

the **Comm***a*

No.116 Autumn 2023

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation



Exciting job opportunity:

see centre pages for details

Helping rare species:

Small Blue, Grayling and more

Bringing *butterflies and moths* back to Britain • westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com



Cover story

Small Heath by **Alex Murison**
(see pages 22–23)

Contributions

Please send articles and images to the Editor. Photographs should be as high-resolution as possible and sent as separate files (not embedded in a document).

Our copy deadlines are
Spring - 28 February
Autumn - 31 August
Winter - 30 November
(early submissions are welcome).
Contact the Editor for information.
Editor: Marian Newell,
comma.editor@newellporter.co.uk

Publisher

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch. The opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Branch or of Butterfly Conservation.

 BC West Midlands Butterflies and Moths

 Butterfly Conservation West Midlands

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 [@westmidlandsbutterflyconservation](https://www.instagram.com/westmidlandsbutterflyconservation)

Chairman's Address



Michael Southall

Branch Members Day and AGM

Despite falling on one of the first hot and sunny days of the year, our indoor Members' Day and AGM in May was well attended. The event was a great success and thanks go to the speakers, **Sam Macvie** from the Heart of England Forest and **Andrew Fusek Peters**, photographer and author of the recent *Butterfly Safari* book, for their excellent talks. Thanks also to **Miriam Tilt** and her helpers for the wonderful lunch and refreshments.

Big Butterfly Count

Talking of sunny days, this summer seems to have had precious few of them and this has unfortunately had an impact on some of our summer events. The stats still show it to be a summer with above average temperatures, except for July of course. The Big Butterfly Count held in late July and early August produced more participants and more butterflies than last year, again proving to be a good event that engages the public and attracts media coverage. The **Red Admiral** came out on top with 263,201 records. I took part in two radio interviews and even a short TV appearance on ITV Central News – my young grandson commented that I'd been a bit slow with my answers!



Red Admiral (Craig Jones)

Wild Spaces

My personal counts for the Big Butterfly Count, and I daresay other people's, showed up some anomalies that could be relevant in other contexts. My small rural garden, for instance, recorded many more butterflies than a large town park I visited. The park is traditionally managed for the public by mainly mowing grass, although there are signs of improvement. Surely such places could include more wild spaces, habitats where butterflies and moths, and other wildlife, could complete their lifecycles and enhance the place for humans even more? Butterfly Conservation has recently launched a Wild Spaces portal on its website



2024 Branch Calendar

Our popular West Midlands Butterfly Conservation calendar will be available again, hopefully from mid-October. The front cover features a study of roosting Common Blues, beautifully photographed by **Nigel Ball**. The cost is £8.50, including postage (£16 for two). To order, send a cheque made out to Butterfly Conservation (West Midlands Branch)

to WMBC, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB or, if you'd prefer to pay by bank transfer, contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com

to encourage the creation and registering of such wild spaces (see butterfly-conservation.org/wild-spaces). The spaces range from a window box to large community areas, and tips are included on how to create them. This is goal three of Butterfly Conservation's 2026 Strategy: to transform 100,000 Wild Spaces in the UK.

Branch committee and membership

At the AGM, our Treasurer **Ian Duncan** presented a concise report showing a continued healthy and well managed financial situation for our Branch. This has enabled the committee to budget for a range of new and ongoing projects, interpretation boards, equipment purchase, magazine production and distribution, and other ongoing expenditure. Our next meeting is scheduled for 7 October.

It was with much regret that **Martin Harrison** and **Steven Williams** resigned from the committee, and I am sure we would all like to thank them for all their previous work. This leaves the committee without a secretary, and we are actively seeking a volunteer replacement (see panel). Please get in touch if you feel you can help, in this role or in any other.

Finally, the monthly membership figures supplied by head office for the West Midlands branch show a continued rise, with 1,883 households and 2,566 individuals. So, a big welcome to our new members and many thanks to our existing members for your continuing support.

Michael Southall Branch Chair



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Branch Secretary needed

The Branch Secretary fulfils an important role in maintaining the smooth running of West Midlands Butterfly Conservation. The

main tasks are to take and distribute minutes of our committee meetings (normally two a year, plus the AGM) and to support the Chairman in distributing information throughout the year, including requests for decisions on important items that require action between meetings. The Secretary needs to have access to a computer and printer and to be able to attend committee meetings, which are held at locations central to the Branch. If you'd like to discuss the role, please contact the Chairman by email or phone (see Branch contacts on page 27).

Please get in touch if you feel you can help, in this role or in any other.

Brown Hairstreak Day



Above: Brown Hairstreak Day at Upper Hollowfields Farm in Worcestershire

Branch AGM



Above: Sam Macvie's presentation at the Branch AGM in May took us on a tour of the Heart of England Forest and introduced us to the Purple Emperor butterfly there – it's headed our way now, more about that in our next issue

Highgate Common Walk



Left: Walk 10 from Butterflies of the West Midlands, Highgate Common in July – note the walkers' light summer clothing!

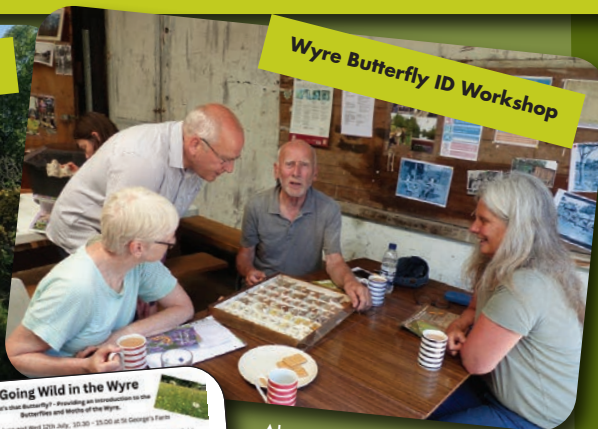
Events across the West

Our Upland Commons – Green Hairstreak



Above: Survey day for Green Hairstreak on the Stiperstones

Wyre Butterfly ID Workshop



Above: Participants in the Wyre Butterfly ID Workshop look at historic specimens from the area



Celebrating the Wyre Weekend



Below: Unveiling the White Admiral Walk board in memory of Adrian Miles (see pages 10–11, Comma 113)

Comer Wood Picnic



Above: Examining the haul at the Moth Morning, Callow Hill Visitor Centre

Kinver Rock Houses



Above: Moth Morning at Kinver Rock Houses in July

Below: Participants enjoyed close-up views of both Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Welsh Clearwing moth (see page 17)

Cannock Chase Ramble



Above: Survey day for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the Stiperstones

Midlands

Our Upland Commons – Small Pearl-bordered



Malvern Hills Lost Fritillaries Project

The latest news about the reintroduction
of Pearl-bordered Fritillary to the Hills



BBC Midlands Today with
Audrey Dias



The year began with carefully planned habitat management during one of the warmest and driest winters on record. Firstly, volunteers removed a large area of saplings on the Chase End Hill site, pausing for regular refreshment breaks and, like **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** caterpillars, basking on the warm, dry, south-facing bracken slopes created, nibbling cakes and sipping tea (instead of violets).

Strictly Raking contest

The remotely controlled Robocutter took over to cut the thick bracken thatch and bramble on extensive areas of both Bromesberrow and Eastnor Estates. However, this left bracken litter scattered across the steep slopes of both sites, which needed to be removed to reveal bare ground and encourage violet plants to grow again. This led to a Strictly Raking contest, with volunteer teams on each site competing for points for both method and outcome.

