

the **Comma**

No. 103 Spring 2019

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation

Butterfly walks: guided
events and new leaflet

Garden Open Day: home
to 21 butterfly species



'Celebrating 40 years'





Cover story

Walker photographing a Red Admiral on North Hill, Malvern (Mel Mason). You can read about this year's Malvern transect walks on pages 24-25.

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
Autumn - 31 August
Winter - 30 November
Spring - 28 February
(early submissions are welcome).
Contact the Editor for more information.
Editor: Marian Newell,
comma.editor@newellporter.co.uk

Publisher

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



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



Chairman's Address

Butterfly news

Lots will be going on in the Branch this coming year but let's start with butterfly news, as we now have the 2018 casual and transect results. **John Tilt** reported that 2018 was the best of the last five years, with an average of 15-20 species per tetrad (2km x 2km square).

The star species for 2018 was the **Brown Argus**, showing increases in both numbers and range compared with previous years. I can back this finding up with a report from my Worcester garden. Otherwise poor for butterflies, although good for bees, I was surprised to find a Brown Argus nectaring on Linaria and Sage on 7 August – evidence of dispersal.

Now that more people are using iRecord, coverage was greatly improved. John says that over 3000 people submitted records, covering 40 species (see page 28). Key observations include the early emergence of **White Admiral**, good numbers of **Hairstreaks** but still poor for **Peacock** and **Small Tortoiseshell**.

The cold spring held back many

species (for instance, **Orange Tip** numbers were down on the Malverns) but then hot weather brought an early record for **Grayling**, the first being seen on 27 June, again on the Malverns. The last was observed on 5 August, which is exceptionally early. These facts are taken from the new Butterflies and Day-flying Moths around the Malverns 2018 – see page 12 for how to order this excellent 80-page publication for only £5.



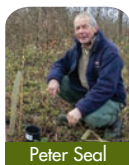
Red Admiral (Mel Mason)

In late 2017, the **Red Admiral** had a bonanza year, running into late autumn following recent winter records. So, is this species starting to hibernate or just overwinter? Poor numbers in Spring 2018 suggest that, although it had previously been seen to continue its breeding cycle through

National AGM – Good News

In recognition of the West Midlands Branch's 40th year, Butterfly Conservation will be holding the national AGM in our region at the Albrighton Hall Hotel, just north of Shrewsbury, on Saturday, 16 November. Plans are underway for a celebratory dinner in the evening, with the opportunity for a raffle to raise funds for the Branch and for a speaker or two on its work. Please put this date in your diary and consider helping for an hour or two, so we can give a good account of the Branch.
<https://www.accorhotels.com/gb/hotel-6629-mercure-shrewsbury-albrighton-hall-hotel-spa/index.shtml>

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY
National AGM
Saturday
16 November



Peter Seal

Branch Calendar 2020

The theme for next year will be 'Celebrating 40 years – a look back over the Branch's development'. We plan to feature a mix of images:

- Butterflies that have declined or been lost, and those that have extended their range
- Moths, especially those newly discovered in recent years
- Events, with groups or prominent individuals in active settings.

We'll select the pictures that most strongly represent what the Branch is about, rather than judging them on artistic or technical merit. We hope to find suitable historical photos of sufficiently high resolution, or drawings; if we can't, we'll review our selection method.

Please send images to peterseal3@btinternet.com, no later than 31 July

mild winters, it cannot survive as a hibernator in cold weather such as the winter of 2017/18 – at least not in our region. Yet it has again been recorded very late in the current mild winter of 2018/19.

Branch activities

So what is the Branch doing this year? We've just held our early Spring Committee meeting, where we welcomed new Secretary **Martin Harrison**, who joined us for the first time, and Committee member **Vicki Liu** on her return to Staffordshire – we need to encourage more people below retirement age to join us!

A new Branch Leaflet has been printed for events and for new members, while the revised sites guide *Walking with Butterflies* nears completion and can now be pre-ordered (see page 30). We're always looking for more content, including new walks, to add to our website.

Another venture that we hope to do more with is the national Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey.

Philip Nunn and **Scott Martin**, who share the co-ordination task, are seeking volunteers to walk a route just twice a year in randomly selected 1km squares. The scheme has adopted a new online data entry system – the WCBS newsletter gives some tips. This scheme is important because, in being randomly selected, the walks give us a different perspective from the many UKBMS transects that follow a fixed route in sites with key species.

Lastly, we have a number of new conservation projects. Natural Networks offers a 45% share for environmental schemes: we have already received approval for a scheme for Shatterford Woods, working with the Forestry Commission, and we're hoping to apply for funding for the **Grizzled Skipper** site at Honeybourne. We would then have to find matching funds from other charitable sources or from the Branch.

Peter Seal Branch Chair

P W Seal

Moths of the West Midlands

Led by **Ian Duncan**, the editorial board is embarking on a companion book to Butterflies of the West Midlands, with an ambitious publication timescale of Spring 2020. Please read Ian's article on page 4, where you will see that we are seeking sponsorship for species champions. The minimum contribution will be £75/species from individuals and families, with £175/species from companies and organisations. Species champions will receive a complimentary copy of the book. If you would like to be a species champion, please contact Peter Seal on peterseal3@btinternet.com stating the species that you'd like to sponsor and he'll then confirm payment arrangements.

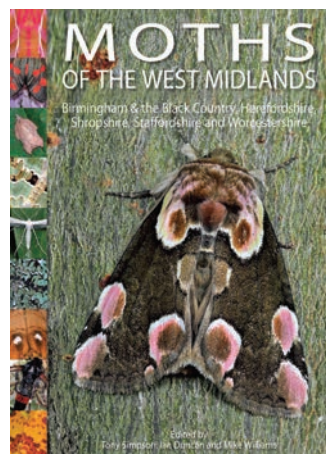


Butterfly Conservation

Company limited by guarantee,
registered in England (2206468)
Registered office: Manor Yard,
East Lulworth, Wareham,
Dorset BH20 5QP.
Charity registered in
England & Wales (254937)
and in Scotland (SC039268)

Plans for the first book on the moths of the West Midlands

West Midlands Butterfly Conservation is to publish the first-ever book on the moths of the area, which covers Birmingham and the Black Country, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.



The book will feature all the macro moths in our region (over 600 species) and many of the micro moths regularly recorded.

The book will be lavishly illustrated with over 700 photographs, from local photographers wherever possible, and will also include up-to-date distribution maps, habitat information, adult flight periods and larval food plants.



If you would like to be a species champion, contact Peter Seal on peterseal3@btinternet.com, stating the species that you would like to sponsor, and he will confirm payment arrangements. If you would like to donate high-quality photographs to be considered for publication, contact me on jurtina245@gmail.com.

gardening for moths and the use of moth lights, pheromones and sugaring.

Our aim is to produce a companion volume to the hugely successful *Butterflies of the West Midlands*. It will appeal to enthusiasts of all levels but particularly to beginners keen to get involved in this fascinating subject.

The editorial team comprises **Ian Duncan** and **Mike Williams**, both co-editors of the butterfly book, and **Tony Simpson**, the moth recorder for Worcestershire. All contributions to the book will be voluntary.

The publisher, Pisces, is planning for the book to be available in the spring of 2020. It will have 240 pages, compared to the 154 pages in the butterfly book. A pre-publication offer will be included in a future edition of *The Comma*.

The Branch has agreed to contribute £2,100 towards the cost of publication and, as with the butterfly book, the greater the Branch's contribution the greater its share of the profits. As a result, the Branch is seeking species champions to raise additional funds to put towards the cost of publication. Champions will be acknowledged in the book and receive a complimentary copy.

The minimum contribution is £75/species from individuals and families, £175/species from companies and organisations.

Ian Duncan Co-editor

A tribute to Frank Lancaster

Many of our longstanding members will remember **Frank Lancaster**, who died last April aged 86. Frank was a pioneer of our work in the Wyre Forest.

Frank and his wife **Pat** moved to Wyre Forest from St Albans, where they'd been prominent members of the Hertfordshire branch of the British Naturalists Association for many years. Frank was a great enthusiast for wildlife, especially butterflies, moths and other insects. He not only enjoyed seeing them but also sharing his passion and enthusiasm with others. I first got to know him in the early 1980s, when he became a member of the fledgling West Midlands Branch.

In 1986, Frank established a butterfly transect in the Wyre Forest, which he and Pat undertook regularly for the next 16 years. He was a leading advocate of survey and monitoring work in the Forest, which has continued to this day and now involves dozens of volunteers every year. He also began to lead some of our field trips – we soon came to realise, sometimes to our cost, that he didn't know the meaning of the words 'going for a short walk'!

Frank's recording interests led in 1991 to the formation of the Wyre Forest Study Group, an organisation that meticulously gathers and records data on the wildlife of Wyre Forest and, in

2015, produced the widely acclaimed book, *Nature of Wyre*. At Frank's funeral, **Rosemary Winnall**, a leading member of the Study Group, said of the early days: 'At that time, there were only a few people recording wildlife regularly in the Forest and Frank was one of them. His untiring work on recording butterflies influenced many of us. He kept meticulous records in those pre-computer days and our present Records Room contains many of his annual reports that he generously shared.'

