

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 119 | LATE SEPTEMBER 2023



Members' Day 28th October



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames
Branch**



www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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

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Cover images: May be seen this month... from left; clockwise:
Elephant Hawk-moth larva (©Chris Brown)
Small Copper & Adonis Blue (©Derek Haynes)
Black Hairstreak ovum (©Tony Croft)



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

Next edition: **MID DECEMBER 2023 (ISSUE 120) [DEADLINE FOR COPY: 8th DECEMBER 2023]**
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Editorial

A very warm welcome to this autumn edition of *Hairstreak*.

If recent years (including 2022) are anything to go by, the main butterfly species expected to be seen flying now (apart from the hibernators who may still be fuelling up for



Clouded Yellow ©Chris Naish

the winter) are Small Copper and the migrant Clouded Yellow; with perhaps a few faded examples of Silver-spotted Skipper and Brown Hairstreak to be found; and with some of the Blues, Browns and Whites determined to hang on.



©Derek Haynes

a 'field day', with dozens of both Small and Essex Skippers competing for the best blade of vegetation on which to prepare to roost. I took this photo at 19:30 on 29th June. Subsequent early mornings saw them voraciously feeding on Everlasting Pea (*Lathyrus latifolius*), inset.

Our focus now turns towards Members' Day and habitat management tasks, details of

both which you'll find within these pages. Full details of a much-anticipated return to our traditional Members' Day format are given on page 6, and be sure to check out the 'back story' of each of our 3 inspirational key speakers on page 8. It's sure to be an entertaining and welcome get-together for our members following the recent series of Members' Days over Zoom.

Over the summer (if you can call it that!), many of our members have been busy with surveys (recording) and working to improve the invaluable habitats that many of our species need to thrive. If you haven't yet joined the 'band of happy volunteers', there are lots of ways you can get involved.

Take a look at our informative website (upperthames-butterflies.org.uk) where (under the **Conservation tab**) you'll find useful links to the activities you might be interested in. For help with churchyard surveys and the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS), for example, why not consider your options now for 2024? Just get in touch if you can offer your services: much appreciated.

Much of the work done to improve habitats is carried out over the winter months, so now is the perfect time to consider how you could perhaps lend a helping hand. Do please check out the current opportunities for joining a work party by either looking on the UTB website (under the **Events tab**) or checking out the electronic Branch E-News that is sent out regularly to those who have registered their email addresses with BC.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter, and we look forward to seeing you at Member's Day and, hopefully, at one of our other upcoming events.

Derek Haynes
Newsletter Editor

Please send contributions for future issues of the newsletter to newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk, with supporting images sent separately (or as attachments) in order to maintain quality. **NEXT COPY DEADLINE IS 8th DECEMBER 2023.**

View from the Chair

I hope you all had some exciting encounters with butterflies and moths this summer. For some, their best encounter might be the very first sighting of a species, or a species seen in their garden for the first time.



For me, the most exciting thing is finding rare species of butterflies and moths in places where the UTB have been instrumental in either providing vital conservation work or the management advice that guided work by others.

This summer I have seen Chalk Hill Blue back at a Forest England site where they seemed to have been lost until massive amounts of work this spring by the Chiltern Society, following our advice.

I've seen Silver-spotted Skipper, Chalk Hill Blue and the exceptionally rare Downland Plume moth at a Thames Water site with none recorded previously, after years of work by our volunteers alongside Chiltern Rangers (see page 5). I have found further evidence of the spread of Duke of Burgundy at both National Trust and Network Rail sites where, again, we worked with Chiltern Rangers to improve habitat near existing colonies.

It is pleasing to see rare species surviving, despite all the odds against them, and totally wonderful to see them doing so because of our efforts. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this in any of the myriad ways that members find to help. I hope you share my thrill in knowing that we are making a real difference.

Changing tack, please give some thought to the hours employed to create this

edition of *Hairstreak*. We want you to enjoy receiving it. Please let Derek know what you like about the publication and what you would change; and perhaps consider sending us an article for a future edition. I want to thank those of you who receive *Hairstreak* electronically, enabling us to produce larger and more frequent versions, since we save on printing and posting costs (which continue to rise). Those savings are then put into the care of key habitats.

Speaking of making a difference, there are several tasks that we could use a helping hand with. Here is a flavour of a few of them:

- Maybe you have social skills and would love to chat to our members to see what they would like from the Society?
- Maybe you can come to our Members' Day and help arrange chairs before we start, or perhaps you could assist with refreshments on the day?
- Maybe you could take some pictures at Members' Day or any of our other various events? We need images for our media presence (Facebook, Twitter, web page etc).
- Maybe you have basic gardening skills which could help us with the increasing range of butterfly and moth foodplants we grow from seed?
- Maybe you like to walk about outdoors, observing butterflies? We have opportunities for surveyors in most parts of the Branch area to visit biologically rich, private land to report on the butterflies and moths they see there.

Please let us know. Key contact information can be found on the last page of this publication.

May I thank all of you, once again, for your fantastic support, making us probably the most effective small conservation body around. Without your, literally, tens of thousands of records and

thousands of hours of volunteer effort, hundreds of our rarest butterflies and moths would, quite simply, not exist.

Hopefully, the fact that you can still see so many butterflies and moths in the UTB area rewards (and is testament to) that effort.

August 2023

DOWNLAND PLUME MOTH: LATEST NEWS

This summer, I returned with Ian Crump, Thames Water's Biodiversity Officer, and UTB committee member Sue Taylor to a Thames Water site where the believed-extinct Downland Plume moth had been recently discovered.

We gathered in hope but with low expectations of finding a tiny moth that was thought to fly in July, and this was the third week of August.

For the first 40 minutes we saw no plume moths at all but then Ian found our first Downland Plume and we went on to find at least 16 different individuals along a linear route of approx. 500m. We were lucky to visit in late afternoon. This moth becomes active as the afternoon becomes evening and then on into the night. Indeed, records of night-flying males, attracted to light traps, are evidence that the species flies in July. The moth may always have been active by day into August.

We believe the 16 individuals we saw comprised both male and female moths, judging by the abdomen size. The two with slim abdomens that we caught and retained for confirmation of their sex by dissection (thanks to Peter Hall) and by genetic study (thanks to the Natural History Museum and its Darwin Tree of Life project) were male. In order that any species can mate only with members of its own species, the genitalia are uniquely shaped.

After news of the site's Downland Plume moths flying late in the season, Colin Hart, the national 'Plume expert', asked if we could get permission for another shot at finding them and asked if he might take a female for egg-laying. The immature life stages have never been seen previously. With permission granted, we went back full of hope in early September, but would we be too late for a moth described in old books as a July-flying species? Once again it did not look promising for more than an hour. Then we found a cluster of about seven and managed to capture one. We hope that Colin will be able to elucidate features of the moth's life cycle that will assist with our conservation effort.

Nick Bowles



Upper Thames Branch Members' Day 2023

We are excited to announce that, after several years of Zoom, Members' Day will be back to meeting in person this year! Please come and join us on...

**Saturday 28th October at 9.45am
at Benson Parish Hall, Sunnyside, Benson, OX10 6LZ**

(MAP OF VENUE & TRAVEL DETAILS ON NEXT PAGE)

It is always a great day - a chance to meet and chat with other butterfly enthusiasts, purchase interesting books, buy a Richard Lewington print and listen to a superb line-up of speakers:

Peter Eeles - Passionate and award-winning conservationist, author and founder of the ukbutterflies.co.uk website.

Will Langdon - An amazing young naturalist currently working towards his PhD at Oxford University, studying 'responses of lepidoptera to environmental change'.

Matthew Oates - Naturalist, author, TV and radio personality, volunteer at Knepp Rewilding and leading expert on the Purple Emperor.

**** See the following article to learn more about each of our key speakers ****

So, make sure you **write the date in your diary now!** Entry is free but there will be a donation box... so if you feel you would like to make a small contribution to cover costs, one is always appreciated.

PLEASE NOTE: that in previous years lunch was provided but this resulted in a fair bit of food left over at the end. To simplify things and avoid food waste, we would ask this year that you bring your own packed lunch. Tea, coffee, squash and biscuits will be provided.

ITINERARY (noting that this has **changed** since the previous announcement).

