

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 120 | WINTER 2023/24



Winner of our Members' Day
Photo Comp. (UK Butterflies)
©Paul Lund



See page 25



There's lots going on over winter!



**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.

Contents

Editorial.....	3
View from The Chair	4
Target Areas for Butterfly Recording: Prepare for 2024.....	6
Members' Day 2023: Recap.....	9
The Year of the Red Admiral	14
UTB Conservation Management is Helping.....	16
Further Thoughts on Moth Trapping	18
News from the 10K Squares	19
Duke of Burgundy Project: Update	22
Winter Conservation Tasks	23
Members' Day 2023 Photo Competition: Results	25
My Magical Memorable Moments + Something for the Butterfly Wonderer	27
Make a New Year's Resolution – Register a Wild Space Today!.....	29
UTB Moth Report 2023.....	30
Business as Usual?.....	35
Membership Latest.....	37
My Magical Memorable Montane Map Me Moment	38

Cover images... May be spotted during the winter... from top left; anticlockwise:
Brimstone in flight (©Paul Lund)
December moth (©Janice Robertson)
Hibernating Peacock (©John Kearns)
Brown Hairstreak ova (©Tom Dunbar)

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

Next edition: **SPRING 2024 (ISSUE 121) [DEADLINE FOR COPY: 8th MARCH 2024]**
PLANNED PUBLICATION DATE: 18th MARCH 2024

Email: **Derek Haynes, Newsletter Editor**
newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk
Print: Supported by **Bluepepper Designs** www.bpdesigns.co.uk

Butterfly Conservation. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468). Registered Office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5QP. Charity registered in England and Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268). VAT No GB 991 2771 89

Editorial

A very warm welcome to this end-of-year issue of *Hairstreak*, and **Season's Greetings** to you all.

On sunny days during these dark winter months, if it's not especially cold, one tends to be hopeful of seeing at least one of our five hibernators 'flexing its muscles' on what may only be a brief interruption from its seasonal slumber. We include Red Admiral in that number, as it's now sometimes able to survive the relatively milder winter climate of southern Britain (whilst remaining primarily a migrant species).

There may not be many butterflies on the wing just now, but some of our moths, such as the aptly named December moth and Winter moth (the former featuring on the front cover), may pay you a visit, particularly if you have a moth trap. We featured an article by Linda Seward in the last edition of *Hairstreak*, 'Moth trapping for beginners', which you may wish to refer back to. In this current issue, there is more from Linda on her thoughts on moth trapping.

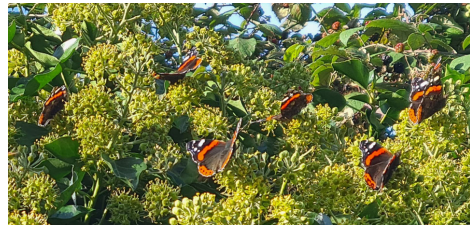
I asked last time for your '**me moment**' of 2023, and I'm pleased that we can share some of them with you here in these pages. After all, sharing is caring (ME = WE)!

Talking of sharing, please take a moment to check out the conservation tasks we have scheduled for the coming weeks, as we'd love to share a few hours with you in the 'fresh winter air'.

I am sure that those of you who attended our October Members' Day event in Benson (Oxon) will reflect on its being a most

memorable occasion, especially given the inspirational talks by our key speakers. You'll find a recap of the day on page 9.

So, what news since our last issue of *Hairstreak*? Some species still seemed to be doing rather well into the last half of September, including Brown Hairstreak which was seen for the first time in a few recorders' gardens. Red Admiral had an unbelievable autumn, and those in this photo by Tom Dunbar on his annual (September) Aylesbury walk contributed to his record tally on the day of 117 individuals. Incredible!



©Tom Dunbar 26th September 2023

Except for Small Tortoiseshell, all the hibernators were still being seen in October; and presumed third-brood Holly Blue, Small Copper and Speckled Wood were also recorded.

When the festivities are over, it's time to consider what we are aspiring to achieve in 2024. Maybe joining one of the UTB walks or work parties; or perhaps offering to undertake some site surveys?

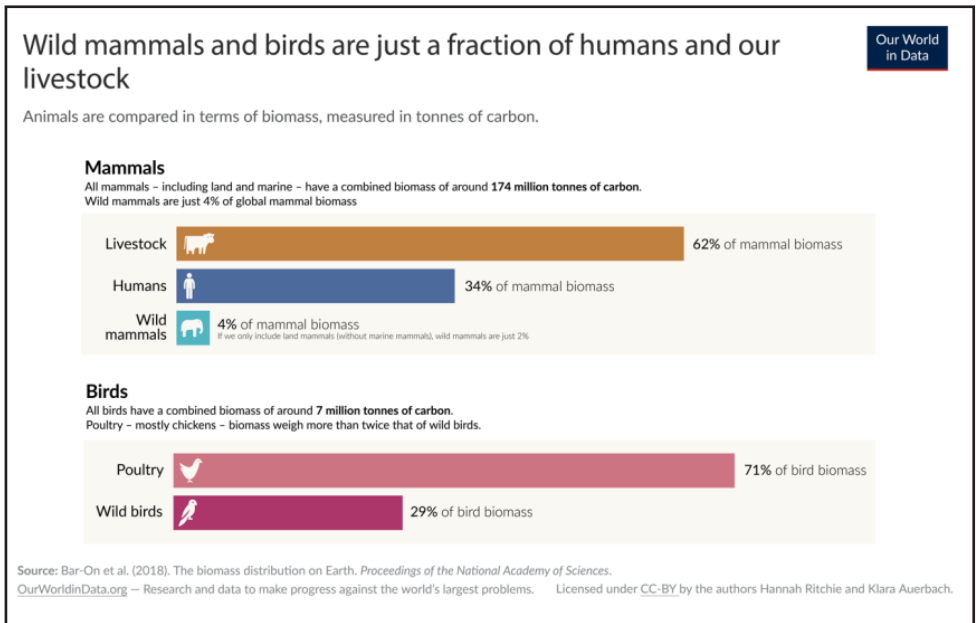
There's no better time to start planning!

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 MARCH 2024.**

View from the Chair

COP28 suggests a recognition that the Climate Crisis is an important issue. Sadly, for we conservationists, the Biodiversity Crisis hasn't engaged concern in the same way. We see national news about the (single) Sycamore Gap tree and two Giant Pandas moving between zoos, whilst there is no coverage of enormous biodiversity losses occurring daily. As David Attenborough explained in *Planet Earth III*, vast amounts of forest are cleared every day and over 75% of available, habitable land is now used for crops - most of which is not food for us but grown to feed to our livestock. The mass of livestock vastly exceeds that of wild mammals; the mass of poultry and game birds (bred to be shot) massively outweighs our native birds. It sounds berserk, but it is true: <https://ourworldindata.org/wild-mammals-birds-biomass>



I hope you agree that the Upper Thames Branch has its priorities right, focusing on the very real need to act to conserve native wildlife - especially the smaller creatures that everything else depends upon. It would not be possible without your money and support.

Once more, our winter conservation work has seen us at regular haunts and new sites, too. I'm so grateful to all the members who turn out for us (and our fellow conservation partners) to help keep these important sites in good condition. If you want to join us, you will be made very welcome see <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events>. Each year we expand our conservation effort and that needs new volunteers stepping up to help.

Our Society also does a large amount of administrative work. Long-serving committee member Kat moved away and retired at the AGM, but the myriad of activities undertaken by so many of us (both on and off the committee) is what makes a big difference - and I would like to thank each of you that has performed administrative tasks, submitted records, grown plants, led a guided walk, helped on one of our stalls at a public event, taken on a survey, organised something for us, come along to a conservation task or attended a UTB meeting, for giving your support to another year of great success.

There are several major initiatives currently in the planning stages, which gives me hope... and I look forward to their finalisation so that I can share news of them with you. I wrote in the last issue that everyone likes to be in at the start of some 'great movement', and these new projects will certainly allow for that. Meanwhile, if you want to do your bit, maybe just in your garden, check out the various ways you could make a difference at <https://wild-spaces.co.uk>. Come the spring, there will be many survey opportunities and I hope you will also consider these.

Meanwhile, despite our ever-increasing recording efforts, almost everyone tells me that they see fewer butterflies and moths each year. Evidence shows that directed conservation effort will convert dwindling numbers into expanding populations. So, please consider creating a Wild Space, join us in the field and attend the training sessions we run. Please, check our events page regularly at <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events> for up-to-date news on our latest projects.

Enjoy the Christmas and New Year holidays and please give some thought to how you can join us in trying to make the natural world stronger in 2024.

Don't mention Politics!

This is a tricky subject, but I feel I need to point out that we are constantly losing biodiversity and there is an urgent need to act. This isn't only my opinion: for the UK, we read, "No let-up in the decline of our wildlife": (<https://stateofnature.org.uk>); for the world, the UN says, "Nature is in crisis": (<https://www.unep.org/facts-about-nature-crisis>).