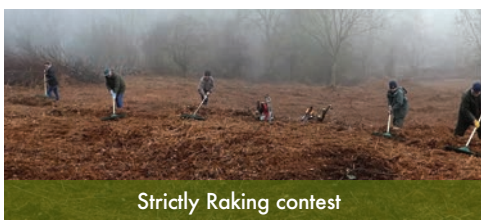
The Eastnor Team scored highly by creating neat corridors and posing over large piles of bracken, whereas the Bromesberrow Team excelled for dash/flair



Robocutter in action



Volunteers basking on the warm bracken slopes



Strictly Raking contest

and maintaining formation on steep slopes. Both teams lost points for multiple tea breaks and excessive cake indulgence. The final score would depend on future spring counts of Pearl-bordered Fritillary in these areas.

Fortunately, another successful reintroduction was underway. Following eight months in diapause, from the end of February the captive caterpillars started to bask during sunny moments in the Pearl Hotel – just before the snow arrived! We brought the breeding pots into an unheated conservatory, where the dormant violets started to grow again just before the caterpillars began to feed. They pupated from late March into April, and



Marked (2023) and unmarked (2022) releases



Female mated within 30 minutes of release



Newly released female



Fourth instars in diapause under UV light

emerged as adult butterflies from late April to late May.

Almost 100 adults were released onto sites during May but, more importantly, we saw the first adult to emerge on site this year from the reintroduction in 2022 – easily distinguished from this year's reintroductions, which were all marked with coloured spots (colour-coded for release date and origin of donor site). Newly released females soon mated onsite, and several were observed to mate with unmarked males that emerged from last year's reintroduction.

BBC Midlands Today joined us in early May to film a release, including mating behaviour, and to talk to volunteers about the project. BBC Hereford & Worcester broadcast interviews the same morning to celebrate the reintroduction and the continuing progress of our project.

Glow-in-the-dark caterpillars

Now the Pearl Hotel is busy again, with hundreds of resident fourth instars in diapause, divided into about

50 breeding pots containing violets, oak leaves or bracken litter. If all goes well, the bed linen will not need changing until they wake up again next spring. We also discovered that our caterpillars appear to fluoresce and glow in the dark under ultraviolet light. (Ed: UV torches are being used more in nocturnal surveys, a topic we plan to cover in our next issue.)

You are very welcome to visit the sites but please keep to the public footpaths if you come without a guide.

“ Butterflies are good indicators of the health of our environment, and so, if we get it right for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary – one of the most at-risk butterfly species in the UK – the chances are we can get it right for the rest of our wildlife too. ”

Article and photographs by **Mel Mason** and **Liz Lloyd**

Small Blue in Worcestershire

The Small Blue butterfly was declared extinct in the West Midlands region in 1990, after repeated surveys at its only known site failed to register any sightings.



The work party (Mike Williams)



Out of the blue, it was then reported in May 2019 from a location on Broadway Hill, a couple of miles from its old site. In fact, a National Trust volunteer had recorded the species at the new location every year since at least 2014 but, due to a misunderstanding, the sightings were never formally recorded and so were unknown to us in the West Midlands Branch.

A potential new site

We now know that **Small Blue** exists at two sites in Worcestershire, roughly half a mile apart, on Broadway Hill. Both populations, and the habitats they occupy, are very small; between the two is the sizeable, worked-out and disused Broadway Quarry which, since quarrying work ceased a few years ago, has been developing a very nice limestone flora. However, this flora unfortunately contains little or no



Broadway Quarry (Simon Primrose)

Kidney Vetch, which is of course the larval food plant of the Small Blue.

Our task for the day

The Branch has been in touch with the quarry company over the last year or so, and they very helpfully offered



Small Blue – underwing (Simon Primrose)



Small Blue – upperwing (Simon Primrose)



1kg bag of Kidney Vetch seed
(Mike Williams)

“ We think the process worked well and hope that next spring we’ll see the first signs of germination of what should become a large expanse of Kidney Vetch. This, in turn, should provide a home for a sizeable and self-sustaining colony of Small Blue butterflies. This colony could then act as a feeder population to two smaller sites nearby, thus securing the long-term future of the species in Worcestershire. ”

to collect seed from one of their other quarries in the Cotswolds, which has extensive areas of Kidney Vetch, and bring it to Broadway to be spread onto the bare ground of the quarry. This exercise took place in early September, when a large group of us broke up the surface with rakes – to aid germination – and then spread out the supplied seed. As it turned out, the seed had been bought because poor summer weather prevented flowering at the intended donor site.

Our thanks to Smiths of Blethington for their support in enabling this project to happen.

Article by **Simon Primrose**

Grayling Action Group

It has been a very informative and fascinating year for this recently formed Group.



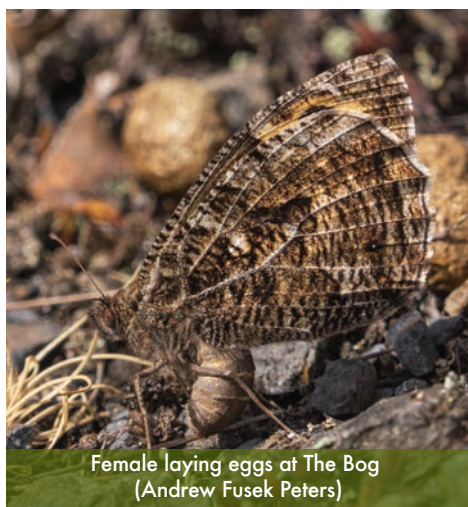
Hunting for caterpillars (Mike Williams)



Caterpillar (Lucy Lewis)



Egg (Lucy Lewis)



Female laying eggs at The Bog
(Andrew Fusek Peters)

To show members the two strongest remaining sites for **Grayling** in Shropshire, we ran two field events in collaboration with the site managers (Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire County Council). We also undertook two caterpillar searches in March and May, finding just one on each occasion and both when we were just about to give up.

Thanks to help from local volunteers, we now have much better transect monitoring on at least two Shropshire sites and occasional monitoring on at least three others. We've also carried out a detailed study of egg-laying behaviour at the Bog Mine, again with local volunteering help, and have identified more than 45 egg-laying locations scattered across this site. This will enable us to determine the habitat being used for breeding here, which we hope will inform future management recommendations for other sites.

“Unfortunately, no Graylings were seen anywhere in the Malvern Hills in 2023; they were also absent from some of the Shropshire sites where they were seen in 2022. Still, we have made a good start and hopefully there will be much more news to follow.”

Article by **Jenny Joy**



Mapping egg-laying sites



Nick Williams

A Tribute to Nick Williams

We were saddened to hear of the death of **Nick Williams** in May this year aged 71. Nick had a long history of involvement with West Midlands Butterfly Conservation, initially in his role of Lecturer in Conservation at Stourbridge College where he was able to bring groups of students across to work in some of our Worcestershire reserves. Prior to this, he worked in conservation management for 18 years, many of those at Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve in Dudley and Leasowes Park near his home in Halesowen.

