



North East England Branch



President Sir David Attenborough CH. FRS

DEDICATED TO SAVING WILD BUTTERFLIES AND THEIR HABITATS

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Butterfly Conservation

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Cover Photo: a typical Spring-flying moth, the Hebrew Character *Orthosia gothica* (Jonathan Wallace)

Spring Newsletter

Welcome to our newsletter number 33! Helen Passey, who was the Newsletter Editor up to the end of 2015, recently became a mother for the first time and therefore unable to continue in the role and so, with a little trepidation, I am following in her footsteps and those of her predecessor Jaci Beaven! I hope that this issue will maintain the standards that they have set.

I should like to reiterate the comments Helen made at our last Members' Day encouraging all of our members, whether expert or beginners, to contribute material for the newsletter. We are interested in including a wide range of different contributions around the subject of the butterflies and moths of the region so please don't be shy! As well as written contributions we are also happy to receive photographs and other artwork. Although the printed edition of the newsletter is in black and white, the on-line version is in full colour and so can, hopefully, do justice to your creativity!

We have included a list of events planned for this year in the newsletter and we hope that we shall see at least some of you at these events.

I hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter and, more importantly, that you enjoy a happy and fruitful summer observing the butterflies and moths of our beautiful region. We look forward to receiving your records!

Jonathan Wallace, Editor

Please note that submission deadlines for the newsletter are:

Spring edition: 1st March

Autumn edition: 1st September.

Chairman's Report.

Peter Webb

One of the first signs that Spring is underway is the appearance of the first male Orange Tip, a sight that takes me straight back to my childhood and my first experiences of watching butterflies. I learnt that once I saw the orange tipped males flying along hedgerows amongst the "whites" there would be the females, identified by the beautiful green mottling of the underside of the hindwing. Once Orange Tips have been on the wing for a week it was time to patiently search Hedge Mustard flower heads for the tiny, orange, skittle-shaped eggs from where the well camouflaged caterpillar would hatch. I look forward to searching for Orange tip eggs this spring with the same sense of "childish excitement".

This spring we are pleased to welcome 62 new members who have joined Butterfly Conversation in the last year, many following 2015's highly successful Big Butterfly Count. I hope all of you will come to share my lifetime passion for these fascinating creatures. One member I know who shares that passion is Ian Findlay who was honoured in 2015 with the award of Butterfly Conservation's Outstanding Volunteer Award.

I was thrilled that Ian's lifelong contribution to conservation had been recognised. For the last 41 years Ian has walked his upper Teesdale transect and operated a moth trap as part of the Rothamsted Insect Survey. His meticulous record keeping and remarkable persistence have made an outstanding contribution to the conservation of butterflies and moths.

Congratulations also to Helen Passey on the birth of her son Aaron in December. Helen has edited the branch newsletter for the last two years but has now decided to give up the role. My thanks to Helen for doing such a good job for the branch. Jonathan Wallace has offered to take over as editor alongside his role as branch webmaster.

In January some of you will have received an email from me with information on branch events. If you didn't receive the email but would like to be included in future emailed updates please let me have your email address. 'Bcc' is always used on these emails so your email address isn't given to everyone else on the mailing list.

Included in this newsletter are details of future events including our AGM and Members Day which will be held on Sunday 9th October at Gibside. With Dr. Sam Ellis, Butterfly Conservation's Director of Conservation and Regions and Allan Rodda, Conservation Officer for the Yorkshire branch of Butterfly Conservation as our main speakers it promises to be another good member's day. This is your day so please do come along.

The North East England Branch currently has over 500 individual members with varying degrees of expertise but I'm sure many of you are like me: a well-meaning amateur with an interest first stimulated in childhood but still with a lot to learn. We all can contribute a little more by submitting records of butterflies and moths we have seen, writing a short article for the newsletter, visiting and contributing to the branch website or facebook or joining the branch committee.



Male Orange-tip
(Graham Beckwith)

North East England Transect Report 2015

Brian Denham

The total number of transects recorded in the North East in 2015 was 47. Three transects recorded in previous years were not recorded in 2015. There were three new transects started in 2015. Of the 47 transects recorded, 12 are in Northumberland (VC67 and VC68) and the remaining 35 are in County Durham (VC66).

As expected, the total numbers of butterflies recorded on transects in 2015 was down on 2014 with 29751 recorded in 2015 and 36952 in 2014. Only six transects were slightly up on total number of butterflies recorded in 2015 compared with 2014. The remainder were down by an average of 25%.

The big excitement for 2015 was the discovery of Essex Skippers on Teesside. In a searching exercise at the end of July they were recorded in 15 out of 20 1km squares investigated. They were subsequently recorded on the Cowpen Bewley transect. They had probably been there and in other areas for some time but just not identified as they are so similar to Small Skippers.

Whilst we always appreciate additional transects being recorded, new ones in Northumberland would be particularly welcome in increasing the coverage of North East England. If you would like to record a transect yourself all the relevant information is on the branch web site – www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk or contact Brian Denham the transect coordinator.

