

Butterflies

of Norfolk



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Bibliography

For more information on Norfolk butterflies please see:

Millennium Atlas of Norfolk Butterflies

BR Watts and BJ McIlwrath (2002), *Butterfly Conservation Norfolk Branch*

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

Recording

Records of Norfolk butterflies should be sent to the county recorder.

e-mail: recorder@norfolkbutterflies.co.uk



Small Skipper

Thymelicus sylvestris

Widespread and common across Norfolk. Look for the orange undersides to the tips of the antennae to distinguish this species from Essex Skipper.

Flight period: mid-June to early September

Overwinters as a caterpillar.



Essex Skipper

Thymelicus lineola

Formerly rare in the county, this species expanded its range across the whole of Norfolk during the 1990's. Look for the glossy black tips to the underside of the antennae to distinguish this species from Small Skipper.

Flight period: late June to late August

Overwinters as an egg.



Large Skipper

Ochlodes faunus

Widespread and common across Norfolk, this species is on the wing a couple of weeks earlier than the preceding species. Look for the dusky shading at the outer margin of the wings and pale greenish undersides spotted with pale yellow.

Flight period: late May to August

Overwinters as a caterpillar.

Alan Dixon

Derek Longe

Hans Watson



Derek Longe

Grizzled Skipper

Pyrgus malvae

A colonial species, favouring scrubby sites with bare ground and sparse vegetation. In Norfolk, it is now restricted to just two sites in the west of the county.

Flight period: late April to late June.
Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Derek Longe

Dingy Skipper

Erynnis tages

This species is in serious decline, and in Norfolk is restricted to sandy sites in the west of the county.

Flight period: May/June with partial second brood in August

Overwinters as a caterpillar.

Swallowtail

Papilio machaon



Hans Watson

Flight period:
Mid-May to late July with partial second brood in August.

Overwinters as a chrysalis.

The Swallowtail is the largest British butterfly and can be seen over reed and sedge beds throughout the Norfolk Broads.

Wheatfen (*Ted Ellis Trust*), Strumpshaw (*RSPB*), Hickling (*NWT*) and Catfield Fen (*Butterfly Conservation*) are all good sites.



Hans Watson



Tony Howes

Brimstone

Gonepteryx rhamni

Widespread across Norfolk, this yellow butterfly is a classic harbinger of Spring, but at rest it always settles with closed wings. Look for the reddish brown spot in the centre of the lower wing to distinguish this species from the Whites.

Flight period: overwintering adults emerge in first warm days of spring and survive until June. Their progeny emerge in July/August and fly till late autumn before hibernating for the winter.



Hans Watson

Large White

Pieris brassicae

Commonly named the Cabbage White, look for the large black patches in the apex of the upper wing of both sexes. Males have clean white upper sides to the wings (apart from the apical patches), females have bold black spots. Both sexes show black spots on the underside.

Flight period: First brood emerges in mid-April, second brood in mid-June, numbers being swollen by immigrants from the continent. Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Small White

Pieris rapae

The patches at the apex of the wings are not so prominent as those of Large White; the wing spots are greyer, and are present in both males and females. The underside of the wing is uniformly white or pale yellow, lacking the grey/green veins of the Green-veined White.

Flight period: First brood emerges from mid-March, second brood from July. Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Green-veined White

Pieris napi

Unlike the previous species, the Green-veined White is not a pest of garden crops. The main caterpillar food plants are Garlic Mustard and Lady's Smock.

Flight period: First brood emerges in mid-April, second brood in July. Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Orange Tip

Anthocharis cardamines

Males are readily identified by the bold orange patches on the forewing, but these are absent in the females. Look instead for the mottled pattern of black and yellow scales on the underside of resting insects.

Flight period: April to June. Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Green Hairstreak

Callophrys rubi

Widespread across Norfolk, but with a preference for gorse covered heathland, where the territorial males will often perch on favoured bushes waiting for passing females. The upper wing is dark brown.

Flight period: mid-April to end of June.

Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Purple Hairstreak

Neozephyrus quercus

Widespread across Norfolk but rarely seen because they keep to the tree tops. The classic location for viewing this species is from the top of the gazebo at Sheringham Park (National Trust). It will sometimes bask with its wings open, revealing a beautiful purple sheen to the upper wing of the male.

Flight period: early July to early September.

Overwinters as an egg.



White-letter Hairstreak

Pieris rapae

Look for this elusive insect flying round the tops of hedgerow elms, where it feeds on the honeydew secretions of aphids, occasionally coming down to nectar on brambles.

Flight period: early July to mid August.

Overwinters as an egg.



Tony Howes

Small Copper

Lycaena phlaeas

Widespread and common across Norfolk, occupying a wide range of habitats, where it flies fast and low to the ground.

Flight period: 1st brood May/June, 2nd brood July to early September, 3rd brood late August to October.

Overwinters as a caterpillar.



