

Great places to see

Woodland Butterflies

A guide to some of the UK's great woodland butterfly reserves

40 great places to see...

Woodland butterflies

The UK supports 56 resident species of butterfly, many of which thrive in woodland habitats. Sunny glades, rides and woodland edges are some of the best places to look for a variety of species, and locating the larval foodplant of specialist butterflies can make searching that bit easier.

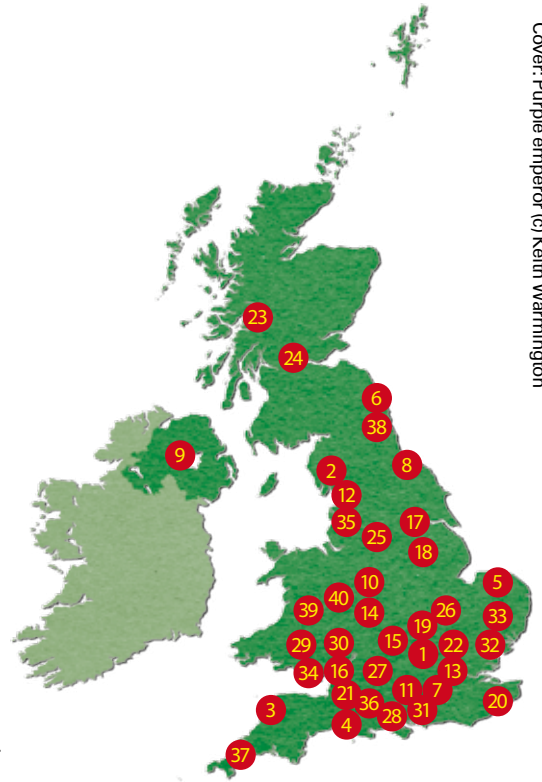
Look to the skies for canopy-dwelling butterflies like purple emperor and purple hairstreak, both of which rarely come to nectar. Scan the tops of oak woodlands with binoculars for the best chance to spot them in flight.

Most other hairstreaks favour scrubby areas and shrub plants on which to lay their eggs. Seek out blackthorn for black and brown hairstreaks and gorse or bilberry for green. White-letter will come to flowering bramble but spends much of its time high among elm trees.

Of the fritillary species, several have particular plant requirements for their caterpillars. Heath fritillary prefers cow-wheat; itself an uncommon plant. Violets attract pearl-bordered, silver-washed, dark green and high brown, and marsh fritillary requires devil's-bit scabious.

Bramble patches are also good watchpoints for passing white admiral which are partial to the blossoms, and any clear areas are good places to look for territorial battles between speckled wood rivals.

Here we recommend just a handful of good Wildlife Trust nature reserves to visit for a glimpse of some of the UK's forest-dwelling butterflies. For more information about the reserves listed here, or to find alternatives near you, visit wildlifetrusts.org.uk/yourlocaltrust.



Purple emperor (c) Keith Warrington



Silver-washed fritillary (c) Don Sutherland

1 Homefield Wood Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust

Explore the main ride leading away from the parking area and the chalk grassland meadow in the nature reserve. The woodland butterflies descend from the trees to nectar on the flowers in the woodland rides. An excellent site for white-letter hairstreak and the unusual 'valezina' form of silver-washed fritillary. Also dingy and grizzled skipper and purple hairstreak.

Where is it? 2.5 miles W of Marlow. Grid ref: SU 814 867

2 Howe Ridding Wood Cumbria Wildlife Trust

This reserve is home to flower-rich rides and one of the largest coppice programmes in the north west. Perched on the side of Whitbarrow Scar, this reserve is home to many rare and threatened butterflies including pearl-bordered, high brown, silver-washed, small pearl-bordered and dark green fritillaries can be found here.

Where is it? S Cumbria, off A590 from the M6. Grid ref: SD 435 882



Pearl-bordered fritillary (c) Don Sutherland



Wood white (c) Nigel Brooks

3 Marsland Valley Devon Wildlife Trust

This huge and exceptional coastal woodland reserve was celebrated in NW Summer 08. Its sunny slopes are butterfly havens; there have been 34 recorded species, including rare skippers, fritillaries, hairstreaks and Devon's largest (and growing) pearl-bordered fritillary population.

Where is it? On the South West Coast Path, or a 15 minute walk from Gooseham village bus stop off the A39. Grid ref: SS 217 169

4 Powerstock Common Dorset Wildlife Trust

Woodland, open grass slopes, hedgebanks and pond habitats. Visit for a chance to see some of 26 regular species including marsh, silver-washed and pearl-bordered fritillary; wood and marbled white; purple and green hairstreak, and dingy and grizzled skipper.