- 09.45 Doors open
10.15 Introduction and welcome: **Nick Bowles**
10.25 Review of the Upper Thames moths: **Peter Cuss**
10.50 Review of the Upper Thames butterflies: **Nick Bowles**
11.15 Holtspur (and other sites) update: **Nick Bowles**
11.30 Break. Coffee, tea or squash and biscuits. Browse books, prints etc. for sale
12.00 Talk 1. 'British and Irish butterfly rarities': **Peter Eeles**
12.35 Talk 2. 'Nothing without a moth trap: Recording micro moths in the Upper Thames region': **Will Langdon**
1.10 Lunch. Browse books, prints etc. for sale. Quiz
2.10 Talk 3. 'The Purple Emperor: Yet more good news!
(*Thou meetest with things dying, I with things living...*): **Matthew Oates**
2.55 Break. Coffee, tea or squash and biscuits. Browse books, prints etc. for sale
3.30 Photo Competition: **Pete Thompson** + Quiz results: **Grahame Hawker**
3.34 Round up of the day: **Nick Bowles**
3.50 Finish



Why not enter the photo competition this Members' Day?

The details are listed below. There are four categories:

1. UK Butterflies
2. UK Moths
3. Early stages (ovum, larva or pupa)
4. Foreign/non-UK Lepidoptera (all life-cycle stages)



A few simple rules to follow, please! Photos should have been taken in either 2022 or 2023. Maximum number of three photos per category per person and a maximum number of eight photos per individual. **Please send your photos (in jpeg format) by email by 7th October to Pete Thompson plthompson127@gmail.com**

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

Map & Directions to Benson Parish Hall, our venue for Members' Day (O.S. maps 164 & 175, grid reference SU618920, postcode OX10 6LZ)

By road:

From **Oxford** direction take A4074 and on outskirts of Benson, turn left at roundabout by BP petrol station. In 200 yards, at new mini roundabout continue straight on, past the school on the left, then bearing left past the War Memorial on your right, and take the left turn signposted Watlington (B4009 and Parish hall). After approx 200 yards the main road curves right and you must turn sharp left at new modified junction into Sunnyside and then immediately right into Parish Hall carpark.

From **Reading** (A4074) or **Henley** (A4130) direction, at the roundabout near Crowmarsh Gifford, take the Oxford road (A4074) for 1.5 miles and turn right to Benson on the B4009 towards Watlington. Pass the church on left and at war memorial triangle, bear right then shortly bear left towards Watlington (B4009, signed to Parish Hall). After about 200m turn left into Sunnyside, crossing Littleworth Road, then immediately right into the Parish Hall car park.

From **Watlington** or **M40 J6**, take B4009 towards Benson. At outskirts of Benson, go through speed chicanes, follow road round left and right hand bends, and be aware of new pedestrian crossing after right hand bend, then almost immediately turn right at modified junction into Sunnyside, and immediately right into Parish Hall car park.

By public transport:

Buses from **Oxford** leave from Westgate Stop E3 at 08.50 (X40 service) and 09.20 (X39), then every half-hour thereafter. The journey time to Benson is 34 minutes. Alight opposite Benson Marina and it's an 8-minute walk to the Parish Hall. Walk in the Reading direction for a few yards, turn left onto the B4009 towards Watlington, then follow the instructions above for road transport from Reading.

From **Reading Rail Station**, buses leave from Station Road at 09.25, then at 09.45 & 10.20. X39 is the faster service. Alight at Benson Marina, cross the road and follow the instructions above.



Meet our Members' Day Guest Speakers

Peter Eeles grew up on the edge of the Cotswolds and – from an early age – became fascinated and increasingly involved with the study of butterflies.

He is perhaps best known for his acclaimed website ukbutterflies.co.uk (established in 2002), with its mission to 'build a community of responsible butterfly enthusiasts in Britain & Ireland'.

As a passionate conservationist, Peter was presented with the Marsh Award for the Promotion of Lepidoptera Conservation in 2016.

In 2019, Peter published his book, *Life Cycles of British & Irish Butterflies*, which includes detailed descriptions and photos of the adult, egg, caterpillar and chrysalis of each species, thus revealing the fascinating life cycles of the 59 butterfly species considered resident or regular migrants to Britain and Ireland.

Peter is excited to confirm the eagerly anticipated publication of his latest book, *British & Irish Butterfly Rarities*, this autumn, which will focus solely on those butterfly species regarded as extinct, rare migrants or present through deliberate or accidental introductions.

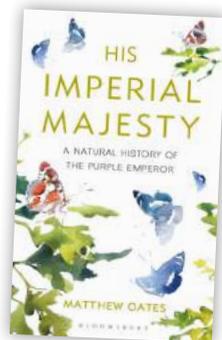
STOP PRESS!

Copies of Peter's latest book will be available on Members' Day at a special pre-publication price. An opportunity not to be missed!



Matthew Oates is a naturalist and nature writer with a passion for butterflies, and he has been actively involved in nature conservation for some 40 years.

Since retiring in 2018, Matthew has taken a fastidious interest in the Purple Emperor, leading to the publication of his book, *His Imperial Majesty, A Natural History of the Purple Emperor*, in 2020. Previous books include *In Pursuit of Butterflies* (2015) and *Beyond Spring* (2017).



Matthew has contributed to episodes of Countryfile, Springwatch and Wild Isles; has done a fair amount of work for radio (especially Radio 4); and has written articles for *The Times' Nature Notebook* column.

Will Langdon is an amazing young entomologist, well-known for his excellent work on leaf-mining micro-moths, and has many 'county first' records to his name. He proved the Large Tortoiseshell was breeding in the UK again after decades of absence.

In 2021 UK Butterflies awarded him their 'Outstanding Contribution Award'. Will is currently working on his PhD at Oxford University on 'Responses of Lepidoptera to Environmental Change'.

Under the Weather: Groan or Grown?

After last year's drought conditions, the jury was out as to how butterflies and moths would fare in 2023.

In fact, Butterfly Conservation were so concerned that they issued a press release entitled **Butterflies, heatwaves and droughts** on 13th July 2022, citing the affect the long drought of 1975 had on butterfly populations in 1976 as "taking a heavy toll... with numbers crashing". The full report can be read at: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/butterflies-heatwaves-and-drought>

A study led by York University examining extreme population changes for 207 butterfly and moth species in England since the 1960s found that the highest number of population crashes occurred in 1977, when 54 species (26% of those studied) underwent severe declines, clearly linked to the drought. Many more species will have undergone less-extreme declines, too.

Before records have been collated and interpreted at the end of this year, data from UTB's Butterfly Sightings Page have given us an insight into the perceived health of our butterflies during 2023's summer season.

In terms of the dates of first sightings, there doesn't seem to have been much variation this year from the mean for each resident species over the past 2 decades (with just a few exceptions).

During **May**, when we started the month

with somewhat changeable weather but ended the month with more sunshine, Brimstone seems to have occurred in healthy numbers across our region, with counts of around 30 (or more) having been recorded on visits to Ivinghoe Beacon (Bucks) and Aston Upthorpe Downs (Oxon). Other species with 'healthy counts' were Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Small Blue and Common Blue, with the highest recorded count for any species in May being 66 for the Duke on a 'full day' at Ivinghoe Beacon on 27th. Geoff Dymott recorded a Wall on 14th on the Ridgeway at Hackpen Hill, Oxon (below).



Wall 14th May 2023 ©Geoff Dymott

Wall is a rare, localised species in our region (being typically confined to coastal areas further

afield), with records over recent years confirming its scarcity. According to UTB data, only 1 record of Wall has been reported over the past 20 years in the 10k square (SU38) in which Geoff's record was taken: at Segsbury Camp, in 2014, some 3 kilometres east of Hackpen Hill. Some work is needed to explain the recent distribution (and future plight) of Wall in our region. The species with perhaps unusually low numbers recorded in May was Green Hairstreak. One (butter)'fly in the ointment' was Marsh Fritillary with sightings (including

by me) at Yoesden Bank (Bucks) - though it is surely highly unlikely to have arrived there of its own volition?

