



Rupert Evershed's monthly diary of the natural world
 Twitter @rupertevershed Blog: www.notingnature.wordpress.com

We're going on a butterfly hunt...

Sometimes something that seems as if it definitely should work just doesn't work and everyone is left feeling a little perplexed and sad. This is how I felt when the news broke that Butterfly World in St Albans was closing.

On the face of it, the original vision of an Eden Project-like visitor attraction with biomes full of butterflies, wild spaces to explore and cafés to relax in seemed certain to guarantee a great family day out.

However, getting to that vision proved an insurmountable task coming at too great a financial cost to make the project viable. Butterfly World never broke free from its pupal stage to really show us what its wings were like.

And yet, in its short life, a remarkable thing had transpired: over 25 species of British butterfly had made Butterfly World their home including the very rare Small Blue butterfly, which after a virtual absence from Hertfordshire began to colonise Butterfly World in 2011.

When Butterfly World closed at the end of 2015 the Small Blue colony was the strongest one in Hertfordshire. It seems the butterflies had not got the memo!

Neither had a host of local volunteers who, as the doors finally closed at Butterfly World, quickly set up the organization Save Butterfly World (www.savebutterflyworld.org) - a realistic and worthy attempt by members of the local community to find a way of realizing the original vision for Butterfly World.

There are now over 65,000 signatures on a petition to take the first steps towards Butterfly World Project 2.0.

For me, the story of Butterfly World to date provides a good illustration of the journey we must all go on if we are to make a real difference when it comes to conserving our natural world.

It cannot be just down to the large, faceless organization to 'save our planet' but must instead be a grass-roots movement, one that has the ownership of the local community, expressing its

own care for its own local nature.

Of course we can all sign the petition (please do) but what better way to take ownership of this fragilely beautiful part of our fauna than to actually get out and enjoy our local butterflies for ourselves?

Though the door to Butterfly World closed at the beginning of last year another one opened simultaneously with the publication of *Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex* by Andrew Wood.

The book is an outstanding and thorough record of our local butterflies but also a fantastically helpful and practical guide to actually going out and finding butterflies for your self.

The subject matter lends itself to colourful glossy photos meaning that the book is at home on anyone's coffee table, but for me it has the lure of a travel brochure...inviting me out into the meadows, woods and hills depicted in the guide alongside the clear site maps.

Butterfly season is upon us but maybe, like me, you have only



A small blue butterfly.

Picture: ANDREW WOOD

really ever got to grips with the more common and larger butterflies: peacocks, red admirals and large (cabbage) whites.

Armed with Andrew Wood's new book there is now the opportunity to venture out on more informed explorations - maybe to one of the sites he details or simply to your nearest green space.

That may just be your own garden and one of the most helpful tips you'll find in the book is what each butterfly likes including, most importantly, what

they feed on.

If you don't see any butterflies now maybe think about planting with them in mind and see if they come next year. After all, that's what happened at Butterfly World and look at the results!

To buy a copy of Andrew Wood's book, *Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex (2016)* please go to: <http://hnhs.org/publications>
To sign the Save Butterfly World petition please go to: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/665/474/121/>