

If the Chinese have their animal years – dragons, tigers, rabbits and so on – then this was the summer of the Brown Hairstreak at Carymoor. Two were seen in 2013 but none at all last year; this year six were officially recorded but several more were reported. This very beautiful little butterfly is seldom seen because it spends most of its life flitting around or sunning itself high in the treetops, the males coming down only occasionally to feed if there is insufficient honeydew in the tree canopies. The female is seen more often, when she comes down to feed and to lay her eggs. The topside of the male and female of this species differ so much that they were originally thought to be two different species!

Another success story this year has been the Holly Blue. Eight were recorded in 2013, only one last year, but this year 32 were recorded. This azure butterfly is a creature more of hedgerows and gardens than grasslands and meadows and its population fluctuates from year to year. This is because many of its



Brown hairstreak *Thecla betulae*

caterpillars are killed by a small parasitic wasp, so the population declines; and as the population of caterpillars declines so there are fewer hosts for the wasps, whose numbers also decline; fewer wasps means that more caterpillars survive, butterfly numbers increase and the process starts again. Let us hope that we are coming out of the last trough and there will be plenty more of these delightful butterflies for a few years to come.

So how did other butterfly species fare this year? Sadly overall numbers were well down on last year with a modest 3,770 records compared with 5,784 last year. To illustrate the point, on 7th August 2014 291 Small Tortoiseshells were recorded, but this year on

8th August a total of 286 of **all** species was recorded, although weather conditions were similar – in fact this year was 2 degrees warmer. Like last year, 26 different species were recorded during 2015, the Brown Hairstreaks making up for the absence of Small Blues this year.

Of the 26 species recorded, 14 declined in numbers from last year. Of our resident species the Small Tortoiseshell suffered the most, down by 78%, followed by the Small and Essex skippers, down 72%. But the biggest decline was in Clouded Yellows, down from 45 to 5, the third successive year of decline for this species. However, this Clouded Yellows come across from the continent each summer, so our numbers are very dependent on conditions on the continent. Small Whites, Peacocks and Marbled Whites have also suffered three successive years of decline.

On a more encouraging note, the Dingy Skipper, a priority, vulnerable and protected species, has increased for 3 successive years, and this year numbers were up 84% to 46. Commas and Small Coppers were also up by 91% and 80% respectively – and so was the gardeners' sworn enemy, the Large White, by 120%, although the total was a modest 84 specimens. Painted Ladies (or should I say Painted Lady butterflies!) also did very well, up 500% to 18! Like the Clouded Yellow these butterflies also come over from the continent each year – so why has one species done so well and the other so badly? Clearly it has been an odd season, with a cold, windy and wet spell at the height of the season in July and August. And so to the overall winners this year in terms of numbers: second was the Gatekeeper, with 508 records; and the most plentiful butterfly was the Meadow Brown, with 830 records. Both these species have increased each year since 2013.

If you would like to know more about Butterfly Conservation in Somerset, please contact Julian Rawlins at jrs1@waitrose.com See Julian's photos at www.northbarrow.org.uk/photos/album?album_id=16929831