

Hairstreak

No 105

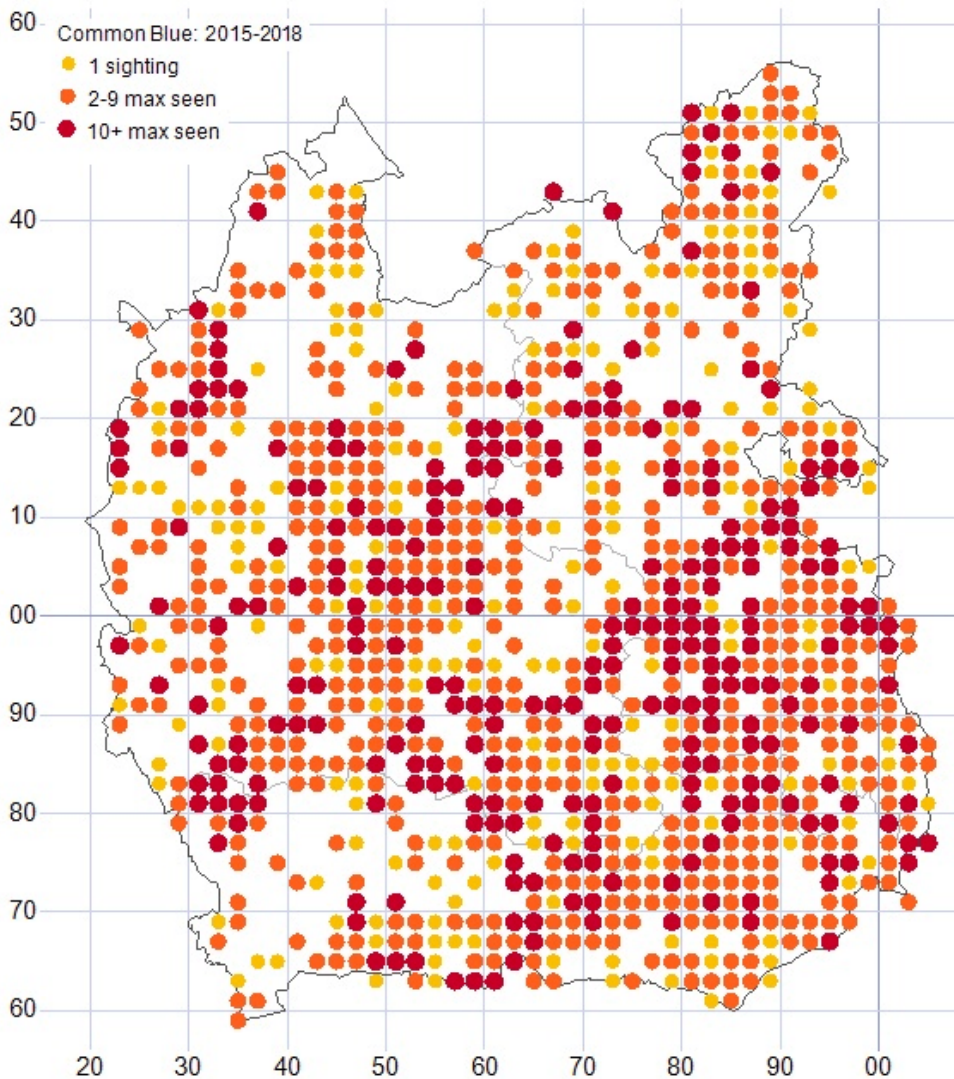
Summer 2019



Butterfly
Conservation



Upper Thames
Branch



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
1st April for Summer Issue
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Contents

Chairman's notes.....	4
Trampling.....	6
Recording for the Atlas.....	7
Silver-studded Blue.....	14
More about buddleias.....	16
Marsh Fritillary project.....	17
Farmland for butterflies.....	21
Winter social.....	24
Garden White-letter Hairstreak.....	25
New members.....	26
Field meetings.....	27
Volunteering.....	31

Cover photo: Small Heath by David Dennis

Opposite page: Distribution map of Common Blue
prepared by Jim Asher from records
supplied by members of UTB

Background: Whitecross Green Wood, Bucks/Oxon

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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Thank you very much, to all those super members that turned out to assist with winter conservation tasks, surveys of eggs and planting foodplants. A recent session, planting cowslips to prepare a new site for the Duke, was my last winter-time task and undertaken in warm sun and turned my thoughts to seeing moths and butterflies.

The winter is the time that we do most of our conservation but I confess that now is the time of year I love the most.

We hope you will join us on our full programme of free guided walks and maybe help with recording. We have even more teams out surveying at even more sites; so, if joining them appeals to you then please contact me or Mark Chapman (m.chapman.butterfly.utb@gmail.com), and we will point you to the surveyed site near your home (or elsewhere if you prefer). We have tried to put on walks and moth trapping events in every part of the UTB region but some areas still lack a truly local event. If you live in one of those 'empty' areas and could offer to lead a walk, or a trapping session, please contact Steph Rodgers (steph@chilternrangers.co.uk). Please remember to check the UTB events web page for up to the minute updates, additions and cancellations <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events.pl> before attending.

This year (2019), is the last year of record collection before the next *Butterflies in Berks, Bucks and Oxon* is compiled. The last edition 2005-2014 was based on 479,368 records and we want to do even better this time – especially as now we have more members than then. Please make an effort to record every single butterfly that you can identify.

Certain areas of our region (e.g. N. Bucks and N. Oxon) are less well recorded and if you are in those areas for any reason please consider stopping and trying to find (and record) some butterflies. Jim Asher (who leads our recording effort) recently contacted all UTB members, by email, to ask them to look out for Orange-tip in April and May. If you look at the map of Orange-tip records which Jim circulated, you will see the northern fringes of our branch region and some parts of west Oxon poorly represented. These same areas also have fewer records of other species, so



Orange-tips
David Ferguson

require visits even after the Orange-tip has finished flying. But it is fair to say that every record, even of very common species, from every part of the UTB area is required to build the most accurate picture of the species doing well and those doing badly.

If you didn't get the email I mentioned above, please check whether your current email address is the one that the National BC office link to your membership. We know that some members changed their email address but forgot to tell head office (this also explained why some members contacted us to say that they expected the electronic newsletter and it hadn't arrived. We are grateful to members who agree to receive the news by email, as it saves us so much money, but just as when you move house you need to inform of your new postal address, if you change email addresses please let us know).

I expect you know that you can record your butterfly sightings very easily on a smartphone these days. No need to try and remember what you saw, or where you were until a pen and paper are to hand. *iRecord Butterflies*, is completely free and available for iOS and Android devices; what's more, all sightings logged in this way go directly into our national recording scheme. If you prefer to record in our UTB local schemes (like our Garden Survey) there are downloadable Excel spreadsheets at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/recording.pl> If you still prefer paper, then information about that method is on the same page.

By the time that you are reading this newsletter, we will have an employee working on our **Five Hairstreaks** project – thanks again to those very generously donating to make this possible. As the only branch which has all five Hairstreak butterflies 'naturally', we are very proud of them and worried about the severe threats to them locally. The Oxford – Cambridge Growth Arc will cut a swathe through colonies of many species of butterfly and moth – but the Brown Hairstreak and especially the Black Hairstreak will be far more badly affected as they are found in so few other parts of the U.K. Members were invited to a day to discuss the Black Hairstreak on the 4th May; this was the first in a series of events to help raise awareness and understanding of the hairstreak butterflies.



