



# North East England Branch



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President Sir David Attenborough CH FRS

Dedicated to saving wild butterflies and their habitats

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**Butterfly Conservation**

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Thank you to all who have contributed to this edition of our Newsletter. Our new members might like to know that there are two Newsletters each year and we are always delighted to include any articles, letters, photos or drawings that any member cares to submit.

If you have a question or observation on a butterfly or moth related subject, how about writing to our LETTERS PAGE; or if you are electronic, send an e-mail.

Copy dates are unquestionably: .....

1<sup>st</sup> March .....April Edition

1<sup>st</sup> September.....November Edition

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The Committee of North East England Branch would be very interested to hear from any Members who have ideas and suggestions for site visits, conservation opportunities or anything of interest within the Branch area.

Any Member of the Branch who has a particular skill to offer, and feels able to give their services, would also be welcomed.

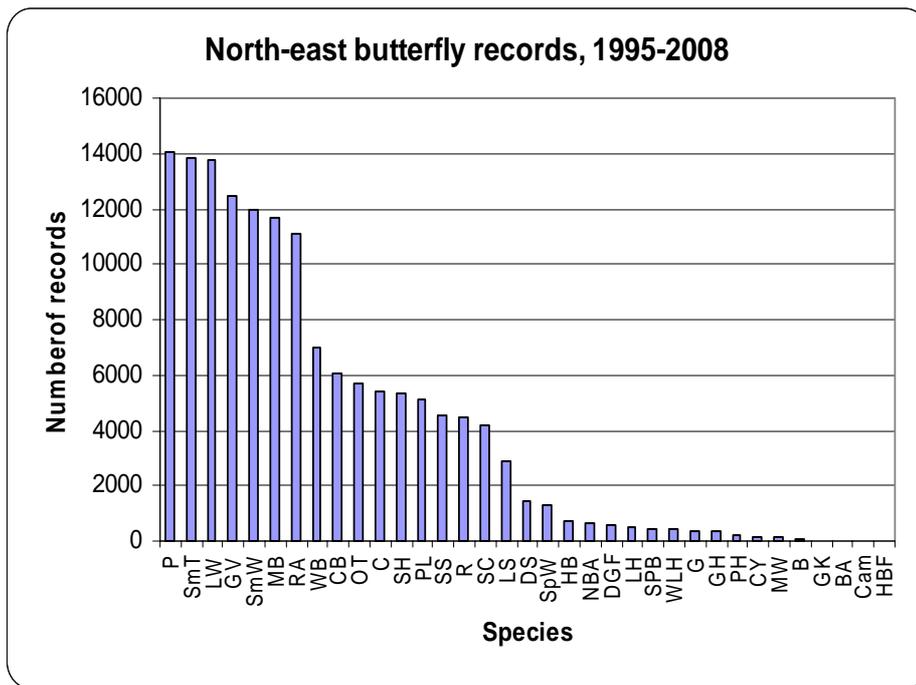
A list of Committee members can be found on the back page of this Newsletter

*Cover Photograph: by kind permission of Jim Asher, Trustee of Butterfly Conservation and Chairman of the Conservation Committee*

**Butterflies for the New Millennium – the end of Phase III**  
**Roger Norman**

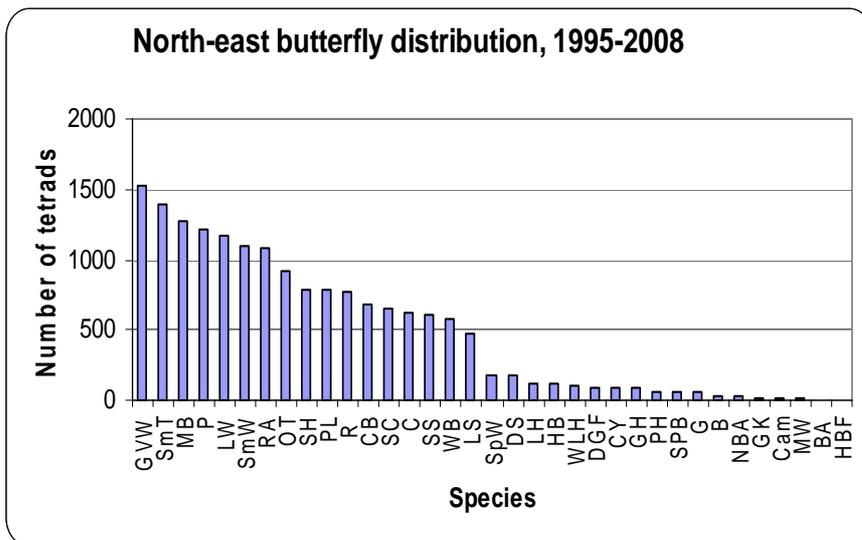
This article is a short look at the records collected in the North-east over the last fifteen years. The Butterflies for the New Millennium Project started in 1995 and initially lasted for five years, the purpose being to assess the state of our butterflies nationwide. The results of the project were presented in the *Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland*<sup>1</sup>. Phase II of the project continued the recording for a further five years, up to the end of 2004 and the results in the Atlas were brought up to date in *The State of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland*.<sup>2</sup> Since then we have continued to collect records and a further five years have now, just, elapsed. Hopefully we will have an update on the state of play for all our species in due course.

The records held by the branch were quite sparse at the start of the Project in 1995, amounting to no more than a couple of thousand records for the whole of the North-east. As the Project got underway, the number of records submitted grew and grew and by the beginning of 2006, had reached one hundred thousand. The current total, at the end of 2008 is one hundred and forty-seven thousand, and when all the 2009 records are in, will probably have reached one hundred and sixty thousand. Currently records seem to be running at around twelve thousand to thirteen thousand per year, although they appear to be affected by the weather, in the gloriously hot summer of 2006, a record eighteen thousand came in. This fantastic dataset is the result of the dedication and enthusiasm of several hundred observers over the last fifteen years, tracking the fortunes of our thirty-five or so species. The graph below shows the numbers of records that we have accumulated for each species. The species code letters on the graph are listed at the end of the article.



The graph shows that we have seven really common species, with over then thousand records each, these being three Whites, (Large, Small and Green-veined), three Vanessaids, (Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral), together with Meadow Brown. We then have ten species with between two thousand and seven thousand records each. Finally we have a long tail of eighteen species, starting with Dingy Skipper and Speckled Wood. Of this group, Dingy Skipper is probably less common that its position indicates as it has been the subject of a specific single species survey, which will have generated extra records above and beyond the normal annual submissions. Given its expansion over the last few years, Speckled Wood is surely on the way to being one of our widespread and commoner species. The bulk of the other species in this tail are either specialists or butterflies currently at the northern edge of their range. The end of the distribution is made up of Camberwell Beauty and High Brown Fritillary, both of which can only be considered as rare vagrants.

