

Chairman's Introduction

Our year got off to a great start with some early Spring sunshine bringing everything on just that little bit earlier than usual. The problems of access we encountered in the previous year were all but forgotten and after successfully running our first field trip we hoped it would "set the mould" for the rest of the season.

This year our Branch has bought 2 hand-held GPS devices and a digital camera which have all proved extremely useful. It begs the question how did we manage without them? To be able to press a button and get an accurate six-figure grid reference is luxury. We have also bought a moth trap and generator and some pots which were all considerably cheaper than we had expected as I utilised the World Wide Web to find good inexpensive suppliers.

After some considerable effort we have eventually managed to produce our own web site which came online towards the end of May this year. Our thanks to Bill Slater our volunteer web-master who persevered until he saw the job through. Oh, and spare a thought for Bill, the job never ends! Do pay the site a visit and let us know what you think, it can be found at:

<http://homepage.nlworld.com/highlandbutterflies/>

Each year I get a few requests from our members in the south for information on where to see Chequered Skippers and this year was no different. What surprises me is that all the information they need is in the Millennium Atlas. "Are they out yet"? Is one of the common questions. They seem very surprised when I tell them that until this year I had only ever seen one Chequered Skipper.

In early June I was able to confirm good numbers of Dingy Skippers at Ardersier

which seemed to belie the fact it was a damp Summer and by late July large numbers of Small Tortoiseshells could be seen indicating this species was also doing well.



Dingy Skipper Photograph by Alex Stewart

We have had our first, and second, visit to the new reserve at Loch Arkaig where work is proceeding apace, the new access road has come through the first block of planted timber and is ready to cross the reserve and the car park is almost complete. 2003 should see the official opening in early June with hopefully all the pomp that goes with it.

September 12th heralded an influx of Peacock butterflies the like of which I am sure has not happened for many a year, if ever before. As I write this the total is around 70 but I expect it may well exceed this number. Will they overwinter? See David Barbour's article for a prognosis.

Jimmy McKellar

Field trip to Aldie Burn

18 May 2002

On the 18th May we met at the Aldie Burn car park on the Scotsburn Road about two miles west of Tain. There were five of us: Jimmy, Alex, David, Tony and Colin.

This part of Scotsburn Forest received the usual block planting some 30 years ago. More recently Forest Enterprise have thinned the trees and made it a public amenity by putting in an entrance drive and car park. Although the weather was fine it was still a little on the chilly side and did not look promising. We were hoping for Green Hairstreaks as Colin remembered seeing them in this area some time previously.

As we set off David pointed out Wood Horsetail growing at the side of the path, there was also Wood Sorrel in flower and in the vicinity of the pond a good selection of flowering plants including Violets, Bugle, and Lousewort.

There were plenty of Green-veined Whites around the Aldie Burn which is a lovely area beside the river and very sheltered as it lies in a natural "punch bowl". Heading west we came to the derelict remains of an old croft. Both inside and outside the ruin was a fine crop of nettles. Here we mused over the way nettles colonise all the ruins in the Highlands. It seems the nitrogen enriched nature of the ground helps them. There followed a lively discussion as to whether this indicated that animals had been kept inside the building in its final days causing the build up of nitrogen or whether it was of ancient enough origin to have had an earth floor. Whichever reason the ground appears enriched enough to help the Small Tortoiseshell by providing its caterpillars with food.

I caught a hoverfly on one of the ruins' fallen stones. It was one of a species I have frequently seen but been unable to

identify previously. It was *Sericomyia lappona*, a fly which has particularly white markings on its abdomen and is easy enough to recognise in the field. I took the trouble to look up the recently issued "Provisional atlas of British hoverflies" published by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and discovered that although it is fairly widespread, it is almost certainly under recorded due to the sparsity of recorders in the Highlands. We will be adding a new dot to the atlas when I send off the record. At this same ruin we caught a moth which we feel sure was a Water Carpet. Without the benefit of a second opinion I am never certain of my own convictions but am fairly sure we got this one correct.



Our party testing the bridge

We wandered on through the wood where we came upon a very large stone sculpture of a snake. It is part of an attempt by Forest Enterprise to encourage the general public to enjoy our woodlands - we needed no such encouragement. By late morning we reached the ford where there is a small concrete sluice with two additional concrete chambers. Presumably it supplied water many years ago when the valley was inhabited. Colin's Mother told him in the 1960s that the last inhabitants had left the valley around ten years earlier in the 1950s. The area above the sluice looked like a beaver meadow, lush and full of flowers. It was in this vicinity maybe twenty years previously that Colin had seen a lone Green Hairstreak butterfly but

there were none there today, nor were there any of the orchids which had originally caught his attention. We did see two Green-Veined Whites which were so cold that they were unable to get airborne.

