

Abingdon Naturalists' Society

Meeting at Bernwood, Thurs 10 July 2013

A warm morning with lengthening sunny intervals tempted 25 members to a butterfly walk in the forest of Bernwood. It was a huge privilege to be guided by our president, Richard Lewington, whose expertise as a lepidopterist is second to none, though a number of other members of the party were quick to identify specimens, some of them flitting past at great speed. We followed the rides to Bernwood Meadow, and then re-entered the woods to complete a circuit. Nearing the end we had logged 15 species, notable among them a black hairstreak spotted on a grassy verge (not in blackthorn, where this rarity is normally to be found) and a good number of the beautiful, and much more conspicuous, silver-washed fritillaries. We had also seen a range of day-flying moths and some showy Odonata, especially around two new ponds recently dug in the forest to attract them: emperor dragonflies, broad-bodied chasers, black-tailed skimmers, brown hawkers, ruddy darters, large red damselflies.

However, the chief prize, the purple emperor butterfly, still eluded us. Then suddenly, on the home stretch, a black-and-white flash and one of them settled on the path in front of us. It soon became so engrossed by the dog-turd it had found that we could approach within a few feet. A splendid climax, and doubly appropriate in that Richard's postage stamps for the Royal Mail were issued that very day, and one of them features the purple emperor. No dog poo visible on the stamp though!

Bob Evans

Species List

Butterflies

Small skipper
Essex skipper
Large skipper
Small white
Black hairstreak
Small copper
Common blue
White admiral
Purple emperor
Red admiral
Small tortoiseshell
Comma
Silver-washed fritillary
Speckled wood
Marbled white
Meadow brown
Ringlet

Moths

Orange
Common wave
White wave
Heart and dart
Heart and club

Dragonflies

Emperor
Broad-bodied chaser
Black-tailed skimmer
Brown hawker
Ruddy darter

Damselflies

Large red