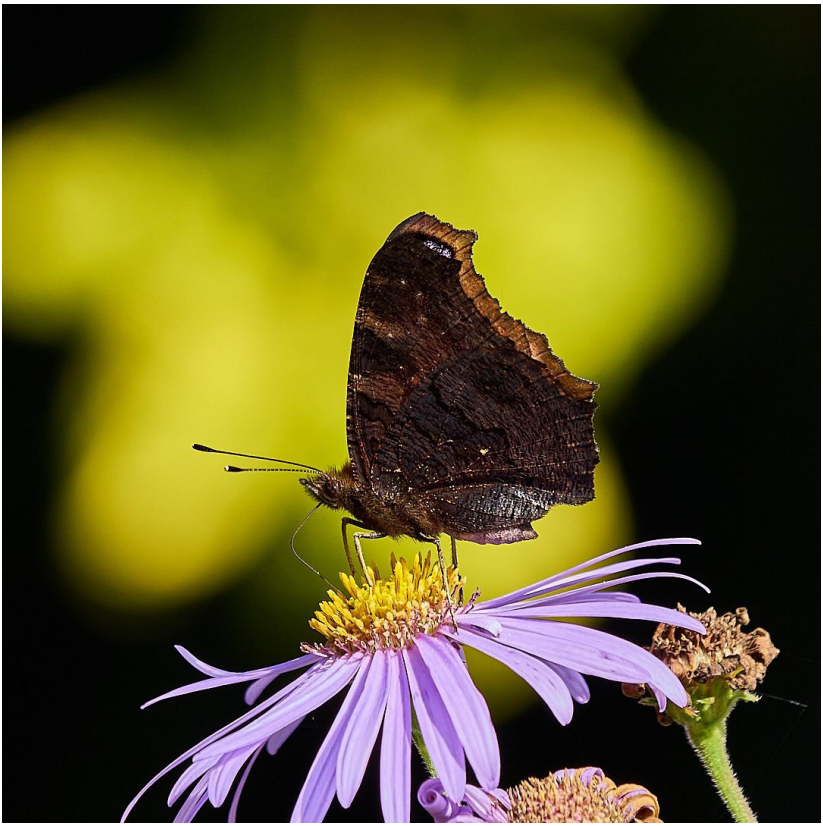
UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Hairstreak

ISSUE 128 | WINTER 2025/26



Join us on one of our winter conservation tasks, which are vital for the future of some of our most endangered species. See page 28.

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Upper Thames Branch

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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Cover image: Peacock (Late September 2025 ©Treve Willis)

Next edition: **SPRING 2026 (ISSUE 129) [DEADLINE FOR COPY: THURSDAY 5th MARCH 2026] PLANNED PUBLICATION DATE: 27th MARCH 2026**

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First Thoughts

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

With the winter season now upon us, you may wonder how some of our butterflies survive at this time of the year. Butterfly Conservation wrote an article last autumn, entitled *Winging it through the winter*, which is worth a read at **https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/winging-it-through-the-winter**

With so little butterfly activity just now, we focus to some extent this time on our moths - some of which are still out and about, getting on with their business as we are perhaps contemplating our new year resolutions. Having said that, some of our resident hibernating butterflies may make their presence known on a sunny, unseasonally warm winter's day - which is why we've featured Treve Willis's enchanting image of a Peacock on this issue's front cover.

Last time, we aired the Branch's rationale behind its ambition for a digital-only version of *Hairstreak*. We are delighted to announce that there has since been an 86% decrease in members requesting the paper version, for which we are most grateful.

For those of you reading this issue on paper, you should note that – in some issues of *Hairstreak* – some pages may be blank. This will occur if the total number of pages in the publication is not a multiple of four. Furthermore, some material (which will appear in the digital version of *Hairstreak*) may be absent.

Our 2025 Members' Day was, as always, an informative and enjoyable event. Some specifics from the occasion – including winning entries from the photographic competition – appear elsewhere in this publication.

It is at this time of the year that the Branch undertakes some of its most important work to improve the habitats of some of our most-threatened species, and we would ask you to consider helping out on one of our planned conservation events. **Our species really need our energy and enthusiasm**. See page 28 for further details.

If, like me, you had one or two 'Wow!' moments in 2025 in your encounters with our wonderful butterflies and moths, you may wish to consider sharing them with our members through this publication.

The deadline for copy for the spring 2026 issue of *Hairstreak* is Thursday 5th March. Please get your contributions in early, thanks.

Apologies if this issue has arrived late in your inbox or on your doormat… but on the basis it's with you 'on time', we wish you a peaceful and joyful festive season; and join you in eagerly awaiting the first harbingers of spring.

Derek Haynes
newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

View from the Chair

It was great to see so many faces, old and new, at our Members' Day back in October. Apologies if I did not get around to speaking to you, but what an entertaining day it was with a fabulous range of speakers and talks (see our review on page 6).

Now that the WCBS and Transect seasons have come to an end, most of you will have already submitted your records. If you have not yet done so, please do so at the earliest convenience so that our dedicated team of volunteers can get on with the important task of verification.

However, that doesn't mean surveying and monitoring has finished for the year. You can still get involved in counting Brown Hairstreak eggs and searching for larvae of Black (and Brown) Hairstreak over the winter and during early spring. Please let me know if you would like to help out.

Now that we have had a chance to look back on the 2025 butterfly season and peruse the results, we can see that it was a much better season (for most species) than in 2024. However, the numbers for 2025 were only average by modern standards and did little to reverse the long-term declines.

Several once-common species are still struggling significantly, with Small Tortoiseshell (for example) showing a 60% decline nationally since 2011. Other species to have had a poor 2025 nationally include Meadow Brown, Holly Blue and Ringlet.

You may be aware that a team of Branch volunteers are in the process of putting together an updated atlas of our butterfly species, led by our Butterfly Recorder, Jim Asher, who also oversaw production of the previous three atlases. We have decided to go digital this time, partly due to the increased costs and sluggish sales of such books and partly due to the flexibility and ease of updating a website.

Early analysis of many of our species appears to show that, although their distribution is stable, their numbers and colony sizes appear to be declining significantly.

On a more positive note, the good weather meant we had fair showings of our migrant butterflies: Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow. Large White and Small White had their best-ever year in the Big Butterfly Count; and the delightful Jersey Tiger moth (shown below) continues to colonise new areas.


©Tamas Nestor

Practical conservation management continues to help key species such as Duke of Burgundy and Silver-studded Blue; and on the subject of practical conservation, don't forget that we would welcome any of you along to our work parties to help with the physical management tasks. Please visit the Events page on our website to find the dates and locations of work parties, and let the leader know if you plan to attend. The more the merrier! Further details may also be found on page 28.

Working hard for the benefit of our species

Don't forget that although most of our adult butterflies have finished for the year, there are still a range of interesting moths on the wing throughout the winter. These include the aptly named Winter Moth and December Moth, as well as species such as the Herald and the Common Plume which may emerge briefly on mild days.

Turning to wider issues, it was good to see the Government banning neonicotinoid pesticides. Whilst they reiterated their commitment to the '30 by 30' targets, their 'build, baby, build' agenda and the lack of protection for biodiversity in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill threatens much of the good work already done, and will make things progressively harder for our increasingly threatened wildlife in the future.

The challenging financial pressures and the charity funding crisis continue to impact us locally as well as nationally, and it was disappointing to learn that the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) has recently been forced to lose a number of its staff to remain economically viable.

As always, a huge thanks to all the dedicated volunteers that allow us to achieve so much for our butterflies, moths and their habitats in our region.

I will leave you to reflect on this brief story:

A couple were on honeymoon on a gorgeous tropical island in the Caribbean, a few days after a tropical storm had left millions of starfish stranded on the shoreline. The couple were having a romantic sunset stroll along the soft sands when they noticed an elderly local man bending down to pick something up and throwing it into the ocean. As the man got closer, they asked him what he was doing. He looked at them in a strange way and explained he was throwing starfish back into the water. They said, "But there are millions, you can't possibly make a difference". He bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it back into the ocean. "Made a difference to that one!" he said.

If only more of us were able to share his approach to life!

As the very mild days of autumn are turning towards winter with the recent cold snap, let us all take heart in the beauty and resilience of the wildlife around us. Let's give thanks to those already making a difference to our threatened habitats and species, and encourage others to join the fight, as we look forward to more adventures, more discoveries, and a countryside where our fabulous butterflies and moths can not only survive but thrive.

With warm wishes and much gratitude, enjoy the festive period, and keep warm and healthy.

Regards,

Peter Philp
chairman@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Members' Day 2025: a Review

Our Members' Day at Benson (Oxon) was supported by just shy of 100 members and supporters, with Richard Lewington providing the opportunity to purchase one of his wonderful prints or original drawings and Pemberley Books offering a comprehensive selection of natural history books for sale.

True to tradition, and following Chairman Peter Philp's opening deliberations, Nick Bowles and Peter Cuss provided an update on the state of the butterflies and moths respectively in the Upper Thames area in 2025 to date. Nick also delivered the latest news on our Holtspur Bottom Reserve (near Beaconsfield, Bucks).

Using data from records submitted on the iRecord app for butterfly sightings across the Upper Thames region up to 23rd October 2025, Nick announced that the five least reported species were Wood White (with the lowest count), Wall, White-letter Hairstreak, White Admiral and Grayling; and, as perhaps anticipated, the most abundant records related to Meadow Brown (with the highest count), Large White and Small White. Following a question from a member of the audience, it was advised that one should record a butterfly – even if the same specimen is suspected of having been seen previously – **every day** it is seen.

During Nick's update on Holtspur Bottom, he praised Brenda Mobbs for maintaining up-to-date signage at the site. He also asked if anyone would like to take on the role of 'Document Archivist', to look after the material the Branch has accumulated on its managed sites over the years (see below for Nick's contact details if you may be able to assist).

