**CONFIDENTIAL**

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Interviewer: Alison Dyke

Respondent:

**INT: So the first question is how long have you been recording and how did you start doing any sort of wildlife species recording?**

P12: Right okay, I’ve thought about this one. I’ve been probably interested in butterflies seriously for about 25 years. Mainly when the children got to an age where I could start thinking I’ve got a life of my own again. They were at school.

**INT: I was looking forward to that. [laughs]**

P12: Yes. I’ve always liked butterflies. And if I went on holiday I would see them and I would try and identify them and I’d get the books. But as I say, about 25 years ago I remember seeing, we didn’t go on holiday in August. And then suddenly the buddleia bush was smothered in peacocks. And I just thought to myself surely somebody wants to know that. And I had no idea where you sent the records. Then probably a few months later there was an article in The Times newspaper from Margaret Vickery who set up the Garden Butterfly Survey, the original one asking for people to submit their first sightings, which I duly started doing. And then someone came round to the door knocking on the door asking if I’d join the [wildlife charity]. I thought, hmm, I think I will. Which you wouldn’t normally do when someone cold calls. And I saw in the publicity they had a talk at the local centre saying, the local arts centre, saying- a talk on the butterflies of [county] from the then chairman of [wildlife charity]. Ooh I thought, I’m definitely going to that. And he produced this annual report, the first ever, 1995, the first year of the Millenium Project. And I said, “Have you got any for sale?” Yes. So I bought one. And next thing I knew I’d joined [wildlife charity]. And the next thing I knew I was recording butterflies sort of in my garden when the children were still young. And then as the Millenium Project hotted up for the last two years our county recorder was very, very proactive. And this is all in the days before the internet and email. And in the post came a little package with a whole load of squares and tetrads and two, you know all the two kilometre squares saying, will I go to this one and find a holly blue? And would I go to this one and find some more tortoiseshell [inaudible: 00:02:42]. And I’d just got the [unclear: 00:02:45], and I just- You would get in the car the minute the kids went off to school, and drive around with my maps, no sat nav or anything like that and find the butterflies. Find somewhere to pull up, walk across a field, find the right habitat. And in doing this I suddenly realised that I was walking through between two fields, and there was a little, small patch of flowers and there were no butterflies on it. And I started to understand the problems of intensive agriculture affecting butterfly numbers. So again, that was another reason I just started to get more and more concerned as well as just having the fun of recording butterflies, the conservation side of it started to concern me. And I ended up on the committee of the local branch. And I’ve been there ever since. That’s how I started.

**INT: That’s really interesting. So do you have a role on the committee, a specific role?**

P12: I’m Secretary, I look after the field trips. I’m branch organiser. I used to look after the website. I organise the events, so this weekend we’ve got our members day and AGM. So in the morning we’ve got a national recorders meeting. And in the afternoon we’ve got our members day. So I’m involved with organising that, which of course this year is online on Zoom. But normally it would be very, very hectic.

**INT: Yes. And do you have a role in- Are you a Vice-County recorder or anything like that?**

P12: No, no, no. That was [Name]. I just send my records. They all go into MapMate. I keep them in a notebook. I put them into MapMate and at the end of the year I submit them. I don’t use, I don’t do it as I go along.

**INT: And has your butterfly recording evolved into recording anything else? Do you do moths? Or any other species groups?**

P12: I do moths. I occasionally do birds. Unfortunately the rest of it, there’s too much to learn. I like to know about specific things. But I don’t- I just stick to moths. And I’m still only getting the hang of micromoths after 20 years. So I have the light trap in the mornings which I go out to.

**INT: And do you do just do the moth trapping at home?**

P12: Yes, well I say that, if we were in the normal world, if I go, I have a- My brother lives in [county], I also do the recording up there. And I look for day flying moths as well if I’m out. And I did used to do clearwing lures this year as well, which was rather fun.

**INT: Yes. And then for the butterflies, what sort of area do you cover? Is it the county, the whole of the county that you’re interested in?**

P12: [laughs] No. Well at the moment it’s just been my local sort of 10k at the most. But in a normal year, well in, let’s have a look. Normally it’s [county]. It extends into [county] for brown hairstreak. It will extend throughout the East of England for purple emperors, which I would normally be looking for. And of course you also do a lot of winter work where you’re looking for habitat. And ooh 15 years ago it was countrywide apart from Scotland when I was looking for white-letter hairstreaks as part of a national project I helped set up with a recording colleague called [Name]. And we hoped to get lots of people involved and instead we did it ourselves basically and travelled- I think we travelled, there is a figure of how many miles we did. And I would have to look it up on the internet. But I think it was a lot of miles. I think it might have been 30,000 miles. I don’t think it was 10, it was either 10 or 30,000. I’ve got a feeling it’s- It’s in several presentations that we’ve done on that project. And we’ve never written the paper up either which we should have.

**INT: Oh gosh.**

P12: It’s on the internet though. You can find it on the internet.

**INT: [laughs] And yes I’ve got a few of those that I’m sitting on as well.**

P12: I don’t think this will ever get written somehow. The results are there. But not written up.

**INT: Yes, well that’s the important thing isn’t it. And then, what was I going to say, de de de. What was I going to say? Oh yes, do you do any structured butterfly recording? So do you do any transects or anything like that?**

P12: Only the Wider Countryside. I do that twice a year on what should be really nice farmland, but it is atrocious. So I rarely see anything, especially if they’ve just been round with the mowers and cut all the margins, which they do.