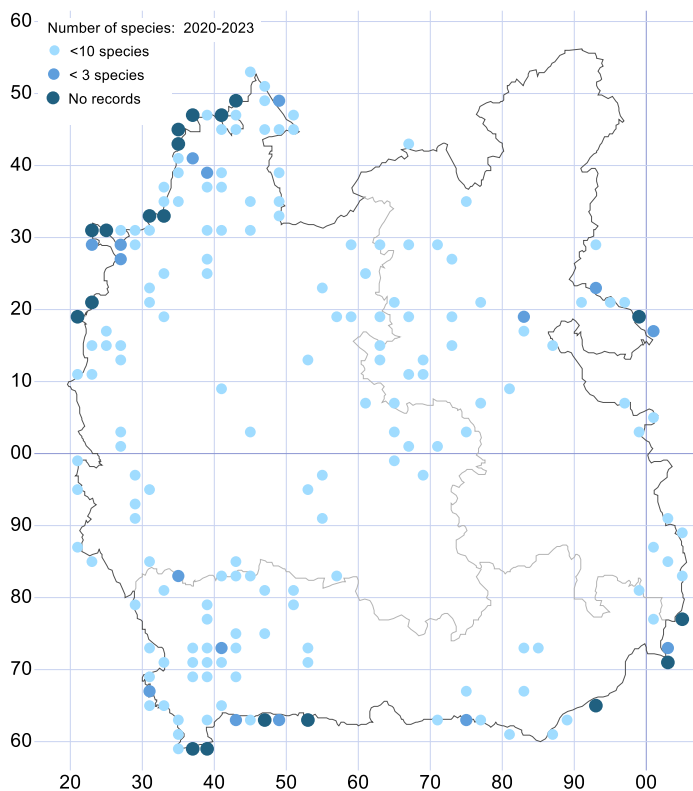
In 2024's general election, please consider pledges being made for biodiversity. Some politicians call it Nature's Capital (the idea that natural 'services' can provide clean water, air and well-being at less cost than any alternative).

It seems we need to press harder for a cause we believe essential. Please try to consider the environment amongst your deliberations when you are asked to make a choice. We must weigh these distinctions as, very sadly, many voters will not consider them at all.

Nick Bowles
nick.bowles@ntlworld.com

Target Areas for Butterfly Recording: Prepare for 2024

In the late spring edition of *Hairstreak* (No 118, page 10) we showed a map to illustrate gaps in our recording coverage since 2020, in the current 5-year recording window (2020-2024). We asked for your help to fill as many gaps as possible in 2023. A small team of dedicated gap-fillers have targeted many of the squares on the map that had no visits recorded. We have so far received over 89,000 records in total for 2023, either directly or via iRecord. The resulting updated 'gaps' map, shown below, includes the result of those records sent in or via iRecord by 2nd December.



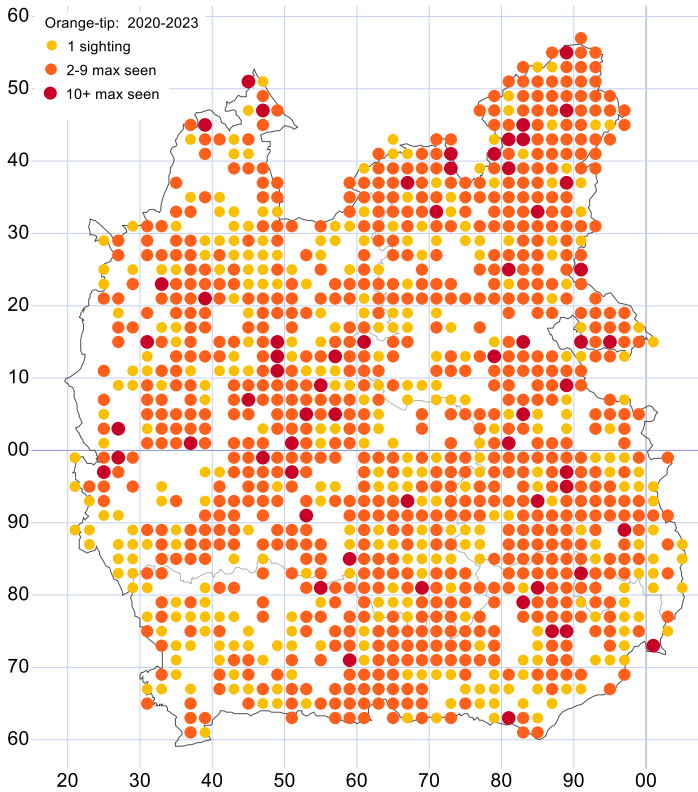
The numbering along the bottom and up the left side of the map is that of the OS grid squares.

As you can see, all the previously unvisited squares fully inside our boundaries have been successfully visited, mostly with more than 10 species recorded.

A huge 'thank you' to everyone who has helped with this great progress.

The remaining unvisited squares are at the edges, straddling the border with neighbouring counties: mainly in

NW Oxfordshire and SW Berkshire. We will be encouraging recorders to visit these areas next spring and summer with the aim to fill all the remaining gaps before the end of 2024. There is still a wide scattering of squares with fewer than 10 species recorded (and a few with <3 species recorded), and we should try to fill these too.



There are a number of squares that were not visited much in the early part of the season, as evidenced in the blank areas of the map (left) of Orange-tip records, mainly in W. Oxon, W. Berks and mid-Bucks. These widespread and mobile butterflies should occur in all parts of our region.

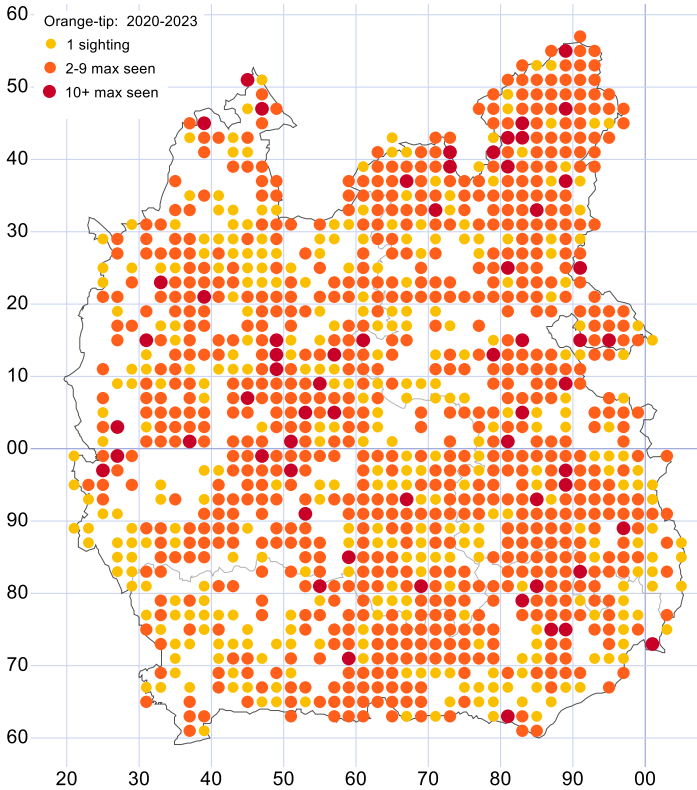
Similar gaps appear in the map of Brimstone records (shown on the next page), although to a lesser extent as Brimstones are also seen in the summer months. As

Brimstones tend to be more obvious in the spring months, more recording visits in these early months will help us fill these 'spring' gaps.

We expect that some recorders will not yet have sent in their records for 2023, either directly or via iRecord. If you are one of those people, please send in your records for 2023 (and, of course, any records you may not have submitted for previous years) as soon as possible and preferably before mid-January. This will give us the best chance to verify these new records and update our maps to best-target recording in 2024.

There are also some common species gaps for 2020-23 at the 10km square resolution (the scale at which UK maps are usually published) and we should try to target these species in these gaps: Essex Skipper has not been recorded in SU46, SU76 SP22, SP43, SP44 or SP92; Brown Argus in SP53 or SP92; and Silver-washed Fritillary (now more widespread) in SU28, SP20, SP34, SP44 or SP82.

Once we are up to date with the records, we will produce a new updated map next spring to show where remaining poorly recorded squares remain, to provide targets for 2024.



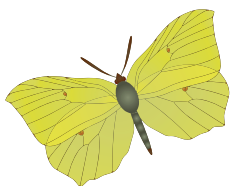
Remember that butterflies have different flying seasons, so you should be visiting and recording at least three different times of the year: late spring (May), early summer (mid-June to mid-July), and late summer (late July-August) to have a chance of seeing the full range of species.

In our best localities with really good butterfly habitat, such as at Bernwood, Aston Rowant and Ivinghoe Beacon, we have records of 35-36 species. In even

modest patches of habitat elsewhere, along footpaths, on field and woodland edges and in gardens, we should be able to find about 15-17 butterfly species over the year in every part of the three counties.

If you have any questions about recording and how you may be able to help, please contact me, Peter Ogden, or Jan Haseler (our 10km square recording coordinator).

Your help is hugely appreciated - your records are making a difference!



Jim Asher
jim.asher@btinternet.com

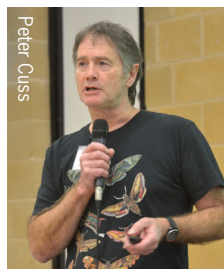
Members' Day 2023: Recap on a Memorable Event

Our very successful Members' Day was held this year in Benson (Oxon), with over 100 attendees.