June, given its general improvement weather-wise, seemed to get off to a strong start for some of our Blues - in particular the Small Blue, which was seen in large numbers at some sites. Adonis Blue also did well in some of its known haunts, with a high of 120 recorded at Yoesden Bank on 3rd. Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper and Marbled White also seemed to be faring well. Towards the end of the month, Small Skipper appeared in unusually high numbers (and I suspect that Essex Skipper did quite well, too). Of the more unexpected sightings in June,



Large Tortoiseshell 27th June 2023
©Jo Parsons

27th in Bradfield (Berks) by Jo Parsons.

July again brought about some mixed fortunes weather-wise, and it remained generally cloudy and relatively cool throughout the month - with just a few full days of sunshine. Woodland specialists seem to have struggled somewhat (especially Purple Emperor and White Admiral in their known haunts), whereas Small Skipper was still being seen in abnormally large numbers. Gatekeeper was prolific and the Whites seem to have had a good month - particularly Green-veined White, as the photo by Trevor Lea suggests! Red Admiral (a



'Mud-puddling' Green-veined Whites
18th July 2023 ©Trevor Lea

migrant, mostly) and Peacock also did very well - especially the former, which I've never seen in such large numbers. After what appeared to be low numbers of overwintering Small Tortoiseshell reported in the spring, the species seems to have recovered somewhat by July; and as far as other migrants were concerned, there were sporadic sightings of both Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow, although 2023 is unlikely to enter the archives as a notable year for either species.

As we moved from a very damp end-of-July into **August**, the weather remained quite unsettled - though a slight improvement came as the month progressed. Where Brown Argus is found, it seems to have appeared in larger numbers than usual. David Hastings recorded a Wall on 9th on the Ridgeway at Hackpen Hill: offspring of the first generation that Geoff reported at the same location in May, perhaps?

Other sightings of Wall in small numbers were also reported throughout the month. Unlike last year, there have been no records submitted to the UTB Sightings Page this August for

either second-brood Duke of Burgundy or Orange-tip, occurrences of both (particularly the former) being most unusual. But Mark Jones did spot this Long-tailed Blue on Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon. Both Silver-spotted skipper and Grayling appeared in good numbers in their known localities.



Long-tailed Blue 20th August 2023
©Mark Jones

Very few Small Tortoiseshell sightings were reported during the month. Chalk Hill Blue also struggled, with second brood Adonis Blue being more populous at some sites where both species are present. Second-generation Small Heath was often reported in good numbers.

During the last week of August, which brought yet more unsettled weather, sightings were quite thin on the ground, with little of note (although second-generation Small Heath still appeared to be doing rather well).

Well, the first 10 days of **September** finally brought us a taste of summer, and sightings were still in healthy numbers, especially for many of our more common

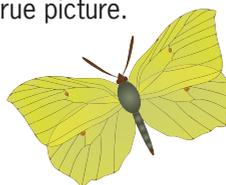
species (including counts of >200 for Meadow Brown and >100 for Small Heath by Peter Philp on Aston Upton Downs on 4th).

Only relatively few moth sightings get sent in amongst the butterfly submissions to the Sightings page, and Humming-bird Hawk-moth once again seems to have featured quite prominently (along with occasional Tiger moth sightings). Jersey Tiger was the only species (butterfly or moth) that I recorded in a recent churchyard survey, and its presence when in flight undeniably attracts attention (especially in the absence of anything else!). Kat Dahl had a county-first for Berkshire (and maybe for all UTB?) with a rare Banded Pine Carpet in her moth trap on 7th.

So, what can we conclude about the effects of last year's drought on species' numbers in our region in 2023? Well, I'll let more competent commentators answer that question in any detail - but, from my own observations and review of the sightings reported to the website, for the most part I haven't noticed a perhaps-anticipated decline in populations (in fact, in many cases, quite the opposite).

Perhaps Plantlife's *No Mow May* and *Let it Bloom June* campaigns have proved somewhat influential?

Only the passage of time will give us the true picture.



Derek Haynes

Winter Conservation Tasks 2023-24

Unless we act to create and maintain suitable habitats, many of the butterflies and moths we love will eventually vanish.

Built-up areas and intensively farmed land host very few species, and, though fallow land is good for a time, it goes through a sweet spot and then loses the diversity that made it so good. This happens as thicker grasses & scrub develops, smothering and reducing the diversity of other plants.

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

Much of our winter effort is at our own Holtspur Bottom reserve near Beaconsfield. The details of some tasks are not yet fixed, so please keep checking the Events page of the UTB website to see when and where you might help:

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

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

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

Work parties start at 10.00am (unless otherwise stated) and they usually finish about 13.00, though in good weather conditions they may continue to about 14.00 (and those with Chiltern Rangers usually finish about 15.00, for those that choose to stay).

PLEASE, ALWAYS CONTACT THE TASK LEADER IN ADVANCE OF EACH TASK, as details frequently change according to the weather, number of volunteers etc.

The detail of each event will be shown on the Events page of the UTB website:

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



Holtspur Bottom (Bucks) tasks begin at 10.00 & usually finish at 13.00.

Meeting point O.S. ref SU918906 Nearest postcode HP9 1BT whathreewords: manage.banana.chimp	
Leader & contact no: Nick Bowles 07727 441376 nick.bowles@ntlworld.com	
Sun 05.11.23	Guided walk, planting, scrub control (& fence repair – if necessary)
Sun 03.12.23	'Scrape' weeding, scrub control & hedge laying
Sun 07.01.24	Hedging and scrub control
Sun 28.01.24	Hedging and scrub control
Sun 18.02.24 (provisional)	Please check before attending: we may postpone until March 10th - for planting of Dark Mullein if weather makes this sensible

Tasks joint with Chiltern Rangers begin at 10.00 & finish at 15.00 (attending part sessions is appreciated).

Chiltern Rangers supply hot drinks, tools and safety gear, but we still advise bringing your own.

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

When the dates are published, **please register your intention to attend with Nick: nick.bowles@ntlworld.com 07727 441376** so we know what kit to bring; and **please check the website immediately before the task** to confirm that it is proceeding as initially described. Weather can lead to alterations in our plans.

Date if known	Site name - all within Bucks.	Parking instructions Postcode, OS ref and whathreewords
	Buttlers Hangings, W. Wycombe	Pay and Display car park transfer to site at 09.50 HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks
	Christmas Gorse, Granborough	Parking in entry to farmhouse MK18 3LF (Grid Ref SP78602514) ///worry.blushes.songbird

continued 

Date if known	Site name - all within Bucks.	Parking instructions Postcode, OS ref and whatthree words
	Coombe Hill, Wendover	Roadside layby HP17 0TZ (Grid Ref SP84710712) ///alternate.digesting.share
	Dagnall Hall Farm (New Site!)	tbc
12/09/2023	Dean Farm, Saunderton	On verge in grass field HP14 4JG (Grid Ref SU80389826) ///unloading.inched.curtail
	Far Kingdom, Saunderton	At far north-east of Golf Club parking area HP27 9NX (Grid Ref SP79800078) ///craziest.signal.asked
	Garners Bank (New Site!)	tbc
06/11/2023	Sands Bank, H. Wycombe	Parking in overflow Wyc Wanderers car park HP12 4HJ (Grid Ref SU83229333). ///custom.alive.length
07/11/2023		
13/11/2023		
14/11/2023		
	Saunderton Triangle & Tunnel	Roadside layby HP27 9NP (Grid Ref SU80769978) ///clipped.idealists.fairly
	Small Dean Bank, Bradenham	Roadside layby HP27 0PR (Grid Ref SU82319898) ///adventure.creamed.stop
	Strawberry Bank, Lane End	Parking at Beacon Farm (private road) SL7 2HT (Grid Ref SU82158999) ///lyrics.backyards.hilltop
	Wadborough Field, nr Ivinghoe	Parking at Pitstone Hill (NT) car park LU7 9EN (Grid Ref SP95501493) ///cashier.gobbling.coaster
	Wardrobes, P. Risborough	Parking at private property HP27 0RH (Grid Ref SP81780170) ///darkest.superhero.inventors
	Westcott nr Waddesden	Assemble by café to move to site HP18 0PL (Grid Ref SP71431740) ///political.blacken.adjust

continued →

Date if known	Site name - all within Bucks.	Parking instructions Postcode, OS ref and whatthreewords
	Whiteleaf Cross, P. Risborough	Dedicated parking area, HP27 0LH (Grid Ref SP82370355) ///lasts.prevented.salt
	Winchester Wood, P. Risborough	In Thames Water parking HP27 0RH (Grid Ref SP82180192) ///arranges.plums.successes

