

Antennae

Newsletter of the Gloucestershire Branch of Butterfly Conservation

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**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

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Photo Front Cover: Essex Skipper - Chris Tracey

Back cover: Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Paul Sadley

Unless otherwise stated all photos by the Author
or from Butterfly Conservation web-site

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From the Chair

Tricia Atkinson



Welcome to this Spring edition of Antennae. As I'm writing this in early March, we have had a few warm sunny days and the butterflies have responded. I've already seen a few Brimstones, a Comma and a Peacock. This could be a false spring and by the time you are reading this, you may be sheltering inside while the rain batters the windows. We don't yet know whether we'll have a hot dry summer like last year or a cool, damp one as in the year before. Of course this has a big effect on our butterflies and moths and other insects. 2024 was a very poor year for butterflies and Butterfly Conservation declared a 'Butterfly Emergency' to raise awareness of how these tiny creatures need our help. The hot dry summer last year meant that conditions were more favourable and the number of butterflies recorded increased but only back to average. It was exactly 50 years ago when we had the record-breaking long hot summer of 1976. On page 29, Matthew Oates reminisces about how this affected the butterflies that year.

Butterfly numbers vary enormously with the weather conditions from year to year and with how the weather affects the habitat. However by monitoring butterflies, we can see the general trends and know which species are in long-term decline, which species are thriving and which species are responding to conservation work. Scientists and conservation managers can then decide on how to respond to worrying declines and work to try to reverse the declines. We are always looking for volunteers to help with recording. Please see page 19 & 36 for more details of how you can get involved.

I think there is a good mix of different articles in this edition which I hope you find interesting. We always welcome articles from different people so please send Lynne, our newsletter editor, any articles which you think would be of interest to our members.

lynne@gloucestershirebutterflies.org.uk

Meanwhile I hope that you may be able to join us at one of our guided walks or events during the spring and summer.

Stinchcombe Hill Developments

Chris Wiltshire

Back in the 1950s we lived in Bristol and my parents would sometimes bring me and my brother up to Stinchcombe Hill for walks or picnics. I was interested in insects and butterflies in particular even then. I well remember seeing Green Hairstreaks, Grizzled Skippers, Marbled Whites, Chalk Hill Blues and Graylings there. If Dad said "Where do you want to go today?" the answer would be "Stinchcombe Hill!" (The Hill from here on)

Jump forward a few decades and I approached Stinchcombe Hill Trust for permission to set up two butterfly transects on the Hill. The reply was very encouraging and they welcomed the fact that someone wanted to do something positive for the Hill. Consequently in April 1988 I started the two transects with the A transect running from the public carpark clockwise round to Stinchcombe Hill House and the B transect continuing clockwise back to the carpark. By the time you read this I may well have started year 39!

I liked the Hill so much that around 1991 John Smallwood (a resident of Dursley) and myself set up the Stinchcombe Hill Conservation Group and we ran the work parties on the Hill, I usually led the weekend sessions and John ran the weekday sessions.

In 1995 I took the decision to move to the Hill and by chance I ended up buying the house from the Chairman of Stinchcombe Hill Trust and he invited me to become a trustee and I accepted. Subsequently I took over the conservation group from 2012 and was made Conservation Manager for the Trust. Sadly John Smallwood passed away late last year but he would have loved the changes taking place.

As time passed it became apparent that a lot more effort was needed to halt the decline of the limestone grasslands which, if left alone, would scrub over and eventually become woodland. In fact since I set up the butterfly transects the woodland edge has advanced at least five metres up the Hill despite our periodic efforts at cutting it back. We employed various contractors and machines such as Deltracs and Robocuts for mowing the slopes, most of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest



Stinchcombe Hill Transect Section A2 Post Robocutting

(SSSI). My long-term dream has been to get cattle grazing, they do a better job. In the mid-1990s we had a short trial with sheep but it was a disaster with one animal killed by a dog and others frightened out of the fenced area and ending up on Stancombe Park below. The sheep did not achieve the type of grazing required, fine if you want a bowling green!

We did have a trial with cattle around 1997, funded by English Nature, when a few Welsh Blacks were put on the slope below the carpark. They did a very good job in the short time they were there but the Golf Club was not happy when the electric fence battery went flat and one of the animals was found on the second fairway early in the morning. Soon retrieved and battery replaced but the trial came to an end. The trust was happy but not the Golf Club.

Bringing things up to date, in 2024 we had a feasibility study done by FWAG (SW). This produced a potential format for getting cattle grazing in place and to enhance the Hill for the benefit of the public and wildlife. We also had a revolutionary new type of high-resolution drone survey done by

Cardiff University to classify the state of the vegetation across the Hill as a baseline and we can repeat this to monitor results of grazing.

We formed a tripartite organisation of Stinchcombe Hill Trust as senior partner, Stinchcombe Hill Golf Club and Stancombe Park and the Hill will be managed by this group. This in turn led to us applying to Natural England for a Conservation Enhancement Scheme grant which consists of two components; firstly the capital works, secondly an annual payment for five years. Finally, on 9th January 2026 we were told we had been successful and that we had to get all the infrastructure in place and completed by the end of March 2026! We already had contractors on standby and they have been really busy since then.

All this only applies to the south west sector which is the biggest SSSI of the three on the Hill. The infrastructure includes permanent fencing through the woods roughly along a line of the Trust boundary with Stancombe Park, semi-permanent fencing along the upper slopes, a



Stinchcombe Hill Transect Section B2 Volunteers Raking up



Stinchcombe Hill Transect Section B10 New Pedestrian Gate

cattle handling area and water pipes and trenching to cattle troughs. The water is supplied by the Golf Club's irrigation system which they have agreed we can tap into. For the benefit of the public the fencing is all plain wire, no barbed wire or electric fencing involved. Numerous gates are being put in for pedestrian access.

At the time of writing, 27th February, all that remains to be done is to install the upper fencing around the top of the slopes. All being well we will have the National Trust herd of Belted Galloways, well six of them anyway, grazing the four compartments from late September this year. In subsequent years Harry Llewellyn from Stancombe Park will provide the animals for grazing. The butterfly transects will continue along with turf height measurements to monitor changes.

