

Martin White

by Martin White, 28-Feb-11 04:33 AM GMT

The Demise of Nottinghamshire's Wildlife Heritage

There is nothing wrong with Surreptitious Science; I practice it all the time. For example, if I release a butterfly species into a Nottinghamshire locality and if it is still there three generations later I consider this a successful introduction, if not, it's a failure. This begs a one or two questions. How do I know the species was actually absent in the first place? Why three generations? Who determines the sites and the species involved? Why should I presume to know more than the experts? Why don't I freely offer my data for scientific scrutiny? Well the short answer to these questions is: – I'm completely satisfied with my own expertise, scientific scrutiny and personal methodology.

On the other hand let us now take a serious look at similar surreptitious endeavours where the consequences are far from benign. In Nottinghamshire sites are officially determined for their wildlife value and some of these are then given "protected status" and called a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation or SINC. With very few exceptions the whereabouts of these SINC's and the science which determines them are kept secret. The reason given is supposedly to protect the sites from the public, yet apparently the determining criteria and species lists of the far more important SSSIs: – Sites of Special Scientific Interest are divulged with no obvious catastrophic results.

The principal of SINC designation rests on a site having more than a critical number of axiophyte species. Axiophytes are plants which typify certain habitats classes, and indeed are a useful tool to determine precise ecologies and their quality (especially useful from a butterfly introductionist's point of view). A county official decides on which plant species are to be included in each habitat list. Unfortunately, while these habitat categories and the names of all of Nottinghamshire's axiophytes are not a secret, precisely how they are formulated is. Thus, there can be no scientific scrutiny here and certainly none from me. Luckily, however, the subjectivity of SINC determination can be qualified by independent random appraisal because some of their names and boundaries are known due to a very amenable hacker. I decided to choose the woods around Worksop, for no other reason than they were local, where either 7 or more woodland herbs or 7 or more tree & shrub axiophytes account principally towards a site's designation. One site, Oak Wood (SK555803), a SINC, has just one woodland axiophyte herb: – Dog's Mercury and only two of the seven trees or shrub species required: – Wych Elm & Spindle. I defy anybody to find more; and truly hope someone might give it a go. Another natural woodland, this time not an official SINC: – Jack Riding Wood (SK565803) has 23 woodland axiophyte herbs, over 3 times that required for full designation (listing available on request). It also boasts perhaps the greatest concentration of the county's remaining population of Broad-leaved Helleborine, together with a unique ancient heathland ground-flora. Albeit, these are the most extreme cases of misdiagnosed woodland from the 50 or so examined (lists available), but a good idea of the inaccuracies involved can be gained if multiplied over the whole of the county's 3,000 plus wildlife sites. The fact that Jack Riding Wood together with doubtless many more of the county's top sites have utterly no official protection I find somewhat frightful.

Equally frightful would be if Jack Riding Wood were to be given SINC designation, as this would seem to offer it no protection whatsoever. Indeed, the powers that be seem to take pleasure in approving the destruction of such sites and in one case (at Warsop) its demise was later sanctioned by Butterfly Conservation. Local Planning Departments cannot be held responsible considering how daft they must consider the codswallop masquerading as science contrived and kept secret by Nottinghamshire's conservation elite. Such expensive and ineffectual research commissioned by these useless do-gooders might well go some way to explain the true reason why the public are being withheld non-sensitive information.

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Butterfly Ecology and Culture and its Relevance to Introductions

Introduction

I believe the study of Culture & Ecology only work effectively with an appreciation of each other.

Ideas

To succeed at butterfly introductions it is a good idea to have knowledge in a few subjects. Ideally, one should be able to show how the minutias of all interact. This is, of course, the basis of building new theories. These must then be capable of being practically tested to see where one is heading. Empirically untested theories or theories which cannot be tested are best classified as conjecture.

One discipline, which to me, seems to have no bearing on butterfly introduction is the etymological obsession with defining the precise differences between the terms: – introduction, re-introduction, establishment, re-establishment, re-enforcement, release, liberation together with various others. In this and my other discussions "introduction" implies the release of a species into an area and "re-enforcement" one sub-division of this term being the release of a butterfly into an area where it is already exists and translocation a second sub-division being the release of none captive-bred stock. I also, without any qualms, make use of the word "species" to mean either its singular or plural form. It will always be obvious which one is implied without the need to be pedantically correct and make use of the horrid word "specie".

Before listing subjects associated with introductionism perhaps two should be mentioned, which although slightly related, are perhaps not so important. These are Anatomy and Taxonomy. Well, here goes, the list in order of importance to an introductionist is as follows:-

- Culture
- Ecology
- Population Dynamics
- Genetics
- Landscape Management (both historical and modern)
- Antiquarian Records & Record Keeping
- Climate
- Geography
- Morphology
- Parasitology (the study of butterfly parasitoids)
- Diseases

Culture & Ecology

It is the interaction of these two subjects and to a lesser extent the people who study them which interests me the most. They propose to be a dichotomy in ideas and ideals and certainly interchangeable in first place. Within culture we have the art of the breeder with a supposed knowledge of horticulture and within ecology habitat composition and a similar understanding of botany. Few people or subjects try to cross the divide between them, yet no single doctrine works effectively in absence of the other. Culture draws into its domain the study of genetics more so than does ecology, but culture, unlike ecology, is seemingly oblivious to population dynamics. Landscape management should interest ecologists, and parasitoids should broaden the horizon of the breeder, but in each case they rarely do. Ploughing through old journals for some bygone history of a long extinct butterfly interests neither, unlike the antiquarian with an exacting passion for natural history.

People Studying Culture & Ecology

Perhaps the best breeder of British [& European] butterflies of the past 60 years was the late Roy Stockley. Although, he claimed to be a geneticist who just happened to dabble in breeding, this modesty didn't belay his profound knowledge of ecology. It is my belief that such knowledge enabled his

breeding capabilities way beyond his contemporaries. Any query of mine was treated to an ecological summary of the species concerned and how to apply it to the breeding cage. Questioned how to overwinter larvae of the Large Heath would evoke a vivid description of windswept moorland and the dry regime required. Pairing White Admirals necessitated the consistency of dim dappled sunlight, heat and humidity firmly associated with its under-canopy existence. "So, simply double-sleeve them, my dear boy." From Roy I received an education from the very best and like to think I'm carrying his work forward. The down-shot is that though years of trials and tribulations could be vanquished in a few short sentences, the methodology and ideas to carry it forward become difficult.

Perhaps the country's best butterfly ecologist is Jeremy Thomas. His work of thirty or so years ago on the ecology of Black Hairstreak is a classic, and after a more modern appraisal by one well known butterfly specialist became a blue-print by which the species can be introduced. One of the kindest comments I've ever received came from the reserve warden at Glapthorn Cow Pasture. He wanted me personally thanked for reducing the pressure on the reserve from summer visitors hoping to see the butterfly. Various people heading down from the north of England now had sites much nearer home to visit. My acknowledgments go out to Jeremy.

Practice

Ecology is not seemingly well understood by most breeders. Mathew Oates' statement that introductions rarely succeed, so why bother seems to back this view. The occurrence of butterflies in the open countryside appears to be an abstract idea held by most, or indeed at best they occur where they've been placed. I certainly hate to see good livestock wasted even if this means talking people out of ridiculous introduction schemes.

Of the few breeders who know something of ecology perhaps less than 10% of the whole are willing to take onboard something of its complexities and it is almost certainly within this group that most successful introductionists belong.

Few ecologists try to cross the divide towards culture and when they do the results are usually rather poor. Ecologists seem even barely capable of understanding that plants grown in containers or with restricted roots need far more watering than those found growing in the open. For example, they seem unable to comprehend that artificial watering is necessary their thinking perhaps that this will ruin results. What normally happens in such cases is that earwigs climb through the drainage holes in their pots or tubs and up in-between the inside of the container and shrunken, desiccated, soil plug and eat all the livestock. One young girl, a PHD ecology student, about 20 years ago, decided on proving the wild dietary requirements of Marbled White larvae by keeping them in plastic boxes under laboratory conditions. Each box contained a specified number of larvae and a single species of cut indoor-grown grass, which was changed daily. The idea was to see which one produced the best survival rates. All but one of these especially reared plants succumbed to an aphid infestation, which by happenstance was Meadow Fescue, and therefore, perhaps not surprisingly, only this species proffered surviving larvae. It was duly written-up that Meadow Fescue was the only natural pabulum of Marbled White. Miriam Rothschild, and an agronomy unit in North Wales believed this and after I helped discover a new ergot species host-specific to Common Couch, which after sequestration by Marbled White produced a flavoid poison new to science it was difficult to make her understand I'd also reared the larvae throughout their entire life-cycle on various other grasses. Happily, it was later proven by Miriam and the agronomists that various ergots, each being host-specific to a certain grass, and each producing a distinctly different poison through Marbled White sequestration, could then be analysed in old cabinet specimens proving exactly what species of grasses they'd fed on. And that Marbled White in the wild fed on differing species of grass, together with the ergots. It's also worth pointing out that the species' black & white chequer-board pattern is a warning to predators that it is highly toxic, so breeders shouldn't have to worry about anything eating this one!

