

Introduction

This is the tenth volume of Fritillary, the seventh on-line, and is a special issue with information on a single topic: The Dragonflies of Oxfordshire. The author, Stephen Burch, is the Dragonfly recorder for Oxfordshire (VC23), a position he has officially held since 2014. Initially approached in January 2020 to contribute to Fritillary, it took until February 2022 for all the available data to be gathered and analysed. The resulting initial 66 page document was substantially longer than the usual submission to Fritillary but local wildlife experts reported that the paper contained important information which should be made available to all. With this in mind the Fritillary Board agreed that a single topic volume was the way forward and the remarkable collection of photographs of nearly all the damselflies and dragonflies described in the paper, complements and completes this volume.

The last publication covering the dragonflies and damselflies of Oxfordshire was by Anthony Brownnett in 1996 and this is a timely update of current knowledge on the 37 species that have been recorded in the County to date. Seven new species have been seen in Oxfordshire since 1996, with several species having expanded their range. This reflects a national trend in range expansion northwards for many species and the arrival and colonisation of species from continental Europe. Thus in contrast to many other species where there is concern about their future survival, at the present time, dragonflies appear to be coping well with climate change.

Basic information on dragonflies is given together with a brief description of the life cycle. The current main habitats are described and information on the best sites to see dragonflies is given. The key section of the paper is a Systematic List of all 37 species recorded in Oxfordshire which includes distribution maps using data from the National Biodiversity Network and photographs of the species described.

For those who wish to delve deeper, the author provides the results of an analysis to show how the relative recording frequencies of individual species have changed over time. These highlight increases and decreases relative to the numbers of records received for all dragonflies including species recently arrived in Oxfordshire. Finally, phenology data from the NBN Atlas for first and last sighting dates are compared with the corresponding information from 1996. This paper can be enjoyed not only visually but in more depth for those interested in the changes that have occurred in the dragonfly population in Oxfordshire over the last 26 years.

In this context we believe that Fritillary allows important information on how our local environment is changing with time to be recorded in the face of ongoing human and natural threats. We welcome submission on any relevant aspect of the natural world in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

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