



# Butterfly Conservation Highland Branch

Newsletter 15  
Spring 2010



[www.highland-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.highland-butterflies.org.uk)

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## Chairman's Introduction

We have been very successful again this year in recruiting members to our branch, the total membership now stands at around 230 households.

This represents the biggest increase of any of the Scottish Branches and reflects the esteem in which we are held by butterfly enthusiasts across Highland and beyond. I have always put this down to regular field trips, good Newsletters and News-sheets to keep our members informed and an amazing diversity of talks and slide shows at a variety of venues. All that, plus our core activity of recording and mapping distribution, makes a very good package.

I am now into my 13<sup>th</sup> year as Chairman and I can look back at many of the rewarding achievements and successful events we have run and participated in over the years. Much of that success I have to say is down to you, the members, as the branch would not function without the hours of time generously given for the benefit of butterflies and our branch. What about the moths I hear you ask; well they are in there too and becoming just as important as their day flying counterparts. Improved recording and the setting up of a regional network of moth recorders has greatly improved coverage and fired up interest in the "dark art". To all who have contributed past, present and hopefully future, a heartfelt thank you.

Where is all this leading? Well, things move on and in the 13<sup>th</sup> year I worry that this may be an unlucky one (if I let it) but I have other plans... I would like you to feed back any thoughts you have

on the way our branch is run and give us a steer as to whether you like it as it is or if you feel a change is needed. What would you like?

It is always challenging to keep our Newsletter fresh and exciting so I am very pleased to announce that Bill Slater has agreed to take over as editor of this issue. Though you may notice I have still managed to contribute a couple of articles which I hope will be of interest.

In this issue we are delighted to publish articles from Steve Duffield in the Western Isles and Sydney Gault in Orkney, and I hope we will hear more from them in the future.

We now have a volunteer to help Bill with the Branch website, and as two heads are better than one I expect we can look forward to some innovative tricks from them.

I would like to welcome the following to their new respective posts, Hilary Quick, Pete Moore, Mike Taylor and Audrey Turner.

Hilary Quick has volunteered to act as co-ordinator for Highland butterfly transects, which will take the load off Neil Gregory, who has single handedly been doing the whole of Scotland as well as holding down the chairmanship of Glasgow and South West branch. Thank you Neil for collecting and keeping our records safe for the past few years.

Mike Taylor has joined the branch committee and will provide support for the website.

Pete Moore has also joined the committee, and having had the pleasure of listening to him give a talk on Insh Marshes at Tain and District Field Club and then another on Mountain Burnets at our AGM I feel sure we have not heard the last of his talks.

Our new treasurer is Audrey Turner. Finance is one of those tasks which terrify normal mortals and causes most folks to walk away from it, so it is all the more important that we have found someone who not only "knows a bit" about finance but also who volunteered. I am particularly pleased Audrey volunteered as otherwise I may have had to do some accounting myself.

Finally as winter approaches I have one last request - please send us your records.

Jimmy McKellar



## Bob's Birthday Butterflies

I'm sitting here almost at the end of 2009, looking out at over a foot of snow with an overcast sky promising to drop more soon, and I can hardly believe that on one day slightly less than six months ago I saw over 500 Butterflies and Moths.

Back on July the 5<sup>th</sup>, my husband Bob's birthday, he decided he'd like a walk around the nature trail at the Insh Marshes RSPB reserve near Kingussie. It isn't too far from us, and as well as being a good place to see birds, the reserve is also known for Butterflies, Moths, Dragonflies and Wildflowers, including the Small White Orchid.



Meadow Brown (Audrey Turner)

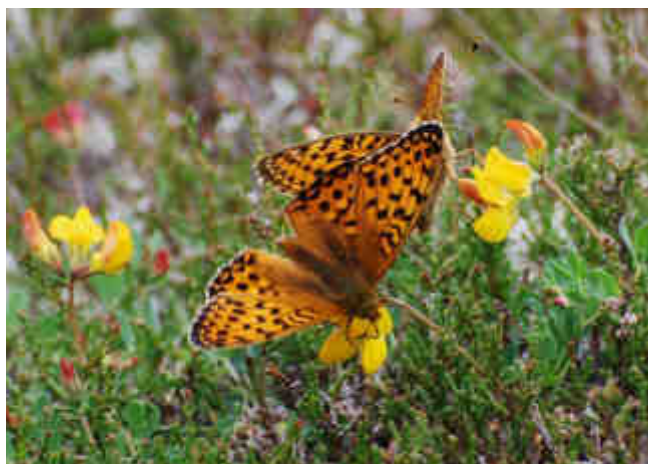
We arrived just before 11am on a beautiful hot, sunny day and after a brief visit to one of the hides we set out along the path. We'd hardly left the car park when we started seeing Butterflies, a Red Admiral, followed by a Meadow Brown with some Ringlets, a Small Heath and some Chimney Sweeper Moths. We carried on walking along the trail to a patch of Rock Rose and saw our first Northern Brown Argus of the day. Several Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary and Dark Green Fritillary were nectaring on some Wild Thyme whilst a single Common Blue was perched on some Bird's-foot Trefoil.

Shortly after that we saw a Small Tortoiseshell and two Painted Ladies and several more Ringlets, as well as more Chimney Sweepers and a Plume Moth, bringing our total number of Butterfly species to ten, whilst only a couple of hundred yards from the car park.



Ringlet pair (Audrey Turner)

As we carried on walking along the trail we saw no extra species of Butterfly, just lots more of some of the species we had already seen. A particular highlight was in a sheltered spot near the viewpoint above Invertromie Farm where we saw approximately 70 Ringlets, 80 Small Heaths and 50 Chimney Sweeper Moths as well as smaller numbers of the other species we'd already seen apart from Small Tortoiseshell. At this point we also saw a Large Red Damselfly, some Common Hawker, Black Darter and Golden-Ringed Dragonflies.



Dark Green Fritillaries (Audrey Turner)

On our way round we also saw a few Moths, mostly Chimney Sweepers but also, Silver Ground Carpet, Purple Bar, Common Carpet, Gold Spangle, Yellow Shell and another Plume Moth.

Neither of us can recall ever seeing so many Butterflies and Moths on a single day, over 500



individuals, including over 200 Ringlets, over 100 Small Heath and just under 100 Chimney Sweepers in total.



Gold Spangle (photo by Audrey Turner)

It took us almost three hours to walk the circuit and get back to the car, there was so much to see and record, we even managed to spot 20 species of birds.

On our way back up the A9 we stopped at Lynwilg, a small hamlet almost opposite the south turn into Aviemore from the A9. A couple of hundred yards up that road just over a cattle-grid there is a small parking area. We then crossed back over the cattle-grid, climbed over a gate and walked north on a stretch of tarmac that used to be part of the A9 before it was upgraded in the 1970s/80s.



Northern Brown Argus (photo by Audrey Turner)

After a short distance the road turns up into a small area below some rocky cliffs that has been used as a bit of a dump for old bits of tarmac and gravel. Nature seems to be reclaiming the road and dump area, and Wildflowers and Butterflies are plentiful. We didn't see the large numbers of individuals that we saw at Insh Marshes, but we saw 9 species of Butterfly including a single Northern Brown Argus. In fact we saw the same species

that we saw at Insh Marshes except for the Painted Lady. We then returned home satisfied at having seen so much fantastic wildlife on our doorstep.

Audrey Turner

### Insh Marshes RSPB Reserve

How to get there:

From A9, take exit to Kingussie. Follow B970 south from village towards, and then beyond, Ruthven Barracks. Reserve entrance is 1 km to the east of the barracks.

Grid ref: NN775998

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/i/inshmarshes/index.asp>

or phone 01540 661518.

## A Memorable Day

The 9<sup>th</sup> of June, one of those days when we were lucky enough to be in the right place, an area in which we have had some good sightings of both butterflies and moths over the years.

Only three Pearl-bordered Fritillaries near the start of the glen, however, as we neared the pipeline a number of *Pyrausta ostrinalis* began to appear, a very bonny wee day flying Pyralid looking its best in the sunshine. And then a couple of Beautiful Yellow Underwing (*Anarta myrtilli*) another day flying moth found frequently on moorland. Both of these moths seemed to be attracted to the wild Thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*) which was in full flower and growing profusely over the area.

On reaching the pipeline on the hillside we began to notice quite a number of distinctive black and white moths particularly on the Thyme and Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*). This was obviously a moth we had never encountered. As they were so intent on feeding it was easy enough to photograph them, could they possibly be Argent and Sable (*Rheumaptera hastata hastata*) and in such large numbers? A look at the book confirmed them as Argent and Sable, though it was impossi-

ble to count them, at a guess between 20 and 30. Definitely a day to remember.