**INT: How long have you been doing that for then?**

P12: Is it 10 years or so, I’ve just got one square just up the road from me. But I don’t do transects. I don’t have the time to put aside for the type of recording I do.

**INT: Sorry I keep on, it keeps on cutting out. It might be my internet, I apologise.**

P12: Yes, I’ll just check. I don’t think it’s ours. Ours is a bit wobbly at times. I don’t know why.

**INT: It might be because I’m competing with my husband who’s probably also on a video call. Let’s hope it’s [over-talking: 0:08:34]**

P12: Yes, I wouldn’t be surprised if mine isn’t downstairs doing something similar. But we do have a bit of a problem with ours, it is quite flaky.

**INT: Well I can hear you okay now so let’s press ahead. So with that Wider Countryside butterflies survey you’re kind of motivated to continue with that, even though you don’t tend to see very much.**

P12: Yes because that’s half the problem. Half of it. Negative counts is just as important as positive, you know. So many people cherry pick and go to the best possible areas to find the key species, they will go to one of the best butterfly sites to see everything. Whereas I actually prefer to find them in the middle of nowhere. And find them for myself. This is with purple emperors, people always hope someone, they always go where somebody else has found them. They never go and find them themselves.

**INT: Yes. So when you go out recording like that then, I’m guessing it probably varies between different trips, but how do you decide where to go? Or is it- What kind of comes of first in the decision making of you’re going to go out recording somewhere?**

P12: It’s for purple emperors it’s usually the 10 kilometre square. We want to prove that they’re actually in that landscape. And we will always be pretty sure that if one wood which is accessible has got them, another wood would also have them.

**[00:10:01]**

So you have to go an accessible wood with the right structure to actually look, usually across the canopy from outside the wood. We tend to try and select one which might be a Wildlife Trust where you’ve got open access. Or where there is footpaths that actually look across to the top of the wood at the highest point. So you don’t necessarily choose, go to the one that might have the best habitat like the- Well the sallows is important for purple emperors because that’s the caterpillars food plant. But it’s the accessibility. We don’t particularly want to walk a mile across farmland fields just to find a wood. And it’s also time essence. You know, we’ve driven round [county], this is with [Name] on a Saturday. And we’d just stop where you could see a wood, looking over the canopy, stop there, get your binoculars and sure enough, suddenly you see two purple emperors chase. I mean we might be 100 yards away. But this is very, very skilled. This is not for your average new recorder. This is 20 years of work, study. Sort of work in parallel with [Name], because we get a few mentions in his book.

**INT: Do you know what I was just thinking that. Because I have read his book over Christmas. And I was thinking, is your name familiar from that book?**

P12: Yes, yes, yes. I haven’t finished it yet. I’ve got as far as the female.

**INT: Oh really.**

P12: I told him where he’d made mistakes. [laughs]

**INT: [laughs] Well I mean you wouldn’t be learning anything from the book. But I learnt a lot. But it wouldn’t be any news to you.**

P12: No, no. I try not to read books. I’ve actually found that I’d rather find out for myself. Rather than- Because if you read books you’d never go to look for brown hairstreaks first thing in the morning. Whereas you need to go first in the morning when they’re active. If you’ve the read the books, so say they don’t get going till about 11 o’clock. And you’ve got to have a certain temperature. They’ve gone to sleep by then. They’ve shut up. They’re just sitting up in the trees by then. That’s why you never see them. And the same with white-letter hairstreaks you have to do early morning or late afternoon for white-letter hairstreaks.

**INT: Yes. So does a lot of your recording, is it species focused rather than site focused then?**

P12: Yes, yes. No! I mean this summer it was very much the local species. I got up to 27. There was the potential for 28 species and I got up to a maximum of 27 in one two kilometre square. But that’s just the generalists, what we call local specialists. And then the woodland specialists like silver-washed and purple emperor, where I live we haven’t got anything like- We haven’t got- It’s clay so there’s no chalk, so you haven’t got any of the chalkland species that we might find. Or the brown field species that you’ve got just a bit to the west of me. So yes, so this summer it was purely local species. But come this summer hopefully I’ll be allowed to drive my car a bit further than a few miles.

**INT: And it will be- So it will be focused on looking for particular species. And will it be focused on then filling gaps in what we know about where those species are?**

P12: When it comes to the first species that I’ll be looking for will be grizzled skipper. That is very dependent on the sites being there. That is more to check the population levels to make sure that they are- They’re doing okay. There aren’t very many more in our area to be found. You know, they’re on the brown field derelict gravel pits. And there’s only so many of those. They’re not moving into the farmland or into the wider landscape. So that’s that side. Then it will be the white-letter hairstreaks. So I will be finding all the elm in our local landscape. So I’ve been in [Town] recently doing other things. And wherever I walked if I saw elm I made a note of it. I looked for the eggs if I could but most of them were out of reach. And they’re flowering now which makes egg hunting much harder, because you can’t knock the flowers off because you may have a white-letter larvae in the actual flower head. So you can’t damage it. Once the seed discs form you can manipulate the seed discs to try and find the larvae because they’ll be bigger. So you’ve just got to be a bit careful at this time of year. But I will go back in the summer and try and find white-letter hairstreak in [Town], just for the fun of it. Then I expect the purple emperors will start flying. So I don’t know how it will work out this year because of you know, social distancing and whether I can do any recording with [Name], which we would normally do. I’ve seen him three times in the last year whereas we would normally meet once a week to go out looking. And then following that it will be brown hairstreak adults in [county]. And that is definitely where we’re looking for new sites. But not for the adults. We look for the eggs in the winter and find the new sites. We will just check some of the sites that we know whether we can see them there, because they’re so elusive adults. And then it’s winter egg hunting. Or habitat, you know, just looking for suitable habitat for species.

