



**Butterfly Conservation
Friends of Magdalen Hill
Down Butterfly Reserve**

**Newsletter No 26
Spring 2007**

Dates for your diary

Summer Work Parties

Meet up track by Magdalen Hill Cemetery on the B3404 (approximately ½ mile west of Percy Hobbs Roundabout. Grid reference SU 511 295) Usually 10am to 4pm but helpers welcome for part of day. An odd hour helps so please come!
Wednesday 4th July Ragwort with Wednesday Conservation Volunteers
Sunday 29th July Ragwort with Hampshire Conservation Volunteers

Public Walks at MHD

Meeting Place at the car park opposite the entrance to Magdalen Hill Cemetery, Alresford Road, Winchester SU 512 295. Walk usually about two hours.
Saturday 21st April Magdalen Hill Down **Leaders** Lynn Fomison 01962 772251 and Patrick Fleet. **Meet** 10.30 a.m Spring in your step - Leisurely stroll to enjoy local wildlife & stunning views. Cowslips should be in full bloom.

Tuesday 24th April **Leader** Lynn Fomison **Meet** 3pm An afternoon stroll to enjoy spring flowers especially cowslips and butterflies

Saturday 12th May **Leader** Colin Matthews 01794 388272. **Meet** 10.30am **Bring lunch** if you wish to continue during the afternoon. Downland Old & New – a chance to find out how Butterfly Conservation has restored neglected downland. Joint with Hampshire Wildlife Trust.

Wednesday 20th June **Leader** Don Bryan **Meet** 7pm A relaxing evening walk to enjoy fine views, wild flowers and an opportunity to learn about the history of Magdalen Hill Down from Don Bryan local Archaeologist. Organised by Lynn Fomison 01962 77251

Sunday 29th July **Leader** Lynn Fomison **Meet** 10.30am at top of track. Those with limited mobility may use the restricted parking at top of track. Others please use car park opposite cemetery Leisurely stroll to enjoy local wildlife & stunning views of Winchester & beyond on MHD N - an area of wild flowers sown in 2004 - a joint project between Hampshire County Council and Butterfly Conservation. Easy walking on a hardened path - suitable for wheelchair users too. One of best times of year to see butterflies and wild flowers. ***This event marks the end of***

National Butterfly Week 21st - 29th July -see web site for other events.

Wednesday 8th August **Leader** Lynn Fomison Meet 10.30am Sharing Nature with Children A leisurely short walk & butterfly games for parents and children. Carry a small picnic with you to eat towards the end if you wish. Approximately two hours

As well as all the above public walks we have a number of bookings for visits by private groups which we welcome under the educational access facility in our Higher Level Stewardship agreement. If you hear of a group that would like a visit please suggest they contact Lynn

On the hill - What people have been seeing

Please let Lynn have your observations through the summer for the Autumn newsletter. We rarely have news of sightings of orchids from people but would welcome these, particularly as we have started finding new orchids on the sown areas of the extension. We are also very interested to hear of sightings of Small Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Dingy Skipper and any other less commonly seen species. We hope that Adonis Blue & Silver-spotted Skipper may also move in.

Grizzled Skippers

These were once rarely seen but are now a success story. Andy Barker recently wrote to Lynn saying....'I thought you might like to know that MHD now comes out as one of the top six sites in Hampshire for Grizzled Skipper. Although there are about 35-50 Grizzled Skipper sites in Hampshire, only a handful of these manage double-figure peak counts. Magdalen Hill Down is one of these. I had a single visit peak count of 11 last year. It's a bit of a worry to think that the population of this butterfly is so incredibly low at so many sites throughout Hampshire. Let's hope we can maintain the good numbers we've seen over the last couple of years.'

At Magdalen on the Original reserve the 2006 count totalled 24 (was 17 in 2005). Patrick has seen them laying on agrimony so we sowed lots of extra seed in various places last year. It would be fantastic to see this increase in GS maintained.

White-letter Hairstreak

Just a very odd one has been spotted at MHD over the years. But we have planted both wych elms & the disease resistant elms that Andrew Brookes provides so maybe it's a good idea if we keep a sharp eye open for WLHS.

For survey tips visit the site established by a fellow branch

<http://w-album.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/index.html>

Butterfly Transects

Here is the piece Lynn put on the web site in early April.

Yesterday 1st April saw the start of the transect season. As far as our 3 reserves are concerned the information gathered during the course of the season is important for two reasons. The fluctuations in butterfly numbers sometimes help us decide on appropriate management. For example when Small Copper number dropped at MHD we implemented a bare ground strategy - areas of sparsely vegetated ground where their larval food plant sorrel would thrive without too much competition & where the areas of bare ground would provide the warm conditions that the species likes.

Secondly when transect figures demonstrate a huge increase in butterfly numbers we can use these in publicity to achieve the recognition that Butterfly Conservation deserves for its success in helping butterflies. Did you know the transect on the original reserve at Magdalen Hill Down started in 1990. 437 Chalkhill Blues were recorded. We were thrilled when in 2003 numbers broke the 2000 mark with 2196 recorded and imagine our delight when the 2006 figure was 3236!

