



## Fife & Clacks Group Newsletter August 2010

East Scotland Branch

Approaching the end of the second week in August, we are well through the butterfly season. Although the Fritillaries, Blues and even Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Heaths are past their peak, there are others for whom August is the best month - Small Copper, for example, and of course the Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock and Comma.

July was one of the wettest on record, with Fife experiencing almost three times the long-term average for the month. This might have contributed to the fact that I have seen just one butterfly in my garden so far this year – a Large White on 26 June. Perhaps with the Buddleia now in flower, there will be some more colourful visitors during August.

Having given a talk to Girl Guides in May, it was the turn of the Boy Scouts at the end of June. I set a moth trap at Scout HQ in Fordell Firs near Dunfermline and was able to show the cub scouts around 40 species including a number of Poplar Hawk-moths. The boys were very excited at being so close to the moths and they asked a number of intelligent questions – the event seemed to make a positive impression and I hope that one or two of them would have been sufficiently inspired to learn more.

### **Recent Butterflies**

Comma records were much scarcer in the early part of the year than in previous years, suggesting that the hibernating adults had not fared well, but it is still too early to gauge how much the next generation has been affected. The peak emergence will be later this month and already there are some encouraging signs across the area. Sightings have come from Cullaloe Wildlife Reserve, Kinghorn, Wormit and most recently there were four of them spotted at Birnie Loch, along with 10 other species on the same day. There have been a couple of others and also from some sites in Tayside, so let's hope there will be more throughout August and September. Earlier in July, the first recorded caterpillar from North of the Forth was discovered on Wych Elm near Bridge of Allan. We must keep our eyes peeled next year for these distinctive caterpillars on Common Nettle and Elm.

Remember the thousands of Painted Lady that invaded the country last year? So far this year, I know of only one sighting, earlier this week, in Colinsburgh. There have also been very few Red Admiral reports perhaps suggesting that spring migration was restricted resulting in a smaller home grown generation (did our winter last too long or were there other factors at work in Europe and Northern Africa?).

There have been a few isolated Peacock records recently, but I'd expect them to increase through August and September as well. There have been good numbers of caterpillars seen on Common Nettle at Birnie Loch, for example, and also at Formonthills near Glenrothes. This is another species that might have been affected during hibernation by the cold winter, bearing in mind that it is a relative newcomer to northerly climes.

Small Tortoiseshell on the other hand, have been out in numbers nearly everywhere, nectaring on roadside thistles and in gardens (not mine!).

There is only one known site for Large Heath on our patch, at Tipperton Moss between Knockhill and Loch Glow. Although they have not been recorded for five years, the habitat remains good and there is not a big risk of loss. Grahame Boath and I tried on separate occasions to confirm their continued presence and despite the wind and rain we managed one possible and one definite record. We have no idea of abundance and it would be good to initiate a timed count in future years. This involves two visits during the peak flying period preceded by a recce visit to establish the approximate colony boundaries. Any volunteers? Let me know and I can supply more details of the process.

There have been some other good days in July:

- The transect at the Clune on the shores of Lochore reported over 120 Ringlet one day, along with Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Meadow Brown and Small Heath. 27 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary were counted on another occasion.
- A recent visit to Tentsmuir by one member resulted in 12 species seen, including Dark Green Fritillary and Grayling.
- Dark Green Fritillary at Holl Meadows were reported as “the most butterflies I’ve ever seen” . This might be a good place for an organised trip next year.

There were a couple of tentative reports of Small Blue, but I am sorry to say that Small Blue is considered extinct in our area. The last reported location was Carlingnose Reserve many years ago and although I keep repeating that we must never say never, I suspect that the Small Blue butterflies were actually small blue butterflies - namely Common Blue. The food-plant of Small Blue is Kidney Vetch and there are still quite a few patches of this in and around Carlingnose, notably on the rocky outcrops at the entrance to Deep Sea World and on the rock faces of the reserve itself. I spent a few hours surveying these areas without any evidence of the butterfly - but of course absence of evidence is not evidence of absence and I will keep looking. The SWT Ranger at Carlingnose is keen to have a Butterfly Transect through the reserve and a start was made this year by mapping out a potential route and by involving a couple of local volunteers to walk the route a number of times. We initiated the exercise quite late in the year and so success was limited but we hope that it will take off next year with the recruitment of more volunteers. It is not really practical to include the rock faces in the route, but with a regular recording presence, and perhaps occasional diversions, we might be lucky and find that Small Blue is still alive and well in Carlingnose!