Where is it? 3 miles W of Maiden Newton. Entrance by old bridge on minor road parallel to and a mile W of A356. Grid ref: SY 547 974

Foxley Wood (c) Norfolk WT



5 Foxley Wood
Norfolk Wildlife Trust

Norfolk's largest remaining ancient woodland, with wide rides far into the wood. Specialities include white admiral, speckled wood, comma, purple hairstreak, meadow brown and ringlet. The wood is exceptionally rich in plants too. Part of the North Norfolk Woods Living Landscape.

Where is it? 15 miles NW of Norwich, signed R off A1067 Fakenham road. Entrance is a mile after Foxley village. Grid ref: TG 049 229

Marbled white (c) Wildstock



7 Norbury Park
Surrey Wildlife Trust

Woodland rides, glades, hedgerows and grassland. Among the trees live speckled wood, dark green and silver-washed fritillaries, white admiral and purple emperor. Other species include large, small and silver-spotted skipper, marbled white, small copper, and brown and green hairstreaks.

Where is it? 500 yards W of Mickleham on A24. 30 minute walk through woods and park from Fetcham bus stop. Grid ref: TQ 158 538

Glenarm (c) Ulster WT



9 Glenarm
Ulster Wildlife Trust

The biggest semi-natural wood in Antrim, with majestic oaks and many wildflowers. Besides meadow brown and ringlet there are specialities such as silver-washed fritillary and Real's wood white. Open to Ulster Wildlife Trust members only.

Where is it? In the Glenarm estate, off the B97 Ballymena Road. Grid ref: D 304 111

Speckled wood (c) Amy Lewis



6 Juliet's Wood
Northumberland Wildlife Trust

This site is actually two sections of ancient semi-natural woodland sandwiched by former farmland and replanted with trees in 1991 and 2009. A good reserve for speckled wood, ringlet, common blue, peacock, green-veined white and small skipper butterflies. The chimney sweeper moth is also common.

Where is it? S of Hexham, just N of Slaley village. Grid ref: NY 977 587

White-letter hairstreak (c) D.O'Brien



8 Hardwick Dene
Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

At least 22 species have been recorded here. Visit between late June and early August to see the rare white-letter hairstreak (bring binoculars). Also comma, ringlet, meadow brown, holly blue, red admiral, small skipper, speckled wood, small and green-veined white and small copper.

Where is it? Entrance via Cornforth Close in Stockton on Tees. Grid ref: NZ 420 205

Burnt Wood (c) C Hayes



10 Burnt Wood
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Ancient oak woodland coppiced over centuries. The butterfly glade has brimstone, orange tip, common blue, speckled wood, peacock, small tortoiseshell and red admiral. Up in the trees is the elusive and beautiful purple hairstreak – you'll need to bring your binoculars.

Where is it? Walk E on A53 from centre of Loggerheads. L into Kestrel Drive, then take Pheasant Walk. Grid ref: SJ 736 355

Pamber Forest (c) Albert Roberts



11 Pamber Forest
Hants & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

An ancient woodland with heath and wood pasture, rich in butterflies and birds. Butterflies make the most of the wide, sunlit rides and many flowering plants. Purple emperors live high up in the tree canopy, while white admirals, silver-washed fritillary and purple hairstreak may be seen along the rides.

Where is it? N of Basingstoke, Hampshire. Grid ref: SU 616 608

Purple hairstreak (c) Philip Precey



13 Sydenham Hill Wood
London Wildlife Trust

A unique mix of old woodland, Victorian garden survivors and recent woodland. The wood is home to over 200 species of trees and flowering plants including wild garlic, early dog violet and bugle. Visit for speckled wood, purple hairstreak and the chance to see white-letter hairstreaks.

Where is it? Greater London. Entrance on Crescent Wood Road (opposite Countisbury House towerblock). Grid ref: TQ 344 725

Black hairstreak (c) Philip Precey



15 Whitecross Green Wood
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust

The wide woodland rides are full of hay meadow flowers in May and June and act as an important nectar source for butterflies. You'll find brown and black hairstreaks in and around the blackthorn bushes. Also look for purple hairstreak, silver-washed fritillary and white admiral. Due to the sensitivity of the site, visitors are asked to keep to the rides and not stray into the trees.

