

# *the* **Comm**a

No.121 Spring 2025

Regional Magazine of West Midlands  
Butterfly Conservation

## **The Butterfly Emergency**

46% overall loss in our region

## **The Branch response**

Our work for species and habitats



Bringing *butterflies and moths* back to Britain • [westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com](http://westmidlandsbutterflyconservation.wordpress.com)



## Cover story

Peacock, Bridgnorth Cemetery,  
22 February 2025: first butterfly  
of the year for Roger Littlelover

## Contributions

Please send articles and images to the Editor. Photographs should be as high-resolution as possible and sent as separate graphic files.

Our copy deadlines are  
Spring - 28 February  
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(early submissions are welcome).  
Contact the Editor for information.  
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## Publisher

Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Branch. The opinions herein are not necessarily those of the Branch or of Butterfly Conservation.



West Midlands Butterflies  
and Moths



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# Chairman's Address



Michael Southall

## Changes at Butterfly Conservation

The past six months have been difficult for Butterfly Conservation, with changes in the way the charity relates to its branches and volunteers. These changes have proved contentious and led to protracted discussions involving our Branch and some others. The message from Head Office and the Trustees is that we are living in a changing world, and that change is inevitable. The charity's income has fallen recently, exacerbated by rising costs.

Two of the changes are the introduction of Assemble, a compulsory volunteers' register, and a new funding model for branches, which will no longer receive £6 from each member's subscription as has been the case for many years. Instead, branches are expected to submit an annual budget to Head Office for approval. These changes have caused the resignation from Butterfly Conservation of two of our long-term and much-valued committee members. We thank them very much for their past contributions and understand that they will both continue to work for the conservation of butterflies and moths, albeit outside Butterfly Conservation.

## West Midlands Landscape Officer

The fixed-term contract of **Natalie Norton**, our regional Landscape Officer, has come to an end, and we thank her for her work over the last three years (see page 26). Natalie has taken up a post with Shropshire Wildlife Trust and we wish her all the best in her new role. Any news of a possible replacement has been delayed until consultation between staff and Head Office is complete.

Here in the West Midlands, our Branch remains focused on delivery of our conservation objectives across the region. It appears that overall staffing in Butterfly Conservation will be reduced by 20–25% this year. To end on a positive note, the good news is that our Treasurer's budget for 2025/26 has been approved by the finance department, meaning that we can continue with our planned spending during the period.

## British and European species

During the winter, I've enjoyed dipping into *Butterflies of Britain and Europe*, the second edition of a guide written by four Finns and published in 2019 (ISBN: 9781472960535). It's been fascinating to see the range of our British species extend across Europe and beyond. The nearly five hundred species described in the book put our fifty-nine species into perspective.

Living on our islands with no endemic butterfly or moth species defines us as being at the edge of their range. The vulnerable plight of many species is

not confined to our islands but also applies to Europe, and indeed the rest of the World, often for the same reasons. Changes to the way in which land is managed have been happening for centuries, with the speed of such change accelerating in recent decades. Climate change is another factor: it will be fascinating to see if some European butterfly species will migrate to our shores and begin breeding, as some moth species are doing. All we can do is to keep improving habitats in our region for the species that we still have, giving possible future arrivals a fighting chance.

### *A better butterfly year?*

Writing this in mid-March, it seems as if we've had a slow start to the year but I note that I've seen butterflies, and indeed moths, in every month so far. I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to this season and feel optimistic that it will be an improvement on last year. Have a good one!

Michael Southall Branch Chair

## Assemble Volunteer Portal

Head Office has been transferring existing volunteers to this register during 2024. It is similar to systems used by some other charities to communicate with volunteers and manage their activities; it will also simplify compliance with statutory obligations such as the General Data Protection Regulation. If you are interested in registering, you can find out more at: [butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/volunteering/assemble-volunteer-portal](https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/volunteering/assemble-volunteer-portal)

## Members' first sightings in 2025



8 March:  
Small Tortoiseshell  
(Andrew Magnay)

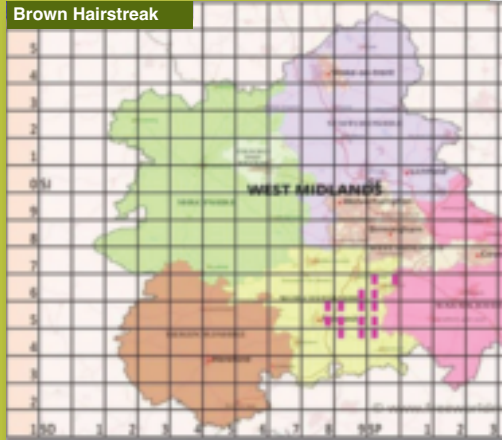


2 March:  
Comma  
(Melyvn Lambert)

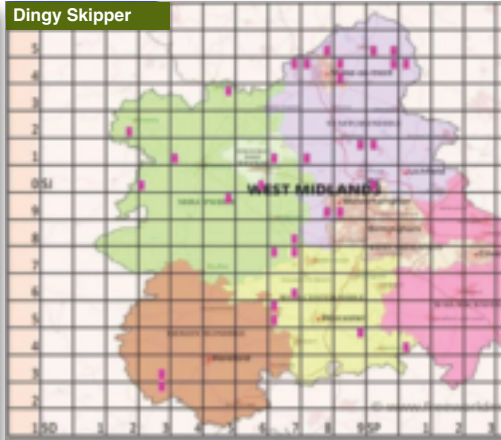


9 March:  
Early Grey moth  
(Steven Croft)

Brown Hairstreak



Dingy Skipper



# Dire recording news for 2024

After an outstanding recording year in 2023, last year saw the total number of butterfly records in our region plummet from 99,922 to 66,500. One hundred sites were active in 2024, of which 42 were active throughout 2019–2024 (excluding 2022). For the 42 active sites, counts were adjusted for missed weeks and average counts calculated for 2019–2023. When these were compared with adjusted counts for 2024, the overall loss was 46% across all species and sites – unprecedented during my time as transect coordinator.

## Reasons for this dramatic decline

I've been involved with butterfly recording for 26 years, having started the Grafton transect and joined Butterfly Conservation in 1999. I've managed the Grafton Wood reserve with a group of enthusiastic volunteers for 27 years and witnessed how habitat management can improve butterfly populations.

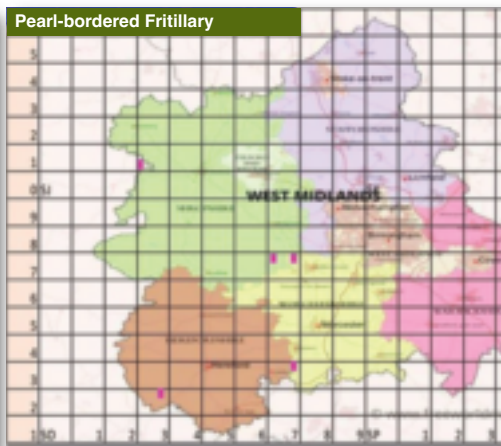
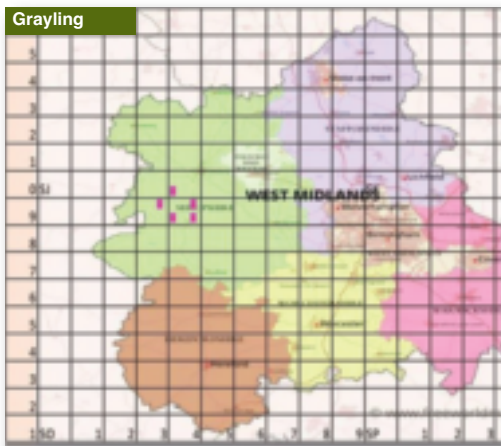
At Grafton, the butterfly population increased from 2000 in 1999 to 5000 in 2020. I took over the role of transect coordinator in 2005 and have attempted to make sense of the reams of data each year. We've seen fluctuations in populations of different species before, usually due to habitat loss, but in all those years we've never witnessed results like 2024, when all species and sites have shown a significant decline in such a short time.

