

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER ISSUE *71*

Autumn 2015

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Chair's Intro, by Malcolm Hull

2015 has been eventful butterfly summer bringing both good and bad news as well as some surprises.

The bad news is that the government have approved the use of chemical warfare against Hertfordshire butterflies. They have partially suspended the ban on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides in areas where flea beetle infestations are impacting on crops of oil seed rape. The pesticide works as a nerve agent, attacking the central nervous system of bees, butterflies and other pollinators. These chemicals have been linked with declines in bee populations and the same is true for butterflies. Recent research has shown that the chemicals attach to the pollen of wild flowers in the areas where crops are sprayed and attacks insects when they visit flowers to gather nectar. Records gathered by Branch members show that butterflies are faring badly in areas of intensive agriculture and this trend is likely to get worse. Butterfly Conservation is continuing to lobby for a complete ban. For more information see the policy statements on the national BC website.

The good news is the spread of some of our rarer butterfly species. Purple Emperors have been seen at several new locations in our Branch area including Hampstead and Hackney in London. Small Blues have also been spreading with new locations near Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Letchworth and St Albans. This tiny butterfly is very vulnerable to loss of habitat. It was considered extinct in our two counties until five years ago and it's recent success is very welcome. The Branch is determined to encourage the Small Blue to spread and thrive in our area. We are looking at the feasibility of a Small Blue Project where we can work with landowners on existing and potentially suitable sites to create and enhance habitats. There will be lots to do and if you are interested in helping with the project please let me know.

In June I attended the official opening of the new British Butterfly Garden at Butterfly World near St Albans. This garden has been designed to showcase ideas for attracting butterflies and moths. We have sponsored the informative display boards which are full of informative tips for gardeners wishing to encourage butterflies and other wildlife. East Enders hard man, actor Jake Wood performed the opening by planting a ceremonial Kidney Vetch.

In July I visited the London Wetland Centre for the launch of the Big Butterfly Count. David Attenborough and Nick Baker spoke at the event which was well attended by the media. I carried out two counts - one in my garden and one on my allotment, counting a total of 12 species. I also managed to enter the data on the BBC app, which seemed more user friendly this year. In total there were over 50,000 counts made this year, a new record high.

We ran a successful program of guided walks to show people a full range of the butterflies in our area. I was pleased to see the White-letter hairstreak in Ealing, Grizzled Skippers in Hertford and the spectacular late display of Small Coppers near St Albans in late September. Many thanks to Liz Goodyear who organised this years programme and thanks also to the walk leaders and assistants who made this possible. Several hundred people attended around 20 walks. Joining one of our trips is a great way to get to know your local butterflies, do look out for a walk near you next year. If you have a favourite butterfly spot you'd like to share with others, do get in touch and we will try and set up a walk for 2016.

Although the summer season is over, there's still much to look forward to over the winter months. Highlights will be our indoor meeting in Harrow and our annual members day in March, details of which are on page 4.

REMINDER:

Don't forget to submit your records for sightings to Andrew Wood (details on back cover) as soon as possible, so that the information can be included into the 2015 Annual Report.



If possible, please submit sightings electronically in a spreadsheet, with columns for grid reference, place seen (or site name), date, species, number seen and any comments.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday

8

**February
2016**

Winter Indoor Meeting with Harrow Natural History Society

The Blackwell Hall, Uxbridge Road, Harrow, HA3 6DQ
20:00 to 22:00. The programme is still being finalised but includes

- Butterflies of North West London - speaker Andrew Wood
- Helping butterflies in an urban landscape – speaker Malcolm Hull

Final programme details will be published on the Branch website.

Wednesday

10

**February
2016**

Winter Work Party at Millhoppers Pasture.

10.00 - 13.00. Further details are on Pages 22-3

Saturday

5

**March
2016**

Branch AGM and Members' Day

The AGM and Members' Day will once again be held at Welwyn Civic Centre, AL6 9ER.

The full programme has not been finalised but the Keynote Speaker will be **Dr Jim Asher**, chair of BC Trustees who will be talking about the latest results from the Butterflies for the New Millennium Project.

Don't forget the photographic competition – it will be held again so please get all your best photos from 2015 ready!

All members and friends are welcome to attend these meetings.

Field Trip Reports

Stanmore Country Park Moth Evening – Friday 18th April, by John Hollingdale

Eight of us gathered on an inauspicious evening weather-wise. The sky was clear and a fresh breeze from the East was blowing. However, much to my surprise moths came regularly until the audience started to complain about the temperature and we packed up after an hour and three quarters. My outdoor thermometer at home was reading 2.3c by the morning. The last moth to arrive was a Grey Shoulder-knot which pleased Robert Payne as this was the first one he had seen. Robert did most of the identification and we must thank him for that. My thanks also go to Colin Plant for identifying the two Acleris.

This is the full list of species:

Frosted Green, Brindled Pug, Early Thorn, Engrailed, Lunar Marbled Brown, Small Quaker, Common Quaker, Clouded Drab,

Twin-spotted Quaker, Grey Shoulder-knot, Satellite, Nut-tree Tussock, Eriocrania subpurpurella, Acleris ferrugana, Acleris notana.

Bluebells and Butterflies - April 25th 2015 Stanmore Country Park, by John Hollingdale

Apart from the usual suspects of Harrow Natural History Society, we were joined by Malcolm Hull; the Branch's new chairman.

After a cloudy morning the sun emerged and so did the butterflies. We did a circuit covering most of the country park's nature trail. However we deviated cross the corner of the Wood Farm extension which makes up part of Greater Stanmore Country Park.

