

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 77 AUTUMN 2018

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**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

50th Anniversary



Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

The Joys of a long hot summer

Many butterflies enjoyed this year's sunshine, especially the blues and hairstreaks. Numbers of Common Blues, Brown Argus and Purple Hairstreaks all seemed well up.

Andrew Wood's sighting of a Brown Hairstreak in the London Borough of Richmond was the first confirmed record of an adult in either Herts or Middx for over 20 years (see article on [page 5](#)).

Other species produced extra broods, including Dingy Skipper and Peacock – keep looking out for unexpected butterflies during the autumn.

But it was not all good news as several species finished early. Numbers of Small and Essex Skippers continued to decline and numbers of migrants such as Clouded Yellow, Red Admirals and Painted Ladies were low.

Most spectacular was the explosion in numbers of Jersey Tiger moths, particularly in East Herts (see article on [page 7](#)).

These are just my initial impressions from the Sightings page of the Branch website, which remains the best way to monitor day by day progress of the butterfly season.

We will publish our full Annual Report early next year – do remember to submit your records to Andrew Wood, the County Butterfly Recorder by early November (see contact details on back page).

Small Blue Project

For the last two years we have been focusing our conservation work on the Small Blue, a butterfly which has re-colonised areas of North and West Herts after many years of absence from our area.

Reasonable numbers were recorded at its existing sights, with record totals at some including Heartwood Forest near St Albans where we funded habitat improvement works last year.

A recent exciting development is the opportunity for the construction of a chalk bank at Chiswell Green near St Albans to provide more suitable habitat. For more details and to find out how you could get involved see [page 11](#).

Members Day

Our main indoor event of the year will be during the day of Saturday 23rd March 2019 at the Civic Centre in Old Welwyn.

Put the date in your diary now, there will be more details sent out next February.

This is a great occasion to make new friends and catch up with the local butterfly scene.

We have confirmed our guest speakers will be the Butterfly Brothers – check them out at <https://www.hazelwoodlandscapes.com/the-butterfly-brothers> .

Call for Volunteers

Do you love nature and enjoy the outdoors ?

Do you enjoy meeting people and making new friends ?

Would you like to learn new skills ?

Then become a Volunteer at Millhoppers Reserve located near Wilstone

We are looking for new volunteers to join our current team.

You could be involved in conservation tasks such as managing a bonfire, hedge laying, fence repairs, raking of cut grass, shrub removal with bowsaws, loppers or 'tree poppers' and ditch/stream clearing.

Tools and gloves are provided along with other equipment and full safety briefings.

If you are interested, please contact Paula at reidpaulaj@yahoo.co.uk or call 07962 874455

East Herts Geology Club - Annual Charity Lecture

*This year they are supporting the Herts & Middlesex Branch of
Butterfly Conservation*

**‘Chalk hills, clays and pebbles – the geology of butterflies
and moths’**

Speaker: Andrew Wood, author of *Butterflies of Hertfordshire
and Middlesex*

Tuesday 30th October 2018 at 7.30 pm

Christ Church Hall, New Road, Ware, SG12 7BS
Grid reference TL360144

Admission is £6 or £4 for members of the EHGC or of Butterfly Conservation. All proceeds from the charity lecture will go to Branch funds. Some items from the Branch Sales Stand will also be available to purchase.

Directions: The entrance to the Church Hall is on the east side of New Road immediately after you see the church. There is a small car park by the Church Hall, but alternatively there is public car parking in Kibes Lane, on the right hand side as you enter New Road from Ware High Street. There is also parking in Tesco’s carpark – vehicle entrance is a few yards further up New Road on the left.

For more information contact Liz Goodyear –
elizabethgoodyear@talk21.com or 01920 487066

For more information about the East Herts Geology Group visit
www.ehgc.org.uk

Brown Hairstreak in Middlesex - an Update, by Andrew Wood

Following on from the records of eggs of this rare species in south west Middlesex, we have had two records of adults this summer.

Andrew Wood saw a female at one of the egg sites in late July but was unable to get a picture. Then at the other end of Middlesex, in the London Borough of Hillingdon, several excellent photographs were obtained by Sharon Newson of a female in her garden, one of which is shown here.



Brown Hairstreak
Photo © Sharon Newson

This is really exciting news as it suggests that this species could potentially be present in a number of areas in west Middlesex where there are remaining Blackthorn hedges or scrub.

It is also worth reflecting on the fact that all these records represent the first ever confirmed records for this nationally rare species in Middlesex.

It has been suggested that the spread of this species is associated with movement along river valleys so it would be well worth investigating blackthorn hedges this winter that are not too far from rivers and streams in these areas, for instance the Thames, Crane, Brent, Colne and Yeading Brook. Now is a good time to identify Blackthorn as the bushes and hedges should be full of the dark blue/black sloe berries at the moment. Go back after leaf fall and look at the junctions of small branches



Brown Hairstreak egg

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

or the large thorns and see if you can find the very bright white circular eggs laid singly. If you do please try to photograph them, close ups are not easy as they are very small and let me know. The Blue-bordered carpet moth also lays white eggs in this position but they are not circular and are often present in pairs – but if in doubt take a picture and let me know. Most eggs are found between 1 and 2 metres above ground level and are usually on younger blackthorn growths that are not gnarled or covered in lichen and algae.

Currently we are not publishing the exact location of sightings in order to protect this rare butterfly and also to encourage searching across a wide area.

Searching For and Finding Brown Hairstreaks in Middlesex, by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

Andrew Middleton and I visited the Hillingdon area on the 6th September. We set off at 9 in glorious sunshine (too bright for egg searching) and walked the paddocks.

After a short while we saw an orange butterfly fly up over the blackthorn by an ash and over the hedge – at first I thought it was a Comma but it was zigzagging!!!! It didn't reappear.

We then walked towards where the garden sighting was made – the habitat was excellent.....

We decided to stop and have something to eat and watch a large ash with an adjacent field maple with loads of blackthorn/prunus underneath. At 11:40 Andrew got sight of a female Brown Hairstreak which landed on the ash and spent some time feeding on the presumed honeydew, coming in and out of sight as she walked around the leaves. It then made several flights between the ash and maple and then around 12:15 dropped down towards the blackthorn.

