

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

# Hairstreak

ISSUE 123 | AUTUMN 2024



**MEMBERS' DAY Saturday 26th October 2024 (see page 5)**



**Butterfly  
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames  
Branch**



[www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)

# Contents

You can click on an article below to be taken directly to that page.

<a href="#">Editorial</a>	3
<a href="#">View from the Chair</a>	4
<a href="#">Members' Day 2024</a>	5
<a href="#">Members' Day Photo Competition</a>	6
<a href="#">Membership Latest</a>	6
<a href="#">Changing of the Guard</a>	7
<a href="#">ID Walks at Howe Park Wood &amp; Grangelands</a>	9
<a href="#">In abundance, prepare for scarcity</a>	10
<a href="#">New UTB Treasurer Sought</a>	12
<a href="#">Winter Conservation Tasks</a>	14
<a href="#">A Tail of the Unexpected</a>	17
<a href="#">UTB Accounts 2023-24</a>	19
<a href="#">Butterfly Numbers</a>	20
<a href="#">Corridors of Hope</a>	22
<a href="#">RSPB Otmoor Guided Walk</a>	24
<a href="#">White-wash</a>	25
<a href="#">Our Greatest Weakness</a>	26
<a href="#">A Monarch in Berkshire</a>	28
<a href="#">Aston Upthorpe Work Parties</a>	28
<a href="#">Overnight Custodians</a>	29
<a href="#">UTB Recording: A Brief Update</a>	31
<a href="#">A Question of Balance</a>	32
<a href="#">Mend the Gap (TVERC)</a>	34
<a href="#">A Tale of Two Siblings</a>	35
<a href="#">What's in a Butterfly's Name?</a>	38

Cover images (clockwise from top left):

Brown Hairstreak, Otmoor, Oxon, 3rd September 2023 (©Nancy Massie)  
Banded Pine Carpet, Crowthorne, Berks, 7th September 2023 (©Kat Dahl)  
Silver-spotted Skipper, Aston Rowant, Oxon, 17th August 2024 (©Huw Williams)  
Magpie moth, Otmoor, Oxon, 13th August 2024 (©Graham Parkinson)

Opinions expressed in the articles in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Branch or the Society.

All images published in this newsletter are the copyright of either the author of the article and/or Butterfly Conservation/UTB (unless otherwise stated) and must not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Newsletter Editor.

Next edition: **WINTER 2024/25 (ISSUE 124) [DEADLINE FOR COPY: Thursday 5th December 2024]**  
**PLANNED PUBLICATION DATE: 16th December 2024**

Email: **Derek Haynes, Newsletter Editor**  
[newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)

Print: Supported by **Bluepepper Designs** [www.bpdesigns.co.uk](http://www.bpdesigns.co.uk)

Butterfly Conservation. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468). Registered Office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5QP. Charity registered in England and Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SC039268). VAT No GB 991 2771 89

# Editorial

A very warm welcome to this autumn edition of *Hairstreak*. Well, it was certainly an indifferent start to the summer, being generally cool, cloudy and damp. One wonders what effect the poor weather may have on subsequent generations of some of our species. It was mid-July by the time we encountered somewhat more favourable conditions.

One marvels, though, at how a particular species of butterfly suddenly appears across a wide area within a few days of the first



Gatekeeper: first see in both Berks and Oxon on 28th June this year

sighting, as if a green light was given for its emergence. This summer was no exception: an example being the Gatekeeper, seen for the first time in all 3 counties within a few days (and just about on the region's mean first sighting date for the species). Amazing, really, given all the variables.

Not everyone submits their sightings to the UTB website, but it would be especially useful to do so if you believe that you might be the first to have seen a species that year. It is valuable data regarding the recorded 'First Sightings', and furthermore confirms to others that a particular species has indeed been seen in our region. Many members use our Facebook Group pages to advise of their sightings (and report on other events), so you are encouraged to join the Group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/458565932924345>

In all cases, please ensure that your records are officially submitted, one way or another. Check out our advice at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/recording>

Incidentally, our Facebook Group has now attracted over 200 members, who have been asked by a poll whether they give permission for their posts (images in particular) to be considered for inclusion in *Hairstreak*. All members of the Group are invited to respond to the poll.



Details of our upcoming Members' Day are given elsewhere in this newsletter. One of the talks is on 'Saving England's

Lowland Juniper', as shown on the above sign (sited just outside Yoesden Bank Nature Reserve). Also at Members' Day, we will be saying goodbye to Nick Bowles in his role as Chairman.

*Hairstreak*: By the members, for the members... As I'm determined to make this publication as interesting and diverse as possible, I ask that you reflect on whether you could contribute to future issues. In my opinion, the most appealing articles are those which combine relevant facts with a slice of humour; even, perhaps, with an element of surprise or a hint of irony. So, please, do consider it...thanks.

Enjoy the remainder of the season.

**Derek Haynes**

Please send contributions for future issues of the newsletter to [newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk), with supporting images sent separately (or as attachments) in order to maintain quality. **NEXT COPY DEADLINE IS THURSDAY 5th DECEMBER 2024.**

# View from the Chair

This will be my last piece as your Chair. At the Members' Day in October, I shall pass the baton to my successor. I would like to thank all members for their excellent support.

It is sad that I'm finishing my stint in probably the worst ever year for butterflies and moths. It will take a truly exceptional autumn to reverse the trend of 2024. None of our recording schemes are reliable monitors this early in the year, because many people retain their sightings until entering them into the local and national schemes from October, but those that are already entered show a drop in the numbers of most species to about 50% of recent times.

Shifting 'Baseline Expectations' means that whatever we saw recently is what we expect to see today, so the fact that most of us would agree that 2024 is somewhere between disappointing and disastrous needs to be measured against our expecting to see far fewer insects now than we did 50 years ago.

Before the year started, Butterfly Conservation were making the case that the situation is getting grave. The 2022 State of Butterflies report says, "In the UK, long-term trends show that 80% of butterfly species have decreased in abundance or distribution, or both, since the 1970s....". This year's further dramatic declines are therefore all the more worrying – which is why the practical conservation work we do (in partnership) is so totally crucial. During my time with the Branch, the membership has provided large sums of money to facilitate that, and I'm very grateful. Many of you gave of your time and effort on the ground, too, and for that I'm even more grateful. As was pointed out to me when I was wailing about the dearth of butterflies

(as I have been too frequently this summer!), it would be far worse without the work that the Upper Thames Branch does.

So, I'm going to end my remarks as Chair with two parting comments.

Firstly, by thanking all the committee and non-committee members who work so willingly to help the Upper Thames Branch. As members, you probably don't think much about all the work behind the scenes that keeps the Branch running smoothly. Please be assured that many competent, brilliant volunteers are working far harder than you might imagine... achieving just that.

Secondly, to urge you as strongly as I possibly can, to come out on conservation tasks to maintain the wild places in our Branch area. I say this every issue - but without your efforts, the numbers and species of all plants, insects and their dependants will fall even faster. Visit any site where we (or our partners) work for conservation and compare the biodiversity of that site with one where no one does. The contrast is stark. If you don't come out, and conservation work ceases, everywhere will have the variety of the average road verge.



An 'average' road verge and its biodiversity

**Nick Bowles**





# Members' Day 2024

## Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch Members' Day Saturday 26th October 2024

Venue: Benson Parish Hall, Sunnyside, Benson, Oxfordshire, OX10 6LZ

### ITINERARY



- 09.45 **Doors Open**
- 10.15 **Introduction and Welcome - Nick Bowles**
- 10.25 **Review of the Upper Thames Moths - Peter Cuss**
- 10.50 **Review of the Upper Thames Butterflies - Nick Bowles**
- 11.15 **Holtspur (and other sites): Update - Nick Bowles**
- 11.30 **Break.** Coffee, tea or squash and biscuits provided.  
Browse books, prints etc. for sale. Quiz.
- 12.00 **Talk 1. Mike Slater: *Conservation the Warwickshire way***
- 12.50 **Lunch.** Browse books, prints etc. for sale.  
*Please note there are no refreshments at lunchtime and, if required, those attending will need to bring their own packed lunch.* Quiz.
- 13.30 **Committee Matters & Presentation of Awards - Nick Bowles**
- 13.50 **Talk 2. Matt Pitts: *Restoring Juniper in lowland England's grasslands***
- 14.30 **Talk 3. Martin Spray: *The nature crisis - a role for BC***
- 15.10 **Break.** Coffee, tea or squash and biscuits provided.  
Browse books, prints etc. for sale. Quiz.
- 15.40 **Talk 4. Elsa Haywood: *Using museum collections to study butterfly responses to global change***
- 16.20 **Photo Competition\* - Peter Thompson; Quiz Results - Grahame Hawker**
- 16.30 **Chairman's Closing Comments/ Round-up of the Day**
- 16.40 **Finish**

\*see the next page for the Photographic Competition 'rules & regs'.

