



**Issue 1**

**Autumn 2008**

Welcome to the first issue of the local Butterfly Conservation newsletter for people living in the Scottish Borders. The newsletter goes out freely to all members of Butterfly Conservation in the region as well as to other groups, agencies and individuals with an interest in butterflies, moths and their conservation. Please pass it on to others and let us know of people who you think should be added to the circulation.

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## Contents

Butterfly Conservation in the Borders.....Barry Prater

The Moor Butterflies the Merrier .....John Woolliams

Pipers Knowe Quarry – July 2008.....Iain Cowe

Green Hairstreaks – a Lost Colony.....Malcolm Lindsay

Fumbling Around in the Dark – a Beginner’s Experiences .....Roddy McGeoch

Some Peeblesshire Moths.....Reuben Singleton

[All photos (apart from Tom Prescott’s on p.5) are by the authors but not necessarily in their own articles]

Please write to us with your articles and views. The next issue will go out in April. Email to me at the above address or by post to

12 Barefoots Crescent  
Eyemouth  
Berwickshire TD14 5BA

## Butterfly Conservation in the Borders

It’s been a pretty rotten summer this year and getting surveys and monitoring work done has been problematic. However, the long term impact of incidents of bad weather on butterflies and moths is unlikely to be great. Wildlife is, and has to be, resilient to fluctuations in weather – how else could it survive? Over the centuries species must have experienced worse conditions than we have seen during the past couple of years but they are still here.

However, weather is not the same as climate. So the current trends caused by global warming, coupled with all the changes in agricultural and forestry practices over the past sixty years are having consequences for our Lepidoptera.

It’s easy to be defeatist about this situation. What can be done to halt the declines in species? Well, there are many conservation success stories for butterflies at a local level which are all based on a good knowledge of the distribution and habitat requirements of the species involved.

Much of this knowledge comes from the efforts of volunteers, but here in the Scottish Borders membership of Butterfly Conservation is very low – perhaps around 25 people – and we really need more members and for more people to get active in butterfly surveys/site monitoring and the trapping and study of moths.

For moths particularly there is much scope for new discoveries across the region; current moth distribution maps tend to reflect where the active moth people live rather than where species occur.

Butterfly Conservation currently has a great new gift membership offer – with all the usual benefits of membership will be added a free copy of “*A Guide to Butterflies of Britain and Ireland*” by Jeremy Thomas. This is a really good up-to-date field guide and it’s the one I use.

So why not give BC membership for Christmas to a relative, friend or neighbour? If each existing member enrolled just one person in this way we would instantly double our numbers.

For more information and a gift membership form contact Hannah Cooper at [hcooper@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:hcooper@butterfly-conservation.org) or telephone 01929 406017.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this newsletter – they show the enthusiasm of our local members. It’s also clear from reading them that you don’t have to be an expert to get involved. To find out how you might be able to help, get in touch with our Branch Organiser Richard Buckland at [r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk) or on 0131 332 0615.

**Barry Prater**

## The Moor Butterflies the Merrier

by John Woolliams (Peebles)

Among the many good reasons for my joining Butterfly Conservation was the realisation that I could take part in the national monitoring of butterfly populations. For me, the future of our biodiversity and habitats can only be secured by establishing schemes of national scope, documenting where we are now so that we can be more readily aware of where we are heading. National schemes need many recorders, so even a novice like me can make useful contributions with just a little help and support. So I was delighted when I was given the opportunity to sign up for the Wider Countryside Monitoring Scheme organised by Butterfly Conservation.

In this scheme volunteers are allocated a 1 km by 1 km OS grid square, i.e. one square on a 1:50,000 Landranger map. The volunteer is expected to walk two transects of 1 km, on two occasions during the summer. I was allocated a square that did not excite me; it contained a small Sitka spruce plantation on the edge of an upland sheep moor. My friend, who knows his invertebrates, suggested a number of species that may be present, but I thought the sub-text was not too encouraging!



**Ringlet**

So it was that I decided to have a go on a rare sunny Sunday morning in July. I had planned my transects, one along the

plantation boundary and one parallel to it in open pasture but I had had no time to walk the route beforehand, and so was very unprepared. I parked some 500m away and walked towards the start of the first transect on a track through some rough pasture and did not see a single butterfly! I found the spruce plantation and then tried to find the starting point that I had planned which was in the open pasture. This is where my total lack of preparation was made obvious to me: what I thought to be fences on the map, I found to be ditches! Without GPS there was no way I would be able to pace out the 100m sections that were required for counting purposes, hopping from one tussock to another in the middle of a peat bog. In coming to this conclusion, I had begun walking alongside the plantation edge and as I did so, I became astounded by the abundance and diversity of the butterflies that I found there!

