



No. 38

NEWSLETTER

Winter 1997

WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH, BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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Chairman's Message

Breaking Records in Worcestershire?

It was the National Executive Committee that set the target of recording the butterfly species present in every tetrad (2km x 2km square) in the whole of the United Kingdom. A formidable task, but an essential one if we are to keep a running check on the health of our national butterfly populations. It also puts factual

information into the hands of conservation bodies and local government planning authorities in the difficult task of assessing the impact of development proposals. To ensure that the information published in the Millennium Atlas would be up-to-date, only records from 1995 onwards were to be included and when we looked at our county distribution maps with the pre-1995 records excluded, we were horrified by the acres and acres (I mean

hectares and hectares!) of open, unrecorded, nothingness.

At this point a new member Richard Southwell, stepped forward and offered to take on the job of recording in Worcestershire. He recognised that he had to find Branch Members (and non-members) who would be willing to do the recording job and to direct them into those parts of the county where current records were thinnest or non-existent. After several abortive attempts to find a way into the problem, the procurement of a county map showing the postcode areas provided a solution. The under-recorded tetrads could be given a postcode and the membership lists searched for members living in or near that postcode area. The next step was to write to those members asking them to record in 2 or 3 of the priority tetrads. 150 letters were sent out and an astonishing 56 positive replies were received. We are now awaiting the results of all this effort. Andy Nicholls has had about 12 records so far and expects to get more, so don't forget to send him all your records, **NOW!** Please don't leave it until Christmas! It would be tragic if, after all the effort made to walk the tetrad, the records failed to get into the Atlas. Records of the more common butterflies, whites and browns, are important too as part of the overall picture.

Now this is all well and good for Worcestershire, but what about Herefordshire,

Staffordshire, Shropshire and Powys? There is no possibility of Richard taking this on, the task would be overwhelming, but all is not gloom and despondency. A number of members in these areas have come forward and offered to record in their locality, and some 30 or 40 recorders have been active this summer. We have been wondering what the Branch can do to help the efforts of these individual county members and have come up with the idea that we hold a number of local meetings in the spring of next year. These will bring together the members in each area, to discuss their priority areas and to agree who will record them. This should avoid duplication of effort and to ensure coverage of all potentially important areas. Such centres as Stoke, Telford, Shrewsbury and Hereford come immediately to mind, but we will be guided by you. Please let us know how we can help, write or talk to us at the AGM.

One thing more, we cannot let this opportunity pass to say welcome to Christine Chance who has valiantly edited and produced this issue of the Newsletter and to say once again our heartfelt thanks to Margaret Vickery for her enormous contribution to the West Midlands Branch both as Newsletter editor and as Branch Organiser.

®

Digby Wood

Two important November meetings

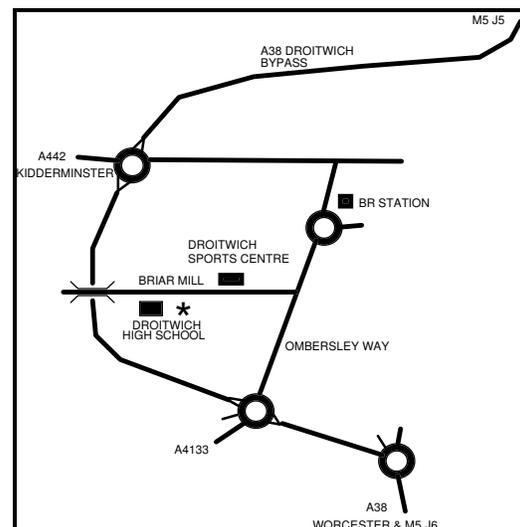
“Art and the Natural World”

A talk in joint celebration by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust & Butterfly Conservation on the purchase of Grafton Wood by

Valerie Baines

Internationally acclaimed wildlife artist and illustrator.

To be held on Wednesday 12 November 1997 at Droitwich High School (see map τ ★), commencing about 7.45 pm. This talk will follow the Worcester-shire Wildlife Trust's AGM (commencing 7.15 pm) and two short presentations on Grafton Wood - Entrance £3 all proceeds towards the purchase of Grafton Wood,



Go MAD in Shropshire July 27th.

Unfortunately few members from Butterfly Conservation turned out on an excellent day in Clun. It was very encouraging to see a number of local people and they took us around Clun to look for suitable butterfly sites. We found many of the commoner species in the area and also two sites for White Letter Hairstreak. I am grateful to Jean Armstrong and others who are continuing to send in records, they have been able to substantially improve our recording in the Clun area.

Species seen: Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Large White, Green Veined White, White Letter Hairstreak, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet.

® Andy Nicholls.

Gnosall Railway Line 25th May, 1997

Four people attended this outing on a very warm and sunny day.

Regrettably, Grizzled Skipper, the target species, was not encountered; however, the opportunity was taken to investigate a suggestion that a series of sites for this species might exist, at intervals, along the former railway line. Wild strawberry was certainly evident in small sheltered pockets - but of the butterfly there was no sign. Nevertheless, a three mile walk, from Gnosall Heath to Outwoods, (close to the Shropshire border, near Newport), along the railway line - produced a total of eleven species observed. A single Wall Brown was seen along with several heavily streak marked, Green Hairstreak and the sun-loving Small Copper.

® Philip Hopson

Fritillary Tail (Mortimer Trail)

A group of about 15 gathered on a rain lashed car park outside Ludlow castle to commence the first leg of the Fritillary trail on June 7th. Fortunately the rain held off for the rest of the day and the weather gradually improved as we walked. It was quickly realised by the group that when walking out of Ludlow the only way is up hill, as we climbed up to Mortimer forest and descended into Mary Knoll valley for our lunch. This was followed by a further long climb up Climbing Jack Common onto the highest point in the forest High Vinnalls. We descended from there in to the Aston stream

valley to the cry of "its a Wall" from Cherry Greenway; our search for Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary proved less successful. Our first day finished at the main car park with a species count of 10 butterflies including Wood White, Wall Brown and a notable moth Wood Tiger.

The second stage High Vinnalls to Bircher common on the 21st June started grey, wet and windy and didn't get any better; only the few very hardy walkers came out this day with a number of others completing this section in better weather on another day. No butterflies were seen at all this day only Peacock caterpillars. Lodge farm at the far side of Bircher common was notable for its interesting collection of old farm equipment and Land Rovers left decaying around a ruin of a farm house, I wonder how an estate agent would sell that one. Thanks to Gunter Peters for helping ferry us to the start.

The third stage of the walk, Bircher common to Lyepole bridge on the 12th July was a much kinder day weather wise and a larger group set out over Bircher common. The walk finally lived up to its name of Fritillary trail with High Brown, Dark Green, and Silver Washed Fritillary seen on the day. Together with much amusement at the army exercise going on in the area blowing up bridges.

The fourth section from Lypole bridge to Wapley Hill July 19th started hot and sunny and the heat stayed with us all day making the final ascent to Wapley hill all the more tiring. With a total species count of 16 notably Silver Washed, Dark Green Fritillary, Purple, and White Letter Hairstreaks and also a single Marbled White on Wapley Hill.

Our final days walk on the 26th July from Wapley Hill to Kington was rather cool and overcast but we did see a few butterflies. We were spurred on in the morning to reach Titley by lunch time, on the understanding there was a pub in the village only to reach it, and find it was closed, and up for sale. Why was that phone in Titley constantly ringing? It was especially nice to see a good number of Silver Washed Fritillary in a small clearing along Little Brampton scar above Kington. Our walk ended in the centre of Kington after five very enjoyable weekends covering nearly forty miles through some beautiful countryside and filling in some unrecorded tetrads for the millennium atlas. Thanks to Cherry for providing the cakes and drinks at the end, and for bringing her dog Meg along.

® Andy Nicholls.

The Exmoor Weekend "A Feast of Fritillaries"

Friday 27th - Sunday 29th June 1997

The weather was cool and overcast and the forecast less than encouraging when eight members (Mike, Terry, Jancis, Bob, Cherry, Jonathan, Trevor and Geoff) clambered into the minibus and headed south-west in a quest for six species of Fritillary. As we had time to spare, we decided to target a seventh species by visiting Sand Point for a possible late Glanville. A brief sunny spell raised our hopes and we were soon listing Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Large and Small Skippers and Common Blue. Sadly no Glanvilles but as they had been seen three weeks previously, it was likely that their flight period was over.

After lunch the sunshine had deserted us and our visit to the new Butterfly Conservation reserve at Haddon Moor failed to produce the hoped for Marsh Fritillaries. Flowers abounded however with masses of Common Spotted and Heath Spotted orchids and meadow thistles (*Cirsium dissectum*). Nearby Haddon Hill looked very promising with plenty of Common Cow-wheat but the cool conditions denied us any Heath Fritillaries.

Saturday morning was dry with sunny periods and, whilst most of the party slumbered, a pre-breakfast walk by the more energetic along the coast path from Lynton produced some good birds including gannets, razorbills, guillemots and ravens.

After breakfast, we travelled to Hunters Inn where we were met by Amanda, the local National Trust warden who showed us the conservation work which was being undertaken on the bracken covered hillsides in the beautiful Heddon and Parracombe valleys. The scenery was breath-taking and even Terry was rumoured to have exclaimed "Isn't it romantic". At long last we began to see some Fritillaries, firstly Dark Green and later High Brown and the cool conditions allowed the photographers to get some good shots of fresh specimens. In addition we also saw Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Small Tortoiseshells. Other species seen were Peacock larvae, a Golden-ringed dragonfly and Brown Silver Lines, Large Yellow Underwing and Heart and Dart moths. Good views were enjoyed of red deer and a small pale coloured cow which, on closer inspection, proved to be a llama.

After lunch at Hunters Inn amid displaying peacocks (the birds this time) and a peahen

with her young chick, we explored some of the local meadows where we were able to compare the wing patterns of Dark Green and High Brown Fritillaries.

From here, we travelled to the extensive dunes at Braunton Burrows where we saw further Dark Green Fritillaries as well as Small Skippers, Marbled Whites, Small Heaths and Common Blues. The moth enthusiasts found Yellow Shell and Cinnabar moths and the larvae of Drinker and Cinnabar. It was the botanists however who had the greatest field day. In addition to commoner plants such as Common Broomrape and some spectacularly large Pyramidal Orchids, we discovered Yellow Bartsia, Sand Pansy (*Viola tricolor* ssp. *Curtisii*) and Sand Toadflax (*Linaria arenaria*).

Sunday morning's pre-breakfast walk for the energetic took us to the Valley of the Rocks where we saw a family of stonechats as well as fulmars and wheatears.

The fine weather had finally deserted us when we headed for Dunkery Beacon in appalling conditions of rain and low cloud. Near Horner Wood, we walked through known Heath Fritillary habitat without much hope of a sighting and all we found was a Heath Rustic moth larva. A Buff Ermine moth in Porlock did little to raise our spirits. After lunch, the weather lifted slightly and we undertook a long and very strenuous walk in Bin Combe but again, no Heath Fritillary. For most of us this had been the prime target species of the weekend but time was fast running out.

Our homeward journey gradually became sunnier so we decided to make a final re-visit to Haddon Hill. It was 4 pm when the cry of "I've found one" brought us all running to gaze admiringly at the elusive Heath Fritillary at long last. During the next few minutes, this butterfly must have come close to becoming the most photographed individual in Britain. Others followed, both male and female and, in the late afternoon sunshine, we also saw Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Small Heaths and Large Skippers as well as Treble Bar and July Belle moths. We were on a definite high now so why not try again at Haddon Moor for the Marsh Fritillary. The two of us with wellies were dispatched into this marshy meadow with instructions not to return until we had found one. After a few minutes, an ear-splitting yell from the smallest member of our party announced to the rest of us (and to most of Bristol) that she had found one. Not only found but also potted. A few others were seen and once everyone had admired and photographed the original specimen, it was released and we

headed for home feeling very smug. Pity about the Glanville but you can't have everything - next year perhaps.

® Bob Bishop.

Coach trip to Anglesey - 6th July

A record turnout of members gathered under rather overcast skies for this year's annual coach trip to north Wales. Talk was of the wretched June and the fact that butterflies seemed very thin on the ground. The weather as we journeyed north did little to lift the mood with skies remaining grey and rain threatening at times. Someone out there, however, was obviously on our side and as we approached the Menai Bridge the sun at last made an appearance and a day that had started so cold and miserable suddenly turned into a real scorcher. Our destination was South Stacks Cliffs on the far north-western side of the island. This RSPB reserve boasts some magnificent seabird colonies and a notable population of Silver-studded Blue butterflies. Our first port of call was the Information Centre right on the cliff edge, where we were able to seek guidance from one of the wardens as to the latest news on butterfly sightings. We were directed over the headland to a gully just above the road, where a number of Blues had been recently reported, and set off in this direction. Just outside the Centre proved an excellent vantage point to view the seabirds and a number of members took advantage of Cherry Greenway's telescope to admire the many nesting Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins. The latter were very numerous, both on the cliffs and down on the water, and there were several family parties. Further out to sea, there were several Gannets diving after fish into the water and, as we took in the spectacle, around six Choughs flew overhead. Arriving at the gully as directed, we were met by a Chough wandering around at the side of the road within a few feet of scores of holidaymakers, who were generally as oblivious to the presence of the Chough as the Chough was to them. For what is generally thought of as a shy, secretive bird, greatly prized by bird watchers who tramp miles of cliff in the hopes of a glimpse of this still rare bird, this seemed almost surreal. It was not long, however, before such thoughts were pushed to the back of the mind with the first sighting of a male Silver-studded Blue. Several butterflies were present, mainly males and looking very fresh as their wings gleamed in the strong sunshine. The photographers in the party were pleased to find a very co-operative pair in

cop on top of a heather plant and many photos were taken. People spread out a bit at this point and amongst other butterflies reported were Painted Lady (a real rarity in 1997), Dark Green Fritillary, Meadow Brown, Common Blue, Small Heath and Ringlet, together with July Belle moths. Some members made their way back to the coach via the cliff path and a few more Silver-studded Blues were seen but only very locally where the heather was less dense and there were areas of bare ground. Rejoining the coach we moved on further down the coast to Newborough Warren but were frustrated by not being allowed to drive down to the bottom car park as planned. However, after some nifty reversing manoeuvres by the coach driver, we managed to park near the reserve entrance and set off for the sand dunes. Almost as soon as we climbed out of the coach, we were buzzed by a Silver-washed Fritillary and again there were several Meadow Browns and Ringlets. The butterfly we had really come to see, however, was the Dark Green Fritillary and they were present in really good numbers on the dunes, although generally dashing around in true Fritillary style to the annoyance of photographers. When they did stop, it was usually to visit Sheep's bit Scabious which was growing in abundance on the dunes, together with many other impressive plants like Sand Pansy and several species of orchid, including Twayblade, Pyramidal, Common Spotted and Marsh Helleborine. Our other target butterflies - Grayling and Small Pearl-bordered - were more elusive but were eventually located by the more determined amongst the party. Anyway, an excellent day with unexpectedly good weather and, despite horrendous delays on the motorway coming home, I think enjoyed by all. Where shall we go next year?

® Mike Williams

Prestbury Hill - 16th August, 1997

Four adults and one child joined Ron Mabbett for a walk over the Prestbury Hill Reserve on the morning of Saturday, 16th August. It was helpful to have a guide on my first visit to the Reserve.

It was another hot and sunny day. The prolonged hot weather over Cleeve Common, spared the heavy rain and floods which had affected Gloucester only a few miles away, seemed to have reduced the numbers of butterflies on the wing. However, there were enough to make the walk interesting and

enjoyable. On our arrival we were greeted at the entrance to the southern part of the Reserve by a couple of Wall Brown butterflies, a rare sight for someone who hails from Warwickshire. We were only a few minutes down the path when the target species for the walk, a Chalk Hill Blue, flew past and, although they did not appear in the numbers for which they are famous, several more of these butterflies were seen during the walk, some at close quarters. It was my first sight of this species. We found most of the butterflies which you would expect to see on sunny grassland in August, together with the Brown Argus and Small Heath, and the rarer Grayling. A solitary and faded Dark Green Fritillary was another first for me but my ambition to see a fresh specimen with its colouring intact must wait for another year. In the meantime I am grateful to the West Midlands Branch for organising the walk.

® Sarah Wager

A Trip to see the Monarchs in Mexico

After seeing an article in the West Midlands newsletter, my wife and I decided to go with Joe Cocker and a small group to Mexico. The main reason for going was to see the Monarchs over-wintering in the Sierra Madre Mountains about 100 miles from Mexico City.

On Tuesday January 31 we set off from our hotel at 7 00 a.m. to cross Mexico City by the 'metro', arriving at the coach station for a 3 hour journey to Zitacuaro. On arrival at Zitacuaro, we were lucky enough to find a local bus ready to leave for Angangao. Arriving there, Joe negotiated with the locals to hire a four wheel drive jeep to take us the last couple of miles to the El Rosario Reserve high in the mountains, at 10,500 feet. Before arriving at the Reserve, we stopped by a small mountain stream to witness hundreds of Monarchs drinking.

The El Rosano Reserve is extremely low key with just a couple of small wooden huts, one of which was the visitor centre. Having paid our 12 Pesos (about £1) we were allocated a guide, a young lad of about 14, to take us up the mountainside. We started to climb a roped off path about 12 feet wide up the wooded mountainside. The previous two days had apparently been dull but today the sun was shining and there were 'Monarchs' flying all around us, more especially where the sun could reach. They were also on the ground and the desire to pick them up and assist them to a

sunny spot proved too much as they just fluttered back to the ground. Higher up the mountainside the sights were even more spectacular - tree after tree was covered with Monarchs, the complete tree being a shade of orange, literally millions of butterflies. One feels very humble to have the privilege of being allowed into their environment and to witness a truly wondrous sight.

After around 3 hours at the reserve we again boarded our jeep to start the return journey to Mexico, arriving at 9.00 p.m. to a very welcome glass or two of 'Corona' .

The first few days of the holiday were spent in Mexico City from where we visited Teotihuacan for the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, Tasco, the silver city and the Museum of Anthropology Mexico City.

Three days were also spent at Palencue in the rain forest. A good area for butterflies. and an excellent base to see some of the many Mayan sites. One day trip was especially memorable - a visit to Yaxchilan, a Mayan site only accessible after a 1 hour trip in a small boat down the Rio Usumacinta along the Guatemalan border.

In summary Doreen and I would urge people not to miss a chance to see both the Monarchs and Mexico. The trip really is the trip of a lifetime.

® John & Doreen Griffin



Another Mexico trip is planned for 1998, see "Dates for your Diary" 6th Feb 1998 (page 16)

Moths of the Wyre Forest

This project, a first for the West Midlands branch, was born out of the enthusiasm of Dr. Linda Barnett who several years ago, during her time as branch Moth Officer, designed a home-made moth trap for sale to members, with a view to promoting the awareness of the 700 British macro moths, including migrants, which are there to be discovered throughout the twelve months of the year. Three of the traps were bought by Peter Darch, Mike Williams and myself and have been used mainly in gardens for want of an electric power supply or generator.

Wyre Forest has been the venue for moth trapping by the few for very many years usually based on running an occasional single trap located on the periphery of the Forest. This new long term project located in the heart of the 6,000 acre Forest is based on the multiplicity of five moth traps and two 1,000 watt halogen lamps. Thanks to the close collaboration that has been built up over the past five years with the Ministry of Defence, a 5 month project was launched in June 1997 when a secluded, private 40 acre site was made available to Butterfly Conservation and the Wyre Forest Study Group to undertake a comprehensive moth survey. The success of

this project has exceeded expectations and is to continue for the full 12 months of the year. Wyre Forest spans both Worcestershire and Shropshire and this particular site falls into the latter county. Over the five occasions so far that trapping has taken place almost 140 species of macros have been recorded including a number of notable species which have been recorded very rarely in Shropshire. These include Angle-striped Sallow, Black Arches, Marbled White Spot (see Summer newsletter) and Waved Black. A fitting climax to this first stage of the project came at the last of our planned monthly surveys in October with no fewer than three Merveille du Jour, surely one of the most spectacular of all moths.

A detailed report will be produced at the conclusion of the project. In the meantime members wishing to become better acquainted with this private site are urged to attend the work day on 18th January next year to help improve the habitat further for Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Grizzled Skipper and Small Heath as well as the moths.

® Frank Lancaster

Conservation Corner

Future of annual Conservation review

With the formation of separate branches for Gloucestershire and now Warwickshire, it has been decided that the 1996 annual review covering the entire West Midlands region will be the last to be published in the existing format. In future, each of the three branches covering the region will be responsible for providing its own annual report to members. How this is done will no doubt vary from branch to branch but, in the case of West Midlands branch, our annual review will now be encompassed in the Spring Newsletter, which has the advantage that all members will receive a copy as of right rather than being expected to pay an additional charge as has been the norm up to now. In order to produce

a report to this timescale, however, members and other recorders will need to ensure that all records and transect data are received by the branch by 31st December at the very latest. Can all transect recorders please list separately the butterflies **for each tetrad covered by the transect**. Any records received after this date run the risk of not being included in the report. As normal, all general records should be passed to the Branch Recorder and transect data to the Conservation Officer. Anyone still requiring copies of the 1996 Annual Review should send a cheque for £3.00 to Mike Williams (please make cheque out in favour of Butterfly Conservation West Midlands branch).

Calling all Staffs and Salop members

Your branch needs you! We have only two full recording seasons left to map Staffs and Salop butterflies for the new Millennium Atlas to be published by Butterfly Conservation at the beginning of the next century. Thanks to the sterling efforts of Richard Southwell who has had great success in encouraging Worcestershire members to record butterflies local to where they live (see separate article), the recording situation in the southern half of the branch's area is now much healthier but the situation in our two northern counties is less good. Please, please make a real commitment to send in all records (including the common species) in 1998, plus any records you may already have for this year or previous years. We need location details and ideally a date and grid reference. Special recording forms are available from the Branch Recorder but we are happy to receive records in any form as long as you include your name, address and preferably phone number in case we need to get back to you. For 1998 we are looking for volunteers who might be willing to take responsibility for encouraging other members and non-members from their local area to send in records. Our experience has been that the personal approach to members really seems to pay off and this is something that works much better on a local level. If you feel that you might be able to help in this vital work (all expenses paid!) please contact Andy Nicholls or Digby Wood as soon as possible.

Winter conservation work

A full programme of winter works days is again planned and we hope that these will continue to be well supported by members. Almost all our effort is focused on improving habitats for our rarer butterflies and moths and we always welcome new faces to our work parties. A new site that we intend working on this coming season is Hunthouse Wood NR near Clows Top in Worcestershire, where members enjoyed a guided walk with the warden, Andrew Santer, last Summer. (see page 15 "Dates for your diary", 14th December for conservation work details).

Regional Action Plan implementation

Mention was made in the last Conservation Corner of the impending completion of the West Midlands Regional Action Plan. With help from the Wareham office this has now been published and is in the process of being

sent out to our conservation partners, local authorities and other agencies involved in biodiversity planning. The final plan which is in two volumes provides detailed conservation priorities for 22 high and medium priority butterflies and 6 high priority moths. It also details the key areas and sites for Lepidoptera where our main conservation effort needs to be focused. The plan has already received very favourable comment from several quarters and we hope its publication will assist partner organisations to set their own priorities. At the same time, we hope that the completed plan will be of help to those other Butterfly Conservation branches nationally who are in the process of grappling with their own RAP and who may be able to benefit from our experience. The plan, of course, is not an end in itself but rather a beginning and the key to its success will be the extent to which the actions and targets proposed can be implemented on the ground. For our part, the three branches who make up the West Midlands region have collectively agreed to set up a regional conservation fund pro rata to their respective membership. This fund will be under the control of the regional Conservation sub-committee, administered through the West Midlands branch, and will be available to support high priority butterfly and moth projects. The Committee will meet later this autumn to begin discussing priorities for 1998.

Essex Skipper arrives in Worcestershire!

As predicted in the 1996 Conservation Review, the Essex Skipper has made it into Worcestershire, after its recent colonisations of Warwickshire and, more recently, Gloucestershire. Rather galling was that the first records came from two holidaying members from Suffolk who, to add insult to injury, came across the butterfly at Monkwood NR! Not realising the significance of their find, their discovery only came to light at the end of September when they passed on their records to Digby. This is certainly an intriguing report and, if a genuine colonisation, must beg the question as to whether the butterfly has colonised from the east or south. Either way there is much searching to be organised next summer to try to answer this question. If the Gloucestershire experience is anything to go by and this is not a casual release (sadly, always a possibility), it is likely that the butterfly will be found over a wide area.

Mike Williams

The Millennium Atlas Project

1998 - Millennium Atlas Initiative

Feeling lonely - not getting value from your annual subscription - lacking a sense of comradeship with your fellow butterfly enthusiasts - many Worcester members enjoyed being given a specific task this year and gained an inner satisfaction that comes with a job well done - and you? The answer is at hand good people why not become an intrepid **TETRAD BASHER** for the Atlas. Everyone can do it no matter how much or how little you do. But why is it so important?

Travelling to my Henley office I listened on the car radio to an Alvechurch lady complaining about a new housing development that is to take place in her own backyard. She even stated the houses should be built in inner cities on derelict factory sites. I was amazed, apart from the fact little such land exists who out of choice would want to live there anyway, besides we all know the best Wall Brown colony in the Midlands is on a similar plot next door to Winson Green Prison, don' t we?

I also know the status of butterfly records in the Alvechurch area given my role as Atlas Organizer for Worcestershire this year. The answer is **ZERO**. Alvechurch was officially a butterfly free zone and I presume this is also true for all other flora and fauna so is it any wonder the Planning Application for the housing estate passed its obligatory Environment Assessment with a clean bill of health!

The good news is that many Worcestershire members took up the recording challenge and initial reports already indicate totally new locations for Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Wood White and Small Blue. N.B. Andy Nicholls is now waiting for your remaining records and my target is to be in a position to review our collective efforts for the Spring Newsletter. However, my hope that new Green Hairstreak sites will be discovered remains but frustratingly for Alvechurch I can now report records are coming onto the database for the area, too late to affect the planning process for the housing estate I' m afraid.

Please, please don' t let this situation happen to you which leads on to.....

NEW YEAR INITIATIVE

During the next quarter, great efforts will be made to involve existing branch members, particularly in poorly recorded outlying regions of HEREFORD, STAFFORD and the whole of SHROPSHIRE. We hope this will alleviate the sense of remoteness and lack of involvement some of you have mentioned.

The Branch Committee view this initiative as one of the main vehicles to spread the word of Butterfly Conservation across the whole of our region and I refer you back to Digby Wood' s leading editorial which gives an outline of the Branch' s intentions. I suspect it will be one of the main topics at the forth-coming AGM (details on page 3). We would like to hear your views and therefore hope you can attend.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

In parallel with all our collective efforts here are a few complementary initiatives happening over the region.

- Jenny Joy has got Shropshire County Council involved by providing a four-colour recording leaflet supplied to all their libraries.
- Phil Hopson' s media campaign has attracted a tremendous response, and maybe many new members despite the fact he looked like a garden gnome in the accompanying photograph. This was Phil' s opinion not mine, I was too polite to agree.
- Andy Nicholls has motivated the local Clun population and pens are already hovering in eager anticipation over their notebooks.
- A Worcester Headmaster has got the whole school tetrad bashing to assist geography and biology lessons. It turns out the BC member I allocated 4 tetrads earlier this year is also Chairman of the school' s Board of Governors!
- Overall the Branch is becoming the centre of media attention with regular features on television, radio and the press, but are the rumours true that Mike Williams wears permanent make-up just in case he gets

the call for another appearance. To think that some collectors in the last century used to paint their butterflies!

Watch this space, all we now need is a brilliant butterfly season in 1998. Volunteers are doing their bit on the ground, as for the weather anyone listening up there !!

So...

® Richard Southwell

Eyeing the land - A millennium survey experience

Richard Southwell's 'targeting' strategy to recruit Millennium surveyors surprisingly paid off when he rang me in March. I am averse to being targeted and resistant to volunteering my time for butterfly work. I do have a weakness though in regard to this project and Richard found it. He told me what tetrads he would like covered. This had me immediately mind-eyeing the land, thinking known and unknown habitat, inescapably already in search mode. What clinched it was that the squares bordered a journey I made twice a week.

The countryside between Droitwich and Feckenham is not Alpine meadows, nor even my beloved Dorset or Wiltshire Downs but it too holds out the promise of unexpected discovery. There is also a proprietorial attraction in stocktaking one's local patch. In fact, as I began to walk my newly acquired lands I became covetous of the adjoining property and on learning that the former recorder was no longer operating, appropriated another clutch of tetrads.

During my first survey year I have enjoyed the freedom of roaming my territory rather than feeling compelled to dutifully complete the list of common species for every tetrad. Although as an economic measure I have adopted the obvious strategy of visiting the most productive habitat in each square several times through the season, I have also made a point of trying unlikely possibilities. Discovering footpaths, bridleways and even a couple of lanes I did not know existed was the pleasant outcome of pursuing the fantasy of overlooked remnants of better-than-average habitat.

Now that I had some quasi-official pretext, a local, private wood that I'd had half an eye on became a feasible target. I made enquiries, contacted the owner and obtained permission to visit the wood. I was initially attracted because the wood had character. It is the remnant of old estate woodland on a hillside. Of the few mature trees remaining, some huge

shattered cedars catch the eye. From the butterfly point of view, the promise lies in the extensive open areas with reasonably diverse ground flora and profusely regenerating understory. It was a delight and a privilege to explore in detail a new place and in particular to discover its butterfly 'spots'. My early season visit was as much about assessing foodplants and nectar potential as appreciating species already on the wing. Later in the year my jottings for July 5th are reminiscent of the innocent enthusiasms of my childhood:

*'Treasures:- woodland border with soaring ashes - 6 treecreeper, great spotted woodpecker, hosts of tits kestrels' nest atop the largest cedar, young birds circling, large dense clump of centaury - love that pink!
A comma wood, zipping about and returning to favoured perches along the overgrown rides ever the hunter, notice sprigs of wych elm in promising location, tarry, sun coming and going, until my instinct is rewarded - little brown butterfly lifts off from the highest leaf & joined by another in a soaring, whirring dance return later in the afternoon, one of the White Letter Hairstreaks has dropped down to nectar on creeping thistle . . .'*

Having an eye for butterfly spots has paid dividends. On three occasions, with Purple Hairstreak, White Admiral and Common Blue, I have had the uncanny experience of seeing the butterfly at the very moment I thought it would be there, as if my wish had been granted. However, three quite unexpected encounters with Brown Argus firmly proved that my eco-psychic powers are not unlimited. On one occasion I was opportunistically scanning a couple of acres of coarse grassland for common species in a hitherto unrecorded square, when I was amazed to see a chasing pair of newly emerged second brood Brown Argus. On the face of it the habitat was unsuitable and owing to recent developments was now entirely isolated.

Discussion on the 'spread' of Brown Argus and its apparent increasing range of food plants will surely gain from the Millennium Survey data. At the other end of the spectrum, I was disappointed but not surprised to find only one colony of Small Heath in my twenty-one tetrads. In August 1989 it was prevalent enough in the area to find its way into my garden. The decline of the Wall is well known but my observations during the summer set me thinking about a possible vulnerability in the Speckled Wood, particularly in respect of its liking for overgrown hedgerow habitats in the more southerly counties.. I was surprised not to find the butterfly in a number of what seemed to be ideal woodland settings, that is, the kind of sites where I have found the species in the past, and where it did occur, observation over time indicated little movement beyond fixed small territories. More numerous field observations from the Survey may well serve to link questions of sedentariness /colonising capacity with climactic and other variables involved in the ebb and flow of its national distribution this century (see Maitland Emmet and Heath, 1989, for further details).

As a boy I knew all about the sedentariness of the Marbled White - it only occurred in one small spot on our local patch. It was over twenty years, in the drought summer of 1976, before a major migration from this colony took place. By contrast, in recent years, I have watched the steady spread of Marbled White in the Droitwich area since my sighting of a single butterfly at the end of June in 1989. This summer I was delighted to find another flourishing colony a couple of miles to the south-west and began to speculate about stepping stones from more highly populated areas. Curiously, this site also produced Gatekeepers one week in advance of everywhere else I visited.

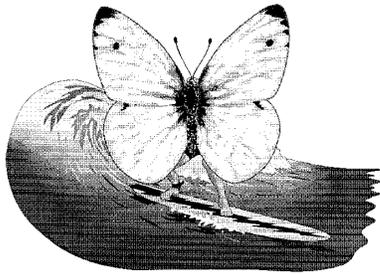
One of the major benefits of this kind of survey, it seems to me, is that the single observer can begin to notice patterns and trends by virtue of seeing the same species in many different locations in fairly quick succession. So, for example, this summer for the first time I became aware of the slightly different habitat preferences of Ringlet and Meadow Brown. In one instance there was a sharp contrast. In several cleared woods that I visited, with sunny glades tending to be dominated by soft grass, I found only Ringlets, even though the Meadow Brown's preferred foodplants were close at hand. If the Meadow Brown has a better year in 1998, it will be interesting to see whether this exclusivity persists. If I saw one Small Tortoiseshell in April and May settling on the warm compacted mud at field entrances, I saw fifty. We tend to think of woodland glades but on the Survey I've discovered meadow glades where the coarser grasses gently give way to the delicate fine grasses and with them a greater diversity of nectar plants. A sure sign that you've found a meadow glade is that there are nymphalids in residence. Of course, this feature epitomises something of the best that can be expected from the range of grassland between 'improved' pasture on the one hand and the few gems of traditional flower meadow on the other, which characterise my survey area. As agricultural Britain goes, I've not done badly but even here, paradoxically, I have occasionally noticed a feeling of relief when approaching villages or areas of recreational activity, where the 'clean acres' give way to more intricate, jumbled minihabitats that seem to hold the promise of something unexpected. And this for me is what the Millennium Survey has been about.

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Peter Darch



Marbled White Butterfly



Inland Sea Horses

This is positively the last reference I will make to my daughter's early Saturday morning horse riding lessons. It had been hot and sunny, a number of days before 19th July. All the blue linseed fields in the Stourbridge area had lost their colour, all that is except the West facing field between High Lodge Stables and Bunkers Hill Wood. Presumably it must have been a late sowing, it was also in 'setaside' last year which might have some relevance that for the moment is lost on me given the topic of this article.

Recording for the Millennium Atlas, I gradually became aware of steady numbers of Green Veined Whites all flying directly East towards the sun from the field at a height of circa 8 feet. On reaching the boundary all stopped, half turned back, and the rest immediately dropped down to nectar. All eventually returned to the linseed. The low numbers of Small White and Large White all came from different directions. After 15 minutes I realized that a pattern was emerging and started to look at the blue field with more interest, this included collecting a pair of binoculars from the car.

Again it took me time to appreciate the scene. Across the whole field I was witnessing slow but regular waves of white emerging out of the

depths. The butterflies just reached the surface and immediately started sinking back down again, it was only the odd one that forgot to dive back and it was those I had originally counted. Each wave numbered between 10 and 20 and I conservatively logged 170 green veined whites for the Atlas, though this figure could well have approached 300. I did not notice any butterflies on the linseed flower, so presumably they were not nectaring.

So all you experts I would love an explanation for this phenomenon, also has anyone got an example of a similar occurrence.

Final Thought:

There is a lot to be said for stationary butterfly watching. I would never have noticed the linseed sea horses on a normal walk, but I do not want this to be an excuse for you to stop tetrad bashing. Countryside pubs with good outside gardens might also be able to adapt this article into their promotions and yes I am open to offers of free beer.

® Richard Southwell

Book Review

**Butterflies of Britain & Europe by Tom Tolman and Richard Lewington
published by Harper Collins at £17.99 ★**

The new Collins Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain & Europe is now in the shops and would make an ideal Xmas present for the aspiring butterfly buff, especially those whose horizons extend to butterflying on the continent. This new guide is an overdue

replacement to the former Collins classic by Higgins and Riley first published in 1970 which has travelled in many a butterfly fanatic's rucksack on their European travels over the past 25 years but is now showing its age. While following a broadly similar format, the

new publication shows some marked improvements over the old. First and foremost, the species accounts are bang up to date and provide additional information on life histories, foodplants and, in some instances, behaviour; all of which, of course, can assist with identification. Maps showing distribution are now incorporated within the species accounts rather than appearing separately as was the case with Higgins and Riley, which is much more user friendly and should help with speedier identification of those all so similar Blues and Fritillaries. Unfortunately, the colour plates (more than a 100) are, like its predecessor, plonked in the centre of the book which means a lot of thumbing backwards and forwards between the plates and the text. As we have come to expect from Richard Lewington, however, the plates are of an extremely high standard and there has been a conscious effort to group together similar

species which should aid the task of identification. Two introductory plates serve to illustrate the characteristics of the main families of butterflies to be found in Europe and should be of help to the beginner. Butterfly twitchers will also no doubt appreciate the addition of a full checklist of European butterflies with accompanying tick boxes. All in all, then, a worthy successor to Higgins and Riley and a book that will no doubt prove essential packing to the European traveller well into the next century.

- ★ Butterfly Conservation members can obtain a £2 reduction on this price by using the order form in the Autumn issue of *Butterfly Conservation News*.

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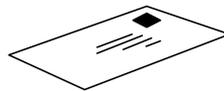
Mike Williams

Information for Contributors

The deadline for
Spring newsletter
contributions is
Tuesday 3rd March
1998

Hand-written articles will be transcribed and returned for corrections. Printed documents will be less prone to transcription errors, especially as it is often possible to scan them in directly. Discs would be very welcome, ideally plain ASCII, but anything readable by Microsoft Word 7.0 should be fine.

Pictures will normally be scanned in and should be black and white. (The final reprographic process for printing off the



newsletter does not do justice to 'grey scale' or colour). Note that, unlike text, pictures cannot be modified by me (except for size adjustment).

Copyright: Pictures for publication must of course be free of copyright restrictions.

Spelling: I will try to correct obvious spelling mistakes unless this affects the writer's style but, in the cause of achieving a consistent format, will use the Word UK dictionary spelling where there are several options.

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Christine Chance

Letters

from T.G. Bucknall

Sunday 17th August was Worcestershire's **MAD** day, with the southern end of Worcs. the target area, being the county's most under recorded area.

Or so I thought. Unfortunately no one else turned up, so single handedly I headed off to the Longdon Marsh area. A total of 13 species were recorded, all common species.

If more people had turned up, more tetrads could have been covered, allowing us to move

to other areas next year. However there will now be under recorded tetrads to the south of the county, so they will have to wait until next year.

To return to a plea from Digby Wood in the last news sheet, please don't assume on these events, that someone else will always turn out.

Yours faithfully,

T.G. Bucknall

Winter Programme 1997/98

Winter work parties generally take place in all weathers but if in doubt check with either the Conservation Officer or the appropriate county group organiser first. Most work parties last until mid-afternoon and those planning to stay all day should bring lunch and something to drink. Tools and work gloves are provided. New faces are particularly welcome. Work is

only as hard as you want it to be and if you can only stay for part of the day that is fine. Why not give it a try?

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Mike Williams

Dates for your Diary

Sunday, 26th October

Conservation task - Trench Wood NR

Meet 10.00 a.m. at reserve entrance on Sale Green - Dunhampstead road. OS Map 150 GR. 929588.

Sunday, 2nd November

Conservation task - Monkwood NR

Meet 10.00 a.m. at reserve entrance on Sinton Green - Monkwood Green road. OS Map 150 GR. 803603.

Saturday, 8th November

Log Sale - Monkwood NR

10 00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. in the reserve car park. Large bags of firewood £3 per bag. All profits go to further conservation work in the wood. Discounts for five bags or more.

Wednesday, 12th November

Joint meeting - Worcestershire Wildlife trust & Butterfly Conservation

7.45 p.m. at Droitwich High School (see page 2 for details).

Dates for your diary.....continued

Saturday, 22nd November Branch AGM & Member's Day

2.30 p.m. at Bishops Wood (see page 3 for details)

Sunday, 23rd November Conservation task - Trench Wood NR

Details as 26th October.

Sunday, 7th December Conservation task - Monkwood NR

Details as 2nd November.

Sunday, 14th December Conservation task - Hunthouse Wood NR

Meet 10.00 a.m. at the entrance to M & M Timber on Clows Top - Frith Common road. OS Map 138 GR. 701706.

Sunday, 28th December Conservation task - Trench Wood NR

Details as 26th October.

Sunday, 4th January Action Earth day - Monkwood NR

Details as 2nd November. Hot soup and mincepies lunchtime. Special Action Earth certificates for all those taking part.
Saturday,

Saturday 10th January Log Sale - Monkwood NR

Details as 8th November.

Sunday, 11th January The great egg hunt - Grafton Wood NR

Meet 10.00 a.m. at Grafton Church just off the main Worcester - Alcester road (take road signposted Huddington then turn right after 200 yards). Help us with the

annual count of Brown Hairstreak eggs and take the opportunity of viewing Butterfly Conservation's newest reserve. OS Map 150 GR. 962558

Sunday, 18th January Conservation task - IMI Wyre Forest

Meet 10.00 a.m. at Earnwood Copse car park on the Bewdley - Kinlet road. Please be on time as we shall be driving to the site in convoy. OS Map 138 GR. 745785.

Sunday, 25th January Conservation task - Trench Wood NR

Details as 26th October.

Saturday, 31st January Butterfly Identification course (part 1)

Joint event with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust based at the Worcester City Museum in The Tything. 2.00 - 5.00 p.m. Ideal for beginners or those that wish to extend their knowledge. The course will be led by Digby Wood and Mike Williams. Cost £5 per session and bookings should be made, including a cheque, to WWT, Lower Smite Farm, Smite Hill, Hindlip, Worcs WR3 8SZ.

Sunday, 1st February Conservation task - Monkwood NR

Details as 2nd November.

Friday, 6th February Mexico - Monarchs and Mayas

Provisional departure date for repeat of 1997 trip (highly recommended), returning on 21st February. For full details see article on page 7 in this newsletter and ring group leader, Joe Cocker on 01905-617935.

Dates for your diary.....continued

Saturday, 7th February
Log Sale - Monkwood NR

Details as 8th November.

Sunday, 8th February
Conservation task - Dowles Valley, Wyre

Meet entrance to Hawkbatch car park at 10.00 a.m. Please be on time as we shall be driving to site in convoy. OS Map 138 GR. 765773.

Saturday, 14th February
Butterfly Identification Course (part 2)

Details as 31st January.

Sunday, 15th February
Conservation task - Mortimer Forest

Meet 10.00 a.m. at High Vinnalls car park off Ludlow to Wigmore road. OS Map 137 GR. 473731.

Sunday, 22nd February
Conservation task - Trench Wood

Details as 26th October.

Sunday, 1st March
Conservation task - Monkwood NR

Details as 2nd November.

Sunday, 8th March
Conservation task - Prees Heath

Meet 11.00 a.m. (note later starting time) in parking area to east of A49. Support our annual heather bash to benefit the Midlands' only colony of Silver-studded Blues. OS Map 126 GR. 558367.

Sunday, 15th March
Conservation task - Bircher Common

Meet 10.00 a.m. at Highwood end gate at bottom of lane passing Croft Castle. OS Map 149 GR. 458658.

Sunday, 22nd March
Conservation task - Trench Wood NR

Details as 26th October.