If you would like to be more involved in the multitude of tasks we undertake to try and counter the constant damage to habitats but haven't yet joined in, then come and join us. It's a great feeling to be part of a successful team and there is a tremendous variety of tasks. There is a list of ways that you might help later in *Hairstreak*.

Don't forget that for up-to-date news of other member's sightings, you can visit our website and our Twitter pages. Enjoy the summer.

Trampling at Whitecross Green Wood

The committee of the Upper Thames branch is hoping you will join us in trying to educate some butterfly photography enthusiasts who seem less informed than you.

Various local reserves, of which the best known is probably Whitecross Green Wood, have rare Hairstreak butterflies among a suite of special animals and some exceptional plants. Sadly people visiting to see and photograph the Hairstreaks (largely the Black and Brown) are trampling these plants and very badly damaging them and everything that lives in them. We hope that you will read this report from Becky Woodell, the warden at Whitecross Green Wood, and join us in trying to get the message across, that the habitats the rarest butterflies live in are as valuable as the butterflies themselves.

Becky tells us: "The rides at Whitecross Green Wood are perhaps unique, because the plants growing along them are those that were found in the past in the local unimproved species-rich hay meadows. Now there are few such meadows.

As more people visited we began to have problems with trampling these plants. We put up signs and created mown paths from the vehicle tracks created during winter conservation work. Much of the visitor interest is photographing Black Hairstreak so we made the best Black Hairstreak area (around the pond) more visitor-friendly, so people could stay there and photograph them. Despite our efforts some visitors are only using the paths until they see something they want to look at or photograph.

It is not only plants that are destroyed. Twice we found huge numbers of tiny frogs crossing the rides. People would stop and comment on them, then walk into the long grass where they certainly could not avoid walking on them. I once saw what I thought was a lost wallet under the trampled vegetation, but when I picked it up I found it was a squashed mole.

2018 was the best Black Hairstreak season nationally since Whitecross became a nature reserve. Many photographers came and trampled some areas flat including the entire right hand side of the ride from the car park to the first intersection. Other visitors came too, just to visit an attractive place. One remarked 'once they get a camera in their hands they think they can do anything they want'.

The effect of trampling the same areas year after year affects the invertebrates which live on the trampled plants. It also compresses the soil, damaging creatures there too and prevents air and water from reaching plant roots. Please, when you visit a nature reserve or any good plant site leave it as you found it.

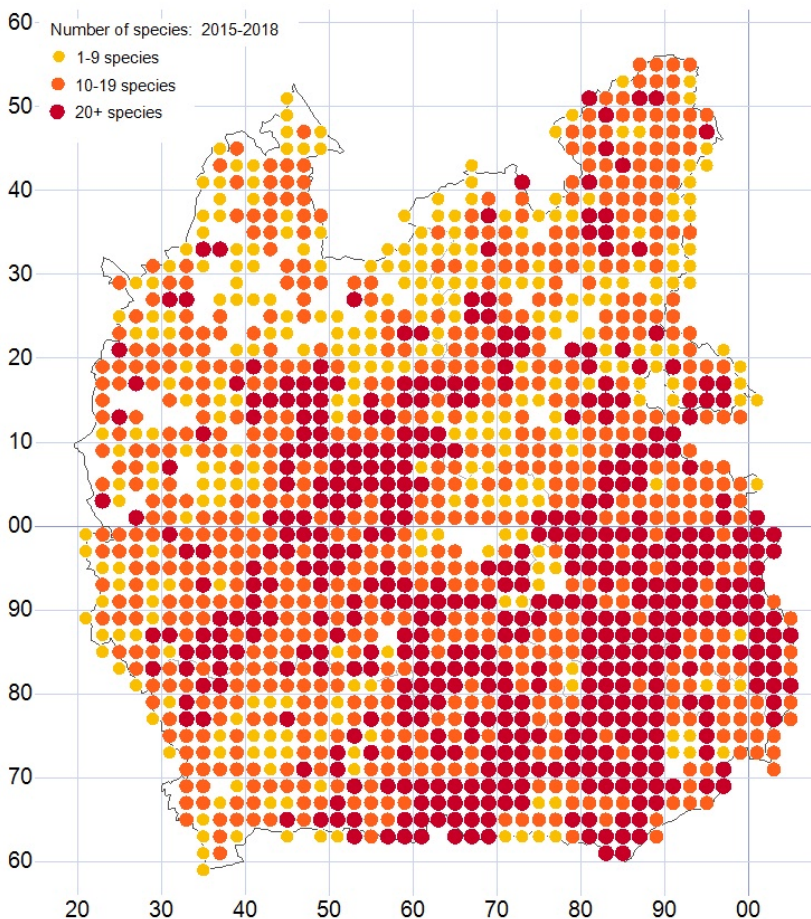
We would add that we should all enjoy nature responsibly, in order that others will follow our good example. Butterfly collecting, once a popular pastime, is now considered rather vulgar. In future trampling might be considered equally anti-social.

A major recording target for 2019 - we need your help now!

Jim Asher

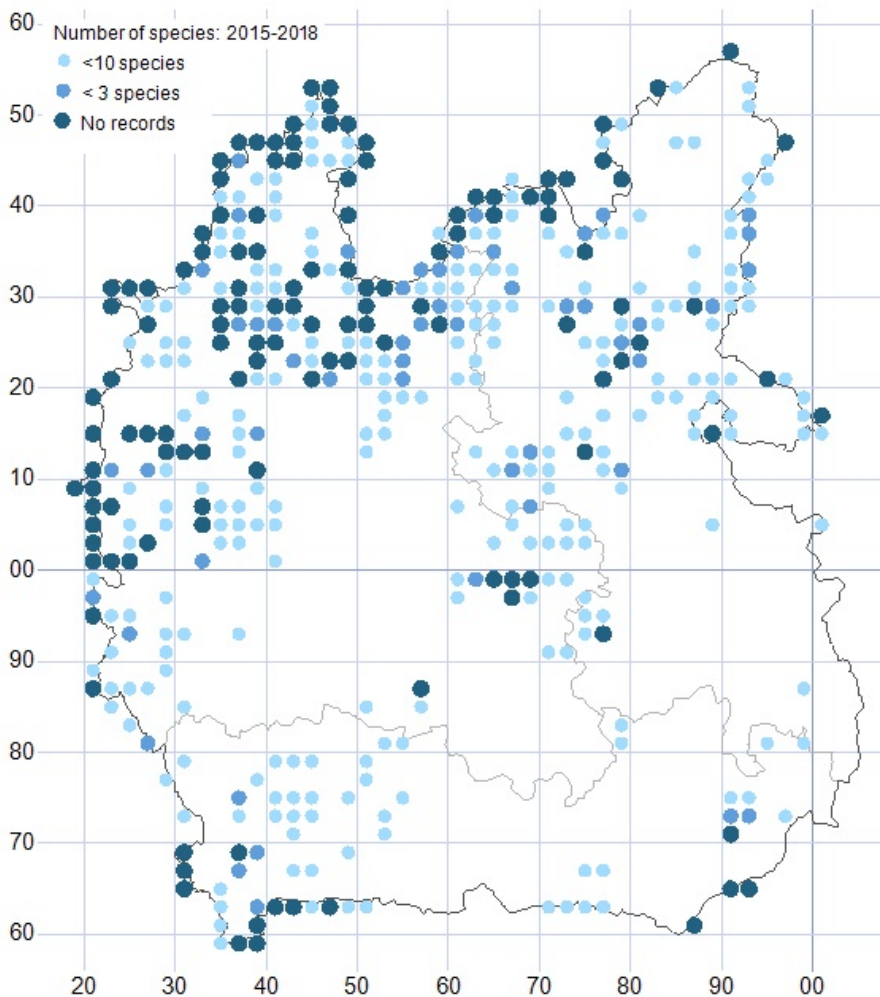
We need your help in spring and summer this year, with some targeted butterfly recording.

