

In celebration of life and of the value of biodiversity in our area, this month the focus is on butterflies – those delightful insects we all love to see at this time of year ...

Butterflies

What winged delights or Lepidoptera can you expect to see in the Kings Worthy area? Based on surveys carried out in the past two years by Worthys Conservation Volunteers, the answer is quite a few - some **24** different species have been recorded.



Sightings have included the pretty brown and orange Gatekeeper (its name originated because it likes to live in hedgerows so is often spotted around gates), Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Speckled Wood, and Comma very distinctive with its fluted wings - all variations on a brown theme.

The white collection has in its corner: Marbled White, Green-Veined White, Large White and Small White (commonly called the 'cabbage whites'), the yellow Brimstone and the Orange Tip.

Colourful fluttering of Red Admiral, richly-decorated Peacock with their four stunning eyespots on the wing resembling the tail-feather pattern of a peacock, brightly coloured Small Tortoiseshell and the elegant Painted Lady can all be seen Worthy ways. It's amazing to think that the latter arrive here after flying all the way from the Atlas Mountains in Morocco; last year there was a mass migration and they were in abundance - they loved the verbena in my front garden.

Then there are the pretty blues, or Lycaenidae to give them their official name - Holly Blue and Common Blue.

Full results can be seen on the group's website worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk

Our fluttery friends are more apparent on sunnier days as they need the sun's warmth to keep them active, so at times when the sun isn't shining they close their wings and rest. When the sun comes out, their bodies warm up and they fly off looking for food again.

These nectar lovers find food in a wide source of flowering plants, such as bramble, bluebell, bugle and buttercup. Brimstones love cowslips; thistles and dandelions attract a wide range of butterflies such as the skippers and Peacock; ground and common ivy also has a wide fan club. You could save yourself some weeding and sit back and enjoy the show. Buddleias are well known as a butterfly magnet, most garden nurseries have a wide range of these plants, some quite small and compact, and the aforementioned verbena as well as golden rod is sure to attract butterflies to your garden.



Like so much of Britain's wildlife, many butterfly species are in decline or have been lost. Habitat destruction, changes in agricultural practice and the cessation of active broad-leaved woodland management, especially the decline of coppicing, are bad news for many species.

But the good news is that many conservation groups such as Butterfly Conservation are working hard to create protected areas. Nearby Magdalen Hill (map ref: SU506293, OS Map: Land Ranger 185) is one such reserve which has been converted from arable farmland back to chalk downland with a range of native grasses and wildflowers attracting a wide number of butterfly visitors, including the more unusual Grizzled skipper and Green hairstreak.

Some butterfly amazing facts; did you know that:

... the wings of butterflies and moths are actually transparent?

The iridescent scales, which overlap like shingles on a roof, give the wings the colours that we see.

... butterflies taste with their feet?

Their taste sensors are located in the feet, and by standing on their food they can taste it!

... butterflies don't have mouths that allow them to bite or chew?

They, along with most moths, have a long straw like structure called a proboscis which they use to drink nectar and juices. When not in use the proboscis remains coiled like a garden hose.

... the average butterfly species has an adult life of two weeks or less?

Some live for just two days but other may live to up to year.

Finally, you don't need a lot of space to attract butterflies to your garden, just a bit of shelter and nectar should do the trick. So why not create your own butterfly habitat and give a helping hand to our local butterflies ...

Gail Alexander

Please help WCV create a nature picture of what's in our local parishes by logging on to www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch and recording your own butterfly sightings.

