



Butterfly  
Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

# The Suffolk Argus



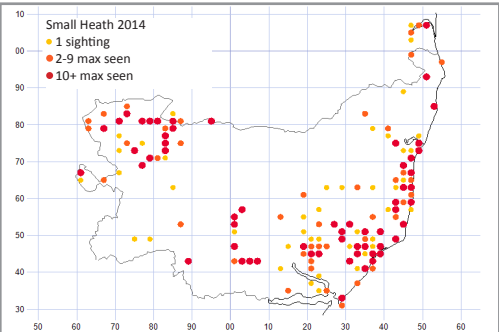
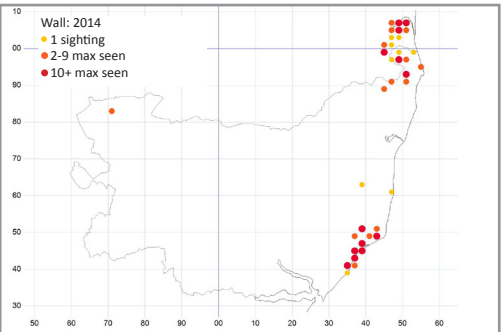
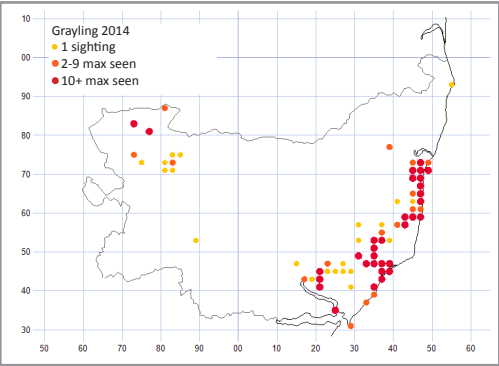
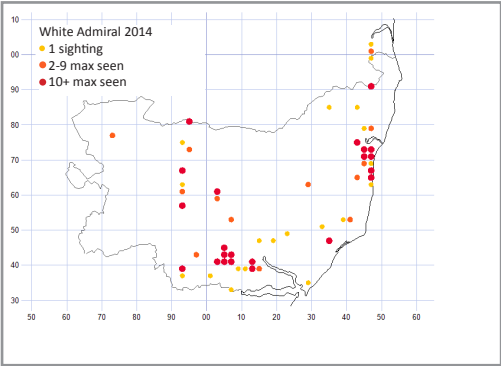
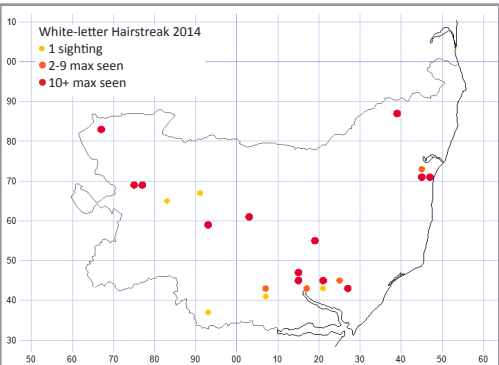
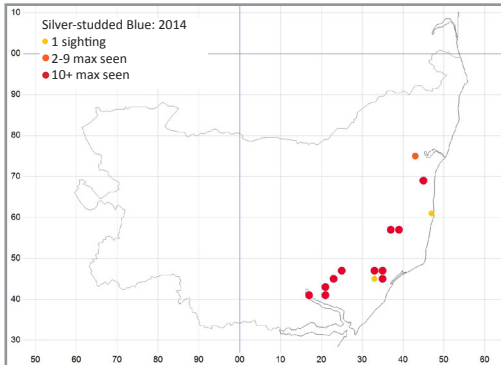
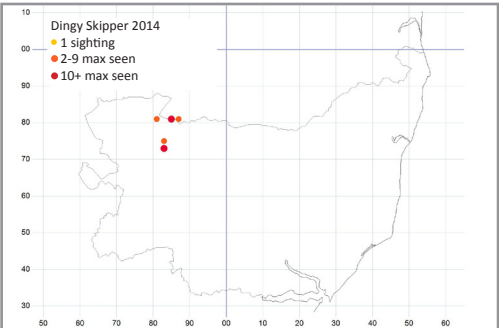
*The Newsletter of the **Suffolk** Branch of Butterfly Conservation*

Small Tortoiseshell on nectar-rich Erysimum 'Bowles Mauve' photo Bill Stone



2014 Butterfly Report

Distribution of Suffolk's  
seven BAP species  
(Pages 11-14)



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## Editorial

*Peter Maddison*

When this newsletter drops onto your doormat or Inbox our high summer butterflies will be emerging. Skippers, Browns, Blues, Admirals, Tortoiseshells, and more will be filling the air. I hope they will be filling our notebooks and phone apps too. Recording what we have and comparing annual results indicates how our butterflies are faring and determines future conservation measures. In this issue we have the Butterfly Report for 2014, made possible because people took the trouble to record. 26,500 records were received by Bill Stone who, quite magnificently, collated them and, together with Rob Parker, produced the report.

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This year there will be a Photographic Competition, with judging to take place at

the AGM. Details of both the competition and the new venue for the AGM are within these pages.

The Suffolk Argus is available online. If at present you receive a hard copy and would like to view the online version contact Sue Sidle, who will forward you a link to the site. [susansidle361@gmail.com](mailto:susansidle361@gmail.com)

Do we have your email address?

It will help us to communicate changes to events and Branch news if we have your email address.

Please email your name to [myemail@suffolkbutterflies.org.uk](mailto:myemail@suffolkbutterflies.org.uk) using your normal email address and 'Email Address' as the subject.

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Butterfly Conservation

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## New Members

*Susan Sidle, Branch Membership Secretary*

The following new members are warmly welcomed to the Suffolk Branch

Mrs L Andrews & Mr S Moore & Family, Lowestoft	Mrs R & Mr L Nicholls, Upper Layham
Miss J Carter, Felixstowe	Ms C Prendergast, Merton
Miss K M Charlton, Stowmarket	Mr C Sampson-Bancroft, Stowmarket
Mrs L & Mr S Crick & Family, Bury St Edmunds	Mr M D Smith, Glemsford
Mr R Crozier, Needham Market	Mrs S L & Mr D W South, Lawford
Mr H M & Mrs S Faull, Coggeshall	Mr C A Stadler, Ipswich
Mr P Jackson, Bungay	Mr P J Steer, Halesworth
Mr R Kitchener, Ipswich	Mrs D Todd, Bury St Edmunds
Mrs A & Mr R Martin & Family, Blundeston	Ms H Waters, Ipswich
Mr B Mattock, Rendlesham Forest	Miss S Wood, Leiston
Mrs M & Mr D Nicholls, Monks Eleigh	

In addition to Butterfly Conservation's Welcome Pack, all new members (including those just new to Suffolk branch) should have received a Welcome Letter from me as Membership Secretary by email or through the post. If you don't think you have received your branch Welcome Letter, please let me know.

We look forward to meeting some of you in the season ahead.

*Contact details for Susan Sidle: [susansidle361@gmail.com](mailto:susansidle361@gmail.com) or 01379 643665.*

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## Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey

Three new WCBS squares are available for surveying once in July and once in August this year.

Grid Ref	Parish	Post Code
TL9479	Coney Weston	IP31 1HL
TL9577	Coney Weston	IP31 1DL
TM5195	Flixton, Lowestoft	NR32 5PB

If you would like to survey one of these squares email our WCBS co-ordinator, Twm Wade [twm.wade@yahoo.com](mailto:twm.wade@yahoo.com)

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## Editorial copy date

Contributions for the Autumn edition of our newsletter are very welcome and should be sent to the Editor, Peter Maddison, no later than **Sunday 27th Sept, 2015**.

Any piece of writing considered to be of interest will be published and we also welcome line drawings, prints

and photographs.

Contributions (preferably electronic) can be sent to the address on the Contacts page or by email to: [prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk)

## 2014 Butterfly Report

*Bill Stone and Rob Parker*

### Summary

Like a lot of you I had great hopes for a great Suffolk butterfly year in 2014. With the previous year allowing a lot of species to recover after the disastrous 2012 my fingers were firmly crossed for another year of all round improvements in numbers and sustainability. However, although it was a relatively settled year weather-wise, most species failed to show significant recoveries and the long term trend is still a concerning one.

**Overview of the UK weather in 2014** All months except August were warmer than average, and this was the warmest year on record for the UK. It was also wetter than average for many locations, particularly south-east England and eastern Scotland. The most extreme weather events of the year were the winter storms of January and February, which brought damaging winds, with inland and coastal flooding. In comparison, the rest of the year was relatively quiet. Summer 2014 brought some fine weather - particularly in June and July. There were no major heat-waves but several instances of torrential summer downpours causing localised flash-flooding, for example across parts of England on 19th

to 20th July. On 10th August ex-hurricane Bertha brought strong winds, heavy rain and flooding to north-east Scotland and a major winter storm affected the north of the UK in early December.

