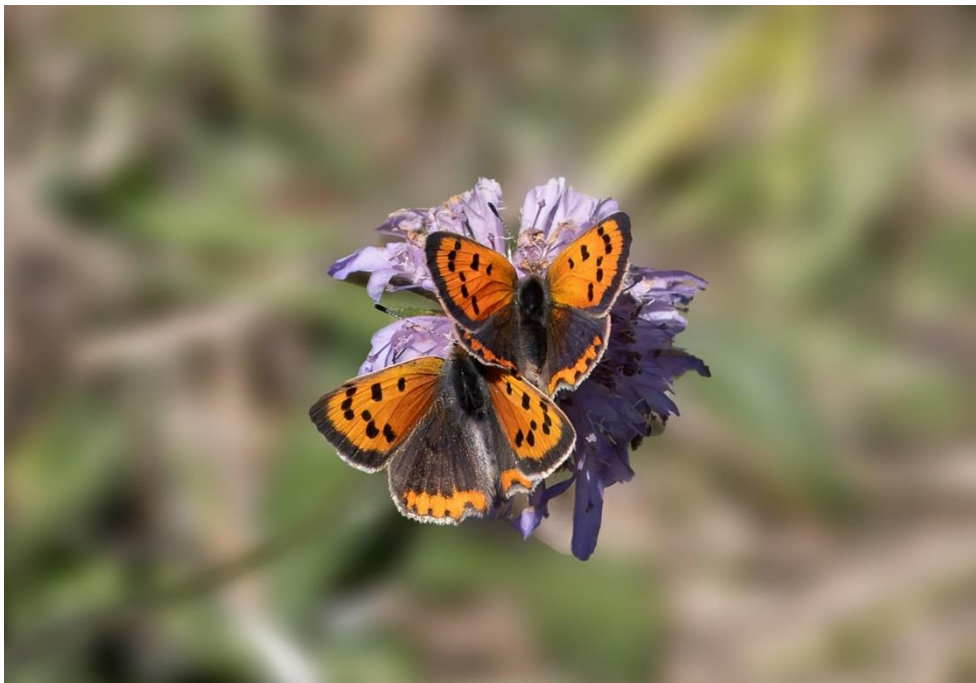


ON THE WING

Winter 2024

Number 102

The Newsletter of Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Butterfly Conservation



www.bedsnorthants-butterflies.org.uk



A very warm welcome to this winter edition of our Branch Newsletter.

Well, it was certainly an indifferent summer, being often cool, cloudy and damp. One wonders what effect the poor weather may have on subsequent generations of some of our species. It was mid-July by the time we encountered somewhat more favourable conditions.

Before the year started, Butterfly Conservation were making the case that the situation for butterflies is getting grave. The 2022 State of Butterflies report says, "In the UK, long-term trends show that 80% of butterfly species have decreased in abundance or distribution, or both, since the 1970s...."

This year's further dramatic declines are therefore all the more worrying – which is why the practical conservation work we help with out of season is so totally crucial. Working Party details are advertised later in this newsletter. We have plenty of members as a Branch, but the number of those who volunteer is relatively low.

Please consider if you can lend a hand.

Steve Bocking

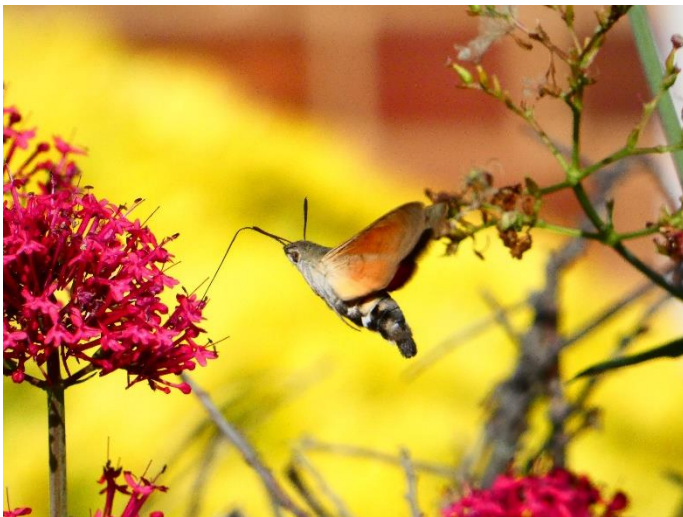
Branch Photographic Competition 2024

Held at our Members' Day and AGM in March 2024, judged by our guest speaker, Peter Eeles, author of *Life Cycles of British & Irish Butterflies*



The Chairman's Shield Best British Butterfly

Winner: Chris Walpole – Comma aberration suffusa



Best British Moth Shield

Winner: Doug Goddard – Hummingbird Hawk-moth in my Northampton garden





The Butterfly Conservation Shield Best Early Stages
Winner: Neil Malton – Small Eggar moth caterpillar



The Don Askew Memorial Shield Branch Activities
Winner: Dave James – A happy visitor (Pitsford moth event)



Winter Work Parties in 2024/25 and AGM in 2025

Branch Members' Day and Annual General Meeting

Sunday 2nd March 2025 at 2:00pm in Turvey Village Hall, High Street, Turvey, Beds, MK43 8DB
Parking is available, there will be refreshments and we will hold our annual Photographic Competition.

Guest speaker: Matthew Oates, naturalist and nature writer, who will be talking on various subjects such as the Purple Emperor and the meaning of butterflying

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

As last year, on the 3rd Sunday of the month

Dates: 19.1.25 and 16.2.25 - 10am to 2pm, including a lunch break

Scrub clearance for Species Recovery Programme target species Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper, plus Green Hairstreak.

We suggest you bring a hot drink and lunch, and wear warm, waterproof clothing (depending on weather conditions), and sturdy footwear. Gloves and tools (bowsaws and loppers) will be available to borrow, although volunteers may prefer to bring their own tools. You are welcome to stay for as little or as long as you like.

