

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Grizzled Skipper Report 2013

David Hastings



Grizzled Skipper f. at Gavray Drive Meadow
12th June 2013 (© Pat Clissold)

The Grizzled Skipper is a very localised and declining butterfly in Britain with its stronghold in central southern England. It occurs in discrete colonies in open, sunny but sheltered, unfertilised grassland, woodland rides and glades and abandoned industrial sites, breeding where the vegetation is sparse and there are patches of bare ground. The best sites occur where there is a mosaic of short and long vegetation where the caterpillars feed on rosaceous plants such as Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla repens*) and bramble (*Rubus sp.*). Other known foodplants are Agrimony, Tormentil, Barren Strawberry, Wood Avens, Salad Burnet and Dog Rose. There is one generation per year, with adults usually being on the wing from the middle of April to the middle of June. Peak emergence is in mid-May.

The Grizzled Skipper was affected by the cold spring weather in 2013. The earliest record was from Hartslock, Oxon on April 30th and the last from Greatmoor, Bucks on June 25th. This gives a flight period of 57 days, which is only slightly below the average flight period of 63 days recorded between 2002 and 2005.

2002 : flight season 21st April to 25th June (66 days)
2003 : flight season 12th April to 21st June (71 days)
2004 : flight season 27th April to 20th June (55 days)
2005 : flight season 29th April to 27th June (60 days)
2013 : flight season 30th April to 25th June (57 days).

Eighty-seven reports were received during the season from 40 observers at 31 sites. The largest number of individuals recorded at one time was 16 on 1st June, at the disused railway cutting near Westcott, Bucks.

Perhaps the most significant sighting was that of a female by Pat Clissold at Gavray Drive Meadows, Bicester, Oxon, on June 2nd. This site supports all five native Hairstreaks, yet it remains at risk of having houses built on it. The addition of the Grizzled Skipper to the species list may help preserve the site.



Male (© David Hastings)



Female (© David Hastings)

The Grizzled Skipper is quite widely distributed in the Upper Thames region, with sightings reported from Ardley Quarry, Gavray Drive Meadows and Salden Wood in the north, Greenham Common and Upton Nurvet in the south and the Ivinghoe Beacon complex in the east. It did quite well at Ivinghoe Beacon in 2013, but in past years it was either under-recorded here or only present in very small numbers. Hopefully the increase in numbers seen in 2013 will be sustained.

The Chilterns north and west of High Wycombe and the Aston Upthorpe/Lardon Chase/Hartslock region on the Berkshire Downs are currently the main sites for the Grizzled Skipper in the Upper Thames region. It is also thinly but widely spread in the wooded complex between Calvert and Quainton in Buckinghamshire and the various rail lines that permeate this area.

Some known colonies are under threat from development, particularly from HS2 and from the East-West rail link. Gavray Drive Meadows in Bicester has lost some of its embankment to the East-West line. HS2 directly threatens Finemere Wood and Calvert Jubilee in Buckinghamshire. It is probable that the Grizzled Skipper is under-recorded in the Chilterns, so it is likely to be affected if a railway line is driven through the area.

David Hastings

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