Butterfly species doing well at Holtspur include Chalk Hill Blue, Small Blue, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Small Copper; with Striped Lychnis, Cinnabar, Jersey Tiger and Scarlet Tiger among the moths also present on the site. There are a huge variety of flora at Holtspur, including Bee Orchids and Dark Mullein (the latter being the foodplant of the Striped Lychnis). Slow worms, hairy shieldbugs (*Dolycoris baccarum*) and Roesel's bush-crickets (*Roeseliana/Metrioptera roeselii*) are among the other creatures to be found there. Nick reported that members of the public seem finally to be respecting signage at the site and keeping to the perimeter paths when sheep are grazing on the reserve. Nick also gave dates when vital conservation work is scheduled at Holtspur - and asked that members

consider joining these events on 11th January and/or 8th February 2026. Another request: if there is a botanist who could help with producing a list of all the flora on the reserve, please contact Nick at **nick.bowles@ntlworld.com**

Our Moth Officer, Peter Cuss (right), talked about some of the more interesting moths that had been recorded across our region in the year to date, including Small Eggar (larval webs), Oak Eggar (larvae and adults), White-spotted Pinion, Silver Hook, Garden Tiger, Jersey Mocha, Scarce Spindle Ermine (a county first for Bucks), Banded Pine Carpet (only the second and third records for Berks), Bloxworth Snout (an Upper Thames first for this migrant species, shown below), Light Crimson Underwing, Dark Crimson Underwing, Olive Crescent (including one 'trapped' by a school moth club in Newbury, Berks), Striped Hawk-moth, Death's-head Hawk-moth, Toadflax Pearl (another Upper Thames first), Small Marbled, Porter's Rustic (the second-only record for our region), Ringed Border (a scarce migrant, and another first for Upper Thames), Blood-vein and a gynandromorph (half male/half female) Gypsy Moth. Quite a feast!

Moving on…

Who knew that dung beetles could be such complex and fascinating insects? Entomologist and farmer Sally Ann Spence does! Sally (pictured right), our first guest speaker of the day, gave an enthusiastic presentation on the subject. She is a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society who received the British Entomological and Natural History Society's gold medal for her research into dung beetles and the livestock sector, and decades of promoting dung beetle awareness.

Sally-Ann told us that the three main groups of dung beetles in the UK are very hard to identify, and although they can all fly as adults, they tend to have a static life cycle, living in or under the dung ('dwellers' and 'tunnellers', respectively). "Over 50% of our dung beetles are in dire straits in the UK, with an extinction rate of around 25%. The main threats are livestock removal, fragmentation of habitats, changes in livestock management, soil disturbance, use of toxic chemicals, changes in land use, new transport infrastructure, climate change and artificial light. Much work is being done (or planned) with landowners and farmers to improve the situation, but it's far from easy."

The inter-dependencies between dung beetles and livestock, other creatures and landscapes (both providers and beneficiaries), both in the UK and beyond, is, alas, too multifaceted for us to report fully on it here (but see the note at the end of this article).

After lunch, Peter Philp went through some of the Branch Committee business, as follows. He, Brenda Mobbs and Peter Cuss were all re-elected, and Treve Willis was formally elected to the post of Branch Treasurer. Dave Wilton has given notice of his retirement from the position of Branch Secretary at the end of March 2026, and a replacement is sought (please email **secretary@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk** if you are interested in this role). Special thanks went to Tom Primett (our new Transect Co-ordinator), Simon Hammett (Branch Events Coordinator) and Andy Spragg (for his tireless work on promoting the recording of species in our region).

Recipient of our annual Frank Banyard Award for dedication to the Branch and its activities was long-standing member Brenda Mobbs - a well-deserved and popular choice.

Nick is seen (left) presenting Brenda with two Richard Lewington prints, with warm applause from chairman Peter Philp from the sidelines.

Another long-standing member, Sue Taylor, was presented with a floral bouquet following her withdrawal, for personal reasons, from hands-on work for the Branch. Sue was responsible for producing the static display (shown below, left, at today's event), and is seen here (right) receiving her gift from Peter.

Our first formal presentation of the afternoon was given by Butterfly Conservation's Steven Lofting, Conservation Manager for South-East England. Steven has been an active participant in a conservation project called Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray (RBOR) in conjunction with the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), whose aim is to explore the use of ultra-violet light to search for the larvae of some of our localised and more elusive hairstreak butterflies (such as the Black Hairstreak). This initiative was featured in our summer 2025 *Hairstreak* ('A Revolution in Conservation') and may be further explored at **butterfly-conservation.org/uv**.

Our next guest speaker was Peter Marren, a notable writer, journalist and naturalist, whose fascinating talk was entitled *The weird and wonderful names of butterflies and moths*. Peter (right), started by telling us that – as far as we know – the first butterfly names in the world are English. "The word *butterfly* itself is a very old word that stems back to Anglo-Saxon times, with its first written mention around 1000AD. One possible explanation for the word butterfly is that, apparently, white butterflies were attracted to outdoor butter churns (the milk itself was believed to be the attractant)." Other speculative (spiritual) reasoning abounds! "From around the late seventeenth century, people became more interested in butterflies and moths - though they didn't have names for them per se. It is believed that the Society of Aurelians (an all-male organisation) first named species around 1700 (in the reign of Queen Anne), with names such as Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Cinnabar among those still in use today. The founder of the Society was Joseph Dandridge, a silk-pattern designer who, along with some of his colleagues at the Society (also connected with the textile industry), used names such as *brocade*, *satin* and *lutestring* [leading, for example, to names like Toadflax Brocade, White Satin Moth and Common Lutestring], due to the men's apparent attraction to the patterns and textures of moths (in particular)." Peter told us so much more, but again we can't include everything here (though see the note at the end of this article).

Our final guest speaker of the day was the world-renowned butterfly scientist Dr Martin Warren OBE (left), a previous Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation (2002-16) and the author of over 200 scientific papers on butterfly ecology and climate change. When retiring from BC, Martin said, **"We live in very difficult and uncertain times, but our work has never been more important: to ensure a brighter future for our wildlife and for the environment on which we all ultimately depend."** These words are as relevant now as they were in 2016.

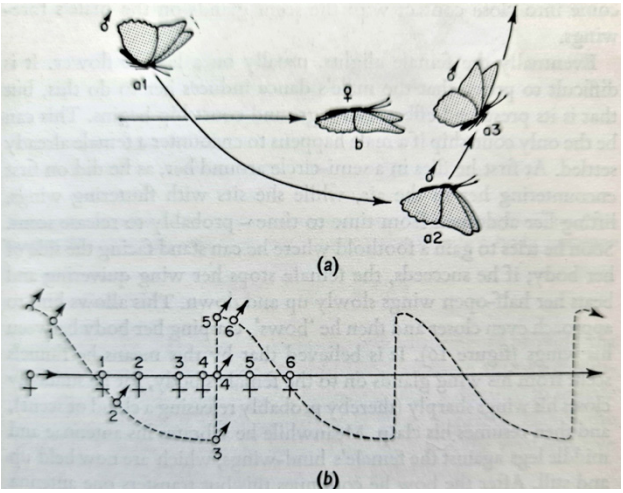
Martin's talk today was entitled *Sex, life and death in the world of butterflies* - a highly entertaining and informative talk, with great insight into how our species behave when it comes to courtship and mating. We don't have the space to include everything by any means, but a few extracts are included below.

- Butterflies are very devious lovers, with the males and females having different views of the process
- The male generally uses one of two tactics to find a mate: patrolling (hunting out females who are skulking in the undergrowth, e.g. White Admiral); or perching (finding a prominent place that a female may find, e.g. Duke of Burgundy)

- Individuals look for similar-looking objects (they can use UV to detect wing patterns), then use pheromones to determine the correct species and sex
- Brightly coloured males 'use their colour' to ward off other males rather than to attract females
- The male passes a **spermatophore** to the female when mating: a large package containing both sperm and nutrients. This can represent a significant portion of the male's body mass, requiring him to feed up for several days before he can mate again

The use of pheromones to attract the opposite sex is noticeable in the courtship routine of species such as Silver-washed Fritillary and Wood White. The courtship routine of the former is particularly fascinating and is seen quite regularly in the species' regular haunts.

The German ethologist Dietrich Magnus carried out detailed studies of this behaviour, and his representation (shown below) is often used to demonstrate it.



The pursuit flight of the male Silver-washed Fritillary

A single swoop and upward dart by the male is shown in sequence (a), while three successive swoops and darts are shown in sequence (b). The female maintains a straight course.

Martin went on to discuss parasites (including the cunning *Mesochorus stigmaticus*, which lays its eggs inside parasites that are already present in larvae), and how they adversely affect the chances of a butterfly egg becoming an adult. Plus, so much more… and more… and some!

Notwithstanding Peter Philp's closing remarks, Pete Thompson closed proceedings with the results of the photo competition. Unfortunately, the autumn *Hairstreak* (which contained details of the competition) was delayed in production, so there were fewer entries than usual. See page 25 for Pete's report and the winning entries.

In conclusion, Members' Day was – once again – an enjoyable and informative occasion. Grateful thanks to our guest speakers and supporters, to the audience, and to those who helped to make the day run smoothly (with particular mention of Peter Cuss and Grahame Hawker, who organised the event).

Brenda Mobbs with her gifts of appreciation

Sue Taylor with her gift of appreciation

The Branch aims (and invariably manages!) to procure the services of highly respected and knowledgeable speakers for its Members' Days, and we urge those of you who aren't normally inclined to attend this annual event to consider doing so in the future. You'd be hard-pushed to find another event that offers the opportunity to hear the 'words of wisdom' from such a formidable group of esteemed naturalists and conservationists.

Though as yet unconfirmed, our 2026 Members' Day is likely to be held on Saturday 17th October at Benson.

Note: If any member wishes to receive an audio recording of any of the day's sessions, please request a copy (stating the session required and your reason for the request) by emailing: **newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk**. You must be prepared to accept the transcript via the WeTransfer utility; and furthermore, accept that the recording remains the property of the Branch and can only be used for personal reference and not published or distributed without prior written permission from the Branch Committee.

