

Wadhurst Park (Batt's Wood and Rolf's Farm East) notes on the butterfly transects 2024.

The weather for January started damp and mild, followed by a cold snap, before returning to damp and mild weather at the month end. February was a very wet month, and it rained most days. It continued to rain persistently for most of the month in March although it was dryer than February. The month ended with cool and unsettled weather with a blustery wind. April became a little more settled but with some strong northerly winds and from mid-month onwards temperatures remained below average. The rather unsettled conditions continued, with a warmer spell developing in the second week of May, but this was rather short-lived, the wind and rain returned, and temperatures stubbornly remained well below the seasonal average.

The same story continued into the summer months with little respite from the cool and often damp and windy conditions. Very few warm sunny days were recorded until late July. These conditions had a significant negative effect on many butterfly species.

Batt's Wood Early – 24th May:

As in the last two years, 2022, low numbers of butterflies continued in Batt's Wood with a dismal total of 23, compiled of just four species. **Speckled wood** had picked up a little with 18 in 2024 compared to 12 in 2023.

The one surprise was a **grizzled skipper** in the wetland section 8. This is a first record for the species in that locality. Otherwise, there were 3 **green-veined whites** and a single **small heath**.

Late – 10th July:

Skipper species dropped from 118 in 2023 (52 in 2022) to 39 in 2024. Of those examined seven were **small skippers** and just one **Essex skipper**. There were 4 **speckled woods** and 4 **silver-washed fritillaries**. **White admiral** went unrecorded for a third season. **Meadow brown** was in relatively low numbers at 200, **ringlet** fared badly at 23, and there were only two **gatekeepers**. No whites were seen.

Rolf's Farm East Early – 20th May

As in 2023, most species were again in low numbers. Whites were particularly hard hit with a single **orange tip**, and 3 **green-veined whites** recorded along with a fourth unidentified white. There was a single **brimstone** record. The **speckled wood** population was similar to 2023 with 9 individuals compared to 8 in 2023.

Dingy skippers showed the highest count since the transect began with 12 insects across six transect sections. It is difficult to understand why this species fared better than most others. In contrast there was just one record of two **grizzled skippers** along section two.

Small heath numbers had picked up against 2023, with 44 individuals this year compared to just five in 2023. A **holly blue** was seen on transect 2, and a **common blue** on 7.

Late – 26th July

The late transect this year was walked by Bradley Draga-Williams, so some observer bias can be naturally expected.

Due to the persistent poor weather of 2024, the Rolf's Farm transect was walked a good two weeks later than in previous years. It was also unfortunate that the transect could not have been delayed a further few days as there was a significant increase in butterfly activity in the county following the hot dry period beginning on the 27th July. As the hay was due for cutting that weekend the survey had to be completed beforehand.

The significant effects on many butterfly populations caused by the unsuitable weather conditions in 2024 can be seen in the summary table below. These are the lowest results overall since recording along the current transect began in 2018. **Meadow brown** was reasonably successful, with slightly higher numbers than in 2022. **Gatekeeper** showed a significant increase in population, but this can partly be explained by the late survey date, gatekeeper being the last of the browns to emerge, and are often at the beginning of emergence when the surveys are undertaken. However, evidence from the wider countryside shows the species had a successful season.

Small and Essex skippers (mostly not differentiated in 2024) were in extremely low numbers compared to previous years, the exception being 2018. Unfortunately, **marbled white** had slipped back to the low numbers seen in 2018, and **Ringlet** had a dreadful season, although the transect might have been a little late for peak activity for these two species.

Of the other species recorded, whites were virtually non-existent with just two **small white** and one **green-veined white**. There were singles of **small copper**, **large skipper** and **peacock**, and no **silver-washed fritillary** or **white admiral**.

Rolf's Farm late transect selected butterfly totals

Species	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Skipper sp.	52	205	178	488	110	424	67
Meadow Brown	837	1309	577	1485	569	1273	638
Ringlet *	194	208	52	208	122	22	5
Gatekeeper	19	6	16	18	76	32	184
Marbled White (Brackets show number of transect sections with records)	5 (2)	18 (5)	22 (6)	62 (9)	14 (7)	45 (11)	5 (5)

*Ringlet cannot always be readily identified from meadow brown in hot weather when in rapid flight, especially older insects.

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