

## Butterfly Observations at the site of Heartwood Forest, Sandridge

This note summarises the current status of butterflies at this site. It is based on historical data and the records of two site visits in April and July 2009. Full details are attached as an Appendix.

### Summary

The table below provides an indication of the status of butterflies on the site. The species listed are those which are most common in St Albans District.

Species	Status	Comments
Small Skipper	Low numbers	Likely to increase later in the season
Essex Skipper	Not recorded	Likely to appear later in the season
Large Skipper	Good numbers	Woodland Edge
Orange Tip	Good numbers	
Green-veined White	Good numbers	
Large White	Abundant	Prolific on unsprayed brassicas
Small White	Abundant	Prolific on unsprayed brassicas
Brimstone	Low numbers	
Small Copper	Not recorded	
Purple Hairstreak	Not recorded	Likely to be present
White-letter Hairstreak	Not recorded	
Holly Blue	Not recorded	Likely to be present
Common Blue	Not recorded	Possibly may be on the site
Brown Argus	Not recorded	
White Admiral	Not recorded	
Small Tortoiseshell	Low numbers	
Comma	Good numbers	Woodland Edge
Painted Lady	Good numbers	
Red Admiral	Good numbers	
Peacock	Abundant	Woodland Edge
Speckled Wood	Moderate numbers	
Marbled White	Low numbers	
Gatekeeper	Not recorded	Highly likely to be present
Meadow Brown	Abundant	
Ringlet	Good numbers	

### Site Characteristics

The two surveys concentrated on the small woodlands to the south & west of the site & surrounding fields. The woods are generally too dark for much butterfly activity. The small clearing and associated east-west ride in Well Wood contained a few butterflies. Areas of old coppice in Round Wood & Langley Wood appeared to have been cut about 10-15 years ago, but are now re-grown & dark. The pit area at the south end of Round Wood may hold some interest, but access is not good.

However the site does contain a good deal of high quality woodland edge habitat where grassy field margins have been unploughed around the edge of the small woods. This is the most important aspect to protect

Most of the remainder of the site does not currently have access, but observations from the perimeter suggest that it is mostly intensive arable and the only areas of interest are along the hedgerows. Some of the hedges for example along the dry valley bottom along NW boundary of the site contain an interesting variety of species.

### **Butterfly Observations**

The lack of management means that it is no surprise that true woodland specialists such as Silver-washed Fritillary & White Admiral are not present. These were both observed in good numbers in nearby Symondshyde Great Wood on the day of the second visit. Purple Hairstreak was not recorded, but is present in good numbers on the adjoining Nomansland Common & is highly likely to be present in the Heartwood woods. White-letter Hairstreak was not found despite 2 hours searching suitable Elm. However there is a fair chance this butterfly is present on site

The Woodland edge is the sites biggest current success story. Peacocks, Commas & Large Skippers are all present in very good numbers. Well Wood produced the greatest number of butterflies, but all four woods had the same attractive habitat feature. There appears to be a small colony of Marbled White on the NW corner of Pismire Spring – this is the least common butterfly recorded on site.

Two of the long grass species, Meadow Brown and Ringlet, were both in good numbers. Small Skipper had only just started to emerge and it is likely that it along with Gatekeeper & Essex Skipper will be there in good numbers.

Species which prefer shorter grass were not found including Common Blue, Small Copper, Small Heath & Brown Argus. These are all well distributed in the district and do well on the adjoining Nomansland Common. They tend to thrive on poor quality/lightly grazed grassland which contain wildflowers.

### **Conclusions**

There are more butterflies present on site than anticipated. This is because of the grassy field margins, particularly those adjoining the woods & some hedges. It would be desirable to maintain as many of these as possible, for example by turning them into rides in the enlarged woodland area.

The suggestions in the paper by Dr Dan Hoare (attached as an Appendix) will help preserve & enhance the butterfly interest of the site.

#### *Additional species recorded since date of report:*

Essex Skipper - 2 seen on the hedge line from Round Wood to Pismire Spring along the valley bottom

Purple Hairstreak - 1 seen on oak along the same hedge line

Small Copper - 1 again in the same location

Gatekeeper