The distribution of our butterflies in terms of tetrads follows a similar pattern to that of the number of records. This graph shows the number of tetrads in which each species has been recorded over the life of the BNM project – for the whole of the North-east, we have approximately two thousand two hundred and twenty-nine tetrads. The same seven species are the most widespread and the same eighteen species have been recorded in the fewest number of tetrads in the region.



Since the number of records submitted and the number of tetrads in which these eighteen species are recorded is much less than for our commoner species, it is harder to track their fortunes and decide which species is expanding or contracting, (i.e. in trouble), in either range or abundance. The moral of this is that whilst we receive annually sufficient records of our seven commonest and most widespread species, we would love to have more records of the middle group of ten and also of the eighteen rare and / or specialist butterflies. Please keep on contributing all your records each year, apart from filling the regional picture, they all go to Head Office and play their part in conservation nationally.

**References**

1. Asher, J., Warren, M., Fox, R., Harding, P., Jeffcoate, P., Jeffcoate, S., 2001. *The Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland*. OUP, Oxford.
2. Fox, R., Asher, J., Brereton, T., Roy, D., Warren, M., 2006. *The State of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland*. Pisces Publications, Newbury, Berks.

**Code letters used on the graphs:** see next page.

**Code letters used on the graphs:**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Code</b>
Small Skipper	SS	Painted Lady	<i>PL</i>
Large Skipper	LS	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>SmT</i>
Dingy Skipper	DS	Peacock	<i>P</i>
Clouded Yellow	CY	Comma	<i>C</i>
Brimstone	B	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>SPB</i>
Large White	LW	High Brown Fritillary	<i>HBF</i>
Small White	SmW	Dark Green Fritillary	<i>DGF</i>
Green-veined White	GVW	Speckled Wood	<i>SpW</i>
Orange Tip	OT	Wall Brown	<i>WB</i>
Green Hairstreak	GH	Marbled White	<i>MW</i>
Purple Hairstreak	PH	Grayling	<i>G</i>
White-letter Hairstreak	WLH	Gatekeeper	<i>GK</i>
Small Copper	SC	Meadow Brown	<i>MB</i>
Brown Argus	BA	Ringlet	<i>R</i>
Northern Brown Argus	NBA	Small Heath	<i>SH</i>
Common Blue	CB	Large Heath	<i>LH</i>
Holly Blue	HB		
Red Admiral	RA	<i>Camberwell Beauty</i>	<i>Cam</i>

## Butterflies of the Ouseburn Valley    Chris Crowe

Butterflies are familiar, popular animals. Butterflies in the UK have been the subject of detailed study and recording for several centuries so we know a great deal about their requirements, which ones are rare or common, spreading or declining, both nationally led by the charity Butterfly Conservation and locally (Butterfly Conservation North East England Branch). They are good indicators of overall environmental quality; the UK government added butterfly populations to its Headline Indicators for the state of England's biodiversity in 2006.

The butterflies of the farm have been surveyed regularly in 2006, 2007 and 2008 partly to help provide data on the wildlife habitats but also because it is fun. This is a brief summary of species present and what they tell us about the Farm. Information on the local and national status of each species is largely drawn from the annual Butterfly Summary Reports published by the North East Branch of Butterfly Conservation. Their records extend from Cleveland to the Scottish Border.

### **How is the recording done?**

Butterflies are counted by slowly walking the same routes around the fields and farm, counting butterflies seen in front to either side. This technique is widely used in butterfly studies (called a Pollard walk, after its inventor Dr Pollard). The walks used for the national recording have a strict protocol, e.g. area watched. On the farm we've been much more casual dashing off after butterflies to check what they are. Walks have usually been done on sunny days sometimes between 11am and 3pm when butterflies are most active. Counts have been made at seven to ten day intervals. In 2006 seven counts were made (end July to mid August), in 2007 sixteen counts (early June to mid September) and in 2008 twenty-two counts (early April to late

September). In 2006 and 2007 counts were only done in three meadows under the bridges (Pond meadow, Red Fescue meadow and Horse meadow) but in 2008 this has been extended to include the farm compound, the two fields below the Cumberland Arms and the grass to east of the Cumberland. **How many species have been found and what might this mean for the Farm and Ouseburn Valley?**

Eighteen species is an impressive total.

Eighteen species have been recorded. Only thirty-five species have been recorded in the North-east (and this includes extreme rarities and some with very specialised habitat requirements that the Farm cannot offer) so eighteen is a remarkable total.

Several species are locally notable.

Holly Blue and Speckled Wood are recent colonists of the North-east. Only one or two Holly Blues were recorded until 2004 and numbers remain low. Speckled Wood have only established in the last couple of years. The record of the Ringlet plugs a significant gap in the butterflies' known range at the national level.

**How many species breed on the Farm?**

Caterpillars have only been found for the Peacock and Large White. Mating has been seen for Meadow Browns and egg laying by Small Skippers. Many other species are likely to be breeding on site. Several species on the Farm usually occur as distinct colonies, most individuals staying close to where they hatched, so the repeated occurrence of fresh individuals each year suggests they are residents (Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Small Copper, Holly Blue, Orange tip, Ringlet, Wall and Meadow Brown). Common Blue and Speckled Wood are also likely to fit this pattern if they have established. The other species are mostly wide-ranging habitat generalists, the familiar garden butterflies, all of which could breed in the valley but whether they do so every year is more uncertain as they come and go.

**What do the butterflies tell us about the Farm’s meadows?**

Many butterflies have quite particular needs, are sensitive to habitat degradation and even the common ones require a variety of habitats, in particular for caterpillars to find their food-plant and adults to find nectar. The rich butterfly fauna of the farm therefore suggests the meadows provide a good range of habitats and are probably rich in other wildlife for such an urban setting.

**Anything need doing for the butterflies?**

Not much, but some things to watch for the future. Right now the meadows are a great mix of open grass, flowering herbs and some woodland shelter. Scrub encroachment can close over the grass excluding butterflies. The “orchard” field below the Cumberland is overgrown and few butterflies are seen there and suckering of nearby trees is encroaching the Red Fescue meadow. Similarly careless mowing of the meadows could interfere with the butterflies’ life cycles. The Pond meadow was mowed in early summer of 2008 but subsequent butterfly numbers were fine. The Horse meadow seems to have fewer species. The sward here is rich in Rye Grass rather than coarse meadow grasses such as Cocksfoot or Yorkshire Fog which several species use as food-plants when caterpillars. More flowers in and around the farm should make butterflies more visible.

**Butterflies recorded around the farm 2006–2008.** First year the species found is listed with a brief commentary on each species’ status.

