



**Butterfly Conservation
Friends of Yew Hill Butterfly
Reserve**

Dates for your Diary

Meet at end of Old Kennels Lane (SU451 269) near junction Port Lane/ Millers lane or join us on the Reserve.(SU 455 264).

Saturday 14th May 10.30pm (Approx 2.5 hours).
Butterflies for Beginners

To view the butterfly habitat, important butterfly larval foodplants in several different areas both on and adjoining Butterfly Conservation's Yew Hill Reserve with Reserves Officer Lynn Fomison.01962 772251. This walk is designed to help people who are wishing to develop their skills in identifying butterflies. **ALL WELCOME**

Wednesday, 15th June, Meet at 7.15pm (7.30pm on reserve by reservoir entrance) A relaxing summer stroll. (The orchids should be especially good at this time.) Leader Colin Matthews (01794 388272)

Friday 29th July Meet at 10.30am. Butterflies for all - One of the best times of year to enjoy the butterflies wild flowers and fine views at Yew Hill. Leader Colin Matthews, Lynn Fomison and others who help to run the reserve.

Wednesday 3rd August (With Upper Thames Branch) Meet at 2.30pm. A walk at a good time for Chalkhill Blues also to see the new field Hilltop. Leader Colin Matthews

Wednesday 17th August 10:30am "Sharing Nature with Children" - a leisurely short walk & butterfly games for parents and children 1 ½ hours duration. Carry a small picnic with you to eat towards the end if you wish. Leader Lynn Fomison



Newsletter Spring 2005

Conservation Work - Progress

We had a number of successful winter work parties so the reserve is reasonably clear of scrub. In addition derelict trees were cleared down the bridle path side in order to make room for seven disease resistant elm trees. These are **Ulmus LUTECE® Nanguen** and they were provided by Andrew Brookes as part of his ongoing project to encourage White Letter Hairstreaks.

A bit more about the trees.... They were bred in The Netherlands and have been propagated in France. They have been sold commercially since Autumn 2002 and these have come from a supplier in Herefordshire.

Trials Results in Hampshire: Impressive combination of hardiness and, away from poorly drained soils, rapid growth; no losses sustained at any site. Young trees at Great Fontley found hosting larvae of the Comma butterfly *Polygona c-album*, and the Grey Dagger moth *Acronicta psi*.

- Immune to DED
- Very hardy, tolerant of both summer drought and winter waterlogging
- Fast-growing on moderately- and well-drained soils
- Largely derived from European species
- Form bears strong resemblance to native elms
- Foliage almost identical to that of English Elm
- Wind resistant
- Available in UK as small [1m – 2m], inexpensive, bare-rooted trees

- Slow growth on heavy, wet soils

It is pleasing that a few new volunteers came along to Yew Hill in the past months.

Butterfly Transect

It is helpful if transect walkers wear the Butterfly and Moth monitoring badges that were provided as it enables members of the public to identify those people who are undertaking official duties at the site. Not got a badge? Contact Lynn. It is also helpful if people note moth & other wildlife sightings on back of transect form as reports can go in YH News. Or send Lynn an email.

If transect walkers (or any other walkers) become aware of a hazard on the transect that needs attention tell Lynn (or in her absence Brian)

On the hill

Tim Walker wrote

I walk through this reserve on a regular basis, usually too late to see butterflies, but often I note the occasional bird. Is it of interest to report these to you?

This evening (31 March) for instance there were 2 Jays and a Chiffchaff there and 2 Red-legged Partridge just beyond the eastern boundary.

On the 24/3, there was a male Yellowhammer and a male Wheatear there.

Earlier in the winter the hawthorns on the western edge were a gathering spot for roosting Redwings and Fieldfares.

Ivan adds... Overall we have had reported Blackcaps, Whitethroats, the Chiffchaff, Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Green Woodpecker, Great-Spotted Woodpecker, Buzzards, Sparrowhawks and Kestrels. Tim's report adds a few more species. Thank you.

We like to have news from visitors so please email Lynn or drop a note to Ivan.

A Comma or Two! Maurice Moss

The appearance of a flash of bright orange-brown, early in the year in the garden, is a welcome sign of spring and is usually an especially active butterfly called the comma, known to biologists as *Polygonia c-album*. The first appeared in our own garden at the end of March having hibernated on a tree trunk, or under a branch, right through the winter. With the jagged edge of the wing, and their beautifully camouflaged colouring when they close their wings, the comma butterfly looks just like a dead leaf. They make no attempt to hide during the winter but you will be very lucky if you spot one. It seems amazing that they can sit it out through our winter, although they usually choose a sheltered spot to settle. To add to the camouflage there is a white 'comma' shaped mark on the underside of the hind wing which looks a bit like a hole in a dead leaf.

The top surface of the wing is a rich orange-brown with a pattern of darker markings and the butterfly is very visible once it has emerged from hibernation and starts to fly. Once they have mated the female sets about laying eggs, usually singly, on the appropriate food plant for the caterpillar. Believe it or not, many butterflies, including the comma, can 'taste' with their feet and the female carefully checks that she is on the right plant before laying an egg. The most popular plant is the nettle, but they will use hop, redcurrant, elm and willow. In fact, there has been an interesting change in the natural history of this species over the last two centuries. In nineteenth century books the main food plant was always given as the hop and, indeed, it was considered to be a serious pest in hop-growing areas. The almost complete disappearance of the

species in Kent, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was considered to be due to the increased burning of hop-vines after the harvest with the destruction of many caterpillars and pupae.

