

# Update on The Vale Royal White-letter Hairstreak Project

A new project was launched in 2006 for three years to safeguard the future of the white-letter hairstreak *Satyrion w-album* butterfly in Cheshire. The Vale Royal White-letter Hairstreak Project secured £22,330 funding from SITA Trust\*, through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme with 10% third party contributions provided by Vale Royal Borough Council and Butterfly Conservation.



The project aims to increase the range and population of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Action Plan species throughout Vale Royal. The Vale Royal area is particularly important lying near the most north-westerly limit of the white-letter hairstreak's distribution. A good ecological network here will allow the butterfly to gradually move northwards in response to climate change.

The white-letter hairstreak relies upon elm trees as its main larval food plant, a single tree can support an entire colony. The onset of Dutch Elm disease in the 1970's meant the butterfly population suffered a major decline. The butterfly was recognised in its plight and added to the Cheshire region Biodiversity Action Plan in 1997. Since then recorders have found that the white-letter hairstreak has managed to maintain small discreet populations across the country, but each of these are vulnerable to any loss of trees due to the disease that still spreads across the country.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust together with Vale Royal Borough Council and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers as members of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership have taken the project forwards to ensure the future of this species in Cheshire.

Throughout the previous two winters a total of 71 wych elm standards and 3125 wych elm whips have been planted. Where necessary, shelter guards have been used to protect these trees. During the past summers there has been control of competing vegetation around the whips to ensure success of the newly planted trees and monitoring of known current populations of the butterfly. This summer white-letter hairstreak butterflies have been found in small numbers both at Leftwich Meadows and Marbury Country Park.

With less than a year to go before the project ends there will be white elm (*U. Laevis*) whips planted at Leftwich Meadows. The elm bark beetle (*Scolytus scolytus*) that spreads the Dutch elm disease do not like to feed on white elms so they are therefore less likely to contract the disease. Planting white elms will help support the white-letter hairstreak population if neighbouring wych elm trees become infected with the disease.

We hope that this project will encourage more people to record this and other butterflies and provide the foundations to support future generations of the white-letter hairstreak in Cheshire. If you would like to get involved with recording butterflies or planting trees as part of this project please contact Sarah Bennett, Cheshire region Biodiversity Manager on 01948 820728

\*SITA Trust distributes funding through the Landfill Communities Fund. Funding is available for community projects within 10 miles of an active SITA UK landfill site and environmental improvement projects within 10 miles of any operational landfill site. Since 1997 the Trust has allocated over £62m to more than 2000 projects across the UK. For further information about how to apply for funding please call the Trust on 01454 262910 or visit [www.sitatrust.org.uk](http://www.sitatrust.org.uk)