

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 116 | WINTER 2022/23



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames
Branch**



www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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Cover images: Top left: Purple Hairstreak ovum ©Peter Eeles; Top right: Speckled Wood pupa ©Butterfly Conservation; Bottom left: Viburnum Button ©David Hastings; Bottom right: Peacock ©Derek Haynes

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

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Editorial

A very warm welcome to *Hairstreak* – and **Season's Greetings** to you and yours.

One of perhaps just a few reasons to be 'cheerful' during these often-gloomy winter months is the knowledge that spring is – optimistically – not too far away, with the prospect of a few early hibernators to delight us once more... like this Comma, spotted late last January in Bucks:



Of course, there's much work to be done meanwhile, so do please look elsewhere in this newsletter for ways in which you can help give our butterflies and moths the best possible chance to thrive... and – in some cases – to survive.

Or you could venture out to look for some of nature's offerings – like those featured on the front cover. We all recognise the Peacock, which may appear on the wing on warm, sunny days (or you may come across one 'asleep' in your shed?). The *Viburnum* Button moth, however, could be more difficult to

find... the second generation which also hibernates as an adult. Purple Hairstreak eggs can be found on (just under) buds of low-hanging oak branches. The Speckled Wood is unique among British butterflies in that it can overwinter as either a larva or pupa. By searching (on hands and knees, perhaps!) the latter may be found suspended beneath a grass blade.

Looking forwards, we wonder what 2023 may have in store? Will we have a long winter, a wet spring or another hot and dry summer... like last year? Any of these can impact on the well-being of our species, one way or another.

UTB wishes you a productive new year: whether that be searching for the immature stages of a species, getting that 'perfect' photo, joining a work party, recording your sightings, discovering a new species, joining an organised walk... the opportunities are almost endless. But whatever you set out to achieve in 2023, have fun doing it.

And, finally, to say that we are due to publish 4 editions of the newsletter for 2023 (including this one), to correspond with the (astronomical) seasons. We hope you approve! Always check the Contents page for the next edition's copy deadline date.

Derek Haynes

Please send contributions for future issues of the newsletter to newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk, and attach any photographs as individual .jpg (or similar) files or provide a link to either a cloud-based storage location or to a location provided by an email file transfer agent. Microsoft Word is the preferred hosting word processor for all articles (ideally using a 'standard' font). Thank you. **NEXT DEADLINE IS 10th MARCH 2023**

View from the Chair

Chairman's Notes Dec 22

The late autumn of 2022 has been very odd, with incredibly mild weather and many of us enjoying late-flying butterflies right into November (see article 'Unseasonal Visitors' on page 32).

Of course, those that enjoy moths will tell you that they keep going even now, when, finally, it is so cold that butterflies are either hibernating as adults - or in an earlier life stage.

Do you remember Peter Cuss's advice that those of us wanting a 'lepidopteran' fix can go into broadleaf woodland at this time of year and find moths by torchlight, as some species' mating strategy is to rest on tree trunks at about shoulder height. Sounds like a great way to burn off a few calories after the likely over-indulgence at Christmas. And if that isn't quite radical enough, we learn that a torch that shines ultraviolet light will make the hibernating eggs and larvae of various species, and pupae of the Purple Emperor, glow. Sounds positively psychedelic, and just the thing for a mild, dark evening between Christmas and the New Year. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/psychedelic-surprise-for-a-night-time-garden-stroll-vg3k0rxzh>

Speaking of New Year brings us to resolutions. As I write, The UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) has only just started, but if you hear anything of it, you will observe that we (yes, you and me) must do a whole

lot more to protect the UK's and the world's biodiversity. Yesterday, as PM Sunak declared that the UK will open a coal mine(!), the UN told us that *"We are losing nature – biodiversity – at the fastest rate in human history. Around a million species of plants and animals are heading towards extinction. As human activities destroy and degrade more natural places, nature is becoming more and more fragmented."*

After COP26, I wrote that I was unimpressed with all the pledges to 'think about doing something later'. I hope that there will be more action to conserve life... especially the plants and smallest creatures on which everything else depends.

If this newsletter arrives with you in December (and the electronic version should); we will already have completed 23 winter conservation tasks, with 21 more to come between January and March. The success of these events depends to a large extent on members coming along to help. Your efforts to conserve habitat will make a huge difference (however long you stay at the event - some just do half days as they think 10.00-15.00 a bit too much!). Obviously, as a conservation society this work to maintain habitats is our primary focus. I'm so grateful to all the members that turn out with us (and our fellow conservation societies) to help keep them in good condition. For details, please see <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events>

Reports on our conservation tasks feature at our Twitter feed: <https://twitter.com/UpperThamesBC> and on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Butterflies.Berkshire.Buckinghamshire.Oxfordshire/> and there is everything else related to the branch on our website at: <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk> and also members' photos on the UTB Instagram pages at: <https://www.instagram.com/upperthamesbc/>

Our committee gained a new committee member, Peter Philp, who you possibly met on one of the very many guided walks he organised (among other things) for the UTB. Help him and other members by offering to lead a walk at a site you enjoy.

And perhaps our fairly new Editor (Derek) will say more of this, but he has persuaded the committee to move to four *Hairstreak* newsletters p.a. - which is a pertinent place to remind members that three copies of a paper version of *Hairstreak* cost us more to manufacture and post than your subscription provides. Unless we are specifically asked to send paper copies, we will send you four electronic copies p.a. Note that we can only do that if you told Butterfly Conservation that you are prepared to receive emails from them. If you want paper copies, please consider sending a donation to cover the far larger costs of paper versions (approx. £5 above your subscription rate p.a.); and thank you to the various generous donations already received from members to help us supply them.



Wendy Tobitt grew and planted foodplants for endangered moths

I would like to thank each of you that submitted records, grew plants, led a guided walk, helped with a survey, organised something for us, came along

to a conservation task, gave a talk, or attended a UTB Zoom meeting and showed us your support in 2022.

Thanks, too, for your expert involvement with many other organisations, as we have the experience and above all, the data, to truly inform their decision-making about habitat management.

However, despite our amazing recording and conservation efforts, almost everyone tells me that they see fewer butterflies and moths each year; and in each issue I ask that you please consider how you could help them recover their numbers and expand their ranges.

Please consider attending the conservation tasks and the training sessions we run in the spring. Check our website Events page regularly and join us in the field; those already there would love to see you soon.

I hope to see you there. We can enjoy butterflies and moths far more if we do so together!

Nick Bowles

Join the 2023 ‘Meet-and-Greet’ Army!

Do you remember feeling, when you first joined Butterfly Conservation, that your membership was all a bit impersonal, and somewhat remote from everybody else?

Have you ever wanted to get a little more involved with the activities of Butterfly Conservation, but can't seem to find a suitable way in? Well, a new initiative could be the answer!

Starting in 2023, Upper Thames Branch will be looking to establish a network of volunteer members to “meet and greet” other members (at their request) on a one-to-one basis: to meet up with them somewhere locally where butterflies can be seen, to “talk butterflies” with them ... and to make them feel welcome.

What's behind this new initiative? Well, we have a lot more members than ever attending the many guided walks that are available to them every year. We want to try out the idea that some members, whether new or established, would find some personal one-to-one interaction more appealing than attending an organized event - or at least would appreciate such an opportunity. Maybe they feel they don't know enough, or are a little lacking in confidence; maybe they just aren't comfortable meeting new people *en masse*.

The primary aim of the initiative is social interaction between individual members. The shared interest in butterflies (and moths) is necessary, but secondary. In other words, enthusiasm is worth more

than expertise (although expertise is great!), and a local site is worth more than a Site of Special Scientific Interest (unless it's also local!).

As a matter of interest, Upper Thames Branch has approximately 2100 members, and covers a total area of approximately 7900 km². If every member volunteered to belong to this proposed network, on average each member would only have to travel within a local area of approximately 4 km². Those of you who record will realize that this is the area of a single tetrad ... so the more the better!

Sounds interesting? If you feel you might like to be part of this initiative, and benefit others and also yourself, please email **Andy Spragg** (the inaugural Meet-and-Greet Champion) on utb.meetandgreet@gmail.com



UTB visit to Buckler's Forest, Crowthorne, 21st August 2022

13 intrepid enthusiasts (a nice mix of experts and beginners) met on a warm but overcast Sunday morning in the hope of a Grayling! Our party was mostly BC members, but we also welcomed some non-members who had spotted the event on the website. We also had some 'guests' from Hampshire and Hertfordshire and we all had high hopes of a good morning.

This was UTB's first group visit to this fairly recently created countryside site, now managed by Bracknell Forest Council's rangers' service. The target species for the visit was the Grayling which has been abundant here in the

last few years, but after the summer's heatwave and some very heavy rain in the previous week we were unsure what to expect. The site is fairly level on sandy soils with mixed woodland and numerous ponds of various sizes. However, the main habitat of interest for us was the extensive flowery grassland across the central parts of the site.

