



No. 40

NEWSLETTER

Summer 1998

WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH, BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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Chairman's Message

Hedgerows for wildlife

Hedgerows are one of the main features of the English countryside and provide a home for all manner of wildlife, birds, animals and many, many insects. A journey through the prairie-like farmlands of East Anglia makes us realise how much the character of our Midland countryside depends on its hedges, and this has been true for centuries. The youngest of our hedges were planted in the 18th century as a result of the Enclosure Acts which swept away most of the old mediaeval field systems and common arable fields and replaced them with the chequer-board pattern of fields enclosed by Hawthorn hedges that we know so

well. But some hedges go back to Norman and even Saxon times and whilst Hawthorn was commonly used for these hedges, as the years rolled by many other species of tree, shrub and plant became established in the hedge base creating the rich, varied conditions so supportive of wildlife.

In fact, the approximate age of a hedge can be estimated by counting the number of species in it and Dr Max Hooper developed a hedge dating formula based on the number of hardwood species in a 30 metre length of hedge.

Age of hedge (years) =
(Number of hardwood species X 110) + 30.

This ignores woody climbers, brambles and counts all rose species as one. To get a reasonable estimate several lengths of hedge have to be examined and the results averaged, but even then it only gives a very approximate age. Nevertheless the species count is a very good indicator of the wildlife value of a hedge and when a number of national wildlife agencies got together to lobby the government to include some protection for hedges in the 1995 Environment Act, they proposed that hedges containing 5 or more hardwood species should be protected. Our formula indicates that hedges over about 550 to 600 years old would be included, that is those planted before about 1400 to 1450. But what would this mean in conservation terms? Well, the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust have, over the last few years, carried out a botanical survey of all the fields in the county of Worcestershire and from this data they estimate that about 30% of the county's hedges would be protected and that would seem to be a very reasonable level of

protection. "Great!" I hear you say, but hold on there's more to come. During the consultative phase of the legislative process prior to the issue of the new regulations in June '97, other interests persuaded the government to change the criterion for protection from 5 species to 7 species. Just a small change, nobody would mind. Hedges would now have to be some 800 or more years old to get protection, that is hedges planted in Norman times. According to the W.W.T. data, instead of 30% of their hedges being protected only 2.5% would qualify, leaving 97.5% of Worcestershire's hedges freely available for ripping out. Other counties could well be worse off.

Each one of us will have their own ideas as to how these things happen, but time and time again the laws that are passed to defend our environment turn out to be ineffective and those who would despoil our countryside for all sorts of "good" reasons are allowed to have their way. After all, it will only take 800 years to repair the damage

- Digby Wood

Obituary - Gordon Benningfield.

It is with great regret that we have received the news of the death of Butterfly Conservation's President, Gordon Benningfield, on 4th May. He was a wildlife artist with an international reputation and his great love of butterflies showed through in many of his paintings. He was a regular speaker at the National Members Days, and when he failed to appear at the 1998 meeting in February, with typical candour, he asked Harold Hughes to explain

that he was in hospital receiving treatment for cancer. Nevertheless it was his intention to fulfil future engagements as soon as the treatment allowed and he therefore accepted our invitation to open the Grafton Wood Reserve on 2nd May. In the event he was taken back into hospital.

His enormous talent as a painter will be sadly missed by the world of art and we will miss a kindly, unassuming man who loved butterflies.

- Digby Wood

Coming Events

Cumbria Field Trip - Saturday 8th August

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO BOOK SEATS.
ADDITIONAL PICK-UP POINT AT
BIRMINGHAM (NORTH) SERVICES.

Our second coach trip of the season is to a National Nature Reserve in Cumbria and the target species, which will be new to many of our Members, are the Scotch Argus and

Northern Brown Argus with Dark Green Fritillary thrown in for good measure.

The site is also known for its colony of Red Squirrels. Plants include Rock Rose, Bloody Cranesbill, Melancholy Thistle, Blue Moor Grass, Bird's Foot Sedge, Lesser Wintergreen, Herb Paris and Stone Bramble. Orchids include common Twayblade, Birdsnest, greater Butterfly and Broadleaved Helleborine. The birds seen in the area are Redstart, Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Sparrowhawk.

The date is Saturday the 8th August and because it is a longish drive we will be making an early start. The pick-up points and times are:

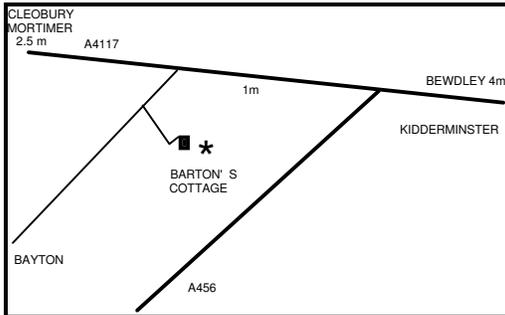
- Worcester (Croft Road) 6.30 am.
- Bromsgrove (Bus station) 7.00 am.
- Birmingham North Services .
- (Hilton Park M6.) 7.30 am.

Send your remittance for £16 to:

Terry Smith,
42 Wiseacre Croft,
Shirley,
Solihull,
B90 1BB.

or phone Terry on 0121 4303945.

Gardens for Butterflies - Open Day Barton's Cottage

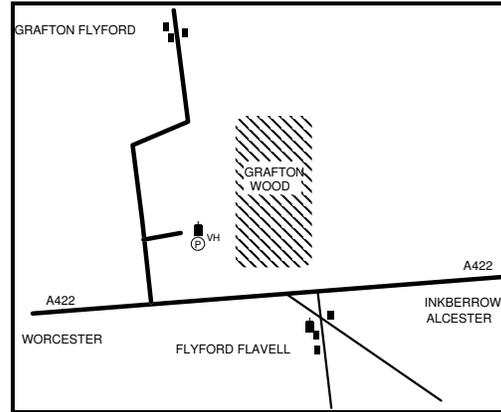


On Sunday 9th August the gardens will be open at Barton's Cottage. This is a 3.5 acre cottage garden managed for butterflies and other wildlife: it is being specially opened for Gardens for Butterflies year courtesy of Mr and Mrs. Ron Hunt. This promises to be a delightful afternoon. Refreshments available. See map and diary entry for travel details. Barton's Cottage will be signposted from the main road. For further information contact Richard Southwell (01384-397066 after 6pm only).

