

# BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

## Purple Emperor (*A. iris*) Report for 2015

Dennis Dell



*Photo © Steve Croxford*



*Photo © Peter Law*

### Acknowledgements

Twenty members sent in their sightings from our region (see Appendix). Thank you for your efforts.

### 1. Summary

- There were 214 sightings [lower than average] in 70 visits, with a sightings/visits ratio of 3.1 [higher than average] occupying 33 tetrads.
- Ten new locations were reported.
- The poor weather delayed the main flight season by about one week. The first observations were on June 14th and 15th, although there were no further sightings until June 30th. The extended peak was between the 7th and 18th July and the last sighting was on August 8th.

### 2. Results and Discussion

#### 2.1 Weather 2015

**March:** The UK mean temperature was 5.5 °C, almost exactly corresponding to the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall was also average. Sunshine was well above normal.

**April:** The mean temperature was 0.5 degrees above the long term average. Rainfall was below average and it was the sunniest April since 1929.

**May:** In May the weather took a turn for the worse. The mean temperature was almost one degree below the long term average, with above average rainfall. Sunshine was slightly below average.

**June:** The mean temperature was slightly below average, as was the rainfall. Sunshine was above average.

**July:** At the start of the month, record breaking July temperatures were recorded in parts of the south-east. After this, however, cool and changeable weather prevailed, with rain and only a few dry and warm days.

**August:** The mean temperature was slightly below the long term average. It was a very wet month, with less than the average sunshine.

Overall, therefore, a rather poor spring and summer with few warm and sunny spells, the best weather was at the end of June/beginning of July.

## 2.2 Sightings

There were two very early sightings on the 14th and 15th June at widely different locations [Black Park and Rushbeds, respectively]. The season did not get going, properly, however, until the beginning of July. The peak of the flight period was rather broad, extending over a ten day period from about 7th July to the 18th. This is almost 'classical' when, in the good old days, the received truth was 'don't bother to start looking before July 7th'. A last sighting was made on August 8th. The total flight period was about 5 weeks.

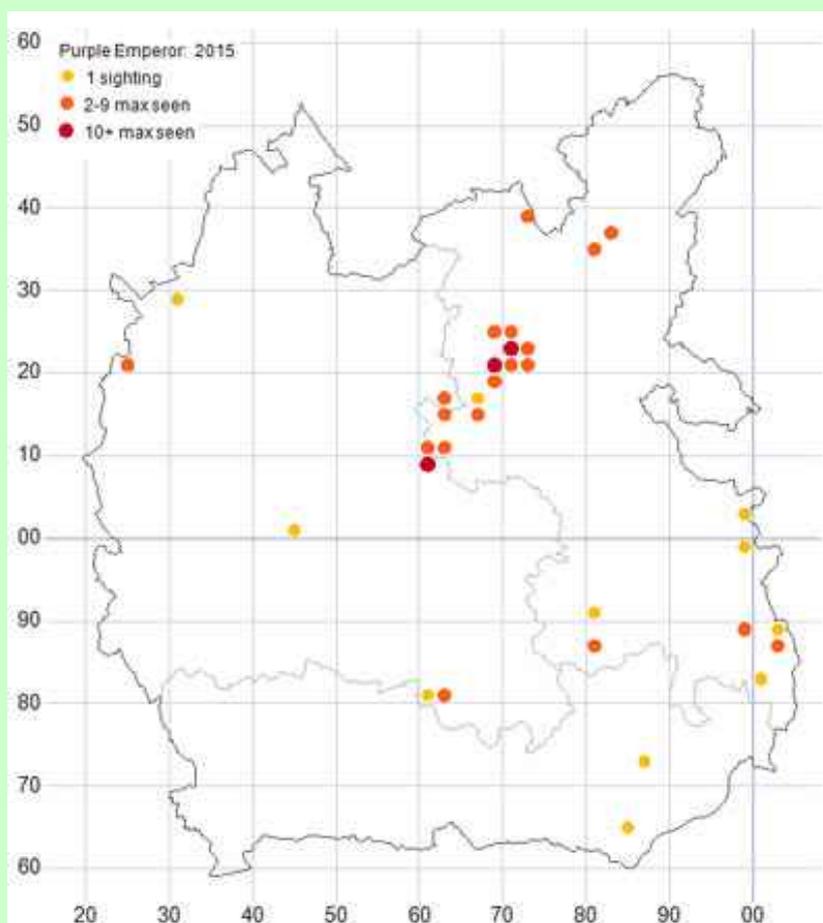
The number of sightings [214] and the number of visits [70] was well down on the numbers for the previous 4 years. However, the ratio of sightings to visits, at 3.1, was the second best. If we take out from the calculation the abnormally high 30 sightings on July 11th in one wood, the ratio falls to 2.77, which is still the third best ratio.