Butterflies seen: Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Speckled Wood.

Oh and the Bluebells seem to be spreading across the site in recent years. At the top of 40 Acre Field the tall buildings of the city were clearly seen.

Moth Evening in Lady Gilbert's Orchard, Grimsdyke. Wednesday 20th May 2015, by John Hollingdate

Weather was clear and cold and didn't bode well. There were four of us gathered for what turned out to be a disappointing night. The head gardener, Helenka, had forgotten to put the date in her diary so didn't attend. Both Dick and Paul had smaller nets than mine and they proved a much more effective piece of kit when catching flying moths. The following were identified:-

Nematopogon swammerdamella, Esperia sulphurella, Eudonia lacustrata, Silver-ground Carpet, Green Carpet, Common Pug, Brimstone Moth, Waved Umber, Orange Footman.

The most numbers, four, were the Orange Footman and the fact that this moth wasn't recorded by me before 2003 in Harrow shows how species can come and go very rapidly.

Finally I must apologise for the mix up in dates which was entirely my fault.

Marshall's Heath, 28th June, by John Murray

Well the weather was the worst imaginable for a butterfly field trip: cloudy and rainy throughout, but nonetheless 16 people turned up. I had run the moth trap overnight and so had Trevor Chapman in Wheathampstead, so we had 50 species of moths to examine, including Small Elephant Hawk, Burnished Brass, Brown Silver-line, Buff-tip and Blastodacna hellerella.

We then walked around the Heath, and to my amazement saw both target species. There were plenty of Marbled White, plus Ringlet, Small Skipper, Small Tortoiseshell and Meadow Brown all flying around in the rain, plus Yellow Shell moth, Bishops Mitre Shieldbug, immature Sloe Bug, Hornet, and some day-flying micro-moths yet to be identified. Amazing what is around under such conditions.



Examining the overnight moth catch

Norton Green, 16th July, by Peter Clarke

The weather forecast at the beginning of the day for our walk did not look too promising but as it turned out for ten of us we enjoyed at least 80% sunshine even if the wind at times was a little breezy. A few minutes after we set off at just after 10:30 we saw a Comma almost immediately basking on a bramble leaf. About two-thirds way down the track we viewed the blackthorn hedge on the western side and the tall oak trees behind for Purple Hairstreak and Purple Emperor. A Purple Hairstreak was seen near the top of a blackthorn hedge and it settled on one of its leaves, which most if not all of us spotted. We probably saw 2 or 3 Purple Hairstreaks flitting above the blackthorn and onto a nearby Poplar and Oak tree at this spot. As we entered the meadow between Watery Grove and Cannocks Wood more butterflies were about including many Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Whites of all kinds although only one Green-veined White. Marbled Whites, Small and Large Skippers and several fresh Gatekeepers were also on the wing. At least 3 Silver-washed Fritillaries with some Commas impressed us with their flight. In the field south of Watery Grove, we spotted a newly-emerged Small Copper and one of us saw a blue (probably Common Blue). Burleigh Meadow presented us with the usual common species as above plus a small colony of Essex Skipper. One of the highlights of the trip was finding the Dyer's Greenweed flower in good numbers at the SW end of the meadow. On our way back to the lay-by, near Pigeonswick Cottage a Speckled Wood was seen by the track. After everyone else left, Bob and I stayed behind for an hour and a half mostly to look for Purple Emperor on the SW edge of Watery Grove. I had laid down some salmon paste (my local Waitrose store didn't stock any of the shrimp variety) in the open area on the edge of the track but we didn't have any luck there either! Nevertheless, we saw at least couple more Purple Hairstreaks and a lovely Peacock on the brambles. Just before we reached the lay-by, we saw a Small Tortoiseshell on Creeping Thistle by the pond opposite Norton Green Farm

National Moth Night at Stanmore Country Park, 12th Sept 2015, by John Hollingdale

13 people attended this event. Thanks to all that came and the experts amongst them who helped with the identifications. The conditions, I

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think, were against a very productive evening. The meadow had recently been mown; the weather was a light SW breeze and there was little cloud. Also was the presence, all evening, of Pipistrelle bats.

The macro moths, total nine species, included an Oak Hook-tip and a Maiden's Blush.

However there were thirteen Micro species. Thanks to Colin Plant and Andrew Wood for helping with the identification of some of them. *Bryotropha affinis* was new to the reserve and *Eudonia pallida* was way beyond its normal flight period of July. It begs the question; does the warmth of the London area have an effect on moth flight periods?

I will forward the complete list to anyone that's interested. Email address hollhu@yahoo.co.uk.

New Members' Day, 25th July, at Butterfly World, St. Albans, by Ian Small

Our second annual New Members' Day was again held at Butterfly World in St. Albans. The previous day and, as it turned out, the following day, were marked by persistent heavy rain, so we were indeed fortunate not only to have a dry day, but also some early afternoon sunshine to coincide with our wander around the site.

The day began with an examination contents of the overnight moth-trap, with the main surprise being that any moths at all had managed to fly to



There was lots of interest in the contents of the moth trap

it in the rain! This was followed by a series of brief talks introducing the Society and our Branch, the common butterflies of our area, gardening for butterflies, recording and getting more involved.

Our afternoon walk gave everyone excellent views of the many Small Blues, as well as of e.g. Brown Argus and Small Copper and the numerous Six-spot Burnet moths that were frequenting the scabious and thistles. Many of those present finished the day by visiting the tropical butterfly house.