If you know of tasks near your home that will benefit butterflies and moths and are not on this list, we are happy to display information on our webpages. Email the detail to nick.bowles@ntlworld.com and webmaster@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Aston Upthorpe (Oxon)

Scrub clearing and coppicing – all helpers welcome; training provided. New volunteers are always welcome! Meeting point: at the grain dryer, SU550844. Start time: 10:00 Finish time: 13.00, possibly extending to 14:00 in good weather. Even if you can only come for part of the time, your help will be much appreciated. Contact: **Jim Asher 01865 391727** jim.asher@btinternet.com

Please contact Jim in advance of each work party as details may change at short notice. **All the dates shown below are Sundays:**

29th October 2023
26th November 2023
17th December 2023
14th January 2024
4th February 2024
3rd March 2024



Volunteers 'having a field day' at Aston Upthorpe on 5th February 2023

Loving the Club Scene - a Fauna & Flora Foray

Some lucky members of a Golf Club in Oxfordshire were treated to a morning of butterflies, wildflowers and other invertebrates on 1st August. The day started out windy, cool and slightly overcast, but by the end of the morning 17 different butterfly and moth species had been recorded as well as lots of other invertebrates.



Nick Bowles, our chairman, led the walk which started in the beautiful wildflower area near the practice ground and continued around the perimeters of the fairways.

The Club Manager has been working hard to combine wild areas with the groomed fairways and greens that its members love. As a result, the course has become a naturalists' haven, with many species of butterflies, moths, birds, beetles, bumblebees and flies taking advantage of the beautiful wild areas. The golf course encompasses a range of habitats favourable to birds, butterflies and other insects, including chalk grassland, acid grassland and heathland as well as neutral grassland. Interspersed between the fairways are areas of well-maintained oak and beech woodlands with holly and hazel shrubs.



The photos on this and the following page were all taken on the day of the visit, representing the wonderful array of fauna and flora present.

Above: Nick Bowles getting the full attention of Club members.

Left: Black and Yellow Longhorn beetle (*Rutpela maculata*).

The Club has pledged to preserve and develop its natural habitat and minimise the impact of course-development on its local flora and fauna. **It is clear that their actions are having a wonderful effect on nature. Long may it continue!**



Above left: Harebells (*Campanula rotundifolia*).

Above right: *Nowickia ferox* parasitoid fly, which is a threat to the Dark Arches moth.

Left: Hairy shieldbug (*Dolycoris baccarum*).

Below left: Comma butterfly (*Polygonia c-album*).

Below right: Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*).



Linda Seward

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION: UPPER THAMES BRANCH

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

INCOME	2023	2022	
Membership			
Subscriptions	8748.00	8715.00	
Legacies/donations (inc. Gift Ai	1645.00	7067.50	
Events/fundraising		0.00	
Other (Grants)	2000.00		
<i>Sub-total</i>	12393.00	15782.50	
Conservation			
Holtspur Bottom Reserve	0.00	0.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>	0.00	0.00	
Finance/Admin			
VAT Refund	25.00		
<i>Sub-total</i>	25.00	0.00	
Total income		12418.00	15782.50
EXPENDITURE			
Membership			
Newsletter	1349.50	199.00	
Events/fundraising	305.00	0.00	
Stock purchases	332.12	0.00	
Publicity etc	306.95	0.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>	2293.57		199.00
Conservation			
Holtspur Bottom Reserve	295.63	630.00	
Equipment/Training	560.78	983.70	
Other Projects	16118.00	3850.00	
Subs/donations	46.00	46.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>	17020.41	5509.70	
Finance/Admin			
Admin/Insurance	199.80		
VAT		289.00	
<i>Sub-total</i>	199.80	289.00	
Total expenditure		19513.78	5997.70
Net income/expenditure		-7095.78	9784.80
Cash b/f		39,665.29	29880.49
Total cash available for future activities		32569.51	39665.29
STATEMENT OF NET ASSETS AT 31 MARCH 2023			
NET ASSETS			
Fixed assets (after depreciation)	0.00		0.00
Stock, debtors & creditors (net)	0.00		0.00
Cash B/fwd	32569.51		39665.29
Total		32569.51	39665.29
ALLOCATION OF NET ASSETS			
Endowment	0.00		0.00
Restricted	960.00		960.00
Designated	4600.00		4600.00
Unallocated	27009.51		34,105.29
Total		32569.51	39665.29

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

2023 Guided Walk Season: Review

The 2023 Guided Walk season came to a close on Tuesday 29th August, with a successful and enjoyable walk at RSPB Otmoor Nature Reserve. This was one of our most extensive programmes ever and attempted to give all UTB members at least one walk reasonably close to where they live. We also sought to give members the chance to see every realistically 'gettable' butterfly species in our region.

48 walks were planned. 3 had to be cancelled (2 for leader health reasons and 1 due to torrential rain); and 3 others were postponed to a later date (weather-related, again). In addition, I added afternoon walks for both the Wytham Woods walks, as the mornings soon became fully booked. The average turnout was 11 participants per walk, with a maximum of 30 (thanks to Nick Bowles inviting the Chiltern Tracking the Impact group to the Grangelands Walk), and a minimum of a single person (on 2 walks, both no doubt due to poor weather).

Participants came from far and wide, including members from BC Branches in Wilts, Hants, Glos, etc. One member travelled from Essex specifically to see Black Hairstreak, whilst another got a taxi from Tewkesbury (Glos) for the same species. They had both tried many times before without luck, but happily both were successful on this occasion. Others from as far afield as south Wales, Glasgow and Kent chose to visit family or friends so they would be able to attend walks hoping to see specific species.

Of course, there were many 'old' friends, some who turned up on numerous walks;

and several who helped with larger groups. It was pleasing to see lots of people who had not been on one of our Guided Walks before, including both new members and non-members. There was also a much better showing of people local to the sites, following broader advertising in the local media and 'What's on' listings. Particularly pleasing was having a few children participate, including a trio of delightful and enthusiastic young girls on our final outing.

As always with an extensive programme, we had a few glitches, particularly with bookings through Eventbrite. These included a couple of wrong postcodes (my fault, I suspect; can't blame that on them). We also noted a trend for some people who had booked via Eventbrite not turning up. If you can't make it, please do cancel or let me know, as there are often people on a waiting list. On the other hand, a number of people turned up without booking, though it really does help us to manage numbers, parking etc. if you do book.

At last, to the butterflies and moths. **A total of 43 butterfly species were recorded on our walks this year**, plus possible White-letter Hairstreaks on the elms at Holtspur Bottom. Wall and Wood White were the other species we might have seen but failed to this year (though we did not actually do a walk in Wood White territory). A particular concern of mine has been the very low number of Small Tortoiseshell I have seen this year, and it was only recorded on 2 walks (and roundly beaten by Essex Skipper, which was recorded on 4 walks).

Most of our walks targeting particular species 'connected' successfully. Highlights included Purple Emperor, Brown Hairstreak and Silver-spotted Skipper on 3 different walks; Black Hairstreak on both targeted walks; Silver-studded Blue on our Hampshire walk but not the Berkshire walk (the weather being unfavourable); and Grayling on our only targeted walk.

The early-season specialists showed well, with Dingy Skipper on 10 walks, Grizzled Skipper on 8 and Green Hairstreak on 7, though Duke of Burgundy was only recorded on one. Marbled White was seen on over half our walks during its flight period, and Silver-washed Fritillary showed on 12 walks whereas Dark Green Fritillary was only seen on 2. The Blues performed quite well during their flight periods, with Small seen on 6 walks, Adonis on 6 and Chalk Hill on 4. Purple Hairstreaks and White Admirals put in showy performances on several woodland walks (6 and 3 respectively).

The presumably introduced Marsh Fritillary showed on one walk, whilst migrant butterflies Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow were seen on 3 walks and 1 walk respectively. Our 'out of region' trip to try to see the reintroduced Chequered Skipper at Fineshade Wood in the Midlands proved successful for only 1 of the 6 from the UTB group (needless to say, it was the only one in our group who had seen it before!). At least Tom got some cracking photos of a freshly emerged and pristine male (jealous, me!)

