



The New Forest Cicada

Species Status Report - 2018

The Species Recovery Trust

37 Albany Road

Salisbury

SP1 3YQ

01722 322539

enquiries@speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk

www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk

Registered in England and Wales Charity 1146387

the
species
recovery
trust



Summary

Survey work to search for the presence of pre-emergence turrets for the New Forest Cicada (*Cicadetta montana*) was undertaken during 2018.

Due to optimal weather conditions for adult song (and surveyor availability), ten days/part days were spent searching for pre-emergence turrets, oviposition scars and singing adults.

Areas searched were those which had previously been identified by the surveyor as being suitable for the species. One new search area was included, at Norley Copse, on the basis of a record of possible song being heard there in 2017.

The temperature during the adult period was largely suitable with the majority of days being in the mid to high twenties Celsius, although many days were punctuated with strong winds.

No cicada pre-emergence turrets, oviposition scars or adults were recorded.

Notes regarding song period, Norley Copse and Inclosure and Gibbet Wood are presented.

Recommendations for further survey are presented.

Introduction

The New Forest Cicada has always had a limited distribution within the New Forest, Hampshire. No confirmed sightings of the species have been made since the early 1990s, despite extensive searches during the period 1996-2014. Survey for the species involve searches for pre-emergence turrets in early spring, searches for singing and active adults during the flight period of late May-early July, and searches for evidence of oviposition during the same period and into early autumn.

Ten days/part days were committed to the searches in light of a run of suitable weather for adult song and activity. Areas surveyed were those which had been identified in previous surveys as being suitable for the species, and therefore most likely to yield results. A new search site, at Norley Copse, near Lymington was included on the basis of possible song being heard there during 2017.

Unfortunately, many of the areas identified previously are now unsuitable for the species and only two areas were identified as being suitable habitat for the species. It was within these areas, and the new location at Norley Copse that the bulk of the time available was spent. Gibbet Wood is no longer considered suitable either for the species today, or as a possible re-introduction site in the future.

Areas surveyed

Areas surveyed were those that had previously been identified as being suitable for the species:

1. **Norley Copse** (grid ref SZ3698), this location was added to the search area based on possible song being heard there in 2017. The site itself is a small area, measuring c. 30 yards x 10 yards, beneath power lines on the western edge of Norley Copse. To the north and west of the 'glade' are hard grazed pony paddocks, to the south, a minor road.

Although there appears to be no formal access to this site, being beneath power lines, and easily accessible via a gate from the minor road, it was possible to stand at said gate and monitor the site, without actually entering.

Visits were made to the site on 22nd, 26th and 28th June, but no sight or sound of cicadas was recorded.

During the visit on 28th June Roesel's Bush Cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*) was heard singing. This species had been identified by myself as having song that sounds most like the cicada, following fieldwork in Belgium during the 1990's. It is highly likely, given the nature of the site discussed below that this is the species which had been heard here during 2017.

2. **Salisbury Trench** (central grid ref SU2514), this includes the Gibbet Wood area where the cicada maintained a stronghold, albeit somewhat artificially from the late 1960s until the early 1990s. This area has largely been unsuitable for the species since the late 1990s and little attention was paid to it during this survey. One small area within the Coppice of Linwood is still relatively suitable and a short period of time was spent searching for adults here on 12th July. Due to extensive Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) growth no searches were made for pre-emergence turrets. Due to mis-management, Gibbet Wood is now unsuitable and so is not worth surveying, other than to continue to take fixed point photographs.
3. **Kings Garn Gutter** (central grid ref SU2513), this area is adjacent to Salisbury Trench and previously contained large areas of suitable-looking habitat. Most of this area is now unsuitable for the species with only the area along the eastern boundary of the Inclosure being visited on 8th and 12th July.
4. **Raven's Nest Inclosure** (grid ref SU2515), this area, again adjacent to Salisbury Trench contains a large area of clear-fell/replant. This area was searched on 4th and 21st June, 8th and 12th July.
5. **Long Beech Inclosure** (grid ref SU2513), a large area of recent (in the past fifteen years) clear-fell with scattered scrub and natural regeneration, but not enclosed against forest livestock. Visits were made on 21st June and 8th July.
6. **Denny and Matley Woods** (grid refs SU3305, SU 3307)
Both these areas were visited on 6th June, 1st and 9th July.

