the bridge over the ditch and walked 10 yards along the London Loop and there was an egg, and then even closer a second egg! All we could do was laugh!!! They were the only 2 eggs found that day!!!

We weren't going to give up though and decided to meet again on the Sunday in Bushey and walk to Merry Hill, a Woodland Trust reserve that neither of us had ever visited but I had heard that there was plenty of blackthorn/prunus on site! The first egg wasn't found immediately, it perhaps took 30 minutes but an egg was found much to our delight, and soon a second one and by the time we finished looking, 14 eggs were found! The first modern Hertfordshire Brown Hairstreak records!



Ian Watts finding the first Hertfordshire Brown Hairstreak egg.

The next day, Rohan stopped at a new site in Elstree and also found an egg there! Peter Fewell and Rick Vickers had also been out looking and between them found eggs at South Oxhey playing fields and in the grounds of Bentley Priory in Harrow and in the meantime Rohan



continued to find more sites in both south Hertfordshire and north Middlesex. In the south of Middlesex, Stephen Reisbach has been filling in more gaps around Feltham and the River Crane and Nick Furtek and Paul Busby were searching along the Yeading Brook! I was delighted that the Ealing Wildlife Group organised a group egg search at Horsenden Hill and found 60 eggs! There is little doubt that the rivers running north from the Thames have been acting as conduits!

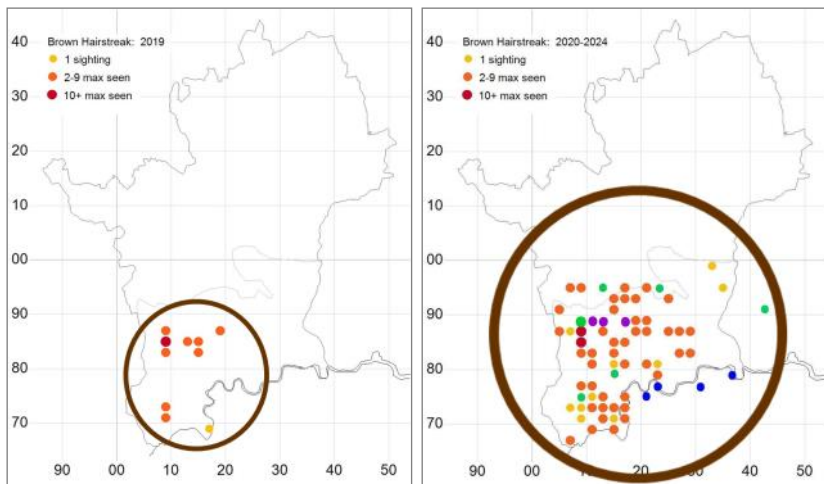
I also spent four days visiting the Darlands Nature Reserve at Totteridge, trying to conduct as thorough egg search as possible following up on the 2 eggs found in January 2023 and adult sightings last summer. Again it was hard going because of the mud but I ended up with around 40 eggs scattered across the entire site! A few days later, more mud was encountered along the Dollis Valley Green Walk but only 3 eggs were found that day but there was so much blackthorn! Several eggs were found in an area of scrub off the Grimms Dyke viewpoint, in Harrow, which had been searched in January 2022 when no eggs were found and despite me saying I wasn't going to do any more searching, I found 3 eggs at Whittings Hill just north of the Dollis Brook in Barnet. Meanwhile, Rohan continued to find even more sites including Hampstead Heath and Regent's Park! With this winter being relatively mild, cherry plum started to flower very early and the blackthorn also started budding much earlier than in some years which makes searching even more difficult! I was amazed at one site to find 2 eggs on cherry plum that was actually in flower!

I should add that we all had days when we couldn't find eggs; for example I visited the Oak Hill Park area in East Barnet and made two visits to Trent Park close to Cockfosters with no Brown Hairstreak eggs being found despite plenty of blackthorn/prunus being present. Whether this is a factor but the streams in these areas go eastwards towards the River Lea? All these negative sites still get mapped so we know the history of visits! We know that several sites in Harrow that were negative in January 2022 - now support Brown Hairstreak and that also applies to sites found in the Feltham area this winter! This tracking of visits is very important to our study; we want to know if you have visited a blackthorn/prunus rich site and not found eggs.

