HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 82 Spring 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Butterfly Conservation
Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2021.

The Branch has already been busy hosting our innovative **Winter Events** programme and Members Day. We had some fascinating speakers and a great attendance from Branch members and guests, with around 400 viewers watching live. By mid-April another 600 had watched the recordings on our new Herts and Middx Butterfly Conservation YouTube Channel. Read about the highlights on page 3 or watch the recordings at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaCAEhhhxWKlw7iTJA9G5GA or through the links on the Branch website. Thanks so much to Liz Goodyear for organising the events, our speakers and our audience for all your great questions and contributions. Its been such a success your Committee have decided to run another online events programme next winter, although we hope also to hold a real life Members Day next March.

Butterfly Walks and Moth Events – our programme will be starting a little later than usual in mid-May. We aim to provide guided walks across the whole of our area, so please do come along to at least one, there will be an event not too far from you. By that time, lockdown regulations should allow us to accommodate up to 30 people at each event. We are conscious that these restrictions are likely to continue to change, so we have introduced a booking system for some walks to help control numbers. We will continue to make all our events free of charge, except in cases where these are required by site owners or managers. Details of the guided butterfly walks confirmed to date can be found on the national BC website at https://butterfly-conservation.org/events?field_branches_target_id=142. Please also watch the Branch website for changes and updates (see link on page 28). **New Members** are particularly welcome at field events and we plan to run some additional events aimed at you - we will be in touch.

After years of planning, our **Big City Butterflies** programme will launch in June. This aims to transform the profile of butterflies and moths in Inner London boroughs. Two staff members have now been recruited and I'm hoping that all our members in the area will get involved with one of their local sites. There will be opportunities for members living in other areas to also get involved – read all the latest on page 12.

We had a great response to Phil Sterling's Members Day talk on

Improving Road Verges for Wildflowers. Several councils are already onto this and there is enthusiasm from our members to do more. Find out how you can get involved increasing wild flowers and butterflies in your local area on page 14.

This is an exciting time for **Butterfly Conservation**. There has been a huge surge in interest during the pandemic and we have ambitious plans to increase the scale of our involvement in habitat conservation and creation. Protecting rare butterflies and moths remains a core priority, but we will be increasing our efforts in tackling declines in widespread species. Big City Butterflies is just a start. Having a great team of volunteers will be as important as ever – if you would like to get involved, keep an eye on the "Can you help?" section of the Branch website and feel free to contact me, or other committee members at any time.

https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/canyouhelp.php

Winter Programme Highlights, by Ian Small

With everyone in lockdown due to the pandemic, the Branch put on an series of online events, which provided a way for members to learn more about butterflies and moths, and also to 'see' each other, albeit via videoconferences. There were 6 evening meetings plus the afternoon event for Members' Day and the AGM. Hyperlinks to the recordings of each talk are included below. *(For those reading this in paper format, but who have access to the internet, please type in the full link presented in the Chair's report which will take you to the YouTube channel, from which each of the recordings can be opened.)*

After an introductory meeting, to test the technology and introduce the Branch Committee and our main activities, the first main event was **An Introduction to Moth Recording**, presented by Andrew Wood. The scope of this presentation was much broader than the name may have suggested, and throughout was illustrated lavishly with Andrew's photographs. After first addressing the (lack of) differences between butterflies and moths - there are exceptions to any 'rule' you may have heard - Andrew addressed such diverse topics as macro vs. micro moths, the derivation of the English names of many moths, species that are hard or impossible to separate from their adult forms, species that have disparate adult forms and his recommendations for reference books and websites.

Andrew then went on to discuss the different ways of observing and recording moths. Starting with an overview of the many day-flying moths, he then covered identifying micro-moths by the 'mines' that their caterpillars leave within the leaves of their foodplants. Many moths are attracted to lights and the different types of moth-traps that take advantage of this were briefly described, as well as ways of attracting those species that do not come easily to light, e.g. by sugaring or wine-roping.

The last section of Andrew's presentation covered species that appear to be either declining or expanding in our area, some problem species (e.g. Horse-chestnut leaf-miner and Oak Processionary moth), some migrant species (e.g. Death' Head and Hummingbird Hawkmoths, Silver Y) and finally some species largely associated with water e.g. the China Marks. All-in-all, this was a really excellent presentation, which can be viewed online here.

The following session saw **Sharon Hearle, BC's Regional Officer for the East of England**, describing her role and current priorities. Sharon, who has worked for BC for 18 years, explained that her work is driven by the East of England conservation strategy, which defines priority species and habitats, and both drives and monitors progress against the strategy for each. Much of her work is outside our Branch area, particularly in the Brecks around Thetford, which hold many priority species. Habitat management, and the meticulous monitoring of the effect that changes have, are key to the role, working with multiple landowners and organisations.

The second half of Sharon's presentation focussed on the Four-Spotted, a day-flying moth currently found just outside the county boundary of North-east Herts. The moth favours very flower-rich, hot, dry and sparse areas e.g. road verges and banks, provided they are not overgrown (or mown too much). The larval foodplant is Field Bindweed, with moths regularly visiting Ox-eye Daisies, Knapweeds and Marjoram. There are historical records for this moth around Ashwell, between Baldock and Royston and it is hoped that increased searching this year will perhaps find it within our Branch area.

