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**Eristalis Tenax by Peter Whitcomb**

## Chair's Report

It was with a mixture of trepidation and delight that I took on the role this year of chairing what has until now been known as the Beacon Hill Working Group, following on from our outgoing Chair, Bob Webzell. It is a privilege to have oversight of our precious and recently extended Nature Reserve but I cannot hope to match Bob's hands-on engagement with Beacon Hill and all who contribute to maintain and enhance the beautiful, tranquil piece of chalk downland that we can all enjoy. This year the title of 'Working Group' is under review as I am fully conscious that much of the work is done outside of this governance group which really only meets to check on progress and pull plans together for the following year.

Beacon Hill is largely tended by the Friends of Beacon Hill, ably led again this year by Jason Fisher, Louise Arnold and Jo Spickett. Their commitment and enthusiasm has inspired dozens of others to don thick gloves and sturdy boots twice a month and launch themselves into the various challenges of reducing ragwort, clearing scrub (known as scrub-bashing to the cognoscenti), restoring paths and steps, as well as planting new saplings in North Wood. The Nature Reserve is also managed by Rangers from Brighton and Hove City Council, with Will Furze having taken over from Emma Keane this year, under the guidance of Dave Larkin. We congratulate Will on his recent marriage and are sorry to lose him so quickly to Stanmer Park where exciting developments are taking place. Will is being replaced by Paul Gorringer who we look forward to working with. Jason and Jo are stepping back this year to take a well-earned break and focus on other more domestic projects.

This year saw the introduction of new sheep grazing patterns, with some areas being grazed twice in order to reduce grass levels and allow the wild flowers to flourish. This has brought about visible improvements to the sward and a better integration of the former golf course into the Reserve. We are grateful to the small team of trained 'Lookers' who keep an eye on the welfare of the sheep and report any problems to our shepherd Sam Baldock and Will Furze reports that no complaints have been received about the extended grazing patterns. In light of high temperatures this summer, new troughs with a ballcock system will be fitted which will be hooked up to the bowsers and they will fill automatically when the float level drops.

There was an incident in May this year where the sheep had to be shorn in situ due to an outbreak of flystrike. Unfortunately, the temperature dropped significantly that night and this affected the sheep's welfare and they had to be removed from the Hill temporarily. We have recommended that they are removed from the Hill in future to a more sheltered location when they need to be shorn.

A new regime for mowing the pathways was agreed last year but many of the ones not supported by Natural England still seem to be being cleared regularly. We are concerned about the number of additional informal routes being trodden over the Nature Reserve, as this threatens our healthy population of skylarks and we need to keep encroachment on the Reserve beyond the official pathways to a minimum if it is to thrive.

It has been a challenging year for our other partners on Beacon Hill, the Beacon Hub who have been hard at work fundraising and taking forward plans to redevelop the former golf kiosk into a South Downs National Park Gateway building, comprising a café and an educational centre for local schools and groups of visitors.

The café is staffed by volunteers and is currently open on Thursdays and Sundays. Bernard Turnbull, Atlanta Cook and Jay Butler continue to valiantly lead this key project which has involved a lot of close negotiation with the South Downs National Park Authority this year, who remain firm supporters.

Our valuable team of experts led by the very knowledgeable and dedicated Peter Whitcomb continue to provide the in-depth monitoring reports included here and you can also read about school visits, now the responsibility of the Beacon Hub. Rottingdean Windmill, tended by Colin Dellar on behalf of the Preservation Society continues to attract thousands of visitors each year on the regular summer Open Days.

The recent extension of the Nature Reserve, championed by my predecessor, Bob Webzell, spurred the Working Group to review and improve the infrastructure and signage on the Reserve this year. We were successful in obtaining a grant of £2000 from the National Park towards the provision of new noticeboards which you will have seen appearing in recent months. The new boards, designed by Acorn Workshops are very sturdy but have proved challenging to erect because of their weight and health and safety regulations. We are grateful to the Rangers for storing the boards off site and aiding with their installation and in particular, to Gill Merlin, for her generous donation towards the noticeboard at the Ovingdean (Heaven) end of the Reserve in memory of her husband Stewart. A small team from the Working Group put together the illustrated content for the new boards and leaflets for the Reserve. The Friends of Beacon Hill have generously provided new bespoke picnic benches and Bob Webzell was kind enough to fund the new leaflets, as well as tackling the bureaucracy around processing the grant application. Mark Rose, the External Funding Co-ordinator for SDNPA, visited in October to view the splendid Hogs Plat noticeboard and thank members of the team. A true partnership project.

Lastly, following on from the Centenary Beacon lighting on Beacon Hill last year, we are hopeful of seeing agreement with the Royal British Legion regarding a permanent site for a brazier in the spot where so many beacons have been lit previously over the generations to mark significant national events.

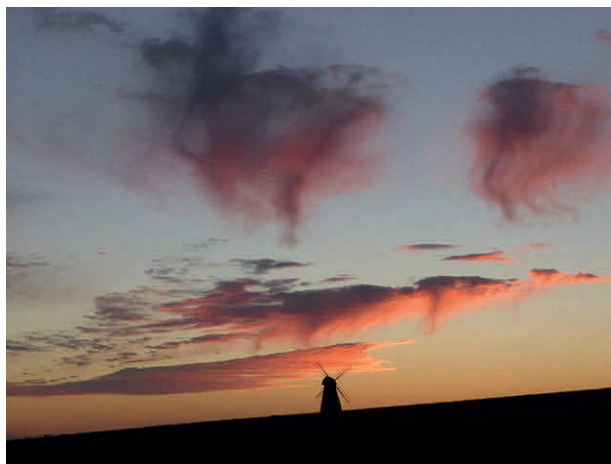
My thanks go to all who tend Beacon Hill Nature Reserve and make it accessible to regular dog-walkers and other visitors. You will have gained a sense from this report of how much we rely on the goodwill and efforts of local volunteers. More are always welcome.

Cllr Sue John



Sunset Beacon Mill

Louise Arnold



Images courtesy of Pauline and Colin Dellar of Rottingdean Preservation Society

## **The 2018/2019 Management Report** **By Will Furze, Countryside Ranger**

As you will all hopefully know, I am now the site Ranger for Beacon Hill, having taken over the site management from Emma Keane in December 2018. For those people whom I may not have met then I have been working for the Council now for 10 years having managed a number of Chalk Downland sites over this time; I've also regularly helped out the previous Rangers for the reserve including Charlie Yates and Emma Keane.

