

No 92

Autumn/Winter 2017

# ON THE WING

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Butterfly  
Conservation

The newsletter of  
Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire Butterfly Conservation

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter. I'm back again for my sins! Hopefully it will only be for a short period until a replacement can be found. Please contact Doug Goddard or myself to have a chat about what's involved. Our details can be found on the back page.

The front cover shows a Small Heath butterfly which was photographed at Twywell Hills & Dales in the last week of August. As the Transect walker on this site I have consistently recorded this species weekly for the last twenty weeks, it's definitely my butterfly of 2017!

The work party season is with us again. Everyone who participates on these days seems to enjoy themselves and goes away satisfied that a worthwhile job had been done! This is a good opportunity to come along, meet fellow members and to see how we try and help butterflies and moths. A list of our work dates can be found below.

Andy

## 2017/18 Northants Work Parties

**October 15th** Fermyn Woods Country Park Scrub clearance in the main park for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Park behind the Skylark Café (SP952848) Contact Doug Goddard 01604 408670.

**November 19th** Twywell Hills and Dales Scrub clearance along the transect route for a range of grassland species 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Meet in the main car park (SP938772) Contact Doug Goddard 01604 408670.

**November 29th** Wednesday Sywell Country Park Winter maintenance in the Butterfly Garden. SP833651 Contact Ian Kimsey 01234 781763 10.00am.

**January 21th** Fermyn Woods Country Park Scrub clearance in the main park for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Park behind the Skylark Café (SP952848) Contact Doug Goddard 01604 408670.

**February 18th** Twywell Hills and Dales Scrub clearance along the transect route 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Meet in the main car park (SP938772) Contact Doug Goddard 01604 408670.

**March 18th** Fermyn Woods Country Park Scrub clearance in the main park for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Park behind the Skylark Café (SP952848) Contact Doug Goddard 01604 408670.

## 2017/18 Bedfordshire Work Parties

**November 12th** Bison Hill Meet in NT Car Park at Bison Hill TL000185 Contact Ian Kimsey 01234 781763 10.30am.

**January 14th** Yelnoe Wood Meet in car park in centre of Sharnbrook Village (Church Lane & High Street) Then short drive to site at SP995596 Contact Ian Kimsey 01234 781763 10.15am.

The scheduled trip took place on Sunday May 14th, in fine bright weather and was very well attended. Some 34 enthusiasts gathered at the entrance to the Whitestones section of the Reserve, many having travelled considerable distances including from Middleton Cheney at the other end of the County and even from Norfolk. Jane Pearman, representative from the local Wildlife Trust who jointly manage the reserve welcomed those attending, along with committee members David James, and Andy Wyldes and Doug Goddard who were leading the walk. The reserve, a former limestone quarry is a rare habitat in Northants where the spoil heaps have become sheltered slopes of limestone grassland. It well known for holding good numbers of scarce butterfly, including early species such as Green Hairstreak, Grizzled and Dingy Skipper and Small Heath all of which are readily found in favourable conditions. These were the target species for the day. As the group moved down the path it was soon found that the Dingy Skippers (18) were very active and easily observed settling in the short grass all along the route. Grizzled Skippers (12) were found in the same habitat although numbers recorded have been disappointingly lower at this site recently. The food plant for this species, Wild Strawberry, needs short grasses to flourish. In order to keep vegetation at a low height, the local Wildlife Trust have arranged for the site to be grazed, currently by ponies. It is hoped that their presence will help maintain good colonies of the species at this site.



Dingy Skipper

Photo Chrissie Hadley

Green Hairstreaks (12) were initially more elusive, though as the morning progressed and the group spread out they were found in the Hawthorns quite frequently, and also observed egg-laying on the ground. Small Heath (8), another site speciality also presented in good numbers for the group to observe. Other butterflies were seen too, notably an egg-laying female Brimstone. Doug Goddard had already found eggs on the food plant, Purging Buckthorn to show the group. Also found were Small Copper, Orange Tip, Red Admiral, Peacock and Green-Veined White butterflies. As the group had spread out other interesting creatures were found including Drinker Moth caterpillar, Burnet companion, Small Yellow Underwing, and Cinnabar Moths. The Birders in the group were being entertained by birdsong, notably Reed Bunting and Lesser Whitethroat. A beautiful fresh Hairy Dragonfly was found at the end of the path, and seemed happy to pose for a time for photos to be taken.

