

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

EAST MIDLANDS BRANCH - MEMBERS' DAY & AGM 2024

(held at 10.15am on 24 November 2024 at Allestree Club, Allestree, Derby)

PRESENT (44): Jane Broomhead (JB) (Branch Organiser), Christine Maughan (CM) (minutes), Max Maughan (MM), Melanie Penson (MP), Suzanne Halfacre, Ken Orpe (KO), Richard Jeffery (RJ), Mark Searle (MS), Gareth Jones, Ian Paterson, Margaret Hobby, Brian Hobby, John Green, Sylvia Green, Willy Lane, John Clarke, Brenda Buckland, John Buckland, Martin Smith, Dennis Dell, Nick Sparrow, Sid Morris, Kelvin Lawrence, Andrew Woodhouse, John Roberts, Aline Roberts, Jenny Emerson, Andrew Smith, Tracy Mann, Pete Clarke, David Gibbons, Melanie Whitehouse, David Bussey, Iain McGowan, Paul Townsend, Russell Nevin, Jane Flint, Hilary Hebron, Geof Adams, Margaret Adams, Amy Ross, Thomas Hollier, Simon Reed, Jill Reed.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Bill Bacon, Gary Atkins

2 MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2023

Having been published on the branch website <https://www.eastmidlands-butterflies.org.uk/news.html> and circulated in the Spring 2024 Newsletter, these were taken as read.

3 BRANCH ORGANISER'S ADDRESS – Jane Broomhead

JB welcomed everyone to the 2024 AGM and Members' Day and explained that the format for the day would be different with less time on formal business and more on informative presentations, a move supported by Head Office.

JB first offered congratulations to Ken Orpe, Derbyshire Recorder, for all of his hard work, in conjunction with South Derbyshire District Council, for the Purple Emperor project which had been awarded an International Silver Green Apple Environmental Award. Ken had been instrumental in involving over 30 Landowners on more than 40 sites across Derbyshire to plant willows for the PE, and had been rewarded with the first Derbyshire PE sighting in July 2024.

JB gave an update regarding the Branch Committee. She confirmed that our long-standing Newsletter Editor, Eliot Taylor, had resigned from the committee due to serious ill health. Richard Jeffrey was then invited to give a brief update on Eliot's condition, and he commented on the generous financial support Eliot had provided for the Branch over many years. Everyone was asked to send Eliot their love. RJ then detailed the measures which had been put in place to produce a branch Autumn 2024 newsletter, albeit in a different format. He outlined the difficulties he had experienced, and hoped that it would be ready for circulation very soon.

JB confirmed that Jim Steele, long-standing Derbyshire Conservation Officer, had also resigned due to health issues, and Amy Ross had agreed to join the committee to replace him. JB also welcomed Nick Sparrow on to the committee as Gardening Expert, and invited a proposer and seconder from the floor for these two new appointments.

Proposed: Ken Orpe

Seconded: Richard Jeffrey

JB thanked other members of the committee for their hard work during the year: KO, Derbyshire Recorder, for his recording, weekly email updates, and other projects; RJ, Leicestershire & Rutland

Recorder, for his recording, work with Rhona Goddard and the Wildlife Trust to improve sites in Leicestershire and Rutland, and for producing the Autumn Newsletter; CM and MM for membership, field trips and helping at events; GA for publicity throughout the year; and MP for her impressive Clearwing work with various landowners, helping at events and attending numerous meetings. She asked the meeting to re-elect the committee en bloc.

Proposed: John Green

Seconded: Geof Adams

Lastly, JB explained that she had decided to stand down as Branch Organiser after this AGM, but would remain as Treasurer and Events Organiser. A plea was made for a new Chairperson whose main responsibility will be to attend zoom and face to face meetings with Head Office, and chair committee meetings and the AGM. Anyone interested was asked to see JB during the meeting.

