

**DEVON BRANCH BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION AGM  
AND OPEN DAY 19<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024  
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

## **1. General**

Last year I commented in the introduction to my report that I had seen a lot of butterflies. However, I understand that this year the numbers recorded by those participating in the Big Butterfly Count are at their lowest level ever. 'Weathering the storms' was the heading under which the new Chair of Butterfly Conservation, Martin Spray CBE, wrote an article in the Spring issue of "Butterfly" when he said that he was grateful to be leading "an organisation in robust and forward-looking form" in spite of the fact that the UK is considered to be the most biodiversity-depleted country in Europe.

From my knowledge of colleagues in the Devon Branch of BC I know that they share the expertise and passion of those involved with the wider work of BC to which Martin Spray refers and we must all continue to support it to the best of our abilities and spread the word about its extraordinary achievements and ambitions.

## **2. Committee Meetings**

Lorna Welch and Noah and Elizabeth Shawcross have been co-opted to the Committee this year as Health and Safety Co-ordinator and Education and Engagement volunteers respectively. Regrettably Karen Rawson has stood down as Field Events co-ordinator.

The Committee has met on six occasions this year including three meetings by Zoom and three in person.

## **3. Finance**

The Treasurer has presented his report for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Income is substantially up on the last financial year thanks to some generous donations and an increase in subscriptions. This has meant that the Branch has been able to transfer £7,500 to Head Office for use by the charity.

## **4. Publicity**

Committee members have represented BC at a number of different events this year including those at the Garden House in Buckland Monachorum, the Exeter Green Phoenix Festival and the Meldon Wildlife Festival. A new and successful venture involved showing children, parents and teachers around the Lydford Reserve in July. A new information board has been erected at Lydford.

## **5. The Branch Newsletter, Website and Social Media**

### *5.1 The Newsletter*

Emma Grice has produced three excellent editions of the Branch Newsletter (issue numbers 119, 120 and 121, and is grateful to all those who have contributed articles of interest to members.

### *5.2 The Website*

This continues to be an essential source of information for our members without which the Branch would be much the poorer.

### *5.3 Social Media*

Ella Chambers continues to operate the three social media platforms I mentioned last year and updates the Committee regularly on the feedback she achieves which we understand is increasing in volume. How she copes with the amount of exchanges she does is beyond my comprehension!

## **6. Field Events**

For reasons which are not entirely clear field events have been poorly supported this year despite Karen Rawson's best efforts. New Health and Safety requirements for BC publicised events may have had an impact but perhaps more to the point is finding well informed volunteers prepared to lead outdoor parties. With assistance from our Head Office we are hoping to find a new Events Co-ordinator for 2025.

May I thank those colleagues within our ranks who did kindly lead events this year.

## **7. Reserve Conservation Work and Conservation Work Parties**

Conservation work parties were organised at nine different sites by Peter Beale and Jenny Plackett over the year including one at a new site at Home Farm Marsh, Fremington, in North Devon. The number of volunteer members attending varied between only one person to a maximum of 12 persons. Peter has calculated that no less than 398 volunteer hours were involved in total on all nine sites.

To assist in the sharing of Peter's workload BC are advertising for a Conservation Work Party Co-ordinator.

In 2025 all work party volunteers will be required to register on BC's database "Assemble".

## **8. Other Matters**

### *8.1 Engagement and Education*

With the addition to our Committee of Noah and Elizabeth Shawcross we have two committed conservationists who are developing ideas over how the Branch might use the funds donated by the Valerie Ayton Trust through engagement with schools. Although these proposals are in their infancy, the Committee hopes that practical projects which meet established criteria and further BC's strategic goal of transforming 100,000 spaces in the UK for butterflies, moths and people can be recognised by an award or prizes.

### *8.2 CR Bristow and Butterfly Walk Leaflets*

Members and the public can now access four butterfly walk leaflets on the website thanks to the efforts of colleagues who have shared their enthusiasm for places they know well, viz Orley Common, Ashclyst Forest, Berry Head and Kerswell Downs.

### *8.3 The Committee and Other Colleagues*

Every year it is my pleasure to thank colleagues other than those who sit on the Committee for the work they do to support our organisation. Our 'back room boys' are key to the smooth running of the Branch and so may I record my and the Committee's thanks to Amanda Hunter, David Holloway and Bill Potter (IYA Web Team) for all they do to keep the website going. Lesley Kerry who has acted as the Silver-Studded Blue Co-ordinator for the Branch for many years is relinquishing her post but we are grateful for all she has done to maintain records of this beautiful butterfly.

As mentioned in the article in this summer's 'Butterfly Magazine' with the title 'Counting on Recorders' data are at the heart of the work of BC does for butterflies and moths so the volunteers who monitor butterfly transects are playing a vital role in protecting them. Jenny Evans, our Transect and WCBS Co-ordinator has decided that the time has come for her to retire from this role. Jenny has done this work for longer than I am aware but on behalf of past and present Committee members and the Branch as a whole may I thank you, Jenny, most sincerely for all you have done to promote the work of BC in Devon.

Max Anderson (BC South West Landscape Officer) who has been so supportive of our Branch in recent years has decided to leave BC to allow him and his wife to travel around the world whilst he can. Thank you Max for all your help and good luck on your journeys.

Since I joined the Committee the average age of its members has reduced. Not only that but we have more female colleagues on it which pleases me greatly. The Branch is incredibly fortunate to have a Committee which works harmoniously together and may I thank all colleagues for the support which they give me and their dedication to the work of our charity.

#### *8.4 Marjory Taylor*

I wish in particular to pay thanks to Marjory Taylor who I understand has sat on our Committee for well over a quarter of a century (that sounds better than 25 years!) and feels it is time to retire from it. Aside of her work for Natural England before retirement, Marjory has brought her expertise as a dedicated conservationist to bear on many issues with which the Committee has grappled, has always expressed her views constructively and, among other duties, has been the first point of contact for the general public as our Branch Contact/Organiser. So Marjory we are all immensely grateful to you for the help you have given us over your years of service to BC and wish you well in the future.

The good news is that Marjory will continue as an associate Committee member to assist with certain Branch administrative matters and so has not 'disappeared' for ever!

**Jonathan Aylett**  
**Chairman**