

'The caterpillar does all the work, but the butterfly gets all the publicity'. G. Carlin.

Great Britain hosts around 61 species of butterfly, of which 34 have been recorded at Shotover, reflecting its national status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The keen observer would be able to see about 26 species in a typical year.

WHY IS SHOTOVER SO IMPORTANT?

The reasons why Shotover is good for butterflies lie in its great age, which has provided a continuity in habitat over many years. The underlying geology gives rise to a series of diverse habitats almost unique in the County. Together with Brasenose Wood, Shotover encompasses: lowland acid heathland and grass; ancient woodland; meadow; hedgerows and marsh, and together these support a broad range of butterfly species. Nearby gardens also contain the fragrant plants that many butterflies find irresistible.

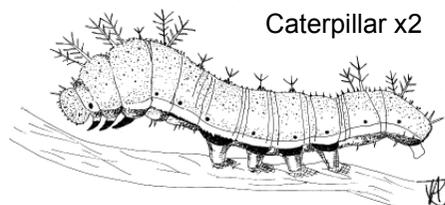


Comma
(*Polytonia c-album*)

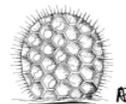
WHERE AND WHEN CAN WE SEE BUTTERFLIES ON SHOTOVER?

To find out when to see a particular butterfly, it helps to know a little about its life cycle. Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks, Brimstones and Commas hibernate ('over-winter') as adults, often in out-buildings or sheds, and the rather dishevelled butterflies can often be seen very early in the year. Others, like the Small White and Orange Tip, survive as pupae (chrysalises); while Purple Hairstreaks over-winter as eggs.

White Admiral (*Limenitis camilla*)



Caterpillar x2



Egg x15

However, many butterflies hibernate through the winter as caterpillars, and the additional stages of development have to be undergone before reaching adulthood. Consequently, the adult butterflies are not seen until late spring or early summer.

Some butterfly species may undergo several life cycles in a single year, giving rise to a second, third or even fourth brood. So, even though individual adults may live for a few weeks only, the butterflies can be seen right through the summer. Many of the grassland butterflies, such as the Common Blue and Small Copper, follow this pattern.

Butterflies are also affected by climate, and numbers are generally higher in, and after, years with hot sunny summers. For migrant species, like the Red Admiral and Painted Lady, conditions in their home country and during their journey from mainland Europe, determine when they arrive and in what numbers. One example is a 'Clouded Yellow Year', when large flocks of these beautiful butterflies arrive.



Peacock (*Inachis io*)
Chrysalis x2

Another way to find butterflies is to look for their caterpillar food plants. Where caterpillars can feed on a range of common plants, such as meadow grasses, then the adults are usually abundant. On Shotover, grassland butterflies, such as the Skippers, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, and Marbled White, can readily be seen in the meadows during the summer months.

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP!

Caterpillars of a number of the 'Blue' butterflies, such as the Holly Blue and Common Blue, have a special symbiotic relationship with various species of ant. The ants look after the caterpillars in or near their nest, and feed on secretions from special glands on the caterpillars back. In return, the ants protect the caterpillar from predators.

Many butterflies are associated with specific plants; the Holly Blue is often found near holly and the Purple Hairstreak around oak trees. Woodland butterflies often nectar on aphid honeydew on leaves. Some of Shotover's most spectacular species, the White Admiral and the elusive Purple Emperor, are most likely to be fluttering around the canopy in heavily wooded areas, like Brasenose Wood.

Butterflies that are very fussy about their caterpillar food plant tend to be much scarcer (or harder to find). Interestingly, the Comma was in severe decline in the 1800s, but is now fairly common having gradually switched from Hop to the more ubiquitous Nettle.

Recording Butterflies

You may like to record the butterflies you see on Shotover. The best time is between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm on a warm day. Butterflies to look out for include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Hairstreak* | <input type="checkbox"/> Orange Tip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brimstone | <input type="checkbox"/> Painted Lady |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Argus* | <input type="checkbox"/> Peacock |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Hairstreak* | <input type="checkbox"/> Purple Emperor* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clouded Yellow* | <input type="checkbox"/> Purple Hairstreak* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comma | <input type="checkbox"/> Red Admiral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Common Blue | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Copper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dark Green Fritillary* | <input type="checkbox"/> Ringlet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Essex Skipper | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Blue* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gatekeeper | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Heath* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Green-veined White | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Skipper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holly Blue | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Tortoiseshell |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large Skipper | <input type="checkbox"/> Small White |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large White | <input type="checkbox"/> Speckled Wood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marbled White | <input type="checkbox"/> Wall* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meadow Brown | <input type="checkbox"/> White Admiral* |

*If you see one of the less common species (denoted by the asterisk) please contact us, we would be delighted to hear from you.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE?

Many butterfly species have declined in Britain as a result of intensive farming, and habitat loss. Some, like the Black Hairstreak which require ancient coppiced woodland, are now very scarce. Others, like the Small Heath and Wall, give much cause for concern.

However, it is not all bad news, and butterflies such as the Skippers, Speckled Wood and Marbled White are increasing in numbers as they adapt to a changing environment. Clearly, careful management, especially of the caterpillar food plants and hibernation spots, is essential for the future of these beautiful creatures.

Shotover Wildlife is a voluntary organisation founded to research and communicate the importance of Shotover Hill for wildlife.

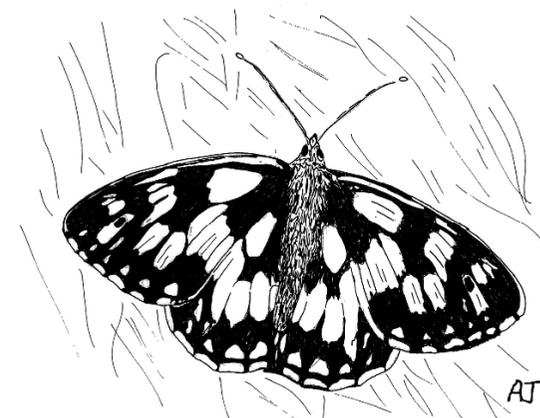
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BUTTERFLIES

on SHOTOVER



Cover picture: Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*)

Leaflet written and illustrated by Angela Julian

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