

The Butterfly Observer

Cornwall Butterfly Conservation Newsletter No.55



**Butterfly
Conservation**



**Celebrating our 20th Anniversary
1993 - 2013**

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1. Chairman's Message

Well, after what was a cold and disappointing Spring, and a difficult late start to the Butterfly season, we have all been surprised and delighted with what has turned out to be a wonderful summer weatherwise, and one the best Butterfly seasons for many years!

As usual some species have fared better than others, some achieving numbers not recorded for several seasons, and all rounded off by a huge influx of Clouded Yellows covering most parts of the County. Let's hope it all continues for 2014. The big disappointment is our failure to have any confirmed recorded sightings of the White Letter Hairstreak, after finding eggs in February at two sites in East Cornwall, and believing them to have been absent from the County for around twenty Years.

Our Field trips have been extremely well supported this Summer - all undoubtedly helped by the better weather, and excellent numbers of Butterflies have been found at nearly every site. We look forward to seeing you all at our AGM on 15th March 2014 - please come along and support your Committee, enjoy our speakers and help to eat the pasties!!

I (and many other members) have been in contact with BC Head Office over the last year, enquiring as to the status of the breeding group that has been formed in Cornwall, some members of which are also members of CBC. For the sake of clarity the Conservation Committee of BC have now provided a statement for CBC members which is included in this issue of our Newsletter. I hope this will provide reassurance to those members who were unsure of the breeding group's position.

Best Wishes to you all, Philip Hambly

2. Cornwall Breeding Group

Statement from the National Conservation Committee

The Committee has been notified of the formation of a Cornwall Breeding Group and wishes to make it clear to Butterfly Conservation Cornwall Branch members that the Group is NOT a part of Butterfly Conservation (BC). It has different aims and priorities from BC Cornwall Branch, which remain focussed on restoring habitats for threatened species and for butterflies and moths in the wider countryside in line with our Regional Action Plan.

The Committee is pleased that BC's Chief Executive has been in dialogue with the Cornwall Breeding Group and hope that they conform to BC's codes and policies on Breeding and Species Restoration. However, as the Group is not a part of BC, it has no control over their activities.

Dr Jim Asher
Chair
BC National Conservation Committee

3. Editorial

After the disaster of a summer that was 2012, it has been a fantastic year for butterflies, both nationally and locally. This summer has seen more Small Tortoiseshells than have been seen in many a long year. My major buddleia bush at home has had up to 20 at a time in late August and early September. The Wall has done well, at least in the second brood and the migrants have done well, Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady being seen across Cornwall.

Some Cornwall Branch members saw a Monarch on the Isle of White in June.

Lee Slaughter and his older son Robert have seen 50 species of butterfly this year, travelling as far afield as Norfolk to see the Swallowtail and Kent for the Long-tailed Blue.

Only the second ever Cornish record of Silver Washed Fritillary *f.valezina* was seen and photographed at Cabilla Woods by Adrian Langdon and Dave Conway, and Paul Fenn saw not one, but two halved gynandromorph Silver-studded Blues. Pictures of both can be found later in the newsletter.

You will, if you turn to the back page, notice that there have been a number of resignations from the committee during the summer. Leon Abbott finds himself unable to continue, Paul Browning has resigned after many, many years service and I myself am not able to continue. This will be my final newsletter.

And lastly, although I could not confirm what they were, I did see 3 small, brown butterflies flying around the tops of the elms at Torpoint in late July. I like to think that they were White-letter Hairstreaks. Roll on next summer.

Penhale Adventures

Paul Fenn writes: "It was while on was on one of my regular walks through the dune system at Perran/Penhale on the seventh of July that I spotted what I thought was a Silver Studded Blue with some sort of aberration up near Perranporth golf course. I took a selection of the usual shots just for ID purposes later, it was only when I posted it on the Cornwall Butterfly Forum that Lee Slaughter kindly (and excitedly) identified it as a Halved Gynandromorph Silver Studded Blue, half male the other half female!



What came as an even bigger surprise happened six days later on the thirteenth of July whilst I was walking down in the main area of the dunes, when i spotted another. Armed with the knowledge of what it actually was this time, I was

far more excited, although I guessed people would be sceptical, after all this is apparently a 'once in a lifetime sighting' if you are lucky..... if only some of that luck wore off on my lottery tickets!"



