

Wildlife of Barcombe Parish - Butterflies

Some personal observations (to 30 September 2020)

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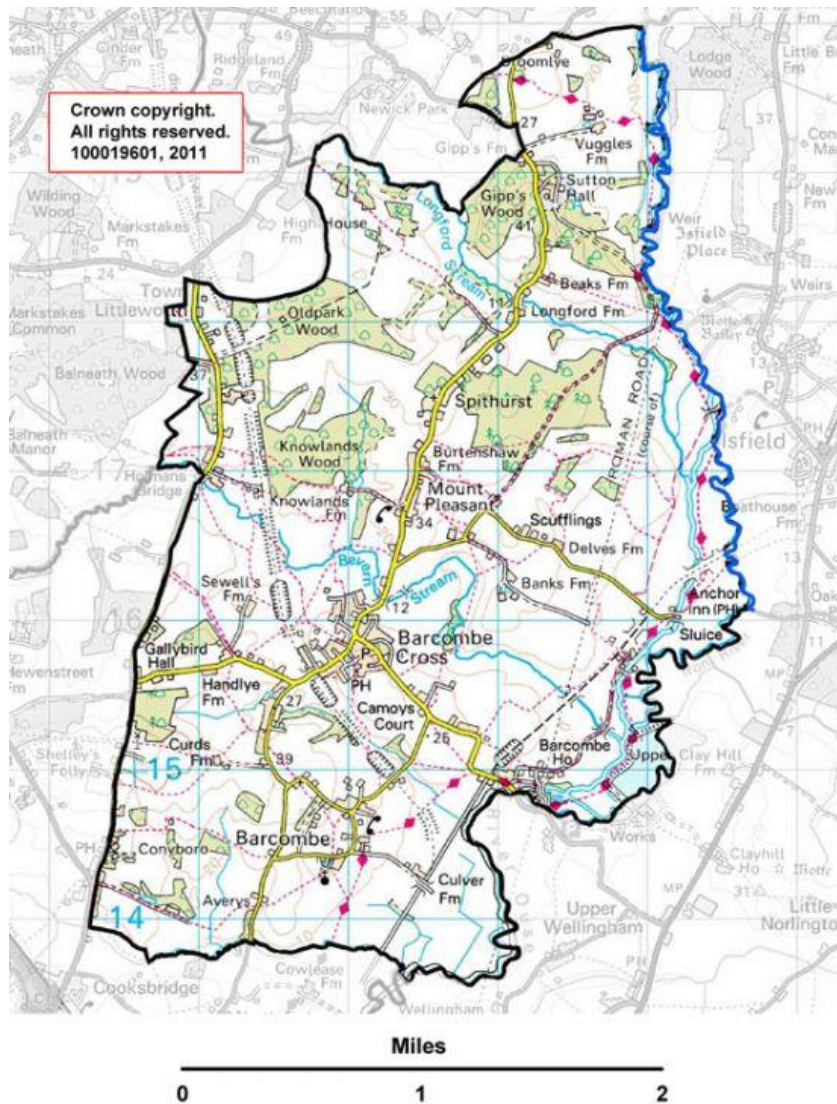
Introduction

Barcombe Parish is a good place to enjoy butterflies. Sussex is noted as one of this country's better counties for butterflies and the parish has recorded many of the species known in the county. We do lack some of the chalk downland specialists but on the other hand perhaps make up for this with our woodland species. Butterflies can be enjoyed at many locations in the parish and indeed in many gardens (particularly if they have nectar-bearing plants). One particular hotspot is Knowlands Wood which is a good location in mid-summer to see White Admirals, Silver-washed Fritillaries and Purple Hairstreak.

Map and place names

- For simplicity, in this document both 'Barcombe' (proper) and 'Barcombe Cross' are referred to as 'Barcombe'.
- Barcombe Parish has two reservoirs – a small farm one located below the new village hall and South East Water's Barcombe Mills Reservoir. It is important to note that the latter is closed to the public. However, all references to 'Barcombe Reservoir' relate to the second facility.
- Barcombe Parish also has two disused railway tracks (though not all with public access; some stretches that are used by the public require due care). Nearly all references to the 'old railway track' relate to the 1.5 km stretch that runs from just west-north-west of the village as far as the Secret Campsite to the north-west of Knowlands Wood.

Map of Barcombe Parish (ref. Barcombe Parish Council website)



Status of butterflies in Barcombe Parish

Four tables are shown. Table A is a summary of the overall status of the 34 species we have recorded personally in the parish. Table B has been compiled by Nick & Harriet Lear of the butterfly species recorded each year since 2010 at Knowlands. Table C shows the species recorded in one Barcombe village garden (that of SL) during the last 21 years. Table D notes two species not recorded by us but that are on the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre database. Consequently, 36 species are known to have occurred in the parish.

Table A. Summary of the 34 species we have recorded in the parish

Status is based on our current assessment of the species in the parish. **Common** = several individuals likely to be seen on the wing during a half day walk in the parish: in the right habitat; at the correct season; under reasonably bright, warm and dry weather conditions; and in an 'average' year (there are yearly fluctuations for nearly all species). **Fairly common** = as 'Common' but generally less abundant. **Scarce** = may take rather more effort because they tend to occur in very small numbers at specific sites. **Unusual** = much less than annual. **Variable** = a species that can be common in one year, absent in another. **Uncertain** = status yet to be fully elucidated. Flight season of adults is based on information in Tomlinson & Still (2002) – see references. The dates on the photographs also give some clue as to season.