As the morning was ending David James and John Philpott suggested going on a Tiger (Beetle) hunt as they had identified a likely location. Those who tagged along were not disappointed as these striking insects were readily found on the bare sunny slope. All who attended were very pleased with the wide variety of species found including the local target species. The weather conditions were ideal on this occasion.



Photo Dennis McQuillan

An email from Matthew Oates in the evening of the 22nd June read "Tomorrow, Neil (Hulme) and I are baiting Emperors with John Craven for Countryfile in Fermyn, weather permitting..." An offer I couldn't refuse!

A quick look at the forecast the next morning revealed dull, windy, overcast and the possibility of rain in the afternoon! That was good enough for me! The chance to meet the legendary John Craven was too good an opportunity to miss! Sandwiches packed and a push bike deposited in the car (Fermyn is a big place) and I was off! I arrived at Fermyn just in time to meet two cars entering the Wood. Greetings were exchanged with Matthew and Neil and a white flash of hair confirmed Mr Craven was on board. The gate was locked and I followed the cars on my bike down the track to the chosen filming location in Lady Wood.

Soon after arriving at the location I was introduced to the production team and the great man himself. The cars were unloaded and it soon became apparent that this was going to be a similar set up to the "Emperor's Breakfast" that had been filmed in the woods a few years earlier, laying

out foul smelling foods which the Emperors find irresistible to feed on. Oates and Hulme were playing it safe with a tried and tested formula which would attract the butterflies for filming! The set consisted of a paste table covered in a white sheet, and on it a variety of posh porcelain crockery on which was served Belachan shrimp paste, fermenting Sardines, another variety of a very smelly Shrimp paste, Black pudding, and an incredibly foul smelling French cheese! Looking skywards, faces were pulled at the dull and windy weather. It did not look good for butterflies!

Over the next hour or so, and, as no butterflies were going to appear, filming concentrated on interviews with Matthew and Neil, and Mr Craven explaining facts about Fermyn and the butterflies. During this session filming was interrupted several times to allow for passing planes to go over, it's amazing how you don't hear these until it's pointed out to you!

As mid-day approached a few drops of rain were felt so the decision was taken to stop proceedings and lunchtime was declared! With this, the producer and some of the production team took orders and headed off to the Skylark cafe in



Fermyn Woods Country Park. No sooner had they set off when the weather decided to brighten up! A patch of sunshine appeared and low and behold, a couple of Emperors burst onto the film set, strutting their stuff and fluttering around the group of people left behind. Over the next few minutes we were visited several more times and without warning one of the butterflies descended straight onto the smelly cheese plate on the table and started tucking in to this vile offering. It certainly knew how to upstage Mr Craven!

The team went into action, the cameraman getting some nice close up shots of the butterfly. John Craven then very carefully moved in behind the table to get in a few words about the Emperor whilst it was feeding. I was very impressed with his professionalism in front of the camera. In the next while, they managed to film "His Imperial Majesty" on two more of the foul smelling offerings on the table, the shrimp paste and fermenting sardines, and also on Neil Hulme's finger, managing to get the full purple of the wings in shot! Close-ups of the bright yellow proboscis were also secured and good footage of "HIM" cleaning his tongue whilst perched in a bush! By the time lunch arrived back, most of the butterfly shots had been secured to the amazement of the producer and a relieved butterfly contingent. We happily enjoyed lunch knowing that Northamptonshire's reputation as an Emperors' paradise was still intact!



*A "natural" in front of the camera!*

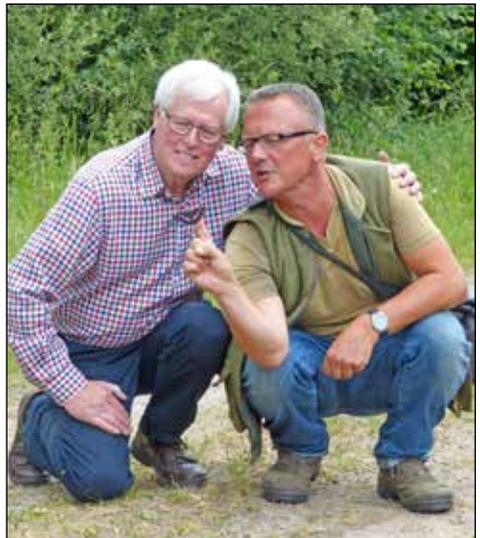
More interviews proceeded after lunch, and things were then wrapped up after about another hour of filming. The set was then cleared and packed away, the crew taking particular care that everything was as they had found it on arrival. The film crew then left the woods to go on to another planned interview which was to be done in the country park. In the meantime as the weather was still quite bright Neil, Matthew and myself had a walk around some of the other rides in the wood to look to see if any other Emperors were active and to reflect on another brilliant day in the company of the Emperor of Fermyn Woods!