Most transect data is now being entered by the individual recorders directly onto Butterfly Conservations “On Line” data base. The instructions for which can be found by going to www.ukbms.org/mydata/home and going to “Welcome to transect Walker on line.” Whilst I would obviously prefer that all data is entered this way I am still willing to enter the data from paper records if the recorder is not computer literate or not connected to the Internet.

Moorland Butterflies

Moors for the Future Partnership launched a citizen science project last year which aims to track how the numbers and distribution of certain species are changing with time and to see how the timing of events (such as peak emergence) is linked to climate change. The project is centred on the Peak District but also hopes to include data from other important moorland areas such as those found in Durham and Northumberland. You can contribute to the project by submitting details of sightings made on the moors.

The target butterfly species are Green Hairstreak, Orange-tip and Peacock. Other species covered by the project include birds and bumblebees. Records will be shared with our County Recorders.

For more details of how to take part and to report sightings using the on-line reporting form please see <http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/community-science/surveys>.

Dingy Skipper Survey

Volunteers are sought to participate in a survey of Dingy Skipper sites to be run in conjunction with Durham Wildlife Trust. It is hoped that this will permit an update on the status of this species following the last survey in 2004-05. Please contact Dave Wainwright if you would be interested in surveying a site (a list of target sites will be produced and publicised via the branch web-site and Facebook page). Dave will be running a training session at Low Barns Nature Reserve at 10.30 on 5th May. This will cover the butterfly surveying methodology and the recording of relevant habitat features and will involve classroom and outdoor sessions. As second training event will be held at Rainton Meadows on 15 May

It is intended that the survey will also cover day-flying moths with the following target species: Narrow-bordered five-spot burnet, Six-spot burnet, Chimney sweeper, Cinnabar, Latticed heath and Mother Shipton.

Winter Work Parties 2015/16

Northumberland

David Stebbings

Over the past winter we held three work parties in Northumberland. Two were at Stargate Ponds near Blaydon. The objective of these was to clear a path, which is on the route of a transect, through a wooded part of the site. The person who walks the transect was finding the path impassable due to brambles and scrub growing over it. In order to maintain the same route for the transect the path needed to be opened up again. In the two well attended work days we cleared the path and opened up a couple of scallops out of the woodland edge to create larger glades, which will hopefully allow some flowers to appear and attract butterflies.

The third work party was at Paradise reserve on Scotswood Road in Newcastle. Here we tackled the continuing problem of Buddleia and birch scrub invading the old railway track bed.

It was good to see some new faces on the work parties this year and a big thank you to all those who came along.

Durham

Mike Harris

Work to prevent the scrubbing up of habitat suitable for the northern butterfly speciality – the Northern Brown Argus – continued this winter in partnership with Durham Wildlife Trust at their Town Kelloe Bank Reserve (NZ 361 369), with work parties in January and February.

In previous years, the branch has put out work parties at Durham County Council's Littlewood LNR (2015) and at Foxholes (2014), part of the National Trust's, coastal landholding.

Town Kelloe Bank is a really special reserve of 5.11 hectares of primary magnesian limestone. The three steep-sided hills that comprise the reserve were formed by a glacial lake melt-water system channel. The flora is classic magnesian limestone – wild thyme, salad burnet, milkwort and autumn gentian. One of the wet flushes also supports the largest

population of birds-eye primrose in County Durham. On the south-facing slope of one of the hills there is a good population of common rock rose, the food-plant of the larval stage of the Northern Brown Argus. The reserve also supports common blue and small copper butterflies.

The reserve has a small population of the Argus – Ian Waller recorded a maximum count of 15 adults in the summer of 2015. It is hoped that control and removal of the invasive hawthorn and ash scrub that was carried out, will allow the rock rose to increase and flourish, increasing the Argus population.

We hope to continue our work parties with DWT in the autumn and winter of 2016/17, so if you want to get involved, please email michaelsharris@talktalk.net



NORTHERN BROWN ARGUS - Inland Colonies 2015

Ian Waller

Being at a loose end after returning to the north of England, and upon hearing Dave Wainwright was looking for someone to visit Northern Brown Argus sites and report on their progress (or not) I started a casual survey of most of the inland colonies. I used the maps from Dave's 2006 report as the basis for searches and have retained the use of those headings for the sites in this article.

Bishop Middleham Quarry NZ3234

As this is probably the easiest Northern Brown Argus site for access, early repeat visits looking for NBA to give me a probable start date for emergence of this species resulted in 3 males being found on the 26 May. One corner of the quarry is very sheltered and will probably produce some of the earliest records every season.

A return visit on the 16 June found 5 adults and a photograph was taken of a male, sitting amongst the nettles by the entrance gate, with the full white spot.

Repeat visits were made over the season as I covered Steve Le Flemings transect on several occasions when he was unavailable. During these visits another full white spot was photographed, on the 6 August, this turned out to an aberrant female. I saw 2 individuals on the 12 August which were the last records made for Durham this year.

Overgrazing by rabbits may be causing problems and DWT is monitoring the situation. Winter grazing by ponies was halted 15/16.



