

Butterfly spotting at King's Meadow

I first started noticing this year's butterflies back in April. I went for a cycle ride round [Attenborough Nature Reserve](#) and immediately knew that spring had finally arrived. The trees and bushes that line the paths around Attenborough had blossomed and the blossom had brought the butterflies with it. That day I noticed lots of small, red and black butterflies, so when I got home I searched online and decided that the butterflies I'd seen must have been Small Tortoiseshells.

I have always liked butterflies. They bring colour to the landscape and no summer would feel complete without the sight of pairs fluttering and dancing through the air. But I have only appreciated them in passing and couldn't name a single butterfly until that day at Attenborough. I decided this summer would be a good opportunity to develop my butterfly spotting skills, as well as being an opportunity to explore one of the Wildlife Trusts smaller and lesser known nature reserves, King's Meadow.

[King's Meadow](#) is just off Clifton Boulevard in Lenton and was once the site of the Wilford Power Station. When the power station was demolished much of the land was turned into a retail park, but a small patch of diverse plants and wildflowers has been preserved and is an ideal location for butterfly spotting.

When I first visited King's Meadow in early May it just looked like a small field with a few trees and patches of cowslip. But three months later, in early August, it was unrecognisable. No longer just a field, it was now an expanse of tall grass and flowers – including lots of bright yellow ragwort, common tansy and cow parsley – and the flowers were alive with buzzing bees and lots of different butterflies.

I walked through the meadow and with every step a butterfly would come bursting out of its hiding place and fly away to safety. I realised I wasn't going to be able to identify that many butterflies if I scared them all off. I tried staying in one spot and waiting for the butterflies to come to me, but that didn't work, so in the end I carried on walking, but stopped whenever a butterfly flew up out of my path. I then watched to see where it landed and approached it again, as slowly and quietly as possible. Often the butterfly would fly off again before I could open my guide book or I wouldn't be able to find it because it had camouflaged itself in the tall grass. Many butterflies, despite having brightly coloured uppersides, have much less colourful undersides, making it harder to spot them when they close their wings.

At one point I spotted a Meadow Brown on a grass stem. Meadow Browns are, as their name suggests, mostly brown, but they also have patches of orange with black “eyes” on their forewings (the top pair of wings, the bottom pair are called the hindwings). As I approached the Meadow Brown it closed its wings and then tucked its forewings under its hindwings, leaving only its brown hindwings showing. It was now almost impossible to see in the grass.

As well as seeing lots of Meadow Browns, I also saw Small Whites and a Small Copper. But my favourite find was a Common Blue that immediately caught my eye with its vivid purple-blue wings. I also found some orange and black striped caterpillars, which will eventually become striking red and black cinnabar moths.

King's Meadow is a lovely little patch of nature in the city and well worth a visit, but there are lots of other excellent places in Nottingham to butterfly spot. [Wilford Claypit](#) has areas of grassland and woodland, and [Glapton Wood](#) in Clifton has a wildflower meadow that is a perfect habitat for butterflies. However, you don't have to go far to see butterflies. Why not take a look in your own

back garden? Most importantly, keep your eyes peeled wherever there are flowers. I spotted lots of Peacock butterflies on a patch of buddleia growing outside the city centre, a Speckled Wood whilst walking through the University of Nottingham campus, and lots of Orange-tips on a farmer's field just outside Beeston. Once you start butterfly spotting you'll start to notice them everywhere!

Here are some top tips that I learnt along the way:

- Take a butterfly guide with you on your spotting trips. I used Richard Lewington's *Pocket Guide to the Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, which is illustrated with beautiful paintings of the male and female butterflies, including their upperside and underside, and the butterflies are grouped according to colour, which makes it very easy for a beginner to use. Each butterfly is also accompanied by a map of Great Britain and Ireland, showing where the butterflies are typically found. This was extremely helpful when deciding between very similar looking butterflies, as there are often only slight differences between the rarer and more common members of a butterfly family.
- If you have a guidebook, start carrying it everywhere with you. You never know when you might see a butterfly and you can't always be sure you'll remember it by time you get home.
- Don't worry if the sun isn't shining. Although warmer weather – above 18°C is best – I managed to see lots of butterflies on an overcast day.
- Since butterflies don't like people getting too close, a pair of binoculars could come in handy, but they are not essential and I managed without.
- Be patient and don't worry if you don't spot anything on your first try.
- Don't worry if you can't identify a butterfly. Sometimes the guidebook can get between you and your enjoyment of a butterfly, so even if you can't name a butterfly, just enjoy it for its beauty!

Finally, don't forget to let Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust know which species you've found. Information about butterflies species and populations is collected every year and helps the Trust ensure their work enables butterflies to flourish. If you would like to get involved in the annual butterfly monitoring survey, [the Trust is looking for volunteers](#).