



## Fife & Clacks Group Newsletter June 2010

East Scotland Branch

Welcome to the second Fife & Clackmannanshire Newsletter of 2010. For the first time I can include a couple of short articles by members other than me. This will make a nice change and hopefully will encourage others to send me interesting snippets as well.

I mentioned last time that I was about to give a talk to a Guide troop and that took place on 31 May. I put a moth trap in a garden close by their meeting hall the night before and was amazed to find the ground sheet frozen the next morning; it has been a strange spring. Luckily there were some moths in the trap, including a Spectacle and a Small Elephant Hawk-moth. The Guides were very impressed with these and with my rapidly maturing Garden Tiger caterpillars and asked some interesting questions during the talk.

### **Recent Butterflies**

Earlier in the year, there had been a couple of Comma sightings and I suggested that we would be inundated shortly. That hasn't happened and I have heard of only one or two more records since then. Is that because they have become so commonplace that they no longer excite people? I suspect not. Similarly there have been few mentions of Small Tortoiseshell or Peacock; there have been some and I dare say that one or two of you have seen lots, but I think generally there have been far fewer than this time last year.

By contrast Orange-tip and Green Hairstreak have had a great time. Orange-tip butterflies particularly have been reported from all over the area. I had a moth trapping session at the Bleachfields at Coaltown of Balgonie one night in May and the next morning accompanied a group of Junior Rangers round the site. In one part of the meadow was a single Cuckooflower and I was able to show the Rangers a number of Orange-tip eggs. This was the first time I'd tried looking for eggs and I even amazed myself! For the next two weeks, I found eggs on every Cuckooflower I looked at, wherever it was.

There have been a number of new Green Hairstreak colonies discovered throughout the Borders and Tayside. These are probably newly reported rather than actual new colonies, but they certainly seem to be doing well this year. For the first time, they have been found at Auchtermuchty Common and there are reported sightings from round Norman's Law. You will read in Grahame Boath's note below how they are also thriving round Loch Glow. However, for the 4th year in a row I didn't find the Lochornie colony at the west end of Blairadam forest that was there ten years ago. And we were unable to find any amongst the acres of Blaeberry on Benarty Hill. A more experienced recorder told me that perching places are just as important as food-plant to this butterfly. He told of one colony that disappeared because the well-meaning management team removed the gorse from the site to allow the Blaeberry to expand and without the gorse to perch on, the butterflies died out!

Anecdotally, it appears that the species hibernating as adults have done less well than those spending winter as pupae. If, for example, the spread of Comma is due in part to climate change, could the cold winter have created unfavourable conditions and set it back?

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary have been out at Auchtermuchty Common since early June and I imagine that they will be around elsewhere by now as well. I'm still keen to find volunteers to visit all current and historical sites over the next 4 years to try to confirm continued presence. A note of all the sites is included at the end of the newsletter. (For the sake of brevity, I have not listed every site if there are several within a couple of hundred yards of each other)

A Holly Blue was reported from Kirkcaldy. Is there now a Fife colony or was it a visitor from across the water?

### **Recent Moths**

Species diversity and numbers are increasing rapidly now. My garden trap is returning 15 to 20 species a night. More favourable habitats are seeing up to 40. Highlights over the last couple of months have been:

- Scarce Prominent in Dunfermline and Oakley. Previously there has only been a single record from Wether Hill back in 1986. I suspect it is present in many birch woods throughout our region.
- White-pinion Spotted in Auchtertool. The first record for Fife.
- Grey Birch in Anstruther. Only the second record for Fife. Also the first record for Vice County 85 of "Fifeshire including Kinross". Vice counties are historical botanical designations and are used in many recording schemes (including moths but excluding butterflies!) as geographical recording areas.
- Green Silver-lines in Kinross. Not a Fife record, but the first for Vice County 85.
- Yellow-barred Brindle in Cardenden and Coaltown of Balgonie. The first and second Fife records.
- ...and a Hummingbird Hawk-moth near Elie – Summer is here!!

This time last year, I suggested that you should look for Chamomile Shark caterpillars on Mayweed flowers. I found them almost everywhere I looked, from Dunfermline to Kinraig, from Kinghorn to Falkland. I didn't get any records from anyone else but perhaps this year will be better. The Mayweed will be in flower shortly, so do go out and have a look.

