

St John's Churchyard Butterflies

As a local resident and a long-standing member of Butterfly Conservation I have been conducting surveys on the Butterflies to be found in St John's Churchyard for almost 20 years. Following regular consultations with the churchyard maintenance team we have been able to establish areas in the churchyard where the wild flowers and grasses have been allowed to grow and flourish while the grass in other areas has been cut neatly.

As a result, there has been a good supply of nectar plants on which butterflies can feed and their food plants have been able to develop so that they can lay their eggs. I have been very pleased to see how this arrangement has resulted in an increase in the number of species which are breeding in the churchyard. In the current year I have recorded a total of 19 different species of butterfly and a large number of caterpillars of the Cinnabar Moth which feed on the ragwort.

At the end of each season the Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation publishes the results of all the churchyard surveys in their region. This covers a total of 67 churchyards. I have been delighted to find that in most years St John's Churchyard has been among the top three churchyards for butterflies within the region and is often at the top of the list. The exceptions to this have been those years where the grass has been cut in mid-summer before the grass loving insects have had the opportunity to hatch and breed. This emphasises the benefit of allowing the grass meadow to remain uncut until the end of August.

As I am a keen photographer, I have been taking pictures of the butterflies I have recorded and I have used a few of these pictures to illustrate this article. I have also produced a number of posters which are on display on the church notice board to enable people to recognise and appreciate the beauty of our butterflies.

We have a beautiful churchyard and I would like to thank everyone who has helped to encourage our butterflies to feed, breed and flourish.

Michael Pitt-Payne

