



Butterfly  
Conservation  
Scotland

## Issue 1

# Lothians Newsletter

Autumn 2011

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Butterfly Conservation newsletter specifically for the members in the Lothians. I have recently stepped down as organiser of the East Scotland branch of Butterfly Conservation, which should give me the time to produce a newsletter for the Lothians subgroup. I hope this will act as a catalyst for further recording of both butterflies and moths in the Lothians and will produce two issues a year, in Spring and Autumn to this end. This and all future issues will be sent out free of charge to all members and interested parties in the region. My goal is to increase the profile of these insects in the Lothians and hence to encourage further recording efforts and increase our knowledge of their distribution.

I would, however, like it to be a true community effort with members controlling the content by submitting articles.

Please send in any articles or relevant information to me and I will try to include them in subsequent issues. My contact details are: 7 Leslie Place, Edinburgh, EH4 1NG. 031 332 0615, [r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk)

*Richard Buckland*

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### **Green Hairstreaks in the Lothians.**

*Richard Buckland*

This species is generally considered to be a moorland butterfly in Scotland where the caterpillar food plant is blaeberry (bilberry).

There is a lot of this habitat in the Falkirk area and the local council asked BC to survey some wildlife sites there with a view to identifying sites of biodiversity interest. This survey found GH at three locations around the Garbethill area south-west of Falkirk. There are other locations with blaeberry in the Falkirk area, so it is likely that more colonies could be found, if anyone could be prevailed upon to continue with the survey work.

Many years ago the presence of a large colony of these butterflies was reported on Auchencorth Moss outside Penicuik. In order to check the current health of this colony I arranged a field trip there this year in conjunction with the TWIC outings programme. We were lucky to see several dozen at a utilities substation on the moss, where trees and bushes provide some shelter. So this colony would seem to be in good shape.

Auchencorth is only just in the Lothians, but as a strong colony, it maintains the butterfly in a healthy state in the locality.

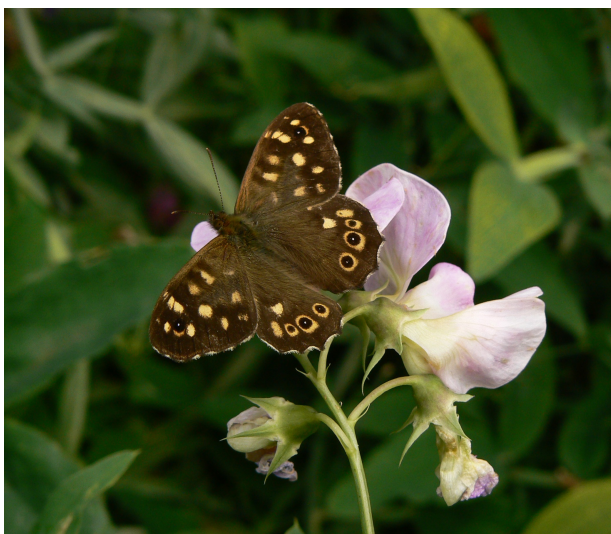
Colonies are also present in the Lothians at Bonaly Country Park, where they are doing well, and at several other locations in the Pentland Hills Park. Butterfly Conservation have erected some enclosures within the park in conjunction with the Park Rangers to conserve the caterpillar food plant. This has increased their numbers considerably. Hopefully, this has established a stable population in the Park. Perhaps as a result of these measures another new colony was reported in the PHP this year. They have also been recorded at a site near Carlops, but it is not known if this colony is still in existence.

BC's 'wider countryside butterfly survey' (WCBS) has also revealed some new colonies in the Gladhouse Reservoir area. The fact that new colonies are coming to light on a regular basis, would suggest that this species is becoming well established in the Lothians.

## Range expansions of four butterflies into the Lothians

Natalie Harmsworth (TWIC).

A number of butterflies have been showing a northward expansion in their range in recent years. I describe here some of the recent changes in four species in the Lothians based on data submitted to TWIC. This data comes from a variety of sources and includes records from the casual observer as well as established recording schemes. The lack of a record for a particular species does not confirm that the species is not present at a particular site. It may just mean the species has not been looked for or recorded at the Local Record Centre (TWIC).



