

The Butterflies of Cassiobury Park & Whippendell Woods

Red Admiral - *Vanessa atalanta*

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2023 Report

Rick Vickers and Pete Fewell

March/April

May

March

21 March Equinox

It's now properly Spring! - someone tell the weather!

Brightened up in the afternoon so went to

Whippendell Woods

Brimstone x 1

Now the season begins!

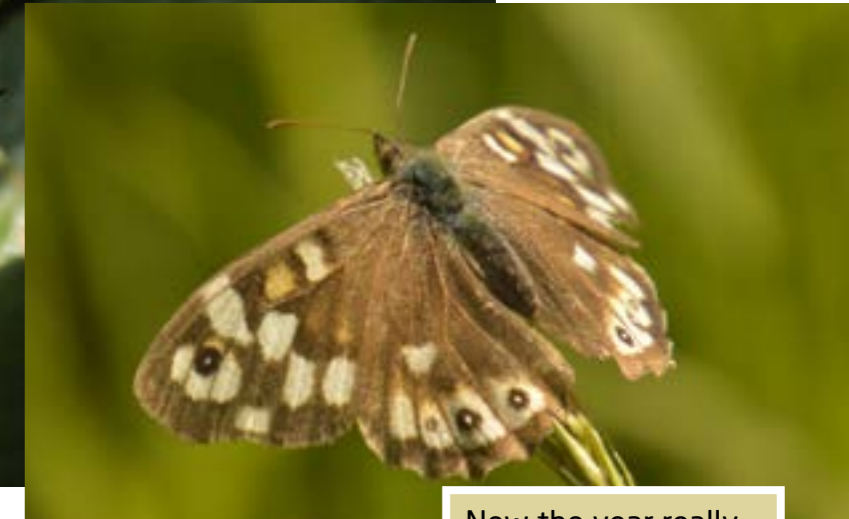
Frit Freeway has been widened.



Brimstone - *Gonepteryx rhamni*



Speckled Wood - *Pararge aegeria*



Orange-tip - *Anthocharis cardamines*



Peacock - *Aglais io*

Notes predominantly taken from from Rick's log with additions for the missing days from Pete.

15 April

13.30 ish off to **The Woods**

The idea was to check **Lees Wood**, to complete the circuit of surrounding woodlands, from **Whippendell**.

Won't be going there again. Nasty walk along a twisty road, and when we finally got there, it's by Appointment Only - Scouts and Police Dogs! On the plus side, it was all pine trees and didn't look suitable at all - would have been a different matter if we had Red Squirrels down there.

At least we had a look...

Back into **Whippendell Woods** to Camilla Corner

Peacock x 1, Comma x 1

30 April

Nice start to the day.

Whippendell Woods, Rousebarn Lane to Frit Freeway

Peacock x 2, Orange-tip x 1, White x 1

To Camilla Corner

Peacock x 1

May

07 May Butterfly Walk

Dull start but brightening up.

Cassiobury Park 13.30

Peacock x 1, Silver Y x 1, Orange-tip x 4+, Brimstone x 1, Holly Blue x 1

14.00 the Walk begins

Whippendell Woods

Orange-tip x 10+, Speckled Wood x 1, Red Admiral x 1, Holly Blue x 4, Peacock x 6, Whites x 10+, (including: Green-veined White x 1, Large White x 1), Silver Y x 1

After Walk over Green Bridge to NR2

Speckled Wood x 1, Peacock x 1, Holly Blue x 1, Orange-tip x 1

Then into NR1

Orange-tip x 3, Comma x 1, Peacock x 3, Small Tortoiseshell x 2

Then back up through the Park to check on the Yellow Rattle seedlings; they're doing well so far.



The Spring Butterfly Walk

Now the year really began to get going after a slow start, following the Winter that would not end.

Small Tortoiseshell

Of particular concern is the rapid decline of this once common butterfly.

It was formerly a regular visitor to parks and gardens everywhere.

The declines in this species are driven by a combination of climate change and a range of parasites (including wasps).

Please keep an eye out for this one next year.



Small Tortoiseshell - *Aglais urticae*

April

01 April

Butterfly Conservation AGM

Then on the way back, had a look in **Bricket Wood**, but it was a bit swampy. As there was still time and light, we had a look at the seedlings in **Cassiobury Park**. The Yellow Rattle is beginning to poke up.

