



## Fife Group Newsletter October 2009

We now have 60 member households in Fife and the three Clackmannanshire members are now also included in what was originally the Fife sub-group. I will try to include some Clacks info in future newsletters but in the meantime if anyone has an interesting story or observation from anywhere in our area, please let me know.

This newsletter is sent by e-mail to 25 of you and by post to the rest. It would be a great help to me if I could increase the e-mail distribution, so if any of you would be willing to convert from post to e-mail, please let me know; my e-mail address is at the end of the newsletter.

### **Butterfly Recording**

I have received lots of records in the last month or so – thank you very much for these. I am sure there are many more to come, so please get them to me as soon as you can. As you know, this is the last year in the five year update cycle of the UK atlas and so it is important to get as complete a picture as we can.

There are three main methods of butterfly recording.

Casual records make up the majority of records, covering any species in any location. These are usually submitted on the well known yellow form, but also come to me in all shapes and formats, paper and electronic. This method is good for mapping distribution changes.

Timed Counts involve monitoring known populations of a single species. These are usually performed only for particular species that are on our regional action plan. For example I visit a couple of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary colonies each year; the timed count involves taking a zigzag course across the colony on two occasions during the main flight period and counting the butterflies seen. This method monitors the health of an individual colony.

A Butterfly Transect is a fixed route of up to several kilometres that is walked once a week, every week, from April to October, and every butterfly seen within a particular distance from the walker is counted. This method is good for monitoring abundance changes year on year. There are five butterfly transects in Fife and one in Clacks. These are at Tentsmuir North, Tentsmuir South, The Clune at Lochore Meadows, Auchtermuchty Common, Cullaloe SWT Reserve and Alva Glen. Taking on a transect is a major commitment and most people share the responsibility from week to week. Neil Gregory manages all the Scottish transects, but now wishes to step back a bit and so I have agreed to take over the Fife and Clacks transects. If anyone fancies starting a new one, please let me know and we can talk about suitable areas and responsibilities.

### **Painted Ladies Again**

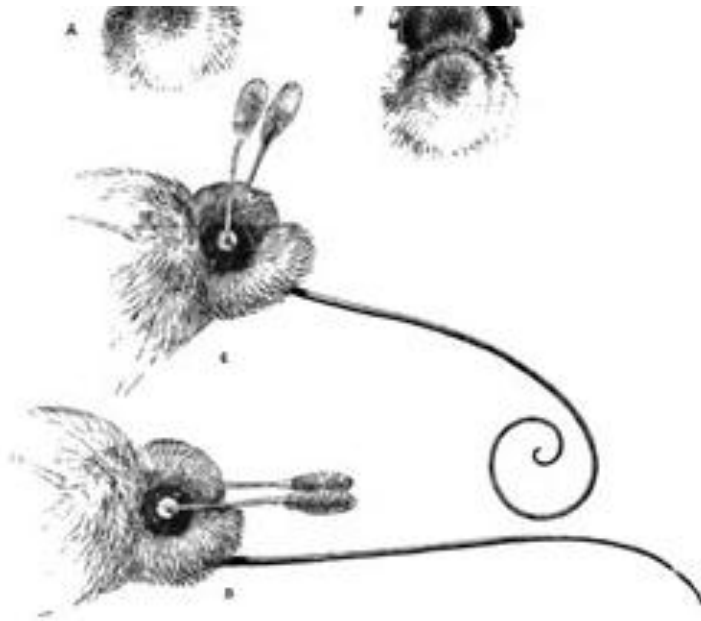
You will probably have seen a number of articles about Painted Lady butterflies throughout the summer and there are still a few flying around now (butterflies and articles). I am surprised by our apparent lack of knowledge of these butterflies. We know that they migrate north in the spring from Africa and the Middle East, and this year was a bumper one due to heavy winter rain and therefore an abundance of food-plant in the Moroccan Atlas mountains particularly. Most of this year's migrants stopped off in southern Europe to breed and only a few found their way to Britain in April. But the offspring of those holidaying in southern Europe continued north and hundreds of thousands appeared all over the UK from late May and throughout June. These have now also bred and died and their offspring have been delighting us over the last couple of months. But what happens now? We know that they

cannot survive our winters (yet) and the current theory is that most will actually return south, either directly to North Africa or via yet another generation in southern Europe. It is thought that we don't see this mass migration because they climb high out of sight before leaving!

