

Issue 5

Autumn 2013

I hope everyone was able to take advantage of the great summer weather in order to record lots of butterflies.

But BC is about more than butterflies. We also care about conserving moths and in this issue I have recruited Greg Fitchett to write an article on his fortunes catching moths this year. Greg has written about moth-ing in West Lothian in 2013.

Richard Buckland

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Wall Brown at Luce bay, Solway Firth
(*Jim Black*)

The State of the Wall Brown in the Lothians *Richard Buckland*

On the face of it, Wall Brown would seem to be the next species of butterfly to be expanding their range north from their stronghold in England as a result of climate change. But a cautionary note should be sounded here, as Walls were recorded in south-eastern Scotland in the mid twentieth century. In fact, Walls had been 'not infrequent in woods in Midlothian' as we noted George Thomson had said in his 'Butterflies of Scotland' book in our book of the butterflies of the Borders (Mercer et al, 2009). As a result of a series of cold summers they declined in the latter part of the century and were not recorded here again until the 1890s, when there is a record from Hawick. It was not until 1977 that they were recorded again in Midlothian. So it would appear their range has been expanding and contracting over the last couple of centuries and perhaps not too much should be read into it apart from the fact that their populations are not very stable. In fact, they are declining at a worrying rate in England at the moment, which is a cause of considerable concern. The problem is mainly that we do not know enough about their ecology to be able to try doing anything about it. However, it does mean that we are rather excited about seeing more of them up here at the moment.

The first I heard of Walls being present in the Lothians was when someone called to say that some had been photographed on the top of Traprain Law outside East Linton and a positive ID was required. These were the photos of Alistair Graham who fortunately had produced photos of a quality that meant their identification was unequivocal. At this time (the summer of 2005) this species was

thought to be absent from the east of Scotland, although well established in Dumfries and Galloway in the west of the country. So this was a notable record indeed and it could not be dismissed as we had the photos to prove it. In recent times they were recorded again in north-east England in the Cheviots in 2000 with several records in Berwick-on-Tweed (mostly around the castle) in 2004. In south-eastern Scotland they were first recorded at St Abbs national nature reserve a few times in the mid 90s and the first record in the Lothians was the one at Traprain Law mentioned above.

It seems that the Traprain Walls were indicating the start of an invasion, as many records in south-east Scotland have followed. There have been dozens of records of Walls being seen by 28 different recorders, mostly from around St Abbs and the Berwickshire coast in general. So far only 31 records have been from inland mainly from just 5 sites (indicating recorder bias?). In the Lothians there have only been a few records since 2005 - 2 in 2010, a further 4 more in 2011 and just 3 in 2012, which might signal a halt in their spread. However, I saw about a dozen in a walk along the beach at East Barns near the lighthouse at Dunbar in June. So I can recommend this as a good site to see them if you are keen to do so.

Refs.

Thomson, G. The Butterflies of Scotland (1980). Croom Helm.
 Mercer, J., Buckland, R., Kirkland, P. and Waddle, J., Butterfly Atlas of the Scottish Borders (2009). Atropos.

My Moth-ing year round Winchburgh, West Lothian *Greg Fitchett*

As a non-motorist and having a tiny garden, my moth-ing is confined to suitable sites within walking distance of home in Winchburgh, West Lothian. Fortunately there are several woodlands, an abandoned landfill site, old quarries and the oil-shale bings in the area and this assortment of habitats produces a few new species for my 'patch'

each year. However, carrying two traps (either 6W Heath or Moonlander) and batteries perhaps 2 miles on occasion, is becoming a struggle for this senior citizen in the evenings and definitely not much fun in the early morning if it is raining when I collect the traps. A dawn walk on a sunny May morning and a trap full of moths is the perfect start to the day.

My moth-ing season began this year on the 17th February with a single Pale Brindled Beauty clinging to the Moonlander and by the end of April only 8 species had been recorded with no double figure counts. May was only a slightly better month, the highlights being Least Black Arches and Pale Pinion on the 16th and Lunar Thorn on the 29th.



Least Black Arches (*Greg Fitchett*)

The month was notable for butterflies, with 8 Small Tortoiseshells nectaring on Dandelions on the 7th May - a heartening sight after several lean years for the species. During a walk to a local quarry in warm, sunny conditions on the 24th May I saw 7 butterfly species including a single Painted Lady and Comma.



Comma (*Greg Fitchett*)

Large Red Damselflies and 2 Four-spotted Chasers were also seen.

On the 12th June came the first new moth for my recording area when a Champion was trapped.



Campion (Greg Fitchett)

A Lime-speck Pug and Turnip Moth are uncommon here but were also recorded. July was an excellent month of heatwave conditions with in excess of 200 moths on several dates and some nice surprises, including *Yponomeuta padella*, *Mompha conturbatella*, Small Dusty Wave, Rivulet and Larch Pug all previously unrecorded species.



Small Dusty Wave (Greg Fitchett)

The fine weather continued for much of August and I put moth traps on a local oil-shale bin on the 8th August (National Moth Night), attracting 280 moths of 35 species to the two 6W Heath traps including Pretty Pinion and Sandy Carpet. This is an excellent site for the target species, Garden Tiger, with 37 crowding a single Heath trap

on the 24th June 2010 and the larvae are often found on the saplings of *salix* in August, but I failed to find any during a daytime search on the 9th August.

My local woodland has plenty of Gooseberry and the Phoenix is recorded most years, but a total of 12 during July and August was exceptional for this attractive species.



Phoenix (Greg Fitchett)

Haworth's Minor was new for my patch and Bulrush Wainscot and Slender Brindle were also notable during the month.

On the 2nd September I recorded 4 Butterbur and a Canary-shouldered Thorn but the onset of indifferent weather and a lengthy stay abroad has curtailed any further moth-ing sessions to date. My tubs of *Nicotiana* are still in flower and I continue to hope for a late Convolvulous Hawkmoth!

My field trips experienced mixed fortunes last year. I seem to have organised them for before the good weather started. For example, I arrived at the outing to Tailend moss with a heavy heart, as the weather was not great. What is more, the MSP for Central Scotland, Clare Adamson, as due to attend. Clare has agreed to act as the species champion for the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary which was the target species on the day. The good news was that I was persuaded to go on a walk round the moss by the other attendees, despite the weather looking rather gloomy and with a few drops of rain already falling. When the sun poked out briefly during a break in the rain, we managed to see a few of the target species (see photo).



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Tailend moss (*Colin Whitehead*)

The bad news was that Clare did not manage to make it in time for the walk, (although we did wait for about 15 minutes!) But the main aim of the outing was accomplished, which was to confirm that SPBFs were still to be found at this moss. We hope Clare will be able to make it to the outing to a similar venue in West Lothian next year to see SPBFs.

Richard Buckland
BC Lothians Organiser