This is a recap of proceedings, focussing on the key presentations of the day by our three guest speakers (Peter Eeles, Will Langdon and Matthew Oates).

But, firstly, a brief mention of the reviews of the UTB moths and butterflies, presented by Peter Cuss (our Moth Officer) and chairman Nick Bowles, respectively.



Peter conveyed to us 'what we do for our moths in the Upper Thames region throughout the year', from the early-evening-flying Sloe Carpet in March/April (not

seen in our area since the early '80s); to Pale Shining Brown in mid-summer (last recorded in the UTB area in 2013); to the endangered double-brooded Barberry Carpet (whose larvae are sought in September). Other species were also

discussed. (See page 30 for Peter's 2023 UTB Moth Report.)

Peter also mentioned that UTB had received requests from three farms whose owners had sought help with the 'rewilding' of parts of their land. Additionally [a retrospective observation], that "moth-light trappers had found the spring and early summer to have been slow this year, but that September had been incredible".

On the butterflies, Nick gave his view on which species he considered had had a good year and those which had done badly, and sought attendees' opinions. The 'overall winner' (with the agreement of all) was Red Admiral, with the 'worst-performing' species suggested by Nick as Small Tortoiseshell (all in agreement), Purple Emperor, White Admiral, Clouded Yellow and Small Blue (though some present considered the first brood of the latter to be plentiful in 2023).

Nick also gave an update on our outstanding Holtspur Bottom Reserve, situated between Beaconsfield and High Wycombe.



So, to our key speakers (whose ‘back stories’ were provided in the last issue of *Hairstreak*), with Peter Eeles first up to the microphone...



Peter’s talk revolved around the subject of his latest book, *British & Irish Butterfly Rarities*, looking at some of the species which could

be justifiably included in one of several categories of migrants... including ‘adventives’ (species that have not arrived on these shores ‘under their own steam’, for example, Geranium Bronze); and then there are the ‘questionable’ species: ones which have ‘no business being here’, such as Lesser Purple Emperor.

Peter talked about the process of ‘backtracking’ to determine where migrants have originated from, using historical meteorological records. Also, “Most migratory species arrive in the UK from mainland Europe;” and [to quote from E.B. Ford’s book, *Butterflies*] “Lepidoptera are much more quickly damaged by contact with grass and bushes than they are in sustained flight, thus challenging the notion that a fresh-looking migrant is probably a release.”

One initiative that Peter revealed was The Great Fen project, whose aim is

to re-introduce the long-extinct Large Copper into its former (drained) habitat (despite many previous failed attempts in the fens).

Peter also opined that the Continental Swallowtail – whose presence in the UK has increased in recent years – might re-colonise Britain in future years (with Large Tortoiseshell and Long-tailed Blue also with upward-trend migratory tendencies); additionally, that a further 63 butterfly species might find breeding conditions suitable in Britain and Ireland over time (though not arriving here of their own volition).

One perhaps-unexpected fact from Peter: a [1702 Cambridgeshire-collected] Bath White butterfly (which was donated to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in 1906) is the oldest known pinned insect (on original pin!), as confirmed by Guinness World Records. Who knew...?

Next, to Will Langdon, who gave us a fascinating and enthusiastic insight into ‘mothing without a moth trap’, based largely on personal experiences.



Will, an Oxford University DPhil student, discovered an abandoned Large Tortoiseshell larval web on Portland (Dorset) in 2020 [= evidence of breeding] (overleaf).



But he also 'likes moths' [a lot!] and acknowledged the benefits of running a moth trap whilst advising that many (particularly smaller) moth species, which typically don't stray far from their habitat, are less likely to be discovered in a moth trap. And, of course, a moth trap won't capture any of our day-flying moth species.

Tapping the vegetation of a known moth habitat by day will often reward one with moths being flushed out. Looking for larvae is also a technique often used to discover the whereabouts of some (especially, micro) species, as the larvae are invariably more readily identified than their adult counterparts. Will has discovered new moth species for Oxfordshire employing techniques other than by using a moth trap.

Will added that, in Oxfordshire (where he is based), whilst 90% of micro-moth records are from moth traps, the 10% discovered by other means are adding greatly to the knowledge. Furthermore, that 40% of the day-flying-moth records in Oxfordshire are for nationally scarce species, whereas just 20% of those (nocturnal species) found in moth traps are nationally scarce. Will has determined that hot, muggy summer days are ideal for discovering micro moths.

Will also told us about his experience with the attractive micro-moth *Chrysoclista linneella*, the larvae of which he has found in Oxford on the trunks of limes, where it feeds under the bark and produces little piles of red frass (as seen in the photo below). The adult moth is also shown.



And, finally, to Matthew Oates, who gave us an intriguing, often-tongue-in-cheek, account of the life of the Purple Emperor, after his decades of energetically studying the species.

Matthew's presentation was so full of fascinating Purple Emperor (PE) facts that it is hard to do it full justice here. So, here are some extracts from his presentation:

On history:

- The facts in books on PE have been shown to be largely mythological or based purely on assumption.

On sallow (PE's larval foodplant)

- Sallow trees are pioneering colonisers of bare clay and wet ground but were vilified in 1959 under the Weeds Act. Sallow supports more moth species than any other plant, except for birches and oaks.

On habitat:

- PE is a species of sallow-rich scrub (but likes oak and beech, probably because they are well-foliaged trees, thus providing protection from the wind).
- The two largest known PE UK populations (in sizeable areas) are at Fermyn Woods (Northants) and Knapp Castle Estate in West Sussex.
- Learn one word: **leeward**. PE will always frequent the leeward side of its habitat (and is where its breeding grounds will be found).
- We tend only to go to look for PE at safe, well-known sites; but 'look elsewhere and thou shalt find'.

On mating:

- PEs mate for an average of 3 hours 45 minutes.

On eggs:

- PE lays her eggs (singly) in partial (or even heavy) shade (as does the White

Admiral), and they hatch between 9 and 22 days later (depending on the weather). She usually lays just one cycle of eggs.

On caterpillars:

- PE spends 10 months as a caterpillar, of which about half is in hibernation (= diapause), but it is prone to massive loss to predatory invertebrates at this stage of development.
- 'I would be very surprised if there wasn't a PE caterpillar within a mile of where we are today.'
- The caterpillar's horns are sometimes used as a defence mechanism.



On pupae:

- The weather during the pupal stage probably has the biggest influence over the number of adults appearing in any year.

On adult behaviour:

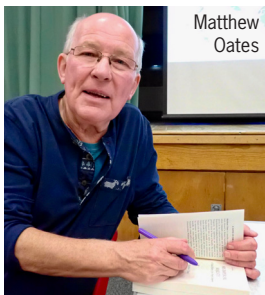
- The flight period is typically mid-late June thru' to the end of July (with very few records from August in recent years).
- The male PE wants to 'smash things up, move the goalposts and establish an empire'.
- The PE behaves similarly to the Comma, but the former doesn't visit flowers (so spends more time some way above the ground) (+ both species

occur at low population densities and change territories remarkably regularly).

- The male PE's iridescence is **not** for wooing the females, but for intra-male rivalry ("these guys seriously hate each other").



- Mornings (typically), in the first half of the flight period, the males will assiduously search for receptive virgin females in sallow scrub.
- Whilst on the lookout for female PEs (particularly later in the day), the males will fight off other male PEs and birds of all varieties and sizes (= arboreal hill-topping).
- The more I study the female PE, the less confidence I have in understanding her.



After Matthew's enlightening presentation, he still had the time (and energy!) to sign copies of his books.

On other matters, a quiz (in fact, three quizzes: 'Name That Caterpillar', 'Butterfly

Anagrams' and 'Say What You See') and photo competition had been organised (by Lesley & Grahame Hawker and Pete Thompson respectively), and our congratulations go to all the winners—though taking part is what counted, naturally! (See Page 25 for results of photo comp.)

We are most indebted to our key speakers for giving us their time, and for sharing their broad knowledge and experience with us.

Thanks, also, to all those who helped out 'behind the scenes' to help make the day go so smoothly. You know who you are!

And special thanks, of course, to all the members who turned up on the day, making it a memorable occasion indeed.

Photos ©Jim Asher & Linda Seward/UTB (unless otherwise stated)

Derek Haynes

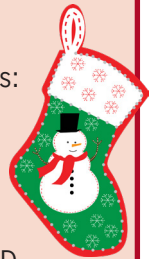
Stocking Filler

10 mins to spare?

Butterfly & moth anagrams:

1. ENTOMB SIR
2. LASAGNE SHED
3. I HIT DEW ALARM
4. GARLIC SETTER
5. BORED GUY UK FUND
6. ROB LEOPARD
7. DOCK WEED SLOP
8. TO COMIC SNOWMAN
9. PROPEL ME PURER
10. WEIRD GUN NERD

Answers on page 36.



The Year of the Red Admiral

This year's Big Butterfly Count's top spot went to the Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*). There were nearly a quarter of a million sightings throughout the UK, representing an increase of over 300% on the previous year's numbers.

Last year's extreme heat and drought had many experts speculating on the impact for British butterflies in 2023, but the Red Admiral seems to have thrived... for whatever reasons. Of course, the Red Admiral is not strictly just a British butterfly as the UK population is supplemented significantly each year by the large numbers that migrate northwards from continental Europe and North Africa.

