

The Sussex **Butterfly** Magazine



2025

Sussex Butterfly Magazine 2025 - Issue 2
An Annual Review by Sussex Butterfly Conservation
Edited by John Heys and Sue Peters

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**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

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Front cover: **Brown Hairstreak** photo by Dave Brown

Back cover: **Clouded Yellow f. helice** photo by Dave Brown

This page: **Ashdown Forest** photo by Dave Brown

Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch
Members' Day

Saturday 22nd November
1.30 - 4.30 pm

Presentations:

'The Wood White in Sussex and Surrey'
- David Bridges and Bill Downey

**'BC reserves and the importance of
Volunteers in their management'**
**- Fiona Scully (Reserves Officer for
SE England)**

Raffle

Photo Competition
results will be announced &
top images submitted will be projected

Tea, Coffee & Cakes

Cyprus Hall, Cyprus Road,
Burgess Hill,
RH15 8DX

Chair's Introduction to 2025 Sussex Butterfly Magazine

Welcome to the 2025 Magazine. It retains the format of the past three years, again being a consolidated one, combining the Spring and Autumn Newsletters into a single publication, making it more efficient and cost effective to produce and distribute. It has again been edited by Sue Peters, who is also our primary Branch Contact, and John Heys, and formatted by Bob Foreman. We may, as other Butterfly Conservation Branches have already done, move to predominately electronic distribution at a future date, although no firm decision has yet been made about this.

Our Committee, our Projects, our Fieldwork

After a welcome strengthening of the Committee over the past two years, there have been a few further changes during 2025. Andrea Gibbs, our Social Media Manager, who has also often very ably represented us at events, has left us, as has Tim Squire, whose work on restoring the habitat for the Grayling at Deep Dean, has been widely recognised, but we have been joined by David Cotton, who is our new Social Media Officer. We are very grateful to Andrea and Tim for all their work with the Branch, and welcome Dave to the Committee. Another impending change is that Paul Johnson, who has been our Recording Officer for eight years, will be stepping down in the near future, as mentioned in his report; succession

planning for this role is currently underway. The Committee is very grateful to Paul for having diligently carried out this important role for many years.

In addition to your Committee working as a whole, sub-groups of Committee Members are also formed to further specific aims or projects (such as the sub-group dedicated to producing this Magazine!). A real test of Butterfly Conservation's (BC's) effectiveness is whether, and how, it can deliver the objective embedded in its name – conserving butterflies. An important element of this is identifying projects where on the ground habitat enhancement work can realise this. To further this aim, initiated by Committee member Kevin Crook, we are establishing a conservation sub-group. This will assist in identifying sites and projects where BC's resources can most effectively be targeted, taking into account BC's Priority Species (which for Sussex primarily means Pearl and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Duke of Burgundy and Wood White) and landscapes. However, a range of other species are of particular conservation interest (Silver-studded Blue for example) and potential interventions to benefit these and other species will also be evaluated.

BC has revised the way in which Branches are funded; until the current year it was based on individual Branches receiving a proportion of membership income, and was thus dependent on the number of members in each Branch. With



2025 was 'mixed' year for Holly Blue

some counties being more populous and having a higher membership, this led to an uneven distribution of funds. This has now been changed, with Branches each year submitting a budget, including an element for specified on the ground project work, for approval. I will return to this later, but in brief for the 2025/6 financial year, there will be additional winter work parties at Kithurst Meadow and Rewell Wood to enhance habitat at these two key sites. The budget also includes provision for Members' Day costs, Magazine/Newsletter printing and distribution, expenses relating to running work parties, purchase and maintenance of tools and first aid kits for example. We received all the budget we requested. This matching of what is required and of funds being made available is an efficient use of BC's finances.

Monitoring of butterfly populations is fundamental to understanding them and targeting on the ground work to

improve habitat quality and quantity. For conserving species (or recovering them - Nature Recovery Networks and species recovery are now an important part of the wider conservation lexicon), we need to know where populations of particular species are, or could become established, with habitat interventions.

We have a good grasp on where the key sites in Sussex are for our butterflies, and of how species are faring. This comes from both informal sightings (such as the Branch sightings webpage) and formal records (iRecord in particular) and from quantitative data, particularly that gained via transect surveys, co-ordinated in Sussex by Julia Lowson. However, there are geographical gaps which would benefit from filling, including for some of our rarer species, which may be patchily distributed over large areas.

One way to start plugging these gaps is by undertaking simple presence/absence surveys, covering as much ground as possible with a group of volunteers. An example is the Silver-studded Blues of the Ashdown Forest. The locations of core populations of this beautiful little butterfly on the Forest are fairly well known and surveyed but other smaller ones may have remained undetected, and there is uncertainty as to whether smaller colonies

seen in the past are still present. A one-off survey in June, organised by the Sussex Branch in conjunction with The Conservators of Ashdown Forest, on a day coinciding with good weather and estimated peak emergence, produced some useful results. Presence/absence surveys of this type can identify sites to be followed up subsequently by more detailed surveys (particularly transects) and where habitat enhancement works can be focused.

Butterflies do not respect administrative boundaries and for one rare and localised species, the Wood White, its Sussex colonies fall within, or are nearby satellite populations of, the large Chiddingfold Forest population. The Forest is primarily in Surrey. However, its southernmost section, including part of the Wood White core population, extends into West Sussex, and a number of the outlying Wood White colonies are also in Sussex. Some of these may be transient populations, others viable populations in their own right. Understanding and conserving these satellite colonies thus requires a co-operative two-county approach. Accordingly, following a meeting of Committee Members and Volunteers from the Sussex and Surrey BC Branches, and others with knowledge of the species in and around the Forest, in early July a group of volunteers visited a number of



A pair of Chiddingfold Wood Whites, being photobombed by a third coming in very fast and blurred

sites where it was thought Wood White colonies may be present. As was the case with the Ashdown Forest Silver-studded Blues, there was uncertainty about whether the butterflies may still be present at sites where they were once recorded, or may occur, undetected, at other potentially suitable but un-surveyed sites. Useful results were again obtained.

The butterfly year 2025 – low expectations?

Turning to how the 2025 season was for our butterflies, it is worth, for context, doing a quick recap of the past few years as a particular season does not occur in

isolation. How it shapes up is influenced by what preceded it. 2022 saw an intense heatwave, with the UK's first recorded 40°C temperature and drought. Although a good season for many adult butterflies, there was concern about how 2023 would shape up – in particular would there be a serious knock-on effect, mirroring what happened in 1977 in the wake of the 1976 drought and prolonged heatwave. However, after a cold spring and slow start, a surprisingly good 2023 season, hot at times, but without the extremes of 2022, unfolded for many species of both habitat specialists and those of the wider countryside. There was hope that 2024 would be another at least reasonable year.

However, the weather swung away from being another hot summer to a prolonged grey, often wet, and sometimes stormy one. Many spring and summer species were late emerging, and when they did

so, often in much lower numbers than usual. It was not all bad news though. Silver-studded Blues emerged in decent numbers and the Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at the Park Corner Heath

and Rowland Wood Reserves, where they benefit from ongoing and effective habitat management, did pretty well. In fact, sites which were actively managed had a reasonable year, and for some species, it was a case of late rather than never; Chalk Hill Blues for example had a late start but built up to reasonable numbers. Others, such as Silver-spotted Skipper did poorly though, and overall, it was not a good year. Butterfly Conservation declared a Butterfly Emergency in September 2024, following the results of the year's Big Butterfly Count recording the lowest numbers over the 14-year history of the survey, but also highlighting a long-term trend of decline and threats including habitat loss, pesticide use and climate change.

In Sussex, as elsewhere, a particular concern at this time last year was that egg deposition during 2024 might have



A better year for Silver-spotted Skipper than last

been, for some species at least, low and that fewer adult butterflies in 2025 would be the result of this. Nevertheless, the outcome would be determined to a large degree by what weather we experienced, before, and during the next season.

The butterfly year 2025 – record breaking weather

2025 turned out to be another exceptionally warm and dry year. Although lacking the searing temperatures of 2022 it was the hottest summer ever recorded in the UK. On 1st September, as we reached the first day of autumn, Met Office scientist Dr Emily Carlisle reported a mean temperature for the summer months (1st June to 31st August 2025) of 1.51°C above the long-term meteorological average. As well as being a record in its own right, it pushed the summer of 1976 out of the top five warmest summers measured in terms of average warmth although the more extended 1976 heatwave means that 1976 still holds the record for the highest average summer maximum temperature. 2025 saw four separate heatwaves, but each relatively short lived and interspersed by more normal (if there is such a thing anymore) temperatures. Analysis by Met Office Climate Scientists demonstrated that a summer temperature as high as 2025 has been made around 70 times more likely because of human induced climate change.

Head of climate attribution at the Met Office, Dr Mark McCarthy, said: “Our analysis shows that the summer of 2025 has been made much more likely because of the greenhouse gases humans have released since the industrial

revolution. In a natural climate, we could expect to see a summer like 2025 with an approximate return period of around 340 years, while in the current climate we could expect to see these sorts of summers roughly one in every five years”. In mid-October, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed that 2024 had seen a record rise of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. A primary underlying cause of climate change is accelerating.

The butterfly year 2025 – plenty to see – more winners than losers

However, the record average summer temperature (following a very warm late spring) allowed caterpillars and chrysalises to race through their development, with abbreviated life cycles likely giving less exposure to predation and possibly parasitism. So ultimately a greater proportion of individuals made it from the egg to adult butterfly. As butterflies lay large numbers of eggs, even a modest increased survival rate at each pre-adult life stage may mean significantly more butterflies, and the bounce-back from an apparently poor year can be rapid if conditions allow, particularly in species with more than a single brood each year. Fitting into this category, the Wall Brown had a particularly strong third brood this year and there were some other extremely interesting reports, including a probable third brood Adonis Blue seen by Bob Eade on October 9th. Martin Kalahar expands on the theme of butterflies and climate change later in the Magazine.

Taking the season as a whole, 2025 was thus characterised by species emerging early, sometimes very early (two



White-letter Hairstreak from Horseshoe Plantation, this species had a very good year

to three weeks), and generally good to very high numbers of adult butterflies. Some extraordinary totals of the scarcer and rare species were recorded, with Neil Hulme counting 800+ Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rewell Wood. It was also a good year for Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at the Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood Reserves, where both species enjoyed long flight seasons, uncurtailed by bad weather. Amongst other Spring butterflies Green Hairstreak and Duke of Burgundy had very strong emergences. A little later as summer arrived, so did Purple Emperor, with exceptional numbers being seen at Knepp, accompanied by very large numbers of Purple Hairstreak. Recovery

from a medical procedure curtailed my ability to look for Purple Emperors this year, and I couldn't make it to Knepp, but on each of the few brief visits I made to more local sites, I managed to find pristine individuals on the ground within a few minutes of starting, something I have never managed before. I was also very surprised, and encouraged, by the numbers of White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary I was seeing, perhaps five times as many as usual for those sites. White-letter Hairstreak also had a good year. For example more were seen at Horseshoe Plantation, near Birling Gap, than for some years. The one habitat specialist which unfortunately failed to show

a significant upturn in numbers was the Grayling, numbers of which at its sole Downland site, Deep Dean, remained worryingly low.

As the season neared its end, Brown Hairstreak were very numerous indeed and what is typically a butterfly which requires some searching for, and with no guarantee of success, became a surprisingly easy one to find. The Steyning Downland was more productive than for a number of years and again one of the top sites nationally to encounter this typically elusive butterfly. Many Branch Members, and others from further afield visited Steyning, and were rewarded with close encounters with multiple (mostly female) Hairstreaks.

Another late species, Silver-spotted Skipper also fared much better; I search each year for this charming species in a reliable, sheltered spot near Birling Gap. Last year, on the best day I saw three; this year, in the same location I saw over twenty.

Moving away from the habitat specialists, most had a good to very good year. One exception was the Holly Blue, although it did better in the extreme north of East Sussex (including at the RSPB Broadwater Warren Reserve, where it is usually seldom seen) and just over the border into Kent. They were very numerous in mature gardens in Tunbridge Wells, the southern part of which straddles the Kent/Sussex border. A parasitic wasp, *Listrodromus nycthemerus*, has a controlling effect on Holly Blue populations so that may be a contributing factor as to why it failed to benefit from the better weather, although why it seems to have done better in Kent than Sussex is hard to explain.

While some migrants have had a good year, the more exotic ones have turned up in smaller numbers than might have been expected. Very large numbers of Large Whites arrived and bred very successfully once here. Towards the end of the season, including throughout August, they became extremely numerous in Sussex and further inland. This is in stark contrast to 2024 when they were relatively scarce, and mostly encountered along the coast, with numbers dropping off sharply moving away from it.

A few waves of Painted Ladies arrived, and it was a good, but not exceptional, Clouded Yellow year. Earlier arrivals of this species bred in Sussex, and fairly large numbers

emerged, predominately near the coast, in late September into early October. I saw more of the pale *helice* female variety than for many years. Long-tailed Blues, although not as scarce as last year, were not common, and the newly arrived primary migrants took more searching to find compared to many recent years. They did not seem to breed as successfully as in recent years, and Sussex bred ones were also scarce. There was, however, the usual influx of Continental Swallowtails, with a number reported on the Branch's Sightings Page. At least a few are reported every year, and although a large and conspicuous butterfly, much less likely to "fly under the radar" than Long-tailed Blues or Queen of Spain Fritillaries, others undoubtedly go unseen and unreported. There is the constant possibility that they may found a population on the Downs, where they have transiently become established as a breeding species in the past.

The butterfly year 2025 – legacy for 2026?