After leaving Stourbridge College, Nick undertook

contracts on behalf of Butterfly Conservation and the Forestry Commission to survey important regional sites. From 2009 to 2012, he worked for Butterfly Conservation as Midland Fritillaries Project Officer, focusing particularly on sites for **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** in the Marches and the Forest of Dean. In the West Midlands, this species is mainly associated with areas of Rush Pasture and, based on his work, Nick produced a factsheet on behalf of Butterfly Conservation setting out advice on how best to manage this habitat. His involvement with the Forest of Dean continued through a Forestry Commission project called Linking the Pearls.

An excellent botanist, Nick was also an expert on fungi.

.....
Mike Williams

Mel Mason recalls: Nick and I surveyed Pearl-bordered Fritillary sites in spring 2020 in the early stages of the Malvern Hills Lost Fritillaries Project. His report helped to form the initial proposal for the project to reintroduce this species. He had a wealth of knowledge about the flora and he helped my understanding of bracken habitats for Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Richard Woolley recalls: Nick was leader of Countryside Studies Groups in Halesowen and Hagley U3As. The many days out for the Halesowen Group, to which I belong, included tree identification, a fungus foray and a trip to Slimbridge Wetland Centre. The group was popular with a good regular attendance and, although it has continued since Nick's death, we will miss his expertise terribly. He was a thoughtful, highly intelligent and very knowledgeable man.

Like me, Nick was a Friend of the Leasowes, a historic parkland and nature reserve in Halesowen, and had a great deal to do with the walled garden there. He lived within the park's boundaries and led walks for various wildlife, including birds, butterflies and fungi.



Surveying on the Malvern Hills

John Tilt recalls: Nick was a great supporter of Butterfly Conservation and particularly of Grafton Wood. I met him at the opening of the reserve in 1998; he offered his help then and continued to support Grafton and many other projects during his life-time. He organised chainsaw training courses for Trevor Bucknall and myself and, in the early days, came to Grafton to help us with



Fungus Foray at Grafton Wood in 2006

some of the larger trees. He also brought groups of students each year while he was still teaching to help with the arduous task of blackthorn cutting.

But his main love was fungi: he organised and ran numerous fungus forays at Grafton. He also helped with projects at other sites, both practically and in an advisory capacity, including Bringsty-

Common, Ewyas Harold, Brotheridge Green, Coppett Hill and Lower Kites Wood. He organised trips for us around northern nature reserves and even to the Picos Mountains in Spain. We so need more people like Nick, who have in-depth knowledge together with practical skills.

Our reserves: Prees Heath

Situated two miles south of Whitchurch in North Shropshire, between the A49 and A41, is a former airfield with an incredible history, from the wings of Halifax bombers during the Second World War to the wings of Silver-studded Blue butterflies today.



Purple Hairstreak – female
(Craig Jones)



Purple Hairstreak – underwing
(Melvyn Lambert)



Comma – aberration
(Debbie Hotchkiss)

Prees Heath Common, also known as Whitchurch Heath Common and RAF Tilstock (during its time as a bomber training airfield), is the last remaining site in the Midlands for the **Silver-studded Blue**. In fact, the site being a decommissioned airfield enabled this species to persist, as it was confined to relic heathland among concrete fragments of the former runways, which prevented ploughing when the remainder of the site was being cultivated. The heathland on the runway provided a sanctuary for it to 'wait in the wings', until Butterfly Conservation purchased 60 hectares of Prees Heath Common in 2006 and embarked on a process of deep-soil inversion and heather brash sowing to

recreate and restore heathland. You can find out more about the first twelve years in *Comma* No. 103, 'From crops to butterfly counts at Prees Heath Common'.

Monitoring and management

It's no secret that the fate of the Silver-studded Blue has been reversed at Prees Heath Common, particularly as large numbers can be seen within stepping distance of the reserve entrance during the peak flight period in June. It truly is a sight that you must see for yourself to believe: seeing hundreds of butterflies in flight at once isn't a regular occurrence except at Prees Heath. Insights into the fascinating behaviour of the Silver-

“You can find out more about the first twelve years at Prees Heath Common in *Comma* No.103, 'From crops to butterfly counts at Prees Heath Common'.”

Mown paths through ragwort
(Nigel A Ball)

Common



Gatekeeper – aberration
(Debbie Hotchkiss)



Common Blue – 2nd brood
(Debbie Hotchkiss)



Rosebay willowherb in July this year (Julie Fox)



Silver-studded Blue on heather (Steven Croft)

studded Blue at the reserve can be read in *Comma* No. 111, 'The Mysterious Life of the Silver-studded Blue Caterpillar', and *Comma* No.112, 'The Courtship of the Silver-studded Blue'.

The success of heathland restoration at the reserve is evident in the annual Silver-studded Blue transect count data, which has been collected by volunteers **Stephen Lewis** and **Nigel Ball** walking a UKMBS transect. In 2009, the year the transect was established, the peak count was 341 individuals; over the fifteen subsequent years, the annual count has shown an increasing trend, with a peak of 2419 individuals in 2022 and a slight fall to 2135 in 2023.

The annual data is also providing an insight into the influence of climate change on the phenology of the species; its emergence has advanced slightly over the

last three years. In 2022, a prolonged emergence was observed and adults were still flying later in the season, beyond the peak flight period – Stephen recorded an adult male in September while walking the transect.

There were reports of research indicating that drought conditions can delay larval development, resulting in prolonged emergence of species. It will be interesting to see if advanced and prolonged emergence will become more prevalent in years to come, with a changing climate.

Annual transect data enables us to direct our heathland management work, including the extent and intensity of mowing to create a mosaic of age and height in the heather, which is required for the butterfly to breed and roost, and to maintain suitable habitat for the Common Black Ant (*Lasius niger*) on which it

Annual
transect data
enables us to direct
our heathland
management
work

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

depends. In 2022, as part of the heather mowing management, we were able to donate heather brash to Shropshire Council as part of their heathland restoration work at Nesscliffe Hillfort and The Cliffe. It is remarkable that Prees Heath Common, which once received heather brash from The Long Mynd and Cannock Chase, is now a donor site for restoration work elsewhere to recreate heathland habitat for species recovery.

Prees Heath Common is now a donor site for restoration work elsewhere.

Experimental plots

In 2019–20, experimental plots were established on an area within the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) boundary to assess the effectiveness of heathland restoration under different interventions. Eighteen plots of equal distance and depth were stripped of turf to leave bare ground; three were left unstripped as control plots. Twelve of the stripped plots were sown with heather, six with Common Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and six with Bell Heather

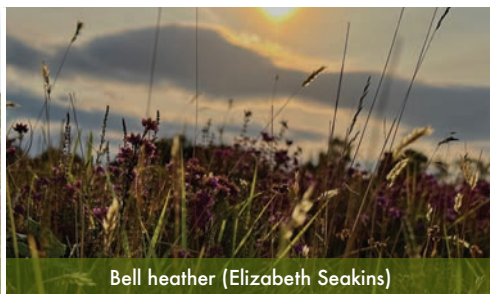
(*Erica cinerea*) and chicken wire was installed on nine of the plots to restrict soil disturbance by rabbits. Botanical surveys of the plots have been carried out in 2022–23 and the results are encouraging: germination of both Common Heather and Bell Heather has been observed this year in the plots where seed was sown in 2020. There was less bare ground in plots protected by chicken wire than in unprotected plots; the control plots were less botanically diverse than the plots from which the turf was stripped.

