

ISLE OF WIGHT BUTTERFLY RECORDS FOR 2006

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Species account.

NB. Many records come from transects which are obtained by a recorder walking the same set route through a site once a week from April to September. The number of each species seen on that route is recorded. An annual index is the sum total of all records for each individual species thus derived. Annual totals and annual indices are one and the same. First and last dates are given only where considered appropriate.

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

This species is probably under recorded in the Island but is widespread and found right across our area wherever its favoured habitat of tall grasses flourishes. Unimproved rough grassland, woodland clearings and the lower regions of chalk downs are all colonised by this insect. Peak emergence of this single generation butterfly occurs in July and although most colonies are usually fairly small individuals can occasionally be extremely numerous such as the sighting of over 200 at Lake on 9 July by DAB. The Small Skipper is expanding its range on a national basis probably due to climate change and as its life cycle is unaffected by summer droughts (the larvae hibernate immediately after hatching and are thus not reliant on food plant quality) it is coping well with changing conditions. It is not under any particular threat other than habitat loss and is almost certainly more numerous than records indicate. The annual index for the Whippingham Fields transect was 578 (JR), a new record high but the numbers at Parkhurst seem to be going against the trend and declining (JR). Transects at Newtown have shown an increase of 125% over the last five years (PLM). The first of this species was seen on the early date of 15 June at Coombe Bottom (NT) and the last were at Totland (SK-J) and Brading (DAB) on 4 August.

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

There are very few records of Essex Skipper for the Island due to the difficulty of identification, as it is almost impossible to tell it apart from Small Skipper without netting the insect first and many observers do not do this. However, in the last few years this butterfly has been positively identified at a number of sites throughout the Island and is increasing its range. The first main colony was discovered in 2001 in the Shalcombe/Wellow Down area and since then 6 more sites have been found including Branstone Cross near Sandown, Redcliff, Atherfield, Bembridge Marsh and Wheelers Bay. Nationally this butterfly is expanding its range more than any other and this is obviously happening on the Island. The first was seen at Wheelers Bay on 5 July (DT) and this was soon followed by a few records from the sites previously mentioned.

Large Skipper *Ochlodes faunus*

Another widespread skipper but not nearly so numerous as the Small Skipper. Favouring, as it does, rough grassland, scrubby areas, sheltered sea cliffs, road sides and woodland the expectation would be that this species should be thriving but records show that this is not so. There is no clear reason why this is and most recorders are in fact reporting a slow but steady decline in the numbers of this insect. The only real exception comes from the Newtown transects where PLM has noticed a small increase over the last 5 years. The Coombe Bottom and Bonchurch Down transects recorded only single figure annual totals for the year (NT). JR noted what he calls a 'continuous rapid decline' at Parkhurst Forest and only an average year at Whippingham Fields where he also recorded the first of the year on 27 May. The last was seen by DAB on the 19 August at Brading Quarries. Quite clearly this is a species that was once very abundant and has now reached a stage of being just common and the situation is slowly getting worse by the year.

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Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*

Although this skipper is widespread throughout Britain and Ireland its strongholds are in the south of England most notably Hampshire, Wiltshire, Surrey and Sussex and it would be assumed that the Isle of Wight would similarly have many thriving colonies but this is not the case and appears never to have been so. With a few exceptions numbers in the Island have always been recorded in low, normally single figures and the situation locally is definitely one of decline much as is happening nationally. This butterfly's larval food plant is usually Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* or Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* both of which are found growing abundantly in the Island and its favoured habitats are chalk downland, woodland rides, coastal cliffs and undercliffs and waste ground of which there is no shortage right across our area. There appears to be no specific reason why this butterfly should be losing ground so rapidly but the few records sent in for 2006 only go to confirm a decline. The first seen this year was at Castle Cove near Steephill on 10 May (AW); a total of only 17 were seen by DAB all year and JR reported only 1 on transect at Whippingham Fields. The most seen at any one time was 8 on Brook Down on 10 June (PC) which also is the last record.

Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*

The principal larval foodplants of this skipper are usually members of the Rosaceae such as Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*. These plants are all widespread across the Island and the distribution of this skipper thus follows suit but usually in low numbers. Downland and woodland rides are where it is found most commonly but it does seem to be very slowly declining. JR reports that it is now lost from Whippingham Fields and only 6 were seen in the Parkhurst NW transect in 2006 compared with 83 in 2000. The vast majority of records came from north of the central ridge and a sighting in the South Wight area is unusual; this year one was seen on the Bonchurch Down transect on 29 June (NT). The only high count came from Monkham Copse with 26 on 14 May (CD) an unusual occurrence. The first seen this year was on Afton Down on 22 April (SK-J).

Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

Up to less than a decade ago, a number of years could go by without any Clouded Yellow being recorded at all but now there are at least a few seen every year and, with more frequency, good numbers recorded in most years. 2006 will go down as an excellent year with some very high totals and the butterfly observed right across the Island. A wide range of leguminous plants are used as larval food plants and if this predominantly migrant butterfly reaches our shores early in the year and breeds, then the migrant numbers occurring later in the summer are augmented by this resultant emergence, which is what occurred this year. The first record was on 16 April at St Cathelines Point (DT) followed by a scattering of sightings from coastal sites throughout early May and into June. By the middle of July numbers increased dramatically and this was due to local emergence as well as continuing cross channel migration. To illustrate this point, a 40 acre field in Brighstone sparsely sown with Rye Grass *Lolium sp* and with White Clover *Trifolium repens* under, had Clouded Yellow recorded in it in low numbers in the Spring but in the last weeks of July was full of the emerging progeny of this initial colonisation. On 20 July A&EB recorded a minimum of 200 at any one time in the field and these in turn were pairing and laying eggs. There would doubtless have been further examples at other suitable sites throughout this period. The fine weather through the autumn also saw local emergence as well as continuing immigration. DD reported Clouded Yellow at sites along the coast up to 14 October and there were many records right into November with the last one at Wheelers Bay on 28 November (A&EB). There were just a few records of the pale female form 'helice'. Although it is almost certain that this butterfly now overwinters in the Island in the larval stage, there is still no definite proof.

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Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* is the principal larval foodplant for this butterfly and as this plant is fairly scarce on the Island it could be then assumed that the butterfly would be quite rare here but the contrary is true and it is, in fact, well distributed through the Island. Surprisingly, it is often recorded along the coastal strip in the South Wight area thus showing its ability to move well away from its foodplant range. The first sighting in 2006 was at Brading on 13 March (DAB) followed by one on 19 March at Parkhurst (KM). JR recorded a total of 303 from all his Parkhurst transects and commented that this was just an average year. Similarly VG recorded an average year at Shalfleet as did DAB at Brading. The last of the year was at Shalfleet on 28 November (VG). This is a butterfly that appears to have a stable population and it is worth noting that it is one of the easiest to help as far as conservation measures are concerned. The answer is just plant a few Alder Buckthorn in any suitable area and the Brimstone will seek them out.

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

This abundant migrant and resident had a typical year with small numbers recorded early on and the usual increase in mid-summer which was of record proportions at some sites. At Whippingham Fields all previous records were broken with an annual index of 506 (JR), DAB reported record numbers at Brighthorne in the summer but VG commented that the population at Shalfleet was only average but stable, relatively unchanged over the last 15 years. The first Large White was seen at Parkhurst on 22 April (JR) and the last was seen flying south out to sea off Ventnor on 9 November, a very late date (A&EB). An unusual occurrence this year was the sighting of a Large White flying round the interior of the Iceland store at Ryde on 24 February (Pauline Peach).

Small White *Pieris rapae*

First recorded at Wheelers Bay on 12 April (DH) this butterfly had mixed fortunes in 2006. DAB reported an excellent year at Brading boosted by a large influx on 15 July giving numbers of over 100 and VG noted a good year at Shalfleet but found many parasitised larvae. A very slow start at Whippingham Fields eventually resulted in a record annual index of 441 but Parkhurst and Woodhouse Copse transects were only average (all JR). The last of the year was at Afton Down on 18 September (SK-J).

Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Most recorders considered that this butterfly had a poor year or at the best 'average'. The only exception was at Newtown where PLM recorded a large increase in numbers; in fact over the last 5 years this insect has been increasing there every year with 2006 the best so far. The first was seen at Totland on 18 April (SK-J) and the last at Barton Manor on 3 October (DTB). This is a much overlooked species and probably under-recorded but the trend seems to be one of a very slow decline. It is a resident, not migratory, and found right across the Island in a variety of habitats.

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Although nationally the trend for this species is one of expansion and paradoxically perhaps a very slow decline, here in the Island it is definitely not doing so well. JR reported one of the worst years ever at Whippingham Fields, Woodhouse Copse and Parkhurst Forest, DAB had an average year at Brading and VG reported a poor year at Shalfleet. PLM commented at Newtown that 2006 was not particularly good and the 5 year average was showing a gradual decrease. These observations are echoed by most of the other recorders. The reason for the decline is, as usual, not clear but the poor spring weather experienced over the last few years may not have helped. Although the main larval foodplant is usually Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis* which is not a particularly common

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flower on the Island it has been noted that this butterfly is making more and more use of Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolata* of which there is plenty, especially alongside roadside verges, so the cutting time of these verges is significant. The first record for 2006 was on 17 April at Bonchurch (DT) and, going against the trend, it is encouraging to report an annual total of 50 in a garden at Wheelers Bay between 18 April and 12 June (A&EB).

Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Very few records of this much over looked species are received so it is not easy to judge its status on the Island. On some sites 'average' sums up 2006 but in Whippingham Fields JR reported a record year with 14 seen up to 11 June and a late single one month later on the 14 July. A few single figure records came in from the chalk downlands much as would be expected. However DAB who noted a decrease at Brading Down. The first was seen on High Down on 27 April(SK-J).

Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae*

The last confirmed records for the Island were in the 1960s & 1970s but there have been a few sightings since but with no definite proof of identification. In 2004 Jill Mears recorded an adult at Coombe Bottom, Ventnor and in 2006 another adult was seen in the Porchfield area on 28 September (BA). This still did not amount to proof positive however, as no photographs were taken. This winter (2006/7) PLM and BA have both discovered the eggs of this species in the Newtown and Porchfield area. Photographs prove their identification as correct so we now know this butterfly is still extant in the Island.

Purple Hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*

This is yet another under recorded butterfly; it is found almost exclusively on Oak trees *Quercus sp* and usually inhabiting the crown of the tree where it is therefore quite difficult to survey. Most observers report only low numbers of this species and it is quite probable that this butterfly is slowly declining in the Island but this is impossible to confirm. JR reported a reasonably good year at Whippingham Fields with a total of 58 seen up to the 25 August but a disastrous year at Woodhouse Copse with a total of only 8 and a poor to average year at Parkhurst Forest with only 41 sightings. PLM had the only good news with a small increase recorded over the last 5 years at Newtown but 2006 was not the best year. An unusual sighting of 5 on Bramble flowers *Rubus sp* at Clamerkin Farm on 15 July (BR) is out of the ordinary.

White-Letter Hairstreak *Satyrium w-album*

Relying exclusively on Elm *Ulmus sp* as its larval foodplant this butterfly has therefore had problems surviving due to the spread of Dutch Elm Disease. Adapting to the changing conditions of loss of mature Elm and the emergence of thousands of Elm suckers this species has seen its population density fluctuate markedly. From the few records sent in for 2006 the general impression is that the butterfly is fairly wide- spread where the food plant is available but numbers are low. The White-Letter Hairstreak could also be expanding its range in the Island with reports from new sites but this could also be interpreted as increased observer coverage. The first of the year was a newly emerged specimen in a garden at Wheelers Bay on the 15 July and 2 in Bonchurch Landslip on the same day (both A&EB). DT recorded the insect in his garden at Bonchurch in July and also around Bonchurch Pond. VG noted that Elm suckers at her site at Shalfleet were dying off when about 2 metres high or less, a worrying observation. In the north of the Island at Newtown PLM recorded a possible slight increase over the last 5 years. A previously unknown colony was found on the lower slopes of Tennyson Down by CD where she recorded 5 adults on the 8 July and 3 on the 16 July. The difficulty of actually seeing this particular butterfly and confirming its identification makes it extremely difficult to confirm its true status in the Island.

