Devon Branch

www.devon-butterflies.org.uk



Heath Fritillary Melitaea athalia Ashton Cleave Woods, nr Devon gate 11.06.2024 Trevor Stevens

Newsletter



Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

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Butterfly Conservation

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details back of newsletter).

Devon Branch Newsletter

The Editor may correct errors in, adjust, or shorten articles if for the sake of accuracy.

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The views expressed by contributors are not Send articles and images to the Editor (contact necessarily those of the Editor or of Butterfly Conservation either locally or nationally.

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Devon Branch Open Day 2024 Saturday 19th October 10am -4pm

at The Boniface 2AH Centre, Church Lane, Crediton EX17 2AH

Come and hear our expert speakers...

Sarah Gillespie, Artist: 'Moths as Messengers'

Gillespie studied 16th & 17th century methods and materials at the Atelier Neo-Medici in Paris and then read Fine Art at Pembroke College Oxford (BFA Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art.) Her work is widely collected by museums and individuals both here and abroad. She is regularly selected and hung at the Royal Academy Summer Show and is an RWA academician.

Now specializing in the 'centuries



'Peach Blossom' - mezzotint engraving 30cm x 30cm ©SarahGillespie 2024 www.sarahgillespie.co.uk

old' art of mezzotint engraving, the V&A London acquired the entire suite of her moth mezzotints for its permanent collection. The Shanghai, Xuhui Museum Fine Art in China followed suit with a large acquisition in the same year.

In 2023 the National Portrait Gallery commissioned a mezzotint for permanent display in their newly refurbished galleries.

Her drawings have long been concerned with the landscape around her home in Devon but her most recent work in mezzotint has focussed on British moths - the gradual drawing forth of the image from the darkness seeming a perfect matching of method to subject. She says of this work: "Mezzotint - a notoriously slow and difficult tonal method of engraving on copper – holds meaning for me somewhere around its ability to speak both literally and poetically of the moths being neither present, nor absent but always both. Here and not here. Also, because one is working in mirror and from dark to light and without line, there are, in the long hours of making, many when it is not at all clear whether one – the artist – is indeed 'drawing forth' or whether the moth – subject – is revealing herself. There is much more of a play, a conversation between these two possibilities than in some other mediums and I value that exchange more than I can say."

Dr Max Anderson, BC Southwest Landscape Officer: 'Moths as Pollinators' and 'UV Fluorescence in Lycaenid Butterflies'

Max works for Butterfly Conservation as a landscape officer in the Southwest, which primarily involves managing the reserves and working with partner organisations to improve the condition of some priority landscapes for our most threatened butterflies and moths. Max spends much of his spare time monitoring and

researching lepidoptera in order to learn more about their behaviours and needs, which can then be used to guide any management advice. In his first talk, Max will talk about some of the research he did on nocturnal pollination of Brambles during his PhD. He will then give a second talk to share some of his insight into the lives of some of our most elusive Lycaenid butterflies, which includes the use of new and innovative monitoring methods.

Phil Dean, Devon Moth Group: 'Creating the new website'

Phil will be talking about the decisions around adopting a new website for Devon Moth Group which shows geographic distribution and phenology for all species recorded in the county. There are now over 1.6 million records in the Devon database and we needed a solution which is scalable, is intuitive to use yet provides





comprehensive information about each species. Phil will look at the options they considered and why they chose the final approach. He will show a live demonstration of the website. Phil has been a member of the British Butterfly Conservation Society, now Butterfly Conservation, for over 40 years and developed an interest in moths some 14 years ago while living in West Berkshire. Soon after moving to Devon he was invited to join the council of the Devon Moth group and has special interest in analysing the masses of records provided by individual recorders across the county. He also carries out the butterfly survey at Devon Wildlife Trust's Andrew's Wood reserve.

Dave Holloway, Web Team: 'Butterfly and Moth photo presentation'

You may be familiar with Dave if you've ever sent in butterfly sightings, photos or had an identification query. At this year's Open Day Dave will be hosting a short presentation of some of the butterfly and moth photos he's been sent. If you have a photo you'd like to be considered for the presentation please send it to him via; **photos@devonbutterflies.org.uk** Please state whether you'd like your image considered for the presentation.