Argent and Sable (photo by Andy Scott)

Many thanks to Roy who identified *Pyrausta ostri-nalis* for us and confirmed the identity of the Argent and Sable.

Margaret Currie and Andy Scott

## Extracts from a Butterfly Diary

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*Tue 17 March 2009*

Decided we should go and check out the transect track at Polmaily, to see if any work had been in progress over the winter. We were surprised and a bit taken aback to find the ditch on the RH side of the track had been scraped out and there was very little vegetation left at ground level. The whole of the track was affected except for one or two isolated spots. We wondered what effect, if any, this would have on the forthcoming butterfly season.

*Sat 11 April 2009*

Saw our first butterflies of the season in our garden, two Peacock.

*Mon 20 April 2009*

First ever time I have seen a butterfly with "attitude" protecting what it obviously regarded as its own territory. There were two Small Tortoiseshell in the garden, when I saw one of them dart at a bumble bee, as if to warn it away and then

minutes later it did exactly the same to a Peacock butterfly.



Small Tortoiseshell (Ron & Dot Ruston)

*Tue 12 May 2009*

Joined Highland Ranger Martin Hind on a countryside walk through Gilchrist and Tarradale to the Beaully Firth. Fantastic weather and wonderful bluebells. Butterflies enjoying the sun were Orange Tip, Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock.

*Sun 17 May 2009*

Managed to catch a photo of a pair of Green-veined White mating on one of our garden solar lights.



Green-Veined Whites (Ron & Dot Ruston)

*Thur 21 May 2009*

We spotted four Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the Polmaily transect today, along with a good variety of other species.

*Tue 30 June 2009*

26c on car thermometer. Did the transect at a slow pace and managed to spot one Dark Green Fritillary amongst the many other butter-



flies out in the heat, plus something we had never seen before and which Jimmy says is on his 'hit list' - a bee beetle!



Bee Beetle (Ron & Dot Ruston)

### *Sat 18 July 2009*

Visited Attingham Park, Nr Shrewsbury, Shropshire and walking along the river bank we spotted several butterflies, including Dark Green Fritillary, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood and Green-veined White.

### *1st to 8th August 2009*

Holidaying on Orkney mainland and visiting Hoy.

Species of butterflies seen were, Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Scotch Argus, Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady. Oh! yes, and a very fat green caterpillar, which we later identified as an Emperor Moth, crawled across the road in front of us at Rackwick Bay on Hoy.



Emperor Moth caterpillar (Ron & Dot Ruston)

### *Tue 18 August 2009*

Ron was mowing grass in the garden and brushed a caterpillar onto his hand. Quite a colourfull little thing with red and black markings. We identified

it from our book as a Grey Dagger moth caterpillar. When it comes to moths we are still learning as we go, so please let us know if we have any incorrect!



Grey Dagger caterpillar (Ron & Dot Ruston)

### *Wed 19 August 2009*

I decided to walk around the garden in an effort to find more caterpillars and was quite successful. On our variegated Poplar there were several Poplar Hawk-moth caterpillars,

a Sallow Prominent and on an old rose bush feeding away contentedly was another very colourful caterpillar, ginger hair with red, white and black markings which we believe was a Knotgrass.



Poplar Hawk-moth caterpillar (Ron & Dot Ruston)



Knot Grass caterpillar (Ron & Dot Ruston)

### *Wed 2nd September 2009*

Walked our transect at Polmaily at the exact same time that Tom Prescott and the FCS man Jeff Dymond did, so we stopped for a chat and were pleased to learn that discussions were in hand to try to improve the habitat at Polmaily for butterflies in order to increase their numbers in years to come. The gorse is getting out of hand and a working party would be very welcome!

### *Tue 22nd September 2009*

We hope all you moth enthusiasts caught the last in the series of programmes filmed in Papua, New Guinea entitled Land of the Lost Volcano.

Dr George McGavin was the insect specialist and set up a huge moth trap with a light bulb that gave him a radius of 200 yards. He kept it on for an hour and the numbers and species were phenomenal. He said he thought 25% were new species. He called it Moth Mayhem and we think he must have thought all his birthdays had arrived together!

The weather remained good towards the end of the month and the Painted Ladies (two) lingered in our garden on the sedum, the buddleia having long died off. We sometimes wonder if they do fly south?

The clearing of the ditches doesn't seem to have had an effect on the number of species on the transect and obviously the vegetation has grown back. We can't notice any great increase in numbers but at the same time we have not lost any.

We have had a book bought for us during the year called The Great British Butterfly Safari by Robin Page and now have the winter months to find out if it is enjoyable reading.

Dot and Ron Ruston

## **A coastal walk: Very Dingy and more than a Little Blue!**

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For the last few years I've been trying to increase the number of butterfly and moth species that I've seen and can identify. With a Small Blue reintroduction project planned for my local branch area

(Glasgow & SW Scotland) during 2010, I thought it was time to see my first Small Blue!



Looking west towards Kingston on Spey (B Slater)

So while up visiting family in Moray I headed off to the coast. I had visited the Lein at Spey Bay quite a few times through the years, but not since getting hooked on butterflies and moths. On the 12th of June I walked from Kingston on Spey along the Moray coast towards Lossiemouth (about 4km from NJ340655 to NJ302669) recording butterflies using a GPS device. The weather was warm and sunny with a mild breeze. Almost as soon as I stepped out of the car I spotted a small blue nectaring on kidney vetch, then another and another! I've never put my walking boots on so fast!



Small Blues at Spey Bay (Scott Shanks)

In total I had a massive count of 117 Small Blues, including 2 mating pairs (about 51 individuals within the area of the Spey Bay reserve). I also managed to see a female laying on kidney vetch flower heads. One of the biggest surprises for me was the magnificent number of Dingy Skippers (80) that I saw along the coast (many of them looking very fresh). Having seen my first Dingy Skipper on the Solway coast just a few weeks before, I was amazed at how many there were



here! Further along the coast a flash of orange caught my attention as Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary flew off towards the tree line. Following it, I found 12 SPbFs nectaring and basking on a small patch of heather (all were about NJ307666). Other species seen on the walk included 15 Painted Ladies (fewer than I was expecting to see), 2 Small Heath, 2 Small White, 1 Small Copper. Plus a Wood Tiger, quite a few Mother Shiptons and a lone Six-spot Burnet.



Dingy Skipper at Spey Bay (Scott Shanks)

I had hoped to go back the next day and walk from the Lossie side, but unfortunately I didn't have time. During 2010 I hope to walk the entire stretch and also check out the tree line for more fritillaries.

Scott Shanks

## Dingy Skippers at Culbin Forest

On the 16th June, a few days after Scott Shanks's visit to Spey Bay (see previous article,) I visited Culbin Forest, which is about 30 km west of the area visited by Scott.

I set out from Wellhill car park in a north easterly direction to Lake of Moy and Binsness (marked 'A' on the map), where I found 4 Dingy Skippers, the first specimens I had seen in about 30 years.

From Lake of Moy I took a track northwards, almost to the mouth of Findhorn Bay. There, ('B' on the map) the track bends to the left in a north westerly direction, and eventually the open area of Buckie Loch ('C' on the map) appears on the right.



Image produced from Ordnance Survey's Get-a-map service. Image reproduced with permission of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

On the bend itself the track broadens, and on its margins there are sparse growths of Bird's-foot-trefoil and Kidney Vetch. Here, I counted 6 Dingy Skippers, 2 Small Blues and 1 Common Blue.

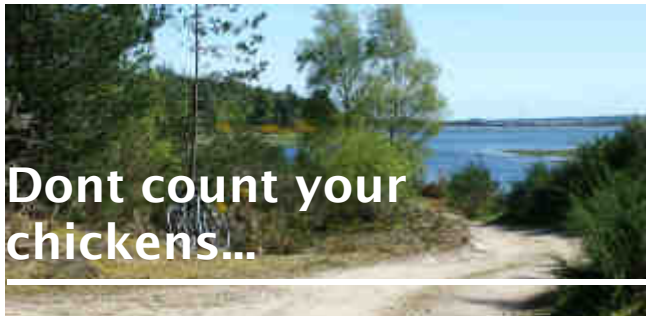
This turned out to be the start of a large count of Dingy Skippers on the track leading to Buckie Loch. All along the way there were small clumps of Bird's-foot-trefoil, and every 3 metres or so there were Dingy Skippers, typically in groups of 2 to 4.

On the return journey, following a different though parallel track, I counted at least 40 specimens.

I had previously seen this butterfly at sites near Portknockie, from which it has disappeared due to habitat change. It was therefore a very exciting experience to see it again in such large numbers, and to hear of Scott's similar findings near Spey Bay. This year I would like to look for it along the coast to the east of Spey Bay towards Portgordon.

