

Hertfordshire & Middlesex Butterflies

Andrew Wood

February 2016 (covering 2015 records)

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Cover Photo: Small Blue at Letchworth, Andrew Wood

INTRODUCTION

A relatively mild January and February were followed by a very mild and sunny March and April. However May was rather cool and wet. The summer months saw a very sunny June followed by another cool and wet late summer. The later part of the year was unremarkable in terms of temperature, sunshine and rain but November and December were very mild, although also rather dull.

We received 32065 records compared to 31786 records in 2014. Many of the recorders and records were again from the three weeks in the summer when the Big Butterfly Count was underway. As with any citizen science project there are some records that cannot be accepted but many of them are perfectly reasonable and help us to fill in gaps in the distribution of many species, particularly in urban areas, of which we have many.

Big Butterfly Count numbers are used to show the distribution of species, but have not been used for the flight charts as this survey covers three weeks in high summer and to have included them would unduly skew these charts.

Regular readers will also notice that the order of species has changed this year as has the comparison data. In both cases this has been because 2015 marked the beginning of a new 5 year recording period. I have taken the opportunity to use the new species order introduced in "Checklist of Lepidoptera of the British Isles" by Agassiz and others published at the end of 2013. The comparison data has also ben advanced 5 years for the flight period charts and the abundance and distribution listings. The format of the distribution maps are also slightly different as we are using a new version of the Levana software we use for our database

Please read and use this booklet and, if you are not already a contributor, send in your sightings on paper or by email to the branch record collator by November 9th 2016. Our branch website <u>http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/</u> has a very active sightings page and we welcome all submissions to this too. Anything sent there is added to the records received for inclusion in the branch database and this report.

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Species not included in the main section

Wall Brown Lasiommata megera

Phil MacMurdie reports that his accidentally introduced colony in Wareside survived into 2015 with three being seen in early September. This makes three years so far, but there is no evidence of any spread. A record of this species earlier in 2015 on the edge of Bishops Stortford proved to be just over the Essex border and no further examples were seen here.

Brown Hairstreak Thecla betulae

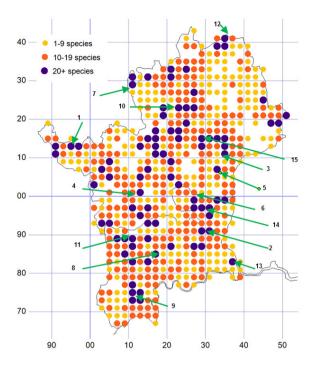
For a number of years we have had reports from a variety of sites in both Herts and Middlesex of possible Brown Hairstreaks since the last confirmed records in 1998. Despite searches for eggs and adults there has never been a sighting that could be confidently accepted. During 2015 signs appeared at Wormwood Scrubs suggesting that this species was present. However appeals for further information by email and social media and some personal communications have failed to provide chapter and verse on its presence or otherwise. If anyone reading this has any more information I would be delighted to hear from them as positive evidence of this species in our area would be very important.

SOME GOOD BUTTERFLY SITES IN HERTFORDSHIRE & MIDDLESEX

This is not an exhaustive list but a pointer to a spread of sites across our area

Мар	Site, Grid Reference, Brief details	Species of Note
1	Aldbury Nowers (SP 951129)	Chalkhill Blue, Dark Green Fritillary,
-	Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT)	Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak,
	reserve north west of Tring	Grizzled Skipper, Small Blue
2	Alexandra Park TL296901	Common Blue, Purple Hairstreak
2	Park around Alexandra Palace in LB Haringey	common blue, r urple nurstreak
3	Balls Wood TL 348106	Purple Hairstreak, Purple Emperor,
5	At Hertford Heath 2 miles south of Hertford	Silver-washed Fritillary, White
		Admiral
4	Bricket Wood Common TL131017	Purple Emperor, Ringlet, Silver-
7	North east of Watford	washed Fritillary, White Admiral
5	Broxbourne Woods TL323070	Purple Emperor, Silver-washed
5	A large complex of woods west of	Fritillary, White Admiral
	Hoddesdon and south of Hertford. Grid ref	
	above is for Broxbourne Wood west car park	
6	Fir & Pond Woods TL277012	Purple Emperor, Ringlet, Silver-
-	HMWT reserve 2 miles east of Potters Bar	washed Fritillary, White Admiral
7	Hexton Chalk Pit TL 107299	Chalkhill Blue, Dark Green Fritillary,
	South of Hexton, turning off B655	Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak,
8	Horsenden Hill TQ 161845	Meadow Brown, Small Copper,
	Bisected by Horsenden Lane North between	White-letter Hairstreak
	Perivale and Sudbury in LB Ealing.	
9	Hounslow Heath TQ141748	Green Hairstreak, Meadow Brown,
	Off Staines Road, Hounslow	Purple Hairstreak
10	Norton Green (Cannocks Wood/Watery	Marbled White, Purple Emperor,
	Grove) TL229231	Purple Hairstreak, Ringlet, Silver-
	West of A1M at Stevenage. Accessed from	washed Fritillary, White Admiral
	byways south of Norton Green	
11	Ruislip Woods TL080896	Purple Emperor, Ringlet, Silver-
	A complex of woods north of Ruislip along	washed Fritillary, White Admiral
	Ducks Hill Lane in LB Hillingdon	
12	Therfield Heath TL347404	Chalkhill Blue, Marbled White, Dark
	Downland west of Royston by A505	Green Fritillary
13	Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park TL367823	Silver-washed Fritillary
	Southern Grove E3 nr Mile End Central Line	
	station	
14	Trent Park TL280969	Purple Hairstreak, Small Copper,
	Near Cockfosters Piccadilly line tube station	Small Heath
15	Waterford Heath TL 318150	Brown Argus, Grizzled Skipper,
	HMWT reserve North of Hertford, accessed	Small Heath, Marbled White
	from Sacombe Road not via Waterford	
	shack local driving /narking /nublic transport dire	

Please check local driving/parking/public transport directions. These sites may be uneven and/or muddy so please go prepared.



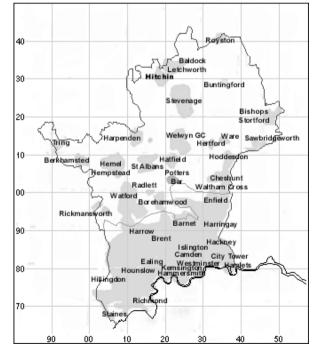
Squares Recorded and Key Sites

2 kilometre squares (tetrads) for which records were received in 2015

We have records from 569 out of 645 full or part squares in our area for 2015

Major urban areas

To put the position of records into context this is a map on the same grid of the major urban areas in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.



