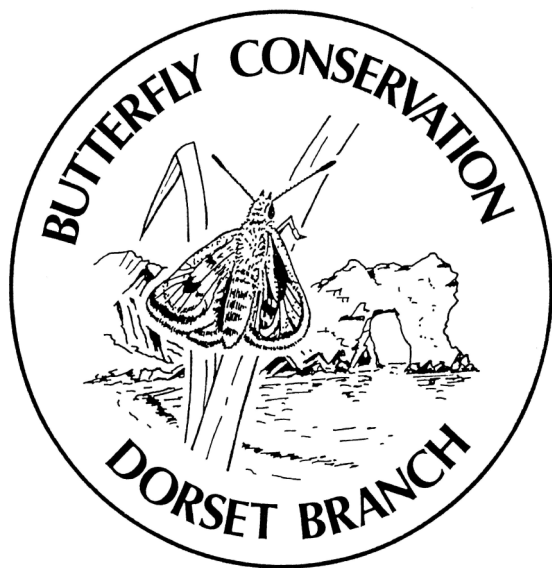


Newsletter No. 80

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Dorset Branch News



www.dorsetbutterflies.com



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

View from The Chair

Since I took over from Jane Smith as the Chair of the Dorset branch in March this year, I have become even more aware of just how much goes on in our branch, both publicly and behind the scenes. This is reaping great benefits for the conservation of butterflies, moths and other wildlife in Dorset and for environmental education and the promotion of our cause.

Arthur Bryant put together a great programme of guided walks and other events through the summer, many of them in conjunction with partner conservation organisations, and the wonderful efforts of the website team directed by Lyn Pullen, Dom Greves and others have ensured that these were widely publicised and well attended. Bill Shreeves and his tireless recording team have coordinated butterfly transect walks on over 60 different sites across the county with several hundreds of volunteers involved in submitting transect results and records for the Wider Countryside and Garden Butterflies Schemes, and with many others sending in casual observations through the website sightings page. Many visitors to Dorset now use these sightings pages and the 'Places' pages to help them plan their holidays and find the best butterfly sites we can offer

Bridget de Whalley and her team of helpers have spent hours, even days, of time promoting the aims and activities of the branch through public shows and fairs through the summer and autumn and as a result many visitors to Dorset have been made more aware of the wealth of wildlife that we are lucky to have in our county. The branch also has a small group of volunteers who will take the message out to local societies and clubs by giving presentations about butterflies and moths in Dorset; many hundreds of people each year become more aware of our work as a result of these efforts.

Robin George has had a busy year as the branch Membership person: we now have well over 800 members and this does not yet take into account the increase in numbers expected as a result of the Big Butterfly Count this summer.

None of the activities in our branch take place by magic – an enormous amount of energy and effort goes into the planning, coordinating and delivery of our conservation work. We are getting to the point now where we will need more pairs of hands if we are to continue to expand. If you can spare the time to help us in some way, just occasionally by serving teas at the AGM in February or the fundraising event at the end of October, or on a regular basis by helping to man a stall, joining the website team or organising the photo library for the branch, please get in touch!

And it does pay off! On one hot Sunday in August, there were at least 16 cars parked at Alners Gorse. This wasn't an organised event; these visitors had all arrived independently to see the 'hairstreak spectacle' at the site described as the best Brown Hairstreak site in southern England. There were people with big lenses, children, dogs, families enjoying picnics on the benches in the wood. It was a great day out and it was the butterflies that had drawn them there. It's up to us to ensure that this enthusiasm is maintained to enable us to keep the work of the branch going so that butterflies, moths and their habitats are conserved for future generations to appreciate.

Nigel Spring

Dorset BC Chairman

The Emperors of Dorset - *Apatura iris*

By Andrew Cooper

I, like many others, have been enthralled by the stories and adventures that usually accompany this magnificent butterfly, and have very happy memories of warm July days in search of this elusive royalty. I have seen and photographed the Purple Emperor in Bentley Wood, one of its strongholds in the neighbouring county of Wiltshire.

However, the history and the distribution of the Purple Emperor (*Apatura Iris*) in the county of Dorset, where I have grown up, has been a story of scarcity and sporadic appearances. Nonetheless, in recent years the butterfly has graced us with its presence more frequently, raising the exciting possibility of a glorious return.

The earliest record that I have unearthed regarding this species in Dorset was published in Edward Newman's: *British Butterflies and Moths 1880 (Page 76)* where notes from J.C Dale report the butterfly's occurrence in Woodland Wood, near Hanford and lists Cranborne as a site. Dates were not given for his observations, but it must have been prior to 1872, the year of his death.

