Hertfordshire & Middlesex Butterflies 2024

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Andrew Wood

February 2025

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Front cover image Small Tortoiseshell by Andrew Wood

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Introduction

Welcome to our 30th annual report on butterflies in our area. We are grateful to everyone who has submitted records for 2024 (and earlier years). If you still have records from previous years, we are very happy to add them to the county database as every bit of information helps to build up a picture of how butterflies are faring. Butterflies react very quickly to environmental changes, so all this data is important in looking at the wider health of the climate and the environment.

Please submit your records using the iRecord, iRecord Butterflies, Butterflies for the New Millennium, iNaturalist, BTO BirdTrack and Garden Butterfly Survey apps. These are verified, then added to the branch database and used in this report. We also have data

from 102 butterfly transect routes. You are also welcome to send records direct to me, preferably in a spreadsheet format. These should have columns for grid reference, site name, date, species and number and stage(s) seen.
Big Butterfly Count data is used in the distribution of species but is not used for the flight charts as this survey covers only three weeks in high summer and to include it would unduly skew them.

Weather summary

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January	Sunnier than average, cold early on, milder later with average rainfall.	July	Cold start but warm end, almost a 1/3 more rain than average and below average sunshine.
February	Warmest February on record, very dull with over 200% of average rainfall.	August	Warmer than average but only 50% of normal rainfall with average sunshine amounts.
March	Very wet and mild but dull.	September	Slightly warmer than average but over twice the normal rainfall and only 80% of the sunshine.
April	Very wet and dull with near average temperatures.	October	Mild but dull and slightly wetter than average.
May	Below average sunshine, above average rainfall but some very warm days.	November	Near average temperatures but gloomy and wet.
June	Very dry, despite a warm end below average temperatures but average sunshine.	December	Cold and dull in the first half, milder and brighter mid-month and dull and still towards the end.

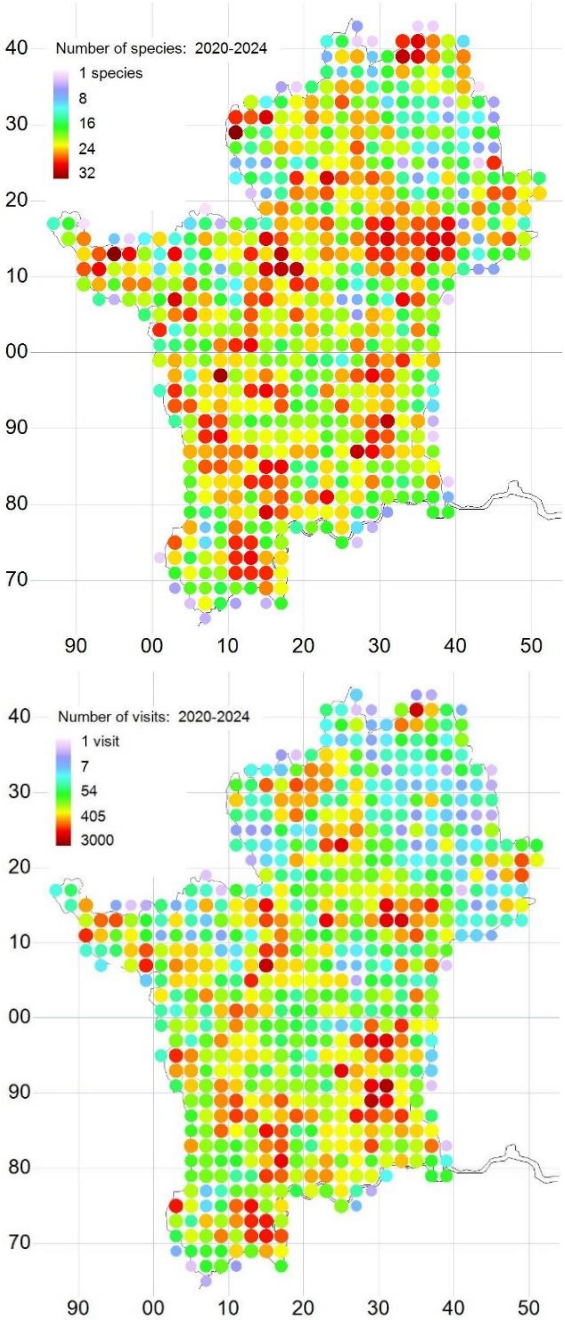
Overview

Meteorological Office information above shows that 2024 was rather dull and wet giving very poor conditions for butterflies to be active, feed and breed. More locally Rothamsted reported that 2024 was one of the wetter years on record, but also one of the warmest. Butterfly activity started early with records during mid-February of emerging hibernating adults. After that, the spring was dull and cool, and many species started emerging later than both 2023 and earlier years. Many species were recorded in lower numbers and in fewer 2km squares than recent years.

Recording Effort

This is the final year of the five year 2020 -2024 survey. In 2024 we received records from 3055 recorders who submitted 50299 records from 600 2 km squares. Overall, for this survey period, we have records from 681 2km squares. The next two maps show the

number of species recorded (top) and number of recorder visits (bottom) for each square in 2020-2024.



Our Area

The inner London boroughs were included in the Big City Butterflies project, one of whose aims was to increase recording in these most built up of areas.

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

Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa*	Hampton Court Park, Middx 24 June 2024
Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*	Bushey Open Space, Herts 29 Jul 2024 Minet Country Park, Middx 21 Aug 2024 Near Heathrow T5, Middx 3 Sep 2024 Northfields, Middx 16 Sep 2024
Monarch *Danaus plexippus*	Bricket Wood Herts, 7 Aug 2024

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

Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*

Restricted and rare

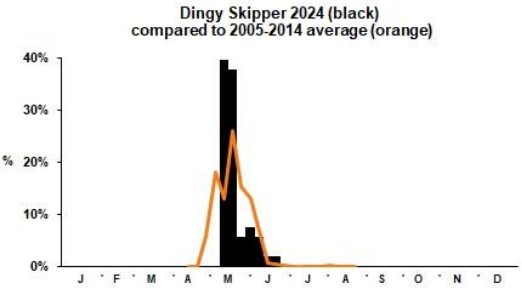
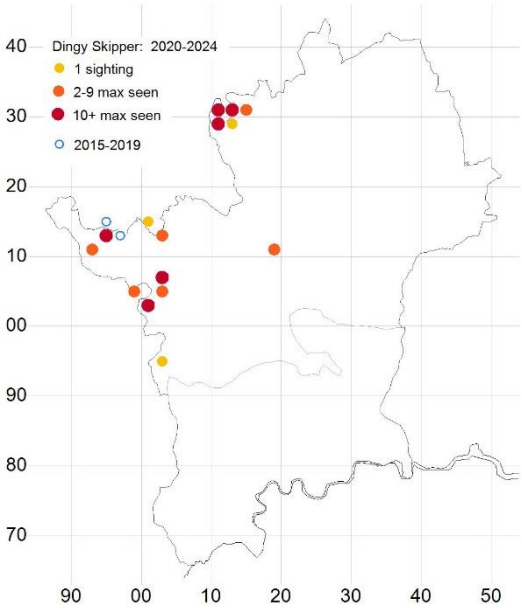


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 9 May
Last: 26 Jun
Peak week: 7-14 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	1% (5)
2023	1% (10)
2015-19 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	4
2023	5
2015-19 mean	9

Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 55% compared with 2015-2019

There were no new sites away from known areas identified in 2024, but it was found on the Hexton Hills estate recently purchased by Natural England. This is very close to the well-known Hexton Chalkpit site. It was also recorded at 2023's new site away from the chalk in central Hertfordshire There was a further abundance drop on transects, though this was not massive and may have been a function of the weather rather than a real fall in abundance. However, it does mean that its abundance is now below half of that in the previous recording period. The flight period was very much concentrated in mid-May but this may be because of otherwise poor weather for recording.

Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*

Restricted & rare

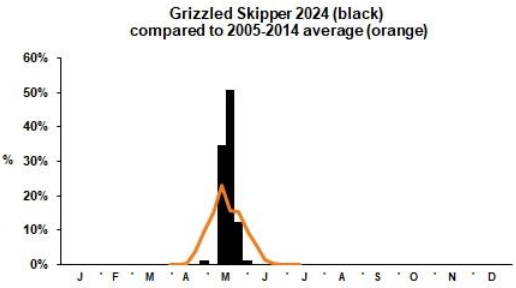
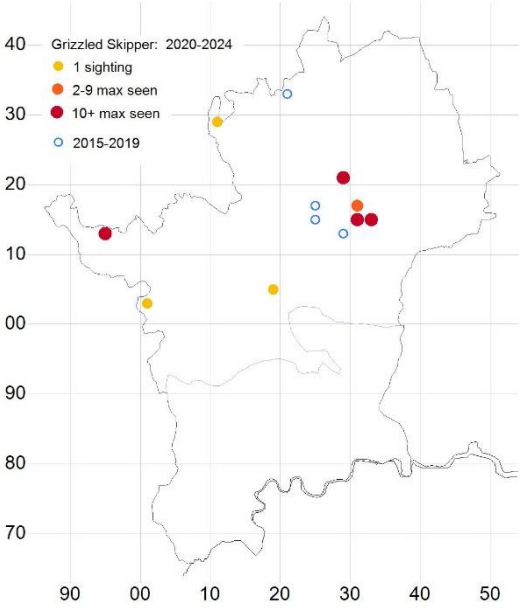


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 26 Apr
Last: 30 May
Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	1% (5)
2023	1% (6)
2015-19 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	5
2023	3
2015-19 mean	8

Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 38% compared with 2015-2019

The poor spring meant that the flight period was concentrated in the middle parts of May with a duration of only five weeks. There were no double figured counts of adults. In the Beane Valley we were able to find a number of eggs on the underside of agrimony plants (much easier to search than the ground hugging strawberry and cinquefoil). However we were unable to find any subsequent larval webs.

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

Widespread

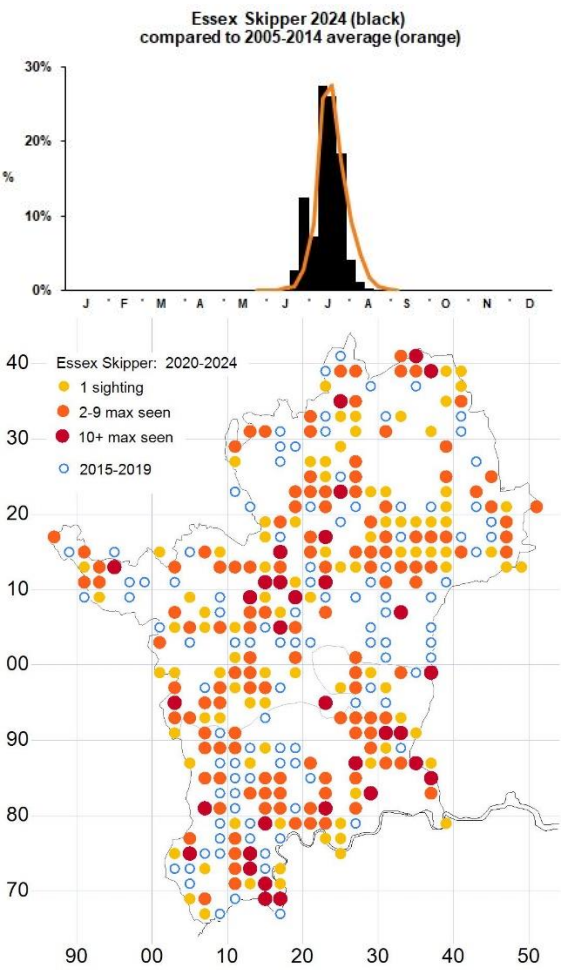


Photo Dee Cullen

First: 18 Jun
Last: 27 Aug
Peak week: 9-15 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	16% (94)
2023	20% (123)
2015-19 mean	17%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	12
2023	15
2015-19 mean	10

Distribution change
Down 6% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 20% compared with 2015-2019

The abundance number remains above the longer-term figure but is a drop from last year. However, its distribution has dropped back to the longer-term rate. Nevertheless, it appears that this species has managed to continue its recovery, or at least, stabilisation. It began flying slightly earlier than 2023 but peaked a week later, but generally it is one of the species that begins flying earlier and finishes later than in the 2005 to 2014 period.

