

## HEATH FRITILLARY BUTTERFLIES by Dave and Gill Shearing

If you go down to the woods today, you'll be sure of a big surprise!

We are talking about Hockley woods here and the big surprise is that you might see a very rare Heath Fritillary butterfly. So rare that people from as far away as Scotland and even Europe have been known to come to Hockley Woods just to see them.



They are smaller and less gaudy than say a Peacock or Red Admiral but beautiful just the same. In the late 1970's they were virtually extinct in the UK due to loss of habitat, use of pesticides etc and steps were taken to recreate suitable habitat for them and re-introduce them to areas where they had once been.



They have been known as the 'woodman follower' because their preferred habitat is recently cleared woodland edges. The clearance allows the soil to warm in the Sun and encourages the growth of the caterpillar's chief foodplant which is Common Cow-Wheat. They are also known to live on and eat Foxgloves.

In the South West of the country they are mostly found on heathland where the food plants used are Ribwort Plantain and Germander Speedwell. The adults, which have a short life of up to four weeks, feed mostly on Bramble flower nectar. The best time to see the adults is on a sunny day sometime in June. The males sometimes gather in large numbers to display in order to attract a female. They can also be found basking in the sunshine.

Their main strongholds now are the South West of England, parts of Kent and three woods in Essex, including Hockley Woods, Pound Wood and Hadleigh Great Wood.

The butterflies have a chequered pattern on the upper sides of their wings. Hence the name 'Fritillary' which is derived from the Latin Fritillus, which means Chessboard or dice box.