Meet next to the Skylark Café (Grid ref: SP 952 848, What3words: racks.digesting.stiletto, nearest postcode NN14 3HS). Day parking permits will be available.

These events are part of a Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme project funded by Natural England and are being held in partnership with North Northamptonshire Council.

Contact Jamie Wildman – jwildman@butterfly-conservation.org

Hilary Monk – hilary.monk@northants.gov.uk

Winter work party at Sywell County Park Butterfly Garden

Wednesday 4th December 2024, 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

From 10am to 2.30pm:

Tuesday 7th January 2025

Tuesday 4th February 2025

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-conservation.org or call: 07483 039324

This is a joint event between the Building the Links for Rockingham Forest project funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund and North Northants Council

In Bedfordshire no specific work parties are organised by the branch as the owners of the nature reserves in the county, the Wildlife Trust and the National Trust, run volunteer work parties to improve habitats for butterflies and other taxa throughout the year on their reserves eg. Totternhoe, Pegsdon Hills, Felmersham, Strawberry Hill, Dunstable Downs. Below are contact details for the WT and NT:

- Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire:
bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org
- National Trust: dunstabledowns@nationaltrust.org.uk

Summer 2025 events and workshops – organised by Dave James (further details nearer the time)

June 15th 2025 - Glaphorn Cow Pastures Open Day for the Black Hairstreak, possibly jointly with the Wildlife Trust

July 6th 2025 - Pitsford Moth and Butterfly event in partnership with the WTBCN - make sure you book early as the tickets go quickly

July 26th 2025 - Northamptonshire Butterfly Identification Workshop for the WTBCN. This is a booking-only paid-for event for the WTBCN (unless you already volunteer for the WT in which case you may well be able to get in for free) - the venue is Pitsford Nature Reserve (last year it was at Ring Haw).

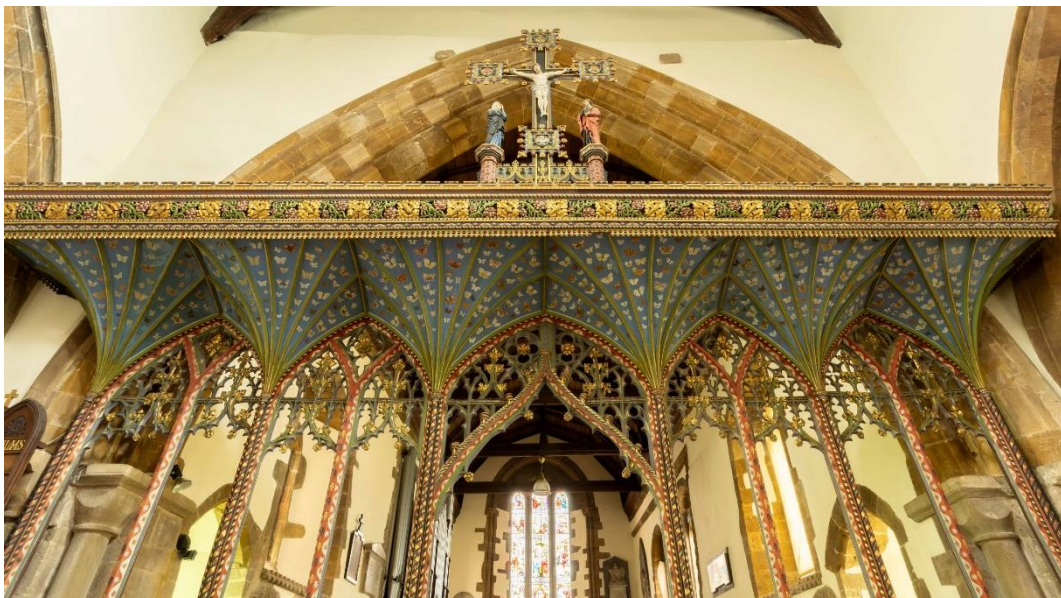
All Saints' Church, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire

Dave James



As well as our local butterflies, I also have a passion for local history, particularly historic buildings and churches. We are lucky to have some fantastic sites here in Northamptonshire, and Earls Barton's magnificent church is one of the most impressive places to visit. While the majority of the church is Norman, the tower is a superb example of Anglo-Saxon architecture.

You may of course be wondering why I am writing this history lesson for the pages of a local Butterfly Conservation branch newsletter. It is in fact because there is a rather special butterfly connection with this church, but you will have to venture inside to see it. Between the nave and the chancel is a magnificent rood screen which was richly decorated by the local artist Henry Bird in 1935. The canopy is illustrated with hundreds of butterflies, and it really is an amazing sight to behold. If you're in the area you can experience it too as the church is now open during the hours of 10am to 4pm Monday to Thursday, and 10am to 3pm on Fridays. I had always wanted to see this rood screen for myself, so when I was invited by the Reverend Chad Chadwick to attend a Big Butterfly Count event being organised by the church how could I possibly have refused?



The event was held on the 27th of July and unfortunately, in keeping with the majority of the rest of the season, the weather wasn't great. There were a few chinks in the clouds though, and in total, we managed to see eight species of butterfly. These were Small, Large and Green-veined White, Painted Lady, Peacock, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper. The Nasturtiums by the entrance gate also had numerous Large and Small White eggs on them which certainly drew people's attention when they were pointed out to them, as did the Toadflax Brocade larvae crawling up a gravestone.



