

Wildlife in Our Meadows



What is a meadow habitat

Flower-rich meadows support lots of different species and are traditionally cut for hay and grazed by sheep or cows. In meadows, the annual removal of vegetation keeps bulky species in check and allows more delicate species to flourish.

Away from farms, anywhere that flowers are allowed to grow, flower and set seed in spring and summer could now be considered meadow-like grassland including road verges, railway embankments, churchyards, sea cliffs and woodland clearings.

Some meadows maintain their grassland characteristics without intervention thanks to environmental conditions such as climate and soil but most require cutting or grazing in order to prevent them being taken over by woody plants.

Chalk grassland meadows rely on low fertility, quick draining chalky soil that warms up quickly in the sun. This allows them to support an abundance of species; just one square metre can be home to 40 different species!

Meadow checklist

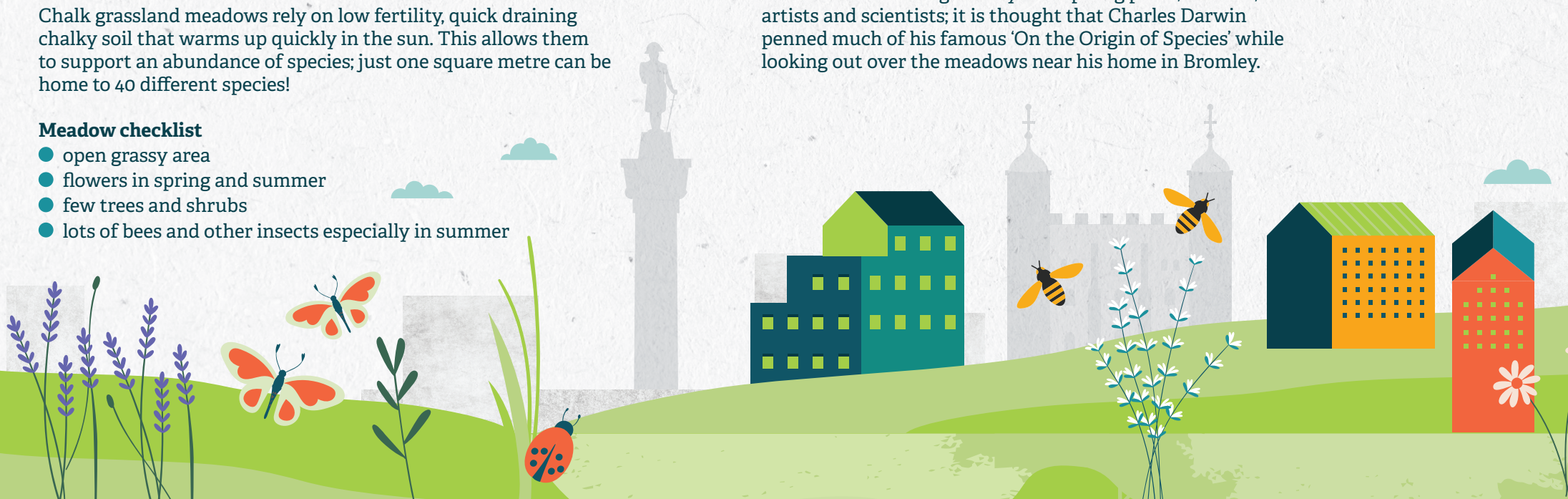
- open grassy area
- flowers in spring and summer
- few trees and shrubs
- lots of bees and other insects especially in summer

Why are they important?

Flower-rich lowland meadows and pastures were once common across the south of England, but only a tiny fraction remain today. Chalk grassland is particularly at threat due to changes in land use from traditional to intensive farming. We have lost more than 80% of our chalk grassland in the last 75 years.

Meadows and species-rich grasslands can support a huge range of wildlife including wildflowers, fungi, bees, flies, beetles, spiders, moths, butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, bats and birds. They are particularly important for pollinators who rely on flowers for their food source.

Meadows have a long history of inspiring poets, authors, artists and scientists; it is thought that Charles Darwin penned much of his famous 'On the Origin of Species' while looking out over the meadows near his home in Bromley.



Key words

Meadow

Grassland typically mown each year for making hay

Nutrients

Chemicals in the soil needed by plants for growth

Chalk grassland

Grassland habitat famed for supporting many species of flowers

Flora

Plant life

Fauna

Animal life

Biodiversity

The range of different species in a habitat

Grassland

Habitats dominated by grasses, often used for grazing

Habitat

The physical environment in which a plant or animal lives

Herbivore

An animal that only eats plants

Invertebrate

An animal that does not have a backbone

Vertebrate

An animal with a backbone. This group includes amphibians, birds, fish, mammals and reptiles