A third good use of transect data is it shows us if our reserves are being colonised by other species.

From time to time we need new people as transect recorders. We aim to have a team of 5 for each transect - 5 of these in all - 3 at MHD, one at Yew Hill and one at Bentley. Sharing the weeks on a rota basis means each person does about 5 weeks through the period April to September. If you think this is something you would like to help with in 2008 and if you feel in need of training in 2007 we can arrange for you to walk the transect of your choice a few times with one of the existing recorders.

If you feel unable to make a commitment for rotated attendance there are opportunities to visit reserves to look for specific species - often those present in low numbers and difficult to pick up on transect.

Do contact me if you would like to help in gathering important data for our reserves.

Butterfly Transect Walkers meeting

This was arranged by Andy Barker & took place on 24th March. The reserves transects were well represented with Jenny Mallett, Patrick Fleet, Alison Harper, Thelma Smalley myself & of course Andy Barker all present. We enjoyed numerous talks about different sites and Ian Middlebrook from head office provided information on the latest position nationally with aspects of the scheme.

Transect walkers may find it useful to look at the web site www.ukbms.org

Moths

We do have extensive records of moths at MHD and we are wanting to keep these updated. Please contact me if you can run moth lamps on a regular basis.

Lynn Fomison
01962 772251

Litter

We pick up an enormous amount of litter at this beautiful reserve. Visitors can help by not leaving any litter and by picking up any they see. Lynn writes "I usually carry a plastic bag with me anywhere I go and it is my gift to lovely places to collect any rubbish I see & dispose of it appropriately. But I must say that the heaps of rubbish recently encountered in Mexico left me totally defeated!"

Rubbish is not only unsightly to visitors but it can be very dangerous to wildlife and grazing animals. Sheep & cattle can choke on plastic bags, get cut by glass and sharp tin. Wildlife is probably even more at risk. An article in the RSPCA magazine Animal Life last summer referred to mice getting trapped in bottles and dying and birds strangled by rubbish - those plastic loops that hold 4 drink tins together being particularly hazardous. Hedgehogs can get stuck in tins and plastic cartons when tempted to forage for food remains.

Lynn adds that in late November she found that a number of spray cans of a Sainsbury's body perfume had been exposed by the cattle grazing. Our guess is this is someone involved in substance abuse - not the sort of visitor we welcome! Especially as they hide the cans in the long grass. Again aerosol cans are a danger to animals & are definitely litter we want to avoid. A recent item in Blue Print - the magazine of the Blue Cross highlighted the danger to dogs from discarded litter. Cuts to feet can result from broken glass or sharp tins.

So please help by collecting of litter & disposing of it safely not just at Magdalen Hill Down but whenever you are out enjoying a walk in lovely surroundings.

Metal Detecting – Another problem

Metal detecting on our site not allowed under our agreement with Natural England. As a result of illegal activity last summer Lynn had to fill in numerous holes, some of them quite large that people had left. Such digging is not only killing wild flowers but also leaving holes hazardous for both visitors and grazing stock. Contact Lynn please if you see anyone metal detecting.

Damaged Anthills

Also Patrick had found anthills upended on original reserve. We are not sure whether the culprits are animals or humans! But our anthills are very important & special. If you see one that has been displaced please try & relocate it. Lot of the anthills are covered in rock rose thus making them important breeding places for Brown Argus & Green Hairstreak.

Thank you

All is not all doom & gloom. Most of our visitors are very considerate & helpful. John is particularly grateful for the care that everyone took with his sheep, especially people who rang about the occasional sheep that has been stuck or was looking a bit off colour.

We are often asked 'Are they having lambs?' Not this year is the answer. But they might well be the sheep that have lambs at Sparsholt College next January & you will be able to go along at the lambing weekends to see them.

In the eventuality of not being able to contact Lynn please ring 101 for the Police if you find motorbikes on the reserve or any other activities inappropriate to a nature reserve.

Grazing

The original reserve and extension was well grazed by Sarah's cattle through the winter & all went well.

The sheep, which are Suffolk crosses this time, went onto MHD N in early March – the field by the road. They went onto the other section with the path through it & then moving onto the extension on 12th April.

They are working very hard for us!

Winter Conservation Work

We are very pleased with all the work we achieved this winter. With the help of The Wednesday Group and then on the following Sunday Nigel Spring & some other Dorset members and local members we managed to get

the 2007 scrub block coppiced. For those of you who are not aware of this aspect of our management plan, we have a scheme to cut down some of the scrub blocks on an eighteen year rotational cycle. The main aim of this is to achieve an uneven age structure to the scrub & to keep the shrubs healthy as they provide valuable shelter & food not just for our butterflies and moths but all wildlife.

At other work parties unwanted scrub was cleared and one Sunday Hampshire Conservation Volunteers did major work on hedgerow maintenance.

We had major tree surgery work on the row of mainly ash trees between the original reserve and the extension. This took place in that little bit of snow in January but fortunately enough volunteers turned up to clear away the branches that the tree surgeon was felling.