The open grassland areas had been bone dry for weeks, and it was clear that most of the flowers had gone over or dried up to a crisp some time ago. All was not lost, and we did find a few flowers including Bell Heather, Sneezewort, Hemp Agrimony, Bird's-foot



The group enjoying a flurry of Clouded Yellows on the parched flowery grassland. ©Des Sussex

Trefoil and plenty of Fleabane to brighten the walk. It was a slow start in the cloudy conditions with just Speckled Wood and some Common Blues to get us started. A Small Heath was found and posed for photos, and we were then lucky to see a Grayling glide past and land nearby. It rested on the dry grass for some time, superbly camouflaged and perching in the typical 'leaning over' fashion. This was a new species for some members of the party, so it was lucky it was very obliging: it sat still for a good while allowing close-up views of just the underside of its hind wing.

As we progressed further into the site the sun decided to come out, and with it we had a flurry of activity as numerous Clouded Yellows were found and photographed. Clouded Yellows had been present in good numbers at the site for a few weeks, and we were treated to some great views. Numerous Common Blues and Small Heaths were also seen, and a few Painted Ladies also showed.

We found a Vestal moth, and there were plenty of spent cocoons of the Six-spotted Burnet moth, although we didn't see any of the moths.

The Clouded Yellows were certainly popular and very entertaining, but we also managed to see more Graylings, encouraged out by the sun. Some were nectaring on a Buddleia, and this proved a great chance for everyone to see the species - at one stage there were 4 Graylings together on the Buddleia offering great photo opportunities.

A few birds and dragonflies added to the visit with Raven, Woodlark, Stonechat and Common Darter all seen by most of the group. A total of 9 butterfly species were seen, and we estimated that we had about a dozen Graylings and 15-20 Clouded Yellows. Those 2 species certainly made it a memorable visit for all who attended, and especially for those who saw a new species or two - and discovered a new site.



Des Sussex

FORTHCOMING UTB EVENTS

There are a whole host of events that have been organised in our region throughout the winter – in fact, regrettably, too many for us to mention here. There are 12 in January alone, starting with a joint Work Party with Chiltern Rangers on 3rd, at Far Kingdom (Bucks).

PLEASE: do check them all out at upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events

Volunteering: Now and Again

Do you volunteer for Butterfly Conservation ... in any capacity? If yes, then please have a quick read of the following.



In order to fulfil its aims and objectives, Butterfly Conservation relies on many thousands of volunteers. They carry out all sorts of tasks from work parties on reserves and leading events, to surveys and a wide variety of roles in the local Branch. They also include County Recorders for moths, as well as for butterflies; and people who take part in a variety of national initiatives. You may well be one of these BC volunteers.

If you do not currently volunteer to help us, but would like to, please contact me to discuss how you may be able to help. I will do my best to point you in the right direction, and support you in your volunteering role.

In April 2022, Butterfly Conservation introduced a **new training programme** to support and guide all its volunteers. This can be found on the volunteering pages of the BC website: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/volunteering>

Although the programme is still a ‘work in progress’, **there is something there for every volunteer**. For example, “**Introduction to Butterfly Conservation – Our Work**” contains a very good video with lots of information about BC, its work and how volunteers contribute. I am sure there is something new there for many of us.

“**Introduction to Butterfly Conservation – The Legal Stuff**” contains important information which will help you, as well as BC, to **keep safe**, as well as **within the law**. There are also training activities for a variety of specialist roles, with more to appear over the coming months.



If you have not done so in the last few months, please find time to have a look at the volunteering pages to see how they can best support you. I believe that this training programme will help both you and BC get more out of the precious time and effort you contribute so generously: *more enjoyment* and a greater sense of *achievement* for you, and a better *focus* of volunteer effort on priority activities for BC. It will also ensure that all volunteers are

properly covered by Butterfly Conservation’s insurance policies, and that we are all passing on the same key messages.

Thanks for your time.

Peter Philp, Branch Volunteer Coordinator
Volunteer-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Upper Thames Priority Moths Report 2022

This is a brief summary of some of the surveys carried out in 2022 for our priority moth species.

Drab looper. Monitoring this scarce day-flying moth in its West Berks haunts continues. The ash removal at Moor Copse NR, Berks, has resulted in an explosion of new wood spurge in Hogmoor Copse, providing some excellent new habitat, and the moth was recorded in this new area - which was good news. On Ashampstead Common I found some new areas of suitable wood spurge, but three surveys of the common failed to record the moth. Nick Asher recorded a Drab looper in his Cold Ash garden, which he believes is 1km from the nearest colony. This is an interesting observation that hints at the species' ability to cover perhaps more distance than one might think for what always looks like a rather fragile moth.

Heart Moth. A successful survey this year recorded twenty-nine Heart Moths in its only known Upper Thames site, Windsor Great Park. The area of the park picked this year was chosen as it was an historically good site, but had undergone some spraying for Oak Processionary moth a couple of years ago. It was good to see that Heart Moth was not affected by this, and the spraying was presumably carried out with care and not too indiscriminately. Derek Barker also recorded Heart Moth in a different area of the park. Once again, Goat Moth was also recorded during the Heart Moth survey. This priority species appears to be doing well in the park.



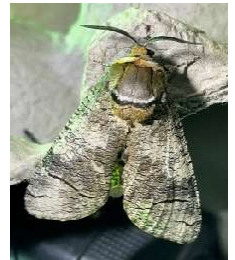
New habitat at Moor Copse NR after ash removal



Drab looper in the new area of wood spurge



Heart Moth



Goat Moth

Liquorice piercer (*Grapholita pallifrontana*). The survey at the site in Oxfordshire (owned by the Earth Trust) produced good numbers this year, with an estimated 50 being seen around the bush that is the hotspot on the site - plus another 12 were recorded elsewhere on the site during the survey. The change of management regime does not seem to have affected numbers yet. There are very few sites for this scarce moth, so it was good news that Martin Harvey recorded it at a new site in the Chilswell Valley (Oxon)... and Will Langdon recorded it at two new sites: one at Botley (Oxon) and one at Wytham Woods (VC22).



Forester Moth. Over the next few years, I am hoping to look at as many sites as possible to compare population size with management regime to try to get a better understanding of the moth's requirements. For example, two sites are shown below... left is Bernwood Meadows, where the moth is present, but in very low numbers; and Millennium Field, Sonning Common, where the species does very well. Could a tweak in management of the sites with small populations make a difference?



Bernwood Meadows



Millennium Field, Sonning Common

Striped Lychnis. This species seemed to have a bad year. Only 122 larvae were counted on the UTB-organised counts across 17 sites. It is possible the moth had a very early season and we missed many of the larvae, but there didn't seem to be many of the dark mullein plants that showed feeding damage - so the evidence would suggest not. All sites produced poor counts, but I have selected three example sites to show comparative numbers over the last three years (see table on page 12). Although the number of flower spikes seems well down on these sites, there were plenty of plants that had not produced spikes. Despite the drought, the condition of the food plant was generally not bad.

Site	Year	Larvae	Flower spikes	Survey date
Bradenham	2020	480	7205	14th July
Bradenham	2021	130	5053	3rd Aug
Bradenham	2022	16	1238	21st July
Holtspur	2020	71	375	26th July
Holtspur	2021	123	413	28th July
Holtspur	2022	16	226	21st July
Homefield	2020	30	745	9th July
Homefield	2021	75	900	18th July
Homefield	2022	1	560	18th July

Barberry Carpet. During the annual larval survey at the only known Upper Thames site for the moth, 44 caterpillars were counted from 49 bushes (see table below for comparison to previous years). While some of the barberry bushes looked fine, in other areas across the site the barberry was looking very stressed by the drought conditions. Unusually, for the time of year, most of the larvae were very small with no final instar larvae being found.

Year	Number of larvae	Number of bushes beaten
2018	35	37
2019	20	50
2020	14	42
2021	166	53
2022	44	49



Healthy barberry bushes



Drought-affected bushes



A. atomella larva at MOD Otmoor ©Will Langdon

Agonopterix atomella. Will Langdon reported that this scarce moth had a good year at the MOD Otmoor site.

Peter Cuss

All photos ©Peter Cuss (unless otherwise stated)

In the Line of Fire

The Silver-studded Blue (SSB) is a very localised species in the Upper Thames Branch area, so every record is important. The Berkshire population occurs along the south-east Berkshire border and is part of the Thames Basin Heaths population, which includes the populations in north-eastern Hampshire and north-western Surrey.



