

the **Comm**a

No. 106 Spring 2020

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation



Moth of the Year:
the Clifden Nonpareil

Value of Recording:
your sightings matter

Bringing *butterflies and moths* back to Britain •

www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

NEW

4-PAGE EVENT
PULLOUT



Peter Seal

Chairman's Address

Annual General Meeting

We held our Branch AGM on 29 February. An important topic was changes in personnel.

Lucy Lewis stood down as Treasurer, after almost five years of excellent service. Some of you will know that Lucy had a major operation last year and, while she has recovered, her rehabilitation is very slow. We wish her all the best for the future.

We also marked **Jenny Joy's** departure from her post, after 17

years of service with Butterfly Conservation. However, I'm pleased to say Jenny wishes to remain actively involved and will become a Branch Committee member.

We have recently learned that **Rhona Goddard** has been appointed as Regional Conservation Manager. As her post will cover the whole of the Midlands, right across to Lincolnshire, we'll be exploring with Rhona the implications of this wider role. We need to know in particular how we maintain hands-on support and how we secure the next phase of the **Wood White** project. Congratulations to Rhona for taking on this challenging post.

We heard from **John Tilt** as to how species fared in 2019 (see page 11), based on the scientific evidence of transect and casual records, including a new species on our patch. We'll have to rewrite our regional book!

As an aside, my personal highlight was a **Humming-bird Hawk-moth**, just around the corner from where I live. I was surprised to find it nectaring in a front garden on the main road at 7.30am on 10 October 2019. A close second was the Wood White which, although slightly down on numbers, has maintained its progress and rewarded all those who have worked to help it prosper.

Moths of the West Midlands

Last time, I wrote about the money pledged by sponsors and the Branch

Cover story

Mike Southall captures the camouflage of the Clifden Nonpareil, a moth that's becoming more common in our region (see page 6).

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
Winter - 30 November
(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

@WestMidlands_BC

Branch website address

www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk



Places for Pollinators update

A site we didn't mention in the last issue is Brinton Park in Kidderminster. Volunteers planted a new bed in May 2019 and **Mike Williams** sent this photo showing the new information board.

to enable this book to become a viable project. I've now signed the contract with Pisces Publications and the Committee will be organising a publicity drive to maximise income from the sales. The editorial board is on course to publish in late Spring. Remember to take advantage of the pre-publication offer before 31 May: £15 (+ £4 p&p), a saving of £7.50.

Bike for Butterflies Challenge

You can read about another initiative on page 26: Simon Saville's Bike for Butterflies Challenge from Land's End to John O'Groats. This will start on 10 June and last four weeks. Simon plans to pass through our area in mid-June and welcomes our support, whether by holding local events or joining him for part of the ride.

Conservation projects

The Branch's financial situation allows us to consider supporting some conservation projects. The Committee has agreed to put more into the Wood White project in various locations. Two new sites in Herefordshire are also possible candidates for projects: the Common next to our Ewyas Harold Meadow Reserve and Bringsty Common. Bringsty used to hold **High Brown Fritillaries** and, although these have long gone, the Manorial Court that manages the common is keen on a partnership with the Branch to enhance the environment for butterflies and other insects.

Indeed, while we have a stake

in five reserves in the West Midlands, it's equally important to care for other sites. Sometimes one or two work parties a year can make all the difference. At Knightwick, where a few years ago Dinky Skippers colonised a roadside verge, we're collaborating with the County Council to improve the habitat – Trevor Bucknall's article in the Winter 2019/2020 *Comma* described efforts to help the same species on a landfill site.

Fraud warning

Sadly, to end on a negative note, I need to say something about the bombardment of bogus emails from fraudsters, particularly attempts at fraudulent bank transfer requests. We've experienced several instances where email requests for phone calls appeared to come from colleagues. The senders usually adopt someone's name and write from a new account so, if an email looks odd, it's worth first checking the sender's email address. Most of these emails can be ignored and some internet service providers have a facility for reporting them. However, occasionally, the fraudster has managed to hack in and take over the correct email address, which requires action by the internet service provider.



River of Flowers update

The Whittington and Fisherwick environmental group has continued to work on public spaces in the two villages over the winter.

Lynn Beal sent this photo of their latest project.

Despite these challenges, I can assure you that the Branch keeps a close eye on your money. This takes me on to my final piece of news, my change of role from Chair to Treasurer, which will make good use of experience I've gained recently. Our new Chair is **Mike Southall**, with support from **Mel Mason** as Vice Chair, and you'll hear from Mike next time.

.....
Peter Seal Branch Chair



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Branch launches **NEW**



Example of a macro-moth spread

Moths of the West Midlands

This much-anticipated book is now with the publisher, Pisces Publications, and publication is scheduled for late Spring 2020.

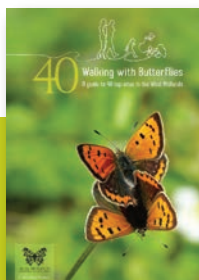
The book is intended to promote awareness and interest in moths and to encourage more recording. It is packed with photos of over 600 macro-moths and 250 micro-moths, as shown in the example spreads. It includes sections on notable moth species in our area, the top places to look for moths, gardening for moths, recording techniques and how

to get involved.

This is a must have, both for all those wishing to begin moth recording and for the experienced recorder.

Wyre Forest Speciality Moths

As part of the book launch celebrations, **Dave Grundy** will be running a course from 10am to 4pm on Sunday 28 June at the Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve. Entitled 'Wyre Forest Speciality Moths', this course is aimed at people who have beginner or intermediate



Get prepared for the new season

We still have copies of the Branch's anniversary publication, *Walking with Butterflies*, a guide to 40 top butterfly sites in the West Midlands. It is £5.95 per copy, plus £1.50 p&p per order. Send a cheque made payable to Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch, to WMBC, Annesbrook, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB.

book with a special event

  			FAMILY GELECHIIDAE (86 species) Synopacma larseniella White-strap Sober Common resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD May-July. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On greater bird's-foot-trefoil, April-June. ■ WINGSPAN 11-14mm.	35.003 (844)
 			Anacamptis populella Poplar Sober Common resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD June-August. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On willows, aspen and other poplars, May/June. ■ WINGSPAN 14-19mm.	35.011 (833)
 			Dichomeris ustulella Worcester Crest Rare local resident in Shawley Wood, Worcestershire (side view left [DW]). ■ FLIGHT PERIOD May-July. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On small-leaved lime, August/September. ■ WINGSPAN 15-20mm.	35.023 (864)
 			Bryotropha terrella Cinerous Neb Common resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD June-August. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On mosses and grasses, September-March. ■ WINGSPAN 14-16mm.	35.040 (787)
 			Athrips mouffetella Dotted Grey Groundling Fairly common resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD June-August. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS In spinning on leaves of honeysuckle, May/June. ■ WINGSPAN 14-17mm.	35.085 (762)
 			Mirifkarma lentiginosella Greenweed Groundling Uncommon resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD July/August. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On dyer's greenweed, May/June. ■ WINGSPAN 12-17mm.	35.092 (879)
 			Scrobipalpa costella Winter Groundling Fairly common resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD May/June and July-October. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On bitter-sweet, May-September. ■ WINGSPAN 14mm.	35.123 (879)
 			Caryocolum proxima Meadow Groundling Rare resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD July. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS On flowerheads and seed capsules of chickweed, May. ■ WINGSPAN 9-15mm.	35.135 (831)
 			Caryocolum junctella Confluent Groundling Rare resident in Wyre Forest. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD August-April. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS In shoots of lesser stitchwort, May/June. ■ WINGSPAN 10mm.	35.138 (833)
			Teleiodes luculella Crescent Groundling Common resident. ■ FLIGHT PERIOD May. ■ LARVAL FOODPLANTS Between oak leaves, September/October. ■ WINGSPAN 11mm.	35.143 (774)

22 Moths of the West Midlands

Example of a micro-moth spread

moth identification skills and want to learn more about the speciality species occurring at this exceptional ancient woodland site. The venue will be the Wyre Forest Discovery Centre at Callow Hill, near Bewdley, Worcestershire, DY14 9XQ (grid ref SO750740).

We'll be looking at Wyre Forest moths caught the night before. If weather conditions are good, species seen may include **Satin Lutestring**, **Common Fan-foot**, **Bilberry Pug**, **Great Oak Beauty** and the stunning micro-moth *Oecophora bractella*.

