

### **Purple Emperor 2007 (Liz Goodyear & Andrew Middleton)**

Nationally, the first male was seen, as always, by Ken Willmott at Bookham Common, Surrey – on Tuesday June 19<sup>th</sup>, the earliest UK sighting since 1893! However, the weather deteriorated before any sightings were made in Hertfordshire and Middlesex and the 2007 season is noted as being very poor, with few sightings, even when the sun shone. Both field trips were very disappointing and this was not a season for prospecting new sites. The first Purple Emperor was seen late afternoon on July 1<sup>st</sup> in Broxbourne Woods by Kevin & Sandra Standbridge, although they had spent all day searching. Generally, numbers were very disappointing, though the major territories were occupied, with a maximum of three males at Park Wood, Ruislip, on July 14<sup>th</sup>. The last sightings were of a male in Hoddesdon Park Wood on August 10<sup>th</sup> seen by Laurence Drummond and a female in Broxbourne Woods on August 11<sup>th</sup> seen by Ian Small. Of additional note, a Purple Emperor was reported from the Ashridge Estate, near Tring on the 10<sup>th</sup> August. Although, the butterfly was seen a few metres inside Buckinghamshire, this large woodland complex is an area where we have felt for some time could support a colony.

However, this report came through from David Chandler *‘I know this sounds incredible but I visited my mother (Violet Chandler) yesterday and she told me she had seen a big mauve blue butterfly with white spots about ten days ago [around 3rd July]. I said to her was it a Common Blue but she said no it was bigger than that and added it was larger than a Red Admiral.*

*We went into the bedroom and looked on the butterfly chart and she pointed out Purple Emperor!*

*I asked mum “are you sure because I would not expect to see a PE in Kings Langley”; but she said “yes I know what I saw and I got a very good look at it on the lavender by the back door before it shot off – and it didn’t even go up the garden on to the buddleia”.*

*Mum is convinced she saw a PE; she even commented that she knew she had never seen a butterfly quite like this one before so knew it was different. I’m amazed, the nearest Purple Emperor colony is a good few miles away, but I always suspected they are around in the Watford area having found a PE caterpillar (with horns) as a child in the 60s.’*

Since 2005 there have been three reports from the sallow/willow rich Grand Union Canal corridor and this area certainly deserves more study but like a lot of areas, it’s hard to know where to start. In 2007 we visited the Whippendell and Berrybushes Woods and watched several high points for territorial activity but with weather conditions as they were, it was impossible to predict the right day to visit!

Another unusual report reached us via Colin Plant from Tim Freed *‘Details for the A. iris I mentioned over the phone: on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2007 a female was found at c.0830 squashed (well and truly!) on the pavement in Bell Yard WC2 (beside the High Court). The lady that found it believes she saw the same insect (large dark butterfly) flying in the same place a couple of days earlier.....’* We can’t suggest how a Purple Emperor was found to be flying in central London, it could have been a release or even hitched a lift on a train from one of the Surrey sites. We will never know.