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Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

This conspicuous little butterfly is found right across our area in a variety of habitats ranging from chalk downland to heathland, coastal undercliffs, woodland, gardens and churchyards. 2006 can be deemed a good year for this species with some record numbers being logged. JW had an unsurpassed 633 for the annual total at Whippingham Fields but conversely a very poor count of only 45 at Parkhurst. It was an excellent year at Shalfleet (VG) and likewise at Bonchurch Down (NT). Some recorders commented that numbers were just average but taken overall most counts were higher than usual. The first of the year were at Osborne on the 5 May (DTB) and Bonchurch Down on the same date (DD). The last was at Whippingham on 29 October (JR).

Small Blue *Cupido minimus*

Not many records were received for this species so it is impossible to judge how it fared during the year. The first to be seen was on 11 May at Afton Down (SK-J) and Compton Down on the same date (DH). There were then a few records from this latter site plus 2 on 4 June at Mountjoy Cemetery and 2 at Brook Quarry on 10 June (both KM). The last report was a single from Afton Down on 14 July (SK-J).

Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*

First seen on Afton Down on 12 May (SK-J) the Brown Argus went on to be recorded as having an above average year from most of its usual locations. DAB reported very good numbers from woodland rides in Brighstone Forest eg. over 30 on 25 July and JR noted that although the first generation consisted of only 6 individuals at Whippingham Fields the second was excellent to give a record annual total of 192 compared with 139 in 2005. PLM has noticed an increase at Newtown over the last 5 years with 2006 being the best so far with a total of 34 and the butterfly was also seen in Bonchurch Landslip (DT). The general trend is of increasing expansion especially in woodland. The last record was from Coombe Bottom on 25 September (NT).

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

The hot dry summer weather that appears to be a feature of the way our climate is changing now, suits this butterfly admirably but there is a danger that prolonged and very hot periods may cause the principal larval foodplant, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* to shrivel and die prematurely, thus depriving the larvae of food at a crucial time. This could possibly happen in the future. Most recorders have noted record numbers in 2006, for example JR had an annual index of 938 for the Whippingham Fields transect and DAB reported increased numbers at Brading Down with best day counts of 41 on 3 June and 86 on 1 August. This is a common butterfly and 2006 was an excellent year for it. The first was seen in Bonchurch Landslip on 10 May (DH) and the last at Wheelers Bay on 3 October A&EB).

Chalkhill Blue *Polyommatus coridon*

Brading Down is now far and away the most productive recorded site for this butterfly in the Island. DAB reported a staggering index of 4612 for his transect on the down with a highest day count of 1274 on 4 August; nowhere else comes anywhere near these numbers. Annual totals for Bonchurch Down were 157, Coombe Bottom 378 and Mottistone Down 457 (all NT). At Whippingham Fields JR had a total of 16 which was the highest number he had recorded at this location. The first record of the year was on 14 July at Brading (DAB) and the last on 30 September at Afton Down (SK-J).

Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus*

The last few years have seen this butterfly expand its range quite dramatically and to do this it has

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undergone a fundamental change in its behaviour. Long known to be an extremely sedentary species and unable to cross even quite low barriers such as hedges or sparse woodland, it has in recent years changed its habits and has been recorded many kilometres from known core sites. Small numbers have even been noted below the southern coastal cliffs on the Island such as at Wheelers Bay and near Steephill Cove. As this butterfly is a chalk downland specialist and its larval food-plant confined to only one species, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* it is surprising to see this rapid expansion. Some sites have been re-colonised due to sympathetic management regimes and this is no doubt helping as is also the resurgence in Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* numbers as they keep the turf short, another requirement. On Brading Down where the Adonis has returned after a long absence DAB reports a slow rise every year and on Bonchurch Down the transect annual index was the best year ever at 507 (NT). Summing up, this butterfly as at 2006, is progressing very well, consolidating core sites and expanding into suitable new territory. The first was seen at Brading Down on 28 May (DAB) and the last at Afton Down on 7 September (SK-J),

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

This is the first blue butterfly to emerge each year so a sighting at Newport Harbour on 29 March (KM) although not unusual is still quite early for this year due to the prolonged cold spells experienced in February and March. This species is found right across the Island and is able to make use of many different habitats especially gardens and many records are thus from these. 2006 was a year of average numbers recorded but with a few high counts such as a second generation total at Parkhurst of 145 being the best ever (JR). There must have been a third generation this year instead of the usual two as records came in from late in the year, the last being on 1 November at Gurnard (DTB).

Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina*

Only one record of 2 adults was received this year from Monkham Copse on 14 May (CD). This is a declining species nationally and the past twenty years have seen this trend mirrored in the Island. Many colonies are now extinct and the small site at Monkham holds only very low numbers of this butterfly. There is possibly a colony still extant on Brook Down but at the moment its location is unknown but occasional sightings of single adults may mean it still survives. There is a management plan for the Monkham site which if ever put into operation may help this very vulnerable butterfly to continue and increase.

White Admiral *Limnitis camilla*

After an excellent year in 2005 this butterfly went on to a repeat performance in 2006. Record numbers were seen at many sites and it is likely that this is another species benefiting from the changes in climate that are experienced now plus sympathetic management in woodlands by conservation bodies. In Parkhurst Forest JR reported that 'he had never seen so many and with a peak of 142 on 2 June they were virtually the commonest butterfly in the Forest'. An annual count of 578 up to 6 August made this the best year ever at this site. PLM echoed this at Newtown where he has observed a large increase over the last five years and with an annual count of 122, 2006 was the best year yet. Due to the hot summer and autumn it is no surprise that a number of second generation White Admirals were seen; 1 in Locks Farm on 13 September (BA), 1 in Walters Copse on 15 September (PLM), 1 in Parkhurst Forest on 15th Sept (DD), 1 in Wallishill Copse (Kings Quay) on 17 Sept (DD) and the last of the year on High Down on 25 September (CD). The first of the year was at Shalfleet on 18 June (VG).

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

The first record this year was of 1 at St Lawrence on 18 January (Sylvia McInnes). After this came a few sporadic sightings until May but once into July the butterfly was seen all over the Island in

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quite reasonable numbers. During August counts of 10+ were quite common but the autumn eventually produced spectacular numbers. These would have been the progeny of spring migrants and increasingly, overwintering residents. The numbers are boosted all through the year by cross-channel migrants as this butterfly is still predominantly a migrant species. On the 16 September, for example, a steady influx of Red Admirals was seen coming in off the sea at Ventnor (A&EB). In October, November and December the butterfly was seen in huge numbers usually on Ivy (*Hedera helix*) all over the Island; the records are too numerous to enumerate with counts of 100+ commonplace.

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

After the poor results last year (2005) this year proved completely the opposite. Of course, this is what would be expected of this purely migratory butterfly, a mixture of good years and bad depending on conditions in North Africa whence it originates. There is however, evidence that in recent years adults have overwintered in Britain but only in low numbers. The first was seen at Wheelers Bay on 19 April (A&EB) and then followed by low numbers through May and early June. As this insect can complete its life cycle in as little as one month these early arrivals can quickly give rise to good numbers in summer and autumn. The Parkhurst Forest transects gave the second best year ever with an annual total of 168 but Whippingham Fields had a record count of 210, being the highest count since the transect started (JR). Along the south coast counts of over 30 on most days through July and August were commonplace and the last of the year were seen at Ventnor on 2 November (A&EB).

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

The decline of this butterfly shows no sign of abating and once more only a handful of records were received. DAB commented in 2005 that things were so bad surely they could only get better but as he says in 2006 'they just got worse'. At Whippingham Fields JR had the worst year yet with an annual total of 51 and he also remarked that no larvae were observed on any Nettle *Urtica dioica* beds and the few larvae he did find elsewhere were all parasitised by *Sturmia bella* which he thinks is the primary cause of the decline. BR similarly said that this was his worst year ever. The Island population of this butterfly is now very low and in an extremely vulnerable state.

