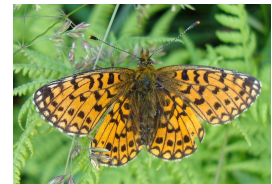




Borders Newsletter

www.eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Issue 5

Autumn 2010

Butterfly & Moth Conservation in the Borders

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 people who you think should be added to the circulation.

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Small Blue



Ochreous Pug (photo: Derek Ogston)

For moths the survey work has been hugely helped by several keen new recorders scattered across our area. This extra recording effort, coupled with targeted searches for day-flying species, the use of pheromone lures and visits to key habitats has produced a wealth of exciting records of species which are new for, or considered rare in the Borders. These include Small Purple-barred, Four-dotted Footman, Bordered Sallow, Ochreous Pug, Annulet, Seraphim, Northern Arches and Shuttle-shaped Dart.

Now is the time of year to send in your butterfly and moth records - full details of the people who need them are given later in the newsletter. Don't think that your records are not worth sending in - ALL records will be gratefully received.

Not only do records build up the picture of what we have locally, they also help us formulate our conservation priorities. Recently butterfly and moth records have contributed to submissions by Borders farmers for funding under the government's agri-environment schemes and the monitoring of experimental sowing of field margins on a Roxburghshire farm with grasses and wild flower mixes has started to try and quantify any benefits for Lepidoptera.

Habitat improvement work at Coldingham for the Northern Brown Argus was undertaken this year, involving cutting down Sycamore re-growth and the sowing of Rock Rose seeds in patches of cleared soil to increase the food plant for this butterfly - we await the outcome.

Borders Biodiversity Week in May was very successful and Butterfly Conservation arranged four events which were well-attended and gave a lot of new people insights into the world of butterflies and moths (and bats). Another similar week is planned for next year, so if you have any suggestions of good venues for public butterfly walks or moth evenings in 2011, do get in touch.

Many thanks to all who have got involved this year.

Contents

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

A Passion for Butterflies..... Arthur Still

The Hunting of the Shark..... Barbara Prater

Moth and Butterfly Recorders' Contact Details

In search of the Scotch Argus..... John Woolliams & Reuben Singleton

Getting up Early to Beat the Badger.....Teyl de Bordes

Progress with the NMRS Barry Prater

[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 2011. Email to me at the above address or by post to: 12 Barefoots Crescent Eyemouth, Berwickshire TD14 5BA

Barry Prater

A Passion for Butterflies

Arthur Still, Sprouston

At the age of ten I had three passions: chess, cricket and butterflies. Living on a farm in Sussex I was familiar with all the common species that inhabit gardens and woods. Once I saw a Purple Emperor, but the butterfly I remember best is the drably named Comma, perhaps because I never saw it again as I moved further north, to York and Durham and eventually the Borders. I tried to be a collector, but was too squeamish, and manually inept. And after a time other preoccupations took over. I ran the school chess club but used it as a cover for assignments with girls, my slow leg spin bowling which had baffled small batsmen became easy prey to confident 18 year olds, and my failure as a collector took the purpose away from my butterfly hunting.

But the passions of a ten year old live on. Names remain in the memory, of old cricketers and chess masters, and of butterflies, more firmly fixed than later knowledge of birds and flowers. They have a comforting familiarity, which in my case means that I can still spend hours delighting in a game of cricket in which hardly anything happens; the sight of a game of chess triggers an audience in me and a quick recognition of the state of play; and the first Red Admiral of the year still catches my breath as I take in the shimmering intensity of the black behind the bright colours of the wings, impossible to capture in a photograph or a painting.

And I felt the excitement of a 10 year old again four years ago when I came across colonies of Northern Brown Argus in the Halterburn Valley. Even now the old passions invite an absorption which can transport me into a world in which the most intense worries and sadness are forgotten. I remember once during a low period of my life, restoring myself by spending a long afternoon very slowly taking photos of the butterflies on the Buddleia in my front garden. Like a meditation.



Northern Brown Argus

This summer the old passions returned with full vigour. I had a hip replacement on Aug 17, came home on Aug 20 and celebrated my 75th birthday on August 22 with a big family lunch in the garden surrounded by Buddleias and butterflies. I reverted to an ideally spoilt childhood. Everything was done for me, and I spent the days playing chess games on the computer, following the test match, and slowly hobbling around the garden watching the butterflies.



Comma

Not expecting anything rare, and there were no Painted Ladies this year, but I was happy with the Whites, the Peacocks and the Red Admirals, and especially the Small Tortoiseshells back in old abundance after their troubling scarcity. Then I saw a Comma; still unmistakable after 60 years. I hurried to my 30 year old book, and read what I had remembered, that the Comma is found in "Southern and midland counties of England, and in Wales".

Later that day by a happy chance Barry phoned to ask me to write this piece for the Newsletter. I told him about my Comma and he explained how they have spread North in the last few years and are no longer rare in southern Scotland.

So populations fluctuate, but up as well as down, as we know from the efforts of enthusiasts who have been more dutiful recorders than me. But I can join them and restore a useful purpose to my old passion. Not just lazily enjoy the butterflies, but report the sightings. Next July I shall be striding over the hills with my new hip and a notebook to record the colonies of Northern Brown Argus in the Halterburn Valley.

The Hunting of the Shark (with apologies to Lewis Carroll)

Barbara Prater, Eyemouth

As an Assistant Lepidopterist by marriage, I am pretty useless. I cannot remember the names of simple household objects sometimes, so remembering the slight nuances of shape and colour required to identify the many and varied members of the moth family is totally beyond me. However, when it comes to 'spot the difference' I am your man, well - woman! Put me in a field of clover and I will produce a handful of four leaved 'lucky' ones. I can spot a stationary, edge on, basking butterfly across the next field. This comes in quite handy when accompanying Senior Lepidopterist on his travels. I spot it, we have a short tussle deciding where it is, and then he identifies it.

Now you have an idea of my disability and compensatory gift, on with the tale. Barry was told that the Chamomile Shark moth, supposedly uncommon in the Scottish Borders, lays its eggs on Mayweed. The caterpillar which then emerges eats the centre of the flower, lying on the flower to do so.



Mayweed



Chamomile Shark caterpillar

By displaying this picture I have probably spoiled the element of suspense, but I felt the reader could better enjoy vicariously our feeling of triumph, when last year after searching a huge number of Mayweed flower heads I spotted my first caterpillar on a plant (just about the *last* plant) on Burnmouth beach. This year, at the start of the hunting season (July), Barry marked out the 10km squares on our map - and off the hunting party went. No Mayweed to be left unexamined in our quest. Cruising slowly along the highways and byways of our square, we would screech to a halt, leap out of the car and dash to be the first over the gate and into the field edge and begin searching. Passers-by, observing two apparently ordinary not young people, bent over earnestly shouting to each other, may have been concerned - but - undeterred we hunted on. If you were one of those people who roared past that field of Mayweed next to the Cockburnspath roundabout on the A1, in the rain....., NOW you know what we were doing!

The result..... the only historical records are one recorded at Ayton Castle (1876), one at Birnam (1961), three recorded at Burnmouth (1963) and one at St Abbs (1978) (all but one of these are for the same 10km square).... in 2010 TEN different 10km squares now have records of the caterpillar and a total of FORTY-TWO caterpillars were seen by us, a further 6 found by Iain Cowe! AND we had an adult come to the trap in our garden in April.

[The inspiration for this hunting activity came from Duncan Davidson in Fife, who started searching for these caterpillars last year and, like us, has had a lot of success in 2010. It just shows that you shouldn't believe all that you read in field guides, especially regarding the distribution of species.]

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In Search of the Scotch Argus

John Woolliams and Reuben Singleton, Peebles

Go to the excellent new book “The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland” by Thomas & Lewington and turn to the page on the Scotch Argus. Look at the distribution map of this butterfly in the southern uplands, and you will see the butterfly is present in the south west of Scotland but gives Edinburgh a wide berth, with just a finger curling south and east towards Berwick. Read the text and the story tells of contracting range. Yet the food plant is Purple Moor Grass, and the butterfly is hardy and survives throughout the Highlands. The records show it to be all but absent from Peeblesshire - the highest county in the UK with plentiful habitat in the Tweed valley - with a single butterfly recorded in the last 10 years. This anomaly seemed worthy of investigation.

A closer look at the records in the Borders show a string of records in moderate numbers stretching down the Yarrow valley from the west, skirting the Tweed valley to the south, and reaching as far as Selkirk. One strategy was to look at valleys such as the Manor Valley which head south from the Tweed towards the Yarrow. The second strategy was to try and confirm the single Peeblesshire record available - a lone butterfly observed in a ride between two stands of sitka spruce.

The first of the strategies gave no indication of the Scotch Argus in the Manor valley despite a couple of visits in the season, even though some favourable habitat was available. It was the second strategy of returning to the lone sighting just south of Tweedhopefoot that provided an ample reward. A small way to the north of the old sighting lies Badlieu Quarry (NT051186) and here were 50 or more Scotch Argus nectaring on Ragwort, and another 8 were found in the rides of the surrounding sitka plantation (NT053185). So the Scotch Argus is in Peeblesshire! But in small numbers? However, walking south in the flood plain of the Tweed, a further surprise was in store, with hundreds seen on the wing and nectaring on Marsh Thistle and Devil's Bit Scabious (NT053180 to 055173).



Scotch Argus on Ragwort near Badlieu, Peeblesshire



Habitat supporting Scotch Argus near Tweedhopefoot

These records are very important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is reassuring to find the Scotch Argus in a habitat where it was historically present and which remains favourable. Secondly, it fills in a big white area on the Thomas and Lewington map south of Edinburgh. Thirdly, it illustrates the potential distribution bias that can occur in under-recorded regions. Another visit to the Ettrick Marshes in the search of the Scotch Argus recorded

its presence there for the first time; Etrick Marshes lie in the Etrick Valley to the south of the Yarrow. So the Scotch Argus is surviving in the Southern Uplands better than has been appreciated: grounds for reassurance, yes, but complacency, no.

Getting up Early to Beat the Badger to the Moth Trap

Teyl de Bordes, Selkirk

Last year after a conversation with the Southern Reporter columnist Corbie I was introduced to moth trapping. It opened a world I had not realised was out there at night; here follow some of the highlights and the odd low in exploring this hidden world.

I had read in Corbie's column about his exploits with moth trapping and invited him to come and see the day-flying moths on a farm I manage near Selkirk. He did come and had a look and put me in touch with Malcolm Lindsay, moth recorder for Selkirkshire. Malcolm appeared one night during July 2009 with Andy Fitchett, recorder for Roxburghshire, and three moth traps. After having been introduced to 457 moths in 46 different flavours by 1am, I started to begin to have my eyes opened to this hidden world. Malcolm came back a few weeks later with a small actinic trap finding another 2 species and 11 species we had caught previously during the "Big Night". That was it for 2009 and moths except for a small group of Herald Moths that spent the winter in the estate bothy toilet.



Herald

In 2010 Malcolm changed tactic to get me addicted to this funny business in the dark! He put up 2 traps the night before an excursion by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and asked me to take a look at the traps at daybreak and close them up to await the arrival of the SWT members later that morning. He gave me a handful of pill boxes to put in any stray moths hanging around the trap. The next morning when I arrived there were moths everywhere hanging from ferns, trees and a building beside which one trap was. I started to collect as many different ones as I could. The pill boxes were soon full and I had to use tea cups and saucers to contain others for an identity parade. It was this experience crawling around on hands and knees with a stack of teacups that finally convinced me to get my own trap. I bought a small actinic trap that could be powered by a car battery as it would give me the greatest mobility around the estate. I also got a large collection of pill boxes as I did not think hunting for moths with a full tea service was that practical.

As I write this late September I have 53 nights worth of trapping under my belt since late June. To start with I was very glad I had bought all these pill boxes because there were lots of "brown jobs" that looked all the same to my untrained eye. So I could take them home make a cup of coffee and sit down with my field guide. Still no luck even another dose of caffeine did not make it any clearer. So it was time for one of many early morning visits to Malcolm's House for "guidance". Luckily I soon started to recognise more and more species. Well, lucky for Malcolm's wife who soon had to get used to me skulking outside the house with a shoebox full of moths. Anybody considering starting taking up trapping would do well to buy a good digital camera. This makes life a lot easier as you can just snap a picture and e-mail it to someone for identification - it saves a lot of hanging around your mentor's doorstep with a shoe box. Soon I started to recognize my moths and I could name many without support. You get to think - I can do this, it is not that hard - and then nature shifts the goal posts by changing the usual suspects to a fresh set of species.

It is amazing how you develop an interest in weather reports! I never was as aware of the moon phases either. With a large estate there are lots of places to look for what was there in the way of moths. Sometimes it was obvious what would be a good spot other times I thought a site would be a sure fire hit and be disappointed. Luckily I have never had a night without any moths in the trap. But I have had the odd morning when I would turn up and find just a single Antler Moth in residence.