Culpleasant House

As we approached the policies of the one time Culpleasant House which is surrounded by mature trees such as Chestnut and Redwood we began to feel that "You could tell people had once lived here". It must have been a very impressive sight in its day but sadly is only a pile of rubble now. In the distance Tony could hear a Great-spotted Woodpecker but it remained hidden from sight.

Lochan Dubh

Towards lunch time we arrived at Lochan Dubh set on the valley floor of the Aldie Water, here we found a nice spot to eat. A commotion alerted me to our first Green Hairstreak then another and another - a whole colony in fact, this was the exact spot Colin had found them at about 10 years previously. We searched over a wide area but the butterflies could only be found in one small plot sheltered by the pine trees and bordering onto the boggy ground. These butterflies seem to spend their time between the bilberry in the boggy area and roosting on the lower branches of the pine trees. A shake of these branches brought out a great cloud of pine pollen and frequently a perching Hairstreak. The following picture shows



the lie of the land. The discovery of this

colony is a feather in Colin's cap as this is a hitherto unrecorded site for Green Hairstreaks.

Whether it was the time spent close to the ground or just luck, we amassed a fair number of records from this spot. We found three caterpillars, a Northern Eggar, a Garden Tiger and a Dark Tussock. All three were photographed and the photographs used for later identification. The Northern Eggar is not actually shown in any of my books in its larval stage - however it seems to be identical to the Oak Eggar. Indeed Porter treats the Oak Eggar as a Common British species and it may well be that the two are actually a cline of the same species. Next the Garden Tiger, our "Woolly Bear" is well known for its hairy black body and red fringe and can often be seen wandering across roads. Finally the Dark Tussock was fairly easy to identify with its brush like bristles along its back. This enlarged photo clearly shows the tufts.

Dark Tussock larva



Our timing was good as we took our leave at this point and headed back to the cars, only just missing a heavy shower of rain.

Our thanks to Colin Ridley for a very enjoyable day, for introducing us to this area and showing us the Green Hairstreaks. Thank you Colin.

Jimmy McKellar
(with copious notes from Colin Ridley)

REPORT FROM THE WEST COAST

Biological recording has been sadly neglected in the past in Lochalsh (or South West Ross as some prefer to call it). When I moved to Dornie in April 1988 I was surprised to find that even bird recording was almost non-existent. Since then I have endeavoured to rectify this situation and have built up a substantial database of records of the resident, summer and winter bird populations of the area. Since 1993 I have participated in many of the Highland Biological Recording Group's surveys and have developed a particular interest in butterflies and moths. I soon produced what is affectionately known by HBRG as an observer "blob" centred on the 10km. squares NG 82 and 92 and stretching into parts of NG 72, 73, 83, 91 and 93. This is the dilemma facing survey organisers in the Highlands when the dots on the maps produced tend to plot the distribution of recorders rather than the species being surveyed. Nevertheless this makes a good start towards discovering the actual distribution of a species and for some groups such as butterflies and bumblebees many of the gaps in remoter areas are gradually being filled in.

MOTHS The location of our house on Carr Brae has been instrumental in generating an interest in moths. Without any prior knowledge we somehow managed to find ourselves surrounded by some of the best mixed woodland in Lochalsh on the south facing hillside overlooking Loch Duich. Together with the steeply sloping grass/heather moorland rising above the woodland and numerous rock outcrops both natural and man-made (in the form of rock cuttings for the A87 trunk road and Carr Brae road itself) it is prime habitat for birds, butterflies and moths.

Throughout the year, moths flock to our large picture windows after dark and almost demand to be identified. 2002 started as usual with large numbers of Winter Moths and for the second year running I recorded Mottled Umber in January. Prior to 2001 my latest date for this species had been 29th December. Pale Brindled Beauty was more numerous than in any previous year with as many as 8 attracted to our windows on 8th February. The other regular "winter" moths, i.e. March Moth, Mottled Grey, Dotted Border and The Chestnut, were all recorded by the end of February. Angle Shades is the only other moth that I have identified in January or February which didn't show up this year.

March saw the addition of Yellow Horned, Red-green Carpet, The Engrailed and Common Quaker to the list and then things began to hot up further in April. Water Carpet, Autumn Green Carpet, Early Tooth-striped, Brown Silver-line, Early Thorn, Red Chestnut, Clouded Drab, Hebrew Character and Early Grey were all seen, even though I was away for the first 2 weeks of the month. However it was 7th May before I added a new species to my Lochalsh checklist and this was the totally unexpected Lunar Marbled Brown, a species which Skinner describes as "---- moderately common in the southern half of England and Wales; rather less common in northern England, southern Scotland and Ireland." It was also a beautiful moth to add to the (photographic) collection.

