

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

Grayling Report 2018

The Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele* is one of our rarest and 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. The species has previously declined due to loss of habitat due to development and changes in land use. It is also at risk from the loss of 'useful' habitat due to lack of management, as natural succession will tend to make heathland, grassland and open forestry areas too overgrown for the Grayling to complete its lifecycle. On the positive side the Grayling is able to quickly colonise newly restored or created areas of suitable habitat as these become available within its local range.

In 2018 there were just 92 individual Grayling butterflies reported from the UTB area, well down from over 250 in 2017 (see table 1). There were 19 separate records (a big reduction from 33 in 2017) submitted by 15 different recorders. It was great to receive records from some new recorders. Most records were submitted to UTB, whilst some were entered directly onto iRecord. The recorded flight season in Berkshire was from 29th June to 16th September 2018 – spanning at least 80 days.

7 records were of singles, 11 records were of counts of 2-9, and just one record was of more than 10. That was from Jan Haseler who counted 32 at Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer. That site has provided the highest counts for each of the last 3 years. Jan and I have met with the forester responsible for the area to encourage positive conservation management for butterflies.

All 2018 records came from just 5 'sites'

- Greenham Common – 11 records
- Swinley Forest* – 4 records
- Barossa MoD Ranges* – 2 records
- Pamber – 1 record
- Mortimer – 1 record

* Note that Swinley Forest and Barossa Ranges, together with Crowthorne Woods are part of an extensive area of forestry and heathland that also extends across into Surrey at Old Dean Common and Poors Allotments. Much of that area has public access and the 'site' certainly supports many more Grayling than currently get recorded.

The 2018 records came from 11 tetrads (2 x 2 km grid squares) as shown on map 1 below. These included 7 tetrads in east Berkshire, and 4 from mid / west Berkshire, all in the south of the county. In total 25 tetrads have been occupied during the period 2009-2018. The blue circles on map 3 below show that, for the current recording cycle (2015-2019), we have not had records from at least 8 tetrads where the species should occur. It would be helpful if recorders could target those tetrads during 2019. Those sites include:

SU5264 – east end of Crookham Common

SU8262 – Wellington College heathland

SU8466 – north of Swinley Forest, west of Caesars Camp & near to Nine Mile Ride

SU9468 – Heathy habitats in Windsor Great Park

There were no 2018 records from a number of 'expected or previously occupied' heath land and forestry sites, including the BBOWT nature reserves at Wildmoor Heath and Broadmoor Bottom. It is not easy to tell if this is due to a lack of Grayling butterflies. Much of Wildmoor seems to lack the fine grasses that are required for the caterpillars.

At some sites the Grayling is likely to be benefitting from positive habitat management. On the MoD ranges at Wishmoor Bottom and within the Range Danger Area work such as scrub removal, mowing, grazing, and bare ground creation is being undertaken by the Surrey Wildlife Trust in partnership with the landowner (Defence Infrastructure Organisation). This is helping to improve the distribution of patches of 'short open' vegetation that the Grayling (and Silver-studded Blue) favours.

The 'clear fell' programme of timber harvesting in and near to Swinley Forest has produced large patches of open, often sparsely vegetated ground which in turn provides good opportunities for Grayling for a few years. As new trees grow the habitats become less suitable, apart from along sunny tracks and verges. The Crown Estate forestry department are trying to make their verge and ride management plans more 'wildlife friendly', and species like the Grayling stand to benefit. Considering the huge numbers of visitors to this site (from the car park at The Look Out) it is notable how few people take an interest in recording butterflies during their visits. If you have not visited before then a trip to Caesar's Camp is well worth a visit to see the restored heath land habitats on the Iron Age Hillfort which has very impressive ramparts. It is also a good place to see the Grayling in late summer. <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/parks-visit/caesars-camp>

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

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A patch of good Grayling habitat with short open vegetation with suitable caterpillar food plant grasses, and heathers (adult nectar sources) amongst bare sandy and stony ground in south-east Berkshire. Note the 'threat' of bracken and birch scrub which can rapidly smother the habitat if there is no management.

