

the *Comm*

No.99 Winter 2017/2018

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation

Puss Moth: *In a
Birmingham garden*

On my patch:
Dudmaston butterflies

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Cover story

Cover photograph of a Purple-bordered Gold moth by **Stephen Barlow**. You can read more about the enigmatic moths of the mosses on page 16.

Contributions

Please send articles and images to the editor at phwarden@sky.com. Photographs should be sent separately rather than embedded in a document, and of as high a resolution as possible. The opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the West Midlands 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

Copy deadline

The deadline for copy for the spring edition of *The Comma* is **28th February 2018**, but all contributions are welcomed well in advance of that date and should be emailed to the editor at phwarden@sky.com

The Branch in Focus



Peter Seal

Hello again – let's hope the frosts are having some effect on the parasites that may be attacking our **Peacocks** and **Small Tortoiseshells**. Another butterfly season should be over, but as of the time of writing this article the occasional **Red Admiral** is still being reported. In the last edition I mentioned the **Wood White** in Monkwood as being my highlight of the year. With transect data now available online through the UKBMS Transect Walker site, I was fascinated to see that from May 7th through to August 22nd this butterfly was recorded every week except the first week in July. Perhaps the near overlap between broods was a combination of good early summer weather and an extended egg-laying season. However, the Wood White has clearly prospered here and elsewhere from the attentions of BC staff and volunteers. BC's "Making a Stand for the Wood White" project is at the halfway stage, so we keep our fingers crossed for an equally good showing in 2018, and further progress with the butterfly increasing its range in key strongholds in the West Midlands.

New website

On another tack, our new website shares the distinction, after much preparation, of also bearing fruit in 2017. Apart from a few teething problems when we went live on November 1st, the launch has been successful with capacity for a wider

range of information. Already you will see details of species with trend data, our reserves and Branch details and history. We have a section for sites of interest, some of which have already been written up, but here is where we need help from our members - see page 13 for more details. From information we gathered when compiling the book two years ago there is considerable scope for adding more sites. It would be nice to have some from Staffordshire, so do you know the Loynton Moss transect, or disused railway lines such as Wombourne and Stafford-Newport? A short write up, with directions, OS reference, map if possible, a link to any relevant website, and photos would be welcome – please email John Tilt or me.

Anniversary time

Two anniversaries to plan for: firstly next year is Butterfly Conservation's 50th. The national body is planning a Day of Action on March 10th. As we already have two Sunday work parties on March 11th at Honeybourne for **Grizzled Skipper** and in the Wyre Forest, as well as Saturday work parties at Bury Ditches and Prees Heath, we shall promote this locally as a Weekend of Action. There will be an extension of the Plants for Pollinators initiative with B&Q, along with suggested Reserve Open Days and the launch of the Moth Atlas towards the end of the year. I'm waiting for more detail from Dorset about how Branches may be involved.

Secondly, in 2019 the West Midlands Branch will celebrate our 40th

Year, and we intend to make this a significant milestone. I believe we should mark a number of our achievements – maybe we can produce a summary to include conservation successes over the last five years, launch of our new website, and implementation of online casual recording. When I took on this role what struck me is the number of activities the Branch regularly undertakes, from work parties and recording to talks and stalls. Each year we seem to add to the list of events, for instance the growing number of weekday work parties, and invitations to provide a stall at the Birmingham Honey Show and the Malverns Autumn Show.

But there is a third milestone - this is our 99th Edition. In April 2018 we shall be producing the 100th *Comma*, so contributions are especially welcome, and our editor feels it would be great to have articles from members who have not submitted articles before, and about places that have not been featured previously.

Branch AGM

We held our AGM in Herefordshire – at Woolhope Village Hall – on November 18th. We were treated to an inspirational talk from Simon Spencer on what the European Butterflies Group is doing to help promote the welfare of butterflies in

the continent, with some excellent examples of partnerships with conservationists in Romania and Greece, and a focus on surveying the fortunes of restricted species such as the **Odd-spot Blue**. I was able to report that we now have 1,500 members, so our Branch grows steadily.

Equally, there are many local initiatives to help our butterflies and moths. Portway Hill in Rowley Regis, which is featured in our book, and in Joy Stevens' excellent article on page 8, has been upgraded to a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Whilst this does not confer statutory rights, it should offer some element of protection from damaging development and raise Portway Hill's profile as a green space amenity, offering health benefits to the local populace. Branch representatives will be attending a meeting with Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust to establish what we might do to help secure this site, as it holds a range of plants, butterflies and day flying moths.

Balancing this, on the negative side we have recently learned that housing development threatens our best Grizzled Skipper site at Swynnerton, an Army base near Stone, which the Ministry of Defence is reported as intending to sell. This is of great concern and,



Peacock (Stephen Lewis)

whilst the press report implies that the project may develop slowly, it is hard to see how any compensating relocation scheme could be successful. We need to think about how to address this as it seems likely to go ahead.

An excellent gift

Finally our book continues to sell, generating funds for practical conservation projects. It is available at £18.95 from Pisces Publications at www.naturebureau.co.uk – it makes an excellent gift.

Peter Seal, Branch Chair

P W Seal

Correction

The captions on the photos accompanying the article entitled *The Early Life of a Brown Hairstreak* on page 10 of the previous issue were incorrect. Paul Meers, the author of the article, writes: "The last one (bottom right on page) of the caterpillar should be the first one 'First Instar' caterpillar recently hatched, followed by the 3 consecutive photos showing the sequence of the 'moult' into second instar. These are the 3 stages of the 'moult' as it happened. There isn't a 'third instar' photo." My apologies to Paul. **Editor**

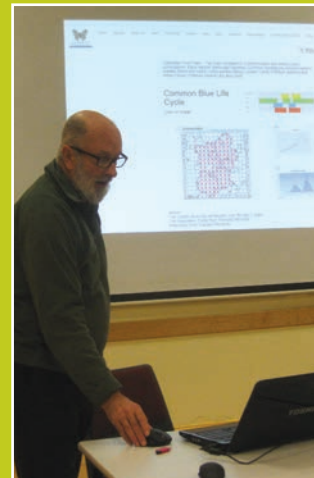


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Herefordshire Hosts the Branch AGM



Peter Seal gives his
Chairman's Report



John Tilt introduces
the new website



Members at
the AGM

The work of the Branch and projects in Europe are highlighted

The Branch tries to ensure that its Annual General Meeting plus guest speaker moves around the West Midlands region – a sort of lepidoptera inspired road trip. In 2015 it was held in Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, and in 2016 at the RSPB's Sandwell Valley reserve in the Black Country. In November 2017 it was held at Woolhope in rural Herefordshire, in the Parish Hall close to Haugh Wood, an important site for butterflies and moths.

Peter Seal, Branch Chair, highlighted the fact that for

many species 2017 had been a much improved year, although this did not include the **Peacock**. Little is understood quite why the fortunes of this common species have declined so markedly, almost like a cliff edge. It is most likely to be caused by a parasite, but nothing has been established yet. **Lucy Lewis**, Branch Treasurer, reported on the financial position of the Branch, noting that balances remain in a healthy position. Anyone wishing to see her report and notes can contact her at lemiller@btinternet.com

This was followed by an update from **John Tilt** on iRecord, the new host for all our casual butterfly records. John said he was very impressed by both the number of butterfly records and the number of butterfly recorders now using the facility. However, he made a plea for recorders not just to go to their usual sites but to seek out other sites in their locality. A map of 10 kilometre squares also highlighted the fact that iRecord has received few, or even zero, records in some squares – special mention was made of SJ52 in north Shropshire, a square which includes Wem, Shawbury, Clive, Grinshill & Corbet Wood Local Nature Reserve and Hawkstone, as no casual records have been posted from there yet. Come on north Salopians – your butterflies need you!

John Tilt also gave us an update on the new Branch website (see separate article on page 13). The Branch committee was re-elected en bloc, with Peter Seal agreeing to continue as Chair with no other nominations forthcoming – thank you Peter. And thanks also to **Bob Hall** for arranging the venue.

After lunch **Simon Spencer** gave an entertaining talk about the work of Butterfly Conservation's European Interests Group. But first there was some explaining to do about names, as the Butterfly Conservation European Interests Group is changing its name. It will now be called the Butterfly Conservation European Butterflies Group. It is open to all members of Butterfly Conservation for an additional £10 membership fee, and it produces three newsletters a year, all sent to members electronically, as well as providing a range of other activities. And it has a new website at www.european-butterflies.org.uk. However, this new name is not to be confused with Butterfly Conservation Europe, which is an umbrella organisation for all butterfly-related partner organisations across Europe. Its website is at www.bc-europe.eu. Clear? – I hope so!