During May I recorded adult Fox Moth, both male and female, for the first time. The larva is the most commonly seen caterpillar in the area but I had not seen the moth before. Other species recorded in May included Yellow-ringed Carpet, The Streamer, May Highflyer, Barred Umber, Lunar Thorn and Nut-tree Tussock. Yellow-ringed Carpet occurs more frequently here than Grey Mountain Carpet. Contradicting Skinner's comment

that “---- (it) shows little interest in light” it has appeared regularly at our windows. Since I first identified this species on 2nd September 1998 I have recorded it on 31 dates: 5 in May, 2 in June, 10 in August and 14 in September. Records were mainly of single moths but there were 2 present on 4 occasions and 3 on 26th August 2000. 4 of these records refer to a Yellow-ringed Carpet found on the wall of the house in the morning but presumably they were initially attracted to the lighted windows the previous night. 2002 has been my best year so far for Scalloped Hazel, which was recorded on 12 dates in May and June with 3 present on the 9th May.

June produced my first record of Ruddy Highflyer on 6th and my first female Drinker since July 1997 on 30th. Males are much more frequent visitors and were recorded on 11 dates between 1st July and 6th August including 3 on 2nd August. A 2nd female was seen on 10th July.



Barred Carpet Photo by Brian Neath

I had an amazing run of quality “new” species during July: a Barred Carpet on 21st was followed by a Chestnut-coloured Carpet on 22nd, a Scotch Annulet on 23rd and a Straw Underwing on 26th. Skinner refers to Barred Carpet as an uncommon species and does not include Ross-shire amongst the counties from which it has been recorded, whilst Chestnut-coloured Carpet is “---- rarely seen as an adult and --- is best obtained in the larval stage”. I was clearly fortunate to see these two

moths on consecutive nights. The Buff-tip is considered to be a fairly common species but the one I saw on 21st July was only my 2nd record. Similarly a Garden Tiger on 26th July was only my 3rd for Lochalsh and my first in the garden. I hadn’t realised quite how big this moth can be until this individual started clattering against the window!

Beech-green Carpet, Green Carpet, Welsh Wave, Scalloped Oak and Purple Clay were all more conspicuous than usual during July and/or August whilst a Northern Arches, 2 Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing and possible Satin Beauty and Dark Swordgrass were amongst the more interesting sightings during August. However The Magpie has to be the moth of that particular month, large numbers being seen practically everywhere, both during the day and at night.

September produced some attractive yellow moths. A Centre-barred Sallow on 1st was followed by a Pink-barred Sallow on 9th and a Canary-shouldered Thorn on 18th. The first of the difficult *Epirrita* group of moths appeared on 25th September and was almost certainly an Autumnal Moth. *Epirrita* moths peaked on 31st October when no fewer than 40 were attracted to the windows. The first two Feathered Thorn were seen on 29th September and peaked at a record 14 on 1st November. That strange-looking noctuid, the Red Sword-grass, was recorded on 15th September, 9th and 29th October.

A Grey Chi on the wall of the house on 20th September was my 5th record of this species. Interestingly, 4 of these records have been of a moth found on the same small patch of wall during the day. The moths are well camouflaged against the white-painted harling.

A Mottled Umber on 7th October brings us nicely full circle and almost back to where we started!

BUTTERFLIES The fine weather during April and early May resulted in some exceptionally early butterfly sightings. I had my earliest records of Green Hairstreak on 27th April (at least 5 on Carr Brae), Orange-tip on 2nd May (a male near Lochalsh Dam), Painted Lady on 3rd May (one in our garden), Speckled Wood on 3rd May (2 in our garden), and Pearl-bordered Fritillary on 6th May (2 on Carr Brae at 17:20!). On 5th May I counted no fewer than 46 Green Hairstreak on Carr Brae. The Painted Lady turned out to be my only sighting of this species during 2002.

4 Small Tortoiseshells were seen at Ardelve on 16th April and 2 Red Admirals in our garden on 27th April. I have only recorded these two butterflies on earlier dates in 1997. A probable Green-veined White at Portneora on 19th April would have been another earliest record if the identification had been confirmed.

Butterfly sightings became less frequent from the second week in May as the weather deteriorated. Only Green-veined White was seen regularly during the rest of the month with the occasional Speckled Wood and Pearl-bordered Fritillary during brief sunny intervals.

However on 30th May there were 2 Green Hairstreak, 8 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and the first (9) Small Heath of the year on Carr Brae. This was despite heavy rain in the morning and a fresh breeze in the afternoon.

As May turned into June so the Pearl-bordered Fritillaries turned into Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries: it is quite uncanny. I have yet to record Pearl-bordered in June, although I have seen Small Pearl-bordered in May, but there never seems to be any overlap. One species appears to displace the other almost overnight on the same sites, and as they are so similar in appearance it can begin to undermine one's confidence. Did

I really see Pearl-bordered Fritillaries or was I imagining it?