What to do? After some thinking, I decided to walk along the plantation edge trying to identify and count the butterflies surrounding me. After an hour, I had identified 6 species, none of which I had knowingly seen before and only 2 of which could I put a name to at the time – yes, I am a novice! Happily I had made one vital bit of preparation; I had taken my camera and was able to take pictures that were just good enough for identification when I arrived home, one of the marvels of digital photography. The two species I could identify at the time were Ringlet, of which there were hundreds, and a single Green-veined White, sitting proudly on top of a thistle. From the photos, I identified the Common Blue, which was found where the heather was mixed in with the pasture, and the Small Heath competing with the Ringlet in numbers. However the other two species I identified from the photos were more surprising, a number of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and several Large Heath – both of

these are priority species for UK conservation action. Of course I could have been mistaken, but I asked my knowledgeable friend to take a look, and a couple of weekends later he confirmed all these species and added two more, Meadow Brown and Dark Green Fritillary.



**Dark Green Fritillary**

So an outing squeezed into a busy weekend, which had started out as a potential disaster, turned into one of the highlights of my summer! I saw butterflies in an abundance I had never seen before, species I had never seen before, in a habitat that I had not understood before despite having lived beside it for many years, and I had identified a site of conservation interest that was unknown before my visit! For me, it emphasises the vital importance of the Wider Countryside Monitoring Scheme – getting to know what is out there.



**Common Blue**

To find out more about the Wider Countryside Monitoring Scheme contact Katie Cruickshanks at [kcruckshanks@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:kcruckshanks@butterfly-conservation.org)

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### Footnote

John's 1 km square is at Spurlens Rig in the north of Peeblesshire (east of Leadburn

Moor on the A703). This is also a proposed windfarm site. A windfarm on Spurlens Rig would not necessarily be a bad thing – in fact it could secure favourable management for 25 years rather than leaving it to the vagaries of the world agricultural/forestry economy. There would of course be an enormous benefit if the conifer plantation to the east were removed and ditches blocked.

**Reuben Singleton**

## Pipers Knowe Quarry June-July 2008

by Iain Cowe (Chirnside)

Pipers Knowe Quarry is a disused sand pit and gravel quarry that lies in the Billy Mire strip, 5km NW of Chirnside village. Since its closure several years ago it has been landscaped and planted with light shrubs and trees and in its centre there is a small man-made lake. The quarry slopes are terraced, and hold light grasses, vetches and orchids.



The thin soils are favourable for Kidney Vetch, Birds-foot Trefoil, and Black Medick amongst others. On the north side there are carpets of Ox-eye Daisy and Marsh, Spear and Creeping Thistle together with Teasel. And among light conifers Tufted Vetch and Knapweed stands thrive. Scabious, Ragwort, Cranesbill, Willowherbs,

Cowslip, Marsh Marigold, Sorrels and countless other herbs adorn the upper slopes and margins. Among other attractions here are Buzzard, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, a large Sand Martin colony, Otter, Roe Deer, good numbers of Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Darter Dragonfly, and various hoverfly, bee and wasp species.

My first visit to this site this year coincided with the recent demise of the grass verges and set aside due to wheat demands....for flora and fauna in this area, there has been a marked drop in all species. It had taken so long to build wildlife communities, and so little time to see them disappear. My target species for this site was the Large Skipper, alas I found none, however I was encouraged by my finding a small number of Small Skipper.

It was June 23rd that I encountered my first butterfly species attributed to the quarry, Common Blue (5-6 males) and one female laying on Black Medick. Their numbers steadily increased through to July, with

up to 16 individuals on the wing; the females were varied in colour from all brown to blue, laying on all clovers and vetches.

Meadow Brown and Ringlet thrived in this grassy habitat, 100 plus easily of each species on any given day, a flash of rare sunshine bringing them out in style. The white butterflies in

this area seemed sporadic, Green-veined White, Large and Small White never broke into double figures.

Towards the end of June Common Blue numbers increased, while Latticed Heath and Brimstone moths with the odd Silver Y, were the only ones brave enough to venture out among the showers.



**Brimstone moth**

The beginning of July brought the first Small Skipper, quite unmistakable, with its swept back wings. I managed to find 4 individual Small Skipper in total, quite aggressive little fellows, holding their own against the larger Meadow Browns for thistle space, and for that matter not perturbed at all at the presence of Common Darter dragons, actually chasing anything from their patch with gusto.