My last two visits were to vulnerable sites, first Warren Farm where the Friends of Warren Farm were fighting Ealing Council to reverse their decision to create several playing fields on the site. Thankfully

Ealing changed their mind and have agreed to designate Warren Farm a local nature reserve. 2 eggs were found on site and 3 more close to the River Brent which will help their cause as will the 3 eggs I found in the Hatton Fields area another vulnerable site to development in Hounslow and within sight of the Hatton Cross underground station and the runways of Heathrow Airport.

It has been a truly amazing season and I would like to thank everyone that has contributed to the eggs finds this winter. I would also like to thank Patrick Barkham the author and Guardian journalist for picking up on the story and including a small article in the Guardian online edition!



The expansion in the recorded range of the Brown Hairstreak  
between 2019 (left) and 2024 (right)  
(from Liz's presentation at Members' Day)

The Brown Hairstreak is a protected species under section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 and requires authorities to take its habitat requirements into account. So with so many eggs found, identifying the right person that needs to be informed within nearly every London Borough in Middlesex plus two councils in south Hertfordshire, as well as the managers of the Royal Parks and Corporation of London to name two land managers, has been a mammoth task for everyone involved. This being in addition to the time spent actually looking for

eggs so finding Brown Hairstreak eggs is a time consuming but addictive business! It will be interesting to see how many adults are reported this coming summer and how many more sites are found next winter!

For more information go to: [https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/BrownHairstreak\\_survey.php](https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/BrownHairstreak_survey.php)

### **Brown Hairstreak Searching, by Rohan Harris**

Over the last few years I have been looking out for Brown Hairstreaks in north London parks where I walk regularly, both for adults in summer and occasionally for eggs in the winter. Last summer after more intensive searching at Fryent Country Park I spotted my first adult female there, and in January 2024 I followed up on this sighting by looking for eggs more thoroughly there. Initial finds encouraged me to look at the field enclosures across the whole site to get an idea of their distribution and almost every field enclosure resulted in some finds. These positive results led me to revisit other north London parks many of which eventually resulted in finding small amounts of eggs.

Liz Goodyear contacted me and was very encouraging, she kindly shared her distribution map and mentioned that they had not been found in Hertfordshire. As a result, I decided to revisit Stanmore Country Park, just south of the Hertfordshire border. I knew there was a good amount of Blackthorn there, I found eggs distributed across the whole site. Eggs were found in Hertfordshire a few days later. Using the map to select areas that had potential, I started looking at other sites in Hertfordshire resulting in egg finds at several sites.



This remarkable photo shows a freshly-emerged Brown Hairstreak larva on the unfurling leaf of a bursting bud.

Photo © Rohan Harris

The process of planning, searching for and sometimes being rewarded with finds has been a wonderful learning process about this species, particularly at sites where they had not been recorded before. Despite much mud, rain and even hail, the seemingly improbable search for something so minute, intricately beautiful and carefully placed among the thorns has been a fantastic experience and a wonderful insight into this species and its habitat.

## Branch Website Upgrade 2024, by Peter Clarke



There have been murmurings about the look of our Branch website in the last year or so. This article attempts to explain the reasons why the website underwent a refresh not only in the way the webpages look but also the functionality of some of the processes. I looked at some websites pertaining to other branches of Butterfly Conservation (BC). Some directly link to the BC Head Office website and although it seems a good idea to adopt this approach for our branch it was thought by some people that there are several grey areas, one of which is lack of control on our part. Even the websites developed and managed by the Branches themselves are inconsistent in their presentation. A few branch websites were mentioned by committee members on which to base our revamped website.

