WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

IS

21

NEWSLETTER
No. 45 Spring 2000

YEARS OLD

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Chairman's Notes Spring 2000

National AGM

As you know, the West Midlands Branch will be hosting the **AGM and National Members' Day on Saturday 26th February at the Three Counties Show ground**, **Malvern**. Doors will be open at 10.00am (coffee and biscuits available and time to browse displays); the meeting will start at 11.00am. This promises to be a fascinating day with a programme of four speakers on the theme of "Butterflies and Moths in the Wider Countryside". Speakers include Mark Young (the author of the Natural History of Moths); Jerry Gissop of Forest Enterprise; Ruth Feber the Butterfly Conservation Fritillaries Officer and John Cousins the Director for Agriculture for the Wildlife Trusts. Full details can be found in the latest national newsletter including the lunch booking form and directions for travel to the show ground.

In addition to the above programme we have organised a mini "entomological fair". Over 15 stalls will be present including, it is hoped, the Wildlife Trusts, the British Trust for Ornithology, the Field Studies Council and sellers of books, paintings, software, nets, microscopes etc.

We are looking for volunteers to assist on the day. Please give me a call on 01684 568415 if

you are able to help in any way.

West Midlands Branch is 21 years old

Our Branch of Butterfly Conservation was founded 21 years ago. It is the oldest regional branch. The event is celebrated by several articles in this Newsletter and is the reason why we are hosting the National AGM.

Branch AGM

This was a very successful event organised by Dave Jackson at a new venue at Sandwell Valley Farm. There were over 40 attendees including many new faces. Stephen Jeffcoate led a stimulating discussion on the future of Butterfly Conservation.

It is intended to hold future AGMs at other locations throughout the West Midlands to allow all our members the opportunity to attend. Any suggestions for a venue in Staffs or Shrops?

The minutes of the AGM can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Andy Nicholls

After many years as Branch Recorder, Andy has decided to stand down now that the Atlas compilation is complete. I would like to thank Andy very much for the great job he has done. As a result of all his hard work and effort we now have all our butterfly records on the Levana computer data base. This represents over 89,000 records covering 2,894 tetrads – a tremendous achievement. I am pleased to report that we will not be losing Andy's knowledge and skills as he has agreed to stay on as a committee member.

Committee Changes

I am pleased to announce the following:

- Jim Chance will replace Andy as Branch Recorder from 1/1/2000.
- Dave Jackson has become the Staffordshire coordinator.
- John Brayford has become the Shropshire coordinator.
- Corinna Philpott has become Secretary.
- Neil Gregory has become the Worcestershire Moth Officer.
- Jeff Andrews has become the Herefordshire Moth Officer.
- Richard Southwell has become responsible for Communications.

Butterfly Conservation Reserve Signs

I am delighted to report that **Faithful Limited of Worcester** have kindly agreed to sponsor the manufacture and installation of two Butterfly Conservation signs at our reserves at Grafton Wood and Monkwood.

Looking forward to seeing you all on the 26th February.

γ Ian Duncan

Next, four contributors (two of them founder members) look back on their years in the branch – Ed

Twenty one years of the West Midlands Branch

When I was asked to write an article with the above title, it made me realise how much my memory is failing! What follows outlines the Branch's story as far as I can recall it, but I stand to be corrected.

My wife and I joined the British Butterfly Conservation Society, or BBCS, as it was then known, in 1978. We were initially disappointed by the lack of any local content in the BBCS News, but spotted a small advert for something called The West Midlands Branch and telephoned Mike Williams. He explained with an enthusiasm which remains undimmed today, that he and Terry Green, both living in Coventry, had felt the same. They had decided to form a local branch to arrange field trips for local members to meet each other as well as to see local rarities.

We duly joined, and attended the first field trips seeing all the advertised species, many for the first time. At the end of the season, we felt we ought to attend the AGM, held in Terry Green's Mum's front room. I was elected Chairman because all the other jobs were taken, and the job as Chairman was the only one not filled, and I was the only "regular" without a job. That started a fifteen year stint which saw the Branch not only develop in its own right, but take a very active part in major changes to the Society as a whole,

culminating in it arriving at today's position.

The Branch's first efforts at practical conservation tasks were in conjunction with the Warwickshire and Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trusts. Branch workdays were arranged on various reserves of butterfly interest. This work not only contributed in a practical sense, but also helped bring BBCS to the notice of the Trusts and formed the basis of the close working relationship that exists today.

During this period, in the early eighties, the Branch was closely involved in major developments in the governance and structure of the main Society. Other branches had been formed but there was no formal place for them in the Society. The Branch Liaison system was introduced at this time, and I served as the second ever Branch Liaison Officer on the Executive Committee. A National Development Committee was also formed on which both Mike Williams and myself served. This committee came up with the sub-committee structure which became the cornerstone of the main society's development for the next decade.

Whilst the Branch was playing a full part in the development of the national structure, efforts were made to establish the Branch's position in the conservation movement and to provide a financial base to allow conservation work to take place. We were fortunate to have a series of dedicated Sales Officers who attended many shows all over the area, raising the profile of the Branch and the Society as well as generating considerable income. It was during this period that we began the Garden Butterfly Survey to give us something to talk to stand visitors about.

The Branch was also lead partner in organising Butterfly Festivals at Postlip Hall in the Cotswolds over several years, events which both raised funds and the general public's awareness of the Society. We also fully participated in Open Days at Monkwood. This type of event has been discontinued because it was felt that the amount of effort involved in their success was disproportionate to the income and benefit. Fund raising has continued by means of flag days from the early eighties right up to the present time.

In 1985 the Branch was at the forefront of the acquisition of the Society's first reserve. We were closely involved with the negotiations with the Worcester Trust, which brought the joint reserve at Monkwood to fruition. Since then, Trench Wood and Grafton Wood have been added to the joint reserve portfolio.

Whilst most branches have been established on a county basis, the West Midlands Branch committee has taken the view that the duplication of effort in administration, accounts, newsletters etc. for relatively few members is not justified. Over the years, we have lost northern Gloucestershire and Warwickshire but still thrive as a regional branch. It is interesting to note that the main society is looking at ways of arranging regional groupings and now backs our desire to remain as a regionally based rather than a county based organisation.

Over the twenty one years, you can see that the Branch has gone from little more than a club devoted to a common interest in watching and photographing butterflies to a major player in the conservation of butterflies in the West Midlands. The Branch has been fortunate indeed to have had a succession of dedicated and hard working volunteers in many guises who have continually taken the Society forward. I would make special mention here of Mike Williams who was a founder and initially held concurrently the offices of Branch Organiser, Conservation Officer and Newsletter Editor. His continued work as the Branch Conservation Officer has been the main reason why the Branch is held in such high regard by all our fellow Conservation Bodies and the main Society. The Branch owes him a great deal.

With the structures now in place, the Branch can look forward to the future with some confidence. We are hopeful of adding a new reserve in Prees Heath, as well as continuing to look after the existing ones. The Branch is well placed to play the major role it has fulfilled in butterfly conservation in the West Midlands, as well as contributing to the health and success of the main society in no small measure.

γ Ron Hatton

Twenty one again!

By now careful readers may have spotted a common theme to the current newsletter. Can it really be true that 21 years have elapsed since that fateful day in Mrs. Green's front room?

