

Butterfly Conservation (West Midlands Branch) Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund 2015-16 Final Project Report

Background

The Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund kindly sponsored the production of the book by Butterfly Conservation (West Midlands Branch). "Butterflies of the West Midlands" is due for publication in spring 2016, and indeed copies will be delivered to the publisher next week. This report regarding the project outlines the task as a whole and its relevance to Shropshire.

1. Receipt of money from sponsors enabled the editing team to enter into a contract with our publisher at an early stage, after securing sufficient funds for the initial advance and a contingency fund for unforeseen expenses
2. The Branch has pledged that any surplus funds and eventual income from sales will go into Butterfly Conservation funds, and no one is being paid for work contributed. The editorial board at the outset stated to potential sponsors that "All monies raised by the sale of the book will be spent on butterfly conservation work in the West Midlands." If at the end not all the sponsorship money is spent on production, the Branch will identify schemes to benefit butterflies and moths including reintroductions
3. This book is the first specifically about the butterflies of this region, with emphasis on a strong local flavour aimed at fostering interest among those who wish to learn more
4. It features a section on 40 butterfly species to be found in the West Midlands (Shropshire being the most diverse County) with historical facts and an update on the current status of each. For example the Wood White is included, a butterfly under threat but with a stronghold in the Shropshire's Hills, and the subject of a forthcoming initiative to increase its range and numbers.
5. As well as topographical information, the book features 25 walks, 7 of which are in Shropshire, and it cross references a total of 92 sites known to be of interest, 28 of these being in Shropshire including Caer Caradoc Hill, Stiperstones, Clee Hill, Titterstone Clee, and Mortimer Forest.

Butterflies of the West Midlands – compiling the book

Who the book is for

We set out to appeal to the general public, rather than produce a detailed atlas. Our intention is to give an insight into the life of butterflies, how they are doing in the West Midlands and where they can be found. For those with more knowledge this book will provide information about their status in the region, along with the most recent 10 year population trends and what the Branch has done for key species. We acknowledge the fundamental contribution of partner agencies such as the Forestry Commission, AONB Partnerships and Wildlife Trusts.

The book has three aims:

1. To document current and historical status of our butterflies.
2. To raise awareness and to encourage recording at all levels of experience and ability.
3. To assist the conservation of butterflies by identifying species of concern and assigning conservation priorities.

What's in the book?

It was important to make it visually appealing so you will find 340 photos, including the 4 life stages of all 41 species featured, (one now extinct) with guidance on identification and distribution charts. There are 25 walks chosen to feature all 40 species. There is a cross referenced appendix containing the 93 sites mentioned in the text. Key sites and hotspots are also cross referenced under each species account

Recording issues

The data sources for the species accounts we used are:

- (a) For Distribution Maps- all casual and transect records in our Branch data base from 2005 to 2014. A second map showing pre 2005 records is also included where there is evidence of a distribution change.
- (b) For Regional Population Trends –records provided by our Transect Recorder to cover 2005-2014

The casual data base contains almost half a million casual records with 70,000 records in the last 5 years.

In addition, a further source of records has come from the over 100 butterfly transects walked in the region since 1979.

These typically contribute around 50,000 records per annum.

This represents a vast effort by volunteers even when we recognise that recording across the region is incomplete.

What we found

Broadly we are confident that we have an accurate picture.

According to the facts, fourteen species appear to show a range change over the ten year period (that's 2005-2014). Four have expanded their range: Marbled White, Brown Argus, White Admiral and Essex Skipper while ten have undergone a range contraction: Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Wall Brown, Wood White, Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper, Small Heath, White-letter Hairstreak, and Grayling.

The findings of the book also confirm growing concern about the Small Heath range and population. However the Pearl-bordered Fritillary population in Shropshire has increased in spite of range contraction.

