



**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION**
East Scotland Branch

Borders Newsletter

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Issue 9

Autumn 2012

Welcome to the latest issue of the local Butterfly Conservation newsletter for people living in the Scottish Borders. 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 2013. Email to me at the above address or by post to:
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Butterfly & Moth Conservation in the Borders

Throughout the wildlife conservation movement there is a huge input of recording from volunteers - we know this is especially true for Butterfly Conservation and, despite being thin on the ground, we have some very enthusiastic local Borders folk who contribute much valuable information. The results of all this recording, especially for our scarcer or threatened species, are rightly seen as vital for the identification of conservation priorities and they should pave the way towards conservation actions. I am aware of very few measures being taken at present across the Borders which are aimed directly at benefiting butterflies or moths, so I think there must be scope for converting more of our knowledge of distributions and habitat needs into conservation actions.

Having said that, there are on-going discussions involving a wide group of interested groups about the possibility of enhancing or restoring the wetland habitats around Gordon Moss. This area is important botanically and also holds what is probably the largest colony of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the Borders, along with plenty of other butterflies and moths. If you know of other sites where we could make improvements or avert habitat damage make sure you flag these up.



Moths and print-making with Edinburgh Printmakers at Traquair House in August

We had a great selection of field trips and other events during the summer and I'm already starting to make plans for 2013 (the Year of Natural Scotland) so, as usual, please come forward with any ideas you have.

Returning to the subject of records, now is the time to send in your 2012 sightings to the local butterfly and moth recorders - their details are at the end of this newsletter. As well as helping us to understand what's happening locally and providing inputs to planning decisions, all the data get fed into national recording schemes and these contribute to the formulation of higher level policies by government so it's very important to make sure datasets are always up-to-date.

Thanks to all the contributors to this issue.

Barry Prater

A few Summer Highlights

Butterflies

Large Skipper - first records from coastal sites

Green Hairstreak - confirmed at several known sites and discovered at new sites in the Newcastleton area and near Clearburn Loch



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - widely scattered colonies appear to be doing OK

Large Heath - confirmed at Clearburn Loch, Thorniecleuch Hill (where extensive tree-planting proposed) and Din Moss (last recorded there in 1998). A new site found at White Knowe.

Moths

Orange Underwing - first Borders record near Denholm (Nick Cook)

Marsh Pug - second Borders record at new coastal site (Barry Prater)

Bedstraw Hawk-moth - adults recorded on Broad Law (Malcolm Lindsay) and at Auchencrow (Wendy Walker); caterpillars, confirming breeding, located at Lintlaw (Iain Cowe).

Maple Pug - third Borders record at Paxton (Barry Prater)



Green-brindled Crescent (Fran Evans)

And into autumn ... we have the stunning Green-brindled Crescent and later generation Silver Y, which are often much darker than the ones which arrive here earlier in the year



Silver Y (Andrew Bramhall)



National Moth Nights (and Days) 2012

Barry Prater, Eyemouth

This year National Moth Night was spread over three days and nights (21-23 June) and the habitat theme was brownfield sites. I always hope to be able to arrange a public moth evening on NMN, but several things conspired against such a plan this year. Firstly, dates in mid-summer mean that it doesn't get dark until very late and only real enthusiasts would turn out so there'd be no opportunity to introduce new people to the world of moths in the night. We also have few recognised brownfield sites across the Borders, although there are some quarries and disused railway lines. And this summer the weather was so unpredictable from day to day that organising anything in advance was problematical.

However, I am not easily deflected from my objectives and after much thought I decided to attempt a combined daytime search and moth-trapping night at a site on the Berwickshire coast which can be considered as brownfield, at least in part, as a result of past rail track realignment works, which changed the area structurally and left behind engineering debris. This site holds our strong Small Blue colony and has a good list of moths already, but I was hopeful that some concentrated efforts would reveal more. I let others know my plans, but in the event it was just me that spent a few hours there during the nice sunny day of 22nd June and I left an actinic moth trap out overnight.

