The Butterfly Observer

Cornwall Butterfly Conservation Newsletter No. 44



Meadow Brown ab. *alba,* Pendoggett, North Cornwall, 25th July 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis. See page 10.

Butterfly Conservation

Autumn 2009

Editorial

Firstly, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Adrian Bennetton for a £50 donation to our local branch in memory of Donna Whitlock who passed away suddenly on the 16th February. It is most appreciated. Adrian says: "Donna was so full of energy that she amazed us all."

We would also like to thank Tim and Sandy Dingle for their donation of £135 raised at their 'Garden Open' day this year. Their hard work and efforts are appreciated by us all.

A number of CBC members have asked whether our Butterfly Atlas is still in print, and if so, where it can be obtained. You may find a web-link on our static web-site to Pisces Publication at: http://www.cornwall-butterfly-conservation.org.uk/ From there, please navigate to the 'Butterfly Atlas' page where details on how to order on line can be found. If you prefer, you may contact them on 01635 550380. The order-on-line site is: www.naturebureau.co.uk/shop and the ISBN number is: 1874357-23-4

I would like to draw your attention to Barry Ofield's article on page 8 as this will add much to our knowledge of the breeding habits of this migratory butterfly.

Roger Lane's close observations have settled the argument about winter breeding of the Red Admiral in Cornwall - see page 4.

Two interesting articles by our chairman, about the benefits of rabbits and the distribution of the White-letter Hairstreak can be found on pages 3 and 13 respectively.

CBC Secretary, Maggie Goodere, writes about a rainy weekend at Upton Towans on page 12 and our 2009 field trip reports are on pages 14 - 23. ~ Ed.

Chairman's Report – Summer 2009.

Yo, here we are again. Autumn is setting in with the leaves on the trees turning slowly from bright green to a dull drab colour. Once again we have had indifferent weather this summer, in fact, the wettest July for nearly one hundred years followed by an August of maybe average temperatures, but certainly not a heat-wave summer (as someone foolishly predicted last year).

Field Trips 2009.

We've been lucky to have struck good weather on most of our set field trips, skillfully picked out by Lee Slaughter. May I just say, very enjoyable days and people again. Unfortunately our annual trip to Tim Dingle's wildlife and formal garden at Bude to demonstrate butterflies was met with some big rain storms. We merrily did our best in this lovely garden of great diversity which has been carefully constructed by Tim, but the weather was against us. We were however, for a short while, able to see **Marbled Whites** and early **Commas** flitting around his field before the weather set in.

We are now into the Marsh Fritillary monitoring season and as usual, any numbers or comments on webs seen will be a good rough guide to its population success, which seems very good in Cornwall.

I've just found a new Internet site called, ***Magic.*** This is a site that gives 6 figure map references which is very handy when doing records at the end of the year. Everybody ought to try it!

Well, all in all not such a bad season as last year. **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** did quite well at flight time except at Bunny's Hill. **Marsh Fritillaries** were ok

for weather. **Dark Green Fritillaries** did well at Gwithian (over 130 seen on our field trip) which was also attended by our local MP, Julia Goldsworthy, who showed great interest in everything she saw, including **Dark Green Fritillaries**.

~ Phil Harris, 24th August 2009.

Rabbits, Friend or Foe?

Whenever we are looking for butterflies we encounter rabbits. “Look at em go”, we are often heard to say, rarely thinking of what good or otherwise they may be doing, so let us, without prejudice, consider some interesting scenarios. Firstly, what does it cost if rabbits are good for butterflies and their habitat? Of course the answer is nothing, neither in money or time. They seem to live and die by their own rules, greatly predated on by foxes, buzzards, stoats and badgers and that most awful disease, myxomatosis. They are so self-regulating in fact, that unlike butterflies, they are rarely counted or worried about; they just seem to happen.

We, as a society, do not like or dislike them, and they rarely upset us, but they do, however, upset the farmer and the gardener, so have we been missing a trick here? Are they working for us and butterflies more than we give them credit for? I have just been to my local sand dunes, and although it was not warm enough for the Brown Argus to be found flying, I did notice an abundance of its food plant, Dove’s-foot Crane’s-bill (*Geranium molle*) flowering in the very short sward along with Thyme and Sheep’s Fescue etc. This plant could not exist on the sand dunes without continual grazing. This is only one example, another is the Large Blue, which I have just read about in Malcolm Lee’s brilliant paper, ‘The Occurrence of the Large Blue Butterfly in Cornwall’ where, in one original observation, the person searching in the long lost past, looked over the Tidna valley where the Large Blue was known, clapped his hands, and it seemed as if the whole valley moved as the rabbits scattered across the hillside to the safety of their burrows. Rabbits were such a pest in those days that thousands, from the same area, had to be killed and eaten every year, but of course they kept the turf short, which suited the butterflies’ requirements. Then myxomatosis was imported and we have struggled ever since to maintain short grasses cheaply.