The Four-Spotted
Photo © Cristian Mihai

While conducting these surveys, Sharon has noted that the delightful Brassy Longhorn moth (*Nemophora metallica*) can be found commonly on Field Scabious flowers nowadays in North Herts, while as recently as 2008, it was described in Colin Plant's moth book as as an 'extremely rare and local resident'. The recording of Sharon's talk can be viewed online here.

In out next event, **Roger Gibbons** gave an excellent illustrated presentation on the features **distinguishing look-alike species**. In discussing all the species occurring in, or close to, our Branch area, Roger not only covered differences between species, but also differences between males and females, and differences between broods. The talk was therefore very informative, and whilst being incredibly useful for those who have only recently developed their interest in butterflies it was also valuable for more experienced members. Almost all of the numerous illustrations were Roger's own photographs and they cannot be commended too highly for the clarity they brought to the points of difference being described.

The details of the talk are far too numerous to re-iterate here, but I would strongly recommend that anyone who is new to butterflies, or simply wants a timely refresher at the start of this year's butterfly season, should view the recording online here.

Andrew Wood returned for the next event, this time focussing on what has been learnt from all the **Butterfly & Moth Records in 2020**. Andrew began his talk by outlining the sources of all the butterfly records, pointing out that the largest single source is the 3-week Big Butterfly Count held each year. Many people submit records from gardens and parks and thus greatly increase the extent of coverage, particularly in urban areas. The proportion of records submitted via the iRecord Apps is steadily increasing, and these are helpful as they allow photos to be submitted with the record, allowing verification. Andrew then used distribution maps to illustrate the locations where the most, and the fewest records had been submitted. Andrew's focus then moved to some individual species, where recent records show interesting trends, e.g. the steady spread of Brown Hairstreak through Middx right up to the border with Herts and the huge spread of Marbled White, once restricted to the very west of Herts, such that it is now widespread across both counties.

After discussing some 'oddities' among butterfly records e.g. Camberwell Beauty and Marsh Fritillary, Andrew moved on to

discuss recent trends among the moths of our Branch area. 2020 saw no less than 13 new moth species in Herts and 2 new for Middx. Notable amongst those that were once rare or absent, the Jersey Tiger is now common in the London area and is spreading up through (mainly east) Herts. Even the Clifden nonpareil, our largest UK moth by wing area, seems to be becoming established across our area, with widespread sporadic records over recent years. The recording of Andrew's talk can be accessed here.

In our final evening meeting of the season, **Roger Gibbons** provided a wonderful overview **comparing our UK butterflies with their French counterparts**. While most of our butterflies can also be found in France, their range of species is several times greater, with many species closely related, or just physically similar to those in the UK. Using his experience from having spent many summers in France studying the butterflies, Roger was able to provide not just expert description of the differences between species, but was also able to fully illustrate all the points using his extensive collection of very fine photographs. For those who have travelled to France, it was the opportunity to check whether your own tentative identifications were correct, and for those yet to experience the wonders of French butterflies, it was a fascinating and informative description of both the wonders and the challenges they pose. Anyone intending to travel to France, when such things become possible again, would be well advised to watch the recording of Roger's talk here before they go.

Members' Day & AGM, by Ian Small

For the second year running we were unable to host an in-person Members' Day event, but this year we instead ran a 'virtual' meeting online on the last Saturday afternoon in March. Prior to the AGM, all the Officers' Reports summarising the year's activities and progress had been made available online (available at: https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/Annual%20Review/Annual%20Review%20for%202021%20Members'%20Day.pdf) in order to keep proceedings as brief as possible.

The first keynote presentation was given by **Dr Phil Sterling**, BC's Programme Manager for Building Sites for Butterflies. His talk, entitled "***Making the best of the built environment for butterflies and moths***" was inspirational. As a professional ecological advisor, his 25 years in local government exposed him to the "pathetic"

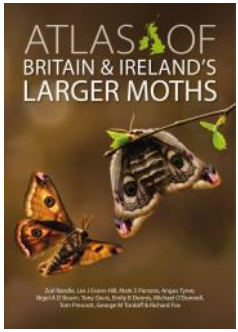
management of green spaces in urban environments, particularly the constant mowing of grass. However, in his last few years in Dorset County Council, he was responsible for road verge management, the first time ever that an ecologist had been put in charge of green space management. The results were transformational both for wildlife but also in reducing land management costs.

Phil explained that traditional greenspace creation had for the past 40 years or so involved layering on about 150mm (6 inches) of topsoil onto any subsoil or mineral base, and then sowing with amenity grass. While providing a quick green space, somebody has to look after it forever. Phil estimates that the UK spends £0.5bn each year just mowing grass! Thick topsoil means high fertility, supporting rank coarse grass. In contrast, low fertility encourages fine grasses and herbs, with spaces for plant germination. Our best grasslands for wildflowers, bees and butterflies develop on the poorest soils (low Nitrogen). Most wildflowers will tolerate that, but coarse grasses can't compete and dominate.

Phil was first able to demonstrate his approach with the verges of the Weymouth relief road, built to support traffic to the sailing events for the 2012 Olympics. Rather than using topsoil, 7 Ha were covered either with no topsoil, or a very thin (15mm) layer, and then the site sown with a wildflower mix. Importantly, this included Kidney Vetch as a 'pioneer species' - it thrives in areas where it can germinate on bare ground, and of course is the foodplant for the Small Blue. The results were spectacular, with rapid growth of Kidney Vetch shortly followed by colonisation with Small Blue within 18 months (the nearest site was thought to be 4 miles away). Hundreds can been seen there now, accompanied by 5 other species of Blue, demonstrating that these species really can colonise created habitats. To date, 141 species of plants and 30 species of butterfly have all been recorded on that relief road, the verges of which have required no mowing at all since their creation.

