

RECENT EVENTS

VISIT TO FINCHAM OLD RECTORY GARDEN, 27 JUNE *A report by Sheila Chambers*

On a balmy mid-summer evening Breckland Society members were privileged to enter the peaceful world of Jan and Stuart Waterston's beautiful garden at the Old Rectory in Fincham. The Waterstons bought the house 15 years ago, when this magnificent and mainly 18th-century property was in an extremely bad state of repair. At that time there was no real garden as such, only some superb mature trees.

Jan and Stuart soon set about creating a sense of order and have essentially arranged the grounds into five separate gardens. The garden in front of the house is lawned, with majestic specimen trees: beech, copper beech, walnut and a particularly fine fernleaf beech. The terrace and lawned garden to the rear fall away to a stunning rose arbour. The lawn is flanked by two gentle herbaceous beds featuring roses and drifts of quiet-coloured perennials, edged with nepeta and buzzing with bees and other insects.

To the right of the main lawn lies a woodland walk featuring a towering oriental plane tree. The walk leads round to the pond garden, where Jan has incorporated reclaimed treasures, among them an old garden pump, which feeds the pond. From here you are led through an orchard to magnificent views over old glebeland meadows – there is a real sense of 'old Norfolk' here.

A further section contains the vegetable garden, in which Jan is growing the healthiest selection of vegetables and fruit I have ever seen! She has planned the compost bays with aesthetic care, and the way she has embraced and presented the outbuildings makes this a classic *Country Living* paradise. Careful thought and a keen and sensitive eye are everywhere in evidence.



Back to the centre and main lawn. The herbaceous borders are divided on the right by a walkway leading into the woodland and marked by stately urns, and to one side of the lawn sits a prettily furnished summerhouse, doors invitingly open.

Jan has chosen many splendid and curious pieces to enhance the garden, and her imagination, creativity and knowledge as a plantswoman all shine through in a tranquil yet powerful way. Undoubtedly a highlight among recent Society visits, and an inspiration for those of us wondering what to do with that problem part of the garden.

NATURAL INSPIRATION Outdoors and Within

Would you like to feel refreshed, enlivened, enlightened and have a greater sense of connection with life and nature? The Society is holding a series of workshops on four Saturday afternoons, one for each season of the year, highlighting the interdependence between people and their environment, and with an emphasis on the Breckland landscape.

Each workshop will follow the same formula. Beginning outside, John Davies and James Parry will point out seasonal plant, bird and animal activity. We shall then move indoors, where Lucinda Mackworth-Young will explore traditional country customs and their significance in the light of our modern lives. Tea follows with homemade food on a seasonal theme (Sue Whittle), and to finish, we will be introduced to ideas and recipes for growing and eating seasonal produce (Liz Dittner).

Hosted by John and Diana Davies at Clermont House Garden, the afternoons will run from 2.00–5.00pm, as follows:

Saturday 31 October: Preparing the Earth, Seeds and Hibernation. Apples and Pumpkins, Divining and Dreaming (Intuition)

Saturday 30 January: First Shoots and Newborns, Candles and Spring Cleaning; Nurturing and Protecting (Imagination)

Saturday 1 May: Full bloom and Fertility, Mayflower and Maypoles, Recreation and Relationships (Creation)

Saturday 7 August: First Fruits – The Plaited Loaf and Corn Dolly, Success and Sacrifice (Celebration)

The cost is £7.50 per afternoon, or £25 for all four afternoons. Numbers will be limited, so please book early to be sure of your place (Sue Whittle, The Hay Barn, Hall Farm Barns, Oxborough, PE33 9PS 01366 328190 susanmalcolmwhittle@tiscali.co.uk).

We very much hope you will join us.

Lucinda Mackworth-Young

Clermont House Garden and Arboretum

Diana and I are delighted to host the Society's Natural Inspiration workshops over the coming year. The garden is on my part an attempt to 'garden with soul'; to 'feel and commune' with the natural healing and spiritual energy of trees and plants. I try to listen to nature. Covering some thirteen acres, it provides a home for my family and a sanctuary and haven for wildlife, and we are always pleased to welcome people here.

