



East Scotland Branch

Fife Group Newsletter June 2009

To quote from an old fisherman's lament, "When the wind is from the east, 'tis not fit for man nor beast". It could just as well have been a lepidopterist's lament and it sums up my experiences during most of May and early June. I have had a number of moth trapping sessions and have spent time trying to fill one of the Green Hairstreak gaps listed last month and the cold east winds have thwarted most of my efforts.

There have, however, been some successes over the last few weeks and we can hope that the rest of the summer will bring more.

The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary season is just starting and an additional event has been arranged for 27 June at Lochore Meadows so that we can have a look for, or hopefully at, this beautiful little butterfly. I have also listed some of the other sites where the butterfly can be seen.

The **Common Blue** will be appearing soon from the middle of June and throughout July into early August. There are a few sites in Fife where the butterfly has not been seen for 5 or 10 years and so it would be good to fill some of these gaps. More details below.

Recent Butterflies

There is no doubt that the cold east winds I keep complaining about have reduced my butterfly records but there have been a few sunny days of relative warmth. Some of you may have seen on the Butterfly Conservation website or in the press that there has been an enormous influx of Painted Lady butterflies. Here is a copy of the website article of 28 May:

Butterfly Conservation has been receiving reports since the start of the Bank Holiday weekend of sightings of large numbers of these butterflies. People throughout Britain have seen these fast-flying butterflies moving overhead for hours on end, setting the scene for what could be one of the largest Painted Lady migrations in decades.



The first indication of their arrival in Britain came last Thursday (May 21) when Butterfly Conservation members first reported seeing large numbers off Portland Bill in Dorset. Since then, thousands have been seen flying north at locations across southern England, from Cornwall to East Anglia.

The fine Bank Holiday weekend weather brought hundreds of new sightings from as far north as Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland. There were even sightings of hundreds in central London. An estimated 18,000 were spotted flying past Scolts Head Island on the Norfolk coast yesterday and were passing at 50 a minute over a 400m front today.

Scientists have been predicting an unusually large migration since late winter. The butterflies originate from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, where heavy winter rains allowed good germination of the caterpillar food-plants. A Spanish researcher, Constanti Stefanescu had reported seeing hundreds of thousands emerging in mid February and beginning their long flight north. They were seen in large numbers in Spain during April and a few weeks later in France. Richard Fox, Surveys Manager at Butterfly Conservation, said: "There are literally millions of Painted Lady butterflies arriving right across Britain. This is a spectacular phenomenon".

I have seen just four **Painted Lady** so far (four more than last year) and there have been around another 20 sightings throughout the length of Fife. One of the rangers at Loch Leven saw ten on Portmoak Moss and 20 more as he walked up Benarty Hill. All were heading east. Similar numbers were seen flying east over Lochore Meadows “at great speed”.

There have been fewer **Comma** reported this year than last, with the most recent in Fife being at Leuchars on 24 May. The furthest north I have heard of this year was at Cluny House gardens in Strathtay on 30 May.

It has been a good year for **Orange-tip** with substantial numbers still around. On 29 May for example, 16 were counted on the transect at Lochore Meadows.

Small Copper is another butterfly that appears to be thriving, although nationally is reported as being in decline. It can be found in grassland, wasteland, heath, old quarries, road sides and embankments – just about anywhere really and its caterpillar feeds on Common Sorrel. It is double brooded, flying in late May early June and again in August. I have seen several in the area of Wemyss Wood and Cleish in the last couple of weeks for example and the transect at Lochore Meadows reported 24 and 25 in the last two weeks of May respectively.

Green Hairstreak – I am pleased to say that Glenduckie has been confirmed as an existing GH colony, thus filling one of the 10km “gaps” that was listed in the May Newsletter. I have not heard of other gaps being filled. I visited all the sites listed round the Loch Glow/Blairadam area on five or six occasions and saw no sign of Green Hairstreak. The foodplant, Blaeberry, was present in large amounts and the sun was shining. However, the sites were exposed to the east winds (have I mentioned the cold east winds?) and I might just have been unlucky in my timing.

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – the first of the year was reported from the transect on Auchtermuchty Common on 28 May. The very first group newsletter listed the known sites for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the main ones are repeated below along with a map of all Fife sites.

Auchtermuchty Common - Grid ref NO21SW
Lochore Meadows – Grid ref NT1795
Star Moss - Grid ref NO310040
Leuchars - Grid ref NO470209
Earlshall Muir - Grid ref NO490225
Tentsmuir - Grid ref NO495246, NO502274
Cattlemoss - Grid ref NS986918, NS994914
Lockshaw Moss – Grid ref NS9991
Wether Hill - Grid Ref NT042957
Lochornie Burn - Grid ref NT103946
Lurg Bridge – Grid ref NT096963



Common Blue will be flying from mid-June onwards. Following on from the plea in the May newsletter I should be grateful if anyone can fill in the gaps from the 10km squares in the table below. The sites listed are a selection of those where the butterfly has not been reported for at least five years - ten in some cases - but the list is not exhaustive and there are other sites within the 10km squares with a similar story.

