

## BUTTERFLY REPORT

The exceptionally warm and dry summer and autumn provided almost ideal conditions for butterflies with the result that large numbers were seen throughout the season.

Reports commenced with a Comma on No.3 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> March and continued until the remarkably late sighting of Small Tortoiseshell on 27<sup>th</sup> November.

The more common butterflies were reported in what may be record numbers for Woolston, with peak totals of 821 Gatekeepers, 163 Meadow Browns, 105 Small Tortoiseshells and 89 Peacocks.

Interesting sightings included a single Small Heath on No.1 bed for the second successive year, and a Camberwell Beauty seen briefly on No.3 bed on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> June.

On the negative side, there was only one report of Brimstone and none of Holly Blue.

Because more reports have been submitted this year, this report is more detailed than last year's initial survey. Many thanks to those who have reported their sightings either directly to me or via the logbook. To be of maximum value, however, it is helpful to have details of numbers seen and location as well as species.

In compiling this report I have made use of information in the Cheshire and Wirral Butterfly Report for 2003. My thanks go to Barry Shaw of Butterfly Conservation for his cooperation. I would recommend readers with an interest in butterflies and moths to join this organisation, which has an active local branch providing regular newsletters and an Annual Report to members as well as organising meetings and field trips.

Individual species reports are as follows:

### **Small Skipper**

*Thymelicus sylvestris*

The first record was on 22<sup>nd</sup> June when one was on the east bank of No.4 bed and four were seen in the Sandpit Pond area. Numbers increased to a maximum of 16 on 6<sup>th</sup> July of which 15 were on No.4 bed. Seven were reported on 18<sup>th</sup> July and the last sighting was of one on 9<sup>th</sup> August.

### **Large Skipper**

*Ochlodes venata*

A single was reported on the north meadow area of No.3 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> June. On 9<sup>th</sup> July one was on No.2 bed and a second on No.3 bed. The final record was on the extremely hot afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> August when two were on No.1 bed including one on Buddleia.

### **Brimstone**

*Gonepteryx rhamni*

The only record was of a single insect on the Ship Canal Track on 15<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Large White**

*Pieris brassicae*

Butterflies were noted from 7<sup>th</sup> May to 27<sup>th</sup> September, when five were reported on No.3 bed. The maximum recorded was 11 on No.2 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Small White**

*Pieris rapae*

An early sighting was of one on No.2 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> March. Thereafter, small numbers were reported until the emergence of the second brood. Counts of 12 on 18<sup>th</sup> July and a minimum of 44 on 2<sup>nd</sup> August were the largest of the year. The final record was a single on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Green-veined White**

*Pieris napi*

Small numbers were reported from 16<sup>th</sup> April until 15<sup>th</sup> September with a maximum of five on 18<sup>th</sup> July. Because this butterfly is not always easily identified unless good views are obtained, under recording is likely.

### **Orange Tip**

*Anthocharis cardamines*

A male on the Ship Canal Track on 14<sup>th</sup> April was the first of the year. By 16<sup>th</sup> April, ten were present on No.3 bed and the Canal Track. Thereafter, only small numbers were reported until the last sighting on 4<sup>th</sup> June, when three were seen on the west bank of No.2 bed.

### **Small Copper**

*Lycaena phlaeas*

Always an uncommon species at Woolston, a total of eight sightings was an improvement on recent years. The first record was of a single on No.4 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> May, followed by one on Butchersfield Tip a week later. There were no further records until 20<sup>th</sup> August when one was found on brambles on No.3 bed. There followed a number of reports from Nos 3 and 4 beds, including 1<sup>st</sup> September when singles were seen on both beds, until the final sighting on 27<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Common Blue**

*Polyommatus icarus*

Small numbers were reported from 14<sup>th</sup> May, when one was found on Butchersfield Tip and a second on the east bank of No.2 bed. Maximum numbers occurred at the end of May and the beginning of June. On 30<sup>th</sup> May a minimum of 19 was on Birdsfoot Trefoil on the north bank of No.3 bed with a further two on the Ship Canal Track. On 1<sup>st</sup> June, ten were seen on No.1 bed, with five at Latchford Locks, four on the Canal Track and two on waste ground on No.4 bed. Numbers then declined and only single figure counts were reported until the last sighting on 7<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Red Admiral**

*Vanessa atalanta*

An early sighting on No.2 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> March and a second on 7<sup>th</sup> April were the first of the year. Such early reports add to speculation about whether such individuals have overwintered locally, but given the excellent weather conditions in March it is possible that these were early migrants from mainland Europe or North Africa. The

only other spring record was of one on No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> May. Six were reported across the Reserve on 25<sup>th</sup> June, with similar numbers noted on various dates through July and August. Typically, numbers peaked at the end of September when a total of 15 was reported on Nos 3 and 4 beds. The final record was of three on No.3 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> October.

