

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

WOOD WHITE ANNUAL REPORT – 2006

Becky Woodell



Wood White

(Photo © Nick Bowles)

SITE REPORTS – UPPER THAMES REGION

Wood Whites were recorded from eight sites in the Upper Thames region as follows:

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Site</i> | <i># Observed</i> |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 23 May | College Wood | one |
| 23 May | Salden Railway | five |
| 05 June | Whitecross Green | eight |
| Peak transect number | | |
| 07 June | Salden Railway | fifteen |
| 07 June | Whitfield Wood | two |
| 18 June | New site | one |
| Grid Ref supplied | | |

| | | |
|---------|------------------|--------|
| 24 June | Leckhampstead Wd | two |
| 29 June | Wicken Wood | twelve |

Bucks section; includes two en.cop.

I had not included College Wood in the list of current sites following the surveys in 2002 and 2003 because no Wood Whites were found there. Therefore we have eight localities instead of the seven recorded in 2003. Leckhampstead and Wicken Woods, although in separate ownership are all one woodland. However, Leckhampstead Wood was previously so overgrown that no Wood Whites were found. Thus, the size of the habitat there has increased.

Salden Railway Cutting

Stuart Hodges and I visited this disused railway on 7 June in good weather. We first looked at the area southwest of the road bridge at SP831311. It is a small area which is currently good for Wood White, but is likely soon to become too shaded. The area is rather small, becoming wooded and shaded to the southwest. A total of 13 Wood Whites were seen here. Two food plant species were seen. Meadow Vetchling was rather rare but Birds-foot Trefoil was frequent. Other species seen were Common Blue (13), Green-veined White (1), Grizzled Skipper (2), Orange Tip (2), Large White (1) Small Copper (1), Burnet Companion (6) and Cinnabar (3).

Stuart and I walked northeast under the road bridge past Salden Wood toward the Newton Longville road bridge. Beyond the wood the cutting widened out, becoming nearly level with the adjacent land. This open area is botanically rather species rich. Two further Wood Whites were seen. Other species were Small/Green-veined White (7), Orange Tip (5), Brimstone (7), Common Blue (14), Brown Argus (1), Peacock (1), Burnet Companion (14), Latticed Heath (1).

I have since talked to Roy Maycock, Bucks Botanical Recorder who knows the area which was surveyed by BBOWT (BBONT) in 1986. He confirmed that all of the line still belongs to Railtrack. There is pressure to reopen this line and link up Milton Keynes with Oxford via Bicester. Roy thought it was not impossible.

Whitfield Wood

Stuart and I also visited Whitfield Wood on 7 June, weather sunny and hot. Two Wood Whites were seen. The wood is small and narrow and is suffering seriously from eutrophication with a lot of cleavers, nettles, etc. Meadow Vetchling is common but the rides are very overgrown with dense grasses and do not look a promising habitat. Other species seen were Large White (1), Common Blue (2), and Silver –Y (1).

Little Linford Wood

Phil Sarre, the BBOWT Warden has no confirmed records for this year. They are usually seen although in very low numbers.

College Wood

The sighting here is good news as none were reported for several years after the Woodland Trust purchased it and undertook drastic 'opening' of the central ride in the winter of 2001-02. We now have singles for 2005 and 2006. This is an important site to watch as conditions may now improve and it could become a good spot again.

New Site

A single Wood White, confirmed by a photograph was recorded in a new site in north Oxfordshire. Due to site sensitivity during the breeding season we are currently withholding Grid References. I will visit in the coming flight season.

Whitecross Green Wood

Wood Whites had a poor season here. The annual index is 25, second worst after 24 in 1998. The first transect date is 2nd June (6 seen). The peak transect count is 5th June (8 seen) and the last transect date is 8th July (1 seen).

The first Visitor's Book date is 29 May when 3 were recorded. The signature looks like B. and M. Raymond who came for a walk. If anyone knows the Raymonds I would be grateful if you could contact me. They ticked the 'BBOWT Member' heading in the Book so might also be UTB members. I did a transect on the afternoon of the 28th and saw no Wood Whites but they might have emerged then or on 29th. Three would fit better with an emergence date than the six I saw especially as they peaked at eight.

Visitor records continue until Steve Woolliams whom I know, saw one on 8 July which ties in with the last transect date on the same day. I saw no more, but some intriguing records appear in the Book which could be a second brood that I never found. Does anyone know the following people?

22 July , Joan Tomkins travelled 70 miles and saw one; 27 July Steve Lane and David Beer (1), travelled either 20 miles or 70; 31 July Meg Pollitt and Mike Zeyfect (?) from Oxford (3). Confirmation of these records would be very valuable. Can anyone help?