The first project which I took over from Emma was completing the installation of the new picnic tables. Over the course of 2 days with the help of colleagues from the Ranger service as well as members of the FOBH we managed to install the benches, even managing to get them nearly 100 % level. 8 months later and the benches appear to be weathering very well and we received lots of positive comments from local people during the install.

I also took over the site mid-way through the seasons sheep grazing. The help of FOBH has been invaluable with me learning the site and getting up to speed with the grazing regime; their help has also been fantastic when moving the sheep and I think we now have it down to a fine art with all the moves going extremely smoothly.

The Sheep were on the reserve slightly longer than usual this year however there were no complaints received from members of the public with regards to the extra length of time they were on the reserve.

This years' grazing went fairly smoothly with the exception of a couple of incidents. Firstly there were concerns raised by some members of the public regarding the sheep not having enough water as well as the water bowsters used to fill the troughs being locked. I'd like to remind everyone that we have an extensive number of lookers trained and working with us on Beacon Hill and that all lookers are aware that they need to top of the water troughs when they are low, and so it should be unlikely that the sheep will ever be without sufficient water.

The water bowsters were initially padlocked (so that the valve couldn't be opened) so that only the lookers and rangers could access them to fill the troughs; this was put in place due to occasions where the bowsters had been drained of water maliciously on other sites. However in recognition of the issues this year we will be changing things in the coming season; we will be using new troughs which are shallower but which have a greater capacity which should mean the sheep should be able to access the water more easily. The intention is to have the troughs fitted with a ballcock system hooked up to the bowsters so that they fill automatically when the float level drops. This should mean that unless the bowser is empty, the sheep should never be without sufficient water in the trough.



Whilst not able to attend all the workdays this year I have managed to be present at a number of the scrub / bramble clearance days. The work on the test area seems to be going well with a noticeable difference between the area the FOBH have been tree popping and hand pulling on and the adjacent area. Hopefully having the sheep graze this patch for a short while in early spring when the fresh bramble leaves are sprouting will also help to keep them at bay.

The ongoing project at the moment is the erection of the new noticeboards on and around the site entrances; so far 2 boards have been erected by members of FOBH and me. The boards themselves look fantastic and the design of the frames means that they should last a significant amount of time within the ground, certainly longer than the previous ones. The remaining noticeboards will be installed once I return from annual leave in late September. The installation is a difficult job which requires 3 / 4 people to help with it due to the weight of the materials and the most recent install took Jo, Jason and me the better part of 6.5 hrs. Once I return from leave I will be sending out dates with my availability with a view to get the remaining boards installed as soon as possible.

On my return from leave I intend to meet with the committee to discuss this years' grazing and the management plan in more detail.

NB Sadly another change of Countryside Ranger means that the meeting to agree a management plan has delayed the production of a 2019 – 2020 management plan or grazing arrangements for Beacon Hill Nature Reserve



One of three Friends sponsored Oak Benches

Louise Arnold

## FRIENDS OF BEACON HILL (FoBH) REPORT 2018/19

The very willing volunteers at Friends of Beacon Hill have been continuing their conservation work throughout 2018/19. Volunteer numbers are on the increase with over 600 hours logged between October 2018 and September 2019. We also had a few visits from the BHCC Roving Rangers and the Portslade Green Gym, both groups flit around the region helping out at various green spaces.

The Winter 2018 Graze saw the sheep here from 2<sup>nd</sup> September until 3<sup>rd</sup> December, with Spring 2019 Graze from 4<sup>th</sup> March to 26<sup>th</sup> May. A total of 172 days. There has been a marked increase in the number and spread of wildflowers across the Nature Reserve since the introduction of grazing instead of mowing. The Autumn 2019 graze was delayed due to a change in BHCC ranger with nobody seeming to take the lead on this.

In November 2018, taking a different tack from scrub bashing, the Friends actually planted instead of pulling !! They applied for and were awarded a pack of 200 tree whips which have been planted along the edge of North Wood. The intention was to increase the diversity of the wood and have planted a selection of Elder, Hazel, Rowan, Crab Apple, Blackthorn and Dog Rose. Upon inspection during Autumn 2019 a good proportion have taken root.

December saw the fruit of 2018 fundraising come to life with the erection of 3 picnic benches at the south end of the Nature Reserve. Joined by the County Archaeologist to oversee operations, he supervised the initial dig of the holes through the earth layer. Once chalk was hit he moved onto the next hole. There were a few finds including a selection of broken pieces of Victorian pottery, an old bone, firecracked flint and flint flakes around 4-5,000 years old. Nothing of any financial value but pieces of great interest to the Archaeological Society.

The Friends have been working on their “experimental” scrub bash area for 3 years now and the results are remarkable. Although the brambles do come back, they are much weaker, leaving the chalk grassland open for the wildflowers to flourish. Unfortunately it has been noted that the North Eastern section of the hill has been somewhat neglected, with brambles, hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose and sycamores becoming more noticeable. This area is going to be tackled during the upcoming Winter/Spring scrub bash, when the hope is to hold more weekend sessions to encourage those that work during the week to come out.

Hoary Cress continues to be an invader on the Nature Reserve and the Friends spent 2 outings pulling. The plant actually comes up quite easily, roots and all, with the sheep doing a grand job of nibbling the new growth in the spring. The sheep are having the same impact on our old friend the Ragwort and this unwanted plant is very much on the decline up on the hill. There are still some sessions over the summer dedicated to pulling the yellow flower before it turns to fluff and spreads its seeds, much like the dandelion.

An additional session was added to help clear the Windmill Allotment border after a request from one allotment holder.

A small project team from the Friends assisted RPC with the design of 6 new noticeboards to replace the old ones. At time of going to press only 2 of the 6 have been erected due to a combination of issues. Hopefully the final 4 will be erected and proudly on display in the New Year.

All in all another very successful year with the Friends of Beacon Hill growing in number and going from strength to strength.



FoBH Images: Louise Arnold





## BEACON HUB BRIGHTON 2019 -20 Report by Atlanta Cook

Beacon Hub Brighton CIO held its AGM on Dec 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 to announce wonderful funding news along with celebratory drinks after. With support from SDNPA's expert fund-raisers we had secured enough funds from our events, SDNP Trust, The Co-operative (giving us the £7,500 we needed to secure our Veolia grant and Rampion Wind Farm which combined allowed us to put the redevelopment of the building out to tender on SDNPA's web portal and we waited with bated breath for construction company quotations to come in. The Café Kiosk volunteers served their last orders on Dec 21<sup>st</sup> and packed the entire contents of 'the hub' into boxes and suitcases ready for storage. Unfortunately, in the New Year only two building quotations came in and they were miles apart! Three is the minimum requirement for comparison and as the costs were so disparate it was agreed that we needed to halt the process and commission a quantity surveyor.