Mating NBA - Bishop Middleham 16.06.2015

Cassop Vale NNR West, Cassop Vale NNR East, Old Quarrington West, Old Quarrington East and Quarrington Hill (Little Wood LNR)

Cassop Vale NNR West NZ3238

No butterflies were found on the 2006 survey and this was the case when the site was viewed from the road in 2015. Grazing by sheep was taking place and the site falls within the boundaries of being opencast by the reworking and extension of Cold Knuckle Quarry.

Cassop Vale NNR East NZ3338

Most of the rock-rose is on the quarry wall sides making an actual count of Argus virtually impossible. Loss of rock-rose is occurring as scrub colonises the quarry face. While it would be a difficult project, this should be tackled immediately. 4 Argus were counted in the quarry floor on the 9 July. Areas around the base of the quarry had recently been cleared but no rock-rose was found in this area. The butterflies chances would be greatly improved by further habitat management.

Quarrington Masts area is part of Cassop Vale East, and there is a small area that the public footpath runs through from the masts to Cassop NNR. This area is in urgent need of management and unless something is done the butterfly will be lost from this site. 6 adults were counted on the 9 July.

Old Quarrington West NZ3437

I have always called this area Cold Knuckle Bridal Path and this was the most disheartening of the sites visited where there was evidence of NBA being present. Fifteen years ago I recall, the NBA could be found in various patches along this bridle path, which was still the case in 2006. On searching along the path this year, only one patch of rock-rose could be found and this was peppered with 30+ ova, 09.07. What is worse than the decline is that this area is due to be quarried, thus destroying the remaining Argus and food plants. It is understood (D Wainwright, personal communication) that Durham County Council has attached a condition to the planning consent, requiring the site to be restored to limestone grassland and it is hoped that this will include the planting of rock-rose and that this will permit the recolonisation of the site by NBA in years to come. The bridle path was officially closed on the 8 July.

Old Quarrington East NZ3337

No butterflies were found on the 2006 survey and this was the case when the site was visited in 2015. In fact despite a prolonged search of the area, no rock-rose could be found.

Quarrington Hill, Littlewood LNR NZ3337, NZ3437

6 adults were recorded on the 30 June. along with an ovipositing Brown Argus. I revisited the site on the 12 July and 5 adults were counted.

A transect is run by Durham Council Rangers on this site and the peak count for the transect was 4 on the 2 July by John Olley.

Crowtrees LNR NZ3337

The creation and management of this site has been a success. On the 9 July, 3 NBA were counted. John Olley noted 5 a week earlier, during his visit to the site.

Pig Hill NZ3644

Pig Hill is the collective term given to four small areas of suitable habitat around Low Haswell/Elemore area. The largest two areas were extensively searched during a visit on the 3 July, with no evidence of NBA found.

One of the areas is known as Cherry Garth, which is a patch of rock-rose in a sheltered woodland glade. A systematic search was made of every rock-rose plant in the hope that ova could be found, but to no avail. The weather conditions were perfect and many other species of butterfly were seen. A short walk through Elemore Woods to Low Haswell Banks followed, where this time suitable habitat could not be found. Cows were grazing the area and the only Lepidoptera of any description were a dozen Chimney Sweep moths.

Dave Wainwright (personal communication) visited Pig Hill in 2006 and adults were present in the woodland clearing. He returned in 2013 and found that the grass was head high and no NBA could be located. Sadly it must be concluded that the species is no longer present here.



Male NBA - Bishop Middleham 16.06.2015

Raisby Hill Grassland NZ3335

5 adults were seen in the quarry bottom at Raisby Quarry on the 16 June. This was the highest count from this small site. The butterflies are monitored by transect on this reserve which I have taken on from the DWT. From the transect results, 2 adults were seen on the 10 June 7 July and 9 July.

The area of habitat is small and DWT will be doing work to enhance the area of rock-rose around a section of parameter fence. Rock-rose has also been planted on a north facing slope and it was found that ova were on the leaves. There is a great opportunity to plant rock-rose cuttings in this area and volunteers are needed to grow rock-rose plants.

Rough Furze Quarry and Thrislington Plantation NNR

Rough Furze Quarry NZ3132

This site was not visited due to access problems. Dave Wainwright visited it in 2013 when he found no NBA. His opinion was that the site was in need of management. It is hoped that a work party on the site can be arranged this winter.

Thrislington NNR NZ3132

This site was not visited. A transect is run there as part of the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme but only 3 individuals were seen in 2015. Graham Beckwith fared much better with a count of 56 on the 1 July. Another high count was of 39 from K. Walton on the 25 July.

Sherburn Hill NZ3241, NZ3341

I last visited this site on a field trip led by Sam Ellis around 1996. Sam with the help of Houghall students had begun working on part of the SSSI to clear scrub. In the intervening years, I understand the landowner has continued with habitat management and over the last twenty years the site has greatly improved. A total of 8 Argus were found with too many eggs to

count, and I am pleased to say, over a widespread area. The first ova were found on the left hand side as one starts to climb the hill and the rock-rose would benefit from some scrub removal along the edge of the path.

A revisit to the site was made on the 4 July, with Dark Green Fritillary being the targeted species. A couple of Argus were noted, as was a very fresh Dingy Skipper.

