



No. 43

NEWSLETTER

Summer 1999

WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH, BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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Chairman's Message, Summer 1999

As I mentioned in the last Newsletter, next year will be the 21st birthday of the West Midlands branch of Butterfly Conservation. We have decided to mark the occasion by hosting the **National AGM** on Saturday February 26, 2000. It will be held in the Three Counties Showground in Malvern. The theme will be "Butterflies in the Wider Countryside".

Speakers will cover topics on how best to manage all aspects of the countryside, including farms, woodlands and hedgerows, to provide diverse, species rich habitats. The emphasis will be on the large percentage of the countryside which is not held as reserves. It is only if we talk to and encourage these landowners that significant results can be achieved.

Particular attention will be paid to farmland, by far the largest part of the countryside. We are

often too ready to criticise farmers who are only responding to the economic climate created within the EU. If we want change we must lobby our MEPs to change the Common Agricultural Policy to provide real incentives to farmers to manage their land in more environmentally friendly ways. We also need to provide advice to farmers to help create a better countryside within the existing economic framework.

We can hopefully achieve with the farming community what has been achieved with the Forestry Commission/Forest Enterprise. I recently spent a day on a workshop with the Forestry Commission on managing woodlands for fritillaries. I was very encouraged with the FC attitude to try to do as much as possible to assist wildlife within the constraints of their commercial environment. The close co-operation between Frank Lancaster of Butterfly Conservation and Forest Enterprise in the Wyre

Forest has shown what can be achieved. This has now resulted in similar initiatives in the Forest of Dean and Haugh Wood. However it should not just be a one way relationship with Butterfly Conservation asking Forest Enterprise to do things. We need to monitor the habitats they are creating and to provide feedback on the results.

We also need to build our relationships with other conservation bodies such as the Wildlife Trusts. We have close links with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and we need to extend this to the other Wildlife Trusts in our area.

I see the National AGM as a means of informing all these organisations of our activities and starting/continuing our dialogue with them. We intend to invite them to attend and set up displays of their work if they wish. These are exciting times for conservation with unprecedented funds available from sources such as the Lottery.. We need to make the most of this opportunity by working together will all involved in the countryside to create a healthy and vibrant countryside.

☺ Ian Duncan

Staffordshire hosts WM Branch AGM

We would like to involve more of our members from Birmingham, Staffordshire and Shropshire in our activities. To try to encourage this we have moved the venue for this year's Branch AGM to the RSPB reserve at Sandwell Valley, starting at **2.00pm on Saturday October 30th**. We are pleased that Stephen Jeffcoate, our new national chairman, has agreed to be our guest speaker. Stephen will give his ideas on how he sees Butterfly Conservation developing into the next century - a thought provoking and stimulating topic.

Please try to attend to air your views.

For those who would like to take in a spot of bird watching at Sandwell Valley before the meeting, the following birds may be seen in October:

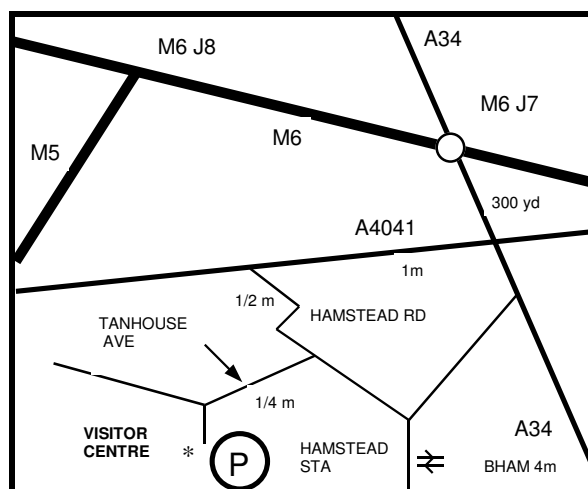
Pochard, Tufted Duck, Widgeon, Shoveler, Goosander, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Snipe, Green and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, Moorhen, Coot, and (seen in recent years), Spotted Crake.

☺ Ian Duncan

How to get there

By car: Leave the M6 at junction 7, travelling south along the A34 towards Birmingham. Turn right at the traffic lights (Scott Arms P.H.) onto the A4041 (Newton Rd.), travelling west. After 1 mile, turn left onto Hamstead Rd.(B4167). After a further 1/2 mile, turn right into Tanhouse Avenue and follow RSPB sign to turn left to the Visitor Centre and car park.

By public transport: Hamstead railway station is on Hamstead Rd. about 1 mile from the Visitor Centre. A number 16 bus (not 16A) runs from Birmingham city centre, past Hamstead railway station and along Hamstead Rd. past the end of Tanhouse avenue. The entry to the reserve is opposite no. 23 Tanhouse Avenue.



Sandwell Valley Nature Centre GR SP935028

The West Midlands displayed

You will have read elsewhere that next year is the 21st anniversary of the West Midlands Branch and that our Branch is therefore the senior branch of Butterfly Conservation. As next year is also Millennium year, the Branch has been given the signal honour of organising the National Members Day in February 2000. We have already booked the Severn Hall on the Three Counties Show Ground at Malvern. It is a splendid hall, re-carpeted this year, excellent catering facilities, ample parking space and it is enormous! And we plan to fill it!

