

Newsletter No. 75
Spring 2014

Dorset Branch News



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Butterfly
Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Chairman's Letter

From Jane Smith, Dorset BC Chairman

Welcome to our 2014 spring newsletter. As in 2013, the next newsletter will be produced in the autumn so the accompanying events list covers the period from April to the end of September. One of the drawbacks of producing only two newsletters in a year is that the publication dates do not fit in well with Bill Shreeves' annual report on butterflies (it used to be an article in the summer newsletter). As a result, this year we have decided to produce a report on the butterflies of 2013 in a separate publication to be produced by Bill in collaboration with Lyn Pullen. This will be sent out by early June and, as it's a separate report, there won't be such a constraint on space so it will be longer and more detailed than it was previously.

I am writing this as we move from meteorological winter into spring, but I think this has been a winter that none of us will care to remember. A series of 12 major winter storms between December and mid-February has meant that the country has been subject to gales and heavy rainfall over a prolonged period. It was the wettest December to January period in the UK since records began and overall, UK rainfall was up 161% on the average. There were more very severe gale days than any other winter season in the last 140 years, and with the mean temperature for the UK being 1.5°C above the winter average, there was a notable absence of frosts. The effect of this on our vegetation, and butterfly and moth populations will become apparent over the coming months. The mild spring has meant that over-wintering butterflies have been on the wing in considerable numbers for some time, and March has seen the emergence of newly hatched species such as Holly Blue, Small White and Speckled Wood; hopefully this is a positive sign.

As usual throughout this summer we will be holding several guided walks throughout Dorset, and will be taking our display stall to events around the county. Details are contained in the accompanying events

list, but if you have internet access it is always worth checking our website for additions to our programme. This year we will be holding two butterfly identification workshops: on Saturday 7th June at Barton Meadow Farm, Cerne Abbas; and on Tuesday 24th June at Avon Heath Country Park where we will be focussing on heathland species. Both workshops include both an indoor theoretical and an outdoor practical session. Spaces on these courses are limited so you must book in advance if you want to come to either workshop; see the events list for details.

We recently held our annual AGM and Branch Members' Afternoon. This year we decided to ask those present for views about two aspects of the newsletter. The first of these was to determine how many people would be happy to receive the newsletter in electronic form only. The advantage to the branch would be that postage costs would be reduced, although the savings on printing costs are less clear-cut. This would mean that more funds would be available for conservation. The second question related to the use of a colour cover for the newsletter (the inside pages would remain in black and white, although photographs are shown in colour in the electronic version). Many branches do use colour, although it substantially increases costs, in our case by about £100 per issue (40% increase) for one side of the cover in colour, and £200 per issue (75% increase) for both sides in colour. I would love to hear your views on these two questions, so please send me an email on chair@dorsetbutterflies.com, or phone me on 01935 814029.

At the AGM we said goodbye to two of our committee members. Sadly, Gordon Hopkins, our Moth Coordinator, has become unwell and is no longer able to fulfil his role on the committee. We will miss his humour and common sense approach to things, and thank him for his time on the committee. Fortunately, Bob Steedman agreed to take over Gordon's role and was duly elected. We welcome Bob back to the committee after his previous role as Acting Secretary in 2010/11. Mark Spencer provided a direct link to the Bournemouth Natural Science Society, of which he is President. We hold a joint event with

BNSS each year, and our relationship with them is very important to us. However, Mark was unable to attend our committee meetings so did not stand for re-election; fortunately, our contact with him and the society remains.

Finally I would like to remind you of the dates of two national events: National Moth Night is on from 3rd to 5th July, and the focus will be on woodland moths, while the Big Butterfly Count will run from 19th July to 10th August, and is proving hugely successful in introducing large numbers of people to the joys of looking for and recording butterflies; please join in both events!

I hope you have a good summer.

Jane Smith

2014: A crucial butterfly recording year

By Lyn Pullen

Butterflies are recorded nationally on a five-year recording cycle, and at the end of each a distribution atlas is published to show the results. This information underpins all our work to help butterflies, so it is crucial. 2014 is the last year of the current five-year cycle, and there are still some kilometre squares (kms) in Dorset where there are apparently no butterflies! Of course, this is not the case; the problem is that no records have been sent in to us from these squares. Because we map the records received the places with no records remain blank, so they have been dubbed “white holes”.

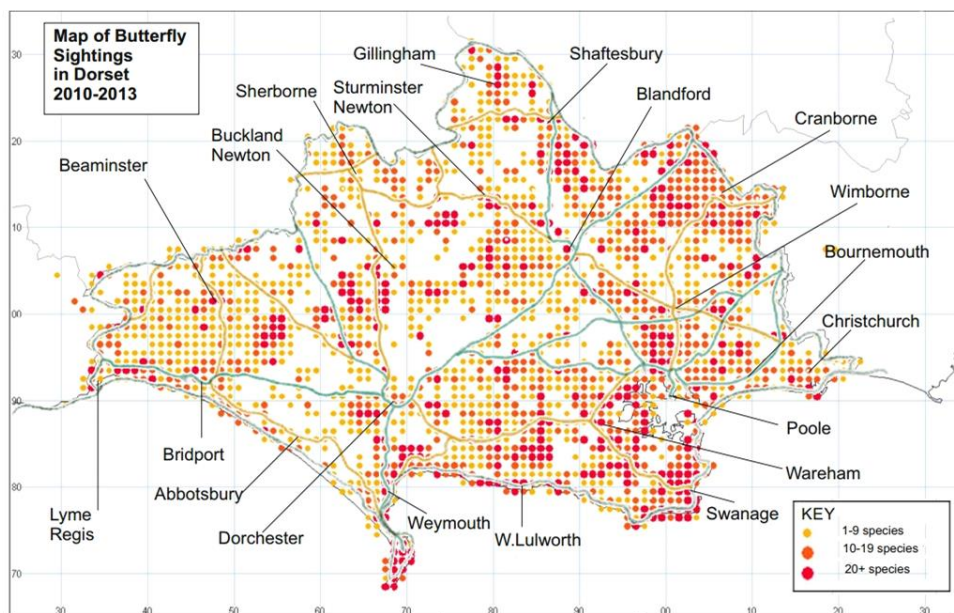
We are doing well:

