

Hairstreak

No 100

Autumn 2017



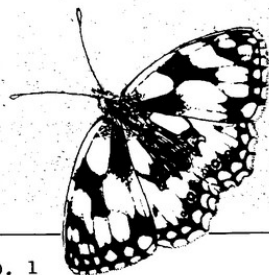
Butterfly
Conservation



Upper Thames
Branch

The British Butterfly Conservation Society

UPPER THAMES BRANCH



SEPTEMBER 1982

NEWSLETTER NO. 1

1982 has certainly been the 'year of the butterfly'. As I write this article on a warm, sunny day in early September I can see a dozen or so Small Tortoiseshells flying in the garden - twisting and twirling above the flower beds. I walked round the garden earlier and counted 30 Small Tortoiseshells on the Buddleia and Ice Plant (Sedum spectabile), 1 Painted Lady, 2 Red Admirals and 3 very tatty Peacocks. The vanessid butterflies have certainly done very well this year - our nettle patches were virtually defoliated by July and it was pleasing to see so many of the migrants (Painted Lady and Red Admiral), both in the garden and surrounding countryside. "Just like it used to be 30 years ago" a number of people have remarked, and others believe that this year was even better than 1976*. Certainly the months of August and September were not so good in '76, largely because many of the foodplants had dried up during the drought.

Good years such as this one and 1976 make us slightly more optimistic about the future survival of our butterfly fauna. Weather does play quite an important part in determining whether a species is going to be scarce or abundant any one year. Many female butterflies will only lay their eggs in sunny conditions and cold winters are thought to be beneficial to butterflies because many of their parasites and other small predators are killed. Also, overwintering larvae and pupae are not so susceptible to fungal attacks in a cold winter than in a mild, wet one. Consequently we may have a series of mild winters and cool, wet summers (such as 1979 and 1980) resulting in a general paucity of butterflies and even local extinctions of some species. However, a succession of years with favourable weather conditions can change the picture completely - dwindling colonies thrive and species thought to be locally extinct suddenly reappear. The Marsh Fritillary is a classic example of this phenomenon and this year has turned up at a number of sites where it was believed to be extinct.

Articles and photographs for inclusion in this newsletter are welcome.
Photographs should be sent as jpg (or similar) files and not embedded in a document or album.

Copy dates are: 1st January for Spring Issue
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1st August for Autumn Issue

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Cover photo: Common Tubic (*Alabonia geofrella*) by David Ferguson

Opposite page: page 1 of issue 1

Background: Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon

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Hello everyone and welcome to the 100th edition of the UTB newsletter (now called Hairstreak).

When edition one was written on single sided hand typed A4 sheets, I don't think anyone would have believed that fairly soon we might have more members than there were words in that first newsletter. The reason for our growth is our success. The Upper Thames branch has been immensely fortunate in having some outstanding volunteers, both from the outset and, of course, even more of you today. Our willing volunteers allowed our fairly autonomous branch to take on projects and do a good job of delivering a worthwhile result despite us existing on almost no money.

I won't use this space to list all our achievements since issue one, partly because a long list is dull reading but mainly because I am more focused on taking us forward to even greater achievements than in looking back. But I shall mention a few of the projects that started way back when our membership was about 30 people and that are still developing and producing great results; for instance, the recording of species across the three counties. Since the early days, when we struggled to collect a few thousand records over the ten years 1975 – 1984, to illustrate maps of distribution on a grid of 10km squares; we have gone on to produce just under half a million records from every single 2km within our boundaries between 2005 – 2014; and what's more this data showed that the range of most butterflies was expanding. We have lost five species since our earliest days and currently the Wood White is under severe threat, but we are working on it and if our members' efforts were all it would take, the butterfly's future would be secure. Only last year a member wrote a new computer program that helps our 10km square champions pin point the parts of their square that need attention; and new software for PCs and smartphones helps us capture far more records than previously.

In 2003, we appointed Species Champions. They agreed to try to do a bit more to help the most hard pressed species. The work of several of these volunteers has been literally ground breaking. With no model to follow, they decided what needed doing and got on with doing it. It could well be argued that more of our rarest species would be in a truly precarious position without the intervention of our species champions, often through discussion with landowners and other conservation organisations.

The outcome of such discussions are frequently an agreement about work to aid threatened species. Our members have been turning out to help on conservation tasks of this type since those early days, but now each work party's numbers mirror the size of the entire early membership. UTB winter work parties are planned at six sites next winter, one of these being our own reserve at Holtspur Bottom and we expect to add new sites in future. Surveys to inform this winter work are also very well supported with requests for help with new surveys in the Chilterns during spring 2017 resulting in over 30 members giving their time freely and turning out to record. I do apologise to those members who would love to get involved but live too far from existing survey and work party sites to get an invitation. We are constantly seeking

ways to allow you to get involved but we need to find a toe-hold in some areas before our work can blossom there as it has elsewhere.

Once we had Species Champions, we began to have Species Champions' Day – now renamed Conservation Review Days; because they no longer solely focus on the work of our Species Champions but now also feature seminar style talks from some leading exponents in the world of butterfly and moth research; very often those who work with the Government's Centre for Hydrology and Ecology. Indeed, our Conservation Review Day is now frequently held at their headquarters and we will be there again on 22nd February 2018.

Another early initiative was to attend public events and try to talk to the public about the need for action to save butterflies; and to sell tea towels and rulers etc. At such events we managed to speak with about one hundred people each year. We no longer try to sell knick-knacks. Now the main thrust is all about delivering our message that each of us must do something to help butterflies, moths and other insects and of course we speak quite literally to thousands of people each year. This newsletter will appear after 'Countryfile Live' and I was once again very moved by the amazing response of members living nearby, who, when asked if they could give up a few hours to man the stall at 'Countryfile Live' (a spin off from the BBC TV Countryfile programme), replied they would help for two or three days! We spoke with nearly a thousand people each day over the four days of the event and to hundreds more at the various other events we attended this year.



Oxford Festival of Nature
Tony Gillie

Naturally, we don't only talk to the public face to face. We also engage with non-members through our websites and both Twitter and Facebook. All run by volunteer effort of course. But our amazing strength is in our members. Each of you receive the Hairstreak, which continues to develop and to stay fresh. The members also have a day set aside for them: our annual Members' Day (the style and length of which has become widely adopted by other Butterfly Conservation branches). The next Members' Day and AGM is in Amersham on 28th October and I hope to see you there.

When you hear headline news about the decline of Butterflies and Moths you might wonder if we are achieving anything. So, imagine how those founding members of the Upper Thames Branch would regard us. I hope they would agree that, 100 newsletters later, through your voluntary efforts, we are an impressive force. Far more sensitive and informed conservation work is being carried out, many butterfly and moth species are increasing their range and people really do seem to be noticing that our work is worthwhile.

However, the message to you, from your committee, is still the same as in that first newsletter, "Thank you to our members".



This photo of a Scarce Swallowtail by Keith Salter was the winner of the Overseas Category in last year's Photographic Competition. It gives an idea of the standard.

Plea for Help

Lindengate is a charity that promotes wellbeing through nature and horticulture. They grow hundreds of plants, for us to plant into Nature Reserves, every year.