Frequent rain and below-average temperatures became the norm during June and July but despite this, Small Pearl-bordered and Small Heath could be found in good numbers during brighter spells. About 15 Small Pearl-bordered and 25 Small Heath were counted on 6th June and about 30 Small Heath on 15th June. The first Dark Green Fritillary appeared on 15th June and this species could also be found in good numbers on Carr Brae, during sunny periods, through until 19th August.

The species that seemed to suffer most from the poor weather were Common Blue and Meadow Brown. I saw Common Blue on only 4 dates between 14th July and 22nd August and Meadow Brown on only 3 dates between 4th July and 2nd August. In both cases 4 butterflies was the most seen on any one day.

By the time the Scotch Argus emerged at the end of July temperatures had improved and this species became the most conspicuous butterfly during August. Red Admirals re-appeared on 20th August and one or two remained in our garden through to the end of the month.

By September we were down to just Red Admiral and Speckled Wood. These are the only commonly seen butterflies after the end of August. Small Tortoiseshell has been recorded in 6 out of the last 11 Septembers and 5 other species have been recorded during September:

Common Blue (once), Green-veined White (once), Large White (twice), Scotch Argus (3 times) and Painted Lady (one record in 1996 and 3 records in 2000).

As usual Red Admiral was the only butterfly to be seen during October. Speckled Wood again came tantalisingly close to becoming an October butterfly with the last one seen on 29th September!

In 2001 the last one was also seen on 29th September whilst in 2000 one was actually seen on the last day of September. There was still a Red Admiral in the garden on 16th October but when we returned after nearly 2 weeks away the temperature had dropped significantly and the butterfly season was over for another year.

Brian Neath

Loch Arkaig

With a degree of neglect bordering on the criminal I thought I had managed to delegate the writing up of this trip to someone else. So if you are one of the lucky people who attended and cannot remember anything in this article ever happening... Please keep it quiet.

For a field trip of this magnitude and distance from our normal destinations we had a superb turnout and with the aid of our new digital camera we have a record of the event and the participants.



There were sixteen of us in total and we had a really useful day on what is to be our first Scottish, Butterfly Conservation reserve. I suppose you could say this was the initial sortie to see what we will be taking on. The reserve itself consists of an area of rough ground between two plantations of spruce on the north side of Loch Arkaig about 5 kilometres from the start of the loch. It is well known in entomological circles as the place to see Chequered Skipper and Pearl Bordered Fritillaries.

Several small burns run down through the ground, the largest of which is called Allt Mhuic. The vegetation is fairly rank with plenty of bog myrtle, bracken and purple moor grass (*Molinea*) and the trees are fairly openly spaced. This picture is typical of the type of ground cover near the burns.



The next picture is more typical of the bracken-covered areas. Forest Enterprise intends to extract timber from the plantations and monitor the situation with a view to helping the butterflies. With Butterfly Conservation's involvement I feel sure we will see the benefits.



Several criteria must be met before an area is suitable for the Chequered Skippers which rank amongst our rarest butterflies. There must be food plants for the adults to nectar at and purple moor grass for larvae to feed on and take shelter within. The many hollows, dips and sun traps with dead bracken which warm up nicely in the spring sunshine afford sun bathing opportunities for the caterpillars. In the

summer, areas in close proximity with both flowers for nectar and grass to lay eggs allow adults to lay eggs and the whole cycle goes full circle.

Did we see any? Oh yes! With David Whitaker as guide we were almost guaranteed success and it was not long before we had the first sight of these lovely insects. I confess I am not the world's best photographer but neither am I the worst. However on this occasion even when presented with a sitting duck I still somehow did not manage to get a decent picture. This is the best I could manage. Is it my imagination or do they have a feathered look which makes it difficult if not impossible to focus properly. Whatever the reason it is a good excuse to try again next year.



Chequered Skipper

Monadh Mor 29 June 2002

We met on the A835 midway between Maryburgh and the Tore roundabout. There were three of us, Jimmy Alex and myself. It was cool, damp and overcast, not very promising.

To start with our finds were chiefly small bumblebees, they have a very robust constitution and are able to function in very indifferent weather. I have noticed that bumblebees are frequently out and about their business whilst my own honeybees stay resolutely in their hives. Water Avens was growing on a boggy patch at the side of the track and nearby an interesting flower growing in clumps, it

had a polyanthus type leaf. Its flowers were pink and white globes on six inch stems, with up to a dozen flowers on each stem. Jimmy took pictures with the digital camera. (see picture). We later managed to identify it as *Pyrola minor*, Common



Wintergreen. In the distance we could hear the mewing of a buzzard and more distant the croaking of a raven. Jimmy pointed out some Yellow Rattle that is soon to bloom, it gets its name from its dry seed pods which rattle when shaken.