Having watched this individual for some



Brown Hairstreak
Photo © Andrew Middleton

time we then had another one fly in which unfortunately Andrew didn't quite get a chance to photo – but did get zoomed in photos of the first one. We then walked along the blackthorn back towards where we had parked when we encountered another very tame female which allowed for several close up shots. This one was so well camouflaged with the dead blackthorn leaves – this individual was at eye level, sunning itself on a blackthorn leaf but we didn't see any egg laying.

After getting our lunch we then walked the field edge the other side of the track to where we had seen what we are happy to accept was also a Brown Hairstreak and after watching the ashes and blackthorn, and now with a build-up in cloud we did some egg searching of suitable blackthorn just on the other side to our sighting and Andrew found 3 eggs!!!! We left at about 14:45

A very exciting day – with our first Middlesex Brown Hairstreak adults! We are happy to say we saw 4 female Brown Hairstreak on what must be a well-established site! It does make you wonder about an unconfirmed 1983 sighting.

Jersey Tiger (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*) Moths in a Ware Garden, by Liz Goodyear

The Jersey Tiger is a large colourful moth of the Arctiid family which includes Tigers, Ermines and Footmen. Usually seen flying between July and September; they are a common sight in Europe and until recently only reported from the Channel Islands and locations along the south coast. Although they can be attracted to moth lights, they are also seen flying during the day - often around buddleia bushes.



Jersey Tiger
Photo © John Hooton

There is no mention of the moth in the Larger Moths of the London area published in 1993 (Plant, C. W., 1993. Larger Moths of the London Area. London Natural History Society). Nor are they discussed at any great length in The Moths of

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Hertfordshire published in 2008 (Plant, C. W., 2008. The Moths of Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire Natural History Society), that is apart from a single record of one in Stevenage in 1934! On the branch website in 2005 Colin Plant commented in response to another migrant species sighting..... “However, I do have records of Jersey Tiger in the London portion of Kent - as genuine immigrants - so it is worth looking out for these sitting on the outside of the trap or on adjacent bushes etc. (none of the Kent ones were inside the trap)” and in 2009 on the night of 14th August I recorded my first Jersey Tiger moth in my Ware garden.

The branch website entry for the next day stated “Ware garden, a Jersey Tiger last night - Liz Goodyear (other reports have subsequently come through from Croxley Green on Wednesday, several in Essex and over 20 individuals seen by Helen and Tristan Bantock on Brockley Station in south London on the 3.08.09. Just on the platform-on vegetation and station signs-they were so easy to see and only two stops from London Bridge!)” As Colin Plant mentioned in 2005, there had for some years been news that there was a developing population in south London. The source of the population maybe open to debate – were they there as a result of a release or created by immigrant adults or just simple dispersal from existing coastal sites. Whatever, they had as a result bred with considerable success in the surrounding landscape!

Whilst maintaining the branch website, because the moth does fly during the day, I started to get more reports of sightings - initially from regular contributors. However, then members of the public started reporting sightings of an unusual ‘butterfly’ – usually asking what were they and were they rare? And with an accompanying photo! Colin Plant and Andrew Wood would also receive numerous emails or phone calls during the summer months each year with similar requests and photos. Over the last few years the distribution range has spread through Middlesex and into Hertfordshire – but generally keeping to the eastern side of the branch area and along the Lea and Stort Valleys, but with each year there have been more reports from other parts of Middlesex and Hertfordshire.

Having had the second known Hertfordshire report – that in itself was significant I started to see them more regularly. However, there must be something about my garden though as the numbers I started to report seemed quite high. I do have a lot of butterfly and moth friendly flowers close to where I have located my moth light and these

are kept watered during the summer to help provide a good supply of nectar and maybe there is good suitable breeding habitat in my local landscape?

So starting in 2009 with a single sighting, we progressed with no further sightings until the summer of 2012 and 2013 when I saw singletons in each year; 2 in 2014; 13 in 2015 and increased numbers in 2016 (41) and 2017 (38). On two nights in both years I recorded 10 and 12 in or around the moth light which incidentally comprises two x 30w actinic tubes.

The exceptional summer of 2018 didn't initially prove to be that good for moth numbers in the early weeks of the heat wave. Nights were often cool and clear which are not ideal conditions for recording moths. However, on the night of the 23rd July I was stunned to find 39 Jersey Tigers in or around the light, on plants and the glass and structure of the adjacent greenhouse! The next night there was only 7 so I assumed that numbers would start to drop off after I had spent a week away. The light went back on the 4th August and I was a bit shocked to find 34 the next morning, dropping to 32 on the 5th. This I thought must be it.....so imagine my amazement when on the next morning I found 93!

They were almost impossible to count as the warm weather made them very active and any disturbance caused them to fly off. The presence of hornets and wasps not helping as they contributed to the disturbance! I simply had to be extremely methodical in my



Jersey Tiger moths at Liz's moth trap.

counting, doing a section of the greenhouse, traps sides, Perspex, inside and what was visible amongst the egg boxes one bit at a time. Only adding to the count those found underneath an egg box. Any subsequently seen on vegetation had to be ignored as they could be ones that had flown off. Having recorded 93 I couldn't believe the numbers could increase further so when I walked up the garden on the morning of the night of the 7th August I was shocked to count 141 – I have no idea how exact that figure was since I recorded around 350

moths in total that night! It was an unbelievable sight which even attracted the notice of my husband and daughter who normally show no interest in the moths! The next night I didn't turn the light on, it was essential that these moths dispersed out of my garden and two days later I recorded only 2 although the night was very unfavourable for all moths. Over the next 10 or so days of recording, numbers did increase but never to the numbers recorded at the beginning of August. The last night I saw any was 22nd August when I found 4, after which I had nearly 7 nights when I was away. On my return nothing! The total count for 2018 was 575 Jersey Tigers!