One of their costs is the pots they provide the plants in, another is the medium in which they germinate and grow the plants. If you have any (clean please) 9cm square pots, trays to hold them and either topsoil or potting compost, that you might donate; please bring it to Members' Day where we will collect them and deliver them. Alternatively, you could take them direct to [Lindengate, The Old Allotment Site, Wyevale Garden Centre, Aylesbury Road, Wendover HP22 6BD](#)

And if you fancy helping with the growing of plants at Lindengate they have a need for extra hands and especially at certain times of peak activity (for a few days). Please contact Charlie Powell charlie.powell@lindengate.org.uk to be placed on a volunteer database and let her know if you are available regularly, or solely at the busiest times.

If you would like to know more about Lindengate please check out their website www.lindengate.org.uk or follow them on Facebook www.facebook.com/lindengategardening or on twitter [@lindengate](https://twitter.com/lindengate)

Butterfly Conservation - Upper Thames Branch Members' Day & Annual General Meeting

Saturday 28th October

Amersham Community Centre, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, HP6 5AH

PROGRAMME

- 09.45 **Doors Open- Registration and coffee**
- 10.30 **Introduction and Welcome** Nick Bowles
- 10.40 **Review of Upper Thames Moths in 2017** Jan Haseler
- 11.05 **Review of Upper Thames Butterflies in 2017** Nick Bowles
- 11.25 **Progress of the Regional Action Plan** Steve Wheatley
- 11.55 **Holtspur Bottom Reserve – latest news** Tony Gillie
- 12.20 **Lindengate** Charlie Powell
- 12.40 **Lunch**
Vote in our annual photographic competition, have a go at the quiz, buy raffle tickets and view the displays. Richard Lewington will be selling his artwork and Aurelian Books will have a bookstall.
- 14.10 **Branch Annual General Meeting**
Agenda
1. Apologies for absence
 2. Minutes of last AGM and matters arising
 3. Chairman's Report
 4. Treasurer's Report and approval of accounts
 5. Election of Officers
 6. Any other (previously notified) Business
- 14.40 **News about Moths and Moths in the news** Martin Harvey
- 15.10 **Butterflies and Moths of Otmoor** David Wilding
- 15.45 **Tea and Raffle**
- 16.25 **Photographic Competition Results** Peter Thompson
Quiz results and winner
- 16.50 **Round up of the Day and Closing Remarks** Nick Bowles

Directions to our Members' Day venue

Amersham Community Centre, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham-on-the-Hill, HP6 5AH

(O.S. maps 165, 172, 176. Grid reference: SU967984)

Parking is **not** allowed in Chiltern Avenue or nearby roads. There are two alternatives: 1) The Chiltern District Council Offices car-park which is **free** and open to the public all day on Saturday. The entrance is in the northern arm of King George V Road, on the right behind some shrubs opposite playing fields. It is a two minute level walk to the Centre; cross the road and follow the footpath past the library. 2) The Pay-and-Display car-park in which the Centre is situated (£3.40 for five hours, free for blue badge holders). The entrance is between the zebra crossing and the bus-stop.

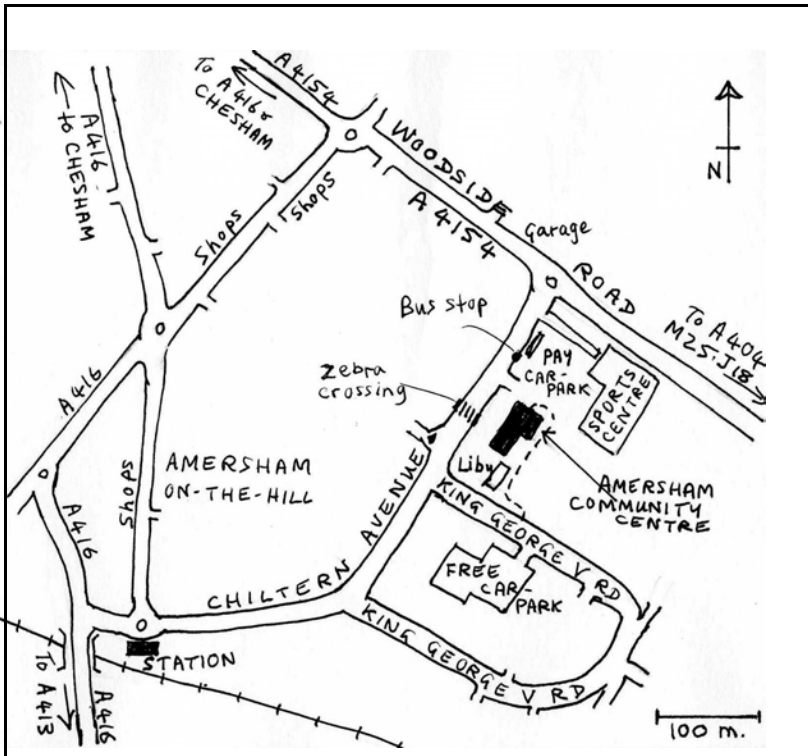
To find Chiltern Avenue by road:

From the A413 or A355, Drive into Old Amersham. At the mini-roundabout just east of Tesco car-park, turn north on to the A416, go up the hill and, immediately after going under the railway bridge, turn right. Drive past the station and into Chiltern Avenue. Ignore the first turning to King George V Road, but take the second one for the free car-park which is on the right.

From the M25 (J.18) and A404, As you approach Amersham, turn right at the lights and mini-roundabout on to the A4154 (formerly A404), go under the railway bridge and bear left into Woodside Road. Continue to the next mini-roundabout, by a garage, and turn left into Chiltern Avenue. The car-parks are on the left after the bus-stop.

From Chesham and the A416, As you approach Amersham, turn left into the A4154 (formerly A404). Go straight ahead at the mini-roundabout and into Woodside Road. At the next mini-roundabout, near a garage, turn right into Chiltern Avenue. The car-parks are on the left after the bus-stop.

By train: As you leave Amersham railway station, turn right into Chiltern Avenue. The Community Centre is about 500 metres along on the right, in the public car-park between the zebra crossing and the bus-stop.



Members' Day Speakers

Steve Wheatley is Butterfly Conservation's Senior Regional Officer for the South East. He is leading the Bradenham Duke of Burgundy project in the Chilterns.

Martin Harvey is an entomologist and biological recorder who can't quite believe how lucky he has been to work in these subjects. He currently gets to play with insects and databases for the UK Biological Records Centre, and also to teach about insects and databases to lots of lovely people who attend his courses for Field Studies Council, BBOWT and Manchester Metropolitan University. His main qualifications for speaking to you today are that he is county moth recorder for Berkshire and used to be a committee member for Upper Thames Branch.

David Wilding has been working on Otmoor for 13 years, starting as Warden and progressing to Site Manager. In the past he has worked for many organisations, including Forestry Commission (New Forest), Park Ranger (Hampshire), BTCV and the North Cascades National Park Service.

Charlie Powell is a Horticulturist and conservation enthusiast, and is one of 2 co-founders of Lindengate, a mental health charity that uses gardening and the outdoor environment to support those with a wide range of mental health needs. The development of the site under Charlie's guidance has been focused on garden spaces that combine nature's natural ability to create beautiful and sustainable environments whilst at the same time nurturing the people who come into contact with them. As part of this, since opening in November 2014, Lindengate has supported a number of conservation projects across the country.