Perhaps less well known was Frank's key role in starting the

It's a reminder that passion, enthusiasm and commitment to the natural world ... will take us all a very long way.

fruitful partnership that now exists between Butterfly Conservation and the Forestry Commission. This has led to fantastic work being done to improve habitats for some of our rarer species. Although it's something we may now take for granted, it wasn't always so. Frank often told the tale of a visit he made to the FC offices up at Callow Hill in the dark days of the 1980s to discuss management for butterflies – he was, politely I'm sure, shown the door. Not a man to take 'No' for an answer, he contacted the local MP the following week to ask for his help.



Frank Lancaster

A meeting was arranged, attended by more senior managers in the Forestry Commission and, as a result, plans were soon in place for more sympathetic management in the Forest. Over the years, this has resulted in huge benefits for wildlife. Frank's stubbornness, plus a large dose of charm, also led to experimental management at the off-limits Royal Ordnance site in Button Oak to try to save the Grizzled Skipper butterfly. Here he also arranged monthly moth nights during three summers to record night-flying insects, sparking the setting up of a Wyre Forest Moth Group.

Frank's determination and organisational skills will be sadly missed but the Forest we see today – with sunny rides and open areas alive with wildlife – is his lasting legacy. It's a reminder that passion, enthusiasm and commitment to the natural world – plus of course a strong sense of fun, something that Frank had in abundance – will take us all a very long way.

Mike Williams Publicity and Marketing Officer



Wood White (Rhona Goddard)

We'll go on 'Making a Stand for the Wood White'

The 'Making a Stand for the Wood White' project (made possible by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund) sadly finishes soon. I've thoroughly enjoyed working on this successful project and send heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers, partners and supporters who've made my last three years so enjoyable.

It's been hard work but very rewarding to see a nationally rare species of butterfly respond so positively to targeted habitat management works in Shropshire, Hereford and Worcestershire. Since the project started in 2016, **Wood White** butterflies have been recorded at 36 sites across these counties. Breeding has been observed at nine sites, increasing the number of known breeding colonies in our region from 12 in 2016, to about 20 in 2019. Three of these are due to project-funded reintroductions (two sites in Worcestershire and one in Shropshire).

One of the most eagerly anticipated events was meeting at 6.30am to reintroduce a small number of Wood Whites to Monkwood (one of the Worcestershire sites), hoping that it wouldn't rain and that the butterflies would remain on site after release. We sat waiting for the day to warm up, hoping to see flying, feeding and egg-laying behaviour and knowing that we'd be

returning a few weeks later to search for the equivalent of a 'needle in a haystack', Wood White eggs. All this waiting and searching can be excruciating but also – when it works – exhilarating!

Just two years after the initial reintroduction in 2016, almost 300 adults were seen in one day at Monkwood, with 254 eggs discovered during three site visits. The population has expanded, with adults seen at three neighbouring sites (including Monkwood Green).

During 2018, 151 adults were recorded at Blakeridge Wood (the Shropshire site), with peak counts of 34 adults occurring on 3 June and 25 July. Fifty-nine eggs were discovered during two searches. A single individual was recorded near the Blakeridge Wood boundary, again indicating expansion.

Targeted practical works have taken place at ten sites across the region. Working together we've created about 3ha of open space at two key Forestry Commission sites (Wigmore Rolls and Bury Ditches), tested a new scallop creation technique, and cleared 3.5ha of coppice and ride-edge at Haugh Wood. Volunteers have improved a further 8km of ride-edge habitat and at least 1ha of open space to benefit

Wood White and other priority species. Without our dedicated volunteers across all three counties, none of this would have been possible.

Sixty site visits and habitat assessments were completed on privately owned and partner-owned land, which not only led to the discovery of new occupied sites but also enabled Butterfly Conservation to advise, support and influence future management works on these key butterfly sites.

Astonishingly, about 2400 people have attended and supported over 80 project events across the region since 2016, including 25 conservation work parties. Without them, we'd never have achieved such great results. Special thanks go to volunteers from West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

The end of the project is by no means the end of Wood White conservation – there's strong commitment from the Branch to continue. Funding bids are in the pipeline and, if successful, we hope to cover more sites. Once again, I'd like to thank everyone for their support and remind people to submit all Wood White sightings using iRecord.

.....
Rhona Goddard Wood White Project Officer

Telford Millennium Nature Reserve, Ketley

It's not every day you find treasure on your doorstep. I've lived in Telford for over 30 years, so I was more than a little surprised to be asked by **Mike Williams** to visit a site I'd never heard of 'behind the Compass Inn in Ketley'.

I imagined a scrappy bit of land squeezed between derelict buildings but instead I found 44 acres of mixed woodland, heathland, ponds, areas ideal

for **Dingy Skippers**, and places that could become great wildflower meadows. My initial delight at the sight of all this was overtaken by despair at the neglected, overgrown state of the place. Could this be restored?

The man who assures me it can is Peter Mcnee from Groundwork. He's amazingly enthusiastic about this seriously daunting task but he's going to

need help!

He's trying to recruit a team of volunteers. So, calling all Telford members... If you live within reach of Beverley Road, Ketley (TF2 6SD) and have some time to spare, please contact Peter Mcnee, on petermcnee@groundwork.org.uk or 07730 688924.

This is a project that could produce a jewel of a site.

.....
Chris Littlewood



Support your Branch in its 40th year!



We have a range of UK-made products on sale with butterflyartshopuk.com, including mugs, bags and T-shirts. If you search for 'West Midlands', you'll find items carrying a full-colour image of a Comma butterfly and others carrying a monochrome 40th anniversary logo on various coloured backgrounds.

Orders come with a free bookmark featuring eight British butterflies and a free card featuring a butterfly.



Herefordshire Moth

Last year's weather extremes meant that Herefordshire's moths had mixed fortunes... some species failed to appear at all in my Bodenham garden (**Small Elephant Hawkmoth** and **Coxcomb Prominent**). Many ground-pupating species, such as **Large Yellow Underwing**, seemed less numerous, at least to start with. Some scarce species seemed to do well – **Gold Spot**, **Dog's Tooth** and the declining **Mouse Moth**.

In early April, around Bodenham, there were three records of **Small Eggar**, which is now seen nearly annually in this part of the Lugg valley. Two **Red Sword-grass** were trapped on 17 and 21 April:

these may have originated from a more upland area. Early May produced the county's second and third records of *Mompha jurassicella*, along with three **Buttoned Snouts** as they emerged from hibernation.

June brought a number of the recent colonist, *Grapholita lobarzewskii*. Also, in **Peter Hall's** trap, an unexpected county first was a *Platytes alpinella* – a generally rare **Crambid** normally found only in coastal areas. Possibly dispersed by heat and drought?

July saw the first record of **Clouded Magpie** for my garden, although it feeds on Elm and there's plenty of that in the area. *Metalampra italica*, another colonist, occurred regularly through the month and so seems well-established. More surprising were the appearances of *Catoptria margaritella* and the tiny macro **Marsh Oblique-barred**, with another of the latter at Whitchurch (second and third county records). These wetland species were possibly displaced by the drought.

Early August produced another wetland wanderer in my garden, a **Webb's Wainscot**, an expanding species but a first county record. The tiny Tortrix *Pammene spiniana*, long thought extinct in the county, appeared three times in my trap. That's four years in a row now but, as yet, nowhere else in Herefordshire. The lovely Crambid *Agriphila latistria* was another nice surprise. Late August saw a pleasing second-brood **Eyed Hawkmoth**, testament to a long hot Summer.

Elsewhere, the Summer produced some great records. **John Walshe** trapped *Dichomeris marginella* (**Juniper Webber**) at Whitchurch, closely followed by the first county record of **Cypress Carpet**, along with

several **Ruddy Carpets** and **Great Oak Beauties**. In July, he found, along with the **Marsh Oblique-barred** mentioned above, a **European Corn-borer**, several **Silky Wainscot** (first county records, I believe) and, in Hereford, a lovely **Gold Spangle**, probably a wanderer from Wales.

In August, John found the first **Garden Dart** in the county for many years. Peter Hall found the second county site for **Bilberry Pug** at Wigmore Rolls. It may be elsewhere on heathy sites in the north of the county.

Probably the most exciting records of the year occurred in October, when John Walshe and

Ray Birchenough trapped the county's second and third **Clifden Nonpareil**. This magnificent Blue Riband species has long been sought as a rare migrant (Ray trapped one many years ago in Kent) but is now securing resident status in the Thames Valley and may well spread into our area. We have plenty of Aspen, which is the larval food plant.

There were a few common migrants over the summer: **Silver Y**, **Dark Sword-grass**, **Rush Veneers** and **Humming-bird Hawks**. Then, with exceptional southerly gales in mid-October, some of the Scilly Isles specialist moths were blown inland. I know of two *Palpita vitrealis* in mid-November (one in Bodenham, one in Whitchurch), plus a **Scarce Bordered Straw** in Whitchurch. During the same period, **Paddy Matthews** in Longtown trapped the county's first **White Speck**. Normally a regular on Scilly but very scarce elsewhere, numbers were found in many counties in the UK. Paddy also trapped a **Scarce Bordered Straw** and **Large Wainscot**.

The year ended quietly but a newcomer to my garden was the common **Mottled Umber**. As I write, in February, the winds are coming from the South and more migrant moths are arriving. Fingers crossed!

Thanks to all those who sent me their most notable sightings.

