

## Chalk Hill Blue report 2018

Our region's first reports came on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, from both Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. This seemed slightly late considering the warmth of July. The report from Berkshire described 16 Chalkies. These 16 were followed by similar numbers at that site over the next ten days and a few others flew at some of the warmest sites in the Berkshire Downs and the Chilterns, but widespread emergence from cooler sites was at least two weeks later. As we have said before, within the UTB, south facing sites which get the earliest sightings also lay claim to the latest sightings. We assume that a range of micro-climate conditions at these sites favour a staggered emergence over a longer time period (though it might be as they get searched more thoroughly).

In most seasons the flight period ends as September finishes. In 2016 a few Chalkies managed to hang on into early October. This was due to cool weather during the flight period. In 2018 we experienced very hot conditions in late July and early August which meant that at many sites the colonies were numerous as July finished but then only present in low numbers through most of late August and almost non-existent at most in September.



However, possibly for the first time, we had sightings of freshly emerged Chalk Hill Blue in the third week of October. A male and a female were seen (and photographed) on the 19<sup>th</sup> October and then probably the same male and two females were seen on the 21<sup>st</sup> (all at Grangelands Bucks). These butterflies were almost certainly members of a second brood, something that we assumed could not happen.

male Chalk Hill Blue Grangelands Bucks. 21.10.19 (photo Nick Bowles)

The unusually hot weather in July is presumed to have caused this to happen (a probable emergence of a small second brood was also observed at a site in Cambridgeshire); and it also led to males wandering many miles from their known sites. We learnt of butterflies in a lane near Oven Bottom (Berks.) and overgrazing was presumed to have made them wander away from their normal 'home', three were reported from Pitstone Quarry no. 1 (by Pitstone church, Bucks.) for the third consecutive year (although we know of no Horseshoe vetch foodplant there) and there was one near Maple Durham (Berks.) away from the chalk where they are normally found. Five males showed up briefly at Chilton (Oxon.) near an old colony site, though none had been seen there in the last thirty years and the furthest travelled was recorded at Stonepit Field, Milton Keynes. This sighting was c25 km from the closest known colony (Sharpenhoe Clappers in Bedfordshire) and shows how in lengthy periods of warm settled weather the males are very capable of dispersing.

However, despite the sightings at unusual locations and the strange second brood, there were not huge numbers of the butterfly (as sometimes happens) at most sites. In fact, at many, despite what seemed very favourable weather, the numbers were, at best, average. On the bright side, slightly larger numbers than in 2017, were recorded from a few key sites and steps have been taken to

improve the habitat at sites near Wendover Woods and Frieth (both Bucks.) to allow small populations to increase in size.



Volunteers clearing scrub which has encroached to cover a very large part of a slope near Frieth. It still has some Horseshoe Vetch, which supports a small colony; but it is in danger of being shaded out by the scrub

(photo Nick Bowles)

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