**INT: So it’s very kind of focused, structured around the flight period or the period where you’d be looking for eggs for particular species.**

P12: Yes.

**INT: And then when you’re out in places looking for those target species are you recording other things that you see as well?**

P12: Not as, well certainly with grizzled skippers you will. Certainly with white-letter hairstreak. When it comes to the purple emperor you really have to simply focus on that species. If you start counting ringlets, or meadow browns, you’ll miss it. You mustn’t- You’ve got to either look down at the ground for one on the ground. Or look for one flying past, flying over you, anything, you just, you’ve got to block out other species. The minute you get distracted by something else, then you miss it. It’s very hard. And you know, you can’t record other species. But you know, if you saw something unusual, yes you would note it. But you know then invariably somebody else has actually recorded them at that site. Or if we’re at a new site where we’re looking- We will keep an eye on what else we’re seeing. But we won’t necessarily count, we don’t count hundreds of meadow browns at the same time.

**INT: And then when you’re thinking about trying to identify new sites for these species, where are you getting the data from that shows you where those gaps are?**

P12: When it comes to purple emperors there is no data. We are the source. We look at the maps. We’ve spent hours looking at maps, judging the high points, seeing, looking at satellite images, you know, Google, satellite. Looking to see what the structure of the wood looks like from above. Then you go to that wood in the winter and see what it looks life. See if there’s sallows or sallows in the landscape because it’s not- whereas white admiral is very wood specific, purple emperors are a landscape scale butterfly. They’re not just in woodland. They are following the tree lines, following the river valleys, everything. This is where you know, I think [Name] has sort of started to discuss it more. But people will say, “Oh which wood is it in?” It’s not in a wood. It’s everywhere. It’s just that they go to the highest point in the landscape for the males to congregate and meet up with the females. But that’s how it works. Or you know, it might even be a few trees at the edge of a common. We’ve got a site in [county], in [neighbourhood], where there’s just some veteran oaks at the end of a green lane, at the highest point in the landscape. And that’s where they are there, every day in the summer for a few weeks.

**INT: And how, this is going off the point slightly but how close do the sallows need to be to those oaks?**

P12: They, I think sometimes probably a mile or so. It’s not- ideally for wood has got sallows, yes. But it doesn’t have to be, they don’t have to be in the wood. As long as they’re in the landscape.

**INT: So they’ll congregate, they’ll mate where the oaks are and then the females will be able to-**

P12: Well they meet up, they meet up with the females there. They’re watching out for the females. I think the pheromones are working big time. And then they’ll either divert, they’ll either see one and go off. Or the female will come in and they will say, oh, hi and go off. It’s complicated. A lot of it all goes on above the canopy. [Name] looks at it far more than we do. We tend to be out of the wood more than in the wood. We have different techniques.

**INT: Yes. I sense that you get a lot of pleasure from knowing about those species in a lot of detail. Or kind of being, like feeling you’ve got the expertise in a particular species.**

P12: I think so yes. I don’t know everything about the actual creatures. I’m awful, I don’t always know the difference between, well you do with a purple emperor because they’re different colourings. But I don’t always notice whether they’re male or female. I mean the female grizzled skipper when you see, they behave differently because they’re on an egg laying run, they’ll behave differently to a male.

**[00:20:06]**

And so you tend to follow, you can follow a female to watch to see what food plants they lay on. So you do that occasionally. And then if you’re very, very clever you can find the eggs as well for a couple of weeks after they’ve mated, and they’ve been laying eggs, you can find them around the site well away from where you’ve been seeing the adults the eggs.

**INT: But it’s that- Is it that opportunity for learning new things that’s kept you engaged and motivated as well?**

P12: Yes and just finding things I think. It’s just a sort of drive.

**INT: Is it?**

P12: Yes. You just- Well my husband would call it an obsession.

**INT: [laughs] So you get something- You get like, you get a bit of a buzz from finding something somewhere new.**

P12: Yes I mean it’s fantastic with the brown hairstreaks. We’ve found so many new sites in [county]. And you’re searching all those blackthorn. I mean it’s not the easiest of stuff to look at. It’s cold, it’s winter, it’s usually not raining but your feet are absolutely freezing. And suddenly after 45 minutes of looking at blackthorn, you find a brown hairstreak egg at a brand new site. And it gives you the most incredible buzz. I mean you only have to look at our distribution map for brown hairstreak for [county], only in the last five year how the distribution has changed. And we were just getting up to, well we had them in, under the flight path to [AIRPORT], just before lockdown. And then of course the blackthorn came into flower last year. So we stopped. And then of course haven’t been able to travel that far again. But yes.