Nick Bowles is Chair of Upper Thames Branch of BC. He is our Chalk Hill Blue species champion and a voluntary Conservation Officer for Bucks. Nick is also a regular contributor of British Wildlife magazine.

Jan Haseler is Vice President and Excursions Secretary of Reading & District Natural History Society, a regular volunteer at BBOWT's Moor Copse Reserve and a member of the transect teams at Lardon Chase and Aston Upthorpe.

Dr Tony Gillie is a member of the Upper Thames BC committee and has been instrumental in a number of initiatives relating to our Holtspur Bottom reserve, including growing, planting and monitoring Dark Mullein in the Holtspur area to support the nationally scarce Striped Lychnis moth.

Members' Day Photographic Competition

Pete Thompson

This summer (at the time of writing – during a rainstorm) has seen a big improvement in numbers of butterflies compared to the last couple of years, so there should have been plenty of opportunities to photograph our glorious butterflies and moths. I expect and hope that many of you will have plenty of images to delight the audience at Members' Day.

We will again run the '**Newer Entrants**' category this year, reserved entirely for members who have never previously entered, or who have done so no more than twice before. You might be a younger member just getting into butterfly photography, or a more experienced person who just needs a bit of extra encouragement! Entries in this category can be of either butterflies or moths, taken, in the wild, in the UK or overseas and at any stage of life from egg onwards.

As usual, there will be two parallel competitions, and the winners in each will be selected by popular vote:

Members' competition – open to members (apart from recent winners of the overall 'best in show' prize, who have been individually notified.)

You can enter a maximum of ten images across all categories, but in the case of UK Butterflies, it's now a maximum of just six (so look out your very best!).

There will be **six** categories, as shown below.

**1. UK butterflies 2. Overseas butterflies 3. Moths 4. Immature stages
5. Newer Entrants**

All photos entered for these first five categories should be **without digital alteration**. For this purpose, 'digital alteration' means making changes to the subject matter by digital means – such as removing or replacing parts of the image, deleting grass stems or blemishes. It does **not** preclude the use of cropping, brightness and contrast adjustments, or some degree of sharpening that happens anyway in most cameras and printers. All these are allowed.

6. Digital creativity

This is your opportunity to be really adventurous and show the beauty of our insects in a very different way. Alterations to lighting, colour and background – or the use of distortion, collage, superimposed images or anything else you can think of – are all specifically encouraged in this category.

All Members' Competition prints should be a maximum of 19x13cm including mount.

There will be prizes for the most popular photos in each category, though only one prize per photographer, and an additional prize for 'best in show'. All photos entered should be prints, taken in the wild since last year's Members' Day. Please write the photographer's name and telephone number on the back, plus the category being entered. Mounting on card, and adding a title, can enhance any photo, but this is optional.

2. Recent Winners' Competition - open to recent winners of the overall 'best in show' prize.

Recent winners of the members' competition have put on an inspiring display in recent years, and we are asking each of them to contribute any 6 prints, preferably mounted on grey card, with an overall maximum size, including mount, of 30x25cm.

Finally, I would like to confirm that by entering our competitions, you are giving UTB permission to use (with acknowledgement) any of your images in our newsletters or electronic media.

So make the most of the weather, get your creative and technological juices flowing and help us to create an even better display than last year.

Butterflies in UTB - what has changed since 1982?

Jim Asher

Around the time Upper Thames Branch was formed, Bernwood Forest was a nationally renowned hot-spot of butterfly species and my favourite site to visit (access was via Hell Coppice then). I recall seeing up to 26 species in a day in high summer in the 1980s. There was also the strange sight of people with notebooks recording things – not so strange now!

At that time, you could find Grizzled Skipper, Wood White, Duke of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Marsh Fritillary in Bernwood. Since that time, we have lost all of these species from Bernwood. You could also find Black and Brown Hairstreak, Purple Emperor and White Admiral, all of which still fly there.

At another of our favourite sites, Aston Upthorpe, we had a localised colony of Duke of Burgundy, Silver-spotted Skippers in Juniper Valley, along with Small Blues, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and Chalk Hill Blues. We have since lost the Dukes and Silver-spotted Skippers from that site, the latter attributed to persistent problems with grazing around 2005-8.

Looking more widely across our three counties, what are the noticeable changes in our butterflies over the 35-year period since our branch was formed? We will look at the major changes in species distribution and in abundance over that period, and at winners and losers. Several of the photos here are from slides dating back to these early years, when image quality was a bigger challenge to achieve!



Bernwood - Hell Coppice

Species distribution and abundance changes

Several species have undergone significant reductions in distribution, which we have measured by changes in 'occupancy' - the number of 2km squares in which they have been recorded within certain year ranges across our three counties. They have also shown changes in abundance – the number of butterflies on sites monitored by transect recording.

At one extreme, populations of some species have dwindled to unsustainable levels and have become extinct in our area since 1982. These are:

- **High Brown Fritillary** – last seen in our area around 1980. At a national level, this open woodland species has undergone massive reduction in distribution, is extinct across SE England and remains threatened in its few residual locations in north- and south-west England.

- **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, a species of damp, but open woodland, was found in Bernwood until the 1980s and hung on in woods on the Berks/Hampshire border, but I have the sad and dubious honour of seeing the last one recorded in our area at Ashford Hill Meadows (SE of Newbury) in 1990.
- **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, a species of coppice woodland in southern England, had its one remaining population in Bernwood Forest, which had a revival when the major ride crossroads known as 'Piccadilly Circus' in Oakley Wood was felled and dozens could be seen flying on open ground. However, suitable conditions could not be sustained in Bernwood, and the last individual was recorded by Mike Wilkins in 1995.



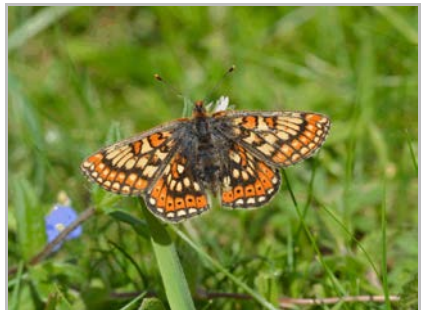
Small Pearl-bordered
Fritillary



Pearl-bordered Fritillary

A number of species have suffered major losses in distribution and are threatened with extinction:

Marsh Fritillary was recorded in a total of eight 2km squares in the early 1980s, with known populations at Bernwood, the railway cutting by Rushbeds and at Seven Barrows. These have progressively been lost, with records from only five 2km squares in 1995-2000, and the last established population at Seven Barrows seems to have gone now. There are occasional records of individuals, but no evidence of an established population, although there are proposals for re-introduction to two sites in our area, which we hope will come to fruition.



Marsh Fritillary

Wall was a relatively common butterfly across our three counties and a frequent garden visitor in the early 1980s. It has declined massively in distribution across central England over the past 20 years, and, apart from the occasional individual sighting in recent years, seems to be all but extinct in our area.