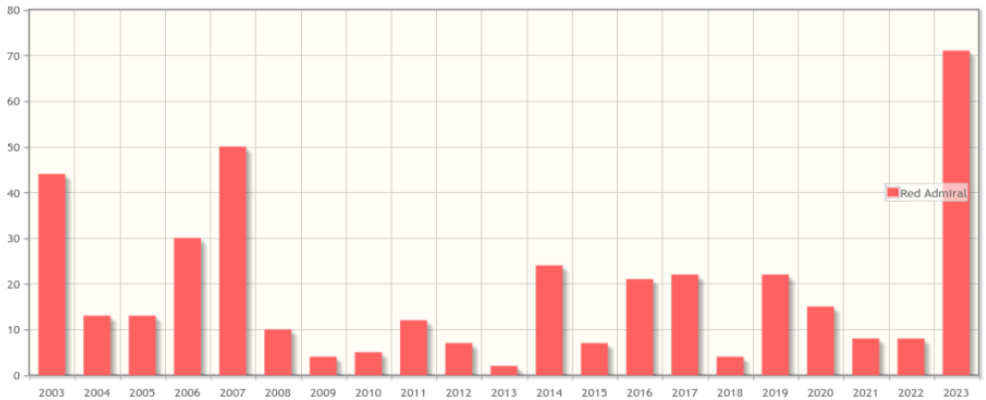
My own experience of this butterfly started from when I grew up in Sunderland in the 1950s and 1960s. This large industrial city, dominated in those days by coalmining and shipbuilding, together with the harsh climate of coastal Northeast England, was not the best environment for butterflies. Yet the Red Admiral was one of the few species I remember visiting our small back garden. This tough butterfly is found throughout the UK, and specimens that overwinter here remain dormant rather than hibernate (such as Peacocks, Commas etc.). The butterfly will venture out on any sunny day, providing conditions are favourable, and records from the Upper Thames Branch Butterfly Conservation website reveal that this butterfly is seen throughout January each year - with one even recorded on New Year's Day!

This butterfly is widespread across the northern hemisphere. On one occasion when holidaying in the Canary Islands, I remember seeing the butterfly. Closer inspection revealed that something strange was going on and that the amount of red on the Admiral's wings seemed to be more widespread than usual. It was only when I saw this butterfly flying together with the insect that we are familiar with in the UK (*Vanessa atalanta*) that I realised that I was observing the Canary Red Admiral (*Vanessa vulcania*). This butterfly is endemic to the Canaries and has somehow evolved into a separate species despite the presence of *V. atalanta*.

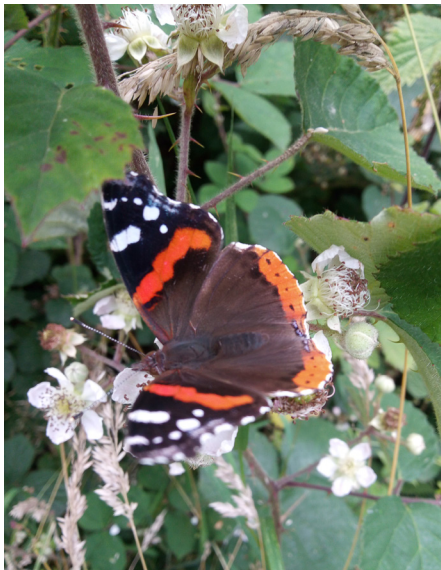


This year has proved to be a record for the Red Admiral on my transect, by some distance (see the graphic below from the [UKBMS.org](https://www.ukbms.org) website). The butterfly first appeared in early spring and then nearly every week from early July to the final week of recording at the end of September. In the last few weeks of the transect, I often found the

Carrington's New Farm (SU884900)



butterflies feeding on the ivy flowers of which there are many in the hedgerows on the transect route. They also had the rather unsavoury practice of feeding from dung!



The butterflies were still visiting my garden up until mid-November. I have noticed that as the weather has become colder and the daylight decreasing, the behaviour of the Admirals has changed. In the summer they were feeding from the flowers and basking in the sunshine; but as autumn progressed the butterflies tended to fly in circuits above the garden and would frequently fly over the rooftops in a circular pattern.

Perhaps they were trying to get a panoramic perspective of the landscape as a prelude to migrating south or maybe they were scouting out suitable hibernation sites? Who can say, but I'm certainly looking forward to seeing what happens to this remarkable insect in 2024.

Martin Robinson

Photos ©Martin Robinson

My 'Me Moment' of 2023

My best moth 'me moment' was seeing so many Cistus Forester at Aston Rowant this year.

Ben Paternoster

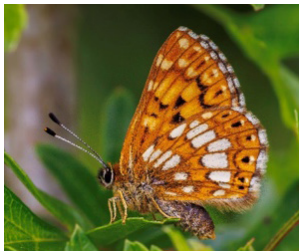


UTB Conservation Management is Helping...

UTB conservation management is helping to conserve rare species, including an 'extinct' moth.

For several years, the UTB has provided winter conservation work and summer survey work at various private sites in the Chilterns (and, lately, beyond, too). These are sites where we believe that no-one else would survey, yet where important habitats persist.

We pay a small sum to Chiltern Rangers for their help in managing these sites (money gained from your membership subs) and we feel that it is very effective.



Duke in 2023, at a site where it has spread since our work began there

We have maintained the Duke of Burgundy at three sites and seen positive signs of its spreading from those

sites onto three more. As BC considers this species to have fewer UK colonies than any other butterfly, we consider that fact important.

We know that Small Blue has appeared at two sites where we work, and that populations of Striped Lychnis moth have been stabilised at two others.

We also work at various sites with Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue, Black Hairstreak and Brown Hairstreak, and are convinced that their continued strong presence is down to our work. We are also convinced that by maintaining habitat that suits these

rare creatures we also benefit many others: species that are surveyed less thoroughly than butterflies.

Evidence of that 'spin-off' benefit came when I took an image of a small plume moth at a Thames Water site near Princes Risborough where we have been busy for about 8 years, controlling scrub and dense grass in the winter and surveying (when access can be arranged) in the summer. Thames Water contributes towards our conservation work as recompense for our work there. Checking identification books and online resources provided no match and the image lingered, unloved, in my 'to be identified' folder. Then I took a second image of the same species at Yoesden Bank (one of BBOWT's superb reserves) and showed that image to Yoesden's warden, Ched George. He was able to tell me that, since 2013, a tiny population of Downland Plume was known on the site (and the UTB's Dave Wilton added that it was known at a few others, besides).

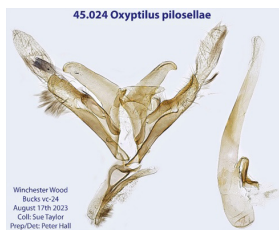
Realising that the Chilterns hold a moth everyone thought lost to the UK in the 1960s, I feel like a newly converted disciple. **I want to broadcast that we have this special and very rare moth**, with apologies to those of you who follow news of our local moth populations more closely and almost certainly already knew. At one time, the Downland Plume moth (*Oxyptilus pilosellae*) was found across parts of Hampshire, Kent, Surrey and in the Chilterns. For unknown reasons all the Hampshire and Surrey colonies disappeared, and then those in Kent, too. The last UK population, in the Chiltern Hills, clung on at a single site until that

too petered out in the early 1960s. By the start of this millennium, Butterfly Conservation declared the Downland Plume 'probably extinct'.



Downland Plume (*Oxyptilus pilosellae*)

Now that the Thames Water site's moth could be identified and, being rather excited to have discovered a rare moth, I went back this summer. My account of this (which included mention of a subsequent visit to the site) was featured in the last edition of *Hairstreak*, with the following image of the dissected genitalia of a male Downland Plume relating to that account.



I think this a really positive story on so many levels. We already knew our work was benefitting some very special species, but none quite so rare.

In habitats where the Upper Thames Branch works, The Duke, one of the UK's butterflies with the smallest and a declining number of colonies, is expanding to new areas.

We also now have a moth, the Downland Plume (amongst those with the smallest number of colonies), breeding in our area – at least partly down to our work. Though many of our readers knew of the rediscovery nine years ago, and with Sue Taylor writing about the moth in 2022, the presence of good numbers of such a rare moth at the Thames Water site, where the UTB is heavily involved in conservation management, is wonderful.

It is further evidence that:

- **our inventions are, at the very least, helping to maintain an important habitat (and I strongly suspect, improving it. Presumably, the same is true at the 14 other sites where we work with Chiltern Rangers)**
- **your donations and subscriptions are being well spent**
- **the voluntary conservation work that our members provide every winter is of immense value**
- **the voluntary conservation work that our members provide every winter is of immense value**

All this should help us convince more landowners to take our management advice in the future.

You may be interested in the further information about these two species to be found on the websites below.

On page 8 of the report, '*State of UK Butterflies 2022*', it shows that of all the UK butterflies, the Duke has lost the most ground in the table of distribution change (%) over ten years: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/State%20of%20UK%20Butterflies%202022%20Report.pdf>

And on the HantsMoths website ('Extinct in the British Isles, formerly on chalk downland in parts of south-eastern England'): <https://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1489.php#:~:text=45.024%20%5BB%26F%3A%201489%5D%20Downland,Wingspan%2015%2D21%20mm>

Nick Bowles

Further Thoughts on Moth Trapping

I talked about how much I enjoyed moth trapping in the last issue of *Hairstreak*, and Derek, this Newsletter's editor, said he would feature more of my photos in this issue in return for writing a few words to accompany them. I'm more than happy to oblige!



