Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch

Newsletter No 91

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www.dorsetbutterflies.com

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Editor's Notes

Earlier on this summer I bumped into Bobby Knowles at a CPRE Garden Party. She was our Newsletter Editor for over 10 years until 2012, so I asked her to write something for us, and she has produced the three short items here. We pay tribute to Gordon Hopkins, who was an enthusiastic supporter for many years, and sadly died earlier this year. There is much else to read, which I hope you will enjoy. Many thanks to all our contributors, to Nigel Spring for his detailed checking, and to Lyn Pullen for her creative final touches and preparing it all for print.

Jane Smith, Newsletter Editor

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Front cover photo: Small Blue by Richard Belding

View from the Chair

From Nigel Spring, Dorset Branch Chair

I **am** writing this the day after the clocks have gone back – and suddenly it seems that winter is upon us with the prematurely dark evenings and finger-numbing frosts. With all the political gloom and unpleasant polarisation we are seeing in our world, added to the crises besetting the planet that many of our leaders would prefer to ignore, it is so easy to forget the amazing season that we have just enjoyed, one when Nature really blossomed on our reserves and wildlife sites, taking advantage of the long spells of wonderful weather.

The statistics speak for themselves – almost 90,000 butterfly records were sent in to our Dorset branch website this year, way more than last year! Far more people are noticing butterflies and acknowledging the importance of sending in records and our branch website attracts more and more interest each year. Over 116,000 butterfly counts were sent in during the Big Butterfly Count (a massive 20,000 increase on last year) with 1.6 million individual butterflies recorded. That is a phenomenal human effort, a huge success for BC and a great boost for public awareness of our natural world.

Not all species did well this year for a variety of reasons and those that did well were not necessarily evenly abundant everywhere. The 2018 season had varying consequences for the abundance of butterfly (and moth) species in 2019. The Marsh Fritillaries at Alners Gorse have doubled their numbers yet again. In the past three years, the number of larval webs counted has gone from 27 to 54 to 94! And the numbers of adults flying

Marsh Fritillary. Photo: Shona Refoy

in May and June reflected this exponential growth. At the same time the numbers of Marsh Fritillaries on the downs above Cerne Abbas were substantially less than last year – probably because last year's dry summer led to the cattle grazing the grass much more tightly.

2019 has been a bumper year for Painted Ladies, though for Dorset at least not quite on the scale as some of the previous invasions. It is certainly good for BC's PR to have a population explosion of these colourful visitors from southern Europe and Africa! The Large Tortoiseshells seen on Portland in the spring created quite a stir but seem to have been the result of releases rather than natural immigrations.

Not so the Long-tailed Blues, seen and photographed widely in the summer then again in early autumn when the progeny of the first immigrants were emerging. Very exciting to have another species getting a toe-hold in our county!

Long-tailed Blue. Photo: Mark Pike

These are just a brief selection of my highlights of the 2019 summer. It would be very interesting to read some of your best butterfly and moth moments, we would be very pleased to publish them in the next issue of our newsletter – send them in before the memories fade!

Finally a huge thank you to everyone who has been involved with butterflies and moths in Dorset over this last season: the transect walkers, the casual recorders who make the effort to send in their observations, the photographers who send such wonderful images to the gallery pages on our website, the nocturnal ones who contribute to all the moth recording, all the different people who help to look after our reserves and other sites – all your hard work is very much appreciated!

Nigel Spring

Butterflies in Reserve Pinail

Lynda Lambert recalls a magic moment in France a few years ago

On the last holiday to La Brenne in 2013 with my now late husband Richard, we drove over to the Reserve Pinail, which is well known for its many species of dragonflies. Of course butterflies love the reserve too, and whilst resting from the heat of the midday sun, and enjoying a picnic, a beautiful Silver-washed Fritillary chose to alight on my neck. It was a very hot day and my skin was glistening (sounds so much nicer than perspiring), and obviously attracted this lovely butterfly. Not wanting to deprive it of its sodium fix, which is so important to butterflies, I just let it tickle my neck as it moved around from the front to the back. After at least ten minutes it was still there and my husband had wandered off to look at a butterfly he had noticed flying into a tree 20 metres away. He called me over excitedly, as he had found a Lesser Purple Emperor.

I grabbed my camera and leapt up from my chair, temporarily forgetting my new friend hanging around my neck, and hurried over to the tree hoping to see a butterfly I had rarely seen. I was craning my neck to get a good look at it when I saw a flash in front of my face. The Silver-washed Fritillary had still been attached to my neck, and had been displaced momentarily, but soon settled back on me. My husband was tickled pink at this episode, even more so when he heard me talking to the insect, telling it I wanted to take some photos so I was calling time on our intimate little interlude. It allowed me to gently put my finger up to it whereby it climbed on to it and I transferred it to some nearby flowers. By then, the Lesser Purple Emperor had flown!

Wildlife experiences like this are memories I will never forget, they are, to me, very special.