This year, 2019, is the last in the current 5-year cycle of UTB butterfly recording, and we are making special efforts this year to ensure that we have covered as much of our three counties as possible. We have so far received an impressive 256,000 records from over 91,000 visits to 1428 2km squares covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. A massive thank-you is due to all who have contributed to this great result so far. If you have records you have not yet sent in, please do so as soon as possible. The map below shows the general coverage of butterfly records from these three counties between 2015 and 2018.

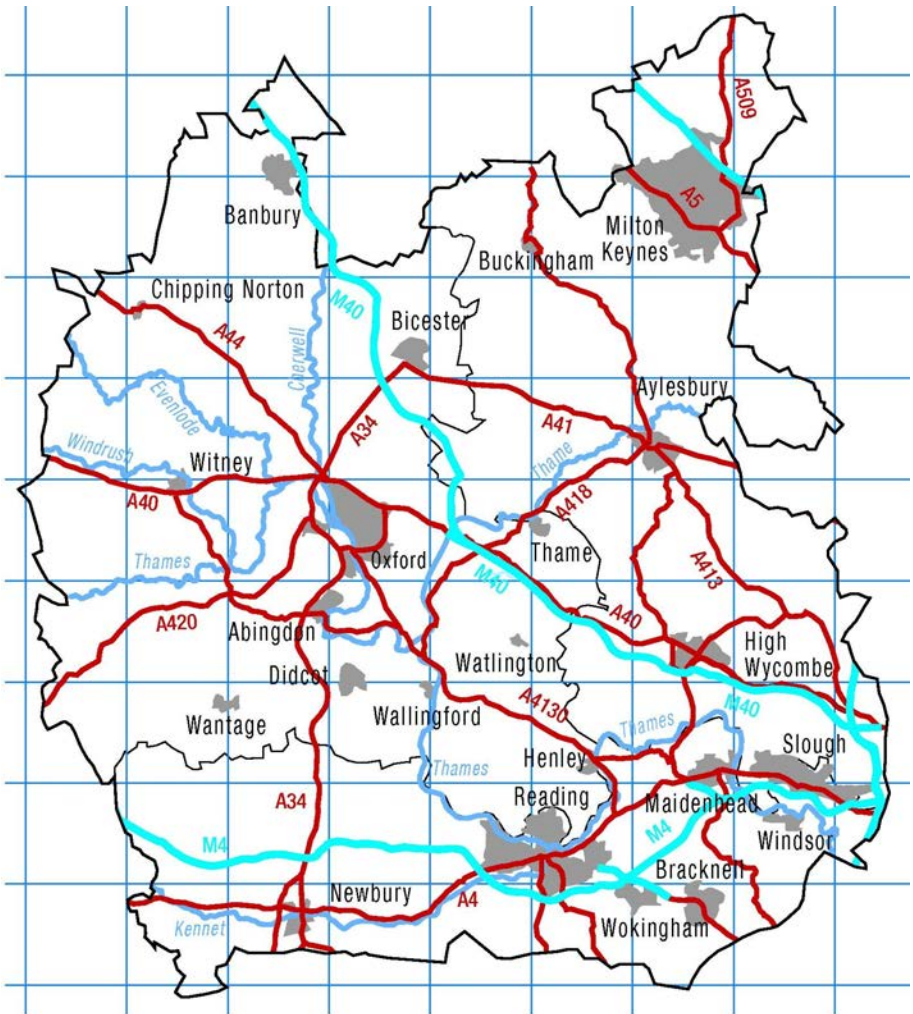


Whilst there is good record coverage in the southern half of this map, there are areas to the north and west that clearly need more visits and records. The areas most needing visits are highlighted in the next map.

The map below highlights un-recorded squares (as the darkest dots) and poorly recorded squares (as lighter dots). Recording effort should be focused especially on the un-recorded areas.

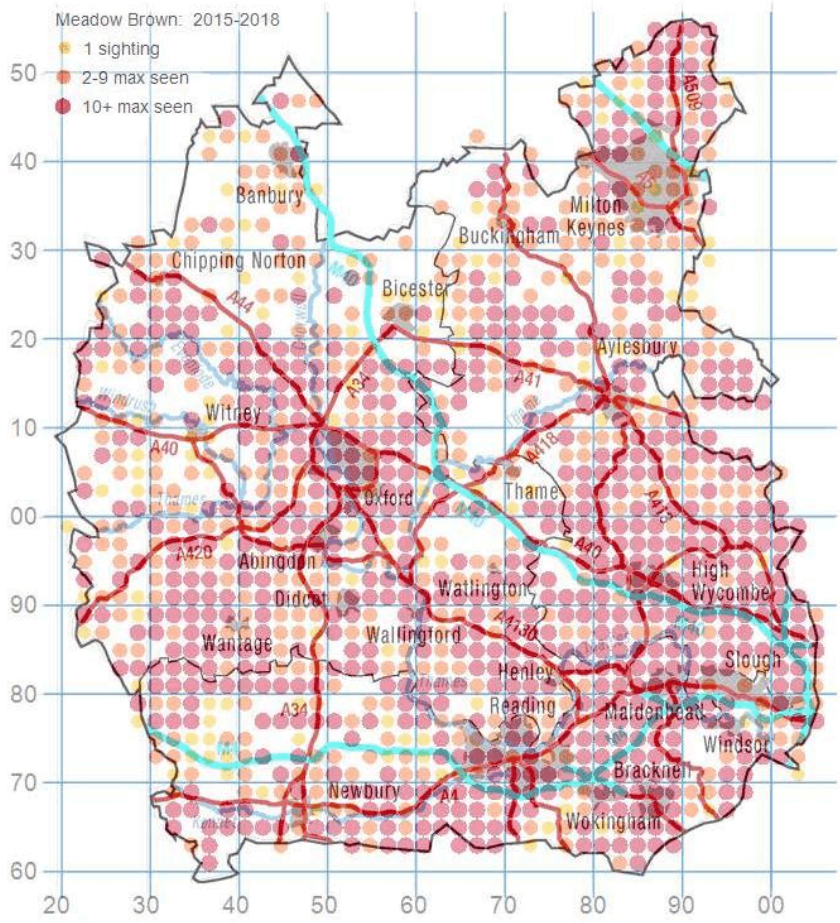


To help orient you to where these gaps are, the map on the following page outlines the main cities, towns and roads in the area. Motorways are shown in a lighter colour. You can locate where you are on the map using the Ordnance Survey grid numbering below and to the left of these maps.

