



Window-winged Caddis Flies in the south of England

Species Status Report - 2019

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 one of the key sites in England for this species, Whitmoor Common, and a site that had not been surveyed for many years but where the habitat was considered to be suitable, Barossa. 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 one day surveying Whitmoor Common as part of the volunteer training course and ran three follow-up survey days, one day on Barossa and two on Whitmoor. In total this year, we trained ten volunteers.

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

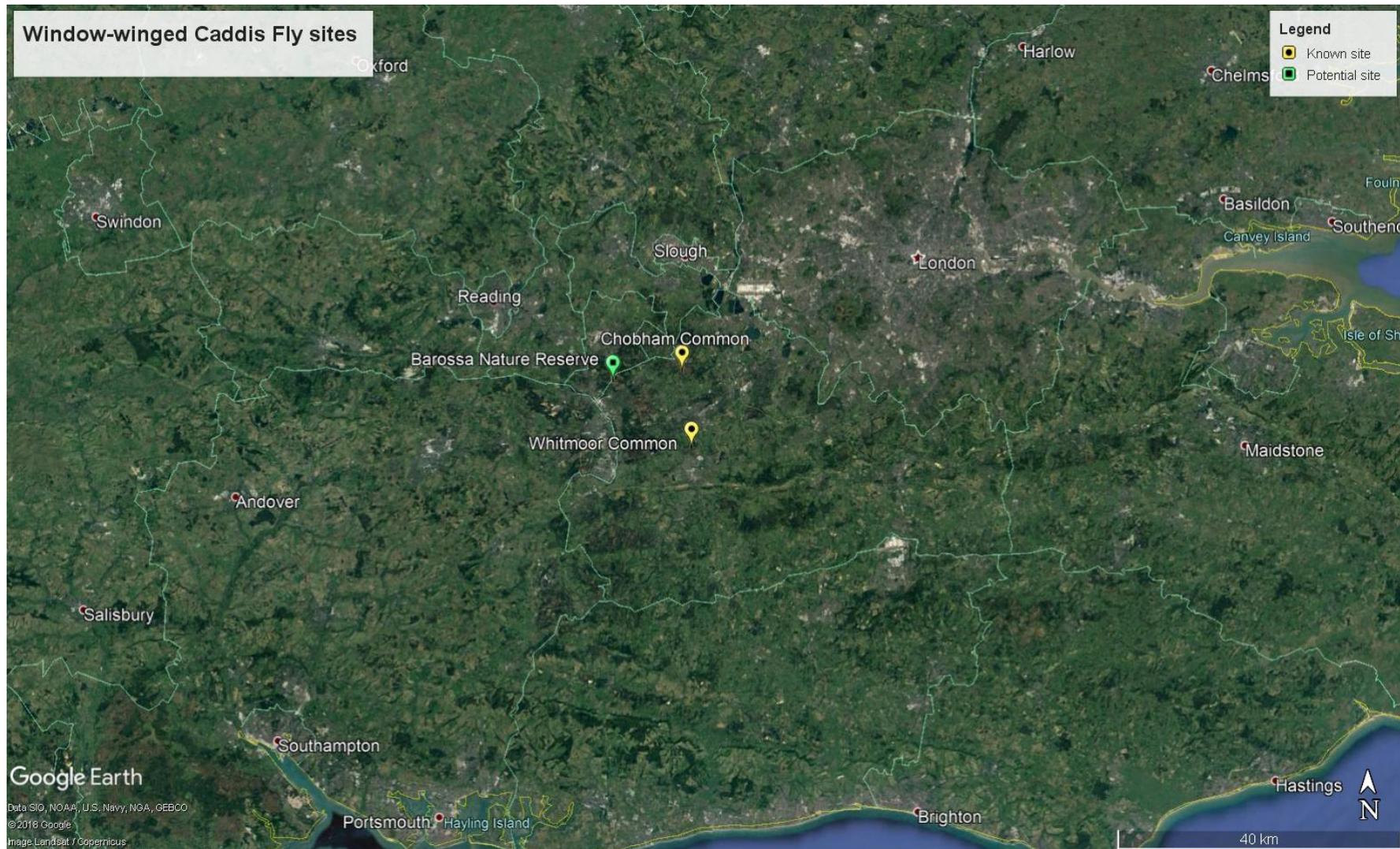
Background

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

On 8th May 2019, we carried out a survey of Whitmoor Common with a group of volunteers. 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

Ten 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 two subsequent days with the volunteers, to undertake some additional surveys in a different section of the common.

The results on Whitmoor Common were very disappointing this year, with no caddis flies seen on either of the first two surveys. The habitat still appears to be suitable but we were unlucky with the weather as it was overcast and windy, with outbreaks of rain. There were some patches of sunshine, but the overall conditions were not optimal for caddis fly surveys.

Fortunately, on the third survey day, one caddis fly was seen, providing confidence that the species is still present on the site.

It was also positive to note that Surrey Wildlife Trust had undertaken extensive habitat work to expand the possible range of the species, as a result of the recommendations that we made following our surveys in 2018. This has massively improved the quality and quantity of habitat available for Window-winged Caddis Flies on the site.

Barossa Nature Reserve

On the 13th May we carried out a survey on Barossa Nature Reserve. We were accompanied by a group of four volunteers. This was an exciting survey because the site had not been surveyed for many years. It is owned by the Ministry of Defence and so it can be difficult to get permission to access the site, however, there is an area on the site that is highly suitable for the caddis fly. We therefore worked with Surrey Wildlife Trust to get permission to access the site.

We arrived in the afternoon on a hot, sunny day with a light breeze, perfect conditions for the caddis fly. We walked through the area of suitable habitat, down by the wish stream. Due to recent fires and a lack of water flow through the area, there was less suitable habitat than we were expecting, however, there was still one area where the habitat looked promising. We used nets to sweep the vegetation and visually searched the purple moor grass for any signs of caddis flies. Unfortunately, we did not find any.

Given that the conditions were perfect for Window-winged Caddis Flies, we are fairly confident that the species is not present on this site. However, we will encourage the volunteers to continue to survey this site each year, with permission from Surrey Wildlife Trust, to confirm if this is the case. Although this is a disappointing finding, it is still extremely useful information in terms of the wider conservation of the species.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings this year were disappointing, with only one caddis fly found on Whitmoor Common. We will continue to work with our volunteers to undertake further surveys to monitor this population in the future to ensure that the habitat remains suitable and that the species continues to survive.

It was also disappointing not to find the species on Barossa. The caddis fly needs a very particular habitat which is not found in very many places in the country. This really emphasises the need to protect the two populations that we know of, as it seems probable that they really are the last two populations in the south of England. However, we will continue to encourage our volunteers to survey across Surrey and Hampshire in the hope that we will find other populations.

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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