

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Grizzled Skipper Report 2014

David Hastings



Male Grizzled Skipper at Ardley Quarry, 30 Apr 2014 (© Richard Wheeler)

The Grizzled Skipper is a very localised and declining butterfly in Britain; its stronghold is 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. The longer vegetation is for the adults to roost overnight, and the shorter turf is where the larvae feed on rosaceous plants such as Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) 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 had a much longer flight period in 2014 than in 2013, because the spring weather was better. The earliest record was from Hartslock, Oxon on April 13th, and the last from Grendon Underwood, Bucks, on June 24th. This gives a flight period of 73 days, which is over two weeks longer than 2013.

Eighty-nine reports were received during the season from 42 observers at 33 sites. The largest number of individuals recorded at one time was 15 on May 6th at Calvert Jubilee, Bucks.

Flight Periods

2002	21st April to 25th June	(66 days)
2003	12th April to 21st June	(71 days)
2004	27th April to 20th June	(55 days)
2005	29th April to 27th June	(60 days)
2013	30th April to 25th June	(57 days)
2014	13th April to 24th June	(73 days)

The Grizzled Skipper is quite widely distributed in the Upper Thames region, with sightings reported from Ardley Quarry and Salden in the north, Greenham Common and Upton Nurvet in the south, and the Ivinghoe Beacon complex in the east.

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 in the Upper Thames region. It is also thinly but widely spread in the wooded complex between Calvert and Quanton in Buckinghamshire, and the various railway lines that permeate this area. It did reasonably well at Ivinghoe Beacon in 2014, following the increase in numbers seen in 2013.

Colonies continue to be threatened by development, particularly HS2, which would seriously impact Finemere Wood and Calvert Jubilee in Buckinghamshire. The Grizzled Skipper is probably under-reported in the Chilterns, so it is hard to know how much it would be affected if a railway line is driven through the area.

In late 2014 BBOWT built a limestone bank in Whitecross Green Wood with the intention of developing it as breeding habitat for the Grizzled Skipper. The species is occasionally recorded here, but usually in very low numbers. This bank is unlikely to make much of a difference in 2015, but hopefully it will in future years.

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