

the **Comm**

No.120 Winter 2024/2025

Regional Magazine of West Midlands
Butterfly Conservation



Reasons to be cheerful

Hopes for the Cliffe transect

Walking with butterflies

How to see more species in 2025

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



Cover story

Mother Shipton moth by **Samantha Batty** now seen at Severn Valley Country Park (see pages 18–20)

Contributions

Please send articles and images to the Editor. Photographs should be as high-resolution as possible and sent as separate graphic files.

Our copy deadlines are
 Spring - 28 February
 Autumn - 31 August
 Winter - 23 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 herein 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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Chairman's Address



Michael Southall

Responding to the Butterfly Emergency

After Butterfly Conservation declared a Butterfly Emergency in response to the lowest numbers in 14 years from the Big Butterfly Count (almost a 50% reduction on 2023), 42,000 people signed a prepared statement that included a demand to stop the use of neonicotinoid pesticides in the UK. The harmful chemical is still used as a seed treatment for sugar beet, although with tight controls in place. The signatures were later given to DEFRA, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Moth news

It has already been noted that records for butterflies, along with many other flying insects, were well down on average numbers over the summer. Early reports are that moths did not do well either, with micro moths particularly badly affected.

Fortunately, our summer moth morning events were well attended by both people and moths. Some of these events were run jointly at National Trust properties, something we plan to repeat next year. I was delighted when we were able to show five types of **Hawk-moths**, plus many other species, to attendees at Croome, Worcestershire, in the middle of June.

Later in the year, several new moth species were recorded in the region for the first time, including **Jersey Mocha** (*Cyclophora ruficiliaria*) and **Many-lined** (*Costaconvexa polygrammata*). Whether this is a response to climate change is impossible to say for sure, but it could well be an early indication of a warming climate. Late autumn saw an influx of migrant moths and former migrants, such as **Radford's Flame Shoulder** (*Ochropleura leucogaster*), in unprecedented numbers.

One would have hoped that accidental introductions of alien species were a thing of the past, but sadly not. A micro moth called **Marbled Fern**



Elephant Hawk-moth (Heath McDonald)

(*Musotima nitidalis*) reached my Worcestershire garden moth trap in August, a first for both county and region. This pretty little moth, which is thought to have been imported on tree ferns from New Zealand or Australia, has been spreading rapidly northwards across the country since its first appearance in Dorset in 2009. The larvae are said to

New Social Media Account

The Branch now has an account on Bluesky, a new social media platform that aims to offer a kinder, gentler alternative to existing platforms. We'll retain our X account for now and see how things work out.

bsky.app/profile/bc-westmids.bsky.social
Butterfly Conservation West Midlands
[@bc-westmids.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/bc-westmids)



Humming-bird Hawk-moth (Leigh Prevost)

feed on bracken, as well as other ferns, and we shall have to wait and see what impact this species may have in the future.

Practical conservation work

Winter work parties are well under way, with good progress being made. Dates and venues are in the Event Calendar in the centre of this magazine – everyone is welcome, so please consider lending a hand.

I attended my recent chainsaw refresher course without significant problems, although a rash felling cut saw the first tree I cut down hung up on another tree, proving once again that you're never too old to learn! Luckily, as dealing with hung-up trees was part of the course, I sort of got away with it.

If you wish to get involved, please let us know.

Next summer's events

The Branch Committee is already planning events, including butterfly walks and moth mornings, for the summer. If you wish to get involved, please let us know. This could be simply by attending an event, or by helping to organise one or even offering your garden as a venue.

With Season's Greetings and my Best Wishes for the New Year.

Michael Southall Branch Chair

STOP PRESS:

Kentish Glory Research Opportunity

**Deadline:
Wednesday
8 January 2025**

PhD student to help with work on Kentish Glory moth genetics – an exciting chance for the right person to get involved with restoring this species to the Wyre Forest (a collaboration between Twycross Zoo, the University of Leicester, the Natural History Museum, Wyre Forest – Forestry England, Natural England and Butterfly Conservation).

Find out more at:
centa.ac.uk/studentship/2025-15-restoring-the-glory-the-conservation-genomics-of-the-kentish-glory-moth



Night search for larvae
at this site in Shropshire
(Sarah Finney)

Grayling at Bog Mine

Following recording of 48 **Grayling** egg-laying sites at the Bog Mine in 2023, searches for larvae were carried out in spring 2024. Daylight searches in March found 18 larvae, 1–1.5cm, probably 3rd and 4th stages. Night searches in April and May found 108 larvae, 1.5–3cm, 4th and 5th

stages. Locations were marked and habitat data was recorded later.

Three searches stood out:

- A night of temperatures around zero, when six of us searched until 11pm and found only two larvae – sensible frost-averse larvae!
- A night when ten larvae were found in very quick succession, quite close together, in an area of dense, high sward.
- A night when a handful of larvae were found in tallish clumps of vegetation in damp soggy patches.

The second and third were both habitats where it was very unlikely that eggs had been laid and this encouraged us to search more ‘unlikely’ areas. Graphs 1–4 illustrate the difference in sward height and percentage of bare ground in the 1x1m area around each egg and larva found, based on data collected in 2023 and

spring 2024. Unlike its mother, a mature larva is not so fussed about bare ground!

In July and August, we recorded data from 106 new egg sites, focussing on the mature larvae’s needs. We hadn’t recorded the height of grass on which larvae were found during earlier searches but observed that mature larvae were usually on stems taller than about 8cm. We now recorded distances from new egg sites to the nearest clumps of fine grass above two height thresholds, 8cm and 12cm. It seems a given that the less larvae have to travel, the less they are exposed and the less energy they use. The data has still to be analysed fully but Graphs 5 and 6 show distances from the first 87 eggs to fine grass clumps taller than 8cm and 12cm, respectively. From the graphs, 75% of eggs were laid within 1.5m of grass taller than 8cm, and 92% within 3m. Similarly,



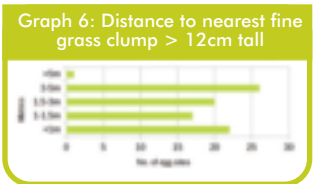
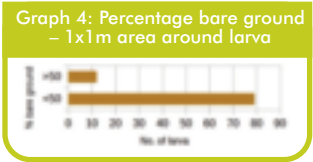
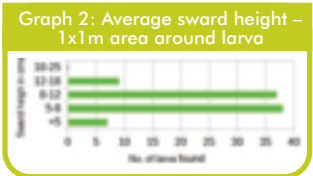
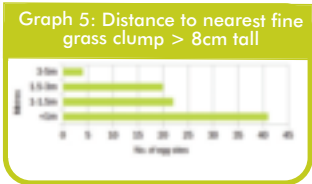
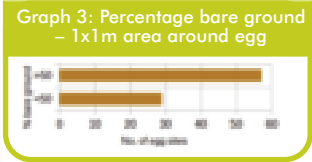
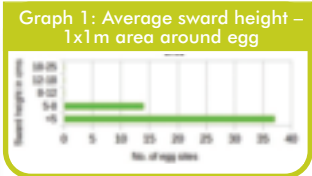
Grayling egg (David Williams,
Joy of Wildlife Group)



Grayling larva – late-stage
(Sarah Finney)

75% of eggs were laid within 3m of grass taller than 12cm, and 97% within 5m.

Nectaring behaviour was also looked for during the flight season. Not much nectaring was seen on site before the heather bloomed later on. A little was seen on bramble and privet, and the butterflies may have used thistles in



a neighbouring field. Once the heather bloomed, however, females were easily found in numbers and often observed laying eggs in the vicinity. A nectar source close to suitable egg-laying habitat is an obvious benefit, and lack of close

early-season nectar could well be a limiting factor for Grayling.

A big Thank You to everyone who helped in the searches, particularly in the cold and dark!