To say this was a blow is an understatement. The trustees and volunteers were devastated. To add insult to injury we had been in communications with a volunteer quantity surveyor from the village, but had been thwarted on taking up their kind offer so it was inevitable that some of our precious funds would now have to be spent on one. The results of the professional cost plan still came in higher than the projected project budget, so we were forced to return to the drawing board and start looking at alternative build modes.

Having moved our entire 2019 Beacon Hub Eco-education & Events Programme operation out of 'the hub' and into the community, we continued with our 'Virtual Seality VR Scuba Dive' at Art Pod Brighton, 'Woodland Flo Days' at Future Roots in Stanmer Organics, 'Midsummer Green Celebration' at Ovingdean Village Hall and Immerse Sea Swimming Film Installation on the ONCA Barge whilst dealing with numerous build & design option meetings.

As well as welcoming Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Margaret's Y5 classes for their annual free Bird Walkabout and Flora & Fauna Walkabout with Windmill Visit, we also hosted our 2019 Roedean Community Action Programme (CAP), which raised £295, and planned a 19-week teaching schedule for a third year of CAP in collaboration with The Green Centre CIC.

A Big Love fund-raiser was held with Beacon Hub & Help Refugees at The Brunswick Pub and we raised a substantial amount through our events and popular 'Message in a Bottle' fishing game at Rottingdean Village Fair. Add to this that for the last 5 years BHB Trustees Jay Butler & Atlanta Cook have provided free rock-pooling, beach cleaning or nature reserve walkabouts to St. Margaret's Beaver Scout Leader, Lindsey Delow and you will get an idea of just how disappointing and busy a year it was for the trustees and volunteers. We continued despite the delay, but were forced to keep the Café Kiosk closed until September so as to not overstretch ourselves.

However, we are a resilient team and are working hard to get a new build design ready to go to planning and to tender out again in 2020. We continue to research our new build options with the support of SDNPA and McConvilles and are confident that we will find a way to get the building we want at a price we can afford.







Beacon Hub Activities Images: Atlanta Cook

**MIDSUMMER GREEN CELEBRATION**

Join us to celebrate our green & pleasant land!

**Saturday 22nd June 2019, 11am-4pm**  
**Ovingdean Village Hall & Garden**

Stalls, Talks, BBQ Bar, Garden Games, Tea & Cakes

**FREE Admission**

**BEACON HUB**  
 Eco-education & Visitor Centre

For further details Email:  
[beaconhubbrighton@gmail.com](mailto:beaconhubbrighton@gmail.com)

**PLASTIC FREE Ovingdean**

**SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK**

**STAR GAZING**

with Dark Skies Dan (SDNPA)  
 + talk by **BRIGHTON ASTRO**

Hot food & drinks plus licensed bar

**Friday 2nd November 2018**  
 7pm - 9pm  
 Beacon Hub Brighton  
 (near Rottingdean Windmill)

Photo courtesy of Sumitra Sribhashyam

Tickets £5 (including hot drink) Under 16s FREE

Book via the **Eventbrite** link on our **Facebook Event** page

**BEACON HUB**  
 Eco-education & Visitor Centre

**BeaconHubBrighton**

## THE STEWARDSHIP AND MONITORING REPORTS

Calcareous grassland (or alkaline grassland) is an ecosystem associated with thin basic soil, such as that on chalk and limestone downland. Plants on calcareous grassland are typically short and hardy, and include grasses and herbs such as clover. Calcareous grassland is an important habitat for insects, particularly butterflies, and is kept in this balance by grazing animals, usually sheep but sometimes cattle. (Wikipedia, 2018)

Over the whole of the South Downs, only 3% of these grasslands remain, the rest having been permanently changed by ploughing. There is no evidence or record of ploughing on Beacon Hill for over a century, probably two.

Following eight consecutive years in which the City Council have organised grazing our NR with mixed groups of Herdwick and upland sheep for three to five months, evidence suggests we are recreating on Beacon Hill the circumstances to maintain the regeneration of the reserve's grass sward. This practice must be maintained. And as our specialists monitor and study it, we continue to discover new plants and other natural findings that suggest our efforts are overcoming the degradation that has taken place to better meet the CG2a category of chalk grassland, and probably contributing to reduced CO2 levels also.

### THE MONITORING OF THE FAUNA AND FLORA ON BEACON HILL

Without the vision of our Founders, David Larkin, John Cumming and the late Alan Holden, and the enthusiasm, dedication and hard work of volunteers, Beacon Hill NR would probably not exist today. It certainly wouldn't have won In Bloom Gold Awards six years running.

We remain indebted to Peter Whitcomb, our Wildlife Co-ordinator, for our current flora observations on top of his primary responsibility of butterfly recording. We are indebted to many regular walkers and observers including Libby and Jay, the Family Connolly, Don Martin, Andrew Whitcomb, Louise, Jo and Bob and many others for unusual sightings. We thank them all for what they do for the nature reserve.



Swallow in flight

Bob Webzell

## PLANT REPORT 2019

By Peter Whitcomb

Our chalk downland reserve has two important speciality plants which flourish and give much pleasure to visitors. 2019 was another year where the numbers of **Cowslips** were well above average, and later on the **Round-headed Rampion** was also in abundance. There was some early concern that the late sheep grazing may have had some detrimental effect, but the numbers appeared to be above average.



Round-headed Rampion



Sainfoin



Greater Knapweed, white form

The sheep grazing may have had some effect, but to generalise would be difficult. Two of our orchids – **Pyramidal** and **Common Spotted** did not appear in places where they have been seen in the past. On the other hand, some of the common plant species were abundant – **Lady's Bedstraw**, **Wild Carrot**, **Agrimony** and **Greater Knapweed** all seemed to be doing well. Two of these are really useful for butterflies and insects.

The grazing on the old Pitch & Putt golf course is also beginning to have some signs of re-generation and one positive about this is that through previous management there is no problems with bramble encroachment on this section.

I make mention here of some of the scarcer plant species found during the year. It started in May when I re-discovered **Corn Gromwell** growing among nettles. Another Spring flower was **Star of Bethlehem** found along the edge of South Wood again after missing it last year. Luckily the large **Deadly Nightshade** was tucked away out of sight. There was a particularly large patch of **Goatsbeard**, **Salsify** and examples of their **hybrid** just south of the windmill.

