**CONFIDENTIAL**

Date Transcribed: 24.05.2021

Interviewer:

Respondent:

**INT Hello. You’ve got a glass of water.**

P03 That would be right, yes.

**INT Okay, so first question is how long have you been recording or how did you start doing wildlife recording?**

P03 That is surprisingly difficult to answer. I can probably only remember back maybe 10 or 20 years. I suppose since I have had my own garden, the opportunity to explore the local area, that has happened much more since I retired, which is 11 years ago. Prior to that I have hardly had time to explore my local area, which is extremely suburban and rather lacking in green space, and rather deprived in terms of the natural world, I would say, apart from what we’ve done in our garden, which was created 30 years ago with wildlife in mind.

With a couple of ponds and we’ve planted suitably where we can. I suppose I first started recording frogs, newts, and birds in the garden maybe 20 or 30 years ago.

**INT And did you do something with those records or was that just for your own kind of personal interest?**

P03 Whenever I recorded I sent them somewhere. Either to the great bird birdwatch, garden bird watch sorry, or butterfly conservation, moths, bats, anything at all out of the ordinary I’ve reported somewhere, yes.

**INT And so that interest kind of started in your garden but then has expanded out into a larger area since you retired?**

P03 I would say so since I walk out and about, and drive out and about around the area. And also go on occasional guiding walks when possible.

**INT So, what sort of are roughly do you think you cover with your recording?**

P03 My garden, [place] which is the nearest open space. Anywhere that I go on a walk or visit, which is mostly [wildlife charity]area, and not very far from home really, probably not more than 10 miles. Although if we’re away on holiday we see butterflies or something I would probably report them through somewhere appropriate.

**INT And do you do any of the kind of more structured recording. Do you walk any transects or anything like that?**

P03 No, I’ve never done that.

**INT So, when you go out is it looking for multiple species groups or is it a particular focus on butterflies?**

P03 Multiple. I’m very into trees at the moment. I just recently read a book on [CITY] trees. I’ve never really done much in the way of insects. Butterflies and moths, we have got our own moth trap which we got last year. Birds I’m very interested in. We have frogs and newts in the garden. If I saw an unusual bee or bumblebee in the garden I’d perhaps note it but not know where to report that.

**INT Sort of how much time – how much of your year do you spend recording, how much effort over the year could you estimate that you spend recording, is it a weekly, a daily, a monthly thing?**

P03 A formal record?

**INT Hmm.**

P03 A few times a year, maybe – it does depend a lot on butterflies and so on. Maybe half a dozen times a year, maybe a bit more, maybe a bit less. I go out for a walk every day with the potential to see things but far from every day reporting.

**INT And so what, okay, we’ll come to that in a bit. What kind of motivates you to do recording, so when you do make a record – so obviously you’ve got a general interest in the natural world but to actually make a record then what it is that motivates you to do that? Is it thinking about kind of conversation of wildlife, is it kind of wanting to contribute to something. Is it just for your own personal interest?**

P03 A bit of everything but I suppose it’s for conservation primarily. If I know that somebody is interested in having reports of something, and I come across them, I’m happy to report them particularly if the reporting is made easy, which it not always is. Or obvious perhaps I should say rather than easy because I mean I’m a complete novice really in that respect. So, to report say an unusual bee that I’d seen in the garden I would have to do some research to see where to report it.

A few months ago, we saw bats in the garden for the first time in 40 years in our house, so I did do the research to find out – I knew somebody would be interested, and found out where to report it.

**INT And was that easy to find out or was it actually quite difficult to find out where you should be reporting that to?**

P03 Well, with the internet these things have become pretty easy I would say, yes.

**INT Okay. And so, you don’t have any particular role in terms of verifying records or anything like that within the recording community?**

P03 No. I don’t consider myself expert enough to verify anything much I don’t think.

**INT So, that kind of gives a good overview of the kind of type of recorder that you are, so I guess moving on to thinking about a specific recording event – so how does that happen for you? Is it that you think I’m going to go to a particular place to record or are you thinking I want to record a particular species, or is it a request that’s been made of you. What sort of comes first in that process of making a record?**

P03 It’s unlikely to be either of the first two I think. Much more likely to be a request. But it could also just be a chance, a chance sighting or a chance finding, yes.