<i>Ochlodes venata</i> Large Skipper	2006+ Never more than 10 recorded at once but conspicuous in late June/early July, often returning to the same perch. Spread north into Northumberland in the 1970s. In pond, red fescue and Cumberland Meadows.
<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i> Small Skipper	2006+. Max. count 16. Appears a bit later than large skipper, throughout July. Colonised the north-east in the mid 1980s In pond, red fescue and Cumberland meadows.
<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i> Small Copper	2006+. Ones and twos in pond, red fescue and Cumberland meadow

<i>Polyommatus icarus</i> Common blue	2008. A single record on 29 <sup>th</sup> June and 4 <sup>th</sup> July, later inside farm compound. A common butterfly of rough grassland, but I do not know of any other sites in city centre where it has been recorded
<i>Celastrina argiolus</i> Holly Blue	2006+. Ones and twos, often flying high along wooded paths (and outside Cluny on one occasion) near Holly trees and Ivy. Has recently established in North-east, with only one recorded in 2001 and still only 284 in 2007.
<i>Pieris napi</i> Green veined white	2006+. Ones and twos throughout the season. A wide spread butterfly, probably under-recorded because it is difficult to distinguish from Small and Large Whites when they are flying
<i>Pieris rapae</i> Small white	2006+. Widespread throughout the season. Highest count of 8, though many of the whites go unidentified when flying at a distance
<i>Pieris brassicae</i> Large white	2006+. A few usually found throughout season. Bred in 2008, the caterpillars munching through the cabbages next to the plastic bottle greenhouse
<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i> Orange tip	2008+. A classic butterfly of spring, found throughout May in 2008 and almost certainly present previously, the recording having started too late to include it. In pond, red fescue and Cumberland meadows.
<i>Inachis io</i> Peacock	2006+. Has been found in April through to September, though never in large numbers. Bred in 2007 with 30+ caterpillars on nettles in red fescue meadow.
<i>Polygonia c-album</i> Comma	2006+. Like the peacock can be found from early spring to autumn, usually in ones or twos.
<i>Aglia urticae</i> Small Tortoiseshell	2007+. Although a dead specimen was found in the pond in 2006 the first live records were in 2007, and then only ones or twos since, although they may appear at any in the season
<i>Vanessa atalanta</i> Red Admiral	2006, 2008. A butterfly of late summer and autumn, breeds in UK but numbers vary with immigration from the continent. Occasional individuals like the buddleas along the river
<i>Vanessa cardui</i> Painted Lady	2006, 2007. Population in the UK very dependent on migration from continent. 2006 was a good year for arrivals, 2007 or 2008 not so.
<i>Pararge aegeria</i> Speckled Wood	2008. Three very fresh specimens were found on 8 <sup>th</sup> September 2008. This butterfly has only recently established in the North east; in 2005 only 144 were recorded and 1223 in 2007, nearly all from south of the Tyne. Has been recorded in elsewhere Newcastle in 2008 and the Ouseburn is suitable habitat for this butterfly of open woodland to breed.
<i>Lasiommata megera</i> Wall Brown	2006+. One or two in spring generation (May) up to 10 in second brood (August). Once common throughout England the Wall has suffered serious declines in much of southern-central England. North-east is now a distinct stronghold.
<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i> Ringlet	2006+. One or two in July. The ringlet is widespread in UK but is oddly scarce north of Co Durham northward to around Alnwick when it becomes widespread again. As a result of this the Farm Ringlet population represents a new record at the national recording scale of 10x10 km. Has only been found in pond meadow.
<i>Maniola jurtine</i> Meadow Brown	2006+. The north-east's most numerous butterfly and the most abundant species in the meadows from July and August with maximum counts of 54 in 2008. In pond, red fescue, farm and Cumberland meadows.

Michael Jeffries and Chris Crowe, Division of Environmental Management, Ellison Building, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST. Full reports for the 2006 and 2007 records are lodged with the Ouseburn Farm office. 2008 report is currently in preparation.

## Surviving The Winter

David Stebbings

The summer of 2009 has turned out to be an excellent year for butterflies on the wing. The flying butterflies we see are, of course, the adult stage of a much longer life cycle. Good summer weather is only half the story: in order to see flying butterflies the conditions must be suitable throughout their life cycle. At some stage during their life cycle butterflies, along with all other insects in Britain, face a major problem – how to survive the winter? Insects cannot function at low temperatures and in Britain the climate may be too cold for up to six months in the year for their metabolism to work. So how do butterflies get through the cold of winter? They have to shut down their metabolism during the cold months, when vertebrates that do this, it is called hibernation, in insects it is referred to as diapause.

Butterfly Family	Number of Species which over-winter as			
	Egg	Larva	Pupa	Adult
Hesperiidae – The skippers	2	5	1	0
Pieridae – The Whites	0	0	5	1
Lycaenidae – Hairstreaks, coppers and blues	6	8	2	0
Nymphalidae – Fritillaries, Vanessids, etc	1	9	0	4
Satyridae – The Browns	0	11	0	0
Papilionidae – Swallowtail	0	0	1	0
Riodinidae – Duke of Bur- gundy	0	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>

Butterflies have evolved ways of surviving the winter in all stages of their life cycle. In Britain each resident species has adopted its own strategy to over-winter. Some species over-winter as eggs, some as larva, some as pupae and others as adult butterflies.

The table above lists each resident British butterfly family and shows at which stage in its development each member of that family over-winters.

I have excluded Red Admiral and Painted Lady from the table. Although some examples of these species over-wintering as adults are recorded, they are strictly speaking migrants and over-wintering in Britain is not part of their survival strategy.

As can be seen from the table the most common method of over-wintering is at the larval stage and the least favoured stage is the adult. To over-winter as an egg would seem to be a good strategy. As development has not yet started there is no need to close down the metabolic system for the winter. It can be started up by the returning warmth of spring. The Hairstreaks which lay their eggs on trees adopt this strategy. The Purple Hairstreak lays its eggs on Oak trees and the White-letter Hairstreak on Elm. Both lay their eggs near buds on twigs and the eggs remain on the trees over the winter. The High Brown Fritillary is the only member of the Nymphalidae family to adopt this strategy, although in this case the caterpillar starts to develop in the egg and passes the winter as a recognisable caterpillar, it just does not break out of the egg until the following spring.

Over-wintering in the larval stage is the most common method adopted by British butterflies. It has the advantage that the caterpillar is active and can search around for a suitable hibernation site. The caterpillars usually feed during the autumn so they are partly grown, go into diapause and then emerge the following spring to continue feeding and complete their development. All the Satyridae family (the Browns) adopt this strategy and most of the Hesperidae (the Skippers). The caterpillars of these two families usually feed on grasses and it is relatively simple for the caterpillars to burrow into the depths of a clump of grass to pass the winter.

