

the **Comm**a

No.105 Winter 2019/2020

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation

Pollinator Special:

gardens and corridors

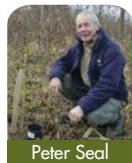
Butterfly of the Year:

highs, lows and rarities



Bringing butterflies and moths back to Britain •

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Peter Seal

Chairman's Address



Jenny Joy

Mike Williams) has just been nominated for Natural England's Conservation Awards.

New moth book

I understand work on *Moths of the West Midlands*, the new companion to our butterfly book, is progressing nicely. We've been fortunate to receive generous offers of sponsorship which, combined with what the Branch has already pledged, will enable us to sign a contract with the publisher and secure continued income for conservation activities. The book will cover all macro moths, along with a selection of micros. Don't forget to take advantage of the pre-publication price of £15 (+ £4 p&p), either using the form mailed with the last Comma or online at www.naturebureau.co.uk/bookshop.

Theft at work party

On a more negative note, **John Tilt** sadly experienced a break-in at Grafton Church car park after a Wednesday work party. Items (including a brush cutter, chainsaw and other tools) were stolen from his

Cover story

One of **Andrew Fusek** **Peter's** stunning in-flight photographs showing the Marbled White, a species now thriving at the Red House (see page 10).

Contributions

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

Our copy deadlines are
Spring - 28 February
Autumn - 31 August
Winter - 30 November
(early submissions are welcome).

Contact the Editor for more information.

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Publisher

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

BC West Midlands Butterflies and Moths

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands

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Branch website address

www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk

Staff news

News of a significant change for the Branch: after 17 years, **Jenny Joy** has left her post as Regional Conservation Manager, a period which has been characterised by many changes and developments. In Jenny's case, these include initiatives to secure **Fritillaries** in the Wyre Forest, to help start the ball rolling five years ago on the **Wood White** project and to support many applications for funding. We are extremely grateful for her support and commitment – we wish Jenny well for the future and indeed we hope she will continue to figure prominently in Branch activities. We look forward to working with her successor and hope to have news on this appointment in our next issue.

The Wyre Forest Facilitation Group (Charlotte Vincent, Jenny Joy and

From the Editor

I attended the National AGM for the first time and was struck by several points that underlined the importance of volunteers:

- Volunteer effort, valued at £14m, is by far the largest of Butterfly Conservation's annual income streams.
- Many initiatives are funded for a limited time, like our own Wood White project. Volunteer effort is essential to achieve lasting results.
- Transect records are used for more than monitoring specific locations. They provide a baseline for other information: to say a species is thriving, declining, spreading, contracting or responding to habitat change requires extensive comparative data.

van in the twenty minutes it takes to return the truck to its storage in the wood and walk back to the car park. Clearly these underhand thieves had watched to establish the party's weekly pattern and committed the theft in spite of the presence of people nearby. It is now necessary for someone to stay with the vehicle to prevent this happening again. This experience reinforces the need to leave nothing on display in an unattended car.

National Butterfly Conservation AGM

On 16 November, we attended this very lively event, which was held near Shrewsbury to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the West Midlands Branch. An excellent and varied set of speakers included our own **Stephen Lewis**, giving an updated account of how Prees Heath was purchased and set up as a BC Reserve to safeguard the only Silver-studded Blue colony in our region.

I'm indebted to all those who



Stephen Lewis

came forward with display material – we managed to fill five tables, featuring reserves, urban projects and outlying work parties, plus the raffle and sales. Takings from the raffle will be devoted to the next phase of the Wood White project

and I'm suggesting to colleagues that we also allocate to the project Branch funds set aside for other things but not yet taken up.

We were also fortunate to hear an account from **Peter Eeles**, whose book is reviewed on page 32. I am two-thirds through it and it occurs to me that it will make a good reference guide for deciding how best to carry out conservation work targeted at specific species. An example is the information that the **Grizzled Skipper** tends to feed on Bramble in its later instars – this will help shape clearance work at Honeybourne.

BC kindly organised for us an evening 40th Anniversary celebratory dinner, where **David Dennis** gave an impromptu but highly entertaining and humorous talk, having been asked to stand in at short notice after the original speaker had to drop out for pressing family reasons. His deliberations on early attempts at capturing images of butterflies on film and on the theme of ageing certainly struck a chord!

Passing through our region

I discovered at the AGM that some are already planning next year's activities, when **Simon Saville**, Chair of the Surrey and SW London Branch, gave me details of his Big Cycle Ride. Through June and July he will pedal from Land's End to John O'Groats using

Sustrans routes, passing through Gloucester, Worcester and Bridgnorth. He intends to visit as many butterfly sites as possible, with Monkwood, Prees Heath and the Wyre Forest already on his list. I'll be contacting him soon about arrangements – I know he's seeking advice on the best places to stop and I suspect he may appreciate offers of accommodation in our area. I have a few thoughts on potential events to help publicise this initiative but, if you have any suggestions, do contact me.

.....
Peter Seal Branch Chair

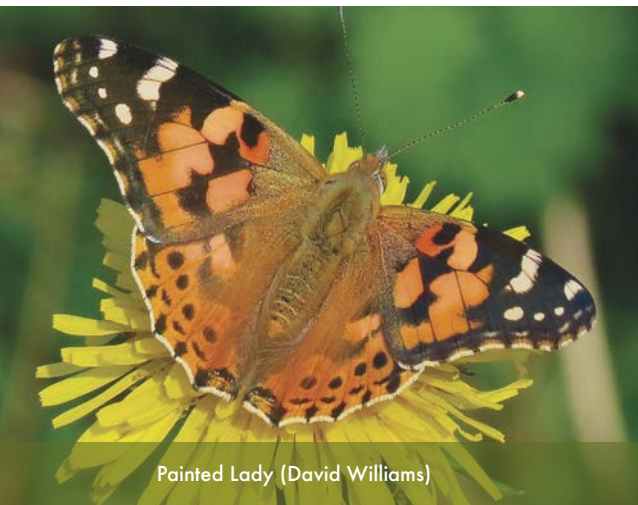
Special offers

We have a few Branch calendars left, now priced at £7 (£13 for two). We also have new polo shirts in two colours (navy blue and heather grey), and two sizes (medium and large) priced at £15 each.

To order, send a cheque payable to Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch, with your name and address, to WMBC, Annesbrook, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB. Proceeds support the conservation of local Lepidoptera.



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Painted Lady (David Williams)



Silver-washed Fritillary,
Valezina form (Andrew Fusek Peters)

It's official – 2019 was a

Spring

The year got off to a pretty good start, with a fine spell in February bringing all the hibernators onto the wing in fairly good numbers. The decent weather lasted well into March, before a return to more unsettled conditions. Star performer was the **Orange Tip**, which was seen well before the end of March – a good three weeks earlier than last year. It was to enjoy a very long flight period, lasting into June in some places. Perhaps rather surprisingly, this good fortune was not shared by its relatives; **Small White**, **Large White** and especially **Green-veined White** all showed sharp falls compared to 2018. **Holly Blue** also emerged before the end of March but numbers seemed lower than in 2018, especially in its second generation.

The Spring did, however, herald the return of the **Peacock**, which had been in the doldrums for several

years. A good emergence was followed by pleasing breeding success and, by August, people were reporting good numbers on garden buddleias, together with a smattering of **Small Tortoiseshells**, which also showed improvement on last year.

Early emergence continued into April and another species to put on a good show was **Green Hairstreak**, which was very plentiful at many of its established sites and experienced a long flight season. Late April also saw the emergence of some of our rarer species, including **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, **Wood White** and **Dingy Skipper**. All enjoyed a reasonable season and, in the case of **Wood White**, showed evidence of dispersal away from known sites, especially in Worcestershire. Numbers at Monkwood were encouraging, although the second brood was perhaps not as large as

2018. We were also pleased to announce a second successful reintroduction of the butterfly into our reserve at Grafton Wood.

Early summer

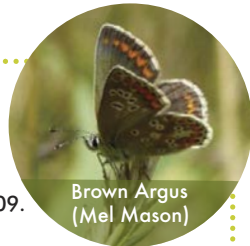
The summer proved rather like the Curate's Egg – good in parts. It was somewhat stop-start: a few days (sometimes just one) of fine weather, followed by a period of cooler and rainier conditions.

Common Blue emerged in mid-May but numbers were poor, a surprise since the butterfly had done well in its second brood in 2018. Indeed, a feature of the summer was that species that did well last year, such as **Brown Argus**, **Small Copper** and **Purple Hairstreak**, all did worse this year. However, it may be that the **Purple Hairstreak** remained in the canopy more, rather than flying low down as it did at several sites in 2018.