As others have pointed out, the West Midlands Branch started in a very small way and with a spirit of informality and friendliness which has persisted to the present day. Our very first newsletter put together by Terry Green and myself in July 1979 was sent free of charge to all BBCS members in the West Midlands and offered membership at 50p for adults and 25p juniors. As an added incentive to joining, we offered a series of summer field trips to local sites but also to Bernwood Forest, the first in what has become an annual tradition of visiting sites outside the Branch's boundaries. Right from the start, however, while the Branch may have lacked numbers and structure, it had vision! To quote from that same newsletter:

"*We know how much fun and enjoyment members can gain through their interest in butterflies, but we believe this can be further enhanced by sharing their experiences with others. The better informed our members are regarding butterflies and their conservation, the more chance we have of educating others to the dangers faced by many species, and fostering in them a similar enthusiasm for the survival of these beautiful creatures".*

This spirit of informing both others and ourselves about the conservation of butterflies (and latterly moths) is something that has been central to the Branch's activities throughout its twenty one years. Displays, talks to outside bodies, organising butterfly festivals and open days have all proved effective ways of getting the conservation message over to others, while our own indoor meetings have seen a succession of expert speakers from within and outside the Branch impart their knowledge. Perhaps uniquely amongst Butterfly Conservation branches, we have also sought to build on our own knowledge of the ecology of the butterflies through the sponsoring of survey work and research. As long ago as 1984, the Branch was able to obtain sponsorship from the World Wildlife Fund (as it was then) to co-ordinate a national survey into the **White-letter Hairstreak**. Since that time, a whole range of ecological studies and projects has been commissioned, some using solely Branch funds but many with financial support from local offices of English Nature who have been tremendous supporters of butterfly conservation in the region over the years. We have been particularly fortunate to have living within our region some excellent field ecologists like Simon Barker and Dr. Jenny Joy and we owe them a tremendous debt for the often painstaking fieldwork that they have carried out on butterflies like **Adonis Blue**, **Brown Argus**, **Grizzled Skipper**, **High Brown Fritillary, Large Heath** and **Silver-studded Blue** amongst others. There is no doubt that the quality of this work has done much to enhance the credibility of the Branch and led to fruitful partnerships with other bodies which have brought clear dividends as far as conservation is concerned. On top of this, however, the Branch has also been fortunate in having members who were prepared to get involved, whether in practical conservation tasks, the undertaking of transect walks, recording or as a hardworking member of the committee (often all of these and more).

Clearly, there have been difficult times when, for example, key committee members have left and needed to be replaced, and there have been setbacks such as the failure (so far at least) to secure Prees Heath as a nature reserve but somehow the whole has always seemed more important than the individual parts and we have been able to work to overcome these problems and move forward. What has undoubtedly helped, has been the strong commitment of a number of individuals (you know who you are) who have stuck to the task and have always been willing to be flexible regarding their role within the organisation.

Over the 21 years, there have been many changes in the way that we have viewed conservation. Our early obsessions with butterfly collectors (and we still don't like them!) has been replaced with a growing recognition that it is the changes in the way that man has managed the countryside that has been so harmful to butterflies and moths. This has been reflected in the establishment of nature reserves, including the first ever Butterfly Conservation reserve at Monkwood, and our efforts over the years, with some success, to manage them in ways that have been beneficial to wildlife. At the same time, however, we have increasingly recognised the limitations of reserves in conserving species and the need for new approaches which build on partnerships with a wide range of other organisations and individuals. One of the strengths of the West Midlands Branch has been its capacity to always take the wider view, to try to avoid excessive parochialism, to be willing to work with others and to endeavour to arrive at a sense of priorities based on a regional perspective. This has not always been easy, everybody wants to see Fritillaries in their neck of

the woods, and our partnerships with other bodies, particularly with respect to land-ownership, has sometimes meant compromises along the way. The benefits of this approach, however, has far outweighed the disadvantages and we have consequently achieved far more for butterfly conservation than would have been the case if we had worked in not so splendid isolation. It certainly put us in good stead when it came to producing a Regional Action Plan for Lepidoptera before any other part of the country and, being ahead of the game in this way, has meant that we have been in an extremely strong position to influence subsequent Biodiversity Action Plans produced at county level.

As far as the future is concerned, there are plenty of challenges ahead, more than enough I suspect to keep my successor as Conservation Officer busy. Our work on the Millennium Atlas has brought home just how much butterflies are continuing to decline and I suspect may force us to examine once again our priorities both regionally and nationally. With a lengthening conservation agenda and the need for more and more professional approaches, paid staff at a regional level is becoming more and more essential. On the basis of scale of activity and its geographical location, I would hope that the West Midlands area will be seen nationally as a priority for such an appointment.

There is still much that we don't understand about why our butterflies continue to decline and what we need to do to arrest that decline and, even more importantly, reverse it. One thing is clear, if butterflies and moths are to have a future in the countryside of the new millennium there will be a continuing need for a flourishing and active West Midlands Branch. We have all come a long way in the past 21 years but we still have a long way to go.

γ Mike Williams

The West Midlands Branch now – the imago?

Perhaps likening the fully mature West Midlands Branch to the perfectly developed butterfly is stretching the metaphor a bit too far, but both the National Society and the Branch have all the characteristics of fully functional organisms, well adapted to their role. Just as the National Society has developed from a group of enthusiasts to the largest, most influential insect conservation organisation in the world, so WM Branch has developed. At first, half a dozen keen amateurs who felt the need for local organisation to further their interest and knowledge lead to the formation of BC' s first ever Branch and to the evolution of BC' s Branch structure which is recognised as the Society' s main strength. We cannot suppose that the group meeting in a Coventry front room had any conception as to where this small beginning might lead, but over the next 21 years an evolutionary process took place. Problems were met and solved, ideas tried out and either adopted or rejected and opportunities seized until we arrived at the Branch as it exists today. A glance through the last few year's Newsletters shows a Branch which organises several dozen field trips each year for its members, several dozen winter conservation days at its 3 nature reserves and elsewhere, an annual overseas trip, a regular programme of moth nights, several dozen transects walked annually by members and a massive input into the national Millennium Atlas.

It is clear that the Branch understands its role and is active in carrying it out, but beneath all these well publicised activities there lies another layer of endeavour that only appears above the surface when it achieves some notable milestone in our common objective of conserving butterflies and moths. It showed itself when the importance of Monkwood was recognised and the Branch used its influence over the National Management Committee to convince them to take on BC' s first ever nature reserve (to be followed by Trench Wood and Grafton Wood). It showed itself when, after the Agenda 21 Conference called for the preparation of action plans to conserve the world' s endangered species, the Branch' s collected data on our regional butterflies was in such good shape that we were able to formulate and publish an Action Plan for the whole of the WM Region months and years ahead of other Branches. Our RAP was used as the model for other branches to follow and indeed for other conservation bodies to use as a framework for their own action plans. Yet again, the recent publication of a massive conservation plan for the Malvern Hills (see The High Brown Hills Project on page 15) where some £0.6 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Local Government and EN is to be used to restore grazing, is based fairly and squarely on the plight of the High Brown Fritillary, a nationally endangered species. We initiated site surveys in ' 86 and again in ' 98

triggering the action, we provided 13 years of transect data that proved the point beyond doubt and we called and led the meeting that got everybody, both public and private sectors, on board and anxious to help with the restoration plans. Every Branch Member can feel justly proud that their contribution to the joint effort is really getting results.

But what of the future? One thing is certain, the threat to our wildlife is not going to get any less. All our data indicate an accelerating rate of decline for most species, and there is the GM issue and who knows what else around the corner. It is becoming clear that more and more nature reserves is not the answer. They have their place for educating and demonstrating good conservation practice, but the final answer must lie in making the wider countryside habitable for our wild creatures, and this is to be the theme at the National Members Day at Malvern on 26th Feb.' 00 and the subject of a major campaign. New objectives, new challenges, new tasks.

So many members, past and present, have contributed to the success of BC and of the Branch, but as I look back over 21 years of effort and achievement, I find one name at the forefront of every significant action. In at the conception in ' 79, organising field trips and workdays, raising funds, buying woodlands, setting up transects, masterminding action plans, getting funding for surveys, lecturing, talking pleading, cajoling and enthusing, every aspect of the Branch' s activities has been driven along by Mike Williams. The Branch would not exist in its present form without him. Mike, we salute you and give you our sincere thanks.