**INT: Yes. What was I going to say? My memory is terrible. [laughs]**

P12: You had all these questions, you’ve written down.

**INT: I know, but you say interesting things and then I think, I’ll ask about that. And then I forget.**

P12: Yes I’m not the usual normal recorder. [laughs]

**INT: No, no. It’s interesting. And yes but this is the interesting is like understanding how different people, what motivates different people I guess is interesting.**

P12: Well the problem with the purple emperors, it happened ever so early in my recording. Because what happened was my husband worked for a large pharmaceutical company which I won’t name, and they had this huge country pad in the middle of [county], just sandwiched the [MOTORWAY] and the [MOTORWAY]. And they had open days. And I went, we went there. And I thought, “*This looks really nice for butterflies*.” So I wrote to them saying would you let me survey for butterflies? Which again, it’s a way of trying to find new sites. You write to the owners and say can I look. And to my absolute amazement, because this was when we’re having all the people trying to break down barriers and get into these places, all these people sabotaging stuff, they said yes! You know, you’ve got to give us notice. You’ve got to do, you know, you can’t just turn up and go off for a walk in the woods. They gave me a radio for my own safety. And I would wander around. And one day this was the 13th July 1999, this large dark butterfly flew past me. And I can remember saying, “What the hell was that?” Wrote in my notebook, large dark fast and forgot all about it till the next spring when I had heard about [Name] finding purple emperors only a few, about less than a mile away. And it suddenly occurred to me what I’d seen. So I met [Name]. And that’s history. And it was so by chance. We didn’t have purple emperors in [county]. They weren’t even supposed to exist. And there were these colonies in this sort of very rarely recorded area. Because again [Name] had been looking there because [Name], who was the county recorder, because this is the last year of the millennium project had heard about his recording skills, rang him up and said, “Would you go and visit some of these woods in [county] for white admiral?” And then instead he found purple emperors.

**INT: Yes. So I guess it was that realisation that you can look for something and find it where other people might assume it’s not. And I guess it’s that thing isn’t it, when you start looking you actually find it, and that’s kind of what [Name] seems to say in his book about the purple emperors, this kind of traditional view, like you say, that it was a woodland species and very restricted and sedentary and would be very localised and only found in certain spaces. And then when you actually start looking for it, you will find it. And it seems to be the same with the other species that you’re interested in.**

P12: Yes, yes. I think white admiral is different because it is in the decline. But what we don’t know with purple emperor is how much is related to climate change. Because historically you see, you didn’t have the internet, you didn’t have mobile phones. If someone saw one they wouldn’t know who to tell. Unless they were really good and got a photo they may not get it, may not report it for another year. Or it may not get published for another year. Now the news, it’s instant. So if you hear that there’s been a purple emperor seen in Essex, everyone goes off there to look. But because we were looking for white-letters for about five, six years, we stopped concentrating on purple emperors. And in that period of time, there was a massive distribution change. But what we don’t know is whether they were already there. Or whether it’s been happening where they’ve been following the silver-washed fritillary which is so visible, and has moved from- When I was first recording we didn’t have silver-washed in our branch area. They were just in [county]. Then they started appearing. And then they started to spread through [county], [county], [county] and have made it to [county]. And the purple emperor has been following them but at a much more discreet level. Or, has it always been there, but no one’s ever seen it? No one, we don’t know.

**INT: No. And we’ll never know will we?**

P12: No. We think with [county] it probably has been there but at such discreet levels. Because every now and then someone will say, “Yes, I saw one.” “Oh I remember that one, yes I saw that, I crashed my car the same day.”

**INT: Yes. [laughs]**

P12: Yes. You know. “Oh yes I know what I saw.” Because when somebody sees a male purple emperor they never forget. So they never forget having it dismissed or thrown in the rubbish bin, which used to happen. So you know, this is the problem. And a lot of people have in the past with purple emperors had their records dismissed. And it’s very rejecting for people. But now with cameras and photos you can say, “Here it is!” “Oh yes.”

**INT: Yes. So would you say that the social side of things is a motivator for you as well? Like you say you mentioned going out so much with [Name] and other people. Like is that something that keeps you going?**

P12: No, I don’t know. I think last year I found that I can do it quite happily on my own as well. I’ve had to learn a new way of doing it because I’ve always had the- It always helps because he is a bloke, I’m a woman, and when you’re out in the middle of nowhere if I’m there people don’t look at him as if he’s mad or a threat. And if he’s with me I feel safer. That, I mean you do get some very funny looks if you’re on your- Well, he does and it feels very difficult. I think this is something also for some recorders especially in strange places, you know, when you’ve got some binoculars and you’ve got a hat on too, you know, you look a bit nerdy. That’s something to bear in mind for all recorders. Because with lockdown he said, “I haven’t been able to do this, do that because I don’t like going to these places on my own because people, you know, dog walkers, all sorts of things can be threatening.” But if there’s two of you, you feel safer. And which of course we haven’t been able to do this year, last year.

**INT: Yes. So are there certain sorts of places that you wouldn’t go on your own? I guess you’re comfortable in your local patch on your own.**

P12: Yes, yes. Mind you walking around, I’ve been walking round [Town] for the last, I’ve had three visits. And I’ve been walking in some pretty dodgy places. But I wear my worst clothes. I don’t look very- I look as tatty as possible, and I try to fit in, and keep my head down. I don’t make eye contact. And keep to the main road, you know, the major roads, don’t go in the back alleys. But this is all built up area. But there, in the midst of all this, there was elm and probably white-letter hairstreaks. Which of course is important because if ever they were to do some redevelopment of [Town], and you’ve got elm there you want to have the records.