A single **Common Broomrape** was located, a parasitic plant which feeds on clovers. Unlike its name it is the first recorded on the Reserve and not at all common locally, although more were found on the allotments later. Oddly enough, another common chalk grassland plant was discovered, **Wild Basil**, again the first noted here which may have been present but overlooked.





Common Broomrape



Star of Bethlehem



Pyramidal Orchid

Volunteer pulling of **Hoary Cress** and **Ragwort** occurred during the year, but the latter was proving beneficial to butterflies, bees and hoverflies in September when the knapweed and other nectar plants were going to seed rather too quickly with the warmer weather.

One of the plants we have plenty of here on the Hill is **Field Bindweed**. While some regard this as a garden 'weed', it has its merits, and there are a number of different colour forms that were spotted during the summer. Here are a few of them:



The small butterfly bank of chalk situated at the west end of the car-park had some success with **Common Rock-rose**, **Bird's-foot Trefoil** and other plants managing to survive drought conditions at times. With the addition of plug plants or seeds, this area together with the north bank of the car-park, will hopefully continue to expand floristically.



Common Rock-rose

## REVISED PLANT LIST 2019

### \*CG2A Species

*Agrimony	*Creeping Thistle	Hoary Cress
Alexanders	*Crested Dogstail	*Hoary Plantain
Annual Wall Rocket	*Crested Hair Grass	Hoary Ragwort
Apple	Crow Garlic	Hogweed
*Autumn Gentian	Curly Dock	Honesty
Babington's Poppy	Cut-Leaved Cranesbill	Hop
Barren Brome	Daffodil	*Horseshoe Vetch
*Bastard Toadflax	*Daisy	Hounds-tongue
*Bird's Foot Trefoil	*Dandelion	Hybrid Bluebell
Bittersweet	Danish Scurvy Grass	Ivy
Black Horehound	Deadly Nightshade	Kidney Vetch
*Black Medick	*Devilsbit Scabious	Knotted hedge-parsley
Black Mustard	*Dog Rose	*Lady's Bedstraw
Blackthorn	Dog Violet	Lesser Burdock
Bladder Campion	Dogwood	Lesser Celandine
Borage	Dove's-foot Cranesbill	Lesser Swinecress
Bramble	*Dropwort	Lucerne
Bread Wheat	*Dwarf Thistle	Marjoram
Bristly Ox-tongue	Elder	MeadowCranesbill introduced
Buckshorn Plantain	Equal-leaved Knotgrass	*Meadow Vetchling
*Bulbous Buttercup	*Eyebright	Michaelmas Daisy
*Burnet Saxifrage	*Fairy Flax	Mugwort
*Cat's Ear	False Oat Grass	*Nettle
Charlock	Fat Hen	Nipplewort
Cleavers	Fennel	Opium Poppy
*Cocksfoot	Field Bindweed	*Ox-eye
Coltsfoot	Field Forget-me-not	Pear
*Common Bent	Field Scabious	Pendulous Sedge
Common Chickweed	Garden Asparagus	Perennial Ryegrass
Common Corn Salad	Garden Columbine	Pineapple-weed
Common Field Speedwort	Garlic Mustard	Ploughman's Spikenard
Common Fumitory	Germander Speedwell	Pot Marigold
*Common Knapweed	*Glaucous Sedge	Privet
Common Knotgrass	*Goat's-beard	Purging Buckthorn
Common Mallow	Gooseberry	*Pyramidal Orchid
*Common Milkwort	Grape Hyacinth	*Quaking Grass
*Common Mouse-ear	Grass Vetchling	Red Bartsia
Common Poppy	Great Mullein	*Red Clover
*Common Ragwort	*Greater Knapweed	Red Dead-nettle
*Common Sorrel	Greater Plantain	*Red Fescue
*Common Spotted Orchid	Green Alkanet	Red Valerian
Common Toadflax	Ground Ivy	*Rest-harrow
Common Twayblade	Groundsel	Ribbed Melilot
Common Vetch	Hairy Bittercress	*Ribwort Plantain
Corn Gromwell	*Hairy Oat Grass	Rock Sea-lavender
Corncockle	*Hairy Violet	Rosy Garlic
Cow Parsley	*Hawthorn	*Rough Hawkbit
*Cowslip	*Hedge Bedstraw	Rough Hawks-beard
*Creeping Bent	Hedge Bindweed	Rough Meadow Grass
Creeping Buttercup	Hedge Mustard	Rough Poppy
Creeping Cinquefoil	Hemlock	*Round-headed Rampion
	Herb Bennet	*Sainfoin



\*Salad Burnet  
Salsify  
Salsify hybrid  
Sea Beet  
\*Self-Heal  
Shasta Daisy  
Sheep's Sorrel  
Shepherd's-purse  
Silver Ragwort  
Silverweed  
\*Small Scabious  
Smaller Catstail  
\*Smooth Hawk's-beard  
\*Smooth Meadow Grass  
Smooth Sow-thistle  
Snowdrop  
Soft Brome  
Spanish Bluebell  
Spear Mint

\*Spear Thistle  
\*Spring Sedge  
Spring Starflower  
\*Squinancywort  
Star of Bethlehem  
Stinking Iris  
Strawberry Clover  
Sun Spurge  
Swinecress  
Sycamore  
Tansy  
Three-cornered Garlic  
\*Timothy  
\*Tor Grass  
Tree Cotoneaster  
Tree Mallow  
\*Tufted Vetch  
\*Upright Brome  
Viper's Bugloss

Wall Barley  
\*White Clover  
White Dead-nettle  
Wild Basil  
Wild Carrot  
Wild Mignonette  
Wild Oat  
Wild parsnip  
\*Wild Strawberry  
Wild Teasel  
\*Wild Thyme  
\*Yarrow  
\*Yellow Oat Grass  
\*Yellow Rattle  
\*Yorkshire Fog



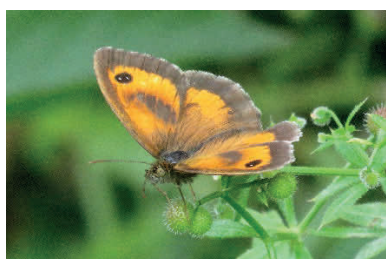


## THE BUTTERFLY MONITORING REPORT 2019

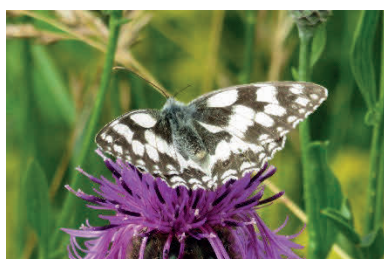
by Peter Whitcomb

I think the term topsy turvy sums up the butterfly year. There were many days of warmth and sunshine but it is difficult to believe that many of the species here on the Hill only showed average or low numbers in 2019. I regret that through circumstance and unsuitable weather that my coverage was incomplete (19 out of 26 weeks) but nevertheless the overall situation was less than encouraging. The species which did do well were **Peacock** and **Gatekeeper**, and to a lesser degree, **Painted Lady**, **Ringlet** and **Wall Brown**.

