

# Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch

## Newsletter No 101



# Spring 2023

[www.dorsetbutterflies.com](http://www.dorsetbutterflies.com)



**Butterfly  
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

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## Editor's Note - from Jane Smith

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We have decided to produce an early spring newsletter this year, to get us back on track to producing three issues a year. I thought it might be difficult to source articles so soon after the last edition, but I have had such a positive response to my requests that some have had to be held over until the next issue.

Many thanks to the contributors for such interesting articles, I hope you all enjoy reading them. And thanks most of all to Lyn Pullen, the other half of the newsletter team.

Please note the ambitious cycle ride being undertaken in May by Wren and Fred Franklin (see page 12), who are raising funds for Dorset Branch. Please support them if you can, and share with your friends.

Front cover: Buff-tip moth on a twig. Photo: Mark Pike
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# View from the Chair

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## Thoughts on the countryside from Nigel Spring

We have recently been working on the slopes at Telegraph Hill between Minterne and Hilfield, a wonderful butterfly habitat with superb panoramic views out across the undulating landscape as far as the Mendips in one direction and the Quantocks in the other. There are some extensive and well recorded ancient woodlands around Hermitage and Holnest, and some isolated pieces of paler green grassland which indicate unimproved habitat, almost certainly rich in plant and animal life. But apart from these woodlands and the postage-stamp sized meadows, the majority of the countryside is a deep uniform rye-grass green. Good for milk production, disastrous for wildlife!

This is dairy country but things have altered somewhat since Thomas Hardy described this same setting for the escapades of Dr Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders* as he rode his horse at breakneck speed eastwards from High Stoy (just along from Telegraph Hill). Dairy farms now are generally highly intensive, with far more cattle per acre than ever before. Those cows are modern, highly developed breeds whose milk production is phenomenal and many of whom on the larger farms never graze outside. Rather they are 'zero-grazed' with their feed being brought to them: silage, concentrates and grains. These huge numbers of cattle require intensively farmed grasslands to provide their silage, which produces huge amounts of slurry, which in turn goes back onto the land to feed the ryegrass – and incidentally to pollute the streams, rivers and even the saltmarshes on the coast.

This ocean of intensive ryegrass is effectively a monoculture with perhaps a few docks, clover and chickweed adding a negligible amount of floristic variety, and almost certainly with no butterfly species, except perhaps clinging on in the unsprayed margins or

decimated hedgerows. These farming systems produce vast volumes of milk to satisfy our insatiable demand for cheap food but they are also one of the main reasons why the UK is one of the most nature-poor countries in Europe. No wonder the latest State of the UK's Butterflies Report suggests that our butterflies have declined by 80% since the 1970's....



Peacock caterpillars feeding on the nettles they need to breed.

Photo: Brian Arnold.

All very depressing! But I think there are reasons to be a little optimistic! In Dorset in recent years we have seen a number of farms being bought up by enthusiastic, often wealthy people, many being emigrants from the city. And many of these new owners are doing their best to manage their land in a nature-friendly way, with the profit motive far less prominent in their list of priorities. There is an enormous fund of resources and advice on the internet from such organisations as Butterfly Conservation, the Wildlife Trusts, Plantlife, the RSPB, BTO and FWAG, and some of these estates are beginning to show greatly increased levels of biodiversity. The Knepp Estate in Sussex is perhaps the best known for its rewilding scheme, but in Dorset we now have a significant number of similar projects (described by Steve Brown in Newsletter 100). Dorset Branch is now closely involved with several of these schemes, particularly the 800+ acres of woodland, damp grassland, streams and lakes at Wyke Farm near Chedington (north of Beaminster). There have been guided walks, weekend surveys and now a butterfly transect; the owners have been funding ecological surveys for nearly 20 years.

It's a very slow process bringing the former rich biodiversity back to ryegrass leys and conifer plantations, but nature can be very resilient. The seeds are being sown!

*Nigel Spring*



# Branch Training Days in 2023

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**Nigel Spring has arranged a season of varied training days, hoping to encourage more people to join in our activities.**

The dates and topics established so far are listed below (dates in brackets are the wet weather alternatives). Additional events will be listed on the branch website [www.dorsetbutterflies.com](http://www.dorsetbutterflies.com).

**Saturday March 11<sup>th</sup> The Lichens and Bryophytes of Alners Gorse.** Leader: Andrew Branson. This course is FULL.

**Saturday April 29<sup>th</sup> Getting to know and understand birdsong – Alners Gorse** Leader: Nigel Spring 8am – 1pm (Sunday April 30<sup>th</sup>) Optional retreat to the Green Man coffee shop afterwards...

**Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> Butterfly identification and ecology – Cerne Abbas Village Hall & Giant Hill.** Leaders: Steve Brown and Amber Rosenthal. 10am – 5pm

**Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup> The natural history and ecology of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.** Leader: Dr Martin Warren. Alners Gorse, and possibly a local downland site. 10am – 4pm. (Sunday June 4<sup>th</sup>)

**Saturday July 15<sup>th</sup> Wildflower identification. Leader Dr Miles King.** Wyke Farm Chedington 10am – 4pm. (Sunday July 16<sup>th</sup>).

**August day to be confirmed.**

**Saturday September 16<sup>th</sup> Leafmines at Alners Gorse Butterfly Reserve.** Leader: Jack Oughton 10am – 1.30pm. (Sunday September 17<sup>th</sup>)

**Booking and Cost:** numbers for these days are limited, so booking is essential. The cost will be £10 for each session to cover any expenses incurred, any surplus will go to Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

Please email [nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk) to book your place.

# Reserves Report 2022

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## Nigel Spring tells us how things are doing on our Butterfly Reserves

### Alners Gorse

**I**t's been another great year with surprising numbers of autumn Marsh Fritillary larval webs (considering the low number last year), and good numbers of Brown Hairstreaks seen by the crowds of photographers in July and August. We had at least six different ones on July 30th when there was a guided walk. Unusually, the number of White-letter

Hairstreaks recorded on the transect walks was zero although there were 56 records sent in through iRecord and plenty more reported through our website sightings page.



White-letter Hairstreaks.  
Photo: Nick Galer

The National Moth Night list for Alners (May 21/22) was low – only 56 confirmed species but the overall species list for the site continues to grow. Attendance at guided walks and mothwing events through the year was excellent: the birdsong and butterflies walk on May 8<sup>th</sup> attracted 28 participants, 29 for the moth night event and butterfly walks on May 21/22, and 25 for the guided walk on July 30<sup>th</sup>.