**Small Skipper**

On the 8th of July I investigated the light fir wood at the north end of the Quarry and found some Burnet moths, at first believing them to be Six-spot, it was only when I returned home that I realised that they had been Narrow-bordered Five-spot, I immediately returned the next day and found the rest of the colony of about 20+ Narrow-bordered and around 6-10 Six-spot.



**Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet**

On the 13th July the weather was cloudy, cool and damp and I had pretty much given up hope of seeing anything when suddenly the sun appeared from behind the clouds and all hell broke loose ... in that 30 minutes while the sun shone, I don't think I have ever seen so many insects ... it was one of those crazy moments, you just end up running around after UFOs. All of the species I have mentioned were involved in this upsurge in large numbers, I even saw my very first Small Skipper female nectaring on Willowherb, but the star of the show for me was a pristine Northern Brown Argus ... the best ones are always the ones you did not expect.

My final visit turned up only one new species for the site – a Small Tortoiseshell in tip-top condition.

All in all, despite the weather, this site proved to be a haven of wildlife. My visits did not reveal the additional species I would likely encounter outwith this time period ... so I am hopeful I can add Orange-tip and Peacock, Small Copper and Comma to the list. I did see one Small Copper and one Comma on site, however they may just have been passing through. Maybe the elusive Large Skipper will discover this site next season.

Due to climatic unpredictability and the ever changing landscape ... you just never know what you will see ... I very much look forward to 2009.

## **Green Hairstreaks - A Lost Colony?**

by **Malcolm Lindsay  
(Galashiels)**

In May 1985 I was delighted to discover Green Hairstreaks on Avenel Hill near Galashiels. This site is an undisturbed west-facing slope above the Allen Water. The steep scree slopes harbour a varied range of relic upland woodland and scrub with prominent stands of birch and gorse and an understory of unburnt heather and large carpets of bilberry (Avenel Hill and Gorge SSSI citation, site 106, Scottish Natural Heritage).

The hillside had previously been notified as an SSSI by virtue of its range of higher plants, lichens and liverworts but the Green Hairstreak had not previously been recorded there. However, as they fly early in the butterfly season (late spring) and can be remarkably inconspicuous, they could easily have been overlooked. One imagines that the colony had probably been present in this agriculturally undisturbed site for many years.



At that time we knew of only 2 or 3 other small colonies in the Borders. Since then, a few more colonies have been found but all are more than 20km from the Avenel site.

The Avenel colony seemed to be exceptionally strong with about 60 butterflies seen over a 600m stretch of hillside. Several mating pairs were also seen. In subsequent years until 1992 the colony remained strong with

30 or so butterflies present at the peak of their season.



**Green Hairstreak**

By 1997, however, numbers appeared to have crashed and I was alarmed then to find only one adult. Very few were seen thereafter. The three seen on the hillside in May 2002 were the last recorded Avenel Green Hairstreaks. Further annual searches from 2004 to 2008, with particular intensive searching in 2008, produced no records.

What went wrong?

There does not appear to be any recent major habitat change or degradation and, despite possibly increased grazing by Roe Deer, the site looks much as it was in 1985. There are many large carpets of healthy bilberry (especially at the epicentre of the previous colony) and these don't look shaded out to any significant extent. Good birch shelter persists. There could be some very subtle change that we are missing, but it seems unlikely that habitat change is the explanation.

Human disturbance also seems an unlikely factor. The site is not easily accessible and numbers of visitors have been few. A very minimal amount of butterfly collection has taken place but, to the best of my knowledge, this amounted to only one specimen in 1985 and two in 1991– this seems very unlikely to have influenced the health of the population. Perhaps the explanation is climatic with a series of cold, wet springs fatally depleting a colony whose isolation has prevented any recolonisation.

It has been a vexing experience to find something very precious only to lose it so quickly. However it's not impossible that the colony could just be surviving in some unvisited hollow or adjacent stretch of hillside. We keep hoping and will continue to search for a year or two yet.

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## Fumbling Around in the Dark - A Beginner's Experiences

by Roddy McGeoch (Lauder)

So....erm...nice pictures....but why *moths* (of all things)? A question I have heard many times these past few years – albeit that the last three words are generally left unspoken. But why indeed.....

I still have a fairly clear recollection of marveling, as a small child, at the “butterflies” flitting around the bright floodlight which illuminated my grandparents' farmyard. The light was mounted on the external wall of the farmhouse, just outside the spare bedroom where I slept on our regular weekend visits, so I had fairly close views - but I could not make out any detail on the wings of the fast fluttering insects.

"Ugh!! Moths! Ugly horrible things!" The words of my mother as she steered me away from the window, closed the curtains firmly and packed me off to bed. So that was that. I daresay I didn't give it much further thought as I drifted off to sleep. Mum would be right (as she always was, back then). They were little more than brownish blurs after all. Some were a little chunkier than others but they all looked pretty much the same. Not nearly as nice as butterflies.

Why would anyone think any differently?



For many, many years I accepted that Mum's instinctive reaction had indeed been the right one - a feeling occasionally reinforced whenever one of the larger noctuids was found blundering around one of the light bulbs at home. This, I should add, was despite my having held a keen interest in almost all other forms of our natural fauna from almost as far back as I can remember. It was ultimately my nature photography (and perhaps a sense of desperation) that eventually led me back to that murky realm I had first peered into in my childhood.

In the intervening years, I had developed firstly a fascination for and, later, a reasonable degree of proficiency in photographing our native mammalian and avian wildlife. Photography and wildlife - my twin passions - and the fact that I was able to combine the two interests.....in truth, it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that my nature photography was probably bordering on an obsession. That's the way it is with nature photography. But it was a time consuming pursuit and, with a young family, it was one to which I felt I could no longer devote the long hours that would inevitably be required if I was to have a chance of securing the standard of photos I wanted to achieve. The photography was still an imperative for me though. I found couldn't just let it go - I needed to be out in the open air making pictures of the creatures that so fascinated me. But how to balance that with my

other loves and responsibilities? That was my dilemma.

The solution was fairly obvious - just to go for the "easier" subjects - the ones I could get close enough to for photography without putting in the groundwork: the hours of patient observation and/or sitting in a hide for hours waiting for the 'decisive moment'. The 'easier subjects', for me, would be those to be found at Wooplaw Community Woods - a few minutes' drive from my door - where I could focus on photographing the insects, fungi and amphibians and making the most of the occasional other opportunities that the changing seasons would bring my way.

Fairly soon, however, I found that I had built up a pretty decent portfolio of the species that interested me - with, in most cases, photos that I felt I would barely be able to improve upon. I was beginning to wonder where to turn next - when an unexpected opportunity sent me off in a completely new direction.

I had gone for a weekend's photography at Cheddar Gorge, where the Mammals Trust had lined up a weekend of dormice, badgers, and reptiles. We had been taken, on the Sunday, to a reserve that was supposed to be teeming with adders, grass snakes, slow worms and lizards - but the heavily overcast and occasionally showery conditions were conspiring against us in our hunt for them. There was nothing to entice them out from cover on a day like this. And then it happened. Although I didn't realise it at the time, the events of the next 20 minutes were to open my eyes to what was, almost literally, an entirely new world.

I had spotted a largish, brown moth sitting squarely on a nettle leaf, some 18 inches from the ground, roughly 3-4 yards away. Not wanting to approach too closely at first, for fear of putting

it to flight, I set up my tripod, popped my longest lens on to the camera and had a closer look. I was still much too far away for a decent photo, but through the long lens I could see that the moth, though brown, was actually quite richly coloured and had a yellowish spot on its wing (or rather, as I was later to discover, its forewing). Should I try to photograph it? Well, nothing else was happening and I had bags of film with me - so why not? So (without, it must be said, a great deal of enthusiasm) I fitted my macro lens to the camera, lowered the tripod and began, slowly, to edge towards my subject. It was as if the photographer's instinct had taken over - while the naturalist's curiosity I always felt when finding something new was certainly there, the sense of excitement and anticipation that would normally quicken my heart as I inched my camera toward my quarry was noticeably absent. In part, this was down to the weather conditions. The poor light would not make for a great image (this was before Photoshop was in such regular use), and use of my flashgun, even for fill-in lighting, would have created garish, glaring highlights of the wet leaf, ruining the shot. And it was only a moth, after all. But it was still a new species for me and I wanted first and foremost to have a closer look at it and, if possible, to take a decent enough picture to enable me to identify it later.

After a few minutes careful approach, and some final adjustments to the tripod I got the shot that would serve for record/identification purposes. Now to move in for the high impact shot...but suddenly I almost jumped backwards, as I saw the moth begin to vibrate. I had never seen anything like that before! My initial thought was that this must be some sort of bluff threat strategy - perhaps designed to deter predators. Not a bad defence mechanism, I remember thinking. (I was also

racking my brain, trying to dredge up any memory of anything that might have indicated whether any moth species can bite or sting - such was the state of my ignorance)! It was only weeks later that I learned that many species have to go through this warming up process before they can take to the wing. I wasn't at all sure what was going on - but was astonished at how long the process continued, even after I had backed off. Interesting. I needed to know more about this creature.



**Gold Spangle**

After I returned home, a check through the (rather basic) insect guides I had at the time proved, frustratingly, less than illuminating. Hardly any of them even mentioned moths - and those that did tended to concentrate only on day-flying species. By chance, though I came across a photo in one of my wildlife magazines that arrived a few days later. Had I perhaps, then, photographed a Gold Spangle? I just wasn't sure. The magazine picture didn't quite seem to match the memory of what I had seen.

The return of my slides clinched it. Whatever it was I had come across, it wasn't a Gold Spangle. OK - time to buy a moth book. That'll do the trick. A visit to a second-hand bookshop quickly yielded a good copy of the Observer's Book of Larger Moths. This, however, simply compounded my confusion. I was pretty sure the moth I had photographed was not in there either. Very odd. Had I perhaps

stumbled upon some exotic foreign traveller?

It was only another fortnight later, with the arrival of my Collins Complete British Wildlife Photoguide, that I discovered (to my slight disappointment) that I had not. The subject of my very first photograph of a moth had, in fact, been ..... a Beautiful Golden Y.

(to be continued)

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## Some Peeblesshire Moths

from **Reuben Singleton (Peebles)**

**Drumelzier Glen, Peeblesshire** (NT143328). On the night of 12-13 July 2008, a Borders Moth Recording Field Trip was held to record the moths of this upland site which forms part of the Tweedsmuir Hills SSSI. In total 47 species of moth were recorded including a number of new Vice County records. The highlights included Green Arches (*Anaplectoides prasina*), Muslin Footman (*Nudaria mundana*), Pale Eggar (*Trichiura crataegi*), Dark Tussock (*Dicallomera fascelina*), Grey Mountain Carpet (*Entephria caesiata*), and Scarce Silver Y (*Syngrapha interrogationis*).

**Dukehaugh, Peebles Garden Light Trap** (NT248402). Numbers have been similar to previous years but with the following species recorded for the first time: Old Lady (*Mormo maura*), Bulrush Wainscot (*Nonagria typhae*), Dun-bar (*Cosmia trapezina*, Centre-barred Sallow (*Atethmia centrago*) and Lunar Thorn (*Selenia lunularia*).

**Kailzie Gardens** (NT280383). Old Lady (*Mormo maura*) recorded in light trap on 30 July 2008.

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## Local Moth Recorders Need Your Records!

Across the Scottish Borders there are four Vice Counties (recording areas) for moths, and the people who are collating records to help create the first comprehensive UK atlas for macromoths would really like to know about what you've seen. So please get in touch and find out how to send in any moth sightings to:

**Vice County 78: Peeblesshire:** Reuben Singleton, Garnock, 6 Dukehaugh, Peebles, Scottish Borders, EH45 9DN  
[reuben@dukehaugh.free-online.co.uk](mailto:reuben@dukehaugh.free-online.co.uk)

**Vice County 79: Selkirkshire:** Malcolm Lindsay, Burn House, Mossilee Road, Galashiels, TD1 1NF.  
[malcandles@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:malcandles@tiscali.co.uk)

**Vice County 80: Roxburghshire:** Andy Fitchett, 1 The Croft, Nether Blainslie, Galashiels, TD1 2QF  
[andy.fitchett@virgin.net](mailto:andy.fitchett@virgin.net) Tel: 01896 860643

& Jeff Waddell, Bonavista, Heatherlyett, Galashiels, Selkirkshire, TD1 2JL [jeff.waddell@ukf.net](mailto:jeff.waddell@ukf.net)

**Vice County 81: Berwickshire:** Barry Prater, 12 Barefoots Crescent, Eyemouth, Berwickshire, TD14 5BA  
[barry@prater.myzen.co.uk](mailto:barry@prater.myzen.co.uk) Tel: 018907 52037

The East Scotland branch has moth-trapping equipment available on loan if anyone wants to have a go with it. Contact Malcolm Lindsay (details above) if you're interested. All of the people listed are willing to help the beginner with moth identification; indeed, some of them are still just starting to get to know their local moths themselves.

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## Butterfly Records Too!

Duncan Davidson compiles all the East Scotland branch butterfly records and his contact details are:

Duncan Davidson, 140 Pitcorthie Drive, Dunfermline, KY11 1HG [duncan@dwwd.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:duncan@dwwd.freeserve.co.uk) Tel: 01383 730446

Recording forms are available if you don't already have them.

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