

DORSET BRANCH BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION AGM .21st March 2015

REPORT FROM RECORDS OFFICER

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The year 2014 was notable for being the final year for collecting data for the 2010-14 Butterfly Atlas. In order to train new recorders we ran two workshops, on 7th June at Barton Meadows Farm adjacent to Black Hill & 24th June at Avon Heath Country Park. Both workshops included the usual morning spent indoors using power point information & books to identify butterflies from cabinet specimens & photos & the afternoon out in the field practicing the skills learned. Both the workshops were fully booked & the one at Avon Heath was linked to training of Rangers & the unveiling of a revived Butterfly walk. Many of the 'students' went on to send in useful butterfly records later in the year.

The Butterfly walking year of 2014 enjoyed the lowest number of missed walk weeks since 2011. The highest ever number of butterflies [133,918] were counted on the record number of 65 full walks which sent in data. This was especially gratifying as at the same time the whole system was being converted to the new Transect Walker on Line organisation. Special thanks to Martin Raper who sorted out all the technical problems. The best performing butterfly of the year on Dorset walks was the Small Skipper, closely followed by Small Tortoiseshell, Brown Argus & Brimstone. The 2013 Butterfly of the Year, the Small White, had a spectacular crash, as did the Large White. Sadly, for the second year running, no Wood Whites were counted on any Dorset Walk or seen anywhere in Dorset. The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary has also ceased to be recorded on any walk though just one small colony survives near Studland. Thanks to the guidance of Adrian Neil the newer system of Wider Countryside walks covered 53 km squares [the most in UK except for Sussex] & counted 7,522 butterflies from 34 species.

Many casual records on paper have continued to reach us & were entered into the Levana Atlas by our valued computer volunteers. However the proportion of people using various methods of electronic recording has steadily increased. Head of this list is our own Web site. Under Lyn Pullen's guidance 37,632 butterflies were counted on line &

sent in for the atlas after being sorted & verified by Martin Raper with help from Nick Urch. The Big Butterfly count, which is now becoming a regular feature of summer, supplied 25,428 Dorset butterfly records. Records organised by Adrian Neil for the Dorset Butterfly Recording project which came in from 112 gardens covering 105 km squares, are also entered into the Atlas. Three newer recording systems have also supplied good numbers of records. iRecords which are from a special butterfly app. promoted by the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, provided an estimated 9,000 butterfly records. This year the butterfly data collected by the British Trust for Ornithology in their Garden Bird recording scheme has been sent to Butterfly Conservation & amounted to 6,262 butterfly sightings. A further 5,850 came from Living Records, a scheme which is encouraged by the Dorset Wildlife Trust & the Dorset Environmental Record Centre. Grateful thanks to Martin Raper for sorting out the technical problems for converting all these sources of data into suitable forms for verifying & passing into the atlas. Eventually all this data will be sent off both to British Butterfly Conservation for the National Atlas, to DERC for their local Dorset data base of wild life & to Robin George who looks after our own Access Dorset Data base of all butterflies ever recorded in Dorset.

The best news for recording of native butterflies was the discovery of 7 km squares for White Letter Hairstreaks. These were in all four regions of Dorset & some were first ever since recording began in 1970. The Ringlet is emerging as Dorset's most successful butterfly. The walk data shows that all its best recording years have been since 2008. At the same time the interim Atlas for 2010-14, which still awaits the entry of all 2014 data, shows it occupying 737 km squares compared to 455 in the whole 2000-04 Atlas. In addition most of these squares are in parts of Dorset where the Ringlet had never before been recorded.

It is fair to say that this has not been a great year in Dorset for migrants & rarities. Painted Ladies had a very quiet year. Clouded Yellows had a second year of moderately good counts including an impressive field of mating and emerging butterflies near Langton Herring between September 22nd & 5th October when a maximum of around 200 was estimated. A very probable Berger's Clouded Yellow was seen & examined by Nick Butt at Rawlsbury Camp. Between 28th June & 12th

July observers along the coast near saint Alban's Head enjoyed the spectacle of Continental Swallowtails. The many photos taken were co-ordinated & analysed by Steve Smith who concluded that there had been at least 5 different individuals. The most likely explanation is that they were migrants from across the channel but there is just a possibility that they had bred in the vicinity from the many migrant & released Swallowtails in 2013. Between 7th & 17th August, Purbeck enjoyed the unexpected spectacular sight of Continental Map butterflies in their late summer 'White Admiral' look alike form. Again Steve Smith co-ordinated the many photos taken & estimated a total of 20 different individual butterflies. As this species has recently colonized the Netherlands & been seen in the Channel Islands there were hopes that these might be migrants but later news revealed that there had been an accidental release by a research breeder.

Grateful thanks should be given to all the recorders, walkers & data imputers involved in such a successful year of recording. We plan to produce a collection of maps & data for the web site along the lines of the earlier printed Dorset Butterfly Atlases of 1995-99 & 2000-04. It might be possible to print a short run of printed hard copies but those interested must book a copy. And now we start on a new 5 year Atlas for 2015-19!