We think there were three regularly singing male Nightingales this season but possibly only two with mates. We were unable to prove successful breeding. On a couple of occasions there were extra singing Nightingales which were thought to be passing through on migration. The Nightingale numbers have never been the same since



the remaining conifers were removed a few years ago which caused a severe structural change to the territories. Nightingale is a species which is declining rapidly in the UK anyway – which is very sad.



Replacing the fencing at Alners. Photo: Nigel Spring

Practical management work has continued through the year with the major task in the spring being the replacement of much of the perimeter fence in the wood where the chestnut posts dating back to 2006 had largely rotted off. It was only when we came to start the work that we realised the full extent of the problem. In the end it took 14.5 mandays instead of the predicted six, substantially increasing the cost of the job - and that does not

include the extra cost of chestnut materials (which was partly paid for from the Tesco's Bags for Life donation from last year.) The new gateway from the reserve onto the lower drove is at the time of writing in at least a foot of water!

Each June/July we take out a proportion of the more isolated blackthorn regrowth when the Brown Hairstreaks will be in their pupa stage. Larger blocks of blackthorn are tackled in the winter though one of the target areas for last winter turned out to be the territory of a (probably) hibernating 'black' adder according to advice given by our friends in the Dorset Amphibian and Reptile Network (DARN), so it was spared. However, we do need to take out a larger amount of maturing scrub this winter. Sean Cooch who is now the main lead for Natural England (NE) on grasslands in England brought a group of NE trainees to see Alners in the summer and was generally very complimentary about the state of the reserve. The open areas in the woodland and the recently cleared scrub areas elsewhere on the reserve have to be cleared of regrowth on rotation – two yearly generally though some are cut each year.

We removed four more of the plantation oaks in the clearing in the wood last winter to open up the canopy and to improve the wood pasture habitat we are developing between our reserve and neighbouring Rooksmoor, and have cut out the larger dead elms from the hedge beside the access track to prevent them falling on the neighbour's fenceline. One of these elm trunks has produced some striking 'Wrinkled Peach' fungus which according to Bryan Edwards of DERC is now a rare species in the UK. We also removed a number of boughs from the pond while it was empty in the summer.

The Alners ponies grazed the reserve through last winter once they had come off our neighbour's land at Rooksmoor, and then were taken off in the spring. Sadly we lost Scarface, one of the original four from 2012. We think she was approaching 30 years old and had started having seizures which caused her to break out of her electric fence – and eventually to cut herself badly on barbed wire.

Through the summer, the other three grazed the land at Common Farm opposite Alners where the owners very kindly allow us to use their three fields. The ponies have been to Rooksmoor and are now back on the reserve with their two friends Blaze and Vanity who are there temporarily. Next season we are going to try grazing some of the compartments on the reserve through the summer months as we are concerned that without summer grazing some of the coarser grasses are getting away causing the composition of the vegetation to alter.



Dartmoor pony Vanity searching for sandwiches. Photo: Nigel Spring



The budget for management has been increased for next season which will be a great bonus. However, I am not certain we will ever be able to afford to manage it perfectly! An attempt to re-establish weekend workparties failed due to lack of support. The work done on weekdays often attracts additional volunteers who are hugely appreciated.

## Lankham Bottom

Another very dry summer has again brought into focus the state of the grassland areas on the reserve, both for the grazier's cattle and for the butterfly species we are trying to support there. The sward length was so short this autumn that the Marsh Fritillary larval webs were almost impossible to find. Chalkhill Blues have been gone from the reserve for a number of years now and although no one is sure why, it could well be related to the decreasing turf length (which tends to favour Adonis Blues). The huge rabbit population on our reserve is an additional factor keeping the sward short and causing massive disturbance to the ground (the ragwort infestation perhaps benefits from this?) The ferreters continue to take a proportion but clearly not enough. Simon King was filming there in the spring and counted 600 with his nightviewer...



Wood Tiger caterpillar.  
Photo: Nigel Spring

One of the species which seems to benefit from the short swards is the Wood Tiger moth, one of the reserve's specialities. It sounds as though they were in almost plague proportions as larvae and as adult moths.

We have cut back much of the overgrown western hedge and have 'deadhedged' it. The regrowth is developing slowly. We have cut 3m wide rides through

the large block of gorse, thorn and bramble not far inside the entrance gateway and will keep these open with regular flailing either with our selfpropelled machine or with the contractor's giant tractor-mounted flail. He spent a day on the reserve in the autumn cutting the regrowth along the tops including in the glades we created in the block of scrub in the SW corner of the reserve. There is still a lot more bramble that needs cutting back which has not been cleared for several years. This will need to be cut with brushcutters then followed up with the flails.

We have continued with the regime of regularly brushcutting the scrub regrowth in the cleared areas on the slopes - this is an annual commitment.

**Ragwort:** this is one of the major management headaches on the reserve and this year it was in plague proportions. The abundance of the ragwort seems to vary from year to year with little apparent relation to how it has been treated in the past. Such was the extent of it this year that we decided to clear only the ragwort within 50-100 metres of the perimeter fence to prevent it seeding onto the neighbouring land. We used brushcutters to cut it and collected up all the cut material and took it to the dump by the gate. We spent 10 mandays and one volunteer group session on this. The DCV group spent a weekend pulling ragwort on the western side but it is a very slow process. Ironically our neighbour to the west and south has no ragwort on his land as he grazes it with sheep. Because we have Marsh Fritillaries elsewhere on our land, we are not permitted to



Pulling the ragwort and the pile at the end. Photos: Nigel Spring



graze with sheep, hence the use of Paul Atwell's cattle. He has expressed concern that a combination of the rabbits and the drought reduce the grass supply for his cattle, and other observers think the reserve is overgrazed. A tricky quandary!

Sadly, most of the ash trees in the spinney on the SW side of the reserve look as though they are infected with Ash Dieback and will have to be felled by a specialist felling team during this winter season.

## Portland

The establishment of a regular day a month for volunteers to work on our 'reserves' appears to have been very successful, as we get a good turn out each second Friday (it will be interesting to see if this continues through the winter months, now that the cold wet weather has arrived!) These workdays are organised in conjunction with the DWT who hold their workparty on the last Friday of each month and we tend to share volunteers. We have managed to keep up with the regrowth of the clematis and other scrub on some of the areas – it was interesting to see how many of the areas we cleared in the spring glowed red with Red Bartsia (and its accompanying specialist solitary bee) in the summer. Each time we have a workparty, we include two EuCAN contractors – a brushcutter operator and a raker - to cut grass and scrub regrowth. This has not gone unnoticed by the woman who has a pony paddock adjacent to the reserve who has asked if she can graze her ponies on the areas we regularly cut. It does seem an obvious answer to the scrub problems and will save us time and fuel if it works.

