

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

White-letter Hairstreak Report 2015

Peter Cuss



White-letter Hairstreak
Photo © Peter Cuss

First and last sightings for 2015

The first sighting was 24th June, a date which is about average for this species. The last sighting was 17th August.

Total number of sightings recorded in the UTB area for 2015

I received reports of approximately (see below) 110 White-letter Hairstreaks from 26 different sites. The sites break down as 2 in Berks, 21 in Bucks and 3 in Oxon.

Buckinghamshire	Berkshire	Oxfordshire
Bradwell Iver/Swan Lane/Coppins farm Calvert Calvert sailing lake Newbradwell Cemetery Charndon Finemere Blue Lagoon Shenley Woods M.K. Loosley Row Homefield Wood Great Linford(3 locations) Road side elms at 737 240 Lane End Chiltern Forest Golf Club Bryants Bottom Kop Hill Farm Wood Wooburn Common Westcott	Maidenhead Thicket Purley	Pack Saddle Pub, Chazey Heath New Farm Whittles Farm

Challenges of recording White-letter Hairstreak

The problem with recording White-letter Hairstreak, in terms of both distribution and numbers, are twofold. Firstly this is a species that is very easily overlooked. I managed to find 3 new colonies in 2015 and see it in 3 previously known locations. However, some sites I visited 3 or 4 times before seeing the butterfly (I suspect these are small colonies) so a fair amount of patience is required! Secondly, determining the numbers within a colony is also difficult. For example, the colony I found at New Farm appeared large by White-letter Hairstreak standards. My gut feeling was there could easily have been 20 or 30 individuals; I could see groups of 2 or 3 in little spiralling flights right across the canopies of the three elms with individuals sometimes shooting off to disappear over the hedge on the opposite side of the road. But 5 was the most I saw at any one time so that was the figure I recorded. Another example was an e-mail I received which recorded "3 simultaneous (once), 2 simultaneous (5 times) and singles (21 times)". This is good observation and great for getting a feel for how big a colony is but how do you record that when compiling data? So I have almost certainly under-recorded numbers in bigger colonies when using the figures above. That said most colonies do seem to be small.

Conservation project for White-letter Hairstreak

2015 saw the start of a new UTB project aimed at conserving the White-letter Hairstreak in our region. There are two parts to this, firstly to get volunteers involved in searching for new colonies in order to get a better picture of the population (in particular I want to get a clearer idea of the population in Berkshire and Oxfordshire). An article regarding this is in the spring edition of Hairstreak and a dedicated page ([click here](#)) is on the UTB website. I hope to involve volunteers from other conservation bodies, as well as UTB members, which should help to raise the profile of the White-letter Hairstreak and Butterfly Conservation. Reading and District Natural History Society have kindly agreed to put a page on their website regarding the project and an article in The Naturalist.

The second part of the project is to plant disease resistant elms close to White-letter Hairstreak colonies and in the long term to monitor how successful each type of elm is in hosting the butterfly. Again, this is a good way of making people aware of the plight of the White-letter Hairstreak and the work we do as a Branch. I have been in contact with the Forestry Commission, BBOWT, The National Trust, golf courses and various councils. I have been really pleased with the very helpful, friendly and positive response from people. 2015 saw the first elm trees planted with more to follow next winter.

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March 2016