**INT: Yes. Yes so then moving on to what with your data then.**

**[00:30:01]**

**Do you, you mentioned that you save all your records till the end of the year and submit them, so that’s your kind of winter job.**

P12: Well I just extract- I put them into MapMate, and then extract them and then submit to all the various county recorders. This year it was just one. But normally there are- I mean some years I’ve- One year when we were doing white-letter hairstreak it was every single county recorder in the whole of England and Wales.

**INT: [laughs] Separately?**

P12: Yes.

**INT: Oh wow. [laughs]**

P12: I mean that’s where the internet does help because I could find their names and their email addresses. Where in one case I had to send them on paper.

**INT: Wow. But then you’ve still got to work out which Vice-County you were in at the time. [laughs]**

P12: Yes I know. Yorkshire was fun.

**INT: [laughs] Yes that point where there’s like three or four that meet. Yes.**

P12: Yes. MapMate’s pretty good because it does actually tell you which Vice-County you’re in, even though I know one was actually in the wrong in Wales, because we’d just gone over the border. And it actually said you’re in a different county.

**INT: Okay.**

P12: But it was still in [over-talking: 0:31:10]

**INT: Oh so it does it for you.**

P12: And the river, we’d gone over the river and you knew that would be the border.

**INT: Yes. [laughs] So do you use your records yourself at home? Do you do anything with your data? Do you kind of interrogate it?**

P12: I do with my moth data, I play with moth data. I don’t tend to play quite so- Well I say that, this summer I created an excel spreadsheet with all my two kilometre squares, I had these nine that I could visit. I could walk to all of them. And I had a spreadsheet where I put the butterflies in and then the numbers would keep going up. And then I was promoting it on Twitter to try and encourage everyone to do their local butterflies. And I would put it up on Twitter. So each day when the colours changed, where I saw three more species in a particular 2k.

**INT: That’s a nice thing to do.**

P12: Yes. But I play with the moth data because I like to see which ones are doing well and which aren’t.

**INT: So you look at kind of changes from year to year.**

P12: Yes, yes. But that’s winter work, when you want to be distracted. When you’re supposed to be doing something important, I think I’ll go and look at my moth records.

**INT: Yes. [laughs] And then I guess as part of the branch or anything like that, do you use the data that’s collated across the county in any way?**

P12: It all gets submitted. And then it goes to head office. I think where we are it’s not a great help because we don’t, we’ve got very few specialist species, apart from white-letter hairstreak and small blue, well and of course brown hairstreak in London, which is a minefield because of all the different London boroughs. None of the species we have are going to affect a development. The grizzled skippers are already on brownfield sites which are designated. They’re not going to get built on.

**INT: Okay.**

P12: Because they’re Wildlife Trust reserves, or well one is, every now and then you’ve got to be mindful they could be vulnerable for more gravel extraction. So you’ve made sure that they are, the data is there in the right places. Likewise the data is all with the county recorders, the wildlife officers. It’s done by the [wildlife charity]. So they’ve got the information and they review the planning applications. The woodland work, that’s harder because of the [GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT] it’s a hard one. Because they do what they want to do. And the [WILDLIFE CHARITY] does what it wants to do. Better edit that.

**INT: [laughs] Yes. So do you ever kind of have conversations with them? So if you see a purple emperor in a new place, do you try and find out the landowner is and notify them or anything like that?**

P12: It doesn’t always pay. [laughs] Because if they- Once they find out, they don’t always want them on their land. And we’ve learnt, we’ve had to do a lot of searching for landowners for some of the brown hairstreak sites because of course they are very, very vulnerable to bad hedge management. And one of the big brown hairstreak sites is actually owned by a insurance group who have bought the land hopefully to sell it one day to make money. It’s still green belt but they would hope that one day it would get redesignated. And they’ve come along and just hammered the hedges and cut them completely cut them all back last winter. And with a lot of negotiation the chairman has managed to make contact with the right people. And we’ve managed to get the hedge management rotated from now on. Fingers crossed. And then next phase is to get the grassland management rotated. Because they are intent of ensuring that there is no wildlife value to the site. And of course with the brown hairstreak because of its high status, they really are under an obligation to manage the site for it. It’s very- It’s been a lot of negotiation by our chairman, you know, he’s had to work very hard on this. And we’re still- You know it’s really hard to get to every single [BOROUGH] and find each, the right person to get in touch with to influence the management of their sites. It's tricky. Which you know, this is where perhaps this project would help.

**INT: Yes. Yes. It’s very tricky isn’t it. And I think with the kind of lack of ecologists in local authorities there’s even less, you know, people with expertise out there isn’t there.**

P12: Yes. And they don’t talk to the contractors. They just employ the contractors who, because of money, are brought in once. They don’t want them to come in more than once because it costs money to bring a contractor in more often. So the grass cutting is just done en masse right up to the margins. The blackthorn is flailed back. And before you know it, you haven’t got brown hairstreak colony. Or they’re just on the top twigs. And then they come and cut the tops, top them as well before you know it. You know, we’ve seen- And then you, with certain- I mean with the purple emperor we’ve tried, there’s one site in [county] which we found very early on, probably about 10 years ago now. And the landowner was quite adamant he wouldn’t let anybody on the land to record the wildlife. So you had to be so careful about what you said, because you would know that the last thing they wanted is for something rare to be on their land. So you don’t always tell them.