Species	Season	Status	Comments
Small Skipper	Mid-summer	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Essex Skipper	Mid-summer	Fairly common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Large Skipper	Summer	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Dingy Skipper	Late spring	Scarce	Old Railway Track and Knowlands Wood.
Grizzled Skipper	Late spring	Scarce	Old Railway Track (2013, 2019 & 2020 though probably overlooked).
Clouded Yellow	Late summer / autumn	Variable	Meadows. Some years there are large invasions from the Continent.
Brimstone	Especially spring (occ. winter)	Common	Widespread including gardens.
Large White	Late spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Widespread including gardens. Hated by <i>Brassica</i> growers!
Small White	Late spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Widespread including gardens. Hated by <i>Brassica</i> growers!
Green-veined White	Late spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Widespread.
Orange-tip	Spring	Common	Widespread.
Green Hairstreak	Spring	Unusual	Edge of scrub e.g., below recreation ground (May 2018) and Old Railway Track.
Brown Hairstreak	Late summer - autumn	Unusual / uncertain	First sighting – Knowlands Farm (2 September 2018, photo). Since then, there have been a handful of sightings suggesting either better coverage or that the species is expanding its range which is primarily to the west. It spends a lot of time in ash trees and so its status might be affected by Ash-dieback though it will use other trees.

Species	Season	Status	Comments
Purple Hairstreak	Mid-summer	Common	Sometimes abundant in tops of oaks in Knowlands Wood. One small colony exists on two oak trees in Barcombe village.
Small Copper	Spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Brown Argus	Spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Common Blue	Summer – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Chalkhill Blue	Summer - autumn	Unusual	Two records of males in 2020 – one in Knowlands Wood and another later on Knowlands Farm (photos). This is a chalk downland species though they occasionally wander. The nearest chalk is about three miles away.
Holly Blue	Especially spring. Less autumn	Common	Widespread including gardens.
White Admiral	Mid-summer	Fairly common	Regular in small numbers in Knowlands Wood.
Purple Emperor	Mid-summer	Unusual / uncertain	One on an oak tree in Barcombe village on 25 June 2017 was a nice surprise (photo). Since then seen on a handful of occasions around Knowlands. There have also been reports from Agmonds Wood and, just outside the parish, from Markstakes Common.
Red Admiral	Spring - autumn (occ. winter)	Common	Widespread. Common visitor to rotting apples in autumn.
Painted Lady	Spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Variable	Widespread. A long-distance migrant visitor some years in large numbers.
Small Tortoiseshell	Early spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Uncertain	Has become rather scarce e.g., with SL only recording one in 2018.
Peacock	Early spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Widespread.
Comma	Early spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Widespread. Common visitor to rotting apples in autumn.
Silver-washed Fritillary	Mid-summer	Common	Regular in small – moderate numbers along rides in Knowlands Wood. One sighting in SL's Barcombe garden.
Speckled Wood	Spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	The Old Railway Track and Knowlands Wood are good locations.
Wall	Spring – autumn (+ gaps)	Unusual / uncertain	Rather an irregular visitor to the parish.
Marbled White	Mid-summer	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Gatekeeper	Late summer	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Meadow Brown	Late spring - summer	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Ringlet	Mid-summer	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.
Small Heath	Early summer – autumn (+ gaps)	Common	Meadows, hedgerows.

Table B. Butterfly sightings at Knowlands from 2010 to 2018 = 34 species

Butterfly Species	<2011	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Small Skipper	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Essex Skipper	Probable						One	√	√	√	√
Large Skipper	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Dingy Skipper	No			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Grizzled Skipper	No			√						√	√
Clouded Yellow	Yes			√	√		√	√		√	√
Brimstone	Yes	√		√	√ ³	√	√	√	√	√	√
Large White	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Small White	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Green-veined White	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Orange Tip	Yes	√		√ ¹	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Green Hairstreak	No	One			√		One				√
Brown Hairstreak	No								√		√
Purple Hairstreak	Yes	√		√ ¹	√ ¹	√	√	√	√ ⁵	√	√
Small Copper	Yes	√		√	√	√	One	√	√	√	√
Brown Argus	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Common Blue	Yes	√		√	√	√	One!	√	√	√	√
Chalkhill Blue	No										Two
Holly Blue	Yes	√				√	√	√	√	√	√
White Admiral	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Purple Emperor	No								√		√
Red Admiral	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Painted Lady	Yes			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Small Tortoiseshell	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Peacock	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Comma	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Silver-washed Fritillary	Yes	√		√ ²	√	√ ⁴	√	√ ²	√	√ ²	√
Speckled Wood	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Wall	Yes	√			√				√	√	√
Marbled White	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Gatekeeper	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Meadow Brown	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Ringlet	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Small Heath	Yes	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

¹ No photo, but almost certainly seen

² Including one *Valezina* form Silver-washed Fritillary

³ On 2nd January!