The most important ecological requirement of any butterfly species is, obviously, its natural larval dietary needs. An understanding of the aspect, density and condition of such plants or in the above case, fungi are also very useful facts. Simply not knowing such information can obviously lead to total failure as far as introductions are concerned. And, it is surprising in such a supposedly well studied group as British butterflies that not all such foodstuffs are known or widely acknowledged. The most interesting example (or omission) must be Scotch Argus. It has been widely acknowledged among breeders for some time that, although it is to be found feeding on Blue & Purple Moor-grass in the wild, to try and breed them constantly in captivity on these two plants will always result in failure. With Blue Moor-grass, from its English and Southern Scottish limestone grassland localities, death is mainly due to drowning in dew-drops formed on the leaf-blade. Purple Moor-grass, from its Scottish moorland home, has such little nutritional value that the larvae slowly fade away, or at best produce small adults. Having eliminated the impossible, whatever pabulum is left growing in its natural localities, no matter how unlikely, should theoretically be worthy of investigation? The only candidate on Cumbria's Arnside Knott after a couple of days of ecological surveying was Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*). Perhaps not a likely sounding candidate. After twenty larvae were placed on a sleeved sedge during a springtime afternoon I thought to return in the middle of the night with little expectation I would find any of them feeding. In my expectation, all would be found stuck in the netting-pleats. In the event, bleary-eyed, I went outside and thought I'd counted thirty-five feeding away quite happily. Halfway back to the house it suddenly occurred to me that I'd only put twenty out. The feeding caterpillars showed such crypsis with the male catkins on the sedge that it was impossible to tell catkins & larvae apart without actually shaking the larvae off. Next morning the pot was seemingly empty and the larvae took some finding, all hidden precisely inside the curled, "pig-tail", dried-out, dead lower leaves of the sedge, colouration, texture and spiracles matching exactly. Henceforth my breeding was far more successful with this species. Another two days of ecological work later, this time at Smardale Gill, proved that the distribution of the butterfly at its other major English site correlated exactly with that of Glaucous Sedge and not that of the commonly supposed Blue Moor-grass. Regarding the foodplant or plants in its Scotland moorland sites where Glaucous Sedge is normally very rare or absent this I don't know. But, guessing a similarity with Glaucous Sedge it is probably either Common or Carnation Sedge, two very similar looking plants and much more readily found on moorland.

Knowing what the larvae of a species feed on in the wild brings into sharper focus most of its other biological needs. The old English records of Scotch Argus suddenly make a whole lot more sense when you realise all its sites have masses of Glaucous Sedge, and because Marbled White is feeding on ergots as well as grasses its relationship with predators and parasitoids becomes far more obvious even to the beginner.

Methodology

The methodology of culture and ecology can also be checked against each other. A barometer so to speak. All of which leads me smartly onto the subject of the British weather and its supposed effect on British butterfly culture. The top and bottom of which is there hardly isn't any. This makes methodology, without such entropy, a whole lot easier to define. True, the methodology of introducing butterfly livestock during wet weather needs attention, but this is purely an artificial process. For example, introducing adult butterflies away from roosting sites when the weather is calling for torpor is never clever nor is dropping larvae into wet or dewy grass. There are plenty of others.

Temperate butterflies may well slowly adapt or evolve to suit climate, but not weather. The culture of people, a tropically evolved species, do quickly adapt to the weather, and I believe the confusion here is to some extent due to anthropomorphism. Wet or cold weather killing butterflies is a common explanation amongst those of limited experience. Such conditions in fact slow life-cycles with hot weather speeding up the exactly the same development. Culture is thereby largely unaffected. The affects of weather on their ecology are however very real and any methodology should principally address itself with an understanding of this in mind. Most breeders of British butterfly seem utterly determined to negate the supposed ill results the weather may bring by overzealous covering. This compounds the natural atmospheric conditions of temperature, humidity and light into extremes and, or, far greater consistency. Both will kill livestock, either working in tandem or separately, and such stresses, if not immediately fatal, may show themselves later. Sometimes much later. The one noted exception amongst the resident British species is White Admiral, which uniquely is better suited to a tropical environment. This particular misunderstanding lead to one noted breeder /introductionist, Ted Rimmington, coining the phrase: - "pipe & slipper treatment". His whole quote being:- "They seem determined to get them over the winter by doing anything imaginable apart from actually giving them a pipe and slippers and sitting them in front of a roaring fire". My mantra to such beginners has become: - "Please try to keep them caged outside in a living environment and fully exposed to as much wind, rain, sun and frost as possibly, and you cannot possibly do them any harm". A complaint that such treatment also resulted in total failure left me in complete despair with the inquisition: - "Yes, I did keep them outside, just as I was told, I even left the garage window open, but they still died!" I replied that they were meant to be kept outside not outside in a garage. Sometimes a very late frost will kill well developed larvae, and if it rains for more than four days continuously caged livestock will start to suffer, but this

happens maybe only once in every ten years or so. And is an ecological concern than a cultural one. The solution is in this methodology and the methodology of cage designs. These most effectively should include maximum containment of stock and predator exclusion compromised against maximum internal atmospheric variation. Natural extremes exacerbated by cage cover can also be overcome to some extent by providing alternative, compromising, environmental conditions or locations, i.e. if it becomes too hot dampen down, or too wet try tipping cages over to expose less surface area to inclement conditions while retaining maximum exposure to everything else. Do not cover them over! Smaller cages with less stock are easier to exclude predators and have far better environmental conditions but are much more labour intensive than larger ones.

One or two experienced breeders have started to rear stock without any cage-cover at all, especially overwinter, though they do expect heavy losses due to some predation and lack of confinement. This produces the healthiest stock, though is not ergonomically viable with all species and does stray somewhat into ecological research, i.e. some larvae tend wander great distances while others remain exactly where they're placed. And it is a possibility that these factors may well be inter & intra-correlated to predator and parasitoids detecting frass and thereby potential prey subjects. Such that, species which move greater distances as larvae tend not to be capable of catapulting frass pellets. And, a species, such as Marbled White, which due to its bio-chemistry, already cited, has no need for either, thereby a stationary feeder, has not evolved such strategic behaviour. (a parasitoid being a predator, only feeding internally as opposed to externally). Speckled Wood, on the other hand, not only wanders great distances but catapults frass pellets too, so there must be something out there in the environment that it has specifically evolved to avoid. It is information of this sort which, though relatively novel and speculative, is still useful to introductionists in determining deployment density and positioning of larval stock.

Husbandry

The methodology of British butterfly husbandry is perhaps best explained as 99% horticulture and 1% logistics. And this includes:- Producing sufficient quantities of the right sort of sterilised plants in the condition right for the species concerned. Plant pest & disease control without the use of propriety insecticides. Understanding watering regimes, growing substrates nutrient requirements, or sometimes even lack of nutrients needed for plants hosting livestock. Cheap and effective caging, which ideally should be easily dismantled, sterilised and stored away. Knowing why, how and when to move stock most efficiently onto fresh growth with the minimum of stress. And good knowledge of adult feeding regimes.

Virtually all problems of livestock husbandry concern larval development. And, because caterpillars are virtually walking stomachs, nearly all their problems are related in some way or another to what they've eaten and how they've eaten it. Hardly anything else matters. Under stress bacteria act as diseases will break down the gut wall, normally killing the larvae. Viruses acting as pathogens are very rare and are lumped together here with bacteria although they work in different ways though the end result is death or butterflies of reduced size. As far as I'm aware no virus treatment has yet shown positive results in any British butterfly trials. Breaking the cycle of disease transmission from one generation to the next is by far the simplest and best preventative measure and produces the best stock for introduction purposes. Adults should be emerged in totally different cages from those used for rearing larvae and "exercised" for several hours so they excrete as much mucous fluid as possible before adding them to a pairing and egg laying environment. Such adult deposits contain large amounts of bacteriological and possibly viral waste and if later ingested by larvae can prove fatal. After pairing, females are best moved to a succession of laying and hatching cages thereby providing more immediate spacious living quarters for their offspring than all being crammed into a single cage. Without supplementary treatment the quality of stock normally produced in later cages increases until the very last. However, in practise sterilising the foliage, substrates, livestock and cage by spraying with Milton at the recommended level normally kills any pathogens and generally for cultural purposes leaves ova & larvae well alone. The sterilising affects of ultra-violet light in sunshine, natural acid in rain and frost also produce exactly the same results although these are not so readily reliable. Larvae kept under glass are placed under extreme stress, including increased conditions of constancy and extremes, already mentioned, but are also denied these three wholly natural and variable benefits. Always fit the cage to the foodstuffs and substrate and never the other way around. Cage designs should accommodate this.