Branch A.G.M. and Members day

The Branch annual general meeting will be held at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday 21st November at Three Villages Hall, Grafton Flyford. The speaker will be Tom Brereton Fritillaries Officer, based at the Conservation Office Wareham, who will be giving us a progress report on his work, including feedback on the national Pearl-bordered Fritillary Survey with which the West Midlands Branch has been closely involved. Those who have not already done so will be able to see this delightfully situated Hall and the surroundings of Grafton

Wood. Please see map for travelling guidance.



Kidderminster Flag Day - Saturday September 26th

Volunteers are required - **please offer before** Mike Williams has to send the press gang out. Ring Mike for further details.

Forthcoming overseas trips

Joe Cocker (of Monarch fame) is offering a new trip to Mexico this year (departing 28th December) which, as well as visiting the Monarch reserve and the various archaeological sites, will also include whale watching off the Mexican coast and a trip on the spectacular Copper Canyon railway. Provisional cost is around £1,250 returning to Britain around 12th January. Joe is also planning trips to Peru, Spain and N. Italy in 1999 all with wildlife/archaeological interest. For further details contact Joe on 01905-617935 or Email:

jcocker@latinlink.herefordshire.com.

Reports on Events

Grafton Wood Opening

After a week of uncertain weather the 2nd May dawned bright and sunny. We arrived early at the Three Villages Hall, Grafton Flyford to find that the members of the hall committee had already erected a sun canopy on one side of the newly renovated hall and were installing the public address system. Our colleagues from the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust set up their display of local wildlife alongside the West Midlands Branch display which had been specially extended to cover the Brown Hairstreak, the Grafton Wood speciality. Tables and chairs were set out on the terrace and on the grass area adjacent to the hall and the ladies of the 3 villages were soon dispensing tea and cakes to the rapidly gathering crowd of visitors. The sun shone while Brimstones, Holly Blues, Orange Tips and Green Veined Whites gave us their own particular welcome.

The Hall, converted from a 17th century school building, stands on rising ground surrounded entirely by fields save for a beautiful half timbered farmhouse complete with duck pond next door, the site overlooking Grafton Wood, fresh and green for spring, a half mile away. At the appropriate time our guests arrived representing all the parties involved in the acquisition of the new reserve and also the Parish Council who were sharing the occasion to inaugurate their new waymarked walks, radiating from the Village Hall, some via Grafton Wood.

There were short speeches from Ron Stanton (Chairman of W.W.T.), Harold Hughes (B.C. National Chairman) and Digby Wood (W.M. Branch Chairman) describing the functions of their several organisations and explaining that this was the third joint purchase of a reserve by the Worcester Trust and B.C., the others being Monkwood and Trench Wood, and confirming how successful these joint ventures had been. Thanks were offered to our benefactors -the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Wychavon District Council and an anonymous B.C. Member - who made the purchase possible, and also to the three villages community for their welcome and unstinting help in making all the arrangements for the opening. Mrs Jean

Honeybourne (Chair of the Parish Council) then gave details of the new walks and finally, Mr Peter Luff (M.P. for Worcester), who had stepped into the breach at short notice, delivered an extremely funny and well researched piece and unveiled a plaque to declare Grafton Wood Nature Reserve open.

Guided walks through the wood followed and most of those present braved the half mile walk across rough tracks to see the magnificent display of bluebells and the butterflies. (The Transect Count taken during the morning had totalled more than 120 butterflies). It was a great day.

A Gold for Butterfly Conservation

The Butterfly Conservation exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show has been awarded a coveted Gold Medal. The garden was designed by Marney Hall, well known as the originator of the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme that is used for all our Transect recording. Marney described the garden at the recent National Members Day, saying that it was envisaged as a quarryman's garden, complete with hut, flower border, a wildflower meadow with a woodland fringe and a 6 foot waterfall! Congratulations to all concerned. It has brought a lot of good publicity to Butterfly Conservation.

National Grizzled Skipper Survey - Wyre Forest

Three weeks before the programmed date of the Pearl Bordered Fritillary Walk (17 May 1998) in the Wyre Forest an envelope dropped on my doormat from Mike Slater requesting that I undertake a nine week survey of the Grizzled Skipper as part of the national survey.

On the day a cavalcade of 14 cars and one motor bike conveying 35 members visited seven specific sites, three of which recorded a very low density of between three and five individuals.

However the premier site exceeded all expectations and on this evidence has been confirmed as the largest known colony in the West Midlands. Furthermore an extended area of 70 acres supporting three colonies suggests it will probably equal any within the U.K. - for the record the county is Shropshire.



Grizzled Skippers

Thanks are due to all concerned for their diligence and as an aside a number of members were rewarded with excellent views of a pair of breeding Redstarts and as a finale to the day several members (six) who stayed the course recorded a first as they viewed seven Crossbills feeding in conifers - 1998 being a Crossbill eruption within Wyre Forest.

Food for thought, amongst the various naturalists I encountered along the way, was an elderly gentleman who sent me his records

dating back to the 1970's which including a sighting of the Brown Hairstreak.

In the spring of 1997 Mike Williams, Richard Southwell and I visited this location which supported Blackthorn, sadly much of which had been slashed to a height of 4ft. Despite our searches no eggs were spotted.

Yes, there remains much to be discovered in this 6,000 acre forest.

- Frank Lancaster

Field Trip Report - Kinver Edge, 16th May, 1998

Thirteen persons attended on a very warm and sunny Spring afternoon at this well known Staffordshire beauty spot. The site is a fragment of Staffordshire heathland - a fast disappearing type of habitat and so an opportunity was taken to view associated insect life present here.

The site does have a woodland presence and so not surprisingly, Speckled Wood was seen amongst the trees. In all, seven different species were observed, with the target species, Small Copper and Green Hairstreak being seen only five minutes before the trip ended (and only singletons at that!). Richard Southwell noted a female Brimstone, not, unfortunately seen by the rest of us. The most numerous species seen - Holly Blue.

