

Devon Branch

www.devon-butterflies.org.uk



White Admiral *Limenitis camilla*
Steph Murphy
Heathfield Great Plantation, Newton Abbot
29/06/2024

Newsletter



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

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Devon Branch Newsletter

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Devon Branch Members Day

We would like to invite you all to join us for this years Members Day.

Our members day is just around the corner and what better way to spend an autumnal day than in the company of some of our counties finest lepidopterists!

Members day is a great opportunity to meet with fellow associates, you can share your ideas and thoughts, meet some brilliant people and fully immerse yourself in learning about our wonderful natural world for the day.

The event is being held on **Saturday 19th October 2024** at the Boniface Centre in CREDITON. Non-members are also very welcome.

We already have some fantastic speakers lined up who are sure to inspire and educate us with their superb knowledge and enthusiasm.

Sarah Gillespie— Renowned print making artist, currently specialising in the centuries old art of mezzotint engraving, focussing on British moths—the gradual drawing forth of the image from the darkness seeming a perfect match of method to subject. Discover how Sarah transforms her delicate moth drawings into exquisite prints, emphasising these often overlooked insects. Share Sarah’s curiosity and engage with her to further explore our relationship with the natural world.

Max Anderson— Southwest landscape officer for Butterfly Conservation, primarily concentrating on managing reserves to improve the conditions for some of our most threatened species. Max will give a fascinating talk about nocturnal pollination and share some of his insights into the lives of some of our most elusive Lycaenid butterflies.

Phil Dean— Founding member of Devon Moth Group. The group plays an important part in increasing awareness of the beauty, diversity and importance of moths and in encouraging recording moths. Observing and recording moths is interesting and fun, but records also provide a vital foundation for conservation. Phil will give us a practical demonstration of the website and share his expertise and specialised knowledge.

Reviewing historic Chequered Skipper records in Devon

Pete Hurst

In 2023, I was contacted, along with a number of other county recorders, by Jamie Wildman who was doing PhD research into the history, ecology and reintroduction of the English Chequered Skipper. The butterfly was last seen in England in 1976 and declared extinct thereafter. Interestingly, a Devon man, A. Archer-Lock, a keen lepidopterist from Plymouth saw one of the last ones on 6th June in its final year.

In the UK, the butterfly still had a presence in Scotland, in 1995 BC organised a reintroduction of the species to Lincolnshire woodland using Belgian stock. This attempt failed, but another introduction of continental Chequered Skipper in 2018 to woodland in Northamptonshire has been successful.

Jamie Wildman's research has sourced information from museums, private collections, personal accounts and also social media and online auction sites. He was able to source 3,534 new English Chequered Skipper records (an increase of 1,328.6% of known records) with 57.2% of these coming from museums. He discovered that around 20 English counties had a claim for its presence in the past, though the records needed to be reviewed and given a verification status.

English Chequered Skipper was often regarded as a Midlands insect, which was probably true for much of the twentieth century, but surprisingly, a number of south coast counties feature in the records, including Cornwall, Devon, Hampshire and Kent. In Jamie's list for Devon, records were given as from "near Dartmoor," "near Dartmouth", "near Ashburton", Ashburton, Poundsgate, Bideford, Torbay (Hope's Nose and Churston), and Woodbury. Jamie decided that specimens labelled with names of settlements would be assigned to best-candidate woodland nearby using historic maps. So, for "near Dartmouth" and "near Ashburton" and the other Dartmoor localities, Jamie assigned these records to Holne Chase. The single record for Bideford remains unverified, not least because the recorder, Bostock (1857) commented on his sighting: "to my inexperienced eye, looked like a Chequered Skipper". Without more evidence, I think this could easily have been a misidentification, and there are no other records from that locality. For the five Torbay records at Hope's Nose and Churston (The Grove and Marriage Woods), their closeness to the sea seems unlikely for this species

not least with the likelihood of sea spray drifting into their habitat. The species was generally found further inland, usually within woodland. Therefore, these records seem unlikely without more supporting evidence. The two Woodbury records from 1953 are discounted as the given month when Chequered was seen was August, which is not during its flight season.

All the records attributed to Holne Chase, however, make for a strong case of a genuine historic site. There are nine records from 1827 – 1935. I have verified these, making Holne Chase the only likely historic site for the species in Devon.