The UK mean temperature for 2014 was 9.9 °C, 1.1 °C above the 1981-2010 long-term average and the warmest year in the UK series, ahead of 2006 (9.7 °C). This means that the eight warmest years in this series have all occurred since 2002. It was the warmest year for all countries and climate districts except Northern Ireland where it was third warmest behind 2007 and 2006. It was also marginally the warmest year on record in the CET series from 1659, just ahead of 2006. While all months except August were warmer than average, none was record-breaking. The number of air frosts for the UK was provisionally lowest in a series from 1961.

The UK rainfall total for 2014 was 1297 mm, 112% of the 1981-2010 average and the fourth wettest year in the UK series from 1910, behind 2012, 2000 and 1954. This means that five of the six wettest years in this series have occurred since 2000. No individual regions had their wettest year on record but for Scotland and south-east

**2014 Weather for East Anglia**

Season	Mean Temp	Anomaly	Sunshine	Anomaly	Rainfall	Anomaly
	Deg C	Deg C	hrs	%	mm	%
Winter 13/14	6.1	1.8	229.9	123	234.9	159
Spring	10.6	1.6	500.00	107	134.4	98
Summer	16.7	0.4	643.6	109	192.7	120
Autumn	12.6	1.7	302.6	93	183.6	102
Source: <a href="http://www.metoffice.gov.uk">www.metoffice.gov.uk</a>						
Anomalies are measured against the 1981-2010 averages.						

England 2014 was the third-wettest year. A large contribution to the high annual rainfall total came from very wet weather in January and February. May, October and November were also wetter than average and August was especially wet across Northern Scotland. However, most other months were drier than average in most areas, and September was the driest in the series from 1910 for the UK.

2014 was a sunnier than average year for most areas, but not exceptionally so. Sunshine amounts varied regionally but in general March, July and December were notably sunny months whereas May and October were rather dull.

### **Residents - Winners & Losers**

Our familiar species such as Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell all appeared to have had a reasonable year with these species seen in good numbers throughout the year. The mild spring also helped our early butterflies and Orange-tip, Green-veined White and Green Hairstreak appeared to have done well. Single brooded grassland butterflies such as Meadow Brown and Ringlet started very well but were then hit hard when the weather changed dramatically in August and they effectively had their flight periods stopped. The August "blip" also nudged a number of species into early hibernation and the amount of butterflies on the wing plunged considerably. Woodland favourites such as Purple Hairstreak, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary appeared early, emergence no doubt encouraged by the warm May/June period. The warm September/October period also encouraged the woodland butterflies to remain on the wing and rare second broods were noted leading to a number of latest dates being

recorded as commented below.

### **Early & Late**

The mild winter meant that a lot of butterflies started to appear early from their hibernation and a Brimstone seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> January became our earliest ever (previously 7<sup>th</sup> January). The traditional spring-time species also appeared earlier than usual and new earliest dates were recorded for Orange-tip on 9<sup>th</sup> March (previously 23<sup>rd</sup> March) and Speckled Wood on 12<sup>th</sup> March (previously 26<sup>th</sup> March). Of note, a new earliest date for Large White was recorded via the BTO Garden Butterfly Survey on the 16<sup>th</sup> February (previously 18<sup>th</sup> March) but perhaps the most bizarre earliest record was that of a Gatekeeper recorded on 20<sup>th</sup> March at Sutton Heath. The previous earliest date for this species was on the 10<sup>th</sup> June. Not wanting to be left out, Meadow Brown also appeared very early across the county. One seen on the 14<sup>th</sup> April beat the previous earliest date of 5<sup>th</sup> May by several weeks. A number of our traditional summer species were also on the wing early no doubt due to the fine June weather. Four of them achieved their earliest recorded dates; White Admiral 6<sup>th</sup> June (previously 7<sup>th</sup> June), Grayling 12<sup>th</sup> June (previously 21<sup>st</sup> June), Silver-washed Fritillary 14<sup>th</sup> June (previously 20<sup>th</sup> June) and Purple Emperor on 23<sup>rd</sup> June (previously 30<sup>th</sup> June).

With both Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral on the wing so early and enjoying a fine summer it was no surprise to see evidence of a second brood. As such, late appearing individuals extended the dates for both species with Silver-washed Fritillary seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> October (previously 26<sup>th</sup> August) and White Admiral on 17<sup>th</sup> October (previously 11<sup>th</sup> October). Both Green and



Purple Hairstreak were also recorded flying late in comparison to previous years. As such, a Green Hairstreak seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> July became a new latest date (previously 20<sup>th</sup> July) and a Purple Hairstreak flying on 15<sup>th</sup> September become the new latest date for this species (previously 8<sup>th</sup> September).

### **Migrants**

The year started well, with a **Large Tortoiseshell** being found at Peewit Hill, Felixstowe on 10<sup>th</sup> March. Despite the weather being unsettled the butterfly lingered with the last sighting reported on 13<sup>th</sup> March. Normally, a sighting of a Large Tortoiseshell would stand out as a butterfly of the year, however, no one could have predicted what would happen later in the year.

In 2013, Suffolk played a role in what was referred to as the “butterfly event of the decade” with the arrival of Long-tailed Blue butterflies along the south-east coast of England. Therefore, in 2014 it was incredible to see Suffolk involved again in what was described as a “European butterfly phenomenon”. The butterfly in question this time was the **Scarce Tortoiseshell** (*Nymphalis xanthomelas*), also known as Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell. The range of this butterfly is localised to suitable habitat in central and Eastern Europe. However, reports via social media in June/ July 2014 identified that this butterfly was being seen in good numbers throughout Scandinavia and the low countries of Europe. Therefore, it appeared that there was a good chance of it heading east towards the UK.

Incredibly, on the 14<sup>th</sup> July two butterflies were found in Suffolk. One was at RSPB Minsmere and the other at Burgh Castle.

Both were photographed and videoed and the identification confirmed. Interestingly, others were recorded locally in Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex as well as further afield in Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire and, inland as far as Rutland. This is a butterfly that hibernates early and, therefore, it is hoped that some of those seen in 2014 will re-appear in the spring of 2015. (*At the time of writing this report at least three Scarce Tortoiseshells have been reported in Suffolk in 2015*).

Two records for **Swallowtail** were received during the year. On 17<sup>th</sup> July, a Swallowtail was recorded flying in a Crowfield garden and photographs taken suggest this was one of the continental race *P. m. gorganus*. The second record concerned a caterpillar found at Walberswick on 18<sup>th</sup> July. It's difficult to say with certainty where this came from as it could have been the offspring from a wandering female from the Norfolk population, a continental butterfly or perhaps a local release.

Another rare butterfly in the form of a **Queen of Spain Fritillary** was seen in a private garden at North Warren on 9<sup>th</sup> August and again on 11<sup>th</sup> August. Of interest, the butterfly was identified after the recorder held up a copy of Richard Stewart's book the “Millennium Atlas of Suffolk Butterflies” alongside it and compared the book's front cover to the butterfly!

Both **Clouded Yellow** and **Painted Lady** were reported throughout the year but numbers were well down on 2013. Some good double figure counts of Clouded Yellow were still made with a highest count of 45 being made on 31<sup>st</sup> July at East Lane near Bawdsey. The **Red Admiral** enjoyed



a very good year and numbers increased considerably through May until September, probably as a result of inward migration as well as successful localised breeding. Good counts were noted on the coast at key watch points in late September and October and suggested return migration to the continent. Of interest was a Red Admiral seen from a passenger ferry on 15<sup>th</sup> October flying strongly south approximately 11km off shore from Felixstowe (Suffolk Argus Vol. 62, p10 refers).

