

Fore Wood Butterfly Survey

RSPB Volunteers Report by Terry Anderson and Sophie Streeter

Each year a butterfly survey is conducted in Fore Wood to record the species of butterfly present and the numbers of each species seen.

When a vacancy arose this year to conduct the survey, we jumped at the opportunity to improve our butterfly identification and general knowledge.

The survey method is via a transect, whereby a set route is walked around the wood each week from April to October to provide a representation across the wood. This route is split up into 10 sections and a description of each section is recorded to understand the type of habitat and woodland being walked (you may have seen our numbered orange post around the woods marking these sections out). The butterflies seen on each section are recorded as we walk the route. We also record information about weather conditions at the start of each walk.

The route remains the same each year to enable comparisons and analysis to be made on the data recorded, and enables RSPB to assess the impact of creating new habitat for wildlife through its woodland management plan. The data is included on the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme to aid UK wide analysis.

Over the course of the year, we saw a total of 765 butterflies, and 20 different species during our surveys. Our highlight of the year was being able to add the Small Heath to Fore Wood's species count, for the very first time. The Small Heath is typical to dry grassland, but may visit grassy woodland rides.

It was also encouraging to see the positive impact for butterflies from opening up woodland rides and creating scallops, as there was a marked increase in butterflies this year on 4 sections where this type of work has been undertaken in recent years; (areas along the 1066 footpath, and the footpath from the bench above the pond to the bench on the top ride).

This year saw an increase of Meadow Browns (292), the highest annual count so far recorded at Fore Wood, and the butterfly most frequently seen. The Silver-washed Fritillary was the second most seen butterfly with an annual count of 101 across the survey period. White Admirals (20), and Gatekeepers (80), had the highest count since 2014, with Gatekeepers having a substantial increase from just 19 in 2018.

There was a notable absence of Green-veined White and Purple Hairstreak on the count this year; the latter being particularly elusive high up in the tops of oak trees.

We have really enjoyed doing the weekly surveys, and as butterflies have different flight periods, we were thrilled each time we were able to add a species to our annual list. It has been an excellent way to observe butterflies and improve our knowledge, and we have emerged as butterfly enthusiasts!



Silver-washed Fritillary



White Admiral



Peacock



Gatekeeper – mating pair

Species List and Count:

Meadow Brown 292, Silver-washed Fritillary 101, Gatekeeper 80, Speckled Wood 80, Peacock 36, Large White 30, Red Admiral 24, White Admiral 20, Brimstone 18, Comma 16, Small White 14, Ringlet 11, Large Skipper 10, Painted Lady 10, Holly Blue 9, Orange-tip 6, Purple Hairstreak 4, Small Heath 2, Common Blue 1, Green-veined White 1