

Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey Annual Newsletter 2024 Season

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Welcome to the WCBS

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) forms part of the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) which generates high quality data on the population status of butterflies. The WCBS comprises a network of randomly selected 1km squares across the UK sampled at least twice a year. Recorders count butterflies using standard transect criteria along two 1km long survey lines, which run parallel within the square. This newsletter presents initial results from WCBS squares in 2024, based on changes in species occurrence from the previous year. The full population trend results, from all component surveys of the UKBMS are published as official statistics and made available via the JNCC and UKBMS websites. The WCBS is jointly run by Butterfly Conservation (BC), the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

Coverage in 2024

Coverage increased in 2024 with 826 squares surveyed*, this is up by 31 squares on 2023 levels. Of these, 510 squares were monitored by BC volunteers and a further 316 squares were monitored by BTO volunteers as an addition to their Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS). The increase in overall survey effort is down to an increase in WCBS-BBS squares of 33, with a slight decrease in WCBS-BC squares of two. This overall increase reflects the dedication of the BTO team in promoting the WCBS and the enthusiastic participation of BBS volunteers. It is especially commendable given the particularly challenging weather conditions faced during the 2024 survey season.

At the country level 729 squares were surveyed in England up by 23 on 2023 coverage, 44 squares were surveyed in Scotland down by four on 2023, 17 squares were surveyed in Northern Ireland up by four on 2023, 34 squares were surveyed in Wales up by 8 on 2023 and on the Isle of Man two squares were surveyed which is the same as in 2023.

**records submitted to the Scheme before 01/01/2025*

Regional Coverage

The three BC branch areas with the greatest number of squares surveyed during 2024 were Dorset with 67 squares (61 by BC volunteers and 6 by BBS volunteers), Gloucestershire with 52 squares (43 BC and 9 BBS) and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight with 43 squares covered (27 BC and 16 BBS). Figure 1 shows the level of coverage per BC Branch area in 2024.

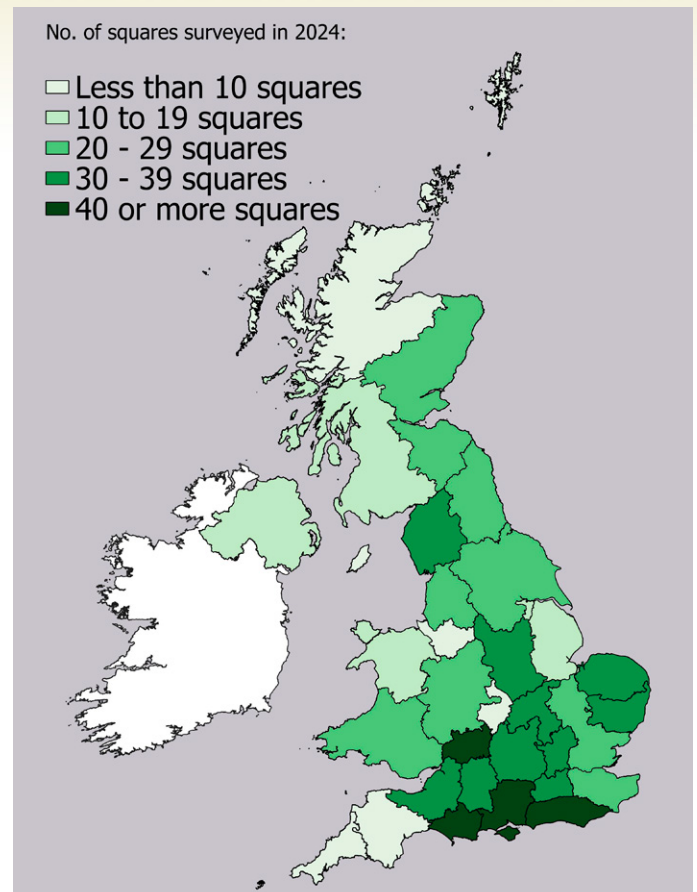


Figure 1. WCBS Coverage 2024 including BC and BBS squares for BC Branch areas (Map data from OpenStreetMap: openstreetmap.org/copyright)

The BC branch area that saw the greatest overall increase in coverage was Somerset and Bristol with an increase of eight squares, followed by Gloucestershire which increased by seven squares. Twenty two regions either increased or maintained the number of squares covered (69%) and just 10 (31%) showed a decline in coverage.

Coverage by BBS surveyors was highest in Sussex with 29 squares surveyed, this is the seventh year in a row that this county had the highest coverage. Also of note is the contribution of BBS volunteers to the dataset in South Wales and West Midlands where they covered more than 70% of the total squares in the area.

The full breakdown of regional coverage can be seen in table 1 ([page 6](#)).

2024 SURVEY

Overview of Survey Results 2024

In total 1,976 WCBS surveys were carried out by 627 different recorders. During the surveys they counted 79,603 butterflies. This included sightings of 47 different species, the same number of species as recorded in 2022 and 2023. The species count comprised of 18 habitat specialists, 25 species of the wider countryside and three migratory species (plus the species aggregate of Small/Essex Skipper).

Early and late visits

There were 344 early spring visits which took place before the core survey season started on July 1st. These visits took place in 208 squares and recorded a total of 38 butterfly species. Meadow Brown was the most widespread species during these spring visits, being recorded within 104 squares. It was also the most abundant with 1,934 individuals recorded during these spring visits. Orange-tip was the next most widespread being recorded in 91 squares and also next most abundant with 556 individuals. Speckled Wood was the third most widespread being recorded in 85 squares and fourth most abundant with 324 individuals counted on the spring visits.