Of note is that Andrew Wood records moths in Bengeo, and as a comparison of their spread, he lives just under 3 miles as the moth flies south west of my garden but still along the Lea Valley. It first appeared there in 2015 and it has built up as follows 2 in 2015 and 2016, 51 in 2017 and 109 in 2018. Ben Sale in Stevenage has a different story so living north and slightly west roughly 16 miles away an extremely stark comparison. First year recorded there was in 2017 with 1 and in 2018 he has seen 3. Both Andrew and Ben will have recorded their garden moths most nights this year, whereas because of my other recording interests there will be several nights when the light is off so my numbers could have technically been even higher?

One other aside is that the majority of Jersey Tiger have a reddish/orange hindwing but a few have a yellow hindwing referred to as the form *ab. lutescens*. As the numbers increased I was asked if I had noted how many of each I was recording and on the morning 5th August I did attempt a quick assessment – the results were of the 32 moths I was able to note that 11 had the yellow hindwing. After that night I gave up – just simply counting the moths was hard enough, let alone trying to assess how many of the yellow form were present!



Jersey Tiger *ab. lutescens*
Photo © Robin Barfoot

Small Blue Project - Creating a Butterfly Bank at Greenwood Park, Chiswell Green, by Malcolm Hull

The Branch has applied for funding to create sustainable habitat for the Small Blue at a site near St Albans.

A new chalk bank will be created in an existing wildflower meadow close to the existing colony at the former Butterfly World site. The bank is in an area which is publicly accessible and will be covered with Kidney Vetch and Birds-foot Trefoil. We hope our application will be approved this Autumn and plan to start work straightaway.

This is the largest and most important project the Branch has carried out for several years. Volunteers will be needed to help with plating seeds and plants and publicity. **If you are able to help, please contact Malcolm Hull (details on back cover) .**

Thanks to Mandy Floyd, Sharon Hearle and Laura Popely who have all worked on the project development and grant application. Thanks also to Councillor John Bell and the staff of St Stephens Parish Council, the site owners, who have given their full support. The text below is extracts from the grant application made to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Overview

This project will enable the restoration of the threatened Small Blue butterfly to Hertfordshire. The Small Blue is the UK's smallest butterfly, and is highly threatened. In Hertfordshire, the population became extinct in 2003, but in recent years has started to make a comeback.

This project will provide a much needed boost to this comeback, as the return of the Small Blue to Hertfordshire has been slowed by the lack of Kidney Vetch in the county, essential for a breeding population. A ditch, chalk area and chalk bank will be created within a publicly accessed meadow in order to allow populations of wildflowers to thrive, and create a microclimate ideal for the Small Blue and other butterflies.

UK sourced plug plants of Kidney Vetch, the Small Blue's sole larval foodplant will be planted on the bank, together with other wildflower plug plants and seeds to provide a valuable nectar source for the adult butterflies.

In summary, work will involve:

- The introduction of fresh chalk onto an area of the meadow
- Creation of a ditch and chalk bank to create variations in the microclimate and vegetation
- Seeding and planting of Kidney Vetch, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Common Rockrose and Horseshoe Vetch on the chalk bed and bank
- Recruiting new volunteers through a programme of public events including guided walks and talks
- Producing a final report for distribution to landowner and funders.

Other butterflies which will benefit from project work include Chalk Hill Blue, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Marbled White, Large Skipper, Ringlet and Peacock. Volunteers from Butterfly Conservation's local volunteer-led Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch will be instrumental to the project, assisting with planting seeds and plug plants and recording butterflies on the site, together with volunteers from the local Friends of St Julian's Wood group.

This project aims to establish suitable habitat management which will encourage the butterfly to re-establish itself on a permanent basis.

St Stephens Parish Council acquired St Julian's Meadow in the 1980's as an extension to its existing ownership at Greenwood Park. The Parish Council are very supportive of this project and have provided a letter of support which is included with this application. They have a strong track record in environmental management and regularly receive the Green Flag Award, the international mark for quality of parks and green spaces. The site of the proposed butterfly bank was previously used for allotments. The meadow has been managed as a natural meadow to encourage wildflowers, birds, butterflies and other insects. There is full public access and convenient parking and proximity to several bus routes.

The long-term success of this project will be measured through ongoing species surveys, monitoring and habitat assessments which will record:

- The area of suitable habitat restored

- The abundance of Small Blue on the project site
- The abundance of other butterflies and moths on the project site

The Small Blue

Britain's smallest butterfly, the Small Blue, has undergone a severe decline in distribution (44% between 1976 and 2014). It is listed as a species of principal importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act, (2006), and was previously highlighted as a Priority Species under the UK BAP.



Small Blue
Photo © Ian Small

It is classified as High Priority in Butterfly Conservation's Eastern England Regional Conservation Strategy. In Hertfordshire, the butterfly has never been common. In the mid 1980's it was present at 18 sites in the county, but numbers declined steadily and it died out on its final Hertfordshire site in 2003.

After several years' absence, the Small Blue is now attempting to spread back into Hertfordshire, but this effort is hampered by a lack of suitably managed habitat. An early success in its re-colonisation was at the former Butterfly World site at Chiswell Green, a commercial leisure site, open to the public until 2015. The butterfly still occurs there, but the site is now owned by developers, closed to the public and not actively managed. It is 1.5 miles from the project site.

The Small Blue's range is restricted by the presence of Kidney Vetch, its sole larval food-plant. This plant requires well-drained poor quality chalk soils. Since the closure of Butterfly World, there are no reliable sites with public access in the St Albans district, as most Kidney Vetch is confined to motorway verges.

Small Blue eggs are laid singly into flowerheads of Kidney Vetch. The larvae feed on the developing flowers, but are also cannibalistic, eating any smaller larvae they encounter. Because of this, females select plants without an egg already present. When fully grown, larvae descend to the ground, wintering in soil crevices, and pupating the following spring.

Attention - Low Flying Purple Hairstreaks! by Andrew Wood

The Purple Hairstreak is a small butterfly which is possibly one of the most mis-understood species in our area. Why is this?

Well most of the time it lives high up in oak trees and rarely flies far away from oaks, unless it makes a short flight to adjacent trees (not necessarily an oak).

Also its flight time peaks in the early evening which is not when most observers are looking for butterflies.