The butterfly was also seen during the 1880s; the only specific year given which I can find is 1889 (*W. Parkinson Curtis*) but no extensive data is given. After researching some general historic data, supplied by Butterfly Conservation's Dorset Branch, it is specified that the butterfly was once found in a particular broad-leaved woodland named Bere Wood. The site, which still exists today, is situated close to the village of Bloxworth, an area I am quite familiar with and which, from my own observations, is still home to Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral. Despite a partial conversion to a conifer plantation, the woodland has managed to maintain much of its former glory with many towering Oaks still intact.

The first of many gaps documented in the occurrence of this butterfly in Dorset arises with a nine year period where no records, that I can find, are specified. In 1898 however, Ham Common, a site also surviving today, was noted as having hosted a Purple Emperor (NBN Gateway) but once again, no further information was provided. The site, situated in the town of Poole, overlooks Poole Harbour and is primarily heathland habitat interspersed with waste ground, mixed woodland and a medium freshwater lake. To any enthusiast that visits Ham Common today, one would not expect or even hope for his or her majesty to make an appearance. The remaining habitat is completely unsuitable for the butterfly, for only scraps of woodland are left, consisting mostly of young trees; Birch and a few Oak, but Sallow continues to grow to good sizes in semi-shade situations with a few impressive Poplars spread over the nearby holiday park.

There are no further records of this species until 1917, when Hooke Park and Alder Woods (NBN Gateway) are named. The latter site, which today covers approximately 329 hectares, comprises of 60 % broad-leaved deciduous woodland. The site is still home to a small but stable colony of Marsh Fritillary; however, it has lost many species over the years, including the rare High Brown Fritillary (c1985). After 1917, there is a comment from the "Notes and views of the Purple Emperor" by Heslop, Hyde and Stockley 1964. On page 80 the occurrence of *A. iris* is mentioned at Middlemarsh Woods, stating that it was "observed as recently as 1927".

There are still woodlands situated to the west of the village and these along with other nearby areas are perhaps worth a search for the Purple Emperor. In 1929 there are further records between Bridport and Beaminster, and another near Child Okeford in 1930. After this, the species was again listed at Alder Woods in 1939. It's likely a colony persisted and was simply under recorded at the time. In the same year, a final record is provided from Ham Common. I have been unable to find any images or old maps of what the site looked like at the time of sightings but, as already mentioned, in the 21st century I imagine it looks very different.

Following another 20 year gap, a single record from 1959 comes from a list of sightings from various years under the location 'Dorset Heaths', but no date or specific location is provided.

During the 1960s, the Purple Emperor was reportedly sighted at a selection of different locations in Dorset, specifically: Castle Hill Wood in Cranborne, Bere Wood and other sites around Bloxworth, and a list of unnamed locations close to Child Okeford, Studland and Hanford.

Following this long period of intermittent records, the 1970s provide some increasingly detailed records, largely thanks to the work carried out by Margaret Brooks and Jeremy Thomas. A colony was observed and studied by Brooks and Thomas in the Cranborne Chase woodlands between the years 1973 and 1978 with individual butterflies being recorded at a number of locations. The majority of sightings were between the villages of Horton and Cranborne in 1970, 1974 (26 July), 1975 and 1979. Localities where it was also observed, briefly on some occasions, include: Manswood, Woodcutts and Scrubbity Barrows, Holt Forest, the Horton area, Woodlands Park and slightly west of Powerstock.

The sightings continue into the 1980s, in the years 1980, 82, 84, 85, 87, 88 (8 June), 89 (26 May). Brooks and Thomas reported it from Cranborne Chase woodlands, close to the Wiltshire border, during the 80s but butterflies were also intermittently noted in the areas between Cranborne and Wimborne Minster, including Castle Hill Woods, Woodlands, and Holt forest and again at Horton and Manswood. Additionally, the RSPB mention a single sighting from Garston Wood during the same period.

The 1990s certainly appear to be a decade of extreme scarcity and slightly puzzling sightings. The first sightings came in 1991, with one from Stalbridge Park, near the A30, followed by another at Langton West Woods, south of Corfe in the Purbecks. In 1996 there were two sightings from an undisclosed site in Dorset, one on 26th July and another on 5th August, and the next year at least one

was recorded on 14th July from Stalbridge Park, a location with a small woodland nearby. In 1998, two single records were provided from St Aldhelm's Head (possibly referring to Langton Westwood) on the 18th and 25th July, perhaps of the same butterfly. This limestone headland site, which sits close to Worth Matravers, is on the south coast of Dorset where a few small strips of woodland lie between the chalk grassland and farmland, but it's possible that these records were of a released or escaped specimen.

Between the years 2000 and 2005, the only sighting of this butterfly in Dorset that I can find comes from 20th July 2000 at an unnamed location.

