

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 117 | LATE MARCH 2023



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames
Branch**



www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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Cover image: Duke of Burgundy (Bradenham, Bucks, 6th May 2022) © John Clough

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

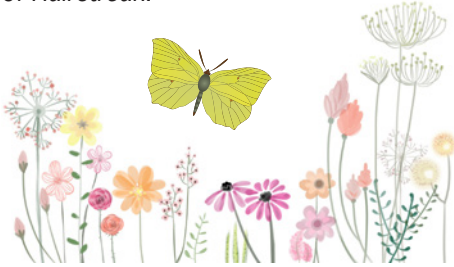
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Editorial

A very warm welcome to the latest issue of *Hairstreak*.



Spring is undoubtedly my favourite season of the year, with much anticipation of what the months ahead may have in store... with many of us having already been able to enjoy the delights that butterflies and moths bring to our lives. Keen observers had spotted all 5 of our hibernating butterfly species 'alive and well' by 19th February!

But, as we are only too aware, all is not rosy... and it is quite shocking (though perhaps not surprising) to learn that 80% of the UK's butterflies have declined in abundance and/or distribution since the 1970s¹ – with England having fared the worst of our home nations. On the flip side, targeted conservation work has proved effective at halting declines, but more – much more – needs to be done. Some ways that you might be able to 'make a difference' will be found within these pages.

I hope you are inspired by some of the articles featured in this (indeed, all)

issues of this newsletter, but we do rely on regular contributions from our members. Perhaps you have something of interest to our readership? Maybe you have a favourite site that you could tell us about? Or possibly you have undertaken some conservation work or created a wild space at home, where both the process and benefits may encourage others to do likewise? Please let us know.

Please have your diary to hand, as we have details herein of our 'in person' Members' Day 2023, an opportunity to join us on a picnic at Holtspur Bottom, and a comprehensive list of organised walks across the region.

Our cover image of Duke of Burgundy has been chosen to celebrate the work that many have done to protect this endangered butterfly in our region, and you will doubtless take heart from the article that describes first-hand a postgraduate's involvement in the study of – and giving a much needed helping hand to – this vulnerable species.

We also have updates on the observed state of Wood White, White-letter Hairstreak and Grayling in our region, with other updates hopefully to follow in the next issue.



Derek Haynes

¹ Source: 'The State of the UK's Butterflies 2022' [BC]

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 9th JUNE 2023**

View from the Chair

During mid-February there were several days when spring seemed imminent... but March saw a return to winter.

I think that colder weather during March is better for those species that can be lured out too soon, before the plants they need are available.

And speaking of the availability of plants, let's consider those wonderful members that help put the **conservation** into our society's name: Butterfly Conservation. Whenever you walk across a biodiverse habitat, rich in the plants caterpillars need, I hope you tip your head in grateful acknowledgement of the volunteers who maintain it.

UTB volunteers worked at over 50 sessions to help butterflies and moths this winter, and I am certain that many of those sites would lose species without their continued work.

Consider this Berkshire site with a population of Duke (amongst our scarcest butterflies, with colonies at just six sites). The cleared area had completely lost its cowslips – which are essential to the Duke – through over-shading.

There is now space for germination from the seed bank, with a plan to return and plant if that process is too slow.

Volunteers will also monitor the population closely to see which areas are most important to the butterfly



As volunteer work began (October 2022)

before next season's scrub clearance of adjacent equally overgrown sections.

Anywhere with more than average numbers of butterflies and moths can pretty much be guaranteed to have had volunteers working to keep the habitat open and productive. We owe them a tremendous debt and should cherish them. "Thanks" doesn't do justice to their effort. All are invited to a picnic (details elsewhere herein) - the only reward, I'm afraid... but I couldn't be more grateful.



After volunteer work (February 2023)

Very soon, the survey season starts, and by the time this newsletter arrives the Standardised Survey Technique training

will have been delivered in Bucks. If you live elsewhere and know a few others that want training, we can organise a session for your group. Please consider helping with surveys at sites where our volunteers (and those of sister organisations) work to conserve the habitat.

Repay that winter work by helping to assess the outcomes and target next winter's habitat management.

Finally, we hope you will enjoy the various guided walks that Peter has arranged for the late spring and summer.

Here are a few videos to watch:

How we can create butterfly habitats:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6PSdMJ2QIU>



Do nothing for the Orange-tip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ytkyf6Ppd2E>

'The State of Butterflies' Report:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M09UwOnVS0g>

Spectacular moths in slow-motion flight:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQL25_hoQ1k

Tiger Moth life cycle:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeU4Sbp-r44>

Nick Bowles

Fancy dipping into the fascinating world of moths?



This is a reminder that **Upper Thames Branch has a moth trap loan scheme for its members**. If you are intrigued by which moths are in your garden, why not give it a go? The traps are free to borrow for a season, and all we ask is that you record the species you see. Help is available with ID-ing your catch. The traps can be picked up from Caversham (Berks) or Westcott (Bucks). Details are available from Peter Cuss... email: priority-moths@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

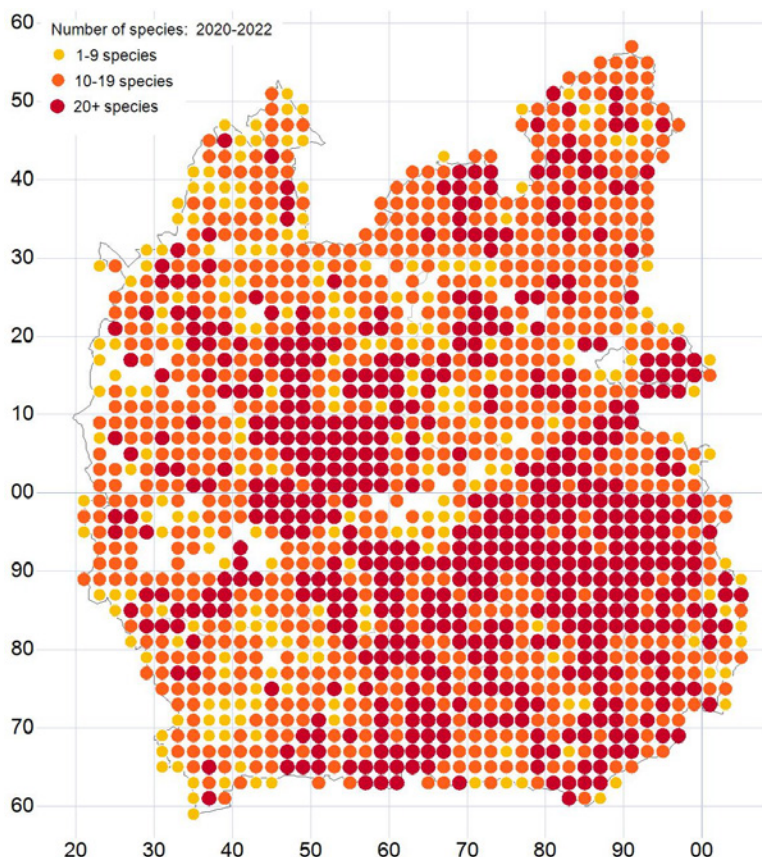
Targeted 2023 Butterfly Recording

We need your help this year with some targeted butterfly recording!

