

# Gardening for Butterflies

Gillian Elsom May 2023



Common Blue nectaring from Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) 04/06/2015

## Butterflies in Surrey

- 43 species in Surrey (59 in UK)
- **17 Habitat Specialists (HS)**: restricted to colonies within a few habitat types & rarely fly far from them eg Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue, Silver-spotted Skipper, Small Blue, Silver-studded Blue, Wood White
- **26 Wider-countryside species (WC)**: either use a wide variety of habitats or are very mobile & travel widely round the countryside including coming into gardens, laying & nectaring as they go

### Habitat Specialists (HS) in gardens (7):

Dingy Skipper, Small Blue, Brown Hairstreak, Chalk Hill Blue, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Purple Emperor  
(6 in my garden)

### Wider-countryside species (WC) in gardens (25):

Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange-tip, Small Copper, Purple Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Heath, Speckled Wood, Marbled White, Ringlet, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown  
(23 in my garden)

## Why attract butterflies to your garden:

- Pollinators
- Good indication of the health of the environment
- Gardens can be 'stepping stones' for species, places to nectar and breed eg Small Blue, Common Blue, Brown Hairstreak
- Can learn more about their behaviour
- Can photograph stages
- Good for mental health



Marbled White (WC) female 29/06/2022



Brown Hairstreak (HS) female 21/08/2019

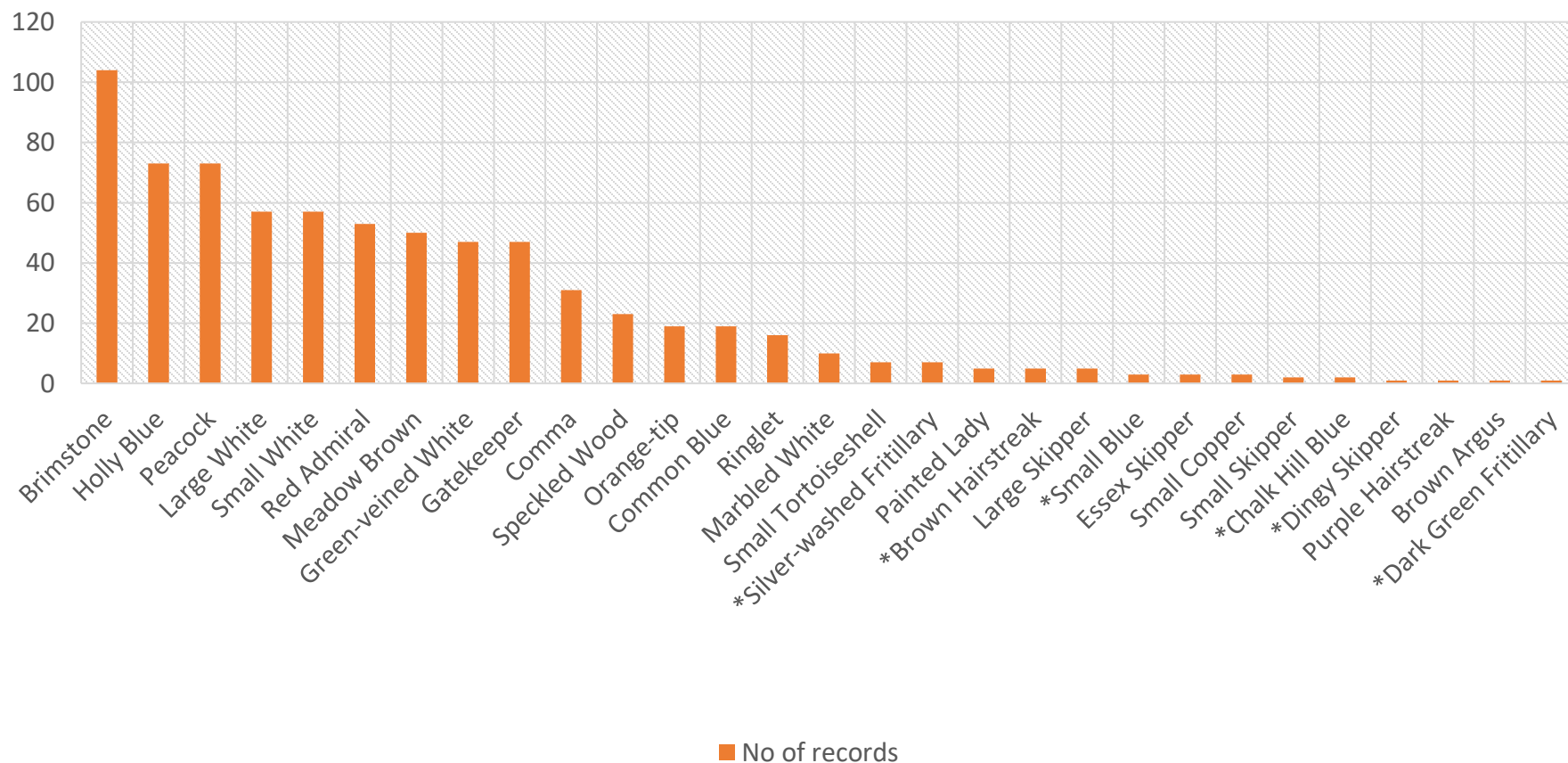
# Join Butterfly Conservation's Garden Butterfly Survey