In December we spent a day on Perryfield Quarry reserve clearing the scrub regrowth and bramble. Considering how small this reserve is, it is amazingly rich!



Broadcroft work party. Photo: Nigel Spring

# John O'Groats to Land's End

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You may remember Wren Franklin's name from the very interesting talk he gave us at our last Annual Meeting. Wren is is manager of Clive Farrell's Ryewater Nursery estate. He writes:

**A**t the end of May, my cousin Fred Franklin and I are going to attempt to cycle from John O' Groats in Scotland to Land's End in Cornwall – a distance of over 1000 miles. The adventure also marks significant birthdays for both of us – my 40<sup>th</sup> and Fred's 20<sup>th</sup>. The intention is to raise funds for Dorset Branch.

We began training back in the depths of winter, with plenty of wet and cold rides, often in the dark. As the days lengthen and the weather improves, our miles in the saddle are increasing. A recent ride took us from Buckland Newton down to Portland Bill and back, using many of the smaller Dorset roads and totalling 68 miles. We will aim to average similar daily mileage on our trip, the difference being that we must do it every day for two weeks!

So far our training rides have yet to return any butterfly sightings but hopefully the big trip will. We want to see how many butterflies we can record along the way (weather allowing) and will expect to see many of the common spring and early summer butterflies of Britain. Will we be



Wren and Fred at the Trinity House monument at Portland Bill.

able to spot some more unusual species such as Small Blue or Marsh fritillary, and will we be able to avoid getting thoroughly distracted in the process?

A support vehicle has been provided by Mann Motorhome Rentals near Blandford, which is kindly sponsored by Clive Farrell. This will provide our accommodation en-route and transport to and from the start and finish, as well as a place to fill bellies and fix bikes.



We are aiming to raise funds for Dorset Branch, so please have a look at and share our fund raising page – <https://gofund.me/e3a1cf45>

Please donate if you can, and look out for further updates via the branch website and social media.

**The Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation sends many thanks to Wren and Fred for this heroic effort!**

Also thanks to them for saying: “This is a charity close to both our hearts. Its nature reserves and work have inspired and benefited us, the wider community and the landscape as a whole.”

As they say, please share news of this ride in any way you can so we can maximise the income gained from all their hard work.



# Remembering Bridget de Whalley

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Two of our members who knew Bridget well have given us their memories of working with her

**Colin Burningham ( Branch Treasurer in the early 2000's)**

It was very sad news to hear from Lawrie de Whalley that his dear wife Bridget had died on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022, after a short illness.

Although Bridget and Lawrie were very much individual characters, they were also an amazing double act in all the work that they carried out for Butterfly Conservation. I therefore make no excuse in frequently referring to their team efforts.

My thoughts of us all working at Lydlinch Common go back as far as our memories will stretch. Suffice to say, Bridget and Lawrie were regular helpers, always working really hard and enthusiastically. Members of the Friends of Lydlinch Common will agree that one lasting memory of our workdays is the way that Bridget tackled the almost thankless task of raking up scrub cut by the brushcutters with great enthusiasm and vigour!



Bridget and Lawrie hard at work at Lydlinch. Photo: Colin Burningham.

Bridget loved crosswords and she would often sit during our lunch break with her crossword, welcoming any assistance that could be offered by the other helpers.

In that time frame, Bridget and Lawrie took over the running of the branch information stall from Kathie and Richard and the stall moved around the county during the summer months, spreading the story of our butterflies and moths, very much steered by Bridget but supported by Lawrie with his display of live moths and caterpillars.

Eventually, with Lawrie's declining health, they made the decision to move to Surrey to be near their family and suitable medical treatment. As ever, Bridget had planned for the future of their noble efforts with the stall and she trained up Colin and Christine to take over. What an act to follow!

Their time in London was dominated by Lawrie's illness and Bridget became his carer, supported by their family and NHS staff. During that time, on appropriate nights, Bridget would set up the moth trap, opening the trap the next morning and potting up the moths for Lawrie to identify.

Lawrie responded favourably to the treatment he received and with Bridget's caring skills, they managed to pay many visits to their local nature reserves. Then, very cruelly, Bridget was taken ill and died after a short illness. She was a truly remarkable person and we will particularly miss her happy outlook on life.

Our thoughts go out to Lawrie and his family.



Bridget flying the BC flag at a Kingston Maurward show in 2010. Photo: Lyn Pullen

## **Bobby Knowles (our last but one Newsletter Editor)**

When Edward and I first joined Butterfly Conservation in the late 1990's, every edition of the Dorset Branch Newsletter contained a distinctive Children's Page. Some point about butterflies or moths was always illustrated in a clear bold cartoon style, and always signed "Bridget." We did not at first connect these with the enthusiastic and lively person we seemed to meet on every field trip and working party, also called Bridget. We soon realised, however, that here was a member who was making a contribution across many fronts to the work of Butterfly Conservation. She and her husband Lawrie formed a hard-working team in all practical aspects, and seemed ever present, in spite of the fact that they really lived in the London area and Winterborne Stickland was only their second home. They were both extremely knowledgeable and wise, and their conversations were always thought-provoking.

We have so many memories of Bridget herself. Among them are her hard physical work on those conservation work parties, and her steadfast help to me when I took over as editor of the Branch



Bridget at a social event in 2012.  
Photo: Lyn Pullen

Newsletter shortly after the turn of the millennium, including an unfailing flow of those Children's Pages. At one time, when Paul Butter was chairman of the Branch Committee, he set up sub-groups and gave Bridget, as a retired teacher, a brief to watch over all the educational aspects of the Branch's work, including the Newsletter. She and I therefore worked closely together, and I must confess that we jointly held out against moving to colour printing. At that time we were unable to find an acceptable quote

for it, and we both felt that funds should not be diverted from conservation work. I am well aware that not all the committee shared this view at the time, and am very glad that the current committee now fully supports the costs of producing such a splendidly attractive newsletter.

Bridget had great vitality and organisational ability which came to the fore with the running of the display stall. Not only did this involve compiling the rotas for staffing the stall in all corners of the county (I hesitate to say “twisting people's arms” although sometimes she had to) but also liaising with Kathie and Richard Clarke so that the transport and storage of the display materials could be meshed in with their arrangements for the book and souvenir sales stall. She herself was a treat to watch when educating and inspiring the general public, children particularly, and answering their questions. It is hard to believe that she has gone. The butterfly world has lost a most vigorous supporter.

