

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 122 | SUMMER 2024



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames
Branch**



www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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Cover image: Silver-washed Fritillaries (Crowsley Wood, Oxon, 29th June 2023 ©Chris Brown/UTB)

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Editorial

I hope you've been able to get out and about to see (and, hopefully, record) our spring and early summer butterflies and moths, despite the generally unfavourable weather.

I'm sure I'm not alone in having been hopeful (expectant, even) of seeing quite a few Red Admirals waking from hibernation this spring, given the good numbers that were seen towards the end of 2023. Alas, it wasn't to be!

Hibernators aside, Small White, Large White, Holly Blue and Orange-tip were all seen on the wing earlier this year than last (as reported to UTB). In the case of Small & Large White, first sightings in 2024 were 30 days and 16 days earlier, respectively, than the average over the past 20 years in our region. Shall we conclude that climate change is an influential factor at play here?



In keeping with the name of this publication, three of all five Hairstreaks to be found in our region should be on the wing very soon (if not already): Black, Purple and White-letter. The Green is an earlier species, and the Brown appears later. We have Species Champions 'in post' for both Black and White-letter Hairstreak, so I recommend that you take a look at their 2023 Reports on the UTB website if you are especially interested in

these species (<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/specieschamps>).

Whilst on the subject of Species Champions, we are still looking for someone to take on this role for the Green Hairstreak (contact champion-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk for further info.).



There are so many other butterfly species on the wing around now, including the charming Silver-studded Blue, first

recorded in 2023 on 12th June, as shown in this photograph by Mark Dodd in Swinley Forest, Berks.

On the topic of our Blues, I have included an article which provides an overview of some of our specialists in that family, supplemented by extracts from 2023 Reports that have been written by our hard-working Species Champions. Many of us know how difficult it can be to identify some members of this family of butterflies, and we have included details of a series of Summer Species ID sessions to give you a helping hand.

Lastly, following on from last year's very successful Members' Day gathering, we are pleased to announce – on page 6 – this year's upcoming event. Not to be missed!

Have an enjoyable and productive summer.

Derek Haynes

Please send contributions for future issues of the newsletter to newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk, with supporting images sent separately (or as attachments) in order to maintain quality. **NEXT COPY DEADLINE IS 6th SEPTEMBER 2024.**

View from the Chair

It is my favourite time of year. The vibrancy of the countryside with so many colours clamouring for attention that they seem to pulse, like a Van Gogh; and the increasing hubbub of new life thrusting its way into the world. All that coupled with my favourite task, touring all the sites where the UTB spends its winter hours improving habitats to see if our finely tuned management is hitting the mark. And I enjoy that because at virtually every site the positive evidence is abundantly clear. I'll walk from one piece of what people call countryside (that I call farmed land) onto the piece where we worked, and the difference between the two is more vivid than between chalk and cheese. As soon as I reach the parts where we have worked, sometimes small sections of a larger site, the 'extra thrum of the insect life' is palpable.

Once again, I'm reminded just how much debt we owe those of you who help cherish these special places with your toil in the winter months. I find it sad, though, that for every one of you – every one of you wonderful workers – there are probably five photographers now trampling the vegetation you worked so hard to curate, professing their love of nature while doing less than is actually beneficial to it.

Enough of my moaning, but a plea to all our readers (members and non-members alike): please consider how you can help us to conserve the beauty we still have. It is a sad fact that our active members, including those with pivotal roles, eventually move on, or away. We need a constant flow of replacements; and, in fact, because so many landowners

hear about the wonderful work and service that you provide, we need ever increasing numbers to meet the burgeoning demand. I have been to three incredible parcels of land for the first time this year where the landowners want surveyors (and that's along with 20 other landowners!).



Member Hugh Ellerton has arranged for us to survey a vast block of woodlands belonging to the Verney family. This is the second largest area of woodland in Bucks. In the photo above, he and Stuart Hodges discuss potential survey routes with Sir Edmund and Nicholas Verney. It is this type of quiet and behind-the-scenes work that helps us perform our conservation role so effectively.

A key vacancy at present is that of Transect Co-ordinator, someone who helps transect teams to replace team members when they move on. We have realised that the role has become relatively large, so that one person might struggle to do all that Mark Chapman has achieved so well across our three counties; and if we get more than one offer of help, we are considering splitting the role by county to make the task more manageable. This is a role that will largely be conducted from a desk, maintaining a database and making contact with the transect team leaders.

A 'thank you' to Mark for all that he has given us, and to the stalwart walkers of transects and Wider Countryside Butterfly Surveys (WCBS). Speaking of the latter, to see the messages on a WhatsApp group used by many WCBS members, where one finds saddening reports of an hour's survey work in 'the countryside' with just one or two butterflies counted, is a stark and painful reminder of just how crucial the work of our winter conservation teams really is. Contrast this to the sharp relief of the counts from transects of sites where we worked over the winter. Here, not just 10-15 times more butterflies seen but 10-15 species of butterfly (and day-flying moth) recorded in a similar time and under the same recording protocols.

Finally, a reminder that elsewhere in this issue of *Hairstreak* you'll find a list of events which our active volunteers are staging, free, for you to attend. Most of them walk around places where our team of conservationists (or those of partner organisations) work to conserve the habitat.

I was delighted to see large turnouts of volunteers at training sessions for surveyors (with grateful thanks to Martin Harvey and Tim Arnold for assistance with those numbers).

Other walks are aimed at helping beginners dip a toe into the addictive world of butterfly spotting; yet others at finding the more elusive and scarcer beauties for members who still haven't managed to connect with them. More thanks are due to those fantastic members that lead such events.



I hope every one of you manages to enjoy the butterflies and moths of the summer. Thanks so very much for all that you give back to those little insects that bring us so much pleasure.

Nick Bowles

Membership Latest

A warm welcome to all new members who have joined since the last newsletter was published. All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and attend Members' Day. Up-to-date news on events can be found on our website. There is also a monthly bulletin sent to members with registered email addresses to remind them of upcoming events.

There has been a slight decrease in membership since the last newsletter. To date there are 2258 individual members in the Upper Thames Branch. The more members we have, the more we can achieve as a Branch.

Please encourage your friends to join Butterfly Conservation on the website.

Brenda Mobbs, UTB Membership Secretary
bc.upperthames@gmail.com



Members' Day 2024

This year's Members' Day will be held at Benson Parish Hall, OX10 6LZ, on **Saturday 26th October**.

It's always a great day, with the chance to meet and chat with fellow members and listen to a great group of speakers. We are also hoping there will be the usual books and prints for sale. So, please, do come and join us (no booking necessary).

This year we look forward to welcoming the following speakers:

Mike Slater, Chair of Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire Branch:
'Conservation the Warwickshire way'.

Matt Pitts, Meadow Advisor to Plantlife:
'Restoring Juniper to lowland England's grassland'.

Martin Spray CBE, Chair of Butterfly Conservation:
'The nature crisis - a role for BC'.

Elsa Haywood, Oxford University student:
'Using museum collections to study butterfly responses to global change'.

Further details will appear in the autumn edition of *Hairstreak* and on the Upper Thames website.

Wood White 2023

Wood White Champion's Report 2023



Thank you to everyone who sent me details of sightings throughout last summer, and whilst the recorded sightings of first-

brood butterflies were two weeks later than the previous year, numbers remained good throughout the summer.

The first reported sighting was on 20th May '23 at Wicken Wood, followed a day later at Leckhampstead Wood, with numbers peaking in these woods during the first two weeks of June, followed by egg-laying during the third week of June.

To the north of the county, Kilwick Wood also reported good numbers, with fourteen sightings on 5th June and – at Wetleys Wood, near Silverstone – forty sightings on 11th June.

Locally, in Leckhampstead Wood, second-brood adults started to appear on 21st July and into the third week of August, which hopefully will provide a good start to this season.

On another positive note, a reported sighting from a reliable source was recorded at Crooks Firs, between Croughton and Fritwell, although this may have been a stray from Bucknell Wood or a local release. Further visits to take place this year.

Wood White Habitat

When visiting woodland rides in our region, look for open, sunny rides with grass or scrub margins that are lightly shaded by surrounding trees and have abundant vetches. Wood White will breed in grassy vegetation at the edges of open sunny rides and glades. Look for foodplants in the legume family, e.g. Meadow Vetchling, Tufted Vetch, Bitter Vetch, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil and Bird's-foot Trefoil.



Sightings

Numbers of reported sightings were encouraging during 2023, but please keep looking for this delicate and vulnerable butterfly and I would urge you to keep searching along the north Bucks/south Northants border for those as-yet undiscovered colonies.

Please let me know of any sightings at woodw@talktalk.net, and remember to record on iRecord. Thank you, and let's look forward to a great summer ahead!