Silent Bank NZ3439

There is a colony that exists on the central reservation of the A181 road. This site was not visited.

Town Kelloe Bank NZ3537, NZ3637

Town Kelloe Banks consists of three small sites in close proximity to each other. While the NBA moves between sites, unfortunately they are not managed by the same people/organisations and this has led to the northern colony becoming almost lost, if indeed it is not already too late to save the habitat. Only one visit was made on the 30 June.



Female aberrant NBA - Bishop Middleham 06.08.2015

(East) 10 adults were counted and ova easily located on rock-rose. Some management has occurred within the last few years by DWT and both the

habitat and species has benefited from this. The NE England Branch of Butterfly Conservation organised two work parties to the site in early 2016.

(West) 6 adults were on the wing.

(North) This site is all but lost to heavy hawthorn scrub. A few rock-rose plants were found in the large area marked on the maps from 2006. The plants had ova on them but due to the dense scrub it is questionable as to whether they will make it to adulthood. This site needs immediate work.

Castle Eden Dene NNR Meadow NZ4138

This site was not visited. I believe the butterfly has been absent for nearly twenty years now.

Hastings Hill NZ3554

This site was not visited but it appears the NBA is present again, although no records were received from this site for 2015. This will be a priority site for me to search in 2016.

Hesleden Dene

This site was not visited. I did search for the NBA in the late 90's here but found nothing.

High Haining Hill and Houghton Scarp

High Haining Hill NZ3550

A large area of grassland was extensively and systematically searched during a visit on the 3 July, with no evidence of NBA found either as adults or ova. I have searched this area previously twenty years ago and it appears there is less rock-rose now. Grazing by cattle was also occurring during the visit.

Houghton Scarp NZ3550

This site was not visited due to lack of access.



Female aberrant NBA - Bishop Middleham 06.08.2015

Pittington Hill NZ3344

Only one visit was made on the 1 July when 4 adults were found but, despite a search, no ova.

Apparently Northern Brown Argus was not recorded for a number of years from this site, but was recently rediscovered there and it was pleasing to find them here again.

This site would be greatly enhanced by habitat management and I would suggest that this location should be made a top priority for any work.

Tuthill Quarry NZ3843

This disused quarry site was visited although due to scrub, access to the immediate location could not be made.

Summary

From my observations: several sites need monitoring, and volunteers are needed to run either a full transect or a species orientated one for NBA from June to early August. If anyone could spare the time of approximately one hour per week, your assistance would be gratefully received. Help could be provided in transect methodology, choosing the route and anything else, if required.

Possible sites for transects would be: Town Kelloe Banks, Pittington Hill, Sherburn Hill, Cassop Vale, Hastings Hill and Crowtrees Butterfly transects are currently being run on: Thrislington, Bishop Middleham, Raisby and Littlewood.

Town Kelloe north, Cassop Vale east and Pittington Hill need immediate habitat management.

Mitigation and protection of the NBA needs to be investigated at Old Quarrington west. Also, reinstatement of Old Quarrington east, following completion of quarrying operations, must include planting of rock-rose.

Volunteers are also needed to grow rock-rose either by seed or cuttings. We have a chance to work with DWT and, hopefully, keen gardeners could help with this.

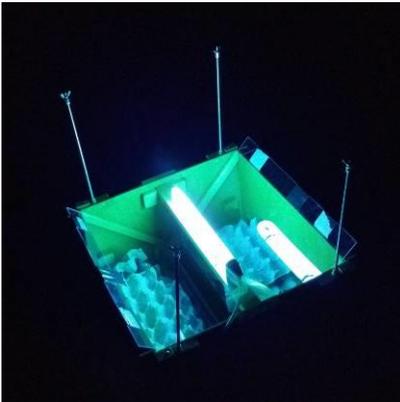
Also, please try and attend one work party that the branch organises. Two work parties ran in Durham, early 2016, which were specifically for the NBA and Mike Harris intends to continue with this policy.

Furthermore, we need help to survey the coastal sites for Northern Brown Argus and possibly set up transects on some of these as well.

The summary provides quite a list of targets but these will only be possible if people come forward to help. In twenty years' time, will you be saying "I remember when the Northern Brown Argus was there" or "I helped conserve the Northern Brown Argus."?

Moths, moths, moths! – Stephen and Helen Passey

The Garden Moths Scheme takes place over 36 weeks from March until November and is open to anyone interested in regular moth trapping and recording in their garden. Early last year we were given the opportunity to get involved in the scheme using a trap on loan from NE coordinator Mike Cook, sponsored by ERIC North East. The trap sported a 40 W actinic bulb, so bright enough to attract plenty of moths but not so bright as to spoil the neighbours' sleep.



The trap in action...



Herald

We managed to trap on 35 of 36 weeks and were amazed to clock up a total of 2,080 moths of 137 species from our small garden. Running the trap on additional nights brought the total for the Summer to 3,897 moths of over 150 species. The most moths netted in one night was 603 (one reason why it isn't recommended to start moth trapping as a new hobby mid-year...) and, yes, about a quarter of those were Large Yellow Underwings...

