

the Comma

No. 102 Winter 2018/2019

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation

In-flight photography:

examples and tips

Butterfly of the Year:

winners and losers



'celebrating 40 years'



Cover story

Small Tortoiseshell captured in flight by **Andrew Fusek Peters** (pages 16-17). Sadly, this species performed badly in 2018 (pages 6-7)

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 and
Winter - 30 November
(early submissions are welcome).
Contact the Editor for more
information.
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Publisher

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



Branch website address
www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk



Peter Seal

Chairman's Address

Counting the cost of the heat

Let me start with a very interesting observation from **Thomas Knowles** of Eccleshall, who reports 'A factor which seems to have affected butterflies, especially the **Small Tortoiseshell**, has been what is called aestivation. This is where, in very hot weather, butterflies act as though they are going into hibernation for the winter rather than remaining on the wing. I have a report that on Friday 20th July there were no less than 54 Small Tortoiseshells in the Tower of Holy Trinity Church, Eccleshall.'

I'm holding my breath to see whether, after another apparently poor year for Small Tortoiseshells, this summer's good weather translates into a recovery for this species next spring. We've not seen comprehensive figures yet but observations suggest that **Marbled White**, **Small Copper**, **Brown Argus** and **Hairstreaks** had a good year. Our **Wood Whites** also responded to work carried out by contractors and volunteers within the Making a Stand for the Wood White project, with a good second brood, including in our reintroduction sites. The hot dry weather helped this process, although concerns have been expressed that we may see a repeat of the drought in 1976. Then, food plants shrivelled and the result was a crash in numbers in 1977.

However I'm hoping that the late summer was not so severe in its effect, and one observation gives me cause for hope. Those who undertook Wood White egg counts in August found females laying eggs in more shaded areas, where succulent plants survived the onslaught from the heat. Combined with the fact that this and some other species completed their life cycle earlier than in 2017, we await the spring emergence with interest.

It will also be important to check, once transect and casual records can be analysed, whether more accurate information about numbers and phenology bear out these observations. The evidence is that butterflies do adapt, witness the fact that **Purple** and **White-letter Hairstreaks** were seen to descend more often to ground level in search of nectar to compensate for a lack of the honeydew that is normally available in the tree canopy.

Our Branch in the spotlight

This is all positive, so let's stick with the good news theme. I hope you all noticed the photo of **Stephen Lewis** in the national BC magazine, alongside **Chris Packham** at the Prees Heath BioBlitz. The previous page featured **John Tilt** receiving the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Medal, which was mentioned in the Autumn 2018 *Comma*.



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Registered office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QP.

Charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SC039268)

Mortimer Forest saved!

I reported last time on the Mortimer Forest development, where luxury chalets were to be built. I was pleased to learn that this has been stopped by a very determined and organised campaign. I like to think the Branch played a small part in safeguarding this Wood White habitat – Mortimer features in the 25 walks in our book *Butterflies of the West Midlands*, and was the subject of the excellent *Life and Times of Mortimer Forest* published through **Julia Walling's** project.

Reserves thrive through collaboration

On matters relating to our direct responsibilities, all our reserves did well this year, evidence of effective partnership with other volunteer organisations. The **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** enjoyed a good spring at Ewyas Harold, which is a boost to those organising and attending work parties there, but they need more volunteers! .

Initiatives in progress

Turning to the running of the Branch, work on the online moth atlas is progressing and a draft database is expected soon.

I know some of you have been promoting the year's free membership offer and, as a result, we are now the Branch with the most members. The next job is to maintain our lead by reducing attrition, and I'm looking to establish more effective contact with people when they join us. I hope we can use the Dotmailer system, which



Highlights from our AGM

We were fortunate enough to have a very stimulating presentation from **Dr Phil Sterling**, who joined BC as Programme Manager, Building Sites for Butterflies, and is committed to influencing housing and road projects at an early stage to make them wildlife friendly. Surprisingly, we are the first Branch to invite Phil to meet us, and we aim to secure his expertise and input in shaping new developments with insects in mind. We've asked him to write an article on this theme for the Spring 2019 *Comma*. Sadly, **Joy Stevens** stood down as Secretary after more than ten years in the role. Her service has been greatly appreciated and was recognised through the presentation of a painting. We are fortunate to be able to welcome **Martin Harrison** as her successor.

I'm not bombarded with questions about how we're using the money we get from your subscriptions and sales, but I can offer a few pointers from **Lucy Lewis's** clear and succinct Treasurer's report. Although we spent slightly more than we received in 2017-18, we still have a healthy bank balance. However, our annual spend corresponds closely to the net figure in hand at any time. That is to say, we are not hoarding money and, indeed, the Branch has a list of planned expenditure – some in the form of commitments such as the online moth atlas and some set aside for funding requests under our Places for Pollinators initiative.

On top of all that, we'll no doubt be spending something on our 40th Anniversary (see page 4). I must mention plans for the 2020 Calendar, for which we need photos from the last 40 years – events or notable butterflies: more on this in the Spring 2019 *Comma*. Finally, work has already begun on a 40 butterfly walks booklet, a successor to our 30th Anniversary publication, and we would especially welcome more walks from Staffordshire and Herefordshire.

allows us to email selected groups, and we'll be updating our Branch leaflet intended for the general public. My ideal would be to find someone to take on the role of Membership Secretary.

Peter Seal Branch Chair

P W Seal

Correction

On page 18 of the Autumn 2018 *Comma*, references to Purple Milk-Vetch should have been to Lucerne, or alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*).

Those who attended our AGM or follow us on social media will know of some of our plans to celebrate our 40th anniversary. Following the article in the last *Comma*, many people have come up with great suggestions

Guided Walks

We have a growing number of guided walks to places of butterfly and moth interest, including many of our reserves, and opportunities to walk some of our butterfly transects with local recorders.

Transect recorders of the Malvern

Anniversary Appeal

Conservation costs money – running our existing nature reserves, buying new land for butterflies and moths, delivering projects like Making a Stand for the Wood White, providing tools and resources for volunteers, expanding our Places for Pollinators programme and producing materials

Butterfly Group are inviting members and community volunteers to join one or more transect walks around the Hills. There are 14 routes, led by the recorders who walk them weekly (and submit up to 30,000 records a year online to UKBMS). It's a chance to see the best butterfly and day-moth sites in the area, find out about being a transect recorder and take part in recording with a local guide's help. Each walk will take two to three hours, giving time to identify all the

to raise awareness of our work and attract new members. By being a member, you are helping but, for our 40th anniversary, we're launching a special appeal to enable us to achieve even more.

You can donate by direct transfer to NatWest Bank, account name 'Butterfly Conservation – West

species seen. A free guide, *Butterflies around the Malvern Hills*, will be available on each walk. Look out for dates, locations and contact details in the next *Comma*.

We've had several offers of garden open days and extra moth mornings. Confirmed dates are in the diary (pages 29–30) and there'll be more in the next *Comma*. A special event will be a celebratory guided walk and Big Butterfly Picnic in the heart of the Wyre Forest on Wednesday, 10 July – details later.

Midlands Branch', sort code 60-22-45, account number 72037229. If you do this, email our Treasurer at lemiller@btinternet.com so that she expects the payment.

All funds raised will be spent on the conservation of butterflies and moths within the West Midlands.



The registration fee for each challenge is £15 and, in return, you'll receive a free West Midlands Butterfly Conservation T-shirt (state size and colour when you register). Various prizes are on offer for most sponsorship raised.

Big Butterfly Challenge

Finally, we hope some of you will want to take part in our Big Butterfly Challenges and raise money through sponsorship:

- **Patrick Barkham Challenge** to see all the butterflies that occur in our region in one year. There are 39 species but, to make it 40, you can either join our South Wales trip to see **High Brown Fritillary** (see opposite) or count the **Scarlet Tiger moth** as an 'honorary butterfly'.

- **Shropshire Five Hills Challenge** (organised for us by **Roger Littleover**) to climb five of the county's highest peaks – Brown Clee, Earls Hill, Hope Bowdler, Titterstone Clee and The Wrekin – during the summer. As well as being challenges in their own right, these hills support many butterfly and moth species.

You can download sponsorship forms and further details from www.westmidlandsbutterflies.org.uk.

Plans for our 40th anniversary year

Out-of-area trips

Northern Ireland

Several people suggested we organise trips to see species not present locally. First is a confirmed trip to Northern Ireland (3–6 June) to see **Irish Wood White** (sometimes confusingly called **Cryptic Wood White**), **Marsh Fritillary** and **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk Moth**. We've provisionally



Irish Wood White courtship (Mel Mason)

booked ten rooms at a hotel in Newcastle, near the County Down coast, at a modest cost for three nights of £200 (single) or £270 (double/twin), including breakfast and parking. Convenient flights from Birmingham to Dublin cost from £60 return (at time of writing) or you can travel by ferry. Each

day will offer trips to local sites, mainly with local guides, and opportunities for moth trapping in the evening. If you're interested, contact Mel Mason at mbg.records@btinternet.com



Marsh Fritillary (Mel Mason)

South Wales

Another species that we can no longer see locally is **High Brown Fritillary**. We've arranged a trip on 29 June to its only remaining site in South Wales, where Butterfly Conservation has played a major role in habitat maintenance. As the location is similar to some former West Midlands sites, a visit will help us plan our part in any national recovery plan. Booking is essential and, if there are enough people, we may organise car-sharing or even a minibus. If you're interested, contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com.

Knepp Castle estate

An exciting re-wilding initiative is achieving fantastic results for butterflies and moths (page 32). The planned date of 5–7 July will coincide with the main emergence of **Purple Emperors**, present here at perhaps the highest density in all of Britain. We'd stay in a B&B near Horsham and visit nearby chalk grassland. This trip will go ahead only if there are enough people so, if you're interested, contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com before the end of January.