Ellie Wyatt, BC Southwest Project Officer: 'Reviving Heddon Valley's Fritillaries'

Ellie works for Butterfly Conservation and will be talking about the project to help conserve Heddon Valley's fritillaries including the threatened High Brown Fritillary.



Open Day running schedule:

09:30	Doors Open
10:00	Welcome from our Chair Jonathan Aylett Elections Moth Report from Barry Henwood Butterfly Report from Pete Hurst
11:00	Coffee Break (Refreshments will be provided)
11:30	Sarah Gillespie: 'Moths as Messengers'
12:00	Max Anderson : 'Moths as Pollinators' and 'The Secret Lives of Lycaenid Butterflies'
13:00	Lunch break. Attendees to bring their own lunch
14:00	Phil Dean : 'Creating the Devon Moth Group Website'
14:30	Ellie Wyatt: 'Reviving Heddon Valley's Fritillaries'
15:00	Dave Holloway: 'Photography Presentation'
15:30	Tea and cake
16:00	End of Day

Open to members and non-members

The Green Phoenix Festival

Hosted by Exeter Phoenix, the Green Festival took place on June 30, 2024. This inaugural event aimed to raise awareness of the climate crisis and highlight ways to combat it. The festival featured talks, workshops, film screenings, community stalls, and creative activities, all delivered free of charge to the local community. It was a

collaborative effort with Ethical Power and various local groups and organisations.

Devon BC committee members attended this indoor event which proved a great way to engage with potential new members in an urban environment. They set up a stall with information boards, leaflets, a nasturtium seed planting activity for children plus some live moths and caterpillars. The event was well attended and lots of positive feedback from visitors and other stall holders.

Overall, the festival fostered community engagement and encouraged positive action for our planet.

Devon BC web pages

When was the last time you had a look at the In Your Area page on the BC website? You'll find it packed with information, photos and news, there's up to date information about events and sightings, and not forgetting the brilliant Roger Bristow butterfly walks. One page is extremely handy when you want to get out and about, Key sites to see species in Devon | Butterfly Conservation (butterfly-conservation.org) featuring what to see, where to see it and the best time of year to go!



Lorna and Emma at the Green Phoenix







Langaford Farm A Brief History & Activities

by Peter Beale

The late Geoffrey Bayes acquired Langaford farm in the early 1970s and bequeathed it to the Trust in 2001. The farm runs to 40.5 ha of grassland, woodland and ponds. It includes nine medieval enclosures within the main farm and another four fields at Moorgate on the edge of the moor. The medieval enclosures within the main farm are located within a corn-ditch, partially surrounded by enclosures of post-medieval open ground. Much of the latter is Rhos (or culm) pasture, valley mire and carr woodland. The purpose of the corn-ditch was to allow the medieval fields to be closed up during the growing season, enabling hay and cereals to be grown and harvested. The animals would have been turned out during the summer, onto the surrounding Rhos pastures or onto a common on Dartmoor. The four enclosures of old pasture on the edge of Challacombe Down, have a fine granite enclosure wall against the open moor.

Geoffrey Bayes, assisted by founder Trustee, John Mills, excavated a number of ponds in the wet valley, in an area that had been worked for alluvial tin. The ponds are fed by a stream and the islands and surrounding land were planted by Geoffrey with a range of native and exotic trees, shrubs and herbs. The old bird hide has been replaced by a new one.

The farm has been managed in a very traditional low-input manner for a great many years. This has resulted in the grassland throughout

the farm being particularly herb-rich, with an important range of indicator species, like Greater Butterfly, Southern Marsh and Heath -spotted Orchids. The Greater Butterfly Orchid is a 'flagship' species, the outlying rhos pastures provide a stronghold for Marsh Fritillary butterflies and Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoths. That is a result of their foodplant, the Devil's-bit Scabious, being very abundant. Pale Butterwort, Roundleaved Sundew, Bog Pimpernel, Bog Asphodel, Bog Violet, Meadow Thistle and



Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth

other typical species grow in the wet pastures. Much of the Birch and Sallow has to be cleared back regularly from the rhos pastures, to prevent them from becoming wet woodland.

