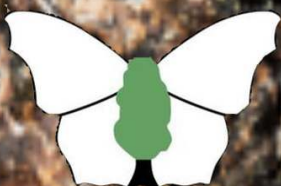


Hairstreak

No 110

Spring 2021



Butterfly
Conservation



Upper Thames
Branch

Spring Moths



Oak Beauty
Tim Arnold



Orange Underwing
Andy Harding



Black-spotted Chestnut
Robin Knill-Jones



Blossom Underwing
Dave Wilton



Emperor
Martin Harvey



Small Brindled Beauty
Dave Wilton



Water Carpet
Dave Wilton



Engrailed
Dave Wilton



Dotted Border
Tim Arnold

*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
1st August for Autumn Issue*

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Cover photo: Alder Moth by Nick Bowles

Background: Bradenham, Bucks

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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I doubt 2020 will stand out as a favourite year in the mind of butterfly or moth lovers. We were restricted in what we could do and anticipated trips and meetings had to be shelved.

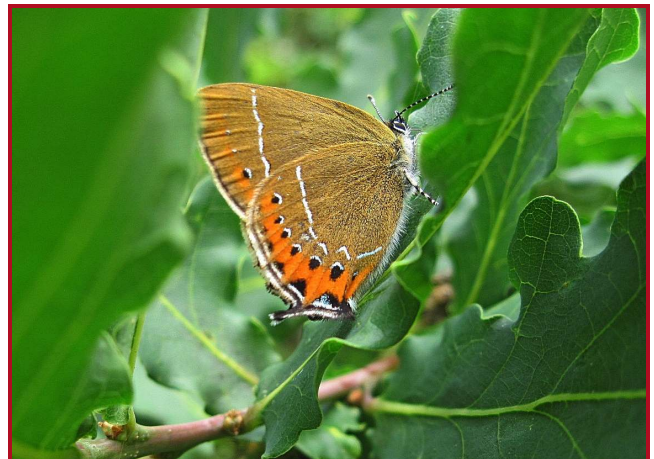
However, on the positive side, more people were taking an interest in their gardens and recording the wildlife there more carefully. Some took the opportunity of more time at home to make their land more wildlife friendly. Many of us discovered really good spots close to home which we had been unaware of. I know some people discovered local gems which previously they had driven past to go to somewhere better-known.

I managed some exhilarating sightings (locally) and met with many utterly amazing landowners who are even more determined to make their land better for wildlife. As your representative, I am invited to see some large tracts of land that are off-limits to most and what has amazed me is the high quality of that land for wildlife. Top of my list of unexpectedly wonderful places I found this year, must be quiet valleys, without roads or footpaths, resplendent with wildflowers and humming with insects, and private woodland blocks where the owners are thinning the trees, not to sell the timber, but to let in more light and improve the ground flora. This year, I was even shown a site with what could well be the densest Black Hairstreak colony outside Bernwood Forest's M40 Compensation area or Glaphorn Cow Pasture, and offering tremendous potential because of the enthusiasm of the owner to make it even better.

I suppose people have to be interested in wildlife before they invite me, but I'm often struck by the passion of these landowners to do what they can, often at considerable personal expense, to help biodiversity and particularly butterflies. I hope that I'm not deluding myself, but there does seem to be an accelerating move to make land less sterile and tidy, but flamboyantly rich and diverse, heaving with variety and thrumming with life.

Sadly, we have only been able to do conservation work with very small groups and although a season of winter work is planned to continue into 2021 who knows if we will be able to deliver it? I apologise to the hundreds of members who would have liked to assist in conservation work and have heard nothing of any such planned tasks. In order to work within the rule of six, we decided to simply invite those known to be regular volunteers at each of the sites. Once we had six volunteers we stopped looking for other help.

Our Five Hairstreaks officer was on part-time, temporary contract in 2020. Sadly



Black Hairstreak
Stuart Hodges

furlough meant that much of her planned work could not be delivered and the contract has now ended. However, she did find funding from TOE2 (Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment) to enable a series of conservation events at Arcott MOD, where work with Chiltern Rangers and other groups ensure the survival of habitat supporting a breadth of wildlife that has to be seen to be believed. We also received funding from the National Environment Partnership to add to UTB funds and employ the Chiltern Rangers to work alongside us at five sites; some with existing Duke of Burgundy populations and others nearby, where we hope the butterfly might colonise. Small groups and 34 sheep have also worked to keep Holtspur Bottom reserve in great shape. Reports of the work undertaken to date appeared on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Butterflies.Berkshire.Buckinghamshire.Oxfordshire> and Twitter pages [BC Upper Thames \(@UpperThamesBC\) / Twitter](#).

I hope there will be further reports but that depends on the severity of restrictions to prevent Covid-19 from spreading.

The potential of the vaccination program to ease restrictions should see us staging guided butterfly walks, training events for surveyors and, eventually, indoor meetings again. Any news about the changing situation will always be displayed on our website, so please keep an eye out for news of developments.

https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/main_index.pl .

The walks programme is already being organised. Those who led walks previously are being asked to consider leading again; and there is always scope for new locations and new leaders, should you like to get involved in the walk's delivery.

Meanwhile, we can work virtually as we did for the delightful, virtual branch's Members' Day and AGM. We believe that 80 members joined us and it was fantastic to share news and views and to be entertained by some absorbing presentations. Voting at the AGM added two new members to the committee – welcome to Margery Slatter and Kat Dahl.

I plan that the UTB will hold online identification courses in butterflies and moths (if indoor meetings are not possible). As these indoor events tend to get fully subscribed an online event might be advantageous, allowing more people to become involved. I imagine that these events will take place in March – close to the flight season - then imparted skills can be tried out before they fade from memory. News of these sessions will be advertised at the sites described above and each will be free but we would appreciate a £5 donation from each attendee.

Peter Cuss is planning a series of surveys to find out more about our key moth species and you might want to become involved in those; again details will be on the website. Perhaps you are considering making a start into mothing. Remember that we have a few loan traps available (on condition that all sightings are recorded). The Berkshire moth group will continue with virtual meetings and it would be great if a member with some IT skills in other counties could offer moth enthusiasts there a similar opportunity to discuss catches.

Whatever happens in 2021, we will move forwards and continue to deliver conservation effort.

Editor: since Nick wrote this, England has gone into Tier 5. Consequently all UTB conservation tasks have been cancelled.