We are now working in partnership with Dr Phil Putwain, Harper Adams University and Natural England to use these results to further our understanding of heathland restoration techniques and to provide evidence of the lessons we've learned through the use of innovative conservation techniques. We hope this work will secure the future of Silver-studded Blue at the reserve and beyond.

Article by **Natalie Norton**



Common heather (Stephen Lewis)



Bell heather (Elizabeth Seakins)



Drone view from near the entrance (Bob Kemp)

National Members' Morning and AGM 2023

10am to 12 noon, Saturday 4 November 2023

Butterfly Conservation's national Members' Morning and AGM will be held online this year. The keynote speaker is Dr Mark Avery, who will be talking about his new book *Reflections – what wildlife needs and how to provide it*, and new Volunteer Awards will be announced. Find out more at butterfly-conservation.org/agm2023



Birmingham and Black Country

Scarlet Tiger Project Work Parties, Stourbridge

Every 3rd Fri: 20 Oct, 17 Nov, 15 Dec, 19 Jan, 16 Feb, 15 Mar

Contact Joy Stevens: 01384 372397, joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk

Meeting points and tasks to be determined



Bagging meadow mowings (Joy Stevens)

Herefordshire

Ewyas Harold Meadow Work Parties

Tue: 7 Nov, 5 Dec, 9 Jan, 6 Feb

11am at the northern Cwm Hill end of Ewyas Harold Common, adjacent to the top cattle grid (SO382302). Approach from Abbey Dore off the B4347 (SO384306). Bring gloves, hand tools, lunch and a drink.

Contact Natalie Norton: nnorton@butterfly-conservation.org, 07485 372199

Ewyas Harold Reserve and Common Work Parties

Sat: 21 Oct, 18 Nov, 16 Dec, 20 Jan, 17 Feb, 16 Mar, 20 Apr

10am at the northern Cwm Hill end of Ewyas Harold Common, adjacent to the top cattle grid (SO382302). Approach from Abbey Dore off the B4347 (SO384306). Bring gloves, hand tools, lunch and a drink.

Contact Dean Fenton

fenton@littleburyfarm.co.uk, Ian Hart (yellowrattle4@aol.com) or Natalie Norton (nnorton@butterfly-conservation.org)

Haugh Wood Work Parties

Sat: 4 Nov, 2 Dec, 6 Jan, 3 Feb, 2 Mar, 6 Apr
9.30am in the Forestry Commission car park on minor road from Mordiford to Woolhope (SO592365)

Contact Robin Hemming (07501 020605, robinhemming@btinternet.com) or Kate Wollen (07786 526280, kate.wollen@forestryengland.uk)

Worcestershire

Ankerdine Common

Sun: 5 Nov – in partnership with
Worcestershire County Council

10am in a small lay-by on A44 close to the turn
off to Martley (SO736557) off the B4193
Stourport-Hartlebury road.

Contact Trevor Bucknall: 07704 138398,
trevor.bucknall@outlook.com

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wed to the end of March 2024, ride
management and coppicing

10am at Grafton Flyford Church; tools provided;
bring heavy gardening gloves, wear appropriate
clothing

Contact John Tilt: 01386 792458,
john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Egg Searches

Sat: 2 Dec, 30 Dec (mince pie and mulled
wine special), 27 Jan

10am at Grafton Flyford Church

Contact Simon Primrose: 07952 260153,
simonjprimrose@aol.com

Simon says: 'We'll also be resuming our
regular weekly **Brown Hairstreak** egg searches
on Thursdays, probably starting in mid-October. It'd
be great to have more people involved, so if you'd
like to join us – for an hour, a day or the whole
season – contact me for more information.'

Monkwood Work Parties

Sun: 5 Nov, 3 Dec, 7 Jan, 4 Feb, 3 Mar

Thu: 19 Oct, 16 Nov, 21 Dec, 18 Jan, 15
Feb, 21 Mar

10am in the reserve car park (SO803603),
usually finished by 3pm

Contact Phil Adams: 01905 610830,
pdadamsrainbow@gmail.com

Penny Hill Landfill Site Work Parties

Sun: 15 Oct, 19 Nov, 21 Jan, 18 Feb

10am at the site entrance off Pudford Lane,
Hillside, Martley (SO752613)

Contact Trevor Bucknall: 07704 138398,
trevor.bucknall@outlook.com



Large Skipper (Chris Barlow)



Small Skipper (Bob Eade)

Trench Wood Work Parties

Sun: 22 Oct, 26 Nov, 28 Jan, 25 Feb,
24 Mar

10am in the reserve car park (SO930588)

Contact Matthew Bridger: 07801 568334,
bridge1805@btinternet.com

Wyre Forest Work Parties

Sun: 26 Nov, 28 Jan

Tue: 24 Oct, 12 Dec, 16 Jan, 20 Feb,
19 Mar

Tuesdays are joint events with Natural England.

10am in Earnwood Copse car park on the
B4194 Bewdley to Kinlet road (SO744784)

Bring your own gloves and refreshments – tools
and hand sanitiser will be provided

Work is mainly removing ride-side coppice to
benefit **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** and sometimes
other species.

Contact Mike Williams: 07802 274552,
wmbutterflies@gmail.com

IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.

Staffordshire

Cannock Chase Work Parties – Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

In partnership with Staffordshire
County Council

Work to benefit this species is planned –
details to be confirmed

Contact Rob Taylor, Countryside Ranger:
07817 122760,
rob.taylor@staffordshire.gov.uk

Expenses: mileage allowance

The Branch committee has agreed to pay a mileage allowance to people attending work parties and committee meetings. Forms are available from the Treasurer (see page 27) and from work party leaders.

If anything else prevents you from coming to work parties, please contact **Mike Williams** (see page 27) to discuss how we could help. There's a great need for more practical help, especially from the Branch's younger and fitter members!

A pleasant surprise



Purple Hairstreak – underwing



Purple Hairstreak – upperwing

It is the First of September, late morning, the sun is shining... time for the first walk round the garden to record the butterflies. We do this several times, most days, and have kept our records for the last 11 years, since we moved here to Church Stretton.

'Ooh, what's that sitting on that hollyhock leaf with its wings open?' It was a chocolate-brown butterfly – phone out of pocket for a quick photo!

And then it closed its wings and 'Voila!', as they say in France. What a nice surprise: a slightly bedraggled **Purple Hairstreak**.

Our records for 2023 show only two others, on 4 and 12 July. The first was early in the morning and was, we are sure, attracted to the previous night's moth trap.

Article and photographs by **Graham Wenman** and
Catherine Wellings

Ed: The Wyre Forest and Monkwood often have good numbers of Purple Hairstreak; see Walks 18 and 22 in *Butterflies of the West Midlands*.



Can you help us restore important butterflies and moths to the Wyre Forest?

Lepidoptera Conservation Co-ordinator

16 hours per week, £26,000 pro rata

Initial 12-month fixed-term contract

Proposed start date January 2024

Twycross Zoo, working in partnership with Forestry England, Natural England and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation, is seeking a **Lepidoptera Conservation Co-ordinator** to support the conservation of butterflies and moths within the Wyre Forest landscape, including habitat assessments, ecological surveys, reintroduction feasibility studies and management to help improve habitats for rare and declining butterflies and moths. The Wyre Forest is the last known site of the **Kentish Glory** moth in England and this new project will explore the feasibility of reintroducing this species, as well as working to improve the prospects of key butterfly and moth species that are declining nationally but still occurring in the Forest.