2010-2012 we had filled 1,683 kms.

2010-2013 we had filled 1,980 kms.

We have 941 white holes left to fill by the end of 2014.

We should note at this point that the number of kms in Dorset is somewhat open to interpretation: do you include every square that has any part, however small, in Dorset? Or go for ones which have more than half their area in the county? It doesn't hugely matter – having a target number of squares left to fill is a device which helps us to focus on the effort needed. So, where are these white holes? You can get an idea from the map below, but for full detail either contact Robin George (see back cover) for a printed copy, or go onto the website www.dorsetbutterflies.com, where under “Recording” you will find “White Holes”. The map is repeated there, but better still, make sure you've got the free “Google Earth” software on your computer, then click the link on our website. After that, you'll be taken into a detailed map which shows the white holes, and you can hover your mouse over a white hole to be shown its grid reference.



A map of Dorset's 'white holes' – could you help us fill in any of these?

Obviously, just one species will 'fill' a hole, but the more species we have recorded in each, the better. One species severely lacking in records is the White-letter Hairstreak, on which a separate article appears below. How you choose to send in your records for white holes (or any sighting) is up to you, but if you have a computer do try using the sightings form on our website – it is very easy. Please help with this recording if you can; it is a remarkable example of citizen science in action, and you can be a part of it.

Where are the White Letter Hairstreaks?

By Guy Freeman

Previously, White-letter Hairstreaks have been recorded in 47 different km squares in Dorset, but during the current five year recording cycle they have only been seen in 7. While this species has suffered from the effects of Dutch Elm Disease, it is likely that this apparent drop in numbers has a lot to do with us overlooking colonies, rather than an actual lack of butterflies. We are now in the final year of the current recording cycle, so to ensure that we have an accurate picture of the Hairstreak's Dorset distribution it would be great if everyone could keep this species in mind when out and about this summer.



White-letter Hairstreak

The key to finding White-letter Hairstreaks is finding Elms. Colonies can be restricted to a single Elm tree, and although the butterflies may sit on adjacent trees and flowers to feed, the majority of their lives will be spent flying around, or sat on an Elm. Perhaps the best tactic is to identify Elms beforehand, and then visit later in the year to see whether there are any Hairstreaks present. In early summer, the

clusters of pale green, papery fruits are distinctive, and the alternate leaves with an asymmetrical base are also useful for identification. Once you've found your tree/trees, you can then search for the Hairstreaks! Due to their habit of living in the canopy, identifying and observing adult White-letter Hairstreaks is best done with binoculars. However, if you spot some small, silvery butterflies spinning around near the top of an Elm in late June or July, you are very likely to have hit the target! If you are fortunate you may get the chance to see one up close as it rests on a low leaf, or nectars on a flower; Bramble, Hemp Agrimony and Creeping Thistle are favourites. Another tactic is to look for the caterpillars. In the later stages of development they rest along the midrib of the leaf, and in May it's possible to spot them by standing beneath a tree and looking up for the silhouette of a caterpillar on its leaf; they stand out surprisingly well apparently!

Although probably too late for the current atlas, searches for this species needn't stop in the winter. The distinctive, disc shaped eggs, laid on the tips of Elm twigs, are perhaps the easiest of the life stages to locate, while in early spring the reddish flowers of Elms make them particularly easy to spot ready for return visits in the summer. If you have any luck, please report your sightings to the website (www.dorsetbutterflies.com).

Why do you work with BC on Cashmoor?

By Lawrie de Whalley

Lines of banks and ditches, with 4000 BC house sites and the Dorset Cursus nearby, run across chalk downland about 5 miles south west of Martin Down. These 2 metre high banks can form a mosaic of wonderful butterfly habitats provided some animal or human activity retains open areas and patches of short sward. In 2013, 30 species were counted on Cashmoor's 2.4km long, 10m wide transect, all of which is public access. The width of the bank system varies from 10 to 25m, and adjoining fields are mainly arable farmland. Dorset Branch Butterfly Conservation volunteers have been working at this site for

over 13 years; here are a few examples of butterfly habitat needs and how we meet them.

Green Hairstreak, which needs both scrub and adjacent short turf warm enough for ants to prosper, is always present in very good numbers. Its pupae emit sounds attractive to ants and exude liquids needed by them¹, so it is likely that they are important in the butterfly's requirements. A short sward (between 3-7cm) is usually beneficial to ants as it lets the sun warm the soil, and my surveys elsewhere confirm that ants become very scarce when the sward reaches 10cm or higher. At Cashmoor, the bank sides slope towards the sun and provide some shelter from the wind. The work parties have cleared scrub so that sections of bank are open to the sun and have a short sward. Some local research to find out which of its many foodplants the larva uses here would be intriguing and valuable.

