

# *A Story of Butterfly Conservation*



What the numbers say

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# Contents

1

INTRODUCTION

2

PEST WASPS

3

MONARCH TAGGING

4

BUTTERFLY COUNTS

5

PUBLIC SPACES

6

CONCLUSION



The connected story

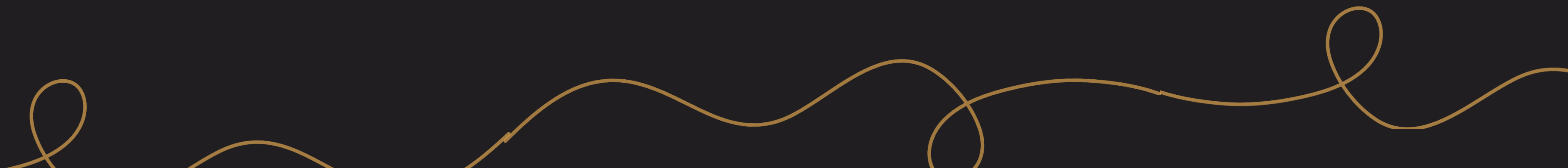
This year's work helped the Trust better understand what threatens butterflies, where they are being seen, how they move, how numbers change over time, and how public spaces can better support them.



Butterfly conservation is not one action.  
It is a chain of connected efforts.

# Pest Wasps Survey : Understanding a Key Pressure on Butterfly Survival

Before butterflies can thrive, some of the pressures on them must be addressed.



# Wasps are a real butterfly conservation pressure.

1155 responses from individuals and restoration group members were collected from across regions in New Zealand.

1

The issue is widespread across Aotearoa

Not a localised issue. People are not only seeing wasps but also feel the pressure is increasing and lasting longer through the year.

2

Threat goes beyond Monarchs

For many people, the wasp problem is most visible through the loss of monarch caterpillars and butterflies. However, native butterflies and moths are also part of the concern.

3

Wasps are creating broader ecological imbalance

Butterfly conservation depends on healthy ecosystems and wasps are disrupting those systems more widely.

4

Communities are adapting

People are increasingly having to protect monarchs artificially, showing how difficult outdoor survival has become in some places.

Community science and community action matter.  
Conservation needs coordination, not isolated effort.

5

Strong public concern and willingness to act

There is strong community appetite for coordinated action.

6

Restoration groups are important conservation anchors

Community groups are essential to on-the-ground conservation, but they need support to sustain their work

7

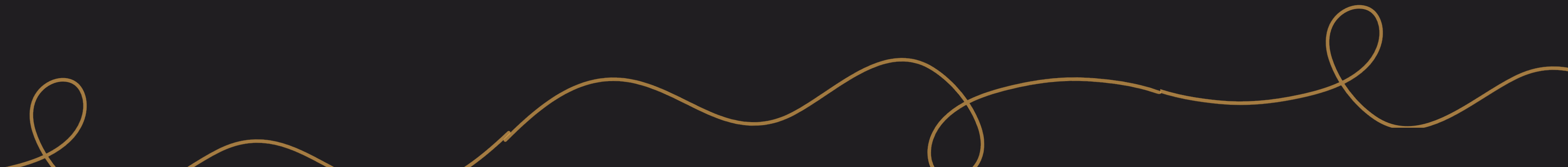
Gap between willingness and practical support

People want to help, but are held back by lack of knowledge, lack of time or personnel, cost, safety concerns, access and regulatory barriers.



# Monarch tagging: understanding movement, survival, and habitat

Butterflies need not just good sites,  
but connected and supportive  
habitat.



# A nation-wide monarch movement project

Most monarchs stayed close to home, but a few reminded us just how mobile and resilient these butterflies can be.

Early insight into where the different sexes can be found.

4362 releases from 44 regions across NZ.  
257 sightings 221 unique tagged butterflies.

About half of all sightings were within 100 metres of the release location.

The median time between release and sighting was 11 days  
25 butterflies flew more than 2 km.

A small number travelled more than 10 km.

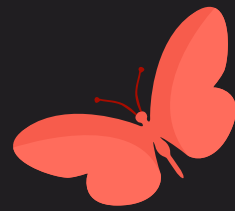
The maximum recorded movement was about 295 km.

