



Hairstreak



ISSUE 129 | SPRING 2026



This Grizzled Skipper was recorded by Mark Smith at Incombe Hole (Bucks) on 1st April 2025 - the earliest-ever record for the species in the UTB region. However, it is in significant decline - having dropped by almost 50% in abundance nationally since records began in 1976 (and thus categorised by UKBMS as being in very highly significant decline). Read our worrying report on Page 6 regarding the long- and short-term trends for each of our butterflies.



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Upper Thames
Branch**



www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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Cover image: Grizzled Skipper (Incombe Hole, Bucks, 1st April 2025 ©Mark Smith)

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First Thoughts

Welcome to *Hairstreak*.



With such a miserable start weatherwise to 2026, the first non-hibernating butterfly recorded in our region was believed to be a Holly Blue in Oxon on 4th March.

Despite the fact that the spring of 2025 was sunny and the summer hot, producing perfect conditions for some of our species, Butterfly Conservation (BC)'s Big Butterfly Count showed that the mean number of insects per count was only average (despite its being considered to be the most successful in its 14-year history, with 1.7 million butterflies and moths recorded), indicating that populations need more than just good weather to flourish.

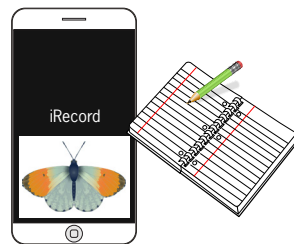
In November 2025, BC reported that membership numbers had risen to over 41,000, and that it had delivered conservation action in 64 landscapes across the UK in 2024-25. Furthermore, more than 2,000 advisory visits were made to over 1,000 sites, giving landowners guidance on creating or improving habitats for butterflies and moths; and more than 3,200 volunteers had been registered. All highly encouraging.

Locally, a huge effort was expended over the winter months across our region's landscapes, giving our species a welcomed helping hand. Fantastic work, all (though much, much more still needs to be done)!

Regarding still more to be done, the Branch is looking for volunteers to adopt the remaining eight Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) 'squares' (2x parallel 1km walks in July and August). Yes, **just 2 days** (of your choosing) **in mid-summer!** The WCBS is a vital part of the national UKBMS scheme (as can be seen from our **Butterfly Winners and Losers** article on page 6). Further details of the history of the UKBMS will be found in the article '50 Years and (Still) Counting' on page 16.

The nature and climate charity Heal Rewilding recently conducted a fascinating national survey into people's recollection of real-life experiences with wildlife when they were children. Take a look [here](#) to see which creatures were most loved among those who took part in the survey (and on page 18 below for which creature got top spot). 83% of respondents were aged 40-79, which might suggest a disconnect between younger folk and nature. Hopefully not!

As the main butterfly season is now under way, just a reminder that we ask for all sightings (of moths as well as butterflies) to be documented... as **every record counts!**



You can keep abreast of all the latest sightings from our region by visiting either our website [here](#) or our Facebook Group pages [here](#).

Have a great season - and stay in touch!

Derek Haynes
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View from the Chair

As the first resident butterflies emerge from hibernation, I am delighted to welcome you to our Spring 2026 newsletter. This is a landmark year for Butterfly Conservation as we reach the culmination of our five-year strategy to halve the number of threatened species and transform 100,000 wild spaces across the UK.

It's good to report a number of successes:

- Winter counts of Brown Hairstreak eggs have shown impressive numbers particularly in areas where our volunteers and local landowners have been managing blackthorn. BC's campaign to reduce hedgerow cutting is also paying dividends with many farmers now only cutting every other year.



Don't forget that we are working closely with BBOWT to help them deliver their **RBOR** project. We are leading on the surveying and monitoring of all five Hairstreak species. This gives you a great opportunity to get involved in using UV torches to search for Brown Hairstreak larvae over the coming weeks; and adult Hairstreaks of all five species later in the year. Please let us know if you would like to be involved.

- Nick Bowles has been very busy in the Chilterns with the **Bradenham Dukes**, looking to secure populations in the area of the NT property. Elsewhere the **Brilliant Butterflies** initiative is looking to improve things for chalk grassland species. Watch this space for a possible project on the Berkshire Heaths.

- Meanwhile, recent data show that butterfly numbers have risen by 350% at sites benefiting from local council wilding programmes. This includes more effort in roadside nature reserves, and other work.

Nationally, we continue to battle habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change, which are driving long-term declines in over half of the UK's butterfly species.

BC also continues to champion the **Manifesto for Butterflies**, urging the Government to double budgets for species recovery. Our focus remains on landscape-scale restoration to counter the fragmentation caused by climate change. This year, we are especially focused on making nature accessible to all, ensuring every community has a Wild Space within a 15-minute walk.

Of course, it's not all sunshine and nectar. Nationally, we're still very much in a 'Butterfly Emergency' - despite 2025 being a better year for many of our butterflies than the record lows of 2024. It's a bit of a wake-up call that even a decent summer isn't a 'fix-all' for the long-term habitat loss we're fighting against.

What's on the horizon?

The **Big Data Drop**: on 27th March, the official UK butterfly statistics are released. We'll finally see exactly how the 2025 season stacked up across the whole country.

On the subject of data, many of you will be joining us to monitor our butterflies and moths and enjoy some decent summer weather and sunshine. Thanks are warmly given to all of you who already help out, but there are plenty of opportunities to join the dedicated volunteer army on

transects, WCBS, or in trying to fill in some of our 'black holes of ignorance'. Just ask and we will sort you out.

You will see the first of our events in our 2026 **Guided Walks** programme later in this issue. We make a real effort to try to make sure there is something near all our members, and to provide opportunities to see (nearly) all of our Branch species. I look forward to seeing many of you out there. If you have never been along, give it a try: it is friendly, enjoyable and entertaining!

Watch out also for our **Moth Trapping evening(s)**. We have not held many of these recently and are putting on a small number of these as a trial run. If they are successful, we will attempt to do more in the future. The data is always valuable, anyway.

Looking further ahead, don't forget to mark your calendar for the Big Butterfly Count 2026 which runs from 17th July to 9th August.

Finally, it's easy to feel like we're just working on one small patch of Oxfordshire, Berkshire or Buckinghamshire, but remember: the Upper Thames is a vital 'corridor'. By fixing our local patch, we're helping species migrate and survive across the whole of the south-east. You're building a bridge - both literally and figuratively - for the UK's nature recovery.

So, to everyone who helps out in any way, your efforts are hugely appreciated.

Warm regards, Peter Philp

Why We Do It

It's easy to get lost in spreadsheets of data, the logistics of major habitat restoration, or the technicalities of sorting out work parties and guided walks. But as we stand on the cusp of another spring, it's worth pausing to remember the real reason we're all here.

The Magic of the First Encounter

Do you remember your first 'spark' species? That moment of pure, childhood wonder when a flash of orange or blue transformed a regular walk into something magical. We do this because we believe that future generations in Berks, Bucks and Oxon deserve that same magic. We aren't just protecting insects, we're protecting the soul of the British countryside.

The Power of the Patch

When you're out in the wind and rain at a work party, it can feel like you're just clearing one small corner of a field. But zoom out, and you'll see the Upper Thames corridor - a vital lifeline in a fragmented landscape. Every bramble you trim and every square metre of chalk grassland you restore is a stepping stone. You are literally building the 'infrastructure of hope' that allows species to migrate, adapt, and survive.

A Legacy in Flight

Conservation is an act of faith. We plant the seeds today for a flight season we haven't seen yet. By being part of this Branch, you are ensuring that the Duke of Burgundy still dances at Bradenham and the Black Hairstreak still haunts our ancient hedgerows long after we're gone. That 350% surge we mentioned above? That isn't just a statistic. It's thousands of individual lives – thousands of wings – that wouldn't be there without you. That is why we do it.

Peter Philp

Butterfly Winners and Losers

Although 2025 seemed like a 'good year' in general for our butterflies, little can be gleaned from an apparent upturn (or, indeed, downturn) in abundance from one year to another, given the number of factors that need to be considered.

Looking at trends over a longer period is the best way of measuring the relative health of our species, which is what the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) does on an annual basis.

With the latest data only available to 2024 at the time of writing, UKBMS has presented its findings for England over both (a) the most recent 10-year period; and (b) for a longer period, which uses data that goes back to when it was first reliably collected in the 1970s or 1980s (referred to herein as 'since records began').

We look here at those species (excluding the migrant Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow) which have shown significant change during the periods defined as (a) and (b) above.

THE LOSERS

(1) The 10 species below had the most significant **negative change in abundance in England over the past 10 years** (to 2024), ranked from the worst first:

Small Tortoiseshell (-79%*), Scotch Argus (-73%), Silver-spotted Skipper (-59%), Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (-53%**), Ringlet (-45%*), Silver-washed Fritillary (-43%), Common Blue (-46%), Adonis Blue (-40%), Large Skipper (-37%*), Small Skipper (-36%).

