

Prestwood Nature Butterfly Transect 2008

Over the summer of 2008 the PN members walked the butterfly transect for a third year. 14 trained members of Prestwood Nature participated: David Page, Peter Daltry, Sue Devlin, Christine Hoskins, Gaye Pickard, Ian Taylor, Angela deMuynck, Sue Davis, Virginia Deradour, Vanessa Rickett, Jill McVean, Lesley Stoner, George Lewis and Chris Bartlett.

The set transect of 5km was walked almost every week from the beginning of April to the end of September. The route has 15 sections; this ensures the coverage of different habitats to pick up the maximum number of species. Butterflies in an imaginary "box" around the observer up to 5m in front and 2.5m each side were counted and walks carried out only in suitable weather, i.e. Between 10.45am and 3.45pm, a minimum temperature of 13°C (in sunshine) and 17°C (no sunshine), wind speeds not excessive, and no rain.

The total number of each species of butterfly observed in each section was recorded on a standard form in addition to temperature, % sunshine, wind speed and direction, and the time the walk was started and finished. **Results** In total 1322 butterflies were counted in 2008. Interestingly, despite the poor summer, this count was higher than last year when 1078 butterflies were counted but still a lot less than 2006 with 3178. For the third year running the Meadow Brown was the most abundant butterfly with 665 counted. This comprised 50.3% of the total compared with 45% and 55.4% for 2007 and 2006 respectively. This is by far the most abundant butterfly with no other species having over 10% of the counts for any year.

The next most abundant butterfly was the large white with 9.9%. This was second in 2006 and third in 2007. Third was the gatekeeper with 9.1%: this was also third in 2006 but sixth in 2007. No Painted lady, Brown Argus or Duke of Burgundy were seen this year but the Grizzled Skipper reappeared after being absent last year.

The total numbers of most species remained fairly constant over the three years. Typical examples being the Marbled White with 3.7%, 3.5% and 2.1% of the total for 2006 to 2008, the Small Copper with 0.3%, 0.7% and 0.5% and the Comma butterfly with 0.8%, 1.1% and 0.8%. However some species showed a marked change over the three years. The Gatekeeper, for example showed a large drop in numbers in 2007 representing only 3.8% compared with 8.4% and 9.1% for 2006 and 2008. The common blue had a similar slump in 2007. In contrast the Peacock had a very good year in 2007 with 9.1% of the counts compared with 0.9% and 3.4% for 2006 and 2008. The Orange Tip and Red Admiral also had much higher percentage counts in 2007 compared with the other years. Thankfully, none of the butterflies appear to be seriously declining. Sadly the Small Tortoiseshell did not improve this year, remaining at under 0.5%.

Only two species appeared to show a significant improving trend over the three years. These were the Speckled Wood with 1.9% (06), 2.5% (07) and 4.3% (08) and the Large Skipper with 0.1%, 0.6% and 1.0% for the three years. Hopefully the Brown Argus and Duke of Burgundy will make a welcome reappearance in 2009. Week 17 (July 23rd, 26°C, 95% sun) had the highest number of counts with 270, followed by week 18 (July 26th, 21°C, 75% sun) with 254 counts, week 21 (August 16th, 18°C, 5% sun) with 111 counts and week 23 (August 30th, 24°C, 50% sun) with 102 butterflies counted. These were the only weeks with over 100 butterflies counted. It should be noted, however, that there were very high numbers of Meadow Browns over these weeks. Only in week 3 (14th April, 14C, 80% sun) were no butterflies recorded.

As mentioned at the start butterfly numbers were up on last year and few species appear to be in decline. However, the very large number of Meadow Brown, Large White, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Small/Green Veined White and Speckled Wood does tend to obscure the true picture with only these six species having counts over 50 for the year in 2008 and together providing 83% of all butterfly counts. This means that the remaining 15 species recorded in 2008 only comprised 17% of the total counts. We clearly need to examine these species in more detail and try to manage and improve their habitats where possible. The results presented here are only a few highlights. A more detailed report will be available later. This year's results were again sent to the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme to form part of their national database.

Week by week data are given on the following page.

2008	Week																										Species Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
Clouded Yellow																											0
Painted Lady																											0
Grizzled Skipper																											0
Green Hairstreak																											0
Brown Hairstreak																											0
Dark Green Fritillary																											0
Duke of Burgundy																											0
Brown Argus																											0
Dingy Skipper							2																	1			3
Holly Blue							1	3															2	2			8
Small Skipper																		7									7
Large Skipper												1		1													13
Essex Skipper									4																		4
Small Heath								1				1									2						4
Small Copper									3									1				2					6
Red Admiral						1																					8
Comma						3						1															11
Small Tortoiseshell						2	1															1					4
Peacock	1	1		13	3	8	8																		1		44
Small/Essex Skipper																									3		8
Brimstone	1			3	3	3	3					1													1		15
Orange-tip				1	2	5																1					9
Marbled White													2	3	1	5	17										28
Speckled Wood						2	2				3	1	4	1		1					1	2	2	13	12	13	57
Common Blue								2	1	16								3			3	6	8	6		2	47
Gatekeeper																6					9	8					23
Small/Green-veined White				2	1	9			2					5							6	13	4		7		62
Ringlet													12	21	1	4	2	22	1								63
Large White						3	4	5	4						3	32	20	3	5	10	25	7		3	6		130
Meadow Brown												24	6	55	26	181	107	51	28	78	40	70					666
Hedge Brown																	31	49	16							2	98
TOTALS	1	2	0	23	5	19	35	0	11	3	30	0	39	40	60	41	270	254	76	48	111	93	102	0	21	34	1318