Hans Watson

Brown Argus

Aricia agestis

Formerly restricted to the brecks and the coastal fringe of north-west Norfolk, this species has expanded its range since the mid-1980's to occupy the whole of the county. Easily confused with female blues, it is best identified by its small size, and crisply defined orange spots along the whole outer margins of both wings, and by the dark discal spots in the centre of the forewings.

Flight period: First brood May/June, second brood August/September. Overwinters as a caterpillar.



Derek Longe

Silver-studded Blue

Plebejus argus

Not many years ago, this heathland specialist was restricted to Horsford and Buxton Heaths, but thanks to successful translocation projects by the Norfolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation, it can now be enjoyed on Cawston and Kelling Heaths as well. Look for the thick black border edging the blue wing.

Flight period: late June to early August.
Overwinters as an egg.



Derek Longe

Common Blue

Polyommatus icarus

Widespread and common across Norfolk. Look for the thin black line between the blue and the white on the upperside of the male. Females are brown with blurred orange spots along the outer margin of the wing (*cf* Brown Argus).

Flight period: First brood May/June, second brood August/September.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.



David Richmond

Chalkhill Blue

Polyommatus coridon

In the 19th century this butterfly was reported as very local on chalk grassland in the vicinity of Snettisham, Hunstanton and Ringland but it became extinct in the 20th century. A small colony became established at Warham Camp following an introduction in 1970, but did not survive. The butterfly was seen again at Warham Camp in 2007, presumably after further releases. That colony still persists and is being monitored by Norfolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

The nearest colony outside Norfolk is at Devil's Ditch, Newmarket, alongside the July Racecourse.

Flight period: mid-July to mid-September. Overwinters as an egg.



Hans Watson

Holly Blue

Celastrina argiolus

Widespread and common across Norfolk. It looks silvery blue in flight as it explores woodland margins and hedgerows searching for egg-laying sites on holly and dogwood in the first brood, and ivy in the second brood

Flight period: First brood late March to late July, second brood mid-July to late September.

Overwinters as a chrysalis.



Purple Emperor

Apatura iris

This species has only recently returned to the county after a gap of almost 50 years. Its distribution was always sparse, even in the 19th century, and by the mid-20th century it was known only at Foxley Wood, from which it was lost in the early 1970s following extensive felling operations.

Then in 2015 there were reports of single specimens seen at Swannington Upgate and North Lopham, presumed to be wandering individuals from the expanding populations in Cambridge and Suffolk. The following year brought two sightings from Sheringham Park. There were further sightings at Sheringham Park in 2017 and 2018 and also at nearby Beeston Common bringing hopes that these might represent local breeding rather than wandering individuals.

In 2019, Purple Emperors were seen again in Foxley Wood. They have a fast, direct flight over the canopy and were also seen imbibing sap for prolonged periods, allowing fortunate observers to savour the return of this magnificent insect to the county.

Flight period: mid to late July.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.



David Richmond

Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

The British population of Red Admiral is dependent upon annual immigration to sustain its numbers. It is common across Norfolk in most years, occurring in a wide range of habitats.

Flight period: a migrant from the continent first appearing in May. Their progeny fly in August/September, with a second brood which can survive until November.

Only a very few survive winter hibernation as adults.

White Admiral

Limenitis camilla

White Admiral was first recorded in Norfolk in 1933, possibly due to deliberate introduction. It is now widely distributed across east Norfolk and the eastern fringes of the brecks. It is a woodland butterfly dependent upon honeysuckle for the caterpillar foodplant. NWT Foxley Wood is a good place to look if you have not seen this species before.

Flight period: late June to mid-August, exceptionally with a second brood later in the year.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.



David Richmond



David Richmond

Painted Lady

Vanessa cardui

This is another migrant species, but its numbers are very variable year on year. In good years it is widely distributed across the county, occurring in a wide range of habitats, including gardens.

Flight period: a migrant arriving in variable numbers from late May. It is continuously brooded through to the end of September, but does not overwinter in this country.

Small Tortoiseshell

Aglais urticae

A once common butterfly, its numbers are subject to periodic declines. It is widespread across the county, and local numbers can be supplemented by immigrants from Europe.

Flight period: overwintering adults emerge in first warm days of spring and survive until early May. Their progeny emerge in June/July giving rise to a second brood in August. These fly till late autumn before hibernating for the winter.



Alan Dixon



Hans Watson

Peacock

Inachis io

Widespread and common across Norfolk. Against the light, the butterfly looks almost black in flight, because of its very dark underside.

Flight period: overwintering adults emerge in first warm days of spring and survive until May. Their progeny emerge in July and fly till late autumn before hibernating for the winter.

Comma

Polygonia c-album

Widespread across Norfolk, the main habitat is woodland and woodland margins, though it can frequently be found in gardens where there are good sources of nectar.

Flight period: overwintering adults can be seen flying from March onwards. Their progeny begin to emerge from July, the early insects mating to produce a second brood which flies in autumn. These, together with later emerging first brood insects, then overwinter as hibernating adults.



