



Newsletter No. 85
Spring/Summer 2021

Dorset Environmental Records Centre

With spring and summer ahead of us, it opens up the possibilities of new places and new wildlife to see. Hopefully we will not be so restricted this year but even if we can't travel far, some of the wildlife is coming to us. Last year one new species to the county was the Antlion (*Euroleon nostras*) recorded by Phil Pickering (National Trust Ranger) on Brownsea Island. Another species, which I noticed for the first time last year just outside Dorchester, is the Alder Leaf Beetle.

Carolyn Steele
(Records Centre Manager)



Antlion © Phil Pickering

Beetle List for Dorset

Adrian Mylward has completed a checklist of beetles in Dorset which is now available to view on the DERC website. The checklist has been designed to give easy access to basic information about the beetles that have been recorded in the county, in a form that will



Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn
© Bryan Edwards



Alder Leaf Beetle © Bryan Edwards

facilitate future modifications. There have been many recent national reports about declines in insect populations, and a quick glance at the checklist will show that many species of beetle appear to have been lost in Dorset. But there is also evidence that new species have been recorded, some as a result of expansions of range, and others through more sophisticated methods of sampling that were not available to earlier recorders.

One to look out for is the Alder Leaf Beetle, *Agelastica alni*, which was formerly a very rare species in Britain confined to a few widely scattered localities. In recent years it has undergone a dramatic increase in northwest England and central southern England. First recorded in Dorset in 2019, this shiny blue-black beetle now has records from Bridport east to Christchurch and is easily observed on Alder trees by streams and rivers, where the larvae reduce the leaves to a lacework.

Another recent addition is the distractive Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn, *Aganpanthia villosiviridescens*, a longhorn beetle which has spread south-and-west-wards



**Longhorn beetles
found in long grass
with umbellifers
in field edges and
road verges**

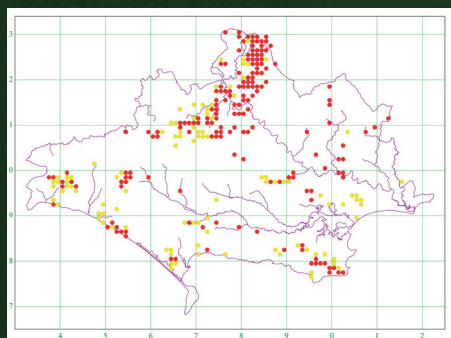
from central England. It can be found in long grass with umbellifers on field edges and road verges. Please contact Adrian if you would like to comment on the checklist, or if you would like to add further beetle records. Beetle records sent into DERC or via Living Record will also be seen by Adrian as part of the verification process.

Adrian Mylward
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Crookhill Brick Pit

As less than 5 ha, Crookhill Brick Pit is a small but important site lying between Chickerell and the Fleet. From 1971 to 1985 Alan Holiday (the current Chairman of DIGS) visited the site regularly as part of the GCE O' and A' level course at Weymouth Grammar School. At that time there were good exposures of Oxford Clay (Kosomocerascom pressum zone) around the pit with the oldest part to the north and younger rocks dipping to the south. However, over time the site became more and more overgrown and the exposures of clay were largely lost.

It became a local nature reserve in 2004 but needs management to keep the footpaths accessible and in a good state of repair. In the last couple of years, the DIGS group has been carrying out conservation work so that the geology can be studied. This is an ongoing project and access is now possible to a NW face and a SW face having cleared tracks through brambles and gorse. Most recently DIGS have been working on access to the northern section of the pit next to the public footpath that runs around the top edge. Crookhill is an SSSI because of its geological importance, being an inland exposure of the Oxford Clay. The work carried out so far has resulted in improved access to the



Map showing distribution of GCN with recent records shown in red.

exposures of clay and specimens of the ammonite *Kosmoceras*, the bivalve *Gryphaea*, have been found, as well as large concentrations (septarian nodules) and crystals of the mineral gypsum.

All the work has been done within the constraints of the bird nesting season and the presence of GCN – Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*). GCN is a European Protected Species so cooperation with Natural England and Lyn Cooch at Dorset Council was vital. Aside from its interesting geology the site has several ponds where the newts breed. One pond recorded one of the



Female GCN egg-laying
© Wren Franklin

highest counts of the species in Dorset and as such the site was declared a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for GCN. The site has a mixture of scrub and grassland with plentiful brick piles ideal for GCN which spend as much time in surrounding terrestrial habitat as they do in ponds.

There has been a focus on GCN in the last couple of years prior to changes in licensing. At DERC we have updated our records and pond mapping with recent information from volunteers and consultants, most notably Philip Temple who spent several decades visiting Dorset's ponds in search of newts. Within Dorset Council the Natural Environment Team has been working closely with Natural England to secure a distinct level license (DLL). This will provide an alternative to traditional NE licensing which requires many detailed surveys

by developers prior to any work. The aim of the Dorset Council scheme, which will operate under the Dorset Biodiversity Appraisal Protocol, will be to ensure that where ponds are lost through development, they are fully compensated for in terms of new ponds located in the best areas to enhance existing populations or improve distribution across the county. For every GCN pond lost a conservation payment for four new ponds will be secured covering their creation, management and monitoring for 25 years. This has only been possible because DERC had a large data set which NE could use for species distribution modeling and mapping. The most exciting part is that FWAG, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset Council have already started digging ponds which will be beneficial to a whole host of wildlife. The new ponds will be added to the ecological network mapping as part of the habitat restoration and creation layer.

Ecological Networks

The data collected by DERC has been used in many different ways over the years but one of the most comprehensive projects has been mapping the Dorset Ecological Networks. We began by mapping the existing network, using layers of wildlife sites, reserves and areas of core habitat. We then looked for areas with the best potential for habitat restoration. The simplest approach is a buffer around the existing networks where sites could benefit from wildlife moving in from adjacent habitats. This gives an overview which can then be refined with more detailed data.

The first ecological networks maps were finished in 2017 but during 2020 we updated the layers with fresh information including a country-wide data set from Dorset AONB. Our plan is to continue to refine the layers as more information becomes available. The networks can be found on Dorset Explorer with guidance notes on the LNP website: <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/dorsets-ecological-networks/>