Maps and appendices

Map 1. 2018 records received tetrad map

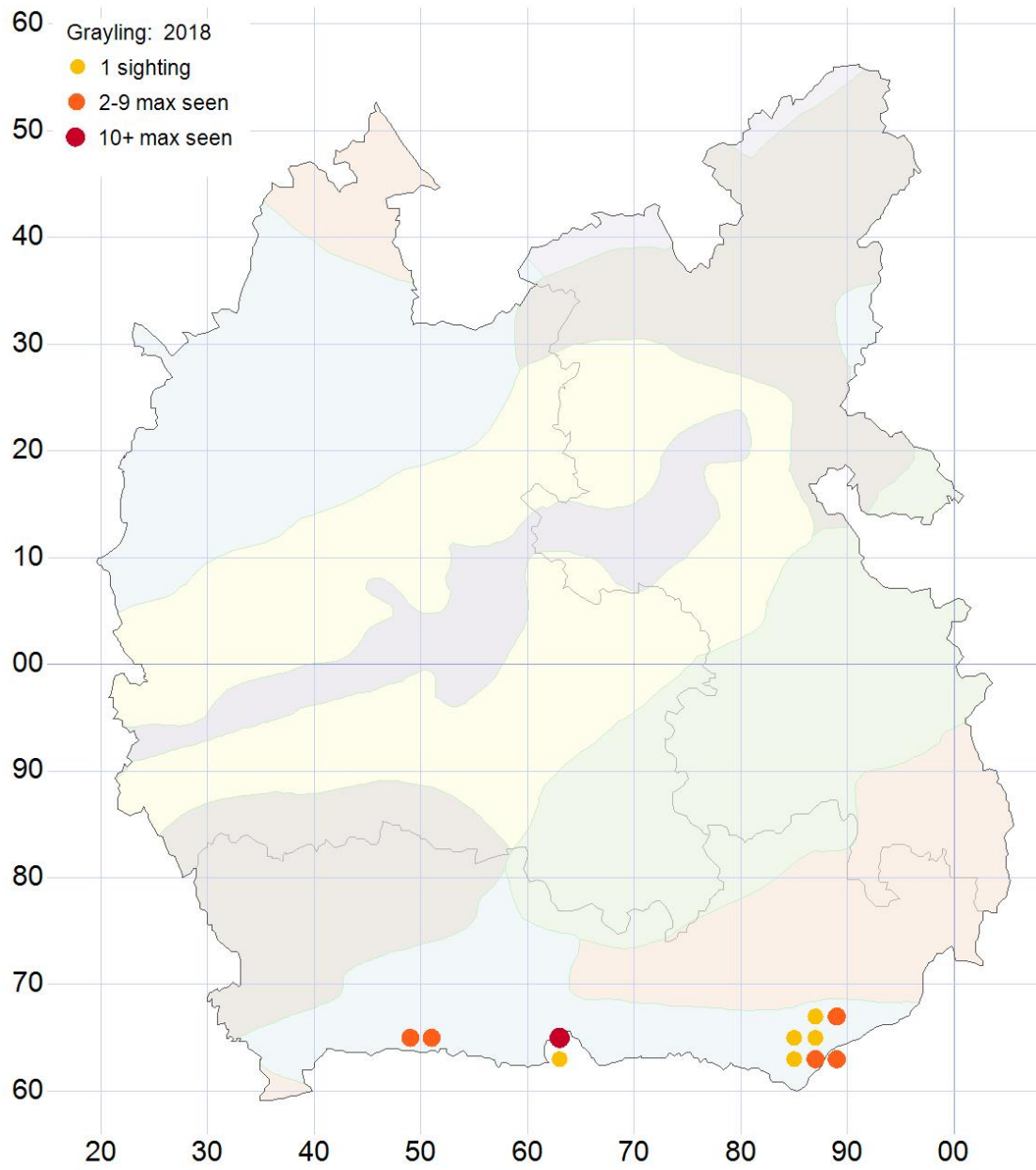
Map 2. 2009 - 2018 records tetrad map (one new tetrad from 2018)

Map 3. 2005 – 2018 records tetrad map

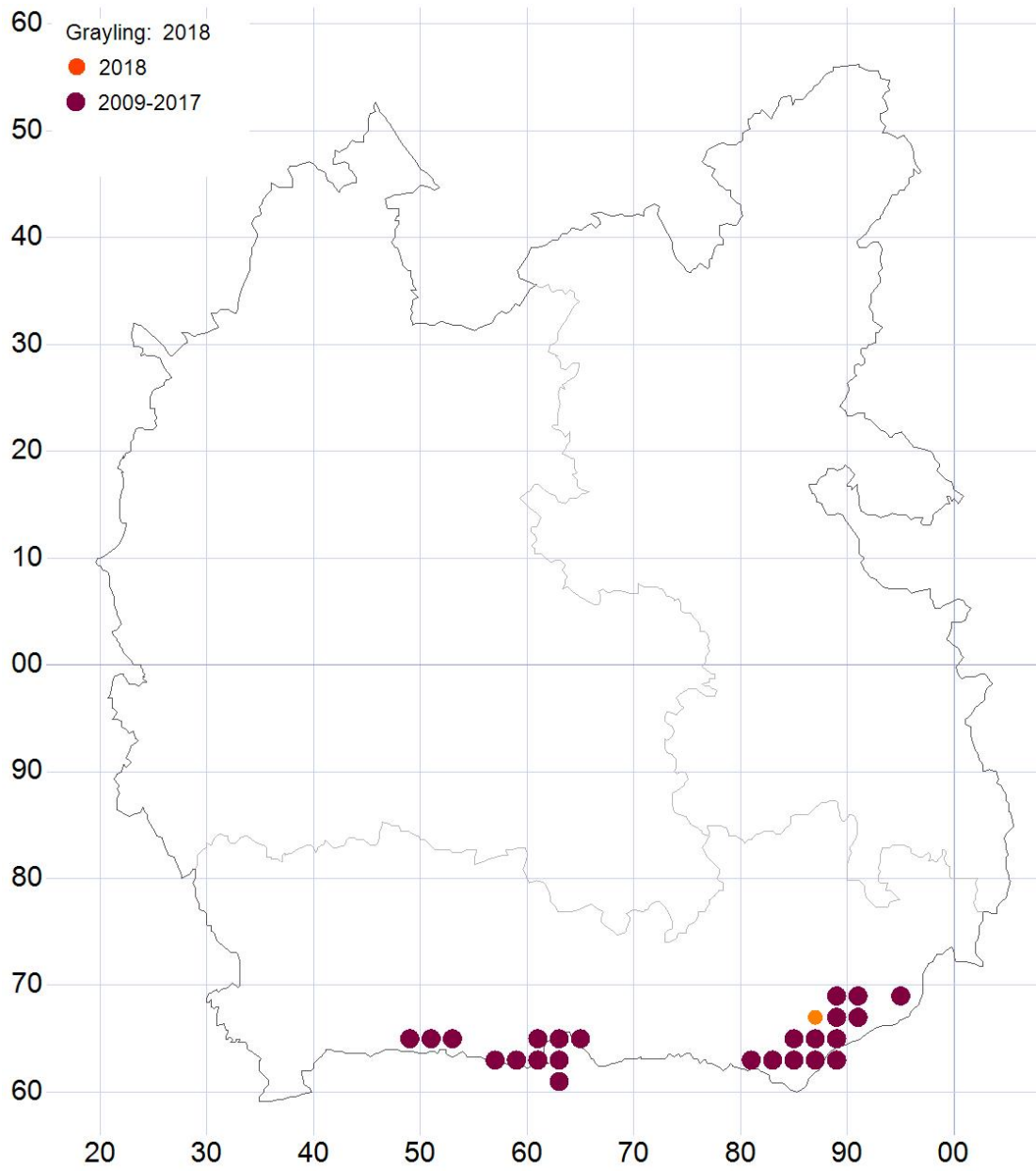
Note - tetrads with no recent (2015-2018) records shown by blue circles

Table 1. recent trends in Grayling recording in the UTB area

Map 1. 2018 records tetrad map



Map 2. 2009-2018 records tetrad map – one new tetrad from 2018



Map 3. 2005 – 2018 records tetrad map
Showing previously occupied tetrads with no recent (2015-2018) records
shown by blue circles