## Why? There are several probable reasons.

- Habitat – of the land in England:
  - 70% is farmed (97% intensive, 3% organic)
  - 3% is designated as wildlife reserves
  - 8% is designated as SSSIs
- Weather – my records go back to 1991 and, compared with averages over that time, in 2024:
  - Day-time temperatures were 0.5°C higher
  - Night-time temperatures were 2°C higher
  - Percentage sunshine was significantly lower, particularly in early spring
  - Rainfall in winter and spring was higher

## Casual recording

I took over the casual recording in 2011 and now



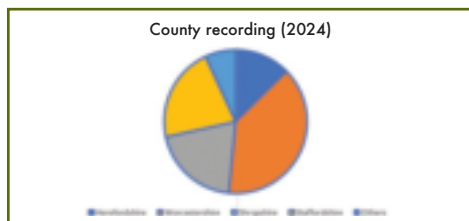
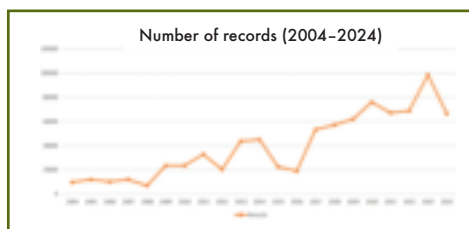
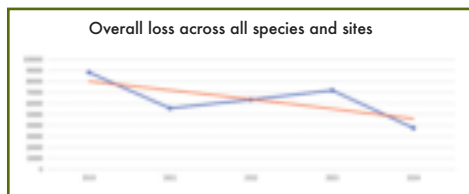
have over a million records for the West Midlands. The real breakthrough came with the introduction of iRecord by the Biological Records Centre (BRC) as part of the work of the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH). This information tells us where butterflies are in our area. In recent years, we've kept a 5-year running atlas on our website for each species and a Google map of all records for our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species. We've watched species decline and become extinct from parts of our region, including:

- **High Brown Fritillary** and **Grayling** from the Malverns
- **Grizzled Skipper** and **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** from Trench Wood
- **Wall** from Bredon Hill and Windmill Hill
- **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** from Haugh Wood and Coppett Hill

There have been successes. The reintroduction of **Wood White** into Worcestershire has been a triumph, achieved by Branch volunteers supported by regional Butterfly Conservation staff. The Branch took over landscape management of Penny Hill Quarry, resulting in over 100 **Dingy Skipper** and 20 **Wood White** records. Mel Mason has started an ambitious Pearl-bordered Fritillary breeding and reintroduction programme on the Malverns, supported by a team of local volunteers.

But, overall, the trend is clear and the need for practical conservation work has never been more pressing.

Based on a report by John Tilt



For a relatively small national charity like Butterfly Conservation, it's always a challenge to work out how to apply limited resources for best effect. It's great to be able to develop initiatives to engage new groups, such as Wild Spaces (see *Comma* 120), but it's important not to lose sight of the fact that conservation work around species and habitats should receive absolute priority.

There are different ways to achieve our goal of conserving butterflies and moths, of course, but we're a conservation charity and that's why most members have joined. Engagement and support of branches, and their volunteers, are fundamental to success and it's vital for all parts of the organisation to pull together.

# A practical commitment to conserving species and habitats

For over 40 years, through its volunteers, West Midlands Butterfly Conservation has made a huge and ongoing practical commitment to conserving species and their habitats. Conservation is central to what we do and we remain focused on delivery. 2024 was a typical year and this article, based on posts from our Facebook page, shows just how important branches and volunteers are to the charity's overall aims and to delivery on the ground.

## January

Despite several named storms causing damage around the UK, our volunteers were out in all weathers working on our reserves and other important sites. The focus was on **Grayling** when a large group cleared gorse from rocky outcrops in the Cardingmill Valley on the Long Mynd, bagging it up and rolling down the slope to a

waiting National Trust trailer for off-site disposal. To create suitable habitat for our planned reintroduction of **Kentish Glory** moth, we cleared mature birch trees from heathland in the Wyre Forest. Our egg searchers continued their long-term monitoring of **Brown Hairstreak** and its range expansion, with their annual count in Morton Stanley Park in Redditch and exploration of new areas for this species.

## February

We continued gorse clearance for Grayling on the Long Mynd and birch clearance in the Wyre Forest to create bare ground for violets to regenerate for **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**. At Penny Hill Quarry, limestone grassland was extended and regrowth controlled to benefit butterflies, moths and wild flowers; the cut material was chipped at the end of the season. The Thursday Streakers continued their weekly Brown Hairstreak egg searches and planted

a tree in Haines Meadow (belonging to the Vale Landscape Heritage Trust) to celebrate finds there. A day in the Heart of England Forest with **Matthew Oates** and **Sam Macvie** yielded a **Purple Emperor** caterpillar and led to plans for searches in other woodlands over the summer.

## March

Our winter work parties came to an end and we looked back on our volunteers' achievements at a wide range of sites, sometimes supported by Butterfly Conservation's regional staff. Using a Robocutter enabled us to cut scrub on steeper slopes on the Malverns and the Shropshire Hills than by hand.

The main recording season began, with the Garden Moth Scheme ongoing and preparations for the butterfly transect season getting underway. March, although unsettled, was still the seventh warmest on record. Decent days in the middle of the month woke a few hibernators but not in great numbers; **Small Tortoiseshell** was notable by its absence. The annual Butterfly Recorders'

## January



Searching for Brown Hairstreak eggs in Morton Stanley Park

## February



Clearing gorse from the Batch Valley for Grayling

## March



Last work party of the season at Trench Wood

Meeting, always a highlight, was held on Zoom (convenient, if short on social contact and the chance to buy publications).

## April

A visit to a quarry near Broadway where, with the help of the owners, we've seeded several areas with kidney vetch, larval food plant of the **Small Blue**, revealed good germination rates. We supplemented this with more plug-plants. Strategically located between the two known sites for this species in Worcestershire, this work should help natural colonisation to occur.

Good progress was made by the Lost Fritillaries project on the Malvern Hills. Our thanks go to all the volunteers who supported this project by helping with site management, growing violet plants and monitoring numbers.

## May

The first Pearl-bordered Fritillaries emerged late but, by the start of this month, we were able to celebrate our work on the Lost Fritillaries project with a special day for members and supporters on the Malvern Hills. For the first time, there was evidence of successful breeding in the wild.

Later in the month, we supported Natural England's National Nature Reserve Week by running a moth morning in the Wyre Forest followed by a Fritillary walk. Moth mornings and butterfly walks combine well: we ran a similar event at our Monkwood reserve, yielding a good selection of moths and giving visitors the opportunity to see **Wood White** (successfully reintroduced in 2016). Surveys took place for rare Clearwing moths that occur in the Wyre, notably **Large Red-belted** and **White-barred** (several new locations for the latter).

## June

We ran butterfly ID workshops in the Wyre Forest and on the Long Mynd, moth mornings at three National Trust properties, a **Welsh Clearwing** training day on Cannock Chase, a butterfly walk in Telford and Purple Emperor searches at various locations. We attended a reception held by the Heart of England Forest team, who have been doing a great job in encouraging Purple Emperor into their woodland. After our efforts to encourage Small Blue to spread into Worcestershire, we were pleased to hear of one on Bredon Hill.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ►

April



Watering in kidney vetch for Small Blue

July



Flower-rich ride-sides created by stump grinding at Trench Wood

August



Searching for Wood White eggs at Monkwood

July

Purple Emperor and Grayling surveys continued. A visit to private woodland near Drake's Broughton produced a very small **White Admiral** caterpillar; their distinctive feeding pattern can help to locate these tiny larvae.

We held meetings at some reserves to plan next winter's management, reviewing past work and identifying where action can help butterflies and moths. Severn Trent funded stump-grinding along ride edges at both Monkwood and Trench Wood; this encourages wild flowers and benefits Wood White and other species. A morning pulling Melilot at Monkwood helped to control this invasive plant, which dominates other ride-side vegetation.

Field trips are an important part of our summer programme – it's always good to introduce members and supporters to new places. We welcome offers to lead trips to different parts of our region.

We've worked for some years on an initiative for pollinators with Wyre Forest District Council, leaving areas of roadside verge to be cut and collected only once a year. These have proved very successful and are now identified with colourful new signs.

August

An open day at Wild Hollowfields was a highlight, combining a moth morning with the first opportunity for many to see this year's Brown Hairstreak on the wing. This was followed by Brown Hairstreak Week at our Grafton Wood reserve, where some visitors were seeing this elusive butterfly for the first time.

The Big Butterfly Count ended with a family day at the Millennium Nature Reserve in Telford, with guided walks for locals and craft activities for children. Despite the indifferent summer, our Monkwood reserve yielded its highest Wood White egg count to date (and a **Yellow-legged Clearwing** came to a pheromone lure). We launched our latest pin badge, Kentish Glory moth, to support our feasibility study into a Wyre Forest reintroduction (its last English location).

September

Usually the beginning of the end for the Lepidoptera season, this was an exceptional month for moths; large numbers of both **Box-tree Moth** and **Large Yellow Underwing** were widely reported. Butterflies also lasted well, with plentiful **Small Copper** at some sites and Brown Hairstreak at Grafton Wood. Less numerous, **Red**



September

Work resumes at Grafton Wood



October

Managing habitat for Pearl-bordered  
Fritillaries in the Wyre Forest



November

Searching for dangleleaf  
(see silk on leftmost leaf)



December

Team takes a break at Pennyhill Quarry,  
an important limestone grassland site

**Admiral** was seen by those with flowering ivy in their gardens.

Our work parties resumed after their summer break and we held our Members' Day and AGM at Pant Village Hall, Shropshire.

October

Our 2025 calendar proved very popular. Represented at the Shrewsbury Christmas Card Shop for the first time, we also offered a new greetings card and our *Walking with Butterflies* guide (which sold well – we hope buyers enjoy the walks over the coming summer).

Our Butterflies under Threat Team (BUTT) was out at some of our Worcestershire sites. Autumn moths are always worth looking for, especially the fairly common **Merveille du Jour** and the range-expanding **Clifden Nonpareil**.

