Butterfly walks: guided events and new leaflet

Garden Open Day: home to 21 butterfly species

Celebrating 40 years
Chairman’s Address

Butterfly news
Lots will be going on in the Branch this coming year but let’s start with butterfly news, as we now have the 2018 casual and transect results. John Tilt reported that 2018 was the best of the last five years, with an average of 1520 species per tetrad (2km x 2km square). The star species for 2018 was the Brown Argus, showing increases in both numbers and range compared with previous years. I can back this finding up with a report from my Worcester garden. Otherwise poor for butterflies, although good for bees, I was surprised to find a Brown Argus nectaring on Linaria and Sage on 7 August – evidence of dispersal.

Now that more people are using iRecord, coverage was greatly improved. John says that over 3000 people submitted records, covering 40 species (see page 28). Key observations include the early emergence of White Admiral, good numbers of Hairstreaks but still poor for Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. The cold spring held back many species (for instance, Orange Tip numbers were down on the Malverns) but then hot weather brought an early record for Grayling, the first being seen on 27 June, again on the Malverns. The last was observed on 5 August, which is exceptionally early. These facts are taken from the new Butterflies and Dayflying Moths around the Malverns 2018 – see page 12 for how to order this excellent 80-page publication for only £5.

In late 2017, the Red Admiral had a bonanza year, running into late autumn following recent winter records. So, is this species starting to hibernate or just overwinter? Poor numbers in Spring 2018 suggest that, although it is exceptionally early. These facts are taken from the new Butterflies and Dayflying Moths around the Malverns 2018 – see page 12 for how to order this excellent 80-page publication for only £5.

In late 2017, the Red Admiral had a bonanza year, running into late autumn following recent winter records. So, is this species starting to hibernate or just overwinter? Poor numbers in Spring 2018 suggest that, although it had previously been seen to continue its breeding cycle through mild winters, it cannot survive as a hibernator in cold weather such as the winter of 2017/18 – at least not in our region. Yet it has again been recorded very late in the current mild winter of 2018/19.

Branch activities
So what is the Branch doing this year? We’ve just held our early Spring Committee meeting, where we welcomed new Secretary Martin Harrison, who joined us for the first time, and Committee member Vicki Liu on her return to Staffordshire – we need to encourage more people below retirement age to join us!

A new Branch Leaflet has been printed for events and for new members, while the revised sites guide Walking with Butterflies nears completion and can now be pre-ordered (see page 30). We’re always looking for more content, including new walks, to add to our website.

Another venture that we hope to do more with is the national Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey.

Branch Calendar 2020
The theme for next year will be ‘Celebrating 40 years – a look back over the Branch’s development’. We plan to feature a mix of images:
• Butterflies that have declined or been lost, and those that have extended their range
• Moths, especially those newly discovered in recent years
• Events, with groups or prominent individuals in active settings. We’ll select the pictures that most strongly represent what the Branch is about, rather than judging them on artistic or technical merit. We hope to find suitable historical photos of sufficiently high resolution, or drawings; if we can’t, we’ll review our selection method.

Please send images to peterseal3@btinternet.com, no later than 31 July

National AGM – Good News
In recognition of the West Midlands Branch’s 40th year, Butterfly Conservation will be holding the national AGM in our region at the Albrighton Hall Hotel, just north of Shrewsbury, on Saturday, 16 November. Plans are underway for a celebratory dinner in the evening, with the opportunity for a raffle to raise funds for the Branch and for a speaker or two on its work. Please put this date in your diary and consider helping for an hour or two, so we can give a good account of the Branch.


Branch News

Moths of the West Midlands
Led by Ian Duncan, the editorial board is marking the publication a companion book to Butterflies of the West Midlands, with an ambitious publication timescale of Spring 2020. Please read Ian’s article on page 4, where you will see that we are seeking sponsorship for species champions. The minimum contribution will be £75/species from individuals and families, with £175/species from companies and organisations.

Species champions will receive a complimentary copy of the book. If you would like to be a species champion, please contact Peter Seal on peterseal3@btinternet.com stating the species that you’d like to sponsor and he’ll then confirm payment arrangements.

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Butterfly Conservation
Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468)
Registered office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QF.
Charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SC039268).
Plans for the first book on the moths of the West Midlands

West Midlands Butterfly Conservation is to publish the first-ever book on the moths of the area, which covers Birmingham and the Black Country, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire. The book will feature all the macro moths in our region (over 600 species) and many of the micro moths regularly recorded.

The book will be lavishly illustrated with over 700 photographs, from local photographers wherever possible, and will also include up-to-date distribution maps, habitat information, adult flight periods and larval food plants.

In addition to the species pages, there will also be chapters dealing with the special moths of the area and the top places to look for moths – ‘hot spots’. Another important section will cover attracting and recording moths. This will include gardening for moths and the use of moth lights, pheromones and sugaring.

Our aim is to produce a companion volume to the hugely successful Butterflies of the West Midlands. It will appeal to enthusiasts of all levels but particularly to beginners keen to get involved in this fascinating subject.

The editorial team comprises Ian Duncan and Mike Williams, both co-editors of the butterfly book, and Tony Simpson, the moth recorder for Worcestershire. All contributions to the book will be voluntary.

The publisher, Pisces, is planning for the book to be available in the spring of 2020. It will have 240 pages, compared to the 154 pages in the butterfly book. A prepublication offer will be included in a future edition of The Comma.

The Branch has agreed to contribute £2,100 towards the cost of publication and, as with the butterfly book, the greater the Branch’s contribution the greater its share of the profits. As a result, the Branch is seeking species champions to raise additional funds to put towards the cost of publication. Champions will be acknowledged in the book and receive a complimentary copy.

The minimum contribution is £75/species from individuals and families, £175/species from companies and organisations.

If you would like to be a species champion, contact Peter Seal on peterseal3@btinternet.com, stating the species that you would like to sponsor, and he will confirm payment arrangements. If you would like to donate high-quality photographs to be considered for publication, contact me on jurtina245@gmail.com.

A tribute to Frank Lancaster

Many of our longstanding members will remember Frank Lancaster, who died last April aged 86. Frank was a pioneer of our work in the Wyre Forest.

Frank and his wife Pat moved to Wyre Forest from St Albans, where they’d been prominent members of the Herefordshire branch of the British Naturalists Association for many years. Frank was a great enthusiast for wildlife, especially butterflies, moths and other insects. He not only enjoyed seeing them but also sharing his passion and enthusiasm with others. I first got to know him in the early 1980s, when he became a member of the Redgiling West Midlands Branch.