We look forward to meeting up again in 2026.

Derek Haynes

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Key Species Update: How Are They Doing? (Part 2)

In the previous (autumn) issue of *Hairstreak*, I set the scene for our more detailed look at the 'health and well-being' of the UTB's key species.

To show context here, in part 2, some of what appeared last time has been repeated below. Perhaps you'd like to refer to the previous article to appreciate 'the bigger picture'?

The UTB's key species need Species Champions because these species need more help if they are to remain breeding in our area. Some Species Champs do a brilliant job of monitoring their species and informing on habitat management practices that seem to benefit them. It certainly isn't an easy role, as working out if populations are changing in size, and then picking apart the multifarious factors that cause populations to grow or shrink, is far from straightforward.

One thing is certain: the hundreds of our members that submit records, the Species Champs that pour over them and try to understand what those records tell us, and the tens of you that venture out to participate in conservation work based upon our interpretation of those records, have ensured that no butterfly species has become extinct in our region in more than 25 years. And although it isn't a species with a Champ, the Downland Plume moth – which was long-believed extinct in the UK – was rediscovered in the UTB area and now gets special attention (just like some butterflies) to ensure that a species, unique to our region, continues to thrive.

The chart on the next page compares the number of colonies known to the UTB in 2004, 2014 and 2024. *Where any single colony 'begins and ends' is a subjective judgement; therefore, so is the absolute number of colonies. I have assumed that clusters of adjacent sites hold a single colony and have ignored singleton records away from known colonies. Other interpretations will produce different colony numbers, but I have applied the same criteria to all species and years. Numbers indicate trends rather than factual colony numbers.

Last time we looked at the first four species in the chart, and we now focus on the remaining key species.

It is worth noting that recorder effort has increased; so, even if the number of colonies had remained static, the data could show a slight rise in numbers due to more thorough coverage which revealed previously undetected colonies. Although the summer of 2024 was frequently wet, thus reducing the opportunity to record, the increased recorder effort is partly balanced out.

UTB Key Species	Number of extant colonies *		
	2004	2014	2024
Adonis Blue	6	7	14
Black Hairstreak	34	29	39
Brown Hairstreak	12	21	33
Chalk Hill Blue	18	21	16
Dark Green Fritillary	9	10	11
Dingy Skipper	29	36	42
Duke of Burgundy	6	5	5
Grayling	4	5	6
Green Hairstreak	22	31	42
Grizzled Skipper	18	16	12
Marsh Fritillary	1	1?	1?
Purple Emperor	12	15	17
Silver-spotted Skipper	5	6	5
Silver-studded Blue	4	3	3
Silver-washed Fritillary	5	33	39
Small Blue	22	24	23
White Admiral	15	23	22
White-letter Hairstreak	24	38	10
Wood White	8	7	5

Dark Green Fritillary. Like the other grassland species, though depending in this case on Violets growing on the edge of scrub, the Dark Green is suffering from loss of habitat as scrub takes over larger parts of the grasslands. Even some sites with work parties trying to keep it under control are gradually losing the grassland to scrub, and those without help are losing it faster. Total scrub cover is inimical, and sadly so too is turf kept very short for plants like gentians and sun-loving insects. So, we see a trend that is going in the wrong direction at all but the largest sites. At these, rotational cutting is continually re-creating new habitat as scrub regenerates into areas of more suitable scattered scrub, and a wider variety of aspects provide a wider range of temperatures. A warming climate doesn't appear to be helping, perhaps as it has accelerated the growth of scrub, or perhaps because the larvae struggle to overwinter in warmer late winters. This hasn't been studied, but a correlation with the loss of the butterfly from the warmest sites nationally is strongly suggestive of the need for sites to show microhabitat temperature plasticity.


Egg on young leaves growing above bare ground

Dingy Skipper. The most notable thing about this species is the way that climate warming has allowed a second brood in most recent years, with a trend for this brood to become more numerous. Whether this has benefited the species is hard to gauge, as 'new' colonies might only be formed amongst the more numerous first spring brood. The species appears at most sites with Birds-foot Trefoil growing in sparse vegetation, and appears able to persist for many years as small colonies, probably within a cluster of colonies in nearby suitable habitat. Such inter-dependent colonies are termed meta-populations. The rising number of colonies is thought to be a combined effect from climate warming and increased recorder efforts.


Looking for larvae that are eating the leaf

Duke of Burgundy. Much effort has gone into maintaining this species' habitat: sheltered clearings in scrub edge. The conservation of the species requires large areas where scrub (rich in large cowslip plants) can be constantly rotated through cycles of clearance and regrowth. Although the number of colonies is stable, the size of those in the Chilterns is growing. Praise is due to several landowners who have enthusiastically engaged in securing a future for the butterfly. Without their support in allowing the Branch to maintain scrubby grasslands and even create new areas of suitable habitat around the existing colonies, at least two of the colonies would have been lost.


Locating the eggshells from which the larvae hatched

Grayling. This species has been able to capitalise on the very thin soils under old military infrastructure at Greenham Common in West Berkshire and does well at two closely managed wildlife site in east Berkshire. There is also a thinly spread population in Swinley Forest. However, most of its former breeding areas have become unsuitable through development or neglect. Though it has very few colonies, it should remain at its current sites, provided that work to maintain the very open heathland that it needs can continue.

Green Hairstreak. No one has explained why a species with larvae that can develop on a wide range of common plants is so scarce. We know that it inhabits grassy areas with clumps of low scrub, sheltered by adjacent woodland or scrub belts. Why those in the Chilterns and Berkshire Downs are more frequently colonised than similar land elsewhere is unclear. Possibly the warmer rapidly draining soils of chalk and limestone assist in larval development, and, if that is so, it helps explain why the number of colonies is on the rise as temperatures rise with global warming. However, the Green Hairstreak is capable of breeding in very cold and exposed Scottish moors, so its patchy distribution in our region is somewhat of a mystery.

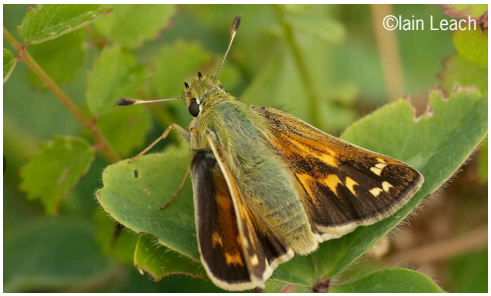
Grizzled Skipper. This is a species that can use many quite common plants as foodplants (e.g. Bramble), if they are in the right and very exacting micro-habitat. Eggs are laid on young leaves growing over bare soil, and this explains the problem that the species faces. With almost all soils now more fertile than in previous times, bare ground is a rarity. The gradual loss of colonies is presumably down to this vanishing habitat: areas of bare soil. In the West Midlands, concrete rubble is deliberately spread for the foodplants to grow over, and the bare concrete surfaces can re-create the habitat required.

Agrimony leaf chosen as it is over bare ground

Recording the larval web's development

Marsh Fritillary. it is a very long time since we had any 'natural' Marsh Fritillary colonies in the UTB. The species is very popular with 'breeders', and we suspect that there have been releases at many sites since 2019. One such presumed release on the Ashridge Estate (presumed because it is so far from any known colony that natural range expansion seems improbable) might be self-sustaining. Larvae have been found in three recent years, but it is impossible to know if they are the result of successful breeding or release, and whether the several adults seen annually came from locally developed larvae.

Purple Emperor. For some time, this species seemed to be increasing its range to occupy many types of habitats with sallow trees, rather than be confined to larger blocks of woodland (with sallow trees). Certainly, there is a small chance of encountering Purple Emperors anywhere across the three counties, but while some of the well-known haunts seem to have retained colonies and still provide reliable opportunities for sightings, several others have recently lost them. We think this is due to several very windy July periods over the last 5 years, which seem to be very destructive of adult Emperors. Most suitable sallow in woodland is along the ride edges, and is thus vulnerable to clearance during timber extraction - though at least two woods that seem to have lost colonies retain all their sallow.

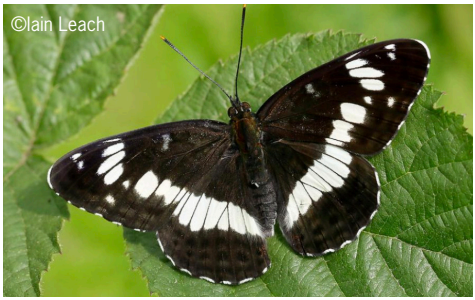


Silver-spotted Skipper. The UTB is the northern frontier of this thermophilic species. Currently some of our steeper, south-facing chalk hills provide both the larval foodplant (Sheep's-fescue grass) and the correct temperature ranges to host the butterfly. Further climate warming should benefit it, raising some slopes at other aspects above the critical temperature. However, Sheep's-fescue only persists in very short sparse turf, so if warmer climes also encourage other taller vegetation to flourish, the butterfly might lose out without the conservation work to control that growth.

Silver-studded Blue. Arguably the UTB's scarcest species, it is hugely dependent upon ants during its larval and pupal stages - and they in turn are very rare outside the warmest heathlands with stands of younger heathland plants. The few heathland habitats in our region are in sympathetic hands and should continue to receive the work required to halt succession from heathland to woodland; and, if so, the butterfly should be safe. There are plans to see some of the land between the remaining fragments reinstated to heath, which will help massively.

Silver-washed Fritillary. This species shows that – given the right conditions – very rare butterflies can make phenomenal recoveries. Undoubtedly the warming climate has helped, but some unknown factor besides that seems to have assisted the very welcomed expansion of the species from the south-west of our region right through every county of the UTB region… and well beyond. Fortunately, the caterpillars can develop on violets growing in the fairly dense shade that contemporary woods create.