Chinese Green at Alners

Kathy Henderson tells us about making a natural dye from a plant at Alners Gorse

No, Chinese Green is not a new species of moth for Alners Gorse! I have had endless fun experimenting with different plants to create dyes for the wool that I weave into rugs with different landscape designs. An excellent crop of Purging Buckthorn berries caught my eye this autumn just as they were turning black. Alder Buckthorn is a very common shrub at Alners Gorse and is well loved by the three summer hairstreak species that nectar on the unassuming little flowers. But this is our only bush of Purging Buckthorn (Rhamnus catharticus), a plant that is more common on the chalk downs.

Purging Buckthorn
Photo: Kathy Henderson

I collected a moderate amount of the black berries and proceeded with my usual method back in the workshop: pouring boiling water over the berries followed by a good squashing to bring out the juice, straining into rainwater in a clean saucepan, before adding the cleaned wet wool.

As I expected it went purple – very nice! However that colour sadly doesn't stick. Once back on the stove, brought to the boil and left to cool, the purple changed to a rather underwhelming grey-green – quite nice I thought and left it overnight. Next morning, I lifted the wool out of the pot and before my eyes, as the air got to it, the colour changed from quite dull to a stunning, strong emerald green.

Further research revealed that I had stumbled across 'Chinese Green', a highly valued ancient

dye obtained from Persian Berries (a general name for Rhamnus berries) across Asia and the Middle East and renowned for this colour - but only at a particular stage of ripeness…

I am looking forward to weaving this beautiful rich green into my next rug!

Skeins of naturally dyed wool. Photo: Kathy Henderson

Butterfly Report for 2018

Lyn Pullen apologises that the 2018 Report has not yet gone out: too little time and too many things to do! It will be with you as soon as possible.

Just a sneak preview of the number of total butterflies recorded in Dorset:
2017 - 234,802
2018 - 252, 841
An increase of 7.7%.

If the website reports are anything to go by, 2019 is going to see a further increase, but we will not know until Bill Shreeves has finished analysing all the records.

Late Pupation of Whites

Ann Barlow writes about late-pupating Large and Small White caterpillars on Nasturtiums last year

Last spring and summer we grew some Nasturtium plants for the white butterflies to use as a foodplant, as we usually do. The plants are normally all eaten by late summer, but we were concerned that as the season went on, we had seen very few caterpillars on the plants. However, in late summer there were quite a few small caterpillars visible, and plenty of foodplant. I was fearful that they would not have enough time to grow to full size before the frosts killed both them and the Nasturtiums.

Time went on, and on 12 November I counted five fully grown Large White caterpillars climbing up our fence to pupate. They disappeared, probably into our neighbour's garden, but one stayed under a higher level window sill of our conservatory, where it was very sheltered, and got the sunshine from the south and west. Overnight between 13 November and 14 November, it pupated. At this time it was joined by a Small White caterpillar, which developed more slowly, and finally pupated overnight between 24 and 25 November! This was quite a while after all the foodplants had been killed by the cold.

Small White positioned ready (left), and Large White (upper right) pupae before emergence Photo: Ann Barlow

I contacted Bill Shreeves of Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch to ask about late pupation, as I wondered if this was some kind of record, but he was not sure.

I continued to watch the pupae over the winter, and the Large White butterfly finally emerged

Emerged Large White, with empty pupal case. Photo: Ann Barlow

Small White pupa in early May (unemerged). Photo: Ann Barlow

on 18th April in the late afternoon. It was fine, and by 6.30pm the butterfly was gone on its merry way. Sadly the Small White never emerged, perhaps because it was in a less sunny, more westerly-facing spot than the large white chrysalis had been. It would be interesting to hear of anyone else's experiences.

Late Pupation: the science

Bill Shreeves has written this scientific footnote from research in 'The Butterflies of Britain & Ireland' by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington

It is interesting to use some of the fascinating scientific information to be found in 'The Butterflies of Britain & Ireland' by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington to describe the problems which Ann Barlow's Large and Small White Chrysalises must have faced in getting that far.

The Large White pupa was unusually late so its 'parents' could either have been end of summer migrants or 'native' Large Whites. Whichever it was, the pupa's survival was very lucky. When a Large White

female mates, the male sprays her with a coating of benzal cyanide to deter other males from mating with her. Very often a tiny parasitic wasp, adapted to pick up the scent of the benzal cyanide, attaches itself to the fur behind the female Large White's eyes. Having used her antennae to pick up the sulphurous scent of cabbages or nasturtiums, the Large White would have started to pump out 40 to 100 eggs at the rate of four per minute. The tiny wasp can then leap into action and start to inject up to 20 of her own microscopic eggs into each Large White egg. The wasp larvae then destroy the Large White eggs and caterpillars. Clearly, Ann's pupa's 'mother' could not have had her eggs injected!

The second stroke of good fortune was that when Large White caterpillars feed on the cabbages or nasturtiums they absorb the powerful mustard oils into their systems which then deters any vertebrates from eating them or their caterpillars.