Moving into June, species such as



Hibernating Peacock in Control
Tower at Prees Heath
(Andrew Fusek Peters)



The Awards

Butterfly of the Year

This award goes to the **Painted Lady**, a worthy winner in its best year since 2009.

Most Improved Performance

It's good to be able to hand this award to the **Peacock**, which has often received the less-than-coveted Wooden Spoon in recent years.

Wooden Spoon for Worst Performance

In a sad case of Hero to Zero in a single season, this award goes to the **Brown Argus**, a species noticeably scarce in both its spring and autumn broods and significantly down on 2018, when it was joint Butterfly of the Year. Other candidates for this award were **Green-veined White**, **Small Copper** and **Common Blue**; sadly, a case could be made for all three.

Painted Lady year

Meadow Brown, **Ringlet**, **White Admiral** and **Marbled White** emerged pretty well on time, the latter once again in very good numbers.

It was towards the end of June that the **Painted Lady** began to steal the show, with numbers building throughout July. The early invasion seemed to be largely on the eastern side of the country but, by early July, they were being seen in increasing numbers in our region (the first had been reported on the Malverns as early as 19 April).

They clearly set about laying eggs in earnest, producing home-grown Painted Ladies in time for the Big Butterfly Count. It is difficult to estimate the scale of the invasion but, nationally, the Painted Lady topped the charts in this year's count with nearly half-a-million individuals recorded. Numbers began to decrease during August and, by mid-September, most had begun their return journey to the Sahara to

complete a round trip of 7,000 miles. It was great while it lasted – a real treat for the eyes.

Other summer butterflies to do well were **Silver-studded Blue**, **White-letter Hairstreak** and **Silver-washed Fritillary**, with the dark form of the female, *Valezina*, being widely reported. **Grayling** numbers were similar to last year's, including on the Malverns. The recovery of **Dark Green Fritillary** in the region continued, with a number of new reports. Amongst the oddities, were three separate reports of **Purple Emperor**, most likely releases, two in Worcestershire and one near Lichfield. **Clouded Yellow** was again seen at Venus Pools in Shropshire at the end of August, which is either a strange coincidence or evidence of possible local breeding. The species is not considered to be able to survive our winters but, as we know with other species such as the **Red Admiral**, climate change is

beginning to make us challenge long-held views.

Late summer

One of our most sought-after late-summer species is, of course, the **Brown Hairstreak**. Once again, we laid on a special week at Grafton Wood in late August to help people find it. Always an elusive species, it proved even harder to find this year than normal. We heard of keen photographers who'd made several journeys, often over some distance, before finally achieving their shot.

We've learned over the years never to judge Brown Hairstreak numbers on the basis of adults seen and we'll have to make our final assessment when the egg count data has been analysed. Already, as **Simon Primrose's** article shows (see pages 6–7), there are encouraging signs of an expansion in its known range for the second year in succession.

Article by **Mike Williams**, Publicity and Marketing Officer.

Male Brown Hairstreak



Brown Hairstreak

the initial find. Incredibly, over the next six weeks, we found eggs in 18 more 'new squares' (19 including Stephen's). This was three more squares than in the four previous winters combined, and it was only 8 November, a date when we're often just starting our winter searches.

Back in September 2018, things had been quiet on the **Brown Hairstreak** front for quite some time. The previous winter's egg searches produced average numbers of eggs in the locations we searched, while summer sightings of adults were few and far between for the second successive year, despite wonderful hot weather. This species is always extremely difficult to see but it had been especially elusive during the summers of 2017 and 2018, even in known hotspots.

An amazing discovery

All that changed on 27 September, when Stephen Reisbach, a keen egg-searcher from the Surrey region, visited our area and searched for Brown Hairstreak eggs. His search centred on Lower Moor, just east of Pershore, and he fairly quickly found four eggs in what was then the most southerly location recorded for our Worcestershire colony. This discovery so far south was unexpected, but the biggest surprise came later.

Spurred on by Stephen's discovery, our small team of winter egg searchers (the 'Thursday Streakers') began searching previously unrecorded 1km grid squares around

All but four of these new squares were around Drakes Broughton, Pershore, Wyre Piddle, Lower Moor and Fladbury, in the extreme south of the known distribution. It was encouraging that some of these discoveries were made on land belonging to other conservation bodies, such as the Friends of Avon Meadows and the Vale Landscape Heritage Trust. This is always good



Brown Hairstreak egg, photographed using a Plugable USB 2.0 Digital Microscope – 2552-A02028; this plugs directly into the USB socket of a computer, which can then be used to capture the images.

news because it's more likely that appropriate blackthorn management will be sustained, helping numbers to increase. We ended last winter with an amazing 23 new 1km squares in which Brown Hairstreak eggs had

STOP PRESS!



This photograph, taken by Glen Dipple and first posted on our Facebook group, led to the discovery of Small Blue at Broadway Tower.

Small Blue

We are now able to announce some exciting news... the **Small Blue** – last known to be breeding in the region in 1998 – has now been re-confirmed as a West Midlands species! Even more surprisingly, it appears to have existed – at what is one of its former known sites – every year back to, and including, 2014; this despite a number of searches there, by us, over those years!

We were first alerted to this by a member of our WMBC Facebook group, who posted on 22 May saying that he'd seen a Small Blue near Broadway Tower. I followed this up with a couple of (unsuccessful) visits to try to see the butterfly but, on the second visit,

spreads southwards

been found for the first time.

More exciting finds

So in November 2019, after yet another summer of disappointingly low numbers of adult sightings, we've picked up where we left off last winter and already added seven more newly recorded squares, two of which are in the same area.

Theories abound as to the causes of these finds. It seems that the species definitely had a dispersal year in 2018 when, for some reason as yet unknown, the butterfly left its usual hotspots and flew out into the surrounding countryside, laying eggs there, and hence establishing new territories. But equally, with this many finds over a wide area, it seems unlikely

that so much new territory could be colonised in just one summer. This suggests that colonies have existed there for the last few years, at least, but been overlooked. This is mainly due to us not having searched there for eggs, because we never imagined the species had spread so far south.

It's intriguing that, before its re-discovery in 1969–70 around Grafton Wood, the previous last-known evidence for the Brown Hairstreak in Worcestershire is from an adult, now preserved in the Rothschild collection at the Natural History Museum in London, dated 1891 and with a given location of Pershore. However, it's hard to imagine that the butterfly has existed, unrecorded, in and around Pershore from 1891 until 2018.

Distribution

So far this winter, we have already recorded Brown Hairstreak eggs in Worcestershire's far south (near Wick) and far north (Arrow Valley Country Park, Redditch). These two sets of eggs are just over 15 miles apart, a phenomenal distance for a butterfly known only from a small area around Grafton Wood as recently as 30 years ago.

Many more discoveries of eggs in large numbers would be needed to support such a possibility.

We'd love more people to get involved with our winter egg searches and work parties – see Grafton Wood on page 29 for details. Help us to monitor and conserve the Brown Hairstreak in Worcestershire.

Article and photographs
by **Simon Primrose**

back in our region

I bumped into a National Trust volunteer recorder. She told me the astonishing news that she knew about the Small Blue's presence there, and that she'd recorded it every year for the last six.

It seems there was a mix up between her and a colleague, with each thinking the other had passed these sightings through to be officially recorded, thus explaining how the butterfly's existence had gone undetected by us. This is a classic illustration of how vitally important it is for everyone to make sure all butterfly records are input to the official database, via iRecord*.

About half a mile from this site is the Fish Hill Picnic Place, which some of you will be familiar with. This is a lovely spot, with peaceful meadows containing lots of orchids and also supporting a small patch of Kidney Vetch, which is the food plant of the Small Blue. A couple of weeks after the sighting near Broadway Tower, I popped into the Picnic Place when passing and was delighted to see a Small Blue immediately, laying eggs on the Kidney Vetch.


Both these sites lie right on the county boundary with Gloucester-

a classic illustration of how vitally important it is for everyone to make sure all butterfly records are input to the official database, via iRecord.


shire, a county that supports numerous known colonies of Small Blue, the nearest of which is only a mile or two away. So, it was always a possibility that the Small Blue could

re-colonise the Broadway area. It will be interesting to see, in the coming years, whether the species proves to be only a temporary resident, breeding for a few years before disappearing again, or whether it is indeed here in Worcestershire to stay permanently.

Article by **Simon Primrose**
* www.brc.ac.uk/irecord

A High Brown Fritillary butterfly with orange wings and black spots is perched on a green thistle with purple buds.

High Brown
Fritillary

A Dark Green Fritillary butterfly with orange wings and black spots is perched on a green fern.

Dark Green
Fritillaries

Upper side: The High Brown's forewings have a convex trailing edge and indented third spots that are smaller than the Dark Green's.