γ Digby Wood

Piggy in the middle

I was amazed when Christine rang me asking me to write this article, to learn that the West Midlands Branch had reached its majority and was 21 years old. (I don' t count the new fangled 18 year mark!). It seems only yesterday, well, perhaps the day before yesterday, that I was editing our 10th anniversary Newsletter.

During its lifetime, the Branch has had only three newsletter editors. The first was Mike Williams, who produced the first 4 page edition. By the time I took over in 1986, the publication had grown to 26 pages, all full of interest. However, the presentation did leave something to be desired, consisting as it did of A4 sheets stapled in one corner. Also, at this time, several members contributed to the typing, so that the format varied from page to page. In fact that was how I first became involved with the newsletter, as one of Mike' s band of willing typists. It was very labour intensive, as despite the advent of Tipp-ex, many pages needed to be retyped when mistakes were found on proof-reading.

It wasn' t long before I was persuaded to take over the editorship, as Mike was also Branch Organiser and the growth of the Branch and its activities meant that the two jobs needed to be split. (In fact they were recombined for 6 years when I was Branch Organiser, but by that time we had a Conservation Officer, which was a great help). One of the first things I did was to invest in an Amstrad PCW word processor, which combined good word processing facilities with those of an elementary computer. At that time, this was state-of-the-art and I think many people who once owned one of these machines look back on them with affection. Now I could delete, edit and move text around without the necessity of retyping a page. It did mean, though, that I now did all the typing myself, but this was a small price to pay for the much improved appearance of the newsletter. At this time, we also started to have the duplication undertaken professionally, firstly by the print department at Coventry Polytechnic (as it then was), and when they closed down, by the Coventry Prontaprint, who have always done an excellent job. Before I took over, duplication was, of necessity, by photocopier, wherever and whenever this could be done free or very cheaply. The advantage of a much larger branch membership was that we could now pay for professional expertise.

At this time too, the Branch was lucky to have as one of its members the artist John Norton, who produced numerous pen and ink drawings for the newsletter and annual report. Almost all through my editorship of 11 years one of John' s drawings was reproduced on the cover of the newsletter, while others were used to illustrate articles. *

At first, we produced two newsletters per year - summer and winter, but it was realised that a gap needed filling at the beginning of the year and so a 4 page New Year Newsheet was introduced. This concentrated on important BC news and listed workdays and spring field trips, covering the period until the summer newsletter appeared. Although the Amstrad had proved its worth, it soon became out-dated as the PC revolution gathered speed, in particular the quality of its

printing left a lot to be desired, so in 1994 I acquired a "proper" IBM compatible with a letter quality printer. Not only did this improve the appearance of the newsletter but now contributors could send me their articles on disc, which saved me a lot of typing. Unfortunately not many members had computers at this time and so my main source of disc material was from Mike, our Conservation Officer. As his contributions were usually quite lengthy, this was of enormous help. In fact Mike' s Conservation Corner has I think, run throughout the history of the newsletter and I think most would agree with me that this is the heart of the publication.

My abiding memories of my time as editor of the newsletter is of the wealth of talent we had amongst the members. I was seldom short of articles, sometimes I had so many that some had to be held over to the next edition. If there was a gap I either wrote a "filler" myself or one of the committee would oblige. I received many complimentary remarks from other branches and outsiders on the quality of the WMB Newsletter, all due to the excellent articles I received from members. I am glad to see that this quality is being maintained today by your third editor, Christine Chance. I think it was with great trepidation that Christine took over from me in 1997, but she need not have worried - she is producing an excellent publication. Long may the West Midlands Branch Newsletter thrive!

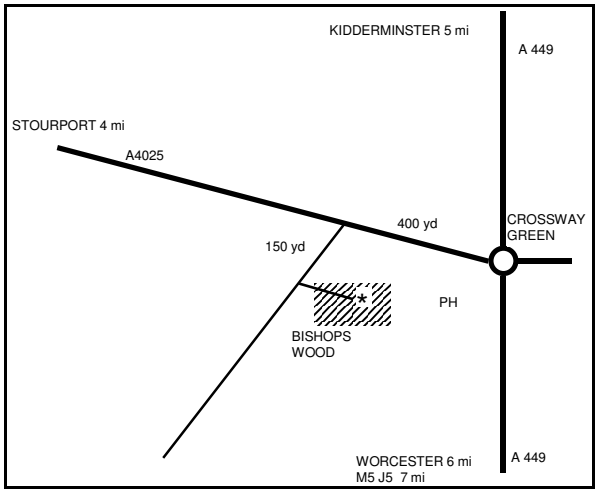
γ Margaret Vickery

** Happily, John Norton is still contributing his delightful drawings to our Newsletter – Ed*

Events

February (Saturday) 26th 10.00 am National AGM and Members Day
National AGM and members day – for details of this meeting see Chairman's notes. This is a high profile occasion for our Branch – please give it your support.

March (Sunday) 19th 10.00 am Camp Farm Walsgrove Hill, Great Whitley. Conservation task at new work site. This is a remnant of unimproved limestone grassland, where diverse flora support several species including **Wood White** and **Dingy Skipper**. A beautiful site, well worth the visit; see diary, page 19.



April (Saturday) 8th Spring Meeting
The Spring Meeting will be held at Bishops Wood Environmental Centre 6.30 pm (see map). There will be a talk on "The Management of the Malvern Hills for the **High-brown Fritillary**". There will be a quiz, raffle and refreshments. Members are encouraged to bring slides (maximum of 10).

May (Sunday) 7th Spring Open Day Tiddesley Wood Nature Reserve, Pershore 10.00 – 4.00pm Worcestershire Wild Life Trust event. Butterfly Conservation stall and guided walks.

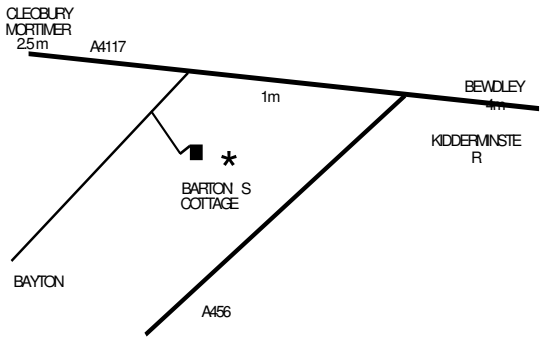
June (Friday) 2nd to June (Sunday) 4th or Saturday only option. A weekend of butterfly walks and a concert at Toller Porcorum, Dorset arranged by Margaret Vickery (Warwickshire Branch). See notice for cost and booking details page 9.

July (Saturday) 8th to July (Monday) 10th Cumbria weekend trip. Main target species **Mountain Ringlet.** Saturday afternoon Honister Pass – **Mountain Ringlet**. Sunday Meathop Moss – **Large Heath** and/or Winbarrow Scar – **Northern Brown Argus**, **High Brown Fritillary**, **Silver washed Fritillary**. Monday fill in the gaps from above possibly Arnside Knott or Leighton Moss (group decision as there are many options). Cost : 15 seater mini-bus £26 per head plus shared diesel costs. £10 deposit for accommodation. Closing date for booking May 1st. Booking form enclosed.

August (Saturday) 5th Coach Trip to Porton Down
This year, after many attempts, we have at last had permission to visit Porton Down. Do take advantage of this opportunity but see Diary page 20 for **special conditions.** Booking form

enclosed.

August (Sunday) 20th 2.30 pm
A chance to see a 3.5 acre garden at Barton's Cottage, kindly hosted by Jean and Ron Hunt. This garden is managed for wildlife and was one of the highlights of the 1998 programme.