Obviously we are the most centrally placed of all the Society's Branches and we stand the best possible chance of encouraging members from all over the country to come to this special National Members Day. Added to this is the extremely attractive setting of the venue against the background of the Malvern Hills, and we plan to capitalise on this in our publicity.

We plan to put a major feature article into the Winter issue of Butterfly News talking about the history of the Branch and about the beautiful West Midlands countryside and its butterflies. We want some colour photographs of our region to illustrate the article and we also want some for large displays for National Members Day itself and this is where you come in, all you photographers. When you are out in the field, keep an eye open for shots of the countryside, beautiful shots, wide open spaces or intimate corners, anything that will show off the beauty of the West Midlands. Maybe you already have

something suitable? We really want to sell our region; make them all want to come and see for themselves.

Slides or prints are all acceptable. Slides are considered best for large blow-ups, but prints are also usable, especially glossy prints. Those selected for use will be electronically scanned to enable copies or enlargements to be made. All slides and prints will be returned to you and all those that are printed will carry an acknowledgement.

Please send your slides and prints to:

Digby Wood,
Jasmine Cottage,
2 Upper Ferry Lane,
Callow End,
Worcester, WR2 4TL.

Closing date 31st October '99.

Each item should have some means of identification and have details of location and any interesting particulars. It's best not to write on the back of prints but to use a sticky label. Pictures will be selected on the basis of their suitability to illustrate the best of the Midlands countryside and all will be returned. Please help us to meet this challenge and make it a success.

D Digby Wood

Events

Cancellation

The garden open day at Eudon Mill has unfortunately been cancelled.

Moth group

The Branch has recently been successful in obtaining a grant from English Nature to purchase a small portable generator. This will allow us to run several moth lights at once in remote locations.

We have agreed with English Nature to carry out surveys in various parts of our region, in particular looking for some of our rarer moths.

A small group has been established to carry out these surveys and we would welcome anyone

else who wishes to attend. If you would like to get into moth identification this is an ideal starting place. If you are interested in participating please call Ian Duncan 01584 568415 or Mike Williams 01299 824860. This year the activities are mostly confined to Worcestershire but in future years we hope to visit other locations in the West Midlands.

Participants: Tony Simpson, Peter Holmes, Peter Darch, Mike Taylor, Dave Scott, Cherry Greenway, Rosemary Winnall, Frank Lancaster, Mike Williams, Ian Duncan, Jeff Andrews.

The programme is as follows:

30 July Wilden Marsh 9.30pm. Meet lay-by GR SO825730 Target - reed bed species. Leader - to be arranged.

- 7 August Ravenshill Wood 9.30pm.**
Meet car park GR SO539739 Leader to be arranged.
- 20 August Grafton Wood 8.30pm.** Meet Three Parishes Hall car park GR SO963557 Leader Mike Williams.
- 8 October Hartlebury Common 7.30pm.**
Park in "goal posts" car park GR SO820705 Target Southern Chestnut. Leader to be arranged.

For further information contact Ian Duncan 01684 568415 or Mike Williams 01299 824860.

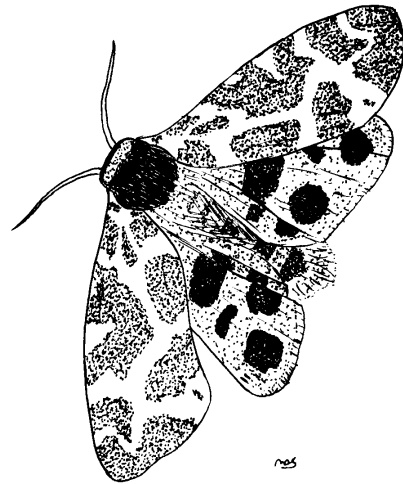
Moth Traps - a Warning

Recently there has been some concern about the possible dangers to your eyes from the ultra violet light given out by the bulbs used in most moth traps. These bulbs are very bright, three times greater than the equivalent filament bulb and with the added uv light.

People wearing spectacles will have some protection and for around £15 you can have your lenses coated with a uv barrier giving 100% protection. Polaroid sunglasses meeting the European CE standard also provide full protection. Attendees at evening moth nights should avoid looking directly at the light and consider wearing some form of protection as

described above.

Garden Tiger moth



Coach trip 14th August

Seats are still available for this coach trip, details from Jan Smith 0121-430-3945

Family day out with Warwickshire Branch

An invitation to A Family Day Out - Warwickshire Branch Sunday 22nd August

Swanage for non butterfly watchers for the beach and town.

Durleston Head for butterflies (Lulworth Skipper, Adonis Blue etc).

A coach will leave Kenilworth bus lay-by (opposite the clock) at 8.30 am. The return journey will leave Durleston at 5.00 pm, calling at Swanage to collect swimmers/shoppers.