A field trip to this part of Culbin Forest in late May or early June is certainly worth considering, but as Jimmy demonstrates in the next article, when planning field trips you just can't depend on the weather!

Bill Slater



Culbin, 16 May 2009

Arriving at Wellhill slightly earlier than the allotted meeting time I was staggered at the crowd of people interested in coming on our walk. Sadly my elation was short-lived when I realised I had come upon a party of orienteers preparing to set off in search of different sport.

We still managed a very healthy turnout of 8, all of whom seemed determined to make the most of what was a rather cool day.

We very nearly had nothing to report as the weather the day before was dire. It seemed to have knocked all the insects down and it often takes a couple of days for them to pick up again. On the outward route towards Binsness we saw almost no flying insects, which did not bode well for a butterfly trip. In the absence of anything on the wing I turned my attention to looking for ant hills and was amazed at just how many there were. It would be fair to compare them to a ribbon settlement system just like humans living strung out along a road-side. Almost all of the nests were on the north side of the path giving them a warm, sunny, southern aspect, just the type of conditions they seem to prefer. While I did not actually measure the distance between mounds, on reflection, they were fairly evenly spaced out.

Allan Lawrence produced a large sawfly which was photographed for later identification.

Audrey Turner managed to put a name to it: Birch Sawfly, and what a beauty it was. The cool weather helped as it posed quietly on my hand for the occasion. We noted that they are not seen that often despite their large size.

Along the way Mike Taylor collected six moth records: Six-spot Burnet (larva), Diamond-back Moth (a migratory micro moth), *Syndemis musculana*, *Capua vulgana*, Dwarf Pug and Cream Wave.

The Cream Wave is a first for Moray and is usually associated with a more western distribution. This moth was the more heavily marked *scotica* sub-species which was confirmed by Roy Leverton and he had not seen one with such dark lines and speckling.

The return leg of the trip ran parallel to the outward path and again the ants were evident on the south-facing side. Here we found the only butterfly of the day, a rather drowsy Speckled Wood. With a little encouragement it did take flight and alighted in a tree.



Birch Sawfly (Audrey Turner)

All told we had a very rewarding day out but we would still hope for better weather next time!

Jimmy McKellar

## Six-spot Burnet Moths on the Move!

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I have always thought of the Six-spot Burnet moth as a coastal species, at least in the part of the Highlands that I am familiar with (Easter Ross, East Inverness and Moray). In vice-counties 95 (Moray) and 96 (Easternness) there were no records further than three or four miles inland. It therefore came as a surprise when Mike Taylor (Moray moth recorder) e-mailed me in the last week of June 2009 to say that he had seen a single Six-spot Burnet at a flower meadow near to Boat of Garten. This was 25 miles from the nearest coastline. I followed up his sighting straight away, partly because it fell within my vice-county (96) but also because I love seeing Burnet moths. I was delighted to find sev-

eral individuals at the site. What had brought them to this spot?



Six-spot Burnet, by Pete Moore

Less than a fortnight later, in early July, I visited Dava Moor, north of Grantown on Spey, looking for flowers. What did I find? More Six-spot Burnets.....fifty of them this time, a sizeable colony!

I then received a report of Six-spots from Stewart Taylor at Abernethy RSPB reserve. I followed this up and just a week after finding the Dava Moor colony, I was able to confirm the presence of a colony of about 100 individuals on Tulloch Moor, part of the RSPB reserve.

Records didn't end there however, because towards mid-July, Audrey and Bob Turner found another small colony (eleven moths) on Dava Moor, this time near Lochindorb. Mike Taylor also reported Six-spots from this site.

In the space of three weeks, we had established the presence of four colonies of Six-spot Burnets in the Grantown to Boat of Garten area, where none were previously known to occur. 2009 had certainly become Year of the Burnet.

After speaking to a couple of local people, it would appear that Six-spots were present on at least two of these sites in the previous year, 2008. Presumably these colonies had become established from individuals that had moved inland from coastal areas. What had prompted this movement? Roy Leverton believes that these movements occur from time to time but that the resultant colonies may be short-lived. It will be interesting to monitor the progress of these new colonies. I understand that similar inland movements have occurred in Aberdeenshire. I would be

very interested to hear of any inland records elsewhere in the Highlands:

[pete.moore@rspb.org.uk](mailto:pete.moore@rspb.org.uk) or 01479 872261.

Pete Moore  
County Moth Recorder VC96  
(East Inverness-shire)

## Old Ladies in Badenoch and Strathspey

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Amy Huff, BTCV's Natural Talent Apprentice Lepidopterist, was based at RSPB Insh Marshes nature reserve during summer 2009. On July 27<sup>th</sup> she was excited to find an Old Lady moth, a large and distinctive species, described by the moth books as 'unmistakable'. Not only was this a new species for her personally but it proved to be the first record of this moth for the reserve. Pete Moore, Insh Marshes Warden and, as it happens, Moth Recorder for East Inverness-shire, was equally delighted to see it since it was a personal first for him as well.

News of the find soon reached Tom Prescott of Butterfly Conservation who lives nearby in Kingussie. He phoned Amy and asked if he could see her Old Lady, which could have been confusing since Amy had her mother staying with her at the time! The moth proved to be a first for Tom also.

It was thought that the Insh Marshes record would be a "one-off" but this turned out not to be the case. A few days later, Anne Smart recorded one at Newtonmore. Then on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Pete Moore was working at a small RSPB reserve near to Dulnain Bridge. He was clearing out old leaves from the inside of a small raft floating on the river, used to detect mink. One of the old leaves turned out to be an Old Lady! It was unfortunately dead but exactly one week later Pete found a live one whilst running a light trap nearby.

There was one more record for the area. Mike Taylor (moth recorder for Morayshire) and his wife Britt found a dead Old Lady on a windowsill inside Nethybridge Community Hall on September 6<sup>th</sup>, bringing the number of local sightings to five.



Old Lady is described as “local and infrequent” on the Scottish mainland as far north as East Inverness-shire and Banffshire. Prior to the sequence of records above, there had been only **two** previous records for East Inverness-shire, both in 2006, and **no** previous records for Morayshire. It seems likely that 2009 just happened to be a good year for this species (Tom Prescott reports that Old Lady had a good year in Butterfly Conservation’s Garden Moths Survey) but there are also more active moth recorders in the area now than in the past. Who knows, maybe we shall see more of this distinctive species in the future.

If anyone else saw Old Lady this season, please ensure that your record is passed on to the relevant vice-county recorder and also please inform Pete Moore ([pete.moore@rspb.org.uk](mailto:pete.moore@rspb.org.uk) or phone 01479 872261).

Pete Moore

## Daytime Wanderings

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During the course of this year I have conducted a few moth events where most and in some cases all of the participants were new to moths and with many new to recording. The response to each event was very enthusiastic and I am sure that many went away with a better appreciation of moths and a little knowledge of how to find them and for a few how to begin the task of trying to identify them. Part of the patter was of course showing that this should be enjoyable and not an onerous task however I am sure that some at least will have been put off seeing the amount of equipment that is transported to and used at these events and the inevitable cost. To counter this I suggest that anyone who wishes to start with moths and recording should take it a step at a time starting with just a few moths as can typically be found around the outside lights of their home. This is how I started, progressing to a battery operated Heath trap and eventually a Robinson MV trap. The last thing I needed as a beginner was to have five, six or seven hundred difficult to identify moths in the trap (too little hair left to pull out with the inevitable frustration). Another perceived difficulty (commitment) would be that moth-ing is usually carried out at night and involves an hour or two (or more) the next morning

to wade through the catch. Of course it need not be so onerous, one can simply go for daytime walks with no more than a small fold-up net a pot and a light weight guide and catch a just a few moths, allowing more time to identify and get to know what has been found.

It is not just the daytime flyers that one will come across as one will inevitably see some of the night flyers as they rest on buildings that have had outside lights left on overnight or are disturbed so that they briefly fly up to find a new resting place. Other benefits being that as it is daylight the wildlife watching is not restricted to moths and some much needed exercise adds to the bonuses. So at last I come to the point of this article, having taken on the task of county moth recorder for Moray, Britt and I decided that we would spend some time walking through some largely under-recorded parts of the county whilst getting to know the territory and putting into practice the recommendations to get out and walk amongst the moths. What follows is a summary of our daytime finds:

**March:** Mild weather and sunshine brought out the first of the Orange Underwings. Whilst walking to a friend’s house on the 25<sup>th</sup> Britt found them flying amongst the birches along the road beside Milton Loch at Boat of Garten.

**April:** We went to Loch Vaa on the 14<sup>th</sup> to see if the Slavonian Grebes had arrived and were rewarded with good views of two in their breeding finery swimming close to the site of the submerged crannog, and capping off a satisfying trip we saw a couple more Orange Underwings on the birches at the nearby cemetery’s car park.