⁴ Including three *Valezina* form Silver-washed Fritillaries

⁵ The first seen in Sussex in 2018

A woodland ride in Knowlands Wood, 15 May 2020



Table C. Species seen in one Barcombe garden (1999-September 2020) = 24 species

Large Skipper
Clouded Yellow
Brimstone
Large White
Small White
Green-veined White
Orange Tip
Brown Hairstreak
Purple Hairstreak
Small Copper
Common Blue
Holly Blue
Purple Emperor
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Small Tortoiseshell
Peacock
Comma
Silver-washed Fritillary
Speckled Wood
Marbled White
Gatekeeper
Meadow Brown
Small Heath



Table D. Species recorded by others in the parish

In addition to those noted in Table A, species noted in the database of the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre at Woods Mill (Sussex Wildlife Trust) as of 2019 are:

	Date last recorded
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	1996
Dark Green Fritillary	2008

Images

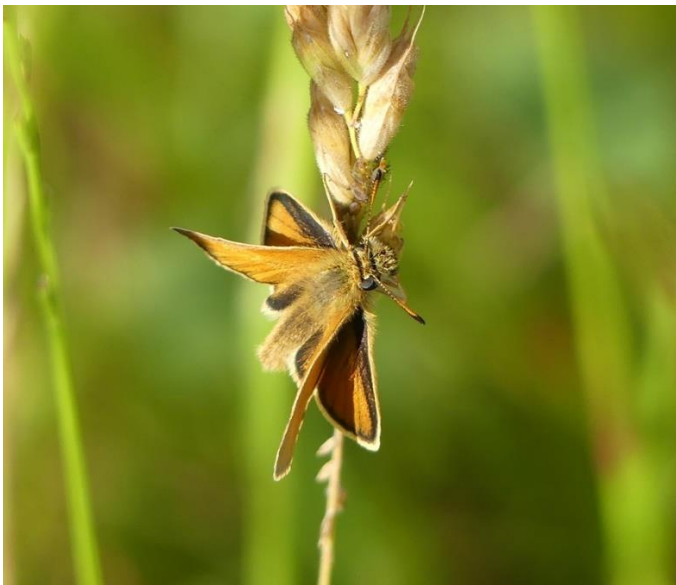
All images were taken in the parish and by SL unless otherwise labelled as taken by NL. The intention is to gradually improve the image quality as opportunities arise. The images vary in scale to real life.



Small Skipper (male), Knowlands Farm, 22 June 2019. Note the brown antennae tips and (in the case of this male) the long black line (sex brand) on the wing that is not parallel to the outer wing edge.



Small Skipper (female), Knowlands Farm, 14 June 2020.



Essex Skipper (male), Knowlands Farm, 22 June 2018. Very similar to the Small Skipper but note the jet black tips to the underside of the antennae (almost as if they had been dipped in ink).



Essex Skipper (male), Spithurst Churchyard, 14 July 2019. The male has a short black line (sex brand) that runs parallel to the outer wing (cf. Small Skipper).



Large Skipper (male), Old Railway Track, 14 June 2018. Appears slightly earlier than both Small & Essex Skippers. Note mottled pattern on wing.



Dingy Skipper (male), Old Railway Track, 21 May 2019. Quite a moth-like butterfly that keeps rather low to the ground.



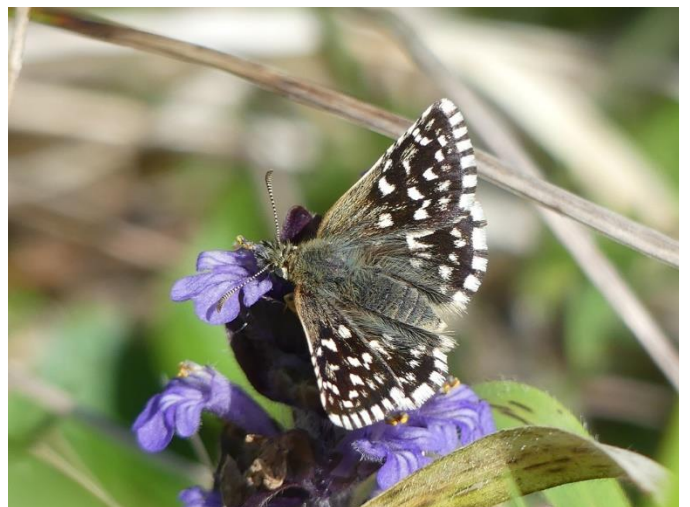
Dingy Skipper (male), Old Railway Track, 7 May 2020.



Dingy Skipper (male), Knowlands Wood, 12 May 2020.



Grizzled Skipper, Old Railway Track, 3 June 2019. Shares the same habitat with the Dingy Skipper in the parish. Again, tends to keep low to the ground.



Grizzled Skipper, Old Railway Track, 7 May 2020.



Brimstone (male), Old Railway Track, 7 April 2017.
One of the real harbingers of spring in the parish.



Brimstone (female), Old Railway Track, 7 April 2017. Noticeably paler than the male in flight and might be confused with a Large White.



Brimstone (male), Barcombe, 16 July 2017.



Clouded Yellow, Knowlands Farm, 8 August 2013 (photo – NL). This deep-yellow species sometimes occurs during late summer and autumn in large numbers. It rarely opens its wings when settled.



Clouded Yellow, Knowlands Farm, 22 August 2020.