Butterflies of Turkey

Graeme Davis

This year I had the amazing opportunity to join a private party, arranged by Mike Williams of the West Midlands Butterfly and Moth Society, on a trip to Van & Bitlis in Turkey. The group was led by two very experienced guides, Safi, a Hungarian professor, and a Turkish butterfly expert, Alperen.

The environment we visited in Turkey is very dry, with several almost desert-like areas, and occasional wet flushes. We travelled all around the region, mostly in the Kurdish parts of Turkey, but also close to the Iranian border for rarities that are not restricted by human-made borders.

On arrival from the plane, we went straight out into the field, where we picked up an amazing Fritillary called Mofidi's, a fritillary that likes areas of wet flushes.

The following day took us up into the Erek Mountain area, where we had our first and most magnificent target – Ebert's Mirza or Yellow Emperor.



Mofidi's Fritillary Butterfly 22.6.25
(*Brenthis mofidii*)
Erek Mountain, Van, Turkey

This rarely-seen butterfly will come down from its treetop cover for water early morning or, like its relatives, for something smelly. In the same area we had Large Tortoiseshell, Hermit and Yellow-banded Skipper. The number of blue butterfly species was phenomenal and made identification a hard task, but we think we found the rare Studinger's Blue!



Eberts Mirza Butterfly 24.6.25
(*Euapatura mirza*)
Catak, Turkey

The second day in the mountains we visited some different habitats, and managed to see one of what would be several species of Marbled White, this one being Ménétrés Marbled White. Throughout the trip we also saw Syrian, Russian/Esper's and Balkan Marbled White.



Iranian Blue Butterfly 25.6.25
(*Polyommatus morgianus*)
Guzeldere, Van, Turkey



Scarce Copper Butterfly 29.6.25
(*Lycaena virgaureae*)
Van, Turkey



Anatolian Fiery Copper Butterfly
25.6.25.
(*Lycaena asabinus*)
Guzeldere, Van, Turkey

Once the Ereğ Mountain area was exhausted, we travelled towards our next hotel in the Catak region. Being slightly closer to the border, we were able to see butterflies like Iranian Blue, Iranian Tawny Rockbrown and Iranian Satyr. One rarity that both visitors and guides were happy to see was the rare Staudinger's Tawny Rockbrown, which took some chasing to get a picture. A butterfly that I enjoyed seeing, though common, was Persian Heath, which has very pretty pearl-like markings on its underwings.

We also visited the third highest mountain area in Turkey, Suphan Dagi. This had a very desert-like gully leading to the top. Tortoises were quite common here. Safi shared with me an interest in Clearwing moths, and we were able to find a species here that neither of us had seen before, flying with the Ichneumon Wasp it mimics.

One of the last sites we visited was Nemrut Crater lake, which was alive with dragonflies. Purple-shot Copper and Queen of Spain were the most numerous butterflies here.

All in all, a fantastic trip with lots of rarities. In total, I photographed 46 new species I had not seen before.

Wow, what IS that?

Helen Deeks

Sitting, having a coffee break, in my town garden I spotted a small 'waspy thing' buzzing around and then stop on a tree trunk and attach itself to a larger version of itself which was resting there.



I started to be a bit apprehensive that they were Asian hornets as my neighbour had seen one recently so I messaged my butterfly buddy, Rob, and he asked to pop round to see it immediately. Amazingly they were still there, still attached, when he arrived. It turned out they were hornet MOTHS and none had been recorded in our area last year!

There was nothing new in my garden of 25 years plus to have attracted them but I had hung out 8 stripy yellow and black bumblebee tutus that particular day!

Forget pheromones and poplar trees, maybe this is the way to attract them!



Butterfly Walks Booklet Spring 2026 Update

Tricia Atkinson

The branch produced the 2nd edition of the Butterfly Walks in Gloucestershire booklet in 2016 and has proved very successful. However there are now five walks which can now not be accessed as described. These are:

Walk 2: Bathurst Estate. It is no longer possible to park and access Oakley Wood. A new visitors car park is now open at The Old Kennels, off the Old Tetbury Road, Cirencester Park and it will be necessary to walk in from there in order to look for Pearl-Bordered Fritillaries. However there is a good colony of these butterflies at nearby Siccaridge Wood, grid ref, SO936034, W3W.cheeses.number.essays. There is limited parking in a small layby at SO938032 W3W. duos.magic.doubt on the other side of the bridge from the Daneway Inn.

Walk 3. Breakheart Hill and Quarry There has been a change in ownership of Breakheart Hill and the hill is now fenced off, although people are still allowed to walk around the fenced off area. However there is still public access to Breakheart Quarry and parking is still allowed.

Walk 6. Chedworth Nature Reserve. This has been closed to the public due to the reserve suffering severely from Ash dieback.

Walk 24. Midger Wood. Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust have closed this reserve due to the danger of extensive Ash dieback. Additionally, the steps to the most important part for butterflies, Saddlewood Roughs, have totally deteriorated.

Walk 25. Miserden Valley – Bull Banks Miserden valley is accessible but not through the gate to the right of the river as it is locked these days. To access the route, go through the gate to the left of the river and follow the fence line alongside the river. At the top of the field it may be necessary to skirt around a raised mound before turning right towards the river. Cross the footbridge and on reaching the main track turn right. Turn left before the gate and head up the hill following the route in the Walks booklet.

We are still selling the booklets but with stickers on the appropriate pages to give notification when a walk is not accessible. To reflect this, the cost

of the booklet is reduced from £4 to £3 and can be purchased at branch events, some retail outlets and by post. Please email Serena Meredith treasurer@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk to order one.

A digital version of the booklet has now been produced using Google maps. This includes up-to-date information on the species to see and any updates in access. See link below.

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1whwaVRJye4ERaDaXJqBiYCZZefVQM3aR&usp=sharing>

Zoom in to the area of interest and the route of the walk will be shown together with a star symbol and a P. Clicking on the star will display a description of the walk and the P will give a brief description of the parking facilities and its location (grid ref, what3words and latitude/longitude)



Clicking the butterflies layer will show the likely location of butterflies. Clicking on the dark square in the lower left corner will change to satellite view.

We are also planning on producing a PDF version which will be put on the website. This can be downloaded and specific walks printed out if people like to have a hard copy to take out with them. It will also be able to be downloaded onto a phone for use out on a walk.