JB gave an update on membership, provided by CM: there were currently 1869 individual branch members from 1349 households which was a drop of around 3% since last year. Nationally the membership stood at 40,477, again a fall since last November. The branch remained 10th largest by membership.

With regard to finance, at the end of September 2024 the branch had £17,592 in the bank. JB explained that a new system of administering branch finances was to be introduced by Head Office in April 2025, in part to recoup a shortfall in finances lost through more competition for sponsorship, grants etc. From April each branch would only be allocated an amount it had stated in advance it would need for the coming year. JB also stated that she had attended nine sales events during the year.

She closed by inviting everyone to enjoy the day's full programme of talks, free lunch, sales, and tombola, and pointed out that there were a few books from Barbara Overton's estate which had generously been left to BC for which donations were requested.

4 BUTTERFLY RECORDING – DERBYSHIRE - Ken & Pat Orpe

KO reported that weather conditions in 2024 had resulted in a disappointing year for butterflies, despite being confirmed as the warmest year on record. An increase of one-degree centigrade means 7% more moisture in the atmosphere so rainfall and flooding is more prevalent.

The early part of the year had been wet and cold and by the half way point butterfly numbers were already 50% down on those of 2023. The second half of the transect season had fared little better and only one heatwave was recorded during the summer of 2024. Only 40% of the transect walking season had recorded sunny weather, and overall butterfly numbers were down by on average 42% on transects and by 66% on the Wider Countryside Butterfly Surveys. The Big Butterfly Count was the lowest since the project began in 2009 – overall in the UK numbers were 33% down and in the East Midlands region numbers were down by 45%. The number of butterfly species had also declined at most sites in the region and it would take some time for species to recover – it had taken 7 years after the hot summer of 1976.

KO reported that hairstreaks, the blue family and Small Skippers were all badly affected; Wall numbers were down by 200%; and many larvae had perished due to fungal infections in the wet conditions.

There had been some more positive news in 2024:

- Peacock had done better than expected
- Speckled Wood, Ringlet & Meadow Brown had done OK but struggled at some sites in the county
- Some species had partial third broods in October 2024 – Holly Blue and Small Copper- there had been late September sightings of Wall as well

- Essex Skipper had finally arrived in the Buxton area 25 years after its first appearance in the south of the county
- Purple Emperor had finally arrived in Derbyshire 7 years after the first sighting in S W Leics. 40 organisations had planted salallows in late 2023
- New rules relating to a 2-metre buffer strip each side of hedges had come into force – no cultivation or fertilisers
- Hopefully neonicotinoids would become outlawed – 40,000 BC petition against their use had been submitted to the government

Although early indications that records from transects in 2024 were significantly down in numbers, those in lowland Derbyshire appeared to have fared worse than sites in the Peak District.

East Midlands transects totalled 206 in 2024 (Derbyshire 140, Nottinghamshire 29, Leicestershire 37), an increase of 11 since 2023. Figures had not yet been published from other regions to establish whether the branch was still leading the country, ahead of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. 500 volunteers were involved, walking a distance of 1.5 times round the world, with 350 of those carrying out transects in Derbyshire.

Online entry on the UKBMS site had been completed for more than 120 sites during 2024 by volunteers, and KO was looking for another 10 people to undertake direct entry next year.

Under the Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme, involving four surveys a year from May to August over a set route, all 15 sites had been walked with 57 of the 60 surveys completed in 2024.

A total of 20 butterfly banks had now been created in the county and most of the limestone (400 tonnes) had been provided free of charge by Longcliffe Quarries Ltd.

