



Butterfly Conservation Friends of Bentley Station Meadow Butterfly Reserve

Newsletter –Spring 2007

Dates for your Diary

Walks: All walks begin from the Car Park at Bentley Station. (SU792 432). There is usually space to park in Station Road, alternatively pay in the Car Park. Leader Lynn Fomison.

Monday 7th May: “Spring Saunter”. Meet at 10:30am for a stroll to see spring flowers and butterflies. Kissing gates, but no stiles. Some wet areas. Children most welcome. Approximately two hours.

Tuesday 5th June. “Walk to Health”. Meet at 11am. The Alton Walk to Health group is visiting BSM on the first Tuesday of the month, up to and including 2nd October. Come and enjoy a leisurely stroll, interspersed with looking at nature.

Tuesday 3rd July. “Walk to Health”. Meet at 11am.

Saturday 21st July. “Save our Butterflies Week”
Meet at 10.30am. A leisurely, short walk at the reserve and a chance to learn more about the elusive Purple Emperor butterfly. Carry a small picnic with you to eat towards the end if you wish. Kissing gates but no stiles. This event marks the start of Save our Butterflies Week, the 21st - 31st July - see the web site for other events.

Tuesday 7th August. “Walk to Health”. Meet at 11am.

Thursday 16th August. “Sharing Nature with Children”. Meet at 10.30am for a leisurely short walk and butterfly games for children, and parents, at the reserve. Carry a small picnic with you to eat towards the end if you wish. Approximately two hours

Tuesday 4th September. “Walk to Health”.
Meet at 11am.

Tuesday 2nd October. “Walk to Health”. Meet at 11am.

For further information on any of the above events please contact Lynn Fomison on 01962 772251



“Walking to Health” in East Hampshire

Monthly walks at the reserve are a new venture for Butterfly Conservation as part of East Hants District Council's Walk to Health initiative, www.easthants.gov.uk/getactive

The aim of the programme is to provide short, safe and sociable walks for people. The walks are ideal for those individuals who want to meet new people, get to know their local area and benefit from gentle exercise. Our walks at BSM have the added attraction of the opportunity to see wild flowers and butterflies.



Problems with cycles

In the winter Lynn became aware that people were taking cycles through the reserve to get into the forest and on to a mountain bike track, which had been made illegally. Forest Enterprise was advised, the local police informed, and the problem seemed to stop.

However, sadly on Saturday 21st April a very keen and longstanding friend of the reserve had an undesirable encounter. She wrote to Lynn: “I was overtaken by two racing cyclists. It was a mercy that neither cannoned into a tree in order to avoid me otherwise they would have broken their necks. I shouted after them and then a stream of others came along but they had the decency to dismount and hear me tell them it was a **FOOT** path and how the SSSI could be damaged. They had expensive bikes and all the gear and may have been a club. Just to let you know that the cyclists were whizzing downhill from the top gate (Gaffney Cline end) to the station gate. I was roughly by the lone willow on the path when two of them shot over the hill, narrowly missing both me and the willow. These two failed to stop when I shouted at them but the other 5 or so did stop and seemed to understand the error of entering the SSSI”.

Lynn has contacted Natural England and is putting up a suitable notice to exclude cyclists. It is an offence to damage SSSIs. If you see anything untoward ring Lynn or the Police on 101.

Glow worms

Fans of Roald Dahl will remember that when James enters the giant peach the dark interior is lit in a most novel way 'Something that looked like a gigantic fly without wings was standing upside down upon its six legs in the middle of the ceiling and the tail end of this creature seemed to be literally on fire. A brilliant greenish light, as bright as the brightest bulb, was shining out of its tail and lighting up the whole room.' Fantastic! But in truth the real life of a Glow worm is probably more stunning than its portrayal in fiction.

What a thrill it is to see a Glow worm for the first time – hard to think that something natural can exude such an eerie light. A Glow worm is a beetle (*Lampyrus noctiluca*) and the vivid gleam is caused by a chemical reaction in a unique organ on the underside of the adult female's body. She is wingless and the purpose of the light is to attract males. At their visit to the Meadow on 12th July last year, Alton Naturalists Society was successful in attracting 4 male Glow worms with green neon lights. Dr David Lonsdale reported that some females were also seen by the tarmac track.

It should be possible to see Glow worms from mid-June to mid-July, usually between 10pm and midnight. They like places that provide a mosaic of short and long vegetation and one that is rich in Snails. As larva they attach to Slugs and Snails injecting them with poison through small bites until the victim becomes paralysed and starts to dissolve into a kind of mush. A larva may ride around in a Snail's shell waiting for the poison to work. As adults they do not feed and only live for a few weeks to mate. Find more information on Glow worms at www.glowworms.org.uk The site gives helpful observations on habitat management, suggesting that 'the best cutting regime is not to cut at all during the glowing season from the beginning of June till the middle or end of August. If cuts are vital they should be restricted to high cutting, so as not to expose the insects which will be down in the under storey. A certain amount of hay lying on the top is preferable to raking it up, which would probably disturb the glow worms. But what you have to avoid is cutting in wet weather which will produce a thick mat of clippings that even the most determined glow worm will find it difficult to climb through at night. The females may appear on footpaths and there is therefore a danger period during summer if the path is heavily used in the late evening while they are emerging to glow. There is not much that can be done about this other than getting people to walk in single file.

