ON THE WING

The newsletter of
Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire Butterfly Conservation
**Winter Work Parties 2019/20**

**Fermyn Woods Country Park**
Scrub clearance in the main park for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks
10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (SP952848) Contact Doug Goddard 01604 408670.
**Sunday 13th October 2019**
**Sunday 12th January 2020**
**Sunday 8th March 2020**

**Twywell Hills and Dales**
Scrub clearance along the transect route for a range of grassland species 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Meet in the main car park (SP938772)
**N.B.** The site is under new management and as yet no firm dates have been finalised.
*Please see our website for any details and hopefully dates.*

**Salcey Forest** (Woodland Wings Project)
3rd Sunday of the month, 10am-3pm:
- 20st October
- 17th November
- 15th December
- 19th January
- 16th February
Removal of small scrub to enhance existing habitat and create new areas for Wood White and Black Hairstreak. Meet in the horsebox car park on Midshires Way, SP810508, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Please contact Caz Temple in advance by ringing 07483 039 326 or email ctemple@butterfly-conservation.org
COMMITTEE MATTERS
- CALLING ALL BEDFORDSHIRE MEMBERS

As we come towards the end of the butterfly season, we can reflect on another good summer. Most species benefitted from the extraordinary weather last year. The Painted Lady has arrived here in enormous numbers and as I write a number of Clouded Yellows have appeared in Northamptonshire having bred there for the second successive year. The Chequered Skipper re-introduction exceeded expectations with a good emergence of adults, the offspring of those released last year, and a programme of events for Woodland Wings has been well attended, including a Black Hairstreak management day and a photography workshop. Our field trips have been well attended allowing many to enjoy our varied species and an increasing number of members are posting photos on social media and sharing valuable information to enhance everyone’s butterfly experience.

Those of you who attended the branch AGM will be aware that I will be retiring from the committee this coming April. The branch would welcome someone to come forward as the new branch chair so please consider putting your name forward to take on this role. On the committee front I am delighted to report that Martin Swannell has joined the committee and Nicky Gibbs has agreed to become treasurer. Keith Balmer and Andy Banthorpe are continuing as post holders but have resigned from the committee while the remainder of the committee have indicated that they will continue to serve, though Andy Wylde would like someone to take over as newsletter editor. Again, please consider taking on this important role.

While the future of the branch is assured for the immediate future, one major issue remains. Of the eleven committee members for next year, only two are based in Bedfordshire, where half of the branch membership resides. Unless members from Bedfordshire come forward to serve, activities within the branch area will be largely confined to Northamptonshire which is very unsatisfactory for those who would like more local events in their county. The branch needs members to organise field trips, work parties and other events in Bedfordshire. I know from meeting people at various events that there is a good level of interest in the butterflies there and it would be unfortunate if there had to be a split in the future since the branch started initially through the enthusiasm and commitment of an enthusiastic band of Bedfordshire members. Please come forward and help your committee and branch members.

Douglas Goddard (Chair)
Picking up Graham Warne in Bedford on a wet Saturday morning, prospects for butterflies were bleak and when we encountered a traffic hold up on the bypass and diverted through Marston things were not improving. After other hold ups we arrived ten minutes late to the car park, just as six members were about to leave for an unguided walk at a site which none had any previous experience of. Just on time, and at least dry, although still cool, Graham and I hurriedly sorted our gear and joined the intrepid band.

The usual walk – along the north side where butterflies often warm themselves facing the sun. No hope today – the sun was well covered and not a sign of flight although the nectar plants could be seen in good quantity. A search around fresher scree piles but no movement and then the gate to the reserve was locked, so onward through the quarry workings and here our luck changed. Finally a butterfly, Dingy Skipper was seen then disappeared quickly. Across the track (no more locked gates) into the more established reserve – a Common Blue, then a Small Heath kicked up out of the grass. This last butterfly settled and allowed a few photo shots.

We moved into ‘the gully’ in search of the Duke. Recent maintenance by the Wildlife Trust had cut back the area which was not familiar to me to find this butterfly, so while it was good that clearings were being created it did not help me locate the species. Emerging at the quarry end into the newly acquired field now managed by the Trust, Graham’s sharp eyes spotted movement. A call of ‘Green Hairstreak’ was quickly changed as the butterfly settled – a Small Blue, very fresh and in an area I had never seen them before. The butterfly was still warming up so offered a photo opportunity. A second one was found and we had time to show a passing family with young daughter their first ever Small Blue.

We continued our walk along the east ridge then along the public path through the south side – no Speckled Woods, which was disappointing, but views of Red Kites and Corn Buntings across the recently sown arable field in the middle of the quarry kept us distracted. Finally along the western cliff, normally an evening roost for Small Blues, but it had been so cold and wet that they had not moved from their roost. A little warmer now, so a few butterflies enabling the sharper eyes to spot Dingy Skipper and Small Blue and finally a few more Small Heath and a Brimstone.

Returning to the car park after the two hour stroll our members from Northants were pleased to have seen Small Blues. Two of the group received instructions and headed for Bison Hill for a second chance of Duke of Burgundy. It was warmer but still cloudy and they are very elusive in these conditions. Our two Bedfordshire members were pleased to have been shown the reserve and said they would return on a better weather day. Graham and I returned to Bedford where it was pouring with rain!

(with many thanks from Douglas Goddard to Ian and Graham for filling in at short notice as I was unable to lead this field trip)
Fifteen members gathered from Morrison’s car park by the entrance to Bradlaugh Fields, formerly a golf course but previously a quarry, this end known as the Hills and Holes. This was a new venue for a Northants field trip to survey a grassland site with a rich flora and a range of species. We were welcomed by Rob Mason of The Friends of Bradlaugh Fields on a cool, blustery and cloudy morning. Thanks to John and Kirsty Philpott who led the walk with me, along with Dave James.

The most common species on the site at this time of year is the Marbled White which was in evidence even as we assembled before the start of the walk. Over sixty were counted in total during the course of the morning but were difficult to photograph in the windy conditions. Newly arrived Painted Ladies settled on areas of bare ground around the old golf bunkers. We soon added the common grassland species with Ringlet being the most numerous followed by Meadow Brown and Small Skipper. Eventually Dave identified an Essex Skipper which sat motionless among the grasses and very obligingly occupied the photographers who were able to get within a few inches of it to record the distinctive black on the underside of the antennae. In the areas of sparser vegetation, a few Small Heaths were flying.

A few Small Tortoiseshells were seen as we wandered along the paths but other species were hard to find, with only single Common Blue and Brown Argus recorded, their second broods not having started yet. Similarly, only one each of Speckled Wood and Large Skipper were located. As we neared the barn, a Comma was seen basking on the adjacent bramble bushes. An elm nearby looked a possible spot for White-letter Hairstreak but patient observation brought no result. We ended the morning with tea and coffee kindly provided free by The Friends of Bradlugh Fields to whom we extend grateful thanks. The group dispersed apart from a couple who walked back with John and Kirsty and me. The day had begun to brighten a little and we added the three common white species and enjoyed views of very fresh Small Tortoiseshells and Commas.
Fineshade Wood 14th July 2019

Organised jointly with the *Back from the Brink* project this field trip in 2018 had yielded twenty-three species on the same weekend in July. The event had also been advertised more widely and in spite of a not very optimistic weather forecast was attended by nearly forty enthusiasts. We were delighted to welcome a number of visitors from Leicestershire. We met in the courtyard at Top Lodge and Susannah O’Riordan gave an introduction to *Back from the Brink* before we set off with eager anticipation as the sun started to break through a little.

The first species to appear was the Ringlet, which would accompany us in numbers as we journeyed down through the wood. This was followed by Large Skippers which have been very common in our local woodlands this year. We were soon greeted by a Silver-washed Fritillary and as the conditions brightened others descended from their treetop perches to nectar on the brambles in a clearing. We were able to witness the splendid courtship flight of this species. A White Admiral was seen though only briefly as it glided through the greenery and Large and Small Whites were added.

We reached the large loading bay clearing where we had seen Dark Green Fritillary the previous year, then a new colonist of the wood. I had noted a couple there on a preliminary visit two days before and one or two were to be seen on this occasion flying in their usual hasty fashion around the back of this area, but denying close views. As we approached Andy Wyldes spotted a male Purple Emperor on some dog faeces on the side of a pile of stone chippings. It was a considerable challenge to usher everyone around without disturbing it but this was accomplished, His Imperial Majesty holding court to the whole assembly gathered in a large circle and allowing those who wished to photograph to do so.

It was an effort to drag everyone away from this, but most of the group followed me further along the main track to higher ground which I know to be a typical territory area for Purple Emperors,
where the males search the canopy of the highest part of the wood for emerging females. Unfortunately it had become a little gloomy and this was not observed. As we returned to the clearing, Andy and Susannah had found a fresh female Dark Green Fritillary at rest in the grass with wings wide open. Everyone slowly approached it (nobody wanted to be the one to scare it off!) and remarkably all had good views and were able to photograph as they wished. Shortly afterwards, a Red Admiral settled on the ground.

On the way back to Top Lodge, Susannah (above) pointed out some wild liquorice, food plant for the diminutive and elusive Liquorice Piercer Moth, one of the priority species of Back from the Brink. A couple of Commas were recorded and by the old car park a Marbled White. We had scanned the oaks for Purple Hairstreaks and surveyed the elms by the bridge for White-letters but the weather was not quite good enough for them to be active as in previous years. The rough ground in the field below the bridge yielded more Marbled Whites and several Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and Small Skippers. The final total was seventeen species.

I would like to express my thanks to Andy and Susannah for their assistance in managing the large group and helping to ensure that everyone got as much as possible from the walk. One lady was celebrating her birthday and regarded seeing her first Purple Emperor and the two Fritillaries as the perfect present. Some participants expressed misgivings about the large number attending, but it is refreshing to see so much interest in our butterflies and to be able to share them so widely. An email from one member summed up, “I was seriously impressed by the etiquette and respect shown by everyone attending this morning – there was no sign of selfishness or anything other than ensuring everyone took the photos they wanted. I never thought I’d see people photographing a Purple Emperor on their mobile phones!!!! What has it come to?” It was a real pleasure to take such a group round the wood.

Silver-washed Fritillary, ever present during the walk!
Judged by our guest speakers Joel & Jim Ashton, “The Butterfly Brothers”

**The Chairman’s Shield**  Best British Butterfly. Winner: Dennis McQuillan and a Green Hairstreak.

**Butterfly Conservation Shield**  Best Early Stages. Winner: Dennis McQuillan with a Lackey Moth caterpillar.

**Best British Moth Shield**  Winner: Dennis McQuillan and a Green Silver-lines moth.

**The Don Askew Memorial Shield**  Branch Activities. Winner: Douglas Goddard with a pic of your editor snapping a Clouded Yellow at Sywell CP!

Victorious in three categories! Dennis McQuillan receives one of his trophies for the Best Butterfly from the “Butterfly Brothers.”

Douglas Goddard and his trophy for the Branch activities category.
August 4th 2019

I left my home in Watford at 9 am and set off up the M1 towards the site. I arrived shortly before 10 am and the car park was almost full. Many of the cars were those of the people coming on the walk. Around thirty people from both branches turned up, plus a chap from the West Midlands who had travelled down especially to tick the Chalkhill Blue off his annual sightings list. The weather was cloudy but warm with a hint of sunshine to come.

Following my well-trodden anticlockwise transect route I took the party straight over the far side of the site. We went to the Dark Green Fritillary breeding area in the east-facing chalk-meadow meadow. Once there, we proceeded to walk around the unimproved chalk down-land hillside in a leisurely way. We paused at places where there were banks of colourful flowers attracting the butterflies and, it being cooler and a less sunny day than of late, the butterflies were settling on flower heads making photography much less difficult.

To all’s delight a few Dark Green Fritillaries were still flying and, for that moment at least, our target “Chalkie” species was overlooked. As we walked around the site watching these Dark Green Fritillaries other down-land butterflies appeared, mostly Brown family and a very few late Skippers. When we came to the main Chalkhill Blue breeding areas we found fifty on the first one (Triangular Meadow) and 220 on the other (Moleskin) – abundance more than meeting the participants’ expectations. There were some freshly emerged female “Chalkies” affording very good photographs and prompting discussions about the chequered borders they have on their wings and how similar to lady Adonis Blues these females are.

We also found some other blue family members, primarily Common Blues and Brown Argus. There were no Small Blues left but we did find one very old and fluttery Marbled White., 9 old Dark Green Fritillaries and 301 Chalkhill Blues in their prime. The Meadow Browns, were also numerous with 134 seen. Ringlets were scarce. The three common whites (Large, Small & GV) were seen in low numbers, but we did see 12 newly emerged Brimstones.

Overall about 600 individual butterflies were seen on the day which is one of the better daily totals seen on Sharpenhoe during this butterfly flight season. In total 19 different species.

The nineteen different butterfly species seen:

SKIPPERS:
Small Skipper

WHITES:
Brimstone, Large White, Small White, and Green Veined White,

BROWNS:

NYMPHALIDS:
Comma, Dark Green Fritillary Peacock, Painted Lady and Red Admiral.

BLUES:
Common Blue, Brown Argus and Chalkhill Blue

Female Chalkhill Blue
A warm morning dawned for this event with thin cloud clearing to hazy sunshine and sunny intervals by the end of the morning. A strong contingent of members from both Beds and Northants made their annual pilgrimage to see the enigmatic Black Hairstreak, while others had journeyed from further afield, from Cheshire, Bristol and Warwickshire to make their first acquaintance with the species. All duly gathered round the famed dewberry bushes where the adults descend frequently to obtain nectar.

Following the unprecedented quantity of butterflies seen here in 2018, the Black Hairstreak had been emerging in good numbers prior to this day and a steady stream of visitors were able to obtain views of the butterflies very quickly and indulge in close up photography. This is always a great social event with everyone generally catching up and recounting anecdotes of other species seen and locations visited. Scrutiny of the butterflies present revealed than many were still very fresh and a few exhibiting
the results of attacks by birds. Several people asked about the difference between males and females and I was able to illustrate the small sex brand on the male by closing in on images on the digital camera.

As the day warmed up, attention was diverted for a time to half a dozen adult common lizards basking on two piles of logs around the ride junction along from the ‘hot spot’. Dick Smith, the reserve warden, and I took visitors to explore the far end of the wood. Here the Silver-washed Fritillaries can be seen in profusion but none had emerged yet. A fine stand of common spotted orchids was in evidence and Meadow Browns, Speckled Woods and Large Skippers were in flight. There is no blackthorn in this end of the wood and consequently no Black Hairstreaks, but on our return we found several clumps of wild privet in flower. This does not always bloom at the right time for the species but this year was perfect and a number of adults were found nectaring on each bush as we made our way back to the entrance ride. Dick showed a pupa attached to some blackthorn which had been trimmed and piled up beside the ride. Close inspection revealed that it had hatched successfully so this practice had not been detrimental.

As we returned to the dewberry bushes, a White Admiral flew into the area and sparked a mad dash by visitors from further afield who do not have it on their local patches as they attempted to photograph it, but its showing was all too brief. A Painted Lady was more obliging as it settled to feed continually on the dewberries and a Red Admiral was also seen here.

As the assembled throng had dispersed towards lunchtime we were able to reflect on an enjoyable and successful morning in which we estimated the tally of Black Hairstreaks present to be around fifty. Before we left, a Marbled White and Small Tortoiseshell were flying in the lane opposite the wood and we later discovered one of the party had also recorded the county’s first White-letter Hairstreak of the year inside the wood.
A party of twelve participants who had pre-booked for this event, a joint venture with the BCN Wildlife Trust, assembled on a bright sunny morning at the Pitsford Fishing Lodge. After a brief introduction over coffee, we grouped around one of the permanent moth traps where Mischa Cross introduced us to the night’s catch. Like a magician drawing rabbits out of a hat, she gradually unveiled the supporting cast, explaining a little about each species as she did so before handing them over to members of the party for closer study and photography. The size of the group was ideal for everyone to obtain detailed scrutiny and take photographs as they wished in an informal, relaxed setting.

Almost forty species had been caught. A Large Yellow Underwing made a swift exit but the remainder were co-operative. Pride of place went to the magnificent hawkmoths represented by five species, the Elephant, Eyed, Poplar, Pine and Privet. The last of these particularly claimed attention in attempts to arrange it in a natural setting for photography. The Buff Tip was placed on a fence post in order to display its charismatic camouflage. We were able to admire the splendid colouring of the Burnished Brass and the markings of the Heart and Dart before the Leopard was introduced. It was easy to see why it was so named and it was most people’s favourite on this occasion. Mischa also showed a Peppered Moth, explaining how this had developed its melanic form which was rarely encountered now owing to a cleaner environment.

When everyone had looked at all the moths, Dave James and I led the group for a walk to look for butterflies. As we set off, a number
of Peacock larvae were spotted among the vegetation at the side of the reservoir, followed by the first Gatekeeper of the year. The walk took us along a tree-lined route with plenty of brambles for nectaring. We quickly found the three white species, Red Admirals, Comma and newly-arrived Painted Ladies. Ringlets and Meadow Browns accompanied us at every turn and the damper vegetation was ideal for Large Skippers. Speckled Woods were holding territory among the shady spots. Small Tortoiseshell was added to the list as we approached the meadows where Small Skippers and a solitary Common Blue were noted, though the Marbled White eluded us on this occasion. Dave James found a Red Admiral egg on some nettles.

The final count of butterflies was fifteen species including the Peacock in the larval stage. However, they were definitely eclipsed by the moths on this occasion. As we were walking around, a Scarlet Tiger moth flew across and settled in a large willow tree where most of us were able to view it through binoculars, another highlight of the morning. Common Blue and Large Red damselflies, Brown Hawker and a surprise Beautiful Demoiselle also added to the wildlife interest of an enjoyable event which we will certainly repeat in the future. We extend our grateful thanks to Mischa for sharing her expertise and enthusiasm for moths and making them so accessible to us.
Twenty years ago, the wardens of Pitsford Water Nature Reserve installed two permanent, static, non-kill moth traps. I started as the reserve officer there over nine years ago and have taken on their legacy and it has opened up a whole world of Lepidoptera to me.

Before I started at Pitsford, I had studied butterflies for university and carried out regular transects in a local wood, but I had never really thought of the world of moths beyond the beautiful day-flying Chimney Sweepers and Burnets. I was embarrassingly dismal at the moth ID test in my interview, but thankfully they took a chance on me. So starting at Pitsford, in June with two moth traps to manage, with an average catch of over 200 moths per night from an average of 120 species, I was in for a steep learning curve!

With mentoring from some of the county’s best moth-ers, to whom I am eternally grateful, and thousands of moths later (some of which I was convinced had to be new to science because they absolutely did not feature in any of the ID guides!), I can ID pretty much any macro moth that pay my traps a visit (except maybe a few of the scruffy pugs!).

As well as inheriting a world of amazing moths, I also inherited eleven years of data from the traps, which run 365 days a year. Even though I am no statistician, I knew that was too good a data set to leave going dusty on a shelf somewhere, so I started the task of digitising the data. Now the traps are in their 20th year of continuous trapping, it has become an excellent data set. Although I can’t do any fancy statistics (if there is anyone out there who loves moths and crunching numbers, please get in touch), the data does highlight some interesting trends, which compared with national trends shows that our moth populations are in line with national trends and some are even bucking the trends.

The Garden Tiger is the unfortunate poster moth of the steep declines that many species are facing. Since I have been trapping, I can count the number of these stunning moths I have seen on one hand. My predecessors however would have seen up to 35 moths per year for the first few years of trapping, then all of a sudden, they virtually disappeared. More historical records from the county had lucky moth-ers trapping over 300 moths per year! The national data set shows that this species has declined by 92%
since 1968. Our data is certainly in line with this national trend. It is thought that the species is in severe decline due to changes in farming practices and climate change.

On the flip side, there are some moths that are doing well (unfortunately not as many as are doing badly). The (not so glamorous) poster moth for species on the rise is the Dingy Footman. This lichen-feeding species was confined to the south, but with lichens recovering due to cleaner air, this species (and other footmen) are on the march (or wing!), rapidly expanding in numbers and range. Their arrival at Pitsford in 2000 coincided with this expansion and now we average 151 moths per year.

Some species are actually benefiting from climate change and are naturally colonising the UK shores. Although they might be considered as ‘naturally’ colonising the UK (I will not enter into a debate on whether colonisation through man-made climate change is ‘natural’ here), it does make me wonder whether these colonists will compete for the niches of existing species that might already be struggling. One such species popped into my trap recently and made a big impact on the local moth-ers who flocked to Pitsford to catch a glimpse of this rare beauty. It was the Clifden Nonpareil, a stunning moth that is on every moth-ers wish list. This species has had a very up and down time in the UK. It was once resident around Kent but disappeared around the 1930s. Occasional migrants would turn up from the continent, but no residents were thought to be present until the mid 2000s when they started colonising the Dorset area. In recent years they have been popping up in locations farther afield. It is unclear if they are migrants or residents, but sightings are certainly becoming more widespread and frequent. Being so far from the coast, Pitsford is not renowned for getting masses of rare migrants, but I will wait another 20 years to have a Deaths Head turn up in my traps if I have to and, with climate change, who knows what species will become common visitors to our traps.
Small Blue’s dependence for development upon Kidney Vetch (Anthyllis vulneraria) means that, within our area, it is largely confined to the chalks of southern Bedfordshire as this is where its sole larval food plant mostly grows. That’s the theory anyway.

The butterfly does pop up in odd places though, such as Cockayne Hatley (TL2549) in 2006, King’s Wood Heath and Reach (SP93390) in 2010, and Marston Moretaine Wood End (SP9740) in 2015, each time photographed to give certainty to the record. This last sighting is particularly interesting as it forms part of a cluster of one-off sightings in the Marston Vale in the last 15 years or so, usually of just one adult, but four were once reported from one of the clay pits in 2004. I had personally not made any of these sightings.

The 2015 sighting was also interesting because it occurred close to where there is a large drift of Kidney Vetch on the edge of the restored Brogborough landfill site and it was hoped this would lead to us discovering our first Small Blue colony away from the chalk. Sadly, however, no more have been seen in this area despite looking there every year since.

I was therefore not unduly surprised when on 17th June 2019 I stumbled across a Small Blue myself on a path in SP9641, close to cycle route 51, and was able to photograph it as proof. The surprise built however over the next few minutes as I found several more along the next 30m or so of footpath, with photographic evidence subsequently confirming at least three males and two females present. Delight turned to puzzlement as I looked around for Kidney Vetch but could find none anywhere in the vicinity. I spent about 90 minutes looking around this area and only found the butterflies along this short length of path with waist-high vegetation, totally unsuited to Small Blue in my experience! I eventually departed excited and puzzled in equal measures.

I then made enquiries about a large recently-established meadow alongside the path in case Kidney Vetch had been included within the seed mix. I was informed that it hadn’t been, confirming my inability to find any. I therefore returned on 22nd June for another crack at solving the mystery of their presence, hoping to observe them egg laying on something. They were still present on the tall vegetation along the path, five males and one female this time confirmed by photographs, and again could be found nowhere else. They were simply sunbathing and occasionally chasing one another, but sadly no egg laying was seen, and no further clues to their presence at this seemingly unsuitable location were gleaned.

Could they have been released by someone? This is always something to be kept at the back of the mind when discussing butterflies. It seems unlikely given the very remote location (why would someone have carried them so far?), and given the (seemingly) unsuitable habitat (why would someone have released them there?)
and the fact that they hadn’t dispersed in search of somewhere better in the five days between visits. They also fitted into the pattern of scattered reports from the Marston Vale.

I concluded they were probably occurring there naturally, but possibly independent of Kidney Vetch unless I’d simply missed it. I’ve looked in many books and while most claim that Kidney Vetch is the sole larval food plant I have found a few that say “Kidney Vetch and other plants of pea family” (Butterfly Watching, Paul Whalley, Severn House Naturalists Library); “Kidney Vetch and related plants” (Butterflies and Moths of Britain and Europe, H.Hofmann & T.Marktanner, Collins Nature Guides); “various small Leguminosae” (A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe, L.G.Higgins & N.D.Riley, Collins). These suggest a possibility that we might have a Marston Vale metapopulation surviving on something other than Kidney Vetch, though until egg-laying and larval development are observed this remains firmly in the realm of speculation. Anything that anyone can add to explain the presence of Small Blue in this area will be appreciated, especially of confirmed observations of behaviour.

Finally, did you know that an old name for Small Blue is the Bedford Blue? There’s Kidney Vetch along the embankments of the Bedford southern bypass. I wonder if some day it will eventually come home...
Fermyn Woods Country Park

19th May 2019

After launching this event the previous May, a joint venture with Back from the Brink, the Country Park and Northants Moth Group, we found the added lure of a free breakfast funded by the branch was an extra attraction to the range of wildlife on show. Twenty-three participants were present for the opening of the moth traps which had resided overnight in nearby Grafton Park Wood.

On what was a slightly cool morning with sunny intervals, the first port of call was the meadow in the centre of the Park. It was adorned with a carpet of bird's-foot trefoil this year, larval food plant for several species which we soon encountered – Common Blues, Dingy Skippers and Green Hairstreaks. Grizzled Skippers were also flying here, mingling with day-flying moths, Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton. On a grassy corner as we left the meadow, a lovely Small Copper put in an appearance.

We advanced past the deep fishing pond into the open clearing beyond it, where we watched a pair of Dingy Skippers courting and quickly mating. A couple of Four-spotted Chasers settled...
briefly among the grasses, a Green Tiger Beetle was seen briefly and we admired a Common Lizard basking in its usual spot on the steps by the path.

We walked through to the pond by the entrance to the wood where the party paused to watch numerous Great Crested and a few Smooth Newts which were swimming over the surface. As the day warmed up and we proceeded further we added Orange-tip, Peacock, Green-veined White and Brimstone to the butterfly list. More Skippers, Common Blues and Green Hairstreaks flitted around the banks and as we returned along a sheltered hedge a Speckled Wood appeared. On the final stretch of bank which we visited the final species to be recorded was Brown Argus (2).

Grateful thanks are due to Susannah O’Riordan and Park Ranger Hilary Monk for organising the event with us, Mark Hammond and the Northants Moths Group as well as Ellie Higgins who prepared the breakfasts. We received very much positive feedback from an enthusiastic group of members who appreciated the varied wildlife of the Park and whom it was a pleasure to show round the site.
# Beds & Northants Branch Committee

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