*Above: Star of the show getting stuck in to fermenting sardines!*

*Right: John Craven and Neil Hulme with Purple Emperor*

*Left: Matthew Oates and crew in action*



## SHARPENHOE CLAPPERS 1ST JULY 2017

I was concerned, late on in Friday evening, as I drove around the M25 from Essex after attending my step-son's birthday party, because it was raining gently as I drove. My butterfly field trip was about eleven hours away and I was worried that people would not turn out on a dull day. Nevertheless, just a few hours later, twelve members of the local branches did arrive at the National Trust car park at Sharpenhoe on a warm cloudy morning for the joint field trip with the target species being the Dark Green Fritillary.

The party was unusual because some senior citizens attended and two of the others had walking sticks. Accordingly, I decided to keep the route to the flatter parts of the site where there was lesser risk of falls. The party was led off by myself along the tarmac path which soon gave way to the set-aside field of long grass and wild flowers. Along the way it was pleasing to see Meadow Browns, Ringlets, a Brimstone, a Comma and a Speckled Wood. Having negotiated the kissing gate, the party enjoyed the sight of an unimproved chalk grassland with views of the Great Ouse valley in the distance. We observed Marbled Whites and then, with perfect timing, the target-species of the trip was found. With considerable excitement, the first Dark Green Fritillary of the day was seen in flight and we tracked it down to where it settled on a blue Scabious flower head with its wings open.

I was very pleased the Dark Green Fritillary had been found and the cooler cloudy conditions made it worthy of being photographed by several



*Photo: S. Weatherhead*

people as it obliged by staying still for some time. The weather was improving and some glimpses of the sun occurred warming the hedges and downs. This was to be a significant feature of the trip; the sun was neither strong enough nor shining for a sufficiently long time to encourage butterflies into lengthy flights. The photographers in the group therefore had good time to compose their shots. With the group spreading out along the field I conducted the less mobile around the path around the edge of the field where there was easier walking. Peter Glenister, who had come along,

assisted me by taking the more agile of the group through the rougher pastures in the centre of the field where the Kidney Vetch grows to try and find a late Small Blue. No joy here though. However, we added to the species count for the day with sightings of more Dark Green Fritillaries, some Small Skippers, Essex

Skippers and a few Small Heath.

We walked further around the site and arrived at the wildflower meadow near the Clappers. At this point the party of less-able walkers went a different way back to the car park. The remainders were able to add Large Skipper, Green Veined White, Small Tortoiseshell and a Red Admiral to their lists for the day. On the sunken path back we looked for Purple Hairstreaks, but to no avail; we were however able to add Large & Small White to the total. At the car park the first half of the field trip ceased.

In the car park meadow during a break a few people saw more Marbled Whites and Dark Green Fritillaries. After the break I led a smaller group on a short afternoon bonus excursion. This was to a narrow area of land known as Moleskin, adjacent to the minor road. Having not seen a single "blue"

on the first half of the trip, Steve from Mersea Island asked if I could find a Chalkhill Blue. I said that we were in the very early days of its flight period but I thought we may have a 10% chance. "That was enough" he said, and having come a long way was game to try. We walked into Moleskin through the area where Small Blues thrive, but saw none here today, to arrive at the south facing chalk slope at the lower end of the reserve. After a short period looking we found three freshly emerged male Chalkhill Blues, one of which posed magnificently on a flower head for all to get a stunning photograph.

This was a really pleasing end to a very successful field trip. Moth sightings on the day included Chimney Sweeper Cinnabar and Five Spot Burnet. Good numbers of Pyramidal Orchids were seen, along with a few examples of Common Spotted. Notable birds that we saw were: Skylarks, Red Kites and Buzzards. Various Bumblebees including a mating pair of red tips.

I am sure that everyone enjoyed the field trip and it was great advertisement for Bedfordshire butterflies. I was delighted that the target species appeared in good numbers, particularly for the visiting members from the other BC branches in East Anglia who had not seen it before.