There are two eating places at Durleston which serve basic lunch-time food, or bring a picnic. There is also an information centre and toilets. Guided walks are often run at weekends by Rangers. There is a large area to roam, plenty

of butterflies to see and the views are superb.

This is our first venture into a family coach trip with a professional driver. We need to fill the coach just to break even, so please support us. In the event of insufficient bookings by August 1st we shall cancel the coach and run a minibus. Whatever happens the trip will definitely take place.

Cost: Adults £12; children under 16 years - first free, others £6. Cheque (payable to Butterfly Conservation, Warwickshire Branch) to Margaret Vickery, 3, The Deer Leap, Kenilworth, CV8 2HW. Please enclose s.a.e. if you wish for an acknowledgement.

Important note to contributors
The Autumn Newsletter deadline for contributions is
Saturday 2nd October 1999

Reports

Spring Meeting Report

The meeting was held on April 24th at Bishops Wood. There were over 40 attendees with all the counties represented.

Richard Southwell gave his usual enthusiastic review of the Atlas project and the current status. Richard appealed for a last, major effort to fill in the gaps in the recording. Recorders were reminded that to meet the late 2000 publication deadline, records had to be submitted to Andy Nicholls **before** September 30. Mike Williams presented a varied and interesting quiz which was narrowly won on a tie-break by Phil Hopson. Phil now has the honour to host the quiz next year! After tea (thank you to all those who helped and provided refreshments) Mike Harper gave an excellent presentation on day flying moths. Mike showed some beautiful slides and gave a fascinating insight into moth behaviour. I am sure he converted a few more to the cause of moth recording.

☺ Ian Duncan

Kidderminster Flag Day

The Kidderminster Flag day took place on May 22nd. Despite competition from other charities on the day and the low turn out of collectors we managed to collect £119. I would like to thank the following for all their help on the day; John Wills, Richard Southwell, Mike Averill, Mike Williams and Digby Wood.

☺ Ian Duncan

Field Trip, Stroud valleys - 29th May

Mark Farmer led a happy group of 13 on a three sites tour of the Stroud valleys.

First stop: Rodborough Common. A flora audit of the limestone hillsides on the common, which were bathed in pleasant sunshine, gave us a clue as to what butterflies we might encounter. Common rockrose, birds-foot trefoil, and kidney vetch being typical and, not too surprisingly, Brown Argus, Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper and Small Blue were all seen.

The sun produced much flying activity as well as mating - mated pairs of Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper and Small Heath all observed. New emergences were Common Blue and Large

Skipper males - the latter being a particularly striking tawny orange/brown colour .

I counted eight Duke of Burgundy; however the group felt that a wider search may have produced additional numbers; their preferred location appeared to be at the base of a limestone hillside and not too far away from the larval foodplant, cowslip.

Our most surprising find: three (or was it one, seen on three different occasions?) Marsh Fritillary! Why did we find it here? It might have been a female, as it looked particularly fresh. A number of persons present took photographs and most considered its presence an (unauthorised?) introduction.

On to Gloucester Marsh Fritillary site. Again more floral delights : (particularly sainfoin, early purple and butterfly orchids); eight species here, mainly singletons, apart from a smattering of Dingy Skippers. However our target species surpassed itself with 145 individuals of both sexes being counted by myself. The females looked quite fresh; however some of the males had already been on the wing for two weeks. One mated pair were keenly photographed.

Finally on to Daneway Bank, where site reserve trustee, Bill Darling took us on a truncated site tour, owing to a brewing thunderstorm. Jeff Andrews provided the only lepidoptera sighting, that of an Elephant Hawk moth amidst the long grasses, just prior to the onset of torrential rain.

☺ Philip Hopson

Environment-friendly farm – 6th June

This trip was a first for the branch, since we were not visiting a known butterfly mecca, but a commercial property. Therefore it was perhaps not surprising that only seven (including a birder from Devon) met at Norchard Farm near Droitwich. Weather had also been atrocious, with a poor forecast for the day. The omens were not good.

Lady luck was with us; it was warm with a fair number of sunny spells. The effort and enthusiasm Mike and Wendy Southall put into the event was not wasted and was much appreciated by all. Most important though is the conservation message that was indelibly imprinted on our minds.