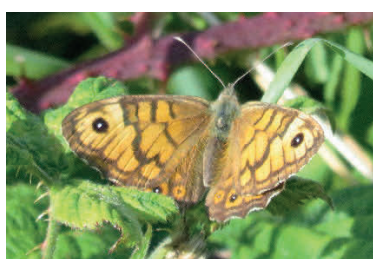
Of the Top Six butterflies that frequent the reserve it was only the **Gatekeeper** that improved on average numbers; **Small White**, **Marbled White** and **Small Heath** hovered on the average mark; and **Common Blue** and **Meadow Brown** were all well below. Perhaps the biggest surprise was the performance of **Ringlet** which accounted for 11 sightings, the first since their initial discovery in 2015. A similar total for **Wall Brown** which was the highest count since 2003.



Gatekeeper



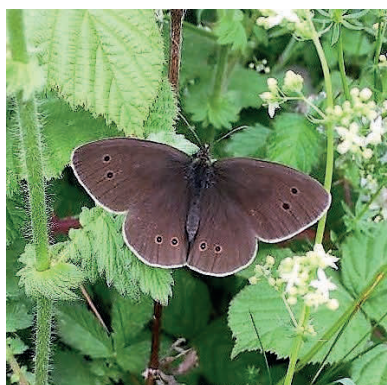
Marbled White



Wall

There were two significant media events with press releases which seemed to have little effect whatsoever on our reserve at Beacon Hill. To start with there were two influxes of **Painted Ladies** with widespread news in the press and TV which stated 'millions' would descend on the UK. Here on the reserve the first influx was hardly noticed and the second influx did show an increase in average numbers, but there was no such huge 'influx' as the majority of sightings seemed to come from the north of England and Scotland, thereby missing us out here in Sussex. Admittedly people were seeing them here and in gardens on their buddleia bushes and they were indeed a joy to see, but there was nothing like the huge numbers prophesied in our area.

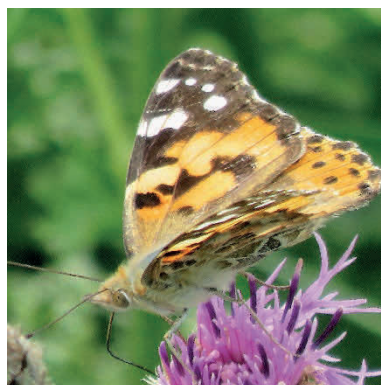
The second item of news was that the BBC stated that **Common Blues** would have a very good year, but again that didn't materialise here at Beacon Hill with very poor figures throughout the year. It is uncertain whether the low numbers had anything to do with weather, the sheep grazing or being close to the coast. In fact, blue butterflies fared badly generally with no sightings of **Adonis** or **Chalk Hill Blues** and low numbers of **Common Blue**, **Holly Blue** and **Brown Argus**.



Ringlet (Libby Darling)



Common Blue



Painted Lady

Perhaps the most surprising fact was that there was not one **Small Tortoiseshell** accounted for during the year. Here are the details of the butterflies counted in 2019, with the average number over the last eight years in brackets. The italic shows the normal flight periods:

**SMALL/ESSEX SKIPPER 53 (82) *End June/July***

Another poor year with similar numbers to the previous two years. One of many species having a poor year. There were two counts of 20 on 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July. The two species are linked together as they are almost inseparable in the field, with the main difference being the colour of the antennae!

**LARGE SKIPPER 3 (4) *June/July***

A very poor year again.

**DINGY SKIPPER 0 (1) *Mid May/June***

None found this year. The last recorded was in Spring 2013.

**CLOUDED YELLOW 0 (2) *Aug/Sep***

There were no sightings of this iconic butterfly this year.

**BRIMSTONE 7 (2) *End Mar-May, Aug/Sep***

The best year since I have been walking the transects. Six were seen in April and one in May. This is a species which prefers woodland and it is likely that it is present in larger numbers but not within the transect route.

**LARGE WHITE 19 (37) *End May/Jun, Aug/Sep***

A rather poor showing with max 10 on 24th July.

**SMALL WHITE 109 (105) *May/Jun, Aug/Sep***

Only just on average numbers with most being seen in close proximity to the allotments. There were two flight periods with peaks in early May and mid September. As Small Whites are more likely to be seen, there has been a general assumption over the recording years that most of the 'smaller' whites are recorded as such, rather than female Orange-tips or Green-veined Whites.

**GREEN-VEINED WHITE 3 (2) *May/Jun, Aug-early Sep***

Only a handful seen close enough to identify from Small White (see above).

**ORANGE-TIP 2 (1) *May/Jun***

It was very pleasing to count a couple along the woodland edge in April, and like Brimstone it prefers woodland glades rather than edges.

**SMALL COPPER 2 (3) *May, Aug-end Sep***

A very poor year for this attractive species, often seen flying later in the recording year.

**BROWN ARGUS** 1 (3) *May/Jun, Aug/Sep*

A good close-up view or a photograph is necessary to clinch the identification, as brief in-flight views are very similar to female Common Blues.

**COMMON BLUE** 53 (169) *Mid May-end Jun, Aug/Sep*

A rather dismal showing especially after reading of a press release stating there could be large numbers this year. The max was 19 on 3rd August.

**CHALK HILL BLUE** 0 (4) *Mid Jul-end Aug*

An unfortunate decline from 15 in 2012 and 4 in 2013 and 2014. The caterpillar's food plant is Horse-shoe Vetch and there is very little of this on the reserve and it is hoped that by adding plug plants the species may return and even increase in numbers. This attractive butterfly is a South Downs speciality and it deserves to be a regular sight here at Beacon Hill.

**ADONIS BLUE** 0 (1) *End May-mid Jun, end Aug-Sep*

The surprise of 3 male sightings last year was not replicated. This is the blueist of all blue species and has not been found in any numbers here as its larval foodplant Horse-shoe Vetch is quite scarce. Same sentiments as above.

**HOLLY BLUE** 4 (7) *Apr/May, Aug-mid Sep*

This was a disappointingly poor count after recent year's highs, and below average numbers. Most were noted during Spring along the woodland edges.