David Chandler

## **BISON HILL, WHIPNADE 21, MAY 2017**

On a somewhat cloudy morning over 40 members of the Beds and Northants Branch, the Beds Natural History Society and a Chilterns conservation group met in the car park at Whipnade Downs. With such a large number Greg Herbert quickly decided to split the group into 2 and under his leadership 11 of us made our way down a winding path with glorious views all around. We quickly spied 2 chasing Small Heath, and it is good to report that 10 individuals were spotted during the walk. One particular turn in the path by a clump of trees led to an eagle eyed member of the party sighting a Green Hairstreak clinging to a branch of hazel in the breeze which most of us managed to see.

With sun gradually breaking through we entered

the one of the many shallow gullies which are such a feature of the Downs, where the cowslips, common spotted orchid and twayblade compete amidst the emerging blackberry and tor grass. It was here that the first of 16 Dinky Skippers were seen, along with a solitary Orange Tip male and the caterpillar of the Drinker Moth. Four Grizzled Skipper were sighted on the walk and when the first Duke of Burgundy was spotted in a good pose for the photographers it was 'mission accomplished' for Greg, having helped us find all 4 spring rarities. However, we were far from finished in terms of adding species, and along our route we found 6 fresh Brown Argus, 9 Brimstone (including 2 females), a Large White and 2 Common Blue males, which apparently emerge before the females.

Greg diverted us from his usual weekly transect route, which did not look too promising as the National Trust appeared to have cut the vegetation too low for butterflies. But spirits soared when a mating pair of Dukes were seen, giving the photographers a great opportunity to record such seldom seen activity. Two of our party who may well have been visitors from afar declared that they had never seen such a good number of species. On the return leg of our walk, 2 elderly Dukes were located in quick succession with their bright orange colouration changed to an attractive dull yellow. Another highlight was the second and final Green Hairstreak of the day which obligingly settled on the side of a gully for a gentle perambulation around the vegetation. By now the sun was strong with the temperature rising as we turned to ascend the slope from its base by a direct route. This is the spot where the Branch work parties each winter have battled to keep the vegetation at bay, in particular the blackberry, but it was clear from the re-growth that we will need to redouble our efforts there next season. During our ascent a solitary Peacock, Speckled Wood and Red Admiral were added to our list, making an impressive 13 species in all. Our thanks go to Greg for taking some of us to parts of the Downs we have not visited before and for making 3 hours so pleasurable.

Graham Warne

There are two places where I regularly try to find, ID and count butterflies. One is the highly significant transect in Bucknell Woods, a South Northants stronghold for the Wood White. The other is in Helmdon, a few miles from where I live in Brackley and where I learned to observe butterflies 'in the field' more seriously, a few years ago.

My interest in Butterflies had only started in 2012 while dog walking in a field near our home. The field had been purchased for house building. It was for a long period, neither cultivated or grazed and had reverted to meadow. As we walked through here with other dog walkers that Summer, we would see large numbers of butterflies rising from the meadow as we passed. I became curious about this daily spectacle, and felt compelled to identify them. Books were purchased and the internet browsed until I was satisfied they were Meadow Brown butterflies. Shortly after this I noticed a copy of 'Butterfly' the BC publication in a patient's waiting room. At the back of the publication was an advertisement for the book 'Butterflies of Northamptonshire' by Douglas Goddard and Andy Wyldes. This seemed a perfect reference for my novice status. A copy was duly purchased via e-mail from the author, and this was the beginning of a fascinating and very rewarding journey. Over the next few years I came to know Mr Goddard and Mr Wyldes

fairly well ( Doug & Andy), and I have very much appreciated their encouragement and patient mentoring both in the field and via e-mail. They do themselves and Butterfly Conservation great credit, as well as being fine company on a day out. My interest in Helmdon old station yard, where we walked our dog regularly, stemmed from references in the book. Disused track beds were known to be good habitat for butterflies and their food plants, and at one time the disused Great Central Railway track bed between Brackley and Helmdon was known to be a fine site for a variety of species including Small Blue. Now much of it is overgrown, though recently Natural England has made a great effort to restore the habitat south of the Station which used to hold a good colony of Small Blue. It would be terrific if this species could be re- introduced to the County at this site. The old station yard has become overgrown too. There are two derelict buildings which used to be the goods shed, and the weighbridge office, and the shapes of platforms can just about be identified under years of vegetation. There is a lot of scrub encroachment, but in some areas the vegetation remains short, and in other areas longer grasses prevail. The land is privately owned. It has been left unmanaged for a long period of time, and is regarded by locals as a great asset both for dog walking and a haven for wildlife.



Looking North towards the viaduct. - Skye carries out a Lab check of the area!

All Photos D. McQuillan

In 2013 I first observed a whole season of butterflies on the site. Our old Labrador Rosie, and now our latest one Skye have loved it here. They never wander too far away while I am searching, and they enjoy rooting about in the long grass. If any dog loses a ball here, our dog Skye is bound to find it.

Gaining Field Skills takes lots of practice. As a beginner I was looking for things but finding little. Then one day my wife and I noticed a small butterfly settling in the short grass. It stayed just long enough for my wife Sally to take a photo. As I still had Mr Goddard's e-mail address I asked if the image was good enough to confirm the presence of a Grizzled Skipper. His positive ID and encouraging response further increased my enthusiasm, and it is now an annual challenge to re affirm the presence of this tiny colony of Grizzled Skippers here.

Over a season, as you would expect at such a site there are good numbers of the more common butterflies, including Brimstone, Comma , Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Large, Small and Green Veined Whites, along with Gatekeeper and Common Blue. There are also good colonies of Large, Small and Essex Skipper. Small Copper, Brown Argus and Small Heath are measured in single figures annually if at all. There are good numbers of Meadow Brown and Ringlet, and a fine colony of Marbled White.



*Marbled Whites*

At the time of writing, the site also holds a distinction of being the location of the latest ever county record of a Common Blue.

On November 1st 2014 I was very surprised to see a blue butterfly on my dog walk. The season for Blues should have been well over. After some pursuit I did manage to get a decent photo for ID and verification. It was a fresh male which has surprised everyone I have told. References indicate there can be a third brood of Common Blue, though these are usually over by late October. The only remarkable thing about the day was that it was unusually warm for November.



*The record breaking Common blue*

There are also good numbers of day flying moths. In the first year of observation there were very large numbers of Five and Six Spot Burnets, yet for some reason they have been sparse since. Common and Lattice Heath abound with good numbers of Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton. I have also found Large Red Damselfly and Common Darter and there are good numbers of Warblers in Summer. In all it is a good place to have as a local patch. I am sure I will be visiting regularly and recording during the season for as long as I am able, or until it is developed. It is heartening to know too, that several individuals have visited and enjoyed this site on the strength of the records published on our BC branch website. It is a site of local scientific interest, and I understand the local Wildlife Trust have offered to purchase, or to manage the site. As yet though, they have not had a favourable response.

## FERMYN WOODS COUNTRY PARK 20TH MAY 2017

A small group of branch eleven members gathered for a visit to one of our best sites for spring butterflies, our targets the Grizzled and Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak. As we gathered, Hilary, the Park Ranger

and I offered some explanation on the state of the habitat. Areas normally good for these species had become very overgrown and were looking very unsuitable.

One of our winter work parties had been cancelled owing to rain and the Park had issues with equipment having been stolen and the

budget not allowing purchase of a brush cutter and the necessary training until too late. We will address this in our programme this winter and would welcome more volunteers to do so.

Our field trip had a dual purpose on this occasion, to unveil our new display board about the Black Hairstreak in the thicket as well as searching out the butterflies. We decided to cut across the open meadow towards the thicket, a route we do not normally take. Here we were pleasantly



*Some of the group with the new display board*

surprised to see the target species had moved in to make use of the bare patches of ground and the abundance of bird's-foot trefoil. Four Grizzled and seven Dingy Skippers were noted, along with two egg-laying Green Hairstreaks and a couple of Common Blues.

We reached the thicket where I untied the ribbon to 'officially' open the display board to the public. We had positioned it next to a prime area of blackthorn in the hope that visitors would see the species as advertised. We must acknowledge the splendid work of our branch volunteers

during several winters, in particular Mick Groom and the Park staff, and the expertise of Andy Wyldes in producing the design and art work on the board. Three weeks later, Black Hairstreaks were to be seen in good numbers next to the board and Mick Groom recorded 31 in the Park on 13th June. What a result!