You could be forgiven if, living in the West Midlands, you know next to nothing about the High Brown Fritillary. But to know it is to love it. And to be proud of our success in helping this threatened creature.

A near-perfect habitat

Last summer we were the guests of BC Wales as we set out from (of all places) a gun club and up a steep climb towards a sun-drenched meadow of bracken. Under the bracken are violets and, while the scene looked perfectly natural, it is very much managed. This is done by several dedicated agencies: the Glamorgan Heritage Coast project, funding from the

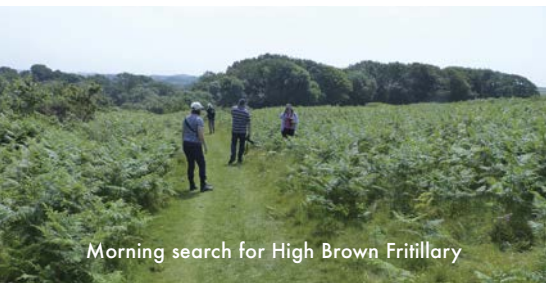
Shoot first,

Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund on behalf of the Vale (of Glamorgan) Biodiversity Partnership... and, of course, Butterfly Conservation through its South Wales branch.

The habitat is now, after 15 years of scrub clearance and coppicing by a team of dedicated volunteers, as close to perfect as can be achieved. We know this because it is working and the **High Brown Fritillary** is not only surviving but making a dramatic recovery.

An identification challenge

A warm sunny day ensured that butterflies would be very much on the wing. A problem: High Browns share this habitat with **Dark Green Fritillaries** that look very, very similar. Hence my personal policy of: shoot first, ask questions later. See a fritillary, take the photo and, amid home comforts, check for the detail differences. These are not glaringly obvious, even to an expert (and I'm no expert).

A group of people are walking through a lush green meadow, searching for High Brown Fritillaries.

Morning search for High Brown Fritillary

A day of two halves

The two main sites, not far from each other, are quite dissimilar in character but what they have in common (apart from being neighbours of gun clubs) are flourishing populations of High Browns. Having made the trip, we measured the day's success by quantity seen.

Up on the morning's plateau, we had to be grateful for enjoyable weather and the occasional fleeting glimpse (was that one?) but most of us had the chance to inspect a paired couple of Dark Greens, which were so involved with each other that they were oblivious to our attention.

The walk to the afternoon site was of a different character: through more woodland, across the river and under the railway line to a rough footpath, a winding way hacked through shoulder-height bracken on a west-facing bank of the River Alun. For each of us, the experience would be different but, for this one photographer, it was as if Open Season had been declared. What mattered, in my personal feeding



Open season for High Brown Fritillary

frenzy, was to take the pictures.

There will be statistics that say how, for every High Brown, there might be four or even ten Dark Greens and, of course, not everyone feels like a kid let loose in a sweet shop. However, for all the facts and figures that tell this success story, it was an experience far better measured in (and this last word is chosen with care)... exhilaration.

Article and photographs by **Martin Harrison**

ask questions later



High Brown Fritillary
(underwing)



Dark Green Fritillaries
(underwings)

Lower side: There's a colour difference and the High Brown has a row of red-ringed 'ocelli' (eye-spots).

From Oilseed Rape

The Red House, Eldersfield



Oilseed rape field in 2011

Background

In June 2019 the Branch visited Keith and Kit Turner at their home near Eldersfield, where they have created a wonderful wildflower meadow from arable farmland in just eight years. Keith showed us round his beautiful Grade II listed house and garden, as well as sharing with us the fascinating history of how he established the meadow. The method he followed and how it succeeded is set out below to encourage others to follow his example. As it was June, the meadow was full of butterflies and burnet moths, with notable numbers of **Marbled Whites** and **Common Blues**.

Species-rich meadows are now a rare habitat in the UK, having declined by an estimated 99% since the 1930s. It is very satisfying to report a reversal of this trend at The Red House.

Worcestershire is fortunate in having almost 20% of the wildflower meadows, on neutral soils, in the country. These meadows are important habitats not just for their flora but also for many invertebrates, especially butterflies and moths, as well as supporting fungal and microbial diversity.

History

The meadow at The Red House covers 15 acres of Keuper Marl clay loam and the soil is good for mixed and arable farming. In the early 20th century it was

managed as an orchard, which by the 1960s was part orchard/part pasture, grazed by sheep and cattle. In the 1970s, it became part of a larger farm, the trees and hedgerows were removed, the land was intensively farmed with the usual array of agri-chemicals being applied and winter-sown crops replaced spring-sown.

The changes to the field's ecology and wildlife were disastrous. Previously there were thrushes, finches and tits using the range of food and nest sites amongst the orchards, together with wintering flocks of thrushes and starlings foraging on the old grassland, as well as owls, kestrel and woodpeckers patrolling. This was replaced by a few pigeons and garrulous corvids, while butterflies and other insects almost totally disappeared. Undeniably, the land produced more food but it became, comparatively, a desert for wildlife.

Keith acquired full ownership of the field in 2011 and set about the transformation to a permanent pasture of rich and diverse broad-leaved species.

Management - Key Considerations



Year 1

Seeds: These were obtained from local meadows in the adjoining counties, of the same soil type, with the

Rape to Orchids



Wildflower meadow in 2019

majority from SSSI-designated fields.

Soil preparation: It is well founded that grass re-seeding is best on soils as free from 'weed' competition as possible. To achieve this, the field was treated with a half-strength application of the herbicide glyphosate soon after the last rape was harvested in the summer of 2011.

A cultivator with vibrating tines was then used to penetrate the soil to 3-5cm. This produced a shallow till and broke up the residues from the previous crop.

Sowing: To achieve the best results, wildflower seed should be sown by simply scattering over the prepared soil. This allows the seeds more access to light and, as result, they germinate better and more quickly.

The seeds were sown at The Red House in August 2011 using a 1950s broadcasting drill mounted on a small tractor. Given the wide range of seed sizes, it was difficult to obtain a consistent rate of sowing and, to meet the recommended application of 24lb of seed per acre, great attention had to be paid to this part of the operation. Much trial and error was involved to ensure neither too much or too little seed was sown.

A long dry period followed the sowing and, for weeks, there was no sign of germination. Finally the rain arrived in November and the worry then turned

into that of losing the seed when the field became flooded. By the end of the year only 5-10% of the seed had begun to grow.

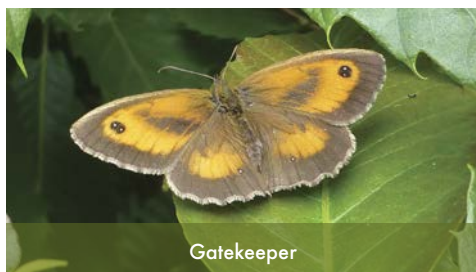
Year 2

With a cold January to March precluding any further seed emergence, panic set in by April when, fortuitously, another consignment of seeds became available, not within its declared

germination period but still viable. A top-up broadcast was then carried out at a rate of around 7lb/acre.

Then, in early May, the green miracle happened: within ten days, the entire field was clothed in green and grew strongly in the warm weather. It became clear that a wide range of the mixture sown was present and that the early establishment objectives had been met. Much seed of many species seemed to have postponed an autumn emergence and opted for a period of dormancy as a result of the low winter soil temperatures. Less welcome was the patchy but widespread appearance of the vigorous arable 'weed' black-grass (or Slender Foxtail), which could smother the weaker, slower growing broad-leaved plants. Fortunately, this threat never really developed.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►



Gatekeeper



6-spot Burnet



Marbled White

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11 ►

By August, the field had germinated fully and, while there were a number of vigorous species such as Oxeye Daisy, Knapweed and Wild Carrot, a closer inspection showed a healthy population of other species.

In September, the new sward was too lush and too late to make silage and, with the daisy, knapweed and carrot now seeded, two flailings were done to let more light in to encourage the slowly establishing perennial plants to grow more strongly before winter. Wildflowers do best in poorer soils and it is important to remove the cut each year to reduce the fertility.

By the end of October, the even establishment across the field was clear and a very good 'take' augured well for the following year.

Grazing: Grazing after the final cut produces a varied sward structure and spreads seeds around the field (via hooves and dung). In addition, after the cut has been removed by cropping, dunging by animals replaces lost nutrients.

Keith decided to introduce sheep (Texels) from a neighbouring farm to integrate into the annual cycle of managing the field. The sheep have the run of the field and have no supplementary feed other than animal licks. Depending on the weather, they normally remain until January or February, by which time the sward has been tightly grazed with little remaining of the previous summer's growth.