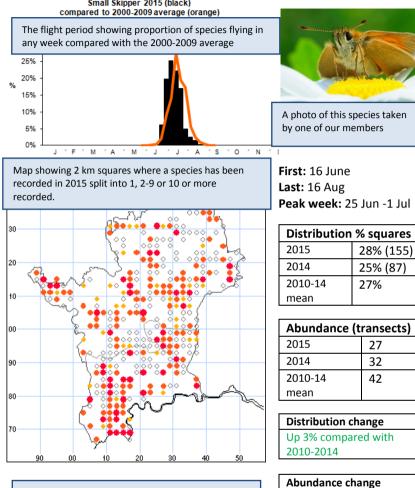
SPECIES PAGES – What each section means

Brief status for species

Common Name Scientific name

Small Skipper 2015 (black)

widespread but declining



Some notes on the species during the year, together with interesting or unusual observations

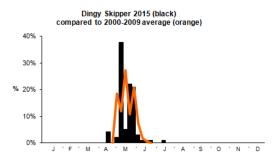
Down 36% compared with 2010-2014 **First sighting**

Last sighting

Peak Week when most seen Distribution % squares. The % and number of 2km squares with records in which this species was recorded Abundance (transects) Average number of a species seen on transects (so comparable year on year) **Distribution and Abundance change** compared with the recent 5 year period to smooth out year to year comparisons

Dingy Skipper Erynnis tages

Restricted and rare



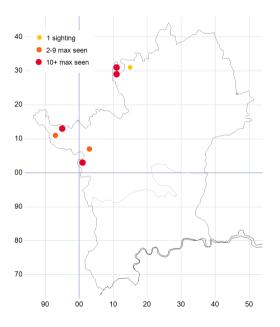




Photo Chris Benton

First: 6 May Last: 8 Jul Peak week: 14-20 May

Distribution % squares		
2015	1% (6)	
2014	2% (11)	
2010-14	1%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	11
2014	6
2010-14 mean	13

Distribution change No change

Abundance change Down 15% compared with 2010-2014

The Dingy Skipper was not recorded at any of the new, but probably marginal sites, where it was found in 2014. The abundance data must be treated with caution as the Aldbury Nowers Transect which contributes most data was unfortunately rather incomplete in 2015. So the drop is probably not as bad as it looks. Reports from Hexton of over 20 seen on visits in the Spring suggest that this is probably our strongest site, followed by Bovingdon Brick Pit and then Aldbury Nowers and Shrubhill Common.. There was one second brood example reported from Wood lane, Pirton in late July.

Grizzled Skipper Pyrgus malvae

Restricted & rare

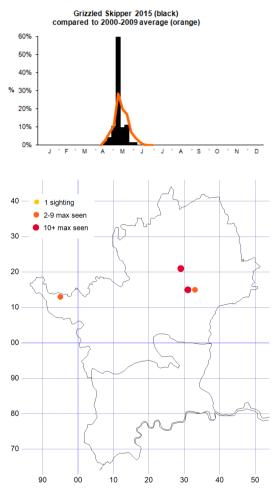




Photo Chris Benton

First: 21 Apr Last: 8 Jun Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares		
2015	1% (4)	
2014	1% (5)	
2010-14	1%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	11
2014	9
2010-14	21
mean	

Distribution change No change

Abundance change Down 44% compared with 2010-2014

The Grizzled Skipper's flight season was very similar to recent years. The very high peak is due to the highest numbers of the year recorded at a private site on successive days by different recorders, so probably many of them were the same individuals. Numbers at Waterford seemed low in 2015 but there were plenty of reports from both transects and casual visitors. It was not reported from any new sites in 2015. The limited coverage of the Aldbury Nowers Transect has probably inflated the size of the abundance downturn

Essex Skipper Thymelicus lineola

Essex Skipper 2015 (black) compared to 2000-2009 average (orange) 30% 25% 20% % 15% 10% 5% 0% м A s 0 N 40 1 sighting 2-9 max seen 10+ max seen 30 20 10 00 90 80 70 90 00 10 20 30 40 50

Widespread but declining



Photo Chris Benton

First: 18 Jun Last: 27 Aug Peak week: 9-15 July

Distribution % squares	
2015	17% (97)
2014	13% (73)
2010-14 mean	14%

Abundance (transects)	
2015	15
2014	10
2010-14 mean	13

Distribution change
Up 21% compared with 2010-
2014

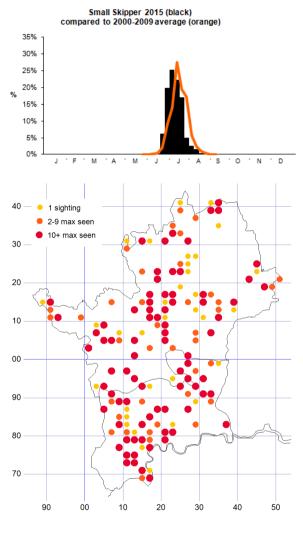
Abundance change

Up 16% compared with 2010-2014

The Essex Skipper has been declining in our area for several years and the recent report "The State of the UK's Butterflies 2015" shows that this species had both a huge distribution increase nationally but a also huge abundance decrease over the 1976-2014 period. Strangely 2015 at the local level saw an increase in both distribution and abundance compared to the previous five years. Whether this is a one off or a turnaround remains to be seen. It will be well worth seeking this species out in 2016 and making a positive identification based principally on the black <u>undersides</u> of the antennae. This is not easy but is best done on duller cooler days when these active butterflies are rather more relaxed in their behaviour.

Small Skipper Thymelicus sylvestris

Widespread but declining





First: 15 June Last: 22 Aug Peak week: 2-8 July

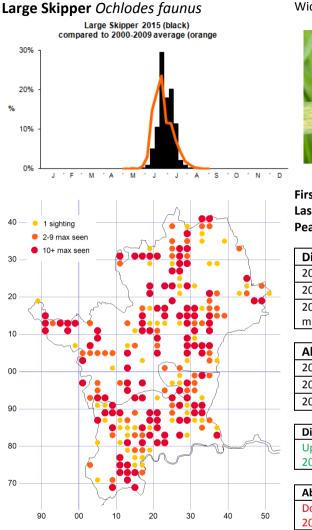
Distribution % squares	
2015	27% (151)
2014	25% (138)
2010-14	25%
mean	

Abundance (transects)		
2015	23	
2014	29	
2010-14	25	
mean		

Distribution change	
Up 8% compared with 2010-	
2014	

Abundance change Down 8% compared with 2010-2014

The report referred to in the Essex Skipper account shows a less drastic drop for this species nationally. However its local situation shows an increase in distribution but a slight drop in abundance. Its absence this year from the arable desert of north east Hertfordshire is striking but this has to be set against probably under recording from this area. Unlike the Essex Skipper it emerged slightly ahead of the longer term flight pattern, in contrast to the later than average emergence of the Essex Skipper. As noted in 2014's report the difference is possibly due to the different stages at which these two species over winter