Large White (female), Old Railway Track, 27 May 2018. Its larger size and the black extending well around the leading and trailing edge of the wing tips help distinguish this from the Small White.



Large White (female – first brood), Barcombe, 19 April 2020. The females have large black spots on the fore-wings.



Large White (female – second brood), Barcombe, 11 August 2018.



Large White (male – second brood), Knowlands Farm, 30 August 2020. The males lack the black spots of the females.



Large White (female), Knowlands Farm, 5 July 2020. The black tip to the upper-wing is just about visible on its underside.



Small White (male), Knowlands Wood, 16 July 2017. This species is smaller than the Large White and has much less extensive black on the wing-tips. It has a relatively plain under-wing pattern.



Small White (four), Knowlands Farm, 22 August 2019. The top individual is a female with two black spots on the upper-wing (the male has one).



Green-veined White, Barcombe, 22 April 2018. Very similar to the Small White but with distinctly green edges to the veins on the underside of the wings.



Green-veined White, Knowlands Wood, 8 May 2019.



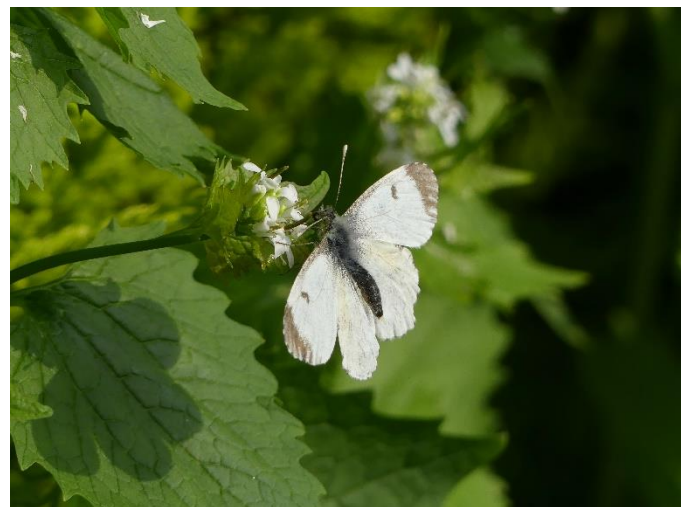
Green-veined White (male – first brood), Knowlands Farm, 25 April 2018. Very similar above to the Small White but the dark on the wing-tips is fragmented.



Green-veined White (female – second brood), Old Railway Track, 3 July 2020.



Orange-tip (male), Old Railway Track, 10 April 2019. Another harbinger of spring and the male, although restless, is easy to identify.



Orange-tip (female), Barcombe, 27 May 2016. The female is best identified by its wing-shape, extensive dark wing-tips and under-wing pattern.



Orange-tip (male), Old Railway Track, 19 April 2020. Feeding on Lady's Smock one of the adult's key food sources.



Orange-tip (female), Old Railway Track, 10 May 2018. The female displays a smart mottled green pattern on the underside of the hind-wing.



Green Hairstreak, Old Railway Track, 19 May 2014 (photo – NL). This small, spring butterfly rarely opens its wings when perched. Luckily, most of the colour is on its under-wings.



Green Hairstreak, Old Railway Track, 7 May 2020.
On Dogwood a food source for its caterpillars.



Brown Hairstreak (female), Knowlands Farm, 2 September 2018 (photo – NL). This small species tends to spend a lot of time at the top of ash trees coming down to lay its eggs on Blackthorn.



Brown Hairstreak (female), Barcombe, 5 September 2020. The female has large orange patches on the upper fore-wings.



Brown Hairstreak (female), Barcombe, 25 August 2019. This species has orange under-wings. Like most hairstreaks, the wings are normally held closed.



Brown Hairstreak (female), Knowlands Farm, 21 September 2020. In common with many hairstreaks, this species is quite happy upside down.



Purple Hairstreak, Old Railway Track, 18 July 2019. The pale greyish under-wings have a distinct black and white pattern and there are orange-red roundels near the tail projections.



Purple Hairstreak (female), Spithurst Churchyard, 21 July 2019. The purple on the upper-wing can be quite hard to see except in perfect light. It spends a lot of time high in oak trees with its wings closed but will descend to lower vegetation.



Purple Hairstreak (female), Old Railway Track, 6 July 2020. The male shows more extensive purple.



Purple Hairstreaks, Barcombe, 29 June 2019. Males indulge in long aerial chases.



Small Copper, Knowlands Farm, 20 August 2018. A beautifully marked small butterfly that is easy to identify once settled.



Small Copper, Knowlands Farm, 28 August 2018. A greenish, copper-like hue to the orange upperparts is detectable in some lights.