04 April

11.30 to **Cassiobury Park** to get some sunshine.

Peacock x 2, Brimstone x 4+

07 April Good Friday

15.00 off to Cassiobury Park

Peacock x 2, Comma x 1

Then to NR2, over Green Bridge

Peacock x 1

June



White Admiral - *Limenitis camilla*



23 June

Whippendell Woods

Meadow Brown x 15, Large Skipper x 5, Whites x 3, White Admiral x 4, Holly Blue x 1, Comma x 2, Speckled Wood x 2, Red Admiral x 1

24 June

26⁺

Solstice the other day.

Pete made it to the Woods yesterday - Camillas (White admirals) are out! So...

...Off to the Woods!

First stop Newlands Spring - 14.45

Speckled Wood x 3, Meadow Brown x 2

Then Dell Wood - 15.10

Speckled Wood x 3, Meadow Brown x 3, Large White x 1

Whippendell Woods - 15.40

Speckled Wood x 2, Comma x 1, Red Admiral x 4, Meadow Brown x 13+, Ringlet x 6+, White Admiral x 6, Large Skipper x 4

Hot sweaty day and cloudy to start, but began to clear as we got into Whippendell, looking quite flowery (the woods, not us!).

Lovely to see the Camillas again, but they weren't settling.

29 June

Whippendell Woods/ Lime Avenue

A fine afternoon indeed! Checking **Lime Avenue**, the Emperor season had started: 1 Purple Emperor seen.

Also along the Lime Avenue,

Speckled Wood x 1, Red Admiral x 3, Comma x 2, Meadow Brown x 1

Into the Woods

Meadow Brown x 5+, Comma x 14, Silver-washed Fritillary x 6, White Admiral x 12 (and maybe a 13th), Brimstone x 1, Ringlet x 10+, Large White x 2, Large Skipper x 6, Speckled Wood x 1, Small White x 1



Meadow Brown - *Maniola jurtina*



Large Skipper - *Ochlodes sylvanus*



Ringlet - *Aphantopus hyperantus*

June

01 June

Crikey! Its June - first day of meteorological Summer - with added cloud...

Sun came out in the afternoon.

15.15 up to Cassiobury Park

First down RH path then into the grassland by **Small Oak Copse**

Orange-tip x 1, White x 1, Holly Blue x 1

Then to NR1

Orange-tip x 4+, Holly Blue x 1, Peacock x 3

Also three Orange-tip caterpillars on Garlic mustard

09 June

Lovely day, so off to...

Cassiobury Park - 16.30

Common Blue x 1, Mother Shipton moth x 1, Holly Blue x 1, Speckled Wood x 3

Then to the Woods/Lime Avenue

Speckled Wood x 1, Holly Blue x 1

Followed by Group Meeting for reptiles/ amphibians with Vicky and HMWT

12 June

Very warm start to the day - Storm 14.00 - just as I was about to go to the **Park/Woods** with Pete.

15.00 - all clear-ish

Had been a massive downpour earlier - path to **NR1** was flowing like the river next to it!

More rumblings 17.00 so time to leave.

16 June

Whippendell Woods

Speckled Wood x 3, L. White x 1, Meadow Brown x 8, Large Skipper x 2, Holly Blue x 1

Casiobury Park

Speckled Wood x 2, Meadow Brown x 12, Silver-Y moth x 1



Purple Emperor - *Apatura iris*

Purple Emperor

To be found up in the tree tops along Lime Avenue

July

02 July

Whippendell Woods

Lime Avenue - 15.20

Red Admiral x 3, Meadow Brown x 4+, Purple Emperor x 1, Ringlet x 2+

The Woods Proper - 16.00

Comma x 3, Meadow Brown x lots, Ringlet x lots, Silver-washed Fritillary x 2, White Admiral x 4, Large Skipper x 2+, Red Admiral x 4 (The Rond), Purple Hairstreak x 4+ (T17)

07 July

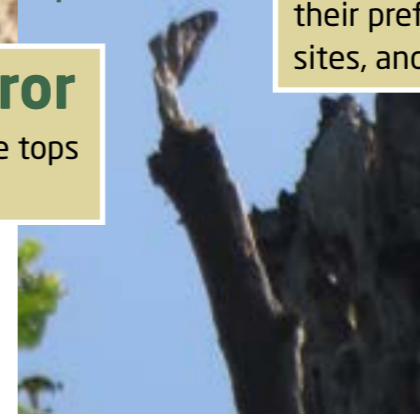
Lovely sunny day! Not a cloud to be seen.

