

## **Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch**

**2020 AGM Saturday February 15<sup>th</sup> Puddletown Village Hall**

### **Chairman's Report**

We were able to welcome 74 people to our AGM in spite of the efforts of Storm Dennis to ruin the event. Several supporters from neighbouring counties were unable to join us because of the dangerous winds – including Frank Crosier and Peter Shallcross from Wiltshire and Lyn Fomison and Tim Norriss from Hampshire.

As always we are very grateful to Adrian Neil our branch secretary for overseeing all the arrangements for the AGM, liaising with all the volunteers who help with setting out the chairs, welcoming and registering members at the door, helping with the projection, making cakes and serving teas, selling merchandise, and organising the raffle. The organisation is always so efficient that the whole afternoon seems to work seamlessly.

We are very sad that we have recently lost several members who have made very important contributions to the Dorset branch. Gordon Hopkins died last summer after fighting a long illness and terrible family misfortunes. He was a great supporter of the Lydlinch Common conservation team and was a dedicated moth-er. Colin Burningham wrote a very nice piece about him in the Summer 2019 newsletter.

John Tubb was a hugely energetic early member of the transect recording team and was closely involved in the management and recording on Fontmell Down and Hod Hill.

Tony Copper died in January this year. He was also involved in the conservation work at Lydlinch Common and was prominent in the recording group on Duncliffe Hill and Fifehead Magdalen Wood in north Dorset.

It never ceases to amaze me how widely the activities and contacts of the Dorset branch can reach and what an important link we are between the national organisation of Butterfly Conservation and the people and countryside of Dorset. The guided walks and conservation events we put on are probably fairly well known and efficiently promoted through our excellent website. But much is going on which is less well publicised but which is a very valuable aspect of our branch work. I would like to describe a few of these - in no particular order.

- a. The Portland Conservation Forum. Three members of the branch are represented on the PCF which meets regularly to coordinate the activities and interests of the various wildlife conservation bodies on Portland. The forum also includes representatives of the Dorset Wildlife Trust, Natural England, the Portland Court Leat, the Dorset Council and Butterfly Conservation at Lulworth. A Community Interest Company has now been established called Portland Nature CIC whose remit will be to oversee the management of the many wildlife conservation areas set aside as part of the section 106 agreements between the Dorset Council and the developers. Two branch representatives are directors of this CIC, Richard Belding and myself.

BC no longer has leases on its two former reserves, Perryfields and Broadcroft Quarries, though we are still involved as a branch in the practical management and the monitoring of both sites with the permission of Betterment Properties and Stone Firms, the owners. We are hoping that the leases can be taken on by the Portland Nature CIC and that we can continue to manage them.

- b. We have recently been contacted by Andrew George who has been involved in the landscape design for wacky projects at Ryewater for many years. He has become involved in an initiative with schools in Sherborne called Operation Future Hope. Starting off with

Sherborne School for Girls and instigated by Lesley Malpas, several other schools are now involved including the Gryphon and Yetminster Primary School. Our branch has been asked to help the Girls' School set up transect routes on the areas the school has set aside for wildlife as effectively 'rewilded' areas. Bill Shreeves and Steve Brown have offered to help.

- c. We have been involved with Frank Crosier of the Wiltshire branch of BC in the taking and propagation of cuttings of disease resistant elms including from those on Alners Gorse (thought to be East Anglian or Hornbeam-leaved Elms). There are also some apparently disease-resistant elms on the edge of Puddletown. Rebecca Porter has seen White-letter Hairstreaks in her garden nearby. It is hoped that the branch and members of the public can become involved in planting elms cuttings to encourage WLH colonies in Dorset.
- d. The branch has been involved in joint activities with many other organisations in Dorset: leading moth trapping sessions and butterfly walks for the Back from the Brink 'Dorset's Heathland Heart' project; joining in bioblitzes at Chedington Woods (2018 and 2019 and this summer July 2020), Chettle House last summer, Boscombe King's Park this coming May, moth trapping with the Gillingham Action for Nature Group (GANG) 2019 and 2020; Moors Valley Country Park have invited the branch to help with their Wildlife Day and Wood Fair, two events this coming summer. We are also taking part in the Cerne Abbas Giant Festival in May and the Radipole Park and Gardens Friends group.
- e. We have been asked by the 'Friends of Castle Cove' to help with a butterfly walk this summer, including the Rodwell Trail.
- f. We are regularly asked by Kingston Maurward College and Dorset secondary schools if we would take on student placements but the number of hours they have to do are usually far more than we can offer. Now we are involved in discussions with KMC and other wildlife conservation bodies fronted by Natural England to share student placements so that each organisation does not have to carry all the burden of each student. It will also give the students a broader view of conservation management in Dorset.
- g. We are continuing to provide volunteers to work on management projects on private land in the county – e.g. at Cashmoor, Lydlinch Common, Tidmoor Ranges for the Dyers Greenweed casebearer moth, on Maiden newton Watermeadows on habitat for the Blairs Wainscot moth. Of course the 60+ transect monitoring sites in Dorset are mostly on private land and good rapport with the landowners is essential.
- h. Our education work in Dorset schools has had a slight hiatus in the last two years but we are hopeful that we can find enthusiastic people who will go into schools to show them butterflies and moths in the coming year.
- i. We are regularly asked to provide speakers for talks to county groups – and it is not always easy to find people to do this. Groups include the Bridport Tangent group, the Cancer support group in Dorchester, W.I.'s, the Friends of Durlston etc.
- j. We have written articles for reports and newsletters for different Dorset groups – another important way to get our message across. Our own newsletters, annual reports and events booklets find their way into libraries and other meeting places – we are always on the look out for other venues for these - please let us know.

We now have over 1000 members and the register that committee member Richard Norman has been keeping for our guided walks, work parties and other events suggests that for the last two years our supporters and members have clocked up just under 900 persondays on branch activities, which is a pretty stunning total. And these totals do not include the organising time that goes into them.

The broader the base of our organisation, the greater the influence we have on wildlife conservation in Dorset and the more important the Dorset branch becomes in the overall achievements of our national organisation, Butterfly Conservation.

Nigel Spring, Chair, Dorset branch of Butterfly Conservation.