

Planting at the Maze for a rare butterfly

A modest but significant event for biodiversity took place today (Saturday 24th February) at the Whitchurch Maze. Peter Cuss from Butterfly Conservation, aided by his son Sam, planted two specimens of *Ulmus minor* 'Ademuz', which is a variety of elm that is highly resistant to Dutch Elm disease.



There was a small group of us to welcome the visitors and agree the location for the trees: Gill Goodwin, Charles Cotgreave, Nick Brazil, Leslie Prater, and the Woolhouses (Pete, Lorna and me).

Peter Cuss is leading a project run by the Upper Thames branch of Butterfly Conservation to plant more elms at sites where there is evidence of the rare **White-Letter Hairstreak butterfly** (*picture*). By doing this, it is hoped to increase their numbers which took a nosedive in the 1970s when so many elms were lost from the countryside.

In January, Peter found some White-Letter Hairstreak eggs on one of Wych Elms at the Maze and so he asked permission of our Parish Council to do this planting. When they become established, these new elms will provide the food plant which is essential for their caterpillars.



The life cycle of this butterfly is interesting. The eggs are laid singly on the terminal buds of the tree (*picture*) in late summer and then they overwinter for nearly eight months before hatching in early spring. The caterpillars eat the flower buds, then the leaf buds and finally the leaves, before pupating and then hatching in June.

We hope that on sunny days in June to August we will be lucky enough to see some adult butterflies on the wing, high in the tree canopy, confirming that Whitchurch is indeed a haven for this rare delicate beauty.

Sally Woolhouse, WoTHabs