Widespread & common



Photo Chris Benton

First: 26 May Last: 14 Aug Peak week: 25 Jun- 1 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	41% (234)	
2014	41% (226)	
2010-14	40%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	25
2014	27
2010-14 mean	29

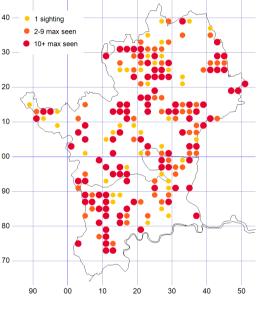
Distribution change Up 3% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 13% compared with 2010-2014

The Large Skipper shows very little change over the past three years, and is sustaining the advances made earlier in the century. As in 2014 the rotten late summer meant an early end to its main flight period. This coupled with a late start to the period meant that they were around for two weeks fewer than in 2014. The Large Skipper is one of those species that nowadays is as likely to be found in suburban Middlesex as rural Hertfordshire. It is much more frequent in gardens than the Small and Essex Skippers.

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Orange Tip 2015 (black) compared to 2000-2009 average (orange) 30% 25% 20% % 15% 2 10% 5% 0% м м n N Δ Т



Widespread & Common

Photo Chris Benton

First: 4 Apr Last: 28 Aug Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares		
2015	35% (200)	
2014	46% (254)	
2010-14	42%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	15
2014	16
2010-14 mean	21

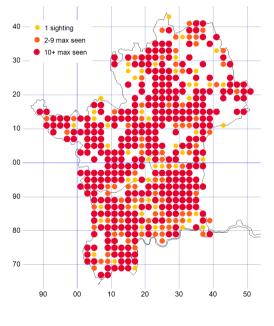
Distribution change	
Down 17% compared with	
2010-2014	

Abundance change Down 29% compared with 2010-2014

The Orange Tip showed rather a large decline in 2015. Much of this was probably due to the cold and wet later part of May which was not good for observers or butterflies. The mild winter did not produce a particular early first appearance but overall it still emerged slightly ahead of the historical curve. Most interestingly it was being recorded in greater than single numbers right through June and into early July with a record of 4 on 6th July at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. An interesting observation came from Harpenden where David Hunt noted, "one of the female Orange Tips showed a good scattering of orange scales along the apical costal margin of each wing, these extending down a short distance along some of the subsidiary apical veins".

Large White Pieris brassicae

Large White 2015 (black) compared to 2000-2009 average (orange)



Widespread & common



Photo Andrew Wood

First: 6 Apr Last: 11 Oct Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	83% (473)	
2014	69% (387)	
2010-14	67%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	59
2014	18
2010-14 mean	38

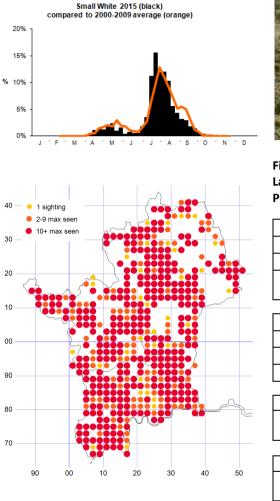
Distribution change Up 21% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 58% compared with

2010-2014

The Large White bounced right back in 2015 being seen in a huge number of squares for what is one year's surveying. There was little variation from the usual flight pattern, with the poor late summer seeming not to have much effect. It seems likely that we could record this species in every square without a lot of extra effort in the next couple of years. In the north eastern Hertfordshire "arable desert" they should be able to thrive around oil seed rape. This is providing it is not sprayed with neonicotinoids which are increasingly being implicated in butterfly, and bee, losses.

Small White Pieris rapae



Widespread & common



Photo Chris Benton

First: 23 Mar Last: 26 Oct Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	81% (459)	
2014	73% (405)	
2010-14	73%	
mean		

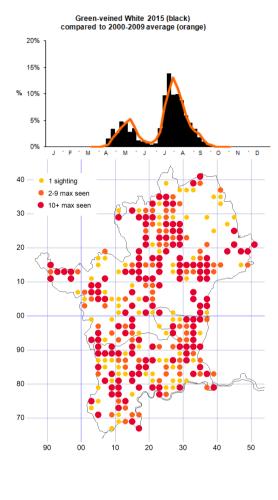
Abundance (transects)	
2015	66
2014	27
2010-14 mean	65

Distribution change Up 10% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 2% compared with 2010-2014

As in 2014 the fortunes of the Small and Large White are very similar with very wide distribution and healthy numbers, unless they are eating your cabbages! Unlike 2014 the Small White was on the wing longer than the Large White and they were seen in good numbers well into late October.

Green-veined White Pieris napi



pattern.

Widespread & common



Photo Chins Benton

First: 2 Apr Last: 12 Oct Peak week: 17-23 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	54% (308)	
2014	54% (302)	
2010-14	52%	
mean		

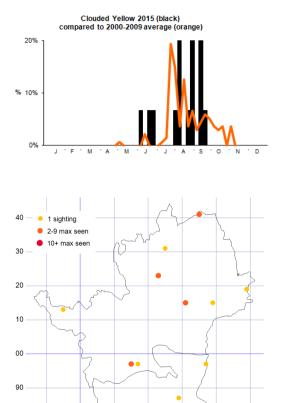
Abundance (transects)	
2015	36
2014	29
2010-14 mean	51

Distribution change Up 4% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 30% compared with

2010-2014 The Green-veined White changed little from 2014, numbers were slightly up but still below the longer term average. The reliance on wild food plants rather than cultivated means that its urban distribution tends to be thinner than the Large and Small Whites. However it is still a common and easily found species. Each brood emerged slightly more quickly than the longer term average but there was no real change compared to this historic flight

Clouded Yellow Colias croceus



80

70

90

00

10

20

30

40

50

Less common migrant



Photo Andrew Wood

First: 9 Jun Last: 22 Sep Peak week: 6-12 Aug

Distribution % squares		
2015	2% (11)	
2014	11% (59)	
2010-14	5%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	2
2014	1
2010-14 mean	2

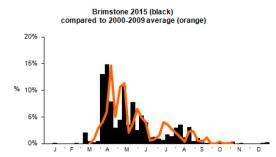
Distribution change Down 60% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change No change

There were only 15 records for this migrant in 2015. All but one of these was of a single individual butterfly, this accounts for the rather peculiar looking flight graph.. The hazards that butterflies face is shown by this comment from Steve Murray at Hilfield Park reservoir, "Aug 21st one ovipositing female, unfortunately the dam embankment used was mown very short in mid-September". Malcolm Hull noted the only multiple sighting, "Both of the CYs I saw were busy nectaring on Wild Basil alongside the Brimstones, unusual to see the two yellow species flying together ". Basically there was no real movement into our area of this species and the lack of spring records underlines the fact that despite the 2014 autumn records this species currently cannot survive a winter in inland south eastern England.