Cassiobury Park - 14.30

Large Whites x 3, Meadow Brown x 8+, Holly Blue x 3, Small Skipper x 5, Comma x 1, Ringlet x 3+, Essex Skipper x 3+, Small Copper x 4

Whippendell Woods - 15.15

Speckled Wood x 2, Comma x 12+, Large Whites x 10+, Meadow Brown x 4, Purple Emperor x 3, Red Admiral x



9+, White Admiral x 11, Silver-washed Fritillary x 9, Ringlet x 5+, Large Skipper x 4, Small Skipper x 2, Gatekeeper x 1, Holly Blue x 1, Purple Hairstreak x 5+

08 July WildFest

We both ran a Stall for BC.

10.30 Walk - Cassiobury Park

Large White, Small Skipper, Small Copper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Marbled White, Large Skipper

Didn't go far, as there were young children in tow, but managed to find most of the target grassland species in one lovely little spot just off the main path through the Park.

After the event, up to **Whippendell Woods** with Josh from HMWT.

Speckled Wood x 4, Comma x 3+, Purple Emperor x 4, Red Admiral x 6+, Ringlet 2+, Large Skipper x 1, White Admiral x 4, Silver-washed Fritillary x 1

Rick joined Friends of Cassiobury Park - "I'm no longer just an acquaintance!"

Silver-washed Fritillary - *Argynnis paphia*



July

Silver-washed Fritillary

Numbers were down from previous years. This was possibly due to the Ash die-back that has been effecting their preferred egg-laying sites, and other tree removals.



Small Skipper - *Thymelicus sylvestris*



WildFest

Essex Skipper - *Thymelicus lineola*



July



Marbled White - *Melanargia galathea*

Purple Hairstreak - *Favonius quercus*



Large White - *Pieris brassicae*



July

Small White - *Pieris rapae*



Gatekeeper - *Pyronia tithonus*



The Summer Butterfly Walk along Lime Avenue



Small Copper - *Lycaena phlaeas*

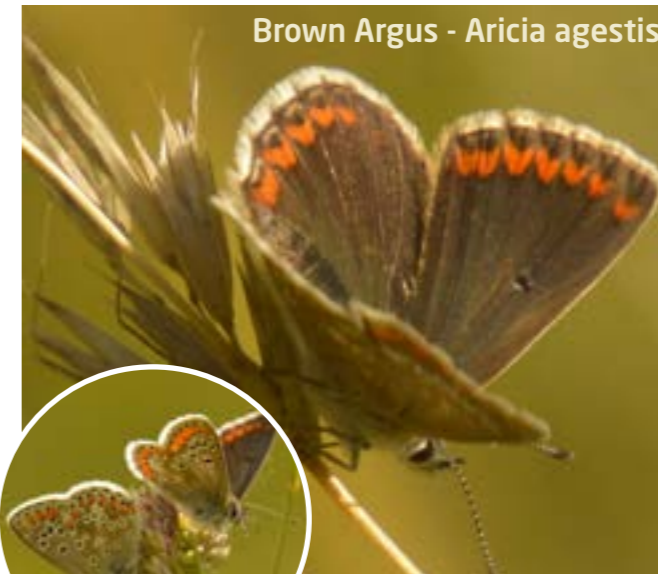
29 July

Whippendell Woods - 15.00

Whites GV, L x lots, Silver-washed Fritillary x 12+, Gatekeeper x 12+, Brimstone x 1, Comma x 4, Meadow Brown x 3+, Peacock x 2, Speckled Wood x 2, Holly Blue x 4, Ringlet x 1, Brown Argus x 1, Small Skipper x 5

Cassiobury Park

Red Admiral x 2, Common Blue x 1
Not a bad day considering the wet washout that Summer is turning into!
Lovely surprise to see the Brown Argus at **Strawberry Fields** - I knew that was the place to enjoy a picnic!