Simon went on to outline the work the Group does with regard to some of Europe's most threatened or rare butterfly species. He stressed the difference between a

butterfly holiday and the sort of in depth fieldwork members of the Group undertake, often producing survey reports with recommendations that are presented to local conservation groups/land managers. He focussed on such threatened species as the **Balkan Fritillary**, the **Grecian Grayling** and the **Danube Clouded Yellow**. The talk was informative, inspiring and entertaining. Simon himself is planning a trip to Greece this summer, and anyone who is interested in joining can contact him via the new website.

And **Mike Williams** is planning a return trip to Belarus to search for the Danube Clouded Yellow in August, so also contact him if you are interested.

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Article and photos unless otherwise stated by the editor



Simon Spencer giving his talk



Items for sale at the AGM (Mike Williams)



Red Admiral

Brimstone

2017 – the only way is up!

Mike Williams looks back on the Butterfly Year and announces the winners and losers

Isn't it good to be able to report on a much improved butterfly year for once? After a pretty disastrous 2016, the majority of butterflies showed a marked improvement this year with the best numbers since 2011 for some species. Data produced by **Mel Mason** for the butterfly transects around the Malverns showed that overall, while numbers had decreased by 38% between 2015 and 2016, compared to the previous year 2017 showed a 74% increase.

There were, however, exceptions: both **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Peacock** again had an extremely poor year overall, which is a worrying trend for two of our most colourful and popular species. In the case of the Peacock, this downward turn shows no sign of abating. On the 14 butterfly transects analysed by Mel, Peacock has shown an 89% decline in numbers since 2013. Much has been written (see for example p. 87 of 'Butterflies of the West Midlands') about the tachinid fly *Sturmia bella*, a recent colonist from the continent, which impacts particularly on Small Tortoiseshell populations but can also parasitise Peacocks. Perhaps we are moving into a situation with these two species where, rather like the **Holly Blue**, numbers fluctuate in response to parasite pressures with a cycle of 'boom and bust' years. Other factors, such as weather, including our increasingly mild winters,

may also be having an effect on these and other species and I do wonder, especially with Peacock, whether they are entering hibernation much sooner after emergence than previously. Given the very poor year for this species in 2016, there did seem more around this spring than one might have expected. Anyway, for the third year in a row, Peacock, whether it wants the title or not, was deemed by most recorders as the **Worst Performer of the Year**.

Early Emergence

One of the very striking features of 2017 was the early emergence of many species. Good weather during April, May and June, prompted many very early first sightings. **White Admiral**, for example, a species often not seen in the West Midlands until late June, was reported from Monkwood on 13th June, the first **Wood White** (last year's Butterfly of the Year, which again did well) was seen at Bury Ditches as early as 11th April, while the **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** was first reported from Wyre on 23rd April, with numbers peaking at many sites before mid-May. Species to show an improved performance during the year included **Purple Hairstreak**, **White-letter Hairstreak**, **Holly Blue**, **Red Admiral**, **Comma**, **Marbled White**, **Gatekeeper**, **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **Orange-tip**

and, at least on the Malverns, **Grayling**. The improvement in the fortunes of the latter is particularly encouraging given the huge effort put into improving the habitat by volunteers from both West Midlands Butterfly Conservation and the Malvern Hills Trust.

Small Heath, a species which is in national decline, had an improved year at Prees Heath. Silver-washed numbers were pretty good throughout the region with a ridiculously early first sighting on 12th June from Grafton Wood, the highest numbers ever recorded at Trench Wood and a report from a new site in north Staffordshire.

Hairstreaks

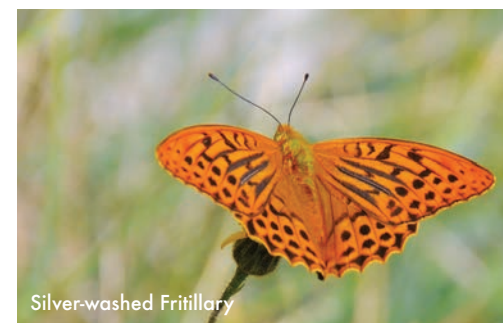
Purple and White-letter Hairstreaks are often poorly recorded on butterfly transects as they are essentially canopy species, but 2017 proved an exception with many more reports of low-level sightings. Whether this was due to a shortage of honeydew or a genuine population increase is difficult to judge and it may be a combination of both. Early emergence was prevalent in both species with the first Purple Hairstreak reported from Old Hills in Worcestershire on 14th June and the first White-letter just 4 days later from a garden in Malvern. Most of the early spring species did pretty well, with both Holly Blue and Orange-tip on the wing before the end of March. Holly Blue enjoyed a very good first brood but dipped somewhat in their second generation. Marbled Whites were also able to take advantage of some fine weather during June and generally enjoyed a good season continuing their spread into new areas. On the Malverns transects it was the 4th commonest butterfly recorded in 2017. Comma had a really good season, both coming out of hibernation and in its first and second broods. It is a butterfly that has been a little in the doldrums in recent

years, and as it is the symbol of West Midlands Butterfly Conservation it was great to see it do so well.

Big Butterfly Count

Unfortunately, by the time of this year's Big Butterfly Count in July, the weather had become rather more mixed but, nevertheless, record numbers of people took part including many from our region. Gatekeeper topped the poll which was good news as this has been a species which has declined significantly over the past 40 years, as was noted in the 'Butterflies of the West Midlands' book. The two species, however, to secure their highest ever ranking in the Big Butterfly Count top ten were the Red Admiral and the Comma. Comma, as previously noted, enjoyed a particularly good year across the region and showed one of the largest improvements of all species on the previous year. Because of this, although a case could be made for other species, the award of **Most Improved Performer** goes to the Comma. This was the title won by Red Admiral in 2016 and this year it has built on this performance. Large numbers have been reported throughout the season and, in many places, it has been the commonest butterfly recorded in the garden. High numbers have persisted throughout the autumn and, even as I write this article in mid-November, we are still receiving news of sightings via our Facebook pages and elsewhere. Often there is a wide divergent of views as to which species should be crowned **Butterfly of the Year**, but this year most recorders plumped for the Red Admiral making it a very worthy winner. What will 2018 bring?

Article by Mike Williams, photos by Roger Littleover



Silver-washed Fritillary



Comma

The Green Black Country



Marbled White (Joy Stevens)

Joy Stevens enjoys a guided walk around Portway Hill, a calm oasis in the heart of a busy industrial landscape

Despite their reputation and associations with industry, Birmingham and the Black Country hold many surprises where nature has regained control of old brownfield sites. Portway Hill, situated alongside the noisy dual carriageway linking Dudley to the motorway, was the site of dolerite quarries. Known as Rowley Rag, dolerite is a volcanic stone used for the production of road surfaces and kerbstones. Although the pits have been filled, traces of that activity are still visible, with exposed pebble beds where the dolerite can be seen. At one time it was possible to see hexagonal pillars similar to the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland.

Crucial and active role

The walk on July 15th was off to an inauspicious start with rain and then drier but blustery conditions, not

conducive to finding our target species of summer butterflies and **Six-belted Clearwing** moths. Undaunted, 21 people of varying ages arrived at the hill, where **Mike Poulton** of the Friends of Rowley Hills explained the history of the site, and the part currently being played by volunteers from the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust to improve the biodiversity of the hill. Part of the site is owned by the Trust, where scrub clearance has been a priority of the winter work parties. Yellow Rattle has been sown, playing a key role in controlling coarse grasses. Many other wild flowers have reclaimed the territory, and others have been planted to encourage diversity across the grassland habitat.

In the grassland

Despite the conditions, we were off



Small Skipper (Joy Stevens)



Six-belted Clearwing hovering over a pheromone lure (Andy Purcell)

to a good start with a **Shaded Broad-bar** moth fluttering up from the undergrowth at the beginning of the walk. With so many pairs of eyes scanning the wet grass, we managed a few sightings. Portway is a great site for **Marbled White** and we were able to spot several hunkered down in the grass. We also found both **Small** and **Essex Skippers**, which enabled our own Richard Southwell to point out the differences between the two species. An advantage of such cool conditions is that any butterflies that are found are fairly docile. This Small Skipper was happy to sit on Richard's finger whilst he explained how to identify these two tiny butterflies. I guess it was much warmer there than in the cold, wet grass.



Portway Hill (Andy Purcell)



On the walk (Joy Stevens)

Interaction

The potential for interaction between people and wildlife is well demonstrated here, with House Martins nesting at the top of a high rise block of flats in the near distance, a spot that has also been used as a vantage point by a Peregrine Falcon. Overhead we were treated to the sight of a hovering Kestrel, later joined in flight by her mate.

Finding Six-belted Clearwing moths posed another challenge. To this end, Richard revealed the contents of his fetching insulated spotty bag – pheromones to lure the male moths. In such cool conditions

we were unsure if this would be effective, but we found a relatively sheltered spot with patches of Bird's-foot Trefoil. A few attempts in separate likely spots proved unsuccessful, so we carried on, steadily increasing our species count.