The farm has been under a succession of stewardship agreements, which help to cover some of the costs of management. Traditionally, the medieval fields were either used to grow cereals or cut as hay meadows and sheep then grazed the aftermath. The current grazing agreement enables traditional Dartmoor sheep to graze some of the meadows during the summer and ponies are used to graze the rhos pastures during the late summer and winter.

Some of the fields at Langaford, and four fields near Moorgate, are let to grazing tenants and these tenancies help to generate income. The Trust is run on a day-to-day basis by a business manager, who also acts as farm and estate manager. He is assisted by a part-time administrator and two students who work one day per week. Additional assistance has been rendered by the Sticklepath Volunteers and Young Dartmoor Rangers.



Marsh Fritillary Euphydryas aurinia



Marsh Fritillary pupa



Marsh Fritillary caterpillar All photographs by Peter Beale

The Trust hosts a number of events during the year and the Trustees are very keen to encourage 'specialist' study groups, to see and record mammals, birds, butterflies, moths, flies, other invertebrates, trees and shrubs, flowers, mosses and liverworts, fungi, soils and archaeology. A large shed - farm building 2 - acts as a meeting and display area, with kitchen, loos, shower, bunkhouse accommodation and stores.

Dr Tim Harrod of the Devon soils group, is one of the users and his group uses Langaford to carry out soils analysis and to store samples. The Trust is very keen to encourage natural history groups, wildlife photographers, artists and others to visit the farm – to enable them to enjoy the range of beautiful habitats and the special atmosphere they provide. A programme of specific events is held annually, to enable recovery and 'mindfulness' groups to use the farm's very relaxing atmosphere. That important use meets the particular wishes of Geoffrey Bayes, the Trust's benefactor.

Langaford Farm is situated near Lettaford, on Dartmoor's North Eastern rim. It conserve a 100 acre mix of pastures, woodland and wetland and is renowned for its conservation of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. The trusts work is divided into three main areas, Education, Science and Well-being. Upcoming events include:

- Thursday 26th September– Mosses with Geri Skeens
- Sunday 20th October– Fungi with Phil Page
- Book you place via info@langafordtrust.org or phone 01647 432889

For more information visit www.langafordtrust.org

Ashclyst Forest guided walk 7th July 2024

By Pete Hurst

Walk leaders were Malcolm Jarvis, a volunteer with the National Trust and Pete Hurst of Devon BC.

A group of 13 attendees walked along the forest paths and tracks with clouds coming and going but some reasonably good sunny periods. A keen northerly wind on the previous day had moderated fortunately, and it felt warm when the sun was out. As with other places this year, we found butterflies thin on the ground though we gradually built up species numbers as we went around. Ringlet was one of the first to show and several were flitting in some damp grassland as we walked past. An occasional Meadow Brown was seen but no more than one or two Gatekeepers. A few Small Skippers were encountered but only one or two Large Skippers, but at least we had them for comparison. A white flew past but wasn't identified.

Malcolm is a key holder, so we were able to access the gated woodland pasture fields which were lovely and flowery and it was whilst visiting those that we added around 10 Marbled Whites to our list and small numbers of Six-spot Burnet moth along with more of the browns that we had already seen.

One of our 3 target species was not seen: the Scarlet Tiger moth, which was on the wing at other sites. Of the other 2 targets, Silverwashed Fritillary numbered no more than 4 and a single White Admiral was only seen briefly a short distance from the parking area on our return journey. Two years ago on the same field event we saw lots of both with dozens of Silver-washed and perhaps 15 White Admiral. Other butterflies seen but not by all the party were Speckled Wood, Peacock and Purple Hairstreak.