Nick Board

The best thing you can do for wildlife in your garden

Various bits of research have been completed in the last ten years that all point in the same direction. If you want to see more wildlife in your garden, then maximise the complexity of the habitats there.

Studies by R.M. Smith (2006), K.J. Gaston (2007), E. Ellis (2021) and L.A. Hordley (2024) looked at different aspects of the garden and the effect on both the number of individual butterflies and/or moths and the number of different species. All these studies found a common theme.

Ignore all the adverts that encourage you to buy products and services to 'look after' your garden. The people behind those adverts want your money and are not necessarily interested in improving biodiversity.

What works far better than anything else won't be the subject of an advertisement for mowers, strimmers, leaf blowers, fertilisers or weedkillers, because it is **FREE**.

You simply leave a variety of native plant species to do their own thing.

Leave the grassy areas to grow uncut; even through the winter at least some should remain uncut. Leave the shrubby bushes uncut. Those areas that do get cut should be different parts each year until after perhaps 3-5 years you are cutting back whatever was cut first.

You will create a colourful explosion of vegetation and the wildlife will stream in. Better still it will stay and breed.

Below: a garden that **lacks complexity**.



Below: A garden that **embraces complexity**.



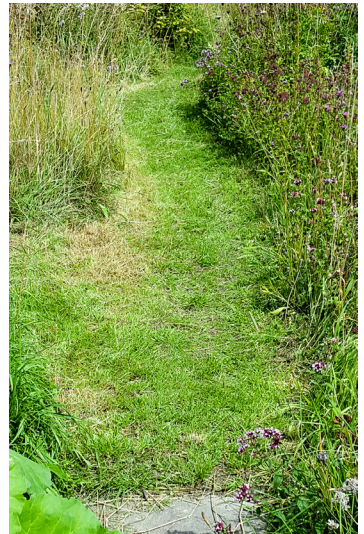
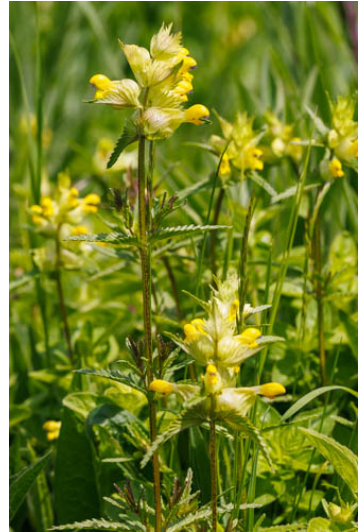
But no-one wants a garden that's so overgrown that you can't move in it! Cut paths through longer vegetation (see photo below) to parts of the garden you want access to.

Grow the semi-parasitic Yellow Rattle (right) to take nutrients from grasses to keep them low to allow more wildflowers to thrive.

In Summary:

- a) Leave areas of grass and shrubs 'wild' for as long as possible.
- b) Think about all life stages and provide food with a diversity of native plants for larvae and adults (in large blocks if possible).
- c) If room, grow a native tree.
- d) Leave the tools in the shed.
- e) Throw all the chemicals away (responsibly).

Sit back and enjoy your garden wildlife all the more when you know its presence is the result of your attention and care.



I left the grass uncut in a larger area of the garden last winter and this spring I was rewarded with my first ever garden-emerged Speckled Wood.



Nick Bowles

Guided Walks: June - August 2024



Our guided walks are aimed at everyone – not just branch / BC members.



You do not need to be an expert to come on one of our walks. Anyone can enjoy butterfly walks, regardless of their level of knowledge (even those with none!) First-time participants, children (with adult supervision), photographers... **you are ALL welcome.**

PLEASE BOOK if you are planning to attend one of our walks. This helps us to manage parking and our impact on the visited sites, and ensures the Leader does not turn up unnecessarily. Guided Walks are subject to amendment, particularly due to poor weather. **Please consult the BC events pages for any last-minute changes** (updated regularly and can be accessed from the '**Booking & details**' link for each event).

Please see the branch Guided Walks web page for guidance on how to get the most out of our guided walks, including meeting points etc.

https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/guided_walks

We have assembled our extensive programme to allow you to see some of our beautiful Lepidoptera species. Walks are scattered across all three counties, so there should be something of interest close to you. The programme gives you the chance to enjoy each of the regularly occurring butterfly species of our region, most of our rarer species, and some of our day-flying moths.

However, we *cannot guarantee* to see a particular butterfly species (or, indeed, any!) but our trips visit some lovely countryside and there will always be something interesting to see.

Enjoy!



If you have attended and enjoyed yourself on one of our walks, and maybe taken a few photographs of some of the species seen, why not take a few moments to share your experience with us?

Send your thoughts and photos to the walk leader, or to Peter Philp or the newsletter editor. Thanks.

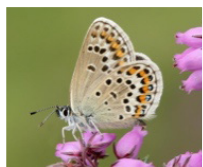
If the **'Booking & Details'** button does not work: please go to the **Butterfly Conservation website**, click on the **'Events'** tab (at the top or in the menu), choose **'Upper Thames'** from the **'Search by Branch'** menu, click **'Search'** and **scroll down** until you find the walk you are looking for.



Saturday 15th June at 10:30am
Bernwood Meadows, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

A walk to search for **Black Hairstreak** and other early-summer butterflies of woodland and meadows.



Tuesday 18th June at 10:30am
Wildmoor Heath, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

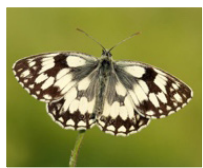
A walk to search for **Silver-studded Blue** and other heathland butterflies and day-flying moths.



Wednesday 19th June at 10:00am
Warburg BBOWT, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

Early summer butterflies, birds and other wildlife; may include **Purple Hairstreak**.



Wednesday 19th June at 6:30pm
East Hagbourne, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

An evening walk to see what butterflies do outside 'normal transect' hours, including **Marbled White**.



Saturday 22nd June at 10:30am
Holtspur Bottom BC, Beaconsfield, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

We hope to see **Small Blue** as well as many of the common summer species.



Sunday 23rd June at 10:30am
Butler's Hangings SSSI,
West Wycombe, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

Summer butterflies may include **Marbled White** and, hopefully, **Dark Green Fritillary**.



Tuesday 25th June at 11:00am

Blenheim Farm BBOWT, Charlbury, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

Summer butterflies may include **Marbled White**; and other grassland and hedgerow species.



Saturday 29th June at 10:30am

Pamber Forest & Silchester Common, Hants

[Booking & details](#)

Exploring for heathland and woodland butterflies including **Silver-studded Blue** and **White Admiral**.

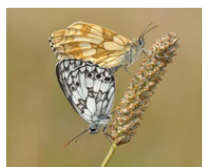


Sunday 30th June at 11:00am

Hackpen Hill, Sparsholt Firs, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A walk in search of butterflies of unimproved chalk downland, including **Dark Green Fritillary**.



Wednesday 3rd July at 6:30pm

East Hagbourne, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

An evening walk to see what butterflies do outside 'normal transect' hours, including **Marbled White**.

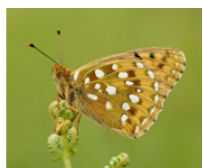


Saturday 6th July at 10:30am

Bradenham, NT Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

A field meeting to help embed the summer butterfly and day-flying moth ID skills presented in the 4th July Zoom meeting.



Thursday 11th July at 11:00am

Ivinghoe Beacon NT, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

We will search the steep downland slopes for butterflies including **Dark Green Fritillary**.



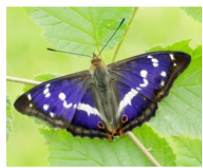
Saturday 13th July at 10:30am

Howe Park Wood, Milton Keynes, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

A field meeting to help embed the summer butterfly and day-flying moth ID skills presented in the 4th July Zoom meeting.

If the **'Booking & Details'** button does not work: please go to the **Butterfly Conservation website**, click on the **'Events'** tab (at the top or in the menu), choose **'Upper Thames'** from the **'Search by Branch'** menu, click **'Search'** and **scroll down** until you find the walk you are looking for.



Tuesday 16th July at 10:00am
Bernwood Forest, Oxon/Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

An amble around this hotspot for woodland butterflies including, hopefully, **Purple Emperor**.



Saturday 20th July at 10:00am
Homefield Wood BBOWT, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore this small reserve for butterflies of woodland including **Silver-washed Fritillary**.



Saturday 20th July at 11:30am
Bernwood Forest, Oxon/Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

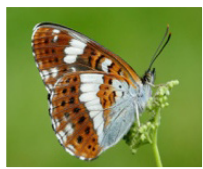
An amble around this hotspot for woodland butterflies including, hopefully, **Purple Emperor**.