# Photo Competition

Why not enter the Photo Competition this Members' Day?



There are four categories:

1. UK butterflies
2. UK moths
3. UK early stages (ovum, larva, pupa)
4. Overseas lepidoptera (any lifecycle stage)



**A few simple rules to follow, please:**

Photos should have been taken in either 2023 or 2024. A maximum number of three photos per category per person and a maximum number of eight photos per individual overall.

**Please send your photos (in jpeg format) by email by 6th October to Peter Thompson at [plthompson127@gmail.com](mailto:plthompson127@gmail.com)**

It is hoped the photos will be shown as a rolling presentation during the lunch break on the day, with the winners shown at the end of each category. It is also hoped that we can publish some of them in a future issue of *Hairstreak*.

**Good luck!**



## Membership Latest

A warm welcome to all new members who have joined since the last newsletter was published. There has been a slight decrease in membership since the last newsletter. To date there are 2245 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 our website ([www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)).

All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and attend Members' Day. Up-to-date news on activities can be found on our website. There is also a monthly bulletin reminding members of events sent to all members with registered email addresses.

**Brenda Mobbs, UTB Membership Secretary**  
email: [bc.upperthames@gmail.com](mailto:bc.upperthames@gmail.com)

# Changing of the Guard



Our Chairman, Nick Bowles (left, speaking at last year's Members' Day), bows out from his official role with the Branch at our upcoming Members' Day.

But it's a goodbye from Nick and not a farewell, since, after ten years at the helm, Nick will remain a highly valued and hard-working member of our Branch, focussing on his passion for conservation and encouraging others to do likewise.

What follows is a tribute to Nick from Jim Asher, our Butterfly Records Officer, a Vice-President and former Chair of Butterfly Conservation, and Nick's predecessor as Upper Thames Branch Chair.

## Nick Bowles - our retiring Chair

Nick Bowles has served as Chair of the Upper Thames Branch (UTB) of Butterfly Conservation since the Branch AGM in October 2014, and, after a sentence of ten years in the post, he well deserves a release!

Nick joined the newly formed UTB in 1982, and his name appears on the first list of the members of the fledgling Branch. He was soon busy juggling a growing opportunity to become involved in the conservation of butterflies with the demands of a career in teaching.

One of my memories of the early days of the Branch was a field trip on 17th July 1983, organised by our Chair at that time, Caroline Steel, aimed at seeing the Large Copper at Woodwalton Fen in Cambridgeshire - the location of the sole remaining UK population of this species at that time.

We were successful in seeing only one or two Large Copper butterflies flying in the fen and relied for most of our experience on the continuing stock of specimens bred by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), now Natural England, in a locked greenhouse on site, for release onto the fen. The photo, right, shows Nick (centre-right) amongst other members photographing them through the glass. Nick was a tripod man then, as we can see.



This was, I believe, the last year when Large Copper was seen flying in the fen. Shortly afterwards, the NCC took the tough decision to stop breeding and releasing stock. There was evidence that the site was not sustaining its population naturally, and the species became officially extinct in the UK. It has become clear since then from research that the butterfly needs very large areas of fenland to breed, and the remaining fragments in England are simply too small to sustain Large Copper populations.

This story highlights the way in which our knowledge of the conservation of butterflies has grown and developed over the past 40 years. On a local scale, Nick has always driven for UTB to be more than a 'butterfly spotters' club', and to be a conservation organisation first and foremost, putting the objective of saving valuable habitats above all else.

Nick has particularly focused on the Chilterns for his conservation work. He has been actively involved with our Holtspur Bottom reserve, from the time it was taken on under the leadership of the late Frank Banyard, to the present day. He continues to organise a range of work parties for volunteers at Holtspur and on other sites, often working with Chiltern Rangers. He is a regular transect walker at Aston Clinton Ragpits, Coombe Hill and Grendon & Doddershall Woods.



Butterfly Conservation News No 80 (2002)

Nick has also been active at a national level in BC and was a member of the National Executive Committee between 1989 and 1995. He was presented with a BC Volunteer of the Year award at the national AGM held in Oxford, in 2002, for 'his tremendous contribution to branch and national activities' and for 'his development and management of *Butterfly Line* since 1993'.

We hope that Nick enjoys his retirement from the Chair and that he continues to remain active in butterfly conservation work in the UTB area!



**Jim Asher**



# Howe Park Wood (Milton Keynes) ID Walk

13th July 2024

Eleven people joined me to walk around Howe Park Wood in somewhat indifferent weather. The display of wildflowers in the meadow by the café was very impressive and the Betony especially notable, with the largest carpet of the flower I can recall anywhere. We walked a loop around the perimeter of the SSSI wood, passing briefly through one section, but cloudy skies and a thick canopy meant that staying inside the wood and looking for butterflies and day-flying moths was obviously a poor choice: it was far too dark.

On the edges of the wood we saw 11 species of butterfly and 4 of day-flying moth, which allowed discussion about the ways to tell the Browns apart when settled and in flight, the Whites when settled (or captured in a butterfly net) and the Skippers by examining their antennae (again most easily done by using a net). We also looked at the position of spots on Burnet moths so that we could confidently distinguish between the (Narrow-bordered) 5-spot from the 6-spot.

One of the species we included in the count was very distant, with fleeting views of silvery-blue butterflies flying in the tops of Oaks, and we decided these were Purple Hairstreak though in truth we never saw one settle in a position where, even with binoculars, we could see precisely what they were.

Thanks to the Parks Trust for their part in organising the walk and to Tim Arnold who came along to help with ID.

## Grangelands (Princes Risboro') ID Walk

3rd August 2024



Following the total abandonment of the July walk (with both morning and afternoon sessions rained off), we met for the final ID session of the year at BBOWT's Grangelands in good numbers and fine weather. 28 attendees walked the site with the inestimable help of Martin Harvey, on a 'Build your Confidence in ID Skills' walk.



Though butterfly and moth (indeed most insect) numbers were weak, most of the species we hoped to see were present, albeit sometimes as a single representative of their species. We saw and compared 14 butterfly species and 8 day-flying moths. One individual of most of these was netted and viewed closely inside a glass tube. It was pleasing that an increasing number of the group had nets and knew what features to look for to separate similar species.

We were able to compare Silver-spotted (photo) with Large Skipper, Chalk Hill with Common Blue and Brown Argus; and all the Chilterns' local Browns except Speckled Wood.

Thank you to the attendees for their time during the day and for that given to the survey work they do around our area.

**Nick Bowles**

# In abundance, prepare for scarcity

In abundance, prepare for scarcity... or so Mencius, the Chinese philosopher, cautioned us (except in Chinese, presumably). As butterfly enthusiasts, we all know the word 'abundance', meaning roughly how plentiful a species is in a particular location at a particular time (it's actually quite a tricky concept to make precise).

The purpose of this article is to introduce a new way to think about abundance, for which I am proposing the name 'scarcity', and which I believe has the potential to extract new information from butterfly records. The article takes a first look at what scarcity has to say about the perceived steady decrease in butterfly abundance. I analysed 1,300,669 UTB records for all species of butterfly for the period 2000-2023 and examined an iconic and widespread 'bread and butter' species: the Orange-tip.

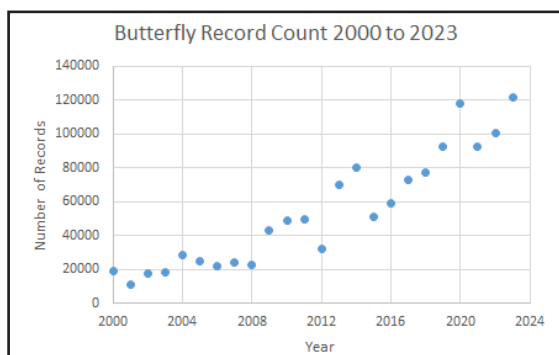


Figure 1. Growth in records per year

The number of records in the UTB database has grown steadily since 2000 (**Figure 1**). But we all know that butterfly abundance has not grown steadily - quite the reverse, so BC regularly tells us in dramatic terms, and few would disagree, even if we might balk at the reported extent of the decline.

The index trends derived by UKBMS represent a tried-and-trusted gold standard for quantifying abundance, albeit

only relative to a base year. However, that analysis necessarily excludes the majority of BC database records, roughly 70% of which (termed 'casual' records) are not of transect provenance and have clear shortcomings (no standard data collection methodology; wide range of recorder expertise). However, they do have the power of 'big data' on their side. Wouldn't it be great if abundance could be measured using all the records in the database?