Article and graphs by **Lucy Lewis**



Mapping sites: orange – eggs (2023), red – eggs (2024), yellow – larvae (2024)



My most exciting find: an Essex Skipper one evening

Local transect reasons to be cheerful

In 2024 our local patch in North Shropshire was as poor for butterflies as elsewhere in the country but, amid the bad news, I found plenty that encouraged me and I look forward to 2025 with hope and optimism.

The team and the results

We have a team of volunteers on the rota for the 26 weeks of the survey. We started in April 2021 but there was an earlier survey in 1995 on a slightly different route and only for 20 weeks.

The table shows the transect data: a total of 23 possible species, and the counts for each year of the survey. Let's start with the areas for concern:

- The Whites show the biggest downturn. **Large White** and **Small White** numbers were each down by around 120 individuals in 2024 compared with 2023. **Green-veined White** also showed a significant decline. The glimmer of hope was that numbers increased in later generations.
- Nationally, our Blues suffered and this was also true on the Cliffe. **Common Blues** are not common for us because the habitat isn't right but you can see a big drop in the number of **Holly Blues**.
- **Small Tortoiseshell** numbers were low, as were **Comma** and **Small Copper** (a real disappointment given the amount of sheep's sorrel on our site).

The blank spaces in the table are interesting:

- **Large Skipper** is an anomaly. Our heathland is dry so their absence is not surprising.
- In theory, **Painted Lady** can be seen 'just about anywhere' but, apart from 2022, that doesn't seem to include the Cliffe.
- **Green Hairstreak** and **Small Heath** were recorded in 1995 and then nothing until this year... Reasons to be cheerful:
- Green Hairstreak is one of my favourite butterflies and a notable success on the Cliffe. Following conservation work and a concerted effort to find them on non-survey days, we now see them on different parts of the site.
- My wife and granddaughter saw a **Small Heath** one day in summer but not during a survey. Might we have a small population?
- A few species maintained or even improved their numbers: **Small Skipper**, **Brimstone**, **Orange-tip**, **Peacock**, **Meadow Brown**, **Gatekeeper**, **Ringlet** and **Speckled Wood** (several are grass feeders and

grasses were happy with the wet weather).

- **Purple Hairstreak** numbers are trending upwards, even though we had a small dip in 2024.
- The totals show peaks and troughs in alternate years – could 2025 be another peak?
- Weekly surveys are inherently good – we all know watching butterflies is good for us but it's also a brilliant way to tell people what we're doing and introduce them to the butterflies around them.
- Our team benefits as well – we improve our identification skills and we all see how our butterflies fare each month and year.
- The survey doesn't just tell us what butterflies are on our local patch but it also informs conservation management. Each autumn/winter, we've been managing scrub to create different heights – our work on bilberry may well have contributed to the Green Hairstreak successes. Recently we have opened up some of the habitat, created bare ground in places and exposed some of the old boundary wall in a sunny area to provide more sites for basking butterflies.

Looking forward

I'm sure we're all hoping for a better year for butterflies. Personally, I can't wait to see the first patrolling Orangetip and the early wandering of male Brimstones. Hopefully our Hairstreaks will continue to thrive and our conservation efforts will be appreciated by **Wall**, **Speckled Wood** and **Small Copper**.

Perhaps 2025 will be the year that we record **Essex Skipper** and **Small Heath** on our Cliffe transect for the first time? 2024 was a bad year but, on our small patch in Shropshire, I can't help but be optimistic about what 2025 will bring.

Article and photographs by **David Shearan**

Weekly records for Large White



Transect Data

	Total				
	1995	2021	2022	2023	2024
Small Skipper	3	5	8	6	8
Large Skipper	7				
Large White	21	201	156	212	88
Small White	30	175	87	161	42
Green-veined White	28	60	17	38	18
Brimstone		4	1	3	8
Orangetip	6	11	5	10	21
Small Tortoiseshell	10	8	6	12	3
Peacock	5	6	1	1	5
Painted Lady			2		
Comma	1	5	3	11	2
Red Admiral	7	25	17	54	28
Common Blue		1	2	3	
Holly Blue	1	10	4	64	3
Green Hairstreak	3				15
Purple Hairstreak	1	1	4	20	14
Small Copper	9	13	5	21	2
Meadow Brown	33	48	34	66	51
Gatekeeper	66	84	59	78	83
Small Heath	1				
Ringlet	1	10	24	6	26
Wall	3		1	1	1
Speckled Wood	45	87	55	83	105
TOTALS	281	754	491	850	523
Number of species	20	18	20	19	19

The Cliffe

Our transect is on the Cliffe, a lowland heath on a sandstone ridge. There are good stands of heather, grassy areas, scrub and a surfeit of bracken. Nectar sources are limited but include heather, gorse, bramble, honeysuckle and bilberry. The transect sections are on open heath, in wooded areas and along tree-lined paths which border the site.



Cannock Chase currently supports the largest recorded population of **Welsh Clearwing** in Britain and the only one in the West Midlands region. However, in the wider Cannock Chase landscape, there is a severe lack of suitable young birch to replace ageing trees that the moth favours, leading to concerns about its future conservation status.



Welsh Clearwings at pheromone lure

Best Practice on Cannock Chase

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust recently leased 25 hectares of land on Cannock Chase from Forestry England. The site was cleared of commercial conifer plantations some time ago to form a vital corridor of heathland between three separate parts of the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation. Heathland vegetation returned remarkably well, but in parts this is now in danger of being shaded out again by invading birch scrub.

Rather ironic that there is a general shortage of regenerating birch in the wider landscape while here it is rather too abundant. Birch management will clearly be required but the Trust, recognising its wildlife and landscape value, aims to retain some of the birch, opening an opportunity to create new Welsh Clearwing habitat.

Key to success will be retention of tree groups in strategic locations.

Ecological requirements

With increasing knowledge of the moth's ecological requirements, it has become possible to identify groups of young trees – and even individual trees within groups – that are likely to be particularly valuable to the moth (see *Comma* 116, pages 15–17). By considering the tree's species, and its developing bark structure, spacing and position within the landscape, we can now identify potential Welsh Clearwing host trees decades before they are occupied. This allows for more precisely targeted conservation efforts, maximising outcomes while minimising conflicts with other land uses.

This is the approach that the Trust has adopted. Key to success will be retention of tree groups in strategic locations, this being particularly important as Welsh



Exit holes in breeding tree

Find out more

More information on features that make a tree suitable for the moth can be found in Butterfly Conservation West Midlands' newly published Welsh Clearwing factsheet, available from stevenbarnes942@btinternet.com.

The factsheet is likely to be of value to anyone wanting to catch up on the latest study findings and may be particularly valuable for land managers.



Ten-year-old birch with well-developed fissures

Clearwing on Cannock Chase do not generally favour isolated trees. Emphasis is placed upon retention of young trees developing bark fissures, this being a key feature of host trees. Retained groups are being thinned to allow for good tree development, a process that helps to encourage retention of heathland plants and further reduces potential conflicts with other management objectives.

It is not just potential host trees that are being considered. Preliminary results from ongoing studies within the wider landscape suggest that open treeless landscapes may be limiting dispersal. Therefore, on this site, potential corridors and stepping stones are also being considered.