**A Truly Amazing Summer – a Tale from Hampstead Heath
by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton with contributions
from Frank Nugent**

In 2012, Andrew Middleton discovered the location of a Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*) Assembly area at Whitewebbs Wood, north Enfield (see Newsletter 64, Autumn 2012). We were truly delighted, as the Enfield area had had several reports over a hundred year period but until 27th July 2012; an assembly area had been the missing jigsaw piece!

We were also thrilled to think that this locality was perhaps the closest known Assembly Area to the centre of London, with Ruislip Woods being further west and at the time our Epping Forest Assembly areas still not located. However, our excitement was quashed when Andrew found a Twitter entry from the Corporation of London, saying that:

One of UK's most beautiful and elusive butterflies - the Purple Emperor (male known as 'His Majesty') on Heath today." @CityCorpHeath.

The sighting was subsequently reported by Robert Renwick to the Branch with the Heath's end of year records the following January.

You may wish to note that a female Purple Emperor was spotted on the heath taking minerals from the edge of a pond that had just had York stone paving laid around, this was during the last week of July. It was seen on Thursday July 26th at around 12:30 in the Kenwood Yard Eco field grid ref: TQ275875."

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There was also reference to an historic report from Hampstead and back in 2003 when we wrote one of our earliest reports (Goodyear and Middleton, 2004) our research had already begun when we discussed the following text:

*An Illustrated Natural History of British Butterflies; 71-77 [1874]"
Purple Emperor by E. Newman*

Middlesex. Caen Wood, near Hampstead - J. F. Stephens."

"We have tried to find the original source of this record. Colin Plant in the Butterflies of the London Area dates it as being in the 1850s, which would have been after Stephens completed his Illustrations of British Entomology and it should also be noted that Stephens died in 1852. We have spoken to Colin and his thoughts are that he may well have found the information on an annotated copy of an original journal or book that he had access to when researching his book. We have also investigated the possibility that Caen Wood was incorrectly assumed to mean Ken Wood, as the Ordnance Survey maps used the name Ken Wood a little later, in 1873-1876....."

More recent research confirmed that Caen Wood mentioned by Stephens is Ken Wood, Hampstead Heath and there are several buildings in the area with that name. In 2007 we received an email from Helen Bantock; the date of the sighting is not known but was probably in 2003 or 2004.

The unconfirmed Purple Emperor sighting was by a woman in the Highgate choir who I just happened to be sitting by in rehearsal three years ago. She lives nearer Golders Green on the other side of the road from Ken Wood. But her description was very vivid of a large dark flying butterfly, which almost settled on her dog's back! And she knew enough to know it wasn't a Peacock. At the time, things were very chaotic at home for her, which is why she didn't tell anyone. It was just chance that we started talking. I can't remember her name and no longer belong to that choir."

Following the news in 2012 and although late in the 2012 season, we visited Hampstead Heath and watched along the Spaniards Road, near to the radio mast, as this is the highpoint in the landscape, but with no success. We approached the Corporation of London who initially

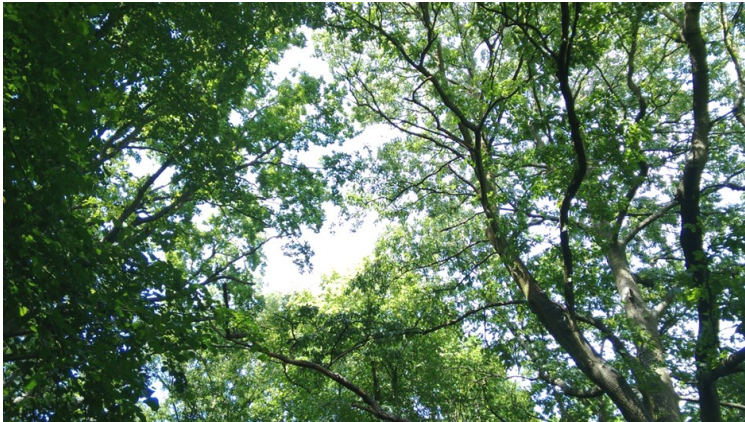
showed a lot of interest in obtaining a chair lift/cherry picker to watch the canopy along Spaniards Road. We contacted the Corporation again prior to the 2013 season using the same contact email addresses, but got no response (as has often been the case with this study). Whilst we didn't revisit in either 2013 or 2014, we would often look across to the Hampstead heights from the North Circular or the north London basin from Essex 15km away.

However, the 2015 season started with glorious weather and I persuaded my employers that they really didn't need me working on Saturday 4th July 2015 allowing me to go out and look for Purple Emperors! I insisted quite firmly to Andrew that we visit Hampstead Heath, so we set off with the aim of getting to the Spaniards Road by about 11.30 and ready to start watching at midday. Our plan was to sit on our collapsible chairs alongside the Spaniards Road and watch through binoculars or unaided the gap between the trees on either side hoping to see a Purple Emperor pass over the road at some point on its way to one of the many prominent mature trees either side. The length of road we were trying to watch stretched from close to the Spaniards Arms public house to a point when the road starts to drop down towards the centre of London so there was a lot of road to watch! The large radio mast was close by at what we felt was the highest point.