NEW '40 Walks' Guide

An exciting piece of news is the decision to publish a new **Butterfly Walks Guide**. Our last guide was produced in 2009 and sold out long ago. The co-ordinator, Roger Wasley, has agreed to repeat his role and we're looking for members to

suggest walks for inclusion.

The guide will cover 40 walks, both urban and rural, with a good regional spread. Walks can be of any length but must be on open access land. There's a simple proforma to complete and we'll need an accompanying landscape photo of the

location and photocopy of an OS map showing the route.

Those who submit walks chosen for inclusion will be acknowledged in the guide, which we hope will be ready for the 2019 season.

To submit a walk, contact Roger at rogerpwasley@icloud.com.



Purple Hairstreak
(Richard Clifford)

Small Copper
(Andrew Fusek Peters)

What a Year!

Mike Williams announces the winners and losers for 2018

It's always good to look back on a year when most species did well, some exceptionally so. Some, of course, did not perform so well and we'll start with them.

Worst performers

Most Nymphalids continued to struggle, with low numbers of both **Peacock** and **Small Tortoiseshell**. Even **Commas**, which did pretty well in 2017, were less numerous.

Theories abound as to the causes of this apparent decline (see page 2). Support for the idea that these species are hibernating earlier comes from the large numbers of Small Tortoiseshell reported at hibernation sites – over 30 in a cellar in Bewdley and over 60 in the control tower at Prees Heath. Do look out for Small Tortoiseshell over winter and tell us of any discoveries.

Painted Lady, although seen at intervals through summer, was never numerous and **Red Admiral**, Butterfly of the Year in 2017, was uncommon (particularly in autumn). Members complained that garden ivy flowers, which last year regularly played host to four or five Red Admirals, were instead monopolised by hoverflies, wasps and hornets. One compensation, however, was that the few specimens

present seemed reluctant to migrate and we were receiving reports well into November.

Spring was late, delaying the emergence of many species. **Orange Tip** and **Holly Blue**, often reported in March over recent years, didn't get going until mid-April, while **Green Hairstreak**, seen in the first week of April last year, was not reported until the 20th. **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** was also late and a sense of relief accompanied the first sighting on 8 May. Most species were eventually seen in reasonable numbers, except Holly Blue.

Perhaps the stand out species of the spring was **Grizzled Skipper**, which had a fantastic year at some Worcestershire sites and was seen at a new location near Leigh Sinton. Very pleasing was **Wood White** performance at reintroduction sites, particularly Monkwood where it was the commonest species by a country mile and had a good second brood.

The onset of good weather from late May turned things around and we suddenly found other species emerging early. **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** was reported on 20 May and did well at some sites, with several new locations reported on the Stiperstones. The first **White Admiral** sighting was on 10 June, the earliest in branch records, quickly followed by the first **Silver-washed Fritillary** on the 14th. The latter had a good season, with evidence of range expansion in Staffordshire (see page 23 of *The Comma* No. 101). White butterflies, especially **Small** and **Large**, were everywhere and made up for the shortage of Nymphalids in gardens.

It was a poor year for migrants in general but one species stole the show over the summer: **Clouded Yellow**. First seen in mid-July, early sightings were mostly in Shropshire and north Herefordshire. Most reports were of singletons but counts of four and five occurred at Venus Pools, delighting and challenging photographers. Most individuals appeared to be males and the hoped-for breeding did not occur. Only a couple of sightings suggested successful breeding, one at Grafton Wood in late September and another, also in Worcestershire, in mid-October.

Best performers

Silver-studded Blue appeared slightly early and did incredibly well, with the peak count topping 4,000 at Prees Heath in late June (the highest ever). **Grayling** had a good season, with encouraging numbers on the Malverns in response to conservation management, and it was good to see higher than normal numbers of **Small Heath**.

Of our less widespread species, **Dark Green Fritillary** continued its recent recovery. It was present again in the Wyre Forest and also on the Rifle Range near Kidderminster and Old Storridge Common. **Wall** did well at its remaining sites and a sighting at Grafton Wood on 17 August was a surprise and something of a mystery.

Hairstreaks had a good year and were more visible because of a shortage of aphid honeydew in the canopy. **Purple Hairstreak** was phenomenally numerous at some sites, especially Trench Wood. The exception was **Brown Hairstreak**, which appeared late and was even more elusive than usual in adult form, but later discoveries (see page 23) led us to revise our initial thoughts that it had a 'poor season'.

Appearing early enabled some species to squeeze in an extra brood. Several second-brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were reported – unusual for our region – and White Admiral was seen in Grafton Wood and Monkwood in late August, and in Trench Wood on 13 September.

Brown Argus had a spectacular year, with more spring sightings than usual and large second-brood numbers. This is illustrated well by the graph shown below, which is based on 30 butterfly transects and shows a tenfold increase since 2014.

Common Blue did well in its second brood, no doubt thanks to excellent summer weather, while **Small Copper** had a strong third brood and was seen well into October at several sites, including about 50 at Aqualate Mere in Staffordshire as late as the 20th.

And the award goes to...

A case could be made for several species and, for the first time in branch history, the coveted title of Butterfly of the Year is shared by two species:

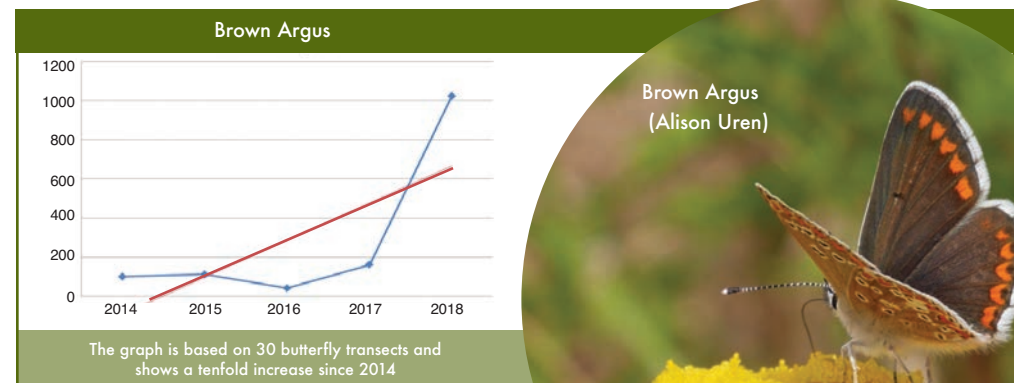
- Purple Hairstreak
- Brown Argus

The award for Most Improved Performance goes to **Small Copper**.

The wooden spoon for Worst Performance goes to our cover star, **Small Tortoiseshell** (perhaps some small comfort to the **Peacock**, recipient for the last three years!).

The big question, of course, is how will our drought summer affect numbers in 2019? We won't have a long wait to find out.

Article by **Mike Williams**, Publicity and Marketing Officer. Graph by **John Tilt**



Brown Argus
(Alison Uren)

Butterfly & Wildlife Project – St Georges, Telford

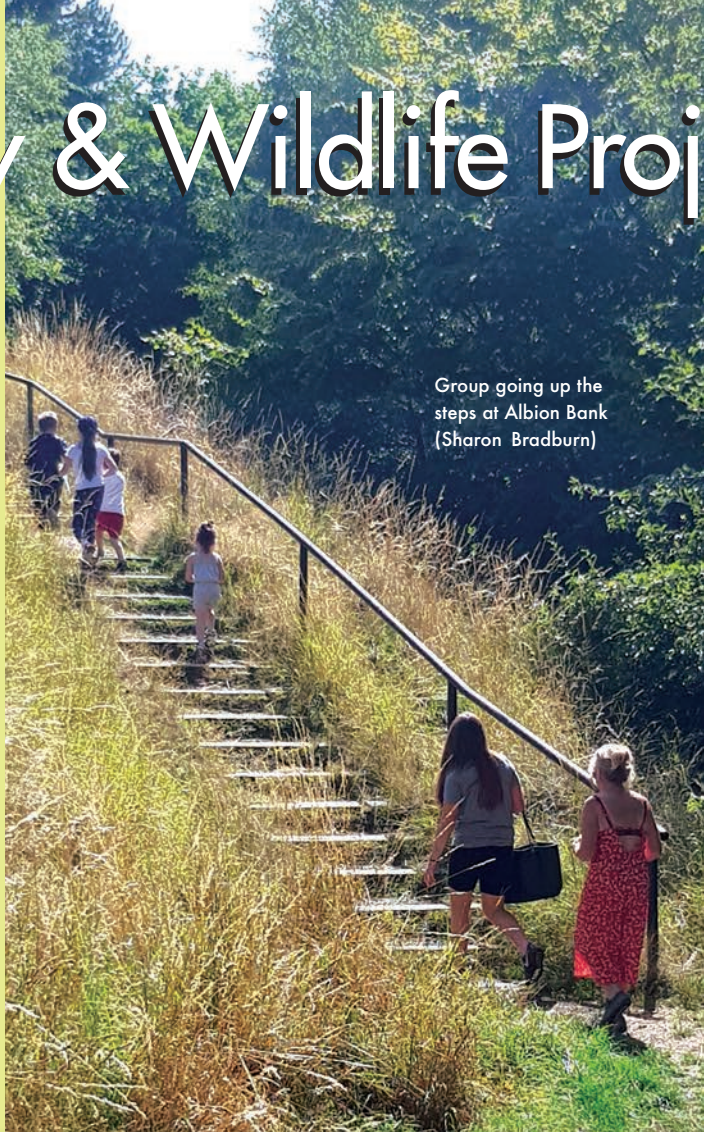
A Big Lottery – Awards for All Programme of Activity

St Georges Community Group has been raising awareness of local green and wildlife spaces through the beauty of butterflies. Since they attended a Butterfly Conservation West Midlands presentation in February 2017, members' knowledge and love for butterflies has continued to grow thanks to support and encouragement from local butterfly experts **Liz Rogers** and **Chris Littlewood**.