Brimstone Gonepteryx rhamni

Widespread





First: 15 Jan Last: 29 Dec Peak week: 9-15 Apr

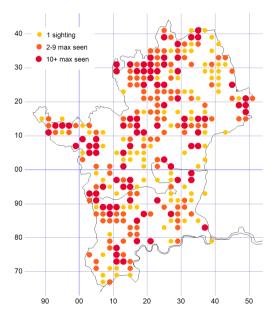
Distribution % squares		
2015	51% (290)	
2014	49% (275))	
2010-14	39%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	20
2014	19
2010-14 mean	21

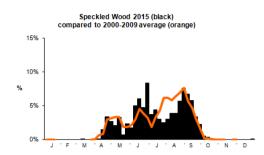
Distribution change Up 30% compared with 2010-2014

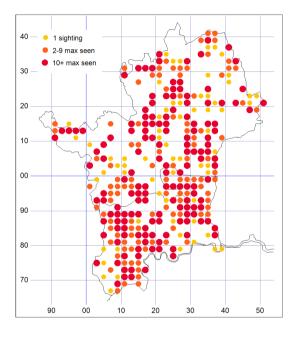
Abundance change Up 5% compared with 2010-2014

There was a very long flight period for the Brimstone in 2015 with both very early and very late records. The late records are associated with the warm November and December when they were probably more easily disturbed from hibernation. Interestingly the warm early spring saw an early emergence from hibernation but the poor late spring seems to have retarded larval growth as the summer emergence peaked late in August rather than July. Overall the Brimstone remains one of our least variable species. Good news comes from Leslie Williams who reported, "The Brimstone was recorded in the highest numbers of any year to date, on both Beane Hill and Fryent Country Park transects". These have both been walked since the 1980s.



Speckled Wood Pararge aegeria





Widespread & common



Photo Chris Benton

First: 10 Mar Last: 29 Dec Peak week: 25 Jun -1 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	56% (320)	
2014	63% (352)	
2010-14	60%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)		
2015	44	
2014	45	
2010-14	58	
mean		

Distribution change Down 7% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 22% compared with 2010-2014

Not an especially good year for the Speckled Wood with abundance and distribution down compared to 2014 and the longer term averages. It is noticeable that the distribution is now more complete in parts of Middlesex than Hertfordshire. In most years this species peaks in late August/early September and that build up of numbers is clearly seen above. However the peak week was at the end of June when the summer adults were well above historic levels, presumably some of this can be attributed to a later emergence following the poor May. The latest sighting on 29th December is exceptionally late as Richard Geary noted, "I was quite convinced I had gone mad today when a Speckled Wood flew past me, so I gave chase and confirmed my id. It was a fresh individual clearly confused by this unseasonal weather".

Small Heath Coenonympha pamphilus

Widespread

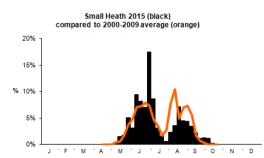
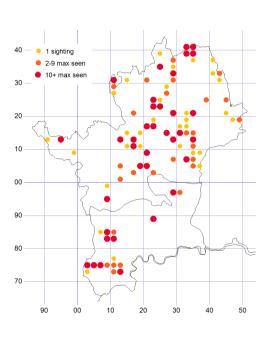




Photo Chris Benton



First: 4 May Last: 11Oct Peak week: 25 Jun-1 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	16% (93)	
2014	16% (87)	
2010-14	17%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	28
2014	23
2010-14 mean	38

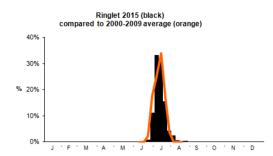
Distribution change Down 6% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 28% compared with 2010-2014

Not a great deal changed for the Small Heath in 2015. It still remains a butterfly that largely avoids urban areas being mostly seen in central Hertfordshire and south western Middlesex. The highest counts through the year were from Heartwood Forest just north of St Albans where it is thriving in the grassland and meadow areas.. Good news came from Len Crouch, "Set aside field immediately east of Twyford Bury Farm. I was pleasantly surprised to see a Small Heath. I have visited this location (TL494194) every July for several years and cannot recall seeing any Small Heath here in the last five years".

Ringlet Aphantopus hyperantus

Widespread & Common





First: 17 June Last: 22 Aug Peak week: 2 Jul - 8 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	42% (237)	
2014	44% (247)	
2010-14	44%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	146
2014	150
2010-14 mean	122

Distribution change Down 3% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 20% compared with 2010-2014

As with so many species in 2015 there was very little change compared to 2014 and not a lot of difference from the longer term picture. It remains a common butterfly in damper, shadier grassland areas. The three highest counts were on the Balls Wood transect where it is still very common (250+ recorded in just over 30 minutes) despite the opening up of the rides and the lessening of shady conditions. Its ability to spread into more built up areas is shown by this report from near Wood Green by Diane Andrews, " Surprised to see a Ringlet nectaring on Marjoram, first time we've seen one here". Diane also noted them for the first time at Lordship Recreation Ground in Tottenham.

Meadow Brown Maniola jurtina

Meadow Brown 2015 (black) compared to 2000-2009 average (orange) 30% 25% 20% % 15% 10% 5% 0% М М л 40 1 sighting 2-9 max seen 10+ max seen 30 20 10 00 90 80 70 90 00 10 20 30 40 50

Widespread & Common



Photo Tom Speller First: 4 Jun Last: 2 Oct Peak week: 25 Jun- 1 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	65% (371)	
2014	64% (359)	
2010-14	63%	
mean		

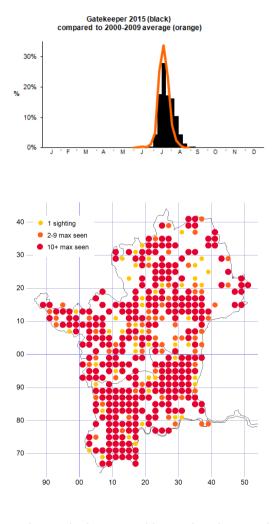
Abundance (transects)	
2015	217
2014	254
2010-14 mean	287

Distribution change	
Up 3% compared with 2010-	
2014	

Abundance change Down 26% compared with 2010-2014

The drop in abundance is noticeable. Emergence was not delayed by the poor May weather and if anything the flight pattern slightly advanced on the longer term average. The importance of grass cutting regimes to this species comes from Leslie Williams at the transect sites at Beane Hill and Fryent Country Park in Brent, "Meadow Browns declined compared with 2014; .. possibly as a result of problems with the hay meadow management in recent years and the lack of a harvest in 2014. During 2015 efforts were made to improve the hay meadow management. ...In future years it should be possible to start the harvest earlier in the season, thus reducing the risk of missed harvests. An earlier cut would also benefit the finer-leaved grasses used as the larval food-plant".