Once the sheep are removed, the field is 'shut up' for the next six months, until the hay crop is taken. This allows time for most plants and grasses to flower and set seed. The timing of cutting is weather-dependent and may be delayed until mid-August but, often, new soft grass at the base of the sward still enables hay of decent quality to be baled.

Keith has now employed this management rotation for seven years.

Results

In 2019, a survey of the field recorded 55 species of broad-leaved plants and 20 species of grass. These included orchids (two species), vetches, bedstraws, clovers, yellow rattle, mallows and trefoils.

However, meadows are much more than just pretty flowers; they are also a haven for wildlife. Each year over 20 species of butterfly are recorded, with **Brown Argus** a new arrival in recent years. In addition, the winter thrushes are back, along with the owls and kestrels.

It is estimated that over 1,300 species of insects eat the most common meadow plants and that Bird's Foot Trefoil alone is the food plant for over 150 species. Meadows are also important for all pollinators, with a soil rich in fungi, worms and beetles. Increasing numbers of these have been noted at the Red House in recent years.

Conclusions

The Red House meadow is a great example of how habitats can be restored and wildlife brought back, in a relatively short period, after years of intensive farming, and Keith is to be congratulated on his achievement. The next 20 years are going to be worth waiting for!

Acknowledgement

This article would not have been possible without Keith's detailed guidance and his assistance is greatly appreciated.

Article and insect photographs by **Ian Duncan**
Habitat photographs by **Keith Turner**

Places for Pollinators

Children at Dorothy Clive Garden (Dave Walley)

This initiative was launched by West Midlands Butterfly Conservation in Spring 2018 in response to the well-publicised decline in pollinating insects, including butterflies and moths.

The initial plan was to support the creation of up to ten 'Places for Pollinators' across the region but such was the demand that the project was extended and so far around 15 pollinator gardens and meadows have been created. To qualify, sites need to be in a prominent position, be open to the public and have sufficient resources, volunteer or paid, to both create and maintain the area. In each location, WMBC has provided advice and support, and paid for an information board to be erected.

Here we feature five new gardens recently planted to benefit butterflies, bees and other pollinating insects.

Dorothy Clive Garden

Dave and **Christine Walley** tell us that, in March, children from the New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, visited the Dorothy Clive Garden, on the border between Staffordshire and Shropshire. After a presentation of The Secret Garden, **Kathryn Robey** (Garden Curator) and **Zdenek Valkoun Walker** (Head Gardener) taught the children the importance of pollinating wildflowers for insect life. Led by Zdenek, the children prepared a patch of ground and were taught how to sow wildflower seeds to create an area for butterfly conservation.

This joint venture of garden, theatre and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Places for Pollinators initiative was sowing seeds for the future and we all looked forward to seeing the rewards. When we returned in September, on a warm and sunny day, the main herbaceous borders were alive with insects and many, many butterflies. Visitors were amazed to see such numbers. We spotted **Red Admiral**, **Painted Lady**, **Small White**, **Tortoiseshell**, **Comma** and one **Brimstone**.

Verbena bonariensis, *Sedum* and *Eupatorium* were the main attraction for the butterflies. The garden that the children had sown with annual seeds was naturally going to seed, having done its thing.

The Halfway House

The Wrekin in Shropshire is a place of ancient history and legend. The track up it is one of the oldest 'roads' in Britain and there are the remains of an Iron Age hill fort on the top. The Halfway House has served walkers since Victorian times by providing refreshments and even used to also offer swing boats and donkey rides. The house has recently been refurbished, the old pavilion tea-room

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

restored and the garden, with its amazing views, is now getting a new lease of life.

As part of this work, an offer from West Midlands Butterfly Conservation of a contribution towards the creation of a pollinator garden was gratefully received (made in response to a successful application to the Shropshire Hills AONB conservation fund).

Jenny Joy tells us that the work has now been done, although it needed pick-axes, mulching mats and fences to ensure it survived – none of which were originally envisaged! Both the pollinators and the local walkers are now enjoying the garden. Two pollinator-themed events have already taken place and recorded many species, including 11 butterflies, five moths, seven bees and 14 hoverflies. Butterfly highlights were **Brimstone**, **Purple Hairstreak** and **Painted Lady**. This unusual garden is therefore already being well used.



Halfway House - Red-tailed Bumblebee (Jenny Joy)



Halfway House - garden in progress (Jenny Joy)

Pool Heritage Trust (winner of a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service this year), which has been working to improve the local environment as well as manage estate buildings.

Cathy Perry tells us that the garden opened in May 2017, thanks to the work of a dedicated team of volunteers and a grant from the Government's Pocket Park scheme. The land had originally been a community space and we know from old photographs that maypole dancing took place there. It was used as allotments during the Second World War. It had become derelict in recent years, with some evidence of fly-tipping. From the outset, the aim of the project was to make the garden wildlife-friendly, as well as a space for local people to enjoy.

The garden has developed into three main areas. The lawn is ringed by a path and deep borders that include fruit trees and bushes as well as plants for pollinators. The woodland walk is a bark path that meanders between established trees and through native wild plants including English Bluebells. Compost heaps, woodpiles and a large insect hotel are also located in this area. And, lastly, there's the newly opened 'Bosk', a woodland area that's perfect for den building!

Alongside nectar plants such as Hebe, Rosemary, Pulmonaria, Buddleia and Primula, food plants for caterpillar haven't been forgotten. Garlic Mustard grows well in the garden, several large sunny Nettlebeds have been preserved, mature Ivy has been retained on a

Nettlefold Garden

This garden is part of the Moor Pool Estate in Harborne, Birmingham, and is about three miles from the city centre. The estate was founded as a garden suburb in the early 1900s and was the brainchild of John Sutton Nettlefold. Plans for the estate can be seen at his house, Winterbourne House and Garden, on the Birmingham University campus. In 2011, the open spaces and amenities of the estate were purchased by the Moor



Branch Chair Peter Seal opens the Nettlefold Garden in May 2019



Severn Valley Country Park - information board (Mike Williams)

visiting the flowers. The team is most grateful for the support and contributions from Veolia and Butterfly Conservation West Midlands, as well as the many plants provided by Ashwood Nurseries of Kingswinford, Cook's of Stourport, Volunteers of Severn Valley Country Park and other individuals. Bill will write about their meadow management regime for us next year.

Burford House



Burford House (Peta Sams)

Peta Sams tells us that this garden is progressing, with the *Verbena bonariensis* doing particularly well. However, more butterflies are still seen in the meadow beyond the river. The garden will continue to grow, of course, and should then attract more pollinators. We'll revisit it in the future.

Article by **Marian Newell**

number of trees, and Buckthorn has been planted to attract the **Brimstones** that have occasionally been seen in the area.

The garden has proved popular with young families: many impromptu picnics have taken place, in addition to organised events such as an Easter egg hunt and wildlife quizzes. From time to time, information about the plants is placed around the garden. The Places for Pollinators board is a great addition to the educational aspect of the garden.

The garden is open to the public every day from April to October (10am–6pm) and at weekends from November to March (10am–4pm). Opening the gate, like everything else in the garden, is done by volunteers so times may vary slightly according to people's availability. Find us in Margaret Grove, B17 9JH, or on Facebook or Twitter.

Severn Valley Country Park

Bill Watkins reports that, a year after its inception (reported in our Autumn 2018 issue), this garden is attracting many favourable comments from the public as well as benefitting the large numbers of invertebrates

It's not too late to become involved and, if you are involved in a project that might be interested in developing a special 'Place for Pollinators', please email wmbutterflies@gmail.com



Tortoiseshell golden pupa



Sturmia bella

The new Tachinid on the

Declines in Vanessids

This year, we have been lucky to experience the joy of many colourful Vanessids (or Nymphalids) adorning Buddleia bushes in our gardens. Many of us can recall childhood memories from the years during the 60s and into the 70s when there were often too many to count, and the **Small Tortoiseshell** competed with the **Meadow Brown** as the most common UK butterfly.

In recent years, the decline in numbers of both **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Peacock** butterfly in the South of England has been alarming. Recordings of Peacock around the Malverns in 2018 were very few, and the Tortoiseshell didn't fare much better. By comparison, the warm summers saw most of our meadowland butterflies flourishing.

The Vanessids are our most mobile butterflies – their strength of flight on a hot day is spectacular – and it's worth remembering that both the **Red Admiral** and **Painted Lady** are migrants, capable of flying from and to the near-continent. These two species are not experiencing the decline of our domestic Vanessid species. Neither is the **Comma**, which in contrast is

expanding its range, having been in drastic decline during the 19th century due to the loss of Hop fields. In the 1960s, this butterfly adapted to using nettles, and hasn't looked back since. That's another story, but may suggest reasons behind what is going on with the Tortoiseshell and Peacock. One fact that separates these two species is that they lay their eggs in large batches on nettles, as opposed to single placement of eggs distributed over a wider area.