However a third stroke of good fortune was still required as there are several species of wasps and flies which are not put off by the mustard gas and specialise in injecting their eggs into the bodies of the Large White caterpillars. Out of these eggs hatch grubs which begin to eat the caterpillars' internal organs leaving the most important ones until the unfortunate caterpillar is just about to become a chrysalis. The grubs then pour out of the caterpillar and make their own rows of little yellow cocoons down both sides of the dead body.

Large White caterpillars on nasturtium: sitting on top of the leaves shows they do not fear predators. Photo: Lyn Pullen.

How lucky Ann's pupa was is shown by an estimate that, in bad years, four-fifths of Large White caterpillars are killed in this way. A fourth piece of good luck was that the pupa had not been

struck down as a caterpillar by a granulosis virus which in 1955 reached British Large Whites from the continent for the first time and has been around ever since.

Finally the pupa itself had two inherited advantages; first the colour of its chrysalis is adapted to its surroundings to give some camouflage against its background; second the very useful mustard oil which was ingested as a caterpillar survives into the chrysalis so that there is enough to burn the mouth of any bird which tries to peck at it. So a mixture of good luck and inheritance allowed Ann's Large White pupa to emerge from its chrysalis safely on April 18th 2019.

The Small White also had a lot of good luck to survive until the pupal stage. However, unlike the Large Whites its caterpillars and chrysalises have no chemical protection despite them feeding on the same cultivated cabbage species and Nasturtiums. As a result the eggs and caterpillars are frequently eaten by birds; Sparrows feed on both; Tits and Warblers take older caterpillars: Thrushes snap up caterpillars as they are about to pupate and the chrysalises are also eaten by birds. In addition, in cold wet summers many caterpillars can be destroyed by viruses.

To add to the Small White's problems, research has shown that nearly two thirds of caterpillars are eaten by other invertebrates in the first two days after hatching. Harvestmen and beetles are the main culprits. Last but not least there is another small wasp, similar to the one which attacks Large Whites but a different species, which drills eggs into the Small White caterpillars with the same results.

After all this run of good fortune Ann's chrysalis still failed to make it through to a butterfly for reasons it is difficult to sort out. In the end both Small and Large Whites remain our commonest butterflies in spite of all their problems.

The Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation is one of 32 Branches of this UK organisation, dedicated to saving butterflies, moths and the environment.
www.butterfly-conservation.org

Butterfly Conservation

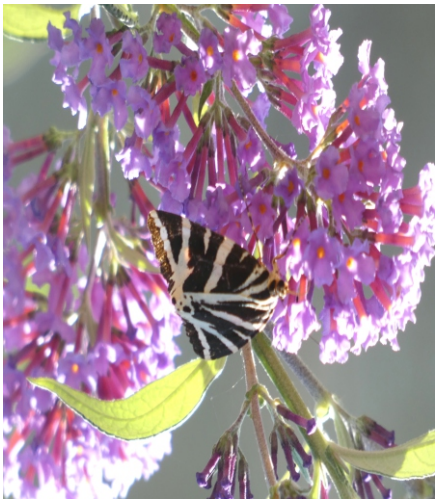
Guided Walk to Osmington

Colin Burningham and Christine Bonner led the walk to Osmington on 22 August

The recent guided walk at Osmington was an opportunity to visit a Dorset downland site with hopefully a chance to see a variety of butterfly species appropriate to such a spot. This was indeed the case, and apart from the expected species a number of interesting day-flying moths took the chance to show themselves.

Vapourer Moth.
Photo: Colin Burningham

Nine members of the public joined us on the walk which had barely started along the access track to the downland site when we stopped to observe a Small Tortoiseshell resting on a distant bush, not a common sight in recent years. We were then stopped in our tracks by a Jersey Tiger moth flying across our view. It landed close to us on a Buddleia bush and everyone had a good chance to see this magnificent insect in all its glory. We also saw a Humming-bird Hawk-moth busily nectaring on Valerian. Before getting the chance to move on, another moth flew across the track and landed on a bramble bush. To our



Jersey Tiger Moth. Photo:Colin Burningham

surprise, it was a male Vapourer moth. This moth is a day-flying species and so sat quite comfortably on the bramble for all to see, once they had got this well camouflaged moth in view. It is a common moth but not seen that often in the field.

We eventually walked on and soon reached the lower slopes of the downland where we were soon treated with the expected sightings of Brown Argus, Adonis Blue, Common Blue, Small Heath, Small Copper and Green-veined White. In addition, a number of late-flying Marbled Whites and plentiful numbers of Painted Ladies were seen and the odd Clouded Yellow passing by at high speed. However, these sightings were soon eclipsed by the sight of a blue butterfly appearing to be somewhat larger than a Common Blue but clearly not an Adonis Blue. Much chasing up and down the slopes eventually showed our butterfly to be a somewhat worn male Chalkhill Blue. This species has not been seen at this site for a number of years although a colony had been present there in recent times. An excellent sighting, maybe resident though it had possibly been blown across from the large colonies existing across the bay on Portland.