Blue = total sightings; Orange = sightings/visits

The main reason for this high ratio was the fact that ten or more sightings were recorded during each of eight visits between the 9th and 21st July. So, good numbers were seen in several of the established habitats.

Consistent with the overall low imagine numbers was the low number of eggs/first instar larvae found subsequently: only 6 in about 10 hours of searching in the 'best' locations. In a normal year, 15-20 would have been found in 10 hours.



*A. iris* distribution 2015

Clearly, a paucity of sightings from Berkshire this year and less than usual from the Chilterns. The two new sightings from the Chipping Norton region on the western border of Oxon are noteworthy, especially as there is very little woodland there.

### 2.3 Territories [male assembly areas]

Only if the same group of trees in a wood is occupied by males several years running would it be regarded as a territory. No new territories were found in 2015. On the other hand, we have sometimes found that a seemingly deserted territory will be reoccupied several years later.

All six territories described below are now well established.

- **Piddington Wood**  
The south east corner of the wood was well occupied, over an extended period, as usual.
- **Little Wood**  
The same applies as for Piddington Wood, to the large Ash and the surrounding trees at the top edge of the wood.
- **Finemere Wood**  
The area from the turning circle southwards to the Corsican pines at the back of the newly created clearing was again occupied this year.

- **Greatsea Wood**  
After a brief absence, activity was again recorded above the conifers at the highest point of Greatsea Wood. The tall poplars at the lowest point along the main track through Greatsea/Romer/Balmore woods was again frequented.
- **Rushbeds Wood**  
The Ashes at the edge of the wood bordering Laplands Farm Meadows produced a few sightings.
- **Waterperry Wood**  
Adjoining the established territory where two tracks meet a few hundred yards to the south of the northern entrance gate, there is a group of Oak and Ash trees where, for the first time, intense activity was recorded. Since it is very close to the established territory mentioned above, it may be regarded as the same territory.

## 2.4 'New' locations

- **Denham, private garden.** This sighting was about 2km south of Oakend Wood, where a sighting had been made a few years ago.
- **Denham golf course.** This is also quite close to Oakend Wood.
- **Great Chalk Wood, Goring.** The area to the east, between this wood and Sonning Common is heavily wooded, and also worth investigating.
- **Over Norton Park, near Chipping Norton.** This is a very interesting sighting, since there are no significant woods anywhere near this spot, just narrow strips of woodland. Increasingly, and not just in our region, this species is occupying open landscapes and is clearly not just confined to woodland.
- **Shenley Wood.** This wood is at the western edge of Milton Keynes.
- **Oakhill Wood.** This wood is about 1km to the west of Shenley Wood, so the butterfly would certainly fly from one wood to the other.
- **Cricket Field Grove, Crowthorne, private garden.** This location is about 0.5 km distant from Bracknell Forest, a very large forest from which sightings have been made in previous years.
- **Goring, private garden.** This spot is about 0.5km distant from the edge of Great Chalk Wood.
- **Bulstrode.** This is private woodland and parkland close to Gerrard's Cross.
- **Foxholes.** BBOWT reserve, west Oxfordshire.

## 3. Comments

This species is not endangered in our region because of well-managed BBOWT woods and certain privately managed woods where the owners are alert and responsive to the management needs of this and other species.

Sightings outside of woods support observations in other regions indicating that the Purple Emperor will inhabit areas outside of woods if there is sufficient Sallow and groups of mature trees close together in the landscape.

The most remarkable example of the above, was the observation of a male [dead!] at Over Norton park [not woodland] near Chipping Norton, the nearest woods being about 5km distant. Interestingly, some years ago, a sighting was made at Heythrope Park, about 5km to the east of Over Norton.

Dennis Dell

December 2015

## APPENDIX: Details of A. Iris Sightings in the UTB area during 2015

(Red denotes a new habitat)

DATE	OBSERVER	LOCATION grid reference	MICRO-LOCATION <sup>b</sup> grid reference	NUMBER SEEN AND SEX <sup>c</sup>	TIME <sup>d</sup>	WEATHER CONDITIONS	BEHAVIOUR <sup>e</sup> and comments
14.6	Jonathan Saunders	black park		1M	16.30	Hot and sunny	Swooped down from canopy, circled him a few times then flew back into Oak
15.6	Mick Campbell	laplands farm meadows	drover's lane	1			Gliding about 10 meters high, then disappeared behind a large oak.
30.6	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Little Wood	high point territory SP625158	1	13.00 to 16.00		first flight at 14.30; second at 15.20; another 3 flights by 16.00
1.7	John Benford	HamHome Wood	in cottage at western edge SP692191	1	14.30	hot and sunny	landed on tow bar of car, then flew up onto Hazel at wood edge; stayed for some minutes before disappearing
1.7	Harry Eve	Oakley Wood	Car park SP6111	1M	17.30	Hot and sunny	Settled on mud; disturbed by dog, but returned
2.7	Mick Campbell	Rushbeds Wood	SP6615; ashes along edge bordering laplands meadow SP6615	2		warm, cloudy with sunny intervals	flying over ashes
2.7	Julia Huggins	finemere wood	SP7222	3			flying above trees at end of ride by turning circle
3.7	David Hastings	bernwood	SP6211	3			

4.7	David Hastings	calvert jubilee reserve		1			
4.7	David Hastings	bernwood forest		1			
4.7	Huw Morgan	bernwood forest	main track 300m down from car park	1M			circled Huw, then landed on track on dog excrement for about 15 mins
4.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	piddington wood meadow	SP6316	1	16.00 to 16.15	warm and sunny	short flights over oak and ash
4.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Little Wood	high point territory SP6215	2	16.30 to 17.00	warm and sunny	chasing over ash territory
6.7	Francis Buckle	Finemere Wood	near entrance gate	1M			
6.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Greatsea Wood	highest point of wood SP715228	1	12.00 to 12.10	warm, sunny intervals	short flights over tall conifers
6.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Romer Wood	poplar tree territory SP714232	2	12.25 to 12.35		several flights over poplars and ash
7.7	Dennis Dell	finemere wood	along main track	3, 2M	10 to 11		one grounded near open area just past entrance SP720215; one grounded halfway along main track, SP719216 and one patrolling Corsican pines below turning circle SP718217
9.7	Cliff & Jack Buckton	Denham	TQ027870 private garden	1F	18.25	sunny 22 degrees	landed briefly on wall
9.7	Julia Huggins	Great Chalk Wood, Goring	SU624805	1F	16.18	bright and sunny 20 degrees	landed on path, probing the surface
9.7	Steve Croxford	Greatsea Wood	highest point SP715228	1M			mud puddling near entrance gate
9.7	Steve Croxford	Romer/Greatsea woods	SP714231 ride junction	3M			

9.7	Wendy and Mick Campbell	Bernwood Forest		4			
9.7	Campbells, Dennis Dell, Malcolm Dennis	Waterperry Wood	northern end SP6090609918	11		warm and sunny	aerial combats over ash/oak territory at northern end, including 2 females low down around sallows
9.7	Steve Croxford	Finemere Wood	SP718219	1M			
10.7	Richard Wheeler	bernwood forest	SP6211	1M		warm and sunny, 20 degrees	alighted on main track in dip by stream
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69842136	1	12.25		flying low along ride
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69852131	1	12.30		circling oak
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69952116	1	12.36		flying fast along ride northbound
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69922099	1	12.40		circling oaks
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP70112102	1	13.28		circling oaks
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69892066	1	12.50		working along tree tops
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69842049	1	12.55		circling the master oaks
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69792029	1	13.02		low down around blackthorn and sallow
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in North Bucks	SP69882032	1	13.10		low down, circled Dave twice
10.7	Dave Wilton	Private wood in	SP69962086	1	13.20		working along tree tops