Dingy Skipper is a priority species nationally. At Cashmoor, It has a good transect count of 29 averaged over the past 10 years. The larvae overwinter in a silk hibernaculum at the bottom of the foodplant, Birds-foot Trefoil. In order to be suitable for the species, this plant must grow in a sward, less than 10cm in height, which is not disturbed in winter by close grazing or cutting. Some bare soil helps and this used to be provided by rabbits, but these are now scarce. Further thought is needed in order to determine how best to provide more bare soil on the sheltered bank sides.

Small Blue, another nationally declining species, needs both scrub and short turf, with its only foodplant, Kidney Vetch, growing and retaining its flower heads as this is where the larva and eggs reside. In 1997 only 8 were seen on transect, perhaps because rabbits ate the flower heads; the larvae and ova are lost if the flowers are eaten by grazing animals. To prevent this, our work parties do not cut in summer, and sheep grazing is restricted to one part of the site outside of the breeding season. Our alternate glade and scrub is made to suit the species' needs and the 10 year average count is now 32; a big success.

This is the place to see Common Blue, with an average of 146 per year over 10 years. The short turf, favouring Birds-foot Trefoil, is

important once again. Chalkhill Blue has modest numbers (average of 24 over 10 years) but as in the rest of Dorset (except Portland) numbers have plummeted from the 1997 transect counts of 900. This has always been a boom and bust species and the reasons are poorly understood. The crash in numbers coincided with the loss of rabbits in 2000, but more research is needed. We retain enough longer sward to meet one of their needs, and their only foodplant, Horseshoe Vetch, is present in

a few thin soil places on the site; ants are mandatory. Branch members are putting considerable effort into driving back scrub near the foodplant sites, and controlling subsequent regrowth. We are always aware that it may be several years after the work has been completed before the species re-occupies the site. As long term volunteers, we wish more grants were available to enable other BC projects to stretch over many years. The double brooded Adonis Blue is present in very small numbers, using the same foodplant and ants as the Chalkhill Blue. A short sward in spring is important.



The Common Blue thrives at
Cashmoor

The splendid Dark Green Fritillary, with a count of 37, was a success in 2013, enjoying the nectar flowers and violets in the damper parts of the ditches. Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks also live in the damper ditches where we leave patches of Nettles for their use. The footpath is kept well clear by our selective clearance throughout the year, and the council have been requested to refrain from running their cutters along it so that a great swathe of flowers and ant nests can survive.

Long grass loving golden Skippers and Browns do very well, with Marbled Whites counted at 351 in mid-July 2013; it's well worth making a visit to enjoy these. Nectar flowers are very important again, and Knapweed is a favourite here. There is a lack of quality research on the impact of available nectar on butterfly populations, although it is probable that females develop a second egg load with abundant nectar on tap.

Moths abound, with 227 macro species being found on one night. Permission to run a light was of course sought from the landowner beforehand. We have watched Footman larvae eating lichen on posts, and the lovely micro *Palpita vitrealis* graced our work party in the autumn; these deserve a separate article!

The above management is carried out by at least 6 branch work party days each year. Although not all are advertised publicly (farm activities and weather can give little notice when choosing a day) more helpers are very welcome; raking and carrying cut grass and lopping scrub are typical needs. We also carry out conservation work on 3 other sites within 5 miles, giving a boost to moths and butterflies at the landscape scale.

Our thanks go to Arthur Bryant who has organised access with landowners, managers and graziers for over 14 years. Arthur has also organised people to come and carry out work, as well as recording transect numbers. A big thank you to the band of branch members who have joined in over the years to keep this unusual site alive with wonderful butterflies.

There is public footpath access across the whole site, starting from the A354 Blandford to Salisbury Road, 7 miles from Blandford. At 'The Inn on the Chase' public house at Cashmoor (DT11 8DN) go 500 yards further away from Blandford to a small lay-by on the right. Foot access is past a silver gate along a track, initially hedged, which continues ahead for 2 miles. At a cross track go over a stile for 200 yards, and enjoy the downland views!

1. J. Thomas & R. Lewington. 2010. The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland. *Pub. British Wildlife Publishing*. ISBN 9780956490209

2013: Year of rare migrants or butterfly breeders & weddings? ***Bill Shreeves & many Dorset Butterfly recorders***

At first sight 2013 appears to have been a great year for unusual migrants in Dorset. With observations of 8 Monarchs, 5 Continental Swallowtails, 3 Large Tortoiseshells and single records of Long-tailed Blue, Black-veined White, Julia Heliconian and Scarce Swallowtail, it seemed to be one of the best in recent years.