Most members of the Pieridae family, the Whites, choose to over-winter as pupae. In September the Large White caterpillars, for example, when fully

grown wander away from their food plants looking for hibernation sites such as sheltered spots under the eaves of buildings, under fences and on tree trunks. Here they attached themselves to a solid spot to pupate and remain in the pupal stage until the following spring when the warmer weather reactivates them to emerge as adults and complete their life cycle.

Only four members of the Nymphalidae family plus the Brimstone enter diapause as adult butterflies. The Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell for example are well known for spending the winter in dark corners of garages and garden sheds. These butterflies are activated on warm spring days in March and April and are the first butterflies to be seen each spring.

Closely related species can adopt different methods of over-wintering. The Small Skipper over-winters as a caterpillar in a spun silk cocoon inside a sheath of grass. The closely related Essex Skipper female butterfly carefully lays her eggs directly into furled sheaths of grass where the eggs remain through the winter before hatching out the next spring. Similarly the Common Blue over-winters as a caterpillar but the closely related Chalkhill Blue as eggs on its food plant.

We may think of a long hot summer as being perfect for butterflies, but just as important are the conditions during the winter, which can determine how many over-wintering butterflies survive to fly in the summer.



Many thanks to all of the members who have taken the trouble to contact the Web-site during the course of the year. A number of committed regulars have supplied details of their butterfly sightings throughout the summer and hopefully this has allowed the 'Recent Sightings' section of the site to provide a kind of running commentary as the season unfolded and give an indication of what is on the wing at any given time. I am also grateful to those of you who have sent in photographs for use on the Web-site, many of which are of an extremely high standard.

As well as sightings and photographs we also received a wide range of different enquiries and every effort has been made to respond to these.

We are keen that the Web-site should be as useful as possible so I very much hope that members will continue to contact us in 2010. Any sightings, photos or information relating to the region's butterflies and moths are welcome. I am also happy to receive suggestions regarding additions to the site that members would find useful or indeed any other improvements that could be made.

The Web-site is located at [www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk).

Jonathan Wallace

Web-site Editor (contact details on back page)



## **Butterflies in Northumberland - 2009**

### **Roger Norman**

Although the season is winding down by the end of September as I write this, it is always a little difficult to summarise the butterfly season before everyone has sent in their records. What follows is unavoidably based on personal experience, comments and anecdotes from a few regular recorders and, for this year, articles in the media about the Painted Lady influx.

The season started with a most unusual discovery of a female Long-tailed Blue on 12 March on a kitchen wall in New Hartley. Hewett Ellis has kindly provided a separate article and photograph describing the finding and this is included in the newsletter. This will be the first occurrence of this species in the county, although it is very unlikely that it arrived unaided.

There was a good showing of Dingy Skipper at a key site in the Chevington area, and a new adjacent site for this UK BAP species was found. Numbers have also been seen at Havannah LNR on the edge of Newcastle, and another new site was found nearby. The complete picture as to how they have fared this year is of course, not available yet. One Brimstone was reported from Berwick in June, but this is the only record I know of. No Clouded Yellows have been reported. Orange Tips were out and about as normal in April and May, with some being seen into June.

We lie on the northern edge of the range for both White-letter Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak and both can be hard to find. The former was viewable at the north end of the road bridge over the River Tyne at Bywell, (on Elm), in late July. It seems likely that they are widely distributed along the river banks where Elm occurs. The challenge is to confirm they are there. Purple Hairstreak was recorded from the Lambley Viaduct on the South Tyne trail. At this site it is possible to look down or across from the viaduct onto the side and tops of mature oak trees growing in the river valley. In previous years they could be spotted in a similar manner from the Nine Arches viaduct on the Derwent Walk. For both species, unless the butterflies are living on scrubby trees which are not too tall, it is a great help if one can find sites such as these where it is possible to look horizontally, or

preferably downwards onto their host tree. Our other Hairstreak, Green Hairstreak is a bilberry lover and a few were seen at a regular site in Dipton. This species needs more observers getting out onto suitable areas in late April and early May as previous records indicate it is quite widely distributed.

Holly Blue has been a notable incomer, recently expanding into Durham and in the last three years or so into Northumberland. Last year's wet August appears to have hit them very, very hard, with only one hearsay record for the county at the moment. Let us hope that other people have had better luck and that it is hanging on, to revive when we get a run of better weather. It would be a great shame if their expansion northwards is going into reverse and we were to lose them from the county.

The big butterfly story of the year has of course, been the Painted Lady influx into the UK, following good rains in February in the Atlas Mountains. My first indication of something unusual happening was an email on 20 May describing a massive northward flow at the Albufera reserve on Majorca the previous Saturday (16 May). The first county records to be submitted so far mention singles at Rising Sun Country Park and at St Mary's Island on 25 May. If we receive enough records it will be possible to track the movement through both counties as they headed north. At the time of writing, (the beginning of October), there are still second generation butterflies around, given a sunny day, on Buddleias and other nectar sources. Where are they going to go in the next month or so? This seems to be a question everyone is asking.

So far our Small Tortoiseshells have not been hit by the parasitism that is affecting them in the south. Indications are that this has reached as far north as Manchester. We must wait and see if it moves further north. Commas seem to have had a poor autumn and my personal tally is very low. I can only hope others have had better luck.

We have two Fritillaries, the Small Pearl-bordered and the Dark Green. The big Fritillary story this year has happened in Durham with the expansion of Dark Green on the Durham moors. It seems as if they probably had a normal year in north Northumberland with one or two being noted at the

southern edge of their range at Druridge Pools. A survey of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the Sweethope area found a small number of new sites and bodes well for its long-term survival in the area. Records of either species are always very welcome and they could be looked for in damp upland areas. The caterpillar food plant is violets, normally Marsh Violet for Small Pearl, but adults may nectar on Marsh Thistle, (easier to spot!) in late June and early July.

Of our Browns, the big story is Speckled Wood. From a few along the Tees valley it has spread north rapidly in the last five or six years and one has been seen this September at Berwick so it has now spread right through the north-east. At times in September it can be one of the commonest species around. With a number of ways of passing the winter, it can be found on the wing throughout a large part of the spring, summer and autumn. Definitely this is a species to look out for anywhere in the county and could be present in areas of sheltered woodland and dappled sunshine.

Members are reminded that butterfly records are always welcome, either on paper, or preferably by email and a spreadsheet is available on the website. We ask that records be sent in by the 30 November each year.



For the Painted Lady it is either famine or feast. In the Branch's Butterfly Summary for 2008 I bemoaned the recent poor years this migratory butterfly has experienced. Well! how things can change! In 2009 the Painted Lady was back with bang. It even made the national press and television, so prolific was it this year. It was certainly the best year for thirteen years, 1996 was the last good year I can remember.

The Painted Lady is a long distance migratory species. Each year the butterfly migrates from continental Europe to colonise Britain usually in May. Before that can happen, it has to migrate from North Africa, its' over wintering area, to southern Europe around March. Apparently the good year was predicted by a Spanish researcher after heavy winter rains in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco led to good growth of its food plant there. He witnessed hundreds of thousands emerging in February and flying north.

We had a report from a North East BC member who was on holiday in Majorca in mid-May. He was lucky enough to see waves of Painted Ladies moving northwards over the island. By May the butterfly was invading southern England in such numbers that it made the national press. The first indication of large numbers arriving in Britain came on 21 May when swarms were seen over Portland Bill in Dorset. Again by chance a North East BC committee member happened to be in Kent on 28 May on business and witnessed this invasion first hand, seeing a steady stream of Painted Ladies heading north.

In the North East we certainly had good numbers of the butterfly. Although the counts are not yet in from recorders, my feeling is that the numbers up here were not as great as down south. I was on holiday near Stratford-on-Avon at the end of July and during a walk along the Stratford canal I stopped counting Painted Ladies when I reached a hundred and had not walked more than a hundred yards! They were everywhere! I am not aware of such numbers being seen in the North East.



It seems the conditions were just right for the butterfly this year, rain at the right time in Africa, southerly winds helping to push the migration northwards through the spring and good weather over much of Europe allowing them to breed successfully to produce second or third generations. Let's hope we do not have to wait another thirteen years before these conditions occur again.

**North East England Branch of  
Butterfly Conservation  
Is in desperate need of a  
Conservation Officer  
For County Durham**

**Please contact any Member of the Committee if you have the time and enthusiasm to commit to this important work. To learn more about the post, contact David Stebbings at [david.stebbing@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:david.stebbing@blueyonder.co.uk) or phone him on 01912 859097**

## Long-tailed Blue in Northumberland (Lepidoptera; *Lampides boeticus*) By Stephen J. Ellis and Hewett A Ellis

On the 12 March 2009, one of us (S. J. E.) discovered a small butterfly with brown wings resting on his kitchen wall in New Hartley, South Northumberland (VC67; Grid Reference NZ306765). The butterfly was released into the garden where it was found again the following day, resting on an outside window frame. It was identified as a female Long-tailed Blue (*Lampides boeticus* L.). The wings were somewhat faded and worn, but the characteristic pale brown underside with white lines, the metallic-ringed black spots and the 'tails' were still clearly recognizable (Figure 1). There was a little blue colouration on the upperside wing bases.

The butterfly was placed in a netted cage with *Hebe* flowers, where it fed avidly on the sugar solution provided. Ova were not deposited and, restored, the butterfly was returned to the wild a week later.

Sightings of the Long-tailed Blue are rare in Britain. The first records seem to have been in Brighton and Christchurch in 1859 (Emmet and Heath 1989); Thomas and Lewington 1991). Subsequently to 1991 there were about one hundred and twenty records, mostly in the southern counties of England and in the Channel Islands.

The present sighting is distinctly unusual in that it was made so far north and very early in the year. Most records of migrant Long-tailed Blue have



Figure 1. Underside of Long-tailed Blue butterfly found at New Hartley, Northumberland in March 2009

been from late June to September (Asher *et al.*, 2001). The species breeds all year round in its warm habitat around the Mediterranean and although it has been known to breed during August and September in Southern England (Fox *et al.*, 2006), colonies are not established since it cannot survive our winters.

All this makes it difficult to explain the presence of a Long-tailed Blue butterfly in Northumberland in March! Theoretical possibilities include – (1) it was a migrant, (2) it had been accidentally or intentionally introduced, (3) it had emerged from an immature stage contained in some imported food such as beans or mange-tout peas. Long-tailed Blue larvae feed on a wide range of leguminous plants, entering the pods to devour the lining and contained seeds, and it is known that adults can emerge from immature stages contained in such imported foodstuffs (Asher *et al.*, 2001).

Much as we would like to romanticize about the possibility that this particular Long-tailed Blue was a migrant, having survived all the odds against it, we have to accept that this is extremely unlikely. Also it seems unlikely that it had been intentionally introduced. The most acceptable explanation is that it had emerged from an immature stage contained in an imported foodstuff unknowingly purchased by someone in the New Hartley district. Whatever the mechanism, we count ourselves fortunate in having had this rare opportunity to see this delightful little butterfly.

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Last winter the branch started a programme of work parties on local butterfly sites to improve the habitats for butterflies. A small, but dedicated group of branch members attended two work parties on the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary sites near Castleside in County Durham, and one at Havannah Local Nature Reserve near Hazlerigg north of Newcastle. On both sites scrub was kept under control by cutting hawthorn and gorse and on the Small Pearl site some fence work was done to control grazing.

I am now putting together a programme for the coming winter. Again, I would like members to come with us to help with this vital work. If you would like to come along please contact me, or just turn up at the events listed below. For all work parties bring along a packed lunch, stout footwear and clothes that you don't mind getting dirty! Tools and protective gloves will be provided.

**Saturday 14 November 2009.** Havannah Nature Reserve. More scrub clearing to maintain the habitat for Dingy Skipper and Common Blue. Meet at the large car park at the airport end of the reserve near to the Dinnington Road junction at 10:00am. Grid Reference NZ215718. **Sunday 13 December 2009.** Same place, meeting time and contact details as for 14 November.

I am in the process of arranging more dates at different sites, so if you cannot make either of the two dates above, but would still like to come along on other work days please contact me for further details.

Contact David Stebbings – [David.Stebbing@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:David.Stebbing@blueyonder.co.uk) or phone 0191 2859097 for further details.



**A Skippy Summer, Heather Young (South-west Scotland Branch Committee Member). Photographs by Ramsay Young.**

The last weekend in May was our summer here in Scotland. Fortunately, this was the weekend we had earmarked for surveying Chequered Skippers in Argyll and Lochaber. The Saturday was spent as a group of Butterfly Conservation volunteers, locals and the odd long-distance Skipper-hunter counting Chequered Skippers in Glasdrum National Nature Reserve. One chap had even driven up from Kent in the hope of seeing this 'rare' butterfly; mission accomplished immediately, as we found several including a mating pair right there in the car park!

On the Sunday, armed with a list of historical Chequered Skipper



Glen Gour, near Sallachan (skipper country), with Chequered Skipper, inset.

sightings to check out, we took the Corran ferry to the west side of Loch Linnhe and spent a fantastic day enjoying multiple sightings of Chequered Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Small Heath, Painted Lady (whose mass arrival in the north-west coincided happily with our own), Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, and even an Argent & Sable moth.

But what has this to do with the North-east of England?

Well, prior to this May I don't recall seeing any of these funny little butterflies before, so imagine my delight when I stumbled on some of their English cousins during a dog walk in July, whilst back home on a hedge-cutting mission at my father's house in Clough Dene, near Stanley, County Durham.

Nowadays there is a whole network of paths and cycleways in County Durham that follow the routes of old railway lines, and the nearest one to my family home is the Bowes Railway Path, descended from one of the oldest railways in Europe, the Pontop and Jarrow Railway, built in the 1850's to take the coal to Newcastle. From Pickering Nook, a few hundred yards along the road from our house (my old school on the corner is now a nursing home), we can head west towards Dipton, or east behind Hobson village towards Crookgate bank top.

On this particular occasion, during a brief sunny spell (albeit windy and cool), we chose the former, and followed the track round behind the Mountsett Crematorium and on towards Dipton. On a clear day from here you can see right across Northumberland to the Cheviot Hills, but nearly always return looking 'windswept and interesting', to steal a phrase from a



well known Glasgow comedian! The Derwent Walk, a popular route between Consett and Swalwell, follows the valley down below, and several paths link the two, but it's a heck of a climb back up! This time we were



even treated to a fly-past by three of the Derwent Valley red kites, part of a recent re-introduction programme.

Anyway, I digress – Skippers. In common with many 'brownfield' sites, the edges of the path have been well colonised by wild flowers like Bird's Foot Trefoil, Knapweeds and Clovers, and provide plenty of nectaring opportunities for butterflies, bumblebees and other insects. At the far end

of the path, just before it rejoins the road, in a wide grassy clearing (NZ161546), we found our first colony of Small Skippers (well, the dog did actually – she was rummaging around the way spaniels do, and disturbed some little orange butterflies that started zooming around in an irritated manner). No net, an inquisitive springer, and an unfinished hedge limited our opportunities for close examination of the little critters (to rule out Essex Skipper, a species that we in Scotland have found to be mixed in with our smalls!), but I left my husband taking photos and headed back to carry on snipping. Later scrutiny of the pictures, in consultation with others who have had experience of both species, confirmed their identity as Small Skippers. Other species encountered on that day included Common Blue, Large, Small and Green-veined White, Ringlet, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma, along with a couple of Latticed Heath moths.

Little did we know that we would come across more Skippers the following day, just before heading back to Scotland – this time during the morning dog walk in the other direction towards Crookgate. Nice and sunny, but very windy, and quite early in the morning, but still apparently suitable condition



for butterflies to go about their business. Quite a few were encountered along the edge of the wood, including Speckled Wood, Dark Green Fritillary, Small Heath, Meadow Brown and Common Blue, but



the greatest concentration, including a colony of Small Skippers and Six-spot Burnet moths, were to be found on an island of birch scrub in the waste ground behind the industrial estate on the site of the old Hobson pit (NZ173563). True, it's not the most scenic of walks, but if you want to see Skippers, it's well worth a visit. Of course, if you really want to do your Skipper-spotting surrounded by beautiful scenery, you'll just have to come and see ours!

## Photographic Competition 2009

Remember to send your entries in to Jaci Beaven.

**The closing date will be 10 January 2010.**

There are three categories, Adult British Butterfly,  
Adult British Moth and Immature Stages (either).  
These will be judged by the Committee Members,  
(who cannot enter the competition),  
and they will award a Best Over All Prize.

Winning entries will be published in the Spring Newslet-  
ter and published on the Web Site.

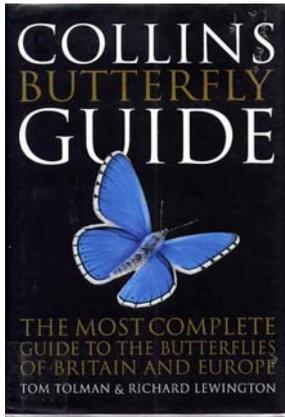
Please join in – the more the merrier.



A decent field guide is perhaps the most basic item in the kit of anyone with an interest in butterflies. When we encounter new or unfamiliar species we need some means to identify them or confirm our identification, and for most of us our trusty field guide is what we rely on. Of all the insects, butterflies are undoubtedly the most popular and, as a result, there is a wide variety of guides available to choose from with an equally wide range of price tags. With such a wide choice available it is not necessarily easy to choose the one best suited to one's needs, so in this article I review some of the contenders. If you are looking to get a new guide to butterflies, hopefully this will help you to decide which one to request for Christmas!

As with most things, there are compromises to be made when selecting a guide and some of the factors that you will need to bear in mind are the price you are prepared to pay, whether you want a slim-line book that will not weigh you down in the field or a comprehensive tome and what the coverage of the book should be. With respect to the last of those, it is important to consider where you intend to use your guide. If you plan to take it on holidays in Europe, a guide that covers only the British Isles will soon result in frustration when you encounter the bewildering diversity of skippers, blues and fritillaries (amongst others) that can be encountered on the Continent. On the other hand if you are only ever going to use it in the UK, then a Britain only guide may offer advantages including a more compact size and the opportunity to provide more detailed coverage of each species.

As well as guides to butterflies there are a number of general guides to insects on the market. Whilst these have their place on the naturalist's bookshelf they cannot provide comprehensive coverage and would not be recommended to someone hoping to identify any butterfly they might encounter.



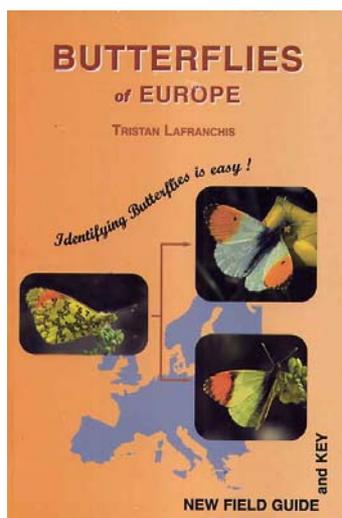
**Collins Butterfly Guide: The most complete guide to the butterflies of Britain and Europe. Tom Tolman & Richard Lewington. (£25)**

This is a serious guide that was first published in 1997 as a replacement for the previous Collins guide, 'Higgins and Riley'. The latest edition (2008) has been improved by re-arranging the plates so that they now appear alongside the text for each species, making the guide a lot easier to use than the 1997 version. The Collins guide is extremely comprehensive, featuring over four hundred species and providing coverage of all of western Europe (from the western borders of Russia and the Ukraine) and including North Africa and the islands of the Aegean but not Cyprus and the south-east Mediterranean.

The plates, by Richard Lewington (arguably the best insect illustrator around and the illustrator of several of the guides reviewed here) are of a very high standard and, in the latest edition, have been enhanced by the addition of small pointers to key identification features. Each species is illustrated at life size.

