

UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 126 | SUMMER 2025



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames
Branch**



www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Contents

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

First Thoughts.....	3
View from the Chair.....	4
Lepidoptera of the UTB Area.....	6
A Date for the Diary: Members' Day 2025.....	9
More, please.....	9
Great Excitement!.....	10
Challenging the Blues.....	11
My Wildlife Garden... three years on.....	12
Beyond the Horizon: Ignorance-busting in UTB.....	14
Early-season Guided Butterfly Walks.....	17
A Revelation in Conservation.....	21
Butterfly Hunting.....	24
Sedentary Beer-enhanced Butterfly Recording.....	24
Newly Available – A Guide to the Pug Moths of the Upper Thames Area.....	25
Guided Walks - Summer 2025.....	26
Immature Behaviour.....	31
Flit for Purpose.....	33
Digging Deeper.....	34
Small Spaces making a BIG Difference.....	36
Purple Peekaboo.....	37
Ignorance-busting in West Berkshire.....	38
Championing the Champions.....	39
Volunteers' Corner.....	40
Membership Latest.....	41
Separation Anxiety.....	42
Event Horizon Barriers with 'Black Holes of Ignorance'.....	43
Just Before You Leave Us.....	43

Cover images (from top, clockwise):

- Wall Brown (Crog Hill, Oxon, 3rd May 2025, ©David Hastings)
- Common Blue: female ("first-ever Common Blue in garden", 23rd May 2025, ©Graham Parkinson)
- Duke of Burgundy ova (May 2025, ©Nick Bowles)
- Oblique Striped moth (Hackpen Hill, Oxon, 3rd May 2025, ©David Hastings)

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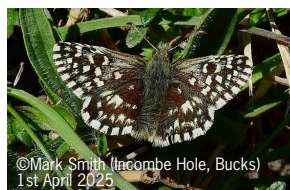
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First Thoughts

A very warm welcome to this summer issue of *Hairstreak*.

It's been a most encouraging start to the 2025 flight season for many of our non-hibernating butterflies, with many of them appearing much earlier than the 20-year average for the UTB area. An extreme example was Small White (15th January), but Marsh Fritillary (now cropping up in several places – though quite probably as a result of unofficial introductions), Small Heath, Small Copper, Adonis Blue and Grizzled Skipper (below) were all first



recorded between 17 and 20 days earlier than the average for the species.

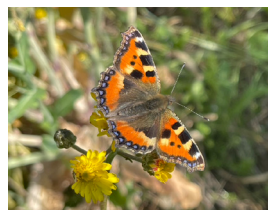
But do these early appearances represent a 'false dawn'? Are the foodplants on which these species lay their eggs readily available?

The first sightings reported to UTB (via the website or Facebook group pages) do, however, seem to vary considerably from one site to another, suggesting that pupae somehow do have a good idea of when local conditions are suitable for emergence. One wonders how they know. (Perhaps not so much a rhetorical question, but one which may inspire a reader to bring some wisdom or knowledge to a future issue of this publication.)

Andy Spragg introduced us last time to the concept of 'black holes of ignorance' in the context of butterfly recording, and we include his follow-up article this time – complemented by some reports from a few recorders who have 'taken up the challenge'.

I meet many people when out and about recording our species (and simply enjoying the outdoors!), with many of them seemingly so knowledgeable about one or more aspect of the lives of our flora and fauna. I only wish one or two of them would 'put pen to paper' to share their wisdom and experiences with our audience through these pages.

Being unable to recall having seen a single Small Tortoiseshell in 2024, I became quite excited to see one on 23rd May this year – so much so that I



am including the image here. Who would have thought all those decades ago that

sometime in the future one would get so encouraged about the sighting of a then-common species.

See page 9 for details of our Members' Day 2025 – a definite date for your diary!

Have a lovely summer!

Derek Haynes
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 THURSDAY 4th SEPTEMBER 2025.**

View from the Chair

By the time you read this, spring will be more or less over and we will most likely be in what is often referred to as the 'June gap' – when the spring species/broods are over and the summer species/broods are not really underway properly.

At least we have had some better weather than in 2024; indeed, the Met Office recently reported that we have already had more sunshine this spring than we had for the whole of last summer! However, this was often accompanied by a cool northerly or north-easterly breeze, which kept temperatures down somewhat (something to do with the Gulf Stream being more northerly than normal). The good weather has meant that many of our spring species were on the wing earlier than usual.



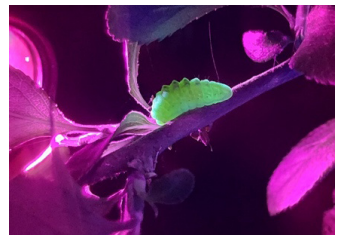
Your Chair & Ex-Chair posing for the Press! ©Pete Hughes

Our Guided Walks programme has now started and offers something for just about anyone interested in our butterflies and day-flying moths. Do have a look at the programme on pages 26-30 of this newsletter. **We are keen to recruit some new Guided Walk leaders;** so, if you are confident in identifying our common butterfly species, know of a good site and can interact with participants to help them enjoy and learn about some of our species, we would love to hear from you. Joining one of our walks to see what is involved would be a useful first step.

Our surveying and monitoring programmes are also well underway following training sessions in all three of our counties in March. Thanks to those who put on these training sessions and to those who benefited from them and are now part of our surveys team.

Simon, our relatively new Events Coordinator, is making good progress in getting our messages out to a wider audience. He has already signed us up to a number of events, is refreshing our displays and leaflets, and recruiting volunteers to help look after our displays and talk to the public.

Branch volunteers continue to make an important contribution to BBOWT's RBOR project (Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the River Ray), with many volunteers braving the cold winter temperatures to look for Brown Hairstreak eggs and now exploring woodland edges and hedgerows, using UV torches



Black Hairstreak larva under UV light
©Geoff Sutton

after dark, to search for Black Hairstreak larvae which glow in the dark. See the article **A Revelation in Conservation** on page 21.

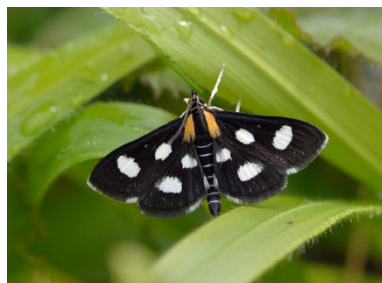
As is clear from the above, volunteers really are the lifeblood of our Branch. Without their dedicated efforts, commitment and enthusiasm, we would not be able to do half of what we currently achieve. **If you do not already offer to help the Branch in some way, please consider volunteering some of your valuable time. There are a wide range of opportunities, some involving only an hour or two occasionally, with others requiring a bit more time.**

On a more chastening note, I am sure that you are aware of how the current financial crisis, reduction in voluntary donations and increased pressure on our remaining habitats are making things very tough for conservation organisations. (The Government's current attempts to emasculate environmental and conservation legislation so that developers can destroy more and more of our remaining valuable habitats is adding to this pressure.) This has meant a major re-shuffle for Butterfly Conservation to align spending with available resources. Sadly, this has seen a number of redundancies across all parts of the organisation, and it now has 25% fewer staff than it had just over a year ago.

Butterfly Conservation is not alone in being forced to make such economies. RSPB, for example, have reviewed the jobs of hundreds of their staff, with a significant number faced with the difficult decision of taking on a different role that they don't really want or facing redundancy. Their education programmes are also at risk, a number of their retail venues will disappear, and they are even considering disposing of some of their nature reserves.

On a happier note, the Blomer's Rivulet moth was recorded for the first time in Scotland, and a new breeding colony of the White-spotted Sable moth was found in Kent following habitat improvements by BC volunteers.

On that positive note, I will wish you an enjoyable, rewarding, and Lepidoptera-filled summer. Stay safe and happy!



White-spotted Sable moth ©Bob Eade

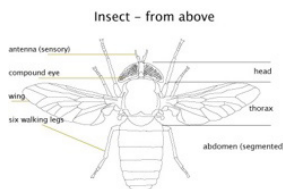
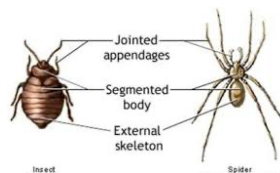
Peter Philp
chairman@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Lepidoptera of the UTB Area

This article is the first in a series that will look at the butterflies and moths that can be found in our Branch area: what can be found, where and how to ID them.

Butterflies: a broad view

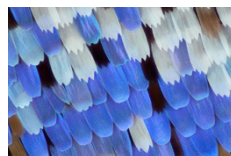
Butterflies have a 'hard' exoskeleton and jointed legs, meaning they belong to the Phylum *Arthropoda*.



They have 3 body parts (head, thorax and abdomen), 3 pairs of legs, and (generally) 2 pairs of wings, so they are part of the Class *Insecta*.

Their wings are covered in tiny scales (many of which may show iridescence), which gives rise to the

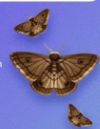

name of their Order: *Lepidoptera* (*Lepid* = scales & *ptera* = wings).
