John Davies

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter please contact the Editor at The Breckland Society

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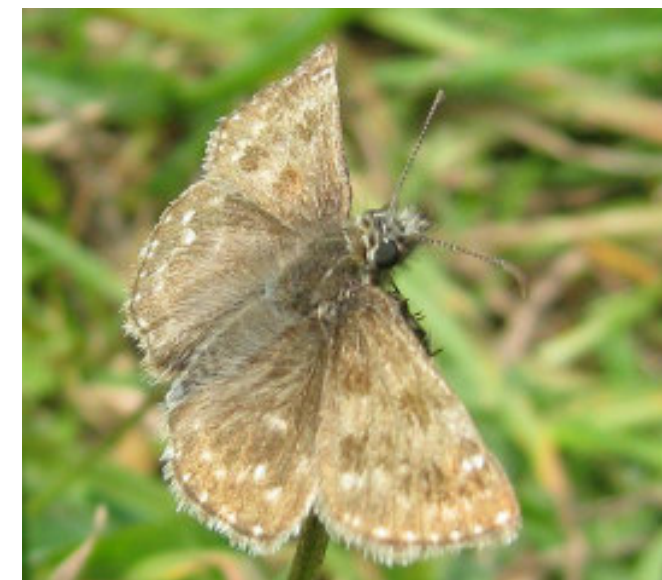
www.brecsoc.org.uk



BUTTERFLIES ACROSS THE BRECKS

The spell of hot weather earlier in the summer prompted the appearance of large numbers of butterflies in the Brecks, including species that are resident locally as well as those that have travelled here from more distant parts. James Parry looks at some of the local notables, as well as at two butterfly species that have been particularly conspicuous this year.

It is a grim fact, but Britain is not the best place for butterflies. Our cool and wet maritime climate and isolated physical location off the north-west corner of the European landmass combine to work against these delicate insects, which favour warm and sunny conditions and are not always able to cross open tracts of sea. Intensive farming techniques and the general tidying-up of the British countryside in recent decades have certainly not helped. We can only muster a total of 58 species – compared to 113 in more northerly Sweden, for example, and approximately 200 in France. Not only is our range of species very limited, but the populations of many are falling fast. A walk through the Breckland countryside a century ago would have produced far greater numbers and a greater variety of butterfly species than is possible today. Our butterflies are in real trouble.



Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*

However, there are some glimmers of hope. The Large Blue *Maculinea arion* has been successfully reintroduced to the West Country following its extinction there in 1979, for example, and careful management has led to the recovery of species of fritillary that are dependent on the coppicing of woodland. As far as the

Brecks are concerned, we are lucky to have populations of two of Britain's scarcest, if admittedly unspectacular, species living here: the Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages* and the Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*. One can easily be forgiven for overlooking both of these, as they are by no stretch of the imagination among the more glamorous members of their clan. Small and rather moth-like, their cryptic coloration makes them hard to spot when they are at rest and even when on the wing they easily escape notice.

WHAT'S ON

forthcoming Society events

Friday 21 August

6pm Guided visit to Cavenham Heath, one of the best examples of heathland in the Brecks. Heather should be in full flower, and there is a chance of seeing stone curlews. Free, but please book in advance with Sue Whittle, 01366 328190.

Friday 18 September

7.30pm Talk on recent work on Roman Norfolk, by Norfolk County Archaeologist, David Gurney. Oxborough village hall. £3, to include tea or coffee.

Saturday 31 October

Natural Inspiration Workshop
See back page for details.

Friday 11 December

Christmas party at Clermont House, by kind invitation of John and Diana Davies. Details in October newsletter.

Be that as it may, both the Dingy and Grizzled Skipper are priority species under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and special efforts are underway in the Brecks to reduce the rate of their decline and help the generally small and fragmented populations expand. Both species favour similar habitat, usually open and sunny unimproved grassland where their larval foodplants grow – bird's-foot trefoil and horseshoe vetch for the Dingy and a wider range of options for the Grizzled, from bramble and agrimony to salad burnet and wild strawberry. The adult butterflies are on the wing in May and June, and can be seen relatively easily at several sites locally, including Foulden Common and the excellent Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Narborough, which is also home to common lizards and a range of interesting birds. The skippers have also been recorded from grassy rides within Thetford Forest and it is possible that some small populations remain to be discovered. Meanwhile, the organisation Butterfly Conservation has recently launched The Big Brecks Project, designed



Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*



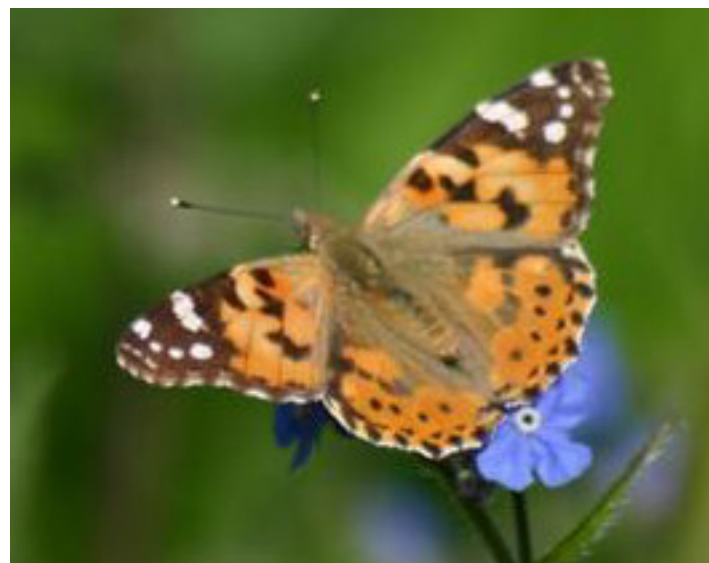
Orange-tip *Anthocaris cardamines*

to boost the fortunes of eight species of priority moth and four of butterfly in Breckland, including these two skippers.

Meanwhile, April and May this year were notable for the large numbers of two species of butterfly with which many of us are much more familiar – the Orange-tip *Anthocaris cardamines* and Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*. The first of these is one of the true harbingers of spring, on the wing from mid-April onwards and a common sight as it flies over meadows of cow parsley and along road verges. This year saw very good numbers of this butterfly, helped by generally fine weather during its flight period in April and May. Protracted wet and cool weather can be disastrous for butterflies, as it inhibits flight, feeding and mating, thereby depressing rates of reproduction and usually meaning a bad year to follow. The large numbers of Orange-tips this year augurs well for 2010, so long as a harsh winter does not intervene and kill off too high a percentage of the overwintering pupae.

The Orange-tip is a resident butterfly here, with adults rarely straying more than a kilometre or so from where they emerged from their chrysalis. At the other end of the spectrum are the long-distance migrants, none more

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*



**CPRE NORFOLK
GREEN BUILDINGS IN NORFOLK
OPEN DAYS 2009**

Thursday 10 September – Sunday 13 September

CPRE Norfolk's popular Green Buildings Open Days will once again be taking place in September. Guided tours at eco-homes, earth buildings and low carbon developments in Norfolk have been arranged by CPRE Norfolk as part of the nationwide Heritage Open Days scheme.

Tours will take place at 12 energy-efficient properties. Many harness the energy of the wind, sun, river and rain - some are hand-made, built from straw, cob or rammed earth, and may incorporate sheep's wool, recycled newspaper or other reclaimed materials. Tours are led personally by the homeowners, builders or architects.

The tours are free and open to all, but will require booking. For a copy of the brochure contact the Energy Saving Trust on **01376 531547**.

remarkable than the strong-flying Painted Lady. Unusually warm weather at the end of May brought many thousands – possibly millions – of Painted Ladies up from north Africa and southern Europe and across the English Channel. They arrived in a virtually constant stream on Saturday 30 May, passing through virtually every location, from town centres to open fields and woodland edges, at a rate reckoned in some places to be in excess of 300 per hour and travelling at an estimated 15–20 mph. Over 18,000 butterflies were seen passing along the Norfolk coast at Sheringham alone. Interestingly, the butterflies were all travelling in the same direction, arriving from the south-east and heading north-west. Exactly what happened to them is not clear, as the next day hardly any were to be seen at all. Since then, however, Painted Ladies have been turning up as they do every summer, although in nothing like the numbers seen at the end of May. As this species cannot hibernate at any stage of its life cycle, it must be continuously brooded in order to survive and regularly disperses from its southern headquarters.

