



Butterfly
Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



The Suffolk Argus

The Newsletter of the **Suffolk** Branch of Butterfly Conservation

Photo Competition: Class 1: Photographed in the UK. Winner - Silver-studded Blue pair
photo: Trevor Goodfellow



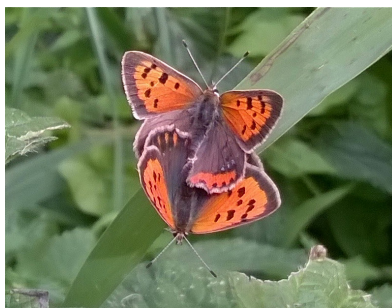
Photo Competition



Class 1 Photographed in the UK
2nd Chris Burslem Common Blue



Spot the Emperor!
Bonny Wood event photo: Kevin Ling (p11)



Small Copper,
form *caeruleopunctata*, pair
photo: Neil Dickinson (p10)

Editorial

Peter Maddison

The score is 530 ... and we're counting! By September membership of the Branch had increased to 530 households, which is a net increase of 52 in the year. Thank you all – old and new - for being members of Butterfly Conservation. The rapid increase in our membership in the last few years indicates that more people are enjoying butterflies and want to see them prosper. Sadly *The State of the UK's Butterflies 2015* and the *State of Nature 2016* both indicated the steady national decline of many butterfly and moth species, with few species maintaining their distribution and numbers and fewer making significant gains. Results from this year's Big Butterfly Count were disappointing nationally too with fewer butterflies being counted than in any year since 2012 when the scheme began.

The mild winter and the poor spring and early summer months might be the reason in part for the low numbers - you will remember the record-breaking wet June, and then July when people scanned blooming buddleias which were devoid of Admirals. But we lived in hope of better weather and more butterflies, and they duly arrived. Bushes were never laden with Commas, Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks but there was a sigh of relief when they did appear at the end of July in time for the open day at Prior's Oak, Trudie Willis' garden in Aldeburgh, where we held guided walks and a moth event. We are extremely grateful to Trudie for her generosity in once again donating proceeds of the day to the Branch. It was good to see Small Coppers, Grayling and Common Blue, and these species seemed to do well on coastal and

heathland sites. Chris Burslem's photo of Common Blue butterflies on Sea Holly was taken at Sizewell where hundreds, possibly thousands of the species were to be seen this year. Our event at Bonny Wood, written up by Kevin Ling, was a great success and shows the draw of the Purple Emperor. This species has been one of the exciting successes of recent years and, together with the Silver-washed Fritillary, new colonies are being found in most of the eastern counties.

The Ipswich Heaths Project is in its final year of major grant funding, so we are actively searching for new sources of finance. Fortunately, for the time being major work has been completed – scrapes dug and competing trees removed, so smaller sums of money will be required. Nationally finance for the environment is being squeezed. Natural England is having its budget cut by a third over four years, Landfill tax grants have been much reduced and Lottery grants are hugely competitive. The effect of Brexit is as yet unknown but therein lies an opportunity. As Sir David Attenborough said to Andrea Leadsom (Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) when he launched the *State of Nature 2016* report that post Brexit there is a great opportunity to tailor our efforts to conserve nature more closely to our UK needs and the future is in her hands. As members of BC we must try to ensure that those in power understand the need to conserve nature and that adequate finance is put in place. If that means writing to your MP, do so!

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Butterfly Conservation

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New Members

The following new members are warmly welcomed to the Suffolk Branch. We hope you find your membership interesting and enjoyable and that you will be able to take part in some of our events and work parties.

Ms J Amour & Mr A Pout & Family	Bury St Edmunds
Mr A Beamish	Lowestoft
Mr J Beetles	Lowestoft
Mr S Bradbrook	Ipswich
Mr C Burslem & Mrs A Allen	Saxmundham
Mr A Cheeseman	Woodbridge
Mrs L & Mr R Gibson	Kesgrave
Mr A Gifkins	Newmarket
Mr M Harrington	Woodbridge
Mrs N Horne	Bury St Edmunds
Mr R H Hutchinson	Aylsham
Ms M Kearney	Worham
Dr R J Mynott	Woodbridge
Mrs M & Mrs D Nicholls	Ipswich
Mrs Y & Mr J Palmer & Family	Bures St Mary
Mr A Parker	Felixstowe
Mrs D & Mr K Pickering	Ipswich
Mr W Plumb	Ipswich
Mr I Rousham	Westleton
Dr S & Mrs R Wilson & Family	Lowestoft
Miss N Wilson-Keshane	Sudbury
Mr S D Wood	Bury St Edmunds
Miss J Wright & Family	Stowmarket

Membership Secretary

At the AGM in October Sue Sidle stood down from her role as the Membership Sec. We are indebted to Sue for her work over the last nine years during which time huge leaps have been made in the use of technology. Sue remains a member of the Branch, of course, and we look forward to seeing her at some of our events in the future.

We are delighted to welcome Tracie Beattie as our new Membership Secretary. Tracie's details appear on the Contacts page.

Do we have your Email address?

A significant sum of your membership fee is used in the printing and posting of the newsletter. If it is not essential for you to have the paper copy of the newsletter, *The Suffolk Argus*, we would be pleased to send you the electronic edition. For this we need your email address. Please contact our new Membership Secretary, Tracie Beattie tc39@hotmail.co.uk

Also, occasionally we would like to send you a brief emailed newsletter giving important news, updates to the events programme and so forth. If you would like to receive these newsletters please get in touch with Tracie Beattie who will be pleased to add your name to the list of recipients. This list is separate from the names of people receiving the electronic edition of the Argus.

