

# Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey Annual Newsletter 2019 Season

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*Painted Lady by  
Keith Warmington*

## 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 common and widespread butterflies. The WCBS comprises a network of randomly selected 1km squares sampled at least twice a year. Recorders count butterflies using conventional transect criteria along two 1 km long survey lines, which run parallel within the square. This newsletter presents initial results from WCBS squares in 2019, based on changes in species occurrence. The full population trend results, from all component surveys of the UKBMS were published as Official Statistics, and made available via the [UKBMS website](#), in late March. 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 2019

We had a welcome surge in coverage in 2019 with 829 squares surveyed; this is an increase of 5% (39 squares) on 2018 levels and our best year since 2014 when 817 squares were covered. We are now only 28 squares short of our record WCBS season which was 2013 when 857 squares were monitored. Over the life-time of the WCBS an average of 780 squares per year have been surveyed; the average for BC volunteers is 460 squares per year and for BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) it is 320. Survey effort by BBS volunteers increased by 41 squares (15%) on 2018 levels, this is a fantastic effort, and a great turn-around from the previous year when BBS participation marked a series low. We thank all of the BBS volunteers who made this turnaround possible. In contrast the number of BC squares covered in 2019 was down by two (-0.4%).

Looking at coverage by Country there were a total of 729 squares surveyed in England (+52 compared with 2018), 48 in Scotland (-9), 31 in Wales (-4), 20 in Northern Ireland (the same as 2018) and one on the Isle of Man (as in 2018).

## Regional Coverage

The three BC Branch areas with the greatest number of squares covered during 2019 were Dorset 62 squares (56 BC and 6 BBS), Hampshire and Isle of Wight 49 squares (33 BC and 16 BBS) and Sussex 45 squares, (16 BC and 29 BBS). Dorset, and Hampshire and Isle of Wight are particularly popular with BC volunteers, whilst survey coverage by BBS volunteers remained greatest in Sussex where 29 squares were surveyed, four more than in 2018. Hampshire and the Isle of Wight had the greatest increase in surveyed squares, a total of 12 (6 BC and 6 BBS). North East England also saw significant gains with 10 (4 BC, 6 BBS) more squares surveyed than in 2018. West Midlands area had the greatest increase in BBS squares overall with eight more surveyed than in 2018. Kent and Suffolk had the biggest growth in BC squares, with each gaining seven more squares compared with 2018.

The regional growth reported for Wiltshire last year continues with a total of 27 squares surveyed, five more than in 2018 (4 BC, 1 BBS). Several Branch areas had their best ever year in terms of coverage of WCBS squares during the 2019 season. These were Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight, Lancashire, Wiltshire, North East England and Cornwall. In contrast Norfolk, South Wales, and Glasgow and South West Scotland had their poorest years in the series. Participation in East Scotland was the lowest it has been since 2010 and Yorkshire also had its poorest year since 2011. It would be great to boost coverage in these areas and restore participation to a higher level. This is possible; in last year's newsletter we reported on the notable decrease in participation in Suffolk, but volunteers stepped up, with the 2019 season seeing a welcome turnaround in this region, with six more squares than in 2018.

## 11 years of the WCBS – vital statistics

- » A total of **1,922 WCBS squares** have been surveyed; **1,039** squares (54%) by volunteers coordinated by **BC**, and **883** (46%) by participants in the **BBS** carrying out extra visits to their BBS squares to look for butterflies.
- » **18,647 visits** have been made
- » Approximately **1,800 recorders** have counted **over a million** (1,093,024) butterflies of **52 species**.
- » The **five most widespread butterflies** over the past 11 years have been Meadow Brown (found on average in 97% of surveyed squares), Large White (85%), Small White (85%), Green-veined White (77%) and Small Tortoiseshell (76%).



*Silver-studded blue  
by Iain H Leach*

## 2019 SURVEY

# Results round-up

In total 1,957 surveys were made in 2019, a combined length of nearly 4,000 km. Approximately 650 recorders counted 129,866 butterflies of 46 species, the same number of species as in 2018. The species count comprised 18 habitat specialists, 25 wider countryside species and the three regular migratory species: Painted Lady, Red Admiral and Clouded Yellow.

Duke of Burgundy and Grizzled Skipper were recorded in the WCBS this year, but were absent in 2018, whilst the reverse was true for Purple Emperor and Silver-spotted Skipper.

There were 315 spring visits to 206 squares with Orange-tip seen in 97 squares and Green Hairstreak seen in 16. The most visits to a BC square was 13 in Saxmundham, Suffolk. The most visits to a BBS square was six in Kimpton, Hertfordshire.