We started the walk late morning and were soon shown a newly planted buckthorn sapling with Mike glumly stating he had seen so few Brimstones this year. The beaming look on his face when Mike Williams showed us all a Brimstone caterpillar resting on a leaf was a picture that will remain with me for years. A Silver-Y moth was spotted with MW stating that they often fly with Red Admiral and, true to form, two were seen an hour later, our first for the year! The first pond area added Small Copper and Common Blue to the list whilst we were regularly noting Large White and fewer Small White, Speckled Wood plus rather faded Small Tortoiseshell and Green-veined White bringing the species list to 9. We were towed on a tractor's trailer to the third pond after a pleasant picnic in the Southalls' garden but failed to spot Large Skipper. We were told that Marbled White would be nectaring on the scabious later in the year. On the way back, Little Owl was sighted. Colin Dolding commented that he hadn't seen so many butterflies for weeks. Mike Averill would have been overjoyed at the masses of various types of blue damselfly which might have included the rare Red Eyed damselfly. Beautiful Demoiselle, seen in a dingle, and Broad Bodied Chaser by a pond were definite records. The event ended with, yet again, Mike Southall happily recording 4 Brimstone caterpillars on a buckthorn by his house. Clearly the knowledge that Mike Williams had implanted earlier in the day was being put to good use, which proves Mark Farmer's point that attending organised trips is the best way of learning. Norchard is intensively farmed, they supply runner beans to Tesco, nor is it organic, so how come is it a mecca for wildlife?

Although intensive, it is not large scale, Martyn Hodgson has told me about a large organic farm in the south of the county that has no trees or hedgerows; it also has no wildlife! Norchard has reasonably small fields with wide margins, unfertilised and unsprayed; hedges which are well maintained with any gaps replanted. Mike told us that they had planted 200 buckthorn last autumn. Copse areas are retained, one is a remnant of Feckenham Forest and has a large Service tree, while the diversity of habitat surrounding the ponds is a joy to behold to the trained eye. This is a commercial farm and a profitable business but it doesn't stop the family scrub-bashing around the ponds in the winter - perhaps we should give them a hand. Tesco demands an Environmental Assessment from all its suppliers, well done Tesco, I don't know why the Company doesn't use this fact more forcefully in its publicity. The Southalls have provided us with a most enjoyable and thought provoking

experience. Don't miss the return visit.

Richard Southwell

Operation High Brown – 13th June

Any military commander will tell you that success depends upon deploying sufficient troops with the right kind of equipment at the right time. The date selected for Operation High Brown was 13th June, timed to allow bracken to be cut with no disturbance to the emerging High Browns. In the event, the first reported sighting of the High Brown was 24th June, so the timing was good.

As zero hour approached, a detachment of 6 regulars, suitably armed with slashers and hooks, reported for duty and we prepared for battle with confidence, but aware of the struggle ahead. Then we had a dispatch from HQ advising us that a general call to arms had been published in the Worcester Evening News, and just before zero hour a further 5 unarmed irregulars appeared. A hasty dash home for some more weapons and the improvised use of a wood saw soon had us all in full military order and we marched into battle. It was all over in an hour and a quarter, the whole area was cleared as specified in orders, and we had learned that a standard wood saw swung at arms length is an excellent tool for slashing bracken.

Our grateful thanks to our Members and to the hard-working visitors who helped us with this annual task that is so vital to the survival of the High Brown Fritillary in the Malverns. The poor late spring and early summer weather in '97 and '98 had reduced the annual count to about 5% of its '88 level. This year's weather has not been a lot better and we feared that we might lose the species all together, but they have appeared only a few days late and we can only hope for some good sunshine during their flight period to enable them to breed.

Digby Wood

Prees Heath & Whixall Moss - 26th June

Peter Boardman led a party of around fifteen persons (including visitors from Cheshire, Hull and Manchester), on a warm sunny, though breezy, day. Prees Heath

The first noticeable thing about the site was the considerable amount of dumped domestic refuse, randomly scattered - something difficult to comprehend in view of the rural nature of the site.

We spent an hour on site, basically confining ourselves to the old runway section that stretches to the A41 trunk road. Five species, were encountered; a solitary Red Admiral and a Meadow Brown included. Not surprisingly, Small Heath were seen in good numbers and I was able to count 108 males and 6 females of the target species, (Silver Studded Blue). The continuation of the old runaway across the other side of the A41 and the areas around the grain store were omitted on this visit; both these areas could have increased the target species numbers. A Grass Emerald moth was also noted.

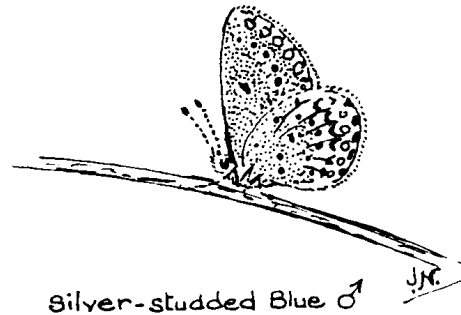
Whixall Moss

Peter Boardman explained some of the history of the site, as well as current management practices and, of interest to all, safety on site. A total of six species were observed, including (again), a single Red Admiral and two female Brimstones.

As black headed Gulls made their vocal presence known overhead, we were led on a specific route across the moss and an area was pointed out where management was encouraging the regeneration of the target species larval food plant - common cotton grass. The site is well worth a visit, (permits must be obtained in advance from the local wildlife trust),

as it has plenty of bird and floral interest, and is particularly known for its diversity of dragonfly and damselfly species.

A most useful days field trip was enjoyed when Wood Tiger and Oak Eggar moths were also seen. I noted a total of 26 large heath butterflies. Photographers had their patience tested when presented with a fleeting opportunity to take a picture, the species was probably best observed in the site's most sensitive area - where the



cranberry beds are found.