*UKBMS significance rating '**significant**'

UKBMS significance rating 'highly significant**'



Whilst Small-bordered Fritillary (of most concern) is unfortunately not a species we have in our region, and Small Tortoiseshell is perhaps unsurprisingly top of the list (and obviously of concern), the inclusion of Ringlet as a species of concern did surprise me somewhat (though the story is very different for the Ringlet over the longer term, which shows a **very highly significant** improvement).

(2) The 10 species below had the most significant **negative change in abundance in England since records began**, ranked from the worst first:



Heath Fritillary (-89%), Small Tortoiseshell (-86%), Wall (-86%), Scotch Argus (-85%), White-letter Hairstreak (-80%), Wood White (-80%), Pearl-bordered Fritillary (-77%), Small Skipper (-74%), Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (-70%), Grizzled Skipper (-49%).

******* UKBMS significance rating **'very highly significant'** for all the above species.

Of those species on one or both of the above lists, **Small Tortoiseshell, Scotch Argus, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Grizzled Skipper, Small Skipper and Large Skipper** all had their worst year in 2024 since records began¹.

It is clear from the above that UKBMS expectedly places more emphasis on the importance of the longer-term trend for species; for example, Small Tortoiseshell's decline is viewed as **significant** over the most recent 10-year period yet **very highly significant** over almost five decades. In the UTB region, we should perhaps be most concerned about the species that we might be able to help the most out of those on the above lists: Small Skipper (the only species apart from Small Tortoiseshell to appear on both 'top ten' lists - though it's recent plight seems to have improved slightly compared to the longer-term trend). Five-decade downward trends for Wood White, Wall and White-letter Hairstreak (all showing a >80% decline in abundance since records began) should also be of concern - as should more recent significant declines for Silver-spotted Skipper.

Other UTB Butterflies that appear to be in decline over both the short- and longer-term (and in a worse position over the short term) are Dingy Skipper, Essex Skipper, Large Skipper, Common Blue and Green-veined White. We may be able to help some of them.

¹According to UK Government data, 2024 ranked overall as the fourth warmest and eighth wettest year since the early 1900s.

THE WINNERS

(1). The 10 species below had the most significant **positive change in abundance in England over the past 10 years** (to 2024), ranked from the best first:



Lulworth Skipper (+213%), Glanville Fritillary (+210%), Heath Fritillary (+177%), Black Hairstreak (+150%), Red Admiral (+74%), Silver-studded Blue (+54%), Wall (+50%), Gatekeeper (+36%), Small Heath (+36%), Grayling (+33%).

One wonders whether the positive trends of the specialist species on the above list is a consequence of a more proactive approach to recording - or of proactive conservation management (perhaps both)?

(2). The 10 species below had the most significant **positive change in abundance in England since records began**, ranked from the best first:

Large Blue (+2356%), Black Hairstreak (+647%), Dark Geen Fritillary (+461%), Silver-spotted Skipper (+364%), Red Admiral (+321%), Glanville Fritillary (+275%), Ringlet (+273%), Silver-washed Fritillary (+249%), Comma (+170%), Purple Emperor (+125%).

No surprise on the Large Blue, given its highly successful re-introduction into the UK in the early 1980s. Black Hairstreak, Glanville Fritillary and Red Admiral are the only 3 species to appear on both lists. Of particular interest to us is, of course, Black Hairstreak - a species for which much effort has been expended recently (with special thanks to our Species Champion, Stuart Hodges, in this regard).



All images ©Derek Haynes

CONCLUSIONS

I'll let you be the judge of those!

Derek Haynes

Please click [here](#) to access the full list of all **winners** and **losers**.

Gearing Up for the Duke



Regular readers will know that we do a lot of work for 'the Duke' (Duke of Burgundy butterfly) in the Chiltern valley that stretches from Princes Risborough to High Wycombe.

During the winter conservation season of 2024/25, we had 15 sessions either on land where the Duke is present (to retain the required habitat) or on nearby land preparing to receive it. This past winter that increased to 21 sessions.



Most of the increase is because of very welcome interest from landowners between Buckinghamshire's Ivinghoe Beacon colonies and those at Bedfordshire's Dunstable Downs. It is very helpful that nearly all the breeding Dukes in both colonies are on National Trust land and that they too want to help the butterfly. Bringing in other local landowners (five so far) has greatly improved the

prospects for this rare butterfly in our region. Simultaneously, BC has decided to focus more effort on our Chiltern Dukes, and this coincides with an attempt by the National Trust to get funding for a major chalk grassland project.

Last winter we spent several days planting cowslips. Cowslip is the Duke's most frequent larval foodplant locally, at sites near Princes Risborough. This is predominantly in an effort to expand existing central Chiltern colonies. We hope to get them to merge.

Now we are doing the same at the northern Chiltern sites. We hope the Duke will expand onto them, linking colonies at Dunstable and Ivinghoe.

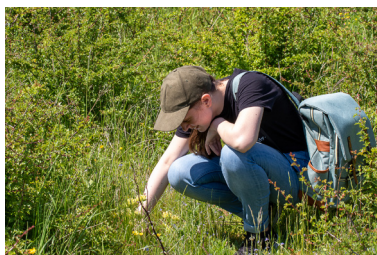
To know that our efforts are paying off, we need more volunteers to survey for all life stages of the Duke and for the distinctive damage that feeding Duke caterpillars cause to the leaves of cowslips. Initially, the caterpillars (that live under the leaves) chew the lower epidermis and make small translucent 'windows' in the leaf, then, as they grow, they eat very small holes right through the leaf and always between the veins. Leaves with multiple perforations that gradually increase in size are a clear indicator of the presence of Duke larvae.



Damage caused by Duke larvae at a site we prepared in the central Chilterns

It was immensely pleasing to have planted cowslips and subsequently discover that the Duke had found them and started breeding at a new site, thus increasing the size of its colony and reducing the risk of local extinction. It was a buzz that we want to feel again.

If you could help survey either at existing sites or on those of private landowners who wish to help the species, I would be very pleased to hear from you. I am running some training sessions to increase people's confidence in their recording of eggs, larvae and feeding damage. (We won't look for pupae as they are far too difficult to find, often buried just under the surface and away from the plants where the larvae fed.) **These training sessions are to be held on Saturday 23rd May, Wednesday 3rd June and Friday 19th June.**



A surveyor discovers eggs on a 'new' site, confirming the spread of the Duke following work by Branch volunteers

To register an interest, please contact me at: nick.bowles@ntlworld.com.

Nick Bowles
Images ©Nick Bowles

Upgrading the UTB Website

If you have used the upperthames-butterflies.org.uk website, you will probably be aware that it hasn't worked very well on small-screen devices.

With some time on my hands last Christmas, I started looking at how to make it work properly on mobile phones - and ended up re-writing the website using modern software. **Each page now reconfigures itself automatically to fit the size of the available display screen.**

You need to be running a reasonably modern web browser on your device to make the new site work properly. I have tested the website on a few mobile phones, but I can't test all of them.

I would like to ask you to try the new site on your mobile phone or other small-screen device and let me know if there are any issues. If you do encounter any issues, please take a screenshot and send it to me (and include details of the device and browser in use). Thank you.

The new site can be accessed here (https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/v2_main_index)

Please note that this is a temporary address and will stop working once the new website goes live, which is scheduled for the Easter weekend.

These are the new (left) and old home pages on my own mobile phone:

The Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation

Home

Welcome to the Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation

The Upper Thames Branch has been protecting butterflies, moths and their habitats in the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire since 1982. The Chiltern Hills, the Oxfordshire/Berkshire Downs, the Oxford and Aylesbury clay vales, the Berwood Forest complex, the edge of the Cotswolds and the Berkshire heathlands are all to be found in the three counties.

Three-quarters of the fifty-eight British butterfly species can be found in the Upper Thames region, including the Black Hairstreak, Adonis Blue, Silver-spotted Skipper and Duke of Burgundy. Over 1700 moth species have been recorded, including Drab Looper, Striped Lychnis and Heart Moth.

The Branch is entirely run by volunteers. If you think you may be able to help us in any way, please click the "Volunteer with UTB"

upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Home About News Events Butterflies Moths Conservation Recording Sites Links

Welcome to the Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation

A re-write of this website, to make it more mobile-friendly, is now available for testing here. Please send feedback to the Webmaster.

The Upper Thames Branch has been protecting butterflies, moths and their habitats in the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire since 1982. The Chiltern Hills, the Oxfordshire/Berkshire Downs, the Oxford and Aylesbury clay vales, the Berwood Forest complex, the edge of the Cotswolds and the Berkshire heathlands are all to be found in the three counties.

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The Branch is entirely run by volunteers. If you think you may be able to help us in any way, please click the "Volunteer with UTB" button below to find out more.

Submit Butterfly Sightings Volunteer with UTB

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David Hastings
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An Introduction to the Micro Moths of the UTB Region (Part 2)

If you missed the first part of this introduction you can find it in the Winter 2025 edition: issue 128. You can find this on our website (About/Newsletters).