Tuesday 23rd July at 10:30am
Whitecross Green Wood, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

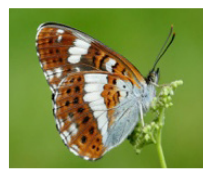
We will focus on getting views of **White-letter Hairstreak** and other woodland butterflies.



Saturday 27th July at 10:30am
Shotover Country Park, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

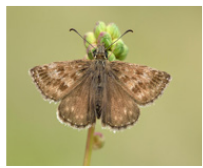
We will be looking for woodland butterflies including, hopefully, **White Admiral** and **Silver-washed Fritillary**.



Sunday 28th July at 10:30am
BBOWT Foxholes, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

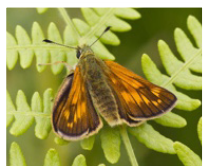
We will be looking for woodland butterflies including, hopefully, **White Admiral**.



Saturday 3rd August at 10:30am
Wytham Woods, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

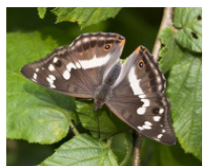
A field meeting to help embed the summer butterfly and day-flying moth ID skills presented in the 4th July Zoom meeting.



Saturday 3rd August at 10:30am
Grangelands BBOWT, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

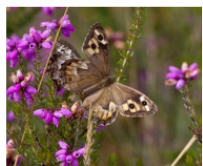
A field meeting to help embed the summer butterfly and day-flying moth ID skills presented in the 4th July Zoom meeting.



Tuesday 6th August at 10.30am
Finemere Wood, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

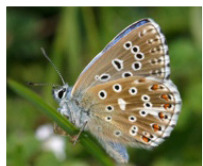
We will explore this magnificent woodland for **Purple Emperor** and other woodland butterflies.



Thursday 8th August at 11:00am
Greenham Common BBOWT, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

An exploration of this extensive heathland for **Grayling** and other heathland butterflies.



Saturday 10th August at 10:30am
Lardon Chase, Streatley, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore the steep downland for **Adonis Blue** and other summer grassland butterflies.



Sunday 11th August at 10:30am
Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

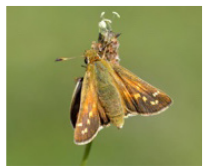
A field meeting to help embed the summer butterfly and day-flying moth ID skills presented on the 4th July. We also hope to see **Silver-spotted Skipper**.



Saturday 17th August at 10:30am
Rushbeds Wood, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

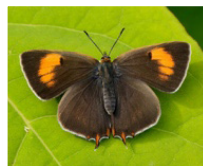
We will wander along to the meadows in search of **Brown Hairstreak** as well as woodland species.



Tuesday 20th August at 10:30am Watlington Hill, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A stroll across this steep downland in search of **Chalk Hill Blue** and **Silver-spotted Skipper**.



Tuesday 27th August at 10:30am RSPB Otmoor, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

We will focus on the 'Roman Road' seeking decent views of **Brown Hairstreak**, as well as other species.

We are always looking for new Leaders to join our team. If you have the enthusiasm, knowledge and skills to lead one of our guided walks – and would be happy to help out, **please get in touch**. Perhaps you may prefer to join one of our existing walks to 'learn the ropes' for next year. It is a great way of getting out in the fresh air and getting some exercise, whilst helping like-minded individuals learn more and enjoy our butterfly and moth species. If you have a current First Aid certificate and would be willing to undertake a small amount of online training, that would be a bonus. **Many thanks.**

Report on some of the early-season 2024 Guided Walks

The cool, damp and cloudy spring season has played havoc with our walks programme. The Yoesden and Hartslock walks were postponed in the hope of better weather in a few weeks. The Pitstone walk was cancelled partly due to poor weather and the forecast for both the Wytham Woods and Seven Barrows/Crog Hill walks was pretty awful.

Nevertheless, a dozen visitors joined us at Wytham and we did manage excellent views of Green Hairstreak and several day-flying moths, including quite a few Silver Ys. Visitors were also pleased to see three Poplar Hawk-moths that Julian had caught just down the road. Several warm sunny spells turned Crog Hill into a success with good views of one Duke of Burgundy and a few others glimpsed. These were supported by many Dingy Skippers, over 100 Small Blues, and, right at the end, a single Green Hairstreak.

Aston Upton Downs provided us with better weather and we 'cleaned up' on expected species with lots of Dingy Skippers, several Grizzled Skippers and a few Green Hairstreaks; plus, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Small Heath and Small Copper; and, of course, the more widespread spring fare.

Peter Philp, Field Trip Organiser
guided-walks@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Dispelling Myths About Misunderstood Moths

Mention the word 'moth' and some people will frown before telling you how much they hate moths for making holes in their best woolly jumpers. Many just have no interest in them or consider moths to be pests. Others find their nocturnal flutterings repellent, as if they are performing some devilish deed. Why are moths so misunderstood when they are so essential to the health of the natural world?



Small Elephant Hawk-moth

Perhaps moths have a flawed reputation because many are small, somewhat drab and nocturnal. Conversely, butterflies are typically larger, multicoloured and fly in the daytime when we are more aware of them. But start studying moths and you'll realise that there is a new world of wonder to experience. And there are some quite large and colourful moths that can put many a butterfly to shame.

Moths and butterflies belong to the order Lepidoptera. These winged insects both go through a four-stage life cycle: ovum (egg), larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis or cocoon) and imago (adult). There are

a few differences between moths and butterflies, mainly the way they hold their wings and the structure of their antennae. However, a key difference is that moths outnumber butterflies by around eight to one. With over 160,000 different species of moths, 2,500 of which live in the British Isles, it is curious that they are so overlooked, especially when you reflect on the many ways that they enhance our environment.

It appears cruel to say that one of the best contributions moths make to our planet is as a food source. Adult moths provide nourishment for bats and night-flying birds. Moth larvae are an essential part of the diet of garden birds, other insects, spiders, frogs, toads and lizards, as well as small animals like shrews and hedgehogs, providing a rich source of protein for them. The cuckoo, for example, likes Garden Tiger (below), White Ermine and Oak Eggar larvae.



Garden Tiger larva
©Ryszard Szczygiel/BC

The presence of moths is a good indicator of a healthy ecosystem because areas that support moths will also sustain other invertebrates (which in turn benefit a range of creatures). It is thought that declining numbers

of farmland bats and cuckoos may be due to the falling number of moths and larvae available for them to eat. Because moths are so sensitive to environmental changes, they are like the canary in a coal mine when it comes to informing us of the overuse of pesticides, irresponsible farming, climate change and air pollution.

Moths are pollinators of wild plants and food crops, their hairy bodies allowing them to pick up and transport pollen easily. There are many day-flying moths that pollinate flowers whilst doing their best to evade predators, either through disguise or by being eye-catching.



Cinnabar moths are often mistaken for butterflies with their colourful red wings and have a unique way of protecting themselves from predation. The eye-catching black and yellow caterpillars feast on ragwort which contains poisonous toxins, and these make the caterpillars and adult moths toxic themselves (and they taste terrible). Their bright colours act as a warning to potential predators. Other moths disguise themselves because they are so tasty, which is why so many are brown or green so they can blend into the background vegetation.



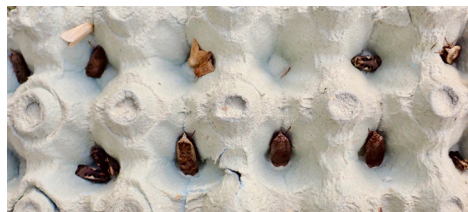
Humming-bird Hawk-moths are quite large, and their darting flight resembles the hummingbirds for which they are named. They extend their long tongues to feed on flowers such as lavender and verbena and can be seen all day long.

Nocturnal moths are specialists at pollinating plants with white flowers and those that have a fragrance, which makes sense since these flowers are easy to find in the dark. Moths do not have a nose, but smell through their bristly antennae as well as through receptors on their feet and mouthparts. This comes in handy for finding flowers as well as mates; some male moths can “smell” females from many miles away.

Most of us encounter moths desperately trying to enter our well-lit homes or encircling external lights. The mystery of their attraction to light has long puzzled scientists. This behaviour is called positive phototaxis. It seems that moths often use the light of the moon and other celestial bodies to navigate in a straight line, turning so they can retain the same angle to the light source. Electric lights confuse and disorientate them

because their rays radiate in a circular way, making the moths spiral around the light. This makes it appear as if they are attracted to the lights when they are only bewildered.

Lepidopterists exploit the lure of light when they wish to survey and count moths by using traps (which do no harm to the moths). A moth trap is a specially designed box with a light that stands upright inside a funnel and shines all night to attract night-flying creatures, who drop down into the box onto cardboard egg cartons. The moths snuggle down into the depressions as they await morning (as shown below).



When the lid is removed, the moths can be counted and photographed for identification purposes, before being released into vegetation well out of the prying eyes of avian predators.

