

DORSET BRANCH BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION AGM. 13th Feb. 2016

REPORT FROM RECORDS OFFICER

Bill Shreeves

As always the Record Officer's year 2015 kicked off from February – March with the four regional meetings for butterfly recorders at Toller Porcorum [West Dorset], Wimborne [East], Wareham [South] & East Stour [North]. At these meetings, with the aid of Power Point productions, recorders were able to see the results of their 2014 local & county efforts. In addition plans were made for summer 2015 with people signing up for Transect Walks & Garden Butterfly & Wider Countryside Recording. On 23rd May a workshop on identifying & recording butterflies & day flying moths was held at a new venue, the Springhead Centre, Fontmell Magna. Here 15 'students' [not to mention an un-invited bat which had to be evicted from the classroom for unruly behaviour!] improved their identification skills by investigating photos & specimens with the aid of tutors. Thanks to a fine sunny afternoon their skills were then tested up on nearby Clubmens Down & a trial Transect walk held. As a result of the workshop new Butterfly walkers were enrolled & empty Wider Countryside squares filled.

The summer of 2015 was not a kind one as all the months from May to September had mean average temperatures below the Fontmell Weather station 36 year average. However to set against this, every summer month with the notable exception of August had below average rainfall & April & June had higher than average sunshine. Unfortunately the number of completed Transect Walks fell from the record total of 65 in 2014 to 62. The walks at Deadmoor, Kingcombe Pound & Durlston Meadow dropped out of the system. Even so the average number of butterflies counted per walk site was slightly better than any year except 2006. Unfortunately when measured by the criterion of the percentage of species improving over 50% on 2014 or on their annual average since walks began, there were only 5 'winners' in 2015 compared to 8 in 2014 & 23 in 2013. Also 2015 had more 'losers' in 2015 [16] than 2014 [12], & 2013 [11]. There were no species which improved by over 50% on both 2014 & annual averages. **Silver-washed & Dark Green Fritillaries & Brimstone** managed to improve by over 50% on their annual average counts on over half the sites & of these the Brimstone actually had a record count on transect walks so can be regarded as 2015's 'winner'. Butterflies which did exceptionally badly were the two brooded species, **Brown Argus & Small Copper**. Especially worrying were three species which had been losers for consecutive years: **Chalkhill Blue** [4] & **Silver Spotted Skipper & Duke of Burgundy** [3 years each]. Finally the **Wood White** has again not been counted on any walk although 2 were seen by John Newbould [Volunteer ecologist for National Trust] near Ware Cliffs, Lyme Regis. **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** no longer appears on any of the walks but is still holding out in the Studland area where the National Trust is taking steps to improve the management. Better news of the **Duke of Burgundy** on the walks is at Cerne where the annual counts remain above 30 & off the walks where it has been rediscovered on Brandis Down by Carole Argles.

At the time of writing, data has arrived for the Wider Countryside Recording scheme, Living Record, iRecord, Big Butterfly Count & the Dorset Branch Web site. We still await data for Butterfly Conservation Garden Recording & the British Trust for Ornithology garden butterfly records. Work is in progress on the 2010-14 Dorset Butterfly Distribution maps but one

startling record is the severe decline in the number of **Purple Hairstreak** km squares since the first atlas in 1970-84. This is almost certainly due to bad under-recording in recent atlases. We need to count Purple Hairstreaks in the tree tops with binoculars on fine days in the late afternoon. In July 2015 Peter Cooper has pointed the way we should go by organising such a survey of 11 oaks on Motcombe Meadows where the species had never been recorded before. Out of the 11 oaks surveyed between 6-8.00pm, 29 Purple Hairstreaks were counted with only 3 oaks failing to show any. The **White-letter Hairstreak** is probably also under-recorded but it is good to report that new squares have been found near Puddletown [Rebecca Porter], near Bindon Hill [Martin Warren], & near Wareham Common [Donald Morris]. The old site in the Wilderness [Purbeck] has been rediscovered by Brian Arnold.

Generally 2015 was not very good for the usual migrant species. The anticipated big **Painted Lady Migration** did not arrive & the **Clouded Yellow** count on Transect Walks fell below both 2013 & 2014. Unfortunately no **Continental Swallowtails** were found near St Aldhelm's Head so hopes that a breeding colony might have been started by those seen in 2014 were dashed. The only Swallowtail seen was photographed in a Poole garden by Tony Palmer on August 15th & was probably a release. The accidentally escaped **Map** butterflies near Swanage in 2014 were more successful as 3 of the first brood 'Fritillary' form were seen & photographed by Neil Hulme on 15th May 2015. Although many searched, no others were found & none of the 2nd brood 'White Admiral' form could be found later in the summer, so it looks as though no breeding colony has survived. One or more **Monarchs** were seen but not photographed by several people near Langton Matravers but the date, August 1st, was unlikely for a migrant so we must assume a release from breeding. The one good piece of rare migrant news was that Dorset did at least have a small share in the **Long-tailed Blue** bonanza in South East England. The first was photographed on 29th August at Lodmoor by Patrick Jefferies & was followed by another, also photographed, by Steve Maskell on 20th September at Kingston Lacy. Between these two, on 5th September Gill Redmond saw, but did not photograph one very old specimen on the Wareham Walls transect walk.

So now we start the 2nd year of recording for the 2015-19 Atlas with fingers crossed for some warm weather. A new national scheme for recording Brown Hairstreaks via controlled egg searching walks is being developed. Dorset has been awarded km squares to cover & Wren Franklin has volunteered to take charge. Please contact him [wrenfranklin@yahoo.co.uk] if you would like to help. Research is continuing on a new Dorset Atlas for 2010-14. Look out on the web site where progress will be shown. When it is completed hard copies might be available for those who prefer them. My thanks to everyone who has sent in butterfly data. My special gratitude to the recording team, Robin George, Martin Raper & Bernard Franklin without who's computer expertise I would long ago have given up; also to Adrian Neil who co-ordinates the Garden recording & the Wider Countryside walks: last & not least for Lyn Pullen's development of the recording part of the web site & for Martin Raper for taking control of organising the web site records with regular help from Nick Urch.