

# BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

## Brown Hairstreak Report 2012

Dave Wilton



Brown Hairstreak f.  
*Whitecross Green Wood - August 2012*  
Photo © Les Purnell

**Like many other butterflies, the Brown Hairstreak did not seem to have a good flight season locally in 2012, probably thanks to the good old British weather.**

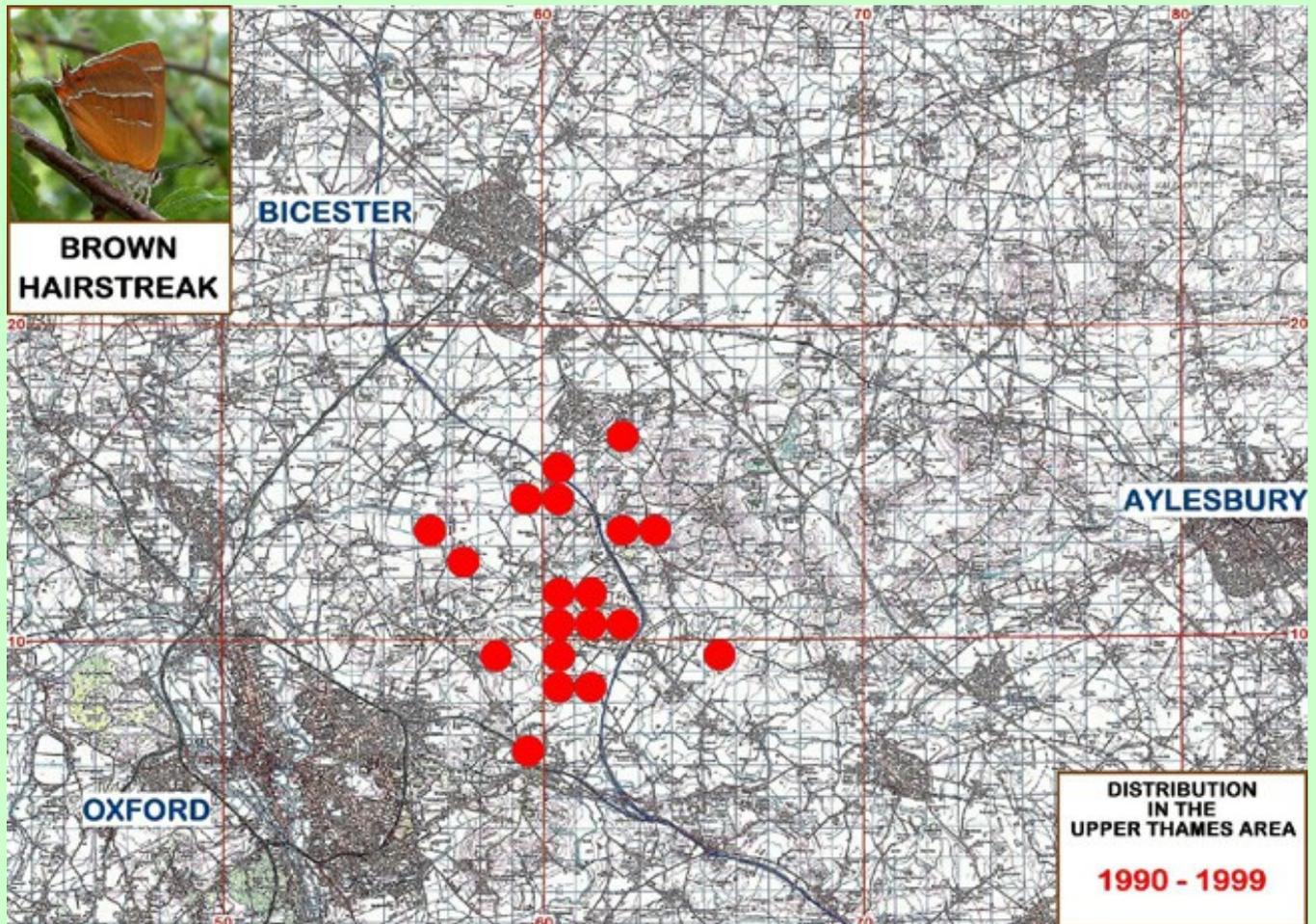
The first adult was seen on 8th August along Span Green, a green lane west of Brill in Bucks. The butterfly normally makes its first appearance in July and this was the latest 'first sighting' for ten years or more (nearly a month later than that for 2011). We also had far fewer adult sightings in 2012 than has been the case for some considerable time, with only 31 records from 23 different 1km squares up to 1st October. However, the butterfly is so notoriously difficult to find, even in good years, that this may not be a reliable indicator of how good a season it had. It is also the case that recorders tend to head for "banker" sites, therefore providing an unbalanced picture of its distribution.