We have some more personal memories too. In the early 2000's she and Lawrie were, I think, the first in the Branch to follow Keith Powrie's adventures into Bulgaria with the British-Bulgarian Friendship Society. Edward and I decided to follow suit in 2004, and we met Bridget and Lawrie socially in preparing for the trip. They came to us for a meal, and Bridget produced the most luxuriant bunch of parsley from their Dorset garden which you could possibly imagine! She advised us to take an umbrella to Bulgaria to use as a sunshade, as it would be so hot. The weather was not so kind to us the summer we went, and the umbrella was not needed, but we certainly needed one for its proper purpose, sadly, when we returned again another year on a dedicated wild flower trip. Bridget was also a great help at Branch meetings, sorting out tables and chairs, and helping Sylvia Dicker with catering. My special memory is of the smoked mackerel pâté she always brought because Lawrie's heart condition meant he must not touch cheese. The pâté was so refreshing and delicious that I asked her for the recipe – and I make it still.



# Field Trip Reports for 2022

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## Tom and Jean Smith led trips to Chase Woods (with Wiltshire Branch), and Winfrith and Chaldon Downs

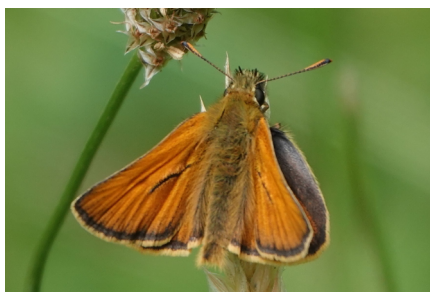
### Chase Woods 10 July

**I**n marked contrast to our 2021 visit, this year we had hot weather, so the butterflies were much more evident and more active. We met at Greatstone Coppice at the southern end of the woods, an area not accessible without prior permission from Rushmore Estate so we're grateful to them once again for making this visit possible.

Jean and I arrived early and were shortly joined by Arthur Bryant. As they chatted, I was monitoring the gate to greet the rest of our party and while sitting on a stool a large butterfly glided slowly past me at about 3' off the ground allowing me to see that this was a female Purple Emperor with its largely brown colour and unmistakable bold white markings. As I was calling Jean and Arthur over it flew around a corner via a muddy puddle before ascending away out of sight, so rather frustratingly I was the only one to see this species.

We had thirteen people in total (including a Wiltshire BC member). From the parking area we made our way slowly north west towards Monks' Arundel Coppice. This ride is through mixed woodland with a number of wider scallops where there are good Bramble patches and other nectar sources. We were pleased to see several Scarlet Tigers as well as expected species such as Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Silver-washed Fritillary. Further along this ride we paused to check some movement high up in an Oak tree. This was a pair of Spotted Flycatchers making periodic short flights to catch insects (we didn't see them catch any butterflies) before returning to a perch.

At a broader grassland area we turned east and headed towards the main part of the wood, Bridmore Ride, passing through further good grassland with plenty of nectar sources. Here we were also finding Small Skippers, a Large Skipper, Marbled Whites, Small White, Large White and Green-veined White. We managed to find some shade along this ride, so stopped here for our picnic lunch.



Small Skipper. Photo: Kevin Denham

After lunch we reached Bridmore Ride, the main, wide north-south ride in Chase Woods, which once again yielded the most butterflies of our visit. We soon caught a fleeting glimpse of a White Admiral, then more Silver-washed Fritillaries including a Valesina female. We had the opportunity to closely look at Small Skippers just to be sure we couldn't find an Essex Skipper. Kevin Denham took this superb photograph of a male Small Skipper, confirmed as such we felt by the conspicuous slightly curved sex brand on the upper wing.

By now it was a hot day so rather than venturing any further in to the wood we began a slow walk back to the cars and some of us saw both Southern Hawker and Emperor Dragonflies and our only Speckled Wood of the day.

An enjoyable day was had by all and thanks once again to Arthur Bryant for compiling the butterfly records on the day and for liaising with Rushmore Estate for this event.

**Butterfly list:** Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brimstone, Small Copper, Purple Emperor, Red Admiral, White Admiral, Comma, Peacock, Silver-washed Fritillary, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Scarlet Tiger.

## Winfrith and Chaldon Down 22 July



Land near Chaldon Herring.  
Photo: Lyn Pullen

After looking at this site last year for Chalkhill Blues (CHB) and finding a female CHB, we felt a return visit with branch members would help us understand more about the presence or absence of this species at this site. Eight of us assembled at the car park at the edge of East Chaldon and then took the bridleway that heads south to the areas of access land

we were due to survey. The hedges and verges alongside this track were busy with a range of butterflies including a Comma, Ringlet and plenty of Gatekeepers and a few Meadow Browns. The next section of the track includes a section of bare chalk and here we found a few Wall Browns and a Common Blue.

As we approached the survey area (covering parts of SY8083, SY8083 and SY7983) a large group of young cattle were blocking the gate so rather than trying to squeeze past them we carried on further on the bridleway and entered the west facing access land at the bottom of the slope about half way along its length then searched along the southern end of this scrubby grassland. There were only a few areas of shorter vegetation and although we found Horseshoe Vetch (the Chalkhill Blue's food plant) here we didn't see the butterfly. This was replicated in the rest of this access land where the vegetation is shorter. The only blues we saw in this area were two Common Blues.

However, we were rewarded with good butterfly sightings including further Wall Browns usually not far from the track at the bottom of the slope. Some of us also got to see several Dark Green Fritillaries. We were mainly seeing Gatekeeper, Marbled White and Meadow Brown with the occasional Vanessa (Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell

and Peacock). Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Large White and Small White completed our list for this area. There was plenty of Tor Grass present, but no Lulworth Skippers were seen.



Common Blue. Photo: Kevin Denham

In the afternoon we just had time to briefly visit some of the access land in the adjacent valley which is part of Chaldon Downs in SY7982. In the short time we were there we found a superior flora with generally shorter vegetation and more flowers, but still no Chalkhill Blues. Here we found Common Blues and Kevin Denham took this lovely photograph of one on a Black Knapweed posing to show the underside of the wings. Our only Small Copper of the day was in this area. Small Skipper, Small Heath, Large White, Marbled White, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown completed our list for this area.

We had an enjoyable day with an enthusiastic group of members and feel further visits would be productive as we led a May and an August visit in these areas in 2016 yielding a good range of species. We think it is likely that the Chalkhill Blue we saw last year was a vagrant.

For the day overall we saw 17 species of butterfly.

