

BUTTERFLY REPORT FOR 2003

Medina Valley Centre Nature Reserve

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The butterfly index is given in figure 1, together with the previous year's records for comparison. The transect was walked on 28 out of the 30 weeks of the recording season. Five of these 28 weeks had conditions that did not fully meet the butterfly monitoring scheme criteria for sunshine, and on two of these walks, no butterflies were seen.

The 2003 season gave a total species count of 22, which is one less than last year. The total number of individuals recorded during the walks was 854, one of the highest ever totals.

The first butterfly to be seen was a *peacock* emerging from hibernation on 16th March, followed shortly afterwards by *small tortoiseshells* which continued their recovery this season following the decline from 1999. By the end of May (the end of the meteorologists' spring season), 10 species had been seen, all in ones and twos with the exception of the *orange tip*, whose brood hatches during this time.

The main flying time was from mid June to mid September, with most of the 15 regularly occurring summer species being present in average or above average numbers. Only *speckled woods*, *large whites* and *small skippers* were down on their long-term averages (1988 – 2002). The particularly hot and sunny weather in August favoured large numbers of *common blues*, and there was an influx of butterflies from the near continent – *painted ladies*, *red admirals* and *small tortoiseshells*.

There was one species recorded as new to the reserve this year, a *chalkhill blue* on 20th August. The vegetation on the reserve is neutral unimproved grassland, mown grassland and hedgerows, definitely not the usual habitat of this species. The nearest colonies are at Carisbrooke (3.6 km to the south-west), Shide chalk pit (2.8 km to the south) and Downend quarry (5.3 km south-east). The extended period of hot and dry conditions had led to exceptionally large numbers on the downs, and with light southerly winds on a sunny day, the probable explanation for this sighting is that the butterfly was caught up in a column of rising air (a thermal) somewhere in the vicinity of Carisbrooke Castle, and carried northwards. A similar situation was reported on the Butterfly Conservation web site, with individual *chalkhill blues* in Essex and Suffolk seen over 30 km from their colonies.

A very late *clouded yellow* was recorded on the reserve on the 6th November, and it was the last butterfly seen on the reserve in 2003.

References

Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (1981) *Butterfly Monitoring Scheme*
The Butterfly Conservation website: www.butterfly-conservation.org

Figure 1. Butterfly species list and sightings at Medina Valley Centre (SZ503909) for 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Species	2001	2002	2003
Brown Argus	-	-	-
Brimstone	*	-	*
Chalkhill Blue	-	-	*
Clouded Yellow	-	*	1
Comma	13	23	25
Common Blue	17	36	91
Dingy Skipper	-	-	-
Gatekeeper	163	178	204
Green Hairstreak	-	*	-
Green-veined White	1	3	4
Grizzled Skipper	-	*	-
Holly Blue	3	15	9
Large Skipper	14	40	41
Large White	23	30	21
Marbled White	23	32	39
Meadow Brown	120	138	212
Orange Tip	6	5	6
Painted Lady	3	3	13
Peacock	5	4	10
Purple Hairstreak	2	-	-
Red Admiral	7	16	19
Ringlet	-	-	-
Silver-washed Fritillary	-	-	-
Small Copper	44	16	31
Small Heath	-	-	-
Small Skipper	5	16	7
Small Tortoiseshell	2	15	29
Small White	60	65	67
Speckled Wood	8	23	14
Wall Brown	9	1	9
White Admiral	-	-	-
White-letter Hairstreak	-	1	-
Number of species recorded	21	23	22

* indicates that the species was seen during the year, but not during a transect walk.

- indicates that the species has been recorded on the reserve, but not seen this year.