Looking at the photos again, I am reminded of how rewarding it is to study a species that is often overlooked or just noticed, like moths. In many ways (pre-trapping days), I merely thought them a nuisance, getting into the house on summer nights and swirling around my ceiling lights until I caught and released them – and they never seemed to want to be caught! I would often heave a huge sigh of relief as I let one go, only to have another fly in over my head so I could begin the process again. And don't get me started on clothes moths!

Butterflies, on the other hand, are large and colourful and fly in the daytime when we are more aware of what is around us. I, for one, greet the sight of those

fluttering wings with joy and a sense that everything is right with this planet of ours.



But start studying moths and you'll realise that there is a whole new world of wonder to experience. For instance, take a good look at their feathery antennae—how complex and delicate they are! And there are some quite large moths that can put a butterfly to shame. On the other hand, there are thousands of micro and pygmy moths to drive us all crazy trying to get an identification.





The season of butterflies and moths is over now, but I'm looking forward to spending some cold winter nights studying my moth books and dreaming about what I will find in my trap next spring and summer.

Linda Seward

All photos ©Linda Seward

News from the 10k Squares

A number of our members have adopted a 10K square, coordinating the recording for the current Butterfly Atlas, which runs from 2020–2024. The reports below describe how some of them have been getting on in 2023.

Steve Holliday is the 10K Champion for the Oxfordshire part of SP34, which lies to the west of Banbury. Steve notes that it was a good spring for Holly Blue in the square, with a few new sites including Balscote Quarry nature reserve, where it was the 24th species that he has recorded there. Small Heath was missing from the square in the 2016 Atlas but has been seen at two sites this year.

Geoff Sutton has recently taken on SP51, the 10K square which includes Otmoor. He reports that this year was very much one of exploration to

understand what the area had to offer and to find out where the most promising areas were for butterflies, and why some areas seemed totally lacking in any records. The latter involved walking across enormous fields completely barren of any wildlife. The highlights were finding Brown Hairstreak on Otmoor (a personal first) and Small Heath and Small Copper in several new locations. Otherwise, the main activity was just walking and cycling the many footpaths and bridleways criss-crossing the area and recording additional species and numbers in many of the 2k squares. The bonus find was 350m of probably Roman road, just outside of Gosford, now added to the Historical Environments Record.

Julian Howe is the 10K Champion for SP42, which is in north-west Oxfordshire, with its south-west corner to the east of



Charlbury and its north-east corner north of Upper Heyford. Julian was pleased to find some Silver-washed Fritillaries, a species which had not previously been recorded in this 10K square in the current atlas period. He reports that there were hardly any sightings of Small Tortoiseshell this year.

Jan Haseler looks after SU66, which lies to the south-west of Reading in Berkshire. At the start of 2023, Holly Blue had been reported from all but one of the 10K square's tetrads. It was missing from the Beech Hill tetrad, an area of predominantly arable farmland with few productive footpaths. A conversation with a resident of Beech Hill demonstrated the value of local knowledge. A permissive footpath, which is not recorded on the Ordnance Survey map, runs from the Elm Tree Inn to Trunkwell House. It runs past some sunny and sheltered hedgerows and some of the adjacent fields have conservation margins. On a sunny day in early May, five Holly Blues were flying along the hedge lines. Then at the beginning of September, two Brown Argus butterflies were seen in the conservation margins. We just need to find Common Blue there now...

Doug Kennedy is the 10K Champion for SP71, which lies to the west of Aylesbury. Doug reports that this was the year of the Red Admiral, which appeared everywhere across his square from early July onwards, sometimes in considerable numbers. In September, dozens could be seen nectaring on holly flowers. The other main occurrence in 2023 is the huge scar of HS2 construction across his square from just south of Aylesbury to north of Waddesdon. This expands to about 400 metres in places and has obliterated the countryside, including some quite interesting pastures and hedgerows, and it limits where he can go. His first records in March 2023 were, oddly, a Hummingbird Hawk-moth and a Red Admiral. In April, there were few Orange-tips, Small Whites and no Small Tortoiseshells at all, and these remained scarce for the entire summer. Small Whites, which are usually very common, were less so as were Peacocks, and he was disappointed not to encounter any Clouded Yellows. There were reasonable numbers of Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, but very few Ringlets. Next year he hopes to be able to access the HS2 areas to see what remains. He adds that he always lives in hope of finding Hairstreaks in new places.

Chris Tyler-Smith and **Yali Xue** look after four squares in the north-east of the Upper Thames region (north of Milton Keynes): SP84, SP85, SP94 and SP95. Their findings this year were probably typical of a lot of recorders: in the north-east of the Upper Thames area, Ringlet and Green-veined White numbers were down, while Red Admiral numbers were up towards the end of the season.

Martin Robinson is the 10K Champion for SU88, which lies due south of High Wycombe and is bisected by the River Thames into two roughly equal halves, the northern half being in Buckinghamshire and the southern part in Berkshire. Martin reports that this year was a mixed one for butterflies in SU88. The species that did particularly well were Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Peacock, Comma and Red Admiral. All were widespread and relatively numerous. The Red Admiral had one of its best years in SU88, and this seems to have been the case nationally, too. By contrast he recorded only one Small Tortoiseshell this year and it appears that this butterfly which was once common and widespread in this 10Km square is again

in trouble. One particular visit to a tetrad that stood out was to Ashley Hill Forest (SU830810) in early July. The weather was warm (23°C) and sunny. On this particular day, the gravel path that runs through the wood seemed to have acquired magical properties. Several Purple Hairstreaks and White Admirals came down to the path to take up mineral salts and to bask in the sunshine – a very special and unexpected treat.

We have a number of 10K squares across the three counties, particularly in the north and west of the region, where we are looking for one or more volunteers to help coordinate recording.

Figure 1 (above) shows whether squares are already adopted, need additional help or are unassigned. If you think you could help, please contact Jan Haseler, **0118 9414750** or email jan.haseler@btinternet.com

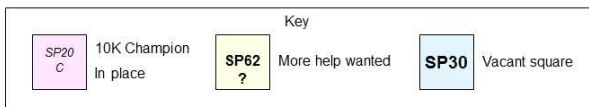
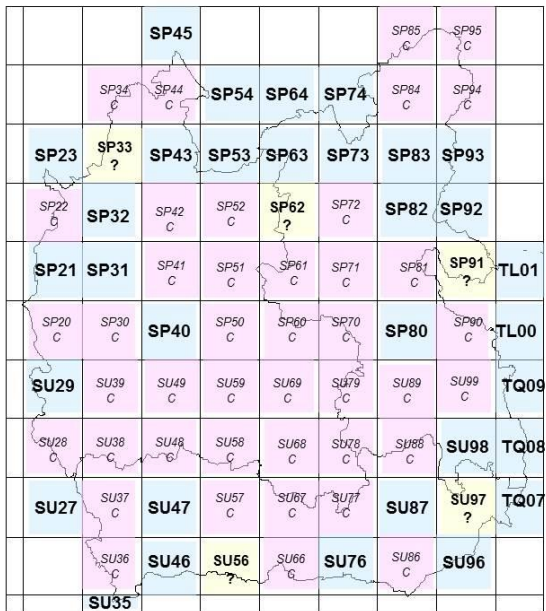


Figure 1: 10K square status, December 2023



Duke of Burgundy Project: Update

The Duke of Burgundy is a very localised and specialist species in the UK (with **'Vulnerable Status'**), but we are blessed to have its presence in both Berkshire and Buckinghamshire – despite only in relatively small numbers at just a few sites. Conservation work is critical for its survival.



Female Duke of Burgundy
©David Hastings

Ex-University of Oxford researcher Agnieszka Bogucka (Aga) intends to continue with her Duke of Burgundy

conservation work at a farm near Hungerford, where the owners have now purchased cattle to graze the site, but Duke numbers were very low there in 2023.

Elsewhere in both Berks and Bucks, the outlook seems more positive. Nick Bowles found evidence that the butterfly is now using private land previously prepared for it within the Ashridge Estate and at a site between Princes Risborough and High Wycombe, while Peter Ogden found further evidence of it in the area. The owners of several nearby private meadows have been located, and we hope to work with them to create 'stepping stones' between currently isolated colonies and to assist those colonies to expand further. Essential winter scrub clearance work at Stepps Hill and Incombe Hole will prevent the cowslip foodplants becoming

shaded out (which did not seem to have damaged the Duke's fortunes on the Ashridge Estate in the first season after clearance, even though a great deal of scrub was removed). This part of the colony could be impacted temporarily, but in the longer term the work will improve the chances of the colony persisting.

Newly agreed work at a farm just over the Bucks/Beds border should eventually produce suitable Duke habitat halfway between the Ivinghoe and Bison Hill populations.

Nick Bowles surveyed SSSI grassland within the Whipsnade Zoo site (between Ivinghoe and Bison Hill) but found no sign of the Duke, and few cowslips.