Our thanks to Peter Boardman for kindly agreeing to lead us and making our trip safe and interesting.

♣ Philip Hopson

More 1998 Recorders

The following should have been included in the list of recorders in the last Newsletter:

Colin Antrobus
 Ian Baggley
 Eric Bird
 R.J. Bullock
 Celia Chaffey
 Arthur Cundall
 Mike Easterbrook
 Anita Ferguson
 Steve Groome
 David Harding
 Ian Hart
 Keith Heaven

Colin Hill
 Frank Hill
 Brian Horton
 S. Hubbard
 Ron Hunt
 Mike Joiner
 Brian Jones
 Richard Lamb
 Rob Mabbett
 Shaun Micklewright
 M. G. Morgan
 Mick Richardson

Noel Slater
 Michael Smith
 Mike Smith
 Mike Southall
 Phylliss Staines
 A. K. Thome
 Paul Townsend
 Mark Trueman
 Dennis Twist
 Kit Welchman
 John Wheeler
 Rosemay Whinnall

♣ Andy Nicholls (Branch Recorder)

Letters

Letter from Dennis Twist:

Small Eggar

One of my neighbours collected some Small Eggar caterpillars last year which emerged in

March.

Collection date: July, 1998

Location: SO2486 - from a web on a roadside hawthorn hedge. This is an exposed location at an elevation of approx

450 m.

Number collected: 3

Treatment: The caterpillars were taken home and fed on hawthorn 1-2 weeks, after which all three pupated. They were then kept in a glass jar by a north window in a cool room.

Emergence: 3 moths emerged on 15th March 1999 and were subsequently released.

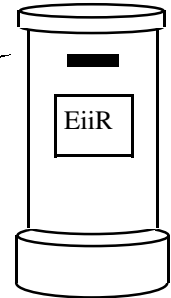
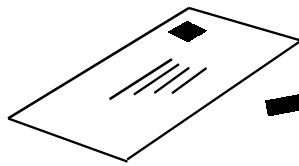
This is of interest because my neighbour (who is a farmer's wife, and has lived in the area all her life) said she had never noticed such a web of caterpillars before.

P Dennis Twist

THE DEADLINE

for Summer Newsletter

contributions is
Saturday 2nd October 1999



Hand-written articles will be transcribed and returned for checking. Printed documents are less prone to transcription errors and can often be scanned in. Laser printed 14 point copy usually scans perfectly, 12 point is OK but 10 point is hopeless. Text on 3.5" disc is best of all but please send unformatted text (e.g. saved as a **.txt** file under MS Word) as some formatted texts received recently have proved to be incompatible with my system. Limiting file compatibility seems to be the latest marketing ploy. Extra safe is to use a simple editor, such as Notepad (under Accessories in Windows) or Edit (MSDOS). Please label your disc with your name.

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.

p Christine Chance

Which way for West Midlands Butterfly Conservation?

As someone who was there literally from the start (Terry Green's front room in Coventry!), I have been asked to write a piece for the newsletter summarising our progress over the years. We certainly have a lot to be proud of and just a simple list of what, as an entirely volunteer led organisation, we have been able to undertake would take up more space than our Newsletter Editor is likely to give me. With our 21st anniversary as a branch fast approaching, however, and the new Millennium literally around the corner, it is perhaps opportune to look back more critically on past achievements and begin to consider some new directions. The branch has grown enormously since it was founded in 1979, both in terms of

membership and, particularly, in the scale of our activities. From organising a few field trips in the summer and helping out on other organisations' reserves, the branch has grown to a situation where this year's summer programme alone offers members the choice of around 50 separate activities ranging from field trips within the region to see scarce butterflies, organised coach trips further afield, a weekend away, guided walks, moth nights, indoor meetings, conservation tasks, garden open days, recording days and opportunities to find out more about other aspects of natural history like birds, beetles, plants and fungi. Last winter, which is the prime time for conservation management work, we organised around 20

work parties spread across three counties, a significant proportion of which were on our own reserves in Worcestershire. No doubt this coming winter we shall organise at least this number again, many of them joint activities with our conservation partners.

We are rightly proud of the nature reserves at Monkwood, Trench Wood and now Grafton Wood managed through the West Midlands branch. Monkwood was the very first Butterfly Conservation reserve in the country and at 152 acres it is still the largest Society reserve. All three reserves are ancient woodlands with a rich diversity of wildlife including many species of butterflies and moths. Over the years, the branch has expended considerable energy and not inconsiderable levels of resources in their acquisition and ongoing management. This alone should perhaps from time to time make us pause for reflection and ask to what extent they are proving successful in our efforts to conserve populations of Lepidoptera.

