

Hertfordshire & Middlesex Butterflies 2020



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

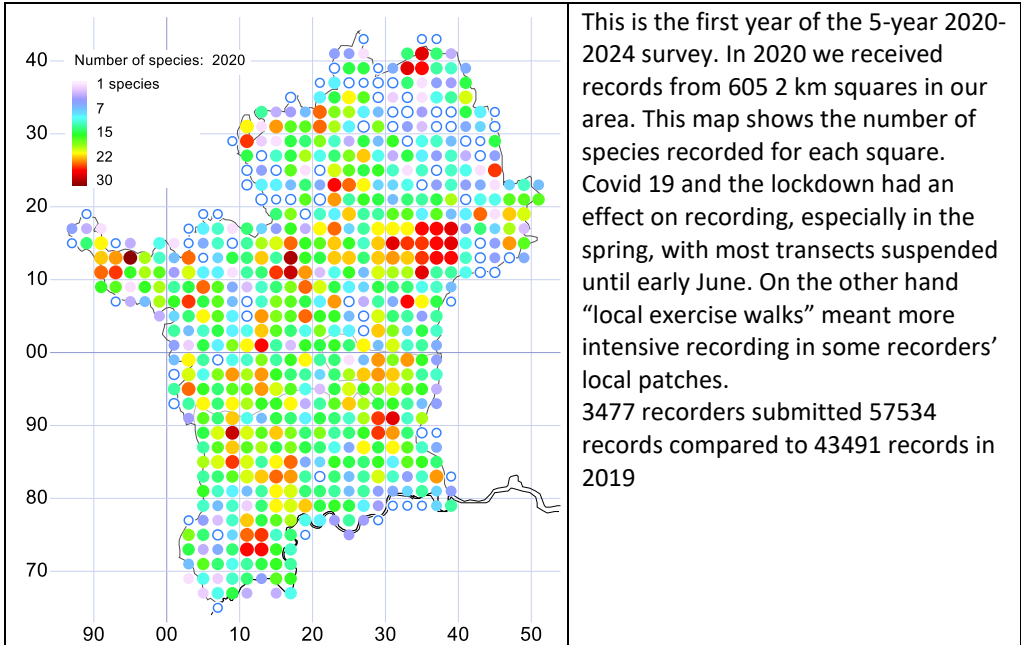
Andrew Wood

February 2021

Weather summary

January	Mild	July	Dry but dull and cool
February	Mild but wet	August	Warm & sunny, 2nd week very hot
March	Mild, especially 2nd half	September	Wet but mid-month warm & sunny
April	Mild, dry, sunny	October	Very wet and dull
May	Mild, dry, sunny	November	Mild, bright, dry
June	Dry but dull and cool	December	Mild early, cold later

Recording Effort

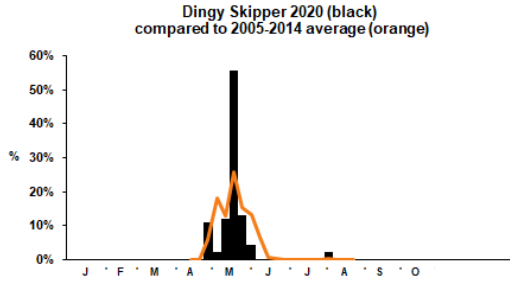


Species not included in the main section – all regarded as most likely escapes, undocumented releases or accidental importations.

Camberwell Beauty <i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>	Wareside, Herts 30 May Wilstone, Herts 10 Sep
Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	Therfield Heath, Herts 17 May Southall, Middx 20 May Twickenham, Middx 20 May
Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>	Clerkenwell, Middx 10 Aug
Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>	East of Much Hadham, Herts 22,23 Jul max 3 seen Old Brompton Cemetery, Middx 31 Jul

A key to the main species accounts that follow can be found on the back cover

Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*



2

Restricted and rare

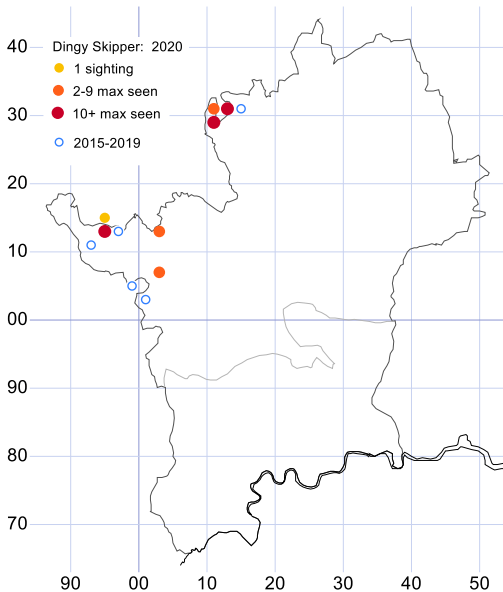


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 26 Apr

Last: 2 Aug

Peak week: 14-20 May



Distribution % squares	
2020	1% (7)
2019	1% (9)
2015-19 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	3
2019	12
2015-19 mean	9

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Down 67% compared with 2015-2019	

As the flight chart shows, this species flies largely in the spring when recording was difficult. The seeming decline in abundance must be taken with caution as no transect recording was done at one of the main sites, Aldbury Nowers, during the main flight season. The only, and always rare in our area, second brood records come from transects at that site on 2 August. Good news was that this species was recorded at Shrubhill Common on the edge of Hemel Hempstead for the first time since 2017. As Roger Prue observed, "They are easily overlooked at this site, unless they happen to land on the path in front of you. Fortunately, this is what happened"

Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*

Restricted & rare

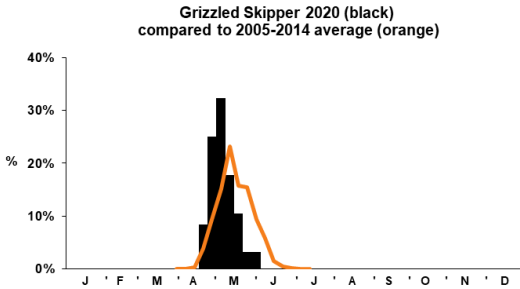
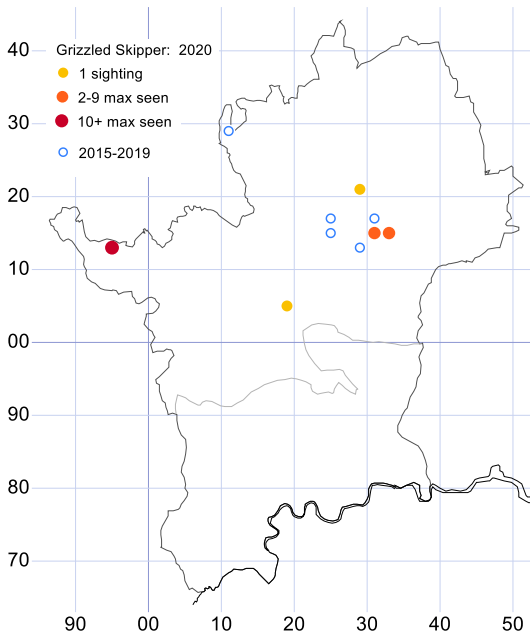


Photo Chris Benton

First: 16 Apr

Last: 2 Jun

Peak week: 30 Apr-6 May



Distribution % squares	
2020	1% (5)
2019	1% (6)
2015-19 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	10
2019	7
2015-19 mean	8

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Up 25% compared with 2015-2019	

As the flight chart shows, there was an early emergence, peak and season finish for this species compared to the average of recent years. Luckily, there was some transect recording possible during its flight period at the sites around Waterford north of Hertford and this shows a welcome increase in abundance, though numbers are never high at any site for this butterfly. A roost count at Waterford Heath done as a local exercise walk on 29 April, found 16 individuals, all but one on the south heath. The dot in central Hertfordshire is a record of one in the Colne valley not that far from a 2012 record by the same recorder.

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

Widespread but recently declining

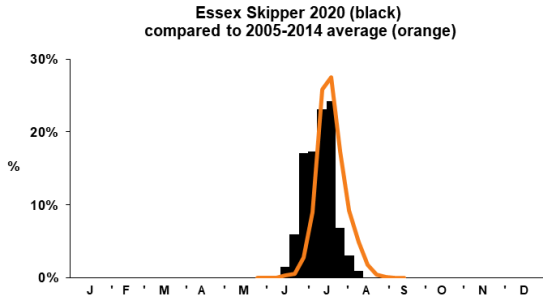
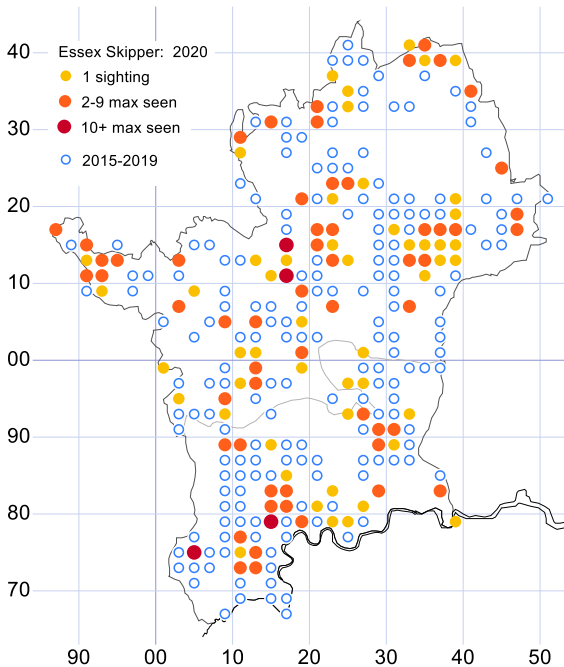


Photo Chris Benton



First: 11 Jun

Last: 8 Aug

Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2020	18% (111)
2019	16% (100)
2015-19 mean	17%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	7
2019	11
2015-19 mean	10

Distribution change
Up 6% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 30% compared with 2015-2019

There seems to have been a further slight recovery in the fortunes of the Essex Skipper, at least in terms of distribution with more 2km squares occupied than last year. As the open circles show, however, there are still plenty of areas to check its presence during this recording period. Less reassuring is the drop in abundance at the transect sites where it was recorded, despite a summer flight period this coverage was more complete than for the spring flying skippers. The flight period built up quickly in mid-June, well ahead of longer-term trends, peaked at the normal time but finished earlier.

