

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Small Blue Report 2014

Dave Turnbull



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The Upper Thames Small Blue season started on April 21st when Charlie Jackson found a single Small Blue at Pitstone Quarry. Pitstone's large colony often produces the first in the season even though geographically it is in the north of the Upper Thames region. Its high banks help produce warm microclimates and provide shelter from the wind which undoubtedly help this very small butterfly.

It was however another two weeks before I found two newly hatched ones at the same site and just over another three weeks before any were seen elsewhere. On this occasion it was a relatively virgin site for Small Blue records and that was our own **reserve at Holtspur.**

Numbers remained low at Pitstone and from Hagbourne, two sites that are usual in producing good numbers. I feel sure that this was due to the extremely wet winter which must have affected the ground dwelling larvae. Certainly Pitstone with its flat quarry floor would have been affected more than perhaps sloping hillside sites as numbers failed to be anywhere near normal for this site.

Just as it looked like a lean year for this butterfly, Brenda Mobbs reported 500+ from Bradenham, right at the end of May. Quite why this site suddenly produced such a large number while others seemed to be struggling, is a bit of a mystery. This now improves Bradenham's status as another UTB and nationally important site for this species and hopefully it will be managed and monitored closely.

Yoesden Bank produced regular sightings and peaked around the same time with a count of 50+ on June 1st with Bradenham having the same number on June 12th. By the 18th June sightings of the first brood were over.

Second brood numbers were low at Pitstone while Yoesden produced three on the 26th July. Amazingly a single Small Blue was seen at Holtspur on the 7th August by Wendy Wilson and it looked for a while that this would be the season's last, but just over three weeks later, on 2nd September, our last sighting of the year was reported by John Holdbrook from Watlington Hill. This was the third year out of the last four with September sightings.

Surprisingly there were no second brood numbers reported from Bradenham but it just may not have been monitored. Second brood numbers were well down this year and I think it reflects the fairly poor first brood numbers from most sites in our region.

Given the right, and simple, management this butterfly is very capable of responding in large numbers. When this happens they are more likely to look for new sites and given the right conditions, and not too far away, will set up new colonies. Lack of management is detrimental to colonies long term.

After five years as Small Blue species champion I am standing down and Karen Saxl has kindly agreed to take over the role. I would like to thank everyone who has submitted records to me or the website and hope you continue to do so for Karen.

Dave Turnbull

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