Hans Watson



Silver-washed Fritillary

Argynnis paphia

This species has only recently recolonised the county, and is one to look out for in sunny woodland rides. It is the largest of the fritillary species to be found in Gt Britain.

It was widely distributed, but uncommon in Norfolk in the 19th century, a famous haunt being Foxley Wood. It survived in Norfolk until the later part of the 20th century, one of the last records being from Felthorpe in 1971.

There were spasmodic records in the early 21st century which were believed to be releases, but then in 2010 there was a major influx with 33 records from 16 tetrads which were believed to be continental migrants or dispersing individuals from Suffolk colonies.

It was reported from 22 sites in 2011, mainly in the north-east of the county but also with reports from south of the River Yare. In subsequent years Holt Country Park and Foxley Wood have proved to be reliable sites with good public access.

Flight period: mid-June to late August.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.

David Richmond



Derek Longe

Grayling

Hipparchia semele

In Norfolk, Grayling is an insect of sandy places. Formerly common in the brecks and on inland heaths, it is now more or less confined to coastal localities. Except during courtship, the butterfly always lands with wings closed, and can be extremely difficult to spot when at rest on dry stony ground.

Flight period: July to September.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.

Dark Green Fritillary

Argynnis aglaja

In Norfolk, this is predominantly a coastal species with strongholds at Holkham and Horsey dunes. There are occasional inland records, but there is always the risk of confusion with the fast flying, brightly coloured Comma butterfly.

Flight period: mid-June to the end of August.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.



David Richmond



David Richmond

Speckled Wood

Pararge aegeria

Widespread and common across the county, though this has not always been the case. In the mid to late 20th century it was very much a breckland species restricted to woodland margins. It now occurs in a wide range of shaded habitats.

Flight period: there are three overlapping broods so that adults can be seen on the wing from March to October.

Overwinters as a caterpillar or a chrysalis.

Wall Brown

Lasiommata megera

This species is in serious decline, and in Norfolk is now mostly seen in coastal areas; yet as recently as the last decade of the 20th century, it was widespread across the whole of the county. It frequently basks on bare ground with wings spread to soak up the sunshine.

Flight period: First brood May/June, second brood July to September.

Overwinters as a caterpillar.



Hans Watson



Alan Dixon

Meadow Brown

Maniola jurtina

Widespread and common across Norfolk. In former times it was found in traditional hay meadows, but is now restricted to a wide range of unmanaged grassland with plenty of nectar plants.

Flight period: June to September.

Overwinters as a caterpillar.

Ringlet

Aphantopus hyperantus

Widespread and common across Norfolk, in a wide range of partially shaded, damp grassland habitats, such as woodland rides and riverbanks. Look for the black velvety uppersides of newly emerged adults, contrasting with white wing margins.

Flight period: late June to mid-August.

Overwinters as a caterpillar.



Tony Howes



Hans Watson

Gatekeeper

Pyronia tithonus

Widespread and common across Norfolk. Often seen along hedgerows or nectaring on bramble, hence its alternative name of **Hedge Brown**.

Flight period: July/August.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.

Small Heath

Coenonympha pamphilus

Widespread across Norfolk, though declining. It is a small, orange-brown butterfly, which flies close to the ground and always lands with wings closed.

Flight period: there are two or three overlapping broods so that adults can be seen on the wing from May to September.
Overwinters as a caterpillar.



Hans Watson



David Richmond

Clouded Yellow

Colias croceus

In flight the Clouded Yellow shows a deep yellow upper wing with a thick black border, but at rest it always settles with its wings closed. It is an increasingly regular migrant which arrives in early summer, frequently breeding to produce a new generation later in the year. It has overwintered in southern Britain but there are no such records for Norfolk.

Camberwell Beauty

Nymphalis antiopa

An irregular wind-blown migrant from the continent which can occur in late summer following strong easterly winds. Exceptionally it can overwinter as a hibernating adult.

Non-resident Migrants



Bob Cobb



Checklist of Norfolk Butterflies

Print out this page to record your sightings of Norfolk Butterflies.

Species	Where	When
Small Skipper		
Large Skipper		
Essex Skipper		
Dingy Skipper		
Grizzled Skipper		
Swallowtail		
Brimstone		
Large White		
Small White		
Green-veined White		
Orange-tip		
Green Hairstreak		
Purple Hairstreak		
White-letter Hairstreak		
Small Copper		
Brown Argus		
Silver-studded Blue		
Common Blue		

Species	Where	When
Chalkhill Blue		
Holly Blue		
Purple Emperor		
White Admiral		
Red Admitral		
Painted Lady		
Small Tortoiseshell		
Peacock		
Comma		
Silver-washed Frit.		
Dark Green Fritillary		
Grayling		
Speckled Wood		
Wall Brown		
Meadow Brown		
Ringlet		
Gatekeeper		
Small Heath		