Netted Mountain Moth (Mike Taylor)

This year I decided that I would spend some time looking for new sites for Netted Mountain Moth and if luck was with me possibly the increasingly difficult to find Small Dark Yellow Underwing. The area that I chose to look at was Dava Moor and Lochindorb. Jeff Waddell and John Knowler had previously found NMM there but not SDYU and given the largely unexplored area and the considerable amount of the larval foodplant, bearberry, there was a fighting chance that I might succeed.

First sighting of NMM was on the 20<sup>th</sup> at a previously recorded site near Duthil Burn, this was the earliest date for the species recorded in Moray, another was found on the 23<sup>rd</sup> at Caochan Dorch near Lochindorb.

**May:** Back to Dava on the 3<sup>rd</sup> on a sunny but breezy day and found NMM again at Duthil Burn about 100 metres north of the first sighting plus another beside the road at Dorback Burn, this was a new site for the species. We continued to visit Dava on suitable weather days and more NMM were found close to other known sites but no sign of any Small Dark Yellow Underwings. Whilst looking for these two species and trying not to chase after every Common Heath, we saw many Northern Eggars plus several Lead Belle, Satyr and Common Pugs plus eight species of micro moth. We also spent some time on the moorland above Carrbridge and found six species of moth but no NMM or SDYU. On the 16<sup>th</sup> I went along to the Highland Branch Field trip to a wet and windy Culbin Forest and whilst it was a poor day for butterflies with just the one Speckled Wood we were more successful with the moths. The highlight was a fresh Cream Wave which I saw trying to sneak past our group, this was the first record of this species for the Vice County. We also found a Dwarf Pug, a Six-spot Burnet larva, the first of what was to be a small invasion of the Diamond-back Moth plus two other micros.

**June:** On the 1<sup>st</sup> we had a look at some of the moorland north of Nethy Bridge and then to the west of Carrbridge, it was getting somewhat late in the year for our two target species but we did see seven other species of moth. The reward for our efforts was on returning home to find an amazing five Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth in our Boat of Garten garden. We watched them for

about an hour with them staying until just after 5 pm nectaring from predominantly blue flowers. For the remainder of the month we did not target any particular species but went for wherever the weather looked best. Localities included Culbin Forest, Dallas and the Dava Way from Grantown to Forres. With improving temperatures it was not uncommon to find ten or more species of moth.

**July:** More walks along the Dava Way and along the Findhorn which must rank as one of the most scenic rivers in the UK with the added bonus that walks along the stretch south of Forres means that there is no excuse for not dropping into Logie Steading for an excellent lunch. The Highlight for me was finding a rather photogenic Clouded Border near the top of Divie Viaduct. On the 14<sup>th</sup> I went to Lochindorb to try to find more of the inland Six-spot burnets that had recently been seen in the area by Pete Moore plus Audrey and Bob Turner. Other areas that we visited were Knockando and Dallas. In this area there were 10k squares with no moth records whatsoever so the target was anything and everything. Micro moths outnumbered the macros but with more familiarity their identification was getting less painful.



Bee Moth (Mike Taylor)

On the 29<sup>th</sup> we went to Ballindalloch Castle. Whilst starting with a coffee in the restaurant Britt pointed out a rather odd looking moth on one of the windows, wasting no time lest it depart before

I could get to it I asked one of the staff if I could get at the area which is normally off limits to visitors and was able to show her a fine female Bee moth, a first for both me and the Vice-county. We then wondered what else this unexplored place might hold and found a rather surprising eleven species of moth beside the outside lights of the visitor's toilet building, walks in the grounds and along the river added to the list most satisfactorily.

**August:** Back to Divie Viaduct on the 1<sup>st</sup> and success straight away with my first Manchester Treble-bar, this despite the near gale that was blowing. Further visits during the remainder of the month along the Dava Way and Speyside Way continued to add to our daytime species list with perhaps the commonest being the many Antler Moths that we saw nectaring on ragwort. Having had some success with Ballindalloch we went to Brodie Castle on the 16<sup>th</sup> to see what we could find there. A Vapourer larva near the car park and several macros on the light coloured castle walls were a good start, we then had a look inside the old dairy and found a Lesser Yellow Underwing and a Dusky Brocade. These were lying beside the windows and were unfortunately dead but nevertheless still counted as useful records. Over the next couple of months we were to find fourteen species of macro moths dead either inside buildings or in cobwebs, some of which were very valuable records.



Old Lady (Mike Taylor)

**September:** On the 6<sup>th</sup> Britt and I attended a moss and liverwort identification day at Nethy Bridge, whilst sipping coffee waiting for proceedings to start Britt saw what she thought was a large butterfly on one of the inside windowsills of the community hall. As I approached the wee beastie

it became obvious that it was not a butterfly but our first Old Lady none of which had been recorded in Moray until this year.

They apparently come indoors to roost and this one presumably became trapped and did not survive, unfortunate but a good find all the same.

The next day another dead moth was the highlight, this time a Dun-bar found on grass at Brodie. The castle walls held eight species with some that I would not have expected to find in the daytime, Canary-shouldered Thorn, Red Sword-grass and Anomalous.

**October/November:** Weather getting cooler and summer long gone but still plenty to find. By now day fliers were not much in evidence but buildings that had had lights left on overnight were still worth taking a look at. The best moth albeit yet another dead specimen was a Merveille du Jour in a cobweb on the outside of the glass protective surround of Sueno's Stone in Forres, it was not in particularly good condition but was still very recognisable. Looking inside of the glass surround there were a number of other moths that had been unable to escape, most were beyond the point where undisputed recognition was possible but there was a very smart White Ermine that counted.

On November 18<sup>th</sup> we did another visit to Culbin primarily for the exercise and to look at some of the lichens of this particular habitat. We had not been expecting any moths as there had been a fair wind blowing for the past twenty four hours at home and temperatures had dropped to a less than balmy 2 degrees Celsius, however on arrival at the Wellhill car park we thought to take a quick look at the walls of the toilet block and found and amazing forty one moths of seven different species sheltering on the walls, and as predicted nothing flying.

So what was the result of our daytime wanderings in Moray? Out of a total of sixty nine macro moth species there was one first for Moray and four second or third records. Of the micro moths there were thirty species with five firsts for Moray and eight second or third records. The higher number of first, second and third records of micro moths shows just both how under recorded this species group is and how under recorded the central part of Moray is with the majority of records coming from the villages in Strathspey or the coastal area



around Culbin. All in all, very satisfying and enjoyable with plenty to do next year.

Mike Taylor  
County Moth Recorder VC95 (Moray)

## Moths Count in Easter Ross, VC106

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Since we took on the role of vice county recorders in VC106 for Butterfly Conservation Moths Count project in 2007 we have tried to build up the data set both in terms of number of macromoth species and the range of habitats and sites where recording takes place. The number of moth species for Easter Ross was boosted significantly by the addition of about 50,000 records from the Rothamsted data set as there have been 4 Rothamsted traps in VC106 at different times over the last 30 years but the only one still active is the Cromarty Rothamsted trap which has run for many years. These records gave a splendid boost to the species count but also presented some problems with occasional records for very unlikely species in this part of the British Isles and we had to lean heavily on the experience of Roy Leverton in sorting them out. We now have over 300 species of macromoth in the data set.

The range of recording sites has been significantly increased by an impressive group of volunteers with Margaret Currie and Andy Scott trapping in the Black Isle, Brigid Primrose in Muir of Ord, Sue Tarr and the Blackwater Natural History Group in the Garve area and Fay and Bob Brown at Lochusie. In addition the Gearrhoille Community wood management committee have allowed us to put moth traps in the wood which is a mixed broad-leaf woodland and a very good habitat for moth trapping. The Forestry Commission have also been very helpful in letting us put moth traps in a variety of their woodlands and this has been particularly valuable in helping us get records in the less populated and under recorded areas in the west of the vice county. We are also grateful to other householders, hotel owners and farmers for letting us put traps on their property.

As far as public moth trapping events are concerned Tony Mainwood has been extremely help-

ful in setting up events as for the Gearrhoille Community Woodland group and at the RSPB Nigg Bay hide for National Moth night in cooperation with staff from the RSPB. A fine Grey Arches was trapped at Gearrhoille, an uncommon species in VC 106. At Nigg Bay 2 Lunar Underwings were trapped and, although they have been seen in Jimmy's garden in Inverness, they have not been recorded in VC106 previously except from the Cromarty Rothamsted trap. However they have now been recorded in 3 hectads in Easter Ross this year.