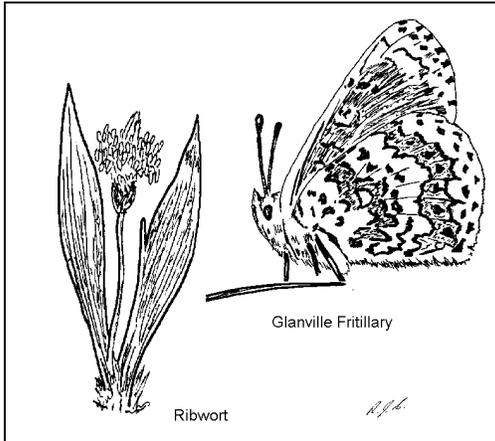
Particularly pleasing was the fact that one member of the party had never seen a Green Hairstreak before!

- Philip Hopson

Lady Eleanor Glanville requests the pleasure of ...

Probably all of us who are interested in butterflies and their conservation could learn something from Eleanor who was an active lepidopterist in the late seventeenth century. Indeed she made a sizeable donation in her will to the cause much to the disappointment of some of her relatives who attempted to have the will set aside by reference to the "Act of

Lunacy". After all, who in their right mind would pursue such a hobby, it was argued. At the trial well known experts supported her, just like Butterfly Conservation would today, though the sense of incredulity persists since one, a Mr. Ray, had predeceased Lady Eleanor by four years! I would love to have witnessed the proceedings.



So in her memory and with a spirit of crazy adventure about us sixteen departed early one Sunday morning, following an overnight downpour, to visit the butterfly named after her. A little mini-bus was our transport and middle-aged spread quickly reminded most of us that it was designed for school kids as our bottoms squeezed into tiny spaces. Also the inability to use the overhead luggage rack plagued us all day, our heads being the recipients of various flying objects. The main culprits were Terry's boots - though I wondered whether Mr. Ray's ghost was inhabiting them!

The lunacy continued as we arrived at Sand Point National Trust car park. The attendant's demonic eyes dulled when Mike showed his Group Pass but inside there was mayhem. Fairground dodgems summed up the vision as cars reversed into already filled parking spaces. Probably us shouting and gesticulating from inside the mini-bus only made matters worse. No one seemed too upset but we had some doubts about the rest of the day when we found out the miscreants were closely associated with our West Country Branch local guides! However we regrouped and waited for the arrival of the Wiltshire Branch. We later found they had already started their walk. The wait had its benefits as a migrating Red Admiral passed through while others studied the habits of a massive Goat Moth caterpillar. Indeed the delay didn't matter since the weather was cloudy but by the time we reached the Glanville area bright patches in

the sky were occurring with increasing frequency. Anticipation mixed with concern followed when the Lady was not spotted as every patch of sun brought out masses of Brown Argus, Common Blue and all the Whites.

Watching the clouds we soon cottoned on to the fact that studying their movement over the sea surface was a far better predictor. The human species is naturally competitive and I'm sure we all harboured the desire to be first to spot our host. No chance, she eventually emerged simultaneously all over the site quelling any likelihood of bitter argument. For many of us this was the first ever sighting and I'm sure no one was disappointed.

Sad to relate a number of us, including the writer, now had the desire to spot the elusive Wall Brown. Walking along the top of the ridge brought us success but patience was needed. Lady Glanville wanted all the attention focused on her so the Walls dutifully obliged by vanishing every time a camera approached. Ask Ian about this, but very quietly, since I would lay "evens" this mild mannered Scotsman will become incandescent when reminded. We also met the elusive Wiltshire contingent on a particularly narrow, precipitous path. A Mexican stand off then ensued as we each looked at the other as though they were creatures from outer space. Worse followed as the youngest in our party, Debbie, politely stepped aside and in the process spotted a most amazing moth nestling at the bottom of a crag. Pandemonium ensued, the poor little insect was surrounded by Wiltshire cameras and general consensus agreed it was a Cream Spot Tiger. They left and we then checked the hidden colour of the rear wing - it was orange. Verification by reference to Skinner during lunch concluded it was probably a Scarlet Tiger. The writer commented that it didn't look like either so let battle commence on a quiz night on neutral ground. Our Lady of the day would not have been amused, either with us, or the Tiger Moth's variable livery.

Lunch was pretty uneventful though one of Worcester's intrepid tetrad bashers, Colin Hill, came down with his in-laws to check whether we are doing our fair share of recording this year. As we finished nibbles Mr. Whippy arrived which was most welcome in the hot and humid conditions. In the ensuing melee Jancis showed no pride as she outrageously licked my lolly!

A large convoy followed the previously mentioned aberrant car driver to Crook Peak

for our afternoon foray. No problem for the cars but our mini-bus nearly got wedged underneath the motorway. I can't believe his spatial awareness guaranteed we had one inch clearance!

The walk started gently, with many new species identified, including two very early Meadow Browns. Increasingly grand views over the Somerset countryside were revealed. We were by now starting to appreciate why our guide wore a striking Panama hat as a route march to beat all route marches unfolded. For some of our weaker Branch members, which was most of us, it was the only way of following the direction of the walk from a distance. The target species, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was spotted in low numbers by the leaders but being frisky in the heat they had gone by the time the rest of us caught up. Still we spotted a few flying over the car park at the end of the walk to make amends along with the manic darting movements of Large Skipper.

It does seem one of the advantages of these trips, apart from visiting famous sites, is the meeting of new enthusiasts from other areas, sharing experiences and information and the general sense of goodwill that is engendered. On this day we were all surprised to learn that the Large Skipper generally appears one week earlier in the Midlands compared to Somerset. I wonder why? A massive twenty-one species were seen including the lucky person who spotted the single Small Tortoiseshell! Finally our spirits were somewhat dampened by delays caused by a motorway multiple crash on the return journey but I guess all in all it was an accidental sort of day. Health and Safety advice books will have to be rewritten to account for irregular parking procedures and Terry's haunted boots.

A great many thanks to Lady Eleanor for inviting us to the Ball and also to her sturdy manservants from West Country Branch: you are welcomed to the Wyre Forest next year to see both the Pearl-bordered species over far less strenuous terrain.