November


We were introduced to a new aspect of butterfly behaviour known as dangleleaf: Purple Emperor larvae use silk to attach their feeding leaf to Sallow twigs. Depending on the weather, the leaves can remain attached to the end of the year, helping in larval searches. Joined by Matthew Oates (to whom we owe much of our knowledge of this species' ecology) and Sam Macvie from the Heart of England Forest, our Purple Emperor Action Team (PEAT) visited a wood near Honeybourne for an invaluable learning experience (but no dangleleaf).

The Brown Hairstreak egg-hunting season began, with weekly egg hunts and an egg survey at Grafton Wood. Over 30 years of detailed egg data at this site forms one of the longest data sets for any butterfly species in Britain.

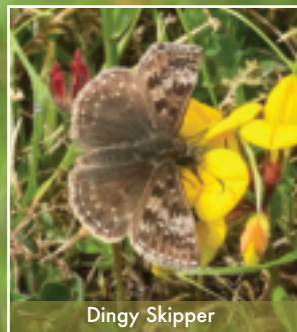
December

We took time to reflect on the year's achievements and to thank our volunteers. A highlight was the 300th 1km square for Brown Hairstreak in east Worcestershire and west Warwickshire (see page 14). Branches such as ours are the lifeblood of Butterfly Conservation: without them and the volunteers they represent, we'd achieve far less. They deserve to be celebrated and, despite difficult times in the charity sector, the value of what they do should be recognised and supported into the future.

Article and photographs by **Mike Williams**



Narrow-bordered  
Five-spot Burnet



# Green spaces in Telford & Wrekin

The sun shines on a Spring day, warming the long grass as it sways in the gentlest of breezes. The call of a buzzard can be heard overhead and the sound of buzzing bees visiting the early spring flowers adds to the ambience. It would be easy to believe you are deep in the countryside: tree-lined meadows extend as far as the eyes can see and, among the more common species you'd expect to spot, red-listed **Dingy Skipper** are flitting around the meadow edges, battling for territory and breeding ground with their freshly emerged counterparts.

The meadows on the spot where I am standing are equally impressive, noted for their array of wildflowers. There's an abundance of colour, including common spotted and bee orchids. This is far from deep countryside, however. This is Rough Park, an urban nature reserve only a stone's throw from mainstream housing and just one of the reserves in Telford & Wrekin Council's impressive portfolio.



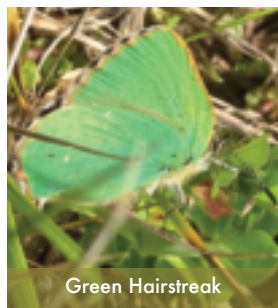
## *Balancing conflicting demands*

Telford & Wrekin is a borough genuinely balancing the pressures for urban growth with the needs of wildlife. Following £1bn of housing investment, Telford is the fastest growing town in the West Midlands and sits in the top five UK locations for housing growth (with the population set to rise by 30,000 in the next 20 years). Despite those bold statistics, the Council's Local Plan has still secured 23 protected Local Nature Reserves and a further 300 Green Guarantee sites – areas of open space reserved for both wildlife and people. These include native hedgerows and broadleaf woodland (some ancient), mixed plantations, wildflower meadows, mixed sward grasslands, watercourses, wetlands and even areas of lowland heath.

The room that this affords for nature's recovery is still vast, four times the amount of open space recommended by Natural England for a town of Telford's size and well within the 'Green in 15' target



**Fujitsu volunteer group working on Buglife's Get the Marches Buzzing project  
- we've worked with groups from many local companies and schools**



**Green Hairstreak**

set by Natural England – referring to the maximum number of minutes people should have to walk from home to reach accessible green spaces.

Having protected areas is a fantastic asset but biodiversity can only be ensured if you invest time and effort in managing these spaces to some extent: protecting the most vulnerable habitats from succession (and other challenges), ensuring wildlife corridors allow for essential migration and keeping tabs on local species data and populations. With Council budgets still tightly constrained, these tasks cannot be covered by central budgets and are not easy to achieve. Council officers have to be creative and prepared to seek out other opportunities to get things done, utilising the know-how of local experts and keen volunteers.

Fortunately, Telford has had many successes with such engagement. Thanks to a team of willing community volunteers forming the Telford Green Spaces Partnership (TGSP), 15 of the 23 reserves have an active volunteer group undertaking hands-on tasks (including tailored habitat maintenance) that the Council's standard grounds maintenance contract simply cannot stretch to cover.

### ***Working in partnership***

Telford has also benefitted hugely from partnerships. One, with Buglife (the Invertebrate Conservation Trust), has seen 15 hectares of mostly new insect habitat created under their Severn B-Lines and Get the Marches Buzzing projects. This has been added to the B-Lines map – a national wildlife corridor for pollinating insects ([buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines](http://buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines)).

Successes for our wildlife don't stop there. With an emphasis on mowing less, more meadow areas are being created all the time and, thanks to some truly excellent work with Butterfly Conservation, we're learning new ways to manage our cut-and-collect grasslands on a rotational management system. Benefiting species such as Dingy Skipper, the larvae of which overwinter in uncut sward, this is a pilot scheme that we hope to expand in the near future.

Indeed the work done with West Midlands Butterfly Conservation experts Jenny Joy and Mike Williams has been a key part of our recent public engagement, with community species surveys on Rough Park Local Nature Reserve delivered in 2023 and 2024. Their specialist knowledge and dedication was fundamental to Telford & Wrekin now having its first-ever (and much-needed) species identification guide for butterflies and day-flying moths (details in the event calendar pullout). This will be used in ongoing education and nature engagement across the town.

I'm under no illusions: the future is uncertain for our wildlife and, worldwide, species face many challenges. However, as pressures mount, I can also see that Telford is endeavouring to find solutions for both people and wildlife. I am proud to have played a part in creating beacons of local hope and am finding great optimism among the growing numbers of people I meet who are keen to do the same.

.....  
*Article and photographs by Rick Shaw*

### **Find out more**

The Council's website shows all the local nature reserves (with maps, things to do and parking details) and explains the Green Guarantee (with a map of designated sites):  
[telford.gov.uk/info/20085/green\\_and\\_open\\_spaces](http://telford.gov.uk/info/20085/green_and_open_spaces)

For volunteering opportunities, contact  
[parks.greenspaces@telford.gov.uk](mailto:parks.greenspaces@telford.gov.uk)

# UK MOTH RECORDERS MEETING 2025



This annual event is always worth a listen, whatever your interest in moths. Conveniently for our local moth-ers, it's often held in Birmingham but this year it was held online. That must be a help to people in other regions but does mean one misses the social banter associated with a live event and the opportunity to buy from various stalls.

## *National Moth Recording Scheme*

**Dr Zoe Randle** kicked off proceedings with an update on this scheme, which has taken off in a big way in recent years: 99% of all 10km squares are now covered and the number of records is increasing. Tribute was paid to all recorders but especially the county moth recorders who, as volunteers, check and verify all the records submitted. Special thanks were given to **Les Evans-Hill**, who was central to the development of the recording scheme and has recently stepped down from the role. Their loss is our gain, as Les is now County Moth Recorder for Staffordshire (see pages 20–21).

## *Clearwing moths*

**Dr Norman Lowe** spoke about Clearwing moths, particularly work carried out in the Brecon Beacons with the help of a Community Nature Recovery Grant. He

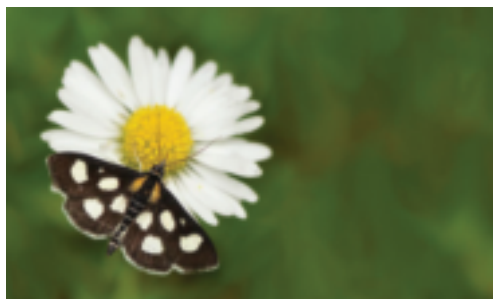
suggested that, if ever moths needed a flagship, this group of species fitted the bill. The Brecon Beacons project team used the grant to purchase pheromones and traps; they held a number of public events that proved popular and resulted in increases in both recorders and records, with a number of new discoveries. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation has done a lot to encourage recording of Clearwings in our own region, so it was good to hear of success elsewhere.

## *Insect declines*

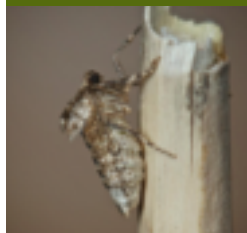
**Dr Luke Evans** of Reading University has been trying to link declines in insect numbers with bird and bat populations, and shared some of his findings. This is a problematic area of study, as it's difficult to separate one factor when there are so many others including habitat degradation and climate change. However, his study suggested that blue tit populations, for example, were very reliant on the availability of moth larvae during the breeding season. A good year for moths (particularly **Winter Moth**) means a good year for blue tits. Overall, however, habitat change was considered the main driver in declines.