Butterfly larvae are hosts for many parasitic wasps and also for certain flies from the Tachinid family

Potential culprits

Butterfly larvae are hosts for many parasitic wasps, and also for certain flies from the Tachinid family (such as *Phryxe vulgaris* and *Pelatachina tibialis*). The decline of the aforementioned species in the South has coincided with the spread of a new species of Tachinid fly called *Sturmia bella*, which has spread northwards from the continent (almost certainly due to climate change). Studies based on numerical evidence show a fairly clear correlation, but reasons as to why these species are being affected, and the extent to which the population decline is attributable to this particular parasite, are open for debate, and further experimental data is being gathered.



Sturmia bella hatched from the golden pupa



Pelatachina tibialis pupae
– note the bifurcated projection

e block – *Sturmia bella*

In the UK, we already have *Pelatachina tibialis*, which lays its eggs directly onto young caterpillars, and this species also parasitises 'Cabbage White' butterflies. *Sturmia bella* lays microscopic eggs onto the nettle leaves where young larvae are feeding. The larvae then ingest the egg, and the larval parasitoid hatches and grows within. The method by which *Sturmia bella* enters its host makes it far more efficient to target batches of caterpillars as presented by the Tortoiseshell and Peacock. By contrast, individual caterpillars would offer a greatly reduced probability of a successful parasitisation event.

It has been observed, that the Small Tortoiseshell is more affected by *Sturmia bella* than the Peacock, and this has been attributed to the timing of the parasite and host lifecycles. The Peacock has a single brood and is at the larval stage during June, whereas the Tortoiseshell is double-brooded with larvae present from June to August.

My own very small study

At the bottom of our garden, we have a very large patch of nettles. Each spring, eggs are laid around the edge of old bonfire sites, which provides an ideal sunbathing area for prospective butterflies.

This year, I was delighted to find a very large number



Tortoiseshell Young Larvae

of reasonably mature Peacock larvae, so I took into captivity 42 individuals. I fed them on nettles taken from the location of the caterpillars. Of these 32 progressed to adult, and ten were parasitised. Of the ten that were parasitised, eight were by *Pelatachina tibialis*, one by an Ichneumon wasp and another by an unknown insect. None were affected by *Sturmia Bella*.

However, later in the summer, I rescued a couple of batches of freshly hatched Tortoiseshell eggs from an area which was due to be strimmed. I took about 50 tiny larvae into captivity. None were parasitised and 48 produced

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►



Peacock Pupae

adults. The rest had been relocated to the nettle patch.

As my captives were hatching from the cage placed in the garden, I noticed a lovely golden pupa hanging from a leaf of a nearby Buddleia. It was so beautiful I took photos of it and placed it on the Malvern Butterfly Group Facebook page. Within two hours, I noticed a maggot at the bottom of the container and a hole in the 'golden pupa'.

This was rather exciting, as *Sturmia bella* hatches from the chrysalis, unlike *Pelatachina tibialis* which emerges from the final larval instar. Within ten days, a *Sturmia bella* fly emerged from the pupa of the Tortoiseshell parasitoid, whereas the morphologically different *Pelatachina tibialis* pupae that emerged from Peacock larvae had not hatched, and will not, until the spring of 2020, which is perfectly sensible for a species adapted for northern Europe.

One can draw no conclusions from such a small sample but the results might imply that later broods of Tortoiseshell are more susceptible to *Sturmia bella*, as the progeny of winter *Sturmia bella* survivors in the south spread northwards throughout the summer months. It seems we will continue to see population fluctuations which may be due in part to the new Tachinid on the block – *Sturmia bella*.

Thanks to members of the UK Diptera group for helping with Tachinid Identification.

Article and photographs by **Phil Taylor**

Postcard from the Common

Stephen Lewis, our Warden at Prees Heath Common Reserve, has written a short novel, loosely based on events at Prees Heath in the post-war period.

Stephen writes:

'Prees Heath has a fascinating social, military and ecological history. Since it was purchased by Butterfly Conservation in 2006, and large areas of the site were restored to heathland and acid grassland, much of this important backdrop has tended to fade from view, but it actually contains very important issues and lessons that are as relevant today as they ever were. The book, which is essentially a work of fiction, describes how a piece of common land, a former World War Two airfield where a rare butterfly lives, came to be threatened with destruction, the effect it had on the local community. The story is told through the viewpoint of two teenagers.'

The book retails for £8.99. Copies can be bought direct by post by sending a cheque for £10.45 (£8.99 + £1.46 p&p) to Stephen Lewis, Dragonfly Cottage, 9 Arscott, Pontesbury, Shrewsbury, SY5 0XP. £6.07 of the purchase price will be donated to Butterfly Conservation for the continued restoration of Prees Heath Common. The book is also available at BookShrop in Whitchurch, the shop at Shropshire Wildlife Trust in Shrewsbury, and online at Amazon and Waterstones.





We all recognise the need to halt the decline of many of our widespread species but our gardens and local nature reserves so often sit in a sterile urban landscape for wildlife, with acres of gang-mown grassland, and hardly any wildflowers or butterflies to be seen.

Building Sites for Butterflies

It doesn't have to be that way, and Butterfly Conservation's Building Sites for Butterflies Programme is on a mission nationally to show how to design wildlife into new development and to change existing management practices on amenity grasslands.

For those who don't know me, I am **Phil Sterling**. I have a background in ecological research and spent 25 years as an ecologist in local government in Dorset, gaining experience in how to create habitats for wildlife within major developments. In addition, for the last four of those years I oversaw road verge maintenance and was able to put into practice the techniques to improve our existing verges for wildflowers and butterflies that I knew should work in theory. I have also been 'into moths' since the tender age of five.

We are coming to view road verges as interconnecting highways for wildlife

Changing perceptions

We are coming to view road verges as interconnecting highways for wildlife. They may not be managed appropriately for that purpose now, but there is a growing public desire for them to be so. Nationally, verges cover some 500,000km², or half the area of our remaining flower-rich grasslands. For the most part,

verges have also not suffered the ravages of industrialisation that our rural landscape has, and the efficiencies of agricultural production that leave so little room for wildlife. For that reason, investment in improving road verges for wildlife is likely to bring quicker, cheaper wins than on farmland. In addition, we have to manage verges anyway to maintain safety of the highway, so the clever bit is to find where maintenance for safety and wildlife are one and the same activity.

That's where ecology comes in. We need to see grassland on a verge, or public park or nature reserve, as an ecosystem. We need to understand what makes the grass grow: if we can reduce how much it grows in the first place, we will have less to cut, and if we have less to cut, it should also cost us less. We all know, of course, that one of the key drivers of plant growth is soil fertility. The more fertile the soil is, the more vigorously the plants grow – a system exploited by farmers for millennia to provide us with food. However, the converse is more interesting, because infertile soils not only prevent plants from growing prolifically, but many more species are able

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to compete for the fewer nutrients that are available. Intrinsically, low-fertility grasslands therefore support more plant species, which means more biodiversity. Put another way, no thug plants, like coarse grasses, docks and Hogweed, can outgrow, smother and shade the more delicate and desirable herbs and grasses. It is no coincidence that our richest downlands for wildlife have developed on thin, chalky, infertile soils.

Creating the habitat

This was precisely the ecological principle I exploited in design of the road verges of the Weymouth Relief Road, constructed 2009-2011 in advance of the London Olympics in 2012, when Weymouth was hosting the sailing events. The standard prescription of 150mm of good quality topsoil and a liberal seeding of an amenity grass mix was abandoned in favour of no topsoil (or a scattering of 15mm in places), followed by hand-seeding a shortlist of wildflowers, carefully chosen to benefit butterflies and moths.

The results were spectacular, and by summer 2013,

the slopes were ablaze with Kidney Vetch and Ox-eye Daisy across seven hectares, and a total of 133 plant species were found there. In 2019, the situation remains similar, there are 141 plant species, with vast patches of Horseshoe Vetch, and an abundance of Kidney Vetch, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Wild Marjoram, and in places there are thousands of Pyramidal and Bee orchids.