Article by **Robin Hemming**, Photographs by **John Walshe**. For more Herefordshire news, visit www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk/herfordshire-newsletter

The year ended quietly but a newcomer to my garden was the common Mottled Umber

Highlights of 2018



Silver-washed Fritillary



2019 Open Garden Days

The garden in Abbey Road, Malvern will be open to visitors 9–11 am on Tuesday 25 June and Saturday 29 June. Booking is essential as numbers are strictly limited – if you would like to visit, please contact John Lane at johnslane@btinternet.com. Tea and coffee will be available. A small donation to Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch is voluntary.

ON MY PATCH – A Malvern Garden

21 out of 31 local species right in the centre of town

Those of us who look out for butterflies and moths in and around the Malvern Hills – recording them, photographing them or simply noticing them because we care about them – are fortunate because we live in a very special location. The hills themselves offer a variety of habitats for a great many species... but so do our gardens. Those to the east receive early morning sun; those to the west are sunlit until late in the evening. They have different microclimates. But many of them are wildlife-friendly and benefit from their proximity to a nine-mile chain of elevated sanctuaries for wildlife.

When **Lady Emily Foley** released some of her land for housing in the 19th century, she stipulated that each plot should have a substantial garden area, and also made the planting of trees a requirement. This partly

explains why anyone surveying Malvern today, from Worcestershire Beacon or North Hill, looks down at a town that is richly endowed with greenery. Butterflies and moths have responded.

Butterflies

Of course, there are some species that rarely stray far from their habitats. The **Grayling** is a butterfly that we're unlikely to see in our gardens, although one was photographed as recently as 2015 in a neighbouring garden. Similarly, only a few of us can expect to come across a **Six-spot Burnet** moth, so abundant on the commons and other less cultivated areas. However, an astonishing number of butterflies do arrive in our town. Of the 31 species recorded in last year's edition of *Birds and Butterflies around the Malverns*, no less than 21 turned up this year in my own garden – a small oasis for wildlife despite being surrounded by buildings in the centre of Great Malvern. From March until October, the

following species begin to arrive: **Orange Tip**, **Holly Blue**, **Peacock**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Red Admiral**, **Comma**, **Gatekeeper**, **Meadow Brown**, **Small White**, **Large White**, **Green-Veined White**, **Brimstone**, **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **Small Copper** and **Painted Lady**. **White-letter Hairstreaks** appeared in 2018 – the third year in succession – along with a **White Admiral**, a **Marbled White**, a **Large Skipper**, a **Brown Argus** and, astonishingly, two **Purple Hairstreaks**.

Moths

Maybe less thoroughly manicured and weeded gardens are more likely to have a high species count – especially with day-flying moths – but regular visitors like the **Humming-bird Hawk** and the **Silver Y** are likely to be found in any Malvern garden. The **White Plume** and the **Mint moth** (*Pyrausta aurata*) often turn up; and the **Large Yellow Underwing**, although a night-flyer, may

be disturbed during the day by many gardeners. The **Vapourer** moth is fairly regularly seen as a rather exotic-looking caterpillar, though less often as an adult. And, with **Alkanet** spreading around the hills and into some of our gardens, **Scarlet Tigers** are now seen more often than in the past.

Other insects

My garden is visited by a wide range of other day-flying insects. Many ladybird species appear, though less often than they used to because of the Harlequin's population explosion. Shield Bugs are rarely absent – I've found the Green, Hawthorn, Birch and Red-Legged species this



White-letter Hairstreak

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►



Purple Hairstreak



Marbled White

New Malvern report - butterflies and moths in 2018

The 80-page *Butterflies & Day-flying Moths Around the Malvern* is now available for just £5. Designed to report on and celebrate the diversity of butterflies and day-flying moths around the Malvern, it is compiled from the records and photos of a large and increasing number of casual and transect recorders. Alongside species reports of all the indigenous butterflies and many moths, there are articles from local recorders on related topics such as how to attract insects into our gardens and the best butterfly walks on the Malvern Hills.

Butterflies are one of the key indicators of the health of our environment. The wealth of data accumulated over recent years is analysed to provide population trends and insights into the present state of our local wildlife. This information helps conservation organisations when they plan wildlife management in the area.

Mel Mason, Malvern Hills County Leader

To obtain a copy, send a cheque for £5 made payable to 'Butterfly Conservation West Midlands', with your name and address, to Mel Mason at 16 Albert Road North, Malvern, WR14 2TP. Alternatively, email mbg.records@btinternet.com.

A separate identification guide to the *Butterflies Around the Malvern Hills* is included with each copy.



Hurry while stocks last!!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11 ►

year. In May, a Cockchafer appeared and then, in June, a small but formidable Rhinoceros beetle. Dark-edged Bee-Flies often visit the apple and pear blossom in spring.

Hoverflies abound – I've recorded at least a dozen species, including the very striking Hornet Hoverfly. Along with regular visits from Emperor Dragonflies, Southern Hawkers, Migrant Hawkers, Common Darters and both Beautiful and Banded Demoiselles, my garden gained a thriving population of Large Red Damselflies as soon as I added a very small pond.

Finally, despite the threat from neonicotinoids, many bees still visit. Along with Leaf-cutter bees, Red Mason bees and many species of Bumble bees, Honey bees appear all over the garden for most of the summer, although numbers vary from year to year, presumably due to Varroa mite infestation and other causes of colony dieback.

I suspect that spiders are well represented in Malvern too; along with the Common Garden Spider, I regularly see Crab Spiders, Zebra Spiders and a good many Labyrinth Spiders, which take up residence in a granite wall that runs along one side of the garden. I have yet to come across a Grasshopper though – I've established a grassy untended area in the hope that they will appear. But that's another story...

Article and photographs by John Lane

From small beginnings...



1982: BBCS stall at Hagley Hall, Mike Williams flanked by Terry Green (Branch co-founder) and his wife Angela, with Mike's children Robert and Emma in front



WEST MIDLANDS
BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

'Celebrating 40 years'

1981: a Building Society window display in Stourport marks Butterfly Year 81-82



Postcards from the past show how far we've come since 1979

Forty years ago, a small front room in a terraced house in Coventry saw the birth of what became the first regional branch of Butterfly Conservation (BC). The co-founders were **Terry Green**, National Sales Officer of the British Butterfly Conservation Society (BBCS) – as BC was known in those days – and myself, the new kid on the block. Terry looked after the money, I took responsibility for the newsletter, and everything else was split between us. By the end of the first year, we had around 50 members; many of these are still with us today, a testament to the success of the Branch and the dedication of those involved.

The establishment of branches (ours was quickly followed in other

parts of the UK) had a profound and lasting effect on the national charity. A National Development Committee was established, with two members from the West Midlands – **Ron Hatton** and myself. This committee produced a report that recommended the establishment of three main sub-committees to oversee the charity's development: Conservation, Education and Information, and Publicity and Fundraising. Members of the Branch were present on all three: **Martyn Davies** on Education, the late **John Reeve** on Publicity, and **Roger Smith** and myself on Conservation (Chair and Vice-chair respectively). These committees made considerable progress, the BBCS became BC,

Harold Hughes took over as national Chairman and eventually we appointed **Martin Warren** as our first paid member of staff. By then, I'd taken over from Roger as Chair of the Conservation Committee and therefore chaired the interview panel that appointed Martin – a fact that I would often remind him of in years to come! Both the Branch and the national charity have come a long way since those far-off days. The best way to find out more about the subsequent history of the Branch is to peruse old copies of *The Comma* on our website (www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk).

Today, we are the largest of all

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

From small beginnings...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13 ►



1988: first reserve sign at Trench Wood



1993: The Land Rover Butterfly Check calls in to Monkwood

BC's 32 branches, managing five of the charity's biggest reserves, publishing a regional magazine that is the envy of many and running an active conservation programme that involves hundreds of volunteers annually and has turned around the fortunes of many of our most threatened butterflies and moths.



1993: wildlife artist Gordon Beningfield, President of BC in its 25th year, at the opening of a jubilee flower bed in Kidderminster



1995: sponsored cyclists at the Bill Smyllie reserve, raising funds for the purchase of Prees Heath reserve, Mike Williams on the right with Trevor Bucknall crouched down at the front

Secrets of our success

It's easy to look back on our history and count the successes, but it's also worth reflecting on how we've reached this point and identifying some of the strengths that have underpinned our success. Three factors seem key and, as we celebrate our 40th year, worth sharing:

1 Our positive message to the outside world, reinforced by our actions, that BC regionally is focusing its efforts on conserving butterflies and moths and their

habitats through practical action. Our experience is that the public and our members are more likely to support organisations that are doing more than monitor declines in our wildlife and are instead making a real difference. The acquisition and management of nature reserves is an important part of this appeal, as is striving to obtain good visibility for our work, both through local media and our physical presence at events that attract large numbers of people.

2 Our record of working in partnership with other organisations and demonstrating that we can achieve more by doing so. Our three reserves in Worcestershire are managed jointly with the Wildlife Trust to both organisations' benefit. We have similarly productive relationships with other county



1989: celebrating the Branch's 10th anniversary

wildlife trusts, the Forestry Commission, Natural England, English Heritage and the National Trust, as well as farmers and other agencies. Species such as **Wood White**, **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**, **Grayling** and **Brown Hairstreak** have all been major beneficiaries of working in partnership.

3 Our success in developing work alongside BC staff in the region. We were the first region to see the recruitment of a paid member of staff. That proved to be the catalyst for many new projects, partnerships and successful joint working over the years. The 'Making a Stand for the Wood White' project is just one of many examples where paid staff, the Branch, other organisations and volunteers have worked effectively together to achieve some great results.

