

West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Grayling Action Group (GAG)

Progress towards agreed aims (see notes in black below) 2023/early 2024 (further feedback since this progress report was sent out to GAG members on 6/7/24 is given at the bottom of this report)

Meetings held – one inaugural meeting online in March and one starting at Earl’s Hill and continuing onto The Bog in July (it was intended that the Malvern Hills Conservators attend this meeting but they had to cancel at the last moment). Two caterpillar hunts were held at The Bog in March and May with one caterpillar being found on both occasions. A September meeting was also held at The Bog with Ed Andrews (the site manager Shropshire County Council (SCC)) and the Shropshire Lichen Group to discuss site management (as Bog Mine is a key site for lichens).

Site searches for Grayling adults – Took place in Shropshire at Bog Mine, Earl’s Hill (good numbers on both sites), Mytton Dingle, Perkins Beach and Snailbeach Mine on the Stiperstones, and Gravels Forestry (none seen on any of these sites), plus Batch Valley on the Long Mynd (small numbers reported). A number of areas of the Malvern Hills were also searched in 2023 but no adults were seen.

In 2024 the aim is to try and re-survey other possible extant sites in Shropshire giving priority to those not visited in 2023.

Transect monitoring – the transects along Cow Ridge on the Long Mynd and at The Bog were re-established. A group of volunteers to cover a transect at Earls Hill has been established and is due to start in 2024.

A research project on the egg laying behaviour of Grayling females at The Bog was undertaken in order to inform site management with a number of recommendations now having been identified as a result of this work. It is now considered that a hydrogeological survey should precede any management work on the site as lying water in winter is much more of an issue here than initially thought. It is anticipated that this research project will continue in 2024 and maybe extended onto Earl’s Hill.

Site management – volunteer work parties on the Long Mynd have been targeted at two extant sites on the Long Mynd (Batch Valley and Cow Ridge). The GAG initial funding (£600) has recently been spent on trial Robocutter work to remove gorse around the third extant site on the Long Mynd (Townbrook Hollow – see the photo below).



Through Rhona further Severn Trent funding has been spent at Earl's Hill and Simon Cooter (Natural England Stiperstones) has confirmed that a work party removed scrub at Crowsnest Dingle. Management recommendations have also been made for Shelve Forestry and David Poynton has tried to raise the profile of Pennerley Mine (close to The Bog) which has recently suffered further damage.

On the Malvern Hills Mel reports that Phil & Robocutter recently worked for 3 days on North Hill to maintain and extend the Grayling habitat (thanks to Mel for the photo below). Unfortunately, the funding does not permit similar work to be completed nearby on the east side of Worcestershire Beacon to restore the habitat on former strongholds from last century.



Other plans for 2024 – UV torch surveys for caterpillars at The Bog (from anytime now) to see if this is a better way of finding caterpillars and confirming breeding locations (the rate of finding eggs/hour being quite low when following females). If successful at Bog Mine this UV survey could then be extended to other sites.

Budget requested for 2024/25 – from £600-£1K. The aim would be to use this as match funding to trigger more management for this butterfly. For example the NT on the Long Mynd have already said they will use some of their farming in protected landscapes funding later this year/early next year for more gorse removal around key Grayling areas.

Feedback from Clive Dean (SWT)

I can offer a brief update on what we have been doing at Earls Hill. Stephen Lewis has been pivotal in setting up a small group to survey Grayling at Earls Hill over the coming season.

SWT volunteers have continued to clear bramble, scrub and other vegetation from the area of scree and also from the Craft Valley on Earls Hill to benefit a range of butterflies including Grayling

Rhona's project has paid for both volunteers and a contractor to clear bramble from the scree in the last two weeks.

This week 6 goats have arrived on the area of scree at Earls Hill, they will be here for 4 months. The goats are controlled by a virtual fence to keep them on the scree and are starting to munch through the bramble. Volunteers are keeping an eye on the goats and talking to dog owners. This has become a big talking point locally. We are paying a local grazer for this grazing but future funding to continue this if successful could be an issue for us.

Prompt to recorders from Caroline Uff

Dear Peter and Jane

You may be interested to see Jenny's Grayling report below. She is continuing to ask for records / transects in 2024, so once again if you are able to help with either this year that would be great.

Best wishes

Caroline

Grayling Action Group - First meeting on 29/3/23 on zoom (thanks to Rhona for setting this up)

Present: Ed Andrews (Shropshire CC) Clive Dean (SWT), Martyn Davies, Ian Duncan, Rhona Goddard, Jenny Joy (Chair), Stephen Lewis, Mel Mason, John Tilt and Mike Williams (all WMBC)

1. **Welcome** – Jenny
2. **Apologies** – Caroline Uff
3. **Introductions** – all introduced themselves to other group members
4. **Group membership** – suggestions for further group members that were agreed were as follows: Jenny suggested adding David Poynton (who first discovered the Graylings on the lead mines in Shropshire). Clive and Mike suggest that surveying volunteers could be added in the future if they were interested.
5. **The initial aims below were agreed with the addition of those in italics**

Agreed Aims

- Identify then retain all remaining extant colonies/populations in the region with no further losses.
- Liaise with the owners/managers of all extant sites to make them aware of the presence of the butterfly and what they can do to help.
- Ensure this butterfly is well represented in our long-term regular monitoring in the region.
- Aim to restore (reintroduce) at least one population in the next 5-10 years.

- Encourage research to identify the possible reasons for site losses (especially on those where there appears to be little change) and whether artificial habitat could be created.
- *Compile a photographic and management record of what has been achieved on other Grayling sites in this country (e.g. which shows the advance of scrub such as gorse and trials with robocutters as well as photos of Graylings adults and larvae which could be used for training volunteers etc). It is anticipated that this will initially involve contacting other branches.*

6. The initial actions for 2023 were agreed with the addition of those in italics

Agreed Actions 2023

- Hold at least two meetings the first being to agree aims, actions 2023 and budget spend (the first one now completed).
- Encourage branch members and local volunteers to visit former/extant sites (underway). a number of sites visited in Shropshire and the Malverns in 2023. What about Herefordshire?
- Bring together all the information we have on this butterfly regionally and nationally by first contacting other branches and see if they have useful management information or knowledge that could help us. **Only part way here. Can anybody take this on?**
- Get targeted management underway on up to three extant/former sites where this is appropriate. **Action Rhona might be able to help with funding for the management of sites already part of the Severn Trent funding (The Bog, Earls Hill and Roman Gravels). Any other sites for possible management need identifying to Rhona by the end of April 2023. Management**
- Establish at least species transects/timed counts on the two sites in Shropshire which are still strong (Earls Hill and the Bog). Use the transect that was previously set up at the Bog as a guide for this. **Action: Stephen offered to help with the transect on The Bog with Mike, Clive and Ed offering to help with recruiting other volunteers for both transect/timed count monitoring and surveys of other sites.**
- Bring together the managers of the Long Mynd and the Malvern Hills to discuss where their problems in managing for this butterfly overlap and what they could learn from each other. **Action: Mel, Rhona and Jenny to arrange date together with the land managers**
- Arrange first field visit in April to look for larvae and discuss management (on The Bog and Earls Hill). **Action: Jenny to arrange date**
- Arrange a date for GAG members to view the Shropshire sites at peak numbers in the first half of July. **Action: Jenny to arrange date**
- Identify how we could encourage more research to help to address our research aim.
- *Mel to lead a visit to the key Grayling areas on the Malverns to look for adults.*
Action: Mel to arrange date

7. Budget

- It was agreed that the £600 budget could initially go on volunteer travel expenses if anybody wished to claim these. *The budget could be re-visited in December to see how much is left to ensure it is all spent.*
8. **Actions offered by other group members:** **Martyn** agreed to encourage survey of former sites in Herefordshire (with Jenny agreeing to try to help with getting permission for access in one quarry). **Ian and Mel** will be surveying sites in the Malverns (such as Broad Down and Ragged stone). **Ed and Clive** were happy to be part of visits to their land and to give permission for surveys. **John** will continue to help with supplying data and maps of records as needed.
 9. **Date of next meeting** – April meeting for larvae hunts at The Bog date tbc by Jenny