

the **Comma**

No. 100 Spring 2018

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation

The 100th Comma: A look
back at the previous 99 editions

**Butterfly Conservation's
Reserves:** A whistlestop tour
around England and Wales



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

50th Anniversary



Cover story

Cover photograph of a Comma for our celebratory 100th edition was taken by **Anthony Woods**. You can read more about the previous 99 editions on page 16.

Contributions

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 the autumn edition of The Comma is **31st August**, but all contributions are welcome in advance of that date. Email contributions to me at phwarden@sky.com and I will forward them to the new editor.

The Branch in Focus



Peter Seal

Hello everyone and welcome to a changed format for our 100th edition. I'll start with the Branch's main preoccupation which is to seek candidates for three vacancies. First,

Stephen Lewis is standing down as Editor after a spell of maintaining the high standards to which we in the Branch have now become accustomed. This is an excellent opportunity to help maintain Branch activity, and induction and support will be made available. It is a question of organising articles and photos sent in by members, and we have Morgan Creative doing the design work and arranging printing with distribution by Head Office.

Second, after 10 years, **Joy Stevens** will complete her spell as Secretary at our AGM in November. This offers someone an excellent opportunity to become involved and obtain more insight into Branch business. Through the year we only hold two formal meetings plus the AGM, however the interesting work goes on elsewhere.

Third, we need a new Coordinator for the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey. Our thanks go to **Scott Martin** who in addition to helping set up our Facebook pages has been overseeing this vital coordinating work. This is a national scheme where volunteers walk a route twice a year on randomly selected one kilometre squares in open countryside. The information is fed into the national UKBMS Annual Report. To make life easier for volunteers the scheme adopted a new online data entry system - their newsletter gives some tips about finding volunteers. This scheme is important because, in being randomly selected, the walks give us a different perspective from the many UKBMS transects which follow

a fixed route in sites known to hold key species or to be good in other ways for our butterfly population. This role may appeal to anyone either studying or working in the environmental field who needs to demonstrate experience in field survey work.

Fundraising

So lots of change, but while we may be losing some experienced input, our organisation is consolidating its reputation by celebrating at national level the 50th Anniversary of Butterfly Conservation. Head Office is planning various fundraising initiatives which include

Dan Hoare to run the London Marathon, a Radio 4 appeal led by **Alan Titchmarsh**, raffles and an online auction.

Plants for Pollinators

Of more direct interest is the Plants for Pollinators campaign, which last year saw a national collaboration with B&Q, whose "Nature of Gardens" can be found on their website. We will be reflecting this in a West Midlands initiative aimed at engaging the wider public in practical steps to conserve butterflies: Places for Pollinators. Please see **Mike Williams'** article on page 12, where he describes a scheme aimed at celebrating BC's 50th, and looks forward to our own



Joy Stevens

40th anniversary as a branch in 2019. Mike mentions that we already have a couple of schemes at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and at Coppice Leasowes in Church Stretton. The Branch will give advice and money for seeds etc and for an information board which will include the Butterfly Conservation logo. We also hope to recover some costs by seeking sponsorship from appropriate providers.

I recently attended the national Branch Chairs' meeting where **Julie Williams**, Chief Executive, and other senior BC figures gave us the latest on the organisation's plans. Key points of interest are

- 2025 BC Strategy which basically commits to continuing and expanding our activities and can be found on the national website.
- **Peter Moore** is to start soon as Director of Development and Engagement and we were told volunteer development will be an important component of his work.
- We have been reviewing our Regional Action Plan. This will become one of the County and Regional Strategies and will be published in spring 2018 as a section of the National Strategy.
- Head Office is to organize a stall at the Malvern Spring Show.
- We continue to develop, with 34,000 members across the UK, 1,550 of whom are members of the West Midlands Branch. An increasing proportion are in the younger age group. Attrition rate - resignations - only 8%, with 70% retention rate in respect of our 12 free months deal.

We are planning other initiatives with money committed for conservation. For instance we are in dialogue with the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife

The Editor speaks

Many thanks to everyone who sent me photos of Commas for this celebratory 100th edition of The Comma. In the end I had to pick one, which was no easy task, but I am sure you will agree that **Anthony Woods'** photo of a Comma in the sunshine on the front cover is a worthy choice.

I will be stepping down as editor as from this issue, so the search is on for a new editor of The Comma. My work as volunteer warden at Butterfly Conservation's Prees Heath Common Reserve requires much time and energy, and taking into account other circumstances I regrettably have to relinquish the role of editor.

Three editions of The Comma are published each year, in spring, autumn and winter. It is an enjoyable and rewarding task, and very much a team effort, with **Trish Connolly Morgan** doing all the design work, and both **Peter Seal** and **Mike Williams** offering useful input. I know that the quality of The Comma is very much appreciated by our members, and it needs to be maintained and developed. So, if you think this is something you would like to do please do not hesitate to contact our Chair, **Peter Seal**.

Trust about improvements at Portway Hill - featured in **Joy Stevens'** article in the previous edition.

Website news

The new website continues in its development and we are keen to add more of your favourite sites, please see **John Tilt's** article on page 28. The Committee agreed to find some money to set up an online Moth Atlas on the new site, and County Moth Recorders are being consulted about setting this up.

MapMate

In connection with this I am reviewing our use of MapMate, as we are paying for licences no longer needed - these

resources can be redirected to cover the new Moth Atlas. I have a list of licence numbers but most do not have the recorder's name against them. I know some do find MapMate useful, so if you hold a licence funded by the Branch please email me to confirm whether you still use it. Please ignore this if I have already been in contact.

Looking forward

Another winter nearly over, but at the time of writing the forecast suggests we won't see too many butterflies over the next week or so. However, by the time you read this they should be on the wing. I'm looking forward to the emergence of **Wood Whites** in the introduction sites and hoping our **Peacocks** bounce back. Have a good summer.

Peter Seal, Branch Chair

P W Seal



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Streaking ahead

A Worcestershire Success Story

For this special 100th edition of *The Comma* I thought it would be interesting to examine the phenomenal spread in range of one of our region's rarest butterflies – the **Brown Hairstreak** – over the period since our newsletter (now *The Comma* magazine) was first published in 1979.

The Brown Hairstreak was rediscovered in Worcestershire in the winter of 1969-70 by the late **Jack Green**, who found eggs on a hedgerow in the Grafton Wood area. This represented an absence of records of 79 years, with the last previously known official record being of an adult – now

preserved in the Rothschild collection at the Natural History Museum in London – dated 1891, with a location of Pershore.

Shortly after the Grafton discovery, Jack Green wrote an article for the Entomological Record where he mentions eggs also being found at 'an airfield' (which we now know to be Defford), and later, in his 1982 book on Worcestershire butterflies, he records the Brown Hairstreak in three 10 km OS Grid squares (SO84, SO94 and SO95). Unfortunately, no more precise details have been found relating to any of these locations, which are away from Grafton.

Out of sight

It must be remembered that the Brown Hairstreak is an extremely secretive little butterfly, preferring to spend the majority of its life out of sight at the top of trees and tall bushes, rarely venturing down to ground level. Out of all the species of UK butterfly it is thus likely to be the most overlooked, and hence under-recorded, butterfly in its adult state. Therefore almost all records of it relate to its eggs being found over the winter period.



Simon Primrose reports on how egg hunting is providing evidence of the range expansion of one of our rarest species

Grafton Wood

Seventeen years on from Jack Green's discovery, and thirty years prior to today, the butterfly was still only officially recorded from egg records on those same few hedgerows immediately surrounding Grafton Wood. These were mostly in the Orchard area, plus one on the extreme southern border of the wood. Indeed, these same few hedgerows are still searched for eggs every year now, and form the core hedgerows of our annual monitoring survey of the butterfly at Grafton Wood. In those early years after discovery, annual recorded

egg numbers fluctuated widely with some years producing a zero result, whilst others produced counts as high as 93 in 1986-87.

Range spread

However, after the establishment of some stewardship schemes on farms in this area, which gave the hedgerows some protection from annual flailing, together with some careful rotational management of the core hedgerows, it was discovered that the Brown Hairstreak was starting to spread its range away from the immediate vicinity of Grafton Wood. By 1996 it was known from five separate 1 Km grid squares – four of those were the ones that envelop Grafton Wood, but also one was slightly further north where the butterfly's presence had been discovered at Roundhill Wood. A year later it had doubled that number up to ten 1 Km squares and its distribution had moved outside its previously known range, both north up towards Feckenham and south at Naunton Beaucham. It must be noted, however, that up until this time intensive egg surveys of the Worcestershire countryside had yet to begin in earnest, therefore it remains a distinct possibility

that the butterfly was under recorded, maybe even back as far as when Jack made his early discoveries at Grafton – we shall never know.....

Annual increase

A steady annual increase in recorded distribution then became the norm, and within ten years it was found to be occupying 100 grid squares in 2006-07. Another 10 years on and we're almost up to date, at the end of the 2016-17 winter, and the total range at that point extended to 215 squares.

This represents a fairly amazing increase in the butterfly's known range in the thirty years since 1986-87. Why this large increase has occurred is difficult to fully explain.

Undoubtedly, the modern farm stewardship schemes have been invaluable in helping the butterfly expand its range. However this can only be part of the story as the general health of the countryside, together with hedgerow management practices, of 100 years ago would almost certainly have provided a much better overall habitat for the butterfly than today's intensively managed land, and this species was always considered rare in the county, even in those Victorian times. Climate warming is also a potential reason to have helped its spread, but again it is unlikely to be the key factor as this volume of increase has not been mirrored anywhere else in the country. As mentioned earlier, under-recording in the past could also partly explain the apparent increase, as it may be that it already existed in a number of different locations throughout east Worcestershire, yet its presence had simply not been noted and recorded by anyone. However, many of the new areas where eggs have been found are places where searches have been undertaken previously without success, which does suggest that genuine expansion of range is taking place.