Emma Sarah Hutchinson (1820-1906) lived in Herefordshire for most of her life. She was married to the Vicar of Grantsfield, near Kimbolton, and became intensely interested in butterflies and moths after her 5-year old son caught a swallow-tail moth (not to be confused with the butterfly of the same name). She was especially devoted to the comma butterfly and it is said that she bribed the hop-growers to collect larvae and pupae for her so that she could breed them in safety and release the adult butterflies back into the wild. She is remembered today in the scientific name of the summer form of the comma butterfly, *Polygonia c-album* form *hutchinsoni*. There was a time during the twentieth century when the comma was a rare British species, confined to the southern counties, but it has been increasing in numbers, now feeding mainly on nettle, and spreading north. Today it occurs throughout England and Wales but is virtually unknown in Scotland and Ireland. The few specimens recently seen in Scotland were the first for 130 years and it may be that the species will re-establish itself there.

The comma has a complex pattern of generations. The eggs of females that have overwintered may develop into two types of caterpillar. A proportion feed rapidly and develop quickly into an early summer brood of adults (these are the form *hutchinsoni*). These mate in the summer and produce a second generation of adults in August and September. The slower growing caterpillars give rise to adults in late July which do not mate until the following year.

This unusual behaviour means that we may see these attractive butterflies on the wing from March right through until September.

Lynn adds "Maurice visited Yew Hill last summer with The Querkett Microscopical Club, was impressed with our reserve and sent me this article" and goes on " Very few Commas were seen on transect last year – 3 in comparison with 24 at Bentley, showing maybe that this is a butterfly that really does prefer a setting with plenty of trees and bushes.

The 'Butterflies of Hampshire' indicates that there were no Hampshire records of this species from 1886 to 1919 but by 1926 it was common again at various locations. The aforementioned book is a brilliant source of information about our local butterflies & no dedicated enthusiast should be without it!"

Footnote Brian Fletcher saw a Comma on transect on 20th April.

Grazing and other grassland management

The grazing went well with only one escapee!! We are very grateful to Penny Furlong for checking

the cattle daily and also her neighbour Cathy who has helped out on occasions too. Also the many people who walk dogs there and keep a friendly and caring eye on everything for us. Thank you all!

The fencing around Hilltop has been significantly improved by C&S Fencing and some minor repairs carried out around the rest of the reserve. This included the installation of a much better notice board.

We are planning to continue cutting some smallish areas of grass through the summer again as we did last year as this seems to be working well in controlling bramble and other nuisance weeds.

Newsletter

This newsletter has been written mainly by Ivan & Lynn. Apologies for any errors/omissions. Items welcomed from you – it all helps to make the newsletter interesting and informative. Please send any items for the Autumn Newsletter to Ivan or to Lynn by 1st September 2005.

Distribution List

If you are receiving this newsletter by post but have an email address please let us know as sending by email saves money and time. Thank you.

An invitation

Members will have had their April newsletter detailing field trips but non members are welcome too and might like to come along to some of these:-

Monday 2nd May **BENTLEY STATION MEADOW BUTTERFLY RESERVE** - Meet at 10.30am for a stroll through the reserve owned by Butterfly Conservation and in adjoining woodland. Guided walk looking at spring butterflies, flowers and tree-lore. Children most welcome. Meet in Car Park at Bentley Station (SU792 432).

(Approximately 1 ½ hours) Leader Lynn Fomison (01962 772251)

Thursday 5th May **Stockbridge Marsh** - Leader: Peter Gardner (01730 827488). Meet 1.30pm in National Trust CP (The Lions Den at SU357346). From Winchester take the B3049 to Stockbridge; at roundabout take A3057, then small road on right to Marsh Court, CP is on right. OS Map, Winchester No. 185.

Saturday 14th May **Abbotstone Down** - Leader: Patrick Fleet (01256 398471). Meet 1.30pm in Abbotstone Down CP (SU582362). Take the B3046 New Alresford to Swarraton road. OS Map Winchester No. 185

Sunday 15th May **New Forest - Inclosures near Brockenhurst** - Leader: David Green. Meet 10.30am at Standing Hat Forestry Commission CP

(SU314035). Take the A337 Lyndhurst/Brockenhurst road; at Balmer Lawn turn left onto the B3055, then left on track to CP. OS Map Solent No. 196.

Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and an introduction to butterfly recording. We would be particularly pleased to meet up with anyone new to the Society or just starting to record butterflies. Come along to this meeting and find out how you can help us make best use of your sightings to further the conservation of our butterflies.

Wednesday 18th May **Portsdown Hill** - Leader: Richard Jones (02392 389623). Meet 1.30pm and park car at junction (roundabout) of Portsdown Hill Road and Southwick Road (at SU647066). OS Map Solent No. 196

Saturday 21st May **New Forest, Pignal Inclosure** - Leader: John Ruppertsbery (023 8066 3492). Meet 10.30am in Standing Hat CP at SU314035 on OS Map Solent No.196

Sunday 22nd May **Bentley Wood** - Leader: Ashley Whitlock (023 9273 1266). Meet 10.30am in main CP along gravel track off main Middle Winterslow road. Wear stout walking boots and take lunch. Grid Reference SU235283 on OS map Salisbury No.184.

Yew Hill Who's Who

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Branch web site

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

National Web site www.butterfly-conservation.org

PS Ivan recently received a donation of £20 for which BC is very grateful – Ivan suggests the donor pop in for a chat.