Making a start

Over the past two summers, group members, local residents and visitors to St Georges have got involved with the national Big Butterfly Count and had amazing results. In 2017, a butterfly at risk, **Small Heath**, was recorded in an area earmarked for development. Participants have become so knowledgeable about butterflies that they now feel

Group going up the steps at Albion Bank (Sharon Bradburn)



confident in identifying and recording species for themselves. This practice is shared with family members and friends at leisure.

Becoming citizen scientists

This year has seen amazing results too. Thanks to funding from the Big Lottery, more training sessions and resources were made available. With nets, bug boxes and i-SPY butterfly booklets, 120 participants (aged from three to 83) became wildlife citizen scientists across 13 fun and interactive sessions, making the most of the amazing sunny summer and the wildlife spaces we cherish so much.

Situated in the north-eastern part of Telford, St Georges is steeped in rich industrial heritage and, as a consequence, features abandoned brown-belt land that has been taken over by natural beauty. Nine local spaces are included in Telford & Wrekin Council's Green Guarantee, including clay mounds, coal mining areas, quarries and pools.

St Georges Community Group

has been raising awareness of the open spaces since Summer 2015, when it was selected for the First Steps Programme set up by the Department of Communities and Local Government. A Community Action Plan for the area was produced and an audit of the local green and wildlife spaces carried out. This summer, the group has run activities in three of the spaces: Albion/New St Walkway, Redhill Ecology Park and the Albion Bank.

Creating new habitats

As well as becoming keen citizen scientists, members of the community have explored and documented trees, bats, bugs, plants and grasses in creative activities that have led to art, crafts, local surveys, conservation and food baking.

Residents are particularly proud of the Albion/New St Walkway. Children working with their carers in the space this summer have had a great time! Sowing of wildflowers generously donated by Grow Wild

UK has seen an increase in the butterfly species on the walkway this year. Over the past few years, an abundance of **Speckled Wood** has been documented but, this year, we've also seen **Holly Blue**. On a glorious sunny October activity day, a lively **Red Admiral** was busy fluttering around while children installed an amazing bee and bug hotel they'd put together in the summer.

Planning for the future

Raising awareness of the space has also improved safe access to the area. Telford & Wrekin Council has recently funded new steps to replace the steps installed 36 years ago. In 2019, the group plans to plant holly bushes to help Holly Blue and fruit bushes to encourage other species.

We've now said goodnight to the Butterfly & Wildlife Project for the winter, winding up with activity sessions at which local residents made apple crumbles and lanterns, culminating in a lantern parade.

Our friend, Liz Rogers, rounded off our Summer/Autumn 2018 programme by summarising our work as citizen scientists. It truly was amazing and very empowering. As a community, we have recorded 251 butterflies of 13 different species and we would like to thank everyone who got on board and supported this great health and well-being initiative in the area we love to live in and visit.

Article by Louise Bremner



St Georges Community Group (Chloe Belcher)



Meadow Brown (Sharon Bradburn)



Liz Rogers (Sharon Bradburn)



Speckled Wood (Sharon Bradburn)

Which is the harder – a Needle in a Haystack or a Butterfly Egg in a Forest?

Our visit to Belarus

Knowing that the Danube Clouded Yellow is in trouble, **Mike Williams**, **Mel Mason**, **Liz Lloyd** and I (all Branch members!) decided to go and see if we could find the butterfly in more sites, offer help with the production of a conservation plan and support the local lepidopterists working on the species.

It's worth reminding readers that Belarus is outside the EU and still has a communist government



Background

The Danube Clouded Yellow (*Colias myrmidone*) has been branded one of Europe's rarest butterflies and, although its range may well extend beyond Europe, most of that will be in Russia with all the associated implications. If we wish to maintain this butterfly as a European species, we must, as part of one of Europe's leading butterfly conservation organisations, at least offer to help with its conservation where we can.

*Butterflies of Britain & Europe*¹ states that, while the species is uncommon, it's found in South-East Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. *Butterflies of Britain & Europe*², published in 2004, shows the species occurring in many of the same countries but describes it as 'very local in Eastern Europe, in decline'. Today, it's only found in two small areas of Romania and Belarus; in all probability, it would also be found in Ukraine. This confirms that it has disappeared from many countries over the past 14 years or so.

By 2012, an 'Action Plan for the Conservation of the Danube Clouded Yellow *Colias myrmidone* in the European Union' had been published under the auspices of the European Commission. That document states that 'Out of eleven EU member states with former populations, it now survives only in Poland, Romania and Slovakia, where the dramatic population declines and range contractions still continue.'

In 2016, an EBG group visited Belarus and the report includes the following: 'Perhaps the most interesting discovery, however, was to visit a site in the south-east of the country where Danube Clouded Yellow is still found.'

The Clouded Yellow Challenge

that's only slowly opening up the country to outsiders. We were accompanied on our visit by **Gabor** and **Andrea**, who had done all of the organising through their tour company Ecotours, and **Anatolij Kulak** the leading lepidopterist in Belarus. Also, while in the south of the country, we had a senior forester, **Vladimir**, who had responsibility for 175,000 hectares of forest. We thank them all for their good humour and brilliant expertise.

We were surprised how widespread the butterfly was.

Our Clouded Yellow sightings

We were able to confirm, first of all, that the larval food plant, *Chamaecytisus ruthenicus* (Russian Broom), was widespread along the forest rides and in recently clear-felled areas of the woodlands in the

south-eastern part of the country, around the town of Rechytsa in the valley of the Dneiper River. Searching these areas revealed adults, mostly females (presumably searching for egg-laying sites), and then eggs and first instar caterpillars. We were surprised how widespread the butterfly was – it seemed almost as if each new site we visited revealed eggs if we just searched for them.

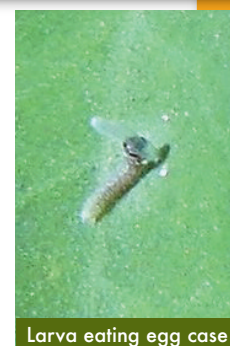
The butterfly, which has two generations each year, flies in late May to June and then again in August. The males and typical females are distinguishable from other species of *Colias* by extra orange scales; the females are a paler yellow and there's also a white form (var 'alba'), which we

saw on several occasions.

The eggs were usually white and were 1.5–2mm tall. Shortly before they hatched, however, the larvae would be visible inside and the eggs changed colour. We observed that, on hatching, some larvae eat the egg case but we found other uneaten egg cases with exit holes. We found larvae on a few occasions but they were far less common and would have soon been predated if they had remained exposed on the upper side of the leaves.

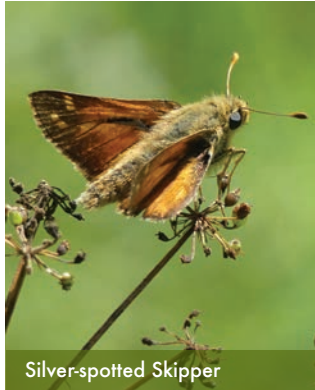
Next steps

A comprehensive report has been written by Mike Williams, giving our thoughts on ways in which forest management can be used to the advantage of the species, ensuring its continued existence in Europe. The sites in Romania are





Pallas' Fritillary



Silver-spotted Skipper

totally different and will require different conservation techniques, but that work is being carried out at Babes-Bolyai University in the city of Cluj Napoca (an institution with which our Branch has close ties). Hopefully, Mike's report will eventually be made easily available to all who would wish to read it in Belarus, Romania and Britain.

We were very close to the Ukrainian border and it's likely that the species exists there on a similar basis as in Belarus. A visit to confirm this, or at least some correspondence with local lepidopterists, would be useful. The former would be difficult, as the location lies within the area affected by the Chernobyl Nuclear Incident! The British Government's website warns against eating the wild mushrooms but the locals seemed undeterred!



Eastern Bath White

Our other sightings

Well, you can't go to another European country and not look for other species! The photographs show some of the species we saw, either in the study area or in the nature reserve north of the capital Minsk (known as the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve). Our visit to the reserve was brief but we also visited a site of the almost equally rare **Violet Copper** (*Lycaena helle*). Unfortunately, we were too late for the beautiful adults but we did find eggs and also **Pallas' Fritillary** (*Argyronome laodice*) and **Silver-spotted Skipper** (*Hesperia comma*). In the south of Belarus, we found **Dusky Meadow Brown** (*Hyponophele lycaon*), **Eastern Bath White** (*Pontia edusa*), and other species that are widespread throughout Europe but not found in Britain. These included **Sooty, Large and Scarce Copper; Large and Northern Wall Browns; Weaver's Fritillary, Queen of Spain and Map Butterfly**, as well as second-generation **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Short-tailed**

Blue and an example of either **Idas' Blue** or **Silver-studded Blue**, which are notoriously difficult to identify. **'Wood Whites** were seen but which species? Who knows?

Anatolij ran a moth trap most nights and many beautiful moths were caught, photographed and released as a result. The highlight for us Brits was the appearance of five specimens of **Catocala fraxini**, better known as the **Clifden Nonpareil** – almost a holy grail for many British lepidopterists! Anatolij's best catch of this moth ever was 11 in the same trap on one night but, unfortunately, that was not while we were there. Other catches included a very rare migrant, **Catocala electa**, known here as the **Rosy Underwing** and a large migrant rarely seen in Britain, **Bedstraw Hawk-moth** (*Hyles gallii*). By the time we came to photograph the latter, it was getting ready to fly and whirring its wings.

