

## Lychpole Hill

**Grid reference:** TQ154073

**Survey/monitoring sponsor:** SDNPA (Central Downs)

**Dates of visits:** 15.6.21 (1 visit)

**Time for complete coverage:** 5.5 hours

**Total number of species observed:** (all visits): 14

**Total number of butterflies counted:** (all visits): 273

**CGSI rating:** 4/5

### Key species and abundances:

Species	Conservation Status	Total Counts (all visits)	Highest Count
Grizzled Skipper	Section 41 species of principal importance under the NERC Act in England UK BAP Priority Species	5	5 (15.6.21)
Dingy Skipper	Section 41 species of principal importance under the NERC Act in England UK BAP Priority Species	3	3 (15.6.21)
Small Heath	Section 41 species of principal importance under the NERC Act in England UK BAP Priority Species (research only)	112	112 (15.6.21)

### Site details:

The Lychpole Hill site comprises a NE-facing slope of 1.5 km length on the Sompting Estate and forms part of the Cissbury Ring SSSI. This open access (CRoW 2000) land is a mix of open chalk grassland, which runs along the topmost and lower slope, and secondary woodland with scrubby edges, which creates a linear band running along the mid/upper slope; diseased Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* is quite widespread. There is a dew pond at the northern end of the site.

Some scrub management work has been performed along the upper edge of the woodland/scrub strip in recent years and the site is currently being grazed with cattle. The chalk grassland sward is of variable quality and appears to be improving, although an increase in grazing pressure is required to further reduce the dense carpets of Tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* which persist particularly over parts of the topmost slope.

Patches of floristically-rich turf, clearly maintained by the Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, occur locally within the carpets of ranker grass on the high ground, but much larger expanses of good quality chalk grassland cover the lower slope. The better areas contain abundant Common Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus* and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, together with scattered Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. Of particular note was the presence of more than 50 Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* at the southern end of the site.

### Butterfly fauna and its indications:

The single late spring visit yielded a total of 14 species and 273 individual butterflies, with the presence of Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath (all Section 41 species of principal importance under the NERC Act in England) and Brown Argus allowing the assignment of a CGSI rating of 4/5. However, with the exception of Small Heath (112 on 15.6.21), the numbers of key species were low for such a large site. Other notable species found at Lychpole Hill include Small Copper, Common Blue (94 on 15.6.21) and Large Skipper (15 on 15.6.21).

Although these results are rather unspectacular, there is clearly plenty of potential here, which would be unlocked by increased grazing pressure. Also, given that the survey date of 15.6 (the cut-off point for CGSI ratings) is rather late for many spring species, it is possible that a more impressive tally would have been achieved by a visit earlier in the year. This is particularly true for Dingy Skipper (only 3 individuals seen); Lychpole Hill has the potential to support a very large population of this early-flier, due to the abundance of its larval foodplant, Common Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* here, growing in ideal conditions.

### Management Suggestions:

- Liaise with landowner to encourage increased grazing pressure; focused grazing over Tor-grass-dominated areas, using suitably hardy animals and achieved by temporary fencing, would hasten the improvement of sward conditions. **SDNPA**
- Continue rotational scrub management along the margins of the wooded strip. **SDNPA/SDVRS**

### Images:



Short turf rich in Wild Thyme



Lychpole Hill dew pond