Looking to the future

Many new challenges face conservation organisations, including the Branch. Financial resources are likely to remain tight, making it more important than ever for charities to build membership and continually

find new volunteers. Staff based in our Head Office can only achieve so much and, if BC is to move forward in the way that we all hope, greater emphasis must be placed on the development of strong regional staff teams working alongside branches.

As pressure on land continues to grow, butterflies and moths need our help more than ever. We now know that the main threat they face is fragmentation and isolation of habitat, so we must work to link up some of their remaining strongholds – landscape-level conservation. It's clear that a joined-up landscape needs joined-up thinking and landscape-level conservation requires staff and volunteers to work together across boundaries.

The success of BC still depends on the commitment of its volunteers and branches. Our challenge in the years ahead is to find new ways to underpin this effectively, which will require more members and possibly a reallocation of resources away from Head Office and towards regional development and staffing.

It would be great to have a crystal ball...

Article by Mike Williams
Publicity and Marketing Officer

Butterflies at sunset and beyond

The second of two photography specials



Prees Heath - Silver-studded Blue



Stiperstones - Common Blue and Milky Way long exposure

The evening, going towards sunset and into dusk, gives us a chance to get closer to butterflies as they roost – though of course we must make the greatest effort not to disturb their special sleeping spots. Butterflies are like clockwork wound up by the sun and, when that source of energy dips and finally sinks beneath the horizon, they will often find the tips of grasses or heather and cling on, whatever wind or breeze is about.

Framed by sunsets

Sometimes, as with the **Silver-studded Blue** at Prees Heath, great clumps of them settle together on the blossoming bell heather. There is then a chance to sit close and capture a moment of stillness in wonderful light. 2018 was one of the best-ever years for this species at Prees Heath, so I was fortunate to have a few wonderful visits there, staying late enough to catch the



Pair of Silver-studded Blues in dusk light

Photography tips

To capture both butterfly and beautiful light is a photographic challenge and, before you can even think about how to make such

a shot, you have to find roosting sites for your chosen species and then make sure that you will not disturb them. Butterflies are in steep decline so getting the shot should be secondary to making sure habitat is not affected. Also, when you've found one roosting butterfly, be careful as



Stiperstones - Small Heath against the sun and with fill flash

sun setting behind that perfect purple heather and then a posing male-female pair in fantastic orange dusk light. Let's hope we have another good show this year – this species really is a symbol of the hard and dedicated conservation work that has been done at this site and at sites all around the West Midlands.

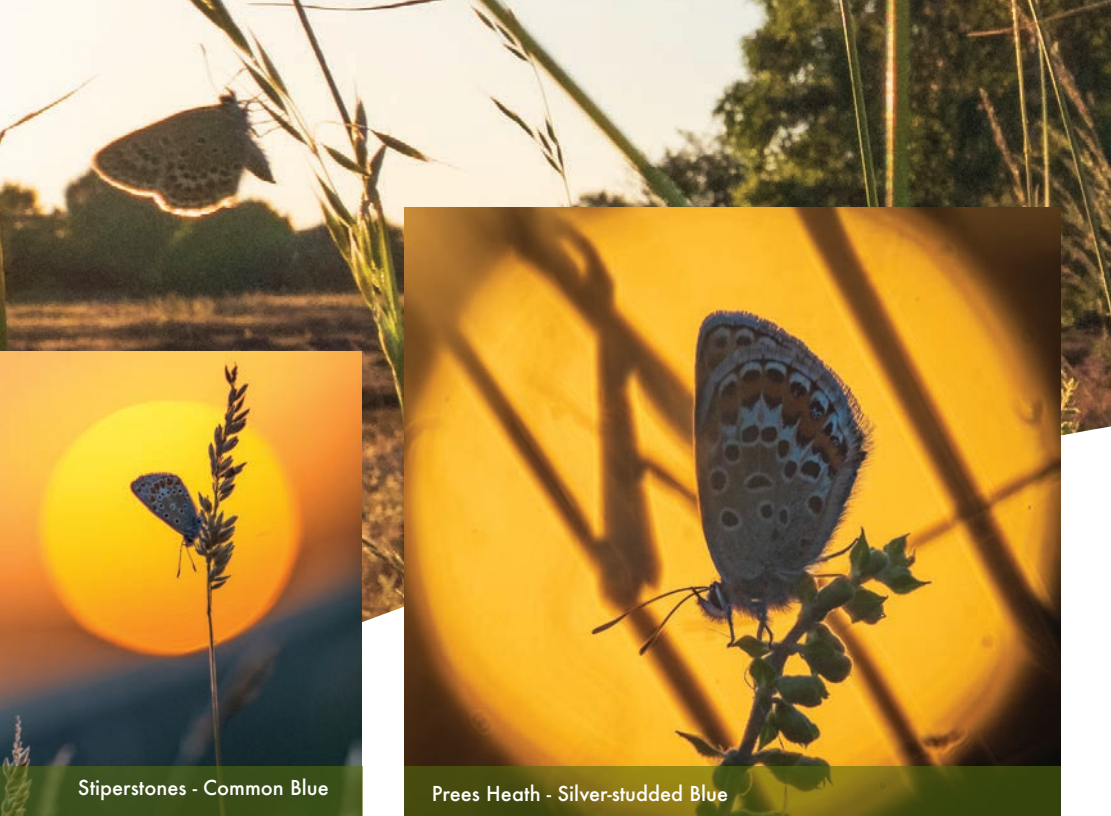
The other spot that I visited repeatedly this year was the Stiperstones, where, after a couple of seasons searching, I finally found the roosting sites of **Common Blue**, **Small Copper** and **Small Heath** (but not **Grayling** – if there's a Grayling roost expert out there, I would love to know where they go at night). The Common Blue loves the swaying upland grasses and heather. A glorious butterfly is even more glorious when seen against the sun falling on the distant Welsh Hills. At last light, this small butterfly really comes into its own and using a wide-angle lens showed the habitat in which it rests at this time of day. I was also able to frame a Small Heath within the circle of the sun – no Photoshop, just this photographer lying on the ground and working hard to frame both light and butterfly delight. As the dusk deepened, I carefully used a bit of fill flash on the same butterfly to show intricate macro detail.

you try to get level that you are not trampling on others behind you.

In an ideal world, you are aiming your camera towards the setting sun, though when the sun is too high, the details will be blown out. The golden hour is called that for a reason, and you have to be patient as the sun sinks low and turns gold. This sort of photo is all about framing and selecting what lies behind your roosting butterfly to create much more than a record shot: something that captures the moment both at sunset and beyond into the dusk, when often the light can be even better than at sunset itself. After that, it's simply working out your settings and practice, practice, practice.

Catching detail and surroundings will require more than a phone or point-and-shoot camera but your camera kit can only take you so far – the rest is down to your patience and persistence. Good luck!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►



Stiperstones - Common Blue

Prees Heath - Silver-studded Blue

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17 ►

Lit by the stars

But it's worth staying even later. After developing new photographic techniques over the last two years and with some attachments on my camera and lens, I was able to show the unique context of Common Blue in the

heath with the flare of the leaning Milky Way as backdrop. This was all contained in one single long exposure with the goal of showing both the habitat and the distant dreams of these beautiful butterflies.

Article and photographs by **Andrew Fusek Peters**
www.andrewfusekpeters.com



Common Blue lit by the last light and using a wide-angle lens to show its habitat

A Flutter in the Past

PART 3

The last part of Mel Mason's review of Malvern butterflies brings us up to date

Fritillaries fluctuate

In 1986 [R1], **High Brown Fritillary** (HBF) 'had a good year'. 'The colony south of Swinyard Hill and into Eastnor Estate is of major national importance'. Also, '**Matthew Oates** ... while studying High Brown Fritillaries using a capture-release technique, regularly found **Dark Green Fritillary** (DGF) among them (approximately 2%)'. The report notes 'the increasing presence of collectors in the area. One person was found in charge of two children carrying about twelve HBF in a killing bottle'. It seems Victorian habits die hard!

By 1987 [R2], HBF was in 'satisfactory numbers'. 'With a national decline of this species we are privileged to have one of its two major strongholds'. However, lack of bracken bruising in Eastnor Park '... may reduce the population next season'. Only '... one or two [DGF] were identified this year'.

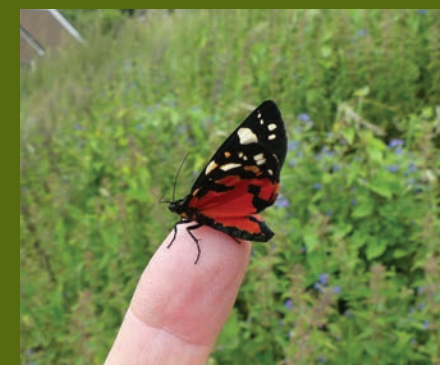
The 1980s had regular sightings of HBF around Swinyard, Gullet Quarry, Ragged Stone, Eastnor and Chase End [R3]. In 1988 [R4], records had 'reduced to 10% of last year's numbers, hopefully due to weather conditions'. As part of habitat management, 'Matthew Oates suggests clearing breaks in bracken adjacent to breaks cleared in previous year, rather than in same place'.

A hand-written summary table in 1989 [R5] lists sightings on the Swinyard Hill Transect: 156 in 1987, 32 in 1988 and 17 in 1989. Despite this decline, **Jeremy Thomas** wrote that the Malverns was 'one of the few places where HBF can be seen in any numbers... It is heartening to know that the management of the area is specifically designed to encourage this and other Fritillaries' [R6]. However, in 2014 [R7] he wrote: 'it was evidently a much harder task than was envisaged in those optimistic days.'

