The High Brown Fritillary. This large, bright butterfly is faring well. Exmoor is a stronghold for some of Britain’s rarest fritillary butterflies. Visiting Exmoor is a must for nature lovers, as it is home to over 30 species of butterflies. Discover Exmoor’s butterflies…

An occasional glimpse of a peacock or a red admiral; a few like to get involved with recording butterflies, please contact details are on the back of this guide). Most British butterflies remain a cause for concern, with three-quarters of our native species in decline. If you see what looks like a butterfly on Exmoor but is not in the identification guide overview, it could be a day-flying moth. Some of the more common ones you might come across are included below. There are a number of differences between most moths and butterflies, but there is no hard and fast rule which separates them. In general, moths are active at night and butterflies are active during the day; butterflies tend to rest with wings open at night and butterflies are active during the day; butterflies tend to rest with wings closed. If you keep a sharp look out, you may also spot a number of different butterflies during your walk across Wimbleball Lake.

Walking route to view health fritillary on Haddon Hill

Day-flying moths

If you see what looks like a butterfly on Exmoor but is not in the identification guide overview, it could be a day-flying moth. Some of the more common ones you might come across are included below.

Butterflies in decline

Most British butterflies remain a cause for concern, with three-quarters of our native species in decline. Four butterflies and over 60 moths became extinct last century. Butterfly Conservation aims to halt and reverse these declines. Our vision is of a world rich in butterflies for future generations to enjoy. Butterflies are beautiful and intrinsically valuable. Together with moths, their sensitivity to environmental change makes them valuable indicators of the health of the countryside. Falling numbers are an early warning to all wildlife that cannot be ignored.

Butterfly monitoring is carried out to help us understand what is happening to our butterflies, and the data we collect helps us to direct our conservation resources where they are most needed. If you would like to get involved with recording butterflies please get in touch with Butterfly Conservation (contact details are on the back of this guide).
The High Brow fritillary. This large, bright butterfly is faring well among butterflies, including Britain’s most rapidly declining species, itself. And by April, the butterfly season is upon us!

Heathland, coastline, woodland, valleys and a diverse range of habitats, including moorland, farmland, support a wealth of butterflies. Butflies vary in their flight periods and the type of caterpillar’s food plant, common cow-wheat, is at its peak around mid-June when numbers are usually at their peak. An occasional glimpse of a peacock or a red admiral; a few more common, fast-flying dark green fritillary.

Butterflies in decline

With three-quarters of our native species in decline, the Butterfly Conservation aims to halt and reverse these declines. Our vision is of a world rich with butterflies for future generations to enjoy. Butterflies are beautiful and intrinsically valuable. Together with moths, their sensitivity to environmental change makes them valuable indicators of the health of the countryside. Falling numbers are an early warning to all wildlife that cannot be ignored.

Discover Exmoor’s butterflies...

Walking route to view Heath Fritillary on Haddon Hill
Discover Exmoor’s butterflies…

Exmoor National Park is home to over 30 species of butterfly, and offers opportunities to walk in a stunning landscape to view them. Exmoor’s diverse range of habitats, including moorland, heathland, coastline, woodland, valleys and farmland, support a wealth of butterflies, including some very rare species found only in a few locations in Britain.

Butterflies vary in their flight periods and the type of habitat they use. This guide will help you identify all the species you are likely to come across, and find out where and when to see them.

Butterflies can be enjoyed in Exmoor throughout most of the year. A warm and sunny day in January or February might offer an occasional glimpse of a peacock or a red admiral; a few weeks later a brimstone or a small tortoiseshell might reveal itself, and by April the butterfly season is upon us!

Exmoor is a stronghold for some of Britain’s rarest frilly butterflies, including Britain’s most rapidly declining species, the high brown fritillary. This large, bright butterfly is faring well on the steep, south-facing bracken slopes in the Heddon Valley, assisted by conservation management undertaken by the National Trust. Populations of heath fritillary can be seen on warm and sunny days in June flying low to the ground in sheltered heathland valleys, whilst other species of conservation concern can also be spotted on Exmoor, including the marsh and small pearl-bordered frillataries and the more common, fast-flying dark green fritillary.

Walking route to view heath fritillary on Haddon Hill

As well as the butterfly interest, this walk offers fine views over open heathland habitat to farmland beyond, and across to Wimbleball Lake. This site is particularly important for heath fritillaries, but if you keep a sharp look out, you may also spot small heath, green hairstreak, marbled white, large & large skippers, small & large whites, white-letter hairstreak and large skippers, as well as blue hairstreaks, white hairstreaks, and mirror hairstreaks. In general, many butterfly species are very numerous, with numbers concentrated in areas where the habitat is just right - sheltered heathy areas where the caterpillar’s food plant, common cow-wheat, is grown in abundance, a low-growing spikey plant with small pale yellow flowers, grows in association with bilberry and can be found in scattered patches across the heath here. The heath fritillary flies from early June until around the middle of July, and the best time to see the butterfly is around mid-June when numbers are usually at their peak.

Directions: Park in the main Haddon Hill car park (grid reference ST797084) and follow the path continue walking in a westerly direction alongside the fringes of the woodland - this is where you have the best chance of spotting the heath fritillary, that bask and nectar in the sheltered areas here. Continue walking along the fringes of the wood and turn left on the track to climb the slope and re-join the track you started out on. This track leads straight up to the gate and road lay-by and small parking area. When you reach the track at the top of the slope, turn right to retrace your steps to the car park.

Distance: 2.5km, 1-1½ hours (can be shortened by following the shorter path around the middle of July when numbers are usually at their peak.)

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For further information or, if you would like to get involved with helping to save our butterflies, please contact either of the organisations below:

Butterfly Conservation
info@butterfly-conservation.org

Butterflies in Somerset & Bristol
by Adrian Dexter
www.devon-butterflies.org.uk
www.somerset-butterflies.org.uk

Where to find out more
The two publications above are available, including:

● WildGuides: Britain’s Butterflies by David Tamlinson and Rob Still

● Phillips Guide to Butterflies of Britain & Ireland by Jeremy Thomas

Recommended books featuring butterflies of the Somerset & Bristol area include:

● 50 Butterfly Walks in Somerset & Bristol by Roger Sutton

● Butterflies in Somerset & Bristol by Adrian Dexter

The two publications above are available by emailing the Somerset Branch of Butterfly Conservation through the contact page on their website (see below).

For information about local events and guided walks, visit the local Butterfly Conservation websites:

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
www.butterfly-conservation.org

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