Gatekeeper Pyronia tithonus



Widespread & common



Photo Chris Benton

First: 25 June Last: 8 Sep Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	72% (411)	
2014	66% (380)	
2010-14	65%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	86
2014	83
2010-14 mean	91

Distribution change	
Up 10% compared with	
2010-2014	

Abundance change

Down 6% compared with 2010-2014

The Gatekeeper had a reasonable year but the map shows a denser distribution in suburban Middlesex than many parts of Hertfordshire and this may be a worrying trend It can thrive in parks and waste ground but intensive agriculture may be restricting it further out. Further years recording will help to see if this is just a reflection of recorder activity or a real retreat. Starting to fly a month later than the Meadow Brown it looks as if the later emergence and flight period was more affected by the cold May retarding larval growth.

Marbled White Melanargia galathea

Widespread in Herts

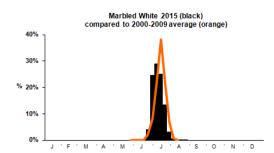




Photo Chris Benton

First: 15 Jun Last: 15 Aug Peak week: 2-8 Jul

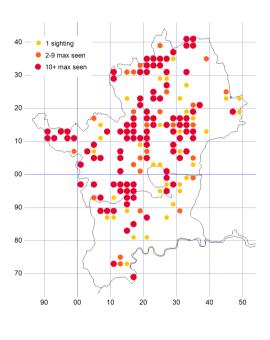
Distribution % squares	
2015	29% (162)
2014	31% (170)
2010-14	26%
mean	

Abundance (transects)	
2015	79
2014	131
2010-14 mean	91

Distribution change Up 11% compared with 2010-2014

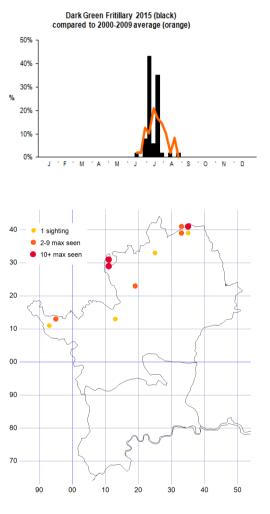
Abundance change Down 14% compared with 2010-2014

There was a noticeable drop in numbers this year, although it still remains well distributed across Hertfordshire and the less built up parts of Middlesex As in 2014 the highest numbers were seen in the Therfield Heath area and anywhere that is dry and grassy now seems likely to hold a colony of this butterfly. This can include clearings in woodland, they have been established in woodland pasture at Bricket Wood Common for a while and repeated sightings at Balls Wood suggest that the open areas there are now suitable for colonisation.



Dark Green Fritillary Argynnis aglaja

Rare but increasing





First: 15 Jun Last: 22 Aug Peak week: 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2015	2% (11)
2014	2% (11)
2010-14	2%
mean	

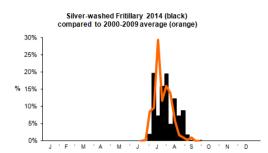
Abundance (transects)	
2015	2
2014	10
2010-14 mean	20

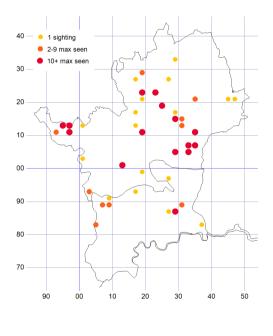
Distribution change Unchanged

Abundance change Down 80% compared with 2010-2014

The Dark Green Fritillary remains rare in Hertfordshire but it seems well established at the chalk grassland sites it has colonised over the last few years. These sites are Therfield Heath, Aldbury Nowers, Tring Park and Hexton Chalk Pit. Odd ones are also sometimes seen on other chalk areas such as Telegraph Hill, Wood Lane, Pirton and Weston Hills.. At first sight the drop in abundance looks alarming but this is because the Aldbury Nowers Transect was rather incomplete in 2015 and it is numbers on that survey that are a significant part of the data that this number is based on.

Silver-washed Fritillary Argynnis paphia





Locally common in woodland



Photo Chris Benton

First: 29 Jun Last: 19 Sept Peak week: 2-8 July

Distribution % squares	
2015	7% (42)
2014	6% (32)
2010-14	6%
mean	

Abundance (transects)	
2015	17
2014	19
2010-14 mean	13

Distribution change	
Up 16% compared with	
2010-2014	

Abundance change Up 30% compared with 2010-2014

The march of the Silver-washed Fritillary continues and it can now be expected in most woodlands of any size across both counties. The poor August did not seem to have so much of an effect on flight as it did in 2014 and it was still flying strongly throughout August unlike the previous year. It appeared at a number of new sites such as Monken Hadley Common. It also appears in less likely places for instance Chris Bessant had a garden visitor at Maple Cross, "Yesterday lunchtime 7th August 2015, I saw a very tatty female Silver-washed Fritillary briefly visit and land in it "

White Admiral Limenitis camilla

40

30

20

10

00

90

80

70

90

00

10

20

30

40

50

1 sighting 2-9 max seen 10+ max seen

Local in woodland

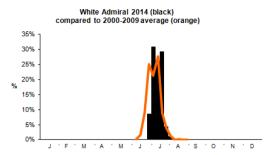




Photo Chris Benton

First: 27 Jun Last: 3 Aug Peak week: 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2015	4% (20)
2014	3% (16)
2010-14	3%
mean	

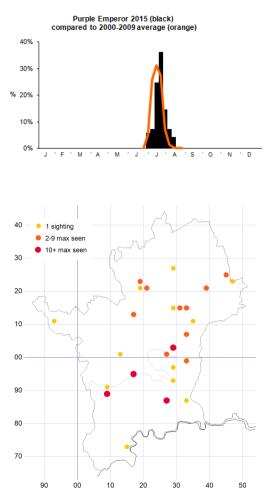
Abundance (transects)	
2015	8
2014	9
2010-14 mean	15

Distribution change Up 25% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 45% compared with 2010-2014

The White Admiral appears to have dropped seriously in numbers again, this is noticeable on sites with transect records such as Balls Wood where there were some summer weeks where it was not recorded on the walk. Higher numbers were recorded only at Bricket Wood Common which is definitely its stronghold. There were no records from the Knebworth Woods complex or several of the Broxbourne Woods complex squares. Commenting on Symondshyde David Hunt prophetically noted, "Disappointing to see so few White Admiral - maybe a late emergence is due, but it is beginning to look like they had a poor winter/spring ". One odd record was a wandering example in Ware, not the first time this has happened but where it was coming from or going to we have no idea.

