

# The Comma

No. 71, Autumn 2008



*Emperor Moth at Hednesford Hills, April 2008 Photo © Dave Grundy*

## **BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH NEWSLETTER**

Butterfly Conservation is a charity registered in England & Wales  
(254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268)



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## Butterfly Conservation

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## Editorial

This is my last Comma as editor. Thanks to all who have contributed articles, letters and photos over the last three years. You have made the journal a pleasure to edit. Apologies for the loss of punctuation in the last issue. We're back to the old printer now.

Roger Wasley has volunteered to be the next editor and has some great ideas for improvements, starting with *The Comma's* own email address (see below).

The branch website is <http://www.westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.org.uk>. It has a lot of information, including copies of past newsletters, and has just been redesigned. The new site will go live very soon now.

The deadline for contributions to the next issue is 21<sup>st</sup> January 2009. Hand-written articles, typed documents and text in any standard text editor format are welcome. Articles may be edited for reasons of style and space. Pictures in most formats are fine, but they must be free of copyright restrictions.

Please send contributions to the new editor:

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## Chairman's Notes

*David Jackson*

The less said about this years weather the better! Needless to say we would very much appreciate all your butterfly and moth records, particularly for 'garden' species such as **Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Red Admiral** and **Humming Bird Hawk Moth**, also for wider countryside species such as **Small Copper, Common Blue, Small Heath** and **Meadow Brown**, and moths such as **Latticed Heath, Common Heath, Chimney Sweeper, Mother Shipton** and **Small Yellow Underwing**, so we can determine just how our region's species have fared during the second year of atrocious conditions.

Please send all your records to Nigel Stone at NStone@hotmail.com and if you do not have access to a computer post them to him 8 Grove Lane, Keresley End, Coventry CV7 8PN.

Thanks to the efforts of David Green, our new Branch web page should allow you access to a Recording Form, but records can also be submitted via your preferred medium.

I am very pleased to welcome Robin Hemming onto Branch Committee. Robin has volunteered to be the Herefordshire Moth Officer and he can be contacted by e-mail at robinhemming@btinternet.com or by phone on 01568 797351.

Its been a busy six months for me and my family as we took our Branch stall firstly to the BBC Gardener's World exhibition at the NEC Birmingham, where we had been invited to run a joint stall and wonderful butterfly friendly garden display, created by East Midlands Branch. Then to Berrington Hall, Herefordshire for a two day summer fair and Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, over the last Bank Holiday. On 25th October we will be at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens Conservation day.

It is a real pleasure to meet people, some of whom I hope became BC members and who are equally as concerned for our vanishing butterflies and moths as we are.

Following on from the last issue of *The Comma*, the latest on the Worcestershire hedge flailing and **Brown Hairstreak** front is that thanks to the efforts of Mike Williams and others involved, we received encouraging news from Natural England (NE) in response to Mike's damning report of our serious concerns over the management of Entry Level Stewardship schemes on farms where wholesale flailing had all but decimated core **Brown Hairstreak** hedgerows.

Natural England have accepted two recommendations put forward by Mike on behalf of Branch. Firstly the Forest of Feckenham is to be viewed as a priority area for Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) grants and extra money should be found to fund such schemes, and secondly NE have found the money to run a training day for farmers later in the autumn. Mike signals this as "definite progress, and if through the Hedgerow Steering Group and other forums we can press for ELS to be looked at nationally, so that it begins to deliver the wildlife benefits it was meant to do – so may be there is hope yet."

Rest assured that Branch Committee, with its support from membership, will work hard to seek satisfactory outcomes.

For those with internet access a recommended read is Harry Green's article entitled *A world apart*, which appeared in *The Guardian* on 7th May 2008. It comments on the loss of some 500,000 hectares of Set-aside by a decision of the EC. Set-aside has been reduced to 0% this year and our beleaguered wildlife used as this valuable resource as sanctuary up to now! The article also covers the untimely flailing of the Worcestershire hedgerows. Well done Harry for firing this broadside into the public domain.

In Shropshire Stephen Lewis has had a very busy year continuing his role as reserve Warden creating **Silver-studded Blue** habitat on a large scale at Prees Heath. He advises that on the existing site the butterfly numbers recorded were up to a record level, so it's not all gloom and doom!

In Staffordshire Jim Cresswell has been monitoring the two isolated and important **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** populations on Cannock Chase and working with the landowners to devise a habitat management scheme.

I am very pleased to confirm the continued existence in the County of **Grizzled Skipper** this Spring, when I was invited onto a private site in Staffordshire where we saw four individuals together with good numbers of **Small Heath**.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr Jenny Joy our Senior Regional Officer, the Branch hosted two very successful **Wood White** Action days this Spring, where national experts including our Chief Executive Dr Martin Warren and ex-national Chairman Dr Stephen Jeffcoate and his wife Gail, met and contributed their knowledge of this delicate butterfly's specific habitat requirements, with valuable input from members of several other Branches who attended. Plans will be forthcoming to bring further positive conservation measures into play at its remaining major sites, to help protect this vulnerable species.

After three years Dean Fenton is stepping down as Comma Editor. Dean has done a wonderful job setting out our Branch Newsletter. On behalf of the Committee we extend our thanks for his commitment to the task.

As the National 40th Anniversary draws nearer to a close why not join one of our winter work parties on any date given in this issue – you will be made very welcome.

During the winter we will be devising activities and events for next year which sees the 30th Anniversary of the West Midlands Branch. We have something to be very proud of, as we were the first regional Branch to be convened.

Please do come along and support us – we look forward to meeting you and sharing the delights that our wonderful Lepidoptera have to offer.

## **The restoration of Prees Heath Common Reserve – Update**

*Stephen Lewis, Prees Heath Officer, 01743 340721 & 07900 886809*

It is now more than two years since BC purchased the reserve and we are more than half way through the allotted funding from GrantScape and Natural England, which lasts until 31st March 2010. So how much progress has been made thus far?

People may remember that there were three areas formerly in intensive arable cultivation that were deep ploughed in March 2007, as follows:

### ***Around the old airfield control tower – 4.5 hectares***

This area was sown with a locally (within three miles radius) sourced wildflower and grass seed mix in September 2007. Germination has been surprisingly good, although there are still some bare patches, and it is planned to manage this area as a hay meadow in the long term.