Thanks to all involved in the organisation of the visit, especially the two local gentlemen and our Hungarian friends: their good

...many beautiful moths were caught, photographed and released as a result.



A moth breakfast!

humour and help with the language problem were utterly essential. Thanks to Mel Mason for the use of some of his beautiful images.

Belarus was an interesting country but completely different to any other that I have visited – a fascinating experience. If you go, be prepared for a bit of a 'culture shock' but don't let that put you off.

The final photograph adds a whole new dimension to the idea of a moth breakfast! The moth is a Rosy Underwing, which we allowed to feed on some watermelon, and the picture was posed. No butterflies or moths were hurt during our visit – all captured specimens were released unharmed. A good picture all the same and you can see why Anatolij is the leading lepidopterist in Belarus: he lives, sleeps, breathes and eats them!

Article by **Martyn G Davies**
Photographs by Mel Mason

References

1. *Butterflies of Britain & Europe* (1997) Tolman, Tom and Lewington, Richard; Collins.
2. *Butterflies of Europe* (2004) Lafranchis, Tristan; Diattheo.

A Walk for Wildlife on the Wet Side

When **Chris Packham** visited Prees Heath last July, he invited us to join his People's Walk for Wildlife in London in September. We felt it was the least we could do to thank him for coming to the reserve.

In contrast to the warm sunshine of Chris's visit, the weather was grey and wet. That didn't deter 10,000 people, including former BC Chief Executive **Martin Warren** and some senior staff, from descending on London for the walk. There were speeches and songs beforehand and then we all played birdsong on our smartphones as we walked across Hyde Park Corner and along Piccadilly, St James' Street, Pall Mall, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall. Curious onlookers peered from the windows of up-market hotels, no doubt wondering why so many birds were singing on a wet autumn afternoon.

At the end, Chris and others handed the People's Manifesto for Wildlife in at 10 Downing Street. You can read it, and find out more about the Walk for Wildlife, at www.chrispackham.co.uk.

by **Stephen and Lucy Lewis**



Stephen Lewis

Lucy Lewis

Hollowfields Open Day raises funds for our Branch

Simon Primrose gratefully receiving a cheque from **Jan Terry**, money raised for West Midlands Butterfly Conservation by a butterfly open day. Upper Hollowfields Farm is a shining example of how a modern farm can provide the most fantastic wildlife environment, including superb habitat for Brown Hairstreak. We thank the Terrys for their continued wonderful commitment to wildlife!



(Picture taken by Mike Williams)



Six-spot Burnet and
Narrow-bordered
Five-spot Burnet

ON MY PATCH - Poolbrook Common



Gatekeeper

An introduction to this SSSI

Poolbrook Common is an astonishing place. Most people drive past it without a second glance but, if you walk through it in summer, you discover it's alive with fascinating insects and bursting with colourful wildflowers. In 2018, it became a Site of Special Scientific Interest in recognition of its status as one of our few remaining meadows – sadly, 97% of the UK's wildflower meadows have been eradicated in the last 50 years.

It's carefully managed by Malvern Hills Trust (MHT) to maintain and encourage the diversity of wildlife. Mowing is late, at the end of August or in early September, which allows the flora to set seed and most of the invertebrates to complete their life-cycles.

In 2017, Poolbrook Common officially became a UKBMS transect, which means a recorder walks around it once a week from April through to October, noting butterfly and day-flying moth species and submitting them to the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. That recorder is me,



Common Spotted Orchids and hybrids

and the weekly walks have become one of the greatest joys of my life! Sometimes it's difficult to find a day that's warm and sunny enough and not too windy, but most weeks there is a suitable moment.

Butterflies

There are 23 species of butterfly on the common, more than two-thirds of the 33 species found locally. The commonest is the **Meadow Brown** – hundreds of them in mid-July – and about two weeks earlier there are nearly as many **Marbled Whites**. This year (2018), there was a sudden surge in numbers of **Common Blue** in late July and August, and also far more **Brown Argus** than in 2017, presumably because of the prolonged hot weather. They congregate on the yellow Fleabane flowers down by the stream – a beautiful sight and very tempting to a photographer. Least common are the **Peacocks**, **Red Admirals** and **Commas**, and so far I have only spotted one **Painted Lady** – but then it's not really a suitable habitat for these species. **Small Tortoiseshells** did well in April, but then very few of the second generation appeared later in the year.

Three species of **Skipper** occur on the common, mostly on the smaller section east of the B4208, because the grasses are longer and thicker there. The **Large Skippers** appear first, and then a couple of weeks later there are **Small Skippers** and **Essex Skippers**, very difficult to distinguish unless one can get very close and spot the black tips to the antennae of the latter. They are often recorded as 'Smessex' Skippers because it's impossible to see them well enough, especially when

they're flying about. There are a few small oak trees on the common and this year I noticed **Purple Hairstreaks** fluttering above them in the warm summer evenings.

Moths

So far, I've spotted 13 species of day-flying moth but I'm sure there are more, and certainly many more species of micromoth. Notably, there are huge numbers of **Six-spot Burnet** and **Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet**. The attractive yellow-green and black caterpillars feed on the Bird's-foot Trefoil in spring, and the long white cocoons form on the grass stems in early June. Then the adult moths emerge in their hundreds to feed on Knapweed (both Lesser and Greater), which is abundant on the common. Sometimes up to ten moths can be jostling for position on the same flower-head. Their warning colours deter predators but nevertheless numbers vary considerably from year to year.

Migrant **Silver-Y** arrived in good numbers this year and were easily seen among the long grasses. **Burnet Companions** peaked in late May and I also found several **Mother Shiptons**, with their characteristic witch-face markings. Migrant

Plants

It's impossible to write about Poolbrook Common without mentioning the fabulous orchids that grow there. There are swathes of Common Spotted and Southern Marsh Orchids in June; these hybridise readily with each other, producing exceptionally vigorous plants – the tallest grew

to 84cm this year! One Green-winged Orchid appeared in May and it will be interesting to see if more appear in 2019.

Other flowers include Yellow Rattle, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Red Clover, Lady's Bedstraw, Dropwort, Tansy, Goatsbeard, Crow Garlic and Grass Vetchling – many of these are essential food plants for the invertebrates. The damper areas of rush pasture include Sharp-flowered Rush and Marsh Bedstraw.

Birds

The transect is also hugely enjoyable for bird-watching. Skylarks nest there and MHT put up notices warning people to keep their dogs under control. Starlings congregate noisily in the trees by the stream, while Buzzards, Kestrels, Peregrine Falcons and Red Kites soar overhead. Whitethroats sing from the hedges and a Lesser Whitethroat appeared for two weeks in April. It is all absolutely delightful, and I wish there were far more areas like it.

Article and
photographs by
Alison Uren
Transect
Recorder,
Poolbrook
Common



Brown Argus

Butterflies in flight

The first of two
photography specials



Small Tortoiseshell showing
underside above scabious

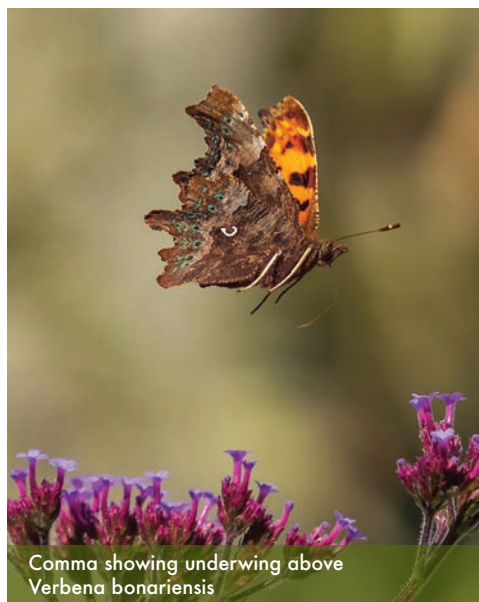


Clouded Yellow above lucerne at Venus Pool

The butterflies in our gardens, and those that nectar in the gardens we visit, are worth closer inspection. But our human eyes cannot often discern the beautiful detail of their flight, both as they alight on flowers and as they take off in their search for summer fuel. Flight can also reveal wonderful surprises in terms of colour, beauty and, of course, identification. But, for this to work, we need a tool that improves on sight: the modern digital camera can take us a long way towards freezing single slices of time and perseverance can really pay off.

Discovering details

I'm a professional photographer by trade, but learning to photograph butterflies in flight has been a recent adventure – I only began my portfolio on this theme during this past hot summer. I actually found one of the best spots to spend a ridiculous amount of time on this pursuit was our back garden at home. My wife's planting skills meant there were plenty of visitors to practice on, and Verbena bonariensis was a great launch-pad for a Small Copper that I was chasing late on in the season.



Comma showing underwing above
Verbena bonariensis



Pair of Common Blue ready to mate

Knowing nothing of aberrations, I did wonder at the bright blue markings on the hindwings and was excited to find this was a known variant called *caeruleopunctata*. The same stand of flowers played host to an immaculate **Comma**, but it was only the flight shot that showed the striking white curl (which gives this species its name) and those jewel-like jade spots on the underside. It felt I was both photographing and learning at the same time.

Selecting scenery

I've been fortunate enough to get access to places such as the Flower Garden at Stokesay Court, a cut-flower business that supplies events such as weddings, where the lavender beds often gave me a perfect backdrop. I also spent time at wonderful spots like the Stiperstones as part of my conservation work for Natural England.