So we sat and waited, Andrew looking in one direction and myself looking in the other. What we hadn't expected on a lovely hot Saturday morning was road works along the road; with temporary lights so all the cars, the lorries and buses built up in a long queue feet from where we were sitting. Walkers passed, dog walkers passed, the joggers jogged past and the cyclists cycled past, all with bemused looks at our strange behaviour. The key strategy was not to make eye contact!!! A few people asked what we were looking for; most thinking we were bird watchers. We did our best to explain but talking can be distracting and we couldn't let our concentration drop. A few dragonflies flew through, and a Purple Hairstreak or two were seen but the Purple Emperor remained truly elusive. This was starting to get boring, we couldn't even have a conversation as the traffic noise was too great so around 2 o'clock we packed up and walked onto the wooded Heath just below the road, admired the superb view across London and started to watch more prominent trees in the hope that a

Purple Emperor would appear.

Around 2.30 we started walking through the wooded area just off the road and towards the radio mast, stopping at regular intervals to watch the small gaps between the trees and canopy. At one such gap, we stopped and before I had time to get my chair in place, Andrew shouted “Emperor” as one flashed across a few yards of sky above our heads!!!! From that point in time I declared I would never in my words ‘faff’ around with a chair and miss the action. Within seconds we both witnessed a second flight and we had confirmed a new Assembly Area just a few metres from where we were sitting by the road and where hundreds of people drive past on a daily basis. Two individuals were present on this occasion and after walking a short distance to the track that leads to private housing, a better view point was gained and for the rest of the afternoon we had the delight of observing an Assembly Area only about 7 kilometres from the centre of London. The Corporation of London has been informed and seemed equally pleased, and Andrew posted the sighting on the London Bird Club Wiki website page (LNHS), in the hope that someone might be interested and make further monitoring visits.



The small gap in the canopy where the first Purple Emperor was seen flying across

Photo: Liz Goodyear

However, the story doesn't end there.....

A few days later on 12th July 2015, we received an email from Frank Nugent and his story now begins and we have his permission to reproduce his correspondence. Frank wrote

“Dear both,

Just wanted to thank you both for your postings last week about the Purple Emperors on Hampstead Heath.

I spent the whole afternoon there yesterday (11th) watching them thanks to you. An incredible experience made more so because the Heath is my local birding (& butterfly) patch and ironic because on the day you were watching them on my patch I had gone to Bookham to see them there! Which once again just goes to show what's under our noses!

I can only imagine how happy you must have been to find them; I know how happy they made me. No idea how you did it but a big thank you. Definitely one of the highlights of my years of birding on the Heath.”

Frank then sent through further details from his visit on the 12th July 2015

Frank continued to watch the area by the radio mast and contributed these posts to the website, corresponding with us throughout the flight period. His regular visits gave such an insight into the behaviour and potential numbers that might be present and it certainly confirmed that our sighting on the 4th July was not a ‘one off’ as some felt inclined to comment. We even had it suggested that the sightings were as a result of a release! His sheer joy and pleasure whilst making these observations and his compliments to our recording skills made us feel quite satisfied. We found his notes regarding the timing of the Red Admirals, that were also present and their behaviour invaluable and confirmed our own experience at other sites we have watched over the years.

A week later Frank was back and still having fun!

“Today I returned to Hampstead Heath for the first time since Saturday 11th July and thought I would submit this little report. I arrived at 11:30 which I knew to be a little early but useful in that I can record that there was no sign of the Emperors despite lots of other

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species on the wing. The weather was at least 22°C, very sunny but with quite a breeze swaying the tops of the trees.

At 13:18 the show began! A bit surprising given that the sun had by now been replaced by cloud and for the next hour it became a bit of a battle between sun and cloud. An Emperor in flight around the usual trees was joined by a second and the most breath taking clashes ensued for about 10 mins.

Joy unconfined as at 13:30 a third Emperor joined the other 2 and all three flew together. After about 5 mins the the third Emperor was lost to sight and I never saw it again all day. But for the next hour constant sparring occurred between the other two.

Sometimes peace and harmony was restored but pass a few minutes and the clashing would commence again. After about 14:30 only one Emperor was visible, sometimes perching, sometimes making short flights around the trees. The Emperor had to contend with quite a breeze and could be seen being tossed hither and thither several times. The temperature had by now risen a few degrees and as the afternoon wore on the short flights became less regular.

At 17:45 I witnessed something completely different. An Emperor flew to a tree (this tree now in full sun for the first time now that it had moved to the west) I had not seen it alight on before, just next to the other trees and settled on a leafless part of a branch about a third of the way from the top. Sometimes it was moving ever so slightly, sometimes motionless and sometimes it walked along the branch. Just after 18:00 the Emperor leapt into the sky and flew as if euphoric for a few minutes around the tree before disappearing from view somewhere near but not at the top. I stayed for another half an hour but did not see any Emperors again today.

I hope that you find something of interest in the above. I will return at some point Thurs-Sun of this week weather permitting and will report again if you would like. By the way, do you think that the Emperor was obtaining nutrients from the tree branch? A snack before retiring for the day?

I still cannot quite believe that I'm able to experience all of this just a few miles from central London...and all thanks to you both."

From the 23rd July 2015

“Made a further visit to Hampstead Heath today to check on the Purple Emperors. 17-22°C, intermittent sun and lots of cloud. HIM [His imperial majesty] appeared at 12:16, earlier than on my previous visits. Tangled with a Purple Hairstreak at 12:35 and made regular flights. At 13:07 a second Emperor appeared and between then and 14:15 had 3 major chases and a couple of clashes, with a Red Admiral joining in at one point.

A lull as the cloud loomed but a chase then at 15:00 and a clash at 15:34 before...

the arrival of the third Emperor. All 3 in a chase at 15:38 after which one perched while the other two continued. After 15:50 I saw only one Emperor and that only briefly. I left at 17:30.