With a maximum of 15 participants, early booking is

advised – contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com. When your booking request has been acknowledged, send a cheque for just £15, made payable to Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch, to WMBC, Annesbrook, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB. A free parking pass, courtesy of Forestry England, will be sent to course participants.

Article by Ian Duncan.



Finally, turn to page 28 for a review of the new *Atlas of Britain & Ireland's Larger Moths*, advertised in the last Comma and available from www.naturebureau.co.uk/atlas-of-britain-irelands-larger-moths.

West Midlands Moth

Clifton Nonpareil (*Catocala fraxini*), also known as the **Blue Underwing**, comes out top in 2019.

Description

This huge, beautiful and spectacular moth has long been only a dream for many of us in the West Midlands. It was resident in the Norfolk Broads in the 1930s and in Kent from the 1930s to early 1960s. It then became only an irregular migrant, mostly in eastern and southern English counties, with scattered records elsewhere in the UK.

Clifton Nonpareil larvae feed from May to July on Aspen and possibly other Poplar species. The adults fly from August to early October, with the female laying eggs which overwinter and hatch in spring. The species is attracted to light, sugar mixtures and wine ropes at night, and has been found resting in the day on walls and tree trunks like its smaller relative, the **Red Underwing** (*Catocala nupta*), which is itself one of our largest resident moths!

The larvae are amazingly well camouflaged, resting along twigs of Aspen in the day and feeding at night. They spend most of their first few days of life climbing rapidly – it is easy to lose them at this time when breeding them from eggs. Although eggs are now available to purchase online, and some records could refer to specimens that have been bred in captivity and released, most of the very large number of recent records must be genuinely wild.



Underwings, Blue (left) and Red (right) (Mike Southall)

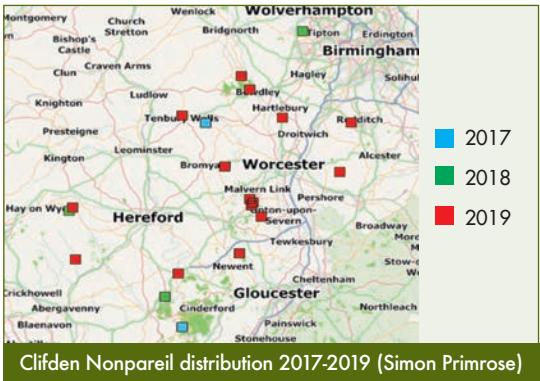


Clifton Nonpareil adult (Jon Cartwright)

of the Year



Clifden Nonpareil larva (Mike Southall)



Clifden Nonpareil distribution 2017-2019 (Simon Primrose)

Sightings in the UK

This century, the Clifden Nonpareil has been occurring more and more frequently as a migrant and is now resident again in parts of southern and eastern England. It is spreading northwards with over 50 in Warwickshire in 2019, including nine on one night in Welford Wood and four on two different nights in Oversley Wood, suggesting it is probably now resident in parts of that county.

There have been small but increasing numbers of records in the West Midlands. In 2017, there was one on 24 September at Highwood, Eastham in Worcestershire (**K Willetts**) and another on the same night, just across the Teme at Burford in Shropshire. In 2018, on 30 July (a very early date), one specimen was found on a path in Baggeridge in Staffordshire (**S Gallis**) and two at Dorstone in the Golden Valley in Herefordshire (**R Birchenough**); then, on 11 October, there was another at Whitchurch in Herefordshire (**J Walshe**).

In 2019, from late August to early October, there seems to have been a sudden influx into the region, and Worcestershire and Herefordshire in particular (see table). No doubt there will be other records that county moth recorders haven't yet received (none from Staffordshire as yet).

Location	Number	Date	Recorder
Hereford			
Bridstow	1	19/8	R Clements
Longtown	1	21/9	P Matthews
Colwall	1	21/9	H Stace
Longtown	1	23/9	P Matthews
Great Doward	2	26/9	I Draycott
Dorstone	1	3/10	R Birchenough
Bringsty Common	1	5/10	P Hall
Worcestershire			
Wyre Forest	1	22/8	M Singleton, S Wright
West Malvern	1	10/9	S Avery
Abberton	1	10/9	G Peplow
Redditch	1	11/9	J Rush
Darkham Wood	1	13/9	R Benson-Bunch
Welland	1	4/10	N & L Harris
Abberton	1	5/10	G Peplow
Malvern	1	11/10	R Comont
Norchard	1	15/10	M Southall
Greater Birmingham area of VC38 (Warwickshire)			
Redditch	1	13/9	R Harbird
Solihull	1	14/9	C Workman
Studley	1	22/9	J Kirk
Shropshire			
Kinlet	1	6/10	J Cartwright

Sightings were widely scattered across the southern part of the West Midlands, from Redditch in the east to Longtown in the west, near the Welsh border. They were probably all migrants, possibly many or all from established populations within the UK rather than from abroad, with no

confirmed breeding in our area so far. However some of the females involved may well have laid eggs and, hopefully, 2020 will see this magnificent insect become a resident species and continue to move further northwards.

Article by **Tony Simpson**



Six-spot Burnet (Oliver Wadsworth)



Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet (Patrick Clement)



Cinnabar (Patrick Clement)



Mother Shipton (Oliver Wadsworth)



Burnet Companion (Patrick Clement)



Scarlet Tiger (Patrick Clement)

The Great Moth Challenge

With 2020 being designated the Year of the Moth by West Midlands Butterfly Conservation, and our new moth book being published this Spring, it's time to get mothly!

At the Annual Moth Recorders Day in Birmingham last January, a speaker mentioned that it was very noticeable how under-recorded day-flying moths are during the preparation of the national moth atlas (reviewed on page 32). This is a generalisation, of course, but it seems that many moth recorders are only active after dark and few butterfly enthusiasts record the moths they come across during the day. This is a great pity – many day-flying moths are every bit as attractive

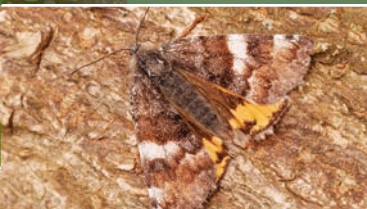
as butterflies and their presence often indicates good quality habitat that will support many other species of interesting, and sometimes rare, invertebrates.

What to look for

So, for 2020, we have selected 12 reasonably widespread and easily recognised day-flying moths that we'd like people to record. They fly at different times of the year and are found in a range of habitats, but it should



Hummingbird Hawk-moth
(Graham Mounteney)



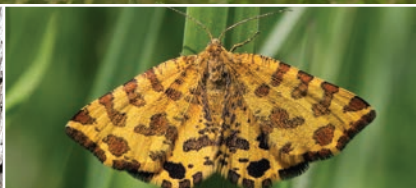
Orange Underwing (Oliver Wadsworth)



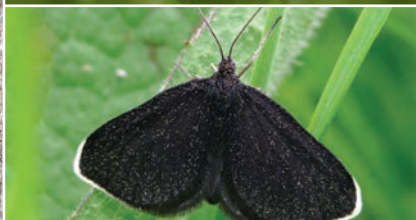
Emperor Moth, Female (Patrick Clement)



Emperor Moth, Male (Patrick Clement)



Speckled Yellow (Patrick Clement)



Chimney Sweeper (Patrick Clement)

- are you up for it?

be possible to see them all over the course of the season. For those wanting more of a challenge, we've selected a further five moths that will need more effort to locate.

The 12 core species are:

- Six-spot Burnet
- Narrow-bordered Fivespot Burnet
- Cinnabar
- Mother Shipton
- Burnet Companion
- Scarlet Tiger
- Hummingbird Hawk-moth

- Orange Underwing,
- Emperor Moth
- Speckled Yellow
- Chimney Sweeper
- Common Heath

The five harder species are:

- Forester
- Clouded Buff
- Argent & Sable
- Any Clearwing
- Drab Looper

Our new book, available from www.naturebureau.co.uk/bookshop, offers lots of information on where these species might be found and how to look for them. Order before 31 May to take advantage of the pre-publication offer: £15 (+ £4 p&p), a saving of £7.50.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►



Common Heath Female (Patrick Clement)



Common Heath Male (Patrick Clement)



Forester (Vlad Proklov)



Clouded Buff (Patrick Clement)



Argent & Sable (Bob Eade)



Currant Clearwing (Oliver Wadsworth)



Orange-tailed Clearwing
(Oliver Wadsworth)



Red-tipped Clearwing
(Oliver Wadsworth)



Six-belted Clearwing (Oliver Wadsworth)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9 ►

How to report your sightings

For every species found, we need to know the date, how many moths are seen and a grid reference for the location. All records will be passed on to our county moth recorders. Please submit your records via iRecord using this link: www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/join/wm-branch-day-flying-moths

Are you up for the Challenge?

