

Bealeswood Common Wildlife BWRG, September 2022

Butterflies (PH)

Butterfly numbers, as counted when walking the Butterfly Conservation transects, have generally been down in the last few years. However, a comparison with the average over the last 5 years of six common species indicates that while 4 out of the 6 have dropped quite dramatically, a couple of species have remained fairly stable: Orange Tip and Speckled Wood numbers have remained much the same but Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Marbled White and Gatekeeper have all seen their numbers drop to nearly half as shown in table below.

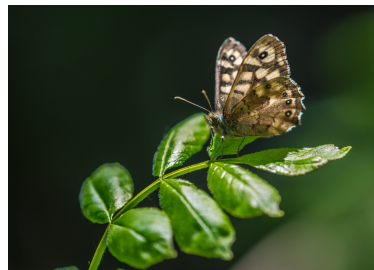
Butterfly species	Average over 5 years	2022
Orange Tip	10	15
Common Blue	47	27
Speckled Wood	37	30
Meadow Brown	573	313
Marbled White	69	33
Gatekeeper	80	43



Orange Tip on
Lady's Smock



Common Blue
on Knapweed



Speckled Wood
on Ash leaf

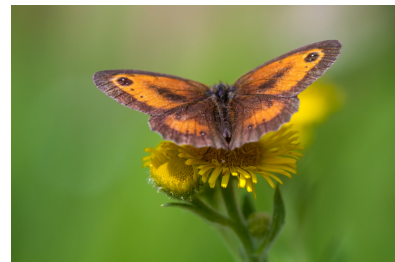
*All photos by Alex Potts
except bottom left,
Shona Foy;
www.dorsetbutterflies.com*



Meadow Brown on
Knapweed



Marbled White on
Marsh Thistle



Gatekeeper on Fleabane

This latter group, apart from Common Blue, are all grassland butterflies whose larvae feed on a variety of native grasses and it is possible that the longer, hotter summers are drying out the grasses before the larvae have time to complete their life cycle. Of the 2 whose numbers have remained much the same, the Orange Tip emerges early in March or April and has pupated by early July, thus avoiding the main heat of summer. The Speckled Wood, whose larvae also feed on native grasses, may benefit from passing the winter as either caterpillar or pupa which gives them a chance to have several overlapping broods, increasing their chances of success.

Our observations elsewhere on the Common seem to indicate that the Purple Hairstreak is having a less successful year than last year when sightings were fairly consistent. It was recorded not just in the canopy but lower down in Oak and Ash where they feed on aphid dew rather than nectar. It is possible that this year competition for aphid dew has been more intense as nectar feeding butterflies have had to find alternative food sources as the flowers on the Common dried up.

Upcoming Events

The Art and Craft of our Parish (AC, CJ, AP)

The BWRG will be contributing to this event being held in the Church of the Good Shepherd, The Street, Dockenfield on Saturday and Sunday 22-23 October. Alan Cox, Claire Jackson and Alex Potts have combined their love of nature and storytelling to present a journey through the seasons, told through the flora and fauna of our parish. The exhibit will comprise a selection of Alex and Alan's amazing photographs of wildlife on the Common together with stories from journalist Claire Jackson. In addition, a 2023 calendar based on Bealeswood wildlife will be on sale (price £8.00) during the exhibition and thereafter obtainable from Alex at acpotts@hotmail.co.uk. All proceeds in support of the church.



Male Blackbird on winter Holly as photographed by Alan Cox. From, The Art and Craft of our Parish exhibition, Dockenfield.

The Geological Evolution and Landscape south of Farnham (DB)

A talk by Dan Bosence (Professor of Geology, University of London). Thurs 10 November 7-8pm, at the Tilford Institute. Admission is free but you are asked to register at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-geological-evolution-and-landscape-south-of-farnham-tickets-408661867647>

Dan will explore the origin of the sands and clays that form the landscape south of Farnham deposited when seas covered southeast England and at a time when dinosaurs roamed the land. This area was later affected by Alpine earth movements, forming Surrey's answer to the Alps; the Hog's Back. This new land was then eroded by rivers into hills and valleys to form our present-day landscape and the rivers Wey and Blackwater left behind gravelly river terraces and, extraordinarily, the River Wey near Tilford changed its direction of flow.

Bealeswood Wildlife Reporting Group (BWRG) www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Clare Jackson, Steve Lockett, Phil Nangle, Alex Potts, Christina Rasmussen, Anne Tutt, and Raf & Karen Wane. 29th September, 2022.