

SOMERSET LEPIDOPTERA 1993

BUTTERFLIES

We have again been reminded how critical climate is to some of our species of butterfly. The wet August and September of 1992 followed by a late spring and cool cloudy early summer in 1993 seems to have affected adversely many of our favourite common and rarer species.

We received only one record of a first brood Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus*, seen at the site of the Mendip colony on June 18. Searches by several people for second brood imagines failed to produce any further records. The Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne* was not recorded outside the Poldens and very few imagines were recorded at Great Breach Wood and Worley Hill reserves. No White Admirals *Ladoga camilla* were seen at Great Breach Wood and only a few at the Ashcott and Shapwick National Nature Reserve. The Small Blue *Cupido minimus* again had a poor year at Draycott Sleights with only fourteen individuals counted on the transect. This occurred in spite of a good flowering season of Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, the larval food plant. The numbers of Graylings *Hipparchia semele* on the hills was also lower but it was seen on Lydeard Hill on the Quantocks where we have no recent records.

Some common species also had a poor year. Numbers of first brood Common Blues *Polyommatus icarus* and Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* were low on most sites, but second broods made a partial recovery. We received very few first or second brood records of Holly Blue *Celastrina agiolus* or the Comma *Polygonia c-album*.

Rare species which had a satisfactory year were the Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina* which did well at Thurlbear Quarrylands reserve and was seen at the back of one of the greens at Pickering Golf Course. The Wood White *Leptidea sinapis* was also present in satisfactory numbers and gave us a new record at Chedington Wood on the Somerset/Dorset border. 1708 Chalkhill Blues *Lysandra coridon* were recorded on the Draycott Sleights transect compared with 2247 in 1992. The Brown Argus *Aricia agrestis* was seen only in small numbers in the first brood in most areas, but second brood numbers were satisfactory. It was also seen on four sites near Taunton and two sites near Wellington where neither of its traditional larval food plants, the Rockrose *Helianthemum chamaecistus* and Storksbill *Erodium cicutarium*, occur. The Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* was present in large numbers at the Mount Fancy reserve but appears to be close to extinction on several sites. The Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja* had a good year on Exmoor and the coastal heaths but we again had no records from the Quantock Hills. It is also at risk on the Blackdowns. The two national rarities, the Heath Fritillary *Mellicta athalia* and the High Brown Fritillary *Argynnis adippe*, were on most of the recently-discovered sites, but there is continuing concern about the survival of both.

Searches for the White-letter Hairstreak *Satyrion w-album* resulted in several new records. These include Sandhill Park near Bishops Lydeard where a small colony was found on several tall old Wych *Ulmus glabra* and hybrid Elms. The species has now been recorded on 28 km squares of the national grid in Somerset since searches started in 1988 when it was known to exist only on two sites. Searches for the Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae* also produced a small number of imagine records and a large number of egg finds during the autumn and winter of 1993-4. The species has now been found in more than 300 km squares since searches started. The Purple Hairstreak *Quercusia quercus* is proving less easy to record and only a small number of new records were received in 1993. Perhaps searches for the larvae will prove more successful.

Most of the common grass-eating Browns and Skippers and the Whites were present

in lower numbers. The transect count for the Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* was 2847 compared with 6591 in 1992. The Orange Tip *Anthocaris cardamines* was an exception and lane searches over the 200 km of ST 13 and 23, including the Quantock Hills in the squares, found the species present and laying eggs on 177 of the squares. It seems likely that the species may breed on all but the highest areas of the hills.

As one might expect, migrant numbers were low, with few records of Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*, Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui* and lower numbers of Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* and Large White *Pieris brassicae*.

After a reasonable showing of our resident Peacock *Inachis io*, most people saw only a few Red Admiral and our resident Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* and Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* in their gardens in September. At the end of the second week in October it started to get colder and the first frosts soon arrived, killing off most of the late-emerging autumn species.

MOTHS

The Scarce Blackneck *Lygephila cracca*, a Red Data Book species, was found to be breeding in Somerset during the summer. Although a previous search for the adults had failed, the larvae were found feeding after dark on the food plant (Wood Vetch *Vicia sylvatica*) in the Exmoor coastal woods.

Other interesting records for the year included Six-belted Clearwing *Bembecia scopigera* at Thurlbear Quarrylands and Green Down, Red-tipped Clearwing *Synanthedon formicaeformis* at Shapwick Heath, Jersey Tiger *Euplagia quadripunctaria* near Haselbury Plucknett and Water Ermine *Spilosoma urticae* at Kingsbury Episcopi.