

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 05-May-17 07:07 PM GMT

Remember me?!? 😊

White-letter Hairstreak 2017: So far.....

Brief overview -

Of 11 White-letter Hairstreak eggs (this years generation) I found in Winter 2017, 11 caterpillars appear to have successfully emerged. There is 1 extra egg, one of the last I found during Winter 2017 which appeared to be of this years generation, due to the eggs clean appearance, but I couldn't confirm this as the egg was already empty. Taking the total upto a possible 12 caterpillars. Between February and May 2017 I have only been able to locate 3 of these caterpillars. Whilst within the last few weeks I have found two extra locations on the tree where I have noted typical caterpillar feeding damage, giving a possible total of 14 White-letter Hairstreaks within observable reaching distance. The caterpillars have been extremely hard to observe so far as the two Huntingdon elms they reside on have seen a larger and longer production of seed when compared to last year, where they are currently staying within for shelter, protection and to feed. I have seen the odd sign of feeding damage to the leaves along with frass but never whilst a caterpillar is present. The weather as of recent with the strong gusts of wind has kept me away from my site, therefore not being able to check on them. Strong wind is a worry as the seed, being late in their development becomes increasing detached from the tree and can be ripped off in strong gusts, possibly with the caterpillars still attached. Based on the earlier development of the Huntingdon elms and the larger size of the caterpillar now, when compared to this time last year, suggests they are about a week and a half ahead, I would expect an earlier emergence of adults this year in Brighton.

As I've previously posted White-letter Hairstreak egg photos, below are a few photos of this years caterpillars.

The same caterpillar, first taken on 21 March then again on 19 April, my how they change and grow: 😊



Whilst this 4mm long caterpillar, with my hand gives a sense of scale, 5 April 2017:



Additional involvement:

Everyday of this year so far has involved me with something to do with White-letter Hairstreak – no joking! From observing and taking notes in the field, sorting out White-letter Hairstreak guided walks for Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch this year, writing the annual Species Champion Report to review the White-letter Hairstreak season during 2016 for Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch, managing a large project focused on White-letter Hairstreak as part of my volunteer work with Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch, writing content for the Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch website about the species (I'll post a link to it soon!) and working (very very slowly) on the Dispar article covering all my White-letter Hairstreak observations during 2016 on two Huntingdon elms. I think you can call that fully immersed 😊 That is without mentioning my work on researching, growing-on and later planning to propagate disease-resistant Elm for Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch. 😊

Re: Jamie Burston

by trevor, 05-May-17 08:11 PM GMT

Hi Jamie,

Wonderful work!. Back in 2015 I found a solitary White Letter Hairstreak along the Cuckoo trail in Hailsham. (see page 14 of my diary). The mystery is that there are no Elms in the area. But last year I went back to the spot where the WLH was found, and noticed some small Butterflies flitting about, high up, in an Ash tree. All the Butterflies confined themselves within the tree. The tree is immediately above the 2015 find.

Hope this is of interest, keep up the good work.
Trevor.

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 07-May-17 10:42 PM GMT

trevor wrote:

Hi Jamie,

Wonderful work!. Back in 2015 I found a solitary White Letter Hairstreak along the Cuckoo trail in Hailsham. (see page 14 of my diary). The mystery is that there are no Elms in the area. But last year I went back to the spot where the WLH was found, and noticed some small Butterflies flitting about, high up, in an Ash tree. All the Butterflies confined themselves within the tree. The tree is immediately above the 2015 find.

Hope this is of interest, keep up the good work.
Trevor.

Hi Trevor,

Thank you very much!

I clearly remember your sighting along the Cuckoo trail when I was working on the Species Champion Report for the species in our Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch, 2015 Annual Report. White-letter Hairstreak males will use other tree species as a territorial post to compete with other males. At Brighton, Hollingbury Park, it's typically the Walnut tree. I can only say that without being there that there has to be an Elm nearby, perhaps tucked away within nearby Woodland. They can use mature trees or smaller regrowth of around 2–3 meters tall. We have passed the time now but last month you would have been able to single out any mature Elm trees by the presence of seed, very distinctive and for the most part visible when other tree species haven't really got going. They may move to this Ash for the shelter and sun it receives, as a species they do fly further than most people would think, just to find the right spot.

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 07-May-17 10:51 PM GMT

As mentioned in my previous post, I've been working on content for the Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch website, providing all the information and photos for the "Sussex species" White-letter Hairstreak page. I've provided tips on how to identify Elm throughout the year, finding eggs and the caterpillars. The page will be added to throughout the year to cover the final two stages in the life cycle as well as identifying Dutch elm disease and updates on the work Butterfly Conservation – Sussex Branch has done.

See the page here: <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/white-letter-hairstreak.php>

Re: Jamie Burston

by Wurzel, 07-May-17 11:00 PM GMT

Great work Jamie 😊 At my Whitter site the Wytch Elms suckers are showing disease – but there are other suckers nearby – will the colony just move to these newer suckers or could the eventual demise of the more mature Wytch Elms also see the end of this colony? I guess I'm asking how mobile a colony can be?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 07-May-17 11:51 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Great work Jamie 😊 At my Whitter site the Wytch Elms suckers are showing disease – but there are other suckers nearby – will the colony just move to these newer suckers or could the eventual demise of the more mature Wytch Elms also see the end of this colony? I guess I'm asking how mobile a colony can be?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Thank you.