In 1986, Frank established a butterfly transect in the Wyre Forest, which he and Pat undertook regularly for the next 16 years. He was a leading advocate of survey and monitoring work in the Forest, which has continued to this day and now involves dozens of volunteers every year. He also began to lead some of our field trips – we soon came to realise, sometimes to our cost, that he didn’t know the meaning of the words ‘going for a short walk’!

Frank’s recording interests led in 1989 to the formation of the Wyre Forest Study Group, an organisation that meticulously gathers and records data on the wildlife of Wyre Forest and, in 2015, produced the widely acclaimed book, Nature of Wyre. At Frank’s funeral, Rosemary Winnall, a leading member of the Study Group, said of the early days: ‘At that time, there were only a few people recording wildlife regularly in the Forest and Frank was one of them. His untiring work on recording butterflies influenced many of us. He kept meticulous records in those pre-computer days and our present Records Room contains many of his annual reports that he generously shared.’

Perhaps less well known was Frank’s key role in starting the Wyre Forest Moth Group. A meeting was arranged, attended by more senior managers in the Forestry Commission and, as a result, plans were soon in place for more sympathetic management in the Forest. Over the years, this has resulted in huge benefits for wildlife. Frank’s stubbornness, plus a large dose of charm, also led to experimental management at the afflimits Royal Ordnance site in Button Oak to try to save the Grizzled Skipper butterfly. Here he also arranged monthly moth nights during three summers to record night-flying insects, sparking the setting up of a Wyre Forest Moth Group.

Frank’s determination and organisational skills will be sadly missed but the Forest we see today – with sunny rides and open areas alive with wildlife – is his lasting legacy. It’s a reminder that passion, enthusiasm and commitment to the natural world … will take us all a very long way.

It’s a reminder to pass on that passion, enthusiasm and commitment to the natural world – plus of course a strong sense of fun, something that Frank had in abundance – will take us all a very long way.

Mike Williams
Publicity and Marketing Officer
The ‘Making a Stand for the Wood White’ project (made possible by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund) sadly finishes soon. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed working on this successful project and send heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers, partners and supporters who’ve made my last three years so enjoyable.

It’s been hard work but very rewarding to see a nationally rare species of butterfly respond so positively to targeted habitat management works in Shropshire, Hereford and Worcestershire. Since the project started in 2016, Wood White butterflies have been recorded at 36 sites across these counties. Breeding has been observed at nine sites, increasing the number of known breeding colonies in our region from 12 in 2016, to about 20 in 2019. Three of these are due to project-funded reintroductions (two sites in Worcestershire and one in Shropshire).

One of the most eagerly anticipated events was meeting at 6.30am to reintroduce a small number of Wood Whites to Monkwood (one of the Worcestershire sites), hoping that it wouldn’t rain and that the butterflies would remain on site after release. We sat waiting for the day to warm up, hoping to see flying, feeding and egg-laying behaviour and knowing that we’d be returning a few weeks later to search for the equivalent of a ‘needle in a haystack’, Wood White eggs. All this waiting and searching can be excruciating but also – when it works – exhilarating!

Just two years after the initial reintroduction in 2016, almost 300 adults were seen in one day at Monkwood, with 254 eggs discovered during three site visits. The population has expanded, with adults seen at three neighbouring sites (including Monkwood Green).

During 2018, 151 adults were recorded at Blakerridge Wood (the Shropshire site), with peak counts of 34 adults occurring on 3 June and 25 July. Fifty-nine eggs were discovered during two searches. A single individual was recorded near the Blakerridge Wood boundary, again indicating expansion.

Targeted practical works have taken place at ten sites across the region. Working together we’ve created about 3ha of open space at two key Forestry Commission sites (Wigmore Rolls and Bury Ditches), tested a new scallop creation technique, and cleared 3.5ha of coppice and ride-edge at Haugh Wood. Volunteers have improved a further 8km of ride-edge habitat and at least 1ha of open space to benefit Wood White and other priority species. Without our dedicated volunteers across all three counties, none of this would have been possible.

Sixty site visits and habitat assessments were completed on privately owned and partner-owned land, which not only led to the discovery of new occupied sites but also enabled Butterfly Conservation to advise, support and influence future management works on these key butterfly sites.

Astonishingly, about 2400 people have attended and supported over 80 project events across the region since 2016, including 25 conservation work parties. Without them, we’d never have achieved such great results. Special thanks go to volunteers from West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

The end of the project is by no means the end of Wood White conservation – there’s strong commitment from the Branch to continue. Funding bids are in the pipeline and, if successful, we hope to cover more sites. Once again, I’d like to thank everyone for their support and remind people to submit all Wood White sightings using iRecord.

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the Comma

Support your Branch in its 40th year!

We have a range of UK-made products on sale with butterflyartshopuk.com, including mugs, bags and T-shirts. If you search for ‘West Midlands’, you’ll find items carrying a full colour image of a Comma butterfly and others carrying a monochrome 40th anniversary logo on various coloured backgrounds.

Orders come with a free bookmark featuring eight British butterflies and a free card featuring a butterfly.

Telford Millennium Nature Reserve, Ketley

It’s not every day you find treasure on your doorstep. I’ve lived in Telford for over 30 years, so I was more than a little surprised to be asked by Mike Williams to visit a site I’d never heard of ‘behind the Compass Inn in Ketley’.

I imagined a scrappy bit of land squeezed between derelict buildings but instead I found 44 acres of mixed woodland, heathland, ponds, areas ideal for Dingy Skippers, and places that could become great wildflower meadows. My initial delight at the sight of all this was overhauled by despair at the neglected, overgrown state of the place. Could this be restored?

The man who assures me it can is Peter Mcnee from Groundwork. He’s amazingly enthusiastic about this seriously daunting task but he’s going to need help!

He’s trying to recruit a team of volunteers. So, calling all Telford members... If you live within reach of Beverley Road, Ketley (TF2 6SD) and have some time to spare, please contact Peter Mcnee, on petermcnee@groundwork.org.uk or 07730 688924.

This is a project that could produce a jewel of a site.

Chris Littlewood
Herefordshire Moth Highlights of 2018

Last year’s weather extremes meant that Herefordshire’s moths had mixed fortunes... some species failed to appear at all in my Bodenham garden (Small Elephant Hawkmoth and Coxcomb Prominent). Many ground-pupating species, such as Large Yellow Underwing, seemed less numerous, at least to start with. Some scarce species seemed to do well – Gold Spot, Dog’s Tooth and the declining Mouse Moth.

In early April, around Bodenham, there were three records of Small Eggar, which is now seen nearly annually in this part of the Lugg valley. Two Red Sword-grass were trapped on 17 and 21 April. These may have originated from a more upland area. Early May produced the county’s second and third records of Momphra jurrasicola, along with three Buttoned Snouts as they emerged from hibernation.