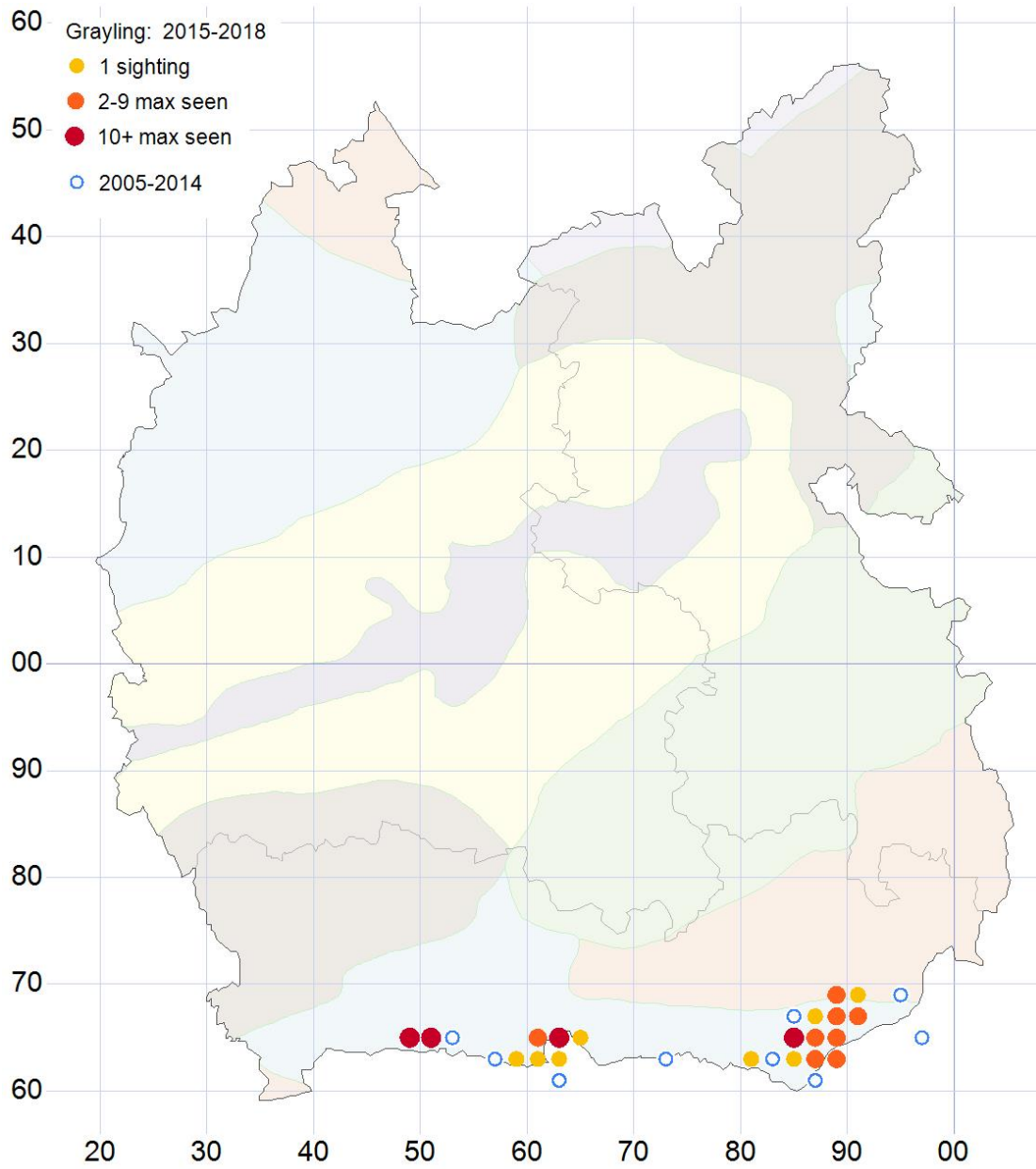


Table 1. Recent trends in recording in UTB area

Year	Number of records	Number of recorders	Total Grayling butterflies counted	Highest count	Number of occupied tetrads	First date	Last date
2016	28	13	135	28	9	14/07	30/08
2017	33	14	257	60	11	04/07	15/09
2018	19	15	92	32	11	29/06	16/09