Purple Emperor Apatura iris



Local in woodland



Photo Andrew Wood

First: 30 Jun Last: 9 Aug Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	4% (23)	
2014	4% (23)	
2010-14	4%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	1
2014	1
2010-14 mean	2

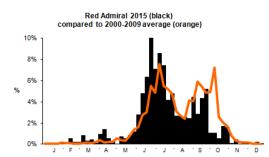
Distribution change No change

Abundance change Too little data to calculate

The Purple Emperor continues to fascinate recorders and to be more widely distributed than the White Admiral. It has continued to advance into Middlesex with records from a newly identified territory at Hampstead Heath and odd records from Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington and a garden in Twickenham. The Twickenham record probably originating in Richmond Park just south of the Thames. The new mapping software adds all sightings together in any square so the appearance of red 10+ max seen dots at several locations does not necessarily mean a large count, but that there may have been several sightings of a few individuals.

Red Admiral Vanessa atalanta

Common migrant



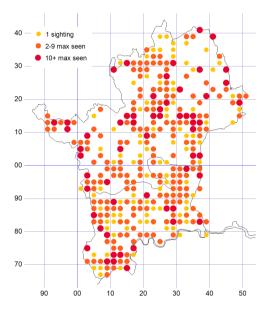




Photo Chris Benton

First: 9 Jan Last: 28 Dec Peak week: 25 Jun -1 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	58% (332)	
2014	66% (369)	
2010-14	59%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	6
2014	8
2010-14 mean	11

Distribution change Down 2% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 45% compared with 2010-2014

A fairly average year in terms of distribution, though numbers were well down on 2014 and the longer term average. The ability of this species to now survive the British winter is shown by the number of winter and spring records, well above the longer term trends. The main summer peak was also ahead of the average and some of this may have been due to home breeding as well as migration.. The numbers around in the autumn were very low,.suggesting some combination of no further migration and poor breeding success in the poor late summer. We had no records of it being seen in double figures at any site. At Tottenham cemetery Diane Andrews noted, "plenty of ivy in flower on 11th and 31st October but still only one Red Admiral".

Painted Lady Vanessa cardui

40

30

20

10

00

90

80

70

90

00

10

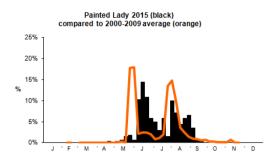
20

30

1 sighting 2-9 max seen

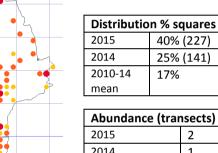
10+ max seen

Variable migrant





First: 10 Apr Last: 23 Sep Peak week: 11-17 Jun



2015	2
2014	1
2010-14 mean	4

Distribution change Up 134% compared with 2010-2014

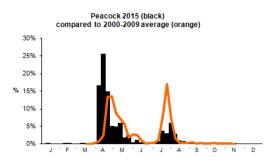
Abundance change Too little data to calculate

Unlike the other migrants the Painted Lady had a much better year, presumably a reflection of good conditions in the northern African winter. Apart from a few individual early records, the initial wave was in early June and it looks like there was a home bred generation that emerged in August flying until mid September. It looks like they did not produce an autumn generation, possibly because of the poor weather during this second flight.

40

50

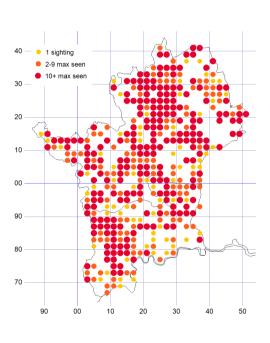
Peacock Inachis io





Common & Widespread

Photo Andrew Wood



First: 14 Jan Last: 12 Nov Peak week: 9-15 Apr

Distribution % squares		
2015	71% (406)	
2014	75% (421)	
2010-14	62%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	37
2014	43
2010-14 mean	27

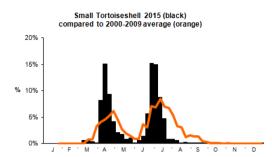
Distribution change Up 15% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 35% compared with 2010-2014

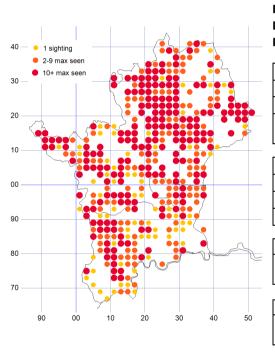
A slight drop from 2014 but this species is still well above the longer term averages and there seems little cause for concern. The flight chart above needs to be explained. The high early peak reflects an early emergence from hibernation followed by a rapid dropping off of records during the poor conditions in May. Unlike 2014 when there was a very short summer flight the emergence was more spread out and there were more records than usual of active flight through August and September, making it difficult to ascertain if the late September records were a partial second brood, as sometimes happens or just a continuation of the main summer emergence.

Small Tortoiseshell Aglais urticae

Common & Widespread







First: 8 Feb Last: 28 Dec Peak week: 25 Jun-1 Jul

Distribution % squares		
2015	71% (404)	
2014	75% (421)	
2010-14	53%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	36
2014	47
2010-14 mean	24

Distribution change Up 33% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 50% compared with 2010-2014

Two rather short and concentrated flight periods for the Small Tortoiseshell. The last couple of years saw a recovery from the nadir of the earlier part of the century. It now seems to have gone back slightly but this is still a well distributed and common species.. The concentrated nature of the flights can be explained by the poor May and August curtailing both broods flight periods. What the lack of autumnal adults will mean for Spring 2016 is going to be interesting. Let us hope it does not mean another population crash.