By the way, just 0.08% of UK moths eat clothes—only two species out of 2,500 UK moths! And it's the larvae that eat your woolly jumpers, not the adults. Do an energetic spring clean, wash your wool sweaters and store them in airtight bags to prevent the moth larvae from munching your clothes.

I haven't yet touched on the myth that butterflies are more colourful than moths. Looking at the images on these pages will hopefully convince you that

some moths have beautiful markings and vibrant colours.



Take a look at [upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/moths](https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/moths) and/or join the Facebook page Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames region (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/458565932924345>), which will enable you to share your finds or receive help with identification.

Peter Cuss is UTB's Moth Officer, and he has written a beginner's guide to moth trapping, available at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/MothID/moth-trapping-for-beginners.pdf>

It is essential that we protect and treasure these overlooked insects.

Please contact me through my website: <http://www.lindaseward.com> or follow me on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/quiltmaniac1/>

Linda Seward

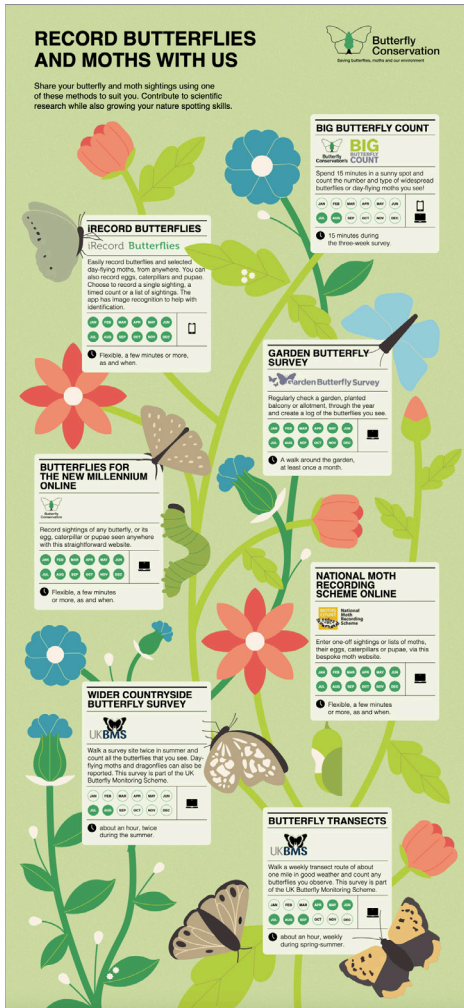
Photos ©Linda Seward unless otherwise stated

[This article first featured in the 2024 issue of *Outstanding Chilterns*]

For the record... whatever works for you

In the last issue of *Hairstreak*, we talked a bit about the various methods by which your butterfly and moth sightings records can be submitted, thus adding that data to national databases.

After Butterfly Conservation issued its delightful artwork in the spring (shown below) to assist with the process of



recording, I thought I'd review (and report on) my own methods of recording – both in the field and subsequently.

My own activities that involve recording the species I see can be categorised as follows:

- (1). Adhoc sightings when out & about (e.g. when walking the dog);
- (2). Visits to places where I expect to see butterflies & moths (e.g. Black Park);
- (3). Places I visit regularly (e.g. my allotment);
- (4). Species I see in my garden;
- (5). Species I see when carrying out specific survey work for UTB/BC (e.g. a WCBS or UTB Churchyard Survey).

When the iRecord app first appeared on the scene some years ago, I began to use it - but found it somewhat unwieldy and unreliable to use in the field, so went 'back to basics': writing details in a notebook (like in the old days!).

One aspect that always needs to be recorded (as well as the species seen!) is the 'exact' location, ideally an 8- or 10-digit OS reference.

These days, I use a combination of manual and tech-based recording, as follows (with reference to the above 5 categories):

- (1). For adhoc sightings, I use the GPS Log app on my iPhone – as I've always got the phone with me. It allows a photo to be taken (if required), and logs (via

GPS) the 10-digit OS reference. I just add, for example, SmTx1, B(m)x2, B(f)x1. This data stays on my phone, and although I believe it can be down/uploaded elsewhere, I prefer to bulk-submit all my records towards the end of the year - historically via a simple spreadsheet to the Butterfly Records Officer, but my intention is to use BNM (Butterflies for the New Millennium Online) in future. More information on using BNM can be found on the UTB and BC websites, at https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Downloads/BNM_guide.pdf and <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/recording-and-monitoring/butterflies-for-the-new-millennium> respectively.

(2). I go to various local sites where I expect to see species throughout the year, for example, Denham Country Park. For these, I use a pen and notebook as I walk around the site - and only record exact OS location (which I get from the GB Worker phone app) when a particularly sensitive (or unexpected) species – say, a Purple Emperor – is seen (otherwise I use a ‘standard’ OS reference for that site when it comes to submitting my data subsequently). For visits to the Bucks County Council parks, I like to retain all my records together on paper as I also provide the Council with my sightings records, annually.

(3). For places I visit regularly (and for which I already know the OS reference), such as my allotment, I just enter my data into a Notes folder on my phone ‘as I go’. Towards the end of the year, this data will be entered online via BNM (with all my other sightings records).

(4). For species I see at home, I also tend to record as per (3). above.

(5). I undertake a WCBS survey monthly throughout the summer, and – as the exact location of sightings is critical (as WCBS requires sightings to be recorded in 100m stretches along a predefined route) – I use the method described in (1) above (but precede the info in each record by ‘WCBS’, to readily recognise the data to go into the WCBS database when I return home, and also ensuring that I don’t ‘double submit’ my records when it comes to using BNM later in the year). For my Churchyard surveys, I revert once more to pen and notebook.

All recorders will choose different methods to record and submit their sightings records, and, of course, that’s absolutely fine. As the title says, ‘For the record... whatever works for you’.

There are 2 key points here: firstly, that we get out and about and record everything we see; and, secondly, that we choose the ‘right’ method(s) for ourselves to ensure that this invaluable data enters the world of our national invertebrate databases.

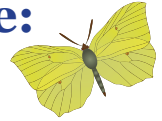
If you wish to consult BC’s advice on recording and monitoring, then visit: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/recording-and-monitoring/find-out-what-scheme-works-best-for-you>

Good luck with all your sightings and records.



Derek Haynes

Up Close and Personal at Ivinghoe: Guided Walk



The clouds lifted just as members were arriving at the Ivinghoe Beacon car park on 19th May, setting the scene for a pretty much ideal morning's butterflying.



Up Close and personal: a member photographing a Duke of Burgundy

I rashly made an absolute promise to show people Duke of Burgundy and was able to oblige within a couple of minutes. Indeed, it was by far the commonest butterfly on the walk.

A circular and, in places, quite steep route netted (figuratively!) fourteen species. They included my first Common Blues and Marsh Fritillaries of the season, the latter having been a controversial feature of the area for a few years.

Ten members joined the walk, with one being thrilled to see five species for the first time in her life. That made the job of guide especially rewarding, and it was a pleasure to lead a walk on my home turf.

The full list of sightings was: Dingy Skipper; Grizzled Skipper; Brimstone; Orange-tip; Green-veined White; Green Hairstreak; Common Blue; Small Blue; Brown Argus; Duke of Burgundy; Peacock; Red Admiral; Marsh Fritillary; and Small Heath.

Rikki Harrington

Another member up close and personal on the same day was **Linda Seward**, who found this beautiful White Ermine in her moth trap that morning.

Have a read of Linda's fascinating article on [Dispelling Myths About Misunderstood Moths](#) on page 16!



Eye of the Beholder

Common nectar-consuming pollinators, including butterflies, moths, bees, wasps and hoverflies, transfer pollen to other plants to greatly assist the pollination process. Hence their importance.

Butterflies are attracted to purple, pink, red, orange, yellow and white, but **dislike blue and green**. In spring, when a nectar source is more limited, many flowering plants are white or yellow: ideal for butterflies. Butterflies like nectar-rich flowers with short flower tubes or flat tops, with some favourites being buddleia, red valerian, camassia, eranthus, sedum, frillaria, marigolds and sunflowers.

Bees cannot see red, but they **can see blue and green**. They can even see ultraviolet light, which helps with navigation to and from some flowers. The mutual benefit derived by bee and flower is known as symbiosis in the scientific world. Bees are drawn to more striking colours and fragrances, and flowers which have elaborate petals and ample nectar that they can easily access.

We are well aware of the importance of suitable habitats for our invertebrates, but the Face Flies (*Musca autumnalis*) in St Mary's churchyard, Radnage, Bucks on 30th April this year (below) appear to have misread the script, being far more interested in sunning themselves on the sign than taking advantage of the surrounding 'haven for insects'!