In 2005, a five year survey of the most likely Purple Emperor sites in Dorset was launched by Roger Smith and a team of volunteers in an attempt to uncover the species again. The butterfly was successfully recorded in July 2005 at Bere Wood which was the same site that previously recorded the butterfly in the 1880s, 1960s and 1970s. Between the years 2005 and 2010 the following possible records have been noted, some from members of the public: 11th, 14th and 15th of July 2006, 16th, 17th and 21st July 2008, and one seen by Peter Davey at Rooksmoor during the late morning on 28th June 2009. This site, which lacks any large clearings, is situated adjacent to Butterfly Conservation's Alners Gorse reserve.

Then in July 2010, the tale of the Purple Emperor in Dorset took an exciting turn with a sudden increase in sightings and a small colony discovered by Steven Andrews, who found and photographed the first one in Cranborne Chase Woods in July 2010. This is just 2km away from where it was studied by Brooks and Thomas in the 1970s. This location is based largely on a chalk plateau covering 380 square miles, and Bill Shreeves and Roger Smith recorded another butterfly here just a few days later. Following on from this discovery, there were single sightings from Deadmoor Common (17th July) and on the Minterne Estate and adjoining woodland near Dorchester in 2011 (15th July), 2012 (26th and 30th July) and 2013.

Another was seen on the 8th August 2013 in Alderholt.

In 2014 there were three records from North Dorset: on the 5th July 1 male was photographed in Cranborne Chase Woodlands near Sixpenny Handley. This is close to the border of Wiltshire, where the species has conserved a stronghold. There was another sighting here on the 10th July, with probably the same butterfly being seen on 12th July.

Here are two photographs of an individual male, photographed by Aidan Brown in early July 2014 within the Cranborne Chase Woodlands, in Dorset.



Interestingly, there appears to be a distinct lack of the Emperor's primary foodplant, Goat Willow (*Salix cuprea*), at these sites, while Grey Sallow (*S. cinerea*) and Crack Willow (*S. fragilis*) are more common; however, more detailed searches are needed and will be carried out by Dorset Branch members. Records of butterflies being seen towards ground level in Dorset were relatively few until recent years. Despite this increase, we are still waiting for confirmation of a breeding colony as no immature stages of the butterfly have been found since the 1970s.

In conclusion, the Purple Emperor has been recorded in Dorset for at least the past 140 years but, in my opinion, was very likely found

here long before that. From recent reports by Butterfly Conservation's Dorset branch it seems that there are two viable populations of the butterfly in Dorset; one within the woodlands of Cranborne Chase and another in or near Minterne Magna. It's likely that a third colony survives in small numbers in the area surrounding Horton, Cranborne and Alderholt, in addition to a possible fourth in the Rooksmoor and Deadmoor woodlands. We are at an exciting period where evidence is building to point us towards the locations of potential colonies of this butterfly in Dorset; nevertheless more work definitely needs to be done to locate the sites at which these butterflies are breeding.

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Griz Lindsay-Watson

An appreciation by John Elliott

Griz Lindsay-Watson, who died at the end of July at the age of 93, was known to many in the Dorset BC branch as the Transect Co-ordinator of the Tadnoll Nature Reserve, a position she held for 15 years.

An interest in nature was nurtured during a childhood in rural Surrey and long holidays spent exploring the Fleet area from their cottage in Langton Herring. She freely admitted that her involvement with butterflies in the pre-war years was in collecting them and sticking them on pins, a pastime shared by many of her generation in those years of abundant flora and fauna.

On coming back to Dorset after her husband's retirement she quickly became active in Butterfly Conservation and also in the local RSPB group. On taking over the Tadnoll transect in 1999 she immediately set about building up the team of walkers, taking care to leave plenty of weeks for herself such as her great enjoyment of the heathland; ablaze with the purple of heather in August, the orchid rich water meadows, even the notoriously difficult-to-get-through Section 3, which did however boast most of the Silver-washed Fritillaries. Over the years she involved 18 people in the transect.

In addition to Tadnoll she also walked the Broadcroft, Tout, Perryfields and Cerne Abbas transects for several weeks over the course of many years. Her large garden was a magnet for butterflies, all meticulously recorded, as were the butterflies in the nine 1km squares around her home along with a few other 'white holes'. Her interest in the natural world was maintained to the end, having walked down her long garden to see the Meadow Browns, the Gatekeepers, the Large Whites and the Red Admirals only a couple of days before her very sudden, though peaceful, passing.

Is the Purple Hairstreak one of Dorset's most rapidly declining butterflies?