If that was a morning when you did not want to get out of bed at daybreak it was disappointing to say the least. But the highs more than make up for them. The days you find 20 - 30 different species in the trap are worth the early start. Or sometimes it was not the range but the rarity or beauty of a moth that made it worth it. Some of the best moth nights were the wettest nights; to stop the rain drowning the moths inside my trap I made a roof with a sheet of Styrofoam weighed down by a wheelie bin tyre (It works a treat). My own house is at the other side of Selkirk and I do not have the wide range of moths there but I do have the odd interesting visitor. Especially some of the micros have been wonderful at home from an appearance of a Golden Triangle to a Rush Veneer that popped in for a visit from the Mediterranean.



Antler Moth

The total species count for the farm so far stands at around 140 macro and micro moths. I have been trying to decide what would be my favourite moth but have been unable to pick one. Any of the Emeralds still give me a great thrill with their amazing green colours. One of the most interesting to me must be a tiny Gold Swift female. To think she would have to overwinter twice as a tiny grub before becoming this wee moth with a fur coat on. She would have been hunting out a male by trying to sniff out his pineapple scent before taking a break in my trap.



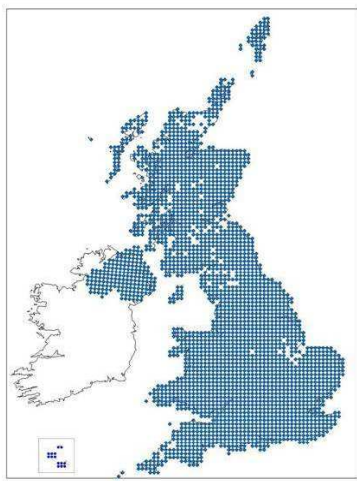
from www.blogs.telegraph.co.uk



Gold Swift (photo: Malcolm Lindsay)

Some mornings the other wildlife at the trap can be very interesting but not mentioned in your Moth Field Guide. I still remember the morning I found I had, unwittingly, put the trap below a wasp bink and had to sift my way through 20 plus cold and annoyed wasps to get to the moths. But the oddest must have been the morning when I found my trap covered in spittle and tongue marks. The only animal that seemed to fit the tongue marks was a badger from a nearby sett!

Progress with the National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS)



The NMRS database has now grown to over 11 million moth records. The map shows all the 10km squares for which there are records; every UK Vice County is well-represented in the dataset and we in the Borders have done our bit to contribute to the production of a Provisional Atlas, due for publication later this year. It will be a simple publication, essentially a collection of distribution maps for the ca. 900 species of macro-moths in the UK, showing records in two date periods, pre-2000 and 2000 onwards. Existing national maps (for the species that *have* such maps) are almost thirty years out of date and were not based on anything like the coverage the NMRS.

It's already possible to see these distribution maps on line at http://www.mothscount.org/maps/94/moth_distribution_maps.html

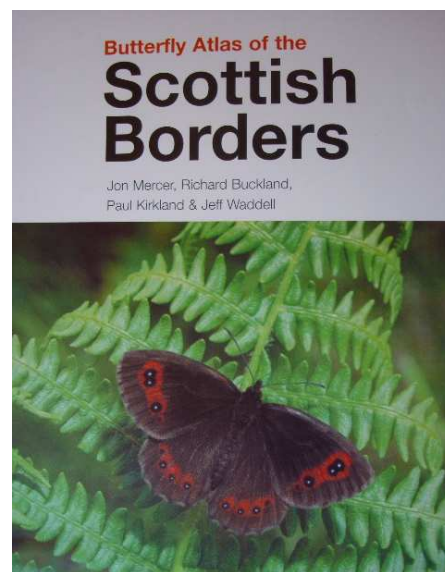
NOTE

The branch has moth traps which can be borrowed if you want to have a go at doing some moth recording, including portable, battery-operated systems, which are easy to use and shouldn't disturb the neighbours. Just get in touch with me if you're interested.

Barry Prater

Borders Butterfly Atlas

With Christmas on the horizon, how about giving copies of the excellent **Borders Butterfly Atlas** as gifts? Published by [Atropos](#) and also available from the [Natural History Book Store](#) for £14.99.



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