The only large populations in Berkshire are north of Camberley on Wishmoor Bottom and the Barossa RDA (Range Danger Area). Whilst Wishmoor Bottom is public-access land, the danger area is very much off-limits... so we were delighted once again to link up with Luke Parham and Adam Bolton from the Surrey Wildlife Trust and Michael Jones from the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership for a day of surveying in mid-June 2022. Surrey Wildlife Trust and the MoD arranged access for us on a sunny day when the firing ranges were closed. We brought along the Berkshire SSB crew of volunteers, and Surrey Wildlife Trust brought 10 of their conservation volunteers - some of whom were new to butterfly surveying. After a briefing

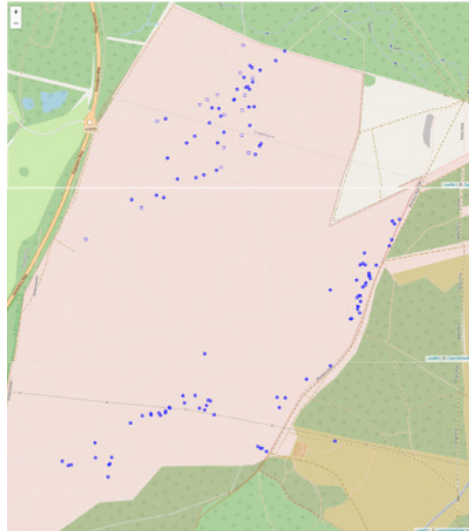
about SSB identification, and how to gather records (most people used the iRecord app), we divided into sub-teams. As a number of the volunteers had never seen SSB before, we ensured that each sub-team had a mixture of experienced and novice volunteers to make for a rewarding time. To help us cover as much of the suitable habitat as possible we divided the site into sections and each group headed to their allocated survey area.

It wasn't long before everyone had seen some butterflies, and the survey proved very successful both for the data collected and enjoyment of all involved. Sensitive management of the heathland at this site is paying off, and a reasonable number of SSBs were seen across the site in areas of low pioneer heather. Some areas at the north of the site had very good numbers, and good views and photos of both males and females were obtained. The survey revealed an improved population of SSB, and an increase in the areas occupied within the larger site. These sightings along with others from the last few years are now building up a valuable database of the SSB population on the site, as we try to monitor the local recovery to more healthy and sustainable populations.

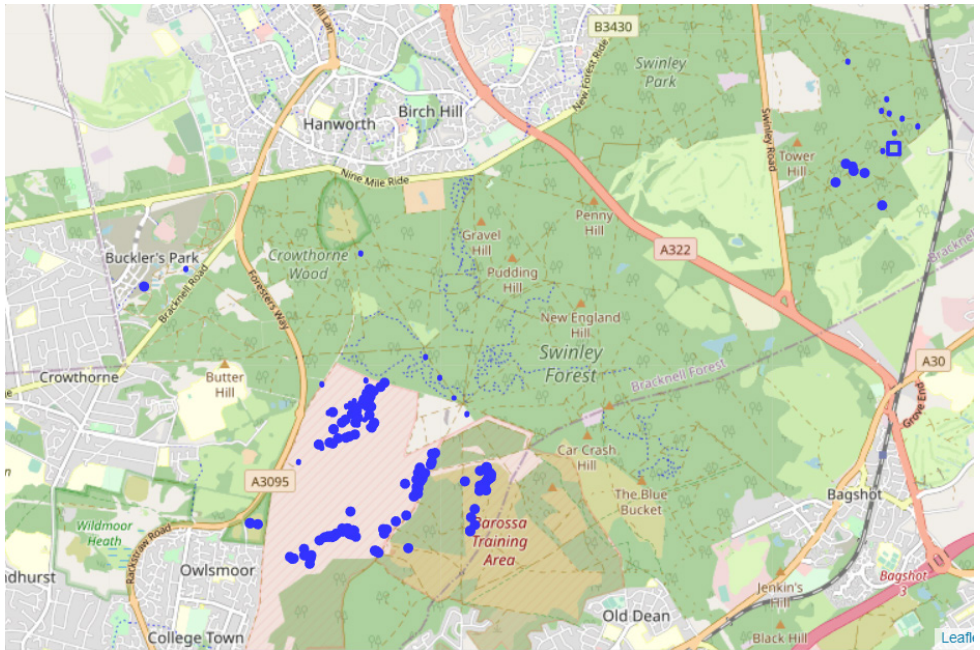
If you are walking in the heathlands and woodland rides along the south-east Berkshire border in 2023, please look out for the Silver-studded Blue and enter your records on iRecord. Thanks to the landowners and managers for their work in helping the plight of the Berkshire Silver-studs.

Distribution maps (screenshots from iRecord)

Map (right) showing the Range Danger Area at Barossa, to show the wide distribution of Silver-studded Blue records collected by the group survey on 26th June 2022



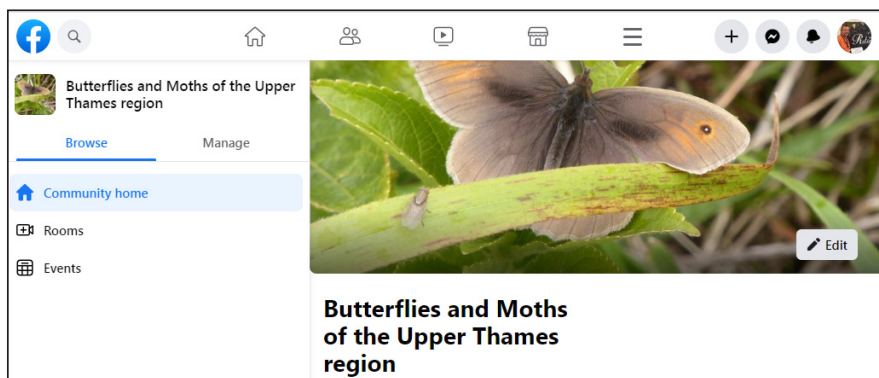
Map (below) showing all of the Silver-studded Blue records for south-east Berkshire in 2022



Grahame Hawker, Des Sussex, Kat Dahl

Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames Region: a New Facebook Group

If you make use of Facebook, the chances are you will have joined at least one or two Facebook groups: forums where like-minded individuals can post photos related to, and engage in discussion of, just about any special interest. Many Butterfly Conservation Branches have such a group, for example, and there are many other groups devoted to butterflies and/or moths, with a national, or international, remit. A few Upper Thames Branch members have long felt the need for a Facebook group with an Upper Thames focus, and one has now been established by Andy Spragg, Emma Thorpe and Linda Seward, who will be group administrators. They hope to welcome lots of Upper Thames Branch members to the group, as well as potential members, and anyone from further afield with a legitimate interest.



Upper Thames Branch already has its own website (unlike most branches), and a Facebook **page**... so what's so great about a Facebook **group**? Well, the main thing that sets a Facebook group apart is that it is, by design, interactive, unlike a Facebook page or a website:

- A Facebook page is really intended for potential customers of a business, who visit it to get information, and who can discuss anything that's posted. However, only the page owner gets to post material on the Upper Thames Branch page, and it doesn't seem to work reliably. If you have visited it, you may have been unable to get new content to appear in your Facebook feed, or to get notifications when new content is posted on there. You may also have been frustrated by discovering that you are able to post material to the page, and yet it never appears.

- The Upper Thames Branch website similarly is designed mostly to disseminate information, which it does extremely well. There is a page where members can submit photographs of sightings with a brief narrative (and optionally channel the information into official records), but no more than three photographs per report, and the process for doing so is quite involved, and, crucially, there is no mechanism for discussion.

A Facebook group is an entirely different proposition. Think of it as a club that is always open, rather than one that only meets periodically. When you join a Facebook group, you become part of something. How big a part is up to you. There is a description of the group that tells you what is and is not 'on topic', and there are group rules that tell you how members should conduct themselves. Within those constraints, you can contribute anything relevant. Anything you post is open for discussion with other members, and similarly you can join in discussion of anything posted by any other member. You can, if you choose, get Facebook to notify you whenever anything new is posted to the group, or when someone replies or reacts to something you have posted. Operated and used well, a Facebook group is a brilliant medium for information exchange.

Here is the description of the group:

This Facebook group is intended for photos and videos of the butterflies and moths seen 'in the field' in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, and for discussion of all topics relating to them (for example, recording, life-cycles and ecology). The group recognises that there are legitimate circumstances relating to, for example, capture, killing and dissection - but these are strictly 'off topic' for group discussion.

The context of sightings is of interest to many members of the group – so, if your post includes photos or videos, stating where and when they were taken is a good habit to get into.

N.B. Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire is the region covered by the Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation, but **the group has no official remit on behalf of Butterfly Conservation.**

In Facebook terms, the group will be 'private' and 'visible', meaning that anyone can find the group, and ask to become a member... but they will only be able to contribute once their membership request has been approved. Andy, Emma and Linda look forward to the group adding a new, albeit unofficial, dimension to what Upper Thames Branch is all about.



Andy Spragg, Emma Thorpe and Linda Seward

Can you identify your local butterfly species?



Do you have a couple of hours to spare 2 or 3 times a year?

Are you fit and able to get out into the countryside?

Yes?... then YOU could be just the person we are looking for!