It should be fun but, hopefully, it will also produce some valuable new records for the region. You could also seek sponsorship for the number of species you find to raise money for West Midlands Butterfly Conservation at the same time, but this is not a condition of taking part!

Article by **Mike Williams**



Drab Looper (Patrick Clement)

Butterfly records 2019

Transect records

Transect recording generates detailed records for a site over the whole season. Butterflies are recorded in a fixed-width band (typically 5m wide) along the transect each week from the beginning of April until the end of September yielding, ideally, 26 counts per year. Transects are walked between 10.45am and 3.45pm, and only when the weather is suitable for butterfly activity (a combination of temperature, sunshine and wind speed). Once a transect has been walked for five consecutive years, the resulting data can be used to calculate population trends.

In 2019, 73 transects were walked in our region – the highest number ever, representing an estimated 3800 volunteer-hours – and 42 of those have now been walked for the last five years. The total number of butterflies counted was 106,978, which equates to 134,978 when we allow for missed weeks.

Distribution of species

The top 11 species account for 80% of our butterfly sightings, shaded in blue on the chart. Species less often seen are shaded in red – some of these have been designated as our Regional Conservation Strategy species.

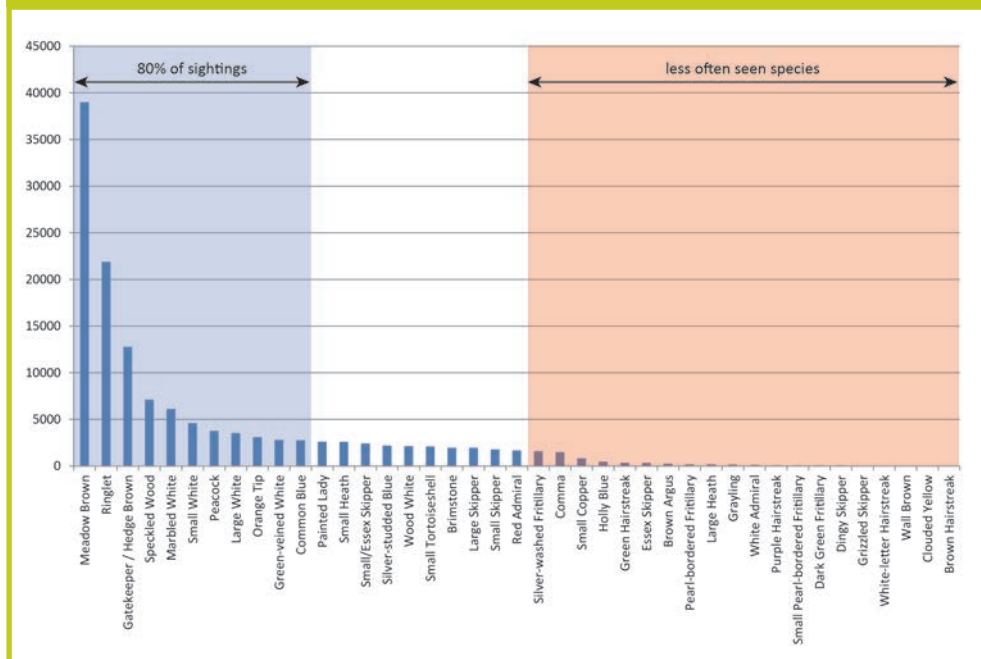
Population trends

Using the regularly walked transects, we can calculate population trends. However, year-by-year variations can be considerable and so we have to establish whether apparent trends are significant. We publish a five-year trend chart for each butterfly species on our website (westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk/species/butterflies).

It was a good year for our 42 regularly walked transects, with most species showing increases. Some

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

2019 Distribution of Species





Male Meadow Brown
(Tim Melling)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11 ►

of our rare species, such as **Brown Hairstreak**, **Grayling** and **Grizzled Skipper**, are not easy to assess from transect data. Instead, we use egg counts and timed counts, which are also shown on the website.

Casual records

Anyone can submit their sightings as casual records. We analyse these records to identify new sites for species, where we can then assess and manage the habitat. Such sites may then become the subject of the more structured transect approach.

To demonstrate the importance of this approach, 59325 casual sightings were submitted by 2918 recorders for our region in 2019. The sightings spanned 41 species and 133 10km map squares.

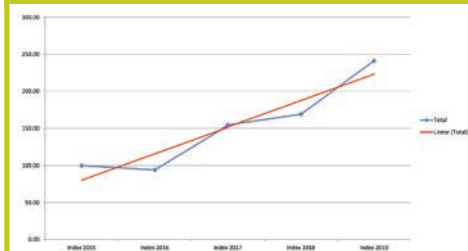
The most recorded species were **Meadow Brown**, **Small White**, **Speckled Wood**, **Gatekeeper** and **Peacock**. Least recorded were **Small Blue**, **Large Heath**, **Grayling**, **Grizzled Skipper** and **Wall**.

Worcestershire topped the list of most-recorded counties, with Staffordshire close behind and Shropshire in third place. As I reported in the Spring 2019 *Comma*, some map squares still have far below the expected number of species recorded and so we still need more casual recorders in more locations.

My analysis suggests that you can capture most of the species occurring in a 10km map square in only three visits each season. All you need to do is pick a warm and sunny day in the first week of May, the first week of July and the last week of August.

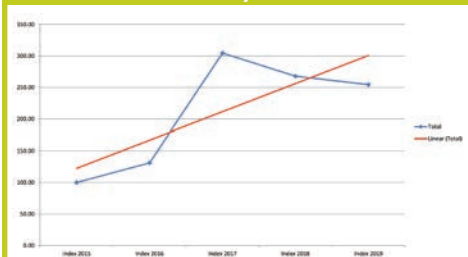
Article and graphs by **John Tilt**

1. Marbled White



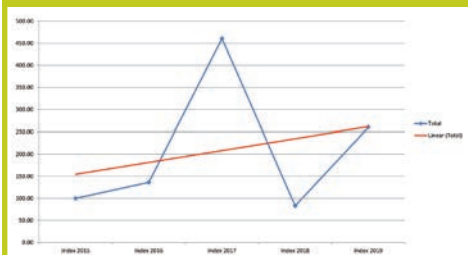
Graph 1: Marbled White has increased significantly

2. Holly Blue

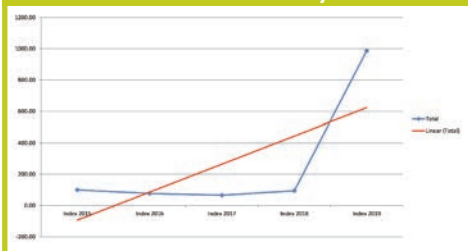


Graph 2: Holly Blue, which always varies from year to year, has also done well

3. Red Admiral

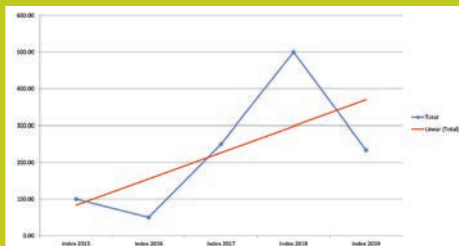


4. Painted Lady



Graphs 3 and 4: Red Admiral and Painted Lady, both migratory species, did well but this is not a trend as their numbers vary from year to year

5. White-letter Hairstreak



6. Wood White



Graphs 5 and 6: White-letter Hairstreak and Wood White have been increasing, the latter due to the Making a Stand for the Wood White project

7. Peacock



Graph 7: Good news for the Peacock, with signs of recovery after several years of sharp decline

8. All Species



Graph 8: Overall results for 2019 – a good year



The Branch adopted iRecord for submitting records in 2017. The iRecord website is hosted

by the national Biological Records Centre. It is easy to use and an app is also available.

To use iRecord:

- 1 Go to www.brc.ac.uk/irecord
- 2 Register your username and password
- 3 Click on the Record tab.
- 4 Select the type of record you want to submit.