### **Hunting For Hairstreaks – by Grahame Boath**

(The following is a note by Grahame Boath, extracted from his blog of 26 May. The blog is well worth a read for those of you with access to such things and can be found here, <http://llendorin.wordpress.com/>, where you can also see those of Grahame's photos that I have removed)

Until two weeks ago, I'd never seen a Green Hairstreak butterfly before. In complete honesty, I should have, but have just never taken the time to do so. I knew they were in Fife, after all. I decided, last week, while the weather was good, to remedy that. I knew they could be found in the Lomond Hills, but I wasn't sure exactly where. A quick email to the county recorder got me the answer I needed – apparently, they were to be found at the Craigmear Limekilns.

So, I packed up my butterfly net and my camera, and off I went. I parked at the main Craigmhead Car Park and set off. It was an absolutely glorious day, and the wind was only a mild breeze, so I knew my chances were good.

When I got to the Limekilns, I began to wonder if the information I had been given could be wrong. There was no Blaeberry (or Bilberry) here. I'd seen the foodplant all the way up the hill, at the side of the path (no Hairstreaks, though), but as soon as I got to the Limekilns, it turned into grass and scrub. My confidence was definitely waning at this point, but I should have had more faith. At the far end of the path, there was a large patch of Blaeberry, approximately 75 foot square. And it's here that I had my first ever sighting of Green Hairstreak butterflies! I saw 6 in total at this site, though I suspect there would have been more about.



I have to be honest, and say I wasn't really sure what to expect with them. I knew they were small butterflies, but I didn't realise quite how small! For those who might not have seen one before, they're about the same size as a 1 pence coin! I was really chuffed with myself for having seen them, but I was a little surprised to see such a healthy colony on such a small patch of Blaeberry.

The green patch on the left half of the image is the Hairstreak colony, with the darker brown patch being the gorse, where they were defending territories.

I wasn't content with that, though. On my way back down the hill, I noticed a massive patch of Blaeberry near the path leading to West Lomond. This just had to be investigated! Luckily for me, I bumped into one of the rangers from Fife Coast and Countryside Trust, who confirmed that there is another colony of butterflies over there. Off I went! I managed to see a further three butterflies on that hillside. I'm sure there were significantly more to be found, but they were being rather elusive! I did, however, manage to find another two butterflies in a small clearing nearby.

In total, eleven Green Hairstreak butterflies seen in one day – which is eleven more than I had ever seen before!

I was feeling suitably chuffed with myself by the time I had to leave for work (there are advantages to working evenings after all!), but I figured that there had to be more to see.

I know the Cleish Hills quite well, and I know where several patches of Blaeberry can be found, so again, I asked the county recorder what records there are, and he advised of a tiny colony, beside the unclassified road that passes Loch Glow. Now, I had my doubts about that being the only active site up there. I suspected it would be more likely that the Green Hairstreaks were simply under-recorded, so I set out to see if I was right. I had a very specific location in mind near the Black Loch, so off I went to look!

There are no roads that go near the Black Loch, unfortunately, so I had to park (with permission) at the fishermen's car park at Loch Glow and walk round. It was a distance of less than 2 miles, so not really a big problem, despite being rather boggy ground.

My first surprise was on the path between Loch Glow and the Black Loch... I bumped into a group of six Green Hairstreaks! Now, I wasn't expecting them here, since there's little to no Blaeberry, but here they were! Admittedly, I was only about 400 metres from the site I was planning to find them, but still, it was a bit of a shock.



Not what you'd call prime Hairstreak territory! I suspect, with it being much windier up in the hills on the Thursday, they were using it as a safe place to escape the wind

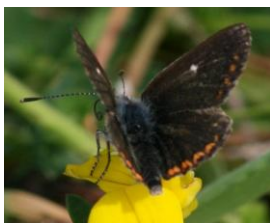
Onwards to the main site, and after only a couple of minutes of searching, there they were! Another 3 butterflies seen, but as I mentioned, with the wind being a lot stronger, I was impressed enough with that!

So there you have it... a new colony, never before recorded. And it was found by me! I suspect in both the Cleish Hills and the Lomond Hills, there are significantly more locations for this butterfly than have previously been recorded. It's just going to take someone with a bit of time and energy to go out and hunt for them.

Incidentally, the colony is on the North slope of the Black Loch, which means that it's not actually in Fife, much to my disappointment! It's in Perth and Kinross by... about 20 metres!

