

Butterfly Conservation 1988-2008

Lester Cowling continues his history of Butterfly Conservation to mark the organisation's 40th anniversary

When the British Butterfly Conservation Society, as it was still known, celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1988, it had no paid staff and a mere 2,500 members. Now the organisation has over 55 staff and a membership of almost 13,000. What was once perceived as a clique of British eccentrics has transformed itself into a professional and highly influential conservation body of international repute.

The transformation starts

The initial changes to the organisation began when Dr Harold Hughes took over from John Tatham as Chairman in 1990. He and Vice-Chairman Dr Ian Small drafted a business plan. This envisaged major growth for the Society and accepted the need for paid staff. Funding from the Nature Conservancy Council made it possible to take on Andrew Phillips, a management consultant with a passion for butterflies, as the organisation's Director and it's first employee. During his three years with the organisation he drove the plan forward with great energy.

In 1991 the society's name was abbreviated to the slightly snappier Butterfly Conservation and marketing company Young and Rubicam produced a new logo. The body of the symbolic butterfly was meant to look like a tree, reflecting a public perception of the time that linked trees and

conservation. Not everyone liked the new look, but it has lasted 20 years.

In 1992, thanks to ardent conservationist the Rt Hon Vincent Weir, the Vincent Wildlife Trust gave a £1 million endowment to provide a regular income for Butterfly Conservation in perpetuity.

Membership soars

The following year saw a further major boost. There had already been a push to increase membership, with PR staff at Janssen Pharmaceuticals helping launch Operation Butterfly. Now BP came up with £50,000 for a newspaper and magazine advertising campaign. Membership soared from 3,000 to 10,000 in three years. More staff were taken on to service the membership and build a financial system that could cope with the growing budget. A head office was established near to Andrew's home in the Essex village Dedham, and four new staff were appointed.

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Moths Count

Moths had been largely ignored until the early 1990s, even though they were a major part of Butterfly Conservation's charter. This changed rapidly through the efforts of Dr Paul Waring and Dr Linda Barnett who evangelised the wonders of moths and began appointing Branch Moth Officers. The recognition of over 50 moths within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan gave a clear focus to the work. The Nature Conservancy Council came up with a grant to start a major new Action for Moths project. In 1999 two Moth Officers were appointed, including Mark Parsons, who is now Head of Moth Conservation. At last Butterfly Conservation had the expertise to deal with the complexities of moth conservation.

The State of Britain's Moths report in 2006 showed for the first time the depth of the crisis facing moths, with two-thirds of common species declining. It provided a springboard for Butterfly Conservation's first ever million pound project, *Moths Count*. Funding included an £806,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Butterfly Conservation's largest single grant to date.

Above: Sir David Attenborough at the *Moths Count* launch.

Building the scientific base

In May 1993 Dr Martin Warren, who had pioneered research on threatened butterfly species, started work as the organisation's first Conservation Officer, operating from his home in North Dorset. Requests for conservation advice poured in. A part-time assistant, Jan Higgins, was employed and then Paul Kirkland joined as Conservation Assistant, which meant there were three people working in Martin's living room. It was time to move out and establish a Conservation Office. Suitable premises were found in the village of East Lulworth, within a field station of Bournemouth University.

The launch in 1993 of the *Butterflies for the New Millennium* recording project, the brainchild of Jim Asher who had served for years on the Conservation Committee, was a major step forward on the science front and one that gathered momentum over the following years. In 1998 Richard Fox was employed as Project Officer. He still runs this project, along with the Moths Count project.

Next came the challenge to amalgamate the data from the numerous butterfly transects run by Branches. The

Butterfly Monitoring Scheme run by the Institute for Terrestrial Ecology had been going since 1976 but was restricted to around 120 sites. Several hundred more were being walked by Branches and if all were combined would build a unique database to detect trends and assess the new phenomenon of climate change. Dr Tom Brereton, taken on as Monitoring Ecologist in 1999, established the *UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme* with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. This scheme now embraces over 800 sites. Last year the importance of this work was acknowledged when the annual butterfly index was adopted by government as an environmental indicator.

Saving species

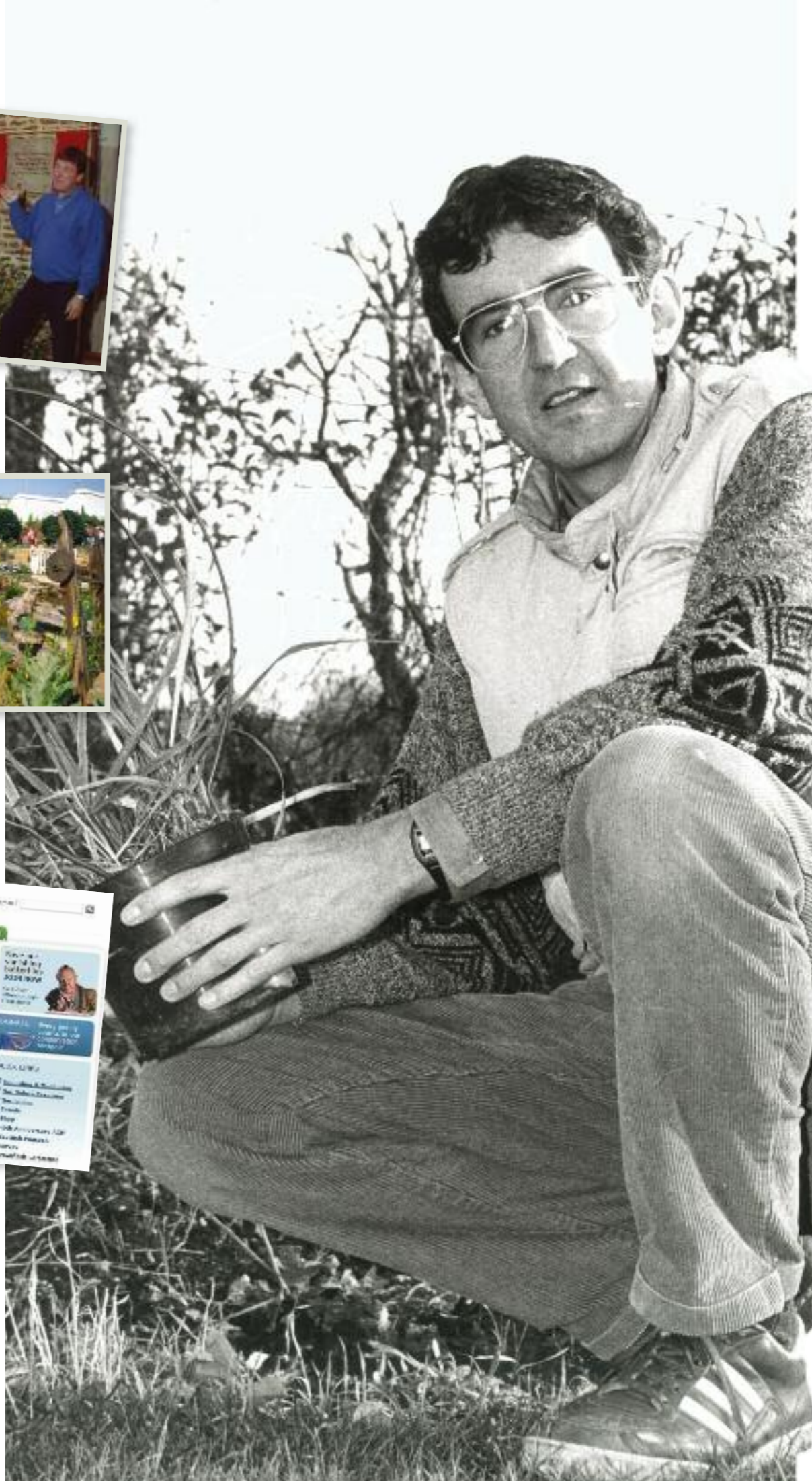
Action for Butterflies was a major umbrella project devised by Martin Warren. It generated strategies for Britain's 25 most threatened butterflies, as well as Regional Action

Below: Sir David Attenborough at a Large Blue re-introduction site – an emblematic species for those concerned with conservation.





Above and right: Alan Titchmarsh opens the Lulworth office, with Jim Knight MP and Chairman Stephen Jeffcoate.



Right: Dr Martin Warren. The organisation's first Conservation Officer who later became Chief Executive.

Plans to guide the work of the Branches. In 1995 the Nature Conservancy Council provided a grant and the following year Dr Nigel Bourn was appointed as Species Action Co-ordinator.

The government had initiated the UK Biodiversity Action Plan following the signing of the Rio Biodiversity Convention in 1992. Thanks largely to the *Action for Butterflies* project, butterflies and moths featured heavily in the plan and Butterfly Conservation was appointed as Lead Partner for all but one of the 64 Lepidoptera listed as Priority Species.

In 1997 ICI provided £115,000 sponsorship to implement plans for the Large Blue and Pearl-bordered Fritillary. The launch was attended by Secretary of State for the Environment John Gummer MP.

Branches and reserves grow

At the time of its 20th anniversary in 1988, the British Butterfly Conservation Society already had over 15 Branches. New ones continued to be formed, building up to a full UK wide network of 31 Branches. The depth of Branch work and activities continued to grow apace, with major new reserves being purchased at Prestbury Hill (Gloucestershire), Catfield Fen (Norfolk), Grafton Wood (Worcestershire) and Caeau Ffos Fach (Carmarthenshire).

In Hampshire, the reserve at Magdalen Hill Down was greatly extended by converting adjacent arable fields back to flower-rich grassland.

Last year, after a 10-year campaign by West Midlands Branch, Butterfly Conservation was able to purchase a large part of Prees Heath, safeguarding the last remaining stronghold of the Silver-studded Blue in the region. A grant of £573,000 made it possible to buy the site and the restoration of large areas of heathland began.

Butterfly Conservation volunteers make an immense contribution, including both to the recording schemes and to the Regional Action Plans. There are now in excess of 700 Branch field trips a year, equal to an average of two every day. A 2007 audit showed that the volunteer effort was equal to employing nearly 400 extra staff. The value of this to the organisation's work amounted to almost \$5.5 million pounds a year.

The challenge of devolution

In 1991 the Nature Conservancy Council was split into separate bodies for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Seven years later, new devolved administrations were established in latter three countries. It was no longer credible to organise conservation for these countries from Butterfly Conservation's existing headquarters in southern England.



Above and right: Rolf Harris marvels at The Quarryman's Garden, which won Butterfly Conservation a Gold at the 1998 Chelsea Flower Show.

Investing in butterflies

The past 20 years have seen vast and dramatic changes. At the time of Butterfly Conservation's 20th Anniversary in 1988 the organisation had a turnover of £14,000. This year it will be more than 200 times greater at around £3 million, with the vast majority of that money going on conservation projects.

Technology arrives

Butterfly Conservation today relies on a sophisticated Information Technology system embracing scores of computers and numerous servers, all overseen by an I.T. Manager.

The first contact most members of the public have with charity is via its website. The website, redesigned last year, attracts thousands of new visitors a month.

Butterfly Conservation's Information Technology wasn't always so advanced.

Just 15 years ago Martin Warren had to rely on "an old Amstrad with a noisy daisy-wheel printer. It took several minutes to chug through a single page." But at least it saved the cost of employing a typist.

It was just 12 years ago that Butterfly Conservation acquired its first PC, enabling the

Conservation Office to use email. Nigel Bourn recalls that it took time to convince colleagues this was the way forward.

Meanwhile Jim Asher had designed his own pioneering software for *The Butterflies for the New Millennium Project*. For the first time it allowed anyone to enter records in a standardised way and submit them for easy collation.

Few could have envisaged, at the time of Butterfly Conservation's 20th anniversary in 1988, that any of this was possible.

Above: Website – unimaginable 20 years ago.





Left: Launch of the Regional Action Plans at the House of Commons with Sir David Attenborough and Environment Minister Michael Meacher.

Right: Dr Martin Warren launches Butterfly Conservation Europe in Germany with host Dr Christian Stettmer.

Below: Gordon Beningfield.



An office was established in Scotland and Paul Kirkland became Head of Conservation in Scotland. Offices in Wales and Northern Ireland followed. Several Regional Officers were appointed to work with Branches within the new English government regions on Regional Action Plans. Butterfly Conservation was able to tap into new funding streams and expand its activities throughout the UK.

Head Office on the move

The artist Gordon Beningfield had a special interest in the countryside. His book *Beningfield's Butterflies* attracted considerable attention when published in 1878 and he had gone on to provide a set of butterfly paintings which the Royal Mail used as stamps. When Butterfly Conservation's first President Sir Peter Scott died in 1989 Gordon was invited to fill the role. He was an early advocate of conservation on a landscape scale.

Following Gordon's untimely death less than 10 years later, Sir David Attenborough agreed to succeed. Harold Hughes, then Chairman, remembers "Sir David thought it was a delightful idea and has been one of our strongest supporters ever since".

Later the same year Harold was succeeded as Chairman by Stephen Jeffcoate. By now Butterfly Conservation had a staff of 22 and had become so large that the appointment of a Chief Executive had become essential. The National Executive Committee was to become a more strategic body and was renamed as Council. It was also becoming apparent that having split offices, with one in Dedham (four staff) and a Conservation Office in Lulworth (with 15 staff) was inefficient and would inhibit the next stage of growth.

David Bridges, a lifelong butterfly enthusiast with a strong background in fundraising, was appointed the Society's first Chief Executive. He had the difficult task of combining the two offices. The Dedham office was closed and all the operations of Butterfly Conservation were moved to the new Head Office in East Lulworth, Dorset. These offices were situated in a converted builders' yard on the Lulworth Estate. New highly skilled staff joined the team,

including Julie Williams, who was quickly promoted to Director of Finance and Administration.

The official opening, on a marvellous sunny day, was performed by Alan Titchmarsh, who had become a Vice President. The event was also attended by local MP Jim Knight, who later became Biodiversity Minister and is currently Schools Minister.

Spreading wings

In 2004 Stephen Jeffcoate passed the reins of the Chairmanship onto Dudley Cheesman. Stephen had seen the organisation grow, develop and become highly regarded. Dudley was keen to maintain this effort and reputation and build a solid financial base. He was joined by Dr Martin Warren, who was appointed Chief Executive in 2004 after David Bridges decided to move back to Sussex and continue to work for the Society as Head of Fundraising.

The plight of butterflies and moths is just as dire in mainland Europe as it is in Britain. Many conservationists looked to Butterfly Conservation to take a lead. After some detailed discussions with Dutch Butterfly Conservation and other European colleagues, it was decided to form a separate umbrella organisation, Butterfly Conservation Europe.

The response was extremely positive and after the Inaugural Meeting in Germany last year 34 organisations from 32 nations joined the network.

The next 20 years?

It is hard to predict what will happen over the next 20 years. There will be new challenges, including from climate change. However, as Butterfly Conservation's President Sir David Attenborough has said, it is vital there are butterflies around for future generations to enjoy.

Over the past 40 years a vast amount of knowledge has been acquired. Conservation Director Nigel Bourn has been instrumental in pointing the way forward to conservation on a landscape -scape - only by preserving entire landscapes is it possible to secure a future for the butterflies and moths that live there.

Given this, and the experience, enthusiasm and energy of volunteers and staff, it's hard to believe there won't be areas of Britain where butterflies are thriving – regardless of whatever else changes.

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Acknowledgements

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