You can view your own and other people's records using the Explore tab.

A record must contain four essential pieces of information:

- Who – name of the person who made the sighting
- What – butterfly species name, number seen and lifecycle stage
- Where – a place name and a grid reference (www.gridreferencefinder.com is a useful tool)
- When – the date

All records submitted are checked by designated verifiers for each area, who submit them to me at the end of the year:

- Birmingham and Black Country – Richard Southwell
- Staffordshire – John Bryan
- Worcestershire – Mike Williams and Mel Mason
- Shropshire – Tony Jacques
- Herefordshire – Bob Hall and Ian Draycott

To help with identification for recording over the coming season

ISBN: 9781874357728,
160 full colour pages,
price £18.95 and available
from www.nhbs.com and
www.naturebureau.co.uk.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Stepping Stones in South Shropshire

Supported by players of



Awarded funds from



Thanks to the generous support of players of People's Postcode Lottery, we have received an award to fund a community-based project in and around the Long Mynd and Stiperstones in South Shropshire.

The project is led by the National Trust and is designed to engage with the local community to enhance the wildlife and cultural heritage of this special landscape, from gardens and roadside

verges to farms, wildflower meadows, trees and wetlands. All of this has the potential to benefit a range of species of butterflies and moths.

The area is known to contain a number of sites where the **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** is present, principally in rush pastures and wet flushes. Marsh Violets are the caterpillar food plant and Marsh Thistle is the main source of nectar for the adults. Populations of this attractive butterfly have declined in recent years and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation plans to arrange a number of surveys and training events this summer

and habitat improvement days in the autumn and winter aimed at benefiting this species, as well as the **Dark Green Fritillary**. A fact sheet on Managing Rush Pasture that was published a few years ago will be revised and reprinted.

The project ends on 31 December 2020, but a key element of the work will be to plan future projects and associated funding for a long term vision of this area. We are most grateful to players of People's Postcode Lottery for their support.

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Article and photograph by
Stephen Lewis

For more information about the events and how you can get involved, please contact Stephen Lewis at pwarden@sky.com or on 07900 886809.

Welcome to our new event calendar!

If the Branch is to continue to help butterflies and moths, we want to encourage more members to become actively involved in its conservation work. We've decided to move our event news to a more prominent position in the centre of the magazine, in a form that can be pulled out and pinned up. We've sorted events by location and date, to make it easier to find the ones that are relevant to you.

The coronavirus situation was worsening when we went to print but, as our Spring issue covers the six months until October, we decided to proceed as planned. Obviously some events may have to be cancelled but we hope that things may be returning normal by the peak butterfly season. We will be providing regular updates on our website and Facebook pages - please check these before setting off. Most nature reserves, parks and open spaces will remain open and we hope that including details of our planned programme will encourage you as individuals to visit the places around the time given and record what you see. Please make sure you submit your records to iRecord but also share your photos and news of what you see on our social media sites. Meanwhile, let's all do everything we can to stay well.

Marian Newell, Editor

Birmingham and Black Country

City Nature Challenge - Birmingham and Black Country

Sun 26 Apr, 10am – Scarlet Tiger Project – north end of Roman Road bridle path (SO885834) This event is in conjunction with a global citizen science competition to record as much wildlife as possible in Birmingham and the Black Country boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton over four days. We're planning to record all wildlife along Roman Road/Sandy Lane, Stourbridge, for submission to

EcoRecord. A similar event is being run from Norton Covert, Stourbridge, by the Friends Group there (also meeting at 10am on 26 Apr). This is an exciting challenge and, if you live in Birmingham and the Black Country (even if you can't make the organised events), please get out and record all the wildlife you find locally – in your garden or on our favourite path. **For full details of how to help, visit the Challenge's Facebook page** (www.facebook.com/pg/BCCNC/events/) **or the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust's website** (www.bbcwildlife.org.uk).



City Nature Challenge 2020
Birmingham & Black Country
- Join the Challenge! -

This April, Birmingham and the Black Country is taking part in a global citizen science competition to see which of 250 cities can record the most wildlife over four days.

We need your help to record as many species in as many places as possible to move us up the global leaderboard.

Get Outside - explore your garden or local park and tell us what lives there!

Discover Nature - spot species you've never seen before and use the iNaturalist app to help you to identify them!

Do it for the Climate - the species data you collect as part of the challenge, will help us to understand more about local wildlife and the effect climate change is having on it.

Any wildlife spotted between 24th - 27th April counts towards our total!

Anyone can take part and it's as easy as 1, 2, 3!

- Download the iNaturalist App**
Download the free phone app and create an account. There is also a website version.
- Find Wildlife & photograph what you find**
It can be plants, insects, fungi or any evidence of wildlife such as tracks anywhere in Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall or Wolverhampton between 24th - 27th April.
- Upload your Observations**
Share your observations by uploading your photos to iNaturalist. All observations must be uploaded by 3rd May.

THE CITY NATURE CHALLENGE IS ORGANISED BY:      



CELEBRATING MOTHS

Sat 30 May, 10am–4pm,

Moth display and information table at Garden Open Day – Ashwood Nursery, near Kingswinford. **Contact: Mike Williams** (wmbutterflies@gmail.com)



CELEBRATING MOTHS

Sat 1 Aug, 9am, Moth Morning

followed by Butterfly Walk – Meet on the main lawn at Ashwood Nursery, near Kingswinford. Leader: Tom Woodall. **Contact: Mike Williams** (wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

Herefordshire

Tue 16 Jun, 10am – 1pm, Guided walk at Ewyas Harold Meadows Reserve. A walk to look at wildflowers, butterflies and day-flying moths. Meet at the junction of School Road and Dark Lane in Ewyas Harold Village. There is roadside parking in the village. The walk to the reserve will take 20 minutes. **Contact:** Lucy Morton (07503 220191 or lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org)

Sat 25 Jul, 2pm, Guided Walk at Haugh Wood. A walk of about two hours following the green trail. Children are welcome but must be accompanied by an adult. No dogs please. Meet at Forestry England car park off the minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope (SO593365). **Contact:** Bob Hall (01432 850623 or randphall@gmail.com)

Tue 29 Sep and Tue 13 Oct, 10am, Work parties at Ewyas Harold. Come and help us carry out practical habitat management on both the Common and the Meadows this winter – tasks will include cutting and burning scrub,

bracken and bramble. Meet 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. Bring gloves, lunch and a drink. **Contact:** Lucy Morton (07503 220191 or lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org)

Ewyas Harold Meadows is a 5 ha Butterfly Conservation reserve of unimproved grassland, including hay meadows and mature hedgerows. Bee Orchids, Dyers Greenweed and Lesser Centaury can be seen, as well many species of butterflies and other insects. The meadows lie adjacent to Ewyas Harold Common, one of the remaining sites to see Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in the spring.



Ewyas Harold - woodpile habitats

Staffordshire

Sun 31 May, Swynnerton Training Area – Butterfly-spotting Day. This site holds what are probably the region's largest populations of Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, with Brown Argus also making odd appearances and Marsh Pug being a good 'tick' for many. Sympathetic land management means great flora, too. Walk around all day or just for a couple of hours. Booking required (limited spaces). **Contact:** John Bryan (Johnpbryan15@aol.com)



CELEBRATING MOTHS Mon, 29 Jun and Mon, 13 Jul – Moth Morning, Rock

Houses, Kinver. Joint events with the National Trust. Bacon rolls available. Moth trap opening at 9am. **Leader:** Dave Smith.