We spent some time at this site and eventually stopped for lunch but not before a vigilant member of the group spotted a mating pair of Clouded Yellows, quite mobile with the male carrying his partner from spot to spot. There was quite a lot of climbing required to get close enough for a photograph to be obtained but eventually most of us succeeded. A real confirmation for us all that the Clouded Yellow does indeed breed on the Dorset coastline.

Mating pair of Clouded Yellows. Photo: Colin Burningham

For the afternoon walk, some of the group elected to return to their cars and the remainder of us set off on a spirited walk up to the top of the ridge. Not

many butterflies were seen but the views were stunning. The walk downhill and back to the parked cars was a joy with Common Blues, Small Heath, Painted Ladies and Small Coppers seen in good numbers. At one spot, we were treated to good views of a startling Wasp Spider.

A recce had been carried out the previous week around the same route and a Wall Brown had been seen, bringing a species total of 18 for the site in August.

Thanks to all who joined us for the walk and for sharing their enthusiasm with us.

Join us at our

Branch Members' Day and AGM

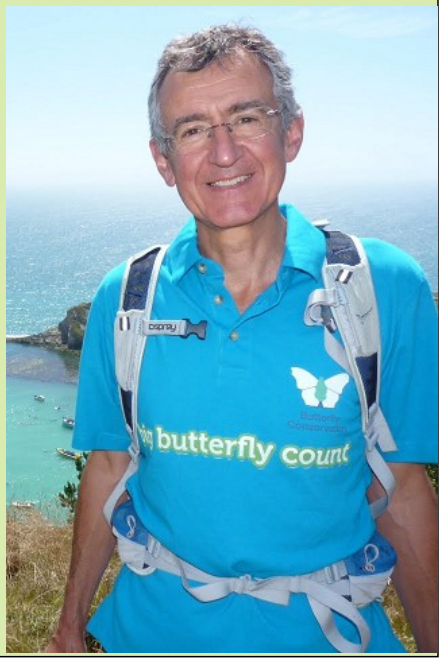
Saturday 15 February, 2.00pm
Puddletown Village Hall

Our speaker will be **Dr Martin Warren**, former Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation:

"Amazing butterflies: new discoveries that will astonish you"

You will be able to talk to friendly, like-minded people, buy items from our Sales Stall, and enjoy our excellent cakes. Always well attended.

Full details in the Events List or via our website.



Tales from Bobby Knowles

Many of you will remember Bobby, who edited the Newsletter for many years. She has written these pieces after a chance encounter between us last July

Tale One: Butterfly Dance

In the middle of the July heatwave the forecast threatened a weekend of wet and windy weather. On Thursday 18th July Edward and I felt that change was indeed in the air: it was cloudier, cooler and windier. If this was going to be the end of summer, we wanted to mark it with an expedition into Purbeck.

We drove to the much improved Encombe Estate car park at Kingston, which is still free of charge, to do the level walk along the top of the beautiful Encombe valley and out to the Houns Tout headland. A Speckled Wood flew across the path in the woods, and one Red Admiral was lurking by the stile at the entrance to the open stretch. The track was extremely exposed, with a strong cold wind from the west. Nevertheless a few Meadow Browns were braving the conditions, and at the far end one Marbled White was flying around.

Usually these days we have a snack on the stone memorial seat, and return the same way. Today we decided to tackle the descent to Chapman's Pool. We had not done it for many years, but we wanted to get out of the wind. As soon as we had turned down, the temperature rose and gleams of sun grew stronger. But, my goodness, I am sure that slope has grown longer and steeper, and the narrow little steps have multiplied!

Our courage, and the stiff legs next day, were justified because half way down the steps are overgrown on both sides with bramble bushes. The sun was shining now. The brambles were in full bloom, and were alive with clouds of butterflies nectaring

and dancing above them. There were Gatekeepers galore, all bright and new, innumerable Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites, at least a dozen Ringlets, and several Skippers. I am sure these were Lulworth: they were small and quite dark and certainly were not Large or Small or Essex. It was a glorious sight, such as you read about in the good old days. Even during the three butterfly tours we did to Bulgaria twelve or fifteen years ago we never witnessed such delightful exuberance.

Tale Two: Small Blues in Scotland

Here is a quiz question for you: what is the most northerly point of mainland Britain? Hands up all those who think it is John O'Groats. Well so did I, until the summer of 2017 when Edward and I drove all along the north coast of Scotland in our motor-caravan. We discovered then that the little town of John O'Groats is beaten in that respect by both Duncansby Head to the east and Dunnet Head, some 14 miles to the west.

We drove out onto Duncansby Head, in strong sunshine and such an almighty wind that it threatened to blow the passenger door off the van when I opened it. Duncansby is spectacular: a grassy headland overlooking the tumultuous waters of the Pentland Firth where the Atlantic meets the North Sea at the north east tip of the country. Beyond this, the Orkney Islands are enticingly visible. The Duncansby Stacks are sheer pointed pinnacles of rocks, reminiscent of the stacks along our own Purbeck and Jurassic coast. Out of the main blast, and sloping down towards sea level, there's a very pleasant stroll along the coastal bluffs back towards Duncansby Ness and John O'Groats.

Driving on west, you pass the Queen Mother's Castle of Mey, and in another ten miles or so you come to Dunnet Head. This is a broad and bleaker wind-swept plateau projecting into the Atlantic, and is an RSPB Reserve

because the sea birds love its wild and weather-beaten cliffs. These days you can rent holiday accommodation there and boast that you have stayed at mainland Britain's most northerly point. For this is the answer to my initial question.

Dunnet Head shelters the wide curve of Dunnet Bay to the west. The sandy beach sweeps for over two miles, with tall dunes at

Bobby at Dunnet Head
Photo: Edward Knowles

the back of it – not unlike a grown-up version of Shell Bay and Studland Beach. We stayed at the wonderfully situated Dunnet Bay campsite, on the very edge of the dunes, on their last night before closing for the season. Adjacent to the Reception building is an excellent little Wildlife Information Centre housing a splendid collection of specimens and is imaginatively laid out. It deserves a visit if you ever venture so far north. Sadly we were the only visitors. The volunteer on duty was uncommunicative at first, but when he heard us exclaiming at a certain piece of information he started to talk enthusiastically. We were excited to learn that the Dunnet Bay dunes are home to a colony of Small Blues. I had no idea they could be found so far north, although on close inspection of the distribution map in Richard Lewington's "Pocket Guide to the Butterflies of GB and Ireland" a small green blob does show up on the north coast. The volunteer walks two butterfly transects, but it is hard to imagine how he ever finds sufficient opportunities with valid weather criteria!

We were particularly struck by this as some concern was being expressed within Dorset Branch about the Small Blues on the former Poole Power Station site. This is one of the most southerly colonies. The threat of development there died down for a while, but is about to raise its head again, and it will be important for the habitat requirements of the Small Blue to be safeguarded.

Tale Three: Butterfly Stream

We have been reading that Painted Ladies arrived in large numbers this summer, but have you ever actually stood in the path of a butterfly migration, and experienced it in reality?

We did, on 2nd April this year (2019) when we were in Cyprus. We were staying on the north west coast, in the Greek part near the Akamas peninsula. The previous day we had done a strenuous walk, and now we needed a gentle expedition. We drove east along the coast, beyond the town of Polis and the resort of Agaka. We noticed a car parked at the edge of the dunes some hundred yards from the road, and nosed our way across the sandy track to the same access to the beach.

As soon as he got out of the car Edward pointed out the Painted Ladies flying across our path. It was obvious at once that we had struck a migration. We were pottering up and down the beach and the dunes there for two hours. During all that time a continuous stream of Painted Ladies was flying from east to west. A few might drop out for a rest, but the overall impression was of an inexorable steady power. They were flying at about head height, so that almost I felt the need to duck. Three separate lines were identifiable: one was along the dunes, one was along the beach, and one (the most surprising to me) was about twenty feet out along the sea. And they just kept coming and coming.

The botanists among you may like to know that we lingered there because of the variety of interesting dune plants. A placard described the threatened *Anthemis tomentosa*, for example. We had already bought the excellent 2017 "Illustrated Flora of Cyprus" by Yiannis Christofides. By a stroke of luck Yiannis was staying at our hotel with a Naturetrek group he was leading. He is interested in all aspects of the natural world, and we talked to him about the butterflies at Agaka. He told us they were migrating from Israel and the Negev. And their destination? That I don't know.

Butterfly Photography: Part 2

Mark Pike continues his personal perspective on photographing butterflies. All photos are by Mark.

In the first part of this article I talked briefly about my choice of camera and lens for butterfly photography, and this part deals with actually getting the pictures you are after. As you might imagine, getting a nice clear close-up of any butterfly is not as easy as it sounds and a good deal of "homework" is required to photograph each of your chosen species: many are far more difficult than others and a lot is also purely down to good fortune and being in the right place at the right time.

A good place to start would be your local buddleia (the well-known "butterfly bush") and experiment with some of the more common species that visit these, which will often take nectar for some time giving plenty of opportunities. In fact, you can sometimes just wait for the butterflies to turn up and snap away. However, to broaden your horizons to the more specialist species you will have to look at these with more detail so that you are aware of flight times/habitat etc. Many rare species can only be found at a very few locations these days. A browse of the Dorset Butterflies website **www.dorsetbutterflies.com** will give you some valuable information regarding this.

Finding rare and difficult species might seem a bit daunting at first. I remember when I first took on this minor obsession I used to read many of the books on the subject and thought to myself how on earth I could ever manage to find, let alone photograph species like White-letter Hairstreak/Purple

White-letter Hairstreak.