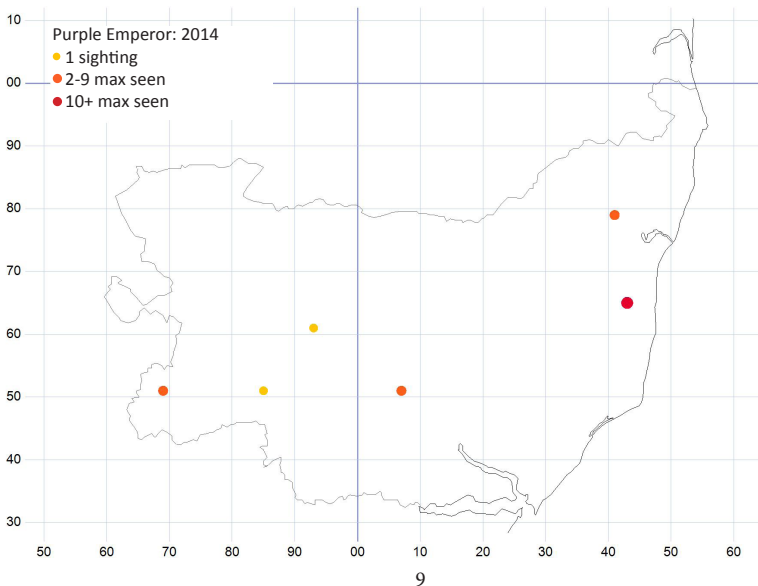
### Other species of interest

The **Chalkhill Blue** site in the west of the county was closely monitored and the table reveals the results of counts undertaken.

Date	Male	Female
15 <sup>th</sup> July	12	0
2 <sup>nd</sup> August	37	5
9 <sup>th</sup> August	94	17
31 <sup>st</sup> August	18	3
7 <sup>th</sup> September	4	2

Based on these results the colony appears to be self-sustaining and worthy of an ongoing monitoring effort. No other records were received in the year but it is highly likely that small pockets of this species exist in suitable chalk land habitat especially if the larval host plant, horseshoe vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) can be found.

Increased awareness of the **Purple Emperor** in the county brought about by the work of Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton and Suffolk Butterfly Conservation's Purple Project did help the number of sightings of this incredible butterfly to increase slightly. As seen in previous years the majority of records related to the introduced colony at Theberton Woods but records were also received from woodlands in the north-east of the county, woods near Bury St Edmunds and in the south-west corner of the county. The map below shows the locations of records for 2014. I am still of the opinion that this butterfly exists, albeit in small numbers, throughout the county in suitable



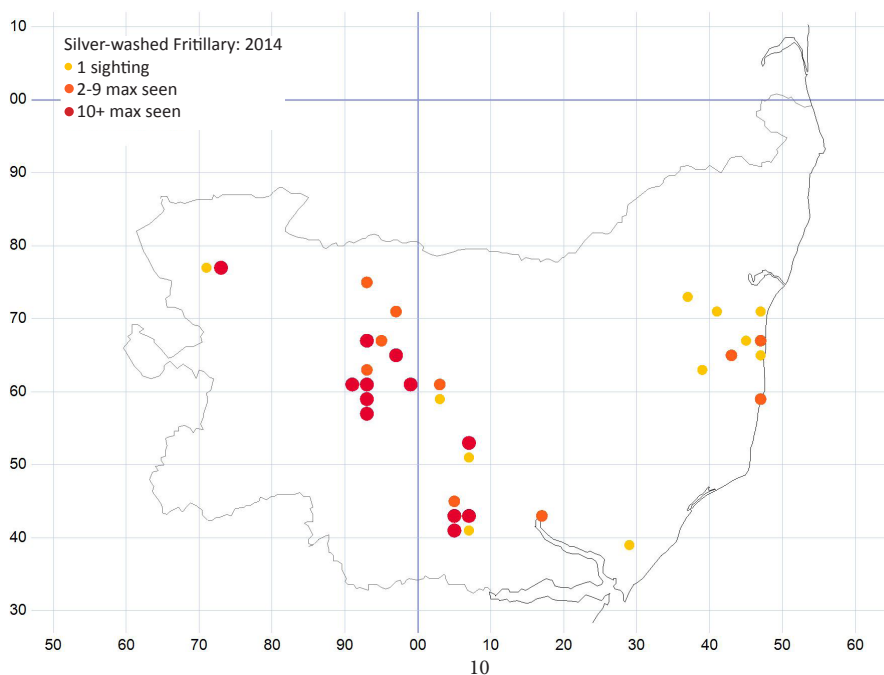
woodlands. However, it remains a difficult butterfly to see and a thorough understanding of its life cycle and behaviour is required to maximize the chance of a sighting.

The **Silver-washed Fritillary** maintained its hold in the county with some good counts received from a number of woodland sites. The highest count was of 50 on 20<sup>th</sup> July in woodlands near Hintlesham, a number of other sites reported 30+ individuals. Its spread in 2014 continued albeit at a much slower pace than seen in previous years with records coming from only two new tetrads. That said it was still present in 33 tetrads as compared to the 31 in 2013. It appeared early in the year and seemed to have a good breeding season until the harsh weather hit in August. However, a partial second brood was noted which generated a new latest date for the species in the county. The map below shows the locations of records received.

Only one west Suffolk record was received for **Marbled White** and involved a singleton in Denston in July. A Marbled White seen flying in Abbey Grove, Felixstowe on 24<sup>th</sup> April was a very odd record and must surely relate to a home-bred release. Elsewhere, the species was again seen at the central Ipswich site flying from late June into late July but in noticeably lower numbers than last year. The butterfly was also recorded in small numbers at another site close by but it is unknown if this was by natural expansion or by deliberate intervention.

### Unusual Species

The year turned out to be an “interesting” one in respect of unusual and odd species seen in the county with the following being of particular note. A **High Brown Fritillary** (*Argynnis adippe*) was found on 19th July 2014, nectaring on coastal buddleja at Landguard Common, Felixstowe. Photos



were taken and confirmed it was a male and in reasonably good condition. The butterfly did not linger and was not seen again. High Brown Fritillary has not occurred in Suffolk since the late 1950's and I undertook a number of enquiries to try and ascertain the likelihood of it being a true migrant from the continent. Contact with Chris Van Swaay of Dutch Butterfly Conservation revealed that although High Brown Fritillary does not occur in Holland some immigrants from surrounding countries have been recorded. Good populations exist in the Ardennes, Belgium and in eastern Germany. No references could be found for High Brown Fritillary migration and especially crossing large areas of water. Contact with UK Butterfly Recorders who have High Brown Fritillary breeding in their counties failed to reveal any noticeable movements of the butterfly in 2014 or any previous years. Indeed some commented how localised and restricted the butterfly was to its sites. Online research, however, does indicate that the larvae of this species were available to buy for home rearing purposes in 2014 and it's likely that a deliberate or accidental release may account for this sighting. A **Cleopatra** (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*) was seen on farm land near Hadleigh in early August and was apparently present on and off for a week nectaring and defending a rank clover patch against other butterflies. Although widespread throughout southern Europe this species is not considered migratory so I can only assume that it was a release or escape from a private collection. Also in August, a number of records and accompanying photographs were received from the Felixstowe and Bawdsey areas of "black" Swallowtails. Closer scrutiny suggests the butterflies to be from North America and

either **Ozark Swallowtail** (*Papilio joanae*) or **Black Swallowtail** (*Papilio polyxenes*). Black Swallowtail is a popular butterfly for home rearing so again, I can only assume these were released or escaped from a local private collection.

## Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan - Priority Species

Seven species of butterfly occurring in Suffolk are deemed as UK BAP priority species. These are Dingy Skipper, Silver-studded Blue, White-letter Hairstreak, White Admiral, Grayling, Wall and Small Heath.

(Distribution maps are shown on Page 2, the inside page of the front cover.)

See also <http://www.suffolkbiodiversity.org/biodiversity-action-plans.aspx>

## Dingy Skipper

Despite the strong season enjoyed by this species in the previous year, 2014 failed to show significant expansion or an increase in numbers. As such it remains a very vulnerable butterfly in need of continuous monitoring and conservation effort. It remains present across a wide area of the eastern King's Forest and in the Thetford Heath area extending east to RAF Barnham and west to Elveden Center Parcs.

It was first recorded on the 9<sup>th</sup> May and the last record received was on the 8<sup>th</sup> June suggesting a flight season of just over a month in total. As noted in 2013, the flowering period of the Bird's-foot Trefoil was later than normal so it appears that emergence is no longer coinciding with its key larval food plant. The resulting distribution map shows Dingy Skipper in 5 tetrads, which is 2 down

on 2013.

### **2014 Survey**

As with many butterfly surveys, chosen dates to undertake counts, do not necessarily coincide with ideal weather and peak flying periods. The Suffolk Breckland population normally flies 10-14 days after those first seen in Cambridgeshire along the Devils Dyke. In 2014, searches commenced on 9<sup>th</sup> May which resulted in butterflies being seen in the eastern Kings Forest. The main Kings Forest survey took place on 14<sup>th</sup> May resulting in a respectable number of butterflies being found. The survey also reinforced what was noted in 2013 in that the flight area was still biased towards the eastern edge of the forest. The Wordwell ride, in the south east corner of the forest, provided almost a third of the numbers seen and continued to show the benefits of the ride widening work undertaken.

