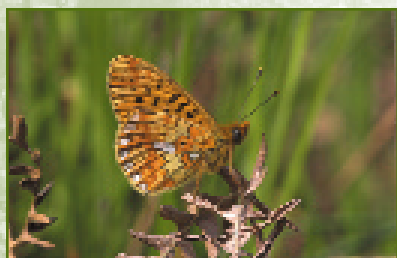


# Butterflies of the Blean



Main picture: The heath fritillary, one of the UK's rarest butterflies, thrives in the Blean. Inset: Heath fritillary on common cow-wheat, it's larval food plant. (Dan Binfield.)

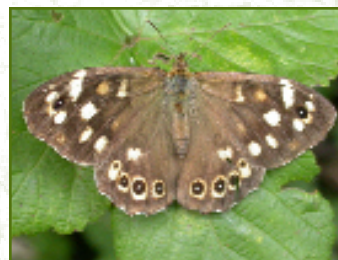


Pearl-bordered fritillary  
(Peter Eeles / Butterfly Conservation.)

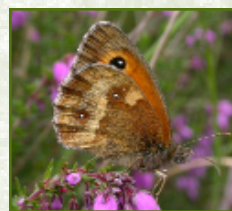
**If you go down to the woods today  
Be sure of a big surprise  
If you go down to the woods today  
Look out for the butterflies  
You may even see some rare ones!**

Among the species of butterfly you might spot in the woods, the heath fritillary is one of Britain's rarest and perhaps the Blean's greatest conservation success story. Close to extinction in the late 1970s, the heath fritillary colonies in the Blean are now some of the country's largest. This butterfly has been brought back from the brink by re-introducing regular coppicing (when trees are cut almost to ground level, allowing new multiple stems to grow from the stump) and creating and maintaining wide rides (tracks) and open spaces that are linked. This woodland management in the Blean creates the right conditions for cow-wheat, the caterpillars' food plant, and it helps the butterfly move through the woods. Because this species thrived where regular coppicing took place it became known in Victorian times as the 'Woodman's Follower'.

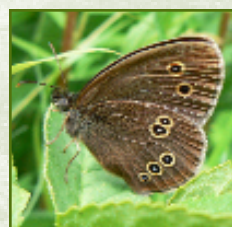
There are 59 resident species of butterfly in Britain. However, 75% of these are declining due to a range of issues of which habitat loss and fragmentation are the most important.



Speckled wood, camouflaged for woodland survival.



Gatekeeper, often seen on bramble and wood sage flowers.



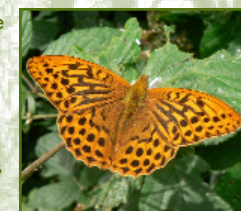
Ringlet, displaying its prominent false eyes.  
(Neil Hulme/Butterfly Conservation.)

In the last 30 years two species which were once quite common in the Blean, the wall brown and pearl-bordered fritillary, have disappeared. The small heath and brimstone have also seen their numbers decline quite drastically. In the last 100 years or so, the small pearl-bordered, high brown and dark green fritillaries and the Duke of Burgundy have also been lost. The cessation of coppicing in the last century has had a direct bearing on this, as all of these butterflies relied on woodland clearings to thrive.

Thankfully, as well as the heath fritillary, two other species of woodland butterfly that do seem to be making something of a comeback are the silver-washed fritillary, which completely disappeared for many years, and the white admiral. The Blean is also a stronghold for the purple hairstreak, which normally lives high up in oak trees and is easily over (or under!) -looked.

However, if you want to see butterflies, it's not just if you go down to the woods today, it is also when! Summertime is the best time to visit, so you might even want to take a picnic!

**Butterflies are very good indicators of the state of our environment, so if you have the good fortune to see one of the rarer species please do report the sighting to Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre: info@kmbrc.org.uk or 01795 532385.**



Silver-washed fritillary, Britain's largest fritillary.  
(Neil Hulme/Butterfly Conservation.)



White admiral, often seen around bramble.  
(John Bogle.)



Purple hairstreak.  
(Jim Asher/Butterfly Conservation.)

the **Blean** is just minutes away...

Covering over 11 square miles, the Blean is one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England, important nationally for both its wildlife and its history. The Blean has been a working woodland for over a thousand years, and continues to provide woodland products, including firewood and fencing materials, for local people. The splendour and tranquillity of this special landscape can be enjoyed on a network of paths and trails. This panel is part of a series of 18 located around the Blean. To see all 18 panels, visit [www.theblean.co.uk](http://www.theblean.co.uk). For information about walking in Kent visit [www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent](http://www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent).

Produced by



December 2011

Sponsored by