Peacock



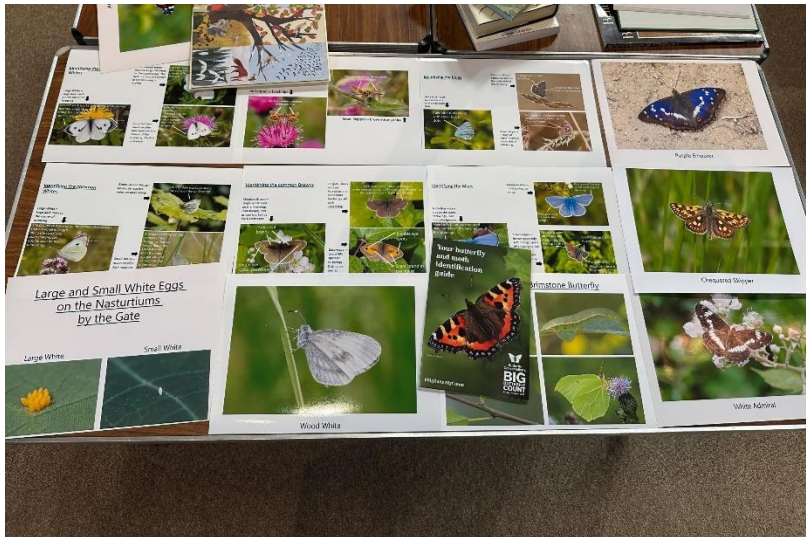
Small White egg



Large White eggs



Toadflax Brocade caterpillar



Inside the church itself, we set up a display table on which we displayed various resources, and photos of some of Northamptonshire's rarer butterflies, I had also printed off some identification guides from my website to help people identify some of the commoner ones. There was lots of discussion around this table about our local butterflies, and we also spent some time studying the rood

screen to see how many species of butterfly we could identify among the illustrations. There are a lot of butterflies to go through but with a bit of searching, you can find a Peacock, a very detailed female Clouded Yellow, Orange-tips and lots of Whites. There are good contenders for Large Tortoiseshell and Camberwell Beauty in there too.

Events like this really show the importance of churchyards as valuable green spaces, and many have become important local habitats for a variety of wildlife. Earls Barton church is no exception, and I would especially like to thank Chad for inviting me along to take part!



Clouded Yellow and Peacock

Orange Tips and Wood White





9 people attended the field trip to Totternhoe on a beautiful sunny day which got up to about 23 degrees, very welcome after a few days of cold and dull weather.

We started up by the path under the chalk cliffs where there were lots of Small Blues but, surprisingly, not much Kidney Vetch. However a few Small Blue eggs were found on the vetch.

We then walked over to the quarry where we saw several Dingy Skippers and Brown Argus.

We were accompanied on the walk by Matt Hayes from Cambridge University who is doing a PhD on butterfly temperature and we went into the field with the butterfly banks. Here Matt explained what they were doing and told us that this is the third year since the banks were constructed. At Pegsdon where they have also built butterfly banks, they have found that the butterflies were using the banks on the hottest day of the year in July when temperatures got up to 40 degrees.



We then went to the motorbike gully but could not find any Duke of Burgundy there although they had been present 2 weeks before.



Brimstone

Thanks to Matt Hayes and also to Dave Tiffin who helped with counting butterflies, spotting them and pointing them out.

Here is a list of the butterfly species seen: Small Heath, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Large White, Small Blue – at least 10, Common Blue, Brown Argus, possibly the first Meadow Brown seen in Bedfordshire, Holly Blue, Brimstone, Dingy Skipper and Speckled Wood. Not many Whites were seen and there were no Duke of Burgundy or Green Hairstreak.

We also spotted Burnet Companion and Cinnabar moths, together with *Osmia bicolor*, the Red-Tailed Mason Bee which was seen carrying sticks to cover its nest of a snail shell.

Flowers: Common Spotted Orchids, Twayblade, Sainfoin, a few Kidney Vetch, Horseshoe Vetch and Bird's Foot Trefoil



Small Blues



Dingy Skipper

Common Blue



Field trip to Fermyn Woods Country Park – 12th May 2024

Douglas Goddard

On one of the few occasions this spring, the weather was warm, sunny and calm, perfect for the thirty-two enthusiasts who gathered for the morning, including Jamie Wildman, Andy Wyldes and myself, who led the group, also accompanied by two Park Rangers.



Photographing a Grizzled Skipper

*Surveying the plateau
and sheltered hedge*



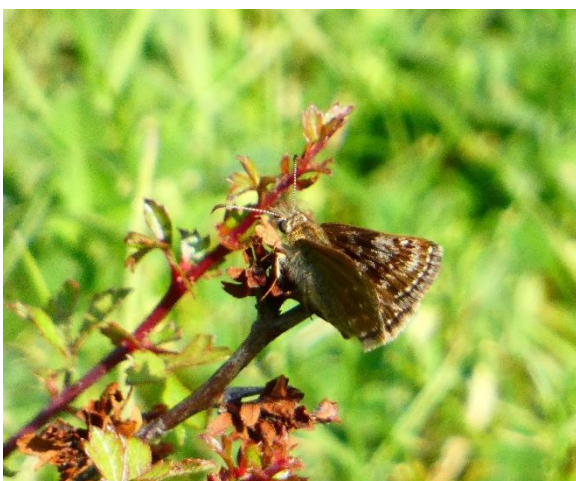


We first approached the short incline and sheltered hedge by Reedy Pond, a favourite spot for Green Hairstreaks. None was seen but among the ground flora of bird's-foot trefoil, black medick and wild strawberry, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper were seen. We made our way round to the butterfly bank, where further individuals were seen, but much less numerous and harder to spot than in previous years. I was able to show the group a Brimstone egg on an isolated buckthorn on the

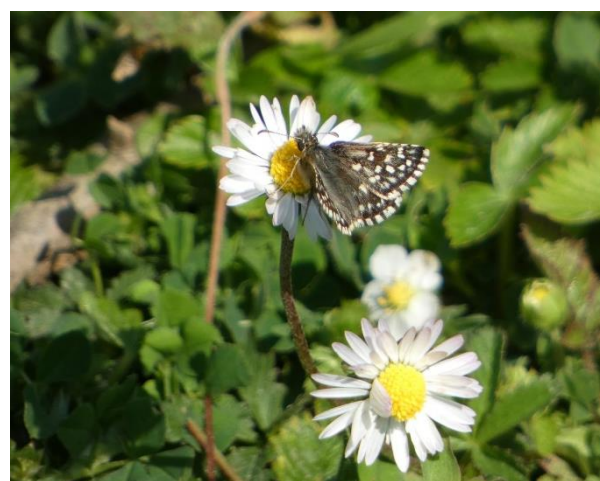
bank, having watched a female lay earlier in the week. We then paused to view the tall hedge beside the bank, where I was confident that we would find Green Hairstreak. It took a few minutes before one appeared and settled among the mass of green hawthorn, high up and difficult to see until it moved, but eventually it was picked out by all of the group. It was joined briefly by a second one.

