



the **Comma**

No. 110 Autumn 2021

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation

Thrill of the chase:

52 butterflies in a year

Welcome to VC37:

8 new moths in 2020

Bringing butterflies and moths back to Britain • www.westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com



Cover story

The wingwalking of courting Brimstones, captured by **David Benton** (see pages 10-11)

Contributions

Please send articles and images to the Editor. Photographs should be as high-resolution as possible and sent as separate files (not embedded in a document).

Our copy deadlines are
Spring - 28 February
Autumn - 31 August
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(early submissions are welcome).
Contact the Editor for more information.

Editor: Marian Newell,
comma.editor@newellporter.co.uk

Publisher

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch. The opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Branch or of Butterfly Conservation.

 BC West Midlands Butterflies and Moths

 Butterfly Conservation West Midlands

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Chairman's Address



Michael Southall

Firstly, welcome to our new Branch members and thanks to ongoing supporters.

It seems to have been a topsy-turvy summer as far as the weather is concerned. The averages may not reflect that, but we seem to have had some extremes this year. It will be interesting to see how it's affected our butterfly and moth counts, as climate change events hit the world news.

Early indications are that counts are lower than usual, partly due to the cold, wet spring. Now that work parties are resuming, habitat management can continue to help our rarer species – please help if you can.

In this issue

This issue includes updates from **Rhona Goddard** on the Butterfly Mosaics project in partnership with Severn Trent (page 4), **Mel Mason** on the Malvern Hills Lost Fritillaries project (page 8), and **Mike Williams** on **Purple Emperors** in the West Midlands (page 22).

Simon Saville was able to complete his Land's End to John o'

Groats bike ride, postponed last year, and passed through our region in early July (see page 6). This was a tremendous personal achievement and a serious challenge for someone even half his age; it has also raised a lot of money for Butterfly Conservation.

Events

As advertised in the last *Comma*, selected events were able to take place this summer. There are too many to mention individually but turn to page 12 for a whistle-stop tour; our thanks to all the organisers and participants. Special thanks to **Martin Warren**, who gave an excellent talk about his new book *Butterflies* at the Branch's online AGM in May.

In early June, our trip to South Wales found its target species, **Marsh Fritillary**, plus an unexpected bonus of **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth**.



Narrow-Bordered Bee Hawk-moth

I hosted a National Moth Night morning event in my garden in July, which was well attended. Running moth traps by a wet reedbed, the target habitat, in the middle of summer



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was certainly a full-on experience. One of the participants wrote to thank me, adding that he'd ordered a moth trap, which was a great result.

Personal highlights

My garden list was boosted this year by using a set of **Clearwing** pheromone lures and traps. I recorded six Clearwing moth species, plus two more within the wider area. It's wonderful to be able to see and record these once-mythical creatures. As a group, we're adding significantly to the knowledge of the region's Clearwings. Several of my other new records may have been species expanding their range or simply wandering in suitable conditions. **Kent Black Arches**, for example, has been recorded around our region this year.



Red Admiral 'millierei'

A memorable sight during one of my Big Butterfly Counts, in early August in my garden, was a **Red Admiral** with no red, an aberration called 'millierei' – apparently a rare occurrence. This butterfly disappeared, only to return to the same bush over a fortnight later.

Branch updates

I'm pleased to report that **Peta Sams** has offered to take on the role of Treasurer for the Branch (see panel). Thanks to **Peter Seal** for his work as Treasurer and his ongoing work to pass over the reins to Peta. While on the subject of funds, thanks, too, to Druids

Our new Treasurer - Peta Sams

Hello. I'm **Peta Sams** (pronounced Peeta not Pet-a in case you were wondering) and I've recently agreed to become the Treasurer for the Branch. Although I've helped several local groups and charities, it's usually been as Secretary and the role of Treasurer is completely new to me.

However, fear not – I've been told by **Mike Southall** and **Peter Seal** that the task is not onerous and that, as Head Office plays a significant role in maintaining the Branch's records and making payments, there really isn't too much to keep an eye on. Well, time will tell but I'm sure the handover from Peter Seal will be smooth and he will be on hand to assist me for a while.

I've been a member of the Branch for many years and help out with the pollinator garden at the Discovery Centre in Craven Arms as well as, with **Jason Kernohan**, verifying the records that you submit for Shropshire via irecord.

Perhaps some of you know me from my work with Swift Conservation, with which I've been involved for over ten years. Loss of nest sites, due to building renovation with modern materials and methods, is a major factor in the drastic decline of swifts (over 50% in 20 years). However, there's now real concern that lack of food is also contributing (and affecting all insectivorous birds). Since starting to learn about swifts, I've come to appreciate butterflies – and all sorts of other insects of which I was previously unaware – and the fascinating links that have evolved between so many species.

So, following **Mike Williams'** exhortations in the Winter 2020 *Comma* to Give Something Back in 2021, I decided that, although work parties are not for me, I could do more to help the Branch – and ultimately the butterflies – by volunteering for this role.

Peta Sams - Branch Treasurer

Heath Golf Club in Staffordshire for their recent donation, which will be targeted to the local area.


The West Midlands Moth Atlas is now up and running at westmidlandsmoths.co.uk. It is proving to be a very popular and useful resource – our thanks to everyone involved in making it possible. There are links between the atlas and the Branch website: remember that we still need more of your moth and butterfly photos for

both websites.


Finally, Head Office is close to announcing its 2026 strategy. This is a set of targets to make clear the charity's goals, which then influence the activities of our Branch.

Well, here's hoping for an Indian summer for everyone to enjoy the best of what autumn has to offer. Do make sure you order our 2022 calendar which is now available (see page 5).

Michael Southall Branch Chair



Small Pearl-bordered
Fritillary (Roger Littleover)



Grayling (Lucy Lewis)

Butterfly Mosaics

In June 2021, Butterfly Conservation and Severn Trent announced a new three-year conservation project in the Midlands.

The project aims to restore and enhance areas of habitat to help reverse the declines of specific species of butterfly and moth found in the Midlands area. The project, titled Butterfly Mosaics, will form part of Severn Trent's Great Big Nature Boost – a scheme intended to look after water by looking after nature too.

Working to improve biodiversity

This partnership with Severn Trent will focus on developing habitats that support eight rare butterfly

species at over 60 sites across the Midlands. Over 30 of these sites are in the West Midlands, meaning a number of our priority butterfly species will benefit from the project, including **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, **Grayling** and **Wood White**. Our aim of creating positive effects for local communities and biodiversity as a whole will only be achieved by working in partnership with landowners, organisations and, of course, our very dedicated and knowledgeable Branch volunteers.

Protecting our precious habitats

Targeted habitat improvement work will include woodland-ride management, creation of scrapes and scollaps, removal of trees and scrub, and planting of larval food-plants. I've started visiting key sites across the Midlands, talking to landowners, managers and key volunteers; the plan is to get targeted habitat management work completed at a number of sites over the autumn and winter, to the benefit of our rare butterfly and moth species.

I'm especially looking forward to measuring how populations respond next year, once the works are well underway.

Thanks to Severn Trent, this exciting and new partnership creates a great opportunity for Butterfly Conservation to help reverse the declines of many important butterfly and moth species in the region.

Article and photographs by Rhona Goddard



If you would like to help monitor key butterfly sites, please do get in touch: rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

The Common Touch

A new project aims to involve local communities with the management of upland commons, enhancing their value to both people and wildlife.



