

ON THE WING

Winter 2023

Number 101

The Newsletter of Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Butterfly Conservation



www.bedsnorthants-butterflies.org.uk



The Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation is pleased to bring you the 2023 Winter newsletter.

We do hope that you enjoyed the 2023 butterfly season – I know that our programme of guided walks was much appreciated by those attending. We thank all the volunteer walk leaders, without whom they would not take place.

There have been a number of changes to our committee since our Spring AGM.

Kirsty and Jon Philpot, Dave James and Jamie Wildman have all left us. Dave will stay involved as an associate committee member but will be mainly focussing on his main role as County Recorder for Northamptonshire. Jamie has secured paid employment with Butterfly Conservation and as a result is now ineligible to be on the committee. Jon has agreed to continue as Branch membership secretary.

I would like to thank all for their hard work and time spent supporting the Branch.

I would like to welcome two new members, Katie Lees and Adam Riley, who have both agreed to join the committee, initially as associate members.

The Committee would welcome other members who are prepared to help the Branch progress to join us, informally or formally - we have over 600 members in the branch, but only a small number of you are actively involved.

The Branch Committee continues to meet “on line” and we will all be meeting up “face to face” at our AGM in the Spring.

A programme of winter working parties has already begun and we would really welcome more members attending these to assist with vital conservation tasks. Dates are published on the website and Facebook page well in advance and with such a large number of branch members, hopefully we can increase numbers? The dates are listed within this newsletter.

I hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter and look forward to meeting some more of you at future events.

Steve Bocking

*Cover photo: Red Admiral at Tilwick Meadows, Bedfordshire by Emma Whitfield, July 2023
This has been the year of the Red Admiral, with the influx of migrants in July (in a year when the Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows were scarce)*

Branch Photographic Competition 2023

Judged by our guest speaker, Stephen Gray, Wild Spaces Manager for Butterfly Conservation



The Chairman's Shield Best British Butterfly
Winner: Dave James- Black Hairstreak



Best British Moth Shield
Winner: Dennis McQuillan – Oak Beauty moth





The Butterfly Conservation Shield *Best Early Stages*
Winner: Andrew Gough – Drinker moth caterpillar



The Don Askew Memorial Shield *Branch Activities*
Winner: Doug Goddard – Sywell work party



Winter Work Parties in 2023/24 and AGM in 2024

Branch Annual General Meeting

Sunday 3rd March 2024 at 2:00pm in Turvey Village Hall, High Street, Turvey, Beds, MK43 8DB

Parking is available and we will be having the annual Photographic Competition.

Guest speaker to be confirmed nearer the time.

Winter work parties at Fermyn Woods Country Park, Brigstock NN14 3HS

As last year, on the 3rd Sunday of the month, 10am – 2pm

Scrub clearance for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreak

Free parking permits on the day

Sunday 21st January 2024

Sunday 18th February 2024

Sunday 17th March 2024

Meet in front of the Skylark Café (SP952848, nearest postcode NN14 3HS)

Contact Andy Wyldes and Doug Goddard: andy.wyldes@tiscali.co.uk and

goddarddouglas@hotmail.com

Winter work party at Sywell County Park Butterfly Garden

Tuesday 28th November 2023, 10am – 1pm

Join us to clear dead vegetation in the Butterfly Garden to prepare it for regrowth in the spring for the new season. Meet in the main car park in Washbrook Lane, Ecton NN6 0QX

(SP634653) at 10 a.m. Free Parking Passes will be provided. Please wear appropriate clothing.

Tools will be provided. If we have a group of us the task usually only takes a couple of hours with a break for refreshments.

Contact Doug Goddard: goddarddouglas@hotmail.com or tel. 01604 408670

Winter work parties at Weldon Woodland Park, near Corby

Once a month on Tuesdays from 10am to 2.30pm:

Tuesday 12th December 2023

Tuesday 16th January 2024

Tuesday 13th February 2024

Join us at Weldon Woodland Park clearing scrub to benefit the rare Liquorice Piercer moth and improve habitat for Dingy Skipper. All tools and training will be provided, along with tea and biscuits! Please wear sturdy footwear and clothing you don't mind getting dirty and bring a packed lunch with you.

Meet in the car park at Weldon Woodland Park, NN17 3JQ (What3Words [jungle.live.flash](https://www.what3words.com/jungle.live.flash))

Please let the event leader, Susannah O'Riordan, know if you're planning on coming along, so we can contact you if there are any last-minute changes. Email [soriordan@butterfly-](mailto:soriordan@butterfly-conservation.org)

[conservation.org](mailto:soriordan@butterfly-conservation.org) or call: 07483 039324

Winter work parties at Fineshade Wood, NN17 3BB

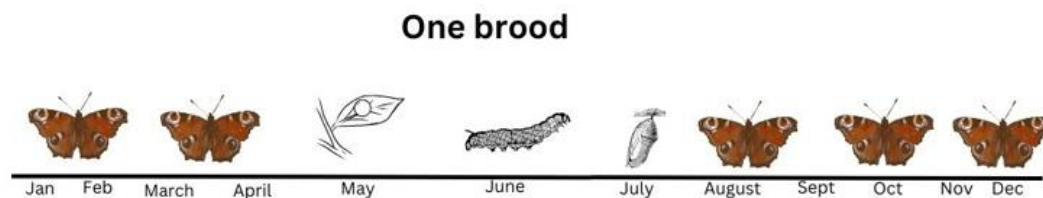
Wednesdays 10am to 3pm on the following dates: December 6th, January 24th

Please let Susannah O'Riordan know if you would like to come (please see details above)

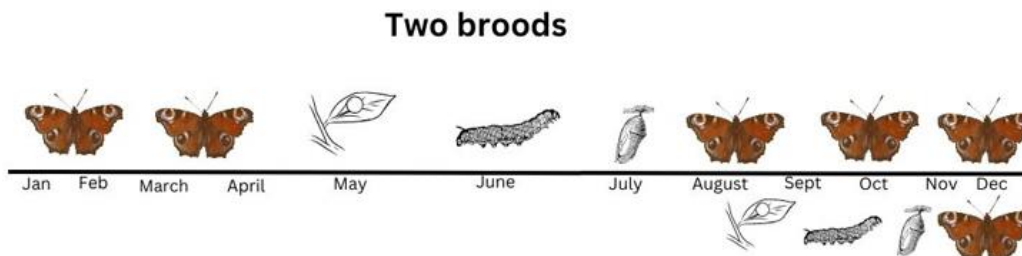
Second brood Peacocks – a sign of climate change or just less recorded? *Judith Barnard*

The Peacock, an easily recognisable butterfly with eyespots intended to scare predators, is one of the best-known species.

Normally the Peacock has one brood each year. Typically, the adult female comes out of over-wintering in the spring and would lay its eggs in May. The caterpillars would develop through June. The pupa would form during June/July and this next generation of adult butterflies would emerge late July and August. After feeding they would look to over-winter, such as in sheds and garages, to wake up the following spring. Then the process would begin again. This is shown below in the one brood timeline.



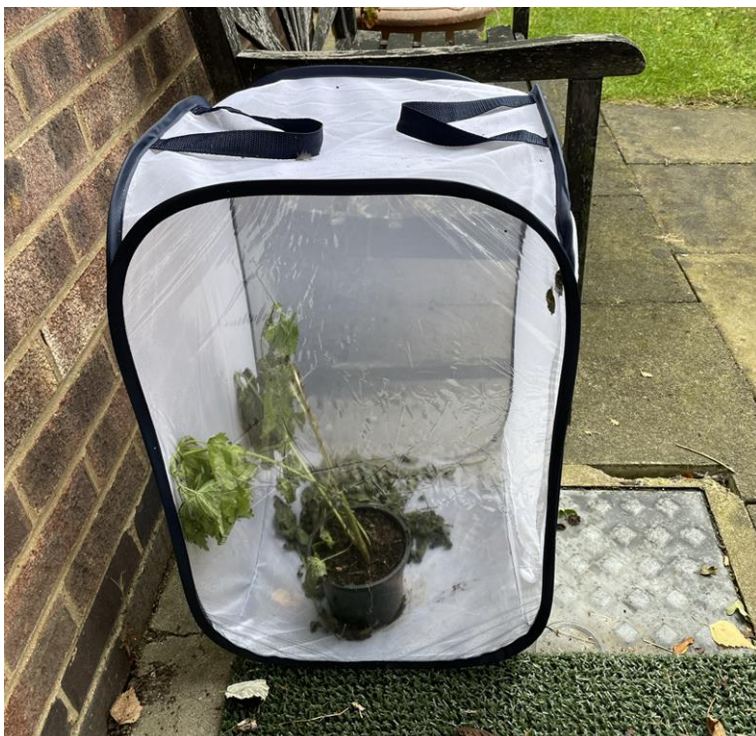
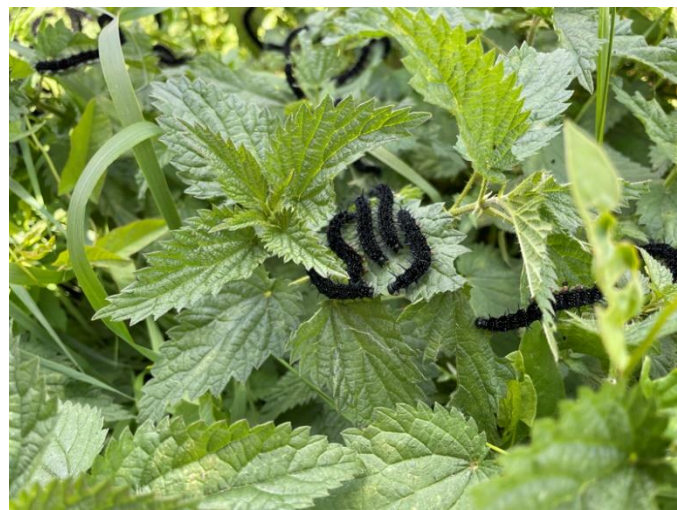
In hot summers though there is always the possibility of a second brood. The butterflies that emerge in July / August time, rather than over-wintering, would continue to breed and lay eggs. This is depicted in the two broods timeline below.



This was the case when we discovered Peacock caterpillars on the 24th September 2022 on stinging nettles on a roadside on the outskirts of Northampton.



It was suggested that I take a sample of these caterpillars to discover what their behaviour would be. Would they turn to pupa then remain in this state until the following spring? Or would they go through the whole lifecycle and emerge as butterflies later in the autumn/winter?