The text could perhaps be a little more user friendly as it is in dense, small type and tends towards the terse. For example, the description for Small White is given as "*Upf apical patch extends along outer margin to v7 or v6 cf. A manni*". Where confusion with other species is unlikely no description is given at all. For every species there are sections on range, distribution, flight period, habitat and life history. Of the Guides discussed here this one gives the best coverage of variations found within species.

Weighing over eight hundred grammes (hardback) this is the largest of the guides discussed here but it remains eminently portable. With its extensive coverage, authoritative text and beautiful plates it is well worth consideration.



***Butterflies of Europe. Tristan Lafranchis. £32.50***

Published by Diatheo, this guide is not generally available in UK bookshops but can be ordered on-line including from Amazon. Published in 2004, the guide provides a set of binomial keys for the identification of European butterflies, an approach that is familiar to botanists but an innovation as far as butterfly identification guides are concerned. By answering a series of paired questions one narrows down the possibilities until left with the identity of the butterfly in question.

The keys can be entered at different levels depending on how uncertain one is about the identity of the insect under scrutiny: at the highest level a key to families will enable you to determine if you are dealing with a Lycaenid, or a Nymphalid, say, but if you already have a rough idea you can by-pass this and go straight to the relevant sub-family or genus key. This approach is very effective at drawing attention to the diagnostic features of each species, and the keys are supported by decent photographs, many of which are annotated to highlight key features. The book's claim that "*Identifying butterflies is easy*" may be a little optimistic with respect to some difficult groups such as the Grizzled Skippers (fifteen rather similar looking species of *Pyrgus* in Europe) but with patience and careful observation it should allow the correct identification of most butterflies encountered in Europe.

For a number of species that are difficult to separate, diagrams are provided of diagnostic features of genitalia and a method is described for examining this without harming the living butterfly (although this is not recommended for small species such as some of the blues). I have not tried this method, which involves gently squeezing the abdomen, and it may not be for the faint hearted, at least without prior demonstration from an experienced practitioner!

Lafranchis' book is very much an identification guide and whilst probably better than the Collins Guide for determining tricky species it provides much less information on each species once the identification has been secured.

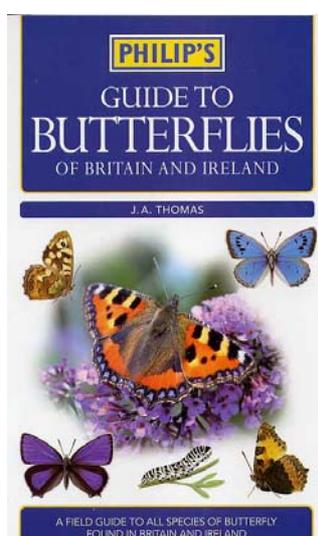
Coverage is very similar to the Collins guide but, at a little over 500 grammes (softback) it is slightly smaller.

### **Mitchell Beazley Guide to Butterflies. Paul Whalley £7.99**

This guide covers a similar geographic area to the previous two but slightly fewer species with three hundred and sixty. It is a fine example of the adage that good things come in small packages. Roughly the size of a cheque book and weighing only one hundred and sixty grammes, this book is ultra portable but nevertheless a serious identification guide for European butterflies. The species not included in the guide are those with highly restricted distributions (for example on single Aegean Islands) and the book will provide adequate coverage for most users across most of Europe.

Apart from its small size the main strengths of the Mitchell Beazley Guide are the excellent illustrations which are painted by Richard Lewington. Each butterfly is depicted life size with both upper and undersides illustrated. The text is inevitably brief but key identification characters are highlighted and basic information on range, flight period and larval food plants is given whilst the typical habitats occupied by each species are indicated by a system of pictograms.

I would certainly recommend this guide and, given the relatively modest price, it is well worth purchasing in addition to one or other of the more expensive guides.



### **Philip's Guide to Butterflies of Britain and Ireland. Jeremy Thomas. £9.99**

This guide was originally published in 1986 as the RSNC Guide to Butterflies of the British Isles and became the Hamlyn Guide to the Butterflies of the British Isles before ending up, in revised form, with its present publisher in 2007.

Written by one of the foremost butterfly experts in the UK, this guide differs from the others discussed here in

covering only the British and Irish butterfly fauna (including a few occasional visitors and extinct species). This allows much more space to be allocated to each species even in a relatively slender volume (just over two hundred and seventy grammes) and this is one of the great strengths of this book.

All of the British and Irish species are illustrated life size (once again by Richard Lewington) in a section at the front of the book and this section is followed by the individual species accounts in which each species is accorded a double page spread. This includes a further (photographic) illustration of the adult butterfly and a sketch depicting the other life stages in typical habitat. A diagram indicates the typical times of year in which one can expect to encounter each life stage. The text is very informative and reflects Thomas' obvious affection for butterflies as well as his deep knowledge. There is a much more detailed account of habitat, ecology and behaviour than is provided by any of the other guides discussed here.

The fact that it only covers British species means that this guide will not be adequate for anyone wishing to undertake butterfly hunting excursions on the Continent. If you are content to do all of your butterfly hunting in the British Isles however, this is a super guide that is particularly good value given its relatively low price. As with the Mitchell Beazley Guide, a good case can be made for owning it in addition to one or other of the more expensive European Guides.

**Dorling Kindersley Pocket Guide to Butterflies and Moths. Paul Sterry & Andrew Mackay. £7.99**

This is a pocket guide, similar in size to the Mitchell Beazley Guide, which covers Britain and North-west Europe (which according to the maps extends as far as the northern Mediterranean and includes northern parts of Spain and Italy). In contrast to the previously discussed guides this guide is intended as a guide to moths as well as butterflies.

For the butterflies the coverage is reasonably comprehensive (about two hundred and twenty species) but unfortunately the coverage of moths is totally inadequate. Although moth species far outnumber butterfly species (in the UK, for example there are more than eight hundred 'macro' moths and around one thousand, five hundred 'micro' moths compared to around sixty

butterflies) this guide assigns around one hundred and twenty-five pages to butterflies and only seventy odd to the moths. The result is that many moth species that are commonly encountered in Britain are not covered. This incompleteness with respect to the moths is likely to lead to both frustration and potential misidentifications and the authors might have been better advised to leave out the moths and use the extra space to give more coverage to the butterflies.

The species are illustrated with decent quality photographs of live specimens in their natural habitats and key identification features are highlighted. The photographs are not printed to the same scale for each species and the book uses a system to indicate size whereby a silhouette of the butterfly is depicted next to a picture of the book itself – a feature I found a little strange and not entirely effective. Typical wing spans are also given in centimetres in the text.