Survey group on the Long Mynd

Commons can be great places for butterflies and moths, just take our Prees Heath Common reserve as an example, but they can also be places which don't reach their wildlife potential. The new Our Common Cause project co-ordinated by the Foundation for Common Land and funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund includes three Shropshire commons: Clee Liberty, Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. The project involves promoting the value of commons for wildlife and working with local commoners, landowners

and the wider community to improve their management.

This is a three-year project and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation is one of the partners. The aim is to undertake a baseline survey report identifying the key areas for species and to produce management recommendations on how these areas might be improved. The three commons are home to a number of nationally and regionally important butterflies including **Grayling**, **Small Pearl-bordered** and **Dark Green**

Fritillary, **White-letter** and **Green Hairstreak**, and **Wall**, as well as moths like the **Forester**, **Wood Tiger** and **Glaucous Shears**. However, many of our records are historic and we lack up-to-date information.

Bracken is a key component and, in the longer term, we hope to produce a leaflet on how best to manage bracken to encourage butterflies and moths and also a butterfly identification guide to enable people to recognise the species that occur. At least two events each year will be held to engage the local community and encourage volunteers to assist in the survey work. The three commons are very extensive and support a range of habitats, so we will need lots of help if we are to produce a comprehensive survey. Some successful events this summer have been held on all three commons and Radio Shropshire came along to cover a guided walk at The Bog in July. If you would like more information, or better still help us with survey work, then email wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Article and photograph by **Jenny Joy** and **Mike Williams**



Thinking of Christmas presents? Look no further than the 2022 Branch Calendar!

Many of you order our calendar every year – thank you for your support. All of the proceeds go towards the conservation of butterflies and moths in our region. If you haven't bought the calendar before, or not for a while, do try it this year. We're lucky to have some fabulous photographers in the Branch and we're confident you'll be wowed by their images.

The calendar is priced at just £8, including postage (£15 for two). To order, send a cheque made out to Butterfly Conservation (West Midlands Branch), with your name and address, to BCWM, Annesbrook, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB or, if you'd like to pay by bank transfer, contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com





Reaching John O'Groats!

Simon Saville recounts his Bike for Butterflies through the West Midlands

I was a third of the way through my Land's End-to-John O'Groats Bike for Butterflies when I reached the West Midlands and it turned out that I was in for a treat.

My guides for the first two days were **Mike Southall** and **Mike Williams**. First, we went round Monkwood, a wonderful 152-acre woodland that's being managed for wildlife. We were lucky to see a fresh **Purple Hairstreak** and a pair of courting **Wood Whites**, along with **White Admirals** and **Silver-washed Fritillaries**. A **Marbled White** joined us briefly as well.

Mike Williams joined me for the ride to Stourport, and we visited the lovely meadow area at Monkwood Green on the way. It was rich with wildflowers and buzzing with insects, even on a dull day. Proof again that wildflower meadows are havens for all sorts of insects.

Mike and Wendy Southall were generous hosts for the night. Next morning, suitably rested, I set off for the Wyre Forest, where the two Mikes were my guides again. This is a vast and magical place, one of the largest ancient coppice oak woodlands in England, and a National Nature

A silver-studded



Mike Southall and Simon in Wyre Forest (Mike Williams)

Reserve and SSSI. We were too late for the **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**, but we did track down some **Small Pearls** and **Silver-washed Fritillaries**. Then we had fun catching **Red-belted** and **White-barred Clearwing** moths with pheromone lures. It took only minutes – goodness knows where the moths were hiding.

The forest was calling me to stay but I eventually set off in the afternoon, heading for Wem. It was a longer ride than I'd realised and much more hilly. It took me six hours, and I was utterly spent. **Derek and Mary Sparkes** had kindly offered me



Poplar Hawk moth from Mike Southall's trap

delight



Monkwood Green wildflower meadow (Simon Saville)



Mike Williams and Simon – ride buddies from Monkwood to Stourport (Michael Southall)

accommodation and they, too, were generous hosts.

I awoke to rain, and my heart sank. It was nice to have **Callum McGregor** as a ride buddy for the day. He's with the Yorkshire Branch, but has recently moved to north Wales. Our destination was the BC Reserve at Prees Heath Common. **Stephen Lewis**, the warden, was an excellent guide and we immediately found **Silver-studded Blues** flying in good numbers despite the rain. It was one of those 'wow' moments: dozens of males, mating pairs and newly-emerged females being tended by ants. Since its purchase in 2006, this reserve has been transformed into a haven of heathland and grassland and it's the last sanctuary of the Silver-

studded Blue in the Midlands. Seeing the butterflies flying in such large numbers remains a highlight of my trip, and it brought a tear to my eye to be reminded of childhood days when clouds of butterflies were a common sight.

The weather cleared as we set off for Nantwich and I was grateful for the company, and for a flatter and shorter ride.

I look back on my visit through the West Midlands with great fondness, and I thank all those who generously helped and supported me on the way.

You can see more on www.bikeforbutterflies.org and on Twitter using #BikeForButterflies.

Article by **Simon Saville**



Although Simon has now completed this remarkable marathon ride, it's not too late to make a donation. To support Simon's fundraising appeal, please send any donation – large or small – to Butterfly Conservation, Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5QT (mark it 'Simon's Ride for Butterflies'). Or, to donate online, visit <https://justgiving.com/fundraising/bikeforbutterflies>



Gravid female
Pearl-bordered Fritillary
from Wyre Forest

Malvern Hills

Extreme weather, predator piracy, and the race to sequence the Pearl-bordered Fritillary genome...

After a very busy year, landowners in three separate counties are transforming the bracken habitat on the Malvern Hills in preparation for the reintroduction of fifth instar larvae and adult **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** (PBF) from spring 2022. The bracken will no longer be cut every year but left to grow to form a canopy over the growing violets and potential breeding sites. In July, volunteers from the region were invited on three guided visits to the receptor sites to learn more about the habitat management and the captive larval breeding programme.

Waiting for the right conditions

The project was faced by the frostiest April on record, the coldest and wettest May, a cool June and an historic heatwave in July. The first adults appeared in the second half of April, in a season lasting well into June, but populations around the Midlands and beyond were down significantly compared with recent years. It was frustrating and disappointing to visit sites in the spring to see females laying eggs, giving initial hope of another good year, while more objective timed counts were not meeting thresholds required to release precious females to start our breeding cycle. Eventually, in June, the weather warmed up and numbers increased slightly in several colonies in the Wyre Forest – enough to release four gravid females.

Protecting our precious breeding stock

Rearing some butterfly and moth species requires only a few leaves and some determined caterpillars. Not so for PBF – there are good reasons why it remains an

endangered species. I had three breeding pots while **Ian Duncan** took charge of the fourth, and we agreed to compare notes on a regular basis as we started our PBF breeding journey. We prepared the breeding pots with sterilised John Innes No.2 compost and violet seedlings first immersed in a detergent solution for several hours and then washed in water. Fine netting called 'noseum' covered the pots to make them impregnable – or so we hoped.

However, there was a chink in our armour... the nectar plants I'd washed and added to feed the gravid females during egg-laying. At first, the PBF eggs hatched and a caterpillar feeding frenzy began, with crescent shaped bite marks all over the violets. Then, among the nectar plants, some predator eggs that had escaped our wash also hatched, only to find a ready-made larder of first-instar caterpillars. The nightmare had begun for some of our precious consignment of vulnerable larvae: in one pot, I found and removed a lacewing larva; in another, two adult hoverflies appeared (Marmalade Hoverfly, *Episyrphus balteatus*, and Migrant Hoverfly, *Eupeodes corallae*). More than once, I've heard a quote from Neil Hulme BC Officer, Fritillaries for the Future Project, Sussex 2015: 'Rearing large numbers of these fritillaries, which hibernate as part-grown caterpillars, appears to be as much an art as a science'. That's presumably because there are so many variables to manage in artificial conditions, where larvae are unable to make their own choices.