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Widespread but recently declining

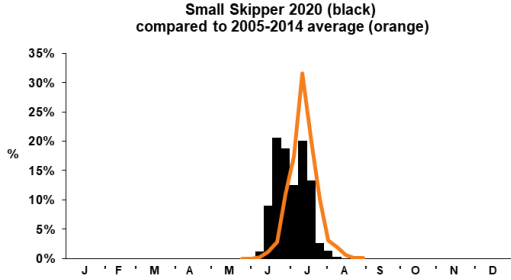
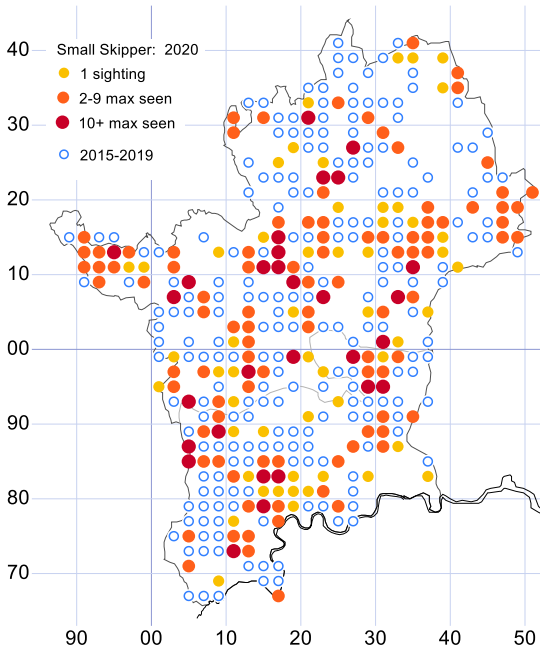


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 1 Jun

Last: 7 Aug

Peak week: 18-24 Jun

Distribution % squares	
2020	30% (179)
2019	25% (152)
2015-19 mean	26%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	18
2019	25
2015-19 mean	20

Distribution change
Up 12% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 10% compared with 2015-2019

The start, finish and peak of this species' flight season were all two weeks ahead of 2019, showing the effect on development of the caterpillar of the very warm spring. As with the closely related Essex Skipper, there were divergent distribution and abundance trends and as with that species there are still plenty of places to look for this little butterfly in the next 4 years of the survey. It would be good if we can continue seeing a fight back for both the smaller golden skipper species. As I have emphasised previously great care must be taken to distinguish this skipper from the Essex Skipper and, early in the flight season, checking that the butterfly you record is not a Large Skipper (which is only relatively large!). See https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/identification_skippers-new.php#ss.

Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus*

Widespread but recently declining

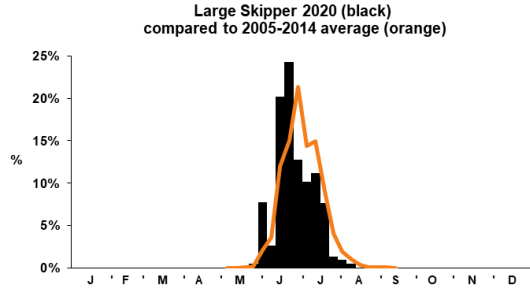
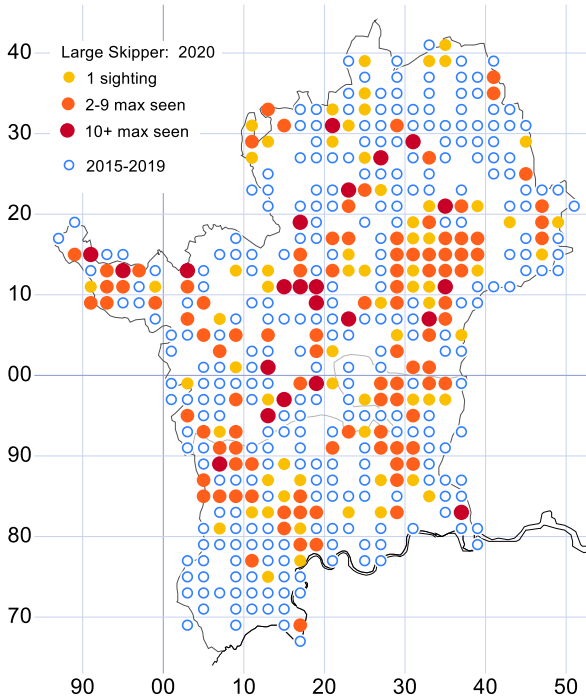


Photo Chris Benton

First: 17 May

Last: 12 Aug

Peak week: 18-24 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2020	31% (181)
2019	30% (183)
2015-19 mean	35%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	22
2019	19
2015-19 mean	19

Distribution change
Down 9% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 16% compared with 2015-2019

For at least the third year running there was only slight change in abundance or distribution of what is the most common of the three golden skipper species. Like those other species it emerged early and started flying in mid-May and we had 56 records from that month, which is quite exceptional. Not surprisingly, the peak was earlier than 2019 and the recent longer-term trends. The highest totals were largely from woodland sites showing how this species is more tolerant of shade than the other two golden skipper species.

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Widespread & Common

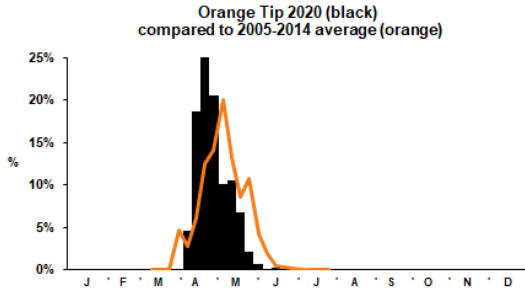
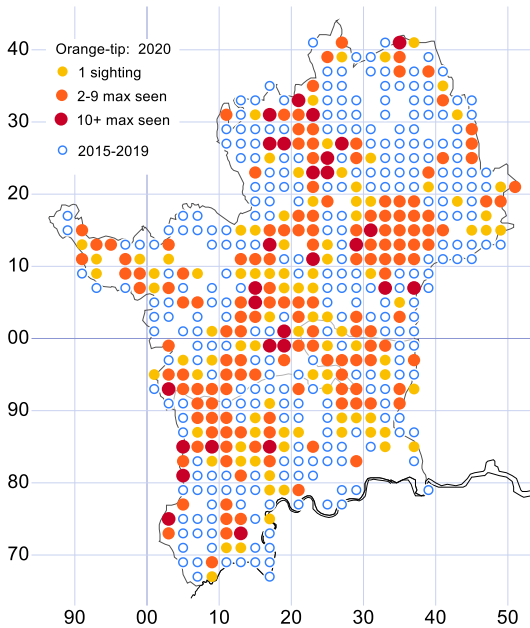


Photo Chris Benton

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



Distribution % squares	
2020	45% (272)
2019	42% (260)
2015-19 mean	42%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	13
2019	18
2015-19 mean	16

Distribution change
Up 8% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 18% compared with 2015-2019

Virtually the whole flight period of this spring butterfly was during the lockdown period when very little transect recording was done. The abundance data is based on far fewer records and sites than usual, so the fall should be treated with caution. There is no suggestion of a decline in distribution and many people were able to record the distinctive male while taking local exercise walks. As is sometimes the case a few were seen in March but the number flying soon grew to give a peak earlier than the longer term mean and generally a flight period that ended earlier, with only a few records in June, but interestingly three in early July

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Widespread & common

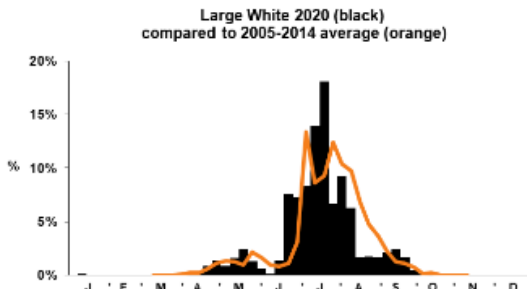
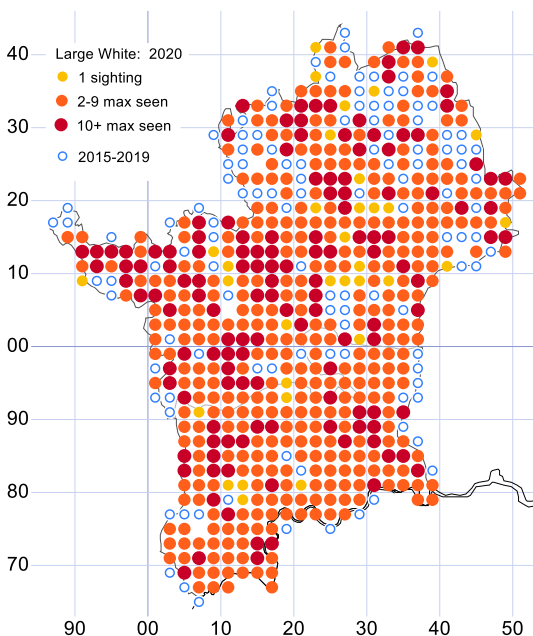


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 10 Jan

Last: 5 Oct

Peak week: 16-22 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2020	87% (528)
2019	74% (458)
2015-19 mean	77%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	55
2019	39
2015-19 mean	47

Distribution change
Up 13% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 17% compared with 2015-2019

Large Whites were extremely common in 2020 with the number of recorded squares exceeding the 511 of 2018. There was one seen sitting on the ground on 10 January in Watford town centre - maybe it had pupated in a very warm spot and emerged very early (compare with a similar Holly Blue record). Apart from that, the first date was 5 April, which is two weeks later than 2019. Its flight followed the usual pattern of a small spring brood which gave rise to a much larger summer brood (maybe boosted by migration?) This brood peaked at the same time as 2019 but the poor later summer seemed to put an early end to its flight.

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Widespread & common

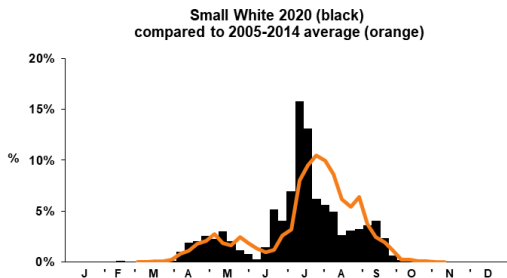
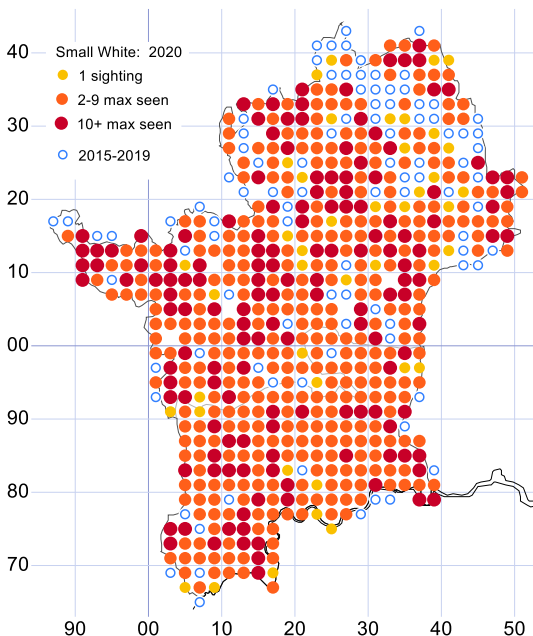


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 15 Feb
Last: 14 Oct
Peak week: 9-15 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2020	90% (545)
2019	82% (508)
2015-19 mean	80%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	78
2019	59
2015-19 mean	64

Distribution change	
Up 13% compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Up 21% compared with 2015-2019	

The Small White was virtually ubiquitous in 2020 with it being seen in 545 squares compared to 523, the previous maximum, in 2018. As in 2019 there was one exceptionally early record in mid February but the main flight began on 22 March. For the second year running there were three distinct peaks, a small one in the spring and then, as usual a large one in mid-summer, followed by another in early September. However unlike 2019 the overall peak week was the one in mid summer.

Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Widespread & common

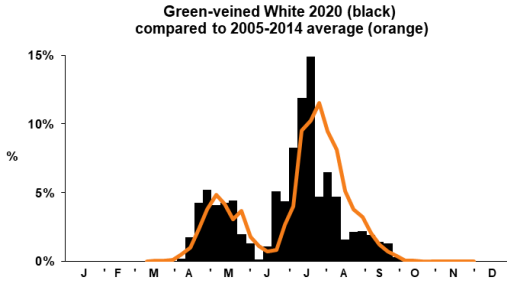
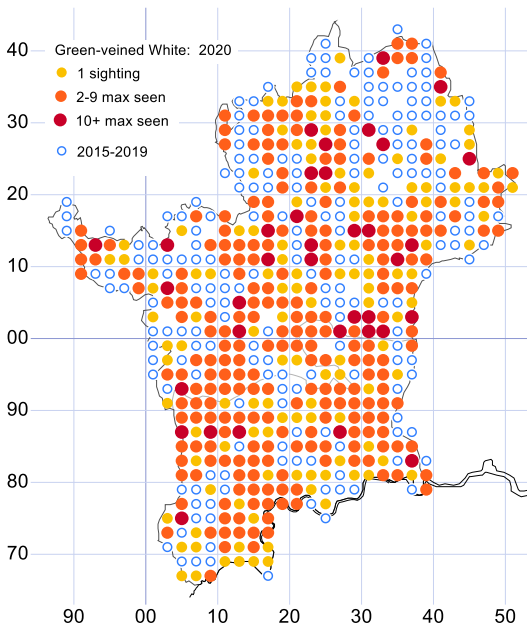


Photo Chris Benton

First: 4 Apr

Last: 23 Oct

Peak week: 16 -22 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2020	68% (408)
2019	56% (346)
2015-19 mean	58%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	38
2019	25
2015-19 mean	38

Distribution change
Up 17% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

The spring flight was almost textbook, but the summer brood started and peaked earlier than the longer-term mean, doubtless due to the exceptionally mild spring during which the caterpillars were developing. The distribution bounced back to 2018 levels, well above the mean and the abundance also increased. It is worth noting that on an even longer scale abundance has been much higher in the recent past. The final date is almost three weeks later than 2019, which is perhaps surprising given the way the summer brood fell way in the later summer period.

Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

Less common migrant

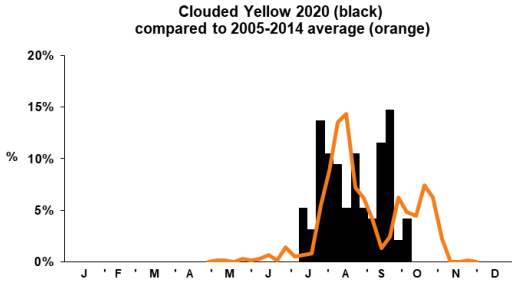
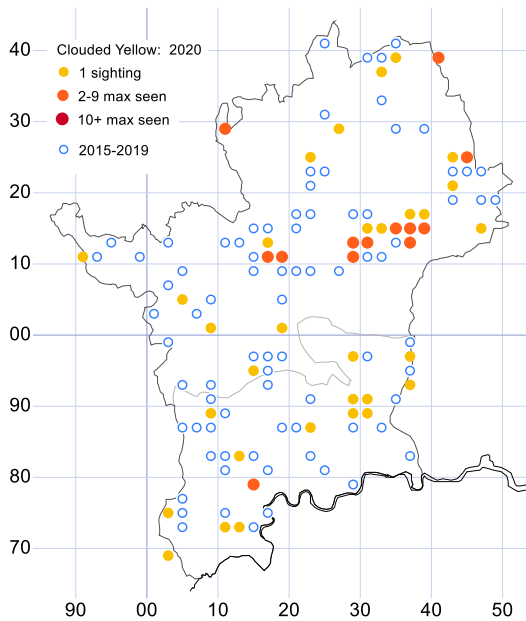


Photo Gerry Rawcliffe

First: 11 Jul
Last: 1 Oct
Peak week: 17-23 Sep



Distribution % squares	
2020	7% (44)
2019	3% (17)
2015-19 mean	4%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	2
2019	1
2015-19 mean	1

Distribution change
Up 75% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 50% compared with 2015-2019

Despite the remarkable image above, this migrant species is hardly ever seen with its wings open. Sightings were well spread across our area, with the concentration of records around Hertford and Ware may be down to intensive local surveying by Andrew Wood and Liz Goodyear. This year there seemed to be more fields planted with clover mixes which attract this species as it is one of its larval food plants. The maximum number seen at any location was five, both in east Hertfordshire. As in 2019 the first sighting was not until well into July and the peak was very close to the end of the flight period with no late autumn sightings.

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Widespread

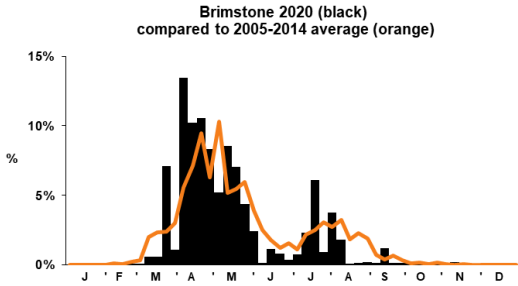
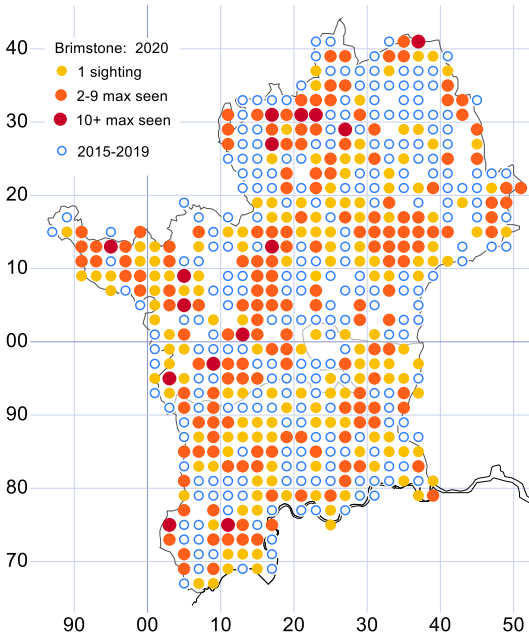


Photo Chris Benton

First: 1 Feb
Last: 15 Dec
Peak week: 2-8 Apr



Distribution % squares	
2020	56% (339)
2019	56% (346)
2015-19 mean	53%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	12
2019	19
2015-19 mean	19

Distribution change
Up 5% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 36% compared with 2015-2019

The Brimstone continues to be one of the least-changed species in terms of its abundance and distribution. This might seem odd as the abundance has dropped by 36% but this may be explained by the lack of spring transect walking due to Covid 19, meaning that much of the over-wintered population could not be counted. The large spring population measured across all survey methods and shown on the chart above may also be a reflection of more casual recording during the heaviest lockdown period. It continues to be most frequent towards the west where chalk soils are more prevalent, which favours the growth of one of its main larval foodplants, Purging Buckthorn.

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Widespread & common

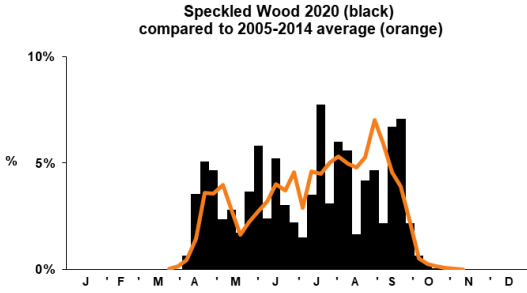
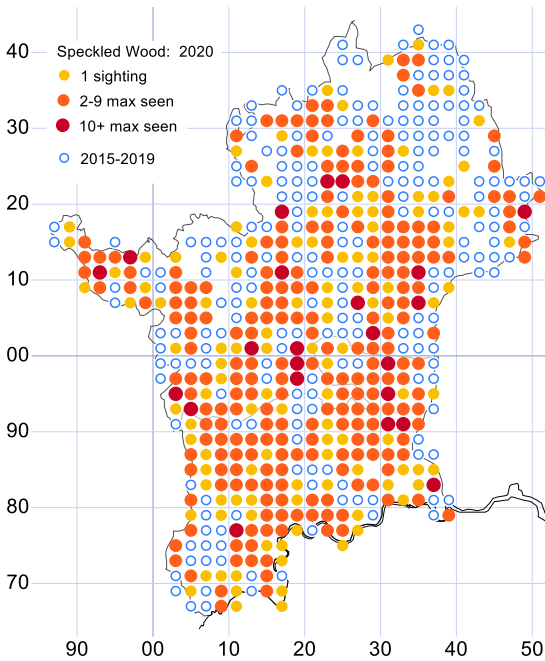


Photo Chris Benton

First: 4 Apr

Last: 22 Oct

Peak week: 16-22 Jul



Distribution % squares

2020	62% (376)
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2019	57% (351)
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2015-19 mean	61%
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Abundance (transects)

2020	30
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2019	38
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2015-19 mean	48
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Distribution change

Up 2% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Down 36% compared with 2015-2019

Although there was a noticeable build up in numbers in later summer, as is normal, the peak flight week was actually during the summer. The smaller numbers in flight shown in the data above was reflected on woodland transects where very few weekly counts exceeded 10 when a few years ago there might have been 30-50 seen on the same route.

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Widespread

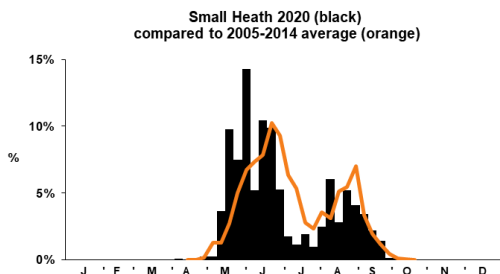
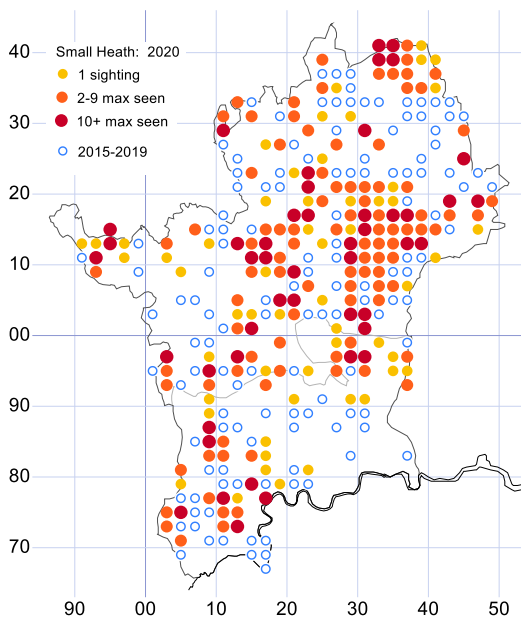


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 8 Apr
Last: 7 Oct
Peak week: 28 Apr-3 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2020	33% (198)
2019	26% (158)
2015-19 mean	20%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	47
2019	52
2015-19 mean	42

Distribution change	
Up 65% compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Up 12% compared with 2015-2019	

The Small Heath, which also appears on the cover, has over the last few years been a success story, especially when one considers that it was added to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan in 2007 due to a rapid decline. It is now a common species in much neutral or unimproved grassland across Hertfordshire and western Middlesex. This year it was most numerous in the spring/early summer generation, which emerged and built up more quickly than the mean trend, whereas the timing of the late summer/early autumn generation was very close to the longer-term trends.

