



## Fife & Clacks Group Newsletter June 2011

East Scotland Branch

We are told that summer has started, but in many parts of Fife and Clacks, I don't think anyone has told the butterflies - I have heard of very few during May or the first half of June. Having started so well, the year seemed to go into decline very rapidly.

### **Butterflies**

There were some positives though. The Green Hairstreak site at Earls Hall Muir was underwater from November until late April and there were fears that the colony would have suffered badly or even been wiped out. However, ten fresh adults were reported from there in the first week of May, along with Small Copper, Orange-tip, Peacock, Small White and Green-veined White. They seem to be able to survive and thrive, whatever the weather throws at them.

The transect at Lochore Meadows started with an encouraging number of whites, Orange-tip, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock, but by the end of May only the Small Copper was showing any number (41 on one occasion).

There was further bad news on one of the Tentsmuir transects, where a large portion has been smothered in sand. This is all a natural part of the changing shape of the coastline but can be quite dispiriting for those who have spent years building up a picture of the transect population trends. Perhaps continuing monitoring will show how quickly the habitat recovers or not.

There were hardly any Comma reports during May and June. We had the same situation last year, with a long cold winter accompanied by fears for their survival - then they emerged with a vengeance in the late summer, proving that plenty of them must have hibernated successfully. Let us hope for the same this year.

There have been more reports of Brimstone butterfly around Edinburgh, but sadly, no pictures yet!

### **Moths**

Moths have had a mixed couple of months as well.

Recorders across the region have reported complete blank trapping sessions, while in Auchtertool there was a gradual build up of species, peaking at 46 one night in June. A couple of nights later this was down to 8 - such a variation shows just what an affect local weather conditions can have on trap numbers: just because they're not in the trap doesn't mean they are not around! One Auchtertool session included 17 White Ermine many of which were playing dead, displaying their bright yellow abdomen as a caution to predators. They belong to the family Arctiidae, many of which have aposematic colouring, warning of toxicity - the Tiger moths are a good example of this.

My garden trap had no more than 6 species on any night throughout May and early June. One of these few species was my first Peach Blossom which is reported as widespread in Fife & Clacks. By the end of the month, in the couple of warm humid nights we had, I was seeing 20 or more species. Heart and Dart were the most numerous species in June, with Large Yellow Underwing just starting to appear at the end of the month. We can look forward to being inundated with them in July.



**Peach Blossom**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, the first verified Fife record of Larch Pug was recorded in Cupar. There are scattered records throughout the Borders, Stirlingshire, Perthshire and Aberdeenshire, so it is not a particularly rare creature, but of course being a pug it is not always readily identifiable. It was nice to confirm it in Fife.



**Yellow-barred Brindle**

The search for oak related species continued through early May, with more trips to Inzievar ancient woodland and the oaks in Falkland estate. Sadly, the Lunar Marbled Brown remains unrecorded in Fife but there were other notable species found – from Inzievar: Yellow-barred Brindle (3<sup>rd</sup> Fife record) and Grey Birch (2<sup>nd</sup> Fife record) and from Falkland: Pale Prominent (2<sup>nd</sup> Fife record). In both sites there were Least Black Arches which was first recorded in our area at Falkland Palace in 2008 and is now appearing all over. Earlier in the year (as reported in the April

Newsletter) I recorded Fife's first Oak Beauty at Inzievar. A few days later I received a photo of a moth that had come to a kitchen window near Cupar - yes, it was another Oak Beauty. Surprisingly there are not many oaks in the immediate area so it might need fewer trees than I had thought, which means there is scope for it being much more widespread.

Last time, I also mentioned that Scarce Prominent might be less scarce than thought and I tried on a number of occasions to find it in the birch woods overlooking Vane Farm RSPB reserve. One very wet session resulted in a disappointing 12 species, but included Broken-barred Carpet. It too is reported as widespread but that was my first example. My last attempt on a clear and windy night resulted in just five species. This is prime habitat in which I would expect to catch 30 or more species and so this again shows how weather dependent light trapping can be.



**Least Black Arches**

At the end of May I arranged a trapping session in St Andrews Botanic garden for the students of St Andrews Wildlife and Conservation Society. Again it was quite a cold night but by the end of it we had a creditable 31 species - all were fairly common, with the highlight being Seraphim.

On the 24th of June, I set up a light trap at Holl Meadows. It was damp and although hardly mid-summer temperatures it did stay relatively mild throughout the short night. In the early morning light, I counted 36 species including Small Elephant Hawk-moth, Poplar Hawk-moth, Buff-tip, Green Carpet and Spectacle. Nothing uncommon, but it was good to see so many moths in such a nice habitat. In the early evening I witnessed several Ghost Moth leks round the edge of the meadow. This is where two or more male moths display together to impress the female who will eventually mate with one of them. In the October 2009 newsletter, I mentioned a talk given by Roy Sexton about moths pollinating orchids and how the orchid pollinia would stick to the moths' eyes. In the trap were several Burnished Brass, Beautiful Golden Y and a single Silver Y. A number of them, including the Silver Y had pollinia on their palps and under their "chin" so they were obviously doing their bit for the orchid population.

