



## Frequently Asked Questions

**I was only able to complete part of the transect route this week due to deteriorating weather/blocked access etc. Should I still enter the data?** No, you should only supply data for transect walks that have been completed. Nearly all our analysis is carried out with site totals, rather than using section level data. An incomplete walk misses the butterflies on the remaining sections. The resulting totals, at a site level, will under-estimate the population figures and could contribute to a false negative trend.

**If I only manage to complete part of the route one day, can I go back and finish it the next day?** Unfortunately, this is not possible – data should only be supplied for complete transect walks, for the reasons given above. Conditions on the two days may well be different and it is not possible to combine two partly complete walks without compromising the data. If you find that you need to return to the site the next day, then you should start again and walk the whole transect.

**I sometimes/often walk my transect with a colleague/ friend. Should we count all the butterflies we see between us?** No, there should always be just one nominated recorder for each walk who records only what they see and those are the data that should be supplied to the UKBMS. It's inevitable that we will miss some butterflies, particularly when they are very active, but the most important thing is consistency, so that data from each walk are comparable. If you include additional butterflies seen by others walking alongside you, this will artificially inflate the population figures for the site and could contribute to a false positive trend.

**Can we enter data from walks carried out in poor weather?** We know that some recorders try to walk their transect every week, regardless of the weather conditions. This is not necessary, and you should be aware that any data which do not meet the weather criteria are excluded from the main trend analysis that we carry out each year. Nevertheless, you may enter data from walks in sub-optimal conditions into the website, provided you supply accurate weather data, and these counts can then be made available for other research uses such as climate change studies. Having said that, some Branch Co-ordinators would prefer that you do not enter these walks, as it makes their local analysis more difficult. If in doubt, please refer to your local Branch Co-ordinator before entering data for these walks.

**Should we still enter data if we didn't see any butterflies?** Yes please! If you have conducted a valid transect walk (full route, appropriate weather) then you should always enter the details of that walk, regardless of whether any butterflies were seen. A true zero count reflects the prevailing

conditions and butterfly activity at that point in the season and is as valid as any other count. As the BTO say, this makes you a 'zero hero'.

**If I have zero count, do I need to enter zero beside each species?** No, just enter your walk details, date, sunshine, temp, wind speed etc. The system assumes you have recorded all the butterflies you've seen, so will assume zeros when no counts are recorded on a walk.

**We walked the transect more than once during a week, should we enter all the data or only the walk with the highest counts?** Please supply us with your data from all valid transect walks during the week. The Annual Summary table on the website will show an average count for these walks, whilst all data points contribute equally to the main trend analysis that we carry out each year. If you pick and choose the best walks, this will artificially inflate the population figures for the site – particularly in comparison with years when you could only walk the route once per week. This could contribute to a false positive trend.

**Can I use the 'Notes' field to let you know when I've done something different?** No, I'm afraid this is not a suitable way to inform us of any variations you have made to the standard recording practice. With over 25,000 transect walks conducted each year, it is simply not feasible for UKBMS staff to read the notes from each walk before we approve them for analysis. If you have not followed the standard methodology, hopefully the answers above will inform you of what you should do with the data. If you are in doubt, please ask your Branch Co-ordinator or a member of the UKBMS team before you enter any data.

**Can I use the 'Notes' field to tell you more about what I've seen?** We are only likely to refer to your notes if we have specific queries with the data. If you have recorded a butterfly on your transect that is unusual or new to the site, or perhaps very early/late in the season, then it would certainly be helpful if you confirm this sighting in your notes. That way we'll not need to contact you further. However, if you make additional butterfly sightings 'off-transect' then you should submit these records separately to your county butterfly recorder – perhaps through the iRecord Butterflies App, iRecord website or via [www.butterflyrecording.org/](http://www.butterflyrecording.org/). We are not able to convert comments in the 'Notes' field into standard biological records.

**How do I calculate the % sunshine for each section?** Any sunshine which is enough to cast a shadow is recordable. For each section record how much of the section was in sunshine, for example

**Section 1.** There was bright sunshine casting a shadow for the entire section - record 100%.

**Section 2.** There was bright sunshine for half of your section, then a cloud obscured the sun and no shadow was cast – record 50%

It can help to think of your section as a bar of chocolate with ten pieces representing the length of your section. If you had sunshine for the first 7 pieces, and cloud for the remaining 3 - record 70%. As walks should be undertaken in a least bright weather, many people find it easier to calculate the 'pieces' of the section of no sunshine and take that away from the total.

**Section 3** - There was no sunshine for 2 chocolate pieces- record 80%

**What time, commitment and energy does a transect require?** A transect provides meaningful data invaluable to research and conservation and requires significant commitment over a long period (at least 2 years to contribute towards national trends, or 5 years to identify local trends)). It is important the potential new walkers are aware of the commitment involved, this is for their own benefit and to help manage the workload of Regional Coordinators who dedicate time and effort to the setting up transects and support of new walkers.

**What should I consider when setting up a new transect?** For transect data to be useful for long-term monitoring you ideally need at least 5 years of data, long term commitment and people to walk it in the future. You may really love your local patch, but would it appeal to others to carry on your good work if you are no longer able? When setting up a transect please consider the following:

- Is the transect convenient, safe, accessible, and relatively easy to walk, i.e., no expectation to climb over fences, jump streams, enter field with cattle etc.?
- Is there likely to be a change of land use in the foreseeable future, which would result in the transect being changed significantly or unwalkable?
- Is it an enjoyable walk, with a mosaic of habitats and likelihood of seeing butterflies, which will encourage others to want to take part or take over?
- Is the transect route easily followed and conveyed to another walkers?
- Is the site correctly mapped and described to allow another walker to take over or provide cover?

**What time and effort does a transect require?** Transects should be walked every week from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April to 30<sup>th</sup> September. Most transects will take around an hour to walk, please also factor in preparation, travel time and online data submission. Please consider the following

- Do I have the time to carry out a weekly walk?
- Do I have time to travel and how far am I prepared to travel? Please consider the environmental and financial cost of travelling when selecting a transect
- Can I walk approx. 1-2 miles over changing terrain?
- Am I able to walk at short notice to avail of good weather?
- Do I mind walking alone, do I feel safe at a remote or urban site?
- Am I confident with my butterfly ID?

If you are not sure you can offer the commitment required, you could try the [Garden Butterfly Survey](#) as a tester. Recording butterflies from your own garden once a week, will help you get a sense of the commitment involved in recording and submitting data on weekly basis.

If a weekly survey from your own garden is proving too time consuming or difficult to maintain, it is unlikely that a more complex transect walk, with the additional travel and data submission is likely to suit you at this stage.

Alternatively, you may wish to try a trial transect year (see **Should I do a trial run of my transect below**)

**Should I do a trial run of my transect?** To test the commitment of a new transect, you can undertake a year's trial run on the site of your choice. Before setting up an account online, map out a route using the [F1 form](#) and conduct a weekly walk using the [F2 Form](#) . If you find that the commitment is easily maintained then you can set up an account, map your route online and submit your data for the year. You may also find that you want to alter your transect route after walking it for a few months. This is another good reason for running the first year as a trial. You can set up your transect online once you've decided on the final route that it will take.

**How and when are Regional Coordinators informed of new sites in their area?** If a new user includes their intended transect or branch area when registering an account we can immediately inform the Regional Coordinator of a potential new transect in their area. If an intended transect is not named, UKBMS admin will request that the new walker informs their local coordinator as soon as possible Regional Coordinators are cc'd into this communication.

New transects which are set up without any further communication with UKBMS staff are not automatically linked with the Regional Coordinator. At the end of every season UKBMS staff will search for new transects on the website and inform the Regional Coordinator.