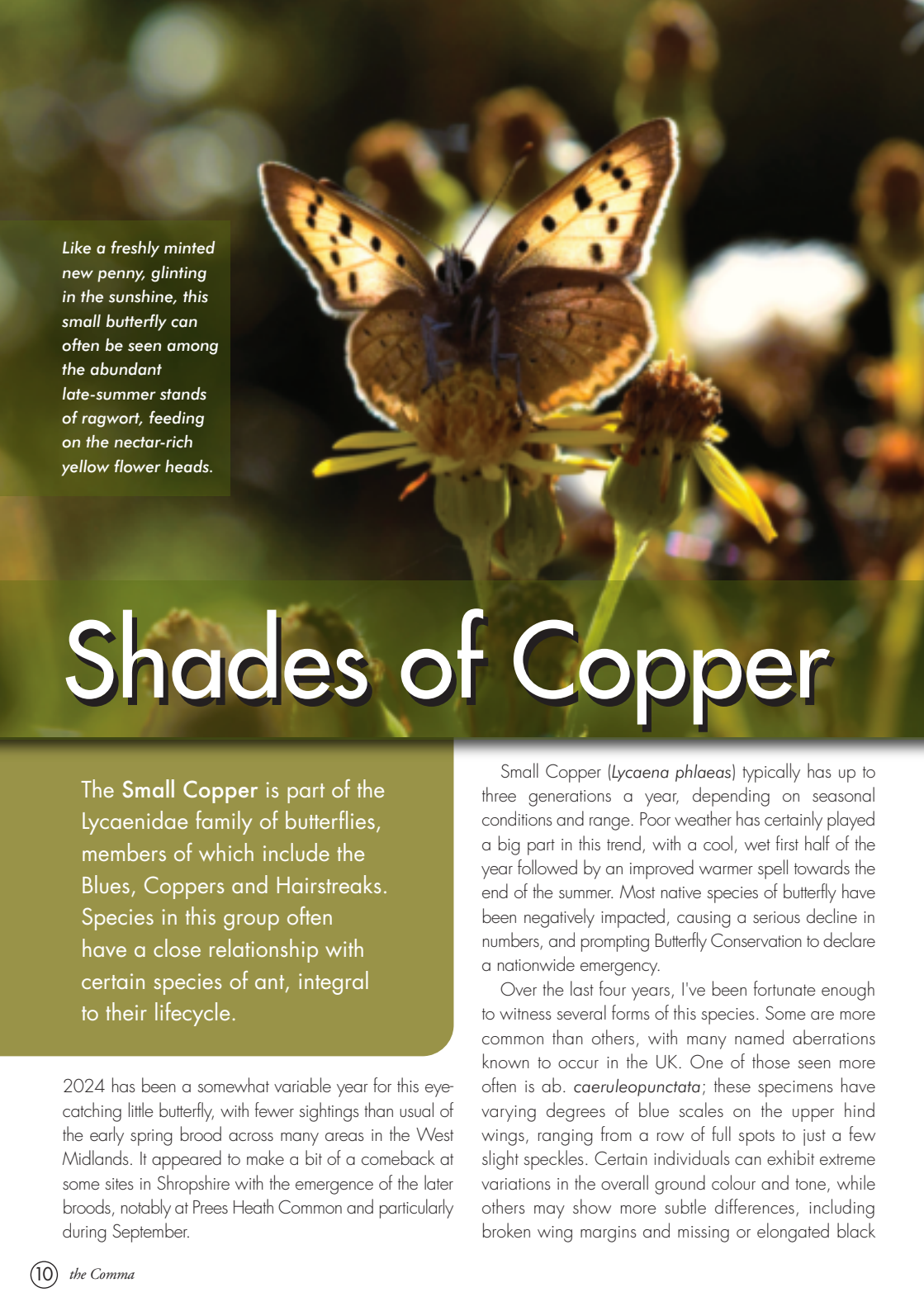
To leave nothing to chance, suitable trees are being clearly marked before starting management operations.

This excellent example of best practice by the Trust demonstrates that there need not be conflict between heathland management and Welsh Clearwing conservation. Adoption of targeted management of this type in the wider landscape could prove key to maintaining the long-term future of Britain's largest recorded Welsh Clearwing population.



Heathland habitat on Cannock Chase

Article and photographs by **Steven Barnes**



Like a freshly minted new penny, glinting in the sunshine, this small butterfly can often be seen among the abundant late-summer stands of ragwort, feeding on the nectar-rich yellow flower heads.

Shades of Copper

The Small Copper is part of the Lycaenidae family of butterflies, members of which include the Blues, Coppers and Hairstreaks. Species in this group often have a close relationship with certain species of ant, integral to their lifecycle.

2024 has been a somewhat variable year for this eye-catching little butterfly, with fewer sightings than usual of the early spring brood across many areas in the West Midlands. It appeared to make a bit of a comeback at some sites in Shropshire with the emergence of the later broods, notably at Prees Heath Common and particularly during September.

Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) typically has up to three generations a year, depending on seasonal conditions and range. Poor weather has certainly played a big part in this trend, with a cool, wet first half of the year followed by an improved warmer spell towards the end of the summer. Most native species of butterfly have been negatively impacted, causing a serious decline in numbers, and prompting Butterfly Conservation to declare a nationwide emergency.

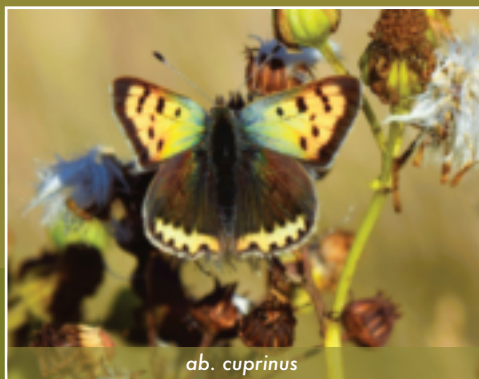
Over the last four years, I've been fortunate enough to witness several forms of this species. Some are more common than others, with many named aberrations known to occur in the UK. One of those seen more often is *ab. caeruleopunctata*; these specimens have varying degrees of blue scales on the upper hind wings, ranging from a row of full spots to just a few slight speckles. Certain individuals can exhibit extreme variations in the overall ground colour and tone, while others may show more subtle differences, including broken wing margins and missing or elongated black



ab. caeruleopunctata



ab. radiata



ab. cuprinus



ab. radiata + ab. caeruleopunctata



ab. schmidtii

markings – a combination of these can even be found in some instances. I have included photographs taken from various reserves across my home county of Shropshire to illustrate a few of these examples.

I now wait patiently, hopeful that next spring will be gilded with the bright sheen of copper...

Article and photographs by **Steven Croft**

References

www.ukbutterflies.co.uk www.britishbutterflyaberrations.co.uk





Brown Hairstreak (Kim Wedgbury)

Butterfly of the Year

Where have all the butterflies gone?

I think you'll agree that 2024 was not a great year for butterflies and moths. A wet and sunless Spring depressed numbers of most insects, not just butterflies, and led to media speculation about what was happening. We all know butterflies are seriously affected by habitat destruction but the effects of changing weather patterns as a result of climate change are less well understood. This was the second consecutive year with adverse Spring weather and low numbers in 2024 are, in part, a reflection of poor breeding success in 2023.

As is increasingly the case, **Red Admiral** was the first butterfly seen by many observers, with a few spotted in late January. Apart from odd individuals, hibernators such as **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Peacock**, **Comma** and **Brimstone** were not seen until mid-March and numbers were disappointing. Numbers of **Holly Blue**, **Green-veined White** and **Orange-tip**, which all did reasonably well in 2023, were down (especially Holly Blue). The

same could be said for other Spring species such as **Dingy** and **Grizzled Skippers** and **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**. Emergence of the latter in the Wyre Forest is eagerly anticipated and we're used to seeing the first individuals before the end of April. For the last two years, however, they have not been recorded until the first week in May. Observers have remarked on a shortage of favoured nectar sources, especially bugle, and, if the decline continues, we may need to consider how to increase the amount of this key dietary element. **Green Hairstreak** emerged around the end of March at Cannock Chase and was seen in its usual numbers; it did less well at some Worcestershire sites. Later in the year, the Malverns produced its customary late sightings – one on 6 August and another towards the end of the month.

The expansion of **Wood White** reported last year continued, with a first sighting at Bishops Wood near Stourport-on-Severn in Worcestershire, but numbers at



Small Copper (Malcolm Lewis)

most established sites were down and the species seems to have been lost from the Wyre Forest despite extensive conservation efforts over the years. Second-brood numbers were also low, seemingly reverting to a partial second generation. Still, the adults present must have taken advantage of good weather in late July – our annual search at Monkwood in early August found record numbers of eggs, well distributed across the wood.

Notable by their absence in Spring were **Common Blue**, **Small Copper** and **Brown Argus** (very few of the latter were reported, taking us back to a time when this species was wholly or partially single-brooded in our region).