In July, the air temperature remained above 27°C in the shade for eight continuous days, while the surface temperature on the netting of the pot was even higher. So, I moved the pots into our bathroom, which was up to ten degrees cooler than outside. When temperatures dropped in August, the pots went back outside and the remaining fourth-instar larvae (at least 180 at the last count, and hopefully well fed) were in diapause under a scattering of microwaved



We recently reached our online funding target, raising over £15,000 from Malvern Hills District Council, WMBC, Bromesbrow Estate, Malvern Hills AONB, and too many individuals to name. Thank you all!

Lost Fritillaries Project

Our larvae thrived in their luxurious quarters, but so did some predators



The Pearl Hotel



PBF larva on oak leaf



PBF larva on violets



Migrant Hoverfly (*Euceodes corallae*)



Marmalade Hoverfly (*Epsirphus balteatus*)



Lacewing larva

dry oak leaves and sheltered from the worst of the weather in my purpose-built shelving units, called the Pearl Hotel – five instar accommodation!

Sequencing the genome

If all goes to plan over the next few years, our three closely connected new sites will eventually share an improved genetic mix from the different donor sites, increasing survival chances for this endangered meta-population.

We achieved our goal to win the race to sequence

the PBF genome. One of our gravid females, after laying eggs for eight days, was collected in dry ice and stored at -80°C at Liverpool University before being transferred to the Sanger Institute in Cambridge for genome sequencing as part of the Darwin Tree of Life Project (intended to sequence the genomes of 70,000 UK species). This is an important milestone for both the Branch and the project.

Article and photographs by **Mel Mason**
Branch Vice Chair



Female resting with wings open, the male flying around her

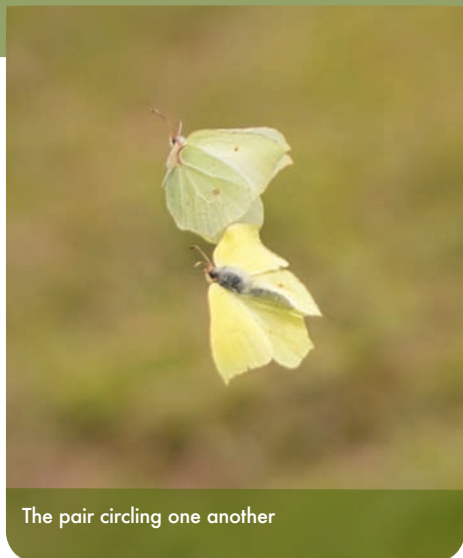
Brimstones go a-courting

Watch closely next time you spot any unusual behaviour

The **Brimstone** (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) is a familiar flash of sulphurous yellow, often seen streaking by on a warm spring day and then disappearing on landing thanks to its leaf-like camouflage. Brimstones always land with their wings closed, so when you see one with its wings open you know something unusual is happening. This was the case when I saw a female land with her wings open on a bush close to me on Prestbury Hill in Gloucestershire. She was being pestered by a male and it was obvious that this was courtship behaviour I had not seen before. I immediately started trying to capture it on camera. It was the first time I'd seen the body or upper wings of this species: you can see the orange spot on the upper hindwing in the photos.

The behaviour

The male fluttered frantically around the female, while she kept her wings folded down below her body and her abdomen raised in a rejection pose. After a short period, they took off and began circling each other and I set off to chase them.



The pair circling one another



Male walking across the female's wings, while she raises her abdomen in rejection

I caught up with them after they settled in some grass, the female again with her wings open and abdomen raised rejecting the male's advances. The male, however, was persistent and began a process of wing-walking, stepping across and along the female's wings (see magazine front cover). They eventually settled into position with the male on top of and aligned with the female. At this point, in the field, I was convinced they were copulating, especially as they stayed like that for some time. Despite the female's rejection posture, the male did not give up. While most female butterflies will only mate once, Brimstones have been known to mate with more than one male.

The interpretation

I haven't seen other butterflies mating in this position but it doesn't seem an impossible contortion. Indeed, given the female's choice of resting place, there may have been no other support for the male other than her wings. Given that whatever was happening was 'behind closed wings', it's not possible to say conclusively that they were mating but, at the time, that was definitely my impression. Subsequent discussions suggest that copulation was unlikely and the male was just being persistent. There's still much to be discovered and understood about courtship behaviour and mating, particularly for Brimstones.

Article and photographs by David Benton

Reference material

- 'Courting Brimstones: Wing walking', Roy Cannon's blog: rcannon992.com/2019/07/31/courting-brimstones-wing-walking
- *Life Cycles of British and Irish butterflies* (2019), Peter Eeles, Pisces publications
- Christer Wiklund, Virpi Lindfors and Johan Forsberg (Mar, 1996). 'Early male emergence and reproductive phenology of the adult overwintering butterfly *Gonepteryx rhamni* in Sweden'. *Oikos*, Vol 75, No 2, p227-240
- [learnaboutbutterflies.com/Lifecycle 9 - mate location courtship.htm](http://learnaboutbutterflies.com/Lifecycle%209%20-%20mate%20location%20courtship.htm)



Male and female resting together – could they be mating?

The Year in Pictures

It was wonderful to welcome the return of face-to-face activities this year, after losing so many events last summer. Here we present a visual compilation of the Branch's projects, events and activities. Sadly, some larger and earlier events could not proceed but attending them will be all the more special next year.



Examining the catch at the Dorothy Clive Garden (Mike Williams)



Searching for Green

The Dorothy Clive Garden held an Open Garden event in July. They kindly allowed the Branch to attend with its information stall and run a moth morning and guided walk. An eager group gathered for the grand opening of the moth traps.



Marsh Fritillary Hunt (Michael Southall)

The **Marsh Fritillary Hunt** in **South Wales** in June found its target species, which no longer occurs in the West Midlands. Sadly, this species is threatened across Europe. Its main foodplant is Devil's-bit-Scabious and its larvae spin conspicuous webs in late summer.



Reserve being surveyed by the Joy of Wildlife



Hairstreak on Clee Liberty Common (Mike Williams)



Searching for Grayling on the Stiperstones (Mike Williams)



Survey group on the Long Mynd (Mike Williams)

The Clee Liberty Common Butterfly Survey in June was a joint event with the Abdon Community Wildlife Group and part of Our Common Cause (see page 5). One of the target species was Green Hairstreak. Other upland surveys took place on the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones.



Group (Stephen Lewis)

The guided walk at **Prees Heath** in June showed visitors the heathland restoration and control tower conservation done on the reserve. Subsequently, wavy-hair grass seed has been harvested to sow in new areas and the award-winning **Joy of Wildlife Group** came to record the reserve's plants, mosses, lichens, insects, spiders and birds.



Moth ID course in the Wyre Forest area (Mike Williams)

Dave Grundy's Moth ID Course in July provided an introduction to the moths of the **Wyre Forest** area, ideal for beginners but also with plenty of information to those wanting to improve their skills.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►



National Moth Night (Michael Southall)

Mike Southall's National Moth Night event in July was an excellent opportunity to see what species an experienced trapper finds in his rural garden. Mike has been taking part in the Garden Moth Scheme since 2003 (see Comma 108).



