



Lothians Newsletter

Issue 2

Spring 2012

This Spring edition of the newsletter is thinner than the last one, as I feel the need to get this one out before the butterfly season starts in earnest. Consequently there are just two main articles in this edition. I have written an article on the Northern Brown Argus, which is essentially an update on the status of the butterfly in the Lothians but given a Queens Park twist. In addition to this Jeremy and Ellen Wilson have written about their moth-trapping experiences in Humble, which was inspired by Mark Cubitt's article in the previous edition of the newsletter. So I can claim that some good has already come from the newsletter.

I would urge anyone else who would like to contribute to the newsletter not to be bashful and let me know, either on 0131-332 0615, or r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk.

Richard Buckland

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Any more Northern Brown Argus in the Lothians?

Richard Buckland

The Lothians lie adjacent to sites for Northern Brown Argus (*Aricia artaxerxes*) in the Borders, with precious few actually within the boundaries of the Lothians themselves. There is a large colony at Soutra at the northern end of the Moorfoot Hills and they also occur in the Lammermuir Hills beyond Gifford and in the East Lammermuir deans near Oldhamstocks. Other colonies exist locally in the Borders in the Moorfoots in the Longshaw Law area. But in the hope that more colonies exist in lowland Lothian, Butterfly Conservation embarked on a search for new colonies. The primary requirement for this search is an accurate knowledge of the whereabouts of the caterpillar food plant, Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*).

I play golf at Dunbar, which is a links course running along the shore from Dunbar to East Barns. During one of my frequent visits to the rough I noticed a patch of Rock-rose. I told myself to make a mental note to have a look for the eggs of NBA in July when they generally appear. To my considerable surprise, eggs duly appeared. I was surprised because it is such a small patch of rock-rose. The question now arises, where did they come from? The nearest colony to Dunbar is at Pease Bay, five miles or so along the coast, just into the Borders. A friend had told me of some patches of rock-rose in East Lothian, one of which was on the outer margins of the Lammermuir plateau to the north of 'Lothian Edge'. In a brief spell of good weather in June, I was in a position to check this patch out for the presence of NBA, and as luck would have it I saw two adults (see photo).

I was also successful in finding some more rock-rose just inland from Dunbar at Spott. This patch of Rock-rose is exactly between the colonies at



NBA at Lothian Edge (*Richard Buckland*)

Dunbar and Lothian Edge, so I would have expected this to be the stopping off point for the colony that ended up at Dunbar, but no NBA could be found there on a couple of visits in July. More patches of Rock-rose have been found at Sheriff Hall, south of N. Berwick but there were no NBA there this year either, so although more colonies are coming to light in East Lothian, the butterfly is obviously not thick on the ground here. These sites would seem to form a group of colonies at the far end of East Lothian, in conjunction with those at East Lammermuir deans and with those present in the local area of the Borders at Abbey St Bathans.

There is also a colony near Hailes Castle, Haddington, which is still the only one identified in lowland Lothians. But I live in the hope that more colonies will be found.

In order to be successful in that endeavour, we need to know of any patches of Rock-rose in Midlothian.

There is an old NBA record from Roslin Glen and a Rock-rose record from Pencaitland, but I have been unable to find any Rock-rose at these sites. So does anyone have any up-to-date knowledge of the current status of the plant at these sites?

There are also old NBA records from Cramond, Gullane and North Berwick. In the past these were explained as being a result of butterflies being blown across the water from sites in Fife. This was also the BC explanation for their arrival on Arthur's Seat in Queen's Park in 2001, as we know of no local sites they could have come from. So it would be good to have a comprehensive survey of all Rock-rose sites in and around lowland Lothians, so that we can put that particular conundrum to bed.

Vestal (J & E Wilson)



Garden Moth Trapping in East Lothian, *Jeremy & Ellen Wilson*

In the Autumn 2011 newsletter, Mark Cubitt drew attention to the low levels of moth recording in Midlothian and East Lothian. In that context, readers may be interested to know of our moth-trapping experiences since 2006 in our garden at Humble, East Lothian, and we hope that some may be encouraged to respond to Mark's appeal for new recruits!

We use the lightweight Johnson-Ranger moth trap and restrict ourselves to an actinic bulb to avoid disturbing our neighbours. This results in more modest catches than use of an MV trap. In compensation, we usually sort and identify these smaller catches in the morning before leaving for work, and this allows us to trap whenever weather conditions are suitable and so maintain a more constant trapping effort over the season.

We were blessed with beginners' luck when we began trapping in 2006 and late September of that year saw a prolonged period of warm southerly winds and arrivals of scarce migrant moths. We were treated to species such as Convolvulus Hawkmoth (on National Moth Night!), Vestal, Scarce Bordered Straw and Rush Veneer all within a few nights, and our small garden began to feel like the moth equivalent of a bird observatory during a 'fall' of migrants.



Scarce Bordered Straw (*J & E Wilson*)

Of course, such excitements have turned out to be the exception rather than the rule over the long run, but the gradually emerging picture of the moth community in our local area and the seasonal and annual changes in numbers of individual species continues to fascinate. Why do some species fluctuate hugely in numbers between years? For example, our annual totals of Brown-spot Pinion, a pretty little noctuid flying

in the late summer and early autumn, are 92, 7, 83, 8, 106, and 9 whilst our catches of Common Rustics remain much more constant at 60-90 from year to year. Equally, we wonder what explains our occasional records of some species more characteristic of moorland (e.g. Heath Rustic, Grey Mountain Carpet, True Lovers' Knot) – perhaps they are being drifted from the Lammermuir Hills, a few miles away, at times when the wind is from the south.



True Lover's Knot (*J & E Wilson*)

In total, the list of 'macro' moth species now recorded in the garden stands at around 13,000 moths of roughly 230 species over the six years, and includes a few scarcer species in a regional context, such as Scarce Tissue, Muslin Footman, Pale Pinion and Green Silver-lines) as well as some of the more common but striking species such as Garden Tiger, Canary-shouldered Thorn and Pink-barred Sallow that put a smile on our faces every time we see one in the trap. All our records are sent to the East Lothian county moth recorder, Mike Thornton. We are fortunate perhaps to live in an area of extensively managed pasture land and woodland, with a relatively rich moth community flying, literally it seems, past our front door. Nonetheless, our experience as complete beginners just a few years ago is that it is remarkably quick and easy to get started, and make a contribution to improving our knowledge of moth distributions across the Lothians. With

the excellent field guides (e.g. Martin Townsend & Paul Waring's *Moths of Great Britain and Ireland*), superb online resources such as Ian Kimber's www.ukmoths.org.uk and friendly identification help from the experts on the Scottish Moths Yahoo Group (<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/ScottishMoths>), you'll be up and running within just a few weeks. As Mark said, "there is huge potential to find out lots about moth diversity and new species not previously recorded in these counties." So do give it a try!



Green Silver-lines (*J & E Wilson*)



Brown-spot Pinion (*J & E Wilson*)



Muslin Footman (*J & E Wilson*)

In the previous edition of this newsletter, I asked everyone who had an email address and who would be happy with me informing them by email that a new edition could be read online, to let me know. By posting future editions on our website (eastscotland-butterflies.org.uk), the branch would save a lot on postage, allowing more of our funds to be dedicated to the conservation of butterflies and moths. That request was very successful in that of the 170 BC members in the Lothians we now have the email addresses of 70 of you. That obviously leaves 100 copies of the newsletter I have had to send out this time but I hope to reduce that by half in time. So please, all those whose mind it might have slipped, send in those email addresses now! Very many thanks.

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BC Lothians Organiser

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