Both photographs copyright Paul Fenn 2013

Congratulations Paul, Lee is right, these butterflies are very very rare. The application of extremes of temperature to the pupae is often said to produce aberrations Perhaps the warm weather may have had something to do with it, particularly if the pupae were in a micro-climate that got really hot?

4. Silver-washed Fritillary *f.valezina*

This unusual form of the Silver Washed Fritillary was found in Cabilla Woods by Adrian Langdon, who was with Dave Conway, who got most excited!!



Lee Slaughter confirmed the identification (and also got excited!) because this is only the second record of this form of this butterfly to be recorded in Cornwall. This form of the butterfly is said to occur frequently in the New Forest, Hampshire, but is rare elsewhere. Frohawk was so enamoured of this form that he named his daughter Valezina, and dedicated his book, *Varieties of British Butterflies* to her.



The pictures of the f.valezina in the text and on the cover were all taken by Adrian Langdon and are his copyright.

I have shown a picture of the common form of the Silver Washed Fritillary for a direct comparison.



6. Field Trip reports

Fieldtrip to Bunny's Hill 11th May, 2013.

Lee Slaughter writes: "At least 20 hardy enthusiasts kindly turned up with hope of seeing Bunny's Hill's special butterfly, the Pearl-Bordered Fritillary. The sky was grey and it was quite windy & we spent 2 hours patiently examining nearly every part of the site but alas no butterflies of any description were found despite a few sunny spells. After Britain's coldest spring for at least 50 years it was hardly surprising given that the daytime temperature was only 9C (48F) and every night had seen the temperature drop to near or below freezing. The managed parts of Bunny's Hill were looking very good indeed with 1000's of violets coming through the bare ground cleared during recent management work which hopefully is good news for the Small Pearl-Bordered & Pearl-Bordered Fritillaries who need fresh violet plants on which to lay their eggs.

We did find some lovely primroses of several different colours & learnt the difference between 'thrum-eyed' primroses & 'pin-eyed' primroses. My grateful thanks to all those who turned up on this cold & windy day."



The target on the day, sadly absent.

Fieldtrip to Perransands 15th June, 2013.

Over 20 people attended with hope of seeing some mid-summer butterflies on a sunny but windy afternoon. Phil Boggis kindly stepped in at the last moment to assist me due to the huge area to be covered on these vast dune systems, to deputise for Dave Thomas who had gone down with a flu bug the day before.

It was quite windy & we spent nearly 4 hours walking down to, and then exploring, the familiar lower lying areas to the west of St. Pirans Cross and also seeking out the best of any areas sheltered from the persistent wind. We saw Dingy Skipper, several very fresh Silver-Studded Blues, Common Blues, Speckled Wood, Small Copper, Wall, Small Heath, Small Tortoiseshell, Large White, Small White & Green-veined White, a perfectly fresh Brown Argus & a very late Grizzled Skipper. Mullein Moth larvae were seen as was a half grown Dark Green Fritillary larva, and the larva of Drinker moth, Garden Tiger moth & Grass Eggar. A number of interesting moths were found including Chinese Character & the pyralid moth, *Pyraustra Cingulata*.

The walk back to the cars turned up the rare wild flower, Mountain Everlasting which is only found in Cornwall & South West Britain at this locality. Many photos were taken on the day & have been posted on both our Cornwall Butterfly Conservation website forum and our Facebook page.

Many thanks to everyone who turned up including the gentleman who told me that he had not previously seen a Silver-studded Blue before coming on this fieldtrip and was delighted to have seen it now here for the first time in his life! Everyone eventually ventured home having seen quite a bit of Cornwall's wildlife and feeling somewhat windburnt.

7. MY SQUARE (SW 4426). Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme.

Richard Clegg writes: "I clamber over the granite stile and follow the small stream under the dense canopy of oak and sycamore. A soft green light dapples the path through the translucent leaves. I won't see any butterflies in these first transect sections, apart from one or two Large Whites if I'm lucky, But who cares, when in such lovely surroundings!

I soon emerge onto a track in bright sunlight. From here on there will be no shade. It's early July, 21 degrees C, no cloud and a light SE breeze. In the hedgerows of bramble, nettle and cow parsley on either side I start to count the Meadow Browns and the occasional Red Admiral, Ringlet and Small Copper.

