

THE NATIONAL TRUST

Butterflies at Basildon Park

Basildon Park is an excellent area for woodland butterflies. When walking through the grounds you may see, on a sunny day, many butterflies moving from plant to plant in search of their food, nectar. The paths through the **Pheasant Park** have low edges, which provide open rides and clearings for butterflies to move along. Here, amongst others, you may see Painted Lady, Peacock, Comma, Gatekeeper, Small White, Large White, Ringlet, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Common Blue, Red Admiral and Brimstone butterflies. The wild flowers and shrubs growing beneath the trees provide food for the butterflies. When it is windy, the butterflies will rest on the grass so make sure that you look low down and at potential food plants too. Further on, in **the Main Park**, is a glade offering open grassland where these butterflies, as well as the Meadow Browns, can be found. The grass species are the food plants for caterpillars of several butterflies.

In the **Secluded Valley**, Marbled White, Silver Washed Fritillary, Small Skippers and Large Skippers may be seen, along with others, depending on the time of the year, and the weather. *Key: L= large butterfly, M= medium sized butterfly, S=small butterfly.*

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|  | <p>Painted Lady (<i>Vanessa cardui</i>) L</p> <p>Orange-brown wings with black and white spots on forewing. Undersides mottled brown with spots. This is a migrant butterfly and this year there have been 2 waves of migration bringing large numbers of these into the UK. The adult feeds on most nectar producing plants. On the wing from April to October.</p> <p><i>Please will you count the number of these that you see and report this number to the ticket office!</i></p> |
|  | <p>Peacock (<i>Inachis io</i>) L</p> <p>Named from the upper wing eye-like spots, which resemble the markings on a Peacock's tail feathers. Wings are black underneath. The adult lays its eggs on nettles and there are many of these at Basildon. This common and distinctive butterfly is on the wing from March to October.</p> <p><i>If a second member of your group would like to count this butterfly, we would be interested to know the numbers. Thank you.</i></p> |
|  | <p>Red Admiral (<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>) L</p> <p>This migrant butterfly is a regular visitor to the UK. Brown/black wings with red bands and white spots near the tips of forewings. Undersides dark and mottled. Both sexes look alike. Eggs are laid on nettles and adults feed on flower nectar. On the wing from May to October/November. (However, after the warm winter 2006-7, they were seen every month of the year.)</p> |

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|  | <p>Brimstone (<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>) M/L</p> <p>It is probable that this butter-coloured fly, known since the mid seventeenth century, has given rise to the shortened name “butterfly”. A medium-large butterfly which rests with its leaf-shaped wings closed. The sexes look different, the male (shown) has yellow-green underwings and yellow upperwings. Females have pale yellow-green wings, looking almost white in flight. On the wing from February to September.</p> |
|  | <p>Speckled Wood (<i>Pararge aegeria</i>) M</p> <p>Found in shady places in rides and clearings where its wing pattern blends in with dappled shade. Male and female look alike. Butterflies often perch in sunny spots, flying into the air to chase each other. On the wing from March to October.</p> |
|  | <p>Small White (<i>Pieris rapae</i>) M</p> <p>Widespread and common. The brilliant white forewings have small black tips and one (male) or two (female) wing spots. Undersides creamy white. It looks similar to the Large White except that this is a bigger butterfly (L) with more prominent black edges down the forewings. Both on the wing from March to September.</p> |
|  | <p>Common Blue (<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>) S</p> <p>The Common Blue is the most widespread blue butterfly in Britain and Ireland and is found in grassland. The Male (shown) has blue wings with black-brown border and thin white fringe. Female brown, but with blue dusting near body. The males are conspicuous but females are more secretive. On the wing from May/June and August/September.</p> |
|  | <p>Meadow Brown (<i>Maniola jurtina</i>) M</p> <p>Widespread and common throughout the wooded areas at Basildon. Orange and brown, with black eyespot on forewing tip. Eyespots have single white centres. The Meadow Brown is probably the most abundant butterfly species.</p> <p>On the wing in both dull weather and sunshine from June to September.</p> |

If you have enjoyed spotting the butterflies in the gardens today, you may wish to visit the RDNHS website and download a copy of this sheet.

Photographs kindly supplied by Jan Haseler and Graham Mulrooney, members of the Reading and District Natural History Society. www.rdnhs.org.uk
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