The alternative is to use sheep, ponies or cattle requiring increased welfare, rules and regulations. This has become almost unsustainable in the real world, but heresy, to suggest we maintain the rabbit! I was reading the other day that in this country there was a person called a ‘Warrener’ whose job was to look after a place called a warren which was a raised bank with a wall around it and lots of plump

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Please note deadlines for contributions are as follows:

- **Winter issue: 1st February**
- **Spring issue: 1st May**
- **Autumn issue: 1st September**

rabbits! His job was to dig the holes, keep out predators and that included hungry people (poachers). Imagine what your favourite site would look like without some kind of check on growth. I have found that rabbits don't eat Violets, Devil's Bit and Bracken - now that's very handy as certain butterflies rely on these plants for their development. Ironically the one place that hasn't got a lot of these 'fluffy tailed things' lately, is Bunny's Hill near Bodmin.

So, in my opinion, we do not appreciate these unsung heroes of our countryside enough, but do I hear you say, "Why do that, the countryside has plenty?"

~ Phil Harris, August 2009.

Winter Breeding of the Red Admiral in South Central Cornwall (2006/08).

By Roger Lane – CBC's Migration Officer.

Introduction.

Although over-wintering of the Red Admiral is not a new concept, being postulated perhaps 50 years ago, even a decade ago it was not fully accepted by everyone. Here in Cornwall I have been seeing over-wintering Red Admirals for 25 years now in numbers from singles, to a colony of 30 to 50 at the 'best' locality. I have seen numbers in EVERY month of the year at many localities, admittedly fewer in the colder winters, but on sunny mornings I have even seen them flying across snow in December. Due to our winters, and natural mortality, minimum numbers fly in the months of January, February and March, however, if one knows where the wintering colonies are, always in micro-climates (natural or man-made), they may easily be sought out on warm sunny mornings when the ambient temperature climbs above c.10 degrees C. with no wind-chill, particularly after clear nights with frosts giving sun all morning and, seemingly, the 'correct' (low) degree of moisture in the air. Early cloud or even rain can ruin potential flight. I could write pages on over-wintering, however, this article is on the breeding of new adults between January and February, at least in 2006 and 2007.

In retrospect, I realise now that the first British emergent Red Admiral I ever saw was on 21st February 1998, at a site 2 kilometres inland, in the Ponts Mill Valley, thus it is not entirely new or unprecedented. Ponts Mill is of course an annual over-wintering site where I have never known Red Admirals to be absent through the winter. On that February day a pristine strongly coloured Red Admiral was 'dashing around' the valley and remained a complete mystery to me, not only me but also to Mike Thomas, who wrote the BBCS's book "The Red Admiral" (1997). Since both of us had our earliest dates for immigrant Red Admirals around mid-March (even those dates being very early). Just to expel a few myths re migrant Red Admirals, I once believed that none of these butterflies emigrated out of Great Britain after mid-October, until 1995, after my year-long study of Red Admiral migration, nor did I believe any Immigrant Red Admirals arrived in Britain until mid-March. (A few have rarely been seen at coastal bird-observatories in late February, but usually during southerly winds, such that they were probably blown off the northern continent i.e. involuntary migrants). Just to revise my estimates, after another 15 years

study I believe that minimal emigration can occur, under ideal (exceptional) conditions until mid-November, when I have seen several leave our shores though hardly 'en masse'! Yet the prevailing conditions (sun plus northerly wind) probably ensured they reached the Northern Continent. Regarding immigrants into Great Britain, the earliest I suggest are still mid-March, but more relevant to winter-breeding is that they will occasionally immigrate 'en masse' and reach the south coast of Cornwall (at least) safely until the first week of November (three recorded occasions) and I have seen them struggling north, overland, into the 2nd week of November (1995). These late immigrations may explain why so many winter along the south Cornwall coast, that is TOGETHER with the numbers which 'emigrate' south overland in late October, but may not have the reserves to cross the English Channel, but enough on migration, although I have several foolscap sheets on the subject, especially for 1995!

Winter Breeding of the Red Admiral.

The whole concept of winter breeding had not been entertained by myself, or anyone else for that matter, despite the Red Admiral being a 'continuously brooded butterfly'. Several workers, particularly Mike Tucker and recently David Nash, had been examining non-adult stages throughout the winter, that is the larvae - most instars found at least through December into January, and even pupal cases later in the year, but these were mainly in Sussex and Surrey, away from the 'perfect' coastal micro-climes of the South West. Nevertheless, final instar larvae and pupae showing red were found in South/South East England in March, but as far as I know no emergence from pupa was witnessed in winter, in the wild. Emergence there in the South East may PROBABLY be as early as March. This leads to a problem of distinguishing between early immigrants and newly emerged 'home-grown' adults! This is the case in the South West too, after an 'average' winter!