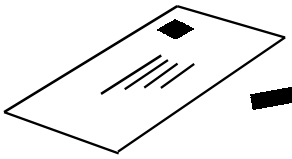
Butterfly Conservation Members weekend: Butterflies and Music
Kingcombe Centre, Toller Porcorum, Dorset, Friday 2nd June – Sunday 4th June

A weekend of butterfly walks around Kingcombe and further afield and a concert by the Frascati String Quartet in Toller Porcorum Village Hall on Saturday at 8pm. The programme will include works by Mozart, Schubert and "Dorset Sketches" by Margaret Vickery, written in memory of Gordon Beningfield, the wild life artist and late President of Butterfly Conservation. Dorset is known for its abundance of butterflies, and during the programme of walks, visits to local nature reserves, and meadows that have never experienced modern farming methods, we would hope to see most of the spring species including fritillaries.

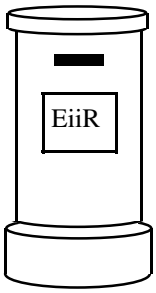
Cost includes full board Friday evening to Sunday lunch and tea on Friday and Sunday plus ticket for the concert. There are facilities for making tea/coffee etc available at any time. Cost: £90 per adult, £45 per child under 13yrs, under 2yrs free. £30 (non refundable) deposit per adult; £15 per child required at the time of booking. The remainder is due by 31 March 2000 and full details will be sent out in April. Saturday only special offer: £25 (to include lunch, dinner and concert). Concert only: £10

For details and booking form please contact Margaret Vickery (01926 512343).

THE DEADLINE for Summer Newsletter



contributions is Friday 23rd June 2000



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.

γ Christine Chance

Moth Trapping Project in the Wyre Forest and Beyond

Three year project (1997,8,9)

The gradual expansion in Moth recording within the West Midlands Butterfly Conservation area over the past three years is to be applauded.

The following is the conclusion of a three year Millennium project (April - October) located within the perimeter of an enclosed 40 acre site of the Royal Ordnance Wyre Forest.

The principle Key to its success has been threefold:

(a) 100% co-operation from Bob Sherriff Ranger Superintendent and his staff (one of whom was required to be on duty until; the early hours on each and every occasion – Friday nights).
(b) An enthusiastic team of "mothers" homing in from Shrewsbury, Malvern and Droitwich, making a possible compliment of eight mothtraps.
(c) Two hundred foot cable "Daleks" to feed out from out station power points to energise the mothtraps.

As will be seen from the description of the final meeting below the weather has not always been receptive to moth trapping.

Summary of the Final Meeting October 1st 1999

Participants met at around 7.00pm with light rain falling. Unfortunately, although quite mild, the evening turned out to be one of the worst ever with continuous rain becoming increasingly heavy by the time we packed up just after 11.00pm.

Species recorded:

Flounced Chestnut
Autumnal Rustic
Angle Shades
Copper Underwing
Common Marbled Carpet

A dismal night for moths, probably our worst ever at the site. Only five species recorded and of these only **Flounced Chestnut** in any numbers. Swarms of caddis flies though! Highlight of the night was definitely the excellent home made soup, bread and cakes very kindly provided by Cherry – thanks Cherry.

Thanks are also due to Bob Sherriff, Phil and all the others at the Royal Ordnance who have kindly turned out in all weathers over the three years; without their support this project would not have been possible. Finally thanks to all the participants for their support and interest over the period and hopefully we all agree it has been an enjoyable and worth while project.

Whilst the aforementioned has come to a close – it is the beginning of a long term moth recording project – namely ;

(i) The Royal Ordnance is prepared to build a moth trap
(ii) This is already on the drawing board
(iii) Erect a permanent undercover site
(iv) To be activated by a time switch as and when requested by Butterfly Conservation
(v) Two members of Butterfly Conservation to visit at 8.30 am the following morning
(vi) This facility will be in operation *ad hoc* throughout the twelve months of the year *ad infinitem*

As in all things – think positive!

γ Frank Lancaster

Chaddesley Woods

The management of this wood is now in the hands of the Worcester Trust who are working hard to improve it for butterflies and other species. A large amount of work has been carried out in the last year but any extra help is always appreciated.

There is a regular work party on the third Sunday of the month throughout the winter and, for any more leisured individuals, another group meets every Thursday morning throughout the year. OS Map 139 GR SO 915737

If you can help please contact the Reserve Manager beforehand, Mervyn Needham on 01562 777461

Letters

Letter from Digby Wood

Autumn Glory – an explanation

You may have been puzzled by this item in the Summer Newsletter with its elementary advice on how to recognise a Comma and its promise to look at the overall picture "next month". The answer is that the item was never intended for the Newsletter, it was one of a series of "pop" articles written for a Parish Magazine discussing the butterflies to be seen each month and the best local places to see them. However, the bit about the Commas breeding on ornamental hops in my garden was felt to be of interest to Branch Members and a much more "high powered" version was prepared for the Newsletter and put on to a floppy disc, the same floppy disc that carried the Parish Magazine article. My computing skills being what they are.....and you' ve already guessed the rest. Apologies to everyone, I hope you didn' t think that I wouldreat **you** in such a patronising way !

Incidental Note: The Parish Magazine articles have created a lot of interest locally and also provided an opportunity to give support to the county wildlife trust and to the proposed restoration work on the Malvern Hills. How about writing something similar for your local magazine? Editors are usually only too pleased to get your articles.

γ Digby Wood

Letter from Richard Southwell and David Jackson

Dingy Skipper Threat – Walsall MBC

Walsall Council generally has a good reputation for biodiversity initiatives but unfortunately, as far as the **Dingy Skipper** is concerned, they appear to be taking John Prescott's request to develop brown field sites to heart. Indeed the borough has a number of such sites with a terrific range of rare species that are, these days, often more scarce in the "industrialised" rural landscape than an urban setting. The Millennium Atlas tells us that this is true.

We are asking members to write to all, or most, of the individuals named below, to urge them to reconsider the planning permission for the Anchor Meadow Development**.** This request is particularly relevant if you live or work within the Staffordshire or West Midlands areas.

The Details:
Site: Anchor Meadow Development
Grid reference: OS Map139 SK 0500
Project: Aldridge Community Health Centre, phase 2 additional housing
Background history: A new member and Atlas recorder, Peter Newell, identified the **Dingy Skipper** colony and informed David Jackson (local co-ordinator), stating that a builder was also tipping waste in the area. David approached the council, got an apology from the contractor who was unaware of the situation (ignorance is often the biggest threat to wildlife) and provisional agreement to translocate the sward plus an additional offer to plant birds-foot trefoil, the caterpillar's foodplant, adjacent to pathways in the development. What is so frustrating, is the colony is threatened by the contractor's temporary rubble tip and the secondary housing scheme and not by the health centre.

Recommended points for letters :

Dingy Skipper is a priority butterfly in the Birmingham & Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan, which Walsall helps to support.

- Does Walsall MBC condone losing 25% of its **Dingy Skipper** colonies to a temporary rubbish tip?
- All butterfly recordings are from 1995 onwards, they are validated and are therefore relevant. Many nature groups refer to 50 year periods!
- Translocating sward rarely works. Celtic Energy spent £250,000+ moving turf from Sellar Farm to another supposedly amenable site in South Wales two years ago. The exercise failed and no **Marsh fritillary** caterpillars survived the first winter.
- Other butterflies that are under threat, and declining, include the beautiful **Common Blue**. This species is also dependent on bird's-foot trefoil as a foodplant.

There are three decision-makers in the council, they should each ideally receive a separate letter. Their names are:

Martin Single, Manager-Planning, Building & Control
Peter Field, Manager-Strategic & Environmental Planning
Nick Young, Manager-Landscape & Conservation

They can be contacted at:

Walsall MBC
Civic Centre
Walsall - WS1 1TZ
Phone: 01922 650000

The "in-field" countryside service is also influential, the contact there is:

David Haslam
Senior Countryside Officer, Walsall MBC
Beacon Lodge, 551 Beacon Road
Aldridge, Walsall
WS9 0QW
Phone: 0121 360 9464

Deadlines

This is an on-going situation, therefore if you intend to respond to this request please do so promptly.