I'm heading north to a small hamlet, seemingly lost in time, where a pack of scruffy dogs follows unnervingly on my heels. Some butterflies are flitting along walls and in the small gardens of the farm buildings. I pass the last building and head west for a short while. To the right are splendid views of the Penwith Moors with the silhouette of Ding Dong Mine perched on the top. Lands End is not far away. About 2 miles away to the left is the sea, where holiday makers will be lining its shores. On this walk I don't see a soul.

I turn south now, dropping gradually down along the hedgerows of large mixed fields where the counts become more abundant. I climb over a high wall (short-cut to save tramping alongside cottage vegetable gardens) and land myself in Section 8---always the best for butterflies! I'm not disappointed with the good variety.

Downwards towards the 2nd farm on my patch, but I don't see the farmer this time..... only his dog which barks incessantly. Through his tidy yard and I open a field gate and walk slowly past his peaceful Aberdeen Angus herd. The year previously he gave me permission to use this route but he hasn't told me he's since tarred the gate at the other end to stop trespassers coming the other way! Never mind, I manage somehow.

A different landscape now, the path leads past wizened lichen covered trees and out into marshy ground, an abundance of vegetation. Here I count mostly Meadow Browns. I push myself through an almost unmoveable gate and onto tarmac which takes me back to the Pottery Studio and Café, where I began.

A pot of tea and a portion of their superb Treacle Tart with cream ends a most enjoyable survey!"

Thank you Richard, beautifully put. (Editor)

If any of you out there would like to get involved in the W.C.B.S. Please contact Jim Barker, details on the back page.

8. Walk this transect with me ...

Jim Barker writes: "You're the butterfly man, aren't you?" Viv Jackson, St Martins farmer, was the man with the question, and the writer was indeed the butterfly man. Helen Smith, Viv's partner, walks the island transect but was up in Higher Town for the morning. We agreed that I should return to Sandy Lane cottage after lunch. If you have walked through Middle Town on this island you will probably have seen the bird list outside their cottage. Viv also does birdwalks for visitors.

At 2pm we set off up Sandy Lane, evergreen trees on each side stopping to talk to Viv who pointed out the swallows nesting in the barn. Apparently there had been some real fights over nest sights with swallows wrestling on the ground outside the barn that morning. We continued to the top and completed a loop around the wooded section.

This brought us back into the lane facing west looking towards the top of Tresco and we walked down past a couple of chalets to one of the farm fields. Section two commenced with two fields at least one of which is a hayfield covered in wildflowers and Common Blues a little later in the year. The section continued as we turned east and walked along the top of the island through the area known as The Plains. A cuckoo flew past, identified by Helen. It had been calling around the back of the beach earlier. As well as an area there is also a house called The Plains and we turned right at what is almost a green roundabout to come out onto the island road next to that house. The new Community Hall was being completed and looked very smart although there were a lot of builders' materials still surrounding it.

For the third section we crossed the road and entered a farm field. The field sloped downhill with a view across to St Marys and came to School Lane and the primary school. From here we walked down to the coastal path that runs behind Lawrence's Bay and the St Martins flats. This area at low water gives the *impression* that you could wade across to St Marys. At the highest and lowest spring tides of the year there is a walk which does exactly that although I believe you have to be prepared to get very wet. From the path we could see the fields of Scilly Organics (Jonathan Smith's farm) and a yurt! This will be used as tourist accomodation in the future.

Finally we walked across another couple of the farm fields, turning uphill and back towards Middle Town. One of the fields sloped very steeply and at the bottom there was a small copse of various deciduous trees, all planted by Viv. At this point I saw my second Small Copper of the walk. The only species we had seen. The weather was sunny but also windy and cold and just like the mainland everything on this Friday in the middle of May was a long way behind.

The transect started in 2012 and achieved the highest number of Meadow Browns in the county: 1219, and was second only to Upton Towans in the number of butterflies: 2407 against 2547. Other highlights: Small Copper 172, Common Blue 177 & Speckled Wood 282. This last is a sub species on the islands with deeper orange spots (*Pararge aegeria insula*) Total species seen were 13. The fields are organic and the climate is mild so conditions for butterflies are good. Helen completed paper records on the transect report forms and posted them to me for uploading to the Transect Walker program UKBMS uses for all UK transects.

My thanks to Helen Smith for a very enjoyable and instructive afternoon and a nice cup of tea."

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