

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Adonis Blue report for 2022

Maureen Cross and Margery Slatter

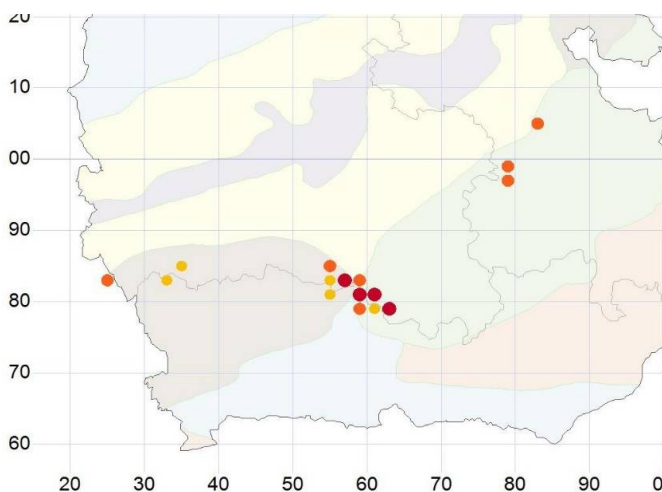
The Adonis Blue in '22

Our colonies of the stunning Adonis Blue had a reasonably successful year in 2022, especially at their strongholds of Lardon Chase, The Holies, Aston Rowant and Yoesden Bank. The earliest sighting was recorded at The Holies on 14th May, and the latest at Aston Rowant on 22nd September. This differs slightly from the comparable dates of 25th April at Aston Rowant and 22nd September at Aston Rowant and Yoesden in 2021, probably because of a later, chilly spring in 2022. The earliest date of emergence often also reflects a more southerly location and the latest sighting that of a more northerly one.

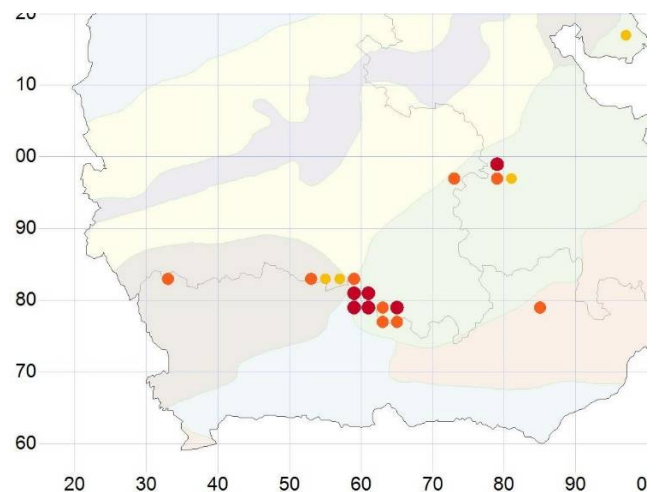


Looking at data from 1997 onwards, it is possible to see a trend towards the establishment of strong colonies further north in our region, perhaps indicating the effects of climate change (see maps below). The maps also show the decline in the number of strong colonies in the Goring Gap, some notable colonies having disappeared from around 2012 onwards due to changes in site ownership and management. Others, like Watlington Hill and Hartslock continue to produce patchy records of very few individuals. But there are a few possible new sites to keep an eye on in the coming years,

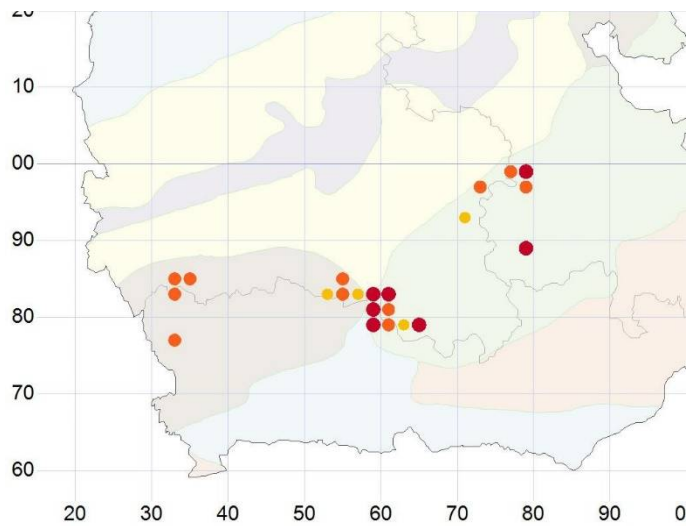
mainly to the east of existing colonies in the South Bucks Chilterns, and a possible 'revival' in the Goring Gap.