Volunteer Work Party on Haddon Hill, Exmoor

Tuesday 12th November 2024 10am-3pm Butterfly Conservation and Exmoor National Park

Call for help! You're invited to join us to help with managing an important Heath Fritillary site at Haddon Hill on Exmoor. The work will involve clearing encroaching scrub and young saplings from the open heathland, improving conditions for the Heath Fritillary and helping to maintain this important habitat for all the wildlife it supports.

Volunteers will be welcome for all or part of the day.

Event: Habitat management for the Heath Fritillary on Haddon Hill **Meet:** 10am at Haddon Hill car park. Parking permits will be provided for the day.

Bring: Lunch, warm drink, gloves, loppers and/or bow saw if you have them (but we can supply some tools on the day if you don't have them)

Wear: Sturdy shoes or boots, and bring rain gear in case There is a short walk to the site and we will be working on a slope.

Booking: Please email <u>getinvolved@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk</u> if you are interested in coming along, and joining details will be sent to you. Any queries, please contact Jackie on 07970 099127 (Mon, Tues & Thurs).

Poor Butterfly year, less so on Dartmoor?

By Pete Hurst

I think most of us have noticed that butterfly numbers in 2024 have been low for many species. Greatly fewer butterflies have graced the garden this summer, and whilst co-leading a walk at Ashclyst Forest on 7th July in ok weather conditions, the party of 13 attendees saw low numbers of all the species we encountered. Ashclyst being one of the best sites to see Silverwashed Fritillary could only give circa 4 sightings in a 4-hour period. Ray Jones said that in one of the better seasons at Ashclyst he had seen around 100 there in one day, so a huge difference. White Admiral also can be seen in good numbers there usually, but our organized meeting featured only a brief glimpse of a solitary individual.

My Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey transect at Trendlebere Down on Dartmoor therefore, didn't look too promising as I set off in good sunny weather on 28th July to do a walk. However, I quickly discovered that somehow butterflies were faring much better there, and I had the second highest count (84 butterflies) for the last 6 years of July transect data for the site. Moreover, I saw 8 butterfly species which is the highest for the same 6 -year period (two other years had seven). Gatekeeper numbers totalled 53, beaten only in 2022 when 110 were counted. I was delighted if surprised.

Another welcome sighting was a very late Green Hairstreak and actually my first of the year. I have seen one in July at the site in a previous year, and, looking at the Devon database I see that there are even eight records for August with the latest being on 29th at Babeny, also on Dartmoor.



Lydford Old Railway Reserve school visit 11th July 2024 By Pete Hurst

Last year, Colin Sargent, Lydford Old Railway Reserve volunteer warden, broached the topic of the possibility of having a visit to our reserve from the local school. The committee thought it was an excellent idea, and after a postponement of an intended visit in May this year, July 11th was agreed on by all.



It was fortunate that unsettled weather earlier in the week gave way to a decent day for our event. Both Colin and Mary Harold had liaised with Lydford Primary School to arrange the day

and children duly arrived with their teachers in the car park just after midday. At the top of the bank on the edge of the car park, Mary had set up our colourful display boards and also a table strewn with twigs and vegetation upon which she had placed a number of moths she had caught the previous night. My contribution was to bring some Cinnabar larvae on Common Ragwort from my garden. I also had a leaf with Cinnabar eggs on the same table with a magnifying glass at the side, and additionally a late adult Cinnabar moth to show 3 of the 4 stages of the moth's lifecycle. Graham and Barbara Davey had another table with their previous night's moth catch, and so there was plenty for the 27 children (and 3 teachers) to look at. Magnificent Privet Hawk-moths and Buff-tips could be seen on both tables along with a host of other species.



Privet Hawk-moth, Sphinx ligustri, Mary Harold

After the children had eaten their packed lunches in the car park, Max Anderson (BC's Southwest Landscape Officer) and Colin led a crocodile of children in pairs with their teachers for a half mile down the old railway line to get to the BC reserve. Max and Colin halted on section 2 where our new reserve information board is, and after Max had explained the purpose of the reserve the children were allowed to experience for themselves the nature present within the grassland there. Max was in great demand with children coming to him with small invertebrates that they had caught in their hands for him to inspect!