Grey Arches (Barbara and Brian Ballinger)

The moth highlights of this year were headed by the discovery of a colony of Argent and Sable moths by Margaret and Andy near the pipeline at Aultdearg. We only had 2 previous records for this moth in VC106 so this was a splendid find. Sue showed us a group of Goat Moth trees near Garve which demonstrated the impressive amount of damage the larvae can inflict and again we have only a handful of records for this moth in VC106. There were 4 separate records for the very attractive Broad-barred White this year, 3 from the Black Isle and one from Contin but we only had one previous record, from the Cromarty Rothamsted trap in 1996.

We were delighted to find a Black Mountain Moth clambering about in the Woolly Fringe Moss and Crowberry at about 800m altitude on Carn Eiteige north of Loch Monar.

The moth showed a remarkable lack of interest in flying, clinging to the short vegetation and seemingly determined to proceed on foot. A sensible option considering the wind speed at times. The other striking feature was its dark colour presumably ideal for absorbing what little radiant heat

was available whenever the sun shone, not very often this summer.



Black Mountain Moth (Barbara and Brian Ballinger)

It is clear from this account that we are very dependant on other people in our efforts to build up a more informative data set for Easter Ross. We would welcome any records which can be emailed to [barbara@garrickwood.org.uk](mailto:barbara@garrickwood.org.uk). or posted to Upper Flat, Fearn Station House, Fearn Station, near Tain, IV20 1RR.

Barbara and Brian Ballinger  
County Moth Recorders VC106 (East Ross)  
October 2009

## REPORT FROM THE WEST COAST 2009

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### SUMMARY

The west Highlands benefited once again from excellent weather during the spring and early summer months resulting in yet another record number of butterfly sightings in my local Lochalsh area and another good year for moth recording.

Undoubtedly the most conspicuous event was the continuing dramatic increase in the Peacock butterfly population. My number of sightings of Peacock during the year (37) was exceeded only by Green-veined White (57) and Speckled Wood (48). As well as the increase in the number of sightings the actual numbers of butterflies also shot up from a maximum of four in 2006, eight in 2007 and seven in 2008 to 23 on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2009.

Despite the unprecedented influx of Painted Lady butterflies into the British Isles the numbers here did not reach those of 1996 and the number of sightings was no greater than in 2003 or 2006.

Although the weather deteriorated during August I still managed to complete all of my weekly butterfly transect visits except one by the end of September.

A Moths Count event was held at Balmacara in May and moth trapping was carried out at a new site at Nostie on three occasions. A number of interesting butterfly and moth records arose as by-products of fieldwork for the BTO Bird Atlas.

### BUTTERFLIES

The Peacock took the headlines from day one with my first six butterfly sightings of the year all relating to this species. The first was at Achnandarach on 19<sup>th</sup> March followed by two on Carr Brae the next day. There were two Green Hairstreak on my Carr Brae transect on 20<sup>th</sup> April and these were soon followed by the first Speckled Wood on 22<sup>nd</sup> and Green-veined White on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Three Orange-tips were seen at the early hour of 08:55 on 28<sup>th</sup> April during a Bird Atlas timed visit at Nonach, near Killilan. There were large numbers of Orange-tip in Glen Elchaig on 14<sup>th</sup> May during another Bird Atlas visit. I must have seen at least 30 but unfortunately hadn't started counting until it was too late as I hadn't anticipated such numbers. The last Orange-tip to be reported was seen by Ishbel Cameron at Drumbuie on 4<sup>th</sup> June. The Speckled Wood has the longest flight period of all our local butterflies and they were on the wing from 20<sup>th</sup> April until 4<sup>th</sup> October with just a three week break during June. A count of 19 on the transect on 17<sup>th</sup> July was my second highest total to date and the individual on 4<sup>th</sup> October was my latest ever record and only my second October sighting.

A Scotch Argus in Dornie on 10<sup>th</sup> July was eight days ahead of my previous earliest record. I saw no more until the 17<sup>th</sup> but then there were 27 on the transect on 25<sup>th</sup> with a peak of 84 on the 13<sup>th</sup>

August and the last sighting was on 6<sup>th</sup> September. I had my highest number of sightings and my highest count since 2003 despite the disappointing August weather. Clearly the Scotch Argus is adapted to cope with whatever rain and gales the north west can throw at it.

Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Small Heath were all widespread, the first two species in their usual modest numbers while the Small Heath was numerous in many areas. The only Graylings I heard of were seen by Roger Cottis at Aird of Sleat, Skye on 4<sup>th</sup> July. This butterfly remains very elusive in Lochalsh.

The most disappointing aspect of the year was the low numbers of both Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell. I saw only five single Red Admirals and two single Small Tortoiseshells throughout the year. There was some glimmer of hope for Small Tortoiseshell as Ishbel Cameron recorded them at Drumbuie in April/May and again in July/August with a last one on 14<sup>th</sup> September. It is to be hoped that it can recover from this small local population and perhaps spread out into the wider area again. Barbara Macritchie found a Small Tortoiseshell caterpillar along with numerous Peacock caterpillars at Reraig in July so hopefully there were a few more there amongst the nettles.

Despite the relatively low numbers of adult Painted Lady recorded, Jane Bowman did locate some larval webs on Spear Thistle in the Balmacara Forest on 7<sup>th</sup> August, almost certainly the first confirmed breeding record for Lochalsh.

As well as the late Speckled Wood there was also a Red Admiral at Conchra on 4<sup>th</sup> October and the last Peacock to be reported was seen by Jean Saville at Glenelg the following day. Of the 58 Peacock records I was able to submit to David Barbour 12 occurred between 19<sup>th</sup> March and 14<sup>th</sup> May, one was seen on 16<sup>th</sup> June and 45 sightings were reported by eight observers between 25<sup>th</sup> July and 4<sup>th</sup> October. The peak count on my transect was 17 on 12<sup>th</sup> September.

## MOTHS

The moth year followed what is now becoming a familiar pattern during the first four months with

the same reliable species turning up as would be expected. Winter Moth, Pale Brindled Beauty, March Moth, Mottled Grey, Dotted Border, Yellow Horned and Chestnut all appeared before the end of February. However no Mottled Umbers lingered into the New Year this year. Into March and the first Brindled and Double-striped Pugs occurred along with Early Tooth-striped, Engrailed, Small Quaker, Common Quaker, Clouded Drab, Hebrew Character and Early Grey. Common Quaker was the first moth of the year to be attracted to the Robinson trap in numbers with 39 on 18<sup>th</sup> March. Three common moths were recorded earlier than ever before - Early Tooth-striped (18<sup>th</sup> March), Hebrew Character (10<sup>th</sup> March) and Early Grey (18<sup>th</sup> March).



Streamer (Brian Neath)

April saw an increasing variety of species as the "carpet" moths began to emerge; Flame Carpet, Garden Carpet, Streamer (still one of my favourites!), Water Carpet, Red-green and Autumn Green Carpets. Brown Silver-line was the most numerous moth with 33 on 20<sup>th</sup> April. Two more moths appeared earlier than in any previous year - Flame Carpet and Least Black Arches both on 20<sup>th</sup> April. The Brindled Ochre is an uncommon moth and I had only five records prior to this year - one in 1996, three in 1997 and one in 2005. So it was good to find one attracted to the windows on 12<sup>th</sup> April, all previous records also having been in April. However I was to see my first autumn specimen later in the year. Two Grey Birch on 20<sup>th</sup> April was another good find being only my third record of this species, one in each of the last three years.



Birch Mocha is another uncommon but possibly increasing moth and one was attracted to the Robinson trap on 17<sup>th</sup> May. Yellow-ringed Carpet, Scorched Wing, Marbled Coronet, Light Knot Grass and Herald were other highlights during May.



Yellow-ringed Carpet (Brian Neath)

This was only my second record of the Herald which is quite rare in Wester Ross as a whole with only eleven records in the database altogether, including all the Rothamsted records up to 2003. Nut-tree Tussock was, perhaps surprisingly, the most numerous moth in May with 15 trapped on both the 11<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. I have only had higher numbers than this in 2005 when there was a remarkable count of 28 on 12<sup>th</sup> May.

A Moths Count event organised jointly with the National Trust for Scotland took place at the Lochalsh Woodland Park, Balmacara on 29<sup>th</sup> May. This was slightly disappointing compared with a National Moth Night event at the same site at the same time of year in 2008. However the catch did include a Yellow-ringed Carpet and a Swallow Prominent amongst the 21 species. The latter species is much scarcer than the Lesser Swallow Prominent and it was only my second record. I had also taken a number of moths with me from my trap at home including Pebble Hook-tip, Peach Blossom, Scorched Wing and Sallow Kitten, all attractive species to show to members of the public. A pleasant walk following our inspection of the traps found our first local influx of Painted Lady butterflies and at least six Orange-tips.