Brown Argus - *Aricia agestis*

Brown Argus

One of our least common Lycaenidae, though they have had a splendid year in many places. Generally associated with Rockrose, but we suspect it is using one of the Cranesbills that are growing in the vicinity

09 July The Summer Butterfly Walk

Warm start, bit cloudy... let's see how it holds up for when we do the **Annual Summer Walk in the Woods** later...
14.00, meeting at The Langley Way entrance and then to...

Whippendell Woods

Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Whites, Comma, Ringlet, Purple Emperor, Brimstone, Silver-washed Fritillary, Gatekeeper, White Admiral, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Purple Hairstreak

Park, Grasslands to Small Oak Copse

Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Small Copper, Marbled White, Gatekeeper

Lovely walk through the Woods, nine people this time. Shame it clouded over as it was a fine start. Still, we managed to get the 'Big 3', for the third day on the trot.

15 July

Early start, volunteering with FOCP.

NRZ

Peacocks, Gatekeeper, Whites - including GV White, Comma, Meadow Brown

13.00 - Newlands Spring

Red Admiral x 1, Silver-washed Fritillary x 1, Comma x 1, Whites x 2, White Admiral x 1

Then came the rain and thunder!

Start again...

Dell Wood - 14.30

Speckled Wood x 1, Large White x 1, Green-veined White x 1, Red Admiral x 2

Whippendell Wood - 15.00

Large White x 2, Red Admiral x 5, Green-veined White x 3, Ringlet x 23+, White Admiral x 3, Gatekeeper x 9+, Silver-washed Fritillary x 7, Essex Skipper x 1

Considering the wind and rain and thunder - not a bad day. Just because we didn't see things, doesn't mean they weren't there. The car park was a good start with a Camilla on a finger!

Diary 1841

"July 12 Very changeable and not a bit like summer. 13th Very showery and like April. 14th A hot morning and fine afternoon. 15th A fine morning but in the afternoon a dreadful thunder storm - rain and hail. 16th A rainy day. 17th A very fine day the first we have had for a very long time."

Lady Adela Capel of Cassiobury

One of the many parallels the weather had this year with 1841. I hope it stops; they had snow in November!

Common Blue

A butterfly that is not as common as its name would suggest, it is a regular visitor to the grasslands of the Park, and seen most years.

With some encouragement, and planting for this species, numbers should increase over the coming years.



Common Blue - *Polyommatus icarus*

August



Holly Blue - *Celestrina argiolus*

August

05 August

Dull wet start.
16.30 off to **Cassiobury Park** to scatter some seeds.
Gatekeeper x 2, Meadow Brown x 3

16 August 25°

Lovely day: at last, a temperature worth recording! it must be the heatwave they've been threatening - we'll see...

Cassiobury Park - 14.00

RH Path from Ricky Road entrance.
Whites x 7+, Speckled Wood x 12+, Holly Blue x 3

Small Oak Copse - as it clouded over

Gatekeeper x 1
and on down to the bottom of the Park

Whites x 4, Comma x 1

Over the Bridge and up Lime Avenue

Whites x 2

Top Avenue

Whites x 3

Frit Freeway

Silver-washed Fritillary x 1, Whites x 3

The Junction and Avenue including Foxglove Glade as the sun reappeared

Speckled Wood x 5, Whites x 2, Holly Blue x 1

Camilla Corner

Comma x 1

Holly Blue x 1

Whites x 2

Back down the Avenue towards Harrocks Wood (cloudy again)

Whites x 10+, Holly Blue x 25+, Speckled Wood x 1

Up the top path of the Circular Walk

Holly Blue x 1

To the Rond and homewards

Holly Blue x 1

Truely lovely at the bottom of the Avenue. An unexpected delight as it's usually dull and gloomy down there. But the ragwort was in full bloom and Hollies were everywhere. Never have I seen such a concentration, three of four flitting about every clump - that's what it's all about!

Also a pleasant surprise to see the SWF - shame it was cloudy, it appeared and then vanished.

19 August

Dull start, and an early one! - Volunteering with FOCP in **Cassiobury Park**.