If I remember correctly (I'll have to find out my reference to double check!) regrowth can contain inactive Dutch elm disease for 20 years in the original trees root systems before it may become active. It's the spread of the beetles that carry the fungus that will cause the trees death, that or the following year, following the beetles activity. I've seen an infected mature tree be cut down, every year after it continues to produce healthy regrowth, it's only the council that wants to keep cutting it down.

The crucial factor is the health of the trees around them when the adults emerge, is there any healthy Elm for the females to secure the next generation on, timing of when the disease strikes would be the significant factor. As it can occur in Spring, from last summers infection, dormant over Autumn/Winter, this would effect development of the tree = no healthy food for the caterpillars or signs of disease later in summer (June – August) from mid-late spring infection. If there is no healthy Elm around then they will try to disperse within the landscape – well documented in Matthew Oates book, or will fail. Can emerging female White-letter Hairstreaks tell if their tree is/has been infected with Dutch elm disease and to know to move to a different tree to lay eggs? I don't know, but given the extent that the trees become infected, just perhaps they can smell the fungus spores seeping from within the tree? You would have to observe caterpillars on a tree, knowing it was to become infected to see how the adults act on emergence if any make it. After the long reply the answer you wanted was – they can travel some distance, 85 meters/ 278 feet or 92 yards from tree to nectar source (Elm on my road to Buddleia in my garden), so imagine the need to find somewhere to lay eggs, they will go further!

Re: Jamie Burston

by David M, 08-May-17 02:25 PM GMT

Jamie Burston wrote:

See the page here: <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/white-letter-hairstreak.php>

An excellent write-up, Jamie, and one I will refer to when WLH hunting.

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 08-May-17 10:21 PM GMT

David M wrote:

An excellent write-up, Jamie, and one I will refer to when WLH hunting.

Thanks David! Pleased to hear that it will be of use to you.
All the best,
Jamie

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 08-May-17 11:05 PM GMT

Back in December I joined Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods volunteers, at Hollingbury Park in Brighton, we cut all the vegetation in some of the bays along the woodland edge down to the ground. In doing so this makes Creeping Thistle send out new shoots, creating more plants, a key nectar source for the White-letter Hairstreak that lives within the woods. I again joined the group of volunteers at the most recent volunteer day, I was pleased to see that the earlier work had produced 5X as much Creeping Thistle in the targeted areas, when compared to last year. However now in May Cleavers were beginning to dominate, careful cutting out was needed to let the Creeping Thistles thrive.

Me, far right:



Glossy Creeping Thistle leaves:



With good weather (hopefully) this should setup my Butterfly Conservation –Sussex Branch guided walks rather nicely to see the White-letter Hairstreaks! See details of my guided walks by clicking on the links below:

<http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/events/#16>

&

<http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/events/#15>

All the best,
Jamie

Re: Jamie Burston

by Wurzel, 08-May-17 11:16 PM GMT

Cheers for your very detailed reply Jamie. It looks like things might not be as bad as I thought, fingers crossed 😊 Interesting idea about smelling the spores, if they rely on scent for attracting mates they must have some form of chemo-receptor so I suppose that could be possible, it would certainly convey an adaptive advantage, like you say though a study would have to be carried out but it would certainly be interesting to know.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Jamie Burston

by Jamie Burston, 08-May-17 11:24 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Cheers for your very detailed reply Jamie. It looks like things might not be as bad as I thought, fingers crossed 😊 Interesting idea about smelling the spores, if they rely on scent for attracting mates they must have some form of chemo-receptor so I suppose that could be possible, it would certainly convey an adaptive advantage, like you say though a study would have to be carried out but it would certainly be interesting to know.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Your welcome! I would imagine they would be fine. The beetles that carry the disease normally fly at the height of the mature canopy, if there is younger trees/growth they should hopefully be overlooked.

Finger-crossed given the low wind speeds tomorrow, I should have a better chance of seeing White-letter Hairstreak caterpillars again locally. If it's too cold they stay within the seed clusters, this year the seed is especially plentiful.

Re: Jamie Burston

by Pauline, 09-May-17 06:16 AM GMT

Morning Jamie

I agree with David – fantastic piece of work on the WLH – unique and original, based primarily on personal observation. I shall certainly be returning to it again and again. For convenience in accessing it, it would be great to see it with other reports on this site (if it's not already there). Well done Jamie – I look forward to seeing the concluding part.

Re: Jamie Burston

by Pete Eeles, 09-May-17 06:32 PM GMT

Pauline wrote:

Morning Jamie

I agree with David – fantastic piece of work on the WLH – unique and original, based primarily on personal observation. I shall certainly be returning to it again and again. For convenience in accessing it, it would be great to see it with other reports on this site (if it's not already there). Well done Jamie – I look forward to seeing the concluding part.

I agree, Pauline 😊

Our vehicle for publishing such works is "Dispar", and Jamie has promised me an article 😊

Cheers,

– Pete