### ***Alongside the old hangars – 6.5 hectares***

100 tonnes of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) brash harvested from Cannock Chase was spread on this area in November 2007, following an application of sulphur to reduce the pH level, which came down from 7 to 4. Our consultant, Dr Phil Putwain of Liverpool University, told us not to expect germination this summer, but in subsequent years, but the good news is that thousands of heather seedlings have appeared in discreet clumps – see the photograph – as well as quantities of Wavy Hair-grass. This augurs well for the future, although steps will have to be taken to prevent too much rabbit damage.



### ***East of the runway – 14.5 hectares***

There was a problem some months ago with sand from this area blowing across the busy A41 trunk road in a sandstorm effect, and in April this year a spring sowing of wildflowers and acid grass species was sown in the most unstable part, which appears to have worked well. We have contracted a local firm of hydrologists and a

topographical surveyor to assess the potential to re-create a wetland in part of this area which was known to be marshy previously. Water levels are being assessed as well as the location of field drains. On the rest of the area we hope that a further quantity of heather brash will be available from Cannock Chase for sowing this autumn, following an application of sulphur.

The tenancy agreement inherited at the time of the purchase of the reserve with a local farmer on the field on the south side of the access track off the A49 has now been terminated, and it is hoped to restore this area (3.5 hectares) to heathland/acid grassland too in the future.

### **Miscellaneous**

A number of events, guided walks and training sessions were held on the reserve, and several articles have appeared in the local press, and many favourable comments have been received on the transformation of the site. The results of the Silver-studded Blue transect showed an increase in numbers of 50% on last year. The reserve is becoming increasingly popular, and in the summer it was a bit like the paparazzi photographing film stars with the numbers of photographers with expensive kit that were to be seen crouching in the heather to shoot the **Silver-studded Blue**. Having said that, the butterfly is very photogenic and does sit obligingly still much of the time, unlike some other species.

Butterfly watercolour artist Julie Horner painted the Prees Heath **Silver-studded Blues** on grasses and generously donated a print to Butterfly Conservation for the AGM raffle to be held in York in November – many thanks Julie, whose work can be viewed at [www.butterflypaintings.co.uk](http://www.butterflypaintings.co.uk).

A leaflet dispenser has been installed at the reserve entrance, and an interpretation panel nearby on a plinth made out of concrete from the old airfield.

The Claim brought against Butterfly Conservation in the County Court alleging that the purchase of the reserve and works carried out had been illegal has been dismissed, and the right to appeal refused as the Judge stated that the Claim had no realistic prospect of succeeding. Butterfly Conservation's costs were awarded against the claimant from the date the Secretary of State gave consent to the works.

Everyone is welcome to come to the Volunteer Work Parties on the reserve (see the **Events** pages). Many thanks to everyone who helped remove the worst of the ragwort during the summer.



## Some notes on rearing White-letter Hairstreaks

*Tony Moore*

This article is the result of observations made during my first attempt to rear **White-letter Hairstreaks** (WLH) from eggs. I was fortunate enough to find 20 or so WLH eggs on elms near my home in Stafford during Dec 2007. Liz Goodyear suggested that the larvae tended to be very heavily predated by Blue Tits during the nesting season, so I decided to collect a few eggs, hoping to give them a better chance of reaching maturity, when they could be released.

When I examined the various eggs in situ at the end of January, a couple appeared to have been sucked dry by some unknown agency. By the first week in February, all the eggshells were empty and I realised that they must have already hatched! Minute examination revealed absolutely no sign of any larvae or bore holes into any buds. Somewhat mystified, I took a few of the small branches with eggshells home, where they could be closely watched. I also sleeved a couple of eggs and marked the others for later observation. Two eggs were taken into my conservatory on their branches and three others were caged outside in a pot with a bit of growing elm. The flower buds on the indoor elm began to develop quite quickly and, by the end of February were well open. Still no sign of larvae.

A couple of days later, I noticed what appeared to be minute amounts of frass on the window sill below the twigs. I could still not find any caterpillars and was reluctant to break open the buds for fear of injuring anything residing therein. Three days, and regular frass, later my hawk-eyed wife spotted a tiny larva curled up in an opening bud. It was about 4 mm long, a dull purplish colour and perfectly camouflaged. A second one was found a day later. Within a week, the open buds had started to produce seedpod 'leaves'. Immediately the larvae spun themselves little silk pads and cast their skins. The third instar caterpillars were alternating green and purple and at once set to work devouring the developing seeds. They usually ate the seed out of the middle of the 'leaf', leaving a hole, but occasionally started at the tip and worked down, resulting in quite characteristic damage. At this time, I checked the elm in the pot in the garden and the marked branches in the field and nothing was to be seen.

As an experiment, I brought one of the twigs from the garden inside, where I could watch it more closely. Over the next week or so, the flower buds opened and began to mature. No signs of animal life. After three weeks these buds were drying out and there was still no sign of life. I almost discarded this branch, but the leaf buds were beginning to open, so I kept it as potential food for my other 'pets'. Two days later, a second instar larva appeared on the outside of the opening terminal leaf bud! As this bud developed, the central few leaves dropped off, I guess as a result of damage caused when the caterpillar was secreted within. Then, on March 25th, a tiny (2 mm.), first instar caterpillar suddenly appeared on the outside of another bud, near its empty eggshell. The bud proved later to have dried out and the larva had been, presumably, forced by hunger to put in an early appearance. This egg had hatched at least seven weeks previously! By this time my indoor reared ones were over one cm long.

I can only conclude that the eggs hatch much earlier than most books suggest, and that the young larvae immediately burrow into a bud, where they remain inactive until the bud begins to develop. This would certainly explain how they manage to survive on non-flowering elm. During their second and third instars, those larvae, which have been living in leaf buds, are also a different colour from the flower bud residents; they

are almost entirely green with a tiny purple spot on each side towards the rear. One problem with rearing indoors is the availability of elm leaves to feed the rapidly developing larvae. Mine had to be shuffled back and forth between buds and developing seeds. By the time the leaf buds started to open (in late March), several larvae were approaching pupation.). At this time, I had others appearing for the first time in opening leaf buds – all had hatched at approximately the same time. Although rearing indoors is fascinating and allows close observation of the various stages, it is of little use as a means of increasing numbers, as the development of the insect is considerably accelerated. My first pupa appeared on 31st March and the first imago on 21st April! Anyone wishing to rear large numbers should certainly use an outdoor cage.

