

SOMERSET LEPIDOPTERA 1994

The 1994 butterfly season got off to a very slow start due to long periods of inclement weather in April and May. This was followed by a fine June during which butterfly numbers began to recover to reach a peak in late July and August.

Of our very rarest species, surveys indicated that both the Heath *Mellicta athalia* and High Brown *Argynnis adippe* Fritillaries had a poor year. No Adonis Blues *Lysandra bellargus* were recorded and only three Pearl-bordered Fritillaries *Boloria euphrosyne* were seen in the Poldens.

Of our rare species which fly early in the season, the Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae* and Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina* were recorded in lower numbers on most sites. This is probably partly due to the lack of recording during periods of predominantly wet weather. Duke of Burgundy were still on the wing at Mount Fancy in early June and eggs were also found.

The Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* seems if anything to have benefited from long periods of wet weather in autumn, winter and spring, although they were on the wing later than usual on most sites. Small numbers were also recorded for the first time on the new Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve at Huish Moor. The later flying Small Pearl-bordered *Boloria selene*, Dark Green *Argynnis aglaia* and Silver-washed *Argynnis paphia*

Fritillaries all had a satisfactory year and there were a number of new site records. The White Admiral *Ladoga camilla* was recorded for the first time for several years on the borders of Gilling Down.

The number of Green Hairstreaks *Callophrys rubi* seen were lower than in recent years but in spite of this we had a number of new records. Only a few White-letter *Satyrium w-album* and Brown Hairstreaks *Thecla betulae* were recorded. Our records show that since 1990 we have recorded eggs of the Brown Hairstreak on over 300 km squares of the National Grid, but have seen adults on only 15 km squares, most of which were close to a gathering site on the edge of Great Breach Wood.

Ian and Jo Burfield's report on the rare Small *Cupido minimus* and Chalkhill Blues *Lysandra coridon* on Draycott Sleights indicates that both had a good year and the report comments that their foodplants, Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* and Horeshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* also did well. 2,913 Chalkhill Blues, their highest annual count, were recorded on the transect at Draycott and there were good numbers at Brean Down, Stoke Camp and Westbury Beacon. Mike Edgington (English Nature) also discovered them on the hills above Wookey where they have not been recorded in recent years. The Grayling *Hipparchia semele* also did well at Stoke Camp.

1994 was a very good year for the commoner grass feeding Browns *Satyridae* and Skippers *Hesperidae*. The wet spring resulted in a later emerging date for some species but numbers were good. Anyone who visited Draycott Sleights on a sunny day in August was able to see clouds of Marbled Whites *Melanargia galathea*, Meadow Browns *Maniola jurtina*, acrobatic Small Skippers *Thymelicus sylvestris* together with Chalkhill and Common Blues *Polyommatus icarus*.

Very few Small Coppers *Lycaena phlaeas* were seen of the first brood and emerging of the second brood started in late July. Adults were seen in many areas through to mid-October.

Of the *Nymphalidae*, the Peacock *Inachis io* and Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* had a satisfactory year, but the numbers of migrant Painted Ladies *Cynthia cardui* and Red Admirals *Vanessa atalanta* were smaller than in recent years. Clouded Yellows *Colias croceus* were reported in small numbers in July and August. We also received enthusiastic reports of Monarchs *Danaus plexippus* near Berrow on 2 September and one from Aller on 1-3 August, also Longleat. We understand one was also reported from Lilstock in Dorset in August, so these were probably migrants not escapes. A Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* was reported from Ash Priors near Bishops Lydeard on 14 August.

1994 must go down as a very interesting year in which a poor early season was followed by a peak of butterfly numbers at Draycott, for instance, which had only been bettered in 1992 when there was one of the warmest Mays on record.