There were an additional 45 late visits to 39 different squares after the core survey season ended on 31st August. These visits recorded 956 butterflies of 20 different species with Small White being the most recorded species on these late visits.

Busiest day

The overall busiest day for survey visits was Sunday 11th of August when 93 visits were carried out, recording 3,416 butterflies of 27 different species. This coincided with a period of warm weather occurring on a weekend, with a warm weather front moving across the UK bringing the highest temperatures of the year so far on the following day. It is great that surveyors were able to take advantage of this warm spell to get out and conduct their surveys.

Most visited squares

The square that received the most visits was a BC square near Hapton in Norfolk with 12 visits undertaken between April 2nd and September 1st. The next most visited square was in Essex near Basildon and received 11 visits, followed by joint third most visited squares near Cambridge and Saxmundham, Suffolk both receiving 10 visits. The most visited BBS square was near Chippenham in Wiltshire with eight visits.

The minimum number of visits required for data to be valid through the WCBS method is two visits that are spaced 10 days apart, but surveyors are encouraged to make further visits during good weather if possible.

Valid core visits

The core survey period runs from July 1st through to August 31st, during this period there were 1,420 visits to 811 squares. To meet the survey criteria, two visits to each square must take place ten days apart within this core period. In all, 719 squares (89% of the total squares

surveyed) met the minimum survey criteria. This data goes forwards into the analysis below.

There were 51 visits that did not meet the survey conditions, ie they were carried out when it was too cold, cloudy, windy, too early in the morning or too late in the afternoon to meet the survey criteria. To ensure the robustness and comparability of the data, the results from these visits were excluded from the analysis presented below.

In total, 2,777 butterfly records were made outside of the valid core visits. These records still have value and are made available to county recorders and others via iRecord as well as helping to build the overall picture for the year.

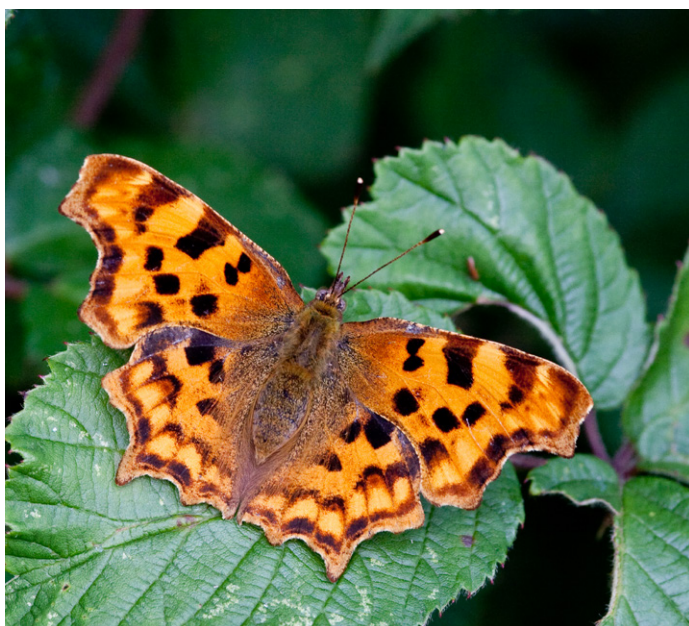
Analysis of valid core visits

There were 22,732 butterflies of 45 species recorded during the 1,420 valid core survey visits. This total abundance shows a dramatic decline on the 2023 figures which were 61,470 butterflies recorded from a similar number of core visits at 1,142.

In 2024, an average of 16 butterflies were recorded per core valid visit - a substantial decrease compared to the averages of 53 butterflies in 2023 and 52 in 2022.

Occupancy

Nineteen species recorded through the valid core visits were reported in 100 or more squares, this equates to having 'good' occupancy. A further six species



Comma (Photo by Peter Eeles)



Common Blue (Photo by Iain H Leach)

were found in 30-99 squares equating to 'average' occupancy, with the remaining 20 species being recorded in fewer than 30 squares.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of squares each species was recorded in during 2024 (in orange) and 2023 (in blue) along with the change in percentage points between the two years, purple showing negative change and green showing positive change.

The Meadow Brown was again the most widespread butterfly being recorded from 87% of squares, down from 92% in 2023. Ringlet was the only species to show any substantial increase in occupancy on 2023 with a 2.1% increase. All other species either showed a decline in the percentage of squares they were recorded in or very little change.

Of those that showed declines in

occupancy, Holly Blue showed the largest (-42.3%) although this species had a particularly good year in 2023. Showing the next steepest decline in occupancy was Red Admiral (-28.4%) and Comma (-28.1%). Another species of concern is Small Tortoiseshell that was recorded in 41.7% of squares in 2023 and down to 18.9% of squares in 2024 (-22.8%). Similar declines in occupancy for Common Blue were recorded from 41.3% of squares in 2023 to 18.8% in 2024 (-22.5%).

Habitat specialists

Sixteen species of habitat specialists were recorded on the WCBS squares. While this survey is not designed to monitor the distribution of these habitat specialists, the records are a valuable and welcome addition to the dataset. Silver-washed Fritillary remained the most widespread of the habitat specialists being recorded



Silver-washed Fritillary

(Photo by Iain H Leach)

on 7% of the squares that were surveyed during the core period. Dark Green Fritillary (2.5%) and Grayling (2.2%) were the next most widespread habitat specialists. In 2024 the habitat specialists did not show such marked declines in occupancy as the wider countryside species did.