## *Moths of Argyll*

Scotland boasts a unique range of moths, some of which occur rarely if at all south of the border. **David Hill's** talk focused on Argyll on the west coast. One species that occurs there is the beautiful but rare **White-spotted Sable**



White-spotted Sable (Pete Withers)



Winter Moth – female  
(Rob Blanken)



Transparent Burnet



Winter Moth – male and female (Rob Blanken)

(*Anania funebris*). As adults are difficult to find, recorders looked for caterpillars on golden rod, the larval food plant, but this was also tricky – one larva after three days of searching! A complication is that a related species, *A. terrealis*, shares the same food plant; the caterpillars look virtually identical, so other minute differences are being sought out. It's thought *A. terrealis* prefers to feed on flowers rather than leaves and may produce more silk, but clearly more work is needed.

In contrast, **Transparent Burnet** is easy to identify. It is strongly associated with basalt rocks and south-facing

slopes, where it feeds on wild thyme, but it is faced with problems from invading cotoneaster and bracken – sounds similar to our own battles with bracken and gorse on the Shropshire Hills.

### Light pollution

A lot of attention has recently been given to light pollution and its possible impact on moths, the subject of a talk by **Dr Sam Fabian** of Imperial College London. Sam's research is aimed at reaching a better understanding of how moths react to artificial light. Is it that moths navigate by the moon and become confused by light (a phenomenon known as subversion of a celestial compass)? Sam records moths at artificial light using video to capture their motion. The conclusion appeared to be that moths were not following a compass cue but, where artificial light was the dominant light source, they naturally flew up to it. One interesting idea, which might be worth pursuing by those who run moth traps, was that placing a reflective sheet on the ground might attract more moths.

The final speaker, all the way from the United States (one of the advantages of a Zoom meeting), was **Dr Avalon Owens** of Harvard University. She described light pollution as the fastest-growing threat to our planet. Apparently Earth is twice as bright now as it was ten years ago: we may have seen 250 stars as children but typically fewer than 100 now as adults. This has four main impacts on insects: temporal disturbance to their internal clocks, fatal attraction (the moth to the flame), spatial disorientation and visual confusion. Moves are afoot to combat these problems and experiments have been done on various colours of light (differences are small but red light might be the most effective). Measures to reduce the impact of light include:

- Remove unnecessary light
- Install motion detectors
- Shield to the smallest area
- Dim to lowest intensity
- Install timers

Overall, Avalon suggested that humans need to get used to lower light levels and that LED lights, while they may save energy, are still generally too bright and have a detrimental effect.

Article by **Mike Williams**

All in all a very interesting morning – you can watch a recording of the meeting at [butterfly-conservation.org/moths/uk-moth-recorders-meeting](http://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/uk-moth-recorders-meeting)

# Brown Hairstreak found in a 300th square

A cluster of four eggs  
found at Grafton Wood  
(Gillian Thompson)



Mike Williams finds the 300th egg square  
(Simon Primrose)

Since the early 1990s, West Midlands Butterfly Conservation has been monitoring and recording sightings of **Brown Hairstreak** (mostly eggs with an occasional adult) in locations across East Worcestershire and, more recently, in West Warwickshire. By 12 December 2024, we had recorded this species in 299 one-kilometre OS grid squares... so the hunt was on for the big 300th!

After a few unsuccessful attempts to conjure up this eagerly anticipated moment in a beautiful rural location, accompanied by a large contingent of our faithful Thursday search team, it fell to just **Mike Williams** and me to make the discovery in a most urban setting – a business park in Worcester City.

Very appropriately Mike found the egg, as it was he who'd been involved in those early days, thirty-plus years ago, organising initial monitoring schemes around Grafton Wood – where the butterfly had been rediscovered in 1970 – and taking part in the first egg hunts in the surrounding countryside.

The increase in range, from just a handful of squares known in the early 1990s to the 300 known by the end of last year, is scarcely believable and represents a tremendous success story for the species. Although some of this increase may have been down to this species being overlooked in one or two areas, the vast majority is genuine range-expansion resulting from better farm stewardship, and also from climate change which obviously suits the butterfly very well. Increases in range are being reported from most of the other areas of the country that currently support populations, so the future definitely looks bright for the Brown Hairstreak – roll on the 400th square!

Article by **Simon Primrose**

## Footnote

We found more new OS grid squares at an astonishing rate in January and February, reaching a total of **41** for the season – a new annual record for our band of searchers – and taking us to an overall total of **333**. We also recorded a large number of eggs on our winter searches at our Grafton Wood reserve, including a 'treble' and the notable 'quadruple' shown.

## Members' Day comes to Herefordshire

11am to 3pm on Saturday 4 October 2025

Bodenham Parish Hall

On the A417 at Bodenham (HR1 3LB)

– 8 miles from Hereford

Following the excellent attendance at last year's get-together in Shropshire, this year we are meeting in Herefordshire. We hope to meet more of the members in that area and hear about local projects and activities. Once again, we have two excellent speakers lined up:

### Matthew Oates

Matthew, a well-known butterfly expert and nature writer, will talk about his work on Purple Emperor and where to look for it in Herefordshire.

### Martyn Davies

Martyn, Editor of the Branch's Herefordshire Newsletter, will introduce us to some of the county's butterflies and moths.

Buffet lunch provided

For more about the venue, visit  
[bodenhamparishcouncil.gov.uk/parish-hall](http://bodenhamparishcouncil.gov.uk/parish-hall)



Matthew Oates showing  
'dangleleaf' – see pages 6–9  
(Mike Williams)



Martyn Davies

## Shropshire

### Butterfly Walk, Comer Woods, Bridgnorth

Sat, 21 Jun. 11am Butterfly Walk led by Roger Littleover. **Contact Roger Littleover:**

07814 995124, [rogerlittleover@hotmail.com](mailto:rogerlittleover@hotmail.com)

### Oswestry Hills and Border Group

This area group organises impromptu events, including surveys and trips to search for specific species (see page 15). **Contact Simon Spencer:**

07866 428875, [cerisyi@btinternet.com](mailto:cerisyi@btinternet.com)

### Shropshire Moth Group 2025 Programme

[wrekinforestvolunteers.blogspot.com/p/shropshire-moth-group.html](http://wrekinforestvolunteers.blogspot.com/p/shropshire-moth-group.html)

**Apr to Oct.** The Group organises a programme of moth trapping field trips on Friday nights, with some extra dates in the week during May and June. Observers, beginners and experienced trappers welcome, so why not join them?

**For further details please contact Tony Jacques (Shropshire County Macro-moth Recorder) at**  
[vc40tj@gmail.com](mailto:vc40tj@gmail.com)

**IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.**



## Birmingham and Black Country

### City Nature Challenge 2025

**25–28 Apr.** Birmingham and the Black Country (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall & Wolverhampton) will be taking part in the 2025 City Nature Challenge, which is an annual competition between cities all over the world to see how many wild species their citizens can spot over four days. We need YOUR help to spot as much wildlife as we can in that time!

During last year's challenge, we collectively managed make over 12,866 observations of a massive 1,340 different species! This result meant that Birmingham and the Black Country made more wildlife observations than any other UK city area and the 9th most of any city in Europe! It also helped to show just how much wildlife and wild space we have in Birmingham and the Black Country!

Taking part in the City Nature Challenge is easy – simply take a photo of any wildlife you see during the challenge period and upload it using the free iNaturalist mobile app or website. If the sighting is within Birmingham and the Black Country, it will automatically count towards our total. You'll be able to see your own personal species total increase as well as seeing how Birmingham and the Black Country is faring on in the global City Nature Challenge league table as it updates in real time!

[bbcwildlife.org.uk/CityNatureChallenge](http://bbcwildlife.org.uk/CityNatureChallenge)

## Staffordshire

### Moth Morning, Moseley Old Hall

**TBC.** 9–10.30am. In partnership with the National Trust. Moseley Old Hall Lane, Fordhouses, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, WV10 7HY. Book in advance, £10 (including hot drink and breakfast pastry). **Contact Richard Orton:** [richardorton285@btinternet.com](mailto:richardorton285@btinternet.com)

### Insect Week, Cannock Chase

**23–29 Jun.** Includes a Welsh Clearwing Moth Walk with Steven Barnes on Thu, 26 Jun, and a Butterfly Walk with Alistair Hughes-Roden and Claire Studman on Sun, 29 Jun.

**For details, visit:** [cannockchase.org.uk/care-for-the-chase/iconic-insects/insect-week-23rd-june-29th-june-2025](http://cannockchase.org.uk/care-for-the-chase/iconic-insects/insect-week-23rd-june-29th-june-2025)



### Conference

**Sat, 11 Oct, Nottingham**

Celebrate the scheme's achievements and hear about recent research and discoveries  
[ukbms.org/ukbms-20](http://ukbms.org/ukbms-20)

## Herefordshire

### Herefordshire Group Events

This area group organises events for members who live in Herefordshire, including field trips in search of rare species. **Contact Martyn Davies:** [martyn.davies808@gmail.com](mailto:martyn.davies808@gmail.com)

**IMPORTANT: Butterfly walks may be cancelled if the weather is unfavourable.**

## **Celebrating Brum's Wild Places, Highfield Hall, Hall Green**

**26 Apr** 10am to 4pm

- Celebrating Brum's Nature and open spaces across the city that are oases for wildlife
- Mobilising urban communities to engage with national campaigns to protect nature – a case study prepared with Wild Justice, Mark Avery and Chris Packham's organisation
- Logging the first entries on iRecord for this 5,700 square metre venue, feeding into the Birmingham & Black Country team's effort for the City Nature Challenge

There'll be talks about conservation projects, themes and activities, along with refreshments of course  
127–129, Highfield Road, Hall Green, Birmingham. B28 0HS  
[bbcwildlife.org.uk/CityNatureChallenge](http://bbcwildlife.org.uk/CityNatureChallenge)

**Contact Chris Millward:** [mmnnactionuk@gmail.com](mailto:mmnnactionuk@gmail.com), 07463 726587

## **Do you have any gardening contacts?**

Gardens can provide valuable habitats for butterflies and moths, provided that gardeners take their needs into account.