By Bill Shreeves

In 'Butterflies of Dorset (1970-84)' Jeremy Thomas wrote: "The Purple Hairstreak is a common butterfly in Dorset. It will surprise many naturalists to learn that this species is more numerous than the conspicuous Green Hairstreak and that it is the third commonest of the Lycaenid butterflies (Blues, Coppers and Hairstreaks) in the county after the Common Blue and Small Copper". However, the number of km squares in which Purple Hairstreaks have been recorded has declined by 38%, from 283 kms in the 1970-84 Atlas to 205 in the 2000-2014 Atlas. This was the 4th highest rate of decline with only Silver-spotted Skipper (-59%) and Small Pearl-bordered and Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (-67% and -88% respectively] doing worse. The Purple Hairstreak rank order of km squares occupied has fallen from 26th to 33rd. This was a fall of 7 places: only the White Admiral with a drop of 8 places had fallen further. The Purple Hairstreak at 33rd was now less common than 4 additional Lycaenids – the Holly Blue (19th) the Brown Argus (25th) the Green Hairstreak (27th) and the Adonis Blue (30th).

Using a much shorter period of 5 years for comparison still leaves the Purple Hairstreak appearing to be in steep decline in Dorset. In the 1995-99 Atlas it was recorded in 145 km squares but by 2010-14 this had fallen by 41% to 86kms. Over the same period its rank order fell by 5 places from 30 to 35. Sadly the Purple Hairstreak is one of a group of 6 species which managed to decline by over 50% on **both** the long term 15 year measurement (1970-84 against 2000-14) and the short term 5 year measurement (1995-99 against 2010-14). On these criteria, only Silver-spotted Skipper, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries did worse.



Purple Hairstreak underside (© G. Cryer) left, and male upperside (© R. Collier) right.

Of course there is an alternative explanation for this apparently drastic decline of a once common butterfly. It is very possible that it is not the butterfly which has declined but the quantity and skill of the recording! For a start the 1970-84 Atlas kicked off from a very high base. As Jeremy Thomas explained in the atlas: "We have examined oaks in more than 100 km squares in 1983-84 and failed to find eggs on only five occasions". The huge black blotches on both the 1970-84 and the 1980-94 atlases testify to the large scale of these egg surveys which have never since been attempted. Of course later recorders have continued to look for the butterfly but as Jeremy Thomas explains in the 'Butterflies of Britain and Ireland', "In the daytime, it is possible to walk beneath a tree bearing several hundred Purple Hairstreaks without being aware of their presence. David Newland observed them for 23 hours over four days from a gazebo overlooking the canopy of an oak plantation in Norfolk. He confirmed that the Purple Hairstreaks seldom flew during the main part of the day, least of all in dull weather. Most of their lives were spent perched in sheltered nooks in the canopy where they rested, basked or slowly walked in circles, dabbing at the leaves for honeydew." This means that transect walkers, who usually operate between 11.00am and 3.30pm, are very unlikely to count Purple Hairstreaks. Understandably, photographers and casual recorders tend to concentrate upon well-known spots like Alners Gorse where the butterflies can be seen with certainty. As a result all the atlases since those of 1970-1984 will have under-recorded the species, and this probably explains the apparent decline.

With a new atlas for 2015-19 starting this year how can we improve the recording of Dorset's Purple Hairstreaks? 'The State of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland (2006)' reported that the "Purple Hairstreak is not a cause for conservation concern" and that "where special efforts have been made, colonies have been reconfirmed or new ones found". This was notably the case in Northumberland, Durham and Kent.

The most obvious method we could adopt in Dorset is to revive the search for eggs, which Jeremy Thomas used to set up such a strong base in 1983-4, and which has been carried out more recently in Kent. Egg searchers need to look for oak trees on the sheltered sides of woods, copses, hedgerows and even in isolated groups in parks. Although many eggs are laid high up in the canopy and out of reach, a reasonable proportion are within a searcher's grasp. The southern and warmer side of trees are the best. "Each egg is about the size of a pinhead but is reasonably conspicuous after oak leaves have fallen. It looks like a small, pearl- grey bun and is stuck on the base of a plump flower-bud or on the rough parts of adjoining twigs" (Thomas, Butterflies of Britain and Ireland). The time to look is from after the fall of the oak leaves until the end of March. After this the caterpillars start to hatch and the oak flower buds begin to break.

Searching for the caterpillar and chrysalis is not easy enough to be a recommended method. The caterpillars start by boring into the hearts of the oak buds and then form cocoons from which they only emerge under the safety of darkness. Fascinating recent research, described fully in 'Butterflies of Britain and Ireland', suggests that the caterpillars pupate in ant nests located in tussocks on the ground at least 5 metres from the oak trunk. Jeremy Thomas searched 76 antless tussocks but only another 5, which had ant nests, contained a chrysalis. Both caterpillar and chrysalis can attract ants through secretions and 'song'. It is clear that looking for caterpillar or chrysalis is too time consuming to be a method for measuring Purple Hairstreak population distribution.

This brings us back to locating adult butterflies which spend their time out of sight in the canopy. Currently most of the Purple Hairstreaks are seen and recorded when hot weather pushes them down to ground level to nectar on bramble blossom or to lower sapling ash trees to search for aphid honeydew. However there is a three hour period when Purple Hairstreaks can quite easily be counted. The researcher David Newland, referred to earlier, provides the key from his gazebo research: "as evening approached the Purple Hairstreaks became more active. From about 5.00pm to 8.00pm the males established perching posts at higher levels than their daytime positions yet still avoiding the uppermost branches of the highest trees. From there they launched themselves after any passing female or engaged in prolonged aerial battles with rivals, spinning and diving at high speed above the treetops. From the ground they look like a handful of silver coins that has been tossed into the sunlight, and are one of the wonders of the butterfly season. Watch them through binoculars to appreciate their speed and dexterity of flight" and, we might add, to make rough counts of their numbers for the next Dorset atlas!

So we have two methods of locating Purple Hairstreak colonies. First, having discovered a suitable collection of oak trees in a km square and chosen a warm, calm and dry evening in July-August, watch through binoculars to find which oak trees have tossing silver coins. Later when the leaves have fallen, come back and search for their eggs, especially on the oak trees which had the highest adult counts. When more skill has been gained for finding the eggs, either method could be tried out in adjoining km squares to gradually build up the distribution map. With some organisation it might even be possible to set up 'Purple Hairstreak walks'. Each oak tree on a site could become the equivalent of a section in Transect Walking. Every year, timed counts of numbers of butterflies and eggs found on each tree could be recorded. The 'Butterflies of Dorset' concluded that Purple Hairstreaks were possibly most widely distributed in the Blackmoor Vale, West Dorset (around Powerstock), the woodlands on the North and

Central Chalk, and perhaps more thinly on the heathlands and the Isle of Purbeck. This still remains to be proven. Finally we probably need a Purple Hairstreak 'Champion' or Champions to organise a 4 year campaign for the next Dorset Atlas to get as many km squares investigated as possible. A possible starting point might be with those 10km squares in the 2010-14 map which have had no Purple Hairstreaks recorded at all! The website and the 4 regional meetings could be used to find volunteers and map progress. Read the article in this newsletter by Peter Cooper to see how some first steps have already been taken on Motcombe Meadows. Volunteers for Champions or recording please get in touch with Bill Shreeves as soon as possible.

Worth Studying: The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington with an excellent section on the Purple Hairstreak which has been the major source for this article.

Purple Hairstreaks are flourishing in Motcombe Meadows!

By Peter Cooper

Motcombe Meadows: A wonderful village facility.

Motcombe Meadows comprises 10.5ha of wetland meadows which are sub-divided into four fields by old, broad hedgerows containing a range of shrubs and mature trees, with Oak being particularly prominent. The area is bisected by a brook, a tributary of the River Stour, which is inhabited by Water Voles and Sticklebacks, and hence has occasional visits by hungry kingfishers!

In 2007, the Meadows were handed over to Motcombe village by Bloor Homes as an area for conservation and recreation. Since that time they have been sympathetically managed by Motcombe Parish Council, guided by a thoughtful long-term management plan which was initially developed by the Dorset Wildlife Trust but has

subsequently had additional input from Richard Belding, Dorset Butterfly Conservation's conservation officer.

The plan provides for a late summer cut of hay, which is kindly undertaken each year by a local farmer free of charge! In addition, pathways and foot bridges have been added to improve access, hedgerows have been allowed to thicken, more than a thousand native woodland trees, provided by the Woodland Trust, have been planted and an orchard of fifty traditional fruit tree varieties has been established. In one field an area has been set aside with 'deer-proof' fencing for 32 keenly tended allotments, and in another field a 'scrape' has been dug to attract wildfowl. Two Barn Owl boxes were added in 2011 with help from the Dorset Rangers, and they have been regularly used since then. More recently, the Council has also encouraged the completion of a thorough botanical survey of the hedges and pastures which was undertaken by the local U3A group, led by Bill Shreeves. This has served to underline the Meadows' wide diversity of herbs, grasses, trees and shrubs.

In 2012, as part of the village's Jubilee celebrations, the Meadows officially became part of the 'Fields in Trust' scheme, thus ensuring that they would remain as a recreational and conservation facility for the village in perpetuity.



Native trees planted in the Meadows (left), and Mark and Jeni with their 10+ Hairstreak tree (right).

Butterflies of the Meadows

In 2010, after many years of living in Kenya, I retired and returned with my family to live in Motcombe. It didn't take me long to discover, like many others, what a great place the Meadows were for walking the dogs and in an equally short time to spot that the Meadows were 'swarming' with butterflies! Initially I simply enjoyed their presence and kept a rough note of the different species that I spotted. However, by 2011 I felt that a slightly more rigorous effort might be useful and was put in touch with Bill Shreeves of Butterfly Conservation who lives close by in Shaftesbury. As always, Bill was hugely supportive and helpful. He provided me with an electronic version of the butterfly recording form that is used by Butterfly Conservation which he had 'customized' for the Meadows, with all the species that I might expect to find being listed. Armed with this and Bill's continuing guidance, I have been able to undertake regular weekly counts between April 1st and September 30th thus mimicking the 63 'official' Butterfly Conservation transect walks in Dorset. Each year I send the records to Bill for his information and safekeeping.

