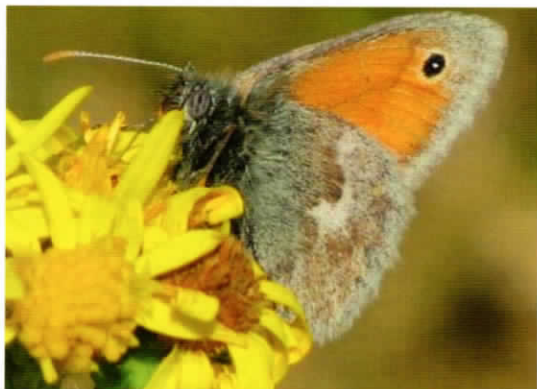


Butterflies of Richmond Park

By Nigel Jackman

Last year saw the loss of Raymond Garrett who we sorely miss as an active Friend who did so much for butterfly recording while sharing his passion for the Park's butterflies. This passion is easy to understand as we move into spring and summer when the Park becomes alive with these beautiful winged insects, lifting our spirits after the winter.

Some butterflies are very dependent on specialist habitats and other conditions and are not found in the Park. However, more than 20 of Surrey's 42 species may be seen here. These include the Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, the Whites, Skippers (Small, Essex and Large), Common and Holly Blue, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Ringlet and Gatekeeper.



Some butterflies, such as Essex Skipper, over-winter in their egg stage; some (e.g. Meadow Brown) overwinter as larvae, and some as pupae (e.g. the Whites). Others, such as Peacock, Brimstone and Comma (photo page 15) hibernate as adults and they are the first to be seen in flight.

Each species has its own season or multi-brood seasons, peaking overall in mid-summer, but with some species still in flight into November. Migrants boost numbers of Red Admirals and Whites, and summer treats to look out for in unpredictable numbers are the true migrants: Painted Ladies and sometimes Clouded Yellows.

The particularly characteristic species of the Park's extensive grasslands and woodland edges are the Small Heath, Small Copper, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper. The Small Heath has long had a stronghold in Richmond Park: small and orange-brown/grey, its season is late May until September.

Small Coppers (front cover photo) can have several broods and they did particularly well last year. They were observed in very good numbers on ragwort in August and September, across large areas of the Park including Sidmouth Slope, Pond Slade, The Bog and Pembroke Lodge Gardens.

Sometimes profuse numbers of Gatekeepers may be seen in July and August especially on ragwort and flowering brambles. The Purple Hairstreak, a small, beautiful, but difficult to observe woodland species, can occur in large numbers in July as it flutters in and out of the middle and upper canopies of Oak trees, e.g. along Queen's Ride.

However, butterflies everywhere are under constant threat and numbers overall are in decline, the victims of habitat and climate change, seasonally unfavourable weather, predation and parasitism.

Photo: Small Heath by Nigel Jackman