		North Bucks					
10.7	Steve Croxford	Rushbeds Wood	SP667155	1M	am		oak edging near intersection of main ride
10.7	Will Jobbins	Denham	TQ043876		20.00		on path at edge of golf course; picked it up and placed it in a safe position
10.7	Julia Huggins	Great Chalk Wood	SU624805	1F			landed on path, taking minerals; took off and disappeared
11.7	Dennis Dell	Private wood in North Bucks	throughout the wood	30	10 to 11	21 degrees, sunny, breezy	frantic male activity throughout wood, mainly flying in and around sallows searching for females
11.7	Peter Law	Bernwood Forest	SP6111	2	am		above trees
11.7	Paul Huckle field meeting	Bernwood Forest	SP6111	4	8.30 to 11.30		one in car park at 8.30; another 2 hours later in car park flying high; one on main track just below car park; one flying high over trees at Piccadilly circus
12.7	Nick Bowles field meeting	Bernwood Forest	SP6111	8			SP612112: over the trees; SP610112: flying across ride; female landed on birch 3m up; male flew around her; SP611113: 2 clashing; SP612114: flew over crossroads; one flew through car park
12.7	Sarah Kettlewell	Over Norton park	SP3128 parkland with narrow strips of woodland	1M			dead, in perfect condition on public footpath
12.7	Martin Kincaid	Finemere Wood	turning circle and lower down main ride	4M		cool, breezy, some showers	3 sparring around sallows in turning circle, and one on fox droppings in main ride, staying for > 30 min
14.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Piddington Wood	meadow corner territory	4M, 1F	16.00 to 17.00	warm, overcast,	vigorous activity around willow,

			SP6316			sunny intervals	oak and ash
14.7	Tim Watts	Finemere Wood		3M, 1F	15.00 to 17.00	mostly cloudy, some sun	males above oaks, one landed; a female seen in Sallow in different area
15.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Romer Wood	SP7135023227 poplar tree territory SP714232 big ride junction SP7149322777 high point territory near top gate	5M 2F 2M, 1F	12.00 to 14.00	mostly overcast, but warm	clashing above trees  flying in and around sallow  males over conifers, female flying out of sallow, low down
15.7	Martin Kincaid	Shenley Wood	SP827364 north east ride	1M	16.10 to 16.20	warm, sunny, 60% cloud	3 flights above oaks; chased purple hairstreak; settled wings closed
15.7	Nick Board	Private Wood in Bucks		4	12 to 13.00	19 degrees overcast with some bright spells	one near layby at southern end entrance; one along eastern bridleway; two along main ride in wood
16.7	John Clough	Homefield Wood	SU812868	1F	13.00 to 13.30	warm, overcast, some sun	ovipositing; on sallow, took off, returned then flew off again; reappeared and landed on neighbouring sallow and oviposited 2 to 3m from ground
16.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Sydlings Copse	ash tree territory and sallows area	0	12.00 to 15.00	cloudy but warm	
16.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Piddington Wood	meadow corner territory SP6316	5M, 1F	15.00 to 16.30		males clashing, female flew along tree line and disappeared into sallow
17.7	Nick Board	Leckhampstead Wood	eastern bridleway	2			grounded taking minerals, and one landed on Nick's trousers
17.7	Dennis Dell	Finemere Wood	1] SP724217,2]	5	14.00 to 15.00	sunny intervals,	1] eastern end of section C [also last year] one flying at top of oak

			SP718218 3] SP718217				at 14.20 to 14.26, very dull; 2] at 15.04 one above oaks and willows just below turning circle; 3] three around top of Corsican pine territory from 15.10
17.7	Mick Campbell & Rex Carslake	Piddington Wood Little Wood Oakley Wood Waterperry Wood	meadow corner territory SP6316 ash territory SP6215 SP6111 Dell's corner SP608098	2M, 1F 4M 1F 4M	11.00 to 17.00	ideal	males chasing and clashing “ near car park around willow males clashing and chasing
18.7	Richard Wheeler	Bernwood Forest	SP6111	1	middle of the day	20 degrees, breezy, mixed cloud and sun	perched 10' up on willow for 2 minutes before gliding off
18.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Chinkwell Wood		0		hot & sunny	
18.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell, Dennis Dell	Sheephouse Wood	SP7015723634, glade SP7030123808 high point at northern edge, ashes and oaks	1 2	at 15.45 16.18 to 16.35	22 degrees partly sunny	flying rapidly through  perching and flying around ash and oak; clashing
18.7	Peter Ward	Cricket Field Grove, Crowthorne	SU847640	1 dead			heavily damaged on tarmac in front of garages
18.7	Julia Huggins	Great Chalk Wood, Goring	SU624805	1F	11.00	sunny intervals, 19 to 20 degrees	on a clematis leaf taking moisture; flew over and along hedgerow and back again
18.7	Julia Huggins	Goring	garden SU613807	1	15.30		flying up tree edge of garden, then over top of ash tree and reappeared a few minutes later to circle around tops of trees before disappearing in a northerly direction