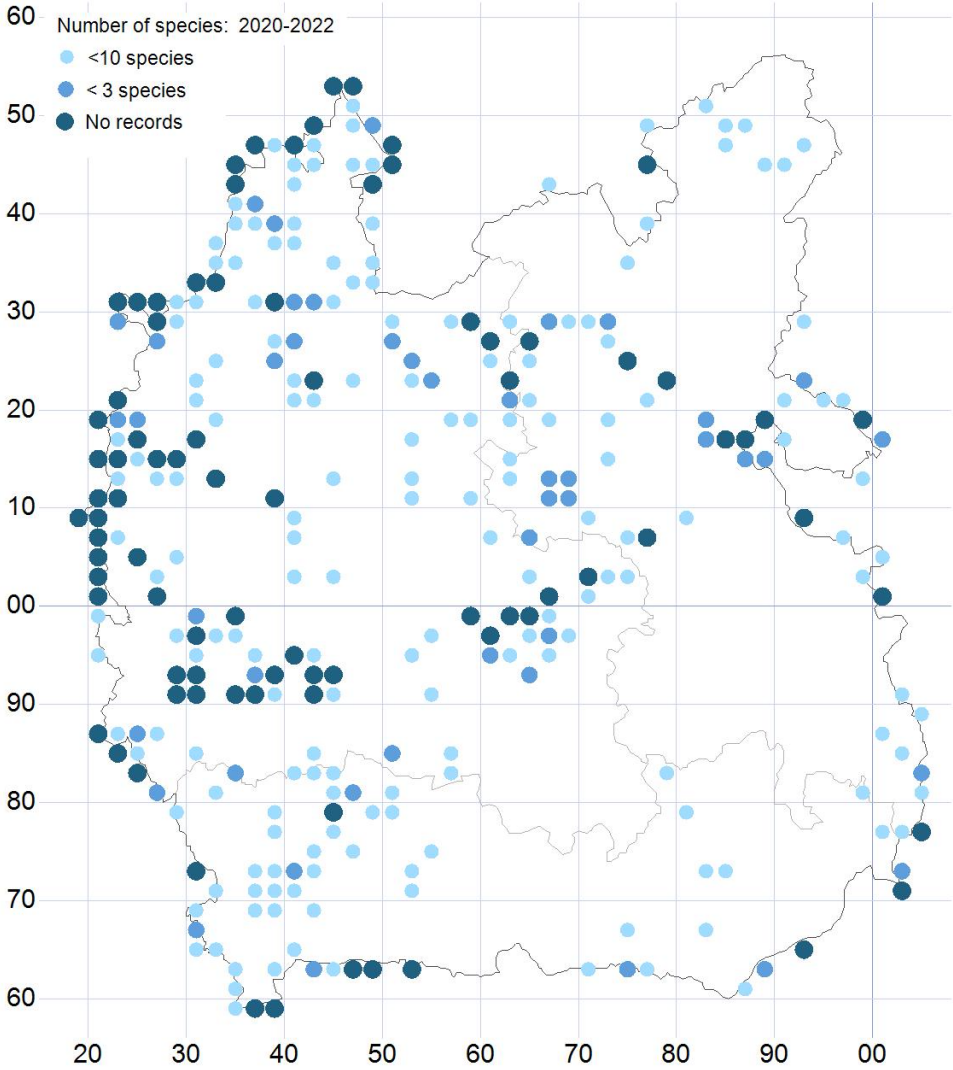
2023 is the fourth year in the current 5-year cycle of UTB butterfly recording, and **we would like to make a special effort this year so there is not so much to cover next year!** For the three years 2020-22 we have so far received an impressive 298,165 records from over 139,828 visits to 1480 2km squares covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. A massive thank-you is due to everyone who has contributed to this great result. If you have records which you have not yet submitted, please do so as soon as possible via iRecord or by downloading the spreadsheet from the UTB website.

The map (right) shows the general coverage of butterfly records from these three counties between 2020 and 2022.

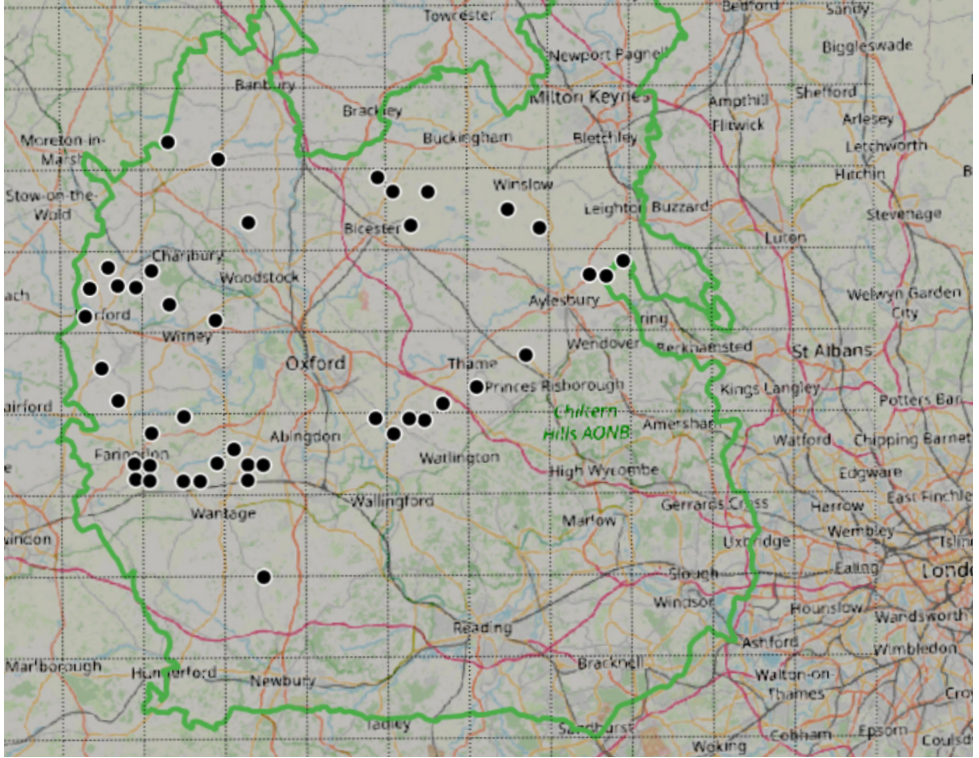
Whilst there is good record coverage in the southern half of this map, there are areas in the north, central and west that clearly need more visits and records.



Areas requiring the most visits are shown in the map below, which highlights unrecorded 2km squares (as the darkest dots) and poorly recorded squares (as lighter dots).



The map below shows the 2km squares which have no records and are not 'boundary squares', and it is these squares we would like to cover this year. Please zoom in on the map to see a more detailed location.



If you are able to visit one or more of these neglected locations to observe butterflies and submit your sightings, we would be most grateful. Thanks for your help!

Peter Ogden

Happiness is like a butterfly: the more you chase it, the more it will elude you; but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.

J. Richard Lessor



Churchyard & Garden Butterfly Surveys 2022

Members may well recall my requests, in early 2022, for more people to volunteer to undertake a butterfly survey of their local churchyard to extend our knowledge across our region.



The overall initial response was very encouraging, with 24 people offering to undertake surveys, plus a further 19 people associated with the Wychwood Forest Trust in West Oxfordshire who undertook surveys of churchyards local to them.

Ultimately, not all of those who volunteered were able to complete a survey, but, overall, 41 people surveyed 65 churchyards in 2022: an increase over 2021 from 15 surveyors covering 29 churchyards!

The butterflies, however, proved elusive, and the impression gained from looking at the results was either that the churchyards were not being managed well enough to benefit wildlife, or, more probably, that it was not a good year. The weather undoubtedly played a big part with the intense heat of midsummer drying up the nectar plants... and a number of surveyors noted that there were no butterflies to be seen in one or more of the months when they visited.

The most common butterflies seen were, as expected, Large White and Small White, with Holly Blue also featuring in quite a number of reports. Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns were also quite frequent in some churchyards, but nothing like in the numbers seen in previous years.

I must, of course, mention our stand-out churchyard at St. John's, Stone, near Aylesbury, which has been managed to benefit butterflies for some years - and always excels. In 2022, a total of 90 butterflies across over 18 species were recorded in St. John's churchyard: a testament to what can be achieved with the right habitat management in place.

The story was much the same with garden butterfly surveys, although I received far fewer reports for 2022. Again, the predominant butterflies seen, most frequently, were the Whites. I can only imagine that with an absence of butterflies in their gardens, people did not think to record those that did occasionally appear.

Hopefully, we will have a better year in 2023. If you volunteered previously, in response to my appeal, but were unable to undertake a survey in 2022 – but would indeed be willing to do so for the forthcoming season – please let me know via email at churchyard-coordinator@upperthamesbutterflies.org.uk so that I know which churchyards we can hope to survey this year.

Chris Woodrow
Survey Co-ordinator

The Lepidoptera Wonderer: Early Spring Butterflies

There is nothing more uplifting than seeing the first butterfly of the year - confirmation that spring is really coming. This year for me it was a female Brimstone... wonderful.



Peacock

Early spring butterflies fall into two groups: those which have overwintered as adults (Peacock, Red Admiral, Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma, which are almost always the first species to be seen) and those which emerge from their over-wintering pupa in the spring (including Orange-tip, Holly Blue, Large, Small and Green-veined Whites and Small Copper).

Butterflies need to be warm to fly and will search for the best locations to warm up, so use your own senses to find the warmest most sheltered locations with likely habitat where you can watch them.

So, where to look? Ivy, with its dark shiny leaves, is a favoured plant for basking insects – not just butterflies – and may

provide a hibernation site too, so it's a good place to start. Open log piles in the sun are another place where butterflies may both hibernate and sunbathe. You will soon get to know your best local spots.

