**CONFIDENTIAL**

Date Transcribed: 24.05.2021

Interviewer:

Respondent:

**INT Okay, fab. So, my first question is how long have you been doing any sort of biological recording and how did you start?**

P04 I think it’s about five years now. It started because I was already a [CHARITY] volunteer, for over 10 years now, and I was volunteering at a [CHARITY] property that set up a transect, so [Name] from [CHARITY], he sets up lots of new transects every year, he’s very active and so he and [CHARITY] got together and set up a transect, and I was one of the volunteers. It was already working there. I have a particular interest in nature which [CHARITY] volunteers don’t always have.

And so, I started – that’s how I got into it. And I thought I knew about butterflies but I now realise how little I knew and that’s probably a later question but that’s been probably the best bit about it, is learning so much.

**INT It’s a different art well doing transect recording isn’t it. I mean I have a PhD in butterflies and then I came to do transect recording I was like – it’s so hard, isn’t it.**

P04 Yeah, and making judgement calls about – especially the whites. Do I record it, how sure am I. Am I best to record or – and certainly initially there were lots of questions like that – and people have different views. There’s ones with a scientific background, totally into the science. They’ve got to be consistent and butterfly lovers tend to be a bit more – if you’re in it for a different motivation then you are less worried about the continuity so it’s knowing [unclear 00:01:55].

**INT When you see an individual and then you see another one and you think is that the same one that’s just flown back into –**

P04 Yes. All those sorts of things, yeah. I know it’s a scientific survey but actually sometimes it’s more of an art than a science, for those sorts of reasons.

**INT And so is it just the UK BMS transect that you do then, or do you do other types of recording as well?**

P04 So, that transect, I have a strange work pattern where I work full time, but I increasingly want time off to do this sort of thing, so I have a contract, so I’ll have a long term contract and then a long term off. So, depending if I’m working or not just depends on whether I can do the transects because it requires me to be available every week through the summer and be able to go when the weather fits as opposed to when I’m available.

So, I don’t always do the transects, so I do also do one of the WCBS, the Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme squares locally and that’s more flexible because you only need to do it two times a year. So, there’s less intent – so I do that as well.

**INT And then do you do any sort of more ad hoc casual recording as well?**

P04 So, I have the iRecord on my thing. So, initially I had the butterfly conservation or the specific butterfly one, but latterly having spoken to [NAME] – because I also record eggs over the winter, so the version I was using, which was just butterflies, it will only record adults. I keep getting this sort of error messages about you couldn’t have seen a brown hairstreak. I know I haven’t seen a brown – first of all I started having conversations with it and then I realised it was an automatic message.

So, I used the main one which is more flexible now so I can record the butterfly eggs. Because before I started doing the transect – walking is my thing. So, I walk a lot anyway in the countryside, largely on my own, because I want to see things and what have you. So, it marries very well. If I see an interesting butterfly on a walk I will record it in the iRecord app, so I do possibly more of that than the transect.

**INT And so what sort of geographical area do you cover with that sort of –**

P04 I’m in [county], so mostly local and I would say local – so I have the [NATIONAL PARK], the chalk [NATIONAL PARK], I spend a lot of time on the chalk. There is a lot of woodland around here, so [Summit] area, and then – west of [TOWN] a lot, along the chalk escarpment. I don’t know if you know these areas –

**INT Not particularly well, no.**

P04 We’re lucky in having a lot of chalk and grass places, what’s behind me is one of them actually, and I spend a lot of time doing hard labour keeping it [unclear 00:05:08]. So, I do a lot of chalk – woodlands – to be honest though in the summer the woodland butterflies are my favourite because they’re more special. You can walk into a good chalk habitat and you should get – in the twenty first century you get a cloud of butterflies, it’s nothing what I read from decades ago when it was a real cloud of butterflies.

