

East Lothian Butterflies 2025



2025 will be remembered as a lovely sunny year, particularly after all the rain the previous year. After a fairly benign winter we had a dry, sunny spring. However, there was often a wind, mostly easterlies, keeping the temperatures down. The summer continued in the same vein, with the occasionally showery day. However, the general lack of rain and the wind caused the vegetation to dry up, particularly in coastal areas. From the end of September the weather became a lot more cloudy and cooler. There was the odd lovely day, but butterfly numbers appeared to almost switch off in October!

The lovely weather wasn't necessarily good for butterflies. As the dry sunny weather continued, the vegetation dried up making the caterpillar food plants less palatable. Of course, there were winners and losers this year and, as ever, it is interesting to speculate why species did well or otherwise.



We had a couple of very early records. Firstly, a Speckled Wood that was seen on 15th January in Butterdean Wood. I can only assume that it had crawled into a nearby greenhouse as a caterpillar last autumn and was tricked into thinking that spring had arrived.

The next butterfly was a Small Tortoiseshell, which was seen near Seton Sands on 28th February. Maybe not such a surprise as they spend the winter hibernating as adult butterflies, so can make an appearance on a mild day.

Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks on 6th March. Both species had a fairly average year, but at least Small Tortoiseshells bounced back from last year's low numbers.



There were a few Red Admirals seen in March, indicating that they may have survived the winter here. They went on to have an amazing year, with us recording about three times the average number.



The first Comma was seen on 15th March. They went on to have a great year, particularly later in the season, and I received the highest number of records since I started collating them in 2008.



A few days later a Painted Lady was spotted in North Berwick. They also had a good year, with 220 records - a big improvement on last year's 14! Their numbers can be really variable. I would suggest the normal annual average is under 100 records, but the figures are skewed by the 2019 invasion when I received 5395 records!



All four white species had an amazing year. For Orange Tips, Green-veined Whites and Large Whites it was by far the best year since I started recording the butterflies. Small Whites also had a fantastic year, way above average, but not quite as high a number as was seen in 2018.



Speckled Wood numbers picked up in April and they also had a very good year. I received records of 1608 of them, which is the second highest number since they reappeared in East Lothian in 2009.



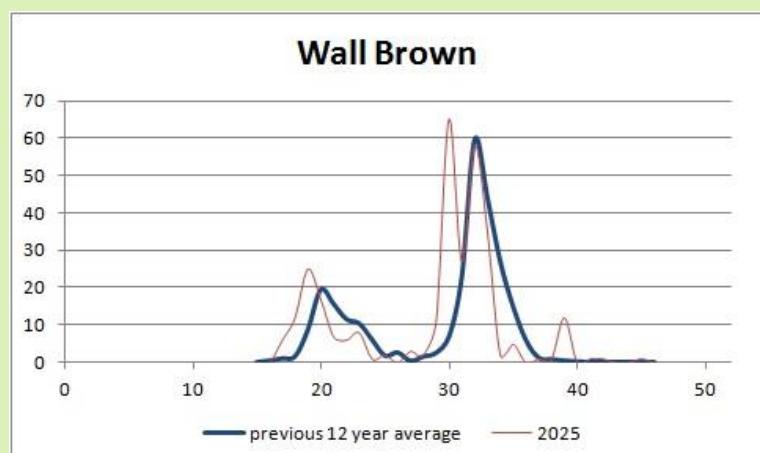
Small Coppers had a fairly average year.

The same could be said for Wall Brown. Their numbers look fairly average, but when you look at



when they were seen, they were almost exactly two weeks early and there was a small third generation towards the end of September, with the last one being seen on 7th November.

For all of the winners in 2025, there have to be some losers! Unfortunately, Holly Blue numbers crashed even further than last year. This year we only recorded 22 in total. Way down on the 377 seen in 2023. I hope we are seeing the boom-and-bust pattern that is seen in England resulting from the effects of the parasitic wasps on the Holly Blue population. Only time will tell.





Small Heath numbers were down on their average and this year was the lowest count since I have been collating the records.

Other species that didn't do so well were Meadow Browns. We only saw about two thirds of the normal numbers.



And Ringlets were the same, although it was notable that some sites did better than others.



Dark Green Fritillary numbers were a little lower than average.



We recorded 41 Large Skippers in East Lothian in 2025. I am sure this must be the best year they have had here, but because we normally see so few I haven't added them to my spreadsheet. I'll sort that over the winter!



Small Skippers had a better year than average, although they have only been seen in East Lothian since 2011. Their numbers peaked in 2021 and have fluctuated since then.



Common Blues did a little better than average.

So, it seems as though many of the grassland species didn't do so well in 2025. Could this be because they also tend to emerge later in the summer, by which time the vegetation had become very dry? This may have resulted in their caterpillars perishing. However, by the time the vegetation dried out the caterpillars would have been fairly well developed and forming chrysalises.

Could it be because of the easterly winds that hit most of the coastal sites? Many of our best grasslands are on coastal sites.



Of course, it maybe isn't as simple as that, because the butterflies we saw in 2025 would have been laid as eggs the previous year, when the weather was less favourable.



There were quite a number of other species seen, but they tend to be found in more remote sites, so were only recorded in small numbers. These included Purple Hairstreak, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Grayling, Northern Brown Argus and Green Hairstreak.

There was great excitement when a Clouded Yellow was spotted at John Muir Country Park in August. Another was seen at Skateraw a couple of weeks later. A good number of them migrated over from the continent in 2025 and there were records from all over the UK.

So, on the whole, 2025 turned out to be a fantastic year for butterflies. Between the ad hoc records and the transects we recorded a grand total of 17,229 butterflies. One thing I always wonder is if we have great weather are there really more butterflies, or are people out and about more and therefore seeing more butterflies!

To round the year off I have just received reports of three different Peacocks being spotted in Cockenzie and Prestonpans in the middle of December. This means that for the first time I can remember we had butterflies recorded in every month of the year! Maybe a sign of climate change?

Thank you very much to everyone who has contributed ad hoc records or walked a transect in 2025. All these records are very valuable. A single record of a common butterfly is every bit as important as a record of something rare. I send them all to Butterfly Conservation at the end of the season to help them track butterfly populations and understand the impacts of habitat loss and climate change. If anyone would like to help record butterflies next year please get in touch with me at nmorgan@eastlothian.gov.uk

Nick Morgan