The other feature of this book that I found a little unsatisfying was the order in which the species were arranged. The other guides discussed here present the species according to the standard ordering of the different families and genera but the Dorling Kindersley guide groups species according to appearance. As a result some groups, such as the hairstreaks, are split up and covered in several widely separated parts of the book. This approach may suit some users but I find it a little odd and not particularly helpful.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, each of these guides has its own selling points and personal preferences as well as the intended use of the guide will sway the choice that is made. With the exception of the Dorling Kindersley guide, which I found a little disappointing, each of them can be recommended as a useful addition to any naturalist's library.

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## Web Site

[www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk)

Report your sightings, send in your photographs,

Keep the Web Site up to date.

Contact: Jonathan Wallace

[jonathan@cherryburn.com](mailto:jonathan@cherryburn.com)

Welcome to the following new members of North East England Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

Mr. M D Andrews	Goole
Mr J T Armstrong	Yarkhill, Hereford
Mr J Barnett	Middlesbrough
Mrs S Birdsall	Stockton-on-Tees
Mr J M Blackburn	Stockton-on-Tees
Miss C Z Broadhead	Reigate, Surrey
Mrs S F Brunstrom	Middleton-St-George, Darlington
Ms K Chapman	Sunderland
Mr M N Coates	Whitley Bay
Mr C J Crowe	Guisborough
Mr I and Mrs E Fell	Hexham
Mrs M Fletcher	Newcastle-upon-tyne
Mr H A & Mrs P Fowler	Hartlepool
Mr S R & Mrs M Goddard	Hebburn
Mr P R Grinter	Hartlepool
Dr J B and Mrs C Lyall	Durham
Mr F Maghie	Springwell Village, Gateshead
Mrs M McLean	Gateshead
Mr H Pine and	
Miss A Horsewood	Ushaw Moor, Durham
Dr B E & Mrs B C Prater	Eyemouth
Ms I Price	Durham
Mr T D Richardson	Backworth
Mr G Sirmond	Sunderland
Mr B Stanbury	Lambton, Washington
Miss A M Stevens	Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Mrs M Street	Whitby
Mr S Straughan	Ashington
Mrs M G Tolhurst	Wallsend
Mr R Woods	Guisborough

Well! I'm not sure what to say. This is the greatest number of new members I have ever reported. A warm welcome to you all. In spite of some iffy weather, I think we have had a good year in the North-east, especially with the Painted Ladies. Isn't it a treat to see so many? We are always on the lookout for news, photos or any talented member who has expertise to offer. Just get in touch with one of the Committee Members listed on the back of this newsletter. Oh! and don't forget our Web Site! Jonathan will be glad to hear from you.

**North East England Branch of Butterfly Conservation**

**Notification of Annual General Meeting**

**This will be held on Saturday 12 February 2010  
At Rainton Meadows Nature Reserve  
At 2.00pm.**

Reports will be given by the Chairman, Treasurer and Conservation Officers before the election of officers for the next year. Results of the photographic Competition will be announced.

**It is hoped that Sam Ellis will give a talk.**

**Any other business should be addressed to the Chairman in writing  
twenty-one days before the meeting.**

## Butterfly Conservation Safety Note

As with any other activity, there are hazards in the countryside and everyone taking part in a Field Trip or Working Party has a responsibility, for their own safety and that of others. We always ensure that our events present no greater hazard than any other walk in the countryside, but please note and act on the following:

1. The leader will provide a briefing on the trip before setting out, with details of any known hazards, and will give advice on what to do in an emergency. Please listen carefully.
2. At the briefing, let the leader know if a) you have a mobile telephone and are able to take it with you on the walk, and b) if you have a first aid qualification.
3. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Stout shoes are a minimum requirement for any walk.
4. In sunny weather take a hat, use sun cream or protection for exposed skin. Make sure that you have adequate food and liquid to drink with you.
5. When on a walk, look out for any hazards – rabbit holes, fallen or hanging branches, barbed wire, boggy areas etc.
6. Children are welcome on our walks, but if under the age of 16 must be accompanied by at least one adult for two children. It is the responsibility of the accompanying adult(s) to ensure that the trip is within the children's capability.
7. Dogs are normally welcome on our walks, but must be kept under control.
8. If you are uncertain about any details of the trip, ring the leader/ contact in advance. If you decide to leave the trip early, please tell the leader.
9. Take care at all times and above all ENJOY YOURSELF

# Submitting Butterfly Records 2009

Records are the bedrock of conservation and the North East Branch welcomes records of all species, for all dates and places, and of course for all forms.

**As for 2008 there will be two ways of sending your records in. For those without a home computer, the existing yellow paper casual record sheets will continue unchanged. However, if you have a PC, the Branch would strongly urge you to send in your records using a spreadsheet such as Microsoft Excel or Lotus 123. Each record should occupy one line and the format of the spreadsheet should look something like the following example:**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Name/s of recorder/s	NZ27442 3	Palace Green, Durham City	22-Aug-2008	Large White	7	
2	Name/s of recorder/s	NZ19685 8	Morpeth (riverside)	24-Sep-2008	Peacock	2	Very worn
3	Name/s of recorder/s	NZ2514	Baydale Beck Darlington	1-Jul-2008	Comma	1	<i>Hutchinsoni</i> form

**Column A** – Recorder/s names.

**Column B** - Grid reference, which should be two letters, (NT, NU, NY or NZ), followed by four or six numbers. The first two (or three) numbers are the Easting, read from the top or bottom of OS maps, the last two, (or three) numbers represent the Northing, read from either side of the map.

**Column C** - Site name. For obscure place names please include a nearby town or village.

**Column D** – Date (please try to follow the format shown) **This is really important**

**Column E** - The name of the species seen.

**Column F** – Please give the actual number seen if possible, **We no longer use letters for abundance.** (A, B, C etc.) For larva (L), ova (O), pupa (P) or mating (M) records, please use the code letter provided, optionally adding numbers seen.

**Column G** - For any comments you may wish to add.

Optionally, you can add a habitat code to column H if you wish.

A blank spreadsheet, with the date formatted, is available by contacting the recorders or from the website. Electronic records are most easily sent as an email attachment. However, you can also send them in by post on CD, Floppy disc or Memory stick. The deadline for records to be included, and credited, in the 2009 Annual Report is 30 November 2009. Depending on where you live, please send records to:

**DURHAM**  
Steve Le Fleming  
7 Albert Street  
Durham,  
DH1 4RL  
tel 0191 386 7309  
E-mail [lsklef@aol.com](mailto:lsklef@aol.com)

**NORTHUMBERLAND**  
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## **Chairman**

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## **Conservation Officer (Durham)**

Vacant

## **Conservation Officer (Northumberland)**

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## **Butterfly Conservation Regional Office (Northern England)**

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## **Website**

[www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk)