

# BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

## Silver-spotted Skipper report for 2022

### Tom Dunbar

#### **Richard Soulsby our former Silver-spotted Champion.**

Richard has stepped down as SSS Champion. To quote Richard: "I have been 'in post' for 20 years and feel it is time to pass on the baton." Richard has done sterling work over that time. His background scientific knowledge, professional expertise and warm and friendly communication skills have been greatly valued and appreciated by members and the branch as a whole in furthering our skills and knowledge of conservation and of the SSS species in particular.

I have taken up that baton knowing that Richard will be available to answer queries and lend support in the field on occasion. My ambition is to learn from Richard how to locate SSS eggs during the upcoming flight season. Richard and I have pencilled-in the coming SSS peak time to crack that one. Perhaps I could pass on that skill to other folks and members?

Tom Dunbar

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### Species description

The Silver-spotted Skipper is a rare butterfly in Britain occurring in discrete colonies on open sunny short chalk grassland, usually breeding where its larval foodplant Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*) grows next to patches of bare ground. In recent years it has colonised many unoccupied sites and has been observed egg-laying in short grassland in the absence of bare ground. That's probably a response to a warmer climate thereby forming microclimates in the swards where it breeds.



Sheep's Fescue

## \*UK SSS Status

**UK Status since 1979** is *Rapid increase* with a change of 612.0% since monitoring began for this species.

**UK Status over the last 20 years** is *Stable* with a change of 14.8%

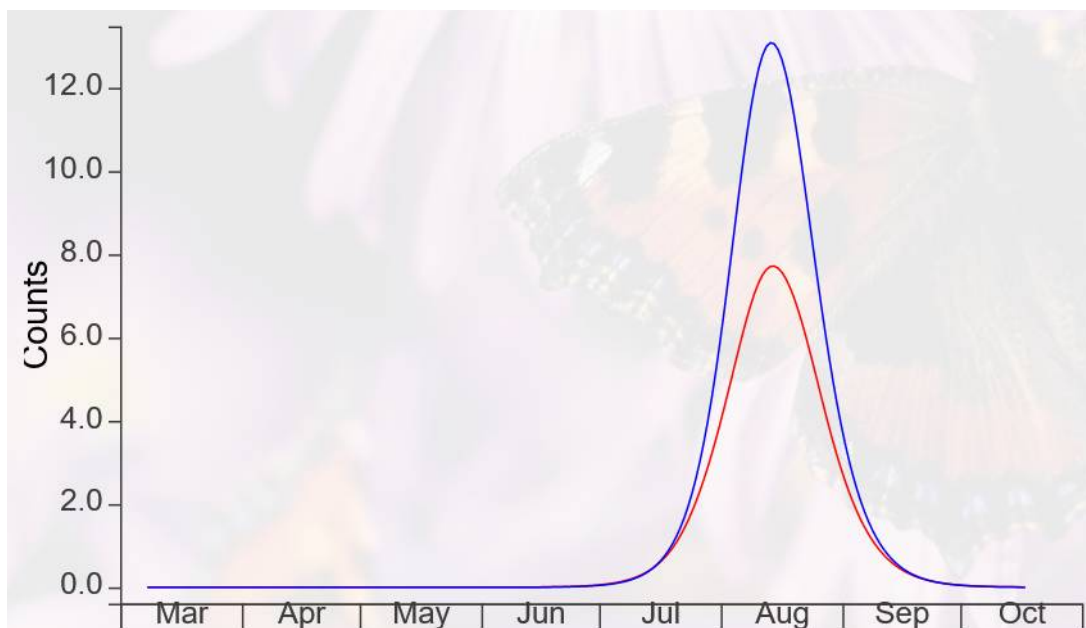
**Status over the last 10 years** is *Stable* with a change of 36.0%

\* <https://ukbms.org/species/silver-spotted-skipper>



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Adults emerge mid-July with peak numbers mid-August.



(Contains UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) data © copyright)

## Silver spotted Skipper in the Chilterns

Our SSS populations on the Chilterns are currently the most northerly in the UK. These extend from sites in the Watlington area to more northerly locations in the Princes Risborough and Wendover locations.

**Watlington populations to the south:** Watlington Hill, Bald Hill, all parts of the Aston Rowant NNR, Swyncombe Downs and outliers.

**Northern populations:** Cadsden, Great Kimble, Ellesborough and outlier.

This northern part of the range is strengthening overall. The northern colony at Buttlers Hangings near West Wycombe has dwindled, with none seen since 2019.

Sadly, former colonies on the Berkshire Downs have been lost, with the last recorded sighting being in 2009.

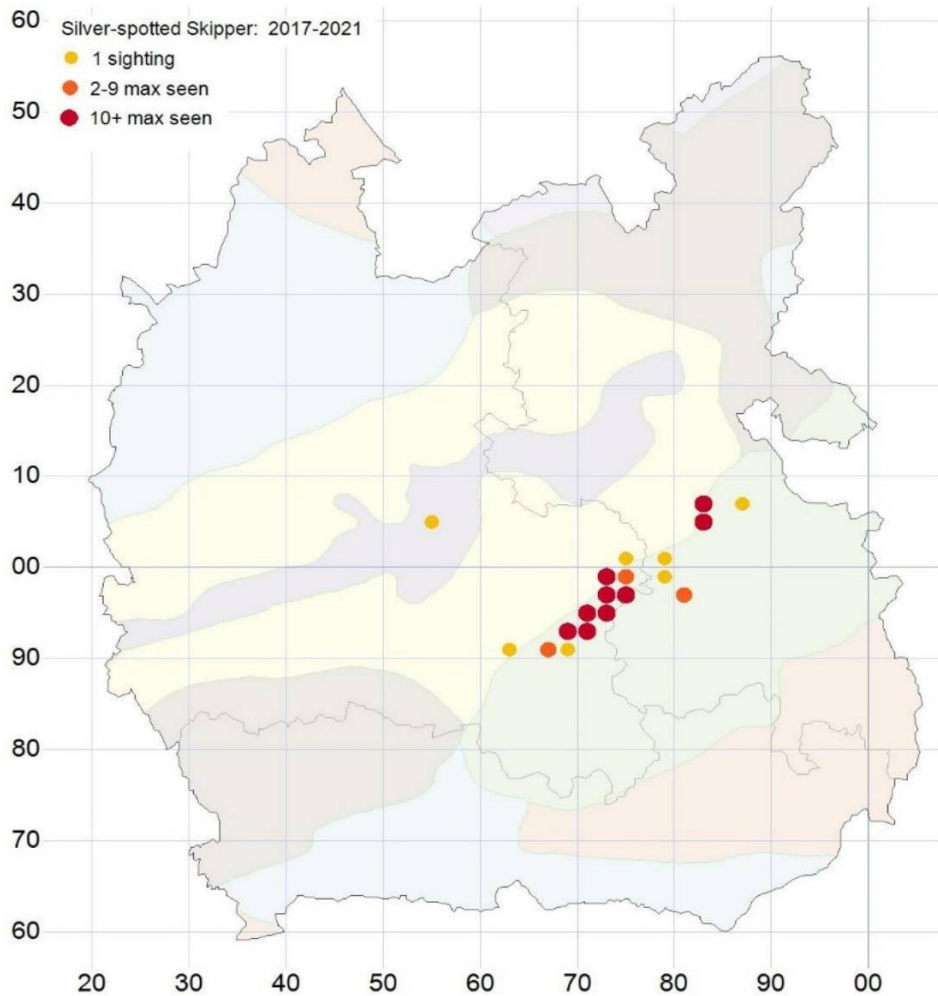
Several other sites which had populations in former years, or indeed current very low numbers, need checking:

Bacombe Hill, Coombe Hill, Yoesden Bank, Swains Wood, Daws Hill Radnage, Buttlers Hangings.



### The Chilterns Populations Map

The map below outlines our Chilterns populations. (The outlier sighting to the west was on a roundabout in Oxford. Any thoughts?)



### Earliest /Latest Annual Sightings

Annual Earliest and Latest UTB Sightings 2022-2013										
Year	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
<b>Earliest UTB Sighting</b>	20/07	15/07	20/07	25/07	09/07	09/07	13/07	17/07	14/07	25/07
<b>Latest UTB Sighting</b>	17/09	16/09	18/09	19/09	02/09	12/09	06/09	11/09	03/09	12/09
<b>Flight period in days</b>	59	64	61	57	56	66	56	57	52	50

Annual butterfly colony emergence and associated flight periods vary. They are subject to conditions such as weather, drought, habitat condition and other possible constraints. This can also apply to the earlier development stages (egg, larva, pupa) and not just at the time of adult emergence. Why the variation in the above figures? Perhaps draw your own conclusions?