6<sup>th</sup> June was a “red-letter day” when a Heart and Dart was attracted to the Robinson trap. Amazingly it was the first “dart” moth of any species that I have recorded. Other good finds during

June were a Poplar Lutestring on 23<sup>rd</sup>, a Coronet on 3<sup>rd</sup> and a Green Silver-lines on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Like the Herald the “common throughout” Green Silver-lines is anything but common in Wester Ross with only a handful of records. Mottled Beauty (11) and True Lover’s Knot (12) were the only species out of the 64 recorded during June to reach double figures.



Heart and Dart (Brian Neath)

My first trapping session at Seathrift, Nostie on 1<sup>st</sup> June was a great success with 72 moths of 27 species recorded. Like most people, the owners Jane and Derek were amazed to see such species as Poplar Hawk-moth, Lesser Swallow Prominent, Pebble Prominent, Pale Prominent, Peppered Moth, Buff-tip, Lunar Thorn, Brimstone and Sallow Kitten in their grounds. Best of all was a Puss Moth which was only the fourth record to be entered into the Wester Ross database. There are no records from north of Lochcarron.

The star moth for July was an Orange Swift attracted to the Robinson trap on 25<sup>th</sup>. The only other Lochalsh record was of one trapped by Dr Iain Matheson at Plockton in July 2008. There are a number of records from the Rothamsted sites at Inverpolly (1977–1992) and Beinn Eighe (1989–2002) but none from elsewhere in Wester Ross. Other good records during July included Barred Carpet, Rivulet, Sandy Carpet, V-Pug and Satin Beauty. Triple-spotted Clay was the most numer-

ous moth as usual with a maximum of 54 on 14<sup>th</sup>. Rivulet and Sandy Carpet are two more moths with very few previous records in Wester Ross. Another trapping session at Seathrift, Nostie on 8<sup>th</sup> July was very successful with 94 moths of 41 species identified. These included another Sandy Carpet, a Satin Beauty and my only two Barred Yellow of the year.

The second Swallow Prominent of the year which was trapped on 4<sup>th</sup> August was my second garden record and third overall record. Two more V-Pugs occurred on the same night as well as 21 Magpie moths and 43 Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing. Although V-Pug has now been recorded in Lochalsh in five of the last six years we still have no records from further north.

The third moth trapping session at Seathrift on 13<sup>th</sup> September produced the first autumn record of Brindled Ochre already referred to as well as a Small Autumnal Moth, five Sallow, three Pink-barred Sallow and 18 Rosy Rustic, 104 moths of 19 species in total. By the 29<sup>th</sup> we were well into the characteristic autumnal species and a Skinner trap at the NTS Lochalsh Woodland Garden attracted well over 400 moths including an overwhelming 350+ Grey Pine Carpet. Other moths included Red-green and Autumn Green Carpets, November and Autumnal Moth, Feathered Thorn, Red and Yellow-line Quaker, Green-brindled Crescent and my only Merveille du Jour of the year.

An exceptionally late Brimstone Moth was amongst the moths recorded at Seathrift on 13<sup>th</sup> and this was followed by two more at the Lochalsh Woodland Garden on 29<sup>th</sup>. Max and Sue Pittman also recorded two in Ullapool on 18<sup>th</sup> September.

October was something of a washout and was mainly dominated by the *Epirrita* species. However the seldom recorded Brick was attracted to our windows on 13<sup>th</sup> while an early Mottled Umber occurred on 8<sup>th</sup> and an equally early December Moth on 18<sup>th</sup>. A Red Swordgrass attracted to the Robinson trap on 8<sup>th</sup> was only my second record of the year. Eight Scarce Umber were attracted to the windows on 28<sup>th</sup>. A Peppered

Moth larva was found on our gate post on 8<sup>th</sup> and a Ruby Tiger larva was found indoors on 16<sup>th</sup>.

Moths recorded whilst involved with BTO Bird Atlas fieldwork included c.20 Chimney Sweeper along the An Leth-allt on 28<sup>th</sup> June while later in the day a Wood Tiger was found near Loch nan Eun. Two more Chimney Sweeper were seen near Killilan on 9<sup>th</sup> July while Pat Mucklow found many in a meadow at Ardintoul on 5<sup>th</sup> July. That tiny noctuid the Beautiful Yellow Underwing is easily overlooked but I was lucky to spot one near Non-ach on 4<sup>th</sup> June and also saw one along my Carr Brae butterfly transect on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. Best of all was my first record of Mother Shipton on Carr Brae on 8<sup>th</sup> June, little more than a kilometre from our house. I wonder how many I might have walked past over the years without noticing amongst the numerous Common Heath on the local hillside?

Ishbel Cameron has been trapping moths at Drumbuie since 2004 and has recorded a wide variety of interesting species there. She has now inspired her daughter Charlene Macleod and granddaughter Laura to get involved. Between the two gardens in Drumbuie they recorded a number of species not seen elsewhere in Lochalsh during 2009. These included Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet, Grey Scalloped Bar, Tawny-barred Angle, Scotch Annulet, Garden Tiger, Vapourer, Double Dart and Brown-line Bright-eye.



Bordered Grey (Brian Neath)

The highlight however was a third record for Drumbuie of a Bordered Grey on 15<sup>th</sup> July confirming this Nationally Scarce A species' presence in this part of Lochalsh. It was also good to get a first record of V-Pug for Drumbuie on the late date of 14<sup>th</sup> September.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Butterfly records were kindly provided by Ishbel Cameron, Roger Cottis, Josephine Dean, Roger Knight, Chris Mitchell, Pat Mucklow, Helen Murchison (via J.Dean) and Jean Saville.

Once again I am grateful to Roy Leverton who promptly answered any identification queries including those concerning caterpillars.

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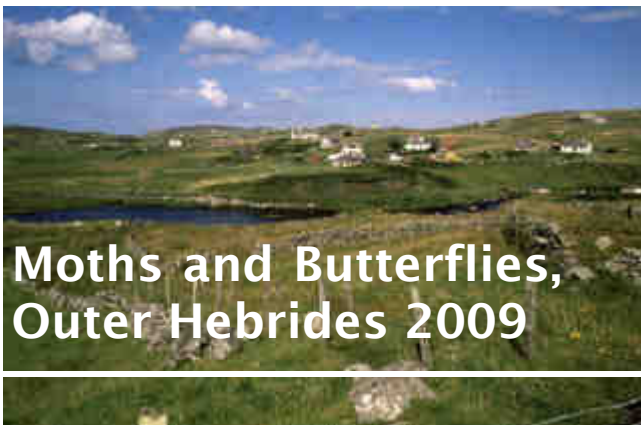
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Brian Neath

County Moth Recorder VC105 (West Ross)



Convulvulus Hawkmoth (Steve Duffield)



One of the big stories this year was of course the invasion of Painted Ladies throughout the UK with thousands even reaching the Outer Hebrides in late May / June. A second wave of sightings occurred as the second generation emerged in July with hundreds gathering in sheltered hollows on the machair of the Uists. Most had gone their way by September yet quite incredibly a single was seen on November 8<sup>th</sup> at Borve, Benbecula – undoubtedly the latest record for the islands. Other migrant Lepidoptera showed well too with good numbers of Red Admirals and around five sightings of Hummingbird Hawkmoths scattered throughout the islands. The autumn saw both Pearly Underwing and Convulvulus Hawkmoth, trapped in South Uist yet the biggest excitement for moth enthusiasts was the number of species potentially added to the islands' list. An incredible 19 species of macro moth caught this year are possibly new to the Outer Hebrides (no data available at the moment 1980 – 2004).

This sudden increase is partly down to the diligence of two new observers; John Kemp and Chris Johnson now regularly trapping at opposite ends of South Uist. Chris at Ardivachar is arguably in an enviable position to pick up migrant moths and this year recorded two new immigrants for the islands; Bordered Straw and White Speck in late May / June. This same period also saw the first records of Cinnibar Moth, Drinker and Lempke's Gold Spot from South Uist.

Not to be outdone Lewis came up trumps with their own host of additions when in the last few days of June, Michael Maher and Tim Skyes hired a generator and took a mercury vapour light trap into the Castle Grounds in Stornoway; the results of which were superb. This inspired and long-over due exercise added no less than 7 potentially new species to the Outer Hebrides list; Peach Blossom, Lunar Thorn, Beautiful Carpet, Clouded Border, Green Arches, Coronet and Grey Arches.



Dun-bar (Steve Duffield)





Chestnut (Steve Duffield)

Other potentially new species added in the second half of this year include Dotted Carpet from Lewis; Golden-rod Pug, Bordered Beauty, Dun-bar, Chestnut, Yellow-lined Quaker and Uncertain from South Uist.