Full job description available to download from:

westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com/wm-moths

Applicants must send a CV and covering letter by 12 November to:

conservation@twycrosszoo.org



Forestry England

Shropshire

Prees Heath Common Work Parties

Wed: 18 Oct, 22 Nov, 20 Dec, 17 Jan, 21 Feb
10.30am on the access track opposite the Steel
Heath turning off the A49 (SJ557363)

Contact Natalie Norton: nnorton@butterfly-conservation.org, 07485 372199

Telford Millennium Nature Reserve Work Parties

Volunteer work parties are due to be held over
the autumn and winter.

*Please contact Peter Mcnee for details if you
would like to help: 07730688924 or
Peter.Mcnee@groundwork.org.uk*

Stepping Stones receives new funding



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (Rob Coleman)



Otter (John Hubble)



Natural England has
Awarded a Species
Recovery Grant of nearly
£290,000 to Stepping

Stones, a National Trust-led project to connect and
restore patches of wildlife-friendly habitat between the
Long Mynd and Stiperstones. Together with partner
organisations, Natural England is driving action
nationally to promote the recovery of Britain's most
threatened species and reduce the risk of extinction.
£14.5 million has been awarded to conservation
projects across England, with 150 threatened species
to benefit from the funding which runs until March 2025.

Four key species in the Stepping Stones project area
will be supported using money from the grant: **Small
Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, otter, willow tit and
dormouse. Patches of wildlife-friendly habitat ('stepping
stones') and wildlife corridors (such as hedgerows,
verges and streams) that traditionally link areas of
habitat are sadly in decline in the Shropshire Hills, and

the mammals, birds and insects that use them to move
around the landscape are under threat.

Charlie Bell, Project Officer for Stepping Stones said:
'We're so pleased that the Stepping Stones bid for the
funding has been successful. It means that we can continue
our work with volunteers, local farmers and partnership
organisations, to raise awareness of threatened species
and undertake work that helps to protect them.'

Planned work includes growing and planting out
thousands of marsh violets (larval food plant of Small
Pearl-bordered Fritillary), building artificial otter holts in
local streams, creating wet woodland and installing
nest boxes for willow tits, and creating or restoring
around 7,500m of hedgerow to provide connected
habitats for dormice.

West Midlands Butterfly Conservation has been
involved with practical conservation work funded by
the Stepping Stones and Our Upland Commons
projects since 2020. The renewed funding will enable
such work to continue.

Look out for related work parties in our event calendars or, to find out more about the project or volunteer,
[email charlie.bell@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:charlie.bell@nationaltrust.org.uk)

IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.

Welsh Clearwing at Cannock Chase

The survey

I had thought for a long time that it would be fantastic if one day it could be possible to simply look at a map of Cannock Chase and see detailed comprehensive coverage of the entire Welsh Clearwing population. Well, it was not going to happen unless someone went out and did the work, so I decided to give it a go.

The only way of establishing the moth's true distribution was to take a landscape-scale approach. The study area was going to be vast, as the entire population needed to be encompassed within its boundaries. This meant that the final study area would be 62 square kilometres in extent and 17 kilometres from north to south. That's 15,325 acres for those of us that still prefer to think in those terms.

Despite some initial concerns that the objectives that I had set myself would be too ambitious, over the next two years the area was systematically surveyed, mapping and recording every tree that could be found showing evidence of occupation by the moth. While there are still a few small areas yet to cover, the final report will show that more than 1,000 trees on Cannock Chase show such evidence, making it by far the largest recorded population in the UK.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►



By colour-coding plots on a satellite image (above), it is possible to separate trees with high numbers of emergence holes (left) that are likely to be in constant use from those more likely to be one-off or infrequent breeding attempts – high numbers in red, low numbers in white.





Bark of Downy Birch

Downy birch (above) does not have the deep fissures seen in the bark of silver birch (below), which are used by female Welsh Clearwings for egg-laying. Consequently, this moth's distribution on Cannock Chase is restricted by the presence of silver birch.



Bark of Silver Birch

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15 ►

For the first time it has become possible to see the location of each occupied tree across an entire landscape, easily identify individual colonies making up the wider population, and provide evidence of dispersal. So, the dream that I had back then has finally come to fruition.

Silver not downy

The study is not just about establishing distribution. Other aspects of the moth's ecology have been studied, including food-plant selection, which led to an important new discovery. Most of the literature and previous studies have stated that both downy birch and silver birch are selected by this species. However, it became evident early in the study that on Cannock Chase this may not be the case.

Having started the study in the south, where downy birch dominates, and after inspecting hundreds of such



Surveying Welsh Clearwing on Cannock Chase

trees without success, I started to have doubts. As the study proceeded northwards, evidence of the moth was found in trees that appeared to conform to both silver birch and downy birch, just as published accounts and previous studies had predicted. However, after more critical examination, it was found that trees provisionally identified as downy birch had intermediate characteristics and were likely to be hybrids.

It can now be shown that the Welsh Clearwing population on Cannock Chase avoids trees with strong downy birch characteristics, breeding almost exclusively on silver birch and on trees with intermediate features that are probably of hybrid origin. Bark structure is probably the critical factor in food-plant selection, in that typical downy birch trees do not normally develop the deep fissures that this species appears to require for egg laying.

Geology holds the key

Reliance on silver birch explains the absence of Welsh Clearwing on heathlands to the south of Cannock Chase. The two birch species have differing habitat preferences, with downy birch favouring moisture-retentive soils and



Information board showing species to be seen on Cannock Chase, funded by a donation from Druids Heath Golf Club, Aldridge, and seen here with Kevin Russell, former Seniors Captain.

silver birch being more tolerant of drier conditions. On Cannock Chase, the soils to the south are derived from glacial deposits and clays that tend to be moisture-retentive, favouring downy birch, while the dry sandy soils in the north favour silver birch.

Welsh Clearwing distribution on Cannock Chase almost exactly matches the underlying geology, with breeding confined to the Triassic Chester formation. It is interesting to note that the other English population, at Sherwood Forest, is on the same geological formation. So, anyone thinking of looking for new English populations may do well to start by first checking out a geology map.

Dispersal

The study made it possible for the first time to gain reliable information on how far adult male moths disperse from breeding sites and has produced a few unexpected surprises. With boundaries of breeding sites firmly established, it became possible to investigate male dispersal by deploying pheromone lures at varying distances from those locations. By measuring the distance from a positive lure response to the nearest breeding site,

Cannock Chase Ramble

Steve acted as one of our guides on our field trip to Cannock Chase on 17 June, along with committee member Dave Jackson. Participants enjoyed close-up views of both Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Welsh Clearwing moth. We were successful in finding the exit holes of Welsh Clearwing on the trunks of birch trees and in attracting adults to a pheromone lure. Cannock Chase is a special place for both moths and butterflies and we marked the occasion by unveiling a special information board funded by Druids Heath Golf Club.

Panel text and photograph by **Mike Williams**

a minimum dispersal range can be readily calculated. However, just to be certain that there was no nearby source that had been overlooked, some areas had to be surveyed up to three times during the study.

The study shows that immediately following emergence there is a mass dispersal of males into surrounding areas. This occurred in both years of the study, being particularly pronounced in the warm June of 2023. The longest recorded flight to date is 4.4 kilometres, but some individuals may disperse well beyond this. It is therefore worth bearing in mind that any Welsh Clearwings recorded using a pheromone lure may have originated from a tree many kilometres distant.