Data aside, the favourites for 2015 were the Poplar and Elephant Hawk-moths, Puss Moth, Twenty-plume Moth and the twig-like Buff-tips. You never know what is going to turn up in the trap next. The closest we got to something rare was an Oak Nycteoline - one of only 7 records in North Northumberland.

Even the cold does not deter the seasoned 'moth-er' and we managed to retain the trap for the Winter GMS. Despite being quite a frosty affair we managed to trap a handful of Chestnut, Dark Chestnut, Early Moth and Mottled Umber.



Oak Nycteoline



Buff-tip

Overall the scheme is great fun and it was fantastic to be able to have the opportunity to try out a trap for free. Although identification can be tricky for some species, there are a host of helpful veterans available to argue over your Pug. Aside from the trap and some containers, a digital camera is a necessity though I found my mobile phone gave better results than an SLR.

The GMS begins again in March this year and this time we have invested in our own trap. If anyone is interested in joining in with the GMS please contact Mike via the website.



Poplar Hawk-moth



Twenty-plume Moth

<http://www.gardenmoths.org.uk/>
<http://www.northumberlandmoths.org.uk/index.php>
<http://www.ericnortheast.org.uk/home.html>

Late Nymphs at Washington Ronald Henderson.

On an industrial estate in Washington, Tyne & Wear, less than five minutes' walk from Lambton Village there is, amongst a plethora of small factories and industrial units, a single plot of undeveloped land, about the size of a football pitch, overgrown with tall grasses and the associated plants that naturally inhabit such land.

Bounded on two sides by factory units, a public path on the third side and mature trees on the fourth side, the usual grass land butterflies have always commonly been found there such as Meadow Browns, Small Skippers and Ringlets. A late summer visit to the field during a long awaited period of hot sunny weather revealed thousands of nectar rich flowering Ragwort plants inhabiting most of the site.

On the afternoon of the 19th of September there were one Red Admiral, 12 Small Tortoiseshells, five Peacocks and four Speckled Woods imbibing on the rich nectar sources. The following day it rained but on the 21st the Small Tortoiseshells had reduced to five, the Peacocks had unusually all disappeared but the sole Red Admiral was still there with the Speckled Woods. Three days later the original Red Admiral had been joined by another three and these remained in the same area until the 1st of October despite being regularly harassed by the Speckled Woods.

On the afternoon of the 25th, joining the Red Admirals and Small Tortoiseshells was a pristine Painted Lady which posed sufficiently long for photographs to be taken before flying off and disappearing into the distance, never to be seen again. This was only the second personal sighting of this species in the north east this year. On the 27th after a lapse of eight days just one Peacock had re-appeared but it turned out to be the last one of the season.

On the 2nd of October only one Red Admiral remained, in company with several Small Tortoiseshells and the Speckled Woods but now another new addition appeared, a sole but perfect Comma and for the second day running, a pristine male Common Blue. After that it rained for three days and a final visit of the year on the 9th, during warm sunny conditions

revealed the Ragwort flowers had almost all turned to seed with not a butterfly in site.

This small urban site, visited at such a late period revealed more species together in one place than any of the other more popular butterfly sites in the region. It only remains now to hope that the site remains in its undeveloped state for many more years to come.



Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral nectaring on ragwort at Lambton Industrial Estate. (Ronald Henderson).

Members' Day and AGM

To be held in the Stables Learning and discovery Centre at Gibside National Trust, Rowlands Gill on Sunday 9th October 2016.

Programme

Arrive at 10.00am . Entry on the day is free, but please tell reception staff you are coming to "the butterfly day". A shuttle bus is available if you don't want to walk up to the stables. Coffee or tea will be provided at the stables on arrival and after lunch.

- 10.00 am Entry on the day is free, but please tell reception staff you are coming to "the butterfly day". A shuttle bus is available if you don't want to walk up to the stables. Coffee or tea will be provided at the stables on arrival and after lunch.
- 10.30 Inspection of the Gibside moth trap to see moths captured overnight.
- 11.00 Talk on moths by Dave Wainwright (BC Senior Regional Officer for the North of England)
- 11.45 North East England Moth Report
- 12.00 Annual General Meeting (to include Annual Chairman's report and Conservation Officers' reports)
- 12.30 pm Lunch (bring a picnic or alternatively purchase food from Gibside Café)
- 1.30 North East England Butterfly Report
- 1.45 Guest speaker: Allan Rodda (Branch Conservation Officer, Yorkshire Branch)
- 2.45 Guest Speaker: Sam Ellis (Butterfly Conservation Director of Conservation and Regions)
- 3.45 Results of the Photographic Competition and closing comments

All members are invited to bring or email original photographs of **British Butterflies and Moths** for a **photographic competition**. Photographs can be emailed to Jonathan Wallace (jonathan@cherryburn.com) by 1st October or given to him before 11 am on the day (size no larger than 10" by 8").

Please notify Peter Webb (apwebb546@gmail.com or 01833 650772) if you plan to attend.

Events

- 13 May **Field trip to Stanley Moss**, jointly with Durham Wildlife Trust. Led by Dave Wainwright. Target species Green Hairstreak and Emperor Moth. Meet 10.30 on the B6299 between Sunnyside and Stanley Crook, grid ref. NZ153381. Good boots, outdoor clothes required.
- 24 June **Coatham Stob**. Field trip led by Ian Waller. Target species is Forester Moth but we should also find a range of grassland butterflies. There will also be opportunities to spot dragonfly and damselfly species around the pond. Meet in the car park at grid reference NZ394155 at 10.30 am. Bring a packed lunch. For additional details contact Ian Waller aeshna@hotmail.com
- 2 July **Sherburn Hill**. Led by Ian Waller. Target species are Northern Brown Argus and Dark Green Fritillary but we expect to see a variety of other butterfly and day-flying moth species. Meet at 10.30 at grid reference NZ323421. On street parking available nearby. Bring a packed lunch. For additional details contact Ian Waller: aeshna@hotmail.com
- 23 July **Cowpen Bewley**. Led by Ian Waller. Target species is Essex Skipper which was discovered in County Durham for the first time in 2015. We will focus on the identification of this species and how to distinguish it from the very similar Small Skipper. A digital camera and/or close focussing binoculars will be useful to bring along if you have them. Meet at 10.30 at grid reference NZ479253 in the large free car-park. Bring a packed lunch. For additional details contact Ian Waller aeshna@hotmail.com
- 24 July **Coatham Stob**. Led by Ian Waller. We will be searching for Essex Skipper, Purple Hairstreak and White-letter Hairstreak. None of these species have been recorded at the site but there is suitable habitat present; we shall also be recording other butterflies present. Meet at 10.30 at grid reference NZ394155 in the large free car-park. Bring a packed lunch. For additional details contact Ian Waller: aeshna@hotmail.com
- 25 July **Big Butterfly Day**. At National Trust, Gibside, Rowlands Gill, NE16 6BG. Please join the North East Branch of Butterfly Conservation and the National Trust for this Summer Holiday Family Fun day at Gibside in Gateshead, Tyne & Wear. Visitors will be invited to take part in a Big Butterfly Count (www.bigbutterflycount.org). Further details will be announced nearer to the date.
- 9 Oct **Members' Day and AGM** (see page 23 for details)

A Rare Moth in Co Durham

Tom Tams

A specimen of *Vitula edmandsii* (Packard, [1865]) a moth of the pyralid family was caught at Souter Lighthouse, Co Durham, on the 16.viii.2015 by Nick Antcliff. A genitalia determination was carried out by T.J. Tams who identified it as a male of this species

This record constitutes the second British record, the first being at Spurn, Yorkshire on 8.viii.1997 (Beaumont, 1998).

Originally a North American species it is now found in a number of European countries, including Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Hot on the heels of the 2nd British record of *Vitula edmandsii* from Co. Durham, one was taken overnight at Howdon, Northumberland (VC67) 10.x.2015 by John Hall. (♂ confirmed by dissection T.J. Tams)



Getting to Grips with Skippers

J Wallace

Skippers (Hesperiidae) are a family of small moth-like butterflies with thick-set bodies and a characteristic busy, darting flight, often close to the ground. Eight species of skipper occur in the United Kingdom and four of these are found in the North East: the Large Skipper, the Small Skipper, the Essex Skipper (discovered around Teesmouth in July 2015) and the Dingy Skipper. Although with a little practice these charming butterflies are quite easily identified there are some potential identification pitfalls and the purpose of this note is to highlight the main distinguishing features.

Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*

This is the first of the Skippers to emerge each year usually appearing towards the end of April and flying until the end of June/early July (a small number of individuals emerge as a second generation in August in some years but this is exceptional). It occurs in grasslands where there is bare ground where its food plant, Bird's-foot Trefoil occurs and is strongly associated with brownfield sites. The Dingy Skipper is quite different in appearance to the other three skippers present in our region, being (as the name perhaps implies) a predominantly grey-brown colour in contrast to the golden-orange colour of the other three. However, the species does sometimes get confused with two day-flying moth species that can occur within the same habitats: the Mother Shipton, *Callistege mi*, and the Burnet Companion, *Euclidia glyphica*. The photos below highlight the main differences.



Dingy Skipper. Wingspan approx. 28mm. Widely spaced antennae with slightly hooked ends. Forewing greyish with darker brown markings forming loosely defined bands. Hind-wing brown. A complete row of white spots along the margin of both fore & hind wings.



Mother Shipton: Wingspan approx. 32 mm. Note Antennae are close together and lack a club. Forewing markings resemble the face of an old crone (Mother Shipton) with a hooked nose and prominent chin and a black spot forming the eye. Hind wings, when visible, have two conspicuous rows of white markings giving a

much more variegated appearance than the Dingy Skipper.



Burnet Companion:
Wingspan approx. 30 mm. Antennae close together and lacking a club. Forewing brown/purplish-brown with two complete darker brown bands and a brown mark on the leading edge towards the apex. No white marks. Outer part of hind-wing is orangey-brown with a dark brown band across it and a dark margin.

(Photo: Weza; Wikipedia Commons, public domain).

Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus*

The Large Skipper usually emerges in our region towards the end of May/early June with peak numbers occurring in late June and remaining on the wing through July and into August. It is a grassland butterfly that occurs where there are clumps of tall grass including its favoured food plant Cock's Foot. The Large Skipper, in our region at least, is usually found in small numbers with counts rarely going into double figures on most sites. The Large Skipper is superficially similar to the Small and Essex Skippers and care needs to be taken to distinguish the three species.



(Photos Graham Beckwith). Wingspan approx. 30 mm.

As with other skippers the antennae are widely spaced on the head and the clubs are slightly hooked. The Large Skipper is one of the 'golden' skippers which all share a similar basic colouration but close examination shows that on both the upper and under sides of the forewing the Large Skipper has a number of pale marks that give the wing a faintly chequered or blotchy appearance. Both Small and Essex Skippers lack these blotches and have a much more uniform appearance. The left hand picture, above, depicts a male, distinguished by the black streak angled across the forewing. This is the sex brand which contains specialised

scent scales. It is larger and more conspicuously marked than the sex-brand of either the Small Skipper or the Essex Skipper.

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

The Small Skipper is the last of the Skippers to emerge in our region, with its flight period lagging roughly three-weeks to a month behind that of the Large Skipper (we don't yet have sufficient data to characterise a 'typical' flight period for the Essex Skipper in North East England but elsewhere it flies at the same time as the Small Skipper). It is a grassland butterfly favouring rough grasslands with long grass. It is much more numerous than the Large Skipper and goods sites can often yield three figure counts. Large counts of a 'golden' skipper are much more likely to be this species than Large Skipper. The favoured food plant is Yorkshire Fog.



(Photos: J Wallace (left); Graham Beckwith (right). Wingspan: approx. 28 mm.

Although it is smaller than the Large Skipper the most obvious difference between this species and the Large Skipper is the relatively uniform colouring of the forewing of the Small Skipper which lacks the chequer marks of the Large Skipper. The sex-brand on the male Small Skipper (see left hand picture) is also much more finely drawn and less

conspicuous than on the Large Skipper. The sex-brand is also the most conspicuous difference between this species and the Essex Skipper. In the Small Skipper it is relatively long, slightly curved and at an angle to the leading edge of the wing whereas in the Essex Skipper it is short, very fine, straight and parallel to the leading edge of the wing. The other key identification mark to separate these two species (apart from rather subtle differences in wing shape) is the colour of the undersides of the tips of the antennae. In the Small Skipper they are usually an orangey brown colour whilst in the Essex Skipper they are black and are often said to give the appearance of having been dipped in ink. However, the colour of antennal tips is not completely reliable and efforts should be made to observe a male in order to check the sex brand characteristics.

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

The Essex Skipper is the latest species to colonise our region, having been discovered by Mike Wilcox on Teesmouth in July 2015. Extensive searches by Ian Waller and Mike Hunter have shown that the species is well established, with its presence confirmed in 27 1km squares around Teesmouth. It is very likely that the species will spread further from here (it has been extending its range in the UK for some time) and we are keen to track this as closely as possible. Observers are therefore requested to check 'small' Skippers closely and to report their sightings to the County Recorders. In this respect, negative records are as important as positive ones so we would be grateful if people could also report where they have checked sites and found only Small Skipper, indicating the number of individual butterflies examined. Because of the close similarity of the two species we would also ask that wherever possible records of Essex Skipper are accompanied with digital photographs of the critical features. These are described above in the section on the Small Skipper and shown in the photos of the two species.



Male Essex Skipper Photo: Ian Waller.

Other British Skipper Species

Species	Scientific name	Notes
Chequered Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>	Extinct in England. Occurs in a number of sites centred around Fort William in the west of Scotland.
Lulworth Skipper	<i>Thymelicus acteon</i>	Tiny skipper that is restricted to a small area on the Dorset coast.
Silver-spotted Skipper	<i>Hesperia comma</i>	This species requires warm conditions and is restricted to a few sites in the south of England.
Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>	Superficially similar to the Dingy Skipper, this species has dark grey/black wings with white chequer marks. It is restricted to central and southern England.

New Members

Welcome to all the following new members of the Branch.