We received some very useful feedback from Part 1. One important thing to note is that most moth recorders tend to use the scientific names for micro-moth families (and often for species), and rarely the English names (except for a few of the larger groups). Hence, I have removed the common names from the second part of this introduction. The 'bible' for those who know all about these things is the *Bloomsbury Wildlife Guides: Field Guide to the Micro-moths of Great Britain and Ireland* by Sterling, Parsons & Lewington. I have used this resource for all names in Part 2.











Rosy Knot-horn ©Dave Wilton










Secondly, I will draw your attention to the fabulous short beginners' introduction to micro-moths on the Upper Thames Moth Website: <https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/MothID/micromoths-for-beginners.pdf>. This will be much more useful if you want to start identifying micro-moths. My introduction in *Hairstreak* is purely to give you some idea of the number of families and species in our region – with an example species (which may or may not be typical of most of the family!). Many thanks to John Thacker for guidance on these matters.

The following table shows the remaining 22 micro-moth families that are currently found in the UTB Region. For each family we present its scientific family name and, where regularly used, 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 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.

We will look in more detail at our butterflies and moths in future editions of *Hairstreak*.

<p><i>Lypusidae:</i> 4 Species 4 Species</p>  <p><i>Yellow-headed Concealer</i></p>	<p><i>Peleopodidae:</i> 1 Species 1 Species</p>  <p><i>Oak Longhorn</i></p>	<p><i>Depressariidae:</i> 51 Species 35 Species!</p>  <p><i>Red-eyed Buff</i></p>
<p><i>Ethmiidae:</i> 6 Species 3 Species</p>  <p><i>Comfrey Ermine</i></p>	<p><i>Cosmopterigidae:</i> 14 Species 10 Species</p>  <p><i>Violet Beauty</i></p>	<p><i>Gelechiidae:</i> 165 Species 105 Species</p>  <p><i>Juniper Webber</i></p>
<p><i>Batrachedridae:</i> 3 Species 3 Species</p>  <p><i>Poplar Needle-moth</i></p>	<p><i>Coleophoridae:</i> 109 Species 72 Species</p>  <p><i>Downland Case-bearer</i></p>	<p><i>Elachistidae:</i> 49 Species 31 Species</p>  <p><i>Yellow-barred Grass-miner</i></p>

<p>Parametriotidae: 6 Species 5 Species</p>  <p><i>Yellow Cap</i></p>	<p>Momphidae: 15 Species 15 Species</p>  <p><i>White-headed Mompha</i></p>	<p>Blastobasidae: 6 Species 3 Species</p>  <p><i>Large Pale Masoner</i></p>
<p>Stathmopodidae: 2 Species 1 Species</p>  <p><i>Alder Signaller</i></p>	<p>Scythrididae: 11 Species 5 Species</p>  <p><i>Gorse Runner</i></p>	<p>Alucitidae: 1 Species 1 Species</p>  <p><i>Many-plumed moth</i></p>
<p>Pterophoridae: 44 Species 25 Species</p>  <p><i>Citron Plume</i></p>	<p>Schreckensteiniidae: 1 Species 1 Species</p>  <p><i>Blackberry Skeletoniser</i></p>	<p>Epermeniidae: 8 Species 7 Species</p>  <p><i>Streaked Ridgeback</i></p>

Choreutidae:

7 Species 5 Species



Skullcap Skeletoniser

Tortricidae:

388 Species c30 Species



Green Oak Tortrix

Pyralidae:

82 Species 52 Species

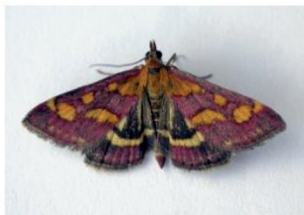


Rosy Knot-horn

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

Crambidae:

100+ Species_80 Species



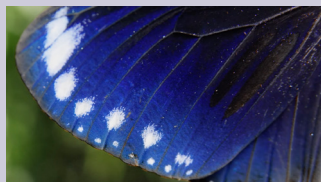
Common Purple-and-gold

I hope 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

Life and Death: the Migration of Purple Crow Butterflies

Every October in Taiwan, hundreds of thousands of Purple Crow butterflies – a collection of four similar species – migrate on a challenging 300-mile month-long journey south to seek refuge in sheltered conditions. In the spring, they mate - and head north again to find suitable conditions in which to lay their eggs in preparation for the next generation.



A fascinating and tender feature-length documentary ("Lost Butterfly") was made of the life of Purple Crow butterflies in 2023, and – in my humble opinion – is worth viewing ([here](#)). National Geographic has this year provided further context (which can be read [here](#)).

Derek Haynes

50 Years and (Still) Counting

Conservationists from across the UK and beyond gathered in late 2025 to celebrate the upcoming 50th anniversary of one of the world's longest-running and most important wildlife monitoring programmes, the **UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS)**.



Since its launch in 1976, volunteers have walked a combined total of 950,000 miles at more than 7,000 sites, carried out 715,000 surveys and recorded more than 41 million butterflies.

The UKBMS data have been used in research, particularly in understanding insect declines, the impacts of climate change, shifting seasonal patterns and land use change. The data are also used to empower and underpin other broader citizen science schemes such as Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count.

When the scheme was introduced, the data used to be laboriously entered over many months using punch-cards and a room-sized computer - a reminder of how far the scheme and technology have come in 50 years.

Today, the UKBMS is run by four partner organisations: Butterfly Conservation, the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Its very existence was a seed that has grown into a network of similar schemes now running in 30 countries across Europe, monitoring 350 butterfly species.

We speak elsewhere in this issue ('Butterfly Winners and Losers') of the national declines in butterfly populations since the 1970s; whereby, for example, the once-ubiquitous Small Tortoiseshell (below) has declined by a staggering 86% since 1976.



The Upper Thames region still has some vacant UKBMS 'squares', so if you'd like to help maintain the credibility of this critical data, you can view the vacant (and adopted) 'squares' [here](#), and the official WCBS guidance document [here](#). Thank you.

Derek Haynes

The Voice of Our Branch

Why Your Perspective Matters

While we spend a lot of time talking about *wings*, this section is about the *people* behind them. We often get caught up in the 'what' and the 'how' of conservation, but we want to stay connected to the why.

Your Secret Spot

We'd love to hear about your 'wild space' successes since January. Did you spot a hibernating Peacock in your shed during the December frost? Or perhaps you've noticed a specific patch of nettles in your local park that survived the winter? Your small, local observations help us build a map of resilience across the Upper Thames that no satellite can see.

A Community, Not Just a Committee

This Branch thrives because of the diverse range of voices within it - from seasoned lepidopterists to those who just planted their first buddleia last year. We want to ensure this community works for you.

- Tell us - what's the one thing you'd like to see more of this summer?
- Share - do you have a 'first sighting' photo or a story of a local win?

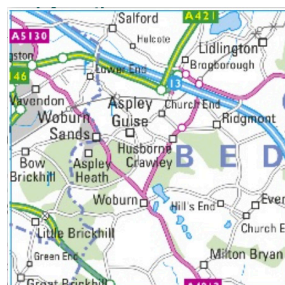
Drop us a line!

Whether it's a suggestion for a new survey area or just a photo of a Brimstone in your garden, your input is what keeps this Branch moving forward. Kindly email the Editor; thank you.

Seek and You May Find

There are still lots of gaps in our butterfly recording at the 1km-square level, and you are asked to check for such absent data in the area in which you live or in areas you visit often.

The best of way of achieving this is to go to our website, select the **Recording** tab... then **10km Square Champions**. You will be provided with a map of our region divided into 10km squares. If you click on any square, you can then select **List of 1km squares** at the bottom of the small window (like the one shown alongside for SP93)... when you will be provided with an 'Ignorance spectrum' of where recordless 1km squares will be shown. You can also select **Species details** from the previous small window, when you'll be shown more detailed information and help.



SP93
Champion: vacant

Black holes of ignorance:
▶ List of 1km squares
▶ Species details

If each of us can 'tackle' just a few 1km squares with absent or weak data this year, it'll make a big difference to our understanding of the distribution of our butterfly species.

And if you spot that a 10km square has a vacancy for a 10km Square Champion (as in the example above), and could possibly lend a hand, please email

10k-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Cold Hands and Warm Hearts



Some of us – me included – hunkered down during some of this past winter’s cold snaps. Others have ventured out selflessly – regardless of the weather – to work towards improving habitats for some of our most threatened species. If it wasn’t for my four-legged companion (who wouldn’t hesitate to check out a brushcutter at full revs – and its operator – given half a chance), I would already have added my name to those prepared to give of their time. That may sound like an excuse... but it’s not: dogs and practical outdoor endeavour just don’t mix; I know that with having my attention-seeking chap ‘work alongside me’ on my allotment!