Grayling was restricted in its local range in the 1980s to heathland sites on the Berkshire border with Hampshire and Surrey, and a few other sites, including some on the Downs. It is now found only on heathland sites, and many of these have faced threats from housing and other development. More priority is now given to conservation of the remaining heathland, and the decline in distribution of Grayling has slowed. A local stronghold now is on restored heathland at Greenham Common, which was a US air base with cruise missiles in the 1980s!

Silver-studded Blue is another heathland species that still hangs on at sites on the borders of Berks with Hants and Surrey and continues to be a rare butterfly in our area.

Wood White was frequently seen in Bernwood and reliably appeared at Whitecross Green, but has disappeared from most of its sites in our area, hanging on now only in north Bucks, near the Northants border. One apparently thriving colony on a disused railway line SW of Bletchley disappeared in the course of two years. We simply don't have enough information to know what has led to its losses in our area.



Wood White

Several species have shown losses of distribution, but a number of populations are still found in our area:

White Admiral is a species of shady woodland rides, but has fallen in numbers and is recorded in fewer sites than the 1980s. In some cases, woodland has become over-shaded for this species. The abundance of this species in Bernwood seems to have dropped in the last few years.

Dingy Skipper and **Grizzled Skipper** are found on downland sites and have also been recorded on brownfield sites, but some local sites have been lost, and numbers have fallen.

The number of 2km squares in which **Small Heath** has been recorded has fallen – we would have regarded this species as relatively common in the 1980s, but the grasslands on which it used to thrive seem to have become less suitable. This seems to be reflected across southern England.

Comings and goings

Duke of Burgundy was found in woodlands (feeding on primrose) and on scrubby downland (feeding on cowslip). It occurred in Bernwood south of 'Piccadilly Circus', but had disappeared from all its vale woodland sites, including Bernwood, by 1995. Apart from a single more recent sighting, we lost it from Aston Upthorpe by 2006. It is still very localised on a handful of sites on the Downs and Chilterns.

We have lost some **Small Blue** populations since the 1980s, one example being on a roadside about half a mile north of the entrance to Oxford Crematorium. Local populations vary in strength from year to year, but this is a persistent species and it still puts in regular appearances in a number of its remaining sites, mainly on the Downs and Chilterns, where its foodplant, Kidney Vetch, thrives.

Small Copper waxes and wanes in its recorded distribution from year to year, but seems to be less frequent. We would regard its presence as a sign of healthy semi-natural grassland, so we need to be alert to its congoing status.

Records of **Dark Green Fritillary** showed declines in distribution since the 1980s reaching a low point in the period 2000-5, but has been making some comeback, with more records in more recent years.

Some species have shown significant increases in distribution since the 1980s.

Essex Skipper moved across our branch area in the 1980s, sweeping from south east to north west, with a particularly obvious increase in distribution in north Oxfordshire. It is now frequently found (if you look for the black antenna tips) across our whole branch area, emerging just a little later than Small Skipper.



Silver-washed Fritillary has shown a massive increase in distribution since the 1980s, when it was a comparatively rare, recorded in only 24 2km squares between 1987 and 1994 and up to over 370 2km squares by 2014. Only very occasionally seen in Bernwood in the 1980s, it has appeared there in good numbers in recent years.

Purple Emperor has spread its distribution significantly since the 1980s, when it was recorded from fewer than 20 2km squares, to some 150 squares by 2014. This is part of what appears to be a larger scale expansion across southern England, although we recognise that it is also at a time of improved skill in recording.



Adonis Blue was a rare treat in the 1980s, recorded in only seven 2km squares in 1987–92. Our best site then was Turville Hill in Bucks, where they appeared regularly, until changes in grazing and too much vegetation growth led to its loss there. Its distribution expanded in the first decade of the 21st century, and 2km square occupancy is 3–4 times what it was in the 1980s, probably benefiting from climate change. Very much a species of tightly-grazed chalk grassland, it occurs as far north as Yoesden Bank in our area, but its frequency varies with weather patterns.



Adonis Blue

In the 1980s, we had to go to Bernwood to have a reasonable chance to see **Brown Hairstreak**, and it was recorded in only four 2km squares in that area. It has subsequently spread to a much wider area, broadly centred on Otmoor, and that spread has been documented through systematic egg-searches pioneered by David Redhead and a team of branch volunteers and it has now been recorded in over 300 1km squares, even reaching into Oxford city.

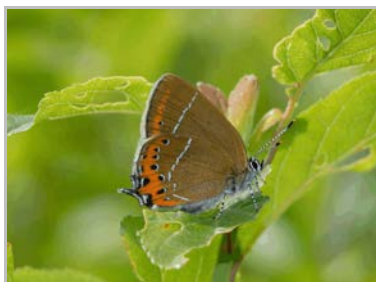


Brown Hairstreak

Brown Argus was seen only on chalk grassland habitats in the 1980s, where its main foodplant, Common Rock-rose, occurred. In the late 1990s/2000s it spread off the chalk, and bred on cranesbill and storksbill species (more successfully in warm summers). As a result, its distribution has grown four-fold and it can be seen on uncultivated field margins.

Red Admiral was a migrant species in the 1980s and did not overwinter. That has changed (probably due to climate warming) and it now over-winters regularly in our area. As a result it has become commoner.

A key UK species, **Black Hairstreak**, is holding on in Bucks and Oxfordshire on the mature blackthorn habitat that it needs. We have the privilege of hosting over half of the populations of this rare butterfly that occur in UK, so we also have a special responsibility for its conservation. The number of 2km squares in which it is recorded has not changed much since the 1980s, although it seems to have good and poor years, depending on weather patterns.



Black Hairstreak

Visitors from overseas

Over the years, we have seen many migrant visitors from the south. **Painted Lady** and **Clouded Yellow** butterflies used to be infrequent migrants into UK, but their migrations seem to have become more frequent, probably attributable to climate change. We seem to see Painted Ladies most years, with very large numbers (even millions) in bumper years; when they arrive in late spring, they breed locally on thistles and their numbers get a second boost when the new generation emerges.

We have also seen rare migrations into UK from the east of **Camberwell Beauty**, linked to anti-cyclonic weather patterns with sustained summer winds from the east. The largest in recent years occurred in 1996, believed to have come across northern Europe from Sweden. We had four records of sightings in our area. Hopefully, Brexit will not block these immigrants!

What has driven these changes?

Many things have changed in UK and in our area since 1982, when we were three years into Margaret Thatcher's government, we had the Falklands war, the lowest ever recorded temperature in UK, the Commodore 64 desktop computer was launched, Prince William was born, and Kielder Water was officially opened.

Landscape changes

The most wide-reaching landscape changes in our area arise from agricultural policy, woodland management, housing and industrial and other development, all of which have had impacts on our butterflies.

In farming, we have seen the introduction of setaside in 1992, leaving areas of land uncultivated (which benefited some butterflies, perhaps notably Small and Essex Skipper), in response to over-production of food. This policy was removed in 2008 as a new system of environmental stewardship was introduced, with farm subsidies linked to schemes for appropriate management including bird- and insect-friendly field margins. Higher level schemes were linked to



Bird-friendly field margin

targeted management of semi-natural habitats in the landscape, but rationed by budget and available only on limited areas of landscape. Increased demand for energy crops for biofuel, has removed the issue of over-production from the agenda.

