

Chalkhill Blue report 2015

In 2013 the southern most populations of Chalkhill Blue, within the UTB area, were very large. In 2014 the season was much 'as normal' with no huge numbers and none that were abysmal. There was however, some evidence of expansion back onto old sites that had been abandoned in previous years



In 2015 the flight season seemed to start a little late and then continuing cool and often wet weather meant that it seemed to go on and on, but with reduced numbers everywhere. From a first sighting (about a week ahead of the next report) on the 4th July (Inchcombe Hole near Ivinghoe Beacon, Bucks.) the season spluttered on until a last sighting on October 1st (Kimble Rifle Range, Bucks.).

Once again, the species was recorded at all the sites with known, persistent colonies, including the UTB reserve at Holtspur Bottom.

Additionally, the species was found at several Buckinghamshire sites where it had not been seen for some years; including College Lake (where it seemed to be breeding) but attempts to find eggs laid by the female seen there among a few males failed; at Pitstone Quarry number One – with reports by several observers of males on different dates; at Buskers End where breeding was suspected in 2014 and at Aldbury Nowers (Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust reserve, about half a mile from the Bucks. border). Very likely this followed expansion in 2014 as there were none of the virtually annual reports of adventitious male Chalkhill Blue many miles north of known colonies.

Continuing studies at Pitstone Hill (Bucks.) suggests that the small colony there is growing in size, as its sole foodplant, Horseshoe vetch, has become more prevalent. On other sites, further south, which have had enormous numbers in recent years (especially in 2013) there were still large colonies but most had shrunk to perhaps 20-40% the size of the largest numbers in those best years. This finding was repeated at the Sharpenhoe Clappers site in Bedfordshire which has had truly enormous numbers since 2010 until this year, which was merely 'about average'.

Certainly the butterfly continues to occupy all its well known haunts and is managing to re-colonise a few sites that are enjoying more sympathetic management recently. However, without management of the sites it occupies the species could be in serious trouble. On many unmanaged sites, rank grasses are gradually replacing all the other vegetation types.