Notes regarding Norley Copse and nearby Norley Inclosure

At first glance this area appears to hold suitable cicada habitat. However, the ground flora appears to show an abundance of Sphagnum moss, suggesting the site lies wet during the winter. This is unsuitable for cicada nymph development. Secondly, the size of glade suggests it is too small to adequately support the species.

By the very nature of being below power lines, the site is presumably cleared of woody vegetation (birch, hazel) on a regular basis which serves to maintain the open nature of the site, which, if the area cleared could be increased, would make the site more suitable for the species. Judging from the current age of re-growth beneath the power lines this area had been cleared approximately three years ago, suggesting it hasn't been suitable for the cicada for a number of years.

A visit was made to Norley Inclosure (SZ3598) early in the season to see if there were any suitable areas of cicada habitat. This was undertaken on the basis that if the species was present at Norley Copse, then it would have presumably colonised from nearby. There were no areas of suitable habitat in Norley Inclosure, most of the rides being vehicle width at best, and no clearings. One other aspect of Norley Inclosure was the total absence of any orthoptera species in any of the rides. The suspected reason for this being a huge population of Wood Ant (*Formica rufa*) that seemed to cover almost every piece of vegetation. Had cicadas ever been present here it is unlikely they would have survived long.

Notes regarding song period

It was interesting to note Roesel's Bush Cricket song at Norley Copse on 28th June, this being particularly early for this species. When I first became involved in this project during 1996 the cicada was the only insect species that could be singing during the period mid-May to early July. This being some weeks before any of the orthoptera matured and began singing. This meant that should song be reported during this period there was almost 100% certainty that it would be cicada. However, since the mid 2000s the song period for many orthopterans has become earlier and there is now a significant amount of overlap between these two groups of songster. I have recorded Field Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*) singing at Denny Wood during the last week of May, and increasingly other orthopterans, including Roesel's Bush Cricket and the Long-winged Conehead (*Conocephalus discolor*) singing during the cicada song period. This will only lead to further confusion over whether cicada or orthopteran has been heard in the future.

Notes regarding Gibbet Wood

Sadly, Gibbet Wood is no longer suitable for cicadas, either today, or as a possible future reintroduction site.

For many years when the project was part of English Nature's/Natural England's 'Species Recovery Programme' the glades at Gibbet were managed to control the bracken and livestock grazing. No bracken management has been undertaken for many years with the result being that virtually the whole area within Gibbet Wood is now shoulder-high in bracken. This reduces the amount of open, warm ground for turret construction in early spring, and creates too much shade for oviposition sites.

Secondly, there was always an agreement with the Forestry Commission that the pedestrian gates to the glade would remain locked for the period 1st March to 1st October to prevent livestock grazing off the ground flora during the summer, and more importantly, if cicadas were present, to prevent pre-emergence turrets being trampled. In recent years, the gates have been open all summer and sometimes locked during the winter. This has resulted in the ground flora being grazed off like the open forest, has reduced *Molinia* growth (a known nymphal food resource) and would result in trampling of any turrets should they appear.

Recommendations for further survey

Further surveys should be undertaken at sites 2 (Coppice of Linwood), 3 (Kings Garn Gutter eastern boundary), 4 (Ravens Nest Inclosure) and 5 (Long Beech Inclosure) as identified above. Priority should be made in areas 4 and 5. Searches could also be made in the Denny Wood (SU3305) and Matley Wood (SU3307) areas where the species was recorded, but no breeding site ever found during the 1970s.

Searches in early spring (late March/early April) could be made for pre-emergence turrets and during the flight period (late May-early July) for singing/active adults. Searches for oviposition scars could be made during the flight period and as late as September.

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.

The Species Recovery Trust
37 Albany Road
Salisbury
SP1 3YQ
01722 322539
enquiries@speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk
www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk

Registered in England and Wales Charity 1146387

the
species
recovery
trust