Environmental stewardship helps, but too much of our countryside is covered by single species crops, or by 'improved' rye-grass meadows with no room for nature. We do not want Brexit to become an excuse for government to relax environmental protection.

Increased human population has led to more housing and infrastructure development across our area with a more free-for-all approach to planning introduced in David Cameron's government. We remain in the midst of this boom as more and more green land disappears under building sites. Transport links have come under

strain; new roads have been built, HS2 is being planned, and the Oxford-Cambridge rail route is being (re)developed, some of it along disused railway lines that had provided good habitat for butterflies. A new incinerator at Greatmoor (between Bicester and Aylesbury) is accessed from the A41 along a new road along a disused railway line, which had Grizzled Skipper, Black Hairstreak and other species breeding along it.

While loss of a single site is unfortunate, the widespread scale of development now in rampage mode poses a major challenge for our wildlife.

Aston Upthorpe - a history

Gerry Kendall

On 21 March each year a group of ever more decrepit butterfly fanciers meet. We raise our glasses to the Downs and grumble about how much better things were in the old days. Even the ale isn't what it was, though it improves a little after a few pints. But it is a happy day, insofar as any day can be happy when everything is going to the dogs, for it was on 21 March 1993 that the Aston Upthorpe transect was set up.

Where and what is Aston Upthorpe

In a sentence, Aston Upthorpe is a piece of chalk downland four or five miles south of Didcot. To reach it by car, turn south off the A417 Blewbury – Streatley road just by Aston Tirrold. You then drive perhaps half a mile along a narrow lane and park by the grain dryer (grid reference SU 550 844).

Aston Upthorpe is part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, just squeezing in at the north-east tip. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is, of course, not just a point on a map, it is a substantial area. In this report I shall be thinking of the tetrad (2km x 2km square) with its south-west corner at SU5482 plus the 1x1 km square SU5383 (so as to include Oven Bottom), but a little elasticity is required.

Perhaps the best known feature of Aston Upthorpe is Juniper Valley. Unhelpfully, this name appears neither on the 1:25000 OS map, nor on the larger scale map defining the SSSI. However, it can be found quite easily on the former (sheet 170) as the cluster of contour lines at about SP545835. Oven Bottom is shown on the OS map and lies a couple of hundred metres to the West. The Fairmile is a little further south.



The Site of Special Scientific Interest

Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI covers about 38 hectares, almost 100 acres. It was first designated in 1953 for its species-rich lowland calcareous grassland, and also because of the quantity of Juniper scrub growing in the valley. The Juniper can be regarded as a relic of the last ice age though it is uncertain how much investigation this romantic picture would withstand. Nevertheless, it is a species which is not commonly found in our area. The site was designated largely for its flora – the Pasque Flower still survives inside its rabbit-proof enclosure and Burnt Orchid has been found by those with patience and a good eye. Interesting birds are also seen: we have come across Ring Ousel more than once and Stone Curlew are said to nest not far away.

But of course it is the butterflies and moths that are of particular interest to us. The citation mentions the Silver-spotted Skipper, the Chalk Hill and Small Blues and “a strong colony of the Duke of Burgundy”. We shall see below that not all these species have flourished in the sixty-odd years since designation. The designation also mentions the the “nationally uncommon” Juniper Carpet Moth *Thera juniperata* and the Juniper Berry Miner (micro)moth *Argyresthia praecocella*. There were also other invertebrates of note, in particular the dusky cockroach, at the northernmost limit of its range.

What happened next?

In the 1977 Handbook of the nature reserves of the Berkshire, Bucks and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust (the name “BBOWT” was not yet thought of) Aston Upthorpe, or at least Juniper Valley, is listed. There was “a fifteen year agreement with the owner”. However, something seems to have gone sour and it is not mentioned in the 1984 Handbook. By the way, Google tells me that the 1977 BBONT Handbook ranks in the Amazon best sellers list at number 951,447. How did we manage before the internet?

Butterfly Conservation and Aston Upthorpe

Butterfly Conservation was formed in 1968, and Upper Thames Branch (UTB) in 1982, well after the designation of Aston Upthorpe as a SSSI. The new organisations immediately recognised that they had an important site in their area. Walks were organised, aimed largely at helping people to see the unusual or rare butterflies. These continue to the present day. Springtime walks target the spring Skippers, Dingy and Grizzled, Green Hairstreak and Small Blue. Needless to say, Duke of Burgundy was a target when there was a reasonable chance of finding it. Later in the year there is a field meeting at Oven Bottom for the butterflies of high summer. Butterfly Conservation work parties are described below as is the Transect, which is organised by UTB.



Grizzled Skippers
David Dennis

The Aston Upthorpe Transect

It was on 21 March 1993 that a group of Butterfly Conservation members met to map out a transect at Aston Upthorpe. We came equipped with a bag of tent-pegs and a mallet and we solemnly pounded in a peg at the start and the end of each sector and at salient points in between. Some of the pegs lasted pretty well, but most of them disappeared as soon as the spring growth took hold. The day was wet. Not a solid continuous downpour but bad enough that we were all thoroughly damp when we came across the landowner in his Range Rover. He had, of course, already given his permission and he politely wished us well. But the look in his eye said "There's nowt so queer as folks except perhaps Butterfly Folk, I wonder if they'll really keep it up".

Well, thanks to Mike Wilkins' organisational skill, the transect has been walked almost every week from April to September from 1993 to the present day, and details of the numbers of each species of butterfly seen go to Mike to be collated and sent to the Butterfly Conservation database which in turn feeds into the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. The pool of volunteers has, of course, been refreshed occasionally. The data provide an invaluable record of how things have changed over time. I'll talk about that in just a moment, but first I can't resist a few memories of transecting.

I still remember the delight each time we came across a Silver-spotted Skipper. In those days we were a bit blasé about Duke of Burgundy, though my diary records that in 2003 I failed to find one and had to make do with Jim Asher who was leading a walk. As you would expect, there were days in the early and late part of the year when there wasn't much to be seen. But in July, your pencil could turn red-hot as you ticked off the Browns. Usually the transect walker picks a reasonable day, but inevitably we have been caught in thunder. I'll mention the Great Nettle Jungle later.

Nevertheless, I have frequently thought that if I could travel back in time I would have an impassioned word with those youngish men setting up that transect. "This isn't just for one year" I'd say. "You'll still be doing this when your sell-by date is looming. Have some sense. When you come to steep hills, do you really have to climb them all?"

The Case of the Missing Duke

While I was collecting material for this piece I realised that relatively recently I had seen a photo of a Duke of Burgundy taken at Aston Upthorpe. No such sighting appeared in the database. My memory is fallible, but I contacted Phil Penson who confirmed that he had indeed sent me such a picture.

How did such an important Duke go missing? I'll spare you the detective work; the short answer is that Phil had thought that I'd send in the formal record and I had thought that Phil would. There is a moral there.

Butterflies at Aston Upthorpe

As we have seen, Aston Upthorpe is a good site for butterflies and thirty five species have been seen there in the last twenty five years. Ten of these are "key species" in the sense of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The table gives the number of sightings

of these key species since 1995 (including the Missing Duke) from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. I would rather have given a picture than a table but with such low and variable numbers it was hard to follow. Totals are for two year periods which provides a bit of smoothing.

The first two columns are for Silver Spotted Skipper and Duke of Burgundy. Details differ but the overall picture is the same: a reasonable number of sightings in the early years and none recently. A dismal situation. In fact the Wall Butterfly is in exactly the same category: one was seen on the 1993 transect with no other sightings since.

The next six columns are for Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Chalk Hill Blue, Small Blue and Adonis Blue. Here I would argue that the picture is very much better: numbers are variable from year to year but there is no evidence of a downward trend. It is true that the numbers of Adonis Blue sightings are low, but they have always been so; it may be that all these insects are vagrants from one of the other known colonies nearby. The same thing probably applies to Small Blue – the Fairmile is a better bet if you want to see this species in the area.

The final two columns are for Dark Green and Silver-washed Fritillary. Here, although the numbers are low (only two in the case of the Silver-Washed) there is perhaps some sign of an increase in more recent years. That is surely welcome, although perhaps one should think twice about the implications for the habitat if the Silver-washed, a woodland species, is really starting to find a nominally chalk grassland site to its taste.

Management of the site

Of course, we recognise nowadays that it is absolutely essential to maintain the habitat at a nature reserve. It is not nearly enough to prevent it from being ploughed up. Benign neglect will probably lead to it scrubbing over and in due course the scrub will turn to trees. This is fatal for a downland site. However, Natural England has a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with the current owner which requires controlled grazing by sheep of the SSSI in the autumn, winter, and early spring. Grazing during the summer is forbidden in order to allow the chalk grassland wildflowers to flower. In addition, each winter several work parties of volunteers from Butterfly Conservation undertake scrub bashing. It was on one such work party that a hunt came through the area where we were working. This was not a hunt in full cry (hardly possible in the narrow glade in question), It looked much more as if the hounds were bunking off in search of a little P & Q. This was much to the embarrassment of those who were supposed to be in charge of them, who knew that the Hunt was somewhere where it should not be and displaying a mastery of hounds that was “still working towards level one”. In due course the last of the dogs was chased away and we returned to scrub clearance.

Summary

Aston Upton is an important site. Even restricting our attention to butterflies, arguably not its strongest suit, it has an impressive list with some important species.

Nevertheless, we cannot be happy with a situation in which it seems at least very likely that two important species, Duke of Burgundy and Silver-Spotted Skipper have been lost. The problem may well be over-grazing by rabbits. This is very hard to control.

The volunteer work parties do help keep the scrub down but it is a Red Queen's Race – running very hard to keep in the same place. The facts of the matter are that lots of scrub (e.g. sycamore) loves being cut and bounces back, shoulder high in two years at most. Similarly, we were delighted when a large area of invasive privet was razed. But we were less delighted the next year when it was replaced by the Great Nettle Jungle, eight feet tall and so thickly packed as to defeat 99% of transect walkers unless they were in good steel armour. We must hope that efforts to preserve and improve this very special place are continued with energy, imagination and a steadily increasing knowledge of what our butterflies need.

Acknowledgements

Writing this piece would not have been possible without assistance from many people. I cannot name them all but neither can I fail to mention help from Alison Muldal (Natural England), Peter Ogden (Butterfly Conservation) and Mike Wilkins (Butterfly Conservation). Nevertheless the opinions, and any mistakes, are the work of the author.

Number of butterfly sightings by species and two year period

	<i>Lost?</i>		<i>Holding their own?</i>						<i>Increasing ?</i>	
	<i>SS</i>	<i>DB</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>GS</i>	<i>GH</i>	<i>SB</i>	<i>CB</i>	<i>AB</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>SWF</i>
1995-6	1	23	21	20	20	6	8	1	0	0
1997-8	6	10	12	12	6	1	5	2	1	0
1999-0	6	11	10	23	2	5	27	1	0	0
2001-2	2	14	9	25	7	5	26	1	0	0
2003-4	4	12	32	45	15	0	77	1	0	0
2005-6	4	3	13	17	7	1	15	1	1	0
2007-8	1	0	12	18	15	1	6	3	1	0
2009-0	2	0	19	33	12	6	30	2	0	0
2011-2	0	1	38	54	10	8	62	5	3	0
2013-4	0	0	25	27	4	0	56	1	8	1
2015-6	0	0	28	49	24	5	36	1	6	1

Key

SS=Silver-spotted Skipper, DB=Duke of Burgundy

DS=Dingy Skipper, GS=Grizzled Skipper, GH=Green Hairstreak

CB=Chalk Hill Blue, SB=Small Blue, AB=Adonis Blue

DF=Dark Green Fritillary, SWF=Silver-washed Fritillary

A Brief History of the UTB

Caroline Steel

The inaugural meeting of the Upper Thames Branch was held in Oxford in the Iffley Village Church Hall on May 15th 1982. It was a beautiful afternoon and I remember someone commenting that perhaps we should be out looking for butterflies rather than having an indoor meeting! Indeed the good weather continued and I mentioned in the first newsletter, which came out in September, that 1982 had been the 'Year of the Butterfly' with good numbers of butterflies seen, in particular the 'vanessids'. As I write this article, I have been watching Red Admirals twirling around the garden and noted a Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell on the Buddleia, reminding me of when my interest in butterflies started as a young child. The next door neighbour's son came round one day, asking if he could catch a Painted Lady from our Buddleia. I joined in the pursuit and was thrilled when I managed to catch both a male and female and soon I had turned my Dad's shed into a butterfly breeding house! I spent much of my school holidays cycling with my sister around the lanes in Surrey with a handmade net and collecting boxes. My aim was not to kill but to try to breed as many species as I could, and my first long distance journey once I could drive was a trip to the Worldwide Butterfly Farm in Dorset.

I became a member of the British Butterfly Conservation Society in 1974 at the age of 19 and remember going up to the Victory Services Club where the national AGM was held. Only 20 – 30 members attended in these early years but numbers grew as branches were formed. I think Upper Thames was the ninth Branch, following West Midlands, London, East Midlands, Yorkshire, West Country, Hampshire and Norfolk. It had always been a dream of mine to form such a branch. After undertaking a two year research project on the butterflies of Bernwood Forest for my M.Phil thesis, I was fortunate to get a job with the Nature Conservancy Council as an entomologist and for five years worked on the Invertebrate Site Register. This was a county by county survey of the best sites for invertebrates and I covered the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. I came into contact with a number of butterfly enthusiasts and hence I was able to draw upon these people when starting up the Branch.

The first newsletter was typed double spaced by my fiance's mother and was printed in A4 format. I chose a Marbled White for the logo as it was easy to identify and well distributed in the three counties. The newsletter included a report of the inaugural meeting, three field trips, two talks and news of an Adonis Blue site and the threat of the proposed M40 extension to Bernwood Forest.