**INT: Yes. It’s using your data against you isn’t it?**

P12: Yes, because we’ve had that happen very early on. You know, you told somebody, you told a land agent how good a site was for butterflies. And the next you know they’d sprayed it all off and ploughed it up. So it doesn’t always pay.

**INT: No. So do you think some people don’t submit records of certain things into the official systems because they’re worried about that happening?**

P12: I think there probably is a small- I don’t- I think more generally as long as it’s at the right place, it’s a hard one. We have certainly- I mean we always send our records in to the county recorder. But we wouldn’t necessarily say, “Oh can you tell the landowner.”

**INT: No.**

P12: Unless you know them. And you know that you’re on good terms with them. Because if you just saw them in a random wood, you’ve got no idea what they might do. Which we have found a lot. You know this day in [county] when we just went round about four or five woods and just kept finding purple emperors. It’s a difficult, it is- But in [CITY] I suppose a lot of the sites, well this is the next problem. If a developer is intent on developing, he’s going to make sure there isn’t anything there. But it is tricky.

**INT: Yes. And then do you get any feedback about how your data are used once they go up to a national level? So once they go to [wildlife charity]?**

P12: No I don’t actually. All you’d see is it in publications, you know, you see the dots on the map. You see, yes, because round where I’m living at the moment, I’m recording as much as I can because the, whatever plan the government has to build thousands of houses on the green belt is right on my back door step. So you know, I make sure all my records do go in. Because when the databases are checked for ecological surveys, they’re going to find all my rare butterfly, my rare moths if nothing else, not rare butterflies, they won’t find any rare butterflies. But the moths are there.

**[00:40:10]**

**INT: And is that moth thing, moths that have come from your clearwing lures?**

P12: Well with that, and just that I’ve got a belt of blackthorn and oak which hopefully they won’t develop, they won’t cut down because of the plans. They’ll go on the agricultural fields which are of no use, no ecological value. But it would just spoil the actual landscape. There’s no need for the housing but they’re intent on building it.

**INT: Yes. And so would you like some more feedback do you think from a national level about how the data are used? Do you think that’s a bit of a gap?**

P12: I think somebody who’s been specifically asked to go and visit somewhere would. Especially if they’re new to recording would certainly want to know. You know, it’s what I’m doing, is actually making a difference? Is it actually helping the land managers, the councils, is it influencing the management? Certainly in [county] they’ve done so much for their- They’ve, I think south of the [RIVER] boroughs seem to be much more amenable. And they listen to the [county] branch. Whereas here it’s very hit and miss in [county], well north [CITY].

**INT: So is visiting a place on a request of somebody something that you would be receptive to? Or you seem to have your kind of plan of what you like to do.**

P12: If I was asked to do it and if I probably had a fraction more time, at the moment I’m still working two days a week. I wasn’t last summer. I was furloughed. So I had all the time in the world except that my daughter was very ill.

**INT: Oh no.**

P12: But now I’m back at work, so two days a week for the moment. So it’s not- I don’t have as much time. But certainly I’d try.

**INT: Yes. And which organisations would you be willing to receive those sort of messages from about recommendations? Would it need to come from [wildlife charity] as a kind of trusted organisation?**

P12: I would prefer the initial approach be made to our branch recorder.

**INT: Okay.**

P12: And then he would then decide who was the best person to go to that area. You know, to have a pool of people that he could- Because I’m not in [CITY], I’m actually 30 minutes on the train out. So I’m a more [county] based recorder. But for brown hairstreaks I will travel into [CITY]. But that’s usually by car round the [MOTORWAY].

**INT: And are there limits to the kind of distance you would travel? Or places that you would want to go to?**

P12: I think there would be limits to certain areas of [CITY] where I certainly wouldn’t want to do it on my own. I think I’d have a pair of people. If there’s some of the- Because you just don’t know what’s in some of these areas because people won’t have gone to them. Because the people there will certainly not be reporting them.

**INT: Yes. But you would be willing to go to somewhere where you perhaps might not find anything, but it would be useful for somebody to go just to-**

P12: Yes. I mean no certainly, because for instance there was the small blue, because every now and then a report comes from the [BOROUGH] area. And then you hear, “Oh somebody saw one along the [RIVER] in [COUNTY].” You know, Greater [CITY], [COUNTY]. So I have been there with [Name] looking for potential places. But again, here you’ve got to look for the kidney vetch, without the kidney vetch you wouldn’t have that species. So that’s another thing that you see, if you’re looking, if you’re targeting a specific species, you look for the food plant. If you’re targeting just generally butterflies in general, you look for the adults.