Videos for those times when getting out into the countryside is hard (or impossible)

Nick Bowles

I suspect I'm not alone in watching more videos in 2020 than before. I have discovered some really brilliant films and I thought I could share the details so that if you didn't find them for yourself you might try them now.

First a video that is perhaps a bit too obvious for many members but if you are new to the activity or know others who might be lured in, you can't do much better than to be hooked by Matthew's enthusiasm in

Matthew Oates Spotting and identifying Britain's butterflies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jGWMliBqXw>

Then a video about a local success story – describing UTB member **Ched George's** work at Bradenham.

Rescuing a rarity - the Duke of Burgundy Butterfly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJ7cIBSJ8vc>

Dr Dan Danahar has created a series of interesting and at times detailed descriptions of various UK species. If you wondered why you have strawberries growing in the garden but you don't see grizzled Skipper there, when every field guide tells you their caterpillars eat strawberry leaves, these videos explain the complex needs of several species of UK butterfly

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRIWLrKvw9CMX9bmuxzOxSg/videos>

Ken and Gillian Elsom's video is only one of a few hosted by the Surrey branch of BC and this one details the life history (extremely well) and the distribution of the Brown Hairstreak in Surrey. This will perhaps be especially interesting to those living along the Surrey border as all the evidence is that the colonies there are creeping into Berkshire.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIS9Yr0vFok>

Filming VARwild is a collection of amazingly good films, not all butterflies and not all UK species but fascinating none the less.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGfTbBNVixX_zsrj6CwLq1A

Finally, **Team Candiru** have some extremely well observed and well filmed videos of various UK creatures including the parasites (strictly the parasitoids) of UK butterfly and moth species

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzakF5bv8dffsqY5JBhOHnA>

I thought the video about the parasitoid of the Large White (Parasitoid wasps: like the Alien movies, but real!) especially enthralling – horrifying but enthralling.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYJpNLWlp8U>

A number of our members have adopted a 10K square, coordinating the recording for the current butterfly atlas which runs from 2020 to 2024. The report below describes how some of them have been getting on in 2020.



Small Heath
David Ferguson

Margaret Price looks after SP41, which lies to the north-west of Oxford, roughly centred on Woodstock. Initially she recorded in her immediate 2K square before moving further to cover as much of the 10K square as possible. Small Heaths were seen in good numbers at the beginning of June in habitat where she would not normally expect to find them. Around the farm there are in-field strips as part of a Government project and these were a joy to behold, not only for the flowers but the butterflies too, including good numbers of Small Tortoiseshells. By the third week of June Marbled Whites were almost too numerous to count but a month later they had virtually disappeared. Meadow Browns were also seen in very good numbers, both the latter reminding her of the good old days of her childhood! For the first year ever she didn't record a Common Blue in the garden while in the wider countryside there were very few. Red Admirals were also in very low numbers. With most of the land in her square being arable it makes such a difference when there are field margins planted with native flowering plants and grasses attracting numerous insects. Uncut roadside verges are also an excellent source of nectar.

Phil Tizzard records in SP63, which lies to the west of Buckingham. He reports that he rediscovered Small Heath at a location where he last recorded it ten years ago, but has not seen it once in the intervening period. He wonders if they have been there all that time and gone unnoticed, or have they somehow reappeared this year? Purple Hairstreak was found again in a couple of locations where it was discovered during the last atlas survey. Most other common species were found as expected, with the exception of Common Blue, which was very thin on the ground.

Jan Haseler looks after SU66, which lies to the south-west of Reading in Berkshire. White Admiral proved elusive this year – of the nine sites in the 10K square where it has been found in the past, she only managed to find it at one, Starveall Woods to the south of Burghfield Common. Small Heath, on the other hand, had one of its best years, including one in the dog-walking area of the M4 westbound Reading Services and another in a field to the east of Burghfield Common which had been sown with an interesting flower mix including lots of clover. This field also hosted a Clouded Yellow in early September. Just across the border in SU76, she found two Small Heaths in Green Park, Reading – a business park which she has been visiting since 2006 without any previous sightings.

John Lerpiniere had some interesting sightings in SU66, including a surprise Dark Green Fritillary on the ground in a bare patch amongst the heather of BBOWT's Decoy Heath reserve and a Grizzled Skipper inside the south gate at Padworth Common. John also looks after the Berkshire part of SU67, which lies to the west of Reading. He managed to find 24 species in his home tetrad SU6674 in Tilehurst, including a Grizzled Skipper which landed at his feet on a Germander Speedwell on his front lawn. As far as he is aware, this is kilometres from any other records and is a complete surprise and a bit of a mystery. Dingy Skipper was recorded near Sparkmoor Cottage at BBOWT's Moor Copse reserve SU6472, the first record there since 2007. Small Heaths turned up at Mclroy Park in Tilehurst, Reading which conveniently covers two tetrads, SU6674 and SU6874. TVERC did a review of this Local Nature Reserve this year and found 20 species of butterfly. Holly Blues were easy to see at the park, with double figures counted on two occasions. Two missing species which might have been expected were Small Tortoiseshell and Purple Hairstreak. The next highest numbers in SU67 were 15 species at Theale, SU6870, and 13 at Englefield SU6272. The latter included Clouded Yellow, only the second he has seen in several years, when a few took up residence at Moor Copse in late summer. We are looking for a volunteer to help with the Oxfordshire part of SU67 which stretches from Goring to Sonning Common and south to the Thames.



John records widely in West Berkshire and he sent the following notes about butterfly sightings in other 10K squares. Even after several visits, he failed to find White Admiral at Bradfield (SU57). A few years ago they were really reliable so hopefully this was just bad luck. A few Purple Hairstreaks were seen here including

two fresh ones on the ground, possibly recently emerged, and two on a transect visit. One White Admiral was seen at Paices Wood SU5862 where just a single visit at flight time produced a result. And a lucky sighting at Lambourn Woodlands just south of BBOWT's Watts Bank reserve may be just the second record for the area SU3276. A single Duke of Burgundy turned up in this tetrad, SU3276, very pleasing indeed after a two year gap. Dingy Skipper, Small Blue and Silver-washed Fritillary were also nice to find at Watts Bank reserve SU3276. Seventeen common species were counted at Inkpen Crocus Field, including a nice colony of Marbled Whites with 12 counted on one visit, plus three sooty black Chimney Sweeper moths, thanks to the Pignut which grows amongst the crocuses. John counted eight Duke of Burgundy butterflies at a private site at Hungerford Newtown. Unfortunately, for the first time, no Silver-studded Blues were seen at Broadmoor Bottom reserve, but ten other species were recorded there.