Summer doldrums

Numbers picked up from June in 2023 but sadly, with some exceptions, did not in 2024. Emergence dates were generally 4–5 days later and hoped-for improvements in abundance failed to materialise. Some Fritillaries did notably badly: **Small Pearl-bordered**, **Dark Green** and **Silver-washed** (usually our commonest). Another woodland specialist, **White Admiral**, also declined (although present at most of its known locations, including our Worcestershire reserves).

The same was true of grassland species such as **Meadow Brown**, **Ringlet**, **Marbled White**, **Gatekeeper** and **Skippers** (**Small**, **Essex** and **Large**).

The Awards

It was difficult to pick a Butterfly of the Year in such a poor season. Several people suggested **Small Copper** and **Speckled Wood** but only based on late recoveries after poor starts. A case could also be made for **Brimstone**. However, the award goes to **Brown Hairstreak**: a record count at Grafton Wood, where another observer also saw it on every one of six visits; several sightings at our Trench Wood reserve; and, most compellingly, eggs discovered where they have not been recorded before. Work by our regular egg-hunters shows this species is expanding its range in all directions – nearly 300 1 km-squares now recorded in east Worcestershire and west Warwickshire, including new finds around Worcester and Pershore plus new squares in the Heart of England Forest east of Redditch.

Similarly, finding a species that had an improved season in 2024 was a challenge. Nominations included **Dingy Skipper**, **Peacock** and **Marbled White**, which did well at some sites, but the award goes to **Small Copper** for its strong Autumn showing.

Nominations for the **Wooden Spoon** included **Common Blue**, **Silver-washed Fritillary** and **Small Tortoiseshell**. Fritillaries did badly overall: it was disappointing to find so few **Silver-washed**, particularly in the Wyre, and an apparent absence of **Dark Green**, which has done reasonably well there in recent years. The choice boiled down to **Common Blue** or **Small Tortoiseshell**, with alarmingly low numbers of both reported, and the award goes to **Small Tortoiseshell** for the second successive year.

Butterfly of the Year

Brown Hairstreak

Other nominees: **Brimstone**, **Small Copper**, **Small White**, **Speckled Wood**

Most Improved Performance

Small Copper – see pages 22–23

Dingy Skipper, **Essex Skipper**, **Large Skipper**, **Marbled White**, **Peacock**, **Speckled Wood**

Wooden Spoon for Worst Performance

Small Tortoiseshell

Other nominees: **Common Blue**, **Small Copper** and both **Silver-washed** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

Grayling numbers held up fairly well at The Bog on the Stiperstones (the only remaining site with a decent population), enabling our Grayling Action Group to continue research into its lifecycle and habitat requirements (see pages 4–5). **Silver-studded Blue**, which has shown a significant increase in numbers at our Prees Heath reserve in recent years, fell back for the first time. **Large Heath** was elusive as usual, so visitors to Fenn's and Whixall Mosses in Shropshire had to be patient to get photographs.

As **Purple Emperor** is difficult to record using conventional methods, numbers are hard to judge but seemed down at established sites. Even so, new sites in the east of our region are still being colonised.

Hibernators such as Small Tortoiseshell were not seen until mid-March and numbers were disappointing



Small Tortoiseshell (Melvyn Lambert)

Butterfly Emergency

The national picture was well summarised in the Autumn issue of *Butterfly* magazine, using data from the Big Butterfly Count: 50% fewer butterflies per count than in 2023, 81% species showing declines since 2023 and an average of just seven species per 15-minute count – the lowest in the Count's 14-year history. We've warned before of the dangers of reading too much into single-year comparisons but something appears to be seriously amiss. It was the worst count ever for many species and 9,000 counts submitted saw no butterflies whatsoever. Our own evidence from the 100+ butterfly transects walked every week in our region, plus casual recording, shows a similar picture.

Butterfly Conservation declared a Butterfly Emergency and urged its members and supporters to sign an open letter to Government calling for a ban on neonicotinoid pesticides; this prompted a very good response, with over 42,000 people signing. Clearly, a complete ban on neonicotinoids with no exceptions would be a step forward. However, the situation is far more complicated, with habitat destruction and climate breakdown being major factors behind butterfly declines.

Signs of an Autumn recovery

The season's first **Brown Hairstreak** was not seen until 31 July, 12 days later than in 2024 (which was our earliest ever record). As usual, most sightings were at our Grafton Wood reserve but reports also came from elsewhere in the Forest of Feckenham and the Redditch area (including a garden record as late as 13 September). The peak count was around the August Bank Holiday, with 14 seen on one day at Grafton Wood – impressive for a hard-to-find species. Decent numbers persisted into September and some showed up at early work parties, a reward for our hard-working volunteers.

Migrants generally had another poor year, with only one **Clouded Yellow** reported near Malvern in September. A few **Painted Ladies** were seen in various locations and Red Admirals were around, particularly in gardens with flowering ivy.

Brown Argus was reported, with a late final record on 23 September. Both **Large** and **Small White** made belated appearances in fair numbers. The biggest surprise, given how poorly it fared in the Spring, were good numbers of **Small Copper** at several sites, with records through to mid-October (presumably a delayed second or possibly a third generation). **Speckled Wood**, not particularly common earlier in the year, had a late flourish with records well into November.

The late-season improvements in Brown Argus and Small Copper are difficult to reconcile with their low Spring numbers, leading to speculation that some species may be able to 'skip a generation', delaying emergence until conditions are better. Given current changes to our climate, this would be a useful ability for multi-brooded species – more research might yield surprising answers.

Article by Mike Williams

Oswestry and Borders Butterfly Group – opportunities and events

Despite a huge amount of scrub that needs ‘bashing’, we have yet to organise winter work parties. If we could find an organiser, we could provide volunteers to help and lots of things to do. It would be useful to work at Llanymynech Rocks Wildlife Trust reserves, which are seriously neglected (see *Comma* 119). There's a grazing animals project in the Oswestry Hills and beyond, which has its home farm at Llanymynech Golf Club and takes an ancient breed of Welsh cattle to graze various wildlife sites in the area. They will at some point be looking for more sites to graze. Volunteers with experience of cattle and fencing are needed, along with ‘lookers’ – people to check on the animals regularly.

Butterfly watching

Oswestry and Borders Butterfly Group, which covers North Shropshire and North Powys, arranges short-notice trips by email to various sites in the region to



White-letter Hairstreak (Bob Eade)



Marsh Fritillary (Roger Littleover)

see butterflies. Despite the appalling summer weather in 2024, we saw **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** at various sites, **Wood White** at Bury Ditches, **Large Heath** at Whixhall Moss, **Silver-studded Blue** at Prees Heath and **White-letter Hairstreak** at Dolgoch Quarry. We will repeat some of these trips in 2025 and also hope to look for **Marsh Fritillary** and **Grayling**, further afield.

Moth recording

The group would also like to promote moth recording, especially on Llanymynech SSSI – as a unique limestone habitat, this has several rare moths. In Wales, the Montgomeryshire Moth Group (MMG) has had a grant from Powys County Council for equipment. Llanymynech Golf Club would provide a power source and, as it is in Wales, MMG could probably provide a moth trap. Apologies to anyone in England! They hope to do ‘Moth Mornings’ at the Golf Club on a regular basis.

Contact Simon Spencer if you are interested in any of these activities (cerisyi@btinternet.com, 07866 428875)

Don't forget to check Butterfly Conservation's websites and groups for other events:

- westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com/events-and-work-parties
- www.facebook.com/groups/westmidlandsbutterflyconservation
- www.facebook.com/groups/250738579030862 (Malvern Butterfly Group)
- butterfly-conservation.org/events

IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.

Birmingham and Black Country

Scarlet Tiger Work Parties, Stourbridge

Every 3rd Fri: 17 Jan, 21 Feb, 21 Mar

Contact Joy Stevens: 01384 372397,

joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk

Meeting points and tasks to be determined

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.

