

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Purple Emperor (*A. iris*) Report for 2019

Martin Robinson

Summary of 2019

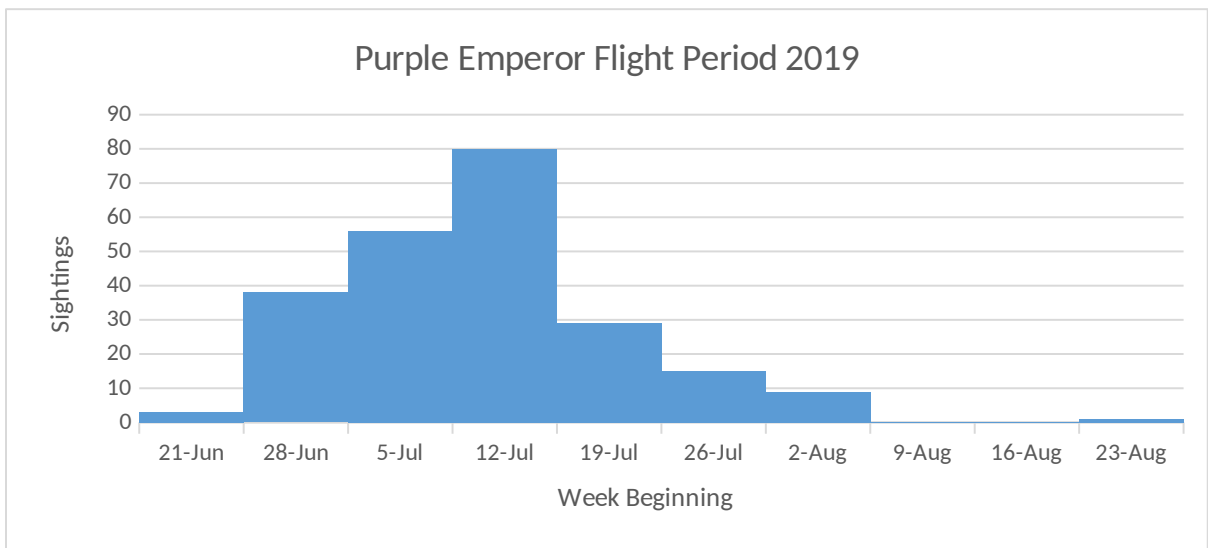
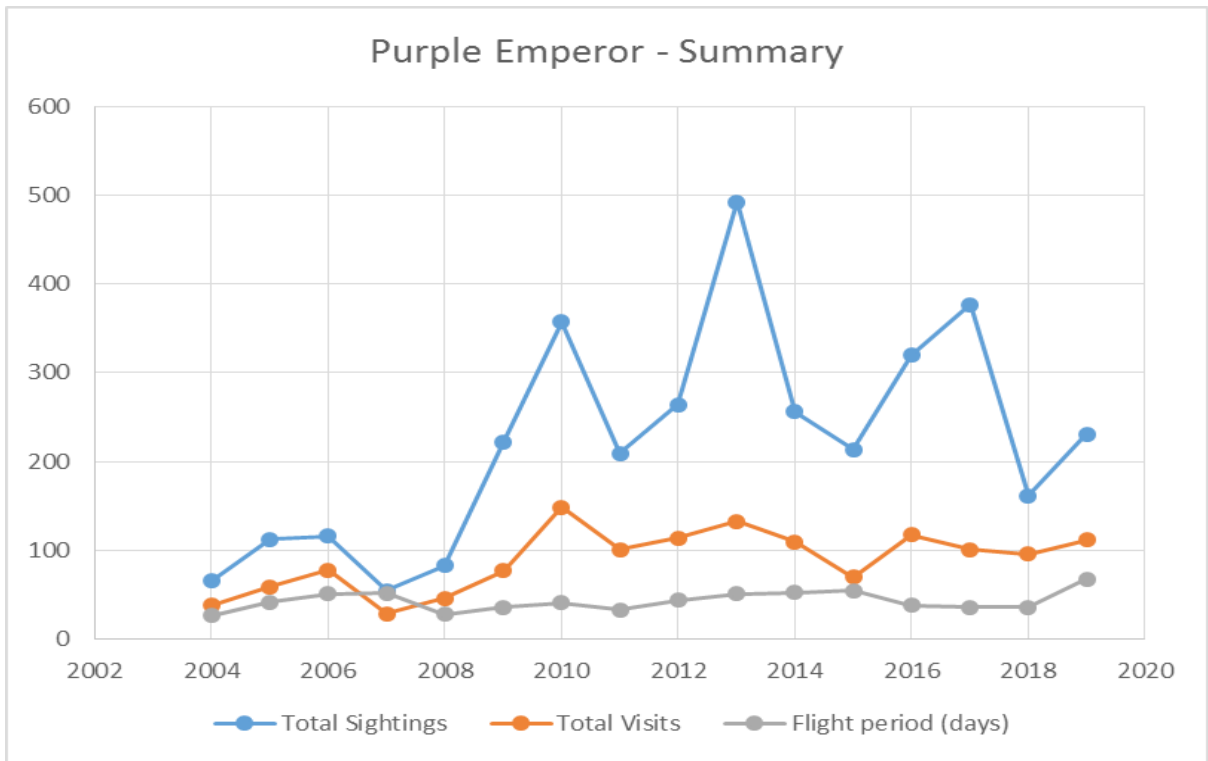
The total number of sightings was up compared to the previous year with 231 sightings from 112 visits (in contrast to 167 sightings from 96 visits for the year 2018).

