

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Chalk Hill Blue Report 2021

Nick Bowles

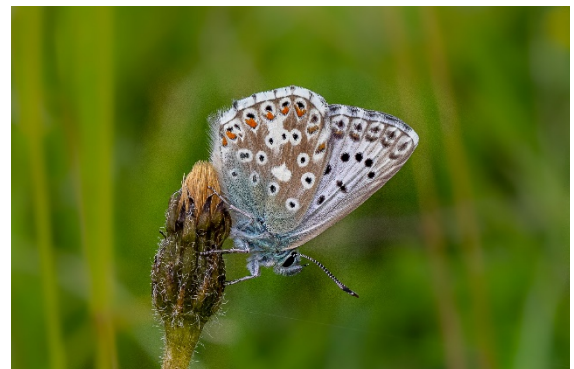
Fortunately, though several butterfly species seemed to suffer in poor weather in 2021 that did not include the Chalk Hill Blue, which appeared in approximately normal (for the last ten years) numbers at most sites and even showed some signs of spreading.



I am grateful to all of those supplying sightings detail and especially to those that keep me regularly updated as the season

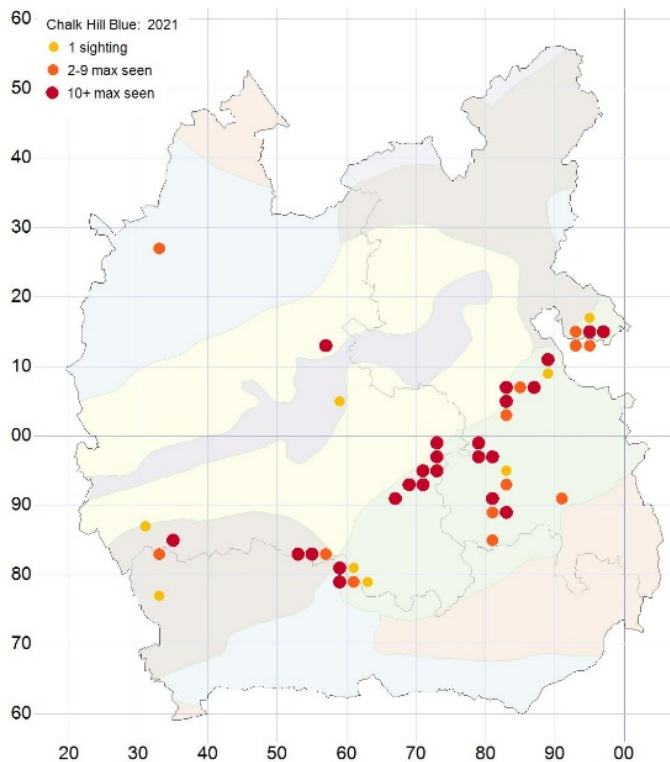
unfolded. It was sad that the number of reports was half that received in 2020. In 2021 I received 76 reports directly with a further c420 through various recording schemes, reporting 9,328 butterflies all combined. Again, a slightly lower number than the total number in 2020, but there were fewer reports so that would be expected.

The first in the UTB area in 2021 was 9th July (over two weeks later than in 2020) near Streatley, and the last on Sept 26th in the Radnage area. These are very similar dates to those in 2019.



As usual, the vast majority of the Chalk Hill Blues (Chalkies) were seen in early August, with none seen in June. 114 were seen in September, though just 12 after the middle of the month. This points to a slightly later emergence and a slightly truncated, flight season compared with most recent years.

Distribution of Chalk Hill Blue sightings



Dots show tetrads with records.

That furthest NW dot is considered to be a mis-identification. Some males are known to wander away from colonies so all isolated sightings are probably of wandering males. The apparent cluster of sightings near Bernwood Forest is a mis-typed grid ref. in submitted data and should be at Aston Rowant (in the Chilterns).

The map shows both where the butterfly was seen and where the butterfly's food-plant, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* persists on unimproved chalk grassland. We know from long term observation of sites with Horseshoe Vetch and no Chalk Hill Blue that the butterfly can (re) colonise areas that become suitable. For that reason encouraging the planting of Horseshoe vetch on sites close to and between existing colonies, is well worth the effort. The butterfly has now reached an area of planted Horseshoe Vetch near Marlow. During 2021 I was involved in 4 projects to get Horseshoe Vetch planted onto new sites in the Chilterns and there has to be hope that these and other similar initiatives will allow new colonies to form. Sadly, it has also (apparently) been lost from an area within Wendover Woods where trees have rendered Horseshoe Vetch too shaded and cold. At our own Holtspur Bottom reserve only males were recorded. All other known colonies persisted in 2021.

The reasons for with some sites experiencing upswings in numbers and others, downswings, in the same year are complex, so no pattern emerges to explain this. Provided that a team of volunteers continue recording the Chalkie, trying to visit all the known sites with Horseshoe Vetch, we might get some glimpses into the reasons. Overall, in 2021 numbers might have been very slightly lower than the average for the last ten years. Nationally, there was an increased abundance at monitored sites and numbers are roughly similar to those before a slump over the last 15 years.



My very grateful thanks to all those who contacted me with news (including of unsuccessful visits); I always welcome news of Chalkies and of Horseshoe Vetch growing in sites where it was previously unsuspected.

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