Silver-washed Fritillary (Trevor Hulme)

The guided walk at **Haugh Wood** in July gave visitors an opportunity to see **Silver-washed Fritillary** and **White-letter Hairstreak**.



White-letter hairstreak (Trevor Hulme)



Feel Good in the Wood at Uffmoor (Mike Williams)

Feel Good in the Wood at Uffmoor was a **Woodland Trust** event in August. Once again, the Branch ran a moth-trapping session and drew attention to these under-appreciated insects.

Once again, we bring you details of events we hope to run but always check with the organiser before attending. Meanwhile, do join in with online groups and events, and perhaps have a go at our challenges.

NOTE TO TRANSECT WALKERS

The deadline for entering results into UKBMS has been brought forward to 31 October.

Birmingham and Black Country

Scarlet Tiger Project Work Parties, Stourbridge

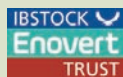
Every 3rd Fri: 15 Oct, 19 Nov, 17 Dec, 21 Jan, 18 Feb, 18 Mar

Contact Joy Stevens: 01384 372397,

joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk

10am at a location posted on the notice board at the northern (crematorium) end of Roman Road (SO885834)

Grant funding from Ibstock Enover Trust boosts Scarlet Tiger numbers



Back in April, the Scarlet Tiger project benefitted from a grant of £3,938 from Ibstock Enover Trust (IET), an Environmental Body funded through the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF). The money was to be used to sow wildflower seeds, purchase tools and equipment, and provide information boards on the Roman Road/Sandy Lane public bridle path, a green corridor in Norton and home to the Scarlet Tiger moth.

Joy Stevens, the Branch's representative, said of the grant: 'This will provide a real boost to the fortunes of the Scarlet Tiger moth along Roman Road and create awareness of the beauty and importance of this and other insects. The Scarlet

Tiger flies in sunshine in June/July and, in contrast with many other moths and butterflies, is expanding its range and becoming more common. It was not recorded at all in the Midlands until 1973, when it was spotted in Malvern, but since then it has spread northwards. It reached Stourbridge in 2013, when a caterpillar was spotted on Roman Road in the spring and a single adult on the day Andy Murray won at Wimbledon for the first time. Its caterpillars can often be seen in March and April, feeding on Green Alkanet – its main food plant on Roman Road.'

This is just one of many community projects funded by Ibstock Enover Trust through the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF). The scheme offers funding to projects that benefit communities living within ten miles of a landfill site. Sadly the Trust has now closed, with this project being one of the last it supported, but Enover Community Trust (www.enover.org) is continuing to fund projects in this area. Additional work parties will be organised to complete the work funded by this grant.



Scarlet Tiger moth (Joy Stevens)

Worcestershire

Ankerdine Common

Sun: 16 Jan – in partnership with
Worcestershire County Council

Contact Mike Williams (07802 274552 ,
wmbutterflies@gmail.com) or Trevor Bucknall
(01905 755757, trevor.bucknall@outlook.com)
10am in a small lay-by on A44 close to the turn
off to Martley (SO736557)

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wed to the end of March 2022

Contact John Tilt: 01386 792458,
john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

10am at Grafton Flyford Church; tools
provided; bring heavy gardening gloves, wear
appropriate clothing

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Egg Searches

Sat: 27 Nov, 8 Jan (New Year mince pie and
mulled wine special), 29 Jan

Contact Simon Primrose: 07952 260153,
simonjprimrose@aol.com

10am at Grafton Flyford Church
Simon says: 'We'll shortly be resuming our
regular weekly Brown Hairstreak egg searches
on Thursdays, probably starting in mid-October.
It'd be great to have more people involved, so if
you'd like to join us – for an hour, a day or the
whole season – contact me for more information
(details as above).'

Malvern Grayling Work Parties

Tue: 12 Oct, 8 Feb, 15 Feb

Contact Mel Mason: 01684 565700,
mbg.records@btinternet.com

10am in North Hill Quarry car park, WR14 4LT
(SO771469); bring own refreshments

**Note: Booking by email is essential for
further details or in the event of cancellation**

Monkwood Work Parties

1st Sun: 7 Nov, 5 Dec, 2 Jan, 6 Feb, 6 Mar
3rd Thu: 21 Oct, 18 Nov, 16 Dec, 20 Jan,
17 Feb, 17 Mar

Contact Phil Adams: 01905 610830,
pdadamsrainbow@gmail.com

10am in the reserve car park (SO803603), usually
finished by 3pm



Courting Wood Whites at Monkwood
(Simon Saville)

Penny Hill Landfill Site Work Parties

Sun: 23 and 30 Jan, 13 Feb

Contact Mike Williams (07802 274552 ,
wmbutterflies@gmail.com) or Trevor Bucknall
(01905 755757, trevor.bucknall@outlook.com)

10am at the site entrance off Pudford Lane,
Hillside, Martley (SO752613)

Trench Wood Work Parties

Sun 24 Oct, 28 Nov, 23 Jan, 27 Feb, 27 Mar

Contact Matthew Bridger: 07801 568334,
bridge1805@btinternet.com

10am in the reserve car park (SO930588)

Wyre Forest Work Parties

Sun: 21 Nov, 20 Feb

Wed: 13 Oct, 10 Nov, 8 Dec, 12 Jan, 9 Feb,
9 Mar

Contact Mike Williams: 07802 274552 ,
wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Wednesdays are joint events with Natural England
10am in Earnwood Copse car park on the B4194
Bewdley to Kinlet road (SO744784)

Bring your own gloves and refreshments – tools
and hand sanitiser will be provided
Work is mainly removing ride-side coppice to
benefit Pearl-bordered Fritillary and sometimes
Wood White.

IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.

Herefordshire

Ewyas Harold Work Parties

Sat: 23 Oct, 20 Nov, 18 Dec, 22 Jan,
19 Feb, 19 Mar

Contact Ian Hart: yellowrattle4@aol.com

Tue: dates to be determined

Contact Dean Fenton: 01568 611575

10am at the northern Cwm Hill end of Ewyas Harold Common, adjacent to the top cattle grid (SO382302). Approach from Abbey Dore off the B4347 (SO384306). Bring gloves, hand tools, lunch and a drink.

Haugh Wood Work Parties

Sat: 6 Nov, 3 Dec, 9 Jan, 5 Feb, 5 Mar

Contact Kate Wollen (07786 526280,

kate.wollen@forestryengland.uk) or Robin Hemming (07501 020605,
robinhemming@btinternet.com)

9.30am in the reserve car park on minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope (SO592365)

Don't forget to check Butterfly Conservation's websites and groups for other events:

- westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com/events-and-work-parties
- www.facebook.com/groups/westmidlandsbutterflyconservation
- www.facebook.com/groups/250738579030862 (Malvern Butterfly Group)
- butterfly-conservation.org/events

Staffordshire

Cannock Chase Work Parties – Dingy Skipper

Sun: 30 Jan, in partnership with Staffordshire County Council

Contact Rob Taylor, Countryside Ranger: 07817 122760, robert.taylor@staffordshire.gov.uk

10.30am outside Rangers Bungalow, Marquis's Drive, Cannock, WS12 4PW (SK005153) – 3pm finish



Corner Field at Prees Heath, an area being restored to heath (Bob Kemp)

Shropshire

Prees Heath Common Work Parties

Wed: 13 Oct, 17 Nov, 15 Dec

Contact Stephen Lewis: 07900 886809,
phwarden@sky.com

10.30am on the access track opposite the Steel Heath turning off the A49 (SJ557363) – 3.30pm finish (half-day in Dec)

Stepping Stones Work Parties for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Wed: 20 Oct at Black Rhadley, 3 Nov at Corndon Hill, 1 Dec at Roman Gravels

Contact Stephen Lewis: 07900 886809,
phwarden@sky.com

10am, rush cutting and scrub clearance, 3pm finish – **BOOKING ESSENTIAL**

Telford Millennium Nature Reserve Work Parties

Weekly work parties on Tuesdays and Thursdays, depending on people's availability.