γ Richard Southwell & David Jackson

Butterfly records from you in 2000? – Yes please

At the start of this year, I took over the role of West Midlands Branch recorder from Andy Nicholls. Andy has for years been the backroom-boy who made sure that all your butterfly sightings were accurately entered onto the local and national data bases. In the run up to the Millennium Atlas deadline, this was a particularly demanding task; just look at all the maps that Andy produced for the provisional Atlas last year and the enormous quantity of records that they represent. Many thanks Andy for all the dedicated work on our behalf.

Several people have asked whether we should still be recording butterflies after the publication of the Millennium Atlas. The answer is **yes of course we (and the butterflies) need your records as much as ever**. Enclosed with this newsletter is a recording form. Please keep this as a master and photocopy for field use and return your records to me at or before the end of the season.

I have suggested that you enter butterfly numbers, rather than the codes, e.g. A = 1, B = 2 to 9 etc. listed in the instructions. Although the computer program that we use presently only stores these codes, it is more than likely that we shall sometime be using other systems which will be able to make use of the extra information. In the meantime, it is quite easy for our volunteer data typists to convert numbers to codes. Some people have expressed frustration to have to use these codes anyway – there is a lot of difference between seeing 2 Brimstones and seeing 9 of them while walking the dog!

Transect records in towns and the "wider countryside"

As you know, there is currently much talk of conserving butterflies "in the wider countryside". We do have a number of dedicated members who walk transects from April to September year after year, recording butterfly numbers at least once per week. Specifications for proper transect recording are rather demanding, for instance 1-2 km walk, wind and temperature records and so on. Such detailed and consistent records are really the only way that we have at the moment of measuring changes in butterfly populations. Most of our official transects are in reserves or other peculiarly butterfly-friendly locations, often targeting one species. The wider countryside, and especially urban sites, which should contain the common species that can be found everywhere are rather poorly recorded. For example, our records showing the decline of the High Brown Fritillary are better than those of the decline of the Wall Brown! I know that many people find the idea of recording according to strict transect rules rather daunting. In any case, multiple ownership and boundaries in towns make it very hard indeed to define an official transect that could be followed for decades. I have been thinking that some keen members could find their own 'mini-transects', If you are willing to have a go, I will try to get the recorded data into some permanently useful form.

Can I suggest that you consider whether there is a suitable area nearby where you could conveniently record butterflies pretty well every week from 1 April to 30 September. If this location was on a separate recording form from your other (also very welcome) records, it would make it easier to identify these 'mini-transects'. Please make clear the difference between zero butterflies seen and no visits to the site, preferably by having one column for *every* visit, even when no butterflies were seen. Parks, churchyards, waste ground and canal towpaths might be favourable. I know that some people already send this sort of data – many thanks. If counting several times per week, could you please use separate columns for each one.

Christine and I cultivate a plot on a large Council

allotment site in Birmingham, which we visit practically every day in the butterfly season and record butterfly numbers. The whole site is our

personal piece of recorded “wider countryside”.

Note from editor: Contributors to the Millennium Atlas will be acknowledged in the Summer Newsletter

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch AGM, 30th October 1999
Sandwell Park Farm
Number of Attendees 45

1. Apologies

Jeff Andrews, Derek Spooner, Andy Nicholls, Trevor Bucknall, Terry and Peggy Higgins

2. Minutes of Last AGM

No objections

3. Election of Committee

There are presently 19 on the committee. The meeting approved the re-election of Trevor Bucknall, Andy Nichols, Jancis Smith and Mike Williams. Co-opted members seeking election were John Brayford (Shropshire Co-ordinator), Jim Chance (Recorder from Jan 2000), Neil Gregory (Worcestershire Moth Officer) and Corinna Philpott (Secretary).
The chairman expressed his thanks to Andy Nicholls for an excellent job as Branch Recorder over many years and his gratitude for the enormous amount of time and energy he had put into compiling all the butterfly records for the Atlas.

4.Chairman' s Report- Ian Duncan

The West Midlands Branch is the 4th largest. Membership has been stable over the past few years, but the issues now are how to increase membership and address the bias towards Worcestershire. Members' activities were diverse. The Moth Group has enjoyed some good nights this year, recording many species including some new ones as well as some not recorded in the region for a long time. At least half of the members contributed butterfly records for the Millennium Atlas. The Branch wishes to build on this enthusiasm so that recording continues after the Atlas is published. Information gained from the many transects in the region has provided a useful database which can be used for monitoring purposes. Much hard work went into organising this year' s trips and they were enjoyed by many members. A good programme has been organised for 2000, including a Pyrénées trip.

Discussions are ongoing with Forest Enterprise resulting in management for Fritillaries in the Wyre Forest. Various organisations are also looking to BC for advice.

The chairman drew attention to the National AGM which will be held on 26th February 2000 at the Three Counties Show Ground in Malvern. The theme will be "Butterflies in the Wider Countryside". There will be some excellent speakers as well as a variety of stalls. The chairman thanked everyone for all the effort that had been put in with particular thanks to the committee members.

5. Treasurer' s Report- Terry Smith

The treasurer provided a copy of the 1999 accounts, which were approved by the meeting. The accounts showed a surplus of income against expenditure of £6,167.75 and a balance carried forward of £10,681.71 (included £7,000 Lottery grant for Grafton Wood). Running costs increased slightly and advertising costs were mainly for new display boards. The treasurer expressed his thanks for all donations. In answer to a question about a decrease in conservation expenditure Mike Williams confirmed that it is a slightly misleading picture because the year end is in the middle of summer therefore does not cover a survey on the Grizzled Skipper.

6. Conservation Officer' s Report- Mike Williams

It has been another successful year of conservation. Mike Williams expressed his thanks for all the effort put in, especially to the management of the three reserves alongside BC' s partners in the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.
The species champions have continued to co-ordinate conservation within the Regional Action Plan. The first Review was published in May this year showing considerable progress so far. The

regional Conservation Sub-Committee oversees this work, with representatives from the Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and West Midlands branches agreeing priorities and contributing to a central fund. One action has been to commission an ecological survey of the Grizzled Skipper across the region by Simon Barker.

The recording undertaken for the Millennium Atlas provides valuable information showing distributions across the region and helps prioritisation of conservation action. There has been a concerted effort to spread the conservation message to a wider audience of farmers and other major land owners who all have a responsibility.

7. Atlas Co-ordinator's Report – Richard Southwell

All participants were thanked for their contributions. Worcestershire and Herefordshire are now well covered although only a few tetrads in Herefordshire have over 10 species. A recent effort in Staffordshire and Shropshire has resulted in a big increase in recorded tetrads. Thanks were expressed in particular to Jean Armstrong, John Brayford and Dave Jackson who have managed to involve other interested parties such as the local wildlife trust and council.

8. AOB

There being no other business, the meeting drew to a close. After tea, Stephen Jeffcoate, BC's national chairman, gave an interactive and highly motivating talk on issues which our Branch believes is important.

The chairman thanked all those present for attending and said it was good to see so many new faces. He thanked Dave Jackson for organising the venue and all the arrangements which had gone very well.

Let's all whisper

In the experimental role as Communications Officer, I hope to act as a catalyst for, as I see it, one of the few remaining pieces in the jigsaw for the achievement of our objectives. Butterfly Conservation nationally, and our West Midlands Branch, is becoming ever more effective and influential as a result of the success of the following initiatives:

- Our Regional Action Plan is being incorporated into all local council Biodiversity Action Plans, hence giving us superb exposure.
- Funding for conservation is at an all time high due to the National Lottery and Landfill Tax which, combined with our track record, means that opportunities can be resolved quickly e.g. Grafton Wood.
- Stronger contacts now exist with all County Wildlife Trusts as a result of our RAP and their co-operation with the Millennium Atlas.
- The large number of members, recording for the Atlas has given extra credibility to the RAP, it also means that many more people are now aware of the situation in their local areas and know where good habitat exists.