Welcome to **scarcity**.

Scarcity is a concept that I introduced recently in two Species Champion reports<sup>1</sup>. Both Jim Asher and Nick Bowles have been instrumental in its conception, by influencing me to take account of visit frequency in my analysis. Suffice to say here that scarcity is a shorthand name for a fraction: visits per record. The denominator (on the bottom) is the number of records for a species, in specific territory, over a specific period of time. The numerator (on the top) is the number of visits to that same territory in the same period of time<sup>2</sup>. The territory can be large or small, and the period of time long or short. Scarcity can be

1. Green Hairstreak and Dingy Skipper, found here:

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

2. This definition is thus an improvement on the version used in the Species Champion reports

interpreted as the opposite of abundance; higher values of scarcity mean that more visits are required to generate each record, so the species in question is harder to find. Hence the name.

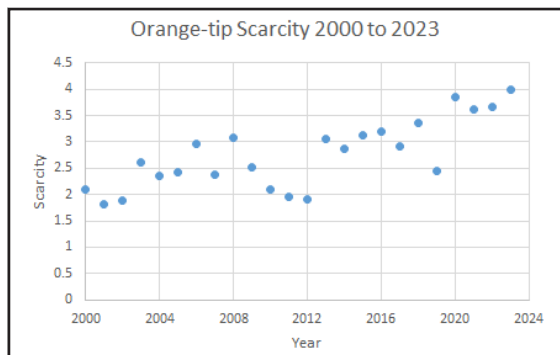


Figure 2. Increase in Orange-tip scarcity

compared to just two visits in 2000. In a very real and tangible sense, Orange-tip was twice as hard to find in 2023 as it was in 2000.

Compared with 2000, Orange-tip scarcity in 2023 was lower at the start of the season, and higher at the end of the season (Figure 3). In other words, the Orange-tip is now easier to find earlier in the year and harder later in the year: that is, its flight period has shifted earlier in the year. The most recent Atlas<sup>3</sup> noted that “the local flight season ... has advanced by about a week between the two ten-year survey periods” (1995-2004 and 2005-2014), so Figure 3 is not entirely new information; however, the existing knowledge gives confidence in the new analysis, which is both more granular and more recent.

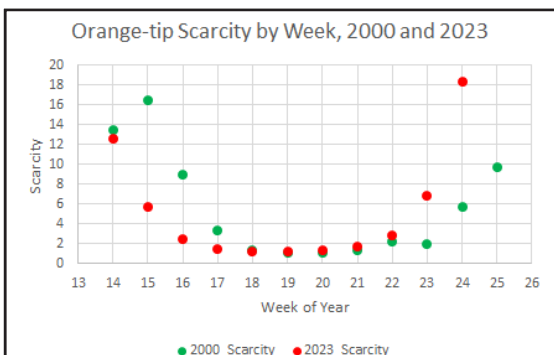


Figure 3. Change in Orange-tip flight period

Space constraints mean that this article can only be a brief introduction to the idea of scarcity. I hope to have shown that it offers an interesting way to make valuable use of all the records in the UTB database, and that it has something useful to say about common-or-garden species as well as championed species. I also hope to have reassured casual recorders that every record does indeed count!

Andy Spragg

3. Atlas of Butterflies in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire (2016)

# New Upper Thames Branch Treasurer Sought



**Butterfly  
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Location:** Home-based but may involve some travel to local meetings.

**Purpose of role:** To ensure that the Branch monitors its financial situation and is able to meet the costs incurred by its activities.

**Key Contact:** Head of Finance (Head Office).



A vacancy has arisen on the Branch Committee for a new Treasurer as the incumbent officer, Chris Woodrow, is to retire from the post at the end of the current financial year, **31st March 2025**, after more than 17 years in the post.

It is not an arduous job and requires only a few hours a month of your time, but the applicant should be able to use spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel, and will need access to the internet and email.

Please contact the Treasurer at [treasurer@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk) or the chairman at [chairman@upperthamesbutterflies.org.uk](mailto:chairman@upperthamesbutterflies.org.uk) if you feel you could perform this important role for the Branch.

The UTB Branch Committee will extend every help required to make the adoption of this new role smooth and simple. The scope of the role is given below.

## TASKS

- Work with the Branch Committee to prepare an annual budget of income and expenditure for the Branch. You may also be asked to advise the committee on the financial implications of their activities.
- Act as a link between the Branch and Head Office (HO) for all financial matters on a regular basis.
- Review financial reserves required for the Branch.
- Provide authorisation to the Head Office Finance Team for invoice payments.
- Provide HO with details of any income paid directly into the bank account in a timely manner.
- Provide HO with the information required to complete end-of-year processes.
- Maintain a list of Branch equipment for insurance purposes.



## **DATES, TIMES, COMMITMENT AND FREQUENCY**

This role is active year-round. Budgets for the following year are prepared in the first few weeks of April. This role can be done from home at a time that suits you. We ask for a minimum commitment of 6 months. Typically, the role takes a few hours per month but this will vary according to how active the Branch is.

## **SKILLS AND ABILITIES NEEDED**

- Experience of working with numbers and using spreadsheets is desirable – or a willingness to learn.
- Organised and efficient with an eye for detail.
- It is helpful to have good written and verbal communication skills for this role.
- You will be able to use spreadsheet software such as MS Excel and will need access to the internet and email.
- You do not need to know about butterflies or moths for this role.
- Your behaviour will support Butterfly Conservation's values.



## **BENEFITS AND SUPPORT PROVIDED**

In addition to the many general benefits of volunteering with us, this role also provides the opportunity to:

- Develop and demonstrate your financial skills in a professional environment.
- Work with other members of the local Butterfly Conservation Branch and find out more about their work.
- Use or develop transferable skills such as communication, working with other people, planning and financial management.

Incidentally, if you are interested in joining the UTB Committee in any capacity, please contact our Honorary Secretary, Dave Wilton, at:

[secretary@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:secretary@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)

**NO LATER THAN SUNDAY 13th OCTOBER 2024**

# Winter Conservation Tasks



The most important activities that we undertake are our conservation tasks.

Unless we act to create and maintain suitable habitats, many of the butterflies and moths we love will vanish. Built-up areas and intensively farmed land host very few species, and, although fallow land is good for a time, as thicker grasses & scrub develops, this rank vegetation smothers and reduces the diversity of other plants that made it so good.

We will undertake about 60 conservation events this winter and we really need you to come along to help.

Much of our winter effort is at our own Holtspur Bottom reserve near Beaconsfield. The details of some tasks are not yet fixed, so please check the Events page of the UTB website (<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events>) to see when and where you might be able to help.

At every site, you might combine a walk around the site with a brief session of work. Everybody is very welcome. Nobody needs to work for an entire session, but obviously you may if you want to. There is always a variety of tasks, and no great strength is required. At many events we would welcome a photographer to document what is done.

Tools and full instructions are provided at every task. Please bring a drink and a snack and dress appropriately for the forecast weather.

Work parties start at 10:00am unless otherwise stated and they usually finish about 13:00, though in good weather conditions they may continue to about 14:00; and those with Chiltern Rangers usually finish about 15:00 (for those that choose to stay). Chiltern Rangers supply hot drinks, tools and safety gear, but we advise bringing your own. Butterfly Conservation prefers that you register your intent to attend through Assemble (<https://volunteer.butterfly-conservation.org/portal/event/index?type=upcoming&filter=all>)

**PLEASE, ALWAYS CONTACT THE TASK LEADER IN ADVANCE** as details frequently change according to weather, number of volunteers etc. The details of each event will be shown on the Events page of the UTB website (<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events>).

**Holtspur Bottom (Bucks) Tasks begin at 10:00 & usually finish at 13:00.**

Meeting point O.S. ref SU918906 nearby Postcode HP9 1BT

what3words ///manage.banana.chimp

Leader & contact no. Nick Bowles 07727 441376 ([nick.bowles@ntlworld.com](mailto:nick.bowles@ntlworld.com)).

**Wed 18.09.24** erecting temporary fencing to exclude sheep from scrapes

**Sun 13.10.24** guided walk, planting, scrub control (& fence repair – if necessary)

**Sun 03.11.24** planting, scrub control

**Continued on next page...**

**Sun 08.12.24** 'scrape' weeding, scrub control & temp fence removal (or next time)  
**Sun 12.01.25** hedging and scrub control (possibly temp fence removal)  
**Sun 09.02.25** as above plus planting if weather permits.  
**Sun 02.03.25** (provisional) planting - but please check before attending, as we may postpone until March 9th (if weather makes this sensible).