*Donacaula mucronellus* (Steve Duffield)

In contrast with their larger cousins there was only a single new species of micro moth added to the list this year, *Donacaula mucronellus*; although there's sure to be a few more in the near future with the fresh enthusiasm around.

For more information on moths and butterflies of the Outer Hebrides please visit: [www.western-isles-wildlife.com](http://www.western-isles-wildlife.com)

Steve Duffield  
County Moth Recorder VC110 (Outer Hebrides)



## Orkney's 2009 Session

I think it's fair to say that we have had a good year for both butterflies and moths in Orkney this year. Unlike some places further south we have had a dry warm summer, and this has been reflected in what has been seen over the session.

In common with the rest of the country we had a large number of Painted Ladies at the beginning of June, which then led to us seeing locally bred Painted Lady in the autumn. Other butterfly species that were seen in good numbers were Small Tortoiseshell and Meadow Brown. I, on one occasion, had a count of 22 Small Tortoiseshells from one location. And on another occasion I had a count of 276 Meadow Browns before giving up counting along a small section of coastal cliff. For Orkney these are high numbers. Several Peacock butterflies were also seen this year, this butterfly being seen on a more regular basis over the past few years.

Moths on the other hand were a mixed bag. Trap catches not being that big on the whole. As I am writing this before I have received all this year's trap records from the Orkney moth trappers, this is the feeling I have received from talking to trappers throughout the trapping session. Notwithstanding this, six new species so far have been added to the Orkney list, and there is the possibility of more to be added once some tailing has been carried out. The new moths are *Phyllonorycter quinqueguttella*, *Pseudargyrotoza conwagana*, *Eurrhypara hortulata* Small Magpie, *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis*, *Triphosa dubitata* Tissue and *Antitype chi* Grey Chi.

This is only a snippet of what has been seen in Orkney during 2009, I will be writing up a more comprehensive report that will appear in the Orkney Field Club bulletin 2010. If you would like a copy of this report send me an e-mail at: [orklander45@gmail.com](mailto:orklander45@gmail.com)

Sydney Gauld  
County Moth Recorder VC111 (Orkney Islands)

## Butterfly notes from Caithness

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Caithness experienced a good year for butterflies.

Once again we had records in spring and autumn for the Peacock butterfly which is relatively new to the county. These were in the Thurso and Dunnet area in spring and in the Dunbeath area late summer.

Another recent incomer is the Speckled Wood and this appeared again in high numbers in particular in Dunnet Forest where I had 9 on one ragwort flower head. By the time I returned with camera in hand this was down to 4.

For once warm weather tied in with the flight period of the Small Blue and a visit to the dune colony at Dunnet Bay turned up over 120 of the butterflies on the south facing slopes. This was late in the afternoon, and a memorable sight to see so many in such a small area. At the smaller

colony at the Castlehill flagstone spoil heap there were 19 on the wing. Numbers at the Scrabster colony were lower.

In August I had another late in the day flier with a Large Heath at 8 pm at night on the moor near my house (Hollandmey). This reflects another sunny day.

We shared with the rest of the UK the wonderful influx of Painted Ladies with records from around the county. I even had one on the island of Swona in June.

The local Countryside volunteers have planted kidney vetch on the stone verges of the new pier at Harbour. Hopefully in the coming years we will find some Small Blue feeding there from the nearby colony. We plan to put up an interpretive panel this summer. This project has been funded by the Caithness Biodiversity Group and supported by Scrabster Harbour trust. Other nectar rich wild flowers have also been planted in what would otherwise be sterile ground.

Mary Legg



Caithness Speckled Woods (Mary Legg)



## Moth-trapping from a beginner's perspective

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It all started one fine sunny afternoon a couple of years ago – I was out recording small pearl-bordered fritillaries when I noticed clouds of black ‘butterflies’ flying around the tops of willow trees around the edge of the heath, next to a large area of recently-felled conifer plantation, but didn’t have a clue what they might be. I eventually came across one that had come to ground – a strange-looking creature with velvety-black wings, a red collar, and a bright yellow abdomen. On returning home and searching the internet, I decided it was a Red-necked Footman, and wasn’t supposed to be here in central Scotland. My butterfly man put me in touch with the county moth recorder, who assured me that they are here, but like many moths are under-recorded. So I bought a book, and started recording any moths I came across during the day – I can’t resist a black hole! One thing led to another, and the knowledge that many more moths are around at night than I would ever see during the day, started me thinking about trapping.

A little daunted by the array (and expense) of equipment available, I asked for advice from my branch committee, and got more than I bargained for – the loan of a Heath trap for the summer! I had to source a battery for it, and opted for a sealed lead acid type designed for use in a model boat – battery plus charger (with red light to indicate when charging is complete) obtained over the internet for a little under £30.



Hebrew Character © Heather Young

Fortunately, being mid-March and still quite chilly, things started slowly. Just one or two moths in the

trap at any one time for the first few weeks – a Chestnut, a few Hebrew Characters, a Common Quaker, a Clouded Drab – all of a similar size and shape, and, having at first been very wary of opening the trap in case its contents redistributed themselves around my conservatory, all very docile and easy to examine at close quarters. In fact one Hebrew Character gave such a convincing performance while playing dead that it almost ended up on the bird table!

So, imagine my surprise one morning in May, when I opened the trap and my first Early Thorn made a bold bid for freedom, and had to be retrieved from the rafters. As the pace picked up, and more moths arrived, I soon found that the easiest thing to do was to take a quick digital photograph of everything and identify them on the computer later in the day. Numbers peaked in mid-August with 33 moths of 14 species, and I now appreciate why I was advised to start with a small 6W actinic Heath trap, and not a Robinson with a 125W MV lamp – a fellow beginner in Aboyne started trapping at the end of July and tallied 3,705 individuals of 109 species, with an average of 75 moths a night!

Most of my moths were of the common, ubiquitous variety – the closest I came to glory was a ‘Great Oak Beauty’, never recorded in Scotland (it was a Willow Beauty really – I get carried away sometimes). Fortunately, Butterfly Conservation equip all their county moth recorders with a standard-issue bubble-bursting pin, a tub of ego salve, and a reference book of pacificatory statements and motivational phrases.

When days started to shorten, and the nights became too long for my little boat battery to last the night, my thoughts turned to upgrading my equipment. I still didn’t want to spend a fortune, so decided to make my own Skinner trap. The internet has lots of examples of home-made traps, some with detailed plans and instructions – I found an old plastic storage box in the garage which had roughly the right dimensions, and set about converting it into the best DIY Skinner ever!

The handles were at just the right height for the light-board (a piece of skirting board), two t-shaped electrical conduits were bolted on to support the perspex sheets, and the internal surfaces were made more moth-friendly by gluing on some



cork floor tiles, the edges finished with silicon window sealant. The only things I had to purchase were a sheet of perspex (£9 but with plenty left over for more traps, or other ingenious devices), and a lighting system. I decided to stick with actinic for the time being (the same trap could be used with interchangeable boards), and sent off for a 40W mains-powered device (£40 with spare tube), although if you really want to keep costs down, a 15W bug-zapper would do fine. Extra insulating tape and a cut-down Coke® bottle, held in place by a hi-tech rubber band, ensures that the business end remains dry, even in gale force winds and torrential rain (yes, I've tried it, and what's more so did a fine December moth (in November of course!)). A bit of chicken wire, or a few strips of wood in the bottom helps to keep the egg trays dry, as puddles collect despite drilled drainage holes, but really that's all there is to it.



Heather's Skinner Trap © Heather Young



December Moth © Heather Young

Late autumn species, apart from several December moths, included Northern Winter Moth, several Spruce Carpets and a November / Pale November / Autumnal Moth (these can only be reliably separated by dissection). As I write in

mid-February, the milder weather recently has brought several Chestnuts and a Pale Brindled Beauty (my first) out of hiding, and I am very much looking forward to adding to my rather meagre garden list (45 species) over the course of 2009.

So the message is simple:

- a) you don't have to go to enormous expense to start moth-ing;
- b) there is plenty of help out there with identification difficulties – branch web-sites, internet chat rooms, and of course your county moth recorder; and
- c) it's a lot of fun! Go on, give it a try – every record is valuable – Moths Count!

Heather Young.

*With thanks to Glasgow & South-West Scotland branch committee, and particularly John Knowler for his patient support. No moths were harmed during the making of this article.*

## Butterfly Gardening

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As an advocate of generously letting Lepidoptera larva munch one's greenery I found myself on the receiving end of their attentions. As a gardener I no longer grow vegetables per se but tend to stick the odd thing in pots to liven up my patio to make it more interesting. To that end I planted purple kale in pots and it certainly gave a change of leaf shape and colour to my display.



Purple Kale #1 (Jimmy McKellar)

One day I noticed a large number of small green caterpillars on the kale and thought little of it.