KO outlined the new Derbyshire Nature Recovery Strategy species list compiled by BC, Derbyshire County Council and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust:

- Dingy Skipper (110 sites in 2023) – mainly Peak District
- Grizzled Skipper (0 sites in 2023)
- Small Blue (0 sites in 2023)
- White Admiral (0 sites in 2023)
- White Letter Hairstreak (39 sites in 2023)
- Green Hairstreak (58 sites in 2023) – mainly Peak District
- Wall Brown (159 sites in 2023) – mainly Peak District
- Small Heath (153 sites in 2023) – mainly Peak District
- Brown Argus – P D R (35 sites in 2023) – Peak District Only
- Dark Green Fritillary (62 sites in 2023) – mainly Peak District
- Purple Emperor (0 sites in 2023)

KO clarified BC's stance on reintroductions and releases.

He summarised sightings at Hoe Grange Quarry NR where, like most sites in the County, there had been declines in 2024 and overall butterfly numbers were down by 31% against 2023. Both Dingy Skipper and Common Blue did really poorly, as did Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Wall and Small Heath. There had been no sightings of Dark Green or Silver Washed Fritillaries. On a more positive note, Peacocks had

staged a recovery and Ringlet and Gatekeeper held their own in 2024. Sightings of dragonflies had included Four Spotted Chaser (variation *praenubila*) and Banded Demoiselle at the Main Pond in 2024, bringing the total for the site to 18 species plus a variation.

KO concluded by confirming dates for transect training and butterfly ID on 16 March 2025 in Allestree, the possibility of another transect training session at Pleasley Pit in February 2025, and Hoe Grange Quarry Open Day on Sunday 6 July 2025 (50th anniversary of transect walking). KO also invited subscribers to his email newsletters for latest sightings and photographs, which currently had 1755 subscribers.

5 BUTTERFLY RECORDING - NOTTINGHAMSHIRE – Steve Mathers

(a pre-recorded video presentation was shown, summarised as follows:)

A review of 2024 ‘Butterfly Emergency – the Recent Evidence from Notts’

SM commented that it had been the lowest records total in the last five years, with approximately only 15,000 records, excluding the Big Butterfly Count. The cold wet spring had resulted in fewer butterflies, but it had not been an even picture across all species, and numbers of immigrants were also down. About half of the Notts resident species had done reasonably well, and Orange-tip appeared to have been unaffected, despite flying when weather conditions were poor.

SM reviewed the various butterfly groups:

- Nymphalids – resident species: Small Tortoiseshell was experiencing a steep decline, both locally and nationally, and reasons were not fully understood. Records of Comma and Peacock were not of too much concern. Purple Emperor, which had appeared in the county in the early 2020s, had been affected by various adverse weather conditions since then. Adults had been recorded at six sites in 2024.
- Nymphalids - migrants: numbers of Red Admiral and Painted Lady had returned to average, but Clouded Yellow had become very rare in Notts.
- Hairstreaks: Green Hairstreak was showing an increase in abundance and range, and numbers of Purple Hairstreak had increased, probably due to better recording. White-letter Hairstreak numbers had remained fairly constant with similar records made by the same recorders each year.
- Skippers: a lot of effort had been put into recording of Grizzled Skipper, but numbers were low, and although Dingy Skipper had expanded in numbers and range, it had a relatively poor year.
- Grassland Browns: most had a reasonable year since their flight periods did not coincide with the earlier poor weather. The exception was Small Heath, more of a habitat specialist, which had a worse year.
- Blues: Common Blue, Holly Blue, Brown Argus and Small Copper all recorded their lowest numbers in the last five years and were a cause for concern, records having previously built up year on year.

In summary, SM discussed the declaration of the ‘Butterfly Emergency’ by BC after the 2024 Big Butterfly Count. He agreed that 2024 had been a bad year overall, but butterflies were genetically strong and could bounce back. However, long-term trends were disturbing due to habitat loss, climate change and use of such things as neonicotinoids. He surmised that low numbers in 2024 could be attributable to wet conditions which resulted in larvae/pupae rotting, but not all species had suffered the same, as demonstrated by record numbers of Silver-studded Blues in Dorset.

He concluded by expressing concern that people were becoming exhausted and sceptical about too much negative newsfeed, and that the government didn’t appear to be taking any notice.