Tireless winter egg surveys

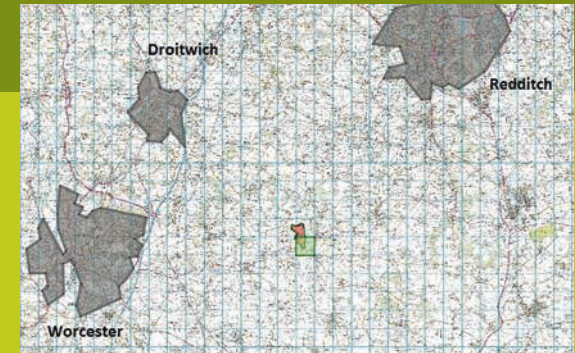
What seems almost certain though is that it never occupied as many 1 Km squares as it does today. Current knowledge of this butterfly's distribution, together with its spread over recent years, is down to the tireless winter egg surveys conducted by a small but determined group of volunteers, known affectionately as 'The Streakers'. This group venture out almost every Thursday during the winter, sometimes in dreadful weather, searching the Worcestershire countryside and monitoring both previously recorded locations as well as new ones for the presence of the little white eggs on Blackthorn.

Its change in fortunes therefore remains something of a mystery, but one for which we are extremely grateful. We are delighted not only to have such a rare and beautiful butterfly flying across an increasingly large part of Worcestershire, but also to be able to report on a major butterfly success story for a change. The maps on the right show how its range has increased over time, with Grafton Wood marked in brown in the centre.

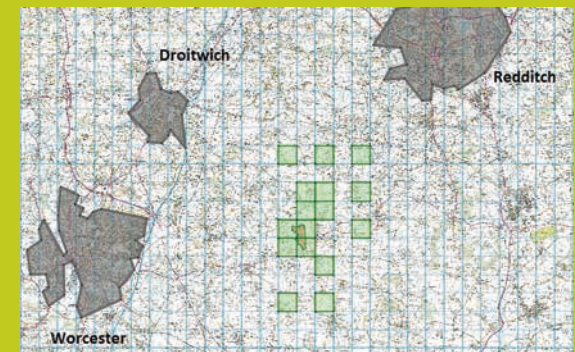
Article, photo and maps by **Simon Primrose**

Footnote: We have already added a further four grid squares to our total this winter with the discovery of eggs in north-west Redditch, at what is the most northerly location yet found in Worcestershire, as well as the most southerly sightings near Throckmorton.

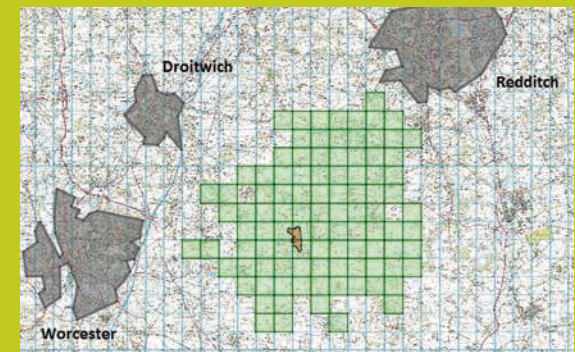
Maps showing how the Brown Hairstreak's range has increased over time



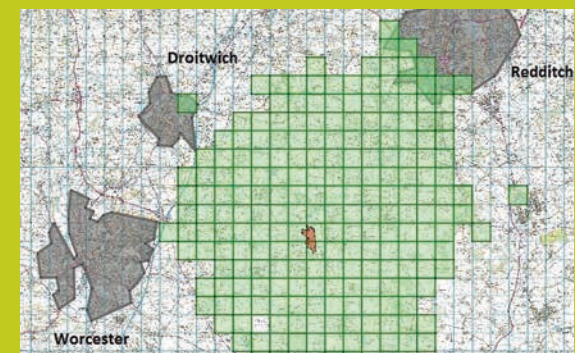
BrH Distribution 1987 v1



BrH Distribution 1997 v1



BrH Distribution 2007 v1



BrH Distribution 2017 v2



Green-veined White (Stephen Lewis)



Small Skipper (Stephen Lewis)



Speckled Wood (Stephen Lewis)



Meadow Brown (Stephen Lewis)

Building and Butterflies

Thomas Knowles looks at butterfly numbers in his home patch

For the last twelve years I have been recording sightings of butterflies in the built-up area of Eccleshall in Staffordshire and its immediate surroundings. In the past two years significant building works have been taking place on former fields to both the east and west of the town, together with a certain amount of infill.

I am sure that what has happened in Eccleshall is replicated elsewhere, except that the two main estates of around 140 houses to the East and over 80 houses to the West are probably going to increase the local population by a higher percentage than building developments in most other areas. Suffice to say that building works on the two estates is not yet complete, although most of the land on the two sites has been subject to the contractor's activity. There was some preparatory work undertaken in 2015 and this did not seem damaging, but by

summer 2016 building work was in full progress.

Damage done

We all know that 2016 was a poor year for butterflies and 2017 was an improvement for some species, but I have found locally that the damage done by the building works has destroyed the habitats for several butterflies which were once common and are now rather scarce in the area. All I can hope for is that the large-scale building sites have been the cause of this scarcity and that further afield the reductions have not been so noticeable.

Locally we do not see more than the high teens of types of butterfly and generally I consider these to be garden butterflies, field butterflies, the whites and others. The garden butterflies in Eccleshall seem to be following a pattern of elsewhere in the country, with

Peacock becoming scarcer and **Small Tortoiseshell** much weaker than was the case a few years ago. To be honest, I do not think these variations have been caused by the building works because **Comma** has been stable and, although mostly an immigrant, **Red Admiral** had an excellent year in 2017, and likewise **Painted Lady** is an immigrant and is inconsistent year on year.

Suffered

The white butterflies, including **Orange-tip**, did not have a significant change in numbers, although **Green-veined Whites** have over the years flourished in the hedgerows adjacent to the building sites and have now suffered. Other butterflies include **Holly Blue** which seems stable, and **Common Blue**, which did have a habitat destroyed but there are a few still about. Only once did I see a **Clouded Yellow** in Eccleshall and that was back in October 2006, and **Brown Argus** has not been seen of late.

Great concern

The big difference has come with the field/meadow butterflies and it is these that cause me the greatest concern, also including **Speckled Wood**. There are not many species in the Eccleshall area, but we do have **Small Skipper**, **Meadow Brown**, **Ringlet**, **Gatekeeper** and **Small Copper**. When I came to Eccleshall, Ringlet had not been reported but was first noted in 2006 and developed strongly from there until the building works saw a decline.

Article by Thomas W. W. Knowles

Footnote: Butterfly Conservation is launching 'Building Sites for Butterflies', a national project which will aim to work with the construction industry to provide habitat for butterflies and moths as part of new developments. Phil Sterling has been appointed Project Officer and starts in May.

Species	Most seen (year)	2015	2016	2017
Speckled Wood	21 (2005)	17	8	3
Small Skipper	17 (2006 & 2015)	17	3	2
Meadow Brown	115 (2006)	24	5	6
Ringlet	75 (2015)	75	5	17
Gatekeeper	58 (2006)	20	7	3
Small Copper	8 (2010 & 2013)	1	0	0
Green-veined White	96 (2011)	25	13	16

I have constructed a small table of the field butterflies including Green-veined White showing the highest number of a species seen by me in one day in a year, and then the last three years' best daily sightings for comparison. I wonder if this pattern is familiar in other areas where building works have taken place. Perhaps from this table you can understand my concern about damage created by building works even taking into account how poor the year 2016 was generally.



Leopard Moth

White Plume Moth

Square-spot Rustic

On the move

Peta Sams finds moving house presents many opportunities

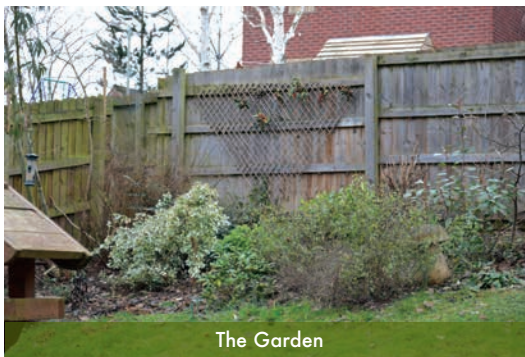
Moving house has always left me worried about new owners looking after the garden and the wildlife it supports, and house purchases have always been as much about the garden as the house. But last year found us moving house to an estate house with a typical postage stamp garden. Although 20 years old it is still relatively bare, and the clay soil and slope do not make it the easiest to work.

Would we see any birds? Would there be anything at all in the garden? How soon would we be able to get some hedging and more native plants established and a pond dug? We have always been good on growing what many (but not, I'm sure, BC members) might call "weeds". However, we have been pleasantly surprised – we have had a good range of species through the garden during our first summer. Not large numbers of anything, and often just one or two individuals, but it's been a promising start.

Oviposting

There were a few **Orange-tips** around at the start of the season, then in July one or two **Commas** were around for a few weeks, as were a couple of **Gatekeepers** and some **Large Whites**. At the end of July a **Small Skipper** was seen, September gave a brief sighting of a **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Red Admirals** were seen on the walls, roof and fence posts until the end of October.

One evening we spotted a beautiful **White Plume** moth on the play areas between the houses. A **Leopard moth** was spotted ovipositing in the willow tree in the garden in June – that was an exciting afternoon. A **Square-spot Rustic** moth was seen in late August and, true to its name, a **Winter** moth was seen on the window in early December. So – all in all – it



The Garden

has actually been a far more interesting year than in some of our other gardens.