We proceeded along the main path, viewing a narrow gully and a second bank before reaching the open glade behind Big Pit Pond. Further Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and two more Green Hairstreaks were noted. Brimstones, Green-veined Whites, Orange-tip and Peacock had appeared, though butterflies were sparse. A Holly Blue flew over the bushes as we left this glade and headed back across the plateau to where we had started. A Small Heath was added to the list and by the sheltered hedge, the Dingy and Grizzled Skippers provided good photographic opportunities as they fed on the spring flowers. David James had joined us and as we headed back along the path to the café, we recorded a Comma. Numbers of butterflies had been below par, but our target species had showed up and contributed to a successful and enjoyable morning.

The final count: 12 Dingy Skipper, 14 Grizzled Skipper, 4 Brimstone, 1 Orange-tip, 2 Green-veined White, 4 Green Hairstreak, 1 Holly Blue, 1 Peacock, 1 Comma, 1 Small Heath



Dingy Skipper on the butterfly bank



Grizzled Skipper feeding on daisy

Field trip to Fineshade Wood – 6th July 2024 Douglas Goddard

Many people expressed an interest in attending this walk, which was eagerly anticipated, but in the week beforehand it became evident that the weather would be dire even by the standards of this dismal summer. I advised those who enquired whether it was still going ahead to try on a better day if travelling any distance. It was raining quite heavily as I set off from Northampton, but there was a promise of an improvement as the morning passed. Arriving at Fineshade I was met by Susannah O’Riordan and ten optimistic participants. It was still very gloomy, but at least the rain had stopped so we decided to walk the route and point out likely spots for the key species for anyone wishing to return under better conditions.



Checking out a Small Skipper

We set off along the forest track north of Top Lodge. Apologies for the lack of butterflies were met with lively banter and good humour and the main topic of conversation was the number of Ringlets which were flying in the still quite dark conditions. We eventually reached the large open loading bay which had proved so productive for a range of species on past visits. It had become a little brighter and here we added Large and Small Skipper to our sightings. We ascended the steep path to another small open area in a vain hope of a Purple Emperor. Susannah spotted an adder basking here, but it slithered away before anyone else was able to spot it.



Watching the White Admiral



Chasing a Marbled White in the meadow

We returned along the main track, with more Ringlets and Large Skippers and the highlight of the day, a White Admiral gliding over an open glade but settling on the bushes well out of camera range. This was the only one of our target species to be seen, with no sign of the two Fritillaries, Purple Emperor or Purple and White-letter Hairstreaks. We pointed out the elms by the bridge which have held a colony of White-letters for around forty years. From here we entered the meadow nearby and observed Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns, more Small Skippers and the first Gatekeepers of the year. There were also some very fresh Six-spot Burnet

moths here.

We decided to continue on a circuit via the wood instead of returning by the road. As we came into the sheltered dip by the Gruffalo, on some large cut tree trunks piled by the side, a fresh Red Admiral and several Commas were seen basking on the logs. Three Whites were on the wing here, one each of Large, Small and Green-veined White. This brought the species total to twelve, far exceeding our expectations at the beginning of the day and everyone agreed that it had been an enjoyable and worthwhile visit. It was a pleasure for us to lead such a friendly and grateful group.

Species count: 10 large Skipper, 8 Small Skipper, 1 Large White, 1 Small White, 1 Green-veined White, 1 Red Admiral, 4 Comma, 1 White Admiral, 8 Marbled White, 4 Meadow Brown, 40 Ringlet, 2 Gatekeeper



The first Gatekeeper of the year



One of the Marbled Whites

Field trip to Salcey Forest, 5.6.2024

Chris Walpole and Judith Barnard, supported by Jamie Wildman

A bit like last year's field trip, the weather this year was a bit dubious for June and we wondered if we would get enough sun for the Wood Whites to be on the wing. We were also concerned about how the heavy rainfall during the last few months had made many rides so muddy that we were unable to include them on the route this year. It's also never a positive sign for a butterfly walk when coats and fleeces are the order of the day! In spite of this, the assembled group set off in hope and anticipation of seeing some nice butterflies.

The walk started from the café car park down the main path towards the ancient Church Path Oak tree. We were greeted by several Speckled Woods on the way and then just as we were close to the oak, Chris (a co-leader) spotted a roosting Wood White. It was sufficiently warm for it to fly about, giving our 7 attendees some photographic opportunities. For some of them it was their first ever sighting of this species, so we were delighted (and mightily relieved) to have seen it.



Wood White



This led to a few more sightings, all on the edge of the main path. When we reached the crossroads, some could be seen flying about in the distance and our final total for Wood Whites was 11. Although we were all pleased to see this number, given that very few had been seen in the days preceding, records were generally much lower than in previous years. Jamie Wildman, the Northamptonshire Landscape Officer, accompanied us on the walk and was able to give the attendees some information on the work he is leading on the conservation of Wood Whites and other key species in Beds and Northants.