So, mainly [county] and then I also have family and grew up down in [county], so if I’m down there irregularly, so I record down there, and also I go down to the [NATIONAL PARK], utterly beautiful, and some [unclear 00:05:47] butterflies. I don’t get wall butterflies up here so if I want to see a wall I have to go down more to the [NATIONAL PARK] towards the cost. In [county] I’ve seen the Lulworth Skipper which I wouldn’t get here.

And I also went to Norfolk once just to see the swallowtail and thank God I saw the swallowtail, otherwise I would have been really upset.

**INT Never have to go back.**

P04 Utterly glorious. Have you been?

**INT I’ve never been no. [IRRELEVANT CONTENT]. I will have to go one day.**

P04 Well, yes, I mean there’s only a very few spots, even within East Anglia, there’s only a very few spots now and I don’t know if it was because of reintroduction or if it’s just where they ended up, I don’t know, and of course it’s quite a short flight period as well. So, very lucky to have seen them but they are glorious. They are so much bigger than – I mean we have Purple Emperor’s round here because we’re near the [NATURE RESERVE], it’s just south of here. So, I’ve seen Purple Emperor’s but there’s something about the – I suppose because it’s pale and it just – it looked really, really exotic compared to anything else.

**INT And did you get good sightings of it then?**

P04 Yes, so I’d done my research beforehand, so I was, there were particular nature reserves that I went to, and the first one I didn’t see it, and though it’s OK, we’ll still have a nice time in – it doesn’t matter, but it really did. I think it was Wicken Fen I went to and was doing the official trail, and we were all there, like twitchers and one – there was one and we were chasing it around. It wasn’t a good – I mean I could tick it off, but I hadn’t really seen it. And then we sort of gave up and went for sort of walks along the canals near there.

We were sitting on a bench and we had our own personal swallowtail who turned up, and was nectaring really deeply in bindweed, the big bindweed flowers. Embedded right in there getting down and it was with us for ages.

**INT Special. It makes you long for summer doesn’t it, it’s still so cold.**

P04 And a summer where you can actually travel would be nice, yes.

**INT Yeah. So, how much of your year do you spend recording then, do you kind of think you’re going out every week or every month?**

P04 I mean during the season if I’m not working or even if I am working actually I’ve recorded butterflies at lunchtime in [CITY]. I couldn’t believe it. So, [BOROUGH], really wide busy disgusting road and a Common Blue flew by and I was almost running out into the traffic.

**INT Yeah.**

P04 I don’t know if I was trying to save it or what, yeah, I find when I work mainly in [CITY] I always find a pocket of green to out at lunchtime. I need to have some greenery at some point in the day and of course I’ll always been looking out for butterflies, so anything that flew when I was in [CITY] walking past got recorded on iRecord. There’s some beautiful little gardens, tucked away –[CITY] has a lot of little green pockets and they’re really cherished.

There’s one particularly in the – I’d say the law court, what’s it’s official title? Where all the old law courts are, and they’re all really tall buildings with bits of green inside, and they pay permanent gardeners. There’s gardeners there and they’re beautiful gardens with wildflower patches and things as well. So, there was Common Blue, what else did I see now, not a lot of different species, there was only three or four species, but everyone was really, really special.

**INT I think it’s almost more special when you see them in a place like that isn’t it.**

P04 Yes, and I go back after lunch saying, “Guess what I’ve just seen?” and they’re like “Right. That’s interesting”. So, I would say I mean possibly daily. Anywhere I am, and I seek out green spots whatever I’m doing, I will – I’m going to look for butterflies and I will record them if it’s unusual. So, any I see in [CITY] are recorded. Yeah, I’ve seen Red Admirals sunbathing on a brick wall quite early in the year.

**INT Lovely.**

P04 Gazing at it, absolutely gorgeous. And as I say I walk a lot. If I’m not working I will generally be walking in the countryside most days, I’m a bit of a dog like that. I need my daily walk. I’ll always be recording. I mean over the winter of course you don’t expect to see anything flying unless you’re very lucky. I’ve seen three Brimstones so far this year, which is lovely.