**RED ADMIRAL** 13 (9) *Jun-Oct*

Above average, but a poor year with only a few recorded on ivy flowers during the last couple of weeks which in the past have swelled the numbers.

**PAINTED LADY** 27 (8) *Jun, Aug/Sep*

Much publicised in the media with 'massive influx' mentioned and this species came out Top in the UK Big Butterfly Count. Here on the Hill the hype was somewhat of a damp squib and although larger than average numbers were recorded it was nowhere near the expected onslaught. The peak was 17 at the end of June. It became clear that the 'influx' was more confined to the North.

**SMALL TORTOISESHELL** 0 (12) *End Mar-May, end Jun-Oct*

It was extraordinary not to record any of this beautiful butterfly during the course of my weekly walks. This is the first time this has happened since the records began here. There are a few patches of nettles around the transect route, but no caterpillars were seen. The low counts were also reflected in the UK Big Butterfly Count for 2019.

**PEACOCK** 12 (6) *Mar/Apr, Aug/Sep*

There was a flurry of early Spring sightings and the total of 12 was the second highest in recent years, and well above average. The peak count was 5 on 18th April.

**COMMA** 1 (2) *Apr-early May, Jul-Oct*

Never a regular species here, but a single was a poor result after a good count last year.

**DARK GREEN FRITILLARY** 6 (7) *Jul/Aug*

An average year for this beautiful chalk grassland speciality, with 3 on 28th June being the peak.



**SPECKLED WOOD 4 (9) Apr-Oct**

An average year for the species, recorded mostly along the woodland fringe of North Wood, but also among the scrub along the western edge.

**WALL BROWN 11 (3) May/Jun, Aug-mid Sep**

A really excellent result with the highest number since 2003. In recent years there were very few sightings, so this is encouraging. The larval food plant is grasses, no problem there, and of the 5 noted on 3rd August included a mating pair.

**MARBLED WHITE 169 (165) End Jun-mid Aug**

This was a better year and right on the average. The peak count was a high 81 on 5th July. Their flight period generally extends into August but the last was on 26th July.

**GATEKEEPER 222 (167) Jul/Aug**

The counts were well above the average and a species really doing well here this year. The peak count was 84 on 24th July.

**MEADOW BROWN 370 (568) Mid Jun-early Sep**

Still the most numerous butterfly on the Reserve, but for two years running the totals have been below par. Peak count was only 83 on 28th June.

**SMALL HEATH 249 (210) May/Jun, Aug/Sep**

Just above average but slightly disappointing after last year's record count. This species has a distinctive habit of keeping its wings closed when alighting, so it is practically impossible to see a photograph with open wings.

**RINGLET 11 (2) End Jun/July**

Significantly these are the first sightings since they were first found here in 2015.

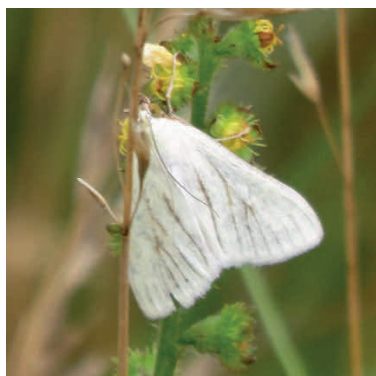
Photographs by Peter Whitcomb except as marked.

## **MOTHS & MISCELLANEOUS**

### **By Peter Whitcomb**

With the absence of any serious mothing on the Reserve, it was left to chance encounters when the butterfly transects were being walked. A new moth was found, a **Sulphur Pearl** but apart from that there was little of any significance. The two common day-flying moths – **Cinnabar** and **Six-spot Burnet** were scarce, yet for some odd reason there seemed plenty of **Cinnabar** caterpillars later in the year munching on Ragwort. It was pleasing to see some Ragwort plants left for the caterpillars after the volunteers had done their pulling.

Also of interest was a **Marshall's Nomad Bee** identified and confirmed by an expert and another species added to the ever increasing list on our wonderful reserve. In September a **Spiked Shieldbug** was found in the old allotment area – new to me and new to the Reserve. Usually there are a number of **Wasp Spiders** to be seen in August-September, but they seemed quite scarce this year, with a max of only 2 in early September.



Sulphur Pearl

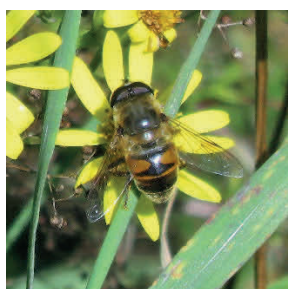


Marsham's Nomad Bee

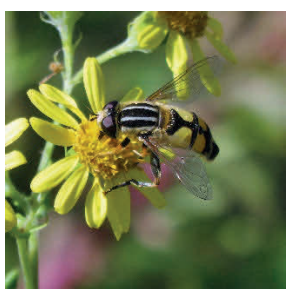


Spiked Shieldbug

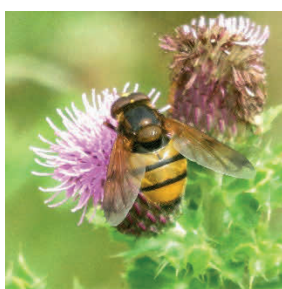
At least eight species of hoverfly were identified at Beacon Hill this year. Taking a decent photo is not always a key to identification and hoverflies are very difficult to identify. The second largest UK hoverfly is **Volucella inanis** and is one of the easiest to identify. It is a hornet mimic. The row of Euonymus bushes alongside Blind Veterans were a magnet for hoverflies when in flower.



Eristalis tenax



Helophilus pendulus



Volucella inanis



Ivy Bee

There was an attempt to report more of the Bumble Bees seen on our Reserve. Joanne and Libby both sent in records. As its name suggests, **Early Bumble Bees** were the first, in April/May followed by **Buff tailed and White tailed** in June. **Common Carder Bees** and **Red tailed Bumble Bees** in mid summer and there was also a sighting of **Red shanked Carder Bumble Bee** by Libby. In September **Ivy Bees** joined Honey Bees, Red Admirals and hoverflies nectaring on the ivy flowers.

The usual irregular sightings of Common Lizard, Slow-worm, Fox, Grey Squirrel and Badger were received.

Thanks for contributions from Libby Darling, Steven Munday and Joanne Spickett

### SPECIES RECORDING

For those readers who are interested in what happens to sightings and records for Beacon Hill, many are entered on iRecord, a website run by the Biological Records Centre (BRC). This is a useful way of record keeping nationally and around our local Brighton area. A representation of butterfly sightings are entered, as are significant plant and insect finds. This enables anyone accessing the website to search for Beacon Hill NR and get an idea of species seen from year to year. The software allows transfer of records to various bodies including the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC), County Recorders and Societies for Plants, Butterflies and Invertebrae.