I purchased an electric typewriter for the second newsletter which was produced in February 1983 to give notice of the first AGM on the 30th March. The third newsletter in June reports that a committee of eight people was successfully raised, and our balance was £23.41. The newsletters were photocopied at a local print shop in Headington and amounted to a third of our expenditure. The formation of an excellent committee, including two members who are still active in the Branch today,

was the catalyst to get the Branch into action and the newsletter reports the production of a mounted display for taking round shows, five field trips, a Marbled White survey and churchyard survey and recording for a book on the butterflies of the three counties. 1983 was also a great year for butterflies and Newsletter No. 4 reports a spectacular invasion of Clouded Yellows. Membership had climbed to 73 and I was now a married lady, having enjoyed a honeymoon on the Isle of Wight during the flight season of the Glanville Fritillary!

The October edition also gives a report from a member who was investigating the Prestwood Picnic site near High Wycombe as a possible site for undertaking some conservation work to maintain the habitat for a large population of the Marbled White and other chalk grassland species. This was the start of the Branch in promoting practical conservation of butterfly habitats in the three counties; winter working parties at different sites soon became part of the newsletter diary.

The newsletter in an A4 format continued for another four years until autumn 1987 when it changed to a A5 format. Intervening news sheets were also produced with details of late winter and spring meetings. The computer and word processor replaced the electric typewriter and it has been lovely to see the quality of the newsletter improve dramatically over the years, including the inclusion of colour photographs. How exciting that we have now reached the 100th edition and we are grateful to all the different editors who have worked so hard to produce a wonderful record of all the activities and conservation efforts of the Upper Thames Branch.

Butterfly transects

Mike Wilkins

The national butterfly monitoring (or transect) scheme was started in 1976. Locally, five sites were established: Aston Rowant NNR North and South, Buttlers Hangings, Foxholes and Waterperry Wood. All were still monitored in 2016 as was Gomm Valley which was added the next year. There were no more established until 1986. Another 19 were added by the end of the century making a total of 25. All but four of these were still being walked in 2016. Over the years over 110 transects have been established and by 2016, 72 of them were still walked, 41 of them on BBOWT sites.

The length of a transect ranges from 50m to 6147m. The total length of the 72 transects is 136.675km, with an average length of 1.87km. By counting a number of sample sites over their lifetimes I estimate that, on average, a transect is walked about 60% of the standard 26 weeks. Thus, in 2016 the total transect length walked was about 2100km. As a standard transect is 5m wide the total area sampled over the season is 10.5 square km.

If we look at the five foundation transects it works out that the walkers have over the 41 years between them walked a total of about 7000km. Of course, this does not take into account the walk to the beginning and back from the end which, in some cases, can be considerable.

I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has helped build our knowledge of the butterflies of Upper Thames by walking these transects over the years.

Butterfly Conservation: Upper Thames Branch

Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31st March 2017

INCOME	2017			2016		
Membership						
Subscriptions	6348.00			5877.00		
Legacies/donations (inc. Gift Aid)	793.00			1074.00		
Events/fundraising	696.00			895.00		
Stock sales	927.43					
Other	1425.00					
<i>Sub-total</i>		10189.43			7846.00	
Conservation						
Holtspur Bottom	1165.50			790.62		
Atlas	2565.55					
<i>Sub-total</i>		3731.05			790.62	
Finance/Admin						
VAT Refund	42.94			362.05		
Bank Charges	0.00					
Holtspur Bank HLS	493.69			987.38		
<i>Sub-total</i>		536.63			1349.43	
Total income			14457.11			9986.05
EXPENDITURE						
Membership						
Newsletter	3593.64			3986.79		
Survey Forms	0.00			0.00		
Events/fundraising	443.73			461.44		
Stock purchases	81.47			231.00		
Other	1220.00			0.00		
<i>Sub-total</i>		5338.84			4679.23	
Conservation						
Holtspur Bottom	1071.99			775.18		

Atlas Update	15.40			4895.25		
Equipment/other	988.19			0.00		
HLS re Holtspur Bank	493.69			987.38		
Other Projects	748.33			375.00		
Subs/donations	4096.00			926.00		
<i>Sub-total</i>		7413.60			7958.81	
Finance/Admin						
Admin/Insurance	208.42			119.65		
VAT	516.70			135.00		
<i>Sub-total</i>		725.12			254.65	
Total expenditure			13477.56			12892.69
Net			979.55			-2906.64
Cash b/f			12185.49			15092.13
Total cash available			13165.04			12185.49
STATEMENT OF NET ASSETS AT 31 MARCH 2016						
NET ASSETS						
Fixed assets (after		0.00			0.00	
Stock, debtors &		0.00			0.00	
Cash		13165.04			12185.49	
Total			13165.04			12185.49
ALLOCATION OF NET ASSETS						
Endowment		0.00			0.00	
Restricted		447.50			447.50	
Designated		5007.00			5454.50	
Unallocated		7710.54			6283.49	
Total			13165.04			12185.49

It is surprising what a notebook and pencil can lead to! One day many years ago I was in the garden and saw a butterfly I didn't recognize; it turned out to be a Skipper. This made me wonder what else I had been missing and so I decided the best thing to do was to join Butterfly Conservation and the local Branch of Upper Thames. I went on as many day trips as I could and it was a great way to not only get to know butterflies but also other members. Everyone was very friendly, patient and eager to pass on knowledge and expertise. My notebook and pencil were much in use. On one occasion my notebook was spied by Frank Banyard, who was Chairman of the Branch at the time, and he asked if I could write the trip report. Me, who hated English at school, not only the grammar but spelling too! However, I did it and several more followed.



In the course of conversation I must have told Frank that I trained as a secretary and one evening he phoned to say the Branch desperately needed a Treasurer because without one it could not exist. Did my training include accounts, well it did but that was many years before, however with a little arm twisting I succumbed and took on the role for a year or two. I passed English O level but despite three attempts never passed Maths. It was the problems that I couldn't get my head round so I am sure you can imagine how difficult I found it at the end of every financial year to get the figures to balance! With help I managed but it was a great relief when another member came forward to take on the books.

During this time I also took on the role of organising the food for Members Day and continued to do so for nine years. This included the Branch's 21st Anniversary in 2003 when food presented at lunch and tea took on numerous lepidoptera features.

When I stepped down from being Treasurer the opportunity arose to take on co-ordinating the garden butterfly records. This was quite a task but a very enjoyable one and again a way of getting to know other members. As you may well have read in the Spring Newsletter I decided that after 14 years, and with records being submitted in ways other than paper forms, I should pass this responsibility on to a younger person.

I still have a notebook and pencil and love getting out and about to record in my garden and 10k square. Without them I may never have become involved in the Branch and now realise how much I would have missed.

Field Meeting Reports

Pitstone Quarry, Bucks, 28 May 2017

Nick Bowles

Eleven members walked in increasingly strong sunshine and after initial delight at seeing Small Blue in the residential street, where we met to start our walk, soon became blasé about the species. We saw what must have been hundreds of Small Blues along with tens of Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, Brimstone, Green Hairstreak, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Speckled Wood and Small Heath. Moths included Burnet Companion, the rare Orange Conch (*Commophila aeneana*), Small Purple and Gold (*Pyraustra aurata*), Treble Bar and, when everyone else had gone, Mother Shipton. Many of these species may have emerged that morning as they looked very fresh and seemed unusually co-operative, sitting still for long periods while people photographed them.

This site never fails to turn up fascinating wildlife and the longer it survives before the planned building starts, the better.