There were a few more butterflies to see on the walk and we were delighted to see Broad-bodied Chasers (male and female), Beautiful Demoiselles and also a couple of Lizards basking on logs. Quite a modest total of butterflies was seen on the field trip overall, but given the Spring that we'd been having, we were pleased with what we did see and we would like to thank everyone who attended for their enthusiastic participation!



Bison Hill Field Trip, Whipsnade – 19.5.24

Aidan and Emma Whitfield

The day of the field trip was perfect weather, sunny and about 21 degrees. 11 people met at the National Trust visitor centre and café and we all had a very enjoyable walk. We had good views of the target species, Duke of Burgundy, which settled well and were easy to spot and photograph.



Along the way, we met the National Trust Ranger, Sam Childs, who was out for a walk doing his butterfly transect which he shares with 2 other people. He told us that they specifically manage the Bison Hill end of the reserve for Duke of Burgundy. Last year they were also particularly successful with *Osmia bicolor*, the Red-tailed Mason Bee, which is a fascinating solitary bee which

lays her eggs in snail shells and then collects sticks to hide the nests, earning it the nickname of the “witch bee” as she looks as if she is riding a broomstick.

Very few Whites were spotted but we did see Brimstones egg-laying on buckthorn and Red Admirals egg-laying on nettles. There were large numbers of cowslips and the site looks to be well managed by the National Trust.

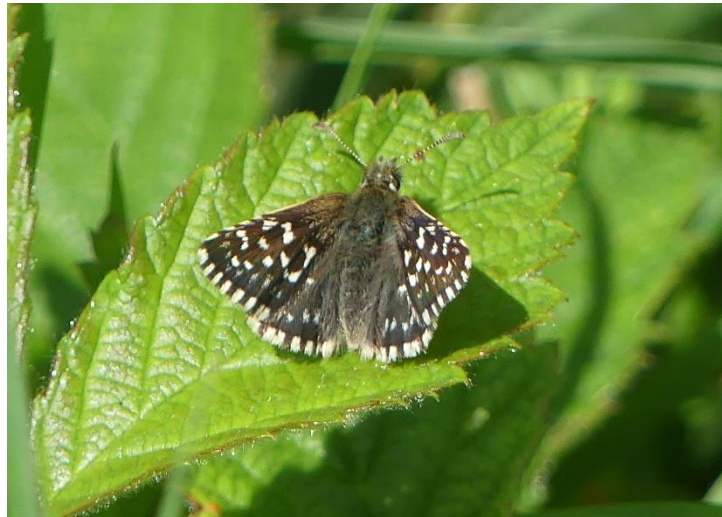


Green Hairstreak

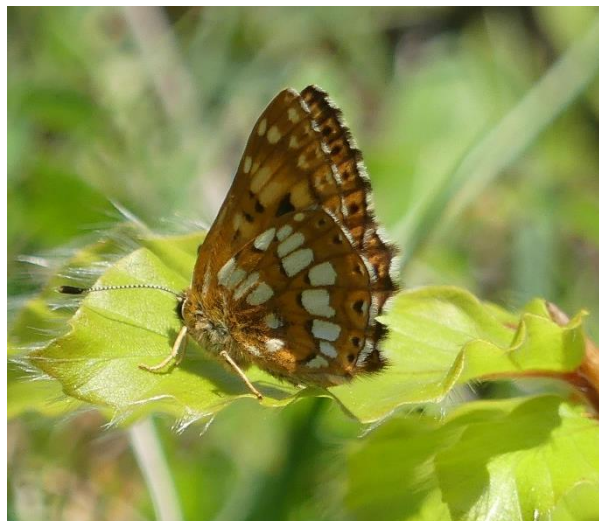
Thanks as usual go to Dave Tiffin who helped with counting butterflies, spotting them and pointing them out to other people as there were some people relatively new to butterflies.

Here is a list of species we saw on the walk : Small Copper – 1, Brimstone – 12, Duke of Burgundy – 24, Dingy Skipper – 10, Small Heath – 9, Peacock – 1, Grizzled Skipper – 5, Brown Argus – 5, Red Admiral – 3, Holly Blue – 2, Green Hairstreak- 3 (looking a bit faded), and 2 Whites – possibly Green veined Whites or Small Whites.

Grizzled Skipper



Duke of Burgundy



Species Recovery Programme Project update

Dr Jamie Wildman, Northants Landscape Officer

In such a topsy-turvy year for our woodlands, one might expect habitat enhancement targeted at Lepidoptera that call such places home would be similarly affected. Last winter, capital works began in Rockingham Forest and South Northamptonshire, funded by Natural England's Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme. What followed were extremely wet months that delayed works getting underway, due to both excessively soft ground conditions and poor contractor availability as a result of the commonly unsettled weather.

However, despite the elements' best efforts, we were successful in creating a range of features across Rockingham Forest, including new box junctions (comprised of four roughly square-shaped glades at a cross-rides) at Lilford Wood, scallops at Bearshank Wood, Fineshade Wood, and Castor Hanglands, and enhancements to widened rides at Collyweston Great Wood, Easton Hornstocks, and Fermyn Woods in the form of mulching and stump grinding. We received fantastic support at Fermyn Woods Country Park through five winter work parties at the site, held in collaboration with North Northamptonshire Council. Our merry band of volunteers sawed, cut, and raked their way through Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper habitat to improve the home of these two project target species, as well as fellow beneficiary Green Hairstreak. Each species showed well during a guided butterfly walk at the site in May once the spring sunshine eventually arrived, rewarding the 28 members of the public who attended with some excellent photo opportunities.