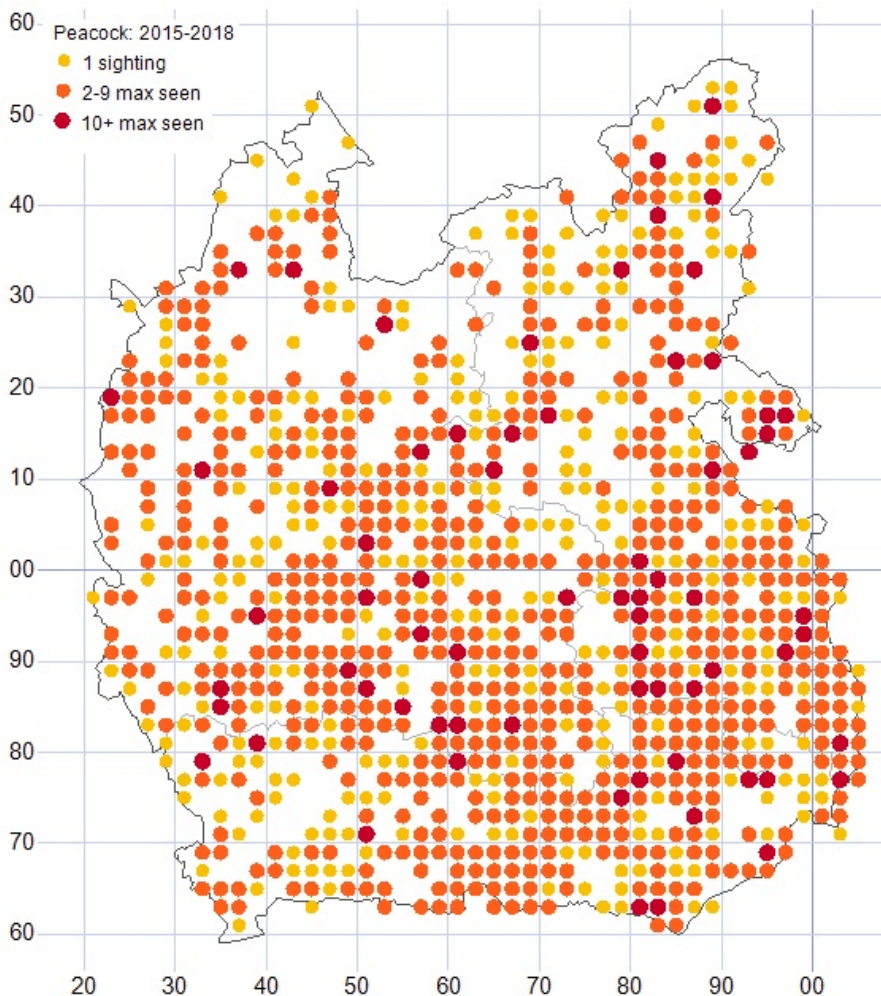


As you can see by comparing these maps, the main gaps and target areas for coverage are around Banbury and Buckingham, and the area between Chipping Norton, Bicester and Witney, and west of Witney. There are also gaps north of Watlington, the SW corner (West Berks) west of Newbury, and SE of Bracknell.

There are large parts of north Oxfordshire, mid-north Bucks, the eastern part of East Berks and the western half of West Berks with gaps where we are short of recorder visits. There are some solid blocks of records that have been contributed by keen and dedicated recorders systematically searching for, and recording, butterflies throughout the year – many thanks!



The map below shows the recorded distribution for Peacock for 2015-18:



Please help us make these maps more complete this year. If you are new to recording, and you need some help to get you started, please start by visiting our website, <https://butterfly.hs.to/butterflies/recording-and-monitoring> and look up the section on Butterflies for the New Millennium. It is quite straightforward. Locate an empty square or squares on the map that you are able to visit. Choose a warm and sunny day, and follow footpaths and walk or cycle along quiet roads. Make a note of any butterflies you see, where you saw them (within each 1km OS grid square) and how many of each species you saw. You can enter records directly online, using the butterfly recording app, iRecord Butterflies (available through Google Play for Android Smartphones or the App Store for Apple iPhones):

You can enter records directly into iRecord through a desktop computer.

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/recording-and-monitoring/irecord-butterflies>

You can also submit your records using a standard Excel file template, Butterfly Records Spreadsheet, available from the Upper Thames Branch website: <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/recording.pl>

Please keep all your butterfly records through the season on the same Excel file. During 2019, please email a copy of your spreadsheet to Jim Asher (jim.asher@btinternet.com) at the end of each month (from April onwards), as you accumulate more records. This is to help us focus recording visits on squares that remain under-visited. We will put updated coverage maps out on the Branch website after the end of each month in 2019, so that you can see where any gaps remain. So, please do visit the website for updates.

If you would like to help with coordinating recording within a 10km square, we have a few for which we are still looking for help, especially in under-recorded areas. For more details, please see:

https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/10km_champions.pl

Please contact our 10km square Coordinator, jan.haseler@btinternet.com for more details.

If you have records languishing in your notebook, or on your PC, and you have not yet sent them in, please do so as soon as possible.

Perhaps most importantly, enjoy the coming season, and enjoy the butterfly recording. Many hands will spread the workload, and your efforts this year (and every year) will be greatly appreciated. Our combined efforts in collecting this valuable data make a major difference to our ability to conserve butterflies and moths.

If you need any help or information with more details of under-recorded areas or species, please contact me, or any other Upper Thames Branch committee member. We will be pleased to assist you.

Jim Asher (jim.asher@btinternet.com)

BC Butterfly Recorder

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire

Glimmers of hope for the Silver-studded Blue in south-east Berkshire

Des Sussex and Grahame Hawker

The plight of the Silver-studded Blue within the Upper Thames Branch area has been rather precarious for some time. It occurred in just 10 tetrads in the most recent atlas period covering records from 2005-2014. That only four of those tetrads had records of more than a single butterfly was clearly of great concern. If we are to secure the future for this priority species in the UTB area there is a need for targeted heathland management to provide the right habitat structure, as well as continued surveying and recording effort.

During 2017 and 2018 we put some effort into trying to encourage more people to look for the butterfly. We hoped to achieve better survey coverage of more areas of heathland, particularly in south-east Berkshire. Whilst records from the 'known' sites are always welcomed and important, we wanted to ensure that other 'potential' sites had been checked for presence or absence.

Some positive news is that the butterfly was seen in pretty good numbers at its core sites. A team survey across the extensive MoD ranges at Wishmoor Bottom, Broadmoor Bottom and Poppy Hills showed the Silver-studded Blue to be widely distributed across the area, although it was not especially abundant at any of the sub-sites. The range danger areas do not allow any public access, and we are grateful that the MoD granted us permission to undertake a survey during the flight season – we counted 114 separate Silver-studded Blues in the danger area (probably the highest count in Berkshire for very many years). Habitat management here is improving thanks to the MoD and Surrey Wildlife Trust who undertake a lot of the habitat management on the Berkshire and Surrey parts of the site. Prospects for the species to increase its 'metapopulation' (both range and numbers) here should be good. The ranges and their heathland habitats extend across into Surrey, and there is also habitat connectivity to parts of Swinley Forest which has heathland patches and verges.