Doug Kennedy has taken on SP71, which lies to the north of Thame and west of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. Within the 10K square, he has also taken on a Wider Countryside 1K square, SP7212. This is next to the hamlet of Nether Winchendon and on the north bank of the River Thame. A single arable field that climbs 50 metres in altitude from the edge of the village takes up most of the square, but there is an equestrian farm on the north side which includes a nice scrubby bit of land. The arable field is under level 1 stewardship so has a wildlife strip around it and it also has a spring from which a small stream flows except during dry weather. He did four counts, all on a circular route, which produced widely contrasting results. In May he counted 11 individuals, mostly Small Whites. In June it was 25 individuals, mostly Meadow Browns, plus three Small Tortoiseshells and no whites at all. In July he counted 264 individuals of 13 species including nearly 100 whites along with lots of Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Ringlets. Finally in August he was back to 36 individuals, most of which were Large Whites. Nymphalids were rare - he saw one Peacock and no Painted Ladies at all.

Jack Peeters records in SP72, which lies to the south and west of Winslow in Bucks. He reports that butterfly numbers in the area of Oving, Bucks have been generally low this year, despite periods of very good weather early on. The skippers, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Ringlelet and Gatekeeper have been relatively scarce in comparison with previous years. The vanessids seemed to do quite well, especially Peacock. Small Heath, formerly quite rare here, had a very good year in his small field and were seen in very good numbers in the surrounding grazed fields and meadows. No Painted Ladies or Clouded Yellows visited while he was counting. Jack will be moving away from the Upper Thames area, but we are very pleased to have Hugh Ellerton taking over from him. Hugh comments that Marbled White numbers were well up, but Small Coppers were less in evidence until late in the season.

This was Andy Spragg's second year as 10K champion for SU79, a square which lies to the south of Chinnor in the Chilterns and includes Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve. It turned out to be more productive than anticipated, largely because of a period of furlough in the spring. Thirteen species now have records in every tetrad. Common Blue and Ringlet are missing from only one tetrad and Large Skipper, Holly Blue and Marbled White are all missing from only two tetrads. In 2019 Andy only saw two Small Blue specimens anywhere. In 2020 he saw the species in four different tetrads, two of them with no previous records. Around SU751995 on 26 May, he saw more Small Blues than anything else, including an ovipositing female. As a result, he is now the Small Blue Champion as well as the SU79 10K champion! On a visit to Swain's Wood, the 22 species recorded included two lifetime firsts - Chalkhill Blue and White-letter Hairstreak, the latter previously unrecorded at the site. Dark Green Fritillary was added to two tetrads with no previous records. Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak were each added to a tetrad with no previous records. Andy reports a late surge for Small Copper with multiple sightings in six different tetrads on five consecutive days in mid-September. He also had his first ever Upper Thames region sighting of Clouded Yellow.

Chris Tyler-Smith and Yali Xue look after four 10K squares, SP84, SP85, SP94 and SP95, which lie to the north and east of Milton Keynes. They comment that Small Heath was widespread with a few good counts in north Bucks.

Robert Godden and Des Sussex are the joint 10K Champions for SU86, which lies to the south and west of Bracknell in Berkshire. They report that there were more signs that Dark Green Fritillary is strengthening its foothold in the south-east corner of the UTB area. After the initial discovery of two individuals at separate locations in 2015, there have been a few further sightings, first of singles, then an impressive ten in a small woodland in Sandhurst in 2018. This year six were flying on heathland between Sandhurst and Crowthorne, close to a public area and catching the attention of passers by. Interestingly, the sequence of sightings from year to year shows a gradual eastward trend. Parts of the former Transport Research Laboratory in Crowthorne have been turned into a large public open space with quite a lot of wildlife habitat. The site is called Buckler's Forest and has become a very good site for Graylings which seem to be thriving on the open grassland with plenty of bare sandy and stony ground. There was a welcome increase in sightings of Silver-studded Blue, particularly from 'new' locations within Swinley Forest. Flowery grassland has been created at Peacock Meadows, Jennett's Park near Bracknell. The site is worth visiting to build up the list – it is supporting common skippers, Marbled Whites, Common Blues and burnet moths. Clouded Yellow and a large fritillary were also seen here – alas the latter was too fast to see if it was a Dark Green or a Silver-washed Fritillary. Just a few years ago this was arable farmland.

Martin Robinson is the 10K Champion for SU88, which lies due south of High



Wycombe and is bisected by the River Thames into two roughly equal halves, the northern half being in Buckinghamshire and the southern part in Berkshire. He writes that this year was one of the most unusual he has ever experienced in butterfly recording. Due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions in the spring, travel was very limited and exercise could be taken only in the vicinity of home. There is a scrubby patch of land roughly 50 yards square about ten minutes walk away from where he lives near Marlow. This area was within the constraints of taking exercise during lockdown so was one of the few walks he could do in SU88. A few years ago he discovered a colony of Grizzled and Dingy Skippers there. It is very easy to overlook because the colony area is so small. Thankfully both species of skipper were back this year, a great uplift given the circumstances at the time. He also spotted a Green Hairstreak, back again after nine years' absence, some Small Coppers and Common Blues and numerous Small Heaths. This last butterfly has had a great year in his 10km square; it has appeared for the first time in eight tetrads and has been present this year in 15 out of the 25 tetrads, often in large numbers. Later in the year on a blazing hot day in July, he discovered a group of Clouded Yellows which had made their home in