During the core July and August recording period 706 squares (85% of the total) received the required two visits. The total number of visits during this time was 1,412 with 104,427 butterflies of 44 species recorded, the latter being the same as in 2018. Tuesday 23 July was the busiest day for surveys with 67 visits (5% of the total) and 749 butterflies of 24 species counted.

Twenty wider countryside species (one fewer than last year) achieved target 'good' coverage (detected in 100 or more squares), whilst a further five species had 'adequate' coverage (found in 30 or more squares).

Of the 25 wider countryside species, 52% were more widespread than in 2018 (Table 1). Meadow Brown returned to the top spot (replacing Small White), as the most widespread butterfly in 2019, occupying 94% of WCBS squares during the core July and August recording period. Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Marbled White and Small Heath all had their best years in the WCBS series in terms of occupancy.

Two of the three regular migrant species were far more widespread in 2019, these were Painted Lady and Red Admiral, both species occupied 73% of squares, increasing by 57 and 25 percentage points respectively, on 2018 levels. Painted Lady, which periodically

experiences years with mass influxes, was more widespread than all other years apart from the start year of 2009, when it was found in a whopping 83% of squares. The maximum Painted Lady count was 228 on 1 August at Lower Killeyan, Argyll And Bute, which was somewhat off the series maximum of 895 on 24 May 2009 near Aslacton, Norfolk.

Small Tortoiseshell showed a welcome increase (+10 percentage points) from 2018 levels, following five years of being progressively less widespread. Peacock also showed signs of an upturn (+15 percentage points), being the most widespread since 2013.

The four species that had the largest decreases in occupancy compared with 2018 were Speckled Wood (-7 percentage points), Green-veined White (-10), Holly Blue (-11) and Common Blue (-13).

## Country Level Results

Looking at national patterns, Meadow Brown was the most widespread butterfly in England and Wales, occupying 96% of squares in both countries, with respective annual increases of six percentage points in England and 13 percentage points in Wales. Painted Lady was the most widespread species in Scotland, occupying 95% of squares, an increase of 62 percentage points from 2018. This butterfly showed the largest annual increase in range in all other UK countries, being up +56 percentage points in England, +65 percentage points in Wales and +72 percentage points in Northern Ireland.

Red Admiral was in second place, in terms of showing the most substantial annual

increases at the country-level being up by 26 percentage points in both England and Scotland and nine percentage points in Northern Ireland. In Wales, Red Admiral occupancy was up by 18 percentage points, but increases in Peacock (+40 percentage points), Large Skipper (+26) and Gatekeeper (+21) were of a greater magnitude.

Peacock increased in annual occupancy in all countries, being most widespread in Wales where it was seen in 83% of squares. The Small Heath was more widespread than in any other year of the WCBS, although at the country level England was the only country showing an annual increase (up 6 percentage points).

Species showing the greatest reductions in annual occupancy were Common Blue in England (-16 percentage points), Small Heath in Wales (-24), Small White in Northern Ireland (-34) and Small Copper in Scotland (-15).

## WCBS squares in National Parks

There were 74 (45 BC, 29 BBS) WCBS squares surveyed in 2019 that occurred within National Park Boundaries, reflecting a successful recruitment drive. To help boost coverage in under-recorded areas, the National Park (NP) authorities were approached to recruit volunteers to survey these squares within their park boundaries. This appeal resulted in seven additional squares being surveyed within the NPs compared to 2018 (two in the Lake District, two in the Yorkshire Dales, two in Dartmoor and one in the New Forest). We are very grateful to the NPs and to the recorders who surveyed these squares.

## Top Counts

- » The **three largest butterfly counts** on 2019 surveys were: 731 Meadow Brown on 28 June in a square near Hare Street, Hertfordshire; 681 Meadow Brown on 16 July near Stonehenge, Wiltshire and 541 Meadow Brown on 5 July near Kemsing, Kent.

## Habitat specialists

- » The **maximum habitat specialist count** (and a series maximum for the species) was 225 **Silver-studded Blue** in a square near Sway in the New Forest on 6 July. Other notable habitat specialist counts included 66 Grayling near Rhunahaorine, Argyll and Bute on 14 July and 54 Lulworth Skipper near Langton Matravers, Dorset on 23 July. Additionally, on 20 May the first ever Duke of Burgundy Fritillary WCBS sighting was made near Upper Coberley, Gloucestershire. For further details about this exciting discovery please see [page 7](#).