The Branch has leaflets containing simple guidance for incorporating suitable species into planting schemes.

If you know of someone who'd be willing to display leaflets at a garden centre or open garden event, please send details to Mike Williams at [wmbutterflies@gmail.com](mailto:wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

## **Bringing Back the Kentish Glory: A Moth's Fight for Survival**

Overshadowed by their butterfly relatives, yet an essential part of the world's biodiversity, moths are fighting for survival on our ever-changing planet. They play an essential role in ecosystems as pollinators, prey, and indicators of a healthy environment. Many species are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change, which is pushing them ever closer toward extinction.

The Kentish Glory Moth Reintroduction Project is working to change that: we\* hope the project can act as a flagship and help many other moths. This striking species vanished from its former English strongholds over 50 years ago. Combining scientific research with the UK's leading conservation organisations and experts from across Europe, we have the opportunity to give the Kentish Glory a second chance.

Projects such as this highlight the importance of conservation in safeguarding biodiversity for future generations. Using a science-driven approach will



Ezz with a Kentish Glory moth in Scotland  
(Adam Kay)

enable us to protect the balance of ecosystems and the project, if successful, will demonstrate that dedicated research and action can bring even the smallest of species back from the brink.

Article by **Erinna (Ezz) Miles**, UK Biodiversity Conservation Coordinator, Twycross Zoo

\* Twycross Zoo, Natural England, Butterfly Conservation, Butterfly Conservation West Midlands and Forestry England; supported by the University of Leicester and Natural History Museum London.

Find out more at [facebook.com/TwycrossZoo/videos/655025420234745](https://facebook.com/TwycrossZoo/videos/655025420234745)

## Worcestershire

### **Moth Morning and Butterfly Walk, Lodge Hill Farm, Wyre Forest**

**Thu, 22 May.** 9.30am Moth Morning led by Mike Southall, 11am Fritillary Walk led by Mike Williams. Natural England office, Lodge Hill Farm, Dowles Brook, Bewdley, DY12 2LY. **Contact Rob Murray:** [rob.murray@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:rob.murray@naturalengland.org.uk), 01299 400686

### **New Recorders' Day, Wyre Forest**

**Sun, 8 Jun.** 11am at Earnwood Copse car park (SO744784). Learn more about the importance of recording and help celebrate UKBMS at 50. Part of SustFest Wyre Forest 2025:

[www.sustfestwyreforest.org](http://www.sustfestwyreforest.org)

**Contact Mike Williams:** 07802 274552, [wmbutterflies@gmail.com](mailto:wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

### **Moth Morning, Croome Court**

**Sun, 15 Jun.** 9.30am Moth Morning led by Mike Southall, near High Green, Worcester, WR8 9DW. £15 including breakfast.

**Booking essential:** 0344 249 1895, [nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/worcestershire-herefordshire/croome/events](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/worcestershire-herefordshire/croome/events)

### **Moth Morning and Butterfly Walk Hallow near Worcester**

**Sat, 5 Jul.** 9.30am Moth Morning led by Mary Singleton, 11am Butterfly Walk led by Mike Williams, free event with breakfast roll and tea/coffee available for £8 (payable on the day). Bonnie's Tearoom and Visitor Centre at Wildgoose, Old Quarry Drive, off Main Road, Hallow WR2 6LS

**Booking essential.** **Contact Mike Williams:** 07802 274552, [wmbutterflies@gmail.com](mailto:wmbutterflies@gmail.com)

### **Moth Morning and Butterfly Walk, Trench Wood**

**Sat, 12 Jul.** 9.30am Moth Morning led by Mike Southall, 11am Butterfly Walk led by Mike Williams (target species: White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary and, perhaps, White-letter Hairstreak and Purple Emperor). Meet in the reserve car park (SO930588). **Booking essential.**

**Contact Mike Williams:** 07802 274552, [wmbutterflies@gmail.com](mailto:wmbutterflies@gmail.com)



## Identification leaflets

Identification leaflets are now available for Cannock Chase, Meres & Mosses of Shropshire & Cheshire, Malvern Hills, South Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, Wyre Forest and Woolhope Dome, with another in progress for the Forest of Feckenham.

Each leaflet is £4, including postage, or £25 for the set. To place an order, send a cheque made out to Butterfly Conservation to WMBC, 2 Dewberry Close, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8TB or, if you'd prefer to pay by bank transfer, contact Mike Williams at [wmbutterflies@gmail.com](mailto:wmbutterflies@gmail.com)



ID training day on the Long Mynd (Mike Williams)

### **Butterfly Walk, Morton Stanley Park**

**Fri, 22 Aug.** 11am Butterfly Walk led by Steven Williams (target species: Brown Hairstreak) Meet outside café just up from main car park off Windmill Drive, Redditch B97 5GE

**Contact Steven Williams:** 07974 152081, [williams0yq@btinternet.com](mailto:williams0yq@btinternet.com)

**IMPORTANT: Always contact the organiser before attending an event.**



# Oswestry & Borders Butterfly Group

## Events

I'll be organising some butterfly recording trips starting in April, at short notice to respond to favourable weather. In the past we've been to Prees Heath (**Silver-studded Blue**), Middletown Hill and the Moellydd (**Pearl-bordered Fritillary**), Bury Ditches (**Wood White**), Whixhall Moss (**Large Heath**) and Dolgoch Quarry (**White-letter Hairstreak**). We might go further afield for **Marsh Fritillary** and perhaps overnight for **High Brown Fritillary** in South Wales. I particularly want help with mapping Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the Moellydd in late April or early May, preferably from fit people capable of negotiating steep slopes. To find out more, contact me on [cerisyi@btinternet.com](mailto:cerisyi@btinternet.com) or 07866 428875.

## Habitat management

I'm glad to report that West Midlands Butterfly Conservation has paid for a contractor to brush-cut the bottom field on Dr Probert's fields in Nantmawr, which had lots of Pearl-bordered Fritillary before being overgrown with brambles. WMBC has also paid for the same contractor to brush-cut some of the flatter parts of the Moellydd, which had the same problem. We're very grateful for this funding. **Rhona Goddard** (Butterfly Conservation) is trying to get the owner of the Moellydd into Higher Level Stewardship, with the help of **Gareth Eggar** (Natural England).

Natural Resources Wales has paid for the materials for a long fence on Llanymynech Golf Course to surround the area cleared of scrub by the Nature Networks Fund grant.

Now we just need to pay someone to put it up! The idea is to graze this area, first in early summer with cattle and later with sheep or goats. **Helen Upson's** Ancient Cattle of Wales\* have done a great job in the enclosure at the other end of the Golf course and her growing herd is grazing other local wildlife sites.

Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust is reviewing the management of Llanymynech Rocks Reserve and we hope to help them with this and the possible introduction of grazing.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust has work parties in the Oswestry Hills that do excellent work on wildlife sites. They're always looking for new recruits – if you're interested, visit [shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk) or call 01743 284280.

## Article and photograph by Simon Spencer

\* Find out more at [ancientcattleofwales.org](http://ancientcattleofwales.org)

## Talk: 'Butterflies need Farmers'

I'll be giving this talk, based on the one I gave at the WMBC Members' Day last September, in Llanyblodwel church at 8pm on Friday 2 May. Admission is free and there'll be refreshments. Part of a series of talks called First Friday at 8, this is organised by Jenny Hoare ([jahoare21@googlemail.com](mailto:jahoare21@googlemail.com)).



# Tiger Moths

## Flying in a postcode near you?

If I bump into someone who tells me they have recently seen a Tiger Moth my thoughts might turn to old biplanes, Biggles books, Dogfights and the Red Baron! Indeed, the de Havilland aircraft company ran an insect theme when naming many of their early models including the Tiger and Gypsy Moth in the 1930s and later, the Mosquito. However, if I know I am talking to fellow Lepidoptera enthusiasts like yourselves, I will almost certainly conclude that they have seen one of our striking macromoths. These moths are so named due to the bold reticulate, spotted or streaked pattern of markings on their forewings, reminiscent of the coat of a Tiger.

Tiger moths are part of the Arctiinae sub-family of the Erebidae family, closely related to Ermines, Footmen, and species such as **Clouded Buff**, **Ruby Tiger** and **Cinnabar**. As described above, Tiger moths have upper forewings with bold chocolate brown-black and white patterning while the upper side of the hindwings is usually red, orange or yellow with black spots. The furry thorax is also often brightly coloured. This striking appearance acts as deterrent to predators such as birds, warning them that the moths are poisonous, or unpleasant, to eat. In addition, the adults can spray irritating chemicals from special glands when threatened. These toxic components are harvested and modified from some of their larval host plants (LHPs) such as foxglove and members of the daisy family; although many other common plants such as nettle, dandelion, bramble and groundsel are also consumed. With such a diverse diet, the availability of specific plant species doesn't constrain the range of most Tiger moths.