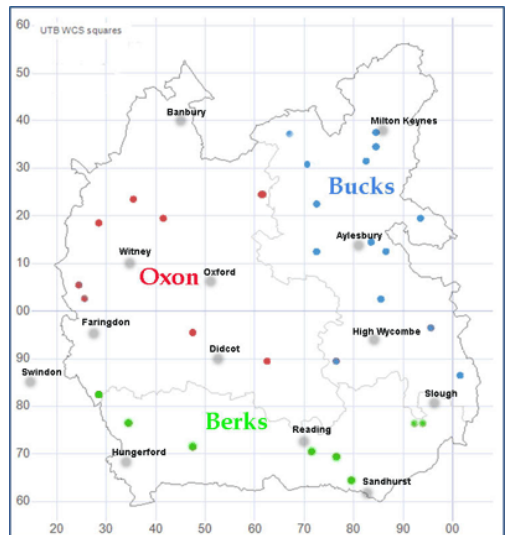
Butterflies tell us a lot about how healthy our environment is. However, most butterfly transects focus on nature reserves or areas with rare species. If we relied on just this information, we would end up with a rather skewed view of our butterfly populations across the region, making it look like they are doing better than they really are.

At Butterfly Conservation we want to create a world where butterflies and moths are enjoyed by everyone, forever.

The **Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS)** is an important program that helps to redress the balance by looking at butterflies away from key conservation sites. This is vital to the monitoring of species, setting conservation objectives and delivering effective actions... such as management advice for farmers and other land managers.

Help us to save butterflies and moths and make the environment better.

- Fun & rewarding
- Gets you out into the fresh air on warm summer days
- You will learn about areas you likely knew little about
- You would be contributing to the conservation of our butterflies
- Very good support material on the WCBS website, including videos and written instructions; and from our Branch.



Grid Ref	Location
SP2405	Filkins, Carterton, Oxon
SP2502	Langford, Oxon
SP2810	North of Carterton, Oxon
SP2818	Shipton under Wychwood, Oxon
SP4545	Great Bourton, Oxon
SP5310	Elsfield, Oxford, Oxon
SP6124	Launton, Bicester, Oxon
SP6527	Godington, Bucks
SP7130	Padbury, Bucks
SP7222	Near Quainton, Bucks
SP7921	Oving, Bucks
SP8230	Mursley, Bletchley, Bucks
SP8434	Emerson Valley, Milton Keynes, Bucks
SP8437	South Laughton Valley Park, Milton Keynes, Bucks
SP9109	Hastoe, Tring, Bucks
SP9319	Horton Wharf, Cheddington, Bucks
SU6473	Theale, Berks
SU7669	Carters Hill, Sindlesham, Berks
SU7765	Arborfield, Wokingham, Berks
SU7964	Finchampstead, Berks
SU8890	Flackwell Heath, High Wycombe, Bucks
SU9277	Windsor Marina, Oakley Green, Berks
TQ0186	Tatling End, Gerrards Cross, Bucks

The map (previous page) and table (left) show where we have current vacancies. E-newsletter readers can click on the Grid Ref in the table to see the actual 1km grid square available.

If you think you might be able to help out, or would like to find out more, please get in touch at the earliest opportunity so that we can plan for the 2023 season.

I am happy to 'hold your hand' through the whole process, particularly in the first year; then be available for support in future years. You would be doing a great service for butterfly conservation in our area. Plus, it gives you the incentive to get out into the countryside, get to know an area you may not know well; and there is nearly always something of interest to see. Last year I came across a singing Quail on my transect!

Peter Philp
Branch WCBS Champion

wcb-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk



Upper Thames Branch AGM 2022

In the aftermath of COVID, once again our Annual General Meeting was held on-line via Zoom, and took place during our annual Members' Day on the morning of Saturday 22nd October, starting at 11.50am. 59 participants were on-line at that time, including most members of the Committee. Apologies were received from Nick Board, Trevor & Sue Brown, Hilary Glew, Mary-Anne Hall, Rikki Harrington, Caroline Jackson-Houlton, Sue Pierson, Des Sussex & Sue Taylor.

Chairman Nick Bowles started off the AGM by giving his annual report on Branch activities. Nick said that it was a welcome relief after COVID to get back to a full programme of field trips this summer, alongside a few attempts at engaging the public at fairs and shows. He thanked Peter Philp who had introduced a more thorough organisation to our guided walks and extended the programme to new areas of our three counties, although sadly the response was rather patchy. A few walks had 15 or so people attending but most had just one or two. As the organisers we really do need to know why so few people turned out and if we are wasting everyone's time in arranging them.



Winter tasks to conserve habitats for key species of butterfly and moth are even more important, as without this work there would be far fewer species to be seen. Nick hoped that the membership would keep supporting these tasks, even if it is only to come and take a few photos for our social media. We have initiated a new system of monthly e-mails to keep people reminded of what is coming up, and perhaps that will raise attendance. Currently they are alerting everyone to the conservation tasks but by the spring they will begin to feature training opportunities and later the guided walks programme.

Nick went on to say that it is down to us to make a difference. Things in the natural world are looking bleak, especially here in the UK where declines continue, particularly amongst our butterflies and moths. The economic and political tides mean that we must make our best efforts. However, there are encouraging stories of places where determined effort is bringing its reward. Locally, work near existing Duke of Burgundy colonies has paid off with breeding confirmed in two areas beyond the previous perimeter. We had already re-started work to create new habitat for the Duke and perhaps for the Dark Green Fritillary to move into, and Nick acknowledged the key role that our work with Chiltern Rangers is playing in that. In West Berkshire, an area where we are historically weak, we have our first tasks specifically to help the Duke. Hopefully Aga Bogucka's work in the county will see its tiny populations expand there too. Nick also thanked Karen Saxl and Jim Asher for their continuing efforts in organising conservation work in Oxfordshire.

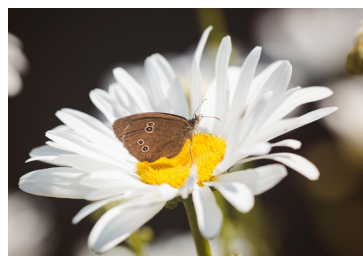
Our greatest strength is in recording, and Nick thanked every single person who had submitted records. It gives us a stronger hand in all our conversations with land managers when we can show the decline that is occurring all around, apart from on those sites with focussed conservation effort. For instance, two sites where we have been working had Chalk Hill Blue recorded for the first time and another site had Green Hairstreak. We know that our encouragement and the work of our volunteers have made those successes real and, as long as volunteers turn out, sustainable.

Derek Haynes has done a brilliant job of editing the Newsletter and Lorraine Evans has handled the tricky business of paper copies with calm expertise. Our costs in the year ending with this AGM come to around £1200 for just under 700 newsletters printed and sent to around 250 members, compared to £0 for over 4000 copies of the electronic version. This explains why we have asked those that want a printed copy to please donate a little extra to the Branch. Also, from 2023, Derek plans to create four issues a year and he needs your help with material to include in them. Other notable costs this year were in connection with setting up the incredible on-line moth atlas for our three counties - and if you haven't visited it yet, please do so (<https://www.upperthamesmoths.co.uk/index.php>). £7000 went to Chiltern Rangers for all their help with conservation tasks and the purchase of tree poppers. In the year to come we plan more tasks with Chiltern Rangers and a spend of £10,000. Another wonderful asset of the Branch is our website, where new and updated information appears constantly. Recent additions have included a guide to good UTB lepidoptera sites with disabled access.

In the spring, BC will be promoting its *Wild Spaces* initiative (please see page 23). The hope is that members will find somewhere (probably on their own land) where they can make a permanent change to benefit butterflies and moths. Whether this is simply a planter for your patio or leaving a corner of a garden or field to produce wildflowers which will remain uncut all summer; this will all help.

We anticipate members asking us for advice about where to buy the plants that BC will be recommending and we're in discussions with a charity called Lindengate to see if they can supply our members with such plants as plugs at a sensible price, as they are often very hard to obtain from garden centres and can be very expensive online. Related to that, remember that anyone who owns more than a few acres can ask us for advice on making the land more floristic and biodiverse. This year we have interacted with many landowners and held two very successful (and oversubscribed) days showing people places that have been changed in that way.

Our grateful thanks go to Maria Spink for hosting us and providing free drinks and buns on the visit to her farm.



Nick concluded by reminding everyone that the Branch *is* its members. He thanked everyone for all the work they do and for their unwavering support. He also thanked the Committee and various members 'without portfolio' who put in a phenomenal amount of work, often behind the scenes, to keep the Branch's activities running and delivering, for us, butterflies and moths.

