

Butterflies of Bedminster

My Wild Bedminster, 2017

Since 2016, My Wild Bedminster has encouraged a range of activities involving park groups, schools and summer playschemes, as well as individuals. Much of our publicity has been through the South Bristol Voice and the now defunct GBCP Newsletter.

In 2017, we asked people to identify animals seen in BS3. Many people contacted My Wild Bedminster with sightings. This report concentrated on invertebrates and 'mini-beasts'.

A quick google will tell you what some of these animals look like.

Butterflies

Early in 2017 we identified 22 butterflies that we thought might be seen during the course of the year. Data from observers came in two formats. One was chance sightings across the BS3 area and the other was a more systematic, year-long survey in three local gardens (in Paultrow, Bealey and Osborne Roads), Alderman Moore's Allotments and Windmill Hill City Farm. With one exception, see below, all of the more random observations did not add to the



list of 15 species seen at the five core sites.

We have assumed that identifications are correct, but several reporters said that they were unsure in some cases.

The original list is below with an indication of what was actually seen in the five core sites.

Male Orange-tip butterfly.

Species	Paultrow	Ald Moores	Beauley	Osborne	WHCF
HESPERIIDAE					
L Skipper					
S.Skipper					
PIERIDAE					
Cl Yellow					
Brimstone					☑
L. White	☑	☑		☑	☑
S. White	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
GV. White					☑
Orangetip	☑			☑	☑
LYCAENIDAE					
S.Copper					
Common Blue	☑				
Holly Blue	☑	☑		☑	☑
NYMPHALIDAE					
Red Admiral	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Painted Lady	☑		☑		
S.Tortoiseshell	☑	☑			
Peacock					
Comma		☑	☑	☑	☑
SATYRIDAE					
Speckled Wood	☑	☑		☑	☑
Marbled White					
Gatekeeper		☑			
Meadow Brown		☑			
Small Heath			☑?		
Ringlet		☑			☑
Total Species	9	10	4	7	10

Altogether, 15 from five families out of our suggested probable list of species were spotted across BS3. We've left out the Small Heath because its identification is uncertain.

This represents about 25% of the species on the UK's list. It's actually about the same number of species that you would find on the semi-tropical island of Madeira, although actual numbers of individuals are much higher there.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the greatest range of species was in the larger and more diverse spaces of Alderman Moor's allotment and Windmill Hill City Farm rather than the gardens, although they did pretty well.

A surprise butterfly and some no shows



The surprise species was a **Small Blue** butterfly (*Cupido minimus*) photographed in Victoria Park bringing our species total to 16.

Matt Collis of AWT comments, '*...this is a true testament to the value of citizen science! Although the photograph is not conclusive, we feel reasonably sure this is a Small Blue. The biggest mystery is how it got there Is there a resident population in Victoria Park? We think it's most likely a chance encounter with an egg brought in on a plug plant for the wildlife meadow. Small Blues are completely reliant on kidney vetch on which they raise their next generation. The only way to be sure will be to keep an eye out next year during late May and early June.*

Small colony, stray egg or just passing through?

No skippers were reported. We will look for them in 2018. They feed on particular types of grass so are unlikely to be in 'cultivated' gardens or 'tidy' places like public parks.

Some of the predicted species were migrants that might be expected to fly in from the continent. In some years they can be in great numbers. In others they are scarcely seen or are, perhaps, restricted to the coast nearest France or Spain. Of these migrants, the **Clouded Yellow** was not reported at all in BS3 and there did not seem to be many **Painted Ladies**. The locally born **Small Tortoiseshells** are often re-enforced by continental migrants (but not, it seems, this year) as are the **Red Admirals**. The **Peacocks** that we didn't see (a bit surprising that?) and the **Commas** that we did see are probably British bred.

The Nymphalidae are particularly fond of nettles as a breeding site, so BS3 may be too tidy for some of them. On the other hand, they are strong flyers so may be coming to us from quite a distance.

Mistaken identities?

The three white butterflies that are sometimes lumped together as 'Cabbage Whites' were fairly abundant, but difficult to tell apart. They all move rapidly and can only be properly examined if they land close by or are caught, briefly, in a net. The caterpillars of the **Small** and **Large Whites** are indeed fond of cabbages and also nasturtiums. But, **Green-veined White** caterpillars prefer plants such as water cress and mustards.



It's likely that there are more Green-veined Whites around than is suggested by the reports where people may have gone for the more straight forward Large or Small identification as they fly by and will have had no opportunity to see the 'green-veins' on the lower wing. WHCF was the only site where a net was used.

[Green-veined White butterfly.](#)

Browns and Blues

Most of the brown butterflies (the last six in the list above) need grasses for their caterpillars. They are often very fussy about which grass species suits them. Apart from the **Speckled Wood**, it's noticeable that most sightings were in the two larger spaces. Our parks are probably not very good for this group, except perhaps in 'rough', grassy areas. The predicted collapse of the Park Department's budget may be good for skippers and 'browns': 'every cloud....'.

Of the three predicted Lycaenidae there were no **Small Coppers** and the **Common Blue** was far from common, but the **Holly Blue** was frequently spotted. Its caterpillars feed on holly and ivy, so it finds good habitats in BS3.

When was everyone around?

Butterflies don't like the winter and have various strategies for avoiding it. They can't fly if their body temperature goes below around 14 centigrade. A few hibernate as adults, but most don't survive. Others spend the winter as eggs or as chrysalises.

The longest season observed in BS3 in 2017 was for the **Red Admiral**. The first recorded observation was in February on North Street outside the deli. Bright day, butterfly woke up, probably a big mistake! The last recorded sighting was at WHCF on November 10. This could have been a second, possibly third, brood individual or a continental migrant.

The first sighting of the **Holly Blue** was on 6 April at both the Paultow and Osborne Road gardens. The last was on 19 August. Each particular species tends to move into the butterfly stage at the same time, sometimes a couple of times a year. It's all about sex. The early bird may get the worm, but being the only butterfly of your species flying about is frustrating and pointless.

Orangetips and **Brimstones** are distinctly spring butterflies. Sightings for the first range from 9 April to 10 May and for Brimstones from 22 April to 24 May.

The **Speckled Wood** usually has two broods and their reported time range in BS3 was from 9 April to 12 September.

The **Ringlet's** time range as an adult is also quite short. Our first reported sighting was at Alderman Moore's on 17 June and the last at WHCF on 2 July. Ringlets tend to gather in a fairly small space or colony rather than flying about all over the place like most other species. Keeping your breeding partners close to both you and the special grass you need for the caterpillars seems to be their strategy. A colony (perhaps two) was identified at WHCF. It (both) disappeared quite suddenly. Perhaps this was because the adults had finished egg laying and had died or wandered off. But, WHCF is closely cultivated, especially in their allotment area, so the colonies may have been



destroyed either before egg laying took place or the necessary grass (cock's foot and wood false broom) may have been cleared away. A colony or two may emerge again in 2018 or the colonies may have been wiped out for the foreseeable future.

Ringlet butterfly.

Moths

And you thought butterflies were hard.....

There are about 60 species of butterfly in the British Island and around 2500 moths. 'Moth' isn't a very helpful name. There are over 30 groups, world-wide, within the order Lepidoptera. One of these is butterflies. All the others are called moths despite being very different from each other. 'Moth' just means 'any Lepidoptera that isn't a butterfly'.

Many moths are usually only seen at night, some are very small (micro-moths) and many are fairly dull. But, day moths, like tigers and hawk moths, can be very colourful and easily spotted in the day time.

The reporting of moths in BS3 was much less thorough than butterflies. Reports contained entries such as 'unknown moth' and we suspect that most moths, when spotted, were just ignored.

However, six species from five different families were identified at one or other of our five core sites.

Cinnabar Moth* A day flying Tiger Moth (Arctiidae) with bright warning colours to tell birds that it is poisonous.

Mullien Moth* One of 400 Noctuidae species in the British Isles. This group is mainly night flying.

Scalloped Oak Moth One of a very large group of Geometridae. Their caterpillars are sometimes referred to as 'loopers' or 'inch worms' because of the way they move.

Mint Moth Small, day and night flying member of the Crambidae family. Guess one of its caterpillars' favourite food.

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

This day flying animal will have flown in from Europe. It was seen in June. Family Sphingidae.



Scarlet Tiger One of the most beautiful of the tiger moths seen at Alderman Moore's on 8 July.

*caterpillars also identified.

[Hummingbird Hawk Moth.](#)

We need a couple of people who will make a serious attempt to investigate the BS3 moths. For night flyers, we have access to a moth trap. Is anybody interested?

Other mini-beasts

We got a few reports of 'slug', 'ladybird', 'beetle' and other generalisations, but not much more. After all, there are lots of different slugs and between 20 and 30 different species of ladybird in the UK.

One more precise observation was of a **Devil's Coach-horse** found in Dame Emily Park. Great name! This insect is related, more or less, to rove beetles and glow worms in the family Staphylinidae.

Another interesting observation was made in July by children at the summer playscheme of Ashton Gate Primary School in their grounds. A nest of **Social Pear Sawfly** caterpillars was in the process of moving out of their young pear tree onto the ground. At some point an adult had laid lots of eggs which had hatched out and built themselves up on pear leaves, hence 'pear' (but they also like cherry and other fruit trees).



For protection the grubs were enclosed in a silk nest. Basically there was a clump of perhaps 30 or 40 caterpillars, hence 'social'. The animals were moving into the next phase of their life by burying themselves in the soil as pupae to emerge as adults the next spring.

Social Pear Sawfly Caterpillars.

What about 2018?

Avon Wildlife Trusts's My Wild City Project and our part of it (My Wild Bedminster) needs to be long-term to be worthwhile.

It has two general aims

1. Raise peoples' awareness of the wildlife around them in the city.
2. Do things that make the city more wildlife friendly in order to expand existing wildlife numbers and encourage new visitors.

Actions in 2016 and 2017 including our mini-beast surveys, but also reports on hedgehogs, slow worms and other creatures certainly help with progress on objective one. Also, for the last five or six years, the BS3 Wildlife Group has undertaken a survey of winter garden birds that visit during October to March. About 20 people join in this every year, so we have quite good records.

To address objective two, we need to be more strategic across the whole area, eg how do we develop the 'wildlife hubs' (e.g. parks and allotments) and how do we link these together with 'wildlife corridors? But, we also need to build on individual interventions in our own gardens.

Although it's useful to get random reports and photographs of creatures, the work undertaken in our five core sites in 2017 indicates how much more useful it is to have a year-long study of a particular and familiar place.

Hopefully, the observers in the three gardens and two larger spaces will wish to continue in 2018. They could stick to butterflies and/or take on additional groups. Perhaps they can find friends who will help out.

What we also need are more observers.

Will YOU volunteer to take on observation in your garden or a local park?

You could just look for butterflies or specialize in spiders. It's up to you.

If you think you might like to do this, please contact My Wild Bedminster (MyWildBedminster@virginmedia.com). We can offer help and advice, so you won't be alone.

Thanks

Many thanks to the local people who sent in records, photos and videos illustrating wild animals of all sorts in our part of town.

Especial thanks to the smaller number of the people who wandered around their gardens and allotments in the sunshine (it must have been hard!!) and provided the core material for this report.

We've also been helped with expert advice by Matt Collis of Avon Wildlife Trust and Alex Morss, literally our resident ecologist as she lives in Windmill Hill. Paul Breedon at the South Bristol Voice has also played a big part. Each month during 2017, the Voice has published information and pictures telling the My Wild Bedminster story.

Thanks to John Hargreaves for laying out this report.

Why don't you join in?

Ben Barker, December 2017.