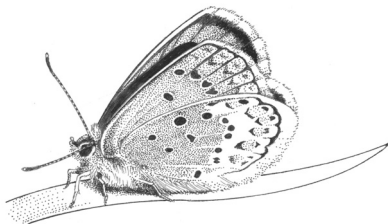
Full data protection of your address is observed

Our promise to you

We will never swap, sell or rent your details to anyone

We will always follow the strict code of conduct set out by the Fundraising Regulator

You can change how you hear from us or unsubscribe from our mailing lists at any time, just let us know.



How attractive are recommended garden plants to butterflies?

Clive Betts & David Lonsdale

One widely available means of engaging people in insect conservation is through wildlife gardening, including the cultivation of foodplants for a wide range of insects in both their larval and adult stages. Many gardeners are, however, inclined to concentrate only on growing certain plants that are attractive to adult butterflies and nectar-feeding moths. This somewhat less laudable option is perhaps not quite as simple as it seems, given that the most well-known nectar plants are not all equally attractive to a range of butterfly species. These plants include the ‘top five’ listed by Butterfly Conservation: Butterfly Bush *Buddleia* spp., Verbena *Verbena bonariensis*, Lavender *Lavandula angustifolia*, Perennial Wallflower *Erisimum* ‘Bowles Mauve’ and Majoram *Oreganum vulgare*.

A recent study by research workers at the University of Sussex explored the number and identity of butterflies visiting eleven kinds of summer-flowering garden plant in a rural garden in East Sussex in August 2013 (Shackleton and Ratnieks, 2016). A total of 2,659 visits by adult Lepidoptera was recorded, representing 14 butterfly and one moth species. The widely grown Butterfly bush *Buddleia davidii* attracted many nymphalines, such as the Peacock *Aglais io* but very few satyrines such as the Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, which mostly visited *Origanum*. One of the plant species, Bird’s-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, received only a single butterfly visit; from a Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*. Each plant species

attracted only a subset of the butterfly community, so that none of them would alone have been sufficient to attract the full range of butterflies recorded.

The reasons for the adult feeding preferences of different butterfly species are not entirely clear. Like earlier authors, including Cribb (1982), Shackleton and Ratnieks mention that the short proboscis-length of certain species prevents them from using flowers with deep corolla tubes. They point out, however, that this does not explain all their observations. For example, they found that the Small White *Pieris rapae* made relatively few visits to the flowers of *B. davidii*, even though the proboscis of this butterfly is on average almost 3 mm longer than the *Buddleia* corolla.

The present authors undertook their study because they saw a need to provide gardeners with more discriminating advice about the preferences of different butterflies for particular nectar plants. A good deal of information on this subject had, however, already been published, including a series of articles in the Bulletin of the Amateur Entomologists’ Society (Stallwood, 1972-79). Also, Hardy (2016, last updated) has been maintaining a database of records of butterfly nectar plants, some of which date back to the 19th century. While preparing their article, Shackleton and Ratnieks (2016) saw Hardy’s database and observed that this comprises records that are mostly consistent with their own findings.

Like earlier authors, including Cribb (1982), Shackleton and Ratnieks (2016) conclude that a variety of plant species are required as nectar sources to stock a butterfly-friendly garden. They suggest that gardeners could usefully be provided with more precise information about the species of butterfly likely to be attracted by particular plants. Perhaps they should have added that gardeners should be encouraged also to grow larval foodplants, rather than merely trying to attract adult butterflies from elsewhere into their gardens, as advised for example by Cribb (1982) and by Fry and Lonsdale (1991: p. 179-82).

References

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- Fry, R. & Lonsdale, D. (eds.) (1991). *Habitat Conservation for Insects: A Neglected Green Issue*. Amateur Entomologists' Society, 262 pp.
- Hardy, P. (2016). *Peter Hardy's Butterfly Database*, Staffordshire University. <http://tinyurl.com/j49ocrc>
- Shackleton, K. & Ratnieks, F. (2016). Garden varieties: How attractive are recommended garden plants to butterflies? *Journal of Insect Conservation* **20**: 141-148.
- Stallwood, B.R. (1972-79). A preliminary survey of the food and feeding habits of adult butterflies. *Bulletin of the Amateur Entomologists' Society* **31**: 25-28; 54-56; 130-23; **32**: 64-72; 108-114; 174-180; **36**: 91-94; **38**: 194-95.

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Purdis Heath Work parties

If you would like to spend some time tweaking the habitat to conserve heathland flora and fauna, particularly the Silver-studded Blue, we would be delighted for you to join us.

Tea, coffee cake and chatter with like-minded folk are ensured.

Helen Saunders has the details:
helens919@gmail.com

Work parties usually take place on the first Saturday of each month during the winter period.