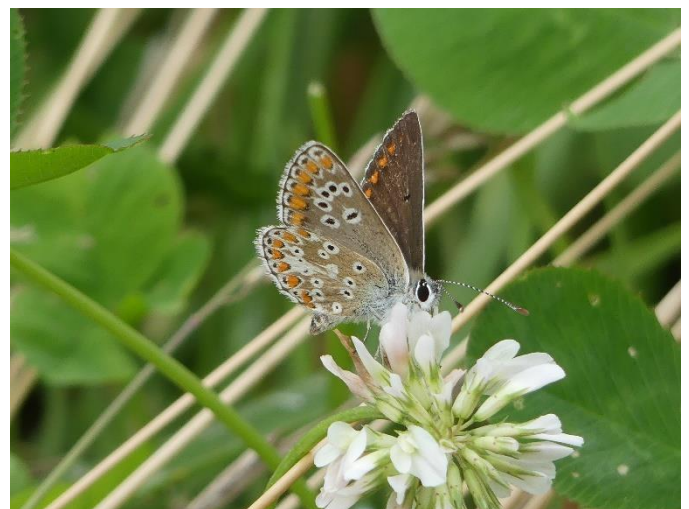
Small Copper, Knowlands Farm, 14 July 2017.



Small Copper, Knowlands Farm, 5 September 2020.



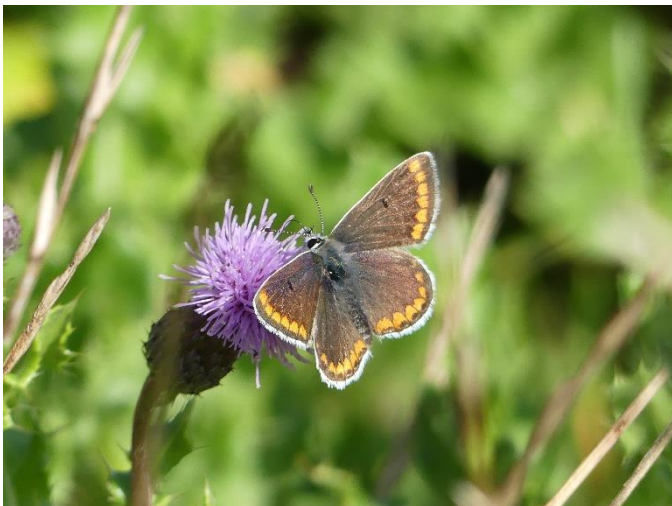
Brown Argus (male), Barcombe Reservoir, 20 May 2019. Unlike the similar female Common Blue, there is little indication of blue above. The patterning of the upper-wing is also neater. The line of red spots on the outer fore-wing (lunules) usually fade towards the front in the male.



Brown Argus (male), Knowlands Farm, 29 July 2017. Underneath, unlike the similar female Common Blue, it lacks a black spot at the base of the forewing and has a 'figure of eight' pair of spots midway along the leading edge of the hind wing.



Brown Argus, Spithurst Churchyard, 15 August 2020. With the proper management regime, churchyards can support considerable numbers of butterflies.



Brown Argus (female), Knowlands Farm, 20 August 2019. The reddish lunules are of uniform size around the wing in the female.



Common Blue (male), Knowlands Farm, 27 May 2018. By far the most likely blue butterfly to be found in meadows within the parish.



Common Blue (male), Knowlands Farm, 8 August 2019.



Common Blue (female), Barcombe, 30 May 2020. Compare the underside pattern to that of the very similar Brown Argus (above).



Common Blue (female), Knowlands Farm, 5 September 2020. Some female Common Blues are extremely striking butterflies.



Chalkhill Blue (male), Knowlands Wood, 23 July 2020. This was the first record for the parish. As the name suggests, a woodland ride is not its usual habitat!



Chalkhill Blue (male), Knowlands Farm, 5 August 2020. This was the second record, again, well away from chalk downland.



Holly Blue (male), Old Railway Track, 7 April 2017. Another early butterfly and the only one (except Small Blue not yet found in parish) with a plain pale blue under-wing dotted with black spots.



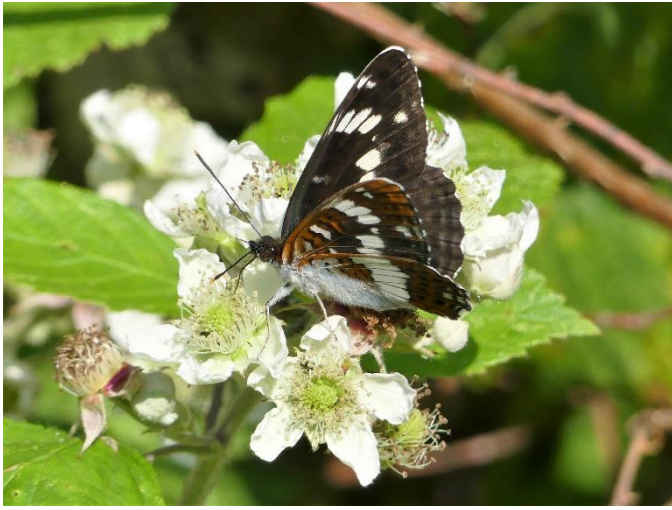
Holly Blue (female), Old Railway Track, 22 April 2019. The female is particularly smartly marked and has noticeably dark tips to the upper forewings.



Holly Blue (female), Old Railway Track, 19 April 2019.



Holly Blue (male), Barcombe, 18 April 2020.



White Admiral, Old Railway Track, 26 June 2019.
This species is regularly seen gliding along the canopy in oak woodlands during the summer. It occasionally comes down low to feed on brambles.



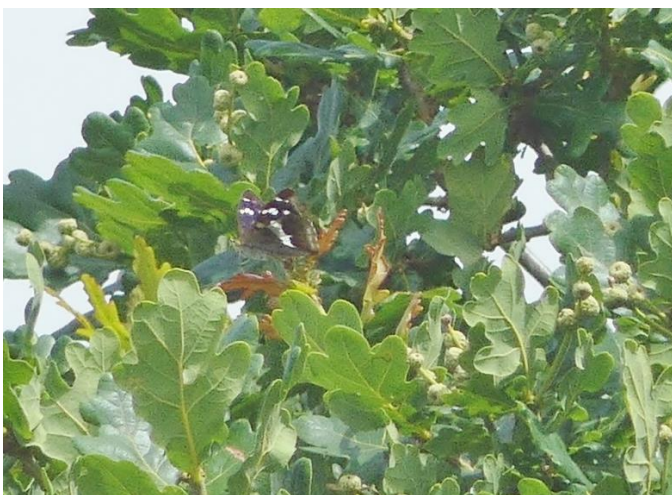
White Admiral, Knowlands Wood, 24 June 2018.



White Admiral, Knowlands Wood, 30 June 2018.



White Admiral, Knowlands Wood, 26 June 2019.



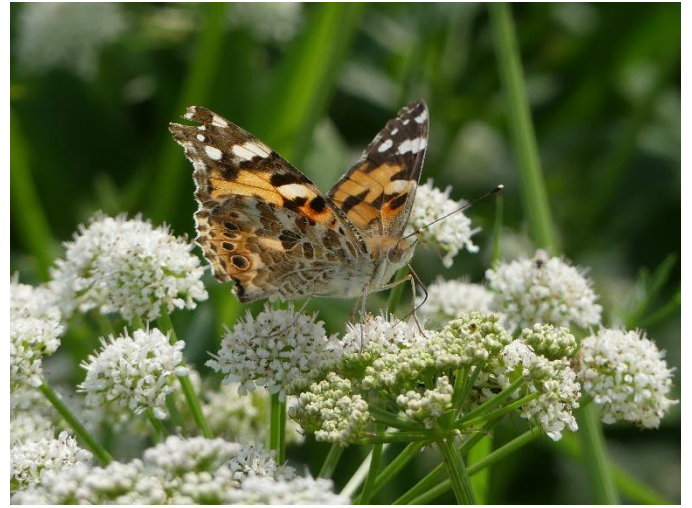
Purple Emperor (male), Barcombe, 25 June 2017.
A rather poor (distant) picture of one that paid a brief visit to an oak tree in a garden near Barcombe School. The purple colour can just about be seen on the upper-wing.



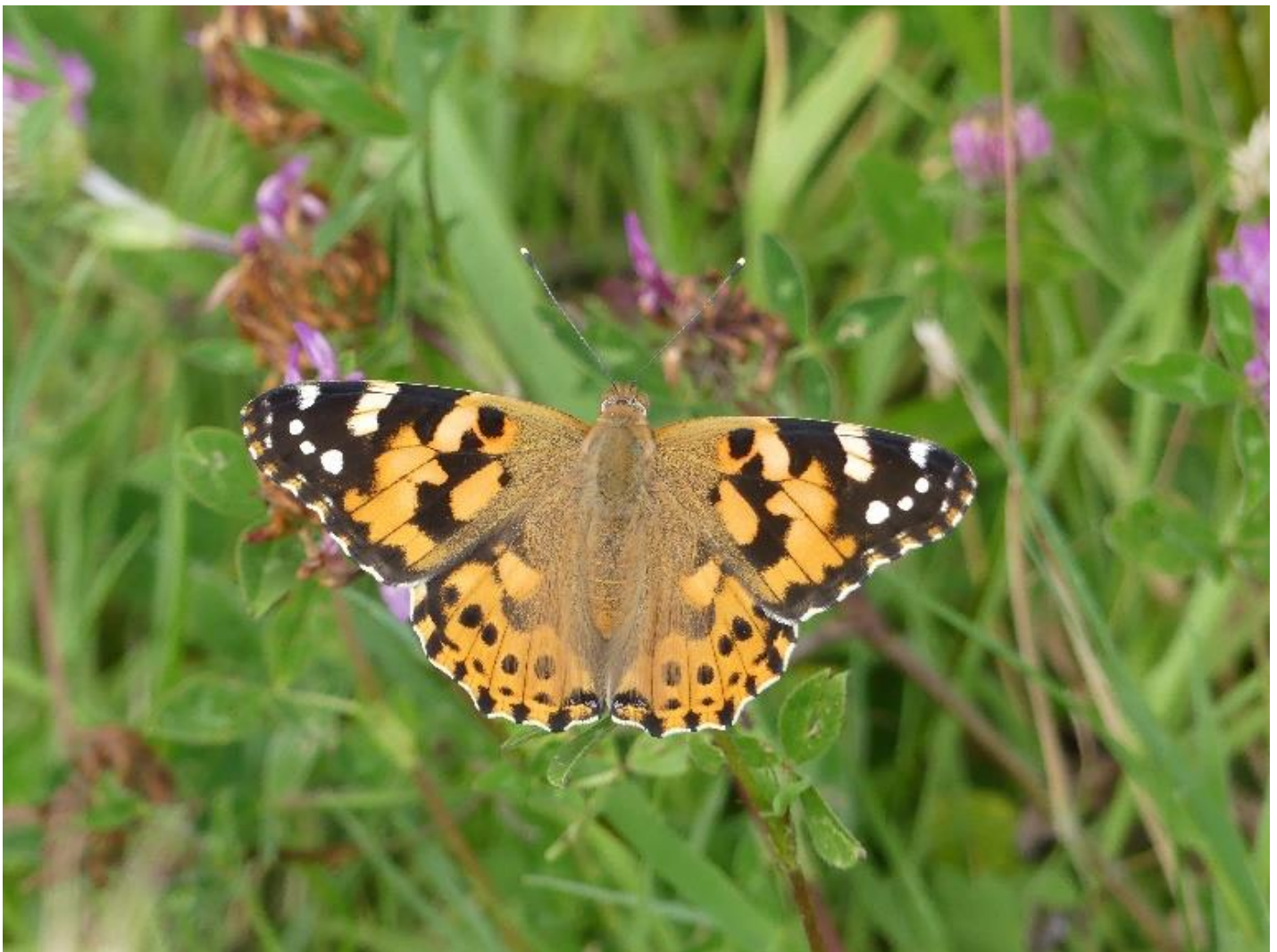
Purple Emperor (female), Old Railway Track, 11 July 2020. This female was on Sallow, a food plant for caterpillars of the species.



