

Post 18

CHALK GRASSLAND FLOWERS & BUTTERFLIES

Up to 40 different species of wild flower can live in a single square metre of chalk grassland. See how many different plants you can spot in this field?

A particularly rare wild flower found here is the greater yellow rattle, which grows in only a few places in Britain.

Greater yellow rattle

Leaves opposite and toothed, yellow two-lipped flower with small violet teeth on upper lip. A chaffy scale to the rear in which seeds rattle when ripe. Flowers June-September.

10 points



Happy Valley and Farthing Downs support most of the British population of this species. Yellow rattle is a 'hemi-parasite', because it obtains some of its nutrients by tapping into the roots of grasses growing near to it.

Several well-known garden herbs, including marjoram, basil and thyme, grow wild on this chalk downland.

Wild basil

Hairy, deeply-veined leaves, square stem, mauve flowers in whorls.
Flowering from July-September.

10 points



Marjoram

A downy plant with oval, untoothed, sweetly-scented leaves. Flowers rose-pink in dense clusters. From July-September.

5 points

In the Middle Ages many animals were killed at the beginning of winter because of the shortage of fodder. The meat had to be salted and stored until the spring, by which time it was rather unpleasant. Herbs collected in the wild were used to improve the flavour.



Salad burnet

A low plant, with deeply toothed leaflets.
Globe-shaped heads of tiny green flowers
with purple stigmas.

Flowers from July-September.

5 points



Fairy flax

A low delicate plant, with
white 5-petalled flowers,
from July-September.

10 points



Common rock-rose

A low, creeping plant. Oval leaves with inrolled edges.

Delicate yellow petals and downy stalks. Flowers May-September.

15 points

BUTTERFLIES

Female butterflies lay their eggs on a plant, or a small range of plants, carefully selected as suitable food for their caterpillars, so that the plant life of an area determines which butterflies are found there. For example, the brimstone butterfly is common on the Downs because its caterpillar feeds on the leaves of the buckthorn, a shrub which is associated with the chalk grassland.



Brimstone

Lemon yellow or white wings with distinctive points to tips, always rest with wings closed like a pale yellow leaf. Wingspan ~60mm.

Hibernates as adult, flies March-October. **10 points**

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Peacock

Distinctive 'eyes' on wings look like the pattern on a peacock's tail.

Wingspan 63-69mm. Hibernates as adult, flies March-May and July-September. **5 points**



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The common and chalkhill blues use vetches as their food plants, which are also plants commonly found on the chalk. In contrast, the small tortoiseshell and peacock lay their eggs on stinging nettles, explaining why they are common in towns.



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Common blue

Males have bright blue upper wings with clear white fringes. Females have orange crescents and brown spots near edges. Underwings of both sexes have numerous black spots with white halos & orange marks around the edges. Wingspan ~35mm, flies May-October. **15 points**

Most butterflies do not appear until summer, but some species, such as the small tortoiseshell, brimstone and peacock spend winter hibernating as adults and wake with the first warmth of spring.

Small tortoiseshell

Bright reddish upperwings with six black patches on each forewing. Wings have a dark border containing blue crescents around all outer edges. Wingspan 50-56mm, flies March-October.

10 points



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Other butterflies overwinter as an egg, caterpillar or chrysalis, and emerge later. Red admirals spend the winter in the warmer climate of southern Europe, the next generation returning in May.

Retrace your steps to the corner of the wood where you left post 17, again taking care when crossing the horse ride. Follow the edge of the field uphill keeping the wood to your right. Follow the arrows into the woods to find post 19
(see map below)

NATURE TRAIL MAP