**INT Nice.**

P04 And in the winter we do look for Brown Hairstreaks because we’ve had – we had a sort of project or focus if you like in [county] looking for Brown Hairstreaks because they are deemed to be rare but actually every time we went looking for them, we found them. Funnily enough, looking for eggs is more easy than looking for the adults. It sounds peculiar. So, you’ll see a lot of people in [county] with their heads buried in the bushes looked for eggs.

**INT So, it sounds like you’ve got lots of different ways in which you do recording then. So, obviously sometimes it’s like a part of the structured transects schemes, and that’s a bit – I mean you’ve just got to go here you’re told to go haven’t you, and then you’ve got the recording that you do because you’re just wanting to get some time outside, and you are recording alongside other activities I guess. So, do you have anything that’s – so like when you’re planning a walk, for example, will you plan it around doing recording or is it the walk that comes first?**

P04 The walk – my walking pre-dated the recording and the thing that kicked off the recording was being asked to do the transects. But once I started doing it I loved it so much that I then put it into my existing habit of walking.

**INT And what was it that you loved about it? What sort of motivated you to start and carry on?**

P04 Who could not love lepidoptera once you get into them? I suppose it’s an escapism in a way, maybe where it’s just a beautiful world isn’t it. They only fly in the sunshine and they generally are in beautiful places. So, it’s just a total love – I mean that’s true of all of us that get completely mesmerised by this in the [county] Butterfly Conservation Group, and it’s not seen as strange at all.

I mean we like being amongst each other because as I say if you go out at lunchtime or something and you come back and no-one is really interested, whereas when you’re people – when we get together, I mean when we started work parties again it’s going to be amazing because it’s not just you’re seeing people you haven’t seen for a while, you’re not just out, you’re not just exercising, it’s the whole point that you can be – I remember once we were trying to walk across the field to get to where we working because I do a lot of outdoor work parties, that’s what I do every week, twice a week, three times a week when I’m not working, and we were trying to get across this field and it took us forever.

We had plant experts. We had insects experts. We have raptors flying overhead and it – we kept seeing things and everything we thought someone saw something we all sort of said “Ooh, what’s that?” and we just love nature for itself, not for us but just love nature, but also it’s being surrounded by other people that know a lot and so you’re constantly learning and so if you see a plant or you see a stranger looking insect someone will be able to tell you what it is. Which makes it even better.

So, when I go out walking I now can identify a lot of what I see whereas I never used to be able to. That in itself, it’s that constant knowledge and the more you learn, the more you realise you don’t know. So, it’s this lovely stretching out ahead of me for the rest of my life. It’s always going to have something new and exciting to learn about.

**INT That’s so nice.**

P04 Butterflies, I mean have a friend who was doing a local transect before I was, she was doing it several years before me, but she used to just do the transect that was that, but then I started doing my transect and we started having conversations and I was forever telling her facts about butterflies because a Holly Blue, for example, there’s so many interesting things about the Holly Blue. So, once I record something I want to know a bit more about it and I’ll go and start researching it.

And who would know that they had extending necks to get into their – the fruit of the holly or the – or the ivy, that they actually have extendable necks. They saw round a hole and reach in, and there’s just so many things that you couldn’t make it up. It’s just fascinating.

**INT So, what do you think it is that recording in particular adds to that experience, so more than just kind of observing something, what’s the extra thing or is there an extra thing that the actual recording and passing on of records gives you?**

P04 It’s useful to other people. It’s to – through ways that I don’t really know, until you see something big come out like the state of the – I knew that my records and our records were in there and had helped make the case, so I know it will do the things I love good. I mean that’s the main motivation. In a way it’s become habit. I suppose. If I see something I’ve got into a habit of recording it, I know it is useful. And to some extent much to a lesser extent it’s sharing as well I suppose. To some extent it’s nice to be the first to see something in the year but it’s not – you took that away it wouldn’t matter. Maybe it’s another way of collecting, humans like to collect things don’t they.

**INT Make lists.**

P04 Yeah.

