

Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch

2019 AGM Saturday February 23rd Puddletown Village Hall

Chairman's Report

We welcomed 65 members to our AGM on February 23rd on a stunning spring day. As usual the date of our AGM clashed with Six Nations Rugby, important football games and preparation work in the garden, but this year the weather was so good we could have been depriving butterfly transect walkers of their first walk of the season! Several present had been counting Brimstones on their journey to the event – apparently 13 males were counted just between Poundbury and Puddletown! Already 80 butterflies of 7 species had been recorded on the Dorset branch website.

A great deal of work goes into the preparation of our AGM and we should particularly thank our branch secretary, Adrian Neil, for masterminding the organisation of his team of volunteers – and all the people who baked cakes, served teas, set up displays, welcomed arrivals, operated the projector, contributed raffle prizes and sold tickets. We must also express our grateful thanks to all the committee who give up a lot of their time for the branch – to Lyn Pullen for her work on the website; to Georgie Laing, our treasurer, for her tireless efforts on our budgets and accounts; to Jane Smith and Lyn Pullen for all the work that goes into the production of our newsletter, a very impressive publication; and to Robin George our hardworking membership officer. Colin and Christine managed to get to 10 fairs, shows and other events last year with the sales and display stand and we are very thankful to them for their efforts.

Of course special thanks must go to Bill Shreeves who has been the branch records officer since time immemorial: even though he is trying to relinquish some of the burden of this responsibility, he still has his finger on a multitude of pulses and will still be the person that everyone will turn to for his wisdom and huge depth of knowledge of Dorset's butterflies. Bill has handed over the responsibility for our spring regional recorders' meetings to local organisers and we hope these will evolve under the care of local members and transect walkers. We are still looking for someone in the Wimborne/Bournemouth/Poole area to take over that area meeting – this year we were very fortunate that Steve Brown offered to step in at the last minute to run this. It would be sad if it had to fold as we have a strong membership in this part of Dorset.

The branch is tantalisingly close to recruiting its 1000th member which would be a fantastic milestone to achieve in the coming year – and one we should celebrate.

What a strange year 2018 was! With the Beast from the East curtailing a lot of human and insect activity in the spring, then the hot dry summer that followed continuing to make farmers' lives very difficult but helping to boost numbers of many species of butterflies and moths, the true consequences of the extremes of 2018 may well only become apparent when we look at the emergence of the more vulnerable species during the coming season. We certainly know that 2018 was a poor year for migrants like Painted Ladies, Red Admirals and Clouded Yellows, and that the declining numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and Chalkhill Blues remind us that we still do not really understand the ecological needs of these species. There were plenty of positives to remember from 2018 – the Duke of Burgundy continues to do well on the sites where there has been targeted management, the butterfly we all know as the 'Common' Blue is still making a great comeback and the explosion of Small Coppers in the autumn was seen in all corners of the county.

David Brown, the National Trust Ecologist for the Purbeck Estate, was the guest speaker at our AGM. He gave a fascinating presentation about the acclaimed National Trust Cyril Diver project which he helped to run on the Studland Peninsula between 2013 and 2015, resurveying the areas that Captain Cyril Diver had investigated and recorded in great depth in the 1930's. Much of the recording work was carried out by volunteers under the guidance of a team of local experts, a

fantastic example of what is now called citizen science and which could possibly act as a model for our branch to use on some of our sites as a way to recruit and motivate volunteers.

We are always eternally grateful to our volunteers for their huge contribution to the branch activities but the pool of volunteers is dwindling. As the sources of funds to pay contractors to do habitat management tasks on our sites become ever smaller or perhaps vanish for ever in the present uncertain climate, Butterfly Conservation will need to find more effective ways to use the untapped volunteer energy in our communities for the benefit of butterflies and moths and the wonderful habitats we all so much enjoy.