For existing road verges and open spaces, the same impact can be achieved by changing the way they are mown - traditionally, the cuttings are just left, ensuring that the soil fertility remains high. By changing to cut-and-collect, it is possible to reduce the fertility of those verges quite quickly, perhaps reducing the need for mowing by about half in as little as 2 years. As this continues, the wildflowers are soon able to compete again, and the need for mowing continues to fall.

A recording of Phil's presentation is available on the Branch YouTube Channel here. Also see the related article on page 14.



The other keynote presentation was by **Zoë Randle**, talking about the work behind, and content of, the recent **Atlas of Britain and Ireland's Larger Moths**. The amount of work and data included in this publication is huge, and in her introductory remarks, Zoë reflected on her discovery that Atlas was the God of Endurance!

Sourcing good quality images for the over 860 moth species included in the book was the first major challenge, happily overcome as the quality of the included images is stunning throughout. Zoë explained funding of the book was a significant challenge but, in addition to major sponsors and Trusts, many individuals and BC Branches contributed via a 'moth auction', to sponsor every species that was included.

As data quality was paramount, all 25.6 million records had to be checked. This was first done by looking for 'dodgy dots' on the distribution maps. This flagged up 10,000 records, all of which went to county moth recorders for checking, after which only 4,500 were retained. Similarly, the dates of records were checked against known flight periods. This resulted in a further 12,000 records being investigated, many of which turned out to be either because non-adult stages had been recorded as adults, or because of an incorrect date format (e.g US-format). As moth data is heavily influenced by a number of factors, complex statistical approaches were used to remove bias and allow the extraction of trends in both abundance and distribution for many species. While the atlas presents this data for each individual species, the aggregated data has allowed more general trends to be identified.

For the 390 species with sufficient data to generate long-term distribution trends, 121 (31%) showed statistically significant declines while 148 species (38%) showed significant increases. Long-term abundance data was obtained from the standardised trapping methodology of the Rothamsted network. Of the 397 species with sufficient data, 136 (34%) showed statistically significant declines in abundance while only 45 (11%) showed significant increases in abundance. Combining these datasets (351 species) showed that 94

species had increased in both distribution and abundance, while 121 had declined in both parameters. More work is needed to further investigate this data.

Changes in phenology were examined looking at the mean flight period for 405 single-brooded species, comparing data from 1970-1979 with data from 2000-2016. Mean flight dates were 4.8 days earlier in the later period, with 81% (329 species) found to be flying earlier. Those species now flying later are predominantly Autumn-flying species, with the trend reflecting warmer Autumn weather.

Factors influencing all these changes are diverse, with the main ones being changes in land use (loss of habitat for many, with some exploiting increased conifer planting or use of ornamental plants in gardens), nitrogen pollution, light pollution and climate change (impacting range boundaries and phenology). Zoë's presentation is available here (starting 2h 21 min into the recording).

Branch Photographic Competition Winners

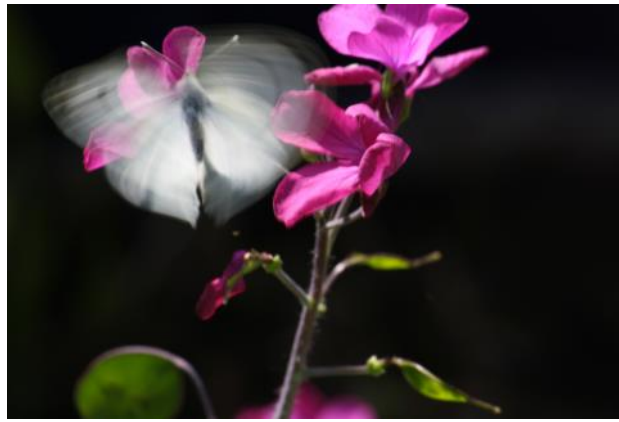
The results of the annual Branch photographic competition were announced at the end of Members' Day. Here are the winning entries:

UK Moths category. Winner: Andrew Wood
Large Emerald

UK Butterflies Category. Winner Chris Barnes
Glanville Fritillary (top) and Wall (below)
were 1st equal, both taken by Chris

Non-adult Stage Category.
Winner Ian Small

Cinnibar moth caterpillar
on ragwort



Behaviour category. Winner Ian Flack
Female Orange-tip

Big City Butterflies, by Paul Busby (Branch Middlesex contact) and Kate Merry (BC's Head of Engagement and Volunteering)

Paul writes: Herts and Middlesex Branch are delighted to work with Cambridgeshire and Essex, Kent and Surrey Branches on this four-year project. The project covers 17 Boroughs of Inner London, 9 of which are in our Branch Area, including Brent, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Camden, Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets, City of London and Westminster. The project will work across Flagship and Satellite sites across the Boroughs and range from Wildlife Gardens such as The Barbican and Gillespie Park Ecology Centre, parks such as Victoria, Clissold and Gladstone Parks, allotments, cemeteries, schools and open spaces to larger areas such as The Royal Parks, Hampstead Heath and Fryent Country Park.