**INT Kind of finding some patterns and logic in the mess I guess, isn’t it?**

P04 Yeah, and I can sometimes look back on iRecord and I can see what I’ve seen and what I’ve been recording and it’s quite – it’s like a little diary I suppose in a way. I know a lot of people do keep diaries, so they wrote down what they record but I don’t do any of that, because I don’t want to carry stuff – when I go out walking I go out walking until it gets dark in the summer quite often, so I don’t want to be carrying stuff. I just can’t drag myself away.

It’s just another encumbrance having to write stuff down and mainly I wouldn’t look at the records anyway, but occasionally it’s nice to be able to see my own personal record.

**INT So, do you just make them on the spot, on the app then?**

P04 Straight into the phone, yeah.

**INT And you mentioned that – like seeing the first of the year, or that kind of side of things, does that play into your recording at all. So, you know, a lot of people like to kind of fill gaps don’t they of dots on maps and things like that. Does that come into it for you or are you more interested in just going to a nice place?**

P04 Yeah, I think so. I mean I have had a bit of that because I read, strangely the year that I started doing the transect, so as serendipity, when I finish a work contract, when I go home I’m going home for the last time if you like to take a nice year off or something. I like to buy a little treat. And this year I’d gone into the bookshop and I bought a pile of books, including Patrick Barkham’s Butterfly Isles is it called. I thought I’m going to go and see all species.

And so, I was almost reading that as I was getting into it myself, so I think initially I was influenced by that, I was thinking yeah, I’d like to see all the species, which is part of the reason I wanted to go and see the swallowtail, but I’ve now got to the point where it doesn’t matter. It will happen when it happens or not at all. So, I’m not a collector in that respect. It’s not about the record keeping and the comparisons and things like that, for me it’s just the joy of being there.

The joy of seeing things, and I honest think they’re utterly beautiful. It’s such an uplifting thing, because I have butterfly binoculars, fantastic pair of binoculars that zoom in as a close up. So, I can see them really close up without disturbing them, and I’m just thinking as I’m talking, the little skippers, they’re like little teddy bears aren’t they, they’re just adorable. And I just see them, and I start smiling, I have that response, which I have to nature generally, but I suppose this is in a more focused way.

And in a sort of now a knowledgeable way that I know about them. I know what they’re doing. I know where they’ve been. And I had this thing where on the working parties I started – I was asking “So, what are they doing now?” so we did the Small Blue project, improving the chalk and connecting up colonies, or connecting up possible habitats so that they can connect themselves up.

And so, where’s the Small Blue now, we’re out in the summer, what’s it doing now, and when we’re out in the winter as well, I think all these lovely butterflies we see in the summer, what are they doing now. Are they caterpillars, are they eggs, are chrysalis. The White Admiral is one of my favourites and it spends the winter curled up, it curls a leaf around itself and attaches itself to the honeysuckle and it’s there all winter.

And I’ve never found one in the winter. So, there’s all these little things. A magical world. All these little things going on. Of course, they’re there 12 months of the year, what are they doing right now, I find that sort of interesting. I forget it by the time the next year comes round because I’m of that age, I can’t retain as much as I’d like to, but then I have the joy of learning it all again.

**INT Yeah. So, do you think that the recording with the learning process as well?**

P04 Totally, yeah. It’s all completely wrapped up and it all happens together. It was the recording that started all this, and so it’s always been alongside, it’s an automatic thing. I wouldn’t not record something of interest because I know people want to know about it.

**INT And is it – so you say things of interest but – so if you’re out on a walk do you record every butterfly you see, or if you see common things do you let them fly by without getting your phone out?**

P04 It depends actually, and I’m guided a lot by [NAME] who’s our local recorder and what he finds useful, because I started recording everything, and recording individuals, and he said “Well, actually that’s very nice but can you record areas” there’s an option to record areas, and he said for information that’s more useful to the recipients. So, if I’m told something is more useful then I will and do that. On the other hand, I do then sometimes thing I’m spoiling my walk and I haven’t got out of the car park yet kind of stuff. I’m still chasing the – so it’s getting the balance really.

**INT So, when you say an area it’s about going to a particular site and saying, “I’m going to make a full list of everything I see at this site”?**

P04 Not in that scientific kind of way. It would be I’m going to an area to walk, and whilst I’m walking I will record – if I know there’s an area that does – especially ones that don’t have a transect or ones where there’s a rarity. So, if I went to [NATURE RESERVE], which is our [widlife charity] that I work on down in [city], if was walking in [NATURE RESERVE] I would of course record all the butterflies whilst I was there because I know it’s a point of interest. We’re trying to monitor what’s happening as a result of the improvement of the habitat.

There might be a particular trigger, it’s a kind of judgement call really and what’s interesting. So, even some of the common species, there’s intermittent interest in them, so I think to myself even though it might be common it’s still of interest, so the Small Tortoiseshell, what’s happened to our Small Tortoiseshell, so I always record Small Tortoiseshell. There seems to be a problem with them. If I see lots of – even Peacocks, I don’t see that many Peacocks. Really. Yeah, so it’s – I suppose I don’t have a system so much.

**INT So, as well as [NAME] sometimes saying – does he sometimes kind of make suggestions of specific sights that you could go to that would be of [unclear 00:23:34]?**

P04 It’s only when I cross paths on working parties and things like that, and talked about things, and I just picked up on what he – he wasn’t asking everyone to do it, it was just in conversation, I was checking with him what the issues were and what have you.

**INT So, do you ever get recommendations from people of particular places to visit?**

P04 Yes. So, [Name], he is very active in butterfly conservation, so he instigates things. So, we’ve had – it was a call to the Brown Hair Streak eggs, where we were going out in groups and that’s when we’ve learnt what we’re looking for, and since then I’ll do it myself as well. We’ve had a specific – when Silver Spotted Skippers emerge, there’s an interest in them, so he sends out grid references. I’ve done recording on that.

Yes, there is some of that as well. The one I draw a line at is the White Litter Hair Streak which hangs around on the top of elm trees, that requires very – you’ve got to lie somewhere for a long time with these binoculars trained at the top of the hills, and he wanted me to do it in my local town, in a park, with elms in it. So, I said “No, I’m not doing that, sorry”. But generally, yeah, I can be relied on to – if there’s a specific interest in something.

It’s nice, it’s like a little project isn’t it, and it gives me a reason to go somewhere, and it’s been lovely actually because it takes me to areas I don’t know.

**INT And then have you gone back and revisited those areas after the project?**

P04 Yeah. Because they all tend to be local ones. So, he will send out a list of grid references to everyone who he thinks will be interested and the idea is that you pick off the ones local to you most of all.

**INT And the motivating thing for you there then is – is it simply that somebody has asked you and that’s kind of it, or is it – have they kind of provided a particular reason for that targeted survey that has appealed to you, or is it just more the general request?**

P04 Well, it’s a bit of both really. So, it’s to do with butterflies, anything to do with butterflies is of interest anyway, but if there’s also a particular reason, such as there’s species at risk, or the project where we’re actually monitoring has it worked or not, who created this habitat, are there any there. So, yeah, it’s nice to know and this is one of my criticisms of when I’m working on [wildlife charity]outside who don’t get that we’re just taken to an area, told to cut stuff down or whatever it is.

And there’s no connection with the ecology of the area and for me as a nature lover what I want to know is what lives here, what are we doing, what do we have to be careful of, all that sort of thing. So, as a nature lover that sort of information is essentially. I need to know the connection why am I doing this, what benefit is it bringing.

**INT Okay. And I guess that could be – could that be quite a general request, because – so I guess what you’re talking about so far is quite specific to a particular species, or a particular management intervention, but if the request was quite generic in that this would just provide us with useful information to help improve X, Y and Z understanding –**

P04 That would do, but I would say if you want to motivate people the more you can explain things the more motivated I would be certainly, because in order to –

**Audio ends: [00:27:17]**