**INT: Yes. And you mentioned that you had some experience of trying to recruit people to doing some recording.**

P12: Yes well this was with the white-letter hairstreak project. We thought, oh every branch, you know everyone thinks the white-letter hairstreak is so elusive. I think people are scared of it. But we thought, well we’ve got this idea, we want people to go out and find the elm. Because if you’ve got the elm you’re going to have, you may or may not have white-letter hairstreak. So this was early days, no it was about, it was 2006. So the internet had got going. So I set up, made my- I was already looking after the branch website and building it. So I built a recording, several recording pages and got people to contribute their own stories. And there was a guy in [COUNTY] who is now in [county] who was brilliant at finding the eggs. And he contributed and sent all his photos. And we devised a map with all these randomly selected squares that people could go to within a- Well it was first of all it would be say, for instance, TQ or SU or TG. So many squares in each, the hundred squares isn’t it. And then in a 10k, we’d select a 10k and that would be one specific 1k. And it was randomly generated using an excel formula. And so we’d say to people, we want people to go to that 1k and see if they can find elm. If you can’t get in the 1k square, go to the 2 tetrad levels, see if you can find it there. And if you can’t find it there, then you’re allowed to look in the 10k. But ideally as close as possible to that 1k. I thought this is brilliant, everyone’s going to have fun doing this. Wrote to all the county recorders, some thought we were mad. “Oh we won’t get anyone to do that.” Some thought, “Oh it’s not a bad idea. But we’ve got lots of other projects.” And some open armed sort of, “This is brilliant, yes I’ll put you in touch with so and so and so and so.” So there were a few people that were really keen. Or someone would adopt one square. And then after year one we found the elm. Then we found that looking for the eggs was actually just as productive as finding the elm. So we started looking a bit wider round our- you know. So we started local. Then we started going to [county] and [COUNTY] and [REGION]. Then as the, we’d set a five year project, so to finish in 2009. So we thought, oh it’s getting a bit close now. We’re never going to get this done. So we thought of funding, we got funding out of a branch. Head office matched it for, this was purely for travel expenses. Then we got a few grants. So we got, a charitable trust gave us some money. Somebody else, a private benefactor gave us some money. So we had money to pay on fuel. And we found the cheapest possible Travel Lodges, or in the summer I learnt how to camp, which was basic to put it mildly. And we travelled round the whole country. And in the summer it invariably rained wherever we went. So we’d still look for eggs. Admittedly we did take samples of elm because otherwise we’d never have looked. But we don’t encourage people to sample. But it’s no different to the council coming along and flailing the treeline, just taking one sample of elm. And we found them at different levels. Certain areas you could find white-letter at 1 kilometre. Certain levels 2. And then certain areas it was much, much harder. And we resorted to 10k. [Name] gave me all the white-letter records that were on the database. So I could see where in that 10k they may have been recorded. So I always made a point of trying to look as far away as possible from that record. And that’s why there are lots of random dots of white-letter hairstreak records for 2010 to 2015. And we found it all around [COUNTRY]. We were following, we’d already started to find it in [COUNTY] and up the [RIVER VALLEY]. And since then a couple who were so- Well they’re not a couple but they are two people just like [Name] and me, both have a shared interest who lived in [COUNTY]. They read, I got in touch with her because I read her article in the local newsletter. And they started looking in [COUNTY]. So they found them right up in [TOWN]. And then they started following the [COUNTY] sector. And then suddenly a guy called [Name] in [REGION], he got one. And they then went up and started finding eggs further inland up, I’ve got to think of where, [Town] that way. So we think actually the white-letter hairstreak didn’t go up the coast into [COUNTRY]. It went sort of northwest up one of the other river valleys, and then met the [RIVER] where there’s almost a sort of low point, or an old railway line that’s at a conduit. So it met the [RIVER], and they actually started colonising in the middle around [Town]. And have slowly crept back down the [RIVER] to where [Name] lives round [TOWN] I think. [TOWN]. Is that on the coast? So and they’ve now found them along, a whole long way along the river. And they didn’t even know they were there. So we don’t know, again, it’s another question, you don’t know when they arrived. Because no one was looking there. No one even thought to look round [Town] until [Name] and [Name], taking on our project, started driving up there, and again they’re locked down so they can’t look this year. So [NAME]’s looking as best he can on the bus.

**INT: So it’s continued then that project.**

P12: Yes it’s continued. Well the enthusiasm from it. And they’ve got- it’s a way again, the climate change must have made the butterflies spread. I haven’t been following what’s going on in [COUNTY]. But we did find it in [COUNTY] after about an absence of 20,30 years. But that was much different. That was very different. It wasn’t, it was much harder to find in [county]. But Dutch Elm disease of course wiped, went through [COUNTY] and of course there was nowhere for them to go. You ended up in a peninsula. But then Dutch Elm started knocking out the elms in [COUNTY]. They were stuck.

**INT: Yes, yes. So did you, you were successful to some extent in recruiting people to that project.**

P12: Yes true. But nowhere near what you initially thought you would achieve. You know, even from the negative county recorder reactions. Although some of them were slightly, they altered their comments once we started finding them on their patches. I’m not naming names. But there was one very dismissive county recorder who, once we found them in all over- on the north coasts of the county, I’m still trying not to name it, he started to sort of, ooh perhaps that wasn’t such a stupid idea after all.

**INT: Do you have any thoughts as to why it was difficult to encourage people to take part?**

P12: I don’t know. We get, that’s another thing [Name] mentioned, we set up a churchyard survey.

