

A short description of each butterfly is given, with the abundance in Herefordshire and the times of year when they can be observed.

SKIPPERS

1 Small Skipper
Common; Flies June - late August

A small orange-brown butterfly with a fast darting flight. It is typically found in unimproved grassland habitats, verges, sunny woodland rides and glades. It is confused with Large Skipper (see below) and Essex Skipper (see below). Caterpillars feed on Yorkshire-fog. Adults prefer to nectar on purple flowers such as Knapweeds and Thistles.

2 Essex Skipper
Rare; Flies end of June - end of August

A similar butterfly to the Small Skipper, which often uses the same habitats. The Small Skipper has orange patches on the underside of the tips of the antennae, whilst the tips of the antennae of the Essex Skipper are black. Prefers warm grassy habitats. Caterpillars feed on Cock's-foot, although they may use several other grasses.

3 Large Skipper;
Common; Flies late May - August

A small, fast-flying, butterfly. It has a faint chequered pattern on both sides of the wings which distinguishes it from the Small Skipper. It occurs in a variety of habitats; woodland rides and clearings, pastures and hedgerows. Caterpillars feed on Cock's-foot and occasionally Purple Moor-grass or False Brome.

4 Dingy Skipper
Rare; Flies late April - late June.

A butterfly which can be confused with the Grizzled Skipper (see below), and also with the Mother Shipton and Burnet Companion day-flying moths. However, the clubbed antennae of the butterfly distinguish it from these moths. It occurs in a range of open, sunny habitats, including woodland rides and clearings, old quarries and railway lines. Caterpillars feed on Common Bird's-foot-trefoil.

5 Grizzled Skipper
Rare; Flies late March - June

A black and white chequered butterfly, with a rapid flight. It can be confused with the Dingy Skipper, which has less chequered and patterned upper and underwings than the Grizzled Skipper. It uses woodland rides, glades and clearings, unimproved grassland and recently abandoned industrial sites such as spoil heaps. Caterpillars feed on a variety of plants from the Rosaceae family such as Agrimony.

WHITES AND YELLOWS

6 Wood White
Uncommon; Flies May - June & July - August

The smallest of the Whites, it always settles with its wings closed and never basks in the sun. It mainly occurs along woodland rides, disused railway lines and the edges of conifer plantations. Caterpillars feed on Meadow Vetchling, Bitter-vetch, Tufted Vetch, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil.

7 Clouded Yellow
Uncommon; Flies May - October

A golden-yellow migrant from the Continent which can commonly be seen in grasslands and clover fields. It can be confused with the Brimstone (see below). Caterpillars can feed on a variety of plants including Clover and Bird's-foot-trefoil.

8 Brimstone
Uncommon; Flies all year

The male has distinctive bright yellow wings, but the female is pale greenish-white. The female can be mistaken for a Large White or Clouded Yellow, however the Brimstone does not have black wing tips. The butterfly never sits with its wings open and occurs in almost any habitat, including scrubby grassland, woodland and hedgerows. Caterpillars feed on Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn. Adults nectar on yellow flowers such as Primroses in spring and on purple flowers such as Thistles and Teasels in late summer.

9 Large White
Common; Flies April - early October

The largest of the Whites. It has blacker wing tips which extend down the body and bolder spots than the other Whites. It can be found almost anywhere including farmland and urban habitats. Caterpillars feed on Brassica crops.

10 Small White
Common; Flies April - October

The Small White is often confused with the Large White (see above) and the Green-veined White. The Green-veined White is a similar size, but it has darker tips to the forewings and 'green veins' on the underwing. It occurs in almost any habitat and often in gardens and fields where Brassicas are growing. Caterpillars feed on cultivated Brassicas.

11 Green-veined White
Common; Flies April - September (up to three generations).

A common butterfly which is frequently found in damp habitats. It has 'green veins' on the underside of the wings, but these can fade and it can then be confused with the other Whites. Caterpillars feed on a range of wild Crucifers including Garlic Mustard, Cuckooflower, Hedge Mustard and Water-cress.

12 Orange-tip
Common; Flies mid March - mid June.

The males have unmistakable orange wing tips. Females do not have orange wing tips and can be confused with Small or Green-veined Whites. However, the green marbled undersides of the Orange-tip can show through to the upperwing, distinguishing it from other Whites. It can be found along hedgerows, woodland edges and gardens. Caterpillars feed on several Crucifer species, in particular Cuckooflower and Garlic Mustard.

