

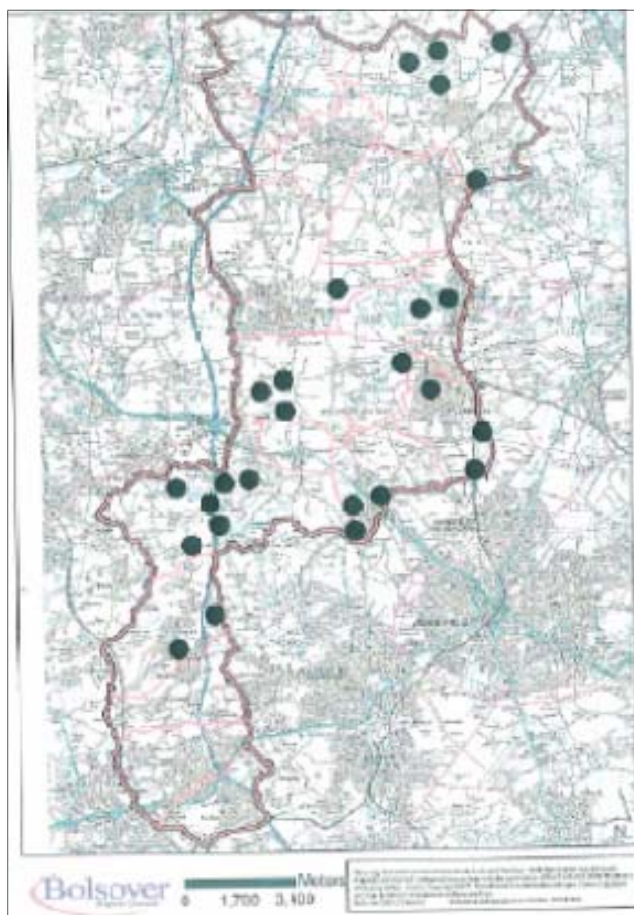
White-letter Hairstreaks in Bolsover



One of the priority species in the Bolsover Greenprint is the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly, an insect which is largely unknown to the general public. It's a small, brown butterfly which is on the wing from late June to early August; it lays its eggs exclusively on Elm trees, and here is the clue as to why it's an important species for conservation action. Although it did not suffer the rapid and widespread decline predicted for it at the height of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s and 80s, there are signs that this species is in trouble nationally.

In Bolsover District survey work began in 2005 and from the first two years' data it appears that the butterfly is at least holding its own. The map shows where it has been recorded recently and you can see from this that there are large gaps. These probably represent areas which have not been surveyed rather than genuine absence. The survey is continuing this year and anyone who is interested in helping should contact Barry Prater (barry@prater.demon.co.uk or 11 Stonehill Close, Ranskill, Retford, Notts DN22 8NG).

Records of White-letter hairstreak in Bolsover



How should a survey be carried out? Well, the butterfly lives in small colonies on Elms and is always described as being elusive and difficult to spot, but if you go about it the right way this should not be so. The best approach is to start in April or early May by searching for Elm trees when their green/yellow seed discs can be abundant and they can be located quite easily, often in roadside hedges or as isolated hedgerow or roadside trees.



White-letter hairstreak butterfly

Then return to these same trees in July and look carefully at the upper branches - if there is a colony then sooner rather than later you will see the butterfly make short, erratic flights up from a leaf, landing on another leaf nearby. During the morning and late afternoon, especially early in the flight period, males can be seen chasing and clashing around the canopy. Binoculars are very useful, especially for larger trees, and if you look at the butterfly at rest you will see the characteristic W-shaped mark on its closed hind wing. It always perches with wings closed.

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