Many moths were seen on our guided walks, but as usual many disappeared before they could be positively identified. Nevertheless, **over 50 species of moth were recorded**, from the common and

numerous Silver Y (another migrant), Mother Shipton, Burnet Companion and Burnet Moths (both Five-spot and Six-spot) to the delightful little Mint Moth and the scarce Cistus Forester.

None of this could have happened without the generosity of time, knowledge and enthusiasm of our dedicated group of volunteer leaders. So, a huge thank you to Carla Boswell, Nick Bowles, Paul Bowyer, Maureen Cross, Peter Cuss, Hilary Glew, Derek Haynes, Trevor Lea, Brenda Mobbs, Peter Ogden, Ben Paternoster, Steph Rodgers, Margery Slatter, Gillian Taylor and Sue Taylor. Apologies for anyone I have missed and thanks to John Lerpiniere who covered one of my absences.

Finally, a number of you I have met on the walks I led clearly have the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to be a Guided Walk leader. We are always on the lookout for new leaders, either for new sites or to take a bit of the load off existing leaders.

Perhaps you would like to become a joint leader for a walk next year before taking on one (or more) of your own? If you think you might be

able to help in this way, please drop me an email and we can have a chat. It does get you out to interesting sites, with the chance to see lots of butterflies and moths in the fresh air and sunshine (hopefully) and, from my own experience, you meet many charming and enthusiastic participants whilst having a thoroughly enjoyable time.



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

[Ed: thanks to all the walk leaders who have submitted reports. It is hoped that some will be published in the next edition].

Silver-Spotted Skipper (*Hesperia comma*)

You may just have missed 2023's flight period for the attractive Silver-spotted Skipper (SSS), with the latest sightings for the species in our region for each of the past 4 years being between 16th and 19th September. But it's nevertheless very worthwhile taking a look at Champion Tom Dunbar's most recent report for 2022 (with an update for 2023) which is reproduced below.



Male SSS ©Tom Dunbar

Species description

Hesperia comma is a rare butterfly in Britain, occurring in discrete colonies on open sunny short chalk grassland, usually breeding where its larval foodplant Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*) grows next to patches of bare ground.

In recent years it has colonised many unoccupied sites in southern England. It has been observed egg-laying in short grassland in the absence of bare ground, probably a response to a warmer climate and therefore microclimate in the swards where it breeds.



©John Kearns reported the first UTB Silver-spotted Skipper sighting in 2023 at Watlington Hill on 1st August

National Status since 1979

Trend summary

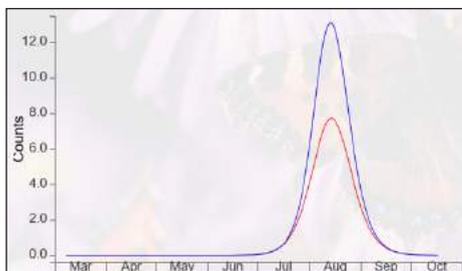
Status since 1979 is *Rapid increase* with a change of 612.0% since monitoring began for this species.

Status over the last 20 years is *Stable* with a change of +14.8%

Status over the last 10 years is *Stable* with a change of +36.0%

<https://ukbms.org/species/silver-spotted-skipper>

Flight Period



**Adults emerge in mid-July
with peak numbers in mid-August**

[Contains UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) data © copyright]

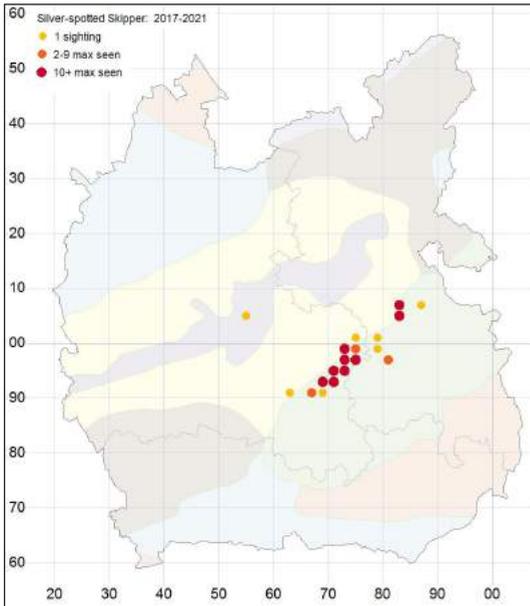
Silver-spotted Skipper in the Chilterns

Our SSS populations on the Chilterns are currently the most northerly in the UK. These sites range from discrete colonies and outliers in the Princes Risborough/Wendover area to the north and at a number of sites in the Watlington and Swyncombe Downs areas further south, tracking the Chiltern Hills.

Abundance and Distribution

The core of the UTB SSS distribution on the Chilterns has remained intact, particularly in its strongholds of Watlington Hill, Shirburn Hill and all parts of the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.

However, there is evidence of a retraction of range in the south since the period 2005-2014. All colonies on the Berkshire Downs have been lost, with the last recorded sighting there being in



2009. Outlying colonies scattered either side of the “00” northings line have also been lost.

The northern part of the range is strengthening overall, with multiple sightings at Beacon Hill and Ellesborough (the northernmost strong breeding colony in the UK), and increasing numbers at Grangelands Nature Reserve, too. A sighting at Bacombe Warren in 2018 was the first there for many years and a sighting at Yoesden Bank in 2017 was the first there since 2010. But the colony at Buttler’s Hangings has dwindled, with low numbers over the last seven years and none seen in 2019.

There have been some sightings at new locations in recent years. These include two long-range sightings: one in Tring, and one on the eastern outskirts of Oxford. These are respectively 9.5 km and 19 km away from the nearest known colonies. Both these sightings were in unsuitable habitats and their origin is uncertain, so we don’t expect new colonies to develop there. New sightings have also been made at Chinnor Quarry, with individual females seen there in 2018 and 2019, and this site might possibly be suitable for a future viable population.

Over the years the date of the first sighting has become progressively earlier, as seen below, based on data taken from the ‘First sightings’ page of the UTB website, with the date of first sighting advancing at an average rate of 8.7 days per decade.



Silver-spotted Skipper nectaring on scabious on Bald Hill on 17th August 2023 ©Tom Dunbar

Please note:

First sighting in the current 2023 year is counter to the trend referred to above. This year's first sighting was 1st August. Several experienced recorders regularly checked our stronger sites mid to late July 2023 with no SSS sightings reported. The years 2016-2022 were approximately a week earlier.

Will we have significantly later last SSS sightings this year to match the later first sighting date of 1st August? Or will the species simply be having a shorter flight period?

Many thanks to the recorders who have submitted SSS records over the years. It will be very interesting to receive reports of any sightings in the coming days. These can be submitted through various means: iRecord, UTB website Sightings Page or perhaps others. Sightings posted on social media are not picked up by the national monitoring system.

Thanks to Richard Soulsby

Richard has stepped down as Silver-spotted Skipper Champion. To quote Richard: "I have been 'in post' for 20

years and feel it is time to pass on the baton." Richard has done sterling work over that time, and his professional research background and scientific knowledge have been a great bonus to the Branch.

I have taken up the baton knowing that Richard will be available to answer queries; and will lend support in the field and data analysis on occasion.

Indeed, on 22nd August '23 Richard gave me a lesson in finding SSS eggs at Aston Rowant, resulting in a find of 7 eggs: an exciting part of my SSS learning journey to be used at other sites! Great stuff, Richard!

Moreover, two days later, I had a significant day at Ellesborough Beacon Hill: my first independently located SSS eggs, with 4 found between two tufts of Sheep's Fescue grass (with the photo below highlighting leaf damage by grazing rabbits).



Tom Dunbar
UTB Silver-spotted Skipper
Champion

silver-spotted-skipper@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Moth Trapping for Beginners

I had been toying with the idea of moth trapping for over a year, having previously attended 'moth-trapping mornings', where moths caught overnight were counted and identified before being released. Although I don't know much about moths, I do have a wildlife-friendly garden that supports lots of different butterfly and insect species, so I thought it would be fun to see what I have in the moth/Lepidoptera category.