Microhabitat

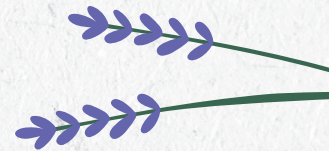
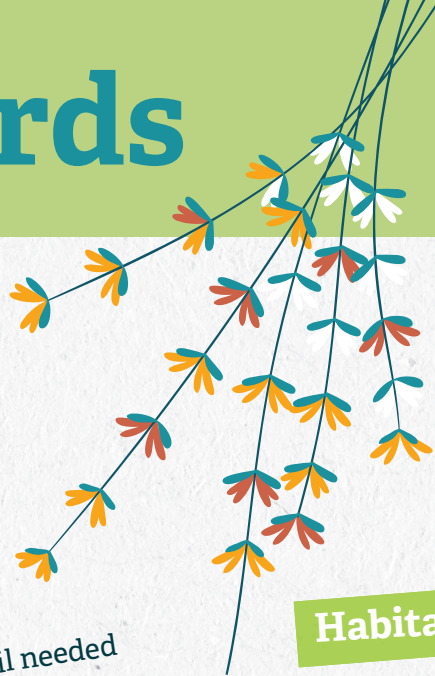
A small area of habitat which different to its surroundings

Omnivore

A living thing that feeds on both plants and animals

Soil

The top layer of earth, a mixture of organic matter and minerals



How many birds, mammals, reptiles and wildflowers can you spot?



Tick the ones you've spotted!



Birds



Mammals



Reptiles



Wildflower

Birds:

1. Buzzard
2. Kestrel
3. Green woodpecker

Mammals:

1. Fox
2. Common shrew
3. Roe Deer

Reptiles:

1. Slow worm
2. Common lizard

Wildflowers:

1. Lady's bedstraw
2. Common St. John's wort
3. Wild teasel
4. Common vervain
5. Marjoram
6. Field scabious
7. Bladder campion
8. Bird's foot trefoil
9. Orchid grass



How many invertebrates can you spot?

invertebrates:

1. Bees
2. Ants
3. Hoverflies
4. Beetles
5. Grasshoppers

Butterflies:

6. Dingy skipper
7. Brown argus
8. Marbled white
9. Meadow brown
10. Comma
11. Holly blue
12. Brimstone
13. Peacock
14. Painted lady
15. Common blue
16. Adonis blue



Tick the ones you've spotted!



invertebrates

How to go on a butterfly hunt!

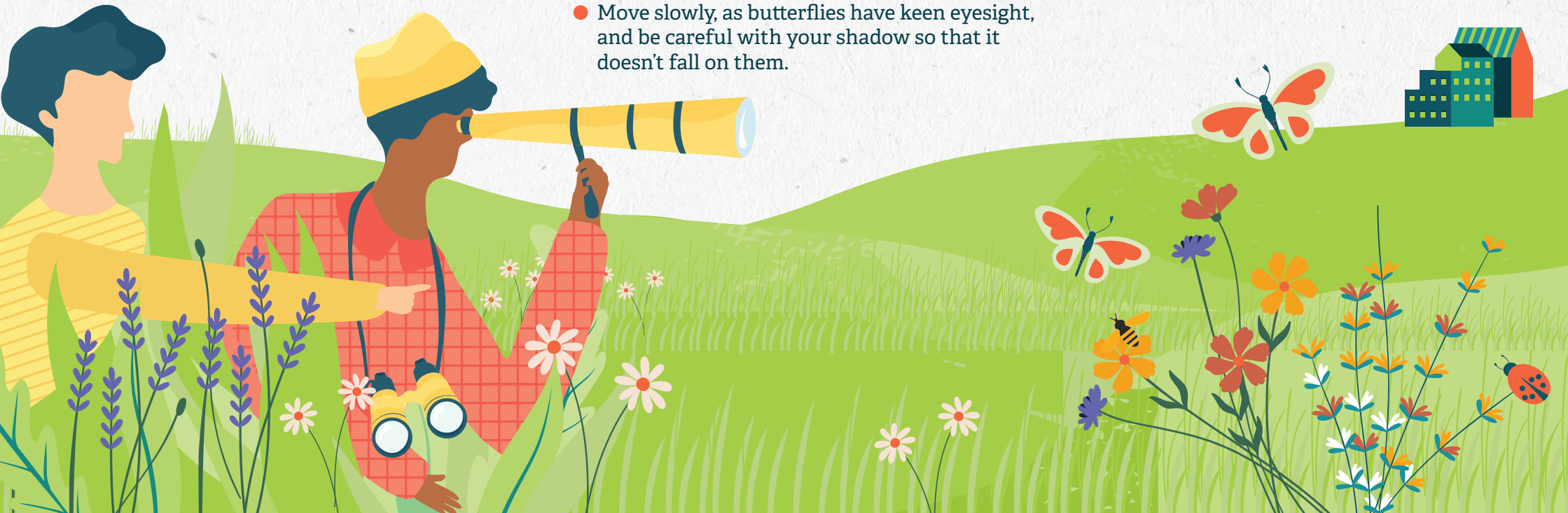


Be prepared: (what you need)

- Spotter sheet from this habitat guide or a field book if you have one
- A phone or camera to take photos (optional)
- Binoculars (optional)
- Wear long, thicker trousers to protect yourself from nettle stings
- Go with a friend, and take a responsible adult too