However the winter of 2006/7 and 2007/8 were hardly 'normal' winters. In Cornwall, they were some of the mildest on record. The sequence of events as I see them begins in late autumn 2006. After a good year in general for Red Admirals, numbers were swollen further by late southward 'emigration' (that is overland, at least as far as the south coast) in October, AND late immigration during October (both witnessed, RL). This led to high numbers near to the coastal strip (at least in south central Cornwall, east and west of St. Austell. In particular the superb, large micro-climate (with an inner, even more sheltered 'sanctum') at the north of Trenarren village (2 kilometres south of St. Austell, ref: SX033489) held 40 to 50 Red Admirals in late October, and 30+ around mid November. During October/November many courtship chases were witnessed, as many as 6 pairs in the air together (small chasing large) usually rapid but with slower periods of almost 'helicopter-like' hovering, all this in a private residence with a huge garden and 100ft trees which, at the time, I had permission to make observations, this has since been rescinded! This was "Trenarren House", formerly the residence of the Cornish Historian, A. L. Rowse, also, and to a lesser extent "Stablelodge" next door, which shares the mature tree belt. The gardens and lawns are mostly completely sheltered from the coldest winter winds from the north and northeast and open only to the (warmer) south and southwest winds. Trenarren House is 1 kilometre north and

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within sight of the English Channel. Both gardens have many (scores) of winter flowering shrubs and plants, too numerous to mention, the most important to Red Admirals being the many *Mahonia sp*. (in "Stablelodge") and *Bergenia cordifolia* (at the lawn edges of "Trenarren House"). The former (*Mahonia sp*.) produces abundant nectar through to late December but rarely into January. The latter (*Bergenia sp*.) gives nectar almost throughout the year particularly in December, January and February. Unfortunately, my permission to visit both gardens has now been rescinded ! However some 50 metres away to the east (fork left along the rough track and then turn left into the track (gates) which leads to Ropehaven House (deserted in winter) is my "stinging-nettle path" to which I still have access, but in 2009 the number of Red Admirals seen in January was ZERO and FOUR in February, due to frost having burnt off all the winter nettles (and incidentally, the garden Bergenias!). Compare this to 2006/8. I think it safe to say there was no winter emergence in 2009! Possibly March, since it was witnessed, in the wild, on 7th April 2009 in Surrey (private e-mail).

Virtually NO larva or pupa were seen, or searched for, during the winter other than one small larva and a larval 'tent', both along the nettle path, since I had not even considered the idea of winter breeding and thus any pre-adult stages! Yet ovipositing by females along the nettle path was commonplace at least through until November annually!

The BIG SURPRISE came from 14th to 16th January 2007 inclusive, when the temperature increased several degrees (to c.14 degrees C.) and the sun came out, following a cloudy first ten days of January when only three single Red Admirals were seen along the Trenarren nettle path, each faded over-wintered samples. Only on the 15th January 2007 did I realise what was happening since, pristine Red Admirals began to appear, basking on the nettles. The first one was seen among just 3 on 14th January 2007 (on which date I presumed it was simply a fine immaculate, over-wintered example, albeit totally un-faded with bright red markings). The next day, 15th January 2007, there were SIX new, pristine Red Admirals among just 8 and on 16th January 2007 there were 10+ pristine Red Admirals among a total of 18+ imagoes!

This was evidently a 'major emergence' due to the sudden increase in ambient temperature, together with sunshine. Some of these were now away from the nettles and nectaring on the garden Bergenias, enough to make counts confusing, in mid-January! It was not just their appearance which made them 'freshly emerged', their behaviour was subtly different, in that the basking (on 15th/16th) was such that all pairs of wings were absolutely parallel, 'ruler-straight', and obviously at right angles to the sun. This I interpreted as 'post emergent wing-drying'. Imagine how important it is for a strong migrant to have wings 'set' dry, perfectly flat and parallel. None were 'bent' up or down from the parallel, quite a sight, all catching the sun at the same angle! Furthermore, the newly emerged adults would stay out longer (than the over-wintered minority). When the sun went in; it was more difficult to interpret, but thought perhaps to be a further aid to wing-drying, possibly by way of the (warm) breeze. The ones seen nectaring in the garden were feeding avidly (on the 3rd day), and were by no means small, or dwarf, from early emergence, indeed there were several obviously large, (taken to

be females). The weather then deteriorated and fewer were seen. The only other count was of "20+ Red Admirals on 5th February 2007" (undifferentiated).

The winter of 2007 was the 'prime' year for early Red Admirals with reports from all over the country. The most important 'up-country' report was of a PAIR seen mating in January or February 2007 (via Nick Bowles BBCS Recorder), which as he stated 'gave substance to Roger Lane's reports of early emergences' (since over-wintered specimens would have been mated long ago, in 2006), and only fresh specimens would be looking to mate as soon as possible. That concludes most of the 'new evidence', which I have, other than subtle nuances. I feel that the phenomena must have occurred at other localities here in Cornwall, and probably other counties (particularly in the New and Asholt Forests of Hampshire, where reports suggest a plethora of Red Admirals in January and February 2007). It seems unlikely that my study area should be the only site in the country where the phenomena has occurred! It is more of a problem of the Red Admiral's unique life-cycle, and the lack of time to observe it, together with the secrecy with which it undertakes its life e.g. mating seen LESS than ten times ever (in Great Britain), the first was in Cornwall on 5th December.

The event was repeated, to a much lesser extent in January 2008. This time, a few days later on the 17th January 2008, see below, (but apparently NOT in 2009 - the coldest winter for this decade. The only POSSIBILITY was a glimpse I had of a dark, hairy-bodied Red Admiral-like butterfly, which tried to alight on me, hence never in focus, before 'disappearing' as quickly as it came, but this was 16th March, 2009! (At Trenarren).

