

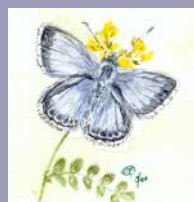
# HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

# NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 80      Spring 2020

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### Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Herts & Middx Butterfly Conservation newsletter.

Not quite the start to the year we had planned for and I'm sorry that so many events have had to be cancelled. But the good news is that there's a new butterfly season starting and much to enjoy!

At the time of writing (mid April) all our events and some recording (Transects & WCBS) are off until the end of June.

If current restrictions are lifted, we may be able to resume in July – Keep an eye on the news page of our website for updates

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

Much preparation had gone in to our annual Members Day and we were able to go ahead with the photo competition on-line.

See [pages 5-6](#) for copies of the winning photos and [page 4](#) for a link to the online gallery showing all the entries.

We will rebook the event at a later date, but don't yet know when this will be possible and will be in touch with all members when there is more news.

Head office have suspended all our constitutional requirements for the year. Many thanks to Liz Goodyear, her organising team and all the speakers.

Particular thanks to May Webber who has completed her year's employment as Project Development Officer for Big City Butterflies, our project to boost butterflies in Inner London. We now await the final decision on funding and hope to have more news by the Autumn.

I'm conscious that the virus has affected members very differently. Some will be working hard in hospitals or other key services. Some will have lost their jobs and others suffered bereavement (see [page 20](#)). Many, like me, will be working at home, grateful to escape the daily commute and pleased to be spending more time in the garden. So this is a great time for recording garden butterflies, planting more nectar-producing flowers and larval food plants, getting that old moth trap out of the attic and thinking what else you can do close to home. There are several suggestions contained in

this newsletter.

I've been working on two new projects close to home, one in my garden and one involving my neighbours. This time last year I was working to deliver the new Butterfly Bank in Greenwood Park, part of our Small Blue Project (see [page 18](#)). This Easter I cleared a small area of my garden, mixed a bag of chalk with some subsoil/rubble and seeded it with Birdsfoot Trefoil and Kidney Vetch. Over time I am hoping it will attract Common Blue and possibly also Small Blue to my garden. Another new local project is Wilderhoodwatch, (<https://wilderhoodwatch.org/>) whose aim is to create an eco-friendly neighbourhood. Already running in parts of Herts, the project is coming to my street in St Albans, aiming to get local residents more aware of local wildlife and involved in providing habitat improvements. This should be good news for our local butterflies and moths as well as other wildlife. I've also continued with my Hibernating Butterflies Project, more on this on [page 13](#).

Whatever happens this Summer, I hope the sun shines, butterflies prosper and you stay safe.

### Virtual Members' Day, by Ian Small

The need to cancel our annual Members' Day meeting was of course a great disappointment, as it denied us the opportunity of coming together and renewing acquaintances. However, rather than simply cancelling, we attempted to put as much as possible of the material planned for the day onto our website, in the hope that this would act as some small compensation. The day itself was rather un-inviting from a weather perspective, so hopefully many of you took the opportunity to participate virtually.

All the material is still on the website, so everything can still be accessed at <https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/membersday-2020.php>. The material you can access includes:

- a) A presentation by Andrew Wood on the population and distribution trends of some of our butterflies over the past 5 years. Species highlighted include Brown Hairstreak, Small Blue, Marbled White, Purple Emperor, the 'golden' Skippers, White Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady, Chalkhill Blue and Small Copper. The fortunes of these species are quite varied during this period and it is fascinating to look at these differences.