I hope that these observations are helpful. I'm curious as to why I only see the third Emperor for a few minutes this visit and previous.

Weather looks unsettled tomorrow but I intend to return at some point on Saturday when I hope I'll see something special as it will be my Birthday!

On Friday 24th July, the weather was seriously unpleasant and Frank reported on the 25th with this email titled ‘*After the Storm*’

“Following the heavy rain all day yesterday and knowing how that can decimate butterflies it was with some trepidation that I returned to Hampstead Heath to check on the Purple Emperors.

While waiting to check the Master Territory all seemed well as every species I'd seen just a couple of days ago was out and about including a very confiding Purple Hairstreak.

On my last visit the Emperor appeared first at 12:16 but not today. Previous visits saw them appear around 13:00 but not today. As time passed, the heart sank. 14:00 came and went with the sun and cloud.

To my great relief at 14:10 the Emperor appeared followed by a second a minute or so later. Lots of chasing and a few clashes ensued after which only one was visible whenever the sun came out, sometimes mostly just perching. More chases and clashing occurred just after

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16:00 but both vanished from 16:40 when the sun was replaced by thick cloud.

It's possible that one did cross the Spaniards Rd and alight in an oak directly in front of the sun on the Sandy Heath side at 17:30 but I'm not 100% sure as my view was obscured at that point and 2 Red Admirals were throwing me off the trail.

I notice that Matthew Oates has tweeted today that Purple Emperors in Savernake Forest (a late site) seem to have been hit hard by the rain yesterday so it's all the more heartening to know that the ones on Hampstead Heath (though I didn't see the elusive third one) have survived.*

**We have video footage of a male Purple Emperor being tossed around during a violent thunder storm and simply when the rain and wind stopped, shook its wings and repositioned itself unperturbed!*

On Saturday 1st August when for many the season was drawing to a close, Frank returned for another visit and on this occasion met our friend Helen Bantock, also a regular visitor to Hampstead Heath.

“After a very brief glimpse of the Purple Emperor at 12:30, from 12:38 there could be no mistaking it. No clashes and no chases as only one Emperor was visible at any given time.

Flights around the Assembly area were as follows: 4 flights between 12:38 and 13:00. 3 flights 13:00-14:20 but the largest number of flights were made 15:00-16:11 when HIM made no fewer than 10 flights. After that I saw nothing. So HIM made it into August and showed no sign of slowing down today.”

And so Frank instead of going to the Chilterns returned to Hampstead Heath on the 2nd August 2015

“Once again Iris overcame me and so I returned to Hampstead Heath. The Purple Emperor appeared shortly before 13:00 and flew excitedly over the Assembly area a few times. There were three further solo flights until at 14:42 I'm delighted to report a second Emperor arrived whereupon a spectacular chase and clash ensued.

A terrific spiralling clash took place about 10 mins later after which

both disappeared over the top of an oak. Only one Emperor returned and flew on and off until 15:54 after which I saw nothing more."

But Frank still didn't give up and returned again the following weekend when everyone else had stopped looking. His first report from the 8th August:

"A day of mixed fortunes on Hampstead Heath today. I watched for Purple Emperor all afternoon today in mostly decent weather but saw not the briefest glimpse of HIM.

However...as I approached the assembly area I saw a male Silver Washed Fritillary basking in the sunshine at 10:30. This follows a sighting of a basking female not far from today's location last Sunday, 2nd Aug at 12:30. I'm not aware of any other records of SWF on the Heath though there have been odd sightings by others at nearby Highgate Wood over the years. The SWF is my 25th species for the Heath."

However, the following day 9th August, the Emperor bounced back with a stunning performance

"I'm beside myself with joy; here's my news:

I'm overjoyed to report after no sighting whatsoever yesterday that the Purple Emperor put on a right regal show today on Hampstead Heath. Photos I took today show much wear and tear but you'd never have known it from his behaviour. He seemed extraordinarily active, first appearing at 13:11 and chasing everything in sight: Woodpigeons seemed to really aggravate him, a Parakeet was escorted off the premises and Purple Hairstreaks and Red Admiral summarily dispensed with. Don't know what was eating him but he spent the day variously seeing off intruders and perching obligingly. HIM remained visible until 17:20 when I watched him leap from his perch and appeared to glide through one of the assembly trees to be seen no more.

Liz/Andrew: one of my most memorable days with the PE here. Why my Mother didn't call me Tenacity I'll never know! To think, I almost went to the Chilterns! But how to explain yesterday's absence?"

Then the news we had been expecting for some time from Saturday

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15th August 2015.....

“Absolutely no sign of PE today despite looking carefully for the whole afternoon.

Despite the lovely sunny start and end to the day, it was actually thick cloud all the way between 1-5! This pretty much happened last Saturday too and you'll recall that it looked like that was it as HIM never showed that day either, the only time I failed to connect. But the following day he was back with a vengeance! I tentatively wonder if there isn't a secondary area somewhere unknown where he resides in such dull weather as today? This might explain his strange absence on 8th only to reappear the next day in glorious weather. In which case I should check tomorrow as per last week if the weather looks good! Or of course 9th August might have been my last sighting...”

What an amazing summer for Purple Emperors in our area. We had several reports from new localities in particular woodland east of Stevenage and Nomansland Common near Harpenden. Phil Woodward saw a Purple Emperor at Tring Park after a gap of several years and Gavin Vicary had a second sighting at Patmore Heath.