Various publications show supposed characteristic feeding patterns on elm leaves. On only one occasion did I see the 'ladder' pattern and this lasted less than a day as the larva proceeded to demolish the remainder of the leaf (it had plenty of other leaves to choose from). I also saw an apparently typical 'ladder', which had definitely been made by an unidentified micro larva.

By the end of April, there was no sign of any larvae in the garden cage, nor on the marked branches in the field. I found the first larva in the garden cage on May 3rd and it was full grown by 24th May. That week, I decided to collect in the sleeved eggs to see what had happened. When the sleeves were removed from the cut branches, there was quite a lot of leaf damage and a couple of micro larvae. There was absolutely no sign of WLH at any stage in any of the sleeves!! I can only assume that the eggs had hatched before I positioned the sleeves and that the young larvae had moved some distance from the egg site. Can anyone shed any light on this?

Three pupae were found in the garden cage in June and these produced imagines at the end of June. They were successfully released near the original egg site.

All in all an interesting experiment, but I think that in future I shall leave Mr and Mrs WLH to conduct their own affairs.

## **My local patch**

*Joy Stevens*

Anyone familiar with BBC's *Springwatch* and other wildlife programmes will have heard Bill Oddie extolling the benefits of keeping in touch with your 'local patch'. In attempting to chase down the various species of butterfly I have still not seen, it occurred to me that I was neglecting the areas on my doorstep. So this year I have made greater effort to monitor the green zones around my home.

My 'local patch' is Bunkers Hill Wood in Stourbridge. Whilst not offering a wide variety of species, it does provide habitat for reasonable numbers of commoner varieties and throws up the occasional surprise. It is a lovely place to walk, whatever the time of year. Despite being so close to the urban sprawl, it provides a quiet refuge with views across the fields to Kinver in one direction and from the top of the wood, over to Clent Hills.

This year I have found that the bridle paths and lanes closer to home, around and leading to the wood, are also rich in butterflies. This started in early May during the heatwave at the start of the month. A walk along Sandy Lane, just a stone's throw from home, proved a delight. I share the general concern regarding **Small Tortoiseshell** whose numbers seem to have dwindled locally year on year from my own limited

observations. Everywhere along the bridle path were **Small Tortoiseshell** frantically dancing together and providing a wonderful display of colour.

There were also good numbers of **Green Veined White**, **Speckled Wood** and **Orange Tip** plus a smattering of **Peacock** and **Holly Blue**. Much encouraged, I repeated the exercise two evenings later – same time, same hot sunshine but totally different results – the only butterflies I spotted were **Speckled Wood** and **Holly Blue** just proving the fickleness and unpredictability of our native species. Perhaps this was the reason for the frenzied activity I had witnessed just two days earlier; butterflies must surely be the prime example of 'making hay while the sun shines!'

On the plus side, I did discover a thriving colony of **Holly Blues**, flitting around the ivy covered, sandstone wall surrounding the local cemetery, right opposite my house.

My quest to 'tick off' a few more species has been a disaster this year. As I write this (early August), the only new species I have tracked down is **Purple Hairstreak**. I flushed a single female out of some damp, long grass in Oversley Wood (near Alcester). The saying goes that you wait hours for a bus and then 3 turn up at once. So it proved for the **Purple Hairstreak**. The next evening I was back on the local track and noticed a great deal of activity in the top of an oak – around 20 **Purple Hairstreaks**. Next evening, same tree, no activity. Then two days later, a longer walk into Bunkers Hill Wood and another oak tree housing a colony of **Purple Hairstreak**. I've always looked up at the trees in past years but never seen any butterflies. How frustrating butterflies are, it does make you wonder if there are more around than we realise.

In addition to this, one of my favourite places is Kinver Edge. It was always a beloved haunt of our family in childhood, providing soft sandy runways to race down and luscious blackberries in late summer – why is it my grandmother invariably found the fattest and juiciest fruits? In recent years I have taken a different view of Kinver, visiting whenever I can for evening walks after work to blow away the cares of the day and to try and keep an eye on the local butterfly population. Kinver Edge was bequeathed to the National Trust just over a century ago and encompasses a range of habitats but is best known for its heathland and this is the area I tend to visit most often. The local Trust workers are endeavouring to maintain this special area of heathland and have attracted criticism for chopping down trees to achieve this end.

A visit in late summer provides a good opportunity to see **Common Blues** and **Small Coppers** and I always manage to spot a few of each every year. However, an evening visit on 1 August turned into a delightful encounter with several of both species. I have never seen so many **Small Coppers** in one location anywhere before. At one spot there were 4 on a single clump of heather. All in all there must have been around 30 butterflies – admittedly over a fair space but in an area where I had only ever witnessed a couple of adults in the past. This number is a conservative estimate, the weather was sunny if rather windy, the butterflies were extremely active and I am making allowances for potential multi-sightings of the same singleton. Time and other records will tell if this is a dramatic success story for volunteers' efforts to maintain the heath habitat or whether it is just a good year for **Small Copper**.

Thus my butterfly season this year has proved inconclusive yet again. Although I have failed to track down those elusive species and been worried by the potential effects of last year's dreadful downpours, I have been constantly surprised by my sightings. For example, on a holiday in Devon in May there were good numbers of **Wall Brown** and in several locations I have seen fair quantities of **Small Heath**. So perhaps there are a few more surprises waiting out there in what remains of the summer.

## Letters

Dear Sir,

I write re. Mike Williams' article on hedge flailing in *The Comma* 70.

It is not surprising that there is no difference between Entry Level Scheme (ELS) and non-ELS farming because no difference in farming is actually required. Having done a few ELS schemes myself I can testify to this. Essentially you go round the farm and add up 'points' for various features like hedgerows, grassland, reduced fertiliser strips, trees etc. you even get points for filling in the ELS form in the first place! (I'm tempted to say 'points means prizes' here in honour of the recently departed Humphrey Lyttleton). Unless the client is farming a featureless arable desert its quite easy to get the required 30 points per hectare on most farms in West Midlands for which they then receive £30 per hectare in addition to the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) which is worth about £200/ha. There is little or no requirement to change the management of any of these features, perhaps reduce fertiliser input in some places but that's just about it.