Just behind St Mary's (to the north-east) is the wonderful Yoesden Bank nature reserve where, on the same day, I saw my first Green Hairstreak and Dingy Skipper of 2024 (the latter being the 'joint first' sighting of the year in our region, according to sightings submitted through the website).

Another 'first' for me, in my maiden year of surveying St Mary's, in 2023, was achieving the highest butterfly species count amongst the UTB churchyard surveyors. I will need to work hard this year if I want to keep my crown, though I don't need much encouragement to regularly visit this delightful part of the world. For me, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, for sure.

Derek Haynes

His Majesty in 2023

The majestic Purple Emperor (Apatura iris) is doubtless the most spectacular butterfly we are fortunate to have in our region.

An enigmatic species for sure, but, when seen, it delivers a magical, unforgettable experience. Neillsen Turner recorded 'a handful' of Purple Emperors in Bernwood Forest (Bucks) on 2nd July 2023, including this gorgeous male.



Species Champion Martin Robinson keeps close tabs on everything Purple Emperor, and his comprehensive 2023 Report is reproduced below.

Summary 2023

The data were obtained from various sources: sightings posted on the Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch website, data from 10km-square observations, sightings recorded on iRecord, and separate records sent to the Species Champion. The data sources were compared and combined, and any duplicates were eliminated.

As always with the Purple Emperor, obtaining accurate population numbers for this butterfly is particularly challenging given its liking for forest canopies. Observing the butterfly frequently relies on its taking to the wing in suitable settings and that the insect is not backlit by the sun so that accurate identifications can be made. Sometimes the Emperor will visit the ground to take minerals or fluids from animal dung or carcasses and, in these cases, it is easy to identify.

On descending from the woodland canopy, males and females are easily distinguished in appearance, the males having a distinctive purple sheen. When flying in the canopy, the males are aggressive, defending their territories from rivals and other insects.

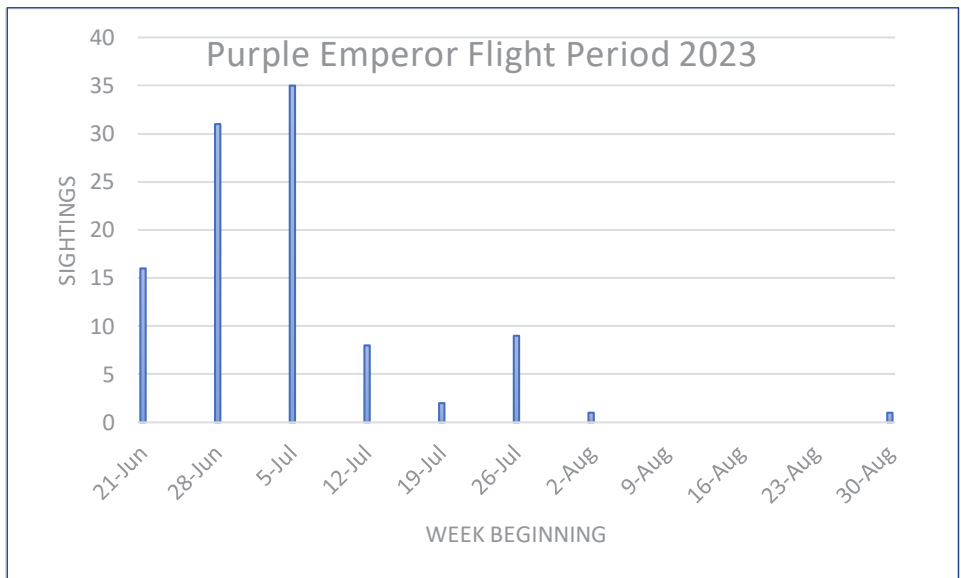
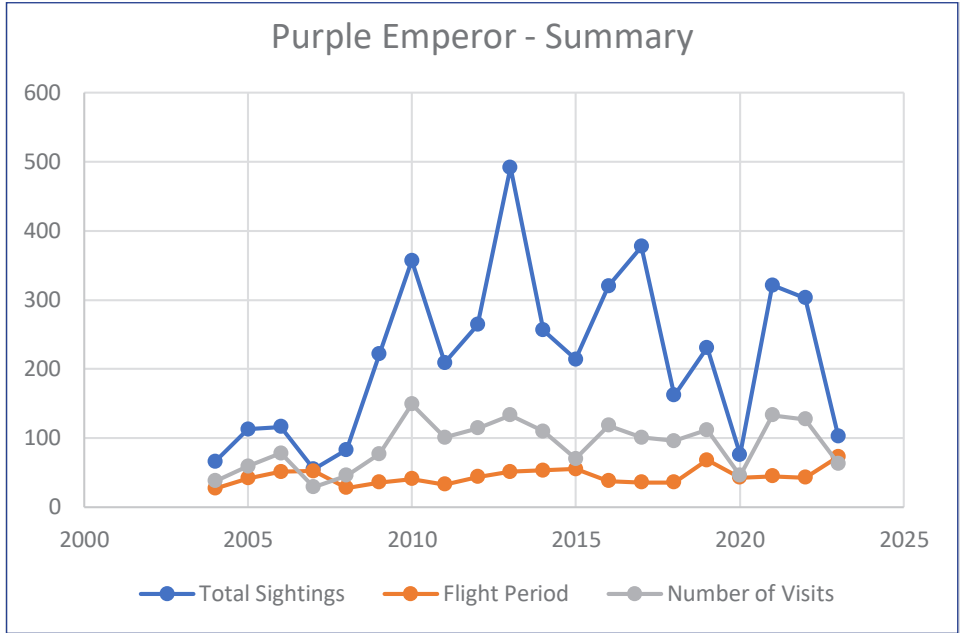
Comparison with Previous Years

Year	Total Sightings	Total Visits	Date First Sighting	Date Last Sighting	Flight period (days)
2004	66	38	04-Jul	31-Jul	27
2005	113	59	27-Jun	08-Aug	42
2006	116	78	25-Jun	15-Aug	51
2007	55	29	19-Jun	10-Aug	52
2008	83	46	29-Jun	27-Jul	28
2009	222	77	25-Jun	31-Jul	36
2010	357	149	28-Jun	08-Aug	41
2011	209	101	21-Jun	24-Jul	33
2012	264	114	04-Jul	17-Aug	44
2013	492	133	01-Jul	21-Aug	51
2014	256	110	16-Jun	08-Aug	53
2015	214	70	14-Jun	08-Aug	55
2016	320	118	03-Jul	10-Aug	38
2017	377	101	17-Jun	23-Jul	36
2018	167	96	19-Jun	25-Jul	36
2019	231	112	21-Jun	28-Aug	68
2020	136	100	20-Jun	17-Aug	58
2021	321	133	26-Jun	10-Aug	45
2022	303	127	15-Jun	28-Jul	43
2023	103	63	21-Jun	2-Sep	73

Overall, 2023 was a quiet year for sightings, and the number of insects seen per visit was relatively low (at 1.64 compared to 2.39 the previous year).

The flight period started in late June, which is fairly typical. However, the last sighting of 2023 occurred on the 2nd of September, which is a record since these reports were first compiled in 2004. This was a lone insect seen at Curridge (SU489722,) recorded almost a month after the previous sighting at the beginning of August.

The Purple Emperor Flight Period and the Weather in 2023



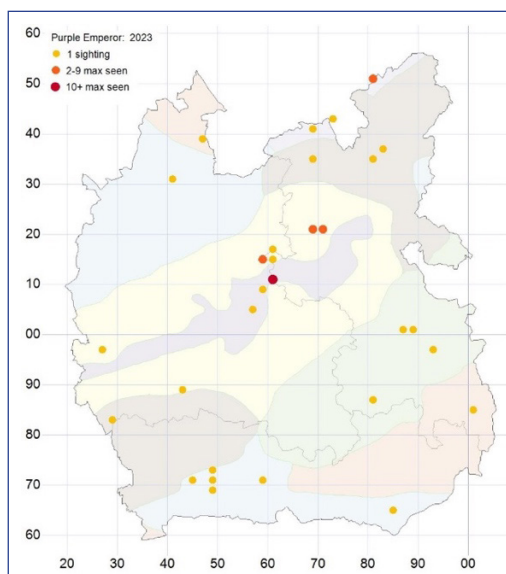
The previous summer, in 2022, was characterised by a period of drought and spells of extreme heat. The main caterpillar food plant, the Sallow, prefers moist conditions. It is tempting to speculate whether these harsh conditions contributed to the lower number of sightings in 2023, given that many species of tree exhibited signs of heat stress such as shedding branches and leaves during the summer and autumn of 2022.

The weather in the spring of 2023 was wet with below average sunshine. Things improved through most of June, which was very sunny. However, conditions changed on 24th June and the weather became unsettled with the sunshine interspersed with showers.

