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Dear Branch Member,

Please find the latest news from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch...

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Annual Members' Day

Our Annual Members' Day is to be held on **Sunday 3rd November** and we have some fantastic speakers lined-up! As ever, this is also a great opportunity to connect with fellow members and reminisce on the 2024 season. As ever, do bring your photos along too, with full details of the photographic competition appearing in the Autumn newsletter.

The 2024 AGM agenda:

11:00	Doors open
12:00	Chairman's welcome and branch updates
12:30	Steven Lofting: Q&A with our BC Conservation Manager (South East England)
12:50	Lunch break
13:30	Andy Barker: The Forest Ringlet (<i>Dodonidia helmsii</i>) - an elusive and endangered New Zealand endemic butterfly
14:15	Peter Marren: The Weird and Wonderful Names of Butterflies and Moths
15:00	Refreshments and photographic competition voting
15:30	Martin Warren: Sex, life and death in the world of butterflies

16:15	Results of Photographic Competition
16:25	Raffle Draw
16:30	Q&A and Chairman's closing remarks
16:40	End of meeting

More information will be provided in the branch's Autumn Newsletter.

Pete Eeles (Branch Chair)

Butterfly garden - take two!

I've always been keen on encouraging wildlife into my garden, and following negotiations with other interested parties (keen gardeners and children) managed to establish some butterfly-friendly plants along with an area of uncut lawn with native wild flowers in my garden in a suburban estate to the south of Winchester. This matured over a period of 30 years and attracted an amazing 31 species during that time – over half of the UK total. They mostly comprised the more mobile hedgerow and grassland species characteristic of the area, but we did have a number of surprise visitors over the years, including one not even on the UK list – a Geranium Bronze - that pitched up on August bank holiday 2020 (its provenance was attributed to imported plants at a local garden centre). No doubt many of those we managed to attract were wanderers from some of the rich butterfly habitat in the vicinity, but it shows what's possible, even in a suburban setting for a minimum of time and effort.

Last year we moved a few miles up the Itchen valley into the “proper” countryside and after initially thinking “been there, done that” I couldn't help myself starting all over again, particularly as much of our new garden is south facing and already included some quite attractive plants and shrubs. A little bit of rewilding on the lawn and we were ready to go.

My expectations were a total somewhere in the mid-twenties (species) over the next few years, as we are a bit further away than we were from the prime downland sites and our immediate neighbourhood comprises river valley and arable fields – good for the widespread species, less so for the specialists. In the event, I've been pleasantly surprised that we've reached the 20 mark before the first anniversary. At the time of our arrival, the buddleia was adorned by Peacock, Comma, Brimstone and Red Admiral, with Holly Blue, Speckled Wood and Gatekeeper flitting among the shrubs. Large, Small and Green-veined White investigated the flowerbeds, while Meadow Brown and the occasional Common Blue were more interested in the patch of uncut lawn, making a credible total of twelve in the last five months of the year.

The 2024 season got off to a good start with the first of many Orange-tips turning up late March in what has generally been deemed a poor year for them. Next was an unexpected Green Hairstreak which visited fleetingly in mid-May. Our first Marbled White arrived in the third week of June, visiting almost daily thereafter, as did the only (so far) Small Heath. “Golden” skippers started to become a regular feature of the uncut grass in July, but weren't keen to pose for identification at first. Most subsequently turned out to be Essex, but there has been at least one Small. Within the space of four days between 21st and 24th July two major surprises – a pristine Small Blue nectaring on thyme and a very worn White Admiral resting on the lawn; along with the earlier Green Hairstreak, species we recorded no more than twice in 30 years in our previous garden.

There are no doubt more to come - we still await our first Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady and Ringlet, for example, but it has been an exciting first twelve months of garden butterflies and we're very much looking forward to seeing what turns up next.

What a Difference a Year Makes!

It cannot have escaped your notice that our gardens and countryside have been bereft of insect life for much of the spring and early summer. This has had a noticeable knock-on effect on the food chain, with bats measured as underweight and bird broods failing - all due to a lack of insects, and their larvae.

While the usual factors of habitat loss (reduced habitat quality and habitat fragmentation) and chemical pollution (the application of insecticides, emissions, run-off from agriculture, and nitrogen deposition) will have had their usual negative impact on our Lepidoptera, it is obvious that our changing weather patterns have been the root cause of the sudden decline in insect life this year.

I'm pleased to say that there has been a significant improvement in the last month or so, although most Lepidoptera species are well down on their usual numbers.

It is important to remember that our Lepidoptera have experienced very poor springs and summers before, but have always bounced back, so long as they are given a chance. It's therefore even more important than ever to create Wild Spaces for wildlife where possible and to also send in our records so that the situation can be monitored effectively and any mitigations put in place, especially for our rarer species.

In summary - keep calm and carry on!

Pete Eeles (Branch Chair)

Reserves report

Magdalen Hill Down

As a part of the project to restore chalk grassland at Yew Hill, following the reservoir and pipeline construction works, the MHD Extension field was suggested as a suitable donor site. This former arable field had previously been sown with seed gifted from donor sites St. Catherine's Hill and Martin Down. It shows how successful the reversion process was for it to be of suitable standard to now be a donor site and help restore other species-rich grasslands. It's not grazed over summer and not too steep to collect seed with a brush harvester making it more suitable than most other sites.



Brush harvesting at MHD Extension field

All photos © Fiona Scully

[Emorsgate Seeds](#) provided the brush harvester and came to collect the seed. The Extension field was looking at its best this year and particularly flowery, so it was a bit traumatic seeing it being driven over and flattened by the tractor! But it was for a worthwhile cause, and the meadow quickly recovered. A trailer load of seed was collected

from a 2.5ha area and will be stored by Emorsgate until it's needed. It's intended for a second seed harvest to be done later in the season next year.

Magdalen Hill is a SINC (Site of Interest for Nature Conservation), a.k.a. Local Wildlife Site. Although not a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), SINC's are recognised for their local ecological importance. A botanical survey is carried out every 10 years and this year it was surveyed again by HBIC ([Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre](#)), joined by the [SDNP Ranger team](#) looking at habitat condition assessment. The chalk grass species are indicators of the quality of the habitat. Roadside and Pathfield, which are more nutrient rich, have taller more dominant grasses such as Yorkshire fog, and False Oat grass. These areas need more grazing and hay cutting.

Our friends from [Alton Natural History Society](#) came on a field trip. Although butterfly numbers weren't that high, we did see the first Chalk Hill Blue (13th July) and a fascinating range of spiders, grasshoppers and crickets including Roesel's bush cricket, a Longwinged Conehead nymph, and shiny Scabious Longhorn moths.



The 2024 SINC survey



Scabious Longhorn moths

All photos © Fiona Scully

The [Tadley U3A group](#) also found interesting invertebrates including Noble Wasp sawfly, Yellow Sided Clover Sawfly, and 6-spot Burnet moth caterpillars. The [National Trust](#) South Downs Countryside Team came and visited for the day to look at the arable reversion fields and chalk scrapes.

Overall, it's been [a poor year so far](#) for numbers of butterflies. Likely attributable to the cold and wet weather, earlier in the year.

Yew Hill

The series of reserve walks reached a high point at Yew Hill in June. Rupert Broadway carefully timed the walk this year to coincide with the White Letter Hairstreak. In previous years the walk was held during the peak Fragrant Orchid display and just missed the Hairstreaks. But success this year as we watched three White Letter Hairstreaks flying amongst the elms.

Yellow Rattle and the thin soil has kept the grass shorter on the banks and ditches but the high amount of rainfall, and no summer grazing has resulted in a lot of Hoary Ragwort and Wild Parsnip. So a large part of this little reserve is looking rather overgrown (but still attracting butterflies!).



Bentley Station Meadow

Work in progress at Bentley with a volunteer day cutting and clearing the bramble in the main meadow and another volunteer day scheduled in August. The cows were on during June to graze the grass down and allow less competitive plants to come through. A tree survey paid homage to some of the notable trees on site, in particular a veteran crab apple and an oak with an enormous trunk which Neil Goodall kindly measured.



Neil measuring a venerable Oak - can you spot him?!



Tackling the bramble at BSM

All photos © Fiona Scully

Butterfly Walks on the Reserves

Please email fscully@butterfly-conservation.org to book a place. See the Hampshire Branch website for [details of walks this summer](#). Summary in [the Dates section](#), below.

20th August Moth Morning event: Magdalen Hill Down 9.30 – 11am led by Kate Barrett. If you're interested in attending please email fscully@butterfly-conservation.org so I have an idea of numbers.

See [our Facebook page](#), for latest updates. For those not already on the list, who would like to volunteer, please email me: fscully@butterfly-conservation.org

Hope to see you at one of our sites soon...

Fiona Scully (BC South Downs Landscape Project Officer, Nature Reserves)

Snippets

- The Branch attended a Bioblitz event and Farm Open Day run by the [Winchester Farm Cluster Group](#). These were public events, so many thanks to the Branch volunteers who gave their time to help out and support the Farm Cluster Group.

The Winchester Farmers group are keen to spread the word about how they work together for landscape, habitat and biodiversity benefits, alongside producing food and how they achieve more by working together. The events are to showcase to the wider community what's being achieved.

- At the time of writing, this year's [Big Butterfly Count](#) has just completed. I do hope you managed to contribute at least a few counts to this marvellous citizen science project - even a 'complete zero' count is valuable data!

Dates

An electronic calendar (.ics), covering all Field Trips & Reserves Walks, is available from [the Butterfly Walks webpage](#), or just copy/paste this link into your Calendar application, to **subscribe** (not 'download'! - you won't get automatic updates, if events change): https://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/BC_Hants_walks.ics

Reserves Volunteering

Please check the website for updates.

Winter 2024/25 programme to be announced	Magdalen Hill Down	Please contact Fiona Scully for details.
Winter 2024/25 programme to be announced	Yew Hill	
Winter 2024/25 programme to be announced	Bentley Station Meadow	

Branch, and branch-related Events*

Sunday, 3rd November	Branch Members' Day, Littleton Memorial Hall	
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*The branch Events Coordinator position is currently vacant. If you are at all interested in the position, then please contact the Branch Chair, Pete Eeles, at chair@hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk.

Branch Field trips

Full details of [Hampshire walks here](#) (PDF). Full details of [Isle of Wight walks here](#) (PDF).

When	Where	Target species
Wednesday, 14th August (09:30)	Shipton Bellinger	Brown Hairstreak, Wall
Saturday, 17th August (13:30)	Brading Downs	Chalk Hill Blue, Brown Argus
Sunday, 18th August (10:30)	Noar Hill	Brown Hairstreak, Purple Hairstreak, Brown Argus, Clouded Yellow
Wednesday, 21st August (10:30)	Beacon Hill	Silver-spotted Skipper, Brown Argus, Clouded Yellow
Sunday, 25th August (10:30)	Soberton Down / River Meon	Poss. Brown Hairstreak
Sunday, 1st September (10:30)	Old Winchester Hill	Adonis Blue, Silver-spotted Skipper, Clouded Yellow
Wednesday, 4th September (10:30) - DATE TO BE REARRANGED	Portsdown Hill	Brown Hairstreak, Common Blue, Closed Yellow, Wall
Saturday, 7th September (13:20)	The Revetment, Ventnor	Clouded Yellow, Hummingbird Hawk Moth
Late September / early October - DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED	Portchester Common / Portsdown Hill	Long-tailed Blue

Accompanied Reserves Walks

Please check the website for updates.

When	Where	Target species	Information
Friday, 9th August (11:00-13:00)	Yew Hill	Chalk Hill Blue, etc.	With Rupert Broadway. Contact Fiona Scully to book.

Friday, 16th August (11:00-13:00)	Magdalen Hill Down	Chalk Hill Blue, Adonis Blue, etc.	With Dave & Anna Stewart. Contact Fiona Scully to book.
Tuesday, 20th August (details TBA)	Magdalen Hill Down	August Moth Morning...	With Kate Barrett. Contact Fiona Scully to book.

[First sightings \(since June e-Newsletter\)](#)

Note: Data extracted from [Branch 'News' webpage](#) (so, **NOT official!)**

9th June	White-letter Hairstreak	Lakeside, Cosham
12th June	Marbled White	Havant Thicket
16th June	Ringlet	Bouldnor Forest, Yarmouth
19th June	White Admiral	Havant Thicket / North Baddesley
20th June	Silver-washed Fritillary	Bouldnor Forest, Yarmouth
20th June	Small Blue	Portsmouth Hill
20th June	Small Skipper	Browdown North, Gosport
20th June	Essex Skipper	Browdown North, Gosport
21st June	Purple Hairstreak	Alver Valley Country Park, Gosport
24th June	Purple Emperor	Southleigh Forest
24th June	Silver-studded Blue	Broxhead Common
24th June	Gatekeeper	Yew Hill Reserve
29th June	Grayling	Browdown North, Gosport
3rd July	Dark Green Fritillary	Old Winchester Hill
17th July	Chalk Hill Blue	Stockbridge Down / Portsmouth Hill

Social Media links, etc.



Branch FB



Our Reserves FB



Branch X
(Twitter)



Branch Insta



Branch WWW