<https://gardenbutterflysurvey.org>

I have recorded butterflies in my garden for the Garden Butterfly Survey for 8 years, with 29 species in total:

**6 Habitat Specialist (HS) species** (marked with \*) and **23 Wider Countryside (WC) species**

## My Garden Butterflies, 2016-2023



## A garden as a habitat for butterflies should have:

- **Plants for larvae to feed on or larval host plants (LHP)** which are UK native stock of local origin if possible eg Common Nettle, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Cock's-foot, Blackthorn, Buckthorn, Holly, Ivy, plum, Cherry Plum
- **Places to pupate** eg golden skippers at base of grasses, Small Blue & Common Blue under foodplant with ants, whites a wall or fence
- **Flowers for nectar** choose plants suitable for soil in garden eg Wild Marjoram on chalk
- **Right mix of sunlight and shelter** for species concerned
- **No use of pesticides or fertilisers**
- **Different areas** all have potential
  - **Lawn with a meadow area** with Yellow Rattle, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Dandelion, Red Clover, Daisy, Bulbous Buttercup, Selfheal, Common & Greater Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Field Scabious, Cowslip, Primrose, Kidney Vetch, Common Ragwort
  - **Flower borders** eg Wild Marjoram, lavender, Michaelmas-daisy, *Verbena bonariensis*, *Sedum spectabile*, Greater Periwinkle
  - **Shrubs** eg Bramble, Wild Privet, Ivy, Holly, Buddleia, Blackthorn
  - **Hedge** eg. Beech, mixed native - with Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Cherry Plum, Field Maple, Hazel
  - **Trees** eg Pedunculate Oak, lime, plum, Cherry Plum, apple
  - **Sunny area for basking** eg patio, wood pile
  - **Pond/wet area for 'mudpuddling' butterflies**
- **Right management** to avoid disturbance during vulnerable early stages so avoid mowing, dead-heading or digging up plants which may hold eggs, larvae or pupae. In 'meadow area' mow once at end of September when seeds have set and take off cuttings.

## Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) 17/06/2016, the 'meadow maker'

- An annual and a hemi-parasite on grasses, suppressing growth & allowing wild flowers to flourish eg Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*)
- Source from a friend's garden, or Emorsgate Seeds <https://wildseed.co.uk/> (£12/100g, need about 4g/m<sup>2</sup>, so for an area of 6 m<sup>2</sup> need about 24g costing about £3
- Collect seeds in August & sow immediately, needs a period of vernalisation (frost) to germinate



Common Bird's-foot-trefoil  
(*Lotus corniculatus*) with a  
seedhead like a bird's foot.



Red Clover  
(*Trifolium pratense*)



Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*)

Our garden is on chalk.  
In the 'meadow area' of our  
lawn, as the Yellow Rattle  
suppresses the grass and drops  
more seeds each year, more of  
the wild plants are flourishing:

- Common Bird's-foot-trefoil
- Red Clover
- Selfheal
- Bulbous Buttercup
- Perforate St John's-wort
- Kidney Vetch
- Wild Marjoram
- Common Ragwort
- Cowslip
- Germander Speedwell
- Oxeye Daisy
- Daisy
- Dandelion

**Brimstone (WC) male 05/08/2016**

- **LHP: Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*)**
- **Nectar sources:** Dandelion, Greater Periwinkle, Buddleia, Cowslip, Primrose, Wild Teasel, Mouse-ear-hawkweed, Bramble, Common Knapweed
- Has a long proboscis about 15mm long
- Often first to appear in spring, has hibernated as an adult





Male



Orange-tip (WC) male 13/04/2017 & 14/05/2018  
and female 18/04/2017

- LHP: Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), Hedge Mustard, Charlock, Honesty, Dame's-violet, Wallflower, Wild Rocket
- Nectar sources: Cuckooflower, Greater Periwinkle, Herb Robert, Field forget-me-not, Bluebell



Male nectaring  
on Herb Robert

Female on Greater Periwinkle



**Common Blue (WC)** male nectaring on Wild Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*) 15/08/2016 & 19/07/2017 and Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) 22/05/2017



**Common Blue** female nectaring on  
Common Bird's-foot-trefoil 11/08/2016  
and nectaring on Wild Marjoram & basking  
04/08/2021



Female, blue form



Common Blue mating pair on Yellow Rattle 14/07/2018



Common Blue female laying on Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)  
11/08/2016 its Primary Larval Host Plant (LHP)  
Other LHP : Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*)





**Dingy Skipper (HS)** nectaring on Common Bird's-foot-trefoil & Red Clover  
01/06/2021

**LHP: Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil & Horseshoe Vetch**

**Other nectar sources:** Oxeye Daisy, Mouse-ear-hawkweed, Selfheal, Bugle, Common Chickweed, Heather, Ground-ivy

Conservation Priority: **High**





Essex Skipper (WC) nectaring on  
Red Clover & Lesser Hawkbit  
05/07/2016

- LHP: Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Timothy (*Phleum pratense*)
- Nectar sources: Red Clover  
Lesser Hawkbit, Buddleia,  
Common Knapweed



Essex Skipper (WC) mating pair on Wild Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*) 19/07/2015





**Gatekeeper (WC)** nectaring on Wild Marjoram 06/08/2016 & mating pair 20/07/2020

- LHP: grasses eg. **Cock's-foot, Sheep's-fescue, Red Fescue, Perennial Rye Grass**
- Nectar sources: Wild Marjoram, Bramble, Common Ragwort



## Small Tortoiseshell (WC) nectaring on Wild Marjoram 06/07/2015

- **LHP:** Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) in sun
- **Nectar sources:** Wild Marjoram, Dandelion, Butterfly Stonecrop (*Sedum spectabile*), Michaelmas-daisy, Buddleia, Aubretia
- **Trend:** reduced numbers in the south-east since 1990s. *Sturmia bella*, a parasitoid first recorded in Britain in 1998, is one factor.



Peacock (WC) basking on Beech Hedge 12/04/2020

- LHP: Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) in sun, Hop
- Nectar sources: Wild Marjoram, Dandelion, Aubretia, *Sedum spectabile*, Michaelmas-daisy, Buddleia, Red Valerian



**Painted Lady (WC)** nectaring on Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) 11/06/2019

- **LHP:** thistles, Common Nettle, Hollyhock, Globe Artichoke, Viper's Bugloss, Common Mallow, Musk Mallow
- **Nectar sources:** Ivy, lavender, *Sedum spectabile*, Michaelmas-daisy, Buddleia, Red Valerian



- **Migrant** species from North Africa to N Europe that can't over-winter in any stage
- Has about 6 generations/year
- 2003, 2009 PL years

Red Admiral (WC) nectaring on Ivy flowers (*Hedera helix*) 21/09/2016

- LHP: Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) in sun, Hop
- Nectar sources: Ivy, lavender, *Sedum spectabile*, Michaelmas-daisy, Buddleia, Red Valerian



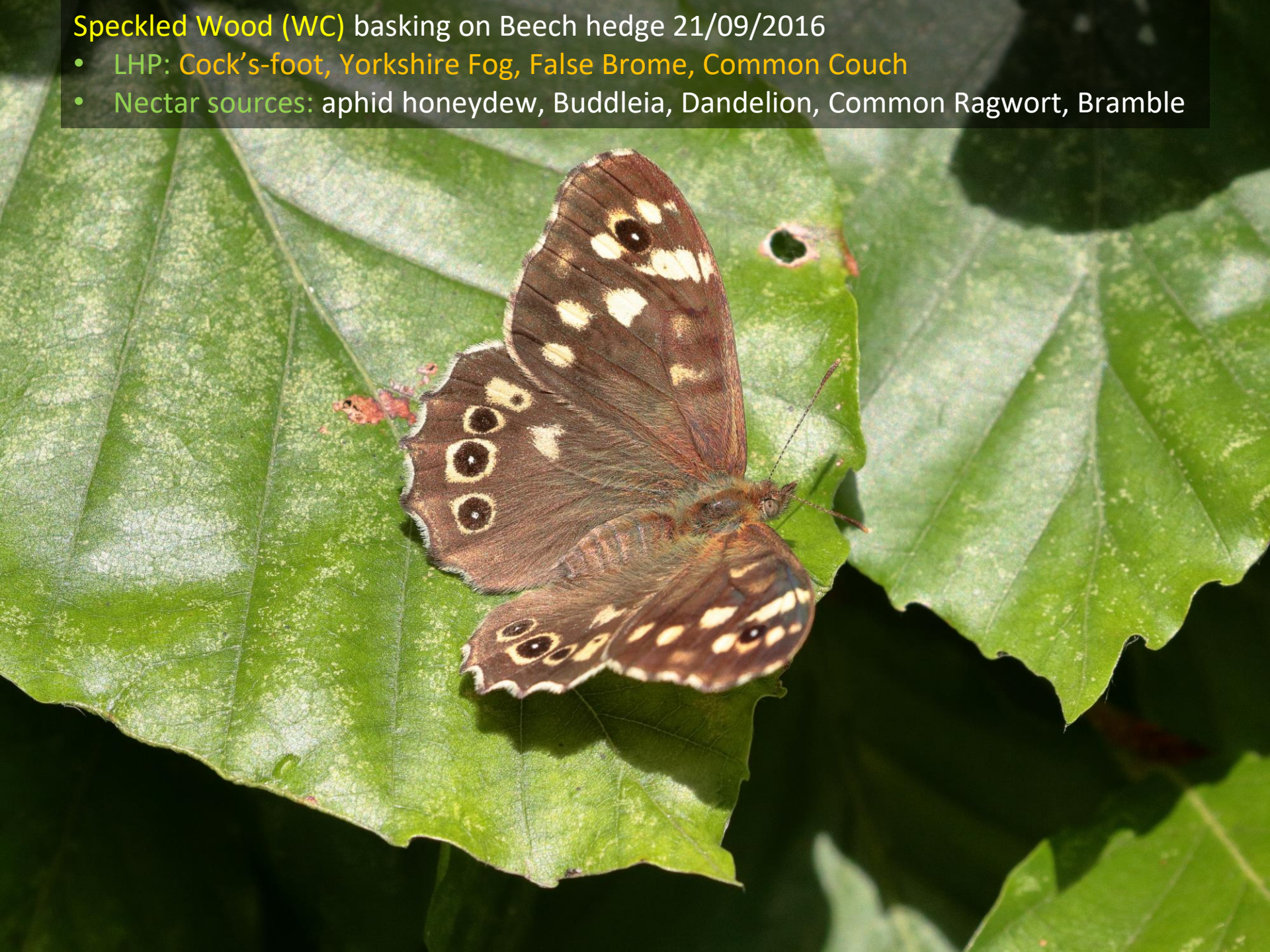
**Comma (WC)** nectaring on Ivy flowers 21/09/2016

- **LHP:** **Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)** in sun, Hop, Black Currant, Red Currant, Gooseberry, Hazel, willows, elms
- **Nectar sources:** Ivy, Bramble flowers & fruit, Wild Marjoram, *Sedum spectabile*



**Speckled Wood (WC)** basking on Beech hedge 21/09/2016

- **LHP:** Cock's-foot, Yorkshire Fog, False Brome, Common Couch
- **Nectar sources:** aphid honeydew, Buddleia, Dandelion, Common Ragwort, Bramble



Holly Blue (WC) nectaring on Wild Marjoram  
12/08/2016

- LHP: Holly in spring & Ivy in summer, Dogwood
- Nectar sources: Holly, Wild Marjoram, Buddleia, lavender, Bramble, Ivy





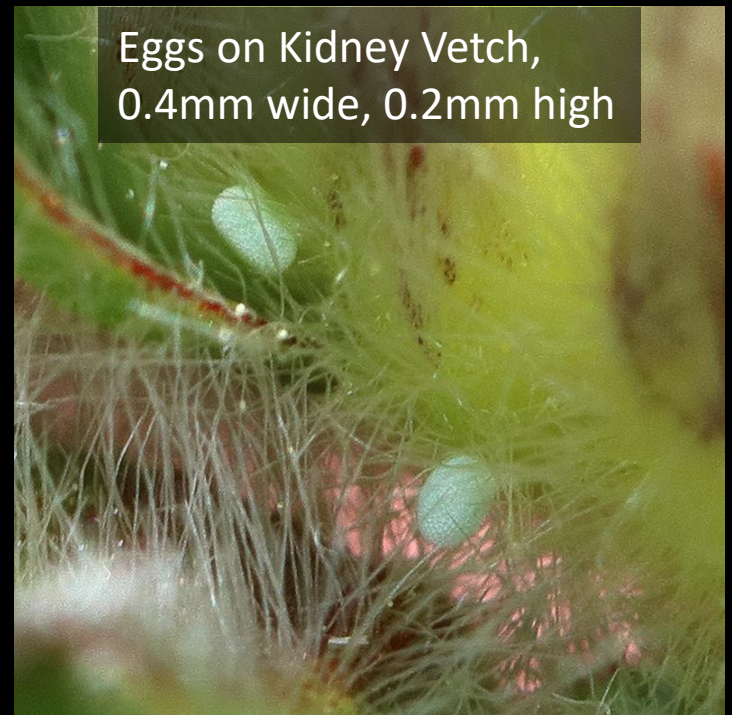
**Small Blue (HS) female** laying on Kidney Vetch  
26/05/2020

- **LHP: Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*)**
- **Nectar sources:** Kidney Vetch, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil
- **Trend:** expanding along the Chalk thanks to conservation efforts.

Conservation Priority: **High**  
GB Red List: **Near Threatened**



Eggs on Kidney Vetch,  
0.4mm wide, 0.2mm high



Small Blue (HS) male basking &  
nectaring on Common Bird's-foot-trefoil  
08/06/2021

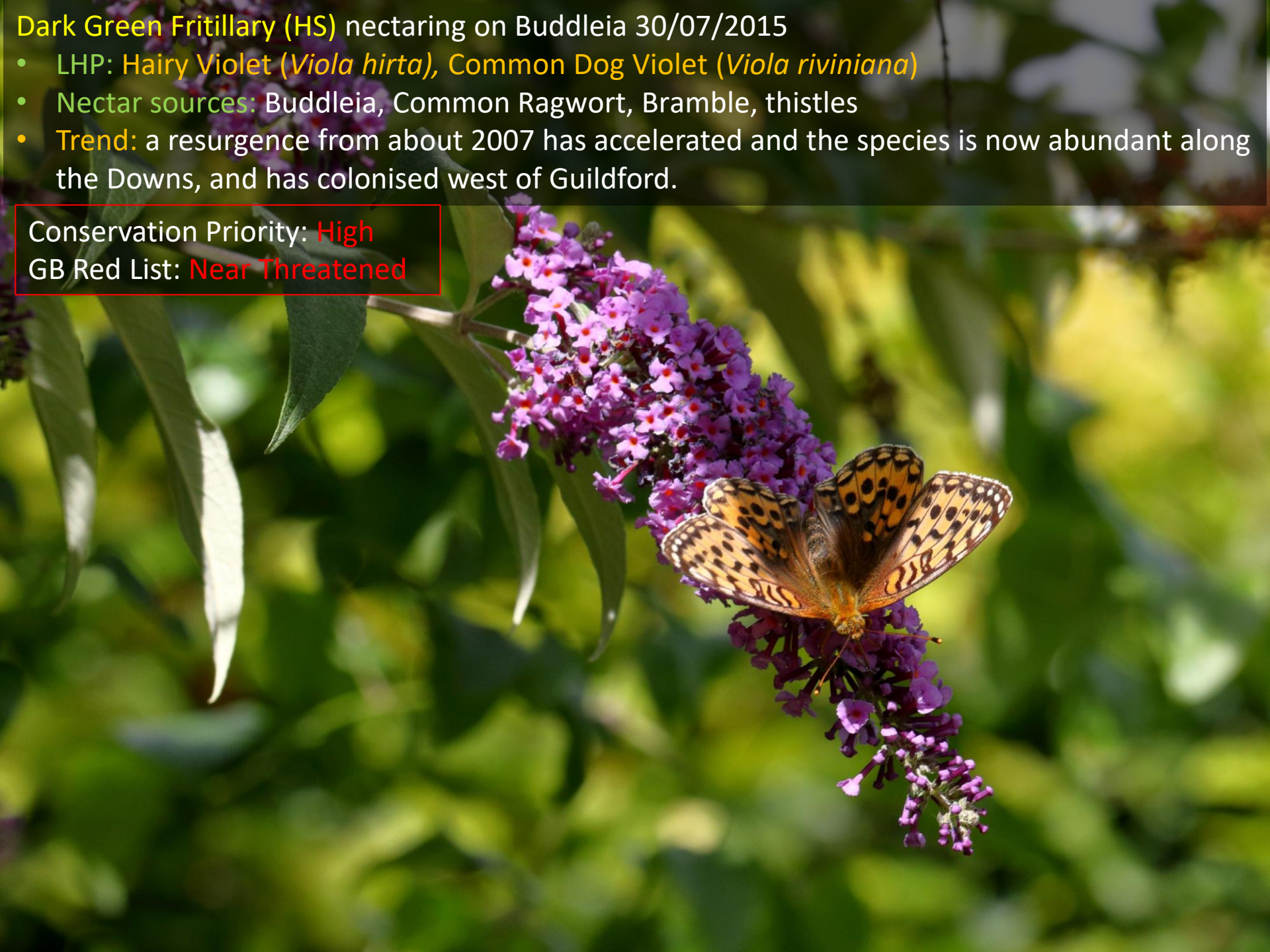
Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*)



## Dark Green Fritillary (HS) nectaring on Buddleia 30/07/2015

- LHP: Hairy Violet (*Viola hirta*), Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*)
- Nectar sources: Buddleia, Common Ragwort, Bramble, thistles
- Trend: a resurgence from about 2007 has accelerated and the species is now abundant along the Downs, and has colonised west of Guildford.

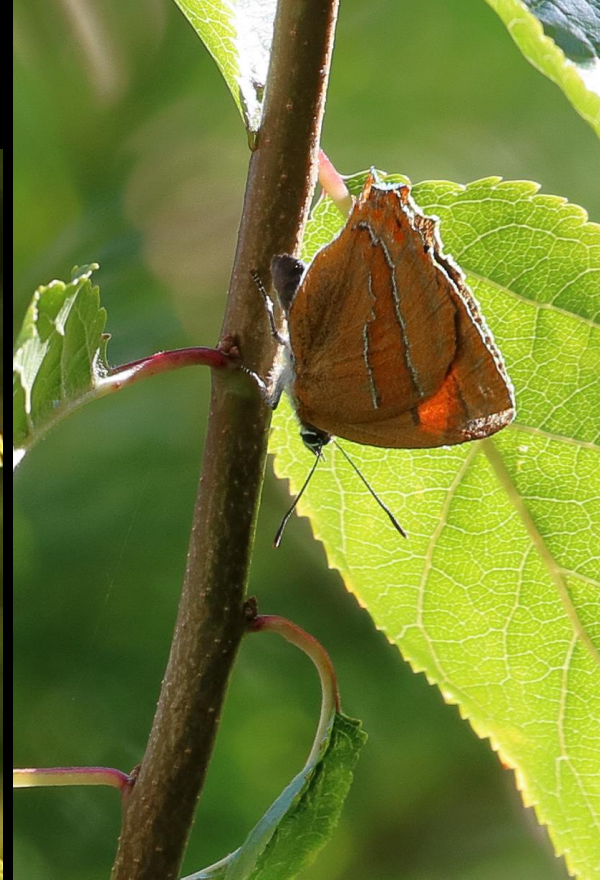
Conservation Priority: **High**  
GB Red List: **Near Threatened**



**Brown Hairstreak (HS) female**  
basking & laying on Victoria Plum  
25/08/2017 & Cherry Plum  
01/09/2017

- **LHP: Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)**, Victoria Plum (*Prunus domestica* 'Victoria'), Cherry Plum (*Prunus cerasifera*), Bullace (*Prunus domestica subsp. instititia*)
- **Nectar sources:** aphid honeydew on Ash, rotten fruit in garden, Creeping Thistle, Wild Angelica
- **Trend:** clearly increasing its range

Conservation Priority: **High**  
GB Red List: **Vulnerable**



Egg 0.8mm wide  
11/09/2017

Garden 'wild area' in lawn 08/06/2021



<https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/gardening/gardening-for-butterflies>

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/surrey-and-sw-london-branch/maps-stats>

<https://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk>

'Pocket Guide to the Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland' Second edition' Richard Lewington, 2015

'Butterflies of Surrey Revisited' Surrey Wildlife Trust, 2013

'Butterflies' Martin Warren, 2021