Monitoring the inhabitants

Dorset Branch volunteers have been monitoring butterflies and dayflying moths since 2012 and, in 2018, a full-blown UKBMS transect was established incorporating the regularly-walked route. Notable colonisations were **Small Blue** in 2012, **Adonis Blue** in 2013 and **Chalkhill Blue** in 2018. The nearest known Small Blue colony was at least four miles away, showing how this little butterfly can colonise rapidly



Marbled White (Iain H Leach)

Weymouth Relief Road (Stephen Brown)

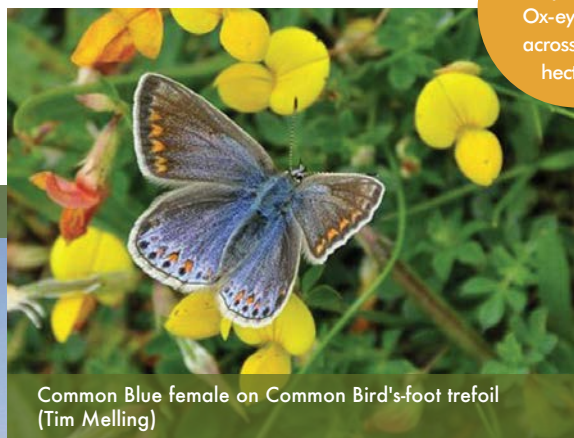


from quite some distance, and Chalkhill Blue probably arrived from Portland, 11 miles to the south.

There are also large numbers of **Small, Essex** and **Large Skippers**, small numbers of **Wall** and **Small Heath**, and it seems likely that **Clouded Yellow** is resident over the winter. Thirty species have been recorded from the slopes so far (over half the UK list) yet, only ten years ago, the land was mainly arable fields. It just shows how important newly created sites can be in redressing losses of our butterflies, if we get the specification right. Moths are poorly studied in comparison, but I'm pleased that the day-flying species **Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet** and **Six-belted Clearwing** are now established.

Managing the landscape

Long-established, gang-mown amenity grassland can also be enhanced in wildlife value – it is all about



Common Blue female on Common Bird's-foot trefoil
(Tim Melling)

...the slopes
were ablaze with
Kidney Vetch and
Ox-eye Daisy
across seven
hectares

reducing soil fertility. While at the Council, I led the team trialling 'cut-and-collect' on ordinary verges in the middle of urban Blandford in Dorset. Rather than cut and leave the mown grass clippings, which meant they rotted and returned nutrients to the soil to grow more grass, the teams used a mower that collected them up, and they disposed of them under trees and in shrub planting areas on the highway. By leaving the grass until it had got really long three times during the year, then cutting and collecting it, nutrients drawn from the soil into the leaves get taken away and can't go back.

The results were surprisingly quick. Verges dominated by coarse grasses turned to a mix of fine grasses in just a year, and in the second year Common Bird's-foot trefoil, Common Knapweed, Yarrow and lots of other common herbs flowered.

The **Brown Argus** butterfly was seen for the first time in the town centre. So successful is this policy at reducing cost and enhancing wildlife that Dorset Council has most of the major roads and verges in villages and towns in rural Dorset on a cut-and-collect regime.

Spreading the word

The Building Sites for Butterflies Programme, funded by the Patsy Wood Trust, is a four-year project running until spring 2022. It is all about encouraging others across the country to follow practices now established in Dorset, and to test and see for themselves the simple changes that can be made to encourage wildlife.

I spend much of my time giving presentations to national infrastructure providers, such as road and rail organisations, to local authorities and major developers, and I'm influencing the specifications within industry-standard design manuals for landscaping. If there's a big scheme near you for which you think we could influence the landscape design to enhance wildflowers, butterflies and moths, just let me know!

You can find out more at butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects/building-sites-for-butterflies

Article by **Phil Sterling** Programme Manager



Pair of mating Scarlet Tigers



Wildflowers are thriving

Corridors and connectivity around Stourbridge

Wild about Tigers

The **Scarlet Tiger** project in Stourbridge has now been running for five years. Although the 'poster girl' is this colourful moth, the project aims to improve the habitat along an ancient bridle path to increase existing numbers of butterflies and to provide a green corridor to attract other Lepidoptera from neighbouring known colonies.

The Scarlet Tigers mainly look after themselves, although we decided last winter to plant Alkanet (the caterpillars' preferred food plant) along the bridle path to encourage a greater distribution. This was a tricky decision, as Alkanet is a rampant plant. We

also planted Comfrey – a more traditional food plant for the larvae.

The colony of Scarlet Tigers seems to have stabilised with good, but not massive, numbers of both caterpillars and adults recorded along Roman Road. They have spread, as evidenced by reports from several people of sightings from their gardens, and they are present at both ends of the bridle path.

One of the butterflies we were aiming to attract made an appearance in 2019. **Marbled White** has not previously been reported along the bridle path itself but has been present in surrounding locations, so it was gratifying to spot an individual nectaring on one

of our wildflower patches in June this year.

We had a splendid show of wild flowers again this year. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) continues to maintain the traffic island; the diversity of flowers here is better than the rest of the lane. However, Bird's-foot Trefoil is gradually establishing a good foothold in the area near the notice board and Knapweed is spreading well.

Like everyone who runs conservation projects, I am extremely grateful for the support, encouragement and work of our little band of volunteers. We even managed to tempt a local resident to join us at our recent work



Bird's Foot Trefoil

party – he offered his services, along with his strimmer, and we gladly accepted. **Keith** made a huge difference to our work.

Wild about Stourbridge

An exciting new development is the establishment of the Wild about Stourbridge initiative. This is in its very early stages at present but it is the brainchild of three local parents, in conjunction with workers at Mary Stevens Park. The main objective is to connect the green areas across Stourbridge and create better wildlife corridors. Dudley MBC has a map of the green spaces, which formed the basis for an initial discussion between several interested parties. This is great news for our little project along Roman

Road, fitting in precisely with our own aims.

Connectivity is not just about joining up green spaces but also about combining the efforts of all groups interested in promoting urban wildlife. Our first Wild about Stourbridge meeting included members from small groups looking after neglected spaces, together with representatives from Dudley MBC, Mary Stevens Park and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, plus a couple of individuals who promote wild flowers through commercial ventures. It was quite extraordinary to hear about the different projects going on in Stourbridge.

The Wild about Stourbridge team have made links with Gigmill School and are due to run a workshop on wildlife and habitats in January, plus they plan to do a wildflower planting session later in the year. In order to kickstart the project, a butterfly-focused activity day was held at Mary Stevens Park. Members of the public were invited to mark on a simple map of Stourbridge the places they felt were good for wildlife. The results were interesting and revealed that we all have much to do to challenge perceptions about what constitutes good habitat.



Bee on Knapweed

Our first meeting established the fact that we need to find out exactly what wildlife we have in Stourbridge.

Personally I've been checking through my records of Roman Road and my own garden. It's quite a simple task to list the butterflies I've seen over the years but I'm amazed at the diversity of moths trapped in my garden, not to mention the variety of other wildlife present – bees in particular, which are also attracted to the Alkanet.

The organisers have been concentrating on getting funding into place to carry out their plans and we held a further meeting to discuss this in early December. Many challenges lie ahead, including a major new housing development being proposed by Taylor Wimpey, but this is a promising beginning... so watch this space!



Marbled White

*Article and photographs
by Joy Stevens*



ON OUR PATCH -

Our group

Our group is called Wfeg, which stands for Whittington and Fisherwick environmental group. At first, the impetus of the group was to lower the carbon footprint of the community. The members did a lot to raise awareness, such as giving away low-energy light bulbs, and arranged for people to club together to have solar panels fitted at reduced cost, in which I was thrilled to join them.

Inevitably, people have different priorities but many are very interested in helping pollinators. I am a member of Butterfly Conservation and another member is a keen beekeeper. I love my garden and was co-opted into the group because I was involved in a 'Gardening for Pollinators' competition.

Following that, we've held an 'Open Gardens' event in alternate years, which has proved to be a good fundraiser. Several gardeners seem to be 'wilding' at least part of their gardens now!

Our location

Whittington is a large Staffordshire village just south of Lichfield. Fisherwick is a hamlet on its outskirts. We're

lucky to have a good community spirit and a lot of people who give time and energy to various village organisations.

Our project

The River of Flowers project has involved thousands of bulbs being planted along grass verges over the last few years. Children at the local primary school have been involved in scattering seeds by the path to school, resulting in a lovely display and lots of butterflies around. The Brownie group have made their own garden for pollinators in the 'new' orchard. The land between Whittington Hospice and Whittington Cricket Club was requested for the purpose of an orchard, wildflower meadow and BMX track (with wildflower-seeded banks, naturally!). This is maturing nicely.

Along the main street of the village, large troughs have been installed to provide colour and nectar over a long season. At the other end of the village, allotments flourish where there was just scrub a few years ago. Swan Meadow is close by. This small parcel of land was left on the edge of a new



River of Flowers

development of housing. Supposedly a 'green' area, it was in fact a neglected and difficult site because of two groups of mature fir trees. After questions and negotiation, it was agreed with the builders, neighbours and Parish Council that this land could also become a wildflower meadow, with fabulous results. Whittington has a small patch of woodland situated between a canal and the east side of the village. This was a sadly neglected area, which a group of neighbours tidied, renovated and beautified by planting bulbs and wildflowers.