I transferred five caterpillars to a butterfly net cage along with a stinging nettle plant, the foodplant for the Peacock caterpillar. By the way, getting a stinging nettle plant from the wild and transferring into a pot isn't easy. Having one in the garden would have been easier*.

It wasn't long until the caterpillars, one by one turned to pupa, the first being on the 5th October. This process involves decapitation hence the gory sight of heads lying on the base of the cage!



Only one of the caterpillars failed to turn to pupa, shown here hanging from the plant (17th October).



Three of the pupae were the brown form and one was the yellow form, shown lying in the leaves.



It felt like they would stay in this state all winter and so the cage was transferred indoors to a cold utility room.



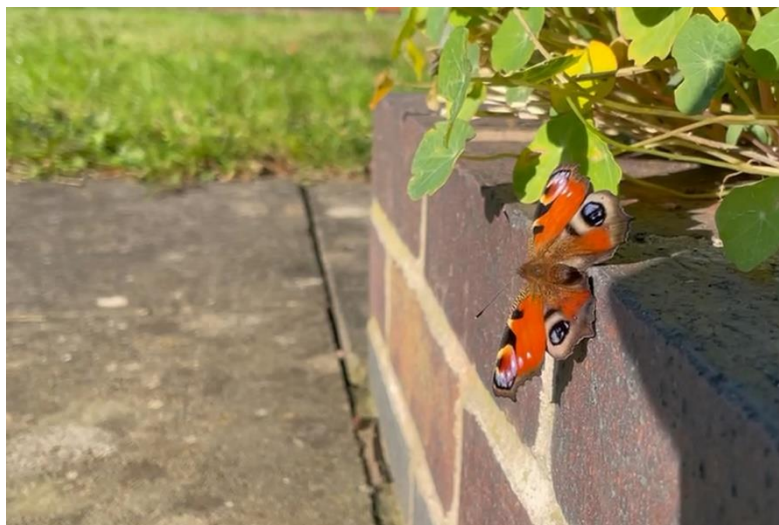
Then on 6th November I was amazed to see the first butterfly emergence had occurred.

The second one emerged on 8th November, followed by the one whose pupa was hanging from the plant on 9th November.

Most of the time they just stayed there. Some rotten apples were placed in the cage but I'm not aware they fed on them at all.

The 12th November was an unusually sunny day and so it felt the ideal opportunity to release the three butterflies outside. Once the cage was turned to the sun they began to fly off down the road.

The final butterfly emerged from pupa on 15th November and was encouraged to fly off on a sunny day on 18th November. It spent a while on nasturtium and wall flowers before eventually flying off.



Where they went and what they did next remains a mystery. Let's hope they found a place to over-winter and emerge next spring.

It would be easy to say that our changing climate is causing this kind of behaviour. Warmer temperatures would encourage the butterfly to continue to breed rather than to go into its over-wintering stage.

But the reality could be that this has been happening more frequently and they just haven't been recorded. It would have been easy to not notice the caterpillars and once in the pupa stage, even less obvious. On emergence it is likely they would go straight to their over-wintering stage with recorded sightings being minimal.

Whatever the reason we need to keep checking those stinging nettles in the autumn months. Unless, of course, they have already been removed by over-keen strimmer operators, but that's another story...

* Why not get involved in Butterfly Conservation's *Wild Spaces* and encourage some stinging nettles in your garden or local space!

YouTube: @butterfliesonfilm

The lifecycle of the Black Hairstreak and

2023's Glapthorn Cow Pastures Open Day

Dave James

Those who know me are already aware that the Black Hairstreak is one of my favourite butterflies. Not only are they beautiful butterflies in their adult form, but each stage of their secretive life can be equally as beautiful too. Of course, to really understand a butterfly you must study these early stages. However, in some species (such as the Black Hairstreak) these early stages can often be rather hard to find. I hadn't actually started 2023 with a view to trying to find all the early stages of the Black Hairstreak as I had done that several times before. However, I always look for them when I find myself in Glapthorn Cow Pastures, but I didn't throw myself totally into it as I did a few years ago. So, it was rather a surprise when in 2023 not only did I find the whole life cycle with relative ease, but I also found them in a fairly short space of time.

It all started back on the 7th of May when my partner and I decided to have a walk through Glapthorn Cow Pastures primarily to listen for Nightingales. As I'm sure you can imagine, I find it rather hard to walk past any Blackthorn bushes, particularly ones in Glapthorn Cow Pastures, without giving them a quick look over the Black Hairstreak larvae! I had only been in there for 20 minutes or so before I glanced down and to my surprise, I had found a nice Black Hairstreak larva resting on the top of a Blackthorn leaf. Then the day got even better as the beautiful song of a Nightingale started to sing out from the bushes behind me as I took photos of the larva, providing the perfect spring soundtrack to the moment.



I returned to Glapthorn Cow Pastures on the 22nd of May to look for more early butterfly stages. I had a quick check on the Blackthorn bush the previous larva had been found on, but unfortunately, I couldn't find it again. After a while, I switched my attention to honeysuckles to try and find the magnificent White Admiral larva. To my surprise, as I searched through the leaves of a honeysuckle spray, behind it



on the stem was another Black Hairstreak larva. It was extremely well hidden, and it was quite a distance from any Blackthorn, so it must have travelled quite far (in larval terms) to get where it was.



I knew that it must be there in preparation to pupate, so a few days later, on the 26th of May, I made another return visit. I managed to find the honeysuckle spray again and luckily the larva was still there. However, now the larva had turned around on the stem to face the other way and a silk girdle the larva had spun across its body to hold the pupa in place. The larva had also taken on a change of colour as it was in the process of its last shed of skin.

On the 30th of May, I returned yet again to see how this larva was getting on and by now it was fully pupated. You can see in the photo the pupation process has only just occurred as the remains of its recently shed cuticle can still be seen on the Honeysuckle stem behind it.



Due to other county recording commitments, I couldn't return to Glapthorn Cow Pastures for a couple of weeks. Each year we normally hold a Glapthorn Cow Pastures open day, and I was due to be the host this year. I managed a quick visit on the 16th to have a quick look around before the event. Despite Black Hairstreaks already being on the wing the pupa I had found previously hadn't emerged yet. I had a quick look around the site, and I spotted a Black Hairstreak



resting on the side of a Blackthorn bush. This certainly wasn't unusual this year and it was quite apparent that the Black Hairstreaks certainly seemed to prefer feeding on the Honeydew on the leaves rather than nectaring on the normal bushes. I spent a bit of time watching the Black Hairstreak I had found. It was a female and after spending some time feeding on honeydew, she had a short rest in the sunshine, and then she turned and walked deep into the leaves before making her way along the branch deeper into the bush.

I managed to follow her as she kept walking and she finally reached where the branches got much thicker inside the bush, and then, as she reached the base of a small twig, she laid an egg! Unfortunately, I was so engrossed in what was happening that I totally forgot to check my settings, and while I got a photo of the recently laid egg it's not as sharp as I'd like it to be. One thing I can tell you though is it is a lovely peppermint green when it is first laid. Then, within seconds, the egg turned a stunning pink/purple colour! Fortunately, by now I had pulled myself together, so I changed the settings on the camera, and I took the photo below. It is without a doubt one of the most beautiful butterfly eggs I have ever seen.



The day of Glapthorn Cow Pastures was the 18th of June. Unfortunately, the weather forecast wasn't good at all but luckily, they had got it wrong! The persistent rain that had been predicted didn't materialise, and Glapthorn Cow Pastures was bathed in sunshine all morning. The lucky visitors who had made their way to this beautiful reserve to partake in the day (some from as far away as Hampshire) were shown lots of



adult Black Hairstreaks, the pupal case (the Black Hairstreak had emerged that morning before I got there) and of course the egg which by now had turned a brown colour.

I cannot finish this account without of course showing you a couple of photos of adult Black Hairstreaks that I had photographed on the open day itself. Glapthorn Cow Pastures is a beautiful reserve, and the Wildlife Trust BCN should be congratulated for managing it so well!



Field trip to Totternhoe, 4.6.2023

Emma and Aidan Whitfield

We were very pleased and relieved that the morning of our field trip to Totternhoe dawned fine and sunny, especially since the previous year's field trip had been a washout with only the organisers attending (nevertheless we did spot a few of the target species, Small Blue, hiding in the wet grass). This year 21 people attended, including 3 very enthusiastic children under the age of 10.

Thanks must go to Esme Ashe-Jepson, who explained the butterfly banks, to Dave Tiffin who did the reconnaissance beforehand and to Tracey Edwards and Graham Bates who helped us on the day.

As we walked along the path under the chalk cliffs there were plenty of Small Blues to be seen with several landing on people's fingers and shoes, presumably attracted by the sweat! Esme used a hand lens to show us a Small Blue egg on Kidney Vetch which hadn't yet hatched.



Butterfly banks



On our way to the field with the Butterfly Banks, we found a few Green Hairstreaks. Esme explained the Banking on Butterflies project which is a joint project between Cambridge University and the Wildlife Trust. This had started in 2021 and involved building banks facing different directions providing varied temperatures for butterflies and other insects. The banks had been left to grow up naturally and were thick with Thistles and Wild Mignonette. The field was also full of Kidney Vetch and other flowers.



Small Blue



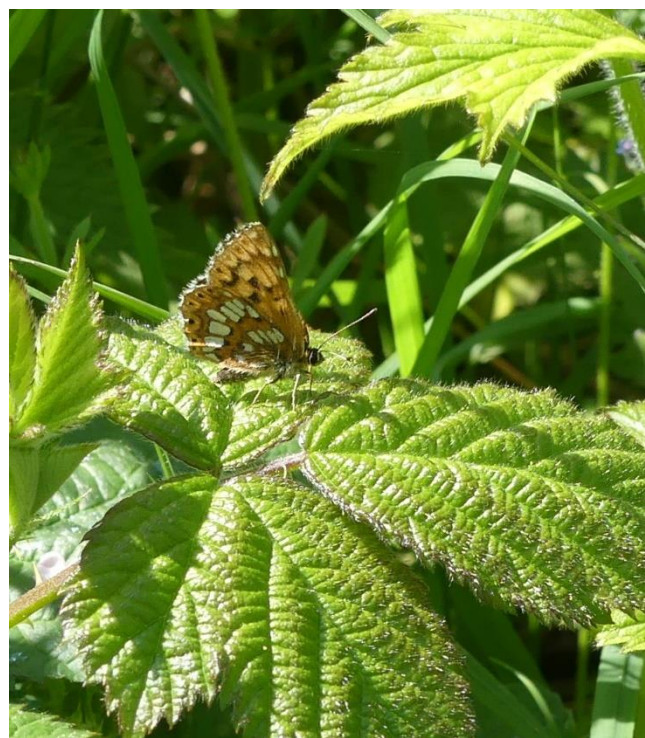
Green Hairstreak

From here, we went into the quarry area and climbed down to the famous motorbike gully where we were surprised to find a Duke of Burgundy still flying and several Dingy Skippers. We presumed this was due to the late season. It was possible to feel the heat produced by the sheltered conditions. Back at the entrance to the quarry, Esme and Aidan found a Brimstone caterpillar on a Buckthorn bush which they were able to show to people. There were also several Brimstones flying up and down.

In all we saw 14 species: Small White, Brimstone + caterpillar, Peacock, Speckled Wood, Holly Blue, Small Blue, Common Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak, Small Heath, Dingy Skipper, Orange Tip, Red Admiral and Brown Argus.



Dingy Skipper



Duke of Burgundy

Field trip to Salcey Forest, 7.6.2023

Chris Walpole and Judith Barnard

Branch Field Trips to Salcey Forest had proved very popular in the past and we felt some weight of responsibility to provide a good experience to the participants, somewhat increased by the fact that neither of us had led a trip before. After completing a trial run the day before and observing a reasonable number of butterflies, we felt ready for the day.

A number of people had contacted us beforehand to say they were coming, so we were confident that it wasn't going to be just us two on the day. That proved to be the case with a total of 8 members attending. Given the weather that we'd been having recently, we weren't complaining about the dry and reasonably bright conditions at the start of the trip.

There was a bit of a walk from the main car park to the Wood White hotspots. We were a bit anxious as the sun didn't want to come out and butterflies weren't appearing.



We're pleased to say that the enthusiasm and knowledge of the group members meant that everyone was kept occupied and happy observing beetles, caterpillars and identifying birds by their calls as we walked.

We finally reached the turning to the side off the main path and slowly made our way down, peering down at every plant if we spotted something white. Most of the time it turned out to be a white petal or bird poo! To everyone's relief, Chris rejoiced with the first one found. This followed by more and then the sun





started to appear and the Wood Whites took to the air. A modest but steady stream of butterfly sightings (Speckled Woods, Large Skippers, Red Admiral, Comma and Holly Blue) kept the group occupied and the cameras clicking.

We headed back along the main path and the Wood Whites kept coming, making it a productive day with over 30 seen. We were able to point out the differences between the sexes of Wood White, in particular the more prominent dark patch on the apex of the forewing in males. It was very pleasing to see how members of the group picked this up and by the end of the trip were able to point out the sex (of a Wood White) as it flew past! Observations of Wood White were the most numerous of any butterfly species and they were observed nectaring on a range of flowers.

The group were also pleased to observe some caterpillars, in particular Orange-tip on Garlic Mustard as well as a Lackey moth on Hawthorn. A few dragonflies were also seen, including a male Broad-bodied Chaser.

The number of butterfly species seen overall was slightly lower than hoped-for, but it was still a pleasure to run this trip to Salcey Forest in the company of such an enthusiastic group. As usual, the Wood Whites were a delight to observe.



Bison Hill Field Trip, Whipsnade 21st May 2023

Aidan and Emma Whitfield

On a fine sunny day in May we met at the National Trust café and visitor centre on Dunstable Down for our field trip to Bison Hill, led by Dave Chandler. It was a great success with twenty two people attending from several different BC Branches. Our target species was Duke of Burgundy which is only found on 2 chalk grassland sites in Bedfordshire. We saw more than 20 Dukes in several locations so everyone had the opportunity to photograph them. Overall, we saw fifteen species including all the Springtime grassland specialists: Green Hairstreak, Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Small Copper, though there were very few whites apart from Brimstones.

The Dukes have clearly benefitted from the good site management work done by the National Trust to achieve a balance of scrub and cowslip rich grassland on the steep slopes.



Grizzled Skipper



Duke of Burgundy



Small Copper

Thirty years ago I led my first field trip to Sharpenhoe Clappers and I was back there on July 2nd to give another public walk and talk around the site. Only six brave souls turned up on the day and, looking at the branch Facebook page later, it was apparent that many of my regulars were at other sites looking for Dukes and Grizzleds, etc. that are not found at Sharpenhoe.

However, I was still pleased I found my target species, the Dark Green Fritillary, in good numbers making my field trip visit worthwhile.

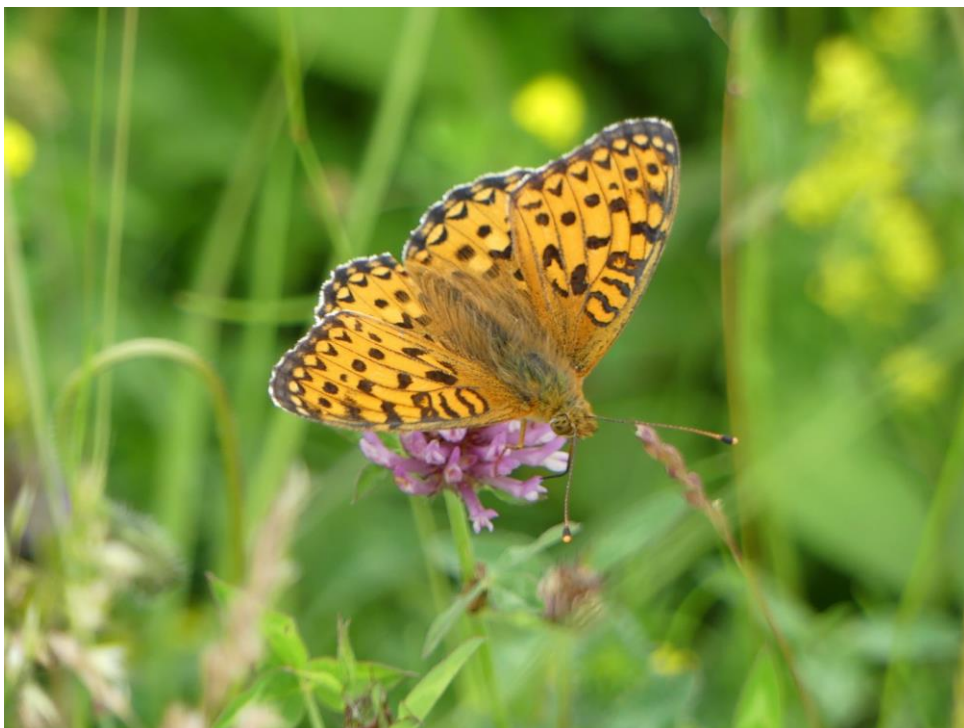
Around 180 butterflies were seen in total and thirteen different species including 30+ Dark Green Fritillaries and 70+ Marbled Whites.

Some of the Marbled Whites were unusually small possibly due to the lack of good lush grasses when they were caterpillars during the big drought last year.

We searched for Chalkhill Blues which had been emerging at the end of June in recent years but we did not find any. I believe the cold wet period in the early spring had delayed their emergence.

I went back to the site ten days later and found my favourite "Chalkies" to my utter delight.

All in all, a quite satisfying day.



*Dark Green
Fritillary,
Sharpenhoe*

Despite the inclement weather, our walk of Whitestones and the meadow at Twywell Hills and Dales on Saturday 17th June generated enough butterflies to satisfy the collective appetite of our guests. Accompanied by former Beds & Northants Committee member and regular Twywell work party volunteer, Andy Wyldes, I escorted attendees northwards between the steep, well-managed banks of Whitestones, happening upon Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Large and Small Skippers, and Speckled Wood butterflies, as well as Burnet Companion, Yellow Shell, Cinnabar, Silver Y, and Mother Shipton moths, plus Small Eggar nests and Six-spot Burnet larvae. After a couple of spells of light drizzle, we happened upon the sheltered, northernmost part of Whitestones area – by far the warmest of any patch we ventured through that day. Guests were treated to numerous Large and Small Skippers territorially springing from flowerheads to intercept and ward off rivals. Winning males circled around us to return to guard their perches in what was clearly a hotly-contested patch.

The highlight of Whitestones was undoubtedly our encounter with a fresh-out-of-the-packet Marbled White, though. Spotted by one of our guests partway up a bank, the butterfly was still pumping up its wings whilst dripping meconium like white paint. Many other Marbled Whites looked similarly fresh, having likely emerged earlier that same morning. They were often uncharacteristically docile, displaying all of their unmistakable, monochromatic beauty with wings abreast. Our walk south, back to the car park through the meadow, featured further Skipper and moth encounters, and was brought to a close by a rather more prolonged rain shower. Naturally, once the walk was over and stragglers refreshed with coffees from the Barista Bus, the sun came out. Who knows what else we would've seen in the brighter afternoon... But there's always next year!



The freshly-emerged specimen dripping meconium



The group inspecting the newly emerged Marbled White

The Pitsford Moth and Butterfly event

Dave James

The 2nd of July saw the return of the always popular moth and butterfly event at Pitsford Nature Reserve, which is jointly held with the Wildlife Trust BCN who manage the site. For the first time ever, the event was totally fully booked so if you missed out this year but would like to visit next year please note that booking early is advisable.



Despite the fact that it had been quite a poor year for moths Mischa, the Senior Reserves Officer at Pitsford Water, had managed to collect a stunning selection of moths with lots of examples from a variety of moth families. There were some of the ever-popular Hawkmoths including Eyed, Pine, Privet, Poplar and Elephant Hawkmoths and old favourites such as the Burnished Brass, Buff-tip, Early Thorn, Peppered moth and Pale Prominent. A total of 17 species of moth were caught in the traps and everyone managed to enjoy them all and get some photos.