On an evening visit to the Meadow it is also worth visiting the station to see the moths around the lights there – and the bats that come to eat them!

In the Meadow

Lynn loves to receive observations in the Meadow, either by email or by transect walkers' notes on the weekly sheet. These details are so helpful in the compilation of the annual report.

The following is taken from a Report received from Dr June Chatfield.

Following a talk on mosses to the Farnham Museum Society on the 22nd February 2007, a field meeting was held on the 4th March at Bentley Station Meadow on the edge of Alice Holt Forest. Eleven stalwarts were undeterred by the unpromising damp start and later rain and rewarded by the discovery of 26 types of mosses and liverworts, with some additional material taken back for later identification under less challenging conditions.

The Meadow is a nature reserve of Butterfly Conservation (Hampshire & IoW Branch) and part of an SSSI. Leaflets on the reserve were handed out. It is managed under Countryside Stewardship and there is open access. Encroaching scrub has been cleared and winter cattle grazing introduced to maintain open grassy places rich in wild flowers and butterflies in summer. With the mosses, it is a reserve for all seasons. A good range of habitats exists for mosses and liverworts including grassland, anthills, tree trunks, stumps, log piles and clay banks to woodland and streams. Bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) were both plentiful and varied in species. Feather-mosses (about six species) were plentiful in the grass, especially the top Meadow near the reserve main entrance. Trunks of oaks, willow and elder provided anchorage for epiphytes: these included feather-mosses, cushion mosses and several types of succulent liverworts. Leaning trunks are often rather good as are those with water runnels: in the rain we were able to see the latter rather effectively! Clearance of scrub has allowed more light to reach the mosses and they do most of their growing in winter when it is wet. Various erect mosses were present on the clay soil, showing that bare ground is as important for them as it is for wild flowers and invertebrate life. Spore capsules were present on many of the mosses and one leafy liverwort and these were particularly attractive under the hand lens showing the intricate detail of the teeth at the mouth of the capsule.

Anyone interested in finding out more about mosses can visit the colorful website <http://rbg-web2.rbge.org.uk/bbs/bbs.htm> and enjoy browsing through 'moss of the month' and obtain help in getting started

Transect walker Sue Clark wrote: Had a 20-minute walk around BSM this morning, (15/3) looking very good. Birdsong lovely. 3 Chiff Chaff singing, 3 Goldfinch in and out of stream, Bullfinch male heard and seen, 2 Nuthatch calling, one looked to be excavating a hole up in oak but I couldn't see properly and didn't want to disturb it by getting closer. Chaffinch, Wren and Robin in full voice, Blue and Great Tits, Blackbird, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, 1 Cock Pheasant, 1 Roe Deer, 2 Rabbit along west field boundary. 2 Comma and 1 Red Admiral.

The male Pussy Willows seem to be producing a wonderful display everywhere.

On April 30th Mike Young photographed a wonderful Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth in the north end of the Meadow nectaring on Bugle - incidentally the Bugle is looking really spectacular this year! Mike also photographed a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly.

On 1st May Mike and Lynn saw a single Green Hairstreak near the leaflet box - a very welcome sighting. And we also heard a cuckoo!

Bees

If anyone is able to photograph bees the Bumble Bee Trust will identify them and record them on their map. www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk

The Meadow's Butterflies in 2006

Members will be able to read Lynn's full report in the Branch's 2006 Annual Report. BC members get a copy of this excellent book free each Spring. It gives loads of information on how the County's moths and butterflies are faring. But here are some 2006 highlights...

It is pleasing to report that most species of butterflies had a better year than 2005. The total number of butterflies seen - 1306 - being the fourth highest in fourteen years. Twenty-eight species were seen. Of these Small and Large Skipper both fared better than last year and the highest number of Brimstones ever was recorded - 24. Small Coppers were 22 compared with one last year! but are a long way off reaching their all time high of 42 in 1995. 40 Common Blues was a significant increase over recent years when they had slumped to a low of just 1 in 2001. It is likely they are benefiting from the areas we are keeping short by cutting. (These areas are also good for the Glow worms.) The best news is that Silver-washed Fritillaries were recorded at their second highest with 65 seen (only a couple less than the 1996 figure of 67). Although 2006 was a good year for Painted Ladies with 17 seen it was well below the 1996 all time high of 52, and the respectable

30 recorded in 2003. The Meadow butterflies continue to thrive with Ringlets holding at higher numbers than in the period 1993 to 1999 and Gatekeepers between 1993 and 2002. In the last two years Marbled Whites have had a better showing than in the period 1996 to 2004 and Meadow Browns fluctuate between 200 and 400 with 334 seen in 2006 - an average year.