Over the following weeks further searches were undertaken by a number of dedicated individuals of the Thetford Heath area, Elveden Center Parcs and RAF Barnham with variable results. On a positive note, the presence of the butterfly in these areas does provide some confidence for its future survival in the Suffolk Breckland.

### **Silver-studded Blue**

With 2013 being a relatively good year for this species, it was hoped that 2014 would support continued improvement and population growth. However, it did appear to be a frustrating year for this butterfly with many observers expressing disappointment as to low numbers. The first sighting was on 3<sup>rd</sup> June at Blaxhall Common with the last sighting of a very late female on 25<sup>th</sup>

September at Black Heath. This year the butterfly was recorded in 14 tetrads as shown in the map.

### **Results of Annual Count**

This year, a total of 29 out of 44 sites were counted, with 2786 butterflies being recorded. When compared to the “datum year” of 2006 where 5470 butterflies were counted this returns a very disappointing figure of only 51%. Due to a change in RSPB priorities, no staff time can now be used for monitoring Silver-studded Blue populations. As a direct result, 12 of the Minsmere sites were not counted (including 2 strong colonies). This played a significant part in producing the low overall count. Three other sites returned counts of nil including the apparent lost colony of Walberswick.

Some positive news was received from Purdis Heath where the efforts of local volunteers appear to have supported a slight increase in numbers compared to last year’s count. In addition, the local Ransomes CWS site also showed a marginal increase and a small number of Silver-studded Blues were recorded at a new site at Pipers Vale. It is thought the butterfly may have been brought in with heather strewing.

Unfortunately, the RSPB decision at Minsmere looks like being permanent, so arrangements have been made to create two single-species transects as a method of sampling the overall numbers in the Minsmere colonies. This will take effect from 2015 onwards, in place of the traditional 100% annual count at population peak.

## White-letter Hairstreak

The White-letter Hairstreak is a troublesome butterfly for recording purposes. Seeing the butterfly and accurately addressing the population of this species is difficult due to it invariably flying in the canopy of elms and neighbouring trees. It can also roam wide areas utilising elm hidden amongst roadside hedgerows. It is, therefore, difficult to count away from known sites where established viewing positions are normally used. Identifying additional sites is important for the future assessment of this species. Looking for elms in the spring is a useful method, as they often get lost amongst other more dominant trees as the canopy develops. These sites can then be recorded and returned to in the summer for accurate monitoring.

In respect of 2014, this butterfly was recorded in 22 tetrads, a drop of 3 on last year's figures. The last five-year period (2010-2014) shows it present in 81 tetrads. It was first seen on 20<sup>th</sup> June at Bury St Edmunds Golf Club and last recorded on 30<sup>th</sup> July at sites in both the east and west of the county. The highest number recorded was 10 at Cavenham on 26<sup>th</sup> June although several near double figure counts were made during the flight period. However, the records received this year do suggest a small drop in numbers. Of note, the UKBMS 10 year trend for this species is a worrying 77% fall in abundance and the 2013-2014 comparison identifies an 18% fall. In Suffolk, the records received for 2014 are widespread, as can be seen from the distribution map.

## White Admiral

The White Admiral appeared to have a good year in Suffolk being recorded in 55 tetrads, an increase of 4 on last year's total of 51. Scrutiny of the records received suggests the additional tetrads indicate short distance expansion on established sites which is very positive. The last five-year period 2010-2014 shows that the butterfly has been recorded in 113 tetrads.

It appeared early as did a number of the summer woodland species and a new earliest recorded date was set with an individual being seen during a bird-ringing session on 6<sup>th</sup> June in RSPB Wolves Wood. Numerous double figure counts were received with the highest count of 35 being made on 24<sup>th</sup> June in Bradfield Woods. Many records were received from June right through to mid August where there appeared to be a definite finish to the season perhaps coinciding with the unpleasant weather experienced. A small second generation was then noted with sightings again being reported from 13<sup>th</sup> September through to 17<sup>th</sup> October. This last sighting was made in Framlingham and was a new latest date for the county. On the distribution map for White Admiral it is interesting to note the very few records from the west of the county.

## Grayling

Thankfully, the Grayling appeared to have enjoyed a good year in Suffolk being recorded in 70 tetrads, an increase of 11 on last year's total of 59. The fine weather encouraged it on to the wing early and the first of the season was recorded on 12<sup>th</sup> June at Blaxhall Common. This also constituted

a new earliest date. It then appeared in good numbers throughout late June, July and August with some excellent counts being made including a highest count of 100 made at Westleton Heath on 5<sup>th</sup> August. It was last seen on 28<sup>th</sup> September at Woodbridge Airfield.

The distribution map clearly shows the split in the county with the Breckland and Sandlings populations. It sharply represents this species' preference to dry, sandy grasslands. It used to be recorded in the general countryside on clay soils in High Suffolk but these records are now few and far between. The "odd" dot between the east and west populations represents one such record with a single butterfly being found near Shimpling on 24<sup>th</sup> August.

The UKBMS Summary of Changes Table for 2014 identifies a series trend (over last 39 years) of -58% for the Grayling population and this fall in abundance is described as "highly significant". In Suffolk it remains a weak but stable population but clearly vulnerable and it is essential that close monitoring continues.

### **Wall**

The Wall appeared to experience another difficult year with the species continuing to maintain a weak foothold in two distinct locations; these being the south east coastal area between Bawdsey and Orford and the Waveney Valley/Forest area in the north east of the county. Suitable habitat was again lost through coastal erosion and by way of associated coast protection activities. However, there are a few positive things to report. A total of 116 records were received and some involved multiple counts of 5 or 6 butterflies in close proximity to each other. Mapping these records revealed the species

to be present in 36 tetrads. This in itself was a clear increase on 2013 where 83 records were received covering 24 tetrads.

In addition, two butterflies were seen in Lakenheath in July and these represent the first west Suffolk records for a number of years. In relation to these records it's worth noting that the Wall enjoyed a good year in neighbouring Cambridgeshire. So, it's highly likely that more Walls were present in the extreme west of the county in suitable habitat but unfortunately remained unreported.

Scrutiny of the records received and the dates of sightings suggest three distinct generations occurred again in Suffolk. The first flew between 5<sup>th</sup> May and 20<sup>th</sup> June, the second between 17<sup>th</sup> July and 16<sup>th</sup> August and then the third flew between 18<sup>th</sup> September and 28<sup>th</sup> October. Of note, three generations were also recorded in Essex and Cambridgeshire. Looking ahead, the Wall remains a species of great concern for Suffolk. I would encourage all sightings to be submitted so that an accurate record can be maintained and the species be closely monitored.

### **Small Heath**

The Small Heath was recorded in 142 tetrads this year which represents a small increase on the 131 in 2013. The current five-year period (2010-2014) shows it to have been recorded in 302 tetrads, almost 30% of the county. The first record was received on 30<sup>th</sup> April in Lakenheath and it was last reported on 9<sup>th</sup> October near the Butley river on the east coast. The maximum count for the year was 100 recorded on two dates, the first being on 12<sup>th</sup> June near Bawdsey and then at Shingle Street on 26<sup>th</sup> June.

The 2014 distribution map clearly shows the strongholds of this butterfly as the heaths of the Sandlings in the east of the county and of the Brecklands to the west. However, the Small Heath is not confined to heath land. It is highly adaptive and can be found in a variety of grassy habitats including woodland rides but the key requirement is a short sward of fine grass species.

The UKBMS Summary of Changes Table for 2014 identifies a series trend (over last 39 years) of -54% for the Small Heath population and this fall in abundance is described as “highly significant”. A comparison between 2013 and 2014 showed a percentage change in abundance of -24%. In Suffolk it remains a weak but stable population and as with the Grayling it is vulnerable and requires continued monitoring.

### **Recording and Geographic Coverage**

In 2014, 26,500 records were received, recording 39 species of butterfly and covering 736 tetrads. Given that Suffolk has 1089 tetrads that meant that the records received related to almost 68% of Suffolk. The map below demonstrates the level of coverage actually achieved in 2014.

Butterfly Conservation operate a general recording scheme known as “Butterflies for the New Millennium” or BNM. This scheme operates over five-year periods for Britain and Ireland in order to assess change, inform conservation and stimulate research.

The current BNM survey ran from 2010-2014, so 2014 represented the fifth and final year of the five-year period. Over the last 5 years (2010-2014) a total of 1023 Suffolk

tetrads have been visited and butterflies recorded. With 1089 tetrads in Suffolk that left only 143 tetrads without any butterfly records being received over the five year recording period. These “black holes” are scattered across the county with the weakest area still remaining the agricultural land in High Suffolk.