So, 2025 was a season characterised by an upturn in butterfly numbers and favourable conditions for them to rapidly complete their life cycles. It was not without challenges for them though. While early emergence may have meant less potential for predation and more adults, they may have emerged out of sequence with the food plants with which they have co-evolved and are dependent on – see Steven Lofting's article later in the Magazine.

It was not just a hot year, the spring and summer were exceptionally dry. The Head of Water Resources of South



Last year's photo competition winner:
Silver-washed Fritillary *f. valezina* by Simon Linington

East Water, commenting at the time (10th October) a drought was declared by the Environment Agency for parts of East and West Sussex, noted that the Sussex Ouse catchment has only experienced two years with lower spring and summer rainfall in its 155 year recorded history. Our Reserves, Park Corner Heath, and Rowland Wood lie (just!) within the Ouse Catchment, as do other significant sites for Butterflies, such as Malling Down. Rainfall was similarly low across most of Sussex.

Drought conditions affect the food plants of our butterflies, so it is not just a concern that butterfly and food plant life cycles could become desynchronised. The very dry soils could result in poorer quality, or a lack of, suitable food for the caterpillars. Dry soils and temperature are

also further intertwined, the Met Office stating that “The persistent warmth this year has been driven by a combination of factors including the domination of high-pressure systems, unusually warm seas around the UK and the dry spring soils. These conditions have created an environment where heat builds quickly and lingers, with both maximum and minimum temperatures considerably above average.”

So, while the butterflies were often abundant this year, and egg laying will presumably have been very high, there is (as there was after the 2022 heatwave and drought) concern that desiccation of either the eggs or resultant caterpillars, or their food plants, will lead to reduced numbers next year. 2023 turned out to be a much better year than it was feared it

might be, so potentially 2026 may be another good year, but again much will depend on how our increasingly unpredictable weather unfolds. Although far from us, and how it will affect our weather very uncertain, the marine heatwave currently affecting a large part of the North Pacific may influence our winter, possibly leading to a colder one than would otherwise be the case. The science of climate change is a complex and evolving field, and how effectively we will address the challenges remains uncertain; a letter to Government by the independent Climate Change Commission in October emphasised that the country was not adapted to the worsening weather extremes already happening, let alone what was expected in the future.

Future butterfly years – the threats – our local action

It is the longer-term trends, not only of climate, which are the really important ones in determining what is happening to our butterfly populations. It is unfortunately the case that the threats faced by butterflies are sadly accelerating rather than diminishing, and a report published by the European Commission in October, the 2025 European Red List of Butterflies (by Chris van Swaay, Martin Warren, Sam Ellis, Joanna Clay, Vittorio Bellotto, David Allen, Aurore Trottet) provided a timely update at a European (including the UK level). This offers a Europe-wide perspective and while some of the issues identified such



**Last year's photo competition runner-up:
Female Purple Hairstreak by Paul Day**

as land abandonment are more relevant to other parts of the Continent, such as the Balkans, the majority are very familiar in a UK context.

The report identifies that “The biggest threats to butterflies in Europe now and in the past are habitat loss and degradation. The primary causes of these changes are agricultural intensification, wetland drainage, land abandonment and overgrazing from livestock. As a result of these changes, many species are now suffering from the consequences of habitat fragmentation, which greatly increases the chances of local extinction.” The report notes that “Over the last few decades, climate change has had a major impact on European butterflies.”

The report also recognises the

problems in attributing declining butterfly populations to specific causes. A revealing statement is that “Pesticides undoubtedly affect both adult butterflies and caterpillars that occur close to the arable or permanent crops where they are applied, but they can also reach the core of protected areas up to several kilometres away, where even low concentrations can cause declines of butterflies (Gols & others, 2020; Van Deynze & others, 2024)”.

However, in many cases while we can see an effect (as loss of a species, or a decline in numbers), attributing it to a specific cause may be very difficult; the report further states that “Even though we know that intensive and large-scale agriculture is one of the major threats to butterfly populations, there is not yet enough evidence to disentangle the impact of each of the individual pressures

such as the application of pesticides, herbicides, inorganic fertilizers, large quantities of manure and lowering of the groundwater table”.

There are situations in the UK where the reasons for the decline of particular species remain uncertain, perhaps best illustrated by the precipitous decline of the High Brown Fritillary, within living memory a common butterfly in Sussex, but lost from the County decades ago and now the UK's most threatened species, restricted to a very few sites in Devon, South Wales and North West England. Fundamental changes to its habitat as coppicing of woodlands was abandoned undoubtedly played a role but even now, in locations where what is believed to be optimal habitat management for the species is being undertaken, colonies are still being lost. Consideration by experts has suggested a number of reasons



**Last year's photo competition third place:
A Pair of Pearls by Jennie Fellows**

why it may still be in decline in these heavily monitored and managed sites, including climate change and nitrogen deposition, but we lack a definitive answer. Nevertheless, other species have responded very well to targeted habitat focused action, the Duke of Burgundy being an excellent example of this in Sussex, being recovered (the work of Neil Hulme being key to this) from a very low level in the early 2000's to the exceptional counts recorded this year, and we can be confident that continued interventions to help this species will be successful.

Thus, at a practical level, appropriate habitat management can make a huge difference for many species, and the Branch's work parties provide an excellent opportunity for members to become involved in this valuable work. For a number of years, the mainstay of this activity has been the conservation winter work parties at the Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood Reserves expertly planned and enthusiastically led by Neil Hulme, commencing in November and running through to February next year. Neil's article later in the Magazine gives an authoritative overview of the history of these sites. It is not just the Fritillaries there which are benefitting. This year Grizzled Skipper did very well. The dates of this winter's work parties are given later in the Magazine and full details will be available on the Branch website. We would like to thank the dedicated volunteers who have put in so much time to help make the Reserves the very special places which they are.

As mentioned above, we are very pleased this year to be offering additional winter work parties to be

led by Neil Hulme at two new sites: Kithurst Meadow and Rewell Wood. The continued success of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rewell Wood is dependent on the coppicing of sweet chestnut which will be the focus of work there. Kithurst Meadow, on the South Downs near Storrington, is a small but renowned site, with many species packed into a small area, but is particularly notable for Duke of Burgundy. It is often the first site at which new enthusiasts encounter the species. While Duke of Burgundy benefit from some scrub, when it starts to overwhelm the grassland, habitat quality for the species rapidly declines, including a shading out of primrose, the caterpillar food plant. This situation was being approached at the Meadow this year; some initial work has recently been undertaken by the South Downs National Park and follow up habitat management can now be undertaken by our volunteers.

A good walk in the sun with (or without) a big camera?

For those who wish to spend a few enjoyable hours seeing, and learning more about, our butterflies, the Branch's field trips, and guided walks, co-ordinated by Roy Broad, are recommended. Thanks to Roy and those who led these events, we were able to run a fairly full programme this spring and summer, with little interruption by unsuitable weather. We will be offering a further programme of events for 2026; details will be on the website. These events are informal and friendly, led by those with expert knowledge of the sites visited, and are an ideal opportunity to meet fellow Branch

Members in often beautiful surroundings and hopefully see a good variety of butterflies.

Last year the Branch held a photographic competition, the results of which were announced at the 2025 Members Day and the winning entries posted on the website. 28 Members entered and there were some really excellent entries, with a lovely shot taken of a Silver-washed Fritillary f. *valezina* female by Simon Linington taking first place. Far from the easiest of butterflies to secure a good image of, with the beautiful *valezina* form seldom encountered in Sussex. (I saw two this summer, failing to secure a decent image of either!) Second place went to a female Purple Hairstreak photo captured by Paul Day. We have had a couple of very good years for Purple Hairstreak recently but coming across a pristine specimen with its wings open, posing beautifully and showing the amazing colours these butterflies have when newly emerged is far from an everyday occurrence. Third was an image of a pair of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries taken by Jennie Fellows. While not a difficult butterfly to find at the (few) locations they occur in Sussex, this was an exceptional photo of a mating pair, one showing its upper and the other its underwings.

The competition is being run again this year, with the results to be announced, and winning entries to be shown very soon, at the 2025 Members Day.

One butterfly which may figure in future competitions is the Southern Small White *Pieris mannii*. This species has now possibly crossed the Channel and hence become an addition to the list of British butterflies. Its spread north

through the Continent, reaching the Channel coast a few years ago has been widely reported, and its arrival in the UK expected. A number of potential Southern Small Whites have been photographed in England this summer, including some in Sussex, although none of the latter have been definitively authenticated. Of all the photographed individuals, one seen at the Landguard Bird Observatory in Essex, seems to have gained most acceptance as being a Southern Small White. Being a species with multiple broods, and with variation in markings between these (and between the sexes), and some individuals having an appearance which overlaps with other Whites (Small White in particular) confirming a Southern Small White from a photo can be very challenging. In individuals with overlapping characteristics, positive identification may perhaps only be confirmed by genetic analysis. As well as some information in the article "2025 First Sightings Table", later in this Magazine, there is a good summary of the situation by Francis Kelly in the Autumn 2025 issue (Number 80) of the Surrey Skipper, the Surrey and SW London Branch's (online) equivalent of this magazine. It is however, definitely one to look out for now in Sussex!

Best Wishes

Dave Brown

Chair, Butterfly Conservation- Sussex Branch

2025 First Sightings

John Heys

Are you in the 2025 hall of fame for First Sightings? All the posts from anyone, branch member or not, who has the impulse to report what they have seen, go on there. Martin Kalaher also highlights in red all the first sightings of each species in the year.

This highlighting makes it a relatively easy job for me to scroll through the months and note the first sightings into a table. The table does not tell the stories of how the sightings came to be made. Nevertheless, it is clear from the locations that only a few may be chance sightings, whereas many have come about as a result of a visit to a specific site to look for butterflies or on a nature walk. Lindsay Morris wears the 2025 crown, with 5 first sightings – Peacock, Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell, Common Blue and Long-tailed Blue. It almost seems that the butterflies come to him rather than he to them.

I do know the back-story of the first sighting of 2025 as I saw it and posted this: *“My first butterfly of the year - on my way to Bognor Regis Town v Hashtag United – a Red Admiral fluttering under the canopy of platform 1 on the south side of Barnham Station”* This was on 11 January, whereas in 2024 the first sighting, again a Red Admiral, was on 1 January 2024. In 2025 January started cold with rain, sleet and snow in many places – not weather to tempt out early butterflies. Things were looking up on the day of my sighting. It was sunny, relatively warm and still. I had checked to see which matches were on, as a lot had been called off for frozen pitches. Bognor was OK, so I made my way there, in lovely weather, spotting the Red Admiral en route. My happy mood soon dissipated. The referee had made a late pitch inspection and called off the match because an area of the pitch was still frozen - warm enough for a butterfly, but not for footballers.

For a deeper look at butterfly activity in 2025 please look for Martin's Butterfly Report. Early in the new year,

Small Coppers at Parham Park in August



January			
11 th	Red Admiral *	Barnham Railway Station	John Heys
12 th	Peacock	North Lancing	Lindsay Morris
14 th	Comma	Rye Harbour Nature Reserve car park	Mike Mullis
25 th	Brimstone	North Lancing	Lindsay Morris
February			
28 th	Small Tortoiseshell	Lancing Manor, North Lancing	Lindsay Morris
March			
3 rd	Painted Lady	Rewell Wood	Neil Hulme & Kat Dahl
6 th	Speckled Wood	East Sussex garden, coastal & south	East Sussex member <i>via website editor</i>
	Small White		
	Large White		
9 th	Large Tortoiseshell	Sussex site	East Sussex member <i>via website editor</i>
26 th	Green-veined White	Crawley	Vince Massimo
27 th	Orange-tip	Etchingham	Richard Farran
30 th	Holly Blue	Wickham Way, Haywards Heath	Robert North
April			
2 nd	Small Copper	Malling Down	Martin Buck
	Green Hairstreak		
4 th	Grizzled Skipper *	Malling Down	Katrina Watson
20 th	Wall	Castle Hill	Pete Varnham
8 th	Dingy Skipper	Malling Down Castle Hill	Paul Atkin Jen Fellows
11 th	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Rewell Wood	Graham Woodland
14 th	Small Heath	Mill Hill	Bob Eade
17 th	Common Blue	North Lancing	Lindsay Morris
19 th	Duke of Burgundy	Kithurst Hill	Stephen Beckingham
24 th	Brown Argus	Malling Down	Bob Eade
27 th	Small Blue	Castle Hill Liz Williams Butterfly Haven, Brighton	Graham Hubbard Gary Fuller
28 th	Adonis Blue	Malling Down	Zayed Ahmed

May			
1 st	Wood White	Sensitive location, West Sussex (north)	Alan Birch
7 th	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Rowland Wood/Park Corner Heath	Bob Eade but Andy Wilson first to post a sighting (14 th)
	Meadow Brown	Kithurst Hill	Julia Lowson
10 th	Large Skipper	Chantry Hill	Stephanie Singh
28 th	Black Hairstreak	Ditchling Common	Vincent Oates
30 th	Silver-studded Blue	Ashdown Forest	Christian Moss
June			
2 nd	Marbled White	Mill Hill	Val Heys
	White-letter Hairstreak	Near Fiveways, Brighton	Cathy & Gary Fuller
4 th	Dark Green Fritillary	Ditchling Common	Martin Buck
	Small Skipper	Liz Williams Butterfly Haven, Brighton	Tony Gould
9 th	Purple Hairstreak	Loxwood Balcombe	Mark Colvin Martyn Waller
	White Admiral	Knowlands Wood	John Williams
	Silver-washed Fritillary		
11 th	Ringlet	Arundel Park	Kate Chesterton
12 th	Gatekeeper	Berwick Station	Chris Bird
	Clouded Yellow	Etchingham	Richard Farran
16 th	Purple Emperor	Southwater Woods	Patrick Moore
27 th	Essex Skipper	Alfriston Road, Seaford	Bob Eade
28 th	Swallowtail	Kithurst Hill	Jonathan Crawford
30 th	Chalk Hill Blue	Horseshoe Plantation	James Wooldridge
July			
2 nd	Brown Hairstreak	Knepp Estate	Alan Salter
9 th	Grayling	Deep Dean	Patrick Moore
11 th	Pavoni's Clearwing	Ditchling Common	Tony Gould
16 th	Silver-spotted Skipper	Chantry Hill	Martin Kalaher
August			
11 th	Long-tailed Blue	Lancing Ring	Lindsay Morris

Martin will complete this detailed review of butterfly activity in Sussex during 2025, very much based on Members' contributions to the Sightings pages. His report and a Moth Report by Colin Pratt, the County Recorder, will appear on-line in "Adastra" published by The Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. These reports, together with reports from earlier years, can be found here:-

- Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre : <https://sxbrc.org.uk>
- Find the drop-downs under "Projects & Publications" on the top line
- Click on Publications
- Adastra is at the top of the publications – click on it or just scroll down
- All the Adastras are there, the most recent first & then going back to 2001
- Find the pages for butterflies and moths in the index
- There are other reports too, eg lichens and birds.