## Pioneering visits

- » Thirty (10 BC, 20 BBS) 1km squares, with **no previous butterfly records** (as per Butterfly Conservation's Butterflies for the New Millennium (BNM) dataset) were surveyed by the WCBS in 2019. The visits generated **records for 28 species**, including four habitat specialists; Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary and Grayling. Out of these newly surveyed squares, the three that had the greatest number of species recorded in them were; Birley in Herefordshire, East Kennett in Wiltshire and Wistow, in North Yorkshire - each with 14 species.

**Table 1: Butterfly occurrence on WCBS squares in 2019, and comparisons with 2018 (using data from squares sampled twice between July and August).**

Species	% squares recorded in 2019	Change in % points from 2018	2019 rank	2018 rank
Meadow Brown	93.8	6.5	1	2
Small White	88.5	-2.1	2	1
Large White	80.5	-6.0	3	3
Gatekeeper	74.1	4.8	4	6
Red Admiral	72.8	25.4	5	10
Painted Lady	72.5	56.9	6	21
Ringlet	69.7	4.7	7	7
Speckled Wood	68.6	-7.1	8	4
Green-veined White	61.6	-10.3	9	5
Peacock	57.6	15.4	10	12
Small Tortoiseshell	54.4	9.9	11	11
Comma	44.6	-3.5	12	9
Common Blue	36.5	-13.2	13	8
Small Skipper	30.9	4.4	14	14
Large Skipper	29.0	11.0	15	17
Marbled White	26.9	9.5	16	19
Small Heath	24.2	4.1	17	16
Holly Blue	22.9	-10.7	18	13
Small/Essex Skipper	21.7	3.9	19	18
Small Copper	21.2	-3.9	20	15
Brimstone	18.0	0.8	21	20
Essex Skipper	11.6	2.1	22	24
Silver-washed Fritillary	10.8	-1.4	23	22
Wall Brown	9.2	0.5	24	25
Brown Argus	7.6	-3.3	25	23
Clouded Yellow	5.1	1.8	26	28
Dark Green Fritillary	4.0	0.1	27	27
Grayling	3.0	0.0	28	29
Purple Hairstreak	3.0	-4.7	28	26
Orange-tip	1.7	0.5	30	32
White Admiral	1.7	-0.3	30	30
White-letter Hairstreak	1.3	-0.2	32	31
Chalk Hill Blue	1.0	0.1	33	34
Small Blue	1.0	0.4	33	36
Scotch Argus	0.7	-0.5	35	32
Adonis Blue	0.6	0.1	36	37
Green Hairstreak	0.6	0.6	36	-
Large Heath	0.6	0.3	36	38
Silver-studded Blue	0.6	0.3	36	38
Brown Hairstreak	0.4	-0.3	40	35
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	0.4	0.1	40	38
Grizzled Skipper	0.1	0.1	42	-
Lulworth Skipper	0.1	0.0	42	43
Northern Brown Argus	0.1	0.0	42	43
Wood White	0.1	0.0	42	43
Purple Emperor	0.0	-0.3	46	38
Silver-spotted Skipper	0.0	-0.3	46	38

## Moths

Moths were recorded in 172 squares (22% of all squares surveyed), three percentage points fewer than in 2018. A total of 776 moths of 35 species (two fewer than in 2018) were counted.

The migratory Silver Y was the most numerous moth, accounting for 18% of all moths seen, and for the eleventh consecutive year it was the most widespread, recorded in 38% of these squares, suggesting that migration of this species was much lower than in 2018 when it was seen in 72% of squares.

Cinnabar was in second place in terms of occupancy, being recorded in 26% of squares, and Yellow Shell came in third, being located in 20% of squares.



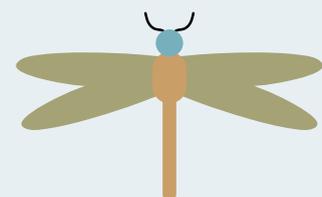
**172**  
Squares

**776**  
moths

**35**  
Species

## Dragonflies

Dragonflies were counted in 212 squares (26% of all squares surveyed), the same percentage as in 2018. In total 2,914 individuals of 24 species (two more than in 2018) were seen. For the fourth year in a row Common Darter was the most widespread dragonfly, occurring in 41% of WCBS squares (4 percentage points greater than in 2018). Southern Hawker was the second most widespread species occurring in 32% of squares and Brown Hawker was in third place occupying 28% of squares.