Postscript: At the Devon BC Members' Day at Crediton in 2018, Stephen Meredith, a BC member, attended from London. He told us about seeing some of the last English Large Blues on southern Dartmoor in 1973, accompanied by Captain A.P. Gainsford of Devon who had invited him along. Stephen showed us photos of the Large Blues he had seen. Whilst living in the West Midlands in the 1960's, Stephen had searched old sites and potential areas in the Midlands for the Chequered Skipper, but to no avail. Prior to the Large Blue visit, he had heard that a site for Chequered Skipper had been found in Rutland. He ventured to ask Captain Gainsford during their field visit if he knew where the colony might be, and the Captain told him that it was South Luffenham Golf Course. The following year on 25th May 1974, Stephen drove from London to Rutland. Persistent rain that day put paid to any searching, but the following day was sunny and warm. After gaining permission from the golf club receptionist, he set about searching a large area of the roughs but saw nothing and was considering giving up his search. He then noticed another area of roughs where, when he approached, he saw a small butterfly displaying an unmistakable skipper flight. With heart pounding he closed in on where it had settled and was overjoyed to confirm that it was Chequered. On that day he saw eight Chequered, and on returning with a Mr Haines the following day, they saw five. What an exciting weekend!



Scans of the original physical photographs of some of the last English Chequered Skippers that Stephen Meredith took on 25th May 1974



Undercliff Butterfly Walk, June 15th 2024.

By Paul Butter and Martin Drake

With yet another forecast of poor weather only seven members made the trip to Whitlands, between Lyme Regis and Seaton. Despite the forecast of rain we remained dry throughout the walk. We set off down the track to meet the southwest coast path from where we went off-piste down what had become a very overgrown path to the Humble Glades, our destination. Luckily I had come prepared with shears and a silky saw, and in the style of Indiana Jones we made it through nettles and fallen branches. On the way we noted a few characteristic plants of the Undercliffs such as Stinking Iris and Common Madder.

On arrival at the first glade we were delighted to see a couple of **Wood Whites** *Leptidea sinapis* one of which obliged by settling down on a flower of the foodplant, Birds' foot Trefoil, long enough for everyone to get a good view. I managed to net a moth that turned out to be one of the *Delplanquia* species that are typical of this habitat in the NNR.



Wood Whites
Paul Butter



Meadow Brown
Paul Butter

There was also a **Meadow Brown** *Maniola jurtina* here which was a first of the year for some of us. Unfortunately the sun disappeared again when we reached the second glade which is a steep south facing slope packed with Rock Rose and Birds'-foot-trefoil and usually a prime butterfly hotspot. A refugia here revealed a couple of slowworms but no butterflies were seen

here. Another very attractive micromoth was netted which turned out to be a fresh **Yellow-spotted Tortrix** *Pseudargyrotoza conwagana*.

Moving on to the third glade we spotted a couple of Bee Orchids and a few more Meadow Browns. There were a few other orchids, probably Common Spotted, as well as some Ploughman's Spikenard, Viper's Buglos and Common Gromwell. The weather was remaining dull so there was still not much on the wing in the next glade, which is dominated by large



Delplanquia species
Paul Butter

limestone boulders, one of which had a good patch of Kidney Vetch, foodplant of the **Small Blue** *Cupido minimus* which may colonise in the future.

Passing through dense Holm Oak we emerged into the fourth glade where we stopped for lunch amongst hundreds of Common Spotted Orchids. After our lunch the sun finally came out and we were suddenly aware of butterflies around us including a couple of **Common Blue** *Polyommatus icarus*, two **Dingy Skippers** *Erynnis tages*, two **Marbled Whites** *Melanargia galathea* and another four Wood Whites. A few cocoons of **Six-spot Burnet** *Zygaena filipendulae* were spotted before a newly emerged adult was seen on a flowerhead. Lots more Meadow Browns were now on the wing too and it was fascinating to watch a Marbled White chasing a Wood White, the Wood White eventually heading into the trees to escape. A few of the Carline thistles showed the folded silken leaves inside which were the green larvae of the rare micro the **Carline Buff** *Agonopterix nanatella*. Martin Drake identified some of the flies that were seen. We saw *Sicus ferrugineus*, a Conopid bumble-bee parasitoid, *Chrysotoxum bicinctum*, an attractive hoverfly with one yellow band on the body and dark-edged wings, and *Neurigona quadrifasciata* which is a Dolichopodid fly with very fancy front feet!



Dingy Skipper
Paul Butter



Marbled White
Paul Butter



Oncocera
semirubella
Paul Butter

The final glade is quite small with no additional species apart from **Mullein moth** *Cucullia verbasci* larvae on a Mullein plant. Beginning our return journey the sun stayed for a while for us to see the lovely Pyralid moth *Oncocera semirubella* which I call the rhubarb and custard moth reflecting the pink and yellow colouration. The rest of the way back was in dull conditions once more but we did note larvae of **Small Tortoiseshell** *Aglais urticae*, **Comma** *Nymphalis c-album*, and **Orange-tip**

Antocharis cardamines.

The finale on returning to the car park was seeing a Sparrowhawk take a small bird and speed off like an arrow.

Report of the butterfly walk at Kingcombe Meadows July 4th 2024

By Paul Butter

We started this joint event between Devon and Dorset Branches at Kingcombe Meadows with an introductory talk by Matt Harcourt, who is the manager of the site. Kingcombe Meadows was bought by the Dorset Wildlife Trust in the 1980s when it was one of the few farms never to have seen the plough or had artificial chemicals spread and referred to in the press as “ the farm that time forgot”. The Reserve has had more land added to it over the years and is now one of the largest areas of lowland grassland in nature management.

The weather was mixed, quite cool at 19°C for July and scudding clouds in a brisk breeze giving a mix of sun and cloud. Our first butterfly was a Red Admiral which was briefly glimpsed speeding along the edge of the car park. Once out in the first meadow we started to see several grassland species including lots of **Meadow Browns** *Maniola jurtina*, and a smattering of **Marbled Whites** *Melanargia galathea* with a few **Ringlets** *Aphantopus hyperantus* fluttering around the taller grasses. The most startling first impression was of the number of flowers in the pasture with a profusion of Knapweeds, Clovers and Bird's-foot Trefoil. The field boundaries were exuberant hedgerows allowed to grow and encroach into the grassland creating a varied edge habitat. Several large Oak trees were scanned for potential Purple Hairstreaks, but none were seen on this occasion. This sheltered spot soon revealed some **Large Skippers** *Ochlodes venata* which settled long enough to see the more patterned wings than seen on the much plainer Small Skipper. A **Small Skipper** *Thymelicus sylvestris* was netted and we had a close look at the antennae to make sure we weren't looking at the



very similar Essex Skipper. Walking on through to another sheltered pasture field we

Left: Large Skipper
Right: Small Skipper
Both by Paul Butter



spotted a **Scarlet Tiger moth** *Callimorpha dominula* fly along the treeline to settle on an Oak. This is a spectacular day-flying moth and once netted we pointed out the differences between this moth and the Jersey Tiger and Garden Tiger. Also flying along the hedge boundary was our first **Gatekeeper** *Pyronia tithonus* , a male, which obligingly sat with open wings for a good look. There were also a few small moths being disturbed as we walked through, when looked at closely through a hand lens the liquid golden edges of the wings could be seen confirming them as the **Garden Grass-moth** *Chrysoteuchia culmella*. We also spotted another day-flying moth, the **Cinnabar** *Tyria jacobaeae*. Like the Burnet moths and the Scarlet Tiger, the cinnabars' black and red colouration serves as a deterrent to birds and advertise the fact that they contain toxic chemicals. Leaving the sheltered low-lying pastures we headed up into a series of three hay meadows and into a stiff breeze. These much more open fields still had a plethora of flowers including Betony, Meadowsweet, Knapweeds and Corky-fruited Water Dropwort. Large patches of Bird's-foot Trefoil provided the foodplants for two species of day-flying Burnet moths. They were difficult to track in the wind but the first to be netted was a worn **Six-spot Burnet** *Zygaena filipendulae*. Later a pair of fresh **Five-spot Burnets** *Zygaena trifolii decreta* were seen at rest on some longer grass. It looked as if the male was flying around the female, but they didn't pair up while we were there. Several Burnets were buzzing about in this area. At the top of the thirds hay meadow the geology became more chalky and there were good numbers of Pyramidal orchids along with other orchids, the Bee Orchid remained elusive however. Descending to an ancient sunken lane we walked through a tunnel of Hazel finally emerging into the lower part of the meadow which was packed with Meadowsweet, and here large swathes of Devil's-bit Scabious, foodplant of the Marsh Fritillary which unfortunately was last seen at Kingcombe in 2013. The last species to be added to our list was the **Green-veined White** *Pieris napi*, two of which were seen in the end.