Planting

But now we want to do quite a bit of development work in the garden – plant some dense shrubs such as *pyracantha* against the bare fence posts, get some ivy established along the boundaries and also even grow some soft fruit for our own

enjoyment. Planting some more shrubs and getting some hedging in the front are also on the to-do list. Of course this, unfortunately, means taking out much of what is there – which actually isn't that much – but I worry that this year we may see less than in 2017 before it all starts to grow. We have a rough plan but things tend to evolve with us rather than be completely determined at the start. And it depends what plants I really cannot resist buying, although with a smaller garden I realise I cannot get as carried away as I have with previous gardens. So I will be looking carefully and hoping that this year is as good as last. We will attempt to make things more wildlife friendly, including excavating a few surreptitious holes for hedgehogs and amphibians under all the right-down-to-the-ground fences that seem to characterize new housing, and we hope this will bring increased numbers to the garden in the not too distant future. A final find of the year as we started removing some unwanted plants climbing on the fence was a pupal case of a **Puss Moth** – I only realised what this was when reading the January 2018 edition of *The Comma*. So that's something else to look out for.

Article and photos by Peta Sams apart from the White Plume Moth by Mike Shurmer

Day-flying Moths on My Patch

Adrian Richards shares his favourite place in Telford

Having just read the *Butterflies on My Patch* article in the winter edition of *The Comma*, I thought I would share a favourite place local to myself. Living in Telford in Shropshire there are plenty of areas within an hour's drive, such as Wenlock Edge, Granville Country Park and Highgate Common, where me and my wife **Janine** can take our dog Bob for a walk and encounter various butterflies and day-flying moths, all out of the way from traffic and noise.



Burnet Companion

years, but I first saw them only a few years ago whilst driving past, and had to investigate what they were. I was very surprised to see they were not the **Skippers** I thought they would be, and also by their profusion. So I look forward to what is becoming a regular yearly walk.

Good policy

Fortunately the Telford & Wrekin Council seem to have a good policy of when and how to mow the stretch of

grass, which in turn encourages plenty of Red Clover and Birds-foot Trefoil, and several wild grasses. I hope you've enjoyed my experience on my patch, and if you are in the area from the end of May and throughout June, it's well worth turning your back on the traffic and seeing this delightful little moth enjoying a spot of sunshine.

Article and photos by Adrian Richards



My Patch

Ten minute walk away

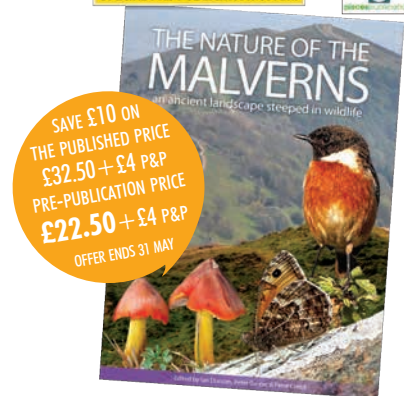
However, one place I look forward to visiting every year is only a ten minute walk away from where I live, right next to a very busy road. The grassy area which lies next to Wrockwardine Wood Way in Telford is home to **Burnet Companion** moths, and in a sunny fifteen minutes we've seen well over a hundred. They've probably been there a good number of

The Nature of The Malverns

Surprisingly, this is the first ever book to cover all aspects of the natural history of the Malverns and will appeal to both residents and visitors interested in learning more about this fascinating area. With a Foreword by writer and broadcaster Brett Westwood, all of the sections are written by local experts and most of the stunning photographs supplied by local photographers. All of these contributions have been voluntary and the funders of the book, the Malvern Hills Trust and the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, have agreed that all profits will be used for wildlife conservation efforts on the hills and commons.

The Malvern Hills, composed of some of the oldest rocks in England, stretch 14km north to south, standing proud above the surrounding landscape. One of the defining features of the area is the surprising number of habitats, representing a combination of hills, commons, woods and urban areas. Many special species are to be found, including over 30 butterfly species and over 1,000 species of moths.

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Robin Hemming shares some notable records from his Herefordshire garden and further afield



Agrotis nemoralis (Graham Wenman)

Moth recording in my Bodenham garden continues to throw up some surprises. In 2017 the confirmed highlights included two species which are new to Herefordshire. A **Yarrow Pug** was only discovered by dissection and is a slightly surprising addition to our Herefordshire list – it may well have been an immigrant. *Stathmopoda pedella*, a micro moth that has recently occurred in Worcester, has also spread into Herefordshire. I trapped one in Bodenham on 14th June, and another was beaten from alder by Aaron Woods at Wofferswood Common on 2nd July.

Obscure Wainscot was new for my garden and continues to appear in the county, following records in the previous two years. Other reed-feeding species are spreading. **Phyl King** trapped the county's first **Brown-veined Wainscot** in 2017. *Calamotropha paludella* has become a regular here. Another wetland species, **Marsh Oblique-barred**, was trapped by **Peter Hall** at Brockhampton. This is another species which is new for our county list.

The lovely micro *Metalimnobia italica* showed up here in Bodenham twice, in June and July, and now seems well established in the county, following the first records from Newton St Margaret's and



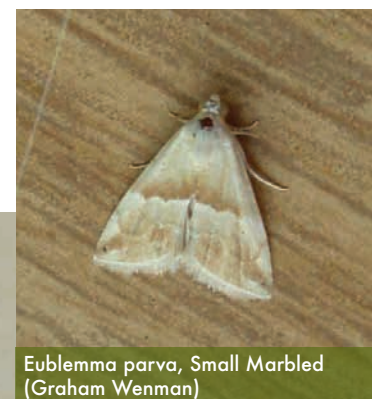
Scarlet Tiger (Graham Wenman)



Trichoplusia ni, Ni Moth (Graham Wenman)



Rhodometra sacraria, Vestal (Graham Wenman)



Eublemma parva, Small Marbled (Graham Wenman)



Clouded Magpie (Graham Wenman)

Colwall. There have been several in Hereford city this year (**John Walshe**).

The first modern Herefordshire record of *Homoeosoma nebulosa* occurred at Bodenham on 22nd August. *Pammene spiniana* occurred on the same night but was less surprising as it had been recorded in the previous two years in Bodenham.

Whilst it was not a classic year for migration there were spells in June when **Silver Y**, **Diamond-backed moth**, **Rush Veneer** and my garden's second record for **Ni moth** arrived. Another Ni moth was taken by **John Walshe** in Hereford city a few days later, along with a **Small Marbled**. **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** were the only migrant hawk-moth reported to me. They were seen widely throughout the county. Late October produced a good wave of immigrants including 5 **Vestals** from Hereford (**John Walshe**), 3 in Bodenham, 3 in Bringsty Common plus others elsewhere. **Scarce Bordered Straw** was seen in Bodenham and Hereford plus a **Palpita vitrealis** in Bodenham.

Scarlet Tiger moth has spread throughout

the county and was widely reported. It was doing particularly well in Hereford city where **John Walshe** also found numbers of **Small Ranunculus** along with 2 **Cypress Pugs**, following his county first in 2016. Surprisingly, he also found 2 ancient woodland Elm feeders, **Clouded Magpie** and **Blomer's Rivulet**, in the city. **Dwarf Cream Waves** were also very unexpected from the city as previously only known to occur rarely in the south-east of the county. Elsewhere on the Doward, **Ian Draycott** recorded *Mompha divisella*, which is new for the county, what is probably the first modern record of *Epinotia signatana*, and the **Plume moth**, *Merrifieldia baliodactylus*. *Pyrausta nigrata* continues to do well on White Rocks, along with **Beech-green Carpet** and **Waved Carpet**. **Devon Carpet** now seems to have spread throughout much of the county.

For me, the VC 36 Herefordshire record of the year goes to **Peter Hall** who trapped an *Agrotis nemoralis*, a presumed migrant, in Haugh Wood. Other good records from Haugh include 5 *Salebriopsis albicilla*, following the county first in 2006 by **Jeff Rush**, and the first recent **Brown Scallop**. A **Double**



Helicoverpa armigera, Scarce Bordered Straw (Graham Wenman)



Blomer's Rivulet (Mike Shurmer)

Line was recorded also. Peter also found an example of *Aproaerema anthyllidella* at Bringsty Common, the first since the 19th century, the fifth county record for *Dichomeris alacella*, and second record for Brockhampton in as many years. *Acleris logiana* was at Bringsty, which is further evidence of this conifer specialist spreading from Scotland.

Peter was again successful in assembling male **Emperor moths** to his reared virgin females in the spring at Bringsty. The

distribution of this handsome species is very uncertain in Herefordshire. Some research with the newly available pheromone could pay big dividends. There were reports from Ceredigion in 2016 of male Emperors following a car as it left a site where lures had been left out, so it seems to work.

Whilst these records demonstrate some of the changes in the lepidoptera world, it doesn't reflect the continuing dramatic decline in both numbers and diversity of our species. We must all work to conserve the little we have left.

By Robin Hemming

Places for Pollinators

Can you help us to provide a place for pollinators in your area?

Butterfly Conservation is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and is running a number of special initiatives and projects during the course of the year, which are detailed elsewhere in this special issue of *The Comma*. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation, as well as supporting the national society in their special year, can also begin to look forward to our own 40th anniversary as a Branch in 2019. We have a number of ideas in the pipeline to mark this occasion, and are launching this spring a new campaign called Places for Pollinators. Pollinating insects are in serious decline in Britain which is bad news not just for wildlife but also for us as we rely on insects, including butterflies and moths, to pollinate the plants that provide the food that we eat. Since the 1940s, 97% of wildflower meadows have been destroyed, whilst many other valuable habitats have been lost.

Formal or informal

Over the next two years, West Midlands Butterfly Conservation would like to support the creation of up to 10 'Places for Pollinators' across the region. These can be the more formal Pollinator Gardens, like the one already created at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, or more informal areas like the Butterfly Meadow being developed at Coppice Leasowes in Church Stretton. What is important is that areas are planted up in a way that will attract pollinating insects through the provision of plants rich in nectar and pollen, but also offering, where possible, opportunities for insects to breed and over-winter. To qualify as Places for Pollinators and receive support from West Midlands Butterfly Conservation sites must be in a prominent location, be open to the public and have sufficient resources, volunteer or paid, to both create and maintain the area.

Information boards

In return, West Midlands Butterfly Conservation will provide advice on the planning of the area, contribute to the cost of plants and/or seed where this is needed and will pay for the erection of an information board on site. The board

will be designed in close collaboration with West Midlands Butterfly Conservation, who will provide some sample text, and the finished board will include the Butterfly Conservation logo.

Good geographical spread

If you know of a site that could become a Place for Pollinators do get in touch. We are keen to obtain a good geographical spread of pollinator gardens and wildflower meadows and would like to see at least one Place for Pollinators in every area covered by the branch, i.e. all four shire counties plus Birmingham and the Black Country. We already have our first site earmarked and will be launching a new Pollinators Garden outside Wychavon Civic Centre in Worcestershire this spring.

We have been very fortunate with the garden at Craven Arms and our new garden at Pershore to have received sponsorship from Shropshire-based C.J. Wildlife, who have paid for the information board and contributed to the cost of plants in both cases. We would be keen to enter into similar partnerships with other businesses within our region, including garden centres and nurseries, and if you know of a company who may be interested please encourage them to get in touch. If we can find partners in this way, we may be able to increase the number of Places for Pollinators that can be created.

Support this campaign

This is an exciting new project which, as well as having direct benefits for our butterflies and moths, will also help to get across the message that, while pollinating insects may be in trouble, there is something we can all do about it. We may not all own large areas of land, but most of us will be aware of sites of vacant land or closely mown grass where there is scope to provide a Place for Pollinators and we hope that all our members will want to do their bit to support this campaign.

Article & photos by Mike Williams

We are keen to obtain a good geographical spread of pollinator gardens and wildflower meadows



Pollinators Garden at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre



Lickhill Primary School Meadow, Stourport-on-Severn

For further information and details of how you can take part please contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com



Waitrose award 2017



Comma and Small Tortoiseshell



Hummingbird Hawkmoth



Least Carpet



Purple Marbled



Red-necked Footman



Dotted Chestnut

Supermarket Sweep

Mike Southall shows how conventional farming and wildlife can co-exist

My brother Paul and I were delighted to receive the 2017 Waitrose Farming Partnership Award for Environmental Sustainability in the fresh produce sector. Southalls of Norchard's entry emphasized our commitment to the farmed environment, and also included our engagement with the local community. Our conventional farm currently produces mainly hand-picked vegetables from over a thousand acres of Worcestershire farmland. The wildlife on the farm has been enhanced by habitat creation combined with habitat maintenance alongside regular recording. This is most evident in and around the three winter storage irrigation pools which we have created. Other hot spots include three small woodlands, hedges and their margins, and uncultivated field corners. The vegetable crops' debris is usually not ploughed in until springtime, which leaves a great feeding resource for wintering birds, especially the old pumpkin fields.

Regular basis

Moth trapping has been undertaken on a regular basis at Norchard since 1999. New species are recorded on the site most years but 2017 was exceptional.

Five new macro moth species were recorded, **Red-necked Footman**, **Devon Carpet**, **Least Carpet**, **Crescent** and the scarce migrant **Purple Marbled**. Several new micro moths were also recorded including **Ruddy Streak**, *Tachystola acroxantha*, probably an Australian introduction and *Anania crocealis*. Another unforgettable highlight was the sight of 41 **Scarlet Tigers** which came to light one night in late June. **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** were seen on four occasions, having been attracted to White Valerian which we had planted in sight of our kitchen window. Several butterfly species also used this plant for feeding. **Convolvulus Hawkmoth** was recorded for the third consecutive year due to the presence of *Nicotiana* plants.

Revelation

National Moth Night in mid-October involved looking at ivy flowers after dark along the farms hedges. It was a revelation for me to see the numbers of moths of different species using this resource at this time of year. The mild conditions also helped to produce an exceptional list from the moth traps so late in the year.

Article & photos by Mike Southall



Volunteers hand harvesting Bell Heather seed

It is often the way of restoration projects that some things go well and others go....maybe not as well as hoped!

There are two species of heather on Prees Heath Common Reserve. *Calluna vulgaris*, Common Heather or Ling, flowers in August and September, and *Erica cinerea*, Bell Heather, which flowers earlier in the year, from June through until October. Both heathers are used by the **Silver-studded Blue** butterfly for egg-laying, but only Bell Heather is used as a source of nectar, as by the time the Common Heather is in flower all the Silver-studded Blues will have mated, laid their eggs and died.

Volunteers

So there is a clear need to establish Bell Heather on the former arable areas of the reserve (29 hectares out of 60 hectares). We have had some success in establishing Common Heather on much of these areas, but Bell Heather has proved more problematic. In 2009 20,000 plug plants of Bell Heather grown from seed harvested on site were planted by volunteers. Many of these, however, did not survive due to rabbit disturbance, being swamped by Common Heather which had been seeded onto these areas or becoming desiccated in the sandy soils. In subsequent years the Prees Heath volunteers spent many hours hand harvesting Bell Heather seed and



Harper Adams University students



RAF Shawbury trainees planting the plugs

broadcasting the seed on these areas, with very little success in the way of germination. In fact the company who grew the plug plants for us, Forestart based near Shrewsbury, had great difficulty in getting their seed to germinate, trying different techniques such as putting the seed in cold storage and applying smoke to simulate fire, and it was not until they left the seeds alone that they achieved some success.

Planting plugs

Last autumn a further 15,400 Bell Heather plug plants supplied by Forestart from seed harvested by our volunteers were planted on the former arable areas.

Not only did the Prees Heath volunteers do the work but also 22 trainees from nearby RAF Shawbury, (we like to maintain an RAF link as the reserve is a former WW2 airfield), 22 sixth-formers from Ellesmere College and 12 undergraduates from Harper Adams University helped to plant the plugs. Since then the plugs have been regularly checked to replant any that the rabbits have scraped out of the soil. A further few trays of plug plants will not be ready for planting out until this autumn. So will we achieve a better result this time? – ask me in a few years' time!

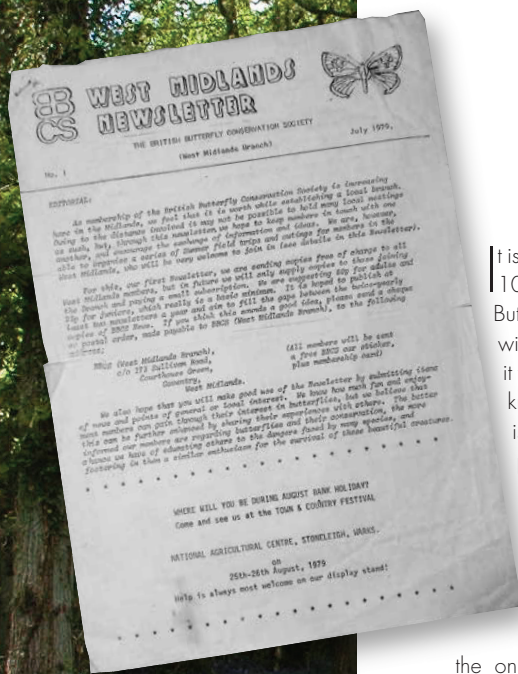
Article and photos by the editor



RAF Shawbury trainees

100 not out!

The Comma reaches an important milestone



It is great to be able to celebrate the 100th edition of West Midlands Butterfly Conservation's magazine with this issue. Not, of course, that it was always a magazine or even known as *The Comma*. The first issue of our newsletter was published in July 1979 shortly after the formation of the branch.

West Midlands was the very first branch within the national society to be established, so we were very much treading new ground. Up to this point,

the only communication received by members was whatever was sent out nationally.

Home-made effort

Our first newsletter was a very home-made effort consisting of four pages of

text typed on a stencil which was then attached to the drum of a Roneo Duplicator and run off manually. With a staple at the corner it was mailed out to all members of the then British Butterfly Conservation Society living in our region. The newsletter offered a summary of the butterfly season so far, a list of field trips planned over the summer, a plea for articles for future issues and an invitation to join the branch – 50p for adults and just 25p for juniors! Despite the very

amateurish appearance the newsletter attracted a good response, and by the time of our second issue we were able to report on a successful series of field trips and 30 members! We were also able to advertise our first members' event – a slide evening at a school in Coventry.

Foresee the future

Less good news was to have to report the demise of the native **Large Blue** with no emergence at its final site. The ability to foresee the future, however, was obviously there from the start, as the editorial contained the words: "We can only hope that the Large Blue's disappearance will not have been in vain, and will awaken the public to the threat overshadowing many of our native species. In the long run, let us hope that the loss will not be a permanent one; that in a few years' time we might see the butterfly re-introduced to one or more of its former habitats."

History of the branch

The history of our newsletter is of course in many ways also the history of the branch, and subsequent issues documented many activities, including:

- the establishment of our first winter work parties (at Brotheridge Green, a WWT reserve in 1981)
- outings outside our region by coach (the first to Exmoor to see the **Heath Fritillary** in 1985)
- the establishment of a branch recording scheme
- the launch of a photography competition
- the organisation of butterfly and moth day schools

- increased representation at outside events including the running of a Cotswold Butterfly Festival (in those early years the branch area covered Gloucestershire and Warwickshire in addition to our current region!)
- the setting up of a conservation project on the **White-letter Hairstreak**
- and the launch of a fundraising appeal to raise money to purchase our first reserve. This quickly bore fruit and in 1986 we were able to announce the purchase of our first national reserve at Monkwood.