## The UK's five resident species

Despite their colourful, almost tropical, appearance, Tiger moths are mainly species of boreal and temperate ecosystems, with either a Holarctic (circum-polar) or Palaearctic (Eurasian) distribution. The genus *Arctia*, for example, contains over 50 species worldwide of which two are British species. Here we profile our five resident

Tiger moths: **Garden**, **Wood**, **Cream-spot**, **Scarlet** and **Jersey**. All are fairly large, with wingspans of 35–65mm. Another species – **Patton's Tiger** (*Arctia testudinaria*) – has been recorded several times along the south coast of England since 2005 (Ref 1); this Southern European species occurs as a very rare migrant and is not considered further here. All UK species tend to fly in late Spring and Summer; after mating, the eggs are laid and quickly hatch; the larvae over-winter before brief pupation and emergence as adults the following year to complete the lifecycle.

Male Tiger moths can be distinguished by their comb-like, pectinate, antennae (see right). All species are active, or easily disturbed, during the day, when they can often be seen perched up on hard surfaces or vegetation; they can also be readily attracted to light at night.

**Garden Tiger (Steve Mathers)** – large graph squares are 10mm



**Garden Tiger caterpillar (Steve Mathers)**



**Distribution of verified records (iRecord, Jan 25)**  
**Garden Tiger (4951 records)**

## Garden Tiger (*Arctia caja*)

The Garden Tiger is the most familiar Tiger moth species

## How can you help?



If you spot any Tiger moth, log it on iRecord ([irecord.org.uk](http://irecord.org.uk)) or send details to the County Moth Recorder (see page 27). To learn more about the moths of our region, see *Moths of the West Midlands* (ISBN: 9781874357926). For their latest status, visit the West Midlands Moth Atlas ([westmidlandsmoths.co.uk](http://westmidlandsmoths.co.uk)).

The Atlas now includes data to the end of 2023, thanks to the County Moth Recorders who verified nearly 128,000 records during 2024 (nearly a thousand recorders, 1316 species, 5000+ sites) – a fantastic effort. Take a look and, to access more detail and support future updates, take out Golden Cinnabar Membership for £20.

in the UK, having been widely distributed in all but the most mountainous areas until a few decades ago. Since then numbers have declined quite markedly, so that this is now quite rare in many areas.

Most of the records shown on the distribution map are from the last 25 years, showing that the former almost nationwide range has now become patchy with coastal, and some upland, areas favoured. The blue and green dots show areas where the species was recorded before 2010, but not since, suggesting loss of territory. Reasons suggested for this decline include wetter and warmer weather in winter and spring, resulting from climate change (Ref 1).

Garden Tiger occurs in a wide variety of habitats including gardens, water meadows, fens, sand dunes, open woodland, hedgerows, and wasteland in urban areas. Preferred LHPs include nettle, dock, dandelion, ragwort, hawthorn and foxglove; it is also found on trees and shrubs including apple, blackthorn and willows.

A large moth with wingspans of 45–65mm, Garden Tiger is a diurnal flyer from June to August and readily comes to light. Following mating, egg laying and hatching, the species over-winters as a larva; about 50mm long fully grown, these caterpillars are popularly known as ‘woolly bears’ due to their furry appearance.

### Wood Tiger (*Parasemia plantaginis*)

The Wood Tiger is the smallest and perhaps least well-known of the group. Wingspans are 35–40mm, with the hindwings being yellow with black dots and stripes (more prominent in the male). In northern forms, the male may have white rather than yellow hindwings (form *hospita*).

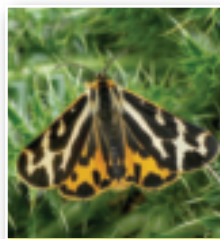
A Holarctic species, Wood Tiger was formerly widely distributed in moorland and heathland across the UK but with a patchier distribution in Eastern and Southeast England. As with the Garden Tiger, its numbers and range have been decreasing.

The distribution map shows Wood Tiger is now almost absent from Southeast England and the South Midlands.

While scattered records cover South-central England, Northern England, parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland, the only clusters of occupied 10km-squares lie in the Southern and Northern Pennines.

LHPs include bell heather,

**Wood Tiger**  
(© Richard Fox)



**Distribution of verified records (iRecord, Jan 25)**  
**Wood Tiger (852 records)**

plantains, rock rose, salad burnet and groundsel – a varied selection, some of which can be found in most areas. Compared to our other Tiger moths, the Wood Tiger seems to be more of a habitat specialist

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►

meaning that large tracts of our countryside are unsuitable for it to occupy.

The flight season is mainly May to June, with the males flying during the day and the females at night.

### **Cream-spot Tiger (*Arctia villica*)**

The Cream-spot Tiger has black forewings with large white-cream blotches, which can vary a little from individual to individual. The hindwings are bright yellow with black dots and patterning. Wingspans are 45–60mm. This species has a Palaearctic distribution that also extends into North Africa.

Cream-spot Tiger has a flight season from May to July, individuals are often seen perched during the day and both sexes are active at night and attracted to light. The most common LHPs include

**Cream-spot Tiger**  
(© Keith Tailby)



**Distribution of verified records (iRecord, Jan 25)**  
**Cream-spot Tiger (890 records, most since 2000)**

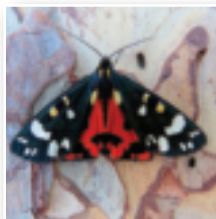
groundsel and chickweed, with the preferred habitats including heathlands, grasslands and open woodland.

The distribution map shows this species mainly confined to the Channel Isles and Southern England, with a strong preference for coastal locations. Overall, its numbers are declining, and its range is contracting slightly (compared with Ref 1).

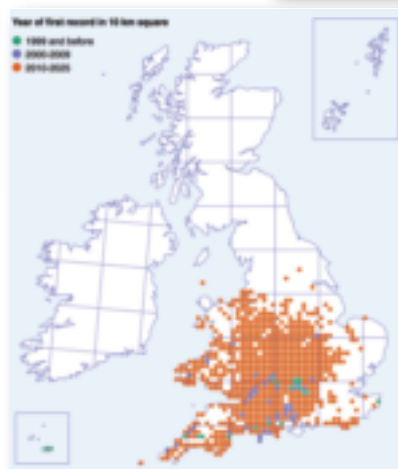
### **Scarlet Tiger (*Callimorpha dominula*)**

The Scarlet Tiger has black forewings with blotches of white and cream and a vivid red hindwing, which gives the species its name, together with black markings. The species has wingspans of 45–55mm and is a diurnal flyer in June to July. Comfrey, alkanet and nettle are favoured as LHPs and traditional habitats were stated to be fens, flood meadows along river courses and coastlines.

**Female Scarlet Tiger**  
(© Dave Evans)



Its numbers have been



**Distribution of verified records (iRecord, Jan 25)**  
**Scarlet Tiger (9400 records)**

increasing and its range expanding northwards since 2000. It has now spread across most of the Midlands from its former strongholds in West Wales, and South and Southwest England. This coverage suggests that the species is not being constrained by the availability of specific habitats nor the presence of LHPs. The distribution map shows further range expansion compared with Ref 1.

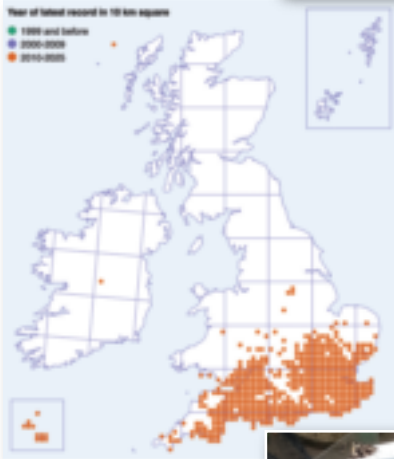
### **Jersey Tiger (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*)**

The distinctive Jersey Tiger has black forewings traversed by streaks of creamy white; the hindwings are orange-red with black dots. Wingspans are 50–65mm. The flight season is July to September, with irregular

flying during both day and night. LHPs include nettles, ground ivy and bramble, so there is no constraint on the availability and range of these ubiquitous plant species.

As the name indicates, the Jersey Tiger was

**Female Jersey Tiger**  
(© Keith Tailby)



**Distribution of verified records (iRecord, Jan 25)**  
**Jersey Tiger (about 15000 records)**

originally resident only in the Channel Islands and occurred in Great Britain only as a rare migrant. By 2000, its range had expanded into coastal Southern England (Ref1) and it is now rapidly spreading northwards into the Midlands and Southwest Wales. Moth trappers sometimes report catches of hundreds of individuals, suggesting that numbers are increasing and swarms are forming.



**A moth trap crowded with Jersey Tigers (240 in all), Ware, Hertfordshire**  
(© Liz Goodyear, Herts & Middlesex Moth Group on Facebook)

## Summary

The five resident species of Tiger moth in the UK exhibit very different trends in their populations and distributions.

Garden Tiger appears to be in serious decline everywhere, with its recorded range becoming

## A Tiger by any other name...

Most moth names date back to Victorian times or before and many do not reflect changes in our understanding of relationships between species. Only two of the species here, Garden Tiger and Cream-spot Tiger, come from the same genus, *Arctia*, with the others all from different genera. Despite its common name, Ruby Tiger (*Phragmatobia fuliginosa*) is less closely related and lacks the tropical appearance familiar in other Tigers.



**Ruby Tiger**  
(Garry Barlow)

fragmented and its numbers much reduced compared to 30–50 years ago. It was assigned Near-threatened status in a systematic review of macro-moth species (Ref 2), while the other four species were considered of Least Concern.

Wood Tiger and Cream-spot Tiger appear stable, showing only slight erosion of both range and numbers. Scarlet Tiger and Jersey Tigers have expanded northwards from southern Britain rapidly in recent decades, with strong increases in numbers.

Explaining these differing trends as the results of climate change is likely to be an over-simplification. The data presented here emphasises the importance of citizen science in accurately mapping changing distributions of these iconic moths over time.

.....  
**Article by Steve Mathers**

## References

1. Randle, Z *et al* (2019). *Atlas of Britain & Ireland's Larger Moths*, Pisces Publications (reviewed in *Comma* 106)
2. Fox, R, Parsons, M S and Harrower, C A (2019). *A review of the status of the macro-moths of Great Britain*. Butterfly Conservation Report Number S19-17



Gold Spot

# Recording moths in St

As reported in *Comma* 119, I've taken over from David Emley as Staffordshire's County Moth Recorder (CMR). I'd like to take this opportunity to thank David for his sterling voluntary work as custodian of the VC39 moth records and for supporting me during my time as data manager for Butterfly Conservation's National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS). I retired from this role at the end of 2024 and, when my wife retires in a few years, we'll move to Cheadle. This is my third stint as a CMR, after Bedfordshire (2003–2006) and Dorset (2011–2016).

Now is the time to forward your moth records for 2024. Records are welcome in several formats, as I explain here.

I originally planned to migrate the VC39 moth data from MapMate to Recorder 6 but this was abandoned due to changes in the way the West Midlands Moth Atlas is to be updated. This delayed the import of the 2023 records but these are now available.

## 2024 records

Now is the time to forward your moth records for 2024. Records are welcome in several formats.

By far the best method is iRecord ([irecord.org.uk](http://irecord.org.uk)). This free online recording system has a dedicated moth recording form that includes all the required fields. Submitted records are available instantly for me to verify and contact recorders throughout the year rather than only at the end.

Another online system, iNaturalist ([inaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org)), is fast growing in popularity in the UK but it isn't as rigorous as iRecord with respect to the quality of records and many records are rejected by CMRs due to insufficient data.

iNaturalist records are available to verify via both the website and iRecord.

The next best system is the popular database, MapMate but it's no longer possible to purchase new licences and support after 2025 will be reliant on specialist volunteers – I will be maintaining MapMate moth taxa library updates when support stops. The product itself runs on all versions of Windows (only) up to and including 11 and should run for the foreseeable future.

Spreadsheets are recorders' most popular option, primarily in Microsoft Excel. Although they seem ideal, they allow recorders to use a plethora of different formats and this means time must be taken to turn the data into an acceptable format before it can be verified. Even so, spreadsheets remain welcome if other options are not possible.

Photographs are required for significant or critical

species, showing salient features to assist in verification. We're not all photographers and image quality can vary but, regrettably, the record will not pass verification if the image is not up to scrutiny.

This point is especially important with leaf mines. The national expert, **Rob Edmunds**, has kindly offered to assist me with verification when needed. A single image showing a mine often isn't enough: important factors include whether the mine is on the upper or lower side, where the mine starts, the features of the larva (if present), the colour and distribution of the frass, the position of the egg or pupal exuvia (cast skin), and

the leaf itself. Many mines cannot be identified without breeding through and, even then, the adults may require dissection. So, there's plenty to think of!

Further details will be available during 2025 in an updated version of **Dave Emley's** document, *Moths and Nothing*.

Article and photographs by **Les Evans-Hill**  
vc39moths@outlook.com

# affordshire

*Ypsolopha horridella*



## Scarlet Tiger in the West Midlands

The success of **Scarlet Tiger** in Stourbridge, and beyond, flies in the face of the reports of declines in Lepidoptera across the UK. From my first sighting of a caterpillar on Roman Road 11 years ago, through my disappointment when the bank verge was flailed as part of Dudley Council's spring maintenance to my delight in spotting an adult that summer, there were tell-tale signs of this species' ability to survive and adapt to changing circumstances.

Much talk surrounds the dangers of invasive species, yet here was a moth seizing an opportunity to colonise the fast-spreading green alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*), a member of the Boraginaceae family resembling comfrey. One of the reasons for Scarlet Tiger's range expansion has been the larvae's preference for a plant seen by most as a pesky weed. They're not fussy, also liking nettle and bramble, but alkanet is definitely favourite.

At the start of the project, we were unsure how to protect the colony beyond persuading the Council to stop flailing the verge. I've spent many happy hours counting caterpillars and observing adult behaviour. The mating ritual is a frenzied, colourful affair, the air full of males at peak flight times – no lengthy courting for these in-a-hurry creatures! Mainly we have found that the best policy is to leave them to their own devices and let the dead alkanet foliage lie on the verge. This is where the tiny caterpillars take refuge over the autumn and winter.

I get reports of sightings from all around Stourbridge and further afield, partly because people are aware of our colony. I recently received a message from Shropshire requesting advice on how to find Scarlet Tigers in areas where they'd been spotted. I've also found caterpillars around the Llŷn Peninsula coast in North Wales – I assume



Scarlet Tiger caterpillars enjoying early March sunshine on wild strawberry, although I have no evidence of this being used as a larval food plant

they've read the same moth guide as me, which says they're mainly a coastal species.

Another Tiger moth that did well last year in my Stourbridge garden was **Ruby Tiger**. It's impossible to project a trend based on one year but it's been interesting to find their caterpillars on... alkanet!

Article and photograph by  
**Joy Stevens**

Deep-brown Dart  
(Garry Barlow)



Northern Deep-brown Dart (John Kemp)

## DNA barcoding

New DNA findings are one reason for changes in our understanding of relationships between species. A DNA barcode is a short fragment of DNA from a specific gene, to which a sample from another organism can be matched. This technique can be used in various ways.

For example, in the UK, the **Deep-brown Dart** (*Aporophyla lutulenta*) and **Northern Deep-brown Dart** (*Aporophyla lueneburgensis*) were sometimes regarded as separate species and sometimes as subspecies; the latter looks slightly different, occurs in northern Britain and flies earlier in the year.

However, recent Europe-wide studies that included DNA barcoding have shown that both of our forms are *A. lueneburgensis*, while *A. lutulenta* is confined to south-eastern Europe.

DNA barcoding has also been used to confirm some rare recent migrants, such as **Marigold Shark** (*Cucullia calandulae*). There is an excellent article about this in *Atropos* 69, available for £8.50 from: [atroposbooks.co.uk/atropos-issue-69-1577](http://atroposbooks.co.uk/atropos-issue-69-1577)

# Maintaining an up-to-date species list for the UK and Ireland

For all of us who record butterflies and moths, it is essential to have an agreed, up-to-date species list to use, so that everyone is clear which species are listed. Unfortunately, the scientific names of our moths and butterflies seem, to many recorders, to be changing too often.

The species name for any insect should be fixed once a description has been published and accepted, but the generic and family names are sometimes subject to revision because continuing research may reveal that what are hoped to be evolutionarily correct relationships need to be changed. In addition, the law of priority means that, if a previously unrecognised published name is discovered and accepted, this name will supplant the old one and will confuse us all!

The British Entomological and Natural History Society publishes *A Checklist of the Lepidoptera of the British Isles*, edited by **David Agassiz**, **Stella Beavan** and **Robert Heckford**, with updates from time to time in the *Entomologist's Record* and *Journal of Variation*. This forms our current gold-standard checklist and is

available for £25 from [benh.org.uk/publications/brit-lep-checklist](http://benh.org.uk/publications/brit-lep-checklist)

The checklist is necessary for another reason: the constant, and – with climate change – increasingly common, additions to our fauna from abroad (either by natural spread or introduced by human activities).

Article by **Tony Simpson**

# Changing of the Guard

An update on Staffordshire's remaining population of Grizzled Skipper

The rough waste ground around part of the perimeter at Swynnerton Training Camp is ideal to support what we think is Staffordshire's last known colony of this species. As reported in *Comma* 113, **John Bryan** and I obtained permission to survey the site over ten years ago and found this colony within the camp.

Another visit was arranged in May 2023, when we were accompanied by **Joe Hamer**, an Ecologist from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO). We were welcomed by our contact **Major Jim Salisbury** (retired).

## Present habitat

The habitat has not changed much since our previous visits, the rear part of the site still being a scrubland mosaic of open gravelly ground. Wild strawberry and bird's-foot trefoil are still growing in decent quantities, with other caterpillar food and adult nectar sources.

John had previously recorded up to thirty **Grizzled Skippers** and two dozen **Dingy Skippers**, among a host of other butterflies. We were pleased to find a couple of each species for Joe, as well as **Small Heath**



Grizzled Skipper pair (Bob Eade)

and **Common Blue**, attesting to the value of this combination of bare ground and disturbed habitat.

## Future management

I will shortly be submitting a draft Management Plan, which will simply request that the rough ground is left mostly in its existing state. This, of course, is still subject to approval by the new Training Safety Officer responsible for the site, who has welcomed my initial approach because he himself is keen to conserve wildlife. I will also be requesting further access to survey the site in future years, during the Grizzled Skipper's flight periods. We would like to carry out a full mapping survey over four discrete areas within the camp.

We hope this partnership can be maintained, working together to support the Grizzled Skipper's continued existence with the protection of its Army guardians. After our visit, I was asked to write an article for *Sanctuary*, the Ministry of Defence's sustainability magazine dedicated to the conservation of wildlife on its estates. My article was published in issue 52, in which Swynnerton featured alongside about a dozen other sites around the UK.

Article by **David Jackson**



Dingy Skipper pair (Edmund Kennerley)

# Corfu – sun, sand, sea



Two-tailed Pasha – one of Corfu's special species

On a dream holiday, I'd spend hours every day in warm sunshine strolling on quiet paths lined with wildflowers, meadows, trees and scrub, accompanied by hundreds of butterflies and other insects. Then in late afternoon, when others were packing up, I'd relax on a sandy beach, reading, sunbathing and occasionally going for a dip.



Millet Skipper – latest addition to Corfu's species list



Moths are not yet my thing but this fabulous creature is an Oleander Hawk-moth

I am doubly fortunate. Not only is this dream a reality but my wife shares my dream as well. We went on holiday to Corfu in 2019, realised how wonderful it is for butterflies and have returned every year since. In May 2022, we met **Dr Dan Danahar**, the driving force behind Corfu Butterfly Conservation (CBC), and we began contributing to the project and the five-year survey by recording our butterfly sightings on the website. Then, in July 2023, I joined the CBC committee and took over maintenance and development of the website.

There are 76 confirmed species of butterfly on Corfu. Other destinations in Europe offer more but we love the quantity and variety of species within a relatively small area. May is our favourite month for the spring flowers and the number of species on the wing, although October is great too, not least because of the **Plain Tiger** and the warm sea.

There are special species such as **Southern Festoon**, **Eastern Orange-tip**, **Southern White Admiral**, **Great Banded Grayling** and **Two-tailed Pasha**, although what you see very much depends on

# but mostly butterflies

the time of year. You can visit the CBC website to check flight times and abundance; last year I developed a tool for predicting the species you could see during a given period, using the data collected over the last four years: [corfubutterflyconservation.org/view\\_daterange\\_species.php](http://corfubutterflyconservation.org/view_daterange_species.php)

There have been many stand-out moments for us. Often it has been the abundance of a particular species, as with **Balkan Marbled White**, **Lulworth Skipper**, **Glanville Fritillary** and **Wood White**. At other times it has been the number of different species in small areas – we once stepped out of our hire car and found ten species immediately, within a few yards. Two very special experiences were watching Two-tailed Pashas chasing birds and having close encounters with **Millet Skipper**, the most recent addition to Corfu's species list.

The CBC website uses live data from registered users to present statistical information. You can see latest sightings, first/last sightings and monthly totals for each species and for every year of the survey. There is also a map showing where sightings took place and gaps representing unrecorded areas.

Article by **David Shearan**  
Photographs by **Anne Sordinas**,  
Educational Outreach Officer for  
Corfu Butterfly Conservation

## Corfu Butterfly Atlas

If you travel to Corfu in 2025,  
please record your sightings  
on our website. It is the last  
year of the Corfu Butterfly  
Survey and records will  
contribute to the Corfu  
Butterfly Atlas:  
[corfubutterflyconservation.org](http://corfubutterflyconservation.org)

### Number of butterflies recorded per year

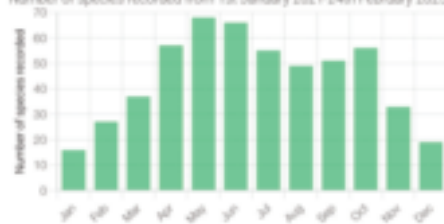
The results shown in the table below are based on verified records submitted via this website.

Year	# Butterflies
2025	1369
2024	34461
2023	32092
2022	22016
2021	12368
<b>Total butterflies recorded</b>	<b>102306</b>

Latest annual totals (end of February 2025)

### Species Richness

Number of species recorded from 1st January 2021-24th February 2025



Number of species recorded in each month for the whole survey period

### Recording Effort Map

The map below is based on verified records submitted via this website only



Sightings map (marker colours indicate year): the island looks to be fully covered but expanding the map on the website reveals where new observations can still be made

# Farewell and thanks to our Landscape Officer



Receiving her farewell gift (Richard Horton)

The West Midlands Branch committee was very disappointed to learn at the end of 2024 that the contracts for all six regional Landscape Officer posts in Butterfly Conservation were at risk of not being renewed.

**Natalie Norton** had been our Landscape Officer for three years, during which time she attended many of our work parties and was a delight to work with. She sorted out various problems and, above all, had an outstanding ability to get on with volunteers. *Comma*



Feeding the work party bonfire (Richard Horton)

readers may remember her articles about Butterfly Conservation reserves in our region (2022–23).

Natalie's last day was on 26 February and the Grafton Wood team couldn't let her go without marking the occasion with tea and cakes in the Flyfords Hall after their weekly work party. She was presented with a gift to remember them by: an Olympus Tough 7 camera. Ideal for taking macro photographs of insects, this has focus stacking (enabling photographers to create images where all the planes are in focus) and can be used under water.

**John Tilt, manager of the Grafton Wood reserve, said of Natalie: 'She was a good hard worker and brilliant around the volunteers. What a loss!'**

On a more positive note, Natalie's skills will not be lost from the region as she has gone to work for Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Our loss is their gain.

# Branch contacts

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# Restoring the Wild



**Donald MacIntyre** is the owner of Emorsgate Seeds, which is the oldest retailer of wild flower seed and mixes in the United Kingdom. Seed is produced in large quantities, and the company has been involved with supplying seed and being actively involved in the creation and restoration of wild flower meadows on quite large scales.

MacIntyre has been actively involved with restoration from the early days, when it was first realised that there was a crisis with our wild flower meadows. He was at a pioneering international meeting held at Monks Wood environmental station in 1983. Among that illustrious group determined to turn the tide were **Dr Terry Wells**, **Chris Baines**, **Loki Schmidt** (wife of the former German Chancellor) and **Dame Miriam Rothschild**.

## Potential readership

I personally think the book is an essential read for anyone, who wants to learn how to create a new meadow, restore a meadow or reclaim other lost habitats. Members

• **ISBN:** 9780719844386 • **Author:** Donald MacIntyre • **Publisher:** The Crowood Press Ltd • **Format:** Hardback, 272 pages • **Page size:** 189x246mm • **Publication date:** October 2024 • **List Price:** £24.00

of our branch have recently been involved with successfully seeding large areas of a limestone quarry near Broadway with kidney vetch. The intention is to encourage **Small Blue** to colonise from sites immediately adjacent to this one. We ended up with thousands of seedlings coming through, from seed kindly supplied at some cost by the site managers Smiths of Bletchington.

If you are as ignorant or as forgetful as me, you may find yourself reaching for the dictionary from time to time, to look up the meaning of some terms. I didn't know, for example, that 'apomictic' means self-pollinating (bee orchids for example) or that 'neophyte' refers to new or alien introductions. Many of the latter are garden escapees that have caused severe problems in the wild, nasties such as rhododendrons, Spanish bluebells and cotoneasters.

## Contents of the book

Much of the first quarter or so is anecdotal, recounting the horrific demise of many of our ancient meadows for the war effort and the serious harm done in subsequent years by the removal of hedgerows to create prairie-type landscapes to feed the nation. Then there is the harm done by agrochemicals, the most recent topical example being neonicotinoids – hopefully, their use has been put to bed at least for this year but watch this space as the sugar beet industry keeps applying for exemptions.

The book is very well illustrated with beautiful photographs, many showing examples of habitats (from meadows to bypasses) created by Emorsgate seed company. There is detail on how seed is collected and how it is in turn used, with information on various soil and habitat types – woodland, hedgerows, scrub and so on.

The last part contains a guide to 224 key species, which are of conservation interest. There are photographs of most species, and information on seed production, habitat types and some information on germination.

**Note:** In late March, the book was still available direct from Emorsgate Seeds ([wildseed.co.uk](http://wildseed.co.uk)) for the pre-publication price of £20.

Review by **Trevor Bucknall**



We carry a book review in each issue of *The Comma*. Newly published titles are ideal but particularly interesting or useful books from the past are also worth highlighting. See page 2 for contribution details.