It has proved to be an absorbing pastime. Over the last 4 years, 25 species have been recorded of which 19 are Meadow 'regulars'. Clouded Yellows, Painted Ladies and Dark Green Fritillaries turn up every now and then and I have had 'single sightings' of Silver-washed Fritillary, Small Blue and Marsh Fritillary. The latter two were a pleasant surprise since neither Kidney Vetch nor Devil's-bit Scabious are present in the Meadows, but we plan to rectify that this coming autumn!

But whither the Purple Hairstreaks?

In July of this year, it crossed my mind that in the four years I had been recording, I had never seen a Purple Hairstreak and yet Bill had listed them as 'likely to be present' and the Meadows are blessed with many splendid Oaks. I asked Bill why this might be and on July 14th he kindly (and politely) told me that it was probably because I didn't know how to look properly! Armed with his advice

of the right time of day to look and visions of '*spiraling flights like silver coins tossed against a blue sky*' events unfolded rapidly.

July 15th morning: whilst walking the dog, I lingered for about 5 minutes by two prominent Oaks and spotted what I was pretty sure were Purple Hairstreaks on both.

July 15th 5.30-7.00pm: armed with binoculars I watched 10 Oak trees for about 10 minutes each and spotted my quarry on 7 of them.

July 16th 6.00-8.00pm: I enlisted the help of two extra pairs of experienced eyes; Mark Pike who is a very keen butterfly photographer and has 'bagged' every species of British butterfly (except for the Mountain Ringlet) and his partner, Jeni Green, who goes with him on many of his hunting trips and has a special talent for butterfly spotting. As it turned out, it wasn't such a perfect evening as the sun was behind the clouds a lot of the time, but it was warm (my car thermometer read 22.5 on the way down). In summary, between us we saw a total of 29 Purple Hairstreaks which we spotted on 7 out of the 11 Oaks we looked at. One in particular was excellent and Mark and Jeni counted 10+ on that tree alone.

So there we are: once I knew what to do, it was both easy and very satisfying, and it helped having extra pairs of eyes and good company. From now on we plan to repeat this count once a year at the appropriate time on the same 11 Oaks and keep reporting the results on a tree-by-tree basis to Bill.

Come and enjoy the Meadows.

The more people who enjoy the Meadows and all they have to offer the better! If you would like to 'satnav' your way to Motcombe, SP7 9NN will take you to Prideaux Drive. At the end of Prideaux Drive is a car park which always has plenty of space and the Meadows are right in front of you.

The Marsh Fritillary at Lydlinch Common

By Colin Burningham

There has been much discussion about the status and conservation of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly at various Dorset sites over the past few years. I feel that I should make a statement of what I know about one particular important site, having been responsible for the collation of the transect walk results and the management of Lydlinch Common for a number of years, prior to my Stroke in August 2013.

At Lydlinch it seems a more encouraging future is evolving after a somewhat harrowing period over the past few years.

To set the scene, the yearly transect results are shown below.

Total count of Marsh Fritillary on Lydlinch Common Transect Walk

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
82	149	109	79	12	40	71

The Common has been managed for a number of years by The Friends of Lydlinch Common, a group of volunteers working under the Dorset branch of Butterfly Conservation as an umbrella organization, with representatives from Butterfly Conservation HQ and Natural England keeping a watchful eye on their efforts and being in general agreement with their actions.

The task was to maintain the site for the conservation of butterflies and birds, with the target species for each being the Marsh Fritillary and the Nightingale respectively.

In more recent times, Natural England has obtained approval and provided funding for the owners of the Common, the Stock Gaylard Estate, to fence it and introduce grazing as a more effective way of controlling the invasive scrub. However, the fencing of Lydlinch Common did not include the area on the north-east side of the

Sturminster Newton road (A357) and consequently that area is now managed by our volunteer group to improve the habitat for the Marsh Fritillary.

It is quite apparent that the ungrazed area (sector 15) has evolved quite differently from the main part of the site. Unfortunately, the cattle introduced onto the fenced site for grazing badly poached the ground in a number of areas, with the grazing also being quite tight in others, leading to a marked reduction in the number of Marsh Fritillaries. In 2013, only 12 individuals were seen on the transect walk, with 6 being seen in sector 15 and 6 on the rest of the site.



Marsh Fritillary © Colin Burningham

Following discussions between representatives of Natural England, Butterfly Conservation and the volunteer group, the problem of grazing on the main site has hopefully now been readdressed by reducing the number of cattle and changing to a less active breed.

In the meantime, the efforts of The Friends of Lydlinch Common on the unfenced site appear to have had a beneficial effect on the numbers of Marsh Fritillaries in the last two years.

In 2014, 40 Marsh Fritillaries were seen on the transect walk, with 34 being seen in sector 15 and again, only 6 on the rest of the site.

In 2015, the number of Marsh Fritillaries on the transect walk had increased to 71, with 51 being seen in sector 15 and 20 on the rest of the site.

It is felt that the various sub-colonies around the site are closely interlinked and there is already an indication that with an improvement in the grazing regime, butterflies are gradually re-colonising the main area where there had previously been a drop to very low numbers. These findings give us hope for the future of the Marsh Fritillary colony on Lydlinch Common.

Chase Woods - Saturday 4th July

By Tom and Jean Smith

This was a joint Wiltshire and Dorset trip and we were co-leading with Arthur Bryant from Dorset branch (of which we're now members since moving to Dorset late last year). Nineteen people turned up for this trip. Fortunately, following the thunder and lightning of the night before this was a warm sunny day with temperatures up to 23°C so we had a good day for butterflies. Jean and I noted that we saw fourteen species of butterfly overall, but more may have been seen by other participants.



Valezina Silver-washed Fritillary

We set off from the parking area near Greatstone Coppice at the southern end of the wood (just inside Dorset, off the Tollard Royal to Sixpenny Handley Road) and our walk took us in a clockwise direction up northwards through the wood to the Shire Rack west-east ride along the county boundary, seeing a Valezina female Silver-washed Fritillary along the way. We then walked along the Bridmore Ride inside Wiltshire and here the first White Admirals of the day were seen, along with Silver-washed and Dark Green Fritillaries, and a range of grassland species including Small and Large Skippers.

After lunching in the shade by the 'circus' we headed south east to look for Purple Emperors, but although we were unsuccessful in our quest, we were compensated with some very good sightings of White Admirals.

We finished the day with the following lists of butterflies and moths.

Butterflies: Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral, Comma, Red Admiral, Peacock, Speckled Wood, Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Ringlet.

Moths: Large Yellow Underwing, Scarlet Tiger and Cinnabar.

Our thanks to the Rushmoor Estate for allowing access.

Winspit - Thursday 30th July

By Arthur Bryant

Encouraged by an improving forecast, a group of 13 from Dorset and Wiltshire branches joined Bernard Franklin for a late season visit to Worth Matravers and Winspit on the Jurassic Coast. Although there was not much full sunshine, conditions were mostly bright and there was plenty of butterfly activity. In all, 19 species were recorded around the village, Winspit quarry and along the coastal path. Thankfully, 3 Lulworth Skippers were seen by those who particularly wanted to see the species. Adonis Blue was not as plentiful as hoped; 25 were seen in 2013 but only 5 on this trip. Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Common Blue were the top scorers. A single Wall, Clouded Yellow and a couple of late Marbled Whites added to the species list.

After lunch in Seacombe Quarry, we set off on the climb back to the car park arriving back at 3.15pm. Our thanks go to Bernard for leading us on an enjoyable day out.

Other notable sightings on the day included Peregrine Falcon, Rock Pipit, Southern and Migrant Hawker dragonflies, Bloody-nosed Beetle, Grey Bush-cricket and Autumn Lady's-tresses.

By Nigel Spring and Kathy Henderson

In the autumn of 2012, the Dorset branch of Butterfly Conservation bought a herd of four fairly elderly Dartmoor ponies. They had spent most of their lives grazing on Dartmoor, and so were used to harsher conditions than they were ever likely to meet in Dorset. The aim was to use them to graze our reserves at Alners Gorse and Lankham Bottom. We built a new corral and handling area adjacent to the carpark at Alners Gorse and found a small team of volunteers who were prepared to take it in turns to check the ponies daily having done a one day course in 'looking' with a trainer from the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust. Up until then the reserve had been grazed intermittently by a small group of ponies and the occasional tethered goat belonging to a local family. When young children from the local schools visited the reserve, the little ones would disappear in a sea of long grass rather reminiscent of the African savanna; fortunately no one fell prey to a lion in those early years.

Our four - Scarface, Holly, Clara and Blackberry - settled in well and began to do an excellent job at Alners, creating a mosaic of short tightly-grazed patches interspersed with areas of rush and longer grass. The Blackmore Vale becomes very waterlogged in winter (and many other times too!) and in February 2014 we transported the four to Lankham Bottom for a period on the well-drained ground there where there was a good supply of grass for them. Sadly Holly had started to lose condition at the end of 2013 and while at Lankham became acutely ill. In spite of much attention (and very high vets' bills) she eventually had to be destroyed. The post-mortem did not reveal any particular cause of death and although parasitic worms were present, they were not in numbers that might have given cause for concern. She was at least 18 years old if not more, and perhaps the harsh life she had led contributed to her illness and death.

In the summer of 2014, we took on two young ponies of mixed parentage from Bodmin Moor. These two, Star and Blaze, had been abandoned on the moor (as many ponies and sheep are) and when they arrived they were in a terrible state, and with extremely unpredictable temperaments. Blaze in particular had clearly been very badly treated and was so traumatised that she was easily spooked just by the sight of a stick or rope. At one point in the period of training her, she ran through the 12ft wooden gate at Alners instead of round or over it. Kathy spent innumerable patient hours working on these two ponies and with the help of two local Annas, one trained in the USA as a 'horse whisperer', the other a farrier specialising in unshod ponies, she managed to train them sufficiently to get head collars on them and allow Anna to trim their feet. They now graze happily with the other three.

As well as going off to Lankham Bottom for their winter holidays, our five have also been doing invaluable work grazing some of our neighbours' land at Rooksmoor as part of the newly established Stewardship scheme there. They are enclosed in paddocks of electric tape and are checked daily by our dedicated team of lookers (especially dedicated as it is quite a trek to Rooksmoor with much of the route frequently under water!)

We are keeping a close eye on how they graze and which plants they like best. We have found that they do not seem to touch Devil's-bit Scabious, the important foodplant of the Marsh Fritillary (though they will nip the flowers off occasionally) and seem to ignore Dyer's Greenweed which is also important for a very rare case-bearing micromoth. When released into the new area on Rooksmoor, they seem to go first for the thistle flower heads and the Angelica flowers, before tucking into the tender grasses. Once the best grasses have been eaten they will eat the coarse grasses like *Calamagrostis epigejos* which forms dense stands and tends to swamp other flowering plants. We are attempting to make a quantitative study of the effects of grazing on the land at Alners and on Rooksmoor.

If you would like to be involved in our pony grazing scheme, as a looker or even just occasionally when the fence needs moving, please contact us. Quite apart from other considerations, Alners and Rooksmoor are among the loveliest parts of the Blackmore Vale at all times of year – during my visit to the ponies today, it was one of those perfect, warm autumn days with a very special light: Chiffchaffs making their plaintive autumn calls from the hedges, Small Tortoiseshells on the haze of Devil's-bit Scabious flowers, hoverflies on the blackberries and a Roe Deer loping away in the distance - perfect!

Notes

Your lasting legacy

Have you ever considered leaving a gift to Butterfly Conservation in your Will?

An increasing number of members and friends are choosing to support Butterfly Conservation in this way. All gifts, whether large and small, make a crucial and lasting difference to the conservation of butterflies and moths. Together they account for over one third of our voluntary income, contributing significantly to the success of our conservation work.

So as well as leaving gifts to loved ones in your Will, please consider leaving a gift to Butterfly Conservation; it will help to ensure butterflies and moths thrive in the years to come.

For more information about leaving a gift to Butterfly Conservation and sharing your love of butterflies and moths with future generations please contact Helen Corrigan on 01273 453313 or hcorrigan@butterfly-conservation.org alternatively please write to Helen at Butterfly Conservation, Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, BH20 5QP

Thank you for your support.

Electronic Newsletter

If you would like to receive your next magazine by email please will you let Robin George know? Her details are on the back of this Newsletter. You can of course receive it both electronically and by post if you wish. Receiving it electronically will help us to save money and is more environmentally friendly.

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.*

J Bascombe - Poole

Mrs W & Mr B Bowers - Christchurch

Mr S Brown - Dorchester

Mrs C Cutmore - Poole

Mr P Dexter - Yeovil

Mr D Duke - Gillingham

Mrs S & Mr J Dutton - Ringwood

Miss R Edwards & Mr Z Taylor - Bournemouth

Ms D Gilbert - Swanage

Mr J & Mrs G Gould - Dorchester

Dr M & Mrs J Halsall - Wareham

Mrs R Johnson - Bournemouth

Miss R Miners - Dorchester

Mr D & Mrs J S A Newnham - Southampton

Mrs K Price - Bournemouth

Mr A L Reek & Mrs J Stewart - Sherborne

Ms C & Miss L Richardson - Portland

Mr J Rose - Blandford

Mrs G & Dr C Stanley & Family - Sherborne

Mr P Swann - Wimborne

Miss S Thomas - Poole

Mr C Williams - Sturminster Newton

Mr D & Mrs M Yeomans - Gillingham

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.

TREASURER'S NOTE

**Bank balance at 31st
August 2015:**

£18,630

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

All members are welcome to attend committee meetings.

To find out further details about when and where the next committee meeting is taking place, and how you can attend, please get in touch with Adrian Neil (01305 832937 or adrian.neil@madasafish.com) for details.

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

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