The full report will be available early in 2024.

Article and photographs by **Steven Barnes**



With the increasing pressure on local councils to allow redevelopment for the building of houses, there are constant new objections from the public to planning proposals that threaten precious green spaces.

Amblecote Meadow
(Graham Beckley)

Saving Amblecote Meadow

One such campaign was mounted in Amblecote when a local meadow adjoining Corbett Hospital came under threat. The site was originally gifted in 1893 by the 'Salt King', **John Corbett**, for the building of a local hospital. Although Corbett made his fortune in Droitwich, he was born in Brierley Hill and he recognised the importance of providing a hospital and a green space for the benefit of the local population living and working in a heavily industrial area. Thus the Corbett Charitable Hospital was built, surrounded by meadows – 'situated in the green borderlands of the Black Country, a kind of oasis on the edge of a waste' according to an article in the Brierley Hill Advertiser of 1893 describing Corbett's original concept.

The campaign

That sounds all too familiar nowadays, when the NHS is promoting 'green surgeries' and 'green prescribing'. The hospital and meadows migrated to the NHS after its formation in 1948 and, in fact, much of the original site has already been sold by the Hospital Trust for

housing development. Thus Amblecote Meadow is the last remnant of the legacy from John Corbett. When this was threatened with further development, the Corbett Meadow Action Group (CMAG) was set up. The descendants of John Corbett added their support to the group, urging the Hospital Trust to respect the wishes of their benefactor ancestor. Support from the local MP, **Suzanne Webb**, and the West Midlands Mayor, **Andy Street**, has further bolstered the campaign.

In view of the strong feelings locally, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council has rejected the proposal on the grounds that it fails to 'consider the historic character and local distinctiveness of the existing site' and the area has been designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. We can only hope that the SINC designation will provide greater protection than that of Green Belt!

The next steps

Despite this welcome news, it must be stressed that, although the proposal has been rejected by the



Merveille du Jour (October)



Lunar Hornet Moth (June)



Maggie (June)



Figure of Eighty (June)



Miller (June)



Clifden Nonpareil (September)



Emperor Moth – male (early Spring)



Golden Plusia (July)



Tawny-barred Angle (August)



Satellite (October)



December Moth (winter)

Borough Council, the battle to save Amblecote Meadow is not yet won. According to the latest posting on the campaign's Facebook page, the deadline for the developer to appeal the decision with the Secretary of State was 13 July 2023. Even allowing for delays in processing the paperwork, it is felt unlikely that an appeal has been made. CMAG and local residents are at present pursuing a position statement on the meadow from the developer Charles Church Properties (Persimmon

Homes) and The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust. If this confirms that no appeal has been submitted, the remaining options for the developer would be to withdraw or to submit a revised planning application.

(STOP PRESS: CMAG has just received notification that the proposal to develop the meadow for housing has been withdrawn.)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►



Brindled Groundling (Patrick Clement)



Pale Lettuce Bell (Patrick Clement)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19 ►

The moths of Amblecote

It is a surprising area, as one of our members, **Allan Nolan**, would attest. Allan regularly runs moth traps and has attracted a wide array of species to his garden neighbouring the meadow. He has also recorded **White-letter Hairstreak** butterflies in the elms nearby.

The photos show a selection of species Allan has trapped, including the **December Moth** – one of the reasons Allan started trapping was to catch one of these furry winter creatures – and the **Clifden Nonpareil** – it's always special when this beauty turns up. He has recently trapped two species not previously recorded in Staffordshire, namely **Brindled Groundling** (*Recurvaria nanella*) and **Pale Lettuce Bell** (*Eucosma conterminana*).

Article by **Joy Stevens**

Photographs by Allan Nolan, unless otherwise credited

Acknowledgement: The information contained in this article is taken from 'The Last Meadow' by the Corbett Meadow Action Group. Particular thanks to Robert Bevan Jones and Helen Cook. For more information, visit www.friendsofcorbettmeadow.com or find them on Facebook – 'Save the Corbett Meadow Action Group'

News from

The new informal Oswestry & Borders Butterfly Group is really only a list of email addresses but we have made a good start and it has been really good to meet other people interested in butterflies. We have had a few field trips.

Whixhall Moss, near Whitchurch

Eight of us had a really nice day out at Whixhall Moss on 9 June. Leaving the car park we turned right instead of left on local advice. We had already seen **Meadow Brown**, **Large Skipper** and **Speckled Wood**. **Holly Blue** and **Green Hairstreak** were added quickly, though we thought it was late for them. It was not long before we had our first **Large Heath** nectaring on cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) and it was the commonest butterfly. **Brimstone** eluded us for some time but we saw several eventually by a hedge that had alder buckthorn (the food plant). The ponds at the end particularly had White-faced Darter, Four Spotted Chaser, Large Red Damselfly, Blue Tailed Damselfly and Azure Damselfly. The highlight of the day was a Hobby hawking dragonflies. A single Beautiful Demoiselle was seen. Moths included **Common Heath** and **Pebble Hook-tip**, as well as **Brown Silver Lines**. We didn't see adders but there were a few common lizards.

Bury Ditches, near Clun

We didn't manage a group visit to Bury Ditches near Bishop's Castle but some of us individually visited and saw abundant **Wood Whites** along the main track. We had a

the new Oswestry & Borders Butterfly Group



Wood White (Simon Spencer)

really good trip to see the **Silver-studded Blue** at Prees Heath on 23 June, where we were amazed by how many were flying in the area of restored heather. We also managed to see **White-letter Hairstreak** in Dolgoch Quarry in Llyncllys, despite the poor July weather, and others were seen elsewhere, including on elms along the canal.

Llanymynech, near Oswestry

The transect team have done sterling work on Llanymynech Rocks Reserve and Llanymynech Golf Course and it was encouraging to see good numbers of butterflies on the newly restored areas on the golf course, including **Silver-washed Fritillary**. Despite the weather, particularly in July, transects have run weekly. Earlier in the year we managed to see **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** in the Nantmawr area, where it still hangs on but numbers are low.

We hope to get funding at some point for a grazing animals project in the Oswestry Hills, which will take over from Shropshire Wildlife Trust who are keen to give up keeping cattle. We hope to use cattle with No Fence grazing collars on Llanymynech Golf Course to graze areas that have been




Large Heath
(Tim Ward)

I'd like to hear from Butterfly Conservation members who'd like to be informed of our activities. The concept is simple: instead of putting a date in the calendar months ahead, we run short-notice visits when it looks as if the weather will be reasonable and advertise them only by email. Members are encouraged to go and see butterflies at certain places, even if they cannot come on the day suggested.

recently cleared of scrub. Helen Upson, who has a small herd of ancient breed Welsh cattle, is keen to pursue this. We also saw Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Middletown Hill, which was a relief; Lottie Glover of Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust did an excellent job monitoring sites for this species in the county. Several butterflies seem to have had a good year: Holly Blue and **Comma** for a start, but also **Red Admiral** and Meadow Brown.

Article by **Simon Spencer**

cerisiy@btinternet.com, 07866 428875



Small Heath
(Alex Murison)

How you can help

By visiting places cared for by the National Trust, you are supporting nature recovery across large areas of the countryside. Every visitor, volunteer and supporter is helping to make projects like Sandscapes possible.