It is worth noting that out of the 26,500 records received 9,000 alone were generated from the Big Butterfly Count and the BTO Garden Bird-watch surveys. Included within these records were sightings for numerous tetrads for which either no previous records or only minimal records existed. Other online recording schemes such as iRecord and on which both the new Butterfly Conservation recording “app” and Big Butterfly Count “app” are based provided valuable data. It was interesting to note how advances in social media and the smart phone “apps” are beginning to impact on how butterflies are recorded and how recorders submit their sightings.

### **Species Maps**

Distribution Maps for individual species have been prepared for our regular Suffolk species, some are included within this issue, the others are available for reference as required. Despite the high number of tetrads visited in 2014 and the incredible number of records received the average butterfly species per tetrad for 2014 remained at 10.9. To put that into context the five-year period (2010-2014) of the BNM survey period gives us an average of 14.2 species per tetrad.



## **Analysis**

The most abundant butterfly in the county in 2014 was the Small Tortoiseshell which was recorded in 574 tetrads. This was closely followed by the Peacock, recorded in 573 tetrads and then Large and Small White, being seen in 508 and 503 tetrads respectively. The results for the Large and Small White are interesting as despite their high abundance position in Suffolk both were recorded in fewer tetrads when compared to the previous year. Of note, the results from both the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) and the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) reported significant and concerning declines for these species on previous years. On a positive note, the county results also showed that Red Admiral had a good year with high counts reported on a number of occasions and a good distribution range achieved of 500 tetrads. White-letter Hairstreak stands out as still being of major concern being seen in fewer tetrads than the previous year. Always difficult to find, it is probably under-recorded but the UKBMS results also note a decline between 2013 and 2014 and, worryingly so, the ten-year trend now describes the decline as being “highly significant”. Other important county species such as Dingy Skipper and Silver-studded Blue appeared to have slipped back slightly but, thankfully, the Wall has showed a small pick-up in the number of records and its distribution especially in the Waveney Valley area.

## **Transects**

Transects are very effective at monitoring habitat specialist butterflies and lowland

semi-natural habitats. They are resource intensive but give a sharp view of butterfly trend. The 2014 results have confirmed the general recovery from 2013, with most all-species transects recording reasonable counts. During 2014, 22 transects and 3 single species transects were monitored and these are listed below. Thanks are due to the following lead walkers, who put in dedicated monitoring effort at:

1. Alton Water (Simon Waters), 2. Arger Fen (Gordon Kennett), 3. Black Heath (Linda Hammond), 4. Bradfield Woods (Steve Hunt), 5. Cavenham Heath (Michael Taylor), 6. Dunwich Forest 1&2 (Sam Hanks SWT), 7. Elveden Center Parcs (Graham Hersey-Green), 8. Knettishall Heath (Samantha Gay), 9. Lackford Lakes (Fay Jones SWT), 10. Manor Farm (Brenda Hudson), 11. Minsmere (Mel Kemp RSPB), 12. Newsons Farm (Frances Bee), 13. Newsons Farm Extension (Frances Bee), 14. North Warren (Dave Thurlow), 15. Nowton Park (Fay Jones), 16. Ramsey/Hintlesham (Shirley Sampson), 17. Sizewell Belts (Dayne West), 18. Spring Lane (Rob Parker), 19. Tythe Farm (Peter Vincent), 20. Upper Abbey Farm (Trudy Seagon), 21. Walberswick (Will Russell), 22. Wolves Wood (Shirley Sampson)

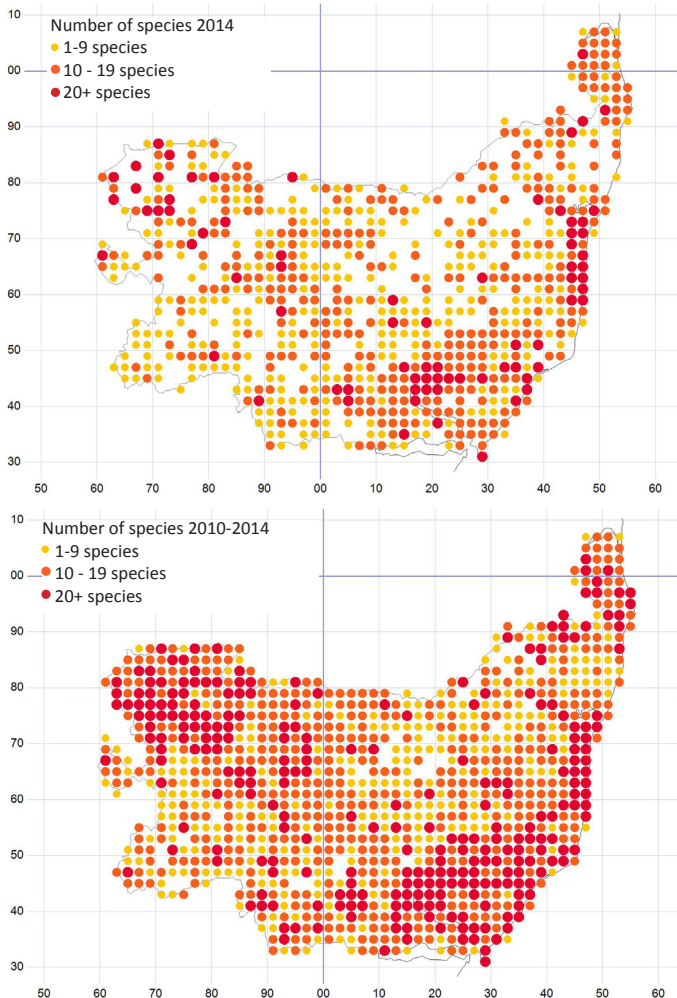
Three single-species transects for Purple Hairstreak (Steve Hunt) and Silver-studded Blue (Terry Peake at Blaxhall Common and Helen Saunders at Purdis Heath) all produced useful contributions to the UK-wide results. In almost every case, additional volunteers (not named individually) assisted the lead walker and provided valuable support to the recording effort.

## Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme (WCBS)

The WCBS forms part of an integrated approach to monitoring butterflies through the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) and complements conventional transect recording. It targets common and widespread butterflies by selecting random 1km squares which are then subject to a minimum of two visits ideally in July and August.

Due to significant work undertaken by Twm Wade, the Suffolk BC Coordinator during the year, the number of WCBS 1km surveyed squares rose from 10 in 2013 to 22 in 2014. The records generated from the scheme are included in the Suffolk data set and, therefore, represent a significant contribution.

*The full 2014 Butterfly Report, including year analysis tables, will be published in the next volume of Suffolk Natural History.*



## **Purdis Heath SSSI update, May 2015**

*Part of the Ipswich Heaths Project . A bit of a diary by volunteer warden Julian Dowding*

Work has continued throughout the autumn and winter months to restore and also recreate habitat for Silver-studded Blue butterflies across this Site of Special Scientific Interest, from the southern end near Bucklesham Road, to the northern end adjacent to Ipswich Golf Club. As in previous years, a troupe of willing volunteers assisted by IBC Wildlife and Education Rangers, Greenways Countryside Project and workers from Ipswich Golf Club have been involved with this work.

Suffolk Branch volunteers and Ipswich Borough Council Rangers started the work in September, using brush-cutters together with hand pulling to remove Bracken from the 'northern link' to Ipswich Golf Club. The particular aim of our work here is to create Silver-studded Blue habitat which will link with that being created at Ipswich Golf Club, Purdis. Throughout the winter, volunteers also helped complete the protective dead hedge around the area, using Silver Birch cut from an adjacent area to the west. This link was subsequently scraped with a JCB and seeded with heather strewings sourced from Sutton and Hollesley Heaths SSSI. Throughout the course of our work since 2009/2010, we have been mindful of all other flora and fauna and the northern link is no exception. Sunny banks have been created there using soil arising from the scrapings, and habitat piles have been made from birch and oak logs. Already these features are being used by Slow-worm and Viviparous Lizard. Where heather litter has been spread, sandy patches of bare soil have been left for thermophilic invertebrates such as the resident Ruby-tailed and Five-banded Digger Wasps. The adjacent areas where Silver Birch was removed by coppicing, now hosts a pair of Willow Warblers. This is a bird whose UK breeding range is contracting north westwards.

An interesting side note relating to the link is that this area occupies part of what was once a World War 1 practice range, with deep trenches

and fox-holes bisecting the site. Given the fact that some of our work here entails the use of heavy machinery with an associated risk of disturbing unexploded ordnance in the ground, Dave Basham (volunteer and Purdis SSB transect walker) checked the entire site with a metal detector before work began. To our amazement he found an unexploded stick grenade. The 'bomb squad' were called and removed the device to an adjacent field about 200 metres away, where it was safely detonated. The resulting huge bang was literally earth shattering and those of us standing at a safe distance felt the shock wave. In October, November, December and January, BC volunteers continued scrub clearance across southern parts of the site. This involved the removal of Gorse, Silver Birch and Bramble which was encroaching upon some of the key butterfly flight areas. Greenways also put in some work.