By 11am we have seen a burying beetle, *Bombus pascuorum*, Bugle and Birdsfoot Trefoil. Jimmy then caught a Pine looper moth and pointed out the diminutive flower of Medick, a member of the pea family which enriches the soil by fixing nitrogen with the bacteria which live in it's roots. At 11:11 Alex saves the day by catching a Green-veined White. This meant everything to us on a day so dour it seems unlikely we would see a single butterfly. But it got better, ten minutes later we chase a Large White which settled on some birch trees, Jimmy took to the undergrowth but despite his best jungle craft it makes good its escape.

We came upon a large number of bumble bees sitting on the purple marsh thistles, many with sluggish movements as if parasitised. Amongst the purple thistles was an occasional white variety. It is clear these thistles are an important source of nectar for many forms of insect life.

By around half past eleven the air was becoming warmer and the sun broke through the cloud cover. We had now reached the furthest point from the entrance and in a twenty-five meter section of this south facing bank we found about 12 Common Blue butterflies flitting around. Our new camera swung into action with the following results:



Turning for home we passed a strange white flower. So far we have been unable to identify it but here is a picture for any botanists to help us out. It is about 18 inches tall and we thought it might be some sort of pea/vetch.



We moved on past big beds of Cotton Grass where Jimmy caught a large red damselfly. Alex then caught a Green Carpet but being a bit lively the only picture we could get was in a jar for ID purposes.

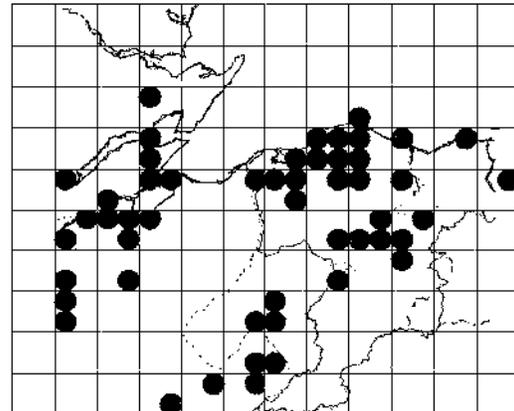


The Green Tiger Beetles caught our attention with their typical short flights and running behaviour as we wandered towards our cars. It had taken us hours to cover a very short distance and we all agreed it was one of the best days we have had in the field for a long time and a much more interesting day than we had dared to hope for.

Colin Ridley

The Year of the Peacock

The Peacock butterfly is a resident species in the UK, so say all the textbooks. However in the Highlands that is not true: the breeding range of the butterfly lies to the south of us, and what few Peacocks we see are just vagrants that range northwards from time to time.



In September 2002 we saw a sudden large influx of Peacocks, accompanied by large numbers of the other 'Vanessids' Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Small Tortoiseshell. I believe all four were part of the same large-scale migratory movement, but since the other three are 'regulars' here anyway, it was the Peacocks that most caught people's attention. The influx started on 11th September, and by the 12th the butterflies were scattered everywhere across a more than 1,000 square mile area, from just west of Banff to just west of Inverness. Having

been alerted by phonecalls from several people, and having seen Peacocks myself in three places in Moray on the 12th, I placed a notice in my local newspaper the 'Northern Scot' asking for details of sightings. I was delighted to receive no fewer than 30 responses from local people, many of them who had lived in the area for 10, 20, 30 years and never seen this butterfly before.

With the addition of many more records from our regular butterfly recorders, we now have about a hundred sightings in just the 3-week period from 11th to the end of September (and this does not include many repeat sightings in the same spot over a period of days). The map shows that the highest numbers were all through the coastal part of Moray and Inverness-shire, and a good few also filtered inland up the Spey valley and the Great Glen. The highest-altitude sighting was at over 2000 feet on Cairngorm (G. Nisbet).



Peacock Butterfly September 2002

Most sightings were of singletons or 2, 3 or 4 butterflies together, but an exception was the spectacular finding of at least 40 feeding together in a garden at Inverfarigaig (N. Gillies). The garden plants chosen for feeding (in order of popularity) included Buddleia, Sedum, Dahlia, Carline Thistle, Godetia, Marigolds, and in wild sites Scabious and

Ragwort. One even came to a fragment of honey-comb at a beehive (B. Maclean).

Where did this influx come from, and why? There is no doubt the Peacock has increased its numbers dramatically in central Scotland in recent years - even since the 'Millennium Atlas' maps were compiled it seems to have spread. This can be put down to 'climate change' and it now seems to be widely accepted that global warming is pushing the limits of some butterfly species northwards. With larger numbers of the butterfly living closer to our area, we would naturally expect to see vagrant individuals more often.