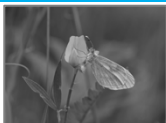



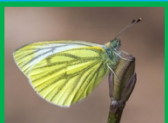
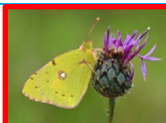
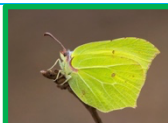
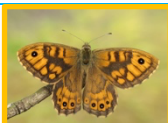










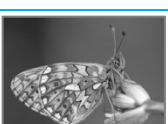
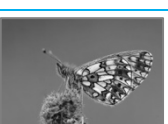
However, our butterflies make up only a little over 10% of the Lepidoptera worldwide, with about 18,000 species compared to about 142,000 moth species! Europe does relatively poorly for butterflies, with less than 500 species recorded regularly (about 3% of global species), and the UK is even more impoverished, with just under 60 regularly recorded species (0.33% of global species). That means that for every 1,000 butterfly species in the world, only 3 are found in the UK! However, around 75% of the UK butterfly species are recorded in our Branch area (more on that later).




















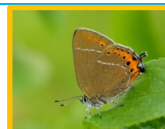









So, you might ask, what is the difference between butterflies and moths? Well, all our butterfly species are diurnal (day-flying), whilst most of our moths are nocturnal. However, there are many more diurnal moth species in the UK than butterflies. Other differences include the following:

- Butterflies typically have thin, straight antennae with a club-shaped tip, whilst moths usually have thicker, feathery or threadlike antennae without a clubbed end.
- Butterflies generally rest with their wings held vertically over their back, whilst moths usually rest with their wings spread flat or folded like a tent over their body.
- Butterflies typically have slender, smooth bodies, whilst moths often have thicker, furrier bodies.

Difference between				
Moth		&	Butterfly	
• Mostly nocturnal				• Mostly diurnal
• Stockier, often hairy				• Slender, smooth
• Duller, cryptic colors				• Brighter, more vibrant colors

The following table shows all the regularly occurring butterfly species in the UK. Those that are **not** found in our Branch area are shown in grayscale. Our widespread resident species are outlined in green , localised species in orange  and our two 'regular' non-resident migrants in red .

				
Swallowtail	Dingy Skipper	Grizzled Skipper	Chequered Skipper	Essex Skipper
				
Small Skipper	Lulworth Skipper	Silver-spotted Skipper	Large Skipper	Wood White
				
Cryptic Wood White	Orange-tip	Large White	Small White	Green-veined White
				
Clouded Yellow	Brimstone	Wall	Speckled Wood	Large Heath
				
Small Heath	Mountain Ringlet	Scotch Argus	Ringlet	Meadow Brown
				
Gatekeeper	Marbled White	Grayling	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

				
Silver-washed Fritillary	Dark Green Fritillary	High Brown Fritillary	White Admiral	Purple Emperor
				
Red Admiral	Painted Lady	Peacock	Small Tortoiseshell	Comma
				
Marsh Fritillary	Glanville Fritillary	Heath Fritillary	Duke of Burgundy	Small Copper
				
Brown Hairstreak	Purple Hairstreak	Green hairstreak	White-letter Hairstreak	Black Hairstreak
				
Small Blue	Holly Blue	Large Blue	Silver-studded Blue	Brown Argus
				
Northern Brown Argus	Common Blue	Adonis Blue	Chalk Hill Blue	

Any feedback on this article would be welcome. Next time we will have a broad overview of our moths.

Peter Philp
Branch Chair

A Date for the Diary: Members' Day 2025



This year's Members' Day will again be held at Benson Parish Hall, OX10 6LZ, on Saturday 25th October.

It's always a great day and the chance to meet and chat with other members. We have an amazing set of speakers lined up, so **save the date!** Full details of the day will appear in the autumn edition of *Hairstreak* and on the Upper Thames website.

Barring unforeseen circumstances, we are hoping to welcome the following speakers:

Sally-Ann Spence - FRES Farmer, entomologist, presenter and researcher

Dr Martin Warren OBE - world-renowned butterfly scientist and previously BC Chief Executive

Peter Marren - professional naturalist, author and journalist

Steven Lofting - BC Conservation Manager (SE England)

More, please...

When you submit photos to the UTB website (normally to accompany your sightings), you are agreeing for the Branch to use them in its publications.

When you post images on the **Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames region** Facebook pages (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/458565932924345>) your images can be used in publications such as this one only if you give your explicit permission. On the homepage you'll find a '🗳️ Poll button' (just under 'Write something...'), which will enable you to achieve this (if you wish).

To date, only 38 of the Group's 280 members have elected to allow their images to be shared.

There are some superb images on both the website and the Facebook Group pages, and your editor would very much like to have more options when it comes to being able to share these with our readership. Thanks.



Great Excitement!

This is my third year of moth trapping and in that time I've seen many exciting moths, especially the various Hawk-moths, but nothing prepared me for what was waiting for me as I skirted the puddles on the way to open my moth trap early one May morning this year. I was wondering whether it was a wise decision to deploy it since some rain had been forecast. Well, that notion evaporated as soon as I saw the trap: the largest moth I have ever seen in the UK was sitting on the cone - too big to fit inside!



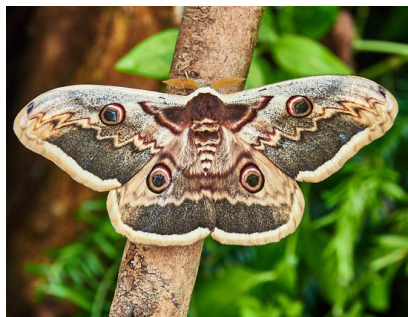
I thought that it was my first-ever sighting of an Emperor moth, a female (an Empress surely?). My heart skipped a beat or two; near-perfect, she graced us all day and was still around well after sunset, but gone the next morning. I did keep an eye out for any males that I was hoping would be attracted to her, but none showed up.

Soon after I posted the find on Instagram the next day, I was informed that it was in fact a much rarer Great Peacock moth (Latin name *Saturnia pyri*, aka Great Emperor Moth or Giant Peacock moth). In France it's a 'Grand Paon de Nuit' (Great Night Peacock), and it's Europe's biggest moth with a wingspan of between 100 and 150mm (4 to 6 inches) - although some texts suggest that 200mm (8 inches) is possible. It is mostly found in Mediterranean Europe and the warmer parts of continental Europe, into western Asia and the Middle East and the coastline of North Africa. It likes dry hot places and is night flying.

Their caterpillars can grow up to 200mm (8 inches) long and have voracious appetites. They can spend up to 3 years in their pupal state. They can't feed in their adult form, so only last a few weeks.

Great Peacock moth has only been recorded a couple of times in the UK, both in Hampshire, in 1984 and 2009, so 'my moth' is extremely unlikely to be a genuine migrant, especially as it was in such good condition. Most likely it was released by a breeder or escaped.

I was so sure that it could only be an Emperor, as females do occasionally come to light and look very much like this one. I realised my mistake (when it was pointed out to me) once I appreciated that it was far bigger than our Emperors (about twice the size); and on closer examination of the photos I took it also had a bushy set of antennae typical of pheromone-detecting males, but its colouration was certainly not that of a male Emperor – a classic case of confirmation bias! In my defence I would never have expected anything else; I've never seen an Emperor in the flesh so missed the size effect.



So, with the additional help of Obsidentify and Google Lens, a male Great Peacock moth it is (which would explain why no male Emperors were attracted!) – almost certainly bred – and accidentally or deliberately released locally.

A fabulous experience nonetheless - if a tad mortifying due to my hurried misidentification.

Treve Willis

[Despite this moth's dubious origins, it's one incredible specimen. You never know what may turn up in your moth trap! Ed.]

Challenging the Blues

Small Blue seems to be having an exceptional year in some parts of our region. Member Paul Gamble visited Crog Hill (Oxon) on 22nd May and reckoned there were more than 1000 Small Blue present on the day. He took the following photo (left), which appears to show 8 individuals.



Three days later, Denise Harper joined a UTB-organised walk at Crog Hill and said that “we were astonished at the huge numbers of Small Blue... and had to be really careful not to tread on them...”. She too took a photo (below) which also shows 8 individuals.



So, the challenge is: who can come up with a photo with more than 8 Small Blue evident? If that's you, let us know at:

newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk - and we'll hope to publish it in a future issue. After all, who doesn't like a challenge!

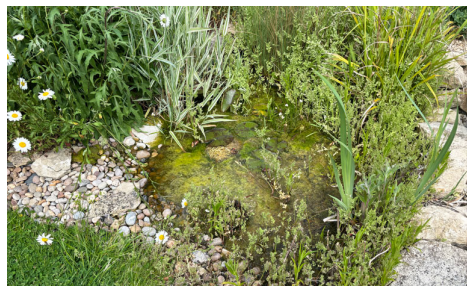
My Wildlife Garden... three years on

Hairstreak 115 contained an account of my endeavours to construct a wildlife garden at my new house in Aston in west Oxfordshire in 2022. Three years on it is time for an update...

The structural plants that I planted in 2022 took a long time to get going, but they are, at last, providing what I was hoping for. In the autumn of 2023, I removed some turf from the lawn and sowed a wildflower meadow seed mix in its place. Now in its second year of flowering, Ox-eye Daisies in particular enjoyed the warm spring weather and at the end of May were still flowering in profusion (below).



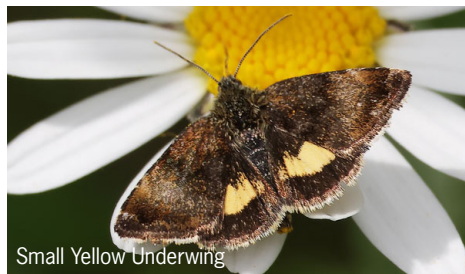
The pond has matured (below), and dragonflies have colonised it. It has also been very popular with honeybees coming to take on liquids.