I keenly devour social media so, when I discovered that **Clouded Yellows** were gracing Venus Pool near Shrewsbury, I went several times until I managed to catch lift-off from a pretty stand of purple Lucerne. My goal was not just to show species in flight but also to think carefully about backgrounds, as here are landscapes as beautiful, varied and relevant as jungles, steppes and forest around the world. In this light, even a 'Cabbage White' among the purple Asters or the translucent underside of a **Small Tortoiseshell** spread above Scabious becomes a small but important local wonder. There are many rarities I would like to cover and I'm excited about that potential next year. But I'm more than happy for now to show these everyday borderland butterflies in a new, up-close and motion-frozen light.

Article and photographs by **Andrew Fusek Peters**

Photography tips

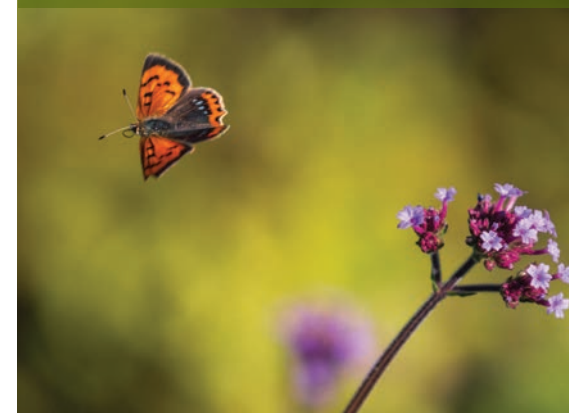
This is probably the hardest type of wildlife photography to attempt because butterflies take off incredibly fast and their flight is erratic. To start with, you will need a decent Digital SLR (Single-lens Reflex) or mirrorless* camera with very good auto-focus tracking. Few compact cameras will be up to the task. A fairly long lens is essential, as butterflies can be quite shy, and sunlight is pretty important for activity.

Pick your garden well, from public gardens you can visit to gardens of friends or your own patch – it must have a lot of the type of flowers butterflies love. If you can find a nature reserve with wild meadows, pick a hot morning or afternoon.

Then it's a matter of stalking the feeding butterflies without disturbing them (hence the long lens – a macro is better suited to feeding or still portraits), and then shooting in burst mode with a very fast shutter speed – 1/4000 second is a good starting point. You will need a huge amount of patience: there were literally thousands of out-of-focus shots for every semi-decent pic I got, and my goal next year is to keep honing this skillset. Practice involves trying to focus not just on the butterfly but also anticipating in which direction it might fly next. Good luck!

* 'Mirrorless' refers to cameras without a reflex mirror, usually with interchangeable lenses and either an electronic viewfinder or no viewfinder.

Small Copper ab. *caeruleopunctata*
above Verbena



A Flutter in the Past

PART 2

Mel Mason reviews 20th century butterfly sightings around the Malvern Hills

Early 20th century

In 1911, the Malvern Gazette lists the extinction or reduction of several local species [R1-pp24–26]:

- **Large Copper:** '...extinct for more than half a century'.
- **Mazarine Blue:** '... almost if not quite extinct in England'.
- **Chequered Skipper:** '...can only be found in a small district not fifty miles from Lincoln (it has an apocryphal notice on our Malvern list)'.
- **Black Hairstreak:** '...is restricted... to a private wood in Hunts (the privacy of this wood may be its salvation)'.
- **Little [Small] Blue:** '...is found on the chalk feeding on kidney vetch... as I know only in one little spot perhaps fifty yards long at Colwall'.
- **Gatekeeper:** Interestingly, the editor [R1-p25] states, 'The Gatekeeper is put down in our Malvern list as "very common". Yet I have found it only and very sparingly, along a line drawn from the Old Hills to Bransford Station'. (Although numbers have declined in recent years, it is now one of our most common butterflies).

A subsequent article in 1911 provides further evidence of several of our less common species [R2-p32]:

- **Clouded Yellow:** 'Many specimens taken in the spring and late summer of 1900.'
- **Pale Clouded Yellow:** 'One taken at Malvern Link in 1900. **Mr Horace Foster.**'
- **Purple Emperor:** 'One seen at Eastnor, August 2nd 1901. W.E.'
- **Brown Hairstreak:** 'One specimen at Birchwood, 1901. W.E.'
- **Marbled White:** 'I saw several at Croft Wood three years ago (1907). **Mr Carlton Rea.**'

The 1970s

A lack of written records between 1911 and 1970 coincides with two World Wars and dramatic changes



Grizzled Skipper (John Lane)



Drab Looper (Mel Mason)



Grayling is now the rarest species in Worcestershire (Mel Mason)



A Monarch was caught in Barnards Green, Malvern, October 1968 (Mel Mason)



High Brown Fritillaries mud-puddling in the 1990s (Matthew Oates)

in our landscape due to intensification of agriculture and widespread use of fertilisers and insecticides.

Jack Green, a local naturalist, provides a much clearer idea about the occurrence of different species in the second half of the last century. 'Records traced to date [1970] show that in all at least 53 species of butterflies out of 70 on the British list have occurred in Worcestershire... The post-1960 records show 40 butterflies' [R3].

Interestingly, Jack Green reports on some of the less common species [up to 1970]:

- **Grizzled and Dingy Skippers:** 'not uncommon'.
- **Pearl-bordered Fritillary:** 'local'.
- **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary:** local but 'scarcer' [than Pearl-bordered Fritillary].
- **Wood White:** 'widely distributed in woods on the west side of the county' and 'although a rare species nationally... its status in our county is more favourable'.
- **Brown Argus:** known in 'very few locations'.
- **Small Blue:** once occurred 'rarely on the Malvern Hills'.
- **Marsh Fritillary:** used to be present in several sites but 'it would be surprising if it was not still in the county'.
- **High Brown Fritillary:** is rare but known in 'a few local colonies west of the Severn'.
- **Dark Green Fritillary:** appears to be the 'rarest of the large fritillaries'.
- **Large Tortoiseshell:** used to be 'tolerably plentiful' in Victorian times.
- **Monarch:** one was caught by children at Malvern [Barnards Green] in [October] 1968.
- **Black-veined White:** used to occur in numerous places in the county, including Malvern, but became extinct in the 1920s.
- **Holly Blue:** 'rather scarce'. (Today, this species is common but populations fluctuate due to a five/six year host-parasite cycle.)

In *A Practical Guide to the Butterflies of Worcestershire* [R4], Jack Green mentions an interesting finding of an **Essex Skipper** at Arley circa 1900 that, if true, suggests this species has been present in small numbers long before it became established in recent times. Even more surprising, reference is made to the **Swallowtail**... 'A

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small colony bred until circa 1920 in a marshy area near Eldersfield. It is possible that these were the last descendants from Swallowtails that flew over Longdon Marsh in earlier times.'

During the early 1980s [R5], Jack Green writes about a planned search for **Large Tortoiseshell**, following sightings in Mallins Wood (1966), Malvern (1968), Allhurst Coppice (1975), North Wood, Newlands (1975), Longley Green (1982) – there have been no further records of this species in recent times.

The 1980s and 1990s

The 1985 Malvern Hills Conservators (MHC) Report [R6] recorded 34 local species including **Grizzled Skipper**, **Dingy Skipper**, **Wood White**, **White Admiral**, **High Brown Fritillary**, **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, **Grayling** and **Wall**. Some of these species are now locally extinct. White Admiral is still seen in small numbers in woodland containing Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), the larval food plant. Dingy Skipper was last recorded in 2011 at the Purlieu next to Park Wood and is now restricted to nearby Mathon, Knapp and Papermill, and Knightwick Bridge. Grayling is now only seen on the northern hills. Furthermore, 'Jack Green reports that the Gullet Quarry area is now in excellent condition for butterflies and hopes that it will remain as open as possible and that the number of conifers will not increase'. Malvern Hills Trust (MHT) currently manages this area, with the help of volunteers, and it is still a reliable site for **Silver-washed Fritillary** and the rare **Drab Looper** moth.

The 1986 MHC Report [R7] recorded the demise of Grizzled Skipper, while White Admiral prospered as 'high June temperatures over the last four years have suited this species well as it has late larvae and pupal stages. It has extended its range and has re-appeared in some Worcestershire Woods where it has not been seen since its last boom in the 1940s. A dark form (var. *nigrina*) was seen in the Gullet area on 16th July. This variation is seen when numbers are high.'

The 1987 MHC Report [R8] states that both Dingy and Grizzled Skipper have not been seen for the last three years, just two years after both were included in a list of 34 local butterflies [R6]. There was only one

sighting of a Wood White '...in the Holywell area by **John Parsons**'. There were reduced numbers of **Marbled White** but 'more widely distributed than it was in the 1960s'. (In recent years, Marbled White has reached record numbers around the Malverns and West Midlands.) Surprisingly late, a **Green Hairstreak** was reported in the Gullet area by Peter Garner at the beginning of August. **White-letter Hairstreak** is 'more elusive' than other species and none were recorded, although Jack Green saw 40 at Gadbury Bank (SO793316), several miles south of the Hills. Only one White Admiral was seen in 1987, by **Mathew Oates** in the Gullet area, despite an encouraging report in 1986 [R7]. Small numbers of Wall were seen on 'open areas of the Hills'. **Brown Argus** was 'unknown' to the editor but Jack Green stated '... that a small colony has been seen in recent years on the south side of Hangman's Hill'. (Today, there are regular sightings of Brown Argus across the Hills where different species of Crane's-bill replace Rockrose as the preferred larval food plant.)