Obtaining accurate population numbers for this butterfly is particularly challenging given its liking for forest canopies, so drawing significant conclusions about its population variations from year to year is probably unwise. Initial reports and anecdotal evidence indicated that perhaps this was going to be a relatively poor year, given the unseasonal wet and cold weather in June when the insects are starting to emerge from their pupae. However once the final counts were compiled, the picture was not so bleak. The data were obtained from three sources; sightings posted on the Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch website, data from 10km square observations, and separate records sent to the Species Champion. The three sources were compared and combined and any duplicates were eliminated.

Comparison with Previous Years

Year	Total Sightings	Total Visits	Date First Sighting	Date Last Sighting	Flight period (days)
2004	66	38	04-Jul	31-Jul	27
2005	113	59	27-Jun	08-Aug	42
2006	116	78	25-Jun	15-Aug	51
2007	55	29	19-Jun	10-Aug	52
2008	83	46	29-Jun	27-Jul	28
2009	222	77	25-Jun	31-Jul	36
2010	357	149	28-Jun	08-Aug	41
2011	209	101	21-Jun	24-Jul	33
2012	264	114	04-Jul	17-Aug	44
2013	492	133	01-Jul	21-Aug	51
2014	256	110	16-Jun	08-Aug	53
2015	214	70	14-Jun	08-Aug	55
2016	320	118	03-Jul	10-Aug	38
2017	377	101	17-Jun	23-Jul	36
2018	167	96	19-Jun	25-Jul	36
2019	231	112	21-Jun	28-Aug	68

The main flight period of the Purple Emperor ran from 21st June to the 7th August until a lone individual was sighted on 28th August at Prestwood Nature Reserve, just north of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. This had the effect of extending the flight period by 21 days to 68 days.



A couple of remarkable sightings were of an aberration – *Ab afflicta*, both seen in Bernwood Forest on separate occasions by different recorders, one on the 4th July and the other on 17th July.



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The Weather in 2019

According to the Met Office, the winter of 2018/2019 was milder than average. Most of the first half of January was warmer than average, but temperatures dipped in the latter stages of the month. The cold spell continued into the early part of February, but the temperature rose as the month continued and there were record breaking day time temperatures in the final week making it the second warmest February on record.

Spring 2019 was also warmer than average and at Easter the day time temperatures were into the 20s. At the end of April Storm Hannah arrived in the South bringing unusually strong winds. However May temperatures were lower than normal especially in the early part of the month, but the weather became warmer as the month drew on. Things changed again in June and the first two thirds of this month were uncharacteristically cold and wet. Fortunately the latter part of June and most of July was very warm and dry with temperatures frequently reaching above 30 degrees. August was also warm but more unsettled.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the people who sent in sightings. A large number of visits and sightings were made by Mick and Wendy Campbell and a special thanks to them for their dedication and expertise.