Another way to find Martin's Butterfly Reports is through our own Sussex Branch website <https://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk>. On the menu bar, at the top of the page, click on "Archives" and the Reports can be found going back to 2015. 2025 will be there in due course. There are fewer butterfly pictures here than in Adastra.

Although 2025 has not ended, we can be fairly sure that the table below is complete – unless, maybe, there is a late, verified sighting of a Southern Small White.

I am a fan of Swallowtails. As well as the 28th June sighting, the observant people of Sussex spotted another four: Bettina Linstrum at Brighton on 24th July, Sheila Loe at Fishbourne on 26th July, Caleb van der Wolf at Glyne Gap cliff, Bexhill on 15th August and Richard Fosbrooke at Marchwood, Chichester on 5th September. What's more, their postings on the Sightings pages include photos.

Of course, Pavoni's Clearwing (*Elzunia pavonii*) is an escape, but I couldn't resist including it. It is usually resident in Ecuador rather than Sussex and is in the Nymphalidae family, as are Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma, and various Fritillaries and Browns.

Female Orange-tip, Red House Common in April



Readers of the Sightings page will remember that a new migrant, the Southern Small White, appeared to have reached Sussex. Neil Hulme posted on 23rd August that he believed he'd seen one laying eggs on candytuft. Another post of a "Southern Small White" was made on 24th August, but Martin Kalaher gave his view that it was a "maybe" sighting rather than a certainty. By 25th August Neil had investigated further and concluded that his butterfly on 23rd August was a Small White. His explanation on the Sightings page is well worth reading for an insight into the difficulties of distinguishing the two species.

The aim of the table above is to give credit to the people who made "first sightings" in 2025. Further information can be found on the Sightings page of the website, by clicking on the blue button labelled "First sightings". In 2025 Paul Shepherd has expanded this page, and for each species the dates for the earliest, median average, and latest "first sighting" date for the website years 2007 - 2025, have been included.

The six months between March and August were mostly sunny and warm and consequently most butterfly species, in Sussex, emerged some 10-20 days earlier than an average median date. Many species benefitted from an early emergence, but that was not necessarily true for all species, as the dry, hot weather may have adversely affected foodplants at a critical time in the breeding cycle. Steven Lofting's article, elsewhere in this

Magazine, looks at some of these issues.

It would be nice if 2026 is at least a reasonable year and I hope that it is warm enough and the winds sufficiently in the right direction to send a Swallowtail my way. They are a lot easier to watch than Long-tailed Blues.

Dingy Skipper, Woods Mill SWT Reserve, April

All photos: Bob Foreman



Riding on a Wave

*The Butterfly Conservation Sussex reserves,
past and present*



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries

Neil Hulme

Whenever the Park Corner Heath (PCH) reserve is mentioned, there is usually a passing comment made that this was the former home of the now-extinct (in the UK) Lewes Wave moth, which apparently only ever occurred here and within the wider Vert Wood complex. Although the loss of this species is now just a snippet in the entomological history of Sussex, the PCH and Rowland Wood reserves would simply not exist today were it not for the ultimately unsuccessful attempts to save it.

The Vert Wood complex was once a Mecca for butterfly and moth enthusiasts, drawing the early collectors from far and wide. However, as is almost always the case, it was the loss of habitat from changes in farming and forestry practices, rather than the actions of those wielding nets, which converted the entomological riches of the past to just a few sad rags. Fortunately, the situation is far rosier today, although we can never bring back the Lewes Wave, or the large numbers of High Brown Fritillary which flew in the rides and clearings here until the mid 20th century. If one is fortunate enough to own a copy of Colin Pratt's *A Complete History of the Butterflies and Moths of Sussex* (Volume 2, 2011), it is well worth reading the fascinating history of the Lewes Wave – a cautionary tale for conservationists.

Vert Wood once comprised a complex mosaic of habitats, reflecting the underlying geology of clays and sands. However, almost all of the once-extensive lowland grassy heath was ploughed during and soon after the Second World War. The deciduous woodlands were clear-felled and rapidly replanted with regimented rows of coniferous trees. These dense dark plantations lacked age-structure and were typified by narrow shady rides; warmth-loving invertebrates were soon facing an existential threat. Fast-growing, mainly non-native conifers were again reinstated after the 1987 'blow-down'.

The removal of non-native conifer plantations, November 2017



The subtly pretty Lewes Wave was first recorded sometime before 1862, although its status as a native species was not confirmed until 1887 (Pratt, 2011). The moth was common through parts of the Vert Wood complex until about 1940; then the rot set in. With the writing now on the wall, the Royal Entomological Society set about managing a tiny fragment of the remaining lowland heath habitat in 1951; this two acres of land would later become part of the PCH reserve.

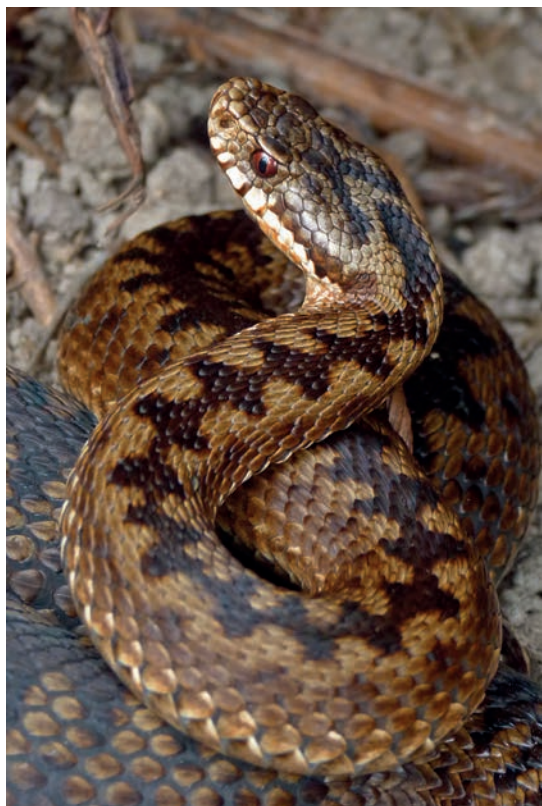
This small patch of Vert Wood was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1953 (subsequently re-designated in 1988), with its entomological and floral interest still being impressive by today's standards; the Duke of Burgundy flew here and the Lesser Butterfly-orchid grew in significant numbers – both have sadly disappeared. In



Heavy forestry work can look brutal – the birth of a new ride, November 2017

The official opening of the new Rowland Wood reserve, June 2011





Adder on Park Corner Heath

Conservation Officer, John Hicks, had already been the warden here since 1967 and went on to serve as Reserve Manager until 1994 – an incredible 28 years. He was followed by Roger Carter (1994-1996), Graham Parris (1997-2007), Michael Blencowe (2007-2010) and Bob Foreman (2011- present). Graham Parris was a man well ahead of his time, and when I became involved in work to conserve the Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Sussex, I was amazed at his depth of knowledge of the precise ecological needs of these superficially similar species, as I delved into his old paper notes and maps.

Back in those days, Dave Mitchell seemed to live at PCH and was always available when engineering expertise was required, whether that be to construct dams in the stream ghyll, or to build or maintain the hut which was to become a much-loved feature for many years. Sadly, after it was given a thorough spruce-up and paint job in 2018, both inside and out, it was soon uprooted by a gust of wind, being dumped unceremoniously on its head. The hut, which technically should never have been there according to the strict letter of SSSI law, has now gone, but a beautifully constructed bench has taken its place (with the necessary consent), in memory of Roger Martin who left a generous legacy to BC in his will.

While so many influential characters have come and gone during the long history of PCH, one volunteer has stayed the course for about 40 years now. Helen Proctor still attends almost every conservation work party on the reserves and has seen many changes. Her energy and enthusiasm are as legendary as her cakes and, like some before her, she has

1964, PCH was set up as a nature reserve by the Sussex Naturalists' Trust (which later became the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation, and then the Sussex Wildlife Trust of today), but this was too late for the Lewes Wave, which was last seen in 1961; it was gone, forever.

Sussex Wildlife Trust extended the PCH reserve in 1974, to include the pond. Much work was done to dig-out some of the silt, cut overhanging branches and remove Silver Birch from the island, by winching out the stumps and roots. Today, the natural processes affecting all woodland ponds have returned things to a similar state; at some point, further costly work will be required to turn back the clock once more.

The British Butterfly Conservation Society, later to become Butterfly Conservation (BC), acquired the reserve for £10,000 in 1989. Although all of the people involved in the loving care of PCH over the years are far too numerous to mention, a few stand out. BC's Branch



Pearl-bordered Fritillaries

become part of the very fabric of the place.

At its full extent, after several additions, PCH still only covers just fewer than 10 acres (four hectares), which in ecological terms is no more than a 'postage stamp'. The isolation of this tiny habitat patch was even more challenging for nature as, until very recently, there was precious little wildlife-friendly management going on elsewhere within the larger Vert

Wood complex, and particularly a dearth of the wide sunny rides and open spaces which are essential in supporting a diverse fauna and flora.

Unsurprisingly, despite decades of rotational coppicing, scrub bashing and Bracken control, the biodiversity count began to drop. It's now many years since anyone has seen the fabulous Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth or diminutive but pretty White-spotted Sable. Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) numbers fell and became very low beyond 2002, before the species apparently became extinct at PCH and within the wider Vert Wood complex around 2007. This species subsequently reappeared on the reserves, in albeit tiny numbers, between 2011 and 2014, with the most likely explanation being a well-meaning but misguided 'DIY job'.

Fears for the longer-term persistence of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) colony based at and immediately around PCH, grew; this was now the species 'Alamo' in southeast England. But a potential lifeline was to appear from nowhere. Of the many great things that Michael Blencowe has done in the name of Sussex wildlife, perhaps the most influential was his intervention at this time. He was the one to spot the sale particulars of the 78 acres (31.5 hectares) of adjacent woodland that would become our Rowland Wood reserve, and he pursued its purchase relentlessly with BC HQ. In 2010, the property was secured via a very generous legacy left by Miss Pamela Lewis, dedicated to the memory of her parents, Dudley and Lisette, together with a large number of donations by BC members and supporters.

Following a grand opening ceremony on 11 June 2011, work to restore the new conifer-dominated reserve started immediately, with a hastily constructed woodland management plan designed to return it to mainly native broadleaved woodland with a more open structure, and areas under active coppice. Contractors set about clear-felling several blocks of dark plantation that winter and the general consensus was that a lifeline had been thrown to the SPBF, in the nick of time.

Indeed, subsequent sightings suggested that at least one female SPBF had moved straight into Rowland Wood in 2012, but that summer proved to be the wettest-ever in England. There was no summer to speak of at all, and almost every species, with the notable exception of Chalk Hill Blue, suffered a 'stinker'. When my father and I spotted one of that adventurous female's freshly-emerged progeny in Rowland Wood on 14 June 2013, we should have been filled with joy. However, it was one of only a handful of SPBF to be seen on either reserve that year, with the very last of that native line being seen two weeks later. The long-fought battle had been lost; SPBF had gone from the reserves, gone from Sussex, and gone from southeast England. In some ways, the loss of the SPBF bore uncomfortable parallels with the loss of the Lewes Wave.

My diaries from that time record several things. Firstly, the utter devastation felt by so many people, including me – this was the darkest hour in the history of the reserves. Many of those who had attended conservation work parties on a regular basis were never seen again at these events; I found this incredibly sad in itself. Helen Proctor stayed.

It's also true that PCH had become very overgrown at this time and had advanced too far down the route of 'vegetation succession', with Alder Buckthorn, Silver Birch and scrub now being excessively widespread; much of the plateau area was marching down the route towards woodland. In retrospect, it is easy to see how this happened. Gone were the days when it was considered acceptable to regularly drive machinery over the surface of a SSSI, which had been the easy and effective method of suppressing Bracken vigour in the earlier

years. Gone were the days when anybody, trained and certificated or not, could pick up a chainsaw or brushcutter. With only half-a-dozen work parties over each autumn and winter, armed with only hand-tools, it was all-but-impossible to keep on top of the vegetation on the 10 acres of PCH – never mind the additional 78 acres of the newly acquired Rowland Wood. This uphill task was exacerbated by the influence of a warming climate, longer growing season and increased Nitrogen deposition.

Soon after taking on the role of BC's Project Officer for Fritillaries for the Future (FFTF) in 2015 (which ran until 2018), I recall leading a group of local primary school children around PCH. We couldn't see further than a few metres in any direction when standing in front of the old hut, such was the height and density of Bracken, scrub and small trees. As we traversed the plateau, the children disappeared into the jungle and I had to exercise extreme care and precision when counting them out at the end of the walk; fortunately, none were lost.

The FFTF project provided a much needed solution to the reserves management dilemma. Volunteers were trained in the use of the brushcutter, I learned how to use a chainsaw safely, and many were put through first aid courses. A vast array of equipment was purchased – sufficient to last us long into the future. In more recent years, we have increased the number of conservation work parties to 16 (including four in the late summer or early autumn) and today we have a highly energetic, skilled and effective work force at our disposal.

A much more aggressive approach to the management of the reserves was soon underway. Ironically, this brought its own set of issues, as we set about the long process of restoring more-open lowland heath habitat, by cutting down a large number of young trees – a moral as well as legal obligation, given the site's SSSI status and reasons for designation. Some very negative and impolite comments started to appear in the hut's visitor book, including some from reptile 'experts', apparently unaware that Adders don't live in shady woodland, which would have been the eventual outcome had the clearance not been conducted with some urgency. We actively manage some parts of both the PCH and Rowland Wood reserves specifically for our wonderful reptile populations, which are diverse and strong. Adders, including many black examples, Grass Snakes, Slow-worms and Common Lizards are all thriving. Rotational management is essential, making sure that the balance of scrub and open, warm, sunny spaces is just right.

Others objected to the removal of young oaks, not realising that these were Turkey Oaks, an unwelcome 18th century import and an invasive species which has a negative impact on our native oaks; even the timber they provide is of very poor quality. Over the winter of 2024/2025, five gigantic Turkey Oaks were removed from the eastern edge of the plateau (now named Parris Plateau), further increasing the area of warm sunny habitat. Today, PCH is once again as open as it was in the later part of the 20th century.

After much consideration, and having gained consent to err from the original woodland management plan, I was given the opportunity to really get stuck into the restructuring of Rowland Wood, as part of the FFTF project. It's rare for an ecologist/conservationist to get the chance to design and create woodland rides and glades on this scale, and it's something I'm still enjoying greatly, as there remains more to do.

However, this major second wave in the restructuring of Rowland Wood, which began in 2017, could not have been delivered so effectively without the critical input of BC's Senior Reserves Officer, Jayne Chapman, and her good friend and forester, Ian Hampshire. Jayne,



Male Minotaur Beetle

who was incredibly efficient at getting things done, even at a moment's notice, was sadly made redundant in 2020. In my opinion, this was a huge loss to BC, but BC's loss proved to be Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's gain. Ian's attention to detail was fantastic; nothing was too much trouble.

I can well imagine that this phase of restructuring had many people deeply concerned, as huge long-armed harvesters tore down conifers, caterpillar-tracked mulchers shredded tree-stumps, and the headlights of timber-laden forwarders shone through the thick palls of smoke blowing through the woods from the large fires that burned for days at a time. However, such apocalyptic scenes are entirely normal when major forestry operations are being conducted. Nature repairs rapidly, and these areas are usually well on the way to recovery by the end of the second summer, after which they just get better and better with the correct maintenance. The same will apply to the new rides created in the northeast corner of Rowland Wood over the winter of 2024/2025.

It wasn't only the BC volunteers who were helping reshape Rowland Wood through this period. On numerous occasions I was joined by the brilliant Brighton Conservation Volunteers. Led by Mike Fearn at that time, their most effective weapon of choice was the scythe, which is remarkably good at tackling tall mounds of Bramble. Sadly, their valuable input came to an end with the pandemic, after which they no longer retained their communal transport. They still do great work in and around the city.

With far more extensive areas of good quality butterfly habitat becoming available in Rowland Wood, and following meticulous planning, both SPBF (2017) and PBF (2019) reintroductions were undertaken; easily said, but even the most thoroughly researched and well-conducted reintroductions are difficult to do successfully. The captive-breeding team

of Theresa Turner, Gary Norman and Mike Mullis did a fantastic job, and both species had a better season in 2024, following a significant downturn as a result of the exceptionally cold dull spring of 2021.

If we are to keep the SPBF colony going, which is now the only population remaining to the east of Devon, it will be important to spread the risk, as all its eggs are currently in one basket. Over the winter of 2024/2025, our neighbours in Laughton Greenwood (east of Park Lane) undertook some major thinning works, but more importantly, widened some of their rides to create the sufficiently sunny and well-connected habitat patches necessary to really open the doors for wildlife. There is now much greater potential for SPBF and other warmth-loving invertebrates in the wider Vert Wood complex.

Following any reintroduction, and always important as a wider measure of the efficacy of any management plan, the monitoring of butterflies (and other fauna and flora) is essential. A new United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Survey transect was designed in 2018 and the task of covering as many weeks of the flight season as possible is now shared between our enthusiastic team of walkers. The benefits of getting involved in various tasks on the reserves are many, and sometimes unexpected, as when Andrea Gibbs spotted a Large Tortoiseshell in 2019; others have been seen since.

Now that the rare fritillaries are back, and much of the dust of restructuring has settled, what of our other butterflies? In recent years, we have seen a welcome increase in the numbers of spring species such as the Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper, including rare aberrant forms of the latter (*taras* and *intermedia*). In some years, the Wall will venture down from the chalk hills, and will hopefully become more permanently established in time. The Dark Green Fritillary is now seen in small numbers; not to be confused with the more numerous and larger Silver-washed Fritillary, which swoops gracefully along the rides in high summer, along with the stunning White Admiral.

Moths have been rather under-recorded in recent years, but we have 220 species listed since 2010, with the more interesting (less common) species including Festoon, Wood-sage Plume, Rosy Marbled, Great Oak Beauty, Enchanter's Mompha and the tiny wasp-mimicking Yellow-legged Clearwing; I'm fairly sure that I saw the latter in Rowland Wood last year, without using a pheromone lure, but didn't manage an image to clinch the identification. One of my favourite sights here in spring is another day-flying moth, the Cream-spot Tiger; they remind me of flamenco dancers in their garish colours of black, yellow and red as they cavort around, before trying to hide under a leaf or Bracken frond.

In line with a contractual obligation to replant the rush meadow at the far end of the Rowland Wood entrance ride – although I'd rather have seen this retained as semi-open space given over to slow natural regeneration (and I dislike polypropylene tree-guards) – I did at least get to choose the tree species. The Goat Willow and Alder planted here will, in time, support a very wide variety of moth species and, hopefully, will one day allow us to add Purple Emperor to the reserve's impressive butterfly list.

Dragonflies and damselflies are very well catered for on our reserves, but the larger dragons eat too many of our rare fritillaries for my liking. An impressive 22 species have been recorded, with the most exciting being Downy Emerald, Scarce Chaser, Southern Migrant Hawker, Small Red-eyed Damselfly and Willow Emerald Damselfly. Some of these are relatively new additions to the British fauna, being beneficiaries of a warming climate.

Much goes on below the surface of the reserves' ponds, which are teeming with

amphibians. Writhing orgies of mating Common Toads and Common Frogs keep us entertained during breaks in the last conservation work parties of the winter, while Great Crested, Palmate and Smooth Newts join the party more discreetly. A rare hybrid between the latter two species has been recorded here.

At this time of year, the laughing call of the Dabchick signals the start of another breeding cycle on the Rowland Wood pond, and many other interesting birds can be seen on the reserves as the seasons change. Throughout the spring, the melodious song of the Garden Warbler is belted out from every stand of young Silver Birch. Late last summer, while sitting on Roger's new bench, I watched a Hobby hunting Migrant Hawker dragonflies over Parris Plateau, and I've twice seen Goshawk here. The Woodcock is regularly flushed from dense undergrowth in the winter months, and a Jack Snipe has spent the last three winters hiding in the same 10-metre-square, until almost trodden on. A couple of winters back, as a few of us huddled around the bonfire at the end of another day working in the woods, we were joined by a small flock of Waxwings which settled in the naked tree above us.

However, in birding terms, nothing could beat the excitement of summer 2024; I'd been waiting for this for several years. Nigel Symington, who diligently records the changes in habitat across the reserves with his camera, spotted a Nightjar snoozing on a Hazel branch near to the edge of a recently clear-felled compartment in Rowland Wood. Our crack team of birders (work party stalwarts Jonathan Crawford and Richard Farran) set out on dusk missions to investigate further, finding two pairs of Nightjar. With just one exception, historical Nightjar records for the wider Vert Wood are restricted to the periods 1968-1975 and 1997-2003, but these all plot-out to more southerly parts of the complex, where periodic clearances and very young conifer plantations would have provided suitable breeding habitat. Our Nightjar sightings provided the first evidence of breeding in Rowland Wood for well over half a century.

There is plenty more to see for the eagle-eyed naturalist. In 2024, invertebrate expert Grant Hazelhurst conducted several surveys on PCH, finding 32 species of bee, 25 species of hoverfly and 14 species of wasp, including the tiny Jewel Wasp *Holopyga fastuosa* – new to Sussex. The scarce Woodland Grasshopper can be found on both reserves, and you may see the portly Minotaur Beetle rolling dung back to its subterranean nursery; the males remind me of Triceratops, with their three horns pointing forward from the leading edge of the



Giant Birch Sawfly

thorax. The stunningly beautiful but deadly Wasp Spider strings out her web amongst the rushes, hoping to snare grasshoppers, and we spotted the spectacular Giant Birch Sawfly on the spring walk for reserves volunteers in 2023.

Until about five years ago, I seldom visited our reserves outside of the rare fritillaries' flight period and conservation work party season, as it's quite a journey from my home, but I now visit at all times of year, simply because the place has become so exceptionally beautiful. I love to see the Sallow in flower, the blossom of Wild Cherry and Crab Apple, and the succession of some of my favourite woodland flowers such as Primrose, Wood Anemone, Common Dog-violet, Cuckooflower, Bugle, Bluebell, Ragged-robin, Goldenrod and Devil's-bit Scabious. Although less showy, we have at least 10 species of sedge growing in the damper parts of Rowland Wood. As autumnal colours develop, I love the earthy smell that the place takes on, as Brittleghills, Milkcaps, Fly Agaric toadstools, Penny Buns and Hedgehog Fungus push up through the leaf mould.

The story of the reserves, and the wider Vert Wood complex, has been a rollercoaster of ups and downs, victories and defeats, darkness and light; paradise lost, but at least partially regained, and we haven't finished yet.

Postscript: Butterflies fared particularly well on the reserves during spring 2025, with good numbers of Grizzled Skipper (including aberrant forms), Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak. Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries both enjoyed prolonged flight seasons of about 40 days, with maximum day-counts of 40 and 32 individuals respectively. Fittingly, both of these peak counts were made on guided walks run specifically for reserves work party volunteers.

If you wish to find out more about these reserves, including their precise location, access details, and opportunities to become involved in their care, please look at the Branch website.

Conservation work party at Rowland Wood, February 2025

All photos: Neil Hulme



Gardening for Butterflies *part #2*

Martin Kalaher

This is the second in a series of articles about “gardening for butterflies” where the emphasis is on specific native plants. I have been asked to choose three wildflower species that provide nectar for adult butterflies and a second group of three that provide caterpillars with their breakfast, lunch and tea, with the added twist that I must choose a bush, a wildflower and a grass species.

Nectar-providing plants

My garden meadows are full of wildflowers, but this year I have chosen Ox-eye Daisy, Greater Knapweed and Clovers (both Red and White).



Female Small Blue feeding on Ox-eye Daisy



Small Heath feeding on Ox-eye Daisy

Ox-eye Daisy

This is our largest native daisy. It is common and widespread, and can be found on roadside verges, field margins and wildflower meadows. A large white and yellow flowerhead, it grows to a height of around 60-90 centimetres. It is said to prefer damp conditions, but in my garden it has to cope with soil that is sandy and dry, and since this plant grows well, it is clearly adaptable. It gives of its best if planted in full sun or partial shade. This species produces large amounts of seed and can colonise any bare soil very quickly. It is also rhizomatous and spreads underground, forming large clumps.

Ox-eye Daisies provide very good value for a wide range of invertebrates, including flower beetles, hoverflies, solitary bees and, of course, butterflies. In my garden I have photographed 12 butterfly species feeding on their flowerheads, as follows: Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Small White, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Marbled White, Meadow Brown and Small Heath.

This daisy is bold and brassy and is a very welcome sight, from mid-May onwards. It is very easy to grow from seed and when establishing a new wildflower meadow it provides



Marbled White feeding on Greater Knapweed

of Sussex" (by Abraham & others) it is said to be "almost confined to downland where it is found on rough chalk grassland and open chalky scrub." However, my garden is situated on Wealden Greensand, and all the knapweed species grow well on the sandy soil.

Greater Knapweed is a big favourite of mine for it has a beautiful flowerhead, and the butterflies in my garden just love it. It is one of my "big five" native wildflowers that I invite conventional gardeners to try. These five species are Field Scabious, Devil's-bit Scabious, Greater Knapweed, Betony and Bird's-foot-trefoil, and if we find room for them they are guaranteed to attract multitudes of insects to our gardens. I never have a problem with aphids or any other "nuisance insect"; I wonder why?

Greater Knapweed flowerheads provide an abundance of nectar, and to prove the point, I have photographed 11 butterfly species feeding on their flowerheads. The list as follows: Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Large Skipper, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Small Copper, Painted Lady, Dark Green Fritillary, Marbled White and Meadow Brown.

It's quite a long list of butterfly species but for me the standout performer is Marbled White for it seems to find the nectar of Greater Knapweed quite irresistible, and, in my Storrington garden, chooses this native plant above all others.