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Widespread & Common

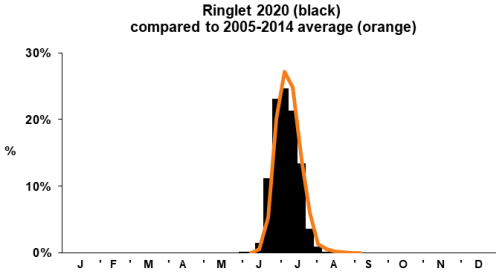
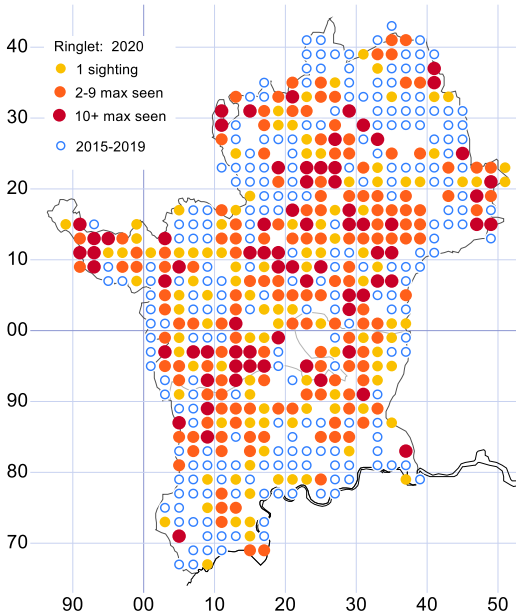


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 2 Jun
Last: 28 Aug
Peak week: 2-8 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2020	55% (332)
2019	48% (294)
2015-19 mean	45%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	62
2019	102
2015-19 mean	108

Distribution change
Up 22% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 43% compared with 2015-2019

In distribution terms, the Ringlet had another good year, although it has still to really penetrate the most built-up parts of central London, not surprising for a butterfly that likes damp, shady, grassy habitats. However, the numbers seen on the transects continued to fall, possibly due to the dry spring which may have dried out the grasses its larva feed on, causing a shortage of food supply. For instance, at Balls Wood the highest weekly count was 202 compared to 514 in 2019. As in previous years its flight period was very similar to the longer-term trends.

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Widespread & Common

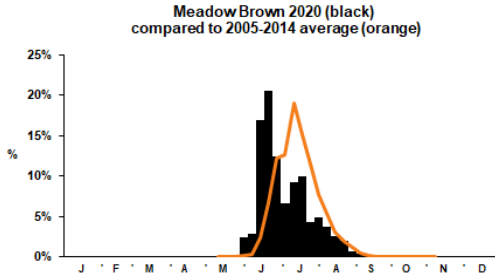
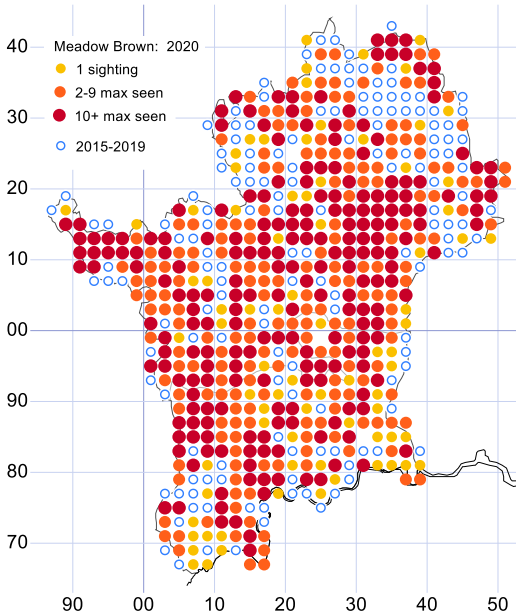


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 25 May

Last: 30 Sep

Peak week: 18-24 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2020	82% (492)
2019	74% (455)
2015-19 mean	68%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	266
2019	440
2015-19 mean	307

Distribution change
Up 21% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 73% compared with 2015-2019

Very well distributed in 2020, apart from the north east of Hertfordshire where there were very few visits during the year. Over the whole five-year survey, we should be able to fill up all the squares. However, the drop in abundance to some way below both last years' very high figure and the longer-term trend is more concerning. To some extent this is probably explained by the reasons advanced under the Ringlet account. The flight season began very early with a remarkable 75 May records and peaked very early as the summer deteriorated

Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*

Widespread & common

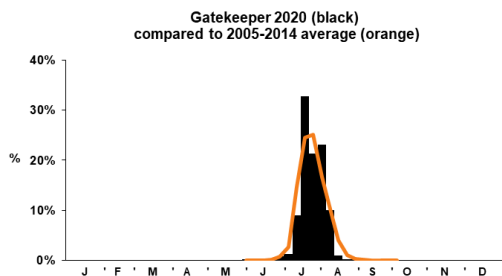
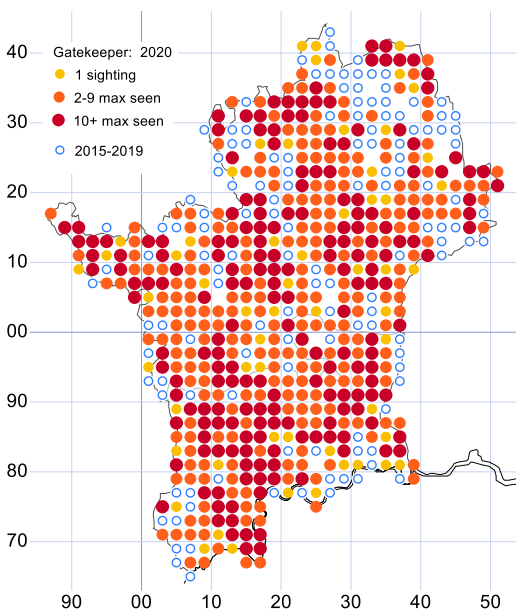


Photo Chris Benton

First: 6 Jun

Last: 22 Sep

Peak week: 16-22 Jul



Distribution % squares

2020	82% (492)
2019	73% (452)
2015-19 mean	70%

Abundance (transects)

2020	82
2019	104
2015-19 mean	85

Distribution change

Up 17% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Down 4% compared with 2015-2019

As with the Meadow Brown there was an early emergence for the Gatekeeper with 48 June records - these do not show very well on the flight chart due to the much higher numbers recorded in mid-July. Abundance was lower than last year's high total but was close to longer-term trends. Interestingly, in view of the poor later summer there were a handful of rather late records well into September.

Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*

Widespread

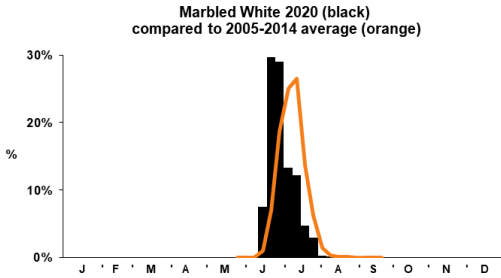
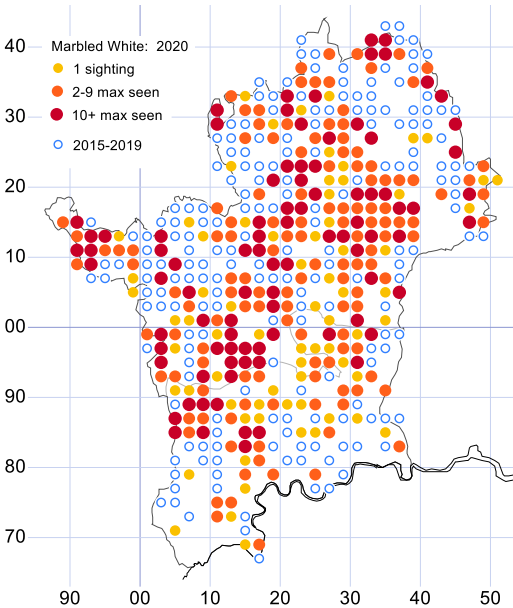


Photo Chris Benton

First: 1 Jun
Last: 12 Aug
Peak week: 18-24 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2020	48% (291)
2019	43% (263)
2015-19 mean	34%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	97
2019	141
2015-19 mean	90

Distribution change
Up 41% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 8% compared with 2015-2019

Marbled Whites both emerged and finished flying two weeks earlier than 2019. Its distribution continued to grow and apart from south west Middlesex and central areas of London, it is now likely to be found anywhere in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. There were many three figure counts, including from several more open woodland areas. The drop in abundance, albeit only back to longer term amounts, is probably for similar reasons to the drops in Ringlet and Meadow Brown.

Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*

Restricted to chalky areas

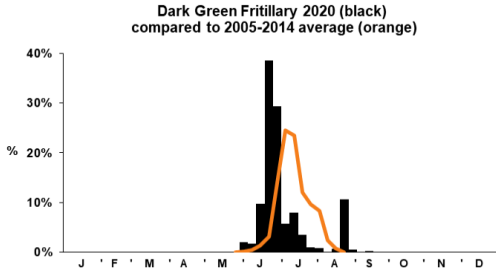
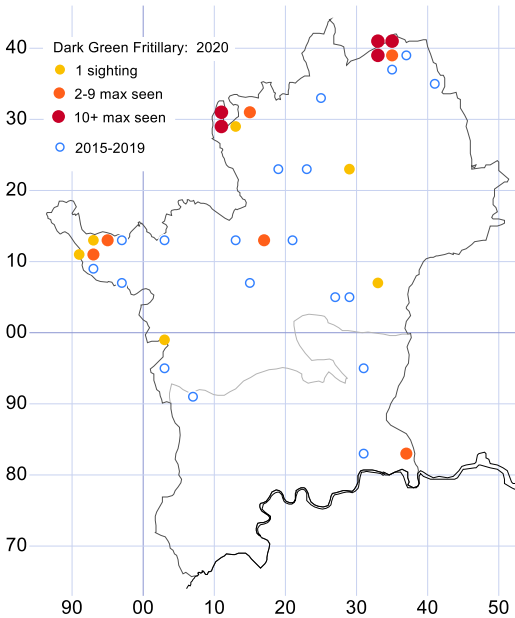


Photo Chris Benton

First: 30 May

Last: 3 Aug

Peak week: 18 -24 Jun



Distribution % squares

2020	3% (17)
2019	1% (7)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)

2020	9
2019	10
2015-19 mean	5

Distribution change

Up 50% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Up 80% compared with 2015-2019

As noted last year, this species is only established at major chalk sites with most other records being presumed to be wanderers. This year it in appeared in Benington and Nomansland Common (3 seen) in more central and eastern parts of Hertfordshire, Frogmore Meadow in the south west and at Tower Hamlets Cemetery in Middlesex. Care must be taken to confirm that any large Fritillary seen outside the core area is indeed this species as several records reported turned out to be the much more widely distributed Silver-washed Fritillary. Large numbers (over 30) were seen at Hexton Chalk Pit but this year this was eclipsed by a report of 75 at the much larger, Therfield Heath.

Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

Locally common, spreading

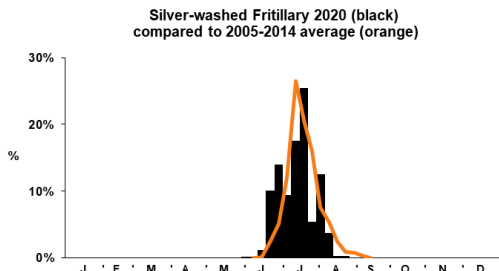
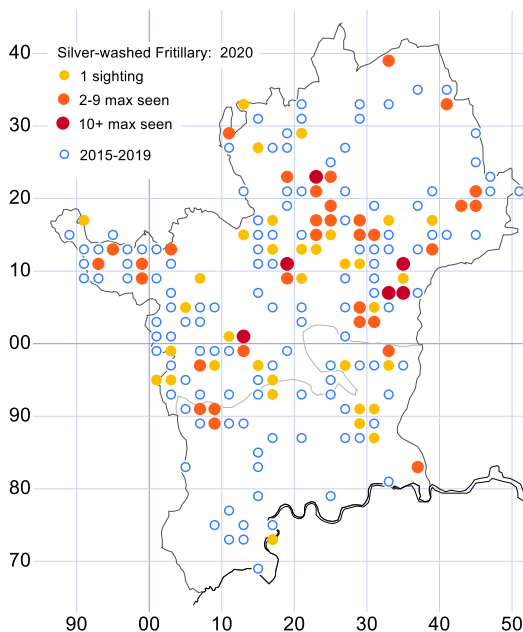


Photo Chris Benton

First: 2 Jun

Last: 23 Aug

Peak week: 16-22 July



Distribution % squares	
2020	12% (72)
2019	12% (74)
2015-19 mean	11%

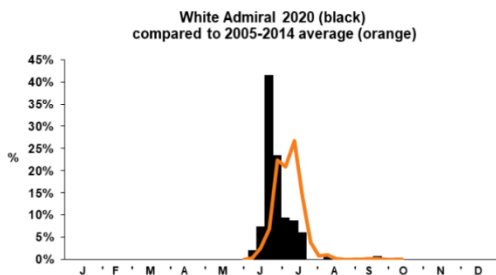
Abundance (transects)	
2020	13
2019	13
2015-19 mean	14

Distribution change
Up 9% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 7% compared with 2015-2019

Very little change in either distribution or abundance for this large, showy species which had seen a remarkable revival in the last two decades. As would be expected, most records are from larger areas of woodland, but it is also turning up at new sites such as Lemsford Springs. The flight period was well advanced compared to the last year, with the first sighting two weeks earlier and the last four weeks earlier. Yet the peak was in the same week as last year. This reflects the mild spring speeding up larval development and the poor later summer curtailing flight.

White Admiral *Limenithis camilla*



Declining woodland species

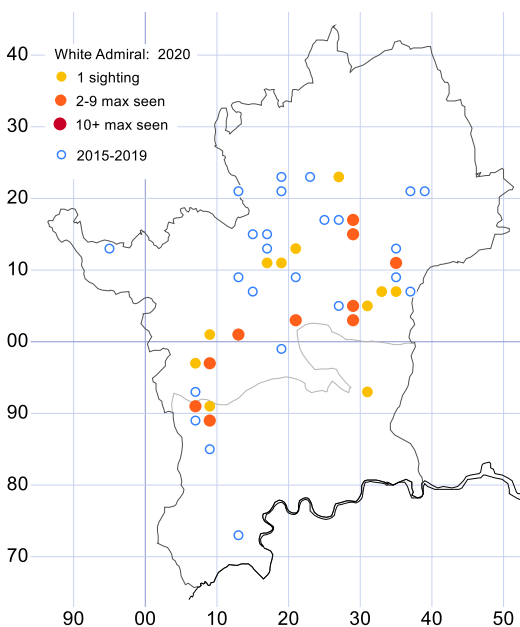


Photo Chris Benton

First: 9 Jun

Last: 21 Sep

Peak week: 18-24 Jun



Distribution % squares

2020	3% (21)
2019	2% (14)
2015-19 mean	3%

Abundance (transects)

2020	4
2019	3
2015-19 mean	5

Distribution change

Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Down 20% compared with 2015-2019

An interesting year for the White Admiral with some signs of a revival as recorded squares climbed back up to 2018's 21. However this total includes an odd record (specimen seen) of one found dead on the pavement at New Southgate in urban north London, one at Lemsford in central Hertfordshire, and one at Aston east of Stevenage, all three some way from a major woodland. Numbers were again poor at the traditional stronghold of Bricket Wood Common with a transect total of 4 (1 in 2019, 10 in 2018), whereas at the normally next best site of Balls Wood the totals were 16, 8 and 9 respectively. A rare partial second brood was noted at Danemead with one seen on 21 September.

Purple Emperor *Apatura iris*

Local and increasing in woodland

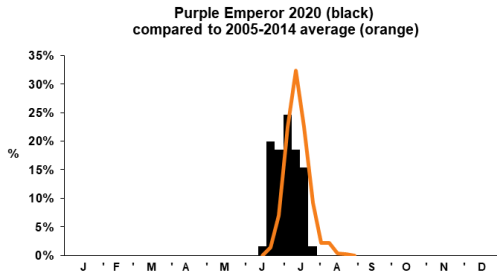
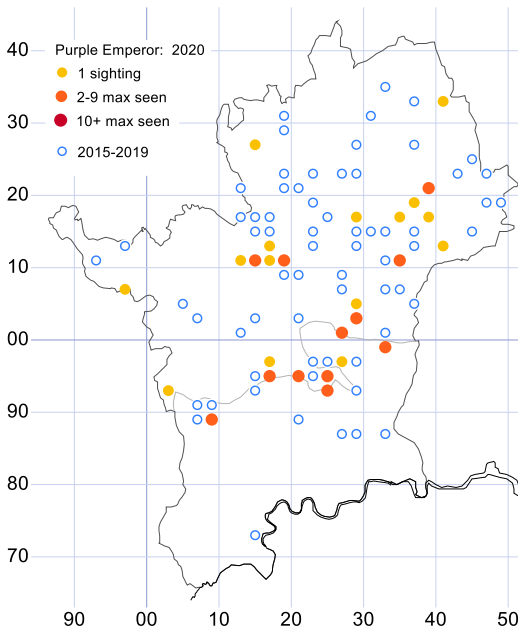


Photo Andrew Wood

First 16 Jun

Last 26 Jul

Peak week: 2-8 Jul



Distribution % squares

2020	4% (27)
2019	4% (25)
2015-19 mean	5%

Abundance (transects)

2020	2
2019	2
2015-19 mean	1

Distribution change

Down 20% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Up 50% compared with 2015-2019

Very little change in abundance or squares occupied compared to last year. The whole season was advanced with the start a week earlier and the end three weeks earlier, with none seen in August. As you would expect most were recorded in our major woodlands, but there were also some records outside these areas with records from Totteridge Green, Monken Hadley Common and Barnet Gate in north London, Berkhamsted in west Hertfordshire, Hilfield Park Reservoir in central Hertfordshire and Stanstead Abbots and High Cross in east Hertfordshire.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Common migrant/Resident

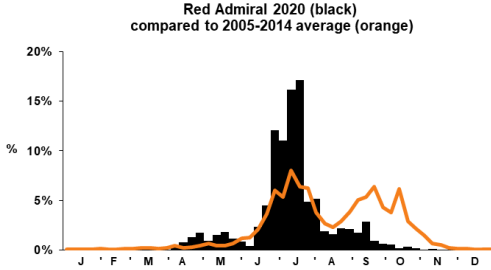
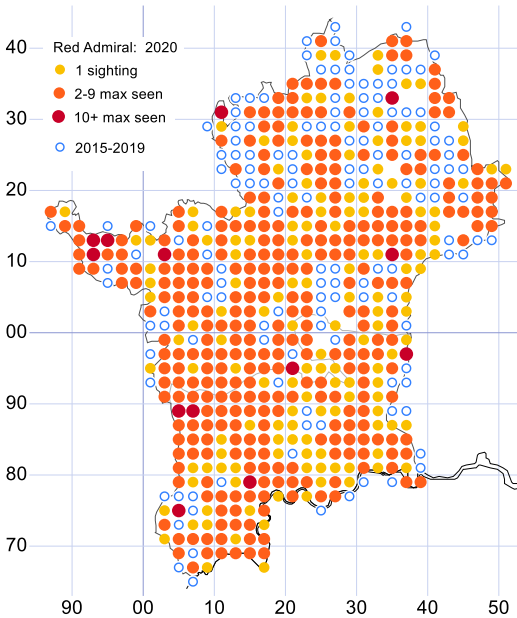


Photo Chris Benton



First: 9 Jan
Last: 9 Nov
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2020	81% (492)
2019	76% (470)
2015-19 mean	68%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	9
2019	11
2015-19 mean	9

Distribution change
Down 19% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

Despite distribution and abundance numbers being close to recent trends this was a very odd year for our commonest migrant butterfly. The flight pattern graph shows this well with a small number of spring records, probably over-wintering adults, followed by a large summer brood when they were commonly seen, especially in Middlesex. However as in 2019 there were few records beyond the end of September and again the autumn ivy was pretty well bereft of Red Admirals. This raises the same questions as I posed last year – lack of migration, poor breeding success, the weather or a mix of all three? It will be interesting to see what 2021 brings.

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Variable migrant

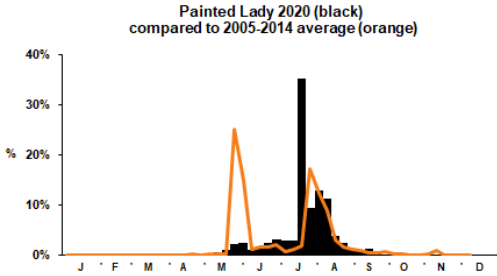
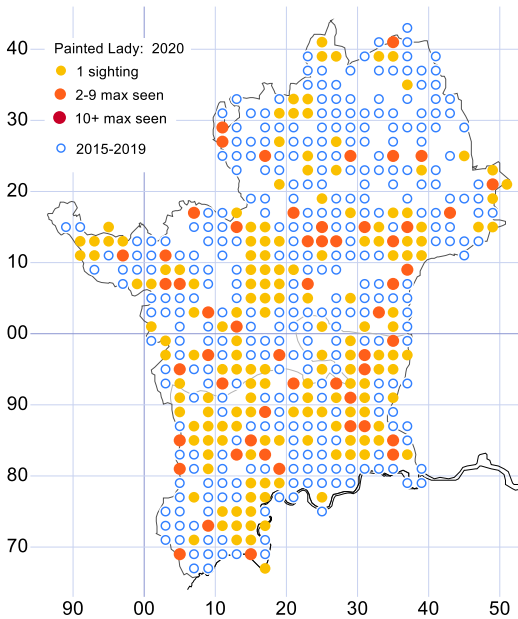


Photo Chris Benton



First: 14 Apr
Last: 7 Oct
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2020	35% (213)
2019	66% (408)
2015-19 mean	43%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	1
2019	9
2015-19 mean	4

Distribution change
Down 19% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 75% compared with 2015-2019

It is very unusual to get two Painted Lady years in a row and so 2020 proved with significant drops in abundance and distribution. However, it was by no means absent and the first examples were on the wing in mid-April which is quite early for a normal year - did any of 2019's manage to over-winter? There were steady sightings of single examples until mid-July when numbers seen at some sites increased to four and five at a time, suggesting migration rather than breeding of the scattered earlier adults. This was a short-lived peak and numbers quickly dropped back to ones and twos with no sign of further migration or breeding for the rest of the year.

