

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Chalkhill Blue Report 2010

Nick Bowles

Numbers at Lardon Chase were surprisingly high by the day of our first report (5th July, with 32 reported) but, generally, the season started very slowly and with lower than normal numbers. As time passed some sites did improve to build reasonable populations but not most. Instead they continued to hold relatively small populations. The highest numbers were definitely in the south of the region.

However, the season did last a little longer than in most years (into early September at most sites) and at Coombe Hill, Wendover, a single male was photographed on 10th October, probably a UTB latest ever last sighting.

A single vagrant male was seen at Aston Hill, private land adjacent to Dancers End, BBOWT reserve. Grazing of this hillside to improve conditions for breeding should eventually see a 'new' colony on this former breeding site.

Other vagrants were very thin on the ground, presumably as August's weather was disappointing, though better than 2008 and 2009. This probably helps us understand why several unoccupied former sites did not show any signs of re-colonisation.



The October male Chalkhill Blue
Photo © Tom Dunbar



So, a below average season for the greater number of colonies but not so poor as to threaten to extinguish any. A greater concern is the apparent reduction in amounts of Horseshoe Vetch at some sites. This might be down to reduced grazing pressure on surrounding plants but no obvious cause is readily available. We will hold a winter work

Photo © Nick Bowles

party at Pitstone Hill to try and increase the area of Horseshoe Vetch there.

Finally, a plea to any reader who thinks they can answer the query as to whether Chalkhill Blue females lay onto their foodplant, or simply 'drop' eggs nearby. I have watched many over the years (this year no exception) that seem to be egg laying. Inspection of the foodplant after they move on, very often shows no sign of an egg.