Speckled Wood Newsletter Issue 11, Autumn 2012

Newsletter reporting on work to conserve Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission Land in England.

Foreword

Welcome to the eleventh edition of “Speckled Wood”, an email newsletter produced by Butterfly Conservation and Forestry Commission England (FCE) about the conservation work to benefit threatened butterflies and moths on priority sites on FCE land. Thank you for all the positive feedback we have received for the last two issues and the articles put forward for this issue. This issue remains at the 6 page style and includes articles covering both the Central and East Forest Districts. Articles cover the following species; Wood White, Brown Hairstreak, Chalkhill Blue, Basil Thyme Case-bearer, Grey Carpet and the moths in Maulden Wood as well as the promotion of two new publications. Details of threatened butterflies and moths factsheets and Butterfly Conservation events can be found on page 6.

Wood White Recovery in Northamptonshire
Priority Site Grade A
Sharon Hearle, East of England Regional Officer, Butterfly Conservation
Email: shearle@butterfly-conservation.org

Butterfly Conservation have received £113,000 from the SITA Trust to run a three year project to clear woodland rides and create sunny glades at five woodlands in the Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge landscape of Northamptonshire for the benefit of the Wood White butterfly. The Project started in July 2012 and will carry out a programme of targeted practical conservation management across this landscape working in partnership with Forestry Commission at four Priority Grade A woodlands including Hazelborough Forest, Bucknall Wood, Yardley Chase and Sywell Wood.

The Wood White is one of the UK’s most rapidly declining butterflies and the Forestry Commission continues to play a hugely important role in the future of the species. In England 62% of all remaining colonies occur on land which is owned or managed by the Forestry Commission. In Northamptonshire the Wood White has been classified as a red data book species, and the county is home to one of only 3 remaining strongholds of the butterfly in the UK. There are also increasing numbers of Purple Emperor, White Admiral and Silver Washed Fritillary at several of these woods.

Survey work in 2012 has confirmed that Wood White is present at all four Forestry Commission woodlands in the project area and should respond well to ride clearance work planned for this winter. The success of this funding was due to considerable effort by Butterfly Conservation (Sam Ellis), Forestry Commission (Cheryl Lundberg) and previous monitoring and practical ride management by Forestry Commission (Andy Patmore) and Butterfly Conservation volunteers in particular Doug Goddard.
Lincolnshire Limewoods-Brown Hairstreak Project results
Priority Site Grade A
Pete Smith, Butterfly Conservation Lincolnshire Branch

A co-ordinated and concerted effort to improve habitat quality and availability within the Lincolnshire Limewoods has seen the Brown Hairstreak respond by both increasing in numbers at its stronghold, and also colonising new sites over the past five years. This species has been the subject of an ongoing project (the “Limewoods Brown Hairstreak Project”) since 1994, and a major survey of all former local sites in 1998 revealed that the butterfly was down to just two surviving colonies.

Since 1998, management work has taken place in the form of conifer removal, ride widening and coppicing of senile blackthorn stands to encourage regenerating blackthorn growth to develop in sunny, sheltered positions within the woodlands. Overwintering egg numbers at the main colony at Chambers Farm Wood have responded magnificently, as can be seen from the annual egg count graph below;

In addition to work carried out by Forest Enterprise and volunteer groups within the woodlands, the species has also benefited from the HLF-supported Lincolnshire Limewoods project, via such schemes as hedgerow planting, linking existing woodlands, and the creation of new areas of woodland on previous farmland. From having just two Limewood Brown Hairstreak colonies back in 1998, the situation in 2011 is very much brighter, as we currently have five established colonies, and have also found evidence of dispersal at a further three sites in the area, demonstrating just how mobile the egg-laying females are in the wider countryside.

With continued management work, and more sympathetic management of hedgerows around the existing colonies, it is to be hoped that the Brown Hairstreak has a much more positive future here in central Lincolnshire.

Thanks are due to Forest Enterprise, all volunteer groups, and to those who have assisted with egg-searches over the years.

At the following links you can find further information on the Limewoods:
http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-7D4FB5
Linconsire Limewoods PDF
Phenomena at Friston Forest?
Priority Site Grade A
Michael Blencowe, Butterfly Conservation, Sussex branch

Following from the South East England District update in Issue 10, the Friston Gallop section of Friston Forest created quite a spectacle this summer, causing much excitement among staff and volunteers. The grassland area under HLS management has already produced suitable habitat for a profusion of Chalkhill Blue.

On the 2nd August, Neil Hulme contacted me to say that numbers at the north end of the Gallops were exceptional and the next day, armed with a tape measure, I walked up to Gallops and joined Neil & Eric Hulme and Mike Mullis to witness this spectacle. There were incredible numbers of Chalkhill Blues up there however, as we reached The Gallops the heavens opened in typical summer 2012 style and we ended up getting a right good soaking. Despite this we still saw thousands of Chalkhill Blues and it was clear that 2012 was going to be a really special year at this site. After we dried off Mike and I decided to survey the entire site and estimate the numbers of Chalkhill Blue present here. The weather conditions were breezy and overcast and most of the butterflies only flew when they were approached. The site is around 250,000 metres square and we walked up and down it (twice) estimating the number of Chalkhill Blues in a number of compartments. Chalkhill Blues were present in all areas of the site - in most years they are concentrated at the north and south ends. There are now pockets of great Chalkhill Blue habitat across the site where the butterflies averaged around 5 per square metre.

However at their usual favoured site (on the slopes above Butchershole Bottom car park) they have reached plague proportions! I have never seen so many butterflies in my life; at one point there was a blizzard of Blue all around me, I had to raise my arm over my face to get through! I estimated 15 per square metre in one corner of this area! When we returned home we did the maths and our rough calculations estimated that there are 827,897 Chalkhill Blues at Friston Gallops - and this I think is an under-estimate! There must be well over a million butterflies spread across this site. Absolutely amazing!

Bare Ground Ride Management in the Brecks
Priority Site Grade A
Sharon Hearle, East of England Regional Officer, Butterfly Conservation

Email: shearle@butterfly-conservation.org

Thetford Forest was planted in the 1920s in a distinctive area known as the Brecks in Norfolk and Suffolk and famous for its dry heaths. The Brecks area is home to a unique population of threatened butterflies and moths and includes species that are not found anywhere else in the UK, like the Basil Thyme Case-bearer and Grey Carpet moths. It is also an important refuge for Grizzled and Dingy Skipper butterflies, which have lost more than 50 per cent of their population nationally in the last 50 years and one of the few inland sites for Grayling butterfly.

A three year Butterfly Conservation project; ‘Heathland Restoration for Threatened Butterflies and Moths’ started in 2010 with funding from Wren Biodiversity Action Fund and included Priority Lepidoptera sites on Forestry Commission land. Nearly all of the threatened species of Lepidoptera are dependent on early successional heathland and grass-heath habitat with bare ground. Without intervention suitable habitat patches for these moths and butterflies where their larval foodplants are abundant are likely to be short-lived. This project has increased the amount of soil disturbance along forest rides using different methods including turf stripping, rotovating and deep ploughing.

Over 5 km of mown grass rides have now been disturbed in the autumn and winter to create bare ground. These rides go on to produce an abundance of nectar from a variety of flowers throughout spring and summer which was a major factor in attracting moths such as Forester and Marbled Clover during the day and many butterflies and other nectaring insects. Grey Carpet moth larvae were confirmed on rotovated rides after its caterpillar foodplant Flixweed appeared. At Cranwich Heath, Basil Thyme which is the caterpillar food plant for Basil Thyme Case-bearer moth has appeared on all 5 rotovated plots covering 1.5 hectares.

Evidence is gathering that the application of soil disturbance at a landscape-scale where small areas of breeding habitat are restored in many locations, together with improved connectivity between those sites will increase the likelihood of species moving through the landscape.

Thanks to all the volunteer butterfly and moth recorders who are active in many parts of the forest especially the new butterfly transect walkers. The success of the Brecks project is due to considerable effort by Forestry Commission (Neal Armour-Chelu) and Natural England (Bev Nichols). We are also very grateful to WREN for funding this important work.
**Mothing in Maulden Wood**  
**Priority Site Grade A**  
Andy & Melissa Banthorpe, VC30 county macro-moth recorders

Maulden Wood and Pennyfather’s Hill SSSI is a large block of mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland situated 10km south of Bedford. The northern section is on a Boulder Clay cap and the southern on Lower Greensand. This influences the ground flora and hence the species found in the two areas.

Our survey of Maulden Wood formed part of the Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission Land in England Conservation Strategy 2007 – 2017. This coincided with a re-survey of the wood, across several taxonomic groups, by Bedfordshire Natural History Society (BNHS) following on from work done in the 1970s. We light trapped on 24 occasions, across all months between 2008 to 2012. Over 40 daytime visits were also made recording both macro and micro-moths. A concerted effort was made to record as many leaf-mining micro species as possible using the expertise of our county micro-moth recorder, David Manning. He led a training day in September 2010 where 71 species were recorded, many new to the wood.

Our surveys recorded 269 macro species (19 new to site) and 302 micros (96 new). This took the overall list for the wood to 397 macros and 392 micros, totalling 789 species.

The good ride structure is an important component of this site and abundant flora along the edges of the wider rides offer nectar sources, especially to butterfly species. Wild Angelica grows along the main ride and whilst the flowers attract many species of diptera, the ripening seeds are food for the larvae of species such as Triple-spotted Pug – first recorded in the county at this site in 2003. In the past two years felling work has taken place, mainly of pine with some hardwood such as Oak and Ash, and it will be interesting to see how this affects the lepifauna of the site as these open areas regenerate. It is hoped that the ride cutting regime, especially the timing, will be included in the management plan.

Overall it continues to be one of the best woods in the county across many taxonomic groups and it is pleasing to see that so many people visit and enjoy it.

### New Publications

**Field Guide to the Micro-moths of Great Britain and Ireland**  
Phil Sterling, Mark Parsons and Richard Lewington  
British Wildlife Publishing, Hardcover £45; paperback offer £26.00  
“This summer sees the publication of the long-awaited Field Guide to the Micro-moths of Great Britain and Ireland. It is a ground-breaking work that covers more than 1,000 species and it is intended to make this overlooked, under-recorded and intriguing group more accessible to beginners and experts alike.  
Micro-moths are often ignored and passed over, even by some moth recorders. This field guide should go a long way to enthuse readers to take a second look.” Les Hill

**INSECT PHOTOGRAPHY, Art and Techniques, John Bebbington FRPS**  
Publisher Crowood Press Ltd. ISBN 978 1 84797 378 8 Marked Price £16.99  
Why another photography book? Over the last 30-plus years I have led many close-up and macro photography courses both in the UK and abroad. Although there are excellent books on close-up and macro work, which I recommend to my students, I felt that there was a need for a book which tried to answer some of the most frequent questions I have been asked, and address the commonest problems met by beginners in insect photography.  
“...the text is profusely illustrated with beautifully reproduced and appropriately chosen photographs.” Robert Hawkesworth F.R.P.S.
Encouraging volunteers to survey and monitor priority sites

Volunteers play a key role in surveying and monitoring Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission England sites. The data this provides is vital to enable understanding of the changes in Lepidoptera populations and provides a basis for management advice. To encourage further survey work at Forestry Commission England sites, get in touch with the local Butterfly Conservation branch (www.butterfly-conservation.org/bcbranches) and other local volunteers. If Forestry Commission staff request survey work, there may be Forestry Commission England funds available to fund volunteer expenses. If you need further help to set up monitoring, help may also be available from Butterfly Conservation staff, so please get in touch with Caroline Kelly (contact details below).

Training Days

Details of training events can be found on Butterfly Conservation’s website www.butterfly-conservation.org/events. Please contact us if you are interested in arranging specific events.

Butterfly Conservation Factsheets

Butterfly Conservation has factsheets detailing the ecology of more than 50 different butterflies and moths (the majority of which are UK BAP priority species). Habitat management recommendations are also included. There are also four new factsheets detailing management recommendations from creating a butterfly bank to scraping. If you would like copies of any of the factsheets please contact Butterfly Conservation, or download them from www.butterfly-conservation.org/priorityspeciesfactsheets, www.butterfly-conservation.org/habitatadvice and www.butterfly-conservation.org/habitatmanagement.

Next Issue

If you have any news about butterflies and moths from your district, (new projects, information or management advice) that you would like to appear in this newsletter then please write an article of no more than 400 words and send it and any accompanying photos to Caroline Kelly (ckelly@butterfly-conservation.org) by 1st February 2013 so it can be included in the next newsletter.

Key Contacts

For further information please contact Caroline Kelly at Butterfly Conservation (ckelly@butterfly-conservation.org, 01929 406029) or Rebecca Wilson at Forestry Commission England (rebecca.wilson@forestry.gsi.gov.uk, 01594 838634).