NR2

Speckled Wood x 3, Whites x 2, Comma x 1, Holly Blue x 1

Possible Purple Hairstreak

Frog and toad

Then into Whippendell Woods

Speckled Wood x 11+, Holly Blue x 31 (including 23 on ragwort at the bottom of the Avenue to Harrocks Wood), Green-veined White x 3+, Whites x 16+, Silver-washed Fritillary x 5, Peacock x 2, Meadow Brown x 1, Red Admiral x 2, Purple Hairstreak x 4+

No luck with the Violet Heleborine (was looking for that the other day when came across the Hollies)

And shame to miss the Brown Hairstreaks, but worth it to see the Hollies again and to see Pete's reaction to the abundance! - A 'Wow' moment!

26 August

Ffine to start with, but as afternoon came so did the rain... and thunder!

But we braved it and planted the Field Scabious up in **Cassiobury Park**, mostly by **Small Oak Copse** - then it rained some more.

After to **Fishers Field**, to have another wander around with Pete.

September/October



Comma - *Polygonia c-album*



Green-veined White - *Pieris napi*

September

09 September

Lovely and hot again - at least a clearer blue sky today.

Whippendell Woods - 15.00

Comma x 6+, Red Admiral x 12+, Speckled Wood x 2, Whites x 3 (at least 1 GV)

Following that went to the **Park** to water the plants that we put in the other month - found five. That was a third of them, and they looked to be doing well.

16 September

10.00 off to the **Park** for Work Party with FOCP raking and trimming, until I woke up a wasp nest!

Whippendell Woods - 13.00

Comma x 9+, Red Admiral x 7+, Green-veined White x 1, Whites x 3, Speckled Wood x 4

23 September

Early start, up to **Whippendell Woods** with WilderWatford, to lead them through the Woods with Pete and point out some interesting bits, and places.

Muntjack, Fox

Speckled Wood x 6+, Comma x 7+, Red Admiral x 12+

Then to Croxley Moor - 14.00

Whites x 2

Small Copper x 5

Meadow Brown x 1

30 September

Time to plant out some more Scabious, Birds-foot Trefoil, and Lucerne in **Cassiobury Park**. It will look colourful where we've been...



Red Admiral - *Vanessa atalanta*



October

21 October

Early start, volunteering with FOCP, raking and clearing in the Nature Reserve. The Wetlands Project is coming along well - all it needs is Swallowtails! Or maybe some Large Coppers...

Whippendell Woods - 13.00

Red Admiral x 1

Following that went to the **Park** to check on the plants we put in the other week, but only managed to find a couple. Perhaps I hid them too well?

A pleasant surprise to find a Fibrous Waxcap by **Small Oak Copse**.

Butterflies in flight and when - 2023

Cassiobury Park & Whippendell Woods

March	Brimstone
April	Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Large White, Brimstone, Orange-tip, Holly Blue
May	Orange-tip, Brimstone, Green-veined White, Large White, Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood
There was a bit of a lull at the end of May/beginning of June, as the changeover from Spring to Summer species happened	
June	Orange-tip, Holly Blue, Peacock, White Admiral, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Large Skipper, Common Blue
July	Red Admiral, Purple Emperor, Comma, Silver-washed Fritillary, White Admiral, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Speckled Wood, Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brimstone, Small Copper, Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Common Blue, Brown Argus
August	Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Comma, Red Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary, Peacock, Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue
September	Comma, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White
October	Red Admiral

The year was a bit slow to start following the long drawn out Winter, and everything was about two weeks behind at the beginning of Spring - it's not often you see an Orange-tip past the first few days of June. By Summer things were settling down, though the weather was not on our side that often. No season is ever the same and every year is a surprise.

The Butterflies of Cassiobury Park & Whippendell Woods

The Whites ▲

The Skippers ▲

The Nymphs ▲

The Browns ▼

The Blues ▲

The featured species can generally be seen in a good year. Some will be easier to spot than others. Some, like the White-letter Hairstreak, Small Heath, Painted Lady, or Clouded yellow, are occasional visitors or in some cases migrants. And each will bring their own variety of neck ache, from looking very high up or down. There are still areas we don't look at as much as we should, and there is still much more to discover. We can't be everywhere at once!

Butterflies & their Larval Foodplants

Whites

Large White: Various Crucifers, including: Cabbages (hint: grow Nasturtiums to keep them off your veggies)
Small White:
Green Veined White: Lady's Smock, Garlic Mustard, Charlock and other members of the Crucifer family
Orange-tip: Lady's Smock, Garlic Mustard, Honesty and other members of the Crucifer family
Brimstone: Alder Buckthorn

Skippers

Large Skipper:
Small Skipper: Various Grasses, including: Cocks-Foot Grass, Couch Grass, Timothy Grass, Common Bent
Essex Skipper

Browns

Meadow Brown:
Ringlet:
Gatekeeper: Various Grasses, including: Meadow Grasses, Cocks-Foot Grass, Couch Grass, Red Fescue, Timothy Grass, Common Bent and others
Marbled White:
Small Heath:

Blues

Holly Blue: Holly, Ivy, Dogwood, Spindle Tree, Bramble, Lucerne, Hop, Purple Loosestrife
Common Blue: Bird's-Foot Trefoil, Clovers, Black Medick, Lucerne
Small Copper: Sheep's Sorrel, Common Sorrel, Broad-Leaved Dock, and others
Brown Argus: Common Rockrose, Doves foot Cranesbill and other Cranes/Storksbill Species
Purple Hair Streak: Various Oaks
White Letter Hair Streak: Wych Elm and other Elms

Nymphs

Peacock: Nettles
Red Admiral: Nettles
Comma: Nettles, Hops
Small Tortoiseshell: Nettles
Silver Washed Fritillary: Dog Violet
White Admiral: Honeysuckle
Purple Emperor: Goat Willow, Grey Willow, Crack Willow, Eared Willow and other Salix Species
Painted Lady: Thistles, Nettles, Burdocks and others

Nectar Sources

Aphid Honeydew
Bird's-Foot Trefoil
Brambles
Blackthorn
Bluebell
Buddleia
Bugle
Buttercups
Clovers
Cow Parsley
Dandelions
Field Scabious
Fleabane
Forget-Me-Not
Hawkweeds
Hawthorn
Hemp agrimony
Hog Weed
Ivy
Knap Weed
Lucerne
Ragwort
Red Campion
Spring Blossom
Teasle
Thistles
Wild Marjoram

And a wide variety of other species

Sources

Other than our own documentation, the following sources have been very helpful:

Larval Foodplants of the Butterflies of Great Britain & Ireland - Peter R May

WildGuides, Britain's Butterflies, A field guide to the butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland - David Newland, Robert Still, Andy Swash and David Tomlinson

A Victorian Teenager's Diary, The Diary of Lady Adela Capel of Cassiobury, 1841-1842

Butterfly Conservation: The Warwickshire Approach - Mike Slater and Keith Warmington

Philip's Guide to Butterflies of Britain & Ireland - J. A. Thomas

Further Reading

The following sources may also be of interest:

The Butterfly Isles - Patrick Barkham

In Pursuit of Butterflies - Matthew Oats

Harrap's Wild Flowers A Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of Britain & Ireland - Simon Harrap

The Butterflies of Britain & Ireland - Jeremy Thomas & Richard Lewington

The Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex - Andrew Wood

The Butterflies of Hertfordshire - Brian Sawford

Rainbow Dust - Peter Marren

Useful Websites

Herts & Middx Branch Website: <https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/index.php>

Herts & Middx Moth Group: <https://www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk/>

Creating Wild Spaces: <https://wild-spaces.co.uk/>

Friends of Cassiobury Park: <https://friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk>

UK Butterflies: <https://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/index.php>

Photographs

All photographs by Rick Vickers and Pete Fewell, and where possible the images were taken at the spots indicated in the text.