**Butterfly list:** Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Large White, Green-veined White, Common Blue, Small Copper, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Wall Brown, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Heath.

**Erratum.** We apologise to Georgie Laing, who wrote the lovely article about Chalkhill Blues on the Weymouth Relief Road in the last newsletter, which we wrongly attributed to Gary Holderness, who took the photo used.



# New Garden/New List

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Wendy and Martin Devine are delighted with the range of wildlife in their new Blandford garden

We had been living in Bournemouth for 30 years or so and had been surprised by the butterflies and moths that visited our suburban garden. We moved to Blandford in early 2022 and wondered what might be different – or indeed the same! We have always loved nature and have done butterfly transects and run our own moth trap for a few years – and we are still learning! The garden we inherited is on a 1970s estate with some well-established choice garden plants, which provided a super canvas for us to work with.

We were unsure what to expect when we moved in but have started to tweak the garden with two small trenches for wildflowers, a bit of longer grass and some wildflowers in the established borders. We were delighted that there was good news to come! Among the dozen or so species of butterflies visiting the garden, it was great to see Brimstones; Orange Tips and Common Blues – the latter two were laying eggs and the former encouraged us to buy some alder buckthorn for next year!

We have run our Skinner type moth trap through the year, not sure what to expect but it's been delightful to have over 100 species including some of the more “local” ones like Chocolate Tip; Small Elephant Hawk and Least Black Arches. We have a



Small Elephant Hawk-moth  
Photo: Wendy/Martin Devine

soft spot though for the showy ones— and it's quite a display when they are on the colourful plants! We submit our moth records to the Dorset Moths website, and it has been interesting to note that we had thirty new species we didn't have over the years of recording in Bournemouth. On the other hand, Heart and Dart; Large Yellow Underwing and the various Carpets, had been numerous and staples of the moth trap in Bournemouth but much fewer in this garden. Perhaps they're waiting until 2023! We must say a big “thank you” to all those that have helped in our (never ending) quest to get better at identifying the various moths, and for the patience of Dorset Moths with us getting up to speed in submitting records.



Least Black Arches  
Photo: Wendy/Martin Devine

As well as this, we welcome all the caterpillars we find feeding in the garden from Orange Tips on the Hesperis and Garlic Mustard, to Angle Shades larvae on the Echiums !!

We have also discovered two slow worms, a toad, hedgehogs, a wood mouse and a one-time visit from a badger on the wildlife camera trap! (We wonder if two camera traps are enough!!!). However, they aren't much good in recording the Red Kites that are overhead from time to time.

Our experience shows how rich the wildlife can be in an “ordinary” suburban garden – it's been great and we both look forward to what 2023 will bring. We probably all underestimate the richness of what visits the garden. Not being satisfied (of course!) we have plans to add five new trees and native hedgerow to encourage even more insects to our garden. It will be interesting so see how things go as the garden develops.

# Dom Greves

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**Dom Greves provides technical support to the Branch Website, and has talked with Robin George about his interest in butterflies**

**M**ost of you will have probably used our excellent website, to find out more about butterflies, see the excellent photos, look up events, and use the recording system to let us know which butterflies you've seen. You may not know that the technical expert behind the website is Dom Greves, who has been helping us with it for many years now. We are very grateful to Dom for the effort and expertise he puts into keeping the website running and up to date, and thought it would be interesting to hear a bit more about him.

## **How did you first become involved with our website?**

In the autumn of 2012, I went to photograph a Hornet nest I'd been told was occupying the composting toilet at Alners Gorse. I bumped into Nigel Spring chain sawing logs in the woodland clearing, and he pointed me in the right direction. I think I must have revealed that I'd been working on the website for Durlston Country Park and Nigel mentioned that help was needed to restore the Dorset Branch online recording system, and he put me in touch with Lyn Pullen.



Hornet Nest. Photo: Dom Greves.

## **I know from your Twitter presence that you are a keen photographer and wildlife expert**

I've been photographing wildlife since working as a volunteer ranger at Durlston Country Park in 2007. In addition to practical habitat

management and visitor services responsibilities, I began to develop their website. Most of Durlston's photographic archive was stored on slides, and digitising them for the website was a laborious process with mixed results. So I began to photograph everything I observed with a pocket-sized digital camera, adding descriptions and metadata, then uploading everything to Durlston's Flickr account. I've been a regular volunteer with various conservation groups for 15 years since, documenting discoveries and gaining wildlife knowledge along the way.

### **When did your interest in nature begin?**

I'm afraid my earliest wildlife memory is of swatting wasps with a badminton racquet beneath our apple tree as a child. Fortunately, I had greater respect for the flurries of butterflies which regularly erupted from the buddleia. My bedroom became a sub-tropical rainforest for several years, but I was less impressed by the insects which regularly infested my plant collection. While travelling abroad, between school and university, I volunteered on several conservation projects, most of which benefited wildlife in some way. Much later, during a career break, I worked on a project in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, which reawakened my previous interest. I then moved down to Purbeck for family reasons, before landing at Durlston, where the photography began.

### **How did you end up designing and building websites? Have you always worked in IT?**

Following an English degree, I worked in educational publishing. When the IT department got made redundant, I somehow ended up running their website. Lured to West London by the ever-expanding World Wide Web I spent 6 years at the internet service provider AOL. There wasn't much training for web skills in those days, so, if something needed building, we figured out how to do it ourselves. Later we had dedicated developer and design teams to brief and coordinate. Now, as a digital freelance, it is back to doing most things myself! I recently figured out how to make outdoor work pay too. Surveying protected species for an ecological consultancy last



summer, I found myself 3 storeys up in a cherry picker rescuing bats from a demolition site, and wading into fierce bramble thickets to identify inky Dormouse footprints. I earn some additional income licensing wildlife photos for publication.

### **Can you tell us about other websites you've worked on?**

The website I worked on at AOL served 2 million paying members, but we only had 5 people on our team! Most of AOL's resources at that time were focused on the clunky AOL proprietary software. Later I worked on websites for the computer games publisher Electronic Arts, supporting popular series like The Sims. After moving to Dorset I helped to manage and develop Dorset County Council's website for Durlston Country Park and National Nature Reserve, creating interactive wildlife maps and other digital learning content. At Imperial College London, I managed the website and social media for a Lottery-funded citizen science project called OPAL (Open Air Laboratories). Originally a collaboration between the Natural History Museum, Open University, and Field Studies Council, OPAL designed and coordinated several national environmental surveys to inform academic research, and influence public policy.