Advance bookings to (0344 249 1895 or kinveredge@nationaltrust.org.uk)



Ewyas Harold - scrub clearance

Shropshire

Wed 20 May, 10am–3pm, Butterfly ID day at Mortimer Forest. Join expert local ecologist, Dave Green, to learn how to identify some of the rare butterflies that can be seen in the forest. Meet in Mortimer Forest – Whitcliffe car park (SO495741). **Contact:** Rhona Goddard (rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org, 01746 762364 or 07903 038261)

Mon 1 Jun, 10am–3pm, Guided walk at Mortimer Forest. Join our Regional Conservation Manager, Rhona Goddard, for a guided walk in the forest. Meet in Mortimer Forest – Whitcliffe car park (SO495741). **Contact:** Rhona Goddard (rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org, 01746 762364 or 07903 038261)

Wed 10 Jun, 1pm, Butterfly Walk, Clee Liberty Common. Meet at Heatham Gate entrance to the common (SO573849). Joint event with the Abdon Community Wildlife Group. **Contact:** Mike Williams (wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

Mon 15 Jun, 2pm, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary identification and training session at the Stiperstones, National Nature Reserve (a Stepping Stones Event funded by People's Postcode Lottery). Meet at The Knolls car park at 2pm. There'll be a walk of about 30 minutes, mostly uphill, with wellington boots needed for this species' marshy habitat. Booking required. **Contact:** Stephen Lewis (phwarden@sky.com or 07900 886809)

Sat 27 Jun, 2pm, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary identification and training session at Brook Vessons, Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserve. Meet at Snailbeach car park at 2pm. There'll be a long walk to the reserve (about 45 minutes), mostly uphill, with wellington boots needed for this species' marshy habitat. Booking required. **Contact:** Stephen Lewis (phwarden@sky.com or 07900 886809)

Wed 8 Jul, 10am–3pm, Butterfly ID day at Mortimer Forest. Join expert local ecologist, Dave Green, to learn how to identify some of the rare butterflies that can be seen in the forest. Meet in Mortimer Forest – Whitcliffe car park (SO495741). **Contact:** Rhona Goddard (rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org, 01746 762364 or 07903 038261)

Tue 14 Jul, 11am–3pm, Moth ID day at Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve. Join George Tordoff, Senior Moth Ecologist for Butterfly Conservation, to learn how to identify three rare moths found at Whixall Moss. Bring lunch and a drink. Meet at the Morris' Bridge car park (SJ493354). Booking advised. **Contact:** Rhona Goddard (rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org, 01746 762364 or 07903 038261)

Prees Heath

Wed 17 Jun, 10.30am, Work party – bracken clearance.

Sun 28 Jun, 2pm, Guided walk around the reserve to see Silver-studded Blue.

Wed 29 Jul, 10.30am, Work party – ragwort clearance.

Wed 5 Aug, 10.30am, Work party – ragwort and bracken clearance.



Fri 28 Aug, 8pm, Moth Evening – get together for some moth-trapping.



Sat 29 Aug, 7am, Moth Morning – inspect the night's haul.

Wed 23 Sep, 10.30am, Work party – tree popping.

Wed 21 Oct, 10.30am, Work party – other tasks around the reserve.

Meet on the access track opposite the Steel Heath turning off the A49 (SJ557363). Wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Bring something to eat and drink. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Contact Stephen Lewis (phwarden@sky.com or 07900 886809)



Silver-studded Blue male (Stephen Lewis)

Worcestershire

Sat 20 Jun, 9.30am, **Simon Saville's Big Bike Challenge – Moth Morning and Butterfly Walk at the Wyre Forest.**

Meet Dry Mill Lane car park, Bewdley.
Leaders: Mary Singleton, Sue Wright and Mike Williams. **Contact: Mike Williams** (wmbutterflies@gmail.com or 01299 824860)



CELEBRATING MOTHS Sun, 21 Jun – **Moth Morning and Butterfly Walk at**

Monkwood. Meet at reserve car park (SO804606), 9am for moths, 11am for butterflies (target species Wood White and White Admiral). Bacon rolls available. Leaders: Mike Southall, Peter Seal and Mike Williams.
Contacts: Peter Seal for butterflies (01905 426398 or peterseal3@btinternet.com) **and Mike Williams for moths** (wmbutterflies@gmail.com or 01299 824860)



CELEBRATING MOTHS Sun, 28 Jun, 10am–4pm –

Moth ID course at Wyre Forest Discovery Centre. An introduction to the moths of the Wyre Forest, ideal for beginners and those wanting to improve their skills. Booking required. Bring a packed lunch. Leader: Dave Grundy.
Contact: Mike Williams (wmbutterflies@gmail.com or 01299 824860)



CELEBRATING MOTHS Sat, 18 Jul – **Moth Morning and Butterfly Walk at Trench**

Wood. Meet at reserve car park, 9am for moths, 11am for butterflies. Bacon rolls available. Leaders: Mike

Southall and Mike Williams. **Contact: Mike Williams** (wmbutterflies@gmail.com or 01299 824860).

Mon 24 Aug to Sun 30 Aug, from 2pm, **Brown Hairstreak Week.** Meet at the main reserve gate. Guides will be available to help to find this elusive species. Check the weather forecast before coming and also look for updates on the Grafton Wood Blog (<https://graftonwood.wordpress.com/>).
Contact: John Tilt (01386 792 458)

Sat 7 Nov, 10am–4pm, **Worcestershire Entomology Day** at Rock Village Hall, Porchbrook Road, near Bewdley, DY14 9SD.
Advance booking essential and for details contact secretary@wyreforest.net

Malverns

Fri 12 Jun, 10am – **Malvern Bracken Bashing Day.** Join our summer work party to remove bracken from Grayling sites around North Hill (we'll use weed-slashers to cut the bracken on steep slopes) and have an opportunity to see some early summer butterflies while you work. Bring sufficient water, lunch and a sun hat. Meet at North Quarry car park (SO771469, WR14 4LT).

Thu 16 Jul, 10am – **Malvern Grayling Walk.** Walk up steep paths to see Grayling around North Hill. Bring sufficient water and a sun hat. Meet at North Quarry car park (SO771469, WR14 4LT).

Thu 3 Sep, 7.30pm – **TALK – A Flutter across Europe in search of Rare Butterflies** at the Eden Centre, Grovewood Road, Malvern, WR14 1GD.

Please go to Facebook Malvern Butterfly Group or contact me at mbg.records@btinternet.com for more information about this and all activities around the Malverns.

Many thanks, Mel Mason, WMBC Malvern / WWT Malvern

Outside The Region

Sat or Sun, 6 or 7 Jun – **Marsh Fritillary Hunt, South Wales.** An out of area trip with BC South Wales branch to see Marsh Fritillary, a

species that no longer occurs in the West Midlands. Choice of day dependent on weather forecast. To book a place and receive meeting details, **contact Mike Williams** (wmbutterflies@gmail.com or 01299824860)

IMPORTANT: With the coronavirus situation changing rapidly, please check events you plan to attend are going ahead, either with the organiser or at www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk



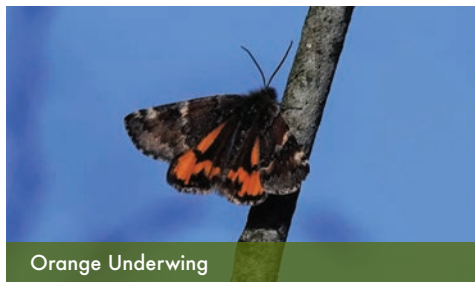
2019 a bumper year for our commonest butterflies

The Malverns are fortunate that 15 enthusiastic transect recorders for butterflies and day-flying moths walk their allotted routes once a week between April and September. Their valuable records, and many casual sightings, have contributed to this summary of trends.

Overall, butterfly numbers increased by more than 30% in 2019, although half of local species declined in numbers compared with 2018. In other words, the bumper increase largely depended on exceptional abundances of some of our most common species.

In the warmest February on record, many **Orange Underwing** moths emerged earlier than usual to fly around the upper branches of birch trees along the hills over a period of several weeks. In the same month, record numbers of all four butterfly hibernators emerged: **Brimstone**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Peacock** and **Comma**. **Orange-tip** also emerged in good numbers towards the end of March and continued in flight up to the middle of June. There was a remarkably early **Small White** in February, and regular sightings from March onwards of **Red Admiral**, **Speckled Wood** and **Holly Blue**.

Spring and summer experienced regular periods of wet then dry weather, with very high numbers



Orange Underwing



Grayling

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of **Meadow Brown**, **Ringlet**, **Marbled White**, **Gatekeeper** and **Speckled Wood**. These five species represent 80% of the total butterfly count in 2019. The remaining 20% include **Small** and **Essex Skipper** (3.1%) and **Common Blue** (2.5%). However, 17 species represent only 5.5% of the total.

The numbers of some species were significantly lower in 2019, compared with averages in 2011-2018. **Green-veined White** showed the greatest decline and **Large White**, **Small White**, **Comma** and **Small Copper** were all down. Similarly, most of the less common species declined, including **Green Hairstreak**, **White Admiral**, **White-letter Hairstreak**, **Purple Hairstreak**, **Brown Argus** and **Small Heath**.

