



BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION
East Scotland Branch

Borders Newsletter

www.eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk



Lesser Swallow Prominent

Issue 6

Spring 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 autumn 2011. Email to me at the above address or by post to:

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Butterfly & Moth Conservation in the Borders

One of the most heartening things about being part of a voluntary organisation is the positive and enthusiastic response from many members when they are asked to get more involved in the group's activities. We have only about 34 member households across the Borders, but the majority of you have contributed, often in more ways than one, to help the cause over recent years. The Society as a whole has recently agreed its '2020 Vision', which sets out in some detail a series of ambitious aspirations, particularly in terms of conservation, but also for our membership and reaching out to the next generation. In the current financial climate, we volunteers can, and should, work more closely with the professionals so that what we do helps meet the Society's aims.

In line with this thinking, the targeted survey work for our more important species will continue through the year and further details are given later in the newsletter. The results of these surveys feed into conservation actions.



Green Hairstreak

Several people have commented that they'd like to see more outdoor events for beginners, so that they can improve their identification skills. All of the eight field trips and moth evenings arranged for the summer are designed to introduce people to the butterflies and moths which live in our area; while the target species can be the less common ones, they too are characteristic of our local biodiversity and they will always be accompanied by more familiar ones.



White Ermine



Speckled Wood

So do try and come along to some of the meetings and share your enthusiasm for Lepidoptera with others.

Many thanks to all the contributors to this issue.

Barry Prater

Outdoor Events in the Borders during 2011

All these daytime and evening events are aimed at introducing people to their local butterflies & moths and to help with identification, so beginners are very welcome. Whatever the weather on the day, they will be enjoyable and there will be plenty to see and learn.

Date	Event	Details	Contact
Friday 29 April 2011	Walk around Neville Morgan's woodland estate in the Yarrow Valley followed by coffee/wine and nibbles and moth-trapping session (from about 9.30pm for those able to stay late). Organised by the SWT Central Borders Members Centre.	Meet at Mill Lade, Hangingshaw, nr Yarrowford NT399299 (turn right off A708, ½ mile west of Yarrowford village). Start 7.00 pm till late.	Malcolm Lindsay 01896 753425 malcandles@tiscali.co.uk Consult http://www.borders-swt.co.uk/ for any late changes
Saturday 21 May 2011	To Auchencorth Moss to see Green Hairstreak. This is a return to last year's rained-off outing.	Meet outside the entrance to Auchencorth farm (NT201571) at 10.30 am	Richard Buckland 0131 332 0615 r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk
Saturday 21 May 2011	Moth-trapping and identification evening at Duns Castle SWT reserve with a sizzling sausage barbecue. Part of Borders Biodiversity Week.	Meet promptly at 9.30 pm at the top of Castle Street, Duns (NT783542). Wear suitable clothing and bring a torch as the evening will go on until about midnight. Free for BC and SWT members; £1 charge for others.	Murray Henderson 01361 883216 and Barry Prater 018907 52037 barry@prater.myzen.co.uk
Saturday 21 May 2011	Moth-trapping evening at Plora Wood. The largest area of ancient woodland in the Western Borders promises an interesting catch. As well as being attracted to light, see how moths respond to sugar and wine! Part of Borders Biodiversity Week.	Meet at 9.30 pm in the lay-by at the entrance to Plora Wood on the back road between Walkerburn and Innerleithen (NT355367). Wear warm clothing and bring waterproofs and torch.	Reuben Singleton 01721 723858 reuben@dukehaugh.free-online.co.uk
Saturday 25 June 2011	Butterfly field trip to the Gordon Moss area to see Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries as well as Small Heath, other butterflies and day-flying moths.	Meet at 10.30 am and park at the entrance to the SWT reserve (NT636428). This is on a bend on the A6105 just beyond Greenknowe Tower to the west of Gordon village. There is a burn to cross so wellies are advised.	Barry Prater 018907 52037 barry@prater.myzen.co.uk
Saturday 2 July 2011	Butterflies, dragonflies and moths at Edrington - Large and Small Skippers, Speckled Wood and Banded Demoiselle plus (hopefully) the contents of the previous night's moth trap.	Meet and park at 10.00 am at Edrington Mains Farm (NT943546) which is on a track off a minor road from the A6105 just E of Foulden village. There is a 1km walk to the site which is steep in places and can be muddy, so come prepared.	Barry Prater 018907 52037 barry@prater.myzen.co.uk
Sunday 10 July 2011	Monynut Water/The Bell in the Lammermuirs to see whether a record of Rock Rose proves to be a site for Northern Brown Argus.	Meet at the entrance to Nether Monynut Farm (NT728645) at 10.30 am. We may also call in at the Bell, where we are almost certain to see the target species.	Richard Buckland 0131 332 0615 r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk
Saturday 30 July 2011	Butterfly walk near Tweedsmuir to see Scotch Argus in an area where they were only discovered in 2010. Search for other species too. This event forms part of Save Our Butterflies Week 2011.	Meet at 10.30 am at NT098242. Leave the A701 at Tweedsmuir on the minor road to Talla and Fruid reservoirs. Pass over the bridge and park in clearing 200m beyond the crossroads. The walk may be boggy in places.	Alison McArthur 01968 682232 and Barry Prater 018907 52037 barry@prater.myzen.co.uk