Comma Polygonia c-album

Common & widespread

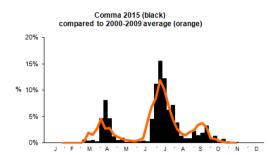
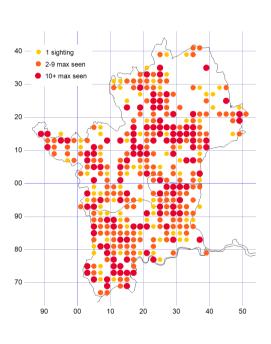




Photo Chris Benton



First: 7 Mar Last: 12 Nov Peak week: 9-15 July

Distribution % squares		
2015	65% (371)	
2014	63% (350)	
2010-14	61%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	16
2014	15
2010-14 mean	15

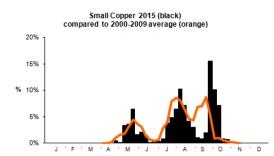
Distribution change Up 6% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 7% compared with 2010-2014

Another species whose fortunes have not changed a great deal in recent years. Despite a warm spring it seemed reluctant to emerge in any numbers until April. Its summer emergence was later than usual, presumably because of the poor May weather. There are plenty of squares in north east Hertfordshire where this species must be comparing its distribution with the Small Tortoiseshell. This butterfly likes over ripe fruit as this comment by Andy Steele shows, "20 Commas in a 300m stretch of Blackberries at Heartwood Forest today - a great sight"

Small Copper Lycaena phlaeas

Widespread & common



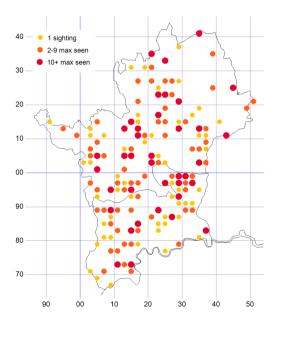




Photo Chris Benton

First: 27 Apr Last: 26 Oct Peak week: 24-30 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2015	27% (153)
2014	27% (150)
2010-14	28%
mean	

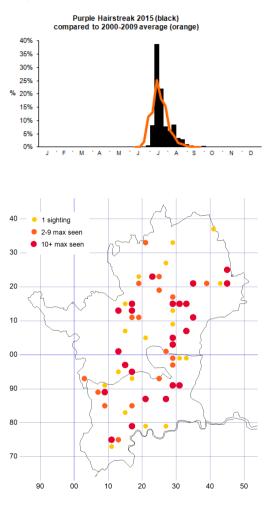
Abundance (transects)	
2015	6
2014	7
2010-14 mean	8

Distribution change Down 4% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 25% compared with 2010-2014

The three broods were very clearly demarcated in 2015. Much of the autumn brood was recorded at Nomansland Common between St Albans and Wheathampstead and at Trent Park whereas the earlier broods were more widely recorded. A typical report came from David Hunt, " An afternoon ramble on Nomansland Common produced 17 Small Copper, including some very fresh-looking specimens and one with the left forewing rather more yellow than the usual coppery hue". The actual numbers were down a bit over recent years but the distribution seems to be pretty constant. Malcolm Hull noted, "Small Copper *ab. Radiata* nectaring on sedum this morning. The orange band on the edge of the upper side hindwing is replaced by a band of alternative brown and orange Quite striking, I've not noticed this before".

Purple Hairstreak Neozephyrus quercus



Common around oaks



Photo Andrew Wood

First: 30 Jun Last: 26 Sep Peak week: 9-15 July

Distribution % squares	
2015	11% (60)
2014	7% (37)
2010-14	13%
mean	

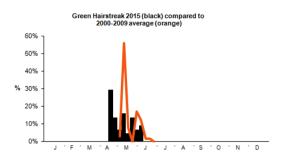
Abundance (transects)	
2015	6
2014	5
2010-14 mean	10

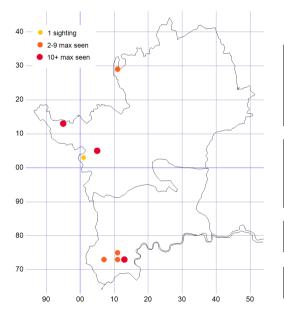
Distribution change Down 15% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 40% compared with 2010-2014

Another species whose emergence was pushed back probably owing to the poor May. The first record was 9 days later than 2015 but they hung on for 19 days later The huge peak in the second week of July was caused by two very high counts from one site that covers a couple of tetrads.

Green Hairstreak Callophrys rubi





Very rare & restricted



Photo Andrew Wood

First: 18 Apr Last: 8 Jun Peak week: 6-22 Apr

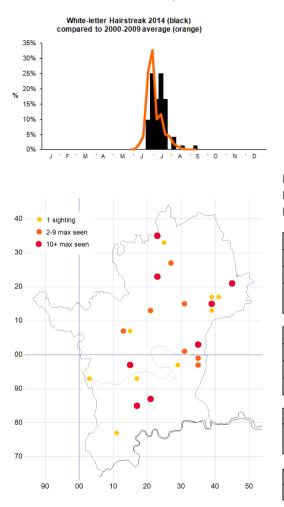
Distribution % squares	
2015	1% (8)
2014	2% (9)
2010-14	1%
mean	

Abundance (transects)	
2015	5
2014	8
2010-14 mean	11

Distribution change No change

Abundance change Too little data to calculate

Green Hairstreaks continued to be found at the recently added sites in south western Middlesex and Roughdown Common. Only one was found at Telegraph Hill in 2015 and the conditions at this privately owned site are a cause for some concern. The abundance has gone down but this is at least partly a result of the lack of data from the Aldbury Nowers Transect discussed elsewhere. The mild Spring is reflected in the early emergence in mid April.





First: 24 Jun Last: 7 Sep Peak week: 9-15 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2015	4% (21)
2014	5% (25)
2010-14	7%
mean	

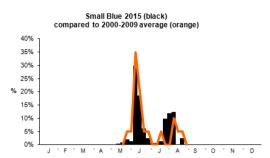
Abundance (transects)	
2015	2
2014	1
2010-14 mean	2

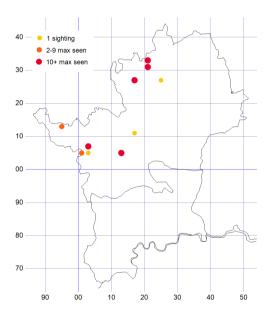
Distribution change Down 43% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change No Change

This is not the easiest butterfly to find as it is rarely encountered casually and its tree top habits make it difficult to record on transects. Good sites are Six Hills Common near the centre of Stevenage, Cheshunt Golf Club and Park and the Bardon Clumps/Rickneys Quarry area north of Hertford. It must be in many other areas so it is worth looking out for distinctive flowering elms in the spring and revisiting the site in July to see what you can find. As Robert Callf noted it can be elusive, "1 female White-letter Hairstreak, flew from thistles and settled on Bramble, edge of Church Wood - thought that I had missed out on this species this year, so pleasantly surprised".