Since 2022 I have added Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*), Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*), Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*) and Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*) to the garden list, bringing the total to 24 species. In 2025 I had recorded 16 species by the end of May. Most notable were a couple of spring-brood Small Heath; I don't usually see this species in the garden until the summer.



The number of moth species I have recorded in the garden now stands at 357 (228 macros and 129 micros). I am still getting new species, both in and out of the moth trap. In 2025 I have had three new macro moths, Small Brindled Beauty (*Apocheima hispidaria*), Small Waved Umber (*Horisme vitalbata*) and Small Yellow Underwing (*Panemeria tenebrata*). The latter was particularly pleasing as its habitat is flowery meadows, which is what I have tried to create.



On the micro side in 2025 I have had *Alucita hexadactyla* (Many-plumed Moth), *Cameraria ohridella* (Horse-chestnut Leaf-

miner), *Cauchas rufimitrella* (Meadow Longhorn), *Dichrorampha acuminatana* (Common Daisy Moth), *Elacista canapennella* (Common Grass-miner), *Esperia sulphurella* (Sulphur Bark Moth), *Notocelia trimaculana* (Hawthorn Shoot Moth) and *Scrobipalpa acuminatella* (Common Thistle Miner).

I have recorded 15 species of Odonata in the garden, six damselflies and nine dragonflies. This is pretty good going considering the size of the pond. I have observed Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*), Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*), Southern Hawker (*Aeshna cyanea*) and Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*) ovipositing in the pond.

Other noteworthy insects I've recorded are the Rhopalid bug *Corizus hyoscyami*, the Capsid bugs *Miridius quadrivirgatus* and *Miris striatus*, Crucifer Shieldbug (*Eurydema oleracea*), Cockchafer (*Melolontha melolontha*), Rose Chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), Dotted Bee-fly (*Bombylius discolor*) and European Hornet (*Vespa crabro*).



Dotted Bee-fly



Corizus hyoscyami



Small Brindled Beauty



Miris striatus



Broad-bodied Chaser

All images ©David Hastings

David Hastings

Beyond the Event Horizon: Ignorance-busting in UTB

"I don't think anyone who loves butterflies can fail to enjoy that 'eureka' moment when you find one, especially if it is in a 'black hole of ignorance!'"

Lorraine Mosolf

"Thoroughly enjoyed exploring both squares! Thanks for setting up this project."

Pamela Chappell

In the last issue of *Hairstreak*, I wrote an article about **black holes of ignorance**, which has already struck a chord with enough people that I wanted to provide an update. In case you missed that article, a black hole of ignorance is a 1km x 1km square of Upper Thames Branch (UTB) territory *for which not a single butterfly record has been submitted since the start of the new millennium, 25 years ago.*

A Black Hole

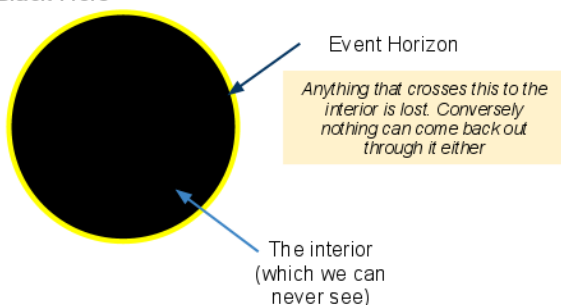


Figure 1: A black hole and its event horizon

Figure 1¹ gives a simple illustration of a black hole, as physics understands the term. Fortunately, black holes of ignorance are not as extreme as this, because we *can go* beyond the 'event horizon' (the boundary of the 1km x 1km square) to see the interior.

To avoid the need to keep using the awkward term '1km x 1km square', I've coined

the term 'wonk', which I think is rather sweet and I hope will gain some traction. In summary, there are 170 black holes of ignorance in UTB territory: 170 wonks about which we know absolutely nothing, in terms of the butterflies that might be resident there - despite there being at least some public right of way (RoW) to explore. There are another 94 that have no public right of way but might still be amenable to investigation, one way or another.

As well as black holes of ignorance, the most extreme form, there are less extreme holes of ignorance, depending on how old their most recent records are. I refer to them as deep purple, deep blue, blue and deep green, for which the most recent records are respectively at least 20, 15, 10 and 5 years old.

1. Adapted from <https://www.seekpng.com/ima/u2q8q8r5y3o0q8u2/>

Type of hole	No RoW	RoW	Total	Visited to date
Black	94	170	264	40 (15.2%)
Deep Purple	6	30	36	8 (22.2%)
Deep Blue	13	72	85	19 (22.4%)
Blue	18	111	129	14 (10.9%)
Deep Green	50	384	434	46 (10.6%)
All	181	767	948	127 (13.4%)

Table 1: Summary of holes of ignorance, and progress in visiting them

Species	Ubiquity
Orange--tip	59.8%
Green-veined White	52.8%
Peacock	44.9%
Brimstone	44.9%
Large White	30.7%
Speckled Wood	23.6%
Small White	22.8%
Small Heath	14.2%
Red Admiral	11.0%
Common Blue	9.4%
Painted Lady	3.9%
Comma	2.4%
Holly Blue	2.4%
Brown Argus	2.4%
Small Tortoiseshell	1.6%
Meadow Brown	0.8%
Small Blue	0.8%
Black Hairstreak	0.8%
Green Hairstreak	0.8%
Grizzled Skipper	0.8%
Dingy Skipper	0.8%

Table 2: Species ubiquity league table

Quite a few people have already been exploring these holes of ignorance. Table 1 summarizes how many of each sort of hole of ignorance there were at the start of 2025, and the progress to date (that I know about) made in visiting them. It represents the combined efforts of just 14 recorders (or in one case, a pair of recorders), who between them have visited a total of 127 holes of ignorance, 13.4% of the total of 948. That's nearly one in every seven, a fantastic effort! What is more, the percentage is notably higher for the more extreme holes of ignorance. Only 6 of those 127 wonks failed to yield any butterfly sightings. In at least some cases the weather was probably to blame.

So far, 21 species have already been reported from the squares visited, nearly half of all the species to be found in UTB territory. Table 2 lists all of them, ranked by how commonly they have been recorded. Orange-tip and Green-veined White are the 'clear winners', both occurring in more than half of all wonks visited. Peacock and Brimstone are tied for third place, well ahead of everything else. It isn't always appreciated that recording is as much about the common species as it is about the

scarce ones, especially in territory where we know absolutely nothing. "Say what you see" is as true for recording as it was for the TV quiz show Catchphrase!

It is certainly reassuring to discover that the most common species are as ubiquitous as we would hope. However, it is exciting to note that visits to holes of ignorance have already added to our knowledge of the territory occupied by five of our nineteen championed species:

- Pete Thompson recorded a Grizzled Skipper, along with six other species including Small Heath, in SU6386, near the delightfully named Drunken Bottom, near Ipsden, Oxon. Before his visit, the most recent records for this deep green wonk were from 2018. 13 species had previously been recorded there, and Pete's visit added two more.
- Peter Philp recorded both Dingy Skipper and Small Blue in SU4583, near Knollend Down, near West Ilsley, Berks. Incredibly, the sum total of our previous knowledge about this deep blue wonk was records from a single year, for eight common species in 2009. Peter's visit added four more (Brown Argus and Small Heath were the other two).
- As part of BBOWT's RBOR project, Geoff Sutton recorded Black Hairstreak larvae, for the first time ever on a private site in SP6123, near Launton, Oxon. This deep green wonk is relatively well recorded, with 18 species, but the last records of any butterfly species were from 2018, including a record of a single adult Black Hairstreak.
- The author recorded Green Hairstreak in SU6593, near Ewelme, Oxon. All that was previously known about this deep purple wonk was a single record of Holly Blue in 2001. The author's visit added nine new species, including Small Heath as well as Green Hairstreak.

Margery Slatter, Chris Tyler-Smith & Yali Xue and Mike Coker have all written short pieces about their own experience of ignorance-busting for *Hairstreak*. Having also read what they have to say, **if your appetite is whetted to have a go yourself, you can take the first step by visiting https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/10km_champions** on the Upper Thames Branch website. Click on any 10k square (it could be the one you live in, or any one that takes your fancy). In the box that pops up, you will find links to two documents. The first lists all the holes of ignorance in that 10k square. The second provides full details of all the species that have been recorded – in every year since 2000 – in every one of those holes of ignorance. If you are new to recording, contact me (details below) for help with how to go about it. [See also pages 34-35.]

My grateful thanks to the following, who have spent time this year replacing ignorance with knowledge. In order of number of wonks visited, they are: Peter Philp, the author, Margery Slatter, Chris Tyler-Smith & Yali Xue, Geoff Sutton, John Lerpiniere, Steve Holliday, Julian Howe, Lorraine Mosolf, Pete Thompson, Pamela Chappell, Mike Coker, Roy Booth and Nick Hollis.

Andy Spragg
spargeus.maximus@gmail.com (07947 399605)

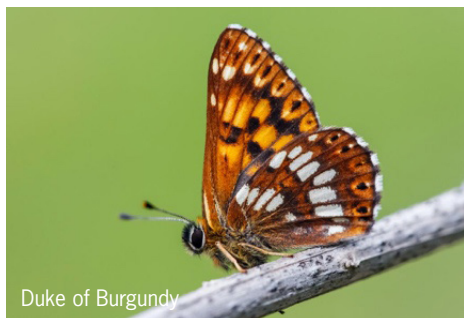
Early-season Guided Butterfly Walks

The 2025 Guided Butterfly Walk season got off to a fine start in the middle of May with walks at Income Hole (part of NT Ivinghoe Beacon) and Aston Upthorpe Downs. Both started off rather cloudy with a moderate breeze, but the sunshine gradually broke through.

