



BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION
East Scotland Branch

Borders Newsletter

www.eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk



Red Admiral

Issue 7

Autumn 2011

Welcome to the latest issue of the local Butterfly Conservation newsletter for people living in the Scottish Borders. It 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 me know of anyone who you think would like to be added to its circulation.

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[All photos are by the authors (except where otherwise noted) but not necessarily in their own articles]

Please write in with your articles and views. The next issue will go out in spring 2012. Email to me at the above address or by post to: 12 Barefoots Crescent Eyemouth, Berwickshire TD14 5BA

Butterfly & Moth Conservation in the Borders

Despite the mixed and often poor weather over the summer, we did have some warm, sunny days in the Borders, happily coinciding with the outdoor field trips, which were very successful - all the butterflies we sought were found, and often in good numbers. If you haven't experienced any of these outings make a point of coming along to some next year - the mix of people means that we always learn a lot from others and they are good fun whatever the weather. There are more details of these outings later on. For the night-time moth events the weather was less obliging, but the wind and rain didn't deter people and a barbecue at one made it very enjoyable.

One important thing which is becoming clear is the benefit of combining forces with other groups for our activities - this brings in a greater diversity of people and also helps us spread the word on the importance of Lepidoptera recording and conservation.



Heart and Club

Recording work has continued well for butterflies and especially for moths, with plenty of excellent finds. Some members of the Borders Organic Gardeners have hosted moth traps in their gardens during the summer to boost the range of recording and others have had a go with traps available on loan from the branch.

Conservation measures take on various forms, from international plans and agreements to localised habitat management. Here in the Borders work has started on identifying Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS), those places which hold something special and important for wildlife. They are often defined just by their vegetation and the resulting habitat, but rare or threatened species will also add to their importance. One thing which stands out from looking at some of the potential LBS is their total lack of butterfly or moth records. So there is much scope for discovery - good botanical habitats will have interesting other residents.

East Scotland Branch is now on Facebook - just go to the website (address above) and follow the link. It gives you the opportunity to talk to people with similar interests and to keep up with day-to-day developments.

Barry Prater

Some 2011 Butterfly and Moth Highlights from the Borders

Records for the complete year have not been collated so there will no doubt be some significant additions to these brief summaries.

Butterflies

Small and Large Skippers - both are doing well, with their strongest colonies being along the lower reaches of the R Whiteadder, and the Small Skipper has now been reported as far west as the Yarrow Valley.

Green Hairstreak - three new sites were located in Peeblesshire and most known sites have now been checked (and many confirmed) since 2004.

Small Blue - the Lamberton colony remains healthy and a few adults and eggs were located at a new site a few km away; none were seen at Eyemouth this year. Former inland sites associated with disused railway lines were checked but proved negative once again.

Northern Brown Argus - confirmed in a new area near Fruid Reservoir.

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - a further two sites have been discovered, probably in new 10km squares and most known sites have now been confirmed over the past decade.

Large Heath - recorded from just a couple of known areas this year, which is worrying; negative results from two other previous sites.

Speckled Wood - recorded in Peeblesshire for the first time and well into October near the coast, so it seems to be spreading and thriving.



Wall - seen between Innerleithen and Peebles and at Stichill, hopefully confirming its inland spread.

Moths

There have been many discoveries and rediscoveries this year. Some species are spreading north and so are starting to appear in our region; others have remained unrecorded for many years or decades, and the recent upsurge in interest in moths has allowed them to be found again.

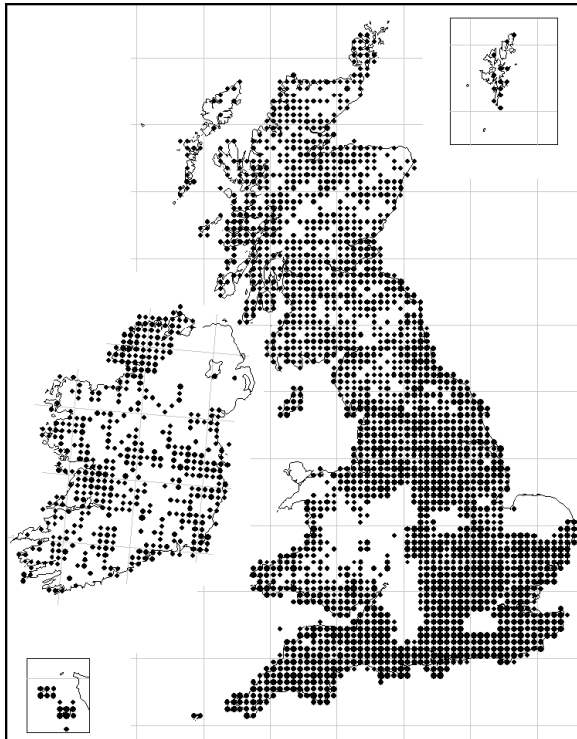
The species which are *probably* new for the Borders in 2011 are all pugs - Maple Pug, Oak-tree Pug, V-Pug and Angle-barred (Ash) Pug. There is a long list of moths whose existence or range extension has been confirmed, including Ochreous Pug, Drinker, Seraphim, Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet, Dingy Shell, Sword-grass (a nationally scarce moth which has all but disappeared south of the Forth and last recorded in the Borders in 1984), Heart and Club, White-line Dart, Shuttle-shaped Dart, Golden-rod Brindle, Pale Pinion, Butterbur and Neglected Rustic. As in previous recent years, the local moth enthusiasts are indebted to Roy Leverton and other members of the Scottish Moths group for help with identifications and advice.