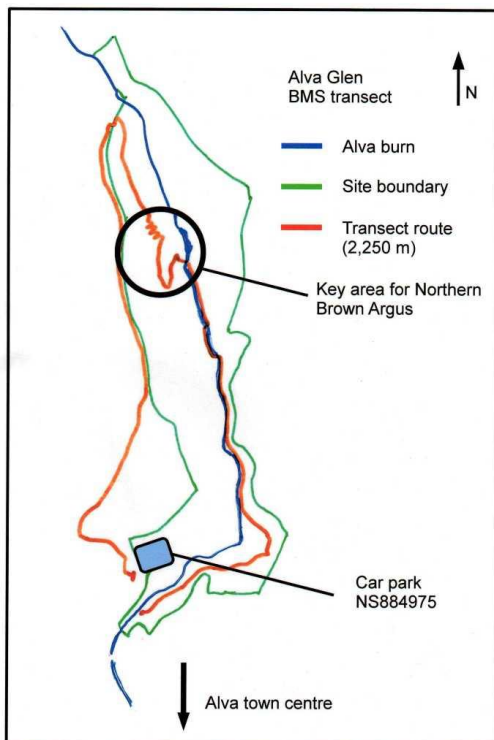
### **Alva Glen butterfly transect – by Heather Young**

In the spring of 2008, I decided to combine my enjoyment of the outdoors, desire to improve my fitness, and love of butterflies, moths and other six-legged creatures, by walking a Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (BMS) transect around Alva Glen. While I recorded all butterfly and moth species seen, I was particularly interested in the population of Northern Brown Argus butterflies at the northern end of the glen. This is a United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Clackmannanshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) priority species, and is restricted to areas that support its larval food plant, common rock rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*).



Northern Brown Argus is a small member of the 'blues' and the Scottish race sports a distinctive pair of small white spots on its upper wings, distinguishing it from the female common blue which can be otherwise superficially similar (the male common blue is much more blue!). Photo showing white spots on wings © Scott Shanks.

The transect was walked once a week from the beginning of April to the end of September, with the exception of one week in April and three in late August / early September when the weather failed to meet minimum BMS requirements.



The route starts at the lower entrance to MacArthur Braes and follows the main pathway along the glen to the waterfall, up the zig-zag path, through the gate at the top, and back along the outside of the sheep fence to the steep descent through the gorse (Pate Road), finishing at the metal stile near the car park.

Very little butterfly activity occurs until the glen starts to open out after crossing the last of the footbridges, as there is so much shade in the lower part of the glen. Further up the path, before it leaves the burn to climb out of the glen, you may see butterflies drinking from puddles, or nectaring on the many wildflowers that grow alongside in the sheltered sunny areas. Speckled Yellow moths were abundant in this area, as well as on the climb to the top of the zig-zag path, during late May and early June.

The vast majority of my butterfly and moth sightings were made between the first seat after climbing up from the dam, and the top of the zig-zag path, as this slope is south-facing, has scattered gorse scrub for shelter, bare ground (the path) for basking, and is composed of flower-rich, lightly-grazed grassland (sheep have been excluded from the glen for some years, although roe deer can still be seen inside the fence). It is in this area that the common rock rose grows on the rocky outcrops alongside the path, and where you are most likely to see Northern Brown Argus, from mid-June to the end of July. Ringlets were abundant on these grassy slopes in July, as were Chimney Sweepers, and the magnificent Six-spot Burnet moths. Small Coppers were common here, and indeed throughout the transect in two generations – May / June and again from the end of July.



Blaeberry Bumblebee  
© BBCT

Many people walking in the glen turn back at this point (if they manage to climb this far!). However the section between the top of the zig-zag path and the sheep fence at the northern end of the glen, is well worth a visit. It is here that the regenerating heather and Bilberry support the presence of one of our most beautiful bumblebees, the Blaeberry Bumblebee, *Bombus monticola*. This is another BAP priority species, and although it is not rare in Scotland, it clearly benefits from the exclusion of sheep, as it is seldom encountered out on the open, more heavily-grazed moorland nearby. Indeed the presence of this bumblebee prompted me to register the same transect around Alva Glen with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust for 2009, and take part in their pilot scheme to monitor bumblebee numbers in a similar fashion to the BMS, but counting bumblebees once a month between March and October.

Another BAP priority butterfly, the Small Heath, is commonly seen throughout the summer on all the grassy sections of the transect, even outside the sheep fence, and seems to prefer a more heavily grazed sward.