**INT So, if it’s a chance finding is it something – more likely to be a rarity that you’ve seen or something particularly interesting for a particular place?**

P03 Yes. Well, that depends on what it is. If it’s a butterfly we get so few butterflies in the garden, or even 10 miles from where I live I probably would report anything I see. Even a cabbage white. Birds, I would certainly report a rarity, like we once had a woodcock in the garden in the winter, which was a rarity, so I did report that. Common all garden things or just for my own interest, trees I haven’t over reported, moths – I’m a novice at that and I find the identification extremely difficult, so I’d be very hesitant in reporting a moth unless I was pretty sure.

**INT And do you get support from anywhere in terms of identification or is it your own research to help you with that?**

P03 I do my research. Very occasionally I’ve asked a naturalist or two that I know, for a confirmation. When we first had newts in our pond I didn’t recognise it. So, I asked a wildlife expert that I knew to confirm what it was, and I know there are sometimes online facilities, for moths say, where you can get help in identification.

**INT But that’s not something you’ve particularly used yourself, that kind of online help for moths identification?**

P03 I have used moths, yeah. Butterflies, I normally do from a book. Lots of wildlife books. I’ve got plenty books but they’re not always easy to use. Wild flowers are terribly difficult. Using a wildlife key more or less defeats quite often.

**INT Me too. I just look at the pictures.**

P03 So, I use a variety of different ways.

**INT And so your kind of casual ad hoc records that you make when you’re out and about is that just alongside existing activities, so say you’ve gone for a walk and you happen to see something, or have you gone to a particular place for a particular reason?**

P03 I think I’ve not often done that although I have gone to see particular trees that were unusual, that are not too far away. I just happened to – one of the most things I read was a tree book and there’s a tree map which I’ve not ever seen before, and that’s very useful. It’s a very interesting –

**INT Is that a local book?**

P03 That’s in [CITY]. Sorry, I can’t remember the name of the author, but it’s data gathered from all the London boroughs for all the trees in their care, which are street trees. Extremely frustratingly to me I live in the borough of [NAME], we’re just on the border of it, and [BOROUGH] is one of the very few [CITY] councils which have not submitted their trees. So, I have to drive basically to another area.

**INT That sounds really interesting. My sister is [CITY], she lives in [Place] and her and her kids love all that sort of stuff. I will have to tell her that there’s a map out there because that would be great for them to go out exploring all the different trees.**

P03 Yes. At the end, if you like, I will get the book for you and there’s a website, it’s very good.

**INT Yeah, that would be good. So, you also said that sometimes people make requests of you to go to do particular recordings, so where do those requests come from?**

P03 Well, there’s the big garden birdwatch which I suppose is the obvious one. The butterfly conservation, the local, I’m not sure how local it is, that I report to. I belong to Butterfly Conservation, so it goes to them, yes.

**INT So, it’s think like the big butterfly count.**

P03 The bats, there’s a local – I found a local bat group, so they were happy to accept reports. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a bird rare enough to report. So, most of it is for my own interest, and if I know somebody is interested in getting reports I do try. So, with the butterflies, for instance, I mean I don’t know what your particular interest is, do you have one?

**INT Well, my personal interest is butterflies, my PhD is in butterflies. The project is focused on butterflies, moths, and grasshoppers.**

P03 Right. Yeah, grasshoppers, I’m afraid we’ve lived here 40 years in our garden. I’ve walked the local area for 40 years. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a grasshopper at home. Only when I’m out, mainly abroad. With butterflies, for instance, I know butterfly conservation is very interested in having reports and they send out a booklet every year with a tiny map and dots of where things occurred and where they haven’t, but that’s not detailed enough for me to know whether there’s anybody reporting in my area, or not. I have no idea.

And I can’t even pinpoint myself accurately enough, it’s such a tiny map I just can’t tell. I suppose I might make more effort if I knew somebody was really interested, or if I knew I was the only person in the area that was reporting on butterflies and moths, I think I would make more effort, yeah.

**INT That’s interesting. So, if you felt that you were kind of filling gaps in knowledge in terms of the distribution of species, or even just observations of species in your area, you would find that quite motivating?**

P03 Yeah.

**INT Because you would feel, I guess, your records are of more value. Okay. And so, if you were to – I guess moving on from that, so you might be able to see that there is not particularly large amounts of recording going on in your area, what might it be that would prompt you to go to a particular site. So, say, for example, the local branch of butterfly conservation said to you “Could you visit X, Y and Z sites” what might it be that would persuade you to do that? Would it be the fact that they were asking, or would you want a particular reason to go to that extra effort?**

P03 Just because they were asking I think, if it was not too far to go. Weather comes into it, I guess, and obviously whether it clashed with anything, if there was a particular time but, yeah, generally, if I had a specific request I think I’d be quite motivated to try and follow it up, if I could.

**INT And are there particular sites that you think you wouldn’t like to go to or particular sites that you would be really more motivated to go to, or would it not really matter?**

P03 Can you expand on that a bit?

**INT So, would it need to be a site where you’re more likely to see something of interest that you would be more persuaded to go to, or if it was a site that was maybe not great for butterflies, but you might see one or two things, would you be equally as persuaded to go that if somebody was asking you to?**

P03 Yeah, absolutely.

**INT Okay. Let me just have a look at my list of questions. And so, do you tend to go out and about on your own when you’re doing this, or do you tend to be with somebody else?**

P03 Usually on my own.

**INT And is that a reason for doing it as well, time to yourself?**

P03 I think my wife’s not quite so keen. She has other things to do. Occasionally we go out together but it’s mostly my own interest or motivation I guess, yes.

**INT And so then moving on to what you do with the records, so I guess thinking specifically about butterflies and moths in this context, so how do you, so the records that you do submit, how do you submit those and who do you pass them on to?**

P03 I’m trying to think of the name but I’m not sure that I can. I used to fill out a form and post it in once year, a grid, month by month. I now do that online, the last couple of years.

**INT Is that for the butterfly, sorry the garden records?**

P03 That’s the butterfly conservation. I could look up the name, offhand I can’t remember the chap who it goes to, [Name]–

**INT [Name]?**

P03 Yes, could be.

**INT And then for the moths, do you do anything with those records?**

P03 Well, as I said I’m very much a novice with moths, they’re more difficult. I haven’t – although I’ve recorded them, I’ve listed them on my phone, I’ve not sent them into anybody.

**INT I’m in the same position. We got a moth trap for the garden last year and I didn’t submit any of the records. You’ve got to get to a point of trusting yourself haven’t you?**

P03 I mean a few of them are really easy, just plough through the books, but a lot of them are so, so similar, it’s very tough.

**INT And then I find it’s difficult to get it to stick in your head as well isn’t it, and you find yourself having to go back to the book every time.**

P03 Absolutely.

**INT Especially the brown ones. And so, then do you use some of the records for your own interest as well in terms of tracking what you’ve seen in your garden, and things like that?**

P03 I do keep a list of birds. I don’t actually keep a list of butterflies. The rest I don’t, they’re just in my head if you like.

**INT And so then the records that you submit to [Name] for your – for the butterflies, do you get any feedback from those? Or does it just kind of go to him and –**

P03 I get a thank you, and once a year I get a survey of the county which is [wildlife charity]. So, he must be something to do with that I think because the report that I get, which is a glossy booklet, contains a summary of all the sightings for the year.

**INT And is that of interest to you, do you find that kind of motivating to see your records in context of everybody else’s?**

P03 Well, it’s mainly exceedingly depressing because we see butterflies in our own garden, they’re just – they’ve tanked, they’re really almost down to nothing, particularly in the last couple of years. So, I mean I – you know, five years ago I think we probably would have seen 10 species of butterfly in the garden. I think last summer was probably more like three. It’s been very poor indeed I’m afraid, yes.

**INT Like you say it is depressing when you’re seeing the decline.**

P03 In the reports I see that it’s not universal. In some places some butterflies seem to do very well.

**INT Do you, in a way, find that as a kind of reason to carry on recording, you know, if you’re seeing these declines, do you feel it’s important to keep track of those, is that a reason to carry on?**

P03 Well, it is quite demotivating. If you’re aiming to record butterflies in your garden and send them in every year, and you find it’s dwindling down to almost nothing that is fairly demotivating. But on the other hand, of course, I’m aware of the issues to do with conservation so I know it might still be of value, yes.

**INT And so in terms of the use of those records, so obviously they go to [Name] and the report is produced, so do you kind of have any feedback or any personal kind of understanding of how those data are used beyond that, beyond the kind of production of those reports?**

P03 Well, only to the extent, I keep track of what our local wildlife trust is doing, so we do get reports and feedback from them about where they’re trying to encourage a particular species, or what type of land management they’re doing to encourage this or that. I don’t think I get, so I get feedback in that way, but perhaps a little indirect.

**INT And are there things that you would particularly your records to be used for? And also, is there anything that you wouldn’t like your records to be used for?**

P03 Can you give me an example?

**INT So, I guess sometimes records can be used by developers or consultants working on behalf of developers to judge the value of a particular site, and whether it should be used for development and things like that.**

P03 Well, that is quite tricky. If I did, if I thought there was no conservation benefit to it then I wouldn’t do it. If I thought it was solely to aid development because there was nothing there, to preserve – well, I don’t know. I suppose even as part of a zoning type programme maybe or something like that it could be useful. It would require some considerable thought.

**INT And is there any other kind of feedback that you would like on your records in terms of, you know, like more personalised feedback in terms of oh that’s a really interesting record for this area, or more information about natural history of the species, or things like that that would kind of help keep you engaged perhaps in the recording that you’re doing.**

P03 Yes, I think so. Just as an example, but when we saw – some months ago we saw a couple of bats in the garden above out ponds, two nights running, now that is a really rare event as far as we know. So, I hunted out the bat group, reported it, I got a reply and I – when I sent in the report I asked how common it was, and I got a sort of reply back just saying the nearest they’d ever been seen was about a mile away on some – where’s there some open space. So, I thought in a way that was a bit of a lost opportunity where they could have told me a bit more.

I made a tentative suggestion as to what species it was. I got nothing back on that. No real encouragement to do it again or how much value or otherwise it might be, so that’s an instance in my mind, and I’m sure it would apply generally. Positive feedback, encouragement, I think is very helpful actually. Very motivating.

**INT Yeah, and it’s that kind of – I guess valuing your record but also is it also providing an opportunity for you to learn something as well?**

P03 Yes. A pat on the back always helps.

**INT It goes a long way doesn’t it.**

P03 Yes.

**INT I think that is all of my questions. So, the last –**

P03 So, whereabouts are you then?

**INT So, I’m just outside [Town]. I work at the University of [Town], but I live just outside [Town].**

P03 This is for your PhD is it?

**INT No, so this is – so I’m kind of a post-doctoral researcher now. So, my PhD was more kind of looking at the ecology of butterflies and how they’re responding to climate change, so Speckled Wood and Brown Argus in particular were my PhD species.**

P03 We do even get Specked Woods sometimes, not very often. Again, we used to see them every year in the garden until the last two years and another side I know they like locally, again it’s always been very reliable, but the last two years they’ve just gone. I don’t how general that is for the Speckled Wood.

**INT I don’t know actually. So, I know they don’t like drought in the summer. So, I think these really hot periods that we have – our weather is so strange now isn’t because we can have these long kind of cool grey periods in the summer and then we can have these really, really hot phases as well, can’t we, and I think with the Speckled Wood when the larvae, the caterpillars are really small, they’re really prone to desiccation, to drying out, so if we do have a dry spell that’s quite risky for them, and then you see the effect in the following year.**

**So, you don’t necessarily see it in that year where there’s the drought, but you see it in the next year, and I think then if you have perhaps two years or three years together where there’s drought after drought then it accumulates doesn’t it. I don’t know actually, to be honest, what the overall trends are. It would be interesting to have a look. But what you might find, because as I say my PhD was looking at – they used to be very much restricted to woodland and now they’ve – we’ve kind of gone through this period where they’ve moved out of woodland, more into kind of scrubby hedgerow even grassland sites.**

**And the modelling that I did with my PhD was suggesting that as the climate changes and it gets hotter, and drier, that particularly in the south east of the country we might see this retraction back into woodland because they provide a kind moister microclimate which protects them from that drought. So, that might be what you’re seeing down there in the south east where it is particularly hot and dry.**

**I don’t know if you felt like that – the weather has been like that in the last few years, it’s just been so strange up here with the – like I say these periods of kind of cool, it can be weeks of cool weather and these really hot periods as well.**

P03 Yeah, from a butterfly point of view we’ve had poor weather over the last few years. Rain at the wrong time.

**INT Exactly, yeah.**

P03 I just thought of something else that might be of interest. Our nearest open space, which is called [place], it is looked after the local authority and I walk it, well when it’s not too wet, because it gets very muddy, I walk it daily sometimes in the summer and it’s – there were hundreds and hundreds of Meadow Browns in these lower poorly drained fields, and I’ve never seen so many butterflies of one species together. I mean it’s a bit field, I don’t know how many acres seven acres anyway, and it’s just let – they mow a path around it and ones up through it, it’s on the side of a hill, once a year.

And they let the rest grow. It was poor farmland at one time, and it just grows pretty rank grass, but these butterflies seem to love it and there’s hundreds and hundreds of them and as I say I saw them daily, and they were still in very good numbers, and then one day I came and the whole field had been completely mown by the council right in the middle of the season and I thought this was terribly upsetting, and I just – I didn’t know what to do about it really. I don’t know if there’s any way of getting anything done about it, or who to speak to. Trying to contact our local council is almost impossible. Perhaps I could have tried the wildlife trust, I didn’t think of that.

**INT I was going to say, the wildlife trust would be who I would go to for that sort of thing because they can kind of act on your behalf, can’t they, and I think they should have the kind of skills and also the interest to do that, because – I used to work for the wildlife trust in [city] and that would be the kind of thing that we would do, would be to kind of have that conversation with the council in terms of advising them on appropriate mowing regimes and things like that.**

**And it’s not always easy because they’re got their – obviously got their constraints in terms of budget and what they’re willing to do, and all the other kind of conflicting needs of a particular area but to mow it all is really – there might be perhaps reasons for mowing some of it but to go through and mow it all, particularly in the middle of the flight side is not good. So, I would contact – and I would contact them now –**

P03 Yes, I will.

**INT - because then that will hopefully avoid it happening again because they will just have a contractor, come, and mow it at this time of year, and – so if you can kind of influence that now then that might avoid it happening this year. It’s so depressing when you see that kind of thing happen isn’t it. You’ve enjoyed seeing the butterflies, you know they’re laying their eggs and then you just think – yeah, that’s a whole kind of generation lost isn’t it.**

P03 So, can I expect to hear anything back further?

**INT Yes, so I think on your consent form you agreed to us contacting you again. So, the next phase of the project, like I saw, we’re kind of developing this prototype of the tool and we’ll be looking for people to help both in – kind of do some initial kind of testing and informing the design, and then when we’ve got a proper version that will run then we want people to test that as well.**

**So, if you’re happy for us to keep your contact details we can add you to the mailing list that will go out to people to look for volunteers for doing that testing, and things like that. Is that okay?**

P03 Yes. What sort of timescale are you –

**INT Well, we’re hoping to have something this summer. So, the project is two years, so we’re hoping to have some – obviously, the development phase kind of running over the next few weeks, something to test in the summer this year, and then we’ll refine it over this winter, this coming winter, and then we’ll have another version, hopefully a better version to test again next summer. So, that’s the kind of time frame that we’re working on at the moment.**

P03 Who is it you’re contacting?

**INT How do you mean?**

P03 This project, sorry, how have you chosen people?

**INT So, we’ve got two target areas. So, [county], as a kind of rural landscape and then [city] is obviously an urban landscape. So, we have contacted people through the local branches of butterfly conservation and also the environmental record centres as well, so they’re the kind of ways that we’ve tried to find people to interview.**

P03 How many people are you doing?

**INT Well, I’d planned to do 30 and I’ve already had 46 people say that they want to be interviewed, and we’ve not even contacted the orthoptera community yet. It’s one of those things that you think oh we’re going to struggle to find people, and then you get more willing volunteers than you’ve got the capacity to manage. But like I say I think we’ve got these other stages that people can be involved in as well, so even if I can’t interview everybody that’s kind of offered people can get involved later down the line as well.**

P03 Okay.

**INT Thank you so much for your time.**

P03 You’re welcome. Very welcome. Lovely to meet you.

**INT And you. Really nice to talk to you. And I hope you have a better butterfly year in your garden this year.**

P03 Thank you. I hope everyone does.

**INT Yeah, I know. All right, thank you very much.**

P03 Okay, bye now.

**INT Bye.**

**Audio ends: [00:40:19]**