Red Admiral, Barcombe, 25 September 2018. One of our most familiar and well-loved butterflies that can be seen in nearly any month during the right conditions.



Painted Lady, Barcombe Mills, 8 June 2016. This migratory species starts its long journey in North Africa in January, with the second or third generation reaching us later in the year where it also breeds. Not surprisingly, some that reach us from abroad often look a bit faded. Nevertheless, a very distinctly-marked species.



Painted Lady, Barcombe Reservoir, 25 July 2016. When freshly emerged, as this British-born individual, the species can be very striking.



Painted Lady, Knowlands Farm, 13 August 2019.
This species has invasion years when large numbers appear. 2019 was such a year.



Small Tortoiseshell, Barcombe, 27 February 2019.
This individual will have hibernated over winter to emerge on one of the first warm days of the year. A really striking butterfly that was once a very common sight. It has been really scarce in some recent years.



Small Tortoiseshell, Barcombe, 8 August 2017.



Peacock, Old Railway Line, 8 August 2017.



Peacock, Old Railway Track, 10 April 2019. A startlingly beautiful butterfly that is seen widely but rarely in numbers.



Peacock, Barcombe, 19 January 2020. Often one of the first hibernating butterflies to be tempted out by winter sunshine.



Comma, Knowlands Wood, 20 June 2017. The white 'comma' on the underside of the wing is visible in this picture.



Comma, Knowlands Farm, 3 July 2018. This butterfly is noticeably orange in flight but shows its characteristic ragged wing edge when settled.



Silver-washed Fritillary (male), Knowlands Wood, 26 June 2019. A typical species of woodland rides and glades in high summer.



Silver-washed Fritillary (female), Knowlands Wood, 20 June 2017.



Silver-washed Fritillary (male), Knowlands Wood, 22 June 2019. This very fresh individual shows the male's characteristic black bars on the fore-wings.



Silver-washed Fritillary (female – form *valezina*), Knowlands Wood, 30 June 2019. This is an unusual form of the female of the species.



Silver-washed Fritillary (aberrant form *ocellata*), Knowlands Wood, 12 July 2020.



Speckled Wood, Old Railway Track, 7 April 2017. A very familiar species of wooded areas.



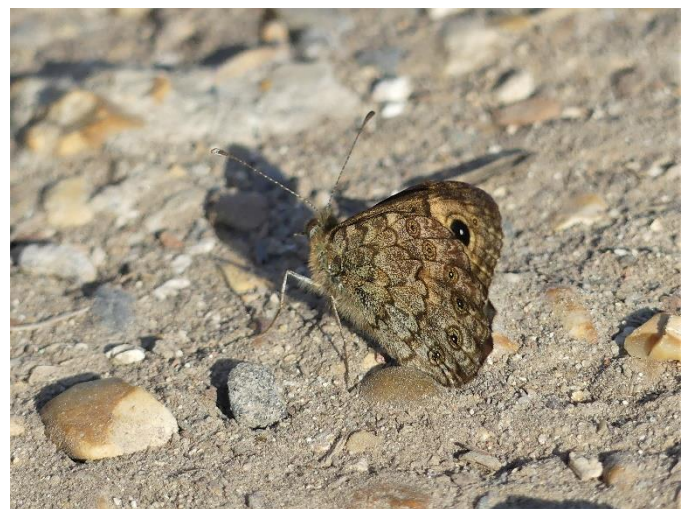
Wall, Knowlands Farm, July 2018 (photo – NL). Seeing this species in the parish is quite an unusual event.



Wall, Spithurst Churchyard, 21 July 2019. One individual living up to its name!



Wall, Old Railway Track, 13 August 2019.



Wall, Knowlands Farm, 21 September 2020. This species has a beautifully-marked underwing pattern.



Marbled White, Knowlands Farm, 22 June 2019. Quite an easy butterfly to identify and characteristic of pastures and hedgerows in high summer.



Marbled White, Knowlands Farm 3 July 2018. This species has a very smart underwing pattern.