All of the butterflies and day-flying moths encountered on my visits to Alva Glen are listed in Table 1, below, in decreasing order of abundance, along with the best time to look for them, and their larval food plants. It is the presence of a wide variety of food plants, along with an abundance of nectar sources, that make the glen so attractive to insects.

Table 1. Butterflies and moths recorded in Alva Glen in 2008, in decreasing order of abundance.

Species	Flight period (Alva Glen 2008)	Main larval food plants
Ringlet	Late June/ July	Grasses
Small Heath	End May – mid August	Grasses
Speckled Yellow*	Mid May – mid June	Wood sage
Small Copper	May / June and again from end of July	Sorrels
Chimney Sweeper*	Mid June – end July	Pignut
Six-spot Burnet*	Mid July – mid August	Bird's foot trefoil
Meadow Brown	July / August	Grasses
Northern Brown Argus	Mid June – end July	Common rock rose
Peacock	April / May then from late July	Nettles
Green-veined White	May / June	Cuckoo flower / garlic mustard
Orange-tip	Late April – early June	Cuckoo flower / garlic mustard
Small White	June / July	Brassicas
Large White	July / August	Brassicas
Small Tortoiseshell	April / May then from late July	Nettles
Common Blue	June / July	Bird's foot trefoil
Dark Green Fritillary	July / August	Violets
Red Admiral	From late July	Nettles
Comma**	Late July	Nettles / wych elm?
Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing**	Late July	Wide range

\*day-flying moths

\*\*single specimen on buddleia on waste ground at entrance to glen

The summer of 2009 turned out to have just as much unpredictable weather as 2008, and the butterflies and moths seemed to have mixed fortunes in the glen. Speckled Yellow and Six-spot Burnet moths did not have a good year, with far fewer recorded on the transect, and Ringlets were also down in numbers. On the other hand, Green-veined White, Small Copper, Peacock, and, happily, Northern Brown Argus all showed a healthy increase in 2009 over 2008, and of course Painted Lady was added to the list following the much talked-about mass migration from Africa.

Following a series of landslips caused by the heavy rains of autumn and the harsh frosts of winter, I have decided to shorten the transect this year and finish at the top of the glen itself instead of continuing along the higher path and down the steep descent of the Pate Road. This will still

successfully monitor the Northern Brown Argus population and most of the other species as well, and I'll still get my exercise climbing the zig-zag path! 2010 has started much cooler than either of the previous two years, and it remains to be seen what effect the harsh winter has had on the lepidoptera of Alva Glen. Early indications are that Green-veined White and Orange-tip are still present in reasonable numbers, but Small Copper have been slow to appear. It is only after a few years of walking the transect that trends can be separated from fluctuations, so I shall just have to keep putting my best foot forward for butterflies and moths.

## **Event Reports**

### **National Moth Night at Cullaloe. Saturday 15 May.**

22 people turned up to see the moths at Cullaloe - an excellent turnout and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves which of course is one of the main purposes of these events. There were five traps set up at different points round the reserve and at the end of the night there was an impressive total of around 120 moths of 20 species. In no particular order, the full list is Pebble Prominent, Lesser Swallow Prominent, Flame Carpet, Water Carpet, Common Wave, Herald, Common Pug, Golden-rod Pug, V-Pug, Brindled Pug, Scalloped Hazel, Brown Silver-line, Early Thorn, Buff Ermine, White Ermine, Clouded Drab, Hebrew Character, Common Quaker, Powdered Quaker and Chestnut.

### **Benarty Hill Green Hairstreak day. Sunday 16 May.**

There were three of us on this trip. It was a good day with enough sunshine to tempt out any butterflies that might be around. There were a few Orange-tip butterflies at the bottom of the steps that lead up through Benarty Wood to the top of the hill, which I thought boded well for the rest of the day. There are hundreds of square yards of Blaeberry on the hillside and all along the top ridge of the hill. We walked through much of it, pausing occasionally to examine small flying creatures, none of which was a Green Hairstreak. We saw Common Heath moths, some unidentified micro-moths and a good number of Emperor Moths flying in the sunshine. But no Green Hairstreak. There are no previous records from the area, but given the profusion of food-plant and the proximity to colonies in the Cleish and Lomond hills I had thought that the odds were good. It could be that we missed them, or that the lack of shelter and perching points means that they are not there. Disappointment was tempered by seeing the Emperor moths, a rather shy Raven and by the sound of a Green Woodpecker yaffling in the background.

## Forthcoming Events

The following events have been arranged.