Treasurer Chris Woodrow ran through the most important aspects of the financial year ending on 31st March 2022 (the full statement of accounts was published in *Hairstreak* issue 115). He reported that Branch finances continued to show a healthy position. Total income was £15,782.50, a decrease of £12,736.45 compared to the previous year, while total expenditure came to £5,997.70, a decrease of £6,563.82. Branch membership remained static, resulting in a like-for-like payment from Head Office for subscriptions of £8,715. Income from donations (and Gift Aid) totalled £7,067.50 compared to £17,901.33 in the prior year, principally due to a legacy donation of £16,768.33 in that year. No money was received for the Holtspur Reserve from the Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme because any continuing income from this scheme is now retained by Head Office.

Expenditure for the year was principally for conservation work in our region and for small items of equipment, with the largest sum (£2,500) being the cost of setting up the Branch Moth Atlas Website. As a result, income exceeded expenditure by £9,784.80 which, together with £29,880.49 carried forward from the prior year of £29,880.49, resulted in a balance in hand at the year-end of £39,665.29.

The **Election of Officers** concluded the formal AGM. Under the Branch's rotational system Peter Cuss, Brenda Mobbs & Sue Taylor were standing down and seeking re-election, while Peter Philp (who had been co-opted onto the Committee during the year) was seeking election. Secretary Dave Wilton proposed that they be elected, and this was seconded by Hugh Ellerton and passed by a show of hands. The Branch Committee now stands as follows: Nick Bowles (Chairman), Grahame Hawker (Vice-Chairman), Brenda Mobbs (Membership Secretary), Dave Wilton (Secretary) & Chris Woodrow (Treasurer) along with Kat Dahl, David Hastings, Stuart Hodges, Peter Philp, David Roy, Margery Slatter & Sue Taylor.



Dave Wilton

A NEW Upper Thames Branch Butterfly Atlas

I hope you have all been using the UTB Moth Atlas, which is amazing and full of detail. It can be viewed at <https://upperthamesmoths.co.uk/>

Its launch has made us somewhat ashamed that the time since the last Butterfly Atlas, published in softback in 2016, is rather too long... and certainly longer than intended in 2016. Planning for the new Atlas of the Butterflies of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire has started, and we already know that you will get an electronic version and not a book. Our aim is that all our members will be able to view it and download it for free. Once downloaded you will be able to print the pages if you wish. There are a number of reasons to move to an electronic version rather than produce another printed book:

- A) It can be created and distributed to our members for free, at far less cost to the Branch
- B) It can be created and distributed with far less environmental impact
- C) Once created, the template will be updateable, and we aim to replace all the distribution maps annually
- D) The process of creation will be faster than if we need to appoint publishers and printers



The Atlas will show current distribution of all butterfly species found within the UTB area and their trends in both abundance and range. We have not yet determined if we wish to show the differences between the current period and one, five or ten years previously; or with each of those earlier times. We expect to be able to show the variation in flight times of those species with changes, and we will highlight species of particular concern to us. It is definitely the case that news of this NEW Atlas will appear on our website once it is available and probably before we can tell you via *Hairstreak*. So, from the summer of 2023 onwards, keep an eye on:

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

In the meantime, visiting the same UTB website page and selecting <Butterflies> then <Species> will bring you here: <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/butterflies...> and clicking on any image will show a recent distribution map and brief text about each species.

Nick Bowles

Pledge to Create Wild Spaces

We need your help! We're on a mission to create 100,000 wild spaces by 2026, to help improve the state of butterflies and moths in the UK.

Sign up to pledge to create Wild Space(s) now at <https://butterfly-conservation.org/wild-spaces/pledge> and we'll be in touch in due course with more information about how you can get involved.

The space can be as small as a planter on a patio or as large as your imagination can visualise. All you must do is plant it with plants that will support all the life stages of butterflies and/or moths, and agree that it will be a permanent fixture on your land.



Gardening for Wildlife - Recommended Videos

For the gardeners among us, Butterfly Conservation has produced these short videos about the benefit of a light touch in the garden:

<https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/donothingfornature>

And the BC gardening blog, with similar helpful tips, at:

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/dig-it-the-secret-gardener-encourages-us-to-do-nothing-for-nature-this-winter>

And for those keen to discover the moths you may attract to your garden...

Moth trapping for beginners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgWQV9Yg9Yw&t=422s>

How to assemble a Skinner moth trap (maybe you'll get one for Xmas!): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkrfWpCRdCA>

Downland Plume... some good news!

Like most of us, you have probably never heard of the Downland Plume (*Oxyptilus pilosellae*)... because if you reach for your moth ID books it's unlikely to be in there; or, if it is, it is likely to be described as 'considered extinct'.

It is a small species with a wingspan of up to 2cm, whose caterpillars feed on Mouse-ear hawkweed. It was at one point widespread in southern England, but the 'last record' was in the 1960s.

Well, I am pleased to tell you that it is not extinct: it has been found alive and well in Bucks. Quietly over the last few years we have been finding it in small numbers on good-quality chalk downland throughout our area (in the Chilterns and especially around Princes Risborough).

The first recent discovery was in 2014, but it was initially known to just a few people... until more was known about it. The national expert on Plume moths, Colin Hart, was 'kept in the loop' and even got to see it in the field, so the next edition of his book *British Plume Moths* – published by BENHS – will probably be revised to reflect this.

I have been lucky enough to see three of these beautiful little moths in successive years, in August. I initially misidentified it, but Colin Hart has confirmed that it was indeed the Downland Plume I saw. Many species can be difficult to identify, and we are indebted to the dedicated experts who help us to identify unfamiliar or difficult species.



Downland Plume on Devil's-bit scabious ©Sue Taylor

The Downland Plume has now been found in at least 10 locations, which is great news. Even better news, I think, is that it means these areas of chalk grassland have been maintained in good condition and have not deteriorated to the point where the moth has been lost. Our work and that of our partners in maintaining these sites has protected the moth, and many other very rare, rare and scarce species, too. Without conservation work it is most likely that the moth would indeed be extinct and lost from the UK.

Finding the moth has also proved the benefits of casual surveying/ recording alongside more formal forms of surveying, as this is a species very unlikely to be picked up on a transect or in a garden moth trap. It is reasonably easy to find. You don't need any special

equipment as it flies by day (and in the evening) and rests in open view - unlike many other moth species that dive under cover as they land.

So, what next? Well, we will continue to look for and record the species. But, please... we need your help, too. We want to know how widespread it is, so if you see a Plume moth resembling the one shown here then please take a good clear photograph of it and then put a record on iRecord or a comment on the Upper Thames Moth Blog.

While you are out and about why not see what else you can find, as we need all the records we can get of butterflies and moths... and you never know, you may find a species that hasn't been seen before or which people thought was extinct!!

Sue Taylor



FOOTNOTE:

We only know about this and other rare and interesting species because our dedicated volunteer surveyors take the time and patience to identify the butterflies and moths they find to species level, and then record what they have seen.

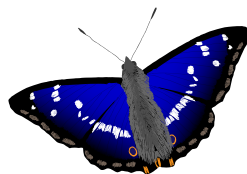
The information this provides is vital, showing how our species are responding to the challenges of climate change and habitat loss.

We welcome more volunteer recorders and will help you with your identification skills if you need it... so please contact a member of the UTB Committee if you want to know more.

©Nick Bowles



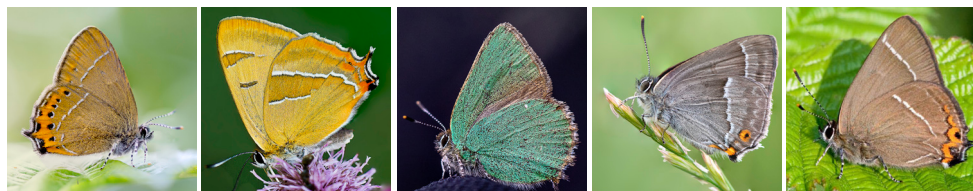
What's Special about the Upper Thames Branch?



The answer is many, many things.

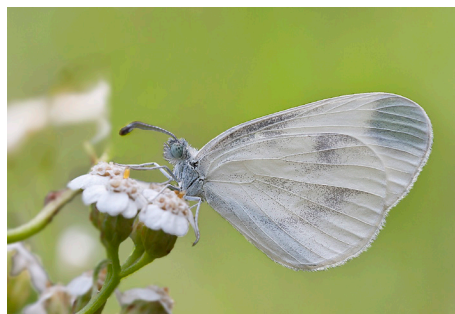
First and foremost is the membership of the Branch. Membership continues to grow as does the number of those of you who are active on behalf of our butterflies and moths. We must thank everyone that does something to help – from leaving a space in their garden for wildlife, through recording, conservation management, to helping to run our Branch (for instance, all those involved in the production of our media, like this newsletter).

But second of course are our butterflies and moths. We are uniquely placed at a point in the UK where all the Hairstreaks can be found at a number of sites. The commoner Hairstreaks can be found in almost every county, and the rarest Hairstreaks can be found elsewhere; many other counties south and west of us have Brown Hairstreak and some to the east, Black Hairstreak, but none have multiple sites with all 5.