Small Blue
David Ferguson

Finemere Wood, Bucks, 30 May 2017

Nick Bowles

Armed with coloured photos and a map of the search area, 12 people spent their afternoon searching Blackthorn at Finemere Wood for Black Hairstreak pupae. After slightly over 15 man-hours, the first pupa was seen, in a prominent position, allowing the photographers a very clear shot. Recharged by the sight of this obviously positioned pupa, the group searched on for another 30 minutes before accepting that there obviously weren't all that many pupae to be found. After our first advertised Black Hairstreak pupae hunt we can see that it took many people a long time to find a pupa; but considering that **no** Black Hairstreak eggs were found in a search of similar intensity in the winter; and bearing in mind how much more pleasant the weather is in late May, pupae searching does seem an equally sensible way to gauge population strength.



Stuart Hodges

Sixteen of us met to look for the Black Hairstreak with weather conditions that were not favourable. Also, due to the recent extensive fencing of the M40 Compensation Area we currently are unable to access the site, so we had to look for an alternative.

Searching back through records revealed the extent of past records and people's concerns from way back in the 1960s. At this time there was a serious move to plant conifers to provide timber for the construction industry, some hardwoods were being sprayed to kill them and conifers planted in their place. The spray drift was also killing Blackthorn.

In more recent years, Forest Enterprise have removed conifers along a central strip between Oakley and Shabbington woods which is bordered by a stream and footpath. Unfortunately the Blackthorn is proving to be slow to spread into this so Forest Enterprise are considering planting some of it with Blackthorn quicks.

Our route took us from the car park and along the main ride. Just as we approached where the stream passed there was a brief but confirmed sighting of a Black Hairstreak low down but it disappeared over the fence where we could not reach it. At this point we turned left along the footpath which unfortunately is rather overgrown. After some hundred metres we came to some Blackthorn and found a sheltered bay where four more hairstreaks were seen over quite a small Blackthorn thicket. Some were on this and also flying between this and a Maple tree. There was regular activity but none came down low enough to allow photographs to be taken.



Black Hairstreak
Stuart Hodges

After some twenty minutes here we retraced our steps, crossed the main central ride and followed the footpath down to Bernwood Meadows. Here we spread ourselves around the edge of the field looking over extensive banks of Blackthorn for butterfly activity and at likely nectar sources where our quarry might be. We searched here for around an hour and saw only Common Blues, a Large Skipper and one or two Meadow Browns; the vast majority of this area was very exposed to quite a strong wind.

Somewhat disappointed we returned to the kissing gate where we had entered the field, turning immediately left along a different route to our approach to the meadows and here at least seven very active hairstreaks were seen, some settling long enough for photographs. It was rather interesting to note that we had been previously searching just on the opposite side of the hedge without success.

Overall it was quite a successful visit to the forest and to the meadows where the pasture is extremely rich in wild flowers. The only other butterflies seen were Speckled Woods along the forest rides.

Seventeen of us attempted to find the Black Hairstreak in hot weather, no wind and almost continuous sunshine. We took the usual route down to the wood. Along the way, a Small Skipper was seen, which was a year first for some of us, along with Meadow Browns, Speckled Woods and several Ringlets.

We struggled to find any Black Hairstreak but after an hour we found two probables high up. Silver-washed Fritillary and Large Skipper were added to the species list.

Then we ventured further into the wood. Continuing to beyond the turning circle. we added Marbled White to our species list. Although there are some Blackthorn thickets no Black Hairstreak were seen. Some of the seventeen participants had other plans and drifted away. The remaining party, however, got lucky. On exiting the wood and passing just beyond the gate, an eagle-eyed person spotted a Black Hairstreak low down. It was a short distance away, but everyone found it. It sat for a long time so everyone got a reasonable photograph. I was particularly pleased for the two men who had traveled all the way from Merseyside. Neither had seen the two high up early on. It was a first time species for both.

Six of us were regulars on field trips, for some of the others it was new experience and six had travelled quite a distance. Apart from Merseyside, two had come from Wales and two from near the south coast.

New Members

Brenda Mobbs

Since the last newsletter 77 new members have joined and the membership is now over 1585 The more members we have the more we can achieve as a branch. Please encourage your friends to join Butterfly Conservation either on the website or by leaflet. Please let me know if you would like any membership leaflets to pass on.

A warm welcome to all new members who have joined since the last newsletter was published.

21 from Berkshire
25 from Buckinghamshire
29 from Oxfordshire
2 from elsewhere.

All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and attend Members' Day

Details of events are found in this newsletter or on our website:

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Conservation Work Parties

You might combine a walk around the site with a brief session of work. Nobody has to work for the entire session but obviously you may. There are a variety of tasks and no great strength is required. Tools and full instructions are provided. **Please bring a drink and a snack.**

All work parties start at **10.00 a.m.** unless otherwise stated. At Holtspur Bottom and Aston Upthorpe they usually finish about 13.00 though in good weather conditions they may continue until about 14.00.

PLEASE, **ALWAYS** CONTACT THE TASK LEADER IN ADVANCE.

Details frequently change according to weather, number of volunteers etc. The planned work and contact detail for each event will be shown on the Events page of the UTB website.

Holtspur Bottom Meeting point: SU918906 HP9 1BT				
Contact: Nick Bowles 01442 382276				All on Sunday
12 Nov 17	10 Dec 17	14 Jan 18	4 Feb 18	25 Mar 18

Aston Upthorpe Meeting point: at the grain dryer, SU550844			
Contact: Jim Asher 01865 391727			All on Sunday except one
Sat 18 Nov 17	3 Dec 17	21 Jan18	18 Feb 18

Brown Hairstreak egg hunts - full detail on the Events page

Sunday 19 Nov 2017 Slade Camp, Oxfordshire

Sunday 17 Dec 2017 Rushbeds Wood, Buckinghamshire

Monday 01 Jan 2018 Otmoor, Oxfordshire

Saturday 03 Mar 2018 Bernwood Meadows, Buckinghamshire

There will be many other conservation events through the winter and sites where we expect to work are listed below. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the dates are not decided as we go to publication. Please check the Events page of the Upper Thames branch website for details as they become clear.

Arncott, MOD land near Bicester

Bradenham, Bucks. National Trust

Deanfield, Bucks. private site

Wardrobes, Bucks. private site

Milestone Wood, Reading

Maidenhead Thicket National Trust

Upton, Oxon. Sustrans route

In Buckinghamshire, the Bucks Invertebrate Group organise a lot of field trips which include studying butterflies and especially moths. Their list of field trips is available on their web site.

<https://sites.google.com/site/bucksinvertebrategroup/Home>

In Berkshire, the Berkshire Moth Group hold regular meetings on the second Thursday of every month. They organise other events as well. Refer to their web site for details. <https://sites.google.com/site/berksmoths/Home>

Upper Thames Branch Website

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

<http://butterfly-conservation.org/288/upper-thames-branch.html>

Have your butterfly sightings and photos posted on the website by sending them to: sightings@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Upper Thames Branch Moth Sightings Blog

<http://upperthamesmoths.blogspot.co.uk>

Follow us on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/Butterflies.Berkshire.Buckinghamshire.Oxfordshire>
and Twitter - @UpperThamesBC

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

<http://www.holtspurbottom.info>

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