Indecision about when to do this was taken out of my hands in the spring when UTB Moth Officer Peter Cuss offered to drop off a Thames Valley trap as he was passing my house. How could I say no? He and his wife came over for tea, and Peter gave me a lesson in how to set up the trap. Taking a deep breath, I set it up that night and waited for morning.

You can see in the photo that a moth trap is just a box (in this case, metal) with a light that stands upright inside a funnel. The light shines all night to attract night-flying creatures which drop down into the box through the funnel. The inside of the box is layered with cardboard egg cartons (below) and the moths seem to enjoy snuggling into the depressions as they await morning.



I got up early the next morning to turn off the light and check out the visitors. One bit of useful advice is to take the trap out of the sun as soon as the sun comes up, as the box can get very hot. I moved the trap into the shade, got out my camera and notepad, and gingerly lifted the lid.



A plethora of enchanting and colourful moths awaited me, as well as several insects I had never seen before (like my first Cockchafer, right, which I thought was a prehistoric monster!). And, of course, there were also many little brown jobs that are so difficult to identify. The moths didn't seem to be in any hurry to leave, which gave me ample opportunity to count and



photograph them. The photos are very important for identification as there are around 2,500 species of moths in the UK, with more migrating from continental Europe and establishing themselves here all the time. Even really good photos may sometimes not give enough information, as moths like the Marbled Minors can only be accurately identified by dissection, which I am absolutely not going to do!



Once I had photographed and counted my moths, I discreetly released them into some large shrubs and trees around my property, well out of the prying eyes of avian predators. There is no point in trying to do some environmental good by recording moths only to have the precious creatures eaten by birds!

So, moth trapping is easy, but identifying them is not. However, there are brilliant Facebook pages including our own Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames Region page: www.facebook.com/groups/458565932924345, from which experts

will enthusiastically help with identification. What I'd say is that you should first try to identify species yourself so as not to take advantage of other people's good nature. I want to take this opportunity to thank all those members who have helped me with identification: you know who you are!

The final task is to make a spreadsheet of your finds with the scientific name, date, grid reference and name of the person who helped your identification (if applicable). Finally, upload your records to iRecord <https://irecord.org.uk>.

I hope this has inspired you to try moth trapping yourself. I'm including some photos from my moth-trapping efforts to encourage you. You can easily make your own trap: directions can be found all over the internet; try here: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/east-scotland-branch/moth-traps>; or contact the Thames Valley group to see if you can borrow a moth trap, as I did.



Learning more about these beautiful night-flying creatures has been a joy and a revelation, and I thank Peter for pushing me to do it!

Linda Seward

All photos ©Linda Seward

[Ed: More photos from Linda's moth-trapping exploits will feature in the next edition]

Lo and Behold

Many readers will know that BBOWT's Yoesden Nature Reserve in Bledlow Ridge, Bucks, is a haven for wildlife, especially so for butterflies, as many 'specialist' species are to be found on its often-challenging terrain.

Having spent many years travelling from my Windsor home to Yoesden to be enveloped by the tranquillity and beauty of the place (and the wildlife!), I decided some while ago that my final resting place would be in the enchanting churchyard of 900-year-old St Mary's Church in nearby Radnage, having discovered that it was being managed proactively for the benefit of wildlife, as the following image shows:



I became so captivated by the place that I couldn't resist from registering an interest in undertaking regular surveys there (as part of UTB's Churchyard Surveys Scheme), having discovered, somewhat surprisingly, that it wasn't already being surveyed.

During my monthly visit in July 2023, I recorded 13 species in the churchyard - only 1 less than I managed to record up on the nature reserve on the same day. This speaks volumes about the way the churchyard is being managed.



Perhaps there's a church you visit regularly that shares the same values as St Mary's, in making its

churchyard a LIVING CHURCHYARD?

If so, you may wish to consider volunteering to survey it monthly during the May-August period from 2024, by contacting churchyard-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk



As for me, if no-one can be bothered to visit me in my final resting place due perhaps to its relative remoteness, I can nevertheless remain hopeful that some of the many visiting or resident butterflies might 'pay their respects' as they go about their daily business.

Derek Haynes

Footnote: a local (Radnage) resident has made an enchanting film about St Mary's, which may be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSokHyKmr-0>

For the Lepidoptera Wonderer

The Wonderer has been wondering about moths.

Butterflies are well-loved: with their colourful patterns and wings, they are often in the media spotlight.

By contrast, moths seem unloved, often accused of eating our carpets, clothes and food. Do a Google search and you will find 'adverts' with methods of killing them.

But I urge all of you to take another look; after all, strictly speaking, butterflies are just a group of day-flying moths, to the extent that many languages do not differentiate between a moth and a butterfly.

We have well over 150 species of day-flying moths in the UK (roughly three times the number of our butterflies). Many of them are exquisite, covered in shimmering metallic scales (like the 6-spot Burnet, below) or tapestries of contrasting colours; add in the often equally spectacular night-flying moths and we have over 4000 species.

6-spot Burnet (with the 2 spots nearest to the head often 'fused') is a very easy moth to see and record in open grassy habitats.



©Butterfly Conservation/Patrick Clement

Most day-flying moths are more elusive than butterflies, but some, like the Tiger moths, Burnet moths and Hummingbird Hawk-moths, are easy to see, making them equally easy species to record.



Elephant Hawk-moth

The variety of moths is amazing: some are so small that unless you are looking for them you are unlikely to notice them, the smallest being only a few millimetres long. The largest are the magnificent Hawk-moths, including the Elephant Hawk-moth (above) whose caterpillar looks like an elephant's trunk with big eyes.

Moths are incredibly important to the environment, and it turns out they are much more important as pollinators than we realised – some of the most efficient pollinating insects we have – and possibly more important than bees to many plants, including bramble.

They are also incredibly important as food for many other species, from spiders to birds and bats.

Though many moths munch leaves or stems, others munch lichen, leaf litter, dead skin or detritus. Some, like the

Lunar Hornet (a Clearwing moth), below, eat wood which is so nutrient-poor it can take them 2-3 years to develop into adults.



Lunar Hornet Clearwing moth sitting in my carpet. It had detected I had been using a Lunar Clearwing pheromone lure the previous day. This specimen wasn't interested in the carpet. Its larvae require living willow or poplar.

But back to the detritivores (those that obtain nutrients by consuming detritus): some do a really useful job of clearing up old feathers and the mummified skins of dead animals in the wild. This is what brings us into conflict, as a very few species enter our houses to helpfully dispose of our dead organic matter, not realising we value this as either carpet, jumpers or flour!

The Tiger moths seem to be having a good year, with Jersey Tiger (below) being spotted throughout our region.



Jersey Tiger moth ©Butterfly Conservation/Sue Davies

The scarlet hindwings of the Jersey Tiger make it look more like a butterfly when in flight.

I referred to 'tapestries of contrasting colours' above, and the Mocha moth (below) is a good example.



The intricately-patterned Mocha.

Butterfly lovers record butterflies, moth trappers record night-flying moths, so day-flying moths tend to be under-recorded. So, please, when you are out and about, take time to record our day-flying moths.

Even our micro-moths can be stunning, as seen in the photo below.



Micropterix tunbergella

Sue Taylor

All photos ©Sue Taylor (unless otherwise stated)

At the Helm

2023 has been my best recording year of White-letter Hairstreak (*Satyrium w-album*) after many years of searching.

I built up my awareness of the locations of suitable elms, done mostly outside the White-letter Hairstreak flight season. I then checked these known elms in late June and early July when the adults spend almost their entire life high on the elms.

The six-day period 21st to 26th June 2023 delivered 53 adult sightings across eleven visits to my known sites. (I'm careful not to double-count!)



White-letter Hairstreak
7th July 2023 ©Tom Dunbar

However, unsuitable weather conditions for White-letter Hairstreak resulted, for me, in only a further six sightings

through to the 7th of July. High winds in the elm canopies and limited sunshine over successive days from this date persuaded me to end my White-letter Hairstreak searches for 2023. My final tally of 59 leaves me with a worthwhile challenge for 2024.

Some suggestions for successful recording:

- Locate suitable healthy elms in advance of searches; post-leaf fall and early spring flowering help greatly.
- Use binoculars or camera to support identification.