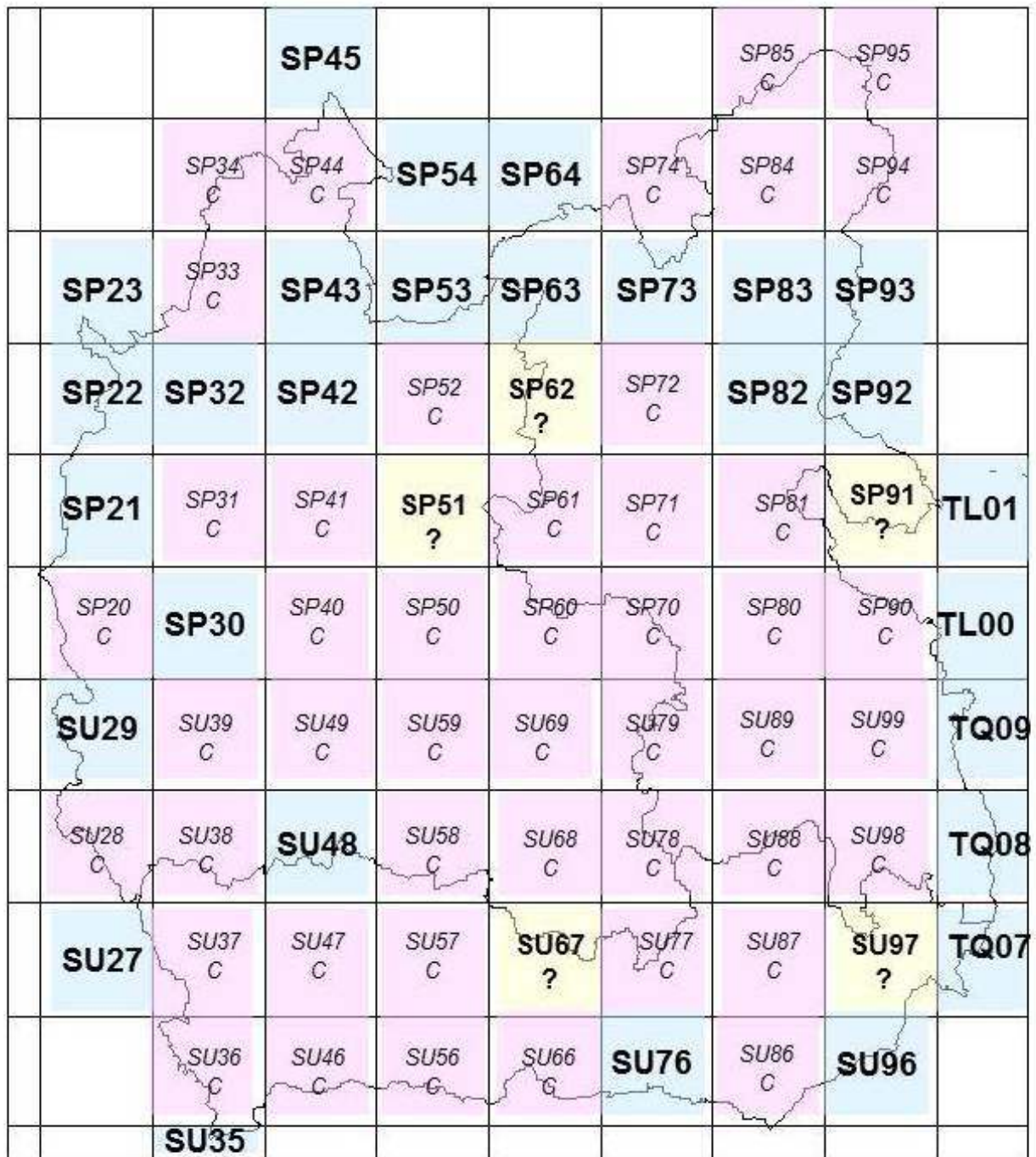
Dingy Skipper
David Ferguson

a clover field just south of Flackwell Heath. These butterflies zipped around at ferocious speed feeding from flower to flower while being harassed by Small Heaths and Gatekeepers. Another surprise sighting was a lone White Admiral which flew over his head on a footpath on the edge of Pinkneys Green on the outskirts of Maidenhead. He suspects it may have come from nearby Maidenhead Thicket where he has seen them previously. Here's hoping next year will be a more normal observing season with further (pleasant!) surprises to come.

Paul Bowyer looks after SU98, which lies to the north of Slough. He writes that he has made a lot less visits to his square this year but has been searching a little bit harder. The best visit was to the George Pitcher Memorial Ground in Burnham where 14 species were found in one hour. Hopefully next year he will be able to visit in spring and increase this number. Purple Hairstreak has been the most notable success. He has seen it in a number of tetrads and fairly low down, thereby avoiding neck strain. This has occurred at Farm Wood, Stoke Common, Burnham Beeches, Flackwell Heath Golf Club, Church Wood and the George Pitcher Memorial Ground. The most worrying species is the White Admiral. He has not seen it in any of the woods in SU98 for two years. These include Woolmans Wood, Church Wood, Burnham Beeches, Egypt Wood and Wilton Park.

We have a number of 10K squares across the three counties, particularly in the north and west of the region, where we are looking for one or more volunteers to help coordinate recording. The map below shows whether squares are already adopted, need additional help or are unassigned. If you think you could help, please contact Jan Haseler. (Tel: 0118 9414750, email jan.haseler@btinternet.com).

10K square status, December 2020



Key

	10K Champion In place		More help wanted		Vacant square
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Twenty-one churchyards were surveyed by nine surveyors in 2020, a very good result considering the constraints imposed by lockdown. Compared with last year, there were two new recorders and seven new churchyards were covered.

A total of 1028 individual butterflies of 23 species were recorded, with St. Mary's, Kirtlington recording the most species at 20, closely followed by St. John's, Stone with 19, and St. John's, Moulsoford with 17. The average number of species recorded per churchyard was 10.

The same range of species was recorded as last year, with the exception of **Painted Lady**, which was not seen at all, reflecting very low numbers generally. The top six species—**Meadow Brown**, **Gatekeeper**, **Small White**, **Marbled White**, **Ringlet**, **Large White**—were the same as last year, and accounted for 72% of the total, the same as last year. Of these, **Small White**, **Large White**, and **Meadow Brown** were seen in more than 90% of churchyards...but not all. In fact, as the table shows, the only species to have been recorded in all churchyards in any year, was **Small White** in 2019.