As a member of the Sussex Ornithological Society I send direct records of occasional breeding local birds and passage sightings during Spring and Autumn.

# BEACON HILL LNR WEEKLY BUTTERFLY COUNTS 2019

Week	1	2	3	3	3	6	7	9	11	12	13	14	15	17	17	18	21	23	24	25	Total	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Date	7.4	8.4	19.4	20.4	20.4	9.5	14.5	1.6	14.6	22.6	28.6	5.7	11.7	24.7	26.7	3.8	22.8	8.9	15.9	19.9	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Small/Essex Skipper											4	20	20	6	2	1					53	57	58	64	78	124	143	83
Large Skipper										2	1										3	1	6	7	9	4	2	1
Dingy Skipper																						0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Grizzled Skipper																						0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Clouded Yellow																						1	2	0	3	3	3	1
Brimstone			3	3			1														7	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Large White						1				1	1		4	10				2			19	81	10	31	51	26	60	22
Small White			3	2	2	2	5	2	1		5	15	8	5	8	10	9	19	23	22	139	94	80	123	100	72	180	86
Green veined White	1								1	1											3	5	1	7	0	0	1	0
Orange Tip				2																	2	4	0	0	0	1	0	3
Small Copper							1										1				2	1	4	1	0	9	3	2
Small Blue																						0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brown Argus												1									1	3	0	2	1	10	1	0
Common Blue								9	7	2	2	1		1	6	19	2	3	1		53	198	189	51	145	167	301	133
Chalk Hill Blue																						2	0	0	0	4	4	15
Adonis Blue																						3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Holly Blue				2			2														4	16	7	15	7	1	1	3
Red Admiral							1			1	1		1	2		1		3	2	2	13	3	11	16	8	10	4	31
Painted Lady											17	1				6	1	1		1	27		0	0	4	2	5	0
Small Tortoiseshell																						1	8	6	19	30	32	4
Peacock	1	2	5	3			1														12	1	6	3	6	4	13	2
Comma																		1			1	6	2	1	1	0	2	0
Dark Green Fritillary											3	1		2							6	7	6	0	5	6	7	13
Speckled Wood				3												1					4	9	6	5	9	19	12	7
Wall Brown							1							3	1	5	1				11	1	0	0	2	9	4	1
Marbled White										12	43	81	32		1						169	126	111	150	149	188	201	231
Gatekeeper												17	44	84	62	15					222	125	81	80	134	273	236	185
Meadow Brown									10	50	83	70	55	25	19	27	21	6	3	1	370	349	444	454	353	682	741	1151
Small Heath						7	13	29	13	35	37	19	10	10	4	16	26	12	13	5	249	477	314	62	66	80	157	275
Ringlet											3	4	3	1							11		0	0	2	0	0	0
WEEKLY TOTALS	1	3	11	15	10	25	40	32	103	149	103	230	177	149	103	102	61	45	44	31	1382	1571	1346	1078	1153	1743	2114	2255
Temperatures	15	13	18	18	14	15	18	17	19	20	21	21	20	26	19	19	20	17	20	19								
% Sunshine	40	10	100	100	100	100	100	100	80	100	100	20	100	100	20	40	100	90	100	90								
Wind Direction	NE		NE	NE	SW	E	SE	SE	SW	SW	E	S	W	SW	W	S	SW	N	SW	SE								
Wind Force	2		3	3	3	4	3	4	2	4	4	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	2	3								



## BEACON HILL 2019 BUTTERFLY FIGURES BY SECTION

<b>Species</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Total</b>
Small/Essex Skipper		5	23	10	7	3	5	<b>53</b>
Dingy Skipper								
Large Skipper			3					<b>3</b>
Grizzled Skipper								
Clouded Yellow								
Brimstone			6				1	<b>7</b>
Large White		5	13	1				<b>19</b>
Small White		64	33	6	14	6	16	<b>139</b>
Green-veined White		2	1					<b>3</b>
Orange-tip		1	1					<b>2</b>
Small Copper			1			1		<b>2</b>
Small Blue								
Brown Argus				1				<b>1</b>
Common Blue		12	16	3	9	5	8	<b>53</b>
Chalk Hill Blue								
Holly Blue			4					<b>4</b>
Red Admiral		2	8	1		1	1	<b>13</b>
Painted Lady		4	16	6			1	<b>27</b>
Small Tortoiseshell								
Peacock		5	2		3		2	<b>12</b>
Comma		1		1				<b>2</b>
Dark Green Fritillary		1	3	1			1	<b>6</b>
Speckled Wood			3				1	<b>4</b>
Wall			4	2	3	2		<b>11</b>
Marbled White		14	56	49	24	8	28	<b>169</b>
Gatekeeper		22	72	35	45	29	19	<b>222</b>
Meadow Brown		34	111	87	56	28	54	<b>370</b>
Small Heath		22	78	20	58	33	38	<b>249</b>
Ringlet			11					<b>11</b>
<b>TOTAL 2019</b>		194	465	223	219	116	165	<b>1382</b>
2018		235	447	223	248	173	245	1571
2017		223	410	139	189	137	248	1346
2016		160	277	131	151	143	218	1078
2015		146	372	182	255	73	125	1153
2014		173	563	227	312	159	292	1726
2013		286	654	216	368	238	352	2114
2012		315	901	316	364	300	240	2427
2011		144	676	156	278	163	133	1550
2010		227	519	106	238	94	261	1445
2006		149	420	163	94	113	182	1113
2004		137	393	181	137	180	229	1257
2003		228	424	143	245	264	218	1522
2002		159	265	123	160	100	208	1015

# Beacon Hill Birds 2019

by Peter Whitcomb

In January a Barn Owl seemed to be resident in the area with multiple sightings. In fact, on a couple of occasions two were seen together. Twenty bird boxes were examined, contents photographed, cleaned and replaced by Louise and her team. Eleven had evidence of the previous year's nesting in North Wood.

On 1st February 2 Tree Creepers were seen in North Wood – quite a scarce bird for our area and rather oddly the first to be recorded here; and the Barn Owl was seen again. On 13th March a Mediterranean Gull was spotted as a fly-over.

The start of April saw plenty of singing Skylark activity and 2 pairs of Meadow Pipits were present and may have nested. The first Wheatear was noted on 8th closely followed by Swallows on 10th. Unusually a Fulmar flew up the valley from the cliffs. On 20th the local Buzzard was seen displaying on the same day a Red Kite flew over.



Wheatear



Skylark



Meadow Pipit

There were two School walk-about for birds during May with St Margaret's and Our Lady of Lourdes. Further summer migrants were seen with Common Whitethroats and Blackcaps probably nesting, and a singing Lesser Whitethroat may also have bred. Red legged Partridges were reported on a few occasions

In July a Whimbrel flew over on 6th and a couple of Sand Martins flew through with a group of Swallows on 11th. Visits during August saw flocks of Goldfinch and feeding groups of Starlings. Two visits to the Hill by birders from outside the area on 18/19th found a number of migrants in the sheltered edge by the horse paddocks. Two Spotted Flycatchers and a Pied Flycatcher were the best birds, with Redstart, Blackcap and common warblers also in attendance. On 8th Sept 3 Wheatears were on the hill. A few days later Spotted Flycatcher and Garden Warbler were in a mixed bunch of common warblers.

On 6th Oct a Short-eared Owl was seen flying away from the long grass near the windmill, but hasn't been subsequently noted. A late flurry of House Martin were flying south on 15th. October also produced regular sightings of feeding Goldfinch and some early display from our Skylarks. On 22nd a large flock of Jackdaw were probably migrants. There were insufficient reports of migrants at this time, but after an appeal we are pleased to have a local birdwatcher on board who is going to send in more regular sightings.

I have for some time been wondering about Greater black backed Gulls nesting in our area, and I received confirmation that they did breed on a Rottingdean rooftop this year.

The updated full list of bird species recorded on Beacon Hill follows:

## The Birds of Beacon Hill – updated list and local status

Fulmar	Breeds on the cliffs; occasionally flies over the Hill
Cormorant	Flies over
Grey Heron	Flies over
Little Egret	Flies over
Brent Goose	Very occasional fly-over
Honey Buzzard	Rare autumn passage migrant
Red Kite	Occasional wandering individuals
Hen Harrier	Scarce passage migrant
Sparrowhawk	Breeds locally
Buzzard	Seen quite frequently, attempts to breed
Kestrel	Resident and probably breeds locally
Merlin	Scarce winter visitor – two recent records
Hobby	Passage migrant
Peregrine	Resident locally
Red-legged Partridge	An occasional wanderer
Pheasant	Resident and probably breeds in the area
Lapwing	Seen during winter hard weather movements
Ringed Plover	One record in 2017, injured by wind
Golden Plover	Rare; flies over on passage and in winter
Woodcock	Rare winter visitor – one old record
Whimbrel	Scarce passage migrant
Black-headed Gull	Winters
Mediterranean Gull	Passage migrant
Common Gull	Winters
Lesser Black-Backed Gull	Winters
Great Black-backed Gull	Occasional fly-over, bred on Rottingdean rooftop in 2019.
Herring Gull	Resident; winters; breeds nearby; non-breeders summer
Sandwich Tern	Wandered off the coast
Feral Pigeon	Resident locally
Stock Dove	Resident and breeds (2-3 pairs) in the woods
Wood Pigeon	Resident in the woods; autumn passage migrant
Collared Dove	Resident locally
Barn Owl	Seen in hard winters
Little Owl	Was once resident in the Allotments; has bred
Tawny Owl	Status uncertain, heard only
Long eared Owl	Rare, one recent record only
Short eared Owl	Scarce winter visitor
Swift	Passage migrant and summer visitor
Wryneck	Rare passage migrant – one record
Green Woodpecker	Resident locally
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Resident locally
Skylark	Resident; breeds (6-10 pairs); erratic in autumn and winter
Sand Martin	Passage migrant
Swallow	Summer visitor; breeds locally; passage migrant
House Martin	Summer visitor; breeds locally; passage migrant
Meadow Pipit	Passage migrant; breeds (2-3 pairs); winter visitor
Tree Pipit	Occasional passage migrant



Yellow Wagtail	Passage migrant, especially autumn
Grey Wagtail	Occasional autumn passage visitor
Pied Wagtail	Passage migrant, especially autumn; resident locally
Wren	Resident; breeds
Dunnock	Resident; breeds
Robin	Resident; breeds
Redstart	Passage migrant
Black Redstart	Scarce passage visitor – two records
Stonechat	Autumn and occasional Winter visitor
Whinchat	Passage migrant
Wheatear	Passage migrant
Ring Ouzel	Passage migrant
Blackbird	Resident; breeds
Fieldfare	Seen during winter hard weather movements
Song Thrush	Resident in very small numbers; probably winter visitor
Redwing	Winter visitor
Mistle Thrush	Status uncertain
Reed Warbler	Passage migrant
Sedge Warbler	Passage migrant
Lesser Whitethroat	Passage migrant; a pair may breed
Whitethroat	Summer visitor; breeds (3-4 pairs); passage migrant
Garden Warbler	Occasional passage migrant
Blackcap	Summer visitor; breeds (1-2 pairs); may appear in winter
Yellow-browed Warbler	Rare autumn passage migrant
Chiffchaff	Summer visitor; breeds (1-2 pairs); may appear in winter
Wood Warbler	Scarce spring migrant
Willow Warbler	Passage migrant
Goldcrest	Passage migrant; may winter
Firecrest	Passage migrant
Spotted Flycatcher	Passage migrant
Pied Flycatcher	Scarce passage migrant
Long-Tailed Tit	Resident; breeds (1 pair)
Marsh Tit	Rare in coastal areas
Coal Tit	Rare here – one old record
Blue Tit	Resident; breeds (5-6 pairs)
Great Tit	Resident; breeds (4-5 pairs)
Nuthatch	Accidental
Tree Creeper	Recorded for the first time in 2019
Jay	Resident; breeds
Magpie	Resident; breeds
Jackdaw	Resident; breeds locally; occasional passage migrant
Rook	Resident; breeds (25-35 nests in North Wood)
Carrion Crow	Resident; breeds
Raven	Flies over
Starling	Breeds locally; winter visitor
House Sparrow	Resident locally
Chaffinch	Resident; probably breeds; winter visitor
Brambling	Occasional winter visitor
Greenfinch	Resident locally

Goldfinch	Resident; breeds; passage migrant
Siskin	Passage migrant
Linnet	Resident, possibly breeds
Common Crossbill	Rare wanderer
Yellowhammer	Surprisingly one record only
Reed Bunting	Occasional visitor outside breeding season



The South Downs National Park



Coffee Table Reflection at Beacon Hub by Lee and Juliet

## THE LOCATION OF BEACON HILL LNR

