

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Dingy Skipper Report 2010

Dave Wilton



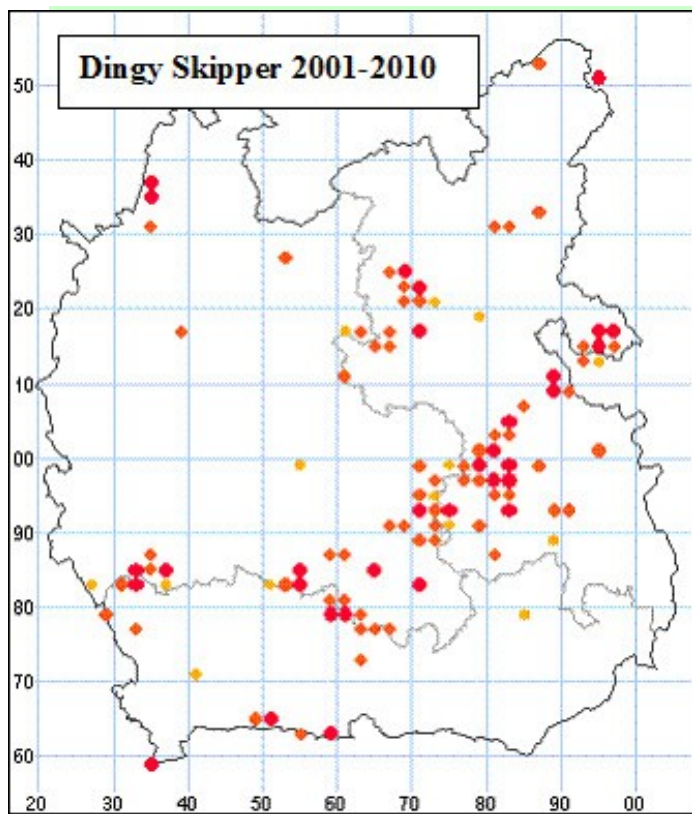
Dingy Skipper and friend on chalk at
Ivinghoe Beacon, 17th May 2010
Photo © Dave Wilton

In 2010 the Dingy Skipper was first reported flying in Sussex on 13th April, while our own local first sighting came ten days later on 23rd April when it was recorded from Sands Bank at High Wycombe, Bucks and from Hartslock, Oxon. The last record was of five seen at Letcombe Basset, Oxon on 20th June so the butterfly could easily have been active somewhere in our region for two complete months. Unlike the previous year, in 2010 there were no reports of second brood specimens during August.

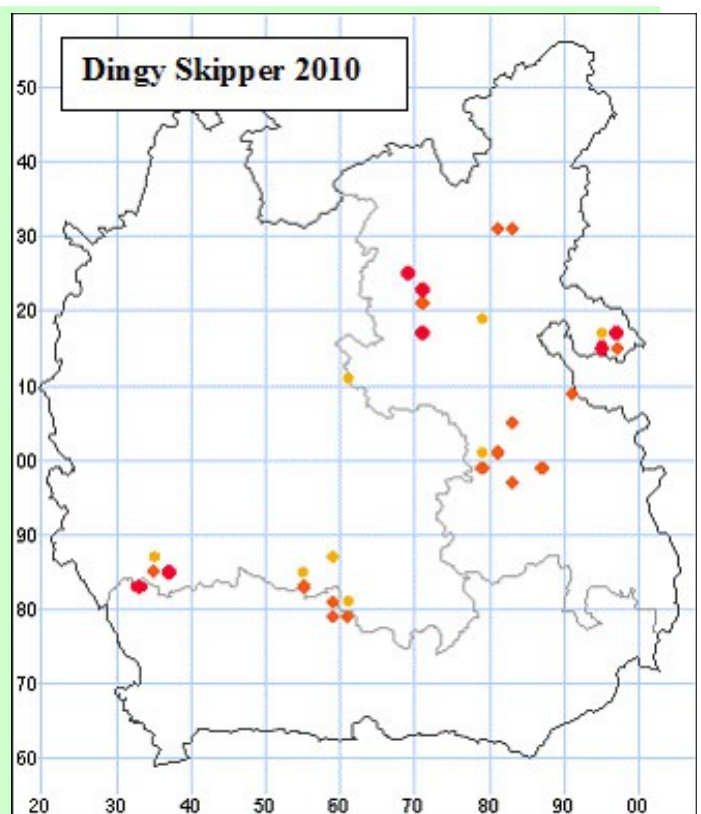
Two new sites were recorded during the 2010 season, both of single specimens. One was by Nick Bowles on 5th June not far from a disused railway line on the Mentmore Estate, Bucks. The other was an interesting find by Dennis Dell on 11th June in the grounds of Aylesbury Park Golf Club on the western side of Aylesbury, Bucks. Unfortunately the planned High Speed Rail Link should ensure that it doesn't survive there for long. Both HS2 and plans for an Incinerator at Calvert directly threaten other Dingy (and Grizzled) Skipper colonies in Bucks as well.

At the time of writing (February 2011) there are 77 Dingy Skipper records in the UTB Levana database for 2010, contributed by 15 people. If I look at our branch website I can see Dingy Skipper sightings from a further 20 people who have not sent in their records to Jim Asher for the database. This is not a very helpful situation for those of us trying to work out what is happening to our butterflies. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that, at those sites where the butterfly was seen in 2010, it did quite well. Seven Barrows (Berks) and Hackpen Hill (Oxon) as well as Greatmoor, Ivinghoe & Westcott (all Bucks) each returned single visit counts of 20 or more individuals, which is quite a good site total for our region.

The left hand map below shows that we have database records from 107 tetrads over the decade between 2001 and 2010 (no real change, then, to the 106 tetrads noted between 2000 and 2009 in last year's report). The right hand map shows the 30 tetrads from 2010 for which we currently have database records. Again, this is very similar to the 31 noted in the 2009 report although 12 of them are different tetrads. The 10-year map is probably a reasonably close reflection of the current picture, with the butterfly being woefully under-recorded in each individual year.



Dingy Skipper records 2001-2010



Dingy Skipper records 2010

Clearly visible on the left hand map is the Dingy Skipper's preference for chalk grassland, with the obvious line of colonies spread between Ivinghoe in the Chilterns to the east and the area around Seven Barrows in the Berkshire Downs to the west. Of the other two main habitat types used by the species, woodland sites have now all but been lost in our region, thanks it is believed to a lack of suitable management. Away from the chalk this leaves the butterfly on 'brown-field' sites such as abandoned military land, quarries, landfills and disused railway lines. Disused railway lines are particularly important to the species as they provide corridors between colonies through otherwise inhospitable and barren farmland.