Once they have warmed up, the butterflies will be off looking for food, a mate and somewhere to lay eggs - so now you must switch to looking for lekking sites (where the males of some species, such as the Small Blue, congregate to display) and caterpillar foodplants, where the females will lay their eggs.



Orange-tip ova

A patch of Hedge Garlic (*Alliaria petiolara*) is a good place to look in early spring – and if you don't see an Orange-tip, you may still find her bright orange eggs in amongst the flower stalks.

Happy hunting!
Sue Taylor

Photos ©Sue Taylor

In the Service of His Grace the Duke of Burgundy

Paraphrasing Tolkien, the biggest adventures start with stepping outside the door... and you never know where the path will take you.

I would add "Say Yes!" and commit yourself before knowing too much about the challenges on the way, as a dose of ignorance can open the door you would never dare to approach!

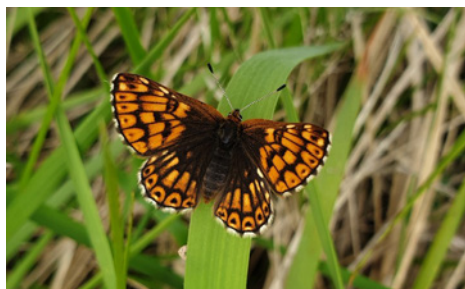
Looking for a research project to complete a postgraduate course with the University of Oxford, I would have been pleased with any subject, and, in hindsight, collecting data on 'Cabbage Whites' or Peacocks would have been more on my level at the time.

Enthusiastically agreeing to survey Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*) butterflies in west Berkshire just tells you all! I am very interested in behavioural ecology and animal behaviour, so exploring females' decision-making when laying eggs (ovipositing) inspired my imagination.

Duke of Burgundy butterflies have a great capacity to charm the observer. They have unique family ties as the only Metalmark (Riodinidae) representative in Europe, a family which is more common in South America. The Duke is the scarcest of all 58 butterfly species in the UK and the fact that they fly only a small distance limits them to their current sites and a very reduced number of suitable habitats in their area.

In the past, they were predominantly a woodland species that followed 'disturbances' like windbreaks, fallen trees or woodland clearances, and used woodland glades to sunbathe and travel. Nowadays, they have adapted to a variety of semi-open habitats, but are still quite picky: they require north- or north-west-facing chalk slopes.

Males perch on low branches or pieces of grass and feistily defend small sheltered sunny patches. Their eagerness to mate and protect their area from everything that flies makes females avoid them after mating, which aids the dispersal but makes finding out about their preferences much harder for us.



The male Duke of Burgundy perches on a tall blade of grass where he sunbathes and waits for passing females. ©Aga Bogucka

Females, which lay eggs on Cowslips or Primroses, are tasked with a difficult choice. They need to find a plant or a group of plants which will remain green and juicy for at least 7-8 weeks to allow their caterpillars to grow and develop into pupae; and the plant needs to have enough shade to survive hot spells,

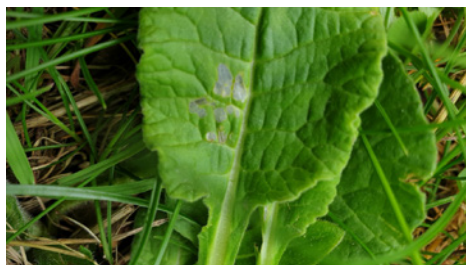
enough sun and moisture to continue to grow, and some shade and shelter from the elements.



Females lay their eggs on the underside of larger leaves (6cms or more). We normally observe 1-4 eggs; on one occasion I observed 11.

©Aga Bogucka

The foodplant should be growing in a thick grass tussock, preferably underpinned with moss, to provide a cosy spot for overwintering pupae. The knowledge of how females choose the right spot is growing, but we are still working on many assumptions.



Characteristic damage on the leaf of Cowslips is the best evidence of larvae feeding at night.

©Aga Bogucka

At the beginning of the project in 2021, I visited twelve known sites in west Berkshire: firstly, to monitor how Duke is doing in each of them; and, secondly, to gather data hoping to understand ovipositing better. There was an expectation of hard work surveying slopes and finding eggs, long hours

and the great reward of observing Duke colonies.

Along the way, I have encountered great kindness and curiosity from the landowners, butterfly enthusiasts and the general public! To my disappointment and increasing concern, I spent day after day visiting sites without seeing Duke. At the end of the survey period, only three out of twelve sites contained Duke colonies! Interestingly, each of them is unique in regard to its history, land management and structure of vegetation.

That, as you can expect, brought more questions, and the urgency to maintain existing sites and learn more about the Duke's presence in this area.

One of the main priorities was to improve the habitat of the site located on Little Hidden Farm. This site was created by the recently-deceased Bill Acworth over 20 years ago, and his family, led by his sons Jamie and Will, are now making great efforts to maintain the site for the Duke. During his life, Bill had been greatly engaged in conservation. He was one of the first agro-foresters in the area and supported local groups including bodgers.

It came as no surprise that work parties brought a good number of volunteers, many of them from local organisations. Our aim over the past winter was to clear the site of a large section of Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) which, as you can see from the picture overleaf, was taking over the site.



Tree poppers were indispensable in removing Blackthorn ©Jamie Acworth

We have now cleared a significant area and doubled the size of the habitat that Duke will be able to use in the coming years.



The final result. As you can see, we left plenty of habitat for other species! ©Jim Asher

It is an ongoing effort, and only a start in giving a hand to this gentle butterfly.

One of the tasks at hand is understanding if west Berkshire has other colonies which we may not be aware of. If you are out and about on public footpaths, keep an eye out, as you may be the one to report a new site (preferably by using the iRecord Butterfly application) ... wouldn't that be exciting!

If you would like to learn more or get involved, please contact us at:

duke-of-burgundy-berks@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Agnieszka (Aga) Bogucka



A volunteer workforce ©Jamie Acworth



HELP WANTED...

To improve habitat for many of our region's rare species.

Please get in touch with the branch if you are able to assist.

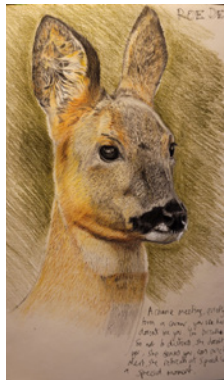
Thank you!

Drawing from experience

Branch member James Ford, also a member of the Chiltern Tracking the Impact WhatsApp group, is a talented artist - and seeing his butterfly images on WhatsApp, the Branch is exploring the possibility of producing a 2024 Conservation Calendar. James kindly provided us with some samples of his drawings to show members what he does and how some illustrations in the calendar might look:



But James doesn't just draw butterflies – in fact, much of his work has birds as the subject... and other forms of wildlife, too:



If we were to go ahead with a calendar for next year, a thought is, perhaps – for each month – to include a species, its habitat and a nectaring and larval foodplant. James draws inspiration for his drawings from personal experience in the field and from photographs he has taken.

At the time of writing, no decisions have been made about producing a calendar, nor of its content (though a conservation theme would be key).

Perhaps you, too, are a 'seasoned' (or budding) artist and believe that you have some work (drawings, illustrations, sketches, paintings... but not photos) which may fit in with our thoughts for a conservation calendar? If so, then please send a sample of your work to the editor at: newsletter-editor@upperthamesbutterflies.ork.uk. And if we don't move forward with the calendar, your work could still be included in a future edition of *Hairstreak*.

Please let the editor know if there is a likelihood you would be prepared to purchase a calendar (at around £12). Thank you!

All images ©James Ford

Guided Walks - May to early July



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



You do not need to be an expert to come on one of our walks. Butterfly walks can be enjoyed by anyone, whatever their level of knowledge (even none!) First-time participants, children (with adult supervision), photographers... **you are ALL welcome.**

There is NO need to contact the leader for most walks. However, our Guided Walks are subject to amendment, particularly due to poor weather. Please consult the BC events pages for any last-minute changes (updated regularly and can be accessed from the **'Further details'** link for each event).

A few walks do require booking; these are clearly marked.

Please see the branch Guided Walks web page for guidance on how to get the most out of our guided walks, including meeting point, etc. https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/guided_walks

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

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

Later walks will be in the next newsletter, but you can always check ahead on our website or Butterfly Conservation's 'Events' pages. **ENJOY!**

[Calendar view](#)

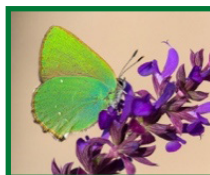
Downloads a .docx file

[Map View](#)

Opens up a new tab

Please check our website for further details
and for any amendments/postponements/cancellations
<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events>

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



Saturday 13th May at 10:30am
Wytham Woods, Oxon

A walk to see and identify spring butterflies, hopefully including **Green Hairstreak**.