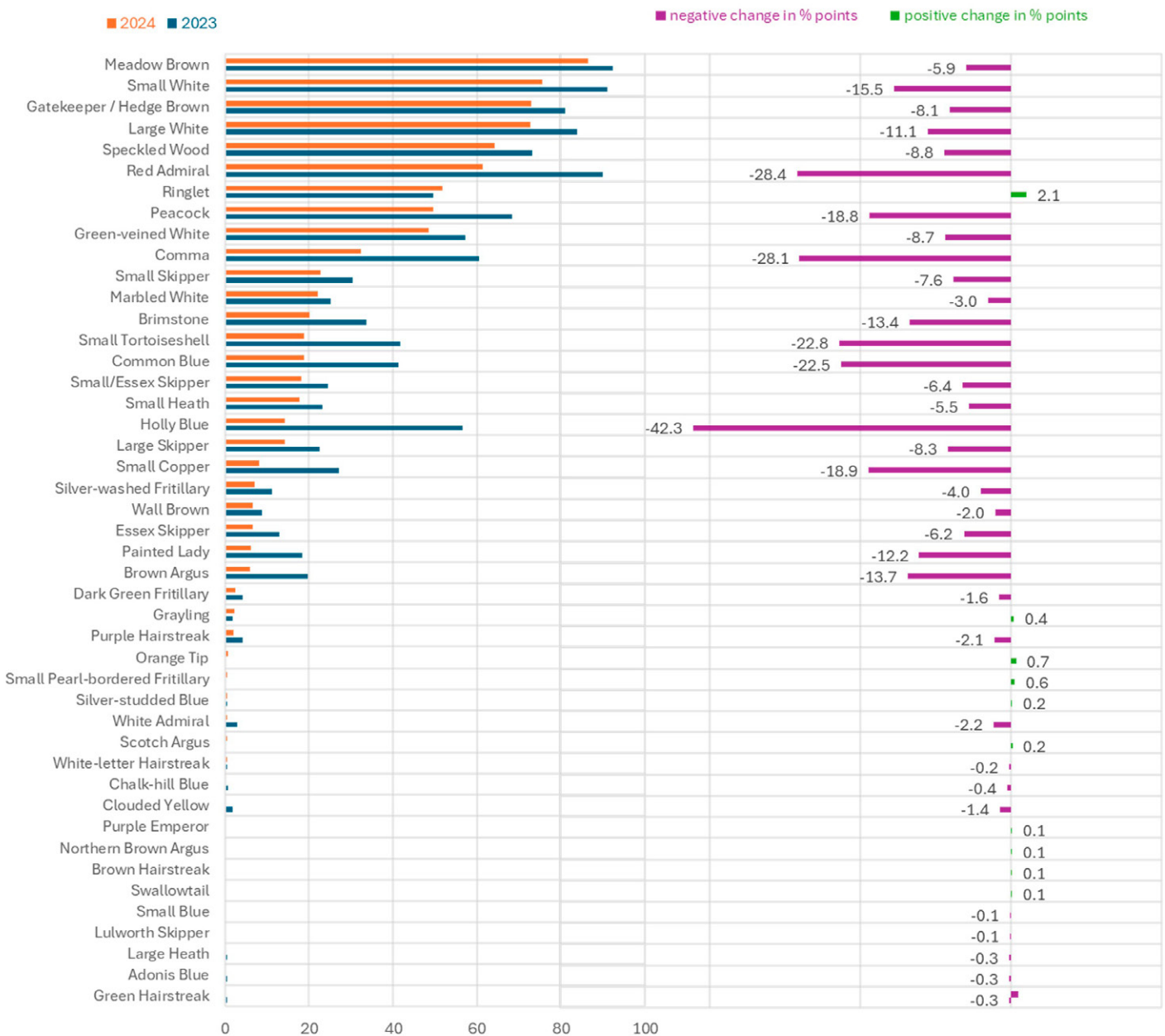


Figure 2. On the left - percentage of WCB squares that each species occupied in 2024 (orange) and 2023 (blue). On the right - change in percentage points between the two years, negative change (purple) and positive change (green).

2024 SURVEY

The maximum count of a habitat specialist was 26 Silver-studded Blue recorded at a square near Ringwood in the New Forest on July 27th. Grayling were recorded regularly at a square in Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk with between one and 15 being recorded on 16 different dates. Large Heath was recorded just twice during the WCBS surveys, both times at an upland square in Aberdeenshire. Other interesting sightings were a Small Blue on a square on the Wiltshire Downs and a Swallowtail on a square a few kilometres north of Hickling Broad, Norfolk.

Highest counts

The highest count of a single butterfly species on a visit was 476 Meadow Browns recorded at a square north of Bournemouth on July 2nd. This was followed by another high count again of 275 Meadow Browns on July 17th from a square north of Chatham, Kent. The third highest count was again Meadow Browns with 213 being recorded on July 11th from a square north of Tenterden in Kent – this is the same square that recorded the highest count in 2023.

The highest count of a different species was 222 Small/Essex Skippers recorded at a square west of Chatham, Kent on July 19th.