Change

By the time I handed over my blue pencil and bottle of Tippex to Warwickshire member **Margaret Vickery** in the Autumn of 1986, the newsletter had grown from 4 to 26 pages. A new Editor meant changes and all for the better! From issue 17 onwards the rather scruffy sheets of paper stapled at the corner became a thing of the past, and members were now able to receive their newsletter in a new A3 folded format which was much more reader friendly. Margaret was also able to draw on the artistic talents of **John Norton**, the curator at Ludlow Museum and a great butterfly enthusiast, who produced original artwork for every front cover for the next 10 years. Margaret did much to consolidate the reputation of the West Midlands newsletter with a varied selection of articles contributed by our members which has been sustained through to the present day. She also instituted a Spring news-sheet which filled the long gap between our winter and summer issues so that members started to receive three communications from the branch each year rather than two.

Colourful future

With the setting up of a separate Warwickshire branch in 1997, Margaret's long reign as editor drew to a close and the task was handed on to **Christine Chance**, a Birmingham member. It was rather fitting that the period of Margaret's editorship should be dovetailed with the acquisition of Monkwood at the start and Grafton Wood at the end, still two of

Butterfly Conservation's largest woodland reserves. With a new editor came further changes in the look of the newsletter, although perhaps more subtle this time, with the introduction of a coloured front and back cover and a more prominent contents page on the front.

Three full newsletters were now produced each year, rather than two plus a shorter news-sheet. Considerable attention was given to recording, and branch members were actively encouraged to visit under-recorded areas to ensure the best possible coverage for the national Millennium Atlas. Both Christine and her husband **Jim** had a strong interest in moths and moth content in the newsletter increased considerably during this time. Indeed, they took on the huge task, along with **Ian Duncan**, of helping **Mike Harper** and **Tony Simpson** to edit and subsequently publish the 'Moths of Worcestershire' in three volumes. A monumental task and the first publication nationally to comprehensively cover micro-moths at a county level.

Taking the reins

When Ian Duncan stood down as branch chair in 2005, Christine also decided to relinquish her role as editor and the job moved on this time to Herefordshire with **Dean Fenton** taking on the reins. Dean's editorship, although relatively short compared to the editors that had gone before him, in many ways saw the birth of the modern magazine as we know it today. The format switched to A4 folded, colour was introduced (again a first for a BC branch

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newsletter) and, after a period of 25 years' gestation, the name 'The Comma' appeared for the first time. Seeing that the branch had adopted the Comma butterfly as its symbol as far back as issue 10 it does seem perverse that we didn't give the name to our newsletter until issue 61! Anyway 'The Comma' had finally emerged from its chrysalis and there was no turning back.

Professional journalist

Dean's tenure as Editor continued until 2009 when he was replaced by **Roger Wasley**, a professional journalist who had previously worked for British Aerospace. Under Roger's leadership

The Comma soon soared to new heights (pun intended!). Now desktop published, colour was extended throughout and the newsletter was enlarged to 32 pages. A much more journalistic style was introduced, then, from issue 80 onwards, we started to refer to the publication as our regional magazine rather than a newsletter. Headlines and sub-headings to stories became the norm with a few classics like 'Branch sticks its neck out for giraffe' (Comma 85) and there were many more in similar vein. Roger also

did the branch a mighty favour when he recruited **Trish Connolly Morgan** to

help with design. Trish's creativity and professionalism has ensured that *The Comma* has maintained a consistently high standard of production and is the envy of many other BC branches. Although Roger made way for **Stephen Lewis** in 2015, Trish has continued as our magazine designer and will be there to support our new Editor as they embark on the next century of Commas.

Voice of Butterfly Conservation

Although *The Comma* has changed its appearance and format over the years what has not changed is its important role as the voice of Butterfly Conservation in the West Midlands. There is no doubt the magazine is highly valued by members and this is witnessed by the large number of them who have contributed material over the past 39 years.

Commitment of our members

Looking back through old issues (and this is something anyone can do via our website) what strikes home is the strong commitment of our members and the branch to the conservation of butterflies and moths. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation has always shown grit and determination to reach its goals and, despite the occasional setback, the 100 issues of *The Comma* reflect the considerable success that has been achieved. As we enter our 40th year as a branch, we owe a major debt of gratitude to our Editors (only six in all this time) who have all done such a great job. *The Comma* will no doubt evolve further under new editorship and will need to adjust to the changing world of wildlife conservation, but we can all be confident that it will continue to build on past success and remain a lively and well-read magazine.

Article by **Mike Williams**

Never Rule out the Unexpected

Ian Hart discovers that the Wood White might be more adept at dispersal than is generally thought



Wood White



Wood White on vetch

Woodland Site, which had been clear-felled in the 1960s and planted with conifers.

Weak flyer

What is of particular interest with this record is that it is well known that the Wood White is a weak flyer, and not particularly adept at dispersal, certainly not over large distances. Of equal interest is that this was not the first time in over forty years of recording that we undertake from our cottage that we have recorded a Wood White on our patch. Trawling through my butterfly records I have a note that one was recorded in the garden on 31st May 1997 and another on 22nd June 2004.

Suitable habitat

The message conveyed here is that the natural world is full of unexpected surprises. Clearly the Wood White is able to disperse, despite its seemingly laborious and laboured flight, and has the ability to re-establish and recolonise new areas should the habitat be suitable.

Article and photos by **Ian Hart**

On July 24th last summer I walked into our meadow adjacent to our cottage to see if anything of wildlife interest was evident. My attention was immediately drawn to a small white butterfly fluttering weakly adjacent to a hedge and I walked over to investigate. Closer inspection quickly confirmed that this was not a **Small White** or a **Green-veined White**, species normally associated with the habitat, but a **Wood White**. It soon alighted on a vetch,

straggling out of the hedge, which is the species' larval foodplant.

Ancient woodlands

The immediate question that came to mind was from where had the butterfly originated? There are some ancient woodlands in the area of western Herefordshire where they have been recorded, but the nearest is some two kilometres distant. Moreover this woodland is a PAWS, a Plantation on an Ancient

To view previous issues of the Comma please visit our website www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk and go to the section 'Download the Comma'



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Nature Reserves

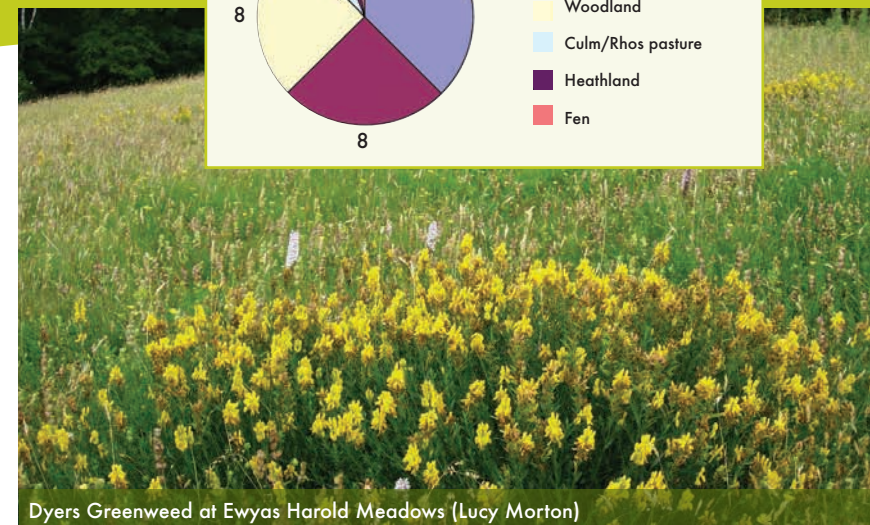
Many West Midlands members will be familiar with the five Butterfly Conservation reserves in our region, all of which are very effectively managed by our volunteers, but those outside our area may be less well known. This article provides a brief introduction to some of the gems out there and the butterflies and moths they support.



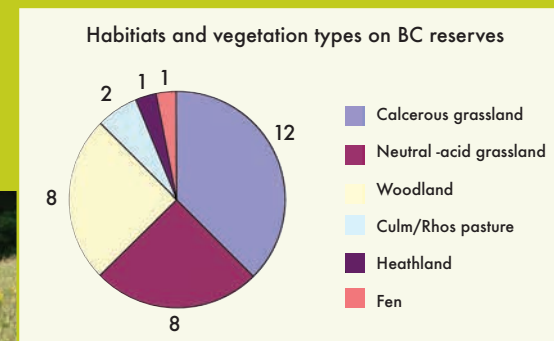
Cowslips on Prestbury Hill (John Davis)



Chalk Hill Blue (John Davis)

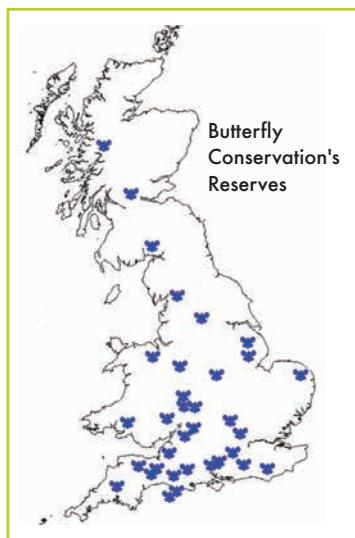


Dyers Greenweed at Ewyas Harold Meadows (Lucy Morton)



Butterfly Conservation owns or leases 37 nature reserves in 22 counties and regions in all countries of the UK apart from Northern Ireland. Members and volunteers in 20 Branches manage the reserves, supported by the reserves team - **John Davis**, Head of Reserves, **Jayne Chapman**, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Reserves Officer, and myself, **Lucy Morton**, National Reserves Officer (part time).

Branch volunteers carry out tasks as varied as transect walking, looking livestock, leading guided walks, writing management plans and carrying out practical work, wielding chainsaws, brushcutters and hand tools, and enjoying the warmth of a glowing bonfire, not to mention taking on the roles of Reserve Managers.



Butterfly
Conservation's
Reserves

Many of the reserves are funded through European Union Agri-environment schemes which are administered by Natural England. These agreements enable the habitat and species work to be carried out, but in return there are rigorous inspections carried out by the Rural Payments Agency that keep us on our toes! We also receive generous donations from members of the public, and an enormous amount of fundraising is carried out by Branch volunteers and the Fundraising team at Head Office, bringing in much needed resources.