**For Aston Upthorpe Scrub clearing and coppicing, please see page 28.**

The alphabetical list of sites below gives an idea of additional sites where we will work this winter. The dates for the majority are not yet agreed. Full details of each task will appear at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events>

When the dates are published, please register your intention to attend ([nick.bowles@ntlworld.com](mailto:nick.bowles@ntlworld.com) 07727 441376) so we know what kit to bring; and please check the website immediately before the task to confirm that it is proceeding as initially described. Changes in the weather forecast may lead to alteration in our plans.

### DATE/SITE NAME/MEETING POINT/PARKING/WHAT3WORDS

**Tues 17/09/2024 Dean Farm** (note 11am vol. start). Parking on verge in grass field HP14 4JG (Grid Ref SU80389826) ///unloading.inched.curtail

**Mon 30/09/2024 Winchester Wood** (note 11am vol. start). In Thames Water parking HP27 ORH (Grid Ref SP82180192) ///arranges.plums.successes

**Tues 08/10/2024 Christmas Gorse** Parking in entry to farmhouse MK18 3LF (Grid Ref SP78602514) ///worry.blushes.songbird

**Tues 15/10/2024 Christmas Gorse** Parking in entry to farmhouse MK18 3LF (Grid Ref SP78602514) ///worry.blushes.songbird

**Tues 22/10/2024 Winchester Wood** (note 11am vol. start). In Thames Water parking HP27 ORH (Grid Ref SP82180192) ///arranges.plums.successes

**Mon 28/10/2024 Sands Bank** Parking in overflow Wyc. Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ (Grid Ref SU83229333) ///custom.alive.length

**Thur 31/10/2024 Butlers Hangings** Pay and Display car park transfer to site at 09.50 HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks

**Mon 04/11/2024 Sands Bank** Parking in overflow Wyc. Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ (Grid Ref SU83229333) ///custom.alive.length

**Tues 05/11/2024 Sands Bank** Parking in overflow Wyc. Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ (Grid Ref SU83229333) ///custom.alive.length

**Fri 08/11/2024 Butlers Hangings** Pay and Display car park transfer to site at 09.50 HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks

**Mon 11/11/2024 Sands Bank** Parking in overflow Wyc. Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ  
(Grid Ref SU83229333) [///custom.alive.length](#)

**Thur 14/11/2024 Sands Bank** Parking in overflow Wyc. Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ  
(Grid Ref SU83229333) [///custom.alive.length](#)

**Mon 18/11/2024 Sands Bank** Parking in overflow Wyc. Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ  
(Grid Ref SU83229333) [///custom.alive.length](#)

**Tues 26/11/2024 Studham Hall Farm** Parking in business premises Studham Place  
LU6 2FU (grid ref TL01061524) [///wiped.woes.hourglass](#)

**Thur 05/12/2024 Saunderton** Network Rail Triangle Roadside layby HP27 9NP  
(Grid Ref SU80769978) [///clipped.idealists.fairly](#)

**Thur 02/01/2025 Far Kingdom** At far north-east of Golf Club parking area HP27 9NX  
(Grid Ref SP79800078) [///craziest.signal.asks](#)

**Thur 09/01/2025 Wardrobes** Parking at private property HP27 ORH  
(Grid Ref SP81780170) [///darkest.superhero.inventors](#)

**Mon 13/01/2025 Butlers Hangings** Pay and Display car park transfer to site at 09.50  
HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) [///horses.luck.risks](#)

**Mon 20/01/2025 Long Orchard** Park in field if ground hard HP27 9NJ  
(Grid Ref SP798013) [///link.hesitate.utensil](#)

**Thur 23/01/2025 Far Kingdom** At far north-east of Golf Club parking area HP27 9NX  
(Grid Ref SP79800078) [///craziest.signal.asks](#)

**Mon 27/01/2025 Long Orchard** Park in field if ground hard HP27 9NJ  
(Grid Ref SP798013) [///link.hesitate.utensil](#)

**Tues 28/01/2025 Small Dean Lane** Roadside layby HP27 OPR  
(Grid Ref SU82319898) [///adventure.creamed.stop](#)

Future 2025 tasks will appear in the next *Hairstreak* and on the UTB website, and additional tasks will be confirmed as landowners agree them. Please check the UTB website for the latest details.

If you know of tasks near your home that would benefit butterflies and moths, which are not on this list, we are happy to display information on our webpages. Please email the details to [nick.bowles@ntiworld.com](mailto:nick.bowles@ntiworld.com)



**Nick Bowles**



# A Tail of the Unexpected

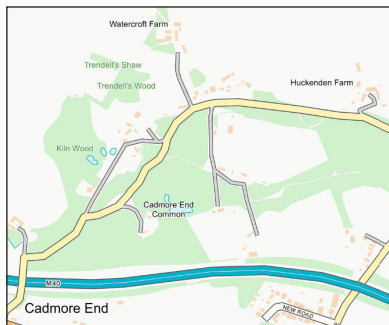


Figure 1: Cadmore End Common in SU7892

a no-brainer: I would head for SU7892, and see if I could spot a Large Skipper or two, before it was too late<sup>1</sup>. That cold logical reasoning was responsible for one of my most memorable butterfly-spotting excursions.

The plan was a circular walk out of Cadmore End, heading out across Cadmore End Common, following the yellow track shown on the map, and cutting across to Leygrove's Wood (not shown) for the return leg. I'd recorded Large Skipper at Cadmore End Common in 2019, so I was quite optimistic about confirming its continued presence there.

We'd recorded four species and were actually in the same place where I'd recorded Large Skipper in 2019 (an overgrown roadside verge) when my partner spotted a small dark butterfly, flying vigorously up and down the mown front of the verge. At this stage, I was intrigued rather than excited; I didn't know what it was, and thought it was probably a female Common Blue, albeit behaving rather unusually. It took us probably three or four minutes, losing and regaining sight of it, before it finally alighted and gave me the opportunity for photographs.



Figure 2: Long-tailed Blue (underside)

---

<sup>1</sup> I did! I saw three, in each of two different locations, all of them fresh as daisies and clearly only recently hatched.



Figure 3: Long-tailed Blue (open wings)

As is often the way for me these days, I couldn't identify it with naked eyesight, and was obliged to inspect the photograph. At which point, I said to my partner, "Take a good look, because you'll probably never see another one!" (I immediately knew what it was because the underside pattern was imprinted on my memory after a brief garden encounter a couple of years ago, when I had to try and decide between Purple Hairstreak and Long-tailed Blue.) We watched it for ten to fifteen minutes, taking more photographs, and eventually being blessed with an open-wing shot (which also shows off the

full baroque extent of the long tails). It seemed somehow wrong to just walk off and leave it, but no purpose would have been served by staying for the rest of the day!

Back at base, I was soon able to establish that there were only three historical Long-tailed Blue records in UTB territory, making mine only the fourth ever! Or so I thought ... only a week later, I learned that another one had been photographed in Chinnor, added to iRecord and mis-identified as a Chalk Hill Blue. To add insult to injury, the sighting was actually made and reported on 28th July, and only picked up for verification two weeks later. So I had to settle for only the fifth ever.

The question of the origin of these Long-tailed Blues remains open. Genuine migrants from mainland Europe, northward pioneers from established territory on the south coast, or released from captive breeding?

**Andy Spragg**

---

Ed.: If you've had a positive sighting of any 'unexpected' species in our region (particularly if supported by photographic evidence), please do bring it to our attention... thanks.



# UTB Accounts 2023-24

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION: UPPER THAMES BRANCH					
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024					
INCOME		2024		2023	
<b>Membership</b>					
Subscriptions		9348.00		8748.00	
Legacies/donations (inc. Gift Aid)		1163.70		1645.00	
Events/fundraising				0.00	
Other (Grants)		4.08		2000.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>			10515.78		12393.00
<b>Conservation</b>					
Holtspur Bottom Reserve			0.00	0.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>			0.00		0.00
<b>Finance/Admin</b>					
VAT Refund				25.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>			0.00		25.00
<b>Total income</b>			10515.78		12418.00
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>					
<b>Membership</b>					
Newsletter		2446.10		1349.50	
Events/fundraising		10.00		305.00	
Stock purchases				332.12	
Publicity etc				306.95	
<i>Sub-total</i>			2456.10		2293.57
<b>Conservation</b>					
Holtspur Bottom Reserve				295.63	
Equipment/Training		1061.83		560.78	
Other Projects		11135.00		16118.00	
Subs/donations		46.00		46.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>			12242.83		17020.41
<b>Finance/Admin</b>					
Admin/Insurance		11.49		199.80	
FB Memb Support		45.00			
VAT				0.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>			56.49		199.80
<b>Total expenditure</b>			14755.42		19513.78
<b>Net income/expenditure</b>			-4239.64		-7095.78
<b>Cash b/f</b>			32,569.51		39665.29
<b>Total cash available for future activities</b>			28329.87		32569.51
<b>STATEMENT OF NET ASSETS AT 31 MARCH 2023</b>					
<b>NET ASSETS</b>					
Fixed assets (after depreciation)			0.00		0.00
Stock, debtors & creditors (net)			0.00		0.00
Cash B/fwd		28329.87		32569.51	
<b>Total</b>			28329.87		32569.51
<b>ALLOCATION OF NET ASSETS</b>					
Endowment			0.00		0.00
Restricted			915.00		960.00
Designated			1000.00		4600.00
Unallocated		26414.87		27009.51	
<b>Total</b>			28329.87		32569.51

If any member has any questions on the accounts please email the Treasurer at [treasurer@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)

## Butterfly Numbers were Worryingly Low this Summer. What are you going to do about it?

Survey work that Andy Spragg and a small band of UTB members have undertaken shows that even the most 'unloved' (as Andy calls them) bits of land within our UTB area have at least ten butterfly species flying on them each year.