The children were good at staying away from the edge of the steep slope of the embankment in that section with all adults still keeping a watchful eye out for their safety. As with most other places, butterflies were only showing in very low numbers but the day was helped with a profusion of grasshoppers and other insects which captured the children's imagination.

Billacombe Fields, Plymstock, Plymouth

By Kevin & Jacki Solman

Saturday 6th July 2024. Following a brief introduction to the area and its development as an SSSI in 1989, seven visitors including leaders enjoyed a pleasant day out at Billacombe Fields. A couple of light showers did not dampen the enthusiasm of the group, who enjoyed a mainly sunny day, though butterfly numbers and species were sadly lower than expected. Areas visited included the flower meadows, woodland, grassy fields and the dry rocky area above the old quarry. Eleven butterfly species were seen, though only one person saw the elusive White-letter Hairstreak at the top of an Elm tree. Good views were had of all the other butterflies.

Meadow Brown	36	Large White	1
Ringlet	16	Small White	3
Speckled Wood	3	Large Skipper	8
Gatekeeper	12	Small Skipper	5
Marbled White	28	White-letter Hairstreak	1
Red Admiral	3		

Species seen were;

Apple Ermine moths By Pete Hurst

In the first week of July I was in the kitchen around 6am, and as I glanced through the window into the garden, I noticed a light-coloured moth crossing through. At the time, I didn't think too much about it, but a day or two later when I was up around the same time, I saw a couple of probably the



Apple Ermine Yponomeuta malinellus Pete Hurst

same kind of moth in flight in the garden. I then thought that rather than witnessing a random flight, this species was actually actively flying. I wondered if they might be plume moths as they looked about the right size. Venturing into the garden I quickly realized I would need a net to catch one as a number of them were busily flying around. Once netted, I realized the moth was one of the Small Ermine group, of the family Yponomeutidae. Looking around the garden, I saw about 10 of them flitting about our large Jupiter apple tree and after checking the moth literature I realized they were Apple Ermine, *Yponomeuta malinellus*.

Several days later, again around 6 am, I went into the garden to look for the moth and discovered numbers of them flying around both of our apple trees and also two more apple trees over the fence next door. Within around half an hour, sunlight began to illuminate the apple trees and the Apple Ermines became inactive.

The larvae of the moth feed gregariously in a web and I can't recall ever seeing them on our apple trees. Looking next door, however, I could make out old communal webs on some of the leaves.

Other Small Ermine moth species feed on Spindle and another species, the Orchard Ermine *Yponomeuta padella* uses Hawthorn and Blackthorn for the larval food plant. You may have sometimes noticed long stretches of these shrubs being defoliated in roadside hedges.

The caterpillar of *Stauropus fagi,* Lobster Moth

Barry Henwood

The adult Lobster Moth in many ways is unremarkable. It is greyish-brown and does not feed as an adult, relying on its fat stores for energy. Consequently it is relatively short lived.

However, in contrast the caterpillar is truly remarkable in a variety of ways from the moment it hatches out of the egg. The first thing it does is to eat its eggshell, as is common amongst the Lepidoptera. Uniquely, it



First instar showing ant mimicry

feeds on nothing else until it has shed its first skin. Only then does it start to feed on leaves, usually Oak or Beech.

The appearance of the caterpillar in these first two instars is most unusual and demands an explanation. We need to bear in mind that a caterpillar has two main tasks – to eat and avoid being eaten. Thus what a caterpillar looks like is related to avoidance of predation. The Lobster Moth caterpillar has unusually long true legs which it waves around at speed. On the rear end the anal claspers have been modified such that they do not function to hold the body to a leaf or twig, but instead they are elongated and held upwards. We cannot know for certain how the defence works, but we can think of a likely



Second instar showing ant mimicry, about to shed its second skin

mechanism. The caterpillar looks rather like an ant which would surely put off many invertebrate predators. In fact, it looks rather like an ant at both ends of the body. This tactic has also evolved in the caterpillar of *Homodes bracteigutta from South-East Asia* – see <u>https://</u> <u>lepiforum.org/wiki/page/</u> <u>Homodes</u> <u>bracteigutta Entt/</u> <u>image/2/1</u>



Penultimate instar showing threatening posture with slit open of the formic acid gland visible

The Lobster Moth is a large species and soon becomes too large to get away with the ant deception. In the final instar it rests with its long true legs folded against the body and it remains motionless, trying not to be spotted. If a predator did disturb the caterpillar, it raises up the front end of its body waving its true legs around in a scary fashion. Furthermore, it has a gland on the first thoracic segment (prothorax) with a slit-like opening from which it can squirt out formic acid if provoked sufficiently. A bird looking at it from the rear sees a snake, in fact a cobra which would elicit an immediate flee response. The illusion

is created by the 7th and especially the 8th abdominal segments being expanded laterally and the modified anal claspers looking like a forked tongue. Readers may wonder how a caterpillar in the UK

could evolve to mimic a cobra. The answer is straightforward. Many of our insectivorous birds are migratory and spend much of their lives in tropical Africa where snakes including cobras are common. The fear that has evolved in birds is innate, not relying on learning to avoid them – there are really no learning opportunities as the first encounter is likely to be fatal. In fact, snake mimicry readily evolves. There are examples in six families of British Lepidoptera, mimicking snakes in a variety of ways. However, it is much more common amongst tropical Lepidoptera.

When fully fed it spins a silken cocoon amongst fallen leaves on the ground, resting there for about 10 months before the moth emerges.



Final instar showing snake mimicry. All photographs by Barry Henwood

Home Farm Marsh, Fremington, North Devon

By Peter Beale and Mike Bowden

A group of fifteen members of Butterfly Conservation and Home Farm Marsh volunteers, joined the Warden, Steve Skirth, for a walk along the strip of habitat that runs along the southern side of the estuary of the River Taw. It was the first organised Devon Butterfly Conservation walk on the reserve which is managed by the Gaia Trust. The outer part of the marsh has fields of damp pasture and one field, in particular, has an abundance of Fleabane. This member of the daisy/aster family may deter fleas, but it is the food plant to the Fleabane Tortoise Beetle (*Cassida murraea*). The adults have the appearance of tortoises, but the larvae look like hedgehogs on a bad day. Larvae were seen to be feeding on fleabane plants and adults were also recorded.

The walk was led by BC members Jean and Mike Bowden along with the reserve ranger Steve Skirth. Anyone interested in butterflies was invited to participate and 16 people in total came along. The target species for the day was to be the Brown Argus and the Wall but nature being what it is they decided to have the day off. All was not lost as we did see a Small Heath, which was a first for this site. Jean and Mike had reports that a few had been seen but not during any of their surveys.

Even though the butterflies and day flying moths were a bit thin on the ground, we were still able to record Marbled Whites, Small Whites, Common Blues, Burnet and Silver Y moths. Other species observed were Commas, Small and Large Skippers, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Speckled Woods, Ringlets, Red Admirals, Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshells, and Small Heaths. Some

158 butterflies in total.

Many thanks to those who came along on the day, also many thanks to Steve Skirth for his continued support.



Home Farm Marsh volunteers by Karen Rawson

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Grizzled Skipper Pyrgus malvae Miltor Mator 08.05.2024 Steph Murphy



Large Skipper (m) Ochlodes sylvanus Heathfield Great Plantation 26.06.2024 Dave Holloway

Do you have some photographs that you would like to be featured in our open day presentation? We would love to see them!

Please send all submissions to: photos@devon-butterflies.org.uk



Eyed Hawk-moth (larva) Smerinthus ocellata Stover CP LNR 12.08.2024 David Turrell



Purple Hairstreak (f) Favonius quercus Oreston, Plymouth 17.07.2024 Graham Smith