Rough Bank Reserve's Rare Moths

Guy Meredith

When Butterfly Conservation bought Rough Bank Reserve (RB) in 2012 it was well known to be a very good site for butterflies. It had been a Large Blue reintroduction site in the 1990s but the colony did not last long. Expecting BC to plan site management for another reintroduction attempt, I thought I should check whether the site had any particularly significant resident moth species whose habitat requirements should also be taken into account (or even take priority!). So I made numerous moth-recording visits, initially mainly in the daytime to look for adult moths and early stages, and occasionally at night to attract moths to my light tower, sometimes using a moth trap. Several 'good finds' were made in 2012 and many more have followed over the years resulting in a list of 792 species recorded from 2012 to 2025, of which 8 were rated as nationally rare by BC in a 2012 UK status assessment of micro-moths. The list also includes a total of 51 nationally scarce species, mostly micros.

There are web pages on the Branch website giving the full moth species list, and giving more details on the rare and scarce moth species (search on Rough Bank Moths to find the pages). This article concentrates on the 8 species given provisional Red Data Book (pRDB) ratings in 2012, and two 'target' rarities found in the area but not yet at Rough Bank.

In 2012 three rare moth species were found in the daytime. *Glaucolepis headleyella* pRDB2 was found on 4.6.2012 and 10.6.2012, a total of five specimens, by sweep-netting over the grassland. It is a tiny moth whose larvae mine leaves of Self-heal. Mines have been found on the site, and adults recorded almost every year since 2012. Unlike many species in the same family (*Nepticulidae*), *G. headleyella* adults are quite easy to identify because of their distinctive silvery white spots on wings mostly covered with blackish scales. The species was new to Gloucestershire, and at present there are no other known sites for it in the county.

On 3.8.2012 I netted a *Coleophora* with plain brown forewings with a white leading edge, and plain unringed antennae. This turned out to be a specimen of *C. niveicostella* pRDB3, a species previously known in the county from three reports, most recently in 1916. A week later I also found

a specimen on Cleve Common. Larvae of almost all species in this genus live in cases which are made from vegetation &/or silk, and they make holes in a leaf on the foodplant enabling them to feed within the leaf whilst the case is attached to the hole. *C. niveicostella* larvae feed on Thyme, and the moth has been found at RB repeatedly since 2012.



Glaucolepis headleyella



Epermenia profugella

On 14.8.2012 I found two small plain dull brown moths in different parts of the slope at RB, both taking nectar on flowers of Burnet Saxifrage. These both turned out to be *Epermenia profugella* *pRDB2*, which has Burnet Saxifrage as one of its larval foodplants. It was the first Glos. record since 1983, and I have since found the species a few more times at RB, once further down the valley at GWT Snows Farm NR, and twice on Charlton Kings Common.

In the Cranham & Sheepscombe area two rare moths have been recorded which both use Wall Lettuce as their main or only larval foodplant. There is quite a lot of the plant in places at RB, mostly in shade under trees, so for years I checked the plant leaves for the distinctive feeding signs which give away the presence of the larva of *Pselnophorus heterodactyla* *pRDB1*, the Short-winged Plume, and I looked for adults of the tortrix moth *Phalonidia gilvicomana* *pRDB3* flying near the flower/seed heads in late afternoon, as I had seen near Cranham. It seemed reasonable to hope for either or both of them to turn up at RB, and on 11.7.2020 I netted and photographed a *P. gilvicomana* at RB; the species has very distinctive forewing markings. Also found there in 2021 and 2022. However no *P.*

heterodactyla at RB yet, and there is a risk that it has died out locally because there is now almost no Wall Lettuce growing in any of the woods where I have found its larvae or adults in the past.

On 18.5.2022 some of BC's senior management team visited RB, and I



Phalonidia gilvicomana



Trifurcula subnitidella

wanted to be able show them a specimen of *G. headleyella*. So earlier that day I tried sweep-netting, eventually getting one and putting it in a small glass tube. But before I found that specimen, I netted a closely-related moth in the *Trifurcula* genus (old lists & books place *headleyella* in that genus). I had sometimes found *T. cryptella* at RB, a nationally scarce species, but this specimen had uniformly dark forewings lacking *cryptella*'s small paler spot. As I hoped, the moth turned out to be *Trifurcula subnitidella* pRDB2, an easily-identified male with a tiny patch of yellowish scales under the forewing. Its larvae mine Bird's-foot Trefoil, and I had already found the moth on a few other Cotswold grasslands. A second specimen of *T. subnitidella*, another male, turned up at an overnight light-tower & trap session at RB on 18.7.2022.

Inevitably, some of the UK status ratings issued in 2012 are no longer accurate. Some species have become rarer, others have spread or have become more widely recorded than in the past because their males are attracted either to pheromone lures designed for the species, or as 'by-catch' to lures designed for other species. Two or three of RB's 'rarities' are examples of these effects.

Lyonetia prunifoliella was rated pRDB1, the most rare category, in 2012. But the species has spread to such an extent that it has now been

recorded in a total of 37 vice counties in England and Wales, many within the past few years (much UK wildlife distribution reporting still uses the 19th century vice county system developed by a botanist). I found the first two Glos. sites for *L. prunifoliella* with its distinctive larval Blackthorn leaf-mines with external 'chains' of frass (droppings) attached to silk in 2022, and by 2024 it was mapped in 10 Glos tetrads (2Km grid squares) including RB where I had netted an adult from a tree in the daytime on 24.10.2023. I found a leaf mine at RB on 24.6.2025.

Males of *Pammene suspectana* (rated pRDB2) are now widely recorded (38 vice counties) by use of the SUS pheromone lure designed for the species, and by 2024 there were records from 8 Glos. tetrads including RB, where one came to my SUS lure on 24.5.2023. Another came to my lure at RB on 11.5.2025. The larval food is thought to be ash, possibly tree bark, so ash die-back at RB and nearby is a risk to the moth's population.

Mecyna flavalis pRDB3 was first definitely recorded in Glos. on 22.7.2022 (a 19th century record was considered doubtful), and a week later Steve Whitehouse photographed a specimen at RB. So far these are the only Glos. records of the species, making this the only rarity which has so far only been recorded once at RB. The species appears to be spreading northwards, with new records from five other English vice counties since 2020.

Another species I keep hoping to find at RB is *Elachista orstadii* pRDB3. In the UK it was only known from Scotland until I discovered it at four sites in the Cotswolds: BC Prestbury Hill reserve, Cleeve Common, and two Glos. Wildlife Trust reserves: Brassey NR in the Windrush valley and Swifts Hill NR near Slad, just a few miles from RB. It seems likely that the species used to be widespread in the Cotswolds, but it is easily overlooked being very similar in appearance to other species in the genus, only identifiable with certainty by dissection (or DNA analysis). Sweep-netting at one of its sites for an hour in good weather during its flight period is no guarantee of finding the moth, so it could be present but has so far escaped notice at RB. Its larval foodplant was unknown until early 2025 when Tymo Muus posted about it on Facebook: it makes long, full-depth green leaf mines in Upright Brome grass, a species found at RB and other Cotswold grassland sites.

Winners of the Gloucestershire Butterfly and Moth Photographer of the Year 2025

The 2025 photographic competition entries were presented at our Annual Members' day and were judged by our guest speaker Mike Slater from Warwickshire BC. The competition was very well supported and a big thank you to everyone who submitted an entry and to Simon Fenner for collecting and collating all of the entries. If you would like to see all of the categories entries, a slideshow has been set to music and uploaded to our branch website (please follow the link below).

<http://www.gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk/hamearis/latest-additions/>

Meanwhile here are the 2025 category winners.



UK Butterflies and Overall Winner: Definitely Essex Skipper (front cover)
and Winner of Immature Stages Chris Tracey



Winner of Overseas Butterflies:
Common Geranium Bronze David Elder



Winner of UK Butterflies or Moths Junior:
Buff-Tip Caterpillar Cara Ennis

Winner of the UK Moths:
Hummingbird Hawk Moth Paul Sadley (rear cover)

Branch Photographic competition 2026

We will be holding the annual branch photographic competition as usual. Similar to 2025, there are four categories UK Butterflies, UK Moths and Overseas Butterflies and Moths and Immature Stages, for photos of butterfly or moth eggs, larvae and pupae.

Please send up to three entries in each category as JPEG attachments to emails to reach Simon Fenner at simonf@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk by 13th October.

As usual we would like children to participate so please encourage your children or grandchildren to enter. There will be a separate prize for the winner of the under 16s.

All entrants must be a member of Gloucestershire Branch of Butterfly Conservation or child or grandchild of a member.

Butterfly Recorders Wanted

Tricia Atkinson

We are always needing volunteers to go out and record butterflies. This can be by walking a standard transect, carrying out the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey in a 1km square, recording on a key butterfly site or other site requested by the landowner. There are different levels of commitment for each type of recording.

Standard transect

This is a walk along a set route recording butterflies within a certain distance (5m in front, 5m at each side and 5m above). Most standard transects are on butterfly key sites where there are some key species of butterfly. The walk is carried out every week from the beginning of April until the end of September in good weather conditions following a specific methodology. It is quite a commitment to carry out a transect every week, but most transects are recorded by 2 or sometimes 3 recorders on a rota.

We are this year looking for transect recorders to help on the following sites:

Miserden

Painswick north

Painswick south

Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey.

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) is an important national survey organised by BC Head Office where 1km squares are chosen at random. The recorder walks along a set route 1km through the square in one direction and then 1km to return, recording butterflies along the route. This is carried out just twice during the summer during July and August, although optional extra visits may also be carried out. The recording follows the same methodology as for standard transects.

This year we are looking for recorders to record in the following squares:

SO7624 near Highleadon.

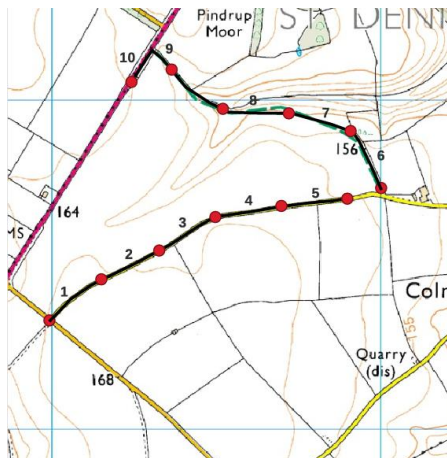
SP0709 near Coln Rogers

The set routes are along public footpaths in interesting countryside.

WCBS SO7624
Highleadon



WCBS SP0709
Coln Rogers



Key butterfly Sites

We are always looking for recorders to visit some of our butterfly key sites in the county. There are over 300 sites so plenty to choose from. This is not so much of a commitment as recorders can do the recording as and when they please and record on the whole site rather than just along a set route.

Other sites

The landowner of Glebe Farm, a very large land holding near Bourton-on-the-Water, would like to improve the habitat there for butterflies and moths and particularly for one or two key butterfly species. However we need to do baseline surveys first to see what is already there. We would like a recorder to visit a few times this spring and summer to survey.

Likewise we are looking for a recorder to survey and record at Lower Harford Farm near to Naunton.

Sometimes recorders need to drop out because of illness, mobility problems or due to other changes in their circumstances. We then need to try to find someone to fill in, so are often looking for extra recorders to cover. Please let me know if you would be happy to be contacted to see if you are able to fill in for a particular transect or WCBS survey.

Recorders obviously need to be able to correctly identify all butterflies likely to be seen. If you think you might like to record but are not too sure about your butterfly identification skills, you would be welcome to attend a butterfly ID day on Sunday July 12th at Prinknash and Painswick Beacon, more details on page 34.

Please email Chris Wiltshire at butterfly-recorder@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk if you are interested in recording on a transect, or Tricia at chair@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk for WCBS recording, key sites or the sites near to Bourton-on-the-Water.

A Butterfly Verification Assistant required to assist the Glos Assistant County Recorder in verifying butterfly records online within iRecord. Ideally needs to have a good knowledge of identifying Gloucestershire's butterfly species. They will need to go on a short online training course run by Butterfly Conservation's Recording Section. Please contact Vic Polley: vic@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Moth Release Box

William Watkins

Moth trappers everywhere release their captured moths as safely and carefully as they can, in all sorts of ways. After we have identified and recorded them we all have our preferred way of releasing these wonderful insects back into the environment where they were captured so that they can continue their lives with a minimum of disturbance. When their release is carried out at night the moths are less likely to be predated by avian species but many moth trappers using a light-box lure, like me, do not wish to stay up all night. We wait until dawn breaks before checking the light-box contents for its treasures. This means that the moths are then often released during the day by letting them go into some dense vegetation or hedges where the moths may get tangled in a spider's web or risk being eaten by a waiting robin with growing chicks to feed!



Moth Release Box

In order to give my treasured moths the very best chance of survival after being recovered from the light-box I put each moth into a purpose made, wooden box.

The box is designed to exclude most natural light; it has some egg box material inside for them to hide in and is

waterproof. The box has an exit hole with a loose flap to allow any moths to escape immediately if they wish, but 90% of the moths stay inside safe and secure from predators.

When recording is complete I place the release box with the moths inside in a shady place. Most of the moths will remain there happily all day and when dusk falls they release themselves as and when they wish.

You may wish to try it. What could be simpler?

Operation “Share the Cinnies”...

Cath Hodsman

It was the summer of 2020 and the world had closed in on itself in the first year of lockdown. Movement and socialising were rationed in an attempt to curb the spread of Covid 19. For me, personally, as an entomological art teacher, all of my workshops to various relevant venues such as the RHS, Royal West of England Academy, The Natural History Museum, Nature in Art (Glos) etc, etc, as well as my own home-based art workshops stopped immediately.

In this strange new existence, for many, nature’s importance became evermore relevant and a place to go to, to feel “normal”, inspired and safe, in a world that no longer felt “normal” or safe. For nature-loving folks like myself, my husband, Paul and all of the members of Butterfly Conservation (BC) and other nature groups, it offered an opportunity to dive even deeper into the arms of Mother Nature and celebrate her presence and vitality. The one-walk-a-day ruling offered a chance for folks to slow down and study the minutiae of the natural world. The quieter surroundings in general meant that many unexpected and rather wonderful things happened – deer roamed free on the streets of London; badger and fox numbers increased due to reduced traffic and hare and peregrine falcons numbers grew due to the relaxing of man’s irresistible desire to control his world.

It was within this unique setting that Paul and I drove down into Stroud one day, from our home on Minchinhampton Common to go and see our son’s new allotment he had recently acquired – all that extra free time meant the lure of growing one’s own veg’ became a very tempting prospect for him. We wandered around the site, marvelling at the variety of veg’, fruit and flowers that were being grown by the enthusiastic allotmentees. As we were leaving (my eyes ever lowered, always looking for insects), I spotted some ragwort growing on the allotment boundary. I said to Paul that these wonderful wildlife-friendly wildflowers would probably be sprayed, or pulled up as soon as they were spotted, such was and still is, the extreme knee-jerk reaction to its presence anywhere (mostly a reaction that is not justified, but that’s another story..). On

looking closer, to my joy and surprise I saw a number of Cinnabar moth caterpillars chewing greedily on the plants. My mind was instantly taken back to my childhood when nearly every ragwort plant was absolutely covered in these black and yellow stripy chubby dudes, all eating as though their lives depended on it (well, actually their lives did depend on eating as much as they could).



At this point my senses were hyper-triggered and as we walked back to the car park, I spotted huge amounts of groundsel (Cinnabar moth larvae's other food plant) on the car park boundary. These plants had recently been sprayed with herbicide. The plants were gradually turning to a yellow mush as they died. On taking a closer look, I could see that on the groundsel, consuming the mush, were hundreds and hundreds more Cinnabar moth caterpillars. I was shocked at how many there were and saddened by the prospect that they would probably all perish as their food plants slowly succumbed to the chemicals.

As we drove home, I couldn't get the caterpillars out of my mind and a plan started to hatch in my brain. What about if I took every single caterpillar and relocated them to our own wildlife-friendly garden where they would be safe and could proliferate in peace (hopefully). A number of

nagging questions gnawed at me, however - was it legal/ethical to relocate such a large colony of insects? And what would the implication be if I encouraged ragwort to grow in my own private outside space? When we got home, I rushed out into the garden and, to my delight, I already had significant numbers of ragwort plants growing in the mowed paths surrounding our no-mow lawns, that I hadn't previously spotted. Would they be enough to feed such a large colony of caterpillars though...? I decided that I would need supplementary plants to feed my wards as they grew. On doing a spot of internet research, I found out that cutting ragwort plants is an acceptable act in an emergency... well this was definitely an emergency, I thought. Also, ragwort is an acceptable plant to have in your private space as long as its seeds do not spread – that was a simple thing for me to ensure too. With these facts onboard, Paul and I returned to the car park in the morning, with containers and scooped all of the beleaguered caterpillars up, with a few mushy food plants to keep them going on the journey back up to our wildlife garden on the common.

As we released them, these wonderful hungry eating machines soon got



Rescued caterpillars

to work and it was such an immense joy and relief to see them feeding on fresh leaves that hadn't been sprayed and I just sat and watched in awe for hours. As with all new mums, I panicked endlessly about my "babies". As they grew, I spent a huge amount of time ensuring each ragwort plant wasn't overloaded with too many caterpillars, so that everyone got a fair "bite of the cherry", so to speak. In a world that felt out-of-control, it felt so good to take a bit of control back and to help save such an important and iconic species of indigenous moth.

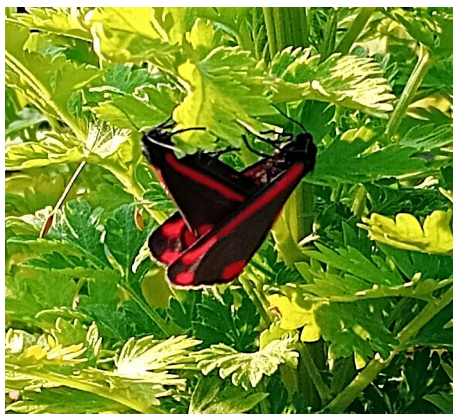
As the summer progressed, gradually all of the caterpillars disappeared, as they reached their target weight and found quiet, dark places, just underneath the soil to pupate. I sighed. My work here was done....but actually it was only just beginning. New worries entered my mind - would they survive the winter and emerge as adults the next summer?? I needn't have worried. Our quiet wildlife garden with minimum digging, disturbance and no spraying meant that a huge amount of red and black fluttering winged beauties emerged from their pupae the next season and adorned our garden like royal visitors, cloaked in red and black velvet capes. Whoop!

The adults busied themselves with feeding and mating, ensuring that our population of "Cinnies" has gone from strength-to-strength every year since.

Cinnabar 1st Instar



Mating Adults



However, new worries started to niggle – what about if we had to sell the house if we got infirm (neither of us are getting any younger) and the new owners destroyed our wildlife haven? It dawned on me that I had, inadvertently “put all of my eggs in one basket” and desperately needed to share the love and to share my population of “Cinnies”. I gave some caterpillars to a few of my lovely insect-art students who very kindly offered to house some in their gardens, but it never felt like it was enough....Enter stage left, Tricia Atkinson of the Glos’ branch of BC. With my ento’ artwork work over the years, I had met this lovely lady and many other fab folks from BC like Bob and Sue Smith, who have all worked tirelessly to save our precious Lepidoptera in the county.

I emailed Tricia and Sue, setting out my conundrum. Did they know anyone who gardened like Paul and I did – for wildlife, or anyone who happened to have a spare wildflower meadow that could safely house some of our wards for years to come?

To my delight, they both wrote back, offering some brilliant suggestions. Tricia wanted some caterpillars for her own wildlife-friendly garden (consider it done) and she also said that BC were working with a number of primary schools who had decided to turn some of their land into wildflower meadows, as part of the growing trend to enlighten youngsters to the plight and significance of small souls, like insects in a healthy, balanced natural world. One of these participating schools was Warden Hill Primary School in Cheltenham, who eagerly expressed a keen desire to “adopt” some of my “Cinnies”.

When the larvae had reached a nice chubby size, so that they could be easily seen and handled by the children, Tricia came to our garden and, together we hived off 100, or so caterpillars, destined for an exciting new home. The prospect of my beloved babies being shared around the region



Collecting the Caterpillars for Redistribution

and surviving for many more years to come was the most lovely feeling.... To my joy, Tricia sent me photos of the children handling the caterpillars as they were gently placed into their new home. The school's management of the meadow was just what the caterpillars, eggs, pupae and the adults needed – no spraying, no digging and no disturbance. Tricia said that the caterpillars were a huge hit with the children, many of whom had never even held one before. The event was reported on the school website <https://wardenhill.gloucs.sch.uk/release-the-caterpillars/>



Operation “Share the Cinnies” (as I’ve decided to call it) has now become an annual event for Tricia and for myself and for any enlightened school who has a wildflower area/meadow and fancies getting up close and personal with these beautiful and characterful caterpillars who have suffered so much due to the persecution of their food plant. How can we expect our next young generation to care about insects if they don’t understand about their relevance and importance in all our lives? If we secure the future of insects, we secure the future of ourselves.....

Please let us know (email chair@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk) if you know of a school which has plenty of Ragwort and/or Groundsel in their school grounds and where they might welcome these colourful caterpillars this summer. There would need to be quite a few plants reasonably close together to sustain the caterpillars and the ground where they are growing would need to be unmown although a cut in autumn after the caterpillars have gone down to the ground to pupate would be fine. Obviously no herbicide used on the plants.

‘Til the sun breaks down’ – the Long Hot Summer of 1976

Matthew Oates

Half a century ago, we sweltered in what become known as the Long Hot Summer of 1976. Whilst the spring and summer of 2025 outshone and out-heated that year, and were drier in most southern regions, '76 outscored it for butterflies - and all other summers in modern entomological history. Crucially, 1976 brought a third good summer on the trot, during which populations of butterflies and moths soared incrementally. 1974 had seen a reasonable summer, then, after a late start, 1975 shone unblemished. From that late July, a continuum of anticyclones spread across us, mainly from the Azores. That weather pattern was to last a year, a month and a day, breaking spectacularly at the end of August '76 – almost to the day on which 2025's drought broke.

The autumn and winter rains failed. In February 1976, our Met Office announced that the previous eleven months had been the driest in southern England's history. Ground water levels were worrying low, and reservoirs too - and in that era many rural communities were not on mains water. The Great Drought of 1976 by Evelyn Cox tells of the struggles of Herefordshire farms and villages dependent on private bore holes that ran dry.

All our resident butterflies boomed in '76, with the exception of the Ringlet. Even Speckled Wood numbers held up, until drowned by the autumn rains. It is hard to pick a single Butterfly of the Year as so many fared so well: Meadow Browns abounded, such that they formed disorderly queues to feed on bramble blossom; my diaries indicate that the Wall Brown was a common wayside and woodland species then; Small Heath too; and Common Blue and Small Copper – also heat-lovers; but best, perhaps, was the Purple Hairstreak, of which there were at times clouds. Take the numbers from your best recent butterfly summer, then add a nought, and perhaps another... . We don't rightly know, as the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme was only launched then, at a few trial sites.

Many butterflies were diminutive in size, especially as the summer wore on. We were further confused by the frequency of habitat-specialist

butterflies turning up in odd places – tiny Chalk Hill Blues, for example, deep in a forest, way off the downs.



PH feeding on bramble. Wagstaffs Wd
NWC Knepp 4.7.25

Instead, there was a super-abundance of ‘honey-dew’, the sugary secretion of aphids. The trees dripped. In the midsummer woods, Meadow Browns were feeding profusely on it, high up in the oak canopy. The abundant aphids attracted swarms of immigrant ladybirds and hoverflies. Such was the mass of aphids and ladybirds in the wheat crops



PH just emerged BG W Knepp 3.7.21

that combine harvesters jammed up. Most incredible, were the media reports of holidaymakers fleeing from beaches, pursued by swarms of ‘biting’ ladybirds. There was even a BBC News clip of two Monty Pythonesque ladies fighting off ladybirds with their handbags.

That summer brought a massive resurgence in butterfly collecting. There were letters complaining about it in The Times. Conversely, butterfly photography was born that summer. At the end of June, a gentleman called John Lodge announced in The Times that he had rediscovered the Large Blue in the Cotswolds. Sadly, that claim was never substantiated.

Moths in the playground

Jacqui Stubbings

'It's a real fairy!' - is a child's response to a white plume moth. Everyone is excited to see a real fairy. As it performs its feathery dance inside its temporary terrarium, this precious discovery is carefully passed around to wide eyes. I can see their interest overcome any trepidation they may have had, as the magic of the mothy realm takes hold. It's peak moth season, the location is a school playground, and I am sharing a miniature mothy zoo in pots, as a precursor to unboxing a moth trap. Most will have had a fleeting glimpse of a butterfly, but few of them will be familiar with the fluffy forms and surprising camouflage of the insects they share their school grounds with.



