

Counting bug splats on vehicle license plates shows numbers of flying insects has dropped significantly

May 6 2022, by Bob Yirka



Photograph showing the splatometer positioned over a number plate. Credit: The Bugs Matter Citizen Science Survey: <https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2022/05/Bugs-Matter-2021-National-Report.pdf>

A team of researchers with the Buglife project, working with the Kent Wildlife Trust, has found evidence that suggests the number of flying

insects in the U.K. has dropped significantly over the past several years. The group has posted a [technical report](#) on their findings.

Buglife is a British-based nature conservation charity organization—it focuses mainly on the preservation of pollinators and [freshwater habitats](#). In this new effort, the group noted that most studies on flying [insect numbers](#) have been focused on distribution rather than [total population](#). To learn more about the abundance of such creatures in the U.K., they created a [smartphone app](#) called [Bugs Matter](#) for use by ordinary citizens. Users were asked to clean their [license plates](#) before heading out on a journey in their vehicle and then to photograph and count the number of bugs they found splattered on the plates when they returned. Those records were then sent to the team at Buglife, and they unified the data into a count of bug splats over a given time period for the entire U.K.—in this instance, from 2004 to 2021.

The researchers found the number of splats recorded dropped dramatically over the course of the study—total numbers were 58.5% lower at the end of the study than at the beginning. Buglife spokesman Matt Shardlow described the findings to the press as "dramatic and alarming." He also noted that the survey shows flying bug totals declined by approximately 34% each decade.

Scientists have suspected that flying insect numbers have been dropping around the world for several years due to insecticide use, habitat and food loss and of course climate change. Prior work has suggested the worldwide population numbers for flying insects could be half of what they were just several decades ago. This new effort appears to back up such estimates.

The researchers are continuing their work on the project. Volunteers can download the Bugs Matter app and record data this summer from June 1 to the end of August.

More information: The Bugs Matter Citizen Science Survey:
[cdn.buglife.org.uk/2022/05/Bug ... -National-Report.pdf](https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2022/05/Bug...-National-Report.pdf)

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<https://phys.org/news/2022-05-bug-splats-vehicle-plates-insects.html>

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