An opinion column in the Farmer's Guardian, which is editorially close to the NFU, was candid about the scheme: "The ELS has been well subscribed mainly because it has enabled us to carry on without too much change. what it does is to enable spin-doctors to publicise how well their policies are working in caring for the environment." They said it, not me! (FG March 7 2008 p8). As for monitoring the ELS or SPS for environmental compliance, you can forget it! During a parliamentary debate about the 'burden' of regulation on England's 106,700 farmers registered to receive their share of the £1.45 billion SPS the then Minister was boasting about how little monitoring Government did and how there was virtually no come back on recipients of all this tax payers' money for environmentally damaging farming operations. Hansard 21 Jun 2007 : Column 1499:

"Barry Gardiner: Let me shatter the myth about burdens. Of approximately 1,500 cross-compliance inspections carried out in 2006, only 71 breaches were reported, of which three attracted warning letters, 44 received a low 1 per cent. penalty, and 21 got a 3 per cent. penalty. Again, the burden is low."

Similarly, anyone trying to use the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations (UK law since 2002), which in theory protect 'semi-natural and uncultivated land' from destruction by farming will find that in practice the regulations are not worth the paper they are written on.

In the absence of any statutory commitment or interest BC therefore has to pro-actively engage with farmers, land agents and contractors directly. This is a time consuming process but one that could form the basis a grant application to a number of grant giving bodies including some funded by the EU itself for example the new LEADER programme or the other schemes under the new England Rural Development Programme (so-called pillar 2 of the CAP). This approach requires some homework and backing from bodies such as FWAG, and possibly Natural England, but may well pay dividends.

Regards,

David Lovelace

## Shropshire update

*(These snippets are from Jenny's email newsletter to the Shropshire group)*

David Williams has been looking out for **Graylings** this summer. Two visits to the Stapeley Hill area in August did not produce any sightings but the habitat was somewhat unsuitable with substantial bracken coverage. He did see **Graylings** on The Long Mynd (on Cow Ridge spur just above Carding Mill Valley), and also on Earl's Hill in July. These records are important as the number of inland sites for this species is in decline. He also saw a female **Wall** by the Carding Mill Valley reservoir.

Stephen Lewis recorded seven **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** at Brook Vessons on the Stiperstones in June, but counts on three other nearby sites totalled only one. A member of Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) staff reported seeing this species in SWT's new reserve The Hollies, which adjoins Brook Vessons.

Roy Fussell surveyed a couple of sites in the Snedshill area of Telford, and found a botanically rich site for **Small Heath & Burnet Companion** with **Dingy Skipper** habitat.

David Williams recorded both **Dingy Skipper** (10 max) and **Green Hairstreak** at Langley Fields in Telford Town Park, and also a number of other butterfly and moth species here and on other sites nearby.

Brian Herring covered a number of sites in the Telford & Wrekin area, including the Forge Retail Park, Spout Mound and Blue Pool and recorded a range of species. Brian and Jenny Joy recorded a single **Dingy Skipper** at Ercall Quarry, good news as the species has been absent from the site for several years.

Jenny Joy has been running the *Back to Orange* Project at the Wyre Forest and actually managed to do some fieldwork herself with some timed counts for the **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** – results were not bad but sadly below last year's record numbers.

Stephen Lewis led a public event at Granville in Telford, concentrating on the spoil mound known as the Western Stockpile across the road from the main entrance – the mound is to become part of the Local Nature Reserve. **Dingy Skipper**, **Green Hairstreak**, **Mother Shipton** and **Latticed Heath** were among the species identified.

Jenny Joy went up to meet Allan Dawes and Doug Hamson in the Oswestry area in May. Two privately owned sites were visited with **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** being recorded on both sites - it is fantastic news that both of these sites still support this species especially as some management work was done on both of these sites over the 2007/08 to improve the habitat for this butterfly.

The **Wood White** research project in South Shropshire has continued with work carried out by Sue Clarke thanks to a grant from the Clive Tate Memorial Fund and the support of the Forestry Commission. There has also been more regular **Wood White** monitoring carried out in the Bury Ditches area thanks to the efforts of Alan Reid coordinating local volunteer recorders.

Adrian Miles reports that the restoration work on the Hay Cop at Broseley has continued with a lot of support and help from the local community, and from the landowner Deryck Roberts of Coneybury View. **Dingy Skipper**, **Green Hairstreak**, **Small Copper** and **Common Blue** have all been recorded there, and hopes are high for attracting **Small Heath** in the future. **Ringlets** and **Meadow Browns** were seen this year in good numbers.

## **Activities – Health and Safety Guidelines**

Guidelines for health and safety during Butterfly Conservation activities will be received from Head Office in due course. In the meantime we reproduce those adopted by the Devon Branch.

There are important responsibilities laid upon us to do what we can to ensure your safety at events organised by Butterfly Conservation. Please act according to the following guidelines at any of our events:

- Wear appropriate footwear for the conditions expected.
- Wear appropriate clothing for the conditions expected. Protect yourself against cold, heat, sun, rain, wind and thorns.
- Consider what precautions you should take to prevent being bitten or stung by insect, plants, snakes or animals.
- Children must be adequately supervised by an adult.
- Dogs must be kept on leads. Ask leaders for permission before bringing dogs.
- Listen carefully to instructions given by the leader before starting.
- Beware of branches swinging back after the person in front passes them.
- Beware of carefully dug rabbit holes, dug to twist your ankle.
- Inform the leader if you intend to leave early.
- Keep up with the party.
- Carry a drink - you may be away from your car for several hours.
- Observe the country code at all times.
- Site-specific hazards will be outlined by the leader at the start.

## **Branch Annual General Meeting, Saturday 6th December 2008**

All Branch Members are cordially invited to attend the Branch AGM at the Three Parishes Village Hall, Grafton Flyford, near Worcester commencing at 11.00 a.m.

Our Guest Speaker is Rosemary Winnall who will talk on *Hidden Treasures of the Wyre*.

To reach Three Parishes Hall - from Junction 6 of the M5 head towards Worcester on the A4538 over the first traffic island, at the next island turn left onto the A422, carry on for circa five miles until you see Grafton Mill on your right. Opposite the Mill is a track sign posted Three Parishes Hall - the Hall and parking are situated to the right of the Church car park. The church is at SO 962557. The nearest village on the A422 is Flyford Flavell.

Refreshments will be available: mince pies and seasonal cheer.