All 5 UK Hairstreaks are flying at a number of UTB area sites
Above (left – right): Black, Brown, Green, Purple, White-letter

We have an increasing number of sites with Silver-spotted Skipper and Adonis Blue, neither found together north of the Upper Thames Branch region. Yet, here in August, a UTB member saw Silver-spotted (and Dingy) Skipper, Adonis Blue (and Chalk Hill Blue) flying with Clouded Yellow and Dark Green Fritillary, and 16 other butterfly species at an Oxfordshire site on one memorable day.



Some of our rarest species are harder to find, but our guided walks were able to show members Wood White (left) and Duke of Burgundy in early summer, and Purple Emperor and White Admiral later.

We also had events, rather more like expeditions, searching for the rarest moths. They found better numbers of Heart Moth this year than for decades, small numbers



of Silvery Arches (left ©Marc Botham), and that the Liquorice Piercer (right ©Dave Wilton), considered restricted to one UTB site, was present there and at three 'new' sites in 2022.



Most pleasing is that over the last 5 years, slowly increasing numbers of the Downland Plume (left) have been found (see article on page 24). The T-shaped Downland Plume moth was possibly last seen near Beaconsfield (in the early 1960s) before appearing to completely vanish and to be considered extinct in the UK. Then, in 2013, it was re-discovered, and the UK population is now restricted to a few but growing number of Upper Thames Branch area sites.

All these beautiful, rare creatures are found at sites where we and our partner organisations work very hard to keep the management just right. It should come as no surprise that only at those sites are the numbers of butterflies and moths relatively stable (weather permitting). The pressures on them elsewhere see their numbers continually falling. The farmed parts of the UTB region have already lost most of their butterflies and moths. Now, urban areas are losing theirs too, as garden sizes shrink and ever-more urban space becomes concrete or tarmac.

We currently survey 134 sites within the UTB area with a standardised method (using the WCBS or transect protocols), and 1000s of sites by non-standardised recording. The data gained is immensely informative and a very impressive result. The data flowing from all this recording is visible on our website (and please see the article on page 22 about the NEW Butterfly Atlas).

We have some incredibly special butterflies and moths; so, thank goodness for all those members that cherish them and the joy they bring. Without you, our members, we would be in a dreadfully impoverished place.

Nick Bowles

Building my Wildlife Garden... update

In the last issue of *Hairstreak* there was an article about building my wildlife garden (in Aston, West Oxfordshire). Now that winter has arrived, it's time for an update.

I added just one species of butterfly to the garden list after July: Small Heath. However, 21 species is more than I had in 30+ years in my Abingdon garden!

I was running the moth trap a couple of times a week from the end of July to the end of October, and it continued to pull in moths. The maximum number in the trap was 240 on 24th August, the maximum number of species was 44 on 1st August, and the largest individual species count was 84 Lunar Underwing on 24th September. Bear in mind that I'm using a 6W actinic light in the trap, which is not very powerful.

Notable macro-moths captured in this period were Pale Eggar (pictured below), Cypress Pug, Cypress Carpet, Dusky Thorn, Feathered Thorn, Mottled Umber, Scarce Umber, Red Underwing,



Swallow Prominent, Least Yellow Underwing, Marbled Green, Bordered Straw, Oak Eggar (pictured below), Scarce Bordered Straw, Frosted Orange, Red-line Quaker and Black Rustic.



The number of macro-moth species recorded in the garden during 2022 was 168, and the number of micro-moth species was 70, making a total of 238.

Dragonflies did quite well in the end, with a total of ten species recorded. I witnessed ovipositing by an Emperor Dragonfly, as well as by Southern Hawkers and Common Darters. Probably only the latter will emerge next year, though.

In September I sowed wildflower seeds, with the aim of producing a mini-meadow next year. Germination has been good, so it's fingers crossed that it will turn out well.

David Hastings

Photos ©David Hastings

Survival of the Fittest: In Defence of the Peacock Butterfly

This article was inspired by contributor Tom Dunbar's concerns (UTB website/ butterfly-sightings, 2nd August 2022) that the Peacock butterfly may be suffering from a 'population crash in southern England'. This got me worrying... and thinking, especially when checking my own records for 2022 which showed – remarkably – only 1 visit by a Peacock to the garden. I felt a little research was needed...



©David Hastings, Dry Sandford Pit (Oxon), 22nd March 2022
(One of the lucky ones that survived the winter)

The Peacock (in common with many other species) is vulnerable at most if not all life stages from attack by predators.

Peacock larvae – despite their long spines and the ability to jerk their bodies and heads in unison when disturbed – are the most vulnerable: to parasitoids (in particular, the parasitic wasp *Phobocampe confusa*). The wasps lay their eggs on/in the larvae, and the outcome is... well, pretty gruesome. If you really want to see for yourself, there is a short video at: <https://www.shutterstock.com/video/clip-1067884265-parasitic-wasp-larvae-emerging-peacock-butterfly-caterpillar>

I haven't been able to find any evidence that this form of predation is becoming more prevalent, but we doubtless recall a similar fate befalling the Small Tortoiseshell in recent years.

I'm unclear as to whether Peacock eggs and pupae are prone to attack by parasitoids, but some butterfly species (such as the Glanville Fritillary, whose eggs can become host to the *Hyposoter horticola* wasp) are. There are at least 6,000 known species of parasitic wasp in Britain – which perhaps doesn't bode well for the future of some butterfly (and maybe moth?) species.

The Peacock's woes aren't necessarily over if it is lucky enough to avoid the attention of parasitic wasps during infancy, as the adult also has many hurdles to overcome. Luckily, it has a few tricks up its sleeve!

You can't help but notice the prominent "eyes" on all 4 upper wings, but they have greater purpose than merely making the Peacock appear a most striking butterfly.



©Butterfly Conservation

Around 10 years ago, the Department of Zoology at Stockholm University in Sweden carried out some comprehensive research to test whether Peacocks with their eyespots ‘painted over’ were more likely to be confronted/attacked by birds than *au naturel* individuals.

The results suggested that predators perceive large lepidopteran eyespots as belonging to the eyes of a potential predator (although, if the Peacocks had their wings closed when the birds approached, it seemed to make no difference when they displayed their wings whether the eyespots were painted over or not: the birds always fled).

So, perhaps Peacocks should rest with their wings open – unless they are very alert baskers! (Though they are well-camouflaged if resting with wings closed on, say, a tree trunk.)

Even after the Peacock finds somewhere suitable to spend the winter (usually a dark place), its worries aren’t necessarily over.

Apparently, some species of mouse are particularly fond of the Peacock – perhaps because it contains no unpalatable matter. Reports indicate that Peacock wings are often found in so-believed safe overwintering lodgings, as the mice only devour the main body parts.

The Peacock therefore has to be very careful about where it chooses to spend the winter. The one in the photo (above right) has – perhaps sensibly – chosen to hang from a roof or ceiling.

The same institution in Sweden again carried out extensive research into the



attraction of Peacock butterflies to 2 species of mouse (viz. yellow-necked and wood mice).

The Peacock – despite being ‘at rest’ during hibernation (a period of suspended development or dormancy known as diapause) – is able to flick its wings if disturbed, causing a hissing sound (audible to humans) and high-intensity ultrasonic ‘click’ (the latter believed used in particular for deterring attacks by bats). The research considered that the above actions by the butterfly give it the chance to move positions, thus reducing the risk of predation (particularly when in complete darkness).

So, when you see the first Peacock of the year in all its colourful glory, think to yourself, “You’re one of the lucky ones; well done (and thanks) for giving me the opportunity to enjoy your beauty.”

Derek Haynes

Acknowledgements/References:

Olofsson M, Jakobson S, Wiklund C [Department of Zoology, Stockholm University, Sweden] (2011): **Auditory defence in the peacock butterfly against mice** [Licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC 3.0)]

Olofsson M, Løvlie H, Tibblin J, Jakobsson S, Wiklund C [Department of Zoology, Stockholm University, Sweden] (2012): **Eyespot display in the peacock butterfly triggers anti-predator behaviors in naïve adult fowl** [Licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC 3.0)]

For the Butterfly Wonderer

Did you know? ... that the day-flying Clearwing moths all mimic stinging wasps to protect themselves. Rarely seen, they are often easiest to find by using a pheromone lure which attracts the males to what they hope will be a female.

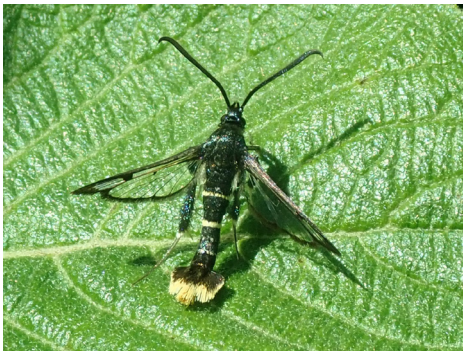
Some species of Clearwing can take three years to go from egg to adult: eating wood makes for slow growing.

