



Window-winged Caddis Flies in the south of England

Species Status Report - 2018

The Species Recovery Trust

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Summary

The Window-winged Caddis Fly, *Hagenella clathrata*, is an extremely rare species. It only survives in a handful of sites in England and is also vanishing almost everywhere in Europe as its bog habitats are exploited.

This project aimed to survey two of the key sites in England for these species, Chobham Common and Whitmoor Common. It also aimed to train a number of volunteers in survey methods, so that they can continue surveying for this species in the future.

We spent two days surveying Whitmoor Common and one day surveying Chobham Common. We also trained fifteen volunteers. The results from Whitmoor Common were very exciting, with a record number of individuals found. Only one adult was found on Chobham Common (and this was not a definitive record). Some recommendations for future habitat work to improve the site were identified.

We are indebted to Margaret Guido's Charitable Trust for generously funding the work.

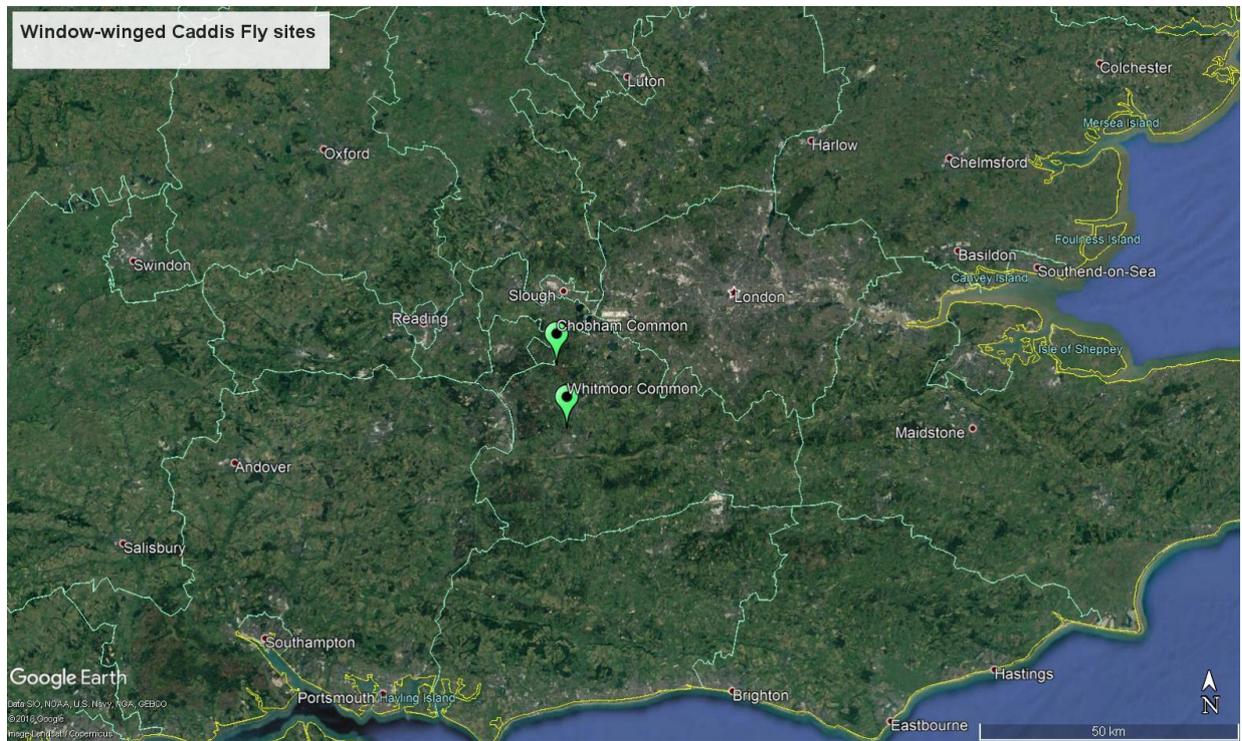
Background

Window-winged Caddis Flies are classified as endangered in the UK, meaning that they face a very high risk of extinction. The biggest threats to these caddis flies are the drying out of their habitat, the encroachment of trees into their boggy habitat, wildfires, and the opening of tussock habitat by livestock trampling the ground.

These caddis flies commonly live in damp, tussocky vegetation, and are only found in a few raised bogs and heathlands in the UK. They inhabit areas with an abundance of purple moor grass, pools available to them in autumn and early summer, and trees and shrubbery (for larval food, cast-making material, and sites for adults to swarm). The caddis flies lay egg masses in wet areas, under a leaf litter layer. The larvae hatch a few weeks after laying and hide in the surrounding damp litter. They reach their full size by spring and adults emerge and fly between May and early June in the south of England. This means there is only a short period of time each year in which to survey for adults.

In the south of England there are only two known populations of the species, one on Chobham Common and one on Whitmoor Common. These sites have not been subject to regular survey and so the status of the populations is not clear.

Sites



Surveys and volunteer training

In May 2018, we undertook two days of surveys on Whitmoor Common and one day on Chobham Common. We invited a group of volunteers to accompany us on two of the survey days to teach them how to survey for the caddis fly. The intention was to build up a network of volunteers who will be able to survey for this species in the future, so that we have a sustainable method of continuous monitoring.

Whitmoor Common

Nine volunteers accompanied us on the survey at Whitmoor Common. This meant that we could cover a lot more ground, as well as teach local volunteers about this rare species and how to survey for it.

We returned on a second day, this time without the volunteers, to undertake some additional surveys in a different section of the common.

The results on Whitmoor Common were very exciting. Over the two days, 56 individual Window-winged Caddis Flies were recorded. As we visited a very different section of the common on the second day of surveying, it is very unlikely that there was any double counting, and so it is likely that these were 56 separate individuals. This is the largest number ever recorded on site.

Overall, the habitat was considered highly suitable and to have expanded in some places, which was a very positive finding. However, there were some areas where habitat work is needed to improve suitability for this species, for example, all compartments north of the stream need scrub management.

Over the summer, there were unfortunately some wildfires on Whitmoor Common. Fortunately, the fires stopped before reaching the main caddis fly habitat, however, they have affected an area that had been identified as potentially suitable for colonisation. It is hoped that some of the volunteers will undertake surveys next year and this will help us to assess any damage to the population caused by these fires.

Chobham Common

Unfortunately, the findings from Chobham Common were very disappointing. In a day of surveying with a group of six volunteers, only one adult was seen, and this was not a definitive record. The overall habitat is scrubbing over and subsequently drying out. This means that urgent action needs to be taken to prevent the species from being lost from this site. We have been in contact with Surrey Wildlife Trust about this, as they manage the site, and we understand that these recommendations will be taken forward in their management work over the winter. We will continue to liaise with them to ensure that this does take place.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings on Whitmoor Common were extremely positive. The population appears to be doing well and the habitat to remain largely suitable. We will continue to work with our volunteers to undertake further surveys to monitor this population and to assess the impacts of the fires.

On Chobham Common, the situation is much more challenging. We will continue to work with Surrey Wildlife Trust to ensure that the necessary habitat work takes place. We will also work with our volunteers to continue to monitor the site.

One final outcome of this project was the identification of a potential new site. A member of Surrey Wildlife Trust accompanied us on the survey of Whitmoor Common. Following this, he has identified an additional site in Surrey that has suitable habitat but has never been surveyed for the caddis fly as it is owned by the Ministry of Defence, and so is not open to the public. The Surrey Wildlife Trust employee is going to organise for us to get access to this site next year to search for caddis flies. If Window-winged Caddis Flies are found on this site, this could be a very exciting development.

About Us

The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.

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