The reserves include a variety of habitats supporting 50 species of butterfly and many more moths! All the reserves have special qualities and it is hard to pick out a few to illustrate in this article, so I have chosen those that represent the habitats below, and my apologies if I have not chosen your favourite!

Calcareous grassland habitats

These habitats are represented by reserves in Dorset, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, North Wales, Lancashire, Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire. **Magdalen Hill Down** near Winchester is a great example of original chalk downland with scrub, and also a long established project to re-create chalk grassland with scrapes on former arable



Former arable land at Magdalen Hill Down (John Davis)



Myers Allotment (Lucy Morton)

fields. Species include **Chalk Hill Blue**, **Small Blue** and **Brown Argus**. Moths include **Striped Lychnis** and **Marbled Clover**. The reserve benefits from having a dedicated Reserves Officer, Jayne Chapman, who also manages other reserves in the south east.

Ryton Wood Meadows (Reserve Manager **Mike Slater**) in Warwickshire, is a species rich grassland restored from an old quarry. Other calcareous grassland reserves include **Myers Allotment**, (Reserve Manager **David Wrigley**) near Arnsdale in Lancashire, and **Eyarth Rocks** near Ruthin in North Wales, both of which have areas of limestone pavement. **Rough Bank** (managed by the Gloucestershire Branch Reserve Committee) near Stroud and **Prestbury Hill** near Cheltenham, are both excellent examples of limestone grassland and both are grazed with cattle over the autumn and winter. Prestbury Hill has

Duke of Burgundy, **Small Blue**, **Chalk Hill Blue**, **Dingy Skipper** and day-flying moths such as **Chimney Sweeper** and **Cistus Forester**. The Reserve Manager is **John Coates**.

Neutral /acid grassland habitats

These are represented in Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Herefordshire. **Alners Gorse**, near Hazelbury Bryan in Dorset is a remnant of a former common enclosed in the 19th century and undermanaged if not neglected during the 20th century. There is a range of grassland types from dry to wet acidic, with extensive scrub communities and woodland. **Marsh Fritillary** has re-colonised following habitat restoration work, and **Brown Hairstreak**, **White-letter Hairstreak**, **Purple Hairstreak**, **Grizzled Skipper**, **White Admiral** and **Silver-washed Fritillary** can also be seen. The locality's moth fauna is very diverse and interesting, with hundreds of species recorded to date including nationally scarce **Dingy Mocha**, **Mocha**, **Small Eggar** and **Marbled Pug**. It is also a stronghold for the Nightingale in the west of the country. The reserve manager is **Nigel Spring** of the Dorset Branch. Other examples of



Marsh Fritillary (Jim Asher)

unimproved grassland are **Ewyas Harold Meadows** in Herefordshire where **Ian Hart** is the Reserve Manager.

Rhos pasture or Culm grassland habitat

This habitat is represented by reserves in South Wales and Somerset. **Median Farm and Caeau Ffos Fach** near Cross Hands in Carmarthenshire is a group of flowery 'Rhôs pasture' fields (wet Purple Moor-grass pasture) at the heart of a landscape of national importance for **Marsh Fritillary**. The reserve forms the main part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one of a series forming the Caeau Mynydd Mawr Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a European

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 ►



Emperor Moth at Catfield Fen (John Davis)



Swallowtail (Peter Eeles)

Bechsteins Bat (Ian Davidson-Watts)



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21 ►

designation for this threatened butterfly. Other species present include **Green Hairstreak**, **Marbled White**, and botanically **Whorled Caraway** and **Marsh Clubmoss**. The reserve is grazed with ponies and the winter work parties clear scrub and bramble. Swaling is sometimes carried out to burn off the dry **Purple Moor-grass** tops and encourage new growth. The reserve managers are **Richard Smith**, South Wales Branch, working alongside **Russel Hobson**, Senior Conservation Officer, and **George Tordoff**, Conservation Officer.

Woodland habitats

These are represented in Sussex, Surrey, Lincolnshire and Worcestershire. The three Worcestershire woodlands are



Exmoor Ponies (Lucy Morton)

jointly owned and managed with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. **Grafton Wood** celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, and the coppicing and ride management carried out by **John Tilt**, Reserve Manager, and his volunteers provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. **Brown Hairstreaks** breed on the banks of blackthorn, laying their eggs on the young suckers. **Bechsteins Bat** is a species that benefits from mature woodland, but also feeds on insects that thrive in the diverse woodland structure. **Trench Wood** also supports **Brown Hairstreak**, and **Monkwood** has been central to the 'Making a Stand for the **Wood White**' project, led by **Rhona Goddard**.

Heathland habitat

This is represented by **Prees Heath Common**, near Whitchurch in Shropshire. It is part of a larger area of Common land, and has varied habitats including grassland, woodland, scrub and a large pond, along with old airfield structures. There is an extensive and on-going heathland re-creation project on areas of former arable cultivation. It is the last remaining site for the **Silver-studded Blue** in the Midlands region. Other species include **Purple Hairstreak**, which were seen in large numbers in the summer of 2017 feeding on honeydew on **Rosebay Willowherb**. The Reserve Manager is **Stephen Lewis**, who was a member of BC staff and was instrumental in engaging with the local community when the reserve was first acquired.

Fen habitat

This is represented by **Catfield Fen** in Norfolk. It forms part of the Ant Broads

and Marshes National Nature Reserve which is one of the best and largest remaining areas of fen habitat in Western Europe. The area is a stronghold for the British form of the **Swallowtail** butterfly. The reserve is a typical fen mixture of open water, reed, sedge and carr woodland. The reed is cut on a 1–2 year cycle, and the sedge on a 3–5 year cycle. The reed is used for thatching, and cutting produces an ideal range of vegetation structures for a great diversity of wildlife. The Fen has a long history of management, which also depends on the careful control of water levels. Many uncommon and rare plants and animals are found on the reserve, including **Milk Parsley** and **Crested**



Catfield Fen (John Davis)

Buckler Fern, and dragonflies such as the **Norfolk Hawker**. The dykes and ditches support rare plants such as **Frogbit** and **Stoneworts**. Old peat cuttings on the reserve provide a special range of conditions for water beetles, and **Catfield Fen** is one of the top national sites for them. **Richard Mason**, RSPB, carries out work under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme on the reserve, helped by **Norfolk Branch**, RSPB and **Plantlife** volunteers.

Article by Lucy Morton



Tiger Cub!



Fence and hedgerow

Scarlet Tiger Gatecrashers!

Joy Stevens provides an update

We are nearing the end of our winter work parties on Roman Road, Stourbridge. Usually we are blessed with good weather, but we did have to cancel our December meet due to the snow and treacherously icy conditions. As usual we have seen some advances but also some setbacks.

Ramming incident

One of our early tasks was to replace the gate at the north end of the bridle path. The original had fallen victim to a ramming incident and there were worries about the risk of unwanted vehicular access to the bridle path. Unfortunately the new gate fared little better, being flung aside and badly bent just a few weeks later, during a police car chase in broad daylight. The gate has been put back on one of its hinges.

Every cloud

Various local residents had also expressed concern about the state of the old sandstone wall which was being seriously undermined by two large sycamores. These worries proved well founded when a section of the wall collapsed. However, every cloud has a silver lining, and this has led to repair work being carried out rebuilding the wall and the sycamores have been cut down. The area has been completely dug over, removing the coarse

grass. We have yet to assess the effect on our wild flowers.

We have carried out maintenance and upkeep work on different patches, clearing around the base of the hedgerow plants planted in previous years to repair neglected gaps. These are mostly faring well. Our February work party was blessed with warm sunny weather which tempted out several 7-spot ladybirds and a couple of frogs. We regularly find frogs along the bridle path, which must benefit from the number of garden ponds in the area. We also managed to check the bird boxes erected

at the end of the 2016/17 winter. Glad to report that one had been utilised by blue tits, as evidenced by their beautiful mossy, feathery nest with a single unhatched egg.

Now there is plenty of evidence that spring is on the way. Following on from snowdrops, a few primroses have ventured into flower. The air is full of bird song, and in a couple of weeks we should see the celandines in bloom and the **Scarlet Tiger** caterpillars emerging from hibernation.

Article & photos by Joy Stevens



The photo on the right shows the gate flung aside and badly bent during a police car chase and above, put back on one of its hinges





Wood White at Mortimer Forest 2017 (Rhona Goddard)



The Great Bury Ditches Rake-off (Stephen Lewis)

is to set up a Wood White timed count. A timed count is very easy to do, it involves walking a set route three or four times a year between May and August and recording how many Wood Whites you see. It's a great excuse to go for a walk on a sunny day. I'm also looking for help with the butterfly transect at Mortimer Forest and Blakeridge Wood, a Wood White reintroduction site, so if anyone is interested in helping with timed counts or transects please do get in touch with me, and training will be provided if needed.

Events

We have a number of events planned for 2018, including a guided walk at Blakeridge Wood on the 31st May, a Wood White walk at Mortimer Forest on 2nd June, a Wood White walk at Monkwood on 3rd June, and a Wood White survey day at Monkwood on the 14th June. For more details see the Dates for your Diary pages.

By Rhona Goddard

Update on the Wood White Project

Firstly, I'd like to thank all the volunteers who have attended our work parties this winter, especially those hardy individuals who attended the day at Blakeridge Wood in the snow! Despite the weather, and thanks to your efforts, we've still managed to carry out conservation work at a number of sites, including Wessington Wood and Pasture, Bury Ditches and Siege Wood. We also spent a great morning at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre with the 'Habitat Helpers'.



Rare limestone plant species

I visited a number of Herefordshire Wildlife Trust nature reserves this winter including Nupend and Rudge End Quarry. At Rudge End we were lucky enough to be there when the Stinking Hellebore was in flower! The quarry supports a number of rare limestone plant species, so working here this winter will hopefully benefit the quarry flora as well as the Wood White.