Clovers (Red and White)

Red Clover and White Clover are common native plants that can be found in grassy areas where the sward is short or medium in height. They are grown commercially as fodder crops for livestock and also used in crop rotation, as they can fix nitrogen, thereby naturally enriching the soil. In my meadows the clovers are generally found on

an instant splash of colour. However, I will give a gentle word of warning, for whilst it is a nice addition to any wildlife garden it can sometimes be a little too successful and dominant, and then it needs reining in a little. When creating a wildflower meadow, it is always a good idea to try for as much diversity as possible and not allow just one or two species to dominate.

Greater Knapweed

Many different knapweed species can be found in Sussex, but Greater Knapweed has the largest flowerhead and is the most flamboyant of the lot. It is strongly associated with chalk and in "The Flora

Meadow Brown feeding on Greater Knapweed





Male Common Blue feeding on Red Clover



Male Small Skipper feeding on White Clover

the margins, where the vegetation is fairly short.

The nectar in the flowerheads appears to be more attractive to bees than butterflies but even so I have managed to photograph five butterfly species feeding on the flowers. The list as follows: Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Small Copper, Common Blue and Brown Argus.

The clovers are not in my top ten “must-have plants”, but I would not like to be without them. As I often repeat, “the greater diversity of native plants, the greater diversity of insects.”

Larval Foodplants

Moving on to larval foodplants, I have been asked to choose a bush, a wildflower and a grass species, and my choices are Blackthorn, Cut-leaved Cranesbill and Cock's-foot.

An “upside-down” female Brown Hairstreak marching down a side branch of Blackthorn



Before reaching the right spot to lay an egg



Blackthorn

This is a deciduous shrub which is ubiquitous in Sussex. It is mostly found in hedgerows but also in scrub and open woodland. The sloes make a lovely sloe gin (sorry, I digress) but from the perspective of a butterfly enthusiast we must think about Brown Hairstreak, and if you visit Ditchling Common, the rare Black Hairstreak.

In Sussex, both Hawthorn and Blackthorn have been used extensively in hedgerows for stock-proofing, and as both shrubs possess vicious thorns it is easy to understand why they have been so popular with farmers who have livestock to contain. If you want to attract Brown Hairstreaks into your garden (and who wouldn't) do consider planting some Blackthorn but please be aware it can be a nuisance with its penchant for spreading underground on suckers and its ability to self-seed, everywhere! I confess there are times when I regret planting Blackthorn in my hedges, but I am conflicted as there is something a bit special about having Brown Hairstreaks as regular visitors.

Blackthorn blossom also provides much-needed nectar in early spring and draws in a nice variety of solitary bees and hoverflies.

Male Brown Argus, showing off the beauty of the underside, and also a glimpse of the upperside

Cut-leaved Crane's-bill

For most gardeners a Cut-leaved Crane's-bill is firmly in the category of a "boring weed" that should be removed as soon as possible. It has lots of leaf, very tiny flowers, and is not

Cut-leaved Cranesbill (to avoid confusion, the flower on the bottom right of the image is Germander Speedwell)



very interesting. However, as it provides food for the larvae of Brown Argus, I view it from a different perspective, and I leave it alone. Brown Argus are very small, but a fresh specimen is very beautiful, and it can be very photogenic.

As the principal larval foodplant is Common Rock-rose this butterfly species is strongly associated with the South Downs, and most of the large colonies are found there. However, away from “the chalk” it will lay its eggs on any of the wild geranium species, such as Dove's-foot Crane's-bill and Cut-leaved Crane's-bill, and also the similar-looking Common Stork's-bill. Many of our wild geraniums are annuals and therefore require disturbed, bare soil to germinate. In an established wildflower meadow, where perennials dominate and competition for space is fierce, there may be little room for any annuals, including the geranium family. Some of the geraniums, such as Meadow Crane's-bill, are perennial species and there are a few clumps in the garden meadows. This geranium species has a large and very pretty flowerhead, and if you have room, it's worth planting some.

I began creating wildflower meadows from 2005, onwards, and recorded my first Brown Argus in 2006, and every year since. In some years I can record double figures for the second brood, and very occasionally I have seen very fresh third-brood individuals. They must breed in the garden but somewhat curiously I have only seen egg-laying once, and that was on Cut-leaved Crane's-bill, and this is why I have chosen this native plant species for this article.

Cock's-foot

This is a very common thick-stemmed grass species, that can be found anywhere in Sussex. When it comes to laying eggs, it is a strong favourite of Essex Skipper, Large Skipper, Ringlet and Speckled Wood. What's not to like? Well, it isn't the prettiest grass species, and it does

form large clumps which are fine in the countryside but not especially attractive in an average garden. However, as I want to have a large variety of breeding butterfly species, in my garden, I must accept a wide variety of our native grass species, and this includes some of the coarse grasses. In my wildlife garden there has been a medium-size Essex skipper colony for around 20 years, a small colony of Ringlets for 7-8 years and both Large Skipper and Speckled Wood breed sporadically. As I want all four species to breed regularly I am allowing more of the coarse grasses to flourish, but only on the margins of the meadows, rather than centre-stage.

The seed heads of Cock's-foot





A mating pair of Essex Skippers

Summary

When we create a wildlife garden, we need to consider how we might provide nectar for as many months of the year, as possible, and especially for the lean months of late winter and early spring. In my case (and without any planning) I have Grey Willow, Common Laurel, Blackthorn, Portuguese Laurel, Hawthorn, *Choisya* and *Potentilla*, all of which are good providers of nectar. By mid-May the wildflowers begin to play their part.

In late spring, Ox-eye Daisy gives us a nice splash of colour and provides nectar for many insects, especially flower beetles, hoverflies and solitary bees. A list of 12 butterfly species feeding on my garden daisies is a respectable number and this species is in my top ten providers of nectar. Sometime in June, Greater Knapweed comes into flower, showing off its beauty and providing sustenance for 11 butterfly species. I would encourage every gardener to try and find room for this lovely native plant. Then there are the clovers, which are rather small and often over-looked. White Clover can be annoying for anyone who wants a uniform, “perfect lawn”, but Red Clover is much more self-contained and is an attractive addition to the margins of a meadow or herbaceous bed.

As well as providing nectar in our gardens, we have to think about those hungry caterpillars and what it is they like to eat. This year’s diverse offerings have been Blackthorn for the beautiful Brown Hairstreak, Cut-leaved Crane’s-bill for the small, but exquisite, Brown Argus, and Cock’s-foot for many of our skippers and brown butterflies.

Sussex Snapshot and More

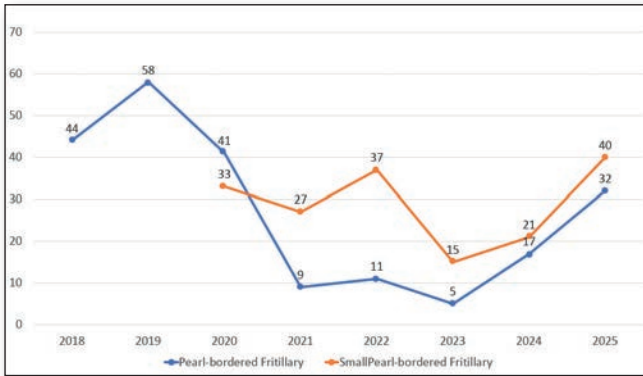
Steven Lofting

Butterfly Conservation's Conservation Manager, South-east England

This year our work has mostly focused on supporting the work undertaken by Neil and the volunteers at Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood to encourage the growth of both the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary populations. Both these species have had an exceptional year on the reserves with an increase for the second year running which is testament to the efforts which Sussex Branch volunteers have put into the site to create suitable breeding habitat for these species.

Additionally, we have undertaken a wide range of contractor led operations including coppicing of large stands of birch and mulching to create new rides and open up more areas of successional habitat.

Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood peak counts



Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Photo: Steven Lofting





Pearl-bordered Fritillary egg

Photo: Steven Lofting

The team and I have also been on hand to provide advice to neighbouring landowners/managers including work with Forestry England at Abbot's Wood. They have as of this year successfully maintained Pearl-bordered Fritillary at the site for 21 years, which is success to be celebrated given the complexities involved in managing for this species.

Where opportunity has allowed, we have also been following up on previous records of White-spotted Sable Moth, *Anania funebris*, which is an attractive large black micro-moth with white spots specialising in open woodland habitats and some grassland where native Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*) is abundant. Caterpillar searches will hopefully confirm if it is still present in some of its former Sussex strongholds. Work here is ongoing.

While 2024 was a difficult year for many of our butterfly species, 2025 seemed to be much better. Was it really so? In the next article, written originally for the Kent Branch, I share some of my thoughts.

Butterflies and Moths 2025, A personal view of optimism and caution

"Butterflies and moths are increasingly being recognised as valuable environmental indicators, both for their rapid and sensitive responses to subtle habitat or climatic changes and as representatives for the diversity and responses of other wildlife"

[Butterflies as indicators (2015) UKBMS: <https://ukbms.org/butterfly-indicators>]

This vulnerability to changes which lepidoptera experience resulted in last year, 2024, being a challenging year for Butterflies and Moths. The wet conditions led to an all-time low in butterfly records being submitted. During the 2024 Big Butterfly Count participants only spotted just seven butterflies on average per 15-minute Count, a reduction of almost 50% on 2023's average of 12, and the lowest in the 14-year history of the Big Butterfly Count. The majority of species (81%) showed declines in number during 2024 compared with 2023. [Big Butterfly Count 2024 results (2024) Butterfly Conservation: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/uk-butterfly-emergency-declared>]

The 2022 Red List categorises half of Britain's remaining species as threatened (Endangered or Vulnerable) or Near Threatened [Fox, R., Dennis, E.B., Brown, A.F. and Curson, J., (2022). A revised Red List of British butterflies. Insect Conservation and Diversity, 15(5), pp.485-495.] and this statistic is likely to worsen with increased extreme weather and climate change. Most lepidoptera species in the UK have lifecycles vulnerable to extreme shifts in

weather patterns and climate in the larval stage and poor weather during the adult life stage can result in poor breeding success.

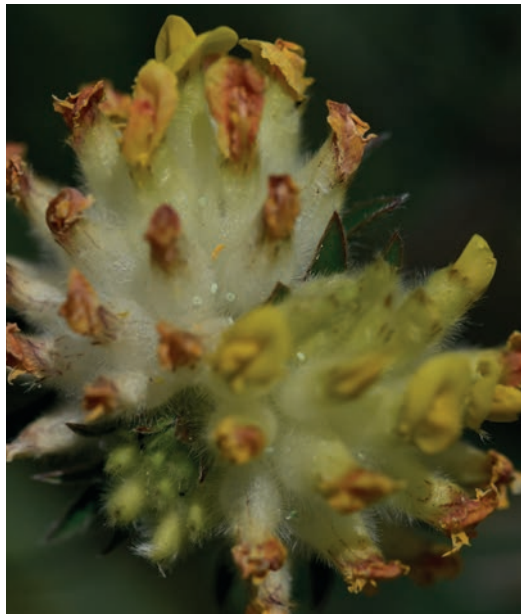
All butterflies and moths need the same five things to complete their lifecycles Food plants for their caterpillars, Nectar sources for the adults, Warmth, Shelter and Safe spaces for over-wintering. Whilst the data for 2025 is not yet available the weather has been a complete contrast with 2024 - long hot spells enabling butterflies to recover and be seen in good numbers and drive dispersal.

However prolonged hot periods are not without their complications, especially when this leads to drought as this can cause desiccation of larvae, reducing the number which make it to adults. Furthermore, the same warm conditions enjoyed by adult butterflies in some cases are also enjoyed by their parasites driving an increase in early life stage mortality. Conversely however it can also reduce some parasites. In 2023 the holly blue did exceptionally well and this is thought to be attributed to a reduction in its parasites during the drought year of 2022.

It is not just the butterflies themselves which are at risk. Butterflies all rely on food plants for their caterpillars to feed on and in some cases individual species are highly specialised to only utilise a few or just one sole foodplant. These, like your house plants without water, can dry up, wilt and die reducing the amount available and hampering the breeding success of Lepidoptera. Interestingly 2025 being dubbed "an early year" for butterfly emergence saw Small Blues arrive ahead of their usual flight window. However Kidney Vetch their sole foodplant was not early and I observed as some females struggled to lay eggs on flower rosettes which had not yet opened. Additionally, the heat had led to there being less Kidney Vetch available and those plants which were open had far higher number of eggs per plant than expected on each rosette I inspected.

On the flip side, for some of our later flying species such as Brown Hairstreak the prolonged heat has its benefits. The caterpillars live amongst the shelter of blackthorn able to easily thermoregulate, feeding by night and with good weather can have a flight period lasting from July to October increasing their chances of dispersal and forming new colonies

In conclusion although 2025 has been a good year to see butterflies and enjoy butterflies bounce back in good adult numbers, it has not been without its challenges. The early life stages will bear the brunt of the heat, especially species with more complex caterpillar stages. Those overwintering as caterpillars are likely to be less robust to extreme shifts weather and climate, whilst others will relish the warm conditions and do well, increasing in both abundance and distribution. The true impact will not be seen until adult butterflies begin to fly in 2026 when we will see how each species has responded which makes butterfly population monitoring and record submission more important than ever.



Small Blue eggs on Kidney Vetch

Photo: Steven Lofting

Sussex butterflies and climate change

Martin Kalaher

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our time, and it is likely to remain so for many decades to come. With a warming climate the weather has become more unpredictable, and severe weather events more frequent. Heatwaves, droughts, record-breaking winds and deluges of rain, are all commonplace, and these weather events are having a significant impact on our countryside and human populations. But what about our Sussex butterflies; how are they coping with it all; how are they faring? Are they able to adapt to a warming climate, and will they survive this on-going crisis?