The only other two SE Berks sites that have reported sightings in the last few years up to 2016 had been the BBOWT reserves at Broadmoor Bottom and Wildmoor Heath, where the Silver-studded Blue is hanging on in small numbers. At Wildmoor it has been found at a small but increasing number of locations in the last few years.

The very exciting news is that the 2017 and 2018 summers have produced records from at least four 'new' sites. This is the result of more butterfly enthusiasts getting out and looking for them, and most importantly taking the time to submit their records. The new sites are:

- Caesar's Camp near Bracknell (approx. 1.5km from the nearest previously known colony).
- Silwood Park (at least 3.0km from the nearest previously known colony).

- Heathy verges in Swinley Forest north of Bagshot (about 1km from nearest colony).
- Private golf course (approx. 3.5km from the nearest previously known colony).

For a species that has a reputation for not travelling very far, this is excellent news. Perhaps the 2018 heatwave enabled better local dispersal? Some of the sightings are from locations where there appears to be suitable habitat for the butterfly to complete its life cycle. At least two of the sites had reports of more than one butterfly which is very encouraging, but it remains to be seen if these sites have got, or will develop, viable colonies. Continued monitoring effort will be important. We aim to work with the various landowners to encourage appropriate habitat management to give the Silver-studded Blue every chance of becoming more abundant at these and other sites with sustainable populations.



A team surveying in the MoD danger area at Broadmoor Bottom during the 2018 heatwave. Over 100 Silver-studded Blues were found. Importantly we confirmed that SSB is widely distributed across the area and is using locations that have only recently been restored to a suitable habitat condition.

Des Sussex

West Berkshire update

At present there are no colonies of Silver-studded Blue on the heathlands of mid and west Berkshire. There are historic records from Wokefield Common and Decoy Heath, but the only known current population in this area is at Silchester Common which lies about half a mile across the border in Hampshire. This colony is relatively small but quite stable. There is quite a lot of potential for future introductions in this area, with potentially suitable heathland occurring at Wokefield Common, Padworth Common, Decoy Heath, Greenham Common, Crookham Common, Bucklebury Common and Snelsmore Common.

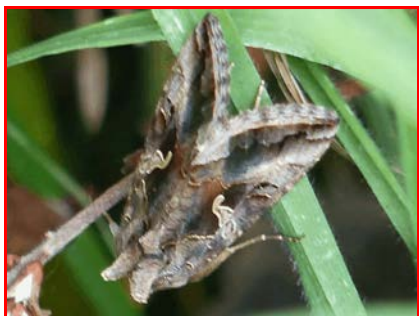
Over the last decade or so talks have been held with Natural England and West Berkshire Council to attempt an introduction at Greenham Common, but a change in site ownership to BBOWT and a constant turnover of volunteer SSB reintroduction coordinators have meant that progress has been slow.

Many thanks to everyone who has surveyed for Silver-studded Blues and submitted their records.

More about Buddleias

Richard Stewart

Can I add another reason why so many people ask why they get so few butterflies on their buddleia? Nick Bowles has thankfully promoted the need to attract garden butterflies by providing appropriate larval food plants but I would suggest there is another reason – lack of deadheading once buddleias have had their initial flowering. This is not difficult at lower levels though admittedly less accurate with a long lopper on higher branches. In the hot dry summer of 2018 I deadheaded our summer flowering buddleia davidii six times, which extended the flowering period through to the beginning of October. Similar deadheading with the later flowering yellow weyeriana has in exceptional years meant the presence of florets right into December.



Silver Y

Steve Lockley

This repeated deadheading should attract more butterflies and in our garden over the years we have attracted seventeen different species of butterflies plus moths including the migratory Silver Y and Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

Preparing the way to bring a rare butterfly back to Oxfordshire

Alison Muldal, Natural England

Natural England, Butterfly Conservation, the RSPB, the MoD, and a private landowner are working together on a long-term project which we hope might eventually result in the return of the beautiful Marsh Fritillary butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*) to its last known location in Oxfordshire.

Marsh Fritillary was once fairly widespread across Britain and Ireland, but its population declined severely during the twentieth century, as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation. In Britain, it is now found in only a few locations, mainly in southwest and central southern England, south and west Wales, the west coast of Scotland and at a few sites in Ireland (data from Butterfly Conservation UK Butterflies website

https://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/sites_square.php?square=SO&species=aurinia

The situation for Marsh Fritillary in mainland Europe is even worse, and Britain is now considered to be one of its few strongholds. This butterfly species is therefore considered to be of very high conservation concern, and is the subject of several conservation projects.

Three years ago, Natural England, RSPB, MoD and Butterfly Conservation started discussing the possibility of trying to bring the Marsh Fritillary back to its last known site in Oxfordshire - the damp grassland fields at Otmoor to the northeast of Oxford. Marsh Fritillary is thought to have become extinct in Oxfordshire around the mid 1990's. However, before any consideration could be given to trying to reintroduce the butterfly, we needed to improve the habitat for this species.

Marsh Fritillary butterflies need an abundant supply of the foodplant for their caterpillars, Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), alongside plenty of tussock-



Marsh Fritillary
Peter Eeles (Butterfly Conservation)



Devil's-bit Scabious at Otmoor SSSI
Rebecca Pringle (Natural England)

forming grasses, rushes or sedges. The butterfly lays large numbers of eggs on Devil's-bit Scabious leaves. As the caterpillars grow bigger, they can eat their way through an entire Devil's-bit Scabious plant in a day, therefore an abundant supply of this plant is needed, preferably in several locations in close proximity. The groups of caterpillars spend the winter in 'tents' of dense silken threads, rather like untidy spiders' webs, at the base of tussocky vegetation.

Although there seemed to be plenty of Devil's-bit Scabious growing at the MoD's rifle range in Otmoor SSSI, the grassland there has to be mown frequently as part of the operation of the rifle range, making it unsuitable for the caterpillars.

Other grassland fields at Otmoor SSSI and in the adjacent RSPB Otmoor Reserve appeared to be suitably tussocky, as they are grazed lightly by cattle or sheep every year, but they did not have enough Devil's-bit Scabious for the Marsh Fritillary caterpillars.

Therefore, following several site visits and advice from Butterfly Conservation and Natural England butterfly experts, the RSPB and Natural England embarked on a project to try to boost the population of Devil's-bit Scabious at the RSPB's Otmoor Reserve, and in the damp grassland fields at a nearby privately owned estate.

We were able to secure grants for the cost of growing the Devil's-bit Scabious plants through a new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agri-environment agreement that was being set up for the estate.

In September 2017, Natural England land management and SSSI adviser, Alison Muldal, gathered seed from the abundant Devil's-bit Scabious plants at the MoD Otmoor rifle range.

Half of the seed was given to Bridewell Organic Gardens, near Eynsham, Oxfordshire, a mental health charity offering social and therapeutic horticulture <https://www.bridewellgardens.co.uk/>. Bridewell was contracted to provide 500 Devil's-bit Scabious plants to the estate. The rest of the seed was grown by Alison herself.

The seed was sown in seed trays, and the trays were then left outside in the icy cold winter weather, because the seed needs to 'stratify' in order to germinate. We then held our breath and hoped for the best. As soon as the weather warmed up in the spring, little Devil's-bit Scabious seedlings started to appear in abundance.