June brought a number of the recent colonist, Grapholitha lobarzewskii. Also, in Peter Hall’s trap, an unexpected county first was a Plateytes alpinella – a generally rare Crambid normally found only in coastal areas. Possibly dispersed by heat and drought?

July saw the first record of Clouded Magpie for my garden, although it feeds on Elm and there’s plenty of that in the area. Meltema italic, another colonist, occurred regularly through the month and so seems well-established. More surprising were the appearances of Catoptria margaritella and the tiny macro Marsh Oblique-barred, with another of the latter at Whitchurch (second and third county records). These wetland species were possibly displaced by the drought.

Early August produced another wetland wanderer in my garden, a Webb’s Wainscot, an expanding species but a first county record. The tiny Tortrix Pammene spiniana, long thought extinct in the county, appeared three times in my trap. That’s four years in a row now but, as yet, nowhere else in Herefordshire. The lovely Crambid Agriphila latistria was another nice surprise. Late August saw a pleasing second-brood Eyed Hawkmoth, testament to a long hot Summer.

Elsewhere, the Summer produced some great records. John Walshe trapped Dichomeris marginella (Juniper Webber) at Whitchurch, closely followed by the first county record of Cypress Carpet, along with several Ruddy Carpets and Great Oak Beauties. In July, he found, along with the Marsh Oblique-barred mentioned above, a European Corn-borer, several Silky Wainscots (first county records, I believe) and, in Hereford, a lovely Gold Spangle, probably a wanderer from Wales.

In August, John found the first Garden Dart in the county for many years. Peter Hall found the second county site for Bilberry Pug at Wigmore Rolls. It may be elsewhere on heathy sites in the north of the county. Probably the most exciting records of the year occurred in October, when John Walshe and Ray Birchennough trapped the county’s second and third Clifden Nonpareil. This magnificent Blue Riband species has long been sought as a rare migrant (Ray trapped one many years ago in Kent) but is now securing resident status in the Thames Valley and may well spread into our area. We have plenty of Aspen, which is the larval food plant.

There were a few common migrants over the summer: Silver Y, Dark Sword-grass, Rush Veneers and Humming-bird Hawks. Then, with exceptional southerly gales in mid-October, some of the Scilly Isles specialist moths were blown inland. I know of two Palpita vitrealis in mid-November (one in Bodenham, one in Whitchurch), plus a Scarce Bordered Straw in Whitchurch. During the same period, Paddy Matthews in Longtown trapped the county’s first White Speck. Normally a regular on Scilly but very scarce elsewhere, numbers were found in many counties in the UK. Paddy also trapped a Scarce Bordered Straw and Large Wainscot.

The year ended quietly but a newcomer to my garden was the common Mottled Umber.

The year ended quietly but a newcomer to my garden was the common Mottled Umber. As I write, in February, the winds are coming from the South and more migrant moths are arriving. Fingers crossed!

Thanks to all those who sent me their most notable sightings.

Article by Robin Hemming. Photographs by John Walshe. For more Herefordshire news, visit www.westmidlandsbutterflies.org.uk/herefordshire-newsletter
Those of us who look out for butterflies and moths in and around the Malvern Hills – recording them, photographing them or simply noticing them because we care about them – are fortunate because we live in a very special location. The hills themselves offer a variety of habitats for a great many species... but so do our gardens. Those to the east receive early morning sun; those to the west are sunlit until late in the evening. They have different microclimates. But many of them are wildlife-friendly and benefit from their proximity to a nine-mile chain of elevated sanctuaries for wildlife.

When Lady Emily Foley released some of her land for housing in the 19th century, she stipulated that each plot should have a substantial garden area, and also made the planting of trees a requirement. This partly explains why anyone surveying Malvern today, from Worcestershire Beacon or North Hill, looks down at a town that is richly endowed with greenery. Butterflies and moths have responded.

### Butterflies

Of course, there are some species that rarely stray far from their habitats. The Grayling is a butterfly that we’re unlikely to see in our gardens, although one was photographed as recently as 2015 in a neighbouring garden. Similarly, only a few of us can expect to come across a Six-spot Burnet moth, so abundant on the commons and other less cultivated areas. However, an astonishing number of butterflies do arrive in our town. Of the 31 species recorded in last year’s edition of *Birds and Butterflies around the Malverns*, no less than 21 turned up this year in my own garden – a small oasis for wildlife despite being surrounded by buildings in the centre of Great Malvern. From March until October, the following species begin to arrive: Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Comma, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small White, Large White, Green-Veined White, Brimstone, Silver-washed Fritillary, Small Copper and Painted Lady. White-letter Hairstreaks appeared in 2018 – the third year in succession – along with a White Admiral, a Marbled White, a Large Skipper, a Brown Argus and, astonishingly, two Purple Hairstreaks.

### Moths

Maybe less thoroughly manicured and weeded gardens are more likely to have a high species count – especially with day-flying moths – but regular visitors like the Humming-bird Hawk and the Silver Y are likely to be found in any Malvern garden. The White Plume and the Mint moth (*Pyrausta aurata*) often turn up, and the Large Yellow Underwing, although a night-flyer, may be disturbed during the day by many gardeners. The Vapourer moth is fairly regularly seen as a rather exotic-looking caterpillar, though less often as an adult. And, with Alkanet spreading around the hills and into some of our gardens, Scarlet Tigers are now seen more often than in the past.

### Other insects

My garden is visited by a wide range of other day-flying insects. Many Ladybird species appear, though less often than they used to because of the Harlequin’s population explosion. Shield Bugs are rarely absent – I’ve found the Green, Hawthorn, Birch and Red-Legged species this
year. In May, a Cockchafer appeared and then, in June, a small but formidable Rhinoceros beetle. Dark-edged Bee-Flies often visit the apple and pear blossom in spring.

Hoverflies abound – I’ve recorded at least a dozen species, including the very striking Hornet Hoverfly. Along with regular visits from Emperor Dragonflies, Southern Hawkers, Migrant Hawkers, Common Darters and both Beautiful and Banded Demoiselles, my garden gained a thriving population of Large Red Damselflies as soon as I added a very small pond. Damselflies as soon as I added a very small pond.

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Finally, despite the threat from neonicotinoids, many bees still visit. Along with Leaf-cutter bees, Red Mason bees and many species of Bumble bees, Honeys bees appear all over the garden for most of the summer, although numbers vary from year to year, presumably due to Varroa mite infestation and other causes of colony dieback.

