

The Ringlet – a truly saturnine new arrival in the Park!

Text and photos by Piers Eley



Female Ringlet – top-side

At the end of June last year, Ken Cheesman, one of the Park's butterfly recorders, took me to see a group of Ringlets that he had found near the Ham gate. I was very excited by this discovery and immediately started to take photographs of this darkly beautiful butterfly – and this article is the result! The Ringlet, *Aphantopus hyperantus*, is one of the *Satyridae*, the brown butterflies of our grasslands, the commonest of which is the Meadow Brown, shown below; however, its habits are very different from those of the latter.



On the left, Male Meadow Brown showing small fulvous patches on upper wings.

On the right, Meadow Browns mating – the female is the more colourful one on the right.



Male Ringlet – top-side

Whereas the Meadow Brown can often be seen in abundance on a hot summer day flying in the open grassland, the Ringlet prefers the shade and dampness of well-protected and watered woodland edge. Unlike most of the other *Satyridae*, these butterflies seem to flourish in a rainy summer and are even happy to be out and about in the rain while other butterflies are clinging with closed wings to strong grass-stems.

The area along the Sudbrook appears to be ideal. The wall and woodlands next door provide protection from the wind, keeping it warm, while the shade from the Hornbeams and the damp from the stream keep the air humid. Interspersed between the Hornbeams are some sizeable bramble bushes, which are in full flower during late June and early July when the Ringlets are most active, providing a favourite source of nectar.

To the right are more images of Ringlets photographed in the Park, to help you in your searches should you wish to join our hunt for them.

The under-side, with its distinctive pattern of seven or eight golden rings, is instantly recognisable once the butterfly has settled, although the rings may vary somewhat in shape. The top-side is more difficult to distinguish from other butterflies, in particular the male Meadow Brown. The main distinguishing feature is the uniform deep velvety- brown darkness of the open wings.

Those of the female are less deeply shaded than those of the male, which may often appear to be almost completely black. When in good condition both butterflies however have a white fringe along the outer edges of the wings. Most importantly, neither sex has any fulvous (orange-brown) patch on either side of the wings.

On the other hand, the male Meadow Brown, which may also appear very dark, will (as in the photograph at the bottom of page 8) have a fulvous patch near the tip of the upper wing, the underside of which is also distinctly fulvous. The female Meadow Brown is quite highly-coloured and should not be open to confusion.

You may also note that the Ringlet's spots or rings may almost disappear in the blackness of the top wings of the male. Those of the female are somewhat more distinct.

If you find any in the Park, please record the date, numbers and location of these and let us have a note of this on one of the "occasional recording forms" available at Holly Lodge or at the Pembroke Lodge Information Centre. Good Hunting!



Male Ringlet – underside



Female Ringlet – underside

Piers Eley is Chairman of the Richmond Park Wildlife Group and of the Butterfly Recording Group.

You might also like to join the *Independent's* "Great British Butterfly Hunt". See <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/uk-butterflies/>, where you will find help in identifying butterflies and some information about their conservation status.