Please contact Peter Mcnee for details if you would like to help: 07730688924 or Peter.Mcnee@groundwork.org.uk



Shropshire Verges Conference

Saturday 13 November

TICKETS ARE FREE

Contact **Charlie Bell** for more details at
charlie.bell@nationaltrust.org.uk

Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project

If you've spent time in Shropshire this year, you may have noticed signs along various rural road verges: 'DON'T MOW, LET IT GROW' and 'LATE CUT PLANNED'. What's this all about?

Over the last 60 years, 97% of our wildflower meadows have been lost. Road verges offer a real opportunity to help reverse this and, if managed correctly, could form long, linear meadows. These would provide habitat themselves but also help to link up fragments of remaining meadow.

Many verges are cut too early and too often, with cuttings left to rot. This removes food for pollinators and destroys finer grasses and wildflowers, leaving verges dominated by 'rank' vegetation such as hogweed and nettles. Instead, managing verges as hay meadows through a late summer cut-and-collect regime would store carbon, restore floral diversity, save money and create habitat.

Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project (RSVP) was set up by local people in 2018. It is run by volunteers, with support from the National Trust, Plantlife and Caring for God's Acre. Shropshire Council has overall responsibility for verge management



Bishop's Castle - verge in 2021

and RSVP is working with them to plan how it could be changed in future.

RSVP volunteers are 'adopting' verges throughout Shropshire and transforming them into mini-meadows. Safety is paramount and, of course, any verges that need to be cut regularly to help with visibility continue to be cut.

To find out more please follow us (@ShropsVerge on Twitter and Facebook). We're planning our first Shropshire Verges Conference on Saturday 13 November – all welcome. Tickets are free: contact me for more details at charlie.bell@nationaltrust.org.uk

Article by **Charlie Bell** and photographs by **RSVP**



Bishop's Castle - verges work party

IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.

A Year Chasing Butterflies

PART ONE

In Comma 109 we challenged members to see if they could locate all 40 butterfly species that occur in the West Midlands region. Kidderminster member Craig Jones achieved this and more.

The year began with these early sightings:

- 28 Feb. **Small Tortoiseshell**. Low Habberley, nr Kidderminster
- 16 Mar. **Comma**. Dowles, Wyre Forest
- 24 Mar. **Peacock**. Puxton Marsh, Kidderminster.
- 29 Mar. **Brimstone**. Grafton Wood, Worcestershire.
- 30 Mar. **Green-veined White**. Monkwood, Worcestershire.

APRIL

Although the sunniest since records began, April was unseasonably cold. The spring butterflies seemed to be in a fix – some emerged on time during the sunshine, while others thought better of it and remained as pupae. This seemed to result in delayed starts and/or prolonged emergence periods.

4 Apr. **Holly Blue**, **Orange-tip**. Garden, Kidderminster.

8 Apr. **Small White**. Dowles, Wyre Forest.

13 Apr. **Speckled Wood**. Wolverley Wood, nr Kidderminster.

26 Apr. The forecast looked promising so a full day's butterflying was in order. First stop was the old railway line at Wyre Forest: three freshly emerged **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**. Next was the old landfill site at Pennyhill, nr Martley: four **Dingy Skippers** and a single **Green Hairstreak**. Lastly, a stop at Monkwood on the way home; as I entered, a **Large White** greeted me and then a very early **Wood White** fluttered by.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►



Dingy Skipper



Green Hairstreak



Heath Fritillary



Small Tortoiseshell



Brown Argus



Adonis Blue



Duke of Burgundy

Silver-washed Fritillary



Grizzled Skipper



Marsh Fritillary



Large Heath



Wall



Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Hutchinson's Bank



MAY

The below average temperatures continued and the weather became generally overcast, unsettled and often breezy.

7 May. A trip with WMBC legend **Dave Williams** to Throckmorton Landfill, Worcestershire to see **Grizzled Skipper**. During the brief sunny spells, four were seen, a disappointingly low number for this delightful butterfly. 11 May. **Small Copper**. Hartlebury Common, Worcestershire.

13 May. First trip out of our patch to Prestbury Hill, Gloucestershire, with **Roger Littleover** in search of the Duke of Burgundy. We arrived mid-morning to overcast and breezy conditions. No Dukes were seen by me but Roger got a quick photo of a male before it disappeared. However, the day was saved by good numbers of Dingy Skipper and **Small Blue** on the lower slopes.

19 May. **Wall Brown**. Lea Quarry, Shropshire.

25 May. Met up with **Andrew Fusek Peters** at Blackgraves Copse, Wyre Forest, for **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**. This was a new butterfly for Andrew and I was pleased to see a good number so he could take some of his remarkable in-flight photographs. However, still no sign of their close cousins, the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

26 May. Trip to Gloucestershire with Dave and Roger. In the morning we arrived at Strawberry Banks seeking the **Marsh Fritillary**. The usual conditions prevailed but after about 30 minutes we saw the first of half-a-dozen of these stunning butterflies. **Common Blue** and **Small Heath** were also seen.

In the afternoon, it was on to Rodborough Common and another attempt for the Duke of Burgundy. A search of the slopes produced no Dukes but **Brown Argus** and a very faded **Painted Lady** were new for the year. After the obligatory ice-cream at Winstone's, Dave suggested we try another site further along the Common where he'd seen Dukes a couple years before. Sure enough, after a couple of minutes, a small brown butterfly rapidly flew up from the grass then returned to its original position. At first, I thought it was a Dingy Skipper, which were plentiful on the Common, but closer inspection revealed it to be His Grace. The **Duke of Burgundy** was in the bag.

JUNE

2 Jun. **Adonis Blue**. Rough Bank, Gloucestershire.

3 Jun. At last, my first **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** at Wyre Forest, two weeks later than the previous three years.

8 Jun. **Large Skipper**. Grimley, Worcestershire.

9 Jun. Trip with Dave, this time down to Hutchinson Bank, a small NR in Surrey, specifically for **Glanville Fritillary** (introduced to the site in 2011 – if you want to see ‘proper’ Glanvilles, you need to visit the Isle of Wight). We arrived mid-morning, entered the reserve, and there was our first Glanville. Spending the day with these beautiful butterflies was a real highlight of the year.

12 Jun. **Red Admiral**, **Meadow Brown**. Grafton Wood, Worcestershire.

13 Jun. Trip with Roger for what I call the ‘Shropshire Double’: **Large Heath** at Whixall Moss and **Silver-studded Blue** at Prees Heath. We got to the Moss about 10.30. Large Heath are difficult and hazardous butterflies not just to see but particularly to photograph. They fly out into boggy areas, luring the unwary not exactly to a watery grave but often very wet boots and trousers. Roger, who’s a braver man than me, led the way after one individual and we eventually managed some decent photographs before returning safely to dry land. After that, Prees Heath was a breeze with the Silver-studded emerging in good numbers and presenting plentiful photo opportunities.