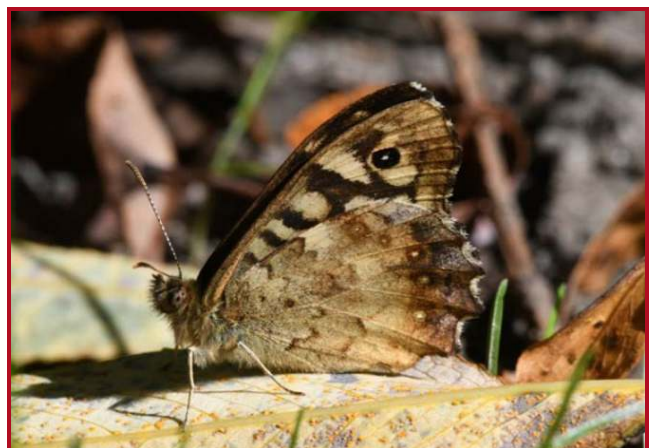
In terms of numbers, the **browns** and the **whites** together accounted for around 80% of the total count, even though both **Small** and **Large Whites** were down by around 40% compared to last year; however **Green-veined White** held steady...as did **Marbled White** (yes I know it's really a "brown"!). Numbers of **Peacock**, **Comma** and **Small Heath**, were all up strongly, the latter by 600% and I suspect we may find that **Small Heath** has done well generally.

Those down significantly in numbers (by more than 50%) were **Brown Argus**, **Common Blue**, **Red Admiral** and **Speckled Wood**, the latter apparently experiencing "...its worst year in the Big Butterfly Count since the start of the project", so maybe not a surprise. **Orange-tip** does not seem to have done well, but this is probably a reflection of the fact that recording doesn't generally start until May.

Last year I commented that **Holly Blue** appeared to be faring better in recent times. This year it was recorded in 13 out of the 21 sites, and although the numbers were down somewhat, I think the apparent increase has essentially been retained. Perhaps the



Small White
Kelvin Richards



Speckled Wood
Will Atkinson

holly and ivy are being allowed to flourish rather than being cut back?

On which point, one of the benefits of the Churchyard Survey lies in the potential for raising awareness of how good churchyards can be for our commoner species, and of the negative impact of maintaining too tidy a churchyard. As one or two people noted, when the strimmers arrive the butterflies depart! So there is definitely an opportunity not just to record the numbers, but to engage with the vicar and churchwarden and explain that butterfly numbers are inversely proportional to tidiness!

As can be seen, the number of churchyards surveyed has dropped considerably in recent years, and now stands at only a third of the peak in 2016. However it was very encouraging to see new observers and new churchyards added this year. I hope that those who were unable to cover their sites this year due to the restrictions will be able to do so in 2021, and we can perhaps get back to greater than 30 sites covered. **If you would like to take part in the survey** and know of a churchyard or churchyards that you would like to cover, or if you previously covered a site but have not done so recently, then please get in touch. As always, the appropriate survey forms can be found and downloaded from the website at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/recording#butterflies>.

My thanks to all those who contributed their time, effort and data to the survey in 2020, and also to Chris Woodrow who transcribed all of the paper inputs into Excel spreadsheets.



Holly Blues

Tony Gillie

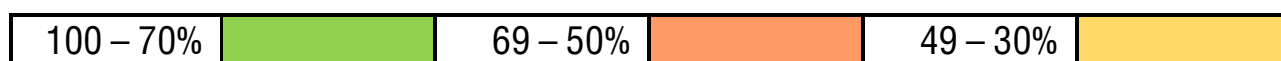


Peacock

Paul Harries

The table below summarises the percentage of churchyards recording each species over the past twelve years.

Year	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
No. of sites	21	24	28	33	67	59	69	68	50	54	45	36
Small White	95	100	78	75	57	68	65	87	60	74	76	75
Meadow Brown	90	92	71	72	57	63	78	81	66	56	56	78
Holly Blue	62	79	61	45	49	51	17	34	32	67	33	33
Orange-tip	29	42	68	57	42	37	39	37	32	52	33	42
Large White	90	67	64	54	39	58	45	81	32	67	60	89
Speckled Wood	24	50	43	57	33	44	62	54	26	46	47	72
Brimstone	38	29	43	33	31	39	42	34	22	30	29	33
Red Admiral	52	46	29	36	28	27	43	22	36	52	36	28
Ringlet	67	54	50	39	27	42	42	44	50	28	40	53
Sm Tortoiseshell	33	25	25	30	27	41	61	47	14	22	29	44
Green-v White	76	54	64	24	27	41	46	35	28	46	42	58
Peacock	48	29	25	15	24	41	42	43	12	19	24	44
Gatekeeper	62	54	43	51	22	47	58	54	42	39	36	36
Marbled White	33	42	21	18	13	19	16	16	10	13	13	8
Comma	33	17	29	24	10	24	42	40	22	20	27	44
Small Skipper	29	21	17	9	10	17	23	18	10	6	9	22
Large Skipper	19	8	11	6	9	14	12	15	6	9	16	14
Common Blue	24	25	21	24	7	20	20	22	4	22	36	31
Painted Lady	0	25	7	9	6	2	4	4	2	0	9	56
Essex Skipper	19	13	11	6	4	14	12	4	2	4	2	0
Small Copper	14	8	11	9	1	12	12	13	12	19	18	17
Brown Argus	10	13	18	9	1	10	6	4	2	17	2	8
Small Heath	29	4	0	6	1	5	3	4	4	0	2	0
Silver-w Fritillary	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0
Purple Hairstreak	0	0	7	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	3
Chalkhill Blue	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Small Blue	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	4	8



Minutes of Annual General Meeting

22nd November 2020 at 3.05pm

Held over the internet using Zoom software

Thanks to COVID-19 our Annual General Meeting had to be held online, taking place during the afternoon of 22nd November. Chairman Nick Bowles hosted the event and David Roy ensured that the technical aspects went to plan. Firstly we were treated to some elements of our (cancelled) Members' Day, including a gallery of superb images taken by members of the Branch, a quiz and a report on priority moth species before the AGM itself commenced at 3.05pm. By then 76 participants were online, almost as good an attendance figure as we would expect at Members' Day.

Chairman Nick Bowles started off the AGM by giving his annual report on Branch activities, the full text of which is reproduced here:

“Our year (since the last AGM) began fairly normally with a focus on our core and key activity, winter conservation work. Based on the records of butterflies and moths that you send in, we can determine where conservation effort is most necessary. We believe that more records than ever have been collected in 2020 and that is in part because our membership continues to grow (up by some 250 this year to 2050 members, with a 4.7% increase in household memberships). Using your submitted records, we look to engage landowners and local members in order to try and improve the habitat at sites that hold the key species, most especially where we think that numbers of key species are falling.

