

# Hertfordshire & Middlesex Butterflies 2017



**Butterfly  
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Andrew Wood

February 2018

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*Cover Photo: Holly Blue at Stanwell Moor, Dave Miller*

## Introduction

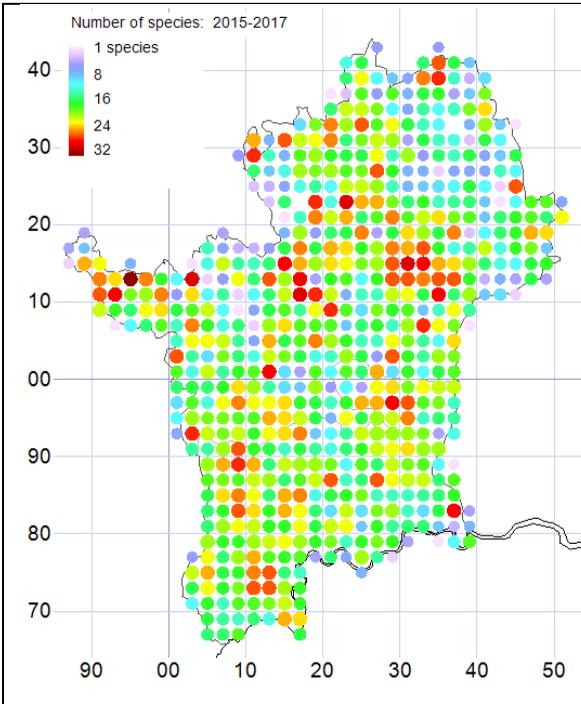
2017 started off with a cold January followed by a generally warm and dry spring and early summer which produced a larger than normal number of records. However from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of July and through August the weather was cooler and duller than normal and this cut down butterfly activity and records received. However a mild and bright autumn benefited several species with a number of notable late records and a record number of records and species seen in November.

We received 37077 records compared to 32663 records in 2016. Many of the 1616 recorders and records were again from the three weeks in the summer when the Big Butterfly Count was underway. As with any citizen science project there are some records that cannot be accepted but many of them help us to fill in gaps in the distribution of many species, particularly in urban areas, of which we have many.

Big Butterfly Count numbers are used to show the distribution of species, but have not been used for the flight charts as this survey covers three weeks in high summer and to have included them would unduly skew these charts.

Please read and use this booklet and, if you are not already a contributor, send in your sightings on paper or by email to the branch record collator by November 9<sup>th</sup> 2018. Our branch website <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/> has a very active sightings page and we welcome all submissions to this too. Anything sent there or submitted via the 'iRecord Butterflies' app is added to the records received for inclusion in the branch database and this report.

<b>Branch Contacts</b>	
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### Recording Effort

In 2017 we received records from 608 squares in our area. This means we have records from 657 squares for our current 2015-2019 survey period.

This map shows the number of species recorded for each square. We particularly need records from the few blank squares and the under recorded purple and blue squares.

**Our challenge is to turn this whole map green/yellow/red!**

### Species not included in the main section

#### Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

We have two reports of this species, which seem likely to be the same insect. Two visitors to Marlborough House in Westminster separately reported a Monarch on 19<sup>th</sup> June. This was almost certainly a release or escape as this species native to North America and the Canary Islands is only found in the UK as a rare migrant normally in the autumn and in south west England.

# Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*

Restricted and rare

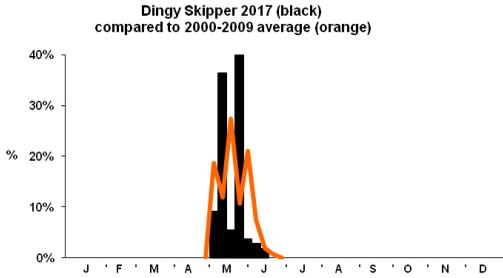
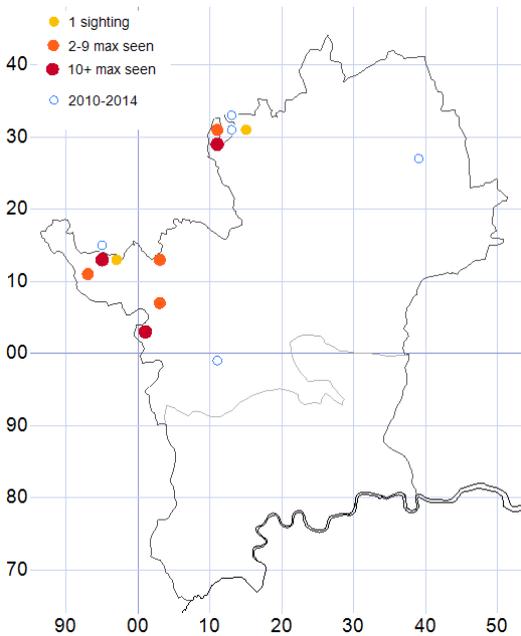


Photo Chris Benton

**First:** 5 May

**Last:** 17 Jun

**Peak week:** 21-25 May



Distribution % squares	
2017	1% (6)
2016	1% (7)
2010-14 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	6
2016	8
2010-14 mean	13

Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 63% compared with 2010-2014

There was little change in the distribution of Dingy Skipper, but the transect abundance figures fell further, showing a disturbingly high drop compared to our previous recording period. However this period includes records from a transect that was not walked in that period so the low numbers reflect an average based on more sites. The current sites are all in the west of Herts at Aldbury Nowers, Bovingdon Brick Pits, between Gaddesden Row and Hoo Wood, Hexton Chalk Pit, Shrubhill Common and Tring Park. As often the highest counts were not on a transect but at Hexton Chalk Pit with a highest total of twenty six on 8 May

# Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*

Restricted & rare

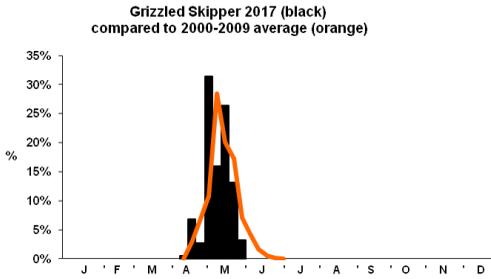
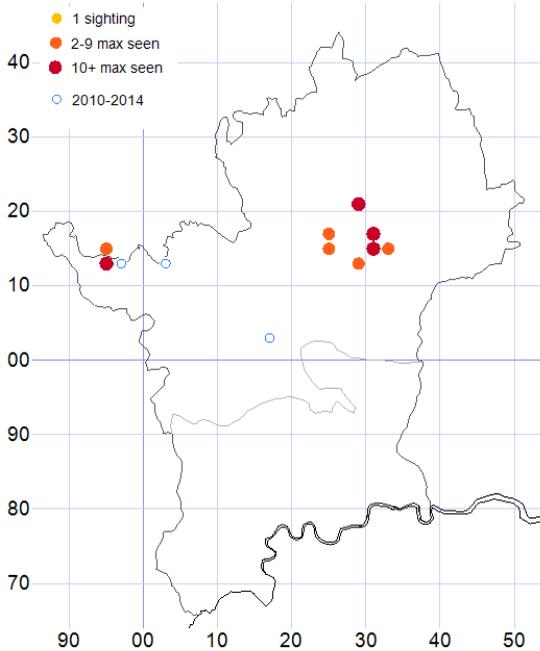


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 12 Apr  
**Last:** 1 Jun  
**Peak week:** 30 Apr-6 May

Distribution % squares	
2017	1% (5)
2016	1% (8)
2010-14 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	6
2016	7
2010-14 mean	21

Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 73% compared with 2010-2014

Despite the mild spring this butterfly did not emerge any earlier, but it quickly reached its peak two weeks earlier than 2016. The seeming drop in distribution reflects recorder activity rather than a real drop. Abundance is still low compared to the previous recording period, but the highest counts were all at non transect sites, not far from the transect sites and it may well be that the overall population abundance in the key area between Hertford and Stevenage is not as much changed. As often the highest counts were not on transect walks when this small butterfly is in flight but in dull weather, outside the transect walking period when it can be easy to see roosting on the top of Perforate St John's Wort seed heads

# Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

Widespread but declining

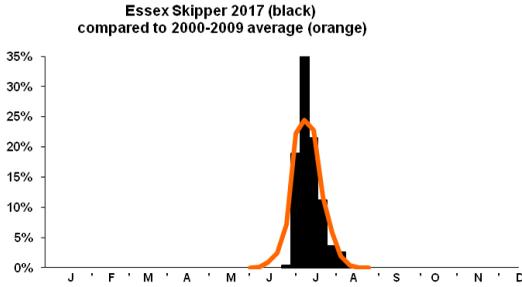


Photo Dave Miller

**First:** 17 Jun

**Last:** 26 Aug

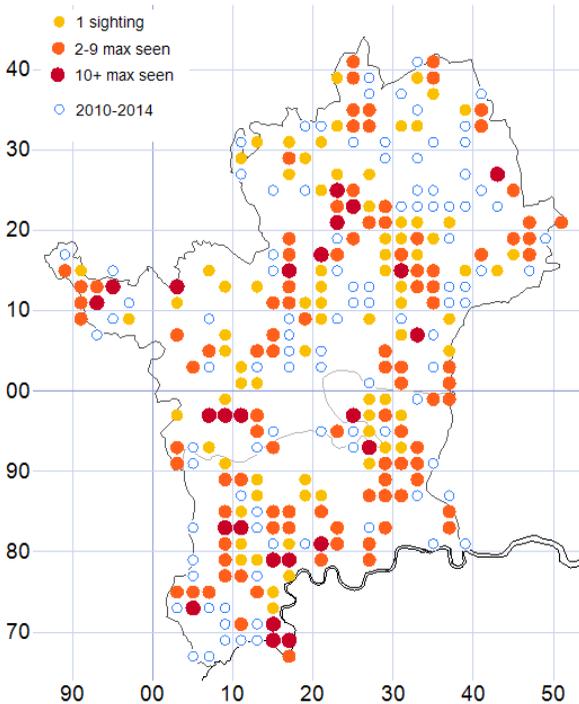
**Peak week:** 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	18% (109)
2016	17% (95)
2010-14 mean	14%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	12
2016	7
2010-14 mean	13

Distribution change
Up 28% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 12% compared with 2010-2014



A welcome bounce back for this species after some poor years. There was an increase in distribution and the abundance recorded on transect walks rose well compared to 2016, almost back to the levels in the previous recording period. However this increase was not consistent as Malcolm Hull noted at Bricket Wood Common, “Essex Skipper was not recorded at all for the second year running”. As the map shows there are still plenty of gaps, particularly in the arable areas of east Hertfordshire. Interestingly the highest counts were at green sites in urban areas at Stevenage in Hertfordshire and Wormwood Scrubs in Middlesex.

# Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Widespread but declining



Photo Dave Miller

**First:** 10 Jun  
**Last:** 30 Jul  
**Peak week:** 2-8 July

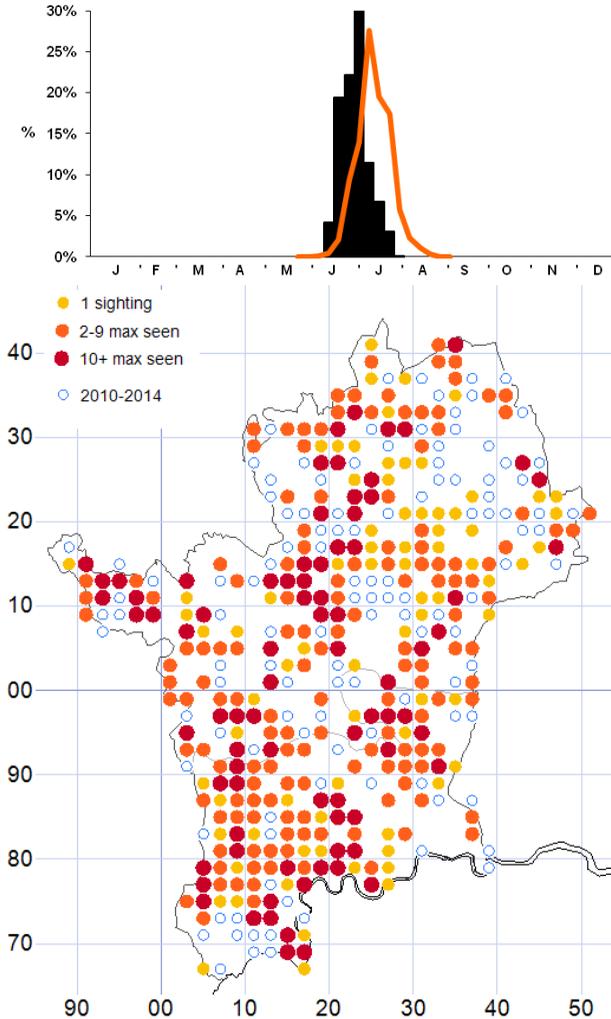
Distribution % squares	
2017	28% (169)
2016	27% (154)
2010-14 mean	25%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	21
2016	14
2010-14 mean	25

Distribution change
Up 12% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 16% compared with 2010-2014

Small Skipper 2017 (black)  
 compared to 2000-2009 average (orange)



The Small Skipper’s 2017 bounce back is similar to the Essex Skipper but it is still more widely distributed and abundant at sites where observers have been able to determine the exact species. Together with the earlier flight period and peaks this may be a result of the mild spring enabling greater survival of the developing larvae and pupae. Each year we receive early records of this species and the Essex Skipper before the middle of June and these often turn out to be mis-identifications of Large Skippers. I will query such early records just to try to ensure that we can get an accurate picture of the status of both these species,

# Large Skipper *Ochlodes faunus*

Widespread & common



Photo Chris Benton

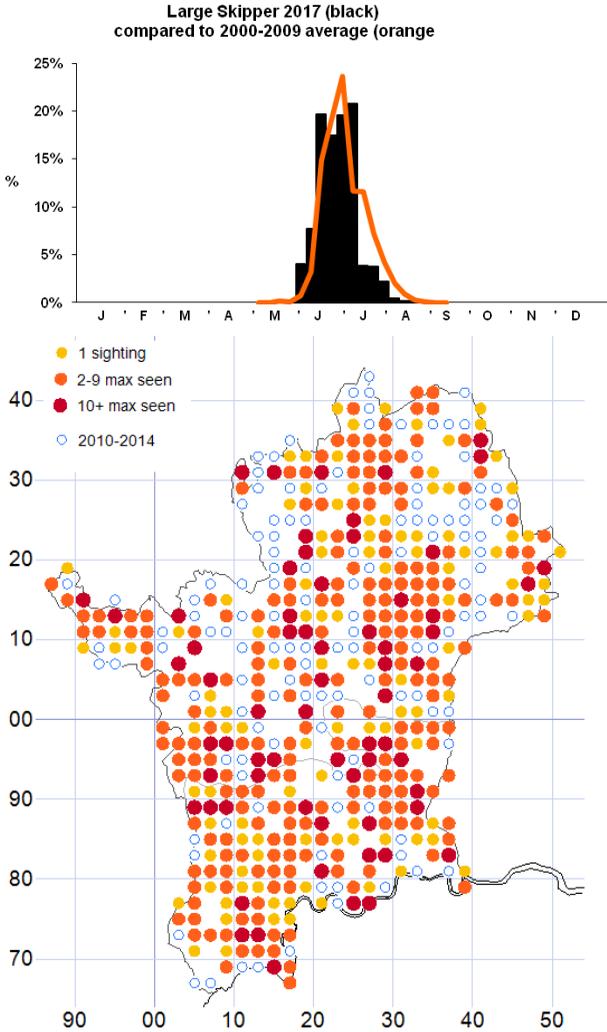
**First:** 27 May  
**Last:** 13 Aug  
**Peak week:** 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	39% (235)
2016	38% (212)
2010-14 mean	40%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	18
2016	19
2010-14 mean	29

Distribution change
Up 3% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 38% compared with 2010-2014



The drop in abundance and distribution noted in 2016 was little changed in 2017, though it remains much more widely found than the two smaller golden skippers. Unlike many other species the early spring seemed to have little effect on the start of flight time and peak for this butterfly but the poor later summer shows a sudden and marked drop in numbers from late July onwards. It is noticeable that there is a higher proportion of unrecorded squares in our current survey period in Hertfordshire rather than Middlesex. Is this a real change to favouring more urban habitats or under recording?

# Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Widespread & Common

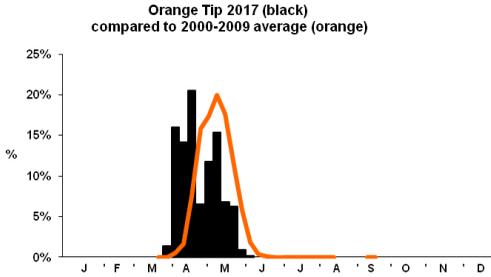
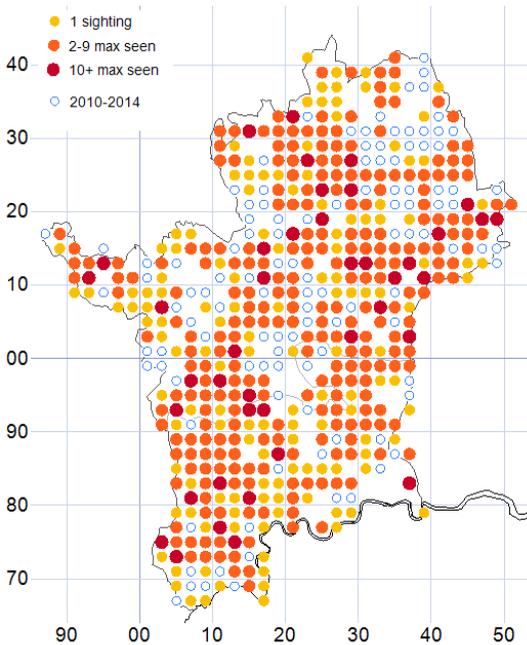


Photo Dave Miller

**First:** 25 Mar  
**Last:** 10 Jun  
**Peak week:** 16-22 Apr



Distribution % squares	
2017	46% (279)
2016	43% (243)
2010-14 mean	42%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	16
2016	14
2010-14 mean	21

Distribution change
Up 9% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 25% compared with 2010-2014

A heartening increase in distribution, particularly in the Middlesex area. Abundance reversed some of last year's fall but still remains below the longer term trends. However this is still a common spring butterfly. The mild spring certainly had an influence with a notably early flight period, with seventeen separate records from March for instance spread across our whole region. Conversely there were only six records after the 3<sup>rd</sup> June and, again, no sign of a partial second brood.

# Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Widespread & common

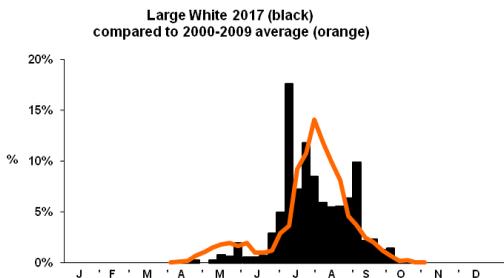
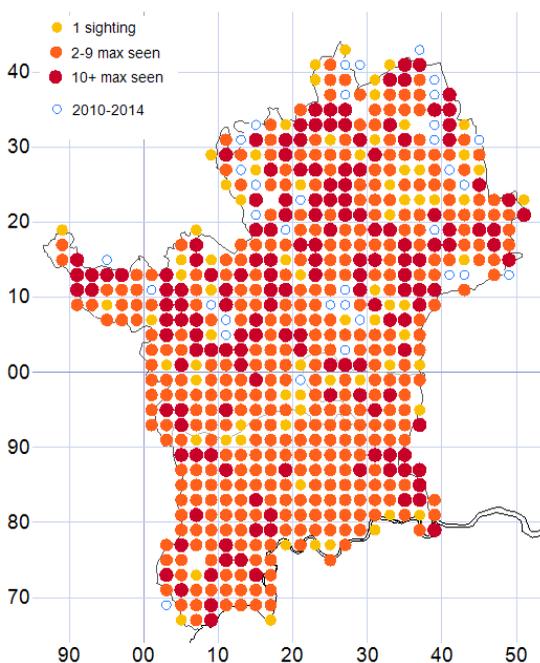


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 3 Apr  
**Last:** 3 Nov  
**Peak week:** 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	72% (436)
2016	75% (423)
2010-14 mean	67%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	28
2016	31
2010-14 mean	38

Distribution change	
Up 7% compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Down 25% compared with 2010-2014	

A further drop in numbers and distribution compared to both 2015 and 2016, but this butterfly is still very widespread and common and there is no reason to see any threat in this data. A final adult flight date of November 3<sup>rd</sup> is particularly late and there were reports of healthy larvae well into November, even after several hard frosts.

# Small White *Pieris rapae*

Widespread & common

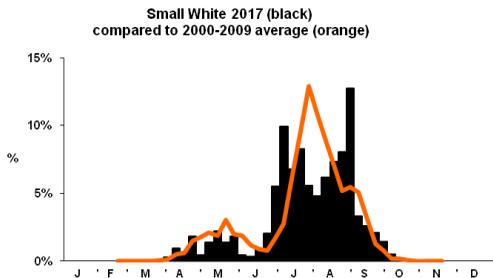
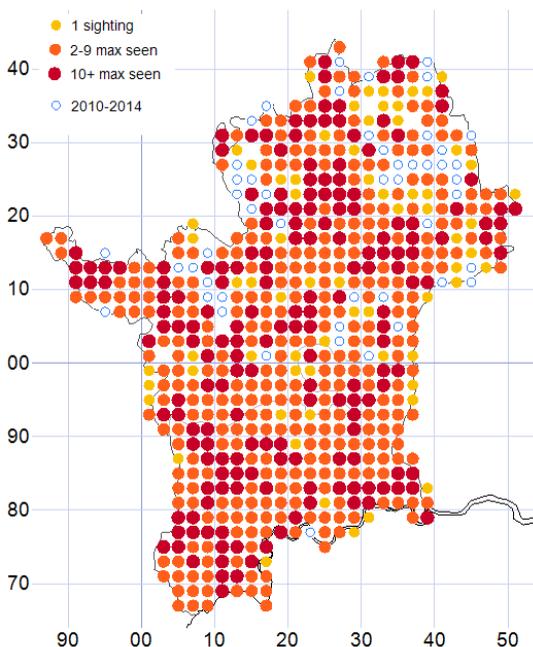


Photo Dave Miller

**First:** 15 Mar

**Last:** 3 Nov

**Peak week:** 27 Aug-2 Sep



Distribution % squares	
2017	75% (453)
2016	77% (437)
2010-14 mean	73%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	45
2016	46
2010-14 mean	65

Distribution change
Up 3% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 31% compared with 2010-2014

Small White showed very little change in 2017 compared to recent years. Like the Large White a few adults were still flying in early November. The peak week in late August is interesting as it is after the slump in weather conditions. This number is not skewed by a high count at one site and appears to be a genuine and widespread increase in numbers. Looking at Met Office data this was a period of slightly warmer and drier weather than in previous weeks and so there was probably both a real increase in active butterflies and recorder activity.

# Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Widespread & common

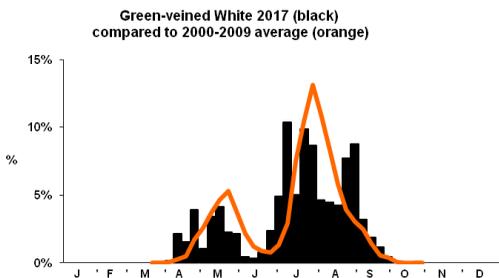
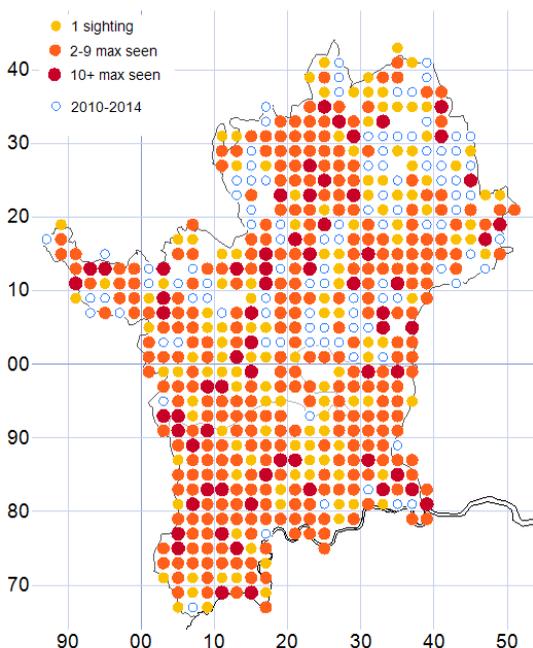


Photo Dave Miller



First: 30 Mar

Last: 6 Oct

Peak week: 3-9 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	50% (304)
2016	60% (343)
2010-14 mean	52%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	26
2016	41
2010-14 mean	51

Distribution change
Down 4% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 48% compared with 2010-2014

In 2016 this was the best performing White, but not in 2017 when it showed a decline in abundance and distribution. Like the Small White there was an upturn in numbers in late August and early September, probably for the same reasons. This species did not show an extended flight period into early November unlike its two close relatives.

# Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

Less common migrant

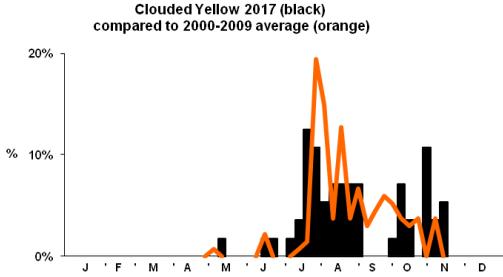
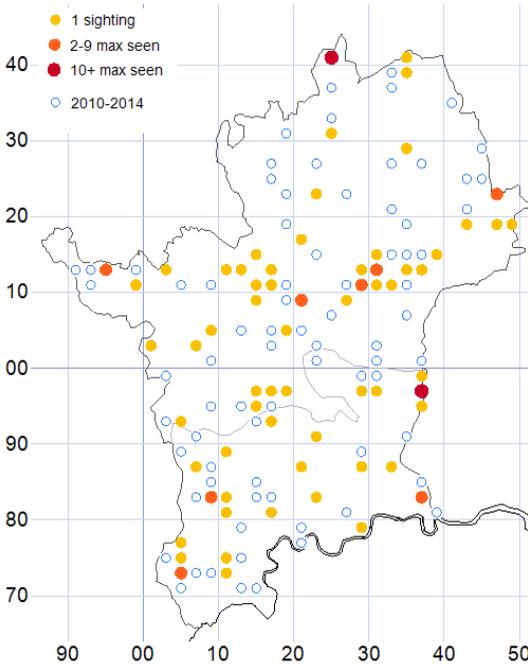


Photo Andrew Wood



**First:** 7 May  
**Last:** 10 Nov  
**Peak week:** 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	5% (28)
2016	6% (36)
2010-14 mean	5%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	1
2016	1
2010-14 mean	2

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

2017 was definitely not a Clouded Yellow year. As late as the end of June there are only three records for our area. It was only from mid July that it was reported with any degree of regularity and the highest number seen anywhere was three so it was unlikely that there was much home breeding. The low numbers can be judged by the fact that the final bar on the chart in November represent three records at Panshanger Park of what was almost certainly the same individual.

# Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Widespread

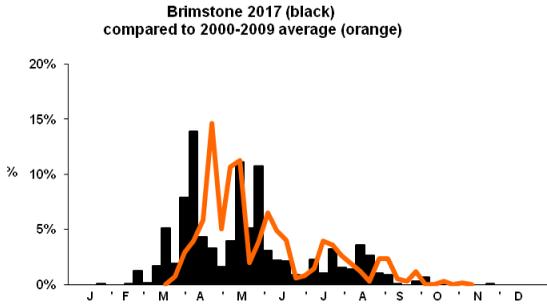
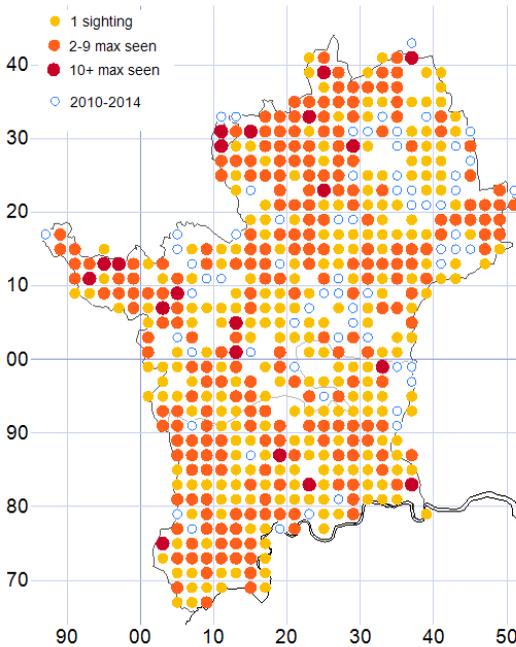


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 4 Jan

**Last:** 16 Nov

**Peak week:** 2-8 Apr

Distribution % squares	
2017	52% (315)
2016	51% (290)
2010-14 mean	39%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	17
2016	19
2010-14 mean	21

Distribution change
Up 33% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 20% compared with 2010-2014

Yet again the Brimstone demonstrates its relative consistency of distribution and abundance. The early flight time in the mild spring is demonstrated by 1 January and 28 February records. As in previous years we received records of eggs and caterpillars on Alder Buckthorn planted in gardens, showing the value of cultivating this shrub as a garden plant.

# Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Widespread & common

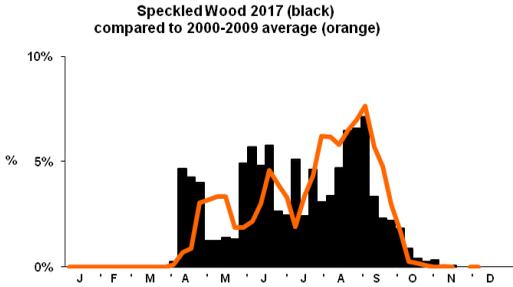
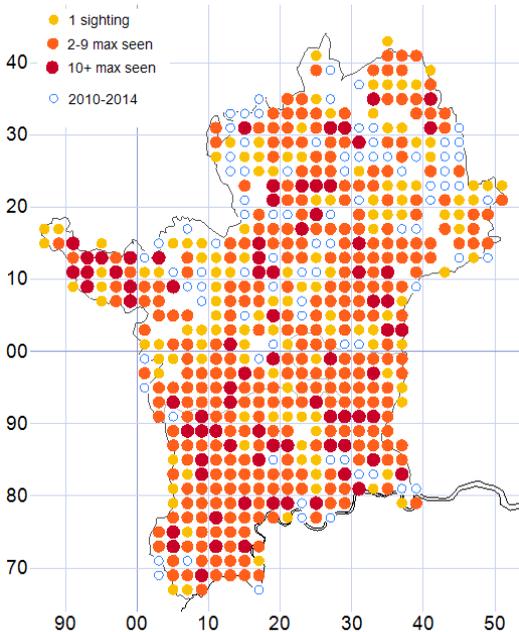


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 15 Mar

**Last:** 10 Nov

**Peak week:** 27 Aug-2 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2017	61% (370)
2016	59% (330)
2010-14 mean	60%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	50
2016	39
2010-14 mean	58

Distribution change
Up 2% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 14% compared with 2010-2014

Much of the previous two year's decline was arrested in 2017 and the butterfly had a very long flight period showing the usual three distinct peaks with those in the spring and early summer being proportionally larger than usual though the peak was as normal at the end of August and start of September. The widespread distribution of this species is shown by Paul Mapplebeck's comment, "Speckled Wood - 82 Lombard Street, London EC3. Today 11th October. In the middle of the city of London? As a young man I worked in the city for a year, but I don't recall ever seeing a single butterfly there!".

# Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Widespread

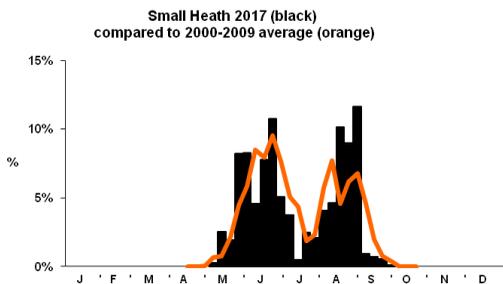
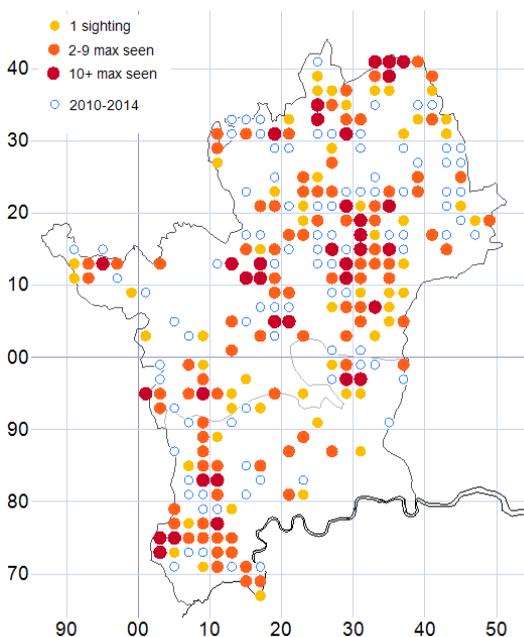


Photo Andrew Wood



**First:** 22 Apr  
**Last:** 26 Sep  
**Peak week:** 27 Aug – 3 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2017	19% (116)
2016	14% (78)
2010-14 mean	17%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	45
2016	24
2010-14 mean	38

Distribution change	
Up 12% compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Up 18% compared with 2010-2014	

A welcome return to form for this small butterfly, though compared to the other browns it is still much more restricted to the more rural and leafy suburban areas, particularly in western Middlesex. Paul Furtek commented that, “a high was at Staines Moor - Small Heaths”. There were two clear broods which were slightly advanced compared to the longer term trends in flight period.

# Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Widespread & Common

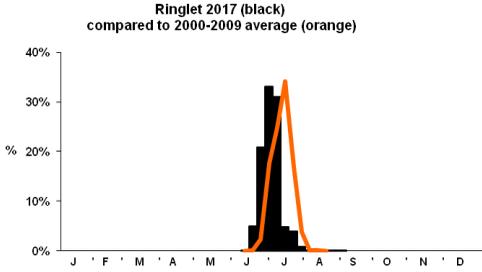
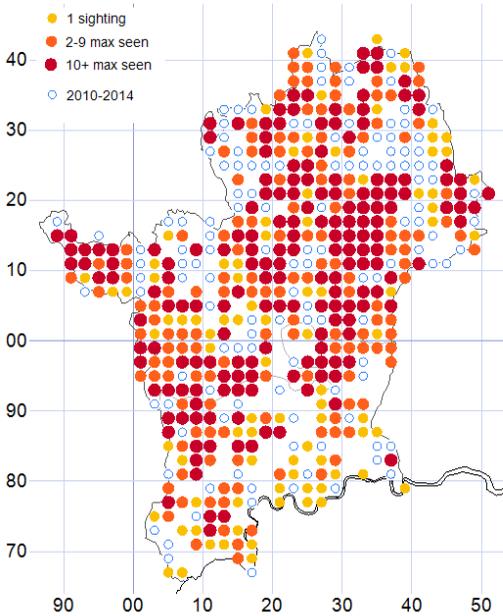


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 7 Jun  
**Last:** 27 Aug  
**Peak week:** 18-24 Jun

Distribution % squares	
2017	44% (268)
2016	45% (251)
2010-14 mean	44%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	121
2016	71
2010-14 mean	122

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Down <1% compared with 2010-2014	

Last year's abundance drop was completely reversed and this butterfly was back to its longer term position. The influence of the mild spring is shown clearly in the flight diagram with about half of the flight period earlier than the longer term average. This is probably also due to the decline in weather towards the end of July which rather prematurely cut off its flight period.

# Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Widespread & Common

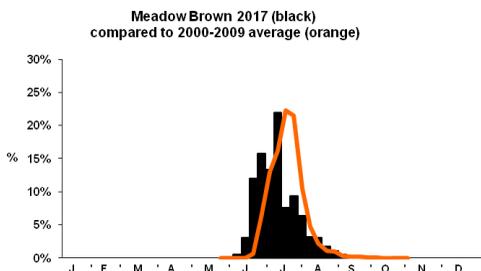
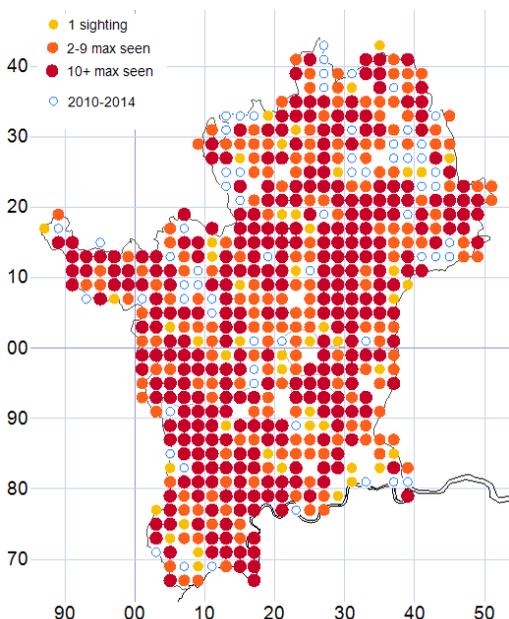


Photo Dave Miller

**First:** 27 May

**Last:** 16 Oct

**Peak week:** 2-8 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2017	69% (419)
2016	61% (342)
2010-14 mean	63%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	358
2016	185
2010-14 mean	287

Distribution change
Up 10% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Up 26% compared with 2010-2014

A very successful year for our commonest butterfly, it is one of those species that should really be recorded in every 2km square in our two counties. The early emergence in late May rather than at the end of the first week of June is not surprising given the mild spring. The year can be summed up with two comments. At Bricket Wood Common Malcolm Hull noted, “Meadow Brown was the star butterfly, with 569 seen... its best year since recording began at this site”. In north west London Leslie Williams commented, “this was the second highest year to date for the Meadow Brown on both transects, with Beane Hill having been higher only in 1989 and the main Fryent Country Park transect in 1991”.

# Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*

Widespread & common

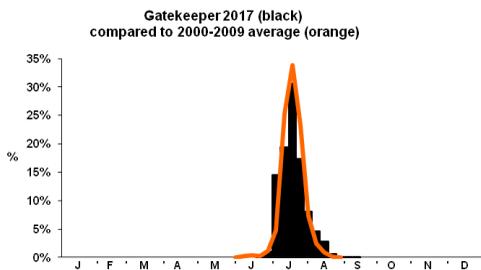
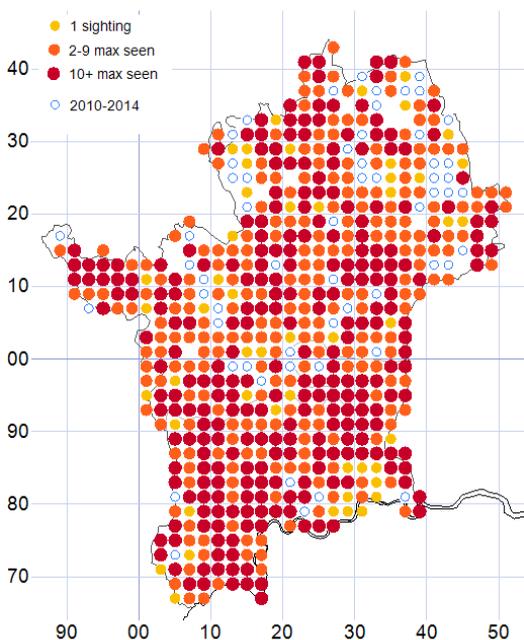


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 6 Jun  
**Last:** 11 Sep  
**Peak week:** 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	71% (433)
2016	63% (352)
2010-14 mean	65%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	108
2016	49
2010-14 mean	91

Distribution change
Up 11% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Up 19% compared with 2010-2014

A good year for this species too. What is most striking is how, unlike most of its closely related single brooded species, its flight period was virtually identical to the longer term trends, the mild spring seeming to have less effect on its general emergence, although there were a few more June records than is usual. Peter Clarke noted an unusual form of this butterfly at Norton Green near Stevenage with the upper right hind wing suffused with white.

# Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*

Widespread in Herts

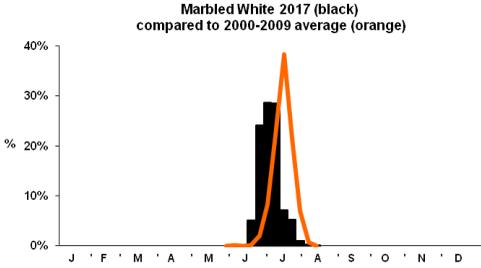
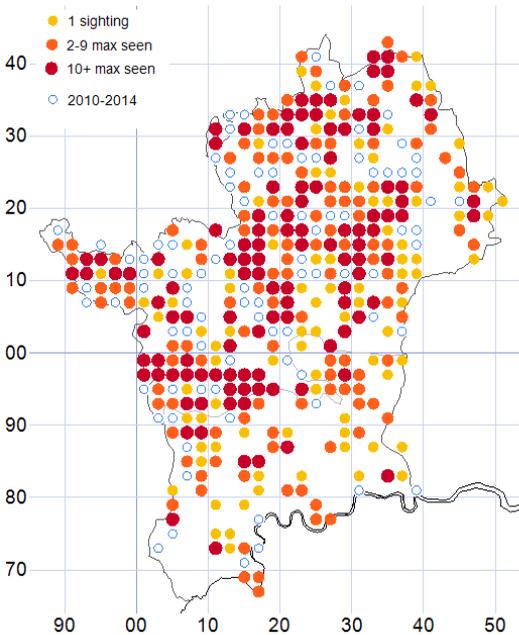


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 9 Jun

**Last:** 10 Aug

**Peak week:** 25 Jun-1 Jul

### Distribution % squares

2017	34% (209)
2016	33% (183)
2010-14 mean	26%

### Abundance (transects)

2017	71
2016	74
2010-14 mean	91

### Distribution change

Up 17% compared with 2010-2014

### Abundance change

Down 22% compared with 2010-2014

A slight increase in distribution but numbers dropped again. The flight period began and finished earlier than normal. The highest numbers were recorded over a range of sites this year with the Southern County Park in Bishops Stortford at the eastern edge of Hertfordshire recording the highest single day count. Comparing last year's map to this year there has been a noticeable increase in sites in north east Hertfordshire along the Cambridgeshire and Essex borders. Good news from Middlesex too, where Diane Andrews reported, "Tatem Park, Enfield - two in courtship behaviour, my previous sighting being of just one in July 2014".

# Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*

Rare but increasing

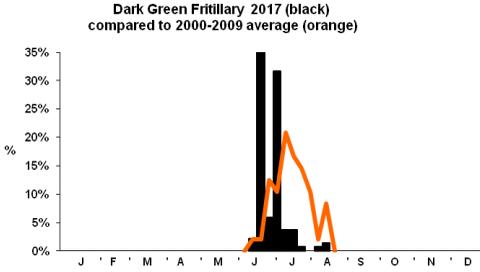
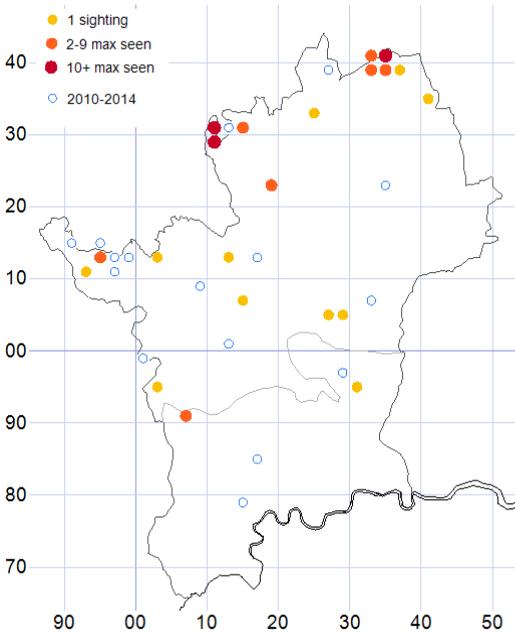


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 13 Jun  
**Last:** 13 Aug  
**Peak week:** 18-24 Jun

Distribution % squares	
2017	2% (13)
2016	2% (10)
2010-14 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	4
2016	4
2010-14 mean	20

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Little change from last year, its strongholds remain in the chalky area of Hertfordshire. The abundance data may look alarming compared to 2010-2014 but this reflects an increased number of transects where it is recorded and where numbers are relatively low and so this can create a distorted average figure. As for several other species the highest counts came from the rather remote (for Herts) Hexton Chalk Pit where we have never had a transect walk. There were a few records from outside the normal range, the most unusual of which, supported by a photo, was on an allotment site in St Albans.

## Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

Locally common in woodland

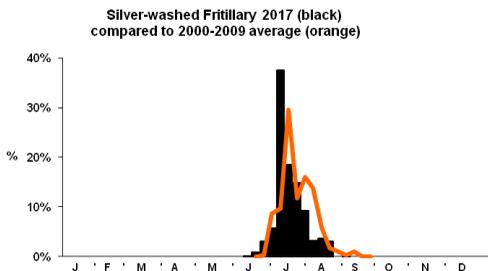
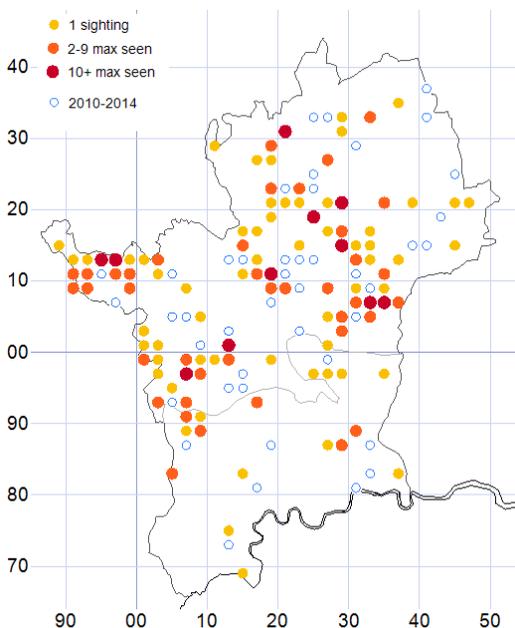


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 7 Jun  
**Last:** 1 Sep  
**Peak week:** 2-8 July

Distribution % squares	
2017	11% (69)
2016	7% (41)
2010-14 mean	6%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	17
2016	8
2010-14 mean	13

Distribution change
Up 83% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Up 30% compared with 2010-2014

A good year for this species with a noticeable increase in distribution. Although numbers were still low compared to previous years, there was a return to better numbers at the Bricket Wood Transect, where Malcolm Hull commented, “Silver-washed Fritillary increased this year, with the butterflies taking a liking to the newly thinned fringes of Mutchett’s Wood. Several females were seen egg-laying on the bark of birch and ash trees”. It was particularly common in Symondshyde Great Wood. The first date of 7 June, supported by a photograph, was a record early date for our area and nationally!.

# White Admiral *Limenithis camilla*

Local in woodland

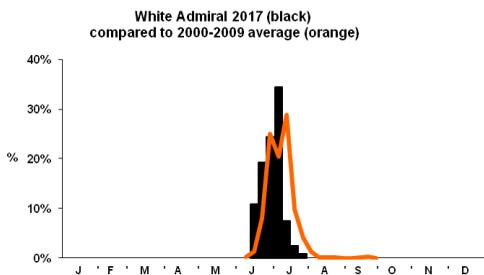
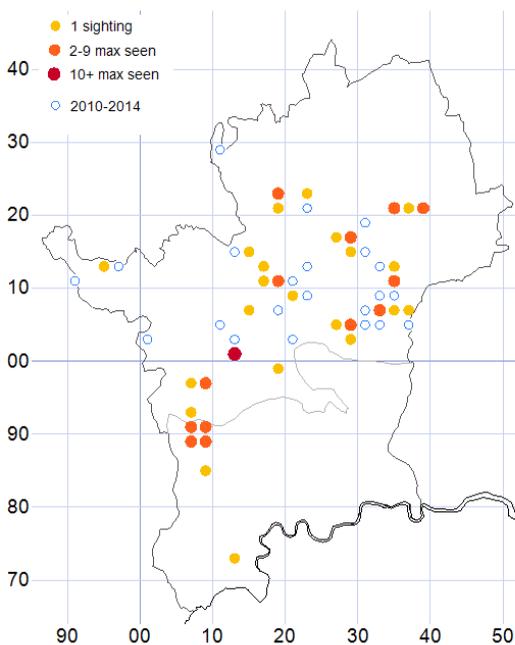


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 14 Jun

**Last:** 25 Jul

**Peak week:** 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	3% (20)
2016	2% (14)
2010-14 mean	3%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	5
2016	6
2010-14 mean	15

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Down 67% compared with 2010-2014	

The White Admiral was slightly more widely seen. Its stronghold remains Bricket Wood Common but the highest transect count was only six (up from four last year), at Balls Wood it was four (up from two last year). There was a welcome increase in the numbers seen in Bramfield and Broxbourne Woods. Good news came from Paul Busby in West London, “Nice surprise on the Gutteridge Wood transect when a White Admiral flew along hedge line, briefly stopping, then away over the hedge, I think the last transect record of a White Admiral here was 1998”.

# Purple Emperor *Apatura iris*

Local in woodland

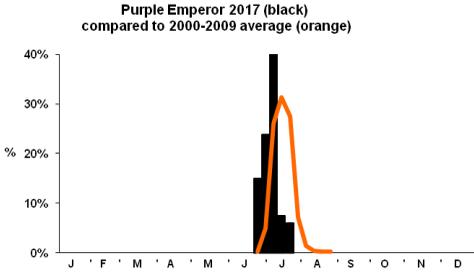
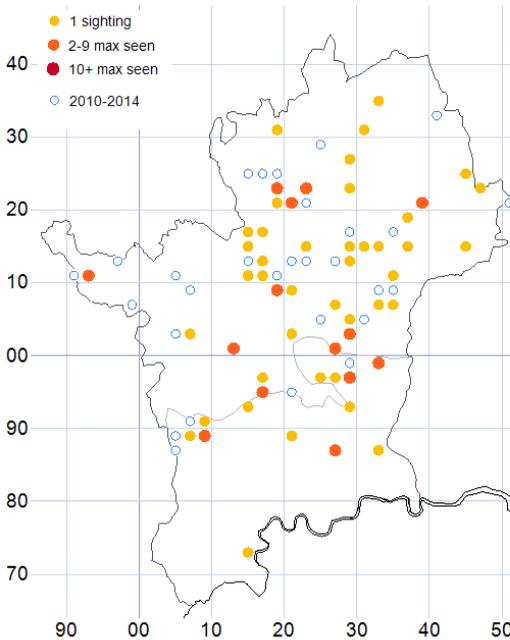


Photo Chris Benton



**First 18 Jun**

**Last: 17 Jul**

**Peak week: 2-8 Jul**

Distribution % squares	
2017	4% (27)
2016	5% (30)
2010-14 mean	4%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	1
2016	1
2010-14 mean	2

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Too little data to calculate	

The number of sites dropped slightly, but this a reflection of lack of repeat records from the one of records that this species produces each year as it roams across the landscape. New sites in 2017 included Sandon churchyard in the north east and Grims Dyke Hotel at Harrow Weald in north Middlesex. One really shouldn't be too surprised to see this butterfly almost anywhere in our area (though you will probably be astonished nevertheless). The month's flight period from mid June to mid July is unprecedentedly early.

# Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Common migrant/Resident

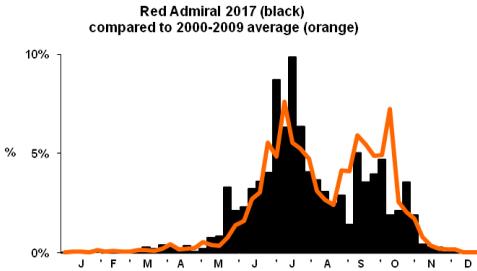
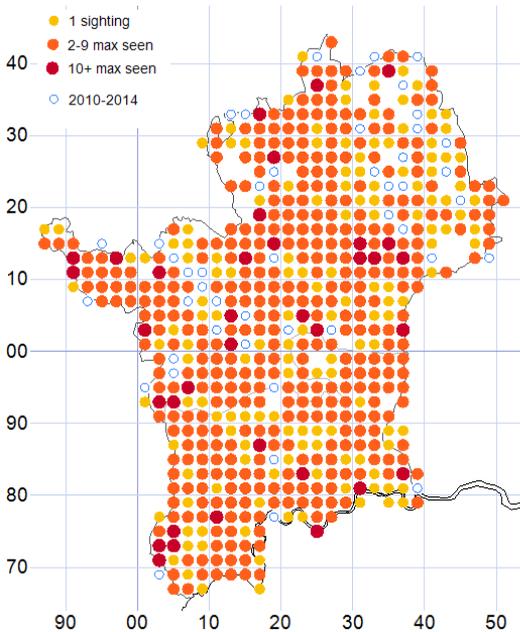


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 2 Jan

**Last:** 31 Dec

**Peak week:** 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	80% (489)
2016	67% (376)
2010-14 mean	59%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	15
2016	10
2010-14 mean	11

Distribution change
Up 36% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Up 35% compared with 2010-2014

An exceptional year for the Red Admiral with records in every month. Autumn numbers were relatively lower than in some years with a peak site count of 52 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October at Amwell Nature Reserve. Winter records were common with 5 in January, 13 in February, 48 in March, 64 in November and 3 in December. The attraction of this species (and many others) for animal waste is shown by this observation from Jacqueline George at Welwyn Equestrian Centre, "Red Admiral seen flying around muck heap and settled down and drank from horse urine".

# Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Variable migrant

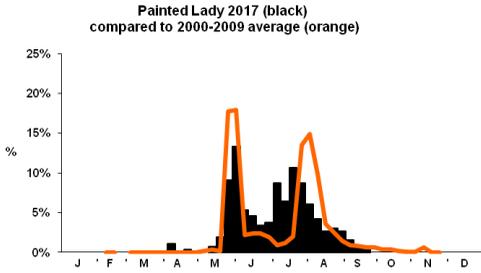
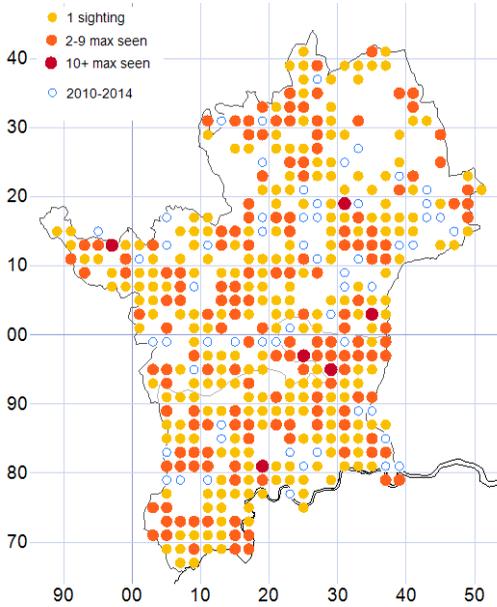


Photo Dave Miller

**First:** 3 Apr

**Last:** 22 Sep

**Peak week:** 28 May-3 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2017	37% (226)
2016	30% (171)
2010-14 mean	17%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	2
2016	3
2010-14 mean	4

Distribution change
Up 118% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Too little data to calculate

There were more Painted Lady butterflies around in 2017, although we did not witness any great migration events. The first influx was at the usual late May/early June period and it looks as if the mild early summer led to successful breeding with good numbers flying in July, though there is no evidence that this brood successfully bred to any great extent as numbers declined through the poor late summer and did not pick up.

# Peacock *Inachis io*

Common & Widespread

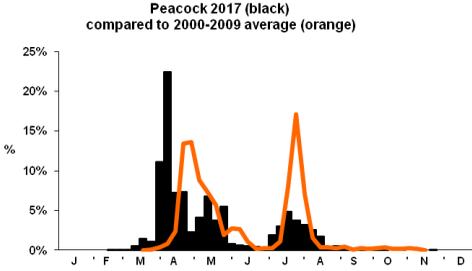
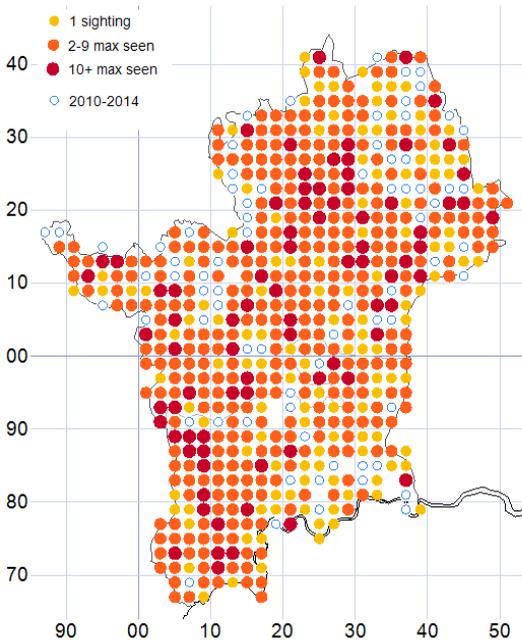


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 17 Feb

**Last:** 22 Nov

**Peak week:** 2-8 Apr

### Distribution % squares

2017	60% (362)
2016	58% (324)
2010-14 mean	62%

### Abundance (transects)

2017	15
2016	14
2010-14 mean	27

### Distribution change

Down 3% compared with 2010-2014

### Abundance change

Down 44% compared with 2010-2014

The relatively large summer 2016 broods meant that the spring flight of these same butterflies was high, but their breeding success seems to have been limited judging by the summer 2017 emergence. Overall it was well enough distributed but numbers did not bounce back. The flight chart clearly shows how early the emergence was in the mild spring.

# Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Common & Widespread

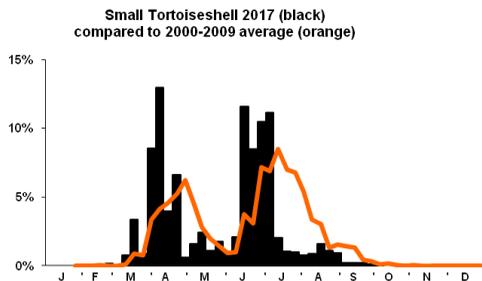
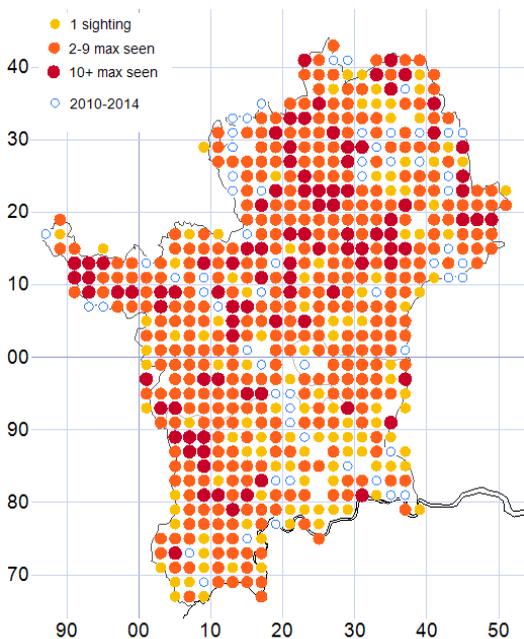


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 5 Jan  
**Last:** 6 Nov  
**Peak week:** 2-8 Apr

Distribution % squares	
2017	68% (414)
2016	63% (356)
2010-14 mean	53%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	19
2016	18
2010-14 mean	24

Distribution change
Up 28% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 20% compared with 2010-2014

The Small Tortoiseshell's data mirrored that of the Peacock with an increase in distribution but little change in a still low abundance figure. Both the emergence from hibernation in spring and the summer brood were early but there was very little evidence of a late summer emergence or migration event. Occasionally we get reports of this species involved in courtship behaviour with closely related species like Comma and Peacock, this year Juliet Morton noted, "Yesterday I was on my transect and I watched for some time, what seemed like a courtly-dance between a Small Tortoiseshell and a Red Admiral. When I came back the same way about an hour later they seemed still to be 'at it'".

# Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Common & widespread

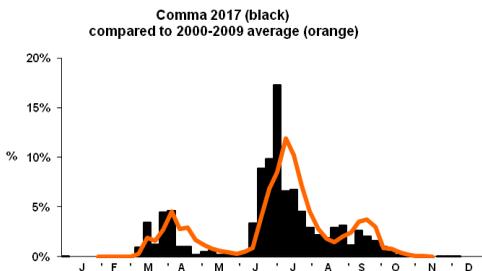
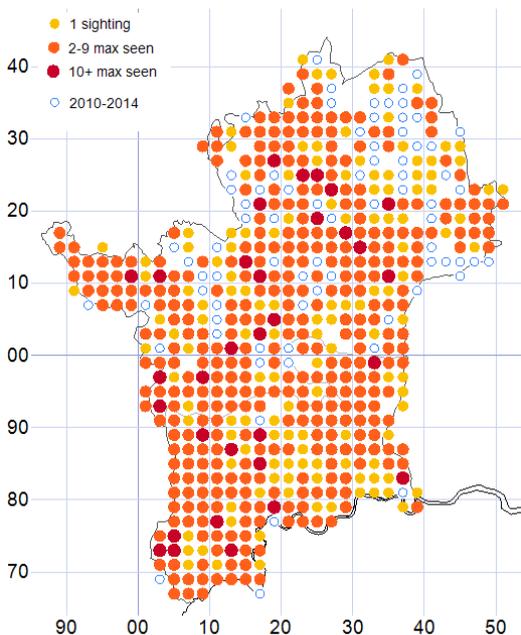


Photo Dave Miller



**First:** 4 Jan

**Last:** 9 Dec

**Peak week:** 2-8 July

Distribution % squares	
2017	69% (421)
2016	56% (310)
2010-14 mean	61%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	21
2016	16
2010-14 mean	15

Distribution change
Up 14% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Up 40% compared with 2010-2014

The Comma had a good year. The map continues to show this species as more widely distributed in urban areas than in rural parts of Hertfordshire with many empty Middlesex squares having been filled with records during 2017. On the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July Peter Clarke found a caterpillar feeding on an unusual foodplant, "I spotted a larva on a hazel leaf. A Comma larva no less, probably in its third instar, but there were no signs of feeding damage on the leaf itself. I returned to the spot this morning and found the larva under the same leaf but with some of it being eaten towards the tip".

# Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Widespread & common

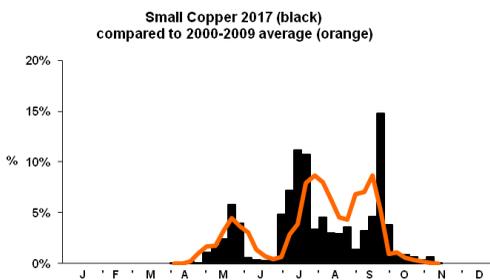
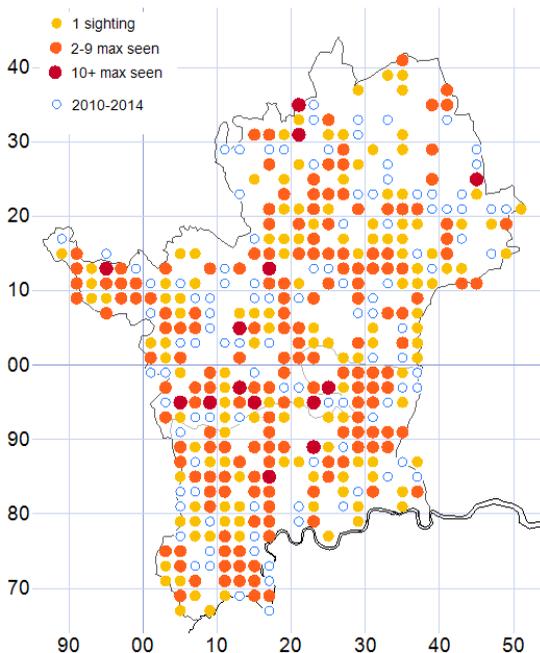


Photo Andrew Wood



**First:** 6 Apr  
**Last:** 13 Nov  
**Peak week:** 24-30 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2017	36% (219)
2016	21% (120)
2010-14 mean	28%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	11
2016	5
2010-14 mean	8

Distribution change	
Up 29% compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Up 38% compared with 2010-2014	

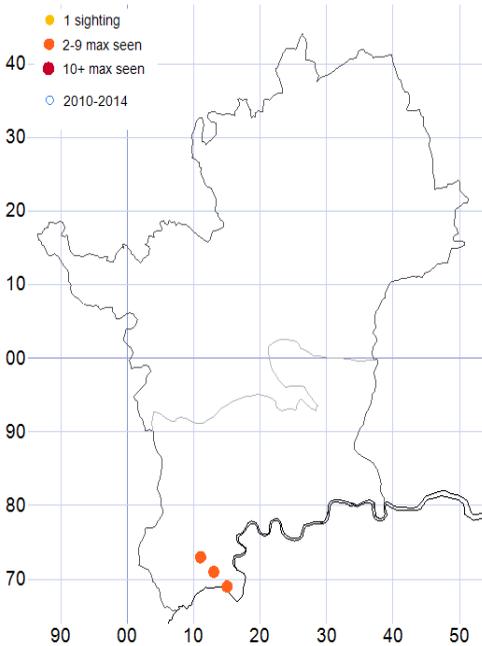
Last year’s pessimism about this butterfly is a good illustration of how looking at a year’s data in isolation can distort the overall picture. Distribution and abundance not only recovered but they hit levels well above the longer term means. The flight chart shows three broods, with an intriguing but small extra peak in early November (with records from five different sites), Was this a very partial fourth brood or just reporting of the relatively unusual phenomenon of November Small Coppers? It will be interesting to see if any early stages can be found during October in coming years.

**Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae***

Very rare and restricted



Photos Andrew Wood



**First:** no data

**Last:** no data

**Peak week:** no data

Distribution % squares	
2017	<1% (3)
2016	<1% (1)
2010-14 mean	None

Abundance (transects)	
2017	
2016	
2010-14 mean	

Distribution change
To little data

Abundance change
No data

After last year’s exciting news about eggs found in the Hampton area several people have been searching Blackthorn in the area. Liz Goodyear, Andrew Middleton and Stephen Reisbach have, as the map shows, some success. It must be emphasised that these searches have also included many sites where the Blackthorn seems not to have been colonised so far all the records are of eggs. Our challenge is to find other sites in these areas and visiting in late summer to see if we can find any of the elusive adults. As before we are not publishing the exact locations of the egg sites, as numbers are small, but we inform landowners and give conservation advice. Of the three sites two are in LB Richmond and one in LB Hounslow. An adult was reported near Mardley Heath in central Hertfordshire but further searches were unsuccessful. For now it is in the intriguing possibilities category.

# Purple Hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*

Common around oaks

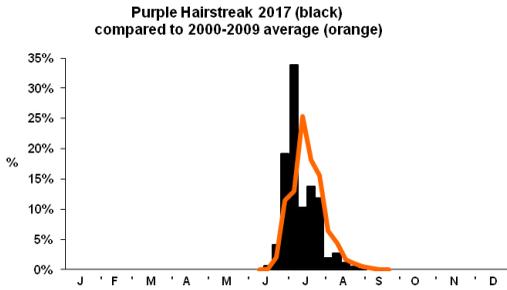
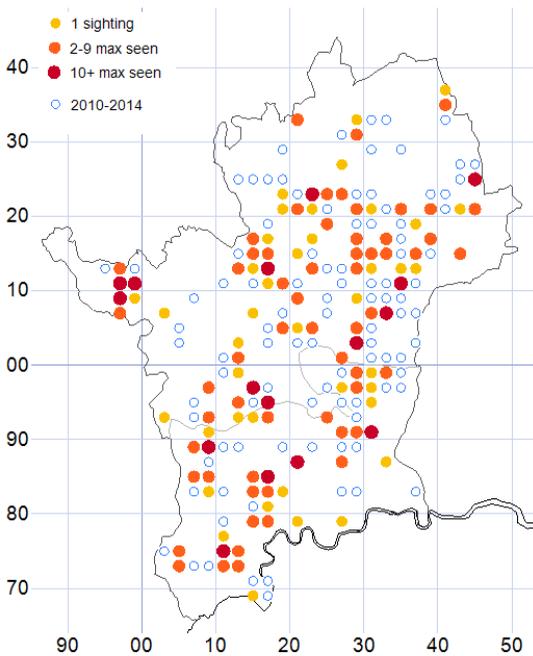


Photo Andrew Wood



**First:** 17 Jun

**Last:** 27 Aug

**Peak week:** 2-8 July

Distribution % squares	
2017	11% (66)
2016	10% (55)
2010-14 mean	13%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	8
2016	6
2010-14 mean	10

Distribution change	
Down 15% compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Down 20% compared with 2010-2014	

A slight increase in 2017, but this species remains below its longer term abundance and distribution. However Nick Furtek commented that, "Local High - Purple Hairstreak recovery in Ruislip woods". Sue Taylor looked for Purple Hairstreak on Northchurch Common, "on the other side I found them in the following locations [18 grid references listed], I suspect. I think that's confirmed it is under recorded".

# Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Very rare & restricted

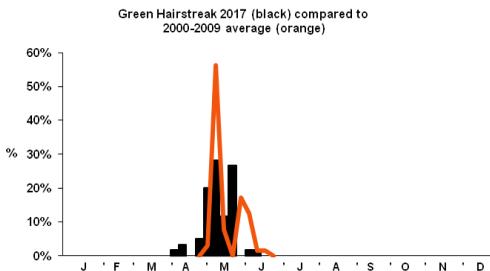
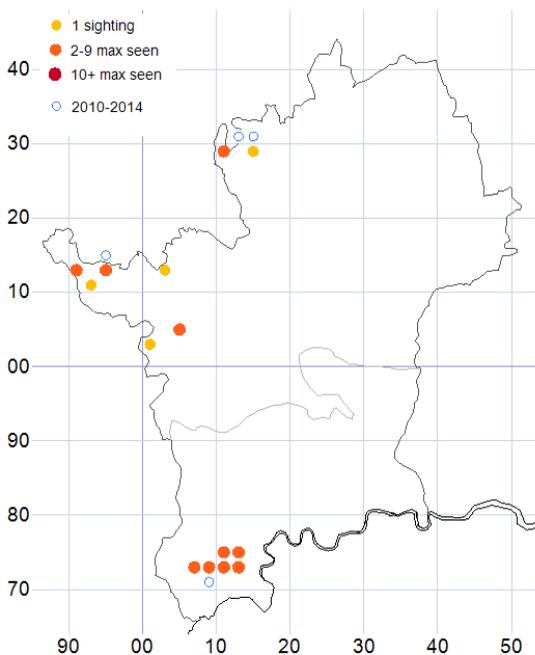


Photo Andrew Wood



**First:** 8 Apr  
**Last:** 13 Jun  
**Peak week:** 7-13 May

Distribution % squares	
2017	1% (6)
2016	2% (12)
2010-14 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	2
2016	6
2010-14 mean	11

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Too little data to calculate	

A species that seems to have retreated to its core areas in 2017 with none of 2016's new sites having a record this year. The only recorded locations were Aldbury Nowers, Hexton Chalk Pit and Roughdown Common in Hertfordshire and the Hounslow Heath/Feltham Marshalling Yard area in south west Middlesex.

# White-letter Hairstreak *Satyrrium w-album*

Common around elm

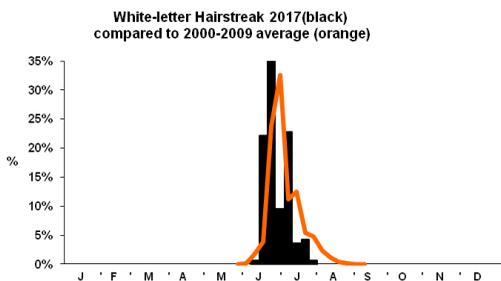
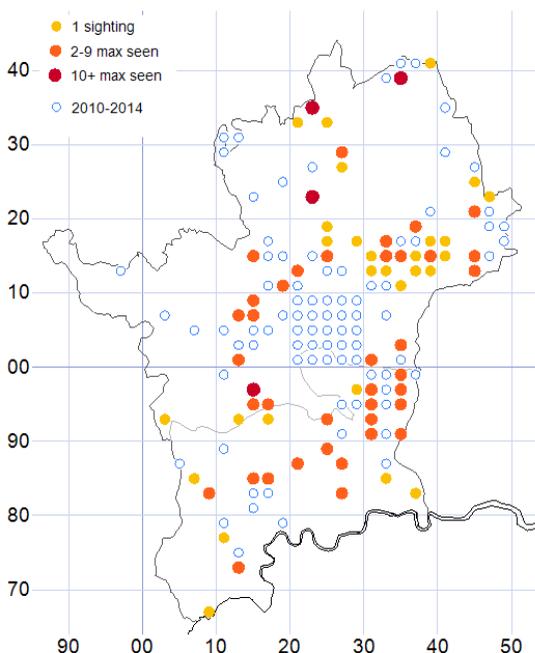


Photo Andrew Wood

**First:** 10 Jun  
**Last:** 27 Jul  
**Peak week:** 18-24 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2017	7% (41)
2016	6% (33)
2010-14 mean	7%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	2
2016	2
2010-14 mean	2

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014	

Little changed since 2016, it probably remains under recorded. Surely it cannot have disappeared from every tetrad in the 10km square TL20 where it was recorded during 2010-2014. A project for someone? An example of finding eggs of this species came from Paul Atkin, “spent half an hour sifting through twigs on some Elm suckers in a disused corner of London Zoo today and discovered exactly what I was looking for, a single White-letter Hairstreak egg”

# Small Blue *Cupido minimus*

Very rare & restricted

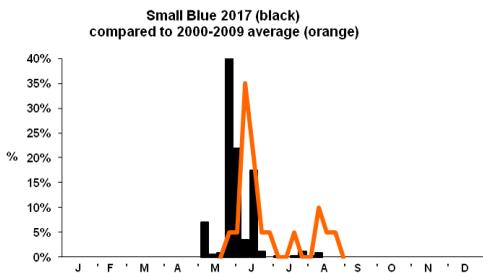
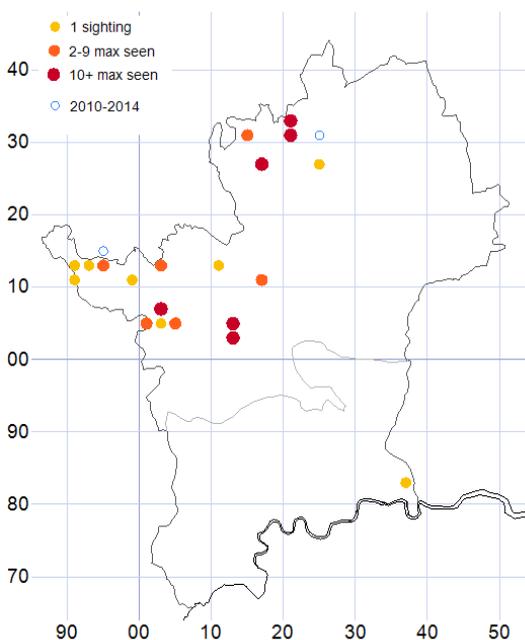


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 5 May  
**Last:** 11 Aug  
**Peak week:** 21-27 May

Distribution % squares	
2017	2% (12)
2016	2% (11)
2010-14 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	5
2016	136
2010-14 mean	26

Distribution change
Up 100% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Too little data to calculate

Please do not be alarmed by the abundance fall. This reflects the fact that we no longer have access to the Butterfly World site to walk a transect there and this was where the peak numbers were found. It may well be that there has been a fall in numbers there due to neglect but the butterfly can still be found on public rights of way near the site. Otherwise it was found in all its usual haunts with particularly good numbers on the A41 cuttings near Bourne End. Please note that although this site is publicly accessible it is very steep and the road very fast and busy and not suitable for a casual visit. Interestingly it was also seen for the first time in six years at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park in the south east of our area. We continue to work with several landowners to ensure the survival of this rare butterfly.

# Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Widespread & common

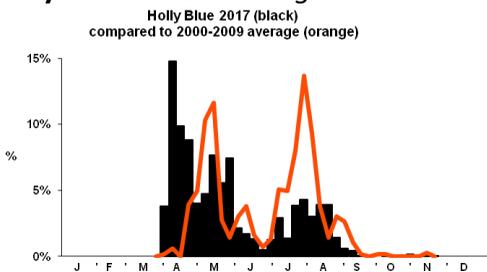
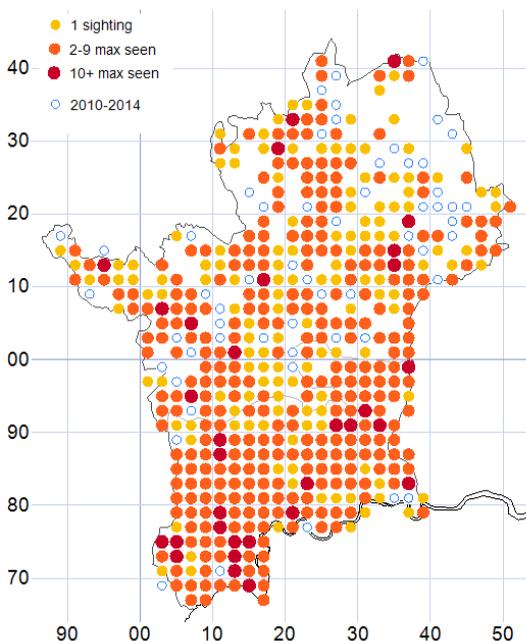


Photo Dave Miller

First 25 Mar

Last: 6 Dec

Peak week: 2-8 Apr



Distribution % squares	
2017	47% (285)
2016	58% (325)
2010-14 mean	42%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	8
2016	11
2010-14 mean	10

Distribution change	
Up 11% compared with 2010-2014	

Abundance change	
Down 20% compared with 2010-2014	

A further drop in numbers and distribution probably reflects the normal host/parasite relationship with the parasite beginning to get an upper hand for a few years. However this is still a widespread species. Please also note that this is generally the only blue species in flight in April and records of Common Blue for this month often turn out to be Holly Blues where photos have been taken. The well documented fresh adult on the 6<sup>th</sup> December is an astonishingly late record. There were also eleven October and two November records.

# Brown Argus *Aricia agesthis*

Widely distributed

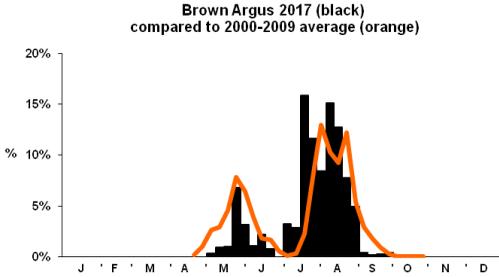
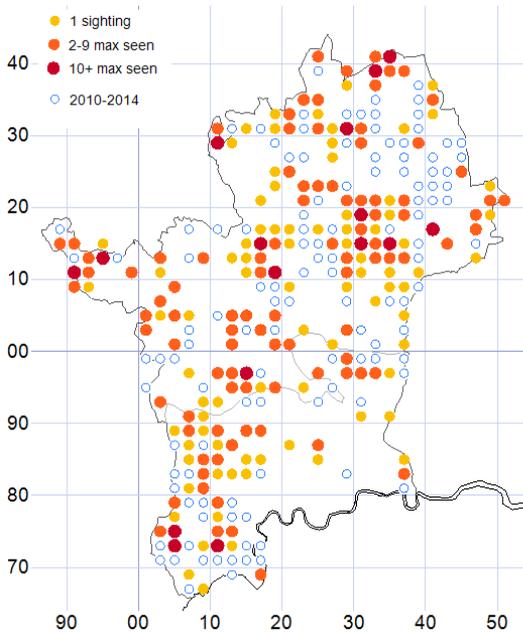


Photo Chris Benton

**First:** 3 May  
**Last:** 27 Oct  
**Peak week:** 16-22 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2017	20% (119)
2016	14% (81)
2010-14 mean	16%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	12
2016	9
2010-14 mean	14

Distribution change
Up 25% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 28% compared with 2010-2014

The Brown Argus had a much improved year in 2017 and it has begun to penetrate some areas of more urban central Middlesex, though it remains a species of the greener parts of our area. The first brood was noticeably smaller than the second, also interesting was the fact that it was not early whereas the second was advanced over the longer term trend. The final 27<sup>th</sup> October record added eight days onto its previous latest date.

# Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Widespread & common

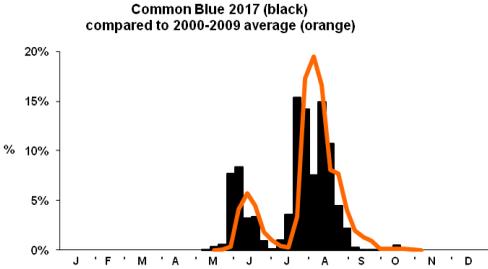
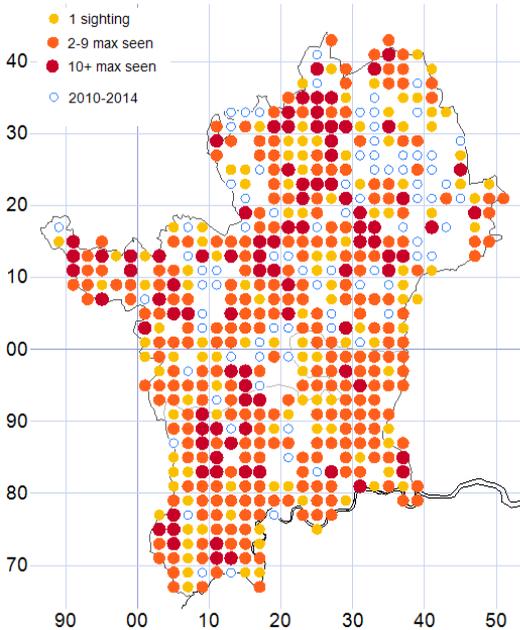


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 5 May

**Last:** 27 Oct

**Peak week:** 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	51% (313)
2016	42% (237)
2010-14 mean	41%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	33
2016	16
2010-14 mean	38

Distribution change
Up 24% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Down 13% compared with 2010-2014

Like the Small Copper 2017 saw a return in numbers and distribution for this species. An example of this comes from Malcolm Hull’s Bricket Wood Transect, “Common Blue and Small Copper, which were both absent in 2016 recovered strongly. These species both like to live in short grass and are benefiting from the introduction of cattle grazing on the Common”. It is unusual for this butterfly to be on the wing before May and recorders need to be careful checking early flying blue butterflies as many reports of Common Blues at this time have turned out to be Holly Blues.

# Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon*

Common at known chalk sites

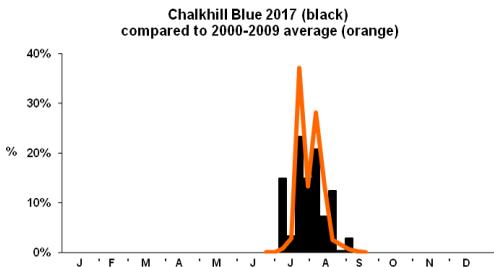
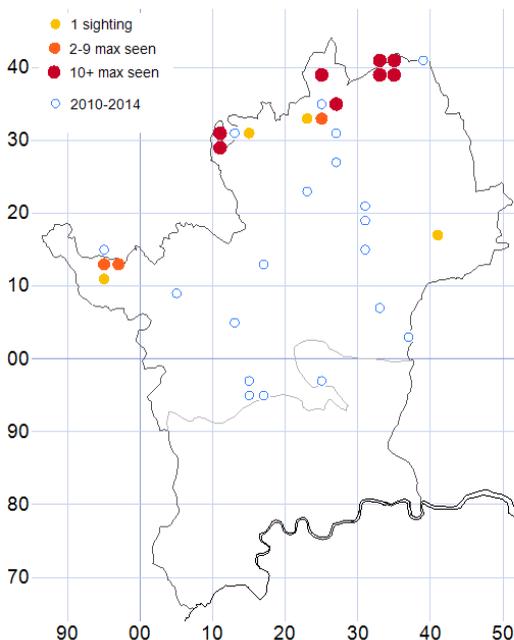


Photo Chris Benton



**First:** 28 Jun  
**Last:** 1 Sep  
**Peak week:** 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2017	2% (11)
2016	2% (10)
2010-14 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2017	167
2016	117
2010-14 mean	96

Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2010-2014

Abundance change
Up 74% compared with 2010-2014

Abundance on transects increased in 2017. Following the sad death of Alan Beale who had walked the Therfield Heath routes for many years. We were pleased to recruit three new walkers to cover the 5 transects there. A change in recorders can have an effect on data and we will need to look at a run of several year's establish a definite trend. Good news was the discovery of good numbers of males and females on the land above the A505 near Clothall Common just outside Baldock which suggests a new colony there using the abundant Horseshoe Vetch that was seeded here.

**Key to the Species pages**  
**Common Name** *Scientific name*

Widespread but declining

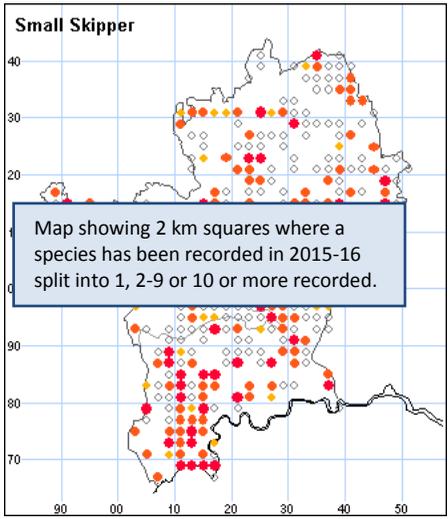
Small Skipper 2015 (black)  
 compared to 2000-2009 average (orange)



A photo of this species taken by one of our members

Brian Knight

The flight period showing proportion of species flying in any week compared with the 2000-2009 average



Map showing 2 km squares where a species has been recorded in 2015-16 split into 1, 2-9 or 10 or more recorded.

**First:** 16 June  
**Last:** 16 Aug  
**Peak week:** 25 Jun -1 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2016	28% (155)
2015	
2010-14 mean	
Abundance	
2016	
2015	
2010-14 mean	
Distribution and Abundance change	
Up 3% compared to 2010-2014	
Abundance change	

**First sighting**  
**Last sighting**  
**Peak Week** when most seen  
**Distribution % squares.** The % and number of 2km squares with records in which this species was recorded  
**Abundance (transects)** Average number of a species seen on transects (so comparable year on year)  
**Distribution and Abundance change** compared with the recent 5 year period to smooth out year to year comparisons

Some notes on the species during the year, together with interesting or unusual observations

The Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex” is still available. It is a fully illustrated 272 page hardback that updates the previous books covering our region published in 1987. There are hundreds of colour photos and detailed analysis of the changes between then and now, together with practical advice on how to find and observe our butterflies. Published by the Hertfordshire Natural History Society and ourselves at the price of £28 (including post and packing). It can be ordered at: <http://www.hnhs.org/publications>