The number of Purple Emperor sightings fell away sharply after the middle of July. This may be due to a summer storm which hit the region on the 14th and 15th July when heavy rain and strong winds battered the Upper Thames area. In previous years (particularly 2020) summer storms are believed to have caused the death of many roosting butterflies, particularly the males which spend the night high in the forest canopy, thus making them more vulnerable to high winds and heavy rain.

Distribution of the Purple Emperor throughout the Upper Thames Region in 2023

The map below shows the number of sightings in 2023. On the next page, the map indicates locations where the Purple Emperor was sighted for the first time since the period 2013 to 2022, indicated by the orange dots.



Most sightings in 2023 were of single insects and only at 5 sites was there more than one butterfly seen.

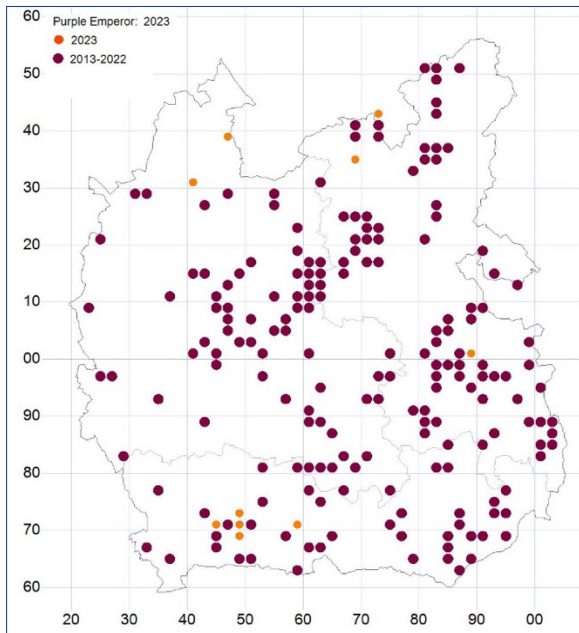
The likelihood is that the Purple Emperor is more common and more widespread in the Upper Thames region than these sightings indicate, but its numbers are hard to quantify as the butterfly is difficult to spot unless searching for it specifically, and because of its liking for the forest canopy.

The main cluster of sightings as in previous years is focused on an area due east of the Cotswolds and north-west of the Chiltern Hills.

The main stronghold of the Purple Emperor in the Upper Thames region is in Bernwood Forest and its nearby satellite woodlands.

The map on the right shows that in 2023 there were 10 new sites where Purple Emperors were recorded compared to the period covering ten years previously (from 2013-2022).

Of these, three sites were at least 4km distance from locations where Purple Emperors were previously recorded between 2013 -2022. The details of these sites are included in the table below:



Site	10km Square	Grid Reference
Great Tew Estate	SP43	SP40633021
Banbury	SP43	SP46043974
Leckhampstead Wood	SP63	SP684357



Acknowledgements

Thanks as ever to all the people who sent in sightings. Many thanks also to Peter Ogden who helped collate and process the data.

Martin Robinson

Photos ©Neillsen Turner

ID Training Walks at Incombe Hole and Park Wood

With (I'm very happy to say) an increasing number of people getting involved in recording, there is a growing demand to help people build confidence in their identification of the 'trickier' species, especially the day-flying moths.

Two Saturdays in early May saw a group of 27 search at Incombe Hole and one of 18 at Park Wood (both National Trust sites) to practise their identification skills.

Incombe Hole is a very warm, sheltered site, so produces a good number of sightings early in the season. This year the number of species was down on previous visits because the season was running late, but we still managed 8 butterfly and 5 moth species. We saw 11 butterfly and 11 moth species at Park Wood.



A group studying a Grizzled Skipper ©Nick Bowles

Members who walk transects and carry out WCBS surveys brought their nets to support me in catching specimens for everyone to examine closely. Most netted insects were detained in glass tubes so that everyone could see all the

markings clearly, and the key features that distinguish each species were pointed out. When we could (without keeping anything captive for more than ten minutes) we examined species that are confusing alongside each other so that the key features stood out more readily. For instance, the Small Blue and Holly Blue at Park Wood, and at Incombe Hole, the Common Carpet and Green Carpet (as shown below).



Feedback from both trips was positive and it is wonderful that so many are keen to hone their skills and improve the accuracy of their reports. My thanks to Martin Harvey and Tim Arnold for assisting with identification.

Comparing Brimstone, Green-veined White and Orange-tip undersides ©Karla Mortensen

All UTB walks are free, and I encourage our members to take full advantage.



Nick Bowles

Brief Encounter: Mates

Sometimes, we come across some 'close up and personal' behaviour when out and about looking for butterflies and moths.

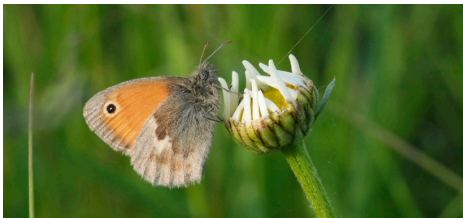


A great example is this mating pair of Poplar Hawk-moths, spotted by Peter Cuss at Moor Copse (Berks) on 11th May. A great find!

A month earlier, Robin Parker came across these Green-veined Whites near Shabbington (Bucks), so, with any luck, a subsequent local brood is assured.



And as early evening descended on the unkempt Eton College-owned land at the back of my house on 18th May, this lone Small Heath was making itself comfortable before settling down for the night...



... and still settling down...



... and finally settled! Dreaming of a mate, perhaps?

Exactly one week later, I spotted these two individuals (Burnet Companion and Dingy Skipper) together, at Yoesden Bank. They then spiralled and momentarily entered unarmed combat in the sky... before descending once more to peacefully share a blade of grass (as shown here).



Do please send us any nice pics of the mates you come across – or those individuals which perhaps don't yet have one!

Derek Haynes





LECKHAMPSTEAD
Woodland Butterfly Walk
Sunday 30th June

Entries: 1-3pm

**Location: Wood Road, Leckhampstead
what3words ///boost.resettle.pads**

Entry fee: £5 or £15 per family



**A unique opportunity to walk in
Leckhampstead Wood, an area of beautiful
private woodland and home to 20 varieties
of butterfly, including the very rare Wood
White**

- Family friendly (1 mile) and Strider (5 mile) trails
- Butterfly specialists on hand
- Well behaved dogs on leads welcome
- Pushchair and wheelchair friendly
- Childrens games and woodland hunt (win a prize!)
- Forest school style activities
- Refreshments and homemade cake

**Pre-registration preferred, please email
leckhampstead@outlook.com**

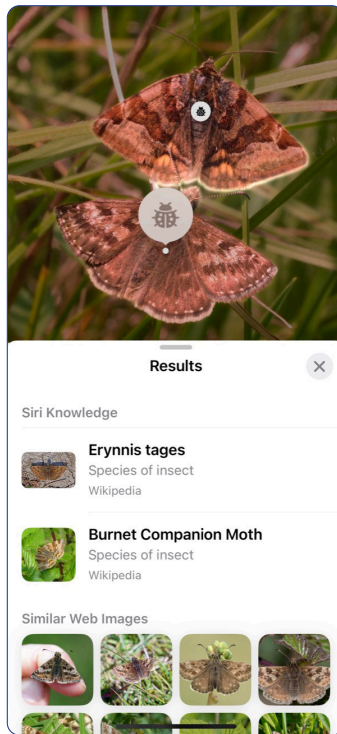
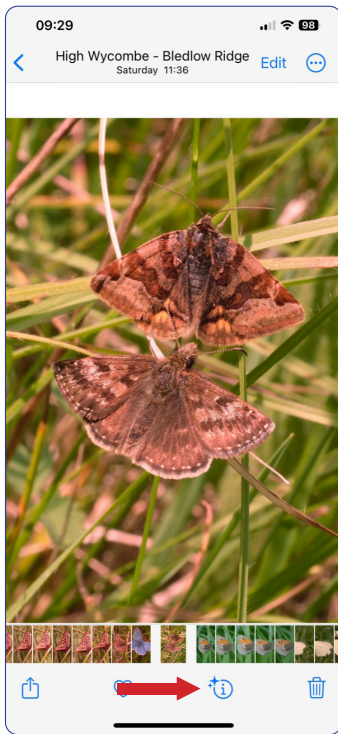


In aid of the church building, St Mary's

Identifying Species on an iPhone

If you own an Apple iPhone (all models from SE 2nd Gen.), you have an inbuilt facility (called 'Visual Look Up') that will do its best to identify flowers, plants and insects that you photograph. Having only recently learned of the feature, I have been trying it out – and it seems to work remarkably well.

By way of example, I used it on the photo I have included in my article 'Brief Encounter: Mates' in this publication, as demonstrated in the phone screenshots below:



By using the “i” button at the bottom of the first screen, further information is then given (second screenshot), which correctly identifies *Erynnis tages* (Dingy Skipper) and Burnet Companion moth.

