

## **Butterflies at Lower Winskill**

Looking after butterflies is now an important part of the management of the farm at Lower Winskill.

Butterflies have a remarkable life cycle. It begins as an egg laid by a female butterfly on a plant; after hatching there is a larval stage when the caterpillar eats leafy material for food, then a phase of dormancy as the caterpillar pupates until it emerges as a fully formed butterfly, and begins the final part of its life to find a mate, and so continue the cycle all over again during which time butterflies feed upon nectar from flowers.

In partnership with Natural England as part of the farm Higher Level Stewardship scheme we help butterflies at different stages in their life cycle. The Northern Brown Argus butterfly, for example, only lays eggs on common rock rose, and this is the sole food plant for this now rare and threatened butterfly. So we encourage the spread of common rock rose by restricting sheep and cattle grazing on the limestone pastures where the rock rose grows. This will provide the colony of Northern Brown Argus butterfly which live in the Scar Edge pastures at Lower Winskill with lots of rock rose plants for their caterpillars to feed upon.

By carefully managing where and at what times of the year sheep and cattle graze on different parts of the farm we make sure that butterflies have the plants they need to lay their eggs upon so their caterpillars have the right food to eat. More general caterpillar food plants such as nettle are left to grow especially where the clumps are in sunny locations. These provide food for the caterpillars of small tortoiseshell and peacock butterflies.

Careful management of sheep and cattle grazing is also the key to make sure that butterflies have a source of nectar from wild flowers throughout the summer. Some of the limestone pastures are not grazed until early autumn to make sure there are lots of late summer nectar plants for the butterflies such as common knapweed and devil's bit scabious.

Other insects such as bees benefit too from having wild flowers available throughout the summer. Wild flower seed also provides food for small mammals and birds such as meadow pipits.



Common rock rose flowering in the Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill. This is the sole food plant for the caterpillars of the rare Northern Brown Argus butterfly.



Female Northern Brown Argus butterflies.



Common Blue butterfly and Small Heath butterfly feeding on common knapweed at Lower Winskill.

Common knapweed is a valuable late summer nectar source for butterflies.

Limestone pastures at Lower Winskill are managed to provide a source of nectar plants for butterflies in late summer.



Peacock butterfly feeding on common knapweed at Lower Winskill.

The caterpillars of the peacock butterfly feed on nettles. By leaving clumps of nettles to grow in sunny locations at Lower Winskill we enable this spectacular butterfly to breed here.



Small tortoiseshell butterfly feeding on small scabious Lower Winskill.

This is another butterfly whose caterpillars feed upon nettles.

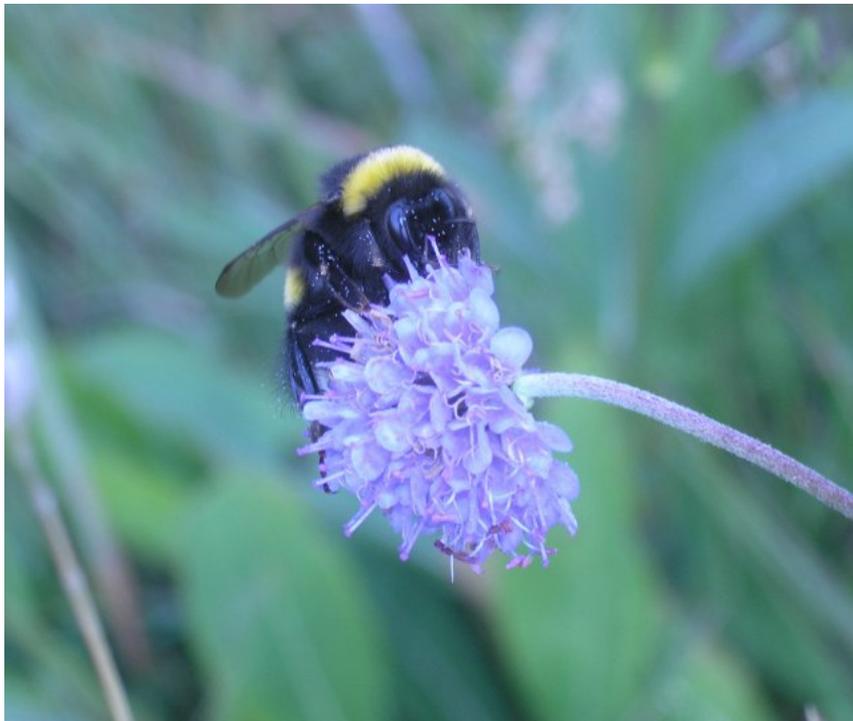


Comma butterfly feeding on devil's-bit scabious in the Crutching Close pasture at Lower Winskill.

The Comma butterfly is presently expanding its range northwards and this may be connected with climatic warming. This photograph taken at Lower Winskill in 2007 is the first record for the Comma butterfly on the farm.



A Small Copper butterfly (top) feeding on devil's-bit scabious at Lower Winskill.



Bumble bee collecting pollen from a small scabious at Lower Winskill



Peacock butterfly caterpillars feeding on a sunny clump of nettles at Lower Winskill.



Close up of Peacock butterfly caterpillars feeding.



Peacock butterfly feeding on devil's-bit scabious in the Crutching Close pasture at Lower Winskill.

Devil's-bit scabious is a valuable late summer nectar source for butterflies.



A Meadow Brown butterfly rests in an uncut margin at the edge of the Bottom Close meadow at Lower Winskill.

It is much less showy butterfly and can be difficult to see in the dappled shadows cast by long grass. By leaving uncut margins at the edges of meadows at hay time butterflies such as the Meadow Brown can still find food and cover. The caterpillars of the Meadow Brown butterfly feed on leafy grasses such as cocksfoot.

The numbers of Meadow Brown butterflies have increased significantly at lower Winskill in recent years.



A small copper butterfly feeds on a daisy in the Far End meadow at Lower Winskill.

The traditional hay meadows at Lower Winskill provide a home, food and shelter for small mammals, birds and insects after lambing time when the grass is allowed to grow for the hay crop.



A male Green-Veined White butterfly feeds on yarrow at Lower Winskill.

Yarrow is another useful late summer nectar source for butterflies.



A Clouded Yellow butterfly in the Hags pasture at Lower Winskill.

This is a migrant species from southern Europe which will also breed here during the summer. It is remarkable to think that this butterfly might have flown all the way from the shores of the Mediterranean to a hill farm in the Yorkshire Dales!



A Painted Lady butterfly warming itself in the sun on a limestone outcrop in the Crutching Close at Lower Winskill.

This is another migrant species which sometimes breeds here. It originates from North Africa. I wonder if this butterfly flew all the way from North Africa. No wonder it likes the sun!