I've been running unboxing sessions in two different schools for the last 5 years in Cheltenham, with reception age and years 5&6, and it always amazes me the richness of teaching that can be built into a session. I've had the privilege of working with some highly experienced teachers, who have helped to evolve the content & delivery, and I have developed a body of supporting visual resources along the way.

Children learn primarily through play, exploration, and hands-on experiences, and so the theatre & spectacle of the moth trap unboxing, offers an easy to access engaging way of learning. Not only can a myriad of national curriculum boxes be ticked - life cycles, habitats, adaptations, evolution, classification, numeracy etc. However, far more valuable lessons take place:-

- Discovery of the hidden nocturnal worlds around us in our own environments.
- A spark of wonder at their beauty and uniqueness.
- Understanding the vital relationship between humans and insects.
- Appreciation of their importance beyond human values.
- A deeper connection to the natural world.
- Understanding what the moths need to complete their lifecycle

Then follows care of the environment and empathy at its loss. I then offer suggestions and empowering actions to help save it. It's these important lessons that few other school-based experiences can provide, and in such an intuitive and enjoyable way.



We are in an era of significant disconnection from nature, often described as an “extinction of experience,” in part driven by rapid urbanization, increased screen time, and the loss of daily interactions with natural environments. This shift has profound implications for mental health, cognitive development and environmental stewardship.

To reverse these trends, early-life exposure, outdoor learning and nature-based curricula for children, are more important than ever. There are approximately 244 primary schools in Gloucestershire, and much as I would like to, I can't visit them all! So if you have a moth trap and would like to help connect the next generations to nature, I can highly recommend it.

If you'd like to know more about what I've found works well in a school setting, or even join forces, then feel free to get in touch. I'd be happy to supply the resources I have. I am also keen to hear about what others might be doing in this area, and what they have found that works well too. email: jacquistubbings@outlook.com

Dates for Your Diary 2026

Below are the events and field trips planned for this spring and summer. The field trips are guided walks looking at butterflies and any day-flying moths. The contact details for the leader are given if you have any queries, e.g. to check what the terrain is like. There is no need to book unless stated otherwise. The events are aimed at the general public and all members are welcome. If bad weather is forecast you might like to check if the event or walk is cancelled. All events and walks are free although sometimes there is an entry fee for the venue where an event is held. Some of the walks are on rough ground so please wear suitable footwear and come prepared for the weather.

Saturday 16th May. 11am - 4pm Minchinhampton Marking Day. The Old Lodge Minchinhampton Common. Traditionally May is when the cows are brought from the overwintering fields and sheds and released back onto the commons. Livestock owners gather with their animals beside The Old Lodge on Minchinhampton Common where each cow is tagged or marked for identification before being released. National Trust staff and other local organisations will be on hand to answer questions about the age-old tradition and the way in which the Commons are managed. There will be guided walks and fun activities for children. Parking on the Common near the Old Lodge. SO852008, GL6 9AQ, What3Words: leafing.nowadays.geek.
Contact events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Sunday 17th May. 2pm - 4.30pm Prestbury Hill Reserve. Walk to seek out Duke of Burgundy, Marsh Fritillary, Small and Adonis Blues, Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak. The site is steep and surface uneven so sturdy footwear advisable. Meet at entrance to main Bill Smyllie section SO993244 What3words: hometown.blissful.scrub Postcode not given as satnavs can direct you to the wrong place. Parking available on the side or the road and inside the gate. Contact Tricia Atkinson 01242 512584 chair@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk or Ken Newcombe 07752 035388 kennethnewcombe2@btinternet.com

Saturday 30th May. 10.00am-2.00pm Cheltenham Biodiversity Festival. A community focused celebration of local ecology and green spaces. Pittville Park. Parking at Pittville Pump Room , What3words:

bags.brave.shin. Full details to be posted on the BC website
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events>. Contact Christine 07752 035388
events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Sunday 31st May. 2pm - 4.30pm Cinderford Linear Park. A walk along mainly level woodland tracks (just one quite long uphill section) to see Wood White and Grizzled Skipper. You are advised to wear long trousers and sleeves, socks and shoes due to the quantity of ticks present in the woodland. Meet in the parking area at SO649127, nearest postcode GL14 3EZ, What3words: unpacked.castle.teaching. Contact Ken Newcombe 07752 035388 kennethnewcombe2@btinternet.com

Saturday 13th - Sunday 14th June. Tinkley Gate Woodchester Park. A gathering to examine and discuss findings from moth traps set the previous night. The day will include family events. tbc - please check details on the events page of the branch website.
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events>
Contact Graeme Davis graeme@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Sunday 21st June. 10.30am - 1pm Boundary Court Selsley Common. A walk to see Summer butterflies with Graeme Davies. tbc please check details on the events page of the branch website
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/events>
Contact Graeme Davis graeme@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Sunday 12th July. 10.30am - 4.00pm Prinknash Abbey and Painswick Beacon. Butterfly ID day. There will be a presentation in the morning of butterflies seen in Gloucestershire. This will be held in the meeting room by the café at Prinknash Abbey. After a picnic lunch in the garden or lunch in the café we will take the 5 minute drive to Painswick Beacon to ID the butterflies flying that day. This is a free event but booking is required as numbers are limited. Park at Prinknash Abbey. SO880137, GL4 8EX, What3Words: apples.broke.salads. Please contact Ken Newcombe 01242 515727 kennethnewcombe2@btinternet.com for more details and to book a place.