### **Do you have a favourite British butterfly?**

During COVID lockdown, inspired by Peter Eeles' magnificent book\*, I eventually discovered a final instar White Admiral caterpillar sunning itself in my local West Sussex woods. I followed it



White Admiral emerging.  
Photo: Dom Greves

obsessively as the weeks rolled by, through pupation to sudden emergence. The adult butterfly quickly vanished, but I managed to locate and photograph two subsequent generations of eggs and larvae. Sadly, all have died or disappeared before reaching adulthood in the years since. Having spent many happy

summers in Purbeck over 20+ years I'm also very fond of celebrity grassland species like the Chalkhill Blue and Lulworth Skipper. Finding Lulworth Skipper caterpillars with Rachel from Butterfly Conservation in 2017 was a particular highlight. The decline of Chalkhill Blues along the Dorset coast is worrying.



White Admiral sequence. Photos: Dom Greves

\*“Life Cycles of British and Irish Butterflies” by Peter Eeles. Pisces Publications 2019.

You can see more of Dom’s work at [www.domgreves.com](http://www.domgreves.com) and more of his stunning photography at [photo.domgreves.com](http://photo.domgreves.com)

We hope you are enjoying this newsletter. If you could write anything for a future edition, that would be most welcome. What got you interested in butterflies and moths in the first place? Are you sticking just to butterflies or have you taken the plunge into our considerably more numerous moth species? What is your favourite memory to do with lepidoptera? If you want to find out if your idea would be welcome, contact our Editor, Jane Smith (see inside back cover).

The Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation is one of 32 volunteer branches of a national charity, all working to help butterflies, moths and the environment.

# White Hole Recording for Nature

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**Rob Morrison writes about his mission to “do something for nature” by recording in as many White Holes as he can**

**M**y sunny days in spring and summer are often guided by the useful pursuit of assisting in completion of the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation White Holes Map. This is a five yearly record of the general distribution of butterfly species observed in each kilometre square of Dorset.

The attraction to me in undertaking this voluntary work is the exploration of previously unseen parts of the county, a pleasant walk on public paths and bridleways and the safe knowledge of assisting in the creation of a permanent record that will be accessible in the future. The aim is to establish ongoing trends to indicate just what has been lost to development, agriculture and land degradation, or through climate change. The records are publicly available to any interested party.

In preparing for my day's walk, I will refer to the White Holes map and see which areas are empty and need to be covered. There is still no shortage in this respect! Alternatively, I might decide to check a particular species distribution in areas where it is unrecorded or under-recorded. In this regard, particular attention might be paid to early season butterflies, perhaps Orange Tip or even Green Hairstreaks (any day when I sight a hairstreak is a good



Looks like an Essex Skipper!  
Photo: Rob Morrison

day!) I have purchased recent OS Explorer maps of areas I am interested in walking and downloaded the map to my mobile phone which allows for accurate path finding. I photocopy a small section of the original map and mark the squares of interest and then check a circular route to a likely parking spot.

You may discover that route-finding is a challenge, as some footpaths are so rarely used and overgrown or cross an arable field and cannot be seen. If this is so, then I prefer to walk the sunny field margin. To date, I have not been challenged by landowners, rather, they are interested in what you are doing and can often assist or reminisce.

If possible, I would advise to avoid walking along country lanes as not only are these often busy with fast traffic, but also the cropped and flailed hedgerows are often devoid of butterflies. Country lanes are particularly to be avoided in the harvest season, when heavy farm traffic renders many lanes and bridleways in arable areas very dusty and disturbed, also resulting in low butterfly counts. I carry a notebook, and I record species and numbers seen and also turning points along the route for later entry onto the Butterfly Conservation website recent sightings map. The walk is more usually easily re-called if the satellite view of the map is used on the same day of the walk!

A really good result is if you can change a white hole into a recorded hole with more than 10 species. This at least indicates that an area has some measure of biodiversity. The number of records from a particular area obviously indicates that a particular square (eg Badbury Rings area, Bindon Hill and Alners Gorse) has a large number of visitors recording their observations throughout the season. However, these same squares were surrounded by White Holes from which no records were made. It is really all a question of formalising your observations and stepping outside of known areas.

Time of day of your walk may be crucial to your observations. From the OS map, it can be seen on which side of hedgerows a path may

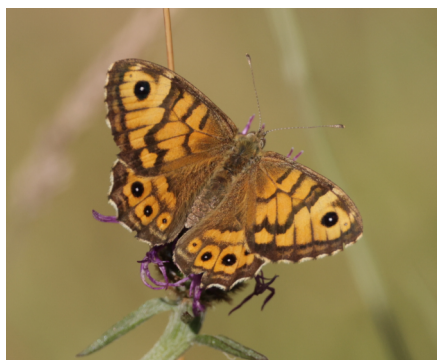
follow. There is little satisfaction walking the chilly side of a shaded hedgerow for no records, whereas just a couple of hours later, the area is bathed in sunshine and the butterflies are active.

Of course, exploration is better made with two persons, my wife occasionally accompanies me and I try to keep a few potential good walks to share. Last summer, we walked a circular route around the Dorsetshire Gap near Higher Melcombe and at the end of the day were rewarded with one corner of a field lit up by sun on blooming planted margins and recorded 11 species over 100 metres, including unexpected relative scarcities such as Small Copper, Common Blue, Wall, Clouded Yellow and Silver-washed Fritillary.

My walks are not just about butterflies, although this is the focus. I have also seen Grey Partridge, Wryneck, Redstart, Large White Egret, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, Harrier and once, a Crane.

Take a camera, if you can. You will eventually make new records of species found in an area and photographic proof dispels doubt. Keep a special eye out for Essex Skippers – known to be spreading from Eastern Dorset on arable land, photograph the Blues females, eventually a Brown Argus will be found which needs careful identification to distinguish it from a Common Blue female.

I also carry out butterfly surveys for the Wider Countryside Scheme.



Wall Brown. Photo: Rob Morrison

These are kilometre squares allocated at random, with a planned two kilometre route. Careful note is made of butterflies within a five metre box of the walk (zero count if there aren't any). Permission in principle to access private land along these routes has already been sought and the count is made at least twice a year, one day in July, one in August. Access is agreed 24 hours in advance with the



landowner. Along these routes I now note dragonflies and damselflies and that is a whole new story.

For practice and to get your eye in, a visit to a managed Butterfly Reserve such as Alners Gorse is of inestimable value and will also allow you to see the scarcer butterflies that appear on the Branch website. The added value of visiting the Reserves is the assistance that other observers and enthusiasts are willing to give, both on species, and on other good venues in Dorset and around the country. You really have to admire the butterfly aficionados.