Similarly, and despite transect walkers having previously reported sightings of Duke on the Bucks/Herts border in the area around Aldbury Nowers, Nick Bowles found no evidence of it there during 2023.

Chilterns AONB Landowner Engagement Officer Nick Marriner hopes to get further funding from DEFRA when the 'Chalk Cherries & Chairs' project ends in 2025, which will include help for the Duke.

If you would like to be involved in future conservation work for the Duke in the UTB area, please contact Nick Bowles at nick.bowles@ntlworld.com

Conservation Work: the most important thing we do



If possible, please consider joining us to give wildlife the helping hand it so badly needs.

02-Jan-2024 10:00	Far Kingdom, Princes Risborough, Bucks.	More info
07-Jan-2024 10:00	Holtspur Bottom, Beaconsfield, Bucks.	More info
11-Jan-2024 10:00	Small Dean Bank, Bradenham, Bucks.	More info
14-Jan-2024 10:00	Aston Upthorpe Downs, nr Blewbury, Oxon	More info
15-Jan-2024 10:00	Far Kingdom, Princes Risborough, Bucks.	More info
20-Jan-2024 10:00	Whiteleaf Cross, Princes Risborough, Bucks.	More info
22-Jan-2024 10:00	Wadborough Field, nr Ivinghoe, Bucks.	More info
29-Jan-2024 10:00	Westcott, nr Waddesdon, Bucks.	More info
01-Feb-2024 10:00	Wardrobes Lane, Princes Risborough, Bucks.	More info
04-Feb-2024 10:00	Aston Upthorpe Downs, nr Blewbury, Oxon.	More info
06-Feb-2024 10.00	Westcott, nr Waddesdon, Bucks.	More info
12-Feb-2024 10:00	Buttlers Hangings, West Wycombe, Bucks.	More info
18-Feb-2024 10:00	Holtspur Bottom, Beaconsfield, Bucks.	More info
20-Feb-2024 10.00	Westcott, nr Waddesdon, Bucks.	More info
27-Feb-2024 10.00	Westcott, nr Waddesdon, Bucks.	More info

01-Mar-2024 10:00	Strawberry Bank, High Wycombe, Bucks.	More info
03-Mar-2024 10:00	Aston Upton Downs, nr Blewbury, Oxon.	More info
04-Mar-2024 10:00	Strawberry Bank, High Wycombe, Bucks.	More info

Outdoor events are sometimes cancelled at short notice, especially in the winter. **Please contact the task leader in advance.**

We ask that you bring your own tools if you have some that you are familiar with, but all required tools and full instruction will be provided. At tasks joint with Chiltern Rangers, hot drinks are provided too - though in all cases we suggest you bring your own hot drink and a snack. Please ensure that your clothing is suitable for working outdoors in winter weather.



Tasks include planting, weeding, cutting scrub, digging, replacing display information, checking fences, collecting seed, taking photos and making bonfires. All attendees choose a task they feel comfortable with and only work for as long as it suits them.

Brief photo descriptions of all the previous tasks can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/458565932924345> ... but you'll need to register to join this private UTB Facebook group.



Members' Day 2023 Photographic Competition: Results



After two years of having just a virtual Members' Day, it was great being able to see and talk to other members, old friends and new, face-to-face!

Over the years, the Photographic Competition, particularly under David Dennis's steady hand, had evolved to become a visual treat with, eventually, seven different categories. However, it had also become a bit of a handful on the day, in terms of not only cataloguing and displaying the prints, but also totting up the votes and deciding upon the winners and runners-up. Pushing through the crowd at lunchtime to assess and vote on the photos was no picnic either! I'd previously formed the view that being able to show the winning photos on screen on the day would be preferable, but that doing this from prints was unrealistic.

Anyway, two years of online slide presentations of members' photos showed that we don't need prints any more – besides, how many people routinely print their photos these days? The environmental cost of printing all the images, and especially the time and effort invested by previous winners, should not be underestimated.

So, in a break from tradition, this year's slimmed-down competition required entrants to have submitted their images electronically in advance, in a narrower range of categories. (Because of the break, it was clearly impracticable to have a Previous Winners' category.)

This provided an opportunity to create a presentation offering all present the chance to see all the images clearly. To get over the problem of voting, we simply didn't have any! Instead, a 'panel of judge' [sic] reviewed all the images and selected the winners. Simple! (This process may well be reviewed in future years).

Anyway, 18 members, both experienced campaigners and new entrants, submitted a total of 89 images across the four categories. Excellent photos throughout made judging very difficult. However, the four category winners were:

- **UK Butterflies:** Paul Lund's breathtaking image of a Brimstone in flight
- **Moths:** The Forester moth, beautifully perched on a Scabious flower, from Linda Seward
- **Immature Stages:** Colin Mather's innocent-looking group of Large White eggs
- **Overseas Butterflies:** Cliff Buckton's splendid Tiger Swallowtail from N. Carolina

See next page for photos - and maybe some more next time.



Many thanks to all the entrants... and remember, it's never too soon to start collecting images for next year!

Winners



UK Butterflies



Moths



Immature Stages



Overseas

A selection of others



My Magical Memorable Moments + Something for the Butterfly Wonderer



Magical Moments

We have been asked to share our favourite lepidoptera moments of 2023. This has been an excuse to spend some time reflecting on some lovely days in the field. I have several moments that stand out.

In the spring, as we were surveying some private land near Grendon Underwood, we stopped at some Blackthorn and to my delight I found my first ever Black Hairstreak pupa (right)! Then, a little to the left, a second one – and, later in the year at the same site, I watched a female Brown Hairstreak (below) investigating a Blackthorn twig with her abdomen, seeking to lay eggs... magical.



Near Ivinghoe I saw my first female Duke of Burgundy butterflies... exciting to see them searching for places to lay eggs, and even more exciting that we saw them in an area which we had been carefully managing in the hope of getting the Dukes to breed there. Success!

In September I joined a small team looking to find out more about the Downland Plume moth: we found a fair number of adults which was exciting enough, but then the Plume moth expert who had joined us started inspecting leaves and found eggs (below, right), making us possibly the only people in the UK lucky enough to see Downland Plume eggs!

These were memorable moments partly because of the rarity of the species. But another moment stands out maybe even more. Standing in the Orchard at Dancersend, I noticed over a dozen freshly emerged Peacock and a few Red Admiral butterflies, all sunning themselves on some logs (photo on the next page). It was afternoon, the sun was getting lower, and as I faced the sun, a Peacock settled on me.

As it left, another arrived... and then another. The connection with a wild animal that chooses to make contact with you always makes a **special memory**.



For the Butterfly Wonderer

For most of us, the long winter months are free of sightings of butterflies and moths. But the species are still around: most as eggs or pupae, but some as caterpillars or adults that shelter and become dormant.

For some species that are hard to see as adults, winter is an opportunity for us to search for the overwintering stages

and record these instead. An advantage of looking for pre-adult stages is that finding them is evidence of breeding in that precise location: they are not just flying through.

Black Hairstreak is the best-known example as we organise egg surveys each winter, but you can also search for Purple, Brown and White-letter Hairstreak eggs. Purple Emperors overwinter as small larva which apparently glow in UV light, so can be searched for at night. Orange-tip overwinter as pupa, though they are hard to find.

Anyone can help by getting out and searching for the overwintering stages. Every observation adds to what is known about these precious insects.

Have fun looking!



Looking for Brown Hairstreak eggs!

Sue Taylor

All photos & artwork ©Sue Taylor

Make a New Year's Resolution - Register a Wild Space Today!

We all rely on nature; it enriches our lives and provides for our everyday needs. But many butterfly and moth species are declining. Can we imagine a future without them?

Wild Spaces is Butterfly Conservation's (BC) flagship engagement programme. It provides a simple and easy way for everyone to get involved and make a difference to help butterflies and moths. Wild Spaces are all around us. They are the flowers in our window boxes, the pots on our patios, the patches of weeds in our gardens or allotments, and the wildflower meadows in our churchyards and parks. They provide space for nature to thrive, and places for people to access and enjoy.



Wild Space Patio ©M Slatter

BC has set a strategic goal to create 100,000 Wild Spaces by 2026. Having already worked with communities and partners to create more than 2,150, there is plenty of opportunity to help to achieve the goal.

Everyone can get involved in Wild Spaces by creating their own Wild Space or helping enhance and maintain a space in their local community. A Wild Space can be large or small, so long as the space is improved or enhanced to help butterflies and moths. A small urban or rural space can be transformed in a few simple steps. These might include:

- planting wild herbs, growing food plants for caterpillars
- letting some grass grow long
- leaving a pile of twigs and leaves.

Some of the most valuable things you can do simply involve doing nothing ... less tidying and better for wildlife!

We aim for Wild Spaces to help butterflies and moths complete their lifecycles, enabling them to feed, breed and shelter. A Wild Space should be free from pesticides, and where compost is used it should be peat free. Every transformation will help make space for butterflies and moths and provide a haven for people to slow down and connect to nature.

Wild Spaces should be registered on the website by the owner of the space, whether private (balcony, patio, garden) or a community space. Spaces can be registered on behalf of BC partners or other organisations by an appropriate representative. It is also fine for someone else to register a space on behalf of a friend or contact, if this is with their full agreement in advance and in the knowledge the Wild Space is genuine. The growing network of Wild Spaces across the UK can be seen on the interactive map on the new website.