[Further details](#)



Saturday 20th May at 10:00am
Paices Wood Country Parkland, Berks

A walk to see spring butterflies including **Dingy Skipper** and **Grizzled Skipper**.

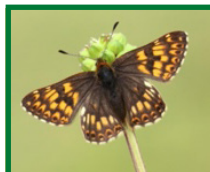
[Further details](#)



Sunday 21st May at 10:30
Aston Upthorpe Downs, Oxon

Spring butterflies of downland and scrub: **Green Hairstreak** and **Dingy & Grizzled Skipper**.

[Further details](#)



Sunday 21st May at 10:30am
Ivinghoe Beacon NT, Bucks

A walk to see a variety of spring butterflies including a chance to see the **Duke of Burgundy**.

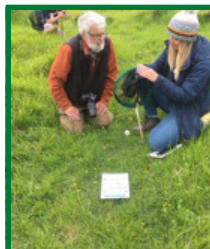
[Further details](#)



Thursday 25th May at 10:30am
Yoesden Bank BBOWT, Bucks

Target Species: **Adonis Blue** and other spring chalk downland species.

[Further details](#)



Saturday 27th May at 10:30am
Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon

A walk to learn identifying tips to help separate butterfly and day-flying moth species confidently, including; **Dingy & Grizzled Skipper**, **Brown Argus**, **Mother Shipton**, **Burnet Companion**, **Small Purple and Gold**, and various other scarce species.

[Further details](#)



Saturday 27th May at 10:30am
Lardon Chase NT, Berks

A walk to see a variety of spring downland butterflies including a chance to see **Adonis Blue**.

[Further details](#)



Saturday 27th May at 2:00pm
Finemere Wood BBOWT, Quainton, Bucks

A field trip to try to find **Black Hairstreak Pupae**.

**BOOKING
REQUIRED**

[Further details](#)



Sunday 28th May at 10:30am
Seven Barrows and Crog Hill, Oxon/Berks

Spring butterflies may include **Small Blue** and **Dingy Skipper**; and day-flying moths.

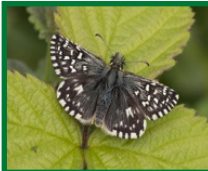
[Further details](#)



Sunday 28th May at 10:30am
Pitstone Quarry, Bucks

Spring butterflies: **Small Blue** and **Dingy Skipper**; and day-flying moths such as **Burnet Companion**.

[Further details](#)



Tuesday 30th May at 10:30am
Hartslock, Goring, Oxon

Grassland butterflies. Target species: **Dingy Skipper** and **Green Hairstreak**.

**BOOKING
REQUIRED**

[Further details](#)



Saturday 3rd June at 11:00am
Bradenham NT, Bucks

We will wander the grassland slopes in search of **Small Blue** and other early-summer butterflies.

[Further details](#)



Saturday 3rd June leaving at 8:30am
Fineshade Wood FE, near Corby, Northants

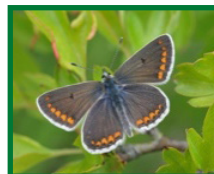
An 'out of county' field trip to see the re-introduced **Chequered Skipper**. We may have time to stop, on our return, to try to see **Wood White** in Hazelborough Forest.

**BOOKING
REQUIRED**

[Further details](#)

Minibus
trip or car
share

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



Sunday 4th June at 11:00am
Ashbury, Oxon

**BOOKING
REQUIRED**

We will explore the restoration grassland for early-summer butterflies and moths; including **Blues** and **Skippers**.

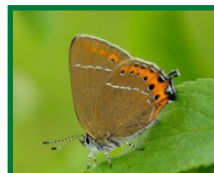
[Further details](#)



Thursday 8th June at 10:30am
Stonepit Field, Milton Keynes, Bucks

We will wander the meadow and pond area hoping to find **Small Blue** and other early-summer species.

[Further details](#)



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

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

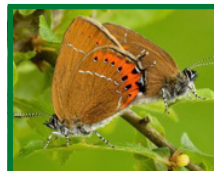
[Further details](#)



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

A walk to see early-summer grassland butterflies and search for the, nationally scarce, **Cistus Forester** moth.

[Further details](#)



Thursday 15th June at 10:30am
Whitecross Green Wood, Oxon

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

[Further details](#)



Tuesday 20th June at 10:30am
Wildmoor Heath, Berks

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

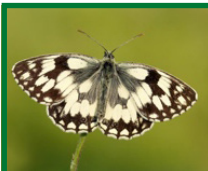
[Further details](#)



Wednesday 21st June at 10:00am
Warburg BBOWT, Oxon

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

[Further details](#)



Wednesday 21st June at 7:00pm
East Hagbourne, Oxon

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

[Further details](#)



Saturday 24th June at 10:30am
Holtspur Bottom BC, Beaconsfield, Bucks

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

[Further details](#)



Sunday 25th June at 10:30am
Butler's Hangings SSSI, West Wycombe, Bucks

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

[Further details](#)



Tuesday 27th June at 11:00am
Blenheim Farm BBOWT, Charlbury, Oxon

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

[Further details](#)



Saturday 1st July at 10:30am
Pamber Forest & Silchester Common, Hants

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

[Further details](#)



Sunday 2nd July at 11:00am
Hackpen Hill, Sparsholt Firs, Oxon

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


[Further details](#)

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




Sunday 2nd July at 11:00am
Howe Park Wood, MK, Bucks
A training event to look at butterfly and day-flying moth identification.

[Further details](#)




Tuesday 4th July at 2:00pm
Maidenhead Thicket NT, Berks
We will search for **White-letter Hairstreak** amongst the rides through this wooded common.

[Further details](#)



Wednesday 5th July at 7:00pm
East Hagbourne, Oxon
An evening walk to see what butterflies do outside 'normal transect' hours, including **Marbled White**.

[Further details](#)



Thursday 6th July at 10:00am
Bernwood Forest, Oxon/Berks
An amble around this hotspot for woodland butterflies including, hopefully, **Purple Emperor**.

BOOKING REQUIRED

[Further details](#)



Friday 7th July at 10:30am
Black Park Country Park, Bucks
A joint walk with the Country Park Rangers to see woodland butterflies including, hopefully, **White Admiral**.

BOOKING REQUIRED

[Further details](#)

I have taken on quite a few guided walks myself this year. This is because several previous leaders have dropped out - mainly due to the 'added bureaucracy' of our increasingly 'blame culture' society. **If you would like to help out, either by taking on leading one of 'my' walks or by helping me or one of the other leaders, that would be fantastic...** particularly if you have a current First Aid certificate and would be willing to take on BC online training (fairly straightforward and all done in about two hours).



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

Our daintiest, smallest... and rarest White

We are very fortunate to have Wood White in our region – albeit restricted to north Buckinghamshire. It truly is an inspiring, delicate little butterfly.

Nick Board is our Wood White Champion, and his 2022 Report follows:

In 2022, the first reported sighting of Wood White in our area was on the 6th May - some three weeks earlier than in the previous year. Allowing for some variances in “actual emergence vs reported sightings”, this was still an early date for a first sighting, and certainly the earliest for the last five years.



What followed was a steady record of sightings for the next two weeks, from locations in Wicken Wood, Salcey Forest, Yardley Chase and privately-owned Leckhampstead Wood. Numbers continued to increase... peaking during the third week of May and into the first three weeks of June: a longer period than in the previous five years.

An emergence of 2nd brood Wood White was noted during the first week of July, but then there was a sudden “drop off” of sightings with no further sightings recorded after the 1st August. It was as if the whole flight period had been brought forward by two to three weeks compared to previous years, which may have been due to the exceptionally warm weather.



Neighbouring Hazelborough Forest on the Bucks/Northants border experienced a similar pattern, with good numbers observed throughout the peak period at the end of May and into June, but then the flight period was suddenly curtailed during July. Further industrial expansion around the Silverstone area close to well-established Wood White habitat could also have a detrimental impact on numbers in the future.

No new sites were reported during 2022, although there are surely some new locations to be discovered... particularly to the north of the area along the North Bucks/South Northants border.

For those of you searching for this fragile little butterfly, some extra information follows!