In the end, the Hants/IOW Branch website was selected as the model. In addition to being visually attractive, the Hants/IOW website incorporates many useful features - increased security and improved performance. Another benefit is that the website deploys bootstrap

software which provides responsiveness: screens respond according to device type – smaller text for smartphones for example. Our website did support this ‘responsiveness’ but to a limited extent. One drawback on our branch website was the method of submitting sightings - sending me emails to display on a sightings webpage manually which I believe is old fashioned considering the many natural history websites providing this function automatically. In high summer, I sometimes spent 2-3 hours a day setting up ‘sightings’ entries on the webpage! The Hants/IOW website overcomes this by generating a news (sightings) form for users to fill in with details and then to be validated/verified by an administrator. Only after successful validation will the news item be output for all users to view. Another advantage is that we can do away with a database for informal sightings and instead insist that recorders should formally use one of the national databases like iRecord to submit sightings records – see the article by Andrew Wood on [page 8](#) and the [General Recording](#) page on the Branch website.

[ [https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/recording\\_general.php#record\\_sheet](https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/recording_general.php#record_sheet) ]

The upgrade was carried out in two phases: 1) include bootstrap software to provide some re-formatting and design of webpages and responsiveness depending on device type (as noted above) and 2) add the automatic submission of news/sightings items.

### **Upgrade phase 1 (Bootstrap)**

Most of the webpages, with priority given to the most visited, were updated deploying the bootstrap software. The 'Home' page was rewritten from scratch. The left panel has disappeared with the clickable items from there transferred to the banner or in the menu bar. Any news items, sightings or otherwise, were added to the right panel. This phase was implemented on 12 January.

### **Upgrade phase 2 (Automatic submission of news items)**

The sightings webpage is replaced by a [News items](#) webpage [ <https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/news.php> ] which as well as sightings, include events like online talks and field trips. The titles of news items are listed on the right-hand side of the 'Home' page.

This was an opportune time to revise the menu bar and the associated menu items. Among the webpages being revised are the moth webpages, e.g [Day-flying moths](#) - [ [https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/moths\\_dayflying.php](https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/moths_dayflying.php) ], updated by Liz Goodyear and [Record Mapping](#) -

[ [https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/recording\\_mapping.php](https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/recording_mapping.php) ]. All the species accounts have also been updated.

The major change, however, is the incorporation of the submission of news items. Implementation of this phase was completed on 28 February.

### **\*\*Submitting News Items\*\***

On the 'Home' page, under 'News' in the menu bar, click on 'Submit News' then add the details in each field on the form. If you have photos to upload click the 'Choose File' button then select the file you want to upload from the file list. Clicking the 'Upload' button should then load your photo onto the screen. Please ensure the file is less than 2Mb otherwise you may be asked to resize or crop the image. Add the caption for your photo. Click the 'Preview' button to check the result of your action. If satisfied, click the 'Submit' button. You should then receive a 'Thank you' message.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Pete Eeles, the chair of the Hants/IOW branch for providing much-needed support for the handover of software and the implementation of the upgrade.

### **Hibernating Butterflies, by Andrew Wood**

Five species of British butterflies hibernate as adults over the winter. The Comma, Brimstone and Red Admiral tend to rest outside in crevices in tree bark or in climbing plants such as ivy. The Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock like more shelter and come into structures such as sheds, attics, culverts and churches. March and early April are the time when the temperatures are generally warm enough for them to be active, find food and not need to take more than temporary shelter again. If you see a butterfly flapping around a window, trying to reach the light at this time of the year please try to catch it and let it go outside. If you see this behaviour in the cold months please don't let them out but move them to somewhere dark and cool, preferably with a way out so that they don't expend unnecessary energy.

I am interested in records of these butterflies indoors as there is some evidence of changing habits. The Peacock has always gone into hibernation in the summer but until recently the Small Tortoiseshell would fly on into the autumn and not go into hibernation until then.

You may have noticed that there are now few Small Tortoiseshells around in late summer and the autumn and from some evidence it seems that they are adopting the Peacock strategy of early hibernation. Is this a reaction to generally warmer temperatures? If it is, can they build up the fat supplies to see them through a long rest and do they wake up again in the spring? There is some real scientific work to be done here as this species seems to be in decline (we have relatively few spring records so far in 2024) so any dated records of indoor Small Tortoiseshells are very welcome.

What do all the other species do? They spend the winter as eggs, chrysalises or caterpillars. Of these only the Speckled Wood can do this in two forms, spending the time as either a caterpillar or a chrysalis. This means that it can emerge early as an adult if it has overwintered as the latter and a little later if the former. This helps to account for its long flight period which now spreads from mid March well into October as a series of overlapping and increasing broods.