I suspect that spiders are well represented in Malvern too; along with the Common Garden Spider, I regularly see Crab Spiders; Zebra Spiders and a good many Labyrinth Spiders, which take up residence in a granite wall that runs along one side of the garden. I have yet to come across a Grasshopper though – I’ve established a grassy untended area in the hope that they will appear. But that’s another story…

For forty years ago, a small front room in a terraced house in Coventry saw the birth of what became the first regional branch of Butterfly Conservation (BC). The co-founders were Terry Green, National Sales Officer of the British Butterfly Conservation Society (BBCS) – as BC was known in those days – and myself, the new kid on the block. Terry looked after the money, I took responsibility for the newsletter, and everything else was split between us. By the end of the first year, we had around 50 members; many of these are still with us today, a testament to the dedication of those involved.

The establishment of branches (ours was quickly followed in other parts of the UK) had a profound and lasting effect on the national charity. A National Development Committee was established, with two members from the West Midlands – Ron Hatton and myself. This committee produced a report that recommended the establishment of three main sub-committees to oversee the charity’s development: Conservation, Education, the late Martyn Davies on Education, the late John Reeve on Publicity and Fundraising. Members of the Branch were present on all three.

Both the Branch and the national charity have come a long way since those far-off days. The best way to find out more about the subsequent history of the Branch is to peruse old copies of The Comma on our website (www.westmidlands-butterflies.org.uk).

Today, we are the largest of all regional branches with 4,800 members; many of these are still with us today, a testament to the dedication of those involved. The establishment of branches (ours was quickly followed in other parts of the UK) had a profound and lasting effect on the national charity. A National Development Committee was established, with two members from the West Midlands – Ron Hatton and myself. This committee produced a report that recommended the establishment of three main sub-committees to oversee the charity’s development: Conservation, Education, the late Martyn Davies on Education, the late John Reeve on Publicity and Fundraising. Members of the Branch were present on all three.

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Today, we are the largest of all
From small beginnings...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

BC’s 32 branches, managing five of the charity’s biggest reserves, publishing a regional magazine that is the envy of many and running an active conservation programme that involves hundreds of volunteers annually and has turned around the fortunes of many of our most threatened butterflies and moths.

Secrets of our success

It’s easy to look back on our history and count the successes, but it’s also worth reflecting on how we’ve reached this point and identifying some of the strengths that have underpinned our success. Three factors seem key and, as we celebrate our 40th year, worth sharing:

1 Our positive message to the outside world, reinforced by our actions, that BC regionally is focusing its efforts on conserving butterflies and moths and their habitats through practical action. Our experience is that the public and our members are more likely to support organisations that are doing more than monitor declines in our wildlife and are instead making a real difference. The acquisition and management of nature reserves is an important part of this appeal, as is striving to obtain good visibility for our work, both through local media and our physical presence at events that attract large numbers of people.

2 Our record of working in partnership with other organisations and demonstrating that we can achieve more by doing so. Our three reserves in Worcestershire are managed jointly with the Wildlife Trust to both organisations’ benefit. We have similarly productive relationships with other county wildlife trusts, the Forestry Commission, Natural England, English Heritage and the National Trust, as well as farmers and other agencies. Species such as Wood White, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Grayling and Brown Hairstreak have all been major beneficiaries of working in partnership.

3 Our success in developing work alongside BC staff in the region. We were the first region to see the recruitment of a paid member of staff. That proved to be the catalyst for many new projects, partnerships and successful joint working over the years. The ‘Making a Stand for the Wood White’ project is just one of many examples where paid staff, the Branch, other organisations and volunteers have worked effectively together to achieve some great results.

Looking to the future

Many new challenges face conservation organisations, including the Branch. Financial resources are likely to remain tight, making it more important than ever for charities to build membership and continually find new volunteers. Staff based in our Head Office can only achieve so much and, if BC is to move forward in the way that we all hope, greater emphasis must be placed on the development of strong regional staff teams working alongside branches.

As pressure on land continues to grow, butterflies and moths need our help more than ever. We now know that the main threat they face is fragmentation and isolation of habitat, so we must work to link up some of their remaining strongholds – landscape-level conservation. It’s clear that a joined-up landscape needs joined-up thinking and landscape-level conservation requires staff and volunteers to work together across boundaries.

The success of BC still depends on the commitment of its volunteers and branches. Our challenge in the years ahead is to find new ways to underpin this effectively, which will require more members and possibly a reallocation of resources away from Head Office and towards regional development and staffing.

It would be great to have a crystal ball…”

Article by Mike Williams
Publicity and Marketing Officer
The evening, going towards sunset and into dusk, gives us a chance to get closer to butterflies as they roost – though of course we must make the greatest effort not to disturb their special sleeping spots. Butterflies are like clockwork wound up by the sun and, when that source of energy dips and finally sinks beneath the horizon, they will often find the tips of grasses or heather and cling on, whatever wind or breeze is about.

Framed by sunsets

Sometimes, as with the Silver-studded Blue at Prees Heath, great clumps of them settle together on the blossoming bell heather. There is then a chance to sit close and capture a moment of stillness in wonderful light. 2018 was one of the best-ever years for this species at Prees Heath, so I was fortunate to have a few wonderful visits there, staying late enough to catch the sun setting behind that perfect purple heather and then a posing male-female pair in fantastic orange dusk light. Let’s hope we have another good show this year – this species really is a symbol of the hard and dedicated conservation work that has been done at this site and at sites all around the West Midlands.

The other spot that I visited repeatedly this year was the Stiperstones, where, after a couple of seasons searching, I finally found the roosting sites of Common Blue, Small Copper and Small Heath (but not Grayling – if there’s a Grayling roost expert out there, I would love to know where they go at night). The Common Blue loves the swaying upland grasses and heather. A glorious butterfly is even more glorious when seen against the sun falling on the distant Welsh Hills. At last light, this small butterfly really comes into its own and using a wide-angle lens showed the habitat in which it rests at this time of day. I was also able to frame a Small Heath within the circle of the sun – no Photoshop, just this photographer lying on the ground and working hard to frame both light and butterfly delight. As the dusk deepened, I carefully used a bit of fill flash on the same butterfly to show intricate macro detail.

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the Comma

Prees Heath - Silver-studded Blue

Lit by the stars
But it’s worth staying even later. After developing new photographic techniques over the last two years and with some attachments on my camera and lens, I was able to show the unique context of Common Blue in the heath with the flare of the leaning Milky Way as backdrop. This was all contained in one single long exposure with the goal of showing both the habitat and the distant dreams of these beautiful butterflies.