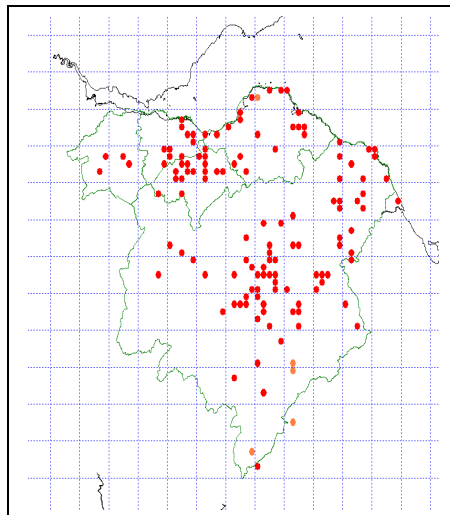
Speckled Wood: Photo. Natalie Harmsworth

The **Speckled Wood** *Pararge aegeria* is a recent, but still very local coloniser from England. Most of the records held by TWIC are for the eastern and southern Borders. However, there are localised sightings for the species in East Lothian, at the Gosford Estate and south-west of Aberlady Bay. Pease Dean SWT reserve in the Borders holds the largest number of sightings for a single year, and is close to the East Lothian border. Overall, it would appear the species has not yet gained a foothold in the Lothians.

Since about 2006, the **Holly Blue** *Celastrina argiolus* has appeared in the region having spread from the south. Unlike the other blue butterflies, which are dependent on species-rich grasslands, this species can turn up in parks and gardens. At National Trust for Scotland property Newhailes and at North Berwick, East Lothian the species has been noted on two or more consecutive years. This may indicate that the species is establishing itself in these localities. However in other sites, records have been for a single survey season only.

Continued recording will be necessary to confirm whether the species is consolidating its range.

The distribution of the **Comma** *Polygona c-album* butterfly has undergone dramatic changes over the past 200 years. In the early 1800s the species occupied scattered locations in Scotland, but in the 1870s the species became extinct. Now the butterfly has returned and is spreading rapidly through the southern half of the country (see the Millennium Atlas of Butterflies, 2001). Between 1990 and 1999 a total of 10 Comma records were submitted to TWIC for the Lothians. These records were restricted to just two localities: Gore Glen Woodland Park near Gorebridge, Midlothian and Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch SWT Reserve in Edinburgh. In the subsequent 10 years, a further 106 records were added to the database, suggesting that the species has successfully colonised the area.



Comma Records 1990-1999 (orange dots) and 2000-2010 (red dots) extracted from the TWIC database (October 2011).

The **Small Skipper** *Thymelicus sylvestris* has already extended its range into the north-east and north-west of England and now the species is being recorded in the Scottish Borders. Over the last 5 years, the Small Skipper has turned up in Berwickshire, Roxburghshire and Selkirkshire, but so far there are no records for the Lothians. Similarly, **Large Skipper** *Ochlodes sylvanus* sightings are currently restricted to the southern Borders area. It is suggested that these species are likely to continue spreading northwards in response to climate change, so it is worth watching out for the arrival of these species near you. By submitting your records to TWIC you will help us build up a more accurate picture of the distribution of these species.

## Lothian Moths 2011

Mark Cubitt

It was a rather mixed year for moths in the Lothians, but not without interest by any means. March, April and May started very well and had some remarkable records of species emerging not just a week or two early, but in some cases four or five weeks early. Through the 'summer' cool and wet conditions made daytime recording and trapping a challenge.

Overwintering is a key phase of the life of any moth or butterfly and The Herald is a great moth to look for as it winters in caves where the temperature is just right. Eleven were found in one of the caves at Beecraigs Country Park in January with droplets of condensation creating a fantastic sight (see photo). Also early in the year the local Spring Usher was found in very good numbers at an Oak woodland site near Blackness.



Mark Cubitt

The Herald

2011 was quite a quiet year for migrants, but excitingly a Small Marbled moth was trapped in July at Abercorn by Carina Convery and was at the Northern edge of a wider invasion of this species through England. A Dark Sword-grass in May and the micro Rush Veneer in April were not recorded again this year and were the only other migrants until much later. Silver Y and Angle Shades appeared in the Autumn as usual. There was a late burst of migrant moths in October through the UK, but few reached the Lothians. Two Rusty-dot Pearl moths in my garden were the first recorded in West Lothian since 1980.

A number of moths made their first appearance for 30 years. Grey Mountain Carpet at Easter Inch Moss, Dark Spinach near Blackness and Small Elephant Hawk Moth in Linlithgow. The former two species, at least, are thought to have

reduced very significantly in numbers over that period.



Mark Cubitt

Small Elephant Hawk-moth

New species to the area included Figure of Eighty recorded in Linlithgow in June after being recorded near Musselburgh by Colin Davison for the first time last year. Colin also caught Archer's Dart also new to the county. Buff Arches, recorded by Greg Fitchett near Winchburgh, is a first of a fabulously looking species. John Harrison has been moth trapping at Aberlady Nature Reserve finding lots of new species there. The highlight on 4th August was a catch of over 1,000 moths including the very local Least Yellow Underwing and also found the rare Lyme Grass moth which feeds on the plant by that name that is stabilising the fringes of the dunes at Aberlady.

Dusky-lemon Sallow has historically never been a common species, but with Wych Elm flowers as its food plant suffered awfully as a result of Dutch Elm Disease and hasn't been recorded in the region for many years. However, this year three of this Autumn flying species have been trapped with two in Linlithgow and one near Musselburgh. Let's hope that with the Elm re-growth now getting big enough to flower that it may be making a comeback.



Greg Fitchett

Buff Arches

Most of the recent moth records are from West Lothian. Midlothian and East Lothian, despite the population concentration, have just about the poorest coverage in the whole of the country. In general they have much the better habitats, so there is huge potential to find out lots about the moth diversity and new species not previously recorded in these counties. Please make contact if you are interest in trying your hand at moth recording.

### **Some late butterfly records for 2011**

*Tom Delaney*

By all accounts, butterflies have had a pretty hard time of it this summer, with little sunshine to fly by. It has been heartening, therefore, to learn of lots of late records in and around the Lothians in the belated good autumn weather.

On 10<sup>th</sup> October, at Bonaly, there were five Red Admirals, four Small Tortoiseshells, four Peacocks and a Comma, all on a single late-flowering Buddleia.

On the same day, birders at Barns Ness looking for autumn migrants were diverted and delighted by a great profusion of Red Admirals, all fresh looking, along with, a few Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks, plus several Small Whites, one pair of which were conducting a courtship flight. A single Speckled Wood was also seen and, best of all, a Painted Lady. There were also scores of Silver Y moths. This bonanza continued, apparently, for several days.

On 13<sup>th</sup> October Richard Buckland saw a Red Admiral at Stockbridge in Edinburgh, and on 14<sup>th</sup> there were ten Red Admirals on Asters at Samuelston.

On 15<sup>th</sup> October two or three Red Admirals were seen at North Berwick and another, notably fresh-looking, Painted Lady. There were more than a dozen Red Admirals at Eyemouth, while a Comma was seen at Duddingston Loch and a Speckled Wood in the Aberlady area.

Also on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and rather putting the latter record in the shade, were the dozen or so Speckled Woods seen, at St Abbs,

On 16<sup>th</sup> October there were single Commas in North Berwick and at Duddingston Loch, dozens of Red Admirals on flowering Ivy in Eyemouth and two Red Admirals at Warriston in Edinburgh.

On 17<sup>th</sup>, and equalling or even eclipsing the St Abbs record of the previous day, there were 14 Speckled Woods at Pease Dean. There are obviously strong colonies at these sites.

On 18<sup>th</sup> there was a single Peacock in a garden at Lasswade.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this update of Lothians lepidoptera. The idea is to encourage further recording by all nature lovers out there, regardless of whether you are a member of Butterfly Conservation or not. As remarked by Mark Cubitt above, there are too few moth recorders in Mid- and East Lothian. Your local branch is here to provide help in getting you started, so please do not hesitate to let us know if this appeals to you, and we can provide the expertise you need.

*Richard Buckland*

Butterfly Conservation is a non-profit making company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468). It is also a charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268).

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