Pine Hawkmoth



Buff-tip moth

Peppered moth



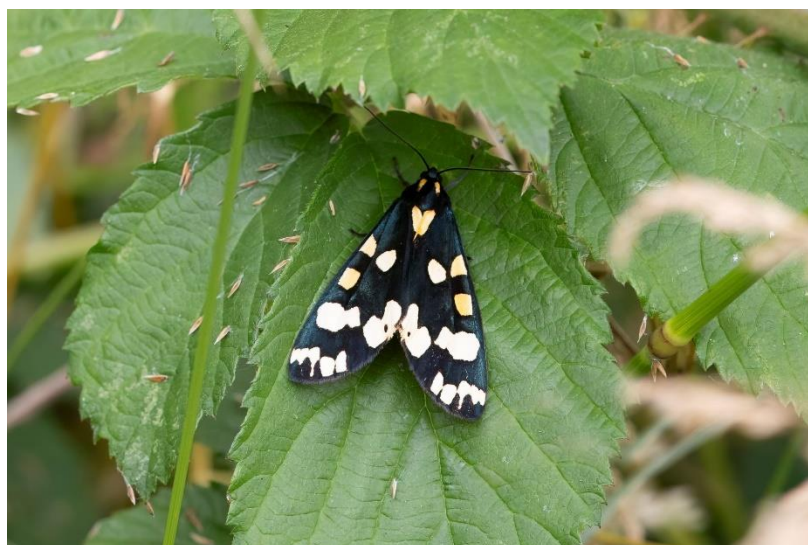
A happy visitor

Similarly to last year we also came armed with some pheromone lures and by using these we managed to add both Hornet Clearwings and Lunar Hornet Clearwing moths to the list too. Everyone managed to have great views of these normally hard-to-see species of moth.



Hornet moth

Lunar Hornet Clearwing moth



The last moth we recorded on the day were some day flying Scarlet Tiger moths that we saw as we went for a walk around the reserve.

After this, we enjoyed a nice walk to look for butterflies. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't very good, and the butterflies were quite a challenge to find at times. However, with some perseverance, we did manage to see ten species of butterflies despite the cloudy weather!

At the end of the day, Mischa was presented with the fantastic "*Butterfly Conservation The Warwickshire Approach*" book written by Mike Slater and Keith Warmington, to say thank you for the hard work she and the rest of the team put in at the reserve and for holding this incredibly popular event each year!



Creating new butterfly habitat on the Dunstable Northern Bypass

Aidan Whitfield

The A5-M1 Dunstable Northern Bypass was opened to traffic in May 2017, but it was not until May 2023 that I used it for the first time when travelling from my home in Bedford to look for the chalk grassland butterflies at Bison Hill and Dunstable Downs. Driving along the bypass I noticed a large chalk cutting with a layby so I pulled in to have a look. The south facing slope of the cutting had been left as bare chalk with no covering of topsoil and I realised it had the potential to be a really good butterfly habitat, just like the [Weymouth Relief Road](#) in Dorset.

A few days later I visited the site again with Sharon Hearle, Butterfly Conservation Manager for the East of England. She then contacted the Highways Agency who were keen to see the site improved for butterflies. In June, we used about £200 of the Beds and Northants Branch funds to buy 1kg of Kidney Vetch seeds (the larval food plant of the Small Blue butterfly), which Sharon and Highways Agency staff scattered on the slope. In the Autumn, the Highways Agency purchased seeds of Horseshoe Vetch (the larval food plant of the Chalkhill Blue butterfly) and sowed them on the site.

Surveying the chalk cutting, May 2023



There are 2 well-known butterfly sites nearby: Houghton Regis Quarry 3km to the south-west; and Sharpenhoe Clappers 5km to the north-east. It will be interesting to see how long it takes for the larval food plants to become established and for butterflies to colonise the site.



If you live near Dunstable and you would like to monitor the site over the next few years, please contact me by email: aidan.whitfield@btinternet.com.

Highways Agency staff sowing Kidney Vetch, June 2023 (photo: Sharon Hearle)

Like many spring butterflies, our Chequered Skipper population at Fineshade didn’t fare so well this year, with far fewer sightings than previous years. This is likely to have been an impact of the drought last summer along with the cool spring this year and reflects a similar situation in the Netherlands (where the butterfly phenology is incredibly similar) where Chequered Skipper numbers tumbled this year. The data collected by volunteers over the flight period is vital to monitor what is going on and this year they inputted over 230 hours of survey time. Whilst this was a bit lower than previous years, it was another fantastic contribution and we’d like to say a really big thank you to all the volunteer surveyors that gave their time. We’d love to recruit some additional volunteers for 2024, so if you’d like get involved in this valuable work, please get in touch (soriordan@butterfly-conservation.org).



Chequered Skipper making its own record!, James Fowler



Belgium male (with red dot) and English female mating, Aidan & Emma Whitfield

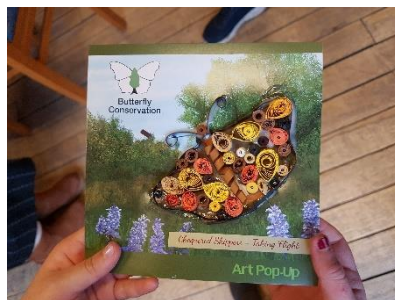
We didn’t make a trip to Belgium to collect more Chequered Skipper adults this year, but did release some Belgian stock into Fineshade. These were from pupae that had been raised by one of the volunteers in Belgium from eggs laid by some of the ‘surplus’ females we collected in 2022. The idea behind releasing more Belgian stock was to help increase genetic diversity as well as bolster the population, and it was fantastic to see this working when Aidan and Emma Whitfield spotted a Belgian male mating with an English female! In other positive news, we were delighted to see a good emergence of Chequered Skipper on a second site following a reintroduction there last year. As with Fineshade, we’ll be waiting until the butterfly has had a few years to establish there before making that site public.