No doubt one of the highlights was a report sent in by Kim Seager from King's Langley on the 7th July “I'm so thrilled, it's the first one (*Purple Emperor*) I've seen in real life! I only saw it, because instead of going in the front door, I went round the back, and he was just sitting on the path, with the sun on him. I panicked to get my phone out to take a pic, and just as I got him perfectly framed, the sun went in, and he closed his wings! I stay there for a few minutes, and decided to risk just touching the edge of his wings, and he very obligingly opened them for me.” The story doesn't quite end there as Kim works with Amy Paterson who just happened to report a female Purple Emperor in 2014 seen from her office window in Berkhamsted where they both worked. There was also a report with photo from Abney Cemetery of a female nectaring.

In addition Don Gregory continued to survey the woods in the Hitch Wood area, where he has found several Assembly Areas in the last three years. And of course Laurence Drummond continues his quest into the extremes of Essex with new sites at Danbury and Criers Wood, near Great Braxted.

Let's hope that the 2016 season is as exciting.

Further information and detail of our previous studies including many references can be found online at this link <http://www.dispar.org/reference.php?id=91>

Butterfly Aberrations, by Peter Clarke

How often have you wandered in a meadow in mid-summer to find a rather drab brown butterfly bumbling over the grass then on closer examination to find it is only a Meadow Brown? But look again. Is it a male or female? Or is it perhaps something more unusual, for example, two eyespots on the forewings instead of one? And how often does this variation occur? When I saw the Valezina variant of the female Silver-washed Fritillary in the meadow west of Watery Grove in July 2011 I became more interested in finding out more about variations in butterflies.

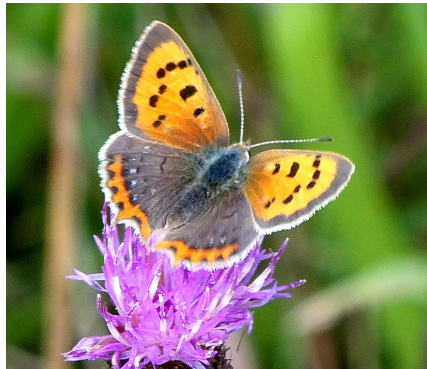
There are several types of variation. For example, we have seasonal variation whereby the colour or markings differ depending on the time of year as in the case of Speckled Wood. The cream specks on the wings are generally larger in the spring than in late summer which is probably associated with the wider open spaces in woodlands at this time of year as some tree leaves are not yet fully out. Another type of variation is geographical as in the Large Heath which has darker and larger spots on its hindwing undersides in England compared to specimens in the colder regions of Scotland. Specimens further south are more active due to the warmer climate and may attract more attention from birds. The more prominent spots is a way of deflecting the birds away from the body of the butterfly. The Valezina form of the female Silver-washed Fritillary could be sex-linked which might be advantageous in dense woodland in warming up due to the darker colouring. It is aberrations, though, which mostly fascinates me.

I would define an aberration as a variation which is more obscure and cannot be classified as sex-linked, seasonal or geographical. It occurs once in a while but varies from population to population although population density is obviously a factor. It is unclear if any aberration is advantageous in a changing environment. For instance, the blue-spotted form of the Small Copper ab. *caeruleopunctata* is quite common in some populations but is this aberration an advantage in any environment? Maybe the blue spots act as a deflector for birds as outlined for the darker spots in the Large Heath example above. More research is required in this area; are Small Coppers vulnerable to particular birds, for example?

Now, that's the techie bits out of the way. Are there any butterflies we should look for aberrations locally? Perhaps, the most well-known one is the Red Admiral with the white spot on the red band on the forewings ab. *bialbata* which is fairly common, I believe. I have seen the Small Copper ab. *caeruleopunctata*, mentioned above, on a number of occasions in the Knebworth Woods area where also the Gatekeeper ab. *excessa* (one or more extra spots under the eyespot on the forewings) was found this year. The Satyrinae family (the Browns) is probably the easiest group to look for aberrations due to the spot patterns on the wings. For further details of aberrations check out the excellent website maintained by Peter Eeles: www.ukbutterflies.co.uk



Gatekeeper, ab *excessa* at Watery Grove, 22nd August 2015



Small Copper, ab *caeruleopunctata* at Watery Grove, 1st September 2015

Photos © Peter Clarke

When you next see a drab brown butterfly, don't ignore it. Take a photograph and you never know - it might turn out to be quite special.

Notes relating to the Large Heath and Silver-washed Fritillary are derived from the www.ukbutterflies.co.uk website (Peter Eeles).

Butterflies and Moths in Toronto, by Andrew Wood

I visited Toronto in Canada during the first week of August as part of a family holiday. Although the purpose was not to look for butterflies and moths I always keep my eyes open as you never know what you might see. The weather was very similar to the UK with bright days and mild nights and temperatures in the mid 20s, but this was the week following an exceptional heat wave which had seen mid to high 30s temperatures and emergency measures taken to help the population keep cool. I suspect that these conditions might have an effect on the insect populations as numbers seen were very low compared to what you might hope to see in a big city like London at the same time. Some things were very familiar as the two commonest species were the Small White and Red Admiral, both the same species as we are familiar with here. Indeed the whites are easier to identify than here as there are no other confusion species.

In the west of Toronto High Park is a large area of lakes, woods, formal and informal parkland and there were a few butterflies here, especially attracted to the wild Rudbeckia and the planted Coneflowers. The Eastern Tiger swallowtail, not dissimilar to our Swallowtail, was reasonably common. There were also a few Summer Azures, a blue very like the Holly Blue and one very tatty Silver Spotted Skipper,



Mating Monarchs
Photo © Andrew Wood

nothing like ours, showing the problem of common English names being used for very different species in different parts of the world. Nearby on the waterfront is an area called Humber Bay that is undergoing regeneration with a mixture of housing and parkland areas and features an acre designated as butterfly habitat with planting designed to encourage butterflies – unfortunately we saw none!