Monkwood, of course, is best known for its population of Wood White butterflies (although it has many other goodies too!) and, through careful management of ride edges and the reintroduction of coppicing into parts of the wood, a very healthy population now occurs there. Indeed, it is probably now one of the most secure and strongest colonies of Wood White in the entire country and is testament to the hard work that has been put into management by branch members and our partners from the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. It is a glowing example of what can be achieved for Lepidoptera conservation by good reserve management. But, and it is a big but, there is also a downside. At the same time as the Wood White has thrived at Monkwood, we now know from recent work undertaken on the Millennium Atlas and the Regional Action Plan that, elsewhere in the county, there has been a 50% decline in the number of sites on which the butterfly is still found over an eight year period. While our attention has been taken up by efforts at Monkwood albeit with great success, the Wood White has managed to disappear from half its remaining sites in Worcestershire.

Trench Wood is another interesting case study but with some different lessons to learn. At the time it was acquired, it was the best site in Worcestershire for nightingales and contained populations of Marsh Fritillary (the only one within the branch area), Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Grizzled Skipper. Like at Monkwood, much effort has been expended over the years to maintain the more open and sheltered areas these butterflies require but with very

disappointing results. Pearl-bordered disappeared in 1989, Marsh Fritillary has become extinct three times in the past 10 years (and once again appears to have been reintroduced!) and Grizzled Skipper has not been recorded since 1996. Nightingales, incidentally, have also completely gone from the wood although probably for rather different reasons. In this instance, all our best endeavours have not even succeeded in maintaining populations of key species within a nature reserve, never mind what has happened elsewhere. This is not I believe, however, an issue related primarily to management but rather the fact that all three species are amongst the 75% of British butterflies that are regarded as having a metapopulation structure. Such species survive best in a situation where there are a number of local populations within the same general area and consequently opportunities for both dispersal and inward migration to take place are available. At Trench Wood and so many other nature reserves this is simply not possible. Trench Wood is an isolated fragment of rich habitat in a sea of agricultural desert. Even within the reserve, only a relatively small portion of the wood has the potential to support species like Marsh and Pearl-bordered Fritillary or Grizzled Skipper. The reserve is just too small to maintain a viable metapopulation within its boundaries and its key butterfly populations are always therefore likely to be vulnerable to extinction. It only takes a slight 'blip' in management or a run of poor springs to push the butterfly concerned over the edge with little hope of natural colonisation taking place.

It is still early days at Grafton Wood but we can feel confident that, by providing a succession of young blackthorn for Brown Hairstreaks and by reintroducing coppicing back into the wood, wildlife will benefit. Such efforts, however, need to be placed in the context of the wider countryside. While the Brown Hairstreak may arrive at Grafton each year to pair on top of some of the very fine ash trees along the edge of the wood, the vast majority of its eggs will be laid on the surrounding farm hedgerows rather than in the reserve itself. However well we manage Grafton Wood, the long term health of the Brown Hairstreak will depend more on our ability to influence other landowners into modifying their hedgerow cutting practices so that more of the butterfly's eggs survive the winter.

The foregoing is certainly not intended to be an argument that Butterfly Conservation should not have its own reserves in the West Midlands or elsewhere but rather to sound a note of caution to what I detect to be an attitude in some

quarters which equates successes in conservation with the ownership and management of nature reserves. Reserves can only achieve so much and certainly, as far as butterflies are concerned, need increasingly to be seen in their landscape context. The challenge for West Midlands Butterfly Conservation and, indeed, I would argue for conservation generally, is to seek out ways of bringing about positive wildlife management in the wider countryside. Reserves, especially big ones, can clearly act as refuges for many butterflies and moths and provide valuable lessons in how best to manage habitats with particular target species in mind. It is interesting that, at the same time as some of our Worcestershire reserves have been losing species, the Wyre Forest, which is over 1000 ha, has not only, with the exception of High Brown Fritillary, largely maintained its butterflies, but key species like Pearl-bordered Fritillary have actually, aided by good management on the part of English Nature and Forest Enterprise, colonised new areas. For once the rate of colonisation has exceeded the rate of extinction. There is no doubt that when it comes to nature reserves, size does matter! We also perhaps need to be more realistic in our approach to reserves and accept that it is extremely difficult, if not downright impossible, to conserve isolated populations of many species, especially on relatively small sites, and if this is the situation then it may be that our time, energy and money is better spent elsewhere. Where we do hold reserves, then it is vital that we seek to

maximise their education and demonstration value. Too often, conservation organisations seem reluctant to disseminate the successes (and failures) of habitat management to outside organisations, particularly other landowners, and we therefore miss opportunities to perhaps influence how the wider countryside might be managed.

At the end of the day, like most things in life, it comes down to getting the right balance. If we are serious about conserving biodiversity, we need to work hard on ensuring our reserves remain models of good practice in terms of conservation management while, at the same time, seek out opportunities of influencing management practices elsewhere. This implies a much more outward and, dare I say it, professional approach to our work and a willingness to understand and work with organisations and individuals whose perhaps prime objective is not nature conservation. As is detailed elsewhere in this newsletter, within the framework of the Regional Action Plan this is something we have started to tackle and, with butterflies and moths continuing to decline at an alarming rate, there is no doubting the urgency of our task.