Sat 12th Nov
Sat 3rd Dec
Sat 7th Jan
Sat 4th Feb
Sat 4th March

The Swallowtail Garden at Strumpshaw Fen

Richard Stewart

Many members of our Suffolk branch will have travelled to Norfolk to see Swallowtails and a popular venue is the RSPB's reserve at Strumpshaw Fen. The path to the Fen passes Marsh Cottage, where for many years Martin George and his wife have placed a notice inviting anyone interested, especially photographers, to walk the whole length of their front garden border, right up to the front door. Along this border many species of butterflies are attracted to rich nectar sources, including Swallowtails which particularly favour Dames' Violet and the slightly later Sweet William. Martin George often came out to chat and over the years he has told me of a few people abusing their generosity by having a picnic in the nearby orchard and even knocking on the front door for a cup of tea. However, he told me of at least one benefit - chatting to a visitor from Northamptonshire he mentioned having never seen Purple Emperors. He was given details of a particularly good site and subsequently he and his wife saw them, including a female ovipositing.

I was at the reserve on 28th May 2016

and it was obvious he was very ill - his daughter was doing the garden and he had visits from the nurse and local vicar. He died on 5th June and there were fulsome tributes in both his local Eastern Daily Press and our East Anglian Daily Times. Doctor Martin George had an important job as the Nature Conservancy's regional officer in East Anglia, was the person who initially suggested making the Fen into a reserve and was awarded an OBE in 1990 for his services to nature conservation. He was the author of the influential 'Land Use, Ecology and Nature Conservation of Broadland' and after his retirement was still regularly consulted by the media about Broadland conservation issues. I actually met Mrs. George after his death, in the reserve meadow watching dragonflies, and I got the distinct impression that, as long as the family remained at the cottage, their generous offer would continue.

Finally, it was appropriate that Steve Plume's tribute in the East Anglian Daily Times featured a Swallowtail taken in their garden just three days before Martin George's death.



Swallowtail
by Beryl Johnson

Small Copper – Slump or No Slump?

Rob Parker

Readers of BC's Summer edition of *Butterfly* magazine will have noticed the headline "Small Copper Slumps". The article referred to the 2015 season, which was its worst year on record, judging by UKBMS transects. Compared to 2014, Small Copper numbers had fallen by a quarter and the species was in significant decline, so perhaps we should consider ourselves lucky to have seen a few in Suffolk in 2016. Many of us look out for the attractive form- *caeruleopunctata*, which has a string of blue teardrop spots on the hindwings, and occurs fairly frequently amongst the Suffolk populations. Richard Stewart has studied these over the years, and has noted their appearance in this journal from time to time.

On 3rd September this year, Neil Dickinson was walking on Redgrave & Lopham Fen, where the SWT reserve sits astride the Suffolk/Norfolk

border, and he was lucky enough to spot a mating pair of Small Coppers, just on the Suffolk side of the border. On closer inspection, Neil noticed the blue spots of the *caeruleopunctata* form – not just on one, but on both the male and the female. He succeeded in taking this lovely photograph (page 2), in which the blue markings can be seen on both insects.

It is interesting to speculate on what the offspring of this pairing will look like. Will all of them be of the blue form? Will any of them be extreme ultra *caeruleopunctata* – or will they just be the normal form – without any blue at all? They should be on the wing in May 2017, so it might be worth visiting Redgrave & Lopham Fen then to find out. Let's just hope that our populations are not suffering too badly from the slump of 2015.

Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme (WCBS) is an increasingly valuable source of data charting the fortunes of the common and widespread butterfly species at the height of summer. The commitment of time is minimal, part of 2 days, one in July the second in August. It is something to do on warm, sunny days. Please look at the list of available squares and let me, Twm Wade, know by email: twm.wade@yahoo.com if you would like to take part.

WIDER COUNTRYSIDE BUTTERFLY SURVEY - IN SUFFOLK Squares Available to New Participants

Grif Ref.	Town or Parish of Grid Ref.	Post Code of Grid Ref.
TL7573	Icklingham	IP28 6PZ
TL8271	Culford	IP28 6UD
TL9462	Beyton	IP30 9AH
TL9479	Coney Weston	IP31 1HL
TL9577	Coney Weston	IP31 1DL
TL9859	Rattlesden	IP30 0RR
TM0969	Wickham Skeith	IP23 8LX

If interested, please contact: twm.wade@yahoo.com

Bonny Wood event Sunday 17th July 2016

Kevin Ling

Having been a member of Butterfly Conservation for a short time, I elected to join the Suffolk Branch committee in order not only to broaden my conservation knowledge, but to do my bit in helping to preserve our endangered British species, whilst encouraging others to do the same.

During the winter months, the committee turned its thoughts towards the summer programme of events for 2016 and I nominated myself to lead my first ever field trip.

In July of 2015, I had visited Bonny Wood for the first time and was impressed by the number of butterflies seen at this Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, with the headline act being Purple Emperor, *Apatura iris*.

So the date of 17th July 2016 was set in the diary for Suffolk Branch's event at Bonny Wood.

I had received a small number of enquiries from interested parties prior to the event, so was hopeful of a reasonable turn out. What followed next took me by surprise, as car after car filtered into the village hall car park, until a grand total of 35 people stood before me. Proof that 'His Imperial Majesty' does have some pulling power (that's the Purple Emperor, not me!)

As we set off for the long walk to the wood, the cloud was persistent and remained so until our arrival at the reserve entrance. However as we entered the first ride, the sun broke through and it was not long before we had our first sightings of White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary on the bramble in front of us. Above us in the Oak canopies, Purple Hairstreaks also joined the party.

As we progressed along the rides, we encountered further summer species including Red Admiral, Comma, Large and Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Small and Large Skipper.