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Off the water front in Toronto there are the Toronto Islands which are car free (though there is an airport at one end) and well manicured suburbia and parkland. One area is again planted up to encourage wildlife as Franklin's (a children's cartoon character turtle) wildlife garden. There were several Monarchs here including a mating pair, the first I have seen for this



Ailanthus Webworm
Photo © Andrew Wood

species. Elsewhere there were a few Clouded Sulphurs (like a Clouded Yellow) and Eastern Comma. We also found a female Gypsy Moth sitting on an egg cluster (we had a male Gypsy Moth in the apartment we were renting). Possibly the most interesting species we found was in the valleys leading out of the Botanic Gardens where an attractive micro moth the less attractively named Ailanthus Webworm was nectaring on goldenrod. This moth's caterpillars feeds on the Tree of Life – Ailanthus and until a few years ago was only known from Florida, but in has since spread all the way up the eastern USA and into southern Canada. It is big for a micro and the red black and white colouring is very distinctive.

There may not be many white species in Ontario but there are many Skippers and they are not all easy to tell apart. However at the Botanic Gardens were were able to identify the Common Sootywing, The Northern Broken Dash and Pecks Skipper, the first a large Dingy Skipper and the latter two variations on a Large Skipper theme.

It was good to see several North American species that I had not seen before even if there were not vast numbers around.

Millhoppers Needs You! By Jez Perkins, Reserve Manager

Millhoppers Pasture is Herts and Middlesex Branch only reserve and is located just outside the village of Long Marston near Tring. This little 3 acre oasis contains a rich mosaic of habitats including flower rich meadows, scrub, ponds and the rare Black Poplar. The reserve is grazed during the autumn with sheep and occasionally cattle, which

maintains the diversity of plants within the meadow; however there are still plenty of things to get stuck into.

Over the last two years the Chiltern Society have kindly run a couple of volunteer days at Millhoppers and have completed some very worthwhile jobs such as clearing blackthorn scrub that was encroaching into the meadow. Further volunteer days are programmed with the next date confirmed as **Wednesday 10th February 2016**. This volunteer day is open to members of Butterfly Conservation and we would love to see you at the Reserve. This task will focus on clearing blackthorn scrub particularly around the main entrance. We will be meeting at Wilstone Village Hall at 10:00 and we usually work until 13:00. Please bring appropriate outdoor clothing and a flask of something hot in case the weather is a bit chilly.

If you have any queries or indeed would like to help out on the reserve on a more informal basis, please contact the Reserve Manager Jez Perkins (details on back cover).

The Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) – its Special Place in My Life, by David Chandler

I was watching BBC2 and, between programmes, one of its many logo clips appeared. This particular one was a female Common Blue “2” that was then consumed by a Venus Flytrap “2”. Whilst amusing to many this sinister image started me thinking about the poor Common Blue and how, quietly behind the scenes, this butterfly has been a constant part of my life.

I’m not a born-again Christian; I’ve never experienced an epiphany like many low church (happy clappy) Christians nor a spiritual high at high church (bells & smells) either. No, my faith has always been with me since my early days at King’s Langley’s Church of England School, at Houghton Regis’ Forward with Faith All Saints Church and, more recently, at New Wine loving St Georges Church in New Thundersley. I’ve been comfortable with them all.

It’s a similar familiar feeling with my love of butterflies and, in particular, the Common Blue. As a child they were a familiar friend

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in my mother's garden which backed onto agricultural-land that was not intensively farmed. They were still present in the 1980s in the fields and the undeveloped land around my home in South Bedfordshire where I first photographed them and in my latter years in South Essex, where they are not so common as they once were, but are still to be found on the north bank of the Thames estuary's linked chain of nature reserves.

Even in my retirement years it is still a joy to see a Common Blue each year. The violet blue colouration of the males is distinctive in the field and their first appearance in early May is one of the heralds of Spring. Their second brood from mid summer to the beginnings of autumn brings joyful colour to walks in the countryside, often bringing cheer well after many other butterflies flight periods have gone by; they can last well past the Autumn Equinox.

The Common Blue is sexually dimorphic, in other words the females differ from the males.

The female's colouration varies from chocolate brown to being almost as blue as the males. I have always found this fact fascinating. I have written previously about the Speckled Wood that becomes 'orangeier' the further south you travel in Europe; it is almost the same for the female Common Blue; I have heard that she tends to become more blue the warmer the climate becomes and that some say this species is a good bell-weather for climate change.

However, from my observations of the species in the UK and on continental Europe this is not always so. I have found brown females in Spain and Greece, and very blue females in the UK. Paradoxically, in southern Europe I've also seen males that sport a more vivid blue coat that can give the observer a hard time trying to differentiate them from the "more exotic" blues found in these places. In truth the species is very variable and it is not just the colour that varies; sometimes they vary in size. I've seen tiny Common Blues the size of Small Blues.

Further, in the UK there is sometimes confusion in the field when those browner female Common Blues fly alongside the Brown Argus. As this task can be tricky, when in doubt, I tend to take a photograph on my phone's camera and inspect the image when I get back home.

