

The OHSCA Guide to South Canterbury Garden Butterflies

Butterflies in your (South Canterbury) garden – and the 2020 Big Butterfly Count

Since 2010 the charity *Butterfly Conservation* has organised one of the world's largest butterfly surveys – the Big Butterfly Count. Steve Wheatley, BC's Conservation Manager for SE England has asked "Do please get involved in the [Big Butterfly Count](#) (17 July to 9 Aug)" and encourage others to join in. "This year more than ever we need everyone to spend 15 minutes recording the butterflies they see."

With many of us now spending more time than ever in our gardens, can OHSCA members take up the challenge locally? But which species can we expect in our gardens, and how to tell them apart? Kent has over 40 resident species – but you can only expect to see less than half of these in a South Canterbury garden. By my count there are 14 species you have a good chance of seeing over the course of a year – including the Brimstone, Holly Blue and Gatekeeper, and another 6 or so are possible. A few extremely rare migrants could turn up almost anywhere – such as the Monarch (from America, perhaps), or the Camberwell Beauty (from Scandinavia).

Some of our most common species are difficult to separate when flying – such as the Small White (their larvae will eat your cabbages!) and the Green-veined White (very rarely if ever on your cabbages). To help with all 20 that are likely, and a few of the rare migrants, I have created a simple guide along the lines of 'white butterflies', 'small blue butterflies', 'browns' etc. This is attached to the digital edition of the OHSCA Summer 2020 Newsletter (No. 15) – and can also be downloaded separately from the OHSCA website (<http://www.ohsca.org/publications.html>). If you can make digital images and want your identifications checked, send your pictures to social@ohsca.org.

Our guide to species covers the next five pages, with the butterflies you might encounter grouped by size and colour:

Medium to large brightly coloured red and/or orange butterflies – page 2



Medium to large white and/or yellow butterflies – page 3



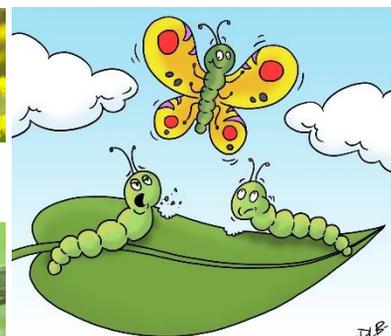
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"You'd never get me up in one of those things"

Derek L. Brettle: <https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/m/metamorphosing.asp>

Medium to large brightly coloured red and/or orange butterflies

There are five species included below that you can expect to see over the course of a year in a South Canterbury garden – all belong to the family Nymphalidae. All pass the winter in the adult stage – although the Red Admiral does not survive very cold winters (annual migrants from the continent augment and re-establish it), and Painted Ladies fly south as winter approaches. You can often find Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells in the winter hibernating in sheds, lofts and other unheated building spaces – waiting for the Spring so they can emerge to establish a new generation.

The underside patterns of all five are distinctive.



Peacock. Upperside left. Detail of forewing 'eye spot' centre. Underside right. The coloration and striking eyespots on both fore- and hind-wings make this species unmistakable. Wing-span about 2.5 inches (60–70 mm).

Adults can be seen throughout the year, but are more rarely met with from the end of May to early July.



Small Tortoiseshell. Upperside left, centre; underside right. The orange colour varies from reddish to paler orange. The underside is not so dark as that of the Peacock. Note the row of bright blue spots on the wing margins (red arrows). Wingspan about 2 inches (45–62 mm).

With two broods, adults can be seen throughout the year, but are more rarely met with in June and early August.



Comma. Upperside left; underside centre, right. The orange varies from reddish to yellowish. The underside hindwing has a pearly-white crescent mark which gives the butterfly its name. Our only species with such a naturally jagged margin to the wings. Wingspan about 2 inches (50–64 mm).

With two broods, adults occur throughout the year, but are most often seen from end May until late September.



Painted Lady. Upperside left, centre; underside right. Perhaps this butterfly can be mistaken for a Small Tortoiseshell – but it has no blue spots along the wing margins, and is never so strongly orange coloured. Wingspan about 2.5 inches (58–74 mm).

A regular migrant in most years, seen from April to October, it can breed in the summer, but does not pass the winter here.



Red Admiral. Upperside left, centre; underside right. The striking red or bright orange bar on the forewing make this species unmistakable. Wing-span about 2.5 inches (64–78 mm).

Adults occur throughout the year, but are most common from April to November. In summer our population is boosted by migrants from the continent.

Medium to large white and/or yellow butterflies

There are five white and/or yellow species that you can expect to see over the course of a year in a South Canterbury garden – all belong to the family Pieridae.

Four are 'whites' that are difficult to tell apart when flying – except the male Orange Tip – which, as its name suggests, has a bright orange tip to the forewing. Once settled with their wings closed the Green-veined White and the Orange Tip (both sexes) are easy to tell apart from each other, and from the Large and Small whites. These last two (the only ones that produce caterpillars which will eat your cabbages) do differ in average size, but they vary – a large small white can be bigger than small large white!



Orange Tip. Male left. Female centre. Underside of female right. Both sexes have the same greenish, marbled pattern on the hindwing underside. The wingspan is about 2 inches (45–50 mm).

Adults can be seen from April until the end of June – exceptionally a few can appear at the end of August.



Green-veined White. Male left (summer form). Female centre (spring). Underside right. Both sexes have same greenish-veined pattern on the whitish or yellow hindwing underside. Wingspan about 2 inches (40–52 mm). Black spot on forewing closer to wing margin than in Small White (blue arrows).

Adults fly from April to late September, with up to three broods.



Small White. Male left. Female centre. Underside of female right. Both sexes have very similar undersides, with the hind wing varying from off-white to pale yellow. Wingspan typically about 2 inches, but they vary quite a lot in size, from 38–57 mm.

Adults fly from April to September, in two broods.



Large White. Male left. Female centre. Underside right. Both sexes have similar undersides, with the hind wing varying from white to pale yellow. Wingspan ca 2.5 inches, but variable (55–75 mm), with females usually noticeably larger. Dark tip and outer margin of fore wing upper-side typically darker and more extensive compared to Small White (orange arrows).

Adults fly April to September, in two broods.



Brimstone. Male left. Male underside centre. Underside male right. Both sexes have the same wing shape, with a pointed fore wing tip, and a short, pointed hindwing 'tail'. The female is a much paler yellow, and can be mistaken for a 'white'. Wingspan up to 3 inches (60–74 mm).

Adults fly at almost any time of year, but very few in late June and early July.

Small to medium-sized brown-and-orange or blue species

There are four species included here that you can expect to see over the course of a year in a South Canterbury garden – and one that you might see (Common Blue). The first two are 'satyrs', belonging to the family Nymphalidae; the other three, generally smaller species, belong to the family Lycaenidae. Of these last three, the Holly Blue is by far the most common in our gardens. The Small Copper is a very active little butterfly that will often chase other insects, even birds.



Gatekeeper. Upperside male left, upper-side female centre, underside right. Note double 'pupil' to single large forewing spot, and separate pale spot on hindwing underside (red arrows). Wing-span about 1.5 inches (37–48 mm).

Adults fly from end June to early September and, although a grass or scrub species, it is quite frequent in our gardens.



Meadow Brown. Upperside male left, upperside female centre, underside right. The large forewing spot sometimes has a smaller spot 'below' it (blue arrow); less orange, the Meadow Brown never has a pale spot on hindwing underside like that of the Gatekeeper. Wingspan about 2 inches (48–54 mm).

Adults fly from June to end September; less often seen than the Gatekeeper in our gardens.



Small Copper. Upperside male left, upperside female centre, underside right. The sexes are generally similar, but some females have a small row of iridescent blue spots on the hindwing upperside. Note the short projection on hindwing margin. Wingspan about 1–1.5 inches (26–40 mm).

With up to three broods per year, adults can be seen in May/June, July/August and September/early October. Infrequent visitor to S. Canterbury gardens.



Holly Blue. Upperside male left, upperside female centre, underside right. The only blue butterfly you are likely to see in a S. Canterbury garden, this species is active, and often flies at 1–3 m above the ground. Wingspan about 1–1.5 inches (26–34 mm).

The adults fly from April to June and mid-July to early September. This attractive little butterfly is frequent in our gardens.



Common Blue. Upperside male left, upperside female centre, underside right. Females vary greatly in colour, from almost as blue as the brightly coloured male, to almost sooty-brown – but unlike the males, they always have at least some orange spots on the upperside wing margins. Wingspan about 1–1.5 inches (29–37 mm).

With up to three broods per year, adults can be seen in May/July, July/September and a sometimes in October. Very infrequent visitor in S. Canterbury gardens.

Small Copper female upperside https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycaena_phlaeas

Six butterflies you have some chance of seeing in a South Canterbury garden

The six species illustrated here represent four families: Hesperiidae (skippers), Pieridae (Clouded Yellow), Lycaenidae (Purple Hairstreak) and Nymphalidae (Speckled Wood). Of these, I have only seen the first and last in my garden in more than 20 years. Note: there are two other migrant clouded-yellow species (Pale and Berger's) that can sometimes occur in Kent, but they are *extremely* rare and difficult to tell apart; they are not included here.



Essex Skipper male left; **Small Skipper** male centre and underside right. These two active little butterflies are very difficult to separate without close examination. The male 'sex brands' (absent in females) differ (blue arrows). Wingspan about 1–1.5 inches (26–34 mm).

The adults fly from April to June to August. Their natural habitats are rough grasslands and open areas; rare visitors to our gardens.



Large Skipper male left, female centre, under-side right. Not much larger than the Small Skipper (and also has a male 'brand' – blue arrow), it differs obviously in pattern. Wingspan about 1–1.5 inches (29–36 mm).

Adults fly from end May to early August. Their natural habitats are rough grasslands and open areas, including parks and churchyards; I have not seen it in my garden.



Clouded Yellow male left, pale form female centre, underside right. Male upperside yellow, with solid black wing margins; females yellow, pale yellow or whitish, with spotted borders. Span ca 2–2.5 inches (52–62 mm).

Adults occur March to November, peaking in August. Only rarely surviving our winters, this migrant is a rarity locally but sometimes reaches the south coast in huge numbers.



Purple Hairstreak male left, female centre, underside right. The colour and underside pattern make this unmistakable in our fauna. Wingspan about 1.5 inches (31–40 mm).

Adults occur end June to mid August. Most active about 7 pm, flying at the tops of oak and ash trees, rarely coming to ground level. Easily overlooked, this species might occur in large gardens with mature oaks.



Speckled Wood male left, female centre, underside right. The chocolate brown colour with cream-spotted pattern make this unmistakable. Wingspan ca 1.5–2 inches (46–56 mm).

With up to three broods, adults can occur from end March to end October. A woodland species, it is an occasional visitor to larger and more shady gardens.

Clouded Yellow male by Josef Dvorák <https://www.biolib.cz/en/image/id98504/>
Clouded Yellow pale female by Heinz Rothacher <http://www.schmetterling-raupe.de/art/crocea.htm>

Six extremely rare migrants that you are very unlikely ever to see in a South Canterbury garden ... but you never know!

You are very unlikely to see any of these rare migrants, not just in your South Canterbury garden but anywhere in Kent. However, all of them have been recorded in the county at least once in the past 50 years.



Monarch male. Female similar but veins more darkly marked. Wingspan about 3–4 inches (70–100 mm).

This iconic species is famed for its spectacular overwintering colonies in California and Mexico. First recoded in the UK in 1876, possibly as a stray blown off course from eastern USA, it now appears here from several sources – including escapees from commercial butterfly houses, and from wedding releases (this last also applied to the Painted Lady) – for which celebrations both species are often bred and released in large numbers (to the chagrin of naturalists!).