In 2007/8 a somewhat colder winter (though still mild), led to a lesser emergence, slightly later on, with FOUR pristine Red Admirals on 17th January 2008, along the same nettle-path, in sunny weather. The weather then broke down through the remainder of January such that emergence of new individuals (among surviving over-wintered specimens), was prolonged and on a lesser scale. Nevertheless, the following identifications were recorded: 2 new Red Admirals on 21st January 2008; 1 on 24th January 2008; 3 on 26th January 2008; 2 on 27th January 2008 and 2 on 29th January 2008. The weather, and mixture of 'old and new' Red Admirals made me look elsewhere, nearer home, and led to a new discovery.

I was in the habit of calling in at Biscovey Church (St. Blazey) to keep track of one or more over-wintered Red Admirals. To my surprise the one which seemed to have wintered alone, was joined by a single, pristine specimen on 12th February 2008 and this was followed on the sunny 13th February, by at least 4 more. Red Admirals have over-wintered there for years, but due to a lack of nettles (basically), I had no reason to suspect breeding! Yet here they were, far too early for immigrants (which would not be found in close proximity once arrived). Although a month later than the Trenarren specimens, they were also over 1 kilometre inland. Subsequently I have found the nettles, many in surrounding farm fields; hence, this was a second winter-breeding locality (at Ref: SX055537), possibly used regularly, but with varying degrees of success.

A third over-wintering site (regular over 10 years) which unexpectedly produced a new brood in early winter months, is the Mount Edgecombe Hospice grounds and gardens, but detailed recording in these very private grounds, was

difficult, certainly they over-winter in double-figures with both Mahonia and flowering shrubs to provide winter nectar, surrounded by farmland with nettles, but I believe this was in March. (Ref: SX027512).

These three are the recently discovered breeding sites from January to March, although breeding was not even suspected before 15th January 2007. The amount of over-wintering activity (and, in retrospect, my first ever winter sighting of a newly emerged Red Admiral, on 21st February 1998), makes Ponts Mill (Lanlivery), ref: SX072563 an absolute certainty for both over-wintering and winter breeding. This site is some three and half kilometres inland, but is only 10 metres above sea level!

In addition to these four 'proven' sites, many other regular wintering sites exist in the south of Restormel. Typically, they are at sites with walled gardens, or protecting buildings, southwest facing and surrounded by mature trees, preferably deciduous but Pine/Fir is also acceptable. Needless to say, nettle beds must also be in the vicinity and winter nectar plants (beyond December) are an added bonus.

Roger Lane. 25 Warwick Drive, Buckler's Village, Holmbush, St. Austell, PL25 3JJ.

The Painted Lady *Vanessa* (*Cynthia*) *cardui* Migration - the Follow up Story.

All our readers and most of the public will have been aware that 2009 saw one of the largest migrations of Painted Ladies ever recorded, as they arrived all the way from Morocco in their millions and spread throughout the country. The following article is a once in a lifetime record of the astonishing number of larvae found in just two fields on the North Cornwall coast.

A farmer friend had mentioned at the time of the migration that he had seen a cloud of Painted Ladies flying in his fields in the early evening whilst attending his sheep and approximately 3 to 4 weeks later he asked me what the larvae fed on, I told him that thistles were the favoured food plant, the next morning he called me to say that I should go immediately and see what had occurred in his fields and the sight that met me was to say the least staggering! Every thistle plant in the two fields was covered with Painted Lady larvae and in order



Painted Lady larvae on Thistle, Higher Hendra Farm, Pendoggett, North Cornwall, 28th June 2009. Photo © B. Ofield.



Painted Lady larvae on Thistle, Higher Hendra Farm, Pendoggett, North Cornwall, 28th June 2009. All that is left of this thistle are a few spindly leaves and some frass. Photo © B. Ofield.

to have this fantastic sight corroborated I called Malcolm Lee as he lives very close to my home and we visited the area.

Malcolm was also stunned by numbers and how small the thistle plants were and we discussed how we could give a realistic estimate of the larvae present in the two fields. We decided to pace out 10 square yard sections in both fields and count the number of thistle plants per square and the number of larvae per plant, the second field had a greater density of larvae per plant than the first one i.e. (5 per plant in field A and 7 in field B).

Malcolm obtained exact field measurements by using the Google earth measuring tool, which showed that the two fields covered 19 acres and the ensuing calculations gave a figure in excess of ½ million larvae in the two fields and we both believe these estimates to be very conservative.

With the help of Butterfly Conservation National, the BBC Autumn Watch team came to film this amazing spectacle and spent over 4 hours filming the devastated thistle plants and also the nettles round the field edges to which great numbers of larvae had moved due to the shortage of food plant remaining in the fields. Some larvae had already pupated very low down in the grass and clover. One of these was filmed together with a newly emerged adult and a very worn and tattered specimen probably from the original migration.



The Silver Y moth (*Autographa gamma*) has stripped these Lupins bare, leaving just the seed pods! Photo © B. Ofield, 18th July 2009 .

About 120 larvae were taken by me to rear through so that a reasonable assessment could be made as to the timing of the mass emergence (these were all released back into the wild).