Peacock *Inachis io*

Common & Widespread

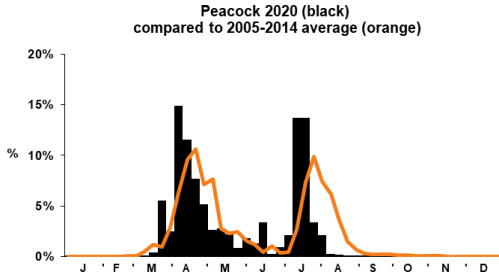
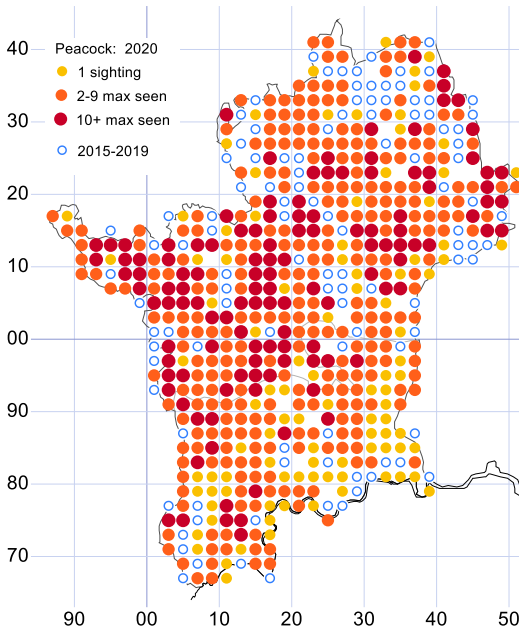


Photo Chris Benton

First: 3 Jan
Last: 17 Dec
Peak week: 2-8 Apr



Distribution % squares	
2020	85% (512)
2019	73% (449)
2015-19 mean	63%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	28
2019	23
2015-19 mean	20

Distribution change
Up 35% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 40% compared with 2015-2019

The data shows a successful year with a big spring emergence following the large numbers going into hibernation the previous August. This emergence started and peaked slightly earlier than usual, no doubt due to the unseasonably mild spring, and this led to a summer emergence that was also ahead of the curve. Between 24 May and 26 June larval nests were reported much more often than usual. Number seen dropped to virtually nothing after mid August as they finished going into hibernation, but this was followed by a small trickle of records from mid September into mid October - were these evidence of a partial second brood or just a reaction, by a few, to warmer days?

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Common & Widespread

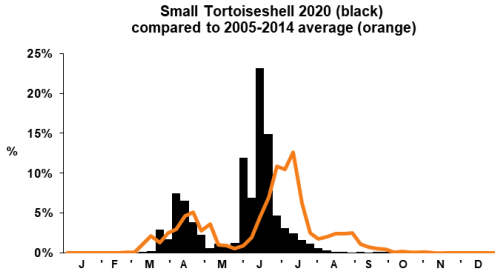
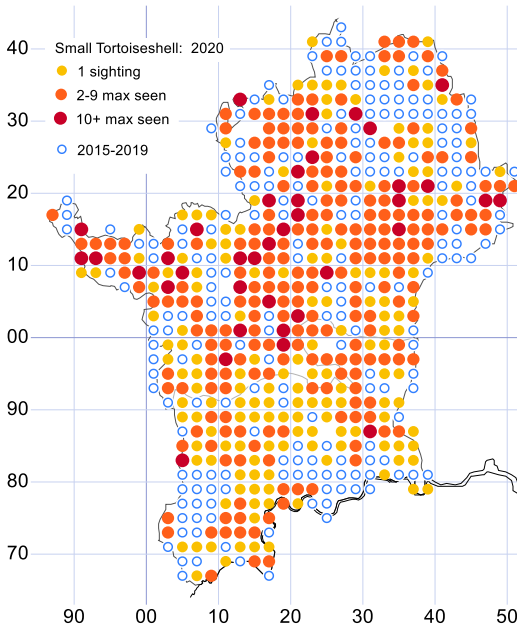


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 9 Jan

Last: 12 Nov

Peak week: 11-17 Jun



Distribution % squares

2020	70% (423)
2019	66% (410)
2015-19 mean	66%

Abundance (transects)

2020	16
2019	12
2015-19 mean	19

Distribution change

Up 6% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Down 15% compared with 2015-2019

Seen widely and with numbers recovering, this is probably an under-estimate as many would have been un-recorded on the missed transects during the spring lockdown. They were particularly in evidence during the early summer emergence - the offspring of the hibernating adults. This generation was on the wing well ahead of long-term trends and finished flying well before that trend. The small number of autumn butterflies suggests that they now enter hibernation, gradually during the summer. 22 June was a record early date for one to be hibernating in Malcolm Hull's shed, although some of this lack may also be attributable to the poorer late summer weather.

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Common & widespread

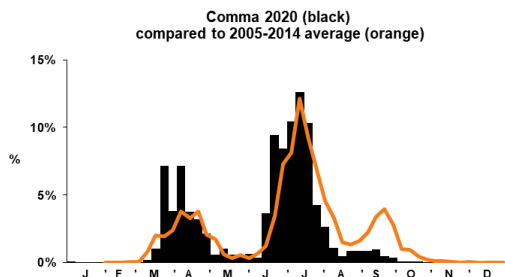
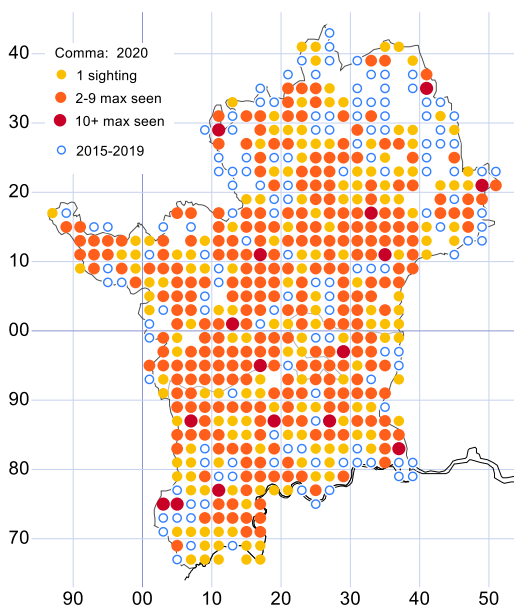


Photo Chris Benton

First: 4 Jan

Last: 19 Oct

Peak week: 9-15 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2020	77% (463)
2019	63% (386)
2015-19 mean	64%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	13
2019	11
2015-19 mean	15

Distribution change
Up 20% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 14% compared with 2015-2019

Like closely related species, the numbers for the Comma look good, but like several of them there was a sudden drop off in adults seen at the end of the summer, with only a small late brood emerging. This could be due to the poor late summer weather impeding breeding success or is there a trend, like the Small Tortoiseshell of going into hibernation early? As the Comma generally does not hibernate in buildings, this is very difficult to monitor. Some evidence may emerge when we see how large the post hibernation flight is in spring 2021.

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Widespread & common

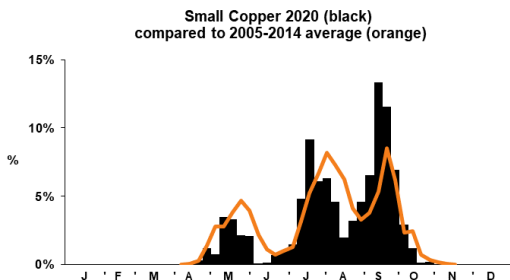
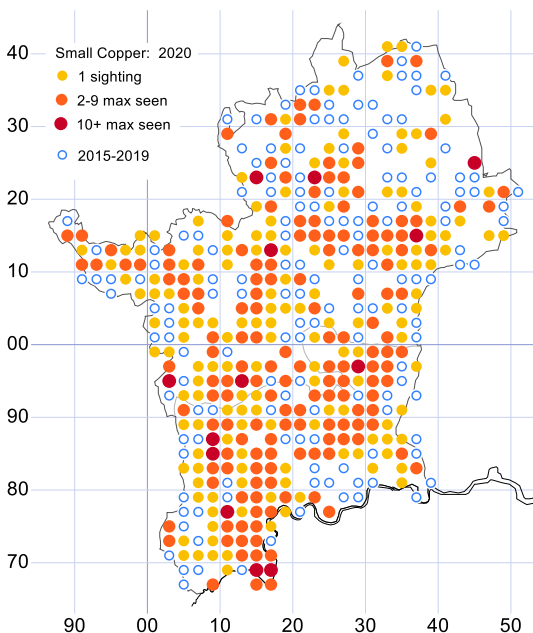


Photo Chris Benton

First: 21 Apr

Last: 22 Oct

Peak week: 10–16 Sep



Distribution % squares	
2020	54% (328)
2019	36% (220)
2015-19 mean	32%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	14
2019	11
2015-19 mean	10

Distribution change
Up 69% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 40% compared with 2015-2019

Small Copper continued to improve from the lows of a few years ago and it is now widely distributed and seen in good numbers. The three generations show the increasing breeding success of the previous one and the poor late summer weather appeared to have no effect on it. The peak week was in mid-September rather than 2019’s late spring. Nomansland Common continues to be by far the best site to see larger numbers of this species.

Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae*

Very rare & restricted

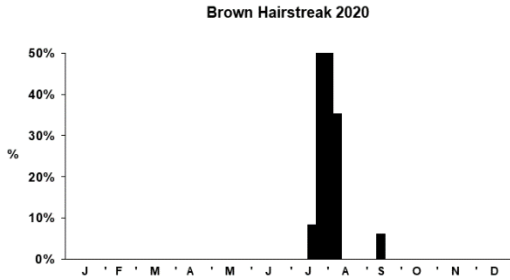
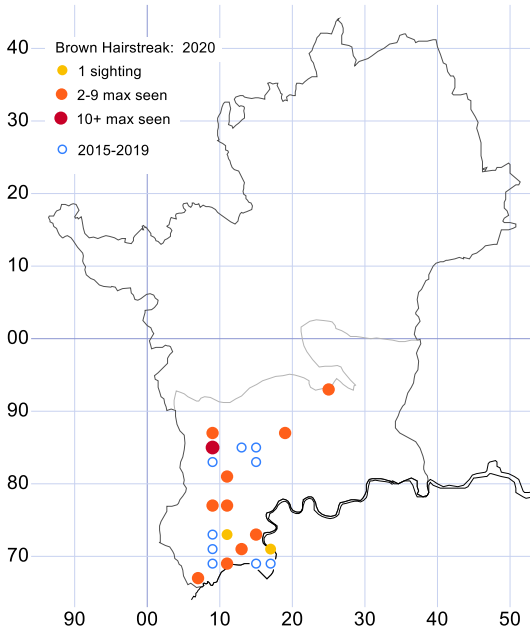


Photo Sharon Newson

First: 17 Jul

Last: 11 Sep

Peak week: 30 Jul - 5 Aug



Distribution % squares	
2020	2% (13)
2019	1% (10)
2015-19 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	No data
2019	No data
2015-19 mean	No data

Distribution change	
Insufficient data	

Abundance change	
No data	

This year most records were of adults (with a flight period advanced by about 10 days compared to 2019), as more observers visited the areas between Ickenham and Ruislip Gardens in north west Middlesex. However, winter egg hunts found them in double figures around the site. The branch is currently working with the site owners to introduce more sympathetic management. It was also recorded as eggs or adults in much smaller numbers at several other west Middlesex sites such as Cranebank LNR, Feltham, Fryent County Park and sites in Hayes and Hounslow. There was a month's gap between the last few records in the second week of September and the previous sightings in the same week of August probably reflects recorders not venturing out in poorer weather.