Small Blue. Once considered a sedentary species, close study has shown that it has surprising powers of both dispersal and its ability to detect its foodplant (Kidney Vetch) growing at some distance from its home colony. Kidney Vetch is an ephemeral plant in most habitats, appearing soon after the creation of bare ground and disappearing again as more vigorous vegetation reasserts its control of the space. Some sites have such low nutrient levels in the soil that Kidney Vetch endures for tens of years, and they can host large populations - but most sites with this butterfly hold a few for several years before losing both foodplant and butterfly. Deliberate scarification and seeding can maintain colonies in those fertile habitats in danger of losing them.



White Admiral. Modern forestry practice leaves large blocks of woodland to mature before the whole patch is cleared. This suits the butterfly very well for a period of time, when the woodland is sufficiently shady for larval development and yet still sunlit in clear spaces throughout the wood. Before this 'Goldilocks' period the wood is too open; and after it, too densely shaded. About 30 years ago a large amount of earlier tree planting had brought many woods into this beneficial stage, but sadly most are passing through it and becoming too shady. Consequently, a species that was never widespread or common is slowly losing ground within the UTB region. However, where ash trees dominate the woodland, their extensive death through ash die-back could provide space for the species, presuming the dead trees are not immediately replaced by new planting.

White-letter Hairstreak. With its fortunes tied so closely to the life of elm trees, this species will undergo successive 'booms and busts' as waves of Dutch Elm Disease clear most elm trees from large areas about every 7-9 years. Some Wych Elms show more resistance than other species, and a single large tree can sustain colonies for 30 years; however, eventually, these too will succumb. The Branch sources and organises the planting of disease-resistant strains of elm, which - with just over four hundred planted so far - will contribute to a refugia that White-letter Hairstreaks can endure within during periods when other elm species around them are dying.


Planting disease-resistant Elms will help

Wood White. Despite the number of colonies appearing to be in gradual decline, we believe the species is in a better position now than ten years ago. Today's colonies are receiving more attention, with landowners with colonies assisting in conservation work to maintain the wide, flower-rich rides required; and some landowners near to known colonies are creating the same conditions in the hope that the Wood White will discover them. Once again, this species has declined as woodlands have become dense and shady. The spring brood of this species is highly dependent upon vetches growing in sheltered sunny positions, though summer broods can cope with more shade. Neither brood can cope if the ride borders are mown whilst larvae are feeding.


Larva feeding on a vetch in full sun

Climate warming is helping some species, and **our conservation work is helping them all**. Several species would probably be lost from the region without the essential work our Branch is undertaking. A largely unrecognised debt is owed to those that have quietly laboured for no personal reward and secured our butterflies' future for later generations to enjoy.

You have our unending gratitude.

Nick Bowles

Unless otherwise stated, all photos ©Nick Bowles

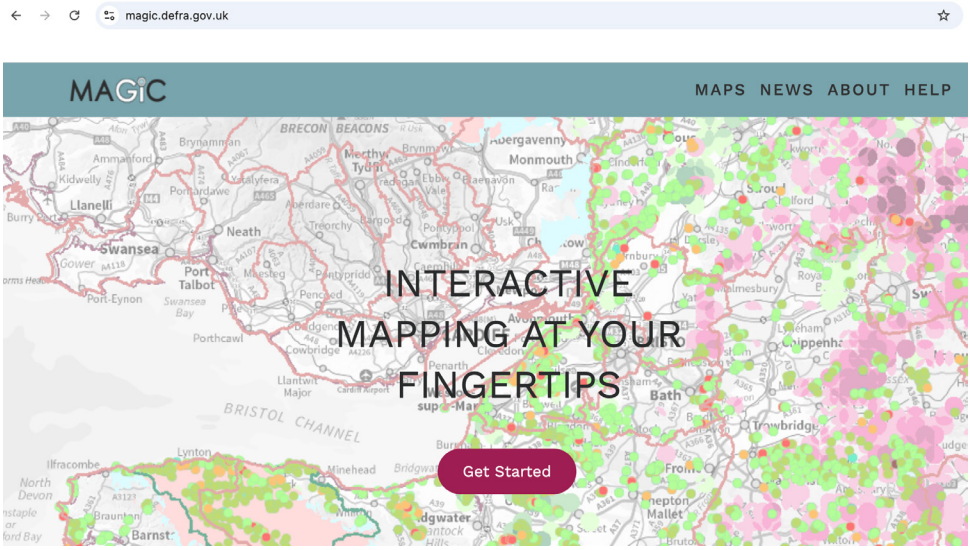
MAGIC Maps

MAGIC stands for **M**ulti-**A**gency **G**eographic **I**nformation for the **C**ountryside, which is an interactive map-based 'open resource' managed by Natural England under the direction of a Steering Group (at its conception in 2013) of partner organisations (comprising DEFRA, Historic England, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, the Marine Management Organisation and Natural England themselves).

One of the 'beauties' of **MAGIC** is that (according to **www.gov.uk**), *"You can download data from the Magic web page… and you do not need to pay or get permission to use Magic."* The resource contains much useful information (which is presented as a 'layer' on the underlying base map), such as:

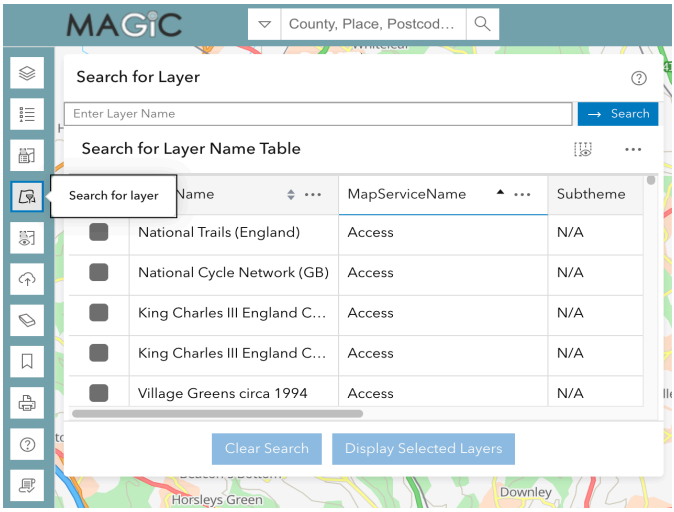
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- National Nature Reserves (England)
- Local Nature Reserves (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Lowland Calcareous Grassland (England)
- Land Management Initiatives (England)
- RSPB Reserves
- Countryside and Rights of Way (Section 15 Land, England)
- Priority Species for CS Targeting - Brown Hairstreak

MAGIC can be accessed from **magic.defra.gov.uk**
You'll be presented with the following homepage:

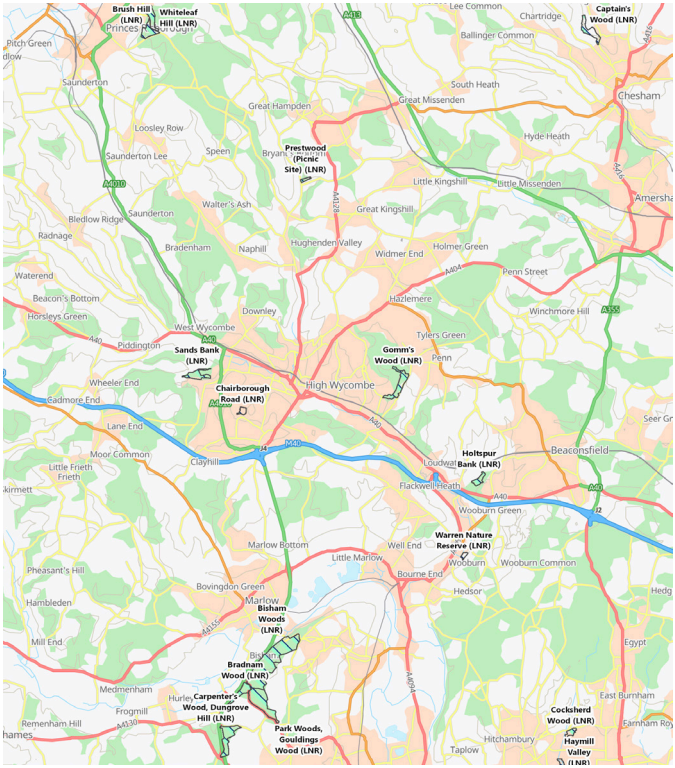


Having selected Get Started, you'll see various options on the left of the map (as shown here, right). Select 'Search for layer', then (to get the list of resources in alphabetical order) select the blue Search button (top right).

Tick the required resource (layer), then Display Selected Layers.



In the displayed map below, 'Local Nature Reserves' had been selected. The map was then adjusted and zoomed in to be centred on High Wycombe (by way of example).



You can select (tick) more than one resource (layer) in the same search, but - depending on what has been selected - this could present you with a 'cluttered' picture.

It is also possible to use **MAGIC** to search for a postcode or a 6-digit OS grid reference, by using the search bar at the top of the page (by first choosing the appropriate option from the search bar drop-down menu).

Why not give **MAGIC** a try?

Derek Haynes

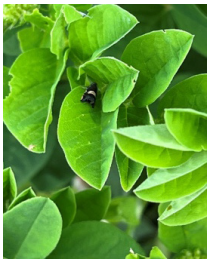
Upper Thames Moth Report 2025

Herewith an overview of some of the work done for the moths of the Upper Thames region in 2025.

Drab Looper. As it was such an early season for most species, an early survey was carried out to see if Drab Looper was on the wing on 1st May, far earlier than it would usually be seen, and three were recorded in the woods around Frilsham. On the 30th May a further search at Rushall Farm found six. Searches at Ashampstead Common once again failed to find any despite some suitable areas of wood spurge. A trip to Moor Copse on 30th May failed to find any Drab Looper and it seems to be becoming harder to find it on this once-good site, although John Lerpiniere did record two here on 26th May.