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The BBC team had been in touch on an almost daily basis as they wished to film the emergence and on the 25th (one of the few sunny days in July) they arrived at 6am and stayed until 8pm, filming the wonderful sight of Painted Ladies all over the fields. It was also fortunate that on that day a Cornwall Butterfly Conservation field meeting was being held at the Delabole Quarry which is fairly near to the fields and some of our members were able to witness this amazing sight.

It is probably worth mentioning that the farm is organic and so none of the fields had been sprayed, and the farmer, having taken the first cut of hay from these fields earlier, was the reason why the thistle plants were only about 12 inches high. He did show me another field where the thistles were much larger i.e. 2 to 3 feet and all these plants had also been devastated!! So the number of butterflies in the area is mind boggling!

On the same farm, Field (Grain) Lupins were being grown as a feed additive for cattle together with Clover etc. These fields covered some 30 acres and having walked over large areas of these, almost every lupin plant had been stripped of its leaves by the larvae of the Silver Y moth *Autographa gamma* (Linn), leaving only the seed pods, which was a blessing as these are the main source of nutrients. An estimate of the number of moths that could have emerged in these fields was not calculated but it would not be dissimilar to the Painted Lady numbers or even greater.

Also feeding on some of the lupin plants were Painted Lady larvae. This would seem to be a new food plant unless the shortage of normal food had driven them to eat anything available.

As most of you will recall, July was a very wet and windy month which could have had a detrimental effect on the survival of the larval and pupal stages of these butterflies, but although it would be impossible to estimate the numbers that did emerge, there were without a doubt tens of thousands of adults spread evenly over the two fields, many of which were just fluttering in the grass and not flying. (Flying being the normal habit for such a strong butterfly).

My thanks must go to Phil Roose (the Farm owner) for his interest and forbearance as without this a great number of people would not have been able to witness what I believe to be a once in a lifetime experience.

Look out for Autumn Watch on the BBC as I feel sure you will see some excellent pictures of this great sight, that is, if they don't end up on the cutting room floor! ~ Barry Ofield, August 2009.

As Barry explains in his article, there was a CBC field meeting that day a mile or so up the road at Delabole Quarry so a few of us decided to see how the BBC camera crew were getting on filming the Painted Ladies. It was an amazing sight with freshly emerged butterflies in every direction especially along the dividing hedge between the two fields where most of the butterflies could be seen. It was on this hedge that the aberrant Meadow Brown, featured on the front cover, was seen. I took the opportunity to take a few photographs (see opposite). ~ Ed.



A freshly emerged Painted Lady highlighted against the late afternoon sky at Higher Hendra, Pendoggett, N. Cornwall. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



A 4th instar Painted Lady caterpillar. This specimen was found on Common Nettle after migrating from stripped thistles at Higher Hendra, near Pendoggett. There were literally no thistles left to feed on and so the hungry caterpillars were devouring anything remotely suitable. (See previous article). Incidentally, this caterpillar is similar to the Red Admiral with its yellow markings on the abdominal segments, the Painted Lady having crescent-shaped markings. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



A pristine Painted Lady at Higher Hendra, Pendoggett nectaring on Clover. (Thistles and Clover appeared to have been the preferred nectaring plants). Photo © P. H. Boggis.

A Rainy Weekend in July for the Upton Towans Field Trip!

A Report by our Secretary, Maggie Goodere.

After a long period of glorious weather with butterflies flying in great numbers on the dunes, we woke to the sound of heavy rain. Our hearts sank because it was the 4th July and the day of the Upton Towans Field Trip when Julia Goldsworthy MP was expected to join us following our Chairman, Phil Harris, making contact with her. We were hoping to show her this wonderful butterfly habitat in all its glory!

By the time Julia and her partner, Chris Church (a dab hand with the camera), arrived at our house, the sun was emerging and we had great hopes! There was a good turnout with 18 people turning up, despite the unpredictable weather, and the butterflies were beginning to appear.



Along side Paul Brewer, Julia Goldsworthy MP is seen taking an avid interest in Dark Green Fritillaries during her visit to Upton Towans.

We were able to show Julia **Silver Studded Blues**, which had passed their peak but were still present in significant numbers and some recently emerged **Dark Green Fritillaries** as well as **Skippers**, **Small Heaths**, **Meadow Browns** and **Ringlets**. We also found **Painted Lady caterpillars** obviously laid by the butterflies during their recent invasion. Julia proved to have a very good eye and put this down to her bird-spotting days. She was familiar with the area and had fond childhood memories of the dunes (by one of those strange coincidences her aunt apparently lived in our house!) She told us that she remembered blue butterflies although at the time she did not know what they were.

Unfortunately about an hour into the walk there was a very dramatic cloudburst. We were all absolutely drenched and Julia and Chris did not have adequate rainwear so reluctantly decided to leave (Julia had several other engagements that day). The rest of us had a vote as to whether to continue and our decision to do so was rewarded by the sun coming out in time for our picnic when we dried out in the sun and, more importantly, it brought out large numbers of **Dark Green Fritillaries** (at least 80-100 sighted), a wonderful sight covering some of the warm slopes!