Scarlet Tiger moth
Paul Butter



Five-spot Burnet moth
Paul Butter

Devon Butterfly records

Pete Hurst, Devon County Recorder

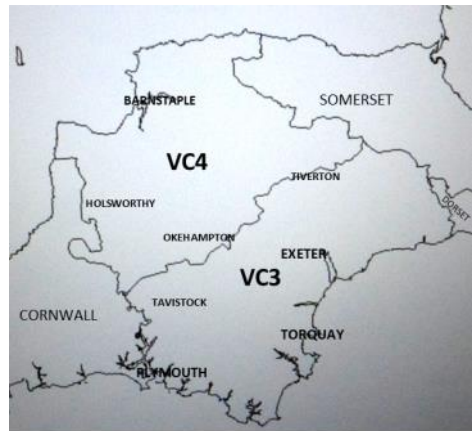
Thank you to all of you who have submitted butterfly records. The number of records has grown enormously. In 2023, over 59,000 records were received. 46% were via iRecord - this includes iNaturalist, transect and wider countryside butterfly scheme results. 46% were from big butterfly count and 8% were sent directly to me. Dealing with all these records does take a lot of time. Submitted records are amalgamated, put through various visual and automated checks and then imported into the Devon butterfly database. This import is done once a year and I have to set deadlines for inclusion in the next import. iRecord data will be exported to include all records entered between 1 January and 31 December. Thus it will include records from previous years entered during the current year. For those of you who send records directly to me please do so by **12 January** each year. Any sent after this date will be imported the following year, so the records will still get added in.

It would be very helpful if recorders would follow the advice below:

- **Site name** should be a name on a map not something like "garden". Please make sure there is a valid site name and this includes when using iRecord. Where appropriate, the site name should have the larger area before the smaller area e.g. Plymouth, Central Park.
- **Grid reference** - this can be accurately calculated via one of two websites: gridreferencefinder.com and <https://www.bnhs.co.uk/2019/technology/grabagridref/gagr.php#map> 4 or preferably 6 figure ordnance survey grid reference is all that is needed. There is little point in 8 or 10 figures. Take care if you yourself adjust longer grid references down to 6 figures, as you can't just chop off the end digits. E.g. SX1234512345 (10 digits) would become SX123123 (6 digits) when converted and SX12341234 (8 digits) would also become SX123123.
- **Vice county** - this is required. iRecord will calculate it, but for those of you sending records directly to me then please enter "3" for South Devon or "4" for North Devon. For most sites it is obvious. However if a site is borderline (e.g. Tiverton, see accompanying Devon VC map) or you are not sure then

entering the grid reference into the following website will give you the answer: <https://database.bsbi.org/gridref.php>

- **Recorder and determiner** - the format should be surname, forename or initials e.g. Hurst, Pete or Hurst, P.
- **Date** dd/mm/yyyy
- **Quantity** - only enter a number here, nothing else. To record a species as present enter "present" or "0"
- **Method** - please enter text here - commonly it will be "field observation"
- **Sex** "f" for female, "m" for male, "p" for a mating pair. If the sex is unknown or there are a mixture of sexes present enter "u". Nothing else should be entered here other than m, f, p or u
- **Stage** - it is really important to enter a stage, otherwise the record becomes difficult to verify not knowing if it was a larva, adult or what else. Furthermore such a record is excluded from phenology analysis. Please be especially careful when using iRecord or iNaturalist to enter a valid stage.
- **Status** - can be left blank or enter "not recorded"
- **Comment** - anything further you wish to add e.g. you could enter a mixture of sexes if both were present and you thus entered "u" in the sex column.



Devon Vice Counties: VC4 North Devon & VC3 South Devon

If sending butterfly records directly to me, the best way is to do it in bulk at the end of the season - an example spreadsheet with the ideal format can be viewed on the Devon BC In Your Area webpages <https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/devon-branch> by clicking "Recording butterflies and moths in Devon" in the list on the left. Records sent on paper are still acceptable but do take more time to process.

Please make sure you only submit records via one route, otherwise duplication in the database occurs. It is not easy to detect and makes the database untidy.

