

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMON

BUTTERFLY RECORDS 2024

As widely reported in the press and by Butterfly Conservation, 2024 was probably the worst year on record for butterflies in much of England, mainly due to adverse weather which included a wet, warm winter and a cool wet spring.

Nevertheless, 20/21 species were recorded although generally numbers were well down on 2023.

Species occurring on the common may be split into the widespread butterflies to be seen anywhere and more specialist species that favour woodland or grassland (marked W and G in the list below).

Maximum counts in the list refer to the largest number seen on any one walk of 30 – 40 minutes.

LARGE WHITE

Max 5. 10/5 -29/9. Seen on many visits

SMALL WHITE

Max 4. 7/5 – 27/9. Seen on most visits

GREEN VEINED WHITE

Max 1. 7/5 and 17/5. Two records from south west corner of the common. Food plants for this species may not be widely available. Also may be slightly under-recorded as hard to separate from small white in flight.

BRIMSTONE

Max 5. 8/3 – 10/5. Recorded on 8 visits

ORANGE TIP

Max 3. Recorded on 4 visits 12/4, 21/4, 7/5, 10/5

SMALL COPPER (G)

Max 1 Recorded on 5 visits 20/5, 25/6, 14/7,27/7,15/9. Recorded from grassy areas near Cabbage Stalk Lane and from around the cricket field.

COMMON BLUE (G)

Max 1. 27/7 Only one record this year and only one in 2023. From grassy area on the “promenade walks” north of Brighton Lake. This species used to be fairly common but numbers have seriously declined in recent years.

HOLLY BLUE

Max 4. (compared with a maximum of 25 in 2023!). Recorded on many dates between 30/3 and 17/8. The decline may be part of a natural cycle whereby this species becomes abundant over 5 or 6 years and then dies down to very low numbers before building up again.

RED ADMIRAL

Max 3. Recorded on 8 occasions between 8/3 and 29/9. A poor year. No evidence of significant inward migration for the continent.

PEACOCK

Max 1. Recorded on 5 visits between 10/4 and 27/7.

COMMA

Max 1. Only 2 records 13/4 and 14/7. A very poor year

PAINTED LADY

Max 1. The only record was one on 25/6. No significant migration from the continent.

SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY (W)

Max 1. One seen on 14/7 was the only record along the "promenade walks" north of Brighton Lake.

SPECKLED WOOD (W)

Max 4. Seen on most visits from 13/4 to early October.

GATEKEEPER (G)

Max 50+. Recorded on all visits between 14/7 and 17/8. This species did reasonably well with counts which must exceed 100 across the whole of the common. Present in all grassland areas.

MEADOW BROWN (G)

Max 60+. Recorded on all visits between 25/6 and 1/9. Widespread across all grassland areas.

RINGLET (G)

Max 8. Recorded on all visits between 25/6 and 27/7. Lower numbers than 2023, but may be under-recorded as can be difficult separate from meadow brown in flight.

SMALL HEATH (G)

Max 1. One record on 19/7. Seen on grassy area on the north side of the "promenade walks" towards Cabbage Stalk Lane end. None in 2023 and the first I have seen on the common since 2020.

LARGE SKIPPER (G)

Max 2. Recorded on 23/6, 25/6 and 14/7. One on the heather/grassy area east of Castle Street, One near the cricket field and one near Cabbage Stalk Lane.

SMALL/ESSEX SKIPPER

Max 4. Recorded on 5 visits between 26/6 and 19/7. In similar locations to Large Skipper. Both of these species probably occur, but they are difficult to separate when low to the ground as the underside of the antenna has to be seen clearly!

SPECIES NOT RECORDED IN 2024

PURPLE HAIRSTREAK (W) This species was recorded in 2023 (one, or possibly two records) and I have seen it in previous years. Probably still exists, but spends most of its life in the top of oak trees, so easy to overlook.

WHITE ADMIRAL (W) Not recorded by me on the Common since 2020. Suitable habitat still exists.

SMALL TORTOISESHELL Once one of the commonest and most widespread butterflies of the area. Not seen by me in Tunbridge Wells for 3 years. A drastic decline throughout the south east generally.

BROWN ARGUS (G) I recorded this species in 2023 on grassland on the south west corner of the "Racetrack" in 2023. None seen this year. The 2023 record was the only one I have ever seen in the Tunbridge Wells area.

PURPLE EMPEROR this species was seen and photographed in the Fir Trees car park area around 2018/19 (not by me).

Glen Wilson