I made contact with Julia's office after the trip and she confirmed that she

is happy to be contacted about butterfly issues in the future. She clearly has an interest in the environment and I feel will be a very useful person to contact with our concerns. She also managed to get an article about her trip into the West Briton



John Gregory taking up the rear as a party of 18 butterfly conservationists climb the dunes at Upton Towans.

which was great publicity for us!

Visit to Tim and Sandy Dingle's Garden.

The following day we had another engagement when we went with Phil Harris and Chris Hylands to keep an eye on the Butterfly Conservation stall at the home of Tim and Sandy Dingle. They are part of the National Garden Scheme and for the last few years have dedicated the proceeds of one of their days to CBC. It was another wet and windy day but fortunately we had a place undercover in the garage. The gardens proved to be absolutely delightful, the refreshments delicious and during the few breaks in the weather we were thrilled to see **Marbled Whites** (not present in our part of the world) and the odd **Silver-washed Fritillary** in the nearby meadows as well as the usual suspects in the garden. I am sure the weather limited the number of visitors although there was a steady trickle, but we had a very enjoyable day with opportunities to purchase plants and would thoroughly recommend a visit in the future. Thank you Tim and Sandy!

~ Maggie Goodere, July 2009.

White-letter Hairstreak

Where are the Cornish White-letter Hairstreaks? Are there any, and what are our chances of finding them? Elizabeth Goodyear, working for Butterfly Conservation, has been searching all the counties of England and is still finding new colonies as far west as the outskirts of Plymouth along with another interesting area in North Devon at Lynmouth and Lynton; we must have them somewhere! over....

One afternoon this year, in early August, I found time to search Grogley Halt, a well-known old site for this species. I had noticed Wych Elms were still there and are easily searched for by walking along the Camel Trail. They are important as the preferred trees for breeding and I did see, fairly high up in the branches, one small butterfly of the right size, but it could have been a Purple Hairstreak (a common problem). I recommend this site to be searched again next year.

Later, in good weather, I went to Maker Heights near Torpoint where, last year, I was looking for Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. I believe I saw some Wych Elms, but unfortunately these trees were all dead/or dying due to Dutch Elm disease.

A couple of miles away is the small village of St. John and there I found a lovely big English Elm next to the church. Unfortunately, no butterflies were seen after an hour of watching with binoculars. Incidentally, it looked as though the first branch was showing signs of die-back and also on the leading shoots. Unfortunately, this will result in the tree's demise within a couple of years and that would be a shame as this was the biggest Elm I have found.

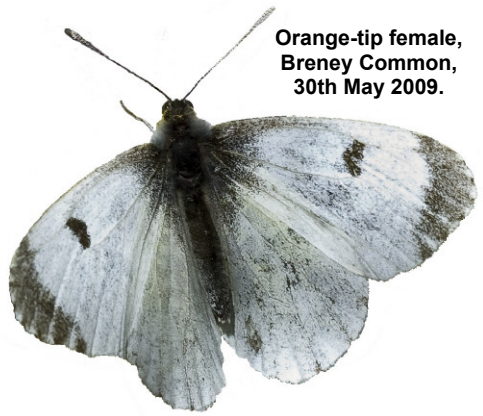
It seems that we will have to keep on trying to look for this species possibly without any guarantee of success, but I'm sure if we put our heads together we will, one day, find this elusive little butterfly.

~ Phil Harris, Chairman, Cornwall Branch, August 2009.

Butterfly Field Trip Reports - 2009.

By Phil Boggis.

By and large the weather treated us fairly well on the three trips Lee Slaughter and myself were leading at Breney Common, Penhale Sands and Kynance Cove. The latter was a particularly enjoyable one with glorious sunshine throughout and a group of people that showed great interest in all aspects of the flora and fauna as also was the case with our other field trips. This adds so much to the day's enjoyment so our thanks go out to you all.



Orange-tip female, Breney Common, 30th May 2009.

Breney Common, 30th May 2009.
Once again a glorious sunny day as about 20 of us met at the car park just outside the reserve. We took the usual route, bearing left just past the entrance gate and were soon greeted by the welcome sight of a **Marsh Fritillary**. As we fanned out in all directions, many more were spotted, much to our relief. (You will know doubt recall the population crash of recent years on this site). Discussing this remarkable comeback, John Gregory and I believe a lack of predation and a dry, warm

April probably helped the few larval-web populations to all come through to the adult stage - nature is very resilient! Other species seen were: **Painted Lady** (an abundance due to a recent influx), **Orange-tip** (About 4 were seen and photographed, all females. It has been a rather extended season for this butterfly). **Speckled Wood, Brimstone** (male), **Small Heath** - which always seems to do well on this site. **Small Copper, Red Admiral and Green-veined White**. Amongst the moths seen were: **Silver Hook** - another species that does well here. **Silver Y**, **Mother Shipton**, **Flame Shoulder**, ***Elachista argentella*** - a small white moth whose larvae feed on various grasses. ***Cydia succedana*** - The Gorse Moth, a very common but very small moth that flits about amongst gorse bushes on sunny days. It has now been re-named ***Cydia ulicetana*** (Haworth 1811) after the recent discovery that the English populations differ in their genitalia to the European species and it is now therefore classed as a different species! This change is presumably due to geographical isolation, however, for all intents and purposes, it looks just like the continental species and has the same biology, so many of us will probably still call it ***Cydia succedana****;* old habits die hard. There is a photograph of the moth in issue 41, page 10 and in this issue, at the top of page 20. Other moths seen include: ***Glyphipterix thrasonella****,* **Speckled Yellow**, **Marbled Whitespot**, ***Bactra lancealana***, **Straw-dot**, **White-pinion Spotted, Glyphipterix fuscoviridella** and **Small Purple-barred.** This latter moth was mentioned by Leon Truscott, our VC2 County Recorder for moths, over....



