

## **Parish Magazine Article June 2021**

### **Adonis Blue** by Michael Blencowe of the Sussex Wildlife Trust

On Sussex Wildlife Trust's Malling Down nature reserve just fifteen minutes' walk from the centre of Lewes, something is stirring. Something rather beautiful. Something rather... blue.

The Adonis Blue must be in with a good chance of being crowned our most beautiful butterfly. The male's dazzling, electric blue wings are an insult to all other butterfly species who consider themselves blue. Believe me - you haven't experienced blue until you've watched a male Adonis Blue fly past. And, like many other famous Lewes residents, our Adonis Blues also have a colourful and somewhat odd life history.

During the larval stage of its life cycle, the Adonis Blue caterpillar exudes a sugary sweet secretion and, amazingly, sings an enticing siren's song. This drives local ants into a frenzy and they fall under its spell. With its sugar-drunk, loved-up ant admirers in tow, the caterpillar cruises the Lewes Downs with the ants protecting it against parasites and predators. Each evening, when the caterpillar retreats to the soil, the ants bury it – effectively tucking it in for the night. It's amazing what devotion you can get around these parts in return for a drink and a song.

When it's time for the caterpillar to pupate, the ants stand guard over the chrysalis too in an underground chamber, and when the adult butterfly emerges, they escort it to the surface. Without so much as a thank you for their loyalty, the butterfly unfurls its wings and deserts them for the skies above – no doubt leaving the ants wondering how they're going to explain themselves to the queen when they get home.

The existence of this wonderful butterfly is only made possible due to the Sussex Wildlife Trust's careful management of Malling Down. The Trust's rare breed sheep, which you can see from Lewes High Street, graze the reserve to ensure the correct habitat is maintained for this rare species. An important factor in the Adonis Blue's life cycle is heat, and if the grass here gets too tall the temperature at ground level drops. Without the grazing management, the fantastic downland habitat would disappear, along with all the amazing species that depend on it.

*Sussex Wildlife Trust is an independent charity caring for wildlife and habitats throughout Sussex. Founded in 1961, we have worked with local people for over half a century to make Sussex richer in wildlife.*

*We rely on the support of our members to help protect our rich natural heritage. Please consider supporting our work. As a member you will be invited to join Michael Blencowe on our regular wildlife walks and also enjoy free events, discounts on wildlife courses, Wildlife magazine and our Sussex guide book, Discovering Wildlife. It's easy to join online at [sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/join](https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/join)*