This year, our reward was a Gold Award in the Large Village category of the Britain in Bloom competition

Our challenges

When I read this, it sounds easy but, in fact, the progress made represents probably hundreds of hours of planning meetings, negotiations, leaflet-drops, funding bids and reassurances to those who do not share the view that wildflower spaces are beautiful – not everyone does. Although we have enjoyed support from the Parish Council, not everyone there has the

same 'vision'. There are some who will always prefer a close-clipped grass verge to 'weeds' but working with the younger generation is encouraging. That brings me to the actual work... and there is plenty of that. Work parties are usually scheduled for weekends and involve those who can make it, Wfeg members as well as the rest of the community.

A lot of work had to be re-done in the orchard last year because some of the trees were not thriving. Experts were asked and it was decided to replant with improved soil – a big job. Last year's drought looked likely to kill young fruit trees and the first year's growth at Swan Meadow. This meant lots and lots of hose-pipe watering over a long period during the summer, involving lots of volunteering. The meadow was stunning.

There have been other setbacks and there will probably be a lot more but, as long as there are people who care about butterflies, bees, birds and all the flora and fauna out there, there is hope.

Article and photographs by Lynn Beal



The Alpine Experience

I have been discovering and enjoying butterflies ever since my husband bought a new camera and said, 'What shall I photograph?' I pointed to a butterfly out in the garden and, from that moment on, our life included butterflies.

This summer, in mid-August, I booked an embroidery holiday at The Alpine Experience in Les Carroz in the French Alps with tutor **Nicola Jarvis**, a lady who shares my interest in butterflies. When I learned that the crewel embroidery project included the most beautiful **Scarce Copper** butterfly, the holiday was off to a great start. This, along with the incredible blue skies, had me smiling throughout.

On my very first morning, I was sitting in the workroom of the chalet. As I looked up and saw my first Alpine butterfly through the open chalet glass wall, I was simply delighted and very excited. I quietly put on my sun hat and picked up my camera. The adventure began (very quickly, I was given the name Deb-or-ah the Explorer (no relation to Dora, I promise). Being able to combine the joy of embroidery and butterflies meant this was my perfect holiday.

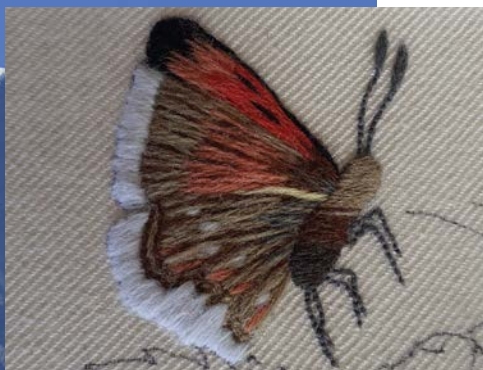
The Butterflies

Firsts: the first time that I see a new butterfly is wonderful and I quickly add it to the list of different species I have seen over the years. To see the way they

settle, behave and perform their rituals, and with so many being all together in one small area for me to watch, photograph and enjoy, was truly memorable. These are just some of the highlights of my time in this beautiful landscape.

- **Mallow Skipper** delighted me by settling with wings fully open on the Alpine flora.
- **Woodland/Rock Grayling** just loved to visit the nearby Buddleia.
- **Scarce Swallowtail** showed off their beautiful extended bodies and stunning tails.
- A **Large Wall Brown**, with its beautiful spots and circles alongside vibrant splashes of orange colour, was radiant in the sun.
- A **Marbled White**, which I have only seen once before, was just beautiful.
- **Chalkhill Blue** was on my list of 'blues' and is now finally ticked off.

Other highlights were: **Wall Brown**, **Scotch Argus**, **Jersey Tiger Moth**, four varieties of **Fritillaries**, **Burnet moth**, **Gatekeeper**, **Common Blue**, three varieties



Scarce Copper in crewelwork



Mallow Skipper



Large Wall Brown

of **Whites**, **Small Heath**, **Large Skipper**, **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Painted Lady**. My tutor Nicola Jarvis also saw the wonderful **Apollo** butterfly.

Chamonix Mont Blanc

Our excursion during this trip was to go to Chamonix Mont-Blanc and, rather than climb, I chose to take the gondola up to the glacier. Although very high (the gondola was a good choice), it was simply glorious. The temperature was 30°C at the bottom and -2°C at the top, so sun-cream and a scarf were the order of the day. But what made this experience even more wonderful was that, at the halfway platform, I saw more butterflies, a very tatty **Gatekeeper** (it obviously hadn't taken the gondola) and a **Scotch Argus** (I think) was fluttering around and landing on people (unfortunately, it was very camera-shy).

Everything came together on this holiday. Beautiful butterflies, exceptional embroidery, fantastic flora and our wonderful hosts, **Nadine** and **Mark**, made this break from busy life such an enjoyable time.

Article and photographs by **Deborah Hotchkiss**



Creating a corridor between
the sites in 2011

Penny Hill landfill site

Thank you... and
a cry for help

History of the site

For the benefit of people who don't know the site, Penny Hill was originally quarried for limestone. When it was exhausted, it was used for landfill. Some of the buildings remain on site, as does equipment to remove methane from below the surface.

When landfilling was complete, the site was capped. Seed/hay was later collected from the adjacent Penny Hill Bank, an SSSI owned by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT), and cast across the site.

Species now seen

The old quarry took several years to establish but has slowly transformed into an exceptional site, both for its butterflies and for its excellent flora. Notable plant species include Autumn Gentian, Dyers Greenweed, Twayblade, and Spotted, Pyramidal and Bee Orchids.

The adjacent WWT meadow, although only 2.1 acres in size, holds small populations of **Dingy Skipper**, **Green Hairstreak** and

Brown Argus, but typically only in numbers counted on one hand. It was hoped these species would migrate on to the much larger landfill site and this did happen, but only very slowly. A plan was hatched to create a corridor between the two sites.

This was achieved with a mixed group of BC and WWT volunteers in 2011, and the results have been quite spectacular. On a visit this May, **John Tilt** and I counted just under 100 Dingy Skippers, and I would say the numbers were even larger when I visited a week later.

Article and photographs by
Trevor Bucknall



Ed on the Fordson Dexta tractor

I'd like to give special thanks to the many volunteers who've turned out to help for many years now, with brush cutters, chainsaws and so on. However, over this last year, even I had to concede that some of the site management was getting away from us. Large areas of bramble were well over head height and an inch thick in diameter – too much for brush cutters – so we employed the services of an agricultural contractor with two tractors and flails, which has made a big impact at the top of the site. This will reclaim a large area of flower-rich grassland.

Four of us recently went to rake up some of the brash left by the flail. Unfortunately, at 60, I was the youngest by several years. Where on earth is the next generation? We constantly hear in the media about what our generation has done to our planet, so come on, you younger members, put down your phones and tablets, and come and join us (see Penny Hill on page 30 for details). We need you – volunteers of 60, 70 and 80 are not the way forward, although they are much appreciated!

Dates for your diary

West Midlands Branch AGM

11am to 3pm, Sat 29 Feb 2020

Three Parishes Village Hall, next to St John's Church, Grafton Flyford, WR7 4PG (SO963557), just off A422 between Worcester and Inkberrow

Tea and coffee from 10.30am, rolls and cake at 1pm. Business starts at 11am (annual reports and Branch updates), with a Panel discussion after lunch on 'Challenges of maintaining Reserves and other key sites'. Minutes of the 2017 and 2018 AGMs are available at www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk/news/meeting-minutes

Ankerdine Hill Work Party

Sun 19 Jan: in partnership with Worcestershire County Council (Wade Muggleton) 10am in a small lay-by on A44 close to the turn off to Martley (SO736557)

Contact Mike Williams: 01299 824860, wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Cannock Chase Work Parties – Dingy Skipper

26 Jan: in partnership with Staffordshire County Council 11am outside Rangers Bungalow, Marquis's Drive, Staffordshire, WS12 4PW (SK005153) **Contact Rob Taylor, Countryside Ranger:** 01543 370737, 07817 122760, robert.taylor@staffordshire.gov.uk

Ewyas Harold Reserve and Common Work Parties

Sat: 18 Jan, 15 Feb, 21 Mar: **Contact Ian Hart:** yellowrattle4@aol.com
Tue: 7 Jan, 4 Feb, 3 Mar: **Contact Lucy Morton:** 07503 220191, lmorton@butterfly-conservation.org 10am at the northern Cwm Hill end of Ewyas Harold Common, adjacent to the top cattle grid (SO382302). Approach from Abbey Dore off the B4347 (SO384306). Some hand tools will be provided but, if you have your own, do bring them. Bring gloves, lunch and a drink.