Article and photographs by Andrew Fusek Peters
www.andrewfusekpeters.com

A Flutter in the Past

PART 3

The last part of Mel Mason’s review of Malvern butterflies brings us up to date

Fritillaries fluctuate
In 1986 [R1], High Brown Fritillary (HBF) ‘had a good year’. ‘The colony south of Swinyard Hill and into Eastnor Estate is of major national importance’. Also, ‘Matthew Oates … while studying High Brown Fritillaries using a capture-release technique, regularly found Dark Green Fritillary (DGF) among them (approximately 2%)’. The report notes ‘the increasing presence of collectors in the area. One person was found in charge of two children carrying about twelve HBF in a killing bottle’. It seems Victorian habits die hard!

By 1987 [R2], HBF was in ‘satisfactory numbers’. ‘With a national decline of this species we are privileged to have one of its two major strongholds’. However, lack of bracken bruising in Eastnor Park ‘… may reduce the population next season’. Only ‘… one or two [DGF] were identified this year’.

The 1980s had regular sightings of HBF around Swinyard, Gullet Quarry, Ragged Stone, Eastnor and Chase End [R3]. In 1988 [R4], records had ‘reduced to 10% of last year’s numbers, hopefully due to weather conditions’. As part of habitat management, ‘Matthew Oates suggests clearing breaks in bracken adjacent to breaks cleared in previous year, rather than in same place’.

A hand-written summary table in 1989 [R5] lists sightings on the Swinyard Hill Transect: 156 in 1987, 32 in 1988 and 17 in 1989. Despite this decline, Jeremy Thomas wrote that the Malverns was ‘one of the few places where HBF can be seen in any numbers… It is heartening to know that the management of the area is specifically designed to encourage this and other Fritillaries’ [R6]. However, in 2014 [R7] he wrote: ‘it was evidently a much harder task than was envisaged in those optimistic days.’

HBF recovered in the 1990s. By 1994 [R3], ‘numbers are well up’ on the past three years (18 Swinyard, 19 Eastnor and 14 Chase End) and that ‘maybe present

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Scarlet Tiger may be benefiting from the spread of its larval food plant, Alkanet (a garden escape) across the lower slopes of the Hills (Mel Mason)
management is beginning to have some effect’. Then, in 1995 [R8], the Chase End Hill Transect recorded 129 during seven transect walks in June and July. Digby Wood wrote post-2000 [R9] that ‘The overall picture is one of decline, the ‘95 peak being only 50% of the ‘87 peak and the current trough being the lowest ever’. In 2000, there was a ‘Slight recovery on the Malvern Hills but still below average’ and ‘not recorded again at Chase End (last record in 1998)’[R10].

In 2004, ‘searches… again only found HBF on the Eastnor Estate’ … ‘the new transect from Peacock Cottage to the caravan park found HBF in good numbers’.

Grayling loses out

Grayling has been recorded on the hills since 1853, but a Malvern Hills Conservation (MHC) Report in 1988 [R4] states ‘No Grayling seen’ – very surprising and likely to reflect a lack of effective monitoring. Subsequent years show records of this species as far south as Gullet Quarry. In 1991 [R12], the Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trust [WNCT] wrote ‘The species is now scarce at inland sites and something of a surprise to country newcomers’. In 1994 [R3], Mike Williams asked for a survey of Grayling on the Hills. Eventually, two habitat surveys were completed on the northern hills in 2007 and 2015 [R15], highlighting a contraction of 5.5 miles in range.

Now restricted to North Hill’s eastern slopes, the population and distribution of this species since 2009 is well documented [R16]. MHT organises graying, contract work and volunteers to help to control the invasion of scrub up the slopes in recent decades. Limited funding is available through a partnership with the Worcestershire and Malvern Library Archive Publications.

However, in 2004, Sue Clarke (a contractor for BC) ‘undertook a survey of the HBF habitat in the southern hills in the spring. She found lots of suitable HBF breeding habitat from British Camp to Chase End’ [R1].

Similarly, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary declined up to 1989 [R5] [SPBF: 81 in 1987, 34 in 1988 and 56 in 1989; PBF: 41 in 1987, 6 in 1988 and 20 in 1989]. By 1994 [R3], ‘no PBF were recorded this year at all’, although ‘19 SPBF were recorded in Eastnor’ Transect records from Eastnor, Castlemorton and Chase End for these species show similar trends to High Brown, with populations peaking in 1994/5 [R12].

The last individual sightings [R13] of PBF and HBF were in 1998 and 2008 respectively, but two SPBF were recorded as recently as 2017 on Chase End Hill. DGF is recorded in low numbers, more recently two west of Swinyard Hill [2017] and one on North Hill [2018] [R14].

Scarlet Tiger gains ground

The recording of an attractive day-flying moth in the 1994 Report [R2] indicates a distinct change over the last 20 years. Four Scarlet Tigers (Callimorpha dominula) were recorded by Peter Holmes from his garden at Malvern Wells – the only other record for this spectacular moth was one swatted by a tennis racket and given to the late Jack Green in the 1960s’. This was a harbinger of things to come. Today, this moth is common and more widespread. In contrast, Wood Tiger (Parasemia plantaginis) and Garden Tiger (Arcia caja) are now far less common. However, Jersey Tiger (Euplagia quadripunctaria) is slowly spreading north in a warming climate – with an August 2017 sighting in Worcestershire [Steve Whitehouse] – and Ruby Tiger (Phragmatobia fuliginosa) remains both common and widespread.

Back to the future…

An impressive 47 local butterfly species in 1887 had fallen to 40 species by the 1960s. Of species now extinct in the UK, local records show four Camberwell Beauty in 1966-97, five Large Tortoiseshell in 1966-82 and one Monarch in 1968. Purple Emperor was noted in Gullet Quarry and Eastnor in the early 1960s, while Wood White and Grizzled Skipper were recorded regularly until the 1980s (and the latter photographed in 2018 at nearby Leigh Sinton Fishing Lake – the first record in more than 30 years).

As recently as 1991 [R12:p58-59], the WNCT wrote ‘The Hills are excellent for butterflies with colonies of HBF, DGF and PBF, Wood White and Grayling’. But, by the beginning of the 21st century, local losses included Wall, PBF, SPBF and HBF. Nevertheless, the Hills and Commons remain species-rich, with up to 33 of the 59 butterfly species native to the UK. Butterfly populations and distributions fluctuate with climate, habitat management and host-parasite cycles. Even so, the overall trend in the Malverns (as nationally) in the past 40 years shows decreases in both abundance and occurrence [R17].

As the Malvern Hills are largely composed of igneous rocks and acidic flora, they will never attract chalk-loving species. However, earlier records show that they have the potential to support other species still found nearby, including Dingy Skipper and Wood White.

More recent records and habitat surveys clearly show that appropriate funding and habitat management could enable the reintroduction of several once-common species, such as PBF, SPBF and even HBF.

Article by Mel Mason WMBC Malvern Representative Butterfly Group Recorder
From crops to butterfly counts at Prees Heath Common

When all the campaigning and hard work starts to pay off.

It’s now over 12 years since Butterfly Conservation purchased the western half of Prees Heath Common, and started to re-create heathland on land that had been in arable cultivation for around 40 years previously, being used to grow potatoes and other crops. The site was purchased to conserve the Silver-studded Blue (SSB) at its sole remaining location in the Midlands, and our Branch led the campaign to secure it. Much work has been carried out for the benefit of all heathland wildlife and visitors since then, and it’s time to consider how this project is progressing with specific regard to the SSB.

Setting up the transect

In 2009, we set up a UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme transect on the reserve, walking a designated route once a week from the beginning of April to the end of September and recording all butterfly species seen within an imaginary 5m-wide box. Volunteers were trained and walked the transect when we were not able to do it. The transect consists of 12 sections, designed to include all the different habitats on the reserve, and it provides a sample rather than a complete count of the number of butterflies present.

Re-creating the heathland

Three of these sections include areas where we have tried to re-create heathland by deep ploughing to invert the soil profile, applying sulphur to lower the pH levels and spreading heather brash containing seed sourced from Cannock Chase or the Long Mynd.

The Hangars field (6.5ha, and including Section 7 of the transect) was the first area to receive these interventions, in 2007. The East of Runway Field heathland area (6.5ha, and including Section 3 of the transect) was the second area to be treated, in 2008, but, as the initial result was copious quantities of weedy species and very little heather, further work had to be carried out, and more heather seed was sown in 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2014. Work on the Corner field (2.5ha, and including Section 11 of the transect) was started in 2010, with additional heather sowings in 2012 and 2014. Heather was not the only seed applied to these areas, as various wildflower and grass seeds were also sown.

Waiting for results

The SSB has a uniquely close symbiotic relationship with ants, the Black Ant (Lasius niger) at Prees Heath, to the extent that if ants are not present there will be no SSBs. So ants had to become established on these areas and, following 40 years of arable cultivation and then all our interventions, this was clearly going to take time. It was decided to let them colonise these areas naturally rather than attempt any translocation, as we knew they would do this once these areas became suitable for their ecology, and that the butterflies would then follow.

And so it has proved over time. The following table and graph show how the SSB has colonised these three separate areas. Section 7 on the transect, the Hangars field and the first area to be treated, is now supporting the largest number of SSBs of the three areas, with 174 being recorded on the transect in 2018. The first evidence that they were breeding there came on 31 May 2014 when Natalie Kay, an MSc student, photographed a SSB caterpillar there, attended by ants. On the morning of 27 June 2018, two of our volunteers, Derek and Mary Sparkes, counted systematically an impressive 700 SSBs on the whole of the Hangars field. Numbers on Section 3 are progressing well. Section 11 of the transect is yet to record numbers in double figures but, as this was the last area to receive these treatments, we can hope that numbers there will increase in the near future. Skylarks are also using all these areas for ground nesting.

Looking to the future

So re-creating heathland suitable for the SSB takes a long time, and things do not always go smoothly. But the restoration of Prees Heath Common is a long term, cutting edge and ambitious project, and it never was going to be a quick fix. More work is yet to be done.

We have been told that the SSB used to be all over Prees Heath Common before arable cultivation started in the 1960s, and not just confined to certain areas. What we’re doing there will hopefully be for the benefit of the flagship species, the SSB, as well as all heathland wildlife and visitors over many generations to come.

Meanwhile, our thanks to all our volunteers.

Article by Stephen Lewis, Prees Heath Reserve Manager and Lucy Lewis, Branch Treasurer.
Summer walks in the Malverns

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of WMBC, the transect recorders of the Malvern Butterfly Group are inviting members and volunteers from the local community and across the West Midlands to join one or more butterfly walks around the Malvern Hills.

Local recorders walk 14 transect routes once a week from April to September and submit all records online to UKBMS – up to 30,000 a year. In addition, over 50 casual recorders submit their sightings to iRecord directly or via the local recorder – up to 10,000 a year.

This is an opportunity to see up to 30 butterfly species and various day-flying moths in one of the most scenic regions in the UK, and to take part in recording them with the help of the local recorder. Each walk will take two to three hours, giving time to identify the species seen.

A free guide, The Butterflies around the Malvern Hills, will be available on each walk.

Places are limited to small groups on each walk and booking is essential. Send your name and email address, with the number and date of the walk, to Mel Mason at mbg.records@btinternet.com. Note: Email addresses will be passed to the walk leaders, who will then contact you by email with final details of the venue and time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>North Hill - Green Hairstreak</td>
<td>Liz Lloyd</td>
<td>Wed 12 June</td>
<td>Very steep slope on good paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>North Hill - Grayling</td>
<td>Mel Mason</td>
<td>Thur 11 July</td>
<td>Very steep slopes, some scrambling over rocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pinnacle Hill</td>
<td>Jess Sly</td>
<td>Tue 2 July</td>
<td>Steep slopes on good paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tue 9 July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Poolbrook Common</td>
<td>Alison Uren</td>
<td>Thur 20 June</td>
<td>Large meadow on good paths</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thur 18 July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>St Wulstan’s Local Nature Reserve</td>
<td>Dave Taft</td>
<td>Mon 22 July</td>
<td>Woodland and meadows on good level paths</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mon 29 July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hangman’s Hills</td>
<td>Roger Bates</td>
<td>Sat 13 July</td>
<td>Steep slopes mainly on good paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Silver-washed Fritillary Walk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sat 20 July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We spent two weeks in Provence in June 2017. It was not primarily a butterfly holiday but rather a number of walks in the countryside spotting, identifying and, when possible, photographing butterflies as we went along, as well as enjoying some of the cultural highlights on offer in this historic region. Some days were spent with the butterflies, some in the footsteps of Cezanne, Picasso and Van Gogh, and some visiting the old towns and main streets of the region, as well as enjoying some of the cultural and gastronomic delights of Provence.

**Week 1**

For the first week, we were based at La Destrousse in the Département of Bouches-du-Rhône. A walk in the hills behind our accommodation on the first day produced an impressive list, with some species becoming very familiar in the days ahead – Southern White Admiral, False Ilex Hairstreak, Spotted Fritillary and Spanish Gatekeeper. And we were soon trying, and often failing, to distinguish between two lookalikes, Provençal Fritillary and Heath Fritillary. Before starting out, we’d been in touch with Roger Gibbons, who has expert knowledge of the area and its butterflies. He told us that the best place to see Provençal butterflies is in the département of Var, to the east of Aubagne – Provence is divided into six départements – so we decided to give it a try. A 10-mile hike in Var, in the area where the films Jean de Florette and its sequel Manon des Sources were made, took us into some varied countryside, with plenty of butterflies on offer. They included Black-veined White, Bath White, Oberthur’s Grizzled Skipper, Western Marbled White, Provençal Short-tailed Blue, Osiris Blue, Escher’s Blue and shedloads of Southern White Admirals.

The following day, again in Var, we walked around a site known as the House of the 4 Brothers. While chasing after a white butterfly that refused to stop, possibly a Wood White, Stephen caught sight of a butterfly sitting on a branch. To his amazement, it was Europe’s largest butterfly, a Two-tailed Pasha, albeit a rather worn specimen with very little left by way of tails. It stayed for one photo and then took off. Later that day, walking along a path flanked by Strawberry trees (Arbutus unedo), its larval food plant, we saw more overhead – majestic and very big. Other highlights of the day included Marbled, Knapweed and Niobe Fritillaries, along with Dusky Heath.

Our last walk in Var was in the grasslands at the foot of the Sainte-Baume limestone massif, where we saw Mazaron Blue, Adonis Blue, Large Wall Brown, Ilex Hairstreak and Pearly Heath. We then climbed up to the monastery in the cliff face, which has a chapel in a natural grotto next to it; this was both exhausting and, disappointingly, butterfly-free.

**Week 2**

For the second week, we were based further west, near St Martin-de-Crau. Two trips to the Camargue were mainly centred on birdlife, including the famous Flamingos and various Herons, as well as the Camargue horses. There were some butterfly species to be seen, however, including Lulworth Skipper, Great Banded Grayling, Scarce Swallowtail and Southern Gatekeeper. On a walk further north in the wooded hills of the Parc National d’Alpilles, we saw Fiery Clearwing, Two-tailed Pasha, Spotted Fritillary and Red Underwing Skipper, as well as a small flock of Crested Tits. Nearer to the farmhouse where we stayed, Lucy found a resplendent Fiery Clearwing moth.

The last walk was a real oddity in terms of both habitat and weather. It had turned unseasonably hot (mid-30s) but with a very strong wind as well, and we went to explore the Crau, a rare and fragile habitat of stony grassland steppe. The wind meant we saw next to nothing, but it was one of those places you felt was unlike anywhere else, and we were glad we visited it.

So, all in all, it was a wonderful holiday. Huge numbers of butterflies, with several species seen by the dozen, especially in the first week, and, although we saw no rarities, great fun in a lovely part of the world.

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**Butterfly Walks in Provence**

Providence in early summer: scents of thyme, rosemary and lavender as you walk in the beautiful hills, heady stuff indeed – who could resist?

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**Authors:** Article and photographs by Stephen Lewis, Prees Heath Reserve Manager, and Lucy Lewis, Branch Treasurer.
Butterfly recording in 2018

Results and coverage are both up, but more records are always needed

Transect records
- 65 transects walked
- 114,723 butterflies counted
- Results 20% better than 2017
- 47 transects adequately covered
- 37 transects have been walked for five years

After a poor year in 2017, most species recovered well in 2018, with remarkable figures for many Lycaenidae (Brown Argus improved most to become joint Butterfly of the Year). Over the past five years, Blues showed significant increases but Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell showed significant decreases.

Casual records
- 52,124 records
- 3332 recorders
- 40 species
- 134 10km squares

For the first time, our Branch area has been adequately covered with most 10km squares showing 14–32 species (22–40 species over the last five years). This enables us to identify squares in which new species have been recorded and plan conservation work for them.

Casual records combine numbers from transects, iRecord and the Big Butterfly Count. Remember to log your own sightings on iRecord (www.brc.ac.uk/irecord). You can record individual sightings on maps of key sites.

For more detailed results, including trends and distributions for other species, visit www.westmidlandsbutterflies.org.uk/recording

Gainers 2017-18
- Brown Argus
- Small White
- Common Blue
- Large White
- Vaillant
- Green-veined White
- Dark Green Fritillary

Losers 2017-18
- Red Admiral
- Brown Hairstreak
- Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- Meadow Brown
- Small/Essex Skipper
- Comma

40th anniversary events
Field trip, South Wales: Sat 29 Jun, 11am, High Brown Fritillary
Garden Open Day: Sun 30 Jun, 11am–4pm, ‘From Oilseed Rape to Orchids’, Mr & Mrs K Turner, The Red House, Eldersfield, Worcs. Own picnic lunch, drinks and cakes provided.
Field trip, South Wales: Fri–Sun 5–7 Jul, Members weekend.
Wyre Forest Guided Walk: Wed 10 Jul, 11am, followed by Big Butterfly Picnic, meet Hawkbatch car park, B4194
Malvern Garden Open Day: See page 10–12
Malvern Hills Guided Walks: See page 24–25
National AGM: 16 Nov, Mercure Shrewbury Albrighton Hall Hotel & Spa, SY4 3AG, 01939 291000, H6629@occ.co.uk
Advance booking required on the above events: Contact: Mike Mason on 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com
Northern Ireland Trip: Mon–Thu 3–6 Jun, only a few places left. Contact: Mel Mason, 01684 565700 or malverngrayling@btinternet.com

Big Butterfly Count
19 Jul–11 Aug: Branch events marked (BBC), www.bigbutterflycount.org for other events
Branch Stall at RHS Spring Festival, Malvern
Thu–Sun, 9–12 May, 9am–6pm: Displays, films, pollinating plant advice. English Heritage event (admission charge non-EH members).
Malvern Garden Open Day: See page 10–12
Malvern Hills Guided Walks: See page 24–25
National AGM: 16 Nov, Mercure Shrewbury Albrighton Hall Hotel & Spa, SY4 3AG, 01939 291000, H6629@occ.co.uk
Advance booking required on the above events: Contact: Mike Mason on 01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com
Northern Ireland Trip: Mon–Thu 3–6 Jun, only a few places left. Contact: Mel Mason, 01684 565700 or malverngrayling@btinternet.com

Countrytastic, Three Counties Showground
Thu 18 Apr, 10am–5pm: BC stall, family day out in Malvern. Advanced tickets at www.countrytastic.co.uk (none on the day).
Field Studies Council (FSC) courses
Butterfly and moth courses at two West Midlands centres (Bishops Wood and Preston Monford), www.field-studies-council.org

Bloomng Gardens at Witley Court
Sat 22 Jun: Butterfly stall, guided walks, pollinating plant advice. English Heritage event (admission charge non-EH members).

Brown Hairstreak Week at Grafton Wood
17–26 Aug: Guides available from 2pm daily, contact John Tilt: 01386 792458 or john.tilt2@btopenworld.com

Butterfly and moth ID workshop
Sat 13 Jul, 9.30am–3pm: Old Hills near Callow End, Worcs. Tutor Mel Mason, book at sadie@worcestershiwel lifefrust.org
Farm Open Day and Brown Hairstreak hunt
Sat 10 Aug (BBC): Lower Hollowfields Farm, near Hanbury, Worcs. Leader: Gert Corfield. Details www.wildhollowfields.co.uk

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Surveys
17 Jun, 24 Jun: 10am–3.30pm, Sherbrook Valley, Cannock Chase, meet in car park opposite The White House, Marquis Drive, Cannock, WS12 4PR (SJ 994161). Contact Rhona Gaddard: 01746 762364 or rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

Hartlebury Common Green Hairstreak Hunt
Sun 19 May, 2pm: Leader Mike Lomax, meet at Wilden Top car park, Wilden, near Walperton, off B4193 (SO827713). Joint event with the Hartlebury Common Local Group.

Haugh Wood Guided Walk (BBC)
Sat 20 Jul, 2pm (BBC): meet in reserve car park, minor road Mordiford–Woolhope (SO592365), tea and cake at Woodbines. Checkley (10 mins away). Contact Bob Hall: 01432 850623 or randphall@gmail.com

Llanymynech Rocks Guided Walk
Sat 4 May, 2pm: joint event BC North Wales. Meet at car park on Underhill Lane, Pant (SJ272219). Leader: Simon Spencer, 01691 648339 or cerisi@btinternet.com

Moth Trapping Events
Sat 15 Jun, 9am: Ashwood Nurseries, Kingswinford, Moth Morning with Tom Woodall and Mike Williams (01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

Please use iRecord

The Comma
Please use iRecord

Kingswinford, Moth Morning with
Tom Woodall and Mike Williams (01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com)
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Sun 26 May, 10am: Milldale Circular walk, 4 miles, steep terrain, good footwear, packed lunch, meet Milldale carpark (SK135547), D6 GE (phone/sat nav reception intermittent) – Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Wall Brown, Catus Forester, Marsh Fug, Speckled Yellow.
Sun 14 Jun, 10am: Milldale Circular walk (as above) – Dark Green and Silver-washed Fritillary.

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Open Day
Sun 5 May, 10am–5pm: Tiddesley Wood, near Pershore (follow signs), butterfly stall, guided walks, www.tiddesley.org.uk

Wood White Events
Contact Rhona Goddard: 01746 762364 or rgoddard@butterfly-conservation.org

STOP PRESS
- new sites guide just out -
urban and rural walks in the West Midlands, complete with photos and maps.

Available May 2019, £5.95 each + £1.50 p&p, cheques payable to Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch. Order from WMBC, Annesbrook, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport, DY13 8TB

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

Sun 23 Jun: Monkwood, 9am Moth Breakfast (bacon rolls available) and 11am Butterfly Walk with Mike Southall and Mike Williams (01299 824860 or wmbutterflies@gmail.com) Sun 29 Jun, 9am: Ewyas Harold Common trappers and recorders, meet at the burning ground (SO382299). Sun 9am: big reveal and moth breakfast for anyone interested, contact Robin Hemmings (robinhemmings@btinternet.com) or Ian Hart (Yellowwattle@aol.com)

Prees Heath Common Reserve
Meet on the access track opposite Steel Heath, turning off A49. Contact Stephen Lewis: 07900 886809 or phwarden@sky.com
Wed 29 May, 10.30am–12.30pm: Hunt for Silver-studded Blue caterpillars attended by ants
Sun 30 Jun: 2pm Silver-studded Blue Guided Walk, 10.30am–4pm Central Tower Open Day
Wed 31 Jul, 10.30am (BBC): Ragwort and Birch clearance
Fri 27 Sep, 7pm: Moth Night
Sat 28 Sep, 8am: Moth Breakfast
Wed 9 Oct, 10.30am: Birch clearance and Bell Heather seed harvest
Wed 13 Nov, 10.30am: Multi-tasking
Wed 11 Dec, 10.30am–12.30pm: Litter pick

Sandwell Valley Naturalists Joint Events
Contact Jay Stevens: 01384 372397 or joystevens@blueyonder.co.uk
Sat 4 May, 1pm: Emperor Moths, Sutton Park, meet in Banner’s Gate car park (parking charge likely)
Sat 25 May, 11am: Green Hairstreak, Portway Hill, Rowley Hills – recorded for 7 years but how common is it? Meet inside Bury Hill Park entrance, short distance north of Cookhouse and Pub on A44123

Staffordshire Guided Walks
Booking required: John Bryan on 01782 541870 or Jahnkbryan15@aol.com

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– Malvern Hills – Mel Mason melmason@btinternet.com 01684 565700

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I bought this book after reading a short quote from it on my local Butterfly Conservation Facebook group.

It’s not a field guide and it doesn’t contain any photographs or colour illustrations, but I think we all have plenty of that type of book already. This is a book about the natural and social histories of butterflies.

It takes us from the early days of collecting in the 1700s, through the frenzy of Victorian obsession and up to the recent extinction of three British butterflies and the subsequent efforts to preserve our remaining species. Rainbow Dust is packed with information. From the early days of the Aurelian Society, the story of Lady Glanville and her fritillary, the cultural references to butterflies in art and literature, how they were named and by whom. The descriptions of clouds of butterflies in sunlit meadows were evocative and, as I read it in late autumn, had me longing for spring once more.

One passage that stopped me in my tracks was: ‘Nature would probably get on without butterflies. Unlike bees, they are not vital pollinators. Unlike moths, they probably do not have any significant role as bird [or bat] food. Unlike worms, they are not energetic recyclers… The planet does not “need” butterflies any more than it needs whales, hawks or primroses – or humans for that matter… We do not need them, nor, in the natural order of things do they need us. But we care about them all the same, because that is the way we are.’

I so wanted to love this book but, while I enjoyed it and found it interesting – indeed parts of it were fascinating and had me turning many corners over for future reference and making notes to remind me to search for paintings later – I found it to be more about people and less about butterflies. It’s clearly written by someone with a passion and huge respect for butterflies, but I didn’t find it engaging. It didn’t have a natural flow for me and I wasn’t longing to pick it up each evening, or not until the last quarter of the book or so, when I reached Chapter 11, Endgame, which I devoured.

Overall, I’d give it four stars out of five.

Article by Julia Saunders

FROM THE EDITOR I’d like to continue to carry a book review on the back cover of each issue of The Comma. Newly published titles are ideal but particularly interesting or useful books from the past are also worth highlighting. Do drop me a line if you have a title you’d like to review.