The feature also helped me to identify the Face Fly in my 'Eye of the Beholder' article.

Many folks, like me, will take their photos on their camera, where, of course, the facility is not available. I am fortunate in that all

the photos I take on my camera are automatically uploaded to my iCloud account and, subsequently, will appear on my phone, hence allowing me to use the facility for any photo I take.

I'm not always adept at identifying moths and plants, but this facility certainly helps. If you have an iPhone, try it out!

Derek Haynes

Transformation

In a previous edition of *Hairstreak*, I referred to a book I own that was written in the 1890s: *Butterfly and Moth Collecting*, by George E. Simms.

I thought I'd share with you a few of the author's somewhat 'romanticised' descriptions from the time, which also serve to demonstrate the drastic changes in both distribution and populations over the years. Conspicuous by its absence (perhaps, unsurprisingly) is any mention of the word 'conservation'!

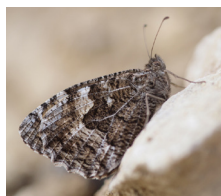
"In the cool dark glades of the wood, before the sun has attained its full midday strength, and again when the evening shadows begin to gather, and tired Nature sinks to repose, we may



have a chance to see a fragile looking white butterfly floating along with slow, undulating flight. This is the **Wood White**. There are

few woods or coppices in which it does not occur; but it requires searching for, as, contrary to the general habit of the diurnal lepidoptera, it shuns the sunshine and prefers to enjoy itself in the shade."

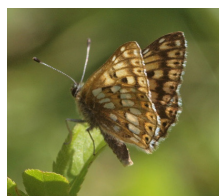
"If the district we are engaged in hunting happens by good fortune to be situated in a limestone district, we shall in all



probability meet with the **Grayling Butterfly**. It is, however, a very local species, though it is always abundant where it does occur, and when caught

forms a handsome and striking addition to the collection."

"The **Peacock**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Large Tortoiseshell**, **Comma** and **Painted Lady** are all hibernated specimens, and it is seldom they are of any use, the wings being ragged and torn, except for setting practice; but nevertheless, their presence in the first month of the year is very welcome, for if they do nothing else they serve to keep up the spirits of the collector during the unproductive days of spring by reminding him that the time is at hand when he will find something more worth his attention than some stray day flyer."



"Towards Whitsuntide, if the weather is bright and sunny, the **Duke of Burgundy Fritillary** will be found in

the glades of the wood flitting over the early primroses. There are few localities of the **Duke of Burgundy Fritillary** in which the **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** or the **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** will not be found more or less plentifully. These butterflies are rapid flyers, but their numbers usually render the task of the collector a comparatively easy one; that is, if he carefully watches their mode of progression, and learns how to do the greatest execution compatible with the least expenditure of exertion."

Thankfully, much has changed since the 1890s!

Below, I've included some of the alternative names given to butterflies in the book. How many have you heard of?

Names from the past					
Alternative name given	As we know it today	Latin name quoted	Alternative name given	As we know it today	Latin name quoted
Half Mourner	Marbled White	<i>Arge galathea</i>	Grand Surprise	Camberwell Beauty	<i>Vanessa antiopa</i>
Marmoress	Marbled White	<i>Arge galathea</i>	His Imperial Highness	Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura Iris</i>
Wood Argus	Speckled Wood	<i>Satyrus Aegeria</i>	White Hairstreak	White-letter Hairstreak	<i>Thecla W-album</i>
Wood Ringlet	Ringlet	<i>Satyrus hyperanthus</i>	Pearl-bordered Likeness Fritillary	Heath Fritillary	<i>Argynnis athalia</i>
Speckled Wall	Gatekeeper	<i>Satyrus megaera</i>	White May Fritillary	Heath Fritillary	<i>Argynnis athalia</i>
Rock-eyed Underwing	Grayling	<i>Satyrus semele</i>	Venus Fritillary	(non-native)	<i>Argynnis aphrodite</i>
Arran Argus	Arran Brown (non-native)	<i>Erebia ligea</i>	Greasy Fritillary	Marsh Fritillary	<i>Melitaea artemis</i>
Silver Bordered Ringlet	?	<i>Satyrus hero</i>	Salmacis	(Northern) Brown Argus	<i>Lycena agestis</i>
Small Ringlet	?	<i>Satyrus cassiope</i>	Artaxerxes	(Northern) Brown Argus	<i>Lycena agestis</i>
White Border	Camberwell Beauty	<i>Vanessa antiopa</i>	Spotted Skipper	Chequered Skipper	<i>Hesperia paniscus</i>

I came across a webpage on butterfly superstitions, which I found fascinating.

I considered the following section – What Does a Butterfly Symbolise? – to be particularly thought-provoking:

“The butterfly symbolises transformation, beauty, and freedom. It reminds us that change is a natural part of life and that even the most difficult transitions can lead to something beautiful.

“The butterfly’s symbolism can also be interpreted as a reminder to be patient and to trust the process of change. Just as the caterpillar must undergo a period of growth and transformation before emerging as a butterfly, we too must sometimes endure difficult times before we can grow and become the best version of ourselves.

“Butterflies are more than just pretty insects. They are deeply symbolic and carry a rich history of superstitions and spiritual significance. Whether you see a butterfly as a sign of good luck or as a reminder to embrace change and transformation, these beautiful creatures are sure to capture your imagination and inspire you to spread your wings and soar.”

[Reproduced with the kind permission of Spooky Isles (spookyisles.com/butterfly-superstitions/)]



Derek Haynes

Feeling the Blues

As a Branch, we are indeed blessed by the presence of most of the British ‘specialist’ blue butterfly species of the Lycaenidae family in our region.

Included in this number are the localised (but often quite numerous in their known habitats) Adonis, Chalk Hill and Small Blue, two of which should be on the wing now or, for the Chalk Hill Blue, in early July. We have active Species Champions for all 3 of these Blues, each of whom is prepared to engage with members on every aspect of ‘their’ species in our area.

Each of these Champions has produced their species report for 2023, available to read in full on the UTB website (details towards the end of this article). Extracts from these reports are reproduced here, to help provide an overview of the species in our region. Such extracts are ‘enclosed in quotes’.

Firstly, let’s take a look at the **Adonis Blue** (*Polyommatus bellargus*), of which the males have gorgeous, vivid sky-blue upperwings – as demonstrated in this delightful photo (right, ©Andrew Cooper/BC). Note the distinctive black lines that enter the white fringes of the wings, which helps to differentiate it from the male Common Blue with which it is often confused (as both species are often found together). The



female Adonis



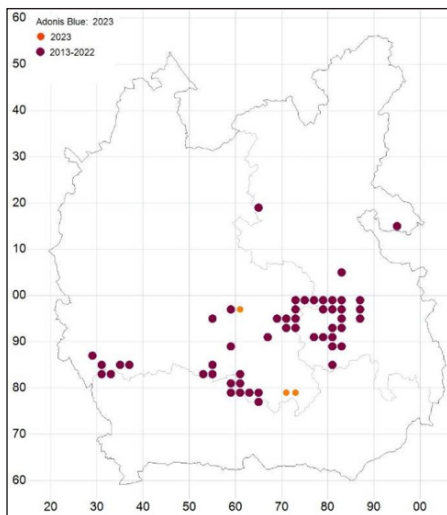
Blue has primarily chocolate-brown upperwings (as shown left, ©Pete Withers/BC), and can again be confused with females of other species of Blue (including the Brown Argus, though that butterfly is considerably smaller). The black fringe lines can again help to identify the species – provided that the butterfly is at rest with its wings open (which, as we know, is not always the case!).

‘Overall, population sizes remain stable for most sites [in our region], though seem to be increasing at Yoesden and Grangelands, the former having the most sightings during 2023. Whilst numbers remain low at many of the sites in the UTB area, populations are persisting over many years and must, therefore, remain viable. However, sadly there have been no records for one of the historic sites in the Goring Gap that appeared from the previous year to have experienced a revival, or from another near Lane End for which records were made in 2021, but for which there have

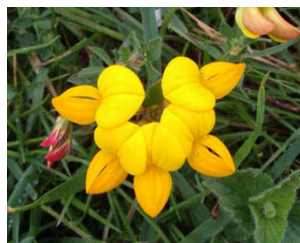
been no sightings since. To counter this, a record has been made again in 2023 at a new site for 2022 near Marlow, giving hope that a new colony may be establishing there.

The map alongside shows Adonis Blue sites/records for 2023 and any changes occurring from those of 2013 – 2022. Unfortunately, the new sites shown in orange are records which have been given erroneous grid references attached to named and well-known Adonis colonies, so, therefore, do not represent new sites for 2023. (Corrections have been made!)

