

# BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION UPPER THAMES BRANCH

## Silver-spotted Skipper report for 2023

Tom Dunbar

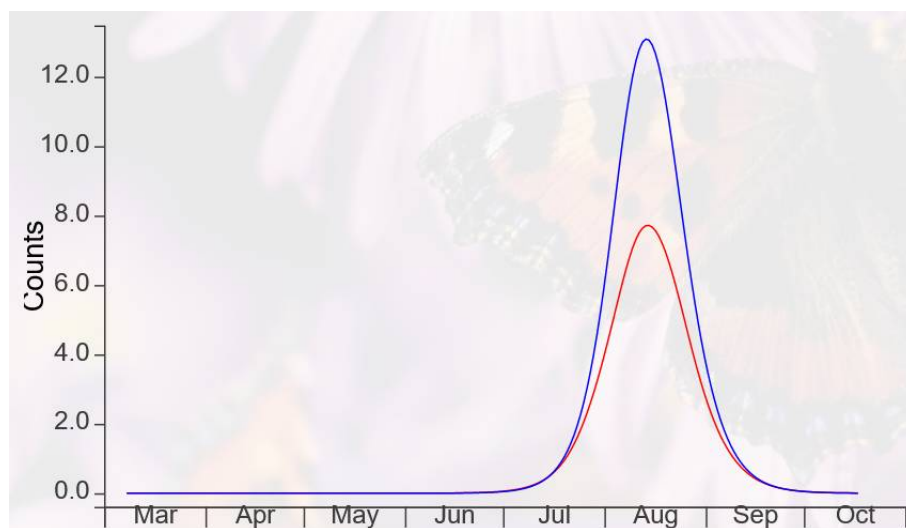
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### Species description

*Hesperia comma* 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 in Southern England. It has been observed egg-laying in short grassland in the absence of bare ground, probably a response to a warmer climate and therefore microclimates in the swards where it breeds.

### Flight Period



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

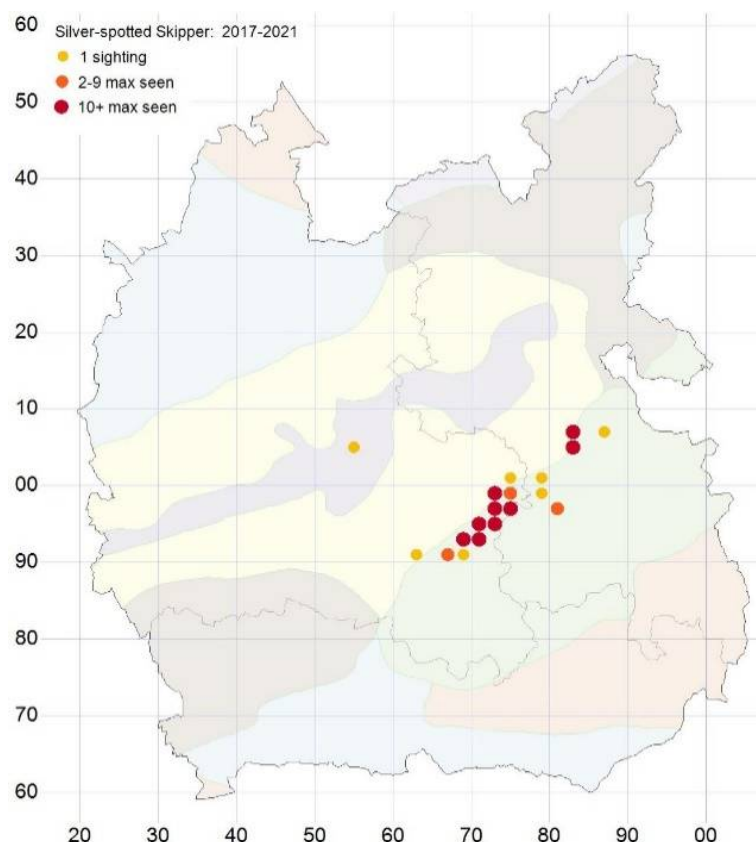
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### Silver-spotted Skipper in the Chilterns

Our SSS populations in the Chilterns are the most northerly in the UK. The core of the UTB SSS distribution across the Chiltern sites has remained generally intact over the last decade. Most successful sites have been concentrated in their strongholds of Aston Rowant to Watlington area to the south, and Wendover/Princes Risborough area to the north. There is a single SSS population in the Swyncombe Downs.

There is evidence of a retraction of range in the south since the period 2005 – 2014. The northern part of the range is strengthening overall, with multiple sightings at Beacon Hill Ellesborough. This is the northernmost strong breeding colony in the UK. The strong colony at the Grangelands reserve too is doing well.

## Abundance and Distribution



## Occasional sightings

There have been occasional reported sightings in recent years, in the following sites: Coombe Hill Wendover, Yoesden Bank (first since 2010), Bacombe Warren Wendover. These reported sightings have not been repeated since at these locations but worth continuing monitoring for future possible sightings in years to come.

**New sightings** have been made at Chinnor Quarry, with individual females seen there in 2023, 2019, 2018. This site might possibly be suitable for a future viable population.

## Concerns

Linkey Down Aston Rowant sightings have diminished in numbers in very recent years (2022, 2023) but hopefully may recover.

There was a well-established colony for many years at Butlers Hangings close to West Wycombe which unfortunately has been lost. All colonies on the Berkshire Downs have also been lost, with the last recorded sighting being in 2009.

Annual Earliest and Latest UTB Sightings 2023 – 2012												
Year	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
<b>Earliest Sighting</b>	20th July	20/07	15/07	20/07	25/07	09/07	09/07	13/07	17/07	14/07	25/07	21/07
<b>Latest Sighting</b>	29th Sept Grangelands Very late	17/09	16/09	18/09	19/09	02/09	12/09	06/09	11/09	03/09	12/09	15/09
<b>Flight period in days</b>	80 *See comment below	59	64	61	57	56	66	56	57	52	50	57

Over the years the date of first sighting has varied, as seen above, based on data taken from the 'First sightings' page of the UTB website.

\*Average flight period 2012 to 2022 was 58 days. 2023 80 days result reflects very late 29<sup>th</sup> Sept sighting at Grangelands in 2023.



**Many thanks** to the recorders that have submitted SSS records over the years. Sightings can be submitted through various means e.g. iRecord, UTB website sightings page and perhaps other methods.

**Sightings posted on social media are not picked up by the National or local monitoring system.**

**iRecord** is excellent for recording and storing sightings. You fill in the site name and the technology will automatically read the Ordnance Survey reference of the location where you are recording. It's a brilliant simple system which is highly recommended.

**Request:** We are very fortunate in having several separate butterfly colonies established in the Aston Rowant area: Bald Hill Aston Rowant; Beacon Hill Aston Rowant; Linkey Down Aston Rowant; Shirburn Hill Aston Rowant etc. We need to monitor the ongoing strength of these important separate colonies accurately. It's important that submitted sightings include the precise site location **titles** indicated above rather than the simple generic name 'Aston Rowant'. Many thanks to the many recorders who already adopt this approach.

**2024 flight and egg season:** Let's hope for a successful and enjoyable season this coming 2024 summer. Hopefully lots of sunshine with abundant sightings to match!



## **A challenge**

My set challenge for 2023 was to develop my skill set in locating SSS eggs across various sites. I achieved this task at 7 sites. I had the assistance of Richard Soulsby, our former excellent Upper Thames Branch SSS Champion. I had a learning session with Richard at Beacon Hill Aston Rowant where we located 3 eggs. I managed to locate another 20+ eggs independently at a further 6 UTB sites and 2 sites on the North Downs Surrey – Denbies Hillside area.

**Have you yet set yourself a challenge for 2024?** If you have, I would welcome feedback at [silver-spotted-skipper@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:silver-spotted-skipper@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk)

**Tom Dunbar**