

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Brown Hairstreak Report 2015

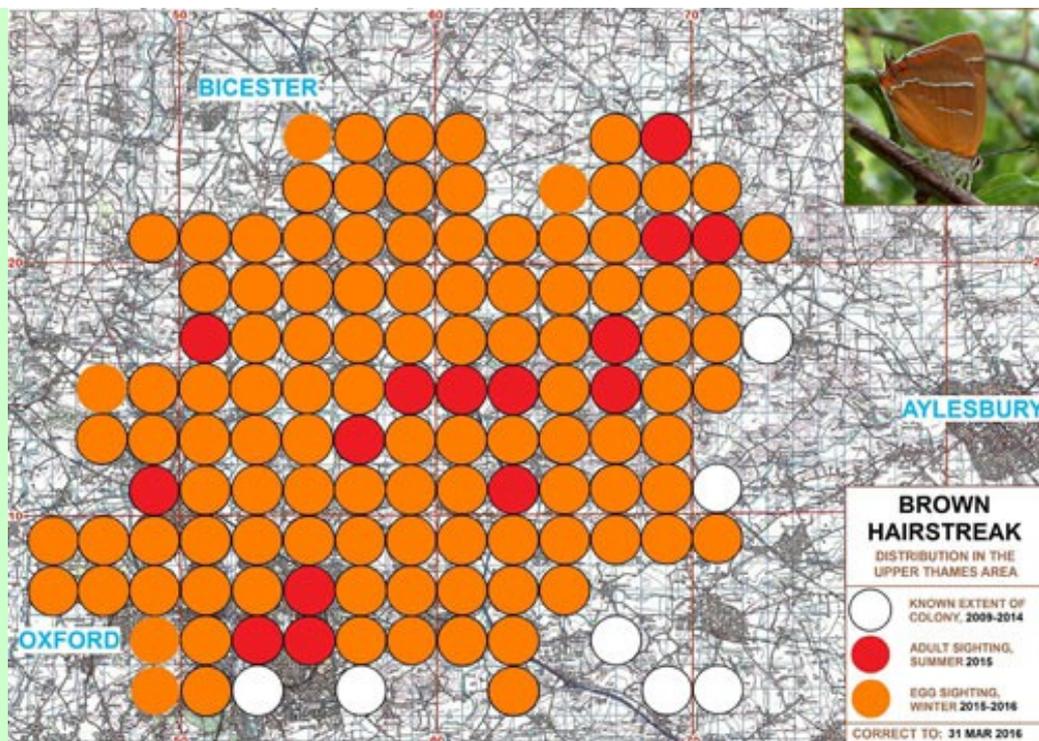
Dave Wilton



Photo © Tim Watts

The 2015 season began with the first recorded egg-hatching at Otmoor on 13th April. The last larval sighting there was on 30th June and the first adult was spotted on 16th July. The first adult sighting away from Otmoor was reported at Finemere Wood on 25th July and we eventually received records from 17 different locations within 15 different tetrads. The final sighting that we are aware of was at Whitecross Green Wood on 19th September, suggesting a rather early end to the flight season which often goes on into the first week of October.

The first sighting of an egg was on 14th August 2015 at Whitecross Green Wood. As usual, our dedicated band of egg-searchers worked very hard during the winter months and by the end of March 2016 had successfully found evidence of the butterfly in 121 out of the 128 tetrads from which we currently hold records. The seven tetrads in which we failed were all to the south and east of our meta-population (the white discs on the map below): eggs had been found in five of them the previous winter, one more (west of Thame) had been confirmed the winter before that, which just leaves the very irritating tetrad at Garsington, south-east of Oxford, in which we have found no sign of the butterfly since a single egg was discovered there in 2009! During the winter of 2015-16, eggs were found in 5 new tetrads (17 new kilometre squares). This compares quite favourably with the 6 new tetrads (17 new kilometre squares) added the previous winter.



Brown Hairstreak Distribution Map 2015-16
(click for larger image)

For the past 12 years we have carried out complete counts at several sites regularly each winter and currently there are four of them, spread across our local distribution map. They comprise Slade Camp on the east side of Oxford and RSPB Otmoor both in Oxon, along with Rushbeds Wood/Lapland Farm and Bernwood Meadows both in Bucks. Totals proved to be below average at all four locations this winter, partly due to necessary blackthorn management, although Rushbeds was the only site to put in its lowest ever count.

This winter we had the added encumbrance of a scheme developed by head office which they hope will provide a better understanding of the butterfly's health. For our Branch this comprised timed egg-counts from given lengths of blackthorn to be selected from within 15 random computer-generated kilometre squares, 13 of them within the area of our local population and two just outside it. We managed to identify appropriate sites and complete the survey within four of our allocated squares. The aim is to revisit the same stretch of blackthorn at each location annually, but the amount of effort we can devote to this will undoubtedly depend upon more volunteers coming forward. Strange, also, that all of our random squares lie east of the M40.

The most interesting Brown Hairstreak research locally this winter has been into the use for egg-laying of *Prunus* species other than *P.spinosa* (Blackthorn). As reported in the Entomologist's Record (Ent Rec Vol.128 Part 1 Jan/Feb 2016), eggs have been found on Apricot, Cherry Plum, Plum, Damson and Greengage in gardens in east Oxford as well as on Almond at Waterperry Gardens.

Particular thanks for all their efforts this winter must go to Shelagh Harlow and Wendy Wilson (for monitoring the eggs and larvae at Otmoor) and to Steve Woolliams (for his work on the additional food-plants). Thanks also go to Tony Croft, Phil Penson & Becky Woodell as well as all the other regulars who turn out in sometimes miserable weather conditions to help us look for eggs!

Dave Wilton
April 2016