Several Natural England and Environment Agency colleagues potted up these seedlings on a hot summer's afternoon in July. Trays of plants were then divvied out to 'Devil's-bit Scabious adopters' to look after for the summer, with two simple instructions - keep them well watered, and keep the slugs and snails away.



Collecting Devil's-bit Scabious from MOD Otmoor rifle range
Alison Muldal (Natural England)



Potting up the Devil's-bit Scabious seedlings – Natural England and Environment Agency colleagues

Alison Muldal (Natural England)

Between the plants grown by Bridewell Organic Gardens and those grown by Alison and her Natural England colleagues, we had at least 1100 plants to plant out at the private estate - a somewhat daunting task!

Two planting sessions were arranged for the first week in November. An amazing 34 people turned up for the first planting session, including RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, Oxford Conservation Volunteers, and Natural England staff. By lunchtime, we had finished planting the first lot of 600 plants, at approximately 1m intervals on the tops of the ridges in the ridge & furrow field. A more modest 10 volunteers from Oxford Conservation Volunteers came out to plant the remaining 500 plants the following Sunday.

We intend to grow and plant out a further 1000 Devil's-bit Scabious plants at the private estate next year. Meanwhile, RSPB volunteers have been planting out similar quantities of Devil's-bit Scabious plants at the RSPB Otmoor Reserve over the last couple of years.

So long as these plants survive the ravages of deer, rabbits, and other herbivores, we hope that these efforts will eventually result in a sufficiently high density of Devil's-bit Scabious in three locations in close proximity – the land at MoD Otmoor, the RSPB's Otmoor Reserve, and at the private estate – so that it may be possible in the long-term to consider reintroducing the Marsh Fritillary back to Otmoor.



Natural England, Butterfly Conservation, RSPB and Oxford Conservation volunteers getting ready to plant.

Jim Asher (Butterfly Conservation)



Planting well under way

Jim Asher (Butterfly Conservation)

Farming for butterflies in the Upper Thames

Des Sussex

I am fortunate to work with many farms and landowners who are making significant efforts to put wild flowers and habitats back into their fields and farmed landscapes. Part of my work is aimed at helping the farmers to restore and create habitats to increase wildlife in the wider countryside. Much of this work is funded by 'stewardship schemes' – part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. It is very rewarding to see the wildlife such as widespread and uncommon butterflies return to areas that were previously devoid of habitats and biodiversity. The return of wildlife provides evidence that the schemes can work when they are well thought out and effectively managed.

Some of the strategies that farmers have used to help butterflies and moths on their farms include:

- Creating wide margins sown with native grasses and wildflowers around cropped fields. The margins can provide nectar, larval food plants and shelter, and act as habitats and wildlife corridors.
- Leaving previously cropped land to naturally regenerate with native flora – this used to be called set-aside. In some fields the seed bank and soil types result in a species-rich grassland returning to the field.
- Selecting fields which are un-productive (perhaps because they are steep, or have poor soils, or get waterlogged) and sowing a seed mix to create chalk grassland, or lowland meadow type habitats. By getting the right larval food plants established they can give butterflies and moths the best chance to colonise. It is then important to get the grazing or cutting right to enable the flowers and butterflies to thrive.
- Less frequent trimming of hedgerows. By leaving some hedges un-trimmed each year there is a much higher crop of blossoms and berries the following year, and a better chance for precious brown and black hairstreak eggs to survive the winter.

We do not have time to do regular butterfly surveys at the farms, but our occasional visits do give us a chance to see if the habitats are working. Here are a few examples from West Berkshire where farmers have been successfully 'growing' butterflies.

Life on the edge

Farmers at Theale and Enborne have been pleased to see Marbled Whites and Common Blues thrive in their created flowery field edge habitats, where previously they had no 'field margins' and saw no butterflies. Near Hungerford and north of East Garston the Small Copper, Small Heath and Brown Argus have been seen using flowery field margins on downland farms dominated by huge arable fields.

Creating chalk grassland

Farms near Peasemore, Newbury and Eastbury have created flower rich grassland on steeper sunny slopes with thin chalky soils. Ideal conditions for lots of butterflies! Patches of Kidney Vetch have resulted in large numbers of Small Blues, and Dingy Skippers are also using some areas, having dispersed from small patches of ancient grassland nearby.

Flowers like Bird's-foot Trefoil, orchids, scabious, Dropwort, Lady's Bedstraw, Cowslip and Clustered Bellflower are abundant in the created habitats. A PhD student tested the effectiveness of creating grassland in restoring biodiversity by doing moth surveys at some farms. He demonstrated that, even after just a few years, there was a higher species richness and higher abundance of moths on created flowery grassland compared to nearby cropped fields. Some of the moths that he recorded included Reddish Light Arches, Small Elephant Hawkmoth, Drinker and Garden Tiger.

I have not named the farms or farmers to respect their privacy. Many stewardship farms are crossed by public rights of way where you may be able to enjoy the butterflies and other wildlife, but not all sites have public access. This can mean that it is difficult to get good survey records, but it is often possible for UTB members to undertake surveys and monitoring of private land by linking up with farmers. This can be very rewarding both for the surveyor and farmer.



A spectacular flowery arable field margin with mallow, knapweed, ladies' bedstraw and many more - a home for wildlife.



Created chalk grassland with Kidney Vetch, Rough Hawkbit and Spotted Orchids - bringing back rare habitats.



Small Blue on created chalk grassland near Peasemore.



Dingy Skipper on the farm - using some successfully created chalk grassland near Eastbury in Berkshire.

Photos by Des Sussex

A bunch of hardy UTB members braved the blustery weather on 10th March to gather in Benson (Oxon) for our Winter Social meeting. In the snug surroundings of the Canons' Room behind the church, they were treated to six short slideshows, while leaving ample time to chat together on butterfly and moth matters – or anything else that took their fancy.

Jan Haseler told us about the history of Lardon Chase and The Holies near Streatley (Berks), which included a motorbike scrambling circuit many years ago at The Holies. These are now prime butterfly sites, particularly for Adonis and Chalkhill Blues. She showed us photos of a wide selection of the plants, butterflies and other wildlife that have been seen there. A transect has been walked there for many years, and could now do with another person on the team. If interested, please contact Jan.

David Roy told us about the different monitoring schemes for butterflies that are collated by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (Crowmarsh, Oxon). He described some of the ways in which that vast collection of data can tell us about the fortunes of the various species – including some that have sadly vanished from our region since recording began, such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary. But even now, there are some unrecorded 1km squares in our region, just waiting to be filled!

David Hastings then took us further afield, to show a selection of his very fine photos of the many butterfly species seen on two wildlife holidays in Bulgaria. These included some species that are very rarely seen in the UK, such as Camberwell Beauty, Black-veined White and Long-tailed Blue, and others which are special to eastern Europe. He hopes to encourage others to visit this beautiful country.

A long break then allowed plenty of opportunity for members to chat among themselves while enjoying teas, coffees and delicious cakes provided by the members.

Jim Asher led us to the 'Scottish Riviera' (the southern coast of Dumfries and Galloway), where he has sought out the distribution of the Northern Brown Argus. He realised that even in poor weather he could track them down by hunting for their conspicuous eggs, which are laid on the upper surface of rockrose leaves. He managed to extend the known distribution of NBA in this area considerably, demonstrating that apparently 'empty' tetrads might be due to lack of recording rather than lack of the species.