HBF recovered in the 1990s. By 1994 [R3], 'numbers are well up' on the past three years (18 Swinyard, 19 Eastnor and 14 Chase End) and that 'maybe present



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was reported again in 2017 after many years of apparent absence (Mick Culquhoun)

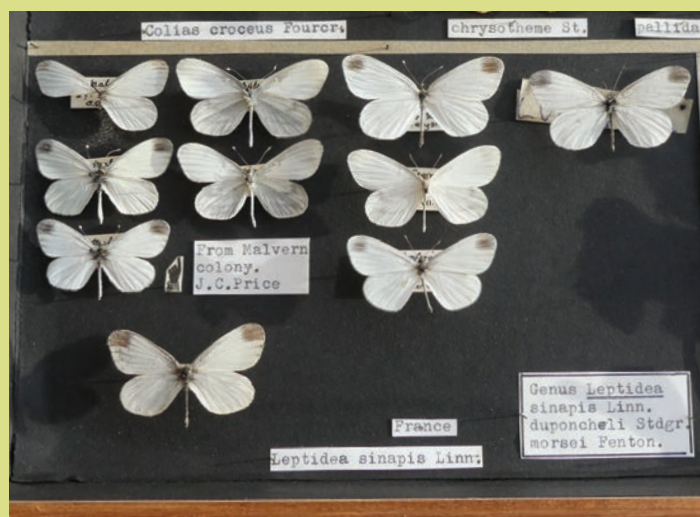


Scarlet Tiger may be benefiting from the spread of its larval food plant, Alkanet (a garden escape) across the lower slopes of the Hills (Mel Mason)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

management is beginning to have some effect'. Then, in 1995 [R8], the Chase End Hill Transect recorded 129 during seven transect walks in June and July. **Digby Wood** wrote post-2000 [R9] that 'The overall picture is one of decline, the '95 peak being only 50% of the '87 peak and the current trough being the lowest ever'. In 2000, there was a 'Slight recovery on the Malvern Hills but still below average' and 'not recorded again at Chase End (last record in 1998)' [R10].

In 2004, 'searches... again only found HBF on the Eastnor Estate' ... 'the new transect from Peacock Cottage to the caravan park found HBF in good numbers'.



Wood White specimens collected by the late Leigh Spencer Plester from Malvern in 1947, donated to WMBC by his brother Keith Plester for educational purposes; lost in the 1980s, this species has been reintroduced successfully to nearby reserves including Monkwood (Mel Mason)

However, in 2004, **Sue Clarke** (a contractor for BC) 'undertook a survey of the HBF habitat in the southern hills in the spring. She found lots of suitable HBF breeding habitat from British Camp to Chase End' [R11].

Similarly **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** declined up to 1989 [R5] (SPBF: 81 in 1987, 34 in 1988 and 56 in 1989; PBF: 41 in 1987, 6 in 1988 and 20 in 1989). By 1994 [R3], 'no PBF were recorded this year at all', although '19 SPBF were recorded in Eastnor.' Transect records from Eastnor, Castlemorton and Chase End for these species show similar trends to **High Brown**, with populations peaking

in 1994/5 [R12].

The last individual sightings [R13] of PBF and HBF were 1998 and 2008 respectively, but two SPBF were recorded as recently as 2017 on Chase End Hill. DGF is recorded in low numbers, more recently two west of Swinyard Hill [2017] and one on North Hill [2018] [R14].

Grayling loses out

Grayling has been recorded on the Hills since 1853, but a Malvern Hills Conservators (MHC) Report in 1988 [R4] states 'No Grayling seen' – very surprising and likely to reflect a lack of effective monitoring. Subsequent years show records of this species as far south as Gullet Quarry. In 1991 [R12], the Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trust (WNCT) wrote 'The species is now scarce at inland sites and something of a surprise to county newcomers'. In 1994 [R3], **Mike Williams** asked for a survey of Grayling on the Hills. Eventually, two habitat surveys were completed on the northern hills in 2007 and 2015 [R15], highlighting a contraction of 5.5 miles in range.

Now restricted to North Hill's eastern slopes, the population and distribution of this species since 2009 is well documented [R16]. MHT organises grazing, contract work and volunteers to help to control the invasion of scrub up the slopes in recent decades. Limited funding is available through a partnership between Malvern Hills Trust (MHT), Malvern Hills AONB and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation for further habitat management for the Grayling, now the rarest butterfly in Worcestershire (the nearest other colonies are in Shropshire).

Scarlet Tiger gains ground

The recording of an attractive day-flying moth in the 1994 Report [R3] indicates a distinct change over the last 20 years. Four **Scarlet Tigers** (*Callimorpha dominula*) were '... recorded by **Peter Holmes** from his garden at Malvern Wells... the only other record for this spectacular

moth was one swatted by a tennis racket and given to the late **Jack Green** in the 1960s'.

This was a harbinger of things to come. Today, this moth is common and more widespread. In contrast, **Wood Tiger** (*Parasemia plantaginis*) and **Garden Tiger** (*Arctia caja*) are now far less common. However, **Jersey Tiger** (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*) is slowly spreading north in a warming climate – with an August 2017 sighting in Worcestershire (**Steve Whitehouse**) – and **Ruby Tiger** (*Phragmatobia fuliginosa*) remains both common and widespread.

Back to the future...

An impressive 47 local butterfly species in 1887 had fallen to 40 species by the 1960s. Of species now extinct in the UK, local records show four **Camberwell Beauty** in 1966–97, five **Large Tortoiseshell** in 1966–82 and one **Monarch** in 1968. **Purple Emperor** was noted in Gullet Quarry and Eastnor in the early 1960s, while **Wood White** and **Grizzled Skipper** were recorded regularly until the 1980s (and the latter photographed in 2018 at nearby Leigh Sinton Fishing Lake – the first record in more than 30 years).

As recently as 1991 [R12-pp58-59], the WNCT wrote 'The Hills are excellent for butterflies with colonies of HBF, DGF and PBF, Wood White and Grayling'. But, by the beginning of the 21st century, local losses included **Wall**, PBF, SPBF and HBF. Nevertheless, the Hills and Commons remain species-rich, with up to 33 of the 59 butterfly species native to the UK.

Butterfly populations and distributions fluctuate with climate, habitat management and host-parasite cycles. Even so, the overall trend in the Malverns (as nationally) in the past 40 years shows decreases in both abundance and occurrence [R17].

As the Malvern Hills are largely composed of igneous rocks and acidic flora, they will never attract chalk-loving species. However, earlier records show that they have the potential to support other species still found nearby, including **Dingy Skipper** and **Wood White**.

More recent records and habitat surveys clearly show that appropriate funding and habitat management could enable the reintroduction of several once-common species, such as PBF, SPBF and even HBF.

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

Thanks

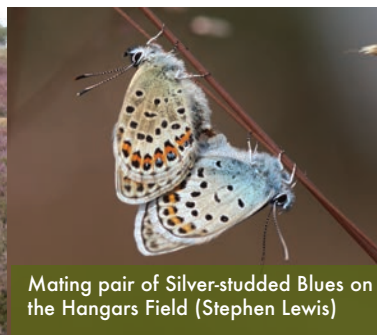
Thanks to all past recorders, transect walkers, Malvern Hills Trust, Ian Duncan for collecting many of the historical reports, Worcester Museum and the Archive Collections, Malvern and Worcester and Malvern Library Archive Publications.

References

1. **MHC Report 1986**, Trevor Trueman, Mike Williams, Jack Green
2. **MHC Report 1987**, Trevor Trueman, Jack Green, Mike Williams
3. **MHC Lepidoptera Report for Malvern Hills 1994**, Tony Simpson et al
4. **MHC Report 1988**, Trevor Trueman, Jack Green, Mike Williams
5. Hand-written records, Trevor Trueman (1984-89)
6. **Butterflies of Britain & Ireland**, Thomas & Lewington (first edition, 1991)
7. **Butterflies of Britain & Ireland**, Thomas & Lewington (revised edition, 2014)
8. UKBMS Records (1995) Chase End Hill
9. **The High Brown Hills Project** by Digby Wood (post-2000, exact date not given)
10. **West Midlands 2000 Annual Butterfly Review**, Ian Duncan
11. **Malvern Butterfly Transects 2004**, Ian Duncan
12. WNCT, **The Nature of Worcestershire** p58-59, ISBN 0 86023 487 8 (1991) Barracuda Books Ltd.
13. **Birds and Butterflies Around the Malverns 2015** p76, Annual Publication
14. **Birds & Butterflies (& Day Moths) Around the Malverns**, Mel Mason (2017)
15. **Habitat Condition Survey of Grayling Hipparchia semele**, Sue Clarke & Mel Mason (2007 & 2015)
16. **A Report on the Malvern Grayling 2007–2017**, Mel Mason, WMBC
17. **The State of UK's butterflies 2015**, Butterfly Conservation

Grayling is now confined to North Hill (Mel Mason)





The Hangars Field in 2017

Mating pair of Silver-studded Blues on the Hangars Field (Stephen Lewis)

From crops to butterfly counts at Prees Heath Common

When all the campaigning and hard work starts to pay off

It's now over 12 years since Butterfly Conservation purchased the western half of Prees Heath Common, and started to re-create heathland on land that had been in arable cultivation for around 40 years previously, being used to grow potatoes and other crops. The site was purchased to conserve the **Silver-studded Blue** (SSB) at its sole remaining location in the Midlands, and our Branch led the campaign to secure it. Much work has been carried out for the benefit of all heathland wildlife and visitors since then, and it's time to consider how this project is progressing with specific regard to the SSB.