Peacock *Inachis io*

As this butterfly overwinters in the adult stage it is usual for a few to be seen very early in the year if the weather is suitable. This year no early sightings were reported and it was not until 15 March that one was seen at Castlehaven (KM) then followed by a few records in April. JR noted very few at Woodhouse Copse, a downward trend that started in 2002. His annual index for Whippingham Fields was 80 which was about average but at Parkhurst Forest numbers were below average with a total of 234. DAB considered it wasn't a bad year at Brading Down with a best day count of 24 on 28 July. At Shalfleet a pristine specimen was seen on 20 October (VG). The last of the year was 1 at Yarmouth on 5 November (DTB).

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Most observers commented that the Comma had an average year in 2006. The first emerged at Woodhouse Copse on 18 March (JR) and the transect annual index here was 129, about average. Whippingham Fields and Parkhurst Forest gave results similar to last year but at Newtown PLM recorded a large increase with his annual total of 93, three times higher than 2005. A very good report was of over 20 nectaring on Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* in Walters Copse on 10 September (BA). This must have been a fine sight. The last report of the year was 1 at Shide on 20 October (DTB).

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Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene*

No records were received for this butterfly in 2006. NB.this does not mean that it wasn't seen.

Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*

This butterfly is now confined to only one site in the Island in Parkhurst Forest. JR reported that he saw a total of 22 in the north east section, 4 in the south west and 1 in the north west making a disappointing total of 28. This species is in a very vulnerable position and probably cannot survive the continual decline in numbers due to the lack of an appropriate management regime. Unless something is done soon to rectify this it will be lost as an Island species.

Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*

Average to above average numbers were recorded along the West Wight Downs which are this species' stronghold. DAB had a high total day count of 207 on 27 July between Wellow Down and East Afton but most other observers recorded only single figures at most other sites eg. 4 on Tennyson Down on 8 July (CD) and 1 on transect at Coombe Bottom on 14 July (NT) and the annual index for the Mottistone Down transect was 28 (NT).

Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

Our largest resident species, this spectacular butterfly is more widespread than would be commonly thought. An inhabitant of broad-leaved woodland, especially Oak *Quercus sp* and where its larval foodplant, Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana* grows, it is confined almost exclusively to north of the central east-west chalk ridge. It is found from the area near Haven Street in the east and as far west as Yarmouth. The first record for 2006 was quite early with a single at Woodhouse Copse on 3 June (JR) and at this site the annual total of 19 was the highest recorded there ever. Parkhurst was above average with a total of 40 (JR) and the Newtown transects gave the best ever total of 49 (PLM). The butterfly was also recorded from Rowlands Wood with 1 on the 18 July (DD), 10 at Bouldnor Copse on 8 August (DD), Locks Copse, Porchfield (BA) and many sightings from Walters Copse at Newtown (mo). There were a few records of the female form *valesina* from most sites.

Glanville fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*

The first Glanville emerged at Wheelers Bay on 14 May (A&EB), later than the last few years which was probably due to the cold weather during the spring. The butterfly had a good year at most sites with a few exceptional day counts such as 202 at Chilton Chine on 15 June (CD) and 103 at Wheelers Bay on 6 June (A&EB). DAB noted 3 in Rylstone Gardens at Shanklin on 3 June and a single at Redcliff on 13 June showing that this site is still supporting the butterfly but in very low numbers. At Whippingham JR saw 4 on 17 June, a similar sighting to 2001 perhaps indicating a colony somewhere near by. Larval web counts carried out by IWNHAS every year since 1982 show the usual fluctuations but no really serious overall declines. The last was again at Wheelers Bay on 3 July (A&EB).

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

This shade loving species had an average year in the Island with no exceptional counts although 24 on Brading Down on 28 July (DAB) was above the norm. It is probable that this is another species that is under-recorded as few sightings are sent in. The first was at Clamerkin on 22 April (DT). At Whippingham Fields JR had an annual index of 213 which was about average but Parkhurst Forest was down at 199, much in line with a continuing decline at this location (JR). At Newtown PLM recorded the highest number for ten years with 257 as the annual total, which is encouraging. The last was at Shalfleet on 28 October (VG).