After the great success of our Chequered Skipper Rangers, Graham and Ellie, last year, we were extremely keen to have a Ranger again this year. Thanks to a very generous legacy from Dr A.O.A (Olly) Wilson along with some leftover budget from the Green Recovery funding, we were able to take on Kate McCahill for a 3-month seasonal role. She had a tough task, dealing with poor weather and lower number of sightings, but did a fantastic job, taking over 200 people on walks around the site in the hunt for this particularly elusive butterfly, and got lots of lovely feedback from visitors.



Kate also spent time collecting habitat condition data to fill in some gaps from data collected by Ellie and Graham last year. Our research team at Butterfly Conservation have been helping analyse this vast amount of data, and the results will help us identify the next potential sites for Chequered Skipper as well as sites that still need more habitat improvement works.

In the early part of the year, we continued our series of art events to provide opportunities for people to engage with our work in a different way. This included an event with Art Pop-up, a community-focused arts organisation based in Stamford. They held a family friendly drop-in session at Fineshade, where people could have a go at paper quilling and make a beautiful image of a Chequered Skipper. We also ran an online illustration workshop with natural history and botanical illustrator Lizzie Harper, focusing on Bird's Foot Trefoil, the foodplant for Dingy Skipper. And one of the highlights of the year for me was working with craft company The Makerss to produce a Chequered Skipper felting kit! Steffi from The Makerss hosted an online workshop so people that had bought the kit could felt along with her and it was great seeing everyone's butterflies come to life. All of these art events were so enjoyable and really well attended and we had some great feedback from attendees as well as lots of lovely images of people's amazing work.



Barbara Sturm





Alongside the art events, we also produced some more interpretation materials, including a leaflet on the Butterflies of Fermyn Woods Country Park, a Pocket Identification guide to Skipper butterflies and a Chequered Skipper information board for

Fineshade.

Our Green Recovery funded project 'Chequered Skippers – Taking flight' finished at the end of June. During the project we carried out work on 19 sites, completing over 14 hectares of habitat restoration and creation to improve habitat for Skipper butterflies and Adder.



Before and after shots of ride widening work at Harry's Park

We also successfully engaged with 1,585 people ranging from young SEND adults to butterfly and craft enthusiasts through a programme of events and training workshops. As the funding came to an end, we ran an event at Fineshade to celebrate the achievements of the project and so we could thank everyone for all their amazing efforts in helping to make it a success. It was lovely to see so many people there and to have the chance to catch up with people in person.





Alongside the Green Recovery work, we've also been running some activities as part of the 'Building the Links for Rockingham Forest' project, funded by the Natural Lottery Heritage fund. This has included some sessions to teach people how to identify day-flying moths, which we ran at Ring Haw and Weldon Woodland Park, along with how to help our survey effort for the rare Liquorice Piercer moth. Following the training, volunteers helped us find three new sites for Liquorice Piercer, which was a fantastic result. We'll be running some more training sessions in 2024 and are hoping to get more people out and about looking for Liquorice Piercer so we can increase our knowledge of the distribution of this species. Please keep an eye out for these if you'd be

interested in getting involved. We've also arranged some work parties at Weldon Woodland Park, to remove scrub to benefit Wild Liquorice (foodplant for Liquorice Piercer). Details of these are below.

In the summer we heard that we had been successful in a bid for funding from Natural England's Species Recovery Programme's new Capital Grant Scheme to help recover 150 of our most threatened species nationwide. The new project, 'Threatened Species Recovery for Northamptonshire's Woodlands' will enable us to create and enhance a network of habitats in Rockingham Forest and South Northamptonshire, providing stepping stones for key species to expand into new areas and strengthen their populations. These species include three butterflies (Wood White, Grizzled Skipper, and Dingy Skipper), two moths (Concolorous and Liquorice Piercer), and one reptile (Adder).



Jamie Wildman, who you may already know from his PhD work on Chequered Skipper, has joined us as Northamptonshire Landscape Officer to deliver this project.

Whilst Jamie is leading on the Species Recovery project, I'll be continuing with Chequered Skipper work as well as broadening out to look at other threatened butterfly and moth species and expanding my area to include additional landscapes outside Rockingham Forest.

Now that winter is here, our focus is once again on habitat management works. We'll be working with contractors to carry out more habitat works as part of the Species Recovery funded project and will be continuing our programme of volunteer work parties. We welcome as many pairs of hands as possible on these! Dates and locations are below and

more information can be found on the events pages on the website <https://butterfly-conservation.org/events>. Please let me know if you'd like to come along.

Weldon Woodland Park NN17 3JG, Tuesdays 10am to 2.30pm on the following dates:

November 14th, December 12th, January 16th, February 13th

Fermyn Woods Country Park, NN14 3HS, Sundays 10am to 2pm on the following dates:

November 19th, January 21st, February 18th, March 17th

Fineshade Wood, NN17 3BB, Wednesdays 10am to 3pm on the following dates: December 6th, January 24th.

Once again, I'd just like to say a huge thank you for your continued support this year, and I hope to see you out and about soon.



Beds and Northants Branch information 2023/24

The [Beds and Northants Branch website](#) has links to our social media pages - Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and iRecord as well as a link to the Butterfly Conservation website

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