However, a sudden appearance of thousands of these butterflies (and the other species which accompanied them) seems to indicate a mass migration, which could have come from southern Scotland or quite possibly from further afield. The classic technique for pinpointing the origin of a migratory influx is to make a back-track of wind directions at the time of the landfall, from available Met Office weather data. Looking at the period 9th - 10th September we found a persistent south-easterly airflow across the North Sea, which could have brought migrants from Denmark, Germany or the Netherlands. (As it happens, there was a landfall of migrant birds on the south side of the Moray Firth at the same time). Other migrant Lepidoptera did not figure much at this time, although we did have at least two sightings of Convolvulus Hawkmoths.

This sort of sudden influx seems to be unprecedented on the mainland of North Scotland, but strangely it has occurred a number of times recently in Shetland. In 1975 and again in 1994, '95, '97 and '99 there were a dozen or more Peacock butterflies seen within a short space of time in parts of Shetland. They often seemed to be concentrated on the eastern

side, giving cause to believe they had migrated on easterly winds from Scandinavia. However in 2002 no such influx occurred there (M. Pennington).

As for the future, I'm hoping this will not be a one-off event for the Peacock in our area. Their normal behaviour is to hibernate inside hollow trees, sheds etc and to emerge in the Spring to mate and lay eggs on nettles. If they succeed in hibernating here, we should see them again in the first warm days of Spring. Let's hope some get through!

David Barbour

Moth trapping Ardersier

By personal invitation on 13 September 2002 I turned up with all my bits and pieces for a moth trapping evening with a difference. It was at the insistence of John Orr, the ranger, that I should "help him out" on what he described as a "Bat and Moth Event". I was met at the gate to the Green Road and we set up the trap, I was then left on my own for a while so that the ranger could meet the public.

I dutifully wandered around keeping one eye on the trap and trying desperately to catch something before the audience arrived. It was very cold and windy and there really was not a lot around. I had noticed a few insects as I set up the trap but they were fast and in the half-light I was having difficulty deciding what they were. But after a few swings of the net I realised they were wasps. I had set the trap up next to a nest. The thought of taking it all down in the dark and moving it did not appeal to me so I convinced myself they do not fly much after dark. To my delight they did seem to disappear as the light faded.

I was assured the event was really a PR job and all I would have to do was show a few moths. Could we beat the appalling

record of 2 species from Beinn Eighe? The temperature was only marginally warmer than a nuclear winter and the wind bracing. I had heard the public coming and took up my normal position next to the trap but was a bit taken aback by the throng which arrived. One small boy actually stood on my finger, bad enough you might think but I was pointing to a picture in Skinner at the time and he was wearing wellies! Where are all the photographs? Well it was dark... I did however manage to entertain the public with some wasps and a few moths which were of the non-descript brown variety? I know not what but they looked nice. However my pièce de résistance has to be the Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillar I spotted just as it got too dark to see the ground, I was squinting through the fireweed when I noticed something unusual which was the fine specimen in this photograph. (I took it home and after photographing it released it at the same spot the following day.)



Without such a good catch the evening may not have been quite so successful. Around 30 people turned up and although no bats were detected and few moths trapped the children with their torches certainly enjoyed being out in the dark.

Thanks to John Orr the ranger for allowing me to take part.

Jimmy McKellar

Central Primary School

I had a request in early February for information on butterflies and how to attract them to a "Magic Garden" /

"Butterfly Garden" that Central Primary School intended to build so I wrote them the following 2 letters which seems to have covered both subjects well:

Letter 1

Thank you for your enquiry. I am delighted to hear of your interest in minibeasts as I too have had an interest in them for many years. There are indeed a great many things you can do to help attract insects to your garden and most of them are quite simple.

You can expect to attract a huge number and variety of insects to your garden by creating the best habitat for them to live and feed in.

Insects love shelter, nice warm sunny spots with no wind, so you can build a horseshoe of soil, the higher the better, with the open part facing south-east if possible as this avoids the prevailing wind. Plant lots of quick growing plants on the outer and top parts of the horseshoe and leave the inner part fairly bare with lots of sandy soil (this helps to heat the sun-trap up quickly) and insects will sunbathe on the warm soil.

What can you expect to see?

Bumblebees: The easiest to recognise is the Red-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lapidarius*, as it is all black with a red tail. There are others with red tails but they are not all black.

Hoverflies: These colourful little black and yellow flies hover and land on flowers and will be starting to appear in a few weeks time.

Solitary bees, honey bees and wasps will all put in an appearance - better not to touch these!

Suitable plants would include:

Brussels Sprouts (which are the food plant of the Cabbage White butterflies also known as Small White and Large White)

Aubrietia
Thyme
Heather
Borage
Nasturtium
Wallflower

Other tricks you can try are putting in a post with holes drilled in it for solitary bees to nest in – you may also get spiders too. If your garden has lots of small cracks and holes, for example in a small wall, these holes would be used by lots of creepy crawlies. Old pieces of wood tucked under plants (so as not to look unsightly) will shelter and feed wood lice.

I hope this helps when deciding what to do.