It leads one to wonder how those ten survive in relatively desolate places where other species cannot. The answer seems to be that these ten have larvae that happily feed on a variety of plant species. Moreover, these widespread ten species of butterfly have larvae that eat plants which grow in a variety of soils and soil conditions. Additionally, the larvae of these ten species cope better (than most caterpillars) with a wide range of weather conditions. They will do best under certain conditions of warmth and moisture, but rather than perish, can grow more slowly in suboptimal conditions.



*Meadow Brown is one of our most widespread species. Its larvae feed on a variety of grasses. Those in ideal conditions can grow quickly with the resultant adults flying in June, others might grow more slowly with the resultant adults flying as late as September.*

Perhaps you have noticed the larvae of 'Cabbage' Whites feeding on your brassicas in December, despite several nights of frost and short hours of daylight. The same species' larvae were feeding on exactly the same plants in July when it was 30°C by day with over 14 hours of sunlight.

Most of our 35ish butterflies' larvae are restricted to feeding on a few plant species or even to just one species. The butterflies that are most restricted in their distribution are often ones that not only eat just a single species of plant, but also a plant that is itself very restricted in distribution.



*Adonis Blue larvae will only eat Horseshoe Vetch, a plant that only grows on alkaline soils with low fertility. Making things even more difficult, the larvae need the food growing in sun and warmer-than-average surrounding temperatures.*

To make things even more challenging, quite often these larvae require weather conditions of quite precise types, or they simply cannot survive.

Even when this single plant species these larvae need is growing well, it

might be in the 'wrong place' for the caterpillar; either too sunny and hot, or too shady and cool. This doesn't entirely explain the low numbers of butterflies this year (when about half the normal numbers were flying). Most likely, the areas with the foodplants of those species that seem especially fussy are so small that when we get periods of unusual weather, even if many of the plants are growing quite well, too few are in positions that provide the exacting conditions these larvae need.

Before modern agriculture and such large areas of formal development, very large expanses of land had more natural vegetation. Weather extremes took their toll in the past as they do now, but with so many more plants to choose between, a larger number of them were still 'in the right place' for larvae to develop. Only if the scarcer butterfly species can be provided with large and varied areas that support their foodplant will they survive the more frequent weather extremes that global climate change is causing.

**Where do I come in?** There seems to be only one way to ensure that these required foodplants grow in a wider range of conditions and across larger areas of our UTB area. That's when we (you and I) go out and plant them and then tend them.

We could decide not to bother. Assuming that we are happy to have only ten species of butterfly across most of the UTB area, that's fine. Many people wouldn't even notice, so perhaps it doesn't matter. I'll leave you to decide and then act accordingly.

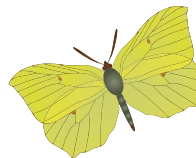
If you think that it does matter, you will find that the UTB has organised conservation tasks to plant and tend these foodplants and you will be very warmly welcomed on any of these tasks by those of us that care passionately about saving the wildlife we have remaining. I really hope to see you there.



*A group planting UTB-purchased Elm trees for White-letter Hairstreak butterflies. Their larvae will eat nothing but Elm.*

**Nick Bowles**

All images ©Nick Bowles





# Corridors of Hope

I live in the village of Eton Wick, just to the west of Eton (Berks). Much of the land around the village is owned by Eton College, who lease many of their fields to local farmers for agricultural use.

A few years ago, such a parcel of land (known locally as South Field) between the village and the Windsor Relief Road (shown below, with red perimeter) was planted out along its northern edge (for a distance of about 630m, alongside the B3026, Eton Wick Road) with a 5m-wide strip of wildflowers. This attracted invertebrates from the get-go, and the area now supports much life, including Common Blue and the expected grassland butterfly species.



Since then, the 2 shorter edges of the field have been planted out likewise; and this year, the second longer (southern) edge was also planted out, providing a wildlife corridor between areas of unimproved grassland to the east and west. At the time of writing (late July), this corridor was awash with butterflies (albeit mainly Whites), bees and dragonflies.

I have also noticed that some other field edges nearby (also Eton College land) have been similarly treated.

I contacted the College on the presumption that the above initiatives were theirs, with the hope that similar action might be taken elsewhere as part of a corporate eco-policy. However, the College's Communications Manager, Rob Birks, advised that "this commendable work will have been done by one of our tenant farmers", whilst adding



that “our tenant farmers are encouraged to do this by us, and it is in line with what we are doing at Eton College.” This is indeed admirable action by a farmer whose main objective is to receive an income from his lease of a piece of land, and I hope that the farmer will get to share in the gratitude I have expressed.

Having offered to be potentially involved in monitoring the effect of similar initiatives taken elsewhere in the local area, I am advised by the College’s Communications Manager that he would share my thoughts with their Environment@Eton society in case they have opportunities for collaboration in the next academic year. Hopefully, something positive may come from this in due course.

Meanwhile, the benefits are here for all to see – and, as a local resident, I get to enjoy the consequences of such initiatives daily. The photo below left is of the southern boundary of South Field, and the other the northern (both as at late July this year).



If you know of similar initiatives in our region, we’d love to hear about them. The more we can demonstrate to landowners and our wider communities that potentially there can be huge benefit (at relatively minimal cost) by providing our invertebrates with ‘tailor-made routes’ between existing pockets of habitation, the better for us all.

Of course, our specialist species are the ones likely to benefit the most from attempts to provide links between habitats (and much work has already been done in this regard across our region), but I for one am delighted to see the results of the efforts of one individual in an area which is currently home to primarily ‘just the usual suspects’.

As the year progresses, take a regular look at our website if you feel that you can offer help with tasks aimed at improving habitats (most of which tend to take place during the winter) and extending the range of some of our species:

[https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/event\\_calendar](https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/event_calendar)

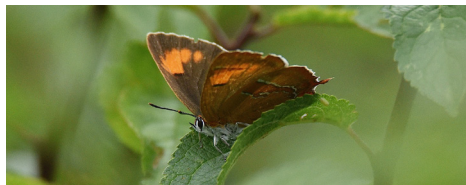
**Derek Haynes**

# Guided Walk at RSPB Otmoor 27th August 2024

We met in the car park on a windy, grey day that was a bit colder than we would have wished, but the warm friendly greeting by our guide, Peter Philp, more than made up for the weather.

After an introduction where Peter showed us his favourite butterfly books and generally chatted about what we hoped to find, we set off along the Roman Road of the Otmoor Nature Reserve where there were sheltered basking areas and good nectar-rich flowers to attract our target species, the Brown Hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*).

Sure enough, it wasn't long before our target was spotted, from a distance, high in the trees. It was very difficult to see against the bright grey sky. One member of our group was an excellent photographer with a long lens, so Matthew Lloyd showed us images of the butterfly on his camera, which were amazing and very satisfying (as demonstrated in the photos here).



We also found lots of Meadow Browns and Whites of various types.

I always try to spot insects while on nature walks, and was rewarded by a rich mixture of crickets, flies, bugs and flowers (examples below) – all of which



Dark bush-cricket



are of equal importance to me when going on a butterfly walk, especially on a grey day when butterflies are in short supply!

The youngster in our group spotted a creature stuck on the Velcro-like seeds of a Burdock plant (shown below).



It turned out to be a bat... and it was still alive. Peter gently prised its trembling

body from the plant and handed it to one member of the group, who kept it warm in his pocket.



Peter later contacted a bat group and arranged for them to pick it up for rehabilitation, so there was a genuine feeling of being in the right place at the right time.