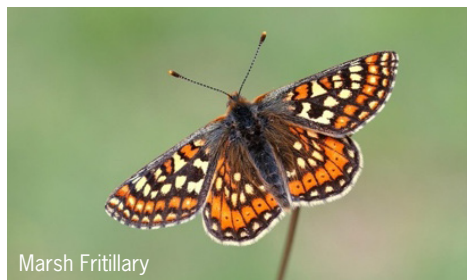
Sixteen of us left the Ivinghoe Beacon car park and headed downhill towards the Beacon but then took a slight detour into 'Duke Gully'. Sadly, it still was not warm enough for much activity, though we did see a single Small Heath and several moth caterpillars. We then walked down the road and track towards Incombe Hole. It was not long before the sun started to break through, and we got our first views of the **Duke of Burgundy**. They were still docile enough to allow fabulous views for all our party, and we saw over 20 individuals before the end of the morning. 'The Duke' used to be thought of as a Fritillary, but we now know that it is our only 'metal mark', a family much more common in the Americas.



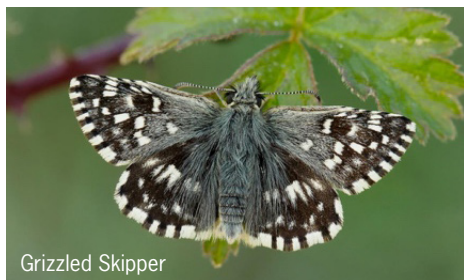
The track to Ivinghoe Beacon



Duke of Burgundy



Marsh Fritillary



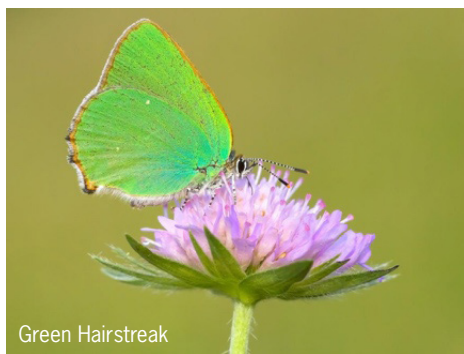
Grizzled Skipper

We gradually added more and more species, with lots of **Dingy Skippers** but only a few **Grizzled Skippers**; **Green Hairstreak** also proved rather shy, and we had to wait until nearly the end of the walk before everyone was able to get good views. We also found about half a dozen of the delightful, tiger-striped **Marsh Fritillaries**, which have appeared here in recent years. A satisfied group then wended its way, slowly, back up the track to the car park, having eventually seen 14 butterfly and 5 moth species on a very enjoyable morning.

The Aston Upthorpe Downs walk saw a group of eighteen of us gather and walk down the track to the 'open access' area in Juniper Valley. Again, the early going was pretty slow, with just a single **Peacock** in the first 40 minutes. However, we gradually saw more and more butterflies and day-flying moths, particularly as we entered the grazed areas. **Dingy Skipper** was again by far the commonest of our target species, with only a few **Grizzled Skippers**; and **Green Hairstreak** again waiting until near the end of the walk to give good views. Some of us had brief views of a single **Marsh Fritillary**, which Jim had seen on his transect earlier in the week. **Common Blues** were, as their name suggests, common. However, there was a surprising lack of **Brown Argus**. We also saw a couple of fine **Small Coppers**, a pristine **Small Tortoiseshell** (only my third of the year) and a lovely bright **Painted Lady**.



Aston Upthorpe Downs



Green Hairstreak

Our BBOWT Yoesden Bank walk attracted fewer participants, with only eight joining me on this spectacular downland slope. Again, the weather made us work hard for good views, but we did see about 8 **Adonis Blues** and rather more **Dingy Skippers**. The former allowed visitors to get great views and see its checkered wing borders clearly. We also saw a good variety of moths including **Burnets**, **Burnet Companions**, **Mother Shipton** and **Yellow Shell**. The more widespread species were slow to appear on the wing. However, we did see all the expected 'whites' by the end of the morning (**Large**, **Small**, **Green-veined**, **Brimstone** & **Orange-tip**).



BBOWT Yoesden Bank



Adonis Blue

Our Wytham Woods walk was fully booked (25), but the poor weather forecast put several off, and so a group of fourteen of us explored these extensive woodlands with areas of open grassland. The weather was less kind, with the sun only breaking through briefly a few times. This meant we only saw two butterfly species: **Speckled Wood** (lots) and **Common Blue** (2).

However, we made up for that with several moth species, including a delightful **Light Emerald**, several **Mother Shiptons**, **Burnet Companions**, and both **Silver-ground** and **Common Carpet**. The cool weather also allowed us fabulous views of a female **Black-tailed Skimmer** roosting in the cool grass and lots of **Azure** and **Common Blue** Damselflies.

Another highlight of this enjoyable morning was seeing a large patch of the delightful, cream-flowered **White Helleborines**, one of our localised woodland orchids.



Wytham Woods



Light Emerald moth



White Hellebore

A dreadful weather forecast put off all but the hardy for our BBOWT Seven Barrows walk, and only four participants turned up (less than half of those who had booked). We did get rather more in the way of sunshine, but this was counteracted by a stiff westerly breeze which kept insects numbers down, if they flew at all.

Nevertheless, we saw more **Small Blues** on the reserve than I had seen in the last 4 years put together! We added several **Small Heaths** and **Common Blues** amidst the large patches of **Birds-foot Trefoil**, **Kidney Vetch**, **Common Rockrose** and the scarce **Drowort**.



Small Blue



Small Tortoiseshell

We then drove along the path to Crog Hill, where Henry had kindly unlocked the gate to allow us access to the private land there. We had only just got out of the car when we were visually assaulted by numbers of **Small Blue**. We were able to see up to a dozen on plants right by the car park. Numbers were spectacular throughout the walk, with maybe as many as 1,000 individuals seen over the morning. At times, it was almost like silver-blue confetti. With over 200 on a relatively small patch of Bird's-foot Trefoil in 'the gully'.

The 'Dukes' made us work much harder, with none at all seen along the edge of the grass slope on private land but eventually giving themselves up in the much more sheltered scrub at the top of the slope. In the end we managed to get good views of 5 **Duke of Burgundy**, a few **Dingy Skippers** and a pristine, newly hatched **Small Tortoiseshell**. We added **Common Blue** and several of the more widespread species of butterfly and day-flying moth to our list before returning to the car park after a rewarding morning.

Peter Philp
guided-walks@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

An overcast, dull and damp morning with a breeze greeted us at Lardon Chase. A good number of butterflies were seen for these weather conditions, especially of the 'target' species of **Blues – Adonis** and **Common**. The butterflies were flying unwillingly, but this gave us a good chance of seeing them at rest, sometimes with their wings fully open. However, good views were had of all species seen, both males and females, allowing discussion of identification and practise at distinguishing each species from similar ones.



It was good to see more **Common Blue** on the site than last year. Though both **Small Blue** and **Green Hairstreak** have been very recently recorded here, neither were seen. A successful and enjoyable walk, despite the weather. Advice was also given about downloading and using iRecord Butterflies.

Margery Slatter
Walk leader

A Revolution in Conservation:

Shining New Light on Butterfly Secrets

On the evening of Wednesday 23rd April 2025, a 30-strong team of volunteers took to the north Oxfordshire countryside to embark on 'a revolution in conservation'. This was a training session like no other!

This unique conservation project, organised by BBOWT (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust) and BC (Butterfly Conservation), involves the use of ultraviolet light (UV) to search bushes for glow-in-the-dark caterpillars – in this first instance, for the UK's five species of hairstreak.



Black Hairstreak larva
©Max Anderson

The following has been extracted from BC's Senior Communications & PR Officer Pete Hughes's 25th April PRESS RELEASE:

"The technique has never been widely used to collect official statistics before, and experts say it could not only make surveying butterflies and moths significantly quicker and easier – it could also reveal hidden secrets about their behaviour and evolution."

Steven Lofting, Conservation Manager for Butterfly Conservation, said: *"This really could be a game-changer: at the moment we rely on daytime surveys for these rare and endangered species and that often means trying to spot a dark brown butterfly high up in a tree."*

"If we can just shine a light in the bushes and these caterpillars suddenly glow at us like an electric lightbulb it could make it so much easier and quicker to do surveys of these species: it has the potential to change our understanding of their biology, distribution, abundance and ecology. It's really exciting."

Steven led the first training session for volunteers and BBOWT staff on 23rd April at the Trust's Finemere Wood nature reserve between Bicester and Aylesbury.

On this occasion the group was specifically looking for caterpillars of the UK's five species of hairstreak butterfly: the Black Hairstreak is endangered, the Brown

Hairstreak and White-letter Hairstreak are both vulnerable, and Green Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak have also declined in abundance and distribution since the 1970s.

Butterfly Conservation and BBOWT have surveyed hairstreaks for decades, but the techniques have been slow and painstaking: for Brown Hairstreak, both charities rely

on teams of dedicated volunteers going out in the middle of winter to look for tiny, pinhead-sized eggs on twigs using magnifying glasses.

In the new technique, all volunteers have to do is shine an ultraviolet (UV) light into bushes and trees which makes the luminous larvae gleam as if they are producing their own light - an effect known as photoluminescence.

On 23rd April the team of 30 found a total of 32 Black Hairstreak caterpillars in two hours. Steven said that a team of 30 looking for Black Hairstreak eggs would be lucky to find one or two in the same time, highlighting the dramatic difference the new technique could make.