Lastly, a brief word about moths. The Brecks are home to a wide variety of moth species, for some of which the area represents their only British haunt. Much remains to be discovered about moths and their ecology, but it is clear that their numbers are falling – a worrying sign that the wider ecosystem is in trouble. Even so, there are still good numbers out there – a recent moth trap evening at Lynford Arboretum produced a staggering 158 species, all released unharmed after being checked and recorded, and trapping has also



Cream-spot Tiger Moth *Arctia villica*

revealed the continued presence locally of species such as the Cream-spot Tiger *Arctia villica*, not recorded from the area for many years until one was trapped recently at Beachamwell.

All photos by Sue Pennell. Further information on butterflies and moths can be found at www.butterfly-conservation.org and www.norfolkmoths.co.uk

CAVENHAM HEATH – ONE OF BRECKLAND'S TOP WILDLIFE SITES

Cavenham Heath is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It lies on the south side of the River Lark near Mildenhall, north of the village of Tuddenham, on the route of the Icknield Way, and covers an area of 204 hectares. The Society has arranged a guided visit on Friday 21 August - see front page for details.

Traditionally, heaths in Breckland could be cultivated for as little as three years, until the crop yields from the dry, sandy soils were too poor to justify continuing. This temporarily cultivated area was known as a "brake" or "breck", hence the name first used by W G Clarke – Breckland. However, the heaths were mainly used for rabbit warrens and for sheep grazing, both of which created and maintained the heathland habitat. There is no evidence of a rabbit warren at Cavenham, but in 1356 a fold for sheep was mentioned in a title deed and by 1549 there were four foldcourses or sheepwalks.

In addition, the heaths provided heather and bracken for animal and human bedding and for thatching. Heather, gorse and turf were used as fuel and gravel and sand was dug out for construction. So vital were these resources to village communities that the right to take from the heath was strictly regulated and defined as commoners' rights.

Cavenham and Tuddenham parishes were enclosed under the Private Enclosure Acts of 1801 "for dividing, allotting and inclosing the fen grounds, heaths, commons and waste lands", but this area of heathland seems to have been left. In the 1940s it was part of the Eastern Command Stop Line with four pill-boxes and anti-glider trenches. In 1942, Tuddenham airfield was constructed and from it flew Stirlings and Lancasters, 144 of which were lost in just over two years. Its military connections continued, and from 1959 to 1963 the base housed a Thor Missile Unit.

Today, the reserve is celebrated for the diversity of its habitats: dry, sandy heather and lichen heath; birch woodland; alder, ash and willow

scrub and river wetland. It is therefore rich in species of birds, plants and insects. Hobby, little owl, kingfisher, tree pipit, wheatear and stone curlew are all regular here, and there are over 280 different species of plant, including several Breckland specialities. Butterflies include ringlet, small heath and small copper.

At the time of our visit, the heather should be in bloom, scenting the air and delighting us with its intense purple colour. In the late evening, Cavenham Heath has a timeless quality and a haunting beauty. Join us on **21 August at 6pm** and experience it for yourself.

Directions to Cavenham Heath

At the Barton Mills roundabout, take the A11 southbound (Newmarket/ Cambridge direction). Turn left at the signed Tuddenham junction, about a hundred metres from the roundabout. Follow all signs to Tuddenham. In Tuddenham itself, turn left at the village green and drive up the road which becomes a track, passing Longwood Farm on the right. Continue on the track for another 400 metres or so – you will see a large white NNR sign on the left; just a few metres past this is our car park, also on your left.

The guided visit on 21 August is free, but please ring Sue Whittleby to book a place.

Please wear footwear suitable for walking along paths through heather and undergrowth.