Where is it? 5 miles S of Bicester. Grid ref: SP 602 146

Small pearl-bordered fritillary (c) Tom Marshall



12 Warton Crag
Lancashire Wildlife Trust

An excellent site for visiting lepidopterists. The warm, sunny corners attract woodland edge butterflies. Pearl-bordered fritillary appears in May, small pearl-bordered in June and, in July, the nationally threatened high brown fritillary. The caterpillars of these butterflies feed on violets, of which four species are found on the reserve. Also green hairstreak and dingy skipper.

Where is it? 1 miles N of Carnforth. Grid ref: SD 493 728

Brown hairstreak (c) Pete Smith



14 Grafton Wood
Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

27 species have been recorded here including silver-washed fritillaries, white admirals and pearl-bordered fritillaries, recently re-introduced after a 30 year absence. The wood is also the centre of the only Midlands colony of the nationally rare brown hairstreak.

Where is it? From the village of Grafton Flyford the wood is about 1km along a footpath through fields. Grid ref: SO 971 558

Weston Big Wood (c) Avon WT



16 Weston Big Wood
Avon Wildlife Trust

This reserve is one of the most wildlife-rich woodlands in the Avon area. Brimstone, common blue, gatekeeper, speckled wood and red admiral butterflies may be seen throughout the year, and you may also see silver-washed fritillary butterfly as it searches for its food plant, violets, growing in the freshly cut coppice.

Where is it? Off Valley Road, near Portishead. Grid ref: ST 452 750

Brockdale (c) Kirsten Smith



17 Brockdale
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

A beautiful dale on the River Went, with ash woodland and wildflower-rich grassland, this reserve is home to 25 species of butterfly. The priority species white-letter hairstreak has been found here, alongside other beauties including painted lady, holly blue and dark green fritillary.

Where is it? 1 mile W of the village of Little Smeaton by public footpath, or car park down unmarked lane off New Road. Grid ref: SE 513 174

White admiral (c) Don Sutherland



18 Eaton and Gamston Woods
Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

At least 24 species of butterfly have been recorded here including the impressive white admiral. This butterfly is at the northern edge of its range here and is found only at this site in Nottinghamshire. The woods are also home to many woodland bird species. The best time to visit is from mid-April to the end of June.

Where is it? Between Eaton and Upton. Grid ref: SK 727 771

Kings Wood (c) Richard Revels



19 Kings Wood and Rammamere Heath
Beds, Cambs & Northants Wildlife Trust

This magnificent wood is part of the largest area of deciduous woodland in Bedfordshire and its history can be traced back before the 15th century. The adjoining large heath is part of the same Site of Special Scientific Interest and provides a contrast to shaded beauty of the woodland. Look for white admirals feeding on bramble flowers as well as purple hairstreak butterflies.

Where is it? 5 miles from Leighton Buzzard. Grid ref: SP 920 294

Dingy skipper (c) Philip Precey



20 Orlestone Forest
Kent Wildlife Trust

Just over 10 hectares of ancient woodland within a much larger area of woodland, which is of particular note for moths and butterflies. Among the species of moth present are lesser belle, sub-angled wave and scarce merveille du jour. The woodland rides attract many butterflies, including grizzled and dingy skippers, ringlet, and red and white admirals.

Where is it? 2 miles N of Hamstreet. Grid ref: TQ 981 355

Brimstone (c) Zsuzsanna Bird



21 King's Castle Wood
Somerset Wildlife Trust

This ancient iron age hill fort is a peaceful haven sheltering a wide variety of uncommon flora including wood goldilocks, herb paris, meadow saffron, toothwort and common gromwell. Look out for early summer woodland butterflies like orange-tip, brimstone and speckled wood attracted by the rich variety of woodland flowers.

Where is it? 1 mile SE of Wells city centre. Grid ref: ST 565 456

White admiral (c) Stephen Wooderson



22 Balls Wood
Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

A large and varied woodland with a huge diversity of wildlife. Look out for butterflies in the woodland glades including red admirals, orange tips, gatekeepers, speckled woods, ringlets, small skippers, large skippers, commas and white admirals.

Where is it? 1/2 mile from Hertford Heath village along Roundings Road. Grid ref: TL 348 106.

Marsh fritillary (c) Notts WT



23 Shian Wood
Scottish Wildlife Trust

A fine example of the ancient semi-natural woodlands typical of the Atlantic coast of Scotland. The wood contains many glades and damp flushes where purple moor-grass and devil's bit-scabious flowers are abundant. The flowers provide food for marsh fritillaries, scotch argus and speckled wood butterflies.