At the time of writing this we are experiencing the arrival of many immigrant moths, assisted by some southerly winds to reach our shores, but with little chance of capitalising on this by either breeding or surviving the winter. So a Death's Head Hawkmoth has been seen near Hawick and both Vestal and Rusty-dot Pearl have appeared, along with the better-known Angle Shades and Silver Y.

[Note - annual summaries of important Borders butterfly and moth sightings are published by the Berwickshire Naturalists Club. The 2010 report is in Vol 51, part 3, p 176-186 and that for 2009 is in Vol 51, part 2, p 99-107.]

Butterflies for the New Millennium Project

This project, the initial phase of which covered the period 1995-1999 and culminated in the publication of 'The Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland', continues to track the fortunes of our butterflies over successive five-year periods. The results and analysis of the most recent survey (2005-2009) will be presented, along with trends from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, in the latest 'State of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland' report in the next few months. The new report will follow the same format as previously, presenting a short summary of the results and their implications to a wide audience including politicians, policy makers and conservationists, as well as butterfly recorders. The report will also be made freely available online.



Butterfly records from 2010 BNM survey work

We are now (2011) two years into the next period and the map shows the level of recording which was achieved across the country last year. Some county datasets are missing (hence the big gaps) and the number of species recorded in each 10km square is indicated by the size of the dot. The coverage has been amazing for just a single year's effort and when 2011 records have been input the picture can only get more impressive. Having said that, parts of the country (including in the Borders) are incomplete and so far there is no indication of which species have been recorded in each square, so for the next three years we must continue with our targeted approach to butterfly recording, aiming to check on the more important species as much as possible.

Nowadays, it is very important that butterfly distribution data can be mobilised rapidly to support biodiversity conservation and research. Therefore, although the BNM project will continue with its programme of five-year surveys of Britain and Ireland (e.g. 2010-2014), the aim of BC Head Office is to collate and make available records from the preceding year on an annual basis. Locally we have our own butterfly dataset (thanks to Duncan Davidson) and this is referred to quite frequently in connection with planning applications or other developments. Put simply, your records are important and are utilised.

Big Butterfly Count 2011

The second year of the Big Butterfly Count, run by Butterfly Conservation in association with M&S, went extremely well during the summer. There was excellent media coverage and over 34,300 people took part. The number of Counts submitted online was just under 30,000 - almost twice as many as in 2010. Perhaps not surprisingly given the weather during late July when most of the Counts took place, the numbers of butterflies and day-flying moths recorded was down on 2010; the average number of individuals seen per Count dropped by 11%. The Gatekeeper was the most abundant species at the UK level but, some good news, the Small Tortoiseshell, which appeared to be on a serious decline in recent years, came top in Scotland. The results of Big Butterfly Count 2011 can be found at www.bigbutterflycount.org/2011mainresults and the records will be made available to BNM Local Coordinators in due course.

Big Butterfly Count will return again in 2012 so look out for further details and hopefully you will spare just 15 minutes to take part.

Field Trip to Gordon Moss area 25th June

Iain Cowe, Chirnside

This outing to Gordon Moss and the wet fields beyond the Hareford Burn was primarily to see the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary which, up to a few years ago, had been presumed extinct in the Berwickshire district.

At the start the weather was doing its best to dampen things down. In overcast and muggy conditions we assembled at the entrance to the Gordon Moss SWT reserve and all waterproofed up we set off into the birch and willow jungle of Gordon Moss. We were lucky to have in our number some people with plenty of local knowledge, David Long and Ron McBeath, who both knew a thing or two about tracking down a few rarely seen plants on the way. So although the Coral-root Orchid eluded us, we were shown a Lesser Butterfly Orchid. A magnificent sight, with delicate, snow-white pearlescent flowers hanging with the utmost fragility to a slender lime-green stem, such a very stark contrast to its dank and lugubrious surroundings.