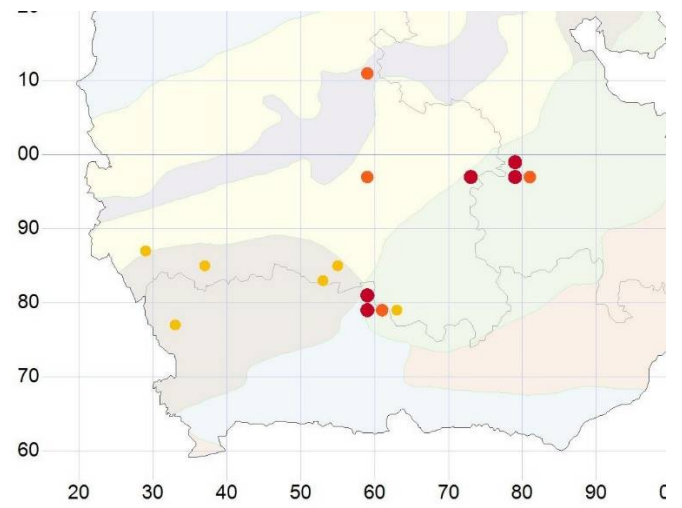
1997 - 2001



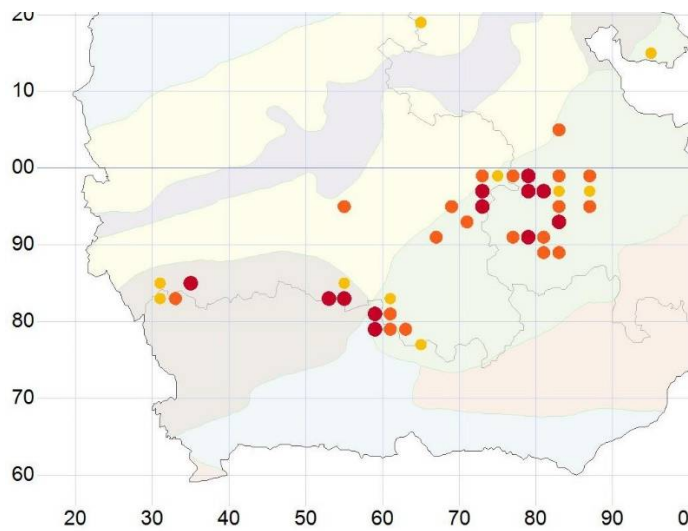
2002 - 2006



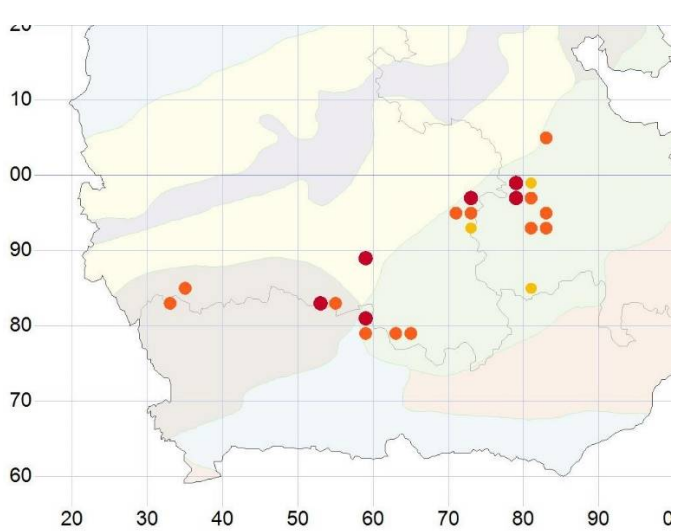
2007 - 2011



2012 - 2016



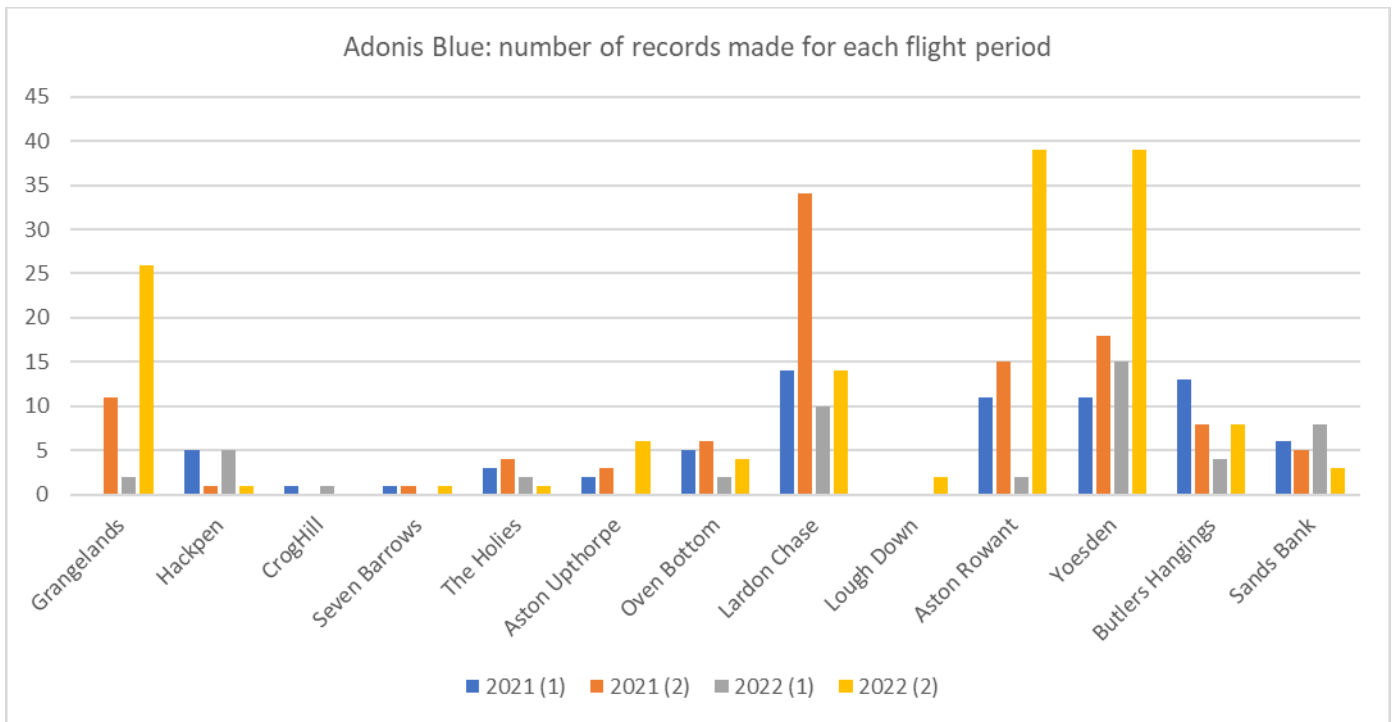
2017 - 2021



2022



The chart below (the number of records of Adonis in 2021 and 2022) shows the predominance of its stronghold sites and the more numerous second brood in many cases. The former is probably due to real numbers of butterflies but could be partially due to the preference of butterfly enthusiasts for a site where they are guaranteed to see something 'good'.