Most of us are keen to see the back of the winter months and we look forward to the first flowering Primroses, the first butterfly, the first Swallows in spring. I keep repeating the word “first”. Well, it’s all about phenology, a word that only came into my consciousness a few years ago. Phenology: “the study of recurring natural seasonal events”; and since this is an article about butterflies, it concerns the timing of events of our Sussex butterflies. When do they first-emerge and when do they disappear at the end of their season?

On the Sussex BC website I refer to these phenological events as “first sighting dates” and “last sighting dates”. For the website years, between 2006-2024, these dates are readily available, and they provide us with an opportunity to look for any evidence of changing patterns or trends. Specifically, is there a trend towards earlier emergence, and at the end of the season are our Sussex butterflies hanging on longer. Are they surviving until late autumn, or even early winter?

Butterflies have been studied in Sussex for 150 years or more and my principal source for the historical data is “A Revised History of the Butterflies and Moths of Sussex”, by county recorder, Colin Pratt. Otherwise, my main references are “The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland” by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington (revised edition, 2010) and “The Butterflies of Sussex” by Michael Blencowe and Neil Hulme (published in 2017).

In Sussex, we have 46 resident butterfly species and writing about all of them would require a book, but to illustrate the various points I wish to make, I have chosen five species: Holly Blue, Peacock, Wall Brown, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell.

Holly Blue

In the latter part of the 20th century Holly Blues typically emerged in mid-April. Between 2006-2024, the “average first sighting date” was 3rd April, but if we look at the dates for just the past seven years, the average first sighting was 23rd March. In just 30 years, or so, the emergence date for this species has moved forward by 2-3 weeks.

Emerging butterflies have just two things in mind; find enough nectar to stay alive and find a mate and breed. For Holly Blues this doesn’t take long, and their eggs are soon laid on a variety of shrubs, including Holly, Dogwood, Spindle and Portuguese Laurel. An early emergence means an early start to the first breeding cycle, and if the weather is set fair, an early completion of this first cycle. In turn, the second breeding cycle begins early and finishes early. This means there is plenty of time for a partial third brood, with the adults emerging from late September, onwards.

A partial third brood for this species is not a new event, but historically it was considered

unusual. In the early part of the 20th century, it was very uncommon and between 1900 and 1984 it was only recorded in four years. In the latter part of the century, it was reported a little more often with records for 1985, 1989, 1990, 1995 and 1997. Moving into the 21st century, between the years 2000-2015, there was a partial third brood for ten of those years. However, since 2016, a partial third brood has been recorded in every single year. What was an unusual occurrence some 30-35 years ago, has become an annual event and is now considered to be normal for this species. That is a big shift in behaviour in a relatively short period of time.

Now we have a regular third brood, it should come as no surprise that the "last sighting dates" are considerably later. Just 30 years ago, the Holly Blue season was largely over by the end of August (with the odd straggler into early September). Moving forward to the website years 2006-2015, the average last sighting date was 21st September. However, for the years 2016-2024, it was much later still, with an average last sighting date of November 15th. In just three decades the Holly Blue season has expanded to include the whole of September and October and the first half of November. We have even had a December record, when Lindsay Morris recorded two females at Lancing on 1st December 2021.

As well as very late records, there have been some very early records in the 21st century; on 22nd January 2002 at Isfield, on 8th February 2008 at Worthing, and 14th February 2019 at Small Dole. This is a species that has joined a very selective list of British butterfly species that has been recorded in every calendar month.



Top: **Holly Blue egg-laying on Dogwood**

Above: **Holly Blue feeding on Blackberry blossom**

Photos: Martin Kalaher



Second brood Peacock caterpillars

Photo: Martin Kalaher



Second brood Peacock

Photo: Martin Kalaher

Peacock

In recent years our Sussex winters have been wet and mild, and prolonged cold spells have become very uncommon. Peacocks hibernate over the winter months and in the absence of very cold weather, some are emerging several weeks earlier compared to yesteryear. In the 20th century the first Peacocks emerged on warm February days, but in this century January records are not uncommon, and for the years 2006-2024 the average first sighting date was 14th January.

In the latter part of the 20th century the summer brood emerged in late July/early August, but in the past ten years or so, there has been a very significant shift forwards, and we now expect to see some adults emerging in the first week of July. This summer brood is beginning 2-3 weeks earlier, compared to 30-35 years ago.

Some of the early-emerging summer brood become part of a second breeding cycle, and the adults from this cycle emerge in the first half of October. A proportion of these autumn adults hibernate immediately, but others linger on, and as a consequence there has

Wall Brown mating pair

Photo: Bob Eade



Third brood male Wall Brown

Photo: John Williams



been a significant increase in records in November and December. The average last sighting for 2006-2024 was 10th December (range 13th November - 31st December).

Some 25-30 years ago, this species was single-brooded, with a very occasional partial second brood. Now it is firmly established as a double-brooded species, although the second brood does remain small. With a regular second brood, we now expect to have November and December records, which means we regularly see this species in every calendar month of the year.

Wall Brown

This species has suffered a serious national decline over the past few decades, but in Sussex it has remained a fairly common butterfly. Between the county surveys of 1990-1994 and 2010-2014 there was a very obvious contraction in its distribution, and it was restricted to its South Downs stronghold, between Eastbourne and Storrington. However, in the past 3-4 years there has been an increase in records away from the South Downs, and that provides us with grounds for cautious optimism.

In the latter part of the 20th century Wall Brown emerged in early May. Looking at the data between 2006-2024, it is apparent that the spring emergence dates have changed significantly in recent years. Between 2006-2013 the average "first sighting date" was 5th May but between 2014-2024, the average date moved forwards to 20th April. With a spring emergence date two weeks earlier (compared to 20-30 years ago), both the first and the second breeding cycles are also completed two weeks earlier, allowing plenty of time for a third brood.

There is nothing new about a Wall Brown third brood. Even in the early years of the 20th century, a particularly warm summer might have resulted in a partial third brood. What has changed very significantly is the regularity of the third brood and the numbers involved. Bob Eade has been monitoring this species at High and Over, Seaford, since 2008, and this is what he has to say about the pivotal years of 2016/2017: "Since I started monitoring the species, at least one 3rd brood was seen every year, but in 2016 there were a few records of 5 or more flying together. In 2017 all 3 broods did very well. I had well over 110 on my 4 mile circuit with the 2nd brood, and a minimum of 20 of the 3rd brood on 17th September."

Bob's studies have shown that Wall Brown continues its breeding cycle over the winter months, and there is no diapause in larval development. This is what he has to say: "I have regularly found larvae from December, but the last 4/5 years I have found some in November, and then followed some through to the following March, when they go nocturnal, as the warmer nights allow them to feed overnight, away from ground feeding birds such as Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Stonechat in particular."

2016/2017 were the "tipping point" years for Wall Brown and High and Over, and every year since a large third brood has been recorded. It is not just High and Over where there have been very significant records of a large third brood, with counts of 50-100 also found at several other downland locations, including Cissbury Ring, Steep Down and Lancing Ring.

In just 30 years, a warming climate has moved forward the spring emergence of Wall Brown, by around two weeks. The partial third brood of yesteryear, changed in magnitude in 2016/2017, when large third broods were first-recorded, and this has repeated itself, every year, since. The evidence to date suggests that having a large third brood, on East



Top: **Red Admiral mating pair**

Photo: Bob Eade

Above: **Red Admiral in late autumn** (*aberrant, no black dots on rear scarlet band*)

Photo: Trevor Rapley

records suggests that few adults survive our winters. With any generalisation there are likely be some notable exceptions, such as Vince Massimo's record of 18 Red Admirals seen feeding on Winter Heather and Daphne, in Tilgate Park, Crawley, on 3rd March 2025.

Red Admiral is mostly a migrant species, with fresh immigration every year in April/May and more particularly in August/September. However, some of the adults we see in April and May, have in fact emerged from a winter breeding cycle. This "new development" was discovered by Dave Harris who followed the fortunes of some eggs laid on 2nd December 2014, with a few adults emerging in mid-May the following year. In the autumn of 2015, another batch of eggs was laid on 2nd November, and six months later, three adults emerged, on 1st May 2016.

Our warming climate is changing the behaviour of some of our insects. Who would have thought it possible, say 30 years ago, that a Red Admiral could complete a breeding cycle over the course of a winter. Where pioneers begin, others are bound to follow.

Sussex downland, is highly advantageous for this species. Climate change would appear to be very beneficial for Wall Browns.

Red Admiral

Red Admiral is now one of our regular over-wintering butterfly species, but it wasn't always so. During the 20th century it was regarded as an "episodic resident in Sussex", only surviving our winters "on average twice a decade", before becoming "a permanent resident here since 1996".

The term "over-wintering" for Red Admiral is preferred to "hibernating" as the depth of sleep is lighter compared to other hibernating butterflies and this is borne out by its early emergence, with an average first sighting date of 3rd January.

If we examine the posts on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation (BC) website there are usually very few records between January and March, and this paucity of



Small Tortoiseshell, second brood

Photo: Martin Kalaher

Small Tortoiseshell

Within our county borders, the Small Tortoiseshell is in serious decline. Trying to fathom out the reasons is complex, and far from clear-cut. Many insect species are attacked by other insects, and in the case of Small Tortoiseshell there is a significant list of predators. This butterfly species has always been predated by parasitoid wasps and flies, which either inject the caterpillar or lay their eggs on the surface of their bodies. Early in the 21st century another predator arrived on these shores; a tachinid fly called *Sturmia bella*. This fly lays its eggs on the nettle leaves close to where the Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars are feeding. The eggs are inadvertently consumed by the caterpillars and whilst the larvae are not killed, it is the pupae that are doomed.

Over the past 10-15 years, or so, our winters have been mostly wet and mild, which encourages an early emergence of hibernating adults, and in the years 2006-2024 the average "first sighting date" was 7th February (range 1st January - 5th March).

In the 1990s, the summer brood flew from late June to early August but by the early 2010s, summer adults were emerging from the third week in May. In yesteryear, most of the summer adults went into hibernation, more-or-less straightaway, and only a minority engaged in a second breeding cycle. In recent years this behaviour has changed, and it would appear that the majority of the summer adults are now involved in a second breeding cycle. The good fortunes of Small Tortoiseshells are heavily dependent on the success of this second brood, and whatever the reasons may be, it is not working out well for this species. Whether it is the lack of suitable nettles (they prefer short plants) or other factors, that have yet to be determined, Small Tortoiseshells are doing badly in southern England. In the cooler north of England they appear to be thriving, or at least holding their own, and therefore the finger of suspicion is directed



Small Tortoiseshell second brood caterpillars

Photo: Martin Kalaher

at climate change, but without convincing evidence (or so it seems to me).

Discussion

Global warming and climate change is an established fact, and unfortunately it's here to stay. The human race caused this catastrophe, and the human race can do something about it, if the resolve is there (which sadly, it often isn't).

The rest of the natural world has to come to terms with this rise in temperature. How are our native insects coping with a warming climate? Are our butterflies changing their behaviour? Are

they adapting to this brave new world?

Sussex butterflies have been studied for 150 years or more. We can get a glimpse of the past by reading Colin Pratt's fascinating accounts in "A Revised History of the Butterflies and Moths of Sussex". In more recent times the county surveys of 1990-1994 and 2010-2014 provide us with some very accurate data, especially in regard to the distribution of butterfly species. The Sussex BC website, 2006 until the present day, holds a wealth of information, and for the purpose of this article the most important (for me) are the records of "first sightings" and "last sightings", for each species.

When butterflies emerge is often dictated by the weather, and that is particularly so for most of the spring species. For example, if we look at the dates for Grizzled Skipper, the "average first sighting date" for the website years 2006-2025 was 10th April, but for the cold spring of 2023 the date was 29th April, and for the very warm spring of 2025, the date was 4th April. That's 25 days difference.

The above paragraph begins to explain how the weather affects the breeding cycle of butterflies, but the terms "seasonal weather" and "climate change" are quite different, and it's taken me quite a while to grasp what climate change really means. In 2024, one of the BBC weather presenters informed the viewers that this was the warmest-ever February, on record. I was shocked, for as far I was concerned February 2024 was cold, wet and miserable. Then "the penny dropped" for it was the night-time temperatures that were 1.5 degrees higher than average and that was enough to make this statement true. As caterpillars mostly feed during the night-time hours (as that is safer than daytime feeding), a small increase in the night temperatures allows them to grow and continue their breeding cycle.

Many butterfly species in Sussex are completing their first breeding cycle, much earlier compared to yesteryear. Species that were once single-brooded (with an occasional partial second brood), now have enough time in the summer months weather to complete a regular

second brood. Peacocks are a good example of this change of behaviour.

For those species that were once double-brooded with an occasional partial third brood, the early completion of the second brood means there is enough time in late summer/early autumn to complete a third breeding cycle. Holly Blue has just begun that particular journey, whilst Wall Brown is now fully-established as a triple-brooded species.

With climate change there will be winners and losers. One apparent winner is Wall Brown, which has had a succession of good breeding seasons in recent years. Thanks to Bob Eade's studies we know that Wall Brown larvae can feed over the winter months and quietly get on with a winter breeding cycle. We also know that since 2016/2017 the third brood has become very substantial. Climate change has been the driver behind this regular third brood, and it is an evolution that is working well for Wall Brown.

Climate change has given us warm, wet winters and thanks to the studies of Dave Harris and Vince Massimo we know that Red Admiral can complete a breeding cycle throughout the winter months. This evolutionary journey is in its infancy but in another 10-20 years with a warming climate it may be commonplace to see Red Admirals emerging in April/May. We shall see.