Later I noticed the same plant had a large number of much bigger caterpillars and a lot less greenery, still I was sure the plant would survive. In retrospect I may have been a bit over optimistic as you can see in the following picture, the hungry horde demolished three whole plants.



Purple Kale #2 (Jimmy McKellar)

What kind of caterpillars can do that I wondered? Strangely it did not occur to me to check the species on the first attack but when it recurred a few weeks later I made sure I checked them out thoroughly. They were Small White caterpillars. I had always thought the eggs were laid singly and that the caterpillars lived solitary lives. But here was a whole group, a huge family! I checked very carefully, counting all the spiracles and noting the position of the black dots and there was not doubt that is what they were. Towards the stage where they get to be full-grown I checked regularly until one day found they had almost all gone. So I searched around and found just one at the top of the house wall under the eaves ready to pupate. I checked tonight (11 Oct 2009) and indeed there are two chrysalises under the eaves ready to overwinter. I am very pleased they are there and I will keep an avuncular eye on them.



Jimmy McKellar

I had better plant more kale next year.

Jimmy McKellar



I heard from my parents on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January about an unusual butterfly encounter they'd had that morning while digging their car out of the snow (up in Elgin). A flash of colour had caught my Dad's attention before it zipped past and disappeared round the side of the house. They later found out that their neighbour had returned home from holiday that day and opened some presents, only to find a hibernating Small Tortoiseshell under the wrapping paper. They'd thought it would be happier outside, so popped it out the front door into near freezing conditions! Hopefully it quickly found some Ivy or a cosy log pile to hide in!

If you find a butterfly hibernating behind your curtains or the wardrobe in the spare room, leave it where it is. However, If the room is heated and the butterfly is quite active it can use up all of its energy very quickly, so it is better to move it to a cooler location such as a shed or outbuilding where it will remain until the good weather comes again in March/April. Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks are the two species most likely to be found while hibernating. The Comma, which is now established in the south of Scotland, also hibernates, but is very rarely found in buildings. There are a few reports of a Red Admirals apparently surviving during mild winters too.

Scott Shanks

## Ringling the Change

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In 19 oatcake I suggested that there must be more Ringlet colonies out there and asked that we all go and search for them. Not much came of that request, though we had a very welcome site found at Bogbuie Wood on the Black Isle near Culbokie by Margaret and Andy which unfortunately does not seem to have survived.

During the summer while taking a short detour from my cycle run to Dochgarroch I saw a butterfly on the woodland track which looked like a Ringlet, it turned out to be just that and was quickly followed by a second some distance closer to Dochgarroch, at Milton of Dunain, a now ruined farm steading. These were just two singletons but I hoped by casting around the area to pick up the colony. The next day I tried again and on the outward trip came across another singleton at the canal beside Torvean Quarry, very close to Inverness. This was getting exciting but despite searching around where I found them on the previous day I could not find any more. On my return trip, even closer to Inverness, I came across a fourth singleton. I was now sure there must be a colony somewhere close by though I have yet to find it.



Craig Phadrig Ringlet habitat (Jimmy McKellar)

A couple of days later while reading an email on an entirely different matter I noticed Al McNee mentioned seeing Ringlets at Craig Phadrig and he later confirmed they had been there for some years. I was unaware of Ringlets up there so I went the following day to see for myself and I was not disappointed, they were all over the site which was just below the Leachkin chambered cairn. The cairn itself of the Orkney-Cromarty round cham-

bered cairn type. I think I am correct in saying the area was at one time a golf course; my older brother suggested one needed crampons to compete at this course. Apparently the ball often landed back at one's feet after an uphill drive. In modern parlance – a steep hill covered in grass and flower sward with a south-easterly aspect, ideal for Ringlets and other butterflies too.

I then heard of a record from the Black Isle, this time from the disused quarry at Munloch. Despite having passed this site many times I seem to have completely overlooked it as it is set back from the road and over a slight incline. It can be found at grid ref. NH654539 and is named Suddie Quarry on the on-line Ordnance Survey “Get a map” web site. It is a small site which will be worth re-visiting this year to confirm whether or not it was a flash in the pan or a well established colony.

On our field trip to Easter Boleskine at the end of July we again came across Ringlets in small numbers in the damp area below the newly created pond. This pond and the surrounding area is certainly worth a second visit and may well hold lots of other interesting records too.

Finally by a stroke of serendipity I chanced to mention to an agency member of staff at my work that I was interested in butterflies so he produced a picture asking;

“What kind it this?”

“It's a Ringlet, where did you snap it?”

Apparently near his home, so another Inverness record, this time from Westhill, Inverness.

All told a remarkable year for Ringlets in our area. The big question for me is, have they always been here and simply been overlooked or are they moving in, or expanding from within, or a mixture of both? I suspect the singletons may possibly have come from the Craig Phadrig colony and were searching for new sites to colonise but that theory would surely be impossible to prove. Either way they do seem to be expanding their range this year. Will they still be around in 2010? We will have to wait to see. Will the heavy snow and sharp frosts this winter be to their liking or could this be the last we see of them for some time to come?

Jimmy McKellar



## Highland Branch Website

The website has existed in its present form for just over two years.

It uses a standard branch template provided by Butterfly Conservation. I volunteered to maintain it because I had basic experience of working with web pages.

Since spring 2008 we have been privileged to receive regular features on moths, with superb images, from Roy Leverton. Roy's monthly contributions enable the home page to be refreshed regularly, and are creating a fascinating archive of species that may be found throughout the year in the Branch area.

Another area of the website that's refreshed frequently is the Latest News page. We are grateful to all contributors. If you haven't contributed before, please consider doing so in 2010.

It's also gratifying to receive enquiries and information via the Contact Us page. Most of our enquiries come from members of the public who clearly aren't enthusiasts or experts, but are perhaps curious about something unfamiliar that they've seen.

In July 2009 the number of visitors to the site peaked at 2,728, an increase of 700 - 800 on the same month in 2008.

One of the things I'd like to do is optimise image sizes and tidy up some of the HTML code so that pages are quicker to download for those who use dial-up or have slow broadband connections.

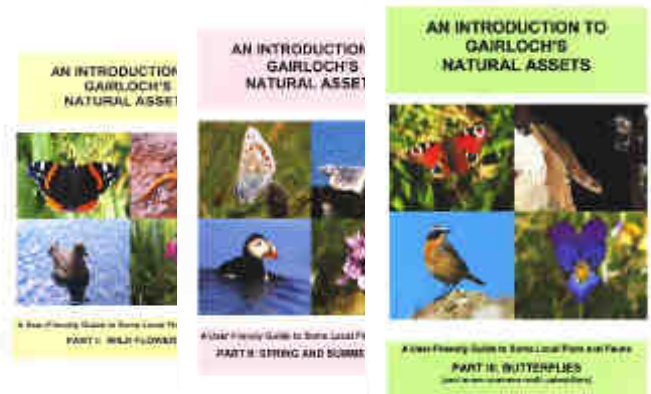
As Jimmy mentions in his introduction, Mike Taylor has volunteered to assist with the website. This is a welcome development, because ideally there should be more than one individual influencing the content and appearance of a site.

If you have any thoughts on the content of the Branch website, please let us know. For example, what would you like to see added, improved or removed? Would you like to contribute content? What about appearance and navigation?

Please send your comments by email to [webmaster@highland-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@highland-butterflies.org.uk), or speak to Jimmy or Tony.

Bill Slater

## Gairloch butterfly guide



This new booklet on butterflies in the Gairloch area is the third in a series called 'An Introduction to Gairloch's Natural Assets'.

Written and compiled by Barry F Blake, the butterfly guide will be available from the end of March 2010.

It begins with a month by month look at the butterflies that may be found in the area, followed by descriptions of recommended sites, with a map and comments on footpaths. Then there are charts showing flight periods, the plants that are favoured by adults, and larval foodplants. Photographs of butterflies, grouped on a colour basis, help to complete the identification process.

The other publications in the series are:

Part 1, Wild Flowers

Part 2, Spring and Summer Birds.

and are available from

- The Tourist Information Office in Strath, Gairloch
- The Gairloch Marine Life Centre, the Pier, Gairloch Harbour
- Gairloch Heritage Museum, Achtercairn, Gairloch
- The Treasure Chest gift shop, Gairloch Harbour
- The Beinn Eithe Visitors Centre (SNH), Kinlochewe
- The Ullapool Bookshop, The Quay, Ullapool
- Bridge Cottage Cafe and Gallery, Poolewe

Parts 1 and 2 are priced at £3.95, and Part 3, Butterflies, is expected to be about the same.

For further information, please contact Barry at [bcb@ancro.plus.com](mailto:bcb@ancro.plus.com)

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