Small Blue Cupido minimus





Very rare & restricted



Photo Chris Benton

First: 13 May Last: 2 Aug Peak week: 4-10 Jun

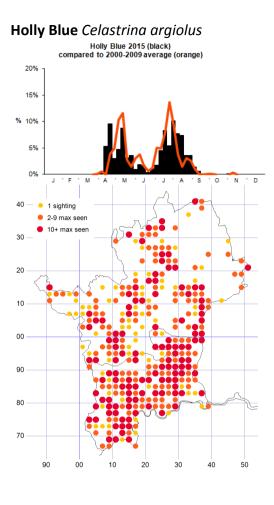
Distribution % squares	
2015	2% (10)
2014	1% (6)
2010-14 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2015	292
2014	27
2010-14 mean	26

Distribution change	
Up 100% compared with	
2010-2014	

Abundance change Up 1100% compared with 2010-2014

The remarkable story of this rare species continued in 2015. Record numbers were seen at Butterfly World with almost 300 recorded over the season with the second brood stronger than the first. A major concern is what will happen to the meadows following the closure of Butterfly World and we will be doing our best to ensure the continuation of this colony. The Letchworth colony remained strong and new colonies were found on and around the cutting on the A41 at Bourne End adjacent to Westbrook Hay. Care is needed if visiting here due to very steep chalk slopes and a busy dual carriageway. A single example was seen at St Nicholas Churchyard in Stevenage and a small colony reported on a private site near Hitchin.



Widespread & common



Photo Chris Benton First: 4 Apr Last: 8 Nov Peak week: 30 Jul – 5 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2015	57% (323)
2014	32% (179)
2010-14	42%
mean	

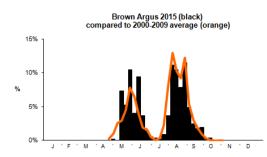
Abundance (transects)	
2015	17
2014	4
2010-14 mean	10

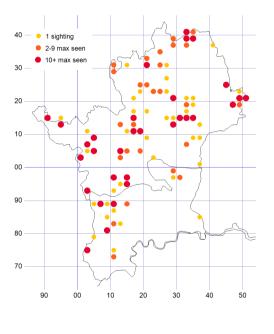
Distribution change Up 38% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Up 70% compared with 2010-2014

2014 was not a good year, but as is often the case this butterfly recovered strongly in 2015 both in its distribution and abundance. The peak was in the second brood but only by a hairs breadth compared to the high point of the first brood. Presumably the Holly Blue has got in front of its parasite as another cycle of boom and bust begins. Two records in early November almost a month later than any others suggest that this species continues to produce a very small third brood, now even in a not especially good year. Diane Andrews reported, "fluttering around snowberry bushes" at St Pancras Cemetery, this is one of the lesser used larval foodplants.

Brown Argus Aricia agestis





Widely distributed



Photo Tom Speller

First: 27 Apr Last: 1 Oct Peak week: 14-20 May

Distribution % squares		
2015	17% (94)	
2014	15% (83)	
2010-14	16%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)		
2015	9	
2014	10	
2010-14 mean	14	

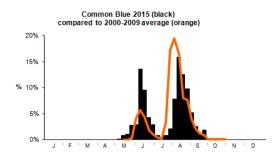
Distribution change Up 6% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 35% compared with 2010-2014

The Spring emergence was late this year, why this should be is not clear. Apart from that its flight fitted in well with earlier years. Its distribution did not change greatly but numbers dropped again. An interesting sighting came from David Hunt,"Friday 18th September 2015 Nomansland Common two Brown Argus - one of which had pronounced areas of whitish scales around each of the black discal spots". A similar variant was seen by Martin Johnson at Therfield Heath in June.

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Widespread & common





First: 4 May Last: 29 Sep Peak week: 6-12 Aug

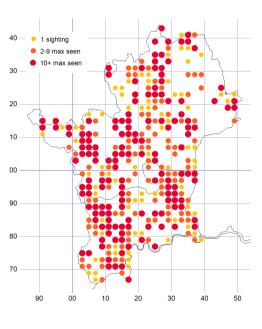
Distribution % squares		
2015	50% (330)	
2014	46% (258)	
2010-14	41%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)	
2015	36
2014	42
2010-14 mean	38

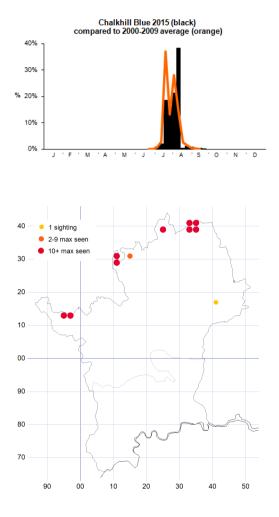
Distribution change Up 22% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change Down 5% compared with 2010-2014

The Common Blue did well this year, with a very strong first brood which emerged earlier than the long term trends. A sharp peak in that brood is a result of the poor May weather, as is the late emergence of the summer brood. Only eastern Hertfordshire shows big areas with this species missing and some of this may be down to under recording. That area definitely needs targeting in 2016. At Weston Hilary Bailey spotted a male where there seemed to be no orange markings on the underwings.



Chalkhill Blue Lysandra coridon



Common at known chalk sites



Photo Chris Benton

First: 29 Jun Last: 19 Sep Peak week: 6-12 Aug

Distribution % squares		
2015	2% (10)	
2014	3% (16)	
2010-14	2%	
mean		

Abundance (transects)		
2015	489	
2014	368	
2010-14 mean	96	

Distribution change See text below

Abundance change Up 509% compared with 2010-2014

Chalkhill Blue has bounced back in 2015 after the slight setback in 2014. It took a little while to get going following poor conditions for larval growth in May and peaked 3 weeks later than 2014. Good news is that the recently established colony at Ashwell Quarry continues at a low level What we did not see were the widely dispersed examples that were a feature of the previous two years. The only record far away from breeding sites was north west of Widford, reported by Phil MacMurdie, "Am assuming the male Chalkhill Blue is a wanderer from Therfield, it was my son Oliver (aged 5!!!) who spotted it first"..

RECORDERS - Many thanks to all who submitted records in 2015 Lauren Acreman;Ray Acreman;Wendy Adams;Nigel Agar;Isabella Aitken;Pippa Akram;Elaine Al-Attar;Ian Alexander;Lucy Alexander;Rod Alexander;Netty Alexander Ribeaux; Julie Ali; Lynn Allan; Emma Allen; Heather Allen; Rj Allen; Siobhan Allen; Steven Allen; Lyndsay Allen-Trott; John Ames; Tim Amsden; Neil Anderson; Sue Anderson; Brenda Andrews; Diane Andrews; Joshua Andrews; Jo Angell; Charlotte Antoniou; Katerina Antoniou; Jane Applegarth; Paul Appleton; Clare Arnold; Kayleigh Arodu; S. 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