

Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch

GRAYLING REPORT 2024

Des Sussex - UTB Grayling species champion

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<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/specieschamps>



The Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele* is one of our rarest and most threatened species and is listed under Section 41 (S41) of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act as a 'priority for conservation action'. At a national level, in 2022 the Grayling was moved from Vulnerable to Endangered on the butterfly 'Red List'.

The Grayling in Berkshire in 2024

In 2024 there were 233 Grayling butterflies reported from the UTB area. All sightings were from the core areas of south Berkshire and along the Hampshire and Surrey borders. Trends suggest that in recent years the species is at least stable and possibly increasing in its local range, although recording effort at many sites is very variable between years, and at some sites we only get occasional records of singletons. The species benefits from targeted conservation work, and also habitats resulting from some commercial forestry and mineral operations.

There were 89 separate records submitted by just 12 different recorders, a rather disappointing number of people to be looking out for one of our priority species. It was seen in 25 separate 1km grid squares (from 13 tetrads), most of which are 'core sites' where the species has its strongholds. The recorded flight season in Berkshire during 2024 was 70 days running from 23 June to 1 September. Once again most records were of singles (47) or low counts in the 2-9 range (38). Only 4 counts of 10 or more were made, but encouragingly from different locations, namely **Burnt Common, Wishmoor Bottom, Hundred Acre Piece and Fifty Acre Piece**.

It was good to have another record from the **Blackwater Valley** – from the Fleethill Farm Gravel pits. New public access paths have been opened up around the habitats at former gravel workings between Moor Green Lakes and the Longwater Road (Finchampstead), and I suspect this area will be worth visiting to look out for Grayling during 2025.

The species was also seen again a few times on open young plantation habitat on sandy soils within **Swinley Park** near Bracknell. It was also seen on a number of occasions in and around **Wickham Bushes** which has been restored as a heathland conservation area south of Caesar's Camp in Swinley Forest. There are very few records from Caesar's Camp itself, which is a pity as it is such a super example of heathland and historic monument restoration and supports all sorts of interesting heathland wildlife.

For those wishing to see the species in 2025 the best/more reliable sites to visit continue to include **Buckler's Forest**, **Swinley Forest** (try around **Caesar's Camp** and **Hut Hill**), **Greenham & Crookham Common**, and **Fifty Acre Piece & Hundred Acre Piece**. For those wishing to check outlier sites it would be good to get some survey effort at sites like **Englemere Pond**, BBOWT's **Broadmoor Bottom NR**, and **Gorrick Plantation**, and anywhere with open habitats and wide verges in **Swinley Forest**, all of which could/should have small colonies.

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

Des Sussex 12 April 2025

Appendices

- Table 1. Recent trends in Grayling recording in the UTB area
- Table 2. Distribution trends
- Table 3. Tetrads occupied since 1997 and in 2024
- Figure 1 Map of 2024 data at a tetrad (2km x 2km) resolution
- Figure 2 Map of 5 year distribution 2020-24 data at monad (1km x 1km) resolution
- Habitat information

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 Monads (1km square)	Number of occupied tetrads (2x2 km square)	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
2019	44	25	230	67		15	08/07	08/09
2020	47	18	384	136	21	13	22/06	15/09
2021	68*	28	180	35	23	14	10/07	21/09
2022	61	25	141	11	25	14	24/06	17/09
2023	68	26	450	129	25	11	30/06	07/09
2024	89**	12	233	20	25	13	23/06	01/09

*24 of the 68 records were from a single group survey visit. **34 of the records were from a single visit

Table 2. Distribution trends for 5 year recording periods (does not include 'dubious' outlier records)

5 year recording period	Total Number of occupied tetrads (2x2 km) squares		
1997-2001	23		
2002-2006	15		
2007-2011	16		
2012-2016	20		
2017-2021	25		
2020-2024	26		