Sarah Walsby	Wallsend	Alison Robson	Chester le Street
Jennifer Burton	Darlington	Keith Ross	Newton Aycliffe
Mr M D Morris	Houghton le Spring	Linda Starkey	Cramlington
Katharine Hogarth	Framwellgate Moor	Ronald Henderson	Washington
Laura Allan	Gateshead	James Craige	Cramlington
Judith Okoro	Newcastle	Samuel Enderby	Hexham
Gavin Struthers	Middlesbrough	Alison Phillips	Ferryhill
James Common	Bedlington	Ashley Johnson	Shildon
Simone Price	Bishop Auckland	Catherine Tuckwell	Sunderland
Michael Tutin	North Shields	Pamela Hooley	Durham
Emma King	Aldbrough St John	Jess Anson	Kielder
Anne Dobson	Durham	Jeannie Hughes	Alnwick
Marie McQuade	Stanley	Sarah Woods	Newcastle
Bill Byatt	Alnwick	Kirsty Hardy	Sunderland
Elizabeth Ferguson	Gateshead	Sue & Aidan Reynolds	Ashington
Mr J Hoskyns- Abrahall	Newsham	Audrey & Katie Linden	Newcastle
David & Rhian Lidell	Leyburn	Tracy & Lesley Hall	Newcastle
Amy Gilo-Haggart & Michael Haggart	Consett	Julia Black & Neil Pont	Newcastle
Peter and Jillian Stranney	Chester le Street	Mark and Nicola Eaton	Alnwick
Wendy Gregory & Alison Crossley	Haltwistle	Liz Wilson	Wylam
Alison Dickens	Sunderland	Martyn Arnold	Stockton on Tees
Stefan McElwee	Newcastle	Wendy & Jennifer Gibson	Ashington
Katie Bainbridge	Richmond	Alison White	Darlington
Andrea Johnson & Jody Edwards	Darlington	Taryn Al-Mashgari	Chester le Street
Alex Keil	Darlington	Victoria Slack	Houghton le Spring
Jonathan Gibson	Darlington	Ian Walby	Houghton le Spring
Gail Young	Newcastle	Fiona Billinge	Sherburn Village
James Nath	Gainford		

Safety Notice

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 seek to 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. Be aware of Ticks. Check the recommendations on the Butterfly Conservation Web Site.
8. Dogs are normally welcome on our walks, but must be kept on the lead.
9. 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.
10. Take care at all times and above all ENJOY YOURSELF.

How to Submit Moth Records

Over 1200 species of moth have been recorded in our region, some common and widespread, others represented by very few, or in some cases, only a single record. Submitting records of moths helps to improve our understanding of the distribution and abundance of these fascinating insects and to enable potential problems they may be experiencing to be detected. Separate databases are maintained for Durham and Northumberland and records should be submitted to the appropriate recorder depending on where they are made.

In all cases the following information should be recorded:

Species name:	Please indicate scientific and (where there is one) common names.
Location:	Where the moth was recorded.
Grid reference:	Ideally a six-figure grid reference for the location.
Vice County:	66 for Durham, 67 for South Northumberland and 68 for North Northumberland.
Date :	For light trapping records the convention is that the date should be that of the evening when the trap is set rather than the morning when it is emptied.
Recorder:	Name of the person who caught/observed the moth(s).
Determiner:	The name of the person who identified the moth(s) (if different to the recorder).
Life cycle stage:	i.e. adult, pupa, caterpillar or egg.
Quantity:	The number of each species recorded.
Method:	Type of trap, field record, or how the moth was caught.

Durham (Vice County 66)

Records should be submitted to either of the joint moth recorders for Durham:

Keith Dover

4 Lindisfarne Avenue
Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham
e-mail: k.dover879@btinternet.com

Tim Barker

26 Farrier Close
Pity Me, Durham, DH1 5XY
e-mail: tim@tapandspile.co.uk

A spreadsheet for the submission of moth records for County Durham can be downloaded from www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk/recording

Northumberland (Vice County 67 and Vice County 68)

Records should be submitted to **Tom Tams**, the moth recorder for Northumberland, 191 Links Road, Tynemouth, Northumberland. Tel: 0191 272 8499

e-mail: tom-tams@blueyonder.co.uk or recorder@northumberlansmoths.org.uk

Full details for submitting records in Northumberland, including a downloadable spreadsheet are given at www.northumberlandmoths.org.uk.

Validation

It is important that records are accurate and based on correct identifications and one of the responsibilities of the County Recorders is to scrutinise submitted records and check that this is the case. For any records of rare species, easily confused species or records of species that are outside their usual geographic range or flight period they may ask for supporting evidence to be supplied before the record is accepted. Suitable evidence may include good quality photographs, or sight of the actual specimen (moths can be kept captive for a day or two in a pot in a cool place without being harmed).

Submitting Butterfly Records 2016

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.

Records can either be submitted on paper using the casual records recording sheet or electronically. The latter is preferred if you have a computer as it greatly facilitates the addition of records to the database. Each record should occupy one line and the format of the spreadsheet should look something like the following example. An 'Excel' spreadsheet can be downloaded from the web-site (www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk/recording.html):

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Name/s of recorder/s	NZ274423	Palace Green, Durham City	22-Aug-2010	Large White	7	
2	Name/s of recorder/s	NZ196858	Morpeth (riverside)	24-Sep-2010	Peacock	2	Very worn
3	Name/s of recorder/s	NZ2514	Baydale Beck Darlington	1-Jul-2010	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)

Column E - The name of the species seen.

Column F - The number seen. The actual number is preferred rather than the letter system. 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. Electronic records are most easily sent as an email attachment. However, you can also send them in by post on CD or memory stick. The deadline for records to be included, and credited, in the 2012 Annual Report is 30 November 2012. Depending on where you live, please send records to:

DURHAM

Steve Le Fleming (postal records)

✉ 7 Albert Street
Durham,
DH1 4RL

☎ : Ian Waller : aeshna@hotmail.com

NORTHUMBERLAND

Michael Perkins

✉ 71 Broadway West
Gosforth,
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE3 2NH

☎ : mjp514@yahoo.co.uk

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