The daytime period confirmed the health of the Small Blue colony (count of 37 adults) and five other butterfly species were spotted, including a Large Skipper, the first one I've seen at the coast. Amongst the day-flying moths were Chimney Sweeper, Latticed Heath, Yellow Shell and Blackneck (this is known in Scotland from only a couple of spots on this coast) as well as a few micros, including the tiny Diamond-back Moth, which arrives in Britain as an immigrant, sometimes in large numbers, and breeds here through the summer. No great surprises during the day, but a good selection of butterflies and moths - what would the night bring?

The following morning I returned to my little 15W actinic trap to see what had arrived. Another nice range of moths, with the highlight for me of two Broad-barred Whites, chunky little moths which I'd not seen before, so I was well pleased. Also the fantastic Buff-tip and one of the coast's specialities the Heart and Club. In all, twenty five different moths from the adventure - well worth the effort.



Broad-barred White



Buff-tip

Living with Wildlife in Remote Teviotdale

Lynn Craig, Hermitage Water

When we retired, we moved to a remote location, half way up a high fell in the Scottish Borders. This was on a farm with 3000 sheep and 120 beef cattle grazing over 935 hectares. It has since changed hands - see <http://www.gorrenberry.org.uk/> and no longer has the sheep or beef cattle.

Our tiny cottage was a bothy and the previous owner had converted it to a very well-insulated dwelling. It was designed for a shepherd to treat sheep when he brought them in from the further remote fells. There are pens attached and a field with a sheep dip. When we arrived the sheep dip had been filled in and the pens were used by the shepherds during lambing until all the sheep were sold. We were allowed to make a garden of the field which had been used for holding sheep prior to treatment. It was hard, but rewarding work to convert it to a garden and with now established hedges it is not so exposed to the wild weather which often hits this glen.

It was some years before birds and butterflies arrived in the new garden. Their arrival was an absolute thrill after having seen nothing but sheep and cows which scared off other smaller life forms.

We soon noticed a massive range of insects but did not know enough about what we were seeing. Obviously we could distinguish a butterfly from a moth, spiders and beetles etc., but what were their names and what made them live here?

In regard to butterflies and moths we decided to join Butterfly Conservation. It was marvellous to make contact with people who answered our every question, no matter how many we asked or how uneducated we obviously were about our sightings. The newsletters alerted us to the rich body of knowledge in the organisation and of their hard work and efforts to study and preserve species.

The most overwhelming period was learning about moths as they appeared in our garden. The Golden Y, the Silver Y, Small Magpie, the Gold Spangle, Clouded-bordered Brindle, Silver-ground Carpet, Gold Spot.....their beauty stunning and exciting me. To a novice like me this was thrilling as I began to notice them whereas all my life moths had never entered my consciousness.



Gold Spangle



early October frost on the sedum

The dreadful 2012 weather has harmed all but the slugs and snails, yet I have wondered at the tenacity of the few butterflies and moths which have appeared. Small Tortoiseshell, usually in high numbers, only in twos or threes, Green-veined Whites in higher numbers, and one Common Blue earlier in the year. Not much of a showing then after much higher numbers last year. Now, as autumn colours fill the garden, especially the deepening red of the Autumn Glory sedum, the Red Admiral, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshell, plus the Silver Y, all take their fill of the nectar.



While the Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells will hibernate here somewhere, I had not realised until I read my Newsletter that the Red Admiral and Silver Y will head to the Mediterranean. That these amazingly beautiful creatures can fly that distance is awe inspiring. I have watched the swallows and house martins leave earlier in the year and thought it would be hard enough for them to reach Africa. I had no idea these little jewels would be doing the same. Good luck and thank you for alighting in my garden!

Update on the Small Blue Survey Project

Iain Cowe, Chirnside

It's great to be able to report that almost all the proposed sites along the Berwickshire and North Northumberland coastal strip were covered during the 2012 season. I had the northern coastline around Pease Bay and Cove looked at in detail by Nick Morgan. Ron McBeath bravely tackled the wilder coastline to the south of Pease, Siccar and Lansey as well as Redheugh. Barry Prater helped at Lumsdaine shore and around Eyemouth and Blaikie Heugh. I covered everything from Cheswick to Coldingham and finally St Abbs and was still searching in mid-August. Fran Evans looked at Homeli Knoll, Yellow Craigs and Linkim. Molly Hardie sent a detailed report from Cocklawburn and Cheswick. My brother Robin did some great work north of Berwick towards Marshall Meadows and Lambertton. I also had help with previous sighting records and general support from Roger Norman, Peter Summers, Fiona Aungier, Richard Buckland and Tom Delaney among others. Feedback has been very good from all parties who did or did not take part this time around. Nick Morgan has other areas he said he will look at in the Cove and Bilsdean areas next season.

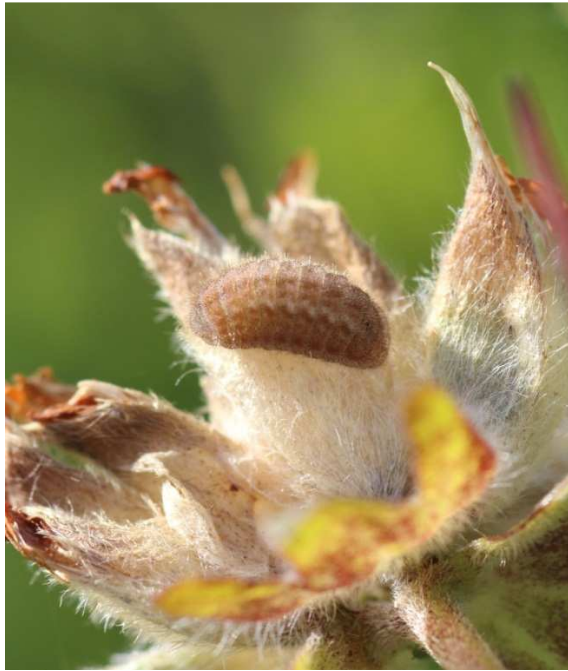


Kidney Vetch on the cliffside at Eyemouth

Kidney Vetch was very obvious around the entire coastal strip from north to south...so...there were some excellent records for the spread of the plant. The butterfly itself was confirmed at Catcairn, and again at Kings Gardens. Peter Summers suggested that Fancove Head (aka Blaikie Heugh) held a colony at some stage in the 70s...this comes as no surprise...we may yet find them there despite a great number of recent searches.



27 May 2012 - field trip to Catcairn Small Blue colony (yes, we did see some butterflies)



The Catcairn colony now extends south towards Hilton Bay and Lamberton Beach and finding larvae on the 16th August south of Hilton Bay on the coastal path confirmed this.

All in all this survey is proving to be successful in covering a large area to look out for signs of the butterfly. The foodplant is plentiful and given a good season or two, the Small Blue may well turn up anywhere all along the coastal strip. There are grey areas as yet uncovered; they will be in future seasons and a list of search sites will be drawn up for next year's season that will include inland sites in the Borders and North Northumberland as well as some East Lothian coastal sites.

Putting some detail on the coast is what the survey proposed...and I strongly feel that after a few more seasons we will have a very accurate assessment of the potential Small Blue population in the region's search areas.

The Joys and Tribulations of Moth-Trapping

David & Annabelle Skinner, Southdean

It all started with a talk on Moths by Nick Cook in Denholm Village Hall. He offered to lend us a moth trap for two weeks. The first night, the 30th of June, we set it up and went to bed early (not our usual habit!) because we thought that we had to get up early to empty the trap. We found 13 species of moth, three of which we had seen before on the windows or in the garden. It took us till lunchtime to identify the other ten!

With help and tips from Nick we soon got faster and by the second week we were fully hooked. We couldn't imagine what it would be like not to have the excitement each morning of turning over those egg boxes to see what beautiful creatures were hiding there. Orders went off for a Robinson 125W MV trap, boxes and field guides (Moths of Great Britain and Ireland by Martin Townsend and Paul Waring) and we even bought a gazebo to keep the rain off as we were going through the trap.

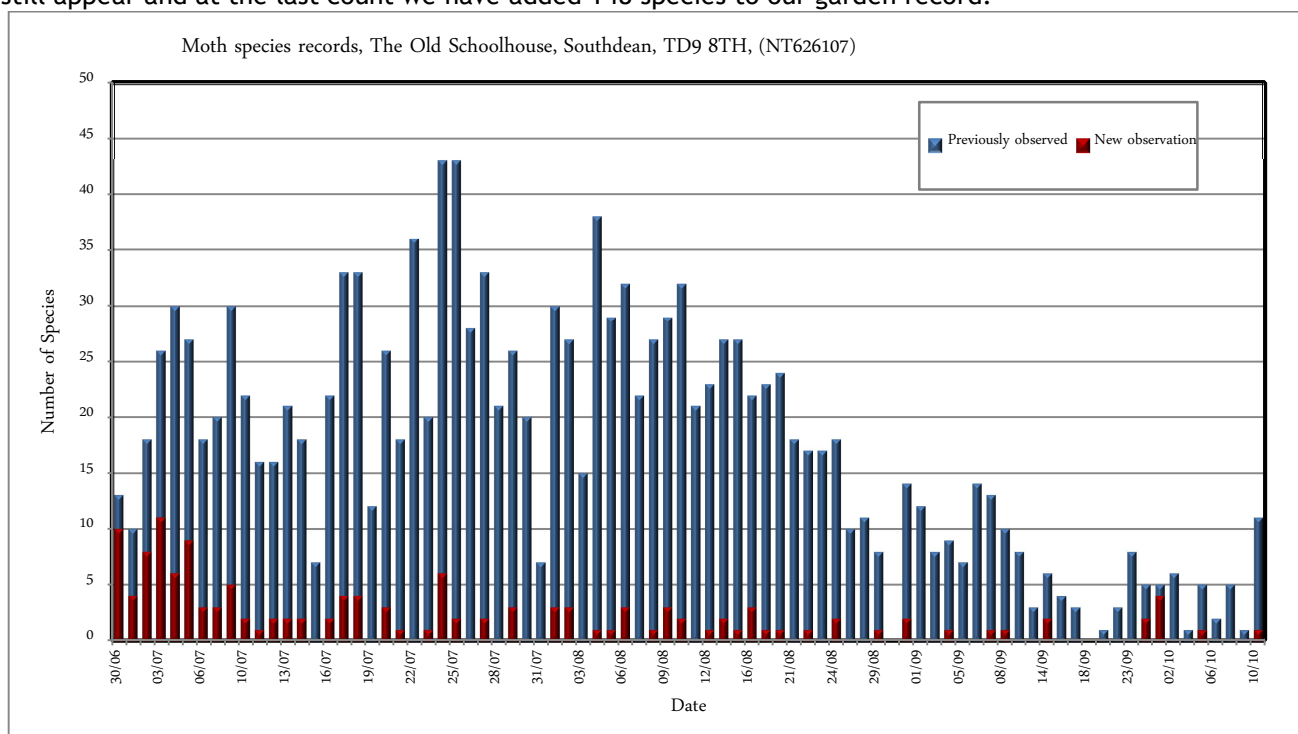
July was a very busy month. One morning the trap was full of wasps and Large Yellow Underwings - not a pleasant experience - our fault for siting the trap next to a wasp nest. Another morning we opened the trap to find carnage. Obviously a small bird had got in past the light bulb and killed a large number of moths - bits of bodies and wings everywhere. After that experience we left the lamp on after sunrise and netted the trap to stop anything getting in or out until we could go through it.

At first we tried to count the number of moths of each species but found with our poor identification skills, too many moths were escaping while we counted. With our scientific training we found it difficult to accept escaping moths. To us it was like 'lost data' but now we have accepted that it is what one observes that is important. We do count again now - we have done since the 2nd of August and it is very interesting to see how many moths appear singly and for just one night.

Recent winds and cold nights have produced empty traps or just a few moths. However, new species still appear and at the last count we have added 148 species to our garden record.



Large Emerald 10th August 2012



It really has been amazing to find all these colourful and exotic creatures that have always been in the garden, invisible to us, hiding amongst the plants, trees and grasses. To stop moth-ing now would be like removing all the flowers from the garden - and we still have winter and spring to experience!

Sightings whilst Cycling

Jason Patient, Coldstream



Small Heath in the College Valley

My two foremost interests, which have been and are full time professions, are cycling and photography. So it's along lanes and byways I cycle noticing much of what nature provides within a rural landscape to savour and enjoy.

Carrying a concise field guide is impractical and having such a poor memory means that I must photograph all butterflies and day flying moths I spot for later identification upon reaching home.

I'm now 'on the hunt' with two strategies. Firstly having noted previous sightings I set off to a particular place specifically to check on what I've seen 12 months or 24 months before, to see if there are more or less of a particular species. Secondly I just stumble across new discoveries.



Small Argemone & Sable (also College Valley)

I've developed a better appreciation and understanding of these wonderful flying creatures.

A Dark Chestnut Story

Barry Prater, Eyemouth (with much help from Roy Leverton, Banffshire)

The Dark Chestnut *Conistra ligula* is widespread and not uncommon throughout much of England and Wales but only has a toehold in the southern parts of Scotland, including the Borders counties, where it appears to be slowly spreading and there are now records from around a dozen sites, mostly from early October to mid-November. However, there is also a sprinkling of records from February, March and April. While many texts from the late nineteenth century through to the present day give the flight period as October and November and sometimes again in March, there has remained some scepticism about the spring records, not least because the much more common and very similar Chestnut *C vaccinii* is well known as an over-wintering species and could give rise to confusion.

An opportunity to confirm the over-wintering status arose when a tentatively identified female Dark Chestnut was trapped in Berwickshire on 13 March 2012. This insect was passed to Roy Leverton who went on to breed the next generation from eggs which were subsequently laid. This was successful and the moths began to emerge on the very early date of 1 August. In Roy's words:

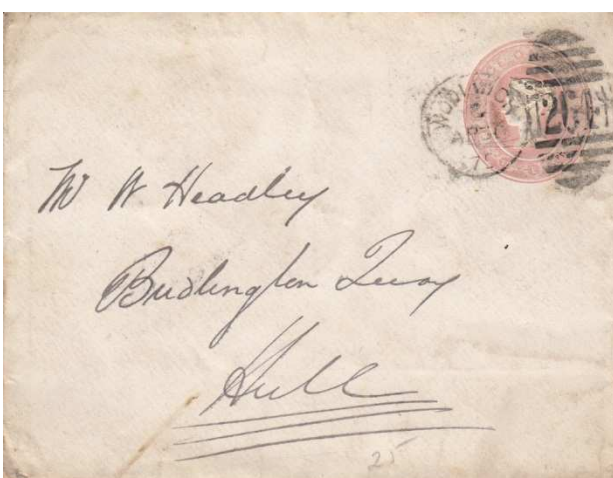
“They are definitely Dark Chestnut, as we thought from the female's appearance, Mark Young's tentative genital determination, and the caterpillars. The reared moths are quite large and all are very dark, obscurely mottled or marbled slightly lighter. The white flecks along the outer half of the costa are sharp and clear, so this does seem to be a useful and reliable supporting feature to help identification. The outer margin is straight, making the wing tip pointed, though it is not really concave.”



Four of the Dark Chestnuts reared from the Berwickshire female (photos: Roy Leverton)



Records come from the strangest places:



This old envelope, posted from Norwich in April 1875 and found recently at an antiques fair, has inscribed on the back “Had the larva of the Goat Moth given since sealing the letter”. I wonder if this record of what is now a rather scarce moth ever found its way to the Norfolk Moth Recorder?

If you've seen it, report it.....

Below are the people to whom you should send your sightings of moths or butterflies during 2012. If you come across something which you think is unusual or interesting then do get in touch quickly as others will like to hear about it, but you still need to send in records to the various people listed to make sure they get logged. You can also publicise your sightings through the forums on the branch website

www.eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk/

or on our Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/EastScotlandButterflyConservation>

or by tweeting <https://twitter.com/#!/ButterflyConsES>

The work of recorders is made a little easier if records are sent in from time to time during the year rather than all together at the end.

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
malcandles46@talktalk.net Tel: 01896 753425

Roxburghshire: Andy Fitchett, 1 The Croft, Nether Blainslie, Galashiels TD1 2QF
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& Jeff Waddell, 33 Eildon View, Dingleton, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9RH
jeffwaddell11@yahoo.co.uk Tel: 01896 822089

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