Zero Heroes

Zero Heroes are walkers who submit their walk data even if no butterflies were seen. Zero counts are just as valuable as high ones and it is really important to continue with walks and submitting counts even if no or very few butterflies are seen. These counts enable us to identify patterns and explore why butterflies are not being recorded in certain areas or habitats. We are incredibly grateful to all of the recorders who persevered through a

difficult year with lots of zero or low counts.

In 2024, a total of 63 visits to 54 different squares resulted in no butterfly sightings or zero counts. This is a very large increase on previous years, in 2023 there were just 12 zero visits to 12 different squares, and 2022 when 38 zero visits were recorded to 34 squares. This is likely a result of the poor survey conditions caused by the weather in 2024 and the knock-on effect that this poor weather had on butterfly populations.

New squares

In 2024 recorders walked 49 new squares which helped to increase coverage overall as some other squares were dropped. Nine of these new squares were surveyed by BC volunteers and the other 40 by BBS volunteers. It is encouraging to see the scheme continue to grow and new squares taken on by volunteers and surveyed. This would not be possible without the efforts of the network of WCBS Champions who support, recruit and encourage the WCBS volunteers in their region. The efforts of the BTO team to support and expand the number of BBS squares that are surveyed for butterflies is also to be commended, so we say a special thank you to James Heywood and David White at BTO for all their hard work.

The weather...

Weather conditions in 2024 had a clear impact on both the ability of recorders to conduct their surveys and the number of butterflies observed. WCBS survey guidelines require dry conditions, with temperatures of at least 13°C when there is 60% or more sunshine, or above 17°C under overcast skies. Wind speeds must also remain below level 5 on the Beaufort scale. Throughout the survey season,



Meadow Brown (Photo by Iain H Leach)



Orange-tip (Photo by Iain H Leach)



Silver-studded Blue (Photo by Iain H Leach)



Holly Blue (Photo by Iain H Leach)



Grayling (Photo by Iain H Leach)

there were numerous days when these conditions were not met, preventing surveys from being carried out.

The UK experienced a cool summer with July temperatures below the long-term average and August temperatures only just above it. Overall it was the coolest summer for 10 years and the mean temperature was just below 14°C. Figure 3 shows the mean temperature for the UK

in summer 2024, there were long periods when the temperature remained below the long-term average and few days when the average climbed above 17°C.

Summer rainfall was around the national average, although August was the wettest month of the summer period. There was substantial regional variation in rainfall, with Scotland receiving double the usual rainfall in August.

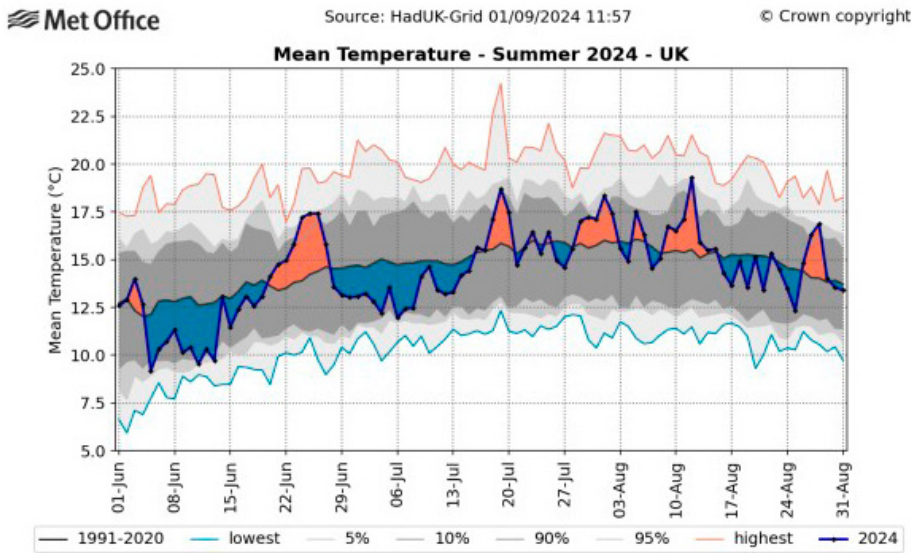


Figure 3. Mean temperatures for the UK in summer 2024, provided by the Met Office. Periods in blue are below the long-term average temperature and periods in orange are above the long-term average.

An extra big thank you to all of the recorders listed below who submitted zero counts this year, you are our Zero Heroes!

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Ian Allen | Judith Hible |
| Tim Arnold | Martin Hughes |
| Susan Banister | Angie Humphries |
| Paul Beckett | Jenny Kelly |
| Edward Bell | David Knass |
| Alison Billett | Amy Laird |
| Paul Blackburn | Carol Long |
| Nigel Bowie | Marlies MacLean |
| Stephen Craig | Steve Malpass |
| Mervyn Crawford | Steve Marshall |
| Corrie Cuthbertson | Geoff Nock |
| Huw Davies | Donald Omand |
| Steven Davies | Ken Orpe |
| Mary Dean | Mary Power |
| Roger Dobbs | Roger Martin |
| Bill Downey | Rebecca Sudworth |
| Trish Dunant | William Telfer |
| Sara Edwards | Tom Aspinall |
| Bill Eldridge | Christine Townsend |
| Clare Faith | Rebecca Tucker |
| Dick Gilhespie | Janet Turnbull |
| Fiona Greathhead | David Waind |
| Pam Hardeman | Paul Wheeler |
| Raymond Hardinge | Jane Wood |
| Vicky Hassell | |

Moths

During 2024 surveys, 1,022 moths were recorded in 197 squares (111 BC squares and 86 BBS squares), which is 24% of all the squares surveyed. Moths of 76 different species were recorded (20 fewer than in 2023). The square with the highest number of moth species was near Swindon with 28 recorded. The Silver Y remained the most widespread moth (recorded in 95% of the squares that recorded a moth), followed by the Six-spot Burnet (far less widespread and only recorded in 15% of those squares that recorded a moth). The Silver Y also remained the most numerous moth, accounting for 36% of all moths recorded. The second most numerous was Garden Grass-veneer. Others that were frequently recorded included Cinnabar, Yellow Shell and Magpie Moth.