**INT: Yes, I spoke to him last week and he said the same thing.**

P12: And we thought everyone would, oh yes, they’d love to do that. But in the end he had about two or three people get involved. It’s really strange, people just like to do what they want to do so often. You know, you say can you go somewhere else? Ooh no, no. Well they only ever go to one area. And it’s very strange. And only a few people probably like me, [Name]. [Name]’s another one. We will travel anywhere to find things. People don’t like, whether it’s people are scared of the unknown, they don’t like travelling more than, you know- It’s very, that’s a very strange thing. But [Name] in 1995 and between 1995 and 1999 managed to motivate so many people in the branch. But I think then, whereas now you tend to email people, he was phoning people. Whereas I don’t like phoning people. I do wonder whether phoning people does actually do the slight difference. I’m thinking about this, because I phoned [Name] up when I got her to start looking around [COUNTY]. I actually spoke to her.

**INT: Yes, I guess it’s something about that direct contact isn’t it. And also it’s more difficult to say no when you’re being asked directly. [laughs]**

P12: Right, yes. Yes. That is part of that. Yes.

**INT: But I think there’s something about that personal connection as well isn’t there.**

P12: Yes. Yes. And certain branches have different responses. We’ve got lots of members. But not that many that record. Whereas another branch will have lots of members, few members but a lot that record.

**INT: Yes. And I wonder why that is. It’s just-**

P12: I think a lot of people in our area belong because they think they’re doing good. It’s like the [WILDLIFE CHARITY], they think it’s a charity they should- You know, it’s their contribution. They don’t want to do anything themselves. But you know, if they give a donation or pay a subscription they’re helping. Well it’ll be interesting to see how many people get to our online members day. You know, we’ve got over 1,000 members. But at the physical one we might get only 100 people if that. But we’ve been doing online Zoom meetings throughout January, since January and we’ve been getting 60 odd people. Which to our mind is very good because it’s getting people from across the entire branch area to get involved. But, you know, we could have- You know if the project gets going we’d have a Zoom meeting to our members to introduce them to it.

**INT: Okay. Yes. And has that Zoom been, the Zoom meetings that you’ve had, have they been successful at bringing different people in? Or is it-**

P12: Yes. Yes.

**INT: Yes, okay. Well that’s good.**

P12: Because of the travel restrictions, well not- The travel restrictions at the moment, because of the way our branch is structured with the travelling between A to B normally, a lot of people would never dream of coming out of [COUNTY] to a meeting in [county]. And since the majority of the committee live in [county], we don’t want to go into [CITY] to hold a meeting and only for say 20 people to turn up. So the Zoom, we’ve had people commenting, I don’t drive. [inaudible: 00:56:22] It’s been fantastic. I live right over- It’s been really great to be able to join in.

**INT: Yes that’s good. I mean as much as it’s not been easy the last year, there have been benefits that have come from it in that sort of thing I think, haven’t there. In kind of opening up those opportunities and thinking about different ways of engaging people.**

P12: Yes. Well like tomorrow, Saturday is the national recorders meeting in the morning. And then after that I’ve got the branch members day. So I’m going to be Zoomed out completely. There could have been something in the evening for the sailing club in [county].

**INT: Oh wow.**

P12: But we kind of declined that. [laughs]

**INT: [laughs]**

P12: I thought, I know, I just can’t do anymore.

**INT: No, not good.**

P12: I need a break. [laughs]

**INT: [laughs] Well I think that is all of the questions that I had. Let me just have a check.**

P12: Well we got totally side tracked.

**INT: That’s all good. It’s all good. So is there anything that you wanted to reflect on or tell me about in terms of your recording that you don’t feel that you’ve been able to say?**

P12: I don’t think so. I think you’ll find, you’ll read about- You can read about me in [Name] book.

**INT: Yes I’m going to do that now.**

P12: And you can- It’s in the appendix more than anything else. Also [Name], have you heard of [Name]?

**INT:** [Name]**?**

P12: [Name], he’s in [CITY]. He does all these YouTube species things. You’ll find the white-letter hairstreak. He’s done one with [Name] and me on white-letter hairstreak.

**INT: Okay, I will have a look at that yes.**

P12: His drone got stuck in the tree. [laughs]

**INT: [laughs] Oh no! How did he get it back?**

P12: And he had to get a friend to get it down. It was, we thought, oops, I think we’d better go now.

**INT: [laughs] I will take a look at that.**

P12: Yes, you’ve got about 30 minutes. [Name] did one white-letter hairstreaks. He’s the [county] guy, he mentions [Name] and me in there a lot I haven’t read it, listened to it all. But there’s lots of publications around which I have been involved with.

**INT: Yes, I’ll look out for your name now.**

P12: Yes.

**INT: [laughs] And then in terms of next stages of the project, we’ve created a mailing list that people can sign up to, which I’ll have to send you a link to. But if you’re happy to be on that.**

P12: Yes do.

**INT: And that will be updates about the project. But also opportunities to get involved in further stages of the project as well.**

P12: Yes, yes.

**INT: So I think, I’m not quite sure if it’s finalised yet, I need to check. And then once I’ve checked that it’s live I will send it round. And you can just add your name and email address to that. Okay. Thank you very much for your time.**

P12: That’s okay. I hope I’ve been able to help.

**INT: Yes definitely.**

P12: I know I got side tracked with probably nothing to do with what you really wanted to know.

[IRRELEVANT CONTENT]

**Audio ends: [01:04:14]**