

National Trust Press Release
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Churchill's many talents - War leader, Nobel laureate... butterfly enthusiast

He led Britain to victory in the second-world-war and is a world renowned historian but Sir Winston Churchill is much less well known for his lifelong love of butterflies.

The butterfly house that Churchill created at his beloved Chartwell in Kent in the 1940s has this year seen butterflies bred there for the first time in 50 years.

Plans to start breeding butterflies at Chartwell began in the summer of 1939 when Churchill consulted the leading expert on breeding butterflies, L. Hugh Newman.

With the intervention of the war years the plans didn't come to fruition until 1946 when Newman designed plans to convert the summerhouse into a butterfly house to breed butterflies and then release them into the garden.

Matthew Oates, Nature Conservation Adviser at the National Trust and butterfly expert, said: "Even war leaders love butterflies. Churchill's lifelong secret passion for butterflies began as a young boy when he went 'butterflying' in the fields near to his school in Sussex [1].

"As a young man he was a serious butterfly collector on his travels across the world and later would have spent many a summer day enjoying the beauty of butterflies in his garden at Chartwell."

This summer saw the emergence of the first butterflies since the 1950s with the beautiful peacocks and painted ladies stretching their wings and fluttering into the garden at Chartwell. Six peacocks emerged in July and painted ladies during August.

The garden team at Chartwell faithfully recreated the butterfly house using descriptions taken from articles written by Newman.

The butterfly house was originally a game larder, which was then converted to a cool summer house. Churchill adapted the latter, erecting a muslin netting doorway over the entrance.

Butterflies, including small tortoiseshells, swallowtails, peacocks and speckled woods, were bred in cages seated on the summer house benches, and Churchill often sat there and watched them emerge, releasing them into the garden when ready to fly.

Today a code advocates that only native British butterflies should be bred for release, and following consultation with Defra and Butterfly Conservation larvae of locally occurring species were sourced to help stock the newly refurbished butterfly house.

Visitors to Chartwell can also wander along the Butterfly walk and follow in the footsteps of guests to Churchill's garden parties in the 1940s and 1950s.

Matthew Oates added: "Chartwell was way ahead of its time with its focus on making sure that they had a wildlife friendly garden and it was also a pioneer of butterfly gardening. Mixed in with the more formal nature of an English country garden Churchill insisted that buddleia and thistles were planted to attract butterflies and other insects."

Chartwell was bought by Winston Churchill in 1924 and remained his home till the end of his life in 1965. It was a source of inspiration to him and his particular love of nature and the beautiful Kent countryside [2].

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For further press information, images and video (different formats are available) please contact Mike Collins, Senior Press Officer, on 01793 817708, 07900 138419 or mike.collins@nationaltrust.org.uk

An ISDN audio line is available - contact the press office for details.

Notes to editors:

[1] Aged six Winston Churchill wrote to his mother in 1880: "I am never at a loss to do anything while I am in the country for I shall be occupied with 'butterflying' all day (as I was last year)". Quote taken from 'Churchill and Chartwell: The Untold Story of Churchill's Houses and Gardens' (2007) by Stefan Buczacki.

Quotes about Winston Churchill and butterflies from 'Living with Butterflies' by L. Hugh Newman:

"It was quite obvious that he knew a lot about butterflies, what they needed as foodplants and which would be the most likely species to breed successfully in the neighbourhood, so that in most cases I had merely to agree with his suggestions." (pg 171)

"On our way back to the house we passed a small summer-house. Sir Winston stopped outside and thought for a moment or two, then he turned to me and said that I could use it to do what I liked. 'Take the roof off if you like, and put a glass one in place. I can get it done for you, but make use of it...Let me have your plans soon and let it be a plan of action'." (From Newman's visit to Chartwell in 1946; pg 171)

"He liked the idea of being able to sit right inside this emergence house, and I heard later that he occasionally spent some time here waiting for the various species to come out of their chrysalides." (pg 172)

[2] More information about Chartwell and its opening times can be found at: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chartwell>

The National Trust is one of the most important nature conservation organisations in Europe with over 1,000 sites covering 250,000 hectares, including coastal sites, woodland and upland areas; many of which are rich in wildlife. All 17 species of UK bat have been recorded as roosting or breeding on National Trust land and 96 per cent of all resident UK butterflies can be found on our land. Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire is our most species rich site and 93 per cent of our land has been surveyed for its nature conservation importance. Find out more at: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/nature>

The National Trust is a partner organisation in the world-wide celebrations of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. The diversity of life on earth is crucial for human well-being and now is the time to act to preserve it. For information on events, initiatives and exhibitions across the UK visit: <http://www.biodiversityislife.net>

Butterflies and the National Trust

- The National Trust is the largest and most important landowner for butterflies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 1 All (but two) of the resident British butterfly species live on Trust land.
- 2 It has many of the best UK sites for individual butterfly species, and many of the rich butterfly sites are home to scarce species.
- 3 The National Trust puts massive effort into conserving populations of rare butterflies, as well as improving life for commoner species.
- 4 It has responsibility for seven of the 11 species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 5 The National Trust works in close partnership with Butterfly Conservation and other conservation bodies.