Fellow committee member David Dowding had gone ahead of the party laying bait to tempt the Purple Emperors to ground (rotting fish and cockles!). This soon paid dividends, as we encountered a rather battered male example feasting alongside a Red Admiral. It was a privilege to see this species at close quarters for such a prolonged period of time. This particular male being the most photographed example of the day.

The main party dispersed into smaller groups as they sought out more Purple Emperors in other parts of the wood. A total of seven sightings was achieved by the end of the morning.

As we continued along the other rides, a further number of White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary were enjoyed, as well as a good number of dragonfly species including Common Darter and Southern Hawker.

This proved to be a very successful and fruitful event and it was nice to have met so many different people on the walk, thank you for your support.

Also a thank you to Jeremy Reynolds for allowing everyone to park at the Village Hall (and sorry that my handful of cars turned into a full car park!).

If you haven't yet visited Bonny Wood, then I would highly recommend a visit in the summer of 2017 (cockles optional!).

Painted Lady migration through the Sahel

Hope you watched the fascinating tv programme about the long-distance migration of the Painted Lady, here are some of the latest findings recently flagged up by Butterfly Conservation Europe.

The Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*, is a migratory butterfly that performs an annual multi-generational migration between Europe and North Africa. Its seasonal appearance south of the Sahara in autumn is well known and has led to the suggestion that it results from extremely long migratory flights by European butterflies to seasonally exploit the Sahel and the tropical savannah. However, this possibility has remained unproven. In a new paper Stefanescu et al. show that autumn migrants collected south of the Sahara now are confirmed to be long-distance movements (of

4000 km or more) starting in Europe. Samples from Maghreb revealed a mixed origin of migrants, with most individuals with a European origin, but others having originated in the Sahel. Therefore, autumn movements are not only directed to north-western Africa, but also include southward and northward flights across the Sahara. Through this remarkable behaviour, the productive but highly seasonal region south of the Sahara is incorporated into the migratory circuit of *V. cardui*.

Stefanescu C, Soto DX, Talavera G, Vila R, Hobson KA. 2016 Long-distance autumn migration across the Sahara by painted lady butterflies: exploiting resource pulses in the tropical savannah. *Biol. Lett.* 12: 20160561. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2016.0561>

What did the Cabbage White do for us?

More than you might think is the answer. Far from being just a pest of the vegetable garden, scientists at Exeter University have shown that the Large and Small White butterflies hold a secret to unlocking techniques to make solar energy more efficient and cheaper.

It is known that on cloudy days the Cabbage Whites take flight before other species. Investigations showed that the butterflies are able to do this by holding their wings when basking in a 'V' shaped posture, known as reflectance basking, which reflects more solar energy to the butterfly's thorax, allowing it to warm up the flight muscles much faster.

The scientists investigated how to replicate the wings to develop a new, lightweight reflective material that could be used in solar energy production.

The team found that the optimal angle by which the butterfly should hold its wings to increase

temperature to its body was around 17 degrees, which increased the temperature by 7.3 degrees Centigrade compared to when held flat.

They also showed that by replicating the simple mono-layer of scale cells found in the butterfly's wings in solar energy producers, they could vastly improve the power-to-weight ratios of future solar concentrators, making them significantly lighter and so more efficient.

Don't underestimate the pest of the cabbage field, it's an expert at gathering/reaping solar energy.

The paper, *White butterflies as solar photovoltaic concentrators*, by Katie Shanks, Dr Senthilarasu Sundaram, Professor Richard French-Constant and Professor Tapas Mallick from the University of Exeter, is available online.

http://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_463490_en.html

Memorable Moments

Twm Wade

This following poem was written specifically as a background ‘commentary’ to a slideshow of photographs taken in 2016. The poem has a collage of actual events and, as far as possible, the butterflies being shown matched those identified in the poem. The combined poem and slideshow were to be shown at the branch AGM, following a similar entry, a film, last year.

Memorable Moments

I stood a-while alone under the tree,
As leaves give shelter from the storm above;
A pause from seeking sulphur’s butterfly.

The sun breaks through the darkened cloud at last,
So out I go to seek again the brimstone,
But there for all to see the hind and fawn.

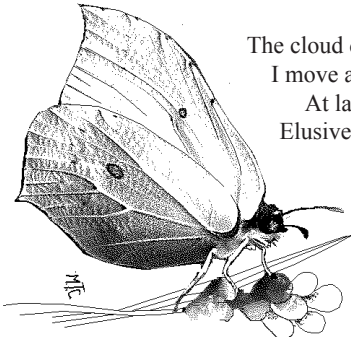
I pause in sunlight warm and dry to watch
As life and butterflies come forth again.
The deer soon leave as I explore the field.

Alone no more as insects rise and then
An amber bow-wave moves as skippers take
Flight ‘tween the blooms of red, yellow and blue.

I stop and wait, the quiet still air lifts
And dries the grasses.
Other butterflies are in the air:
The blues, the whites, a dark lone Peacock.

The gentle wind across the meadow gusts.
I reach the hedge to search the base and bush
To find the harbinger of spring as bright
As butter for all to see from far and wide.

The cloud draws over the sky and hides the sun.
I move along the hedge to spot a fluttering.
At last I see the yellow blaze of that
Elusive one, the one and only Brimstone.



Brimstone
by Mervyn Crawford

Wolves and Ramsey Woods: a site guide

Adrian Richards

These two excellent butterfly woods are situated midway between Hadleigh and Hintlesham. Wolves Wood lies on the northern edge of the A1071 and Ramsey Wood close by to the south. Both are ancient woods and actively managed by the RSPB.