Still if all this has whetted your appetite for the **Cumbrian Scotch Argus trip** in August do apply quickly as rumours of a black market for tickets are starting. N.B. Stafford and Salop members are particularly encouraged since convenient collecting points can be arranged off the M6 as the coach travels northwards.

- Richard Southwell

Small Copper - Stops Play

The four 'B' encompass my principle leisure pursuits, butterflies, birds, bridge, bowls - it is the latter which I have discovered as a transient habitat for butterflies. To quote but three instance in 1997.

A total of 27 Holly Blues observed in two hours of play, all flying across the bowling green in a westerly direction - this coincided with their emergence in April.

The most striking observation was a Clouded Yellow which graced the green for several minutes - possibly the only Worcestershire sighting in 1997.

Heavy rain is the only reason a bowls match stops play - not so! In the middle of a club match a Small Copper alighted on one of a cluster of eight woods and yours truly expounded on the beauty of butterflies.

For those readers who recline in deck chairs watching cricket - take your eye off the ball awhile and look for

Ⓟ Frank Lancaster

“You can't rush a good breakfast” Mid-Wales weekend 26-28 June

After the mixed weather on the 1997 Exmoor weekend, we were hoping for better conditions this year for the Branch's weekend in Wales. The forecast was not good and neither was the weather as we set out from Kidderminster railway station in a mini-bus. The party consisted of Terry and Jancis Smith, Mike Williams, Frank Lancaster, Richard Southwell, Jeff Andrews, Bob Bishop and Ian Duncan.

In Churchstoke we met up with Dr. Simon Spencer, the Montgomeryshire recorder. In spite of the weather, we split into small groups and walked some potentially good butterfly habitat on Corndon Hill and Todleth Hill. The thinking was that, although we were unlikely to see much in the prevailing conditions, we could at least get to know the area and hopefully revisit when the weather was better. We met up for a pub lunch and were surprised to learn that everyone had seen butterflies, albeit only Small Heaths.

Conditions were even worse after lunch and we took a short walk through an area of woodland where the only find was a colony of Peacock caterpillars. It was here that we encountered a herd of horses and Richard attempted to make friends with a very large and jealous stallion. The rest of us beat a hasty retreat.

On to Welshpool, where we were booked into a variety of B&Bs, ranging from ordinary to downright decadent. We met up for an evening meal in a Welshpool pub and loudly cheered England in their match against Colombia in the World Cup (in spite of the locals' apparent preference for Rugby).

On Saturday morning, we were due to leave at 9 am and as one B&B didn't start serving breakfast until 8.30 am we were a little late away, but as Terry rightly observed "you can't rush a good breakfast" and, as he was our driver, what he said went. Our plan was to survey the Migneint area north-east of Dolgellau in the Snowdonia National Park. We drove through some stunning scenery and looked in vain for signs of improvement in the weather. In the car park at Bala we were joined by Dennis Goodbody, one of our seven Welsh Branch members. Dennis confessed to being a beginner at the butterfly game but he stayed with us for the next two days and helped greatly with his local knowledge.

Our target species was Large Heath, which had been noted in the area in recent years. Again we split into small groups and searched boggy areas where its food plant, Cotton Grass, was noted. By this time the rain had eased but it was still overcast with a cool wind. At Hafod-y-Rhedrwydd, near Penmachno we managed to see numerous Small Heaths and also Small Copper, Green-veined White and an unidentified Fritillary. On the mountain road to lake Vyrnwy we spent some time trying to run down another Fritillary, only to discover eventually that what we had actually seen was a Northern Eggar moth. Dinner again in Welshpool. This time some of the party enjoyed, some tolerated and some avoided curries at the local Indian restaurant.

Sunday morning dawned bright and sunny and we needed to be on our way by 8.45 am but "you can't rush a good....", "all right Terry you've made your point".

Not a cloud in the sky as we bowled along to

the Elan valley and Mike even spotted a Clouded Yellow just before Rhayader. At the Visitor Centre we met up with Richard Knights, the RSPB Warden, who showed us some promising areas for search on the map. Once again, our target species was to be the Large Heath and we split into small groups and were dropped off in likely areas to survey up until lunch time. I was paired up with Richard with instructions to watch him closely after he had waded into a bog on the previous day. Over a picnic lunch we compared notes and reported mixed fortunes. One group had seen Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and Richard and I were able to report the only Large Heath of the weekend. It was agreed that we were probably a week or two too early. Further walks in the area around the Visitor Centre and in one or two likely places on the way home added further species to our tally, including Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Large Skipper and we ended the weekend with a total of 12 species.

It is remarkable that, in spite of the often appalling weather conditions, at no time did spirits flag. This, in spite of some members wading through waist-high bracken in pouring rain having forgotten to bring waterproof over-trousers or sinking waist deep into the "Grimpen Mire".

An undemanding lot these butterfly conservationists. All they need is a break in the clouds and an unhurried breakfast.

- Bob Bishop

Gardens for Butterflies - Allotments

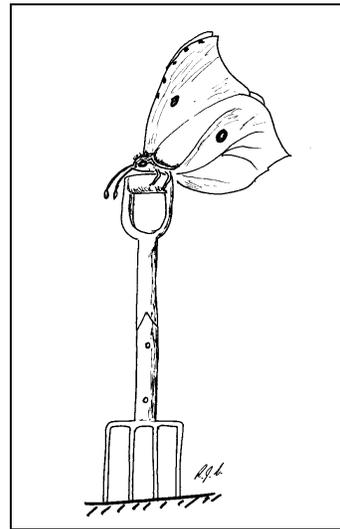


Two miles west of the centre of Birmingham is a triangular area of almost three acres - two sides bounded by mature trees, Ash, Lime, Beech Horse-chestnut and others; the third side with trees and the gardens of houses backing on to the site. A stream, Chad Brook, runs the length of the site. This is Harborne Hill Leisure Gardens home of some eighty allotments and eighteen species of butterfly.

