



Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

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Butterfly Conservation

Help for Hairstreaks

Black Hairstreak



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There are four little known Hairstreak butterflies in Cambridgeshire and Essex that need your help; Green Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak, Black Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak

In Cambridgeshire and Essex there are four butterflies known as hairstreaks

They are part of the Lycaenidae family and have characteristics that include erratic spiralling flight, habit of resting with wings closed and living in self-contained colonies. One further feature in the eastern region is that they are relatively under-recorded and Butterfly Conservation needs more people to get involved in survey and monitoring.



Abbots Ripton



Hairstreak Habitat



Green Hairstreak



It is possible to search for signs of this group of butterflies throughout the year. Even in February very experienced surveyors can search for butterfly eggs such as White-letter Hairstreak on Elm and Purple Hairstreak on Oak.

However it is definitely easiest to search for the adults:

- Green Hairstreak** early April - early June
- White-letter Hairstreak** late June - early August
- Purple Hairstreak** July - August
- Black Hairstreak** mid June - early July

There is a fifth hairstreak called Brown Hairstreak which is not featured in this leaflet as it has not been recorded in Cambridgeshire and Essex recently and is almost certainly extinct.

What can you do to help us?

Survey and monitoring

Help us understand the true distribution of these butterflies in Cambridgeshire and Essex. Butterfly Conservation compiles monitoring data recorded by people all over Britain so that we can tell which butterflies are becoming rare and require our help.

An accurate Ordnance Survey map grid reference or detailed description will help us to find your record. A grid reference is a sequence of two letters and six numbers that can be used to pinpoint any location in the UK.

Join a training workshop or guided walk to learn more about butterflies and their habitat needs.

Habitat conservation

Practical conservation work is needed to help protect remaining colonies of these butterflies and the local branch of Butterfly Conservation does organise volunteer work parties.

Join Butterfly Conservation

If you are not already a member of Butterfly Conservation, why not join us? Join Butterfly Conservation and you'll receive our wonderful 'Butterfly' magazine 3 times a year, which is packed full of fascinating articles and stunning photographs.

You will automatically become a member of your local branch who organise a range of field trips, talks and events.

Black Hairstreak

The Black Hairstreak is a rare and elusive butterfly found in only a small area of central England and only recorded at a small number of sites in Cambridgeshire in recent years where it is a Local Biodiversity Action Plan species. It is not found in Essex. It is one of our most secretive butterflies, only found in dense mature thickets of Blackthorn growing in sunny, sheltered situations, usually along wood edges or glades.

It is rarely seen at ground level as the adults spend nearly all their time in the canopy. In sunny weather they make short looping flights and may come to nectar on privet blossom.

The best time to look for this butterfly is between mid June and mid July and it is probably best for beginners to start by joining a guided walk or event organised by Butterfly Conservation.

Woodland management work for this butterfly requires great care as colonies are small and need Blackthorn in a very specific situation. Further details about this butterfly can be found in the species action plan at www.butterfly-conservation.org.uk.

Although Purple and White-letter Hairstreak if not seen close-to look very similar to Black Hairstreak you are very unlikely to find a Black Hairstreak away from Blackthorn and its known sites.

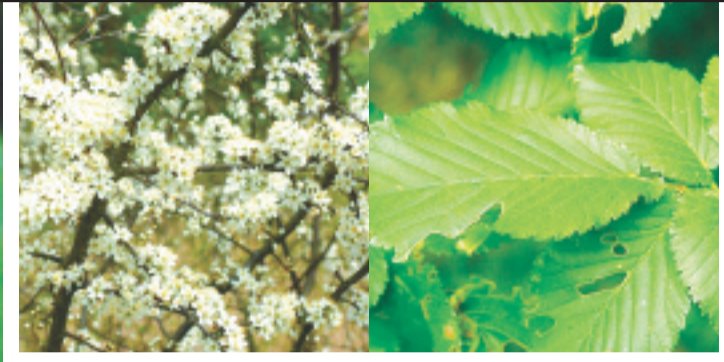
White-letter Hairstreak

The White-letter Hairstreak occurs throughout Cambridgeshire and Essex, but numbers have declined since the 1970s when its caterpillar foodplant, elm trees were reduced by Dutch Elm Disease. There has been a national decline in distribution of 53% since 1970. The caterpillars feed on various elm species, both mature trees and sucker growth, but appear to do especially well on Wych Elm. Elm trees are easily identified by their asymmetrical leaf shape.

This butterfly spends most of its time flying around the top of elm trees (sometimes Lime or Sycamore if they are next to Elm) from late June to late July, where the adult butterfly feeds on aphid honeydew, so binoculars are helpful. It does occasionally come down to ground level and can be seen nectaring at Ragwort, Bramble or Thistle.

The eggs are laid on elm twigs and can be found when the leaves fall off in the autumn until the end of March when the caterpillars emerge to feed on the flowers and leaves.

It is important to protect existing elm trees, even if they show signs of disease as new suckers will grow again and provide habitat in the future. Elm trees including disease resistant varieties, should also be included where possible in new tree planting schemes in appropriate areas.



Purple Hairstreak

The Purple Hairstreak is probably the commonest hairstreak in East Anglia but is often overlooked because the adult spends so much of its time in the woodland canopy at the top of oak trees. A single isolated tree can support a colony but most will be found along woodland edges or hedgerows.

The adult butterfly can be seen from July to August by looking along the south facing edges of oak trees with binoculars. Purple flashes on the upperside may be seen in flight but the butterfly looks mainly silvery when on the wing.

The undersides feature the characteristic white 'hairstreak' line and small eye marking near the 'tail'.

This butterfly spends the winter as a egg usually beneath the buds on oak twigs.

This butterfly does occur across Cambridgeshire and Essex wherever oaks are found, even in towns and villages, but more records are needed to confirm this.

Green Hairstreak

The Green Hairstreak is the only green butterfly in the UK and the smallest 'hairstreak' with a wing span of 20-30mm. It is the first of the hairstreaks to fly and can be seen from late April until early June. The males are highly territorial and will often perch 2-3 metres above ground on a suitable bush and spiral upwards with a rival male.

The Green Hairstreak can be found in a variety of different habitats and the caterpillars use several different foodplants, but it is scarce across Cambridgeshire and Essex.

In Cambridgeshire it can be found on Devil's Dyke near Newmarket around Hawthorns on south facing banks. The caterpillars probably feed on Rockrose or Bird's foot Trefoil

The foodplants is likely to be Buckthorn or Bramble at Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire. In Essex the butterfly has been found around Colchester, in the Danbury and Bicknacre area and around old gravel pits in the Thames Valley where the caterpillars may feed on Gorse, Dogwood or Buckthorn.