The first **Monarch** was seen near Highcliffe by Ken West at 10.30 am on **July 13th**, by the Chewton Bunny undercliff. One had been seen previously across the border in a Hampshire garden for 5 seconds, near New Milton on **July 8th** by Robin Harley. Later, on **July 26th**, the story moved into west Dorset, with a Monarch seen by Charlie Fuge in his Burton Bradstock garden. He reported that it circled around his head before flying next door and feeding, with wings open, on a Hydrangea. Unfortunately, while he was indoors fetching his son it disappeared. Five days afterwards, further east along the coast at Abbotsbury, at 11.30am on **August 1st** John Hurst was in the car park at the entrance to the Tropical gardens when a very large pale orange butterfly appeared, hovering briefly and then flying away towards the gardens. Later, at 12.15 pm, a much darker orange butterfly with clear black veins came up over the cliffs into the gardens from the south below the Magnolia walk. It did not stop but continued to fly powerfully northwards. John had encountered Monarchs before in Madeira and had no doubts about the identification. He asked the Head Gardener whether there had been any official releases and was assured there had been none. On **August 9th** Monarch interest shifted back east to Poole, where Anthony Harradine reported “a large orange butterfly” arriving in his garden from the west before settling high in a Bramley cooking apple tree. Anthony was able to identify the butterfly as a Monarch and notes that his garden, situated on a ridge overlooking Poole Harbour, is one of the highest points around. Monarch sighting number 6 was reported 3 days later on **August 12th**. Dick Hewitson was at Winspit to do some drawing with two other artists, and as he searched for suitable locations he spotted the Monarch flying

along the low cliff at the edge of the old quarry. He noted "It was flying inland over the vegetation just below the top of the cliff. I did not actually see it flying in from the sea, but it looked to me as if that was where it had come from". It headed inland, but unfortunately disappeared while Dick went to get his camera. The grand finale for Dorset Monarch sightings in 2013 came at the home of Katie Bedford at Ensbury Park in Bournemouth on **August 30th - 31st**. She wrote the following very detailed description of events: "I saw the first Monarch, a male, on 30th August. It came gliding down from possibly the west at 12.45 pm and came to rest on the leaf of a small tree (which intertwines with a pale mauve buddleia), wings closed, head upright, motionless for nearly two and a half hours. Then it fed on the buddleia for a minute before going to a leaf to bask in the sun, wings open, for another minute. Next it went back to the buddleia flower to feed for a further two minutes. It transferred to a *Verbena bonariensis* a few feet away and fed for another minute then to a *Rudbeckia* just to bask for several minutes, occasionally closing its wings but not feeding. Next it was off to another nearby plant and then to the white garden chair for a couple of minutes, wings closed, before going back to the verbena and feeding avidly for several minutes. It finally flew off possibly eastwards at about 3.15 pm. Next day on **31st Aug** we found, mid-morning, two Monarchs, about a foot apart roosting on the east side of our mulberry tree about 12 feet off the ground. By 11.30 am one had flown off. The other with partially clipped forewings, stayed an extra quarter hour, before transferring to a smaller tree to bask for 15 minutes or so before flying off. The damaged one was a female. She looked as if a bird had taken a bite out of the two forewings when the wings were closed. I have seen others like this in images on the internet. We haven't seen them since. These butterflies needed much longer to warm up than our Whites and Speckled Woods which had been flying round and feeding for ages". All these observations were backed up by excellent photographs.

The **Continental Swallowtail** story began earlier in the year on Friday **31st May**, between 12 and 12.15pm. This subspecies, known as *gorganus*, is not to be confused with the native English *britannicus*

which is confined to Norfolk by its food-plant Milk-parsley. John Boys was doing the Pamphill Transect Walk and had reached section 3 when he saw the Swallowtail “flitting about and basking in the sun on several yellow flowers in longish grass. It was in fine condition”. The same insect was observed by Gillian Hawkins who fortunately had her camera and took an excellent photo. On the way back to the church she saw either the same or another Swallowtail. Further sightings, very possibly of the same butterfly, were to follow on **June 2nd** and **4th**. Geoff Salt explained how he and his son “came across a single Swallowtail in a grass field at Pamphill, Wimborne. It was in good health and flew strongly away eastwards over open farmland”. Not far from this, on **June 4th**, Anthea Cross, living in Cowgrove Road, saw a Swallowtail from her kitchen window which “came from the south between the two cottages and then turned west across the end of next door and south down their other side”. On **June 7th** at 4.20 pm, Jon Rowson took a distant photo of what was certainly a Swallowtail at Hengistbury Head (probably too far south to be the same insect).

Earlier, on **June 2nd** at 10.30 am near Durlston’s Tilly Whim Caves, young Jess Nicholls, with her mother and her grandfather, Malcolm Turnbull, had seen what must surely have been a different Swallowtail. Her grandfather (once a Warden at Durlston Country Park) emailed: “The weather at the time was warm, approx 18°C, with just a light NW breeze. The butterfly was first spotted by Jess at the entrance to Tilly Whim Caves. The Caves are approximately 20m above sea level in an area of steep limestone cliffs with abundant Thrift currently in full flower. The butterfly circled around this particularly warm and sheltered area for 20 seconds or so allowing all three of us to have good views before it moved a few yards to the west where it settled on some Thrift adjacent to the coast path. It remained in this position for some 10 to 15 seconds allowing my daughter Nicky to take photographs on her iphone - I must say that I was rather surprised that it stayed in one place for so long and also that it allowed her to get so close. The Swallowtail then headed off to the west”. The Swallowtail story continued into July. On **July 6th**, Peter Poore took a photo of a Swallowtail in his vegetable garden in Merley, south of

Wimborne, in which it appeared to be attempting to lay eggs on his carrots. Mary Ann McVean photographed a Swallowtail in her garden near King's Park, Bournemouth, on **July 12th** which she described as "dancing about my honeysuckle and lavender to my delight". On **July 15th**, Cheryl Patrick sent a photo of two Swallowtail caterpillars which she found "munching on my fennel plant in my back garden in Furzehill". After that things went quiet until **September 29th**, when Jason Hickman reported the following from near Julian's Bridge, Wimborne: "When I saw the butterfly I was digging my allotment and it came from a northerly direction and headed south east.... The butterfly never settled but it did appear to circle around patches of Michaelmas Daisies before disappearing into the distance".

It would be very satisfying to think that all of these fascinating sightings were of genuine migrants, but the increased activities of private breeders, as well as professional breeding for the fairly recent phenomenon of butterfly weddings and funerals, are making it very difficult for County Butterfly Record Officers.

The Monarch records for July/August do not fit the usual pattern of migrants in September and October when the butterflies, returning from Canada to their Mexican hibernation centres, are blown off course by the cross Atlantic winds and come to ground on the South West coast of UK. 'Googling' on line reveals plenty of adverts offering butterfly weddings. One example states "We will usually supply either Monarch or Swallowtail butterflies, depending on



Swallowtail caterpillars in Furzehill
© Cheryl Patrick

availability. When released, these butterflies tend to stay within the area as they all have a slow, flapping flight (smaller butterflies when released tend to fly off very quickly, making it hard to see them). Monarchs and Swallowtails are attracted to bright coloured clothes and flowers, and this behaviour should enable your guests to see them, photograph them and enjoy their beauty". Brides in white wedding gowns are shown displaying live Monarch butterflies.

Highcliffe Castle is a known wedding venue and there is a firm which breeds butterflies for such occasions in the New Milton area. They claim not to use Monarchs, but admit that they do study some in greenhouses and that one escaped in July around the time of the Highcliffe sighting. A TV programme in mid-October reported an anniversary ceremony commemorating a sad death under the Burton Bradstock cliffs in 2012 which consisted of the release of Monarchs and Painted Ladies on the beach. This was of course much too late to link directly with the August Monarch records for Burton Bradstock and Abbotsbury Gardens, but illustrates the growth of this idea. It was interesting to see a photo in the news and notes section in the autumn 2013 edition of *Atropos* showing a Monarch photographed on June 17th-18th in Gosport (Hants). Could this have been part of an early migration or was the location, Ann's Hill Cemetery, an indication of another explanation? It is sad to relate that rumours, of the 'friend of a friend' variety, suggest that the Monarch which was seen and photographed by so many on Portland in 2012 was a release by a private breeder. If any of the 2013 sightings were genuine migrants the most likely candidates would be those at Abbotsbury, Burton Bradstock and Winspit.

With regard to the **Swallowtails**, more 'friend of a friend' rumours suggest that three were released by a private breeder in the Poole area in early June. It is therefore just possible that most of the Poole-Bournemouth-Wimborne area sightings of butterflies and caterpillars could have been generated from the three releases. However, the Durlston, and possibly the Hengistbury records could have been genuine cross channel sightings, especially

as there were other reports from southern counties around that time.

Most of the remaining possible migrant records also have problems. It is likely that the **Large Tortoiseshells** were correctly identified, though not backed up with photos. Lorraine Lambeth saw her Large Tortoiseshell at 10.01 am on **10th July**: "I sighted a Large Tortoiseshell on a clump of teasels. I have studied butterflies for 50 years and although I have never seen a live specimen before, I knew immediately what it was". However, the location, at the foot of the steps leading from the Cliff Top car park near Chewton Bunny, was rather close to the **Highcliffe** sighting of the Monarch of the 13th! Longham Lakes, not too far off, were the location for two possible Large Tortoiseshells seen by Hugh Clark back on **29th June**. A possible **Scarce Swallowtail**, mentioned by Jeremy Thomas (Butterflies of Britain and Ireland) as an obvious candidate to re-colonise southern England, was glimpsed by Adrian Bicker on **July 14th** at Ham Pond, between Rockley Caravan site and Poole Harbour: "I had a close encounter with what I think was a Scarce Swallowtail butterfly, which passed me about 12' away then continued across the corner of the pond, up over the bank and away. I am used to these from holidays in France. It all happened quite quickly but I was aware of off-white colouration, a big, powerful butterfly and dark straight lines almost parallel to the body, but diverging away from the tail". There have been occasional sightings of this species in Dorset (the most recent in June 2009) but whether they have been released by breeders or made their own way across the English Channel is never clear. The same is true of the **Black-veined White**, glimpsed briefly as it flew rapidly though the Portland Observatory garden on **9th June**. Once common in southern England, the species went into decline and last bred in Kent during the 1920s. Strangely, only one reliable historic record (10th June 1815!) exists for Dorset despite there having been large colonies in the New Forest during the 1860s and 1870s. We have two recent possible sightings (May 2009 and August 2012) but it has long been a favourite with breeders, going back to the vast numbers released in the grounds of Chartwell for Winston Churchill, and it is thought that most sightings are releases or escapes.

A final example of a butterfly 'escape' must surely be the '**Julia Heliconian**', also known as the Flame, seen by Rob Hope on **July 15th** at Langdon Hill near Chideock: "We were walking on the track going around the base of Langdon Hill when the butterfly settled briefly in front of us. We have never seen such a sleek 'solid coloured' butterfly before. Was it a large moth? I googled 'orange butterflies' and scrolled through many photos, but kept coming back to the Julia Heliconian. I have never seen anything like it before". The '**Julia**' is a native of Brazil and occurs northwards into Florida and Texas. Although it would be thrilling to imagine such an exotic butterfly coming across high altitude jet streams along with American Monarchs it seems more likely to have been an escape. The species is known to be popular with butterfly houses because it is tough, long lived and day flying.

With the exceptions of 2006 and 2008, Dorset has received at least one sighting of **Long-tailed Blue** in every year since 2005. They seem to pop up in many different months: June in 2009, September in 2010-12, October in 2007 and November in 2005! So in a year in which the former UK records, set in 1945 and 1990, were smashed with multiple sightings across the south in August, followed by eggs, larvae and more butterflies in September and October, it seemed unfair that Dorset was missing the party!

However, at last, on **October 4th** in Sturminster Newton, Cath Walker's record arrived. Cath was called to the kitchen to see a butterfly, but when she got there she noted that "It looked like nothing I had ever seen before". Cath managed to get a few excellent photos while the butterfly was indoors, but once released in the garden it rapidly disappeared. The mention of the kitchen suggested that this record might be related to the well documented group of accidental importations of caterpillars or pupae among vegetables from hotter countries. A famous instance was the adults which emerged from two batches of mange-tout peas imported from Kenya in 1998. This year larvae were found on 2nd August in Somerset on peas packaged in Zimbabwe, and bred through to adults which emerged on 14th August.

However as Cathy explained the ‘accidental import’ hypothesis does not fit exactly: “It seems most likely that the Long-tailed Blue must have entered our kitchen as a caterpillar or chrysalis in something, although I can’t think what, as most of the vegetables we buy are in shrink-wrapped supermarket packets and kept in the fridge. Home-grown vegetables enter the house... but then how would the caterpillar have got into them in the first place if it’s a migrant from warmer climes?”. Given the news this year from Kingsdown Leas near Dover, where around 50 eggs found on Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea were converted into British-bred Long-tailed Blues in September, it might be possible that fertile eggs were laid on some of Cath’s home-grown Vegetables and transported into her kitchen.

In conclusion it is clear that the rapid growth of butterfly breeding is creating a large problem for verifying butterfly records. In San Francisco, according to a report in the Times on December 7th, “the city is considering a ban on the release of commercially bred butterflies. ‘Butterflies are not creatures to be owned and become party favours for the human circus’, a local lepidopterist has argued. At stake there is a significant industry



Long-tailed Blue in Sturminster Newton
© Cath Walker

where a dozen Monarchs can cost about 100 dollars and breeders can earn up to 250,000 dollars per year”. Things have not reached this scale in UK yet but I certainly feel that I could do with some more help if I am to make a reasonable effort at deciding which records are artificially bred releases. I would be very delighted to hear from

anyone who could assist me by gathering more rapid intelligence about what is being seen, not just in Dorset but also elsewhere in the UK. People who enjoy browsing through websites could make a major contribution, because sightings still don't automatically reach me. Equally I often don't find the time to circulate Dorset records of unusual migrants to British Wildlife Reports or the Butterfly Conservation web site. Also, if there is anybody out there who has the skill of weather back-tracking, this is enormously helpful for determining whether the wind currents and directions at the time and place of sighting could have brought the butterfly from overseas. Another part of a possible 'migrant intelligence department' might be a tactful investigation of the location of butterfly breeders and butterfly weddings! Grateful thanks to all those who have not only taken the trouble to send in their sightings, but also provided me with eye witness accounts, photos, and answered my probably very annoying additional questions! Just a reminder that the best place to send any Dorset butterfly records (not just rarities) is the Dorset Butterfly website: (www.dorsetbutterflies.com).

The Purple Emperor in Dorset: a chronology and update

By Roger Smith

In the Dorset Branch News nos. 56 and 62 (summers 2007 and 2009) readers were given historical and current information on the status of the Purple Emperor in the county. After a five-year survey of some ten or more sites, launched in 2005, no definite sightings of our quarry were achieved. However, in July 2010 one of the surveyors, Steven Andrews of Blandford, discovered a small colony in Cranborne Chase, about 2kms from where it was last known and studied by Margaret Brooks and Jeremy Thomas between 1973 and 1978. In the interim, individuals have been recorded during the 1980s at scattered locations between the villages of Horton and Cranborne, and in the 90s at somewhat isolated and surprising sites such as Stalbridge Park, near the A30, and Langton West Wood in Purbeck.

After 2000, and prior to Steven's encouraging discovery of 2010, there were more reports of singletons at Bere Wood in July 2005 (previous records 1880, 1960s and 1970s) by Jonathan McGowan, and at Rooksmoor in July 2009 by Peter Davey. Following the Cranborne Chase discovery of 2010 there were records of individuals from the Minterne Estate in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (although the site of the breeding colony is yet to be located) from Lord Digby's head gardener, Ray Abraham; a male on Deadmoor Common, on 17th July 2013 from Robert Hall (Natural England); and away to the east near Alderholt on 8th August 2013 from David Lambert. These post 2005 records confirm the presence of two viable populations, one in Cranborne Chase and one in or near Minterne Magna, as well as a probable third in the Horton/Cranborne/Alderholt areas, and a possible presence in the Rooksmoor/Deadmoor woodlands. On the evidence of recent surveys by your present informant and others, Bere Wood and Bloxworth remain possible localities and are worthy of further exploration.



