

There were many butterflies on the wing on the second day, including brown argus, brimstone, green-veined white, meadow brown, red admiral, speckled wood and small white. Birds included herring gulls and cormorants in the bay, stonechats and whitethroats in bushes near the sea.

Fish and chips in Blandford kept starvation at bay as we wended our way home and a beautiful sunset refreshed our spirits.

An Astonishing Year for Malvern Butterflies

By Mel Mason

If 2016 was one of the worst years on record for butterflies, then 2017 has been one of the most surprising. Numbers crashed in 2016, approximately 30% less than in 2015. Against the odds, numbers have not just recovered on 13 transect sites around the Malverns; they seem to be the highest in recent years. The season started with regular sightings of red admiral in March and April (usually not seen until mid-May or June) and almost matching the number of brimstone. Is this due to unprecedented migration from southern Spain or successful winter breeding in an extremely mild winter? Later in spring and early summer a record number of 27 green hairstreaks were seen in the lower quarries and higher slopes, the last as late as 1st July. Then, the first brood of holly blue numbers exploded, 70% greater than in 2016 and 2015. No doubt, the ichneumon wasp *Listrodomus nychthemerus* is already on the heels of this peak ready to inject its eggs into the caterpillars and resume the five-year cycle of host and parasite. In summer, small copper made a significant recovery, following a 30% decline in the past six years, with approximately 75% more than 2016. More often out of sight at the top of elms, white-letter hairstreak usually number between one to five sightings each year, but fifty were reported from around the Hills and Malvern Gardens along with one on wych elm near the North Quarry Clock Tower. Perhaps the best site was the Old Hills where it was difficult not to find many purple hairstreaks feeding on bramble flowers in the middle of the day, along with white-letter hairstreaks laying eggs on the wych elms nearby. Marbled white numbers show the most astonishing population increase, 50% up on last year, which was the highest ever recorded population of this species both locally and across the West Midlands. It must be one of the winners of climate change and extreme weather events. It has also been a bumper year for common blue, with the second highest numbers in recent times.

The big losers of the past ten years include some of the most common species, particularly peacock, small tortoiseshell and gatekeeper. Fortunately, gatekeeper and small tortoiseshell have improved this year but peacock numbers have fallen again. Total butterfly numbers reached a peak in the week beginning 8th July, a week earlier than last year, and following the most prolonged heatwave since June 1976. Two further surprises were recorded in the Southern Hills: in early summer two small pearl-bordered fritillaries were identified on the western slopes of Chase End Hill, and, later in summer, several recorders saw two dark-green fritillaries on Swinyard Hill. In much larger numbers, silver-washed fritillary sightings are increasing each year, in particular around the Southern Hills.

Last, but not least, the graylings emerged early and increased in numbers on the eastern slopes of North Hill this year. During a butterfly walk on 23rd July, Malvern WWT members were fortunate to see grayling in addition to 17 other species of butterfly. The future of the Malvern grayling is dependent to a large extent on the volunteers attached to MHT and WMBC who continue to play a significant role in maintaining and improving the grayling habitat on the northern hills.



BBC Midlands Today interviewing Mel Mason on 17th July 2017 to celebrate the highest grayling population for several years on Grayling Ridge, North Hill. Other pictures can be seen on our website.

My Wildlife Garden

By Tricia Portch

We have a fairly large garden abutting Malvern Hills Trust land on the eastern side of North Hill. The garden slopes steeply and we've spent a lot of time this summer trying to install a pond. I'd hoped that by now (October) I'd be writing about the arrival of new aquatic life, but I'd underestimated the difficulty of getting the slope terraced! Meanwhile we've done the August cut of our little meadow. About four years ago, we decided to encourage this area to become a wildflower meadow. Initially the grass grew long and thick all over, but in the early autumn, we removed all the cuttings to impoverish the soil, and strewn yellow rattle seeds thickly to parasitize and further weaken the grass. Interestingly, the rattle flourished in only a third of the area and finer grasses such as common bent were able to take over here. It failed to grow on the south side which is on a band of clay, or on the uphill side which is nearest to woodland. Here unfortunately, coarse grasses such as couch reign supreme. Despite being of limited success as a wildflower meadow, the area is popular with wildlife: ringlets, meadow browns and gatekeeper butterflies breed there, and I find frogs, toads and slow worms. I'm hoping there will be grass snakes soon as I understand they've recently bred locally. Common carder bees nest and many species of birds drop by to feed. The green woodpecker searches for ants in the short grass, tawny owls breed nearby, greenfinches, bullfinches and nuthatches often appear, and all kinds of tits come to the sunflower kernel feeder.

Contributions

Please send any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to the editor alison.uren@gmail.com or phone 01684 567819

Malvern Group Newsletter

Winter 2017

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Worcestershire

Indoor Meetings 2017 and 2018

Indoor Meetings are held at 7.30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms in Church Street, Great Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50 with refreshments included. Children are free and non-members of the Trust are very welcome.

December 7th: Butterflies of the Malvern Hills

Mel Mason, West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Representative

January 4th: Pine Marten Recovery in Wales and England

Elizabeth Croose, Projects Support Officer of the Vincent Wildlife Trust

February 1st: The Flora of Herefordshire

Peter Garner, BSBI Recorder for Herefordshire

March 1st: Farming with Nature

Caroline Corsie, WWT Grasslands and Agriculture Officer

Outdoor Meetings

Our programme of Trips and Walks has been immensely successful this year, with many of them running twice to accommodate the large numbers of people wanting to come. We are all very grateful to Margaret Vernon for her excellent organisation and to our minibus driver Lyndon Knott, who is prepared to drive long distances two days running. The forthcoming trip to Ynis-Hir and Aberystwyth is no exception; it is fully booked on December 9th and 10th. However it is always worth putting your name on the reserve list for any of our outings.

Full details of all walks and trips 2018 can be found on the enclosed booking form or on the website. For more information or booking, phone **Margaret Vernon on 01684 565079**.

Next Trip: Wednesday February 7th 2018. A day trip to the Forest of Dean to see winter birds.

Other walks are organised at short notice by email, so if you are not on our list then please send your email address to malverngroup@live.co.uk so that you can be kept informed.

Collection at Wilko's, 26th August

Very many thanks to those who helped at the cash collection outside Wilko's this year. We raised £235 in one day, which is going towards the appeal to purchase Hardwick Green Meadows. Overall we have contributed over £1,500 to this appeal, which is worth £12,000 in match funding from other sources.

Brean Down And Sand Point Nature Reserves, 13th July

By Neil Edwards

Brean Down is a promontory on the coast of Somerset, owned by the National Trust and rich in wildlife, history and archaeology. On arrival at the visitor centre we were met by our National Trust guides Ian and Paul, who, throughout our visit, provided a wealth of interesting detailed information on all aspects of the reserve.

During the visit we were treated to numerous sightings of many different butterfly species, including Essex skipper, wall brown, grayling and chalkhill blue. Of the abundant coastal flora, we were particularly pleased to see the rare white rock rose, sea lavender, dwarf sedge and Somerset hair grass. Good sightings of stonechats, linnets, swallows, a soaring peregrine and a rather splendid sulphur beetle contributed to a substantial visit list.

From the summit (325 metres above sea level) there were fine views along the Mendip Hills and Somerset Levels, and across the Bristol Channel to Cardiff. We had lunch at the Victorian Fort, built at the extreme end of the headland to guard against possible invasion during the Napoleonic wars and later both World Wars.

Once back at sea level the group then moved on to Sand Point, which provided more interesting flora and fauna, with the added attraction of extensive views across salt marshes, mudflats and unusual volcanic formations.

Tyneham Village, 9th & 10th August

by Christine Poyner and Helen Tudge

Tyneham Village lies close to the Dorset coast. In 1943 the area was requisitioned by the army and cleared of its inhabitants to make way for Allied troops preparing for the D-Day landings. The residents were never allowed to return. The area remains Ministry of Defence land with limited public access, so being untouched by modern farming practices it has become a haven for wildlife.

Two trips to Tyneham took place: the first day being overcast with light rain; the second day, dry with warm sunshine. There was interest en route including roadsides and roundabouts planted with wildflowers. In Savernake Forest there were several substantial oaks including the Big Belly Oak, thought to be the oldest oak in Britain (about 1100 years old). And a straw owl atop a thatched roof!

On arrival some walked to Worbarrow Bay with its surrounding chalk cliffs, whilst others ventured further afield. In Tyneham itself, poignant interpretation boards in the church, the former school and the farm painted vivid pictures of former village life. There was a good variety of flowers to be seen, both around the village and along the track to the bay, including hemp agrimony, common fleabane, field scabious, bird's-foot trefoil, tufted vetch, woody nightshade and wild clematis.