As we headed back to our cars, Peter spotted a Brown Hairstreak at virtually eye-level, posing for all of us, even those with 'lesser' cameras. What a way to end a glorious morning at Otmoor!



Common Fleabane with visitors  
©Linda Seward

**Linda Seward**

All images ©Matthew Lloyd  
(unless otherwise stated)

---

## White-wash

I have never seen so many Whites up at my allotment as I did this 8th September: they were everywhere!

On a couple of plants (similar to Ragwort), near to where I was fastidiously digging my plot, there were 5 nectaring Small Whites and 3 Large Whites. A Green-veined White was also in close attention. Overall, if I had had the time to check, numbers would have run into dozens. Lovely to see – though I'm not sure my allotment neighbour would have been so pleased to discover several Large Whites seemingly trapped beneath the netting that was covering her cabbages.



The previous day, I found these 2 male Small Whites harmoniously sharing a leaf for a couple of minutes.

No squabbling for these guys!

**Derek Haynes**

# Our greatest weakness...

Thomas Edison was spot on when he once proclaimed, *“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”*

Many of our members and enthusiastic volunteers obviously agree with Mr Edison, as they seem determined to go that extra mile for the benefit of all. I could cite many such people in our Branch, and hope to do so in future issues of *Hairstreak*, but want to start by focusing on this occasion on just one individual: Andy Spragg.



Andy is a relatively recent addition to the ‘UTB workforce’, yet has shown his resolve in myriad ways since his arrival on the local scene.

Quite recently, Andy (left) took over the role of 10km Square Co-ordinator from Jan Haseler, a role that one might assume is all about cajoling others into fulfilling their own roles as ‘Champions’ in the parts of our region in which they record species (currently for the 5-year recording window 2020-2024). Indeed, whilst it is, fundamentally, a mentoring role, Andy has gone far above and beyond, not only taking on 10km square SU79 himself, but by

helping to ‘fill the gaps’ in 26 other 10km squares (that’s an incredible 1 in 3 of all UTB squares!), including ones far from where he’s based, such as SP20, SP44 and SU46. And as well as spending many hours in the field (and on the road!), he has found the time to report on his exploits regularly on the **Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames** region Facebook Group pages. A commendable effort, indeed – and ‘rewarded’ by the fact that:

**the Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation achieved a historic milestone on 24th July 2024, by having records for at least some species in every UTB tetrad, all 1,569 of them, for the first time ever.**

**Splendid work by Andy and the many others who have given of their time to help the Branch to achieve this incredible landmark. Well done, all!**



On his ‘home patch’ of SU79:  
Green-veined White ©Andy Spragg



We could, however, still do with more help with this vital role, so if you feel you could take on (or help with) a 10km square, contact Andy by email at the address below.



Green Hairstreak ©Derek Haynes

Andy is also very astute at analysing data, and in one of his other adopted roles – that of Small Blue Champion – he developed a data analysis tool (that he calls SCRIPT: Species Champion Report Information Processing Tool) which, in brief, interprets historical recording data to provide some very valuable information (particularly to Species Champions) on the distribution, abundance and flight duration of species across our region.

Whilst Andy used similar techniques to assist with his exceptional report on the **Butterflies of the Ridgeway** (as featured in issue 118 of Hairstreak, and well worth the read at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Downloads/Butterflies-of-the-Ridgeway.pdf>), he has also found it of immense value when – having become joint Species Champion for both Green Hairstreak and Dingy Skipper (with Ben Paternoster) earlier this year – he used SCRIPT to provide a platform on which the roles could be taken forward (given that there had been no Champion's Reports for either species since 2014 and 2012 respectively).



Dingy Skipper ©Derek Haynes

Andy has now written his **Green Hairstreak** and **Dingy Skipper Reports** for 2014-2023, which, again, are well worth consulting at [https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/GreenHairstreak\\_Report\\_2023\\_ASpragg.pdf](https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/GreenHairstreak_Report_2023_ASpragg.pdf) and [https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/DingySkipper\\_Report\\_2023\\_ASpragg.pdf](https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/Reports/DingySkipper_Report_2023_ASpragg.pdf) – especially for those, like me, who always use a sighting of either species (along with Orange-tip) as a harbinger of spring. In fact, as Andy himself suggests, they're "a rattling good read"!

Some of our other Species Champions (and we have 16 currently 'in post') may like to consult Andy if they believe that he could (due to his data analysis expertise) assist them in their judicious efforts to fulfil their roles. He may be contacted at: [10k-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:10k-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk).

I reckon that Andy deserves a long lie down for the rest of the year, while the rest of us ponder whether we can go that extra mile in 2025 to achieve our own or the Branch's objectives. Thanks, Andy, for your unrelenting resolve.

**Derek Haynes**

# A Monarch in Berkshire!



When out butterflying in Berkshire one might expect to see an Admiral, or hope for an Emperor, but to see a Monarch close up would seem a bit optimistic.

This spring, whilst working in Windsor Great Park, I was showing a chap some of the flowers and tree saplings in an area of wood pasture, with some interesting acid grassland habitat. A butterfly flew past us and landed, allowing for closer inspection. He inquisitively asked me what it was.

"A Small Heath", I replied, and explained that it is a not a particularly common species locally, but is to be found across the grasslands in the Great Park. He was really interested and wanted to see more, but he had to hurry off as he had to get to a meeting at the castle. It's not often you get to talk butterflies with His Majesty King Charles III.

**Des Sussex**

---

## Aston Upthorpe Work Parties – Winter Season 2024/25

Aston Upthorpe Scrub clearing and coppicing. Meeting point: at the grain dryer, SU550844. Start time: 10:00 Finish time: 13:00, possibly extending to 14:00 in good weather. Contact: **Jim Asher 01865 391727** [jim.asher@btinternet.com](mailto:jim.asher@btinternet.com)

New volunteers are always welcome – training is provided. Even if you can only come for part of the time, your help will be appreciated. Please contact Jim in advance before each work party as details may change at short notice.

### ALL ON SUNDAYS:

20th October 2024  
10th November 2024  
15th December 2024  
19th January 2025  
16th February 2025  
9th March 2025



Grizzled Skipper, Aston Upthorpe Downs, Oxon  
9th May 2024 ©David Hastings



# Overnight Custodians

Once again, our 'overnight custodians' have been working overtime. Many of our members now have access to a moth trap – and they sure know how to use it!

For those of you who don't access our Facebook Group pages (details on the next page), where many of you now post your sightings, we have included images of some of the beauties found in traps by regular contributors Linda Seward and Cliff Buckton in June and July this year.



Blotched Emerald ©Linda Seward 25th June 2024



Buff Ermine ©Linda Seward 13th June 2024



Small Elephant Hawk-moth ©Linda Seward  
25th June 2024



Common Marbled Carpet ©Linda Seward  
21st June 2024



Lace Border ©Cliff Buckton 26th June 2024



Swallow-tailed Moth ©Cliff Buckton 27th June 2024



Elephant Hawk-moth ©Cliff Buckton 28th July 2024



September Thorn ©Cliff Buckton 12th July 2024



Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing ©Cliff Buckton 15th July 2024



Black Arches ©Cliff Buckton 24th July 2024

What fabulous creatures these are!

Hopefully, the prospect of discovering one of these species (or one of many others) in your own garden will inspire you to consider buying a trap, or – if you're happy to go onto a waiting list – borrowing one from the Branch.

Linda and Cliff have both given their kind permission for their images to appear in this publication, following their being posted on the **Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames region** Facebook Group pages.

I would strongly recommend that you apply to join the Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/458565932924345>), where much information is posted concerning many aspects of the work of the Branch, as well as members' butterfly and moth sightings. And who knows, if you grant permission, one of your own images may feature in a future edition of *Hairstreak*.

Our Moth Officer, Peter Cuss (who also posts his moth-trap findings on the Facebook Group pages), can be contacted regarding traps at: [priority-moths@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:priority-moths@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)

**Derek Haynes**

# UTB Recording: A Brief Update

A number of dedicated people, coordinated by (and including) Andy Spragg, have been working to fill the remaining gaps in our 5-year coverage of butterfly records across our three counties.

Some of our most active volunteers have gone many extra miles to record in 'neglected' squares, including those marginal squares at our outer borders, and have successfully added new species' records. A huge thank-you goes to everyone who has helped with this project this year, and in previous years.



Most of the 2024 records have still to be verified and formally imported into our system, and we know that many recorders have still to send in their records. We would be very grateful if those of you who have not yet done so could submit your records, preferably either online via iRecord or by sending in an Excel file. If you can, **please send them in by the end of November**, to give us time to process them.

A big thank-you also goes to Peter Ogden and to our small but dedicated team of verifiers, who sift through, check and verify (or query) records on iRecord. It is a big ask, and we are hugely grateful for their expertise and help with this task.