Mothing in Tweedbank

Andrew Bramhall, Tweedbank

In the mid 1970s I moved into the new development taking place in Tweedbank between Galashiels and Melrose. This is a corner of Roxburghshire that was previously farmland and to create an aesthetically pleasing environment many of the hedgerows and existing trees were retained and augmented by heavy landscaping. It is bounded on one side by the River Tweed and on the other three sides by farmland and woodland. Eventually Tweedbank became an area with varied habitats which has become rich in wildlife.



(from: fotolibra.com)

Although I have always been interested in all aspects of natural history, ornithology has been my main interest and I am currently WeBS organiser for the Scottish Borders and member of the Swan Study Group. However, through contact with local naturalists I was stimulated to take a broader interest in the wildlife of Tweedbank. From contact with the local Nature Conservancy Council officers (now Scottish Natural Heritage) and membership for a few years of Scottish Wildlife Trust, my knowledge was increased and my interest in moths was fostered by Andrew Buckham. This occurred after I started to find that the street lights within the first phase of the development attracted a wide range of moths which remained under the lights all day.

Andrew Buckham became my mentor and between us we recorded a wide variety of moths. The moths from around the lights were brought down by means of an old three piece fishing rod, were bottled and then taken to Andy for identification. It was not unusual to be asked how many fish I had caught that morning and I suppose I became a bit of an eccentric within the village. But it was amazing how many people became interested in my early morning activity.

Eventually I obtained my own moth field guides and managed to identify a good number myself, but the problem ones always went to Andy. The collecting was extended to netting sessions on the old railway that passed through Tweedbank and collecting from the fluorescent lights in the underpass on Tweedbank Drive.

While bringing up four children my pocket did not extend to obtaining a light trap but I did have some sessions with Andrew to enhance my skills. A friend of mine produced an insect trap with an ultra violet fluorescent tube and this was converted into a moth trap by removal of the electrocution part and making a box to collect the moths. This has undergone various modifications and has been used with success for a good number of years. In 2010 I was loaned a Skinner light trap for three weeks and worked with this in my garden during July to augment the moths I had found with my old but trusted trap.



Satellite



Seraphim

I suppose I have been light trapping on and off in the summer months from the early 1980s, but this year I have been presented with my own Skinner trap and started to use it on some of the mild nights at the beginning of March, taking several Chestnuts, Clouded Drabs and a couple of Satellite moths. So I am looking forward to some more intensive trapping during April and May to further extend the year list, and hopefully the species list for Tweedbank. The 2010 sessions produced a number of new species, including the Seraphim, which was the first to be recorded in the Borders.