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Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*

Although the Wall was seen right across the Island in a number of differing habitats the numbers recorded were only very low. This is a rapidly declining species. It has virtually vanished from Hampshire and the Island was thought to be its stronghold but apparently no longer. The undoubted strongest population has been at Brading Quarries with quite high returns on the transect there in previous years but this year even this site was well down with an annual index of 37 compared to 78 in 2005 (DAB). PLM's transects at Newtown all showed a decline and JR reported the worst year ever at Woodhouse Copse and Whippingham Fields. It is thought that this butterfly is very susceptible to temperature fluctuations, especially in the summer, and it may be that it will just as rapidly increase if the summer weather continues as it has in recent years. This can only be speculation; constant monitoring will show what is happening over the next few years. The first Wall was seen at Brighstone on 17 May (DTB) and the last, a third generation at Shalfleet on 8 October (VG).

Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*

A good to average year was the general consensus for this butterfly in 2006. At Whippingham Fields a peak of 1260 on 2 July and an annual index of 2492 proved to be the second best year ever (JR) but, in contrast, the Parkhurst Forest transect was well below average with a total of only 548 (JR). DAB recorded a good year at Brading with a best day count of 96 on 8 July. He also saw over 100 at Culver Cliff on 15 July. This butterfly continues to be widespread and reasonably abundant although some of the downland colonies appear to be decreasing slowly. The first of the year was a coastal sighting at Wheelers Bay on 23 June (A&EB) and the last on 11 August on the Coombe Bottom transect at Ventnor (NT).

Grayling *Hipparchia semele*

This is a rather inconspicuous species and probably overlooked and thus under-recorded. In spite of this quite a few records were received this year showing a fairly widespread and healthy population in its suitable habitat. The highest numbers came from Mottistone Down where the transect annual index was 58 with a best day count of 15 on 12 July (NT). DAB reported single numbers along the Tennyson Trail at Brightstone nectaring on Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*. It was also recorded on the South Wight Downs in low numbers (NT) and at Bleak Down on 3 July which was the first record of the year (DD) and also 4 on spoil next to the Wilderness Farm reservoir on 7 August (DD). On the same date came the highest day count of any site with 38 at Bleak Down (DD). An odd sighting was of a single adult in a garden at Bonchurch on 5 August (DT).

Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*

With a few exceptions most observers considered this an average year for this butterfly. At Woodhouse Copse however, JR reported the worst year ever and at Whippingham Fields a below average year and the Parkhurst Forest transects were down by a half with an annual count of 990. Conversely, the Newtown transects gave the highest totals yet over a ten year period with 817 (PLM). DAB was of the opinion that numbers were slightly down at most sites. This is a common butterfly and numbers will fluctuate year to year. Also not every observer bothers to record it. The first was seen at Whippingham Fields on 25 June (JR) and the last at Clamerkin on 13 September (BA).

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

This is one of our commonest butterflies and often seen in almost uncountable numbers. It also inhabits a variety of different habitats from open grassland to coastal cliffs or urban parks and gardens. 2006 was considered by many to be another average year. JR commented that with an annual index of 8249 Whippingham Fields was above average. At Woodhouse Copse he recorded an

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annual total of 2150 which was the highest ever at this site. At Newtown PLM also had a record total of 1926, the highest of a ten year period. The first was seen at Whippingham on 3 June and the last on 8 October at the same site (both JR).

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

The stronghold for this butterfly is, without doubt, Parkhurst Forest where excellent numbers are usually recorded. This year, although slightly down on 2005, the site still produced a total annual count of 1773 (JR); no other location can match this. Coombe Bottom at Ventnor had an annual index of 59 and Bonchurch Down of 9 (both NT), showing the marked difference between an area of downland with a small amount of suitable woodland and one without. Odd reports came in from other areas which give the impression of a general trend towards slight expansion.

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Overall this appears to be a species that is slowly declining, both nationally and locally. The reasons for this are not clear and may be climate related as the Island has large areas of suitable habitat for this butterfly and management regimes in many of them that are sympathetic to it. However, there are still good numbers recorded, such as at Whippingham Fields where the annual index for 2006 was an all time record of 1241 (JR), an astonishing total. At Mottistone Down the highest day count was 21 on 28 June and an annual total of 98 (NT). In the South Wight the total for the Coombe Bottom transect was 75 (NT) and for Brading Quarries 123 (DAB). At Shalfleet, where VG manages a traditional hay meadow, numbers have increased but are still only in single figures. The first of the year was seen at Whippingham Fields on 18 May and the last on 24 September at the same site (both JR). In spite of this possible slow decline 2006 was not a bad year for this species in the Island.

Scarce Immigrants

Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa*

One was seen perched on the windscreen of a car parked at the Bargeman's Rest at Newport Quay on 22 August (Tony Gutteridge).

Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

One was seen flying across Wheelers Bay car park on the afternoon of 7 October (PC) and what must have been the same one was seen the next day in a garden at Wheelers Bay (A&EB, PC, AW).

Discussion

It will be seen from the species account that the numbers of some butterflies are decreasing quite rapidly, some are stable and some are increasing. This at first sight, may seem to be stating the obvious and is what should be expected to be in line with the situation nationally, but the underlying trend is more subtle and more difficult to determine. The Island has a high percentage of its natural areas owned and managed by a number of conservation organisations, actively working to enhance the wildlife potential of these sites, so lack of appropriate management is not too much of a problem. Loss of habitat, which is probably the greatest threat to most species nationally, is again not noticeably the cause of observed declines for the same reasons. We now come to climate change, arguably, a natural course of events probably exacerbated artificially. The changing global climate has an effect on the weather systems experienced locally so 2006, for instance, has been recorded as the hottest year ever in Britain and with the highest July temperatures ever recorded; severe winters do not now occur. What effect does this have on our native flora and fauna? The short answer is that this is unknown as events have happened in such a short time span and short term statistics will not give a true picture. Only long term recording and monitoring will ever give

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an idea of causes and effects. Solutions are possibly out of the control of local and national bodies but it is acknowledged that this statement could be a rather contentious one. It is quite likely that the Island will lose some species of butterfly and gain others. To speculate: Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus* and Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros* could become residents, Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola* and Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus* will continue to expand their range and we could lose Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*, Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina* and some of the Skippers (the first two species due to lack of management). We live in interesting times.

Observers.

BJ Angell (BA), D Britton (DAB), A&E Butler (A&EB), Dr DT Biggs (DTB), P Cambell (PC)
D Dana (DD), C Dudley (CD), V Gwynn (VG), D Hammersley (DH), SA Knill-Jones (SK-J), K
Marston (KM), P Le Masurier (PLM), National Trust (NT), B Ransom (BR), J Rowell (JR), D
Tucker (DT), A Wright (AW).

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Site Grid References

Atherfield	SZ7945	Mountjoy	SZ5987
Barton Manor	SZ9451	Newtown	SZ9042
Bembridge Marsh	SZ8761	Osborne	SZ5295
Bleak Down	SZ5181	Parkhurst Forest	SZ4790
Bonchurch Landslip	SZ582788	Redcliff	SZ6285
Bouldnor	SZ3790	Rowlands Wood	SZ5689
Brading Down	SZ6086	S.C.P	SZ4975
Brighstone	SZ4283	Shalcombe	SZ3985
Brook Down	SZ3985	Shalcombe Down	SZ3985
Castle Cove	SZ552769	Shalfleet	SZ8941
Castle Haven	SZ508755	Tennyson Down	SZ320854
Chilton Chine	SZ409821	Totland	SZ328860
Clamerkin	SZ9043	Walishill Copse	SZ541934
Compton Down	SZ3790851	Walter`s Copse	SZ431907
Coombe Bottom	SZ5678	West High Down	SZ318853
Firestone Copse	SZ5591	Wheelers Bay	SZ571776
Lake	SZ5983	Whippingham Fields	SZ9352
Locks Copse	SZ8490	Wilderness Farm	SZ503823
Monkham	SZ4586	Woodhouse Copse	SZ9352
Mottistone Down	SZ405845	Yarmouth	SZ9037