*Guided walk
- guests
viewing a
Green
Hairstreak at
Fermyn
Woods
Country Park*



*A new box junction
at Lilford Wood,
near Lyveden New
Bield, Northants*

Despite occasional highs, the flight period of Wood White – the third and final target butterfly of the project – was beset by poor weather. A brief peak of heat and sunshine in late May drew out the butterfly in good numbers at select sites, but the picture was less rosy at other strongholds in South Northamptonshire, which reported lower than usual counts that took time to build. Volunteers generously donated their time and energy to complete timed counts at Wood White project sites across the county to establish baseline data for the project. Data submitted through surveys will be used to determine to what extent habitat enhancement benefits target species in the years to come and continue to justify Butterfly Conservation’s work to improve the prospects of threatened Lepidoptera across the UK.



*One of four new
scallops at Castor
Hanglands NNR*

Without measurable evidence our work is having a positive impact, funders will be less inclined to support future projects, so the continued support of new and seasoned volunteers is incredibly important to us. A huge thank you to those of you who took part this summer, including Lee Burrows, who recorded a fantastic total of 67 Wood White across two timed counts at a site near Northampton. Equally, the contribution of Rachel Sparrow, Helen Wren, and others who dared to venture into sites on the periphery of sub-populations were just as appreciated. No data is still good data and is vital for improving our understanding of species distributions in occupied landscapes. Occasional sightings at Harry’s Park and Cherry Lap near Brigstock suggest Wood White is expanding its range in this part of the county. Please look out for this dainty, brilliantly white butterfly in the Fermyn Woods area in 2025!

In amongst all this surveying – including many visits of my own, such as a trip to the spectacular glades, hidden ponds, and weaving woodland rides of Yardley Chase in the company of ex-Beds & Northants Chair, Doug Goddard – our summer programme of guided butterfly walks was well underway. However, luck was never really on our side, and events were typically beset by unsuitably cool, cloudy, or oppressively wet weather conditions, which led to a scarcity of butterflies. Nevertheless, the sun showed partway through a trip to Castor Hanglands over the border in Cambridgeshire in mid-July. Small, Essex, and Large Skipper, Marbled White, Silver-washed Fritillary, and a dozen other species showed well in response. On a damp and cool early August day at Lyveden and Lilford Wood when surprises seemed unlikely, a Small Cooper was spotted in one of our new box junctions at Lilford.



Small Copper seen in a Lilford Wood box junction on a guided walk



Guests on our guided walk at Castor Hanglands in mid-July

As we move through the autumn, focus has now shifted to arranging winter habitat management work to improve conditions for all six of our project's target species: the aforementioned Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, and Wood White, as well as Liquorice Piercer and Concolorous moth, and Adder. I am working closely with our project partners Forestry England, Natural England, North Northamptonshire Council, and Rockingham Forest Park, who have been incredibly helpful and gone above and beyond to support our objectives. We are extremely fortunate to have such a good working relationship with these organisations in Northamptonshire, given that Butterfly Conservation does not own any of the project's 17 sites where we are working.

Having worked closely with Forestry England this past year, learning about its working practices, objectives, and general culture, I am optimistic that commercial forestry operations and Lepidoptera conservation are compatible. Ongoing management at Fineshade Wood for the Chequered Skipper reintroduction and Adder —now augmented by our Species Recovery Programme work— is a great

Jamie and Doug Goddard at Yardley Chase



example of this strong partnership in action. So much goes on behind the scenes before machinery and its operators can arrive on site and begin clearing vegetation, especially for the large-scale operations we hope to carry out in the South Northamptonshire landscape in the coming months. The development phase for such operations is more protracted than one might expect. Attention to detail is key, necessitating repeated revisions to plans, discussions with stakeholders and contractors, and finally, after the ink dries, hoping the weather will be on our side and provide much-needed payoff for our threatened species through enhancement of the woodlands they call home.

At this stage, I'm hoping for a dry winter that will present the fewest roadblocks and potential for delays. Despite the extremely wet period we're experiencing, I remain hopeful some of the rides I'm squelching down and sloshing through will eventually dry out. I love rain, but when I have my Project Officer hat on, I tend to grimace every time the heavens open! Keep a lookout across Rockingham Forest and South Northamptonshire landscapes in the coming months for work starting as we aim to leave a lasting legacy for our threatened target species in the county, and please consider supporting our work parties at Fermyn Woods Country Park in November, January, and February. Check out the Butterfly Conservation website and our volunteer portal, Assemble, for more details.



White Admiral at Yardley Chase



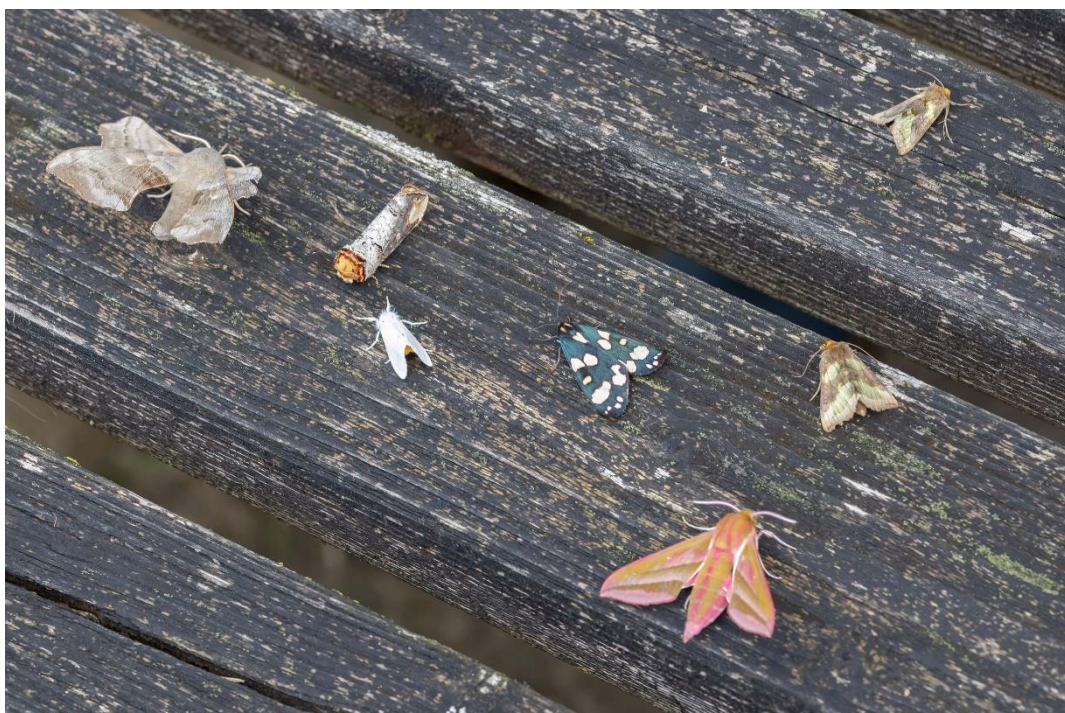
Wood White at Yardley Chase

The Pitsford Moth and Butterfly event

Dave James



On the 7th of July, we held the ever-popular Moth and Butterfly event at Pitsford Nature Reserve with the Wildlife Trust BCN. This is always a very well-attended event and it is fantastic to see so many families with children getting involved and coming out to enjoy the moths. Due to the recent inclement weather, the moths were in short supply, but as always Mischa, the reserve warden, managed to wow the crowd with some of the magnificent moths she had caught in the reserve's moth traps. It is always a delight to see the public enjoying the moths up close and being given the opportunity to see things often for the first time. Mischa gave a superb talk about moths as she handed the many pots around the crowd for people to examine before they were let out so everyone could have a chance to photograph them. The Privet and Elephant Hawkmoths were very popular as were the Burnished Brass, Blood-vein, Green Silver-lines, Yellow-tail, Scarlet Tiger and Buff-tip.





After we had enjoyed the moths, we then went for a walk around the reserve to look for butterflies. Unfortunately, due to this year's poor butterfly season, we didn't see many as we walked around, certainly not the amounts we are used to seeing at this fantastic reserve. However, we did manage to record a few species including Large Skipper, Green-veined White, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, and Speckled Wood. This reserve is rich in lots of other wildlife too, and highlights from the walk

also included a Kingfisher and an Osprey!

This event is always one of the highlights of the year, so if we run it again next year and you would like to come along make sure you book in early to avoid disappointment!



Green Silver-lines



Burnished Brass



Buff-tip

Purple Hairstreak monitoring at Strawberry Hill, Bedfordshire

Aidan Whitfield

In the summer of 2024, the butterfly recording team at Strawberry Hill in Bedfordshire monitored the population of Purple Hairstreak using the new method that was introduced by the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme in 2023. The method involves visiting specific mature oak trees, during suitable weather, in the early evening, once a week during the flight period from mid-June to the end of August and spending 2 minutes at each tree recording the maximum number of butterflies seen at any one time.

The Purple Hairstreak is a common butterfly, but it is only rarely seen or recorded on a standard butterfly monitoring transect because of its unusual behaviour - it lives in the top of mature oak trees where it feeds almost exclusively on honeydew, and it is most active in the early evening. They are only occasionally seen at low level where they might be nectaring on bramble or thistles.

Strawberry Hill was a conventional arable farm until the 1990s when the whole 150 hectares was put into 'set aside' and has not been farmed since. Most of the site is now scrub, dominated by hawthorn and blackthorn with some open areas of grassland. It is the largest area of scrub in central England and an important site for breeding birds especially Turtle Doves and warblers, including Nightingales. When the site came up for sale in 2020, the Wildlife Trust secured the lease and has now successfully raised the funds to buy the whole site.



Lindsey monitoring Purple Hairstreak, Strawberry Hill, Aug 24. Photo: Helena



Helena monitoring Purple Hairstreak, Strawberry Hill, Aug24. Photo: Lindsey

Several butterfly surveys were carried out in 2020–23, which confirmed the presence of most of the common and widespread species typical of grassland and young woodland. There were also a couple of Purple Hairstreak records, and we assumed that they were breeding in the small number of mature oak trees scattered across the site in the original farm hedgerows.

The chosen survey route went across the middle of the site and covered 13 oak trees at 11 locations (3 trees were very close together and counted as 1 location). We carried out a survey one evening each week for 9 weeks and saw a total of 58 individual Purple Hairstreak at 8 out of the 11 locations, with none seen at the remaining 3 locations. The peak counts were 17 and 16 individuals on the 18th and 26th July respectively and the peak count at a single location was 7. Although the numbers were not high, we know that on a conventional transect, looking for butterflies at low level in the middle of the day, we would have been lucky to see more than 1 or 2 individuals. The weather in 2024 made surveying difficult with many evenings that were too cool, wet and windy, but we don't know what effect that had on the overall numbers. When we get the full analysis of local and national Purple Hairstreak records for 2024, we might be able to put our numbers into context.



Male Purple Hairstreak. Photo: Dave James



Female Purple Hairstreak. Photo: Keith Balmer

If you want to monitor a site for Purple Hairstreak there is a [guidance note \(NG4\) and training video](#) on the UKBMS website. Alternatively, you might want to set yourself the challenge of looking for them in your local park or woodland. Ideally you want to select a few mature oak trees on the western edge of a woodland so that you can observe the tree canopy with the evening sun behind you. They are a delight to see chasing each other across the tree canopy even if you only get a distant view through binoculars and end up with a crick in your neck! Prof. Jeremy Thomas, in his book 'The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland' wrote: *"From the ground they look like a handful of silver coins that has been tossed into the sunlight, and are one of the wonders of the British butterfly season...."*

If you do see any Purple Hairstreaks, the County Recorders would welcome your casual records for this elusive and under-recorded species.



A typical view of 4 Purple Hairstreaks above an oak tree Renhold, Beds, June 2024. Photos: Emma Whitfield



With a Zoom lens or binoculars, you might get a view as good as this!