If we are all inspired to act, together we can make a big difference. **Please join in and register online today!**

For further information or to register a space, visit: www.wild-spaces.co.uk

Margery Slatter

UTB Moth Report 2023

The following is a brief overview of some of the work carried out by the Branch in support of our moth species in 2023.

Drab Looper. We continue to monitor the population of this scarce moth in west Berkshire.



Drab Looper, Frilsham woods (Berks), 2023

Good numbers were recorded in the woods around Frilsham (I recorded 14 here on the 18th of May) and at Rushall Manor Farm. John Lerpiniere recorded it at Holly Copse (SU597702), and to the best of my knowledge this is a new site for Drab Looper.

Derek Brown recorded one at Greyfield Wood but also noted that there seemed to be a decline in the amount of wood spurge on this site.

As in previous recent years, the old sites north of the M4 (with the exception of Moor Copse) are doing badly.

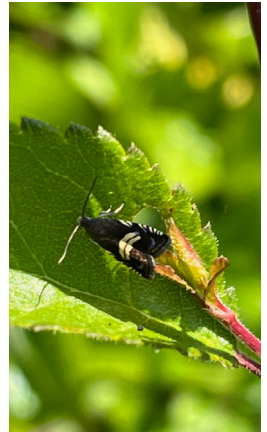
I carried out two searches on Ashampton Common and found no Drab Looper

despite finding a few areas of suitable habitat. Margery Slatter also searched Ashampstead Common, Hampstead Norreys and Lay Fields, but did not find the moth this year.

We did make contact with the Yattendon and Eling Estates following the very extensive Drab Looper survey in 2021, to make them aware of the moth and its requirements. Longer term I would like to have contact with them again to see if it might be possible to work with them for the benefit of this species.

Grapholita Pallifrontana **(Liquorice Piercer)**

The population continues to do well at its Bushy Bank (Oxfordshire) site. Good numbers were recorded on the survey this year and it seemed to have a better distribution across the whole site.



Grapholita Pallifrontana

2023 Survey for *Grapholita Pallifrontana*
18th June. Temp 24C; very sunny.

Grid ref.	Estimated no.
SU5844091479	30
SU5832291595	15
SU5829891603	1
SU5822091645	8
SU5825691638	2
SU5822691645	6



Silvery Arches, Swinley, 2023 ©Chris Wilkinson

Silvery Arches. A survey was undertaken at Swinley on 24th June to keep an eye on the small population at this site, last carried out in 2021. Three Silvery Arches were recorded. A larval survey had been planned for April, to see if we might get a better understanding of its requirements. Unfortunately, this had to be cancelled due to heavy rain. Next year we are hoping to search other Berkshire heaths for this moth.

Heart Moth. This year's survey, on 1st July, targeted an area of Windsor Great Park that had not previously been trapped. We will aim to do this in future years as well, in order to better map the population of the species across the



Heart Moth, Windsor, 2023

park. Three Heart Moths were recorded despite its being a rather cold night.

We were also pleased to record this species at Swinley during

the Silvery Arches survey. There are veteran oaks at Swinley Park and we plan to survey for Heart here next year to see if that is where this individual may have come from.

Derek Barker also recorded four at Great Meadow Pond plus one was recorded in a garden at Sunninghill Park. This species appears to be doing well within its range.

Clearwings. There are three Clearwings which are priority species: Sallow, White-barred and Large Red-belted.



Sallow Clearwing
©Butterfly Conservation

Some effort was put into trying to record these moths in the UTB area in 2023, using pheromones, with several searches at Decoy Heath, Bucklebury

Common, Padworth Common, Swinley and just over the border at Pamber Heath. None of the searches were successful, but we will continue looking next year.

Agonopterix Atomella.

A small UTB team continues to monitor this species at the restricted MOD site at Otmoor. Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth is also recorded at the site.



Agonopterix Atomella
©M. Parsons/BC



Goat Moth ©Tamás Nestor/BC

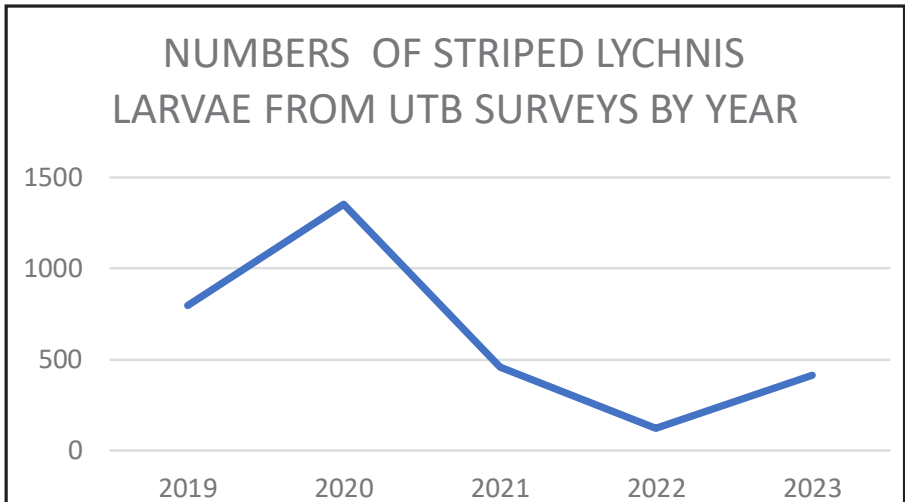
Goat Moth. Although we haven't done much in the way of searches for this priority moth per se, it does turn up when trapping in Windsor Great Park and at Swinley and appears to be doing well in this corner of the UTB area.

Striped Lychnis. Very poor numbers of this species were recorded in the 2022 larval searches at all sites. The vast majority of the final instar larvae

I observed in 2021 had Tachinid eggs attached and I believe this may possibly have been the cause of the population crash last year. By contrast I have noted very few larvae affected this year. 2023 has seen an increase, with 414 larvae recorded. It should be noted that the figures below (for 2019-2023) are based on UTB larvae/flower spike surveys and not on the totals recorded on iRecord etc.



Striped Lychnis larva ©Iliia Ustyantsev/BC



The table below shows three sites monitored by UTB over the past five years, comparing larvae and available flower spikes.

SITE	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Larvae/F.spikes	Larvae/ Flower spikes	Larvae/F.spikes	Larvae/F.spikes	Larvae/F.spikes
HOMEFIELD WOOD	26 / 1233	30 / 745	75 / 900	1 / 560	15 / 900
BRADENHAM HANGINGS	311 / 1313	480 / 7205	130 / 5053	16 / 1238	91 / 5013
HOLTSPUR BOTTOM	50 / 819	71 / 375	123 / 413	16 / 226	53 / 411

Barberry Carpet. This protected species has only one known site in the UTB area. It is monitored annually by larval searches. This year’s search produced a reasonably good number of larvae as a ratio to barberry bushes searched. The table below shows the last six years for comparison.

Year	Number of larvae	No of bushes beaten
2018	35	37
2019	20	50
2020	14	42
2021	166	53
2022	44	49
2023	32	27



Barberry Carpet larva

Scarce Burnished Brass. One survey was carried out for this species in 2023, on the 21st July at Thatcham Reedbeds. We did not record it on this occasion, but it was a very cool night and moth numbers were generally low.

Site surveys. This year we have been running moth surveys at three farm sites that are running re-wilding projects. It is exciting to see an increase in this type of project, and hopefully there will be more in the future.

At the Sulham Estate in Berkshire, we made 4 visits and recorded 139 moths of 50 species. At Billingbear Farm, Berks, we made 2 visits and recorded 112 species, including White-spotted Pinion, only the third record of this species in the last thirty years. On the Oakingham Estate, Oxfordshire, 3 visits produced 229 moths of 62 species, including a Dotted Chestnut.

Loan moth traps. This scheme continues to be popular, and all available traps went out on loan again this year.

Peter Cuss

Photos ©Peter Cuss (unless otherwise stated)

My 'Me Moment' of 2023

Whilst doing a transect at Bradfield, near Reading, in July, I was walking down a track through the wood... when a small butterfly fluttered from the wood to sit sideways on top of the bramble right in front of me. To my amazement it was a White-letter Hairstreak. I could have reached out and touched it, but, instead, took a picture. As I turned away, another small, grey butterfly fluttered down the track towards me. Could it be a Purple Hairstreak? Sure enough, it was... and, again, I could have reached out and touched it, but instead took a picture. Both butterflies in reach at the same time! One of those surprising moments that happen on occasion when you spend time in the countryside. John Lerpiniere



Videos: a counter to those Christmas repeats

- **State of the UK's Butterflies: Are Conservation Efforts Working?** with Dr Richard Fox <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz8ozuPDnnM>
- **Submitting a Wildlife Observation to iRecord** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DlrgOuV13I>
- **Yellow Meadow Ants: An Important Contributor To Biodiversity In Grasslands** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glpjEgteoHM>
- **E-book (free) Common Micro-moths of Berkshire, 2020 edition** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/13xRaCrEc6IKSOLkZKyEOqAfgzvHztGOF/view>
- **SEWReC Online Course: Introduction to Micro Moths** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEF7w0EoeSo&t=3438s>



Business as usual?

My usual practice of supplying Small Tortoiseshell (SmT) final-instar caterpillars (the last of many molts) to local schools failed in 2023.

The overwintering SmT butterflies I had 'in captivity' were down a little in number this year, and all had flown by April (when I fully slid back the lid of the box they were being kept in). Corresponding Peacock numbers were slightly up on the norm.

I had received requests for caterpillars from two local junior schools, so that the children could observe them from the final-instar stage through to the adults' emergence.

However, this spring I could only find one small group of SmT caterpillars, despite having seen about the same number of overwintering adults as usual flying in my garden. My conclusion was that the adults did not survive the unsuitable weather to oviposit once it had become warmer.



April and May were wet months, so, as I could only find these few caterpillars, I collected them at the second-instar



stage, not the fourth, in the hope that there would be some available to meet the schools' requests. However, several died: with the parasites *Photocampe confusae*, *Cotesia vanassae* and *Sturmia bella* taking the majority at the final-instar stage before I could share them, so there were just two which emerged as adults, to be released.



Freshly-emerged *Cotesia vanassae* parasite grubs weaving their own cocoons

The Peacock butterfly only completes one life cycle a year, which is later than the first of the two SmT life cycles.

Previously, I had not shared any Peacock larvae with schools, fearing they would not emerge as adults before the end of term. But this year, as I found several

groups of them, I shared one large group with two schools, giving thirty to each. With good fortune, they did emerge as adults just before the end of term, but the schools reported a high loss to parasites.

The Peacock caterpillars I have observed in past years have not suffered to the same extent from parasitic loss as those of the SmT. In late June and July, I only saw four adult SmTs. One was on some ideal fresh nettles in a marginal grass-buffer strip that had been cut earlier in the year, so I hoped this might result in another generation. However, the nettles were cut again. Many arable fields have grant-aided grass-buffer strips, but it has become regular practice to top-cut the grass as it helps prevent the black grass seeds from spreading from the margins, and is preferred to using a herbicide.



A patch of nettles stripped bare by a large number of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars

Second-brood SmT caterpillars have always been more numerous, but not this year: I did not see any.

This autumn I have, however, found five hibernating SmTs (and seven Peacocks),

although one cannot draw any real conclusions from such small numbers. This is an improvement, though, over the two SmT and two Peacock hibernators of the autumn of 2022.

One of the five SmTs I refer to was, in fact, caught in the threads of a Cellar (Daddy Long-legs) Spider, *Pholcus phalangioides*, a species which has increased in number over the past ten years. Come the spring, the spider will probably have covered it with more threads, and the butterfly would be unlikely to have freed itself.



Hibernating Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks (mid-October 2023)

So, has this year been 'business as usual' for the Small Tortoiseshell? Many observers believe that it has been a bad year for the species. Let us know what **you** think.

Stuart Hodges

All photos ©Stuart Hodges (unless otherwise stated)

Answers to anagrams on page 13:

1. Brimstone
2. Angle Shades
3. White Admiral
4. Scarlet Tiger
5. Duke of Burgundy
6. Drab Looper
7. Speckled Wood
8. Common Wainscot
9. Purple Emperor
10. Red Underwing

Membership Latest

There has been an increase in membership since the last newsletter, and, to date, there are 1730 households in the Upper Thames Branch, with 2134 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.

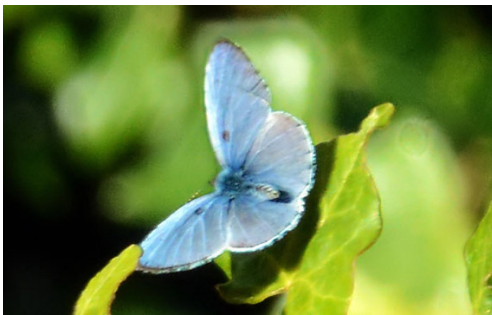
All of you are welcome to join field meetings, work parties and attend Members' Day. Up-to-date news on activities can be found on our website, and there is a monthly bulletin – sent out to all members with registered email addresses – reminding members of forthcoming events.

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

My 'Me Moment' of 2023

After many years of observing the expected butterflies in our small Kidlington garden (SP4914), initially for the Garden Survey, on 8th September what should turn up but a female Brown Hairstreak. It tarried for a while, before moving on its way. A 'me moment' to treasure after all those years.

John Gould



Paul Furtek photographed this male Holly Blue in Langley (Berks) on 17th November 2023. Apart from its being an unusually late sighting, the specimen has an 'unfamiliar' spot on each forewing. If you can identify the aberration (or perhaps have an even later sighting of Holly Blue), please let us know at newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

My Magical Memorable Montane Map Me Moment

I've got to know the butterflies of Switzerland's Jungfrau Region pretty well, having holidayed in Mürren more than twenty times (Room 202 of the Hotel Edelweiss). Covid broke the run, and in 2023 my wife, Dee, and I returned for the first time in four years. We were three days late leaving on account of my being a guest at the Luton & Dunstable hospital, and we were somewhat concerned that the problem might recur. As it turned out, it was Dee, not me, who spent days two to seven in Interlaken Hospital. The views from the L&D and Spital FMI Interlaken could scarcely have been more different!

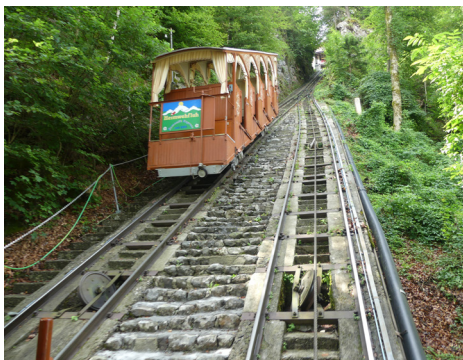
As hospital visiting didn't begin until 13.30, I was able to spend the mornings butterflying in those mountains that Dee could frustratingly see from her window, although my mind was elsewhere for most of the time. Walking from Winteregg back to Mürren alongside what must surely be one of the most scenic mountain railways in the world, I approached a flowery bank and spotted somebody behaving strangely – just like me, in fact. His wife was standing beside him – as Dee often does when I spot something interesting (she's learnt to bring a book). "Looks like you're playing the same game as me – photographing butterflies", I said. "Yes. We wanted a good butterflying holiday to celebrate our 60th birthdays and read an article about this very bank in Butterfly Conservation's European Group newsletter." "Oh, right," I replied, "and is it up to expectations?"

"Yes, very much so." "Thank goodness for that – I wrote the article." "Are you Richard Harrington?!" They were Howard and Alicia from Royston (below), and we recently spent a lovely day together, reminiscing.



Once out of hospital, Dee was unable to return to Mürren because of the altitude, and unable to fly, leading to a

search for hotels in Interlaken and a ten-day delay getting home, thanks to our incompetent travel insurance company. Once we had a plan to get home by train, though, we managed some very enjoyable days, especially boat trips on Lake Brienz and Lake Thun. July 19th was one such day. We decided to get the 12.10 boat on Lake Thun to Oberhofen. This gave me a couple of hours to nip up Heimwehfluh on a beautiful old funicular (below).

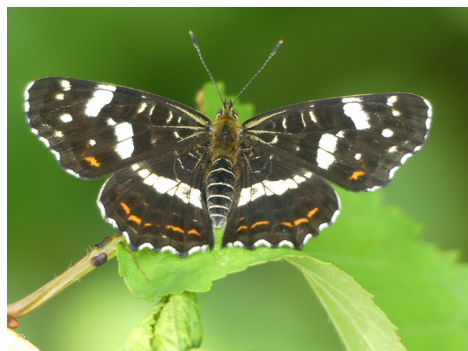


My hopes of finding good butterflies were not high, but I had seen White Admirals there in the past. As I stepped off the funicular and looked across the courtyard, I saw what I thought was exactly that, but, as I got closer, its



behaviour looked wrong. It was the European Map, which I'd only seen a couple of times before. I willed it to land in a convenient position and it obliged, with wings closed (above).

I willed it to open them, and it did (below). I took dozens of pictures. In those minutes, all else was forgotten and I felt blessed. That was my magical 'me moment'.



Only naturalists can understand the feeling. I rang Dee, told her that it was "mission accomplished" and I would

see her at the dock, where we enjoyed a schale coffee followed by a happy afternoon on Lake Thun.

Butterfly of the trip, though, was Thor's Fritillary (below), only my second sighting. I alerted Howard and Alicia immediately and, although they were on site within minutes, it proved too late.



A nice bonus was my photo of Damon Blue (below) making the February slot in the European Group calendar.



Rikki Harrington
All photos ©Rikki Harrington

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>

Follow us on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/Butterflies.Berkshire.Buckinghamshire.Oxfordshire>

Twitter [@UpperThamesBC](https://twitter.com/UpperThamesBC)

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

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

www.holtspurbottom.info

Upper Thames Branch Officers

Chairman: Nick Bowles 01442 382276 nick.bowles@ntlworld.com

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

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

Hon Treasurer: Chris Woodrow
39 Old London Road, Benson, Wallingford OX10 6RR 01491 838637
lepidoptera45@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary: Brenda Mobbs 01494 712486 bc.upperthames@gmail.com