In December, at the scrape adjacent to the 'T-trench' we created in 2009/10 before the Ipswich Heaths Project received WREN funding, volunteers counted 180 young Bell Heathers and whilst searching, also discovered seedpods on some of the plants, a sign that last year some of them had managed to flower. This is very pleasing to report, since these plants are critical to the successful future of the butterfly as they provide virtually the only source of nectar when it is on the wing. All of these plants have arisen either from seed remaining in the soil or through the application - by volunteers - of heather strewings two winters ago. The plants are still small, the largest measuring about 4-5 inches across in spite of the fact that some of them must now be in the region of 4 or 5 years of age.

In January, Greenways held their annual 'Megabash' event, and improved and widened the 'desire path' which runs in a roughly northerly direction on the eastern edge of the site. The

result of this work has been very encouraging, with more people using the improved path rather than the one which cuts across more sensitive areas. This work has also opened up the heath, improving habitat for heathland species.

In February and March as in previous years, IBC contractors and Ipswich Golf Course employees using a tractor and cutter continued forage harvesting across the site. This operation was applied to areas of over-mature and degenerate heathers, cutting them back hard in the hope of creating new stands of young heathers suitable for Silver-studded Blues.

In February, two Pedunculate Oaks were removed by IBC Rangers from the southern section of the heath, just north of Bucklesham Road and the woodland belt. The area had been earmarked for scraping and seeding with Bell Heather litter to create more new habitat. Material from the trees and cut Silver Birch scrub was used by BC volunteers and local residents to reinforce the dead hedge created around three sides of the southern section of the heath. This dead hedge offers protection for some of the more sensitive wildlife such as ground nesting birds and reptiles. Unfortunately, parts of the hedge had been breached or dismantled by uncaring people, so a certain amount of re-instatement was needed.

In March, an enclosure made with stakes and rabbit wire fencing, which was created a couple of years ago to assess rabbit grazing on forage harvested areas, had to be rebuilt. Unfortunately again, thoughtless walkers had allowed their dogs to effectively breach the fencing such that it served no use.

In April, at the scrape adjacent to the 'T-trench', we carried out a session of 'weed' control on bramble and gorse using a herbicide. With so much bare soil around, the conditions of all the scrapes, of which there are now four, are perfect for such fast growing plants to grow at the expense of the heathers, so aside from hand

pulling and digging (which seems to be a never ending job), a certain amount of weed treatment was deemed appropriate. The scrape today is looking very much like pioneer heathland and our hope is that in a few years' time the habitat there will be perfect for our beloved butterflies. We've already found a number of invertebrates using the area, including Black Ant and Heath and Green Tiger Beetles.

Our transect walkers have also installed a few broken paving slabs into some of the cut areas around the site in the hope of encouraging Black Ants, so necessary for the success of the Silver-studded Blue as the ants are known to tend the butterfly larvae. The slabs seem to have achieved the desired effect, with ants now found under many of them.

Site notices have also been installed on the site at various times (especially before new works begin) explaining to the public what we are doing.

Helen, our volunteer co-ordinator and our other Purdis Silver-studded Blue transect walker, has conducted a number of pH tests across the site in various locations. Acidity would appear to range from 3.5 - 7, i.e., from very acid to about neutral. These figures are spot on for lowland acid heathland. Helen has also been compiling a list of species recorded on the site in recent history, the total now exceeding 500.

It is heartening to note that numbers of birds on the site have increased with at least six singing Nightingales (as of May12th), four Willow Warblers and similar numbers of Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Linnets. As alluded to earlier, the following reptiles inhabit the site and continue to hold their own: Grass Snake, Viviparous Lizard and Slow-worm. As far as we know, Adders have not been recorded at Purdis Heath since the 1980's although we do have anecdotal evidence that they were seen about 5 years ago.

As for the Silver-studded Blue, success depends on whether the work that we have done is effective. Since this work is of a long term nature, it may be a few years before we really know. However, if early signs are anything to go by then we have cause for optimism since we are beginning to notice positive changes with a gradual increase in recent times of Silver-studded Blue numbers and other heathland specialist butterflies such as Grayling and Small Heath. These increases, together with improved concentrations of Bell Heather and pioneer habitat and increases in numbers of other heathland flora and fauna can only be good.

Throughout the course of the year, over 600 volunteer hours and a good number of contractor hours were put into the work. On behalf of the Branch, I wish to record my thanks for all those who have helped. A note of thanks should also be recorded for Ben Calversbert and Suffolk Wildlife Trust who kindly donated heather strewings for the scraped areas.

If you would like to become involved with Purdis Heath and Silver-studded Blue butterflies, please do get in touch with us.

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## Notes on the Photos of Day-flying Moths on the back cover

*Trevor Goodfellow*

Day-flying moths are often encountered while chasing butterflies and occasionally they resemble our quarry: Mother Shipton moth while hunting Dingy Skipper for example.

The easily identifiable Five-spot and Six-spot Burnet are a welcome sight, often in large numbers and the striking yellow and black Cinnabar caterpillars on Ragwort are also pleasing to see.

Locally I have spotted Forester Moth at Ramparts Field, Orange Conch *Commophila aeneana* at SWT Grove Farm, Red-tipped Clearwing at home in Thurston, and Hornet Moths hatching from the trunks of poplar trees over just a few days.

The Orange Conch inspired my interest in micro moths and recording them expanded my domestic moth list considerably.

Silver Y, Yellow Shell, and Latticed Heath also catch my eye on occasion

It is a good idea to get a quality reference book like: *British Moths* by Chris Manley, and *Field Guide to the Micro-Moths of Great Britain and Ireland* by Phil Sterling and Mark Parsons. I cross-reference between these books and Tony Pritchard's excellent [suffolkmoths.org.uk](http://suffolkmoths.org.uk) with useful 'similar too' feature and the handy [ukmoths.org.uk](http://ukmoths.org.uk) website.

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## AGM

The AGM, Members' evening and Photographic Competition will be held on Saturday 26th September at Ixworth Village Hall. 6.00pm for 6.30pm start.

The Hall is situated off the High Street. Grid ref: TL 932703 Post code IP31 2HH

# Suffolk Branch Photographic Competition

*Twm Wade*

**At the 2015 AGM there will be a photo competition for photos and videos taken in the UK or abroad by a member of SBBC.**

There are three classes:

1. Still photo taken in the UK
2. Still photo taken outside the UK
3. A video or digital slide show.

Judging will be by those who attend the AGM so the entries must be available for that evening.

## Rules

R1 - There shall be no more than 5 entries per participant. Such entries can be in more than one class (e.g. 2 in two classes and one in another).

R2 - Photos or films must:

- > be of a butterfly or moth at any stage in its life cycle
- > be of wild stock, not captive bred
- > have been taken by a Suffolk Branch member; their own work
- > have been taken in the year of 2015.

R3 - Individual still photos must:

- > be printed and presented no larger than A4 (12" x 8"); A5 (6" x 8") preferred
- > have minimal editing before printing; not digitally enhanced but allowing cropping and resizing.

R4 - Slideshows or films:

- > must be no longer than 5 minutes; less preferred
- > may include a commentary, background music and/or text; other editing must be minimal; not digitally enhanced but allowing cropping and the Ken Burns effect (commentary can be live)
- > may include more than one species.

Class 1 - "The photo I wish I had taken" - taken in the UK & decided by popular vote on the night  
Class 2 - "The photo I wish I had taken" - taken outside the UK & decided by popular vote on the night

Class 3 - "The video or slideshow I wish I had

made or presented" (DVD or other format - please check what will work) - decided by popular vote on the night.

Prizes - a round of applause.

## Administrative Arrangements

A - there is no entry fee

B - entries in classes 1 & 2 shall have the member's name on the back and a unique number with the name if that person has more than one entry

C - entries for classes 1 & 2 shall have the class number (C1 or C2) stated on the back

D - the still photo DVD, CD or memory stick will remain the property of the member but the committee cannot accept responsibility for their condition at the end of the competition

E - entries need to be presented to a committee member for display before the AGM starts

F - entries may be pinned to a board or displayed loose on a table

G - entries may be labeled using masking tape stuck to the edge of the photo and then put on a wall or board

H - the still photo entries will be judged by those attending the meeting during the tea break and decided by ballot (to be arranged on the night); entries for Class 3 will be decided on a show of hands after their display

J - entries need to be retrieved by the member or their representative at the end of the meeting

L - the winning entries for classes 1 & 2 need to be made available for publication to the editor of Suffolk Argus in electronic form after the meeting (the editor may ask for others).