- Select days with suitable weather conditions: sunny periods and a low-wind factor.
- In preference, search sheltered sunny areas of the elm canopy.
- Be able to separately identify White-letter, Black and Purple Hairstreak, which occasionally fly together.
- White-letter Hairstreak does well in urban areas, too. Get to know your healthy local elms!

Elm canopy ©Tom Dunbar



A national White-letter Hairstreak Recording Project (2007-2009), initiated by Andrew Middleton and Liz Goodyear of the Herts/Middlesex BC Branch, is a fascinating source of information on White-letter Hairstreak. Use the link below to view their magnificent work: <https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/w-album/index.php>

As a result of the project, Liz and Andy are recognised as the UK's leading experts on the White-letter Hairstreak species. I strongly recommend an in-depth read of their project work.

Tom Dunbar

[Ed: Peter Cuss is our White-letter Hairstreak Champion, who has done a huge amount to promote the species through his elm planting].

Grangelands and Kimble Rifle Range Walk

19th August 2023

Two weeks previously I'd cancelled a walk (on one of the very wet Saturdays that blighted this summer) for the very active Chiltern's surveyors group known as Tracking the Impact.

Two weeks prior to this walk at the foot of the Chilterns scarp in Bucks only 7 persons had booked to attend. I'd just cancelled a walk (on one of the wet Saturdays that blighted this summer) for the very active Chilterns surveyors group, known as Tracking the Impact, at the same venue. So, with permission from UTB Events organiser, Peter Philp, I invited the members of that group to join the UTB walk on 19th, hoping for better weather. It turned out to be probably the best Saturday of the month.

Just in case the walk on 19th proved more popular than it appeared it would, I asked the kindly Brenda Mobbs (UTB Membership Secretary) to come along and help guide the group. This proved to be a good idea, as, on the day, 12 attended who hadn't booked. Additionally, 7 UTB members and 11 Tracking the Impact individuals (who had booked) turned up making a total of 30 persons.

We split into two parties. One, led by Brenda, went in search of the site's rarities, with the other, led by myself, looking to hone their skills at separating tricky similar-looking species.

My party set off at about 11.00 and within 10 minutes had plenty of Chalk Hill Blue to look at. These were mixed

in with fewer Common Blue and smaller numbers of Brown Argus, which allowed those of us keen to work on ID features the chance to study male and female individuals that we netted and placed into



pots to hand around. We made similar comparisons of Gatekeeper, Small Heath and Meadow Brown.

I had intended to compare the Small

and Green-veined Whites, but despite catching three Whites, all were Green-veined. We were able to see how similarly 'white' a released female Brimstone looked as she flew away, having noted her pointy wing tips whilst she was captive.

Our search for a Small White (as a comparison to Green-veined) was halted when Tessa, checking with binoculars, announced that a roosting butterfly we assumed to be a Common Blue had black veins through the white margin. This too was potted, and everyone got a good look at an Adonis male. We also caught a female Chalk Hill Blue, and I explained the theory of telling female Chalkie from Adonis, stressing that it was not easy as it relied on a good view of a tiny part of the upperside hindwing of fresh specimens.

Then we compared Silver-spotted

Skipper with Small Copper and Small Heath in pots but, sadly, we didn't find a Large Skipper to complete the look-a-like line-up.

We also had a close look at a 6-spot Burnet moth, and I explained the possible confusion early in the season with the 5-spot (in Berkshire) and Narrow-bordered 5-spot in all three of the UTB counties: the latter two species with a single spot nearest the forewing tip and the 6-spot with two spots there.



This doesn't sound like a great amount of catching and comparing, but it was already 12.40 and several members of the walk were booked on a plant ID course that afternoon, so we headed back to the cars.

Brenda's party was also walking back and, as we merged, we learnt that they had seen almost identical numbers of

the same species we had seen, though they had been on a different part of the reserve.

Back at the cars, a few saw Holly Blue, giving us a total of 13 species of butterfly and just two moth species (with Angle Shades, sitting in clear view on top of a leaf, being the second moth species).

I wish to thank Brenda for assisting by taking half the group, and those with me for being very patient while waiting their turn for a chance to scrutinise the potted insects. Both parties saw rather smaller numbers of butterflies than we had hoped for, but all the target species were encountered and gave clear views to all present.

Nick Bowles



Our Butterfly Garden Haven: update

This time last year, we published Peter Scott's fascinating account of how he and his wife had transformed their Reading home's back garden into a butterfly haven, resulting in an impressive species-to-date total approaching 30. During 2022, they unexpectedly added Small Blue and Chalk Hill Blue to that list.

Here is Peter's update for this year thus far: "2023 has turned out to be a difficult one for our garden, largely due to the 'problematic' weather during the first half of the year.



We haven't seen a single Large Skipper, but, more tellingly, there were very few Orange-tips (we usually see a lot, as we have all three of their caterpillar foodplants). Things improved from mid-July and, up until 26th August, we have seen 21 butterfly species this calendar year, though the particularly interesting one was the Silver-washed Fritillary, our first definite sighting since 2020.

On the plus side, we had a profusion of Small Coppers, whereas previously we have only seen one or two each year. We also had substantially larger numbers of Burnet moths. On the negative side, we haven't seen a single Small Tortoiseshell, and I understand they are not doing well nationally, either.

We're hoping that cutting back some of the non-native shrubs we inherited from the house's previous owners will provide more light and space for wild and/or butterfly-friendly plants next year."

Peter Scott

Photo (taken in August '23) ©Peter Scott

If you didn't read Peter's original article, check it out on page 15 of Issue 115 of Hairstreak (available on the UTB website under 'About/Publications/Branch Newsletters').

Membership Latest

There has been an increase in membership since the last newsletter. To date there are 1646 households in Upper Thames Branch with 2205 individuals. The more members we have the more we can achieve as a Branch. Please encourage your friends to join Butterfly Conservation either on the website or by leaflet. Please let me know if you would like any membership leaflets to pass on.

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

Brenda Mobbs (Membership Secretary) bc.upperthames@gmail.com

Off to the PUB

Two years before the start of WWII, the poet John Betjeman wrote his poem, *Slough*, as a protest against what he considered an onslaught on the rural lifestyle of the town at the time:

*Come, friendly bombs
and fall on Slough:
it isn't fit for humans now.
There isn't grass
to graze a cow.
Swarm over, death!*

Mention the town of Slough to most people today and they may think of either industry (with Slough Trading Estate being Europe's largest industrial estate) or that the BBC comedy series *The Office* was filmed there. And there may be other unflattering thoughts, too.

What many folks don't realise is that on the southern edge of the town, adjacent to the M4, are a couple of oases that provide some respite from all the hype: namely, Herschel Park and Upton Court Park.



In April 2023, BC member and Slough resident Richard Emerson, who had seen the BC Wild Spaces initiative, contacted our designated branch contact, Margery Slatter, asking whether we might consider being involved in a project to improve habitat management at the aforementioned sites (and the nearby Grade I listed St Laurence's churchyard). Richard was also hoping to engage with other local bodies such as schools, Slough Borough Council and The Friends of Herschel Park. UTB representatives Brenda Mobbs and Peter Ogden visited the Upton heritage conservation area with Richard, then made several recommendations.

Richard has suggested the project could be called Project Upton Butterflies (PUB)!

As a member who lives relatively close by, I agreed to carry out regular summer (May-August) surveys at all 3 locations.



St Laurence's churchyard (above) has a small footprint and, apart from the perimeters, is pretty much full of graves. This has resulted in the grass areas being kept regularly mowed, with the assistance of young offenders on the Community Payback scheme.

Herschel Park has proved far more encouraging. The Park is fundamentally split into 2 parts: a wildlife area (identified as a Nature Reserve) and a larger part, which is more a recreational ('garden') space.

Regarding the wildlife area (seen below, behind the information board), this has proved to be 'home' this year to a number of butterfly species, with 10 recorded there on the July visit, including Brown Argus and Small Skipper (and an overall individual count of over 30 on the day).



The recreational part of the Park was less vibrant, with most species (Whites and the occasional Holly Blue excepted) seen feeding on buddleia during July and August. Overall, 13 species were recorded in Herschel Park during the period in question.

Upton Court Park is by far the largest of the areas targeted, although it is primarily recreational by nature. The part that is adjacent to the M4 is the most interesting for butterflies, as it's primarily unmanaged grassland. Here, I recorded 14 species overall, with 9 (the highest) recorded on my July visit. Those species seen here which were not also seen

in Herschel Park were Marbled White, Ringlet and Essex Skipper (whereas those seen in Herschel Park but not in Upton Court Park were Orange-tip and Small Skipper).

Richard is hoping that the recommendations made will, if implemented over time, improve the habitats for invertebrates. Included in those recommendations are to increase nectar-rich flowers in the Herschel Park recreational area; monitor (and change the cutting regime of) the grass bank by the Herschel wild area car park (and perhaps plant horseshoe vetch and bird's-foot trefoil); cut the grass less often in the churchyard (or leave some areas uncut); and promote a 'no mow' regime in parts of Upton Court Park + 'protect' some patches of stinging nettles for our more common Nymphalid butterfly caterpillars.

I'm hopeful we can provide an update on progress on improving habitat in this corner of south-east Berkshire in a future edition of *Hairstreak*.

Ricky Gervais's *The Office* persona David Brent, in his *Life on the Road* album track, *Slough*, says of the town:

*Don't believe what the critics say
Like it's soulless and boring and grey
See for yourself, what are you waiting for?...*

He has a slightly different opinion of the town to John Betjeman, and I have embraced that closing verse of his song. Sometimes, you simply don't know what's on your own doorstep!

Derek Haynes

I was in at the start, you know...



It's strange, but although a good idea will stand the test of time and remain a good idea, it seems more important when it is new. The Lawton Report hit upon such an idea.

Sir John Lawton was given the task of examining the future for nature conservation in the UK. He wrote a report called "Making Space for Nature". His central idea was to make those spaces (quote), Bigger, Better, More Joined-up.

It led various conservation charities to make the work they were doing to that end more conspicuous and many now use the term "Landscape Conservation" to convey the idea that the change needs to be on a massive scale, across very large areas.

Butterfly Conservation champions this cause and publishes more and more evidence to show that it works and increases biodiversity (while creating nature reserve 'islands' seems to simply reduce the rate of biodiversity loss). See <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/our-strategy> and watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETniTACCEbM> that summarises that aim.

For examples of the strategy working across the UK, read <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects/landscape-scale-conservation-for-butterflies-and-moths-report> and https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/bc_wider_countryside_science_review_s18-02_final_0.pdf among many reports.

We are invited to be part of this growing movement in various ways, through the new strategy's aim to 'improve the condition of 100 of the most important landscapes for butterflies and moths'.

As the UTB has four landscapes of national importance within it, we need to push this idea up people's agendas and to respond when they show interest. We need more volunteers to join the UTB's band of surveyors. Landowners across these landscapes (and some outside it) are constantly contacting us and asking for baseline surveys. They want to know what they have currently living on their land. Most often we don't really know, as this land is privately owned and probably not open access. Surveyors usually find that they are invited to survey large areas of very quiet, unexplored land, with great potential. Landowners who contact us for surveys are planning to improve biodiversity and our surveyors will be there from the outset, charting the rise in species variation and abundance.

I'm involved with four such (initially) baseline surveys. All are astounding. In just a few years they have gained exciting new species and, of course, reporting on that to the

landowner makes me quite popular! No-one can guarantee that every piece of land we are asked to survey will turn out to be a utopia and, of course, landowners can change their minds. But our experience is overwhelmingly positive. As the nation's move to embrace conservation has grown, so has our need for surveyors. Please consider getting involved! If you like the idea but your confidence needs a boost, remember that we run (free) training courses each spring.

Register your interest now! You could well be in at the start of a landscape's transformation to a far better place for nature; furthermore, you would be an integral part of that change. Please contact me at: nick.bowles@ntlworld.com

The four landscapes in the UTB area are the:

Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge
Northern Clay Vales
Chilterns and
Thames Basin Heaths (albeit 90% in Surrey)

Note: the Berkshire Downs are not currently a designated landscape, but we are working there, too.



Nick Bowles

Late-September Moths

With butterflies now all but over, let's take a look at the 'Top 5' nocturnal moths most likely to be flying at this time of the year: those that have had the highest number of sightings recorded during the third week of September in our region between 2017 and 2022.

All data in the descriptions below is to the end of 2020.



Large Yellow Underwing
©Butterfly Conservation/Ryszard Szczygiel

Top of the list has been the Large Yellow Underwing (*Noctua pronuba*) which has been recorded in 92% of the 10k squares in the UTB region. This moth is common across a wide range of habitats (with herbaceous plants and grasses the caterpillars' foodplants). The Large Yellow Underwing can be disturbed from ground vegetation during the day.

The 'number 2 spot' goes to the Lunar Underwing (*Omphaloscelis/Anchoscelis lunosa*), which is a widespread and common single-generation species which frequents a range of grassland habitats across our region (recorded in 85% of our 10k squares). Its larvae

overwinter and feed on various grasses.

'Third in line' is the Square-spot Rustic (*Xestia xanthographa*), another grassy-habitat species, recorded in 92% of our 10k squares. It may also be found along woodland edges and in suburban habitats. Its nocturnal caterpillars feed mainly on grasses during the winter.



Lunar Underwing
©Butterfly Conservation/Julian Francis



Square-spot Rustic ©Dave Wilton

The fourth most-recorded species is the Lesser Yellow Underwing (*Noctua comes*), whose larvae feed on herbaceous and woody plants. Again, this is a common species throughout our region, occurring in 91% of 10k squares.



Lesser Yellow Underwing ©John Thacker

Like its larger cousin, the Large Yellow Underwing, it shows a wide range of variation in both colour and pattern on the forewings.

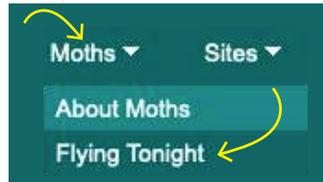
'In fifth place' we have the wonderfully named Setaceous Hebrew Character (*Xestia c-nigrum*), equally common in a wide range of habitats (but especially in cultivated areas). It is quite easily identified by the bright straw-coloured triangular marking on the leading edge of the forewing adjacent to a black mark considered to look like a letter from the Hebrew alphabet (hence the name!).

Note the variation in colour and markings of the 2 photos shown above right. Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is one of its larval foodplants, so check out your local nettles for activity!

Check out our website for the full list of those moths you may see at this time of the year:



Both images above of Setaceous Hebrew Character ©Butterfly Conservation/Ryszard Szczygiel



If you select a species on the list, you'll also find details on how you can submit your own sightings and/or upload your own photos.

We know that nocturnal moths are less conspicuous than their day-flying counterparts (or, indeed, butterflies); nevertheless, discovering them can bring great joy.

Derek Haynes

A (me) Moment in Time

As another season draws largely to a close, we should perhaps take a moment to reflect on some of the joyous moments of 2023.

Sure, a lot has gone on 'behind the scenes' this year to give our species a helping hand and promote their wellbeing, but I'd like to take this opportunity to ask each of you – as a 'supporter of the cause' – to reflect on perhaps one notable contextual moment of the year that brought you great joy.

In the next (December) issue of *Hairstreak*, it would be uplifting during the dark days of winter to be sharing those special moments with each other.



So, if you think back to that one moment (or maybe there were several) this year, please don't be shy in letting us know.

I think we're really looking for a piece that perfectly captures the moment: say, a short account of up to around 50 words which will hopefully enable the reader to 'witness your experience' for themselves.

Mine would probably be a reflective account of those Small Skippers vying for the best roosting site that I referred to in my editorial.

Had any thoughts of your own yet?

If so, try to best reflect that unforgettable moment in a single sentence and, if a photo would help to enhance the occasion, all the better.

Send your '**me moment**' of the year to the email address at the foot of this page, and we'll select some of the best for publication next time.

Of course, you may feel that your experiences this year deserve more than just a sentence to best capture those joyous occasions, in which case please submit one or more articles for consideration. This is perhaps particularly pertinent leading into the festive period (when thoughts may well be focused elsewhere), with articles for the newsletter tending to be less forthcoming.

We hope you've enjoyed this edition of *Hairstreak*, which will ever only be as good as the sum of its parts.

Happy autumn forays!

Derek Haynes
[newsletter-editor@
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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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