Purple Hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*

Common around oaks

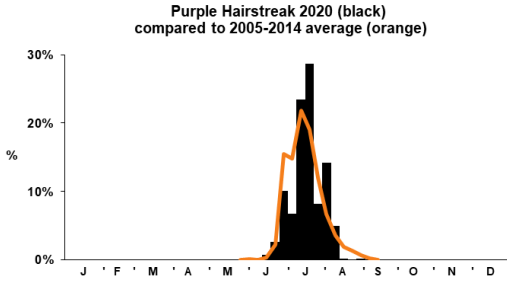
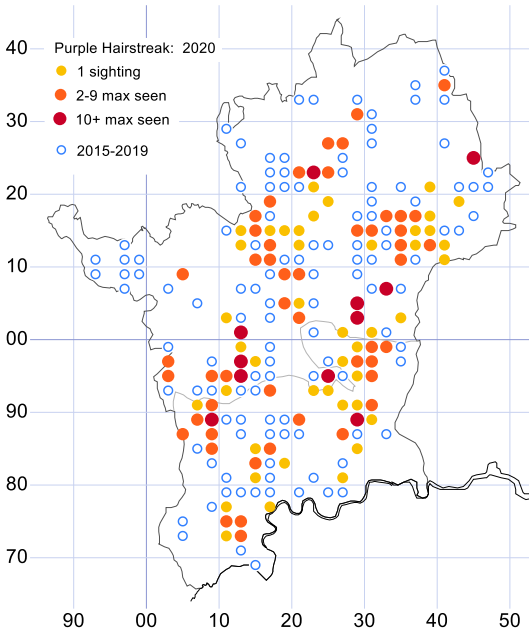


Photo Chris Benton



First: 2 Jun

Last: 1 Sep

Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2020	17% (103)
2019	11% (70)
2015-19 mean	13%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	13
2019	5
2015-19 mean	7

Distribution change	
Up 31% compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Up 84% compared with 2015-2019	

Purple Hairstreak was widely recorded across both counties with numbers well up on both 2019 and the longer-term. Unlike many species the peak flight period was two weeks later than 2019 and the whole flight period was a close match to the longer-term average, apart from a drop in numbers during the poor late summer weather.

Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Very rare & restricted

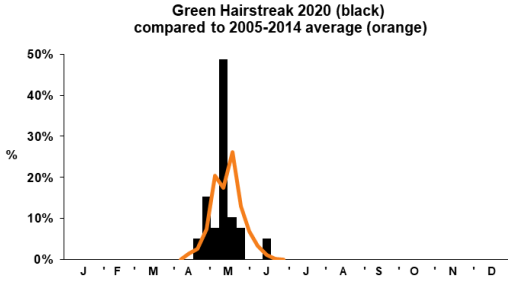
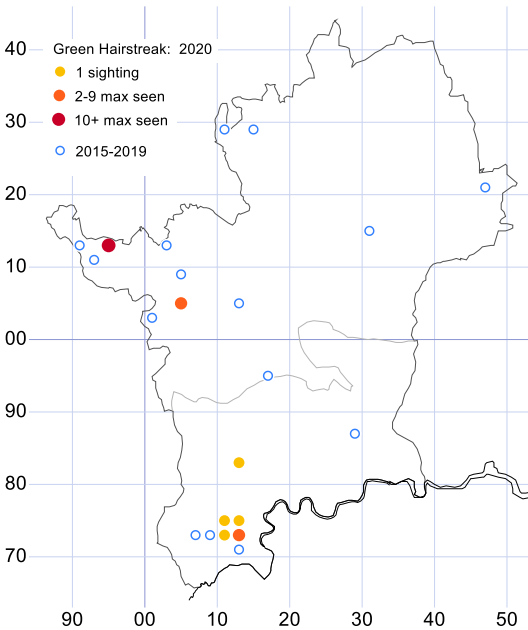


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 21 Apr

Last: 13 Jun

Peak week: 7–13 May



Distribution % squares	
2020	1% (7)
2019	2% (12)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	3
2019	5
2015-19 mean	4

Distribution change	
Down 50% compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Down 25% compared with 2015-2019	

The increase in recorded sites came to an end in 2020, though with a spring flight some sites may have been under-recorded during the lockdown. In Hertfordshire, the sites at Aldbury Nowers and Roughdown Common are represented but there were no sightings and no visits in the spring until late-May to Hexton or Telegraph Hill. There were also records from the Middlesex strongholds around Feltham/Hounslow Heath. The only new site was a record from a bit further north in a garden in Greenford which may be a wanderer.

White-letter Hairstreak *Satyrrium w-album*

Common around elm

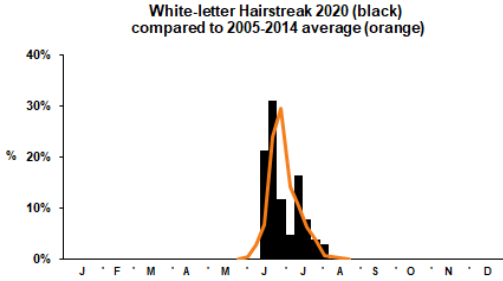
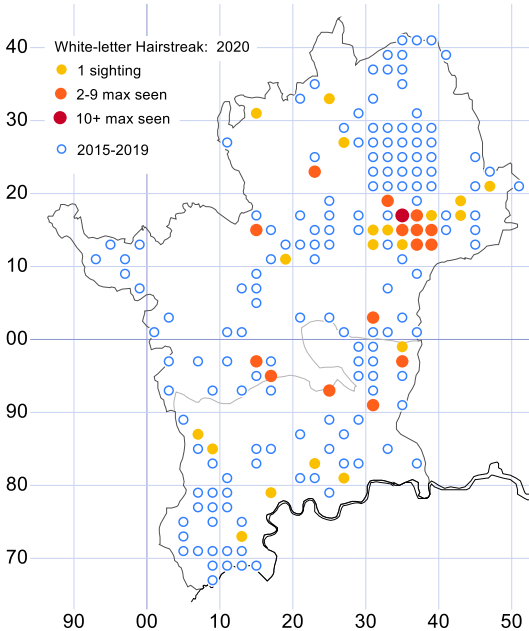


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 13 Jun
Last: 3 Aug
Peak week: 18-24 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2020	6% (35)
2019	8% (49)
2015-19 mean	9%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	1
2019	2
2015-19 mean	2

Distribution change
Down 33% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 50% compared with 2015-2019

It was not a good year for White-letter Hairstreak, though this must be set against the restricted area available for two of its most assiduous seekers to operate in. The flight period was about a week later than 2019, but the peak was slightly ahead of the longer-term curve. Surveys in the St Albans area suggested that there is a continued decline, but other areas surveyed such as around Ware showed it to be present there in good numbers. There is a need to survey and monitor this species to establish its current status.

Small Blue *Cupido minimus*

Very rare & restricted

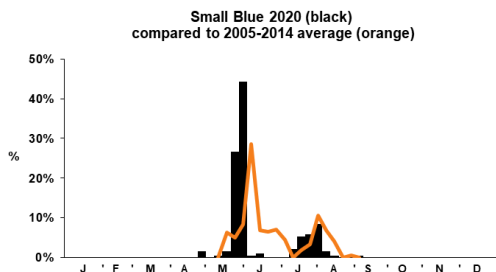
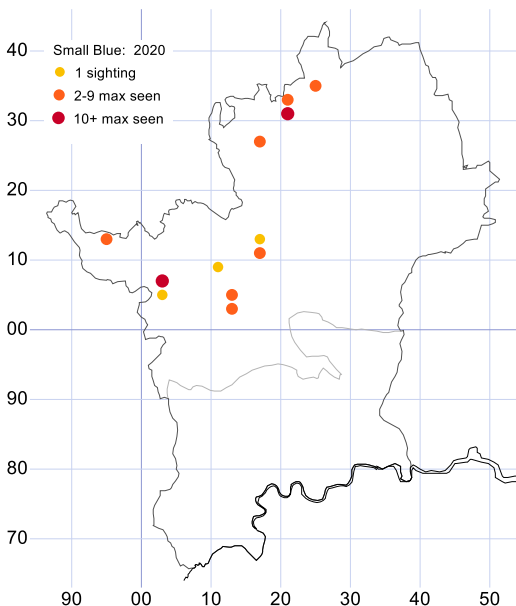


Photo Chris benton

First: 24 Apr
Last: 9 Sep
Peak week: 28 May–3 Jun



Distribution % squares	
2020	2% (13)
2019	2% (12)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	7
2019	7
2015-19 mean	89

Distribution change	
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Too little data to calculate	

As the flight chart shows the mild spring encouraged an early emergence and peak for the Small Blue, following which the summer brood, as always much smaller, was also a little ahead of the usual dates. The drop in abundance is misleading as the data for 2015-2019 includes the Butterfly World transect which was the major site for this species until its closure stopped the transect after 2016. The highest counts of 24 and 21 were noted in the fields behind Hillbrow in Letchworth and the A41 Bourne End Junction. New sites were Butterfield LNR at Wheathampstead and, after many years of checking the chalk land north of Clothall Common on the kidney vetch planted as part of the Baldock bypass construction.

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Widespread & common

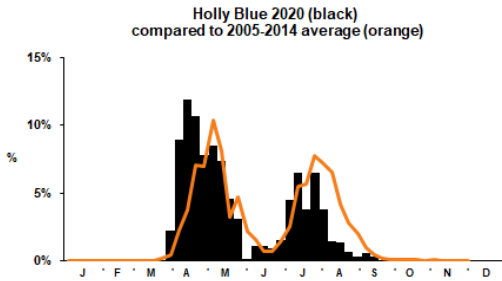
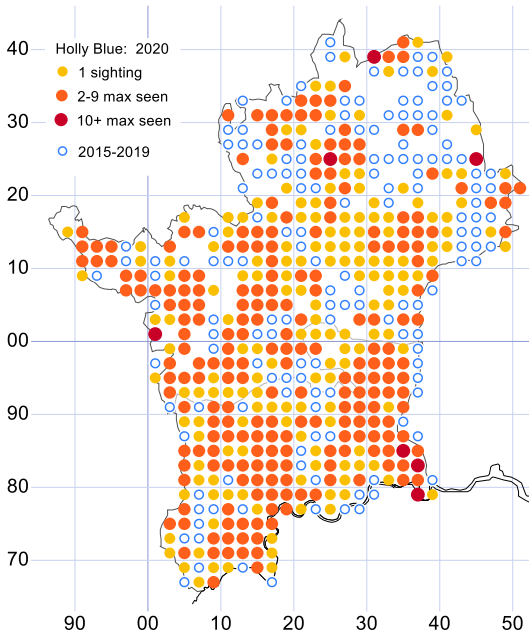


Photo Chris Benton

First 8 Jan

Last: 7 Nov

Peak week: 16-22 Apr



Distribution % squares

2020	67% (404)
2019	48% (299)
2015-19 mean	55%

Abundance (transects)

2020	9
2019	10
2015-19 mean	13

Distribution change

Up 22% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Down 31% compared with 2015-2019

The Holly Blue was widely observed during 2020 with the spring generation stronger than the summer one just as it was last year. The first record on 8 January, seen fluttering around an ivy hedge on the edge of Hertford was remarkably early, the next earliest was 23 March. There were three records in late October/early November representing a very small partial third generation. As usual this butterfly was found most densely in the Middlesex area rather than the more rural parts of Hertfordshire.