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Widespread but recently declining

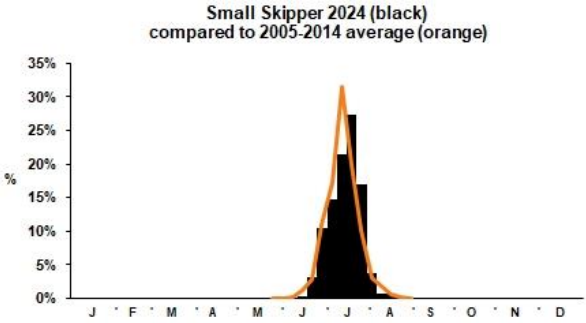
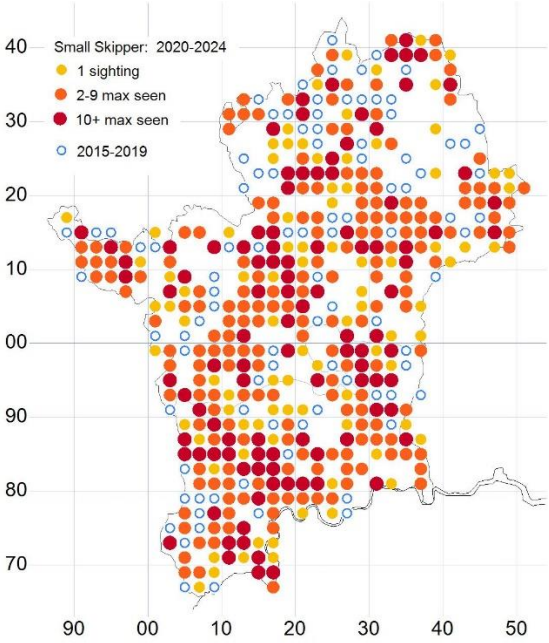


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 15 Jun
Last: 17 Aug
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	26% (157)
2023	31% (183)
2015-19 mean	26%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	15
2023	27
2015-19 mean	20

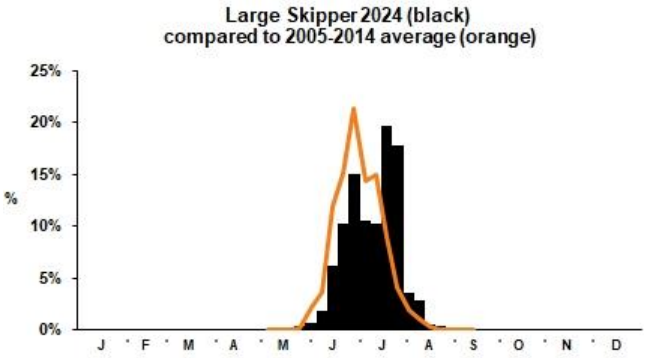
Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 25% compared with 2015-2019

The Small Skipper retains a similar distribution compared with the previous five year survey. Less reassuring was the big drop in abundance to not far off half of 2023 and a quarter down on the longer-term. This is a different trend to the Essex Skipper and may reflect the way in which their winter stages differ; the Small as a larva and the Essex as an egg and perhaps less exposed to predation and inclement weather

Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus*

Widespread but recently declining



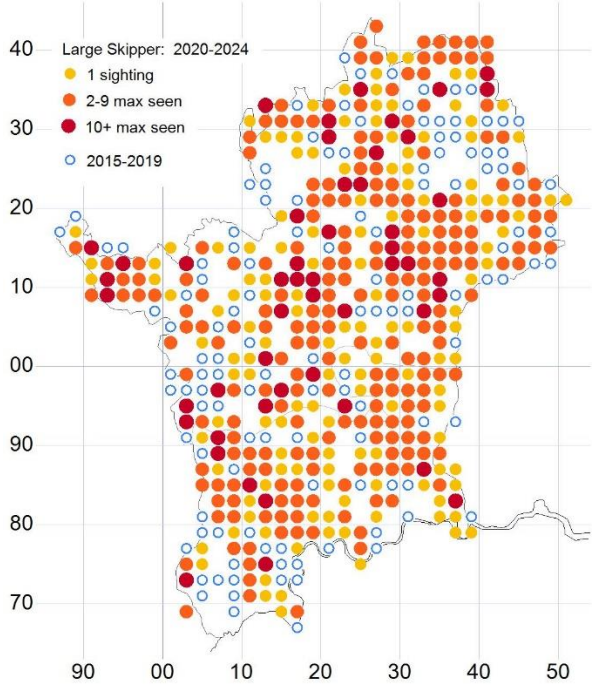


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 20 May
Last: 23 Aug
Peak week: 16 Jul-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	26% (154)
2023	32% (196))
2015-19 mean	35%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	11
2023	18
2015-19 mean	19

Distribution change
Down 23% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 40% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance and distribution continued to drop in 2024, some of this may be weather related but the falls are too large to be totally accounted for by this factor. It is still the most widespread golden skipper over this five year period. As last year the largest counts were from woodland sites where the males take advantage of shrubs along rides to perch and keep a watch on their territory. Unlike the Small and Essex Skipper, they behave in a much more solitary rather than colonial way.

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Widespread & common

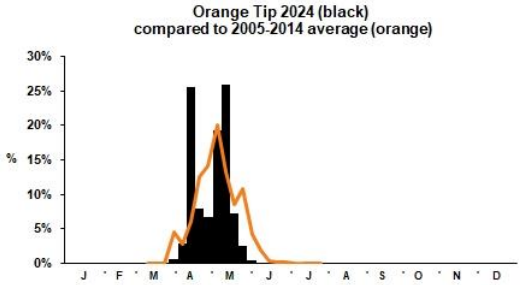
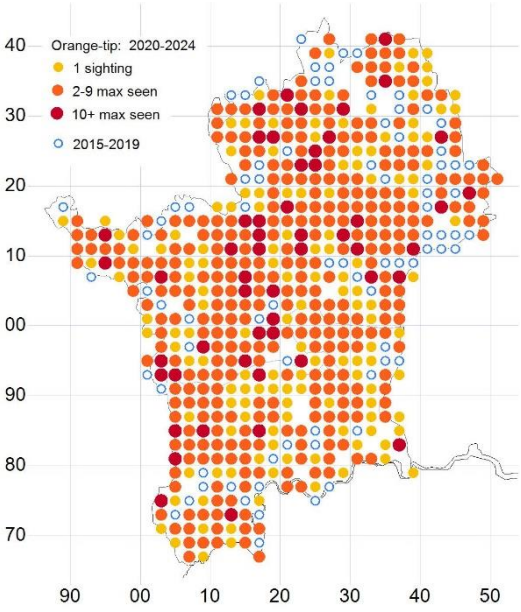


Photo Chris Benton



First: 30 Mar
Last: 29 Jun
Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	43% (255)
2023	45% (276)
2015-19 mean	42%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	8
2023	11
2015-19 mean	16

Distribution change
Up 3% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 50% compared with 2015-2019

A much shorter flight period than 2023 with the first individual not on the wing until late March and no definitively identified adults after the end of June. Although it continues to be widely distributed its abundance fell below last year and was only half of the longer-term average. Some of this may reflect the poor spring weather, but the trend is worrying.

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Widespread & common

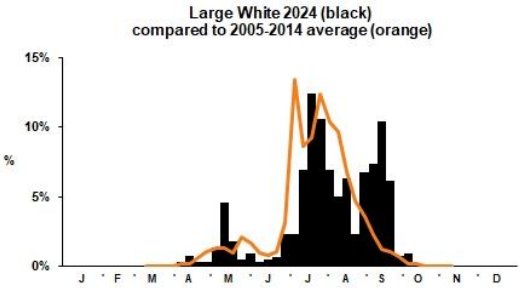
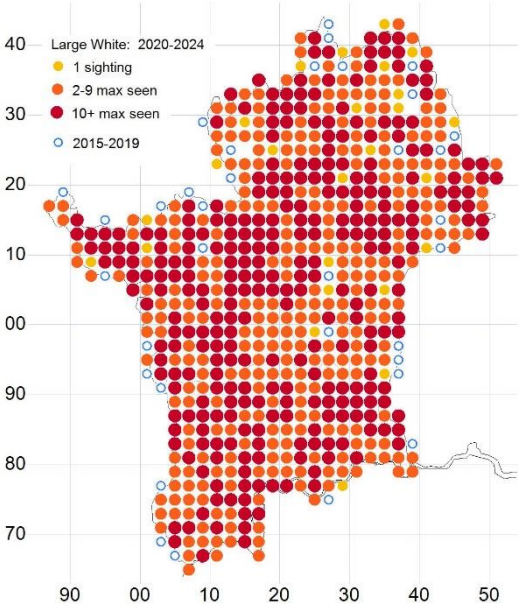


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 17 Mar
Last: 7 Nov
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	83% (499)
2023	85% (527)
2015-19 mean	77%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	32
2023	33
2015-19 mean	47

Distribution change
Up 8% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 31% compared with 2015-2019

The Large White had been very common up to 2023 and it continued to be widespread but at a slightly lower level than in previous years. Unusually there were three flight peaks. The first was very sharp and probably reflects butterfly and recorder activity in a brief good spell of spring weather. The summer peak was pretty typical but there was then an autumn peak in activity. It would seem possible that this may have been caused by an influx from Europe. Most of the double figure counts were during this period when there was considerable activity observed over brassica fields.

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Widespread & common

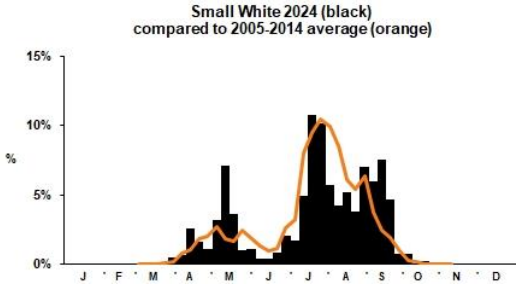
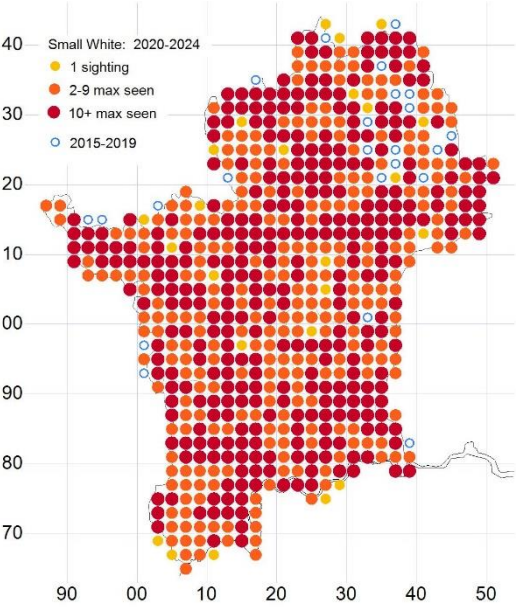


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 15 Feb
Last: 27 Oct
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	84% (505)
2023	87% (542)
2015-19 mean	80%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	33
2023	57
2015-19 mean	64

Distribution change
Up 5% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 48% compared with 2015-2019

The Small White is the first of the whites to fly and there was an early emergence in a brief mild spell in February. The fall in distribution compared to 2023 was similar to the Large White, but the abundance drop was much greater and is well below the longer-term. There were no huge counts from any site.

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Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Widespread & common

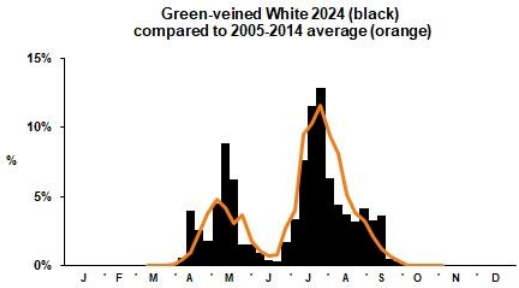
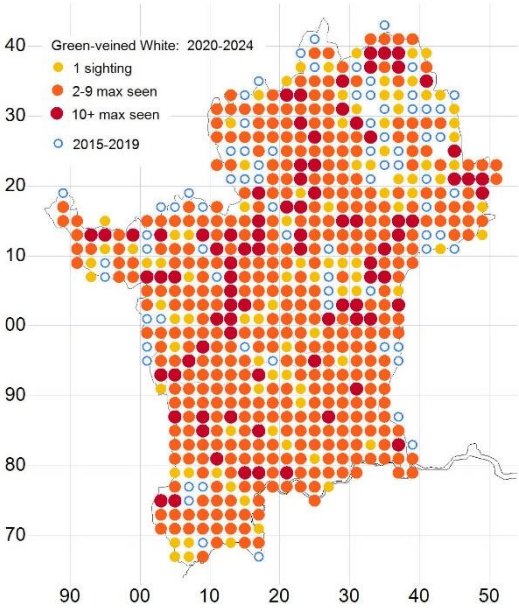


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 30 Mar
Last: 22 Oct
Peak week: 23-29 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	60% (359)
2023	62% (381)
2015-19 mean	58%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	22
2023	34
2015-19 mean	38

Distribution change
Up 3% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 42% compared with 2015-2019

This species shows similar short and longer-term trends to the other whites. The two broods were similar in size and timing to the longer-term trends too. The two peaks in the spring brood probably reflect the poor weather conditions rather than anything more complex.

Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

Less common migrant

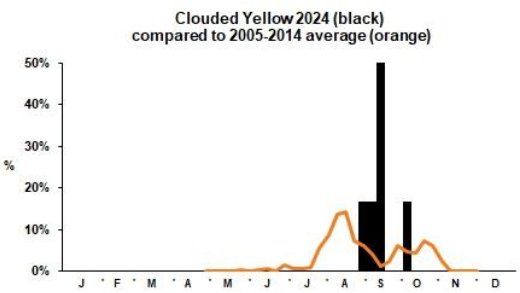
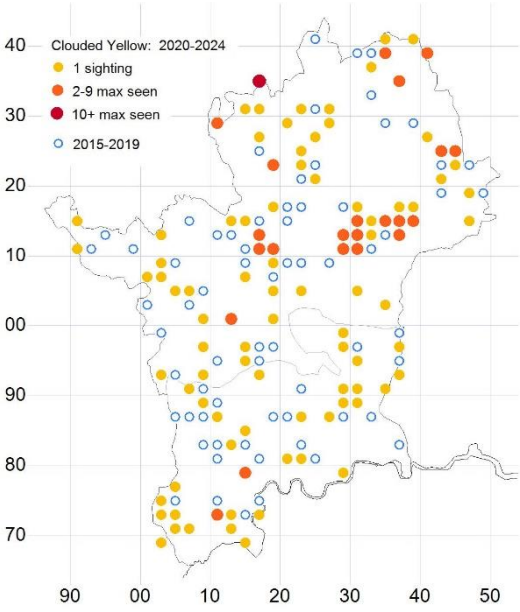


Photo Dave Miller



First: 1 May
Last: 7 Oct
Peak week: 10-16 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2024	1% (5)
2023	2% (9)
2015-19 mean	4%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	0
2023	1
2015-19 mean	1

Distribution change
Down 75% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

The Clouded Yellow was not common in 2024 with only six records compared to 2023's thirty which was also a low total. Not surprisingly there is no calculable abundance figure as none were seen on transect walks. Its abundance in our area relies on migration from Europe which depends to some extent on weather conditions there. Clearly they were not conducive to movement. Dave Miller's striking photo of one near Heathrow is unusual as the species normally rests with its wings firmly closed.

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Widespread

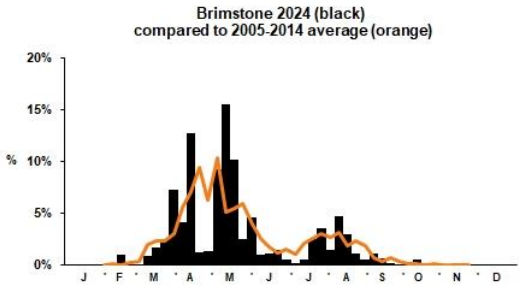
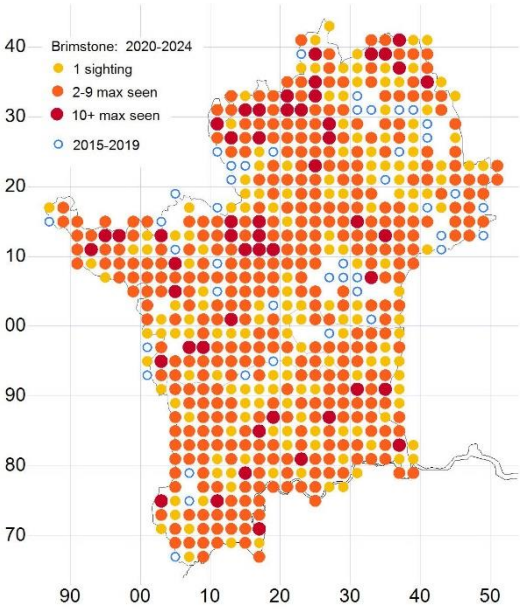


Photo Chris Benton



First: 25 Jan
Last: 31 Oct
Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	63% (379)
2023	65% (401)
2015-19 mean	53%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	22
2023	28
2015-19 mean	19

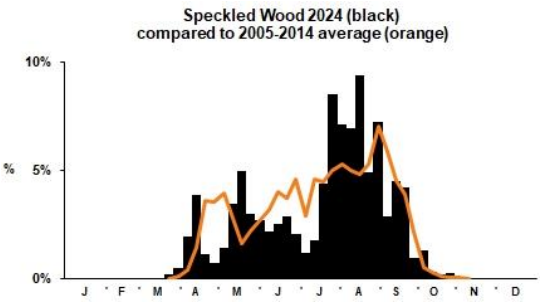
Distribution change
Up 19% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 16% compared with 2015-2019

The spring weather gave us a much later first flight date and numbers peaked a week earlier than 2023. Even with these fluctuations the Brimstone remains one of our most consistent species in distribution and abundance. As in the last two years there was a small, but noticeable, rise in sightings in the autumn. This is beginning to look like a trend to a very small partial second generation. Though as noted previously it could also be a small degree of temporary emergence from hibernation.

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Widespread & common



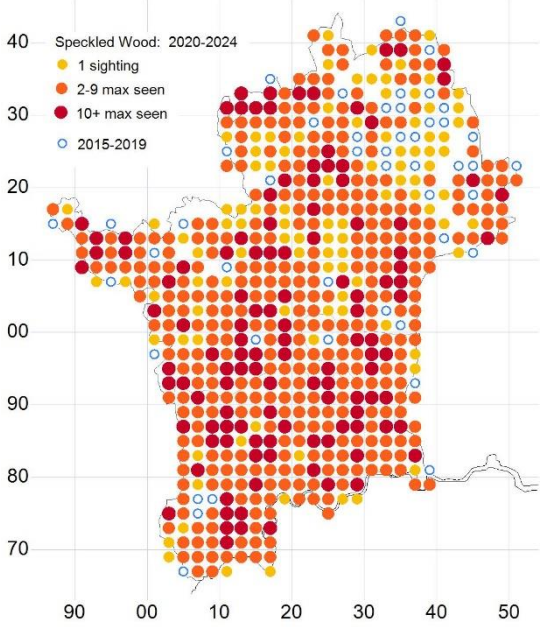


Photo Chris Benton

First: 20 Mar
Last: 12 Nov
Peak week: 20-26 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2024	66% (396)
2023	72% (447)
2015-19 mean	61%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	32
2023	56
2015-19 mean	48

Distribution change
Up 8% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 33% compared with 2015-2019

For the second time in three years the flight pattern was unusual. The spring emergences reflect the difference between those that over wintered as pupae and those as larvae. After that there was a big drop rather than the steady rise to the usual late summer peak. As ever with butterflies some of this can be attributed to the poor weather. It may be that the better weather in August meant that there were more seen on the wing compared to the previous months. As with most species in 2024 the abundance was well down compared to last year and the longer-term pattern. Like last year the largest counts were from urban London transects. Balls Wood in Herts which used to be top for many years could only produce the 30th highest count.

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Widespread

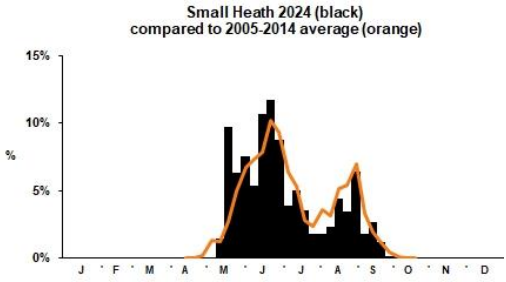
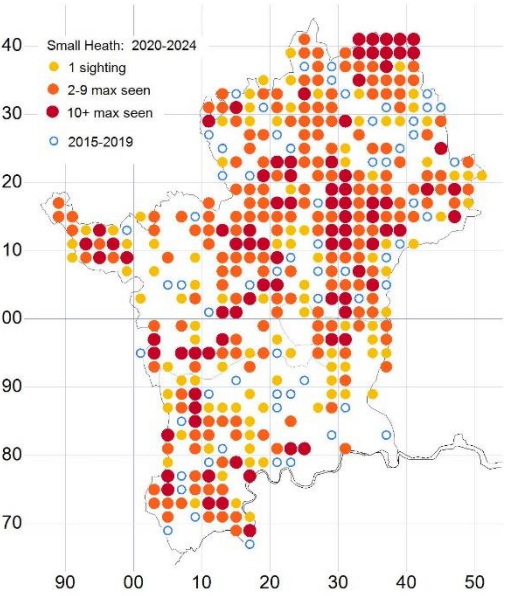


Photo Chris Benton



First: 4 May
Last: 28 Sep
Peak week: 18-24 Jun

Distribution % squares	
2024	27% (164)
2023	31% (181)
2015-19 mean	20%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	35
2023	48
2015-19 mean	42

Distribution change
Up 35% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 16% compared with 2015-2019

As with so many other species there was a fall in abundance and distribution since 2023 which may well be attributable to the weather, especially as this is a butterfly that favours drier grassland. Its distribution is well up over the last five-year period and a number of observers have remarked on how it has spread into areas where it was unexpected a few years ago. Its flight was a month later starting but again went well into September. This later start may well be the reason that there was a less definite gap between the two broods than in 2023 with more records in July than might normally be expected.

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Widespread & common

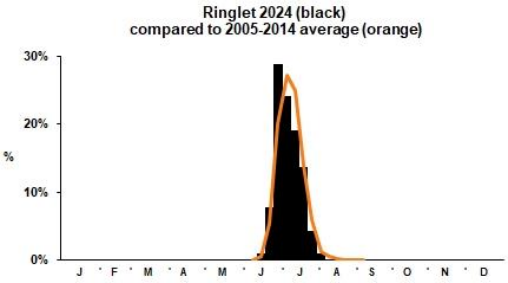
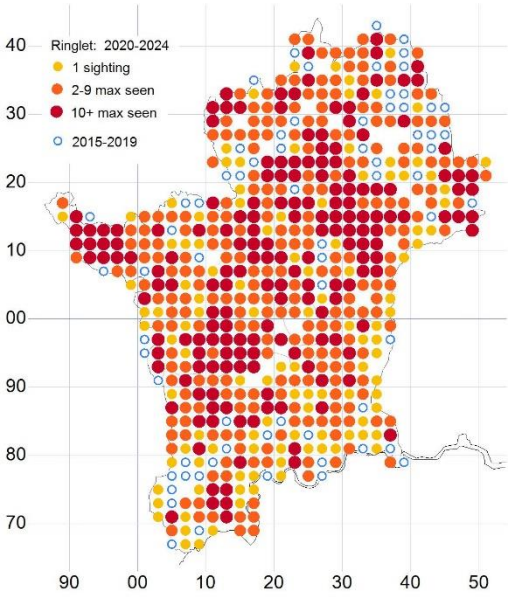


Photo Chris Benton



First: 2 Jun
Last: 18 Aug
Peak week: 25 Jun-1 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	53% (316)
2023	49% (304)
2015-19 mean	45%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	50
2023	43
2015-19 mean	108

Distribution change
Up 18% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 54% compared with 2015-2019

Last year's comment about a hope for greater numbers in 2024 proved to be the case, unlike for most species, and it was also observed in more 2km squares than both 2023 and the longer-term figure. This increase is reflected in an upturn in numbers at its most populous site from a weekly maximum of 212 last year to 290. Interestingly this year the flight period ended almost four weeks earlier but the peak flight period was two weeks later.

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Widespread & common

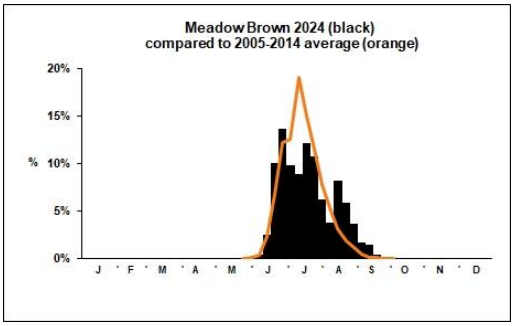
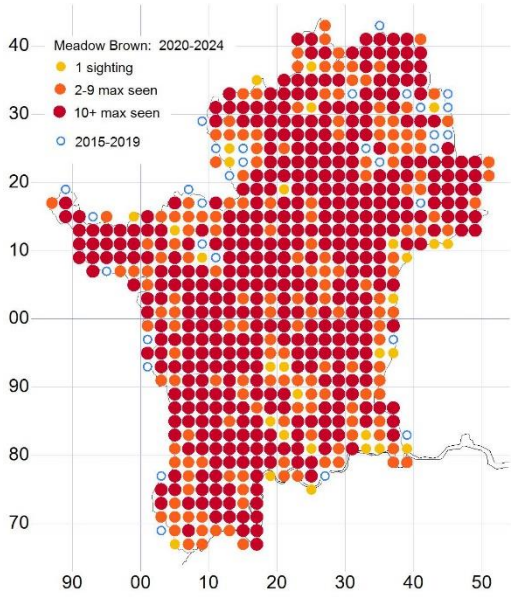


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 24 May
Last: 23 Oct
Peak week: 25-1 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	81% (487)
2023	82% (508)
2015-19 mean	68%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	226
2023	333
2015-19 mean	307

Distribution change
Up 19% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 26% compared with 2015-2019

The flight period seems to consistently start in the last week of May, not long ago it was the start of the second week of June. It then flies well into the autumn with a staggered emergence of adults. Last year we commented on its abundance in old meadows in London suburbia and again many of the highest counts were from such sites. However, although its distribution was up compared to the longer-term, abundance was well down against the previous five year period.

Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*

Widespread & common

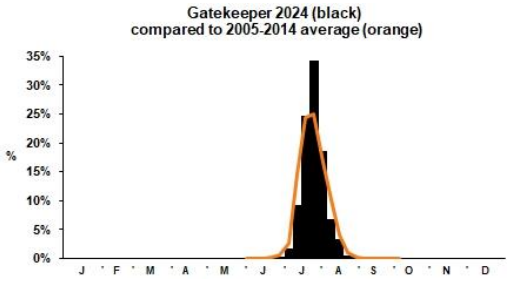
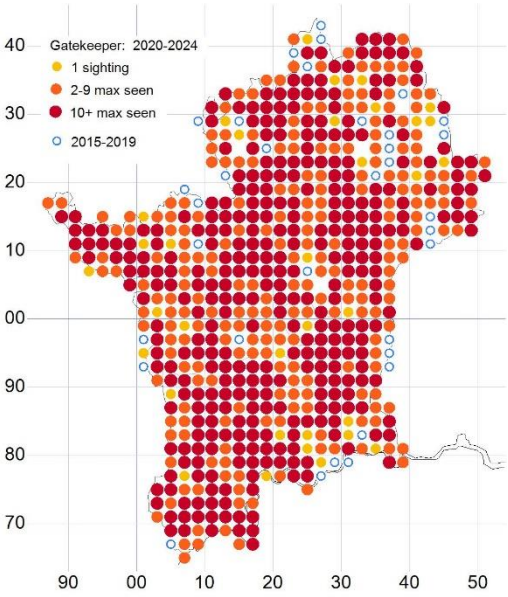


Photo Dee Cullen



First: 15 Jun
Last: 22 Sep
Peak week: 23-29 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	82% (492)
2023	81% (503)
2015-19 mean	70%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	68
2023	130
2015-19 mean	85

Distribution change
Up 17% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 20% compared with 2015-2019

Like other species this one now regularly starts flying earlier, from mid-June and then well into September, in the recent past the start was early July. Perhaps unsurprisingly last year's high abundance figure was not maintained, but it is something of a shock to see that it has almost halved, dropping well behind the previous five year period. The biggest counts were in Hertfordshire but good numbers could also be found in more urban grassland areas such as Wormwood Scrubs and Minet Country Park, both in west Middlesex.

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Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*

Widespread

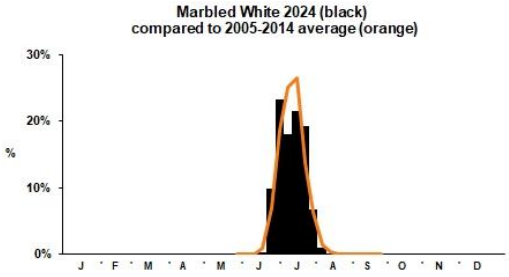
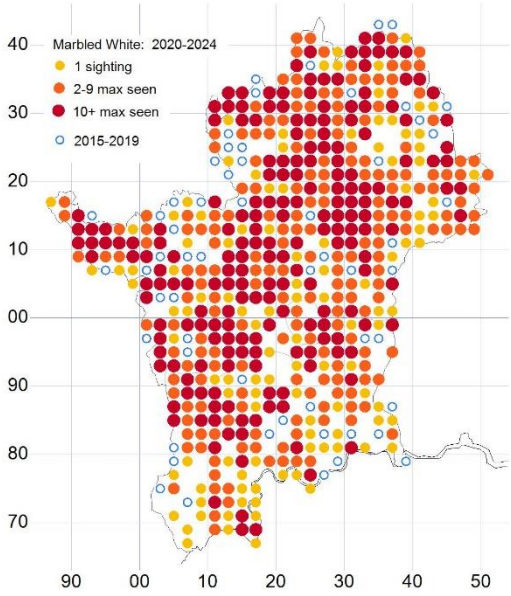


Photo Annie Sutcliffe

First: 7 Jun
Last: 25 Aug
Peak week: 25 Jun-1 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2024	51% (304)
2023	48% (296)
2015-19 mean	34%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	38
2023	78
2015-19 mean	90

Distribution change
Up 50% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 58% compared with 2015-2019

As with the other open grassland brown butterfly species there was a big drop in abundance. For all these species the poor July and August weather conditions in 2023 must have contributed to poor breeding success. Although well distributed across our area, most of the largest counts were in Hertfordshire with only Horsenden Hill in north west London being in the top thirty.

Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*

Restricted to chalky areas

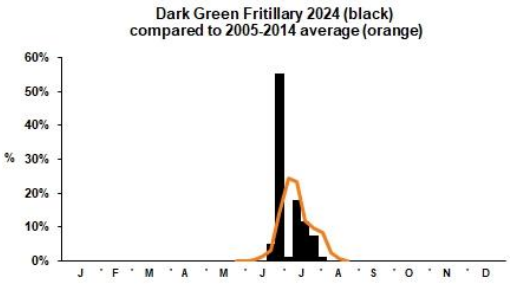
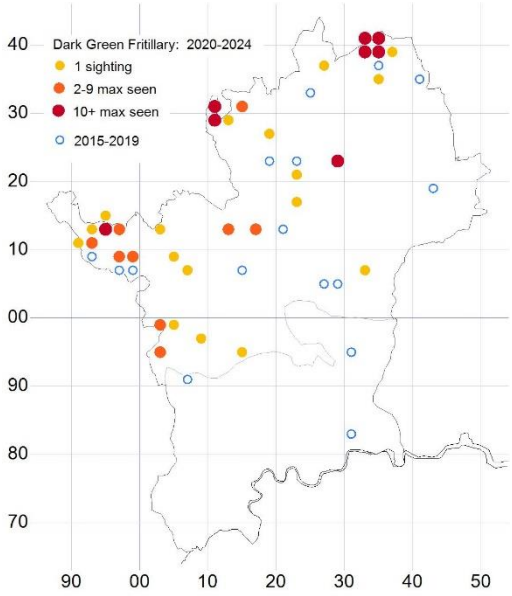


Photo *Martin Johnson*



First: 24 Jun
Last: 31 Jul
Peak week: 25 Jun-1Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	1% (5)
2023	1% (8)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	5
2023	5
2015-19 mean	14

Distribution change
Down 50% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 64% compared with 2015-2019

Last year's trends continued in 2024 with no records from the recently discovered central Hertfordshire colony near Aston. The lack of good weather to see them might have been a factor, though I visited in reasonable conditions and saw none. The week in early July with no records illustrates the issues with weather in 2024. Otherwise it was only observed at chalkland sites on the Chiltern fringe. All the highest counts and the only ones in double figures were from Hexton Chalk Pit. Excluding that site the highest count was just four.

Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

Locally common, spreading

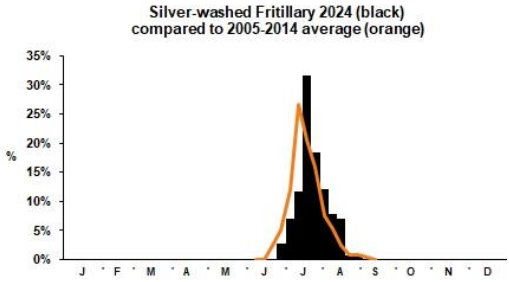
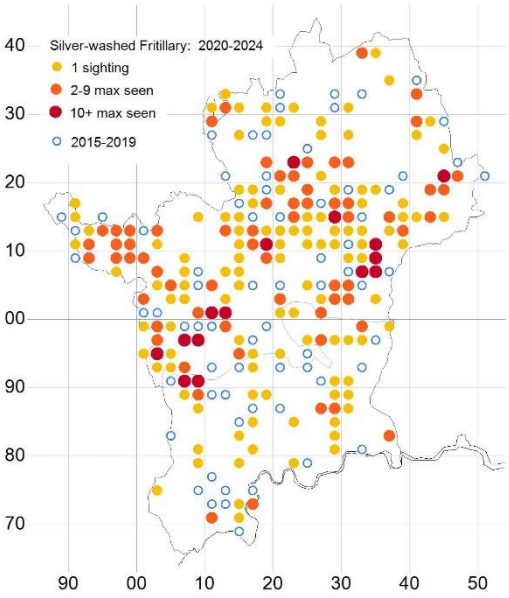


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 24 Jun
Last: 28 Aug
Peak week: 16-22 July

Distribution % squares	
2024	7% (44)
2023	13% (79)
2015-19 mean	11%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	6
2023	9
2015-19 mean	14

Distribution change
Down 36% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 56% compared with 2015-2019

Like most species there were big drops in this butterfly's abundance and distribution. Its best sites were concentrated in western Hertfordshire, the area through which it established its first returning colonies in the early 2000s. Of the top ten counts all but one were from Bricket Wood, Whippendell Woods and Bishops Wood, It is still present at more eastern sites such as Symondshyde Wood and Broxbourne Woods but in lower numbers. There are fewer reports also from the more urban parts of London than in recent years but it was widely distributed with sightings in at least nine boroughs including Tower Hamlets, Enfield, Haringey, Barnet, Harrow, Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Hillingdon. Gladstone Park in Brent had a first sighting on this relatively new transect.

White Admiral *Limenithis camilla*

Declining woodland species

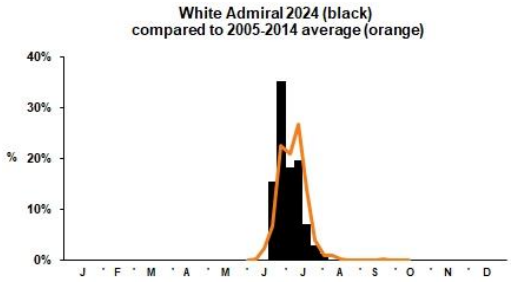
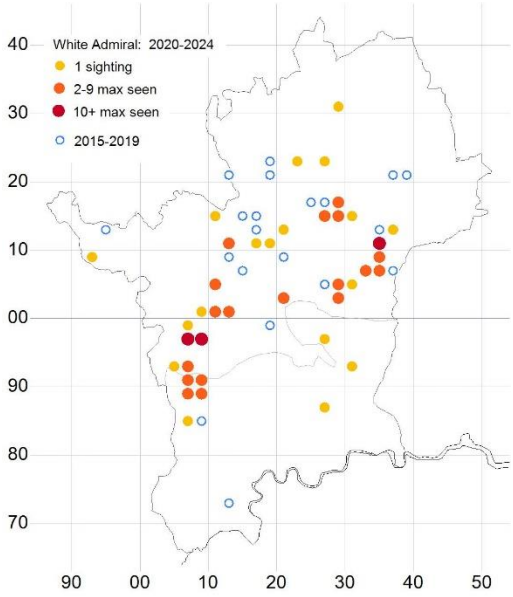


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 17 Jun
Last: 1 Aug
Peak week: 25 Jun-1 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	2% (11)
2023	2% (13)
2015-19 mean	3%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	5
2023	4
2015-19 mean	5

Distribution change
Down 50% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

There were actually few changes in the numbers for this species but these mask some worrying developments. At Balls Wood there were no records for the first time in over thirty years of recording on the transect, although there were casual sightings of single individuals. Counts at other eastern and central sites were also low and restricted to just Danemead Broxbourne and Knebworth Woods The highest counts were, like Silver-washed Fritillary, in the west at Bricket Wood, Whippendell Woods, Potters Crouch and Bishops Wood. The only London sightings were from the Ruislip Woods complex.

Purple Emperor *Apatura iris*

Local and increasing in woodland

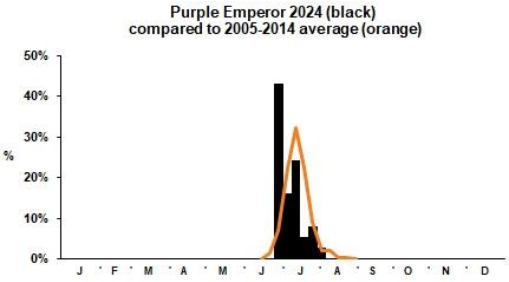
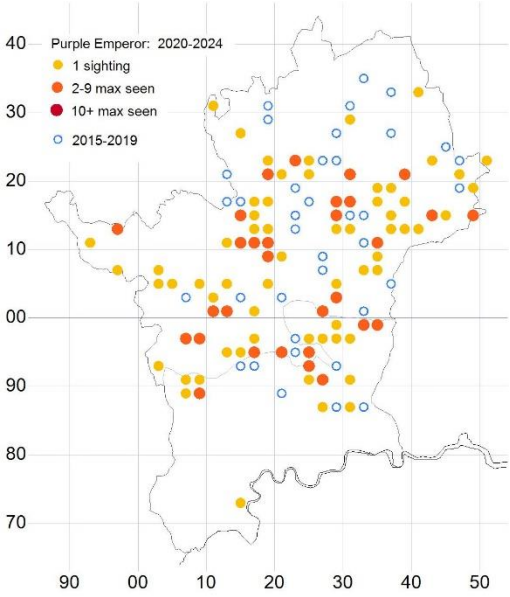


Photo Andrew Neild



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

Distribution % squares	
2024	3% (17)
2023	5% (29)
2015-19 mean	5%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	1
2023	4
2015-19 mean	1

Distribution change
Down 40% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 300% compared with 2015-2019

Not a great year, as with the other big woodland butterflies. The best numbers are again from Heartwood Forest with similar numbers at Whippendell Woods in the west near Watford In London there were no records from Hampstead Heath but it was seen at Whitewebbs Park, Alexandra Park and Kneller Garden, Twickenham.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Common migrant/Resident

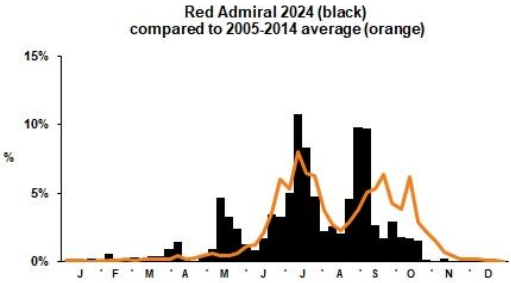
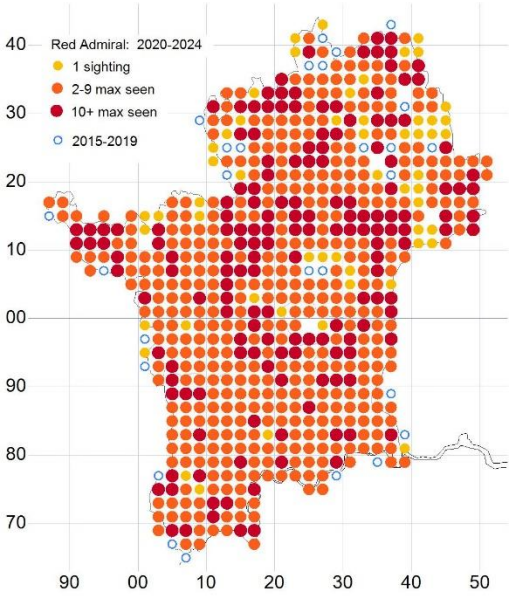


Photo Peter Clarke



First: 2 Jan
Last: 15 Nov
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	78% (469)
2023	91% (563)
2015-19 mean	68%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	8
2023	36
2015-19 mean	9

Distribution change
Up 15% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 11% compared with 2015-2019

Following 2023's record breaking year it was back to normal with both abundance and distribution falling back closer to the longer-term trends. Given the low numbers later in the 2023 season this is not surprising. The few double figured counts were in September but they were not a common sight on autumnal ivy flowers, as the smaller than normal autumn flight on the chart above shows. There were 39 records before mid March illustrating the number that now manage to over winter locally.

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Variable migrant

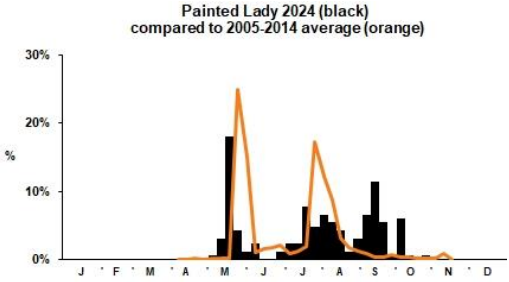
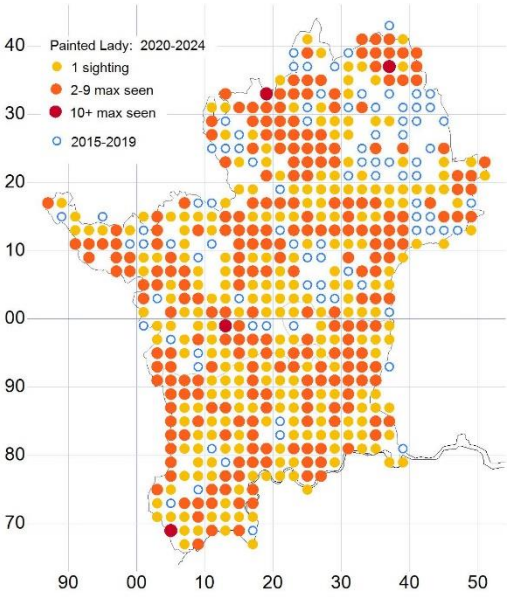


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 18 Feb
Last: 22 Oct
Peak week: 14-20 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	30% (178)
2023	43% (267)
2015-19 mean	43%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	1
2023	2
2015-19 mean	4

Distribution change
Down 30% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 75% compared with 2015-2019

The Painted Lady was not especially common in 2024 with a big drop in numbers. Its presence here is controlled by weather in northern Africa and southern Europe during the winter and spring. 18th February is a very early date, was it a migrant, a rare overwinter or an escape from a school classroom? Otherwise, there were an unusual three peaks, that in May probably being migration, the summer one being their offspring and the unusual September one which could be for either or both of these reasons. Over 90% of observations were of just one, the maximum being only five.

Peacock *Inachis io*

Widespread & common

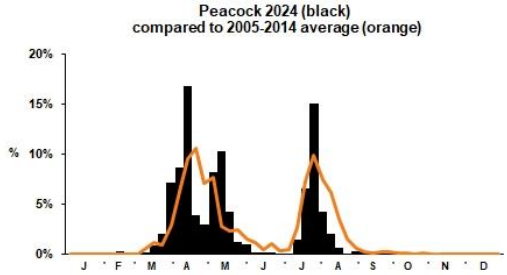
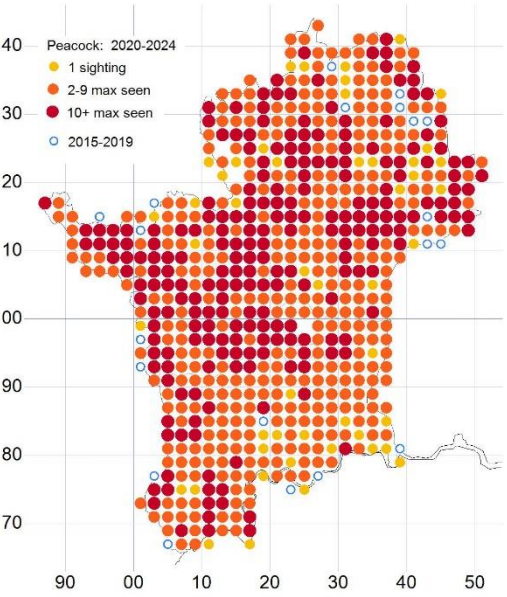


Photo Dee Cullen



First: 3 Jan
Last: 24 Oct
Peak week: 9-15 Apr

Distribution % squares	
2024	76% (458)
2023	82% (511)
2015-19 mean	63%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	19
2023	29
2015-19 mean	20

Distribution change
Up 20% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 5% compared with 2015-2019

The Peacock did not change its abundance and distribution as much as last year, though the general trend was downwards. The spring flight was the largest, this being 2023's hibernators which had been summer 2023's emergence. Very few larval nests were recorded. The main part of the summer flight was very concentrated between mid-July and mid-August but there was a tail of records throughout the rest of August, September and October rather than a gap followed by a small flight in autumn. There seems to be no definitive answer as to whether they are late hibernators or a partial second brood. Mature larvae have been seen in September but it has also been noted the most likely hibernator to emerge temporarily during late warm spells.

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Widespread but apparently declining.

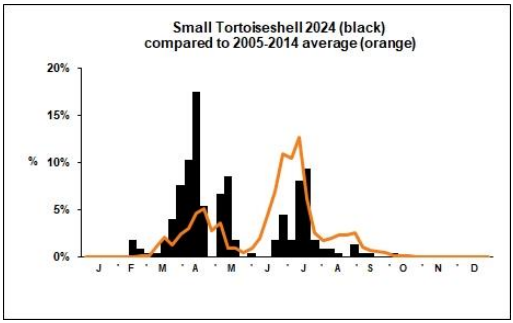
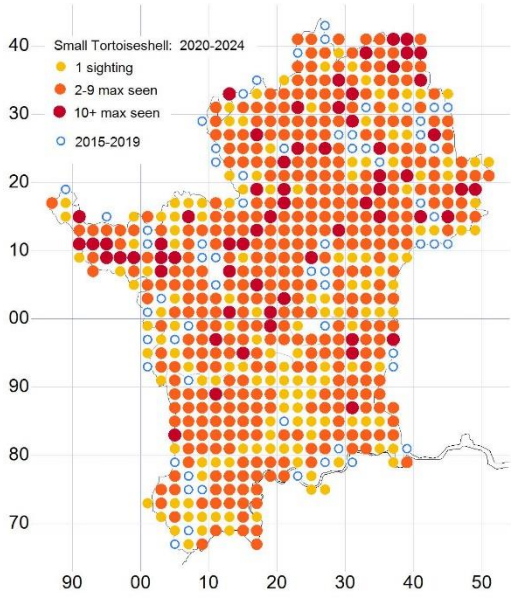


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 28 Jan
Last: 4 Oct
Peak week: 9-15 April

Distribution % squares	
2024	39% (234)
2023	54% (337)
2015-19 mean	66%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	2
2023	4
2015-19 mean	19

Distribution change
Down 26% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 89% compared with 2015-2019

This once common species is on the cover to highlight the tremendous fall in abundance and distribution in 2024 following a comparable trend last year. Many observers have remarked on their rarity, particularly later in the year. All may not be lost as there was a similar crash in abundance and distribution between 2005 and 2012 followed by a recovery, but in 1997 the abundance figure was 67 and hundreds could be recorded on a year's transect walks. The flight chart shows poor breeding success with the number emerging from hibernation in the spring being much larger than those flying in the summer.

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Widespread & Common

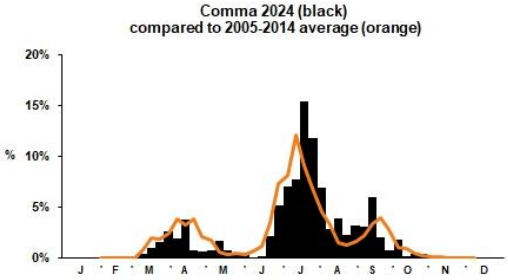
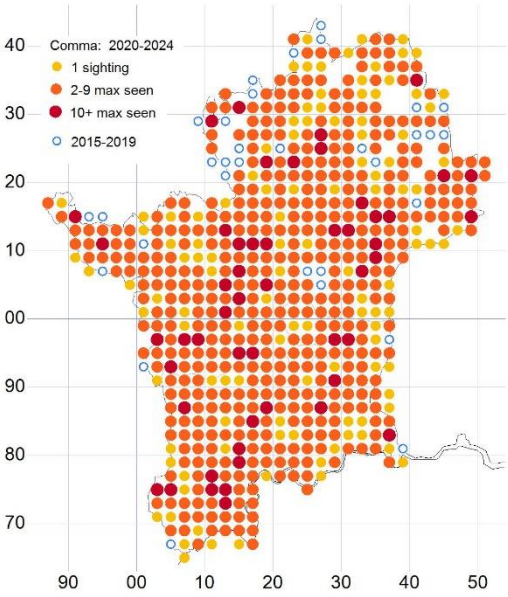


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 15 Feb
Last: 12 Nov
Peak week: 16-22 Jul

Distribution % squares	
2024	70% (419)
2023	78% (482)
2015-19 mean	64%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	9
2023	15
2015-19 mean	15

Distribution change
Up 9% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 40% compared with 2015-2019

The Comma's flight pattern was a close match to the longer-term trend and the falls in distribution and abundance compared to 2023 were not huge compared to some other species. There was a much stronger autumn flight than last year even if slightly earlier than the longer-term trend. As with the Red Admiral they were not a common sight on ivy blossom. From 19 September onwards all the counts were of one or two individuals only.

Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina*

Rare & restricted

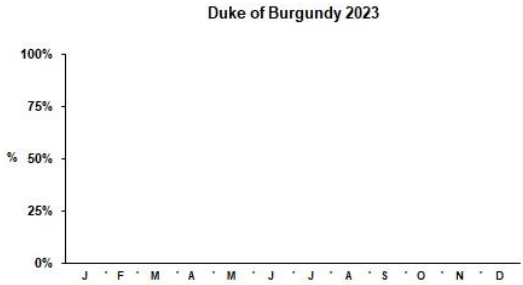
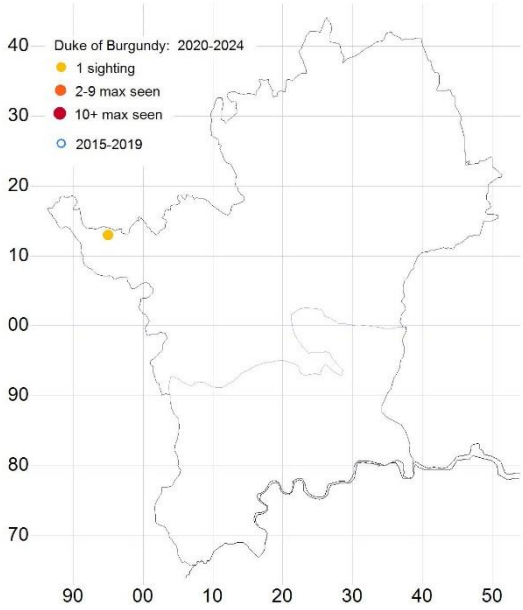


Photo Andrew Wood



First:
Last:
Peak week:

Distribution % squares	
2024	0
2023	1(>1%)
2015-19 mean	n/a

Abundance (transects)	
2024	0
2023	0
2015-19 mean	n/a

Distribution change
Insufficient data

Abundance change
Insufficient data

The fourth year of inclusion in this report, but only to note that there were no records of this rare species in our area. We continue to work with Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to try to understand the requirements for this species at Aldbury Nowers and whether these can be accommodated alongside other rare species there.

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Widespread & common

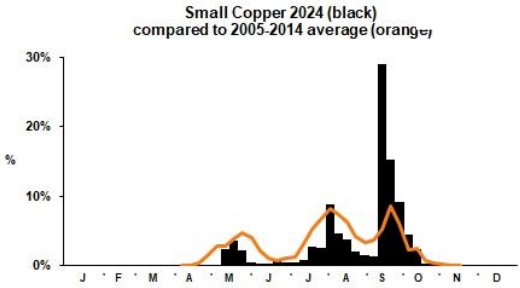
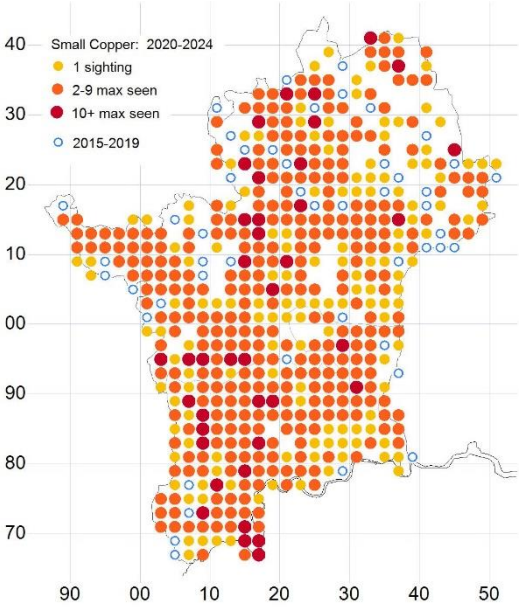


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 7 May
Last: 27 Oct
Peak week: 10-16 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2024	45% (272)
2023	55% (339)
2015-19 mean	32%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	6
2023	14
2015-19 mean	10

Distribution change
Up 40% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 40% compared with 2015-2019

I commented on a good bounce back in 2023, but this did not continue for most of 2024, especially in the first and second generations which were very small. However, the autumn generation was larger, at least on the face of it. There was a concerted effort to visit some of the stronghold sites such as Nomansland Common and this may have, possibly skewed the numbers, but equally there were also good numbers on the Patmore Heath Transect which was monitored all through the season. Let's hope that this generation was able to breed and that their offspring will give us better numbers in 2025.

Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae*

Spreading across London and into southwest Hertfordshire

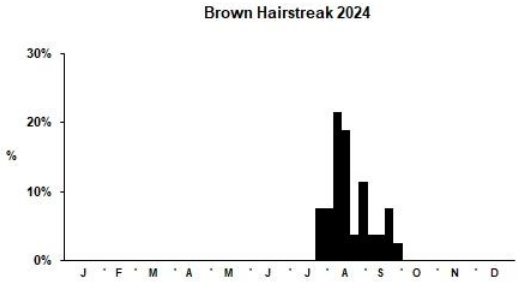
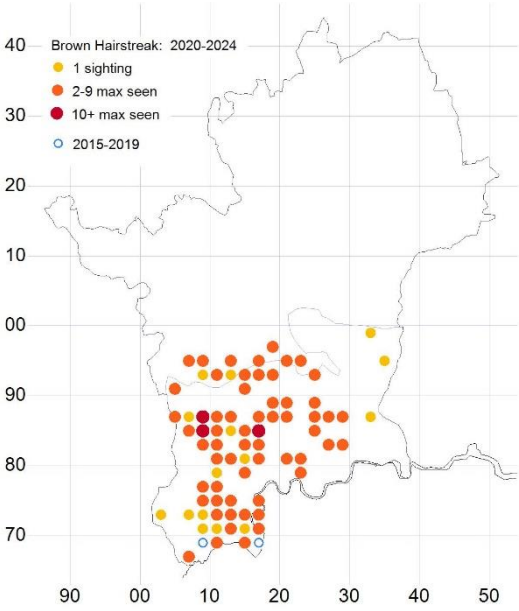


Photo Peter Fewell



First: 23 Jul
Last: 28 Sep
Peak week: 6-12 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2024	9% (56)
2023	3% (21)
2015-19 mean	1%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	2
2023	No data
2015-19 mean	No data

Distribution change
Insufficient data

Abundance change
Insufficient data

The spread of this species continues and as predicted last year it has crossed over into Hertfordshire with records of eggs and/or adults from Merry Hill, Bushey and Prestwick Road Meadows in South Oxhey. The map is filling up in West Middlesex and It is spreading both east into central Middlesex and north as noted above. Most records are of eggs and it is worth checking blackthorn for the eggs before it starts flowering if you are in Middlesex or south Hertfordshire. For detailed information please see https://tinyurl.com/wcucxjx5.

Purple Hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*

Common around oaks

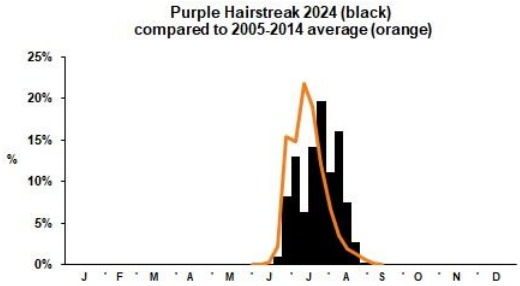
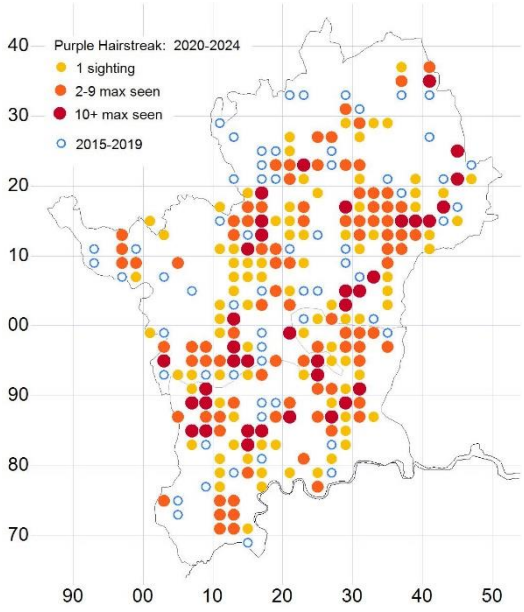


Photo Andrew Wood

First: 21 Jun
Last: 30 Aug
Peak week: 23-29 Jul



Distribution % squares	
2024	11% (67)
2023	13% (83)
2015-19 mean	13%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	6
2023	12
2015-19 mean	7

Distribution change
Down 8% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 14% compared with 2015-2019

Some slight drops for this little butterfly, which is not always easy to observe. The flight time was a little later than the longer-term trend probably due to the poor spring conditions. It emerged a week later than in 2023 but finished a week earlier.

Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Restricted but increasing, especially in London area

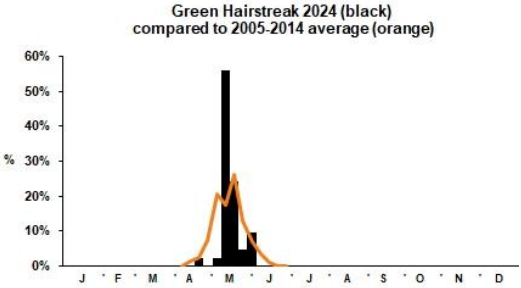
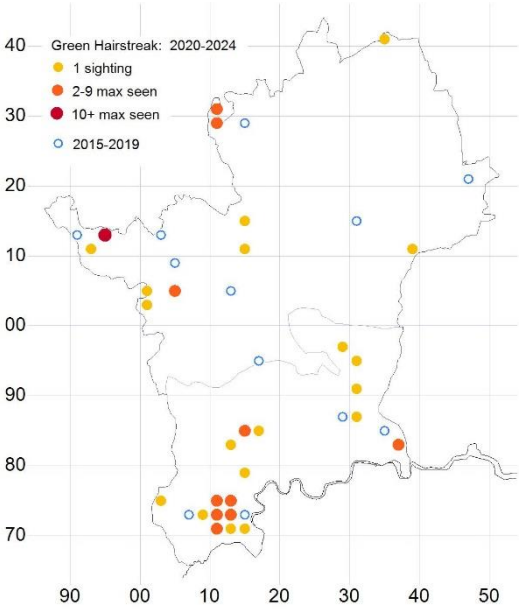


Photo John Eborall



First: 6 Apr
Last: 18 Aug
Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	3% (20)
2023	2% (11)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	2
2023	3
2015-19 mean	4

Distribution change
Up 50% compared with 2015-2019

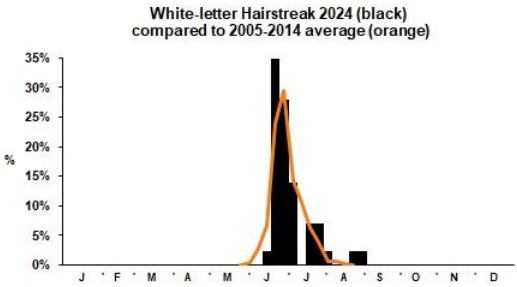
Abundance change
Down 50% compared with 2015-2019

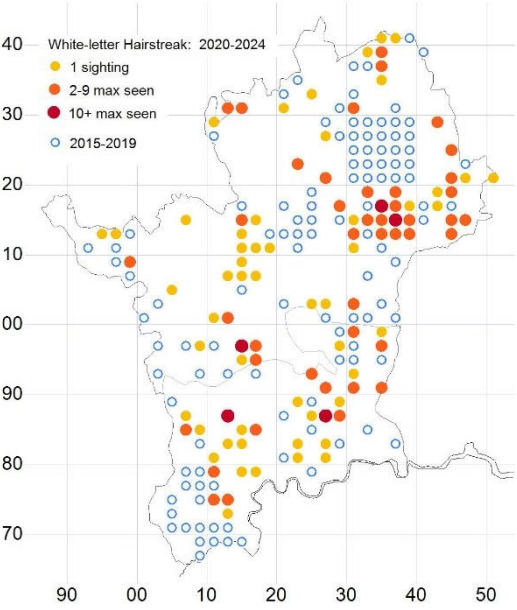
Unusually for 2024 the distribution measured by squares increased significantly and it was seen at sites such as Oakwood Park in Barnet and Finsbury Park. Away from the chalk at Aldbury Nowers and Hexton Chalk Pit in north west Hertfordshire it is concentrated at a number of sites in south west and west Middlesex. Remarkably late records in mid-July and August, double checked with the recorder came from a transect in the Hanwell area of west London, the numbers are too small to show on the flight chart above. A record number were found on the branch walk at Hounslow Heath.

White-letter Hairstreak *Satyrium w-album*

Common around elm

Photo Dee Cullen





First: 16 Jun
Last: 30 Aug
Peak week: 18-24 Jun

Distribution % squares	
2024	4% (21)
2023	6% (37)
2015-19 mean	9%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	2
2023	4
2015-19 mean	2

Distribution change
Down 57% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

No one took up the challenge of adding colour to the grey circles in east Hertfordshire so the map is still sparser than the likely distribution of this species. Although many elms succumb to Dutch elm disease when they get to about five metres tall, they sucker readily and this is sufficient for the butterfly to breed on. I repeat last year's advice to look out for distinctive elm flowers in the spring before leaves appear. Then revisit from mid-June to mid-August and look up in sunny weather for small dark butterflies flitting around the leaves.

Small Blue *Cupido minimus*

Rare & restricted

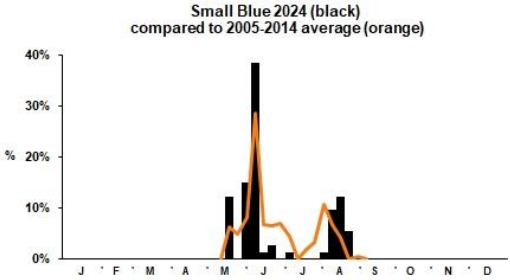
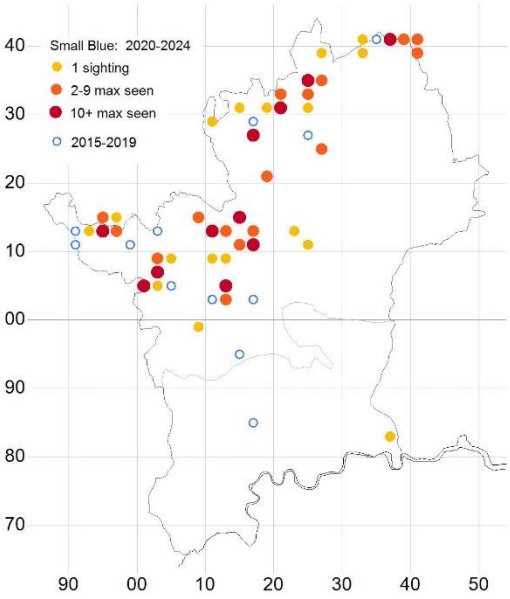


Photo Malcolm Hull



First: 19 May
Last: 23 Aug
Peak week: 4-10 Jun

Distribution % squares	
2024	3% (17)
2023	4% (27)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	1
2023	5
2015-19 mean	89

Distribution change
Up 50% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Too little data to calculate

The weather is probably responsible for the drop in distribution with the weather not suiting searching for this species. The fall in abundance is down to very few transects actually having this butterfly so is fairly meaningless as, especially as the comparator is with the transect at the now closed Butterfly World. We have continued to work with farmers to distribute and sow kidney vetch seed to try to encourage new colonies. Somewhat strangely this larval foodplant was also seeded and grew well at the unlikely site of the A602 at Stonyhills north of Hertford. Whether it will continue to grow and attract the butterfly will be interesting to see.

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Widespread & common

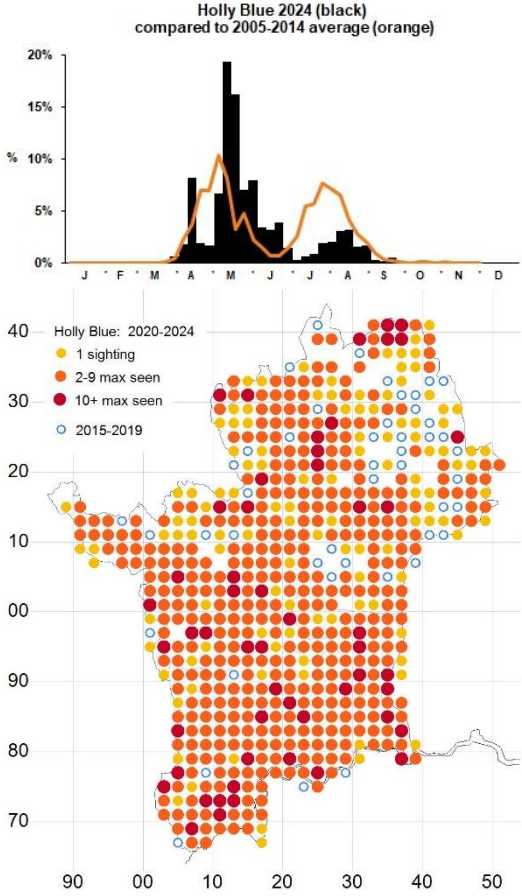


Photo Chris Benton

First 20 Mar
Last: 7 Oct
Peak week: 7-13 May

Distribution % squares	
2024	59% (351)
2023	76% (472)
2015-19 mean	55%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	13
2023	29
2015-19 mean	13

Distribution change
Up 5% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

A huge fall back after 2023's bumper year. As the flight chart shows it was common enough in the spring brood but the summer brood was very small. Was this weather related or has the parasitism that periodically affects this butterfly caught up with it? There was virtually no evidence of a partial third brood with only two records in October and none in November. It will be interesting to see what happens in 2025. It continues to be more common in the London area than Hertfordshire.

Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*

Widely distributed

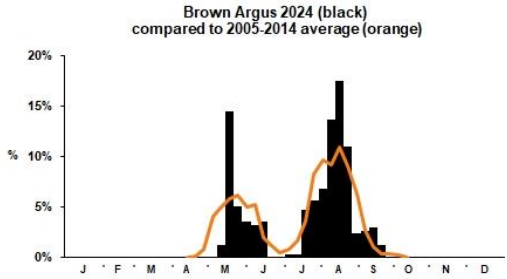
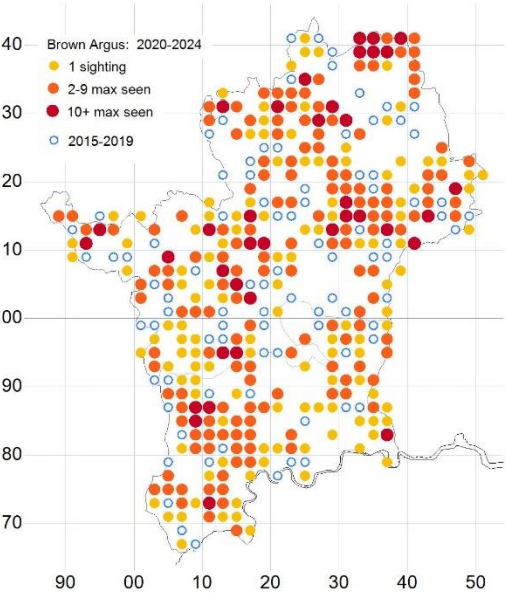


Photo Peter Clarke



First: 5 May
Last: 22 Sep
Peak week: 13-19 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2024	11% (66)
2023	31% (191)
2015-19 mean	20%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	6
2023	32
2015-19 mean	15

Distribution change
Down 45% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 60% compared with 2015-2019

2024 was something of a crash year for Brown Argus with large declines in both abundance and distribution. The balance between the two broods was normal. It is noticeable that the majority of records of the second brood came from regularly monitored transects rather than the wider countryside suggesting a retreat from what may be possibly more marginal habitats.

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Widespread & common

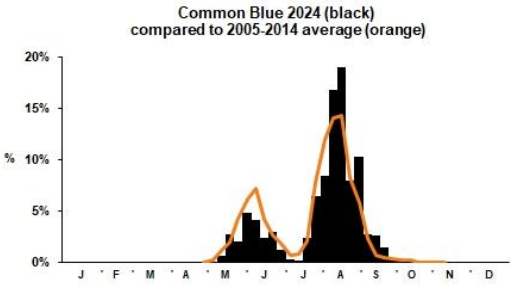
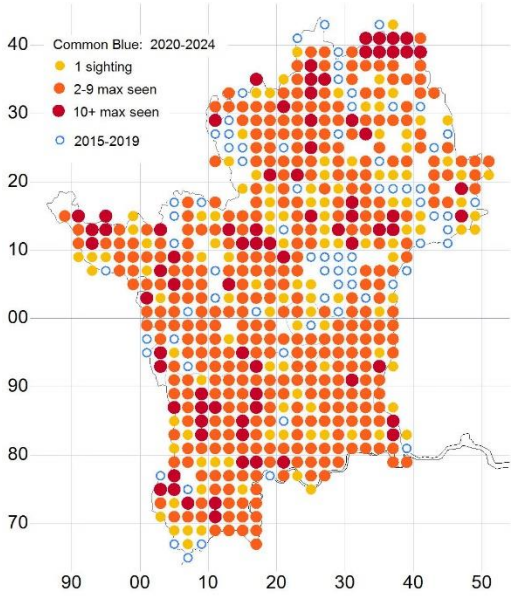


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 29 Apr
Last: 23 Oct
Peak week: 13-19 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2024	44% (264)
2023	66% (410)
2015-19 mean	54%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	12
2023	21
2015-19 mean	26

Distribution change
Down 19% compared with 2015-2019

Abundance change
Down 56% compared with 2015-2019

Many of the remarks under Brown Argus apply here too. It seems likely that both species were badly affected by the cool and wet conditions for much of the flight season. For a butterfly that tends to live in colonies it is striking that most counts were single numbers with only 17 out of 628 records being double figured. Many of these were at brownfield type sites such as old quarries, brick pits and road building spoil sites.

Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus*

Very rare & restricted

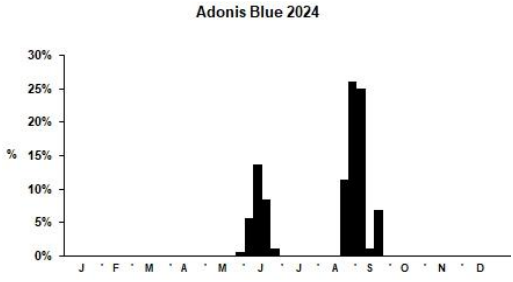
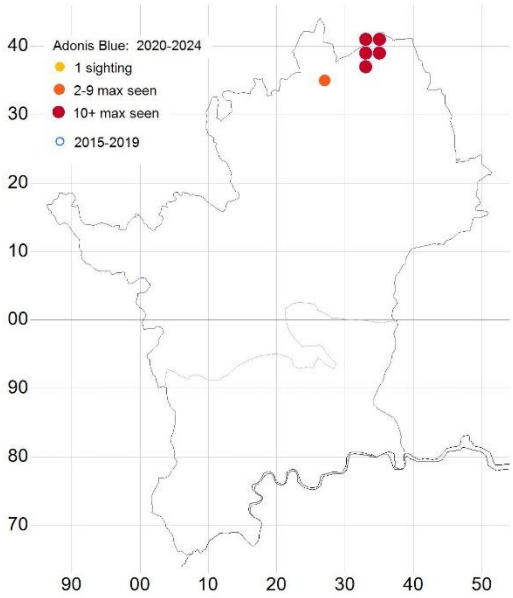


Photo Peter Clarke



First: 25 May
Last: 13 Sep
Peak week: 27 Aug-2 Sep

Distribution % squares	
2024	1% (3)
2023	1% (5)
2015-19 mean	>1%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	10
2023	25
2015-19 mean	2

Distribution change
Unchanged since 2015-2019

Abundance change
Up 400% compared with 2015-2019

The known colonies of this likely introduced species persist at Therfield Heath but none were seen east of Clothall Common near Baldock. The flight period was much the same as 2023, but there were more recorded in the summer brood. There are five transects on Therfield Heath but all the transect records were from the two on the Rifle Range Area on the eastern side rather than Church Hill where it was first recorded after the original introduction.

Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon*

Restricted to chalk, often common where present

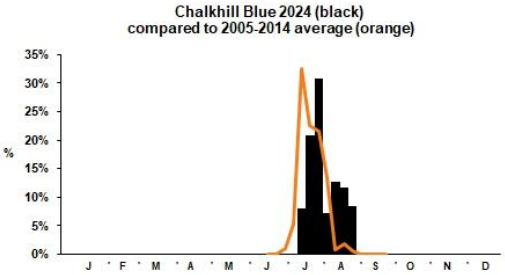
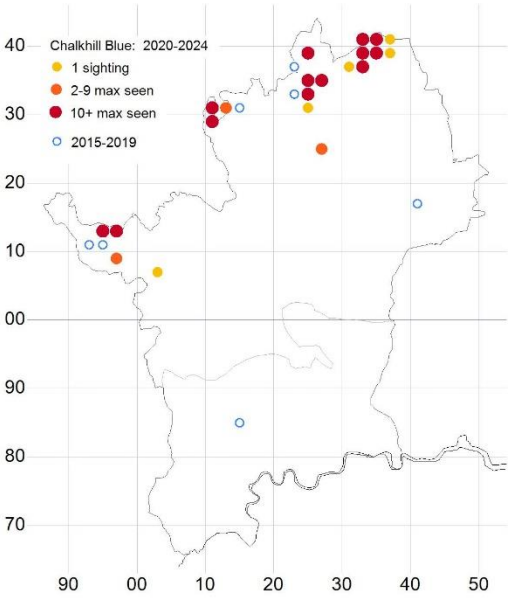


Photo Andrew Wood



First: 11 Jul
Last: 13 Sep
Peak week: 30 Jul-5 Aug

Distribution % squares	
2024	2% (11)
2023	2% (13)
2015-19 mean	2%

Abundance (transects)	
2024	69
2023	103
2015-19 mean	188

Distribution change
Unchanged compared with 2015-2019

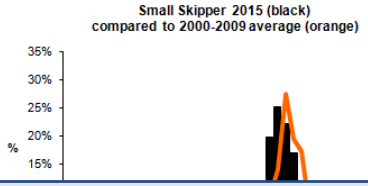
Abundance change
Down 63% compared with 2015-2019

The distribution of this species was slightly down, one reason being that there were no records from the ten year old colony at Ashwell Quarry. One year's absence does not mean the colony has definitely gone but it is symptomatic of the decline in abundance. The annual standardised count at Hexton Chalk Pit was also down with a value of 31 compared to 96 in 2023 and 202 in 2022. Two poor springs and summers with cool damp conditions have not helped the larval development of this species. The one site where 2024 was not worse than 2023 was a private site not far from Hexton.

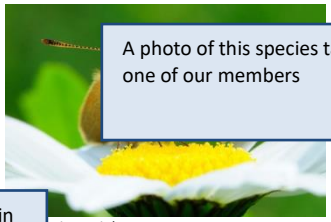
Key to the Species pages

Common Name *Scientific name*

Widespread but declining

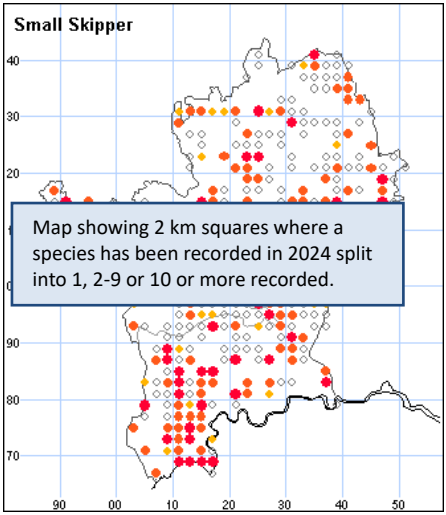


The flight period showing proportion of species flying in any week compared with the 2015-2019 average.



A photo of this species taken by one of our members

Brian Knight



Map showing 2 km squares where a species has been recorded in 2024 split into 1, 2-9 or 10 or more recorded.

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

Distribution % squares	
2024	28% (155)
2024	
2015-19 mean	
Abundan	
2024	
2024	
2015-19 mean	
Distributi	
Up 3% co 2015-202	
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

Our branch website is at http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/

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