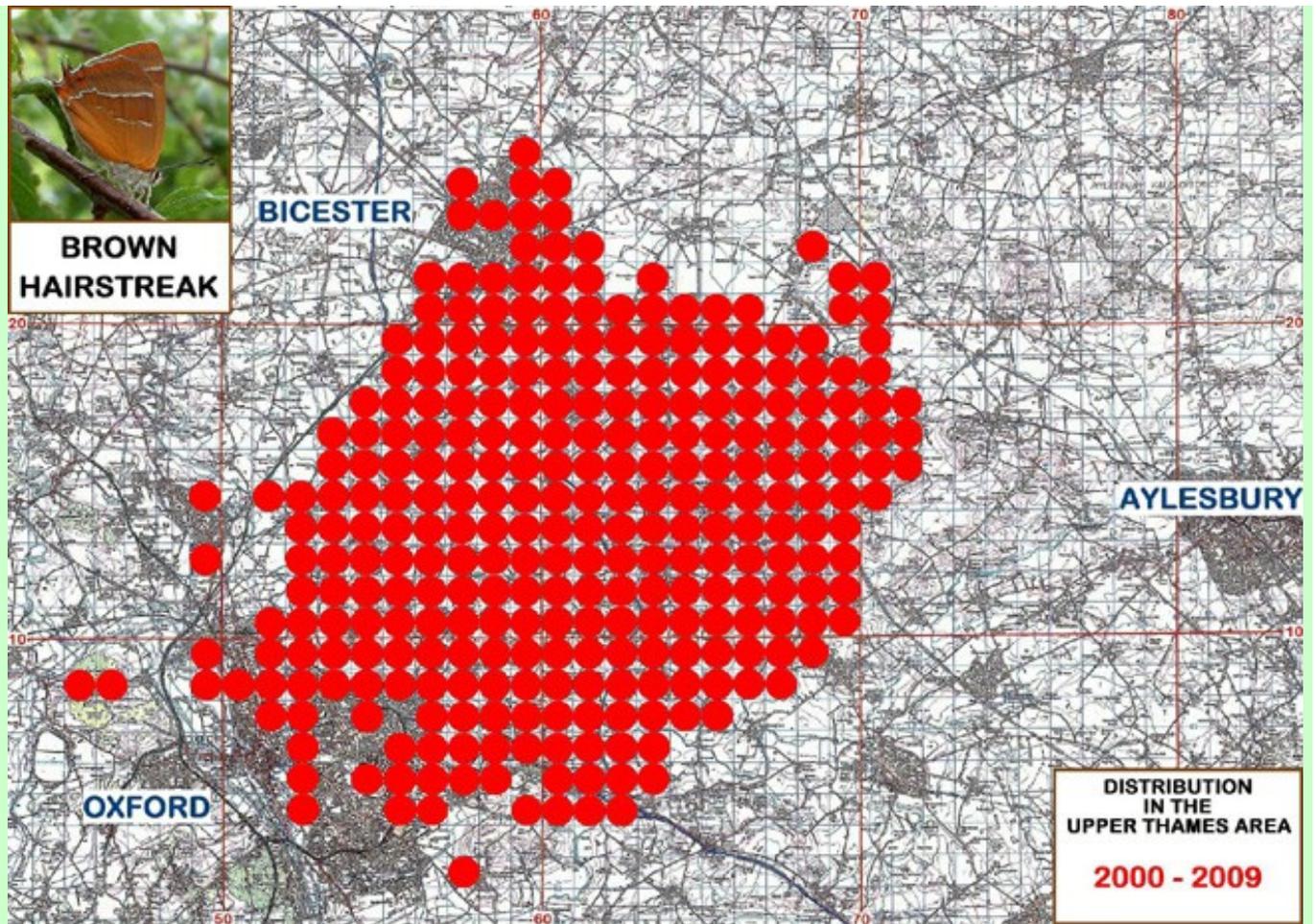
Winter egg searches normally provide a better indication of how the previous adult flight season progressed. While egg searches are still continuing as this is being written, it is already clear that the butterfly was active throughout the area in which it has been recorded in recent years so it obviously did rather better than our adult sightings would suggest. However, the general impression from those engaged in egg searches is that fewer of them are being found than is normally the case, suggesting that the females were perhaps more thinly spread.

It is still not entirely clear that we have succeeded in accurately mapping the butterfly's range locally (if indeed that is possible at all, because the boundaries must fluctuate to some degree from year to year depending on how far pioneering females manage to fly). The maps below show the recorded distribution by 1km square over two successive decades, but the substantial difference between them is more likely to be down to recorder activity rather than any significant expansion in range. A concerted effort to search for eggs in wintertime

did not get underway until the years immediately following the Millennium. Could the butterfly have been as widespread in the previous decade as it was between 2000 and 2009? Who knows?! With the amount of field work put in recently we must now be getting somewhere close to establishing the approximate boundaries of our local colony but the position of some of the more recent finds suggests that we're not quite there yet, particularly to the north-west of the range. A further 39 new 1km squares have been added around the edges over the last three years, including five so far this Winter, so the current total (as of the end of January 2013) stands at 336 rather than the 297 depicted on the lower map.

The Brown Hairstreak is thought of mainly as a species of the wider countryside, frequenting field hedgerows and woodland, but it is interesting to see just how widespread it can be in urban areas too. The butterfly seems to be just as much at home in the centres of Oxford and Bicester as it is in Bernwood Forest or on Otmoor.





Dave Wilton  
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