Drab Looper, Rushall Farm 2025

Grapholita Pallifrontana. The annual survey at the Earth Trust's Bushy Bank site for this moth was carried out on 31st May. Although not ideal conditions, being rather windy, 24 individuals were recorded. The population seems to have a better spread across the site than in the past and both the moth and the wild liquorice food plant seem to be doing well.



G.pallifrontana, Bushy Bank 2025

Searches for potential new sites for *Agonopterix atomella* and *Mirificarma lentiginosella*

Project Aim

To look at BBOWT sites that are listed as having Dyer's Greenweed in their plant list and then assess how much of this plant is present; and, if it is present, whether it hosts either of the rare micro moth species *Agonopterix atomella* or *Mirificarma lentiginosella* by surveying for the larvae.

Sites identified as having Dyer's Greenweed and survey results:

- **Bernwood Meadow**. SP6081510917. Surveyed on 26th May. No Dyer's Greenweed found.
- **Chawridge Bank**. SU89337386. Surveyed on 28th May. Good amounts of Dyer's Greenweed present. Two hour search found no evidence of either target species.
- **Asham Meads**. SP5901714318. Surveyed on 2nd June. Some patches of Dyer's Greenweed found but not abundant here. No evidence of target species.
- **Arncott Bridge Meadow**. SP6070218505. Surveyed on 2nd June. A few small patches of Dyer's Greenweed found. No evidence of target species and amount of food plant not likely to be sufficient to maintain a colony of either species.
- **Leaches Farm**. SP6070218505. Not able to survey: no access due to work being carried out by National Grid.

Thanks to Colin Williams and Louisa Reeve of BBOWT for information, help and permits. Also, my thanks to Nick Bowles (for 'showing me the ropes' on Atomella at MOD Otmoor) and Will Langdon and George Tordoff for useful tips and advice.

Four-spotted. A couple of searches were made to see if any evidence of Four-spotted as a breeding species in the Upper Thames could be found. Gareth Casburn recorded this moth near Woodstock in 2024 so this area was surveyed on 30th June. The site is large and contained lots of field bindweed, but the moth was not recorded during a two hour search. It was a nice butterfly site but has sadly been extensively planted up with trees, largely sycamore - no doubt in the name of conservation. Given this, it is probably not a site worth returning to.

The second site, on 4th July, was the area around Culham Lab. There are old records here and Will Atkinson has also recorded the moth in his Culham garden several times in recent years. Starting at the rough grass area next to Clifton Hampden Village Hall, and following the footpath around the back of Culham Labs, there is a fair bit of field bindweed in both. Also, some grassy fields behind the labs with some bindweed present but the moth was not recorded.

Pale Shining Brown (PSB). This species is almost certainly extinct. However, as we are currently helping a conservation group with baseline surveys for a 'Moths of the Evenlode Valley' project, we thought we could kill two birds with one stone! Stonesfield, the last Upper Thames site for the moth, is in this area. As well as lending the group a moth trap for its own surveys, we arranged to do a trapping session during the flight period for PSB, just on the off chance. So, on the 21st June, I trapped in a meadow close to the village and Marc Botham ran a few traps on Stonesfield Common. Unsurprisingly, we didn't record PSB - but at least recorded plenty of species for the Evenlode project.

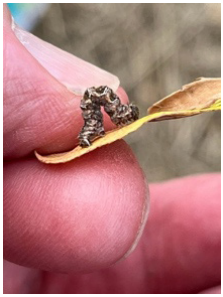
Striped Lychnis. A few UTB larval surveys were carried out. The National Trust had asked if we could include Green Farm, Hughenden. They have just taken back the management of the farm from a tenant farmer and were keen to know how the species was doing on the farm that was once a great site for it. The table below shows survey results. All have been iRecord-ed.

DATE	SITE	NUMBER OF DARK MULLEIN FLOWER SPIKES	NUMBER OF LARVAE
8/7/25	Culden Faw Estate	823	113
9/7/25	Watlington Hill	340	11
10/7/25	Green Farm	637	15
13/7/25	Holtspur Bottom	597	11
25/7/25	Caversham Heath G.C.	30	1

Scarce Burnished Brass (SBB). Marc Botham and I trapped at Thatcham Reedbeds on the 12th July. Unfortunately, we did not find the target species. Always a nice place to trap, though, and always some nice moth species (which included Webb's Wainscot, Crescent, Double Lobed, Mocha and Beautiful China Mark).
Peter Philp and I trapped on the 18th July, putting traps out at Parsonage and Dry Sandford. Again, sadly, we did not record SBB. Highlight of the evening for me was a

Chocolate-tip, a species I rarely see these days. Sad not to record SBB, but we will continue to look for it next year.

Barberry Carpet. The annual search at the only known site for this species in the Upper Thames took place on the 24th August. 23 Barberry bushes were beaten and that produced 22 larvae. A reasonable result which indicates the population remains stable. The table shows comparison to previous years.

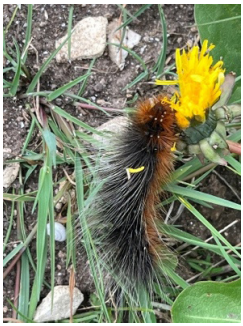


Barberry Carpet larvae from the 2025 survey

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
2024	33	29
2025	22	23

Barberry Carpet survey results by year

Wood Tiger. A larval search was carried out in April at the Devil's Punch Bowl near Hackpen Hill. This was not successful, but a nice consolation prize was finding three Garden Tiger larvae.



Garden Tiger larva, Devil's Punch Bowl

Sites on which we have been asked for help to survey moth species:

- **Wild Oakingham,** Oxfordshire. Rewilding project. Five surveys carried out in 2025. 158 species recorded to date.
- **Sulham Estate**, Berkshire. Rewilding project. Three surveys in 2025. 114 species recorded to date.
- **Holly Copse**, West Berkshire. Rewilding project. Two surveys in 2025. 105 species recorded to date.
- **Billingbear Farm**, Berkshire. Rewilding Project. One survey in 2025. 156 species recorded to date.
- **Bradfield College**, West Berkshire. Two surveys in 2025. 204 species recorded to date.
- **Stonesfield**, Oxfordshire. Evenlode moth project. Two surveys in 2025

Loan moth trap scheme

This continues to be a popular scheme with all available traps on loan again in 2025.

Peter Cuss
(August 2025)

Capturing the Essence

If you're reading this on a chilly midwinter's day, I hope you will feel warmed by words I wrote on a day that the mercury rose to high-summer levels.

I make several visits to Bernwood Meadows each summer, with at least one of these timed to see Black Hairstreaks when they first start to fly.

Sometimes, the small car park for the BBOWT reserve is empty, but the site's reputation as a hairstreak hotspot means it's not unusual to have the company of butterfly enthusiasts who've travelled many miles for the chance to see one of our most secretive species.

Bernwood Meadows is not only home to butterflies; as its name suggests, it also has a rich wildflower landscape that is worth the trip in its own right.

As with my four previous hairstreak poems, my words have emerged from personal experience. This time I've tried to capture the essence of many minutes of patient searching, broken (very eventually!) by that joyous 'Aha!' moment when the small creature I'd travelled to see deigned to descend from the top of a blackthorn bush… and land on a bramble flower right in front of me.

Only six months or so 'til I go looking again.

To the Hedge

A balmy wind-free day
Is made for a mid-June visit
To bewitching Bernwood,
And the short stroll,
Done quickly, to the hedge.

I'm not the first.
No, crushed grass
Publicises the trail
Of other initiates,
Devotees beside the hedge.

Long minutes of patience,
Flickering fancies of jerky flight:
I scan the thick prunus -
Surely there's one up there?
I lay siege to the hedge.

'Is it?' 'Was it?' moments:
My twitcher's eyes defeated.
Time to go home?
Or give it five more minutes…
And stay here by the hedge?

A teleportation
Breaks my creeping stupor,
Routs the blur, as lens and
Retina find their range:
I lean towards the hedge.

I freeze, my heart runs hot.
Satyrium settles, sashays, sucks
On a rubus flower.
The busy world put on hold
By the sprite of the hedge.

Paul Gamble

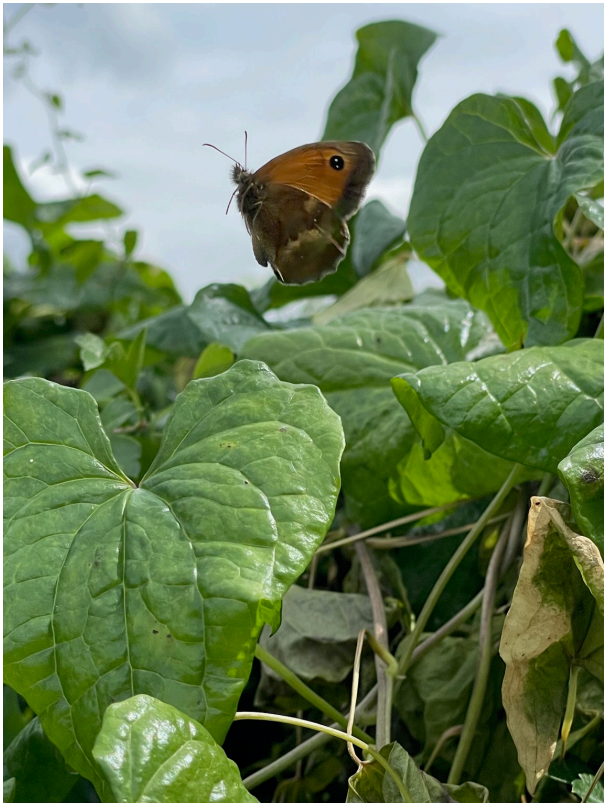
Members' Day 2025 Photographic Competition: the Results

Once again, the overall quality of the entries was outstanding - only partly offset by the smaller number of both images and entrants. I strongly suspect that this was due to the delayed publication of the autumn *Hairstreak* (mine arriving after the closing date!).