...if ants are not present there will be no SSBs. So ants had to become established on these areas...

Setting up the transect

In 2009, we set up a UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme transect on the reserve, walking a designated route once a week from the beginning of April to the end of September and recording all butterfly species seen within an imaginary 5m-wide box. Volunteers were trained and walked the transect when we were not able to do it. The transect consists of 12 sections, designed to include all the different habitats on the reserve, and it provides a sample rather than a complete count of the number of butterflies present.

Re-creating the heathland

Three of these sections include areas where we have tried to re-create heathland by deep ploughing to invert the soil profile, applying sulphur to lower the pH levels and spreading heather brash containing seed sourced from Cannock Chase or the Long Mynd.

The Hangars field (6.5ha, and including Section 7 of the transect) was the first area to receive these interventions, in 2007. The East of Runway field heathland area (6.5ha, and including Section 3 of the transect) was the second area to be treated, in 2008, but, as the initial result was copious quantities of weedy species and very little heather, further work had to be carried out, and more heather seed was sown in 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2014. Work on the Corner field (2.5ha, and including Section 11 of the transect) was started in 2010, with additional heather sowings in 2012 and 2014. Heather was not the only seed applied to these areas, as various wildflower and grass seeds were also sown.

Waiting for results

The SSB has a uniquely close symbiotic relationship with ants, the Black Ant (*Lasius niger*) at Prees Heath, to the



Silver-studded Blue caterpillar attended by ants (Stephen Lewis)

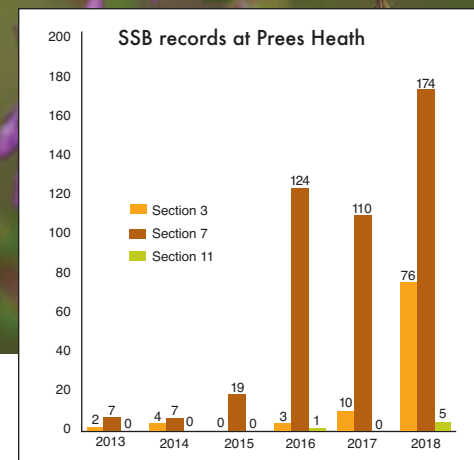
Male Silver-studded Blue (Stephen Lewis)



Prees Heath from a drone, showing restored areas left and right (Bob Kemp)

extent that if ants are not present there will be no SSBs. So ants had to become established on these areas and, following 40 years of arable cultivation and then all our interventions, this was clearly going to take time. It was decided to let them colonise these areas naturally rather than attempt any translocation, as we knew they would do this once these areas became suitable for their ecology, and that the butterflies would then follow.

And so it has proved over time. The following table and graph show how the SSB has colonised these three separate areas. Section 7 on the transect, the Hangars field and the first area to be treated, is now supporting the largest number of SSBs of the three areas, with 174 being recorded on the transect in 2018. The first evidence that they were breeding there came on 31 May 2014 when **Natalie Kay**, an MSc student, photographed a SSB caterpillar there, attended by ants. On the morning of 27 June 2018, two of our volunteers, **Derek** and **Mary Sparkes**, counted systematically an impressive 700 SSBs on the whole of the Hangars field. Numbers on Section 3 are progressing well. Section 11 of the transect is yet to record numbers in double figures but, as this was the last



area to receive these treatments, we can hope that numbers there will increase in the near future. Skylarks are also using all these areas for ground nesting.

Looking to the future

So re-creating heathland suitable for the SSB takes a long time, and things do not always go smoothly. But the restoration of Prees Heath Common is a long term, cutting edge and ambitious project, and it never was going to be a quick fix. More work is yet to be done.

We have been told that the SSB used to be all over Prees Heath Common before arable cultivation started in the 1960s, and not just confined to certain areas. What we're doing there will hopefully be for the benefit of the flagship species, the SSB, as well as all heathland wildlife and visitors over many generations to come.

Meanwhile, our thanks to all our volunteers.

Article by **Stephen Lewis** Prees Heath Reserve Manager and **Lucy Lewis** Branch Treasurer

Summer walks in the Malverns

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of WMBC, the transect recorders of the Malvern Butterfly Group are inviting members and volunteers from the local community and across the West Midlands to join one or more butterfly walks around the Malvern Hills.

Local recorders walk 14 transect routes once a week from April to September and submit all records online to UKBMS – up to 30,000 a year. In addition, over 50 casual recorders submit their sightings to iRecord directly or via the local recorder – up to 10,000 a year.

This is an opportunity to see up to 30 butterfly

species and various day-flying moths in one of the most scenic regions in the UK, and to take part in recording them with the help of the local recorder. Each walk will take two to three hours, giving time to identify the species seen.

A free guide, *The Butterflies around the Malvern Hills*, will be available on each walk.

Places are limited to small groups on each walk and booking is essential. Send your name and email address, with the number and date of the walk, to Mel Mason at mbg.records@btinternet.com. Note: Email addresses will be passed to the walk leaders, who will then contact you by email with final details of the venue and time

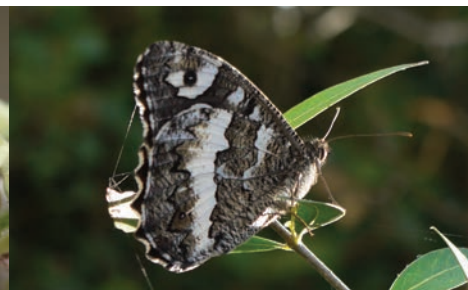
No	Name	Leader	Date	Notes
1	North Hill - Green Hairstreak	Liz Lloyd	Wed 12 June	Very steep slope on good paths
2	North Hill - Grayling	Mel Mason	Thur 11 July	Very steep slopes, some scrambling over rocks
3	Pinnacle Hill	Jess Sly	Tue 2 July	Steep slopes on good paths
4			Tue 9 July	
5	Poolbrook Common	Alison Uren	Thur 20 June	Large meadow on good paths
6			Thur 18 July	
7	St Wulstan's Local Nature Reserve	Dave Taft	Mon 22 July	Woodland and meadows on good level paths
8			Mon 29 July	
9	Hangman's Hills	Roger Bates	Sat 13 July	Steep slopes mainly on good paths
10	Silver-washed Fritillary Walk		Sat 20 July	



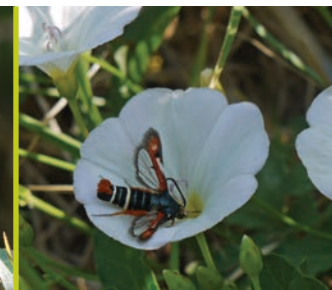
Red Underwing Skipper



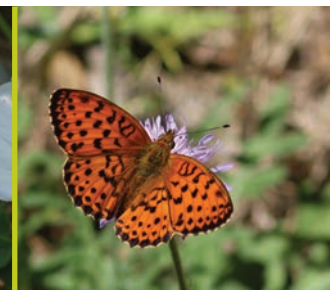
Dusky Heath



Great Banded Grayling



Fiery Clearwing



Marbled Fritillary

Butterfly Walks in Provence

Provence in early summer: scents of thyme, rosemary and lavender as you walk in the beautiful hills, heady stuff indeed – who could resist?



Ilex Hairstreak

Fritillary and **Spanish Gatekeeper**. And we were soon trying, and often failing, to distinguish between two lookalikes, **Provençal Fritillary** and **Heath Fritillary**. Before starting out, we'd been in touch with **Roger Gibbons**, who has expert knowledge of the area and its butterflies. He told us that the best place to see Provençal butterflies is in the département of Var, to the east of Aubagne – Provence is divided into six départements – and so it proved. A 10-mile hike in Var, in the area where the films *Jean de Florette* and its sequel *Manon des Sources* were made, took us into some varied countryside, with plenty of butterflies on offer. They included **Black-veined White**, **Bath White**, **Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper**, **Western Marbled White**, **Provençal Short-tailed Blue**, **Osiris Blue**, **Escher's Blue** and shedloads of **Southern White Admirals**.

The following day, again in Var, we walked around a site known as the House of the 4 Brothers. While chasing after a white butterfly that refused to stop, possibly a **Wood White**, Stephen caught sight of a butterfly sitting on a branch. To his amazement, it was Europe's largest butterfly, a **Two-tailed Pasha**, albeit a rather worn specimen with very little left by way of tails. It stayed for one photo and then took off. Later that day, walking along a path flanked by Strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*), its larval food plant, we saw more overhead – majestic and very big. Other highlights of the day included **Marbled**, **Knapweed** and **Niobe**

Fritillaries, along with **Dusky Heath**.

Our last walk in Var was in the grasslands at the foot of the Sainte-Baume limestone massif, where we saw **Mazarine Blue**, **Adonis Blue**, **Large Wall Brown**, **Ilex Hairstreak** and **Pearly Heath**. We then climbed up to the monastery in the cliff face, which has a chapel in a natural grotto next to it; this was both exhausting and, disappointingly, butterfly-free.