Patrick Fleet continues with the important task of working from one end of the original reserve to the other cutting off all scrub regrowth. It is this regular work together with the grazing – cattle & rabbits that keeps the original downland looking so good & providing such excellent butterfly habitat. This work will continue through the summer. Also this summer Phil Budd will be doing the botanical monitoring on the extension.

Visit to Magdalen Hill Down on 6th August 2006 – a report by Tony Mundell

Our thanks go to Butterfly Conservation (BC) for this Hampshire Floral Group visit to their reserve. Initially 22 people assembled, but apparently the event had been incorrectly advertised in a local newspaper as a walk specifically for butterflies. This led to 6 people branching off to concentrate solely on that! The rest of us sampled three different habitats at the reserve. These are known as the Original Reserve, the Extension and the North.

The Original Reserve is 23 acres at the west end, where the very steep slope had saved chalk downland from the plough. Since its acquisition by BC in 1987 much of the encroaching scrub has been removed and it is now wonderfully rich habitat with a wealth of plants and butterflies. In particular, Chalk-hill Blues were abundant during our visit. In places Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) was the dominant plant, supporting a colony of Brown Argus butterflies. Nearby we managed to locate three patches of Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), counting at least 59 plants.

The Extension (which we visited first) was arable farmland until acquired by BC in 1995. In a pioneering project BC prepared the soil, collected native grass seed from surviving Hampshire chalk

downland, and sowed this across the site in 1997. The restoration to traditional flower-rich downland is a slow process as fertilizers leach away, but it is clearly underway here. During the first few years botanists were delighted to find a few plants of Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) thought to be a genuine wild relic of the original arable field. The sward is now too closed for it to survive, but a little seed was transferred to the adjacent Magdalen Hill Down North where we saw that it is still just hanging on. One plant we saw on the Extension was a deep-pink flowered form of Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*). Until then I had only seen the usual white-flowered plants.

The adjoining 55 acres of MHD North was arable land until recently but is now being managed for butterflies and other wildlife. It was sown with collected native seed in 2004, some of it harvested from parts of Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire. We saw lots of Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*) and in one area Martin Rand showed us plants of an unusual subspecies of Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor* ssp. *calcareus*) that had evidently come from its stronghold on Salisbury Plain.
Tony Mundell

Peeps from The past

Sylvia Whalley told Lynn recently that she had not realised that Glencross – the single storey building opposite the cemetery entrance dated from the 1st World War army camp. It had been the Officers' mess. We know from an old map that what's now our extension was the officers' golf links.

If the historical aspects of MHD are of interest to you do come on the walk with Don Bryan on 20th June.

North – news of our newest area

The transect

It is amazingly pleasing to report that butterfly numbers showed a large increase in 2006 over 2005. 1051 individuals of 25 species were recorded in comparison with 236 of 20 species in 2005. Common Blues and Chalkhill Blues both increased greatly as did Meadow Browns. The new species for 2006 we Small & Large Skippers, Small Blue and Marbled White. Marsh Fritillary was also recorded but we believe this to be a released butterfly.

We await the results of the 2007 season with great expectation

RAGWORT

At the time of writing (early April) hardly any ragwort plants are to be seen. We hope it will stay that way! But we do have plans to tackle any mass outbreak!

Newsletter

This newsletter is produced on behalf of Butterfly Conservation Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch & is provided free of charge to friends of the reserve. Lynn has written the majority of this newsletter - apologies for any errors/omissions. Items welcomed from you. Please send any items for the Autumn Newsletter to Lynn by 15th August 2007. Let her know if you would like it by email to save us the cost of postage. Alternatively it can be accessed on our web site

Hot News

This year Patrick first saw a Green Hairstreak on the original reserve on 2nd April and just ten days later is reporting that numbers of GHS are good – no surprise with this wonderful spell of weather. On Tuesday 10th April Patrick saw Grizzled Skippers several times & estimates there were at least 4 separate individuals flying. He says it is the earliest he has seen them.

On 2nd April Patrick also saw 2 Humming-bird Hawkmoths, one of which appeared to be laying on hedge bedstraw.

On most sunny days in April it has been possible to see Brimstones, Peacocks, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshells.

On the day of writing (12th April) the cowslips on the extension are starting to look good.

On 12th April Lynn saw a Small Copper on the extension (SW corner Area E) and a Small White at the top.

Magdalen Hill Down Who's Who

Who's Who....

Friends Coordinator: Sylvia Whalley, 77 Alresford Road Winchester.SO23 0LA Tel: 01962 890848

Warden: Patrick Fleet, Ivy Cottage, Dummer. Basingstoke. RG25 2AG Tel: (01256 398471)

Reserves sub-committee Chairman and Transect Rota

Jenny Mallett Great Fontley Farm Fareham PO15 6EA 01329 832177

Branch Chairman Dr Andy Barker 02380 270042

Reserves Officer and Editor of MHD News:

Lynn Fomison Mount Pleasant Parkstone Road Ropley SO24 OEW Tel: (01962 772251).

Sheep Owner John Britton 01420 587343 Mo 07850 256167

Cattle Owner Sarah Jackson 01962 733969 mo 07889 750577 and 07738 420860

web site www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk

National web site

www.butterfly-conservation.org