(After I wrote this, my copy of Butterfly Magazine arrived, in which Richard Fox talks at more length about the Painted Lady life cycle)

### **Members' Day at Birnam**

This was a great day out and I thoroughly recommend next year's to all of you. All the talks and activities were really interesting and it gave a chance to catch up with other members and hear what is going on elsewhere. Roy Sexton gave a fascinating talk about Darwin's work with orchid pollination. The Greater Butterfly Orchid for example has its pollen sacs positioned in such a way that only moths with a specific proboscis length and head size will do as pollinators. As the moth tries to reach the nectar, it has to push forward between the pollen discs, which then stick to parts of the moth's compound eyes. After the moth withdraws, the pollinia come out with it and after a specific short period they droop down so that they can be correctly presented to the stigma of the next flower visited. The diagram below shows what I mean, but Roy actually had photographs of moths in this state. Other species use different means of pollination and Roy also had a fantastic shot of a Hummingbird Hawk-moth, hovering in front of a flower ready to present it with a pollinium attached to its proboscis. Incredible!



Taken from *My Studio Neighbours*, William Hamilton Gibson, 1898.

### **Chamomile Shark**

In July I suggested you should look for caterpillars on Mayweed flowers. I haven't heard of any being found but hopefully your records are in the post! I searched a lot of flowers in many different areas and found the caterpillars near Kinghorn, Loch Fitty and in a third part of Dunfermline. In other areas, I found signs of feeding on the flower heads without seeing actual caterpillars and I guess I might have been just too late in the season. Not counting the sites where I saw feeding signs only, there are now ten confirmed Chamomile Shark locations in the area and I am convinced there are many more just waiting to be found.

## **Death's Head Hawk-moth**

No – not in Fife or Clackmannan, but on a house wall in Dufftown in Morayshire on 8 September. The suspicion is that it arrived on the southerly winds that were prevailing at the time. Who knows – it might have stopped off here on the way! One observer commented “Its threat display, accompanied by a rattling squeak, was quite remarkable.” Quite!

## **Event Reports**

***Auchtermuchty Common – 15/16 August*** – We were on the verge of cancelling this event because of high winds throughout the day on 15 Aug. However, it stayed dry and didn't get too cold. Kate the ranger and some hardy friends camped out overnight and watched over the three light traps. The following morning we identified 25 different species, mostly singletons but a reasonable count nonetheless. Among them was the micro-moth *Agonopterix ocellana* – the first Fife record was last year in Tentsmuir so it is evidently spreading rapidly!

***Balmerino Abbey – 22/23 August*** – The evening started encouragingly with good conditions for bats and moths. There were quite a few children in attendance and it is always heartening to see the enthusiasm with which they gather the moths and try to identify them. It turned quite chilly later and the forecast rain came more or less on schedule. We decided not to continue the event the following morning due to the conditions. We did manage over 30 species, however, the highlights being Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing and Bulrush Wainscot and many fresh, colourful Red-green Carpets.

***National Moth Night – 18/19 September*** – This year, National Moth Night was held over two nights in an attempt to double the chances of having decent moth weather in September. There were a couple of public events organised – one by SWT on Friday at Cullaloe reserve and one by Fife Countryside Rangers on Saturday in an orchard in Newburgh. Friday was definitely a better night than Saturday and that was reflected in the catches at the two events. Cullaloe had more moths but fewer mothers; 24 and 5 respectively. Highlights were Frosted Orange, Pink-barred Sallow and Svensson's Copper Underwing. Saturday was a beautiful sunny day and this of course meant clear sky and plummeting temperatures for Newburgh's event with only 4 moths but nearly 20 mothers! Highlight was seeing the excitement generated in nine children by seeing a single Common Marbled Carpet fluttering down into the light.

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