Our man Nick Bowles has, once again, been the driving force behind most of the Branch’s recent winter conservation effort - a good chunk of which was targeted towards helping the delightful but ‘demanding’ Duke of Burgundy. You won’t have to look too carefully to see how happy and enthusiastic the workforce was here at a private site in early January to assist the Duke!

It’s worth noting that members of Chiltern Rangers (and – encouragingly – children from local schools) are regular participants on many of the Branch’s tasks, so our grateful thanks to them.

Our Holtspur Bottom Reserve received the recurring attention of our volunteers over the winter, with work parties undertaking various tasks, including removal of temporary sheep fencing, planting horseshoe vetch plants, scrub removal, replenishment of signage and clearing a perimeter path. Aston Upton Down also witnessed the endeavours of volunteers, including a couple of newbies who we warmly welcome.



Winter work has now ceased, but if you’d like to get involved in any of our scheduled 2026 activities (and we would really appreciate your support), take a look at our Event Calendar [here](#). We don’t anticipate cold hands any time soon, but warm hearts are always welcome.



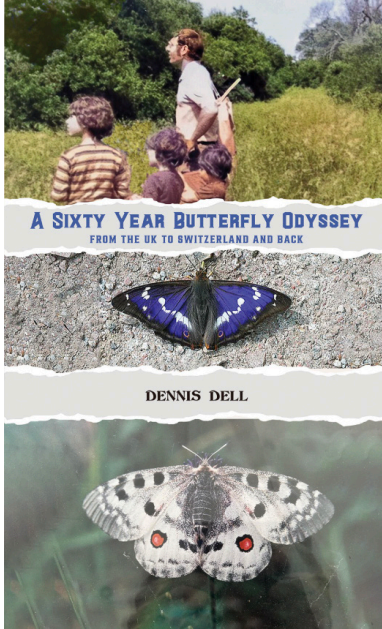
Derek Haynes

... and the creature that came top of Heal Rewilding’s recent survey (see **First Thoughts** on page 3) was – yes, you guessed correctly – the butterfly. It just had to be!

Hooked from the Age of 10

Dennis Dell was an active member of our Branch between 2003 and 2017, before moving with his family to South Yorkshire. His obsession with butterflies started in 1949... and has unabated.

Dennis has just written a book, *A Sixty Year Butterfly Odyssey*, for which he writes:



"Nobody can fail to be fascinated by butterflies: their beautiful colouring, intricate wing patterns, and, above all, the miraculous transformation from egg to larva to pupa and finally to the adult butterfly. Apart from the larvae of the Small and Large Whites nibbling your cabbage leaves, they do no harm, and they perform a useful service as pollinators.

"I was hooked from the age of 10 when I encountered these beautiful creatures in Epping Forest, Essex. Because their larvae generally feed on the leaves of various wild plants, to see the less common species, it is necessary to visit wild, unkempt areas of countryside. Such places have become more difficult to find as a result of increasing urbanisation and agricultural land use. Searches for the rarer species, in Switzerland and in the UK, took me to beautiful habitats: woodland, meadows, and hillsides.

"Just as rewarding has been meeting the many 'kindred spirits' during this long journey who share this fascination."

In his time with UTB, Dennis was often 'first of the season' to record Purple Emperor in our region.

In his book (which is published by Austin Macauley) Dennis makes reference to his time in the Upper Thames region, and members may well be interested in purchasing a copy [here](#).

In-field Training

Duke early instar (see article on page 9)

Sat May 23rd, Weds June 3rd and Fri June 19th.
Meet Pitstone Hill NT car park LU7 9EN
(Grid Ref SP95501493) [///\[cashier.gobbling.coaster\]\(http://cashier.gobbling.coaster\)](http://cashier.gobbling.coaster)

To register attendance please email Nick Bowles
nick.bowles@ntlworld.com



Hairstreak larvae, UV torch, survey technique training

Tues April 14th. BBOWT will release details later.



Black Hairstreak larva fluorescing under UV light

Butterfly & Day-flying Moth in-field ID training

Several of these sessions are joint with Tracking the Impact and places will be limited. Please do NOT attend unless your booking is confirmed with Nick Bowles nick.bowles@ntlworld.com
A pair of close-focusing binoculars and a butterfly net would be useful if you have them.



Comparing Common and Chalk Hill Blue

<p>Sat 16.05.26</p>	<p>Incombe Hole, Ivinghoe Beacon</p>	<p>Spring Butterflies of the Chilterns (session 1) Meet south of the main National Trust car park at the small parking area on Steps Hill LU6 2EG ///blurred.escapades.starfish OS ref SP963157</p>
<p>Sat 30.05.26</p>	<p>Small Dean Lane, Saunderton</p>	<p>Spring Butterflies of the Chilterns (session 2) Meet in NT depot car park at HP14 4UE ///punctual.quack.flamingo OS ref SU821988</p>
<p>Sat 06.06.26</p>	<p>Howe Park Wood, Tattenhoe, MK</p>	<p>Late Spring/Early Summer Butterflies of North Bucks Meet in the Education centre by Grounds Café, Chaffron Way H7, MK4 3GG. Free parking at OS ref SP830344 ///permanent.lighter.bond</p>

Sat 11.07.26	Bradenham, Saunderton	Summer Butterflies of the Chilterns Meet in layby at HP14 4HF ///bitter.laying.rescuer OS ref SU827971 There is additional parking south side of cricket pitch
Sat 08.08.26	Granglands, Princes Risborough	Late Summer Butterflies of the Chilterns Meet in NT Pulpit Hill car park HP27 ONB ///bathtubs.cheater.others OS ref SP832046. Note that this car park fills early, so please check & then park blocking members of our group (assuming they will leave when you do).

Aerophobia

Here is a poetic version of an old joke.

**Two caterpillars scrutinized the
 Monarch's huge wingspan.
 "Can that thing fly", said one,
 "do you suppose?"
 "Don't know" replied another one,
 "but even if it can,
 You'll never get me up
 in one of those!"**



Incidentally, did you know that Monarch Airlines
 was co-founded by Don Peacock?

Rikki Harrington

If you would like to read more of UTB member Rikki's poems, you can get a copy of his book, *The Butterfly Collection: A poem for every British butterfly* from the publishers (Brambleby Books), Amazon, bookshops (Google 'Richard Harrington The Butterfly Collection') or direct from Rikki (harrington.rikki@gmail.com). The book is hardback and beautifully produced, including Rikki's photographs. The rrp is £20 and Rikki would send one to you for that price without charging for postage.

Guided Walks Programme: May & June 2026

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



They are rewarding, sociable and enjoyable. Our team of leaders has a wealth of information and knowledge and will be delighted to share it with you. Do consider coming along if you have not been before. Just follow the link below or visit our website, click the 'Events' tab and select 'Guided Walks'.

There you will find useful information about the walks, including the meeting/parking points, what to bring, etc. We also look forward to seeing 'old friends' who have been on our walks before, many of whom know as much if not more than we leaders do!

[Click here to go to the Guided Walks Page on our website](#)

We hope you enjoy participating as much as we enjoy leading the walks.

Saturday, 16th May, at 10:30am

Seven Barrows, Berks

A gentle amble around this grassland site to enjoy spring butterflies. Time permitting, we will also visit a private site at Crogs Hill. We hope to find **Small Blue**, **Dingy Skipper**, **Green Hairstreak** and **Duke of Burgundy**.



Sunday, 17th May, at 10:30am

Incombe Hole, Bucks

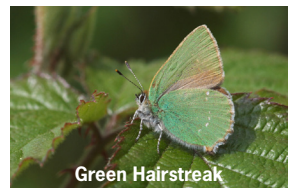
We will explore this step downland site, looking for spring butterflies including both **Dingy & Grizzled Skipper**, **Green Hairstreak**, **Duke of Burgundy** and **Marsh Fritillary**.



Tuesday, 19th May, at 10:30am

Hartslock, Goring, Oxon

We will explore this downland reserve, looking for spring butterflies and day-flying moths. We hope to find **Dingy Skipper**, **Grizzled Skipper** and **Green Hairstreak**.



Saturday, 23rd May, at 10:30am

Aston Upthorpe Downs, Oxon

A walk to enjoy the spring butterflies of this open-access downland site. We hope to see **Green Hairstreak** and both **Dingy & Grizzled Skipper**.



Sunday, 24th May, at 10:30am

Swyncombe Downs, Oxon

An energetic walk on this steep downland, looking for spring butterflies including **Green Hairstreak** and both **Dingy & Grizzled Skipper**.

Sunday, 24th May, at 10:30am **DETAILS UNCONFIRMED: PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE**

Pitstone Quarry, Bucks

A relaxed walk around this disused quarry to enjoy its spring butterflies. We hope to see **Small Blue**, **Dingy Skipper**, and day-flying moths such as **Burnet Companion**.

Saturday, 30th May, at 10:30am

Lardon Chase NT, Berks

A stroll to enjoy a variety of spring downland butterflies, including a chance to see **Adonis Blue**.