Anyway, 16 members, again including quite a few new names, submitted a total of 88 images across the four categories. Excellent photos throughout, as always, making judging very difficult. However, the category winners and runners-up were:

UK Butterflies:

- Third equal were Graham Parkinson's Chalk Hill Blue, and David Hastings' Brown Hairstreak
- Second was Nancy Massie's Large Skipper
- **Winner was the delightful image of a Gatekeeper, snapped in flight (below) by Lorraine Mossolf**



Overseas Butterflies:

- Third was a Bath White from Sicily by John Hemmings
- Second was a Red Lacewing from Thailand by Nancy Massie
- **Winner was John Hemmings with his perfect image of a Common Tiger Blue taken in Dubai (below)**

Moths: again, a split decision

- Third equal were a Small Yellow Underwing, by David Hastings, and Phil Tizzard's Orange Swift
- Second was Graham Parkinson's mating pair of 5-spot Burnets
- **The clear winner was David Hastings with his nectaring Mint Moth (below)**

Immature Stages: we had a much larger number of pictures of ova this year; however, the winners were all photos of larvae

- Third was a Buff Ermine by Simon Collings
- Second, a Striped Lychnis from John Hemmings
- **The winning entry, a group of sinister looking Peacock larvae (below) taken by David Hastings**

It was noticeable that all the winning entries were of common species (even if only in name), so there is no need to seek out rarities. 2026 could be the Meadow Brown's year!

Many thanks to all the entrants, and learning from this year, please don't wait for a reminder from the autumn *Hairstreak* to send your photos in!

Some of the runners-up entries will feature in a later issue of *Hairstreak*.

I received several questions and comments about the judging process, on the day, so if you would like to be involved in judging the entries next year or have ideas about how we could set up a simple, free, transparent, and robust online voting system, I'd like to hear from you. (I'm certain all our members are as honest as the day is long, but as a former Presiding Officer, I'd be concerned about the potential for the appearance of 'election fraud'!).

Peter Thompson
plthompson127@gmail.com

Winter Conservation Tasks 2025-26

The most important activities that we undertake are our conservation tasks. I'm not the only one who thinks so. Various surveys in the last two years showed that between 71% and 92% of people living in G20 countries agree that 'Nature' is damaged and that wildlife needs intervention to save it. The higher figure of 92% was from a UK survey. One survey asked if new technologies alone, (i.e. without direct human action) will solve environmental problems. Only 39% of G20 respondents thought that they might, further highlighting the very widespread belief that active human effort is required. With most of us having agreed that more action is required, it is odd that so few people do anything practical to help nature.

Dogwood Removal at Triangle Bank 27th November 2025 ©Nick Bowles

Unless **we** act to create and maintain suitable habitats, many of the butterflies and moths you love will vanish. No-one else is going to do it for us. We undertake conservation events all year but most noticeably in winter and **we need you to come along and help**.

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

Please bring a drink and a snack and dress appropriately for the forecast weather. Work parties start at **10.00** unless otherwise stated and at Holtspur Bottom usually finish about 13.00, though in good weather conditions they may continue to about 13.30 and those with Chiltern Rangers usually continue until about 15.00 (for those that choose to stay) – but they do provide free hot drinks and biscuits!

PLEASE… ALWAYS CONTACT THE TASK LEADER IN ADVANCE as **details frequently change** according to weather, number of volunteers etc. The details of each event will be shown on the Events page of the UTB website: **https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/events**. Butterfly Conservation prefers that members (like you) register your intent to attend with Assemble. Please contact Nick Bowles in the first instance, and he can send you a link for Assemble and let you know if details of an event change… **nick.bowles@ntlworld.com** **07727 441376**, **or** for events jointly with **Chiltern Rangers** (with CR in the site name column) you could register with the Chiltern Rangers' Eventbrite page.

Apologies if some of the tasks listed below have already taken place!

Date	Site Name	Meeting point/parking	Task
14/12/2025	Aston Upthorpe	Park on track by grain dryer nearest postcode OX11 9DS (Grid ref SU550844) /// claw.excavate.refer	Scrub control
18/12/2025	Bucklebury Common Nb. 09.30-13.30	For details of parking and meet point please email ranger@buckleburyestate.com	Maintaining heathland
22/12/2025	Far Kingdom CR	At far north-east of Golf Club parking area HP27 9NX (Grid Ref SP79800078) ///craziest.signal.asked	Scrub and grass control & raking (with bonfire)
02/01/26 and possibly on 06/01/26	Buttlers Hangings CR	**Possibly** Pay and Display car park at 09.50 shuttle bus to site HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks **or** sometimes park near Slough Lane junction HP14 3AS (Grid ref SU819955) ///voting.mime.cats	Scrub and grass control, raking (with bonfire) + poss. planting
08/01/2026	Wardrobes CR	Parking at private property HP27 0RH (Grid Ref SP81780170) ///darkest.superhero.inventors	Scrub control with bonfire
11/01/2026	Holtspur Bottom	Parking along very narrow single track with only one passing place - at **nearby** Postcode HP9 1BT (grid ref SU918906) ///manage.banana.chimp or on Cherry Tree Rd., Holtspur & walking 500m on footpath. HP9 1BH (SU922904) ///flute.spoken.wizard	Scrub and grass control
18/01/2026	Aston Upthorpe	Park on track by grain dryer nearest postcode OX11 9DS (Grid ref SU550844) /// claw.excavate.refer	Scrub control
22/01/2026	Far Kingdom CR	At far north-east of Golf Club parking area HP27 9NX (Grid Ref SP79800078) ///craziest.signal.asked	Scrub and grass control, raking with bonfire

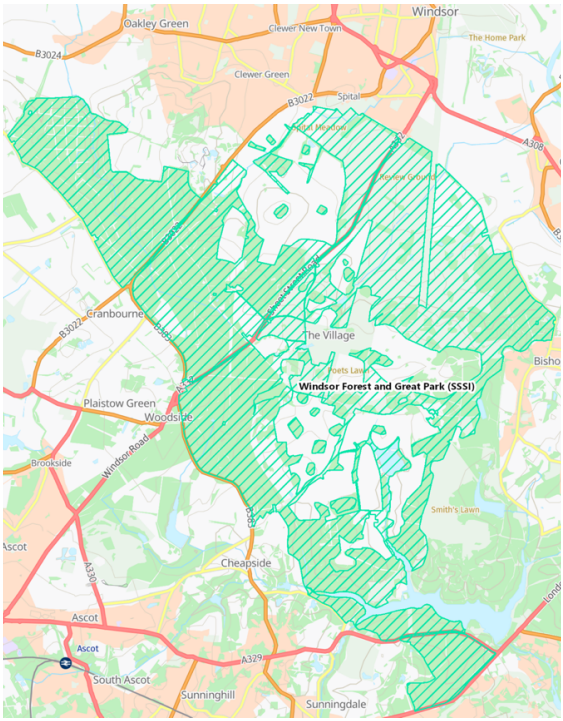
Date	Site Name	Meeting point/parking	Task
26/01/2026	Buttlers Hangings CR	**Pay and Display car park** at 09.50 shuttle bus to site HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks or sometimes possible to park on Slough Lane junction HP14 3AS (Grid ref SU819955) ///voting.mime.cats	Scrub and grass control; raking
27/01/2026	Small Dean Lane Bank NT CR	Park in NT yard HP27 0PR (grid ref SU821988**) ///**twit.puzzles.holds	Scrub and grass control; raking.
03/02/2026	Dean Farm CR	On verge in grass field HP14 4JG (Grid Ref SU80389826) ///unloading.inched.curtail	Scrub and grass control, raking
08/02/2026	Holtspur Bottom	Parking along very narrow single track with only one passing place - **near** Postcode HP9 1BT (grid ref SU918906) ///manage.banana.chimp **or** on Cherry Tree Rd., Holtspur & walking 500m on footpath. HP9 1BH (SU922904) ///flute.spoken.wizard	Scrub and grass control; raking
10/02/2026	Westcott Venture Park CR	Meet at café parking HP18 0XB (Grid Ref SP714173) ///plan.assemble.townhouse	Scrub and grass control; raking
13/02/2026	Coombe Hill CR	Roadside layby HP17 0TZ (Grid Ref SP84710712) ///alternate.digesting.share or possibly Ellesborough GC HP17 0TZ ///supper.fills.stooping – **please check the day before.**	Scrub and grass control; raking
15/02/2026	Aston Upthorpe CR	Park on track by grain dryer nearest postcode OX11 9DS (Grid ref SU550844) /// claw.excavate.refer	Scrub and grass control
17/02/2026	Swyncombe Down CR	in off road parking at RG9 6ED (Grid Ref SU666914) ///acrobats.disgraced.diverting	Scrub and grass control; raking
24/02/2026	Wadborough Field NT CR	Parking at Pitstone Hill (NT) car park LU7 9EN (Grid Ref SP95501493) ///cashier.gobbling.coaster	Scrub and grass control

Date	Site Name	Meeting point/parking	Task
26/02/2026	Westcott Venture Park CR	Meet at café parking HP18 0XB (Grid Ref SP714173) ///plan.assemble.townhouse	Scrub and grass control
01/03/2026	Holtspur Bottom (provisional date)	Parking along very narrow single track with only one passing place - **near** Postcode HP9 1BT (grid ref SU918906) ///manage.banana.chimp or on Cherry Tree Rd., Holtspur & walking 500m on footpath. HP9 1BH (SU922904) ///flute.spoken.wizard	Scrub and grass control; raking
03/03/2026	Buttlers Hangings CR	**Pay and Display car park** at 09.50 shuttle bus transfer to site HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks or sometimes possible to park on Slough Lane junction HP14 3AS (Grid ref SU819955) ///voting.mime.cats	Scrub and grass control; raking
08/03/2026	Aston Upthorpe	Park on track by grain dryer nearest postcode OX11 9DS (Grid ref SU550844) /// claw.excavate.refer	Scrub and grass control
10/03/2026	Buttlers Hangings CR	**Pay and Display car park** at 09.50; shuttle bus transfer to site HP14 3AP (Grid Ref SU82659474) ///horses.luck.risks or sometimes possible to park on Slough Lane junction HP14 3AS (Grid ref SU819955) ///voting.mime.cats	Scrub and grass control; raking
20/04/2026	Winchester Wood CR **11am vol start**	In Thames Water parking HP27 0RH (Grid Ref SP82180192) ///arranges.plums.successes	Grass control, raking & watering cowslips.