Marbled White numbers have increased dramatically in recent years and were spectacularly abundant on Poolbrook Common in July. Following a worrying decline in recent years, **Peacock** numbers increased significantly. **Painted Lady** was reported migrating in millions from North Africa across the Mediterranean in early spring, and sure enough they were a common sight throughout the summer – nearly 700% more than the average over the previous eight years.

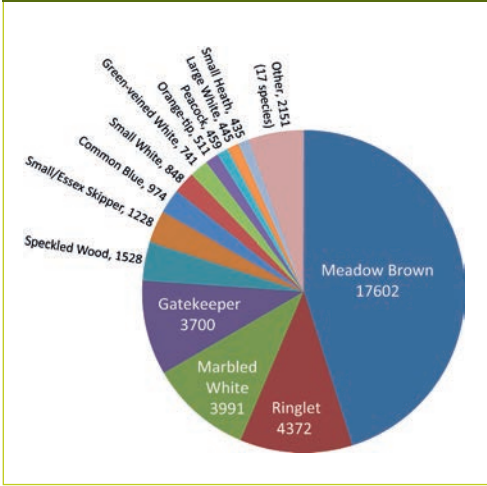
Fortunately, our rarest species, **Grayling** (*Hipparchia semele*), emerged very early, at the end of June, and the population remains stable thanks to the hard work of WMBC and Malvern Hills Trust volunteers to improve the habitat on North Hill during the winter months.

Article and photographs by **Mel Mason**



Marbled White

Malvern Butterfly Group
Transect abundances
31 Species 38985 specimens



Remarkable numbers of casual sightings early in the year

Species	Feb	Mar
Brimstone	65	49
Comma	15	31
Holly Blue	0	8
Orange-tip	0	8
Peacock	17	63
Red Admiral	9	3
Small Tortoiseshell	30	33
Small White	1	5
Speckled Wood	0	5
Total – butterflies	137	205
Angle Shades	1	0
Dotted Border	1	1
Early Grey	0	1
Herald	0	6
Humming-bird Hawk-moth	0	1
Oak Beauty	0	1
Orange Underwing	38	5
Small Magpie	1	7
Total – day-flying moths	41	22

Violet disorder, arrest made

Recording can help us to develop the right habitats
in the right places.

As the person who validates the Staffordshire records contributed by our members (and others) through the iRecord scheme, I get to 'see' a lot at county-wide level. Last season, it was the unprecedented numbers of **Silver-washed Fritillary** recorded and every year I've witnessed the slow, but sure, northward advancement of **Marbled White** and the increase in **Brown Argus** sightings. At a slightly less grandiose level, I had personal garden ticks this year, here in suburbia, of **Small Skipper** and **Gatekeeper**, and the third successive year of a female **Common Blue** laying on my Bird's-foot Trefoil.

These records show two things, firstly the importance of a back garden as a stopping-off point and secondly that butterflies, moths and all manner of things are continually on the move through our landscapes.



Dark Green Fritillary
(Nick Pomiankowski)

Dark Green Fritillary

One record from this season that highlights such movement was the appearance of a **Dark Green Fritillary** in the middle of an industrial estate in Newcastle-under-Lyme; this species is a powerful flyer and turned up miles from any known colonies. The colonies in question, most in the north-east of the county, are doing well: last year's heatwave didn't affect their numbers and again they have appeared in areas outside their normal haunts.

RSPB Coombes Valley

One site that has a good record of singletons is the RSPB's Coombes Valley but, sadly, there isn't a resident population flitting over their flower-filled hay meadows. A quick recce in late April to survey for violets in bloom

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Dark Green Fritillary larva in the Wyre Forest, May 2017 (Rosemary Winnall)

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confirmed why they were all passing through: hardly any larval food plant in sight.

Contact was made with **Tom Stenning**, one of the present intern wardens, and a plan was formulated. A grant of £100 was secured from Branch funds and spent on 160 Common Dog-violet plug plants. Tom and his team then carried out scrub clearance around hedge lines and in areas within the meadows to create planting patches for the plugs. These were duly planted in late September to give them time to bed in and establish themselves to provide a laying opportunity for any females coming through the reserve next year. Hopefully, this time they'll stay instead of passing through.

Article by **John Bryan**



Planting Common Dog-violet plug plants (Tom Stenning)



Small Elephant Hawk-moth



Chocolate-tip

Starting out as a moth-trapper

I started moth-trapping in June 2018, after seeing a photo of a beautiful **Elephant Hawk-moth**. I was really taken aback by the colours, and didn't know a moth existed in such vibrant pinks and greens.

Soon I was researching online how to get started with moth-trapping in my own garden, choosing between buying a trap and trying to make one. Luckily, I had a friend who kindly offered me a homemade Skinner moth trap.

Amazingly, the first night I captured my very own **Elephant Hawk-moth**, plus a lovely **White Ermine** and a **Gold Spot**. It didn't take long for me to start trapping regularly.

Bitten by the bug

I decided to upgrade to a Robinson-style trap from ALS (Anglian Lepidopterist Supplies), which is one of the larger and more expensive traps on the market. This supplier does, however, sell some very affordable smaller traps for those starting out. An example is the compact Skinner, an excellent small trap that I also now own.

One of the most daunting things when I started moth-trapping was learning to identify the species



Compact Skinner moth trap



Robinson trap with mercury vapour (MV) bulb

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Merveille du Jour

Living in a residential area with a smallish garden, I don't have large catches. Even so, I've still had some really great moths over the past 18 months – including the only **Golden Plusia** recorded for my area in 2018.

Some of my other highlights have included a **Small Elephant Hawk-moth** last year (much less common than its larger relation) and smaller macro species such as the beautiful **Merveille du Jour**, **Chocolate-tip** and **Buff-tip**. I've even recorded a couple of day-flying moths (at night) in the form of **Scarlet Tiger** and **Cinnabar**.

My best moment, however, was in September last year. I found a wonderful **Clifden Nonpareil** sitting lazily on the side of my trap, proving that you just never know what might turn up.

Taking it further

Another interest of mine is photography, and I love combining the two hobbies. It's a great way to keep a visual record of what you catch, plus it helps you get to know and recognise the different species.

As well as trapping at home, I enjoy the events put on by Butterfly Conservation. It's great to meet and chat with other moth enthusiasts, as well as looking through catches to see what has been caught in that particular location.

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caught. I found it important to set myself up with some good identification tools.

The 'What's flying tonight' app is a great online aid; it lists the top 50 moths you are likely to see in your location on any given night. Using this, alongside books such as *British Moths* by Chris Manly and with help and guidance from fellow 'moth-ers', really helps you to work out exactly what you've caught.

Two new books featured in this issue will help you identify your catch. See *Moths of the West Midlands* on page 4 and *Atlas of Britain & Ireland's Larger Moths* on page 28.

Trapping FAQs

What do you use to attract the moths?

I use a ready-made moth trap, with either a Mercury Vapour or Actinic light bulb. A cheaper option is to hang a white sheet outside and shine a bright torch or outside light onto it.

Where do you put the traps?

I put my trap either in the back garden or at the side

of our house. It can be placed in the open, under trees or beside shrubs (see what works best for you).

Note: Think of your neighbours; Mercury Vapour bulbs are very bright and so Actinic bulbs may be better in built-up areas.

Are traps for night-flying moths only?

Yes, usually, but you do get the odd exception because some day-flying moths are attracted to light at night.

Do you need different traps for macros and micros?

No, you can use the same trap for all moths.

Are the moths unharmed?

Yes, they will enter the trap and come to rest inside it on your egg cartons. It's important to handle them gently when recording – tap them out or carefully use a soft paintbrush to pot them up.



Robinson trap with Actinic light

I find trapping and recording moths is a really interesting and educational hobby (it's pretty addictive too). I'd recommend anyone, of any age and ability, to give it a go. The more of us involved, the more we can showcase moths and prove they are anything but dull and boring!



Robinson trap open and showing egg cartons inside

Article and photographs by **Clare Workman**

Of course, moths can occasionally die in traps just as they can anywhere else.

What containers do you use?

You can use any small transparent pots, or you can buy specialist collection pots online from any of the lepidopterist supply shops. The latter can work out expensive but you can save money by purchasing plastic shot glasses. Having a variety of sizes is useful.

What's the best way to release the moths?