Saturday 18th July. Ebworth to Sheepscombe Common walk, 10.30am start, finishing about lunch time or later for those bringing lunch with them. The walk will leave the carpark at 10.30am and we will proceed

down through the Ebworth Plantations (beech and mixed woodland) to St George's Field and then onto Sheepscombe Common. Species that we might see are Small Copper, Common and Chalk Hill Blue, Purple and White-letter Hairstreak, Dark Green and Silver-washed Fritillaries. The route to the Common is about one kilometre downhill along rough forest tracks, St George's Field is easier going if you stick to the path with lots of anthills off the path. The Common itself has stone tracks; there are steep slopes, rough hollows and very uneven ground. On departing it will be uphill though the woods and slippery if wet. Meet at Ebworth Centre public carpark, grid reference SO899113, What3Words fatter.liked.converged. Please contact Chris Wiltshire, 01453 545509, cotswold.sp250@btinternet.com

Thursday 23rd July 11am - 4pm The Big Butterfly Count at Barnwood Arboretum. Join us and the Friends of Barnwood Arboretum to take part in the Big Butterfly Count. Discover the arboretum's special trees and flower rich grassland and help us to count the butterflies which make this local nature reserve home. There will be also be a quiz trail, craft activities and live moths. Barnwood Arboretum is accessed via a footbridge from Barnwood Park. There is no car parking on site but there is easy pedestrian access to the Arboretum and Park from surrounding roads. Church Lane, Barnwood, Gloucester GL4 3JB. W3W winter.rate.wizard. Contact events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Sunday 2nd August. 10am - 4pm. Crickley Hill. Family Fun Day and Big Butterfly Count. Why not come dressed as a butterfly or moth, bring a picnic and enjoy the views. There will be guided butterfly safaris (11.30am and 2.30pm), a self-guided butterfly trail, bug hunts, craft activities as well as colourful moths to discover. Explore the wildflowers, birds and bugs that make Crickley Hill special. Held in partnership with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and the National Trust. Park at SO929163, nearest postcode GL4 8JY. What3Words: downturn.cowboy.listening. Note that there is a charge for parking. To reserve a place on one of the guided safaris email: events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk.

Friday 21st August 11am - 4pm. Rococo Gardens, Painswick. Rococo Family Fun event. Learn how to make a Wild Space for butterflies and moths, get creative with some craft activities, go on a bug hunt and explore the garden's butterflies and moths. SO864105, GL6 6TH.

What3Words: plant.latter.cubs.

Contact events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Saturday 22nd August, 2.00pm – 4.30pm Rough Bank Reserve. A walk around the reserve to see what butterflies (and possibly a few moths) are still on the wing. Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue, Brown Argus and Small Heath can be expected as well as a few of the high summer browns. Meet in the car park at SO914087, about 0.5km south of The Camp village. what3words: dislodge.football.cracker in time for a 2.00pm start. Contact Serena or Guy Meredith 01242 524138
treasurer@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Branch Volunteering Opportunities

Committee Vacancies

There are two vacancies on the committee at present:-

Moth Conservation Coordinator and Forest of Dean Contact

If you think you might be interested in either of these posts and would like to find out more, please contact chair@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Volunteers to help at Events

We need more volunteers to help at branch events including moth enthusiasts to trap and open a box of moths (preferably caught at the event site). If you enjoy meeting people and talking about butterflies and moths, then please consider helping at one of our events. Contact Christine Blythe at events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk if interested.

How to get in touch and stay up to date

Branch website



The Branch has kept its dedicated website in addition to the branch area of the national Butterfly Conservation website.

www.gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk



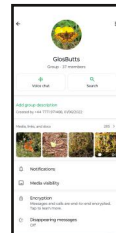
Facebook



We have two Facebook groups, Gloucestershire moths and Gloucestershire butterfly Group. They are closed groups but to get access search and click join.

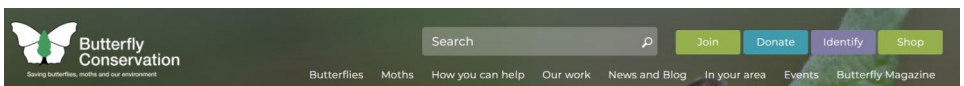
WhatsApp

There is also a Gloucestershire Butterflies WhatsApp group **GlosButts**. Once you have an account please contact Matthew Oates on 07771971488 to get added.



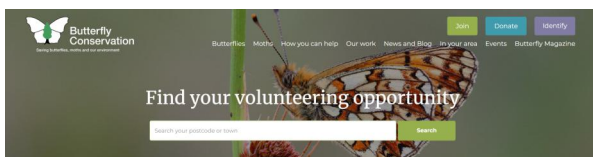
National Website

For National news and events go to <https://butterfly-conservation.org> and navigate from the main menu. All of the Gloucestershire BC events are posted here and please feel free to share these with friends and family.



For information on volunteering opportunities in Gloucestershire Branch and other branches go to:

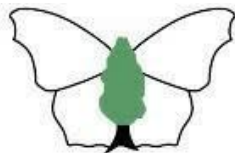
https://volunteer.butterfly-conservation.org/opportunities#display=grid&s=date_advertised&o=desc&limit=14&include=image&public_search=true



Gloucestershire Branch Committee

Chair/Secretary	Tricia Atkinson	Tel: 01242 512584 email: chair@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Treasurer	Serena Meredith	Tel: 01242 524138 email: treasurer@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
County Butterfly Recorder	Chris Wiltshire	Tel: 01453 545509 The Brambles, Stinchcombe Hill, Dursley GL11 6AQ email: butterfly-recorder@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Asst. County Butterfly Recorder	Vic Polley	Tel: 01453 842896 email: vic@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Moth Conservation Coordinator	vacant	
Forest of Dean Contact	vacant	
Newsletter	Lynne Turner	Tel: 07946 759892 email: lynne@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
H & S Co-ordinator	Serena Meredith	Tel: 01242 524138 email: healthandsafety@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Membership Secretary	Christine Blythe	Tel: 01242 678148 email: membership@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Prestbury Hill Reserve Contact	Tricia Atkinson	Tel: 01242 512584 email: chair@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Events Organisers	Christine Blythe and Rosie Woolley	email: events@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Education Coordinator	Ken Newcombe	Tel: 01242 515727 email: education@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Committee	John Coates	Tel: 07776142482 email: john@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Lynne Turner email: lynne@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Graeme Davis email: graeme@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Seb Buckton email: seb@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Rosie Woolley email: rosie@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Simon Fenner email: simonf@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Moth Recorders: VC33 VC34 VC34	Robert Homan	email: vc33-eastglos@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Michael Bradley email: vc34-westofsevern@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk Ali Bourne email: vc34-eastofsevern@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk
Webmaster	Sue Thompson	Tel: 07963 861964 email: webmaster@gloucestershire-butterflies.org.uk

Emails for associate committee members are given on the branch website
<https://www.butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/gloucestershire-branch/committee>



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Butterfly Conservation

Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468)

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