



Butterflies



Welcome them to your woods

Butterflies need our help

There are over 50 species of butterfly and 2,000 species of moth in Britain, each with its own special niche in our environment. Many make use of the distinct and dynamic characteristics of woodlands.

The majority of butterfly species have declined in abundance over the last 40 years. Habitat specialists including woodland butterflies have fared the worst, declining 45% in the UK since 1976. Butterflies like the Heath Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Wood White are now only found in a small number of woods. Even a widespread and formerly common species, the Common Blue, has declined 17 percent.

Butterfly presence or absence tells us a lot about our woodlands. The Speckled Wood is an indicator of a closing canopy; its rich brown wings with yellow dapples exactly match its preferred habitat of lightly shaded woodland; big, bright yellow Brimstones can be found where there is a nearby source of Alder Buckthorn; the Speckled Yellow moth is an indicator of the ground layer is becoming coarser.

It is very important that, where woodland butterflies and moths are seen, their habitats are conserved and enhanced.

Why are butterflies disappearing?

Significant changes have taken place in the way woodlands and the open countryside are managed. Herbicide and pesticide use has increased. Hedgerows – the remaining connections between woodlands – have been lost or degraded. Woodland edges have been intensively cut, leading to hard edges between wood and field. In many places, we've lost the soft, natural mosaic of meadow, scrub, woodlands and clearings.



Pearl-bordered Fritillary
(Photo: Butterfly Conservation)

Why do we need butterflies?

Butterflies and moths are a valuable part of the woodland ecosystem. They tell us about

the health and changes in our environment, including climate change. Butterflies represent a far wider range of invertebrates, which collectively provide environmental benefits, including pollination and natural pest control. They are an important element of the food chain and are prey for birds, bats and other insectivorous animals.

Butterflies are good for us. Enjoyment of nature reduces stress and improves health. Up close, the diversity of intricate wing patterns, their iridescence and the transformation from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to adult are wonders to behold.



Above: Peacock butterfly (Peter Eeles), Purple Emperor (David Dennis), White-spotted Sable; overleaf, top Speckled Wood butterfly and Silver-washed Fritillary (*Butterfly Conservation*).

What do butterflies and moths need?

- Specific food plants (trees, shrubs and ground flora) for the caterpillars
- A variety of growth stages close to each other, from young saplings to mature trees and including decaying wood
- Sunny areas to warm up, such as rides, clearings, woodland edges, and bare ground
- Nectar plants for the adult butterfly, available at just the right time, including Common Dog-violet, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Wild Strawberry, Primrose, Golden-rod, Wood Spurge, vetches and grasses
- Minerals from a rich woodland soil, as well as pools of water
- Cover and protection from the weather (wind, rain, and also shade) and from predators.

How woodland owners can help

Woodland owners are in a unique position. We've all heard about the butterfly effect, when small changes make a big difference. With just a little work, woodland owners can have a tangible effect on butterfly populations and help change the world, one clearing at a time.



Save butterflies with SWOG

The Small Woodland Owners' Group is working in partnership with Butterfly Conservation to support a number of workshops throughout south-east England next spring and summer. Staff from Butterfly Conservation will explain the needs of different species of woodland butterflies and help you recognise different varieties in flight. They will help you identify the plants eaten during the caterpillar stage of the butterfly lifecycle – different species favour different plants and their presence or otherwise will determine which particular butterflies breed in your woods. Owners can find out more about creating different areas for butterflies: for the larvae, for nectaring, for patrolling in flight as a territory, and for shelter.

Join in

We hope many members will attend a series of meetings in woodlands in the south-east during in 2017. Additionally, if you are able to host a meeting, perhaps in tandem with your neighbours, please get in touch. SWOG will organise the session and is able to pay up to £100 for your time and effort.

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