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Egg Searches

Sat: 1 Feb: 10am at Grafton Flyford church. **Contact Simon Primrose:** 07952 260153, simonjprimrose@aol.com

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wed until the end of March: 10am at Grafton Flyford church. **Contact John Tilt:** 01386 792458, john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

Haug Wood Work Parties

Sat: 4 Jan, 1 Feb, 7 Mar: 10am in the reserve car park on minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope (SO592365) **Contact Kate Wollen** (07786 526280, kate.wollen@forestryengland.uk) or **Robin Hemming** (07501 020605, robinhemming@btinternet.com)

Honeybourne Work Party (Grizzled Skipper site)

Sun: 15 Mar: 10am at the bridge above the disused railway (SP127441) on road between Honeybourne and Mickleton **Contact Peter Seal:** 01905 426398, peterseal3@btinternet.com

Malvern Grayling Work Parties

Mon: 10 Feb, 24 Feb: 10am in North Hill Quarry car park, WR14 4LT (SO771469) Tea and coffee provided mid-morning but bring own lunch/refreshments if staying all day. **Contact Mel Mason:** 01684 565700, mbg.records@btinternet.com

Monkwood Work Parties

1st Sun: 5 Jan, 2 Feb, 1 Mar.
3rd Thu: 16 Jan, 20 Feb, 19 Mar: 10am in the reserve car park (SO803603) **Contact Phil Adams:** 01905 610830, pdadamsrainbow@gmail.com

Annual Moth Recorders' Day

10am to 4pm, Sat 25 Jan: Birmingham and Midland Institute, details and bookings at butterfly-conservation.org/moths/moth-recording/uk-moth-recorders-meeting

Mortimer Forest Work Party

Sun 19 Jan: 10am at Forestry England barrier, just off the B4361 near Overton (SO500720), in partnership with Forestry England **Contact Rhona Goddard:** 01746 762364, rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ►

Penny Hill Landfill Site Work Parties

Sun 23 Feb and 8 Mar: 10am at the site entrance off Pudford Lane, Hillside, Martley (SO752613) **Contact Mike Williams (01299 824860) or Trevor Bucknall (01905 755757)**

Prees Heath Common Work Parties

Wed: 12 Feb (tree clearance around the pond), 11 Mar (tree popping on the old runway): 10.30am on the access track opposite the Steel Heath turning off the A49 (SJ557363) **Contact Stephen Lewis: 07900 886809, phwarden@sky.com**

Scarlet Tiger Project Work Parties, Stourbridge

Every 3rd Fri: 17 Jan, 21 Feb, 20 Mar: 10am at a location posted on the notice board at the northern (crematorium) end of Roman Road. **Contact Joy Stevens: 01384 372397, joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk**

Siege Wood Work Party, Herefordshire

Thu 13 Feb: 10am in the reserve car park (SO355344) **Contact Mike Williams 01299 824860, wmbutterflies@gmail.com**

Trench Wood Work Parties

Sun 26 Jan, 23 Feb, 22 Mar: 10am in the reserve car park (SO930588) **Contact Matthew Bridger, 07801 568334, bridge1805@btinternet.com**

Wood White Work Parties

Wessington Wood and Pasture Nature Reserve, Herefordshire (SO603353) **Tue 11 Feb:** 10am in

Walks at Llanymynech Rocks to see Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other butterflies

Sat: 2 May and 9 May: 2–4.30pm at the Shropshire Wildlife Trust car park (SJ271218), take Underhill Lane to the end just south of the Cross Guns pub in Pant. No charge, requires reasonable weather with sunshine (will be cancelled if raining continuously), accompanied children welcome, no dogs please **Contact Simon Spencer: 07866 428875, 01691 648339**

the reserve car park, in partnership with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust Bury Ditches, Shropshire (SO333839) **Sun 16 Feb:** 10am in the reserve car park, in partnership with Forestry England **Contact Rhona Goddard: 01746 762364, rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org**

Wyre Forest Work Parties

Sun: 9 Feb

Wed: 29 Jan, 25 Mar:

Wednesdays are joint events with Natural England – tea and coffee provided 10am in Earnwood Copse car park on the B4194 Bewdley to Kinlet road (SO744784) **Contact Mike Williams: 01299 824860, wmbutterflies@gmail.com**

Atlas of Britain & Ireland's Larger Moths

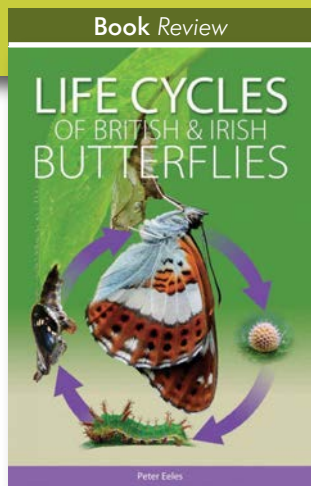
Published in November, this contains over 500 pages and 800 colour photographs. It includes current and historical records for 893 species, with phenology charts for 866 species, most comparing flight periods in the 1970s with 2000–2016. This landmark publication, the first-ever atlas of larger moths in Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands was produced in partnership with MothsIreland. It comprises over 25 million moth records from Butterfly Conservation's National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS) and the MothsIreland dataset. The atlas includes records up to 31 December 2016, with the earliest record being that of Kentish Glory recorded in April 1741, therefore spanning an impressive 275 years of moth recording effort.

Price: £38.50 + £4 p&p • **Publisher:** Pisces Publications **ISBN:** 978-1-874357-82-7 **Hardback.** www.naturebureau.co.uk/atlas-of-britain-irelands-larger-moths



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• ISBN: 9781874357889 • Author: Peter Eeles • Publisher: Pisces Publications • Cost: £34.99 • Publication date: September 2019 • Format: Hardback, 394 pages, 1300+ colour photos, colour distribution maps

I'm sure most readers here will be familiar with, or at least aware of, the name F W Frohawk. In 1924 his life's work and masterpiece, the two-volume *Natural History of British Butterflies*, was published. This was the first work to describe and illustrate all the life stages of British Butterflies. Now, 95 years later and taking his inspiration from Frohawk, Peter Eeles gives us a truly impressive modern equivalent.

The book itself is beautifully presented with excellent photography throughout. The layout is clear and consistent, and the text comprehensive but accessible. However, it is the sheer scope of the work and the astonishing amount of information that Eeles manages to pack into the 394 pages of *Life Cycles* which raises it above probably all the other guides currently available.

The work is organised into the six butterfly families, with an overview of the general characteristics of the four life cycle stages for each.

At species level, all of our 59

residents and regular migrants are represented, with information on distribution, habitat and status. This is followed by sections on each of the four life cycle stages: imago, ova, larva and pupa. As expected, these are particularly impressive, with detailed text and photographs illustrating the changing appearance of the ova and pupa, and each instar of the larva.

There is also a handy section at the beginning of the book listing plant names of nectar sources and larval food plants.

Those relatively new to butterflies should not be discouraged by terms such as imago – the adult butterfly, ova – the egg, larva – the caterpillar, pupa – the chrysalis and instar – the phase between each of a caterpillar's five moults. The book has a short list of definitions on page 5.

For me, there was a wealth of new and surprising facts, and delightful nuggets of information. For instance, I did not know the adult **Large Heath** rarely flies more than 100m from where it has emerged but a male first brood **Wood White** has been recorded flying 2,407m! Even our patch gets a few, if brief, mentions. It is stated that the **Brown Hairstreak** 'occurs as far north as Worcestershire' and there is a 'notable population' of **Silver-studded Blue** at Prees

From the Editor

Peter Eeles' talk at the national AGM underlined the monumental team effort that went into this book. For example, caterpillars normally reared underground by ants had to be reared in captivity under licence (and later released) to obtain the necessary images.

Peter said there was only one criteria in selecting the photographs: they must be the best available, even if they weren't his!

Heath, Shropshire.

In the introduction of *Life Cycles*, Eeles states that he did not intend the book should replace Frohawk but that it should, by using the latest imagery and information, and including an emphasis on conservation, complement the earlier work. In this it succeeds admirably.

In conclusion, this book is a remarkable achievement and I cannot recommend it highly enough. It is accessible enough for the novice but also contains enough detail to satisfy the more knowledgeable reader.

Butterfly enthusiasts now fall into two groups – those who already own a copy of this book and those who should.

Article by **Craig Jones**

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