Sue Taylor returned us to our own area, with a very comprehensive survey of the extensive Bradenham Estate (Bucks) that has been the site of an official re-introduction of Duke of Burgundy. Sue's excellent photos also showed us a much wider range of invertebrate species, which the owners are keen to encourage by grazing with cattle that are not treated with medications that eradicate dung beetles, leading to much greater biodiversity right up the food chain.

Finally, Grahame Hawker led us to Sussex and the Knepp estate, which over the past 15 years has pioneered a rewilding of what had been intensively farmed,

but poor quality, land. The owners introduced various near-natural large herbivores, but otherwise let nature take its course. This keeps the land in a savannah state, and has led to pleasing numbers of rarities such as Nightingales, Turtle Doves and the largest colony of Purple Emperors in England.

All in all, a very pleasant, sociable and informative afternoon, at an informal and relaxed level.

Garden White-letter Hairstreaks **Dave Wilton**

Where I grew up in Burnham, Bucks during the 1950s and 1960s there was a line of magnificent mature English Elms (*Ulmus procera*) along our road. Unfortunately they all had to be felled when Dutch Elm Disease took control and since then the sight of a mature elm anywhere in Bucks has been a rare thing indeed. This had a major impact on elm-feeding insects, including the White-letter Hairstreak.

When my family moved to our present house out on the clay in the Vale of Aylesbury around about the millennium I was pleased to find a row of young elms along one side of the garden, although they were already starting to show signs of succumbing to the disease. Unfortunately within a couple of years the majority had to be cut down as they died, leaving only a couple adjacent to our boundary fence which were then perhaps only a few years old and still looked relatively healthy. There are plenty of hedgerow elms in our local area but the disease is still endemic and the trees only survive about 20 or so years before it sees them off, meaning that many hedgerows (in particular those along main roads) are full of dead examples, rather a sad sight.

I first noticed White-letter Hairstreaks making use of these young hedgerow elms in our village in 2006 and I've seen them in small numbers locally almost every year since then, so the butterfly has obviously managed to survive the disastrous events of the previous century and has now adapted to using elms which haven't even matured sufficiently to begin flowering.

By 2013 the two elms on our boundary must have been approaching 20 years old and a couple of younger ones were growing in the garden from the stumps of those cut down when we first moved in. That was the first year in which I noticed White-letter Hairstreaks actually in our garden and I've been lucky enough to see them here each June and July since then, although mostly as singletons. They mostly appear to be territorial males which, even when they weren't sparring with other passing insects, were relatively easy to pick out at rest on leaves near the tops of the trees. Unfortunately, getting pictures of them was mostly out of the question and the best I could usually do was as in the silhouetted image below (taken on 23rd June 2018)!

In 2017 one of the two older elms died, while the other one flowered for the first time – a sure sign that it won't last much longer. However, that particular tree

survived the 2018 season too and produced the usual small crop of adult butterflies, so I hope that more will appear for at least one more season yet.

During 2018 I saw butterflies feeding on our buddleias a couple of times but didn't have the camera to hand at the appropriate moment. However, on 10th July 2018, with camera in hand, I did notice a female land on our lawn and start to wander around aimlessly for a few minutes and I managed to grab a few pictures of her before she flew off. I wonder what she was looking for?!



New Members

Brenda Mobbs

Since the last newsletter 77 new members have joined and the membership is now over 1806. 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.

- 22 from Berkshire
- 29 from Buckinghamshire
- 26 from Oxfordshire

All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and attend Members' Day and will be invited to a New Members' Day.

Field Meetings

For all field trips it is recommended that arms and legs are covered to protect from insect bites.

Sunday 26th May 10.00am

Wicken Wood, Bucks

WARNING! Please check with Nick Board prior to attending this walk as there is a chance that it will not take place following significant clearance at Wicken Wood. Nick will be making preliminary visits to see if the Wood White has survived the winter and the works!

Most of the walk is along a public footpath for easy walking; however, some 'off path' rides are likely to be more overgrown with uneven footing in places.

Meet at the car park at the entrance to the wood (OS Map 152, Grid Ref: SP730413). **Leader and contact:** Nick Board 07811255453

Tuesday 28th May 2.00pm

Finemere Wood, Bucks

A field trip to try and find Black Hairstreak pupae.

Entrance at OS Map 165, Grid Ref: SP720209

Leader and contact: Stuart Hodges 01296 730217

Thursday 30th May 10.30am

Yoesden Bank, Bucks

Target species: Adonis Blue. We also hope to see other spring chalk downland species. Wear appropriate footwear: steep slopes. Meet in the entrance field by the pumping station in Bottom Road, Radnage. Parking in field.

OS Map 165, Grid Ref: SU789975. **Leaders and contact:** Sue Taylor taylor57sc@gmail.com and Brenda Mobbs 01494 712486

Saturday 1st June at 11.00am

Bradenham, Bucks

Target species: Small Blue, along with other early summer butterflies. Turn east off the A4010 into Bradenham Wood Lane at the Red Lion pub. After 500 metres, turn left into the small car park (OS Map 165, Grid Ref SU827972).

Leader and contact: Sue Taylor taylor57sc@gmail.com

Saturday 15th June at 10.30am

Finemere Wood, Bucks

Our Black Hairstreak Champion leads a walk to see his butterfly!

Meet at the reserve entrance on the Edgcott to Quainton Road. OS Map 165, Grid Ref: SP720209

Leader and contact: Stuart Hodges 01296 730217 and [07941 763850](tel:07941 763850)

Sunday 23rd June at 10.30am **Shotover Hill and Brasenose Wood, Oxon**

Meeting organised by Upper Thames section of Butterfly Conservation and Shotover Wildlife Group. A very interesting habitat consisting of acidic grassland, ancient woodland and Blackthorn scrub. We hope to see the rare Black Hairstreak as well as other early summer species.

This walk will be led by the Chairman of Shotover Wildlife Group – Ivan Wright.

Meet at Shotover car park, Old Road (east end), Headington, OX3 8TA (OS Map 164, Grid Ref: SP564062). It is advisable to bring a packed lunch.

Leader and Contact: [Ivan Wright](#)

Saturday 29th June 11.00am **Silchester Common, Hants**

A good site for the Silver-studded Blue. The ground is uneven so please wear suitable footwear. There is also a lot of gorse so long trousers are advisable.

Meet in the car park on the west side of Pamber Road in Silchester.

OS Map 175, Grid Ref: SU625622

Leader and contact: [Bryan Williams 0118 9792177, mobile 07919 921910](#)

Sunday 30th June 10.30am **Hackpen Hill also known as Crowhole Bottom and Devil's Punchbowl, Oxon**

A walk in search of various butterflies and day-flying moths. There are steep slopes requiring suitable footwear. Meet at Sparsholt Firs on the Ridgeway by the B4001, OS Map 174, Grid Ref: SU344850

Leader and contact: [Gillian Taylor 01235 751646](#)

Tuesday 2nd July at 2.00pm **Maidenhead Thicket, Berks**

Meet at the 'Butterfly trail car park' (OS Map 175, Grid Ref: SU 857809).

Target species is the White-letter Hairstreak but hopefully also a good selection of woodland butterflies. Silver Washed Fritillary, Purple Hairstreak, White Admiral are all seen here as well as the occasional Purple Emperor.