We moved on to the old railway line which cuts through the heart of Gordon Moss and as we emerged from the wood, so did the sun. This gave us our first good look at some butterflies - freshly emerged Ringlets - dancing among the sodden grasses. Our next objective would be for all eight of us to cross the Hareford Burn at the west end of the Moss, no easy task at the best of times. Fortunately, Ron used some pre-planned bridge engineering to great effect to transport us all safely to the other side.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Once across the burn we made our way into the open fields beyond the Moss. These fields are home to a large colony of the day's target species, which is one of Berwickshire's rarest butterflies and doubtless infrequently, if ever, seen by the denizens of the shire. From late May to July the butterfly is on the wing here in very high numbers. On a perfect June morning the butterflies swarm over the wettest areas of the field, males looking for emerging females, tirelessly fluttering around, stopping only to refuel on Bugle that serves as their nectar source in the early part of the season. Despite the previously grim conditions, we were able to find the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary very easily indeed. They were openly nectaring on the tall Marsh Thistles in the field so everyone got great views of this very pretty bright orange and black chequered butterfly with its stained glass underwing of pearly white and copper split with black bands and spots.

There was even more interest to be found in these plant-rich wet fields, with more species of butterfly, including the Small Copper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Green-veined White. Some excellent moths included Small Argent and Sable, Green Carpet and Clouded Border. The plant life here is quite breathtaking, with many species. We were able to see Heath Spotted Orchid, Bog Asphodel, Marsh Cinquefoil, Cranberry, Sundew, Ragged Robin, Bugle, Heath Bedstraw, Tormentil and most importantly the Marsh Violet. This last one is the food plant of the fritillary's caterpillar; they can use other types of violet, but this one is preferred here. Surprise of the day for me was sighting an Adder, the first one I have ever seen and, beautiful as it was, I won't be sad to never see one again soon!



Green Carpet



Marsh Violet

So, a great day had by all who attended and much was learned about a small part of the Borders which few of us see.

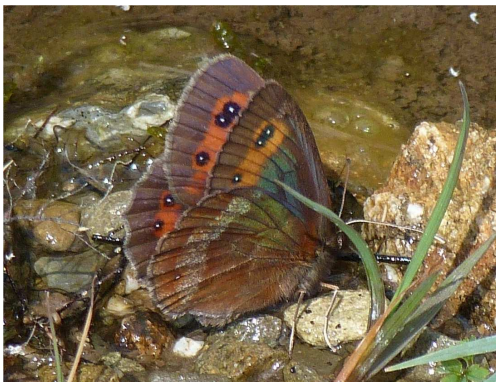
Field Trip to Tweedsmuir on 30th July

Alison McArthur, Dolphinton

Saturday the 30th July dawned with a thick mist and I hoped this was heralding a sunny day ahead. By the time I arrived at Tweedsmuir some members of the group were already gathered at the rendezvous point. They had even had brief glimpses of our target species, the Scotch Argus, which only flies when the sun is out, so all was set for a good day. The pair of Ospreys nesting nearby also put in an appearance.

As other participants gathered, some Ringlets and a few more Scotch Argus were spotted in flight, and we discussed the differences between the two species. The Ringlets looked dull brown beside the fresh dark chocolate coloured male Scotch Argus, with their scarlet bands and black and white eye-spots on their upperwings. We also realised that the bands and spots are not always noticeable when they're flying.

The decision was made to drive to the dam wall at Fruid reservoir where earlier in the week I'd come across a good-sized colony of Scotch Argus. Also, in the middle of July, a single Northern Brown Argus was spotted on the banking by the road alongside the water, so the ten of us arrived there with high expectations!



Scotch Argus (photo: Mervyn Griffin)



the worn Northern Brown Argus

In no time we were spotting lots of Scotch Argus, in fact it turned out to be the most numerous butterfly in this area, with c50 seen. It was also good to find a few fresh Small Tortoiseshells and some Common Blues dotted about, delighting us as always. The species list grew as Small Heath and Green-veined White were added, plus several day-flying moths including Chimney Sweeper, Purple Bar and Six-spot Burnet - and still the sun shone!

Suddenly there was a call from the group well out in the lead. They were confident they had spotted a Northern Brown Argus. It was a rather worn specimen but it was still showing distinctive single white marks on the upper forewings and had orange lunules round its dark brown wings. However, it also had a dusting of blue on its body, so just to make sure it wasn't a female Common Blue it was caught in a pot and we were all able to have a good look at both the upper and lower wing surfaces. The distinctive pattern of white spots and blotches on the underwings, many minus black pupils, confirmed that it was a Northern Brown Argus. It then wasn't long before a small patch of Common Rock-rose was discovered on the banking beyond. This was a good find since of course it is the food plant of the NBA caterpillars.

At this point I think we were all feeling quite content and also rather hungry, so we returned to our cars to pick up our picnics and enjoy relaxing in the sun. After lunch we split into smaller groups and radiated out in all directions. This proved quite productive since a much fresher single Northern Brown Argus was found and photographed, and another 120 Scotch Argus were counted by the roadside below the dam wall.