6 GRIZZLED SKIPPER PROJECT – Mark Searle

MS stated that a lot of habitat management work had been undertaken during the winter of 2023/24 and sites had looked good, but the bad weather in the early part of 2024 had led to a slower development rate due to waterlogged conditions, and therefore late emergence. Numbers recorded were down, and more significantly, sites had become overgrown due to the wet conditions, swamping many of the egg-laying sites.

On the East Leake former railway sites recordings had been down over the last ten years, but egg counts had proved that GS was still present.

The formal meeting closed at 10.35am.

After a coffee break, Gareth Jones, Countryside Manager for the National Trust at Clumber Park, gave an illustrated talk on the history of Clumber, its landscapes, heritage and ecology, including work on the re-introduction project of the Silver-studded Blue butterfly, and the future of the Park.

After lunch, Richard Jeffrey, Butterfly Recorder for Leicestershire and Rutland, gave a summary of 2024 records, followed by a presentation on the 'Leicestershire Nature Recovery Strategy'.

In his brief annual summary RJ gave details of the eight new transects which had been carried out for the first time in 2024, including Asfordby Hill, Cribb's Meadow and Launde Park Wood which importantly filled in gaps in the transect map to the east and north-east of Leicester. Despite having additional transects, more than 7,000 fewer butterflies had been recorded on transects in 2024. Ringlet appeared to have had a good year but numbers of Meadow Brown had dropped by almost half.

Butterfly Records received via iRecord & iNaturalist for 2024 totalled 12863, 14.3% down on 2023.

Notable sightings for 2024 were:

11 May	Wall	Lyndon NR, Rutland Water	First for 20 years
22 Jun	Black Hairstreak	Bloody Oaks Quarry (LRWT)	New Site
13 Jul	Purple Emperor	Croft Quarry Nature Trail	New Site

Local Nature Recovery Strategy – VC55 Priority Species

RJ commented that although BC had highlighted only Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper as Priority Species in the East Midlands, the LNRS for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland had identified eight species, and therefore more could be achieved for the key county species via the LNRS:

Grizzled Skipper	(classed as Endangered (EN))
Dingy Skipper	(EN)
Wall	(EN)
Black Hairstreak	(EN)
Small Heath	(classed as Vulnerable (VU))
White-letter Hairstreak	(VU)
Dark-green Fritillary	(VU)
White Admiral	(VU)

- Targeted habitat management was required for GS, DS, W, SH and DGF because they have specific requirements, and they would also benefit from joining up existing habitat.

- Both Hairstreaks required the creation of quality habitat, expansion of existing habitat and joining up of existing habitat.
- White Admiral needed a greater evidence base to establish distribution, to understand the reasons for its decline and the recovery actions required to halt the decline. Surveying of historical sites would be necessary to establish whether they were still suitable, and what remedial action was required.
- Wall had been recorded in the east of the county 3 times in the last 5 years, outside of its regular territory in the Charnwood area of NW Leics. It was most likely present in other areas but not recorded.
- Black Hairstreak and White Admiral were expanding their range naturally in neighbouring Northamptonshire, and this was likely to result in natural expansion into VC55, as evidenced by the record of BH at Bloody Oaks Quarry (LRWT) in 2024 for the first time.

RJ stressed that the LLR LNRS was a long-term project and it was vitally important that EMBC was involved at all times. He encouraged recorders to investigate areas close to known populations of the LNRS listed species, and also historical sites in order to increase the evidence base.

This was followed by a presentation on the Butterfly Conservation Lincolnshire Branch by Dr Ian Paterson, Branch Chair, which featured branch activities, its reserves, and specific projects relating to assessment of the status of Grizzled Skipper within the county, and habitat restoration for the Duke of Burgundy on the Grimsthorpe Estate.

The event concluded with an interesting selection of Members' photographs.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.

Christine Maughan