#### **Painted Lady**

*Cynthia cardui*

An influx of this species was noted on 1<sup>st</sup> June when seven were on the banks of No.4 bed and one on No.2 bed. On 5<sup>th</sup> June a total of 15 was reported for the whole Reserve. Thereafter, numbers reduced with reports of one or two throughout the summer and four on 24<sup>th</sup> August. Records continued into autumn with singles present on 9<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October.

#### **Small Tortoiseshell**

*Aglais urticae*

Butterflies were present in large numbers throughout the season with the first record from No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> March and eight on Nos 2 and 3 beds by 26<sup>th</sup> March. Few were noted during April and May but by 20<sup>th</sup> June 16 were counted in the centre of No.3 bed building to a Reserve total of 32 on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Lower numbers were reported during July and August but there was a dramatic increase towards the end of August. Over a hundred were seen on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> August and 105 were reported for the whole Reserve on 24<sup>th</sup> August. Only single figure counts were recorded thereafter until 17<sup>th</sup> September. Late records were one on 17<sup>th</sup> October and a probable sighting on 10<sup>th</sup> November. On 27<sup>th</sup> November, a mild sunny day, there were records of single butterflies on both Nos 3 and 4 beds, a remarkably late date.

#### **Camberwell Beauty**

*Nymphalis antiopa*

On the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> June a butterfly of this species was seen briefly on the south meadow area of No.3 bed by K.Foster. This may be the first Woolston record of this rare immigrant to Britain, although there is a possibility that the butterfly was an escape. If this was a genuine migrant it may have come from southern Europe where its normal flight period is from mid-June to July. Most British sightings occur in late summer and are thought to have come from Scandinavia where it breeds later in the year.

#### **Peacock**

*Inachis io*

Sightings began on 21<sup>st</sup> March when two were on No.3 bed. Small numbers were reported on various dates until 14<sup>th</sup> June with a maximum of three on 6<sup>th</sup> April. There were no further reports until 18<sup>th</sup> July when eleven were present. The beginning of August saw a major emergence with 35 on No.3 bed on the first and the remarkable total of 89 on Nos 3 and 4 beds the following day, including 25 feeding on Hemp Agrimony in a ditch to the west of No.4 bed. Very few were reported thereafter with five on No.3 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> August and the final record of a single on 9<sup>th</sup> September. It is interesting that this species fared so well at Woolston this year as in the rest of Cheshire it was scarcer than normal.

**Comma***Polygonia c-album*

The first record following hibernation was of one on No.3 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> March. Singles were noted on other dates in March with a maximum of five on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. There were no other reports until newly emerged insects were noted from 20<sup>th</sup> June onwards, with large numbers building up. On 24<sup>th</sup> June nine were on No.3 bed and a Reserve record total of 17 was present the following day, including seven along the river to the north of No.2 bed. On 6<sup>th</sup> July, 13 were reported from No.3 bed. One or two butterflies were noted on various dates in July and August, with a late summer peak of nine on 5<sup>th</sup> September and six on 15<sup>th</sup> September. The last record was of one on the south bank of No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

**Speckled Wood***Pararge aegeria*

A single on 15<sup>th</sup> April was followed by six on the south bank of No.3 bed the next day. Insects were reported in single figure numbers until a major build-up in late summer when 35 were on the Reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup> August and 20 on No.3 bed two days later. Up to eight were recorded on several dates until 27<sup>th</sup> September and the final sighting was of a single on the south bank of No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

**Gatekeeper***Pyronia tithonus*

Butterflies were reported from 6<sup>th</sup> July when 42 were seen. A total of 821 was recorded for the whole Reserve on 18<sup>th</sup> July with further large counts on 29<sup>th</sup> July (400 on the west bank of No.4 bed) and 181 on No.4 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August. Very few were seen thereafter and the final sighting was of a single insect on 22<sup>nd</sup> August.

**Meadow Brown***Maniola jurtina*

The first record of a single butterfly on 20<sup>th</sup> June heralded a rapid build-up to 42 on 25<sup>th</sup> June rising to a maximum Reserve total of 163 on 18<sup>th</sup> July. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 77 were present following which numbers declined to 15 on 22<sup>nd</sup> August. A single on 7<sup>th</sup> September was the last sighting of the year.

**Small Heath***Coenonympha pamphilus*

For the second successive year a single insect was found on No.1 bed. On 16<sup>th</sup> July, a hot sunny day, one was observed near the west pool. This follows last year's sighting of one, also on No.1 bed, on 12<sup>th</sup> July.

**Dave Hackett**