HAIRSTREAKS, COPPERS AND BLUES

13 Green Hairstreak
Rare; Flies May - mid July

A small bright green butterfly, which always sits with its wings closed. It prefers warm sheltered sites, such as rough, scrubby grassland, woodland rides and clearings and old quarries. On calcareous grassland caterpillars feed on Common Rock-rose and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil. Gorse and Dyer's Greenweed are used on heathland and other habitats.

14 Purple Hairstreak
Uncommon; Flies July - August

A widely distributed butterfly, the adults spend most of their time in the canopy of Oak woodlands, hedgerows with tall Oaks and ancient parklands. Caterpillars feed on Sessile and Pedunculate Oak. Adults nectar on aphid honeydew and only occasionally visit flowers.

15 White-letter Hairstreak
Uncommon; Flies July - mid August

A small butterfly which always rests with its wings closed. It has a strongly defined white 'W' mark across the undersides of the wings. It occurs in sheltered hedgerows, mixed scrub and woodland ride edges with Elm trees. Caterpillars feed on various Elm species. Adults nectar on aphid honeydew and occasionally on flowers such as Thistle, Bramble and Ragwort.

16 Small Copper
Uncommon; Flies April - mid October (in three or four broods)

This small butterfly occurs in a range of habitats, thriving in warm, dry and sunny conditions. Caterpillars feed on Common Sorrel and Sheep's Sorrel.

17 Brown Argus
Uncommon; May - June & mid July - September

A small butterfly, which differs from the other Blues as it has no trace of blue on the upperwings. It occurs on limestone grasslands and a range of other habitats with disturbed soils. Caterpillars feed on Common Rock-rose on calcareous grassland and on Dove's-foot Crane's-bill or Common Stork's-bill in other habitats.

18 Common Blue
Uncommon; Flies May - September (two broods)

The males are brightly-coloured but the females are browner, often with little or no blue. It is a widespread butterfly found in a variety of grassy habitats in sunny, sheltered situations. Caterpillars feed on Common Bird's-foot-trefoil.

19 Holly Blue
Common; Flies April-May & mid July-mid September

The female has heavy black wing tips. The male can be confused with the Common Blue, but the Holly Blue has bolder black borders near the wing tips and white fringes chequered with black along the wing edges. Both sexes have pale blue undersides. It is found in a range of shrubby habitats, including hedgerows, woodland rides, gardens and parks. Caterpillars feed on Holly in the spring and Ivy in the summer.

VANESSIDS AND FRITILLARIES

20 White Admiral
Uncommon; Flies mid June - August

A distinctive woodland butterfly which uses ride edges, glades and areas of shady woodland. Caterpillars feed on Honeysuckle. Adults are often seen feeding on Bramble flowers.

21 Red Admiral
Common; Flies May - November

A common butterfly of many habitats, which migrates from Southern Europe and North Africa. Caterpillars feed on Common Nettle. Adults feed on a variety of flowers such as Buddleias and Sedums and in autumn on Ivy flowers.

22 Painted Lady
Common; Flies mid April - October (in several broods)

A migrant from mainland Europe, it occurs in warm open flowery places and even in intensively farmed locations with Thistles. Caterpillars feed on a variety of plants, but Thistles are preferred.

23 Small Tortoiseshell
Common; Flies all year

This well-known butterfly occurs in almost any habitat and overwinters as an adult. Caterpillars feed on Common Nettle and Small Nettle.

24 Peacock
Common; Flies all year

A striking butterfly with eyespots evolved to confuse predators. It can be seen almost anywhere and it overwinters as an adult. Caterpillars feed on Common Nettle.

25 Comma
Common; Flies all year (two broods)

A unique butterfly with ragged wing edges. It mainly occurs in open woodland and wood margins, but is also found in gardens and other habitats. Caterpillars feed on Common Nettle, Elm and Hop.

26 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
Rare; Flies mid May - mid July & August (in warm weather)

This species occurs in damp, grassy habitats and woodland clearings. Caterpillars feed on Common Dog-violet, but Hairy Violet is also used on calcareous grassland. Adults prefer to nectar on purple flowers such as Thistles and Knapweeds.

30 Silver-washed Fritillary
Uncommon; Flies mid June - August

A large butterfly occurring in broadleaved woodlands and also along mixed hedgerows and on uncultivated land near woods. Caterpillars feed on Common Dog-violet and adults prefer to feed on Bramble flowers.