2006 yielded the best ever sightings of Purple Emperors. Occasional White Admirals were seen, as were low numbers of Dark Green Fritillaries, Holly Blues, Brown Argus and Green and Purple Hairstreaks. The lowest of all - with just one sighting was ... Small Tortoiseshell.

Visitors can help us monitor the butterflies in the Meadow by reporting all sightings on our branch web site

Winter Management Work

It is pleasing to report that we got all the work done that we planned and that the reserve is looking in great shape. With funding from Natural England, under our Countryside Stewardship Scheme, we were able to employ a contractor to fell a number of trees and at a couple of volunteer work parties we cleared them up. We are also very grateful to Tony Anderson of the Blackwater Countryside Partnership who, on two occasions, tackled some of the brushcutting. On his second visit he was assisted by one of the partnership's volunteers, and they did a great job - cutting the brambles under the Oak trees and on the bank down to the stream. The area under the Oaks is coming on well with many violets growing there. It is the place to watch for female Silver-washed Fritillaries laying eggs on the tree trunks.

At a volunteer work party we also started tackling the very derelict Blackthorn at the northern end of the Meadow.

The cattle grazing went well and the spring flowers are looking really beautiful.

His Imperial Majesty

Radio 4's "Nature" programme caught up with Matthew Oates last summer tracking down Purple Emperors in a Northamptonshire Forest.

The programme started with a lovely quotation from Coleman (c1860) stating that the Purple Emperor was accorded the title "His Imperial Majesty" on account of his robe of purple; the lofty perch which he assumes; and the boldness and elevation of his flight. Add to that his growing number of loyal subjects, who really do worship this splendid butterfly, no other insect can deserve the title "His Imperial Majesty" so much!

2006 was a really good year in the Meadow with both males being seen congregating around some tall trees just over our boundary in Alice Holt Forest, and females seen egg laying on our Sallows. Matthew Oates and Patrick Fleet made these observations on 17th July. An account on the web site recorded a Purple Emperor being seen on 29th June and Lynn had fleeting glances on 4th July. Given that it is not an easy species to see, these sightings are very heartening. Our conservation work on caring for the Sallows is regarded as a priority task – the plan being to develop an uneven age structure.

Purple Emperors **are** seen every year in BSM and we hope that during July lots of you will be out looking and reporting your sightings.

Summer Work

Patrick Fleet will undertake the usual summer work of keeping the path around the butterfly transect cut. As well as making it safer for walkers, we find the butterflies like these shorter areas too. He will also tackle Bracken and Docks, and selective cutting of Nettles.

We plan to keep several areas of the Meadow mown again. This is helping to reduce Bramble and producing good habitat for Common Blue and Brown Argus to breed. This cutting also yields a few more flowers in the autumn

Weather

Lynn writes that she always seems to be looking at weather forecasts. Either to ascertain that winter work parties are going to have reasonable weather or – once Spring and Summer arrive – is the sun going to shine for butterfly watching on the many walks we hold?

Lynn is grateful to Janet Jones for telling her of the Met Office local weather web site www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/se/farnham_forecast_weather.html

You can choose Southampton to get a forecast appropriate for the reserves at Winchester

Promoting the Meadow

Last year we had a few opportunities locally to promote the Meadow, during the August Bank Holiday weekend at Bird World and, in September, at the Wildlife Gardening Weekend at Forest Lodge. The latter was really well organised by the Garden Centre. They had specially bought in lots of butterfly plants and we had a lot of visitors, both old friends and those showing a new interest in butterflies.

In October we had our tent at the Blackmoor Apple Day and used this as an opportunity to promote BSM as Butterfly Conservation's local reserve in the area.

We will be having a display at Bird World during the week of 13th to 17th August. Are you able to volunteer to spend a few hours with the display that week? Please contact Lynn if you can. Another way we promote the reserve, and indeed the work that Butterfly Conservation is doing to help butterflies and moths, is through Group Visits arranged under the Educational Access Provisions of our Countryside Stewardship Agreement.

A total of 20 public walks and group visits are planned for the Meadow this year. If you belong to a group that would like a guided visit please contact Lynn. The visits are free to the group, but we are able to claim grant income of £100 per visit.

Newsletter

Lynn has written much of this newsletter - apologies for any errors/omissions.

Items are welcomed from anyone who visits the Meadow. Please send any items for the Autumn 2007 Newsletter to Lynn by the 30th August 2007. Contact details in 'Bentley Station Meadow Who's Who'.

Bentley Station Meadow Who's Who

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Branch Website

<http://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk>

National Website

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