Habitat

Wood White breeds in tall grassland or light scrub, in partially shaded or edge habitats, with most colonies breeding in woodland rides and clearings.

Features

The adult butterfly is creamy-white, and the male has a squarish black or blackish spot on the tip of its forewings. On the other hand, the blackish spot on the female is reduced to some blackish scales between the veins.

Flight pattern

The male flight pattern is rather feeble as it makes its way up and down the rides searching for females, bobbing up and down as it goes. Its weak flight is unlikely to be confused with other species flying at the same time - for example, Orange-tip or Green-veined White, which have a far more vigorous flight.

If the weather is overcast, Wood White can be reluctant to fly... tending to settle on the underside of a leaf and can be difficult to see.

Egg laying

During early June, the eggs are laid on Birds-foot Trefoil, tuberous pea or the Vetch family, so it is a good idea to look out for these plants.



Good luck with your searching during 2023 - and please let me know of your sightings and any new locations, at: woodw@talktalk.net

Nick Board

All images ©Nick Board

One of the easiest ways to help us...

If you can spare a couple of hours just twice a year, then the WCBS (Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey) could be for you.

You would walk a 2km transect, recording the butterflies, on nice warm, calm summer days and then submit your records. This would make a significant contribution to our understanding of how our butterflies are doing in the 'Wider Countryside'.

It would help in Butterfly Conservation's aim of *'Creating a world where butterflies and moths thrive and can be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere'*.

Square	Location	County	Occupied/ Vacant
SU7669	Carters Hill, Sindlesham	Berks	Vacant
SU7765	Near California Country Park, Arborfield	Berks	Vacant
SP6527	Godington / Twyford	Bucks	Vacant
SP7130	Padbury, Buckingham	Bucks	Vacant
SP7921	Oving / Whitchurch	Bucks	Vacant
SP8230	Newton Longville, Bletchley	Bucks	Vacant
SP8434	Emerson Valley, Milton Keynes	Bucks	Vacant
SP8437	Laughton Valley Park, Milton Keynes	Bucks	Vacant
SP9109	Hastoe, Tring	Bucks	Vacant
SP9319	Horton Wharf, Cheddington	Bucks	Vacant
TQ0186	Alderbourne Manor, Gerrards Cross	Bucks	Vacant
SP2405	Filkins, Carterton	Oxon	Vacant
SP2810	Asthall, Carterton	Oxon	Vacant
SP2818	Shipton under Wychwood	Oxon	Vacant
SP4545	Great Bourton, Banbury	Oxon	Vacant
SP2818	Stratton Audley / Launton, Bicester	Oxon	Vacant



There are still numerous vacancies: click on the relevant 'Square' on the table (left), to see the specific 1km available.

(Sorry, only available to e-newsletter and website users).

Suggested video: Survey techniques for transects and WCBS recording:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgyJYD7CvqY>

Think you can help? - please get in touch.

Peter Philp, WCBS Champion
wcbcs-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Upper Thames Members' Day 2023... a date for your diary!

We are pleased to announce that the 2023 Members' Day is back 'in person' after a couple of years of Zoom meetings.

Whether a new or a long-standing member, we hope you will join us at:

Benson Parish Hall (Oxon) on Saturday 28th October

It is always a great day... chatting to fellow enthusiasts, browsing the books and prints for sale, and listening to some great talks.

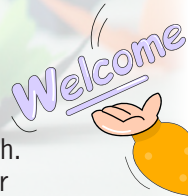
We have some fantastic guest speakers lined up (more information on that in the next issue of Hairstreak), so put the date in your diary now!

*** FULL DETAILS TO FOLLOW ***

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

In the last few months, we have seen a pleasing number of people joining our Branch. There are currently 1576 households in the Upper Thames Branch, with 2194 individuals.

A warm welcome to all new members who have joined since the last newsletter was published.



The more members we have, the more we can achieve as a Branch. Please encourage your friends to join Butterfly Conservation, either through their website (www.butterfly-conservation.org) or by leaflet. Please let me know if you would like any membership leaflets to pass on.

All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and walks, and to attend Members' Day. Up-to-date news on activities can be found on our website: www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

There is also a monthly bulletin sent to those members with registered email addresses, reminding them of upcoming events.

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

Master of Disguise

When at rest, the Grayling is ‘the king of camouflage’ of all the species found in our region. If spotted perched on its typically ‘barren’ background, it might appear somewhat underwhelming...



... but once airborne, it is transformed into what indeed makes it the largest (and perhaps the most impressive) of our Browns.

Des Sussex is UTB's Grayling Champion, and his comprehensive and engaging 2022 Report follows.

The Grayling butterfly (*Hipparchia semele*) is one of our rarest and most threatened species and is listed under Section 41 (S41) of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act as a ‘priority for conservation action’. At a national level, in 2022 the Grayling was moved from Vulnerable to Endangered on the butterfly ‘Red List’...

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/half-of-british-butterfly-species-on-new-red-list>

“The State of the UK's Butterflies 2022 Report”* cites that:...

“Although it remains widely distributed, mainly around the UK coastline, there is increasing concern about Grayling, which has suffered a severe long-term decline. Since 1976, the abundance of this species has decreased by 72% and its distribution by 92% at the UK level, and with major declines in both measures in England, Scotland and Wales. These ongoing, rapid declines recently led to Grayling being upgraded from Vulnerable to Endangered on the GB Red List. Dependent on fine-leaved grasses growing in sparse vegetation with much open ground or rock, the butterfly faces threats from habitat degradation due to ecological succession and nitrogen deposition, and from consequent small population size and increasing isolation.”

* download the State of the UK's Butterflies 2022 Report

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/state-of-uk-butterflies-2022>

The Grayling in Berkshire in 2022

In 2022 there were 141 individual Grayling butterflies reported from the UTB area. All sightings were from the core areas of south Berkshire and along the Hampshire and Surrey borders. This total was down on the last few years, in part due to the lack of high counts from Mortimer which had boosted the totals in 2019-21.

There were 61 separate records submitted by 25 different recorders.



Grayling often fly up to trees to perch / roost on the trunks of pine and birch in the forests. They can be hard to see until they move.

The recorded flight season in Berkshire during 2022 was 84 days, running from 24th June to 17th September. Once again most records were of singles (39) or in the 2-5 range (16). Only 7 records were counts of 6 or more, and the highest count was just 11 from Buckler's Forest. The butterflies either endured or enjoyed the exceptional heatwave, during which most of the grasses and flowers on the dry heaths became parched and



A Grayling in a little 'sun trap' at Barossa. The fine grasses that the caterpillars depend on soon went dry and brown in the 2022 drought & heatwave. Fortunately, they did green up again when the rains finally arrived.

dried to a crisp. The fine grasses on which larvae depend did recover quickly once the rains arrived again, and it will be interesting to see how the Grayling numbers fare in 2023 and if there is any positive or negative legacy of the heatwave & drought.

In table 3 I have listed all the tetrads where Grayling has been recorded since 1997, a few of which are just over the boundary in north Hampshire. It has been seen in a total of 38 tetrads since 1997, but only from 20 of those tetrads since 2017. It has almost certainly been lost from some locations, and it has not been recorded from 8 previously occupied tetrads for over 20 years. The table may prompt some searches for suitable habitat and butterflies in those tetrads.

Buckler's Forest in Crowthorne was again a good place to see the species (and very accessible – although the car park is often full), and the sites at Greenham to Crookham Common, 50 & 100 Acres Pieces, Barossa, Swinley Forest, and Buttersteep Forest all continue to hold populations dispersed over large areas. It was good to get some records from BBOWT's Wildmoor Heath and Broadmoor Bottom Nature Reserves, also from Burnt Common and an unexpected record came from farmland at Finchampstead at some distance from where the species has been seen before. This may well have been a wandering individual which was taking advantage of the heatwave to disperse in search of suitable breeding habitat.

Many heathland and forestry site managers undertake habitat and estate management which benefits the Grayling,

such as scrub clearance, heather and grass mowing, bare ground creation, Bracken control, ride verge widening, and creation of new patches of open habitat with heathers and acid grassland grasses and flowers. Some examples are shown below.

Habitat Management for Grayling and other species that favour 'early successional' habitats.



Bare ground creation - a mini-excavator is scraping off the vegetation to expose bare sand in patches on a heathland nature area near Ascot. The bare area was used in 2022 by various burrowing bees and wasps, green tiger beetles, and Grayling.



Heather structural diversity - a tractor-mounted flail collector is mowing patches of heather in Buttersteep Forest. This creates a varied age and height mosaic in the heather, with lots of valuable 'edge' habitat. Both Grayling and Silver-studded Blue benefitted from this work in 2022.

Heathland habitat restoration in Swinley Forest - Autumn 2022



A 5ha site at Wickham Buses to the south of Caesars Camp had all the young birch and pine trees cleared and removed as biomass.



Following initial clearance there was still a thick layer of organic material over the sandy soil.



The organic layer was carefully scraped off and removed from the site to enable regeneration of heather and fine grasses. The aim is to establish a heathland/acid grassland habitat. The left-hand side of this photo shows an area that has been scraped. In 2023, it will be seen if the site needs any additional seed.

Appendices

Table 1. Recent trends in recording in UTB area

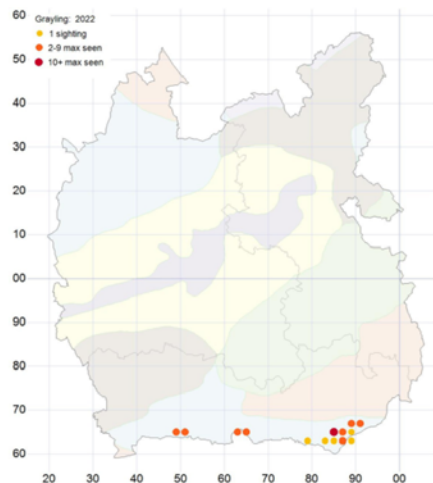
Year	Number of records	Number of recorders	Total Grayling butterflies counted	Highest count	Number of Occupied Monads (1km square)	Number of occupied tetrads (2x2 km square)	First date	Last date
2016	28	13	135	28		9	14/07	30/08
2017	33	14	257	60		11	04/07	15/09
2018	19	15	92	32		11	29/06	16/09
2019	44	25	230	67		15	08/07	08/09
2020	47	18	384	136	21	13	22/06	15/09
2021	68*	28	190	35	23	14	10/07	21/09
2022	61	25	141	11	25	14	24/06	17/09

*24 of the 68 records were from a single group survey visit.

Table 2. Distribution trends for 5 year recording periods (does not include 'dubious' outlier records)

Year	Total Number of occupied tetrads (2x2 km squares)
1997-2001	23
2002-2006	15
2007-2011	16
2012-2016	20
2017-2021	25
2022-	14

Figure 1 Map of 2022 data at a tetrad (2x2km) resolution



Many thanks to all who look out for this species and submit records or help with site and habitat management.

Table 3. Tetrads occupied since 1997
Green shading = 2022 records

	Tetrad	Tetrad location & sites	Most recent record	Recorded 2022
1	SU4264	Crookham Heath to Hamstead Park	1997-2001	
2	SU4864	Greenham	2022	YES
3	SU5064	Greenham Common to Crookham Common	2022	YES
4	SU5264	Crookham Common	2007-2011	
5	SU5268	Bucklebury Common	1997-2001	
6	SU5662	Brimpton Common to Wasing	2012-16	
7	SU5862	Paices Wood	2017-21	
8	SU5864	Paices Wood to Aldermaston	2017-21	
9	SU6060	Pamber Forest/Heath (Hants)	1997-2001	
10	SU6062	Silchester Common & Decoy Heath Nature Reserve (part Hants)	2012-16	
11	SU6064	Padworth Common	2017-21	
12	SU6262	Silchester Common & Belyons Inclosure	1997-2001	
13	SU6264	Padworth/Burnt Common, Fifty Acre Piece, Hundred Acre Piece,	2022	YES
14	SU6464	Holden Firs	2022	YES
15	SU7262	Wellington Country Park (Hants)	2002-06	
16	SU7462	Bramshill (Hants)	1997-2001	
17	SU7862	Blackwater Valley- Fleethill to Moor Green 'new workings' west	2022	YES
18	SU8062	Moor Green 'new workings'	2017-21	
19	SU8064	Simons Wood, Gorrick Plantation	2021	
20	SU8066	Gorrick Plantation	2017-21	
21	SU8262	Wellington College Heath	2022	YES
22	SU8264	Gorrick Plantation, Heathlake	1997-2001	
23	SU8462	Wildmoor Heath NR, Broadmoor Bottom NR	2022	YES
24	SU8464	Crowthorne Woods, Buckler's Forest, Swinley Forest (Hut Hill)	2022	YES
25	SU8466	Beaufort Park, Downshire Golf Course	2007-11	
26	SU8660	Royal Military Academy Sandhurst	2002-06	
27	SU8662	Barossa: Broadmoor Bottom to Wishmoor Bottom, Poppy Hills to Swinley Forest Lower Star Post	2022	YES
28	SU8664	Swinley Forest: Caesar's Camp & The Look Out to Upper Star Post & Lower Star Post	2022	YES
29	SU8862	Swinley Forest: Lower Star Post SE	2022	YES
30	SU8864	Swinley Forest: Pudding Hill and Penny Hill to Rapley	2022	YES
31	SU8866	Swinley Park, The Berkshire GC	2022	YES
32	SU8868	Whitmoor Bog	2012-16	
33	SU9064	Buttersteep Forest: Dukes Hill, The Berkshire GC, Swinley Forest GC	2017-21	
34	SU9066	Buttersteep Forest, Swinley Brick Pits, The Berkshire GC	2022	YES
35	SU9068	Englemere Pond LNR	2021	
36	SU9466	Sunningdale GC, Chobham Common (Surrey)	1997-2001	
37	SU9468	Silwood Park	2012-2016	
38	SU9666	Chobham Common N (Surrey)	1997-2001	

Habitat requirements and management guidance

The butterfly depends on early successional habitats with plenty of bare and sparsely vegetated ground. In our local area it is restricted to sandy and gravelly soils. Even within nature reserves and protected sites it

is at risk of the loss of suitable 'open' habitat if there is a lack of management. Without adequate management, natural succession tends to make heathland, grassland and open forestry areas too overgrown for the Grayling to complete its lifecycle. Management activities such as rotational mowing, grazing, or even surface 'scraping' are required to create some form of 'disturbance' to provide suitable open conditions, with a supply of the short fine-leaved grasses that the caterpillar feeds on, and flowering nectar plants such as heathers which the adults feed from. The Grayling appears to be quite mobile and able to find newly restored or created patches of habitat within a few kms of its local range.

USEFUL WEBLINKS

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/grayling>

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

Grayling Species Factsheet
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/1grayling-species-factsheet.pdf>

Bare Ground for Butterflies & Moths
https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/BareGround_WalesLeaflet_2.pdf

Des Sussex

grayling@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

All images ©Des Sussex




**CALLING ALL UTB SPECIES &
10KM-SQUARE CHAMPIONS**

If you haven't yet done so...

Please prepare and submit your
REPORTS FOR 2022
at the earliest opportunity.

Thanks.





Holtspur Bottom Reserve Picnic

To celebrate all that our volunteers have done for us and the wildlife at Holtspur Bottom, we are inviting everyone who has ever attended a conservation task anywhere (with us or a partner or any other conservation organisation) to join us at Holtspur Bottom on...

Monday 8th May 2023 (at 12:30)

[King Charles' Festival of Volunteering Day]



Map of the Reserve

Please bring a very basic picnic with you; we will provide some cakes and soft drinks. Sadly, numbers might be too large for us to provide a 'meal' for everyone!

After our meal, we will tour the reserve and bask in the glory we have created from sown rye grass fields.

To enable us to judge numbers, please contact nick.bowles@htlworld.com three days ahead of the event. Please join us!



Small Blue (male)
[previously recorded
at Holtspur Bottom]
©David Hastings

Non-standardised Butterfly Survey Teams

The UTB runs a number of casual, non-standardised surveys across land that has limited access, and all would welcome extra help. If you think you might like to join the teams and help survey these areas, please get in touch with nick.bowles@ntlworld.com

Arcott MOD, near Bicester, Oxfordshire

Survey teams admitted after security clearance

Ashbury and Ashdown, near Faringdon, Oxfordshire

Private farmland and National Trust land

Bradenham, near Saunderton, Buckinghamshire

National Trust land

Ditchley Estate, near Charlbury, Oxfordshire

Private estate with limited access

Farmoor Reservoir, near Botley, Oxfordshire

Thames Water-owned site with a request for regular surveys of the adjacent meadows and an opportunity to set up moth-trapping sessions

Green Farm and Hughenden, near High Wycombe, Bucks

National Trust land with limited public access and nationally important populations of a rare moth

Hall Farm, near Dagnall, Buckinghamshire

Private farmland with rich chalk flora but no footpath

Otmoor MOD, near Beckley, Oxfordshire

Survey teams admitted after security clearance

Piddington MOD, near Bicester, Oxfordshire

Survey teams admitted after security clearance

Road Farm, near Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire

Private farmland with no footpath

Strawberry Bank, near Lane End, Buckinghamshire

Private estate with limited public access to chalk downland

Tilehouse Estate, near Lillingstone Dayrell, Buckinghamshire

Private farmland and woodland with no footpath

Wapseys Wood, near Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire

Veolia-owned site with footpaths but currently no organised surveying taking place

Wendover Woods, near Wendover, Buckinghamshire

Forestry England – open access but currently no organised surveying taking place

West Woodhay Estate, near Inkpen, Berkshire

Private estate with limited public access

In nature, nothing is perfect...

'In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect' is a quote by novelist Alice Walker (*The Color Purple et al.*).

I don't know about you, but I haven't been fortunate over the decades to see butterflies that are as 'imperfect' as these examples.

In researching the Natural History Museum's vast wealth of historical data, the editor has come across some 'weird and wonderful' specimens from our region that are anything but normal. If I saw any of them in the field, I'd have to change my specs – and grab the camera quickly!

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



1. Small pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene selene* ab. *hallantsi* Crowthorne 1942
2. Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina insularis* ab. *partimtransformis* Princes Risboro 1941
3. Comma *Polygona c-album* ab. *reichstettensis* Oxford 1930
4. Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja* ab. *suffusa* Swinley 1930
5. Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* ab. *dannenbergi* Thame (undated)
6. Chalk Hill Blue *Lysandra coridon* ab. *extrema* (underside) Chilterns 1952

Send us your 'imperfect' sightings!

Citation: Natural History Museum (2014). Specimens (from *Collection specimens*) [Data set resource]. Natural History Museum. <https://data.nhm.ac.uk/dataset/collection-specimens/resource/05ff2255-c38a-40c9-b657-4ccb55ab2feb>

Yoesden: A sight site for sore eyes



©Butterfly Conservation upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

If you've never visited this incredible site, you've somehow missed a trick!

Situated in the Radnage valley near Bledlow Ridge in Bucks, this BBOWT-managed site of unimproved chalkland (often referred to as Yoesden Bank) is home to many rare butterflies and a host of wildflowers. At the top of the steeply sided valley (on the right in the above photo), on the north-eastern edge, is a 'hanging' beech woodland.

Access is difficult, with steep, potentially slippery slopes, kissing gates and undulating ground.

I visit the site several times throughout each season, and have also just taken on a regular survey of the St Mary the Virgin Church (Radnage) grounds for our Branch.

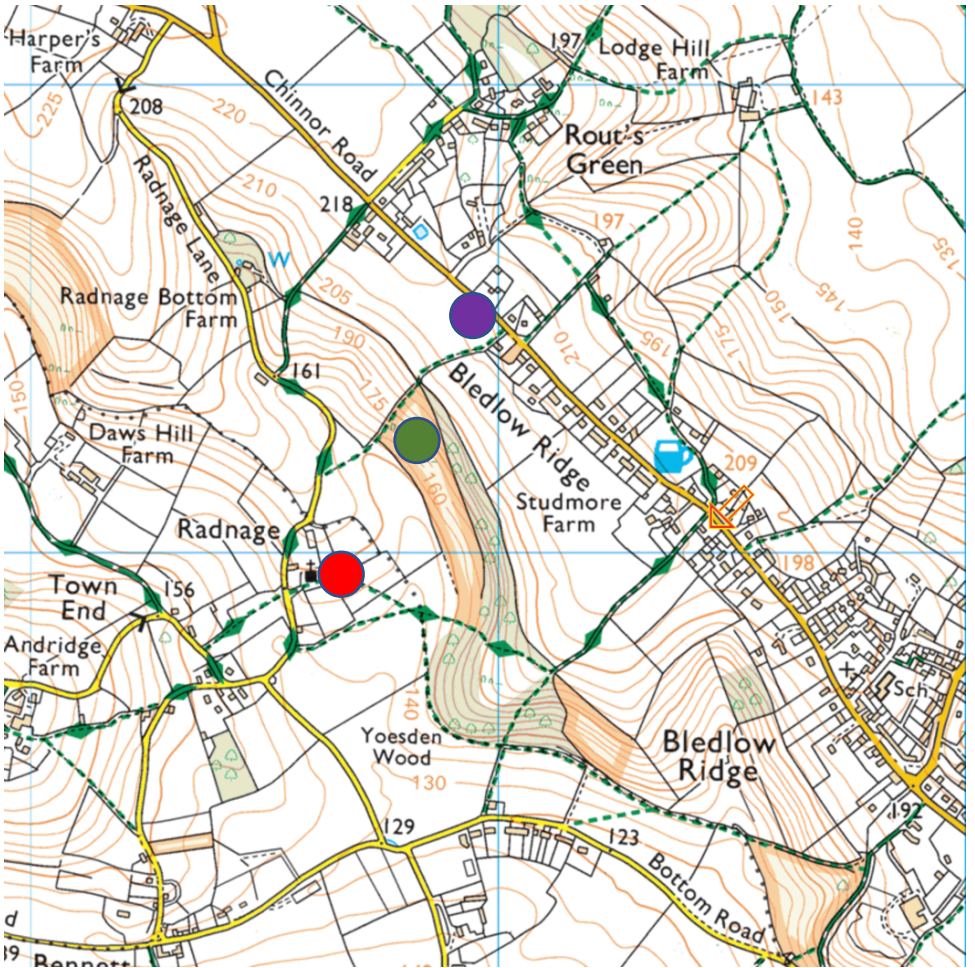
Last May, Brenda Mobbs and Sue Taylor led a walk here – and a 'repeat visit' is scheduled for 25th May 2023 (details of which can be found in this newsletter and on the UTB website). **DON'T MISS IT!**

Yoesden is awash with butterflies, moths and other invertebrates throughout the summer – as well as caterpillar foodplants including Cowslip, Common Dog-violet, Horseshoe Vetch, Kidney Vetch, Common Bird's-foot Trefoil and Devil's-bit Scabious.

Some of the 'specialist' butterflies to be found on the Reserve include Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue, Small Blue and Dark Green Fritillary. On last year's organised walk, 12 species of butterfly and 11 species of moths (including the Narrow-bordered five-spot Burnet, pictured below) were recorded.



©Sue Taylor



© OpenStreetMap contributors



The Reserve (SU788984). Nearest postcode is HP14 4AR



Suggested parking on Chinnor Road (near stile, which takes you onto the Reserve)



Please do NOT park at St Mary the Virgin Church in Radnage Lane, Radnage

Derek Haynes

Plants to the Rescue?

The UTB Committee is delighted to announce the following plantings across our region:



30 **Dark Mullein** plants have been placed on Peppard Common (Oxon) to support Striped Lychnis, with permission for more to go in this year. Additionally, 35 Dark Mullein were planted at Holtspur Bottom, Beaconsfield (Bucks).

75 **Horseshoe Vetch** plants have been placed on one of the roughs at Ellesborough Golf Course (Bucks), adjacent to a site which has Chalk Hill Blue.



100 **Common Dog-violet** plants have gone into Grendon & Doddershall Woods (Bucks) to help Dark Green Fritillary & Silver-washed Fritillary. Another 50 plants of Common Dog-violet have gone



into Christmas Gorse (Bucks) to benefit Silver-washed Fritillary, and there are plans to plant more there this spring.



100 **Cowslip** plants have gone into a rough bank at Stocken Farm near Princes Risborough (Bucks) to help create a link between existing and potential Duke of Burgundy sites.

We are of course hopeful that all the above plantings will have a positive impact on the target species. Do let us know what you are planting on your own land to help butterflies and moths.

A View to a Kill

For the past fourteen years I have been collecting late-stage Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars, following a request from BC to observe the extent that the *Sturmia bella* parasite (right) was spreading throughout the country after it first made its way across the Channel at the beginning of the century.



Photo ©Peter Smith
[Gedling Conservation Trust]

Having grandchildren at the local junior school, I enquired if they would like some caterpillars at a late-instar stage so that they could observe their pupation and emergence as adult butterflies – and release them in the school playground. This proved popular and has continued for several years – with my only request being that they leave everything in the cage, from where I can see any evidence of the impact of parasites.

Last year, in the paddock close to home after a very warm April, I found three groups of first-instar caterpillars at the beginning of May which is about the same as I usually find. When I returned just over two weeks later they had gone, leaving very little trace of their having eaten the nettle leaves.

The warm weather in April was followed in May by quite a long spell of unsettled weather and I feared that the Small Tortoiseshells, which had overwintered but not oviposited in April, would have died before laying any eggs.

This fortunately proved to be very wrong, as I found more groups of caterpillars than I have ever found in the spring before - yet I soon noticed a far higher percentage had been taken, not by *Sturmia bella* but by another parasite, *Cotesia vanassae*, which is usually almost absent in spring caterpillars but sometimes takes over 75% of the summer ones.

Shortly after collecting some caterpillars, I was seeing adults from the previous generation, which resulted in the Small Tortoiseshell being on the wing over longer periods last summer than I have ever noticed previously.

One report from a school that had received some caterpillars described the scene as carnage, because of the extent of parasitic impact on the caterpillars: something I didn't want the children to witness.

Come the summer I found several groups of Peacock caterpillars, which are usually only subject to a low number of parasites... but last year they suffered the same fate as the Small Tortoiseshell - even two *Photocampe confusae*, a parasite that is seen far less.



The image left shows 17 *Sturmia bella* pupae, 1 *Photocampe confusae* pupa (the striped one on the left) and – on the ‘cotton wool’ – small grubs of *Cotesia vanassae* (which spin the material to conceal themselves).

Pictured below is a Small Tortoiseshell pupa with a *Sturmia bella* thread attached. I have noted that caterpillars which pupate on nettle leaves are coloured to best match their background.



Despite all the parasites seen last summer, I found more Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock adults going into hibernation than usual - but this may only because I have been moving more boards and timber!

It will be interesting to see what we see on the wing this spring.

Stuart Hodges

Photos above © Stuart Hodges

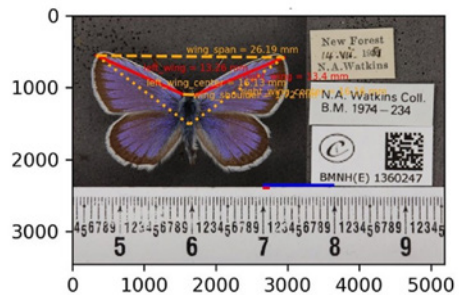
Looming Large: Food for thought...



Did you know that many of our butterflies are getting bigger?

Researchers and museum scientists have digitally analysed 125,000 of the Natural History Museum’s British butterfly specimens (using a computer vision pipeline system called Mothra), pairing the monthly temperature records experienced by the late-stage larvae of 24 British butterfly species and looking for patterns in the relationship between size and temperature.

They found that for 17 of the 24 species, the increase in temperature when the butterflies’ late-stage larvae were developing caused a corresponding 1.03% per °C average increase in adult butterfly size.



Open access data (*Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 2022 ©Rebecca J. Wilson and Alexandre Fioravante de Siqueira et al)

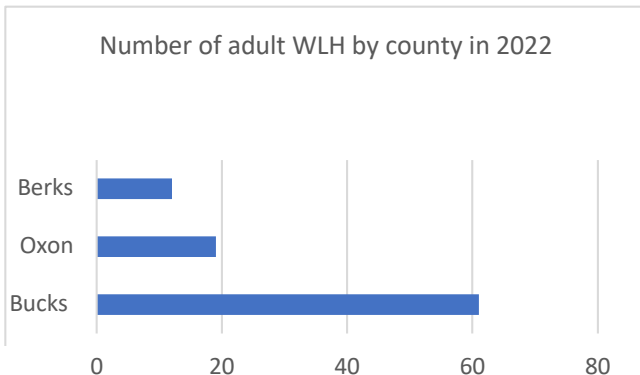
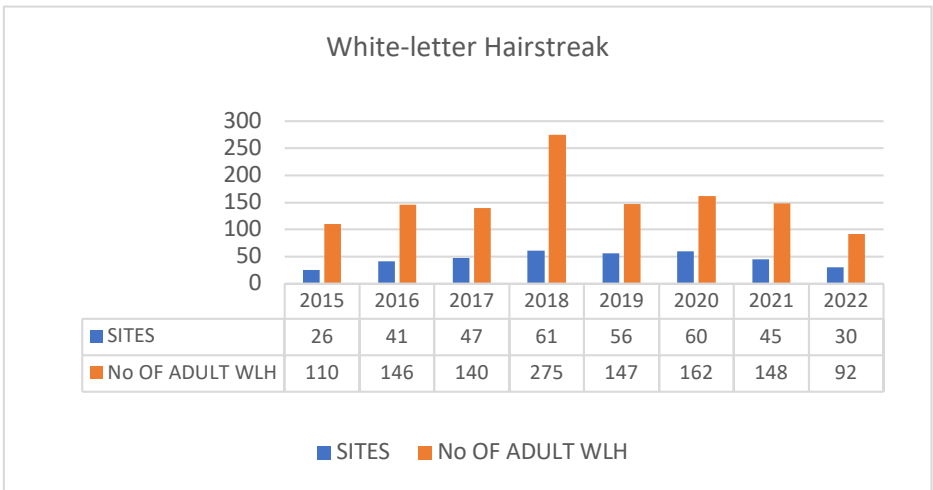
Food for thought, indeed.

White-letter Hairstreak Champion's Report 2022

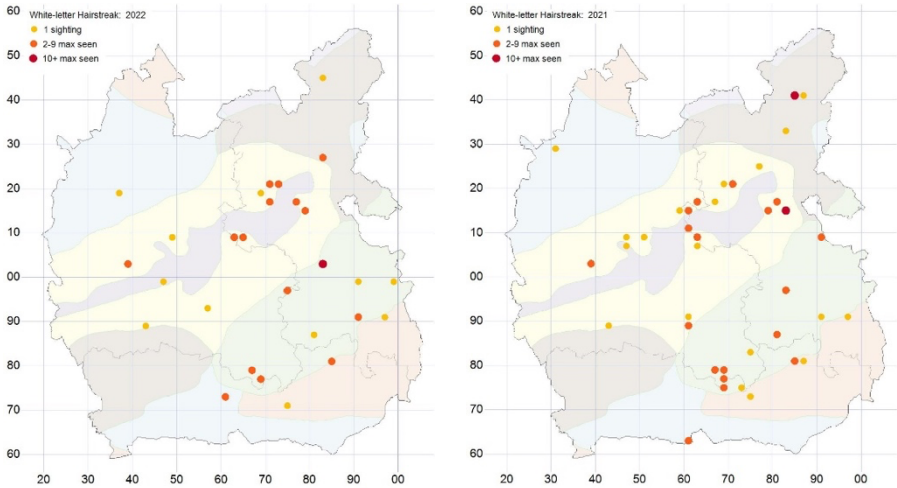


Many thanks to all those who sent in their records of White-letter Hairstreak. The first sighting was on the 14th of June and the last was on the 4th of August. Just over 90 adult butterflies were recorded in the Upper Thames region in 2022. Whilst this is the lowest figure recorded since I became Species Champion in 2015, it was also from a relatively low

number of sites. This makes it a little harder to conclude if 2022 was a bad year for the species or if it was just under-recorded - or even a combination of the two. I certainly managed to see it reasonably easily at all the known sites for the butterfly that I visited last year, which makes me think it probably wasn't an awful year for the butterfly overall. A comparison of yearly numbers/sites is shown in the chart below:

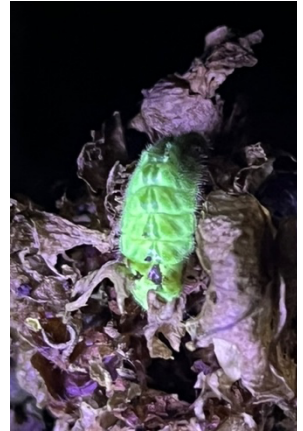


Distribution maps of records for 2022 (left) and 2021, by way of comparison, are shown below:



Searching for larvae using a UV torch

As green caterpillars fluoresce under UV light, I experimented last year with using a UV torch to look for WLH larvae... to determine whether this might work as a survey method. It certainly seems to work (photo right), and I hope to do some more trials this year.



Elm planting

The planting of elm to support the White-letter Hairstreak (and other elm feeders) continues, with 391 elms planted to date. (Left): Elm planting at Charvil this winter.

Peter Cuss
Photos ©Peter Cuss

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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Holtspur Bottom Reserve

www.holtspurbottom.info

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