

First records for Woodland Brown *Lopinga achine* in Dordogne

The Woodland Brown is a scarce and diminishing species in France. It is found at scattered and isolated sites across the country, often at low population levels. It has never been confirmed to be present in Dordogne department, though there are colonies in some adjacent departments including the Lot and Correze (P. Deschamps pers. com). As its name suggests it is a woodland species favouring woodland edge and clearings with a good grass layer, including roadsides. Other satyrids for example Speckled Wood, Woodland Grayling and Meadow Brown are also found in this habitat and a casual glance at a butterfly could dismiss a Woodland Brown as being one of these three common species. This may be the reason for the lack of records in Dordogne until 2011.

My first indication of its presence last year came on 19th May 2011, when a group of holidaying nature conservationists from the UK led by Colin Williams, reported the species to me. They had just returned from a trip to Rouffigniac Cave near Les Eyzies and said in passing that they had seen a Woodland Brown outside the famous cave entrance. They nearly did not mention it as they didn't realise it was a rare species in Dordogne. I visited the site the following morning around 10.30am when the weather was very warm and sunny. I found at least six fresh individuals between the grassy slope opposite the cave entrance (where I observed what appeared to be a pair flying together) and along the road to the picnic area (see photo). Individuals were observed flitting about along the roadside, landing on the ground and roadside tree foliage up to 10 metres. One individual settled on a low rocky vertical exposure in the manner of a Wall or grayling and another on an animal scat (see photo) where it took nutrients. I searched along several paths through the woods adjacent but found no more. The following day a friend Dick Askew visited and found around twelve individuals in the same area. These early records were in keeping with the unseasonably mild spring in 2011. Many other species were recorded emerging several weeks early, until the weather changed in mid June. In the north-west Lot the Woodland Brown normally emerges later in June (D.Cheeseman pers. com).

On the 10th June while searching for butterflies in the Bessède Forest near Cadouin, I noticed an unusual dark satyrid flying along a woodland edge adjacent to a small damp pasture. When it landed with closed wings, the large sub-marginal pale rings and adjacent interior pale line on the underside, confirmed it as another Woodland Brown (see photo). Later a second individual was seen. The weather was changeable with sunny intervals when the butterflies were active. We returned to the site on 24th June when Dudley Cheeseman found another rather tatty individual. Mr Cheeseman has some interesting comments on the Woodland Brown: "it does seem to have similar likes to the Speckled

Wood, e.g. roosting in sunshine in wooded areas with dappled sun, but to me it has a slower, lazier flight. Unlike the Speckled Wood, the males seem to be more active in roaming further afield and searching for females around trees and along woodland rides”.

Whilst checking the butterfly search engine on the Faune Aquitaine website I was interested to see that there had been another Dordogne record of Woodland Brown reported in 2011. This was made at the Argentine plateau near Rochebeaucourt in the extreme north-west of the department, by Bruno Jourdain and Inge van Halder on 2nd June.

Further research, this time on the observado.org website, produced yet another record for the species at Chancelade near Perigueux. The recorder was Ewen Adamson, who reported 10 on 19th May 2011. He comments: “The sighting was in my garden actually. It's the ideal spot for them. I live in a little wooded valley with ponds, lakes and streams running through meadows along the floor of the valley and mixed woodlands covering the sides. They are quite plentiful in mid May and I saw them shortly after moving here in 2005, much to my delight. The colony seems fairly stable”. He refers to mid May to June as being the flight period.

Conclusion

2011 brought the first ever confirmed records of the Woodland Brown for Dordogne. They were found at four roughly equidistant sites from the extreme north-west of the department through the centre to the south-east: Argentine, Chancelade, Rouffigniac and Cadouin. Some information on flight period, behaviour and numbers was gathered. These records suggest that the species may in fact be more widespread in Dordogne. It is not known whether the exceptionally warm dry spring weather in 2011 improved the fortunes of this species, making it easier to observe here. Further searches are planned for 2012.