Sunday, 31st May, at 10:30am

Yoesden Bank BBOWT, Bucks

We will explore this steep downland site, looking for spring butterflies. We hope to find **Adonis Blue** and maybe the re-introduced **Marsh Fritillary**.

Sunday, 31st May, at 10:00am

Paices Wood Country Parkland, Berks

A gentle stroll to enjoy spring butterflies, including **Dingy Skipper** and **Grizzled Skipper**.

Tuesday, 2nd June, at 10:30am

Ivinghoe Beacon/Incombe Hole, Bucks

We will explore this steep downland site, looking for late-spring/early-summer butterflies including both **Dingy & Grizzled Skipper**, **Green Hairstreak**, **Duke of Burgundy** and maybe **Marsh Fritillary**.

Wednesday, 3rd June, 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 maybe **Small Blue**.

Thursday, 4th June, at 10:30am

DETAILS UNCONFIRMED: PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE

Stonepit Field, Milton Keynes, Bucks

We will wander this small meadow and pond, looking for early-summer butterflies. We hope to find **Small Blue** and other early-summer species.



Saturday, 6th June, at 10:30am

Wytham Woods, Oxon

A gentle stroll around this Oxford University site, focusing on reinforcing the spring butterfly identification course. We hope we may find **Green Hairstreak**.

Sunday, 7th June, at 11:00am **DETAILS UNCONFIRMED: PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE**

Bradenham NT, Bucks

We will wander the grassland slopes in search of early-summer butterflies and day-flying moths. We hope to see **Small Blue**, amongst other species.

Tuesday, 9th June, at 10:30am

Bernwood Meadows, Bucks

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



Saturday, 13th June, at 10:30am

Whitecross Green Wood, Oxon

A gentle amble around this nature reserve looking for early-summer butterflies. We will spend some time searching for the rare **Black Hairstreak**.

Sunday, 14th June, at 10:30am

Finemere Woods, Bucks

If we can avoid HS2 closures, we will enjoy a gentle stroll around this magnificent woodland looking for early-summer butterflies including **Black Hairstreak**.

Saturday, 20th June, at 10:00am

Holtspur Bottom BC, Beaconsfield, Bucks

A great opportunity for all who joined the winter work parties to see some of the butterflies that are benefiting. These may include **Small Blue** amongst other early-summer species.

Tuesday, 23rd June, at 11:00am

Blenheim Farm BBOWT, Charlbury, Oxon

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

Saturday, 27th June, at 10:30am

Wildmoor Heath, Berks

A relaxed walk around this heathland nature reserve, looking for summer butterflies. Will we manage to find **Silver-studded Blue** amongst the summer butterflies this year. Always a chance of seeing the spectacular **Golden-ringed Dragonfly**.

Sunday, 28th June, at 10:30am

Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon

An energetic stroll around this steep downland, looking for summer butterflies including **Dark Green Fritillary**.



Sunday, 28th June, at 10:30am

DETAILS UNCONFIRMED: PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE

Swinley Forest, Berks

We will explore the open forest rides and heathland areas hoping to find **Silver-studded Blue** and other summer species.

Tuesday, 30th June, at 10:30am

Swyncombe Downs, Oxon

An energetic walk on this steep downland, looking for summer butterflies including 'the **Blues**' and **Dark Green Fritillary**.

Thank you.

Peter Philp

guided-walks@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Residential Status... Once More



The Large Tortoiseshell butterfly has been declared a resident species in Britain once more after it was long believed to have become extinct.

Butterfly Conservation has confirmed the species has returned to woodlands spanning Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorset, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight.

This marks the first time in the charity's 58-year existence that the species has been classified as resident rather than migratory.

Gardening Jobs in April to give our species a helping hand

Usually by April the soil outside is warm enough to sow 'hardy annuals' (which complete their life cycle in one season) directly into the soil instead of growing them indoors. These plants can cope with some cold and even a bit of frost.



The best hardy annuals for butterflies and moths are those with large flowers that are easy to land upon. These include Sunflowers and Pot Marigold. Another plant with large flowers that provides nectar for butterflies is Cosmos. This plant comes in shades of white, pink and deep purple, but it is sensitive to cold. You can get a head start now, though, by sowing these in peat-free compost in a tray on a sunny windowsill or using a propagator.

April is also the month when Dahlias start to grow again. The open-flowered varieties are a top plant for butterflies in the garden in late summer. However, in colder and wetter parts of the UK they must be stored as tubers indoors through the winter, otherwise they can rot. You can buy Dahlia tubers in April and put them into pots of compost and keep them somewhere warm. Their shoots will soon pop up, and you can keep them outside from May onwards. Just remember to dry them out and store them for the winter at the end of the year.

April is also a great time to divide your perennial plants (plants which come back year on year) and get more of them for free. You can keep these or give them away to friends to help them create their own butterfly garden with insect-friendly plants. The method you use depends on the plant, but for some like Hardy Geraniums, you can simply cut through the plant with a spade or fork and lift it up. You can also do this with plants like Asters.

If you've got a smaller outdoor space, now is a good time to plant pots or window boxes with herbs that can be used by insects. You can grow drought-tolerant herbs like Thyme, Marjoram, Lavender and Rosemary this way. They can be very cheap to buy in garden centres and will come back year after year. All of them have flowers that insects love!



Finally, if you have a larger garden, you can still plant trees in early April. Just be ready to water them if there's a long period without rain – it can happen! BC always recommends using trees which are native to the UK, as these will be the most useful for caterpillars of moths and butterflies.

[Compiled with the help of BC's The Secret Gardener]

New GB Red List for Vascular Plants

A new GB Red List for vascular plants has recently been published (November 2025) by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI), providing a comprehensive revision of the previous (2005) List. **Red Lists use internationally recognised criteria to assess threat status and are crucial in providing the evidence which underpins nature conservation and helps prioritise future action.**

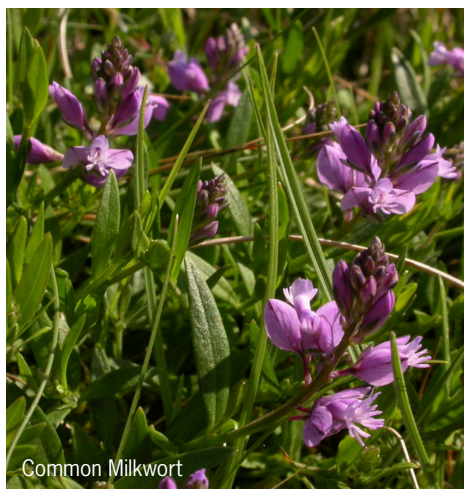
Of the 1,720 species evaluated for the new List, **434 species (26%) were assessed as threatened (Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable) and a further 140 as Near Threatened.** The new List is based on around 50 million plant records collected by thousands of volunteer members and supporters of the BSBI. Their records, collected between 1930 and 2019, fed into three national plant distribution atlases, the most recent of which was published in 2023. The 1,720 species evaluated for the new Red List are all either native plants or species which were introduced to Britain and Ireland before AD1500.

Dr Pete Stroh, BSBI's Scientific Officer and lead author of the new List, said: **"This latest revision of the GB Red List again paints a stark picture of the state of our wild flora.** Although a few of our rarest species, such as Fen Orchid, have a potentially brighter future thanks to the targeted efforts of conservation organisations, and some, for example Bee Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid, are more common

than they once were, many plants once widespread in our countryside have continued to decline to the point where they are now assessed as threatened."

Those threatened plants include:

- **wild flowers** that are positive indicators of unimproved, species-rich habitats, such as Common Milkwort [known foodplant of Common Blue larvae], Common Restharrow [also a potential foodplant of Common Blue larvae] and Betony [a foodplant of the Speckled Yellow moth]



- **species of wetlands and waterbodies**, for example Marsh-marigold and Shining Pondweed
- **plants of arable fields**, such as Venus's-looking-glass and Rough Poppy
- **arctic-alpine plants such as** Alpine Gentian (18)

Dr Stroh said, **“These declines are linked to many factors, including the intensification of agricultural management, or conversely long-term neglect; development pressures; eutrophication and pollution. All these factors are most prevalent in lowland areas, but many wild flowers of upland areas are also at risk, most notably our arctic-alpine species, with some declines linked to the symptoms of climate change”.**

The new Red List was produced by the BSBI and UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, with funding from Natural England and supported by a working group (the Species Status Assessment Group) with representation from a range of independent experts and interested organisations, including the BSBI, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot, the Biological Records Centre (within the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology), the Natural History Museum, Plantlife International, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Prof Paul Ashton, BSBI President, said “Although the situation seems bleak, the good news is that there are still many areas where our wild plants continue to flourish, and we now have the evidence to better understand which species are being lost, why this is happening and what needs to be done to assist recovery. Our wild flora has

countless benefits for individuals, for communities and for the economy, and the increasingly urgent task now is for the Government to act on the evidence presented in this Red List, and to fully engage with conserving and restoring our wild flora”.