However, sometimes it is possible to tell in the field because the Brown Argus has no blue scales and has a few more orange lunials on its upper sides. That all said trying to tell these species apart from their undersides is far more testing and its down to recognising the spot patterns on the wings; the figure of eight pattern on the leading edge of the hind wing of the Brown Argus being the least difficult to remember, but in bright light this is quite hard.

Never-the-less, I believe the Common Blue to be one of our finest butterflies and whether or not the female turns bluer in bright light conditions to avoid predators, as I've also heard, is a moot point, the species remains one of the finest of God's creations and a joy to behold

New Members

Over 100 new members have joined the Herts. & Middx. Branch so far this year. A very warm welcome to you all. We hope you enjoy your membership and are able to join us at some of our Branch events or field trips in the months to come.

R Allen	Tring	Mrs C & Dr I Churchward	
Miss S Anderson	London	& Family	Bishop's Stortford
Mr B & Mrs M Battley	London	Mrs L Clarke	Bishop's Stortford
Mrs D Bailey	Hitchin	Ms R Clegg	Uxbridge
Mr J Berkoff	London	Mr J Cloke & Mrs C Shone	London
Mr P Black	Newbury	Mrs M Cobley	Greenford
Miss N Blyth & Mr R De Souza		Mr S Coultas	Hemel Hempstead
& Family	Enfield	Mr R Crabtree	Welwyn Garden City
Mrs C Brawn	Royston	Miss L Crimlisk	Hemel Hempstead
Mr P J T Brown	Enfield	Ms J Crystal	Hitchin
Miss G E Buck	Rickmansworth	Ms J Curle	Hayes
Mr M Burton & Family	Teddington	Miss R Debnath	Hemel Hempstead
Mr B Camps & Ms G		Mr P & Mrs A De La	
Ducco	London	Nougerede & Family	London
Mrs M & Mr P Cartmell	Harpenden	Ms J Digby	Hertford
Mr T Caswell	London	Ms A Dougall	London
Mrs P Chapman	Ware	Mrs C Douglas	Edgware

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Miss R Downie	London	Mr T Murdoch & Ms M	
Miss E Edwards	Baldock	Harrington & Family	London
Miss R Edwards	Baldock	Ms B Murray	London
Mr P Elborn	Hemel Hempstead	Ms L Nazer, Mr N Bieber &	
Mr G O Evans	Hitchin	Family	London
Mrs S Findlay	Rickmansworth	Mr R Norris	Royston
Mrs A Fowlds	St. Albans	Mrs W Oakins	Hertford
Mr B Gardner	Letchworth Garden City	Mrs M Ogden	Bishop's Stortford
Mrs D Gilbert	Letchworth Garden City	Miss V Pain & Family	Much Hadham
Mrs H Goodsell	London	Miss S M Palmer	Uxbridge
Mr D Gregory	Stevenage	Miss V Pearce	Uxbridge
Dr V Grodzinski	London	Miss A Pezzin	London
Miss L & Mrs A Gyle	St. Albans	Mrs N & Mr R Ramnath	
Ms P Hajnal-Konyi	London	& Family	Waltham Cross
Mrs H Hall	Enfield	Ms H Reeping, Mr N	
Miss H Harkness	Potters Bar	Bishop & Family	Sawbridgeworth
Mr W Havis	Bishop's Stortford	Mr G Roberts	St. Albans
Mrs C Holton	Northwood	Mr P Robinson	London
Mr C Henry	London	Mr H Sampson	Teddington
Miss F Hervey	London	Mrs E Shaw	London
Mrs M Hukin	Stevenage	Mrs J Shaw	Kings Langley
Mr D Hull	Ware	Mrs L Shelley	Staines
Mrs J Humphreys	Stevenage	Mr P Spring	Hampton
Dr D Hunt	Harpenden	Mrs J & Mr G Stergios	Stevenage
Mr D Inward	Hitchin	Mrs M & Mr N Surridge	
Mr O & Mrs S Irons &		& Family	Welwyn Garden City
Family	London	Mrs S Swift	Potters Bar
Mr M Jones	Barnet	Mr G Taylor	Letchworth Garden City
Mr P Janes	Bovingdon	Miss H Thynne & Mr A	
Mrs J Lee	Stevenage	Clark	Uxbridge
Mr J & Mrs S Lipscombe		Mr K & Mrs G	
& Family	Stevenage	Tuck	Sunbury-On-Thames
Dr K Lumley	London	Mr J Turner	Sunbury-On-Thames
Mr D J Lyness	Welwyn Garden City	Mrs N Vaughton	Stevenage
Dr A & Mrs E Marsh &		Mr J Vincent	South Woodford
Family	London	Mr G Wiggett & Mrs	
Mrs J MacKay	Stevenage	S Taylor	Berkhamsted
Dr J Malinowski	London	Mrs S V Wilson	Hertford
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Mr N Marsh	London	Edwards	St. Albans
Miss E McEwan	Hitchin		
Miss H McKay-Ferguson	London		
Ms E Millbank	Hitchin		
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Ms H Moore	Berkhamsted		
Mr S Moss	Hitchin		

Before you flutter by....

....please could we ask you to create a brighter future for butterflies and moths?

By including a gift to Butterfly Conservation in your Will, you will support our conservation work ensuring a healthy environment in which butterflies and moths thrive for future generations to enjoy.

Your legacy will make a real difference to securing a world rich in butterflies.

To find out more about leaving Butterfly Conservation a gift in your Will, please contact Helen Corrigan on 01273 453313 or hcorrigan@butterfly-conservation.org

Thank you



Copy Deadline for the next Newsletter will be

18 December 2015

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

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