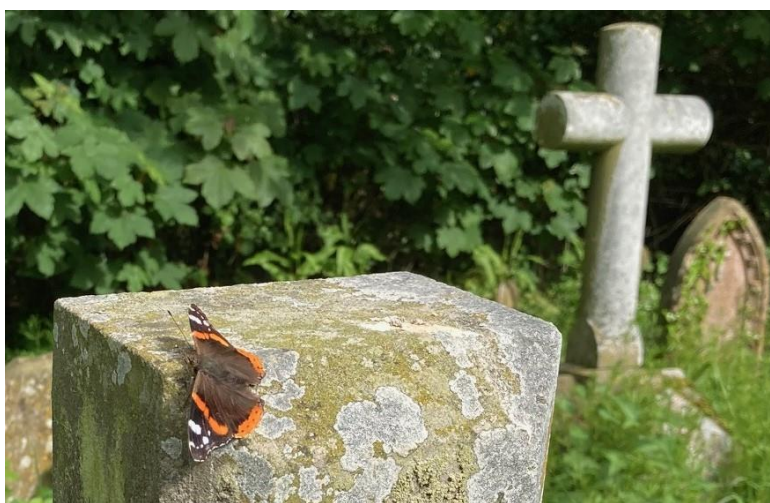


## 7. Fiona Bates writes about her experience of counting butterflies

### “2022 – our first count of butterflies

Reading the Church News in 2022, I saw a couple of sentences asking for volunteers to count the butterflies in the churchyards of the Wychwoods. This had not been done before so there was no baseline data and the Wychwood Forest Trust was trying to get something going.

Butterflies are amongst the most threatened wildlife species in the UK. According to Butterfly Conservation, 80 % of our butterflies and moths have been lost since the 1970s. These insects are very important – see note at the end.



Red Admiral

### What we did

I felt that this was something I could do so I signed myself and my children up to count butterflies in St Simon and St Jude's churchyard. We were given some helpful advice e.g. if you wouldn't take your cup of tea outside to drink it, then you are not going to see any butterflies. Butterflies like it to be above 14 degrees and sunny. We were asked to go out once a month for half hour between the months of May to August and, like the Big Garden Bird Watch, count the most amount of butterflies seen at one time, rather than counting the same butterfly lots of times.

We were also given a colour identification guide for butterflies in the Wychwood Forest and a month by month guide of what it is possible to see. An amazing aide for someone like me who, since childhood, has been able to name peacock, red admiral, cabbage white, brimstone... but can be foxed by a broader selection!

We were also asked to say what habitat the butterfly was seen in (as described below). Most of the butterflies were seen around the trees and hedge behind the church. With it being quite a large churchyard it can be difficult to decide where to sit and whether to walk around. I took my children so we could divide and conquer!



Orange Tip

## We counted again in 2023

We went on to record results in 2023, this time coordinated by Butterfly Conservation.

Our 2023 results...

| 14 <sup>th</sup> May  | 25 <sup>th</sup> June   | 21 <sup>st</sup> July                                | 30 <sup>th</sup> August                           |
|---|---|--|---|
| Large White 1 A<br>Orange Tip 1 C<br>Holly Blue 1 A<br>Red Admiral 1 A<br>Speckled Wood 2 A | Small White 1 D<br>Holly Blue 1 A<br>Peacock 1 A<br>Ringlet 2 A | Large White 2 C<br>Red Admiral 2 D<br>Gatekeeper 2 D | Large White 1 A<br>Red Admiral 1 A<br>Ringlet 2 A |

A = Old hedge or bushes

B = Regular close mown area

C = Area not mown

D = Mown once or twice.

From these results, it can be seen that butterflies do not favour closely mown areas, much preferring old hedges and bushes, and areas mown only once or twice. This supports the argument for No Mow May – see the article in this Newsletter.

For me, as a summer activity it ticks all the boxes for a bit of mindfulness - being present in the moment, in fresh air and not worrying about all the other things that have to be done. I can highly recommend it. I'm still not a butterfly expert, but I have definitely enjoyed it."

**Fiona Bates, March, 2024**



Holly Blue

### **A note on why butterflies and moths are important**

Butterflies and moths have, of course, their own intrinsic and also aesthetic value. People like seeing them; they are often beautiful and seen as the essence of nature. They are important elements in the food chain for birds, bats and other insectivorous animals. And, being a part of pollination and pest control, they are good indicators of a healthy environment and healthy ecosystems.

Many thousands of people garden for wildlife, and especially for butterflies and moths – could you do more in your tubs or gardens? The following flowers are especially attractive to butterflies; buddleia, marjoram, thymes, lavender, bugle, hawkweeds, and buttercups.



Ringlet

## Will you take part in counting butterflies in 2024?

It's such a worthwhile activity and so relaxing and delightful; please join in the count!

### There are several ways of being involved;

- a. **any time** you see a butterfly (or day-flying moth) you can record it on the **iRecord app** which uses the GPS on your phone to record where you have seen it and the time when you do the recording. It takes only seconds. A paper recording system is available if you are put off by an app – contact Chris Woodrow for details on [lepidoptera45@btinternet.com](mailto:lepidoptera45@btinternet.com).
- b. as Fiona did, at **any churchyard** - please contact Chris Woodrow at [churchyard-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:churchyard-coordinator@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk).  
You will visit for 30 minutes **once a month in May, June, July and August**.  
A useful guide is available from Chris Woodrow to help you to identify the butterflies and complete the form. Take the children with you – we need them to help protect our wildlife in future
- c. join the **Big Butterly Count (BBC)** between **July 12<sup>th</sup> and Sunday August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024**. An app will be available nearer the time to download to your mobile phone or tablet from [butterfly-conservation.org](http://butterfly-conservation.org)

For more information on butterflies and news of activities at branch level in the Upper Thames Region (which includes Oxfordshire) go to [www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk).

**Elaine Brittan, April 2024**