Brown Argus *Aricia agesthis*

Widely distributed

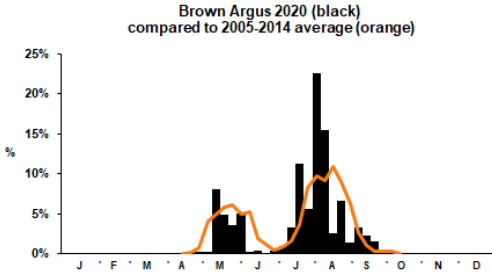
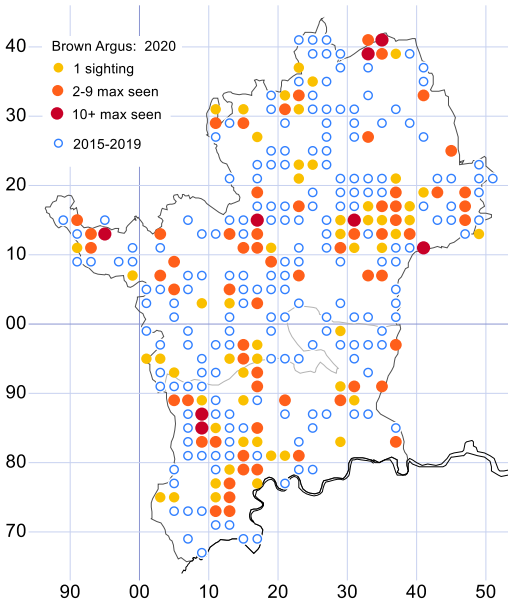


Photo Chris Benton

First: 23 Apr
Last: 28 Sep
Peak week: 30 Jul–5 Aug



Distribution % squares	
2020	21% (121)
2019	24% (146)
2015-19 mean	20%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	9
2019	16
2015-19 mean	15

Distribution change	
Up 5% compared with 2015-2019	

Abundance change	
Down 40% compared with 2015-2019	

A small drop in distribution since last year, the rather larger drop in abundance, is possibly misleading as it may reflect the lack of transect records during its spring flight period due to lockdown. As is normal, the second brood was larger than the first with an early peak, followed by numbers dropping in the poorer later summer weather, although the last recorded date was five days later than last year.

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Widespread & common

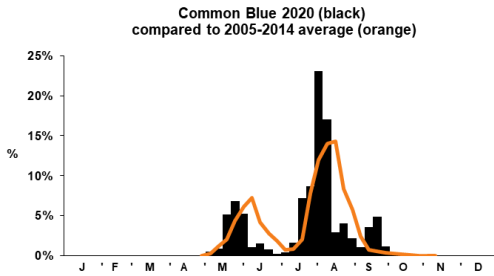
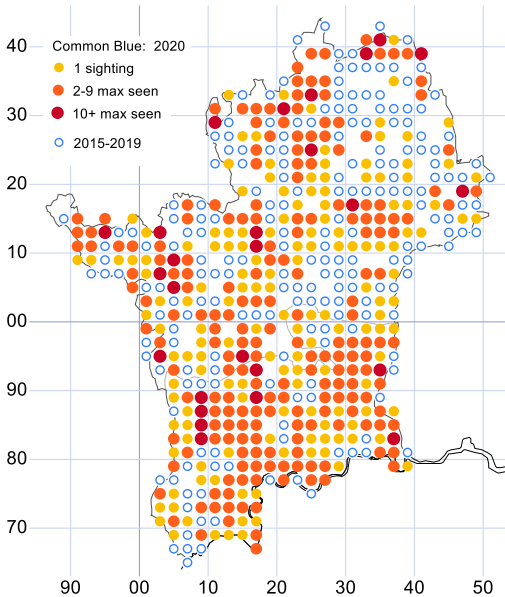


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 2 May

Last: 16 Oct

Peak week: 30 Jul -5 Aug



Distribution % squares

2020	62% (377)
2019	52% (322)
2015-19 mean	54%

Abundance (transects)

2020	19
2019	21
2015-19 mean	38

Distribution change

Up 11% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change

Down 50% compared with 2015-2019

The Common Blue's distribution gives no cause for worry, whereas the abundance is well down on the longer-term average, although some of this drop may be explained by the lack of spring transect recording. The high early peak in the summer brood followed by a steep drop off reflects the poor later summer weather, the third peak representing the better conditions for flight and observation in mid-September rather than a small third generation. As in previous years the filtering of early records of this species from Holly Blues has been problematic. I require firm evidence of this species to substantiate April records.

Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus*

Probable undocumented release

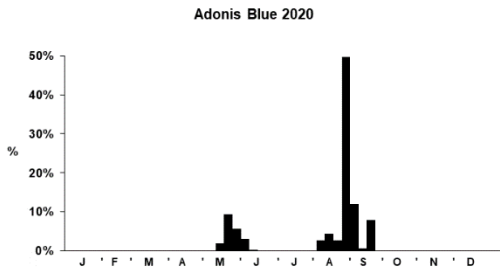
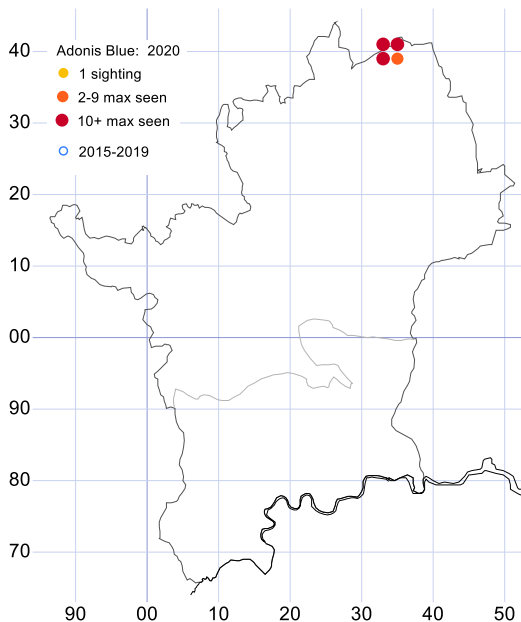


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 8 May
 Last: 15 Sep
 Peak week: 30 Jul - 5 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2020	>1% (4)
2019	>1% (3)
2015-19 mean	>1%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	12
2019	2
2015-19 mean	2

Distribution change	
Too little data to calculate	

Abundance change	
Up by 600% compared with 2015-2019	

This species appeared in August 2019 at Church Hill, Therfield Heath, almost certainly as the result of an undocumented release. These gave rise to a spring brood that emerged on 8 May and was on the wing until 9 June, with a maximum of 21 recorded. The second brood was first noted on 3 August and flew almost 6 weeks. It has also spread across much of the Heath and was found in some numbers around the edge of the golf course and across to the Rifle Range area.

Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon*

Common at known chalk sites

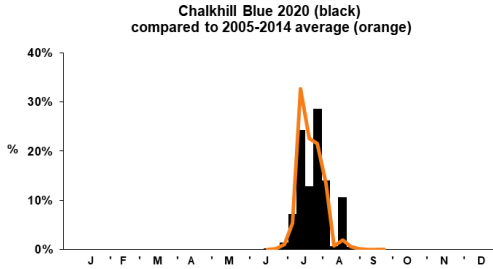
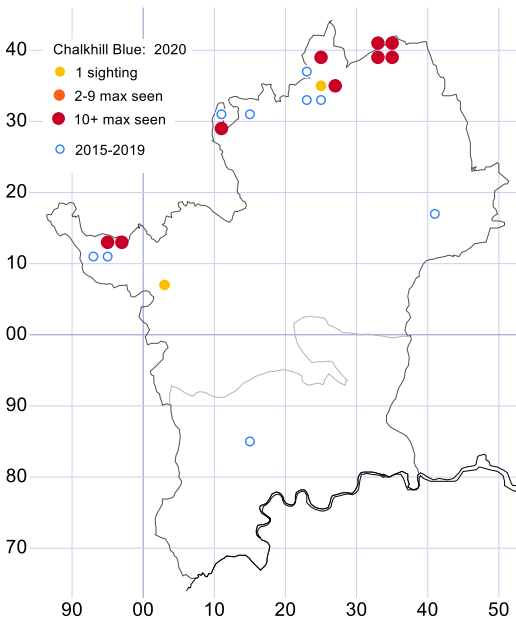


Photo Chris Benton

First: 22 Jun
Last: 10 Sep
Peak week: 30 Jul- 5 Aug



Distribution % squares	
2020	2% (11)
2019	2% (11)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2020	95
2019	79
2015-19 mean	188

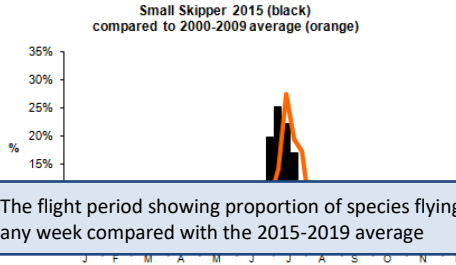
Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 49% compared with 2015-2019

There was some recovery in numbers in 2020 and it is worth noting that although the abundance figure is only about half of the recent trends, it was almost the same as the 2010-2014 abundance. It was found at all its usual sites, but there was little sign of dispersion apart from one seen at Shrubhill Common in Hemel Hempstead. The recent colony on the grasslands north of Clothall Common on the edge of Baldock seems well established with a count of 41 on 21 July. At Hexton Chalkpit there was a recovery in numbers with my annual count route giving a total of 88 after a couple of years of totals around 30.

Key to the Species pages
Common Name *Scientific name*

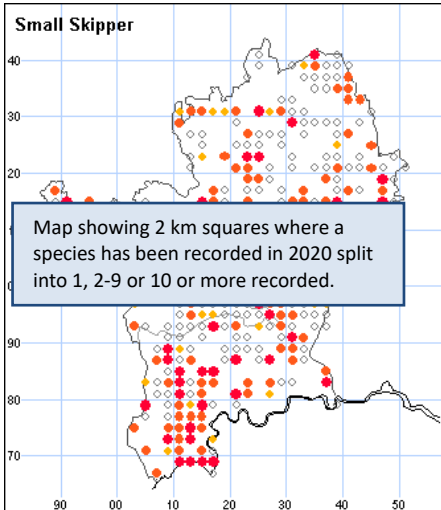
Widespread but declining



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 2015-2019 average



Map showing 2 km squares where a species has been recorded in 2020 split into 1, 2-9 or 10 or more recorded.

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

Distribution % squares

2020	30% (155)
2020	
2015-19 mean	
Abundance	
2020	
2020	
2015-19 mean	
Distribution	
Up 3% compared to 2015-2019	

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

Abundance change

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

Our branch website <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/> has a very active sightings page and we welcome all submissions. Anything, sent there or submitted via the 'iRecord' apps or the Big Butterfly Count, once verified, is added to the branch database, and used in this report

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