One female monarch travelled from Feilding to Clive, Hawke's Bay, a distance of about 140 km in 23 days.

Males were more often associated with flowering plants offering nectar.

Females were more often associated with milkweed (e.g. swan plants)

# Big Butterfly Count: Building the National Picture



Butterfly conservation is becoming  
a nationwide community effort.



A broadening yet  
varying monitoring  
network  
accompanies a  
growing volunteer  
participation.

1

Monitoring network has expanded strongly

Butterfly monitoring is expanding: 238 locations surveyed across three years.

2026 alone covered 170 locations and 286 survey visits.

2

The programme is spreading geographically

Wellington had the largest number of distinct locations surveyed in 2026, followed by Manawatū-Whanganui, Auckland, Canterbury, and Waikato. Taranaki recorded butterfly surveys for the first time in 2026.

Gisborne has had no surveys since 2024.

3

Volunteer participation has grown dramatically

2026 saw 105 new volunteers —the biggest influx since monitoring began

High-abundance sightings are rare.

‘Butterflies’ in NZ are beyond Monarchs.

4

Most visits record small numbers of butterflies

Most survey visits recorded one or a few butterflies, with occasional high-abundance events.

Species Insights

Small White emerged as the most frequently encountered species.

Other species included Monarchs, followed by Common Blue, Red Admiral and Common Copper.

5

Urban and semi-urban landscapes are important butterfly spaces

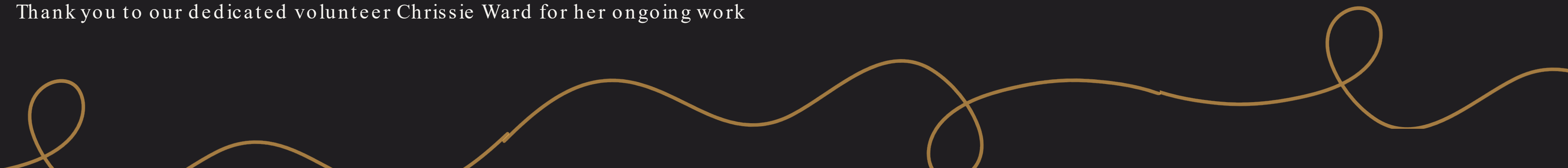
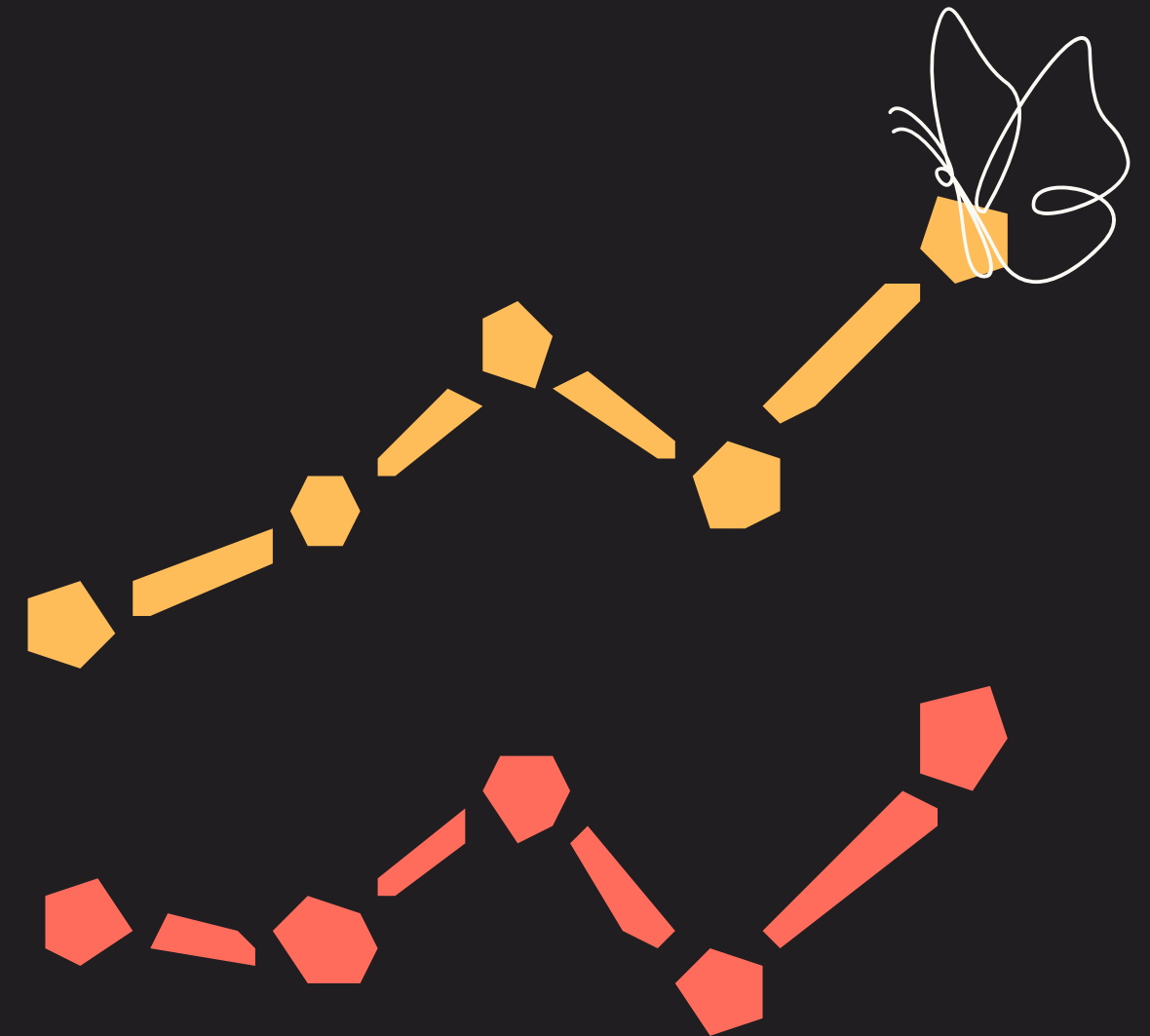
Co-occurrence patterns that suggest many surveys are happening in urban and peri-urban landscapes that includes gardens and parks.

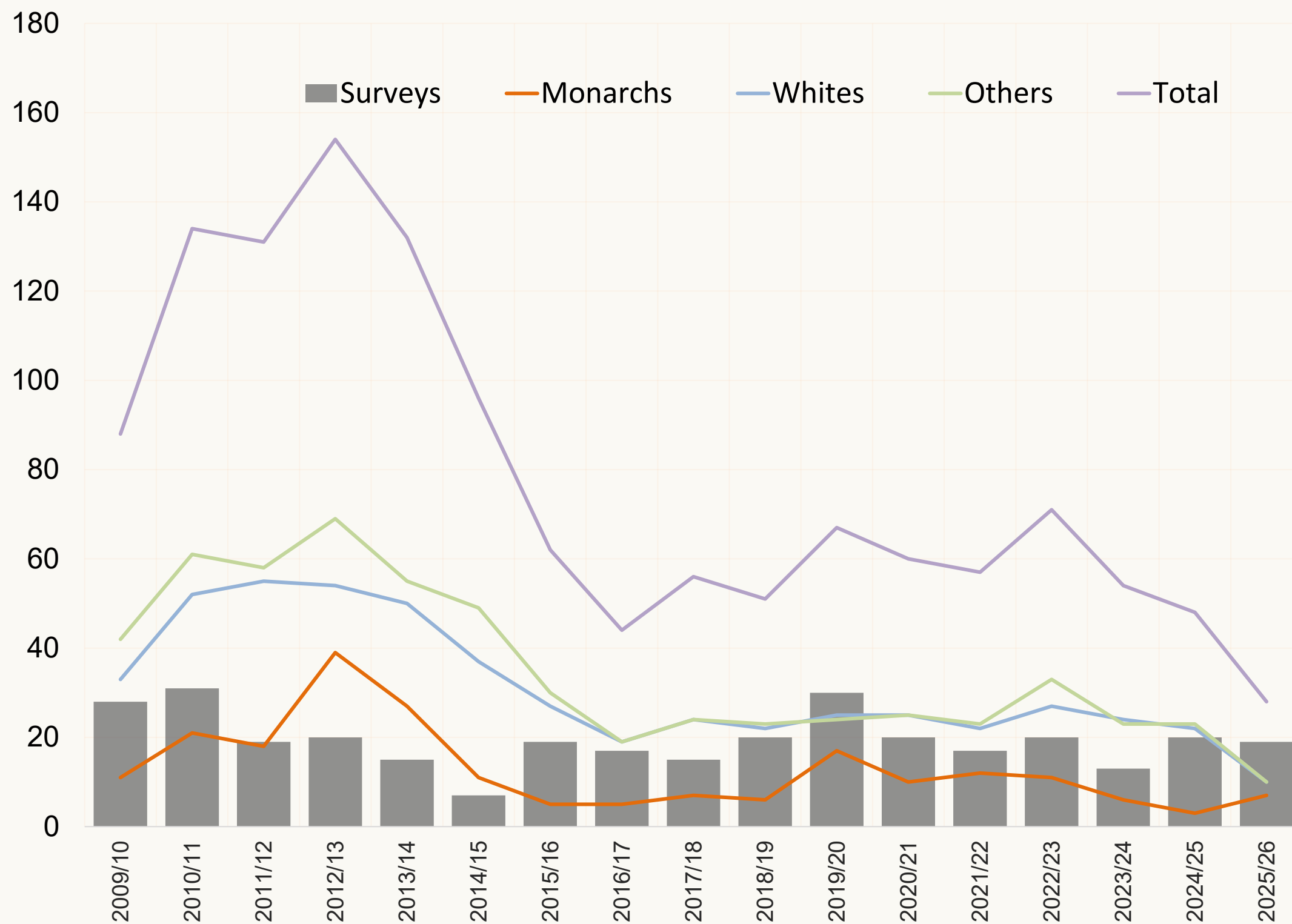
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# Nelson Transect: Seeing change over time

Without long -term monitoring, we cannot tell whether butterflies are simply fluctuating or genuinely declining.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteer Chrissie Ward for her ongoing work





## The strongest butterfly years were in the early 20 10 s

The Nelson transect recorded its strongest butterfly activity in the early 20 10 s, peaking at 154 butterflies per survey in 20 12/13.

## Butterfly counts then declined sharply

After a high-abundance period, butterfly counts dropped sharply through the mid-20 10 s.

## There was only a partial recovery in the early 20 20 s

There were signs of recovery in the early 20 20 s, but not back to earlier highs.

## The decline is broader than monarchs alone

The long-term change is not only about monarchs. It reflects a broader shift in butterfly activity.

# Public Spaces Project: Turning Evidence to Action

The future of butterfly  
conservation depends not only on  
data, but on how we shape the  
spaces butterflies depend on.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers Jannette Arlidge and Lynda Emery for their ongoing work



Councils are already doing some of the right things for butterflies and pollinators, but the work is not yet consistent, visible, or fully embedded in policy.

24 responses from local authorities and organisations involved in land management, biodiversity, and parks.

20 unique councils were represented.

1

Councils are already doing practical work that can help butterflies

Many councils are already planting and revegetating in ways that can support butterflies and pollinators.

2

No-mow and low-mow approaches are still early-stage

Low-mow approaches are still mostly at the interest or pilot stage, not yet standard practice.

3

The biggest barriers are public acceptance and operational constraints

The biggest barriers are social and operational, especially expectations for tidy landscapes and fire risk.

Councils are not lacking interest. They are lacking systems, confidence, and practical support to act more consistently for pollinators.

4

Wasp management is often reactive  
This creates an opportunity for a stronger pollinator protection approach.

5

Chemical use is still the default, but councils want alternatives  
Chemical use remains standard, but there is growing interest in practical alternatives.

6

Collaboration is not yet common  
Collaboration with local groups is not yet the norm, which creates a clear opportunity for the Trust to add value.  
Councils are looking for practical tools —not just inspiration, but guidance they can use.

Listen to those flutters

Every survey, tag, count, transect, and habitat conversation is contributing to the same goal: a future where butterflies and moths can continue to thrive in Aotearoa.