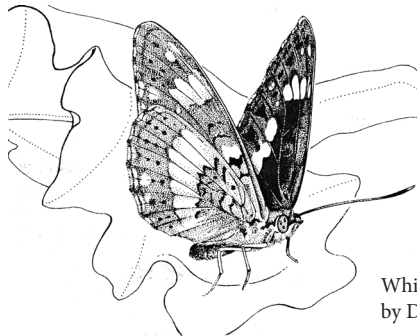
The main target species, the Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral can be seen in good numbers in both woods throughout July, fine sunny weather being the only prerequisite.

Wolves Wood has a good-sized car park accessed off the A1071. A footpath leads away from the car park to the left. This clockwise circular walk passes through dense woodland for the first 150 metres or so before it becomes an open sunny ride. The managed area either side of the ride has good ground flora and is lined with flowering Fleabane and Watermint. Large numbers of Ringlets, Gatekeepers and Speckled Woods can be seen jostling on these flowers. This more open area has a good number of large flowering thistles which are a firm favourite of the Silver-washed Fritillaries, but they often have to share them with the newly hatched Peacocks.

A little further on, a bench comes into view. A path leads off to the left here to a large pond, where large numbers of Ruddy Darters and Southern Hawker dragonflies can be seen. If you are quiet, you may see a Grass Snake. They like to bask by the pond edge.

After the bench the main ride straightens out and this northern section is fringed with large Oaks. Purple Hairstreaks occur in good number on these trees but patience will be required to see them. In these trees, Gt. Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and Treecreepers can also be spotted. The shrub layer below is often frequented by Marsh Tits and their more common cousins.

As the path snakes away to the east, a large clear felled area comes into view. By the edge of the path is a large pond over which several Four-spotted Chaser dragonflies will be seen hawking. A little further on, the path becomes a sunlit woodland ride once more and is a good spot for White Admirals. Several will be seen, no doubt attracted in part by the numerous Honeysuckles winding around the other shrubs.



White Admiral
by Douglas Hammersley

Another pond again by the path boasts Broad-bodied Chasers along with Azure and Large Red Damselflies. After this section, the path re-enters the woodland and leads back to the car park.

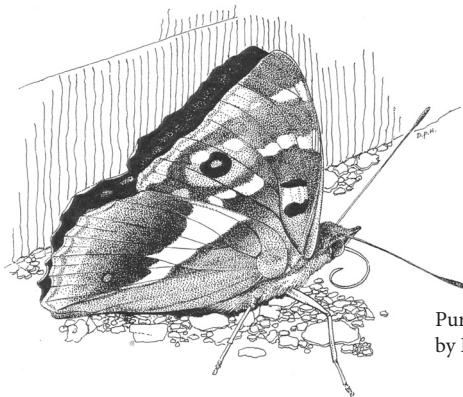
To get to Ramsey Wood, just turn left out of the Wolves Wood car park. About $\frac{3}{4}$ mile along the road on the other side is a layby where you can park. From this layby, a wooded public footpath leads to Ramsey Wood itself. As this footpath opens out into a ride, there is a turning to the left. Ignore this and carry straight on.

I am confident you will see Silver-washed Fritillaries straight away. On either side of the ride are good numbers of flowering Brambles and here it is easy to photograph the fritillaries. The White Admirals are more challenging as they seem to be constantly on the move.

This year a White-letter Hairstreak was seen by the ride perched near some Wych Elm. It's a butterfly often overlooked, but it's worth keeping an eye out for it. Purple Hairstreaks are again present here, often

in large numbers. Purple Emperors were found in Ramsey Wood for the first time this year. A male was seen flying around the top of an Ash tree and on subsequent visits up to three males have been seen on and around the tree. This favoured 'Master Ash' is easy to find. It is situated halfway along the ride on the western edge. The tree is quite distinct as it is multi-stemmed and has a Larch next to it. All of the Purple Emperor sightings have been from late morning to mid-afternoon.

On the eastern side of the ride are good numbers of large Sallow bushes and trees. These are worth checking as there may be both male and female Purple Emperors flying around and perching on these. If you carry on walking you soon come to the edge of the wood where it meets the even bigger Hintlesham Great Wood. You are also met with the unsightly base of a pylon. This area is managed for maintenance, which encourages a large population of wild flowers. The flowering Fleabane and Vetches attract Ringlet, Commas and Speckled Woods.



Purple Emperor
by Douglas Hammersley

The Lord of the Mountains Trilogy

Paul Johnson

Perhaps like many other butterfly watchers I was stuck on two. And perhaps like many others, the two resident British species I still sought were the Mountain Ringlet and the Chequered Skipper; both denizens of remote, unfamiliar habitats of the far north requiring considerable endeavour to find; both single-brooded species and, in the case of the former, a short-lived butterfly with a flight period determined by altitude as well as the normal considerations of latitude and longitude.

My first opportunity to look for the ‘Lord of the Mountains’ (Matthew Oates’s name for the Mountain Ringlet from his 2015 book, *In Pursuit of Butterflies*) came in 2010 on a holiday to County Durham. On the second Sunday, I loaded up the car and eagerly set off for the Mountain Ringlet colony on the fells above the Honister Pass slate mine in the Lake District. Arriving there mid-morning, I took a few paces across the car park and then retraced them to dejectedly pull from the car my heavy winter coat. All of my early optimism, which had already faltered as cloud had built steadily en route, evaporated and I knew then that unless there was a miraculous rise in temperature the day would have to be filed away under the category of reconnaissance.

Honister was not to be blessed by a miracle that day and the cold, swirling clouds did not yield. I spent an enjoyable morning exploring though – the remains of an old

drum house highlighted on the site notes I’d printed out were easily found, and this crumbling structure marked the start of a well-trodden path to Brandreth where a forbidding Raven stood sentinel at a fence line. After lunch, I walked across the open fell in the hope of flushing out a Mountain Ringlet from the grass. This was successful in flushing quantities of fell water into my shoes and, with sodden socks, I retreated to the mine’s visitor centre for coffee. It had been a chastening experience – did butterflies really thrive here in conditions so alien to those I knew?

Back at home with admirals and fritillaries gliding along woodland rides and hairstreaks flashing silver in the treetops, thoughts of the Mountain Ringlet quickly faded and weren’t to resurface until 2015 when we stayed on holiday near Penrith. After a decidedly chilly first few days, a weak ridge of high pressure crept almost apologetically onto the weather chart and with it came a chance. After much deliberation I decided to revisit Honister in favour of Irton Fell, a lower altitude, earlier emergence Mountain Ringlet site in south-west Lakeland.

As I passed Keswick, the sun was shining and my optimism increased only to ebb as clouds accumulated as I reached Honister. Still, it felt much warmer on the fell this time, a few micro-moths flickered about weakly, while Meadow Pipits and Wheatears made pleasant companions. I scanned the grass

for butterflies and the sky for sunshine. Away in the distance a couple appeared to be doing the same, and it transpired later that they'd travelled up from Norfolk that morning to look for ringlets!

With the cloud stubborn, my thoughts turned to the Morrisons steak pie I'd bought for lunch. Back in the car, I carefully unwrapped the pie and then looked up to find the fell suddenly and unexpectedly bathed in sunshine. I needed to be back up top and tried to wolf down the pie which promptly responded by disintegrating into my lap. There was no time to lament though, and I scooped up my camera bag and took a quiet quarry track which I felt certain offered a much quicker ascent than the main path I'd previously taken. The reason for the track's unpopularity soon became apparent for it comprised a series of viciously steep hairpin bends hidden from view from the car park. I arrived at the drum house breathless, hot and with pie crumbs still clinging tenaciously to my fleece. However, the sun had held and I'd even seen a butterfly – a Small Heath shuffling about amongst the slates on the quarry track.

Now I started to search with renewed intent, checking sheltered gullies and the warm scree slopes at the foot of Grey Knotts. A little way off, the Norfolk couple did likewise until our paths crossed and we sadly concluded that the Mountain Ringlet simply hadn't emerged here yet. Driving back towards Penrith, a small voice kindly reminded me about Irton Fell where ringlets flew earlier; "you fool, you fool," it insisted,

"you should have gone to Irton."

Drawn back to Cumbria, we booked our 2016 holiday near to Penrith again. A few days before, I checked online and nearly fell off my chair – the Mountain Ringlet had just emerged at Irton Fell, Cumbria Branch had a walk there on the first Sunday of our holiday, and the weather forecast heralded sunshine and high temperatures. I arranged to join the walk and monitored the coming weather forecasts nervously.

Sunday dawned to a peerless sky and early-rising Painted Ladies showed salmon-pink along the quiet lanes as I set off. The good omens continued as I passed the Red Admiral Inn at Gosforth, then on to Santon Bridge where our group assembled before beginning a steady ascent of the wooded slopes of Irton Pike. Mountain Ringlet stories were exchanged – the 4am starts, huge mileages and desperate hands-and-knees searches of Mat-grass tussocks as rain had fallen mercilessly in proverbial stair rods. Clearly I'd escaped with a mere flesh wound by comparison! Then we were out onto Irton Fell and these past travails forgotten as we moved quickly towards a small, dusky butterfly which flew low over the grass. The search was over.

We soon saw many more Mountain Ringlets, mainly males with a faint gun-metal sheen to their uppers, quartering the sward; this near-constant search for females clearly a necessity for a butterfly living only a few days in a challenging environment. For all this activity, the Mountain Ringlet

struck me as a gentle-natured soul much like the low altitude Ringlet which, with its bobbing-cork flight, always seems a most benign butterfly.

The Mountain Ringlets did though reveal a mischievous side to their nature for on the few occasions they paused to nectar on drifts of yellow Tormentil, they became acutely aware of any approaching lepidopterist. If the lepidopterist happened to have a camera, this awareness was heightened further and the beep of an auto-focus button would guarantee the butterfly's immediate disappearance into a confused mass of grass stems.

The female Mountain Ringlets we found were more amenable, their flight restricted to short, uncoordinated sorties by the heavy cargoes of eggs held in their broad abdomens. Twice I watched a female Mountain Ringlet clamber gingerly up a slender grass stem, only to topple back into the tussock below on reaching the top. Later, I found a female curving her abdomen to oviposit on a blade of Mat-grass but could find no sign of an egg afterwards.

With photography proving difficult, I decided to simply enjoy watching the ringlets. As I trailed them through myriad

gullies of close-cropped Bilberry and heather, the count rose to 114 – a total only eclipsed by that for the Small Heath (128) for which this site is also clearly a thriving metropolis. Both the Mountain Ringlet and Irton Fell had surprised: the former an endearing butterfly with a gentle charm and character belying its rather austere appearance; the latter, with its undulations, hollows, outcrops, flushes and streams, instantly appealing. I'd perhaps had an insight too into Matthew Oates's enthusiasm for the 'Lord of the Mountains' and the frequency of his trips from southern England to seek it.

We broke for lunch. A few miles westwards the hazy curve of the Cumbrian coast punctured incongruously by the stacks and chimneys of Sellafield. Then pasture land, then the slopes of Irton Fell clad brightly in flowering Tormentil and Gorse. Mountain Ringlets flew about us, searching, constantly searching. I sat back contentedly and took a leisurely bite from the Morrisons steak pie I'd bought for lunch.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Butterfly Conservation – Cumbria Branch for letting me join their Irton Fell walk and for the Mountain Ringlet information provided on their website.

Events 2017

Visit our website early in the new year for our 2017 Events

Copy Date

Spring Argus 2017
Sunday 22nd January

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Becky Miners, BC Supporter Development Officer

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Purdis Heath SSSI project update and observations.

David Basham and Julian Dowding

Purdis Heath is part of what was once a much larger tract of lowland heath lying on the eastern fringe of Ipswich. Over the course of the last two centuries and particularly post WW2, this has been whittled down to a few isolated pockets due to ‘development’, forestry and agriculture. Purdis, which together with Martlesham Heath comprise Ipswich Heaths SSSI, is without doubt one of the best remaining examples of this beautiful rare and priority BAP habitat on the outskirts of Ipswich. It also contains some very interesting and rare species. Notwithstanding statutory protection, Purdis still faces the other threat that most heathlands face, namely, that left to its own devices, it would ‘scrub over’ and disappear as heathland, ultimately becoming woodland to the detriment of heathland species.

Despite the valiant efforts of various conservation bodies over the past 20 years or so, the tide of birch, gorse and oak began to overwhelm the heathers and other characteristic open heathland plants with a resultant steep decline in the number of *Plebejus argus* (Silver-studded Blue) and other heathland species. From the 1000’s present in the 1980’s the number plummeted to just 4 in 2010. A report by Dr. Neil Ravenscroft in 2009 commissioned by Suffolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation to assess the state of Silver-studded Blue on the Sandlings highlighted the need for an intensification of management at Purdis in order to help its ailing Silver-studded Blue population. A meeting was called and all interested parties were invited to formulate an emergency plan of action. Those present were unanimous in agreeing to more radical management as the best approach.

In winter 2010 Butterfly Conservation began the Purdis Heath Restoration Project, followed in 2012 by the Ipswich Heaths Project, with the help of volunteer organisations and individuals

led by site wardens and funded by a WREN landfill tax grant. Both projects have involved the removal of trees and scrub from the centre of the site to open it up, the removal of some of the deep litter layer, and the cutting of mature and degenerate areas of *Calluna vulgaris* (Ling) and *Erica cinerea* (Bell Heather) to encourage re-growth and different age structures which seems to favour the butterflies. Note: not all mature heather is bad.

In order to increase characteristic heath habitat and micro-climates, sandy scrapes have also been created and these have been strewn with Bell Heather clippings containing seed. Bell Heather, the primary nectar source of Silver-studded Blues takes a long time to mature to a level where it provides enough nectar to attract the butterfly but it germinates readily, along with other characteristic heathland plants, such as *Ornithopus purpusillus* (Bird’s-foot) and *Festuca ovina* (Sheep’s Fescue) which are also used by heathland butterflies.

The work has not been without attendant problems. Opening up the site has made it far easier for the public to get about the site, with the unfortunate result that damage is caused to seedling heathers from trampling and disturbance to other species. Therefore, dead hedges made from cut Silver Birch and sandy bunds made from the spoil from scraping have been created, to encourage walkers and their dogs to keep away from sensitive parts of the site and also to create areas of seclusion.

The result of all this is that today, 6 years after Suffolk Branch took on active management of Purdis, there is a healthy ‘superstructure’ of young pioneer heathers, foraged areas, and sandy scrapes, all gently merging into the scrubby edges and woodland belt. Of course

there will always be a need to continue work on the heath to maintain the open structure but the following snippets of recording efforts and casual observations suggest that Purdis Heath is in a much better condition than it was 6 years ago and that it has a positive future.

Butterflies and moths: Silver-studded Blues have responded well to the work, with a rise to over 50 recorded on one day in 2015 and a much greater spread of butterflies across the site, moving into areas which had been unoccupied since the 1980's.

Around the beginning of July 2016, a quick look under one of the paving slabs placed on the southern section of the heath a few years ago to encourage ants to nest/colonise (ants and SSB's share a mutualistic symbiotic relationship) revealed a Silver-studded Blue pupa nestled in an ant channel and receiving the attention of ants.

In the course of one of our Silver-studded Blue transect walks, a female SSB was photographed laying an egg on mature heather.

While assessing the 2016 winter work programme, a nicely marked male SSB was seen on a scrape created during winter 2010/11. It has taken 5 years to get one on this new area. Many of the young Bell Heather plants on that scrape are now bearing flowers which hopefully will attract more SSB's in future.

Hipparchia semele (Grayling) butterflies are also doing very well. We've counted more than 10 on two separate visits this summer. The wonderful courtship behaviour has been observed on at least 4 occasions and females have been seen laying eggs on all scrapes over 2 years of age. They certainly like these new features and will be utilising the fescues which grow upon them as larval hosts, as will Lunar Yellow Underwing, a rare moth species which has been recorded as both adult and larva on the

site again this year.

Birds: Early in spring 2015, a male Woodlark, a species absent from the heath for many years was heard singing. This year 2 Woodlarks have been there. Due to territorial behaviour and the fact that the birds have been seen together, we believe they may have been nesting. We've been out on several occasions to experience their wonderful song. They've been seen in various parts of the heath but ultimately spent a lot of time in between a scrape created in 2010/11 and an area which has been fenced to monitor the effects of rabbit grazing. The birds have chosen a fairly secluded spot.

Continuing the bird theme, at least 8 singing Nightingales have also been present this year, plus Cuckoo, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler, Woodcock, Linnet (at least 7 present before nesting began) and Blackcap.

As part of our on-going survey of site species, quite a few other interesting invertebrate records have come to light in the last few years, particularly as we now have a good range of bare earth and sand habitats with plant regeneration at varying stages.

Bees, wasps and ants: there are currently 33 species of bee recorded at Purdis. We have the Nationally very rare *Lasioglossum sexnotatum* which is actually a bit of an Ipswich and surrounds speciality, being found in extremely few other places in the Country. *Lasioglossum brevicorne* is another, that whilst not quite as rare as *L. sexnotatum*, is Nationally uncommon, although thinly scattered across the Sandlings.

With the increasing tracts of flowering Heather present we have a good population of the heather specialist bees, *Colletes succinctus* and *Andrena fuscipes*, and their associated cleptoparasitic bees, *Epeolus cruciger* and *Nomada rufipes* respectively. Another bee keen on the Heather flowers is the frenetic Green-eyed Flower Bee,

Anthophora bimaculata, which can be seen darting about the Bell Heather flowers with its characteristic high-pitched buzz. Purdis is one of a handful of Suffolk sites for this bee.

We have been lucky to find a couple of interesting species relationships.

One of only two known modern county records of the cleptoparasitic bee, *Nomada ferruginata*, came from Purdis in 2014 so a search was made during early 2016 to track down its host, the mining bee *Andrena praecox* which is a very early bee to appear in the year. Sure enough *Andrena praecox* was duly found and this becomes only the third modern record for this bee, although as noted, its appearance early in the year probably means it is under-recorded.

Another rare *Nomada* bee, *Nomada signata*, which has only a few modern records in the County was also found during 2014. This bee uses the common Tawny Mining Bee, *Andrena fulva*, as its host so its rarity is a bit of a puzzle, but it remains uncommon.

A small bee collected in April has now been confirmed as being *Lasioglossum sexstrigatum*. This is the first record of this bee, which has only recently been added to the British list, north of the Thames and represents a significant expansion of the species.

The wasps are represented by 21 species currently with, again, a couple of interesting species relationships noted.

Astata boops is a bug hunting wasp that is common on the heath, digging its nest burrow into the bare sandy soil where the paralysed bugs are deposited prior to ovipositing. One of the tiny but beautiful ruby-tailed wasps, *Hedychridium roseum*, is its associated cleptoparasite and this was recorded for the first time in 2015.

Another couple of rare ruby-tailed wasps have been recorded from the heath. *Hedychrum niemelai* and *H. nobile*, which have only fairly recently been separated as species, parasitise the nest burrows of *Cerceris* digger wasps. We have a couple of common species of *Cerceris*, and quite possibly some of the rarer ones, so presumably some or all of these are being used as the ruby-tails can be quite numerous on some occasions. As with the whole project more work remains to be done to investigate the situation more fully.

Smicromyrme rufipes – Small Velvet Ant - is a Nationally Notable (Nb) species of parasitic wasp with the male fully winged but the females wingless. She scurries about looking for ground-nesting bee and wasp burrows to lay her eggs in. This species was recorded for the first time from Purdis during 2015.

Beetles: Recent interesting finds from other invertebrate groups include the small but good-looking Blue Rove Beetle – *Ocypus ophthalmicus* - which occurs thinly across the Sandlings. This is like a slightly smaller Devil's Coach Horse Beetle but is metallic greeny-blue across the head and thorax, with a black abdomen.

We've been monitoring *Lampyrus noctiluca* (Glow-worms) at Purdis for the past two years. This year half a dozen surveys have convinced us of a healthy colony there, so healthy in fact, that most of the females extinguish their 'candles' soon after dark! Under one of our ant slabs, a single Glow-worm larva was observed.

Bugs: Rare bugs found in the last couple of years have been the uncommon Broad-headed bug, *Alydus calcaratus*, along with its ant-like nymphs, and the Heather Bug – *Rhacognathus punctatus* - with Purdis Heath being one of only two known modern Suffolk sites for this Heather Beetle predating bug.

Purdis Heath update and observations (p20)



Silver-studded Blue female
Photo: Matt Berry



Silver-studded Blue male
Photo: Matt Berry



Silver-studded Blue pupa
Photo: David Dowding



Astata boops
Photo: Matt Berry



Ruby-tailed Wasp
Photo: Matt Berry



Bee-wolf with prey
Photo: Matt Berry



Photo Competition

Class 2:
Photographed
abroad

1st
Two-tailed Pasha
Kevin Ling

2nd
Purple Emperor
Kevin Ling