Many thanks to everyone who came from far and wide to make the day a great success. Much knowledge was shared, and we enjoyed great views of our target species. It proved to be a really interesting field meeting, in ideal conditions.

Evolution of a Moth Hunter

Ron McBeath, Lamberton

My first dabbling with moths goes away back to some of my earliest memories, when our local postman in Ayton introduced me to painting fence posts with a mixture of treacle and beer. I have no recollection of catching anything but do remember he had a striking specimen of a Death's Head Hawkmoth in his collection. At about the same time, like many other school boys I kept jars full of caterpillars, most hatched out into butterflies and moths and I can remember the surprise when a jar of what I thought were Magpie Moths became sawflies.

For the next 50 or so years birds and plants held my attention - until I met Barry and Barbara - and soon a moth trap was in my garden! Not long after that David Long informed me he was going to Abbey St Bathans for an evening moth trapping meeting, would I like to join him? The rest is history.

Soon I got the loan of a moth trap, which luckily has turned into a long-term loan, and started trapping in our garden. At the start it was quite daunting, as some mornings I caught 150 moths and could only recognise a handful, often there were so many to process that I had to release some unchecked. Digital photography of the specimens was the big breakthrough and the ability to send the images to Barry. Poor Barry was suddenly overwhelmed with common species to identify and diplomatically correct my misidentifications. Little by little I started to recognise some of the common ones and there is always great excitement now when something distinct and new to the garden turns up, like Drinker, Spectacle or Pebble Prominent.



Drinker

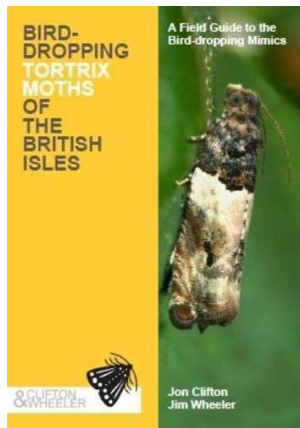


Pebble Prominent

Even better, when Barry admits he has never seen one before in Berwickshire - but that has not happened very often.

It was fun and enlightening to go with Barry to Pease Dean and catch specimens attracted to our lights, which included Yellow-barred Brindle and Lunar Marbled Brown. This was followed by an SWT meeting in the grounds of Duns Castle when about 18 people turned up to watch the *experts* catch moths on a dark and very wet night. I think we were lucky not to get lynched or locked up.

Joining the Scottish Moths Forum was a major step forward. Seeing all the photos posted, reading the comments, following the threads on evolution and identification is great and absorbing; Susan my wife never sees me in an evening now as I am in the office in front of the computer! It is great when I post a specimen and get a name back in a few minutes - or get put down for posting photos of caterpillars which are sawflies, not moths.



At the start I ignored the micros, but after photographing a few, found they were fascinating when seen enlarged on the computer screen. Now when I take the dog for a walk a net is sweeping anything that dares to fly. Most have not been named yet and many will be impossible to name, but a start has been made. One day Susan opened the mail, to her surprise the booklet that emerged from an envelope appeared to be on Bird-droppings, had I completely flipped? It was of course A Field Guide to the Bird-dropping Mimics.

What of the future - by the time you read this I will have retired so in theory should have more spare time on my hands. Christmas is coming and a battery-operated light trap would make a great Christmas present and give me a licence to roam.....

If you've seen it, now is the time to report it.....

These are the people to whom you should send your sightings of moths or butterflies during 2011:

The Borders County Moth Recorders

Peeblesshire: Reuben Singleton, 5 Frankscroft, Peebles, Scottish Borders EH45 9DX
reuben@dukehaugh.free-online.co.uk Tel: 01721 723858

Selkirkshire: Malcolm Lindsay, Burn House, Mossilee Road, Galashiels TD1 1NF
malcandles@tiscali.co.uk Tel: 01896 753425

Roxburghshire: Andy Fitchett, 1 The Croft, Nether Blainslie, Galashiels TD1 2QF
andy.fitchett@virgin.net Tel: 01896 860643

& Jeff Waddell, 33 Eildon View, Dingleton, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9RH
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Berwickshire: Barry Prater, 12 Barefoots Crescent, Eyemouth, Berwickshire TD14 5BA
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& the East Scotland Butterfly Recorder

Duncan Davidson, 140 Pitcorthie Drive, Dunfermline KY11 1HG
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There is guidance on submitting your butterfly and moth records on the branch website and also some recording forms which you can use - these help enormously when collating all the records.

Butterfly Conservation is a non-profit making company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468). It is also a charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268).

Butterfly Conservation Scotland can be contacted at Balallan House, Allan Park, Stirling FK8 2QG, Tel 01786 447753.
Butterfly Conservation East Scotland branch: www.eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk