

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Duke of Burgundy Report 2011

Ched George



Duke of Burgundy - Ivinghoe Beacon
Photo © Clive Burrows

The Duke of Burgundy had another good flight period, at least at its remaining two Buckinghamshire colonies. Dave Turnbull was the first to report a Duke sighting from Ivinghoe Beacon, which was on April 20th. The last reports from here were those seen on May 14th at the UTB field meeting led by Robin Carr. Robin has served as our Duke Species Champion for a number of years but has handed the reins to me partly as the primrose feeding colony on the BBOWT Reserve of Dancersend would appear to have declined to extinction. Mick Jones had just one unverified report from a visitor.

Elsewhere, I recorded the first Duke of the season on April 18th. This was at the private site in the Saunderton valley. I was able to record 10 there on May 3rd which qualified the colony to be upgraded from a small to medium colony. Another private site in Bucks again produced a single sighting, the 3rd in the last 4 years. Whether this is an outlier colony hanging on, or singletons wandering from the Saunderton valley colony; remains undetermined.

On the Lambourn downs in Berkshire, Jim Asher also recorded 10 from a known site and another possible vagrant elsewhere. Malcolm and Gillian Taylor reported Dukes from the Devil's Punchbowl area of Berks. There were no reports from Aston Upthorpe, another site which appears to have gone extinct.

Over the last few years I have assembled a dossier of all previously known Duke sites and made frequent visits to those in the Chilterns. I know that at least 13 sites between Henley and Ivinghoe supported Dukes in 1991 and we have lost 11 of these. In 2010, Matthew Oates and National Trust staff at Ivinghoe Beacon supported a project to re-introduce Dukes to an old site near High Wycombe. Volunteers from the National Trust, UTB and Ruislip NHS collected ninety-one ova from Ivinghoe on May 27th. Matthew believed that this was just a single day's egg-lay within the colony and was less than the originally agreed target of 120. I cared for the stock and although more than 70 reached the pupal stage a number were lost

due to emergence of a 2nd brood. I was able to release adults as they emerged in 2011 and 51 butterflies emerged between April 18th and May 1st. Matthew and I looked for signs of larval damage on the cowslip foodplants on July 28th and signs look good for a successful introduction.

Since we had some quite windy weather during the flight period, we might have expected reports of Duke sightings in adjacent areas from the release site but this did not occur. It is possible that fertilised females will have wandered some distance from the release site such that recorders should be aware of sightings in unusual places between the M40 in the south and Wendover in the north, during 2012.

Two photos from July 28th showing Duke larval damage are shown below.



Ched George
March 2012