For some reason we always seem to get more volunteers at tasks in mid-Buckinghamshire (thank you very, very much to all those attending), but we are very keen to see work undertaken across all three counties. If you know a site where conservation work could assist butterflies or moths, please let us know; and if other organisations are arranging tasks we are prepared to help advertise and try to get more volunteers along. Unquestionably, working in a larger group is more rewarding and the effect of a large group can be genuinely transformational. So, to avoid our members working in tiny groups, please consider when you might join us. Once again we are grateful to the Chiltern Rangers, with whom we work frequently, for their organisational skill, effectiveness and expertise.

As the winter work gradually ended we started a programme of training for butterfly surveyors. Sadly after only four meetings this was curtailed by COVID-19. This meant that seven further planned meetings had to be cancelled (including our dedicated Moth identification and surveying meeting). Even so, before lockdown we did manage to reach another 80 keen surveyors. Thank you to all those attending and those registered to attend whom we had to disappoint. Each year I think that we should be cautious in booking rooms, in case we have already reached all those wishing to develop their ID skills and survey aspirations, but each year we find an even larger number of enthusiastic applicants. With lockdown preventing meetings, we presented videos via “Zoom” to some groups and these presentations are visible

online.

The summer was quite weird with no group field meetings but committee members did still manage a number of visits to impart management advice to landowners. Surveyors from this season's training sessions (and those of previous years) carried out almost as many formal surveys as in a 'normal' year. Some members, finding themselves with more time on their hands this summer, have actually been out doing informal surveys most days and we may well find that we get more records in 2020 than in previous years.

Many of us have found that having a love of butterflies and moths provided a passion to engage us during troubling times.

Our reserve at Holtspur Bottom has been a delight once again. Thank you very much to all those giving time to make the place such a resounding success. Our "Five Hairstreaks" project officer Caz was furloughed and her short term employment has ended. Unfortunately the period when she might have been most effectively engaging with landowners and managers was when she was prevented from doing so. Another downside of COVID-19 has been the loss of funding for the national society, resulting in staff being made redundant and various posts being reorganised. Our regional officer Steve Wheatley was also furloughed and on return to work was one who discovered that his role had been expanded to encompass several additional strands. Despite an extra workload Steve devoted time to surveys at various UTB sites this summer. The Branch made a donation to Head Office to help with the shortfall in cash and one member contributed very generously indeed to both national and local funds, but the society has many long-term aims that require ongoing funding and we are seeking ways to replace lost financial support. Requests for volunteers produced help from Katrina Easterling with fund raising and from Kat Dahl with social media. We can use people in many ways, for example by visiting potentially good habitats to report back to both us and the landowner. We also need a photographer to record our activities.

One thing we have been able to do during lockdown is to prepare new materials, including new caterpillar and moth leaflets and various other bits and pieces. You can find them on-line at:

<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/publications>

Elsewhere you will find links to presentations that our speakers were unable to give following the cancellation of Members' Day but kindly provided for us to use anyway:

https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/annual_event?event=MDA

Unfortunately the pleasant group events of the summer have had to be cancelled and I speak for all the Committee when I say that we missed meeting you. We really need your help – or more precisely our butterflies and moths need your help. In summary we have had a strange year but still achieved a huge amount. Quite what will be practicable this winter is still a mystery and this coming spring is even more uncertain. I will be planning conservation tasks and inviting members to join me, but each of these will probably operate with small 'bubbles' of volunteers working as separate teams – even if working on the same site. Please let me know if you would like an

invitation to these tasks. If you fancy helping by starting to record moths and want to trial the experience before buying your own trap, remember that Peter Cuss has loan traps available (pj.cuss@gmail.com).

As ever, I remind our members that it is you who make our society. Our work is delivered by wonderful volunteers taking on tasks. Our most heartfelt thanks go to you to all of you, from the recorders of sightings, through the wildlife gardeners to those taking on specific tasks like the newsletter editor, webmaster and survey organisers, to the UTB committee; and to every member. Your support and encouragement make us the conservation force that we are. Thanks everyone. It is such a real honour to receive all the positive news our amazing group generates.”

We then moved on to the administrative part of the AGM. The minutes of the previous one (published in the Spring 2020 issue of “Hairstreak”) were accepted as correct by a show of hands. Branch Treasurer Chris Woodrow answered some questions about the accounts from Ched George and Karen Saxl, the accounts themselves having been published in the Autumn issue of “Hairstreak”. The figures for fiscal year 2019-20 no longer needed a vote of acceptance by the Branch because they had already been accepted at the national level. We were still in a healthy position with circa £30,000 in the bank at the time of the AGM. Chris had prepared a report, as follows:

“In the financial year covered by this report to 31st March 2020, the Branch finances have continued to show a healthy position. Total income for the year increased by £5,892 compared to the previous year, and total expenditure for the year decreased by £5,985, compared to the previous year. Increasing Branch membership resulted in an increase in the amount we received from Head Office for subscriptions to £627 while income from donations, grants and fundraising events increased overall by £1,100 during the year, compared to the prior year. The review by Natural England of the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, which resulted in our not receiving any payment in the previous financial year, meant that we received two payments in the year under review totalling £1,778.45.

With regards expenditure, the cost of the Newsletter has increased this year as a result of the increase in memberships, and in addition we incurred a cost in producing and posting AGM notices to members for the 2019 AGM which was shared with Head Office, our share being £343.00. Expenditure for the Holtspur Reserve at £925 included the cost of sheep grazing at £315 plus repair work to fencing and gates. Expenditure on Other Projects of £637 was the cost of conservation work carried out during the year in our region.

As a result of the foregoing, income exceeded expenditure by £6,041 which together with the balance carried forward from the prior year of £7,882 resulted in a balance in hand at the year’s end of £13,923. Our finances remain healthy.”

The Election of Officers followed, with a request for a vote en bloc for Kat Dahl & Margery Slatter to be formally elected to the Committee and for David Roy, Stuart Hodges & Nick Bowles (who were standing down in turn under our rotational system) to be re-elected to the Committee. This was accepted unanimously by those present. The Upper Thames Branch Committee then comprised Nick Bowles (Chairman),

Grahame Hawker (Vice-Chair), Brenda Mobbs (Membership Secretary), Dave Wilton (Secretary) & Chris Woodrow (Treasurer) along with Peter Cuss, Kat Dahl, Stuart Hodges, David Roy, Margery Slatter & Sue Taylor. That concluded the formal part of the AGM which ended at 3.40pm.