....and if you are very lucky a Purple Hairstreak might perch on the edge of a leaf. Renhold Beds, July 24

My thanks to the Strawberry Hill Butterfly monitoring team Helena, Christina and Lindsey for their dedication and letting my wife Emma and I join them on a few occasions. Thanks also to Chantelle, the Wildlife Trust Site Manager, for submitting the records to the UKBMS website.

Chequered Skipper and Rockingham Forest update

Susannah O’Riordan, Chequered Skipper Project Manager

It was a mixed season for Chequered Skipper in Rockingham Forest this year. At Fineshade, Chequered Skipper numbers remained low, though consistent with 2023, based on sightings per hour. We were really delighted to spot adults in the northeast corner of the wood for the first time. This was in an area where we introduced a small number of individuals in 2022, but had seen no activity in 2023, so it was very exciting this year to discover a new population may be taking hold here. Chequered Skipper fared much better at the second reintroduction site, with another good emergence and an increased number of sightings per hour. As yet, the butterflies have not dispersed as widely across the second site as they have done at Fineshade, so it will be interesting to see how things progress there over the next few years.



Chequered Skipper in northeast corner of Fineshade

Whilst the low number of sightings at Fineshade is a little concerning, it reflects a generally poor year for many species, with our spring species particularly affected by the cool, unsettled spring weather. Sadly it was also a very bad year for Chequered Skipper in Belgium and the Netherlands where numbers have plummeted – all the more reason to continue our efforts to establish a resilient population in Rockingham Forest.

This year, we once again didn’t make a trip to Belgium to collect adult butterflies, but received more pupae from a colleague in Belgium, who had reared them from a couple of



Butterfly cages with pupae attached to sticks, waiting to emerge (Photo: Jamie Wildman)

females collected there last year. The pupae were more successful this year, with 15 emerging out of 16 (in comparison to 9 out of 18 last year). As in 2023, males were dominant, with 10 males emerging to 5 females. All these butterflies were marked up (to distinguish them from ‘English’ ones) and released into Fineshade, with the intention of boosting the population size

as well as increase genetic diversity.

We didn't have any funding to take on Chequered Skipper Rangers in 2024, but visitors were still able to visit the site independently and self-guide around the site. With the low number of sightings this year, it was more of a challenge to see one, but several people were fortunate to do so. Two lucky visitors even managed to spot a couple of Chequered Skipper right at the end of the flight period, including a female egg-laying, something most of us have yet to see in seven years of surveying! Whilst we couldn't deliver a programme of guided walks for the general public this year, we were able to lead walks for a couple of BC branches, as well as the Langdyke Trust. These were well attended and, despite Chequered Skipper proving elusive, rewarded us with some fantastic conversations, as well as sightings of Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, and Black Hairstreak, the latter bucking the trend of many species by having a very good year.



Black Hairstreak on the Bulwick Estate – a new site for this species which had a good year

This year we also saw the publication of our scientific paper on the history, science and preliminary results from the reintroduction of the Chequered Skipper into Rockingham Forest. If you are interested in reading this, it can be accessed online [here](#)

We've been continuing running activities as part of the 'Building the Links for Rockingham Forest' project, funded by the Natural Lottery Heritage fund. This included some day-flying moth and butterfly walks in the spring to introduce people to the magical world of moths and spot some of our spring butterflies. The cool weather wasn't on our side for butterfly spotting, but we did manage to find the rare Liquorice Piercer moth on both occasions as well as see one male doing its mating dance – a fascinating sight which I'd not seen before. At Weldon Woodland Park, we were also delighted to find several Concolorous moths in one of our light traps, a new site for this rare moth.



Concolorous moth at Weldon Woodland Park

We have also been continuing our work parties to improve habitat for Liquorice Piercer at Weldon Woodland Park, cutting areas of grassland and clearing scrub to allow more space (and light) for Wild Liquorice to thrive. We've been working here in collaboration with the lovely staff and volunteers from North Northants Council. Extra pairs of hands are always welcome, and details of the remaining two work parties this winter can be found below (as well as on our website):



Weldon Woodland Park NN17 3JG, Tuesdays 10.30am to 2.30pm on the following dates:

- January 7th 2025, February 4th 2025



This summer we joined our partners from the Building the Links project to run a community event on the Priors Hall estate (a large housing estate on the edge of Corby), with activities such as leaf-bashing, tree identification, moth trapping, butterfly crafts, apple pressing, and guided walks. It was a fantastic event, with huge interest from families and residents on the estate, and it was great to work alongside our partners to showcase the biodiversity and habitats that can be found on people's doorsteps. A huge thank you to the volunteers that helped out on our stand for what was a non-stop, but very rewarding day.

I also spent some time over the summer carrying out habitat condition assessments for Wood White in some of the woodlands in South Northants, including Bucknell, Whistley, Plumpton and Hazelborough. It was great to get to know these sites better and look at where there might be opportunities to improve them. This work will be mapped and the data collated so it can be used to develop future projects and help inform Forestry England about where management efforts would be most beneficial.

Securing funding to continue Chequered Skipper work remains a priority, as we currently don't have funding beyond March 2025. I am also looking for someone to take on the butterfly transect on the Bulwick Estate (near Harringworth). This is a transect I've been walking for the last couple of years, on a really lovely site that is transitioning away from arable to a wilder landscape. The transect will help monitor changes as the site develops as well as the impact of different types of management and grazing. If you would be interested in taking this on (training available!), please get in touch.

I'd just like to say a huge thank you for your continued support this year, particularly everyone involved in the Chequered Skipper surveys and our winter work parties – we wouldn't be able to carry out our vital work without you. I hope to see you out and about soon.

Beds and Northants Branch information 2024/25

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
The annual reports for Bedfordshire butterflies from Keith Balmer are [here](#) and for Northamptonshire butterflies from Dave James are [here](#).

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