

## **GRAYLING REPORT 2017 – Upper Thames Branch**

The Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele* is one of our rarest and most threatened species which is listed under Section 41 (S41) of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act as a priority for conservation action.

In 2017 there were 257 individual Grayling reported in the UTB area, all from south Berkshire. There were about 33 separate records submitted by 14 different recorders. Most of those records were submitted to UTB, and 5 were entered onto iRecord. The recorded flight season in Berks was from 4th July to 15th September 2017. I did also see an earlier one on 26th June over the county border in NW Surrey. In 2016, 135 individuals were reported from 28 recorded visits, so this is a welcome increase in total numbers reported.

15 records were of singles, 11 records were of counts of 2-9, 5 records were of 11-49, and one count was over 50, the successful result of a group effort. There were some counts which were a significant increase on the highest counts of previous years. 40 plus were seen in the Hut Hill area of Swinley Forest, but this was surpassed by a count of 60 by Jan Haseler and co from Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer (a site which is just over the county border in Hampshire, but is within the VC of Berkshire).

The 2017 records came from 11 tetrads (3 tetrads had highest counts of 1, 6 tetrads had highest counts of 2-9, and 2 tetrads had highest counts of over 10). I have subdivided the records into 9 separate sites across Southern Berkshire. The majority of records were from visits to the large sites/site complexes at Mortimer, Swinley Forest, and Crowthorne Woods. Greenham Common and Wishmoor Bottom also had a number of visits, and 4 sites returned just one record each.

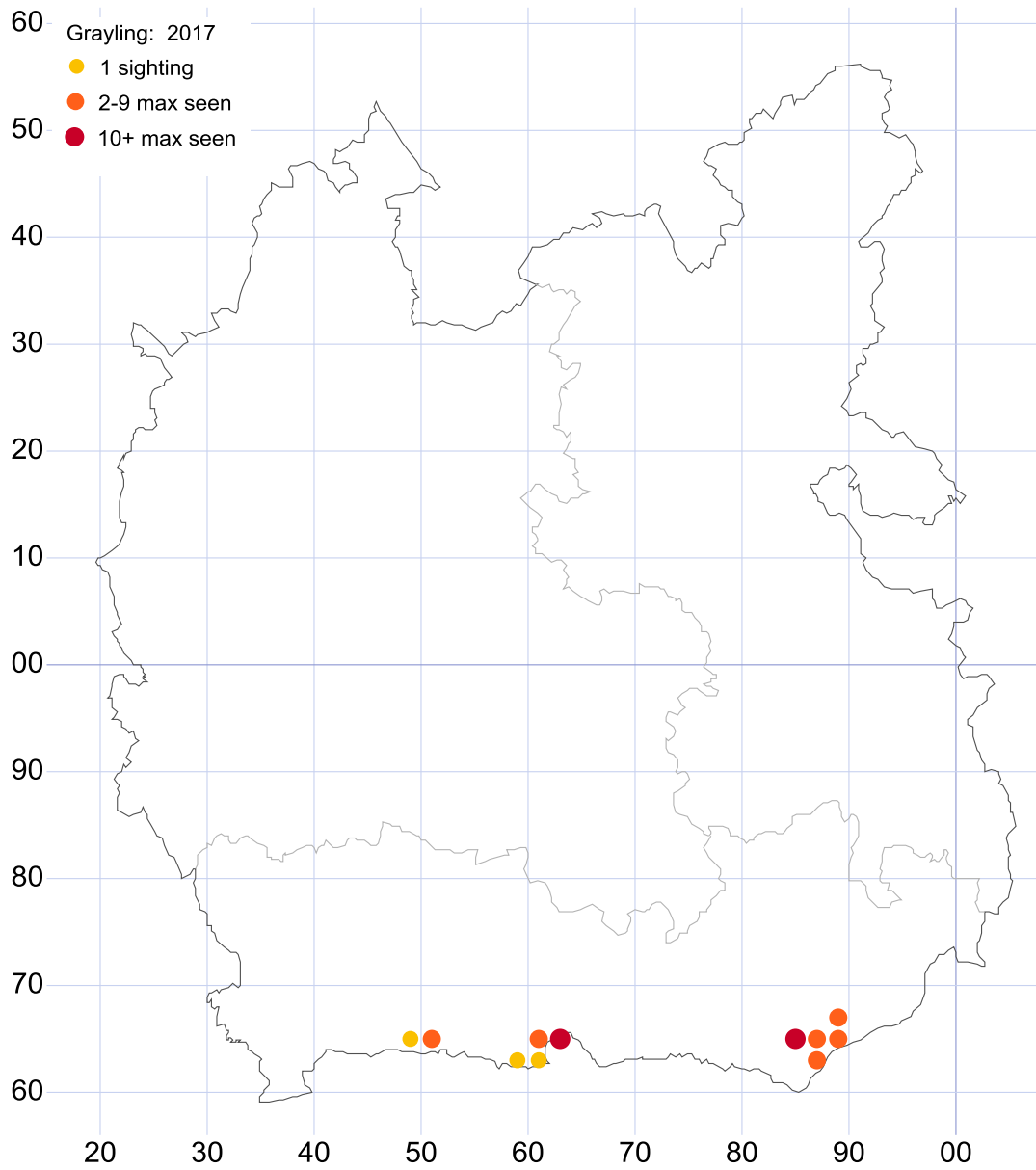
It is notable that there were no 2017 records from a number of 'expected or previously occupied' heath land and forestry sites, including some nature reserves. It is not easy to tell if this is due to a lack of Grayling butterflies, or a lack of survey visits/recording effort. This included the BBOWT reserves at Wildmoor Heath and Broadmoor Bottom, as well as sites like Snelsmore Common which should support the species – do try to make survey visits to these sites during the flight season in 2018 if you can.

Within Swinley Forest a new water pipeline has enabled a long heath land habitat corridor (over 3km) to be created –this has already become a focus of Grayling activity and records. I met with the Crown Estate chief forester and ecologists from South-East Water to encourage long term maintenance of this valuable habitat. I have also been working with the Surrey Wildlife Trust who manage a lot of the MoD habitats in Berkshire at 'Barossa/Wishmoor Bottom'. Their management has restored and enhanced a lot of open heath land and bare ground, and this will definitely help the Grayling population, and hopefully the Silver-studded Blue as well. Jan Haseler has been surveying areas of forestry land at Mortimer, and we met with the estates Forester in September to encourage maintenance of the open heathy habitats, and sensitive management of the flowery rides and verges in the forest. He seemed very keen to help, and the bonus was that we were able to show him a late Grayling which posed for good views.

Many thanks to all who look out for this species and submit records, or help with habitat management.

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## 2017 tetrad map



The new water pipeline through Swinley Forest has enabled creation of a long (over 3km) open habitat corridor.  
Pipeline in construction.



The sown native heath land grasses and heathers have established well, with plenty of flowering and useful patches of bare ground.



Bell heather and fine grasses are valuable nectar and larval food plant resources for grayling and other heath land invertebrates.