### **Recent Moths**

Moth diversity has been at its peak over the last couple of weeks. An amazing catch in a light trap near Auchtertool comprised nearly 600 moths of 73 species. The highlight of that catch was probably the Gothic; certainly not the 129 Large Yellow Underwings, which can become a nuisance by disturbing other moths before they can be identified. A notable session in Anstruther at around the same time had nearly 200 moths of 54 species. We also had several hundred moths at the trapping event on East Lomond, including a new species for Fife. Details are in the event report later on.

My garden has been rather less prolific, but I did have a Swallow Prominent one night, which was a pleasant change from the more numerous Lesser Swallow Prominent.

There was a spate of reports from around the country of trees covered in webs and a couple of television news items identified the culprits in southern England and in Dee-side as Ermine micro moths; these are small white moths with delicate black spots. In this area, three species from the genus have been recorded. The adults and their caterpillars all look very similar and the most reliable way to tell them apart is from the tree that they are feeding on. Bird-cherry Ermine, *Yponomeuta evonymella*, feeds on Bird Cherry, Orchard Ermine, *Yponomeuta padella*, feeds on Hawthorn and Spindle Ermine, *Yponomeuta cagnagella*, feeds on Spindle. The Spindle Ermine has taken up residence in St Andrews Botanic Gardens and webs can be seen each year on the spindle there. The other two species are widespread, though I have not seen their webs personally. The photograph below is from near Dunfermline and was sent to me by David Haines. It is typical of the webs produced and trees usually make a full recovery.



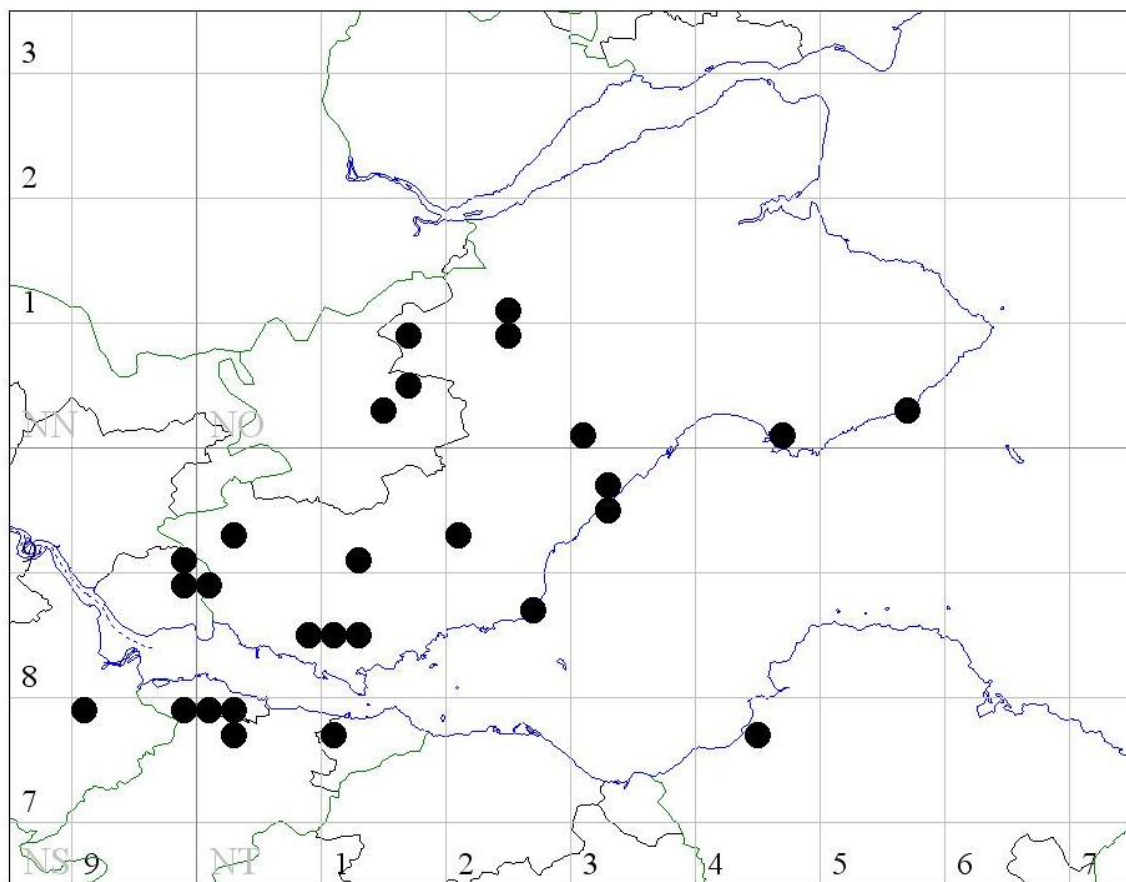
There are good years and bad years for these insects and this year seems to have been a very good year. The reasons aren't clear, but of course if every year was a good year, the trees would soon not be able to recover and every year would be a bad one!