**212**  
Squares

**2,914**  
dragonflies

**24**  
Species

## 2020 CHALLENGE

### Priorities for improving coverage 2020

Of the 31 BC Branch areas, nine achieved good coverage of WCBS squares: Cambridge and Essex; Bedfordshire and Northants; Dorset, Gloucestershire; Hampshire and Isle of Wight; Norfolk; Suffolk; Surrey and south-west London; and Sussex. There are eight BC Branches (two fewer than in 2018) which are 'high priority' (see Figure 1) where a boost in coverage is required. These are: Cornwall; Devon; Glasgow and south-west Scotland; Highlands and Islands; Lincolnshire; North Wales; South Wales and Warwickshire. Fourteen areas fall into a 'medium priority' category (see Figure 1 legend): Cheshire and Wirral; Cumbria; East Midlands; East Scotland; Hertfordshire and Middlesex; Kent; Lancashire; North East England; Northern Ireland; Somerset & Bristol; Upper Thames; West Midlands; Wiltshire and Yorkshire.

The improvements seen in Cheshire and Wirral, North East England and West Midlands BC Branches led to a change in coverage category from high priority to medium priority. In addition to this, Cambridge and Essex has now achieved good coverage and is no longer on the priority list. However, reductions in the number of squares covered in 2019 has resulted in South Wales becoming a high priority area and East Scotland and Upper Thames Branches being elevated to medium priority.

### Squares with long data-runs

There are 18 BBS squares with data-runs of 10 or more years which are currently not being monitored. They occur in Cheshire and Wirral; Devon; Glasgow and South West Scotland; Hampshire and Isle of Wight; Kent; Lincolnshire; Norfolk; North Wales; Suffolk and Surrey; South West London; Yorkshire and West Midlands. If you are interested in re-activating any of these squares please contact Sarah Harris (see 'Getting involved' page 9).

There are also 11 BC squares currently not surveyed with data-runs of 10 or more years (Table 2) and similarly it would be great to get these squares re-surveyed. If you are interested in taking on any of them please contact the relevant recorder (see [back page](#) of this newsletter for details) or contact BC's WCBS Co-ordinator (see 'Getting involved').

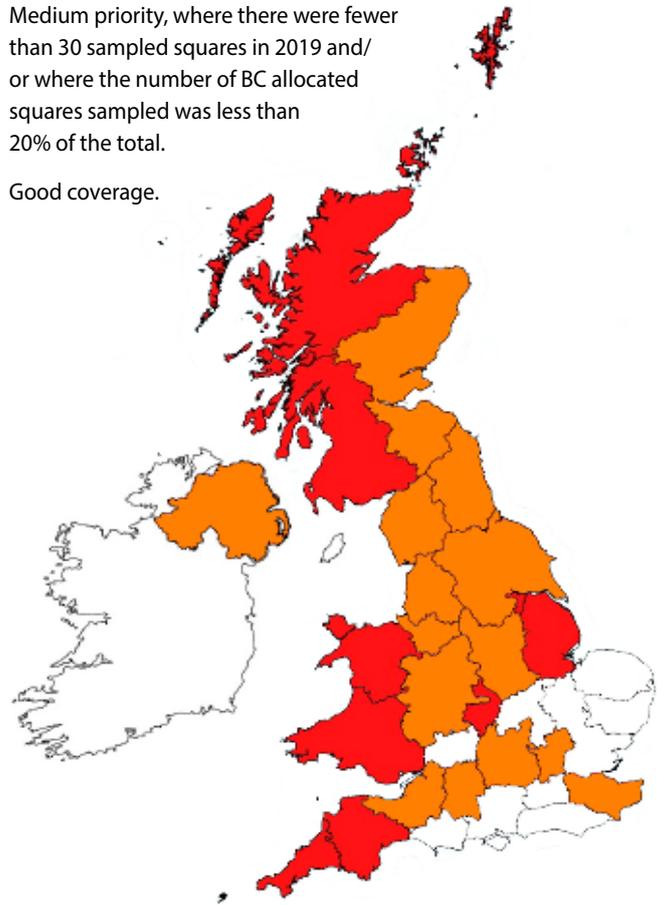
*Silver Y by Robert Thompson*



**Figure 1: Priority BC Branches where additional WCBS BC/BBS surveys are required.**

#### PRIORITY STATUS

- High priority areas where there were fewer than 20 squares surveyed in 2019.
- Medium priority, where there were fewer than 30 sampled squares in 2019 and/or where the number of BC allocated squares sampled was less than 20% of the total.
- Good coverage.