Caterpillars of many other butterflies and moths also glow under UV light but the technique is so novel that scientists still don't have a full list of which ones. Butterfly Conservation is now asking volunteers across the country to go out with UV lights and start submitting their findings to illuminate this new field of ecology. **Guidance on how to do this safely can be found at: butterfly-conservation.org/uv**

The training session was part of a landscape-scale conservation partnership project led by BBOWT called Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray (RBOR) which aims to work with communities, farmers and landowners to restore habitat for threatened species. The project, on which Butterfly Conservation is a key partner, has received £512,182 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and BBOWT is applying for a total of £3.6 million.



Brown Hairstreak larva
©Max Anderson

The volunteers will now go out using UV lights to look for hairstreak caterpillars specifically on private land such as farms which haven't been well surveyed before. The hope is that they will shine a light on the species' true distribution.

Emily Coulam, RBOR Nature and Greenspaces Officer, BBOWT said: *"It is fantastic that we are able to utilise new and innovative techniques to better understand the wildlife of the region through our National Lottery Heritage Fund supported RBOR programme. The data we gather through these volunteer surveys will help us work with Butterfly Conservation, the Ray Farmer Cluster and others to develop projects which hope to increase abundance and range of the hairstreak butterflies through habitat creation and restoration."*

Surveying butterflies is especially important for conservation because they are known as 'indicator species': that means that rises and falls in their populations can predict the health of the wider ecosystem.

Official figures from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme released at the beginning of April revealed that 2024 was the fifth worst year for UK butterflies since the scheme began in 1976, and more than half of species were in long-term decline.

It seems that it's not only caterpillars that glow in the dark!

I'm thinking many of us will now be considering using UV to search for breeding species in or near our own gardens.



Derek Haynes

Butterfly Hunting

Everybody loves to read an article from a novice butterfly hunter teaching grandma to suck eggs, so here goes...

I love butterflies and remember the days in the 1970s when you would see hundreds of them. Now not so much. Butterfly hunting is a worthwhile pastime, gets you out of the house and gives you so much pleasure. But why stop there? Why not extend the pastime into a hobby like collecting butterflies?

...waits for the screaming to die down...

Not physically collecting, of course - but having a collection of photographs that you have taken. We have all taken many photos (including for iRecord), but have you done anything else with them?



Personally, I have a note-taking app on my iPad (GoodNotes) and – with the help of PowerPoint – I can correlate all the photos by species with notes on where and when seen. This enables me (and perhaps you?) to track those species not seen or photographed before, thus enabling one to plan more butterfly-hunting trips. Most BC branches have data to get you up and running.

In summary, this is like stamp collecting - but keeps you fit and is more rewarding.

Tom Primett

Sedentary Beer-enhanced Butterfly Recording

[This commentary is featured to complement Andy Spragg's article on page 14, to which we suggest you refer – Ed.]

In perusing the OS map for my 10k square in mid-Berks I noticed that some of the 'black holes of ignorance' contained, or were close to, watering holes of various kinds. My first foray to address a common species gap involved sitting outside a golf-club bar watching Brimstones and led to Andy pondering whether his epitaph should be: *'helped to further the cause of sedentary beer-enhanced butterfly recording'*.

The neighbouring square, SU8273, was my first 'black hole'. The pint had been replaced with a clipboard and the gentle sounds of a golf-course with the sound of traffic. However, I was quickly rewarded with a few common species.

A community litter-pick (wearing hi-viz jackets) gave me an excuse for a visit to SU8473. Again, my surveying was done from roadside verges and rewarded by a few common species. The next three squares that I plan to visit have a vineyard bar, a brewery taproom and a pub in adjacent squares, so I won't be doing sedentary butterfly watching... but I know where I will be parking the car.

Mike Coker

Newly Available – A Guide to the Pug Moths of the Upper Thames Area

Pug moths are characterized by relatively small size and many of the species have rather obscure markings. This has led to their reputation as a difficult set of macro-moths to identify. They do have a distinctive shape (at rest): as shown by the illustrations to the right, the wings are held flat and often at right-angles to the body. Also a few species are easier to identify because of distinctive markings or colour, which may be reflected in their English names (e.g., Lime-speck Pug; Green Pug).

This new guide surveys the 33 Pug species most commonly found in our area (a few very local or rare species are not illustrated but are referred to if they are sufficiently similar to the commoner species). After a short introduction and illustration of the general features of Pugs in the first few pages, each species is described in detail (one page to a species). Compared to the illustrations in most guide books, which are mostly about life-size, a large image of a typical specimen is shown with important features highlighted by extensive annotation. Included on the same page are other examples where some variation is found, as well as a listing of similar species with further illustration where appropriate. A typical page is shown to the right (much reduced in size of course); the guide can be downloaded in PDF format and the images can be enlarged further at will.

The guide is now freely available to peruse and/or download from our website:

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

under the 'Moths' tab. Hopefully it will help recorders to engage with this fascinating group of moths!

My thanks go to all those moth recorders from our area who have agreed for their excellent Pug photos to be used to illustrate the guide, as well as their encouraging comments on the project, and especially to Nick Asher for reviewing the guide. Any mistakes are of course my own, and I would appreciate any comments for improvements, etc., from users of the guide (contact: john.thacker2@ntlworld.com).



Mottled Pug

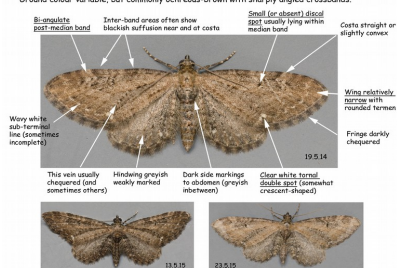


Lime-speck Pug

70.183 COMMON PUG (*Eupithecia vulgata*)

Very common across whole region, April-August (peak: early June). Forewing 10-12 mm. Larval foodplants: various deciduous trees and shrubs as well as a variety of herbaceous plants.

Ground colour variable, but commonly ochreous-brown with sharply angled crossbands.



SIMILAR SPECIES

GREY PUG (p.16) - Common. Forewing brownish-grey (not ochreous), not so narrow, larger discal spot lying outside median band, post-medial band not so angular, sub-terminal line and torse spot fainter.

SATYR PUG (p.34) - Local. Softer brown, weakly-marked, costa straight, post-medial band less angular and all veins usually chequered, discal spot present but variable.

Similar-sized Pugs such as **WHITE-SPOTTED PUG (p.19)** and **SHADED PUG (p.32)** should be readily distinguished when fresh. The rare **CAMPANULA PUG** (not illustrated) has a larger discal spot and white sub-terminal line conspicuously very.

page 10

John Thacker

Guided Walks: Summer 2025



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

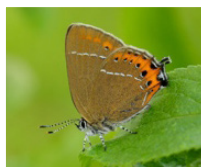
There should be at least one that each of you would enjoy.



Please see the branch Guided Walks web page for full details and guidance on how to get the most out of our guided walks, including meeting point, etc.

https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/guided_walks **PLEASE BOOK**

ENJOY!



Saturday 14th June at 10:30am

Bernwood Meadows, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

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



Tuesday 17th June at 10:30am

Wildmoor Heath, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

A relaxed walk around this heathland nature reserve, looking for early-summer butterflies. Recent visits have failed to turn up the restricted-range **Silver-studded Blue**, but we have found some nice dragonflies.

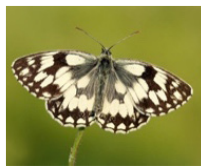


Wednesday 18th June at 10:00am

Warburg BBOWT, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A gentle walk around this delightful nature reserve, looking for early-summer butterflies, birds and other wildlife. We may be lucky enough to find some **Purple Hairstreaks**.



Wednesday 18th June at 6:30pm

East Hagbourne, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

An evening stroll along the Sustrans track to see what butterflies do outside 'normal transect' hours. We hope to see **Marbled White** and maybe **Small Blue**.

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



Saturday 21st June at 10:30am

Holtspur Bottom BC, Beaconsfield, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

A stroll around BC's only local nature reserve, looking for early-summer butterflies and day-flying moths. We hope to see **Small Blue**.



Saturday 21st June at 10:30am

Pamber Forest & Silchester Common, Hants

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore the woodland in the morning and the heathland after a short lunch break. We will be looking for early-summer butterflies and hope to find both **White Admiral** and **Silver-studded Blue**.



Sunday 22nd June at 10:30am

Butler's Hangings SSSI, West Wycombe, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

An energetic stroll to this steep downland site, looking for summer butterflies. We hope to find both **Marbled White** and **Dark Green Fritillary**.

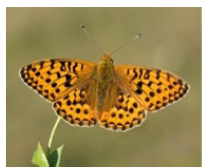


Wednesday 25th June at 11:00am

Blenheim Farm BBOWT, Charlbury, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A gentle stroll around this nature reserve and the adjacent Millenium Wood, looking for summer butterflies. We hope to find both **Marbled White** and **Small Blue**.

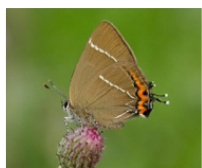


Sunday 29th June at 11:00am

Hackpen Hill, Sparsholt Firs, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

An energetic walk to this steep, open-access downland in search of summer butterflies. We hope to find **Dark Green Fritillary** as well as some of our day-flying moths.

