



Dorset Environmental Records Centre

Newsletter No. 92
Winter 2024



Downland Bee-fly on Holm Oak



This time our newsletter is a contrast of new and old. We report on the conclusions from the review of Ancient Woodland, conducted by Jo over the past two years, whilst Adrian and Alison have provided an update on Living Record, capturing data from current projects across the county. For those of us that find time to get out for some field recording, you will know that nature continues to surprise and delight. I have been helping with plant surveys at Lyscombe over the summer months where we came across the Downland Bee-fly (*Villa cingulata*) congregating on bare ground along one of the tracks. This species was first recorded in Dorset at Cranborne Chase in 2014 and is now spreading south and west, mainly on the chalk, across the county. Tracking these changes is only possible with records from naturalists, so please keep sending your records in.

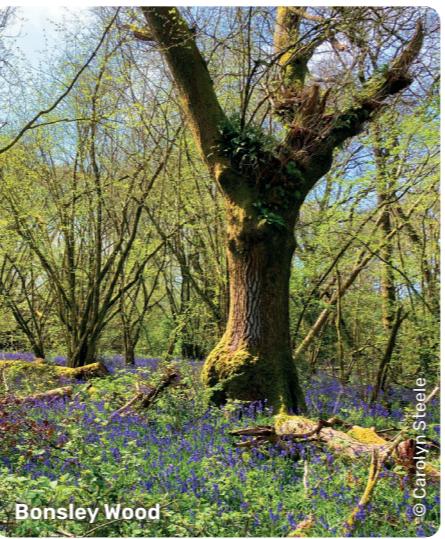
Carolyn Steele (Records Centre Manager)

Updating the Ancient Woodland Inventory

In 2022 DERC began work updating the ancient woodland inventory for Dorset. The work was structured in five phases. The first two phases were desk based and resulted in a modified GIS layer for ancient woodland and a mapped layer of all the long-established woodland >0.25 ha in the county. Whilst ancient woodlands are areas that have been wooded since 1600, the long-established woods will have been wooded since c.1880.

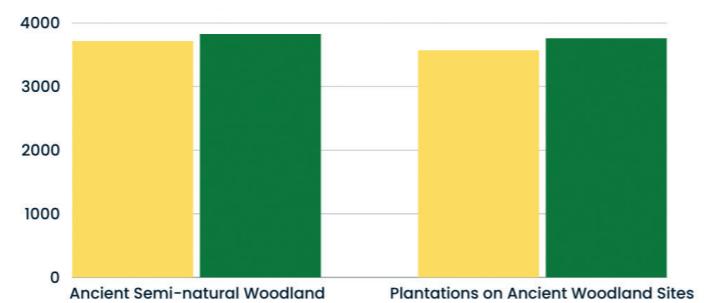
The third phase was the longest and most interesting. In this part of the research, evidence was gathered to determine if woods and wood pastures were ancient in origin (wooded since

1600) or more recent. This involved checking all the woodlands against the tithe maps and apportionments, historic maps and estate surveys and records. I owe my thanks to the staff of Dorset History Centre for their help and support with this, and thanks to the Dorset Museum for allowing me to view the records of the late Joan Brocklebank, who had been researching woodland history in Dorset. Alongside historical evidence I gathered biological data, both historic, such as the surveys of Prof. Ronald Good, and more recent biological records plus the Ancient Tree Inventory (from the Woodland Trust).



Increases in ancient woodland cover

The yellow column shows woodland cover (ha.) on the original inventory and the green woodland cover on the updated inventory.



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Other evidence included names, placement in the landscape and LiDAR imagery. To complement the desk study, I was joined by a team of volunteers and we surveyed a selection of woodlands across the county for supporting botanical and archaeological evidence.

The last phases of the work have been to determine the naturalness of the woods: are they ancient semi-natural or plantation on an ancient woodland site? or ancient wood pasture? The final mapped layer has been submitted to Natural England and will replace the current version once all checks have been completed.

So, have we identified more ancient woodland in the county? Yes, nearly 3% more ancient semi-natural woodland, 5% more plantations on ancient woodland sites and 7,777 ha of long-established woodland. All data that should help protect this irreplaceable habitat.

Jo Stephen
Ancient Woodland
Inventory Officer

Edited by Carolyn Steele

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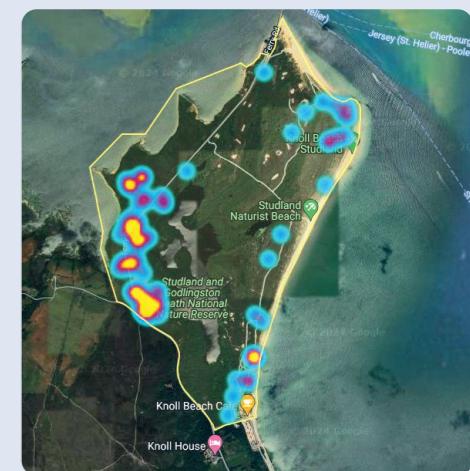


Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*) © Bryan Edwards

Living Record reaches a new milestone

Living Record, the online recording website used by DERC, recently reached 2.5 million records. It began in 2010 as a method to collate dragonfly records for Dorset but, with support from DERC and a grant from the Patsy Wood Trust, quickly extended its scope so that anyone can record any species they find anywhere in Great Britain.

While Living Record provides recorders with their own personal records system, it also allows co-operative working through setting up projects and inviting like-minded friends to join in. The National Trust's 2013 Cyril Diver project set new challenges and site-based recording was incorporated to allow direct comparisons between new records for the Studland peninsula and those from the original surveys eighty years earlier. Distribution maps let recorders track their combined progress while the project ecologists could map, review and download records in real time. Living Record has since become a powerful tool used by local conservation organisations, recording groups, farm clusters and councils. Aside from general recording, Living Record has been used to map native Black Poplar across Dorset and record new plantings, whilst volunteers at Durlston Country Park have input



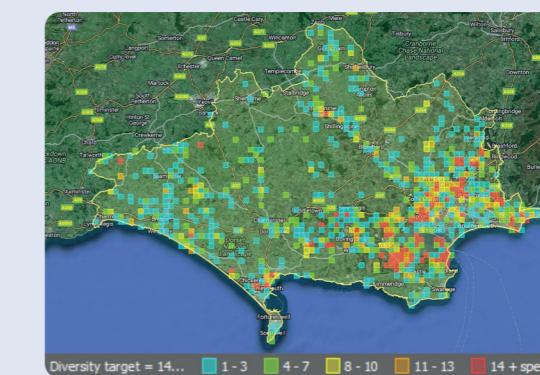
Heat map for Grayling Butterfly

historic data from the rangers' daily diaries.

Over 1.4 million of these collated records are for Dorset, many contributed by Dorset's botanists and moth recorders, but records added for other groups have also increased. This welcome growth in records received does however increase the workload for our volunteer local experts who do an excellent job verifying the records before they are added to DERC's main database. DERC would be interested to hear from anyone who knows their specialist group well enough to assist with this verification task.

Looking to the future, Adrian is now working on an update to make Living Record easier to use on different devices and screens, large and small. If you are setting up a new recording project or want to keep track of your own records, please give it a go and help us contribute to the next recording milestone.

Adrian Bicker (Living Record) and Alison Stewart (Environmental Database Manager, DERC)



Dragonfly diversity

Distribution of all the woodland in Dorset by classification