Wood White timed count

Thanks to Branch volunteers we've received a number of Wood White records from new sites around the West Midlands region since the project began in 2016. It would be great to know a little more about these sites, especially regarding the number of Wood White butterflies they support and, importantly, if they're breeding. One way of doing this

Key species

Fantastic to see all the practical works finished at Haugh Wood, with more woodland scallops and scrapes created at Wigmore Rolls and Bury Ditches. This habitat work will hopefully benefit not only **Wood White** but other key species too, and now we will just have to wait and see.

Rhona Goddard finds inspiration in Herefordshire and seeks more help with Wood White recording



Habitat Helpers (Rhona Goddard)



Short-tailed Blue

Large Tortoiseshell

Les Papillons de Bretagne

Colin Grey gives us a tour around his garden and further afield in Brittany

For over 40 years I have spent at least part of my summers in South Brittany in France, in particular around the Commune of Penestin, just south of Vannes. It is an area with a mild climate (some 300 miles due south of England), is generously wooded and has numerous small fields enclosed by banks and hedges that have frustrated modern agriculture and been abandoned to become scrubby flower meadows.

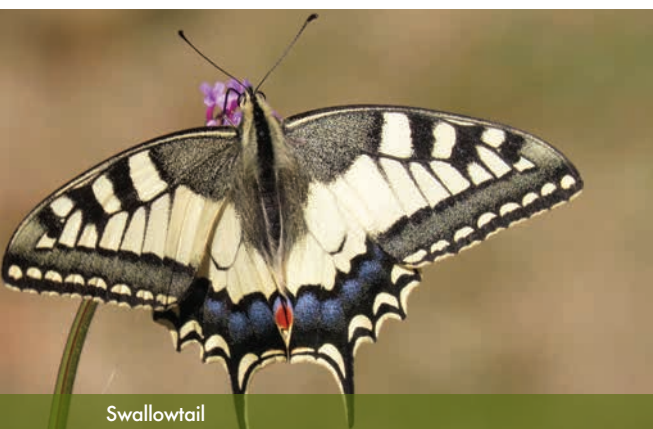
A different view

I was initially drawn to the coast and various fishing activities, but in the last 10 years a growing interest in butterflies has given me a different view of the region. Wandering around my

garden, identification book in hand, I soon realised that some of my fleeting visitors were somewhat upmarket to what I was accustomed to seeing back in Redditch. **Silver-washed Fritillaries, Swallowtails, Queen of Spain Fritillaries** and even a **Camberwell Beauty**. Not all on the same day, of course!

Rich and varied

The butterfly population is so rich and varied (perhaps as in Britain two or three generations ago) that I was able to develop half a dozen walks – all starting and finishing at my front door. One particular favourite is around a partly filled-in quarry. Although only



Swallowtail



Mazarine Blue



Long-tailed Blue



Brown Hairstreaks

the size of a decent football pitch, I have so far seen and identified 42 different species within it, including six different **Fritillaries**.

Particularly rare

The usual migrant species can be encountered here: **Clouded Yellow, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Painted Lady** etc., but I get my biggest 'buzz' from the species which have become extinct or particularly rare in the British Isles. Along the sunken lanes and field boundaries **Wood Whites** are fairly common, and I have found a spot where **Large Tortoiseshells** regularly come to nectar on some overgrown laurel hedges. **Swallowtails** (Continental variety) are around from spring to late summer visiting gardens for nectar and laying eggs on wild fennel. **Black-veined Whites** appear in good numbers and allow a close examination of their amazing wing structure built around a framework of glistening raised black veins. In the meadows, among the **Small and Sooty Coppers, Common Blues** and **Brown Arguses** (which the French call the **Coral Necklace**), you are quite likely to come across

the striking **Mazarine Blue**, and on occasion both **Short and Long-tailed Blues**.

Grafton Wood

During the winter months back in England I spend most Wednesdays with the merry Grafton Wood work parties, but I have only once seen a **Brown Hairstreak** there – a bedraggled October specimen. My spirits were lifted, however, when I discovered them in Penestin, and it was on a hedge just behind the house that I had perhaps my rarest encounter – a mating pair of Brown Hairstreaks!

Article & photos by Colin Grey



Black-veined White

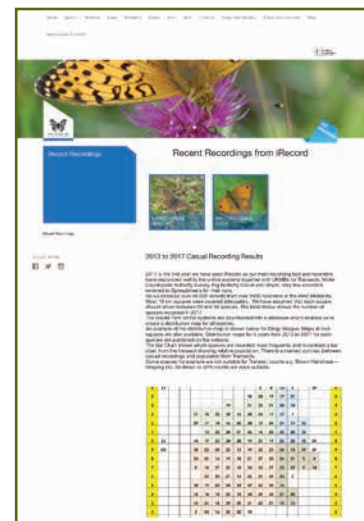


Queen of Spain Fritillary

Butterfly Recording 2017

The results for butterfly recording in the West Midlands are now complete

This is the first year that casual recording has been done online, with a few exceptions. Most of the records have been submitted to iRecord from computer, iPad or iPhone, and data has come from other online systems such as Big Butterfly Count, the Wider Countryside Scheme and UKBMS transects.



Recording page from the website

Distribution maps

We have received over 48,000 records in the West Midlands from over 2,000 recorders. The coverage of our Branch



area has been good, with some records from all 10km squares. A report is available on the Branch website under Recording → Casual → 2013 to 2017 Results. This has enabled us to draw a new distribution map for each species, and the distribution maps are shown on the under Species → Butterflies → Species Group → Species Name.

Population trends

57 UKBMS transects were walked in the West Midlands in 2017, and 86,000 butterflies were counted. 31 transects have been walked consistently for the last 5 years, which has enabled us to look at population trends. The analysis is divided into species with significant positive trends, significant negative trends and population stable. The significance is to some extent speculative as some of our rarer species do not lend themselves to the transect methodology, for example **Brown Hairstreak** and **Grayling**. For such species egg searching or timed counts are more suitable. Again, a full report is available on the website under Recording → Transects → Transects Results 2017.



Transect page from the website

Population trends are shown for each species under Species → Butterflies → Species Group → Species Name. We hope to have a web page with timed and GPS counts at a later date. Anyone requiring more detailed information from the records or on recording in general should contact me.

Article by John Tilt



The new Branch website has been operational for some time now. The object is to give information to members and non-members alike about what we do for butterflies and moths here in the West Midlands. The site is still in the development stage and we have a lot more to do, particularly for moths. There are also three areas for butterflies that we would like to develop:

- **Site Guide.** Some sites are available already with maps, species and habitat photographs. However we would like more. Where is your favourite butterfly walk? – send a rough map and habitat photographs to me.
- **Members' Photograph Gallery.** Please send your VERY BEST photographs of species to Dave Williams at dgwilliams52@hotmail.co.uk – the best of these will appear in "Cloud" attached to species on the website.
- **Timed Counts and GPS Counts.** If you do this sort of useful work and would like to publish it please send details to me.

Dates for your diary

Butterfly Conservation Symposium

6th – 8th April at Southampton University. Visit www.butterfly-conservation.org for further details.

Ashwood Nurseries Moth Mornings

Saturday 16th June at 9.00am. Moth morning, a National Moth Night event. Meet at Ashwood Nurseries, Ashwood Lower Lane, Kingswinford DY6 0AE Grid Ref SO 864879. Contact Mike Williams on 01299 824860 or at wmbutterflies@gmail.com **Saturday 4th August at 9.00am.** Moth morning followed by a butterfly walk at 11.00am. BC stall. **Contact details as above.**

Baggeridge Country Park

Sunday 22nd July 2018. White-letter Hairstreak and Six-belted Clearwing Foray. Meet at 11.00 am at the Ranger's office car park, Baggeridge Country Park, off A463 Wodehouse Lane near Wombourne (parking charges apply circa. £2.00). **Contact Dave Jackson on 07940 826671.**

Butterflies of the Malvern Hills ID course

Sunday, 15th July 10.00am to 3.00pm. Led by Mike Williams and ideal for beginners. A Worcestershire Wildlife Trust event. **Advance booking required to Ray Howard-Levine on 01905 754919 or at rae@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org**

Cannock Chase Ramble

Saturday 16th June 2018. Welsh Clearwing and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary ramble. Meet at 11.00am in the Milford Common car park off A513 Milford to Rugeley Road (parking charges may have been introduced). If you have them please bring Welsh Clearwing pheromone lures and small nets. **Contact Dave Jackson on 07940 826671.**

Cannock Chase Survey and Training Days

Tuesday 19th June and Monday 25th June from 10.30am to 3.30pm. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary survey and training day at Sherbrook Valley, Cannock Chase. Meet at Penkridge Bank car park opposite the White House. **These events are yet to be confirmed as we go to press. Contact Rhona Goddard 01746 762364 or at rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org for more information.**

Dudmaston Butterfly Guided Walks

Sunday 24th June and Sunday 8th July at 10.30am. Meet at Comer Woods car park WV15 6QJ Grid Ref SO739903 on the A442 Bridgnorth to Kidderminster road. A joint event with the National Trust. Target species: White Admiral & Essex Skipper. **Contact Roger Littleover at rogerlittleover@hotmail.com**

Ewyas Harold Meadows & Common Work Party

Saturday 14th April. 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. **Contact Sue Young on 01981 240776.**

Grafton Wood Open Day & Walk

Sunday 8th July at 2.00pm. Start from the 3 Parishes Hall Grafton Flyford. Tea and cake after the walk at the Village Hall.