**Table 2: BC squares with long data runs requiring re-establishment**

Square	Branch	Location	No. years surveyed
<b>TL4789</b>	Cambridgeshire and Essex	Manea, Cambridgeshire	10
<b>NY7906</b>	Cumbria	Nateby, Cumbria	10
<b>ST8518</b>	Dorset	Twyford, Dorset	10
<b>SY7892</b>	Dorset	Tinleton, Dorset	10
<b>NJ9736</b>	East Scotland	Arthath, Aberdeenshire	10
<b>TF5016</b>	Norfolk	Walpole St Peter, Norfolk	10
<b>TF9040</b>	Norfolk	Wells-Next-The-Sea, Norfolk	11
<b>TG1206</b>	Norfolk	Wrappingham, Norfolk	10
<b>TM1599</b>	Norfolk	Wreningham, Norfolk	11
<b>TM3388</b>	Suffolk	Bungay, Suffolk	10
<b>TQ2823</b>	Sussex	Ansty, West Sussex	10

## HOLIDAY SQUARES

### Holiday squares

The ['holiday squares' web page](#) was launched in May 2019, with the purpose of improving coverage of WCBS squares in the uplands of northern and western Britain. Relatively few recorders live in these areas, but they are very popular holiday destinations. Holiday squares are currently available in North West England, North East England, Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire. A total of seven holiday squares were surveyed in 2019 across Yorkshire, Northumberland, Anglesey and Flintshire.

There are opportunities to visit some of the remoter BBS ['Upland Rovers'](#) squares in 2020 as a 'holiday square' too. If you are interested to see where these Upland Rovers squares are a possibly carry out a single visit to the square, check out their location on the [Upland Rovers map](#) and then contact Sarah Harris (see 'Getting involved' [page 9](#)) to be allocated the square for one season only. Note, the map application is for BBS bird surveyors only, so please email Sarah directly.

If you are planning a holiday to any of these destinations in 2020 please do take a look at the webpage and sign up to a holiday square if you can. If you can only manage one visit that is fine, someone else could do a second visit. The WCBS provides great opportunities for getting off the beaten-track and generating new 1 km square records for butterflies in the UK.

### Here is a sample of what is on offer:

#### NT1400, Braefield House, near Laverhay Dumfries & Galloway

This idyllic and peaceful square is reached easily via forestry tracks. A route is already established as the square was surveyed in 2010.



#### SE5189, Dale Town Common, North York Moors

Several small disused quarries can be found in this square. It has not been surveyed since 2016 but has previously boasted five habitat specialist species.



#### SH7942, Migneint, Snowdonia

Within this square is Cefn Garw, a remote abandoned farmhouse, which was once occupied by a Mr Roberts, who shepherded on horseback. It is a long but picturesque walk along a track beside the Afon Serw. Large Heath has been recorded in an adjacent square. Are they lurking, awaiting discovery here too?



### Be a trailblazer... make discoveries

You may be surprised to hear that despite the popularity of butterfly recording and monitoring in the UK **there are still some 1 km squares without any butterfly records.**

Comparing the Butterflies for the New Millennium (BNM) dataset with the list of available BC WCBS squares we found that 131 of the squares do not have any butterfly records. Contact BC's WCBS Co-ordinator for more details (see 'Getting involved' [page 9](#)).



**STOP PRESS NEWS**

# Coronavirus COVID-19

**We are sorry to announce that all of the events that were due to appear on this page have been cancelled due to the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic.**

In addition to this, the UKBMS have as of 24th March **suspended all UKBMS butterfly monitoring activities until further notice.** This is following the Government advice that was issued on 23rd March 2020. **The single most important action we can all take, in fighting coronavirus, is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives.** Government policy is fast changing in relation to the evolving pandemic, so for the latest UKBMS Coronavirus guidance please refer [here](#).

## UKBMS 2019 Results

**2019 Headline Results**

- » **Best butterfly year in 22 years.**
- » **8th best butterfly year since 1976**
- » **Four species had their best year in the series**
- » **3,014 sites monitored**

## Released

Despite the UK Butterfly Recorders' meeting being cancelled the UKBMS 2019 results have been published and bring good news.

The 2019 season was the best butterfly year since 1997 and the eighth best year in the UKBMS series. Just over half of UK butterfly species showed higher population levels in 2019 compared with 2018. Chequered Skipper, Marbled White, Orange-tip and Brimstone all had their best years in the series, no species had their worst year.

It was an excellent year for two of our three regular migrant butterflies, with Red Admiral annual abundance up by 195% (making it the fifth best year in the series) and Painted Lady numbers up by a massive 1993% (third best year in the series).

The threatened Duke of Burgundy also bounced back to log its eighth-best year in the series, whilst the rare Lulworth Skipper, rallied with its annual abundance up by a whopping 138%.