Those present were then treated to the annual review of butterflies in the Upper Thames area, followed by a pre-recorded presentation by our regional officer Steve Wheatley which concluded a very successful on-line meeting.

New Members

Brenda Mobbs

Since the last newsletter 108 new members have joined and the membership is now 2052. 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.

28 from Berkshire
38 from Buckinghamshire
40 from Oxfordshire
2 from elsewhere

All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and attend Members' Day and will be invited to a New Members' Day. Unfortunately at the moment all events are unable to proceed due to Covid-19.

Up to date news on activities can be found on our website:

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

A 2020 Moth Trapping Story

David Hastings

When I was at university in the 1970s I did quite a bit of moth trapping as part of getting my degree in Agricultural Science. Between then and 2017, when I retired, I hardly did any moth trapping apart from a few nights here and there with my old friend Paul Waring.

When the lockdown started I began thinking about buying a moth trap, but was put off by the high cost of even the most basic commercially available model. When May came and the lockdown was still in effect, I had another idea – could I make a trap? A search on the net came up with

butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/east-scotland-branch/budget-bucket-moth-trap



This describes the construction of a simple moth trap using readily available components (bucket, funnel, light) that keep the cost down. It wouldn't be as effective as a Robinson or Skinner trap with an MV bulb, but would be small, light and a cheap way to get going.

I already had a suitable funnel, a bulb cover (a spare cafetière glass!) and an electrical cable. Amazon supplied a large bucket with a lid, a 40W compact fluorescent bulb (40% UV content), and a fitting for this. The total cost was £30.

Cutting a circular hole in the bucket lid was the hardest part of the construction, but once that was done I seated the funnel with some silicone sealant, bolted a piece of wood across the top, fixed the light fitting to it, obtained some egg boxes, and switched it on. But the real test would be running it overnight.

I have a small suburban garden. There are two street lights nearby which probably interfere with the trap. Initially I ran the trap close to the house, but later moved it in front of the greenhouse. There is little grass in the garden (there is grass in adjacent gardens), but there is Ivy, Holly, Honeysuckle, Pyracantha, Common Nettle and Buddleia.

The first run occurred on the night of June 11th/12th. It captured seven moths of five species: **Shuttle-shaped Dart** (1), **Heart & Dart** (3), **Large Yellow Underwing** (1), **Middle-barred Minor** (1) and **Dark Arches** (1). Not a huge catch but it proved that the trap worked.

On June 13th/14th I captured the best moth of



the year, a **Small Elephant Hawk-moth**. This had probably been attracted to the garden to feed on Honeysuckle flowers. Also in the trap were a **Varied Coronet** and three **Uncertain**. There were also a couple of micros, several leaf beetles, and a Summer Chafer.

On June 16th/17th I trapped 12 individual macro-moths from six species. **Riband Wave** and **Heart & Club** were new. I found a **Willow Beauty** outside the trap.

On July 1st I had a few interesting micros: **Maple Button**, **Rosy Tabby**, one of the small **ermine** species (possibly Orchard), an **Orange Pine Twist** (the larvae of this feed on Scots Pine, and there is none locally, so it must be using other pines) and a **Porphyry Knot-horn**.

On July 5th I found a fresh **Nut-tree Tussock** outside the trap. On the 13th a **Marbled Beauty** was a new species in the trap. On the 15th I had a fresh **Scalloped Oak** and a **Clay**. On the 18th a **Red-barred Tortrix** was a new species in the trap. Outside it I found a fresh **Early Thorn**.

On the 22nd I had the largest moth trap catch so far, but three-quarters of it was accounted for two dozen **Garden Grass-veneers**. A **Double Square-spot** was a new species. On the 24th I had a **Turnip Moth**.

On August 4th I trapped the moth with the longest English name: a **Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing**, looking very smart with its lime-green collar. There were also two **Straw Underwings** in the trap.

On the 7th I had a **Marbled Coronet** and **Orange Swift** in the trap, and a very smart **Iron Prominent** outside it. On the 9th I had a **White-point** in the trap, and singles of **Canary-shouldered Thorn**, **Grey Dagger** and **Willow Beauty** had dived into the greenhouse.

On the 11th/12th the overnight temperature didn't fall below 21°C. There were 13 species of macro-moth either in the trap or the greenhouse, including **Vine's Rustic**, **Marbled Beauty**, **Brimstone Moth**, **Common Wainscot**, **Garden Carpet**, **Willow Beauty**, **Common Rustic**, **Flounced Rustic**, **Small Dusty Wave** and **Double-striped Pug**. There were six species of micro, including **Diamond-back**, **Mother of Pearl**, **Marbled Piecer** and **Ox-tongue Conch**.

On the evening of the 26th I found an **Old Lady** and a **Mother-of-Pearl** near the trap. The next morning there was a new species in the trap, a **Square-spot Rustic**.



Maple Button
Acleris forsskaleana



Orange Pine Twist
Lozotaeniodes formosana



Orange Sallow

On September 9th I had a nice **Orange Sallow** in the trap, and there was an **Angle Shades** in the greenhouse. On the 20th I had another new species, a **Pale Mottled Willow**. On the 30th there was a **Lunar Underwing** in the trap, and a **Barred Sallow** and a **Narrow-winged Grey** outside it.

The list of moths in or near the trap are listed below. Some were regular in the trap, so they were probably breeding in my garden or nearby, whereas those that I only saw once were presumably coming from further away.

Identification was tricky in some instances. Dark/Grey Dagger, Common Rustic/Lesser Common Rustic, Marbled Minor/Rufous Minor/Tawny Marbled Minor, and the small ermines can only be separated by dissection, and others are visually very similar (Uncertain/Rustic) but can be separated with practice. I needed assistance with some of the micros.

The web page www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php was very useful, although it is obviously not optimised for Oxfordshire.

All sightings (and photos of some species) were uploaded to iRecord.