### Join the Dark Side....

Dark skies are not just a treat for stargazers, they're critical for moths, bats and other wildlife to thrive. Light pollution interrupts the lifecycle of many of our moth species. Most of the UK's moth species are nocturnal and fly at night. Some moths are naturally drawn to sources of light, but artificial lights can disorient them. They may spend a lot of time travelling to artificial lights or circling them, leaving them too exhausted to find food or to breed.

Moths drawn to artificial lights are also more vulnerable to predation. It's also not just the adult moths which are affected. Some moth caterpillars are attracted to artificial light, which could take them away from food sources, leave them more vulnerable to predators and impact their development.

You can find out much more, and of course what you can do to help, by visiting Butterfly Conservation's **Dark Side** website

[<https://butterfly-conservation.org/join-the-dark-side>]

where you will also find a link to download a free guide.



## Newsletter Editor Role

After editing this newsletter for over 25 years I have decided that it is time to step aside and allow fresh blood to bring new life to it.

The role is far less onerous these days as the majority of members access the newsletter in pdf format, which can be generated by several software packages.

[I am able to continue printing and distributing the few hard copies that some members require, at least for now.]

If you think this could be a role for you, then please reach out to me - I'm more than happy to discuss what's involved and what is needed.

(see back cover for my contact details)  
Ian Small

**Copy Deadline for the Autumn Newsletter will be  
31 August 2024**

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](mailto:ian-small@virginmedia.com)

or send an article by post - address on back cover

I look forward to hearing of all your exciting butterfly or moth observations and anecdotes from what we all hope will be an excellent year for all our Lepidoptera and other wildlife.

### Committee Members

**Chair: Malcolm Hull**

11 Abbey View Road, St. Albans, Herts. AL3 4QL .....07768 154324  
[malcolmhull@hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:malcolmhull@hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk)

**Branch Organiser: Liz Goodyear**

7 Chestnut Avenue, Ware, Herts., SG12 7JE ..... (01920) 487066  
[elizabethgoodyear.t21@btinternet.com](mailto:elizabethgoodyear.t21@btinternet.com)

**Membership Secretary & Newsletter Editor: Ian Small**

59 Penn Way, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 2SH..... (01462) 677654  
[ian-small@virginmedia.com](mailto:ian-small@virginmedia.com)

**Records Collator: Andrew Wood**

93 Bengoe Street, Hertford, Herts. SG14 3EZ .....0776 5098824  
[zoothorn@ntlworld.com](mailto:zoothorn@ntlworld.com)

**London Contact: Paul Busby**

113 Southbourne Gardens, Ruislip, Middx, HA4 9TA .....07749 709422  
[buzz113@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:buzz113@hotmail.co.uk)

**EBG Liaison: Roger Gibbons**

7 Lowlands, Hatfield AL9 5DY .....[gibfam@ntlworld.com](mailto:gibfam@ntlworld.com)

**Publicity Officer: Alex Lewis** .....[lemsfordalex@gmail.com](mailto:lemsfordalex@gmail.com)

**Millhoppers Reserve Managers:**

**Paula Reid** ..... 0796 2874455 or [reidpaulaj@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:reidpaulaj@yahoo.co.uk)

**Christine Ridley** ..... 01442 386322 or [chrisridleysen@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:chrisridleysen@yahoo.co.uk)

**Chris Hilling** ..... [cosmosra@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:cosmosra@tiscali.co.uk)

**Webmaster:**

**Peter Clarke**, 13 Lyndale, Stevenage. SG1 1UB ..... [peter.clarke4@ntlworld.com](mailto:peter.clarke4@ntlworld.com)

**Branch website:** <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/ButterflyConservationHertsMiddlesex>

**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/Bc\\_HertsMiddx](https://twitter.com/Bc_HertsMiddx)

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/hertsmiddxbutterflies/>

The magazine is produced by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch of Butterfly Conservation (Company limited by guarantee), registered in England (2206468). Registered Office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QP. Butterfly Conservation is a charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SC039268). VAT No. GB 991 2771 89 The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Committee or the National Society. Copyright 2024.