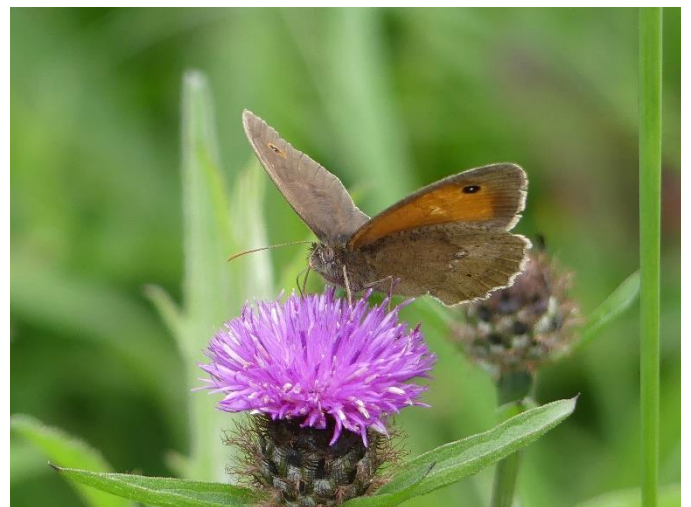
Marbled White, Spithurst Churchyard, 11 July 2020. This species is related to the Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood rather than the other white butterflies.



Gatekeeper (female), Knowlands Farm, 30 July 2018. Unlike the Meadow Brown, it has orange on the upper hind-wing and two white spots at the centre of the dark roundels.



Gatekeeper (male), Barcombe Reservoir, 25 July 2016. The male has a dark band across part of the fore-wing which is lacking in the female.



Meadow Brown (male), Spithurst Churchyard, 3 June 2019. This is one of our most prolific summer butterflies. The male is mainly brown above.



Meadow Brown (female), Old Railway Track, 26 June 2019. The female has large orange patches on the forewings unlike the male.



Meadow Brown, Old Railway Track, 22 June 2019. The undersides of the fore-wing are orange with a distinct white-centred black roundel.



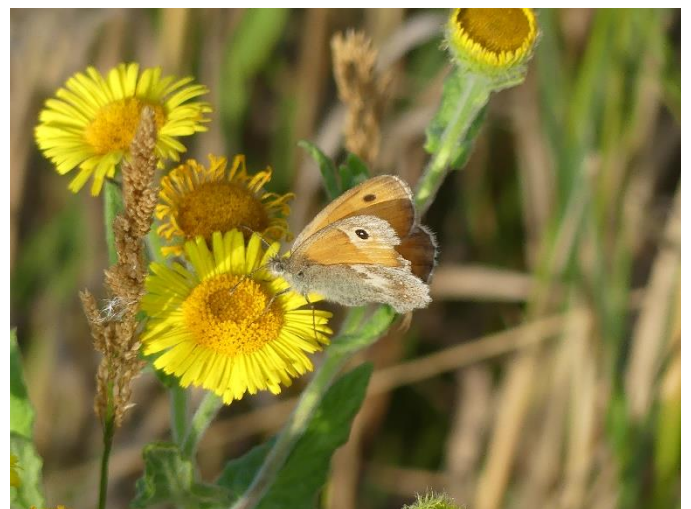
Ringlet, Old Railway Track, 30 June 2017. This very dark butterfly looks superficially like a Meadow Brown but lacks any orange coloration.



Ringlet, Spithurst Churchyard, 14 July 2019. The underside of the wings have a characteristic set of rings as exemplified by this individual.



Small Heath, Barcombe Reservoir, 21 May 2018. This small butterfly has orange upper-wings though they're not easy to see because it regularly settles with closed wings.



Small Heath, Knowlands Farm, 11 Aug 2020. It is unusual to get a glimpse of the upper-wings when it is settled.



Small Heath, Knowlands Farm, 30 June 2019.

References

David Tomlinson & Rob Still (2002). *Britain's Butterflies*. Wild Guides Ltd.

Michael Blencowe and Neil Hulme (2017). *The Butterflies of Sussex – a Twenty-First Century Atlas*. Pisces Publications.

Sussex Branch of Butterfly Conservation. Website <https://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/>

Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre. Website <https://sxbrc.org.uk/home/>

Acknowledgments

- Thanks to Bob Foreman of the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) for providing information on this and other taxonomic groups.
- Thanks to those who have submitted their records, directly or indirectly, to the SxBRC thereby helping us to build up a picture of this taxonomic group within the parish.
- Thanks to John Gowers who has joined SL during recent butterfly searches in the parish.
- Some of the observations have taken place during the monthly wetland bird surveys at Barcombe Reservoir which are facilitated by South East Water. Consequently, thanks go to the company's ecologists: Patrick Austin, Sam Pottier and Richard Dyer; also previously, Christina Pullan.
- Thanks to Dr Martin Kalaher for his helpful comments on this document.
- SL would also like to thank Nick & Harriet Lear for all they do to encourage butterflies at Knowlands. Also thanks to John Hayhurst and Michael Smith for their observations from around Knowlands.

Eight butterflies of four species (3 Gatekeepers, 3 Meadow Browns, 1 Common Blue and 1 Small Copper) gathering nectar on seed heads of Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Knowlands Farm, 13 August 2017