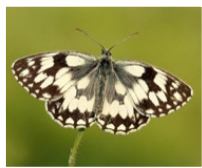


Tuesday 1st July at 10:30am

Maidenhead Thicket NT, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

We will search this wooded common for summer butterflies. We will spend some time checking the elms for the elusive **White-letter Hairstreak**.

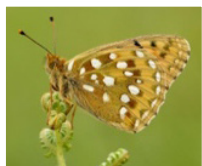


Wednesday 2nd July at 6:30pm

East Hagbourne, Oxon

An evening stroll along the Sustrans track to see what butterflies do outside 'normal transect' hours. We hope to see **Marbled White** and some 'day-flying' moths.

[Booking & details](#)

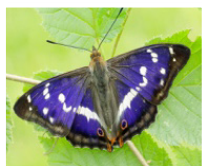


Thursday 10th July at 11:00am

Ivinghoe Beacon NT, Bucks

We will explore the steep downland slopes for summer butterflies. We hope to find the delightful **Dark Green Fritillary**.

[Booking & details](#)

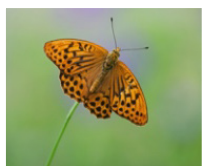


Tuesday 15th July at 10:00am

Bernwood Forest, Oxon/Bucks

An extended amble around this woodland hotspot, looking for summer butterflies. We hope to find **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **White Admiral** and even the magnificent **Purple Emperor**.

[Booking & details](#)

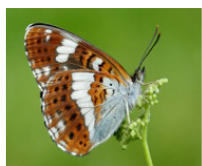


Saturday 19th July at 10:00am

Homefield Wood BBOWT, Bucks

We will explore this small woodland nature reserve for its summer butterflies. We hope to find **Silver-washed Fritillary** and some of our day-flying moths.

[Booking & details](#)



Saturday 19th July at 11:30am

Bernwood Forest, Oxon/Bucks

An amble around this woodland hotspot for summer butterflies. We hope to find **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **White Admiral** and even the magnificent **Purple Emperor**.

[Booking & details](#)



Tuesday 22nd July at 10:30am

Whitecross Green Wood, Oxon

We will explore this nature reserve, looking for summer butterflies. Though recent years have failed to turn up the elusive **White-letter Hairstreak**, we hope to see **Silver Washed Fritillary** and maybe **White Admiral** or the magnificent **Purple Emperor**.

[Booking & details](#)



Saturday 26th July at 10:30am

Brasenose Wood, Oxon

A gentle stroll around a less-visited part of the Country Park in search of summer butterflies. We hope to find both **Silver-washed Fritillary** and **White Admiral**.

[Booking & details](#)

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

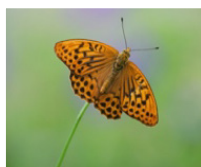


Sunday 27th July at 10:30am

BBOWT Foxholes, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A gentle stroll to this nature reserve in search of summer butterflies. We hope to find the **Silver-washed Fritillary** or **White Admiral**.



Tuesday 5th August at 10:30am

Finemere Wood, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore this magnificent nature reserve, looking for summer butterflies. With luck we will find one or more of the following **Silver-washed Fritillary**, **White Admiral** or even the magnificent **Purple Emperor**.

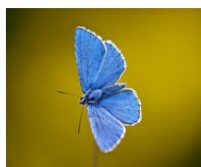


Tuesday 7th August at 11:00am

Greenham Common BBOWT, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore this extensive heathland for its summer butterflies. We hope to find the **Grayling** and some of our day-flying moths.



Saturday 9th August at 10:30am

Lardon Chase, Streatley, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore this steep downland, looking for summer butterflies. We hope to find second-brood **Adonis Blue** as well as some of our day-flying moths.



Saturday 9th August at 10:30am

Wytham Woods, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A gentle stroll around this Oxford University site, focusing on reinforcing the summer butterfly identification course. We should also see some of our day-flying moths.



Sunday 10th August at 10:30am

Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

An energetic stroll around this steep downland, focusing on reinforcing the summer butterfly identification course. We will hopefully see the rare **Silver-spotted Skipper** as well as some of our day-flying moths.



Saturday 16th August at 10:30am Fifty Acre Piece, Berks

[Booking & details](#)

We will take a relaxed stroll across the site, looking for summer butterflies, including the **Grayling**.



Saturday 16th August at 10:30am Rushbeds Wood, Bucks

[Booking & details](#)

We will wander through the woodland to the meadows in search of summer butterflies. We will spend some time searching the hedgerows in the hope of seeing the elusive **Brown Hairstreak**.



Tuesday 19th August at 10:30am Watlington Hill, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

A stroll across this steep downland in search of summer butterflies. We hope to find **Chalk Hill Blue**, **Adonis Blue** and the rare **Silver-spotted Skipper**.



Tuesday 26th August at 10:30am RSPB Otmoor, Oxon

[Booking & details](#)

We will explore the nature reserve, looking for late-summer butterflies. We will focus some time on the 'Roman Road' seeking decent views of the elusive **Brown Hairstreak**, as well as other species.

Many thanks.



Peter Philp
Field Trip Organiser

guided-walks@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Immature Behaviour

To paraphrase a joke from my school days...

*What's the first sign of madness?
Looking for butterfly eggs.*

*And what's the second?
Finding them!*

About a week ago I visited Hackpen Hill – a good site for many butterflies, including Small Blue, which we did see. We also passed someone going into the Devil's Punchbowl, and I mentioned Small Blue eggs and shared the photo below.



Whilst some may think that looking for Small Blue eggs is really difficult, I think the difficulties are people not knowing what to look for, either because they don't recognise the foodplant or because they just aren't sure what they are looking for.

I search by gently prizing apart the heads of kidney vetch, looking for a bright green dot. Sometimes it might be a white dot of the right size (not sure why some are white – but maybe it is

because they are newly laid). You can search for eggs when it is dull, cold and the adults will be keeping their heads down in the grass. It isn't so easy to find them if it is raining because the heads of kidney vetch fill up with water droplets that catch the light and tend to be bigger than the eggs, making it much more difficult to spot the little green dot lurking in the midst of the flower heads.

This year I saw my first Small Blue eggs along the Sustrans 544 route south of Didcot, on 2nd May. I didn't manage to see an adult along the route until the 13th. Once the eggs hatch the larvae will eat their way into the flowers and feed off the seeds that develop inside - so I don't get to monitor and watch the larvae growing.

Orange-tip eggs are another source of joy, and here you can return to monitor the larvae as they grow. Again, it's something you can do when it's dull and cold and the adults aren't around. It's also something that can be done in the rain. All you really need to be able to do is to recognise the foodplant (garlic mustard), though I have also found eggs on secondary plants (such as oilseed rape growing wild in the hedgerow). Ideally the foodplant will be in a sheltered but sunny spot near a hedge. There isn't much garlic mustard along my section of the Sustrans route now as it tends to get mowed into oblivion by contractors engaged to keep the hedgerows tidy. This can be quite heartbreaking.

On a different section of the route several years ago I found something like 60 eggs and 20 larvae, only to revisit the next day to find that everything had been cut down in the battle to stop cow parsley taking over the path.

However, the garlic mustard does seem to have moved into a hedgerow along the route, just before the geology switches from clay vale to chalk upland (a railway embankment built by Isambard Kingdom Brunell in the mid 1800s). I don't think garlic mustard gets on well with chalk, so I wouldn't expect to see anything further south than this hedgerow.

Last year I found some eggs on a solo plant along the hedgerow, only to notice that something had eaten the head a few days later. I suspect it was a passing horse.

Most of my observations this year have actually been a group of 2-3 isolated plants on a stretch that I use for a jog and walk each morning. I am more hopeful that these plants will fare better as they are a bit further back from the path and better protected by brambles and nettles.

Usually, you wouldn't expect to find more than one or two eggs laid on a plant but this particular outcrop has hosted a total of 11 eggs over a couple of weeks. This morning there were 8 larvae (all at different stages) and 3 unhatched eggs.

When the eggs are first laid, they are bright white, but within 24-48 hours they turn bright orange (below).



They can be laid on the underside of a leaf, but I tend to find most laid in the flower heads just after they have started to flower.

About a week later they hatch into tiny brown caterpillars (example below).



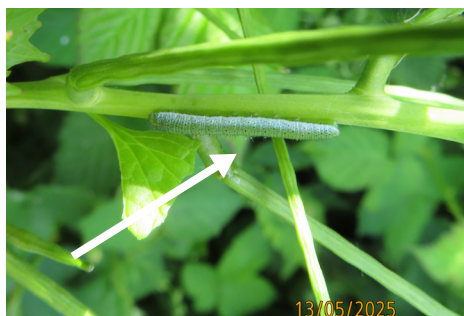
Last week I was checking on the larvae on a very cold morning jog and realised that there was actually a male camping out on top of one of the heads. I didn't have my camera with me, but it was so cold I knew that I had time to go home, collect my camera and return before the butterfly would have moved on. If you

look carefully, you can just make out part of a larva just below him.



They then start feeding on the seed pods and become a bigger green 'streak' (above right).

This is as far as this year's group has developed as I write this, but I look forward to watching the larvae continuing to grow until the final instar



decides the time has come to find a suitable tree on which to pupate. I've never managed to find a pupa and doubt I will this year, as the nearest candidates for pupation are protected by nettles and brambles.

However, I hope to catch up again with them next year.

Karen Saxl

Flit for Purpose

I watched a female Brimstone flying purposefully atop the vegetation on a small section of BBOWT's Yoesden Nature Reserve, Bucks (chalk grassland/scrub) on 11th April 2025, stopping often to oviposit on what I presume to be freshly sprouting Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*).