Pair of Graylings on bare sand/gravel – Grahame Hawker

Table 3. Tetrads occupied since 1997
Green shading = 2023 records

	Tetrad	Tetrad location & potential sites in that tetrad	Most recent record	Recorded 2024
1	SU4264	Crockham Heath to Hamstead Park	1997-2001	
2	SU4864	Greenham	2024	YES
3	SU5064	Greenham Common to Crookham Common	2024	YES
4	SU5264	Crookham Common	2007-2011	
5	SU5268	Bucklebury Common	1997-2001	
6	SU5662	Brimpton Common to Wasing	2012-16	
7	SU5862	Paices Wood	2017-21	
8	SU5864	Paices Wood to Aldermaston	2017-21	
9	SU6060	Pamber Forest/Heath (Hants)	1997-2001	
10	SU6062	Silchester Common & Decoy Heath Nature Reserve (part Hants)	2012-16	
11	SU6064	Padworth Common	2024	YES
12	SU6262	Silchester Common & Beynons Inclosure	1997-2001	
13	SU6264	Padworth/Burnt Common, Fifty Acre Piece, Hundred Acre Piece,	2024	YES
14	SU6464	Holden Firs	2022	
15	SU7262	Wellington Country Park (Hants)	2002-06	
16	SU7462	Bramshill (Hants)	1997-2001	
17	SU7862	Blackwater Valley- Fleethill to Moor Green 'new workings' west	2024	YES
18	SU8062	Moor Green NR and 'new workings'	2023	
19	SU8064	Simons Wood, Gorrick Plantation	2021	
20	SU8066	Gorrick Plantation	2017-21	
21	SU8262	Wellington College Heath	2022	
22	SU8264	Gorrick Plantation, Heathlake	1997-2001	

23	SU8462	Wildmoor Heath NR, Broadmoor Bottom NR	2022	
24	SU8464	Crowthorne Woods, Buckler's Forest, Swinley Forest (Hut Hill)	2024	YES
25	SU8466	Beaufort Park, Downshire Golf Course	2007-11	
26	SU8660	Royal Military Academy Sandhurst	2002-06	
27	SU8662	Barossa: Broadmoor Bottom to Wishmoor Bottom. Poppy Hills to Swinley Forest Lower Star Post	2024	YES
28	SU8664	Swinley Forest: Caesar's Camp & The Look Out to Upper Star Post & Lower Star Post	2024	YES
29	SU8862	Swinley Forest: Lower Star Post SE	2024	YES
30	SU8864	Swinley Forest: Pudding Hill and Penny Hill to Rapley	2024	YES
31	SU8866	Swinley Park, The Berkshire GC	2024	YES
32	SU8868	Whitmoor Bog	2012-16	
33	SU9064	Buttersteep Forest: Dukes Hill. The Berkshire GC, Swinley Forest GC	2024	YES
34	SU9066	Buttersteep Forest, Swinley Brick Pits, The Berkshire GC	2024	YES
35	SU9068	Englemere Pond LNR	2021	
36	SU9466	Sunningdale GC, Chobham Common (Surrey)	1997-2001	
37	SU9468	Silwood Park	2012-2016	
38	SU9666	Chobham Common N (Surrey)	1997-2001	

Figure 1 Map of 2024 data at a tetrad (2x2km) resolution

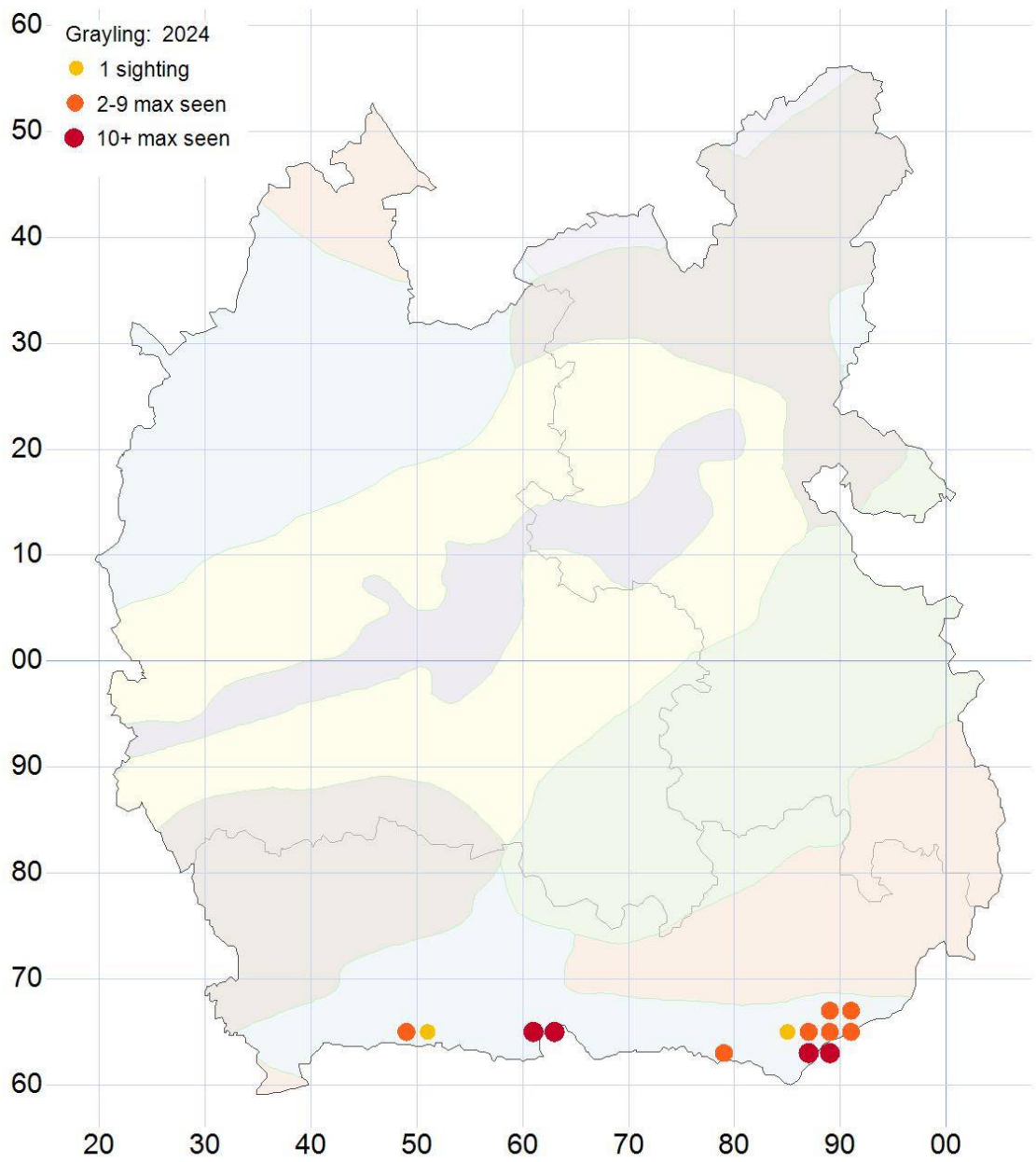
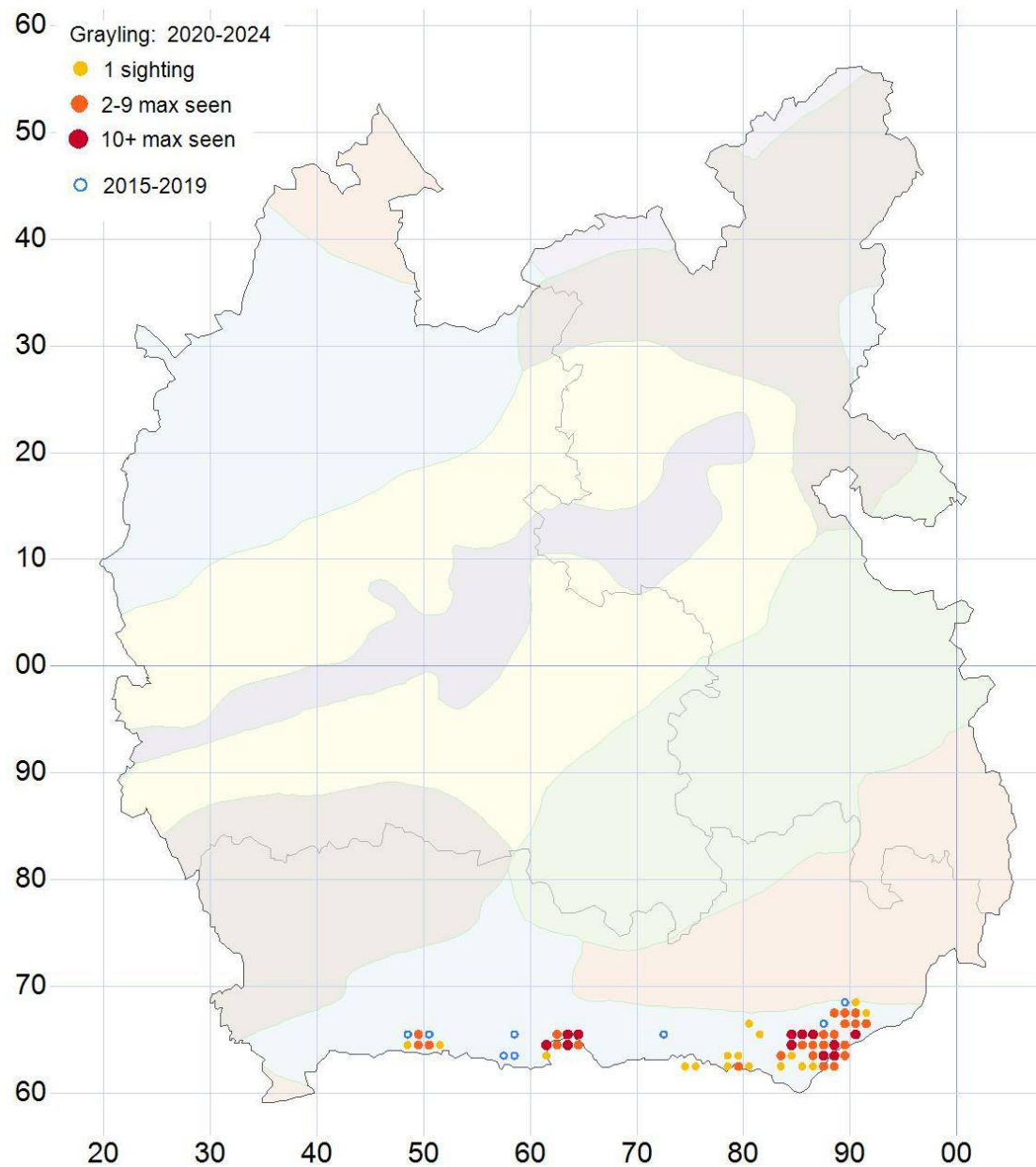


Figure 2 **Map of 2020-24 data at a monad (1x1km) resolution**



Habitat requirements and management guidance

The butterfly depends on early successional habitats with plenty of bare and sparsely vegetated ground. In our local area it is restricted to sandy and gravelly soils. Even within nature reserves and protected sites it is at risk of the loss of suitable 'open' habitat if there is a lack of management. Without adequate management natural succession tends to make heathland, grassland and open forestry areas too overgrown for the Grayling to complete its lifecycle. Management activities such as rotational mowing, grazing, or even surface 'scraping' is required to create some form of 'disturbance' to provide suitable open conditions, with a supply of the short fine-leaved grasses that the caterpillar feeds on, and flowering nectar plants such as heathers which the adults feed from. The Grayling appears to be quite mobile and able to find newly restored or created patches of habitat within a few km of its local range.

Useful weblinks

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/grayling>

<https://www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/specieschamps>

Grayling Species Factsheet

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/1grayling-species-factsheet.pdf>

Bare Ground for Butterflies and Moths

https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/BareGround_WalesLeaflet_2.pdf