If we can use this knowledge to communicate directly with local landowners and decision-makers in a positive and proactive way, it is my belief the last important piece of the jigsaw is in place, but only if good numbers of us get involved. In these days when government policy appears to be determined by the opinions of "discussion groups" I am sure local councils are moving in the same direction. I have therefore asked a number of Senior Countryside Officers and/or Local Agenda 21 Officers how often the public approach them with matters of concern, compliments or just information. Their response is summed up in the phrase "a deafening silence".

I see the role of Communications Officer as one to encourage you to whisper, or in some cases shout, to decision-makers/influencers about specific local issues of concern. Too many people in local government have told me the positive effect this will have on local biodiversity issues for me to disbelieve them. This confirms a point I have made in previous newsletters, that we have the power if we choose to use it. There could not be a better time to put this theory to the test: if enough members do so there will be a "deafening roar" in the corridors of power. Strangely, known conservationists and committee members are often less effective since the "recipient" of the advice already knows the person and knows how to react. There is nothing like the power of the unknown to unsettle the powers that be, which so often these days are the

“spin doctors”.

So you might ask what do I want you to do? I don’t like being prescriptive since this is a voluntary organisation but it might be useful to identify what I have done:

- Attended a Dudley MBC organised evening meeting for the local population to discuss and agree a tree planting programme at Dunsley fields, near Ridgewood school, to ensure that butterflies will be considered in the planning. I went with Steve Harper, a longstanding BC member, and we were amazed that the public’s unconsidered gut reaction favours dog pooh and mono-culture green grass to biodiversity. The outcome is that Steve will join the site management committee, so sense will prevail.
- My article to the local newspapers last autumn suggesting councils stop strimming or spraying roadside hedge margins to encourage the **Orange Tip** and birds such as blackbird chicks, as well as reduce expenditure, was not printed. It would probably have been best to write in April. This year I will also write to Russell Newey, Manager-Landscape Contracts for Dudley MBC to encourage the council to abandon the misplaced vision of excessive tidiness
- Sent a letter to the Chairman of Tesco complimenting the company on their biodiversity friendly produce, enclosing a copy of the autumn newsletter highlighting the article on Mike Southall’s environment friendly farm. Got a positive response that stated they are to consider using this in their publicity.
- Can you see yourself carrying out something similar in your local community? I do hope so along with your next-door-neighbour, friends or work-mates. Need advice? Do contact me or another committee member in the first instance for an opinion, we don’t pretend to be the experts but might well know someone who is. Also, do please find out the name of your Council’s Senior Conservation Officer and contact him directly. They are a mine of information, know their way around the internal workings of the administration and are always pleased to help. Finally, let me know how you get on, whether successful or not, we need to develop a catalogue of best practice to aid our future efforts. The first entry might well be Trevor Bucknall’s appeal for volunteers in the Malvern paper that attracted so many to attend the **High Brown** bracken bash last year.
- Please see the letter on page 11 which puts most of the above points in context,. I hope it will act as a catalyst for you to help not only our Walsall butterfly colonies but also those in your own “home patch”.
- A final thank you from Andy and me and the local coordinators for the contributions so many members have made to the Millennium Atlas.

γ Richard Southwell

The High Brown hills project

Measured against any of earth' s natural timescales - astrological time, geological time or even the time scale of natural succession - our life span is relatively brief, and we scarcely notice the changes that are taking place in the wild places around us. The Malvern Hills look the same as they did when we were children, don' t they? Well, actually, no they don' t. They are slowly but surely being overgrown by nature' s colonisers, bracken and scrub, particularly birch scrub. It' s "natural succession". So what stops this from happening all over the countryside at large? The answer is farming and in particular the grazing of farm animals. The arable fields depend largely on carefully timed cultivation to keep them weed free but pastures depend almost entirely on animal grazing to keep them looking the way they do. This gives us the clue as to what is the problem on the Malverns - lack of grazing.

Traditionally every cottager on the common land at the base of the hills took advantage of their rights to graze and kept small herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, they cut bracken for winter bedding and their old fashioned breeds of stock wandered far and wide competing for the grasses and herbage, trampling the bracken and eating off the seedling scrub. This produced a rich mosaic of grass, herbs and bracken and provided an ideal habitat for an extraordinary range of wildlife. It was the farming that produced the habitat for the wildlife to live in and this is what has changed. Relatively few of the commoners make use of their grazing rights, a better living can be earned by employment elsewhere. The modern

breeds of cattle and sheep have "soft mouths", they don' t appreciate the "hard tack" on the hillsides and in any case, with the reduced numbers, there is now little competition for the lusher grasses down on the common. So as the grazing pressure on the hills has reduced, so the bracken and scrub has gained the upper hand and slowly over the years the bracken stands have become denser and denser until large areas are now useless for grazing animals.

West Midlands Branch has been deeply involved in conserving the High Brown Fritillary on the Malvern Hills. As far back as 1986 we initiated, with English Nature funding, the survey of HBF sites carried out by Matthew Oates, which found large numbers spread over a wide range of sites. The following year we started the Malvern Hills transect and recorded an annual count of 152, but only two years later in ' 89 the count was down to 17, demonstrating the dramatic effect of outside factors like poor weather at critical times during the breeding cycle or perhaps the effects of predators and parasites. The numbers peaked again at 36 in ' 91, and then fell again to 15 in ' 93. We started bracken management in ' 94 and were encouraged by a count of 82 the following year, however numbers have declined ever since falling to 9 in ' 98 and to 2 in ' 99. The overall picture is one of ever lower peaks and ever deeper troughs.

In view of these poor results we instigated a further site survey in ' 98, and English Nature funded Simon Barker of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to re-visit the Matthew Oates sites. His report made depressing reading, a catalogue of sites invaded by bracken and scrub, confirming our worst fears. The alarm bells were now sounding loud and clear, we were in danger of losing the **High Brown**, and EN agreed to support the BC Conservation Office in calling a meeting of all the interested groups – Local Authorities, Malvern Hills Conservators, National Trust, landowners, AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Office, Universities and Wildlife Trusts. The meeting took place early in July and Branch Members presented the hard facts on the state of not only the HBF, but also the **Pearl Bordered** and **Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries**. Martin Warren (BC National Conservation Officer) and Matthew Oates (National Trust) explained the importance of grazing on bracken covered Fritillary sites to produce a mosaic of bracken, grass and violets. By happy coincidence, the Government had just given EN a supplementary grant of £6 million, "ring fenced" for practical conservation work and this has enabled our local EN to fund a major bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The restoration work will re-establish grazing on the lower slopes of the hills so vital to the HBF (and also the PBF & SPBF) as well as restoring a number of ancient monuments, springs and water features. The proposals include scrub removal and bracken breaking and cutting to improve grazing conditions and the construction of cattle grids on all access roads. This will be followed by the introduction of 150 sheep suitable for rough grazing, together with a shepherd and dogs to ensure that grazing is concentrated on the vital slope areas. The cattle grids will benefit the common rights holders by removing the serious problem of animals straying and a full-time Project Officer will be engaged to promote the marketing of Malvern Lamb.

Perhaps at last we can begin to hope that the failing fortunes of the Malvern Hills Fritillaries will be turned around and the Hills returned to full health.