A male Purple Emperor

One feature that emerges from these surveys is the relative scarcity of the primary larval foodplant, Goat Willow (*Salix cuprea*), in comparison to that of Grey Sallow (*S. cinerea*) or Crack Willow (*S. fragilis*). This is apparently true of most of the Emperor's sites, including Cranborne Chase and Minterne where populations clearly thrive, but further searches are needed. In Dorset, records of insects on carcasses, animal excreta and sap-runs are noticeably few up until now, as are records of eggs or larvae apart from the earlier work by the late Margaret Brooks in Cranborne Chase (see BC Dorset Branch News no. 62, Summer 2009). It is encouraging to know that, after a long gap from the 1980s through to 2010, the Purple Emperor is clearly in residence in the county once more. It is to be hoped that in 2014 the sharp-eyed among us will uncover further signs of its presence.

A riot of colour now greets travellers when the yellow blanket of Kidney Vetch blooms on the cuttings and bridleway on the ridgeway; this is important as the caterpillar food plant of the Small Blue. For the last two years, Butterfly Conservation volunteers have been monitoring the site to record the species of butterfly.

2013 proved to be a good year, with 25 visits being made, 20 species recorded, and 621 individual records.



The Small Blue is one of the species which has benefitted from the conservation work carried out along the Weymouth Relief Road.

Photo © John Elliott

8 new species were recorded in 2013, including Large Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Green-veined White, Orange-tip, Adonis Blue and Peacock. 3 other species showed large increases on last year's numbers, these being Small White (144 recorded), Common Blue (213 recorded) and Small Tortoiseshell (79 recorded).

Other species seen in 2013 included Large White, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Wall, Marbled White, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown. Ringlet was recorded in 2012, but was not seen again this year.

We would like to continue the monitoring in 2014 and are hoping to design a transect. More volunteers are needed, so if you would like to help, or would like a more detailed report of the records, please contact Georgie Laing (georgie_laing@yahoo.co.uk).

Good days for butterflies

By Roger and Christine Hewitt

What was your best butterfly moment in 2013? Ours was on Sunday 9th June.

When we woke up we did not know what to do, but finally decided to take a walk on the west side of Ballard Down. After arriving at the Ulwell lay-by at 9.30 am, we walked up the path and around to the main footpath below the hillside.

Straight away we noticed quite a few Adonis Blues beginning to fly, with some just laying on the ground warming up. As we took a few photos the time just flew by, and once the sun got up,

around 10.30 am, the whole hillside came alive with Adonis Blues from top to bottom; a mass hatch. This has happened before, but not to us; it was just brilliant! The disappointing thing was that we were the only two watching it all unfold, apart from a young lady who turned up later and sat on the bank drawing or painting. We continued our walk along the footpath, finally returning to the lay-by at 1.30 pm, by which time the Adonis Blues had started flying across to the other side of the road. We wondered if any one else has experienced this, and what the experts' thoughts are. How often does this happen? And what elements have to be right for it to take place?



A male Adonis Blue

Another notable sighting was a group of 12+ Clouded Yellows on my local patch at Briantspuddle. I am sure that bigger numbers have been seen before, but these stayed faithful to one field from September 6th, with 7 still being present in mid-October. So what was holding their interest in that particular field? Well, a new crop, which was unfamiliar to me, had been planted and a bit of research allowed me to identify it as Lucerne, one of their main foodplants. I now hope that the farmer might crop it for their horses and not plough it in for fertiliser, but it's certainly something to keep an eye on next year.

Haiku - Summer Butterflies

By Richard Stewart

Through pastel flowers
A Marbled White butterfly
Dances on the downs.



Between pine needles
A flicker of pale blue sky
As Holly Blues rest.

Two brown butterflies
Dancing beneath dappled leaves
Battling for sunspots.



Velvet smooth in sun
The wings of summer Peacocks
On their maiden flights.

Above the mud patch
A cloud of bright butterflies
Blue sky come to earth.



White flags fluttering
Around the lavender beds
As Small Whites nectar.

The Clouded Yellow
Lands on a bright buttercup
Bathed in summer's glow.



By the carriageway
Close Adonis Blues dazzle
On a fox dropping.

Loud group in the park
And around a nearby oak
Purple Hairstreaks dance.

Hungry Tortoiseshells
Flying in from the cold sea
Feed on tall thistles.

WIDER COUNTRYSIDE SURVEY

From Adrian Neil

For the second year running, 2013 saw Dorset in top position (joint with Sussex) as the Branch area that surveyed the largest number of squares. With the help of 5 recorders from the British Trust for Ornithology, records were obtained from 51 squares and a total of 37 species were seen out of 45 in the whole national survey - the highest ever for us.

I hope that we can do at least as well this year and possibly manage to get 50 squares recorded by Butterfly Conservation members. There are a few squares that could not be allocated last year and some recorders have had to withdraw from the survey so I would be very grateful for a few more volunteers to help. Squares are available across the county and only two core visits are required; one in July and one in August. If you are interested, please contact me for further information - my contact details are on the back page.

Visit Athelhampton House and Gardens for just £5!!

Branch member Martin Young, who runs Nectar Plants in Weymouth, is organising the Plant Heritage Plant Fair at Athelhampton House this year on Sunday 4th May 2014 (open to the public 10.30 am-3 pm). The fair will have a wildlife theme, and our Branch will be there with our Display Stall.