On your marks, get set, hunt!:

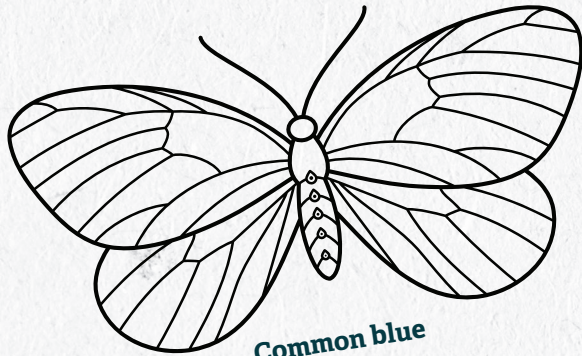
- Most butterflies fly only on sunny, calm days, or on overcast days over 20°C so keep an eye on the forecast and pick your day.
- Pick your site – flowery places with long grass are often good for butterflies.
- Think like a butterfly – most seek warm, sheltered, south-facing spots.
- Use your binoculars to scanning the canopy, the tops of hedgerows and the middle of nettle and bramble patches.
- Move slowly, as butterflies have keen eyesight, and be careful with your shadow so that it doesn't fall on them.
- Do your research – learning the plants on which the caterpillars and adults of each butterfly prefer to feed can help you spot particular species. As will finding out more about which different butterflies fly at different times of the year.
- Take a photograph for reference (especially if you've seen something unusual) and confirm the sighting when you get home.
- Don't leave it too late to see a butterfly as sightings tail off in the late afternoon, even on warm, sunny days.



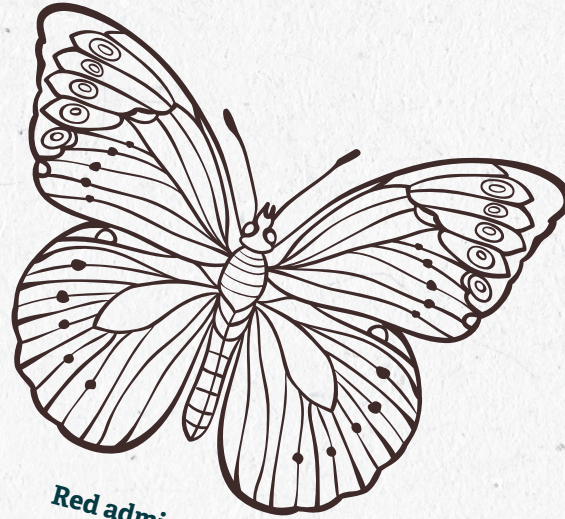
Activities

Wildlife watch - Minibeasts colouring

Try and observe these butterflies and copy their colours below.
If you haven't spotted them use the guide to help you!



Common blue butterfly



Red admiral butterfly



Brimstone butterfly

Butterflies Wordsearch



How many butterflies can you find in the wordsearch below.

- brimstone
- comma
- common blue
- gatekeeper
- large white
- painted lady
- peacock
- red admiral
- ringlet
- swallowtail
- wall brown



a	p	t	g	x	l	i	r	r	i	n	g	l	e	t
l	g	e	w	e	u	l	b	n	o	m	m	o	c	k
n	a	p	e	a	c	o	c	k	r	j	w	b	u	c
r	t	r	y	a	e	v	n	l	a	i	a	y	g	x
q	e	r	g	t	f	d	s	u	n	j	l	d	e	o
o	k	e	d	e	o	r	e	n	g	t	l	a	t	i
w	e	d	z	u	w	b	r	c	e	y	b	l	p	o
a	e	a	f	p	e	h	r	e	t	o	r	d	y	f
l	p	d	o	s	y	c	i	w	i	q	o	e	z	c
s	e	m	t	h	v	n	k	t	p	w	w	t	g	o
b	r	i	m	s	t	o	n	e	e	f	n	n	z	m
t	y	r	a	d	h	r	p	o	m	b	v	i	s	m
l	i	a	t	w	o	l	l	a	w	s	m	a	x	a
g	e	l	r	i	n	q	l	t	c	v	u	p	o	k



Make a seed bomb!



You will need:

- Meadow flower seeds or seeds collected from the garden
- Peat-free compost
- Water
- Powdered clay (found in craft shops)
- Mixing bowl

Creating your seed bomb:

- In a bowl, mix together 1 cup of seeds with 5 cups of compost and 2-3 cups of clay powder (you could use clay soil instead if you have it).
- Slowly mix in water with your hands until everything sticks together.
- Roll the mixture into firm balls.
- Leave the balls to dry in a sunny spot.
- Now for the fun bit! Plant your seed bombs by pushing them into a pot or windowbox filled with soil, or if you have a garden, throw them into a bare patch and wait to see what pops up!

Top plants to include in your seed bombs:

- Bulbous Buttercup
- Chamomile
- Common Bird's-foot-trefoil
- Common Knapweed
- Common Spotted-orchid
- Lady's bedstraw
- Red Clover
- Wild Thyme

