

Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation

Annual Black Hairstreak Report 2006

by Stuart Hodges

A total of **995 Black Hairstreak** were seen in 2006. This is exceptional and we saw an average of 8.87 per hour, higher than any previous year.

4 new colonies have been found and 1 was brought to my attention, a record that I had overlooked in 2004, Piddington Bridge. **Widnell Lane** 15 seen, (nearest known colony three quarters of a mile) a site searched several times in the past, a strong colony, a disused railway line near **Grendon Wood** (nearest known colony one third of a mile away) three seen, **Gavray Drive near Bicester** (nearest known colony over four miles away) three seen, **Weston wood** (nearest known colony one third of a mile away) one seen, and **Piddington Bridge** (nearest known colony one and a half miles away) one seen. Three of the new sites had been searched before, further confirming the probability that they are dispersing and expanding their range.

Although we had a cold wet May, a time when the Black Hairstreak is at the caterpillar stage, the cloudy nights resulted in no late frosts. We also found high numbers in 2004 another year with no late frost, so this is a further indication of the likelihood that late frost could have a major impact on numbers.

The weather during the flight period was again good with at least 7 days when the temperature was high enough for them to be active for at least 12 hours, numbers peaked quickly after about a week and this lasted for only three or four days before falling away.

Searching was again successful for both eggs (3 found) and pupae (6 found). We now have timed counts for 9 eggs taking an average of 190 minutes each to find, 6 pupae taking 76 minutes each to find (pupa searches in 2005 were not timed). In two years we have found 12 pupae and our observation found that only 5 emerged, the other 7 disappeared, probably taken by birds.

One egg hatched 5th or 6th of April another found already hatched on the 15th and the last not until early June, leaving one speculating as to what would become of it.



A Black Hairstreak having just laid an egg - photograph © Dave Wilton

We have established that a strong colony now exists at the M40 Compensation area. On the 10th of June the first adult of the year was found there and then on the 14th June 19 were seen in poor weather conditions. This area as mentioned last year was established primarily for the Brown and Black Hairstreak, the first Black being seen in 1999. Transects in 2005 indicated a colony existed.

The smaller colonies in less favourable habitat did not have the same percentage increase in numbers seen elsewhere.

In the last twelve months management of Blackthorn has taken place at 4 sites, and plans are being made for management at 3 other sites. We have continued to keep landowners informed about the Black Hairstreak, but I need to make more effort to find more of the landowners.

Once again we have a very good set of records, **I am very grateful for all the effort everyone has put into monitoring.** This coming year will be our tenth recording year.

Yearly comparisons from our Monitoring:

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Total number of Colonies ever seen in Bucks & Oxon										93
Sites visited by the recording group	31	22	36	28	29	40	38	51	78	
Colonies seen by the recording group	7	13	9	15	9	13	34	34	39	44
Colonies seen since 1990										50
New colonies found since 1998	2		1		2	2	1	6	14	
Colonies re-discovered seen pre 1990	1	5	2	4	1	1	2	1		17
Individual Butterflies seen	19	28	73	90	123	109	525	258	995	
Hours Spent Looking for the B.H.				90.5	52.8	48.7	76	99	112	
People helping with the recording	4	9	12	13	15	16	17	24	21	
Days when the Weather was suitable for the B.H. to be active			16	18	18	21	22	28	28	
Hours when the Weather was suitable for it to be active	40	90	105	149	151	167	150	176	234	

Figure 1

Colony Information:

The current number of colonies in Bucks and Oxon*	48
Colonies within Woodland	5
Colonies in Woodland edge sites	21
Colonies at Hedgerow Thicket and Copse Sites **	22
Some of the Features of these Colonies:	
Hedgerow Colonies at Roadside sites	8
Colonies Associated with Bridleways and Footpaths	9
Colonies alongside Railways	4
Colonies with Private Landowners	19

Figure 2

*Estimate only. Colony numbers have increased since 2004, in some cases it is more difficult to define the boundaries between them.

**Two of these colonies extend out along hedgerows from woodland for over 100 metres.

Numbers seen per Hour:

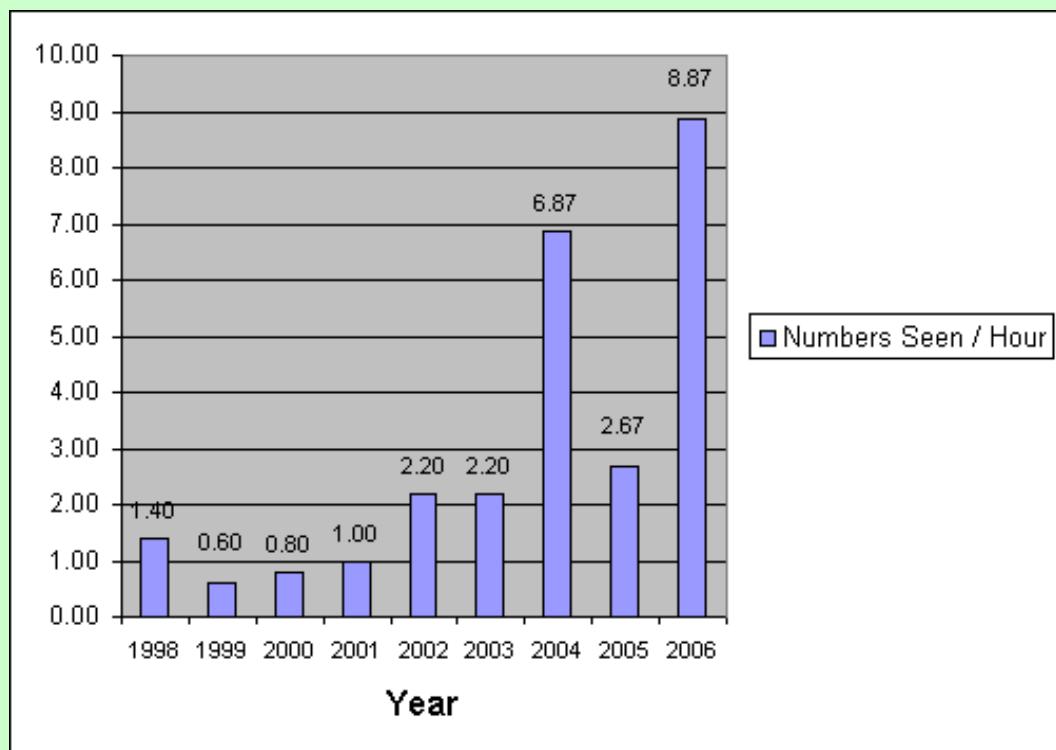


Figure 3

Year on Year Difference of Numbers Seen per Hour:

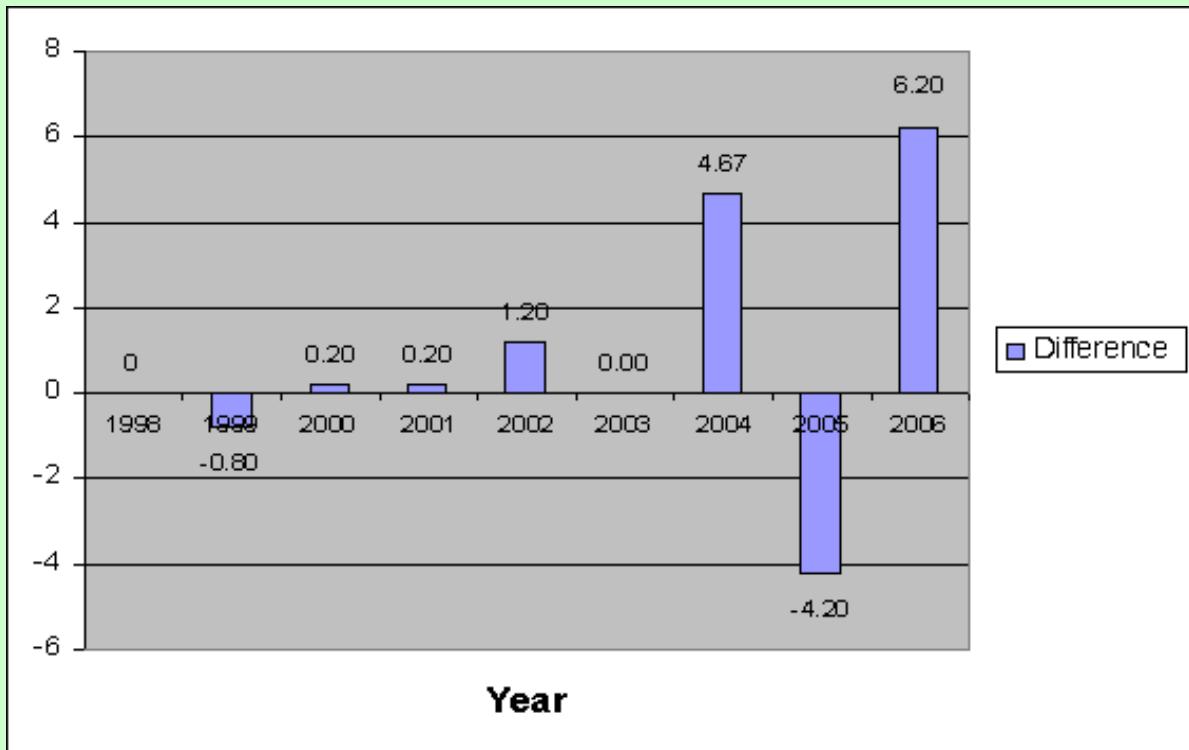


Figure 4