Marbled White at Alners Gorse.  
Photo: Rob Morrison

**Three gold stars to Rob for being our most prolific recorder of butterfly sightings on the Branch website every year since 2020!**



The “White Holes” are our name for kilometre squares where no butterfly has been reported in the current recording cycle, which is 2020-2024. You can find the frequently updated map on our website at [/www.dorsetbutterflies.com/recording/white-holes](http://www.dorsetbutterflies.com/recording/white-holes).

As of the end of December 2022, 27% of the km squares in Dorset were unfilled, 34% had 1-9 species recorded and 39% had 10+ species recorded.

Don't miss Rob's photo on the back cover!

# Branch Finances

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**W**e remain concerned for our Branch finances in the longer term. We have a good sum in the bank now, but we are spending more each year than we are bringing in.

The committee are working hard to raise extra funds. Steve Brown created a butterfly calendar for 2023, the sales of which have brought in £427 to date; we give grateful thanks to Herrings in Dorchester for sponsoring the postage involved.

We are also encouraging people who come to our walks or talks to donate a sum of their choice if they can. Last year, over 250 people attended our events, so even three pounds from each of them would have gained us a useful amount, which is less than the cost of a pint of beer.

You will also see on page 5 that Nigel Spring is running some training days, which will be good in their own right, but also bring in some income. Anything you can do to help will be gratefully received.

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ERRATA. The eagle eyed amongst you will have noticed that there were some arithmetic errors in the accounts that were published in the last newsletter (No. 100), affecting the Balances Statement for 2021-22. Please accept our apologies for this error. The correct figures are shown below. The error was only in the newsletter, not in the accounts submitted to Head Office. Note also that the incorrect figure for 2020-21 was shown at the bottom of the Income table for Excess (deficit) income over expenditure, (£11,244.95 instead of £9,241.47), but the correct figure was shown in the Balances Statement.

BALANCES STATEMENT		
	2021-22	2020-21
Opening Balance bf	£46,452.00	£37,069.00
Opening Balance adjustment	£0.00	£142.00
Adj Opening Balance bf	£46,452.00	£37,211.00
Surplus (deficit) in year as above	(£1,704.00)	£9,241.00
Closing Balance	£44,748.00	£46,542.00

# Migrating Moths in NW Dorset

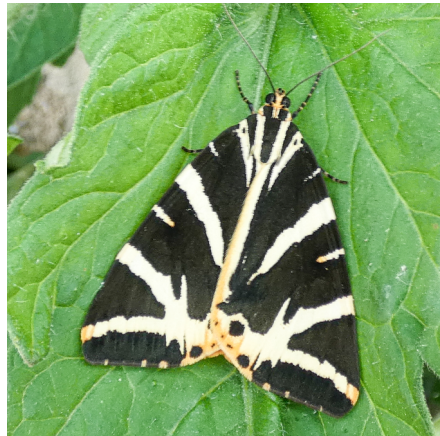
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From Colin Burningham

I have been regularly running a Moth Trap (fitted with a 125W MV lamp) in Yetminster for over 10 years and have been amazed at the variety of both Macro and Micro moths that are attracted. Each year, a new species turns up and always creates some excitement and apprehension with regard to the accuracy of the identification.

2022 was different for me in some respects because of the variety of unusual sightings, both resident and migrants. Arrivals of immigrant moths on the southern coastline have always been recorded and it has always been evident that the extra twenty or so miles from the coast to Yetminster is a buffer of sorts for the rarer migrants. In fact, many migrants, such as the Silver Y moth, have been regularly arriving on these shores each year in vast numbers and moving inland.

We have watched the increase in numbers of Jersey Tiger Moths arriving in our moth trap, but the best indicator has been the reports of their sightings by members of the public who have visited our information stall at various sites around Dorset to tell their tale. Their enthusiasm has been very encouraging in our quest to spread the good news of moths and butterflies in Dorset. Apart from their casual sightings of Jersey Tigers, their observations reported to us have also highlighted the increase in numbers of Humming-bird Hawkmoths arriving in the county. One visitor even reported his visit to Northern France a month earlier where he described the large



Jersey Tiger



Convolutus Hawkmoth



Small Marbled



Clifden Nonpareil



White-speck Moth



Dewick's Plusia



Flame Brocade



Radford's Flame Shoulder



Crimson Speckled

numbers he saw, presumably waiting to make the flight across the channel when the conditions were favourable.

And now to turn a focus on the rarer migrants which have at last made the journey further north from the coast to Yetminster with the possibility of forming resident populations inland. This is not an attempt to make a definitive statement about what is generally happening to the movements of moths. This will eventually emerge from the hundreds of moth records sent to the county recorders every year.

Our first sign of a likely inward migration was the arrival of a *Convolvulus Hawkmoth* on 4 September. There is a possibility that this might be a resident, but it was something unusual for this site. Nearly a month later, another possible candidate for a fairly unusual migrant or resident was a rather stunning *Clifden Nonpareil*. Judging by its beautiful condition, it is likely to be an offspring produced from resident adults. It is a fair point to make that transient residents can possibly become resident or indeed revert back to being a migrant. Weather patterns and availability of their larval food plants are just two of the parameters which might affect this happening.

The next migrant to arrive in Yetminster was a *Dewick's Plusia* on 3 October. Although considered a migrant, records show that it is possibly a candidate for transient residency. A *Radford's Flame Shoulder* was recorded on the 27 October: again, another species that could be a resident. In addition, another migrant arrival on 27 October was the *Small Marbled*. Finally, on 25 November, a *White-speck Moth* arrived in Yetminster, completing my migrant story for 2022.

There were at least two other species which migrated to the south coast and even made it inland, but unfortunately not to my trap. They were the *Flame Brocade* and *Crimson Speckled*. The former was photographed on Portland but was reported in a neighbouring village and the latter was photographed in Catalonia, Spain.

Here's hoping for a bounty of migrant moths in 2023!



# Dorset Butterflies on the Red List

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## Steve Brown has looked at the updated Red List for butterflies seen in Dorset

**T**he revised Red List for British butterflies was published in May 2022, and is featured on the main Butterfly Conservation website. As it is the second such list, we can see how butterflies have performed since the original in 2010. The reasons behind the classifications are very involved and any interested person should read the original article on the website. However, classification essentially depends on the spread and numbers of each species, and assigns them to one of four categories. The most serious is endangered, next is vulnerable, followed by near-threatened and finally least concern. The categories are self-explanatory, but all should carry some concern, as many endangered butterflies were once quite common in the past. The Red List provides a framework for conservation priorities to reverse downward trends. The aim is to try and avert reaching the final end of the road, extinct

Trying to understand why butterflies are endangered, or are moving from near-threatened to vulnerable is the most important question and often this is difficult to answer. The purpose of this study is to pose the questions, so that we can work towards understanding the reasons in the future.

It should be emphasized that the Red List relates to Britain as a whole, and that a particular species could have quite different status in individual areas of the country. One example of this in Dorset is the Large Tortoiseshell. This seems to be making the journey from Extinct as a result of likely introductions in Portland, with recent sightings and evidence of over-wintering and breeding on Portland.

The diagrams below show the trends in Red List classifications of butterflies that are found in Dorset between 2010 and 2023 in three

groups (status unchanged, status improved, and status declined). It is perhaps heartening that the largest single group is of butterflies remaining in the Least Concern category between 2010 and 2023.

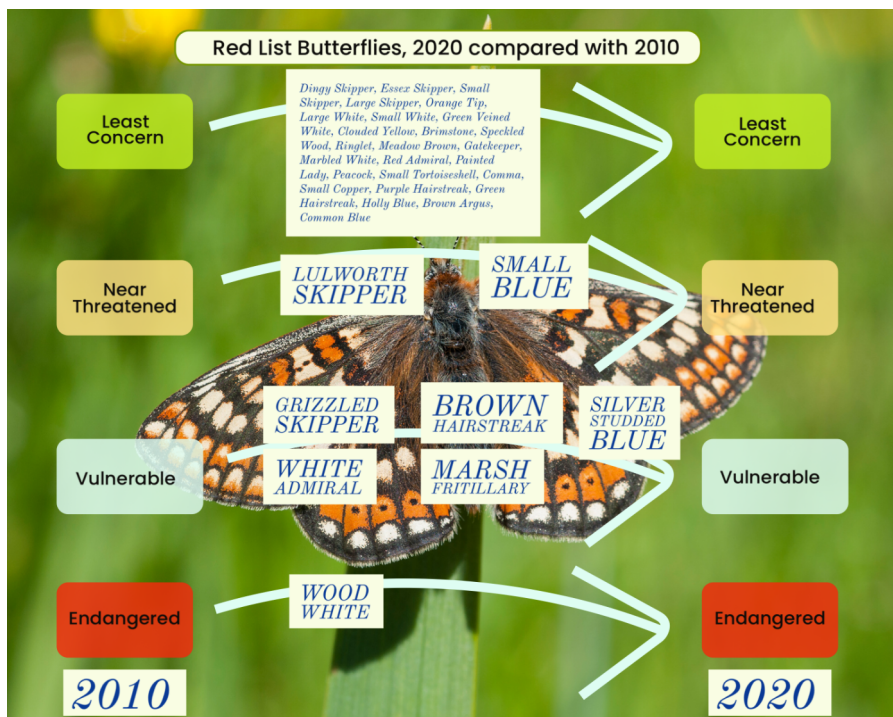


Figure 1: Dorset butterflies with unchanged Red List status between 2010 and 2020  
 Artwork: Steve Brown

Butterflies remaining in Least Concern category: Dingy Skipper, Essex Skipper, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Orange Tip, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Copper, Purple Hairstreak, Green Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue

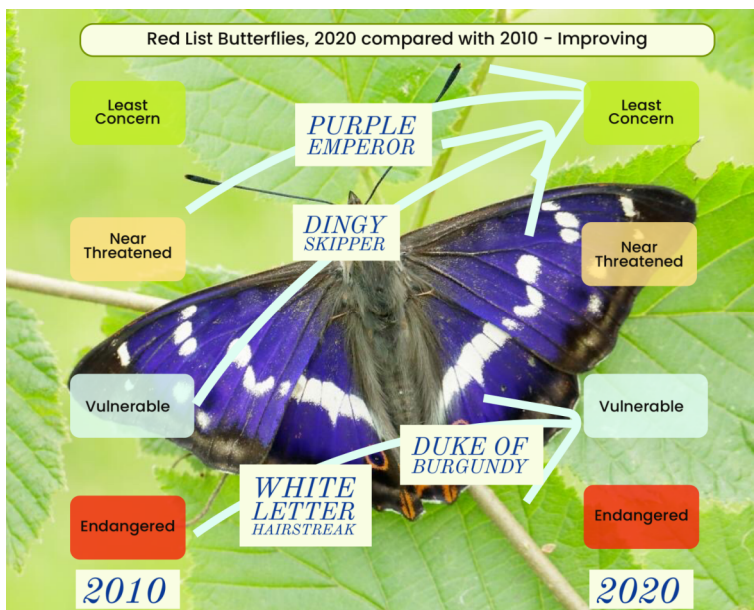


Figure 2: Dorset butterflies with improved Red List status between 2010 and 2023. Artwork: Steve Brown

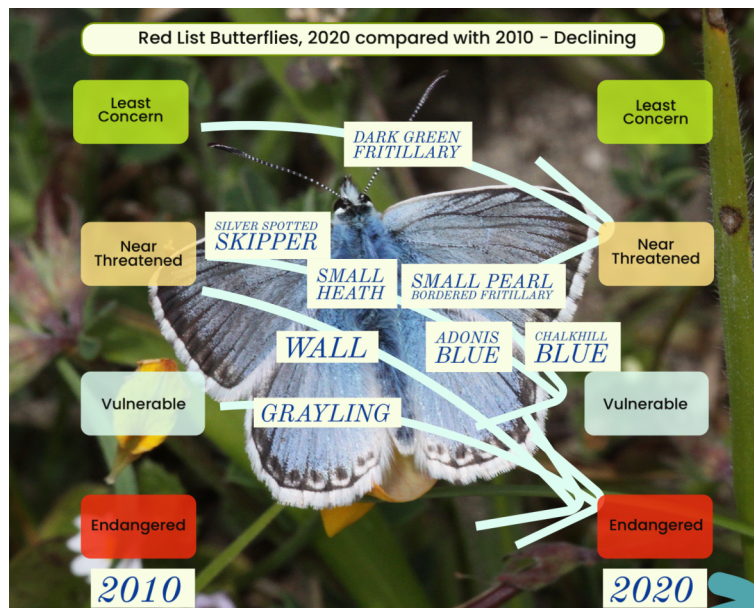


Figure 3: Dorset butterflies with worsened Red List status between 2010 and 2023. Artwork: Steve Brown

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Back cover: Field margin  
Tarrant Gunville.  
Photo: Rob Morrison.