This is a very brief update: once we have the bulk of the records in from 2024 (including those from Big Butterfly Count, UKBMS, etc.) we will be able to update you much more fully on the coverage early next year.

**Butterfly recording remains an important part of our conservation work.** The results keep us up to date with species' changes in these ever more interesting and challenging times, as butterflies battle against the impacts of climate change and our rapidly changing environment.

**Please keep up the good work** as we prepare to enter our next 5-year recording window, starting in 2025! Thank you.

**Jim Asher**

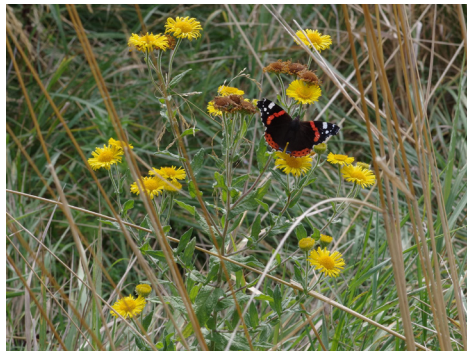




# A Question of Balance

Ragwort! Yes, a controversial and divisive plant, indeed.

This year, it has been both ubiquitous and plentiful across our region (no doubt nationally, too).



Red Admiral on Ragwort ©Steve Boughton (RSPB Otmoor, 1st September 2024)

There are 19 species of the daisy-like Ragwort genus *Senecio* to be found in Britain, with the main species being the native *Senecio jacobaea* (or *Jacobaea vulgaris*).

Also known by many other names, including Stinking Willie and Stagger Weed, Ragwort is viewed by conservationists as an important plant. On the flip side, Ragwort contains toxins which – in sufficient quantities – can cause liver poisoning in horses and livestock. Most animals instinctively steer clear of it, although they can be tempted if food is scarce. Of particular concern is that Ragwort can be present in hay if the field from which it has been cut contained the plant.

Whilst there is no legal requirement for

landowners to remove Ragwort (unless ordered to do so by DEFRA), the plant is covered by various codes of practice (Acts) to limit its spread.

The widespread yet declining Cinnabar moth, *Tyria jacobaeae*, (note the similarity of scientific name to the plant) is a striking red and black species whose poisonous yellow and black larvae are particularly fond of Ragwort. What a colour contrast between the immature and mature stages! Can you think of a better example?



Cinnabar moth ©Ben Sale BC



Cinnabar larva ©Koen Thonissen BC

The owner of the Facebook page **Urban Countryman** has recently posted an interesting article on Common Ragwort, based on personal experience, beliefs and facts, and is well worth the

read (9th August 2024 post) at:  
[https://www.facebook.com/urbancountryman/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/urbancountryman/?locale=en_GB)

On UTB's Holtspur reserve, Nick Bowles and a group of 9 volunteers recently spent some time thinning out the Ragwort there. As Nick says, "We know that Ragwort is great for pollinators, but so are lots of other things that grow at Holtspur Bottom - and we don't want the fields so full of Ragwort that nothing else can grow."



The 'before and after' views here show the value of their efforts. Great work, all! Ragwort is not the only species of native wildflower classified as 'injurious' under the 1959 Weeds Act. There



are 5 species, of which 3 are frequently visited by pollinators: ragwort and the 2 thistles, *Cirsium arvense* and *Cirsium vulgare*. According to a study, four times as many pollinator species and five times

as many conservation-listed species have been recorded visiting these 3 insect-pollinated plants than to DEFRA-recommended plants.

In the UK, Ragwort provides both a home and a nectar source to at least 77 insect species. Thirty of these invertebrates use Ragwort exclusively as their food source, and another 22 species use it as a significant part of their diet.



Brimstone on Ragwort ©Steve Boughton (RSPB Otmoor, 1st September 2024)

A John Clare poem of 1831 certainly portrays the plant in positive light:

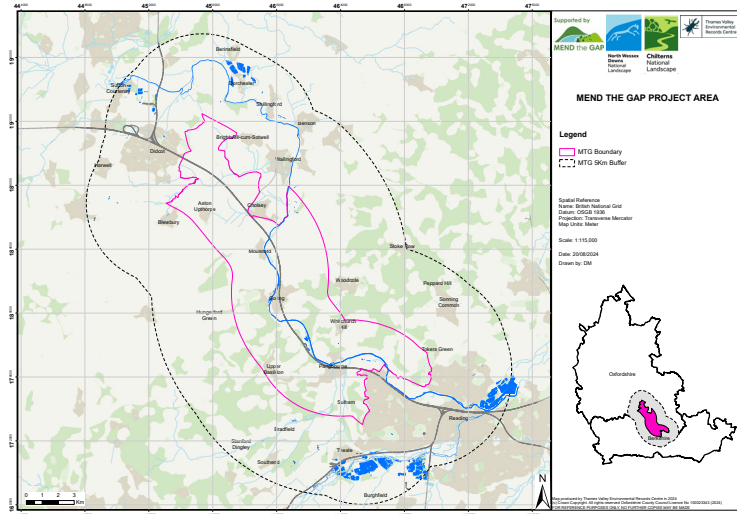
*Ragwort thou humble flower with tattered leaves  
I love to see thee come and litter gold...  
Thy waste of shining blossoms richly shields  
The sun-tanned sward in splendid hues that burn  
So bright and glaring that the very light  
Of the rich sunshine doth to paleness turn  
And seems but very shadows in thy sight.*

However, as is the case for many aspects of our natural world, it's all a question of balance.

**Derek Haynes**

Images ©Nick Bowles (unless otherwise stated)

# Mend the Gap Project (TVERC)



Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) would like to learn more about the people who observe wildlife in the part of South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire highlighted on the map left (the 'Project Area').

The Mend the Gap Project Area includes the area within the Mend the Gap boundary and a surrounding 5km buffer. If you spot wildlife within the Mend the Gap boundary or its surrounding 5km buffer, they would appreciate your feedback (by means of the survey provided).

This survey is funded by the Mend the Gap (MTG) programme, a joint programme of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, and the Railway Action Group. The vision of Mend the Gap is that the outstanding national landscape that links the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs will be enhanced and enriched for wildlife, residents, and visitors. To find out more visit [www.mendthegap.uk](http://www.mendthegap.uk) or follow [www.facebook.com/MendtheGapProgramme](https://www.facebook.com/MendtheGapProgramme)

To complete the survey online please go to this link:  
<https://forms.office.com/e/CDxSDwCX8T>

Or download the survey form at: <https://tverc.org/tverc-news/2024/mend-gap-project-enhancing-wildlife-monitoring>

You can return your completed form by email to [tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk) or by post to Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), c/o Oxfordshire County Council, County Hall, New Road, Oxford, OX1 1ND.

The survey should take around 10 to 15 minutes to complete. **Please note that the survey will be open for responses until September 30, 2024.**



# A Tale of Two Siblings (or how to conserve butterflies)

A rich man lived in a farmhouse in the centre of two hundred acres of land. His poor sister lived in a farmworker's cottage with a tiny garden. She was passionate about nature, especially butterflies, and he began to think that perhaps he, too, should take an interest. He declared that he would take early retirement and travel the world to see its wildlife. His claim that many indigenous people rely on nature tourism, and protect nature so that people pay to visit, was quite convincing.

He could tell that his sister wasn't entirely happy about his decision: his carbon footprint was going to be vast. So, he told his land manager that he wanted every plant around his home cleared away and replaced with a forest of buddleia, nurtured with fertilisers, and kept entirely weed-free so that it grew as strongly as possible. Happy that this would surprise and delight his sister, he set off and spent many years seeing the 'Big Five' in Africa, as well as Monkeys, Orangutans, Gibbons, Gorillas and Bonobos around the world. He saw Possums, Panthers and Pangolins, Penguins and Polar bears, Porpoises, Whales and Dolphins, colourful Birds of Paradise, and pretty little Passerines and Parrots of many hues.

Meanwhile, his sister took on the maintenance of the track that led to her cottage. She cut the verges very hard, raked away all the cuttings and spread Yellow Rattle seed. While that became established (so that she would only



Elm saplings grown from seed to help White-letter Hairstreak butterflies, White-spotted Pinion and many other moths.

need to cut the now-much-shorter grass annually) she researched the plants that the caterpillars of her favourite butterflies ate. With this knowledge, she collected seed and germinated wildflowers, took cuttings of shrubs and trees, and when



Seedling Horseshoe Vetch that will feed caterpillars of Adonis and Chalk Hill Blue, Dingy Skipper and those of moths like Chalk Carpet.

they were growing strongly (and the grass weaker), she planted them along the track.