They are known as Clearwings as parts of their wings lack scales and are completely clear. But the wings don't start off clear: when they first emerge, the wings are covered in the scales for which the Lepidoptera (Lepido=scaled; pteron=wing) are named, but these are swiftly lost leaving areas of clear membrane.

Below (left): an Orange-tailed Clearwing, whose larvae use viburnum shrubs; and (right): a Six-belted Clearwing, which requires Bird's-foot Trefoil.

Sue Taylor

Photos ©Sue Taylor



Electronic Correspondence: Advisory

In order to bring to your attention up-to-date information regarding forthcoming Branch events and tasks, you will have noticed that we now send out monthly email reminders (entitled 'Upper Thames Branch {month} Update').

Please be advised that if you were to unsubscribe from any email from either Butterfly Conservation or Upper Thames Branch, you will (currently) no longer receive any further emails from either source.

If you have previously elected to unsubscribe, **you can re-subscribe at any time** by emailing membership@butterfly-conservation.org with your details.

IMPORTANT REMINDER:

Change to the way that butterfly sightings are recorded

As mentioned in the last issue of *Hairstreak*, butterfly records sent in during 2022 for the Sightings Page of the UTB website have also then (by UTB) been added to iRecord - unless the submitter had stated that they had already done so.

Those of you who have sent sightings in by email have generally **not** been stating whether or not they have also been added to iRecord. **It would be much appreciated if you could start doing this in 2023...** that is, clarifying, either way, thanks.

David Hastings

Footnote [Ed.]: Please do get in touch if you are having difficulty or doubts over using iRecord – or indeed if you require any further information regarding the submitting of records to the Branch.



Unseasonal Visitors in 2022

Weather-wise, 2022 was quite an unusual year – and this has been reflected in some of the unexpected sightings reported in our region. Climate change is certainly beginning to show its hand. A few examples are given below.



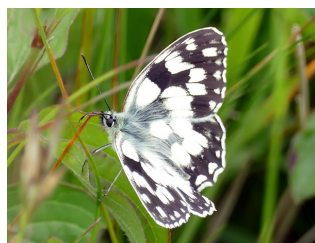
On 12th November, this female Holly Blue was recorded by Ellen Stickland in her Aylesbury (Bucks) garden.

Other 'unseasonal' sightings included a Speckled Wood at Woburn Sands (Bucks) on 16th January (by Amanda Floyd); a Holly Blue in a suburban Slough street on 27th February (by Neil Popham); and a Chalk Hill Blue at Ivinghoe on 18th October (by Tom Dunbar).

News from the UTB 10K Square

A number of our members have adopted a 10K square, coordinating the recording for the current butterfly atlas, which runs from 2020-2024. The report below describes how some of them have been getting on in 2022.

Gillian Taylor monitors the butterflies in the Berkshire and Oxfordshire parts of SU28, to the north-west of Lambourn, and in SU38, to the south-west of Wantage. She reports that she spent some time this year in a chalk-grassland field near Ashbury where the farmer has established a lot of Horseshoe Vetch. It is hoped that Chalk Hill Blues will colonise the site, although Gillian has not seen any there yet. This year she saw a single Duke of Burgundy butterfly at Crowhole Bottom. In 2020, Gillian realised that there were also Duke of Burgundy butterflies in a small area of open access land nearby. She took a few members of the Letcombe Conservation Group there this May - but warns that the stiles are wonky and the walking rough and steep. It looks a fairly abandoned spot with increasing scrub, but might be grazed by sheep at some time in the year.



Marbled White in SU67 03/06/22 ©Louis Powell

John Lerpiniere is the 10K Champion for SU67, to the west of Reading, but he also records in other parts of west Berkshire. He reports that there have been more sightings of Dark Green Fritillary – after just two records in past years – in the small woodland meadows at Rushall Farm, Bradfield, in SU57. Silver-washed Fritillaries are frequent here and it is easy to assume these are what you are spotting, but the Dark Green Fritillaries have a ‘more fluttery’ flight low over the meadows and this behaviour may help to separate the two. We hope for more future records of Dark Green Fritillary.

Gerry and Penny Kendall are the 10K Champions for SP50, which includes the city of Oxford. Gerry reports that, thanks to tremendous efforts by local recorders, only a single tetrad out of the twenty-five in the 10K square has fewer than 20 species recorded. The sore thumb is SP5402, the area of Blackbird Leys and the Kassam Stadium. If you have any records for SP5402, Gerry requests that you send them in!

Yen Hoe is a new recruit to the 10K Champion scheme. She has taken on SU78, which includes Henley-on-Thames and parts of the Chilterns to the north. Highlights for Yen this year included a Small Tortoiseshell in April, which was a new tetrad record, and her first Small Blue in June.

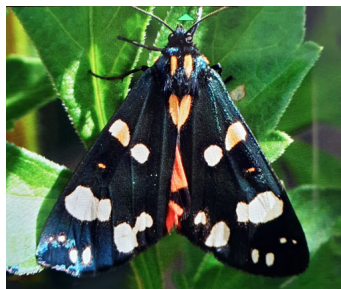
Andy Spragg is the 10K Champion for SU79, which lies to the east of Watlington and includes Aston Rowant. He has analysed his own SU79 records for 2022 and

all SU79 records for 2019-2021 (2019 was his first year as 10K Champion for SU79). He made 23 SU79 field trips in 2022, compared to 17 in 2021, but well below 39 and 33 in 2020 and 2019 respectively. His recording is based on long circular walks: more formal than casual recording; less formal (but more granular) than transect recording. In terms of sheer numbers, the Comma, Gatekeeper and Ringlet did tremendously well in 2022; for each of these species, he recorded more than twice as many as the average number seen for 2019-2021. Conversely, the Small Heath and Common Blue had a terrible year; for these two species, he recorded only about one-third as many as the lowest number for 2019-2021. Marbled White and Meadow Brown had a different worrying story to tell: for these two species, the number of specimens recorded has decreased year-on-year since 2019, and in 2022 was less than half the average number for 2019-2021. The Small Tortoiseshell also had a second bad year in succession: more than 30 specimens recorded in 2019 and 2020, fewer than 10 specimens recorded in 2021 and 2022. Andy's unexpected location success story of the year was SU7090 (Greenfield Wood), with records for four species (Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Chalk Hill Blue) not recorded for the previous ten years, and for three more species (Small Tortoiseshell, Large Skipper and Dark Green Fritillary) not recorded for the previous five years.



Doug Kennedy is the 10K Champion for SP71, which lies to the west of Aylesbury. Doug reports that the cold spring kept butterfly numbers low, so he only saw 4 species in March (Peacock, Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma) and 10 species in April, with low sightings of Orange-tips and Whites, but a few Peacocks and Brimstones about. As May came in, he explored several neglected tetrads between Waddesdon Manor and Westcott. In their arable fields, Waddesdon Estates have planted wildflower strips among the crops in addition to the wildlife strips around the margins. These attracted Common Blues, Brimstones and a few Small Whites. The Whites did not have a good year – there are usually lots of them, sometimes in quite big groups, but sightings were sporadic all summer. June and July were rather good, with 13 butterfly species and 6 moth species recorded in the first couple of weeks. Common Blues seem to have had a good year, with quite large colonies in another neglected area north of Aylesbury. Meadow Browns were numerous, but Small Tortoiseshells, Ringlets and Small Heaths were less common than normal. Doug recorded Scarlet Tiger moths twice during the season, a Garden Tiger moth in June and Jersey Tigers in July and August. Hummingbird hawkmoths were present from late June to September. In August, butterfly numbers seemed to fall off a cliff, particularly in his Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) square at Winchendon. However, he did photograph and record over 40 species of moth during August and September, most of them around his outside light in the late evening.

Hugh Ellerton is the 10K Champion for part of SP72, which lies between Aylesbury and Buckingham. Hugh reports that despite, or maybe because of, a long dry summer, numbers of butterflies were generally down on previous years. Butterflies that were notably scarcer included Peacock, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell, and Painted Lady was seen in lower numbers than in other areas of the country. The flowering period of a number of nectaring plants, particularly bramble, was remarkably short because of the heat, and this may have been a factor in his not being able to observe these butterflies in numbers. Butterflies that were seen in greater numbers than previous years include the prolific Marbled White, Holly Blue, Common Blue and Small Copper. Hugh's butterfly highlight of the year came not from SP72 but from nearby SP83 (which does not currently have a 10K Champion), where Mick and Wendy Campbell have found a well-established colony of Purple Emperors.



