

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

Cumbria Branch

Newsletter No. 20
Spring 2010

Butterfly Conservation

DEDICATED TO SAVING WILD BUTTERFLIES
And MOTHS IN THEIR NATURAL HABITATS

BRANCH CHAIRMAN ROUND UP.

I start the newsletter with the sad news that John Strutt our President and Richard Little, one of our longest serving members have both recently died. Both were great supporters of the branch and will be sorely missed, an article about each is to be found later in the newsletter.

It has been a wonderful winter (so long as you like proper winter weather I suppose !) the fells have been covered in a thick blanket of snow under blue skies for weeks on end and the tarns, rivers, and some major lakes have been frozen solid. It will be interesting to see how the butterfly populations respond to an entirely natural weather pattern this coming spring and summer.

We have done some good habitat management work at a number of sites throughout the winter. Witherslack Woods in particular looks great after finally completing the long ride from Howe Ridding to Witherslack Hall School, cutting two more glades and generally tidying up.... I hope the Fritillaries that are the focus of our work here like it just as much as I do!

Despite some poor weather we have had good attendance at our work parties, ending with a bumper turn out of 19 at Witherslack Woods on 14th March. Many thanks to everyone who turned out to help, it has been a real team effort. A special thank you is due to Jean Ellwood who has supplied her superb, freshly baked rock buns on every occasion.

We have once again, been helped by staff from the Environment Agency at Penrith, with work parties at Braithwaite and Witherslack woods, and by the National Park volunteers with a great turn out for a work party at Braithwaite. Working with people from like minded organisations, that share our goals to improve wildlife habitat, is something we must do more of.

Butterfly Conservation is currently planning the 'road ahead' for the next decade or so, it was therefore a pleasure to welcome national council member John Dover to our February committee meeting. Each branch is being consulted by a council member to determine what happens 'at the grass roots,' what we need by way of support from head office and how we can in turn support them. It is a healthy sign I think, that such local consultation is taking place and I feel it can only have a positive impact to the work of the organisation.

Details of our AGM are to be found later, we have changed venue to Braithwaite in the centre of the county this year. We hope to welcome the regulars as well as some members who may otherwise not feel like travelling down to the south lakes area. Please support the day if you can and if this is not possible there are details of a full programme of summer field trips to see the 'Cumbrian specials'

Following comment from a member, we have also published our work party dates for next year, these are the second Sunday in each month, September to March inclusive.

Hopefully advance warning will be helpful to people who would like to attend work parties but find our dates clash with other commitments. It is not possible to give work party venues at this time as work plans need to be developed and consents obtained.

Finally, David Ellwood and Peter Boardman have served their term of three years on committee and so they will resign at this years AGM as required by branch rules. Both have been an absolute pleasure to work with.

If there are members that would have an interest in joining the committee & play a part in directing the branch, or if further information is required please contact me before the AGM.

Best wishes to you all, have an enjoyable summer

Steve Clarke

Branch Chairman.

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FIELD TRIPS (and AGM) - 2010

Yet another 'bag of goodies' this year and designed to see many of our Cumbrian species. Do come along, they really are good days out.

Sunday 23rd May – Warton Crag, 11.00 am.

Meet at the big quarry car park. From the M6 J35 take the A6 north past Pinr Lake resort then first left to Warton village. Turn left in the village then right before you get to the church, go up the hill and the big quarry is about 1km on the right – SD492725.

Target Pearl Bordered fritillary and Dingy Skipper.

Contact; Rob Eddleston, 015395 324590, and Jennifer Newton.

The walk is uphill with some steep sections. Strong footwear advised.

Sunday 6th June – Annual General Meeting at Braithwaite Moss, 11.00 am

This will be held in the new field centre there and followed by a field trip on site. Follow the A66 from Keswick towards Cockermouth. Pass junctions to Braithwaite on left and Braithwaite Moss is on the right hand side by farm buildings, about 1km. Parking available at the farm/site entrance – SD232248.

Wellies are essential for the field trip.

Contact; Steve Clarke, 01946 725828.

Sunday 13th June – Irton Fell, 11.00 am.

Park at the old quarry car park 1 mile from Santon Bridge on the Esdale Green road. It is on the left just after a sharp left hand bend – NY122013.

Target; Mountain Ringlet.
Contact; Steve Clarke, 01946 725828.
Some hill climbing so walking boots and warm clothing advised.

Monday 14th June – Township Plantation, 11.00 am.

Bracken bashing essentially, but we might see some butterflies too. Coming from the Gilpin Bridge on the A590 take the A5074 then 2nd left into The Howe village. Turn left in the centre at the top of the hill then bear right on a bumpy track. Enter the wood and park at the first clearing – limited parking, SD454885. This is a work party so stout footwear, rainwear, warm clothing, lunch. Contact; Sarah Bradley, 015395 52340.

Sunday 4th July – Glasson Moss, 11.00 am.

At Kirkbride on the B5307 from Carlisle drive north on the Bowness on Solway road for about 3km to NY230601. If time permits the group will move on to the nearby RSPB Reserve at Bowness.

Target; Large Heath
Contact; Jackie Foot 07752 379 803.

Sunday 25th July – Barkbooth Lot, 11.00 am.

From Bowness (the Windermere one this time) take the A5074 towards Crosthwaite south of Winster. Just past the Damson Dene hotel take a very sharp right onto a very minor road for about 1km. Turn left at first junction and park on roadside verge – SD416907.

Target; Various fritillaries.
Contacts; Sarah Bradley, 015395 52340 or David Eastlick, 015395 32076.

Sunday 8th August – Arnside Knott.

For another unforgettable day at this ‘mecca.’ Turn left up the hill from the centre/sea front in Arnside. Turn right into Redhills Road, following the NT signs the after about 1km veer left up the hill to the main NT car park.

Target; Scotch Argus and lots more.
Contact; Sarah Bradley, 015395 52340 or David Eastlick 015395 32076.

WINTER WORK PARTY DATES.

It may seem a bit premature to be talking about next winter but to help with your advance planning please put the following dates in your diary.

12 September 10th October 14th November 12th December

9th January 13th February 13th March.

Venues, meeting place details will be in the Autumn newsletter.

Steve Clarke

JOHN STRUTT

John Strutt, a true conservationist, has been the president of our branch since its formation. He has been a great supporter over the years and donated generously towards the costs of practical habitat management work for the Marsh Fritillary and in South lakes. John did not enjoy good health in his later years but retained a keen mind and would often ask pertinent and thought provoking questions to keep us on our toes and moving in the right direction. He will be greatly missed, especially by those like myself who had the privilege of working with him on committee issues.

John developed his great love of nature on the family sporting estate at Kingairloch in Argyll. After completing his national service, he obtained employment with the land registry after which he came north to work at Dalemain where his expertise as a shot and fisherman, his warm heartedness and quickness with words opened many doors. When his father passed a share of the family property to him, he bought Hartley Fold, near Kirby Stephen and settled down as a farmer.

As John's interests in wildlife conservation broadened, field sports appealed to him less, and he gave up shooting and fishing. Instead he enjoyed creating wildlife habitats, digging a series of large ponds in a wet meadow at his home Eden Place, as the nucleus of what is now a substantial area of wetland surrounded by woods that John himself established.

This led on, in the 1990's, to the decision to stop farming Hartley Fold commercially and instead put it into trust for wildlife. The whole objective was to safeguard the wildlife already present and to create steadily improving conditions so that an increasingly diversity of plants, insects birds and other animals would make these places their home.

The John Strutt Conservation Foundation, which now manages over a thousand acres of wildlife habitat was the result.

John will be a great loss, not only to our branch, but to conservation in Cumbria as a whole.

Steve Clarke

Richard Little

Richard sadly died on 29th September 2009 after bravely fighting a lengthy illness. He was very much a stalwart of Cumbria Branch since its creation back in the early 1990's and was a regular at work parties for many years. He also enjoyed many Summer field trips up to the time when the head had to rule the heart. In fact right up until the day he died he was one of our Marsh Fritillary captive breeders. I like to think this last year particularly gave him a great amount of pleasure to see the full life cycle of the butterfly day by day in the cage in his lovely wildlife garden. The sight of many adult Marsh Fritillaries flying freely in that cage this last Summer was, I am sure a delight for him at a time when he was mostly unable to go out into the field to see the many other

species we have in Cumbria. Over the years Richard managed to see and photograph all the British species of butterflies in the wild but north Cumbria was where he settled in retirement and where he was greatly involved in all forms of wildlife. He wrote a monthly wildlife garden column in the local *Cumberland News* and gave many slide show talks over the years. He was also an active member of Carlisle Natural History Society for many years.

But, though his butterflies were special to him it was moths which were his very special passion in wildlife terms. Very few people had the wealth of moth knowledge that Richard had. I shall miss him very much, but will always be able to recall many special days out we had together over the last 20 years.

Richard who was aged 73 sadly lost his wife Liz several years ago but latterly was very happily married to and is survived by Elaine. He had two children, David and Ruth, two grandchildren and a son-in-law. Our deepest sympathies go to all of them from the many within Cumbria Branch who knew him and enjoyed his company over the years.

Steve Doyle



FIRST TRANSPENNINE EXPRESS - GREEN GRANTS SCHEME AWARD

On behalf of Cumbria Branch I am delighted to be able to thank First TransPennine Express (FTPE) for awarding us with a Green Grant of £2000. FTPE operate a rail network which stretches from various parts of Yorkshire and across to Manchester Airport. From there the network reaches Cumbria and travels on via Arnside, Grange over Sands and Ulverston to Barrow. They also operate the branch line from Oxenholme to Windermere. They are therefore our main rail link in South Cumbria particularly with the Manchester Airport route.

First TransPennine Express highlight in their literature that in partnership with the Forestry Commission (FC) they would like to inspire people to make a positive improvement to their community and improve their local environment. The FTPE and FC Green Grants are available for environmental improvements in relation to trees and/or woodlands for the benefit of the community.

Much of the work we are doing in Cumbria Branch is to manage woodland habitat for the benefit of wildlife so that those places become more attractive not only to the wildlife itself but also to human visitors who enjoy their leisure time in such places. It is not only endangered species of butterflies that benefit from our work but other forms of wildlife as well. Wild flowers now abound in the woodlands we are working in. Before that they were becoming dark benign places. Bats benefit from the wider rides and paths, birds, foxes and badgers are obviously benefiting too as well as other insects like moths, beetles and bugs of all sorts and colours.

FTPE and FC have recognised the value of our voluntary work. We welcome others to join our volunteer ranks and help to make a difference to our natural surroundings so that future generations are also able to enjoy seeing what we can see now in our diversity of Cumbrian natural habitat.

The £2000 we have been awarded is being spent on good quality tools and safety equipment. Thanks to this Grant we are able to acquire updated quality power tools for our fully trained operators and more robust hand tools for our 'infantry.' Health and Safety' is vital too so new first aid kits are being purchased along with first rate protective clothing for our power tools people. This fits in nicely with the First Aid training several our team recently undertook.

Thank you First TransPennine Express and Forestry Commission. Together we WILL make a difference to our native woodlands so that wildlife has the chance to survive and so that others may be tempted out of house and home to enjoy the air outside, both fresh and tranquil.

Steve Doyle

**What's Going On
..... with our major Cumbrian Projects**

Small Blues

In previous newsletters we have reported that Small Blues can be found on the coastal strip of Cumbria between Maryport and Workington. In more detail the only actual colonies we have are at Maryport itself and in Workington itself. All along the rest of that coastline we have only a handful of records probably because of the reduced amount there of the larval foodplant Kidney Vetch.

We have also reported on the total loss of the Siddick Pond colony through re-development several years ago and of severe reduction in numbers of Small Blues at Maryport and at the windfarm site in Workington, both due again to developments which did harm to the habitat though not total loss. Both those colonies still struggle on with numbers still well down on what they used to be. By now one would have thought that the numbers within those colonies would have recovered somewhat – but they have not.

It is therefore very disappointing indeed that the remaining large colony at Workington is still under threat on private land and that we have recently heard that further development plans are afoot which will impede still further on the Maryport colony. That could mean that all our Small Blue colonies in the Allerdale area have either been lost already or are in danger.

So what are we doing about it? We are still hopeful that an agreement can be made on the Workington private site. We are not trying to stop it altogether, we are just trying to conserve a relatively small section of the site for butterflies and other wildlife on this exceptional habitat. As I write, we have every reason to believe that this, perhaps with one exception, was the largest Small Blue colony in the UK although after de-commissioning the site recently the numbers of Small Blues we expect have been severely reduced. If we can gain access to the site to survey we will be able to produce figures. All we ask is to be able to reach a reasonable compromise solution with the developers. On the Maryport site it is not all of the breeding area which might be affected but it is nevertheless a well colonised area of it. Planning permission has not yet been requested, as I write, but it is understood that houses are planned for the site. We have already reminded Allerdale that this area was the subject of a Public Enquiry several years ago and the decision was made at that time to

restrict development so as not to include this site. It has also recently been agreed as a County Wildlife site.

We shall, with the aid of others, continue to try to reach a sensible compromise.

Marsh Fritillaries

This is a continuing story isn't it? Well yes it is and rightly so. Since the four reintroductions in 2007 three of our sites have done well or exceptionally well whilst the other has just about stumbled on. I hope I'm wrong but my gut feeling is that 2010 might see us take a bit of a knock as far as those four sites are concerned. We know that historically Marsh Fritillary colonies crash from time to time, peaks and troughs and all that. Generally the reasons given have been that as colonies increase rapidly (they lay batches of up to 200 eggs at a time) there comes a point when the larvae literally eat themselves out of food, many thus starve and the colony reduces naturally then builds up again – simple.

But that is not the reason why I suspect we might be in for a knock in Cumbria this year, though I hope of course that I'm wrong. My reasoning is that one of our largest and most prolific sites lay right in the path of the disastrous path of the River Derwent floods which created much havoc in Cockermouth and Workington. Much of the site having been ravaged by torrents of water then remained under deep dirty water for many days so it will be more than interesting to see how our hibernating larvae managed to cope. Hopefully deep down in the grass roots attached and in waterproof silken webs they survived in reasonable numbers though some will have undoubtedly been lost due to sediment being piled on top. A second colony and marginally our largest last year should be alright however and I've already seen plenty of Spring larvae. However we might still have reduced numbers there as we are grazing the site longer than usual at this time of year in an effort to bring more of the site into the right condition. In other words we might have to sacrifice a few larvae to accidental 'hoof' damage for the overall greater good, but that is how nature works. The West Cumbrian site I shall be surprised if numbers do not fall this year as the area where the Marsh Frit breeds is ever more overgrown. There has been yet another delay in installing cattle grids and hence a delay in grazing to rectify the growth problem. It stands to reason that if nothing happens then the colony will disappear – that's no doubt how it disappeared in 1979 in the first place. The fourth colony will struggle again and might be lost in 2010 but the ESA agreement which was in place has now expired and Natural England are replacing it hopefully with a Higher Level Stewardship agreement which will allow a lot more management flexibility.

The good news, oh yes there is some, is that we plan at least one and perhaps two new reintroductions this Spring 2010 if we have enough captive stock. We need at least 10,000 larvae for one introduction and should reach that but numbers of larvae emerging from winter slumber are slow due to some rather harsh weather to say the least. That has also restricted the growth of the larval foodplant on the reintroduction sites so that's another thing we have to consider in the timing of things. After all that, we still expect

to see them flying by mid May. Right now as I write this on the 9th March I can see heavy frost on my front grass yet again. But, let's think positive.

The Morecambe Bay Limestone Woodlands Project

This of course is being headed up by our Regional Officer Dave Wainwright and assistant Martin Wain. It is a massive four year project though unbelievably we are now getting towards the halfway mark. By now work of some sort has been done on over 20 broadleaved woodlands mainly to widen rides, create glades and scallop out clearer areas of habitat suitable for breeding by species such as Pearl Bordered and High Brown fritillaries though others such as Duke of Burgundy and Silver Washed will also benefit.

The Pearl Bordered is in dire straights at present having been recorded in very low numbers on its already low number of colonies in the Morecambe Bay area straddling South Cumbria and North Lancs. Hopefully the work being done by this project will arrest the decline at the very least but make no mistake we are in very great danger of an extinction here.

The Duke of Burgundy suffered a major decline in transect records in 2009 in the Morecambe Bay area and that was mirrored in the sparse colonies elsewhere in the UK generally. My personal view is that the colony on Whitbarrow Scar did Ok and held its own. It is never seen there in huge numbers in any one place but over a large area of the site the number of singles seen accounted for a very reasonable number in total. In contrast the numbers recorded at the other main colony just into North Lancs crashed alarmingly. I have no reason to suspect this is the case but I am hopeful that the only reason for the crash in sightings there is that it is that the butterflies have moved off the transect routes and into freshly cleared areas not on those transect route.

The High Brown fritillary numbers are again down though we still have rather more colonies than for Pearl Bordered or Duke of Burgundy.

After reading that you will be able to see why this Morecambe Bay Limestone Woodlands Project is so important. We simply have to re-start woodland management or we will lose these already highly endangered species – fact.

Apart from the important work being done literally on the ground by Dave and Martin's organised contractors and volunteer groups, it is also their job to put in place a plan to sustain the work well beyond the four year life span of the funded Project. Without that things will simply stagnate again and we will be back where we started. I am therefore pleased to say a significant amount has already been achieved towards that sustainability aim and more time in future will be taken to continue that and report it in future editions of this newsletter. Several initiatives are already underway, but early days yet to be reporting in more detail. Suffice to say however that we are pleased with progress so far and the fact that several other extremely important partners are committed with us is not only encouraging but vitally important not just for butterfly conservation but for biodiversity in total.

We must aim for Landscape Planning and that is why we are working in so many woodlands. Non inter-connected sites or postage stamp sites only work for a relatively short time in the greater scheme of things. The latter requires a much greater and detailed planned approach.

Cumbria Branch Activity

We in Cumbria Branch are of course fully supportive of the Morecambe Bay Limestone Woodlands Project having banged the drum for it for a very long time. The work we do within the Branch however as far as work parties is concerned is in addition to all the massive work that Dave and Martin organise. Our Branch work involves Marsh Fritillary habitat which is outside of the range of the Morecambe Bay area and which takes us to central, north and west Cumbria. We do however work extensively in South Cumbria as well in broadleaved woodlands but in different areas and doing different tasks. For example we created and enlarged a Northern Brown Argus glade in Halecat Woods just alongside a ride widened by the bigger Project. We also maintain our own area within Witherslack Woods and it was good to see that Cumbria Wildlife Trust have 'hedge laid' the boundary of their How Ridding reserve so that it now harmonises well with the widened ride we did stretching for a mile and a half from there. We continue of course to do more and bit by bit each year we feel we are 'getting there.' Thanks to all the help we have had again from all our volunteers and also from the Environment Agency staff volunteers and the Lake District National Park staff and volunteer group. A fantastic effort by all concerned and much appreciated. It really does make a difference.

Steve Doyle

MOUNTAIN RINGLET

South of the Scottish border the Mountain Ringlet is an exclusively Cumbrian butterfly and so is of special interest to the branch. Apart from the Irton Fell colony, there is no regular or methodical surveys carried out to determine how this special butterfly is faring up in its mountain home. So little is known about the butterflies specific needs or its abundance and distribution, that regular methodical surveys will really contribute to UK scientific knowledge about the species.

I am therefore hoping to set up a number of surveys of the most prolific colonies around the county and would appeal to any members who are able to get up into the hills and who may be interested in helping to get in touch with me. The survey method is likely to be a timed count on a fixed route, and will ideally be done twice, about 2 weeks apart, during the flight season when the weather is fine.

So if you are happy to do one or two fell walks with a useful purpose during mid June to mid July and would like to get involved, please get in touch for more details.

Steve Clarke

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS).

You will be glad to hear that the WCBS will be continuing in 2010.

I am sorry that it has taken so long to let you know but as usual funding has been the limiting factor. As last year, we have little external support for the survey and the costs are being borne largely by Butterfly Conservation with a small contribution from Natural England and support of our partners in CEH and BTO. However, the government agencies have expressed a strong interest in the results and are actively seeking funds for future years. At the present time, therefore, we have to run the survey as cheaply as possible, which means that our time to give support will be somewhat limited.

The priority in 2010 will be to continue recording last year's squares and if possible all previous recorders to carry on or find a replacement although we welcome new recorders to survey new squares.

The feedback newsletter is at the printers and will be with the recorders' over the next few weeks- I am sure you will all really enjoy reading about how your hard work has set an excellent standard for the future of butterfly monitoring in the UK. The feedback document will serve to inform recorders that the survey is going ahead again but if possible your help in passing the message around would be useful. Over the next few weeks I will be organising the following areas:

- Making sure that you all know which squares are available in your branch region
- Like last year, I will forward any new recorders to the appropriate branch Champion
- Preparing the documents (instructions, recording forms etc)
- Making sure all recorders have copies of documents - including copies of the maps if necessary
- Updating the website

You may be wondering why I am writing to you after announcing my departure from Butterfly Conservation? Fortunately the company I now work for (Footprint Ecology) is based in Wareham and has very strong links with BC. Therefore I will be continuing as co-ordinator of the WCBS in 2010 as part of my new job under a contract with BC. **To summarise.....**

- We are continuing to run the WCBS survey this year and next year
- Our priority is to continue recording last years squares and would urge all previous recorders to carry on or find a replacement
- We welcome new recorders to survey new squares
- To contact me by email please continue to use survey@butterfly-conservation.org (my kcruckshanks@ email address is no longer in use)
- Please note the new telephone number 01929 552486.If you have any questions or comments then please get in touch. Best Wishes,
- **Katie Cruickshanks**

‘ Patches ‘ 1km Branch Recording Scheme.

Firstly I can confirm this scheme is continuing in 2010 much the same as it did last year. I was very pleased with the way this new recording scheme got ‘off the ground’ last year and it served two very useful purposes. Firstly it helped us to provide records for a good number of previously unrecorded or under-recorded squares. Secondly because it meant that quite a few members were able to contribute by not really straying far from home or by going much out of their way to provide valuable information whilst at the same time getting out and about with a real purpose.

The WCBS survey described elsewhere in this newsletter is a very similar scheme though a bit more detailed and more random in its selection of allocated squares. Both schemes however are an extremely good way for members to be involved in providing data and both WCBS and ‘Patches’ will be continuing in 2010.

By the time you have got this newsletter those involved in ‘Patches’ should have received their documentation for this year. Anyone not involved last year and who would like to give it a go this year, please get in touch with me. There really is not much to it and in many cases your ‘patch’ can start right outside your front door.

Looking back to last year I did not have time to issue a compilation of ‘Patches’ records sent in to me but all records were indeed sent to the County Recorder in Carlisle and from there on to the National Database. I did not expect many or even any rare species to turn up and that was largely the case although some interesting species did come along like Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, Green Hairstreaks and a Large Heath somewhat ‘off piste.’ Where there were I felt, queries to be made I have followed them up and will try to visit those locations with the recorders concerned this year.

So, here’s looking to decent weather to enjoy those lazy walks through your patch. Remember to review the Guidelines again and use the new recording form I sent you.

Above all else, enjoy your Summer and keep safe.

Steve Doyle

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From Avril and Brian Chadwick's 'world tour' of 2009.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED – Part 1, 12th July 2009.

With eager anticipation we travelled south to Prees Heath in Shropshire for their Open Day at 2.00 pm. We were warmly welcomed by Stephen Lewis (some of you will have met him) and were made to feel like 'celebs' having travelled from the wilds of Cumbria. Within 5 minutes of entering the reserve there were the Silver Studded Blues flitting gently over the stunning bell heather, very rewarding in the warm sunshine. The heath looked so picturesque with carpets of bell heather and birds foot trefoil. Other species of butterflies were seen, Small Copper, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Large and Small Whites and wildflowers including St John's Wort, Knapweed, Evening Primrose and Pyramidal Orchid but the stars of the show were the beautiful; Silver Studded Blues.

Three families had taken advantage of the Open Day and to see five young children between 6 and 8 years old with their digital cameras, and dropping down onto their knees to take close up photos was very heartwarming (we seniors have to bend more slowly!). They were made to feel very welcome by Stephen and other adults in the group. Two young brothers even had a walky-talky and each was comparing what they were seeing with their mum's encouragement.

All together there were about 150 Silver Studded Blues. Three of the people there were travelling to Cumbria later in the year for fritillaries. We hope they will also be able to say 'Mission Accomplished' like we did. Our next trip is to Wiltshire in August and we hope to join a field trip to see the Chalkhill Blue. Read onto 'Mission Accomplished' – Part 2.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED – Part 2, 23rd August 2009.

Brian and I often now travel long journeys in one day to enthusiastically visit a reserve particularly for butterflies but we decided that Wiltshire was just that bit too far! So, we had a short break in a village near Lacock so only a 'stone's throw' from the field trip venue. Maurice Avent the Butterfly Conservation Chairman and our leader for the day had kindly sent us the grid reference for parking. We all know how difficult sometimes these places are to find – or is it just us? (*not just you Avril, some of us even get lost on Cumbrian field trips*)

On a beautifully warm, sunny morning we were warmly welcomed by an exuberant Maurice Avent and those who have met him will know what I mean. With his able, knowledgeable assistant Hugo, 25 species of moths firstly were identified from an overnight trap. The group were then given a species list each and informed of hazards such as rabbit holes, horseflies etc. then we steadily climbed the steep chalkland hillside. We were soon rewarded by the beautiful male and female Chalkhill Blues. They were nectaring mainly on

Scabiosa and in good numbers. Obliging they lingered a while for the photographers. Wonderful. Suddenly, a Small Blue at the very top of the hillside caused huge excitement, to Maurice in particular as he does the weekly transect walk and it was the first of a second brood that year. Great. From hillside to woodland, to scrub we were all delighted to see 18 species in all.

Maurice invited us back to his beautiful farmhouse in Biddestone not only to look at his twelve Buddleias alive with dozens of different butterflies but to make us a very welcome cup of tea. A remarkable man, a remarkable day and another 'Mission Accomplished' with the Chalkhill Blues.

Avril (and Brian) Chadwick

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COUNTY BUTTERFLY and MOTH RECORDS

This is an exhortation to all members to submit their butterfly and moth records to the County Recorder. A summary of them is published by Cumbria Naturalists Union in an annual booklet entitled 'Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria' which contains records of all taxa for the year in question. Although bird records predominate, there is a section edited by Geoff Naylor devoted to butterfly records and indeed another for moths for whom the recorder is Rob Petley-Jones. So far as butterfly sightings are concerned, it is my belief that not enough sightings are being logged to provide a true analysis of what is out and about in the County. That being the case then Cumbrian records are not being adequately compared with others who are more keenly being sent in. At a time when the distribution of species is changing dynamically year on year, it would be very helpful to have a really comprehensive record so that we in Cumbria can know when and where we can expect to see a particular species. It would also help visitors from outside the County to plan their excursions into Cumbria. Lastly, if we don't record things then we can not divert management resources into our conservation efforts.

Geoff Naylor who enters records for the County Records at Tullie House in Carlisle is at 2, Fell View, Milton, Brampton, CA8 1JE.

The information required is :- Date, Species, Number seen, Place name, Your name,

Grid Ref. e.g. SD4070 or better still a 6 figure ref. e.g. SD401704,

The published results are at hectad (10 km square) level, e.g. SD47 so for sensitive sites or species you need not be concerned that publication will lead to hordes of people trampling your 'private' site. However providing your records at tetrad level enables the recorder to plot how species are expanding and contracting their range.

Robin Eddleston.

Cumbrian Butterfly Diaries 2009

.....by a lepidopterist even less lapsed.

Thank you all. Your phone calls worked again! Another season at the Theatre by the Lake, another summer in Cumbria, another chance to meet up with friends old and new, human and lepidopteral and to become even less lapsed. I settled into my River Greta-side digs just before Easter and left with them nearly in the river on November 20th, feeling a little guilty for this untimely desertion. A very busy work schedule with the odd distraction thrown in (fatherhood in June) threatened to reduce my butterflying explorations – but priorities have to be maintained! I managed three branch field trips and a work party and numerous other excursions.

The first field trip (24th May) to Township Plantation was led by Sarah Bradley (Mrs. Moth – heard about and spoken to, but never met). Our target species – Duke of Burgundies and Pearl Bordered Frits – were in evidence if not abundant: 20+ and 6+ respectively. Almost as difficult to see you would imagine would be Brimstone eggs, but not for one of our keen eyed party, who discovered several on a recently coppiced Buckthorn. After lunch a smaller group headed up onto Whitbarrow Scar. I had never been atop this limestone escarpment before. A stunning 360 degree panorama greeted me along with the first Painted Lady. Numerous Dingy Skippers were, well... skipping about on the top and on the track back down to the plantation. I later went on to Howe Ridding, where I spied more PBFs and watched a female laying eggs in leaf litter. Quick: camera, specs – gone!

Deciding to make use of my weekend I decamped to a local inn and the following day with Dukes and Pearls still on my mind, I headed for Gait Barrows. My 2008 visit was rewarded with good numbers of freshly emerged specimens of both species but this year I was met with fenced off areas and notices explaining about the poor summer ('08) and wet spring ('09) and concerns about the viability of the Duke colonies. I saw only one Duke but thankfully a reasonable number of Pearls (20), Brimstones (15), Dingy Skippers (25) and two Green Hairstreaks. Gait Barrows is always a special visit but the plight of the Dukes cast a long shadow.

The next two weekends I had detailed for expeditions – “distraction” date was getting closer!

Saturday 30th May: My butterfly guide, the dependable Steve D, took me onto the Keswick Marsh Fritillary site and explained about all the management work that has been going on to reintroduce this wet-meadow species. Farming for butterflies - and it appears to be working. We walked the site. Steve counted, I gasped in awe as I watched these precious little butterflies flit and bask in the sun (where's the macro button?). Some were too newly emerged to take to flight (super macro?), others, mainly males, were bolder in their journeys. I was also delighted to spot some brighter, faster butterflies

making longer flights – Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries. We met Geoff, whose son Paul now runs the farm, and even he seemed excited by talk of larval webs and mating butterflies!

Sunday 31st May. Field trip to Finglandrigg. Steve D our leader, ably assisted by Frank (fellow Leicestershireian..?) who having been warden of this reserve for twenty years knew every twig. The sun shone and our targeted Marsh Fritillaries were performing well: 50 + flying, posing, mating and one observed egg-laying. The numbers seemed good to me, but then Steve did the numbers game: forty thousand larvae released on four sites; 90% expected to perish during their first season. Not great odds eh? But today they were putting on a show. I noted that the males here seemed to be smaller than those at Keswick. Frank was a fount of local knowledge but was somewhat distracted as he had seen a Green Hairstreak – a species never before recorded during his tenure at Finglandrigg. Picnic completed, a splinter group - myself, Carl, Peter Wardle and Steve D headed to Maryport to look for Small Blues. An expanse of undulating dune land along from the harbour proffered Small Blues, Common Blues, and Walls and a wonderful bank of Purple Northern Marsh Orchids. Steve was disappointed in the Small Blue numbers.

7th June. My third field trip and a return to Irton Fell. Leader Steve C back-felled before the start, Millie stepped into the breach. I arrived late (why did I think the Hardknott Pass would be a quicker route!), but I soon spotted a group of huddled figures in the distance pointing at something on the ground. I caught up. It was one solitary, frozen, confused Mountain Ringlet. It was not the best of conditions: intermittent sun but mainly cloudy and cold. At the first colony site, 10-15 of our target insect were sighted. Some freshly emerged and nearly all were opening wings to gain maximum exposure from the elusive sun to give maximum opportunity for photos. I had a camera ready this time...but no battery! Further up the fell, the wind was stronger and butterflies sped past slightly out of control.

I later that week re-visited the Marsh Frit site and saw 60+ but now I hold my breath, as I hope the hibernating larvae were able to do, to see what effect the floods will have had. The Moss was also the location for my one work party outing (“distractions” you know!). Summer reappeared on September 20th and we celebrated it with bonfires! Millie and Steve C on soup; David Ellwood on rock cakes (thanks Jean); Peter and farmer Paul on chainsaws ;Sarah and Martin on moths; Steve D on matches; David E, Frank, Bob and myself on loppers. What a swell party we had! Hedgerow trees were being felled to let more light in to a newly wild flower seeded pasture where 7500 Scabious plants (Bob Bennett grown) were to be planted; ditches to be cleared to maintain correct water table.

In August I had my eye trained on the tops of oak trees for Purple Hairstreaks. Blackstock Point on the shores of Bassenthwaite lake provided me with sightings in 2007 and once again that colony was active moving between the tops of the major oaks, occasionally floating tantalizingly low enough for me to exchange binoculars for camera (need to be quicker!).

Some of their host trees are looking sickly, which got me to wondering how far the butterflies might disperse if need be, to establish new colonies. Anyone? My home over the summer was in Keswick on the edge of Brundholme Woods – a magnificent stretch of Atlantic Oak woodland that straddles the river Greta and rises up the steep gradient of its northern banks. You can walk along the old Penrith-Keswick railway line and at one point pass through the canopy. I have often eyed the Oakscape on that walk and thought “Purple Hairstreak territory – surely...”. Well this year I confirmed it. Walking through the wood, along the river and out onto the railway line, there were little butterflies visible above me in the canopy all the way. Not just on the majors either. I must have seen at least 40 and I would guess that the numbers are far greater as they probably colonize the whole wood. A much neglected species perhaps – neckache to blame?

A Dark Green Fritillary at Dubwath Silver Meadows and Commas popping in and out of the garden at Keswick provided relief to the waves of Painted Ladies that 2009 will mostly be remembered for. My memories will linger on the Marsh Fritillary sites I visited and one particular Purple Hairstreak moment: on a sunny picnic visit to pig field, cradled in a bend in the Greta, a male Hairstreak fluttered down from the sturdy masts above to take a drink from a pool some three feet away from me – I had my arms full of my five week old daughter...and no camera!! Luckily the mother of my armful did and we now have a cracking photo of a perfect, open-winged *Thecla betulae* in the album entitled “your first picnic”.

Well it was quite a year in many ways.. As always, thanks to Cumbria and to all of you who shared your knowledge, your butterflies and your picnics so freely and so warmly. And remember keep phoning the theatre...

Peter Macqueen.

.PS. Peter has published an illustrated booklet about his time in Cumbria entitled –“The Scrooge Diaries”- with profits going to the Cumbria Flood Appeal. It includes the Hairstreak photo and tales of “Cumbria’s butterfly nuts” (that’s you lot!!)

£3.50 + postage.

Text an order to 07939 642470 or call in at the Theatre by the Lake, Keswick for one.

BLACK BEAUTY and the HONEY MONSTERS are doing a wonderful job.

We humans in Cumbria Branch do our bit by getting out there once a month on a Sunday plus a few midweek days too but we are not the only ones doing a good job. Even we don't go out every day but we have little, well quite big really, helpers who are out there seven days a week, twenty four hours a day. I refer of course to our four legged friends. On an increasing number of sites which are crucial to the survival of butterflies and other wildlife we, and others realise that grazing is a very important factor in maintaining optimum habitat condition. Since Butterfly Conservation was founded 41 years ago, a great deal of knowledge has been gained and that knowledge is being increasingly put to good use, including and especially here in Cumbria. We don't pretend to be in a position of knowing everything of course, but the sharing of information amongst conservation groups is a very good step forward. Much of what is done is regulated by Natural England. Although they are usually under pressure from all directions it has to be said that regulation is necessary if the balance of nature and awareness of other forms of wildlife requirements are to be satisfied e.g. no good us doing work to help High Browns if we are damaging habitat for dormice, and vice versa of course.

Anyway, back to our four legged friends. As I was saying, grazing is most important in maintaining many butterfly sites. Marsh Fritillaries are perhaps the most acute example. Knowledge gained by Butterfly Conservation has pinpointed the necessity for light grazing of sites so that the larval foodplant Devils Bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* can compete with surrounding and often more vigorous plant/grass species. Without correct management there is no doubt that sites become overgrown, the Devils Bit is out-competed and becomes longer and weaker before disappearing altogether, and with it the Marsh Fritillaries disappear too. Even then we now know about yet another threat, that of genetic weakness caused by declining numbers (of sites as well as butterflies) – but that's another story! Having established that grazing is important we then need to know by what animals and at what levels. Oh, just shove a flock of cows on that there field lad, that'll do the job – oh no it won't! Well a pile of sheep then – ah, not a good idea. Pigs? No, sorry, not quite right in fact not a bit right.

So just what do you want lad said the farmer? Well that field is not too big so six cattle will be sufficient but not all the time, can you put them on when needed and take them off again when needed? Then move them to an adjoining field and so on in rotation. It depends on what habitat is available of course and different situations have different solutions but I'm sure you get the general idea i.e. it requires quite a lot of thought and time.

In the title I referred to Black Beauty and the Honey Monsters. The former refers to the Black Angus cattle we use as well as some of the horses we use – come back to them in a minute. The Honey Monsters are the Highland Cattle we use, honey because of their colour – I know, it's obvious but some Highlands are a different colour, really. Digressing a little I recall the first time I encountered Highlands on site. I had not realised they were there and was

squatting looking at a Marsh Frit web in my own little world I was. I became aware of a presence, looked up and was surrounded by Highlands, six of them a bit like a wagon train being surrounded by indians. Hello, who are you they seemed to be saying through their large eyes. I'm friendly said I and fortunately so too were they but a sudden twitch of those long horns as they divert a fly could be dangerous if not intentional. Anyway I'm still here. The second time was on another site with a different outcome. I was halfway across the field when I realised Highlands were around as several stood up. They had young with them. I backed off with care – best to avoid that type of situation.

Grazing by horses is also useful by most types of horses so long as their feet are not too big. They too will selectively graze and trample to maintain the mosaic of habitat we require for Marsh Fritillaries which is a tussocky landscape interspersed with shorter more open patches where Devils Bit Scabious can thrive. Sheep and goat grazing has its place too but only in limited fashion in Cumbria. They will eat just about anything including Devils Bit Scabious so should only be used where a universal shorter sward habitat is required and in Cumbria we would both take and give advice on that.

Cattle and horses not only maintain Marsh Fritillary habitat. They can also be good to maintain managed woodland with wide rides where grass and bracken can be a problem. The National Trust use that method to good effect in one particular woodland. Cattle are also being used by Cumbria Wildlife Trust not just for grass grazing but for bracken control as well by trampling routes through that bracken which, though invasive can also be useful in a controlled way at times. Such trampling routes are good to expose violets in bracken litter which in turn is used by High Browns for egg laying. Again however the levels of cattle used and length of grazing time are most important to avoid either under or over grazing and of course weather conditions also need to be heeded.

Other wider areas are used for habitat management by light cattle grazing so long as there is a water supply and boundary walls or fencing. Areas of Whitbarrow are lightly grazed particularly where the non native species of trees have been removed and in an effort to maintain the correct mosaic of habitat and condition of paths and rides. Arnside Knott is another example especially in the non National Trust areas. It is the lower down parts which are more wooded and scrubby which benefit most from the cattle.

Fortunately we in Cumbria Branch do not need to do all the arranging with farmers and so on. We are able to liaise with several experts in that field of activity in Natural England who have in place Stewardship Schemes with many farmers. We are fortunate in Cumbria firstly to have many very sympathetic farmers and also to have many very experienced and knowledgeable staff in Natural England – even if they are very over-worked.

Much more could be said about habitat management by grazing but I'm sure the above comments give a flavour of how important our four legged friends are – and as you get to know them they really are quite friendly, even the

honey monsters with their long horns. But do be careful of going anywhere where there are animals with young, and especially if you have a dog even one on a lead.

Steve Doyle

CAPTIVE BREEDING **.....of Marsh Fritillaries.**

In earlier newsletters I have described why we began a captive breeding programme. We are now five years into the project and are about to release another 10,000 larvae into the wild. I thought therefore it was about time to mention some of the things we have learned. The first thing is that it is hard work and time consuming but in exchange for that it is very enjoyable to watch the life cycle of such a wonderful butterfly at such close quarters all year round.

SO WHAT ELSE HAVE WE LEARNED IN THE LAST 5 YEARS?

There is so much. What is written in books and scientific papers is extremely useful but conducting a captive breeding programme which is carried through to an actual series of releases certainly requires a lot of knowledge much of which is gained by working with the captive stock just about every day of the year. Hibernation time over winter is the quiet time but even then there might be things to do e.g. did the storms last night damage the cages, does the netting need to be replaced or do any of the full cages need to be re-built. In winter I also need to seek out and visit other new potential release sites, with farmers, land agents or both and of course liaise with Natural England and other key members of the Cumbria Marsh Fritillary Action Group. Some of those sites need to be worked on and management plans thought through and Stewardship Schemes put in place.

We also need to monitor the release sites and the potential sites. Make sure there is a management plan for each site and that it is implemented.

In the wild the larvae eat Devils Bit Scabious but in captivity we supplement their diet with honeysuckle. That is mainly because Devils Bit Scabious leaves/regrowth is almost impossible to find in the wild in early March beneath a thick layer of grasses. This year you can add a thick layer of snow to that. Good job the larvae out in the wild know where it is but they synchronise their growth with the growth of the foodplant in the wild. In captivity it is bound to be slightly different even though we try to mirror 'wild' conditions as far as possible. The cages are in an open sunny position and I should at this point say the larvae are in large plant pots full of Devils Bit Scabious plants which will grow large enough for the adult butterflies to lay eggs onto. We put dry grass between the pots to mirror wild conditions and because we noticed that the larvae like to bask on the dry grass in the early Spring sunshine.

That brings me to the next thing we have learned. The freshly emerged Spring larvae rely almost entirely on the sun for their energy until they 'moult' or more correctly go through an instar after which they slowly start to feed on the honeysuckle or the Devils Bit Scabious regrowth in the pots.

That leads on to the next thing we have learned. Sun is not just important, as obviously it is, but it is absolutely vital in the early Spring especially. Without that sun the larvae freshly emerged from hibernation are most unlikely to survive. This is one of the things the female adult butterfly the previous Summer did not know. She did not know when she laid her eggs in bright Summer sun with the latter high in the sky, that when her offspring emerged next Spring the sun would not be as high in the sky but the plant on which she laid her eggs would indeed be in the heavy shade of those trees over there and that the resultant frost would not clear from that plant for a long time. By then it would be too late for those larvae. So the lesson learned by us is that we must ensure there is not a continuous line of high trees along the sunny side of the site. That relates to our captive breeding cages too. We must position them in the most sunny place i.e, not north facing but preferably south facing with plenty of early morning and mid afternoon sun.

We must also get our hydrology right. To start with our sites must have an abundance of Devils Bit Scabious, the larval foodplant. For that plant to grow profusely the water levels need to be correct which in turn means ditches must be at the right depth and kept clear to allow the right flow of water or alternatively hold water as the case may be. Perhaps you are wondering what this has to do with the captive breeding programme. Well there is no point in breeding larvae if when you release them they are going to have very little chance of survival in the wild. As it is their survival rate is only likely to be 1% (yes, one percent) so if we don't get the 'wild' conditions as right as possible those already short odds will really mean that our plans are doomed to fail without question. Again that relates also to our captive breeding programme where we must ensure our breeding cages and the pots therein are not waterlogged – they need adequate drainage too.

Another interesting thing learned is that not all larvae grow, go through instars and pupate. Somewhere about 10% fail and just die as larvae. I don't know why. At first I thought they might be parasitized but having taken dozens into separate captive cages and observed them closely every day they simply do not progress. Having said that, I have tried to speed up their development by putting them into artificially heated conditions with moisture and that in some, but not all, cases been successful and the larvae did then progress and pupate. From these observations in captivity it is highly likely that this failure of some larvae will also apply to those in the wild but of course we would never have known that as I doubt if anyone has ever sat and watched one particular caterpillar in the wild for about six weeks non stop. In captivity however there was no apparent reason for it as there was enough food for all and the other 90% of stock did not have a problem and in several years of captive breeding we have never had a parasitic wasp emerge. In some ways I wish we had as it would be yet another learning curve for us to examine.

Incidentally I mentioned moisture just then. The larvae do need moisture so our captive breeding cages are out in the open which means they not only get the sun but they get rained on, snowed on and frozen up too.

There are many other things we have learned during this captive breeding programme, too many to share with you in this short piece. To finish with for now however it is so important to ensure certain key things are in place before a reintroduction is attempted especially with Marsh Fritillaries. Firstly you must release several thousand larvae on a site bearing in mind the expected survival rate is only 1%, so if you only release 500 you will be lucky to get 5 adult butterflies which in all probability will be zero the next year. Secondly you must know why a site became extinct and ensure those conditions are put right and a site management plan is put in place and in that respect a major factor is that there must not be too much shade in the vital Spring period when the hibernating larvae re-emerge. Thirdly you must have a dedicated person to run a captive breeding programme over many years and have other volunteer breeders spread out over the full geographic county so that not all your 'eggs' are in the same basket.

I could go on, but enough for now.

Steve Doyle

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following the sad
loss of John Strutt
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