If you know of tasks near your home that benefit butterflies and moths and that are not on this list, we are happy to display information on our web pages. Please contact **nick.bowles@ntlworld.com**

Windsor Forest: Then and Now

Much of Windsor Forest and Windsor Great Park (within the wider Windsor Estate) first gained SSSI status in 1973, being second only to the New Forest regarding the diversity of its invertebrate fauna (being especially noted for its rare beetles, for example, Violet Click Beetle, first recorded in Windsor Forest in 1937; and flies). Some extremely rare fungi also occur, as does a diverse flora. The key habitat features are the large numbers of ancient and veteran trees, and areas of ancient species-rich acid grassland. The area has also been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (and additional forestry areas are within a Special Protection Area for the Conservation of Wild Birds (SPA)), reflecting its high ecological importance at both national and international levels. Windsor Forest and Windsor Great Park (taken as a whole) comprises a mix of land uses, with ancient and re-planted woodland, open parkland, wood pasture, grassland, farmed land, waterbodies and ornamental gardens. The map below shows its extent today.



If one were to look at old maps of the area, Windsor Forest (with the term forest referring to its original use for hunting, rather than as a place for growing timber) seemingly referred to an area much larger than that shown here. This presents uncertainty over historical records of butterflies and moths marked as having been 'taken in Windsor Forest'.

On a wet September morning in 2025, I was debating whether to undertake some overdue domestic duties or, alternatively, trawl through records for Windsor Forest in the Natural History Museum's vast collection of specimens[1]. You might have guessed which path I took! (I **am** a tad biased, given that the area in question is 'on my doorstep', so of particular interest on many fronts.)

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

Anyway, I was quite surprised to discover the identity of some of the specimens from the Museum's collection tagged with 'Windsor Forest', as you'll see from this list of the more unexpected records (for our region - or at least this part of it):

- Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- High Brown Fritillary
- Grayling
- Wall
- Feathered Footman moth *Coscinia (Spiris) striata*

The very rare migrant, Feathered Footman, only ever recorded in Britain a handful of times (all in the nineteenth century), was recorded here (shown left… without abdomen!).

The other butterfly species attributed to Windsor Forest in the collection are Silver-washed Fritillary, Green-veined White, Small Copper, Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Orange-tip, Ringlet; Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Large Skipper, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Small Heath (some things don't change!); with the only other moths recorded there being Grey Birch, Common Carpet, Elephant Hawk-moth and Small Elephant Hawk-moth. (It is, however, worth noting that not all records relating to the collection have yet been digitised - so the above lists can't be relied upon as being complete.)

The picture today, though, is somewhat different. Despite the number of species (and their distribution) having declined, we can at least be more assured of the integrity and accuracy of the data.

Des Sussex is the 10km-square Champion for this part of our region and works on the Windsor Estate. He has kindly provided the following data for the Estate, some of which has been obtained from Brian Baker's 1994 book *The Butterflies and Moths of Berkshire* (where Windsor Forest is denoted by 'WF' and Windsor Great Park by 'WGP'). The text italicised below relates to extracts from Brian Baker's book.

- **Purple Hairstreak**: *1971, 1983 fairly common*. Still common/abundant
- **White-letter Hairstreak**: *1971-75 Silwood*. One 2023 record from WGP
- **Silver-studded Blue**: *1978 South Ascot*. Recent recovery in Buttersteep Forest and Swinley Forest; occasionally in Swinley Park
- **Wood White**: *1972 WF thought to be a vagrant or escapee*
- **White Admiral**: *1971, 1979, 1983 WF & WGP*. Still present, but very scarce

- **Purple Emperor**: *1985 Englemere Ascot (within the Windsor Estate).* Still present… seen in numerous locations… a few records most years
- **Camberwell Beauty**: *1970 Silwood, 1976 Windsor*. No recent data
- **Large Tortoiseshell**: no data
- **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**: *1971 WF*
- **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**: no mention in the book/no recent data
- **High Brown Fritillary**: *June and July 1934 WGP common on thistles but hardly seen since*. No recent data
- **Dark Green Fritillary**: recorded in a forest south of Ascot in 1990s
- **Silver-washed Fritillary**: no mention in the book. Now quite common and widespread
- **Marsh Fritillary**: *1976, one seen at Silwood Park adjacent to WF*
- **Wall Brown**: *1969, '70, '71, '72*. No recent records
- **Marbled White**: *1966, '71 Silwood Park*. Now quite common
- **Grayling**: *1974 Caesars Camp, 1975, '84 Crowthorne, 1978 Rapley, 1976 South Ascot (Crowthorne Woods/Swinley & Buttersteep Forests).* Currently widespread in these forestry areas

Des also adds: "Moving to present times, some of those species have been lost; yet over the last few years 30 butterfly species have been recorded in Windsor Forest and Great Park… although not all are thriving. Important species like the White Admiral seem to be just about 'hanging on'.

"The woodland specialists are impacted by both a lack of sunny clearings within large areas of rather dense shaded woodland and excessive browsing of larval food-plants and nectar sources by the high numbers of deer. Dense bracken (unpalatable to deer) smothering ground flora is also a problem. All these issues are being actively addressed by the Crown Estate's forestry team. The Purple Emperor is seen in small numbers in most years, and Silver-washed Fritillary appears to be doing quite well across the wider area. A single White-letter Hairstreak (2023) gives a glimmer of hope that some unrecorded colonies may exist; there is plenty of Elm scrub and the Estate has planted some disease-resistant Elms in recent years. On the varied flowery grasslands Marbled White has increased a lot, and Small Heath is still widespread.

"Additionally, the Silver-studded Blue and Grayling occur in the wider Windsor Estate on the extensive areas of commercial forestry south of Ascot and Bracknell, and both are increasing with habitat restoration. There has also been some effort in recording moths over the last 30 years, with well over 600 species recorded, of which the Heart Moth is probably the most significant in terms of conservation, it being a species that seems to be closely associated with the ancient oaks in the parkland and woodlands."

Wouldn't it be exciting, though, if we could go back in time 100 years or so - and see for ourselves exactly what was going down in Windsor Forest!

Derek Haynes

An Introduction to the Micro Moths of the UTB Region (Part 1)

Following brief introductions to the butterflies and the macro moths of the UTB area in previous editions of *Hairstreak*, we now turn to the much less well known 'micro' moths that can be found in our area. However, they are even more numerous than the macro moths, (far too many to introduce each one individually), and we must confine ourselves to looking at their families (nearly 50!) in order to get some idea of the number and variety of these fascinating creatures.

Hedge Beauty – ©Dave Wilton

The traditional division between micro moths and macro moths is primarily a matter of **evolutionary history** and **taxonomy**, not strictly size, and is thus an unscientific grouping. The 'micro' and 'macro' labels are historical conveniences, with the key difference being that micro moths belong to families that evolved earlier and are therefore regarded as more primitive.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature estimates that there are about 160,000 moth species globally. They also estimate that about 70% of all moths may be micros. This puts the global number of micro moth species in the order of 110,000! Europe is rather impoverished, with only around 10,000 species, of which about 7,000 are micros; and whilst the tradition of studying moths has been going on in the UK as long as anywhere in the world, only around 1,600 of our c.2,500 moth species are micros.

Citizen science in the UK means we have a better understanding of our lepidoptera species, including 'micros' than in many other areas of the world. This is reflected in the fabulous **Upper Thames Moths website**, which hosts an amazing amount of detail for most of our moth species, including micros. I would strongly commend this website to all our readers as it includes photographs, distribution maps, flight times and further details for most of our micro species, as well as for the macros.

The following table shows the first 27 of 49 moth families that are currently regarded as micro moths in the UK (and UTB region). For each family we present its scientific family name and its most commonly used English name. It also gives an approximate number of **UK species** & **UTB species**, as well as an example species for each family.

The remaining 22 families will be featured in Part 2 (next time); and we will also look in more detail at our butterflies and moths in future editions of *Hairstreak*.