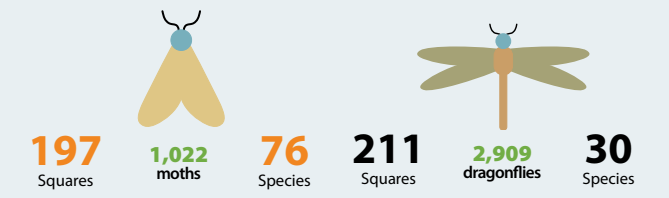
The two most widespread moths from WCBS surveys in 2024 – on the left Silver Y (Photo by Mark Parsons) and on the right Six-spot Burnet (Photo by Patrick Clement).

Dragonflies

Dragonflies and damselflies were recorded in 211 squares in 2024 (103 BC and 108 BBS). A total of 2,909 individual dragonflies or damselflies were recorded of 30 different species. The most numerous species recorded was Banded Demoiselle accounting for 17% of all Odonata recorded. The most widespread species was Common Darter which was recorded in 45% of squares that recorded a dragonfly or damselfly species.

Other species

There were 674 observations of other wildlife which were made up of 165 different species. The four most commonly recorded species were all birds being Buzzard, Swallow, Chiffchaff and Magpie respectively with Buzzard being the most widespread recorded on 14 squares. The Common Carder Bee was the fifth most recorded species. Mammals were also represented in the top 10 most recorded other wildlife with Brown Hare being recorded on eight squares. These data flow into the iRecord database for verification and are made available to county recorders and the relevant national recording schemes.