Where is it? Lies on the south shore of Loch Creran. Grid ref: NM 907 418

Small pearl-bordered fritillary (c) Bob Coyle

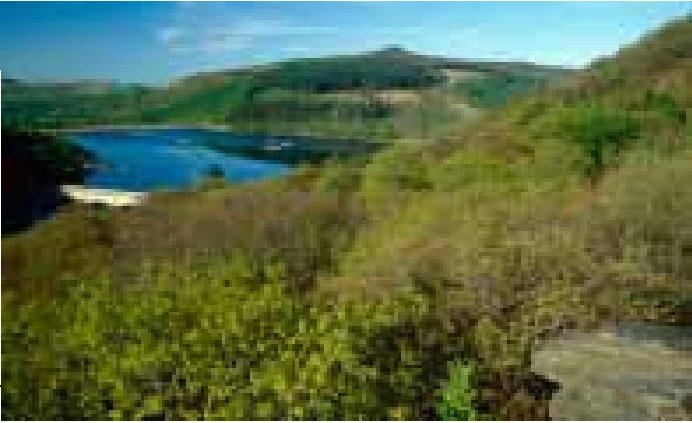


24 Forest Wood
Scottish Wildlife Trust

Plantation woodland with smaller areas of lowland acid peat bog, heath and grassland. Over 120 species of flowering plants have been recorded on site, together with many species of fungi, mosses and liverworts. In the woodland glades orange-tip, green hairstreak and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies can be found.

Where is it? 1 mile SE of Cumbernauld. Grid ref: NS 785 745

Ladybower Wood (c) Mark Hamblin



25 Ladybower Wood
Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

One of few remaining examples of upland oakwood in the Peak District. Woodland such as this was once a familiar sight, covering most of the gritstone edges and moorlands of North Derbyshire. The elusive purple hairstreak butterfly may be seen around the upper branches of the oak trees in mid-summer.

Where is it? Off the A57 between Sheffield and Glossop. Grid ref: SK 205 867

Brampton Wood (c) Clive Stephens



26 Brampton Wood
Beds, Cambs & Northants Wildlife Trust

The wood is the second largest woodland in Cambridgeshire and is at least 900 years old. At least 30 species of butterfly have been recorded recently including white-letter hairstreak, brown argus and white admiral. The blackthorn thickets provide a home for many black hairstreak butterflies, one of the UK's rarest butterflies.

Where is it? 4 miles from Huntingdon. Grid ref: TL 184 698

Comma (c) Amy Lewis



27 Siccaridge Wood
Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

An ancient coppiced wood with fantastic displays of bluebells, wild garlic and wood anemones in spring. The woodland provides a perfect habitat for the rare dormouse. The open rides provide excellent habitat for a number of species of butterfly such as comma, pearl-bordered fritillary and silver-washed fritillary.

Where is it? Between Sapperton and Oakridge. Grid ref: SO 945 035

Roydon Woods (c) Albert Roberts



28 Roydon Woods
Hants & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

A large patchwork of ancient woodland, pastures, ponds, heaths and the Lymington River, this is a fantastic place to explore and is home to an enormous range of plants and animals. Amongst the multitude of butterflies found here are scarce species such as white admiral and pearl-bordered fritillary.

Where is it? New Forest, Hampshire. Grid ref: SU 315 009

Marsh fritillary (c) Philip Precey



29 Ystradfawr
Brecknock Wildlife Trust

Woodland and meadows, all draped over an old mining landscape to create a fascinating place to explore and great for wildlife. Look out for the rare marsh fritillary along with silver-washed fritillary, blues, skippers, orange tip, ringlet and speckled wood.

Where is it? Upper Swansea Valley. Entrance by Hendreladus (SA9 1SE) past youth and community centre. Grid ref: SN 796 108

Grizzled skipper (c) Andrew Kerr



30 Miners Rest
Herefordshire Nature Trust

Much of the reserve consists of broad-leaved woodland, apart from a few open rides and clearings. The rides, clearings, and latterly, the newly coppiced areas are of great entomological interest, with stable populations of a variety of butterflies including grizzled skipper and the nationally scarce pearl-bordered fritillary, as well as holly blue and silver-washed fritillary.

Where is it? Great Doward in the S of the county. Grid ref: SO 553 158

Speckled wood (c) Neil Aldridge



31 Rodborough Common
Surrey Wildlife Trust

Rodborough Common is a Site Of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and is made up of rare lowland heath and acid grassland, bordered by secondary woodland of silver birch, oak, hawthorn and hazel. Notable butterfly species include silver-washed fritillary, purple hairstreak, meadow brown, gatekeeper, speckled wood and silver-studded blue.

