

Issue 4

Spring 2013

I am writing this in the hope of getting it out in time for the new butterfly season, which is threatening to get going over the Spring bank holiday as a welcome area of high pressure moves in from the Atlantic.

For this issue I have written another article on a threatened butterfly species in the Lothians. I have also included information on suggested recording priorities for the coming year. If you could get out and about to help fill in as many of the gaps as you can in the coming two years it would be much appreciated.

Richard Buckland

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The State of Large Heath (*Coenonympha tullia*) in the Lothians

Richard Buckland

As with the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which was the subject of the previous newsletter, the Large Heath becomes rarer the further east you travel in Scotland. This is, again, because of the drier climate and the consequent disappearance of suitable habitat. The habitat of Large Heath is lowland raised bog and blanket bog. In Britain these are the areas where the caterpillar food plant, Hare's-tail cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) grows. In Scotland, lowland raised bog is found in a great crescent from Renfrewshire through Lanarkshire to Stirlingshire at Flanders Moss. Unfortunately for the Large Heath, such mosses have been much abused over the years and precious few still remain as suitable habitat. Much of Lanarkshire, for example, has had its peat bogs dug up to supply peat for the garden nursery business. Those that have not been dug up have had shale waste dumped on them in the form of bings or been planted over with conifers. In summary, much abused.

So the number of Large Heath colonies is not great, even in a landscape that is superficially suitable for the butterfly. In Lanarkshire, for example, we know of colonies near Hamilton, and there is an old record from Carnwath Moss. But so far we have not identified any colonies in the large number of suitable bogs around Lanark and on up to Falkirk.

Within the Lothians, West Lothian is on the fringes of this crescent of peat bogs. Large Heath are present on Cobbinshaw Moss and near Colzium in the foothills of the western

Pentlands. There are old records from Dunmore and Letham mosses near Falkirk, the latter of which is currently being extracted (but of which roughly 10% apparently still remains).

The final old record is from Red Moss at Balerno, where it has not been recorded in over 100 years.

The other area in the Lothians where Large Heath habitat is found is in the trough of land between the Pentland and Moorfoot Hills. Colonies of the butterfly are to be found at the many mosses in the Gladhouse Reservoir area and Auchencorth Moss, and also Fala Moor, where the habitat is more similar to blanket bog.

Unfortunately, a lot of these sites are threatened with wind farms. It seems the owners of these Large Heath sites have not finished abusing them yet. We will need to keep an eye on them to see what effect they have on the fortunes of the butterfly.

Some Recording Priorities for 2013-2014

Duncan Davidson and Richard Buckland

Butterfly Conservation produced a landmark document at the turn of the millennium, our 'Butterflies of the New Millennium' book. This was the write-up of a nation-wide survey of all the butterfly species found in the Britain and Ireland at the turn of the millennium. This gave us a snapshot of the locations of all species. It was a massive undertaking and was generally considered to have been a great success. Because of this success we

are keen to follow it up in order to get an idea of how well each species is doing in the modern-day environment, that is, are they increasing in number or in decline? Such information is vital to judge the need for conservation measures.

BC have therefore continued with the survey and publish the results in five year tranches as 'The State of British Butterflies, 2000-2005' e.g.). So far this has indicated that in Scotland we are doing fairly well. Most species have not declined as much as in the rest of Britain. By constantly updating the data, we are given timely alerts as to any species that is starting

to do badly.

The committee are keen that as a branch we keep our recording up to date, so that we can contribute fully to the national updates as they come round.

In this issue of the Lothians newsletter, I have shown where certain species have yet to be recorded in the present five year window (indicated by red and blue dots (red dots indicate it has not been recorded here since 2000, while the blue dots indicate they have not been recorded between 2000 and 2010. The green dots mean they have been recorded here since 2010 and are thus up to date for the current recording window).

For **Orange-tip**, we have a fairly complete record for this period. The map over shows that it has not been recorded within the western end of the Pentland Hills, namely in the Livingston area (square NT06) and the square immediately to the south containing Cobbinshaw Reservoir (NT05), and adjacent to that the square containing Carlops and West Linton (NT15). There is also a gap in the coverage further along into the Moorfoots in the square containing the Moorfoot escarpment stretching from Gladhouse Reservoir to Middelton Moor (NT35). And finally, in the Tynninghame area near North Berwick (NT68).

Sites where they were recorded in the past are: Hillend Reservoir; Cobbinshaw; Almondell & Calderwood Country Park; North Esk Reservoir and Carlops Road, West Linton; Temple and Tynninghame Bay.

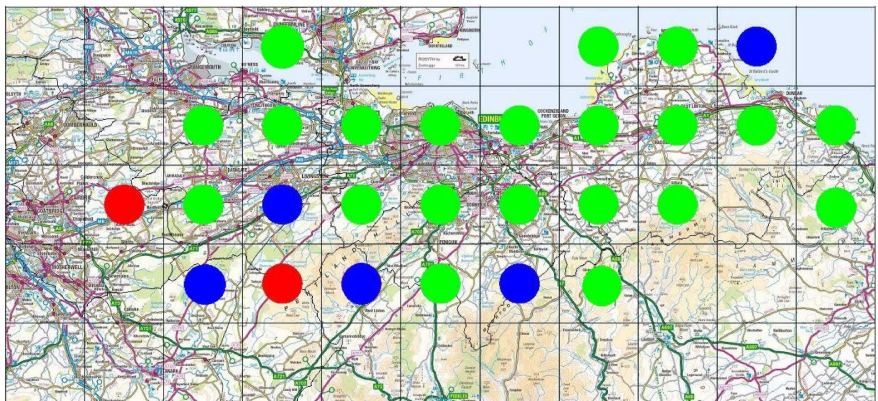
For the **Small Copper** the coverage is a little less complete. The 10k squares that are lacking records are at the western end of the Pentland Hills again, in the square containing Livingston (NT06) and the square containing Cobbinshaw Reservoir (NT05) (red dot). Other squares lacking current records are immediately to the east of Livingston which contains Balerno and Threepmuir reservoir (NT16). A square in the Moorfoots lacks current records. This is the one containing Fala Moor (NT45). The last one is in the Lammermuir Hills at NT66 and contains Whiteadder Reservoir.

