

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Small Blue Report 2012

Dave Turnbull



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With favourable Spring weather Small Blues can be seen in late April but this year mid April was cold with night time frosts and the end of the month was cool with heavy showers and periods of prolonged rain. It was therefore not surprising that we had to wait until nearly mid May (13th) when Karen Saxl saw a single Small Blue at Upton and Andy Hoskins reported two near Pitstone Church. Around the same time last year at Pitstone (9th May), they were already in their hundreds.

The end of May was hot with temperatures in the mid to upper 20C and this seemed to push on their emergence as their numbers peaked around the first to second week of June, some three weeks later than last year. Just as their numbers were starting to peak the weather turned to being wet and windy and this can't have helped their breeding.

Numbers at Pitstone were in the lower hundreds at this time compared to the thousands of last year. Away from Pitstone there were only three other reports in double figures, Yoesden 10+, Seven Barrows 26 and 40+ at Upton Railway cutting. It is good to see what is obviously a good colony at this site at Upton.

By the middle of June numbers started to decline and the second brood, which we have come to expect in our area, were low in numbers in spite of the Kidney vetch being in such profusion.

There were some August sightings with the Hagbourne to Upton cutting producing seven and Pitstone eight on the 6th of the month, Swyncombe a single on the 9th with Pitstone providing the last sightings of the year, with six seen on the 20th.

Their flight period this year was about average at 15 weeks but well short of the exceptional 22 weeks of last year.

The very changeable, and sometimes adverse weather, had a considerable effect on Small Blue numbers and their ability to breed and also contributed to less sightings as it hindered many of us getting out and about.

We can only hope, as with many of our Spring Butterflies, that we have more favourable conditions next year to give them a fighting chance to redeem their low numbers this year.

My thanks to everyone who sent in their sightings.

Dave Turnbull
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