I always release my catch the following night. That way, there is less chance of them being predated by birds or cats. Moths are very docile during the day, so often will sit in one area if you release them. At night, they are very lively and will fly straight out of the trap once you take the lid off.

Traditional hay meadows and their loss

We carry many articles about creating new wildflower meadows but how did we come to lose so many in the first place?

It is well documented that, since the mid-1930s, we have lost 98% of traditionally managed hay meadows. This was largely brought about by the Dig for Victory Campaign at the beginning of the Second World War, when farmers were encouraged to plough up permanent grassland to grow arable crops, such as potatoes and cereals, to feed the nation.

What is a traditional hay meadow?

Well, it is long-term or permanent grassland which is managed to produce hay each year. The traditional management regime is simple but quite rigid in that no grazing with animals or cutting is done from the beginning of the year until late summer. This allows all the grasses and wildflowers to complete their natural process of flowering and setting viable seeds before it is cut to make hay.

The hay-making process

Hay-making requires a spell of good weather to dry the grass. Tossing and turning the cut hay frequently shakes out any remaining seeds on

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to the ground. Only after the hay has been carted off in late July or early August is the freshly emerged grass, known as aftermath, grazed by sheep or cattle. Sheep were most commonly used because they do not churn up the soil as much as larger animals. The action of sheep's feet (the golden hoof) pushes the seeds from grasses and flowers into the soil, where they can germinate to provide new plants for the next season. Livestock are removed by Christmas, after which the field is left until the cycle begins again.

Silage

Making good hay relies on a spell of several consecutive days of dry and sunny weather – not always easy – so many farmers turned instead to producing silage. Freshly cut grass is placed in sealed pits to 'pickle' the crop for feeding in winter – a process known as 'ensiling'. Less dependent on dry weather and quicker and more efficient

than hay-making, ensiling became the preferred method of conserving winter fodder. Farmers then discovered that, if the grass was cut earlier, it would produce another crop of silage later in the year. This had the dramatic effect that few, if any, viable seeds went back into the ground and resulted in an almost total loss of flowers. The fast and early cutting of grass also had a disastrous impact on ground-nesting birds like the corncrake, curlew and skylark, whose nests and eggs were destroyed in the process.

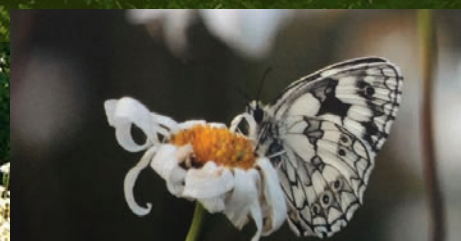
The demand for cheaper food and bigger crops favoured ensiling grass over hay-making. Artificial nitrogenous fertiliser applications increased the yields of grass, which soon crowded out the wildflowers so these began to decline.

Herbicides

At about the same time, selective herbicides were developed that would kill unwanted broad-leaved plants such as docks, thistles and buttercups without harming the grass. The use of these chemical



Six-Spot Burnet moth (Patrick Clement)



Marbled White (Bill Watkins)

herbicides not only killed the thistles but also most of the other plants, such as orchids, dandelions, cowslips, knapweed, self-heal, yellow rattle, ox-eye daisy, meadow cranesbill and many others. Species-rich meadows were quickly reduced to 'just grass'.

The Essential Ingredient

I have mentioned yellow rattle. An annual, this is the essential ingredient for any traditionally managed hay meadow because it is semi-parasitic - it obtains nutrients from grasses by attaching its roots to theirs. In doing so, it inhibits the vigour of the grass so that more light reaches the wildflowers, allowing them to thrive.

Farmers were keen to get rid of yellow rattle, buttercups, thistles and docks (grassland weeds) to increase the yields of grass. At the same time, new higher-yielding varieties of grasses (especially the S22 strain of Italian ryegrass) had been bred at the Grassland Research Station at Aberystwyth. Grass yields increased dramatically with the new strains of ryegrass crops at the expense of old

meadow grasses such as yorkshire fog, sweet vernal, quaking grass and smaller plants like adder's tongue.

Invertebrates

Flowers provide vital nectar for our bees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths, many of which need traditional meadow grasses as food for their larvae. Without flowers to provide nectar there are no pollinating invertebrates. Without invertebrates and their larvae, there is no food for insect-eating birds.

The story is the same for arable crops. Efficient herbicides were developed to eliminate wildflowers (arable weeds) from the cereal crops too. Corn marigold, corn cockle, poppies, blue cornflower, corn buttercup, corn mint, scarlet pimpernel and a host of other species were soon in decline. These vital sources of nectar for invertebrates require freshly ploughed or disturbed soil to thrive. They have disappeared, just like the ones in grassland.

.....
Article by Bill Watkins



Red-tailed Bumblebee (Bill Watkins)



Yellow Rattle (Bill Watkins)





Butterfly and moth bonanza in Bolivia

Visiting a country with over 3,500 butterfly species and over 10,000 moth species, with many more still to be discovered, is guaranteed to set pulses racing.

It was with great anticipation that fifteen of us, mainly from the West Midlands, set out last November for a fortnight's trip to Bolivia. We flew into the dizzying heights of La Paz, at 3650m the highest capital city in the world, via Madrid and Santa Cruz.

On arrival, our cameras were soon busy and would remain so for the rest of the trip. We were heading for the Yungas valleys, which are a transition zone between the Andean highlands and the Amazonian lowlands.

Week 1 – Coroico

The journey to our first location at Coroico was a spectacular ascent then descent in the magnificent Andes. Stopping en route, we recorded the first butterfly of the trip, a **Puna Clouded Yellow**, and a rare day-flying moth, *Scea gigantea*. The dramatic scenery combined with the strange plant life added to the experience.

The Sol y Luna Ecolodge at Coroico was a quirky delight. Set on a steep hill overlooking the town, the beautiful gardens were full of life. Strange bird calls from the oropendolas and chacalacas filled the air, and hummingbirds whizzed about. The garden held several

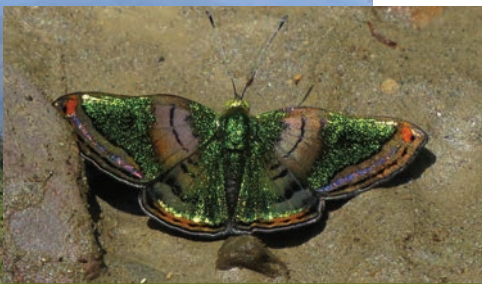
species of **Glasswing** butterflies, among others.

The day trips involved short journeys to great butterfly sites chosen by our guide Miguel. He targeted sites at different altitudes to increase the number of species seen, which he baited with his special smelly concoction, usually on damp areas by clear-flowing streams.

An often-heard expression was 'WOW!', as the diversity and beauty of the Lepidoptera revealed itself. 'Morpho' was another common shout, as these oversized iridescent blue butterflies floated by. **Swallowtails, Skippers, Hairstreaks, Whites, Brush-foots** and **Metalmarks** were all seen and photographed.

The quantities of butterflies that gathered at the puddling sites were quite remarkable. Day-flying moths joined the butterflies and it was sometimes difficult to say which was which, as the diversity was so great.

The evening meal was followed by moth-viewing, which was repeated before breakfast. Here, the variety of species continued to amaze: the huge Rothschildia moth and **Black Witch, Hawk-moths**, and wasp-mimicking Ctenuchids. A succession of weird insects was also attracted to the moth lights, including Dobson flies,



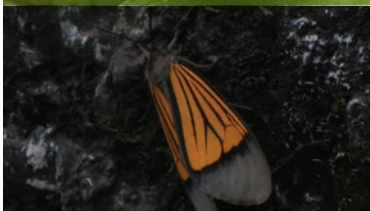
Caria mantinea



Caria trochilus



Morpho achilles



Scea gigantea



Mixed group of Swallowtails and Whites



Road repair (Mike Williams)

mantids, planthoppers and beetles.

Week 2 – Caranavi

A week quickly passed, and we moved on to the larger town of Caranavi. This was further east, towards the Amazon basin. The altitude dropped from 1800m to 600m, and both temperature and humidity rose noticeably. Here, the rivers widened and the mountains became hills.

The diversity became even greater in this region, if that's possible, with more stunning Metalmarks and Skippers. **Cracker** butterflies could be heard to 'crack' their wings together to ward off rivals. One particularly dark night produced an exceptional moth haul that included at least ten species of Hawk-moths.