Humming-bird Hawk-moths have been reported from near Glasgow and through the country to Banffshire. Just this week, one was seen in NE Fife nectaring at a hanging basket. We know that these moths are resident in southern Europe and North Africa and every year a few will migrate to the UK. Most years we see at least one or two in this part of the world but sadly they cannot survive the winters and will die quite soon. Occasionally they will breed here and in 2007, a caterpillar was found near Burntisland but it too would have perished with the onset of winter.

All ten of my Garden Tiger Moth caterpillars pupated successfully and have now emerged. I am pleased that I managed to keep them close to their natural lifecycle, emerging at the same time that they would have in the wild. It is not good practice to release specimens away from their capture site but I had no qualms releasing so few of these relatively common moths where they are regularly recorded anyway.

Did anyone else find any Chamomile Shark caterpillars this year? A couple of years ago, there were only two modern records from Fife & Clacks and over the last two years I have found caterpillars on Mayweed in most of our 10k squares. The map below shows the sites where the species has now been recorded.

### Chamomile Shark (*Cucullia chamomillae*)



### Event Reports

#### East Lomond Bio-Blitz. Friday 25 and Saturday 26 June.

This was a very successful event, well attended by members of the public over the two sessions, not just to check out the moths, but also to help identify other insects, plants, birds, bats and other mammals. The total species count at the end of the day was 195, of which we estimated nearly 600 moths of 43 species. There were easily over a hundred Clouded-bordered Brindle, Silver-ground Carpet and Latticed Heath. Many of the Clouded-bordered Brindle seemed to be swarming round one

of the few small isolated trees – there was no obvious nectar source and we wondered if there was some sort of mating ritual going on. Most spectacular catches were Poplar Hawk-moth, Small Elephant Hawk-moth, Garden Tiger, Lempke’s Gold Spot and White Ermine, but the highlight was an unobtrusive dark coloured micro-moth called *Pyla fusca*. It is a member of the Pyralid family and has a habit of resting in areas of burnt heather, where its dark colouration makes it well camouflaged. Despite being fairly common across heathland in the UK, this is the first record for Fife. Also recorded on Saturday morning were Green-veined White, Common Blue, Small Copper, Small Heath and Small Tortoiseshell larvae.

### **Auchtermuchty Fritillary day. Saturday 3 July.**

There were five of us on this trip. It was quite windy but we did see our target species. A single Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary sat quietly while we all got a good look. By contrast, the few Dark Green Fritillaries we saw were flying low and fast with the wind. We did manage to pot one on a flower head and got a closer look at this beautiful butterfly before releasing it unharmed. We saw a number of 6-spot Burnets, a lot of Grass Rivulets and other "grass" moths along with various bumble-bees and a species of Mirid Bug.

### **Forthcoming Events**

The following events have been arranged. Note that the Barry Buddon day was previously incorrectly stated as 8 August.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Sunday 15 August	Butterfly walk at Barry Buddon	Meet at Monifieth Football Pitch car-park (NO503324) at 10am. Contact Duncan for detailed directions if necessary.	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
Sunday 29 August	Eden Estuary open day	This event is organised by Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. There are a series of activities including tracking Eagles and learning how to tag and track seals. Moth traps will have been run on the Saturday night and will be examined on Sunday morning.	Kate Morison 07950 786245
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

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