Date	Event	Details	Contact
Fri/Sat 25/26 June	Moth trapping and butterfly walk on East Lomond	Meet at the Limekiln on East Lomond at 9.30pm on Friday for moth trapping and again 10am on Saturday to empty the traps and take part in the butterfly walk. (NO238058). There is car parking close by either at Craigmead or the East Lomond Relay Station.	Kate Morison 07950 786245
Sat. 3 July	Auchtermuchty Common to see Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Meet at the car park (NO236134) on the B936 about a mile north of Auchtermuchty at 1.30pm.	Kate Morison 07950 786245
Sunday 8 August	Butterfly walk at Barry Buddon	Details to be confirmed. Contact Duncan if interested.	Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
Sat/Sun. 21/22 August	Moth trapping at Auchtermuchty Common	Meet at car park (NO236134) at 8.30pm. on the 21st. to check early moths at the traps, and again at 10.00am. on the Sunday to see what was caught	Kate Morison 07950 786245
Sat/Sun. 28/29 August	Eden Estuary open day	Details to be confirmed. Contact Duncan if interested.	Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
Sat/Sun. 4/5 September	Bats and Moths at Falkland Palace orchard	Meet at the Palace at 7.30pm. on the 4th. to check early moths at the traps, and again at 10.00am. on the Sunday to see what was caught	Kate Morison 07950 786245

Duncan Davidson

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Email: [duncan@dwwd.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:duncan@dwwd.freeserve.co.uk)

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Sites

10k square	Site	Gridref	10k square	Site	Gridref
NN90	Glendevon	NN978031	NS98	Devilla	NS964887
NO00	South Queich	NO027041	NS98	Devilla Forest	NS9687
NO00	Craighead, Glendevon	NO0404	NS99	Birkhill, Clacks	NS935935
NO10	West Lomond	NO185066	NS99	School Wood	NS957933
NO20	Harperleas Reservoir	NO2005	NS99	Gartgreenie	NS959930
NO20	Lomond Hills	NO2106	NS99	Bath Moor Plantation	NS962917
NO20	Lomond Hills	NO2203	NS99	Sand Pit, Devilla	NS965900
NO20	Lomond Hills	NO2204	NS99	Foad Wood, nr Forest Mill	NS968945
NO20	Lomond Hills	NO2206	NS99	Lockshaw	NS986912
NO20	Craigmoss Meadows	NO231059	NS99	Cattlemoss	NS994914
NO20	Lochmuir Wood, Glenrothes	NO2903	NT09	Cattle Moss, Saline	NT005910
NO21	Auchtermuchty Common	NO2313	NT09	Cowstrandburn, Saline	NT027907
NO30	Star Moss	NO310040	NT09	Wether Hill	NT042957
NO30	Langdyke, Fife	NO3205	NT09	Wether Hill	NT042961
NO30	Cults Hill, Fife	NO3508	NT09	Dumglow, Cleish	NT073962
NO30	Cults Hill, Fife	NO3609	NT09	Black Loch	NT078960
NO32	Luthrie, Fife	NO3320	NT09	Dunduff	NT0791
NO40	Woodside, Fife	NO4208	NT09	Tipperton Moss	NT080956
NO41	Craigtoun Country Park	NO467128	NT09	Cleish Hills	NT083963
NO42	Morton Lochs	NO463264	NT09	Loch Glow	NT087949
NO42	Leuchars Airfield	NO470208	NT09	Roscobie	NT0892
NO42	Earlshall Muir	NO476213	NT09	Roscobie	NT092932
NO42	Tentsmuir	NO4822	NT09	Dow Loch	NT094965
NO42	Reres Wood	NO487210	NT09	Cleish Hills	NT098963
NO42	Earlshall Muir	NO4922	NT18	Townhill	NT112896
NO42	Tentsmuir	NO492231	NT19	Lochornie Burn	NT103946
NO42	Goose Pools	NO495210	NT19	Gaskie Hill, Fife	NT105922
NO42	Tentsmuir	NO495246	NT19	Craigencat, Fife	NT1095
NO52	Tentsmuir NNR	NO5027	NT19	Cowdenbeath	NT158931
NO52	Tentsmuir	NO5026	NT19	Lochore Meadows	NT1597
NS89	Alva Glen	NS884982	NT19	Vane Farm	NT1599
NS89	Alva Glen	NS885975	NT19	The Clune, Lochore Meadows	NT1795
NS98	Peppermill Dam, Devilla	NS948896	NT39	Earlseat, Coaltown of Wemyss	NT3197