Brimstone caterpillars only feed on Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) – the presence of each of which is dependent on the alkalinity or acidity of the soil.

You'll see that the egg is pale green when first laid. Individuals only lay one



egg per visit to a plant, though other female Brimstones might lay an egg on the same shoot.

Over time, one hopes that the eggs will develop into these...

Derek Haynes



Digging Deeper

On page 14, Andy Spragg provided an update on his initiative to drive the identification and recording of species in 1km squares that have had few or no records over the recent past.

Andy now affords anyone the opportunity to ‘dig deeper into the data’ to see the picture in either the area in which they live or places in which they record.

Conservation ▼

Recording ▼

Conservation Activities

Holtspur Bottom Reserve

Health & Safety

Species Champions

10km Square Champions

Hairstreak Conservation

Churchyard Management

Gardening for Butterflies & Moths

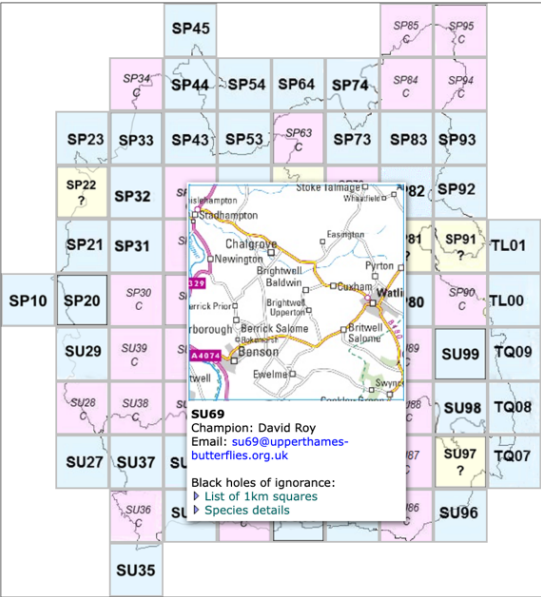
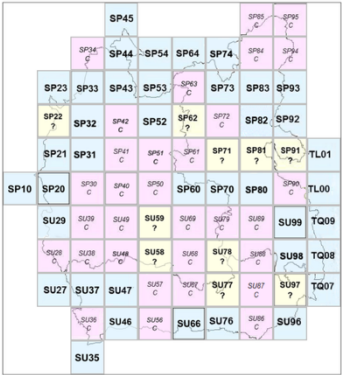
Wild Spaces

On the UTB website homepage, head for **10km Square Champions** under **Conservation** on the menu (as shown, left).

Having selected **10km Square Champions**, you’ll be shown a map of all the 10km squares in our region, as shown here (right).

If you then select your ‘square of interest’, SU69 in the example below,

you’ll be shown the details of the current Champion (if one is in place) and two selectable items under **Black holes of ignorance**: (1). **List of 1km squares** and (2). **Species details**.



If you select **List of 1km squares**, you’ll see the following:

SU69 ignorance spectrum

No records for 5+ complete recording cycles

No records for 4 complete recording cycles

No records for 3 complete recording cycles

No records for 2 complete recording cycles

No records for 1 complete recording cycle

Right of way

1k square

Recordless years

SU6992

SU6398

SU6099

SU6593

SU6897

SU6199

SU6195

SU6998

SU6798

SU6699

SU6698

SU6697

SU6599

SU6399

SU6398

SU6097

No right of way

1k square

Recordless years

SU6393

SU6794

The **List of 1km squares** is colour-coded and provides an overview of the 1km squares in the selected 10km square which have no data over recent recording cycles.

It is hoped that this information will entice observer-recorders.

If you were to select **Species details**, you'll be presented with those – but you'll need to consult Andy's 'pre-amble' on the first page displayed to get a full understanding of the significance of the data. A sample of the data displayed is shown alongside (in this case, for SU69).

If you encounter any difficulties using this facility (or need any help with interpretation), Andy's contact details can be found on page 14.



Green-veined White

1kID	SU6097
IgnoranceHue	DarkGreen
UTBstatus	Ox
UTB_RoWL	351.2
Diversity	16
Small Skipper	-----b-----
Essex Skipper	-----
Large Skipper	-----a-----
Brimstone	-----
Large White	-----c-----
Small White	a-----b-----a----
Green-veined White	-----c-----
Orange-tip	-----
Small Copper	-----
Brown Argus	-----
Common Blue	-----a-----
Holly Blue	-----
Red Admiral	a-----b---a-----
Painted Lady	-----b-----
Small Tortoiseshell	-----a-----b----
Peacock	-----b-----b----
Comma	-----a-----
Speckled Wood	a-----
Marbled White	-----a-----
Gatekeeper	-----b-----a----
Meadow Brown	-----c-----
Ringlet	a-----b-----a----



Small Spaces Making a BIG Difference

Butterfly Conservation has ‘paired up’ with British Flora, with the latter offering a ‘Rewild Range’ of native wildflowers – in the form of a ‘Butterfly and Moth Selection Box’ of 84 plants (across 12 species), each individually labelled. For every box ordered from British Flora, Butterfly Conservation receives a 5% cash donation.



British Flora states, **“With thoughtful planning, gardens can function as a corridor between natural habitats offering a place [for butterflies and moths] to feed and breed.”** Their selection box of plants complements its Birds, Bees and Butterflies seed mix.

If you have some ‘free’ garden space in a sunny location, you might wish to consider one of these options. Further details at: <https://www.britishflora.co.uk/rewild/butterfly-moth-selection/>

My own attempts to introduce a ‘mini wildflower meadow’ up at my allotment (as reported previously) seem to be reaping rewards. Interestingly, I sowed half of the large packet of British wildflower seeds in the late autumn of 2024, with the remainder planted this spring (in the other half of the prepared area) – and I now have different flowers presenting in each half. The ground preparation was – and conditions are – identical, so the time of sowing appears to be the only factor determining the outcome.



It seems that the seed planted this spring may not have successfully germinated, as virtually all the plants present as of late May seem to be Wild Mustard (which wasn't listed as present on the packet!). Not sure what's happened here. In the part that was sown last autumn, the annuals (such as Common Poppy, Corn Cockle and Cornflower) seem to be doing better at present than the perennials.

In time, if the patch looks like it's going to develop as a sustainable mini-meadow, I'll register it as a ‘Wild Space’ (see <https://wild-spaces.co.uk> for more details of Butterfly Conservation's Wild Spaces initiative).

Derek Haynes

Purple Peekaboo

When June meets July is the time when the first Purple Hairstreaks can be seen in our region's woodlands.

A delightfully pretty butterfly if you get to see one up close with its wings outstretched, yet more often seen with its wings closed at rest (or, more likely perhaps, flitting around the top of an oak tree when you can catch sight of its silvery underside).

The larvae exist firstly inside, then outside the buds of one of the several species of oak.

Adults feed primarily on aphid honeydew up in the tree canopy, seldom visiting flowers. It is single-brooded and not considered a vulnerable species.



Purple Hairstreak ©Paul Gamble

In the last *Hairstreak*, member Paul Gamble gave us his thoughts – through poetry – on the Green Hairstreak. This time, Paul gives his poetic take on a successful search for Purple Hairstreaks beneath the oaks of London's Richmond Park.

A July morning's made for hope,
Here, beside the Ballet School,
Beneath oaks, seeking a barre,
Where a flight-life will start.

I've come to catch first moments,
Travelled to see ghost-grey underwings
Lose wrinkles in new freedom,
And watch air smooth creases.

Waist-high bracken's where I'll search
For stand-out white lines,
Tiny clementine spots,
Or, best, that Tyrian sheen.

And if, on a triangular frond,
I see one fresh-emerged
And frozen in fragility,
Exposed, naked, vulnerable,

I could pick it up. But won't.
Why would I trouble such beauty?
It's not mine, not ours:
I'll possess in vision, no more.

As it dries off, I'll dream of flight,
Envisage balletic moves:
Ouvret, Arabesque, Battement;
Jeté, Entrechat, Aplomb.

I'll conceive its up and down
Lifestyle. Mostly up, of course,
Above the oak canopy:
A spinning silver coin.

They say purple's for royals,
But that's been nabbed
By the bullying Emperor.
Favonius will need a personal schtick,

Unique moves, mystery, its 'thing'.
It'll play 'Purple Peekaboo',
A teasing game of hide-and-seek;
This ballet will be among oaks.

It's in those upward thoughts
That my eye is caught.
Just a slow-motion shift –
As if the yawn of wings –

And the still slightly scrunched
Creature allows me a glimpse
Of its African violet patch.
I'll dream even better now.

Ignorance-busting in West Berkshire

[This commentary is featured to complement Andy Spragg's article on page 14, to which we suggest you refer – Ed.]

Somebody once said (possibly the 17th century traveller Celia Fiennes, who went all over England riding side-saddle) that the best way to see the landscape is from horseback.

I don't have a horse, or even a bicycle unfortunately, but both would be very helpful in visiting all the 1k squares in SU57 (West Berkshire). Although on paper almost every square has a range of access types, the Ordnance Survey map is deceptive – not all the well-marked paths and tracks are accessible; many are only reached by hiking many miles into the arable desert of the region; and a machete would be advisable equipment for any visit after the end May.

