

BUTTERFLY BONANZA IN BRECKLAND

After the wet summer of 2012 and the seemingly unending winter, no one expected to see many butterflies in 2013. How wrong everyone was! Sue Pennell is a keen and knowledgeable observer of butterflies, and is also an accomplished photographer ...

This summer and early autumn saw butterflies in their multitudes—Whites, Peacocks, Commas, Small Tortoiseshells, Speckled Woods, Skippers and Painted Ladies, among others. Everyone noticed them—both in terms of numbers and variety. But it was not just the familiar; it was the unfamiliar, unusual and rare butterflies that were spotted in Breckland this summer.

Hints of good things came in early summer, when Green Hairstreaks were spied in the Brecks. This small butterfly is not common and is difficult to find, but once its shimmering emerald wings have been spotted amidst golden explosions of gorse or broom, it is rarely forgotten.



Green Hairstreak

By midsummer the bonanza was in full swing. White Admirals and White-letter Hairstreaks, treetop-living butterflies, were found nearer the ground, nectaring and basking in the sunshine in larger numbers than usual, and at new sites across Breckland.

For several years past there have been rumours that the Suffolk population of Silver-washed Fritillary was expanding and recolonising the Norfolk Brecks, where this species bred in the 1970s. Sightings in 2013 would appear to confirm this, as these large, spectacular marmalade-coloured butterflies were seen cruising at speed along secluded woodland rides.

Visitors also came from further afield, with Clouded Yellows carried to Breckland from southern Europe on the warm winds. Each year brings reports of one or two in Norfolk and Suffolk, but not this year—2013 saw a mass invasion. Clouded Yellows were everywhere, in ones, twos and threes, bringing an exotic touch of gold to summer in the Brecks.

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WHAT'S ON

forthcoming Society events

www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events

Friday 13 December

Society's Christmas Event

A talk by Stephen Pope on *The Village Craftsman*, followed by seasonal refreshments.

Cockley Cley Hall, 7.00pm

Members £10, non-members £13.

Booking essential: contact Sue Pennell, tel 01366 328452 or email suemark@12s.com, by 6 December please.

Sunday 12 January

Winter Wander, Santon Downham.

See page 3 for details.

Friday 28 February

The Archaeology of Breckland

Presented by David Robertson (Norfolk Archaeology Dept)

Mundford Village Hall, 7.00pm

Members £5, non-members £8, to include refreshments.

(Mundford is situated at the junction of the A134 north of Thetford and the A1065. The Village Hall is first right (St Leonard's Street) off the A134. The Hall is on the right.

March

The Society is organising a private view of *Thetford's Lost Tudor Sculptures*, an exhibition at the Ancient House Museum. See January issue for details.

If you need a lift to a Society event, please contact Sue Pennell on 01366 328452, as it may be possible to arrange transport with other members. If there are any members near Necton who are able to give a member there a lift to events, please also contact Sue. Further information about events is available from Sue Pennell on info@brecsoc.org.uk



Clouded Yellow

It was the Chalkhill Blue, no foreign invader or adventurous native species, which perhaps caused most comment. The nearest colony to our area is on chalk grassland near Newmarket, from where the butterflies do not normally stray. However, this year they were found in new locations in eastern counties and, amazingly, also in Breckland.

The male Chalkhill has iridescent, silvery blue and black-bordered wings. It cannot be mistaken. So unusual are they that reported sightings were checked and double-checked. The question was asked, "How did they get here?" Experts do not believe they have flown in from Newmarket, so could they have been introduced illegally, as was the case at Warham Camp in North Norfolk? Alternatively, have they always persisted in a few locations across the Brecks without being noticed? No one seems to know the answer.

Chalkhill Blue



Will these incomers become permanent residents and thrive in Breckland? It depends on their environment. Most of these rare butterflies have particular dietary needs for both caterpillar and adult. White-letter Hairstreaks live only in the canopy of elms; Silver-washed Fritillaries lay their eggs only on violets; and Chalkhill Blue larvae require horseshoe vetch. Without these specific plants they cannot breed or establish colonies. The Clouded Yellow cannot survive a British winter and, being dependent on southern winds, will remain a welcome, but intermittent, visitor.

Will we see another Breckland butterfly bonanza in 2014? Let us hope so, but only time will tell.



Silver-washed Fritillary



White Admiral



White Letter Hairstreak

CARNAGE ON OUR ROADS!

The fall in wildlife numbers is a matter of concern to us all and a constant theme on national television and radio programmes. The reasons behind such decline are complex and varied, but one factor does stand out—roadkill.

My wife and I are keen cyclists and on our trips around West Norfolk had noted the large number of bird and animal corpses along the roadside. It occurred to us that this was a major factor in wildlife mortality. To try to substantiate our theory, we started a roadkill count. Over eight weeks we travelled 345 miles and counted 463 dead creatures—a truly astonishing figure. Acting as lead cyclists for the Oxborough Half Marathon in September, we cycled through Beachamwell, Barton Bendish and Boughton to Oxborough and then home via Cockley Cley. Over the total of 26 miles we counted 46 roadkill corpses, taking great care not to count things twice. This figure will be only part of the actual death toll as many animals will crawl away to die, are quickly scavenged by other wildlife such as crows, or are struck so violently that their bodies end up out of sight of the road.

What to do about the impact of this slaughter on our roads is not so straightforward, but at the very least there should be wider debate on this subject and greater recognition of its implications.

We are now in contact with BBC TV's *Countryfile* and with Cardiff University, which is running "Project Splatter", designed to raise awareness and collate data on levels of roadkill.