Week 2

For the second week, we were based further west, near St Martin-de-Crau. Two trips to the Camargue were mainly centred on birdlife, including the famous Flamingos and various Herons, as well as the Camargue horses. There were some butterfly species to be seen, however, including **Lulworth Skipper**, **Great Banded Grayling**, **Scarce Swallowtail** and **Southern Gatekeeper**. On a walk further north in the wooded hills of the Parc National d'Alpilles, we saw

Baton Blue, **Chalkhill Blue**, **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **Blue-spot Hairstreak** and **Red Underwing Skipper**, as well as a small flock of Crested Tits. Nearer to the farmhouse where we stayed, Lucy found a resplendent **Fiery Clearwing** moth.

The last walk was a real oddity in terms of both habitat and weather. It had turned unseasonably hot (mid-30s) but with a very strong wind as well, and we went to explore the Crau, a rare and fragile habitat of stony grassland steppe. The wind meant we saw next to nothing, but it was one of those places you felt was unlike anywhere else, and we were glad we visited it.

So, all in all, it was a wonderful holiday. Huge numbers of butterflies, with several species seen by the dozen, especially in the first week, and, although we saw no rarities, great fun in a lovely part of the world.

Article and photographs by **Stephen Lewis**, Prees Heath Reserve Manager, and **Lucy Lewis**, Branch Treasurer

And we were soon trying, and often failing, to distinguish between two lookalikes

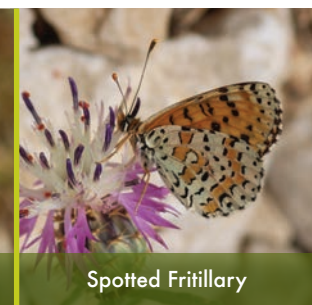
We spent two weeks in Provence in June 2017. It was not primarily a butterfly holiday but rather a number of walks in the countryside spotting, identifying and, when possible, photographing butterflies as we went along, as well as enjoying some of the cultural highlights on offer in this historic region. Some days were spent with the butterflies, some in the footsteps of Cezanne, Picasso and Van Gogh, and some visiting the old towns and their huge markets.

Week 1

For the first week, we were based at La Destrousse near Aubagne in the Department of Bouches-du-Rhône. A walk in the hills behind our accommodation on the first day produced an impressive list, with some species becoming very familiar in the days ahead – **Southern White Admiral**, **False Ilex Hairstreak**, **Spotted**



Blue-spot Hairstreak



Spotted Fritillary



Two-tailed Pasha

Butterfly recording in 2018

Please use iRecord

Results and coverage are both up, but more records are always needed

Transect records

- 65 transects walked
- 114,723 butterflies counted
- Results 20% better than 2017
- 47 transects adequately covered
- 37 transects have been walked for five years

After a poor year in 2017, most species recovered well in 2018, with remarkable figures for many *Lycaenidae* (**Brown Argus** improved most to become joint Butterfly of the Year). Over the past five years, Blues showed significant increases but **Peacock** and **Small Tortoiseshell** showed significant decreases.

Casual records

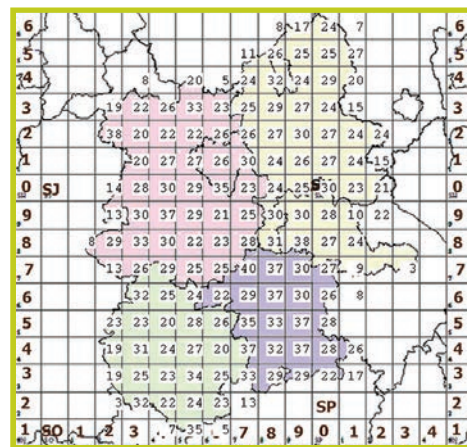
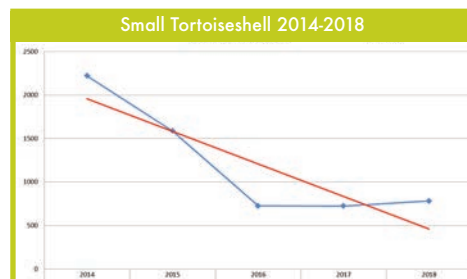
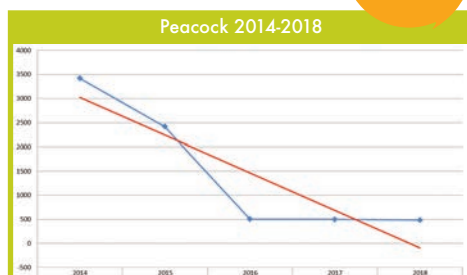
- 52,124 records
- 3332 recorders
- 40 species
- 134 10km squares

For the first time, our Branch area has been adequately covered with most 10km squares showing 14–32 species (22–40 species over the last five years). This enables us to identify squares in which new species have been recorded and plan conservation work for them.

Casual records combine numbers from transects, iRecord and the Big Butterfly Count. Remember to log your own sightings on iRecord (www.brc.ac.uk/iRecord). You can record individual sightings on maps of key sites.

For more detailed results, including trends and distributions for other species, visit www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk/recording

Article by **John Tilt** Records Co-ordinator



Gainers 2017-18

- Brown Argus
- Small White
- Common Blue
- Large White
- Wall
- Green-veined White
- Dark Green Fritillary

Losers 2017-18

- Red Admiral
- Brown Hairstreak
- Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- Meadow Brown
- Small/Essex Skipper
- Comma

Dates for your diary

40th anniversary events

Field trip, South Wales: Sat 29 Jun, 11am, High Brown Fritillary

Garden Open Day: Sun 30 Jun, 11am–4pm, 'From Oilseed Rape to Orchids', Mr & Mrs K Turner, The Red House, Eldersfield, Worcs. Own picnic lunch, drinks and cakes provided.

Field trip, South Wales: Fri-Sun 5-7 Jul, Members weekend.

Wyre Forest Guided Walk: Wed 10 Jul, 11am, followed by Big Butterfly Picnic, meet Hawkbatch car park, B4194

Malvern Garden Open Day: See page 10–12

Malvern Hills Guided Walks: See page 24–25

National AGM: 16 Nov, Mercure Shrewsbury Albrighton Hall Hotel & Spa, SY4 3AG, 01939 291000, H6629@accor.com

Advance booking required on the above events:
Contact: Mike Williams on 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Northern Ireland Trip: Mon-Thu 3-6 Jun, only a few places left.

Contact: Mel Mason, 01684 565700 or malverngrayling@btinternet.com

Big Butterfly Count

19 Jul–11 Aug: Branch events marked (BBC), www.bigbutterflycount.org for other events

Branch Stall at RHS Spring Festival, Malvern
Thu–Sun, 9–12 May, 9am–6pm: Displays, films, pollinator plants. See www.rhs.org.uk.

Contact: Mel Mason on 01684 565700 or meljmason@btinternet.com

Countrystastic, Three Counties Showground
Thu 18 Apr, 10am–5pm: BC stall, family day out in Malvern. **Advanced tickets at** www.countrystastic.co.uk (none on the day).

Field Studies Council (FSC) courses

Butterfly and moth courses at two West Midlands centres (Bishops Wood and Preston Montford), www.field-studies-council.org

Blooming Gardens at Witley Court

Sat 22 Jun: Butterfly stall, guided walks, pollinating plant advice. English Heritage event (admission charge non-EH members).

Brown Hairstreak Week at Grafton Wood

17–26 Aug: Guides available from 2pm daily, **contact John Tilt: 01386 792458** or john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

Butterfly and moth ID workshop

Sat 13 Jul, 9.30am–3pm: Old Hills near Callow End, Worcs. **Tutor Mel Mason, book at** sadie@worcestershireswildlifetrust.org

Farm Open Day and Brown Hairstreak hunt

Sat 10 Aug (BBC): Lower Hollowfields Farm, near Hanbury, Worcs. **Leader: Gert Corfield. Details** www.wildhollowfields.co.uk

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Surveys

17 Jun, 24 Jun: 10am–3.30pm, Sherbrook Valley, Cannock Chase, meet in car park opposite The White House, Marquis Drive, Cannock, WS12 4PR (SJ 994161). **Contact Rhona Goddard: 01746 762364** or rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

Hartlebury Common Green Hairstreak Hunt

Sun 19 May, 2pm: **Leader Mike Lomax**, meet at Wilden Top car park, Stourport-on-Severn, off B4193 (SO827713). Joint event with the Hartlebury Common Local Group.

Haugh Wood Guided Walk (BBC)

Sat 20 Jul, 2pm (BBC): meet in reserve car park, minor road Mordiford–Woolhope (SO592365), tea and cake at Woodbines, Checkley (10 mins away). **Contact Bob Hall: 01432 850623** or randphall@gmail.com

Llanymynech Rocks Guided Walk

Sat 4 May, 2pm: joint event BC North Wales. Meet at car park on Underhill Lane, Pant (SJ272219). **Leader Dr Simon Spencer: 01691 648339** or cerisiyi@btinternet.com

Moth Trapping Events

Sat 15 Jun, 9am: **Ashwood** Nurseries, Kingswinford, Moth Morning with **Tom Woodall and Mike Williams (01299 824860** or wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ►

Sun 23 Jun: Monkwood, 9am Moth Breakfast (bacon rolls available) and **11am** Butterfly Walk with **Mike Southall and Mike Williams** (01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

Sat 29 Jun, 9pm: Ewyas Harold Common trappers and recorders, meet at the burning ground (SO382299). **Sun 9am:** big reveal and moth breakfast for anyone interested, **contact Robin Hemming** (robinhemming@btinternet.com) or **Ian Hart** (Yellowrattle@aol.com)

Sat 13 Jul, 9am: Moth morning with **Tony Simpson** followed at **11am** by guided walk at **Trench Wood** with **Peter Seal** (01905 426398 or peterseal3@btinternet.com).