Article by **Mel Mason** WMBC Malvern Representative
Malvern Butterfly Group Recorder

Thanks

Thanks to all past recorders, transect walkers, Malvern Hills Trust, Ian Duncan for collecting many of the historical reports, Worcester Museum and the Archive Collections, Malvern and Worcester Library Archive Publications.

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Trends in Haugh Wood

Bob Hall reviews butterfly transects for the two parts of this Forestry Commission woodland

Haugh Wood North (2006–2017)

Skippers

Large Skipper numbers have been steady in the last four years, peaking at 29 in 2014. The species has recovered well from low counts in 2008/09.

Essex Skipper is certainly present, as shown by the 2016 Skipper survey at Herefordshire Wildlife Trust's nearby Wessington reserve. The distinguishing features of **Small** and **Essex** Skippers are hard for transect walkers to discern when walking transects, so these two species are banded together for transect results. Combined numbers peaked at 31 in 2013, since when there has been a dramatic decline with no records in 2017. Is this a genuine decline or have we recorders simply missed them?

Whites

The nationally rare **Wood White** has been found in consistent numbers in the north side of Haugh Wood, peaking at 212 in 2014. Since then numbers have declined slightly, with an overall count of 108 in 2017. The average count for 2006–2015 was 119.

Brimstone, **Large White** and **Small White** are generally found in small numbers, peaking at seven for Brimstone in 2016, 64 for Large White in 2010 and 60 for Small White in 2013. The ubiquitous **Green-veined White** peaked at 205 in 2014, with lower numbers since. **Orange-tip** peaked at 55 in 2011, but had a relatively good year in 2017 with a count of 20.

Blues

Purple Hairstreak has not been recorded in Haugh Wood North since 2013, although it's almost certainly under-recorded here as elsewhere. A single **White-letter Hairstreak** was seen in 2015, but that was



White-letter Hairstreak
(Mel Mason)

the first record since 2008. **Small Copper** peaked at 14 in 2010, since when numbers have declined rapidly. There've been no records since 2013.

Common Blue peaked at 114 in 2010, with good numbers in the last couple of years (33 in 2016 and 59 in 2017). It's significant that many of these records are found in transect 7, where the verges are full of Bird's-foot Trefoil (the food plant). The **Holly Blue** is really a garden butterfly, so it's no surprise that numbers of this species remain low.

Nymphalidae

White Admiral has not been recorded in Haugh Wood North since a solitary record in 2010. **Red Admiral** had a good year in 2017 with a count of 26 (almost certainly an underestimate). **Painted Lady** last had a good year in 2009, when 37 were counted. Since then, predicted invasions of these migrants failed to materialise and only very small numbers have been recorded.

Small Tortoiseshell peaked at 16 in 2011, since when it's gone into a depressing decline. Incredibly, there were no records for this once-common species from all of the transect walks in 2017. Is this just the work of the parasitic wasp?

Peacock also seems to be in terminal decline, peaking at 107 in 2013 but then falling over the last four years: 72, 47, 17 and just seven in 2017. The obvious question is: why?

Comma has fared better, peaking at 19 in 2010. **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** peaked at 22 before it started raining in 2012, but none have been seen since 2015. **Silver-washed Fritillary** peaked at 27 in 2015, but also had a good year in 2017 (a possibly conservative ten).

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Browns

Speckled Wood is stable, with 93 in both 2013 and 2014. **Gatekeeper** peaked at 212 in 2008, since when it seems in decline. **Meadow Brown** peaked at 176 in 2013, with 99 in 2017. **Marbled White** has not been recorded in Haugh Wood North since 2006. The most abundant butterfly overall is still the **Ringlet**, peaking at 866 in 2014.

Haugh Wood South (2015–2017)

Skippers

Large Skipper has been steady in the last three years, with a good count of 33 in 2017. The combined total for **Essex** and **Small Skippers** was two in 2017, seeming to confirm the decline in Haugh Wood North.

Whites

The nationally rare **Wood White** had been fairly stable, with a maximum count of 212 in 2015, but has since declined slightly, with 104 in 2017.

STOP PRESS: 2018 numbers

Large Skipper numbers were healthy in both North and South transects, with 51 in the South. **Small/Essex Skipper** has also shown a pleasing increase from low 2017 results in the South, but numbers remain low in the North.

Wood White counts, too, were healthy: 295 in the South and 121 in the North. The other Whites also had a good summer, with **Green-veined White** at 305 in the North and 384 in the South.

Common Blue had an incredible season on the North side, at 325. Good numbers, too, for the under-recorded **Purple** and **White-letter Hairstreaks** in both parts of the wood.

Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers remain perilously low in the South side, but **Silver-washed Fritillary** has been recorded in good numbers, with 53 in the South.

Peacock numbers remain low, and **Small Tortoiseshell** desperately low, with a total count of only five for the latter in both parts of the wood. One theory is that, in the very hot weather in July, the emerging second brood went into aestivation. Time will tell if this theory is correct.

The Browns had a very good year, with **Gatekeeper** reaching 250 in the South and the ubiquitous **Ringlet** reaching 564 in the North and 1011 in the South.

In summary, there is reason for cautious optimism for **Large Skipper**, **Wood White**, **Common Blue** and **Silver-washed Fritillary**, but concern remains for **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Small Skipper** and **Peacock**. **White Admiral** seems to have gone from Haugh Wood and **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** is only just hanging on.

Brimstone, **Large White** and **Small White** are generally found in reasonable numbers, peaking in 2015 at 18 for Brimstone, 55 for Large White and 44 for Small White. The ubiquitous **Green-veined White** peaked at 106 in 2016 and showed reasonable numbers in 2017. **Orange Tip** had a relatively good year in 2017, with a count of 40.

Blues

Purple Hairstreak was found only in small numbers but is definitely under-recorded owing to its habit of appearing in late afternoon. **White-letter Hairstreak** had a relatively good year in 2017, although numbers remain low.

Common Blue has declined over the last three years, from 79 to 25 to just six. This is an interesting contrast to Haugh Wood North, where numbers are much healthier.

Nymphalidae

Red Admiral had a good year in 2017, with 43 (almost certainly an underestimate). Being a migrant, **Painted Lady** is very variable and none were recorded in 2017. **Small Tortoiseshell** experienced a sharp decline, with only four in 2017. As in Haugh Wood North, **Peacock** seems to be in terminal decline, falling over the last three years from 57 to 14 to just six, but **Comma** has fared better.

Essex Skipper (Mel Mason)



Pearl-bordered Fritillary has gone into steep decline, falling over the last three years from 15 to 12 to just two in 2017. **Silver-washed Fritillary** peaked at 20 in 2015, with 18 in 2017 (almost certainly an underestimate).

Browns

Speckled Wood also seems to be in decline, peaking at 134 in 2016 but with only 56 in 2017. **Gatekeepers** peaked at 253 in 2015, falling to just 78 in 2017. **Meadow Brown** peaked at 178 in 2015, falling to 125 in 2017. **Marbled White** is present in small numbers. The most abundant butterfly overall is still the **Ringlet**, peaking at 874 in 2015.

Comment

Several weeks were missed for various reasons in 2017, with weather being an important factor in the second half of the season. The counts recorded, particularly for butterflies flying in July and August, are clearly below actual numbers.

Summary

We're concerned for **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, **Small/Essex Skipper**, **Peacock** and **Small Tortoiseshell**. We must continue to monitor these species in 2018 and beyond, to see if declines are permanent or temporary blips.

My thanks to **Kate Wollen** of the Forestry Commission for organising the transect counts, to Kate Wollen and **Robin Hemming** for organising the Butterfly Conservation winter work parties, and to my fellow transect walkers.

Article by **Bob Hall**



Searching for eggs at Avon Meadows (Mike Williams)

Going on an Egg Hunt

What a start to the Brown Hairstreak egg searching season!

Back in September, things had been fairly quiet for quite some time in Worcestershire on the **Brown Hairstreak** front. Last winter's egg searches had produced a reasonably average number of eggs in the locations we searched. Summer sightings of adults in 2018 were very few and far between – for the second successive year and despite the tremendous weather. This is always a difficult species to see but it has been especially elusive during these last two summers, even in its known hotspots.

However... all that changed on 27 September when **Stephen Reisbach**, a keen egg searcher from the Surrey region, visited our area and set about searching for Brown Hairstreak eggs. His search centred on Lower Moor, just to the east of Pershore, and fairly quickly he found four eggs in what was then the most southerly recorded location for our Worcestershire colony. This discovery was quite unexpected as it was somewhat further south than any previous finds, but the biggest surprise was what was to follow over the subsequent weeks, as a result of his initial find.

Searching unrecorded grid squares

Spurred on by Stephen's discovery, our small team of winter egg searchers – 'The Thursday Streakers' – began searching all previously unrecorded 1km grid squares within striking distance of the initial find.

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The closest egg found to Pershore (Jean Young)

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Incredibly, over the following six weeks, we found eggs in 18 further 'new squares' (19 if we include Stephen's). This total of new squares is three more than we've found in the four previous winters combined! And we were still only at 8 November, a date when we're often just starting our winter searches.

All but four of these 19 new squares are in the area around Drakes Broughton, Pershore, Wyre Piddle, Lower Moor and Fladbury, in the extreme south of the known distribution, and it is very encouraging that some of these new finds have been on land belonging to other conservation bodies like the Friends of Avon Meadows and the Vale Landscape Heritage Trust. This is always good as there is a higher likelihood of appropriate blackthorn management being sustained, which will help numbers to increase. Theories abound as to what the background is to these finds. It seems that the species definitely had a 'dispersal year' in 2018 where, for some as-yet-unknown reason, the butterfly left its usual hotspots and flew out into the surrounding countryside, laying eggs there and hence establishing new territories. But equally, with this many finds over a reasonably wide area, it seems extremely unlikely that all this new territory could have been colonised in just one summer. This raises the likelihood that colonies have existed down here for several years but have been overlooked, due to not having been egg-searched because, in turn, we never imagined it could have reached this far south.