Please send Robin George (Clarence House, Cemetery Road, Gillingham SP8 4BA) a stamped self-addressed envelope for your discount voucher. Present this at the entrance to the Plant Fair and pay your reduced entrance fee of £5.00. You can stay all day and visit the House and Gardens as well. The Restaurant, Café & Bar will be open, serving a great variety of things including coffee, light snacks, salads, hot meals etc. A Sunday carvery is on offer too (it might be sensible to book as this is popular!).

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

If you feel that you do not require a hard copy and you would prefer to receive the newsletter by email, please get in touch with our secretary Robin George at rab.george@which.net.

Making this change means you can enjoy the newsletter in full colour, as well as allowing The Branch to allocate more funds to conserving the county's butterflies.

We should emphasise that The Branch is more than happy to continue producing a paper copy of the newsletter for anyone who would like one.

Greetings! *The Branch is delighted to welcome the following new members. We hope to meet you all soon at our events and work parties. Please introduce yourselves to any of the committee members and find out how you can get the most out of your membership and what you can do to help.*

Miss V Bailey - Henstridge

Mrs A & Mr A Barnes & Family -
Charminster

Mrs S Bass - Poole

Mr M A Bloxham - Wimborne

Mr D & Mrs J Boddy - Church Knowle

Mr R Bradford & Ms J Simpson -
Stalbridge

Miss C Bray - Highcliffe

Mrs D Brunt - Bournemouth

Mr P Clarke - Weymouth

Mr S Claxton - Tarrant Hinton

Mr A Conroy - Bournemouth

Mrs J Cook - Wool

Mr D Coombes - Piddletrenthide

Mr C Cooper - Winterborne Whitechurch

Miss S Davis - Bournemouth

Mr C Deane - Poole

Mr B & Mrs V Dorey - Swanage

Mrs M Evans - Poole

Miss L & Mrs P Fancy & Family - Bere Regis

Miss J Forsdike - Bournemouth

Mr J & Mrs K Foyle - Cattistock

Mrs E J Gardner - Child Okeford

Mrs J Gault - Poole

Mr M Geater & Ms D Price - Poole

Mr S R Gilbert - Wool

Mr P Godier & Ms C Dale - Bournemouth

Mr M Gould - Bournemouth

Miss S Graham & Mr E Parrott - Poole

Mrs R Hamlin - Thornford

Mrs C Harvey - Bridport

Mrs S & Dr G Heald - Weymouth

Mr J & Mrs K Hodrien - Corfe Mullen

Mrs A & Mr T Hogan - Tarrant Hinton

Mr J & Mrs A Hornsby & Family - Verwood

Mr D C House - Kingston

Mrs J & Mr N Hull - Poole

Mrs P Hunt - Wareham

Mrs S Isherwood-Harris - Bournemouth

Mr D Jack - Spetisbury

Mrs H Johnston - Fontmell Magna

Dr S & Mrs H Jones - Weymouth

Mr D W & Mrs G S Kent - Blandford St Mary

Miss E Kimber - Bournemouth

Mr & Mrs B Lagden & Family - Wareham

Mrs J Lane - Bridport

Mr & Mrs Leithead - Shillingstone

Mr J Lewis - Bournemouth

Mr D & Mrs C Matthews & Family - Swallowcliffe

Dr M Maudsley - Bridport

Ms P Maxwell & Mr D Lynn - Bournemouth

Mr J & Mrs C McCusker - Verwood

Miss F McIntyre - Wool

Mrs C J McIntyre - Blandford Forum

Miss K Mooney - Bournemouth

Mr N Neville-Jones - Wareham

Mrs J Passmore - Verwood

Mr K Patenotte - Bournemouth

Mr T Perrett - Cann

Mr M & Mrs S Phipps & Family - Weymouth

Mrs A Pickering - Beaminster

Mr M Pike & Miss J Green - Motcombe

Mrs M Regan - Milborne St Andrew

Mr S J Sacher - Askerswell

Miss L Shaw - Bournemouth

Mrs K Simmons - Poole

Mrs A & Mr T Smart - Weymouth

Mr R Steele - Poole

Miss J Stephen & Mr T Dixon - Blandford Forum

Mr & Mrs C Stuckey - Poole

Mrs A Swain - Wimborne

Mr G Thompson - Poole

Miss E Turner - Ferndown

Mr J Van Crugten - Weymouth

Mrs T & Mr M Watson - Ferndown

Mrs D Wills - Poole

Mrs S & Mr M Windsor - Poole

Miss C Yorke - Weymouth

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

31st August

For mid-September publication

28th February

For late-March publication

If you would like to submit something for the next newsletter please send your articles in by these dates at the latest. Many thanks to the people that have contributed articles to this current edition.

We are always in need of articles and line drawings, so please put pen to paper, or your finger to keyboard, and send in your contributions.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

All members are welcome to attend committee meetings.

The next meeting will be held on:

**19th May 2014
7.00pm**

The meeting will be held at the United Reform Church Hall, Blandford. For further details, please check beforehand with Adrian Neil (01305 832937 or adrian.neil@madasafish.com) for details.

TREASURER'S NOTE

**Bank balance at 31st
December 2013:**

£13,568

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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PLEASE NOTE THE OPINIONS
EXPRESSED IN THIS NEWSLETTER ARE
NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF
THE SOCIETY OR THE BRANCH

All material in this magazine

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* = *Branch Committee Member*