

# BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

## Chalk Hill Blue Report 2022

Nick Bowles

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

Chalk Hill Blue had another near normal year in terms of abundance and distribution, with some sites apparently doing slightly better in terms of numbers and others slightly worse. Overall, 2022 probably saw yet another slight fall in abundance. However, there were further signs of consolidation at sites into which the butterfly had been hesitantly spreading in the last three years.



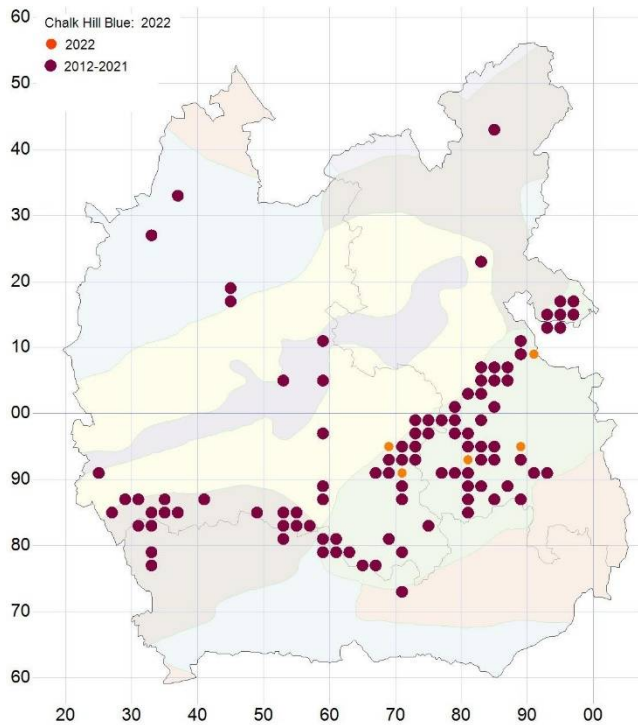
The first report in the UTB area in 2022 was quite early on 24<sup>th</sup> June (over two weeks earlier than in 2021) near Streatley and it was a week until there were reports of multiple sightings. The last was on Sept 19<sup>th</sup> in the Risborough area, apart from an apparent second brood individual weeks later, 18<sup>th</sup> October at Ivinghoe. These are very similar dates to those in recent years and we had at least three second brood individuals flying in October in 2018. The only other county that has recorded second brood individuals is Cambridgeshire (also 2018).

As usual, most Chalk Hill Blues (Chalkies) were seen in late July and early August. Despite the Chilterns being relatively narrow, north to south, there is a difference of about a week between the sightings in the south (e.g. at Lardon Chase) and the north (e.g. at Ivinghoe Beacon) Only five sightings were reported in September, far fewer than normal in this month. This points to a truncated flight season compared with most recent years and helps us understand how there were smaller numbers overall.



Horseshoe Vetch is low growing plant of sparse grassland, with narrow leaves arranged opposite each other along the stems. It flowers before the similar Birds-foot Trefoil and it is the curled seed pods that give it its common name - horseshoe.

## Distribution of Chalk Hill Blue sightings 2022



Dots show tetrads with records.

The dark dots are records over the previous ten years.

Red dots show squares with sightings in 'new' places.

Some males are known to wander away from colonies, so isolated sightings are possibly of wandering males. Those in the NW of Oxon may be wandering from the Cotswolds, which have colonies far closer than any of ours in the Chilterns and Downs.

The map shows both where the butterfly was seen and, in the Chilterns and on the Downs, where the butterfly's larval 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. Following planting of Horseshoe Vetch the butterfly has now colonised a site near Marlow. Planting has taken place since 2020 at various sites close to known colonies and we await the good news that the butterfly is back. Sadly, it was another year with no sightings within Wendover Woods where planted trees and tall scrub have rendered Horseshoe Vetch too shaded and cold. All other (known) colonies persisted in 2022. At our own Holtspur Bottom reserve, after worries as only males were recorded in 2021, there was a small population, including at least one female.



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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