Sites in these squares where the butterfly

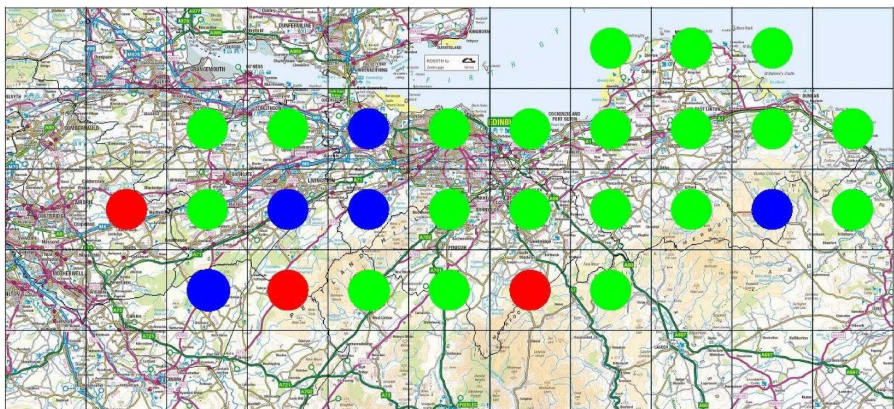
has been recorded in the past are: Blackridge; Cobbinshaw Reservoir; Crichton Glen; Tailend Moss; Almondale Country Park; Harperigg Reservoir; Dalmeny; Hound Point and The Bell.

For the **Common Blue**, the situation is a bit more problematic, as our coverage is more sketchy. This could, of course, be because the species is genuinely declining in abundance. It is just this kind of information that we are trying to obtain from this survey, so it is important that we try to get as many records for this species as possible. If the records cannot be obtained, then we must conclude that populations are contracting and hence that numbers are falling.

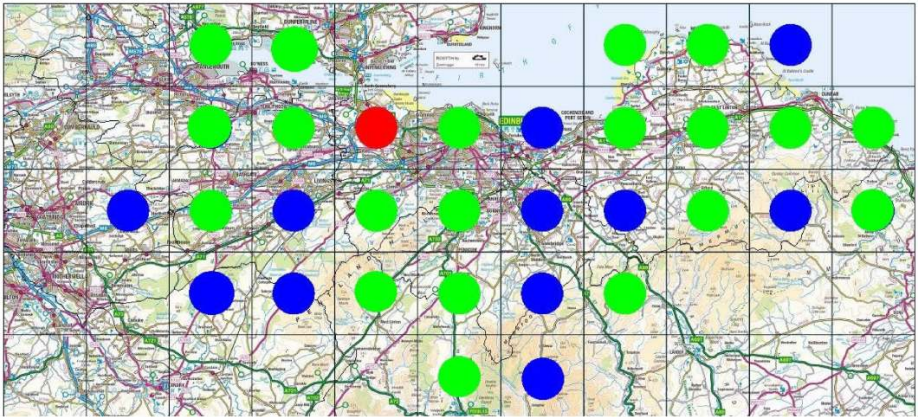
Records are currently lacking from the same squares as the Small Copper above. That is from the Livingston square (NT06); the Cobbinshaw square (NT05); the Moorfoots escarpment square (NT35) and from the Whiteadder (NT66), Queensferry (NT17) and Tynninghame(NT68) squares. Additionally, there are no current records from the square containing Dalkeith (NT65) or from the adjacent square containing Humbie (NT46) or the one containing Musselburgh (NT37).



10k squares where Orange-tip has been recorded in the Lothians.



10k squares where the Small Copper has been recorded in the Lothians.



10k squares where Common Blue has been recorded in the Lothians.

Sites where Common Blues have been recorded in the past are: Dalmeny; Cramond Island; Gladhouse; Newhailes; Tynninghame; Whiteadder Reservoir; Gowd Burn; Leithen Water and Gore Glen.

It would greatly help the branch's effort to help with this survey if members could get out to record these species over the next two summer

It may be the fact that the current distribution of records is similar in different species reflects recorder effort. If this is the case it means that the chance of finding your quarry is reasonably good and that it is important to record every species you see, as it is likely that other species have not been recorded at these locations either.

Orange-tips are flying NOW (May) and Common Blue mainly in July. Small Coppers have two generations in Scotland and so are on the wing from May to September (but the second generation is the larger and so adults are most common in August).

And finally for my usual request for email addresses. In the previous editions of this newsletter, I asked everyone with an email address and who would be happy with me sending them the local newsletter by email, to send me their address in order to save money on postage. This would allow more of our funds to be dedicated to the conservation of butterflies and moths. That request was moderately successful but there are still members that have yet to get back to me on that. If this applies to you, then please get in touch with your email address. Very many thanks and happy butterfly recording this year!

Richard Buckland
BC Lothians Organiser

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