- b) A presentation by Malcolm Hull on Creating a Home for the Small Blue Butterfly in Greenwood Park. This presentation describes the status of the Small Blue in Hertfordshire, its lifecycle and dependency upon Kidney Vetch, the process of building the chalk bank and of its subsequent seeding with the larval foodplants, engagement with the local community, especially the local school, and of course plans for the future.
- c) There is also a link to a podcast by Malcolm Hull, entitled “Butterflies and Other Reasons to Smile”, which is a recording of an interview Malcolm gave during an episode of the ‘Environment Matters’ programme on Radio Verulam (covering the St. Albans area). The interview starts about 3 minutes into the podcast, and lasts for around 10 minutes. The main topic is the work to support the Small Blue at Greenwood Park. The direct link to the podcast is: <https://www.radioverulam.com/podcast/butterflies-and-other-reasons-to-smile/>
- d) Two presentations of members’ photos, contributed by Andrew Wood, Peter Fewell, Roger Gibbons, Dee Cullen, Malcolm Hull, Ian & Peta Small. In addition to many taken in the UK, these include species from as far afield as France, Switzerland, New Zealand and Thailand. Had Members’ Day proceeded as planned, then these images would have been displayed on a loop during the lunch interval.

The one item that did proceed, almost as planned, was the annual Branch Photographic Competition. All of the entries are still available to view on the website (<https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/photo-competition-2020.php> ). Entries were submitted in 5 categories, and members invited to submit their votes electronically. Many thanks go to all who contributed photos and to those who cast their votes. Congratulations to all the winners - the winning photos are shown below.



**UK Butterflies: Winner - Miles Attenborough : Swallowtail**



**UK Moths: Winner - Ian Small : *Nemophora metallica***



**Butterfly/Moth  
Behaviour:**

**Winner : Dee Cullen**

**Lime Hawk-Moths  
Mating**

**Butterflies and Moths  
Outside the UK:**

**Winner - Tim Alps**

**Chalk Burnet  
(*Zygaena fausta*)**



**Non-Adult Stages:**

**Winner - Ian Small**

**Mullein Moth  
caterpillar**



**Butterflies in or Near Your Garden, by Ian Small & Andrew Wood**

As most of us are currently unable to visit our favourite butterfly haunts as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, our opportunities for observing, studying and recording butterflies are severely diminished. However, those of us lucky enough to have a garden, or access to e.g. flowery road verges, may still be able to enjoy our butterflies and other wildlife.

Some of you may even be fortunate enough to have butterflies breeding either in your garden or close by. While it is always a great thrill to have any butterflies visiting your garden for nectar, the satisfaction of having them choose your garden as somewhere to lay their eggs is even more special. As this can sometimes go unobserved, we are providing here some details of where to start - namely, with the Orange Tip, as this is one of the best species to



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follow a butterfly's life history at close quarters

A real symbol of spring awakening is the Orange Tip butterfly. Flying from early April to the end of May or early June it is common in many environments including gardens. Only the male has the bright orange tips to its white forewings, but both sexes have the beautiful marbled green/grey/yellow pattern on the lower hindwings. In flight it, the female especially, is very similar to the Small and Green-veined Whites which are both flying at the same time, but the Orange Tip is slightly smaller, with more rounded wings and much less active, being distracted by nectar much more frequently.



*Orange Tips (male, left, female right)  
Photos © Ian Small*

The females are attracted to its food plants among which are i) Ladies Smock (in damp places), ii) Garlic Mustard or Jack by the Hedge, which is very common in the countryside and readily established in gardens and iii) the garden flower Honesty. These latter two are easy to establish and difficult to eradicate and this makes it very easy to offer breeding sites for this butterfly.

The female lays a single egg at a time at the base of a flower. These are one of the easiest butterfly eggs to find, especially when they turn orange as they mature. [There is, however, recent evidence (perhaps as a result of global warming) that eggs may be laid on the leaves if the plant does not yet have any developing seedpods.]



*Orange Tip egg. Photo © Ian Small*

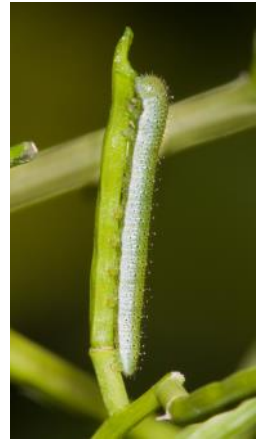


When they hatch, the tiny yellowish larva begins to feed on seed pods rather than leaves and continues to feed on these throughout its development. If several eggs get laid on one plant they have a reputation for cannibalism leading to the largest larvae surviving to maturity. As the caterpillar grows, it sheds its skin several times finally emerging as a silver and green caterpillar about 2cm long and well disguised on the plant. Having said that they are relatively easy to find once you get your eye in. Mature larvae are easiest to find towards the end of the of the adult's flight period and into June. Indeed last year while searching north east Hertfordshire's under-recorded squares I was able to add several new locations in mid June by finding larvae.