## Dates for your Diary

Please remember that further dates may be added to the website at short notice. Check <http://www.westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.org.uk>

### ***Saturday 1st November Worcestershire Entomology Day***

The Wyre Forest Study Group committee invite you to attend the above event which promises to be very informative and enjoyable. **Booking essential.** For details contact Mick Blythe 01299-871233 or email: ydn27@dial.pipex.com

9.30 am – 4.30 pm at Heightington Village Hall. Outline programme:

- The Back to Orange Project - Jenny Joy
- Rare moths and butterflies of the Wyre Forest - Dave Grundy
- Butterfly monitoring, a personal view - Owen Tudor
- The Brown Hairstreak Project - John Tilt
- Parasitic Flies and Lepidoptera - Mick Blythe
- The Garden Moth Scheme - Dave Grundy

### **Winter work parties**

Unless stated, all work parties start at 10:00am. Some tools are supplied but bring lunch/drinks and gardening gloves.

#### ***First Sunday monthly Monkwood (Paddy Harrison 01905-641523)***

Meet at 10:00am at the reserve car park SO 804606.

#### ***Second Sunday monthly Grafton Wood (John Tilt 01386-792458)***

Meet at 10:00am at Grafton Flyford Church car park SO 962557. This year we will be working on coppice plots and ride maintenance.

#### ***Third Sunday monthly Walsgrove Hill (Trevor Bucknall 01905-755757)***

Meet at 10:00am at the Hundred House pub, Great Witley, Worcs. SO 752662. Trevor has sent me photos of the area we cleared last winter, showing the masses of orchids which appeared there this summer. The owner is moving towards introducing grazing to this site eventually and it's important to continue working there in the meantime.

#### ***Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>, Jan 25<sup>th</sup>, March 29<sup>th</sup> Throckmorton (Trevor Bucknall 01905-755757)***

Meet at 10am just inside the landfill site on the access road (SO 970480).

### **Wyre Forest**

Volunteer work days are planned on Sun. 25th January and Sun. 29th March 2009. On both days the event starts at 10.00am. The work areas are yet to be decided. Contact Phil Rudlin, Wildlife Ranger (01299-266302 or 07711-239428), or Jenny Joy nearer the time for more details. These work parties continue the good joint FC/BC working started last winter.

### **Prees Heath Common reserve**

Date	Activity	Location
Sat. 25th October	Tree / scrub clearance	Runway
Weds. 19th November	Tree/Shrub planting	Alongside A41
Sat. 29th November	Tree/Shrub planting	Alongside A41
Weds. 10th December	Tree/Shrub planting	Alongside A41/A49
Sun. 14th December	Tree/Shrub planting	Alongside A41/A49

All parties start at 10.30am prompt and finish around 3.30pm - come for half a day or all day, as you wish. Meet on the access track off the A49 opposite the Steel Heath turning, OS Grid Reference SJ557363.

Please let me know if you wish to come, so that I know how many tools to bring and can organise the work to be carried out appropriately.

Stephen Lewis, Tel: 01743 340721 Mobile: 07900 886809

### **Herefordshire**

On the Ewyas Harold Reserve/Common dates we will be working both on the Common and the new Caederi Meadows Reserve. Please come and support our work in this lovely area.

Meet at 10.00am at the northern end of Ewyas Harold Common, SO 382302, adjacent to the cattle grid. This is approached from Abbey Dore off the B4347 at Grid Ref: SO 384306 taking the minor road up the hill and taking a sharp left hand turn at the top of it. The Common is signposted. Any queries Contact Ian Hart 01981 510259 or e-mail yellowrattle4@aol.com

15 November 2008: Work party at Ewyas Harold Reserve/Common

13 December 2008: Work party at Ewyas Harold Reserve/Common

24 January 2009: Work party at Ewyas Harold Reserve/Common

21 February 2009: Work party at Haugh Woods.

### **Hartlebury Common, Stourport**

Dates for Hartlebury Common work parties are the first Sunday and third Saturday in the months to February. That is: 2 Nov, 15 Nov, 7 Dec, 20 Dec, 4 Jan, 17 Jan, 1 Feb, 14 Feb.

# Butterfly Activity in a Residential Garden

Christopher Young

This is an abridged version of a larger article in the open access journal *Urban Habitats*. For that see [http://www.urbanhabitats.org/v05n01/butterfly\\_full.html](http://www.urbanhabitats.org/v05n01/butterfly_full.html)

## Summary

Little is known about how butterflies use one of the country's most commonly available habitats, the residential garden. Studies in a Wolverhampton garden demonstrate that most individuals use these spaces as movement routes through the urban matrix. Of 516 observed individual visits by butterflies during 2000–2002, only 13.8% involved a stop for some purpose. The duration of these visits was characteristically short, with a mean visit time of nine seconds. Individuals tended to fly through the study garden using distinct entry and exit points largely dictated by variations in structure of the study garden and surrounding gardens. This seems as important as availability of nectar- or food-plant species. When considered as systems of interconnected green spaces, residential gardens represent an extraordinarily valuable and dynamic component of the urban habitat.

## Study Site

The study site is a residential garden in suburban NW Wolverhampton, bounded on three sides by a 1.5-meter-high wooden fence and on the other by a house. It is adjacent to other gardens to the north, south, and east. Immediately bounding the garden is a variety of small garden buildings, trees, and shrubs. This includes sheds and garages that provide breaks of between 1 and 3 meters in the otherwise largely solid, shrubby boundary edge where it rises above the fence. There are also some larger and denser plantings with small gaps between adjacent canopies that act as barriers to the movement of wildlife. Within the garden, there is a similar mix of open areas and denser planting/solid structures. The interplay of taller trees (> 5M), medium height shrubs (up to 5M), and the gaps between them provides an intricate, though limited, network of potential routes for butterflies to use when moving in and out.

The study garden is one of approximately 100 such plots that form a continuous block of garden green space. It is broadly wildlife-friendly, with a low input of artificial fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides and consisting of a mixture of lawn, border flowers, herbs, shrubs, and trees.