A memorable return journey took the group up to the snowline. Thanks to Mike Williams for organising a fantastic trip.

Article and photographs by **Mike Southall**

Mike Williams tells us: While we were in Bolivia, there was considerable political unrest following a general election. This resulted in widespread demonstrations and numerous roadblocks. Our main problem was returning to La Paz to catch our flights home: with routes to the city blocked, we had to cross the Andes on mountain tracks at altitudes up to 4750m. A landslide had removed one section of road; we had to use picks and shovels, and shift heavy boulders, to repair the road – the joys of butterflying in South America!

Simon Saville will be cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats this summer to raise funds for Butterfly Conservation.



Bike for Butterflies Challenge

In June and July, I'll be cycling 1200 miles along the length of the UK, from Land's End to John O'Groats. I'm doing this challenge to highlight the decline of butterflies and moths, and the importance of connecting with our natural world, and, importantly, to raise funds for Butterfly Conservation.

You may know me as Chair of the Surrey & SW London Branch or, for the last year or so, as a Trustee of Butterfly Conservation. Cycling has always been an interest of mine, and I've long held a fascination with the Land's End to John O'Groats ride. Having retired early, I wanted to take on something that would challenge me – something that I wasn't sure that I could accomplish. This seemed the ideal opportunity: at 61 years old,

it feels like 'now or never'!

I aim to raise awareness of the crisis that faces our wildlife, to promote Butterfly Conservation and the fantastic work it does with its volunteers, and to encourage people to engage with nature, especially near where they live and work. The point is that everyone can do something to help in protecting the UK's nature: every small action or donation counts.

In your region

My ride uses the National Cycle Network set up by Sustrans, and I'm visiting as many BC reserves as I can. All being well, I'll be in the West Midlands from Friday 19 June to Sunday 21 June. Details are

being finalised but I'd like to visit Monkwood and the wonderful Prees Heath, as well as the Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve.

I hope to be able to meet as many local volunteers as possible. I welcome folks to join me on their bicycles, whether for a couple of miles or longer.

Detailed planning of events is at an early stage, so look out for more information.

Butterfly Conservation is promoting the ride, which has appeared in the Spring 2020 edition of *Butterfly* magazine, and at www.butterfly-conservation.org/bikeforbutterflies.

Article and photograph by
Simon Saville

I welcome folks to join me on their bicycles, whether for a couple of miles or longer.



We want to raise money, of course, and I've set up a JustGiving page at www.justgiving.com/fundraising/bikeforbutterflies. We'll be promoting the ride with the hashtag #BikeForButterflies.

Branch contacts

Officers

Chairman	Mike Southall*	michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk	01299 251467
Vice Chair	Mel Mason*	meljmason@btinternet.com	01684 565700
Treasurer	Peter Seal*	peterseal3@btinternet.com	01905 426398
Secretary	Martin Harrison*	martinh1236@yahoo.com	01743 351929
Recording, Transects, Website	John Tilt*	john.tilt2@btopenworld.com	01386 792458
Publicity, Marketing	Mike Williams*	wmbutterflies@gmail.com	01299 824860
Regional Conservation Manager (BC)	Rhona Goddard	rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org	01746 762364
Reserves Officer (BC)	Lucy Morton	lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org	07503 220191
Conservation – Herefordshire	Ian Hart*	yellowrattle4@aol.com	01981 510259
Conservation – Worcestershire	Trevor Bucknall*	trevor.bucknall@outlook.com	01905 755757
Moths – Birmingham, Black Country	David Jackson*	jacksongrus@talktalk.net	01902 344716
Moths – Herefordshire	Robin Hemming*	robinhemming@btinternet.com	01568 797351
Moths – Worcestershire	Mike Southall*	michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk	01299 251467
Malvern Hills	Mel Mason*	meljmason@btinternet.com	01684 565700
Brown Hairstreak Champion	Simon Primrose*	simonjprimrose@aol.com	07952 260153
Wider Countryside Butterfly Count	Philip Nunn	philip-nunn@hotmail.co.uk	07931 488624

Reserve Managers

Ewyas Harold	Ian Hart*	yellowrattle4@aol.com	01981 510259
Grafton Wood	John Tilt*	john.tilt2@btopenworld.com	01386 792458
Monkwood	Phil Adams	pdadamsrainbow@gmail.com	07725 622342
Prees Heath	Stephen Lewis*	phwarden@sky.com	07900 886809
Trench Wood	Matthew Bridger	bridge1805@btinternet.com	07801 568334

County Records Coordinators – butterflies

Birmingham, Black Country	Richard Southwell	richard_southwell@hotmail.co.uk	01384 397066
Herefordshire	Bob Hall	randphall@gmail.com	01432 850623
	Ian Draycott	idraycott@yahoo.co.uk	01600 891123
Shropshire	Tony Jacques	rec-vc40@vc40tj.plus.com	01952 882096
Staffordshire	John Bryan	johnpbryan15@aol.com	
Worcestershire	Mike Williams*	wmbutterflies@gmail.com	01299 824860
	Mel Mason*	meljmason@btinternet.com	01684 565700

County Moth Recorders

Herefordshire	Peter Hall*	peter.herefordcmr@btinternet.com	01886 822135
Shropshire – macro	Tony Jacques	rec-vc40@vc40tj.plus.com	
Shropshire – micro	Mike Shurmer	mpshurmer@gmail.com	
	Graham Wenman	gjwenman@yahoo.co.uk	07565 802480
Staffordshire	David Emley	recorder@staffsmoths.org.uk	07484 185039
Worcestershire	Tony Simpson	Tonysimpson.1945@hotmail.co.uk	

Other committee members

Martyn Davies*	martyn.davies808@gmail.com	01432 266703
Jenny Joy*	jenny.joy17@outlook.com	01952 249325
Joy Stevens*	joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk	01384 372397
Steven Williams*	s.williams@yescomputers.co.uk	07974 152081

* Committee members



Atlas of Britain & Ireland's Larger Moths

• ISBN: 978-1-874357-82-7 • Author: Randle, Z et al • Publisher: Pisces Publications • Cost: £38.50 • Publication date: November 2019 • Format: Hardback, 504 pages, over 800 colour photos

This century has seen a dramatic rise in interest in moths, fuelled in no small way by the publication of several field guides showing moths in their resting positions (rather than as set museum specimens), the advent of the digital camera and the amazing reference store that is the World Wide Web. A vast army of recorders has submitted over 25 million moth records to the Moths Count recording scheme, which was launched in 2006, and this publication is the product of all that accumulated data. However, it is not just recent records that are included – the historical data goes back to 1741!

The introductory chapters (covering recording, analysis, trends and environmental drivers of change) give a fascinating insight into the current and future status of our moth fauna. The remainder of the book is taken up with the

accounts, which cover the 893 species of larger moth (or macros), 761 of which are considered to be resident. Each account consists of a map, a high-quality photograph and a paragraph of useful information to help to interpret the map (including details on status, habitat and phenology change).

The dots on the maps are split in to three time periods; pre-1970, 1970-1999 and 2000 onwards. Each period is colour-coded, enabling one to see the changes in species' fortunes over time. The number of 10km squares recorded in each period is also given.

The maps are accompanied by a phenology chart showing flight periods. Where enough data is available, charts are split into two colour-coded time periods – 1970-79 and 2000-2016 – enabling one to see how emergence/flight periods have changed over time.

With so many species, it can be difficult to identify some larger moths, especially when many are themselves very variable and some are very similar to other species. Often, especially for scarce or rare

species, knowing if it is likely to turn up in your area or if it is likely to be flying at the time can help in identification. In such cases this atlas will be invaluable.

There are 'problem' species that cannot be separated without resort to dissection and these are generally recorded as aggregates (for example, **Marbled Minor agg.**). The maps for these aggregates are included in an appendix but would,

I think, have been better placed with their constituent species. I would also have liked a greater contrast between the darker colours used on the maps and phenology charts, but these are very minor points.

This atlas, then, enables recorders to see that their valuable efforts are being put to good use and also shows how the species in front of them fits in to the national and local picture. It is, by any standards, a superb piece of work and should be considered as essential as any field guide.

Article by **David Emley** County Moth Recorder for Staffordshire

... enables recorders to see that their valuable efforts are being put to good use ...

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.