My husband and I have three plots, on each as well as vegetables, Garlic Mustard and Sweet Rocket are grown in abundance in the flower borders. The Sweet Rocket has proved popular with those (humans) who catch the scent but it can be uphill work explaining that these weeds (wild flowers) are not just tolerated but encouraged to attract butterflies. Marjoram and Mint also have a high profile; Golden Rod, Hyssop, Corncockle, Germander and white daisies cover the rest of the borders. Because the plots are in fact a series of "gardens" there is an opportunity to watch the behaviour of butterflies in other "gardens" apart from ones own. Last year, the year of the Tortoiseshell, walking the length of the drive one lunch time we counted more than 200; there were numbers on our allotment but a row of Garlic Chives on one plot and a row of Statice grown by a neighbour took first prize for attracting these butterflies. I begged some of the Garlic Chives plant for my border - now I'm waiting.

Over the years we have learned to look for the Skippers on the top leaves of the potatoes when they are first touched by the morning sun, the blues (both Holly and Common) on the Mint, particularly on a large patch grown by

another neighbour. For some reason the blues often sit on the dead heads of the Corncockles on dull days and before the sun comes up; they also seem to be attracted to the Golden Rod but not to that which we grow at home! Home or away the Marjoram attracts the Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns. and the Skippers.



Apart from the flowers and herbs, we planted two Buddleias, an Alder Buckthorn and some Hops Last year we were rewarded by having Brimstone caterpillars on the Buckthorn - these ate every vestige of leaf and in desperation we brought some home to put on an even smaller tree; we also visited the University Botanical Gardens to see if they had an Alder Buckthorn - the on-site expert showed us to a near relative which the caterpillars apparently did not fancy! We have now invested in three more plants - but this year no luck. Although we had some Orange-tip caterpillars at home, the masses of Garlic Mustard on the allotment did not, as far as we could tell, produce any. However, we were excited to spot eight or nine on our Sweet Rocket - the last of these was still on the plant when we went down to the plot this morning (1st July). This is also the first year that we have had Comma caterpillars on our Hops, or at least the first time we have seen them.

One of the more frustrating aspects of butterfly watching on site is the rule that no one may set foot on another allotment unless the holder is present. Thus an interesting looking butterfly may escape to an out of bounds plot before it has been properly identified, there is a strong temptation to stand about hoping that it will reappear. I would not like to confess the number of times I visited the spot on our own allotment where I saw a Wall Brown in 1996. On 7th June this year we saw an early Large Skipper on someone else's spinach (not ours of course) and felt obliged to explain to others why we were spending so much time staring at the plants.

Plot holders are required to cultivate their allotments to a minimum standard - failure to do so results in a "dirty allotment" notice; it has to be said of the two plots currently in this state that one produced the Large Skipper and the other a fine crop of Tortoiseshell caterpillars on a clump of nettles. This is not to say that the whole site is cultivated within an inch of its life; the mature trees ensure that those with an allotment reaching under them are forced to leave some land untouched as tree roots make cultivation impossible. The banks of the brook are also wild as is the bottom of the Hawthorn hedge which surrounds much of the site.

I began my "watching" with Ladybird Watch: This has lead me to try and introduce as many people as possible to the ladybird larva, a rather sinister looking being, bearing no resemblance to the adult. Unfortunately the larvae often appear to be "infesting" a plant and have been killed by people who would go to some lengths not to harm a ladybird. The problem with caterpillars is not as bad, but similar; everyone knows that most caterpillars turn into butterflies but since many caterpillars are greenish and eat foliage they are often bracketed with the cabbage white caterpillars and are therefore unpopular.

As a result of boring everyone who will listen about larvae and the desirability of growing plants for butterflies I have now got my "comeuppance" in that I am occasionally asked identify some "specimen" - including, recently, some particularly evil looking inch long, grey-white, rat tailed larvae swimming happily in a butt of Comfrey water. Having no formal training in entomology I had as usual to admit ignorance and promise to consult the books - the answer, they were Drone Fly larvae.

The majority of members are retired, some are over eighty, but over the past two or three years there has been a influx of younger people renting allotments - this group is notable for preferring organic gardening or as nearly organic as is practical. The trend is not entirely confined to the new recruits - some of the older gardeners are keen to avoid peat and use minimal pesticides. The skills available vary from plumbing (very useful when the stand pipes freeze), to law (hopefully we won't need this) and accountancy. Only a few women rent an allotment on their own .

There are almost 8,000 allotment sites in England with a combined area of more than 25,000 acres. Most people rent an allotment to grow vegetables but it is rare to see a plot without some flowers and herbs. If plot-holders could be encouraged to grow even a small number of butterfly friendly plants this would surely make a significant contribution. As it is, I regularly see more butterflies and especially more butterfly larvae at the local allotment than any other site. There has recently been a national campaign to encourage people to take on plots - hence the interest generated among younger people. The National Association Magazine "Allotment and Leisure Gardener" recently carried a two page article on growing wild flowers - butterflies were mentioned once, in the last paragraph, under the heading Buddleia. That the article appeared at all demonstrates a huge change in attitude - it would seem that this is a good time to carry the Gardens for Butterflies crusade to plot-holders.

- Christine Chance

Butterfly Line - a thank you to all Butterfly Line informants

Since it began, Butterfly Line has raised in excess of £10,000.

If you have used the service, you'll know that the line provides feedback on the butterflies (and day flying moths) that members have reported during the previous week. It gives predictions of the end of broods and the likelihood of fresh specimens for the keen photographers amongst us. Then, more awkward to compile as it depends heavily on the weather, there's a guide to the areas of the

UK most likely to provide specific sightings, or the best range of sightings in the coming week.

The 'Line' is evidently helpful. It gets plenty of positive feedback. Complaints are rare but include the occasional moan that the exact locations of scarce species are not given, or that members' local area wasn't mentioned. Invariably because the 'Line' received very little data from that district the previous week.

The £10,000 raised is due to help given by ordinary Branch members phoning through brief details of their sightings. Even details of common species seen in the garden are helpful. They all contribute to a comprehensive weekly review of our butterflies' fortunes. So if you are already contributing to this record database, a big thank you for helping to raise that £10,000.