Hairstreak/Purple Emperor etc as it quoted them as being more or less confined to the tree tops. Whilst this is essentially correct these species do occasionally come down to a manageable height to photograph them when visiting nectar plants or taking salts from the ground.

I could easily go through every species in detail describing my own ways about getting pics of each but that would probably fill a whole book, so I will just cover a few to give you an idea of my personal methods.
Strangely enough some of the most difficult species I find to

Orange Tip.

photograph are some of the more common ones. Orange Tip always seem to give me the run around in the spring when they seemingly never land whilst hunting for females and even the lowly Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers can sometimes be

Duke of Burgundy.

very frustrating and skittish. The much rarer Duke of Burgundy and more common but tricky Lulworth Skipper are good examples of getting the timing right to photograph them at their most pristine, which it always my aim. Both species seem to be appearing earlier each year, especially the Lulworth Skipper. Many guide books tell you that the best time is late June/early July but the first one I saw in 2019 was on 6th May! If I had left it until July to see them most would have been very worn.

Having done your research on your chosen species it is then all about actually locating it and photographing it on site. The aforementioned Duke of Burgundy, although a small butterfly, is quite easy to find

once you get your eye in as it usually flies close to the ground and settles regularly. The trick here is to try and get down as low as you can very slowly and as quietly as possible. Whatever you do, avoid casting your own shadow over the butterfly, that usually spooks them straight away! You can also use this method for most of the Skippers and Blues and in fact I often end up literally lying on my belly to get the shot I want.
I suspect many of you have visited the wonderful Alners

Purple Hairstreak

Gorse in the hope of seeing White Letter/Purple/Brown Hairstreaks and getting frustrated (like me!) when you either just see one high in a tree or not at all. Patience is the key here though. Again, looking at the guide books they often tell you of optimum times that these species are found nectaring on bramble flowers etc but in all honesty I have seen them at all times of the day. Very often I have wandered around the reserve for hours drawing a blank but just when you are resigned to a bad day hey presto! Once a Hairstreak is found nectaring on a flower it can be there literally for hours if undisturbed. If this is at the right height you can fill your boots with a camera load of shots. Once again though, stealth is required and an awareness of your immediate surroundings. Try not to inadvertently tread on a long bramble shoot or nudge a branch with your arm, these will invariably be connected to the whole bush and scare off your subject in an instant!

One more strategy that often brings me great success involves the magnificent Silver-washed Fritillary, again at Alners Gorse. This is a very large powerful flyer that thunders around often

Silver-washed Fritillary

looking like just an orange blur. There is however a lovely sunny and sheltered spot at the bottom of Alners where tall thistles grow in abundance. Over the past few years around the start of July I have found that by just standing and waiting in this area the butterflies come to nectar regularly for a few minutes at a time.
At one visit this year I was talking to a chap who had come particularly to try and photograph the lovely Valezina form often found here. I suggested he wait for a while in this area and one will come along. About five minutes after our conversation sure enough a fabulous Valezina arrived and was nectaring for a good few minutes. The visitor went away a very happy chappy indeed!

Marsh Fritillary.

Could you leave us something in your will?
Conservation work is always going to be necessary to help our lepidoptera thrive, and it costs money. At the same time government grants are shrinking.
Remember to specify whether you want your bequest to go to the national society or Dorset Branch.

Gordon Hopkins

Colin Burningham and Nigel Spring write about Gordon Hopkins, who sadly died earlier this year

Colin writes:

It is with great regret that I have to report on the death of our dear friend and colleague Gordon Hopkins. Over the past seven or so years, Gordon had experienced a continuous array of critical attacks on his health and as a result, he had lived through some desperate times. To add to his physical ailments, he lost his wife Pauline and his elder daughter Jenn to terminal illnesses in the same time-frame. Any lesser person would have been excused for succumbing to his experiences but not Gordon. He was a very brave man and although we saw him go through these desperate times, he always seemed to see light at the end of the tunnel and fought on through adversity.

I had known Gordon for a long time. He was an amazingly enthusiastic man who regularly turned up to as many Butterfly Conservation days as he could possibly attend. He was well known for his chain-saw and brush-cutter, but even more, for his amazing blow-pipe with which he would restore life to the most depressed of fires. He always brought along baked potatoes to finish off in the bonfire and that tradition is maintained to the present, certainly at Lydlinch Common.

I particularly knew him from his regular attendance at these Lydlinch Common Work-Days. The two of us would commonly be left at the bonfire site after everyone else had gone, spending our time together, chatting about life. We would stay there until it was safe to leave the fire unattended. Once, we stayed so long, it was dark when we finally decided to leave and we had a real struggle finding our way through the dark, back to our cars!
But his real passion in the Butterfly Conservation movement was

moths. He had a great knowledge of moths and for a number of years, he edited the Dorset Moth Group newsletter. He supported the regular reporting of moths to the Dorset Moth Group as well as being involved in the Garden Moths scheme. Although his personal health hindered him somewhat, he still managed to run his moth trap on selected nights and reported his findings to the Dorset Moth Group website.