Expanding our search into new areas

It's intriguing that, prior to the Brown Hairstreak's re-discovery in 1969/70 around Grafton Wood, the previous last known evidence for the butterfly in Worcestershire is from an adult – now preserved in the

Rothschild collection at the Natural History museum in London – dated 1891 and with a given location of 'Persnore'. However, it is stretching the imagination to conclude that the butterfly has existed, unrecorded, from the Persnore region from 1891 until this year, and there would need to be many more discoveries of large volumes of eggs in that area, to begin to suggest that as a possibility.

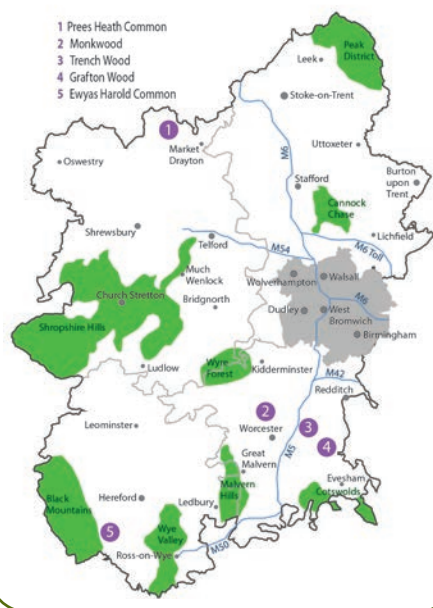
Nevertheless, it all represents a fantastic start to the egg-searching season – which is still very young – and plenty more areas remain to be searched this winter, so we will see – watch this space!!

We would love more people to get involved with our winter egg-searching, so if you would like to join the 'Thursday Streakers', be it every week or just once in a while, then please get in touch.

Article by **Simon Primrose** Species Champion for Brown Hairstreak. simonjprimrose@aol.com

Map of the West Midlands Nature Reserves

A reader suggested that we include a map showing the Branch's reserves and other locations in our region. We hope you'll find this useful.



Butterflies of Australia



Ulysses Swallowtail (© Lorraine Harris)

This view from one of the stops on the cable car to Kuranda gives some idea of the extent of the rainforest in Northern Queensland and a hint of its diversity.

Nick Williams shares some highlights of a trip to Queensland

The ancient continent of Australia has as distinctive a butterfly fauna as it has of mammals or lizards. A total of 416 species are found there, including 18 species only on outlying islands. Tropical Queensland, which is about the same size as the United Kingdom, has 271 species, 68% of the total, with three **Birdwings** among 35 **Papilionids**, mostly **Swallowtails**, probably the most spectacular butterflies in Australia. The **Ulysses Swallowtail**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ►



Indigo Flash

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25 ►

or **Mountain Blue** is one of the state symbols of Queensland and features in many advertisements.

Butterfly families

There are 81 butterflies in the Nymphalids, about 20% of the total, but there is only one that we would recognise as a **Fritillary**. There are many **Browns, Tigers, Crows** and **Planes**.

The two biggest families represented in the Aussie butterfly fauna are **Skippers**, with just under a third overall, and **Blues** and **Hairstreaks** with just over a third. Many of the 121 **Skippers** are like our European golden skippers but here there are some very different names to contend with: **Palm Darts, Grass Darts, Sedge-skippers, Ochres, Awls** and **Flats**. The **Blues** and **Hairstreaks** are also known by many unfamiliar epithets: **Pea-blues, Grass-blues, Line-blues, Opals, Dusky**

Blues, Pencil-blues, Flashes, Azures, Oak-blues, Moonbeams, Jewels, Forest Blues and **Ant Blues**. Many of these, as the last name implies, are associated with ant species, just as some of our European blues are (here often with the Green Tree Ant).

Habitats

More than a hundred species are found only in Rainforest, and another 60 are associated with Rainforest. The Cape York Peninsula, sticking up towards New Guinea like a finger at the northern end of Australia's east coast, has 226 species alone, in an area about the same size as Scotland.

My wife and I have visited Australia only twice and only for a week at a time, in transit to visit family in New Zealand, both times staying mainly in tropical North Queensland.

Good hunting grounds for butterflies have been the Botanical Gardens in Sydney (also with the



Cruiser - male



Cruiser - female

Rustic, Lurcher, Red Lacewing, Varied Eggfly, White-spotted Flash and **Orange Bush Brown** listed there.



Lurcher - male

Daintree Rainforest

In the Daintree Rainforest, on two excellent half-day wildlife tours with Odyssey Bound Tours four years apart, very few butterflies were seen, with **Orange Bush Brown** and **Union Jack** or **Red-banded Jezebel** to the fore. The latter, like many of the true rainforest species, tends to fly high above the ground in the mid to upper canopy where its larval food plant, a Mistletoe, can be found.

The **Indigo Flash**, a blue with the tails and dark spot of a hairstreak, was seen at Kuranda, where more **Ulysses Swallowtails** glided past. This village, well known for its craft markets is accessible by road, but it is much better to arrive by cable car (from near the coast road north of Cairns) to get at least an inkling of the diversity here. As you float upwards over the canopy, you can see the different kinds of forest below you from the drier eucalypt woodland near the base station to areas with abundant climbing palms or various epiphytes and parasites like Mistletoes.

best view of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge) and Cairns, although we have seen only a small fraction of the latter.

The only **Skipper** that I have had a reasonable view of was in Sydney, a **Grass Dart**, but the photograph is too poor to reproduce here. The Cairns Botanical Gardens was rather more rewarding, with several **Ulysses Swallowtails** patrolling main rides and **Cruiser, Bordered**

Australian Butterfly Sanctuary

At the top end of Kuranda village is the Australian Butterfly Sanctuary, the largest in the southern hemisphere, and well worth visiting to get those close-up views of the spectacular **Birdwings** and **Swallowtails**. The Sanctuary breeds its own stock

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Dates for your diary

40th anniversary events

Mon 3 Jun – Thu 6 Jun: Northern Ireland trip. Contact Mel Mason: 01684 565700 or malverngrayling@btinternet.com

For following events, contact Mike Williams: 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Sat 15 Jun, 9am: Moth Morning at Ashwood Nurseries, Kingswinford, with Mike Williams and Tom Woodall.

Sun 23 Jun, 9am: Moth Breakfast at Monkwood reserve with Mike Southall and Mike Williams, followed at 11am by butterfly walk. Bacon rolls available.

Sat 29 Jun, 11am: High Brown Fritillary field trip to South Wales. Advance booking required.

Sun 30 Jun, 11am – 4pm: Garden Open Day 'From Oilseed Rape to Orchids' The Red House, Eldersfield, Worcestershire (courtesy of Mr & Mrs Keith Turner). Bring own picnic lunch. Refreshments and cake provided. Advance booking required.

Fri 5 Jul – Sun 7 Jul: 'Go Wild in Sussex'. Members weekend. Advance booking required.

Wed 10 Jul, 11am: Guided Walk in the Wyre Forest followed by a Big Butterfly Picnic. Meet Hawkbatch car park on B4194 Bewdley-Kinlet road. Advance booking required.

Sat 13 Jul, 9am: Moth morning with Tony Simpson followed at 11am by guided walk at Trench Wood with Peter Seal.

Ewyas Harold Reserve and Common Work Parties

Saturdays: 19 Jan, 16 Feb, 16 Mar, 13 Apr

Contact Sue Young: 01981 240776, yellowrattle4@aol.com

Tuesdays: 15 Jan, 5 Feb, 26 Feb, 12 Mar, 2 Apr

Contact Lucy Morton: 07503 220191 or lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org

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). Some hand tools will be provided but, if you have your own, do bring them.

Field Trip

Sat 4 May, 2pm: Llanymynech Rock. Meet at car park off A483 from Pant village (SJ272219).

Leader: Simon Spencer (joint event with North Wales Branch).

Field Studies Council Courses

Tutor: Dave Grundy; Location: Bishops Wood, Crossway Green, Stourport, Worcestershire.

Book online at www.field-studies-council.org/naturalhistory.

Sat 1 Jun: Daytime Moths of Worcestershire (£50).

Sat 15 Jun: Larger Micro-moths of Worcestershire (£50).

Sat 6 Jul – Sun 7 Jul: Smaller Micro-moths of Worcestershire (£100).

Garden Open Day

Tue 25 Jun and Sat 29 Jun, 9 – 11am: Abbey Road, Malvern. Tea and coffee available (voluntary donation to the Branch). Booking essential – numbers strictly limited. Contact John Lane at johnslane@btinternet.com

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Egg Searches

Saturdays: 26 Jan, 10am at Grafton Flyford Church. Contact Simon Primrose: 07952 260153 or simonjprimrose@aol.com

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wednesday until 27 Mar, 10am at Grafton Flyford Church. Contact John Tilt: 01386 792458 or john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

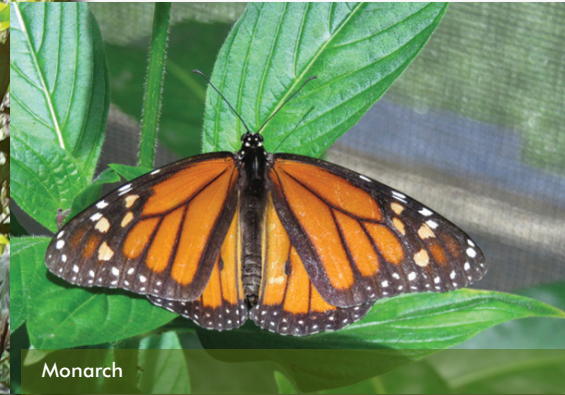
Haugh Wood Work Parties

Saturdays: 5 Jan, 2 Feb, 2 Mar, 10am in the reserve car park on minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope (SO592365). Contact Kate Wollen (07786 526280) or Robin Hemming (07501 020605)

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust Talks

Thu 31 Jan, 7.30pm: Herefordshire Butterflies, Martyn Davies, Aymestrey Village Hall.