Micropterigidae: Jaw moths 5 Species_5 Species	***Eriocraniidae:*** Sparkling Archaic Sun moths 8 Species_8 Species	***Nepticulidae:*** Pygmy moths 97 Species_88 Species
 *Plain Pollen-moth*	 *Common Spring Jewel*	 *Maple Dot*
Opostegidae: White Eye-cap moths 4 Species_2 Species	***Heliozelidae:*** Shield-bearer moths 6 Species _6 Species	***Adelidae:*** Fairy Longhorn moths 14 Species_12 Species
 *Sorrel Cap*	 *Oak Cutter*	 *Yellow-banded Longhorn*
Incurvariidae: Leafcutter moths 5 Species_5 Species	***Prodoxidae:*** Yucca moths 7 Species_5 Species	***Tischeriidae:*** Trumpet Leafminer moths 6 Species_4 Species
 *Feather Cutter*	 *Raspberry Shoot Borer*	 *Oak Blotch-miner*

Psychidae: Bagworm moths 18 Species_7 Species	**Tineidae:** Fungus moths 63 Species_38 Species	**Roeslerstammiidae:** Roeslerstammiid moths 2 Species_1 Species
		
White-speckled Bagworm	*Four-spotted Fungus Moth*	*Burnished Copper*
Bucculatricidae: Ribbed-cocoon Makers 13 Species_10 Species	**Gracillariidae:** Leaf Blotch Miners 98 Species_88 Species	**Yponomeutidae:** Ermine moths 24 Species_20 Species
		
Buckthorn Tuft	*Ilex Leaf-miner*	*Black-tipped Ermine*
Ypsolophidae: Ypsolophid moths 18 Species_15 Species	**Plutellidae:** Diamond-back moths 17 Species_7 Species	**Glyphipterigidae:** Sedge moths 14 Species_11 Species
		
Long-barred Ochre	*Streaked Diamond-backed*	*Woodland Sedge moth*

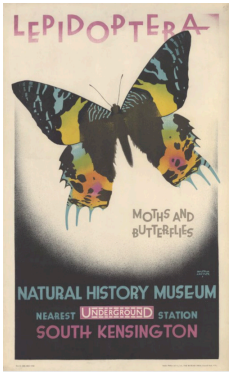
Argyresthiidae: Shiny Head-standing moths 24 Species_24 Species  *Gold W*	**Praydidae:** False Ermine moths 6 Species_4 Species  *Ash Bud moth*	**Lyonetiidae:** Lyonet moths 8 Species_6 Species  *Blackthorn Blister moth*
Bedelliidae: Bedelliids 1 Species_1 Species  *Bindweed Sleeper*	**Scythropiidae:** Scythropiids 1 Species_1 Species  *Hawthorn Moth*	**Douglasiidae:** Douglas moths 2 Species_1 Species  *Speckled Bugloss moth*
Autostichidae: Yellownecks, etc. 5 Species_3 Species  *Four-spotted Yellowneck*	**Oecophoridae:** Concealer moths 27 Species_19 Species  *Hedge Beauty*	**Chimabachidae:** Chimabachid moths 3 Species_3 Species  *Early Reveller*

A huge thank you to Dave Wilton for use of his fabulous photos to illustrate this introduction to our micro moths.

I hope Part 1 of this article inspires you to find out more about these lovely creatures and encourages you to help our moths as well as our butterflies.

Peter Philp

Let's Play 'Hunt the Skipper'

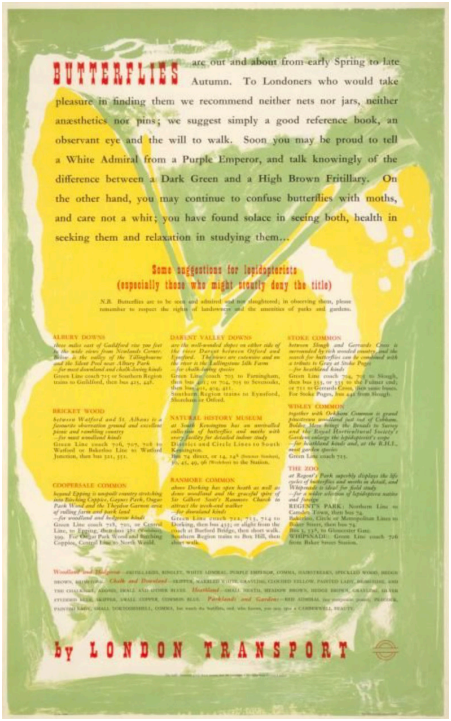


Almost 100 years ago, the Canadian-born commercial artist Austin Cooper produced this poster for London Underground to promote the Natural History Museum's vast collection of lepidoptera.

Between 1922 and 1944, he produced at least 137 posters for both London Underground and (from 1933) London Transport (under whose umbrella all London public transport now operated).

I'm nowhere near old enough to have seen this poster back in the day, when it presumably could be spotted in and around London's transport network - but I did spend many hours looking through the Natural History Museum's amazing collection of specimens in the 60s. I believe the collection is now only accessible by special appointment.

A handful of other posters were also commissioned by London Transport over the years to promote butterflies and moths, including, in 1952, the one below (left) which tells the viewer that they will be able to **'talk knowingly about the difference between a Dark Green and a High Brown Fritillary'!**



And in 1967 the one (below, right), which tells you, 'High on the chalk downs you will be able to… play **Hunt the Skipper**'.

Perhaps a new poster is now due - not just to encourage us to get out and about to enjoy our wonderful natural environment, but to incorporate a message to promote conservation at the same time. I'm working on it!

Derek Haynes

Better Late than Never?

The early part of November was unusually mild, so it was no surprise that most of our hibernating butterflies were seen 'out and about' by members.

What was surprising, perhaps, was that the mild conditions encouraged activity by other species. Holly Blue, for example, was reported on 4th November by David Hastings (alongside) and by Paul Bowyer and Karen Roberts on 13th - a species not normally seen beyond the beginning of September.

Even more surprising was the colony of Large White caterpillars discovered by Peter Thompson (below) in his garden on 21st November - despite some sub-zero overnight temperatures. This species' larvae would normally have pupated by the end of September, so one wonders whether they will survive to adulthood.

Of course, many of our moths were still on the wing, including this pretty Scarce Umber (below), photographed by Peter Cuss on a chilly 17th November evening torchlight walk.

Derek Haynes

Everywhere and Anywhere: Mothing Indoors

A dark shape nestled in the angle between wall and ceiling on our landing was clearly a moth, but which species? I couldn't see any colour, but it looked settled, so I headed off to get my camera. A few shots quickly revealed its identity as a smart-looking Double-striped Pug. Not by any means rare, but it was the first time I had ever found one indoors.

Double-striped Pug

A few days previously I had found a Many-plumed Moth indoors on a windowsill, only the second I had ever seen, and these two events prompted me to wonder just how many moth species I had ever recorded indoors.

A quick search of my database revealed the answer. My 'indoor list' totalled 23 species, of which 14 were new for me at the time I recorded them. And what is more, of those fourteen, there were five species which I have only ever recorded indoors![1]

The most numerous species on the indoor list is Bee Moth, no doubt because we regularly get several wasp nests in our attic. In fact, one year they almost reached plague proportions, with up to 20 settled on the walls in the late evening. I'm afraid my wife took a dislike to them (they are not toilet-trained) and started disposing of them. I lost count after about 170!

Next most frequent is the micro moth with a name longer than itself, *Mompha subbistrigella*, but its cousin *Mompha jurassicella* is one of those species that I have only ever recorded indoors.

Mompha subbistrigella

And the moral of this story? Well, there isn't one, except perhaps that moths are everywhere and anywhere. But now I have a new list to maintain, in addition to my life list, my garden list, my leaf-mine list, my larva list and...

Phil Tizzard
[Photos ©Phil Tizzard]

[1] **HOT OFF THE PRESS:** I've just added one to the list (Mompha divisella) that appears to be a first for Bucks and fourth for the UTB region (data up to 2022)!

The Long Wait

Small Tortoiseshell
Aglais urticae

Safely inside the garden shed,
Dormant throughout the winter's cold,
Fixed upright to its wooden bed,
Its, and its lover's, lives on hold.

But when the time to Spring's too long,
The itch for butterflies too great,
The urge to see those wings too strong,
I know that I don't have to wait.

Arising from the warming hearth,
So captivated by the spell,
I tiptoe down the gravel path
And check to see that all is well.

Until, one glorious vernal day,
I fling the shed door open wide.
My winter muse is on its way –
And leaves an empty space inside.

Too soon the summer sun will burn
Less bright and, though I'll pine once more,
The wanderer's offspring will return
And I shall gently close the door.

This poem seems appropriate for the winter edition of *Hairstreak*. It is from my book *The Butterfly Collection* and is reproduced with permission of the publishers, Brambleby Books.

Rikki Harrington

It's Not Every Day...

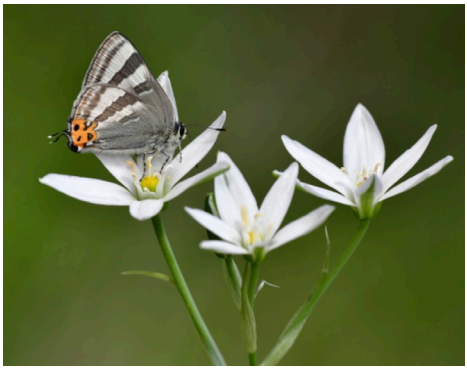
The *Lycaenidae* family of butterflies includes the *Theclinae* group (the hairstreaks), of which we have five members in the UK (and, indeed, in our region). Members of the *Theclinae* group are described as **thecline** (not a term often seen or used).

This is only relevant here in the context of a recent discovery in the Republic of Turkey: **a new thecline species of butterfly**. (Thanks to Roy Booth for bringing this discovery to our attention through the *UTB Butterflies and Moths of the Upper Thames region* Facebook Group pages.)

On 4th June 2024 naturalist Süleyman Erdeğer captured an unusual (worn and damaged) male butterfly in west-central Turkey (provisionally identified as *Rapala/Atara arata*), with other individuals also seen and photographed. It materialised that there was no record of this butterfly west of eastern Asia (some 7,500km away)! The captured specimen was subsequently dissected, and although there was damage to its genitalia, some minor differences were noted from specimens from eastern populations.

The location of the 2024 sightings was revisited in April 2025, when fresh specimens were collected, including a pair in copula. The species has since been scientifically described as ***Rapala suleymani* sp. n. (Solomon's Tiger).**

And what a stunning species it is, too:



Very occasionally, we humans have butterfly aberrations named after us. UTB member Wendy Campbell was such a person, who, in 2011, discovered a Green Hairstreak in Buckinghamshire with distinctly enlarged underside white markings… which was subsequently described in *The Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation as* ***Callophrys rubi* ab. dennisorum Campbell.**

Derek Haynes

In Buckinghamshire, the Bucks Invertebrate Group organises a lot of field trips which include studying butterflies and especially moths. Their list of field trips is available on their website **https://sites.google.com/site/bucksinvertebrategroup/**

In Berkshire, the Berkshire Moth Group holds regular meetings on the second Thursday of every month. They organise other events as well. Refer to their website for details **https://sites.google.com/site/berksmoths/Home**

Upper Thames Branch Website

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk
https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/upper-thames-branch

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

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

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

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