P Mike Williams

This article is partly based on a presentation to the Butterfly Conservation Reserves Seminar held in Winchester in March 1999.

Conservation Corner

Worcestershire Mothers Group

We may not have quite affiliated yet to the Mothers Union but a new Mothers group covering Worcestershire is now decidedly up and running aimed at improving the recording of the county's moths. With grant aid from English Nature Three Counties team, we are now the proud owners of a Honda 650 generator and have embarked on an ambitious programme of moth trapping at a number of key sites over the next few months. The programme has been put together with the help of the county's moth recorder Tony Simpson and is targeting BAP species and other local rarities. The plan is to visit a range of sites, many of which hold historic records for key moths but lack up-to-date information. Among the species to be targeted are Great Oak Beauty, Silky Wainscot, Festoon, Mere Wainscot, Reddish Light Arches and Southern Chestnut and we shall also be looking to improve general recording at important sites like Ravenshill Wood and Grafton

Wood. This is year 1 of a two year project supported by English Nature which we hope will greatly increase current knowledge of the status of our scarcer moths. In year 2, we shall be looking to develop a similar programme in Herefordshire, with the assistance of Mike Harper, and we would be pleased to hear from any additional mothers keen to take part. Ian Duncan is the main contact or Jeff Andrews, the branch Moth Officer.

Large Heath at Wem

Subsequent to the publication of the 1998 Annual Review which referred to the apparent absence of Large Heath at Wem Moss last year, I received a letter from Tony Hatton informing me that he had seen three individuals on 21st June but confirming our mounting concerns about the general unsuitability of the habitat detailed in the Winter 1998 issue of the newsletter. It will be interesting to hear what has been the fate of the

Large Heath this year at Wem and nearby Whixall Moss and I would be pleased to receive any further reports from anyone who visits either site.

Pearl bordered Fritillary seminar

One of the 'actions' pertaining to this species included in the West Midlands Regional Action Plan is feedback to landowners and other site managers. While this is fairly straightforward where sites are owned or managed by other conservation organisations, it is much more difficult when sites are in private hands. The branch were therefore delighted in May when we received an invitation to take part in a Fritillary Workshop jointly organised by the Forestry Commission in association with English Nature. The event held at Holme Lacy College near Hereford in the morning and Haugh Wood in the afternoon was attended by FC Woodland Officers from throughout the Severn, Wye & Avon Conservancy. As part of their role, FC Woodland Officers are responsible for issuing felling licences and also administer the various woodland grant schemes which come under FC jurisdiction. They are therefore in a very good position to influence positive management within privately owned woodland. Ian Duncan as Pearl-bordered Fritillary Species Champion, together with myself, represented West Midlands branch at what proved a highly profitable day. We found a very receptive audience on the part of those present and, after running through some of the key habitat requirements in the morning, we were able to see Pearl-bordered Fritillaries flying within a recently cleared area at Haugh Wood during the afternoon. We are grateful to Steve Scott from the Forestry Commission in Coleford and David Heaver from English Nature for organising the day. This workshop followed a similarly successful meeting earlier in the year in the Forest of Dean convened by Frank Lancaster with Forest Enterprise staff and attended by representatives of Gloucestershire branch as well as West Midlands. This meeting was concerned with developing a successful conservation strategy for the Forest along similar lines to that already in place for Wyre Forest. Again, FE staff under the guidance of Jerry Gissop (ex-Wyre) proved very receptive to the ideas put forward and follow up meetings are planned hopefully including staff from Butterfly Conservation's Wareham office.

Grizzled Skipper survey

One of the region's fastest declining species is the Grizzled Skipper and in a new initiative the West Midlands regional Conservation sub-committee has commissioned Simon Barker to undertake an ecological study into the butterfly's requirements. The objective is to identify factors leading to its decline and loss from specific sites and to develop

a conservation strategy that will help populations to be maintained at current locations. The cost of this work is being met out of the West Midlands RAP Fund which is supported by the three Butterfly Conservation branches which make up the region.

Pyrenees trip

The proposed Pyrenees trip planned as part of the branch's 21st anniversary is beginning to take shape. We are looking at a fortnight's trip leaving late June 2000 travelling by ferry to Santander and spending three days in the Picos de Europa before travelling on to the Spanish and French Pyrenees. Accommodation will be guest house style with breakfast and evening meal provided and we hope to recruit local guides to show us some of the best spots. We shall be travelling in a 15 seater minibus but with a maximum party size of 10-12 so we should not be too cramped. Apart from those days when we travel to and from ferry ports, most days we shall be visiting local sites. The timing of the trip should enable us to see the maximum range of butterflies (predicted 80-100 species) but also to appreciate the fantastic wildflowers of the Picos and the Pyrenees (the birds should be pretty good too!). For a little taster look at the article by Teresa Farino in issue 70 of Butterfly Conservation News. Costs will be kept down as much as possible, hopefully around £700 per person including food, accommodation and minibus hire. A number of people have already expressed an interest in the trip but, in order to secure our booking at 1999 rates, definite commitments (and a £50 deposit) are required by the end of August at the very latest. For further details or to book a place ring 01299-824860.