Letter 2

Thank you for your enquiry. I am delighted to hear of your interest in creating a Magic Garden for your school and others to enjoy.

I had to do a little research before I could answer some of your rather tricky questions. I found out the following:

What types of butterflies can you expect? There are a limited number of butterfly species here in the north and many of them are local in distribution. This means that to see them you would have to travel to where they live. Others are more widespread and are likely to turn up in your garden. Fortunately, the more colourful ones are the ones you will probably attract.

Species you might see:

Large White (less common than the Small White)
Small White (fairly common)

Green-veined White (the most common can be seen throughout the Summer)
Common Blue (possibly might be seen while passing through)
Red Admiral (appears in the Autumn)
Painted Lady (appears in the Autumn)
Small Tortoiseshell (appears in the Spring and Autumn and often found in houses)
Clouded Yellow (rare migrant from North Africa/Southern Europe - arrives in numbers many years apart, last good year 1992)
Camberwell Beauty (very rare migrant from Scandinavia - only a handful are seen each year - attracted by rotten bananas - last good year 1995 when 350 sightings were made nationally)

What flowers?

The only plant which I know of that attracts butterflies and which you could train over an arch is Ivy, *Helix hedera*. I have often seen Red Admirals attracted to it in late Autumn as it is a late flowering plant. Honeysuckle is a nice alternative and has the advantage that it attracts our largest and most impressive moths – the Hawk-moths which hover and feed on its flowers.

Other relevant information:

The Silver Y which is a migrant moth will fly during the day and is attracted to Lavender which is also great for bees. Another great butterfly, moth and hoverfly shrub is Buddleia which is also known as the Butterfly Bush though I doubt if you could train it over an arch. If you only have room for one plant, this is the one that will give you hours of pleasure as it never fails to attract lots of insects.

I hope this gives you some useful tips and I wish you every success with your venture.

Yours sincerely
Jimmy McKellar
Chairman, Butterfly Conservation
Highland Branch

In response I received two very nice letters back from the children thanking me. We await the outcome of their efforts.

Jimmy McKellar

Kindrogan

Each year we are normally invited to a tri-branch meeting. We get together to discuss all sorts of things which are happening within Butterfly Conservation and within Scotland, it is a first class opportunity to ask questions and get points across to those who need to know. The over-riding benefit is that it is an informal affair and everyone get a chance to have their say, be it at the breakfast table or in front of the group. I find the progress of the other 2 branches useful and Richard Buckland's talk on Northern Brown Argus this year fired me with enthusiasm. Julie Stoneman's slides and talk on Handa was a treat, so much so that we plan to visit this year if at all possible. We missed the previous year which meant we had all the more to talk about. As I write this I am unsure of the details of our next "Kindrogan" as the venue may change or we may decide to miss another year. Phone me in early October if you think you would be interested.

Jimmy McKellar

National Moth Night 2003

Plans are well underway for the fifth National Moth Night. The event is to be held on Saturday 12th April 2003. As in previous years, the aims of the event are: To encourage widespread moth recording and to gather useful data, particularly of target species. To stimulate wider interest in moths and raise their profile amongst the public. To raise funds for moth conservation projects.

National Moth Night is organised by Atropos and Insectline with the support of Butterfly Conservation and has grown in strength over the years, and it is hoped that this year even more organised events will be held and the funds raised for moth conservation projects increased.

One of the aims of the 2003 event is to provide an opportunity for some recorders to target two rare species whose distributions are poorly understood. These moths are the **Orange Upperwing**, *Jodia croceago*, and the **Sword-grass**, *Xylena exsoleta*. The Orange Upperwing is regarded as extinct in Britain, but there is speculation as to whether it is still present in low numbers. It was formerly found in oak woods in central, southern and south-west England. The Sword-grass is a scarce species of moorland and open woodland in Scotland, northern England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To publicise any events open to the public there is a National Moth Night Information Line which is operational nearer to the event. The number is 09068 446862 and calls cost 60p a minute. The proceeds from this line will be used to fund a moth conservation project. Full details of events in your area can be heard by phoning this number; it will also be used to give some feedback after the event.

We would like as many people as possible to run light-traps in as many different areas as possible on the night of Saturday 12th April 2003 (i.e. the period between dusk on Saturday night and dawn on Sunday morning). Participants may choose to record the moths in their garden or their local patch, but we would encourage people to visit new areas that they have not looked at previously or for a number of years. That area you've often thought about visiting but never got around to it - go there on National Moth Night! Visits to under-recorded / remote areas are also encouraged, as are searches for scarce species at new sites. However, do ensure that you have permission from the appropriate landowner.

Whether you end up running your own event, trapping in your garden, targeting a specific species, or attending an organised event, we hope that you have an enjoyable night.