However, I have managed to record a butterfly (in some cases it is literally one) in every 'black hole' of my 10k square (2 black; 3 dark blue; 2 blue; and 10 dark green) including those with no public right of way access (PROW). The latter involved lurking as close as possible to the 1k square boundary for considerable periods and peering along the field edges, hoping an identifiable 'white' would show itself. That's where a horse would be useful – you can see over the top of barriers and hedges to the sunny aspect which is inevitably on the other side from the PROW – as well as having your own energy-saving transport.

Though I cannot claim any sighting 'gems' of championed species in my 'black holes' just yet, I have had some 'semi-precious stones': 2 spiralling Small Heath just over the gateway in the fly-tipped layby where I stopped to lurk in one of my less accessible squares (SU5378); 8 species recorded in the middle of the arable desert after a long hike from neighbouring territory (SU5077); and a little gem of a meadow next to woodland in SU5677 where I have high hopes of recording many more species as the season progresses.



Word of warning to self: don't let SU57 turn dark green where it is currently white! There is a danger that in targeting less visited squares the rest get neglected - many of these only have recent records because I have visited them regularly in the past few years!

Margery Slatter

Championing the Champions

We have so-called Species Champions, who have volunteered their services to 'oversee the health and wellbeing' of those butterfly species regarded as specialists in our region (that is, they have rather specific habitat requirements).

Nineteen species have been thus categorised, though some of them have no active Champion currently at the helm. If you feel able to help out with this vital role, please contact our Species Champion Co-ordinator (Nick Bowles) at champion-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

For the 2024 season, seven Species Champions have recently written their reports, all of which can be accessed from the UTB website homepage (under Butterflies/Species Champions). The species in question are Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue, Grayling, Grizzled Skipper, Silver-studded Blue, White-letter Hairstreak and Wood White – and we recommend that you take a look at what the Champions have to say about the health of the species they champion. The data they process to provide this insight is obtained from the records that you and I submit throughout the year... which is why every record counts!

Thanks to Andy Spragg who has produced software to help Species Champions with the analysis of their data.

What follows is one statement from each of the 2024 Reports mentioned above:

Adonis Blue – “Over the last 20 years, *Rapid decline* with a change of -60.8%.”

Chalk Hill Blue – “For the first time in many years some small colonies did not return a single sighting, or at best only a singleton. This is very disturbing...”

Grayling – “There were 89 separate records submitted by just 12 different recorders, a rather disappointing number of people to be looking out for one of our priority species.”

Grizzled Skipper – “The species had a pretty poor year in 2024... with only 162 records submitted.”

Silver-studded Blue – “The species remains a high conservation priority in the area, and its dependence on actively managed heathland makes it a useful indicator of habitats of high conservation value for a range of specialist heathland species.”

White-letter Hairstreak – “The butterfly appeared to have a poor year with only 44 adults recorded from 22 sites - the lowest number of sightings in the last ten years.”

Wood White – “Although numbers of sightings were generally lower than in



previous years, the good news is that the species fared quite well as it coped

with days of wet weather during its flight period (and, indeed, occasional high counts were recorded).”

Derek Haynes

Volunteers' Corner

There are a number of ways you could help our Branch to improve the region for its butterflies and moths. Please consider seriously if you could help: it is not all scrub-bashing or recording butterflies.

Could you spare 2 or 3 hours of your precious time once a month over the summer... or even just two or three times in mid-summer? If you can, and you can identify our common butterflies, you could play a really important part in our survey and monitoring work.



Butterfly Transects

If you could manage to monitor any of the following transects just once a month until the end of September, that would be a huge help: **Swyncome Down, White Horse Hill, Butler's Hangings, Oxfordshire Golf Course, Waterperry Wood, Shabbington Wood, Stoke Common & Owlpit Copse.**

WCBS (Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey)

Perhaps you can only manage 2 or 3 sessions over the summer? That would be ideal for monitoring one of our vacant WCBS squares: **Carterton, Langford, Shipton-under-Wychwood, Enstone, Banbury, Bicester, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes, Great Hampden, Chieveley, Sindlesham & Gerrards Cross.**

Meeting people and sharing our messages

Maybe your skills and interests are more people-focused? Our Branch is attending a number of events over the summer. Please consider helping at one of them. It can be great fun sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with members of the public – adults and children alike – and there is great camaraderie in the teams. Events that could do with at least one extra person:



- **Leckhampstead Wood Charity Event:** Sunday 29th June
- **Prestwood Nature Open Day at Boug's Meadow:** Sunday 29th June
- **Kidlington Gala Day:** Saturday 19th July
- **Combe Mill Education Wildlife Day:** Sunday 20th July
- **Chenies Manor Plant Fair:** Sunday 20th July
- **Binfield Environmental Group Binfield Fayre:** Wednesday 27th August

If you would like to help but can't make these dates, please let us know as there are other events in the pipeline.

Transect Coordinator

Perhaps your skills and experience lie in the administration and communications area? In that case, this could be a great way of contributing. Your key role would be to keep an eye on our transects and help recruit, train and place volunteers in suitable transect teams. Almost all of this can be done from home using a computer and phone. If you think that this is a bit much just now, please consider taking on the role for just one of our three counties.

We would be delighted if you could join our team of dedicated enthusiasts and help us do a bit more. You would be welcomed and supported throughout. **We look forward to hearing from you.**

Peter Philp
volunteer-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Membership Latest

There has been a decrease in membership again since the last newsletter. To date there are 1640 households, comprising of 2258 individual members in the Upper Thames Branch area. **A warm welcome to all new members** who have joined since the last newsletter was published.

All communication with members, including the welcome letter from the Branch, will now come from Head Office. Up-to-date news on activities can be found on our website. There is also a monthly bulletin sent to all members with registered email addresses, reminding everyone of upcoming events.

Brenda Mobbs
UTB Membership Secretary
Email: membership@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Separation Anxiety

Confident ID of similar-looking species

Every year Nick Bowles runs a small number of events to help people gain confidence with the identification of lookalike species of butterfly and day-flying moth. Those who have previously watched the online preparatory presentations and then joined an in-field session report that these events made a big difference to their ability to know what features to look for - and to be certain about which species they have seen.

The next online presentation is on Thursday June 19th at 18.00

Identification: Early summer butterflies & day-flying moths

This is entirely free and with no need to book. If you miss the video, it will be posted shortly afterwards (and there are similar presentations at https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/online_events).



The in-field sessions **MUST be booked** and only the **first 25 persons to book can attend**. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to deliver a rewarding session to attendees with more than this number of people.

There are two in-field sessions/walks currently arranged for July:

Sat 5th July at 10.00 at NT Bradenham, Wood Lane, Bradenham, Bucks.

Meet in layby at HP14 4HF <http://bitter.laying.rescuer>

There is additional parking on the south side of the cricket pitch. **BOOK FIRST!**

Sat 12th July at 10.30 at Howe Park Wood, Chaffron Way H7, Milton Keynes.

Parking at SP830344 <http://permanent.lighter.bond>

Meet at the Education Centre by grounds café. **BOOK FIRST!**

To book an in-field session please email nick.bowles@ntlworld.com. A pair of close-focusing binoculars and a butterfly net would be useful on the day if you have them.

Volunteers needed for surveys of private land

Almost wherever you live, the Branch is involved with private landowners who would like some occasional surveys undertaken to inform them about the butterflies and moths present on their land.

Please contact Nick Bowles at nick.bowles@ntlworld.com if you would like more information.

Event Horizon Barriers with ‘Black Holes of Ignorance’

[This commentary is featured to complement Andy Spragg’s article on page 14, to which we suggest you refer – Ed.]

We are focusing on the more extreme ‘holes of ignorance’ and have visited 10 of them in Buckinghamshire (plus nearby squares, or ones we pass through - and note species from the car). As well as recording the species present in the ‘holes of ignorance’, we are curious about why these target squares previously had no records. There seem to be two reasons: one is that access is not quick or easy, requiring quite a walk to reach them; and the other is that – while a busy road may go through them – there is nowhere to park and no attractive habitat. The following two examples illustrate these experiences:

- SP9050 has a main road passing through it, but no places to park; verges that are non-existent, narrow or blocked off by stones; and footpaths only through intensively farmed fields that are less attractive to butterflies than the roadside hedges. In ~40 minutes, we recorded just two species. When recording is focussed on tetrads, it is easy to see why a square like this would be neglected.
- By contrast, SP9149 has a road leading to its edge and a footpath and bridleway passing through it. However, access is not as simple as it might sound. The road leads up to a farmyard, and the footpath starts on the other side of the farmyard. However, there is no public right of way through the farmyard itself – but, fortunately, the farmers allowed us to pass through, and the outcome was our best-recorded square so far this season: eight species including a substantial colony of Small Heath and our first Painted Lady of the year.

Painted Lady ©David Hastings



Furthermore, the farmers were interested enough to ask whether they had any rare butterflies on their land... and were happy to hear the results.

Chris Tyler-Smith and Yali Xue

Just Before You Leave Us...

If you are reading this issue of *Hairstreak* on paper, it is the first time that Butterfly Conservation’s Head Office has arranged for its printing and distribution.

The Branch would appreciate your feedback on its quality and timeliness, so if you are able to email the editor on newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk with your thoughts, it would be much appreciated. Thanks.

If you’d like to switch to a digital-only version of *Hairstreak*, please contact BC’s Membership Team on **01929 400209** (email: membership@butterfly-conservation.org).

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/groups/458565932924345>

Twitter [@UpperThamesBC](https://twitter.com/UpperThamesBC)
Instagram [utb_butterfly_conservation](https://www.instagram.com/utb_butterfly_conservation)

Holtspur Bottom Reserve
upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/holtspur_bottom

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