Needless to say my interest also extends to butterflies. My wanderings round Tweedbank have allowed me to photograph nearly all the species that occur around the village.....digital photography has proved itself when it comes to moth identification as I now have very fresh photographs to assist with identification, particularly for those specimens that don't appear like anything, even in the most up-to-date field guides.

My First Scotch Argus - at Lindean Loch 2010

Sarah-Louise Davies, Bonnyrig

Before I describe my first visit to Lindean Loch I would like to mention some of the very interesting details about the site. It lies approximately 4km east of Selkirk and is a nature reserve with a walk of 2km around the loch. Near the entrance is an excellent information panel about some of the geology and history. Its story began 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age. As the ice sheets melted they left large quantities of a fine clay called marl in shallow lochs. The lochs became boggy areas, known locally as "mosses".



Lindean Loch (photo: Walter Baxter)

Although the site looks natural, huge quantities of fertile mud were dug out by hand in the 18th century to extract the lime rich marl for use as a fertilizer on grass fields to improve the grazing. In the 20th century the site was dammed and turned into a public water supply, providing nearby villages with water up until the 1970s. This latter explains why, on the Ordnance Survey map 338, grid reference NT5029, the loch is named as Lindean Reservoir. The demand for marl was so great that in the late 1700s a tunnel had to be dug under the hill on the south side to drain the moss. Legend has it that an Irish labourer and his wife were paid the princely sum of one shilling and six pence per yard (7.5 pence per metre) to dig the tunnel. It is not known how long it took them!

Lime-rich water and soil make Lindean Loch unusual for Scotland. Over 600 plant and animal species have been found in the loch, along its edges and in the surrounding grassland. In the loch itself there are 46 different species of water beetle, together with water scorpions and rare great crested newts. Over 220 plant species grow in the grassland, with quite a show of orchids in the early summer. I understand that some of the grassland is mown each autumn to encourage the flowering plants.

The great diversity of life on the site led to it being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1977. A group representing Scottish Borders Council, Selkirk Angling Association, Scottish Wildlife Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage manages the loch to maintain this rich diversity of life. It is also an integral part of the nearby Whitlaw Mosses National Nature Reserve managed by Scottish Natural Heritage.

So on the 29 July 2010, my first visit, no wonder I was amazed at the sight that greeted me and that was before I saw my first Scotch Argus! The sun was shining, the whole area was ablaze with wild flowers and the air was buzzing with insects. I just stood there literally transfixed for a few moments. I passed through the gate and no sooner had I started walking along the path when to my right I saw my first Scotch Argus. Absolutely amazing especially as I thought I may be a little early for these butterflies. It was right beside me and pristine-looking, almost black. I thought it must be a male that had emerged that morning. Fortunately this beauty stayed long enough for me to absorb totally every detail and diagnostic feature though not long enough for me to get my camera ready to take a photograph!



Large Skipper



Scotch Argus

I then saw another flying further away just before I met a gentleman further along the path. After a little chat we introduced ourselves and I was very surprised to discover it was Dr Malcolm Lindsey to whom I had sent some Borders moth records in the past. He mentioned that he had never seen the wild flowers in such abundance at this site before. I was very happy to inform him of the Scotch Argus butterflies that I had seen. He later sent me an email to advise me that he had also seen them after we had gone our separate ways. That day, in total I saw four Scotch Argus butterflies but none as close as the first one, all looking almost black.

Dr Lindsay said that I may see some Large Skippers further along the path in amongst the grasses and the wild flowers. Unfortunately my luck had run out and I did not see any skippers but, for the afternoon managed to see Common Blues, Small Whites, Large Whites, Green-veined Whites, Meadow Browns, Ringlets, a single Small Heath and a healthy number of 30 Small Tortoiseshells.

I made another trip on 15 August when I saw 24 more Scotch Argus butterflies noticeably more brown looking than on my previous visit. I could not help but observe that whenever a Scotch Argus met a Small Tortoiseshell that the Argus always chased away the Tortoiseshell!

