

Butterfly Transect Results 2012

As in previous years, it was planned to walk a set route ("transect") of about 5 kilometres at a regular pace 26 times over the summer period (beginning of April to end of September), once a week. This was carried out by 12 trained volunteers. During the walk all butterflies coming within 5 metres were recorded.

The walk is divided into 15 distinct sections. In the event the weather was too poor for butterflies to be flying in twelve of the weeks, and several other transects were carried out in marginal conditions. These were the worst conditions encountered since we began in 2006. It was therefore no surprise that in 2012 the total number of individual butterflies recorded was 1,008, covering 20 species, more or less equalling the worst results we have ever had (in 2007). We got more individuals than in that year, but one fewer species.

The low number of species was due largely to the rarer species not appearing this year during transects - the only exceptions being a single **Dingy Skipper** and three unidentified hairstreaks. As these exist at lower frequencies there is only a tiny chance of picking them up when total numbers flying are low. But some of the commoner species were also missing - **Large Skipper**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, and **Painted Lady**.

The commonest species, as always, was **Meadow Brown**, with 581 records, which was quite remarkable in being a marginal increase, by 11, over 2011. Last year's report noted that numbers of this butterfly were lower than normal, so we were merely seeing a slight move back towards more normal levels, thwarted by poor August weather. The number of meadow browns relative to all other species actually achieved a record high this year, against what had been until then a fairly steady decline. Absolute numbers were still low, but far better than 2007. Whereas in 2011 it was seen unusually early on 3 June, this year it was not picked up until 13 June (in Abbey Park) and on the transect not until 7 July. Dry conditions with light winds (though not particularly hot) at the end of July and beginning of August probably benefitted this summer species. The second commonest species this year was the **Hedge Brown** or **Gatekeeper**, which reached a substantially higher total than last year (94 against 66), and would have benefitted from the same early summer conditions as the Meadow Brown. The closely related **Ringlet** also exceeded its 2011 total and came third with 92 (up from 77). These summer-flying grass-eating "browns" were apparently less disadvantaged by this year's weather than other species. While their numbers were not that high, they were at least holding their own. Despite appearances the

Marbled White is also in the brown family and it too held its own, with similar numbers to 2011.

Last year we noted that the "whites" had done particularly well, but this year they plummeted. **Large White** managed to come in fourth, but with no more than 41 individuals seen all year, down from 177 in 2011. In fact, apart from the browns above and one other species, numbers of every species were far below what they were the previous year. The exception was the **Peacock**, which saw a modest increase from 2011's very low 12 to 19 this year.

Particularly badly hit were the skippers, orange-tip and comma (just one sighting!), for which bad spring weather must have been to blame. These findings were replicated nationally and are not peculiar to our area.

Transects do not start until April, but there was a promising period in March when several records were received. These included several brimstones, peacocks and a comma. At that time we thought it was going to be such a good year - remember all that talk about droughts?! It is to be hoped that these early fliers were able to mate and make up to some extent for the later dearth.

Last year I noted that each year has so far been associated with one particular species doing much better than usual, and asked readers to submit guesses about what butterfly would be the star of 2012. I did not

receive any entries for this competition, but in any case it would be difficult to pick out any butterfly this year, so 2012 will go down as the year without stars. So, in a way, you were all right!

Tony Marshall

Week	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	
Mean Temp								15.00	21.00	18.00	18.00	18.00			14.00		18.00	20.00	17.00	23.00	24.00	22.00	18.00	24.00	20.00	2012	
Mean Sun								100.00	100.00	60.00	70.00				80.10		48.57	60.00	43.00	100.00	90.00	71.00	90.00	100.00	99.00		
Small Skipper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0	2					1				0	3
Essex Skipper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0				1						0	1
Small/Essex Skipper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Large Skipper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Dingy Skipper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0			0	0	0	0										0	1
Grizzled Skipper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Brimstone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0			0	0	0	0				9	4				1	0	20
Large White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2			0	0	0	0		2	8	21	1			2	1	0	41
Small White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1			0	0	0	0	1	1		12	4	4	1	1	2	0	31
Green-veined White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0			0	0	0	0				1						0	3
Orange-tip	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	4		0	0	0	0										0	13
Green Hairstreak	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Brown Hairstreak	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Small Copper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0						1		1	1	0	3
Brown Argus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Common Blue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		2	0			0	0	0	0				6		5	1	3	3	0	20
Holly Blue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0			0	0	0	0			1							0	2
Duke of Burgundy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Red Admiral	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1			2	3	0	12
Small Tortoiseshell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Peacock	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	2	0	2		0	0	0	0		2			2				4	0	19
Comma	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0			1							0	1
Dark Green Frithillary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0										0	0
Speckled Wood	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		2	0	1		0	0	0	0		5		4	3	2	3	8	11	0	39
Marbled White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	1	0	15		1	1						0	18
Gatekeeper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0	4		14	19	14	31		2		0	84
Meadow Brown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	29	0	175	75	81	61	70	46	24	14	6	0	581
Small Heath	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	0	0				5					2	0	7
Ringlet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			0	0	31	0	16	27	3	4				2		0	83
Section Totals	0	16	24	0	11	1	0	0	61	0	213	115	110	145	98	90	29	35	34	0	982						