List of macro-moths (49)

Hepialidae

Orange Swift (probably breeding nearby)

Sphingidae

Small Elephant Hawk-moth (probably attracted to Honeysuckle flowers)

Geometridae

Brimstone Moth (probably breeding nearby)

Canary-shouldered Thorn (only had one of these)

Double-striped Pug (probably breeding on garden Ivy)

Early Thorn (could be breeding on garden Honeysuckle)

Garden Carpet (breeding in my garden or nearby ones)

Riband Wave (could be a garden breeder)

Scalloped Oak (only had one of these)

Small Dusty Wave (probably breeding in the garden)

Swallow-tailed Moth (probably breeding on garden Ivy)

Willow Beauty (probably breeding on garden Ivy)

Yellow Shell (probably breeding in the garden)

Notodontidae

Iron Prominent (only had one of these)

Erebidae

Common Footman (probably breeding in the garden)

Ruby Tiger (possibly breeding in the garden)

Noctuidae

Angle Shades (only had one of these)

Barred Sallow (probably breeding on the Sycamore in a nearby garden)

Clay (probably breeding nearby)

Common Rustic (probably breeding nearby)

Common Wainscot (probably breeding nearby)

Dark Arches (probably breeding nearby)

Double Square-spot (only had one of these)

Flounced Rustic (probably breeding nearby)

Grey Dagger (probable; only had one of these)

Heart and Club (probably breeding in the garden)

Heart and Dart (probably breeding in the garden)

Large Yellow Underwing (probably breeding in the garden)

Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing (probably breeding in the garden)

Lesser Yellow Underwing (probably breeding in the garden)

Lunar Underwing (probably breeding nearby)

Marbled Beauty (probably breeding nearby)

Marbled Coronet (only had one of these)

Marbled Minor (probably breeding nearby)

Middle-barred Minor (probably breeding nearby)

Nut-tree Tussock (probably breeding on the Sycamore in a nearby garden)

Old Lady (probably breeding in the garden)

Orange Sallow (no local larval food-plant)

Pale Mottled Willow (probably breeding nearby)

Rustic (breeding in the garden)

Shuttle-shaped Dart (breeding in the garden)

Silver Y (probably a fly-over)

Square-spot Rustic (breeding in the garden)

Straw Underwing (probably breeding nearby)

Turnip Moth (probably breeding nearby)

Uncertain (breeding in the garden)

Varied Coronet (probably breeding nearby)

Vine's Rustic (probably breeding in the garden)

White-point (only had one of these)

List of Micro-moths (18)

Pterophoridae

Beautiful Plume

Common Plume

Crambidae

Elbow-stripe Grass-veneer

Garden Grass-veneer

Mother of Pearl

Narrow-winged Grey
Small Grey
Straw Grass-veneer

Pyralidae

Porphyry Knot-horn
Rosy Tabby

Tortricidae

Light Brown Apple Moth
Maple Button
Marbled Piercer
Orange Pine Twist
Ox-tongue Conch
Red-barred Tortrix

Yponomeutidae

Orchard Ermine? (impossible to visually separate from others in this genus)

Plutellidae

Diamond-back Moth



Barred Sallow



Canary-shouldered Thorn



Nut-tree Tussock



Varied Coronet

Identification pairs



Black Hairstreak



White-letter Hairstreak



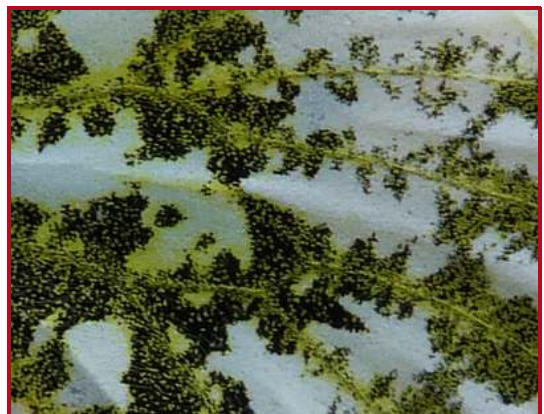
Meadow Brown



Gatekeeper



Green-veined White



Orange-tip



Male Common Blue



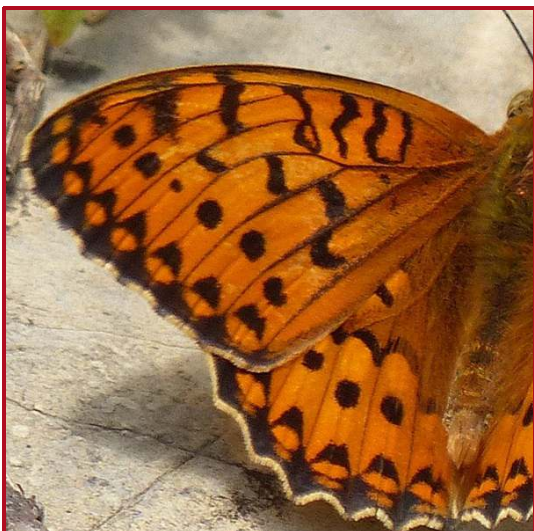
Male Adonis Blue



Male Green-veined White



Female Orange-tip



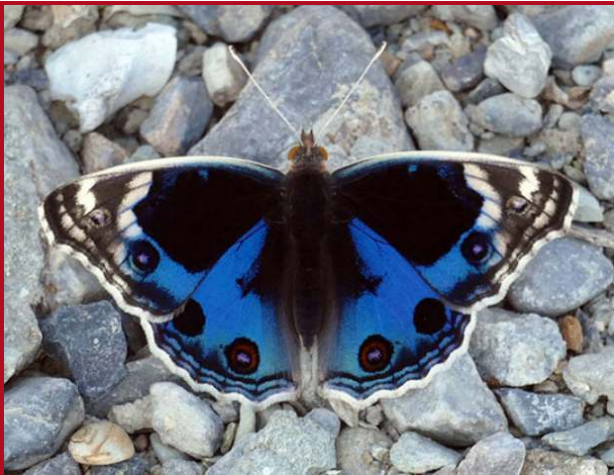
Male Dark Green Fritillary



Male High Brown Fritillary

Photos by David Ferguson

Some photographs from the Zoom AGM gallery



Blue Pansy
Phil Tizzard



Scarce Swallowtail
Janice Robertson



Two-tailed Pasha
Tony Gillie



Tree-lichen Beauty
Will Atkinson



Buff-tip
Colin Mather



Orange-tip
Paul Lund

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](https://twitter.com/UpperThamesBC)

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

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

<http://www.holtspurbottom.info>

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