[twm.wade@yahoo.com](mailto:twm.wade@yahoo.com)



## Six Of The Best in 2014 - Part Two

*Richard Stewart*

The second species I tried to see at six different sites in 2014 was the White Admiral. I got to know it well during the 1995-1999 Millennium Survey when it was recorded from 54 2km tetrads, compared to 13 in the previous Suffolk survey. I consider it to have the most elegant flight of any British species and the underwing patterning is very beautiful. The first sighting was in Hargate Forest, near Tunbridge Wells in Sussex, as part of our Branch weekend. Initially the weather was so poor we had a very early coffee break but it improved and one in pristine condition was seen along a main ride, with a distant second one later. Thanks to the knowledge of Paul Johnson we also saw two Purple Emperors high in the canopy. That was on July 6th and eight days later White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries provided a rich mix of sightings in Wolves Wood. This visit was also memorable for chatting to two men staking out an area with bananas and soft plums, in case Purple Emperors were present. Pakenham Wood was the third, on 17th July, with White Admirals high in the oak canopy and at least 18 Silver-washed Fritillaries nectaring on tall thistles in the sunlit glade and some making their looping courtship flight. Can I thank the couple who came in later. They quickly assessed I was alone, in 'another world' and kept very quiet, just taking photos and not coming over to talk, as most people would. Old Hall Wood at Bentley was visited on 21st July. Here the footpath comes out at a long sunlit drive. In 2013 I was unsuccessful but this year, as soon as I entered the ride, two tattered White Admirals were nectaring on bramble, one seeming to bounce across the leaves, presumably to save energy in flying. Here I encountered the opposite of Pakenham Wood as two large dogs suddenly appeared, jumping up at me. I shouted loudly and the owner appeared, trying to convince me she wasn't on a footpath until I pointed out the sign right next to her. She did apologise but it spoiled the experience. Bracken is encroaching on many brambles and I have indicated this to

Colin Hawes who lives nearby and watches over the wood.

Tangham was next, on the 23rd, this part of Rendlesham Forest now probably the best East Suffolk site for this species. The first was on bramble, next to a Peacock and two more followed, one momentarily landing on my shirt sleeve. It was good to see mums and toddlers heading for the pond-dipping platform but in recent years I have been puzzled as to why an alder obscures the view of the pond on the bridge, cutting out the sunlight that dragonflies like the Emperor, seen on my visit, need. I mentioned this to a ranger who told me it was being cut down the next day. Alders are of course useful for wildlife but there were many more nearby.

On the 26th July I was in Tunstall Forest, formerly a site where, given good weather, I could confidently take groups to see White Admirals at four different locations. The best was destroyed by a large harvesting machine taking short cuts and at two brambles off the main track I drew a blank, noting nearby tracks of another large machine close by. Here again bracken is taking over, some of it eight or more feet high, and this was proving to be my most difficult day. I was also mindful of the time, since I had arranged a time to be picked up by the Community Link bus. Eventually, in an area of the forest new to me, I found a long sunlit strip, about ten metres deep, where trees had been harvested. It had been colonised by nettles and brambles, attracting Peacock, Meadow Brown, Comma, Gatekeeper, one Grayling and, at last, a somewhat tattered White Admiral. It kept moving as it fed and ended up just a few feet away, its body angled so I could appreciate the subtle underwing patterning. I stood for some time at this spot as I could hear no human or machine noises, just a gentle breeze and the calls of yaffles, woodpigeons and a distant muntjac - mission achieved.



## New Beginnings

Bill Stone

Following on from my last article regarding my new Kesgrave garden I was fortunate enough to be given some additional plants. From work, I received some Bugle *Ajuga reptans*, Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber*, buddleja (buzz varieties) and a few Euphorbias. I was also very lucky to receive some plants from Gary and Jenny Plank, who also live in Kesgrave, including one of my favourites, Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*. Needless to say, all the plants were quickly added to the garden. With the remaining £10 of my £50 budget I bought some Rudbeckia, Thyme, Marjoram to sit in pots along with a mixture of Nasturtium seedlings to ramble amongst the pots. Over the months that have passed I have been pleased to see that the garden has started to develop and with the mixed wet and sunny weather some have grown very vigorously. As a number of you will appreciate the Bowles Mauve always grows well in a sunny position and those that I planted have really taken off. In fact, it was on one of these plants that my first garden butterfly was recorded on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015 and it

came in the form of a Small Tortoiseshell (see front cover photo). A few days later a Peacock was seen and over the recent weeks I have recorded several more Small Tortoiseshell and Peacocks as well as Large and Small White. One thing that I have noticed in the garden is the amount of flying insects, particularly bees that have appeared and this will, hopefully, lead to attracting predatory insects such as dragonflies.

Looking ahead, I am hopeful that, as the garden continues to develop, more butterflies from different species will be attracted in. The buddleja and verbenas are already waist high and some success with scabious, verbenas and knapweed seedlings also bodes well. Hopefully my next update will report on some new species!

Bill Stone, Suffolk Butterfly Recorder

**New address:** 26 Thomas Crescent, Kesgrave, Suffolk IP5 2HN

## Seventy-Four Years Later

Richard Stewart

On 16th July 2014 I visited Wheatfen Broad in Norfolk, a place I explore more frequently after discovering a convenient bus service. At this time of year I always visit a large sunlit bramble glade at the far end of the wood, hoping White Admirals may have returned, as there was a small colony present until a few years ago. There were just a few whites present until an orange flash was seen, then a second and third time, all briefly and with the butterfly not landing. At first I thought it was a comma but I soon realised it was larger, with different colouring and flight pattern. I was also aided by having watched Silver-washed Fritillaries in Wolves Wood just two days earlier. With some excitement I headed back to find David Nobbs, the warden. I must admit I was doubtful if this would be a new sighting as, in all my years of visiting Wheatfen, including when Ted Ellis was alive, the only time I had achieved this was by finding a dead Sea Lamprey in a dyke near the cottage. So it turned out David had watched it for over an hour on 1st July and had two good photos to show me. These were of a male but subsequently, after my visit, a female was seen. To encourage a possible future colony David and his volunteers have

already reshaped the glade, removing a few branches and coppicing nearby hazel to let more light in, but retaining some shade and honeysuckle in case White Admirals return. Dog violets grow along Sluice Dyke and this is being widened to reduce shade, but retaining nearby trees as eggs are laid on them, the emerging caterpillars then crawling to the dog violets, which are the larval food plant.

This beautiful butterfly is our largest fritillary and its spread in many parts of the country includes 88 records from 31 2km tetrads as included in the 2013 Suffolk Report. Norfolk's 2012 report lists records from 14 2km tetrads with County Recorder Andy Brazil commenting on at least five breeding colonies. The nearest record I can find to Wheatfen is one from Thunder Lane in Norwich, July 2012 - probably about eight miles away. It will be interesting to see when this species is recorded at Strumpshaw Fen, just across the river and with suitable woodland habitat.

As for the title, the last record at Wheatfen was back in 1940, and not surprisingly the person who saw it was Ted Ellis.

## Farmers Do Listen – Sometimes!

*Mervyn Crawford*

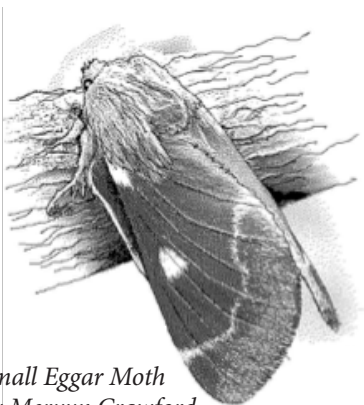
This article is written to confront an issue which all of us, as lovers of wildlife and our countryside, will encounter in most years. At the very outset I wish to make it very clear that in no way is this article an attempt to ‘knock’ or expose our farmers to unjust criticism. I married a farmer’s daughter and on the whole I am thankful for the generally sensitive manner in which farmers take on the role of stewards of our countryside. I do want to make our members more aware that often the farming community may turn to people like us for appropriate advice, as conflicting, inadequate and misleading advice often abounds from ‘official’ sources.

I recognise, however that it is simply impossible to please all conservationists all of the time. Even in my own one acre of ex-heathland that I call a garden, conflicts of interest arise as to what is beneficial management for some species. In partial retirement I have the time (just) to sit in my deck-chair each spring and observe female Holly Blues laying eggs on the terminal buds of several shrubs besides Holly and Ivy. I then wish to protect these with my tiny cloth sleeves, just as my gardener wife declares that now is the best time for a Spring pruning of these shrubs, having heeded Monty Don’s advice on *Gardeners World*. Later in June, the Lilac needs cutting back after flowering and the front Privet hedge needs its first ‘back and sides’ trim of the year. This is just after the first female Privet Hawk moths in my trap have been carefully released on to these very same hedges. And so on.....