To find out more, visit nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/shropshirestaffordshire/dudmaston/sandscapes-project.

To get involved, email sandscapes@national-trust.org.uk

Sandscapes

A landscape-scale project to restore and reconnect sandy habitats across three counties

Heathland habitat is characterised by wide, open landscapes, dominated by scattered trees and low-growing shrubs, such as gorse, heather and grasses. It was once common across our region but has decreased by 80% since the 1880s; even so, the UK still has 20% of the world's lowland heath.

So much of the habitat locally has been lost over a few generations, much of it to development and intensively managed farmland. The objective of the Sandscapes project is to reverse this decline and return areas of heathland back into the landscape. After restoration work at Kinver Edge resulted in increased numbers of various invertebrates including butterflies, the National Trust is applying similar principles on the Dudmaston Estate, less than ten miles away.

Kinver Edge, Staffordshire/Worcestershire

The area of heathland at Kinver Edge was restored back in 2014 and is becoming a hotspot for butterflies, bees and many invertebrates, thanks to its warm, dry soils. The open character of heathland provides an ideal habitat for sun-seeking butterflies such as the **Small Heath**, populations of which have grown since

the restoration work.

Ewan Chapman, Lead Ranger, said: 'Heathland is one of the UK's rarest habitats and many species that live here are endangered. Seeing the Small Heath butterfly re-emerge on Kinver Edge is a visual reminder of the reasons why we're saving this important habitat and the wildlife that calls it home. Restoring the landscape has encouraged the growth of larval food plants, which caterpillars feed on, as well as nectar sources for adult butterflies to feed on. This kind of habitat benefits all stages of a butterfly's life cycle.'

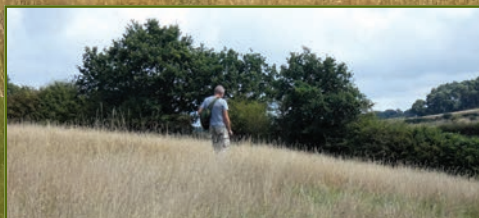
Dudmaston, South Shropshire

Following the success at Kinver, the tenant farmer at Mose Farm on the Dudmaston Estate near Bridgnorth is working with the Trust to turn an area of farmland into a patchwork of heathland, wood pasture and grassland to benefit nature and wildlife. The sandy soils provide an ideal habitat for lots of species, including ground-nesting birds such as Tree Pipit, Woodlark and Nightjar. Following the restoration work, experts hope others will return, including **Emperor Moth**, **Green Hairstreak** and Small Heath butterflies, and Pantaloon Bee.

Martyn Bebb, Tenant Farmer, said: 'For me it's about the partnership with the Trust and working together. The project is being funded through the



A view of the Sandscapes project area at Mose Farm
(James Lawrence)



Roger Littleover walks the new transect

The Branch's role

West Midlands Butterfly Conservation is supporting this ambitious scheme led by the National Trust to restore heathland on part of the Dudmaston Estate and, ultimately, to link the estate with Kinver Edge. We have already run two public events this summer to enable people to hear more about future plans and enjoy some of the butterflies and moths already found there. We are also undertaking baseline survey work on Mose Farm, where we have recently established a butterfly transect and hope to make a contribution to future heathland restoration work. This will build on the legacy of Adrian Miles, who lived on the estate for many years and contributed hugely to our knowledge of the butterflies and moths found there. Watch out for further news as the project develops.

Panel text and photograph by Mike Williams

Countryside Stewardship schemes but we are working with the Trust to deliver it. It's an ambitious, large-scale project. It wouldn't be possible for an individual to achieve all this on their own.

'Being a farmer is always about striking a balance. I'm responsible for making sure this land is working for everyone; for me, my family, for nature and wildlife. I have to make a living but equally, we're starting to see the impact intensive farming is having on our landscape and the wildlife that call it home. Change is always hard work but we must learn to adapt.

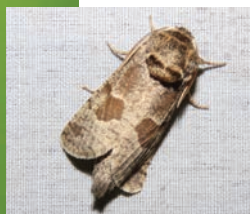
'The block of arable we're taking out is about 160 acres. It's quite marginal arable ground, and poorer quality. It's mixed in with permanent grassland and a block of woodland that's right in the middle of the project area. When we've finished, it should be a mixed mosaic of heathland, acidic grassland and wood pasture, which will benefit a host of wildlife. Elsewhere on the farm, we're retaining some arable land.'

James Lawrence, Project Manager for Sandscapes, said: 'Heathland habitats, once so common in this region, are now fragmented and isolated. The species that depend on them are under real threat of extinction, due to habitat loss, disturbance and climate change. Working with stakeholders, like Martyn, to deliver this vision is integral to the success of the project. Sharing concerns and passion for the protection of this landscape and all that it offers, is right at the heart of our work.'

Article by Alex Blakeman



Scarse Large Blue



Paracossulus thrips



Goat Moth



Calymma communimacula

From mountains to plains

In late July this year, a small group, which included some members of the West Midlands Branch, spent a week watching butterflies and moths in Hungary.

We were based in the north-east at an ecolodge called Farm Lator, hosted by Dutchman **Rob** and his Hungarian wife **Barbara** and located in a quiet valley on the edge of the Bukk National Park. The lodge is well situated between the Carpathian Mountains and the corn-, sunflower- and sorghum-growing country of the great Hungarian Plain, giving easy access to a variety of habitats.

Hungarian guide

We were aided and abetted by our knowledgeable Hungarian guide **Safi** and his colleague and driver **Soly**. Safi, who is an expert on finding and identifying Hungarian butterflies and moths, took us to some memorable sites. Traditional management has declined at many of these sites and other ways are being introduced to maintain the habitats. Wandering around the beautiful flowering, plan-rich meadows, Safi would regularly call out the names of the various fluttering species often from just their flight. He helped us to an amazing trip list of 80 species of butterflies. Among the highlights were **Scarse Swallowtail**, **Scarse Large Blue**, **Lesser Purple Emperor**, **Large Copper**, **Queen of Spain Fritillary** and **Geranium Argus**.

Many of the species were familiar to us but often not in sync with their UK flight season. The other challenge was the quantity and similarity of the many blue species we saw, often flying together at the same site. The old song 'I never felt more like singing the blues' came to mind.

Taking care with identification

Moth traps were run nightly at Farm Lator and inspected before breakfast. We enjoyed seeing several hundred species of moths during the week, including many day-flyers and some Clearwings attracted to pheromone lures. Again, many were familiar to us but we had to take care with identification because of similar European species, such as **Greater Buff-tip**. I was personally able to see many longed-for species that are very localised, extinct or rare migrants in the UK, such as **Burren Green**, **Spotted Sulphur**, **Silver Barred**, **Silvery Gem**, **Purple-bordered Gold** and **Lappet**.

One evening, Safi arranged for us to trap at a nearby site known to hold the rare *Paracossulus thrips* (a moth of the family Cossidae). The larvae of this species feed on Jerusalem Sage (*Phlomis tuberosa*), which was abundant at the site. We were seated on a warm night

by a busy moth sheet, with wine and nibbles, and I had a glimpse of what heaven might look like! The rare moth duly appeared in small numbers, with a **Goat moth** (*Cossus cossus*) for comparison. I had taken my actinic light trap, which attracted a **Spurge Hawk-moth**, **Sussex Emerald** and the stunning little moth *Calymma communimacula*. Hopefully the records produced will help to stop the proposed expansion of the adjacent lignite mine onto the site.