The decline of the Small Tortoiseshell, in Sussex, is something of a mystery. It has certainly become "a loser" in recent years but the underlying reasons are not entirely clear. The earlier emergence of the summer brood doesn't appear to be working out very well for this species. Late May/early June is very early for a butterfly to go into hibernation, for there is a very real risk that its energy stores may not last until the following spring. It's only a few extra weeks of hibernation (compared to yesteryear) but that could be enough to deplete these reserves. A week of warm, sunny days in mid-winter may be rather pleasant for us human beings but if it is warm enough for these insects to be wakeful for a few days, that would also not be helpful for their survival. Is climate change the main driver for the decline of this species? Well, probably, but the evidence does not appear to be conclusive, just yet.

Conclusion

Climate change is having a disastrous effect on this place we call Earth. Extreme weather events are likely to be the biggest problem faced by our Sussex butterflies. The three-months heatwave and drought in 2022 gave us an indication of the sort of weather we might experience over the next few decades.

Are our insects adapting? Well, of course they are, and generally they seem to be adapting quite well. The autumn months, in Sussex, are generally warm and dry and we are seeing many butterfly species, much later in the year, as for example the 18 species recorded on 3rd October 2024. We know that Red Admiral and Wall have winter breeding cycles, and in time it is highly likely that other species will follow suit.

I am an optimist. Our insects will survive, they will evolve, it will just be a little bit different. The species that cannot cope with warmer climates will move to the cooler parts of these isles, with northern England and Scotland benefitting from this movement of insects. In turn, it seems inevitable that southern England will be colonised by different species from mainland Europe.

We can all do our bit towards mitigating the worst of climate change but as for our butterflies, they will adapt, of that I am sure.

Grayling 2025

Patrick Moore

Please note, the opinions in this article are mine and mine only. They are based on observation, research and pondering.

Most of my Horsham garden has been set aside for wildlife, that is unmowed from the patio to the vegetable plot apart from a mowed path between the two. This summer was exceptional in my garden, especially for insects. Coming home and just sitting on the patio watching was fantastic, especially during the Gatekeeper season.

While sitting one afternoon, I noticed a robin continuously landing on the mowed path and collecting something to eat. It would fly up to a vantage point and then head down again to eat. I had effectively provided its dinner plate in that one mowed line of path. Why did he not go into the deeper grass and flowers? Perhaps the open area gave him a longer horizon to see predators. It was far more dangerous in the long grass.

Now imagine creating a far larger 'dinner plate', perhaps on the Downs, maybe even at Deep Dean. There are plenty of caterpillars in the short grass there for predatory birds. Overgrazing I believe has created this 'dinner plate' and dinner is the caterpillar of the Grayling. Luckily they feed at night I thought. However, first instar larvae "can occasionally be found feeding during the day" [Peter Eeles, *Lifecycles of British and Irish Butterflies*]. Also JM Harding [The Irish Butterfly Book] suggests that night time feeding only occurs up to and including the third instar which can be in March. This is six months plus into the Grayling lifecycle. They feed on tender tips of young grasses, also a problem if an area is overgrazed. I guess what I'm trying to point out is that in my opinion Deep Dean has been heavily overgrazed. Everything has appeared early this year so I made my first trip to Deep Dean on 9th July. Apprehensively I passed the middle gate and made my first sweep of the top path; nothing to be seen.

Then I stepped down the slope and headed south west. Suddenly a Grayling chasing a Humming-bird Hawk-moth, diverted onto my hat. I counted a further five, all males.

My next visit was on 13th July, where in the heat only eleven males and two females were to be found. I bumped into Stephen, who later reported seeing a female Grayling on the South Downs Way, 400 yards from Deep Dean. Excellent news, but worrying





as this is very much an end of season activity.

I returned on 17th and counted a very worrying five individuals, all males. However, it was rather chilly with a sea fret over the hills and within Deep Dean. I was then away for ten days but others visited and counted as follows:

- 18th July a large group of counters led by Neil Hulme managed just nine but noticed a lack of flowers and grazing sheep
- 25th July, J Crawford and three others in perfect conditions counted just three, two males and one female

I returned on 5th August, fully expecting the season to be over, but counted five Grayling, four male and one female, all in Deep Dean plus one other male just north of Windover Hill summit.

Grayling are just hanging on in Deep Dean. I believe that to prevent extinction of the Sussex Grayling further grazing must be stopped for at least a couple of years.



Graylings at Deep Dean

All photos: Patrick Moore

Sussex Branch Events 2025

Roy Broad

Another season over and what a season it has been. Butterflies galore to be seen by all those attending our Events. Of course not all was quite that easy, as planning to normal emergence times has been thrown out this year with many butterflies appearing well before they were expected.

I continue learning in this my second full year in the role. Primarily I have realised that however much I put into the organisation of events they will only happen and succeed with members volunteering to lead them.

It may seem that leading a walk could be onerous but all that is needed is knowledge of a particular site, its lepidoptera and to a degree the general flora and fauna. I do all the paperwork involved and with Julia Lowson's help we provide the required First Aid cover. So please consider whether you could help here.

If, as I would hope, we increase the number of Events next year then Julia and I would appreciate another volunteer to gain the BC recognised First Aider certificate in order to share the workload. It simply involves attending a one day St John's Ambulance course, or similar, all arranged and paid for by Butterfly Conservation. You would then help fill the First Aider requirement for walks and have the ability to give First Aid in any unfortunate everyday situations.

The attendance at events has been very good with some being oversubscribed. Those that led walks last year have again stepped up to the mark and members have been able to benefit from some very enjoyable and educational walks. Thankfully no walks were cancelled due to weather though one was changed to the following day.

Besides the walks Julia Lowson organised two days of Transect training; one at National Trust's Woolbeding Gardens, Midhurst and the second at Buchan Country Park, Crawley. Both were designed to educate and enthuse people to add to the database of species and their habitats.

This theme was carried on by David Bridges who ran an interesting and well attended day for newer members and those local to the Warnham Butterfly Fields site. This involved some indoor talks and then, after a picnic lunch in light rain, we enjoyed a dry tour of what was farmland but now restored to provide good butterfly habitat. Hopefully the event will also have helped David find more volunteers to continue this important work.

Our first walk, 9th May, was again led by Paul Johnson near Mayfield. It was extended to 5 hours to cover this large area which proved very worthwhile. 15 species were seen with Dingy Skipper being the most prolific. Other notable sightings were Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Painted Lady and Small Copper. The Grizzled Skippers included an aberration: *ab. taras*, in which some of the small white spots on the forewings had merged to form larger central white areas.

Next day, 10th May, was Martin Kalaher's walk at Chantry Hill. 14 members in total enjoyed the 3 hours in this wildlife rich area and 21 species were seen. Most notable were the very early sightings of Meadow Brown (average first sighting 30th May) and Large Skipper (average first sighting 26th May) and, in his words, "Green Hairstreaks dripped off every bush". Martin estimates that 250 to 300 were seen there over the season.



Top row (from left): **Green Hairstreak - Mayfield, Small Copper - Mayfield**

Centre: **Searching for Skippers - Mayfield**

Bottom row (from left): **Dingy Skipper - Mayfield, Grizzled Skipper - Fairmile Bottom**



The 7th June saw Martin leading us around Fairmile Bottom near Arundel. This delivered, with a good selection of butterflies (including 3 Skipper species and Duke of Burgundy), moths and several different orchids, my favourites being Frog, Bee and Fly orchids.

On the 12th July Martin's Storrington wildlife garden yet again proved a draw for members with attendees able to learn much about which plants to introduce to attract not just butterflies but many other insects too.

I was very pleased that this year we were able to enjoy a guided walk around Knowlands Wood, Barcombe led by Nick Lear. The weather forecast was not great but 8 of us turned up and very much enjoyed the wandering through the less windy woodland rides. 21 species were seen including 14 Silver-washed Fritillaries (only 1 male), 2 pristine Brown Argus and both Red and White Admirals. With everyone expressing their enjoyment of the day I am happy to say that Nick has already agreed to a return visit next year.

Top to bottom: **Female Silver-washed Fritillary - Knowlands Wood**
Ringlet - Knowlands Wood
Female Gatekeeper - Knowlands Wood

I am sorry to mention his name again but Martin very kindly offered to show members around Stoke and Medley Bottoms near Amberley. This took place on the 27th July and 21 butterfly species were seen. One attendee mentioned he was happy to see his first Small Tortoiseshell of the year. Clouded Yellows, Adonis Blues and a second-brood Dingy Skipper were among those putting in appearances.

If you had wanted a chance to compare Blues this year, you should have attended the walk at Castle Hill near Woodingdean led by Graham Hubbard. Adonis, Common and Chalk Hill were everywhere and landing close enough to each other to allow comparisons. What better way to learn identification pointers. Clouded Yellows also gave good views for those that had not seen this species before. 19 species in total were seen on a beautiful sunny day which made a very good end to our walks of 2025.

I am very grateful to Martin and the rest of you who led walks this year but it would be really good to have others offer to do the same on their favourite patch. Most butterfly lovers are happy to talk to friends about their sightings and extol the virtues of the areas they know. Extend your audience by leading a walk and giving others the chance to appreciate the site, the butterflies and your enthusiasm for these beautiful creatures.

If you could lead a walk or are interested in becoming a First Aider for us then please email me, Roy Broad, at events@sussex-butterflies.org.uk.

At the end of the day we would be very happy to meet as many of you as possible enjoying our walks with a knowledgeable leader next season.

As always thank you to all mentioned here, especially Martin Kalaher, for their time and enthusiasm to help make our events both enjoyable and educational.

Nick Lear leading the group - Knowlands

All photos: Roy Broad



Ticking Off the Chequered Skipper: A Scottish Adventure

James Milton

It was an unusually warm spring day in May, in the middle of Scotland's driest period in 60 years, when I saw my very first Chequered Skipper butterfly. At the time, I was conducting my research project at the Scottish Centre for Ecology and the Natural Environment (SCENE), investigating the differences in embryonic heart rates of Blue Tits between urban and rural environments.

During the bird breeding season (April – June), this work often meant seven-day weeks; after all, birds don't take weekends off from laying eggs! Fortunately, though, this beautiful spring Sunday required only minimal fieldwork, giving me the chance to pursue this skipper.

Kanishk Walavalkar, another Master of Research student at SCENE, with whom I had built a strong connection over the year, was studying the food web of a small lochan nearby. When I mentioned my plan to search for Chequered Skippers, he was really eager to join me on the venture.

I had been tipped off that Chequered Skippers had recently been spotted at Glasdrum Wood National Nature Reserve, and, being in Scotland, it felt like the perfect time to strike - another step toward my goal of photographing all 59 British butterfly species. Even though the university field station sits close to the southern edge of the Scottish Highlands, the drive to Glasdrum took over two and a half hours. The reserve, near Oban and close to Appin and, is at the north-east end of Loch Creran.

#1: A male Chequered Skipper guarding its territory in Glasdrum National Nature Reserve



Upon arrival, I was mentally preparing myself... I've had considerable difficulty locating skippers in the past. Their natural ability to "skip" at low heights across grass blades and wildflowers always made them difficult to spot. Still, I really needed to photograph this skipper – I knew returning so far north to such an isolated location would be a challenge, especially as I was to be based at the University of Exeter in southwest England for the next four years undertaking a PhD from September.



**#2: Vice-Chair James and friend Kanishk, standing on the shore of Loch Creran.
The scenery up here is stunning and worth a visit on its own!**

However, my worries were, for once, misplaced, as the Chequered Skippers' location was only a five-minute walk from the car park. We followed a gently ascending woodland path into the reserve, then turned left into a glade-like meadow which was their supposed sanctuary. We strolled along the path in my usual butterfly-hunting style, scanning the plants meticulously like a submarine's periscope sweep. Suddenly, I caught a flash of a skipper darting past my feet – "That was one," I said to Kanishk, and we began searching the area for its established territory. Then, only a few moments later, we noticed a male chequered skipper perching on a bit of bramble with its wings fully spread. I swung my camera from my waist, looked through the viewfinder, and SNAP! – Butterfly #47, the Chequered Skipper was ticked off my list (Photo #1).

We spent the majority of the afternoon around these skippers watching the males guard their territories valiantly from many larger butterflies. After a few of these displays, I paused and thought... "Hang on a minute... Is one of those larger butterflies a Small-pearl Bordered Fritillary? Another species still on my list to photograph."

Suddenly, the visit evolved into a duo-species photography mission: The challenge was to wait until early evening and try to snap a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary perched in the glade. We had spent much of the afternoon attempting to photograph them, with little success, interspersed with a break, having a quick "dip" in Loch Creran. Such beautiful scenery (Photo #2)!

Upon returning to the glade around 17:30, the Small Pearls began to slow down and we spotted a real beauty sitting very calmly on one of the ferns (Photo #3). Our luck didn't end



#3: A Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary posing beautifully for the camera in the late afternoon at Glasdrum National Nature Reserve.

there as quite soon after, we noticed two more posing with their wings wide open, soaking up what remained of the retiring May sun (Photo #4).

Overall, I would highly recommend a visit to Glasdrum Wood National Nature Reserve in May to see these beautifully patterned skippers. Even if you don't manage to see the elusive skippers, the scenery of the place is breathtaking in itself.

I end this butterfly season with two more photographs added to my

collection, both the Chequered Skipper and the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary which brings my total to 48 out of 59 British species. What's next? Well, my new position in the southwest will give me fairly good access to the Lulworth Skipper in Dorset, the final skipper I need, as well as the High Brown Fritillary, which despite being critically endangered, still has some hotspots in Devon.

Have a wonderful rest of 2025 and I'll catch you at one of our events or in our next Sussex Butterfly magazine.

Remember to follow me on Instagram: **@chattingwiththeecologist** for butterfly and ecological posts.

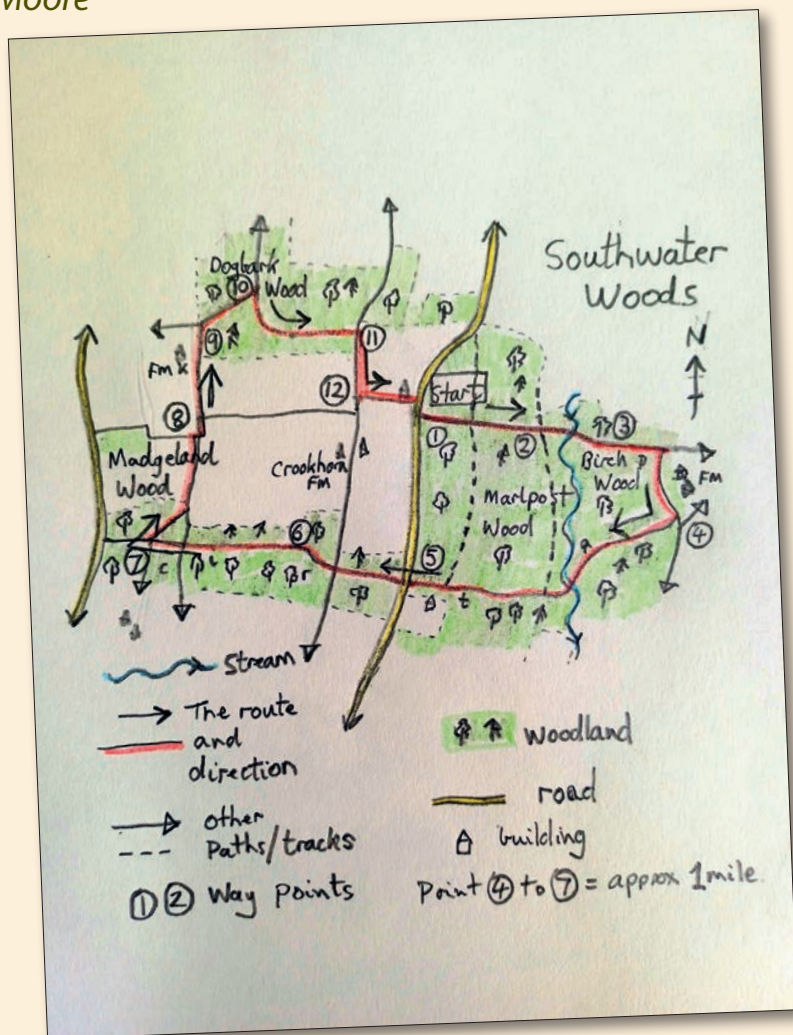
Kanishk also has a blog where he explores contemplations on life, society, and the philosophical underpinnings of our actions including reflections on ecology. You can check it out at kapilasparrrot.wordpress.com. Thanks to him for proofreading!



#4: A pair of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries posing elegantly for the camera!

SOUTHWATER WOODS WALK

Patrick Moore



One of my favourite areas to visit, not just during the butterfly season, is the Southwater Woods complex. This loop of approximately 3 miles starts at a layby on Marlpost Road, west of Southwater, at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference TQ 141 258. This is itself about 1.5 miles from the bus stop at Lintot Square, Southwater, served by route 23 between Worthing and Horsham and local route 98 from Horsham. On foot by road from the bus stops in Worthing Road, Southwater follow Church Lane towards and beyond the Holy Innocents Parish Church where the Lane becomes Bonfire Hill. Continue (beyond Shaw's Lane) and turn left when you reach Marlpost Road. Proceed to the layby which is on the left after a property named Woodlands (RH13 9BZ). There are also many different footpaths between Southwater and the start of the walk.



Silver-washed Fritillary

The most popular reason to visit the area is no doubt the presence of the Purple Emperor, but there are many others butterflies to be found. This year my total species count for the area has reached 29, so definitely worth more than one visit.

The walk:

1. Pass through the gate at 1 on the map and on down the slight slope ignoring the paths that cross from left to right, although these are worth exploring.
2. Continue to the gate at 2, go through and down over the stream, which feeds the River Adur, up again and through the gate at 3.
3. Continue up now, round a slight S bend, down and up a dip on to the gate at 4. Do not go through this gate but turn right and take the broad track, fence on your left. This track curves slightly left to a junction of paths.
4. Take the broad flint track to the right and head downhill. There are a few twists and curves on this track. Continue over the stream again and up to the road via another gate at 5.

Marbled White



5. Cross the road, pass the gate and continue along the sometimes very muddy but wide track. At the junction continue slightly left, level then down the slope.
6. At what, at a distance, seems a dead end turn slightly right and continue up the now flint track. Ignore the first footpath crossing and continue on up through the gentle curves.
7. At the top of the slope, at the second footpath sign, take a hard right, almost doubling back. Follow this broad track through the tall Oaks and continue left at a T junction to a kissing gate which leads to an open field. In high summer the fields coming up are full of meadow butterflies.
8. Follow the path generally in a northerly direction as it twists and turns through and along the field edges all the way to...
9. Where you re-enter the woods through a kissing gate. Cross the bridge and continue to a footpath sign on the left. Turn right along a recently widened track.
10. At the next junction turn right and follow this track bearing slightly left and up the slope towards a hard left turn. Continue up the slope to a slightly overgrown and disused gate.
11. Beyond this gate is a Green Lane onto which we must walk turning right. Follow the tree lined lane passing fields and meadows to a footpath sign on the right, where the trees thin out and just before the lane narrows.
12. Take a left through the gap and along the hedgerow, passing a house to the left back onto the road and the start point.

Hopefully the walk on a sunny day will be enjoyable. Please leave access when parking, wear good boots, take drinks and trail snacks and a proper map. Good luck.

Purple Emperor

All photos: Patrick Moore



Committee Report to Members for the Year Ending 31 March 2025

Recording

Paul Johnson

To begin, my thanks to everyone who submitted their butterfly records for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 that's covered by this update. All the records were greatly appreciated in a season of rather subdued butterfly numbers. Recording is in essence a long-term endeavour – encompassing relative lows along with the highs of better seasons – and, accordingly, 2024 marked the end of the latest five-year cycle in Butterfly Conservation's well-established Butterflies for the New Millennium project.

Although I write this update in September 2025, the 2024 dataset will be my last as Recording Officer for the Sussex Branch as I have decided to step down from the role after eight years. My thanks again to everyone who has over that time submitted their butterfly records (there have been about half a million in total), either as part of an established recording scheme or on a more informal basis. My thanks as well to everyone who has helped me in extracting, collating, processing, verifying and importing records, including Bob Foreman, Sue Peters, Julia Lowson, Kevin Crook, Clare Blencowe, Neil Hulme, Dave Harris and Colin Pratt. Sincere apologies if I have forgotten anyone here!

When I took on the Recording Officer's role in 2017, my predecessor Clare Blencowe marked the changeover by kindly giving me a copy of Joyce and Peter Gay's *Atlas of Sussex Butterflies* published in 1996. Many of the species distribution maps presented in this atlas differ markedly – and in some cases almost unrecognisably – from our current-day understanding of Sussex butterflies that continues to be underpinned by the dedication of the numerous field recorders across the two counties. This is perhaps no more so than



for the Brown Hairstreak which has stealthily colonised large swathes of coastal Sussex and the hinterland of the South Downs, and I look forward to coming across one near me in Crowborough before too long as it will surely arrive here soon. Earlier this summer, my partner excitedly called me to come down into our urban garden as a Marbled White was feeding on the verbena we'd planted; this another butterfly that has rapidly spread from its traditional localities on the chalk.

Emergence times and flight periods are changing too, with some species, such as the Brown Argus, now fitting in an additional brood. In recent years, high-summer Dingy Skipper records have become more frequent on the heavy clay soils of the High Weald, this partial second-brood having been traditionally only associated with warmer downland habitats.

Some of these dramatic changes have occurred or accelerated during my time as Recording Officer. As I handover the Recording Officer role, my successor will surely find themselves witnessing and logging similar fluctuations, along with the arrival of different species bringing new identification and verification challenges. Please do continue to send in your records for without this invaluable information the changing fortunes of our butterflies cannot be tracked or begin to be understood.

With my best wishes,

Paul Johnson

Previous page (bottom left)
Marbled White (right) **Dingy Skipper**
This page (right)
Brown Argus

All photos: Paul Johnson



Membership

Simone and Kevin Crook

The total number of household-based memberships with the Sussex branch is currently 1,515, a small drop of 18 compared to 2024.

17 members of the branch joined pre-2000, with our longest standing member joining 53 years ago in 1972!

We are hoping to send out more information to members moving forward, and this will primarily be via emails sent out from Butterfly Conservation Head Office. If you would like to receive information on events, conservation activities and other news, please check with the BC membership team (**membership@butterfly-conservation.org**) that you have opted in to receive email communication.



Butterfly Conservation Sussex Social Media Revival

James Milton

If you have been following our Facebook page and Instagram account over the last few years, you probably have noticed that our posts have been a bit sparse. This is something we are eager to change!

Having active and informative social media pages is almost essential for organisations nowadays. They allow us to promote our work, give you up-to-date information on our events, and of course, share the amazing butterfly photos we are sent from all across the county. Many of you already use the 'Sightings' page on the BC Sussex website and we're excited to expand this amazing resource onto our social media channels.

How are we going to do this? We're delighted to introduce Dave Cotton – Our new Social Media Officer. Dave will be key in reviving our social media accounts and will be supported by James Milton, BC Sussex's Vice-Chair, who is now also taking on the role of Social Media Manager.

If you're not currently following our social media channels, here is the information you need:

Instagram: Search @sussexbutterflies in Instagram's search bar.

Facebook: Search "Butterfly Conservation in Sussex" in Facebook's search bar.

We're looking forward to sharing this revamp with you!



BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION – SUSSEX BRANCH

Members' Day

Saturday 22nd November 2025 1:30pm

The next Sussex branch Members' Day will be held at Cyprus Hall, Cyprus Road, Burgess Hill, RH15 8DX on Saturday 22nd November 2025 at 1.30pm

We will have two interesting and informative presentations from:

- **David Bridges** and **Bill Downey** on 'The Wood White in Sussex and Surrey'
- **Fiona Scully** (Reserves Officer for SE England) on 'BC reserves and the importance of Volunteers in their management'

Tea, coffee and cakes will be available, plus a Raffle (cash donations would be appreciated).

Photo Competition results will be announced, and the top images submitted will be projected.

We'd really love for our members to be able to meet and mingle.

There is a large pay and display car park behind Cyprus Hall, and other (also paying) car parks around the centre of Burgess Hill. The Hall is about a 5 minute walk from Burgess Hill station.

No booking needed.

We anticipate the afternoon will finish around 4.30pm.

WANTED

MORE ARTICLES FOR OUR MAGAZINE

We're always interested in features for our annual magazine. It's the contributions from our members that fill this publication, so why not put pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard) and write a short article or send in an idea. Perhaps you have a favourite butterfly watching spot in Sussex you'd like to write about, or some butterfly gardening tips. Maybe you've observed some unusual butterfly behaviour, or you'd like to tell the story of your first encounter with a new species. Whatever inspires you we'd like to hear about it! Send all contributions and ideas to **branch.contact@sussex-butterflies.org.uk**.

Winter Work Parties 2025-26

Throughout the winter the branch arranges and supports conservation work parties on its reserves and on other important reserves across Sussex, helping improve the habitat to ensure the continued success of our butterflies in 2026 and beyond.

Neil Hulme will again lead the winter work parties at Rowland Wood and Park Corner Heath this season. There will be 12 work parties this year, all on Sundays from October to March:

- **26 October**
- **9 and 30 November**
- **7 and 14 December**
- **4, 11 and 18 January**
- **1, 15 and 22 February**
- **1 March**

The work parties will start at 10am and end around 3:30pm, but don't feel obliged to stay all day. There is no need to inform anyone that you plan to attend - please just show up. Please bring your own work gloves and your own hand tools if you have them, particularly loppers. You will also need to bring your own food and drink as required.

There will be additional work parties this winter, also led by Neil, at Kithurst Meadow specifically to benefit Duke of Burgundy and Rewell Wood for Pearl-bordered Fritillary. For dates and details, please refer to the website.

We do recommend that you keep an eye on the Winter Work Parties page on our website as we will make it clear here if any of the work parties have to be cancelled due to unsafe weather - <https://sussex-butterflies.org.uk/otherpages/index.php?id=9>

Please contact Neil Hulme if you have any queries - neil.hulme.sussex@outlook.com

Here's a little summary of what we do on the work parties

by Jonathan Crawford

The work parties last from 10am to about 3.30pm, but we normally give up early if it's raining. Some people arrive and stay the whole day, some people just a few hours or after lunch. Everyone is welcome and every contribution is valuable. We start the day with a chat and roll call and a little bit about health and safety, and then we go into the reserves.

Most of the work is clearing scrub with loppers and saws (heavy duty gardening). There is normally something for every ability, and people can work as fast or as slow as they like. A couple of us run brush cutters, but that is usually done away from the group so as not to disturb their peace and quiet. Often, we have fantastic bonfires which are especially welcome on cold winter mornings and a great focal point. We work for about an hour and a half and then stop for a break. Another hour and a half and it's lunchtime. After that is a couple of hours and it's time to go home, tired but happy. As you would imagine, the people who attend are very keen on birds, botany and butterflies so we can have marvellous chats during our breaks.

Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch



Management Committee

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Vice Chair & Social Media Manager

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John Heys and Sue Peters

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Reserves Officer – South East

Fiona Scully

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Health and Safety Coordinator

Dave Harris

The committee would also like to thank everyone who gives their support, time and advice to Sussex Butterfly Conservation

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