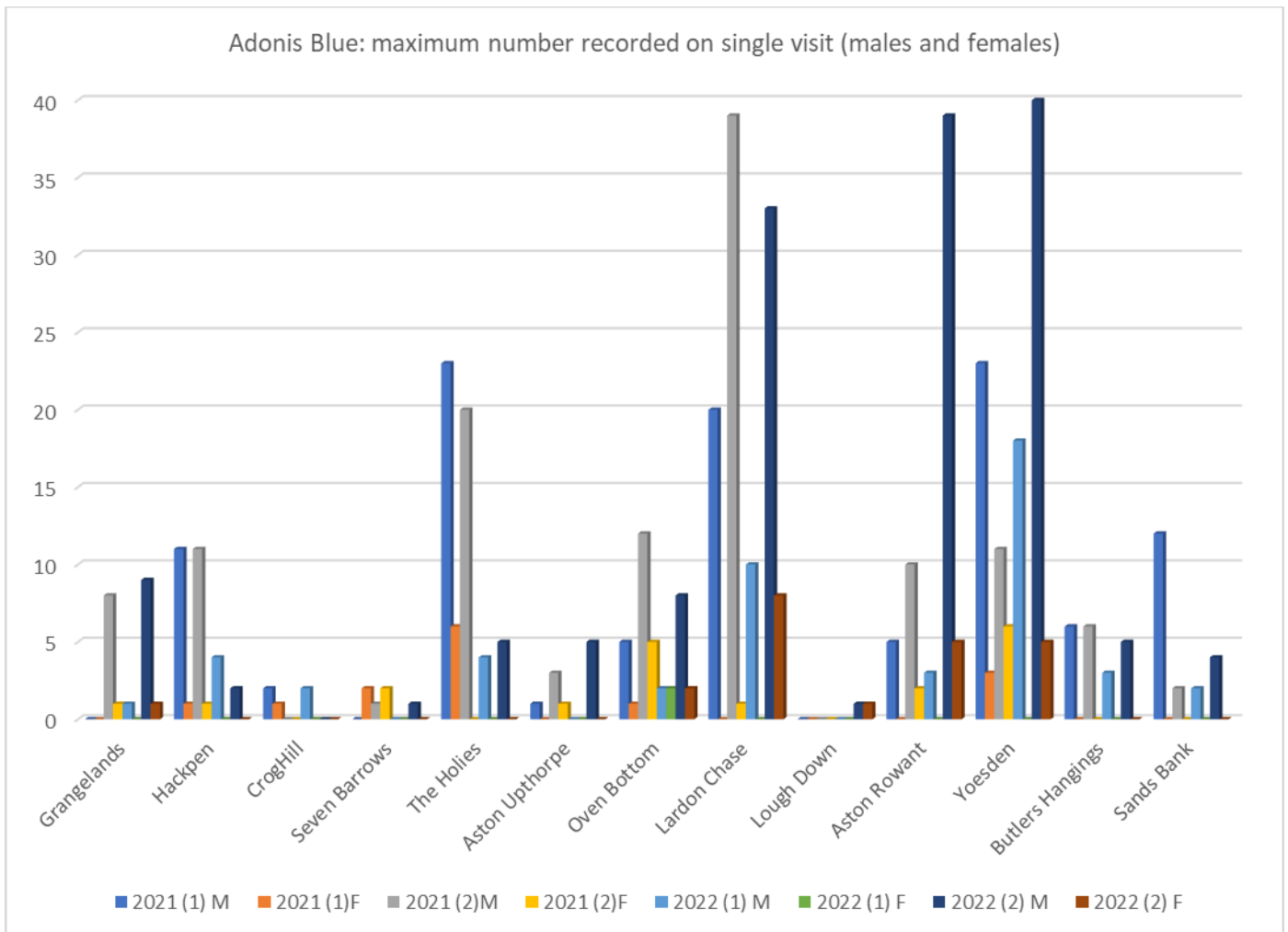
The 2017 -2021 map above may show the effect of Covid increasing the number of records received and showing a wide spread of sightings not replicated in 2022. Some of these warrant further investigation as potential colonies. Could there, indeed, be a growing wider distribution of the species, or is this sudden increase due to some enthusiastic misidentification, or even, in some cases, to clandestine releases?

Adonis Blue can be a difficult butterfly to identify, especially if it has been a while since you last saw one. A freshly emerged Common Blue can fool the unwary into thinking they are witnessing the full glory of the Adonis. However, once seen, the almost iridescent blue of the male Adonis is unmistakable and seldom forgotten. Not so the female, unfortunately!



Records of female Adonis lag far behind the males and, in several instances, persistent colonies have no records of females in any given year. This is patently unrealistic but shows how difficult it is to reliably tell the female Adonis from the female Chalk Hill Blue – so much so that some sites' data may only show females when mating is recorded. This makes it difficult to predict whether a colony remains viable.

The chart below shows the highest number of individuals recorded in a single visit in the main colonies of the Upper Thames area and the comparative paucity in the records of females.



The chart also illustrates how the right habitat conditions are vital to the success and viability of a colony. Take for instance the example of Lardon Chase and Lough Down. Lardon Chase is south facing, well-managed, richly floriferous chalk grassland with a well-established stronghold colony of Adonis Blue. Lough Down, the adjacent field, which shares its management regime and has a comparably rich sward, is north-east facing and clearly not favoured by the butterfly. Only recently have there been sightings in this area.

Lastly, but by no means least importantly, we would like to thank all those volunteer recorders who enable us to keep tabs on the health of the Adonis Blue populations in our region and who also contribute to the knowledge of their habitat requirements and management. Your continued interest and contributions are invaluable. We wish you happy hunting in 2023!

Maureen Cross and Margery Slatter – Adonis Blue Champions