10k Square	Site	GridRef
NO31	Norman's Law	NO3119
NO31	Edensmuir	NO314106
NO31	Hill of Tarvit	NO378118
NO51	St Andrews	NO506156
NO51	Kinkell	NO525158
NO51	Kingsbarns halt	NO579114
NO61	Cambo Sands	NO601127
NT28	Burntisland Docks	NT237855
NT28	Burntisland	NT242864
NT28	Kinghorn Bottleworks	NT265863
NT28	Seafield	NT279885
NT59	Elie	NT501997
NO30	Drummy Wood	NO319054
NO30	Brutus Craft Centre	NO345082
NO32	Balhelvie	NO3021
NO32	Norman's Law	NO3120
NO32	Carphin Farm	NO318200
NO32	Coultra	NO347230
NO32	Bottom Graig	NO369246
NO32	Rathillet	NO373215
NO32	Wormit	NO393255
NO60	Fife Ness	NO636093
NS99	Bath Moor Plantation /FC	NS964911

Elsewhere in the country, Northern Brown Argus are already flying on the Berwickshire coast and there have been significant numbers of Wall and Small Blue in the same area. A couple of Brimstone butterflies were reported from Insch in Aberdeenshire but if the sightings are accurate it must mean that they are being captive bred and released. The nearest foodplant is probably 300 miles away. Interestingly, another was recently reported from Speyside.

Recent Moths

Although quantities of moths remain low, the diversity of species is increasing as would be expected. A typical selection in early June included Common Swift, Gold Swift, Common Marbled Carpet, Satyr Pug, Currant Pug, Poplar Hawk-moth, Small Elephant Hawk-moth, Lesser Swallow Prominent, Pebble Prominent, Coxcomb Prominent, White Ermine, Heart and Dart, Flame Shoulder, Broad-barred White, Marbled Coronet, Lychnis, Knot Grass, Small Angle Shades, Clouded-bordered Brindle, Rustic Shoulder-knot, Spectacle and Beautiful Golden Y.

I netted a Red-necked Footman in the Blairadam area which I believe to be only the third or fourth Fife record.

Event reports

East Lomond - 16 May – Only one other person turned up to look for Green Hairstreak on what was a fairly blustery and cloudy day. While waiting in Craigmead car-park I netted some moths flying in the undergrowth – Satyr Pug, Diamond-back Moth and an attractive micro-moth *Grapholita jungiella*. There were a few small patches of blue sky as we set off from the car-park, but the top of East Lomond was clothed in dark cloud. On the way up we spotted a moth caterpillar at the side of the path, which was either Square-spot Rustic or Six-striped Rustic - impossible to tell apart without rearing. As we reached the limekiln it started to rain heavily – it wasn't quite horizontal, but felt rather like it and it was *cold* rain. We spent half an hour more than was sensible looking in the whin bushes and on the large area of Blaeberry overlooking the limekiln but without success.

My companion returned the next day in sunshine and relative calm and found numerous Green Hairstreak throughout the same area. So a success of sorts – what a difference a day makes.

Cullaloe – 5/6 June – Five of us set up four Robinson type traps at various points on the reserve: one in the lower car park; one on top of the dam wall; one by the bird hide; one at the loch overflow. It was disappointingly cold (those east winds again) with temperatures down at around 5 degrees Celsius after midnight. In the earlier part of the evening there were a number of Silver-ground Carpet flying but as the evening progressed it was clear that we were not going to get the number or variety of moths that are surely around there. We packed up two of the traps at about 1.30am and left the other two out all night. At one stage we found a caterpillar crawling on a pine trunk, tentatively identified as Barred Red

Next morning in the occasional rain, we (three of us from the previous night and two new arrivals) examined the catch and took some photos. The final tally was of nine species: Silver-ground Carpet, Common Carpet, Pebble Prominent, White Ermine, Pale-shouldered Brocade, Brown Rustic, Beautiful Golden Y, Spectacle and the micro moth *Blastobasis decolorella*.

Events

Note that times might still be subject to change so it is a good idea to contact the organiser beforehand.

Date	Event	Details	Contact
Sun. 27 June	Lochore Meadows to look for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Meet at the Lochore Meadows Visitor Centre at 2pm. Bring wellingtons or stout shoes and dress appropriately for the outdoors!	Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
Sun. 5 July	Kinraig Point to look for Northern Brown Argus	Meet at the car park at NO469005, before the Shell Bay caravan site, at 2pm.	Kate Morison 07950 786245 Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
Sat/Sun 11/12 July - WAS 22/23 AUGUST	Moth trapping at Falkland Palace	Meet at palace gates at 8.30pm. on 11th. and again at 9.30am. on the 12th. to see the catch	Kate Morison 07950 786245
Sat/Sun. 15/16 August	Moth trapping at Auchtermuchty Common	Meet at car park (NO236134) at 8.00pm. on the 15th. to check early moths at the traps, and again at 9.30am. on the Sunday to see what was caught	Kate Morison 07950 786245
Sat/Sun 22/23 August - WAS 30/31 MAY	Moth trapping at Balmerino Abbey.	Meet at abbey (NO357246) at 9.00pm. on the 22nd to see moths at traps. Meet here again at 9.30 in morning of 23rd to see the catch	Kate Morison 07950 786245

I plan also to arrange a visit to Tentsmuir NNR to see Dark Green Fritillary and Grayling. Details to be confirmed.

Scottish Wildlife Trust have a number of moth trapping events planned throughout the summer, the next being at Cullaloe again on Friday 19 June at 9.30pm and Saturday 20 June at 10am. Contact Tim Brain on 07739 428224 for confirmation of this and subsequent SWT meets.

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