18.7	Paul Elborn	Bulstrode	SU9888	2			Mixed parkland woodland, private
18.7	Mr and Mrs Benford	Ham-cum-Home Wood	SP6918	1	16.00	slightly cloudy, warm	flying around top of large oak at ride edge
18.7	Martin Kincaid & Helen Wilson	Oakhill Wood	SP815359	2M	13.15 and 14.00	hot and sunny 22 degrees	1 <sup>st</sup> sighting soaring over oaks and spruce in turning circle; 2 <sup>nd</sup> came low, landed briefly, and clashed with a second
19.7	Julia Huggins	Goring	private garden SU613807	1	10.30	warm and sunny	flying over and out of garden in a southwesterly direction
19.7	Steve Croxford	Piddington Wood	meadow corner territory	1			
19.7	Martin Kincaid	Oakhill Wood	SP815359	1M	12.30	intermittent sun	two brief sightings soaring above trees
19.7	Martin Kincaid	Shenley Wood	SP827364	1M	13.45	warm, sunny	2 sightings flying around head height
19.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Homefield Wood	SU8080687153	2M, 1F	16.00 to 17.30	warm & mostly sunny	seen at 17.10. above tall oaks, ash and willow; female flying lower
20.7	Mick Campbell & Dennis Dell	Home Wood	SP7159524467	2M, 1F	14.00 to 16.00	21 degrees mostly overcast	new territory, possibly. northern end of ride, flying around big willows and oaks and ashes
21.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Piddington wood Little Wood	meadow corner territory ash territory	3M, 1F 2M, 1F	13.45 to 14.00		males flying above territory, female into willow
21.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Woodeaton Wood		0	11.15 to 12.45		investigating new wood
21.7	Steve Croxford	Finemere Wood	SP71892175 and SP72002162	3			2 around tops of pine territory just south of turning circle; 1 oak

							edging further down main track
22.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Boarstall Wood	SP6313	0			
22.7	Dennis Dell	Finemere Wood	SP720215	1F	10.45 to 12.30	21 degrees, partly sunny	seen flying in and around oak at entrance , settling low down; damaged
23.7	Steve Croxford	Rushbeds Wood	SP66711551 and SP66851549	2	am		one on sallow at main ride crossroads, and then flew off; the other on sap run on same oak where we saw several last year
23.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Besselsleigh Wood	SP4513701300	1F	13.00	cloudy with sunny intervals	flying part way down big oak and taking sap several times
		Appleton wood	SP429008	0	14.30 to 15.00		
25.7	Dennis Dell	Private wood in North Bucks		0	15.00 to 16.00		4 eggs found
25.7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Little Wood	main territory	4M	12.15 to 13.45		chasing & sparring; in ash and 1 <sup>st</sup> single oak. They all looked to be in good condition
		piddington wood	vista SP629161 and meadow territory SP6316	2M in vista; 1 in meadow	14.30		
		waterperry wood		0	15.15 to 16.00		
27/7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Little Wood		1	2.30-4.15		Very cloudy & windy. 1 x PE short flight, blown out of ash tree!
28/7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Bernwood	Turning circle at SP627-107	0			1 egg found on sallow in turning circle.
29/7	Wendy & Mick Campbell	Little Wood		4	3.45-4.45		3 chasing & 1 perched, in main territory. Many flights between 3.45-4.45pm.
30/7	Wendy & Mick Campbell &	Little Wood	Oak tree near main	1	2.45	Sunny by 3.30.	1 x PE in oak. None in main ash

	Dennis Dell		territory				tree territory.
8.8	Una Fenton	Foxholes BBOWT reserve	SP257206	1	14.30		flew up and over the shady side of large old oak, settled on branch, moving along, opening & closing wings