We wandered back via a clearing at the back of the fishing pond and the banks along from the visitor centre. Green-veined White, Speckled Wood and Red Admiral put in an appearance. It was beginning to cloud over by this time and we found Dingy and Grizzled Skippers roosting in typical fashion on dead seed heads. A further four Grizzled and six Dingy Skippers, another Green Hairstreak and three common Blues were added to the totals. After a while it began to rain steadily and we were forced to adjourn early for lunch in the café. When it brightened up again a few of us ventured out again and a mating pair of Brown Argus completed the list of species for the day.



*Dingy skipper habitat in the Country park*

*Photos J Barnard*

## GLAPTHORN COW PASTURES OPEN DAY 25TH JUNE 2017

Judging the optimum date for observing the Black Hairstreak proves to be very difficult each year. Warm temperatures in late spring had brought the emergence date forward this year, the first being seen on 3rd June. In anticipation that the flight period would be over by our field trip date, via our website and social media we urged visitors to go well before this if they wished to see the butterfly this year.

It was a warm sunny morning as Andy Wyldes and I were joined by several visitors, one from Norfolk. As we entered the wood the first Gatekeeper of the year alighted on a hedge to be photographed. Numerous Ringlets and a few Meadow Browns flitted long the side of the ride as we approached the centre of the wood, marked by two large dewberry bushes in a clearing. Here is the 'hot spot' for Black Hairstreaks and we were pleasantly surprised to see a couple down to nectar on the brambles, among the Large Skippers and Speckled Woods. Those who wished to stopped to photograph while the other participants wandered at their leisure further into the wood to search for Silver-washed Fritillaries.

As I came to a small glade just beyond the dewberry bushes, I was conscious of a large dark butterfly flying quickly around before disappearing into the middle of a large blackthorn. I could not see it, so tried to shake the tree, a vain gesture as the trunk was too large. However, as I stepped back away from the tree I spotted the butterfly in question, which turned out to be a male Purple Emperor, and I called several people over to see it. This was the first record of this species on the site. A few years ago, Matthew Oates and I had searched the wood in vain for Purple Emperor, as he always maintained the habitat was suitable and they should be there.

Further on, an east-west ride in the late morning sun was alive with very fresh-looking Silver-washed Fritillaries on and around the brambles, males and females, over thirty in total, along with a couple of Green-veined Whites, Small Tortoiseshells and half a dozen pristine *hutchinsoni* Commas. Among the Silver-washed were a couple

of *Valezina* females, recorded here for the first time the previous day, but these were far too skittish to photograph. The sun began to disappear and we returned to our cars for some lunch. Andy had to go home but I decided to go back into the wood for another look. The sun was reluctant to come out again, but eventually a longer bright spell ensued and one of the *Valezina* females re-appeared and nectared on the bramble flowers for several minutes, allowing me to obtain a photograph finally before going home.

On leaving the wood, I met Dick Smith, warden of the Cow Pastures, who was taking a small group around. We reflected on one of the most memorable Open Days in the wood, particularly recounting our first sighting of a Silver-washed Fritillary there a decade previously and how we thought it was a release, not realising how the species was extending its range. Normally at this date, Purple Emperor would not have emerged and only a few Silver-washed would be on the wing, but the vagaries of this season had brought them out. Glapthorn deserves to be acclaimed for its range of butterflies, not just for the Black Hairstreak.



One of the two *Valezina* Silver-washed Fritillaries



First Purple Emperor record

Photo D. Goddard

The much anticipated Back from the Brink project has finally started. Work has begun across the country to try and save 20 species from extinction and help another 118 species on the road to recovery. 20 separate projects are underway, with some focusing on particular species such as the Ladybird Spider and Narrow-headed Ant, whilst others concentrate on specific habitats, including the Dorset heaths and the Brecks grasslands. Butterfly Conservation is leading on three of these projects – the Barberry Carpet moth, Cotswolds Limestone Grasslands and Restoring Rockingham Forest's species.

Since taking up the role at the end of July, I've been busy getting to know my project area - Rockingham Forest - and meeting the landowners and land managers of the 11 priority sites where we plan to carry out management work and surveys. One of my first activities was joining the Beds and Northants butterfly walk at Fineshade, where I am based. It was great to meet Doug Goddard and David James, as well as other keen Lepidopterists, and we were rewarded with good weather and a fantastic show of butterflies, including white-letter hairstreak and a valesina, which I'd never seen before.