However if you look up into Oaks from mid-June to mid-August you may see small silver/grey shapes making short flights across the trees, normally high up, though not necessarily at the top. Sometimes they will clash and their flight then becomes rather more agitated, but in any case all these flights tend to be over a short distance and over in seconds. The best way to locate them is to look up at the trees with the naked eye as using binoculars gives a much narrower field of view.

Occasionally they can be seen sitting lower down on leaves or, if newly emerged, on plants near the base of oaks.

Many people believe them to be rare but in reality they are greatly under recorded as they do not behave as many other species do.

Unlike many butterflies, but like other species that live around trees such as the Speckled Wood, they relatively rarely feed on nectar, preferring to get their sustenance from honeydew, the sugary waste product created by aphids as they feed on the sap of the leaves and stalks. Using this means that do not have to move far to find a ready made source of nutrition and they can stay protected from predators. However in very dry weather or after heavy rain, they will



Purple Hairstreaks
Photos © Andrew Wood

sometimes descend to the ground to take minerals from damp grass or mud or sometimes from what looks to us like dry ground.

The summer of 2018 was very warm and dry and this meant that aphids and thus honeydew were plentiful, however the warmth dries the sticky liquid and encourages moulds to grow on the honeydew creating a dirty gritty sticky mess, that as some readers will know, can make a real mess of cars parked below. The result of this was that low flying, or even resting, sightings became very much more common than in many years. Sometimes they would be seen on the ground, sometimes flying at head height or landing on grass stems or bramble bushes. The usual impression would still be of a small silvery-grey butterfly but with the additional flash of purple from the upper wings if you were able to catch a view at the right angle. The end of July/beginning of August was a particularly good time, those members who attended the new members' day will recall them flying along the gas main ride in some numbers. On one of my transect walks at Balls Wood I recorded more Purple Hairstreaks in one walk than I had recorded in the previous 20 years of walking the route

It looks as if we will get more Purple Hairstreak records, from a greater number of sites than ever before, for 2018, so if you saw them and have not reported please do!

Purple Hairstreak in Trent Country Park , by Simon Bullivant

On 20th July, my partner and I made our first trip of the summer to Trent Country Park. We were keen to see what effect the lengthy dry spell was having on the landscape and its butterflies. The pond levels were well down, the water garden was as dry as a bone, while the grass, like everywhere else, was a golden brown colour. As for the butterflies, Whites were especially abundant, Meadow Browns greatly outnumbered Gatekeepers, although there was not a single Vanessa to be seen. It was the behaviour of another butterfly, however, that really surprised us. We noticed what we took to be a female Common Blue flying low down amongst the grasses and brambles. On close examination it turned out to be a Purple Hairstreak, and in the next few minutes we saw more than half a dozen of them flying or resting near the ground. I have only previously encountered this particular butterfly at semi-distance, higher up in the trees, so this was a new

experience. We presumed the insects' behaviour must be in some way related to the hot weather. Was it occasioned perhaps by a shortage of aphid honeydew in the oak tree canopy? Are Purple Hairstreaks coming to the ground to take salts and sustenance from the dry earth? I should be pleased to know if other members have observed similar behaviour this year.

Over-wintering Red Admirals, by Peter Clarke

In the past few years, more Red Admirals appear to be surviving our winters, at least in the southern counties of England, probably due to global warming. Fresh specimens seen in March and early April may have emerged locally but we cannot rule out the possibility of early arrivals from the Continent. Since the Red Admiral can pass the winter in any stage (egg, larva, pupa or adult) it is worth following its life cycle during this period. The fact that females are laying eggs here in the autumn probably suggests there is less emigration to the Continent. Once mating and egg-laying has taken place is there a need for the adults to undergo a long journey over the English Channel? This could explain why we are seeing more adults here in the winter.

In light of this, I decided to undertake a project to discover if the Red Admiral can overwinter in any of its immature stages successfully in my local area. After some background reading on where I might find eggs and caterpillars I set out to search for suitable nettle beds in sunny sheltered spots around Stevenage. Females prefer healthy fresh growing plants to lay her eggs.

On 3 November 2017, I checked some low-growing nettles on the south-eastern edge of Cowley's Corner Wood in Knebworth Park. Three eggs were found, all on the upper surface of a nettle leaf, near the edge. On 24 November, one or two eggs had turned yellow-green, indicating that they would soon hatch.

On 4 December, no eggs were seen except one which had already hatched. No larvae were found but on 9 December, at least one larva, about 1 cm long, was discovered on the same nettle patch. On 14 December, a larval tent had been constructed around the same spot but had disappeared by 19 December perhaps due to the recent cold weather. On 24 December, an egg was found on a Ground Ivy leaf close by, but this was probably a case of mistaken identity by a female

as the plant was surrounded by nettles. Unfortunately, despite frequent visits to the site in the early part of 2018 I found no further eggs, larvae or, for that matter, adults either! They probably perished owing to hard frost in early January.

There was another site I investigated towards the end of last year. This is in Fairlands Valley Park, north-west of the Environmental Lake close to the St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School. The nettle patch here was more densely packed compared to the site in Knebworth Park. I had noticed earlier in the autumn that a Red Admiral was loitering over these nettles perhaps suggesting she was searching for a spot to lay her eggs. On 30 December, I found a larva here but I had no further luck on a number of subsequent visits until 13 April when I found a larval tent.

It is known that the immature stages in the winter progress very slowly. An enthusiast in Sussex, undertaking a similar, but more extensive, project found that the development from egg to adult for one individual lasted 216 days (18 Sep 2017 to 22 Apr 2018)! Nevertheless, the vast majority of specimens die in the winter so whether this strategy is successful or not, only time will tell.



SE edge of Cowley's Corner Wood 4
December 2017



Red Admiral egg 24 November 2017



Red Admiral larva 30 December 2017 at
Fairlands Valley Park

All photos © Peter Clarke

How many Red Admirals were flying at the beginning of 2018, up to the end of April? Any adults seen from late April are almost certainly migrants. In our branch area, at least 20 sightings were reported of which the earliest was on 2 January. As noted above, I did not find adults during this period but there was a report from Shephall, perhaps less than a mile from the site in Fairlands Valley Park, on 18 February but the butterfly was in poor condition, indicating that it most likely emerged here in the autumn.