Queen of Spain Fritillary. Female (sexes similar). Many beautiful large silver spots on hindwing underside. Wingspan about 1.5–2 inches (38–46 mm).

This is a rare migrant from the continent which seems unable to establish here – even though the larvae, like those of our other native 'true' fritillaries, feed on wild violets (*Viola*). Dover has been a bit of a 'hot spot' – 25 individuals were captured there in 1882.

© Adrian Hoskins <https://www.learnaboutbutterflies.com/Britain%20-%20Issoria%20Iathonia.htm>



Large Tortoiseshell. Sexes similar. Could easily be confused with the smaller Small Tortoiseshell, but the wing bases of the latter are much darker. Wingspan about 2.7–3.0 inches (68–75 mm).

The larvae mainly feed on Elm. Formerly a resident UK species it is now locally extinct. Most years a few are recorded, thought to arrive from the continent (some may be captive releases). But maybe a comeback is now 'on the cards'? –

<https://twitter.com/WillLangdon12/status/1272268965792940032>



Camberwell Beauty. Sexes similar. With its large size and pale creamy borders to the dark wings, unmistakable. Wingspan about 3.0–3.5 inches (76–88 mm).

Despite its very 'English' common name (in the USA it is more aptly known as the Mourning Cloak), this butterfly, which is closely related to the Large Tortoiseshell, is not known to have ever been resident here. In some years a few arrive across eastern England, mostly from Scandinavia it is thought.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=670555>



Bath White. Female. Male similar but with fewer/smaller dark spots. Wingspan about 2 inches (48–52 mm).

A very rare migrant presumed to arrive occasionally from southern Europe. In recent years it has been recognised that the Bath White represents a species complex which has proved very difficult to 'untangle', even using DNA data. This is one of the few cases where there would still be good justification for collecting a 'British' butterfly.

Nilce Coutinho Guerra <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/677299231434379390/>



Swallowtail. Male (female) similar. Wingspan ca 2.5–3.5 inches (65–86 mm).

Although we have a native population of this large swallowtail (once named the 'Royal William') in the Norfolk Broads area, any butterfly of this distinctive appearance in Kent will not be from Norfolk, but most probably a rare immigrant from France. However, this and similar species are 'flown' in butterfly houses, and escape from time to time! If you see anything like this anywhere SE England, do try to get a photograph.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_World_swallowtail_\(Papilio_machaon_gorganus\)_Italy.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_World_swallowtail_(Papilio_machaon_gorganus)_Italy.jpg)

Names, foodplants ... and winter

All the butterflies mentioned above are listed here, in 'systematic' order, with their scientific (Latinized) names, main caterpillar food-plants (some butterflies have carnivorous larvae – but none of our local species!) – and how they pass the winter. There is still much scope for new discoveries on their life cycles, even though so much does seem to be known. Each individual butterfly is as genetically unique as we are – so that variation, even within the separate biological species that we are dealing with here, is the rule, not the exception. This affects all aspects of their life, not just details of their colour patterns. There are always surprises once you get to know them!

Family Papilionidae

Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	Fennel and related plants	[Pupa]
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Family Hesperidae

Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	Various grasses	Egg
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	Yorkshire-fog and other grasses	Larva
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	Cock's-foot and other grasses	Larva

Family Pieridae

Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	Mainly clovers and vetches	[Larva]
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn	Adult
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	Garlic Mustard, other wild crucifers	Pupa
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Mostly cultivated brassicas	Pupa
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Wild and cultivated brassicas	Pupa
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	Wild crucifers	Pupa

Family Lycaenidae

Purple Hairstreak	<i>Favonius quercus</i>	Oaks	Egg
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Sorrels, Docks	Larva
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Trefoils, Medick, Restharrow	Larva
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	Holly, Ivy, Gorse, Dogwood ...	Pupa

Family Nymphalidae

Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	Milkweeds	[Adult]
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Various grasses	Larva or Pupa
Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Various grasses	Pupa
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	Various grasses	Larva
Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>	Violets, Lucerne	[all stages]
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Stinging nettles	Egg or Adult
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Thistles and many other plants	[Adult]
Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>	Elm, <i>Salix</i> , other trees	Adult
Camberwell Beauty	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>	Sallow, Poplar, Elm, Birch	[Adult]
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	Stinging nettles	Adult
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>	Stinging nettles	Adult
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Stinging nettles; also Hop	Adult

Although several are close to local extinction, 21 other butterflies are listed for Kent – all of them very unlikely to be seen in our gardens. In 2018 OHSCA members observed two of these in Blean Woods (Heath Fritillary and White Admiral), and in 2019 two more in Denge Woods (Duke of Burgundy and Green Hairstreak). This year we had planned to look for the Silver-spotted Skipper. The 21 are: Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*), Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*), Silver-spotted Skipper (*Hesperia comma*), Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*), White-letter Hairstreak (*Satyrus w-album*), Brown Hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*), Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*), Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*), Chalkhill Blue (*Polyommatus coridon*), Adonis Blue (*Polyommatus bellargus*), Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*), Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*), Wall (*Lasiommata megera*), Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*), Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*), Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*), White Admiral (*Limnitis camilla*), Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*), Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*), Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*), Heath Fritillary (*Melitaea athalia*).

Internet sources

These days there are some excellent websites that cover the British Butterflies. First and foremost is that of Butterfly Conservation itself:

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>

For Kent: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/kent-and-se-london-branch>

For all the native British species, go to:

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/identify-a-butterfly>

Here are two other excellent sites for British butterflies:

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

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/07/butterfly-identification/>

Books

Witness David Dunbar's 2010 book on British butterfly books (*British Butterflies. A history in books*. London: British Library), there have been literally hundreds — from Amazing through Banal to Catastrophic — and still they keep coming. Among the most recent I would strongly recommend:

Peter Eeles. 2019. *Life Cycles of British and Irish Butterflies*. Newbury: Pisces. ISBN 978-1-874357-88-9

This 2014 field guide is also excellent:

Jeremy Thomas & Richard Lewington. 2014. *The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland* (new revised edition). Cumnor Hill: British Wildlife Publishing. ISBN 978 0 95649 026 1

Look out for a forthcoming book on the butterflies of Kent by Michael Easterbrook.

'*Butterfly gardening*'. There are a number of books on this subject – but I would be wary of any that give the impression, for example, that by leaving a few stinging nettles in a forgotten corner of your garden you will encourage Peacocks, Red Admirals and Small Tortoiseshells to breed – these butterflies will normally only develop naturally on large stands of nettles in a suitable, usually very sunny location. Most of us have quite small gardens – the best thing is to grow good nectar plants that will attract the adults of a variety of our local species – they really do need nectar! For information you can start with: <https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/10-plants-for-butterflies/> and <https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/gardening/gardening-for-butterflies>. If you do have a larger garden and want to try something more challenging, I suggest getting a copy of Andrew George's 2007 book *The Butterfly Friendly Garden* (Totnes: Alphabet & Image) – which is based on the remarkable achievements of Clive Farrell at Ryewater Nurseries, Dorset.

Credits

This guide has been compiled by OHSCA member Dick Vane-Wright – who has studied butterflies for the past 70 years in the UK, elsewhere in Europe, and the tropics. Dick is currently Honorary President of the Kent & SE London Branch of Butterfly Conservation, and is very grateful to Branch Chairman Nathan Jones and to Butterfly Conservation for permission to use the great majority of photographs included here. These images are copyright of Butterfly Conservation, and the individual photographers (who are all noted on the main Butterfly Conservation website – see above). The few images from other sources are separately acknowledged where they appear. The text is copyright of OHSCA/Dick Vane-Wright, June 2020.

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