20 Jul, 9-11 am: (BBC) Moth Morning with the National Trust at **Kinver Edge**, £6 (includes breakfast). **Book on 0344 249 1895** or www.nationaltrust.org.uk/kinver-edge

Prees Heath Common Reserve

Meet on the access track opposite Steel Heath turning off A49. **Contact Stephen Lewis:** 07900 886809 or phwarden@sky.com

Wed 29 May, 10.30am–12.30pm: Hunt for Silver-studded Blue caterpillars attended by ants

Sun 30 Jun: 2pm Silver-studded Blue Guided Walk, **10.30am–4pm** Control Tower Open Day

Wed 31 Jul, 10.30am (BBC): Ragwort and Birch clearance

Fri 27 Sep, 7pm: Moth Night

Sat 28 Sep, 8am: Moth Breakfast

Wed 9 Oct, 10.30am: Birch clearance and Bell Heather seed harvest

Wed 13 Nov, 10.30am: Multi-tasking

Wed 11 Dec, 10.30am–12.30pm: Litter pick

Sandwell Valley Naturalists Joint Events

Contact Joy Stevens: 01384 372397 or joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk

Sat 4 May, 1pm: Emperor Moths, Sutton Park, meet in Banner's Gate car park (parking charge likely)

Sat 25 May, 11am: Green Hairstreak, Portway Hill, Rowley Hills – recorded for 7 years but how common is it? Meet inside Bury Hill Park entrance, short distance north of Cookhouse and Pub on A4123

Staffordshire Guided Walks

Booking required: **John Bryan** on 01782 541870 or Johnpbryan15@aol.com

Sun 26 May, 10am: Milldale Circular walk, 4 miles, steep terrain, good footwear, packed lunch, meet Milldale carpark (SK135547), DE6 2GB (phone/sat nav reception intermittent) – Dinky Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Wall Brown, Cistus Forester, Marsh Pug, Speckled Yellow

Sun 2 Jun: Swynnerton Training Area, Grizzled Skipper, development threat, chance to increase wildlife/botany records

Sun 14 Jul, 10am: Milldale Circular walk (as above) – Dark Green and Silver-washed Fritillary

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Open Day

Sun 5 May, 10am–5pm: Tiddesley Wood, near Pershore (follow signs), butterfly stall, guided walks, www.tiddesley.org.uk

Wood White Events

Contact Rhona Goddard: 01746 762364 or rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

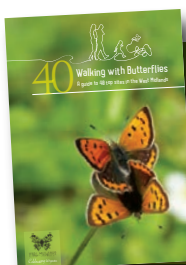
2 May, 7pm: Join BC to launch Wood Brewery's Wood White beer at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre to celebrate the 5th anniversary of Grow, Cook, Learn and the end of the Making a Stand for the Wood White project.

22 May, 7.30pm: Talk for the Strettons Branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Mayfair Community Centre, Church Stretton, SY6 6BL

12 Jun, 7 Aug (BBC), 10am: egg-monitoring, survey, Blakeridge Wood car park (SO295866)

16 Jun: Mortimer Forest, 10am Moth Morning, 11am Wood White Walk, meet at Vinnals car park (SO474731) – in partnership with FC

1 Aug (BBC): Guided walk at Wigmore Rolls, meet in small car park (SO397688) – in partnership with FC



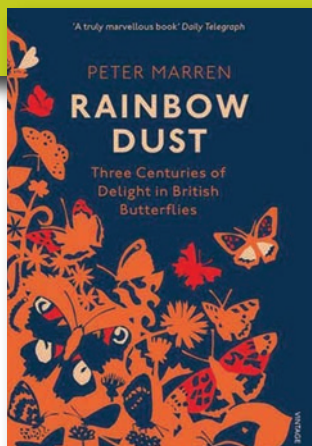
STOP PRESS

- new sites guide just out -
urban and rural walks in the
West Midlands, complete with
photos and maps.

Available May 2019, £5.95 each + £1.50
p&p, cheques payable to Butterfly
Conservation West Midlands Branch.
Order from WMBC, Annesbrook,
2 Dewberry Close, Stourport, DY13 8TB

Branch contacts

Chairman Peter Seal	peterseal3@btinternet.com	01905 426398
Vice Chairman & Conservation Officer Mike Southall	michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk	01299 251467
Treasurer Lucy Lewis	lemiller@btinternet.com	07840 530270
Branch Secretary Martin Harrison	martinh1236@yahoo.com	01743 351929
Regional Officers Dr Jenny Joy (Senior Regional Officer) Rhona Goddard	jjoy@butterfly-conservation.org rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org	01952 249325 01746 762364
Recording, Transect and Website Co-ordinator John Tilt	john.tilt2@btopenworld.com	01386 792458
County Records Co-ordinators – Bham & Black Country - Richard Southwell – Herefordshire – Bob Hall & Ian Draycott – Shropshire – Tony Jacques – Staffordshire – John Bryan – Worcestershire – Mike Williams & Mel Mason	richard_southwell@hotmail.co.uk randphall@gmail.com rec-vc40@vc40tj.plus.com johnpbryan15@aol.com wmbutterflies@gmail.com	01384 397066 01432 850623 01952 882096 01299 824860
Reserve Managers Ewyas Harold - Ian Hart Grafton Wood - John Tilt Monkwood - George Groves (retiring) Prees Heath - Stephen Lewis Trench Wood - John Holder (retiring)	yellowrattle4@aol.com john.tilt2@btopenworld.com george_groves@btopenworld.com phwarden@sky.com johnholder@fiscali.co.uk	01981 510259 01386 792458 01905 620721 07900 886809 01905 794854
Conservation Officers Worcestershire - Trevor Bucknall Herefordshire - Ian Hart	trevor.bucknall@outlook.com yellowrattle4@aol.com	01905 755757 01981 510259
Moth Officers Bham & Black Country - David Jackson Herefordshire - Robin Hemming Worcestershire - Mike Southall	jacksongrus@talktalk.net robinhemming@btinternet.com michael_southall58@hotmail.com	01902 344716 01568 797351 01299 251467
County Leaders North Staffordshire - John Bryan Central Staffordshire - Robert Winstanley South Staffordshire - David Jackson Herefordshire - Dean Fenton Malvern Hills - Mel Mason	johnpbryan15@aol.com robandpatwin@btinternet.com jacksongrus@talktalk.net fenton@littleburyfarm.co.uk meljmason@btinternet.com	01782 541870 01889 576768 01902 344716 01568 611575 01684 565700
Brown Hairstreak Champion Simon Primrose	simonjprimrose@aol.com	07952 260153
Committee Members Martyn Davies Peter Hall Vicki Liu Joy Stevens Steven Williams	martyn.davies808@gmail.com hall018@gmail.com vicki_liu@hotmail.co.uk joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk s.williams@yescomputers.co.uk	07731 924822 01384 372397 07974 152081
Publicity and Marketing Officer Mike Williams	wmbutterflies@gmail.com	01299 824860
Magazine Editor Marian Newell	comma.editor@newellporter.co.uk	01746 765287
Magazine Design and Production Trish Connolly Morgan	morgancreative@btinternet.com	01939 220776
Wider Countryside Butterfly Count Co-ordinator Philip Nunn	philip-nunn@hotmail.co.uk	07931 488624



Rainbow Dust – Three centuries of delight in British Butterflies

• ISBN: 978-1784703189 • Author: Peter Marren • Publisher: Vintage • Publication date: 28 July 2016 • Cost: £9.99

clouds of butterflies in sunlit meadows were evocative and, as I read it in late autumn, had me longing for spring once more.

One passage that stopped me in my tracks was: 'Nature would probably get on without butterflies. Unlike bees, they are not vital pollinators. Unlike moths, they probably do not have any significant role as bird (or bat) food. Unlike worms, they are not energetic recyclers... The planet does not "need" butterflies any more than it needs whales, hawks or primroses – or humans for that matter... We do not need them, nor, in the natural order of things do they need us. But we care about them all the same, because that is the way we are.'

I so wanted to love this book but, while I enjoyed it and found it interesting – indeed parts of it were fascinating and had me turning many corners over for future reference and making notes to remind me to search for paintings later – I found it to be more about people and less about butterflies. It's clearly written by someone with a passion and huge respect for

Biography

Peter Marren is a wildlife writer, journalist and authority on invertebrate folklore and names. His books include the bestselling *Rainbow Dust*; *The New Naturalists*, which won the Society for the History of Natural History's Thackray Medal; and *Britain's Rare Flowers*, which won the Botanical Society of the British Isles' Presidents' Award. Peter also won a Leverhulme Research Fellowship for his work on *Bugs Britannica*.

butterflies, but I didn't find it engaging. It didn't have a natural flow for me and I wasn't longing to pick it up each evening, or not until the last quarter of the book or so, when I reached Chapter 11, Endgame, which I devoured.

Overall, I'd give it four stars out of five.

Article by **Julia Saunders**

FROM THE EDITOR I'd like to continue to carry a book review on the back cover of each issue of *The Comma*. Newly published titles are ideal but particularly interesting or useful books from the past are also worth highlighting. Do drop me a line if you have a title you'd like to review.