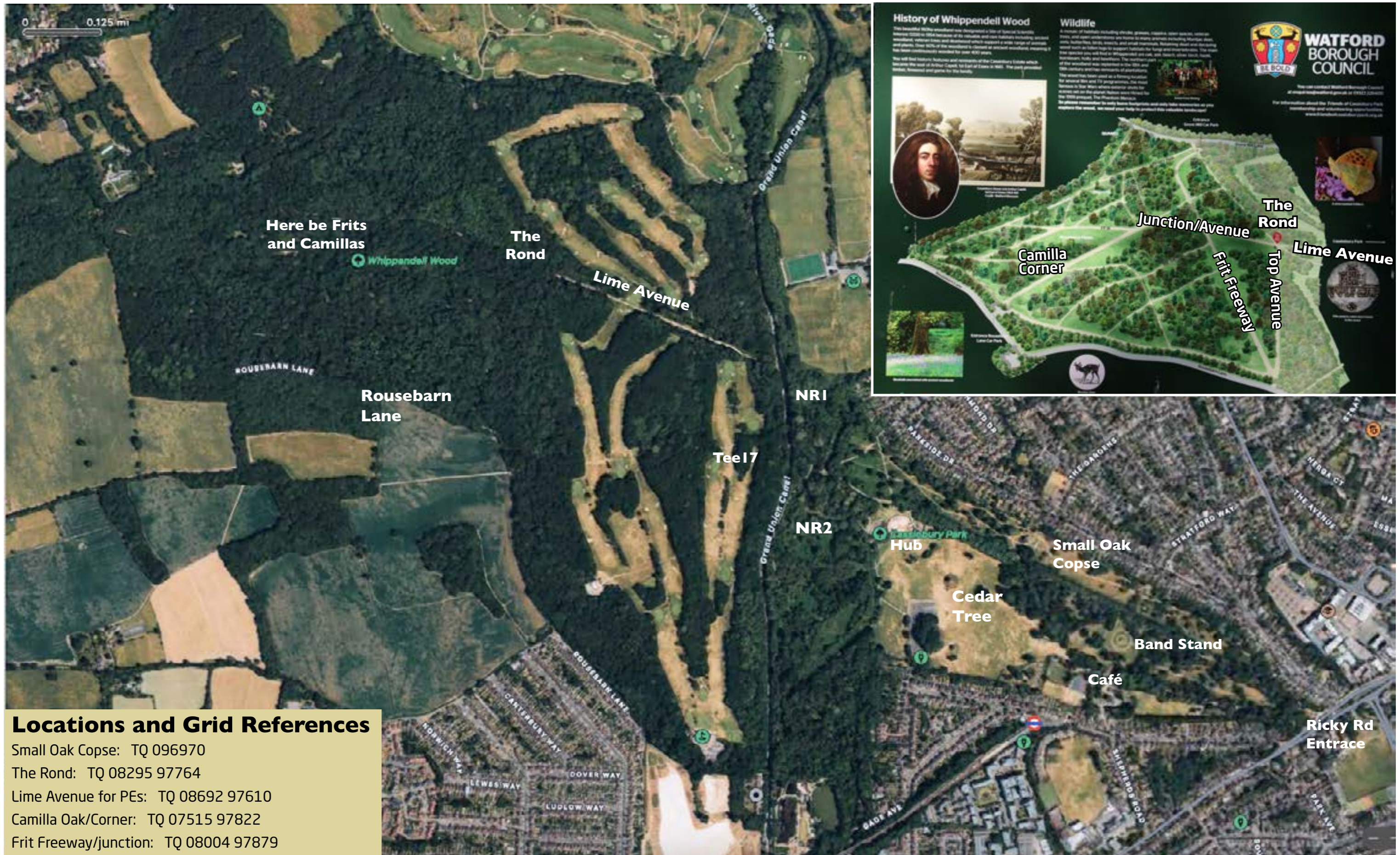
special thanks to Clare Turner for proofreading.

And Malcolm Hull for additional information.

Grow it and they will come...

...hopefully

Whippendell Woods & Cassiobury Park



Locations and Grid References

Small Oak Copse: TQ 096970

The Rond: TQ 08295 97764

Lime Avenue for PEs: TQ 08692 97610

Camilla Oak/Corner: TQ 07515 97822

Frit Freeway/junction: TQ 08004 97879



Look out for our future events in the Park & Woods in 2024

Spring Butterfly and Bluebell Walk

May*

Summer Woodland Butterfly Walk

July*

Banquet for an Emperor

July*

*** Dates and full list of events to be announced in early 2024
on the Friends of Cassiobury Park and Butterfly Conservation websites**



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment