

Plumpton and East Chiltington Wildlife Group

Big Butterfly Count

This year's national Big Butterfly Count takes place from Friday 16th July to Sunday 8th August – so there is still time for you to do this.

All you have to do is count butterflies for just 15 minutes during bright (preferably sunny) weather during the above dates. The charity leading the annual project (which has been running since 2010) is Butterfly Conservation and it chooses this time of year because most butterflies are at the adult stage of their lifecycle, so more likely to be seen. They want you to concentrate on the most common species of butterflies and day-flying moths. Records are welcome from anywhere: your own garden, the village green, the school grounds, the recreation grounds, fields and woodlands. You can repeat the count as many times as you like before 8th August – just log them separately on the link <https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/map>

The butterflies most likely to be seen in gardens include the Red Admiral, Peacock, Brimstone, Painted Lady, Comma, Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshell, Small Cabbage White and Large Cabbage White. You might also find Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Orange-Tip, Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Small Copper and Holly Blue butterflies in gardens in Plumpton and East Chiltington. Other types of butterflies prefer specialised habitats, such as chalk downland or coppiced woodland, and are unlikely to be seen in gardens.

As well as your own garden, good places for butterfly spotting in Plumpton and East Chiltington include the grassland at Plumpton Bostal (look out for Chalk Hill Blue and Grizzled Skipper butterflies), the main ride up through Warningore Wood (White Admirals), The Plough meadow (Marbled White, Common Blue, even Clouded Yellow), the track from East Chiltington Church to Novington Manor (Brimstone, Peacock and Speckled Wood), and the path from the College past the back of Plumpton Place and Drews Farm up to Ashurst Organics (Comma, Skippers, Painted Lady). Forty-five of the 59 UK butterfly species are known to occur in Sussex. PECWG members have recorded at least 30 of these, including the rare Purple Emperor, in the parishes of Plumpton and East Chiltington.

But why count Butterflies in the first place?

We count butterflies because not only are they beautiful to look at but they are important parts of the ecosystem as both pollinators and are part of the food chain. However, they are under threat. Numbers of both butterflies and moths in the UK have decreased significantly since the 1970s – we should not ignore this warning.

Butterfly declines are also an early warning sign for other wildlife losses; therefore, if their numbers are falling, nature is in trouble. Butterflies are key biodiversity indicators for scientists as they react very quickly to changes in their environment. So, tracking numbers of butterflies is crucial in the fight to conserve our natural world.

Butterfly Conservation describes '*counting butterflies as taking the pulse of nature and we depend on you, our citizen scientists, to help us assess how much help nature needs*'. The data from this count helps the charity identify trends in species and assists it to plan how to protect butterflies from extinction as well as understanding the impact of climate change on wildlife.

Give it a try – I promise you will find it not only fun, but a lovely way to be in nature and totally switch off from the stresses of the world – and be part of a vital scientific project.

Carole Nicholson