

DORSET BRANCH BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION AGM. 4th Feb. 2017

REPORT FROM RECORDS OFFICER ON 2016

Bill Shreeves

The traditional 4 regional meetings were held at Toller Porcorum, Wimborne, Wareham & East Stour with the usual aims of informing recorders of the previous year's results [2015], planning ahead for the 2016 recording year & introducing new recorders. Grateful thanks to Lawrie de Whalley & Lyn Pullen for operating the Power Points & to Jon Bellamy, Keith Miller, Robin George, Adrian Neil & Arthur Bryant who helped with the talks &/or with the booking of the meeting halls. On May 21st the identification workshop took place for the first time in Cerne Abbas village hall. In theory this would have made it possible for students to proceed quickly from the 'classroom' straight on to one of the best butterfly sites in Dorset & so put into practice the skills they had been learning. Unfortunately the weather had other ideas & so the whole day was spent indoors. This, however, was by no means wasted & thanks to Robin George & the tutors most of the students went on with the confidence to help with the year's butterfly recording. Towards the end of the year Wren Franklin held a workshop to set up the Dorset Brown Hairstreak egg survey walks. Also thanks to Wren we now have a new walk at Ryewater Nurseries to bring the 2016 Dorset Butterfly Walk total up to 64.

This year showed a continuing trend for a greater proportion of the recording to be sent in electronically. Thanks to Lyn Pullen the Dorset Branch web site [www.dorsetbutterflies.com] continued to boost recording by showing the records on line & in many cases photos of the species seen. Martin Raper had been joined at the demanding job of checking & verifying the records as they came in, by Nick Urch with the result that at the end of the season the data was already clean & needing little verifying. Special thanks are due to Martin Raper for managing these records. He has decided to retire & leave more time to checking the steady tide of data coming in from iRecord & Living Record & his management of the technical side of Transect Walker on Line. We hope to find new volunteers to help Nick Urch this year. Meanwhile individual walkers can now enter their data on line & co-ordinators have the power to check & amend. Towards the end of the year it also became possible to enter Wider Countryside walk data on line. Adrian Neil, who has long worked hard as both Dorset Wider Countryside Champion & co-ordinator of Dorset garden records, now finds that many garden recorders are able to enter their data into the new Butterfly Conservation Garden Survey website. At the end of this complex data conveyor belt thanks are due to Bernard Franklin handling the transfer of data into Levana & Robin George co-ordinating all the data into our Dorset Butterfly database. Nevertheless we are still open for paper records!

As a result of a poor year in 2015 & a summer which, although a warm one, failed to produce much actual sunshine, 2016 was not a great butterfly year. On the evidence of the butterfly walks only three species [Red Admiral & Large & Small Whites] performed quite well. In contrast there was a dismal list of 18 species, led by Brown

Argus, Small Tortoiseshell & Small Copper, which did very badly. The long awaited 'big migrant year' for Painted Ladies & Clouded Yellows did not arrive & the only confirmed record of a rarer migrant was a Long-tailed blue on Boscombe cliffs. Nevertheless there were still sites which went against the trend & species which arrived in totally unusual places as will be revealed at our regional recorder meetings in February & March.

Research for a new 2010-2014 Dorset Butterfly Atlas, which I mentioned in my last report, has proved more difficult than at first thought but thanks to the efforts of Robin George, Bernard Franklin, Lyn Pullen & Dominic Greves the single species distribution maps may be investigated on our website. I have also been attempting to compare the new atlases with the older 1979-94 ones to work out which species have been expanding their Dorset ranges & which contracting. The method was to work out the percentage changes in numbers of kilometre squares by comparing the longer term 15 year atlases of 1970-84 with 2000-2014 and the shorter term 5 year atlases 1995-99 with 2010-14. **Four species have extended their range** on both criteria – Essex Skipper, Comma, Ringlet & Silver-washed Fritillary. **Three other species which expanded rapidly** on the short term 5 year atlases were Purple Emperor, Small Blue & White Admiral. On the other hand, **Three species have collapsed** on both criteria – Pearl & Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries & Silver-spotted Skipper. **A further Five species which declined** over the short term periods were Chalkhill Blue, Wood White, Duke of Burgundy, Brown Hairstreak & Lulworth Skipper. We hope to show details of these findings eventually on the website.

So we are now about to start 2017, the 3rd year, half way stage, of our 2015-19 Dorset Atlas. My grateful thanks to all walkers, recorders & surveyors & I do hope they will be able to keep up their good work. I would like to conclude with a special thank you to Lawrie & Bridget de Whalley who have to leave us for Surrey. Their contribution to Dorset Butterfly & Moth recording has been immense & ranged over everything from butterfly walking & co-ordinating to running the surveying of rarer butterflies in the Central & Southern chalk region, organising moth trap evenings & helping with the verification of problem butterfly species. We shall miss them both badly & will have to increase our recording efforts by infinite times to come even close to making up for their loss.