Dr Kevin Walker, BSBI’s Head of Science said, “Thanks to the millions of plant records collected by thousands of BSBI volunteers for our national distribution atlases, and the trends derived from those landmark publications, this new Red List provides a state-of-the-art assessment of the level of threats faced by our wild flora. **Its conclusion, however, is stark.**

Around a third of our flora is threatened and will continue to be unless we tackle the main drivers head-on through reductions in damaging land management practices, pollution and climate change”.

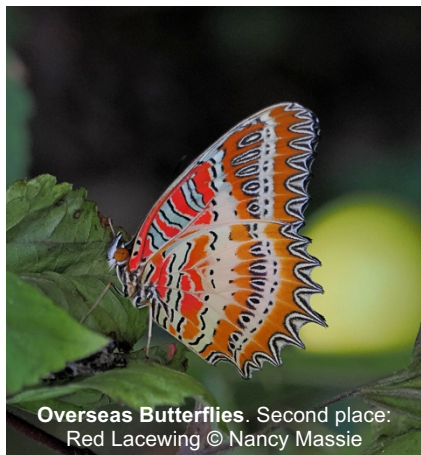
More details can be found at: <https://bsbi.org/about/news/press-releases/new-gb-red-list-for-vascular-plants>

Members' Day 2025 Photographic Competition: the Runners-up

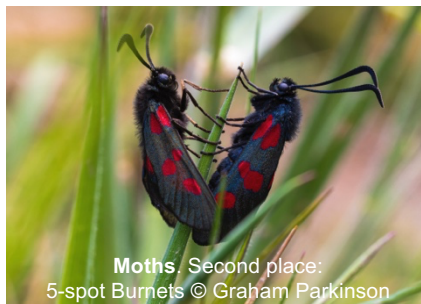
In the last issue, we featured the winning entries from the 2025 Members' Day photo competition. Here we show the runners-up entries.



UK Butterflies. Second place:
Large Skipper © Nancy Massie



Overseas Butterflies. Second place:
Red Lacewing © Nancy Massie



Moths. Second place:
5-spot Burnets © Graham Parkinson



Immature Stages. Second place:
Striped Lychnis larva © John Hemmings



Brown Hairstreak

UK Butterflies. Joint third place:
Brown Hairstreak © David Hastings



UK Butterflies. Joint third place:
Chalk Hill Blue © Graham Parkinson



Moths. Joint third place:
Orange Swift © Phil Tizzard



Overseas Butterflies. Third place:
Bath White © John Hemmings



Small Yellow Underwing

Moths. Joint third place:
Small Yellow Underwing © David Hastings



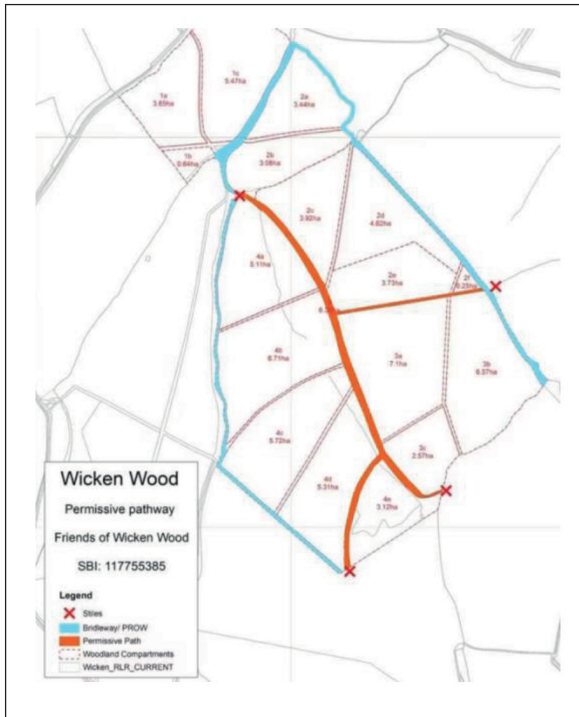
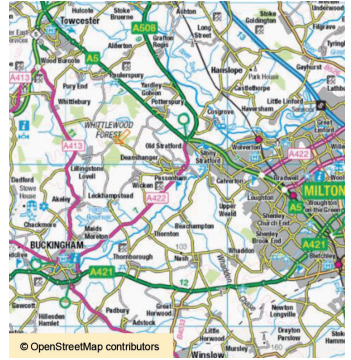
Immature Stages. Third place:
Buff Ermine larva © Simon Collings

Congratulations to all winners and runners-up. In Peter Thompson's report in the last issue of *Hairstreak*, he referred to the fact that members may have had short notice of the competition (due to the delayed publication of the autumn *Hairstreak*), and suggested that – for 2026 – you send your entries in well in advance (by email to plthompson127@gmail.com).

Wood White in Wicken Wood

Wicken Wood - home to the dainty Wood White - is a major remnant of the ancient Whittlewood Forest, straddling the border between Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. The arrow on the map alongside shows its location. Wicken Wood is – in recent years – the site where Wood White is often first seen in our region.

Wood White is a very localised species and requires specific habitats in which to survive. It has endangered status on the GB Red List (2022).



Access to Wicken Wood is granted through the use of public rights of way, but advantage is to be gained by becoming a Friend of Wicken Wood, whereby the landowner will allow access along permissive paths (as shown on the map alongside). You can check out the details [here](#).

If visiting the site, you can park at SP730412. **Please note that there is no public access to the adjacent Leckhampstead Wood**, where Wood White is also to be found.

Nick Board is the UTB Species Champion for the Wood White, and his Report for 2025 is included below.

Species Champion's Report 2025

The weather in Spring 2025 was warm and mainly settled although it wasn't until the end of May and into June that more sunny spells appeared.

The warm weather continued throughout the summer although July and August were a little unsettled.

The early conditions proved more favourable than in previous years for the emergence of Wood White, and, whilst we wait for any iRecord details, in the north of the region it was first seen on 3rd May at Wicken Wood when 15 were recorded.



Previously first recorded sightings at Wicken Wood were:
2022 10th May; 2023 20th May; 2024 18th May

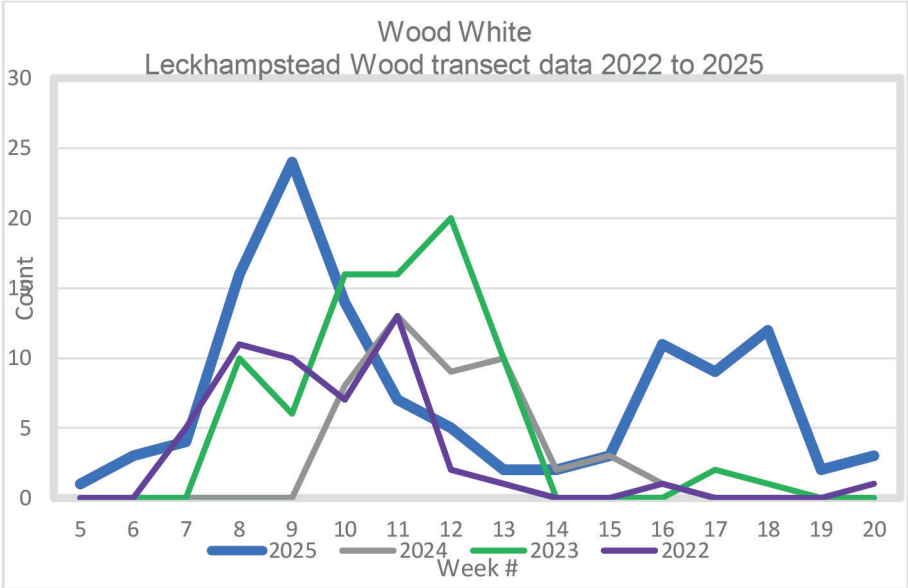
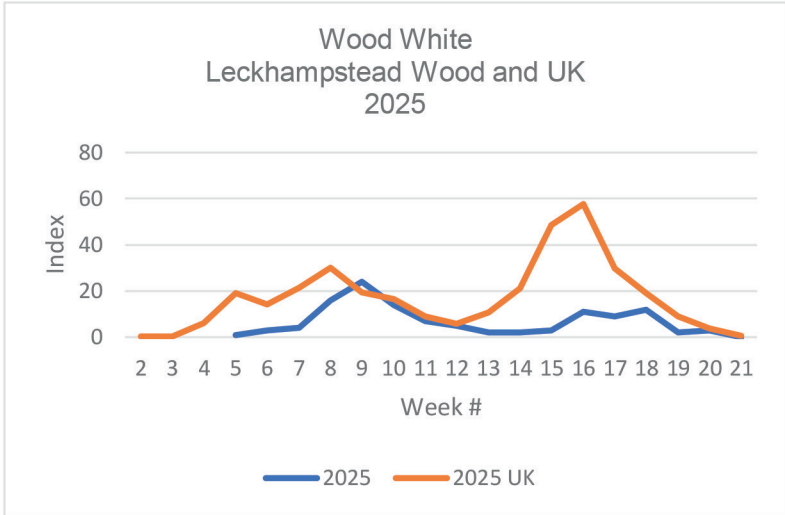
Sightings remained strong and consistent throughout May with numbers reaching 30+ on 13th May at Wicken Wood and 25+ on 31st May at the privately-owned Leckhampstead Wood.

Neighbouring Bucknell Wood and Hazelborough Wood also had good numbers of sightings throughout May and into June. (See Northants BC Sightings Report for 2025.)

Not guaranteed every year, but a second brood saw a last recorded sighting on 13th July.

Work continues with local landowners to offer advice about the suitability of their woodland environment for Wood White and how to protect it whilst they manage their own challenges around deforestation and the replanting of trees.

The following graphics show distribution numbers for Leckhampstead Wood.



Nick Board
wood-white@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Why not plan a visit to Wicken Wood this May?

Moth Watch

Non-hibernating butterflies are typically in short supply in the last week of March, but our region has **more than one hundred species of moth recorded** in the same week over recent years.

Moths worth checking out in late March include the following seven species, each which has had **more than one hundred sightings** over the past 5 years.

Hebrew Character



©Janice Robertson

Widespread and very common in the region, in a wide range of habitats.

Recorded in 70 (90%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Common Quaker



©Keith Mitchell

Widespread and very common in the region, in a wide range of habitats.

Recorded in 70 (90%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Small Quaker



©Janice Robertson

Widespread and common in the region, in a range of habitats, but especially numerous in woodland. Recorded in 68 (87%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Clouded Drab



©John Thacker

Widespread and very common across the region, in a wide range of habitats. Recorded in 69 (88%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Early Grey



©Dave Wilton

Widespread and common across the region, in a range of habitats. Recorded in 66 (85%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Brindled Beauty



©Janice Robertson

Widespread and common across the region in woodland and other habitats. Recorded in 66 (85%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Double-striped Pug



©John Thacker

Widespread and very common across the region, in a wide range of habitats. Recorded in 68 (87%) of 78 UTB 10k Squares.

Discover which moths are 'flying tonight' on [https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/flying tonight](https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/flying_tonight)

And did you know there are more species of day-flying moths in the UK than there are species of butterfly?

Unexpected Visitor

Our Treasurer, Treve Willis, was anticipating the prospect of seeing his first butterfly of the year in his garden on a relatively warm 22nd February, when what showed up - quite unexpectedly - was this stunning example of a Humming-bird Hawkmoth.



Treve has a number of theories about how and why it may have turned up in his garden at this time, but suggests that it had possibly over-wintered in his heated greenhouse.

In referring to the Upper Thames Moths website (which can be accessed [here](#)), there is the suggestion that “late winter records of adults from early February strongly suggest overwintering, but could in some cases be due to immigration”.

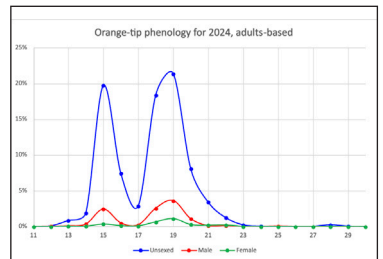
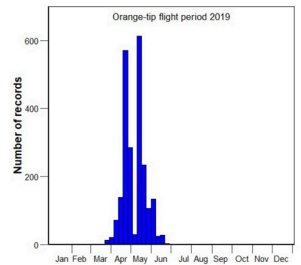
Orange-tip: Species with a Secret?



The mean first sightings' date for the Orange-tip over the past two decades in our region is 29th March, so – if one hasn't yet been spotted in 2026 – now is the time to be on the lookout for them. Although the male is obvious to spot in flight, the female is not so easily distinguishable from other members of the White family - so it's wise to wait until the individual is at rest, when it's differentiating marks can more easily be verified.

Although a widespread and relatively common species, there is an ongoing mystery over why – in some years at least – it appears to be bimodal (that is, having two distinct distribution peaks within its recognised spring flight period): noted, for example, in both Upper Thames and Yorkshire in 2019, portrayed in the accompanying graphics for Yorkshire (upper, 2019) and Upper Thames (2024).

For us to be able to better understand this phenomenon, please be sure to accurately record all your sightings.



Net Gain

Back in the mid 60s, my schoolfriends and I weren't alone in wielding butterfly nets in the Dorset and Hampshire countryside. It's now hard to believe that we weren't catching butterflies purely as an aid to identification!

Of course, over time, the realisation of the harm we had caused came to the fore.

In the 2000s, I went to Bulgaria on an organised butterfly trip. It had been suggested that a net would be useful, so I bought one (as the one from my school days was lost in the mists of time). It did prove to be a worthwhile investment, though the handle became a bit of a nuisance as it was not telescopic.

Last June, I decided to buy a new net - or, more specifically, a combination of frames, nets and handles. This allowed me to have a folding net with tiny handle for the rucksack, and a net with an extending telescopic handle to keep in the car.

A net has proved particularly valuable when differentiating like species (especially when leading a group keen to learn) and thus enabling correct identification (for recording purposes). We all know how difficult it can be to differentiate a Small Skipper from an Essex Skipper 'in the field' (and sometimes even when netted!).

So, yes, a net is sometimes useful - but most species can be identified without the need for one. If you are using a net, great care should be taken not to harm the unsuspecting target. Butterfly Conservation states that, "using nets is acceptable to confirm identification of common species, provided they are handled with extreme care and released immediately at the place of capture. This should only be done if you have the necessary skill to avoid harming the insect".

However, some species of butterfly and moth are fully protected in the UK under the [Wildlife & Countryside Act \(WCA\) 1981](#) and/or the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#), and it is illegal to catch, handle or harm them without a licence.

The fully WCA-protected species currently are:

BUTTERFLIES

Large Blue*
Large Copper
Heath Fritillary

High Brown Fritillary
Marsh Fritillary
Swallowtail



Large Blue ©Derek Haynes

MOTHS

Barberry Carpet (*Pareulype berberata*)
Black-veined Moth (*Siona lineata*)
Essex Emerald (*Thetidia smaragdaria*)
Fiery Clearwing (*Bembecia chrysidiformis*)
Fisher's Estuarine Moth (*Gortyna borelii*)*
New Forest Burnet (*Zygaena viciae*)
Reddish Buff (*Acosmetia caliginosa*)
Sussex Emerald (*Thalera fimbrialis*)



*Large Blue and Fisher's Estuarine Moth are also protected by the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#)

In Spain and Germany, it is illegal to capture a butterfly or moth with a net (or in a trap) without official authorization. Other countries may have similar laws - so do check before you travel.

Equipment Categories	
Entomology	343
Bat Survey & Monitoring	180
Bat Boxes	84
Bird Boxes	181
Aquatic Survey & Monitoring	267
Field Study Equipment	284
Other Nest Boxes, Habitats & Feeders	118
Plant Survey	77
Ornithology & Bird Ringing	145
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Education	177
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Wildlife Management	35
Batteries	30
Habitat Management Tools	49
Astronomy & Cosmology	8
Expedition	1
Mycology	1
Remote Vehicles	35

For information, I purchased my net components in 2025 from NHBS (originally known as Natural History Book Service), a UK-based company whose “core purpose is to support those who work to understand, protect and conserve the natural environment”.

NHBS publishes *British Wildlife* and *Conservation Land Management* magazines and stocks a wide range of Field Guides and Academic & Professional Books in their **Bookstore**.

Their **Equipment Shop** comprises many categories, as shown alongside.

Their website is [nhbs.com](https://www.nhbs.com)

Kate Bradbury, the award-winning writer in wildlife gardening, is due to release a fresh edition of her book, *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone and Everything*, which can be ordered/pre-ordered from NHBS [here](#). Kate's book will tell you everything you

need to know to turn your garden, balcony, patio or windowsill into a haven for wildlife.

Derek Haynes

Transect Volunteers



Volunteers are the lifeblood of collecting the all-important data used by UKBMS to establish the health of butterflies across the UK. The collated data are used by the governments of the UK and others to illustrate how their policies affect wildlife, and is respected worldwide.

As you may be aware, our Branch is run entirely by volunteers: ordinary people who give of their time to contribute to conserving our butterflies and moths and the habitats they depend upon. Many of our volunteers have been carrying out their roles for quite some time, but, reluctantly, some have had to step down. It is therefore important that the level of volunteers is maintained or even expanded so that the collection of data can continue.

Butterfly Transects

Our Branch has over 110 active butterfly transects across the three counties, with at least 150 volunteers helping to survey them each year. For many of these volunteers, it is a highlight of their week: getting out in the warm sunshine in good habitats and enjoying the delicate beauty of our butterfly species.

However, some of our transects (right) desperately need some new blood, otherwise the long chain of continuous data will be broken, and it is this continuity that is vital for accurate statistics.

Transect Name	County
Besselsleigh Wood	Oxfordshire
Bucklebury Common	Berkshire
Burnham Beeches	Buckinghamshire
Bushy Bank	Oxfordshire
Finemere Wood 2023	Buckinghamshire
Glyme Valley	Oxfordshire
Howbery Park	Oxfordshire
Little Linford Wood	Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire Golf Club	Oxfordshire
Tuckmill Meadows	Oxfordshire
Wildmoor Heath	Berkshire
Windsor Great Park	Berkshire

So, what's involved? Transects are surveyed every week from the beginning of April to the end of September, with most transects being surveyed by a team of volunteers. Any contribution you can make would definitely be worthwhile; and even if you feel that you could only offer the occasional week, it would allow someone to go on holiday knowing that their site will still be surveyed. Also, transects should only be walked when it's warm and (preferably) sunny – a bonus any day!

There are also opportunities with Peter Philp's WCBS, Andy Spragg's 'Holes of Ignorance' (refer herein or to previous *Hairstreaks*) and Nick Bowles's private site owners who would welcome ad-hoc survey as shown here.

For all volunteers there is training available, mentoring from most teams and heartfelt thanks from all their colleagues.

You can discover more about both local and national volunteer vacancies [here](#).



Please contact me if you think you can help, and I will forward your details to the relevant person.

Tom Primett (Transect Co-ordinator)
tom.primett@sky.com

Your Spring Action List: 4 Ways to Help Right Now

1. Go Peat-Free (The 2026 Deadline)

As of January 2026, the UK retail ban on peat-based compost is officially in effect. If you're stocking up for spring planting, make sure your bags are 100% peat-free. By doing so, you're directly protecting the lowland peat bogs that species like the Large Heath call home. It's the easiest way to be a conservationist from your own potting shed!

2. The 'Slow Mow' Spring

Don't wait for May to tuck the lawnmower away! Dandelions and Celandines are the 'fast food' of the butterfly world for those waking up from hibernation right now. Try leaving just one corner of your garden completely untouched this March – those early Brimstones will thank you for the vital fuel.



3. Nature is for Everyone

We are more committed than ever to making the Upper Thames Branch a welcoming space for everyone. If you know someone who loves nature but finds rugged hill-climbing a bit much, let them know we are planning some '**accessible spotting days**'. We're looking into more 'low-impact' walks this season because everyone deserves a front-row seat to the spring emergence.

4. Keep an Eye Open for 'Climate Travellers'

Climate change is pushing species further north, and the Upper Thames is right on the frontline. Keep your cameras ready for the Jersey Tiger or even the Continental Swallowtail. If you spot something that looks 'unusual' for our region, please log it immediately - your garden sighting could be a major new data point for national research!

Yellow Peril

2025 was a record-breaking year for the non-native **yellow-legged (Asian) hornet** (*Vespa velutina*) in Britain.

The first record of the species in Britain was in 2016. Predominantly recorded in the south of England, their numbers are increasing... and they're on the move.

This species is a threat to honey production, pollination, biodiversity and our entire food system. Being opportunistic predators, they feed on some 1,400 different insect species, including honeybees (most worryingly), bumble bees, butterflies, hoverflies and beetles.

The yellow-legged Asian hornet is known to attack honeybees outside the entrances to beehives, where they charge the honeybees from below - primarily when the honeybees are returning with nectar or pollen. Each hornet only consumes part of its prey, pulping the rest for use as larval food.

As this is a **notifiable species** in Britain, the GB Non-native Species Secretariat (NNSS) has issued advice, which can be found [here](#). This includes the requirement to notify authorities by one of the following means:

- Via the **Asian Hornet Watch** recording app (for iPhone and Android)
- Online at www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/asianhornet
- By emailing alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

It is important take a photo and provide contact details. **Do not disturb an active nest!**

Here are the key identification features:

Key ID Features

The composite image contains three main parts:

- Top Left:** A photograph of a yellow-legged hornet in a clear container. Labels include: "Entirely dark brown or black velvety body" (pointing to the thorax), "Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends" (pointing to the legs), and "Queens up to 30 mm; workers up to 25 mm long" (pointing to the abdomen). The name "David Walker" is at the bottom right of this section.
- Top Right:** A diagram comparing the abdomens of a "Yellow-legged hornet" (left) and a "European hornet" (right). The yellow-legged hornet's abdomen is mostly dark with a yellow band on the 4th segment, while the European hornet's abdomen is mostly yellow with black bands. A label below reads: "Yellow-legged hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4th abdominal segment."
- Bottom Right:** A photograph of a yellow-legged hornet attacking a honeybee on a wooden surface. A label reads: "Yellow-legged hornet 'hawking' for honey bee prey". The name "J. Haxaire" is at the bottom right of this section.

Choosing the Right Path

As a boy, back in the mid 60s, three school friends and I became interested in butterflies as our school had a rather fine collection of old specimens.

We travelled far and wide across Hampshire and Dorset as teenagers, collecting what we could along the way. Yes, we collected specimens - though I'm somewhat ashamed today to think about that aspect of our interest.

We never really thought much in those halcyon days about conservation, or whether we might – eventually – get to discover all the indigenous UK species.

More recently, one of those schoolfriends and I – having ticked Chequered Skipper (below) off the list on a joint trip to Scotland in 2018 – realised we only had Mountain Ringlet and Scotch Argus left to discover.



I was mildly miffed when he finally got to see both of the 'missing species' in Cumbria within a couple of years (he having offspring living within a return daily commute).

Well, I **really did** now have to face up to the prospect of two trips 'up north' (as Mountain Ringlet and Scotch Argus are on the wing at different times: the latter much later) – and planned a trip to both Cumbria and Scotland in June '24.

I knew that Mountain Ringlet normally appears in mid-June, but there are of course no guarantees.

Anyway, we (a mate, my dog and I) headed directly for Scotland (Argyll & Bute), and with BC citing a location relatively close to where we were staying in Appin (near Oban), off we went up Ben Lui. On paper (more specifically on the BC Branch website), it looked easy: "Park in the car park and take the track up the mountain". After about 20 metres, the track stopped at the edge of a river. What? Well, that wasn't mentioned in the script. Nor was the low (and I mean limbo low!) bridge under the railway line on the other bank of the river (which a notice warned could become flooded and unusable). Photo below.



Thankfully, these first two obstacles were successfully navigated, though soaking wet feet was the price to pay.

With those challenges behind us, surely it would be ‘plain sailing’ from now on. Er, no. I won’t concern you with the detail, but 2 exhausting hours later (and yet more watercourses to navigate) we found ourselves above the (artificial) treeline, at around 3000’. “Now, where **are** those Mountain Ringlets?” Er, not on this part of the mountain, it would seem. To be honest, after such a gruelling climb, we couldn’t summon the energy to climb yet further, not without some confidence that we might find them (with just a single specimen having been a mildly monumental event). Fabulous views, though, as the next photo shows.



With our attempts thwarted in Scotland, a further opportunity would surely come in Cumbria on the return journey.

Before heading south, we went to the picturesque Isle of Mull, where we discovered a small colony of well-worn Marsh Fritillaries on the foreshore of the southern coast (one example shown above right).



We also visited Glasdrum NNR back on the mainland (NM999453, where we found Chequered Skipper back in 2018), and saw a few this time, along with some Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (though both species in fewer numbers than on our previous visit).

So, on to Cumbria.

We were (intentionally) located just a few miles from Irton Pike, where there are usually good numbers of Mountain Ringlet. We surely only had this one opportunity, but – despite the climb up onto Irton Fell – the clouds came rolling in (and Mountain Ringlets don’t do anything unless the sun is shining!). Another thwarted attempt.

Early the following morning (our day for the return journey home), the sun was shining so off we went again, and – after a while – I finally spotted one at around 1500’.

Needless to say I became very excited, and, to cut the story short, we found around a dozen over a 90-minute period (with the sunny spells coming and going).

I managed a few photos, but most examples were pretty much nestled down in the grass. Below is one of a number who 'gave permission' for its photograph to be taken.



Some might think me mad to have expended so much effort to see a single species; others may share my determination. Which camp are you in?

On reflection, we were perhaps foolish to try to climb Ben Lui... the most demanding and unforgiving trek I've ever undertaken. But no pain, no gain.... as they say!

Just Scotch Argus left for me now, which is scheduled for early August this year. Here's hoping that the path to that species is somewhat easier!

Footnote: I mentioned with hesitation above that we collected specimens back in the 60s. One of my schoolfriends still has much of his collection displayed at home; however, following a downsizing house move in the early 70s for my family, I elected to donate my collection to the school where the story began for us.



Hopefully, some of the pupils were enthused to take an interest in butterflies (and wildlife in general), though I trust they chose the path of conservation over one of collecting.

Derek Haynes

Some of you may already have seen all the UK butterfly species; others may yet to have achieved that feat...and some may not be fussed either way.

If you have your own story to tell in the pursuit of your own objectives, why not share it with our members? A few accompanying photos would be good, too.

Email: newsletter-editor@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

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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