If you haven't previously provided information you could ring details through on 01442 824

407. Butterfly Line want to raise the next £10,000 even faster and at the same time reflect the situation in all parts of the UK even more accurately.

Ring in your sightings on 01442 824 407 usual call charges

Listen to Butterfly Line on 0891 884 505 all calls 50p per minute An added inducement to phone sightings in is that Nick Bowles (who collects the data) tells me he's quite happy to chat with people phoning (most evenings) about butterfly related topics. Answer phone at other times.

Out of print butterfly and moth books....

...try David Dunbar, 31 Llanvanor Road, London NW2 2AR (tel. 0181-455-9612)

- Mike Williams

Letters

From Roger Webb to the Millennium Atlas Co-ordinator

I read with interest your letter concerning butterfly recording for the millennium.

It's a good job the millennium doesn't come too often for it seems to have spawned a lot of ideas resulting in a lot of commitments. I happen to be a bell ringer and someone suggested that all the church bells should be rung for the millennium without wondering whether there are enough ringers. At the moment I have weekly teaching sessions teaching some recruits. I mention this just as an aside.

I joined the BBCS (as it was then called) a few years ago, principally because of my interest in photography and because I had chosen butterflies as a new subject to photograph. Obviously to achieve results I had to find out where the less well known subjects lived.

Being a bit of a butterfly myself my interests have now flitted from photography to other things (e.g. bellringing!) but because I had enjoyed looking at the insects I thought I'd continue my membership of Butterfly Conservation as a way of supporting the creatures. So I should be considered a

sleeping, rather than an active member of the organisation.

Whilst I learned to identify butterflies from photographs sitting at home with a book in front of me, my ability to do so in the wild is a bit suspect. If this limited expertise is acceptable then I'll have a go at what you ask.

Good luck with your project - if the weather holds I might make a start today!

- Roger Webb

From Jane Southwell

It is now three years since butterflies came into our lives. Is it a good or bad thing? We have had a few disappointments but also some wonderful experiences. Toby, our dog, has sniffed some truly incredible scents - we know because we have had to shampoo them off him. Our girls are sometimes apprehensive about the start of the season, but boat rides at Catfield Fen, coach trips with friends to Anglesey, Phil Grahams finger at Prees Heath and honourable mentions in despatches for spotting *Junonia Oenone* at Grove Hill were more than adequate compensation. Debbie took the Gold Medal for being the first to spot Orange Tip in 1997; she always reminds Digby

he is silver! There are so many places we have been to where we would never have gone.

So may I give a big thank you to Butterfly Conservation for coming into our family. My

husband even bought me a pair of walking boots for my birthday - who says romance is dead!

• Jane Southwell

Conservation Corner

Transect walkers required

Transect walks are a vital tool in our efforts to monitor the progress of important butterfly sites in the region and are a relatively painless way of making a real contribution to butterfly conservation. You do not have to be an "expert" to do them and full training can be given; all that is required is a commitment to take a weekly walk in the countryside from April to September along a regular route and to record what butterflies you see. Like butterflies, transect walkers do not venture out when it is wet and windy, in fact the warmer and sunnier it is, the better. Currently, around thirty transects are walked every week, mostly by branch members, covering a whole range of different habitats. They are fun to do and are highly addictive! We have some transect walks that have been running for well over 10 years with no change of recorder. Inevitably, however, circumstances do change and we are currently looking for replacement recorders for the Bromyard transect, for Prestbury Hill NR in Glos, for Wyre Forest east and the new BC/WWT reserve at Grafton Wood. We are also looking to start a new butterfly transect at Ewyas Harold Common in Herefords. If you think this sounds just up your street or you fancy setting up your own butterfly transect at some other site, please get in touch.

Progress on RAP targets

Encouraging progress is being made in our efforts to implement action programmes for the high priority species identified in the West Midlands Regional Action Plan. Each of the twelve top priority butterflies now has its own Species Champion who will seek to co-ordinate the required actions set out in the Plan. The targets for 1998 were agreed at the February meeting of the Regional Conservation Committee and will be reviewed when the Committee next meet in October. The high priority species and their respective champions are as follows: Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Frank Lancaster; High Brown

Fritillary - Andy Nicholls; Marsh Fritillary - Matthew Oates; Grizzled Skipper - Mike Slater; Wood White - Jeff Andrews; Brown Hairstreak - Mike Williams; Small Blue - Mike Slater; Silver-studded Blue - Jenny Joy; Northern Brown Argus - Phil Hopson; Duke of Burgundy - Guy Meredith; Large Heath - Jenny Joy; and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Phil Hopson. All of the Species Champions would be pleased to receive offers of help from members together with any interesting records or observations. The success of this approach is very dependent on the involvement of individual members and anyone with a particular interest in any of the species listed should get in touch with the appropriate Species Champion either directly or via myself.

Action for Fritillaries

Two of our most threatened species regionally - the Marsh and High Brown Fritillaries - have already benefited from funding via English Nature to carry out further survey work aimed at identifying ways of increasing habitat suitability in the immediate vicinity to their remaining sites. This is particularly important for the Marsh Fritillary which has a tendency to die out from isolated sites and ideally requires a network of sites in close proximity to one another if they are to survive in the longer term. The Marsh Fritillary is extremely vulnerable as it is now only found from a single site in Gloucestershire and the aim of the survey will be to examine nearby areas closely in the hope that, with appropriate management, the species may be able to colonise these areas naturally. The work on the High Brown Fritillary will concentrate on the southern Malverns and will again attempt to examine site suitability and suggest measures that may enable better and more extensive areas of habitat being made available. The branch is grateful to English Nature for making funding available to support this vital work.

Biodiversity Action planning

The process of producing Biodiversity Action Plans at county level within the region continues to gather momentum and the hard work put in to the production of our own Regional Action Plan is beginning to pay off. We have already worked very closely with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in the preparation of their Red Data book for the county and will also be involved in the writing of individual species action plans. The latest draft plan to be produced is for Birmingham and the Black Country and once again there should be opportunities for Butterfly Conservation to make an input. Hopefully in this way, we will be able to ensure that local plans fit into agreed national and regional priorities as far as Lepidoptera are concerned and show some basic consistency with one another.

Mothers unite!