If you are interested in helping Cardiff University, please contact them via their Facebook page or at www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/articles/help-uk-wildlife-be-a-splatter-spotter-11618.html, letting them know what you have found and giving a grid reference, which you can find on www.gridreferencefinder.uk.

Brian Wilson

WILD ABOUT THE BRECKS

Thetford Guildhall on Saturday 19 October

The Society had a stand at “Wild About the Brecks”, an event organised by the RSPB and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust—a day celebrating the wildlife and heritage of the Brecks and attended by over 600 people.

It was a day for all the family, and an opportunity to display our brand new printed cloth, sporting our name and logo, alongside our pop-up banner and display screens giving information about the Society and our activities and projects. There was a lively throng of visitors throughout the day, many of whom participated in our “Do you know your Brecks?” quiz, cleverly devised by Sue Pennell. The winners of the quiz were Mr and Mrs Hoskins of Thetford, who receive a year’s complimentary membership of the Society.

We were in excellent company: the RSPB were there; the BTO were publicising their Winter Thrushes Survey; the Breckland Astronomical Society were exhibiting some fantastic photographs of the night skies, taken from their telescopes; the Icení Botanical Artists were displaying an impressive selection of their members’ work; and a host of other organisations, all advertising the magnificent array of wildlife the Brecks has to offer.



BTO WINTER THRUSHES SURVEY



Fieldfare with apples

Photo: Jill Pakenham/BTO

The UK countryside supports large numbers of several thrush species through the winter. The BTO Winter Thrushes Survey, which is now active online, aims to find out more about their numbers and distribution, and the resources they need to survive through to spring and the next breeding season.

Gaps in our knowledge include:

- How does thrushes’ use of habitat (including gardens) vary, by species, geographically and through the winter?
- How do feeding behaviours vary, again by species, geographically and through the winter?
- What is the relative importance of key habitats such as farmland, gardens and orchards and of various feeding resources?
- In what ways do thrush numbers, distribution and feeding behaviour differ between successive winters?

The more data we can gather, the better we shall be able to promote the conservation of these popular birds.

Visit: www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thrushes

Join us for an informal

Winter Wander

at Santon Downham

on Sunday 12 January 2014 at 10.30am

Come and join Anne and Sue on an informal walk of approx. 2½ miles along forest rides and tracks. On the way we shall see earthworks of a deserted village, a moated manor house, a holy well and church, burial mounds and a Viking grave.

After the walk we shall take the cars the short distance to the Forestry Commission car park and then visit the nearby parish church of St Mary’s. It was this beautiful little church, along with much of the village, that was partially buried by the sand blow in 1668.

Free to all who wish to come along!

Location: Meet at St Helen’s picnic site car park.

Directions: Santon Downham is signed off the A134 between Thetford and Mundford. Follow the small road for a mile or so and, having passed over the level crossing, take the turning on the left, before the bridge, signed to St Helen’s. The free car park is on the left in about a quarter of a mile.

Please let us know if you are coming along: contact Sue on 01366 328452 or suemark@12s.com

An evening with Pippa Blackall

Society members were treated to a magical evening in Oxborough Village Hall on 11 October, when our local artist working with stained glass visited us, accompanied by wonderful samples of her work.

With her collection of slides, Pippa Blackall gave us an account of how she set about making a stained glass window, from initial sketch, with painstaking measuring, through the cutting of the coloured glass, fitting the lead and transportation to the site, to the final installation of the window in its new home.

As well as using coloured glass (the glass she uses is all hand-blown, and then flattened—an ancient technique) Pippa uses different methods to achieve the finish she desires. She may paint the glass, or she may sand-blast it, or she may fuse layers of glass together, not only producing a blend of colours but also a relief effect. Or she may employ all those processes.

Pippa has been working in stained glass for more than 30 years, having been trained by Francis Spear, a leading artist-craftsman of the 20th century,

Pippa (centre) explains some techniques to Society members



Miriam the Prophetess: detail of window, St Edmundsbury Cathedral

who nurtured her work through national competition wins from the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass. She says her favourite periods of art are Byzantine and Romanesque, which entails as much travelling as possible to Greece and France.

Recent commissions include a window for St Edmundsbury Cathedral, an east window for SS Peter and Paul at Alpheton in Suffolk, an east window for St John the Baptist parish church at Mileham, Norfolk and chapel windows for Treloar Collage in Hampshire. The Mileham window was featured on BBC's *Songs of Praise* in May 2005.

Pippa is currently tutor and artist in residence at the Stained Glass Museum, Ely. For examples of her work, see her website:

www.stainedglass-art.co.uk

A summer stroll exploring Knettishall Heath

Eleven o'clock on Sunday 1 September found a select band of members, their guests and two dogs gathered in the car park at Knettishall Heath Country Park for a leisurely stroll and picnic.

There was a distinct autumnal feel in the air as we set off in our coats, but soon enough, as the sun came out, these were discarded.

We followed the "Green Rabbit Walk" through shady woodland, later passing the Bronze Age barrow of Hut Hill, crowned with its lone fir. A herd of beautiful and semi-wild Exmoor ponies watched us as we crossed the heather-covered tracts of heath. We found and explored the 18th-century circular rabbit warren, but were surprised by how small it was, and how different from the extensive medieval warrens researched by the Society as part of its warrens project.

Our route took us past a disused quarry full of blackberry bushes bursting with delicious fruit, alongside a newly harvested field and back to where had we started our stroll. Here, in a sunny clearing, we found a table for our picnic before completing the day with a shorter walk beside the Little Ouse, where the dogs had a welcome swim. It was a very relaxed and enjoyable day—so much better than mowing the lawn!

Peggy English



If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email: lizdittner@tiscali.co.uk or tel 01366 727813