γ Digby Wood

Conservation Corner

BAP latest

Those members living in the Birmingham/Black Country conurbation who have internet access may be interested in visiting www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/urbanwt/bap.html where the draft Biodiversity Action Plan for Birmingham & the Black Country can be accessed. This is the latest BAP to be published for our Branch area following on from Shropshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, leaving Herefordshire as the only county still to produce a biodiversity plan, although work has now started on this with Andy Nicholls providing input from West Midlands Branch. The draft Birmingham & Black Country plan contains species action plans for both **Wall Brown** and **Green Hairstreak** produced by West Midlands Butterfly Conservation and based on our own Regional Action Plan. The plan also highlights important habitats for wildlife within an urban

context like canal towpaths, former industrial sites, relict woodlands, old quarries etc. which are too often seen as just "waste land" and ripe for development. An early test of the effectiveness of the BAP process in safeguarding such habitats is provided by the current threat to the Walsall **Dingy Skipper** site reported on page 11 in this newsletter. Meanwhile in Worcs, the new Sites and Species Officer at the Wildlife Trust is carrying out a review of the county's Special Wildlife Sites and has approached the Branch for our assistance in developing criteria for selection as far as butterflies and moths are concerned. Special Wildlife Sites are those sites which are important for wildlife but have not, for whatever reason, been formally designated as SSSIs. A large number of good butterfly and moth sites come into this category and, in terms of our desire to focus our conservation efforts more on the wider countryside outside of nature reserves, it is important that we make sure that those sites containing our regionally important species are included.

Action plan for the Grizzled Skipper

The latest product to be produced under the auspices of the West Midlands regional Conservation sub-committee, which continues to oversee the implementation of the Regional Action Plan, is a study of the **Grizzled Skipper** in the region undertaken by Simon Barker. The **Grizzled Skipper** is one of the West Midlands' fastest declining species with an estimated rate of decline of 31% over the past seventeen years. The aim of the study, which was funded by the three regional branches through the RAP Fund, was to try to identify factors leading to decline and loss and to make recommendations for conserving the butterfly at its remaining sites. As part of the study, Simon looked at a selection of sites in Glos, Herefords, Warks and Worcs covering the main habitat types occupied by the butterfly, namely woodland rides and clearings, unimproved grassland and post-industrial sites, particularly old railway lines. Both extant and extinct sites were chosen for each habitat type. In total, the report looks at around a dozen sites and makes recommendations on how habitat can be improved or restored to benefit the **Grizzled Skipper**. Overall, the report concludes that the factors leading to decline are related to the loss or fragmentation of the early successional habitat on which the butterfly depends. This in turn has led to the breakdown of the metapopulation structure favoured by the butterfly thereby making surviving colonies highly vulnerable to local extinction. The key to the butterfly's long term survival is maintaining existing and creating new habitat patches within the larger metapopulations where the butterfly is still doing reasonably well.

Essex Skipper spotting

It is very frustrating that, ever since the first Worcs report of **Essex Skipper** in 1997, Skipper numbers have been in the doldrums and despite efforts by a large number of recorders we are still far from clear about the exact status of this butterfly within the county. Two definite records, however, supported by, for the first time, clear photographs were received for 1999 from Gary Farmer for Windmill Hill NR near Cleeve Prior and from a site in Redditch. These reports perhaps suggest that the main penetration into the county has been from the east and that future searches may be productively targeted on this side of the county.

Winter work parties

No repeat I'm afraid of last year's "Record turnout at work party" headline, but again a very successful season with plenty of excellent work accomplished. Some good publicity for our efforts was obtained through our participation in the Whitbread Millennium Action Earth campaign which also produced some new volunteers (who hopefully will return!) and some extra money to enable us to buy replacement tools. A new work site this season was Camp Farm near Great Witley, one of the few areas of limestone grassland that survive in this area but threatened with encroaching scrub, see diary 19 March. Two very successful and enjoyable days have made a considerable impact on this problem with, we hope, very positive results for the flora and fauna. By the time this edition of the newsletter is published, our current work day season will be drawing to a close but, as always, further volunteers will be made very welcome.

New transects

Three new transects have been started over the course of the summer at Ewyas Harold Common, Old Hawne Colliery in Halesowen and on the north end of the Malverns. Transect walkers are reminded that any outstanding 1999 data should be sent to Ian Duncan as soon as possible. Data is now being gathered nationally as well as locally as part of a new research programme supported by MAFF which is a major step forward and should help Butterfly Conservation to more closely monitor trends in the health of our butterflies in the wider countryside.

1999 Butterfly & Moth Report

This will be published in the next issue of the newsletter and all contributions will be very

welcome. Thank you to those members who have already sent through first and last sightings data and if there are other people out there who have very early or late dates for butterflies seen within the Branch area in 1999 I would be pleased to hear. I would also welcome nominations for the final butterfly oscars of the last millennium. We received an apparently unbeatable claim for first butterfly of the new Millennium from Simon Pancheri who saw a **Red Admiral** in Dudley on 1 January. Amazingly, this has now been rivalled by Andrew Fraser, who saw a **Peacock** in Alvechurch on 1 January at 1.52 pm!

Change of address

Neil McLean, the warden at Trench Wood NR, has now moved to 10 Hammond Close, Droitwich, Worcs, WR9 7SZ tel. 01905 795381.

γ Mike Williams
mike@stagborough.fsnet.co.uk

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:

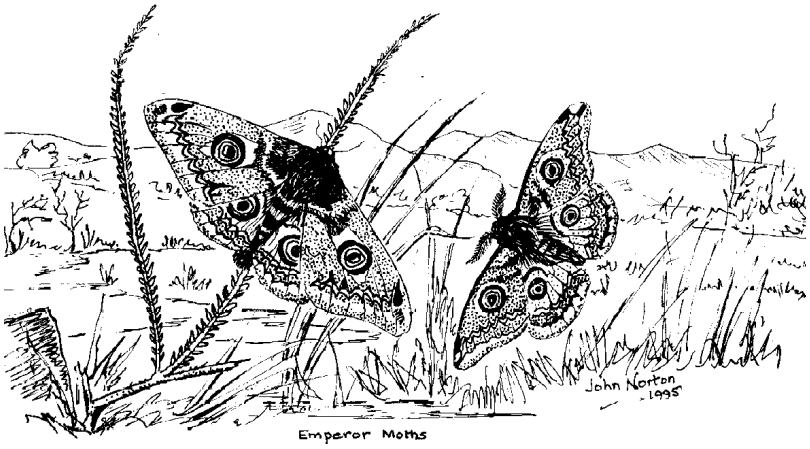
- Wear appropriate foot wear for the conditions expected underfoot.
- Wear appropriate clothing for the conditions to be expected. Protect yourself against Cold, Heat, Sun, Rain, Wind and Thorns.
- Consider what precautions you should take to prevent being bitten or stung by insect, plants, snakes or 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."

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.



Emperor moths

See moth programme

29th April

Dates for your diary

FEBRUARY

26 February (Saturday) AGM and National Members' Day, Three Counties Show ground Malvern, doors open 10.00 am, meeting 11.00 am.

MARCH

5 March (Sunday) Conservation Task - Monkwood Meet 10.00 am in the reserve car park just off the Sinton Green-Monkwood Green Road. OS Map 150 GR SO803603. Glade management.

12 March (Sunday) Conservation Task – Grafton Wood Meet 10.00 am at Three Parishes Village Hall, Grafton Flyford (next to church) just off A422 Worcester-Alcester road. OS Map 150 GR SO963557 Brash clearing.

19 March (**Sunday**) **Conservation Task** – **Bircher Common**. Meet 10.00 am at Highwood end gate at bottom of lane passing Croft Castle (look for NT signs) OS Map 149 GR SO458658.

19 March (Sunday) Conservation work – scrub clearance Great Whitley. Meet 10.00 am at Hundred House public house, Great Whitley OS map 150 GR SO752662, leader Trevor Bucknall 01905 755757

26 March (**Sunday**) **Conservation Task** – **Trench Wood**. Meet 10.00 am at the reserve entrance on Sale Green – Dunhampstead road. OS Map 150 GR SO929588.

APRIL

8 April (**Saturday**) **Spring Meeting** – **Bishops Wood Environmental Centre**. Meeting starts 6.30 pm. See page 8 for details and map.