Jeff Andrews, our new Moth Officer, would like to hear from members interested in getting involved in the recording of moths, particularly those who own or who are thinking of buying moth traps. Jeff is looking to produce a simple list of the commoner moths and the times of the year when they fly as an aid to those new to moths and somewhat daunted by the pages of often very similar looking species in Skinner. By far the best way of getting into moths, however, is to attend one of the branch's moth evenings (see Spring newsletter for dates) when there are always people on hand to help with identification and pass on much helpful advice. The ongoing moth survey at the Royal Ordnance (formerly IML) site in Wyre Forest is still going well and anyone interested in attending these sessions (first Friday of the month) should contact Frank Lancaster on 01299-824860 for full details. Frank is also hoping to follow up on a 1995 report of Goat Moth in an old orchard on the edge of Wyre and would be interested in hearing from anyone who has other records of this species from the area or who might be interested in joining him in an orchard survey.

Records wanted

While out in the field, tetrad bashing for the Millennium Atlas please do make a note of any other insects (or anything else for that matter) you see and pass on records to the

appropriate Biological Records Centre. If you are not sure where this is contact your local Wildlife Trust who will be able to help you. We have been approached recently by the British Dragonfly Society for assistance with their own Atlas project and given that a number of our members are keen dragonfly enthusiasts, hopefully people will be able to respond positively to this request. The Regional Recorder for the Midlands is Mike Averill, 25 Oakhill Avenue, Kidderminster, DY10 1LZ and he is probably the best initial point of contact for recording forms etc. You may also like to join in with the Great Stag Hunt organised by the People's Trust for Endangered Species who are organising a national survey of the Stag Beetle, which is Britain's largest insect. Stag Beetles used to be found in the region but there have been very few recent records. The males are pretty unmistakable with their large size (up to 2.5 ins long) and huge jaws resembling stag's antlers from which the species derives its name. There is a very good illustration in the Collins Field Guide to Insects (plate 50 in my copy) if you have one. They are completely harmless despite appearances to the contrary and are most likely to be seen in flight on warm evenings during the summer months or perhaps around decaying wood where the females lay their eggs.

Watch out for those Essex Skippers

By the time this newsletter is published, Essex Skippers should hopefully be on the wing. Members in Worcestershire (and also Herefordshire) are urged to check any local Skipper colonies very carefully. Tips on identification were included in the Spring branch newsletter and there was also a session on Essex Skipper spotting at our Spring meeting. If you missed both of these then the Jeremy Thomas field guide is your best point of reference. If you see one over the next few weeks then please ring the Essex Skipper hot line immediately (01299-824860) to report your sighting - we will need date, numbers and grid reference. An update will be included in the Winter newsletter.

Good news for Grafton

Excellent news as the newsletter went to press was that the £30,000 shortfall on the purchase and restoration costs of our new Grafton Wood reserve has been met through a donation from Onyx Environmental Trust, a charitable trust

established by the landfill operator Onyx. This donation was triggered by a private donation of £3,000 from a Butterfly Conservation member to whom we are extremely grateful. This additional money means that we have now met our appeal target and will be able to meet all the conditions of our grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Those people who missed the splendid official opening of the Wood back in May have another chance on 6th September when we shall be keeping our fingers crossed for good weather and a few Brown Hairstreaks on the wing.

Could this be a Clouded Yellow year?

One slightly cheerful note in what has been a pretty depressing early summer for butterflies has been the report of a few Clouded Yellows in the Midlands over the weekend of 21/22 June. There would appear to have been a sizeable invasion on the western side of Britain

especially in N. Ireland, together with Red Admirals and Silver Y moths, and it is certainly worth keeping an eye open for over the coming weeks.

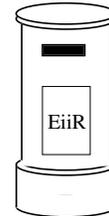
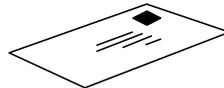
Conservation Days

The full list of conservation tasks over the winter will appear in the next newsletter but a quick reminder is in order of our blackthorn bash planned for August 15th. We shall be working in a privately owned woodland near to Grafton Wood, which some members will have visited (in the rain!) last year. The owner has worked very hard over several years to provide suitable habitat for the Brown Hairstreak and this will be a good chance for branch members to support this sterling work. If the sun shines this time, we might even get a glimpse of a Brown Hairstreak as well!

- Mike Williams

Information for Contributors

The deadline for Winter newsletter contributions is Monday 2nd November 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.

- Christine Chance

Health and Safety

Guidelines for health and safety during activities organised by Butterfly Conservation will be received from Head Office in due course - in the meantime we reproduce those adopted by the Devon Branch:-

"There are important responsibilities laid upon us to do what we can to ensure your safety at

events organised by Butterfly Conservation. Please take a little time to read, consider and act upon the following points at any of our events:

- Wear appropriate foot wear for the conditions expected underfoot.
- Wear appropriate clothing for the conditions to be expected. Protect yourself against Cold, Heat, Sun, Rain, Wind and Thorns.

Consider what precautions you should take to prevent being bitten or stung by insect, plants, snakes or animals.

- Children must be adequately supervised by an adult.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead. Seek permission from the leader before bringing your dog.
- Listen carefully to instructions given by the leader at the beginning of the event.
- Beware of branches swinging back onto you after being passed by the person in front.

- Beware of carefully dug rabbit holes, dug to twist your ankle.
- Inform the leader if you intend to leave early.
- Keep up with the party.
- Carry a drink - you may be away from your car for several hours.
- Observe the country code at all times.
- Enjoy yourself.

Site specific hazards will be outlined by the leader at the start of the field trip.

Dates for your diary

Aug 2 Gardens for Butterflies day - Ryton Gardens, Warks 10.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. at Ryton Organic Gardens, Ryton on Dunsmore near Coventry (signposted from A45). Nearest station: Coventry. Tickets: £2 in advance from Margaret Vickery, 3 The Deer Leap, Dalehouse Lane, Kenilworth, Warks CV8 2HW (please enclose SAE) or £2.50 on the day. Garden butterfly display, flight cage, plant stall. A Warwickshire branch event.