Other butterfly holidays

Joe Cocker (of Monarch fame) is also planning a further trip to Mexico in late January next year to see the Monarchs, visit Maya archaeological sites and also take in tropical rainforest in Belize and Guatemala (provisional cost £1,500 for 17 days). Before this in late October Joe is planning a trip to look at Inca sites in Peru while in December a trip to Egypt is planned. Details of all these trips can be obtained from Joe at 35 The Moorings, Lowesmoor Terrace, Worcester WR1 2RX (tel. 01905 607935).

Finally, finally...

Do take advantage of the improved weather to target those missing squares in the Millennium Atlas. If you are not sure which these are, contact your local Atlas Co-ordinator immediately (names and phone numbers in the last branch newsletter).

P Mike Williams

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

for this trip July 31st

AUGUST

- 1 **August Monkwood Butterfly and Dragonfly day.** There will be two guided walks one at 11.00 am and one at 2.00 pm. These will both start from Monkwood car park. A charge of £1.00 for adults and 50p for children will be made. Leader Mike Averill
- 6 **August Wyre Forest Moth Night** contact Frank Lancaster for details 01299 266168
- 7 **August Brown Hairstreak Conservation Day. 10.00 am** Meet Three Parishes Village Hall – old clothes, gloves. Stay as long as you like. OS Map 150 GR SO 978553 leader Mike Williams 01299 824860
- 7 **August Ravenshill Reserve Moth Night 9.30 pm.** Meet in reserve car park OS Map 150 GR SO 539739. Details contact Ian Duncan 01684 568415
- 14 **August Coach Trip Goring Gap and Kidlington Hill.** Downland specialities Adonis Blue, Silver spotted Skipper. Bring lunch - stout shoes. Bus pick up Worcester Coach Station 8.30 am and Bromsgrove Bus Station 9.00 am Details from Jan Smith (use booking form enclosed). Closing date

- 14 **August (Gloucester Branch) Stinchcombe Hill 2.00 pm** for Chalkhill Blue and possibly even Essex Skipper! Meet in the public car park on the hill (OS Map 162 GR ST 744984) Leader Chris Wiltshire (01453-545509)

- 22 **August Eudon Mill, Ebury & George. 2.30 pm** Garden open day and walk. Take B4364 Ludlow Road and turn right onto A458. After 2 miles (Down the road) turn left for Middleton Scrivens & Ebury. After 1/2 m, (past crossroads) turn left along farm track (sign board for Ebury hedge) park in courtyard. OS 138 Map GR SO 689897

- 29 **August Grafton Wood 11.00 am** Brown Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak. Meet Three Parishes Hall car park off A422 Worcester to Stratford Road. Bring lunch. OS Map 150 GR SO 963557

SEPTEMBER

- 3 **September Wyre Forest Moth Night** contact Frank Lancaster for details 01299 266168
- 3 – 5 **September International Symposium, Oxford.** Details see Butterfly Conservation

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SEPTEMBER

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- 3 – 5 **September International Symposium, Oxford.** Details see Butterfly Conservation News.
- 19 **September Monkwood, Fungal Foray and Feast. 10.30 am.** Meet in reserve car park. This will go on until about 2.00 pm. Leaders Diane and Tim Bateman who will also cook our finds afterwards – just the edible ones! Charge of £2.00 per person. Booking is essential and should be made with HQ at Smite by Thursday September 16th.

OCTOBER

- 1 **October Wyre Forest Moth Night** contact Frank Lancaster for details 01299 266168
- 3 **October Conservation Task - Monkwood NR** - meet 10.00 a.m. at reserve entrance on Sinton Green-Monkwood Green road. OS Map 150 GR SO803603
- 10 **October Conservation Task - Grafton Wood NR** - meet 10.00 a.m. at Three Parishes Village Hall, Grafton Flyford (next to church) just off A422 Worcester-Stratford road. OS Map 150 GR SO963557
- 24 **October Conservation Task - Trench Wood NR** - meet at reserve entrance on Sale Green-Dunhampstead road. OS Map 150 GR SO929588. A Make a Difference Day event - your chance to take part in this national day of volunteering with balloons, certificates and other freebies for all those taking part + baked potatoes from the bonfire - bring the family!
- 30 **October Branch AGM, Sandwell Valley RSPB reserve** - see page 2 for details.

NOVEMBER

- 7 **November Conservation Task - Monkwood NR** - details as 3rd October
- 14 **November Conservation Task - Grafton**

Wood NR - details as 10th October

Additional dates and the programme from
January 2000 onwards will appear in the
next issue of the newsletter

**28 November Conservation Task - Trench
Wood NR** - details as 24th October

DECEMBER

**5 December Conservation Task -
Monkwood NR** - details as 3rd October

**12 December Conservation Task - Grafton
Wood NR** - details as 10th October