Butterflies for the New Millennium
Summer 2024 newsletter

Welcome to the summer newsletter for the Butterflies for the New Millennium (BNM) project.

Common Blue (Matt Berry)

Well, I think we can all agree that it has not been a butterfly spring or summer! It has been widely reported that the June gap was extremely elongated this year, exacerbated by the wet weather.

Ken Orpe, County Recorder for Derbyshire, did some research on butterfly numbers on transects in Derbyshire up to the end of Week 10 of this year's season. He found that numbers were 60% down on the same period last year and throughout the East Midlands numbers were 50% down on average across the Region.

Data from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) shows that across the UK, the average number of butterflies seen during each transect walk was down by 40% across the first 12 weeks of the season. This looks like a combination of both poor spring numbers (30% down on the previous decade across weeks 1-10) and now a late emergence of summer broods. The UKBMS also shows that the total number of butterflies on transects each week is down compared to last year, and the previous decade. It is only during the warm spell during Week 18, that numbers were finally catching up.

We know that butterfly populations vary year on year due to weather conditions, but this year is exceptionally poor, so much so, that even 'non-butterfly-type' friends and family are asking "where are all the butterflies this year?"

Big Butterfly Count

Red Admiral (Peter Eeles)

The Big Butterfly Count was launched on 12 July at Butterfly Conservations Head Office, Manor Yard in Dorset, and ran until Sunday 4 August.

Despite the slow start due to poor weather and a lack of butterflies, the BBC has been a great success. Fortunately, the weather picked up in many areas for the final 10 days of the count and data were coming in in thick and fast. Provisional results show that almost 141,000 counts were submitted by around 85,000 people who counted almost 999,000 butterflies and day-flying moths. Gatekeeper took over poll position from Meadow Brown in the final week of the count.

Big Butterfly Count data can be submitted until the end of August, after which it will be downloaded and analysed for the results press release which is due out mid- late September. Following that we will repatriate the Big Butterfly Count 2024 data to County Recorders in October. Many thanks to all of you who have promoted and taken part in the count this year.

BNM update

The importation of local datasets to the Butterflies for the New Millennium scheme is going well. Jim Asher is helping Les with this task. In June we were really pleased to receive the outstanding 2020 – 2022 Butterfly data for Cumbria and Westmorland. This is now in the queue for processing and import.

We are now in the last stage of the sixth five-year Butterflies for the New Millennium (BNM) survey, so it is important that we receive your 2024 data as close to the 31 March 2025 deadline as possible.

The annual audit of missing datasets will be done in the Autumn, in the meantime if you have any outstanding 2020, 2021, 2022 or 2023 datasets please forward them to the Recording Team via recording@butterfly-conservation.org.

We appreciate that the County Butterfly Recorder role is a busy one and it can be overwhelming at times. We are encouraging team working to help share the load and reduce the pressure. In Northern Ireland the County Moth Recorder has been working with two Verification Assistants who have made an incredible difference to the enjoyment of the County Recorder role. An article about this was originally published in the May edition of E-moth, for ease of reference, it has been included on page three of this newsletter.

UK Butterfly Recorders' Meeting 2025

The date of the next UK Butterfly Recorders' Meeting (UKBRM) has been set. It will be held on **Saturday 29 March 2025**, online via Zoom. Details on how to book will be available in due course.

The results from the evaluation of the last four UK Recorders meetings (butterflies and moths) are being reviewed. We are exploring funding opportunities to enable us to hold these meetings in-person on a regular basis. We recognise and appreciate the value and benefits of in-person meetings for the recording community and the value of online meetings for accessibility.

Although the 2025 UKBRM will be online, plans are underway for an in-person 50th anniversary celebration of the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme in autumn 2025, so there will be an opportunity to get together next year. Further details will be shared when they're available.