The UKBMS staff are very happy to assign new transects to Regional Coordinators at any time if they become aware of a new transect prior to the end of season audit.

**Can I walk more than 26 weeks?** Yes, if you wish, you can start your walks as soon as the weather is suitable and continue into the Autumn months if they remain warm and bright.

When submitting your data, earlier weeks start at -1, -2, -3 etc. depending on how many weeks prior to the onset of the official week 1 April 1-7<sup>th</sup> you have started. Additional weeks in Autumn just continue the numerical sequence e.g., week 26 is the official final week of September, week 27, 28, 29 and so on are additional weeks into Autumn. These additional data will not contribute to routine analysis, but could be used for additional research purposes.

**Can a transect be transferred to someone else?** Yes, transects can be linked to several user accounts, or transferred from one recorder to another. All users linked to a transect can see summary data entered by other users on the same transect. However, data cannot be transferred between accounts (see below).

**Can transect *data* be transferred to someone else?** Any data entered onto the website belong to the account through which they were entered. The data cannot be transferred to another user (although other users can see a summary of those data).

However, if the user account was set up by an organisation and the lead staff member has moved on, it is possible to transfer that account to a new member of staff, so that they maintain full access to the previous data. In this circumstance we can change the email address linked to the account, to allow for communications and password resets etc.

**Can I change the route of my transect?** When looking at changes in butterfly numbers, it is important that we are comparing like with like – the same route each year. All our main analyses are based on site totals, not individual sections, so any changes to or loss of sections would affect overall trends for the transect. If you really need to change your route, you will need to set up a brand new transect.

Several years of monitoring are required before any local trends in abundance can be identified, so it is usually better to keep the same route going, wherever possible. If you wish to incorporate additional areas into your transect, you can set up an extension and run the new sections as a separate transect (usually called '*Site Name Extension*'), and this would maintain the data run for the original transect.

**What is the value of aggregated Small/Essex Skipper aggregates (combined) records?** For UKBMS, it is important that every butterfly within the recording box is recorded, as far as practically possible. If recorders only include butterflies when they are 100% confident, this will lead to them counting more butterflies as they gain skills and experience. This could then result in a false positive trend – i.e., a trend that reflects the recorder's experience level rather than true changes in butterfly abundance.

The Small/Essex Skipper aggregate has been included within the UKBMS since its inception, as a tool for allowing recorders to include them when a clear identification is difficult. The UKBMS can then produce an aggregate trend for those species (which is how the data are currently used for Government Indicators).

For County Data Sets, these aggregate data are of less value, when the principal aim is to collect species records. Although a County Recorder could choose to include aggregate records, and produce distribution maps of aggregate species, they are not obliged to do so. We understand that, and the idea of removing the aggregate class from UKBMS has been discussed at intervals, but at present we intend to persist, for the reasons given above. We do encourage recorders to attempt a positive ID to species level and to practice their ID skills.

In some areas of the country, where Essex Skippers are rare, transect co-ordinators have instructed recorders to record all as Small Skipper, unless a positive ID of Essex Skipper is made, this is not a realistic approach in all areas.

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## **If you aggregate skippers, why don't you aggregate whites?**

The identification of Whites is less challenging than Small/Essex Skippers and, with a little practice, most recorders should be able to distinguish most Whites in their recording 'box' and should know which species are more likely to be encountered in different sections of their route. If similar species such as Small White and Green-veined White are flying together at a site, you may want to net a sample to determine the proportion of each species present - you can then divide up your overall counts accordingly. For example, if you catch and identify 8 Small Whites and 2 Green-veined Whites, a count of 30 unidentified whites can be converted to an estimated 24 Small Whites and 6 Green veined Whites. As we ideally need you to record every butterfly in your recording box, this approach is preferable to using an aggregation for trend analysis.

For advice on identifying whites please see [How to identify whites](#)

## **Thanks to our partners**

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