Contact John Tilt on 01386 792458 or at john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Week

From Monday 20th to Sunday 26th August. Guides will be available in the wood from 2:00pm. **More details on the Grafton Wood Blog – www.graftonwood.wordpress.com - and on the Branch Website, or contact John Tilt as above.**

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wednesday from 8th August. Blackthorn cutting for Brown Hairstreak. Meet at Grafton Flyford church car park at 10:00am. **Contact John Tilt as above.**

Haugh Wood Guided Walk

Saturday 21st July at 2.00 p.m. A guided walk following the green trail lasting approximately 2 hours. Children are welcome but must be accompanied by a responsible adult. No dogs please. Meet at Forestry Commission car park off the minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope. Grid Ref SO 593365. **Contact Bob Hall at randphall@gmail.com**

Malvern Hills Grayling Guided Walk

Wednesday 18th July 2018 from 10.00am to 1.00pm. Meet at North Hill Quarry Car Park Grid Ref SO7711746931. Charge £4.00. Great care is necessary as the walk is on very steep slopes and exposed crags between 250 and 350m. Wear suitable clothing, sun hat and good walking shoes or boots. Bring sufficient drinking water. **No dogs or children please. Early booking is essential as numbers are limited. Contact Mel Mason at malverngrayling@btinternet.com**

Monkwood Guided Walk and Reserve Open Day

Sunday 3rd June at 2.00pm. A walk around the wood led by Peter Seal, mainly to see the re-introduced Wood White. Charge £3.00 for adults, £1.50 for children. Meet in the reserve car park. **Contact Peter Seal on 01905 426398 or email peterseal3@btinternet.com**

Monkwood Moth Morning

Sunday, 24th June at 9.00am. Help Mike Southall go through the previous night's moth trap over a bacon roll, followed by butterfly walk at 11.00am led by Mike Williams. **Details from 01299 824860 or email wmbutterflies@gmail.com**

Prees Heath Common Reserve Big Silver-studded Blue Count

Wednesday 27th June at 10.30am. Help to count the whole Silver-studded Blue colony, and to clear Ragwort. Meet on the access track opposite the Steel Heath turning off the A49 Grid Ref SJ557363. **Contact Stephen Lewis on 07900 886809 or at phwarden@sky.com**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ►

Dates for your diary cont'd

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29 ►

Prees Heath Common Reserve Open Day

Sunday 1st July. Silver-studded Blue guided walk at 2.00pm. Former RAF control tower will be open from 10.30am to 4.00pm. *Meeting point and contact details as above.*

Prees Heath Common Reserve Moth Night

Wednesday 18th July from 9.00pm onwards with Dave Grundy. *Meeting point and contact details as above.*

Prees Heath Common Reserve BioBlitz

Thursday 19th July from 8.00am to 10.00pm. Moths and mammals from the night before. All welcome to find and identify all the wildlife on the reserve – butterflies, wildflowers, birds, pondlife, reptiles, bats etc. Marquee, toilets, equipment all available on site. A Butterfly Conservation 50th Anniversary event. *Contact Stephen Lewis on 07900 886809 or at phwarden@sky.com*

Prees Heath Common Reserve Work Parties

Wednesday 1st August, Wednesday 12th September and Wednesday 17th October at 10.30am. Ragwort, bracken and birch clearance. *Meeting point and contact details as above.*

Swynnerton Training Area, Staffordshire

Saturday 2nd June. Access has been arranged for a visit to this site which is very rich in its biodiversity, excellent flora and fauna with one of the Midland's biggest Grizzled Skipper colonies, with Dingy Skipper and Brown Argus also appearing as a sideshow. Sadly, this site is now under threat of being sold off and developed. The aim of the day is to obtain as many biological records of species as possible, so anyone from any field/interest is most welcome. **Space however is limited, and in the first instance email johnpbryan15@aol.com to book your place.** Fuller details will be emailed closer to the time.

Trench Wood Guided Walk and Reserve Open Day

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

Wardlow Quarry Guided Walk

Sunday July 22nd at 10.30am. Target species on this relatively short walk are Dark Green Fritillary, Six-belted Clearwing, Peregrine Falcon and some chalk grassland plant species. Meet at 10.30am in the road which meets the A52 at Grid Ref SK08514 47780. Postcode for satnav users ST10 3HD. *Contact John Bryan at johnpbryan15@aol.com to book a place.*

Wyre Forest Woodland Walk

Saturday 19th May at 11.00am. Joint event with Natural England and part of Wyre Forest Council's Big Active weekend. Meet at the Dry Mill Lane car park, Bewdley at the start of the disused railway line and the Butterfly Trail. **Bookings in advance to Alice James on 01299 400686 or email at alice.james@naturalengland.org.uk** Charge £3 adults, children free, payable on the day. Target species: Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Wyre Forest Moth Morning and Breakfast Barbecue

Saturday 21st July at 9.30am. Moth Morning in the Wyre Forest with Dave Smith. Joint event with Natural England. Meet at Dry Mill Lane car park, details as above. **Bookings in advance to Alice James on 01299 400686 or email alice.james@naturalengland.org.uk** Charge £3 adults, children free, payable on the day.

Wood White Project Events

For all the following events contact Rhona Goddard on 01746 762364 or at rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

Wood White butterfly talk, Bishop's Castle Town Hall, Shropshire

Tuesday 8th May. Arrive at 7.30pm for an 8.00pm start. A talk by Rhona Goddard about the rare Wood White butterfly. Tea and coffee available on arrival.

Wood White Guided Walk at Blakeridge Wood

Thursday 31st May from 1.30pm to 3.30pm. Join Alan Reid (Wildlife Ranger, Forestry Commission) and Rhona Goddard for a walk to discover how these two organisations are working together to benefit the recently reintroduced rare Wood White butterfly. Meet in second car park Grid Ref SO295866. At the small cross roads in Colebatch village (near Bishop's Castle) take the minor road signposted for Cefn Einion, continue past the first Blakeridge car park and park in the second one.

Wood White Guided Walk & Survey at Mortimer Forest

Saturday 2nd June from 10.30am to 1.00pm. Meet in Vinnals car park Grid Ref SO474731. Just after the Charlton Arms on Ludford Bridge, take Whitcliffe road, following the brown Forestry Commission sign. Continue along this road for approximately 2 miles until you reach Vinnals car park.

Wood White Guided Walk & Survey at Monkwood

Thursday 14th June from 10.30am to 2.30pm. Meet in car park Grid Ref SO803603.

Wood White Guided Walk at Wigmore Rolls

Tuesday 31st July from 10.30am to 1.00pm. Joint event with Herefordshire Ornithological Club. Meet at the site entrance on the minor road leading west from Wigmore village Grid Ref SO397688. Car parking spaces limited.

Big Butterfly Count Event at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre

Sunday 5th August from 1.30pm to 3.30pm. Meet in the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre car park, Craven Arms Grid Ref SO435825.

Wood White Guided Walk at Bury Ditches

Sunday 12th August from 10.30am to 1.00pm. Joint event with RSPB South Shropshire Local Members' Group. Meet at the Bury Ditches car park Grid Ref SO331837. Take the right-hand turning just opposite the Crown Inn pub (SY7 0HU) in Clunton village. Signposted as Bury Ditches Hill Fort.

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Treasurer Lucy Lewis	lemiller@btinternet.com	07840 530270
Branch Secretary Vacant	If you can help in this important role please contact Peter Seal	
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Wider Countryside Butterfly Count Co-ordinator Vacant	If you can help in this important role please contact Peter Seal	
Link Trustee To be confirmed		



The Holy Grail of Moths, Part 2 - The Shropshire Prequel

Pete Boardman recalls his encounter with a Clifden Nonpareil

I was interested to read in the last edition of *the Comma* (No.99) of the claim that Holy Grail of Moths' the **Clifden Nonpareil**, *Catocala fraxini*, had been found in Shropshire (VC40) for the first time during 2017. I was a little surprised as I had seen it myself in the county in the mid 1990s (I estimate it was late August 1995 or so) and was convinced that the record had been submitted, but there appears to be no sign of it. The circumstances of this sighting may be of interest to readers so I will recount them here.

Actinic trap

At the time I was new to moth trapping having moved to the county in late 1990 to study at Walford College. As my time in Shropshire unfolded I gradually became involved in nature conservation and started walking voluntary butterfly transects at Colemere Country Park, then Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses. This graduated into moth recording, and I soon bought my first actinic trap. I was asked to do a survey of moths at The Moors in Ellesmere (a small area of swamp to the east of The Mere – SJ409343) by the then ranger. This site was then known for **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, *Boloria selene*, but no one had studied the moths there.

Runway lights

I hadn't done an in-depth moth survey at that stage of my entomological career, and so I asked a friend from Cheshire who was more experienced if he would help me. He had several mercury vapour light traps, a big noisy generator, and enough insulated cable to reach to the moon and back, so we

arranged to visit the site together. Once the long drawn-out process of placing and setting up all of his kit had been done and it was up and functioning, I asked where I should place my little actinic trap. He, rather dismissively, pointed to a bit of birch woodland into the far distance, so that it was away from his array of runway lights. Once this was done we spent the evening going from trap to trap to trap, and as we did he pointed out the moths, using his well-thumbed and mosquito-splattered copy of Bernard Skinner's field guide to get my eye in. I was soon seeing a wide range of species, many new to me. This was exhausting, and by the time it came to turn everything off and pack up I was ready to head off home to sleep. I then remembered my own little trap and went to retrieve it. I picked the trap up and carried it back to the car to inspect the contents. I took off the lid and with my torch peered in.

"Are there many moths with blue wings?" I innocently asked.

"What!!!!!!!" he bellowed, "Are you xxxxxx kidding?"

He pushed passed me and lifted out the said moth on its egg box, muttering a further series of profanities as he did so.

"You might well never see another of these." he said after regaining his composure, and I secretly felt incredibly pleased with myself that my little trap had attracted the star moth of the night at the expense of his blinding runway lights.

I later became County Moth recorder for Shropshire for a while and certainly wasn't aware of any other records of this species under my tenure. This record was in my dataset then but does not appear to have survived the passage of time.

Article by Pete Boardman and photo by Mark Parsons

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