The trip bird list came to ninety species. One morning we visited a Bee-eater colony where at least a hundred of these beautiful birds were busy feeding young. European Rollers and Golden Orioles were



in Hungary

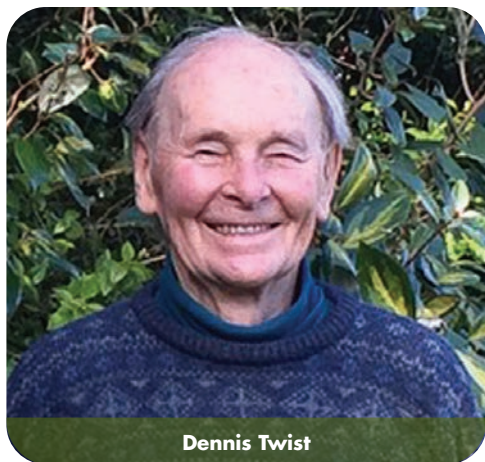


Scarce Swallowtail

highlights, plus White Storks rearing young on platforms provided in village streets. The rarer Black Stork and Little Bittern were seen on a visit to a fishpond area.

One wet day saw us looking for the extraordinary yellow-and-black Fire Salamander; we were not disappointed and had an excellent view of an individual. Colourful Long-horn beetles, a Wart-biter grasshopper and many rare plants added to the enjoyment – not to mention good company, food, beer, wine and Palinka (a Hungarian brandy). Thanks to Rob, Barbara, Safi and Soly, and to Mike Williams for organising the very enjoyable trip.

Article and photographs by **Mike Southall**



Dennis Twist

A Tribute to Dennis Twist

Dennis Twist, a butterfly enthusiast and a stalwart of the Clun and Bishop's Castle Branch of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, sadly died of heart failure at the beginning of August at the age of 92.

When I joined the Clun and Bishop's Castle SWT in about 2008, he had been established for many years on the Branch Committee, as Treasurer. It was only a few years later that I learnt of his passion for butterflies. There was a Butterfly Conservation and Forestry Commission campaign to clear the edge of rides on Bury Ditches, in south Shropshire, so that wild flowers, especially Bird's-foot trefoil, could establish themselves, making a suitable habitat for **Wood White** butterflies (*Leptidea sinapis*).

Dennis began a monitoring programme, to walk a transect through the edge of the woods, to monitor Wood Whites weekly from April to the end of August each year. He started the transects himself, marking out eight sections in which all butterflies (not just Wood

Whites) would be counted. He soon persuaded about thirteen people to join him in these surveys (including myself). He worked out the rota of surveyors, collected the results by email on Excel spreadsheets and sent the results to Butterfly Conservation.

Although Dennis was a keen walker, especially in the Clun Peramblers, he had to give that up in the last few years. When walking the three-mile, there-and-back transect for the butterfly survey became too much for him, he relied on his volunteers but still organised everything. He stopped marking the sections with red paint, after being accused of being an old vandal by someone from the Forestry Commission!

Dennis was not just interested in Wood Whites. He regularly did surveys for **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** at sites in the Clun Forest uplands. In 2022, during a 'Bioblitz' in the grounds of Clun Castle run by the Clun and Bishop's Castle SWT, a **Marbled White** butterfly was found and subsequently Dennis found twenty of them. He reported this in an article in the *Comma* last autumn.

Dennis will be very much missed by everyone who knew him and, of course, especially by his wife Margaret and their two sons and daughter.

Mike Tucker

Leo Smith recalls: Dennis was the organiser of the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Butterfly Group for several years. He carried out his own surveys, particularly of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Wood White, helped with rush management site work to enhance the habitat of the former species, collected records from other surveyors, and wrote the Butterfly Group section of the UCCWG Annual Report. His contribution was much appreciated, and his loss will be keenly felt by the Wildlife Group.

Lucy Morton recalls: I always found Dennis to be so interested in all the wildlife that I'd tell him about on Bury Ditches, over and above the butterflies, and we always exchanged nice emails! I only met him once, when we first came to Clun in 2016, but it was because of him that I wanted to continue walking the transect when we moved away to Leintwardine and then Orleton. He will be greatly missed.

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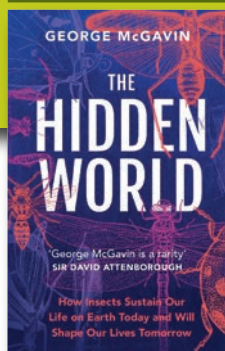
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The Hidden World

How Insects Sustain Our Life on Earth Today and Will Shape Our Lives Tomorrow

• ISBN: 9781802794939 • Author: George McGavin • Publisher: Welbeck Publishing Group • Publication date: February 2023 • Cost: £14.99 • Format: Hardback, 288 pages

This is the latest release by well-known British entomologist and television presenter **George McGavin**. Some of you may be familiar with his name as he is a regular contributor to BBC 1's *The One Show*. He has also presented a whole host of other Natural History programmes. George's biggest passion is insects, having spent years studying them and teaching about them at Oxford University. In *The Hidden World*, George uses his vast knowledge of all things entomological to take us on a journey to look at little-known truths about this most enduring and successful group of species within the animal world, and to show us the effect insects have on Planet Earth.

Starting at the beginning (quite literally), the book's early chapters highlight how life began on earth and just why insects developed to be so numerous and successful. George then goes on to explore the amazing traits that insects have evolved to possess, such as dragonflies that can fly across whole oceans without resting or male crickets that assert their dominance over each other through an aggressive song. The book takes us through a range of topics including defence, reproduction, pollination and the relationship insects have to humans.

Interspersed with discussing insects and their role in the world, George also recounts his own personal

experiences of insects from his childhood and beyond. It gives a sense of just how passionate and fascinated by this species group he is. This is something I can wholly relate to, as I share a fascination for all things invertebrate.©

Extract: exceptional acoustic engineers

Mole crickets construct elaborate burrows to make their songs more audible. The part of the burrow where they sit and sing is a chamber tuned to resonate at the carrier frequency of their song (about 3.4kHz) and, from there, two exponentially flared horns amplify and carry the song up to the surface. The singing burrow is incredibly effective and, at 1 metre above the ground, the peak sound level can reach 92 decibels – enough to carry nearly a mile in quiet conditions. No wonder, then, that early manufacturers of loudspeakers copied the exact shape of the crickets' acoustic horns.

The book is not confined to George's thoughts on the insect world; he is joined by a number of guests from the world of Natural History, Biology and Entomology, who feature in interview chapters to discuss their thoughts on insects. These guests include legendary broadcaster and zoologist **Sir David Attenborough**, former president of the Royal Entomological Society and lead on the UK Ladybird Survey **Professor Helen Roy** and Senior Curator at the Natural History Museum in London **Dr Erica McAlister**.

To summarise, I would say that *The Hidden World* is well worth a read even if you have just a passing interest in insects. The book will help you understand just how adaptable and incredible these fascinating creatures are and also highlight their possible roles in humanity's future.

Review by **Jason Kernohan**

Find out more

The Insecta class contains 28 orders, one of which is the *Lepidoptera* with around 160,000 known species in 120 families: royensoc.co.uk/understanding-insects/classification-of-insects

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