Field trip - Wigmore Rolls, Herefords Meet 2.00 p.m. at entrance to wood on minor road running west from Wigmore village. Organised in conjunction with Forest Enterprise. Charge £2. OS Map 137 GR. 397687. Nearest station: Ludlow. Leader: Andy Nicholls. Target species: Silver-washed Fritillary, Wood White.

Aug 5 Field trip - Trench Wood, Worcs Mid-week walk. Meet 2.30 p.m. in the reserve car park on minor road between Sale Green and Dunhampstead. OS Map 150 GR 929588. Nearest station: Droitwich. Leader: Ken Thomas. Target species: Purple & White letter Hairstreaks.

Aug 7 Wyre Forest moth survey A continuation of the survey started last summer at the IMI site in Wyre Forest (see Winter newsletter for further details). Contact Frank Lancaster on 01299-266168 if you are interested in taking part.

Aug 8 Summer Coach trip - Cumbria Pick-up points: Worcester (Croft Road) 6.30 a.m., Bromsgrove (bus station) 7.00 a.m.,

Birmingham North Services Hilton Park M6 7.30 a.m. Target species: Scotch Argus, Northern Brown Argus, Dark Green Fritillary. Please send cheque to Jan Smith together with a SAE. Seats £16; see page 2

Aug 9 Gardens for Butterflies - Bartons Cottage Open Day 2.30 - 4.30 p.m. at, Far Forest, Rock near Bewdley (signposted from A4117 Bewdley-Cleobury Mortimer Road - take road for Bayton a few hundred yards north of Plough PH). A 3.5 acre cottage garden especially managed for butterflies and other wildlife. OS Map 138 GR.725746. Nearest station: Kidderminster or Bewdley (SVR). Refreshments. Garden specially opened for Gardens for Butterflies year courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Ron Hunt.

Aug 15 Blackthorn bash and Hairstreak hunt Meet 10.00 a.m. at Three Parishes Hall, Grafton Flyford for day of blackthorn management in the heart of hairstreak country. See May 2 for directions. OS Map 150 GR. 963557. Nearest station: Worcester Shrub Hill. Leader: Mike Williams.

Sept 4 Wyre Forest moth survey See Aug 7 for details.

Sept 6 Brown Hairstreak day - Grafton Wood, Worcs A chance to visit Butterfly Conservation's newest reserve. Meet 11.00 a.m. at Three Parishes Hall, Grafton Flyford. See AGM for directions. OS Map 150 GR. 963557. Nearest station: Worcester Shrub Hill. Leader: Mike Williams.

Sept 13 Spider hunt - Monkwood, Worcs
Meet 2.00 p.m. in the reserve car park.
See April 26 for directions. Charge: £1
adults, 50p children includes squash and
biscuits. OS Map 150 GR. 803603.
Nearest station: Worcester Foregate Street.
Leader: Mike Taylor.

Sept 20 Fungal Foray & Feast - Monkwood,
Worcs 10.30 a.m. - 2.30 p.m. Meet 10.30
a.m. in the reserve car park for grand
fungus hunt. Return to car park for 12.30
p.m. for identification session followed by
cookery demonstration and sampling.
Charge: £2 per person. Booking essential.
Please send cheque to Jan Smith by 31st
August. OS Map 150 GR. 803603.
Nearest station: Worcester Foregate Street.
Leader: Diane & Tim Bateman.

Sept 26 Flag day - Kidderminster Meet 8.45
a.m. onwards at base of Rowland Hill
Centre escalator (opposite Mothercare).
Please support our main fundraising event
of the year. Contact Mike Williams on
01299-824860 in advance if you are
planning to come.

Oct 2 Wyre Forest moth survey - A
continuation of the survey started last
summer at the IMI site in Wyre Forest.
Contact Frank Lancaster on 01299-266168
if you are interested in taking part.

Oct 4 Conservation task - Monkwood - NR
Meet 10.00 a.m. at reserve entrance on
Sinton Green- Monkwood Green Road OS
Map 150 GR 803603. Stay as long as you
like - aim to finish mid afternoon.

**Oct 11 Conservation task - Grafton Wood
NR** - meet 10.00 a.m. at the car park of
the Flyford Arms, Flyford Flavell on A422
Worcester-Stratford road OS Map 150 GR
978553 Stay as long as you like - aim to
finish mid afternoon.

**Oct 18 Conservation Task - Bringsty
Common** - meet 10.00 a.m. outside the
former Live and Let Live Public House
turning off the A44 Worcester Bromyard
road OS Map 149 GR 699549. Stay as long
as you like - aim to finish mid afternoon.

**Oct 25 Conservation Task - Trench Wood
NR** - meet 10.00 a.m. at reserve entrance
on Sale Green - Dunhampstead road. OS
Map 150 GR 929588 Stay as long as you
like - aim to finish mid afternoon.

Nov 1 Conservation Task - Monkwood NR -
details as 4th October.

**Nov 8 Conservation Task - Grafton Wood
NR** - details as 11th October.

Nov 21 Branch AGM & Members Day - 2.30
p.m at Three Villages Hall, Grafton Flyford.
Speaker Tom Brereton, Fritillaries Officer.
See map .

**Nov 22 Conservation Task - Trench Wood
NR** - details as 25th October.

Dec 6 Conservation Task - Monkwood NR -
details as 4th October.

**Dec 13 Conservation Task - Grafton Wood
NR** - details as 11 October.

**Dec 27 Conservation task - Trench Wood
NR** - details as 25th October.

Jan 3 Conservation Task - Monkwood NR -
details as 4th October.

**Jan 10 - Conservation Task - Grafton Wood
NR** - details as 11 October.

**Jan 24 - Conservation Task - Trench Wood
NR** - details as 25th October.

Feb 7 - Conservation Task - Monkwood NR
- details as 4th October.

**Feb 14 - Conservation Task - Grafton Wood
NR** - details as 11 October.

**Feb 28 - Conservation Task - Trench Wood
NR** - details as 25th October.

Mar 7 - Conservation Task - Monkwood NR
- details as 4th October.

**Mar 14 - Conservation Task - Grafton Wood
NR** -details a 11 October.

Mar 28 - Conservation Task - Trench Wood
- details as 25th October.