It is thought that adult Red Admirals don't truly hibernate since there are many reports of them on the wing in January in the UK. In 2018, for example, there were 93 Red Admiral sightings and the next most reported species was the Brimstone with 18! However, it was a good autumn in 2017 for the Red Admiral which will have undoubtedly boosted the count in January 2018. There is evidence that females will lay eggs at any period during the winter if the weather is warm enough. I believe that if global warming continues this pattern of behaviour will advance northwards in the UK.

Have time on your hands this winter? How about searching for Red Admiral eggs and caterpillars on your local patch but you will need a hand lens and a pair of gardening gloves!

Website topic for observations 2017-18:

<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=8&t=9581&hilit=over+wintering+red+admirals&sid=0020e24b88a91c6467b1551e85b8f777>

Reference: British Wildlife, Volume 29, Number 4, April 2018, pp. 287

My Recording Journey, by Dee Cullen

I thought it might be helpful to share how I got involved in recording butterfly sightings. I hope it inspires you to do so also.

My interest in butterflies developed when I started doing the Big Butterfly Count with my son Pierre when he was 4. That was 10 years ago. It was a great way to get to know more about the different species and what was common around my local area. Pierre enjoyed it too, and he still looks out for butterflies. The interest and love of butterflies has

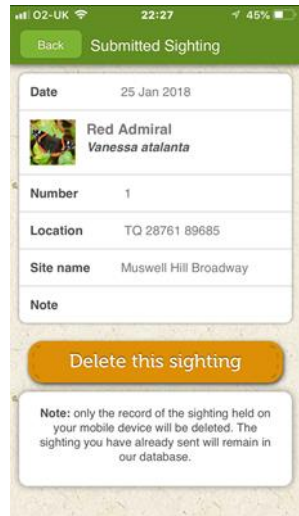
been there in the background since.

I read and was inspired by the book 'The Butterfly Isles' by Patrick Barkham. I was reading it for the first (of many times) whilst in Brittany on holiday and saw many and more varied species than in the UK. Pierre who was by then aged 7, spotted a small orange butterfly, around some menhirs near Carnac, he took a photo with my phone and from the colour plate in the book we worked out it was a Brown Hairstreak! That was a thrilling moment and I was hooked after that. I began to notice more when on holidays and visiting different places. For example seeing swallowtails in Greece was another highlight.



Brown Hairstreak photo taken by Pierre aged 7

I discovered the i-record app for year round recording last year. Previously I'd only recorded for the Big Butterfly Count on a different app. I use it everywhere I go, in my own garden, my allotment, on walks such as on Hampstead Heath, at Kew Gardens, Embankment Gardens near where I work and further afield on uk holidays. The app is useful as it also allows you to look back on and see what trends there are and make comparisons. I can also look back on key sightings, for example my first sighting this year was on the 26th January on Muswell Hill Broadway of a Red Admiral.



This is what a typical entry in the app looks like :

I decided I'd like to do a bit more recording and chatted to Andrew Wood about this, having read the very informative summary booklet he wrote 'Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex 2017'. He suggested some specific, lesser recorded areas on the area map for Herts and Middlesex and gave me some pointers about the square system. I found-and still find -the navigational elements tricky, but if I'm stuck I get the app to tell me where I am. It will give me the grid

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

reference of my current location, so I'm able to tell if I'm still in the intended area or if I've strayed out of it: a very helpful feature!

I targeted a couple of areas on the map, starting in April. There were highs and lows....

Trying to find some of the squares and work out where I was, proved challenging at times. One was intersected by the A1M and working out where to park and how to get to the place was a bit tricky, not least as there was a golf course on some of it. My son was with me and together we figured it out, his sense of direction is better than mine. Amazingly once I parked, the best variety and number of sightings weren't in the park and woods around Scratchwood, but just on the road verges. We saw many Holly Blues and Orange Tips.

The Notting Hill area was more frustrating. I visited various parts of it over April and May roughly once, sometimes twice a week, as I work in town. Not a single butterfly did I see, this seemed very odd to me. Maybe the under recording was from lack of butterflies, rather than a lack of records I began to think.

I did drop Andrew a line about it at the time, and he helpfully pointed out that negative results also provide useful data.

I worked out that if there were butterflies, that they were probably in hidden gardens or private squares as the streets around there aren't particularly green or tree lined. I circled around private square gardens that I had no access to, peering through the railings. But even more surprisingly, in Kensington Gardens, in the greenest and most shrub and flower filled bits of it, not a single butterfly did I spot. After that, I didn't visit for a few weeks. I was busy with my allotment, making up for the late spring we'd had, and getting seedlings out.

I did though, pay a visit to a Wildlife Trust area called Yeading Meadows in early July, as I was in west London taking my son to a badminton competition near there. I escaped the sports hall for an hour and saw literally hundreds of Ringlets, Meadow Browns and Skippers. The Skippers were busy mating.

In mid July, I made another visit to the Notting Hill square, and was at last rewarded not only in the streets of Notting Hill where I saw some Holly Blues and Whites, but in a patch of uncut meadow grasses and wild flowers in Kensington Gardens. There I was very pleased to see a variety in a tiny area, of Small Coppers, Common Blues, Skippers.

In the BC magazine which arrived in July, I saw an article about the Wider Country Butterfly Survey. It was encouraging members to sign up. This survey entails visiting a random 1km square at least twice during July and August. I signed up and as it was already July, I picked a piece of land in our area that had rights of way throughout, it was too late to be asking permission for access from landowners.

This afforded me another opportunity to hone my map reading and navigational skills. I had to find the square and do a recce to map out two parallel routes each of 1 km long across that square. Then I divided it into 200m

sections, numbered 1-10, noting landmarks so the route could be replicated. All this information was logged on the central recording system. Those of you who do transects will be familiar with this.

Northaw Great Wood is a beautiful and ancient wood. A tranquil place, with plenty of butterflies and other wildlife: e.g. hornets and deer, as well as butterflies. I had another first sighting there of the hairstreak variety, and felt the same thrill I felt on seeing the Brown Hairstreak back in 2013. I thought it was a white letter hairstreak, but it was hard to tell from the blurry photo taken from the other side of a bramble patch. As luck would have it, at the end of that walk I met the warden for the woods and we had a good discussion about the area, butterflies and recording. She confirmed that it was a Purple Hairstreak, and they are known to the area.

I'm still as I write in mid August, engaged in recording for the WCBS, visiting the under recorded squares and doing my usual daily recording of sightings where I am during the day.

I've learned such a lot since getting more involved. Knowing how seriously the sightings are taken and how helpful the data is in building up a picture of how the various species are faring, is rewarding. It's also taken me to places I wouldn't have ordinarily visited. I'm much more aware about the seasonal cycles of different butterflies, when they are emerging or coming to their end. I've started to get my



Small Coppers in Kensington Gardens

eye in, on the behaviour patterns and flight type of different species.

Ironically, back from a second visit to Northaw Wood on my birthday, a bit deflated not having seen many at all. As we were parking the car at home I saw a tiny pale butterfly lowish down near the path in my front garden, and couldn't believe it, it was a female common blue. A first in my garden, what a nice present!



Female Common Blue
Photos © Dee Cullen

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Stanmore Country Park (SCP) May 2018, by John Hollingdale

Starting with the Butterfly walk on May 5th; the weather was ideal; a hot sunny day. Eight people turned up, some having seen the details on a local web site; hooray for social media.

We saw, in the meeting car park, a Comma and a Holly Blue. It has been a good year for the Holly Blue in Harrow. Also for Orange Tips as we saw several on the circular walk. Also noted were a couple of Large Whites. As we crossed a corner of Wood Farm (the site uphill from SCP) a Peacock was seen. At this point the local Buzzard came over to inspect these intruders on his/her territory. We heard both Chiffchaff and Black Caps on the route. St. Mark's flies followed us. Coming into 40 Acre field on the East of the reserve two Green-veined Whites were seen nectaring. A very pleasant couple of hours.

On the other hand, the moth evening on the previous Saturday was disappointing. A North-Easterly breeze was blowing with a mostly cloudy evening. Only five locals turned up and the people who promised to come and didn't, were probably wiser than us. No moths were seen until a couple of policemen arrived to see what we were

upto. A Double Striped Pug then appeared and this was the only moth we identified. Oh well, better luck next time I hope.

Bovingdon Brickworks, 20th May 2018 (with the Box Moor Trust) by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

We joined David and Karen from the Box Moor Trust and five other members at Bovingdon Brickworks for our now annual guided walk around this lovely site close to the village of Bovingdon in west Hertfordshire. For once the sun was shining; it was a beautiful morning, but despite this, butterflies were quite elusive! We were able to get good views of several Dingy Skippers and 20 were recorded either on the field or in the 'pits'. Also seen were several Large Whites, Green-veined White, Holly Blue and Speckled Wood plus a single Small Tortoiseshell. Male Orange-tips were seen and an Orange Tip egg and a caterpillar were found on some Cuckoo Flower. Day-flying moths did make a small appearance with 4 Burnet Companion, a Mother Shipton and Cinnabar. A site specialist that feeds on Speedwell was also seen - *Adela fibulella*

Sharpenhoe Clappers, 30th June 2018, by David Chandler

As I ate my cheese topped brekky crumpets on Saturday 30th June at my pied-a-terre in Watford, I pondered how lucky it was that the long dry spell we were enjoying had continued to the end of the month and the prospect of many Dark Green Fritillaries making an appearance on the branch field trip to Sharpenhoe Clappers was becoming a reality. Excitedly, I set off up the M1 to the site and forty minutes later I arrived. It was shortly after 10 am and the car park was nearly full. Many of the cars were those of the people coming on the walk. In total thirty three people turned up, including a group from Essex who had enjoyed my Wall Walk at Canvey-wick in May so much that they came to hear my repertoire of butterfly stories all over again!

As there were so many people waiting around at 10.15am I conducted a pre-field trip experience for twenty or so members in the field next to the car park and we enjoyed the abundance of the Brown family butterflies present. Then, at 10.35, assisted my Mike Gitos and Peter Glenister, I took the party straight over the far side of the site. We went to the Dark Green Fritillary breeding area in the east-facing chalk-meadow. Once there, we proceeded to walk slowly, up, down and along the chalk downland hillside in a zig-zag random walk. Being so hot, nearly thirty degrees, most of the butterflies were constantly on the

wing and it proved almost impossible for any photography to be taken but, in contrast, everyone was able to see a spectacular display of lots of active butterflies in a chalk hay meadow in its finest condition.

Most of the Dark Green Fritillaries were males who were searching up and down the chalk down-land for emerging females. As we walked around the site watching Dark Green Fritillaries other down-land butterflies appeared, mostly Brown family and Skippers, We found few of the blue family, mostly late-flying Common Blues. Unfortunately no Chalkhill Blues nor Small Blues.

We did see 115 Dark Green Fritillaries and in total 20 different species, The Meadow Browns, Marbles Whites and Ringlets were very numerous and seen in hundreds. The white family were seen in reasonable numbers too, Overall about 750 individual butterflies were seen on the day which is one of the finest daily totals seen on Sharpenhoe during the entire butterfly season.

The twenty different butterfly species seen:

SKIPPERS: Essex Skipper, Small Skipper and Large Skipper,

WHITES: Brimstone, Large White, Small White, and Green Veined White,

BROWNS: Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Small Heath, Speckled Wood, Ringlet and Gatekeeper.

NYMPHALIDS: Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Dark Green Fritillary and Red Admiral.

BLUES: Common Blue, Small Copper and Purple Hairstreak

Fir & Pond Wood and Northaw Great Wood, 1st July 2018, by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

When the field trip programme is arranged it is impossible to predict when Purple Emperors will be at the peak of their flight period – a time when seeing them patrolling in the woodland canopy is at its best, so for some years now we have held back setting a date until we know how the flight period is progressing. The 2018 flight period proved to be a very early one and we went for the 1st July which was possibly already too late for peak activity!

We were joined at Fir & Pond Wood by HMWT Assistant warden John and his wife, and Sue Smith. Whilst waiting by the Fir Wood entrance

gate at 12.30, Sue's alert eyes picked up a Purple Emperor in the gap above our heads but no further flights were made so we walked the field edge to watch the canopy of Pond Wood as in previous years. At least one Emperor was patrolling the canopy although not too conspicuously so at about 1.15 we returned to the meeting point and again a Purple Emperor was seen, followed soon after by two chasing. This top edge was a new area for Emperors although the gap we were watching wasn't probably the exact assembly area.

Leaving John at Fir & Pond, Sue, Andrew and I then went to Northaw. We arrived just after 2 and almost immediately, a male patrolled the usual area, a gap between an oak, ash and sweet chestnut close to the car park and entrance road. Later two were seen chasing but around 2.15 we had a prolonged pause in activity. However, two then suddenly returned and we were treated to some amazing aerial displays. Just as we were leaving we had a chase of two with a third individual not noticing!!

Purple Hairstreaks were active at both sites and a Silver-washed Fritillary came along the path at Fir Wood.

Ruislip Woods NNR, 4th July 2018, by Dick Middleton

This was a joint meeting with the Ruislip and District Natural History Society and was supported by a maximum of ten attendees. The aim was to see White Admiral, Purple Emperor and Silver-washed Fritillary. However, as in previous visits the first port of call was the area known locally as the Water Board Field (although currently easily accessible it is owned by Affinity Water). The field is south of Copse Wood, at the back of Ruislip Lido car park. Unfortunately, the increase in grass and amount of scrubbing over, noted previously, continues to take place. While not as impressive as some years there were good numbers of Meadow Brown and Marbled White while the list was added to by a few Small Skipper (one was potted so that the group could have a closer look at the antennae), an unidentified White, and singles of Gatekeeper, Comma and Painted Lady added some colour to the proceedings. Also noted were Silver Y and Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet moths. Moving on through Copse Wood, Speckled Wood, Green-veined White and Purple Hairstreak were added to the list and then, along the narrow track approaching Poor's Field, a White Admiral flew in front of the leader but quickly disappeared and, so, was missed by almost all of those in the group. Disappointingly this

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

was to be the only sighting despite attempts to find one later in Park Wood.

The long climb up through Park Wood to the area by St Vincent's Nursing Home was now taken with the prospect of seeing Purple Emperor. This was an opportunity to have a snack and, eventually, at least two PEs were observed spiralling in the gaps in the canopy above the group but the icing on the cake was a view of one perched. It stayed long enough to be videoed which, on playback, it was found that the soundtrack had recorded the vocal appreciation of the group. In the attempt mentioned above to find White Admiral a change was made to the normal route and, while the leader charged ahead, the slower members of the group found a Silver-washed Fritillary. A closer examination of the photograph taken showed it to be a female.

So, to some extent, mission was accomplished but not by all.

Tring Park, 7th July, by Nick Bowles

Six people joined the leader to walk around the Woodland Trust's Tring Park as part of the Gordon Benningfield exhibition at the Tring branch of the Natural History Museum. It was a very hot afternoon of nearly unbroken sunshine so more butterflies were seen in the cooler, shadier woodland than in the baking grasslands of the Park. We were pleased to find Purple Hairstreak (which some of the party had never seen) and 15 other species. We were able to look at the difference between Green veined White, Large and Small White, and the uppersides of male Meadow Brown and Ringlet, which so many of us find tricky to tell apart. The relatively recently arrived Silver-washed Fritillary was present in most parts of the wood; but another more recently arrived species, the Purple Emperor, could not be located. Neither could Speckled Wood which would normally be frequent in the wooded section; but the dry weather had very seriously reduced its numbers.

Tale of two walks - Broxbourne Woods, July 4th & July 10th, by Steve Kiln

Firstly I led a walk from White Stubbs lane car-park on July 4th. We had a lovely warm day firstly we walked through Bencroft wood ride and saw Comma, Ringlets and Large Skipper. Then we reached the field on Wormley west end side. Very long grass but buzzing with butterflies. 40 + Marbled Whites, Ringlets and Meadow Brown and slightly less number of Small Skippers and Gatekeepers. Also had

Large White, Green-veined Whites and Small Whites and a Peacock and one or two Purple Hairstreaks in the oaks. there were also 20 + 6 star burnet moths and a few silver Y's.

We then walked from there a cool walk up to the top of Wormley wood. In the rides there to my delight we had about 5 White Admiral and about 20 Silver-washed Fritillaries, the lovely large orange and black butterflies.

In contrast a week later on July 10th, I led a walk from Broxbourne west car park on a cloudy morning and the temperature had dropped from near 30 to 15 degrees. We saw a few Small Skippers, Meadow Browns and Ringlets early on. But down the East Car-park ride where I had recently seen a purple emperor there were no butterflies at all but there were coal, blue, great and long-tailed tits flying around. We walked round to the ride near the west car park and into the main glade. We saw nuthatches, treecreepers and swallows on the nearby wires. But it brightened up a bit and the Marbled Whites came out , so did the skippers and we had both Essex and Small Skippers. they are almost identical except the Essex has black tips on the antennae. whereas the small has a little white. We also had Gatekeepers and a Small Heath and someone glimpsed a Silver-washed Fritillary. What a contrast between the two walks.

Norton Green, 12th July, by Peter Clarke & Bob Cliff

An overcast start to the day didn't promise much and yet 14 people turned up for the Norton Green Common field trip. We set off down the track and very little was happening until we reached the open area at about 10:45 when the sun began to burst through. We scoured the brambly bush on the right and suddenly we were overwhelmed with the number of Purple Hairstreaks dancing around and many sitting motionless on the leaves. While we were marveling with this experience Chris Benton had a look around in the 'meadow' on his own and found 4 or 5 White-letter Hairstreaks feeding on thistles. An opportunity missed for most of us because when we ventured into the meadow they were gone (or maybe just missed) but we found plenty of golden skippers, whites, Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Gatekeepers with the occasional Silver-washed Fritillary, Peacock and Comma. Entering the field beyond the meadow looked less promising as most of the grass was cut about two weeks ago but we still found two Small Coppers and a Common Blue. At around 11:50 we saw a flash of black and white near the wooden stiles - a Purple

Emperor! A female Silver-washed Fritillary was also spotted near this point foraging close to the ground. Returning to the meadow, we encountered a Brown Argus, a couple more Common Blues, Small Coppers, Red Admirals and Large Skippers. One of the highlights was finding a Gatekeeper ab. Excessa (extra black spots on the forewings) feeding on thistle. In the open area, as we were about to say our goodbyes at 12:50, a male Purple Emperor flew up and was about to settle close to some dog poo but didn't! At this time another Purple Emperor (a female) was seen high up on the oak towards Pigeonswick. Four of us stayed around for another hour and we saw 2 or 3 more Purple Emperors in the open area including a female possibly laying her eggs on a willow close to the bye-laws sign at about 14:10. Quite a few dragonflies about too like the Common Darter, Migrant Hawker and Ruddy Darters spotted by Bob in a shrubby part just beyond the common.

New Members' Day, including Bricket Wood Common, 21st July 2018, by Ian Small

Our annual event targeted at new members was held at the Parish Centre in Bricket Wood, and committee members were joined by almost 20 new members. Unlike last year, the weather was glorious and so we didn't need to adjust the agenda to avoid rain.

The morning started with an examination of the moths collected in traps the previous evening by John Murray, Andrew Wood and Liz Goodyear, with specimens ranging from hawkmoths to micro-moths displaying a glimpse of the huge diversity in size, shape and colour found in our native moths.

We then went indoors for a series of brief talks, covering BC and our Branch; identification, lifecycles, flight periods for our more common local species, and gardening for butterflies; butterfly recording (how and why) and finally about how to get more involved in our activities.

Our afternoon walk was to the nearby Bricket Wood Common, where, in line with the articles earlier in this newsletter (see [page 14](#)) the most frequently-seen butterfly was the Purple Hairstreak. Many were seen flying and perching at low levels. There was a solitary Silver-Washed Fritillary, but Brown Argus was common and camera-friendly, as was a Small Copper. Other species seen included Holly Blue, Brimstone, Peacock, plus good numbers of the usual Browns and Whites.

Therfield Heath, July 30th, by Martin Johnson

Nine of us joined the walk (part of the Big Butterfly Count scheme). We soon found our first Chalkhill Blues and, after initially finding males, we came across many (ca 40) females egg laying or looking for suitable sites near their food plant, Horseshoe Vetch. We also had fun trying (not always successfully!) to distinguish, both in flight and at rest, between the female Chalkhill Blues, female Common Blues and male and female Brown Argus butterflies. A significant minority of female Chalkhill Blues were of a locally common variant having four white marks on the upper wings. Also seen on the walk were two Small/Essex Skippers, Large White, Small Whites, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, lots of Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers and a few of a new generation of Small Heath butterflies. Several Silver Y moths (currently at plague proportions!) were also seen.

Beningfield Weekend, by Malcolm Hull

Two entertaining evening talks kicked off a weekend of events commemorating the life of Gordon Beningfield. The achievements of the celebrated artist, wildlife enthusiast, TV presenter and BC's past President were described by Margaret Noakes and Alice Adams in the last newsletter. Gordon brilliantly combined the worlds of science and art, so it was fitting that the talks took place in the Natural History Museum at Tring.

Dr Jim Asher, Chair of Butterfly Conservation described the achievements of our organisation in its 50th anniversary year and the importance of Gordon's contributions. Gordon's first book "Beningfield's Butterflies" and his subsequent TV programmes did a great deal to draw attention to the rapid decline of butterflies in the seventies and eighties.

At that time butterflies had much less support than today. BC had only a few thousand members and no full time staff. The Chequered Skipper and Large Blue both then recently extinct in England featured on Gordon's famous illustrations for Post Office stamps. He would be delighted to know that numbers of the Large Blue are now at their highest for 80 years and that Chequered Skippers are now flying again in Northamptonshire.

Gordon had a great love of the countryside and placed great emphasis on the importance of the landscape. At that time much nature conservation focussed on small sites and in some ways his emphasis on landscape, reflected in our modern approach to conservation, was ahead of its time.

Dr Julian Hume of the Natural History Museum brings extinct species back to life – a claim which immediately grabbed the attention of the audience!

Through painstaking examination of anatomy using bones, fossils other evidence, Julian creates lifelike illustrations showing how extinct creatures would have looked. 99.9% of all species which have ever lived on earth are already extinct. This evolutionary process has happened over millions of years. But today this process has speeded up. Extinctions linked to human activity started around 60,000 years ago and are caused by three main reasons

- Over hunting, with the slowest moving species killed off first for food, skins or feathers.
- Introduction of non-native animals which cause destruction – rats being a good example
- Deforestation and other changes to habitat through changes in land use.

Extinctions of species such as the Dodo in Mauritius and flightless birds in New Zealand are often cited as examples of early extinctions. In fact these were just the last sizable islands reached by man and so the last areas on earth to suffer from the problem. The relatively recent extinctions provide far more evidence for Julian to work on, though some of the 18th century illustrations of the Dodo were based heavily on the artists imagination. Contemporary extinctions are proceeding at pace and Julian described recently drawing the last Northern Black Rhino.

Book Offer

Gordon was a prolific author and published several books including his paintings, as well as illustrating several other books. His publisher, Calendar Books kindly donated copies of a number of his books to BC, which were sold to raise funds for BC.

Many thanks to Margaret Noakes for helping organising this. Several

are also to be sold in BC's 50th anniversary auction.

We will be bringing a selection of books along to Members Day on Saturday 23rd March 2019, available in return for a donation



Branch website: <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ButterflyConservationHertsMiddlesex>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/Bc_HertsMiddx

**Copy Deadline for the Spring Newsletter will be
24 March 2019**

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

I look forward to hearing of all your exciting butterfly or moth observations and anecdotes from what has been the best Summer for the past 20 years.

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