The above does show the value of regular and clear entries in the Book. Sometimes there are no entries for several days although I see good numbers of visitors.

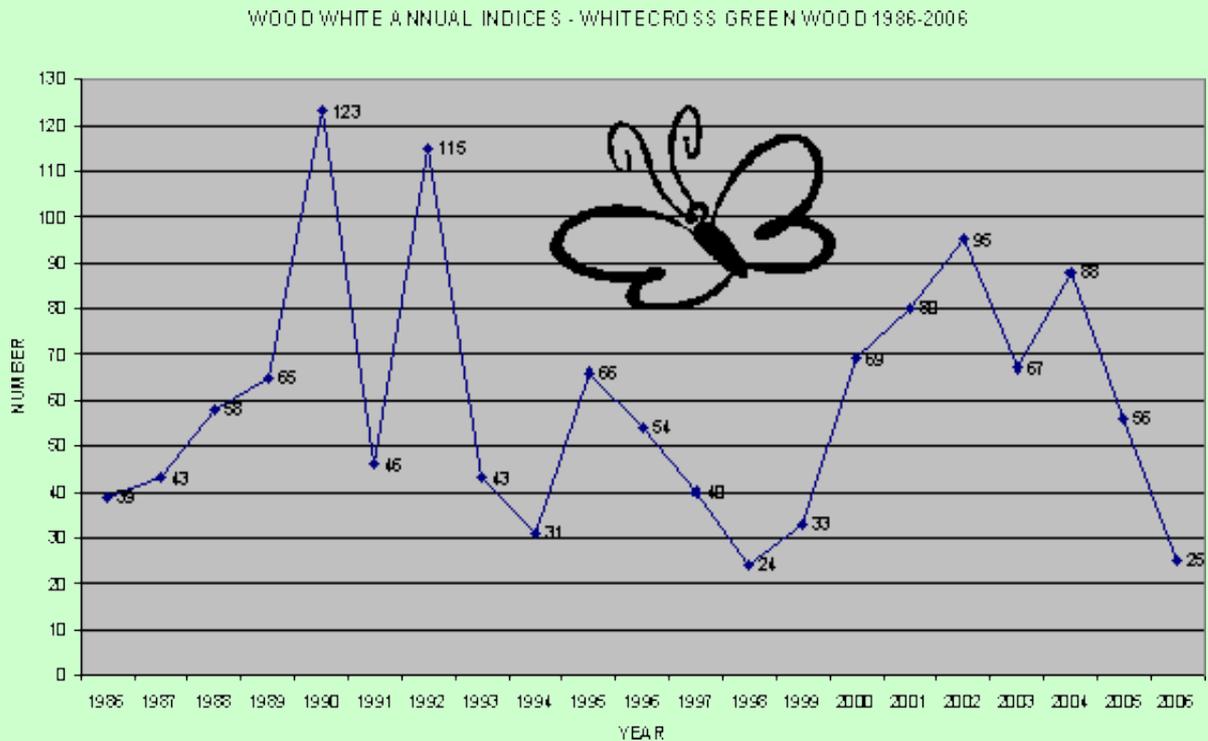
THE WIDER COUNTRYSIDE

I have contacted two other people who monitor Wood Whites.

Stephen Jeffcoate monitors Oaken Wood in Surrey. This wood has a good population, although numbers were down in 2006 but not as low as 1993 or 1994. I spoke to Stephen just before he went away for a while so will contact him later to see if we can get some more exact information by looking at his figures for these years.

Andy Patmore is a forester who monitors Wood Whites in several Forestry Commission woods in Northamptonshire. He does four transects a year in each wood during the Wood White flying season and regards 2006 as one of the lowest years he has recorded. He says Wood Whites have cycles of peaks and troughs. In his sites the worst slump was 1998 with another in 1993. They built up again in 1994–96 and 1999–2004.

Below is a graph of the annual Indices at Whitecross Green since transects began in 1986. The lowest numbers occurred in 1986, 1994 and 2006 with peaks in 1990, 1995, 2002 and 2004. Compare the Whitecross graph with the information from Oaken Wood and the Northamptonshire woods. On the basis of these figures my hypothesis is that Wood White populations, as with other Lepidoptera species are influenced by climate/weather while local habitats and management can ameliorate or worsen the effects.



Thank you to everyone who has provided records or searched without success. Please keep looking in 2007 and remember that for this species a negative result during the flight season can be as important as a positive if you are in a known or previously known site.

Thanks to Cliff Cooper and Tony Croft without whose patient technical help this report would probably have been written by hand. Special thanks to Stuart for ensuring that I never became irrevocably lost in the wilderness of Bucks woodlands.

Becky Woodell, February 2007