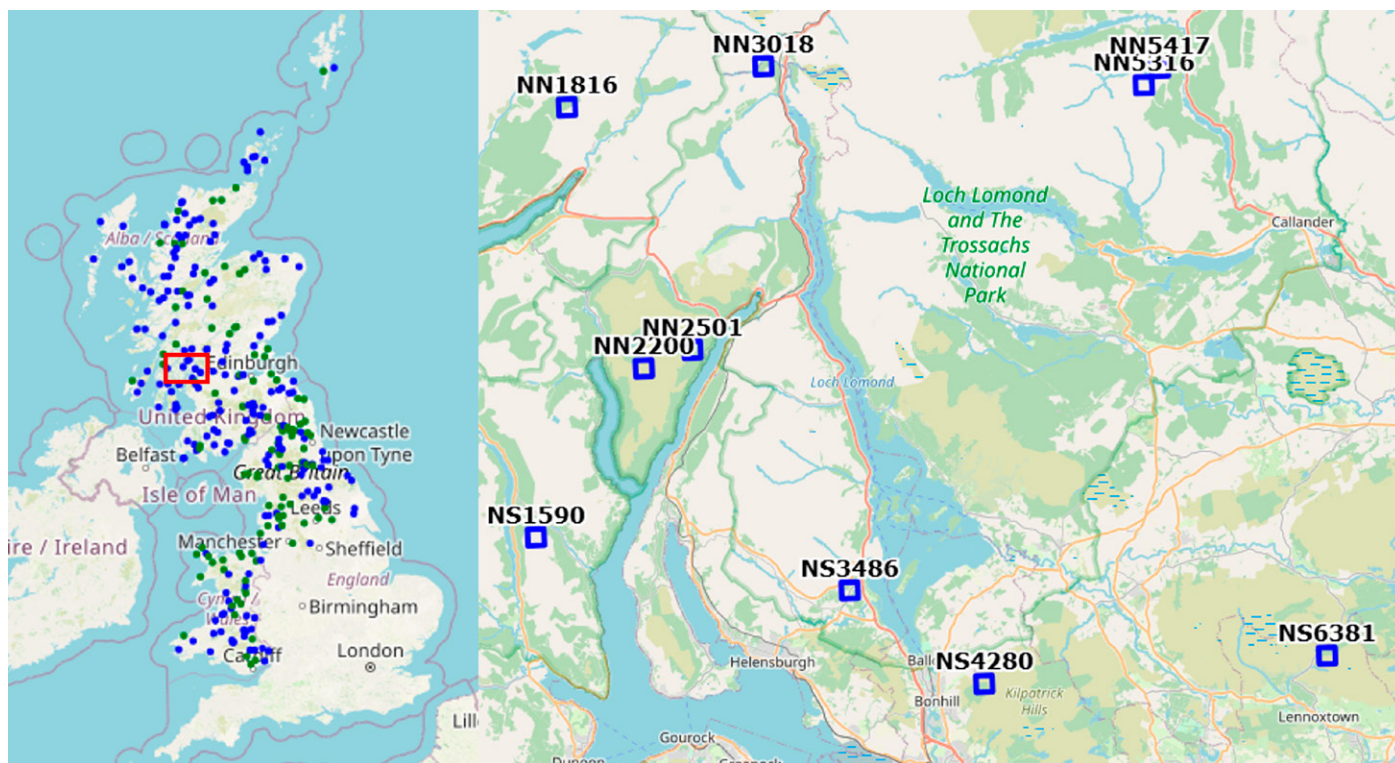


BC Branch area	Total squares surveyed 2023	Total squares surveyed 2024	Change in number of squares	% change on 2023	WCBS-BC 2024	WCBS-BBS 2024
Dorset	69	67	-2	-2.9	61	6
Gloucestershire	45	52	7	15.6	43	9
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	43	43	0	0.0	27	16
Sussex	41	40	-1	-2.4	11	29
Somerset & Bristol	31	39	8	25.8	27	12
Suffolk	41	39	-2	-4.9	30	9
Beds and Northants	40	37	-3	-7.5	29	8
Norfolk	42	37	-5	-11.9	30	7
Cumbria	31	36	5	16.1	30	6
Upper Thames	33	35	2	6.1	20	15
Surrey & SW London	37	34	-3	-8.1	25	9
Wiltshire	28	33	5	17.9	22	11
Herts and Middlesex	37	31	-6	-16.2	14	17
East Midlands	30	30	0	0.0	17	13
East Scotland	27	28	1	3.7	14	14
Kent	22	26	4	18.2	10	16
Cambridgeshire & Essex	21	25	4	19.0	14	11
Lancashire	22	25	3	13.6	13	12
Yorkshire	25	25	0	0.0	8	17
South Wales	14	20	6	42.9	2	18
West Midlands	16	20	4	25.0	4	16
North East England	21	20	-1	-4.8	14	6
Northern Ireland	13	17	4	30.8	11	6
North Wales	12	14	2	16.7	8	6
Lincolnshire	6	11	5	83.3	3	8
Glasgow & SW Scotland	11	10	-1	-9.1	4	6
Cornwall	5	7	2	40.0	4	3
Cheshire & Peak	6	7	1	16.7	5	2
Devon	7	7	0	0.0	2	5
Highland	7	6	-1	-14.3	5	1
Warwickshire	3	3	0	0.0	2	1
Isle of Man	2	2	0	0.0	1	1
Grand Total	788	826	38	4.8		

Table 1. WCBS squares surveyed 2023 and 2024 for each BC Branch area.

Painted Lady

HOLIDAY SQUARES



Spot your holiday destination

The aim of the Holiday squares is to improve coverage of the WCBS in areas where fewer recorders live, but that are popular holiday destinations. These are focussed around the north or west of the UK. You can sign up to survey these squares whilst you are visiting the area. Or perhaps use them as a great excuse to get out and explore a new area whilst contributing valuable information to the scheme. To sign up to survey a Holiday square visit the Holiday squares page on the UKBMS website, find it under 'My data'. <https://ukbms.org/holiday-squares>

The UK map above shows the Holiday squares, those in green are already assigned to someone and those in blue are available. The red square shows the location of the featured holiday squares around Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. Some of these are not far from Glasgow and provide a variety of habitats to explore. The neighbouring squares of NN5417 and

NN5316 provide an opportunity to survey two squares at once and to explore Glen Buckle and the uplands around Strathyre. Square NS3486 is close to the banks of Loch Lomond just off the A82 and could provide a nice opportunity to break up a longer journey north with a spot of butterfly surveying.

Don't forget - to unassign the square if you change your mind or have completed your survey and won't be revisiting - then the square will be available for other surveyors to take on. Holiday squares that are assigned to you will be shown in red on the Holiday squares page when you are logged in to the UKBMS website.

The BTO run a similar scheme called 'Upland Rovers' where BBS squares can be taken on for a season, visit their website to find out more - <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/bbs/taking-part/upland-rovers>

*The craggy top of An Sidhean and Loch Lubnaig square NN2501
(Photo by Alec Mackinnon from geograph.org CC BY-SA 2.0 Image ID:3019378)*



FEATURE ARTICLE

Focus on Farmland Habitats

Farmland plays a crucial role in the survival of the UK's butterflies, with over three-quarters of species relying on farmed landscapes for at least part of their life cycle. Thanks to the data collected by the WCBS, we're able to monitor how farmland butterflies are faring—and what can be done to help them thrive.

Butterflies use a wide variety of farmland features throughout their lives. These include areas that provide caterpillar foodplants, nectar sources for adults (like wildflowers or aphid honeydew), warm basking spots as well as sheltered spaces for egg-laying, caterpillar development and overwintering. Let's take a closer look at some of the key habitats that you may come across on your WCBS surveys on farmland and how they support butterflies and moths.

Grassland

Grasslands, particularly species-rich varieties, are vital habitats for many butterflies and moths. The quality of these habitats is influenced by factors such as soil type and land management practices. The most valuable grasslands are unimproved, semi-natural areas that have not been ploughed, reseeded or treated with fertilisers. Unfortunately, more than 90% of these grasslands have been lost in the UK over the past 50 years.

In addition to larger grassland areas, uncultivated field corners, orchard areas and strips along hedgerows and tracks can also support butterfly populations by providing nectaring opportunities for adults and larval foodplants such as nettle and grasses. Patches of nettles, particularly in sunny locations, serve as crucial food plants for the caterpillars of species such as the Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Leaving some of these areas uncut over the winter can also provide shelter for overwintering butterflies and moths.