Small Purple-barred, Breney Common, 30th May 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



***Elachista argentella,* Breney Common, 30th May 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.**

whilst I was chasing around trying to photograph a **Silver Hook.** He said he saw the **Small Purple-barred** during a day out and tried, I believe, to photograph it, but as soon as he got near, it promptly upped and flew on a few yards till he could not follow it any farther. Soon after our conversation he had to leave us, whereupon a number of our party decided to explore the upper fields and promptly returned bearing a **Small Purple-barred** in a pot to be photographed! (See previous page). I will not mention what Leon thought about that!



Marsh Fritillary ♀ Breney Common, 30th May 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis



Steve Jones from the Cornwall Dragonfly Group and his family joined us at Breney Common and he kindly identified this as the Four-spotted Chaser. From its behaviour of sitting on a twig and then chasing anything in sight, I could see it was aptly named. Note also the four spots on the wings. Photo © P. H. Boggis.

Penhale Sands - 20th June 2009.

Another reasonably sunny day greeted us at Gear Farm, our usual meeting place for this field trip, which is usually well attended as can be seen from the photo opposite. After negotiating the semi-circular forcing-pen gate, we all made our way along the track that leads across to St. Piran's Cross, about half a mile away. This landmark can be a useful rendezvous if one gets lost!

As we approached a small stream where larger populations of **Silver-studded Blue** can be found, we noticed another group of people making their way in the opposite direction. They turned out to be a group headed by Sir David Bellamy, the well known broadcaster, environmentalist and botanist. He was conducting a guided tour of the dunes for the holiday-makers at the local caravan site.

It seems incredible how many **Silver-studded Blues** there are in so many small pockets - all across the sheltered dune slopes, amongst the Marram grass. Those taking photographs were spoilt for choice! It was nice to see a **Garden Tiger**

and its caterpillar, a species that has much diminished in some parts of the country during the last 30 years. The moth was found amongst the Hemp Agrimony and Fleabane. continued over....



Pictured here before they set off across the dunes are from left to right: Bernard Hocking, John Gregory, Marilyn Edyvean, John Cook, Joyce Gregory, Adam Jones, Lynn Jones, Steve Jones, Gilbert Thomas, Pauline Penna, Malcolm Lee, Peter Coleman, Chris Barnard, Dell Netherton, Lee Slaughter and Mary Cockerill.



***Pyrausta despicata,* Penhale Sands, 20th June 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.**



***Pyrausta cingulata,* Penhale Sands, 20th June 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.**



A declining species, the Garden Tiger, Penhale Sands, 20th June 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Silver-studded Blue male, Penhale Sands, 20th June 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.

If you have a computer, an article about this beautiful species, and well worth reading, can be downloaded at:
http://mothscount.org/uploads/Moths_Count_Newsletter_2009(2).pdf - scroll down to page 5, you will of course, have to have Adobe Reader loaded onto your machine!

Two quite small day-flying moths of the ***Pyrausta*** genus were also seen flying close to Thyme, namely: ***P. cingulata*** and ***P. despicata.*** The caterpillars of ***Pyrausta despicata*** feed on various plantains whereas ***Pyrausta cingulata*** is associated with Thyme. Both species are double brooded. Several years ago the spring brood of ***P.cingulata*** was everywhere across the dunes . I had never seen so many in one place. This is indeed a remarkable habitat! Butterflies observed were: **Painted Lady, Large Skipper, Small Heath, Silver-studded Blue, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood** and **Small Tortoiseshell.**



Enjoying the beautiful sunshine at Kynance Cove are from left to right: Malcolm Lee, Ann Skidmore, Steve Jones, Adam Jones, Lynn Jones, Peter Coleman, Bernard Hocking, John Cook, E. A. Paull ? A. Pooley ? Richard Vulliamy, Paul Brewer and Keith Wilson? My apologies for not getting all your names right.

Kynance Cove - 8th August 2009.

This was an excellent field meeting with marvelous weather and a good attendance (about 20). A most enjoyable and informative time was had by all. This site always brings surprises and the first butterfly to greet us as we walked from the car park was a second generation **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** with many more to be seen as the day progressed. Kynance Cove is a strong-hold of the **Grayling**, one of the target species for the day, and as soon as we approached the cliff edge, several were 'got up' in front of us; they are so cryptic!