Butterflies most likely benefited from an unusually warm and wet summer conducive respectively to both a strong emergence of adults and successful development of the immature stages preceding this emergence. A warm Spring likely helped too.

As is usually the case each year, a number of other species had different fortunes. The Common Blue dropped in annual abundance by 54%, Adonis Blue by 40%, Green-veined White by 43% and Large White by 40% with all four species having below average years. The ongoing decline in Heath Fritillary continues to be of concern; this species had an annual abundance decrease of 34%.

Perhaps the most heartening news from 2019 was that a number of conservation Priority Species such as Adonis Blue, Brown Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Large Heath, Marsh Fritillary, Silver-studded Blue, Small Blue and the Silver-spotted Skipper that have been the focus of intensive conservation efforts in recent decades by Butterfly Conservation and partners are no longer in long-term population decline

On a human level, for the first time ever, the 3,000-site barrier was crossed with a staggering 3,014 sites monitored over the season. Huge thanks to all of our volunteers who contribute their valuable time and data to this vital scheme.

For a full rundown of the results please check out the [UKBMS 2019 press release](#) and the [Official Statistics](#). Thanks again to everyone who supports the UKBMS.

## Butterfly and moth recording in the time of Coronavirus

Though we do not advocate WCBS and any other UKBMS recording beyond the confines of home, there are still opportunities to record butterflies within the confines of your garden. There are other schemes such as Butterfly Conservation's [Big Butterfly Count](#) and [Garden Butterfly Survey](#), which you can get involved in and submit data online. Other garden records can be submitted via The Butterflies for the New Millennium (BNM) [online recording portal](#) which is now live.



*Chequered Skipper by David Newland*



*Lulworth Skipper by David Newland*



*Orange-tips (top to bottom): upperside male; underside male; underside female by David Newland)*

## VIEWPOINT

**Tricia Atkinson: Duke of Burgundy found in Gloucestershire square**

I think one of the exciting things about WCBS recording is that I never know what I am going to see. Often we may just be recording common butterflies like the Meadow Brown and Small White but sometimes we can come across a really special butterfly.

I am WCBS Champion for Gloucestershire Branch and record in five squares. One of the squares covers intensive arable land but also has a small wood and a shallow disused quarry. The field surrounding the quarry is ploughed but the actual quarry is left and has grown over with long grass and a few flowering plants. My route goes by the side of the quarry so as I can record any butterflies within the required 2.5m either side of the route, I can record those I see in the quarry nearest to the route.

During my survey in August 2018, I noticed that there were Cowslips growing on the shallow quarry floor. Examining them carefully, I noticed that a few of the leaves were nibbled in the characteristic pattern caused by the larvae of the Duke

of Burgundy butterfly. This species has declined in recent years and is one of the butterflies focused on in the 'Back from the Brink' project which is aiming to restore suitable habitat for this butterfly. Of course, in order to do that they need to know where the butterflies are.

I had a hunch that 'Dukes' might be breeding in the quarry but I really wanted to see an actual butterfly rather than just the larval feeding damage to be absolutely sure and that it is a breeding site.

So, in 2019, I decided to do an extra survey in May during the Dukes flight period. I wasn't holding out much hope of seeing one especially as the weather was a bit cool and cloudy. When we got to the quarry, we had a good look around. We searched the quarry without much luck. Then the sun came out and I spotted one opening its wings to warm up in the sunshine! To top it all, it was within 2.5m of my route so I could record it on the WCBS survey.

The part of my route which goes past the quarry is not on a public footpath, so I have obtained permission from the farm manager in order to do my survey. I thought I ought to tell him about our find



*Duke of Burgundy by Tricia Atkinson*

so that he doesn't plough up or destroy the quarry. He was interested to hear about it but was concerned that if people found out about it there might be people going off the public footpath to look for the butterfly in the quarry. I assured him that this wouldn't happen as there are several other sites nearby with public access where the butterfly can be seen. As a result, I cannot say where this site is!

It just shows that you never know what you might find when carrying out a WCBS survey even if at first sight the area doesn't look good for butterflies. As the quarry does not have public access, we would never have known about the Dukes there.

## VIEWPOINT

**Catriona Miller, WCBS on Army Ranges**

We were very pleased to be asked to survey the Military Ranges in Dorset knowing that the area had been uninhabited for many years and hoping that it might be particularly butterfly rich as a result. The area is in fact extensively farmed and there is a substantial Clay Pit in the middle with heavy commercial plant which is unexpected! We hoped my husband's military credentials would help with access but to begin with we had to be escorted at all times and are restricted by a set date and time. Things have improved recently. We now attend an Annual Safety Briefing which gives us an entry Pass and we can now go alone. We have to book in advance when there is no firing on the Range which means mostly weekends. Anticipating weather conditions in advance is difficult but in 6 years we have only missed two walks although some have been cool and windy.

Usually we must stick to existing tracks – unexploded bombs are a real possibility!

The habitat near the Clay Pits is a mixture of oak woods, marshland bordered by Bracken, Bramble and Gorse, a stream and chalk downland. This provides a good variety of butterflies, the most spectacular of which is a growing colony of Silver-washed Fritillary. The second part of our walk is across newly planted grassland where the clay excavations have been backfilled. No bombs in this area! In six years, the area has grown from barren, stunted grass, to a good sweep of increasingly flower rich habitat although gorse is rapidly taking over! Here we have found good quantities of Grayling and this year, for the first time, Common and Silver-studded Blues.

We now do a second walk. With the difficulties of access, we do both walks in one day. The quantity and variety of butterflies in this new area is amazing! Only a mile from our other sector but very different. It is particularly sheltered and very warm with a good variety of habitat! In a year that was exceptional for Painted Ladies we saw hundreds! Large and Small Skippers were abundant and



*Grayling by David Newland*

Silver-studded Blues were found in good quantities. We are excited at the prospect of investigating this area further next year!

Our average count is well in the hundreds in each area and we have seen at least 26 species, if not all at once! We also see many dragonflies, but we find these very difficult to identify!

It is a great privilege to be allowed to explore this uninhabited and largely unspoilt area. The silence is profound and the wildlife quite undisturbed.

## VIEWPOINT

**Paolo Farina, my role as Branch Champion**

I essentially fell into the role as Kent & SE London's WCBS Champion, which previously had been rolled into our County Recorder's position. However, the opportunity to divest the two roles and help on our committee presented itself. At the end of 2018 Kent & SE London had recorded just five BC WCBS squares with two volunteers. Therefore throughout 2019 and looking to 2020, I've been dedicated to upping our recorded square counts and the number of volunteers.

One of the first things I realised was how easy undertaking a square can be - a fact I don't think is as widely known as it should be. Therefore a central aim was, and continues to be, to inform and really express how accessible the scheme is; arguably our better known conventional butterfly transects can seem daunting to take on and more than once when describing WCBS to volunteers they look taken aback when I mention they only have to go out twice in the year and only during the height of summer! Once they get over their surprise at how relatively minimal the imposition on their time is, WCBS becomes a fairly

straightforward sell. In fact, if we were a commercial organisation I'd say we should be upselling all our activities with a WCBS square!

A second tenet for me has been to also foster a strong sense of square ownership – something I'm sure develops naturally over time. However, for volunteers new to WCBS, some dare I say are a little too scared of "getting-it-wrong". In my mind the less prescriptive I am and the greater creative input the volunteer has when establishing their square, the better. Of course on the flip side it's important to be supportive and help guide, particularly during the initial square setup and for new walkers. I've really enjoyed receiving the planned routes and getting on-the-ground insights of the different squares during my various email conversations. In one instance I was fortunate enough to actually join with one of our members with their recce of square TQ3771 (near Bromley) - not only did it get me away from my desk during my lunch break, but we were rewarded with a rare sighting of a Large Tortoiseshell. Needless to say I was beaming on my return.

As enthusiastic as I am about WCBS and getting to work with our volunteers, at the end of the day I'm just a glorified



*Large Tortoiseshell by David Newland*

admin person, the true stars are our volunteers. So I must truly thank all our 2019 WCBS volunteers in Kent & SE London, their ranks have swelled from just two to now over 12 and I'm getting a lot of interest for 2020. Similarly our square count has gone up by 140% to 12 - our best year since 2015. Because of our members' efforts we can now boast coverage from the Sussex border to East Kent, from London to Folkestone with even the Isle of Grain surveyed this year – resulting in our most populous square (well over 400 individual butterflies seen!) – something to be said for our untouched areas of Kent and the beautiful English wilderness. It pays to be adventurous.

## CHANGES

**It's goodbye from me and hello from Megan**

After ten years of co-ordinating the WCBS for Butterfly Conservation I am stepping aside to co-ordinate the County Butterfly Recorders for the Butterflies for the New Millennium project as well as continuing to co-ordinate the County Moth Recorders for the National Moth Recording Scheme. It has been a pleasure working with you all over the years. The WCBS has gone from strength to strength and I am incredibly grateful to all of the WCBS Champions and WCBS recorders for supporting this vital scheme, the only scheme dedicated to monitoring butterfly species of the wider countryside. I am handing the WCBS

baton over to my fabulous and very capable colleague Megan Lowe.

Megan has worked for BC for five years and has been involved with the Munching Caterpillars project and more recently the All the Moor Butterflies project. She joins the WCBS team with a wealth of experience and knowledge in volunteer engagement and outreach. Megan will be a valuable asset to the WCBS and I hope you will join me in wishing her well in this role. The changing of the guard will be effective as of 1 April 2020. From 1 April please address all WCBS queries and enquiries to Megan via [survey@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:survey@butterfly-conservation.org) and 07827 460767.



*Zoë Randle*



*Megan Lowe*

## GETTING INVOLVED

### Getting involved in the WCBS

Overall project coordination is undertaken by BC's WCBS Co-ordinator who can be contacted via [survey@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:survey@butterfly-conservation.org). If you want to do the WCBS on your BBS square, please contact Sarah Harris at the BTO via [bbs@bto.org](mailto:bbs@bto.org) or 01842 750050.

To get involved or find out who your WCBS Champion is please see the [back page](#) of this newsletter.

#### WCBS Champions

WCBS Branch Champions are the lynchpins of the scheme, performing a vital role in promoting the scheme to recruit volunteer recorders on their patch. Throughout the season they also

provide support and encouragement as and when it is required. For the coming 2020 season we welcome Celia Macey to the team of WCBS Champions; Celia has taken over from Christian King for Norfolk. Peter Courtney has returned to the fold as WCBS Champion for Northern Ireland as Stuart Watson has stepped down. In addition to this Val Standen is the new WCBS Champion for North East England and Penny Wills has taken over Somerset and Bristol from Ross Harley. Many thanks to Christian, Stuart and Ross for their efforts with regard to the WCBS and welcome to Celia, Peter, Val and Penny. To find out who your WCBS Champion is please see [page 10](#) of this newsletter.

#### Volunteer to be a WCBS Champion

WCBS Champions are required for Lincolnshire and South Wales BC Branches, if you are interested in taking on this important role please contact BC's WCBS Co-ordinator.

#### BTO Regional Organisers

The WCBS on BBS squares is coordinated by Sarah Harris, the BBS National Organiser at BTO HQ, however, we are grateful to the efforts of the BTO's Regional Organisers for the BBS who help promote the WCBS to their BBS volunteers.

## NEWS

### News from our partners

#### UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme – Claire Carvell

As partners in the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, the WCBS team encourage you to undertake a "Flower-Insect Timed Count" (FIT) in your gardens, and when COVID-19 restrictions can be safely lifted in the future, in your WCBS squares. **In the light of COVID-19 FIT counts in public spaces have been suspended until further notice.** However, there are still opportunities to engage, via FIT counts carried out on private property to which you have access that is unrestricted by the current and future government guidance, such as gardens, yards, balconies and window boxes. Allotments that are only accessible via leaving your private property are not to be used for PoMS FIT counts at this present time.

The FIT Count is a simple 10-minute survey to collect data on pollinator numbers, recording all flower visitors to group level. It works equally well in rural or urban locations. All the materials and guidance you need are available on the [PoMS website](#) including: FIT Count Survey Guidance, Flower Guide, Insect Guide, and Recording Form, plus how-to video guides.

#### WCBS boost in the central Chilterns

BC, BTO and UK CEH have teamed up with the Chilterns Conservation Board and Plantlife to deliver an exciting new

landscape-scale wildlife surveying programme called *Tracking the Impact*. The aim of the project is to assess the state of key wildlife indicator groups (butterflies, birds, higher plants) across the central Chilterns area and to use the data to inform local woodland, grassland and arable farmland conservation efforts. The monitoring programme forms part of a new Heritage Lottery Funded project called Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership led by the Chilterns Conservation Board, which runs until 2024.

As part of the monitoring programme, existing WCBS sampling will be supplemented, with the aim of delivering 50 squares across the central Chilterns.

Exciting new opportunities are thus being offered to:

- » take on new WCBS survey squares
- » receive training in species ID and survey techniques
- » meet with other surveyors and to get feedback on the project at regular workshops and events
- » For further details contact Nick Marriner [here](#).



**Please note that due to COVID-19, all survey methodology and species identification training as well as all formal bird, butterfly and plant surveying as part of the Tracking the Impact project has been cancelled until further notice. However, you can still register interest for future years.**



Aston Rowant by David Newland

# MEET THE TEAM

## UK co-ordination

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