

Butterfly Report for Beacon Hill LNR 2020

By Peter Whitcomb

There has never been a year like this and with the outbreak of Coronavirus through March and April UK Butterflies called off all transect counts. With some relaxation of Government guidelines it wasn't until mid-May that counts were resumed. Normal counting would have been from 1 April, this meant losing six weeks. In actual fact some of the April counts would have been quite high as for once there was a spell of hot weather.

On the plus side the species that did well were Marbled White with a max count of 104 on 24 June, Gatekeeper and Small Heath. Large White and Common Blue had a better year but were still a little below average. Hovering around average were Small Skipper, Dark Green Fritillary and Wall Brown.

Missing the first six recording weeks would have increased the chances of higher counts on some of the early fliers. In fact there were no Speckled Wood or Brimstone recorded even though they have a second flight period. Once again some of the larger butterfly species fared poorly with very low numbers of Comma, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Red Admiral too, but with a few weeks to go the final aggregate could improve as this species fly well into October. It was disappointing not to record Ringlet and Painted Lady this year. I saw no Clouded Yellow either, but one was seen on the Hill on 4 September.

A possible sighting of a Green Hairstreak on 9 April would be a first for the Reserve.

Blue butterflies are a feature of chalk grassland and although Common Blues had a better year the other species could do with some encouragement. In the past we have recorded small numbers of Adonis, Chalk Hill and Small Blue and they require certain larval foodplants for their survival. Beacon Hill could certainly do with some seeds or plug plants of Horseshoe Vetch and Kidney Vetch or better still a properly created butterfly bank which B&HCC have successfully placed elsewhere in the Brighton area.

Moths and Miscellaneous 2020

Very few moths were positively identified during the year. A Mother Shipton was seen in May and there were a number of sightings of Yellow Shell. A Hummingbird Hawkmoth was seen in June and a caterpillar of Six-spot Burnet was found at the end of June. Cinnabar caterpillars were feeding on Ragwort in July but very few of the moths were seen. The first Six-spot Burnet moths were seen on 4 July, with max 18 on 11 July and continued to be seen in decent numbers until early August. I managed to secure a person willing to set up moth traps on the Hill, but owing to the pandemic this did not materialise. Hopefully something will take place next year.

There was a good number of miscellaneous sightings with at least six species of Bumblebee noted, included a possible rare Brown banded Carder Bee seen by Libby Darling on 13 June. Other insects included Hoverflies (*Scaeva pyrastris* etc), a

Yellow Dung Fly and Cockchafer, and various Grasshoppers. Numerous St Mark's Flies were encountered towards the end of April. On 14 May the quaintly named Fire streaked Bugkin was found – a first for the Reserve. A Common Darter dragonfly was hawking along the woodland edge on 30 August. Other species reported were a Weasel in April and a Stoat in May. Foxes, Grey Squirrels and Badgers are present but not reported. A Wasp Spider was seen on 18 August.