## Recording Butterfly Activity

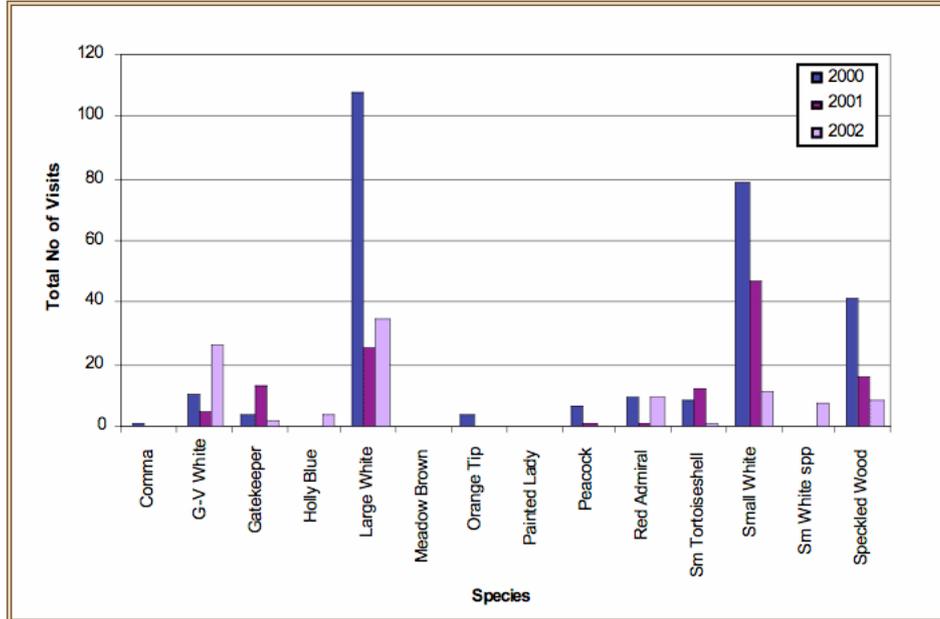
To observe visitors, I undertook steady-paced, repetitive walks around the garden. Flying butterflies were spotted prior to entering then tracked. The total range of each individual's activities was noted, and the timing of each activity, its flight track, and any stopping places were recorded. Activities recorded were: flying, feeding, resting/perching, basking, and "other" (e.g., territorial displays).

The recording season was April to September, one recording day per week, comprising two hours during the morning and two in the afternoon.

## General Results

Recording was undertaken in a total of 28 weeks out of a possible 78 over the 3 recording seasons of 2000–2002, 5 weeks of which produced no records. Over the whole period I recorded 13 species. I also recorded a separate category of undetermined small white species that flew through the garden quickly or at the farthest recordable distance so were difficult to identify. I could not confidently identify these as **Small Whites**, **Green-Veined Whites**, or female **Orange Tips**. In total, I recorded 516 individual butterfly visits in 112 hours of observation, with 278 visits in 2000, 128 visits in 2001, and 110 visits in 2002.

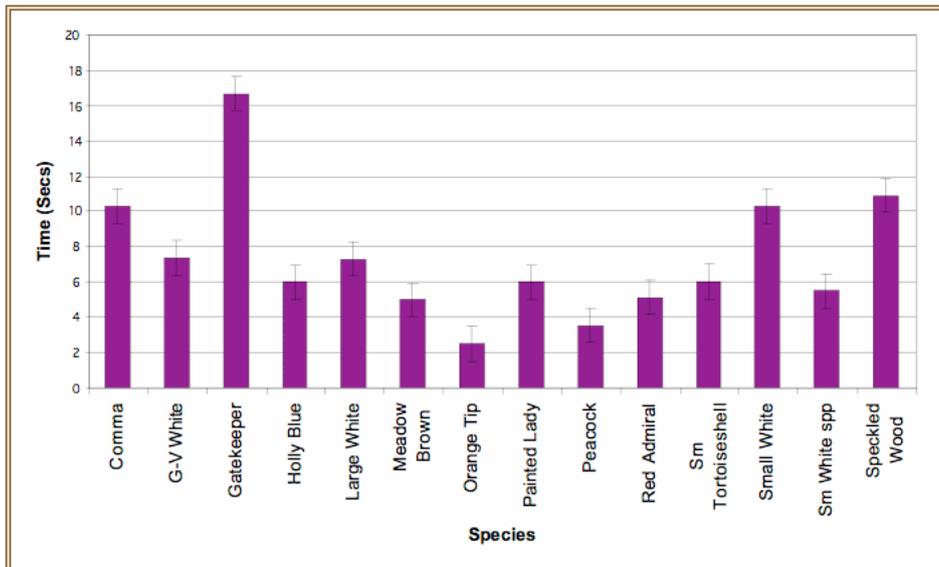
Two species dominated throughout: **Large Whites** and **Small Whites** logged 169 and 138 visits, respectively. This graphic shows totals:



The three years show a variety of trends in both variability of recording time and butterfly numbers. The year 2000 had 15 recording weeks with 278 individual garden visits and a mean of 18.5 visits per recording session. **Large** and **Small Whites** dominated with 187 visits (>67%), while **Meadow Browns**, as noted above, showed only one record for all three seasons. The 2001 observation season saw 128 visits in 8 recording weeks (16.1 visits per session), with **Large** and **Small Whites** again dominant at 73 visits (>57%). The 2002 season had the fewest recording weeks at 5, but claimed the highest mean per session (22), with **Large Whites** comprising the majority (31.8%) of all observed butterfly species.

### ***Garden Activity: Flight Times***

Flight times of individual visits ranged between 2 and 128 seconds, with a mean visit time of 9 seconds. This graphic shows times:



### ***Garden Activity: Feeding, Basking, and Perching***

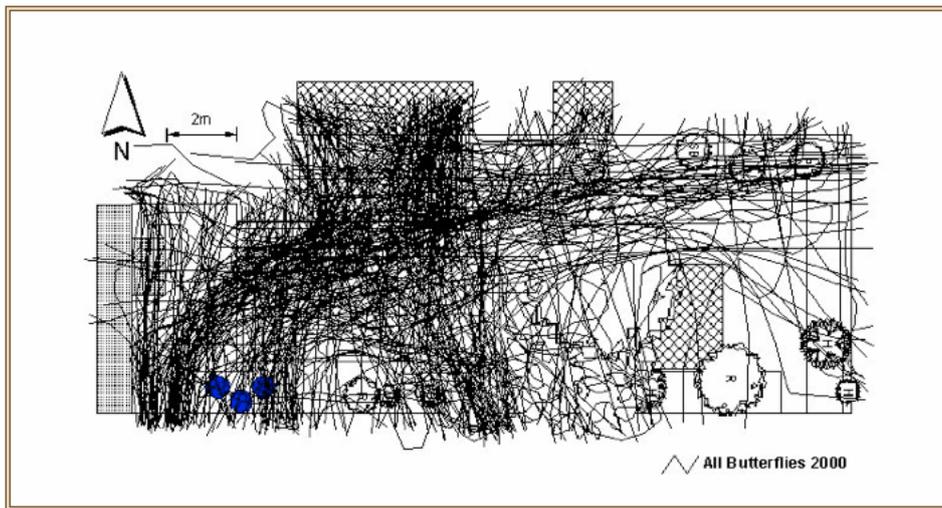
Of the 516 individual visits, 71 involved stops for some purpose (13.8%). Fifty-two visits involved single stops, 14 showed 2 stops, and 5 visits had between 3 and 14 stops. Individual stops varied between 1 and 951 seconds, with feeding stops averaging 78.4 seconds and basking stops 99.2 seconds.

All individual visits to the garden were for a single purpose, mainly feeding or basking. The single exceptional visit involved five stops: three for nectaring, one for basking, and one for perching. Nine species stopped in the garden for some purpose, but only five species had two stops or more (Speckled Wood, Large White, Small White, Green-Veined White, and Red Admiral).

### ***Garden Activity: Flight Paths and Routes***

Particular routes were used, with butterflies using common entry and exit points in response to a range of primarily structural modifiers of their behaviour. The figure below shows all butterfly visit flight paths in 2000. Distinct corridors of activity are noticeable both across and along the garden.

Gaps in the surrounding vegetation and hard structures both inside and outside the garden channelled flight paths. Trees in the garden to the north were substantially taller than those in my garden, creating a channelling effect, as butterflies had to fly around a tree to exploit gaps between it and adjacent trees. They therefore deviated from otherwise straight flight paths both to and from the neighbouring garden.



### **Discussion**

There were surprisingly small numbers of individual visits. Annual visit totals were usually boosted by a couple of busy recording weeks in midsummer. For example, in 2000, 87 individuals visited during one recording session (week 21), while one session had two visits (week 1) and three sessions had no visits (weeks 5, 7, and 22).

The length of time many butterflies spent in the garden was unexpectedly low, with 47% of all visits flying through in less than five seconds. It is evident that butterflies are using individual gardens as part of a wider meta-habitat, identifying available resources rapidly and then moving on if their requirements are not met at that particular time.

### **Conclusion**

This study is based on data from one garden only but the general conclusions are:

Individual gardens can probably be managed to improve opportunities for butterflies to move through them/encourage them to stay longer. This could be as simple as ensuring gaps between adjacent gardens or planting relevant butterfly-friendly nectar and larval food plants.

Individual visitors use the garden as a thoroughway rather than to stop off. A number of distinct features appear to affect the direction of flight path: garden orientation and the presence of shrubs, trees, and hard structures. Individual garden use seems to be defined by these as much as nectar or food plants.

The low numbers of visits recorded were surprising. However, when these are magnified to the level of gardens in the contiguous residential block (approximately 100 gardens here), then to the urban area as a whole, and finally across the UK, the importance of urban gardens to butterflies is clear.

## The Brown Hairstreak at Grafton Wood

*Steve Meredith, 020 87154585 Meredith99@googlemail.com*

On Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August I attended the **Brown Hairstreak** day at Grafton Wood. The weather was dreadful with thick cloud, rain or drizzle, but this did not deter 30 or 40 enthusiasts from turning up. As it was raining quite hard as we were about to enter the wood, leader Mike Williams suggested that we stay in the Three Parishes village hall for some refreshment, which was welcome to most of us. John Tilt, the reserve manager, gave an interesting introduction to this locality of quite possibly the most elusive butterfly in Britain.

After half an hour or so, it was decided that we should brave the weather and at least see the habitat. Mike Williams showed us an average sized ash tree which seemed to be set in a thin hawthorn hedge some 50m from the egg laying area. He described how with binoculars the butterflies have been seen round the top of the tree. The males arrive first at this assembly area, followed a few days later by the females. After pairing, the females disperse to lay their eggs.

We took a walk through a very promising looking laying area and I was lucky enough to find about six eggs. Three were laid on a small single stem blackthorn sucker almost in the middle of a rough path. I hope the bush and its tenants survive. I think three adults were seen flying, fairly high up. We then had a long walk through Grafton Wood and John Tilt gave an interesting talk on its ecology and management. We returned to the village hall for more refreshments. Mike had a very impressive large scale OS map with differently coloured symbols denoting the years in which the **Brown Hairstreak** appeared in the relevant km. square. I think he said it occurred in 150 squares, with Grafton Wood at the centre of the area.

Despite the weather the organisers, particularly Mike Williams, John Tilt and the lady who provided the most welcome tea and cakes, deserve great praise for turning what could have been a disastrous day into a memorable one.

I live in London and on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept. I paid a second visit to the Mole Valley (the river is named thus as its course takes it underground), almost under the Gatwick Airport flight path. This followed a Kent Branch outing on 24<sup>th</sup> August, in equally bad weather, when Peter Kirby led a group hoping to see the **Brown Hairstreak**. No luck with the adults on either day, but I did find four eggs. I contrasted the peace and quiet of Grafton Wood to Gatwick, with aircraft constantly taking off and the ever present smell of aviation fuel. Nonetheless, it is a site that could reward a visit so if you fly from Gatwick it might be worth reserving some extra time for a search.

At Grafton I met a tall young lady carrying a new Jessops camera bag. Unfortunately our conversation on the **Brown Hairstreak** was curtailed, but I have something of hers and would welcome the chance to return it if possible.

## Building a moth trap

*Bill Watkins*

With the help of Keith Dawes, a near neighbour who already takes part in the Garden Moth Scheme, I have constructed a "Skinner" type moth trap from marine plywood. (A lighter grade of ply or wood would be adequate). I used screws rather than nails and a small amount of wood glue.

I obtained the mains electrical equipment from Anglian Lepidoptera Supplies (ALS). An 18 inch long 15W actinic tube costs about £15. This is a fluorescent tube, which runs cold, and is specially designed to attract moths. In addition I had to have the electrical control box which comes ready wired with cable and fittings for the tube and with cable and mains plug costing £35, making a total of £50 in all. Portable kits are more costly and a battery is needed as well.