Our aim was to make the old serpentine quarry by lunch time. It is a fairly steep climb down to the flat bed of the quarry but still some 100 feet above sea level. It is here that we have found, in the past, the highest concentrations of **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** and we were not disappointed this time. Also seen was an early instar caterpillar of the **Fox moth**. It loses the yellow banding at the final (5th) instar. The caterpillars are often seen on various heathers where they will

feed up until October when they seek a sheltered place to hibernate, probably amongst leaf litter etc. It is my opinion that they choose the detritus under Heather where it grows over bare rock. This is because such places are sheltered and protected but still have plenty of air flowing through them. If not exposed to the winter weather as such, they would probably succumb to fungi disease and if too dry will literally shrivel up! On page 20 is a photograph of ***Agonopterix rotundella***. My first impressions were that this moth was ***Agonopterix kuznetzovi*** which inhabits the Lizard, and as its Russian sounding name implies, is a native of the south Ural mountains. It apparently does not occur anywhere between there and South West England! Below and on page 20 is a picture gallery of species seen.

over....



Second generation Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in cop. Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Grayling, Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. This specimen, a female, obliged us by posing for many photographs. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Early instar Fox moth caterpillar on Heather sp. Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. Note the dark velvety texture of the final instar beginning to show. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



2nd Generation Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary posing for a photograph. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Cydia ulicetana **(Haworth, 1811) - formerly C*ydia succedana.* Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis. (See page 15)**



Pictured through a plastic container, is this pretty pyralid moth, *Endotricha flammealis.* Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



This striking looking caterpillar of the Knot Grass moth was found on Plantain. Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Agonopterix rotundella, **named after its rather rounded termen. Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.**



This picture gallery would not be complete without this beautiful view of Kynance taken from above the serpentine quarry and looking south. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Seen here getting down to some serious photography is Lee Slaughter our Field Trip Organiser. He is photographing a mating pair of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. Kynance Cove, 8th August 2009.

Two other field trips must be mentioned, namely: **De Lank Quarry** and **Delabole Quarry,** the former for a sizeable colony of **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** found both along the sides of the quarry and the footpaths along its edge and to the south of the entrance to the quarry, but still in its grounds. Some clearance work by Tim Dingle and the Fritillary Action Group at this part of the site produced several specimens (see photo below). Other **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** were seen along the flood plain of the De Lank river to the south of the quarry and is overlooked by Pendrift Downs. It must be very heartening to see this species doing so well here.

Delabole Quarry. This is one of the few remaining eastern inland colonies of the **Grayling.** They can be found all along the southern edge of the scree slope over....



Pearl-bordered Fritillary. (The white segments on the hind-wing did not look as if they were due to wear). De Lank, 21st May 2009. Photo © P. H. Boggis.



High Brown Fritillary, Dunsford Reserve, Devon, 8th July 2009 (see page 22). Photo © P. H. Boggis.

of the old Delabole Quarry spoil heap. Dave Conway expertly guided us around the site which also turned up a few late **Marbled Whites** which have had an extended flight period here this season.

Finally, although nothing to do with our CBC trips, I must mention a day out to **Dunsford Reserve**, mid Devon with Dave Conway and Lee Slaughter to observe the **High Brown Fritillary.** Firstly, our thanks go to Dave for getting us there and then showing us around. We both very much appreciated his expertise and help.

Lee was seeking to see all the British fritillaries in one season after his holiday to the Isle of Wight where he saw the **Glanville Fritillary**; he was not disappointed.

Dunsford Reserve is overlooked by managed violet and bracken-covered slopes where undoubtedly, the **High Brown Fritillary** breeds. I stood for an hour and a half by a bramble patch waiting for a specimen which was observed earlier nectaring, to return, which it duly did. The photograph on the previous page was taken with my camera at the ready! I also saw a Red Admiral ovipositing on Nettle and managed to get a photograph as well. (See below). Several local people monitoring this reserve were there to note the fortunes of the **High Brown**



Marbled White, Delabole Quarry, 25th July 2009. This specimen gave Steve Jones and myself the run around before we managed to take a reasonable shot! Photo © P. H. Boggis.



Red Admiral egg on Common Nettle, Dunsford Reserve, Devon, 8th July 2009. The egg is only about 2mm high and the nettle leaf was waving about in the strong breeze - a difficult photo-graph to take! © P. H. Boggis.

Fritillary this season, especially after two poor years. They noted, and mentioned low numbers compared with other years (no more than 10-15 compared with an average of 30 in most other years). We all hope that butterfly numbers will recover for next season, especially as the Devon Wildlife Trust has been granted £44,100, to mange the **High Brown Fritillary**, one of Britain's rarest butterflies. To read more about Dunsford Reserve, please visit: http://www.wildlifeextra.com/do/ecco.py/view_item?listid=14&listcatid=169&listitemid=2089#cr



Standing by the Delabole Quarry Visitor Centre are at the rear from left to right: Lee Slaughter, Dave Conway, Paul Brewer, Bernard Hocking, John Oates, Mr J. Vernon? John Gregory, Jenny Evans, Marilyn Edyvean and Nicola Morris. In front: Steve, Adam and Lynn Jones.



A view of the managed bracken and violet-covered slopes at Dunsford Reserve.
Photo © P. H. Boggis.

~ Phil Boggis, August 2009.

The opinions expressed in the articles of this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Cornwall Branch, or Butterfly Conservation.

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