On this visit I did not see any Ringlets or Small Heaths but there were 16 Peacocks and 7 Small Coppers. I hope to come back later this year to see if I can find any Small or Large Skippers!

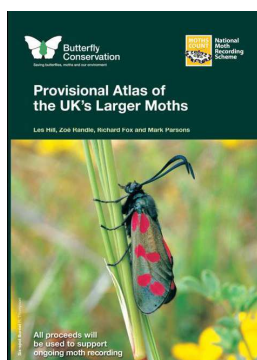
Many of us who love the butterflies also appreciate the wild flowers. I had great pleasure in seeing my first great burnet in a large clump with approximately 200 flower heads on the slope above the boat house and greater spearwort with water mint at the east end of the loch.

And all this natural bounty because of the underlying geology.



Great Burnet

New Moths Atlas Published



This atlas is the culmination of the Moths Count project which Butterfly Conservation started in 2006 and which established the National Moth Recording Scheme. It has over 450 pages and includes distribution maps for all the macromoth species which are found in the UK. It's available for £20 + £5 p&p from Butterfly Conservation. It makes a fascinating read and poses as many questions as it answers.

Targeted Butterfly and Moth Surveys 2011

During 2010 the Large Heath was recorded at only one site in the Borders (John Woolliams confirmed its presence at Spurlens Rig) but there are around another twenty sites where it has been recorded over the years. So this will be the top priority butterfly species for us - it's a UK BAP priority species which is on the wing during July and is only found in damper, upland areas with plenty of Cotton-grass.

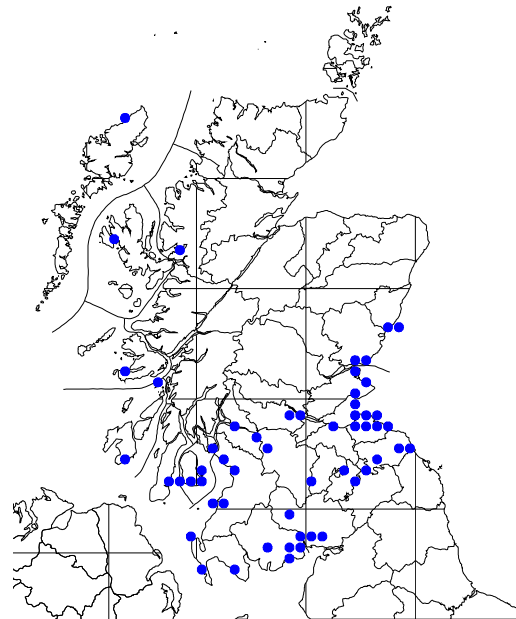
Do we have any Purple Hairstreaks in the Borders? There is an old record from Bowhill in 1951 but nothing since. Recent searches have shown that this butterfly appears to be quite well-distributed across SW Scotland and good numbers have been recorded in the Glasgow area and in Stirlingshire. Suitable habitat exists (oak woodland and even isolated oak trees, with a possible preference for pedunculate over sessile) so it could be worthwhile taking some binoculars and spending a sunny afternoon and early evening scanning some oaks for this fluttering, silvery rarity which has no excuse not to be around here.

The discovery of new sites for some of our scarcer species in 2010 suggests that there could well be more and so the Green Hairstreak, Small Blue, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Scotch Argus will remain as important targets.

Further details sites will be circulated to people who have helped with survey work in recent years, but there are opportunities for anyone to get involved - just get in touch for more information if you'd like to contribute.

Butterfly Conservation Scotland is organising a postcard and on-line survey for the Comma butterfly this year, primarily targeting central Scotland where it is now colonising after a rapid spread from northern England over the past decade. Check the BC Scotland website for details from April onwards (www.butterfly-conservation.org/scotland) by clicking on the link to the Scottish Comma Survey.

This is the third and final year of the Cinnabar moth survey across Scotland. The map shows where caterpillars have been found during 2009 and 2010, but there will be many other sites where it is present. Evidence of breeding further north and to higher altitude would be very interesting as it would suggest a response to changing climatic conditions. Details of any sightings of adult moths or caterpillars from June to August should be sent through to Barry Prater at barry@prater.myzen.co.uk (postal address on page 1).