There are so many great spots for butterflies and over 30 species can be found in Inner London. Marbled Whites are increasingly found in our Branch area and you may even spot Silver Washed Fritillaries at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, a Purple Emperor near The Spaniards at Hampstead Heath or help us find White Letter Hairstreaks in the Elms of our London parks and open spaces.

Kate writes: Exciting times ahead! Thanks to players of the National Lottery, Butterfly Conservation have secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to deliver an ambitious new project, '**Big City Butterflies**' that will support Londoners to discover butterflies and moths, and in doing so will connect them with nature and their local green spaces. The people reached through the project will have opportunities to learn about butterflies and moths, how to seek them out, to enjoy them and to help them thrive in their neighbourhoods.

The Big City Butterflies project will enable Butterfly Conservation to make some important discoveries too. We need to understand more about how populations are faring in the capital. In London, butterflies and moths are under-recorded, and we'll be providing training opportunities to equip a new wave of urban recorders in the heart of the city.

Through our development work for the project in 2019, we identified a network of sites across inner London on which to focus our programme of recording, engagement and habitat management work.

We tested out our ideas for activities and workshops at a series of trial events. Having submitted our bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in early 2020 we were full of anticipation at starting the full phase of the project in the autumn. But we all know what happened next.

The pandemic has highlighted how time outside in parks and green spaces is essential for our wellbeing, with so many people finding joy and solace in nature during this past year. News of our success in securing the grant came late in December (the best Christmas present!) and now we're raring to go as we gear up to deliver a project that will provide Londoners with opportunities to discover and connect with nature in their local green space. Butterflies are often used as a symbol for recovery – and we could all do with some of that in 2021.

Meet the Team

We're delighted to introduce the Big City Butterflies delivery team:

Steve Bolton
(Conservation Officer)

Eleanor Johnstone
(Engagement Officer)

Steve Bolton "Having recently developed a variety of habitat creation techniques whilst working on the Brilliant Butterflies project I am really excited to continue developing and refining those techniques across inner London with Big City Butterflies. Developing relationships with land managers and community groups will be vital to help tailor different techniques to suit individual sites and the resources available.

One of my favourite species is the Small Copper. They are small and delicate but have a big attitude with males often chasing off other insects from their favoured spot while they await passing females."

Eleanor Johnstone "London is just packed full of amazing sites for wildlife, and I really cannot wait to get out and about and show people in London the beauty of butterflies and moths, how to find them in their local green spaces and how they can help them thrive.

What amazes me about butterflies in inner London is how they can be right under our noses without us knowing. It's tricky to decide on a favourite species but I think it has to be the Brimstone. That unmistakeable flash of sulphur-yellow is not only a sign that spring is here, but also marks the beginning of butterfly season."

The Project Officers will be place by end-May with an eagerly awaited launch of the Big City Butterflies Project in June. Whether you live or work in London or want to explore some of these interesting butterfly sites, look out for regular updates on the Herts and Middlesex website and social media pages or sign-up to the Big City Butterflies project page (https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects/england/big-city-butterflies).

How We Can Increase Wildflowers on Road Verges, by Malcolm Hull

Wildflower meadows have disappeared from large areas of our countryside - 97% of them have gone over the last century. This loss of habitat has caused massive reductions in the numbers of many widespread butterflies and moths.

Road verges and public green spaces such as parks provide some of the few remaining areas where wildflowers can grow. But there is a problem – excessive mowing. How often have you seen wildflowers growing alongside a road near you, only to find they've been mown down a week later?

Progress so far

People have increasingly been making individual complaints to their

councils. But up to now this has never really been a main focus of our activities. Recently both Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife have dedicated staff time to tackling this issue.

Phil Sterling managed the road verges for Dorset County Council, transforming them into a haven for wildflowers. He now works for Butterfly Conservation with the aim of persuading other councils to follow suit. His recent presentation at our Members Day (see page 6 & link below) prompted several of us to ask what we can do to reduce unnecessary mowing in our local area.

Several councils in our area have already shown interest in this idea and some parks now have wild areas and "low mow" zones, where grass is cut just once or twice a year. Sue Taylor mentioned how Northchurch Parish Council is planting wildflowers on road verges in the area north of Berkhamsted. Peter Fewell has been successfully lobbying Watford Council to increase wildflowers in Cassiobury Park. Stevenage Council has been working with Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust to improve their green spaces. St Albans council have recently appointed a Wilder St Albans officer and allocated a budget for increasing wild spaces in the district. Christine Ridley has noticed a reduction in mowing in Hemel Hempstead, though Margaret Huitson has found LB Harrow unreceptive. Herts CC have developed a pollinator strategy and are reported to have trialled reduced mow verges in 70 rural areas, though several members report excessive mowing is still taking place.

Since Members Day, I've found out more about the project carried out by the Parks Service at the London Borough of Brent. They have reduced mowing in 22 parks within the borough and reduced mowing on many roadside verges to just once a year. Swathes of wildflower seeds have been planted in parks and alongside roads in strips of ground which have been rotavated. The intention is that over time the wildflowers will spread into surrounding areas. Native British wildflowers Including Ox-eye Daisy, Common Knapweed, Wild Carrot and Bird's-foot

A Meadow in Brent
Photo © Leslie Williams

Trefoil have been included in the mix, along with poppies and other colourful flowers chosen to encourage public support.

What we can do next

I've also been in touch with Phil Sterling to find out more about how we can spend time effectively to achieve improvements. All councils are under pressure to reduce costs and reduced mowing provides a good opportunity. Lockdown has seen a big increase in interest in wildlife and people are more in touch with their local area. So this is a great time to be asking for a reduction in mowing. One of our issues is the sheer number of councils involved – in our Branch area there are 30 councils – GLA, Herts CC, London Boroughs and district councils. In several areas parish and town councils have responsibilities, as do social housing organisations. Councils tend to be most responsive to people who live in their area. So if you are willing to get involved, perhaps by emailing or speaking to a councillor, that would be a great help. It would also be good to know more about what individual councils are doing on the ground. So whether you've noticed any changes or not in mowing regimes alongside roads and on public green spaces, we'd like to know. We can then help identify the key people and suggestions of what to say. To achieve success requires persistence and politeness – there are many pressures on our public spaces. We can't have everything our own way and need to explain the purpose in a way which wins people over

It would be good to hear If you think this is a good area for the branch to be focussing on. If you have any suggestions how we can make a difference, any information about what's happening in your area, would like to help, or just want to know more, please contact me at malcolmhull@hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk.

More Information

You can also find out more info on the links below:

Phil Sterlings' presentation: -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faneUTCoJI0&t=226s

Butterfly Conservation - https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects/building-sites-for-butterflies

Plantlife -
https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign

LB Brent - https://www.brent.gov.uk/council-news/august-2020/urban-wildflower-verges-to-boost-biodiversity-along-brents-roads/

Herts CC - https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/data-and-information/pollinator-strategy.pdf

Some Encouraging News for Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Woods, by Peter Fewell

Over the past few years I have been monitoring butterflies with the help of Rick Vickers in Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Woods. Over this time we have recorded 29 species from the park and woods. This number does include the Purple Emperor, last seen in 2018, and a Clouded Yellow that turned up last September, both of which we have not been able to photograph there. Last year 27 species were seen, including a Painted Lady seen by the Chairman of Friends of Cassiobury Park. I don't recall seeing a Painted Lady in Hertfordshire last season. The Clouded Yellow is included on this list. Brown Argus turned up again in 2020 along with Common Blue and Small Copper and the Small Copper did have a good flush with 10+ seen about the third week of September, the same day the Clouded Yellow made it's brief appearance. Within Whippendell Woods, the White Admiral had a good season despite the chaos of human traffic - first seen on 13th June with numbers peaking about 20th June with 10 seen. There were regular sightings until late July. Unfortunately there were no confirmed sightings of the White-letter Hairstreak nor a sighting of the Purple Emperor. The Small Tortoiseshell seems to be the one that's gone into decline the most with far fewer sightings. They used to do well in Cassiobury Park - I can only hope they bounce back.

Last season, I contacted Pherenice the parks manager about some inappropriate mowing that occurred in July when the contractors turned up early. The majority of the wild flowers were mown down at a time when it was good for butterflies along the Lime Avenue. Pherenice has implemented a no mow till September in certain parts such as the Lime Avenue. Since then I have been making a few other suggestions for growing wildflowers for butterflies and other pollinators. Pherenice has been very supportive of improving biodiversity and of growing wild flowers. Although early days and set back somewhat due to the lockdown of winter, things are looking very encouraging for growing wildflowers for the park. With the help of the parks education officer

we are planning to engage with local schools, educating younger people about certain plants and the butterflies that are associated with them. It will also be an advantage to help grow a sufficient amount of seedlings to plant out. Although funds are limited I'm sure my own investment of £100 per year for seeds will go a long way. Even if some seeds fail and it teaches some younger people to appreciate the plant and the butterflies associated with it then it will not be a total loss. Kidney Vetch along with Bird's-foot trefoil are two plants I have in mind to get things started. For the Brown Argus, I shall be looking into growing some Cranesbill as it's unlikely that Rockrose is used by this species in Cassiobury Park. That is assuming that this plant is not being used from somebody's back garden either in it's wild or cultivated form.

After a meeting with Malcolm Hull and Pherenice in early September 2020 it was apparent that some ride widening was due to take place along the ride where the White-letter Hairstreak were seen in 2018 and 2019. During the autumn, the known elm and a honeysuckle stand was marked out so that these would be spared the ride widening just in case there were any eggs laid there. Sadly, Whippendell Woods is losing it's ash trees to ash dieback, potentially a problem for the White-letter Hairstreak as they do seem to prefer the honeydew from the aphids that feed on the ash. Hopefully they will adapt to other honeydew and come down to nectar on flowers instead! There is one replacement tree that I have in mind for filling in some of the spaces and that tree happens to be Sallow (Goat Willow, *Salix caprea)* . The reasons for this are fairly obvious, being the main willow the Purple Emperor lays on. Here I have taking cuttings from existing Sallows in mind which should be relatively straight forward to do. It should also be cost effective and hopefully encourage some to grow a tree! I shall write an update on any progress for the next issue.

The White Admiral has become a Whippendell Woods speciality over the past few years and “Camilla Oak” has certainly been the most reliable site for sightings over the past four seasons. I'm fairly confident that they will return there this summer. Map coordinates from my new phone read -51.669, -0,446. I don't know the accuracy of those readings but if you follow the Lime Avenue until you reach a junction of paths, it is the straight ahead path. This takes you down into Whippendell Woods. When you come to the next junction of paths it is straight on again. On the left, the path is the one that has been widened over the autumn. It also the path where the White-letter Hairstreaks were photographed in 2018 and where the rescued elms remain. It is also

worth noting at that junction of paths White Admiral were frequent there in 2020 as in the photograph. But for "Camilla Oak" it is straight on until you come to a fork in the path. Take the left fork which is also the lower path. From here you will pass some birch trees and a small fallen one across the path as you go. You will eventually come to a grassy area with a fallen birch tree in front of you. There is a living birch tree on your right. If you turn round just watch and wait, if it is a fairly good weather day and you should see them there.

White Admirals in Whippendell
Photo © Peter Fewell

Of course, you hopefully will be able to join me on this years butterfly walk without restrictions this year if you wish to do so. For those that cant make Sunday 4th July and wish to visit the site then please follow the above guidance. It would be nice if others gather some additional data on White Admirals so that I can keep the parks manager informed. That way it will make it easier to conserve the White Admiral in Whippendell Woods for future generations. If you look for there emergence time on the branch website it will be a good indicator for other White Admiral sites too. I shall post my sightings onto the branch site this year as I've finally got my internet problems solved.

The Silver-washed Fritillary *valezina* form, by Peter Clarke

Many text books quote that the proportion of females being of the form *valezina* in a Silver-washed Fritillary population can be up to 15% and only in thriving colonies according to some of the literature. Is this really true? I have reasons to question this low percentage, at least in some situations. I was fortunate to find the *valezina* form on two occasions in the last ten years in the Stevenage area. The first was on 24 July 2011 after I was informed by Stefan Hunt of his sighting of such a specimen at the southern end of Norton Green Common on the previous day. The second was on 29 July 2020 in Whomerley Wood. What is surprising about these sightings is that colonies at these sites

are relatively very small.

Silver-washed Fritillary, form *valezina in Whomerley Wood, 2020*
Photo © Peter Clarke

Expansion of the butterfly in Hertfordshire started at the beginning of this century, with a notable increase in range and numbers in 2003, from the south and west. In the Knebworth Woods complex, which includes Norton Green Common, Nigel Agar probably saw a Silver-washed Fritillary (95% certain) at Newton Wood in 1996. There were occasional sightings at the site thereafter until 2009 after which the butterfly occurred regularly in ever increasing numbers. In Whomerley Wood, I found it in 2006, knowingly the first record there since probably the 1950s but it did not re-appear until 2013. There was another gap until 2018 and a colony was probably established in 2019 when a male and a female were seen on the same day. On my Stevenage transect which covers Whomerley Wood and the adjacent Monk's Wood, which I have operated since 1993, I have never seen more than two individuals on any one visit apart from the special day in 2020 when a *valezina* specimen was spotted out of three overall.

Are there any other *valezina* sightings in Hertfordshire in the recent past (since 1995)? Consulting the annual reports and the website sightings pages and checked by the county recorder, Andrew Wood, I found the following entries:

Date	Site
28 August 2008	St Albans Lane, Bedmond
23 July 2011	Norton Green Common
3 Aug 2016	Old Copse Drive, Ashridge
4 July 2019	Bricket Wood Common
29 July 2020	Whomerley Wood
2 August 2020	Broxbourne Woods

The *valezina* form was seen at Old Copse Drive also on 4 until 8 August 2016 inclusive but it is likely to be the same individual as that reported on 3 August. The specimen found on 24 July 2011 at Norton Green Common by myself (and Stefan Hunt) is also most likely to be the same one as that seen on 23 July.

If one is more likely to encounter a *valezina* specimen in stronger colonies, e.g. at Bricket Wood Common, then it is probably present but not being seen or reported as much as expected. Perhaps it was just chance that I found the two examples but then maybe not. There are some possibilities worth considering.

Are observers looking in the right places? The *valezina* form is more likely to be found in shady places in woodland. In addition, being grey -green in colour, it is less conspicuous and less active than the normal orange form.

It is known that the *valezina* form, expressed only in the female, is controlled by a dominant gene so this form should be more widely represented in the adult population. Natural selection is probably acting against it. Is it therefore possible that the proportion of *valezina* in females in newly established colonies is relatively high but gradually diminishes in future generations? However, in good summers when the butterfly is abundant there could be proportionately more *valezina* females in the population. Many unanswered questions on this subject.

Working Out Where Your Records are From, by Andrew Wood

As some of you will be aware, our records are used to produce maps of distribution. To do that we need to know where a record is from, using the Ordnance Survey grid reference system, as this is the backbone behind recording databases and the production of maps.

To many people the Grid Reference system is not part of daily life. This piece is not an attempt to explain how to calculate a reference but to give some hints on how to find them simply.

Often records come into me with a named location, which if it is accompanied by a street address, makes it easy to derive an exact location, but equally it may be a location like Therfield Heath or Ellenbrook Fields. These are large areas that cover one or more 1 and

2 Kilometre grid squares which can make records hard to locate exactly and just as importantly match records to particular environments.

For instance, it could be important if an unusual species is recorded at Therfield Heath to be able to work out if it was at Church Hill or Lankester Hill, a couple of kilometres away and a rather different area.

Sometimes you will have been asked for a postcode to enable me to derive a more exact location, as most people know their local code but we don't know them for other areas

In unpopulated rural areas they may not be of much use at all as they were not designed by the Post Office as a national location system.

Schemes such as iRecord and the Big Butterfly Count will calculate your location using the GPS on your phone but this has led to some misleading records where a record has been added when a recorder is back home and not at the location of the sighting.

I have received records with north London grid references that are named as the Sussex Coast and vice versa. These records have to be ignored, which is unfortunate, when they arrive as part of a dataset of thousands of records from largely unknown recorders.

With all this in mind I would like to mention a website called UK Grid Refence Finder (https://gridreferencefinder.com/).

It enables a grid refence to be found from a wide range of other location methods including:

Post Code

Street address

Longitude and latitude

What3Words

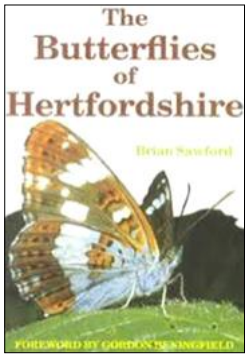
If the location that comes up is not quite right, it is possible to right click on the Google Earth map that comes up and highlight the exact point of your record.

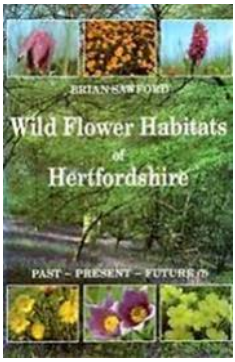
I hope that you might find this to be a useful tool when making records.

Brian Sawford (1940 - 2020)

Members will be saddened to hear of the recent death of Brian Sawford. Many tributes have been paid to him, some of which are captured below.

Andrew Wood wrote - When I moved to Hertfordshire in 1994 I had little idea of what the butterfly fauna were like in the county. One day in a Welwyn Garden City bookshop I saw, bought and devoured a copy of Brian's "Butterflies of Hertfordshire" book that had been published a few years before. The production of this book was clearly a huge task marshalling together historical and environmental information with detailed species mapping and excellent colour photography. It set a standard for county butterfly accounts not matched for many years. His organisation of a survey of butterfly distribution by 2km squares, rather than general locations that would be awkward to interpret years later, took our county's butterfly recording into the modern era with detailed information being stored on hand-written cards. Little did I know that 20 years later I would be asked to write a follow up book (with the huge advantage of computerised record keeping). It was only then that I actually met Brian. I spent two afternoons with him at his home talking about his book, sources and research methods as well as many other topics. After a while I asked if he would read and comment on the first draft of my book which he generously agreed to do, making many useful comments and suggestions. It was a shock to hear, late in 2020, that Brian had died, sadly not many months after his collaborator and colleague Trevor James.





Brian Sawford was born in Letchworth Garden City Hertfordshire on February 29, 1940. He was a well known local naturalist and contributed much to the natural history of Hertfordshire. He was a gifted photographer and shared his love of the countryside through illustrated talks and lectures.

Like his sometime colleague at the museum, Trevor James (who also sadly died last year), Brian was an all-round naturalist. He was a long-time contributor to the systematic lists in the Herts Bird Report and was HNHS President at the time of the Millennium. His highly-praised butterfly book remained the 'go-to' work for county enthusiasts for 30 years after its publication.

Brian held many key positions in a long and distinguished career, among them Environmental Officer for NHDC, Senior Keeper of Natural History and Countryside Officer for Letchworth Museum, Butterfly Recorder for Hertfordshire, Vice-recorder for Vascular Flora for Hertfordshire, Conservation Adviser for the Herts & Middx Branch of Butterfly Conservation and President of Letchworth Natural History Society. Some of his several publications were The Butterflies of Hertfordshire, Wildflower Habitats of Hertfordshire and Wildlife of the Letchworth Area. He also co-authored (with Trevor James) the county's first Biodiversity Action Plan. Brian was also well appreciated as an instructor and walks leader.

When conditions are safe, there will be a celebration of Brian's life and a commemorative tree planted on Norton Common. For now, the family is inviting donations to Butterfly Conservation. To donate, go to https://brian-sawford.muchloved.com/.

Our sincere sympathy goes to Terri, his wife of 40 years.

Bumblebees in the Garden, by Juliet Bloss

This article first appeared in the Hants & IOW Branch newsletter, and is reproduced here with permission.

Last spring during lockdown I embarked on a big replanting project in the garden. My aim was to attract pollinators – bees, butterflies, moths, hoverflies, etc. by planting a wide variety of nectar-bearing flowers. It turned out that the most numerous/obvious visitors were bumblebees, and being fairly easy to identify, I kept a log of the species that I saw and the plants that they favoured.

There are 22 species of bumblebee in the UK, but of these only seven are likely to occur in the average garden; the rest are restricted in range or found in more specialised habitats such as flower-rich chalk downland. When you think of bumblebees you probably envisage a large furry black, yellow and white striped bee, which in early spring (Feb/March) would be either a Buff-tailed (*Bombus terrestris*) or White-tailed Bumblebee (*B. lucorum*) queen, according to the colour of its tail. The smaller workers, which appear a bit later, resemble the queen except that, confusingly, Buff-tailed workers have white tails and are hard to distinguish from White-tailed workers. You might also expect a Red-tailed Bumblebee (*B. lapidarius*) (Mar/April), both queen and workers are all black except for a very red tail.

Two additional Bumbles are easy to identify: Tree Bumblebee (*B. hypnorum*) is a recent colonist (2001) and has a ginger thorax, an all-black abdomen and a white tail. Unlike the others mentioned, which nest in old mammal burrows underground, this one often takes over bird boxes or natural holes in trees. Finally, a later-emerging Bumble (April/May) is the very common Common Carder Bee (*B. pascuorum*), smaller than those already mentioned, with bright ginger or yellow/brown hair all over. The other two species which you could expect are Early Bumblebee (*B. pratorum*) and Garden Bumblebee (*B. hortorum*), both black and yellow, Early Bumble with an orange tail.

Red-tailed (left) and Buff-tailed (right) Bumblebees
Photos © Juliet Bloss

There are two types of bumblebee: “true” and “cuckoo”. Cuckoo bumblebees (about six species) do not collect pollen. They predate the nests of true bumblebees, killing the host queen and laying their eggs

in the nest, to be raised by the host workers. A cuckoo resembles its host in appearance but is distinguished by small details, including dark wings. I have only ever identified one type in the garden, late in summer, *B.vestalis*. Its preferred host is the very common Buff-tailed Bumble.

White-tailed Bumblebee
Photo © Juliet Bloss

Bumblebees can also be divided into those which have long tongues, and those with shorter ones, determining which flowers the bee prefers to feed on. The long-tongued species, e.g. Garden Bumble, or Common Carder Bee, prefer tubular flowers such as foxgloves, comfrey, vetches, honeysuckle, snapdragons, or penstemon, whereas those with shorter tongues prefer open flowers like marjoram, cosmos, single dahlia, ivy, cotoneaster, clover and many garden plants. Some short-tongued bees rob tubular flowers by biting a hole at the base of the tube to access the nectar, thereby avoiding pollinating the plant.

When the first queens emerge from hibernation in late February/early March they urgently need to find nectar. Gardeners can help by growing early flowers such as Pulmonaria (lungwort), crocus, primrose, winter flowering heathers, or hellebore. The important thing is to keep the supply going right through the season, certainly until November. Planting in groups or drifts helps the bees to feed more efficiently and is better than having plants dotted around. It is also important to have a variety of flower shapes to cater for all sorts, and to keep everything well-watered, as nectar production depends on this. Not every plant attracts bees; some are sterile and produce no nectar (e.g. *Lynchnis coronaria*), others refill only slowly after being visited. Plants to avoid are bedding plants such as pansies, double begonias, or any double flowers, which have little nectar. Blossom-bearing shrubs and trees are important sources of nectar. I often have a Buff-tailed Bumble on a winter-flowering Mahonia ‘Charity’, and Cotoneaster *horizontalis* on a sunny wall attracts particularly Tree Bumble and Common Carder Bee.

Studies have shown that as a bee approaches a flower, a tiny electric field is created between plant and pollinator which may signal that the

plant's nectar supply has been temporarily depleted, thus warning the bee to forage elsewhere and not to waste valuable feeding time. Some plants renew their nectar in a matter of 20 minutes, some take a full day. A real star in this respect is Borage, which is said to take only two minutes to refill. Plants which have a number of blooms on one stem, such as Alliums and flowers in the daisy family are popular with short-tongued bees, allowing them to feed continuously without journeying elsewhere; bees with long tongues appreciate deep flowers like Honeysuckle which have a lot more nectar per bloom. Some very successful plants in my garden last year were Pulmonaria and Aquilegia in spring, with Foxglove, Hebe *salicifolia*, Nepeta 'Six Hills Giant' and Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) later in the season. These latter two were never without a bee. Alliums, lavender, and knapweed were also popular.

By the end of the season I had listed all the above-mentioned species in the garden, the commonest being *B. terrestris, B. lucorum, and B. pascuorum*. My project for 2021? To oust a number of less popular plants and try out some others.

Thank goodness the garden centres are open.

Copy Deadline for the Autumn Newsletter will be

31 August 2021

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 we all hope will be an excellent year for all our Lepidoptera and other wildlife.

Committee Members

Chair: Malcolm Hull
11 Abbey View Road, St. Albans, Herts. AL3 4QL.....(01727) 857893
malcolmhull@hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk

Branch Organiser: Liz Goodyear
7 Chestnut Avenue, Ware, Herts., SG12 7JE ..... (01920) 487066
elizabethgoodyear@talk21.com

Membership Secretary & Newsletter Editor: Ian Small
59 Penn Way, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 2SH.....(01462) 677654
ian-small@virginmedia.com

Records Collator: Andrew Wood
93 Bengeo Street, Hertford, Herts. SG14 3EZ 0776 5098824
zoothorn@ntlworld.com

Moth Officer: John Murray
Field End, Marshalls Heath, Wheathampstead, Herts. AL4 8HS ..... (01582) 833544
J.B.Murray@open.ac.uk

London Contact: Paul Busby
113 Southbourne Gardens, Ruislip, Middx, HA4 9TA 07749 709422
buzz113@hotmail.co.uk

EBG Liaison: Roger Gibbons
7 Lowlands, Hatfield AL9 5DY ..... gibfam@ntlworld.com

Treasurer: Clifford Mullet.....cliffmull@btinternet.com

Millhoppers Reserve Managers:
Paula Reid, ... 0796 2874455 or reidpaulaj@yahoo.co.uk
Christine Ridley ..... 01442 386322 or chrisridleysen@yahoo.co.uk
Chris Hilling.....cosmosra@tiscali.co.uk

Webmaster:
Peter Clarke, 13 Lyndale, Stevenage. SG1 1UB .....peter.clarke4@ntlworld.com

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

Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/ButterflyConservationHertsMiddlesex

Twitter: https://twitter.com/Bc_HertsMiddx