Worcestershire

Grafton Wood Work Parties

Every Wed to the end of March 2025, ride management and coppicing

10am at Grafton Flyford Church; tools provided; bring heavy gardening gloves, wear appropriate clothing. These are joint events with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and open to members and non-members alike. Details of ride-mowing work parties will be on the Grafton Wood Blog (graftonwood.wordpress.com) and the Branch website (westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com). Details of work parties at Throckmorton landfill site and Honeybourne railway line will also be on the Branch website.

Contact John Tilt: 01386 792458,

john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

Grafton Wood Brown Hairstreak Egg Searches

Sat: 1 Feb

10am at Grafton Flyford Church

Contact Simon Primrose: 07952 260153,

simonjprimrose@aol.com

Simon says: 'Our regular **Brown Hairstreak** egg searches on Thursdays will continue until the end of March. If you'd like to join us – for an hour, a day or the whole season – contact me for more information.'

Grafton Wood, Monkwood and Trench Wood

Work parties at these sites are held in partnership with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. New volunteers should register their interest here: www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer-enquiry



Survey of Small Copper colonies, The Cliffe, July 2024

Monkwood Work Parties

Sun: 2 Feb, 2 Mar

Thu: 16 Jan, 20 Feb, 20 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: 19 Jan, 16 Feb, 16 Mar

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

Contact Trevor Bucknall: 07704 138398,

trevor.bucknall@outlook.com

Trench Wood Work Parties

Sun: 26 Jan, 23 Feb, 23 Mar

10am in the reserve car park (SO930588)

Contact Matthew Bridger: 07801 568334,

bridge1805@btinternet.com

Wyre Forest Work Parties

Tue: 21 Jan, 18 Feb, 18 Mar

These are joint events with Natural England.

10am in Earnwood Copse car park (SO744784) on the B4194 Bewdley to Kinlet road and drive into the Forest. Refreshments are provided but bring a packed lunch if staying all day.

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,
robert.taylor@staffordshire.gov.uk



Volunteer Day for Welsh Clearwing
(see pages 8–9)

Shropshire

Prees Heath Common Work Parties

Wed: 15 Jan, 19 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

Grayling Action Group conservation days

Fri 10 Jan: Pavilion Tearoom, Carding Mill Valley
Fri 7 Feb: far National Trust car park, Batch Valley.
Contact Mike Williams: 07802 274552,
wmbutterflies@gmail.com

Stiperstones Work Parties

Fri: 21 Feb, 7 Mar. 10am at The Bog car park
(SO357978) **Contact Mike Williams: 07802 274552,**
wmbutterflies@gmail.com



Grayling Action Group

Herefordshire

Haugh Wood Work Parties

Sat: 1 Feb, 1 Mar

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)

Ewyas Harold Reserve and Common Work Parties

Sat: 18 Jan, 15 Feb, 15 Mar, 19 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)

Butterfly Walk, Kington, Herefordshire June 2024

A group of twelve Butterfly Conservation members met on the track leading to Hergest Ridge, just outside Kington in north-west Herefordshire. The target species were **Green Hairstreak** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**.

Both species were recorded but only in small numbers. Green Hairstreak was found on gorse, and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was seen near a damp flush* on the side of Hanter Hill (just over the border into Radnorshire). Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is now a rare insect and confined to one or two sites in West Herefordshire, in the Black Mountains where there are open stands of bracken and dog violet in rush pasture.

The group also recorded **Small Heath** in good numbers, plus **Painted Lady** and **Common Carpet**.

Article by **Bob Hall**

Photographs by **Dave Griffiths**

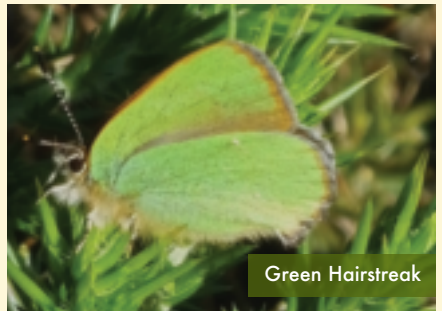
* A flush is an area where groundwater flows out onto the surface. Rather than bubbling up like a spring, the water spreads diffusely over the ground surface, held up by impermeable soils and rock.



Willow Warbler



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Green Hairstreak



Common Carpet moth



Yellowhammer

Pearl-bordered Fritillary – mating pair
seen on Walk 25



Walking with Butterflies

In 2019, its 40th anniversary year, West Midlands Butterfly Conservation printed a book called *Walking with Butterflies – A guide to 40 top sites in the West Midlands*. This year, I decided to buy it to increase my knowledge and sightings of butterflies.

Many knowledgeable people contributed to the book. It starts with a list of the 40 walks by county. Next are four short articles explaining how the book came about and giving general guidance about walking in the countryside. Then each walk is described on one page, which shows:

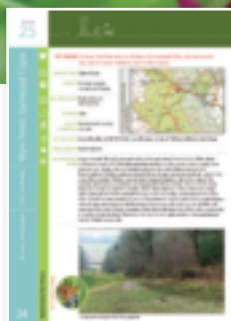
- Name, location and owner of the site
- Key species to be seen
- Map of the route
- Opening times
- Parking, with map reference
- Best time to visit
- Distance
- Access/conditions
- Getting there
- Refreshments
- Recommended route
- Photographs of the site and some key species

On the back cover is a numbered map, so you can see all the walks at a glance – a particularly well-designed feature. Readers will get many hours of enjoyment from this informative publication and I'd like to share some of my experiences here.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►

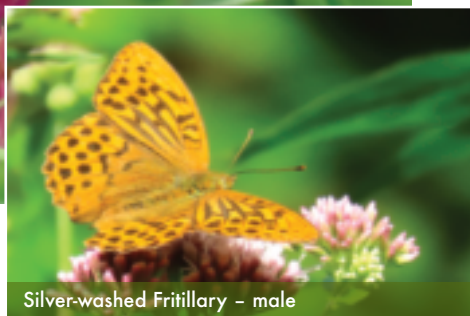


Woodland ride in the Wyre Forest



Walk 25: Wyre Forest, Earnwood Copse

Key Species: *Pearl-bordered*, *Small Pearl-bordered* and *Silver-washed Fritillary*



Silver-washed Fritillary – male

After parking at Earnwood Copse, I was greeted by a view of a beautiful path through the forest and I soon started to see butterflies. My first visit was in late May and, as I walked along the path, bluebells and bugles were among the flowers ready to feed the butterflies. I heard a symphony of spring birdsong. The sun was shining – a walk is always lovelier when the weather is good.

Continuing down the path, I came to a grassy ride; it's a hot-spot where butterflies stop and nectar. Further on, the path splits and I took the grassy upwards route towards the top of the section. This was where I turned around but the paths and forest continue and there is so much still to explore.

As I started my return route, down the grassy path, it was wonderful to see **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**, including a mating pair. As well as securing the next

generation, this enabled me to see the differences between the appearance of the male and female. I carried on and was able to watch several more of these butterflies near the ride that had lots of bugle for them to nectar on.

I returned to the forest twice in August to look for **Silver-washed Fritillaries**: I was successful on both occasions, although I'd expected them to be earlier. I saw mainly females on my earlier visit and mainly males on my later visit. This species loves woodland glades and rides: the hemp agrimony just past the ride was a hot-spot in mid-afternoon. With a wingspan of up to 7.6cm, it is a strong flyer and gets its name from the silver markings on its underwings. The male puts on a magical display during courtship, circling the female and releasing confetti formed of scented scales from the black veins on his forewings.

I saw many other butterflies during my visits including **Brimstones**, **Whites**, **Speckled Woods**, **Peacocks** and **Common Blues**, as well as a lovely selection of moths. I haven't yet seen **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** but look forward to that in 2025.

Grayling



Walk 23: Stiperstones

Key Species: *Grayling*, *Small Copper*, *Green Hairstreak*, *Common Blue*, *Small Heath*, *Painted Lady*, *Emperor Moth*, *Forester moth* and *Chimney Sweeper moth*

The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve is a rugged, almost deserted, and beautiful landscape, with amazing rock formations extending into the Shropshire Hills. It was towards the end of July that I visited; the weather started dull and damp but improved, with sunny spells later. After parking at the Bog Visitor Centre, it was time to 'walk with butterflies'.

Grayling is more likely to live in coastal areas, but there are a few inland sites. We are very privileged to have this species in our area. It is a large butterfly (the largest Brown) and its size makes it easier to spot in flight. The detailed patterns under its wings provide camouflage, making it very hard to see at rest. It angles its wings towards the sun and enjoys sunbathing with its wings closed in sunny spots (see

pages 24–26, *Comma* 111). The uppersides of the wings are a rich brown with flashes of orange, stunning when the second eye-spots are revealed.

The recommended hot-spot for seeing this butterfly is a rough area just beyond the car park, which has heather, brambles, grasses and lots of stones. As soon as I reached this location, a Grayling landed on the ground and became invisible. This was a very special moment, seeing a species for the first time, and my thanks to a fellow butterfly enthusiast for helping me to spot it.

A very enjoyable morning followed, watching the butterflies take off and land, nectar on the flowers and then sun themselves while resting. The little lane down the side of the Visitor Centre is another hot-spot and I saw several other species on bramble by a field gate there, including **Small Heath**, **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Meadow Brown**.

Article and photographs by **Deborah Hotchkiss**



Stiperstones National Nature Reserve



Order your copy here

Walking with Butterflies: our guide to 40 of the best sites to see butterflies and moths in the West Midlands is available for £7.45 (including postage). To order, send a cheque made out to Butterfly Conservation

(West Midlands Branch), with your name and address, to BCWM, Annesbrook, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB or, if you'd like to pay by bank transfer, contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com



Marbled White –
Melanargia galathea

Meadow Management at Severn Valley Country Park

It is well documented that, since the start of the Second World War, Britain has lost 97% of its traditionally managed hay meadows through Government legislation and subsequent changes to farming practice. Making good hay is weather-dependent and expensive when compared with conserving grass as silage to feed livestock in winter, so traditional hay-making has become unpopular. The question now is how to protect species that depend on hay meadows for their survival.

An opportunity

Just before the Millennium, two fields of grassland came up for sale next to the former colliery that is now Severn Valley Country Park in Shropshire. The Park is midway between Kidderminster and Bridgnorth, linking the villages of Highley and Alveley, with the River Severn and Severn Valley Railway running through it. The two fields were purchased by Shropshire Council and added to the Park; one was very old permanent grassland with yellow meadow anthills and the other, Spring Piece Meadow, had not been ploughed for some years.

In 1998, green hay collected from a species-rich wildflower meadow near Farlow was strewn on Spring Piece Meadow. The hay contained seeds of yellow rattle, which is the essential ingredient for the successful management of hay meadows – it is hemi-parasitic and

Grass Rivulet – *Perizoma albulata* (Samantha Batty)



**Burnet Companion –
*Euclidia glyphica***



**Six-belted Clearwing –
*Bembecia ichneumoniformis***

takes its nourishment from the grasses to which it attaches, suppressing their vigour and giving surrounding flowering plants more light and space. As yellow rattle is an annual, its seeds must be allowed to mature and shed so that new plants can grow each year. The resulting increase of meadow flowers such as common spotted-orchids, clovers, bird's-foot trefoil, lady's smock, lady's bedstraw and knapweed is the key to attracting invertebrates such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies. It is vital and its importance cannot be overstated!

which are attracted to pheromone lures by Invertebrate Recorders. In July 2024, as many 20 to 30 individual male Six-belted Clearwings were recorded at a single visit.

Another site near Bridgnorth, a former RAF training station known as Stanmore Country Park, is managed by the same Countryside Rangers. For several years, green hay collected from Severn Valley Country Park

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

Results

Within a few years we recorded our first **Marbled White** and their numbers have increased each year. They've been a very common sight at the Park since 2021 and, in stark contrast to the general picture, they had a very good year in 2024.

In May 2023, I recorded three day-flying moths: **Grass Rivulet**, **Burnet Companion** and **Mother Shipton** (see cover image). The larval food-plant of Grass Rivulet is yellow rattle – the larvae feed on its seeds. Bird's-foot trefoil and clovers are among the food-plants for the larvae of Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton.

Below the Visitor Centre there is a patch of scrub and grass known as Sarah's Slope where Marbled Whites have excelled. This is managed in a similar way to the hay meadows. Good amounts of bird's-foot trefoil have improved the fortunes of **Six-belted Clearwings**,



**Yellow rattle –
*Rhinanthus minor***

Places for Pollinators

- **Brinton Park**, Kidderminster
- **Burford House Garden Centre**, Tenbury Wells
- **Dorothy Clive Garden**, Market Drayton
- **Halfway House on the Wrekin**
- **Haycop nature reserve**, Broseley (in progress)
- **Little Lakes Leisure Park**, Bewdley
- **Moor Pool Heritage Trust**, Harborne
- **Severn Valley Country Park**, Alveley
- **Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre**, Craven Arms
- **Stanmore Country Park**, Bridgnorth
- **Wychavon District Council Civic Centre**, Pershore
- **Wylde Green Railway Station**, Sutton Coldfield



Brinton Park, Kidderminster

This is a long-running Branch campaign to encourage organisations to manage natural spaces for wildlife in general and pollinators in particular. Twelve sites have been designated and we're looking for more organisations to take part. To qualify, sites must be accessible to the general public (not private gardens) and be able to display an information board that we provide. The board explains why support for pollinators is so important and encourages people to take action in their own gardens or other green spaces – this is why we see public accessibility as key to the campaign. We're also asking new participants to register sites with Wild Spaces, Butterfly Conservation's national scheme (see page 21).

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19 ►

has been strewn on grassland at Stanmore and it, too, now attracts a wide range of invertebrates and pollinators.

Management practices

Traditionally managed hay meadows should not receive any artificial fertiliser. They are not cut or grazed by livestock between Christmas and the end of July. The herbage is left to flower and set seeds before it is cut to make hay at the end of July.

The hay-making process shakes out the seeds, and

the hay is removed. Sheep are allowed to graze on the 'aftermath', the name given to the new young grass after the old grass has been cut. Sheep are removed from the field around the end of December and should not return until the following August.

Old hay meadows are home to grasses like sweet vernal, crested dog's-tail and quaking grass, which are favoured by many species of butterflies, moths and other invertebrates

Article and photographs (except Grass Rivulet and Places for Pollinators) by Bill Watkins

Wild Spaces in the West Midlands

Wild Spaces is Butterfly Conservation's flagship engagement programme, launched in 2022 to offer people across the UK the opportunity to help butterflies and moths thrive. A Wild Space is any area – large or small, rural or urban – improved to help butterflies and moths to feed, breed and shelter. Examples are collections of native food and nectar plants on a patio, areas of private gardens left to grow wild, and community spaces transformed into wildflower meadows.

The focus of Wild Spaces on engagement recognises the value of these spaces to local people. Sadly, the UK is not only one of the most nature-deprived countries in Europe but its population is also the most disconnected from nature. To help address this widespread lack of access to nature and green space, organisations such as Butterfly Conservation can play an important role, helping connect people and communities to nature and attracting new advocates to our cause in the process. This amplifies our voice and reach, as diverse people from different backgrounds demonstrate they care about the decline in butterfly and moth species and demand that action be taken.

We aim to provide opportunities for under-represented groups to engage with Butterfly Conservation. This includes younger people (under-25s), people from ethnic minority or mixed ethnic minority backgrounds, and people living in areas of green space deprivation (more than 300m from the nearest green space). Currently, less than 1% of Butterfly Conservation supporters are under 25; there is much to do, and the opportunity is huge.

Achievements

Last year saw the launch of our dedicated website: wild-spaces.co.uk. To date, more than 4,200 Wild Spaces have been registered, including areas in private gardens, community spaces and school grounds. We continue to encourage people to register a space they are involved in creating or looking after, at home or in their community.

You can visit our dedicated website at wild-spaces.co.uk

In the West Midlands specifically, 25 Wild Spaces are registered in Birmingham, 11 in the Black Country, 20 in Herefordshire, 20 in Shropshire, 29 in Staffordshire and 31 in Worcestershire. As a large region with diverse people, communities and landscapes, it has significant future potential for Wild Spaces.

By creating opportunities to experience nature on the doorstep – particularly in urban areas – Wild Spaces can help develop a new generation of people from different walks of life who connect to and care about butterflies and moths, and feel a sense of empowerment to take action to help them. A strategic priority this year has been to develop flagship projects in urban areas to do exactly that. Our work creating Wild Spaces in community areas in Perth and Stirling in Scotland, transforming spaces in 47 primary schools across Bristol and Weston-super-Mare, and creating 1.6 hectares of new wildflower meadow in public parks across Leeds is engaging many hundreds of local people and helping to attract and support new volunteers to care for the Wild Spaces in the years ahead.

We continue to develop new Wild Spaces projects and partnerships and are keen to explore opportunities in Birmingham and the Black Country, particularly those involving people from diverse backgrounds who are new to Butterfly Conservation.

Article by **Steve Gray**, Director of Engagement & Volunteering

Image used under license from Shutterstock.com

Swallowtail drying
its wings after
emergence
(Abi Tann)



Across the Channel

Tales of the unexpected in Brittany

After my wife and I moved from Lincolnshire to Brittany in 2021, I quickly discovered that many species of moths and butterflies considered rare in the UK are relatively common here. Some are absent from the UK altogether. The first UK rarities to appear were two **Large Tortoiseshells**, which I released from my own sous-sol (basement) that spring! For a short time during July and August 2023, they were more numerous on my buddleia bushes than their smaller cousins.

My first **Swallowtail** appeared on 9 May 2021 – I later found their caterpillars feeding on both fennel and carrots. After we returned to the UK last autumn, my daughter helped herself to our remaining carrots and found a fully grown caterpillar. She enabled it to pupate and it emerged and flew off in June this year. How it did after that is uncertain, as it's been a bad year for Swallowtails along with most other butterflies.

A rare UK resident that has appeared twice in my garden is the **Brown Hairstreak**. Unlike in the UK, in Brittany they will feed on other plum species besides blackthorn. The first appeared in late August



Map butterfly – summer generation
(Phil Horton)



Map butterfly – spring generation
(Richard Rafe)



Large Tortoiseshell
(Phil Horton)



Queen of Spain
Fritillary
(Jean Ogston)

2022 and the second in early September 2023, even though by then many of the plum suckers had been cleared. I just managed to photograph the latter before it flew off. Rare UK migrants seen in our garden have included **Long-tailed Blue**, **Queen of Spain Fritillary** and **Clouded Yellow**.

One non-UK resident, widespread in Brittany, is the **Map** butterfly. It was not until 2024, however, that I managed to photograph a summer-brood example in my garden; this is quite different from the spring ones, as shown in the photographs. Earlier, in May 2021, my wife and I discovered another non-UK species, the **Sooty Copper**, on the edge of our village. I went back in May this year with my friend **Richard Rafe** but without success. We did see **Holly Blues** and a **Green Hairstreak** though.

During Richard's visit, I had the opportunity to return to a species-rich hay meadow in the extreme east of Brittany, near Nantes. I had discovered this meadow in 2022 with Brittany-based naturalist **Martyn Williams**. We then recorded **Black-veined White**, **Mazarine Blue** and a small 'heath-like' fritillary. The meadow was still there and we again saw Mazarine Blue and the small fritillary, now identified as **Meadow Fritillary**, along with **Wood White**. This visit was the butterfly highlight of my year in Brittany, as the rest of the summer was a wash-out!



Meadow Fritillary
(Richard Rafe)



Sooty Copper
(Susan Horton)

Article by **Phil Horton**

Note: The IDs of critical species were confirmed by Maël Garrin at Rennes University. My thanks to my wife Susan, daughter Abi Tann and friends Richard Rafe and Jean Ogston for use of their photographs.

Across the Atlantic

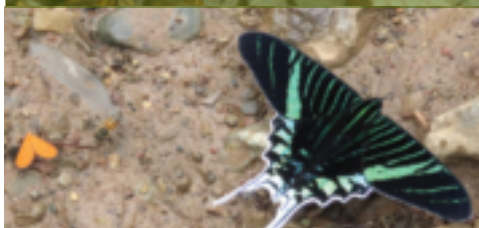
Satipo and beyond



Peru's Central Highlands



A butterfly congregation on a wet roadside



Little and Large – day-flying moths, an unknown species and the spectacular *Urania leilus*

In a short article like this, it's only possible to scratch the surface of a trip to Peru so, when Mike Williams asked if I would write a report, I decided to explore what it meant to me personally. I grew up enthralled by television series such as David Attenborough's *Zoo Quest* (1954–63) and Peter Scott's *Look* (1955–69). I then studied Marine Biology at UCNW Bangor before becoming a Biology Teacher.

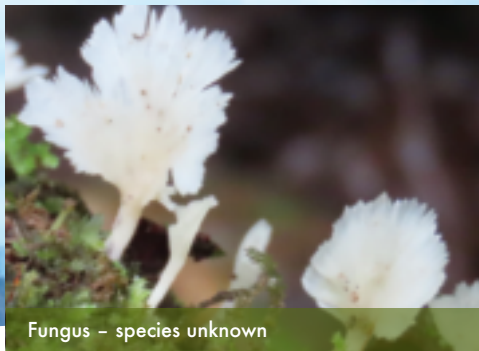
After many family holidays in Britain and later in Europe, I had the chance to travel with a group of like-minded people to Bolivia in 2018 to see butterflies and other life-forms, achieving a lifetime ambition of visiting South America. The desire to walk in the Amazonian Forest on the shores of the Amazon River was fulfilled in 2022, on another of Mike's extravaganzas – this time to Iquitos, Peru. Two items ticked off my bucket list, and



Morpho didius – big enough to cover my hands!



Anteros principalis – the tiny Principalis Jewelmark



Fungus – species unknown

both trips expertly guided by Miquel and friends. An invitation to return to Peru, this time the Central Highlands, was a golden opportunity.

So what is it like?

The land rises steeply and is bisected by fast-flowing rivers and streams. Roads are rough once off the main routes (which aren't always perfect) and are usually forested. Streams cross the roads under bridges or simply run across the surface; where they do the latter, you sometimes get 'congregations' of butterflies taking in water laced with essential mineral salts – the banks of fords are also great places for these congregations. At any time, twenty to thirty species may be flying around! It can be hard to know where to look when someone shouts, 'Come and see this one'.

You sometimes get 'congregations' of butterflies taking in water laced with essential mineral salts

Butterflies and moths

Obviously, the main aim of my visit was to see Lepidoptera: butterflies, day-flying moths (which often appear among the butterflies and are coloured just as brightly) and night-flying moths. You cannot but be amazed at the variations on a theme which is the world of South American species, from the giant Morpho butterflies flying around with their dazzlingly blue upperwings, big enough to cover my open hands, to the tiny Jewelmarks, not much more than one centimetre across. Name a colour of the rainbow, add black, white and brown, and you can guarantee that you'll see lots of butterflies in that colour combination during the day. Remember Peru has 4,000 species of butterflies – more than any other country in the world.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ►



Footbridges can be a challenge, swaying far above the rivers



Dryas iulia – Julia Heliconian

Other species

My interests are much wider than Lepidoptera; other insects, plants and fungi were photographed, just to marvel at their shapes, forms and colours.

Unusual plants abound, with a massive range of leaf shapes and flower forms, and fungi also show huge variations in their fruiting bodies.

Birds are everywhere, of course, but one goal of the 'birders' on the trip was to see Peru's national bird, called the 'Cock of the Rock', which they accomplished while visiting one of the National Parks near the town of Oxapampa. Hummingbirds were flying around the hotel gardens at this venue.

Insects were everywhere – crickets, grasshoppers, dragonflies, wasps, flies and bees – all in myriad colours, including metallic greens and blues.

Finally, a highlight was a group of night monkeys that spent the day hiding and sleeping in a bamboo thicket less than twenty feet from my hotel balcony.

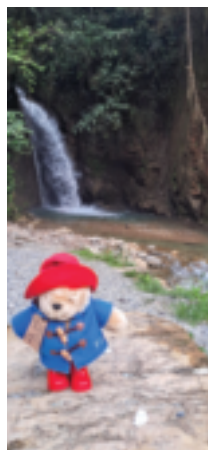
Highly recommended

If you have never been to South America and you are interested in Lepidoptera, I can recommend both Bolivia and Peru, but be prepared for a culture shock; poverty is not a thing of the past there, but friendliness abounds towards visitors. Footbridges over fast-flowing streams and rivers can be a challenge the first time you cross one, as it swings from side to side but safely! It has been a pleasure to go three times now and who knows if I will get there again – age is catching up! You obviously have an interest in butterflies as you're reading this magazine, so I'll leave you with some of my favourite species.

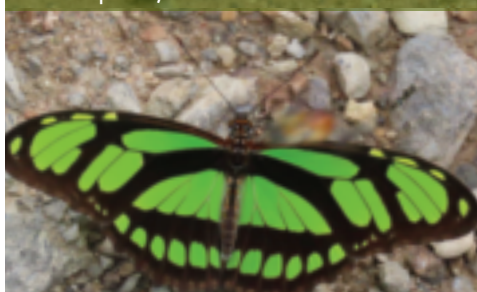
It only remains for me to thank some people: Miquel, Jose and our drivers; Mike for organising the trip; the other members for their company – a great time was had by all.

.....
Article and photographs by
Martyn Davies

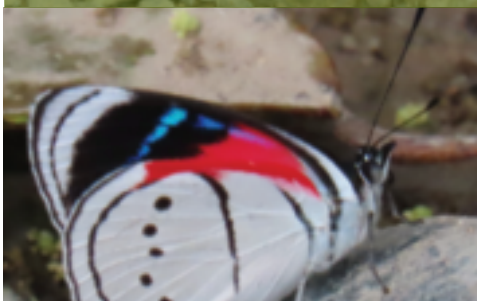
PS That bear came with us – they don't know about him in Peru.



Rhetus arcus – Arcius Swordtail (one of three similar species)



Philaethria dido – Green Longwing



Perisama species (probably *vaninka*)



Jemadia species – a Peruvian Skipper

Branch contacts

Officers

Chairman	Mike Southall*	michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk	01299 251467
Vice Chair and Malvern Hills	Mel Mason*	mbg.records@btinternet.com	01684 565700
Secretary	Marian Newell*	comma.editor@newellporter.co.uk	01746 765287
Treasurer	Ian Duncan*	erebia13@gmail.com	01684 891446
Recording, Transects, Website	John Tilt*	john.tilt2@btopenworld.com	01386 792458
Publicity, Marketing	Mike Williams*	wmbutterflies@gmail.com	01299 824860
Conservation – Herefordshire	Ian Hart	yellowrattle4@aol.com	01981 510259
Conservation – Worcestershire	Trevor Bucknall*	trevor.bucknall@outlook.com	07704 138398
Moths – Birmingham, Black Country	David Jackson	jacksongrus@talktalk.net	01902 344716
Moths – Herefordshire	Robin Hemming	robinhemming@btinternet.com	01568 797351
Moths – Worcestershire	Mike Southall*	michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk	01299 251467
Brown Hairstreak Champion	Simon Primrose	simonjprimrose@aol.com	07952 260153
Purple Emperor Champion	Ian Duncan*	erebia13@gmail.com	01684 891446
Scarlet Tiger Project	Joy Stevens	joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk	
Herefordshire Newsletter Editor	Martyn Davies*	martyn.davies808@gmail.com	01432 266703
Oswestry & Borders Butterfly Group	Simon Spencer	cerisyi@btinternet.com	01691 648339
Social Media Manager	Craig Jones	cfjmarpool@gmail.com	07970 808898
Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey	Philip Nunn	philip-nunn@hotmail.co.uk	07931 488624
Regional Conservation Manager (BC)	Rhona Goddard	rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org	01746 762364
Midlands Landscape Officer (BC)	Natalie Norton	nnorton@butterfly-conservation.org	07485 372199

Reserve Managers

Ewyas Harold	Ian Hart	yellowrattle4@aol.com	01981 510259
Grafton Wood	John Tilt*	john.tilt2@btopenworld.com	01386 792458
Monkwood	Phil Adams	pdadamsrainbow@gmail.com	07725 622342
Prees Heath	Natalie Norton	nnorton@butterfly-conservation.org	07485 372199
Trench Wood	Matthew Bridger	bridge1805@btinternet.com	07801 568334

County Records Coordinators – butterflies

Birmingham, Black Country	Richard Southwell	richard_southwell@hotmail.co.uk	01384 397066
Herefordshire	Bob Hall	randphall@gmail.com	01432 850623
Shropshire	Jason Kemohan	jasonkemohan@blueyonder.co.uk	07856 276511
Staffordshire	John Bryan	johnpbryan15@aol.com	
Worcestershire	Mike Williams*	wmbutterflies@gmail.com	01299 824860
	Mel Mason*	mbg.records@btinternet.com	01684 565700

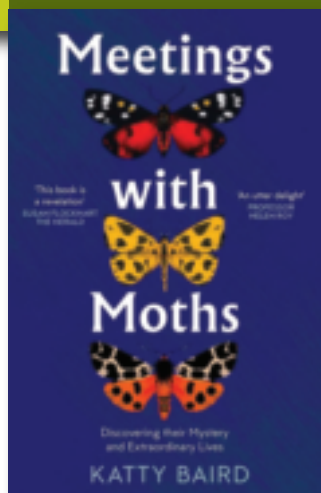
County Moth Recorders

Herefordshire	Peter Hall	peter.herefordcmr@gmail.com	01381 621470
Shropshire – macro	Tony Jacques	vc40tj@gmail.com	
Shropshire – micro	Mike Shurmer	mpshurmer@gmail.com	
	Graham Wenman	gjwenman@yahoo.co.uk	07565 802480
Staffordshire	Les Evans-Hill	vc39moths@outlook.com	
Worcestershire	Tony Simpson	tonysimpson.1945@hotmail.co.uk	

Other committee members

George Davis*	georgeedavis@gmail.com	
Jenny Joy*	jenny.joy17@outlook.com	01952 249325
Neil Gregory*	speckledyellow@gmail.com	07765827000

Meetings with Moths



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For example, finding burnet saxifrage above cliffs leads to an exciting find of **Pimpernel Pug**. On another adventure, Katty finds Scotland's first overwintering **Tissue** moth deep in the cool passages of an old castle.

This book inspires the imagination and broadens the interest in mothing, above and beyond the everyday sightings. Not only is there adventure in the places that she goes, but wonderful detail about the journey and the methods of discovery. I strongly recommend you read this book – you may find yourself itching to target your own recording.

Katty finishes the book by cherishing her meetings with moths and their sharing of their lives with her.

Review by **Neil Gregory**



About the author

After a Zoology degree and PhD, Katty Baird continued in academia studying insect-plant interactions. She now works as an ecologist, recording and monitoring invertebrates throughout Scotland; she has just won the National Biodiversity Network Award for Terrestrial Wildlife Recording 2024. Natural history has always been an important part of Katty's life and in the past decade moths have become the focus of her attention. This is her first book, published in hardback in 2023.



Tissue moth (Rachel Scopes)

We carry a book review in each issue of *The Comma*. Newly published titles are ideal but particularly interesting or useful books from the past are also worth highlighting. See page 2 for contribution details.