Successful

A perceptible rise in temperature tempted several more butterflies to take to the air, and Richard had to depart for a lunch time engagement. He left the pheromones with Mike,

which proved a wise decision. Mike duly tried the pheromones again in several spots in only slightly better conditions and was successful at every site tested. Sure enough the male moths turned up every time, with total numbers estimated at between 20 and 25. It was also possible to note marked differences in the sizes of individuals. Subsequent to the official walk, Mike has revisited the site for his normal transect recording, when he tried the pheromone lure again at nine different points. From this exercise he was able to prove that Six-belted Clearwings are present across the site wherever Bird's-foot Trefoil occurs.

All in all we clocked up 18 species of moth and butterfly. Thanks to everyone who turned up, and especially to Mike Poulton for arranging the walk and Richard Southwell for the entertainment, pheromones and expert knowledge.

Article by Joy Stevens

Portway Hill is featured as Walk 23 in 'Butterflies of the West Midlands'.
Not got your copy yet? Visit www.naturebureau.co.uk for details.



Marbled White
on Hangman Hill

Green Hairstreak on North Hill



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust members on North Hill



BBC Midlands Today filming on 17th July 2017, with Mel Mason on the right (Mike Williams)



Butterflies Bounce Back on the Malverns

Mel Mason reports on a better year in the hills

If 2016 was one of the worst years on record for butterflies, then 2017 was one of the most surprising. Numbers crashed in 2016, approximately 35% less than in 2015. Against the odds, numbers have not just recovered on 14 transect sites around the Malverns, they seem to be the highest in recent years – more than 70% higher than 2016 and 20% higher than 2013, previously the highest number recorded in recent years.

Early sightings

The season started with regular sightings of **Red Admiral** in March and April, a species which is usually not seen until mid-May or June, almost matching the number of **Brimstone**. Later in spring and early summer a record number of 27 **Green Hairstreak** appeared in the lower quarries and higher slopes, the last as late as 1st July. Then the first brood of **Holly Blue**

numbers exploded, 70% higher than in 2016. No doubt the ichneumon wasp *Listrodomus nychthemerus* is already on the heels of this peak, causing the predictable rise and fall in its population.

Summer sightings

In the summer **Small Copper** made a significant recovery, following a 30% decline in the past six years – approximately 140% more sightings than in 2016. **Small Heath** also made a welcome recovery this year but was still 20% lower than in 2013. More often out of sight at the top of elms, **White-letter Hairstreak** usually number between one to five sightings each year, but 50 were reported from around the hills and Malvern Gardens, along with one on Wych Elm near the North Quarry Clock Tower. Perhaps the best site was the Old Hills, where it was difficult not to find many **Purple Hairstreak** feeding on bramble flower in the middle of the day, along with **White-letter Hairstreak** laying eggs

on the Wych Elms nearby. In July, **Marbled White** numbers increased to an extraordinary level – 90% up on last year, which was the highest ever-recorded population of this species both locally and across the West Midlands. It was also a bumper year for **Common Blue**, not as high as the record year of 2015, but the second highest in recent times.

Not so common

The big losers of the past ten years include some of the most common species, particularly **Peacock**, **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Gatekeeper**. Fortunately, **Gatekeeper** and **Small Tortoiseshell** have improved this year but **Peacock** numbers have fallen again – 89% less than in 2013. Total butterfly numbers reached a peak in the week beginning 8th July, a week earlier than last year, and following the most prolonged heatwave since June 1976. Two further surprises were recorded in the Southern Hills: in early summer two **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** were identified on the western slopes of Chase End Hill, and, later in the summer, two **Dark Green Fritillaries**

were photographed on the west side of Swinyard Hill. In much larger numbers, **Silver-washed Fritillary** sightings are increasing each year, in particular around the Southern Hills.

Conservation works

Fortunately, the **Grayling** – Herefordshire & Worcestershire's rarest butterfly – increased in numbers on the eastern slopes of North Hill this year. Three different butterfly walks in July (Malvern Hills Trust, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation) along with the local press, BBC Hereford & Worcester and BBC Midlands Today helped to celebrate the highest population for

several years, including the earliest ever emergence on 23rd June. The future of the Malvern Grayling is dependent, to a large extent, on the volunteers attached to MHT and WMBC, who continue to play a significant role in maintaining and improving the Grayling habitat on the Northern Hills. The season for most species of butterfly finishes at the end of September, but **Red Admiral** was seen in good numbers throughout October – and they have increased by 727% since 2013. Keep a lookout for any caterpillars that might be surviving the winter period while we wait for the hibernators (**Peacock**, **Brimstone**, **Comma** and **Small Tortoiseshell**) to

appear again in March.

Impressive totals

An impressive 32 species were recorded in 2017, compared with 33 species in 2013, which also included **Clouded Yellow**. Hill Court Farm, numbering 6,950 butterflies, and Old Hills, with 4,241, showed the highest abundance. Population estimates are taken from 29,842 records (estimated by the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme) from 14 transect sites and more than 5,500 casual sightings of butterflies around the Malvern Hills

Article and photos unless otherwise stated by Mel Mason

The big losers of the past ten years include some of the most common species

Mating pair of Small Coppers. Interestingly, the one on the top is form *caeruleopunctata* with tiny blue spots on the hindwing, whilst the other one isn't.



Grayling on North Hill

Butterflies on My Patch

I have lived in the beautiful town of Bridgnorth for 15 years, and I am fortunate to have the likes of the Wyre Forest, Prees Heath and Cannock Chase within striking distance, although it does involve a car journey of 45 minutes or so to get to these places. Dudmaston National Trust Estate, however, is pretty much on my doorstep – a good walk or a five minute drive and I'm in Comer Woods.

Recent work improving access and revitalising existing paths through Comer Woods have created more opportunity for exploration. A new car park and visitor centre will be up and running for 2018. A great deal of consideration and care has been taken in areas where ancient oak

and honeysuckle have accommodated **White Admiral** for several years. In my meetings and conversations with tenant farmers, some have agreed to consider expanding the green belt on their fields and adding



Essex Skipper



White Admiral

more wild flowers. My best Big Butterfly Count was recorded on Dudmaston in 2017, where I had a count of over 20 **Essex Skippers** in July.

I have been asked to consider leading two walks in June and July, and the dates are to be confirmed soon. The National Trust welcomed over 90,000 people to the Hall, Garden and Dingle walks in 2016. That is quite a lot of people, most of whom will have little idea of how stunning the White Admiral is, which is doing very well here on my patch.

Article and photos by **Roger Littleover**

We could make *Butterflies on My Patch* a regular feature of *The Comma*, so do please send an article to me at phwarden@sky.com - Editor.

Spring Transect

Orange-tip
(Roger Wasley)



During 2017 Chris Morgan accompanied his wife Pauline on three regular transect walks in Hall Green, Birmingham, providing the motivation for this poem.

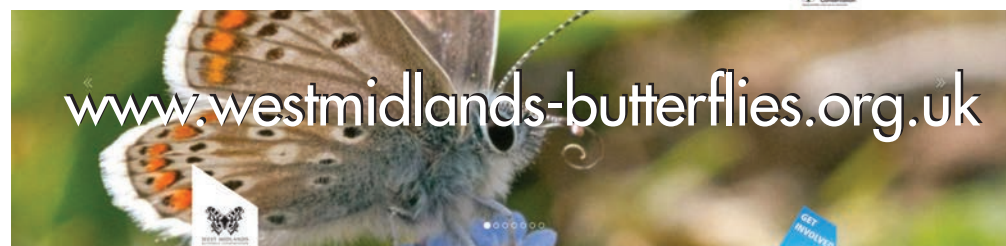
*So easy to identify,
those bright corners
visible at fifty yards*

*So common this year,
by far the most
in April and May*

*So delicate the green
and white, almost
a chequerboard, a tweed*

*So much rarer,
the female, uncertain,
the orange not orange*

By Chris Morgan



John Tilt outlines features of the new Branch website

Last year the Branch Committee agreed that we should update our Branch website, using modern design which would work on tablets and iphones as well as more traditional systems. We asked **Morgan Creative** (the company that designs *The Comma*) to do a basic design. The design involved pull-down menus and a tile layout with moving picture galleries. They employed **MadWire** to do the programming.

Basic structure

We then set about loading the basic structure with all our West Midlands information. The diagram below shows the site map with the headings. For example "Species" now shows Photographs, Distribution, Population Trends, Phenology, Life Cycle and Caterpillar food plants. It also contains "Best places to see", which is linked to a "Sites Section". This section includes habitat photographs, Openstreet maps, Google mapping and a list of species. There are sections on Recording with all the latest news on Casual Recording and Transects. You can access iRecord

directly from the Recording tiles and add your latest sightings. The system is so flexible that it can be developed as we wish.

More sites

We need the help of members. We need more sites – your favourite place in the West Midlands where you go to see butterflies, with habitat photographs and details of the site. Send any



suggestions to john.tilt2@btopenworld.com. If you do work in an area regularly it would be worth doing a news blog with regular updates about what is going on, such as can be seen on the Grafton Wood blog and the Prees Heath website. We can also add any research and timed recordings done by members in our Reports section.

Moth section

Further development is planned. We are hoping to create a moth section similar to the one run by the Staffordshire Moth Group, giving distribution and details of moth species. We also hope to add a members' photograph gallery for each species.

One snag we have encountered is that, because the system is written in the latest software, it will not work with Windows XP, which is no longer supported by Microsoft. If we can fix this we will, but all other systems seem to work.

Article by **John Tilt**

If you have any ideas that you would like to be included contact john.tilt2@btopenworld.com



Butterfly bunds (Pat Rowland)



Small Copper (Steve Rowland)

Pat Rowland shows what dedicated volunteers can achieve

For over ten years, members of The Valley Riverside Project have observed and recorded the local birds visiting the Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC) area on Billesley Common, Birmingham. Having recently created a wetland area, the City Ranger

suggested we start to keep records of the butterflies and dragonflies that were now being attracted. In 2013 we began to identify and record a variety of species of butterflies that were enjoying the range of wild flowers growing on our conservation site.

We were soon to learn of the general decline in butterflies and began to ask what we could do to encourage more to breed on

Billesley Common. A butterfly bund was described to us and it seemed that we had a suitable south facing slope, and all we needed was the wherewithal to build it.

Scatter seeds

Working with the City Council Rangers, an application was made to the Birmingham Municipal Trust for funds to hire a team to dig out another scrape and create two 1 metre high mounds of earth. Earlier this year we received £1,000 from the Trust and work began in May to make another wetland scrape, to create the two bunds and to raise the path through the wetland area. This also attracts butterflies to bask. We invited local people to scatter seeds onto the bunds, and lo and behold last autumn a range of flowers appeared. Not necessarily ones that we would have chosen,



Butterfly bunds under construction (Pat Rowland)



Path on the Common (Pat Rowland)

Creating a Butterfly Bund

but it's a start!

During the next year we will be more selective in what we want growing on them. We were delighted to see two **Small Coppers** warming themselves on the clay that forms part of the bunds. We plan to use the clay & pebbles at the base of the bunds and we have been collecting suitable seeds, including Bird's-foot Trefoil, Kidney Vetch, Common Milkwort, Sheep's Sorrel etc.

Conservation volunteers

We are a team of about 15 conservation volunteers which meet monthly to undertake a variety of conservation work that includes litter picking, checking the water quality of the Haunch Brook, clearing brambles, maintaining the woodland area, scything the small



Flowers on the bunds (Pat Rowland)

meadow and generally improving the site for local people and wildlife. Since 2006 we have successfully raised £42,000 through a range of trusts and charities. This has been used to lay paths across the area which has made the Common more accessible and welcoming. We have also purchased litter picking

equipment, installed benches, bins, information boards etc.

Advice and support

We are all novices as far as butterflies are concerned and so any advice and support would be most welcome. I can be contacted at pat.a.rowland@googlemail.com

Article by **Pat Rowland** on behalf of The Valley Riverside Project



The volunteer team (Pat Rowland)

PS see us on Facebook and Twitter 'Friends of Billesley Common'

Moths of the Mosses

Assessing the fortunes of some of our rarest and most beautiful species

In 2016 the Meres and Mosses Landscape Partnership Scheme, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, initiated a project to assess the status of the **Argent & Sable** moth, *Rheumaptera hastata*, in the Meres and Mosses area, which in our region includes parts of North Shropshire and Staffordshire. It was led by **Dave Green** under the direction of **Jenny Joy**, BC's Senior Regional Officer. The project centred on Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve, which at nearly 1,000 hectares in size, is the third largest lowland raised bog in Britain, and it supports nearly 2,000 invertebrate species.

Argent & Sable formerly occurred throughout most of England and Wales, the southern uplands, the north-west of Scotland and the Hebrides. It has declined greatly throughout much of England and Wales where recent surveys have confirmed this to be a highly localised species, with a handful of populations found in Somerset, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, Merionethshire, Caernarvonshire, Yorkshire and Cumbria. Its status in Warwickshire and Derbyshire is uncertain. There is evidence that the decline is continuing and just 16 sites in England have been confirmed since 2010. In north-west Scotland its status is less clear



Argent & Sable (Lucy Lewis)



Sterrhopterix fusca larval case (Stephen Lewis)



Argent & Sable larva (Dave Green)

as the species is probably under recorded.

In our region, apart from in Shropshire and Staffordshire, the moth was last recorded in Herefordshire in 2000, having been recorded most years by Michel Harper from 1986 in

Haugh Wood and Queen's Wood. In Worcestershire it managed to hang on a bit longer, until 2002, when it was last recorded in the Wyre Forest, although it was recorded in at least nine woodland sites in Worcestershire in the 19th century, and in fewer sites up to 1948. It was seen at Postenplain in the Shropshire part of Wyre in 1998, but there are no records since then. In Staffordshire it continues to be present in several areas, including Chartley Moss and Churnet Valley.

Foodplants

The Argent & Sable flies by day in warm sunny weather between May and early July, with northern moorland populations flying later in the year. The larva feeds on Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, Downy Birch, *Betula pubescens* or Bog Myrtle, *Myrica gale*. In some years willows *Salix* sp. may occasionally be used.

Eggs are laid singly on the underside of leaves of Birch generally less than one metre tall or on bog myrtle, growing in full sun. On Birch the larva spins one, two

or three leaves together and feeds from within the chamber, eating just the inner leaf surface when small and later eating through the leaf. It feeds among the terminal leaves of bog myrtle shoots in the same way. It overwinters as pupae, which have been found in moss or plant debris at the base of trees in woodland and bog myrtle on moorland.

The project

The aims of the project included:

- Carrying out surveys and habitat assessments for the Argent & Sable
- Providing training to enable volunteers to conduct surveys
- Holding a feedback event at the end of the project

The initial training workshop was well attended, and around 30 people were involved in surveys or workshops during the project. From the outset it has to be said that nationally 2016 was a poor year for the Argent & Sable, so the survey results have to be viewed in this context. 16 adults were recorded on Fenn's, Whixall, Bettisfield and Wem Mosses in Shropshire, and 11 larvae. In Staffordshire 1 adult and 1 larva were recorded at Chartley Moss and 2 adults at Coombes Valley. At a known site near Church Stretton in south Shropshire none were recorded despite considerable searching. Brown Moss in Shropshire, very close to Prees Heath, was considered to have the potential to provide suitable habitat in future years given sufficient areas of early successional birch.

It was apparent from where on the mosses the moth was recorded

that it favoured edge habitat rather than the open areas of the mosses, and shelter may be a factor in this regard, although more open areas are known to have been used in past years. Several of the records were from the disused railway line at Fenn's Moss. Ensuring a supply of suitable Birch in future management will be vital, although the moth can often be seen well away from suitable breeding habitat.

As well as the Argent & Sable, during the survey two **Forester** moths, *Adscita statice*, a declining

species in the UK, were recorded on Fenn's Moss by **Mike Sokolowski**, and eleven **Manchester Treble-bars**, *Carsia sororata*, were recorded on Whixall Moss. Seven larvae of the micro-moth *Ancylis tineana* were also recorded, as well as a vacated female larval case of *Sterrhopterix fusca* - the mosses are the only confirmed sites for both these species in England and Wales.

2017 - a better year

Although 2016 was a poor year in many ways, 2017 proved to be just the opposite. **Stephen Barlow** and **Mike Sokolowski** recorded 14 Argent & Sable on Whixall Moss on one day on a transect. **Purple-bordered Gold**, *Idaea muricata*, and Manchester Treble-bar, have also been seen in good numbers. Somewhat bizarrely, Stephen managed to photograph an Argent & Sable on a Rhododendron flower on the edge of the mosses. Despite much searching, however, Argent & Sable was not recorded on the known site near Church Stretton.

George Tordoff of Butterfly Conservation Wales (the reserve straddles the England/Wales border) spent 5 days at Fenn's, Whixall and

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Argent & Sable larval tent (Stephen Lewis)



Ancylis tineana (Dave Grundy)



Training event at Whixall Moss May 2016 (Stephen Lewis)



Manchester Treble-bar
(Stephen Barlow)



Argent & Sable on
Rhododendron (Stephen Barlow)

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Bettisfield Mosses in July as part of the £5 million five year European Union and Heritage Lottery funded Marches Mosses Bog LIFE Project to enhance the mosses and purchase more land. 20 Argent & Sable larval tents were found, all on Downy Birch. Most of the larval tents were found on dry bog with some wetter peat cut areas and an abundance of small Birch trees. Elsewhere, larvae were found at a low density in areas close to the wooded edge of the bog. No larvae were found in more exposed open bog conditions, despite Birch being present, as was found to be the case in 2016.

Unfussy

George's survey included searching for larval cases of the rare *psychid* moth *Sterrhopterix fusca*. The moth larva makes a case, usually on Birch or Heather. 58 vacated cases were found, with the highest density on Bettisfield Moss. Considering the rarity of this species the moth appears

surprisingly unfussy with regard to its habitat requirements. Cases were found in areas of both dry and wet bog, in both sheltered locations close to the bog margin as well as more exposed locations on the open bog, and on a range of host plants. However, no cases were found in areas of secondary woodland, both dry and wet, as all cases were in open, unshaded situations. Only one case was found to contain an active larva, on a Birch leaf on Whixall Moss. It was photographed and, if you look closely, you can just see the black head of the larva poking out.

George also collected larval spinings on Birch of the rare micro-moth *Ancylis tineana*, which produced two adults a couple of months later, thereby confirming the presence of this species. Both *Sterrhopterix fusca* and *Ancylis tineana* are proposed Red Data Book species. The Silvery Arches moth, another secondary target of the survey, was not recorded during light trapping, possibly because the flight season had already finished.

This moth and Argent & Sable, Purple-bordered Gold, Manchester Treble-bar and Marsh Oblique-barred, *Hyphenodes humidalis*, are all listed as Nationally Scarce B (recorded in 31-100 10km squares in Britain since 1980).

One aspect of the LIFE project is to remove Birch scrub from the mosses and to raise the water table, both of which could adversely affect the suitable habitat for Argent & Sable. The timing of any work is also important so as not to disrupt the egg-laying and larval stages of the Argent & Sable from June to leaf fall, as well as the need to maintain some taller trees to provide shelter. These aspects are particularly important regarding the area of Whixall Moss where most of the Argent & Sable cases were found. Ongoing monitoring of the larval stages will be required in those areas where restoration work is carried out.

By the editor, with thanks to Dave Green and George Tordoff for permission to summarise their reports, to Stephen Mitchell of the Shropshire Moth Group for his assistance in writing this article, to Tony Jacques, the Shropshire Moth Group and to the many people who helped in the surveys in 2016 and 2017.

Forestry Commission Contract Extended

Butterfly Conservation's contract with the Forestry Commission is to be extended for the next five years and will cover more areas of the UK

In August 2017 Butterfly Conservation was invited to tender for a contract to deliver the conservation of butterflies in the West of England and has recently heard that its tender has been successful. The new contract is for around £100K over 5 years and has been extended to cover the whole of the west of England. This means Butterfly Conservation will be covering parts of the UK they have not really worked in much before and have the opportunity to work with foresters in more of our existing priority woodlands, as well as working on new sites.

Absolutely delighted

Jenny Joy, Senior Regional Officer for the West Midlands, who was involved in ensuring the success of the tender, said "We are absolutely delighted to receive this new grant which will mean that we shall be able to continue our close working relationship with the Forestry Commission at a regional level and continue to work together to achieve further gains for butterflies and moths. We are really grateful to the Forestry Commission for making our ongoing working relationship such a positive one and particularly to our FC colleagues Rebecca Wilson, Richard Boles, Phil Rudlin, Kate Wollen, Alan Reid and Lorne Campbell for all their support".

Partnership projects

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands has had a very close working relationship with the Forestry Commission locally for many years especially in the Wyre Forest but also through partnership projects, involving the FC, targeting Wood White sites in Herefordshire and Shropshire. This partnership developed particularly during the period Ian Hickman was Forest District Manager for the Marches District during the 1990s and up until 2012.

Ian's priorities, aside from timber production, were education and conservation so any new staff appointed quickly engaged with this ethos. FC staff frequently planned to create glades, scallops and box junctions in appropriate places without even being asked!

Conservation work

A number of successful funding applications were developed to undertake conservation work on priority sites such as Back to Orange at the Wyre Forest and SITA funded projects in Herefordshire and south Shropshire. In 2007, this work was formalised on a national level by the production of a joint conservation strategy which ran from 2007 to 2017. Regionally, in 2012 the FC offered a five-year contract to enable Butterfly Conservation to work across 19 sites containing key species like Argent & Sable, Drab Looper, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Wood White. Together, this partnership has led to many very positive outcomes for butterflies and moths including:

- More direct conservation work on the ground
- More people engaged with work in FC woodlands
- Habitat management advice which has proven to work
- Successful fundraising effort which has brought in significant funds for conservation work in FC woodlands
- More local support and understanding when issues arise

The new contract will enable Ian's legacy to continue into the future with new targets being developed to meet the changing needs of butterflies and moths.

Article by Jenny Joy and Mike Williams



Drab Looper (Dave Green)



Ian Hickman's retirement party
(Rosemary Winnall)



Pearl-bordered Fritillary
(Mike Williams)





Siege Wood volunteers

Wood White Work

Rhona Goddard provides an update on this project

I spent a great day in November at Siege Wood in Herefordshire with Liz and Mark (the owners) and members of the Ledbury Naturalist Group. Thanks to all for their efforts. The group spent the day extending a woodland ride and enlarging a glade, specifically for the **Wood White**. During a site visit to Siege Wood this summer I was really pleased to see a female Wood White egg-laying in an area cleared by volunteers during the previous winter. Approximately 30 Wood White butterflies were recorded at Siege Wood this year, and it is great to see Wood White numbers responding to recent habitat works. Thanks to all for the records.

Work parties

There are a number of conservation days planned for early 2018. The first work party of the year will be held at Wigmore Rolls near Ludlow on the 21st January, and the second will be a joint work party with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust on the 6th February, at one of their nature reserves in the Woolhope Dome area. We will also be working at Bury Ditches near Bishop's Castle on the 18th February, when we are hoping the Forestry Commission will be providing a barbecue. All welcome.

Anniversary

2018 is Butterfly Conservation's 50th anniversary. In celebration of this we are holding a national Day of Conservation Action on Saturday 10th March. As part of this celebration, I will be leading a conservation work party at Bury Ditches to benefit the Wood White butterfly population. If you would like to join us to help celebrate our 50th year, please call me on 01746 762364 or email me at rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org (The Branch is holding events on both Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th March as a Weekend of Action - see Dates for your Diary

Wood White at Mortimer Forest



pages for more events – Ed.)

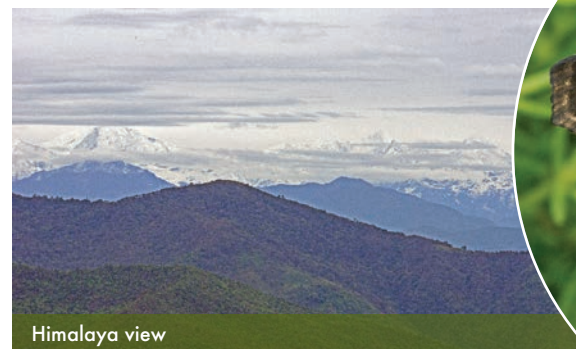
Monitoring

If winter work parties are not really for you, perhaps you would like to join me and other volunteers next summer to monitor butterfly populations at Blakeridge Wood (a Wood White reintroduction site) and Mortimer Forest. Both these sites support a variety of butterfly species, including the Wood White, and basic butterfly ID training will be provided, which I hope will also include how to find the tiny Wood White eggs!

Symposium

Butterfly Conservation's eighth international symposium will be held at Southampton University in April. To highlight the Wood White Project I am hoping to attend, and maybe present a talk. For further information about the symposium please visit www.butterfly-conservation.org

By Rhona Goddard, with thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund and their players, and to the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. All photos by Rhona Goddard.



Himalaya view

Butterflying in the North-east Himalaya

Tony Moore goes on a solo trip to Lama Camp in Arunachal Pradesh

My trip started well when I was bumped up to Business Class for the flight to Delhi. Instead of languishing cramped in 'cattle class' for nine hours, hoping that the world might end prematurely, I was seated in luxury, being plied with champagne by stewards, prior to an excellent dinner and seven hours sleep in a proper bed. Pretty damn good! I flew straight on to Guwahati, where I stayed the night before the 10 hour, 380 km trip up to Lama. My driver arrived at 7 a.m. the next morning, and off we went. Once in the mountains, the road became very hairy indeed, especially the last 20 km of rocky track up the side of a cliff to Lama. We were regularly no more than a tyre's width from a near vertical, unprotected drop of several hundred metres. Those of a nervous disposition should probably give it a miss! The camp proved to be just

that – a motley collection of fixed tents and shacks – with a phenomenal view 10 km down the valley to Tenga.

High level species

It was, actually, a bit spartan for my old bones. Cold, no electricity (except for battery charge), no running water or showers, hole-in-the-ground bog, no beer and veg curry three times a day.

After a couple of days it did assume a quaint charm, albeit somewhat forced. The main problem was that it was very early season and there weren't many butterflies about. However, most of those I did see were in pristine condition. There were some very interesting, high level species, although most were seen on the sandy track which ran through the camp, with little opportunity for creative photography. My first butterflies were on the way up, where we stopped for a bite at a wayside café – dahl curry and the most delicious puris, a deep fried



Indian Tortoiseshell

bread, I'd ever eaten, all for 85p!

There were several **Indian Tortoiseshells**, *Aglaia cashminensis*, nectaring outside. These are very like our **Small Tortoiseshell**, but with more contrast, and with a more elongated wing shape, especially the females.

Down the track

At the camp, it was cloudy and rainy the first day and I didn't see a single butterfly. The next morning was bright and clear and I set off down the track. This proved to be something of a *Puncharium*, with

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Woodland ride and glade at Siege Wood November 2017



View to Tenga



Common Windmill



Mixed Punch



Green Sapphire



Powdery Green Sapphire

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21 ►

four species of **Punch** seen: **Lesser, Tailed, Orange,** and **Mixed**. Sadly, no **Plum Judy** to keep them company. The first few that I saw all had closed wings, and it was a surprise to find that they were *Riodininae*, rather than *Lycaenids*. As soon as there were open winged ones, they looked very 'Dukey'. There was also a **Plain Sulphur**, *Dercas lycorias*.

There were a few tiny, rather hairy **Blues**, which proved to be **Darjeeling Straightwing Blues**, *Orthomiella pontis*. A few **Helens** and **Windmills** were floating

around the treetops, but there they stayed. Still, pretty good for a first proper day.

Lama is mainly known as a mecca for birders, being second only to the Andes in species diversity according to a local researcher. Certainly, the place rang with birdsong, day and night. I did manage a photo of a Scarlet Minivet, which was just about in range of my 105mm lens.

Sapphires

After a first breakfast of warmed western style sliced bread, sprinkled with sugar, I managed to convince Ami, our cook, that I would prefer Indian food. Thereafter I had the most delicious parothas, chapatis and puris. Only vegetarian food was allowed on the campsite, but although I

often had no idea what I was eating, it was universally very good. However, after four days of veggie food, I jokingly suggested that I would be happy with a live chicken for dinner. I was the only visitor at the time and Ami reappeared ten minutes later, saying "Are you liking mutton?". An hour later I was tucking into an excellent lamb and mushroom curry.

Most of the butterflying consisted of slowly walking up and down the mountain tracks, trying to find stuff before it saw me. Quite a rare little butterfly, the **Powdery Green Sapphire**, *Heliophoros tamu*, showed both upper and lower surfaces. An underside shot of another **Sapphire**, which looks very similar, but which had shining blue/green uppersides,

turned out to be a **Green Sapphire** *Heliophoros androcles*. I also spotted **Eastern Veined Labyrinth** *Neope pulaha*. There are several *Neopes* in India, but most are very characteristically marked and quite different.

Blues

I was now starting to really enjoy the experience, especially when I awoke one morning with a fine view of the distant Himalaya. My last day dawned fine and sunny, and after my mandatory veg curry, I mooched off down the track. The first new species was a very pale Blue. It was **Albocaerulean Blue** *Udara albocaerulea*, very unusual, especially in India. My day ended with a butterfly which appeared to be deep shining blue/black as it flew around my legs. When it

settled, it was a gorgeous golden brown! It proved to be a **Blue Forester**, *Lethe scanda*. From the photograph alone one might wonder why it was called a Blue.

Windmill

I thought that was my butterflying finished as my transport back to Guwahati was coming at 7 a.m. the next day. It tipped with rain all night and on the way down the next day there was a massive landslip and the road was all but obliterated. The road guys had been working through the night, but we were still held up for 50 minutes. This proved to be a blessing in disguise as there was lots of lovely fresh damp sand about. The camera was quickly out as there were several **Chestnut Tigers**, *Parantica sita*, floating

around. This has to be the most elegant and beautiful of the Tigers with the chestnut suffusion on the hindwings. Unfortunately, they were very jumpy and I was unable to get a reasonable shot. While chasing them around I nearly stepped on a stunning fresh **Tabby**, *Pseudergolis wedah*. And then, to crown it all, a **Common Windmill**, *Byasa polyeuctes*, dropped down for a salt lunch.

Those were three that I didn't expect, putting a real gloss on a very interesting holiday. It was, however, also a case of you win some and... ..the one species that would have really put the icing on the butterfly cake, the spectacular **Bhutan Glory**, *Bhutanitis lidderdalii*, just wasn't to be seen.

.....
Article and photos by Tony Moore



Scarlet Minivet



Pansy



Albocaerulean Blue



Tabby



Close-up of Puss Moth flagellae (Mike Poulton)

Vacated pupa case attached to side of old wooden table (Mike Poulton)



Puss Moths mating (Julia Morris)



Puss Moth caterpillar in disturbed posture, with raised head and pinkish flagellae extending from the twin tails (Mike Poulton)

Puss Moths in an Urban Garden

of the other houses along their road, sacrificing the small front garden has enabled them to get their car off the busy road

At the rear, the south-facing garden slopes gently upwards to meet the boundary fence of the garden of the house in the next road. A small lawn near the back door is for the convenience of their two rather large but very friendly dogs, and the remaining garden has been set aside for wildlife. When they moved here in 2006 high on the agenda was a

garden pond, and, once installed, marginal and submerged aquatics were planted, and the pond was left for nature to take its course.

Wildlife-attracting shrubs and perennials were introduced to the garden, including a Buddleia and a native willow along the fence-line to help to screen off the neighbouring garden. Julia has always been very fond of willows, so when an opportunity presented itself at their local plant nursery to purchase two sorry-looking, pot-bound plants, reduced in price for

Wildlife-attracting shrubs and perennials were introduced to the garden

It all started when a large green caterpillar was found in a pond...

Julia and Rob are passionate about wildlife. They live on the northern side of the Rowley Hills in a semi-detached house along a bus route road on the sprawling Rowley Regis housing estate. They have an average-sized garden, not overly large, but bigger than the postage-stamp sized gardens of today's modern housing, and, like so many

a quick sale, this was too good an offer to pass by. One of them, labelled as 'American Willow', had been grown as a 'standard', with the 'American Willow' top grafted on to a hardy, more vigorous rootstock. The other, a 'Contorted Willow', they were informed, was "perfect for small gardens as it never achieved much of a size". Back home the American Willow was found a spot next to the pond so that its weeping branches would help to shade the water-surface during hot summer days, and the Contorted Willow was planted

In the pond

We now move this story forward to 2008 and the garden is maturing nicely, with butterflies, bees and many other invertebrates regularly visiting. The pond is full of aquatic creatures, including damselflies and dragonflies which are already using it for breeding. One warm summer's afternoon Julia had gone into the garden as she often did after work, and was staring inquisitively into the

pond. To her surprise, there in front of her, floating lifeless in the water, was a large green caterpillar. The forlorn creature was quickly scooped out and placed on the path to show Rob when he returned from work, however, after a minute or two lying there motionless, it began to move and started to crawl off. She quickly found a suitable container together with leaves from various plants around the garden. By now she had concluded that what she had found was a **Puss Moth** caterpillar, but she had no idea where it had come from or what it ate. Had this creature crawled here from one of the neighbour's gardens? When Rob returned, and after researching Puss Moths on the internet, she was confident that it must have come from one of the willows in their own garden. The search began for more caterpillars. The obvious first place to look was on the native willow they had planted along the fence line, but this drew a blank. The American Willow overhanging the pond, and the nearest to where the caterpillar had been found floating on the water was next, and within a few minutes of searching, several Puss Moth caterpillars in various stages of growth were discovered on the

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undersides of partly eaten leaves. In the weeks that followed further searches were carried out, and eggs and caterpillars were found on both the American and Contorted Willow. From then on, after returning from work and feeding the dogs, it was straight up the garden to check on the Puss Moth caterpillars.

However, they soon discovered to their dismay that smaller caterpillars were vulnerable to predation, birds being the usually culprits, although wasps and even Harlequin ladybirds also took their toll. The caterpillars that survived this early onslaught, once they reached a certain size, were generally left alone. By now, feeling quite protective and responsible, whenever tiny caterpillars appeared on the American Willow, a net curtain would be draped over the bush. This somewhat unorthodox conservation measure undoubtedly helped to protect the caterpillars when they were most vulnerable, because every year since then Puss Moth caterpillars have been found on the two willows.

By careful observation and photographing the various stages of the Puss Moth's life cycle in their garden, Julia and Rob have concluded that, once hatched, the young caterpillars quickly disperse and feed almost constantly for around four weeks, passing through at least five moults until fully grown. They then crawl off the food plant to find a suitable log or piece of wood on which to spin a cocoon

Puss Moths are not the only moths with exclusive rights to the willows in their garden



Well camouflaged Puss Moth caterpillar on willow shoot (Mike Poulton)



Puss Moth caterpillar feeding (Julia Morris)



Vacated Puss Moth eggs and newly emerged caterpillars (Julia Morris)

reinforced with fragments of wood - an old wooden table in their garden is often used. After spending the winter in the cocoon they emerge the following spring to start the cycle once again. In some years predation takes a heavy toll, but generally enough survive to maturity, ensuring there will be moths again the following year.

Puss Moths are not the only moth with exclusive rights to the willows in their garden. They also get **Eyed Hawkmoth**, and in 2009 **Vapourer Moth** caterpillars were

all over the American Willow and many of the other shrubs in the garden. Julia and Rob's efforts to protect the Puss Moths must be commended, especially as the moth population in this country in general appears to be decreasing. But how unusual is it to find Puss Moths in an urban garden using non-native willows as their food plant I wonder? Are there willows in your garden? If so, maybe it's time to take a closer look to see what might

be lurking in the foliage. You could be in for a surprise.

.....and in case you were wondering what happened to the caterpillar that was rescued from the pond that started all of this off - it went on to pupate on a piece of old fence post in their garden, but alas, never emerged the following spring.

The photographs were all taken in Julia and Rob's garden and show various stages in the life-cycle of the Puss Moth.

Article by **Mike Poulton**

Telford Butterfly Recorders Group in 2017

Chris Littlewood reports on the group's 2017 activities

When we held our initial meeting in February we aimed to hold three field trips during the spring and summer to get experienced and new recorders together and give them practical experience of recording on a variety of sites. We picked three very different sites, invited everyone, but each afternoon was miserable and overcast. The sun did not shine!

However, all was not lost. People met up, contacts were made, emails exchanged and the few butterflies we did find were caught, potted, identified and discussed. At our last outing on Beeches Field, six children arrived with parents and grandparents. The children proved extremely nimble, bounding through the long grasses and netting specimens for everyone to see - they had a terrific time.

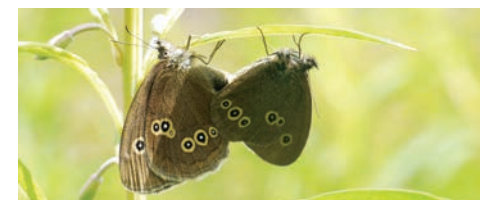
So, in spite of zero warmth and sunshine, we can claim a measure of success, enough to make us think we may well repeat the process this year.

Article by **Chris Littlewood**



Telford Recorders at Redhill (Louise Bremner)

The group welcomes new members. Anyone interested in joining should contact Chris Littlewood at chriswood022@gmail.com



Ringlets (Lucy Lewis)

Sites visited:

Rough Park SJ675048

27th May. Overcast. 13C and a cold wind.
2 Speckled Wood.

Redhill Ecology Park, St Georges, SJ710114

25th June. Overcast. 15C. Drizzling.
21 Ringlet.
4 Small Heath.
10 Meadow Brown.
25 Six-spot Burnet.

Beeches Field, Ironbridge SJ675038

6th August. Overcast. 16C.
12 Meadow Brown.
6 Gatekeeper.
5 Common Blue.
3 Small Skipper.
1 Small Heath.
2 Small Copper.



Speckled Wood (Lucy Lewis)

Dates for your diary

Help to celebrate Butterfly Conservation's 50th Anniversary at the Weekend of Action Events – Saturday 10th March & Sunday 11th March

See details of work parties being held at Bury Ditches, Honeybourne, Prees Heath, Ewyas Harold and Wyre Forest.

Also our Reserve Open Days – Sunday, 3rd June, Sunday, 1st July and Saturday, 14th July See details below.

Moth Recorders' Meeting

Saturday, 27th January. 10.00am – 3.45pm at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham. **Book in advance at www.butterfly-conservation.org**

Butterfly Recorders' Meeting

Saturday, 24th March. 10.00am – 4.00pm at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham. **Book in advance at www.butterfly-conservation.org**

Butterflies of the Malvern Hills ID course

Sunday, 15th July 10.00am – 3.00pm. From Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns to Marbled Whites and Small & Essex Skippers and more. Led by Mike Williams and ideal for beginners. A Worcestershire Wildlife Trust event. Advance booking required. **Contact Ray Howard-Louvaine on 01905 754919 or at rae@worcestershirowildlifetrust.org**

Ewyas Harold Meadows & Common Work Parties

Saturdays: 20th January, 17th February, 10th March, 17th March and 14th April.
Tuesdays: 6th February and 6th March.

Meet at 10.00am at the northern Cwm Hill end of Ewyas Harold Common adjacent to the top cattle grid. Grid Ref SO382302. Approach from Abbey Dore off the B4347 at Grid Ref SO384306.

Some hand tools will be provided, but bring your own if you have them. Please bring gloves, packed lunch and a drink. **Contact for the Tuesday working parties is Lucy Morton, Reserves Officer, on 07503 220191 or at lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org and Sue Young for the Saturday work parties on 01981 240776.**

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Egg Search

Saturday, 27th January. Meet 10.00 am at Grafton Flyford church. **Contact Simon Primrose on 07952 260153 or at simonjprimrose@aol.com**

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wednesday. Meet at 10.00am at Grafton Flyford Church. **Contact John Tilt on 01386 792458 or at john.tilt2@btopenworld.com**

Haugh Wood Work Parties

Saturday 3rd February and Saturday 3rd March. Meet at 10.00am at Haugh Wood FC car park on the minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope. Grid Ref SO597365. **Contact Kate Wollen on 07786 526280 or Robin Hemming on 01568 797351**

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Aymestrey Branch

Thursday 25th January at 7.30pm at Aymestrey Village Hall. Talk: "Butterfly Conservation: Nature Reserves and Conservation in Herefordshire", by Lucy Morton, BC Reserves Officer. **Contact Lucy Morton on 01568 782244 or at lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org**

Honeybourne Work Party

Sunday 11th March. Meet at 10am at the bridge above the disused railway (GR SP127441) on the road between Honeybourne and Mickleton to work on the Grizzled Skipper site. **Contact Peter Seal on 01905 426398 or at peterseal3@btinternet.com**

Malvern Grayling Work Parties

Monday 15th January & Monday 12th February. Meet at 10:00am in North Hill Quarry Car Park. Grid Ref SO7711846931 & Post Code WR14 4LT. Mid morning refreshments and cakes available but bring your own lunch if you stay for the afternoon. **Contact Mel Mason on 01684 565700 or at malverngrayling@btinternet.com**

Monkwood Guided Walk and Reserve Open Day

Sunday 3rd June at 2.00pm. A walk around the wood, mainly to see the re-introduced Wood Whites, led by Peter Seal. Charge of £3.00 for adults and £1.50 for children. Meet in the reserve car park. **Contact Peter Seal on 01905 426398 or at peterseal3@btinternet.com**
Sunday, 24th June at 11.00 am. Guided butterfly walk led by Mike Williams. Meet in the reserve car park. **Contact Mike Williams on 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com**

Monkwood Work Parties

Third Thursday in the month up to and including March, starting at 10.00am. Meet in the reserve car park. **Contact George Groves on 01905 620721 or at george_groves@btopenworld.com**

Penny Hill Landfill Site Work Parties

Sunday 21st January & Sunday 28th January at 10.00am. Meet at the site entrance off Pudford Lane, Hillside, Martley. Grid Ref SO752613. **Contact Mike Williams on 01299 824860 or at wmbutterflies@gmail.com**

Prees Heath Common Reserve Silver-studded Blue Guided Walk and Reserve Open Day

Sunday 1st July at 2.00pm. Former RAF control tower open 10.30am – 4.00pm. Meet on the access track off the A49 opposite the Steel Heath turning. **Contact Stephen Lewis on 07900 886809 or at phwarden@sky.com**

Prees Heath Common Reserve Work Parties

Wednesday 10th January, Saturday 10th March & Wednesday 27th June at 10.30am. Meet on the access track off the A49 opposite the Steel Heath turning. **Contact Stephen Lewis on 07900 886809 or at phwarden@sky.com**

Scarlet Tiger Project Work Parties, Roman Road, Stourbridge

Every third Friday of the month up to and including March. Meet at 10.00am at a location as stated on the notice board at the north end of Roman Road. **Contact Joy Stevens on 01384 372397 or at joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk**

Telford Butterfly Recorders Group Meeting

Wednesday 14th February at 7.00pm. Guest speaker: John Tilt on iRecord. Meet at the offices of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, Darby Road, Coalbrookdale, Telford, TF8 7EP. **Contact Chris Littlewood at chrislwood022@gmail.com**

Trench Wood Guided Walk and Reserve Open Day

Saturday, 14th July at 11.00 am. Meet at the reserve car park Grid Ref SO930588 for a Big Butterfly Count. **Contact Peter Seal on 01905 426398 or at peterseal3@btinternet.com**

Trench Wood Work Parties

Every Thursday at 9.30am and the fourth Sunday of the month at 10.00am up to and including March. Meet at the reserve car park. Grid Ref SO930588. **Contact John Holder on 01905 794854 or at johnholder@tiscali.co.uk**

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Dates for your diary cont'd

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Wyre Forest Work Parties

Second Sunday of the month up to and including March, also Wednesday, 17th January. Meet at 10.00am at Earnwood Copse car park on the B4194 Bewdley to Kinlet road. Grid Ref SO744784. Contact Mike Williams on 01299 824860 or at wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Wood White Project Work Parties

Please contact Rhona Goddard if you plan to come to any of these work parties on 01746 762364 or at rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org. All work parties take place from 10.30am to 3.30pm.

Siege Wood

Thursday, 11th January. Meet at Siege Wood car park. Grid Ref SO605343.

Wigmore Rolls

Sunday 21st January. Meet at the site entrance on the minor road leading west from Wigmore village. Grid Ref SO397688.

Woolhope Dome area

Tuesday 6th February. Joint work party with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust – exact venue to be decided.

Bury Ditches

Sunday 18th February & Saturday 10th March. Meet at Bury Ditches car park. Grid Ref SO331837. Take the right hand turning opposite the Crown Inn pub, post code SY7 0HU, in Clunton village, signposted to Bury Ditches Hill Fort.



White Admiral Project at Severn Valley Country Park

At Severn Valley Country Park volunteer John Freshney made an observation that there are no records of **White Admiral** butterflies. At Dudmaston and Wyre Forest, a short distance away, however, White Admirals are recorded annually in good numbers. John observed that both bramble, which is the adult butterfly's main nectar plant, and honeysuckle, which is the larval foodplant, possibly need to be growing in close proximity to each other. In Severn Valley Country Park both the bramble and honeysuckle occur but often not close to each other.

During late spring of 2017, John & Jane Freshney collected honeysuckle cuttings from Stanmore Country Park. The cuttings were taken to Severn Valley Country Park where they were planted in pots of compost, watered and placed in a secure place in the shade to prevent them drying out. Virtually every cutting produced roots, and by early autumn they were ready to be planted out.

On 31 October, John, Jane and I set out to plant nearly 100 Honeysuckle plants in groups near to patches of bramble in the Severn Valley Country Park. The area chosen was between the River Severn and the wooded area which is not coppiced between Colliery Bridge and Pitts Island.

We now wait. It may not work but we believe it is an exercise which is well worth trying, and it may be repeated and extended. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. What a joy it would be to see White Admirals at Severn Valley Country Park.

Article by Bill Watkins

Committee Members and Officers

| | | |
|--|--|--------------|
| Chairman Peter Seal | peterseal3@btinternet.com | 01905 426398 |
| Vice Chairman & Conservation Officer Mike Southall | michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk | 01299 251467 |
| Treasurer Lucy Lewis | lemiller@btinternet.com | 07840 530270 |
| Branch Secretary Joy Stevens | joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk | 01384 372397 |
| Regional Officers Dr Jenny Joy (Senior Regional Officer) | jjoy@butterfly-conservation.org | 01952 249325 |
| Rhona Goddard (& Wood White Project Officer) | rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org | 01746 762364 |
| Records Branch Recording Co-ordinator – John Tilt | john.tilt2@btopenworld.com | 01386 792458 |
| – Birmingham & Black Country - Richard Southwell | richard_southwell@hotmail.co.uk | 01384 397066 |
| – Herefordshire – Bob Hall & Ian Draycott | randphall@gmail.com | 01432 850623 |
| – Shropshire – Tony Jacques | rec-vc40@vc40tj.plus.com | 01952 882096 |
| – Staffordshire – John Bryan | johnpbryan15@aol.com | |
| – Worcestershire – Mike Williams & Mel Mason | wmbutterflies@gmail.com | 01299 824860 |
| Transects John Tilt | john.tilt2@btopenworld.com | 01386 792458 |
| Reserve Managers Ewyas Harold - Ian Hart | yellowrattle4@aol.com | 01981 510259 |
| Grafton Wood - John Tilt | john.tilt2@btopenworld.com | 01386 792458 |
| Monkwood - George Groves | george_groves@btopenworld.com | 01905 620721 |
| Prees Heath - Stephen Lewis | phwarden@sky.com | 07900 886809 |
| Trench Wood - John Holder | johnholder@tiscali.co.uk | 01905 794854 |
| Conservation Officers Worcestershire - Trevor Bucknall | trevor.bucknall@tesco.net | 01905 755757 |
| Herefordshire - Ian Hart | yellowrattle4@aol.com | 01981 510259 |
| Moth Officers Bham & the Black Country - David Jackson | jacksongrus@talktalk.net | 01902 344716 |
| Herefordshire - Robin Hemming | robinhemming@btinternet.com | 01568 797351 |
| Worcestershire - Mike Southall | michael_southall58@hotmail.com | 01299 251467 |
| County Leaders North Staffordshire - John Bryan | johnpbryan15@aol.com | 01782 541870 |
| Central Staffordshire - Robert Winstanley | robandpatwin@btinternet.com | 01889 576768 |
| South Staffordshire - David Jackson | jacksongrus@talktalk.net | 01902 344716 |
| Herefordshire - Dean Fenton | fenton@littleburyfarm.co.uk | 01568 611575 |
| Malvern Hills - Mel Mason | meljmason@btinternet.com | 01684 565700 |
| Brown Hairstreak Champion Simon Primrose | simonjprimrose@aol.com | 07952 260153 |
| Committee Members Steven Williams | s.williams@yescomputers.co.uk | 07974 152081 |
| Publicity and Marketing Officer Mike Williams | wmbutterflies@gmail.com | 01299 824860 |
| Magazine Editor Stephen Lewis | phwarden@sky.com | 07900 886809 |
| Magazine Design and Production Trish Connolly Morgan | morgancreative@btinternet.com | 01939 220776 |
| Website coordinator John Tilt | john.tilt2@btopenworld.com | 01386 792458 |
| Wider Countryside Butterfly Count Co-ordinator Vacant | If you can help in this important role please contact Peter Seal | |
| Link Trustee Roger Dobbs | | |



Clifden Nonpareil (Kenneth Willetts)

The Holy Grail of Moths Turns up in Worcestershire and Shropshire

The moth most highly prized by Victorian collectors has turned up this autumn in both Worcestershire and Shropshire, a first record for both counties

The Clifden Nonpareil (Nonpareil translates as Unparalleled), *Catocala fraxini*, is a big beast with a wingspan of 75-95mm. Clifden, or Cliveden, is an estate in Berkshire, and it was there that it was first recorded in Britain in the 18th century. It was illustrated by Benjamin Wilkes in 'The English Butterflies and Moths' published in 1749.

Blue colouration

The moth has a striking pale blue streak on the uppersides of the hindwings against a black background, which lends it the alternative name of the Blue Underwing, and those familiar with British moths will know that there are not many with any blue colouration. It is of the same genus as the more common Red Underwing, which has a predominately red upperside to the hindwing with black bands. Both use their hindwings to give a colourful flash to would-be predators. The larval food plant for Clifden Nonpareil is Aspen, *Populus tremula*, the tree with the leaves that rustle in the

breeze, where it overwinters as an egg. It has been recorded at rest during the daytime on tree trunks and walls, and it also comes to sugar and light.

Going north

It was a resident British species in the middle of the 20th century in certain parts of Norfolk and Kent and then disappeared, but it has now become resident again in southern England since around 2007, in Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, south Wiltshire, Dorset, Sussex and Kent. There is some evidence that it is spreading northwards, colonising Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Nowadays it is both a resident and a migrant. This autumn – September is the most common month for sightings - saw the first county records for Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, and maybe others I am not aware of. In Worcestershire (VC37) it was recorded by Kenneth Willetts on 24th September 2017 in his garden at Highwood, Eastham near Tenbury Wells, using a

Skinner moth trap with a 125W mercury vapour bulb. A few days later it was recorded on a factory wall just the other side of the river Teme near Tenbury Wells in Shropshire (VC40). It is widespread in Europe, from Spain to Russia. So here in the Midlands the question is are they migrants from the continent or have they emerged here in Britain? And when will we find evidence of it breeding in our region?

Article by the **editor** with thanks to Mark Parsons, Richard Fox and Mike Williams for their help with this article.



Clifden Nonpareil (Mark Parsons)