So throughout the twelve month calendar, there is never the absolutely ideal time for

any maintenance activity. I’m sure some will share my dismay at the mile after mile of flailed hedgerows that seem to have appeared more commonly this winter. Whenever I read my books on best pruning practice I’m told to make as clean a cut as possible to avoid diseases taking hold. What this does to our hedgerow moth population is incalculable, when many pass the winter on the outer growths as eggs, hibernating larvae and even cocoons. Then in early June, for the sake of good driving visibility, the lush growth on our roadside verges of Cow Parsley, Nettles and Garlic Mustard is turned to pulp with those rotary flails. The pupae of our Browns and Skippers, the newly-laid eggs of Orange-tips and Vanessids, and even adult Drinker larvae must be very vulnerable to this mass-destruction of their micro-habitat.

In June 2014, during a chance meeting at the Devil’s Dyke with Sharon Hearle, our Regional Officer, I was informed of a number of larval webs of the Small Eggar moth in the Woodditton/Saxon Street area, a few miles to the south of Newmarket. It was a week or two before a free afternoon



*Small Eggar Moth*  
*by Mervyn Crawford*

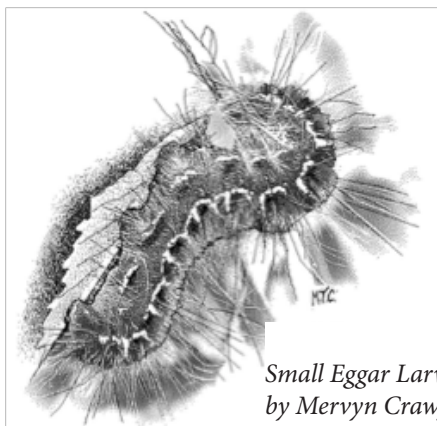
allowed me to drive through the area, and, sure enough several of these tough, white papery webs could be seen from the car, including a very exposed one almost 700mm in length.

Although a nationally much declined, even threatened species, it has never been that difficult to spot these webs in the hedgerows in the Newmarket/Wickhambrook/Haverhill triangle. The females seem to prefer hedges where Blackthorn with at least a two-year re-growth predominates. I suspected I was still in Cambridgeshire, so continued across country towards the road from Dalham to Kentford to see if I could locate any 'Suffolk' webs. On my way I encountered several more in the Ashley/Dalham area and finally a 'home-grown' example on the road down into Kentford.

As this was on a familiar route from my days teaching at HMP Highpoint, I was able to keep a watch on these webs until one day all four together had suddenly disappeared! Somewhat alarmed, I pulled into the nearest field gateway and walked back to the spot. I actually located where two had been cleanly cut away and was then able to see one lying in the field through the hedge. One or two nearly fully grown larvae were still on the hedge itself, very conspicuous as the twigs were quite defoliated. I trespassed into the field and found three rain-sodden webs just lying on the ground. Several larvae could be seen quite active still under the various layers of tough silk, and, thankfully I could not detect the smell of insecticide spray.

Without even stopping to consider the 'correctness' of my actions the webs were put in the boot of my car and driven home to Mildenhall. I had an ulterior motive in

that I was anxious to film the life-cycle of this species to put with the others on my YouTube channel. As something of a bonus, a couple of the rather gaudy grey/blue and yellow larvae of the Figure of Eight moth had also been spotted on that same hedge, but reluctantly were left to whatever fate might befall them. This is another once-familiar species whose numbers have probably been adversely affected by severe hedge trimming methods at the wrong season. The same could well apply to the Lackey moth and it's superficially similar webs and the huge larvae of the Lappet moth that I can only have any hope of finding now in the Cambridgeshire fens around Ely and Littleport.



*Small Eggar Larva*  
by Mervyn Crawford

However, it is not all distressing news. The flailing of hedges in winter around here could well be beneficial to the Brown-tail moth as last year for a 150 metre stretch near the Z-bend between Freckenham and Fordham, the hedges were completely defoliated. As far as I could tell, the larvae were nowhere near large enough to pupate and therefore starved to death. Now there are fewer hibernaculums left at each end of the stretch, they should all survive this year, as the re-generation could be more lush than

normal perhaps?

I think it is worth saying that for some once-common species like Figure of Eight larvae, they are only able to be predictably found still at places like Aspel Close and Ramparts Field where hedge flailing never takes place. Even the common Yellow-tail and Lackey seem to be suffering too, but the Brown-tail seems to be undergoing something of a population explosion in this neck of the woods.

From eggs laid in my trap on one occasion I transferred tiny Oak Eggar larvae to some bushes on the Beck-Row road adjacent to USAF Mildenhall airbase, and carefully marked the spot. It was virtually impossible to find any of them just two days later, until I discovered that they all had moved inside the bushes on to main stems, presumably ready for hibernation. This gave me a little comfort that these might just escape unharmed if a flailing machine were to come along. Much later in November, I found that a sharp jolt on the bush would not dislodge them as they appeared to be connected to a flimsy silk pad. When feeding resumed the following April, the only three that I could still see 'migrated' to the outer twigs where the slightest touch or vibration caused them to roll into the characteristic ring and drop into the grass (if my inverted umbrella had not been there). The only two Lappet larvae I have found in recent times on Damson at Wicken did exactly the same thing when I tried to photograph them whilst holding the lead of my daughter's impatient dog in my other hand. This instinctive reaction may save them if hedge trimming is carried out later.

The saga of the Ashley Small Eggars does have a very happy ending. Using Google Earth I located the nearest cluster of farm buildings to the hedgerow in question, and with some trepidation found myself knocking on the farmer's door. The good lady who answered got her husband on his mobile phone, and within minutes they both were listening intently over a cup of the most unhealthily delicious coffee. Soon he rummaged through a most untidy bureau and produced a cutting from an old farming and countryside magazine, and was full of remorse at his mistake.

I was appalled at the gross and unchallenged overstatement that I read – "If you see white webs in the hedgerow, then these are almost certain to be those of the Brown-tail moth. The presence of this moth in any locality is most undesirable and a cause for concern. The remedy is to spray the entire hedge with the strongest insecticide available and the hundreds of people who annually suffer the immense irritation caused by the wind-born hairs of their caterpillars will be eternally grateful"

I am blessed with a thick skin and can handle these larvae whilst only suffering minor temporary itching between the fingers, but I realise that for some others more sensitive than myself it is far more serious. One just wishes for a return to the reciprocating (but I suspect un-economic) type of cutters which don't utterly destroy everything in their path. I now feel it is safe to clip several egg clusters back into the same hedge from whence they came, as the farmer has watched my video and informed his neighbours.



Purdis Heath 2014 - 2015  
See the Ipswich Heaths Project Update on page 18



Purdis Heath northern section



Scraping off the surface trash



Heather clippings being spread



Small Eggar moth larval web

See 'Farmers Do Listen -  
Sometimes'

Page 24

**Enter the  
Photographic  
Competition 2015**

**See page 21  
for details**

# Day-flying Moths

See Trevor Goodfellow's notes on page 20



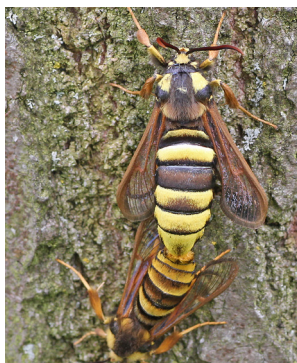
Red-tipped Clearwing



*Commophila aeneana*



*Pyrausta despicata*



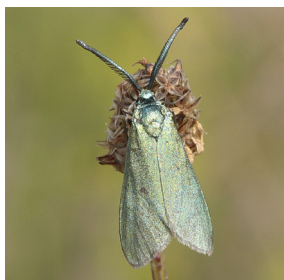
Hornet Clearwing



Six-spot Burnet cocoon



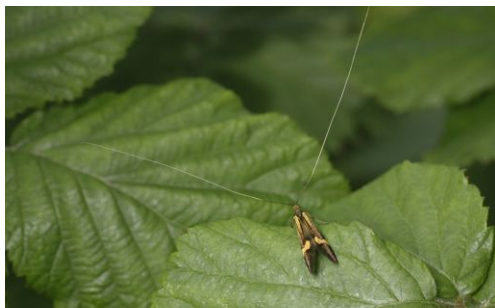
Five-spot Burnet



Forester



Mother Shipton



Longhorn *Nemophora degeerella*



Plume moth *Pterophorus pentadactyla*