21 Jun. **Ringlet**. Old railway track, Wyre Forest.

22 Jun. **White Admiral**, **Silver-washed Fritillary**. Monkwood, Worcestershire.

23 Jun. Trip with fellow butterfly enthusiast **Neil Duggan** and Dave to Haddon Hill, Exmoor, for **Heath Fritillary** returning via Green Down NR, Somerset, for **Large Blue**. After the 3½ hour journey we arrived at a small pull-in with room for about three cars. As we piled out, another car arrived containing none other than **Dave Martin**, another regular from the WMBC Facebook Group. He has the uncanny knack of finding the butterfly he seeks, no matter what the conditions, so success was assured. We followed a rough track through the bracken down to a small clearing and were amazed. Heath Fritillaries were everywhere, some obviously just emerged, and at least 50 were seen.

After a couple of hours, it was back in the car and on to Green Down, a merciless bank of what seemed like a 55° incline criss-crossed with the narrowest of tracks. When we arrived at about 2pm the sun was blazing down and the Large Blues (about half-a-dozen were seen) were refusing to settle for photographs. I must remember to take some climbing gear if I ever return. While trying not to fall over, I saw my first **Marbled White** of the year.

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Article and photographs by **Craig Jones**

Part 2 in the next issue



Marbled White



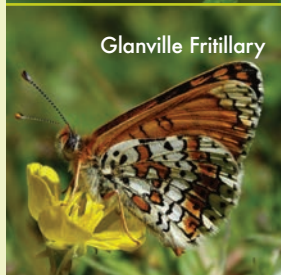
Wood White



Small Blue



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Glanville Fritillary



Silver-studded Blue

Prestbury Hill



Moths new to Shropshire

Bill Watkins reports three thrilling captures in the south-east of the county this year

Ruddy Carpet

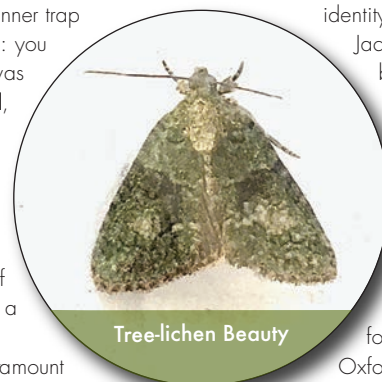
A night's moth trapping can be disappointing if weather conditions are unfavourable (wet, cold or windy), but the night of 9 July was 14°C, overcast, dry and calm – just right for the Garden Moth Scheme survey. At 6.15am the next morning, I opened the Skinner trap (15W actinic light) in anticipation: you never know what you'll find. I was pleased to see **Buff-tip**, **Peppered**, **Elephant Hawk-moth**, **Phoenix** and **Small Elephant Hawk-moth** among the more common moths. I logged them quickly before my eyes rested on a moth I didn't recognise, settled on the inside of the box. I carefully secured it into a plastic tube.

Knowing a moth's identity is paramount to those who record them: it becomes an obsession. The distinctive colouration, wing pattern and size revealed it as a **Ruddy Carpet**. This was confirmed by Waring & Townsend's Field Guide, which shows it as nationally scarce and only occurring in the South of England and Channel Islands. Like many others, its range and numbers have declined since the 1940s.

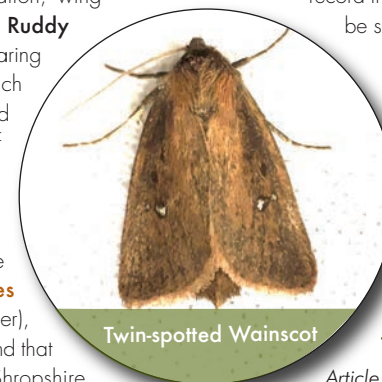
I sent a photograph with the record details to **Tony Jacques** (Shropshire County Moth Recorder), who confirmed the identification and that it was the first such record for Shropshire (although there are several for Worcestershire).



Ruddy Carpet



Tree-lichen Beauty



Twin-spotted Wainscot

Tree-lichen Beauty


This small moth (forewing 10–13mm long) appeared in the moth trap only two weeks after the Ruddy Carpet. To me, it looked very similar to a **Marbled Beauty** but the dark central pattern made me question its identity. I sent a photograph to Tony Jacques for his opinion. I could barely believe that it was a **Tree-lichen Beauty**, another first for Shropshire.

This Noctuid moth is an immigrant and recent colonist of East Anglia, Kent, Surrey, Essex and the South of England coast, as well as the Channel Islands. There are records for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and, more recently, Cambridgeshire, plus an isolated 2015 record in Northumberland, so it appears to be spreading.

Twin-spotted Wainscot

Finally, after reporting my two firsts, I saw a **Twin-spotted Wainscot**. This is another species new to Shropshire, although Paul Fallon from Albrighton spotted it a day or two before me!

Article and photographs by
William Watkins



Dichrorampha sylvicolana
(Patrick Clement)

Eight new moths in Worcestershire in 2020

The county moth recorder brings us the highlights from Vice County 37

As reported in Comma 107, **Nicki Rowberry** had a **Dark Crimson Underwing** in her light trap in Malvern on 11 August 2020. This was followed by another for **Jason Waine** in Redditch on 15 September. Previously confined to a few sites in the south of England, this species has been spreading north-west. These records suggest it may become resident here, like the related **Clifden Nonpareil** or **Blue Underwing**, of which 15 were recorded from ten sites last year.

Other larger moths included two new unexpected vagrants: a **Silver Hook** caught by **David Throup** at

light at Powick on 13 May and a **Crescent Dart** by **Alan Prior** at Hall Green on 29 July.

New micromoths

There were five new micro moths:

- **Patrick Clement** and **Steve Whitehouse** recorded four of the beautiful *Pyralid Oncocera semirubella* from limestone grassland on Penny Hill Bank on 24 June and 22 July. This is another species spreading northwards.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

- They also found three specimens of a small **Tortrix**, *Dichrorampha sylvicolana*, in Black Meadow, Chaddesley Woods on 13 and 22 June. Likely to be a previously overlooked resident, feeding on the roots of Sneezewort, this is very local and uncommon in the UK.
- Another new and rapidly spreading moth in England is *Anarsia innoxella*, of which two were caught at Berkeley-Pendesham by **Steve Whitehouse** on 12 and 30 June and one in Bromsgrove by **Mike Wakeman** on 12 July. This species closely resembles the resident *A. spartiella* and feeds on Field Maple.
- A new **Plume moth** was a *Stenoptilia millieridactyla* to light in Redditch on 1 July by **Jason Waine**. Introduced accidentally from Ireland to Derbyshire in 1971, this species has been spreading slowly, feeding on Mossy Saxifrage in gardens.
- The last new moth was *Opogona omoscopa*, found by **Jared Tibbetts** in Webb's Garden Centre, West Hagley. A detritivore introduced to the Isles of Scilly, probably from St. Helena, this is now spreading with the movement of horticultural material.

Other significant records

Two *Crassa tinctella* were recorded by **Steve Whitehouse** at Berkeley-Pendesham on 16 and 31 May. These are the first county records of this dead-wood feeder since 1885. A *Pyrausta nigrata* caught by **Mike Southall** at Norchard on 30 July is the second county record (the last was in 1899). A **Lappet** from Low Habberley by **Bob Green** on 24 July was most exciting, as the last record was from near Longdon in 1995. **Buttoned Snout** continued to spread, with seven records, and a **White-spotted Pinion** that came to **Peter Garner's** lighted porch at West Malvern on 16 August was a long way from our only extant known site. **Oliver Wadsworth** found a larva of *Ethmia docecea* on 10 September at Ab Lench, confirming that this moth is now a resident. **Alan Prior** had a second **Toadflax Brocade** at Hall Green, suggesting it may be breeding nearby. **Mike Averill** found a *Tinea pallescentella* on his lighted window in Kidderminster on 4 October. *Metalampra italica* and **Box-tree Moths** continue to spread, mostly in urban and suburban areas.

With many people now using pheromone lures for **Clearwing** moths, increasing numbers have been recorded. This included an explosion of **Orange-tailed Clearwings**, well outside its previous sites in the south-east

of the county; it may now be feeding on garden species of *Viburnums*. **Kevin McGee** photographed a **White-barred Clearwing** in Wissett's Wood on 9 June, a new site for this local moth. There were many new sites for **Lunar Hornet Moths**, recorded with the availability of a new lure in 2020.

Migrants

It was another year with very few migrants recorded; even usually common species were seen in low numbers. Rarer migrants included:

- **Glaucous Shears** at light by **Steve Whitehouse** on 27 April at Berkeley-Pendesham and by **Dave Smith** on the same date at Stourbridge; these follow the typical and recurrent trend of similar records across the county during May in 1998, 2001, 2007, 2008 and 2012, which must represent migration. The species is resident on high ground in west Herefordshire and Shropshire and Staffordshire; whether it comes from somewhere local or from further away (even from abroad) seems to be unknown.
- **Convolvulus Hawk-moths** at High Wood, Eastham, by **Ken Willets** on 23 August and two more at Norchard by **Mike Southall** on 18 and 21 August.
- **White Points** from Carpenter's Farm by **Martin Skirrow** on 31 July, Norchard by **Mike Southall** on 16 August and Grimley by **Steve Whitehouse** on 21 August.
- Two records of **Delicate** from Carpenter's Farm by **Martin Skirrow** on 31 July and from Upper Welland by **Ian Duncan** on 8 September.
- One **Scarce Bordered-straw** from **Mike Wakeman** at Bromsgrove on 21 August.
- *Palpita vitrealis* from a light trap at Wythall by **Janet James** via **Neil Gregory** on 11 August.

The totals for common migrants were:

Diamond-back Moth	221
Rusty-dot Pearl	11
Rush Veneer	2
Humming-bird Hawk Moth	89
Vestal	2
Gem	1
Silver Y	853
Small Mottled Willow	1
Dark Sword-grass	17

Article by **Tony Simpson**

Photographs sourced by **Oliver Wadsworth**



Opogona omoscopa (Patrick Clement)



Anarsia innoxia (Steve Whitehouse)

To find out more about moths across our region,
visit the Branch's new online moth atlas at
westmidlandsmoths.co.uk



Silver Hook
(David Throup)



Dark Crimson Underwing
(Jason Waine)

Stenoptilia millieridactyla
(Jason Waine)



Crescent Dart
(Alan Prior)



Ethmia dodecea
(Oliver Wadsworth)



Purple Emperor showing
underwing (Paul Lloyd)



Has the West Midlands now joined the Purple Empire?

The last few years have seen a number of intriguing reports of Purple Emperor sightings within the West Midlands. Most have been one-offs, leaving us wondering whether they arose from casual releases or from genuine range expansion.

The **Purple Emperor** is popular with breeders and often released clandestinely, leaving us scratching our heads to make sense of what's going on. Emperors can even be ordered online for release at weddings (so-called butterfly confetti) and funerals, perhaps explaining sightings in places like Edgbaston, Rednal and Malvern.

The Emperor's historical range was in central southern England: the New Forest, Wiltshire, across to Surrey and Sussex, and up to Oxfordshire and the Home Counties. Although records exist for most counties in the West Midlands, they're seldom supported by museum specimens or photographs, making them hard to validate. The species' arboreal habits can make it hard to spot, leading to speculation that it could have been

more widely distributed than was understood. The latest research suggests it's more mobile than was thought and by no means confined to areas of mature oak woodland.

What we do know, largely thanks to **Matthew Oates'** excellent book (see Comma 108), is that Emperors were unofficially released in three Warwickshire woodlands in 2004. This was done by a private breeder with little or no consultation with conservation bodies or even permission from the site owners. One of the sites was Oversley Wood near Alcester, not far from the Worcestershire border: 80 Emperors were released, bred from females collected from Alice Holt Forest in Hampshire (according to Matthew, some breeders have used stock from China!). More releases followed

The Purple Emperor's arboreal habits can make it hard to spot (Richard Horton)



Purple Emperor with Red Admiral (Paul Lloyd)

but the numbers and duration of support-breeding are unknown. The Emperors clearly like Oversley and the population appears to be self-sustaining.

From this initial release, Emperors colonised nearby woodlands and so were likely to cross the county border sooner or later. Over the past three years, they've been reported in both Grafton Wood and Tiddesley Wood. Grafton was predictable, being less than 10 miles from Oversley with plenty of intervening woodland to act as stepping stones. Key to colonisation is the Heart of England Forest, where Emperors were first recorded in 2015 (Spernal Park) with other sightings since. The forest is being actively managed for them (planted with lots of

sallow, the larval foodplant) and Matthew regards it as having huge potential. Tiddesley is further away (about 17 miles) but feels like a good location, with wide forestry roads and plenty of local dog walkers who don't always clean up after their pets! On 16 July, I saw two Emperors on the ground extracting minerals from animal excrement. Then, in late September, a group of WMBC members found larvae on the site.

At both Grafton and Tiddesley, the first sightings were in 2019 and local breeding has clearly taken place. In his book *A Practical Guide to the Butterflies of Worcestershire* (1982), the late Jack Green speculated that the Emperor may have occurred around Pershore and some suggest that it may always have been present at Tiddesley. That seems unlikely – a species remaining undetected for nearly 50 years in a well visited nature reserve – and there are also rumours of a release by a breeder. Spread from Oversley is the alternative explanation but we shall probably never know for sure.

Perhaps more surprising is the Emperor's appearance in Staffordshire, a long way from any of its known sites. Matthew mentions one seen near Rugeley in July 2019 and subsequent sightings in nearby Forestry England woodland over the last two years suggest a local population is being established. One of our local members is monitoring the site and it will be interesting to hear developments. The Emperor seems to be extending its range without assistance and it's perhaps unfortunate that breeders are still releasing it in ways that 'muddy the waters'.

Whatever one's views on such releases, it looks as if the Emperor is here to stay and the West Midlands can now be viewed as part of the Purple Empire. Personally, I remain less than enthusiastic about butterflies being seen as amenity objects or the countryside as a butterfly zoo; others,

I know, will disagree. We live in exciting times, with many species moving northwards and colonising new areas naturally, so it's a shame that Emperors can't be left to find their own way. A bonus for photographers to be sure, who will no longer have to travel outside our region to get shots, but something of a distraction from our efforts to conserve species that occur here naturally and really need our help.

Article by **Mike Williams**
Branch Publicity & Marketing

I remain less than enthusiastic about butterflies being seen as amenity objects

High Exp

Male Chalk-Hill Blue



Large Wall Brown

Seeking new species at the 'top of Germany', travel restrictions notwithstanding

Winter in the Bavarian Alps means snow and skiing but, in summer, it's where enormous numbers of fit and healthy Germans set out on days of hiking while some of us are catching our breath – because the air is thin at 3,000 metres (10,000 feet). Zugspitze is called, according to the cable car station, the top of Germany: snow all year round, and tobogganing – even in August. But, apart from a handful of Vanessids, some Alpine Choughs and of course the stunning views, there was apparently 'not much to see' in return for the 60 euro ride – hmm!

A hot spot for fritillaries

The mountain here is considered one of the area's loveliest places for butterflies. The view, over the twin towns of Garmisch and Partenkirchen, is breath-taking from the cable car's halfway station. It's the perfect place to find Alpine flower meadows positively heaving with butterflies.

A little research before leaving home suggested there might be quite a few fritillaries and this is indeed so, mostly of the High Brown and Dark Green persuasion. Among them is the occasional Comma, plus an assortment of Nymphalid browns, but it's the almost white blues that catch the eye. Lots of them, so it would be nice if one or two would land... or stay put long enough for me to get down on my knees, focus the camera and press the button before – oh, no, not again! Gone in an instant, and my elderly knees do not appreciate this. Persistence wins the day and inspection of the camera screen says they're Chalk Hill Blues, and immaculate, plus one or two Mazarine and Common Blues.

Well worth a visit in summer

It can be difficult to convey the delight without resorting to a list of species, some of which might even need to be checked online, before thinking this is surely somewhere to consider visiting in summer. There are **Silver-spotted Skippers**, **Swallowtails** and **Large Wall Browns**. There are **Wood Whites** and **Pearly Heaths**. There are **Arran Browns**, which might be **Lesser Mountain Ringlets** (or vice versa), as well as all the 'usual' butterflies we disregard because we're so used to seeing them in Britain.

ectations



Arran Brown

An unforgettable experience

Four days in Bavaria can be easily dismissed as 'hardly worth going', as they say, and the perfidious weather can determine whether it's a frustrating waste of time or, with luck, day after day of awesome scenery that's breath-taking in more ways than one. The restrictions placed on us by Covid-19 have made European travel something of a lottery this year. Portugal changed from being green to amber while I was there (but butterflies were not) and I was left without a flight home. It wasn't exactly a piece of cake getting home from Germany either but, for anyone seeking new species each year as I do, the risks really are eclipsed by the unforgettable experience. But, I repeat, with luck.

Article and photographs by
Martin Harrison



Silver-spotted
Skipper



High Brown
Fritillary with
missing dot

The beautiful Valezina

The Silver-washed Fritillary is a distinctive butterfly with golden wings and an olive-green tinge to the underwing. From mid-June to early September, these powerful fliers can be seen at the National Trust property near Bridgnorth where I am a volunteer guide for butterfly walks. The sole species of Fritillary on the estate, it nectars in the gardens of Dudmaston Hall and patrols the sunlit rides in nearby Comer Woods.

This species is the largest of our Fritillaries and, although stable, it is still considered a species of regional conservation concern. The Valezina is an unusual form of the Silver-washed Fritillary. This form is always female, and it's said that one in a hundred emerge this way.

The Valezina has not yet been discovered in Shropshire but I'm always hopeful of finding a specimen on my butterfly-hunting walks. As you can see from the photograph I took at our Trench Wood Nature Reserve in Worcestershire, the beautiful silver-grey of the wings, tinged with teal blue, is a sight to behold.

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Article and photographs by
Roger Littleover



Comer Wood is featured in our Walking with Butterflies guide (Walk 16).

To find out more about other butterfly forms, visit www.british-butterflyaberrations.co.uk



Silver-washed Fritillary,
female, Valezina form

Valezina

Have you seen her,
Have you seen her?
O beautiful Valezina.

I had often wondered
Why you are one in a
hundred!
Until I saw you,
Until I saw you...

Wings of teal blue
And deep olive green
Touching my heart
Like a kiss unforeseen.

I have seen her,
I have seen her
The beautiful Valezina.

Dancing on the wing
Like a ballerina.
I will never forget
That moment we met.



Silver-washed Fritillary,
male, normal form

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County Records Coordinators – butterflies

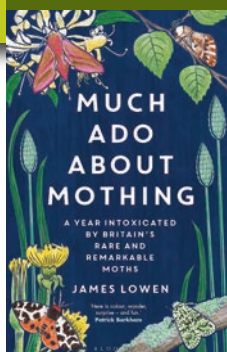
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Much Ado About Mothing

- ISBN: 9781472966971 • Author: James Lowen • Publisher: Bloomsbury Wildlife • Publication date: 27 May 2021 • Cost: £18.99 (discounts available)
- Format: Hardback or ebook, 371 pages, 32 colour photos

I don't read for pleasure, being happiest with field guides and textbooks about moths, so this book would never work for me – wrong! This book crosses boundaries, appealing to those who don't read 'story books' and can't cope without lots of photos, whether they're moth fanatics or total novices.

daughter now shares his love of moths, particularly hawk-moths, and he writes of this in the book.

What did he find?

The reader follows James' travels around the country in a car packed full of moth traps, not to mention his mothing 'wingman' **Will Soar**, whose sharp eyes were responsible for some of the best finds. I was lucky enough to meet them in the planning phase at Butterfly Conservation's annual moth meeting in January 2019. You can imagine the work that went into picking the best sites, and the best times to visit them, with experts from around the country. How lucky to have chosen 2019 and not 2020!

I met them again in late June on one of their adventures: Chapter 11, the Isle of Mull and west coast of Scotland. We had a great few days, with moth chat over evening beers, as well as showing a local camper a **Peppered Moth** that he remembered from school. Most importantly, we saw a trio of day-flying **Burnet Moths**, which James well describes as 'rare, very rare and obscenely rare'. What a great time: stunning highland scenery in endless sunshine. But there are many more well-written stories of his search for other exciting moths.

Surely this book will inspire you to buy a moth trap and field guide for your garden, and encourage you to travel to some beautiful parts of the country in search of moths? A moth trap will soon be first into the suitcase when you go on holiday! At the very least, *Much Ado about Mothing* will be on your list of Christmas presents. Such a great read that even someone like me, who struggles with reading, can enjoy every page!

Review by Dave Grundy

Find out more:
www.nhbs.com/blog/author-interview-with-james-lowen-much-ado-about-mothing

What's it about?

The book is a diary of a year in the life of **James Lowen** from Norfolk, who decided to spend a year travelling round Britain looking for rare and exciting moths in every month and every corner of England, Scotland and Wales. It isn't just a list of dates and moths: James has a great way with words and brings moths to life, from the tiniest micro to the largest macro – a stunning **Oleander Hawk-moth**. There are even stories about species he didn't see.

You get a real sense of the conservation work done by Butterfly Conservation and others, helping scarce species across the country, and the value of the work. You hear tales of some of the characters who devote their lives to searching for moths – some great people, young and old. The moths take James on a great adventure, from the majesty of the Scottish Highlands to the 'desert' Breckland of Norfolk and the Dorset coast at Portland Bill.

Who is James Lowen?

He is an award-winning author who writes for *The Telegraph*, *BBC Wildlife* and *The Countryman*, to name but three! He focuses on birds, travel and natural history, particularly from the Polar regions, Europe and South America. People tried to persuade him to look at moths for years but he resisted the temptation, until eventually he saw the light – or is that darkness?! His young

We carry a book review in each issue of *The Comma*. Newly published titles are ideal but particularly interesting or useful books from the past are also worth highlighting. See page 2 for contribution details.