Northern Ireland Verification Assistants: "Providing breathing space"

Butterfly Conservation is actively supporting the formation of teams to support the vital role of the County Recorder network. We are aware that three-quarters of the County Recorder network are struggling to keep up with the demands of this important role, and in many areas the workload is becoming too large for one person alone. Recently Andrew Crory, the County Moth Recorder for Northern Ireland has been joined by two Verification Assistants to support him, Lois Clements and Jen Jones. Andrew, Lois and Jen share their experiences below. If you are a County Recorder looking for support from a Verification Assistant, please email Zoë Randle via recording@butterfly-conservation.org. Equally, if you think you could help support the County Recorder network (moths or butterflies) please drop Zoë a line or look out for opportunities on the Butterfly Conservation website.

Lois' experience

Last December, I signed up to be a Moth Verification Assistant after coming across an ad in the Butterfly Conservation Northern Ireland Branch newsletter, and it's been an amazing experience so far. I'm a recent graduate in Business with Spanish hoping to break into the conservation sector, and this role has been the perfect opportunity to gain new skills (and add some more moths to my week).

Most of my time verifying is spent taking paper records that recorders have submitted, which often contain an entire year's worth of sightings (or more!) and digitising them into an Excel

format that can be easily uploaded by the County Recorder onto MapMate / Recorder 6. It's been incredibly rewarding; I've improved my moth knowledge so much just by being exposed to so many different species. It's been especially great to learn about more localized species and ones that people tend to see a lot more of in other parts of the country.

As someone self-taught in mothing, it's been super interesting to get to know the 'behind-the-scenes' of the recording and monitoring process. Since a large portion of my role is validating records (i.e. making sure that things like the records' grid reference, date, location, and species name are in formats accepted by the National Moth Recording Scheme, I've been able to become familiar with the Irish Grid Reference & Vice-County system, and current species naming conventions. I've also become so much more aware of the varied host of methods people use to find & trap moths!

Early Grey (Lois Clements)

One of the best parts of this role is knowing that the records I help digitise will contribute to resources I use constantly like MothsIreland, Informing NI's Priority Species, the NI Priority Species List, and NBN Atlas. It feels awesome to contribute to the national moth recording schemes and see the impact of my work. Working closely with our County Recorder has been another highlight, he is incredibly knowledgeable and always willing to answer my questions (no matter how many)! I'm happy to be able to support the massive amount of work he does for moth conservation.

Looking ahead, I'm excited to learn even more about moths and see more records come in. I got my first home trap recently—a 6W Heath—and caught my first moth of the year, an Early Grey. Being a Moth Verification Assistant has been fantastic - I've been absolutely loving the opportunity to contribute to moth conservation!

Jen's story

I volunteer as the Moth Data Assistant for Butterfly Conservation in Northern Ireland in my spare time. As an avid biological recorder this has helped me learn more about and improved my identification skills of moths. I cannot pick a favourite moth that I have recorded myself but Scotched Wing is one of my top ones!

Scorched Wing (Jen Jones)

It is great to be able to assist Andy with the Northern Irish macro and micro-moth records and to contribute and inform their work to help understand trends and potential future fates of our moth species.

The tasks I have helped out with are to process all moth data sent to me; this includes cleaning and streamlining for species names and distribution analysis. Moth records come in from the National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS), iRecord, and the Garden Moth Scheme (GMS).

The best part about this voluntary role is that the data are eventually verified and will contribute to the Lepidoptera data in the NBN Atlas, the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording at Ulster Museum (CEDaR), the NMRS, BCNI, and MothsIreland. From here the data I have worked on will inform BCNI targeted species conservation projects, update the all-Ireland moth species distribution maps, and contribute to work on the status and distribution of Northern Ireland Priority Species (NIPS) and Irish Red List Species!

Andy's report
Lois and Jen have been a brilliant help, especially with digitising records and compiling spreadsheets. This gives me so much more time to make sure the top copy is correct for adding to the main Northern Ireland database. Time is one thing, but it has also taken an awful lot of stress away from me - I would wake in the middle of the night with passing fearful thoughts of 'that big pile of paper records' or 'the spreadsheet in a diabolically alien format'. There were times when being the NI Moth Recorder was sapping my humanity - it was a never-ending task, with an eternal backlog and errors. Lois and Jen tackled whatever I threw at them with no complaints whatsoever and this has given me breathing space to I find the whole thing fun again - a massive thank you from me!

Contributed by Lois Clements, Jennifer Jones and Andrew Crory

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