Finally – I saw my first Chamomile Shark caterpillar of the year on 17 June. It was very small, but by now they will be more obvious on the Mayweed flower heads. So, wherever you see patches of Mayweed – in field margins, building sites and waste ground - please do have a look at the flower heads for this beautiful caterpillar. And then tell me where you see it please! There are photos in the July 2009 newsletter.

## Event Reports

### Moth Trapping at Cullaloe, 15 April

The first event of the year was with SWT at Cullaloe. The night was fairly mild to start with but got cooler later. Sixteen common species were recorded, but there were only 4 people present. Highlights were Twin-spotted Quaker and Small Quaker.

### Benarty Hill Green Hairstreak Day, 15 May

Or more accurately - No Green Hairstreak Day. It was mainly dry, but overcast, very windy and with occasional spits of rain. There were eight of us altogether and although we didn't see any Green



Hairstreak we did spot a number of Common Heath moths, a Speckled Yellow, Spruce Carpet, a few White-tailed Bumble-bee queens and a worker Bilberry Bumble-bee. Last year we walked mostly through the blaeberry on the open hillside but this time we kept to the margins of the plantations where there was still plenty of blaeberry, but more importantly there were both shelter and suitable perching points. Still no butterflies though. Was it the weather? Was regular muir burn to blame?

On a positive note, we could see that many of the blaeberry plants had resident larvae and I took a couple of samples away. They pupated not long afterwards and have since emerged as two very different looking examples of the same moth – July Highflyer



### **Moth trapping at Bankhead Moss, 20 May**

Tim Brain spent a lonely night on his own at Bankhead Moss. It was cold and very windy and he eventually had just 4 species to keep him company. This was another SWT organised event and their Fleecefaulds event on 17 June was rained off.

### **Holl Meadows Butterfly and Wildflower walk, 19 May**

This was my first visit to Holl Meadows and prompted me to make the second visit reported above. The Meadows form a thin strip along the western edges of Holl Reservoir. It was a warm day with some sunny spells and four of us traversed the length of the meadows in the hope of seeing some Dark Green Fritillary. There were many, many different meadow plant species described by Kate, including Meadowsweet, Woundwort, Alpine Bistort, Wood Crane's Bill, Melancholy Thistle and too many others to remember! There were areas of Common Rock Rose, Wild Thyme, Bird's Foot Trefoil,



various vetches, grasses, sedges and of course orchids – Fragrant, Greater Butterfly, Northern Marsh, Common Spotted and hybrids of the latter two. On coming across a hybrid, one of the party stated that this was the highlight of the day. I had to disagree, because we also found a thriving colony of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. As well as this we saw a single Dark Green Fritillary, lots of Chimney Sweeper moths, Small Tortoiseshell (one being chased by a pair of fritillaries), Common Blue, Small Heath and a handful of other day flying moths.

**If anyone would like a full list of species recorded during any of the sessions described, please just ask. Remember also to send me your records of butterflies and moths for inclusion in the Butterfly Conservation database and distribution atlases. Fife records will also be included in Fife Nature's database.**

**Please also send me any notes of interest or queries for subsequent newsletters!**

Previous editions of the newsletter can be found on the East Scotland Butterfly Conservation website at <http://www.eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk/newsletter.html> or from me on request.

## Forthcoming Events

In addition to the events below, Scottish Wildlife Trust have a number of moth trapping sessions planned on their reserves throughout the year – Details are in SWT publications, on their website and available from Tim Brain on 01577 840317.

Please remember to take suitable foot wear, waterproofs and, for the moth events, a torch.

Date	Event	Details	Contact
17 July	Butterfly Walk at Holl Meadows	Meet at 2pm at the car park beside Holl Reservoir (NO224034).	Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
22/23 July	Moth Trapping in Devilla Forest with Forestry Commission	Meet 9pm on the Friday to see moths arriving at the traps and again at 10am on Saturday to check what was found overnight. Meet at Devilla Forest min entrance on A985 near Kincardine. Parking at NS966886. Children under 16 to be accompanied by an adult.	Jenny 07717714760 or Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
7 August	Butterfly Walk at Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve	Meet in Kinshaldy car park at 1.30pm. (NO498242).	Duncan Davidson 01383 730446
19 August	Moth Trapping at Falkland Palace	Details to be confirmed. Contact Kate.	Kate Morison 07950 786245
27/28 August	Moth Trapping at Vane Farm	Meet at 8pm on 27 Aug at the visitor centre for a short illustrated talk on local moths and butterflies, followed by a look at the moth traps to see what is arriving. Morning session at 10am to help identify and release what was caught overnight.	Duncan Davidson 01383 730446

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