*Early instar Orange Tip caterpillar*  
Photo © Andrew Wood

In late June the caterpillar leaves its food plants and forms a beautifully curved chrysalis attached to a hard surface with a few strands of silk. They are notoriously difficult to locate in the wild. There are occasional reports of pupae being found on the foodplants, but as these plants die right down over the winter, that probably explains why that is a rare (and likely unsuccessful) strategy.



*Mature Orange Tip caterpillar*  
Photo © Ian Small



*Orange Tip pupa*  
© Andrew Wood

The Orange Tip will then spend the longest part of its life in this pupal state before emerging the following spring.

There are of course other butterflies which may be breeding in or close to your garden in spring e.g. Brimstones which are often the first kind of butterflies to be seen in spring. Those we see at this time of year emerged last summer and have hibernated over the winter. As with the rest of our species that overwinter

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as adults (e.g. Commas, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells), it is only those that survive the winter that go on to mate and to produce the next generations of adults. Indeed, Brimstones can on occasions survive for over a year as an adult, with small numbers still flying by the time next generation emerges in summer.

The larval foodplant of the Brimstone is a shrub (or small bush) - alder buckthorn, although buckthorn can also be used. They are not the most attractive of plants, as the flowers are small and relatively inconspicuous – they are however a magnet for small bees. If you have space in your garden, then an alder buckthorn will almost certainly attract egg-laying Brimstones. The buds break a little bit later than many other shrubs and trees, and it is usually at least the 2nd half of April before there is much sign of life. However, it is on those fresh green shoots from the just-opened buds that the Brimstone will lay its eggs, ensuring a growing supply of fresh green leaves for the caterpillars to feed on.

The pale eggs are quite long (up to 2 mm) and hence quite conspicuous



*Early instar Brimstone caterpillar and eating damage on leaf*  
Photo © Ian Small



*Adult Brimstone (above) and egg, (below)*  
Photos © Ian Small

on the small shoots. The caterpillars are green and lie along the midrib of the leaves, affording them some camouflage. When they are very small, it is usually easier to spot the numerous small holes eaten in the leaves, than to see the tiny

caterpillars themselves. However, as they grow, they become more obvious, and often sit with part of the body raised. They are quite mobile around the plant and will happily move to find new fresh growth. I am often surprised by the fact that the birds seem to largely ignore these caterpillars. That said, I have never been able to determine whether those in my garden do successfully pupate, or whether the birds have just waited until they are fully grown before feasting on them!



Mature Brimstone caterpillar in characteristic pose  
Photo © Ian Small

Whatever butterflies you see in your garden, please do remember to record them and to submit your records in the usual ways e.g. by using the iRecord Butterflies phone app, or by sending your records to Andrew Wood. In addition, there is also Butterfly Conservation's national garden butterfly survey scheme, which can be found at:

<https://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org>

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* **Gardening for Butterflies** \*  
\*  
\* If you now have more time to spend in your garden and \*  
\* would like to know more about which plants are best for \*  
\* wildlife, and for butterflies in particular, then there is a \*  
\* wealth of information available. There is a whole section \*  
\* on the main BC website relating to gardening for \*  
\* butterflies:  
\* [https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-  
\\* involved/gardening/gardening-for-butterflies](https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/gardening/gardening-for-butterflies) \*  
\* There is information on nectar plants, larval foodplants \*  
\* and a monthly gardening blog providing timely guidance \*  
\* on what can be done throughout the year. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

### Going Paperless...?

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, this newsletter will be made available electronically, and paper copies only circulated once circumstances permit. However, it is your opportunity to re-think your current preferences.

#### **Did you know that....**

- We currently spend about £4,000 a year on printing and posting the Newsletter and Annual Butterfly Report (Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex)
- About two-thirds of our share of membership subscription income is spent on printing and posting
- We have minimised these costs through ‘home-printing’ of the Newsletter, but nevertheless this is a huge logistical effort twice a year to print, staple, fold and stuff the newsletters into envelopes before labelling them and managing the dispatch. Even with those who already opt to receive these electronically, it still requires over 1000 to be printed and posted. Commercial printing of these would substantially increase costs even more.

Members can help reduce these costs, and the amount of paper we use, by deciding to opt out of receiving printed versions of either or both of these documents, in favour of electronic (pdf) versions. These are identical to the printed versions (except, of course, that you can click on the hyperlinks and jump straight to the reference target). Opting to receive electronic Newsletters would free up more of our funds to be directed to actual conservation work. If you would like to change your preferences, please e-mail our membership secretary **ian-small@virginmedia.com**.

It may be that you would like to receive a paper copy of one but an electronic copy of the other. Please be assured that we will continue to offer paper versions of the Newsletter and Annual Butterfly Report to all members who wish to receive them, free of charge, for the foreseeable future. For the Annual Butterfly Report, the default will continue to be for physical copies to be sent out, unless members actively opt to receive them electronically. Please remember to notify the membership secretary, as above, when you change your e-mail address.

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## Small Tortoiseshells - The Lost Generation, by Malcolm Hull

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Last Spring I wrote in this newsletter about the butterflies which hibernate in my shed. Since then a lot of people have shown interest, resulting in a Guardian article, a film on BBC Winterwatch and a Blog on the national BC website. (links to all these are below).

A few key points from recent observations:

- This winter has seen the highest numbers of hibernators so far, a total of 43, of which 30 were Small Tortoiseshells and 13 Peacocks.
- Hibernation started in the week ending 12 th July 2019 and 80% of the butterflies had gone into hibernation by the start of August.
- Unlike 2017 and 2018, there was a small second generation of Small Tortoiseshells which continued to enter hibernation up until the end of September.
- Survival rates through the winter were very good, with only one casualty, a Small Tortoiseshell which appears to have been attacked by a spider.
- Emergence started during the week ending 6th March and was completed by week ending 10th April.
- The periods of greatest emergence were the two sunny weeks ending 27th March (one third flew) and 10th April (one half flew).
- There was little difference between the timing of the Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock departures

The most remarkable finding is still how early the butterflies go into hibernation. This year was not as extreme as 2017 when all 22 Small Tortoiseshells were in hibernation by the week ending 7th July. It is noticeable that there is quite a degree of difference from year to year. The most encouraging statistic this year is the total number of Peacocks (13) was dramatically up on the previous record of 3. The number of Small Tortoiseshells (30) was the second best total after the 35 which hibernated in 2016/7.

I should add that I have records from the shed for every year back to the year our Branch was founded in 1994/5 (when the total was just 1 Peacock).

This is not necessarily typical of other sites as I have made a number of modest improvements to the shed over the years which may have increased its attraction to butterflies

If like me you are spending many hours at home, you may be wondering what you can do to offer accommodation to over-wintering butterflies. If you do, I'm happy to have a chat (contact details on back cover)

The basic structure is shown well on the Winterwatch film – solid brick built, small windows, so not much natural light. No central heating or artificial light. No glass in the windows allowing easy access for butterflies (they also sometimes crawl out through the gap under the door!).

The changes I've made which I think add to its attractions:

- Spring cleaning – remove all spiders webs when the butterflies aren't there during May (its the only month I've not recorded a hibernating butterfly!)
- Didn't replace the lightbulb when it popped, so the only artificial light is a low powered torch I use for recording
- Installed a trap door which prevents daylight entering from above
- Planted many nectar sources close-by in the garden – they often gorge themselves on nectar from Buddleia and Thyme before hibernating. Remember also they will be hungry when they wake up – Aubretia, Primroses and Dandelions are all good early nectar sources.

Close proximity to a nettle bed does not seem to be important. The nearest to my house is 250 meters away at New England St Recreation Ground. The butterflies quickly find their way there once they have left hibernation. I've really enjoyed recording hibernators and am interested to hear from anyone else who has seen any around their home or while out and about.

Guardian:- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/28/butterflywatch-shedding-new-light-on-hibernation-tactics>

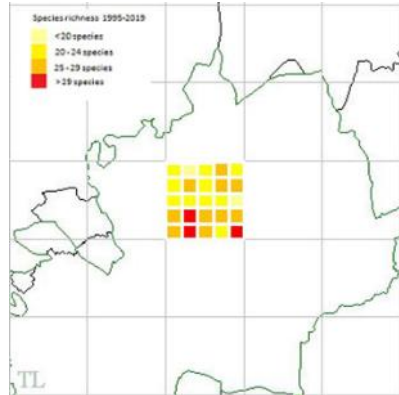
Winterwatch:- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000dtqb/winterwatch-series-8-episode-4> (starts 16 mins in)

Second Article:- <https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/SmallTortoiseshell-LostGeneration.php>

## 25 Years in the Stevenage Area (TL22 Square) , by Peter Clarke

As most (if not all) of you are aware, I have collated butterfly records in the Stevenage area for the 1995-2019 period so thank you to all those who contributed and to Andrew Wood who supplied me with all the associated data.

Unsurprisingly, some areas attract more butterflies than others. The best site is the Knebworth Park and Woods complex with 32 species recorded and the gravel pit near Hook's Cross is also an excellent site with 30 species including the very local Grizzled Skipper. On the other hand, arable areas like Almshoebury and the surrounds of Walkern are relatively poor although it is likely that far fewer visits are made to these places partly accounting for the very low number of records.



Stevenage Borough Council launched a Biodiversity Action Plan for Stevenage in 2010 – the latest update for 2017-22 can be found here:

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/15953/24701/24704/Biodiversity-Action-Plan-2017-2022.pdf>

As far as butterflies are concerned the management of grassland and woodland habitats in the town are most important. Among these are at Fairlands Valley Park (including Shackledell Grassland), St Nicholas Churchyard, the chalky bank off Martins Way, Six Hills Common, Whomerley and Monks Wood. Wildlife management at Norton Green and the Knebworth Woods complex are not under the sole auspices of the council. It will be interesting to continue to monitor the impact to butterfly populations following actions taken at the aforementioned sites. The paragraphs below describe how butterflies have fared during the 1995-2019 period.

The skippers have unfortunately suffered a decline since 1995 more especially in the last few years. Essex Skipper, in particular, has been badly hit since 2015 when it appeared to have reached a peak. The Small Skipper was also notably lower in abundance in many areas



since 2015. There appears to be no obvious reasons for the decline for these skippers. However, Large Skipper populations are relatively stable although smaller than in the decade 2000-09.

The Small White has been the most stable and commonest of our 'whites' although numbers fluctuate widely each year. Overall abundance has risen since 1995 for the Large White but numbers are partly governed by migrants arriving from Europe. Green-veined White is not as successful though and has steadily declined since 1995 possibly owing to drier summers in the last decade or so. The Orange-Tip is doing well with a small pick-up in numbers in the last decade while the status of the Brimstone has remained remarkably stable over the long-term. Only occasional sightings of Clouded Yellow have been reported in the last decade.

The 'browns' have generally done quite well since 1995. Populations of Speckled Wood have declined slightly in the last decade possibly because of the opening up of some woods. Time will tell if the downward trend continues. 2017 saw the start of an incredible recovery of the Small Heath, after a long lean period since the 1990s. The Ringlet has also prospered and numbers have generally been rising since 1995. Numbers of Meadow Brown dropped significantly during the latter half of the 2000s and the first half of the last decade but has done well since. Unfortunately, the Gatekeeper has not recovered after similar declines during the same period. The Marbled White is continuing to thrive although numbers have stabilised in the last few years.

Only two fritillaries have been seen in the area since 1995. The Silver-washed Fritillary has spread across the area since the warm summer of 2006 and can be expected to be seen in most of the larger woods. There are reports of sightings of the Dark Green Fritillary in the Knebworth Woods complex but there is some doubt if it breeds there.

The White Admiral used to be a regular, if uncommon, sight in the Knebworth Woods complex in the first decade of this century but its numbers have fallen in the recent past. The Purple Emperor, on the other hand, has progressed well and is now regularly seen in the 'meadow' at Norton Green Common.

Numbers of Red Admiral have increased in the last few years. There is evidence that some individuals overwinter in the immature stages here but it is unknown if any have survived the winter. Painted Lady is widely seen as expected from their migratory behaviour. The Peacock

has declined slightly during the 25-year survey but there was a major recovery in 2019. The recent warm and dry summers may be impacting the Small Tortoiseshell as abundance had dropped alarmingly until around 2013 when there was a sudden resurgence but numbers have fallen once again. Populations of the Comma have stabilised since the rise in numbers up to around 2005.

The early years (mid 1990s) were excellent for the Small Copper but thereafter numbers declined sharply. Although 2003 was a good year, it did not make a significant sustained recovery until 2017.

Several unconfirmed sightings of the Brown Hairstreak have been reported in the Knebworth area in the last decade. The Purple Hairstreak appears to be doing well but since it is mostly seen on oak tree tops it is difficult to gauge any trend in abundance. Only one report of the Green Hairstreak has been recorded with two specimens at Crouch Green in 1997. There are scattered colonies of the White-letter Hairstreak in the area with possible new sites yet to be found.

Until the last few years, the 'blues' generally fared poorly. There might be a Small Blue colony near St Nicholas Churchyard where a specimen was seen in 2015. The chalky south-facing bank off Martins Way seems the most likely breeding site. The Holly Blue is widely distributed and the last five years have seen an upturn in numbers but the butterfly is supposedly subject to a 6-7 year cycle. The Brown Argus has done remarkably well as numbers have been steadily increasing since 1995 with many more reports now of more than two specimens at any particular site. The Common Blue has also benefited with abundance rising at a slower rate but numbers fluctuate quite widely year by year. As there are no suitable chalk habitats in the area for the Chalkhill Blue - no colonies exist, but in 2013 when there was an explosion in numbers, a few male 'wanderers' were seen at Norton Green and Great Ashby Park.

It appears from the surveys and records reported that the grassland management scheme instigated by the council is paying off for our butterflies. It remains to be seen if woodland management, for example, at Whomerley Wood, is having any significant benefit yet but I expect in time with more surveys being done we will eventually see some positive results.

For more details, including historical records, see my website [www.stevenagebutterflies.co.uk](http://www.stevenagebutterflies.co.uk)

### Small Blue Project Update, by Malcolm Hull

Small Blue had another good year in 2019. This is especially heartening as 10 years ago it was not present as a breeding species in the Herts & Middx. Branch area.

The latest Herts & Middx Butterflies Annual Report 2019 shows its' presence in 30 tetrads, distributed widely across north, west and central Herts, with a couple of locations in Middx.

The Branch have worked hard to encourage landowners to provide sustainable habitat for this species and our efforts have paid off. Fifteen Small Blues were recorded at the Woodland Trust site at Heartwood Forest, Sandridge in the area where we financed Kidney Vetch planting in 2017.

Other organisations we've been partnering with have also had success. For a full account read our Small Blue Report 2019, available on the Branch Website (<https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/Small%20Blue%20in%20Hertfordshire%20and%20Middlesex%202019%20Final.pdf>)

Our flagship project last year was constructing and seeding/planting a chalk bank in Greenwood Park, Chiswell Green, financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is described in the slides showing how we went about the task on the Members Day section of the website ([https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/SmallBlue%20GreenwoodPark\\_Apr20.pdf](https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/SmallBlue%20GreenwoodPark_Apr20.pdf)).

As part of the project Branch Member Emily Bagnall designed two interpretation boards, which are now in the process of construction and will be on permanent display in the park.

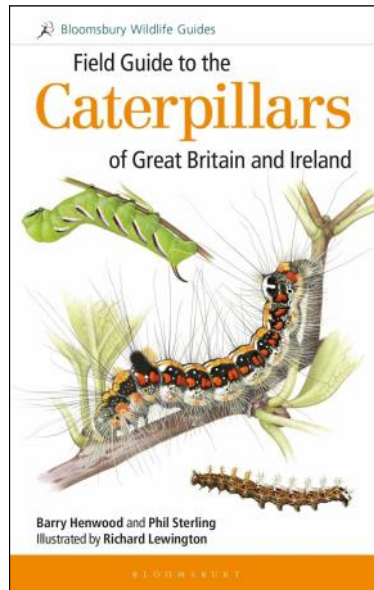
These tell the story of our Small Blues Project and the butterflies renaissance.

We have more activities planned and any member who would like to be involved should contact either myself or Andrew Wood (details on back cover).

Book Review, by Andrew Wood

**Field Guide to the Caterpillars of Great Britain and Ireland** by Barry Henwood and Phil Sterling, illustrated by Richard Lewington. Bloomsbury, 2020.

Compared to guides to adult butterflies of which there are many, and increasingly guides to adult moths, there have been very few guides to caterpillars. The last serious one was Bernard Skinner's photographic guide published 11 years ago. The new guide, similar in format to other Wildlife Guides to micro and macro moths, is a chunky 448 page paperback with superb paintings of every species by that un-matched artist Richard Lewington.



I think for larvae, which can be difficult to focus on photographically and often merge into their background, there is a definite advantage to clear accurate paintings with a scale showing life-size and a clear white background. The text for each species contains field characters, similar species, habitats, food plants and field notes, as well as a generalised distribution map.

There are 69 pages of fascinating introductory articles, an index of food plants and the species that eat them and appendices to help distinguish similar species. Since the book was published about a month ago it has helped me identify several caterpillars in the garden, much more easily than using other guides and much more quickly than trawling through images on the web. All in all a beautiful book to look at and a real help to identification. Thoroughly recommended.

Two other recent books which are highly recommended are described on [pages 22-23](#).

### Souls of the Dead ? by Malcolm Hull

Lockdown is a good time to consider the spiritual side of butterflies. The association of butterflies with the spirits of the dead is quite widespread, particularly in some far eastern and native American cultures. The link is usually made because of the metamorphosis process each butterfly goes through, first born as a caterpillar, transforming to a pupa and finally “reborn” as a butterfly. Many people have taken solace from seeing butterflies after the death of somebody close to them. In 2014 I experienced this myself in circumstances which were quite unique. My father died after a long illness. He had lived in Dorset for nearly fifty years and became a keen butterfly spotter in his retirement. One of his last trips out was to visit Colmer’s Hill, near Bridport, a prominent local landmark, which he had always wanted to climb. The ascent was difficult due to his poor health and he only made it up with my mothers help. The views of the Dorset countryside from the top were spectacular. But my father was more interested to find a dozen Wall Brown butterflies, spaced out at intervals along the crest of the hill.

Although Wall is no longer found in Herts & Middx, it hangs on in Dorset, though it is unusual to see many away from the coast. “Hilltopping” behaviour is a recognised mating strategy for some butterfly species. In our area it is sometimes used by Red Admirals and there are similarities with the “treetopping” strategy used by Purple Emperors. Bill Shreeves, the Dorset Butterfly Recorder remarked how unusual it was to receive a report of Wall Brown using this mating strategy. A few months later, I spoke at my fathers funeral and recounted the tale of the hilltopping Wall Browns.

After the funeral, I needed a break and luckily had booked a Greenwings Butterfly trip to Greece in search of specialities such as the Odd-spot Blue and Osiris Blue. Climbing to the top of a local mountain in the heart was arduous and with no vegetation in sight, we were rewarded with spectacular views, but did not expect to see any butterflies. But there were several species hilltopping including Painted



*Greek Hilltop.  
Photo © Malcolm Hull*

Lady, Small Tortoiseshell and Swallowtail in good numbers. I spent half an hour recording butterflies along the ridge, but it was only when I got right to the top that a single small brown butterfly caught my eye. Photographing it was not easy, but when I did get a good look, it was clearly a Wall Brown.



*Wall Brown*  
Photo © Malcolm Hull

I've never seen Wall Browns hilltopping before or since. My father had not seen it before his last Dorset trip and had no idea why they behaved that way. My trip to Greece took place less than a month after the funeral. When I was planning my funeral speech there were thousands of memories I could have drawn on. I've no idea why I chose to speak about him climbing a hill and seeing a Wall Brown, a trip when I wasn't present. Is this a spiritual experience? I will let you make your own mind up, but for me, it was more than just coincidence.

### Re Brian Cassie-Notes from Afar 1 & 2, by Corinne Stevenson

*The message below relates to articles in the past 2 newsletters from Brian Cassie, a Life Benefactor of BC, who lives in Massachusetts in New England, USA. The note comes from another BC Life Benefactor.*

I had the pleasure of visiting Brian this summer (2019) and thought you'd like to see the momentous putting of the 20,000th Sweet Fern... he has passed 50,000 now. He has been inspired by our own Butterfly Conservation projects. He was very kind and showed me many butterfly habitats.. my favourite at Allen's Pond.

He also showed me how to raise Monarch butterflies from eggs.. it was a first for me and really special. I raised 5 Monarchs from scratch - 3 females and 2 males. Sadly, I had to leave the other 12 caterpillars in Brian's capable hands. The trip was a real adventure and thanks to





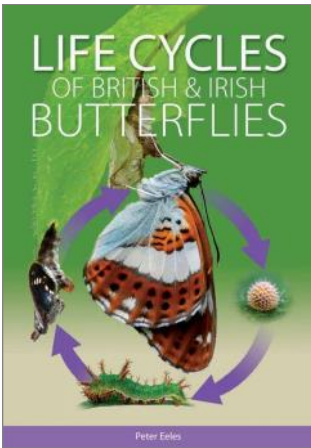


Brian I saw a plethora of butterflies, birds and mammals. Brian has also written many books about various topics, although he is very modest about his nature books and projects. He started the Massachusetts butterfly club from scratch! He is a real naturalist and I will be back!

**Life Cycles of British & Irish Butterflies**, by Peter Eeles. (394

*Corinne Stevenson with one of the Monarch butterflies*

**Recent Publications to Keep you Occupied**



pages, 1300+ colour photos, colour distribution (maps.)

ISBN: 9781874357889

Over the past decade or so, Peter Eeles has patiently compiled photographs of every stage of the life cycle of every regularly breeding British butterfly.

With detailed descriptions and photos of the adult, egg, caterpillar and chrysalis of each species, this book reveals in detail the fascinating life cycles of the 59 butterfly species that are considered resident or regular migrants to Britain and Ireland. It provides unique insights into a

hidden world, and is illustrated with over 1,300 high-quality colour photos that reveal the subtle beauty in something as small as a butterfly egg.

Review comments include:- “Book of the Year 2019. Buy it! Will be a best seller ..”; “Can’t praise it highly enough! Get it!”; “A superb achievement. Buy it !!!”.



**Atlas of Britain & Ireland's Larger Moths**, by Zoë Randle et al. (492 pages, colour photos, colour illustrations, colour distribution maps.) ISBN: 9781874357827



Around 25 million moth records from Butterfly Conservation's National Moth Recording Scheme and Moths Ireland have been combined to produce this landmark publication – the first ever atlas of all macro-moths in Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. The book includes accounts for 866 macro-moth species, each with a distribution map showing current and historical occurrences, trends, status, a phenology chart and colour image. A further 25 species, which were former residents, but have not been recorded from 1970 onwards, have a distribution map.

Brief introductory chapters detail the long-standing tradition of moth recording and the development of the National Moth Recording Scheme, methods used to collect and analyse the data, an overview of trends since the 1970s and the environmental drivers of change in moth populations and distributions.

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**Copy Deadline for the Autumn Newsletter will be**  
**31 August 2020**

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

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