Where is it? Off the A3100 N of Milford. Grid ref: SU 934 415

Cow-wheat (c) Philip Precey



32 Thrift Wood
Essex Wildlife Trust

A woodland of hornbeam coppice with many oak standards, some birch, ash and coppiced sweet chestnut. It is one of the principal sites in Essex for common cow-wheat, food plant of the heath fritillary butterfly. The butterfly became extinct in Essex but was re-established in the reserve in 1984.

Where is it? On the B1418 road 400m south of the Brewer's Arms pub in Bicknacre. Grid ref: TL 790 017

Bradfield Woods (c) Suffolk WT



33 Bradfield Woods
Suffolk Wildlife Trust

A working wood that is unique as it has been under continuous traditional coppice management since 1252. Of special note is the white admiral butterfly which can be seen sipping nectar from the flowers on bramble or look up into the top of an oak tree to catch a glimpse of a purple emperor.

Where is it? Felsham Road, Bradfield St George. Grid ref: TL 935 580

Purple hairstreak (c) Philip Precey



34 Lavernock
The Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales

Lavernock is made up of a number of habitats, including grassland and scrub. The Oak Copse north of Fort Road is home to the elusive purple hairstreak butterfly, and speckled wood can also be found. More than 25 butterfly species have been recorded on the reserve in total.

Where is it? 5 miles S of Cardiff. Grid ref: ST 181 681

Boilton Wood (c) Lancashire WT



35 Boilton, Nab, Redscar and Tunbrook Woods
Lancashire Wildlife Trust

Amongst the invertebrates recorded here is the rare white-letter hairstreak, a butterfly that prefers the margins of deciduous woods and is on the wing in July and August. It's closely associated with elm, particularly wych elm, as its caterpillars feed on the leaves and flowers. An impressive list of moths is also associated with the reserve.

Where is it? On the River Ribble E of Preston. Grid ref: SD 579 314

Duke of Burgundy (c) Zsuzsanna Bird



36 Blackmoor Copse
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Of the 55 species found throughout Britain, over 30 have been seen here regularly in the last 10 years and the reserve is one of a very few woods in the UK where you can see five different species of fritillary butterfly. In particular it supports purple emperor, pearl-bordered, small pearl-bordered and silver-washed fritillary and Duke of Burgundy butterflies.

Where is it? 6 miles E of Salisbury. Grid ref: SU 233 288

Brimstone (c) Janet Packham



37 Pendarves Wood
Cornwall Wildlife Trust

This reserve is mixed broad-leaved woodland with streams and a lake, with some marsh surrounding the lake. Butterflies such as brimstone occur here. The male's wings are a strong sulphur yellow, their hindwings have an orange spot and the underwing is greenish-veined, while the female is similarly marked, but in more delicate shades.

Where is it? 2 miles S of Camborne. Grid ref: SW 640 376

Milkwellburn Wood (c) Durham WT



38 Milkwellburn Wood
Durham Wildlife Trust

A large mixed woodland in the Derwent valley with mixed conifer and broad-leaved plantation and remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland. Rare butterflies such as white-letter hairstreak have been recorded along some of the woodland rides and more recently the purple hairstreak has been seen along woodland edges.

Where is it? 0.5 miles E of Chopwell. Grid ref: NZ 113 570

Green hairstreak (c) Sue Crookes



39 Gilfach Farm
Radnorshire Wildlife Trust

A mosaic of habitat including traditional hay meadows, rocky outcrops, rhes pasture, wet flushes, hill-side scrub and oak woodland, which is of course hugely rich in flora and fauna. Look out for purple and green hairstreak as well as dark green and small pearl-bordered fritillary. In 2009, the rare Welsh clearwing moth was found on the reserve, the first record for Radnorshire.

Where is it? 3 miles north of Rhayader. Grid ref: SN 964 717

Pearl-bordered fritillary (c) Wildstock



40 Jones' Rough
Shropshire Wildlife Trust

This small, steep limestone woodland, set among many tiny fields and hedgerows, has an abundance of spring flowers, notably violets. This attracts the pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly, whose caterpillars live on an exclusive diet of violet leaves. Jones' Rough is one of only a handful of places in Shropshire for this butterfly.

Where is it? Above the village of Nantmawr. Grid ref: SJ 248 248