Using moth traps in secondary school biology lessons

By Noah Shawcross

Moths trapping is an excellent way to engage A-level students with issues to do with biodiversity, climate, classification and natural selection. The vast majority of A-level biology students have limited knowledge about the biodiversity of UK moth species. At West Buckland School in North Devon over the last 10 years I have used a 15w Heath Moth Trap to sample biodiversity in a hands on way. Students love opening the trap and identifying the moths collected (using the SEEK app and Paul Waring's "Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland".) My aim has been to try and foster a wonder and love of the world around us while covering aspects of the A-level biology specification.

Obviously, the hawk moths are always favourites, but so too are species like the white ermine, lobster moth and buff tip. As a biology teacher it is always great to find a peppered moth and placing them on lichen covered tree trunks brings home their wonderful camouflage and creates a great opportunity to tell the story of industrial melanisms. Often, other species are caught in the trap, maybugs and other large beetles – often with phoretic mites.

I use the data collected (moths, species and abundance) to calculate a Simpson's Diversity Index. Students then research the impact of agriculture, deforestation and climate change on the moths, often using Butterfly Conservation's "The State of the UK's Butterflies 2022 report". The Devon Moth Group have a useful code of conduct– available on their website to ensure moths are not harmed by recording them.



Roger Bristow memorial walks



There are now four walks available;

1. Orley common, Ipplepen, by Pete Hurst
2. Ashclyst Forest, Killerton, by Paul Butter
3. Berry Head National Nature Reserve, Brixham, by Amanda Hunter
4. Kerswell Down Butterfly Walk, Kingskerswell, by David Poole

All guides include a map and contain detailed information of how to get there, key species and other information relevant to the walk.

Each walk is available to download as a PDF.

You can find details of all the walks on the 'In Your Area' page of the Butterfly Conservation website.

[Roger Bristow Memorial Walks in Devon | Butterfly Conservation \(butterfly-conservation.org\)](http://butterfly-conservation.org)

Please get in touch with your committee if you have a walk that you would like to share with others, we would love to hear from you and learn about your walk.

Lydford Old Railway Reserve gets a new information board

With thanks to Ambrosia our reserve at Lydford now has a fantastic new information board that is packed with loads of facts and figures. The new board has a map of the reserve, historical information and a guide to the species you can spot. The information board is situated

near the entrance to the reserve so you should be able to spot it when you arrive.



Not one, but two wood mice

By Colin Sargent

While I was recently working at our Lydford Butterfly Reserve along side our contractor clearing and extending section 4, I noticed a lovely knot hole in part of the tree trunk that was felled and I asked him to cut it into a smaller log to make it easier to carry back to my car. The hole looked perfect for a photography theme I had in mind, with all this wet weather we've had these past few months, I've had to work in my studio to achieve some Wildlife shots, this shot of two cute wood mice cuddled up in the log is one of my latest projects and has had some great feedback, These mice had been busy chewing through several bits and bobs in my shed and after catching them in humane mouse traps, I set about building an interesting set up in my studio, they are adorable creatures and although not everyone's cup of tea, make wonderful photography subjects and another one to add to my collection of pictures to discuss at my next camera club wildlife photography talks. (After their model release forms had been signed, the mice went on their merry way Probably chewing through my shed wiring! If anyone would like any further information on set ups and camera equipment used, please get in touch or come along to one of my talks.



Devon Moth Group talk

If anyone missed the online event held earlier this year, organised by Devon Moth Group and would like to listen to the recording the link is given below. The event was in two parts. Firstly, "The Jewel Box - how moth's illuminate nature's hidden rules" Professor Tim Blackburn, University College London. Secondly, "Kent's Magnificent Moths" Rebecca Levey, Butterfly Conservation. Both talks were very informative and are highly recommended.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2dCENEGS78&t=5s>

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Red Admiral
Vanessa atalanta
Loxhore
15/01/24
Gary Watson



Orange-tip (m)
Anthocharis cardamines
Ivybridge
20/04/24
W.B.Bryan



Brimstone
Gonepteryx rhamni
Stover CP
16/02/24
David Turrell



Green Hairstreak (m)
Callophrys rubi
Rushlade Common
10/05/24
David Turrell



Holly Blue
Celastrina argiolus
Whitwell CP
22/04/24
David Sneyd



Purple Hairstreak
Favonius quercus
Hisley Wood
07/07/20
Kev and Jacki Solman



Peacock
Aglais io
Bickington
20/06/22
Mark Beer