I'm sure many of you already know that one of the aims of the project is to reintroduce the chequered skipper to England, where it has been extinct since 1976. We are hoping to trial the first reintroduction in Spring 2018, weather permitting. Whilst there are still populations of the chequered skipper in Scotland, we will be sourcing our butterflies from Belgium. This is because the primary larval plant of the Scottish populations is purple moor grass, whilst the English skippers were associated with false brome grass, which the Belgium populations also favour. Whilst the chequered skipper is seen as being



the flagship species of the project, there are many other species that we hope will benefit from the woodland management work that will be taking place. 14 other priority species have been identified in the Rockingham Forest area, along with 11 secondary species – a mixture of bats, mammals, plants, birds, reptiles, and other Lepidoptera, so there will be plenty of things to look out for.

As well as carrying out habitat management work in the priority woodlands, the project will be encouraging people to get involved and find out more about the special species of Rockingham Forest through workshops and events. I am currently co-ordinating with some of our partner organisations: RSPB, Bat Conservation Trust, Plantlife and ARC (Amphibian and Reptile Conservation) who will be involved in delivering elements of the project, helping people learn about the target species and training volunteers to carry out survey and monitoring work. They will also be running workshops for land managers to advise them how to manage their woodlands for the benefit of a variety of species.

My next priority is going to be carrying out vegetation surveys along the rides within the target woodlands. This will enable us to identify which woodlands are most suitable for the proposed chequered skipper reintroduction, as well as which sites we want to priorities for habitat management work this winter. So if you're out in the woods and see someone zig-zagging across the rides with a drop disc (which measures vegetation height), and looking at grass, it might be me! Feel free to stop and say hello.

If you would like to find out more about the project, or how you can get involved, please contact me, Susannah O'Riordan (Back from the Brink Rockingham Forest Project Officer) [soriordan@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:soriordan@butterfly-conservation.org)

I hope you have had a good summer. After last year's poor showing, most of our butterflies seem to have increased in numbers this year. Exciting and challenging times lie ahead for the Branch. We are about to embark upon a new phase of the Wood White Restoration Project while the high profile Back from the Brink Project which includes the reintroduction of the Chequered Skipper is under way with funding secured and Susannah O'Riordan appointed as Project Officer. There will be opportunities for members to be involved in this. Keep an eye on the website for further details. An update from Susannah can be found in this newsletter.

Conserving our butterflies becomes a greater challenge with each successive year. A major colony of Chalkhill Blues was discovered in late July on a disused airfield in north Northants during a survey of rare plants only weeks before the site was turned over to quarrying. Some butterflies were taken for captive breeding and release elsewhere next year,

sadly the only option available. Work this winter is being done in Cherry Lap from the entrance to Fermyn Wood, involving thinning of the trees and piling logs along the main rides. We were consulted on the operations and these should be concluded by next summer to the benefit of key species in the wood.

Two of our sites important for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers at Twywell Hills and Dales and Fermyn Woods Country Park have become very overgrown as a result of a combination of issues. The scrub clearance undertaken by our Branch volunteers this winter will be of paramount importance and I hope more of you will come along to our work parties. Summer field trips in Northants particularly have been well attended, showing the high level of interest in our butterflies, but please also support our work by sending in records of sightings, contributing to social media and providing material for the newsletter.



*Chalkhill Blue*



*Grizzled Skipper*

# Branch Photographic Competition 2017

*Judged by our guest speaker Sam Ellis (Director of Conservation at BC)*



## Chairman's Shield

Winner of Best British Butterfly: **Chris Colles** with an imbibing Purple Emperor.

Runner up: **Dennis McQuillan** with a colourful Painted Lady picture.



## Don Askew Memorial Shield

Winner of Branch Activities: **Doug Goddard** with Commas in Salcey Forest.

Runner up: **Judith Barnard** with Sharpenhoe Field Trip.



## Butterfly Conservation Shield

Winner of Best Early Stages: **Doug Goddard** with a Burnet moth caterpillar spinning a cocoon.

Runner up: **Andy Wyldes** (pictured) with a Pale Tussock moth caterpillar in Salcey Forest.

## Best British Moth Shield

Winner: **Chris Colles** and a beautiful Herald Moth.

Runner up: **Judith Barnard** (pictured) with a Scarlet Tiger Moth.

# Beds & Northants Branch Committee

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