Postcard survey

I am currently trying to organise a postcard survey of Common Blue butterflies and have contacted Janet Bromham who is the Highland Biodiversity Officer, with luck we should see the postcards in the spring. The following quote is from the information which went out with the previous survey:

“The aims of the survey are to find and record as many colonies as possible, to see whether we need to take urgent action for these very attractive insects, and to involve as many people as possible in helping to conserve the rich diversity of life that can be found on their doorstep. Most of the biodiversity on this planet consist of insects, and butterflies and moths act as flagships for all those species that we know next to nothing about”.



The **Common Blue** is the only bright blue butterfly found in Scotland. This species lives in small colonies centered round a good supply of the caterpillar food plant, bird's-foot trefoil. The colonies mostly occur in areas of native flower-rich grassland that are only lightly-grazed or ungrazed. They are on the wing from late June through to early September, and can be seen on coastal grassland / sand dune systems, roadside verges and unimproved

pasture. As they are strong fliers, they can quickly colonise new areas, such as quarries, disused industrial sites and new road or railway embankments. Unfortunately the **Common Blue** is not as common as it used to be, largely because the flowery pastures where they used to live have been ploughed up and re-seeded with uniform agricultural grasses, and the sandy coastal grasslands have been built on.

RDB

National Red Data Book Codes. These codes seem to crop up regularly and I personally find it infuriating that I do not know what they mean, so to eliminate all the confusion the following explains it all:

R1 Species in danger of extinction. Known from less than five 10-km squares in Britain.

R2 Species which are vulnerable and likely to make it to category R1 if causal factors continue to operate.

R3 Nationally rare species, present in 15 or less 10-km squares in Britain.

Na Nationally notable species, known from 30 or less 10-km squares in Britain.

Nb Nationally notable species, known from 100 or less 10-km squares in Britain.

Who we are...

Paul Kirkland - Head of Conservation - is the overall manager and leads on conservation work in Scotland and the implementation of our Regional Action Plans.

Tom Prescott - Conservation Advisor - provides advice to land owners, managers and their advisors, develops practical conservation projects, and helps manage research, survey and monitoring contracts.

Julie Stoneman - Volunteer Development Officer - recruits and trains volunteers to undertake surveys and monitoring work, and raises awareness of butterflies and moths. The focus of this work will be South and West Scotland during 2002 - 2004.

Shona Greig - Administrative Officer - is responsible for all administrative tasks and leads on butterfly gardening. She works part-time and is in the office on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday mornings. And what do they look like?



Shona, Paul, Julie and Tom

Loch Arkaig 31-08-2002

It was our intention to search for the caterpillars of the Chequered Skipper to determine where they feed and to try to obtain photographs if possible. David Whittaker was our leader but rather disappointingly only two of us turned up for the daytime quest. Even although the weather was indifferent Brian Neath, myself and our leader resolved to search and see what we could find.

We were fortunate that David knew what to look for and most importantly, where. We searched amongst the Purple Moor Grass, *Molinia caerulea* as this is the known food plant. It appears that it is not just sufficient for this grass to be present but certain other conditions must also

prevail. The best place to find the feeding activity, indicated by the notches in the grass stems, is at the bottom of a slight rise where water seeps out of the ground. We tried various techniques like bending over or crawling on all fours but although we found a fair bit of evidence we just could not find a caterpillar. We found a Slow Worm and a dragonfly, a Common Hawker, *Aeshna juncea* but no Chequered Skipper larva.

As usual and almost in desperation we tried a different location and although we found some brown caterpillars, close to, but not on the notched stems we could not find anything resembling the pictures of Chequered Skipper caterpillars in the books. It had been a good day but sadly not for Chequered Skipper larvae.

We made our way back to the car and I came across a lovely blue caterpillar which I photographed for later identification. I do not think the camera is really meant for macro work but the pictures are good enough to confirm species with. This specimen proved difficult, as there just was not a comparable larva in "Porter". I sent it off on the World Wide Web and got an instant ID - Drinker Moth! I looked at the book again and discovered my picture is of an earlier instar. See picture.



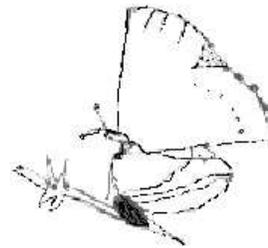
About this time I also got an email from Brian suggesting that the brown caterpillars may have been the early instars of the Chequered Skipper, oh joy, I had

not photographed them. If anyone has a macro lens for next year...

Duncan arrived at the car park (partly constructed) and Brian and David took their leave. The two of us used our time usefully and Duncan showed me the various leaf miner moths which are relatively easy to do. He clocked up a useful number of new records in no time at all which was very good news.

We were joined in the evening by Anne Smart and David also returned for our moth trapping however the weather was particularly cold and we packed up earlier than anticipated. Still we managed to record a few moths which will act as our baseline for our next attempt.

Jimmy McKellar



Green Hairstreak by Lia McKellar

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