No 10K Champion yet for SP83... but Scarlet Tiger in SP83 16/06/22 Photo ©Jason Chalk

Wendy Wilson looks after the Buckinghamshire part of SP74, which lies between Milton Keynes and Towcester. She is only able to access 10 tetrads or part-tetrads, with the rest being in Northants. Four of them have more than 20 records. These include Stony Stratford with its nature reserve and flower meadows. Both Small and Essex Skippers were absent this year, though she had hoped the Essex may have survived the previous winter's floods. They over-winter as thick-shelled eggs and can stand being submerged better than those of the Small Skipper. Leckhampstead Wood also has 23 records, and she has been enjoying the Wood Whites there thanks to their Champion Nick Board's helpful advice. This year she also targeted SP83 and SP82, which have no 10km-square Champions. Two under-recorded squares have been particularly interesting: SP8030 (north of Mursley) has only had two records since 2020 as it is a construction site for EW Railway. By visiting the square on Sundays when no work was taking place, she was able to access some lanes and paths and found 15 more species this year. SP8630 in south Milton Keynes between Bletchley and Stoke Hammond only had a single record, as an estate of several thousand homes known as Newton Leys was being built. She has made several visits this year and recorded 15 more species. Among the houses are plenty of green spaces, including grass, scrub, old bits of woodland and hedges, a stream and a lake. These are interconnected as well as connecting to surrounding areas. She looks forward to exploring more new estates being built around here in future years.

Chris Tyler-Smith and **Yali Xue** look after 4 squares in the north-east of the Upper Thames region (north of Milton Keynes): SP84, SP85, SP94 and SP95. This year, Chris and Yali focussed on the under-recorded tetrads and were particularly pleased to see a Clouded Yellow, a Purple Hairstreak and several Silver-washed Fritillaries. These are all species which they rarely record in their area.

We have a number of 10K squares across the 3 counties, particularly in the north and west of the region, where we are looking for one or more volunteers to help coordinate recording. Figure 1 (below) shows whether squares are already adopted, need additional help or are unassigned. If you think you could help, please contact Jan Haseler (Tel: 0118 9414750, email jan.haseler@btinternet.com).

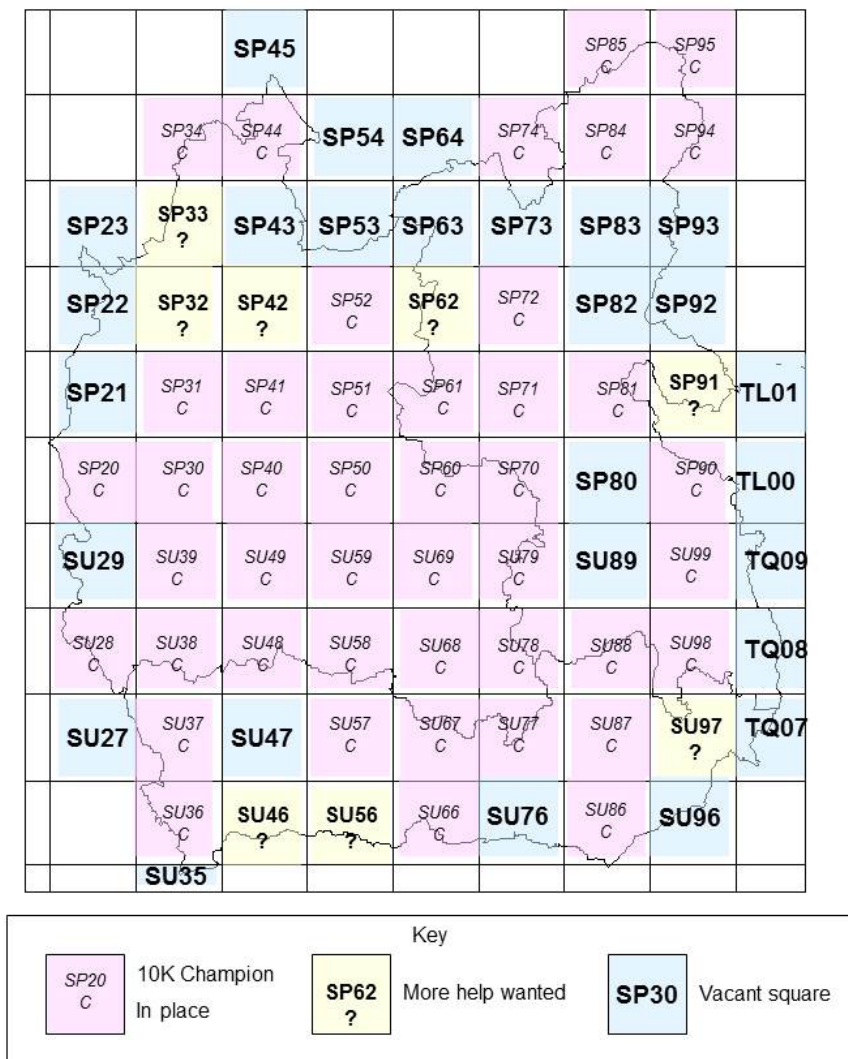


Figure 1: 10K square status, December 2022

Is there a ~~Doctor~~ First Aider in the house?

When we go out on our various tasks to protect, maintain or enhance habitats, we always run the slight risk that someone will get injured.

In the last 20 years and on the hundreds of conservation tasks I've attended, there have been only two injuries worth noting: one when a rash appeared on a volunteer's wrist and they felt light-headed, possibly after rubbing against a plant that contained some allergen; and another when a nasty graze was caused by brushing against a post as a volunteer lunged to grab a falling tool.

We haven't simply been lucky; most tasks we undertake are safe. The more hazardous tasks are considered very thoroughly both before we start and as they progress. Even so, we want to offer the best support we can to our members in every way.

Alongside a full range of guided walks, training courses and conservation tasks, and with the most reassuring presence of knowledgeable and experienced people to lead, we also want First Aid-qualified people at our activities... so that in the very unlikely event of an accident occurring, we can give them the best possible help.

We suspect that many of our members hold a qualification as part of their role at work. If you have a First Aid qualification and might, however rarely, help by attending events near your home, please let me know so I can build a register of potential assistants.

Please email nick.bowles@ntlworld.com and provide your contact details, including your home address and the sort of distance you are prepared to travel to help - plus the times when you are free and the type of qualification that you hold.

Thanks very much. Stay safe, everyone.



Things that went well in 2022

All of us could write a list of things that went badly in 2022. To balance that up here is a list of things that went well for butterflies and moths in the UTB area in the strange year of 2022.

Like many other regions we saw large numbers of Hummingbird Hawkmoths and those of you following advice to plant bedstraws (Ladies Bedstraw is the most attractive I think) in your wildflower spaces probably saw their spiky



larvae (above), as well as the adults zipping backwards and forwards around your flowers.

The threatened Duke of Burgundy enjoyed a long and fairly numerous brood. In Buckinghamshire it was egg laying (below, right) just outside one of its remaining strongholds and present in better numbers at another site where we have been working with Chiltern Rangers to change the habitat to suit it. Along with a farmer, a member of the Branch has helped arrange an improvement in the conditions for our most westerly colony. This is the first dedicated work to support a Berkshire colony of the Duke for many years.



There were more sightings of a plume moth, known as the Downland Plume *Oxyptilus pilosellae*, than in any other year (see article of page 24). Pretty good going for a species considered to

be extinct in the UK, until 8 years ago when it was discovered to be still present in the Chilterns. Many reference works still list the species as extinct, e.g. Hants Moths who say, "Extinct in the British Isles, formerly on chalk downland in parts of south-eastern England. Unlikely to be recorded in Hampshire."

The rare Silver-spotted Skipper was seen repeatedly at sites further east than in most years. There was good evidence of it moving to new habitat on the scarp edge of the Chilterns. It also enjoyed a longer than normal flight period.

By our recent standards a very good number of the rare Heart moth were trapped in Windsor Great Park, proving that the species continues to breed there and seems to have a stable population. Every one of the rarest moth species found in the UTB area since 2020 were seen in 2022, and some new moth species were added to the county lists.



And our various presentations and guided walks for landowners, to explain ways to help butterflies and moths, were very well attended by landowners and land managers who are passionate to make a difference.

Nick Bowles

THE GAME IS UP...

... and DOWN, ACROSS,
DIAGONAL, BACKWARDS, ...



This Middle America butterfly, *Diathria anna*, is also known as Anna's Eighty-Eight (I wonder why?!). In Chinese culture, the number 8 is a symbol of good fortune (and 88 means double good fortune) ... so, we wish you every 88 with this UTB Winter Wordsearch.

F M
L U
K X O I
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R Z A C
G B X C
Q S P D
V E R G

ANTENNA
COMMA
DRABLOOPER
HAIRSTREAK
MULLEIN
OVA
SILVERY
WINTERMOTH
BRIMSTONE
DANCERSEND
ELM
LODGEHILL
OAK
PUPAE
CHILTERN
DECOYHEATH
GRAYLING
MOORCOPSE
OTMOOR
RINGLET



Courtesy of TheTeachersCorner.net Word Search Maker

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

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

Have your butterfly sightings and photos posted on the website by sending them to: sightings@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Upper Thames Branch Moth Sightings Blog
<http://upperthamesmoths.blogspot.co.uk>

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

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

www.holtspurbottom.info

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