28 High Brown Fritillary
Rare; Flies mid June - August

A threatened species which has declined significantly. It is protected by law and it is illegal to catch, handle or disturb this butterfly without a licence. In Herefordshire it is now largely restricted to Bracken covered parts of the Malvern Hills. It is often confused with the Dark Green Fritillary (see below). Caterpillars feed on Common Dog-violet.

29 Dark Green Fritillary
Rare; Flies June - August

One of the most widespread Fritillaries. It is most easily confused with the High Brown Fritillary, which is a similar size. The High Brown Fritillary is rarer and has a row of brown spots with silver centres on the undersides of the wings. The butterfly occurs in a range of flower-rich grasslands with patches of scrub and occasionally woodland rides and clearings. Caterpillars feed on Common Dog-violet, but Hairy Violet is also used on calcareous grassland. Adults prefer to nectar on purple flowers such as Thistles and Knapweeds.

30 Silver-washed Fritillary
Uncommon; Flies mid June - August

A large butterfly occurring in broadleaved woodlands and also along mixed hedgerows and on uncultivated land near woods. Caterpillars feed on Common Dog-violet and adults prefer to feed on Bramble flowers.

BROWNS

31 Speckled Wood
Common; Flies late March - October

A speckled butterfly of shady hedgerows with tall grass and mosaics of grass, dense bracken and light scrub. Caterpillars feed on various grasses, including False Brome, Cock's-foot, Yorkshire-fog and Common Couch. Adults feed on aphid honeydew, but occasionally visit flowers late in the year.

32 Wall Brown
Rare; Flies late April - June & mid July - mid September

A butterfly which can be mistaken for a Fritillary, but it has a characteristic rapid dancing flight, interspersed with glides and rests on the ground. It is often found along disused railways or field edges. Caterpillars feed on various grasses, including Tor-grass, False Brome, Cock's-foot, Wavy Hair-grass Bents and Yorkshire-fog.

33 Marbled White
Common; Flies mid June - mid August

This distinctive butterfly prefers flower-rich meadows, but also occurs along roadside verges, disused railways and rough woodland rides. Caterpillars feed mainly on Red Fescue, but Sheep's Fescue, Yorkshire-fog and Tor-grass are also used. Adults nectar on Knapweeds and Scabiouses.

34 Grayling
Rare; Flies mid July - mid September

A well-camouflaged butterfly, which normally occurs in coastal areas. It can be seen in Herefordshire around the hill tops of the Malverns. It likes well drained, sun baked soil with short grass. It rests with its wings closed. Caterpillars feed on Sheep's Fescue, Red Fescue, Bristle Bent and Early Hair-grass.

35 Gatekeeper
Common; Flies Late June - End August

A butterfly of many habitats including grasslands, hedgerows and open woodland. It can be confused with the Meadow Brown which is a larger, duller butterfly. The Gatekeeper also has a more sharply defined orange patch on the upperside of the forewing, which reaches the edges of the wing alongside the body. Caterpillars feed on various grasses, with a preference for Bents, Fescues and Meadow-grasses. Adults feed on a variety of flowers such as Ragworts and Bramble.

36 Meadow Brown
Common; Flies June - September

One of the few butterflies to fly on overcast days. It can be found in a range of habitats such as woodland rides, road verges and wasteland. In flight males can be confused with Ringlets, but Ringlets are darker with "ringlet" patterns on the wings and white fringes to the wing edges. Also confused with Gatekeepers (see above). Caterpillars feed on fine grasses such as Fescues, Bents and Meadow-grasses.

37 Ringlet
Common; Flies June - August

A dark brown butterfly with a series of eyespots or 'Ringlets'. Males tend to be smaller and darker than females with hardly any markings on the upperwings. The "ringlets" on the underwings vary in number and size and can be virtually absent. It likes damp woodlands, shady hedgerows and occasionally more open habitats. It can fly in dull weather.

38 Small Heath
Uncommon; Flies May - mid October

An inconspicuous butterfly that only flies in sunny conditions and always keeps its wings closed when at rest. It occurs on dry, well-drained grasslands with a short sparse sward of fine grasses. Caterpillars feed on fine grasses including Fescues, Meadow-grasses and Bents.



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Butterfly Conservation

butterflies of Herefordshire

an aid to identification



Silver-washed Fritillary, Jim Asher

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