Adult pairing, with the sole exception of Purple Emperor is fairly straight forward. The occasional species will only pair at specific times of day or when the males have reached a critical age, but otherwise few problems are encountered. None-hibernating males always peak first during emergence, and should be placed in their pairing quarters before females allowing them to become imprinted on their environment. Females are normally added two or three days later around mid-day during sunny conditions. Pairings usually take place immediately or within 20 minutes.

Virtually 100% success at hibernating or aestivating should be achieved with most species. Most problems are, as explained, with the caterpillars and knowing how and when to provide them with a constant supply of clean growing foodplants or whatever. My best advice is change stock at least every instar and divide them up while doing so onto fresh weathered foodstuffs and substrates in greater and greater numbers of equally small cages. It is also to be noted that on average a newly hatched larva will grow one thousand times before it reaches pupation and as such will therefore require caging with an average of one thousand times greater space at the end of this cycle than at its beginning. How much space you give them is a complex subject and is largely based on experience and ecological understanding. Concentration camp mentality never works. The Fritillaries, in particular, will eat as much on their last day's growth as on all their other days put together. So, be warned. As a general rule never, ever place stock in a fridge or try to rear larvae indoors or in plastic boxes. Try to avoid antibiotics at all costs. And, these are only ever wholly successful if applied before a problem actually becomes apparent, normally because of some earlier mistake. If they have to be used, never, ever use the same one consecutively on the same stock. Producing a "super-bug" by using the same antibiotic over and over again on the same species and introducing this into the wild either accidentally or deliberately has the potential to wipe out an entire species. And quite possibly not necessarily the one you've introduced. There are, of course, absolutely no problems with introducing diseased stock or stock with the correct compliment of gut bacteria into the wild, where the disease or bacteria /virus itself must have originated in the wild and hasn't been artificially tampered with. I would also absolutely encourage parasitoid introduction with stocks. British manmade ecologies thrive on diversity, not a lack of it as I hope to prove fairly conclusively later.

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Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Bill S, 28-Feb-11 07:16 AM GMT

"Martin White" wrote:

[size=150]Well the short answer to these questions is: – I'm completely satisfied with my own expertise, scientific scrutiny and personal methodology.

Well your own science must be fine then. 🤔

You seem to be adopting a moral high ground on the basis of flawed science in others but your own work has not been peer reviewed. That isn't a strong position to take.

Bill

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Gruditch, 28-Feb-11 03:34 PM GMT

"Martin White" wrote:

Indeed, the powers that be seem to take pleasure in approving the destruction of such sites and in one case (at Warsop) its demise was later sanctioned by Butterfly Conservation

I would like to hear the facts behind this accusation please.

Regards Gruditch

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by JohnR, 28-Feb-11 06:26 PM GMT

This would appear to be an opportunity to exercise your right under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

- (1) Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled—
- (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
 - (b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.

The act was designed to rootle out such information.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 28-Feb-11 07:46 PM GMT

Martin.

I have to say that this is rather beyond me, so for the moment at least, I am making no comments on this particular topic.

However, it would be most useful to hear about your breeding programmes. For example, the cages you use, how to keep predators such as birds and cats away, the locations within your garden (sun, shade, etc), your overwintering methods.

I have dabbled with butterfly breeding (mainly easy species such as Orange Tip) but not always successfully. On the point I raised above, overwintering is quite an issue. I have found that in captivity, there is a strong tendency for early emergence. I overcome this with Orange Tips by keeping the pupae in a box in a fridge but clearly this isn't a very practical method for overwintering larvae. The fridge method does work though for species that hibernate as adults.

So please let us know some of the secrets behind you successes and maybe some photos of your kit, cages, etc.

Jack

Martin White2

by Martin White, 13-Aug-11 10:34 PM GMT

MISSION NOT SO IMPOSSIBLE

Despite the claims of vulgar opinion Nottinghamshire's butterfly enthusiasts have produced a plethora of evidence detailing their sightings and captures over the previous two centuries. The relative intensity of this activity is doubtless less copious than that provided for us by the ornithologist, but nevertheless this leaves the modern generation with only the remotest chance of making truly fresh discoveries. Indeed, prosperity may well signal the county's last genuine, original butterfly observation as being made in the year 1956, on the occasion of one Neil Wood diverting his prodigious talent to a site north of Retford and discovering a colony of the Grayling. All subsequent claims of foremost butterfly discoveries must be treated as precocious, i.e. already tabulated, cribbed, ubiquitous, introductions, or the results of prosaic and easily foretold spread or migration. This is not to say that the modern recorder /conservationist is not without employment, nor is it that his or her task is the least bit boring, lacking in enjoyment, or skill. There is far too much to do and learn, filling-in all the blanks, monitoring seasonal trends, and doubtless many, many more equally important tasks engaging the jolly camaraderie of enlightened minds. All these however only providing the icing on the cake of past originality. To aver otherwise is to live an existence of temporal smugness or exhibit a crass understanding of the past.

Nottinghamshire's most overt exponent of such ideology must be geologist, Professor John Carr, whose belief in the Invariable Universe caused him to treat any nineteenth century butterfly occurrence not apparent in his own lifetime as reputed. Such is the ever-changing flux of ecology that may we not now try to understand, forgive and bury such perverse thinking for good?

One species treated to disregard by Carr (and others) is Nottinghamshire's original lineage of Brown Hairstreak Carr, J.W., 1916, *The Invertebrate Fauna of Nottinghamshire*. Its sole nomination for the county rests within a mid-nineteenth century list replete with all manner of other curiosities not know to reside here at the beginning of the twentieth century Sterland, W.J., 1875, *Worksop, The Dukery and Sherwood Forest*. This resulted in a case of mass dismissal by unlikely association. Luckily, all barring one of these supposedly exotic creatures have been confirmed from the various surrounding shires at one time or another, thereby strongly inferring a somewhat less dubious collective provenance for Notts. See also: - White, M., 2000, *A ramble through the butterflies of Nottinghamshire*, AES Bulletin, Vol. 59, no.433. All of which would've remained fairly prosperous for the shire's bygone history of Brown Hairstreak had it not been for Yorkshire aficionado, Steve Garland, who incongruously decided to make a late-twentieth century amendment to Sterland's nineteenth century list, making it look a whole lot more incredulous than it already appeared Garland, S.P., 1981, *Butterflies of the Sheffield Area*, Sorby Record, p.6. Thus, in 1981, the derisive tyke addition of 1800s Heath Fritillaries aided the excommunication of Victorian Hairstreaks from Nottinghamshire. All rather sad. However, one bright-named spark, who was neither Ornithologist, Geologist, nor Yorkshireman had, in 1975, despatched a copy of the original record to Monks Wood Biological Records Centre, and from here it triumphantly found its way into the Millennium Atlas SK66, 1874, *Sherwood Forest*.

It's perhaps also well worth mentioning that in Garland's aforementioned book, White-letter Hairstreak is considered very rare in the Sheffield area, at a

time when the highest density of the butterfly's British records were epicentred around Sheffield. Plus, the locally abundant Purple Hairstreak was ignored altogether. Later protestations emanating from Sorby [Natural History Society] that the species was simply missed-off by the printers offended my credulity even further, when an offer to view the original manuscript was flatly refused. A slightly earlier work upon which Garland's [garbage] was based *Smellie, W.J., c.1976, Sheffield Area Butterflies, Sorby Record*, also appeared with exactly the same supposed printers error. What naughty printers, I say. Others might well call them a dozy bunch of northern twits who didn't realise Purple Hairstreak occurred in their region in the first place. Certainly, however, none of them had sufficient nous to pontificate on anything to do with Nottinghamshire's fauna or flora, especially when they were overtly incapable of getting their own right.

Anyhow, back to Brown Hairstreak. Sadly, in 1984, the species finally died-out in its very last, very isolated, Lincolnshire locality due, apparently, to long-term inbreeding. In 1993, and in accordance with Butterfly Conservation's principal objective to breed and release rare butterflies into the wild, and with the necessary paperwork, this gorgeous small brown butterfly was summarily liberated by myself into Chambers Farm Wood. And, with deft indifference to the stalwarts of vulgar opinion this introduction flourished, much more than just the specified occasional first generation to the next. Indeed, it can still be seen flourishing in ones and twos to this present day. All went modestly well, until Pete Smith (Lincolnshire Hairstreak egg-hunter extraordinaire) found the species at a second location, 4km away, in robust quantities. Had it spread from one of my reliably vigorous, ex-Buckinghamshire-scion, introductions or not? Well, after obtaining a sample stock, from this second site, they appeared far too fecund to be descended from any of the early 1980s lacklustre Lincolnshire specimens I'd reared before. A fairly subjective conjecture to be sure, but now consider this less tenuous fact: – the nature reserve purchasing willpower at butterfly central suddenly went pear-shaped when their next intended acquisition, ergo Mr. Smith's new Hairstreak location, was realised to have been founded by released butterflies. Something they, Butterfly Conservation, had been informed about but rather conveniently, immediately forgot.

As for the current existence of Brown Hairstreaks on Nottinghamshire's side of the Trent, I would leave it to the reader to discern how truthful the supposed "Mission Impossible!" difficulty of one Dr. Barry Prater *Prater, B., 2003, Butterfly Conservation, East Midlands Branch Newsletter no.33, p.22 & 23* of discovering a "long-lost species" after he, at that time the Branch Organiser, had been graciously informed exactly how the butterfly came by its status and a precise six figure grid reference where he might just go look for it.

All attempts to put this particular record straight have been met with varying degrees of daftness from Butterfly Conservation. Perhaps the most amusing notion came in 2004 from Hon. Chairman, Dudley Cheesman, who claimed "The good doctor didn't wish to imply he'd actually made the discovery." "He'd just accidentally put together a miscellaneous string of words that made it appear as if he had." "Perhaps the General Medical Council should be immediately informed about this." I suggested. Concluding, "For if he were to become so confused while writing some poor wretches' medical-history it could easily prove quite fatal." Unfortunately, this didn't go down well and wasn't taken up! Cheesman then made it abundantly clear that Prater wouldn't find further patronage within the society. Consequently, a very large dark cloud suddenly appeared over Prater and he left fairly quietly under it, and shortly thereafter so did the completely ineffectual County Records Officer, a certain Michael Walker. None of which has helped me in the slightest to straighten the record about Nottinghamshire's current Brown Hairstreaks.

It seems long overdue, but I believe a disclaimer is definitely now required on all Butterfly Conservation's Recording Forms to avoid future mishaps of this kind. A bit like a Government Health Warning, so to speak. Firstly, it should be clearly stated that any record after it is sent to the society then becomes the sole property of said society, to abuse in any way the said society thinks fit, i.e. to bowdlerise, plagiarise, or change in any way for the pompous aggrandisement of the privileged few. Secondly, Ordinary Society Members (hereafter referred to as Punters) should under no circumstances believe they have any recourse to equal free speech in any society publications after their information has been treated to any sort of stinking contempt by any Officer of said society. Thirdly (and perhaps most importantly), Punters should not be eligible for any sort of complaint if the butterfly localities they identify are subsequently destroyed by the over-paid idiots the society employs. This latter clause is perhaps a little harsh, as in nearly all circumstances is only ever applicable to introduced butterflies and even then most exterminations are only ever committed or sanctioned by the more top echelons within the society, e.g. Chief Executive, Martin Warren at Warsop Vale, Nottinghamshire, where Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper & Small Blue were treated to more than a metre of filth and pond slurry.

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Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 14-Aug-11 12:22 AM GMT

Warsop Vale Site Destruction

For Butterfly Conservation's first record of Dingy Skipper at the Warsop Vale site in 1999 see:-

East Midlands Branch, Butterfly Report – 2000, p.7

For the destruction of the site see: –

Nottinghamshire County News, Christmas 2006, Bright future for Dingy Flier;

ELG Wants & Exchange List no. 626, 7th Feb. 2007, Local News / A Plea for Help, Bleak Future for Dingy Flier in Nottinghamshire;

ELG Wants & Exchange List no. 632, 15th May 2007, Letter to the Editor

For slurry enrichment of the site:-

Nottinghamshire County News, Christmas 2006, Pond life Makes Comeback

For a photograph of the idiots involved & the sole surviving Dingy Skippers (made from card) see:-

Butterfly, Issue 94, Spring 2007, Brownfield sites: the way forward

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 14-Aug-11 12:36 AM GMT

Jack

"However, it would be most useful to hear about your breeding programmes. For example, the cages you use, how to keep predators such as birds and cats away, the locations within your garden (sun, shade, etc), your overwintering methods."

Best phone me or send an email address

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 14-Aug-11 12:52 AM GMT

"JohnR" wrote:

This would appear to be an opportunity to exercise your right under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

(1) Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled—
(a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
(b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.

The act was designed to rootle out such information.

JohnR

In one case using this particular Act the information I requested was claimed to have been deliberately shredded especially so that I couldn't get my hands on it! I suggest you try Wollaton Hall BRC at Nottingham for details of Nottinghamshire's scientific critera for determining SINC designation and then pass this on to me. I've never had any luck.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 14-Aug-11 12:59 AM GMT

"Bill S" wrote:

"Martin White" wrote:

[size=150]Well the short answer to these questions is: – I'm completely satisfied with my own expertise, scientific scrutiny and personal methodology.

Well your own science must be fine then. 🤔

You seem to be adopting a moral high ground on the basis of flawed science in others but your own work has not been peer reviewed. That isn't a strong position to take.

Bill

Bill

I absolutely agree

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Paul Wetton, 14-Aug-11 01:37 AM GMT

Martin

Do you only introduce genetic strains that are indigenous to Britain or a particular area. My worry is that irrespective of whether you judge your experiments to be successful or failures the long term effects of introducing a new genetic strain of a species to a particular area could possibly have disastrous effects on the long term future of the species countrywide where you have been successful in introducing a species to an area.

Devils advocate at work here, but if you are highly successful and introduce a genetic strain of a species that is highly successful itself and spreads throughout the British Countryside removing previous genes that have been successful in their own right for many generations. You could introduce a genetic strain that is prone to a specific disease that ensures that the whole population of a species could be in future years be completely wiped out, even after your own demise. I would judge then that although you may have passed away thinking you had been extremely successful you were in fact in this case a complete failure.

This is not an attack on what you do and I do not know your methodology but I do hope that much consideration is taken on your part before beginning an introduction.

Re: Mission Not So Impossible

by Gibster, 14-Aug-11 04:37 AM GMT

By crikey Martin, you don't often say much...but when you do!!!!

Re: Mission Not So Impossible

by David M, 14-Aug-11 05:25 AM GMT

I get the distinct impression that, maverick though he seems to be, he knows his stuff better than practically anyone.

Re: Mission Not So Impossible

by Martin White, 16-Aug-11 03:34 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

I get the distinct impression that, maverick though he seems to be, he knows his stuff better than practically anyone.

If I know my stuff better than "practically" anyone, as the first and possibly only person ever to be professionally employed as a County Butterfly Recorder then I strongly believe the good people who paid my wages (Nottingham City Council) jolly well require a refund. 😞

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 21-Aug-11 01:05 AM GMT

Paul,

Yes, I do introduce genetic strains that are not sourced from Britain into Britain. Although, very rarely and only then under very special circumstances. I have also helped introduce a multitude of British butterfly strains all over Europe including two very recently above the Arctic Circle, plenty in Japan, and at one site in Canada. As of yet none to the Southern Hemisphere, though.

One of the greatest tools available, possibly the greatest, to the introductionist is the use of hybrid stocks. At two very complex sites I have deliberately "engineered" the butterfly's phenotype to better withstand global warming. (But not, deliberately, the genotype.) Virtually all newly introduced colonies or re-enforcements immediately dip from their scion-number for an average of three generations. My current thinking on this is the genes reacting to their new environment or ecology. Subsequent increases then suggest equilibrium in genetic conformity with their environment. (One of the aforementioned "engineered" sites increased 700 percent above a nearby control over c.5 years.) It is however the speed of this change which needs much further explanation. I believe this is way above any current understanding proffered by the majority within the butterfly scientific community and many may well find it very, very upsetting and difficult to accept. There is huge scope for further investigation here, not least by myself. I find your theory (which is widespread) on deleterious genes very difficult to equate with my research. Stocks with hybrid vigour (or a bigger genetic base) are far more likely to withstand the impact of disease (or whatever) than those that are not. I can think of hundreds of examples, but the insular North American Indians huge mortality against Small-pox is one which is rather well understood. Your theory would place these people (now, a vigorous hybrid population) in very great peril. I strongly suggest if you still truly believe your theory is correct and mine not, then write to these people expressing your concerns.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Paul Wetton, 21-Aug-11 02:26 AM GMT

Hi Martin

Thanks for your answer that allays my fears to some extent in that your genotypes are selected to increase the gene pool. Lets keep our fingers crossed that long term effects of these introductions continue to profit the species involved.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Gibster, 21-Aug-11 05:09 AM GMT

Regards Martin's reply above...I have been told that internet etiquette demands that no person should respond to a posting whilst "all het up" but should first calm down, construct a rational and civilised response and save any awkward unpleasanties. Hence I shall go away and come back later.

Gibster.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 21-Aug-11 06:17 AM GMT

Bugger the etiquette. This guy has much knowledge to offer and I personally love reading it.

Historically, those who were abnormally unorthodox often made the greatest contribution to political and social change.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Pete Eeles, 21-Aug-11 06:45 AM GMT

Without specifics it's difficult to comment since any concern would be largely species-specific. However, I do agree with Paul's sentiments, that introducing non-native genes artificially into the gene pool (without good reason and good planning) is arguably a high-risk strategy since there could (I imagine) be the prospect of any introduction having a negative effect, as well as positive.

I could understand doing this when a species is on its last legs – such as the Cumbrian Marsh Fritillary being crossed with stock from other regions, or when reintroducing a species that has been lost altogether (e.g. Large Blue from Sweden, Chequered Skipper from France, Large Copper from the Netherlands), but would hate to see the "races" that have adapted to the environment in the British Isles over tens of thousands of years disappear as a

result of genetic experimentation!

Given your experience, Martin, I'm sure you're more careful than that!? I'd also be interested in the purpose of introducing non-native strains both in Britain and elsewhere – or since you mention global warming, the evidence that suggests certain species need help adjusting to this.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Paul Wetton, 21-Aug-11 06:48 AM GMT

Kinda like myself Seth but I've just given a polite answer and that'll be the end of it for me as I have better things to do currently.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Paul Wetton, 21-Aug-11 07:25 AM GMT

Martin, when you say "introduction of non-native strains" into regions such as Japan, do you mean strains of species already present or are you introducing new species into these areas?

I would have thought that even the introduction of a new genetic strain of a species would be illegal in many countries.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 25-Aug-11 03:13 AM GMT

Martin clearly knows his "stuff" and his results speak for themselves. I make no judgement on the ethics (and indeed legality) of his methods – I leave that to others. He uses some scientific terms that are frankly a little beyond me.

But I do have to ask one question – doubtless others have been wondering the same but are too polite to ask.

"Martin: what is your scientific/entomological background and what academic qualifications (if any) do you have?"

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 27-Aug-11 10:48 PM GMT

"Paul Wetton" wrote:

Lets keep our fingers crossed that long term effects of these introductions continue to profit the species involved.

Anyone with any examples where the long term effects of such introductions havn't profited the species involved? Any species?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 27-Aug-11 10:56 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Without specifics it's difficult to comment since any concern would be largely species-specific.

Criteria-specific, yes, which makes it a lot easier to understand. But, considering one answer invariably leads to a whole host of further questions, I'll decline to answer this one for the time being.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 27-Aug-11 11:13 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

I do agree with Paul's sentiments, that introducing non-native genes artificially into the gene pool (without good reason and good planning) is arguably a high-risk strategy since there could (I imagine) be the prospect of any introduction having a negative effect, as well as positive.

I agree with Pete, mine is a high risk strategy with potentially disastrous results, but not possibly in the way Pete imagines. Again, I would need

examples of where the adding of non-native genes (either artificially or otherwise) has had a negative effect on any species. What I would do if I were you would be to argue that breeders could easily do irrevocable harm by the improper use of antibiotics, with the potential of adding a "super-bug" to the environment with catastrophic results. Then I might listen.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 27-Aug-11 11:37 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

I could understand doing this when a species is on its last legs – such as the Cumbrian Marsh Fritillary being crossed with stock from other regions, or when reintroducing a species that has been lost altogether (e.g. Large Blue from Sweden, Chequered Skipper from France, Large Copper from the Netherlands)

I approached The Nature Conservancy Council [now Natural England] (Caroline Peachey [Steel]) regarding the Cumbrian Marsh Fritillary nearly thirty years ago when the county still had six colonies. My suggestion was to take a small number of post-hibernation larvae from each remaining site, cross them together and re-enforce each colony with the resulting progeny (as if, were it not for mankind's fragmentation of suitable habitat, the sites would be able for natural spread). This idea was received with the same sort of reverence as a very loud fart at the vicarage during high-tea. Crossing them with Scottish examples to "save the Cumbria race", as then happened, would most definitely not have been necessary.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 27-Aug-11 11:51 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

, but would hate to see the "races" that have adapted to the environment in the British Isles over tens of thousands of years disappear as a result of genetic experimentation!

So would I, but, at most, only just slightly over one lot of ten thousand years, surely? Maybe you mean generations, not years?

Although, I would admit to answering these statements myself without the use of a spell or grammar-checker, so please forgive my mistakes!

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 27-Aug-11 11:54 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Given your experience, Martin, I'm sure you're more careful than that!? I'd also be interested in the purpose of introducing non-native strains both in Britain and elsewhere

I think you've pretty much already answered this one yourself.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 28-Aug-11 12:12 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

– or since you mention global warming, the evidence that suggests certain species need help adjusting to this.

Bottle-necked colonies certainly do. For evidence look no further than Mountain Ringlets moving higher up mountains. What happens when their ecological requirements are higher than the mountains they inhabit? You could move them to higher [uninhabited] mountains. Or adjust their genetic tolerance so this includes lower stratum? I can already think of one very good [reasonably easy] way of doing this. Can anyone else?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 28-Aug-11 12:31 AM GMT

"Paul Wetton" wrote:

Martin, when you say "introduction of non-native strains" into regions such as Japan, do you mean strains of species already present or are you introducing new species into these areas?

I would have thought that even the introduction of a new genetic strain of a species would be illegal in many countries.

I have helped in these introductions, not actually undertaken them myself. I might well advise or provide the stock, but the legality of these particular introductions is clearly not my responsibility, nor is the fact that I am constantly ignored. On the subject of legality, I never treat the law with any greater contempt than that with which the law treats itself.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 28-Aug-11 02:52 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Bugger the etiquette. This guy has much knowledge to offer and I personally love reading it.

Historically, those who were abnormally unorthodox often made the greatest contribution to political and social change.

Maybe I could get a small part on TV?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 28-Aug-11 04:06 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

Martin clearly knows his "stuff" and his results speak for themselves. I make no judgement on the ethics (and indeed legality) of his methods - I leave that to others. He uses some scientific terms that are frankly a little beyond me.

But I do have to ask one question - doubtless others have been wondering the same but are too polite to ask.

"Martin: what is your scientific/entomological background and what academic qualifications (if any) do you have?"

Jack

Wherever possible I try to write so that I am intelligible to an average eight year old. Or intelligible to myself as I was at this age. It is certainly my fault that you do not understand some of my "scientific terms". Perhaps you could send me a list of the terms you don't understand for me to try and explain or for me to try and use better examples in future. All my qualifications are in horticulture. Almost as good as some of Matthew Oates'. I do not wish to brag about my entomological background suffice to say that if you believe my results (most don't) then surely this should speak volumes in itself. I would, however, like you to know that my science is fundamentally different from the orthodox version. While orthodox science tries to prove what it thinks to be true, mine doesn't. It likes to prove what is true, irrelevant of what I may or may not like to believe. I've never been known to fall in love with any of my theories, and they end up in the rubbish bin faster than meat off Jack Sprat's plate if they've proven faulty. All in all; you'll find the average scientist would find it somewhat offensive to include me amongst their fraternity. Personally speaking, I cannot disassociate between the ludicrous natures of both religion and orthodox science, each appear to me to be opposite sides of the same human neurosis. But please let's keep this one between ourselves.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Paul Wetton, 28-Aug-11 04:19 AM GMT

In my opinion introductions can be a god send for example the Large Blue but I think we will all agree that introductions can also be extremely dangerous not only to the established natives of said species but also other critters in the ecosystem. As you said Martin yours is a high risk strategy.

I therefore, agree that in certain circumstances we probably should be introducing or more specifically re-introducing species. I think that protocol of some sort should be followed and if so this should be a protocol designed by the so called expert, ecologists, butterfly experts etc and I would include you in this category Martin as you are an expert breeder and have thorough knowledge of butterfly ecology (I assume).

I do not think that releasing butterflies throughout the countryside is correct and in my opinion should be discouraged, even when much thought has gone into a release. As I said this is my personal opinion but I feel the need to state it here. My reasoning is partly that no one has the right to play god believing purely in their own ability and that their thinking and science is correct and also the long term effects are never known and thus restraint should be practiced. Your high risk strategy may be disastrous for a population or even a species but not to yourself so it is not you that is really taking the risk.

I would like other people from UKButterflies to express their own personal opinions in this thread as I would like to hear what others have to say on this subject.

Thanks to all .

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 28-Aug-11 04:50 AM GMT

...opposite sides of the same human neurosis.

WTF does that mean?

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 28-Aug-11 06:09 AM GMT

Martin, do you act autonomously because you get frustrated by bureaucracy and officialdom when dealing with recognised conservation bodies?

As someone who works for the government, I myself get irritated by the hoops you sometimes have to jump through in order to get something done which, ostensibly, appears straightforward.

Often, the minutiae rather than the major issues cause the problem, as well as the obsession with things going through the right channels and being appropriately sanctioned by those of suitable 'grade'.

I often think if we were dealing with a forest fire, by the time the 'i's had been dotted and the 't's crossed, the whole area would have already burned down, but at least we'd be able to reassure ourselves that our original plan to deal with it had been properly thought through!

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by NickB, 29-Aug-11 04:46 AM GMT

I have to agree that some people appear to judge others, not by what they see in front of them, but by the initials they can see after.....

Which, for people who have devoted far more years in the field, accumulating and absorbing knowledge as they go, than some who do indeed have letters after their name, can be a real problem.

Especially if those, with letters, dismiss those without, out-of-hand! Had Martin's idea for Cumbrian Marsh Frits been accepted, it may have averted the situation he described; I can appreciate the frustration! (As DavidM acknowledges, dealing with authority does not necessarily mean that the right decisions are taken for the right reasons - using his analogy, one might say that Butterfly Conservation could be accused of being more interested in delivering proof of a decline, than taking active measures to halt that decline.....)

But back to the thread; I too have to express concern that UK species should be allowed to continue, so far as possible, without genes from other European ssp's.

Of course, with our small and isolated populations, a UK-based genetic mixing would be preferable to extinction.....or would it?

As we have seen, species can change their behaviour and food-plants locally when faced with challenges.

Do we feel we have the right to interfere?

... or is it, we can, so we are going to do it, because we can?

I do have issues of a moral nature with this!

Specially GM'd butterflies to fit the niches we have left them with?



Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 03-Sep-11 11:22 PM GMT

"Paul Wetton" wrote:

but I think we will all agree that introductions can also be extremely dangerous not only to the established natives of said species but also other critters in the ecosystem. As you said Martin yours is a high risk strategy.

Again, I would like examples of supposed extremely dangerous introductions to natives and other critters, as I doubt very much this is something you actually believe. What you seem to be bigoted in favour is the extremely dangerous practice of habitat mismanagement which does badly affect the genetic balance and extinction of other critters somewhat immediately. Bigots and especially hypocrites make extremely poor Devil's Advocates with such an extremely biased viewpoint. Your argument for a high risk strategy would be better served if you could spell strategy correctly. You talk out of your AH. 😞

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by NickB, 03-Sep-11 11:45 PM GMT

Whilst I attempt to understand others' views in this thread, even if they are contrary to my own, I find that exchanges work best if the participants stick to reasoned debate, rather than resort to personal insults. This usually signifies either that someone is losing an argument, or is unable to articulate fully what they are trying to say; charitably I put Martin into the latter category for his last outburst.

Martin, you undoubtedly bring with you a great knowledge to this forum; however, your behaviour is *not* befitting of this forum, sadly.....

Paul, I feel, is perfectly justified to expect an apology for, what I can see, is unwarranted abuse.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 12:14 AM GMT

"Paul Wetton" wrote:

no one has the right to play god believing purely in their own ability and that their thinking and science is correct and also the long term effects are never known and thus restraint should be practiced. Your high risk strategy may be disastrous for a population or even a species but not to yourself so it is not you that is really taking the risk.

The idiots at Butterfly Conservation play God all the time, believing utterly in their own ability, with habitat [mis]management (and with no risks to themselves). The long term effects are known and restraint after any episode of complete and utter stinking stupidity is never practiced. This has been (no maybe about it) disastrous for numerous butterfly populations, with their supporting ecology wholly destroyed, yet I bet you'll remain forever with a cork up your AH on this one. There is absolutely not one scrap of evidence to suggest the long term effects of my introductions will have any disastrous results and plenty of evidence to suggest the complete opposite. Assuming one of my colonies does die out and somehow wipe from existence its supporting ecology at some point in the remote future, as you seem to be advocating, then surely this is far better than having no butterflies or ecology in the interim. Disbelief in my theories, by no matter how many people, will never stop them from actually working, and this, I believe, is what you find truly offensive.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 12:25 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

Paul, I feel, is perfectly justified to expect an apology for, what I can see, is unwarranted abuse.

Obviously, Paul doesn't actually talk out of his AH, this would be very difficult indeed, so I apologise profusely.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 12:30 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

...opposite sides of the same human neurosis.

WTF does that mean?

Jack

What does WTF mean?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 12:37 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Martin, do you act autonomously because you get frustrated by bureaucracy and officialdom when dealing with recognised conservation bodies?

No.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 12:45 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

I often think if we were dealing with a forest fire, by the time the 'i's had been dotted and the 't's crossed, the whole area would have already burned down, but at least we'd be able to reassure ourselves that our original plan to deal with it had been properly thought through!

I assume therefore that you wouldn't try to save your own property from such destruction if bureaucracy or officialdom did nothing?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 12:52 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

a UK-based genetic mixing would be preferable to extinction.....or would it?

A UK-based genetic mixing surely has to be preferable to extinction, but then using only the minimum of divergent material.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Gruditch, 04-Sep-11 12:52 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

I find that exchanges work best if the participants stick to reasoned debate, rather than resort to personal insults

I agree, tone it down Martin.

Regards Gruditch

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by NickB, 04-Sep-11 12:54 AM GMT

Back to the thread. I can see that Martin as as committed to butterflies as others on this forum.

And that, as with any evidence-based strategy that is adopted by conservation organisations, proof that the strategy has NOT worked is often only after the negative effects have made themselves apparent, to the dis-advantage of the butterflies concerned. But the proof then does exist that it does not work! That does not necessarily do the butterflies much good, but science has moved forward and a PhD beckons for some ambitious academic.....Sometimes it does appear to be like that....

Yet it is often not difficult to have reached that conclusion *before* an hypothesis is tested, given an open mind and the ability to listen to those who bring their own different experience and knowledge to the subject. Knowledge is gained inside and outside of academia, often through years of personal study in the field, reading and in front of the computer – learning is not confined to those who are professional academics, yet it tends to be judged by them only in academic terms. So that, unless there is a paper on it, obvious steps for conservation of butterflies may be dismissed out-of-hand.

For me, *anyone* with a passion for butterflies and their conservation deserves a platform, so long as they stop eating the red-meat *just* before they contribute.... 😊

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 01:02 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

As we have seen, species can change their behaviour and food-plants locally when faced with challenges.

Again, I would like examples, and examples which have changed more rapidly than the rate at which bottle-necked colonies of Mountain Ringlet have lost ground on the lower slopes of some of its mountains. Again, I would ask the question what happens when the ecological requirements of this species are higher than the mountains they inhabit due to climate change?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 04-Sep-11 01:11 AM GMT

"Martin White" wrote:

"David M" wrote:

I often think if we were dealing with a forest fire, by the time the 'i's had been dotted and the 't's crossed, the whole area would have already burned down, but at least we'd be able to reassure ourselves that our original plan to deal with it had been properly thought through!

I assume therefore that you wouldn't try to save your own property from such destruction if bureaucracy or officialdom did nothing?

Martin

Of course I would. That's self-preservation.

However, in this discussion, we're talking about butterfly preservation which can only be performed by the very same species that has been effectively destroying them with its impact on the climate and the landscape. I admire your attempts to contribute to this preservation, but you have to admit your methods are unusual and this is what I find interesting.

Which butterfly species is your current top priority?

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 01:21 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

Do we feel we have the right to interfere?

We began interfering a very long time ago (c.5 thousand years). What we have now is far from a pristine environment with genetically altered butterflies evolved to fit that degraded environment. In my opinion we have an obligation to interfere. An obligation to put things right, or restore a proper balance. We don't have the right not to interfere, assuming, that is, we have the brains to do it correctly, but I'm fairly certain you knew this already.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 03:25 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

... or is it, we can, so we are going to do it, because we can?

I do have issues of a moral nature with this!
Specially GM'd butterflies to fit the niches we have left them with?



I think I understand your moral issues, but sometimes it's GM'd butterflies or a case of no butterflies at all irrespective of whatever niches we've left them with. My butterflies in this context are certainly GM'd, unfortunately.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 04-Sep-11 03:50 AM GMT

WTF means "What The F*ck"

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 04:10 AM GMT

"NickB" wrote:

proof that the strategy has NOT worked is often only after the negative effects have made themselves apparent, to the dis-

advantage of the butterflies concerned. But the proof then does exist that it does not work! That does not necessarily do the butterflies much good, but science has moved forward and a PhD beckons for some ambitious academic.....Sometimes it does appear to be like that....

Once proof exists that a strategy has NOT worked this invariably leads to a cover-up or white-wash job to protect the employment prospects of the people involved. Ambitious academics with their new PHDs then repeat the same mistakes over and over again. This never does the butterflies any good, and science rarely moves on. One novelty of science is that provided with duplicate results two groups of scientists are capable of coming to two completely different conclusions. This depends on who is paying them and the belief systems of such employers. E.g. Saturated fats are very good for you (McDonalds) or harmful in anything but moderation (The Health Service). Although there are other methods, for example during China's so called Cultural Revolution scientists could easily be persuaded to come up with spectacular crop yields or face threats of having some of their internal organs removed whilst still alive (and possibly external ones too). Personally speaking, I would come to any conclusion you could possibly care to name given the alternative of having my testicles removed whilst still breathing.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 04-Sep-11 04:20 AM GMT

Martin referred to

....having [his]testicles removed whilst still breathing.

This thread really has degenerated into a load of b*lllocks.

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 04:22 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Which butterfly species is your current top priority?

Large Heath

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 04-Sep-11 04:24 AM GMT

Actually, I can see the merit in his analogy (painful though it seems). 😞

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 04-Sep-11 04:24 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

WTF means "What The F*ck"

Jack

I've been told to tone it down, so I'm not going to answer someone who swears.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 04-Sep-11 04:27 AM GMT

"Martin White" wrote:

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

WTF means "What The F*ck"

Jack

I've been told to tone it down, so I'm not going to answer someone who swears.

Martin

LOL! 😊

Martin, you are an unintentional comedian (I mean that in the nicest way, BTW).

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 04-Sep-11 05:52 PM GMT

<http://www.msghelp.net/showthread.php?tid=47064>

Now for the challenge. Can anyone write a meaningful message about butterflies using only these acronyms?

(and no swearing in accordance with the rules of the forum)

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 04-Sep-11 10:01 PM GMT

"Martin White" wrote:

"David M" wrote:

Which butterfly species is your current top priority?

Large Heath

I'm interested to know why Large Heath only occurs from mid-Wales northwards despite seemingly ideal conditions being present further south, eg in S. Wales and Exmoor/Dartmoor region.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 18-Sep-11 12:10 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

I'm interested to know why Large Heath only occurs from mid-Wales northwards despite seemingly ideal conditions being present further south, eg in S. Wales and Exmoor/Dartmoor region.

Large Heath is dependent on its larval foodplant, Harestail Cotton-grass, growing at sufficient density over a sufficient area (the day-feeding larva showing very strong cryptsis against the leaf-sheath) & a nectar source, most notably Cross-leaved Heath (though this is not necessarily an essential part of its ecology). No other species of Cotton-grass is ecologically acceptable in no matter in what quantity, although the species feeds well on Common Cotton-grass, various other sedges, plus rushes, and a large variety of grass. Dartmoor and Exmoor do not currently have the required habitat in any sort of density. As for South Wales I would at least like some detailed information to provide an educated opinion, e.g. locations and photos of habitat you think might be acceptable. It's somewhere I've not studied, but would like to bet that any potential locality, to the south of its current Welsh sites, is simply not viable. Only one, relatively, very small area of extant habitat exists in the south of England; on the Dorset /Hampshire heathland (data via Phase 1 & 2 Natural England Surveys). It is certainly not, as commonly imagined a "northern species", only an insect whose habitat is northern on the island of Great Britain.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 18-Sep-11 12:33 AM GMT

"Paul Wetton" wrote:

I therefore, agree that in certain circumstances we probably should be introducing or more specifically re-introducing species. I think that protocol of some sort should be followed and if so this should be a protocol designed by the so called expert, ecologists, butterfly experts etc and I would include you in this category Martin as you are an expert breeder and have

thorough knowledge of butterfly ecology (I assume).

And back to the humour:-

STOP PRESS: Just heard on the News that the East Moldavian President has announced East Moldavia intends to send a man to the moon and return him safely back to East Moldavia before the decade is out. No plans are available on how they hope to get to the moon but their scientific secretariat has unanimously decided on the colour scheme for their space vehicle (blue, green & pink; the colours of the Moldavian Flag). Although, whether to take a wood-burning stove, so the Moldavonaut can prepare and enjoy the national dish of smoked squirrel on the moon, has divided the Food Standards Sub-committee. The President, himself, has written to NASA hoping to combine their not inconsiderable protocols in this venture, but NASA has failed to respond. I cannot think why?

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 18-Sep-11 12:44 AM GMT

"Martin White" wrote:

"David M" wrote:

I'm interested to know why Large Heath only occurs from mid-Wales northwards despite seemingly ideal conditions being present further south, eg in S. Wales and Exmoor/Dartmoor region.

Large Heath is dependent on its larval foodplant, Harestail Cotton-grass, growing at sufficient density over a sufficient area (the day-feeding larva showing very strong cryptsis against the leaf-sheath) & a nectar source, most notably Cross-leaved Heath (though this is not necessarily an essential part of its ecology). No other species of Cotton-grass is ecologically acceptable in no matter in what quantity, although the species feeds well on Common Cotton-grass, various other sedges, plus rushes, and a large variety of grass. Dartmoor and Exmoor do not currently have the required habitat in any sort of density. As for South Wales I would at least like some detailed information to provide an educated opinion, e.g. locations and photos of habitat you think might be acceptable. It's somewhere I've not studied, but would like to bet that any potential locality, to the south of its current Welsh sites, is simply not viable. Only one, relatively, very small area of extant habitat exists in the south of England; on the Dorset /Hampshire heathland (data via Phase 1 & 2 Natural England Surveys). It is certainly not, as commonly imagined a "northern species", only an insect whose habitat is northern on the island of Great Britain.

Martin

Thanks for the detailed response, Martin.

There's no blanket bog in S. Wales, but there are lowland raised bogs of the type found at Meathop Moss near the Cumbrian coast. I haven't visited any of them so I don't know if Harestail Cottongrass grows there.

I understand what you mean about not being a 'northern' species. I notice it's range in France is decidedly east-leaning (although it does appear to be totally absent from southern Europe, even where suitable habitat may exist at altitude).

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Rogerdodge, 18-Sep-11 04:11 AM GMT

Martin

Dartmoor and Exmoor do not currently have the required habitat in any sort of density.

The High Moorland blanket bogs on Dartmoor have a very high density of Hare's Tail Cottongrass, together with Cross-Leaved Heath. The habitat may well be suitable for Large Heath, if a little exposed. However, I would prefer it if you didn't come down here and muck about with our ecology thank you very much. p.s. I understood that Common Cottongrass *E. angustifolium* was also used - particularly in N. Yorks..

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Gruditch, 18-Sep-11 05:41 PM GMT

You would hope that the SSSI status of Dartmoor and Exmoor would prevent any such unauthorised introductions 🤔

Regards Gruditch

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 18-Sep-11 06:06 PM GMT

From British Butterflies, 1905, by W.S.Coleman.

NORTH WALES.—Between Bala and Ffestiniog.

Ashdown Forest, in Sussex, has been given as a locality, on doubtful authority, certainly; but from what I have seen and know of that district and its productions, I think it is not at all impossible that *Davus* may be really found there. We have there, at any rate, the heath-covered, yet swampy, moorlands that the insect loves, and also in plenty the plants one finds most in the northern moorlands; such as *Vacciniums*, Cotton-grasses, the three common Heaths, &c., &c., with great variety in the elevation, some of the ground lying very high.

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by David M, 18-Sep-11 08:32 PM GMT

Aah...the days when people took punctuation seriously.

Thanks for that snippet, Jack.

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Jack Harrison, 18-Sep-11 09:08 PM GMT

It's a little bizarre that a parallel discussion should recur over 100 years later.

Jack

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 08-Oct-11 11:26 PM GMT

"Rogerdodge" wrote:

Martin

p.s. I understood that Common Cottongrass *E. angustifolium* was also used – particularly in N. Yorks..

I remember the ecology work which supported this view and I can assure you it was flawed.

Martin

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 05-Nov-11 11:53 PM GMT

"Rogerdodge" wrote:

Dartmoor and Exmoor do not currently have the required habitat in any sort of density.

The High Moorland blanket bogs on Dartmoor have a very high density of Hare's Tail Cottongrass, together with Cross-Leaved Heath. The habitat may well be suitable for Large Heath, if a little exposed.

Dear Rogerdodge,

You are right and I am wrong. There are goodly amounts of data which suggests Dartmoor is very interesting for Large Heath. There are, however, two facets which perhaps you might not be acquainted. Old records for Dartmoor do exist and I possess the largest private database of botanical information for the area in question.

Records per Harry T. Eales, c.1998, work: – “*Sites in England and Wales from which the Large Heath Butterfly, C. Tullia. Müller. has been recorded since its discovery as a British species in 1795.*”, include: – SX5073, Hares Down Moor, date unknown, via *NCC files, Tavistock, ISR*. Considered by Harry to be a confusion in place names between the nearby Whitchurch and the one where the butterfly still occurs in Shropshire. I’m not so sure. And: – SX59, (near) Okehampton, pre 1876, *H. Rowland-Brown, Etudes de Lepidopterologie compree. (1912) 7: 115–6*. Bizarrely, this is what Harry has to say on this latter record: – “In view of the doubts cast upon the original recorders list by others, this record must be considered as, at best doubtful. [And,] in view of the fact that there is no confirmation of this record from later recorders and also the considerable distance to the nearest known sites, it would appear that this record should be considered erroneous, unless further evidence is forthcoming. However, Martin C. White [oneself] has examined this area and has found that there are at least two sites with suitable habitat within the forest which may have supported *tullia* in the past.”

Your Dartmoor ideas seem to back my supposed intensive survey-work. However, I've absolutely no recollection of ever visiting Dartmoor or coming up with any two such sites. To say the least I'm flabbergasted. Though, with my interest now well and truly peaked I decided to try and find the best two paper sites for Dartmoor using my very impressive botanical database and an especial program. Maybe they just might match yours?

The programmable results offered a truly staggering 80 Dartmoor sites with four major extant Devon Large Heath occurring Axiophytes being concomitant. The quartet of plant species ordered in importance being: – Hare's-tail Cottongrass, Cross-leaved Heath, Bog Asphodel & Round-leaved Sundew. To further clarify these results another fourteen axiophytes were added, again, arranged by foremost value. All sites were then ordered by being scored firstly for axiophyte numerical superiority and subsequently, within each numerical sub-set, their priority or value. The fourteen axiophytes in order: – White Sedge, Oblong-leaved Sundew, Bog Pondweed, Many-stalked Spike-rush, Heath Spotted Orchid, Marsh St. John's Wort, Marsh Club-rush, Black Bog-rush, Bog Pimpernel, Marsh Helleborine, Tawny Sedge, Marsh Valerian, Bogbean & Royal Fern. This then gave a positive result for the two best paper sites out of the original eighty. First with 13 axiophyte species is an area just to the north-east of Postbridge, centred on two tetrads SX68V & SX68Q. And secondly, and very interestingly, an area not too far from its supposed station at Whitchurch, being just to the west of Princetown, centred on four tetrads SX57M, SX57S, SX57L & SX57R.

Direct translocation of stock from any of the abundant Northumberland sites where the climate and therefore possible evolved morphology is similar to Dartmoor may prove ideal for a successful establishment? I can supply whatever site details anyone might wish for such work. It is doubtful if habitat wind intensity is a great cause for concern, it isn't elsewhere, release date duly excepted, of course. Should anyone require a full listing of my priority-ordered potential Dartmoor sites and full analysis, mentioned above, please send an email address. In properly surveying a large area for Large Heath it might also just be worth considering aerial photography when Hare's-tail Cottongrass is seeding, showing-up as white fog-patches and efficiently illustrating any habitat or introduction site much better than a paper survey or any, hard-slogged, holistic ground-work.

Best wishes

Martin White

email: martincwhite@talktalk.net

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by selbypaul, 06-Nov-11 08:48 PM GMT

Hi Martin

Thanks so much for your detailed explanation of your findings. The scientific detail you give is surely something that organisations such as Butterfly Conservation should take more notice of. Whilst I'm against willy nilly reintroductions all over the place, the findings from your last post are surely the basis for a controlled and scientifically evaluated trial release.

I don't doubt you have similar types of findings for other species too, which again would potentially be hugely useful for conservation organisations.

Thanks again for your explanation
Paul

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 13-Nov-11 11:24 PM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

From British Butterflies, 1905, by W.S.Coleman.[attachment=0:2bhuge1i]LH.jpg[/attachment:2bhuge1i]

Jack

Ashdown Forest has a small selection of singularly originated records for long departed Large Heath. Such information only arises here because the butterfly was introduced to the site by a certain Mr. Plastead [=Plasted], from c.1802 onwards. Likewise, he also imported continentals and released them too, including Pearly Heath & Purple-edged Copper. All these curiosities were then re-captured by the self-same person, pinned, and sold as authentic British. Not surprisingly the distribution of this material has led to a great deal of latter-day controversy being garnered by museums. Good examples of his work are to be found at Melbourne Museum in Australia. I, myself, being fortunate enough to have examined the antipodean photographs of these incredulous captures for closer-at-home inspection. Unfortunately, trying to dissuade such an august institution of their erroneous, albeit rather studious understanding of the facts, failed to meet a desired expectation.

Plastead's activities went on for some decades hereafter, and seem to have included yet more exotic creatures and introductions to equally unlikely and luckless places as Brixton, Epping and possibly his home-town, Chelsea, therein from whose former market-garden trade his material may well have originally found import. J. C. Dale summed him up to perfection as someone who "cannot be looked upon in the character of a trustworthy personage." As such, I'm highly disinclined to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Plastead or indeed remotely suggest that Ashdown Forest is, or within recorded history, ever has been suitable for Large Heath. And, clearly, anyone who might like to believe otherwise is not correctly bolted to reality.

Martin White

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Rogerdodge, 14-Nov-11 06:02 AM GMT

Unauthorised releases of butterflies into areas they haven't previously occupied!!
There ought to be a law against it!

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Martin White, 20-Nov-11 07:37 PM GMT

"Rogerdodge" wrote:

Unauthorised releases of butterflies into areas they haven't previously occupied!!
There ought to be a law against it!

Apart from my very first two or three naive introductions (1967–73), none of my releases have been unauthorised, nor in so much as can I deduce to places where such creatures have previously not been found. Only the hysteria principally furnished by the complete ignorance of a former debate on this particular forum would seem to suggest otherwise. I agree with you whole-heartedly, apart from the fact that your spelling and grammar seem to have been provided by lunatics from the local asylum.

Martin White

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Gruditch, 20–Nov–11 08:02 PM GMT

Martin, this part of the forum, has been put aside for members to record their activities in a Personal Diary. Your postings do not in anyway resemble a personal diary. And for the second time, if you can't refrain from resorting to personal insults, then maybe these forums are not for you. 🙄

Regards Gruditch

Re: Surreptitious Science:

by Rogerdodge, 20–Nov–11 08:04 PM GMT

apart from the fact that your spelling and grammar seem to have been provided by lunatics from the local asylum.

I shan't rise to this.
You should just pray that we never meet.

Re: Martin White

by Pete Eeles, 20–Nov–11 08:19 PM GMT

Everything moved into 1 place – consider this Martin's "diary" (even though it isn't a diary!).

I don't know what other forums you might visit, Martin, but we've been given no choice (given your outspoken comments) to lock this thread. I'm all for freedom of speech and all that, but I think it's time to call it a day here; the consensus is that you've crossed too many lines.

Cheers,

– Pete