

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate use

Pint-sized butterfly beats extinction

Britain's tiniest butterfly, the small blue, has made big news by returning to Hertfordshire after being extinct in the county for eight years.

This dinky delight, which is barely bigger than a five pence piece, was spotted at [Aldbury Nowers Nature Reserve](#) near Tring recently, where Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) have been carefully managing the habitat to encourage butterflies to thrive. It seems the unassuming little insect decided to put in a special appearance for National Insect Week, which runs until 27 June.

Local resident Martin Hicks, who made the discovery, has surveyed the butterflies at Aldbury Nowers NR since 2003 every single week without fail during the summer months: "Aldbury is fantastic for butterflies - we have species doing well here that are declining elsewhere, like the green hairstreak, dingy skipper and grizzled skipper. I really hit the jackpot on my 235th survey though! I could hardly believe it when I spotted the small blues."

The return of the species to Aldbury Nowers NR is thanks to extensive work carried out by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to encourage the plants that butterflies favour, such as kidney vetch in the case of the small blue. Particularly important is the grazing of the land by HMWT's own flock of sheep, which creates just the right environment for fussy butterfly species.

Paul Thrush, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's Reserves Officer said: "It's great that the small blues are back. Four years ago we launched a major restoration project at Aldbury and part of the work we do involves removing scrub and vegetation, allowing rarer, smaller plants like kidney vetch to return. With the help of funding from SITA, Chilterns AONB and Natural England and the dedication of volunteers and HMWT staff, this reserve has become the best place in the county for butterflies."



Herts & Middlesex

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Notes to editors

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

We are the leading voice for wildlife conservation in Hertfordshire and neighbouring areas. With 43 nature reserves spanning 1,900 acres, from beautiful woodlands and wetlands to rare patches of heath and orchard, we take practical action every day to help wildlife to flourish. The Wildlife Trusts are unique in being the only organisations that work to protect the full range of UK habitats and species, at a local level.

Small blue butterfly

Small blues are designated a priority species and are declining in most areas. They are rare because their chalk grassland habitat has become rare. They depend on the yellow flowered kidney vetch for laying their eggs. Since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the 1990s, far less sheep have been kept and as a consequence much grassland has become overgrown with trees, leading to a decline in plants such as kidney vetch, which in turn has had a knock on effect on small blue populations.

The Wildlife Trust's fleecy friends

For the last five years Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has been grazing its own flock of Shetland sheep to keep Aldbury Nowers nature reserve in good condition for butterflies. The sheep are moved between the Trust's different nature reserves regularly.

National Insect Week

The week is organised by the Royal Entomological Society and runs from 21 – 27 June 2010.
www.nationalinsectweek.co.uk

Aldbury Nowers Nature Reserve

Situated on the Chiltern escarpment and adjoining The Ridgeway National Trail with superb views across the Tring Gap and Vale of Aylesbury, this reserve supports splendid flora and over twenty-five species of butterfly. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The bigger picture

Aldbury Nowers is part of a complex of chalk grassland sites in the west of Hertfordshire which continues through into Buckinghamshire. The Trust is working with conservation neighbours such as the National Trust to conserve and enhance these habitats on a landscape scale – the more quality habitat there is, the better it will be for butterflies and other wildlife.

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