

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) goes ahead in 2009

By Dr Katie Cruickshanks, WCBS co-ordinator

After two years of pilot testing, a new method of monitoring butterflies in widespread habitats, such as farmland and upland moorland, is to be rolled out nationwide this year.

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey method has been developed by Butterfly Conservation and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology as part of the UKBMS project.

The existing Transect network provides invaluable data on the status of butterflies, yet widespread habitats are under-recorded. More information on the fate of butterflies in these areas is needed. The new survey is intended to fill these gaps by complementing, rather than replacing, the existing Transect network.

The pilot testing has thrown up some interesting information. Last year, despite the unsettled weather, nearly two thirds of the 1-km squares visited in 2007 were revisited by volunteers. In total 40 species were recorded.

Importantly all 23 target species were detected in both pilot years which means that trends can be analysed to test whether classic Transects provide a truly representative picture of butterflies in the UK landscape as a whole.

Volunteers who have participated in the pilot testing have shown considerable enthusiasm and it is hoped this will continue to grow.

There has been close involvement with the British Trust for Ornithology and the method is based on the highly successful Breeding Bird Survey. We hope that many BTO recorders will be returning to their bird sites this summer to collect butterfly data as part of the survey along with many new surveys completed by BC recorders.

The new method involves making a minimum of two visits to a randomly selected square near to your home between May and August to count butterflies along two 1km survey lines running roughly north-south through the your square. The survey will be co-ordinated centrally by BC but we aim to find a Champion in each Branch to help find willing volunteers. We are aiming for 20 squares per Branch.

Please email survey@butterfly-conservation.org or call 01929 406036 to register interest in taking part and you will be contacted in early spring with instructions and the location of your random 1km survey square. Keep an eye on www.butterfly-conservation.org/wcbs for more information.