

Butterfly watch



'Butterfly Blue Beauty' – the name of this plant caught my eye on a recent trip to the local garden centre. I bought the small scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*) plant, transplanted it into a nice pot, and placed it on the garden patio. Almost immediately I was rewarded with the sight of an Orange Tip butterfly alighting on one of the lilac-blue flower heads. Result!

Small scabious is just one of many nectar-rich species that you can plant in your garden to attract butterflies. Other butterfly favourites include cornflowers, marigolds (French and African), *Verbena bonariensis*, lavender, marjoram, and, of course, *Buddleja* (aka butterfly bush). Plant them in sunny, sheltered spots – butterflies like warmth.

These plants have plenty of nectar for adult butterflies to feed on. If you really want to help increase the number of butterflies you could also try and grow the plants that their caterpillars like to eat. Different butterflies have different host plants, but it is only the caterpillars of the Cabbage White butterflies that are potential pests in the vegetable garden – the caterpillars of other species are happy to eat garden 'weeds' such as garlic mustard (Orange Tip and Green-veined white butterflies) and nettles (Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell).

If you don't fancy leaving a clump of nettles in your garden, a meadow area of mixed grasses will provide food for the caterpillars of Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Ringlet, Small Heath, Large Skipper, Small Skipper and Essex Skipper butterflies.

Many gardens already contain holly and ivy, the preferred food for Holly Blue caterpillars.

Have a look at the [Butterfly Conservation](#) and [Royal Horticultural Society](#) websites for more tips on attracting butterflies into your garden.

If you have time, why not record the butterflies visiting your garden for Butterfly Conservation's [Garden Butterfly Survey](#)? Gardens are a potentially important habitat for butterflies but surprisingly little is known about

whether different species are increasing or decreasing. The online survey collects information about the number, species and time of year butterflies are seen as well as details about garden size, geography, and plant cover.

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. 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 (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. The new 'Butterflies of Sussex' atlas, due to be published next year, will contain information on the status and distribution of butterflies recorded in Sussex over a five-year period from 2010-14. Tony Hutson and Jon Wood recorded species for the Plumpton area.

The [Big Butterfly Count](#) has been running nationally since 2010. Like the big Garden Birdwatch, it aims to monitor trends in the numbers of the UK's most common butterflies. Last summer was relatively cold and wet and the average number of butterflies spotted during each 15-minute recording period was lower than in warmer years. Despite the weather, Holly Blue, Gatekeeper and Painted Lady butterflies were recorded in relatively high numbers. Other species – Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Peacock – declined in numbers compared to the previous year. This year's Big Butterfly Count takes place between 15 July and 7 August. All you have to do is record how many butterflies of 20 common species you see over a 15-minute period. You can do as many counts as you like, in as many sites as you like, over the 3-week survey period.

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