On his journey home the man contacted his sister and suggested that he fetch

her when he got back, so that he could tell her about his years of travel. Even though he arrived home on a pitch-black night, he could smell the buddleia and imagined the delight on her face when she saw the transformation from pony paddocks to a butterfly paradise.



An empty Buddleia flower.

Next morning, he walked out early to his forest of buddleia. It was covered in luxuriant flowers, but he was surprised to see no butterflies. He thought, "After breakfast, when it's warmer, there will be swarming clouds of butterflies". But, after breakfast, it was much the same.

He walked through his forest for an hour in disbelief and tried not to think of the expense. A few Whites, the odd yellow butterfly and a Red Admiral were all he saw.

Greatly disappointed, he recalled his sister telling him while he was away that insect numbers in the UK had plummeted. He hoped that however poor this looked compared to the places he had seen abroad, she would nevertheless be impressed that he had spent heavily and 'saved' some species. It was a lovely warm summer's day, and

as he loved his veteran, open-topped sports car, he drove it to collect his sister.

Reaching the track to her cottage, he remembered that his low sports car would ground on its ruts, but as it was a lovely day and only 200m up the track to her house, he parked and walked. Pretty much as soon as he left his car he was surrounded by clouds of brown and white



Planting plugs of Cowslip to feed the caterpillars of the rare Duke of Burgundy.

butterflies. Passing through them like the parting of a wave, he saw a deep rut with mud ahead and knew his decision to walk was sensible.

But seeds getting into his socks and making his feet itchy got him cross, and he wondered why on earth she hadn't cut the vegetation. Now he was in a wider section and noticed a bustle of blue butterflies over colourful vetches and behind them on the thistles growing among nettles, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and a Painted Lady. Then an astonishing Purple Emperor glided from a young tree-staked Sallow, swooped around him, scattering the blues, and settled onto the muddy patch less than a metre away. Even in all his years away he hadn't seen anything more spectacular.

By the time he reached the cottage, his plan to smother his sister with love had been forgotten in his fuming about the money he spent to achieve less than a rough farm track had provided; and as she opened the door, he blurted out, "How come I spent a fortune and have no butterflies and you spent nothing and have thousands?". She greeted him warmly before replying, "True, I spent no money, but I didn't do nothing".

"I asked if I could look after the track to the road and I researched what the caterpillars of my favourite butterflies ate, and then, after checking if those



Planting plugs of Dark Mullein, caterpillar foodplant of the very restricted Striped Lychnis.

butterflies lived nearby, planted plugs for them.

"I collected and germinated seeds myself. I made sure I had the right grasses for the Browns and Skippers (and kept it short and weaker with Yellow Rattle), the right vetches for the Blues, and shrubs and trees for species like Hairstreaks. It has taken some time, but it is coming along very nicely. All in all, it has been a great success," she said, "and it cost me nothing but some time –

probably less time than I've spent since, immersed in watching the butterflies that I gave the space to breed."

This is a simplistic story, but underlying it is a truth. You will only increase the number of butterflies (and moths) by looking after their caterpillars. No matter how many nectar plants you provide, if caterpillars can't feed, there will be no adults to take the nectar.

Despite the advice on the BC website that you could attract 20 species into your garden with the right nectar sources, at the UTB we also point out that you won't see that many if you live a long way from where the caterpillars feed. Far better, we think, is to provide caterpillar food and adult nectar sources, with some plants doing both (see [www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/gardening](http://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/gardening)); and there are good ideas on the BC national site, too (see [wild-spaces.co.uk/info-hub/](http://wild-spaces.co.uk/info-hub/)).

Already, a small number of our members grow plants for the scarcer butterflies of our region. Most of those plants are plug-planted onto nature reserves or into farm margins. Why not join those of us doing a little more than simply attracting the passing adults... passing as they search for areas with their caterpillar foodplant?

**Nick Bowles**

All images ©Nick Bowles



# What's in a Butterfly's Name?

This summer, my partner and I visited both France and Germany for our holidays. The first trip was an organised butterfly-watching vacation; and the latter a more sedate affair in Bavaria.

In both countries we saw many butterflies common to the UK. As I have an interest in languages, I started wondering what the local names were for many of the common butterflies we saw, so when we returned to the UK, I started doing some research.

In France, the butterflies Le Demi-Deuil, Tabac d'Espagne and the sinister-sounding Robert Le Diable are all found in the UK. In Germany, such creatures as Das Schachbrett, Der Kleiner Fuchs and Die Tagpfauenauge all take to the air each summer, just as they do in the UK. More later on what these butterflies are known as in England!



Silver-washed Fritillaries – but which of the names above is it known by in France?

Just the word *butterfly* has an interesting history. The word originates from Old English – *Butorfleoge*, and its earliest documented use dates from the 12th century. One theory is that the name

is taken from the colouring of one of the early spring butterflies in the UK, the Brimstone. Another is that witches took the form of butterflies in order to steal milk and butter (and presumably other dairy products). The latter concept seems highly implausible given butterflies' limited ability to carry heavy objects such as milk churns! The words for butterfly in German and French, respectively, are Schmetterling and Papillon. In Denmark, where I spent some summer holidays as a child, the other children I played with called butterflies Sommerfugle, which translates rather charmingly as summer birds.

Returning to the UK, most of the names of our native species of butterfly have evolved over time. No doubt there were also local names for the same butterfly in different parts of Britain. In some cases, males and females of the same species had different names, possibly because people at the time considered them to be different species because of their appearance, without realising that they were in fact the same insect.

Early in the 18th century the male Common Blue was known as the Blew Argus and the female as the Mixed Argus. Some butterflies were named presumably after the eminent scientist or member of the society who first described them. Handley's Brown Hog Butterfly (Dingy Skipper) and the rather quaintly named Mr Vernon's Small Fritillary (Duke of Burgundy) are two such examples.



The Marbled White (below) used to be known as the Half Mourner in the 19th century, because its black and white colouring resembled the clothes of people in a period of 'half mourning', which followed the period of full mourning following the death of a family member.



In France, I discovered that this butterfly is called the Demi-Deuil - the latter word translating as grief, so the similarities with the earlier English name become apparent.

In Germany, the Marbled White is called Das Schachbrett, which is a chessboard. There seems to be more of a trend for naming butterflies after the foodplant of the caterpillar in Germany, hence Der Distelfalter (Thistle Butterfly) is the Painted Lady (La Belle Dame in French); Der Eichenfalter (Oak Butterfly), the Purple Hairstreak; and Der Kleiner Kohlweissling, the Small White (Kohl being the word for cabbage).

There are some very quaint examples such as Der Kleiner Fuchs (the little fox), which is known as La Petite Tortue (the little tortoise) in France - the Small Tortoiseshell; and Der Aurorafalter (in

German) and L'Aurore (in French), which is our very own Orange-tip. Because of its very distinctive eye-spots, the Peacock (below) is unsurprisingly given similar treatment when it comes to naming it in both French and German: Paon de Jour (Peacock by Day) and Die Tagpfauenauge (roughly translating as Peacock's Eyes by Day), respectively.



So, what of Tabac d'Espagne (Spanish Tobacco) and Robert Le Diable? Well, the former is the Silver-washed Fritillary (shown on the previous page), and the latter is the Comma! (C-Falter in German). Who (or what) the infamous sounding Robert was in French history, to have his name given to an innocuous looking butterfly in such a sinister way, is the subject of another research project!

**Martin Robinson**

All photos ©Martin Robinson

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/berksmoths/Home>

## Upper Thames Branch Website

[www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](http://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](mailto: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](http://upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/holtspur_bottom)

## Upper Thames Branch Officers

**Chairman:** Nick Bowles 01442 382276 [nick.bowles@ntlworld.com](mailto:nick.bowles@ntlworld.com)

**Vice-chairman & Conservation & Recording Chairman:** Grahame Hawker  
Well Cottage, 22 Brimpton Common, Reading RG7 4RZ 0118 9814405  
[grahamehawker@hotmail.com](mailto:grahamehawker@hotmail.com)

**Hon Secretary & Branch Contact:** Dave Wilton  
25 Burnham Road, Westcott, Aylesbury HP18 0PL 01296 658701  
[wilton@burnhamlodge.plus.com](mailto:wilton@burnhamlodge.plus.com)

**Hon Treasurer:** Chris Woodrow  
39 Old London Road, Benson, Wallingford OX10 6RR 01491 838637  
[lepidoptera45@btinternet.com](mailto:lepidoptera45@btinternet.com)

**Membership Secretary:** Brenda Mobbs 01494 712486 [bc.upperthames@gmail.com](mailto:bc.upperthames@gmail.com)