MAY

1 May (Monday) Monkwood - Bluebells and Spring Flowers. Meet in reserve car park 11.00 am. Guided walk led by Claire Turner and Terry Norledge. Charge £1 adults, 50p children. OS Map 150 GR SO803603

7 May (Sunday) Spring open day at Tiddesley Wood Nature Reserve Pershore – Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. Following the A44 from Pershore to Worcester**,** take the minor Besford/Croome road on the left at the top of the hill. The road is signed "Croome Landscape Park". The Reserve entrance is on the left after half a mile. OS Map 150 GR SO928462 Butterfly Conservation stall and guided walk.

21 May (**Sunday**) **Haugh Wood** target species **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** and **Grizzled Skipper**. Meet 11.30 am in the car park OS Map 149 GR SO593365. Leader Jeff Andrews (01432 870301).

28 May (**Sunday**) **Cranham Common** - target species **Duke of Burgundy**, **Small Blue**, **Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper and Brown Argus**. Meet 11.30 am Park in lay by at Cranham Village Hall. OS Map 163 GR SO897129. Leader Rob Mabbutt. For details ring Mark Farmer (01242 621008).

JUNE

2/4June (Friday to Sunday or **Saturday** only option) Warwickshire Branch – a weekend of . butterfly walks and a concert - Toller Porcorum, Dorset. Full details page 9

11 June (**Sunday**) **Wyre Forest** – target species **Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small**

Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Grizzled Skipper. Meet Earnwood Copse car park 11.00 am. OS Map 138 GR SO745784. Leader Frank Lancaster (01299 403056)

17 June (Saturday) Monkwood – target species **Wood White**. Meet car park Sinton Green – Monkwood Green Road 11.00 am. OS Map 150 GR SO803603 leader Paddy Harrison (01905 641523)

25 June (**Sunday**) **Prees Heath** and **Whixall Moss**. Target species **Silver–studded Blue** and **Large Heath**. Meet 11.00 am Prees Heath car park off A49. OS Map 126 GR SJ558368. Stout shoes, wellingtons for Whixall, insect repellent for horseflies. Leader Peter Boardman 01925 634899.

JULY

1 July (**Saturday**) **Castern Wood.** Target - **Northern Brown Argus**. Meet 11.00 am The Watts–Russell Arms, Hopedale, Alstone Field, Ashbourne. OS Map 119 GR SK126550. Leaders Phil Hopson and David Jackson (01902 344716)

8/10 July (**Saturday to Monday**) **Coach Trip** – Lake District (target species **Mountain Ringlet**), and Arnside Knott (many species). Coach leaves Bromsgrove at 8.30 am, for more details see page 8.

15 July (Saturday) – **Bircher Common** – target species **High brown Fritillary**, **Dark Green Fritillary** and **Silver-washed Fritillary**. Meet 10.30 am at Highwood End Gate at bottom of lane passing Croft Castle. OS Map 138 GR SO458658. Leader Andy Nicholls (01432 275834).

23 July (Sunday) - **Grafton Wood**. Target species **White Admiral and Purple Hairstreak**. Meet 11 am at Three Parishes Village Hall. OS Map 150 GR SO978553. Leader John Tilt 01386 792458.

30 July (**Sunday**) **Wyre Forest** – target species **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **Purple Hairstreak** and **White Admiral**. Meet at 11.00 am Earnwood Copse car park. OS 138 GR SO745784 off B4194. Leader Frank Lancaster (01299 403056).

AUGUST

5 August (Saturday) Coach Trip Porton Down. Target Downland Species. Bring stout walking shoes or boots, protective clothing and lunch. **Applications must contain full name and age**. This will be an official guided tour. Coach leaves Worcester at 7.30 and Bromsgrove at 8.00 am. Cost £12.50 Booking before May 1 essential.

13 August (Sunday) The Bog near Stiperstones. Target species **Grayling** and **Wall Brown.** Meet at 11.00 am large car park on west side of Stiperstones. OS Map 137 GR SO357978. Leader Bill Davidson 01588 640727.

20 August (**Sunday**) **Garden visit Ron and Jean Hunt at Barton's Cottage** 2.30 – 4.30pm at Far Forest, Rock, near Bewdley. OS Map 138 GR SO725746. Sign posted from A4117 Bewdley- Mortimer Road. Take road for Bayton a few hundred yards north of Plough public house. This is a 3.5 acre garden managed for wild life.

27 August (Sunday) Target species Brown Hairstreak. Meet 11.00 am at Three Parishes Hall to visit a site near Inkberrow. OS Map150 GR SO978553. Mark Farmer 01242 621008 (day time)

Moth programme - 2000

APRIL

29 April (Saturday) Castlemorton Common 1.00pm. Target species **Emperor Moth.** Meet just off main road at the junction OS Map 150 GR SO787389

MAY

12 May (Friday) Haugh Wood 8.00 pm. Target species **Barred Hook Tip.** Meet in picnic area car park. OS Map 149 GR SO593 365

20 May (Saturday) Posten plain 1.00 pm. Target species **Argent and Sable.** Meet at Button Oak car park. OS Map 138 GR SO753793

JUNE

9 June (Friday) Haugh Wood 8.30 pm. Target species **Clay Triple Lines**. Meet in picnic area car park. OS Map 149 GR SO593365

17 June (Saturday) Grafton Wood 9.30 pm. Under recorded site. Meet Three Parishes Hall car park. OS Map 150 GR SO963557

23 June (Friday) Trench Wood 9.30 pm. Target species **Festoon**, **Glow Worm**. Meet in reserve car park. OS 150 GR SO928589

JULY

1 July (Saturday) Midsummer Hill 9.30 pm. Target species **Confused**, **Beautiful Brocade**. Meet in car park. OS Map150 GR SO759369

7 July (Friday) Queen's Wood 9.30 pm. Target species **Beautiful Snout**, **Orange**, **Rosy Footman**. Meet at track off minor road. OS Map 162 GR SO666268

14 July (Friday) Haugh Wood 9.30 pm. Target species **Cloaked Carpet, Great Oak Beauty**. Meet in picnic area car park. OS Map 149 GR SO593365

15 July (Saturday) Bircher Common 9.30 pm. Meet in National Trust car park on common. OS Map 149 GR SO458658

21 July (Friday) Crew's Hill Wood 9.00 pm. Under recorded site. Meet in Ravenshill Reserve car park. OS Map 150 GR SO739539

29 July (Saturday) High Vinnalls 9.00 pm. Meet in main car park from Ludlow. OS Map 138 GR SO474732

AUGUST

4 August (Friday) Bredon Hill 9.00 pm. Meet Cherry Tree Cottage, Westmancote near end of track. OS Map 150 GR SO946386

11 August (Friday) 9 Holes Meadows SSSI 9.00 pm This site is difficult to find. The house, 9 Holes (OS Map 138 GR SO607674) is well back from the road along a small track with a gate at the end, off the B4214 near Tenbury Wells. Meet at the gate OS Map 138 GR SO606669. Leader Peter Holmes

18 August (Friday) Wigmore Rolls 8.30 pm.. Target species **Old Lady**. Meet at the Compasses public house in Wigmore. OS Map 137 GR SO415690

25 August (Friday) Haugh Wood 8.30 pm. Target species **Barred Chestnut**, **Satin Beauty**. Meet in picnic area. OS Map 149 GR SO593365

SEPTEMBER

8 September (Friday) Haugh Wood 8.00 pm. Target Species **Oak Nycteoline, Merville-du-Jour.** Meet in picnic area car park. OS Map 149 GR SO593365

23 September (Saturday) Hartlebury Common 7.30 pm National Moth Night, Southern Chestnut. Meet in "Goal posts" car park. OS Map 138 GR SO822705

An invitation

Something to say but too busy to write an article, why not write a letter instead? New contributors are particularly welcome. – Editor

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