**From the EIG Chairman Simon Spencer**

First can I welcome you all here to this EIG AGM. The joint AGM with Hampshire and IOW branch came about as a bit of an accident. We had already booked their usual location on their preferred date and persuaded Martin Warren (BC CEO) to speak on 10 years of progress for Butterfly Conservation Europe. You will hear him later. When they heard that we has booked their hall with such a good speaker they suggested a joint meeting and we both thought it would be a great idea. We thought it was a good opportunity to acquaint a wider audience with our work and get more people excited about European butterflies.

Secondly an apology. I cannot be with you as I am recovering from an operation and though up and about I am not really up to long journeys yet. Anne, my wife is here holding the fort on my behalf. She has some beautiful EIG calendars to sell and many thanks to all those who have sent in photographs. Every year it gets more difficult to choose between them. She also has a few EIG sweatshirts. I am very grateful to Mike Prentice for taking charge of the day. I am afraid there are several apologies from committee members. I am very disappointed that I cannot catch up with you all, hear about your summer expeditions and to plan future butterfly adventures. Can I ask all of you to phone me in the next few weeks for a chat or ask Anne to get me to ring you.

Just occasionally in life you realize that what you have aimed for over a number of years has now been achieved. Let me take you away from a cold October day in England to Greece in July. Here we were a group of five EIG members doing a survey of a national park in Greece accompanied by our friend and local butterfly expert Lazaros Pamperis and local park conservation officer Rika Bisa whom we had met on Mount Chelmos in 2007. We were working together as a team making an important contribution to the records of the park on butterflies which were very limited before we started. Not much escaped our attention and with the combined expertize available there were not many question marks in the dataset. The team work is important and works well. Some of us use nets and concentrate on finding and identifying butterflies and other tend to take photographs. You cannot do both at the same time. The subsequent correction of field records using the photographs is very valuable and instructive and can be done at leisure with reference books available. The photographs themselves are a valuable record. The learning process is greatly enhanced by the collective identification of butterflies by the team. Working alone you never have that confirmation. It was also great fun. We went to some fabulous places that without Rika’s help and local knowledge we would not have found. We did not know what we would find in the way of butterflies. That is always very different and more useful than a tour of well known butterfly sites. This was what EIG was set up to do – work with local experts to make surveys of butterflies as a team. Last year it was helping Miguel Munguira in Spain. It also makes a very enjoyable holiday. The evening discussions on local culture and history were very well informed and instructive. Like most of Greece the traditional shepherds are now a rarity. This is likely to have a big impact on butterflies. I hope we go back many times and do the same in other national parks. John Salmon’s report on the EIG trip to the Tzoumerka, Peristeri and Arachthos Gorge National park will be in the next newsletter. We would like to send another expedition to work with Lazaros next May but it may be delayed until 2016 – unless there are volunteers who could go next year. We are also in the early stages of thinking about a butterfly meeting in Greece. This would be less ambitious than the Digne conference but on the same lines. It is likely to take place in spring 2016. There is a recent surge in interest in butterflies in Greece mainly prompted by Lazaros’s book the ‘Butterflies of Greece’ and no doubt helped considerably by Lazaros giving away many copies of the Greek edition despite investing his life savings in its publication! He has given copies of the book to every school in Cyprus and offered one to every school in Greece – amazingly the Greek education authorities have not taken up his offer.

EIG has had a year of consolidation and we have had a bit of a change around in roles on the committee. Dudley Cheesman has taken over as treasurer from Nigel Peace allowing Nigel to take over editing the newsletter from myself and Anne. We now use a professional typesetter for the newsletter so it now looks very professional. A big thank you to Nigel for doing such a good job as treasurer and to Dudley for taking it on. This will mean that I have more time to attend to the growing task of being chairman.

We are also drafting in more help. Matt Berry has set up an EIG facebook page and we are going to make sure that the EIG website [www.bc-eig.org.uk](http://www.bc-eig.org.uk) is refreshed more frequently. I have an excellent Germany country page from Marion Thomas that is now finished and Jude Locke, our indefatigable EIG representative in France, has researched all the regional butterfly recording schemes in France see [www.bc-eig.org.uk/countries](http://www.bc-eig.org.uk/countries) to encourage EIG members to send in their records and also as useful local contacts in France. These 2 pieces of work will go onto the website over the next few days. There are still gaps on the country pages: most of Scandinavia and Portugal but we are getting there. The coverage of France is also not complete with nothing in the Alps. We would welcome contributions. We are beginning to get people sending in records to local recording schemes in France and elsewhere. Now that the recording spreadsheet is fully developed we will roll it out for all countries in Europe.

We ran a butterfly ID training camp in Valjouffrey in the Ecrins national park in France. It was aimed at a young inexperienced EIG members who could run up mountains at catch lots of butterflies. As it turned out we were all rather elderly but we did see some great butterflies. It is such a rich area and we were lucky with the weather. The weather in the Alps this year was generally poor. Dudley Cheesman has written an account for the newsletter.

We would like to do more public EIG trips. Mike Williams has run a number of successful EIG fund raising tours and raised over 20,000 euros for the Hungarian Natural Heritage Trust. He is planning an EIG fund raising tour of Macedonia 11-18th of July. Few of us can afford more than a few weeks butterflying a year and not everyone wants the hassle of organising an EIG trip. They are great fun but we are desperately short of leaders. They don’t have to be spectacular or involve an itinerary to see as many butterfly species as possible. If you feel you could take this on or have any ideas please get in touch with me. From the contacts we have built up over the years and our contacts in Butterfly Conservation Europe we now have access to a network of butterfly people all over Europe. These people like to receive our records. Some also appreciate our practical help. Some like Lazaros will come and join you for a week.

We are going to have a bit of a marketing campaign this winter and try and raise the number of EIG members from the 250 we have at the moment to a higher percentage of Butterfly Conservation’s 25,000 members. We have revamped the EIG membership leaflet. It will go out early next year with the Butterfly magazine. I welcome further joint activities with Branches. I have spoken at Branch AGM’s about EIG and we would welcome opportunities to meet BC branches and tell them what we do. Because we are a national group we actually have very few opportunities to meet members and for members to meet each other. We would like to find more opportunities for this.

Gaining more EIG members would give us more income to spend on things like trying to conserve the most vulnerable European butterflies. We are particularly concerned about Colias myrmidone (Danube Clouded Yellow) whose range has declined enormously ( it was previously present as far west as Germany but now seems confined to Hungary and Romania). At the Symposium earlier this year we got a group of like-minded people together to work out what to do about the butterfly in Romania. Self-funded volunteers have a role but there is also a need to pay local people to actually do something before this butterfly disappears. Long term associate of EIG Szabolics Safian (Safi) is on the case and has been researching one of the few remaining group of colonies in Romania with our help. We hope to make further progress on this important initiative next year.