Thu 7 Feb, 7.30pm: Herefordshire Butterflies, Rhona Goddard, Weobley Village Hall.



Monarch

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of Cairns and New Guinea Birdwings, and of course Ulysses Swallowtail.

Several species (including Cairns Birdwing and Cruiser) show sexual dimorphism, where the male and female look very different, and others demonstrate mimicry (such as Bordered Rustic and Lurcher).

That great migrant, the Monarch, is also found in Australia, breeding more or less continuously in Queensland and further south migrating to limited areas near Sydney and in South Australia to overwinter. Further north there are other migrants amongst the Pierids, rather like our Clouded Yellows.

But the Birdwings are the stars – the female Cairns Birdwing has a wingspan of 150mm (six inches), the male an inch less. At Kuranda, I watched a newly released female fluttering along a path in the Sanctuary while a male looped the loop around her in his desire to get her to mate with him. Unforgettable!

Article and photographs (except Ulysses Swallowtail) by Nick Williams



Cairns Birdwing

A view through the dense growth in the Daintree Rainforest, probably the oldest such forest on Earth, dating back 40 million years. Plenty of time for diversity to develop!

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Honeybourne Work Party (Grizzled Skipper site)
Sun 10 Mar, 10am at the bridge above the disused railway (SP127441) on road between Honeybourne and Mickleton. **Contact Peter Seal: 01905 426398 or peterseal3@btinternet.com**

Malvern Grayling Work Parties

Mondays: 14 Jan, 11 Feb, 10am in North Hill Quarry car park, WR14 4LT (SO 771847) Tea and coffee provided but bring your own lunch if staying all day. **Contact Mel Mason: 01684 565700 or malverngrayling@btinternet.com**

Monkwood Work Parties

1st Sundays: 6 Jan, 3 Feb, 3 Mar.
Contact George Groves: 01905 620721, george_groves@btopenworld.com
3rd Thursdays: 17 Jan, 21 Feb, 21 Mar.
Contact Phil Adams: 01905 610830 or padamsrainbow@gmail.com
10am in the reserve car park (SO803603).

Ockeridge Wood Work Party

Sun 7 Apr: Meet at 10am in lay by at top of bridleway leading to Monkwood (SO794617). **Contact Mike Williams: 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com**

Prees Heath Common Work Parties

Wednesdays: 16 Jan, 13 Feb 10.30am on the access track opposite the Steel Heath turning off the A49 (SJ557363)
 Silver-studded Blue caterpillar-attended-by-ants hunt:
Wed 29 May, 10.30am-12.30pm
 Silver-studded Blue guided walk:
Sun 30 Jun, 2pm (former RAF control tower open 10.30am-4pm). **Contact Stephen Lewis: 07900 886809 or phwarden@sky.com**

Recorders' Meetings

Sat 26 Jan, 10am – 4pm: UK Moth Recorders, Birmingham & Midland Institute, advance booking on www.butterfly-conservation.org, £10.
Tue 5 Feb: Herefordshire Moth Recorders, The Swan Inn, 171 Aylestone Hill, Hereford, HR1 1JJ, meal at 7pm (numbers needed by 2 Feb), meeting at 8.15pm. **Contact Robin Hemming: 07501 020605 or robinhemming@btinternet.com**
Sat 30 Mar, 10am – 4pm: UK Butterfly Recorders, Birmingham & Midland Institute, advance booking on www.butterfly-conservation.org, £10.

Thu 4 Apr, 2pm: Wyre Forest Recorders, Discovery Centre, Callow Hill: for all those interested in helping with butterfly survey and monitoring work in 2019.

Scarlet Tiger Project Work Parties, Stourbridge

Every 3rd Friday: 18 Jan, 15 Feb, 15 Mar 10am at a location posted on the notice board at the northern (crematorium) end of Roman Road.
Contact Joy Stevens: 01384 372397 or joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk

Trench Wood Work Parties

4th Sundays: 27 Jan, 24 Feb, 24 /31 Mar (TBC) 10am in the reserve car park (SO930588)
Contact John Holder: 01905 794854 or johnholder@tiscali.co.uk

Trench Wood Guided Walk

Saturday 13 Jul (part of the Big Butterfly Count) **11am** in the reserve car park (SO930588)
 Target species Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral. **Contact Peter Seal: 01905 426398 or peterseal3@btinternet.com**

Wyre Forest Work Parties

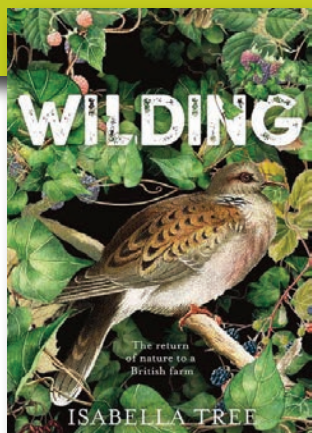
Sundays: 13 Jan, 10 Feb, 10am in Earnwood Copse car park on the B4194 Bewdley to Kinlet road (SO744784).
Tuesdays: 22 Jan, 26 Feb, 26 Mar
22 Jan: 10am in Dry Mill Lane car park, Bewdley, at the start of the disused railway line.
26 Feb, 26 Mar: 10am in Earnwood Copse car park as above.
 The Tuesday dates are joint events with Natural England – tea and coffee provided.
Contact Mike Williams: 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Wood White Project Work Parties

If you plan to come to any of these, please **contact Rhona Goddard: 01746 762364 or rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org**
Siege Wood, Herefordshire: 10am – 3pm,
Thu 10 Jan, Siege Wood car park (SO605343).
 • Blakeridge Wood, Shropshire: **10am – 3pm,**
Sun 20 Jan, Blakeridge Wood car park (SO295866).
 • Joint work party with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust:
10am – 3pm, Tue 5 Feb, 9.45am in the Wessington Wood and Pasture car park (SO603353), then car-share to Nupend (parking there is limited).
 • Bury Ditches, Shropshire: **10am – 3pm,**
Sun 17 Feb, Bury Ditches car park (SO331837),
 BBQ provided courtesy of the Forestry Commission.

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Wilding. The return of nature to a British farm

• ISBN: 9781509805099 • Authors: Isabella Tree • Publisher: Picador • Publication date: 3 May 2018 • Cost: £20

In 1987, Charlie Burrell inherited the 3,500 acre Knepp Estate in West Sussex where his grandparents had farmed dairy cattle and mixed arable crops for 40 years. The farm was losing money, and continued to lose money despite diversification, until 2000 when Charlie and his wife Isabella decided to take a different path. All the farm machinery was sold off and 11 men lost their jobs. *Wilding* is the extraordinary account of the transformation of Knepp over the 18 years that followed.

Mindful of agricultural intensification and increasing dependency on chemicals, and the shocking statistics of its impact on wildlife, they visited Oostvaardersplassen near Amsterdam. This nature reserve, covering 6000 hectares of land reclaimed in the 1970s and 1980s from a huge freshwater lake, is now a Ramsar site – a wetland of international importance for nature – and also one of the most controversial. In the early years of the reserve, instead of human management to prevent the progression from scrub to closed

canopy woodland, free-roaming grazing animals were introduced. Some management (culling) has been necessary in recent years when herd populations outstripped the food supply, but the principle of non-intervention has remained otherwise unchanged. Charlie and Isabella were inspired to follow this new approach to conservation and introduce rewilding to the Knepp Estate.

With funding from the Countryside Stewardship scheme, they were able to ring-fence part of the estate and bring in fallow deer, followed in later years by Old English Longhorns, Exmoor ponies, Tamworth pigs and Red deer. By 2009, the whole estate was ring-fenced for grazing animals.

Wildlife returned in astonishing numbers – Turtle Doves, breeding Skylarks and Woodlarks, Snipe, Ravens, Redwings, Lesser Redpolls and 13 out of the 17 species of bat known in the UK – but most astonishing of all has been the Purple Emperor butterfly. Two were seen by Matthew Oates in 2009 and, by 2017, the numbers had increased to 148, establishing Knepp as the largest breeding colony in the country, larger than the legendary

Fermyn Woods. It seems that the Sallow, self-seeded in great profusion at Knepp, shows remarkable biodiversity in the leaves, especially the kind favoured by the Purple Emperor for egg-laying. It also seems that the butterfly, flying in such high numbers in open-grown oaks and Sallow scrub may no longer be described as a woodland species. A

...but most astonishing of all has been the Purple Emperor butterfly. Two were seen by Matthew Oates in 2009 and, by 2017, the numbers had increased to 148, establishing Knepp as the largest breeding colony in the country, larger than the legendary Fermyn Woods.

fascinating insight into the adaptability and complexity of nature once it is free of human intervention.

Isabella Tree writes with passion and conviction, taking us through the various stages of the experiment, from the initial horror of neighbouring farmers to the point in 2018 when the soil has restored itself and plants, animals, birds and insects are thriving. When we hear so much about the bleak prospect for wildlife in the UK and worldwide, *Wilding* is a breath of fresh air, one of the few nature books that offer hope in our dark times.

Article by Sue Brooks