Woodland and scrub

Many farms include small woodlands, copses, and areas of scrub, which are incredibly valuable for butterflies and moths. These areas offer larval foodplants, nectar and shelter. They are especially valuable when they contain a mix of native tree species along with sunny clearings and edges.

Many butterfly species breed in woodland edge or scrub habitats such as the Brimstone which needs Buckthorn or Alder Buckthorn as a caterpillar food plant and Holly Blue which mainly uses Holly and Ivy. There are several species of arboreal butterfly that live out most of their lives in the canopy of trees, for example the Purple Hairstreak. This species breeds in the canopy of oak trees with its caterpillars feeding on oak leaves and the adults relying on honeydew from aphids.

Hedges, verges and lanes

Hedgerows that are managed with wildlife in mind can be really valuable to



Uncultivated strip of grassland along hedgerow (Photo by Martin Warren)



Woodland edges support a diverse range of plants which provide feeding and breeding opportunities (Photo by Dan Hoare)



Purple Hairstreak in an Oak tree (Photo by Jim Asher)



Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars feeding on Nettles along a field boundary (Photo by Sam Ellis)

butterflies and moths by providing feeding, breeding and overwintering sites. Thick, wide hedges with a mix of species and broad, grassy margins containing wildflowers will provide the most resources. The cutting regime can have a big impact on how good the habitat is, with hedges that are cut on rotation every two or three years providing better habitat than those that are cut every year.

Blackthorn is the primary larval foodplant for the Brown Hairstreak, making hedgerows rich in Blackthorn particularly valuable for this species. It is also essential for the elusive Black Hairstreak, which is confined to Blackthorn-rich woodlands in parts of the East Midlands. Hedgerows containing Buckthorn or Alder Buckthorn support Brimstone butterflies by providing food for their caterpillars. Hawthorn serves as an excellent nectar source and is also the larval foodplant for over 100 moth species. Additionally, thick, tussocky grasses at the bottom of hedges left uncut through the winter offer vital shelter for a range of species during the colder months.

Arable fields

While arable fields themselves offer limited resources for butterflies, species-rich margins can become important short-

term nectaring sources - especially when located in sheltered spots like south-facing field edges. The use of pesticides and fertilisers can however be damaging and drift from the crop into the margins.

To support a diverse range of butterfly species, a landscape must include features that meet the requirements of all stages of their life cycle, within a manageable distance to allow for movement between these resources.

Butterflies that can be found in botanically rich margins around arable fields include Meadow Brown, Common Blue, Marbled White and Small Skipper.

Why it all matters

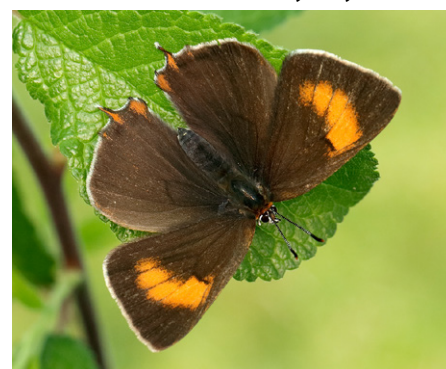
All of these features of farmland will also support lots of other beneficial insects, which in turn will provide food for birds, mammals and a whole host of other species. The creation and management of many of these features has been supported by agri-environment schemes which pay landowners to manage farmland for the benefit of wildlife. The data from the WCBS is a useful tool to assess the effectiveness of these schemes.

Are these features present in your WCBS square and if so, are there opportunities

to improve them? Butterfly Conservation has a series of management factsheets that go into more detail, these can be found on the [Butterfly Conservation website](#).



A thick Blackthorn hedge provides habitat for Brown hairstreak (Photo by Kelly Thomas)



Brown Hairstreak (Photo by Iain H Leach)

Species rich margin to an arable field provides larval food plants and nectar for adults (Photo by Martin Warren)



ID FEATURE

Moths Matter! – How to identify day-flying moths

by Rob Still, Princeton WildGuides

Here we look at some of the most commonly recorded day-flying moths from WCBS surveys. We look at the essential ID features to help you get to grips with this large group of lepidoptera, and perhaps start recording them on your square. You can add your day-flying moth sightings to the data entry page when you enter your butterfly data.

The 'Black-and-reds' (Burnets and Cinnabar)

Burnet moths have clubbed antennae; (left inset) Cinnabar has thin antennae (right inset). Separating burnet moths from each other can be tricky. The number of wing spots helps; but the width of the rear black border on the hindwing needs to be seen to distinguish the Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet from the rarer Five-spot Burnet which has a broader border.

© Dave Green



Six-spot Burnet

© Rob Still



Narrow-bordered
Five-spot Burnet

© Rob Still



Cinnabar

Noctuids

Noctuid moths typically rest with their wings closed but at an angle. 20 or so of the 400 British and Irish species are regarded as day-flyers and most of these are best identified by their upperwing markings.

© Mark Parsons



Silver Y – y-shaped mark

© Dave Green



Antler Moth – ‘antler’-shaped mark

Geometrids (carpets and allies) and Mother Shipton

Geometrid moths usually have flat wings at rest. Their background colours and patterns, although variable, are key to identification and the carpet moths usually need close attention.

© Mark Parsons



Twin-spot Carpet – two
closely spaced spots near
forewing edge

© Mark Parsons



Garden Carpet – dark area at
base of forewing same colour
as the mid-edge area

© Mark Parsons



Common Carpet – darker
central band with obvious
rear-pointing ‘projection’

© Les Hill



Yellow Shell – yellow to
brown with white and/or
orange-brown wavy lines.

© Mark Parsons



Shaded Broad-bar – dull
brown with a darker central
band; many with a diagonal
line at the forewing tip.

© Mark Parsons



Mother Shipton – pattern
said to resemble the profile
of a witch, with a long, pointed
nose and beady eye.

NEWS

Could you be our next Champion?

The WCBS Champions are an essential part of the UKBMS team, these volunteers help to coordinate and support the WCBS Recorders in their region. We currently have vacancies for WCBS Champions in Kent and the West Midlands.

As a WCBS Champion you get to build a thorough understanding of your region and the butterfly populations found there as well as connecting with and growing the network of WCBS Recorders in your region. You don't need to be a butterfly expert but you do need to enjoy helping people and promoting butterfly recording. For more info and to apply please visit the [volunteering pages on the Butterfly Conservation website](#).

We'd love to hear from you!

Share your news stories with us to survey@butterfly-conservation.org or tag us in social media. Be sure to follow our social media channels to hear the latest about the schemes.

Bluesky @ukbms.bsky.social or
X @UKBMSLive

NEWS

50 YEARS United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme

The UKBMS celebrates its 50th survey season

This year marks the 50th survey season of the UKBMS – the wider scheme that the WCBS contributes to. This is a major milestone for one of the world's longest-running invertebrate monitoring programmes. The UKBMS launched in 1976 with the WCBS being introduced in 2009 to broaden the sites that the scheme monitors. The scheme now monitors over 4,000 sites annually including the WCBS squares. The UKBMS would only be a shadow of what it has become, were it not for the dedication of all its volunteers and recorders over the years. We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers, both past and present, who have played a crucial role in the schemes success. Your dedication and perseverance in collecting consistent and reliable data have made it possible to monitor the health of the UK's butterfly populations.

To mark this important occasion, a range of activities and initiatives are planned:

• 50th Anniversary conference

An in-person conference will be held on Saturday 11th October in Nottingham, bringing together guests and speakers for a day of celebration and talks about the scheme.

• Local Events

Organised by regional volunteers and BC branches, these events aim to thank and celebrate the volunteers. Save the date and follow our social media or check the website to secure your free place once bookings go live.

• #UKBMS50

Follow the hashtag on social media to keep up to date with news and celebrations.

• UKBMS at 50

A webpage to bring together info about the scheme in its fiftieth year - <https://ukbms.org/ukbms-50>

Assemble rollout continues for BC volunteers

In 2024 BC rolled out its new volunteer platform called Assemble and over 2,000 UKBMS volunteers have already registered. This secure platform provides us with all the essential information we need as well as providing the volunteers with lots of benefits including:

- Connect with other volunteers and staff through secure messaging
- Access to a document hub with all the info about your role as well as useful info, training resources and ID resources
- Keep up to date with news and see other opportunities and events local to you
- Comprehensive insurance cover for registered volunteers.

All WCBS Recorders managed by BC must register on Assemble. If you haven't done so yet, please make this a priority to ensure are making the most of your volunteering and you are covered under BC's comprehensive insurance. To register please visit the [Health and Safety page on the UKBMS website](#).

Add more pollinators to your surveys!

Spring and summer bring with them not only the chance to enjoy butterfly discoveries in your WCBS square, but a chance to appreciate other pollinating insects such as wild bees and hoverflies. From 1st April, the ninth season for UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) begins with Flower-Insect Timed Counts (FIT Counts). The FIT Count is a simple 10-minute survey to collect data on pollinator numbers across the UK. To carry out a FIT Count you need to find a patch of flowers, choosing just one sort of flower as your target and focusing on a square of 50 by 50 cms in any location, be it a garden, park or countryside. Count the number of insects that land on the target flowers within a ten-minute period, identifying them into broad groups (bumblebees, hoverflies, beetles etc.). Butterflies and moths are included as one of the groups. Counts can be recorded onto printed recording forms and added to the website, or you can use the FIT Count app which takes you through the whole process.

Last year more than 700 people participated in the FIT Counts, contributing over 4,200 counts - equivalent to nearly a month of counting all day every day! This has taken the total number of recorded insect interactions with flowers on FIT Counts since the scheme began to over 217,000.

The PoMS team are keen to see more counts carried out in north-west England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with WCBS squares providing ideal potential locations. While flies tend to be the most abundant insects recorded visiting flowers, the data suggest that butterflies and moths are typically recorded on between 12 – 16% of FIT Counts, and tend to be marginally more abundant in counts in gardens than in agricultural habitats. Watch out for the 2024 PoMS Annual report in June to see how insect numbers have fared overall since the start of the scheme. With continued monitoring and as more years can be analysed, UK PoMS aims to refine the kinds of trend metrics that can be reported to show how and where pollinator populations are changing.

For all the information you need to carry out a count, and to find out about the other PoMS surveys and activities, see the [PoMS website](#). Butterfly Conservation are partners in PoMS.



FITCount



Insect watching can be fun and relaxing as well as producing useful data! (Photo by Catherine Jones)

MEET THE TEAM

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BC WCBS Champions

WCBS Branch Champions have a pivotal role promoting and coordinating the WCBS in their local areas. They provide support and encouragement to recorders and act as a first point of contact for any queries recorders may have. You can find and contact your local WCBS Champion below and on the UKBMS website.

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