

Bealeswood Common, Wildlife Records June 2021- The Grasses

As prepared by the Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG)
Previous monthly records and notes are posted at
www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

Grasses are a major feature of Bealeswood Common both as a dominant member of the plant community but also as a food plant for our caterpillars and hence butterflies and moths. Grasses come into flower in spring, continue through the summer and are the most abundant flowers out on the Common in June. However, their flowers are very small and rarely colourful; grasses are wind pollinated and have no need to attract insects.

Having small flowers makes grasses hard to identify and for many years they have not been included in our floral surveys. To help with this, a grass workshop was organised by BWRG in June with Surrey Wildlife Trust's Isobel Girvan. During the morning Isobel was able to show us the characteristics of some 17 grasses and rushes that are frequently seen on the Common and some are illustrated below.



Meadow Foxtail False Oat-grass Cock's-foot Yorkshire fog Rough Meadow-grass Perennial Rye-grass

Meadow Foxtail- 30-100 cm high, flowering from May-June. Flowers cylindrical, soft and 2-10 cm long. This was the dominant grass in May on the Common.

False Oat-grass- The tallest (50-150 cm) and most abundant grass on the Common in June. A loosely spreading flower that catches the light and sways in the wind.

Cock's-foot- A tall (100 cm high) stiff-stemmed grass with keeled grey-green leaves. Erect 3-15 cm long flowers on minor branches ending in clusters, resembling a cockeral's foot.

Yorkshire Fog- Another tall (up to 100 cm high) and abundant grass on the Common. Distinguished by its soft grey, hairy stem and leaves, and purplish tinge to its upright branching flowers.

Rough Meadow Grass- A thin but rough stemmed grass 20-60 cm tall. Delicately branching flowers

Perennial Rye-grass- Smooth wiry stems bearing flowers in two opposite rows along stem. Grows on paths where it may be 20-30 cm high compared with its max. at 80 cm.

(Photo: Dan Bosence)

Butterflies depend on grasses

The importance for grasses to our butterfly populations is clear from the following list of those butterflies found on Bealeswood Common that lay their eggs on native grasses.

9 species of grassland butterfly found on Bealeswood Common, lay their eggs on native grasses:

Small Heath: on Fescues, Bents, Meadow-grasses and Crested Dog's-tail

Ringlet: Cock's-foot, False Brome, Tor Grass and Tufted Hair-grass

Meadow Brown: lays or drops eggs on grasses including Fescues, Meadow-grasses, Bents and Rye-grasses

Gatekeeper: Cock's-foot, Timothy, Fescues, Common Couch and Meadow-grasses

Marbled White: female drops eggs randomly on Sheep's Fescue, Red Fescue, or Tor-grass

Speckled Wood: False Brome, Cock's-foot and Yorkshire Fog

Large Skipper: Cock's-foot, False Brome

Essex Skipper: Cock's-foot, Creeping Soft grass, Tor Grass, Meadow Fox-tail and Timothy

Small Skipper: Yorkshire Fog or Creeping Soft-grass

In addition at least 20 moths recorded locally lay on native grasses

This year we are excited to have two rare butterfly sightings on the Common; the Small Heath (last recorded 8 years ago) and the Green Hairstreak (first time recorded). Both photographed by Alex Potts, but unfortunately not on grasses!



Small Heath



Green Hairstreak