Contact [Peter Cuss 07938 577944](#) email pj.cuss@gmail.com

Thursday 4th July 11.00am **Ivinghoe Beacon, Bucks**

A walk to see the Dark Green Fritillary in one of the best sites in the Upper Thames Branch region. There are some very steep slopes and rabbit holes so please wear suitable footwear.

Meet in the car park (OS Map 165, Grid Ref: SP963160)

Leader and contact: [Paul Bowyer 01628 526225](#)

Thursday 4th July at 10.30am **North Bucks Way and Oakhill Wood, Milton Keynes, Bucks**

A walk of 2.5 miles (approximately) along the North Bucks Way to look for White Admiral, various hairstreaks, and other summer species. Purple Emperor has also been spotted on previous walks.

Meet at Shenley Wood car park (OS Map 152, Grid Ref: SP824356).

Leader and contact: [Martin Kincaid 07768 146232](#)

Tuesday 9th July 10.30am**Bernwood Forest Bucks/Oxon**

Weather permitting, good numbers of summer butterflies should be seen: the main attraction being the Purple Emperor.

Meet in the main Oakley Wood car park (OS Map 164, Grid Ref: SP611117).

Leader and Contact: Paul Huckle email: paul.huckle@btinternet.com

Wednesday Evenings 10th and 17th July at 6.30pm**Didcot, Oxon**

A repeat of last year's fascinating evening walks, exploring what butterflies get up to outside transect hours. Target species: Marbled White, Small Blue, and other summer butterflies. 17th Sustrans path on top of disused railway line from Didcot to Upton. Some rough ground but alongside metalled path. Meet at the Village Hall at East Hagbourne. This period overlaps with the height of the Marbled White season. Around the solstice, butterflies can be in flight until 2100 and perching until 2200. OS Map 174, Grid Ref: SU525883

Leader and contact: Karen Saxl 01235 818574

Saturday 20th July 10.00am**Paices Wood, Aldermaston, Berks**

A look at the varied habitats of this country parkland which supports a variety of species. Entrance is south of Youngs Industrial Estate between Aldermaston and Tadley off A340. Parking at OS Map 174, Grid Ref: SU587639, on the west side of A340 (best sat nav post code is RG7 4PG). Follow the brown signs! **Leader and contact:** John Lerpiniere 0118 375 1756

Sunday 28th July 10.30am**Oven Bottom, Oxon**

A trip to see some butterflies of high summer! From the A417, a mile east of Blewbury, turn south along the narrow lane opposite the turning to Aston Uphorpe village. Park and meet by the grain drier, half a mile along the lane. There are steep chalk slopes and the walk will proceed to the near end of 'Juniper Valley', then bear right up the hill, turn right onto Grim's Ditch by the dew pond, then on to Oven Bottom. We will return by descending 'Juniper Valley'. OS Map 174, Grid Ref: SU550844.

Leader and contact: Malcolm Brownsword 01235 850668

Saturday 3rd August 10.30am**West Wycombe Hill and Buttler's Hangings, Bucks**

A walk to see summer butterflies and hopefully some of the rarer species on Buttler's Hangings including Chalkhill Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper. After meeting at the south end of the National Trust car park on the top of West Wycombe Hill (OS Map 165/175, Grid Ref: SU827950), we will walk through the woods, along the top of the ridge, until we arrive at Buttler's Hangings. A walk of about 4 kilometres in total with very steep slopes, so please wear suitable footwear. Please note that it is not possible to park on the road directly below Buttler's Hangings.

Leader and contact: Tess and Peter Ogden 07596 495007

Thursday 6th August 11.00am

Greenham Common, Berks

Lots of butterfly species to see, our main target is the Grayling...

Meet at the car park near the control tower.

OS Map 174, Grid Ref: SU501652 off Bury's Bank Road.

Leader and contact: [Paul Bowyer 01628 526225](tel:01628526225)

Friday 9th August 11.00am

Shirburn Hill, Oxon

Target species includes the Silver-spotted Skipper and other midsummer chalk downland species. The site has steep slopes and rabbit holes.

Meet at the southern end of Cowleaze Wood car park, off the road from Christmas Common to Stokenchurch. OS Map 165, Grid Ref: SU725955.

Leader and contact: [Paul Bowyer 01628 526225](tel:01628526225)

Saturday 10th August at 10.30am

Lardon Chase, Streatley, Berks

Targeting: Adonis Blue. Very steep grass slopes. Meet in the main National Trust car park off the A4009 at the top of the hill out of Streatley (OS Map 174, Grid Ref: SU583806). **Leader and contact:** [Maureen Cross 01491 871239](tel:01491871239)

Sunday 11th August 10.30am

**Kimble Rifle Range near
Monks Risborough, Bucks**

Summer butterflies (including Chalkhill Blue and hopefully Silver-spotted Skipper) and day-flying moths at this BBOWT reserve. This is a 3 kilometre walk and includes some slopes, but is possible with grippy shoes and the exercising of caution about rabbit holes and ant hills.

Parking: Map 165, Grid Ref: SP832045 on Longdown Hill near HP27 0NB.

Leader and contact: [Nick Bowles 01442 382276](tel:01442382276)

Wednesday 14th August 10.30am

**Whitecross Green Wood,
Bucks/Oxon(BBOWT Reserve)**

Target species is the Brown Hairstreak. Binoculars and lots of patience are essential! Meet at car park at the entrance of the wood OS Maps 164/165, Grid Ref: SP600150. **Leader and contact:** [Tony Croft 07808 289588](tel:07808289588)

Saturday 17th August 10.30am

Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer

The wide flowery rides through the conifer plantation on the Berks/Hants border are one of the local hotspots for the Grayling butterfly. Park in the quiet cul-de-sac of Stephen's Firs, Mortimer. OS Map: 175, Grid Ref: SU644647.

Leader and contact: [Jan Haseler 0118 9414750/07464 603236](tel:01189414750)

Could you help with any of the tasks listed below?

With meetings	With direct conservation	With organisation
Physical help; e.g. putting out chairs, erecting displays	Use hand tools at conservation tasks	Maintain a database or spreadsheet
Meet and greet people attending meetings	Use power tools at conservation tasks	Lead a walk, or invite others to view your moth trap
Help with catering, e.g. pour the tea, make a cake	Help to store and transport tools	Help to man our stall at fairs and events
Put together a display to show at meetings	Grow plants for reserves	Help with publicity and promotion
Write accounts/take photos of meetings (indoor & out)	Record butterflies & moths locally	Help to arrange events
Run the raffle or a quiz	Run a moth trap & record the catch	Contribute to: our website, our Twitter feed, our Facebook page or our newsletter
Provide facilities for meetings, e.g. rooms, laptops	Join and survey as part of a team	
Help with finance	Walk a transect	Join a committee
Consider a Legacy to leave money to BC	Travel to record in under-recorded areas	
Arrange a token collection at Waitrose	Organise a team of surveyors	
Organise a fund raising event	Become a 10km square champion	
Take the newsletter electronically	Become a species champion	

Please tell us of any additional ideas

Thank you

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

and Instagram - [utb_butterfly_conservation](https://www.instagram.com/utb_butterfly_conservation)

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

<http://www.holtspurbottom.info>

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