If you buy a "Skinner" type trap complete with electrical fittings, the cost is about £120, so by making your own you can save about £50, except for the cost of screws, timber and polycarbonate sheeting for the actual baffle/trap.

The internal dimensions of the box need to be 50cm x 50cm x 42cm deep, to allow for the 18 inch (45.72cm) light-tube plus the end connections. This will allow the tube and end connections to fit just inside the top of the box.



The wooden spar across the top supports the light-tube which is attached by means of clips provided by ALS. The spar sits in wooden slots and is easily lifted out complete with light-tube at the end of trapping.

I used clear polycarbonate cut to size, to sit on angled strips of wood inside the box to create the trap. This must fit close to the sides at the top to prevent moths escaping. The polycarbonate cost me £14 from B & Q but you may be able to get it cheaper elsewhere. Polycarbonate is difficult to cut and care is needed to prevent it shattering. You can saw it using a tenon saw. I actually cut mine with a Stanley knife against a steel ruler, scoring it continuously with the knife until I had cut it through, then sand-papered the edges.

In addition to the two main pieces of clear polycarbonate, you need two narrow strips of the material about 2 inches wide to fit in vertical slots at the lower edge, to complete the trap (see the picture below). Glass is heavier and more dangerous to handle than

polycarbonate. Finally, it is worth drilling some holes in the base of the box to allow any rain water to escape.



I set up the trap each Friday night and check the contents on Saturday morning. It is fascinating to see what we have caught and great fun identifying the moths. My records contribute to the Garden Moth Scheme and I also send them to my County Moth Recorder. I would like to know what numbers and species other moth trappers get, so that I can compare them with mine.

## **The STOP EXTINCTION Appeal**

*From Head Office*

£100,000 is in sight for the STOP EXTINCTION Appeal

Thanks to the marvellous support of Butterfly Conservation members we have raised a magnificent £84,000 for this appeal. However, we need a further £16,000 to meet our ambitious target to stop further extinctions across the UK. Acknowledging the tremendous response to the Appeal, our Chief Executive, Dr Martin Warren, urges everyone who has not contributed so far to support the appeal with gifts of any size, either by post or made online. "Every donation, whatever the amount, will make a difference. We have conservation projects ready to start immediately, as soon as funding is in place".

Your £10 can become £40 when used to match a Sustainable Development Fund grant. For example, a study into habitat restoration for the **Duke of Burgundy** in the North York Moors can now go ahead thanks to match funding donated by the Yorkshire branch.

Please help **STOP EXTINCTION** today by sending your 40th Anniversary donation to Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QP, or go online and make a donation to the **STOP EXTINCTION** Appeal at [www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)

## Monarchs in Mexico

Next year, as part of their 30th anniversary, West Midlands branch is planning a trip to see the hibernating Monarchs in Mexico. There are still some places available and West Midlands Butterfly Conservation is extending an invitation to Gloucestershire members to join them. The proposed dates are 7-21 January, 2009 and if you are interested please contact Mike Williams by email ([mike@stagborough.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:mike@stagborough.fsnet.co.uk)) or telephone (01299 824860) asap. As well as the Monarchs and other tropical butterflies and birds, a visit to Baja California is planned to see Gray Whales and their calves. Total cost is likely to be around the £2,000 mark depending on final numbers. The price includes all flights, accommodation, transport and food.

## Countdown 2010 boost for West Midlands

On Monday 6 October Natural England announced the key conservation projects to receive £5.5m under its **Countdown 2010** biodiversity action fund which aims to help some of England's most threatened biodiversity.

For more information visit the website <http://www.countdown2010.org>.

In the West Midlands a project to conserve Fritillary Butterflies across nine priority landscapes has received funding. This project will implement a conservation programme for 14 UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species of butterfly and moth, including the **High Brown**, **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** which are among Britain's fastest declining butterfly species. Work will take place on 169 sites across nine priority landscapes. The project will also benefit two further species of fritillary, the **Dark Green** and **Silver-washed**, which are High and Medium regional priorities respectively.

In addition to the fritillary species, the other UK BAP Priority Species and Priority Habitats that will benefit are:

- Butterflies: **Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Wood White, White-letter Hairstreak, White Admiral, Grayling.**
- Moths: **Forester, Mistletoe Marble (Celypha woodiana), Argent and Sable, Drab Looper, Common Fan-foot.**

The habitats are: Lowland heathland, Lowland mixed deciduous woodland, Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land, Purple moor grass and rush pastures, Upland calcareous grasslands.

The nine priority landscapes covered under this project are Wyre Forest, Malvern Hills, Cannock Chase, Oswestry Uplands, South Shropshire & North Herefordshire Woodlands, Herefordshire Commons, Forest of Dean, Shropshire Rush Pastures, Princethorpe Woodlands

## Committee members

This list gives members you are most likely to want to contact; for other committee members see the branch website.

<b>Chairman</b>	<b>David Jackson</b> Jacksongrus@btinternet.com	01902-344716
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<b>Conservation Officer</b>	<b>Mike Southall</b> michael_southall58@hotmail.co.uk	01299-251467
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<b>Co-ordinator/South Staffs Advisor</b>		
<b>Transects</b>	<b>John Tilt</b> John.tilt2@btopenworld.com	01386-792458
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<b>Champion</b>		
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<b>Monkwood</b>	<b>Paddy Harrison</b> paddyharrison@ukonline.co.uk	01905-641523
<b>Prees Heath</b>	<b>Stephen Lewis</b>	07900-886809
<b>Conservation officers:</b> (for Shropshire see Jenny Joy, above)		
<b>Worcs. Herefordshire</b>	<b>Trevor Bucknall</b> trevor.bucknall@virgin.net <b>Ian Hart</b> yellowrattle4@aol.com	01905-755757 01981 510259
<b>Moth officers:</b>		
<b>Worcestershire</b>	<b>Mike Southall</b> (see above)	01299-251467
<b>Herefordshire</b>	<b>Robin Hemming</b> robinhemming@btinternet.com	01568-797351
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<b>Herefordshire</b>	<b>Dean Fenton</b> fenton@littleburyfarm.co.uk	01568-611575

*Silver-studded Blues at Prees Heath, 2008*



Photo: © Stephen Lewis

*Large Blues at Collard Hill, Somerset, June 2008*



Photo: © Tony Moore