Gordon, with his enthusiasm, was eventually going to succeed in persuading me to start moth trapping, and I have never looked back. Thank you, Gordon for all your encouragement and all your help over the years.

Outside of our conservation movement, it should be noted that Gordon was a very experienced birder and also followed many sports with great enthusiasm.

Gordon: Rest in Peace

Nigel writes:

Gordon was a great ally in our practical conservation teams, very conscientious in his attendance at workparties at Alners Gorse and Lankham Bottom and at Lydlinch Common from the very early days, religiously guarding the bonfires from meddlers, leaning on his longhandled fork or wielding his homemade blowpipe made from a length of copper piping. He had a great sense of humour combined with a considerable lack of patience with most of the human race.

He was very supportive of our efforts to take moths into schools in the early days. He would arrive early in the morning after I had brought in the moth traps from the school grounds we were visiting, and help me with the identification of the species with the different groups of children. His enthusiasm was highly infectious and his knowledge of micromoths way ahead of mine (that's not very difficult). I would often find myself trying to translate

The beautiful landscape of Lankham Bottom on which Gordon worked.
Photo: Lawrie de Whalley

Gordon's stream of latin names into words that six year olds might understand….Though I am not sure that 'Dawn Flat-body' is any more comprehensible to the uninitiated than Semioscopis steinkellneriana which Gordon used to take delight into renaming as Stinker!

A defining moment in my birdwatching experience with Gordon took place at dawn at Alners Gorse one perfect spring morning ten years ago when our dawn chorus walk had already logged a singing Grasshopper Warbler, a Peregrine (not often seen there) and Ravens as well as the Alners regulars – Nightingales, Garden Warblers etc. A sizeable bird of prey flew over us and we both caught a very fleeting glimpse of it. Almost in unison we called out 'Montagu's Harrier' (Gordon probably called out 'Monties!'). What a fantastic sighting we thought. It was only later when the record was disputed (and rejected!) by the Dorset Rarities Committee that we realised we had absolutely no real evidence that it was a Montagu's Harrier, just a perfectly synchronised interpretation of that momentary glimpse….

Dorset Branch Accounts

Income and Expenditure account for year to 31 March 2019						
		2018-19		2017-18		*Notes*
Expenditure						
Conservation	Travel & Subsistence	£537		£843		
	Training	£0		£55		
	Field equipment	£400		£881		
	Water rates	£14		£46		
	Reserve maintenance	£12,048		£7,565		
			£12,998	£9,390	£9,390	
Education	Schools & Educational access	£61		£1,240		
	Printing	£177		£211		
	Workshops/ training days	£239		£268		
			£477	£1,719	£1,719	
Fund-raising	Events	£15		£0		
	Cost of sales	£264		£494		
			£279	£494	£494	
Membership	Newsletters	£3,045		£2,925		
	Website	£1,250		£1,050		
	AGM costs	£30		£25		
			£4,325	£4,000	£4,000	
Administration	(eg stationery, postage, meetings)	£107		£127		
	Insurance	£273		£236		
			£380		**£363**	
Total expenditure			**£18,458**		**£15,966**	
Income						
Receipts from Head Office						
	Grants	£11,612		£6,403		*1*
	Membership subscriptions	£5,601		£5,277		
	Other (Gift Aid, interest)	£528		£750		
			£17,740	£12,430	£12,430	
Donations			£2,570		£2,227	*2*
Legacy			£10,000		£0	*3*
Fundraising						
	Sales stall	£636			£687	
	Other fundraising	£199			£518	
			£835			
Contract income			£1,002		£750	*4*
Total income			**£32,148**		**£16,612**	
Excess income over expenditure			**£13,689**		**£16,249**	

Notes. 1) £5,640 has since been returned as paid in error. 2) Includes £1k from R Williams for Perryfields tree works, Lyn Pullen £556, Waitrose Ltd £499, Wessex Water £50. 3) Tim Field (deceased) 4) Includes Euroforest £327, Rooksmoor pony grazing £600

to end of March 2019

Balance sheet at 31 March 2019			
	£	£	*Notes*
	March 2019	*March 2018*	
Bank (current account)	16,198	*13,456*	
Bank (deposit account)	20,000	*10,000*	
VAT	59	*83*	*1*
Stock	588	*390*	
Prepayments	233	*125*	
Accruals	(50)	*(61)*	
Debtors	218	-	
Creditors	(175)	*(488)*	
	37,071	***23,505***	
Represented by			
General funds	27,154	*13,505*	
Designated funds	10,000	*10,000*	
Excess income over expenditure	13,689	*646*	
Irrecoverable VAT	(124)	*(187)*	*1*
Movement in funds in year	**13,566**	***459***	
General Funds			
Balance brought forward 1 April 2018	13,505	*23,046*	
Surplus (deficit) for year	13,566	*459*	
Transfer to Designated fund in year	-	*(10,000)*	
Balance carried forward 31 March 2019	**27,071**	***13,505***	
Designated Fund- Reserve management	**Alners Gorse and Lankham Bottom**		
Balance brought forward 1 April 2018	10,000	-	
Surplus (deficit) for year	-	-	
Transfer to Designated fund in year	-	*10,000*	
Balance carried forward 31 March 2019	**10,000**	***10,000***	

Notes: 1) The repayment/refund of VAT is done the following year. Not all input VAT is recoverable.