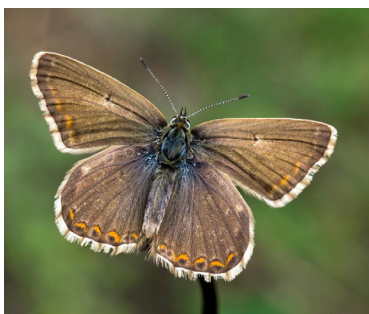
So, it can be seen that there have been no additions to the location of Adonis Blue colonies from the previous 10-year period.'



The sole foodplant of the Adonis Blue is Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), shown left. This plant is not dissimilar to Common Bird's-Foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), shown right.



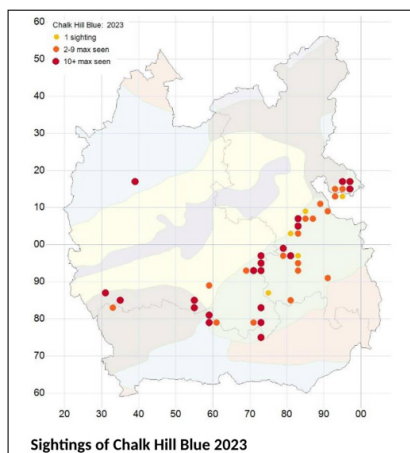
The second species on our 'list' is the **Chalk Hill Blue** (*Polyommatus coridon*), another lovely butterfly which is marginally larger than the Adonis Blue. As with many members of our British family of Blues, the male Chalk Hill is blue (a palish blue) and the female predominantly brown, as shown below.



Left: male Chalk Hill (© Iain Leach/BC); right: female (© Tamas Nestor/BC).

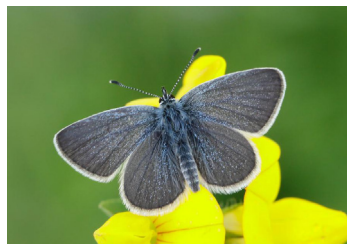
Like the Adonis Blue, the sole foodplant of the Chalk Hill Blue is Horseshoe Vetch.

'The first report in the UTB area in 2023 was 7th July (at Ivinghoe Beacon and Aston Rowant), considerably later than 24th June, the first in 2022. This July 'first' date was more similar to that in 2021 and previous years. Numbers built slowly, and it was 5 days until anyone reported more than 4 at a single site. At most sites it was another week after that first sighting until there were any reports. An increase to multiple sightings at established sites came towards the second half of the second week of July.



Evidence of the poor numbers came in, with only Lardon Chase returning a sighting of over 100 individuals flying on a single day, with 118 counted on transect (1st August). In previous years some sites have had day-counts of over a thousand! As usual, most Chalk Hill Blues ('Chalkies') were seen in late July and early August. Despite the Chilterns being relatively narrow, north to south, the first sighting is usually in the south (e.g., at Lardon Chase) about a week before that in the north (e.g., at Ivinghoe Beacon). However, no such difference was obvious in 2023.

We work with a number of landowners to prepare areas of alkaline soil and plant Horseshoe Vetch. It has been seen to be an effective way to get new colonies established. If you know of sites with potential, please let us know.'



And, finally, to the **Small Blue** (*Cupido minimus*), our smallest native butterfly, with a wingspan typically of 20-30mm. Often overlooked due to its size and somewhat dusky blue colouring (as per the photo left, ©Iain Leach/BC), this species is usually restricted to small patches of sheltered grassland where its sole foodplant, Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), is found.

Unlike other Blues (apart from Holly Blue), the Small Blue's underside is notably different from most of our other Blues, having overall grey underwings with a series of black dots on each of them (as per the photo on the next page, ©Gillian Thompson/BC).

'For a species that reputedly is unwilling or unable to fly more than a few hundred meters from its hatching place, the Small Blue has an unerring ability to appear far beyond known locations. Maybe it is unusually prone to being picked up by the wind

and deposited far from home, or maybe its status as the UK's smallest species means there are still many small, localised (and possibly transient) populations to be discovered on an ongoing basis.'

Andy Spragg is our Small Blue Champion, and his 2023 Report is a highly detailed account of the species in our region over a number of years (and is well worth a read if you'd like to know more about its distribution and abundance):

<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/SmallBlueReport2023ASpragg.pdf>



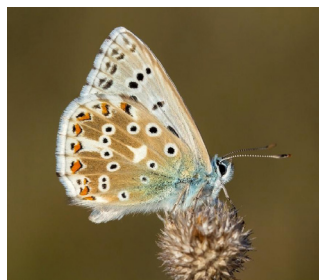
Our website also holds Nick Bowles' 2023 Chalk Hill Report, which may be read at: <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/ChalkHillBlueReport2023NBowles.pdf>

... and Maureen Cross and Margery Slatter's 2023 Adonis Blue Report is available at: <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/AdonisBlueReport2023MCross.pdf>

Some members of our Blues family are notoriously difficult to identify in the field, especially when at rest with closed wings. The following photos demonstrate this difficulty.



Male Adonis Blue underside
© Keith Warmington/BC



Male Chalk Hill Blue underside
© Tamas Nestor/BC



Male Common Blue underside
© Andrew Cooper/BC

One of our Summer Species ID sessions may help you out here! Details of these can be found on the next page.

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Summer Species ID Sessions

The Upper Thames Branch is pleased to announce details of an upcoming series of sessions to help with the identification of some of our summer butterfly and day-flying moths. The first is a Zoom training session, but all others are in-field events.

Persons interested in attending the in-field events would benefit from first participating in the Zoom training session on Thursday 4th July, presented by Nick Bowles. Book a place at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89476278844?pwd=nHkorai1uSfkhmBTuGBvRDTuTiiq7J.1>

Time: **19:30** Meeting ID: **894 7627 8844** Passcode: **080781**

The following in-field sessions have been organised. A pair of close-focusing binoculars and a butterfly net would be useful for participants, if you have them.

- (1). Saturday 6th July, Bradenham NT (Bucks), 10:30**
Please check out full details for this event at:
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events/an-upper-thames-branch-identification-session-at-bradenham-led-by-nick-bowles>
- (2). Saturday 13th July, Howe Park Wood, Milton Keynes (Bucks); 10:30**
Please check out full details for this event at:
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events/an-upper-thames-branch-identification-session-at-howe-park-wood-milton-keynes-led-by-nick-0>
- (3). Saturday 3rd August, Grangelands (Bucks), 10:30**
Please check out full details for this event at:
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events/an-upper-thames-branch-identification-session-at-grangelands-bucks-led-by-nick-bowles>
- (4). Saturday 3rd August, Wytham Woods (Oxon), 10:30**
Please check out full details for this event at:
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events/an-upper-thames-branch-guided-walk-at-wytham-wood-led-by-peter-philp>
- (5). Sunday 11th August, Aston Rowant NNR (Oxon), 10:30**
Please check out full details for this event at:
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events/an-upper-thames-branch-guided-walk-at-aston-rowant-led-by-peter-philp-0>

The link provided for each of the above events will enable you to book a place. Alternatively, contact Nick Bowles for sessions 1-3 or Peter Philp for sessions 4-5.

Nick Bowles **07727 441376** nick.bowles@ntlworld.com
Peter Philp **07434 652770** guided-walks@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk



Silver-spotted Skipper
©Bob Eade/BC

Recent Developments

Our members have been very busy, with many observing caterpillars at various stages of development. We share some of their finds here.



On 20th April, Julian Griffiths spotted an egg-laying Small Tortoiseshell on nettle – and went back subsequently to collect 70 healthy caterpillars (left), then reared them at home.



By 26th May, they were at various stages of development (left).

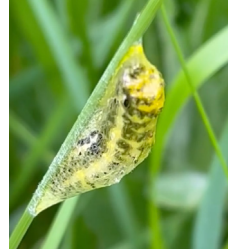
Check out Julian's post

on our Facebook Group pages for the 'unfolding story'.

On 25th May, Nick Bowles discovered larvae of the incredibly rare *Agonopterix atomella* on the UTB event 'Learning the field signs of Micro-moths' (example below).



Peter Cuss found this Burnet moth larva pupating at Bernwood on 27th May (right), along with other species including the Yellow-tail (below).



On the following day, Paweł Czudec discovered several Mullein moth larvae on *Verbascum* (example below).



Let the rest of us share in the delight of your own discoveries!

In Buckinghamshire, the Bucks Invertebrate Group organises a lot of field trips which include studying butterflies and especially moths. Their list of field trips is available on their website <https://sites.google.com/site/bucksinvertebrategroup/>

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

Upper Thames Branch Website

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/upper-thames-branch>

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>

Twitter [@UpperThamesBC](https://twitter.com/UpperThamesBC)

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

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/holtspur_bottom

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