Several important moths in our area are day-flying and so can be sought without any special equipment (although a net can be helpful); examples are Marsh Pug, Dew Moth, Broad-bordered White Underwing, Blackneck and Small Purple-barred. They tend to have specialist habitat requirements and so are very localised, but could well be discovered at new sites.

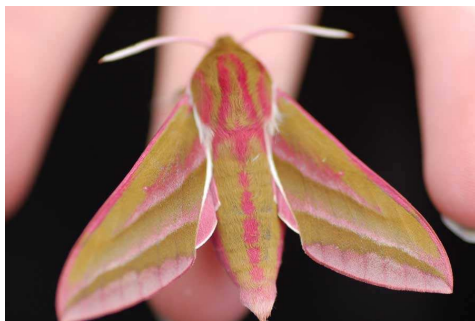
A reminder - the branch has moth traps (both portable and mains-operated) which can be borrowed so you could have a go in your garden or, if you have access to some of our less-populated areas which have been little-studied, there is much new ground to be covered.

Mothlight

Richard Ashrowan, Phenzhopehaugh

What is this strange fascination of the moth for the light? The huge glowing ball in our night-time garden appeared, as if some alien firefly grounded from another world, luring creatures from the underworld, a fatal attraction in the darkness of night. And so it was that this fascination came to be shared by us, the mothlight drew us to become moth-people, shuffling around the glow of the light, drawn and illuminated. I think of some lines from Elizabeth Bishop's *The Man-moth* "If you catch him, hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil, an entire night itself."

What's the expression? "Like *a moth to a flame*", not, one should note "*a moth to a light*." We have retained this notion of the flame within the mothlight, an echo of the eerie self destructive behaviour of moths around the light, a confusion of desires, suicidally drawn inwards, in ever diminishing trails. As an artist, my mothlight experience became a nightly revelation, drawing me too into a dangerously seductive world of photographing, naming, classification, collecting. On the one hand, there was perception, the act of pure seeing, an experience of exquisite beauty as we peered into the mouth of the moth-trap.



Elephant Hawkmoth

It was a world of unnamed glories, creatures seen entirely new with unknowing eyes. The sensuous White Ermine, the glorious Elephant Hawk Moth, the sulphurous Brimstone and the shimmering green light from the Burnished Brass. Moths slowly emerged from their perceptual mysteries and took psychological form through the equally fascinating process of identifying and naming. Yet it was the raw experience that really remains with me.



Brimstone



In 1963, the experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage released a film, *Mothlight*, made in part by pressing moth wings between two clear strips of film and then projecting this as a film print. Brakhage's work always aimed at what he termed "thinking with one's eyes" or "the eye's thought." He sought a visual language in his films that he considered belonged to a pre-thought stage of perceptual experience. And Brakhage was fascinated by moths, "these crazy moths are flying into the candlelight, and burning themselves to death, and that's what's happening to me." At first he tried to film moths on the wing, but this he found impossible (I myself have tried it and can testify to the difficulty). So he collected moth wings from the dead he found in lampshades, "to try to... give them life again, to animate them again, to try to put them into some sort of life through the motion picture machine." *Mothlight* is a strange film, but it sums up so much of the mothlight experience for me. The drawing towards the light, the astonishing perceptual beauty and fragility of the moths themselves, the tragic quality of their behaviour and sometimes death, their transformation through the eyes, hands and intellect of humankind.

We are especially grateful to Malcolm Lindsay for introducing us to mothlighting and for helping so much with the identification of many of the moths we found.

If you see it, report it.....

These are the people to whom you should send your sightings of moths or butterflies. You can do this at the end of the year, but if you come across something which you think is unusual then it's worth contacting the appropriate person at the time.

The Borders County Moth Recorders

Peeblesshire: Reuben Singleton, Garnock, 6 Dukehaugh, Peebles, Scottish Borders EH45 9DN
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