Our Purbeck Garden

Brian Arnold writes about his garden near Swanage, and of the 31 butterfly species seen

Our garden is situated in a woodland near Swanage. This forms a gentle valley, split at the bottom by the Swanage steam railway. We own the south facing slope, with our house at the top end looking down towards the railway. We have about an acre of formal garden, with the woods bordering our lawn. Describing it as a lawn is rather pretentious, as it is really more of a field, and we leave swathes of it to grow wild to encourage insects, but interspersed with flower beds. In the spring and summer it is full of Fleabane, Marjoram, Oxeye Daisy, Common Bedstraw, Primroses, Violet, Self-Heal, Celandine, Creeping Thistle and Woundwort, bordered by some Brambles and Buddleia, all surrounded by Oak, Holly, Ivy, Ash and Hazel.

We moved to our house in 1984, and since then have seen 31 species of butterflies in our garden which represents more than half of UK butterflies. This year there were 27 - Brimstone,

Grayling. Photo: Brian Arnold

Green-veined White, Large White, Marbled White, Small White, Orange-tip, Clouded Yellow, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Holly Blue, Small Copper, Comma, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Grayling, Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Painted Lady, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Silver-washed Fritillary including Valezina, and Dark Green Fritillary. In previous years we have seen Small Heath, Purple Hairstreak, and Dingy Skipper, and back in 1985 we saw White Admirals.

We look forward to the arrival of

the Silver-washed Fritillaries and for the past few years we have seen 2 or more Valezina in the garden. Our kitchen window overlooks the garden and they are a joy to watch as they do their mating dance across the lawn with the male spiralling around the female. I have noticed that the female sometimes flies at an angle with its right wings sticking up at about 45 degrees, and have also witnessed a Valezina doing this - fascinating. When a "butterfly" friend of ours came to stay a few years ago, we were having breakfast in the garden, and a SWF landed right next to his plate. "Oh heck", he said "My camera is still in the house!" - typically the best shots are when a camera is not to hand! The name Valezina is special to us, the naturalist and entomologist Frederick Frohawk named his daughter Valezina after the dark form of the SWF which at that time (about 1910) was only found in the New Forest. When my daughter was asking for children's names, I suggested Valezina, and to our surprise she used it as the middle name for our granddaughter. Today's butterfly experts spell it with an "S" not "Z", but we prefer to use Frohawk's spelling.

Silver-washed Fritillary, Valezina form. Photo: Brian Arnold.

One of our most bizarre garden butterfly sightings was a Purple Hairstreak in August 2018. It was a warm day and I cooled my feet in our grandchildren's paddling pool. There, floating in the middle, was a Purple Hairstreak. I assumed it had gone to meet its maker, but after fishing it out there were signs of life, so I put it on a leaf to dry out, and it sat obligingly for me to take photos. Eventually it flew away, and I saw it again in the garden eight days later, no worse for wear. Another oddity was our Comma and its "Pose on a Hose". In July this year, at almost exactly 4pm every afternoon, a Comma appeared and sat on our garden hose. It didn't seem to mind if the water was off so the hose was warm from the sun, or cold when

Purple Hairstreak drying out
Photo: Brian Arnold

we were watering the garden. Whether it is the colour, or the temperature of the hose we just don't know, but I have also seen Painted Ladies sit there too. The moral of this is "You don't need nectaring plants in your garden, just a nice yellow hose!".

This year I saw our first Essex Skipper in the garden. Every summer I spend ages lying in the grass trying to photograph Small Skippers from below to check the antennae. And finally this year "Success!". There is a downside to lying on the ground - our garden is infested with Ticks - they find us tasty and I am forever pulling them off. They have a kind of horrid fascination and I have occasionally put them down to take a photo. Most wildlife I like, but definitely not this one.

Our garden has the right conditions for Purple Emperor (Oak trees and Sallow/Willow), but alas they have not yet found us here - I guess we need lots of smelly poo in the garden, but that is not so welcome. This year we attempted to plant a flower meadow in a clearing surrounded by oak trees, but it attracted just Red Admiral, Small White, Speckled Wood and Meadow Brown. We also planted Everlasting Pea in the vague hope of a passing migrant Long-tailed Blue. About 150 yards to the south of our garden across the railway there is a small colony of White-letter Hairstreak, maybe we could grow some Elm to encourage them in. So what will 2020 bring? Fingers crossed for a few more species in our garden.

Essex Skipper Photo: Brian Arnold

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* denotes Committee Member

Top to bottom: Red Admiral, Comma and Painted Lady. Photo: George McCabe