



Butterfly  
Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

# The Suffolk Argus

The Newsletter of the **Suffolk** Branch of Butterfly Conservation

Clouded Yellow, male and female at Bawdsey. D and M Carter

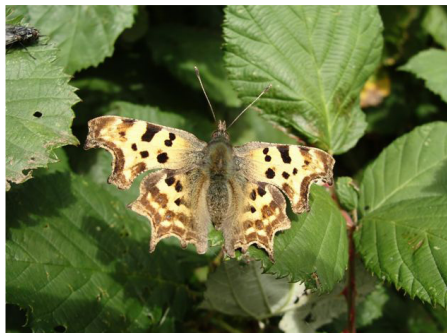


Autumn 2013

Volume 58

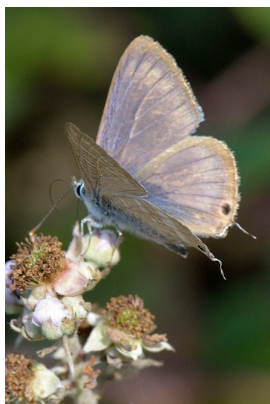
## Some unusual butterflies 2013

See Page 9 for details

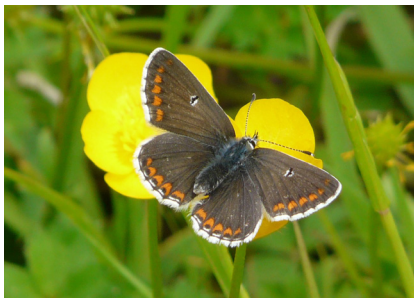


Comma *Polygonia c-album ab. nov*  
Photo Pauline Rutherford

Purple Hairstreak © Martin Rogers



Long-tailed Blue at Dunwich Heath Photo Chris Overton



Brown Argus *Aricia agestis ab. snelleni* ter Harr Photo Trevor Goodfellow

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# New Members

We welcome the following new members and look forward to meeting them at our events in the new year.

Mr L & Mrs D Acaster & Family	Wortham	Mr M Forbes	Bungay
Mr & Mrs Allport	Martlesham Heath	Mrs S Goldsmith	Kesgrave
Mrs J Arkell	Stoke by Nayland	Mrs C & Mr M Harwood & Family	Stowmarket
Mr M Bagstaff	Newmarket	Mr R Heathwaite	Felixstowe
Mrs J Baxter	Felixstowe	Mr C Heseltine	Sudbury
Mrs R & Mr S Bisbrown- Chippendale	Haverhill	Miss L Jackson	Halesworth
Mr A Brown	Wickhambrook	Mr B Lowry	Saxmundham
Mrs R & Mr K Bullen	Sudbury	Mr W Millard	Newmarket
Mrs H Carter	Kirton	Miss P Power	Great Cornard
Mrs G Chadwick	Alresford	Mr N Prior	Saxmundham
Mr J Coleman	Beccles	Miss A Procto & L Marsh & Family	Haverhill
Mrs C Coles	Halesworth	Mr S & Mrs S Ramsey & Family	Ipswich
Mr A Culley	Ipswich	Mrs K & Mr R Seaman	Ipswich
Mr G Davies	Lowestoft	Mr M Tripp	Ipswich
Mr CJ & Mrs SM Davis	Stowmarket	Mr J Valentine	Woodbridge
Mrs S Dawson	Aldeburgh	Mr EN Watts	Boxford
Mrs M & Dr P Feeney	Bury St Edmunds		

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5QP Charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268)

## Editorial

by Peter Maddison

'A harsh winter, a late barren spring, a heatwave in July, migrants in August and a few surprises along the way.' These were the words of Rob Parker at the AGM, when he summed up the butterfly season. It was an extraordinary season in which memories were made.

Perhaps the abundance of the Small Tortoiseshell or the resurgence of the Dingy Skipper or the influx of the Clouded Yellow were special for you.

Or do you remember a fleeting butterfly moment such as when a perfect Purple Hairstreak was observed at ground level or when an unusual form of Comma or Brown Argus was photographed. Undoubtedly the sighting of a High Brown Fritillary is always special! These stories are in this newsletter. If you have a tale to tell, even just a short note, share it with the readers of The Suffolk Argus. It would be great to hear from you.

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### We celebrate our 20th anniversary.

The inaugural meeting of the Suffolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation was launched at the Suffolk Butterfly Conference held at Ipswich School on the 30th October 1993. Reported in *The Suffolk Argus*, it was 'an auspicious occasion, with a large crowd of people attending to hear some of the latest thinking on the conservation of butterflies and moths. Many of the country's top experts were present, as well as the great and the good from Suffolk...'

There was a call to arms, Suffolk had lost 9

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## Editorial copy date

Contributions for the Spring edition of our newsletter are very welcome and should be sent to the Editor, Peter Maddison, no later than **Sunday 12th January, 2014**.

Any piece of writing considered to be of interest

species of butterflies since the 1950's, and the fate of the Silver-studded Blue, Dingy Skipper, Brown Argus, White-letter Hairstreak and the White Admiral seemed to be in the balance. Something had to be done to prevent further losses. Recording became a priority, and practical conservation work in association with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the students of Otley College began at Purdis Heath.

\*\*\*\*\*

Since 2010 practical conservation work has been re-started at Purdis Heath. Julian Dowding has plans for the coming winter and writes here about The Ipswich Heaths Project. It is worth noting that work has progressed well at Pipers Vale and during the last few years, in part of the site where heather once grew, volunteers have scraped the land surface of trash, and then strewn heather. Now there is a good size plot of heather, including Bell Heather, where Small Copper and Common Blue are found, and Grayling has been spotted nearby. The Silver-studded Blue is not far away. We live in hope!

Recording remains a priority. You will know that during the past year Bill Stone has been working alongside Rob Parker in the role of Recorder. At the AGM the handover of responsibility took place, so if you have not sent in your 2013 records yet please email the record sheet to [butterflies@sns.org.uk](mailto:butterflies@sns.org.uk) or post to Bill Stone, 27, Draymans Way, Ipswich IP3 0QU.

will be published and we also welcome line drawings, prints and photographs.

Contributions (preferably electronic) can be sent to the address on the Contacts page or by email to: [prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk)

## Ipswich Heaths Project for Silver-studded Blues and other wildlife.

*Julian Dowding*

This four-year project, which is WREN Landfill Communities Fund aided, is entering its second year. It follows on from two previous years' work by the Branch and volunteers after a report by Dr Neil Ravenscroft assessing the status of the Silver-studded Blue in Suffolk which highlighted the plight of the species around Ipswich.

The ecology of the butterfly which is now thankfully better understood than it was in the 1980's (when Sainsbury's built their superstore at Warren Heath destroying one of the best sites for the butterfly in Ipswich) dictates what kind of habitat work we do if we are to save the butterfly. In short, the butterfly requires larval food (generally Heathers) growing near patches of open soil or in short turf and strong populations of Black Ants which tend its larvae and pupae. It also needs warm sunny spots to bask, nectar sources, generally Bell Heather, and places to lay eggs.

My main involvement has been as site warden at Purdis Heath. Over the past few years, we have focused upon scrub removal, cutting old leggy heather with a mower and scraping back patches of soil with a JCB in order to help provide conditions that both the butterfly and ant require. Whilst some of this has been done by machinery, much has been done by volunteers wielding little more than loppers and bow saws through the winter period.

Since we began work in earnest in 2010, butterfly numbers at Purdis have increased from fewer than 10 to over 40 but such numbers are still perilously low and the Ipswich populations of the butterfly remain

at risk. Therefore it is vital that we continue to improve things for the butterfly.

This winter we plan even more habitat work, building upon what we have achieved so far. If you feel that you can help, then please get in touch. We'll have regular volunteer groups at Purdis on the first Saturday of the month starting in November and also during the week if you have time to spare. You don't need much experience or know-how really, just a willing spirit. There will also be opportunities to get involved with other Ipswich Heaths which are being part funded by the grant. At Piper's Vale for example a group working with Joe Underwood has been successful in re-establishing Bell Heather there and would be pleased to have you on board. Work there will be very similar to that at Purdis. We will provide tea, coffee and biscuits but if you are staying for the whole day, then bring a packed lunch. Obviously, it's important that you are dressed appropriately, so you would need to wear stout footwear and bring a pair of work gloves if you can. It's a great way to get some exercise outside in the open air on a beautiful site teeming with wildlife and to be in the company of like-minded people.

For further details, please contact me by telephone: 01473 436096, or email: [julian.dowding@ntlworld.com](mailto:julian.dowding@ntlworld.com).

For Piper's Vale, contact Joe, by telephone: 07736826302

The report on the status of the Silver-studded Blue in Suffolk can be found on the branch website:

<http://suffolkbutterflies.org.uk/downloads/SSBReport2009.low.pdf>

## Rocking gently with Val Doonican and the Silver-studded Blues

Darren Flint

After eight enjoyable years with the RSPB late 2012 led me to leave my job and return to the realms of full time education as the most matured student on UCL's MSc Conservation degree. In these economic straightened times, a risk, certainly, but no less exciting nor an opportunity to be missed to realign my mid-life career. Once the challenges of essay writing, environmental statistics, GIS mapping and numerous other modules had been mastered attentions were turned to achieving the lion's share of the final grade, the 12,000 words research dissertation. Thoughts regarding suitable topics had started early while I was still at work and only one area, Lepidoptera, was ever really in the running.

Of the eight Butterfly Conservation MSc research projects for the coming year one was located on the eastern fringes of Ipswich to study the population changes of Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus*) on Suffolk's lowland heathland. As a regular visitor to Suffolk and the owner of a handy little caravan just along the coast, this topic was the obvious choice from the point of view of both interest and the practicality of 'where am I going to sleep?'.

The Silver-studded Blue is a niche habitat species requiring a complex mix of Bell and Ling heathers at all lifecycle stages, warm microclimates, bare earth patches of loose soil and the presence of certain species of Black Ants with which it lives in a mutualistic relationship. In a world of fragmented landscapes and modern day land use pressures, it isn't difficult to predict why this butterfly has been in trouble over more recent decades.

If you consult any quality butterfly book you will see that early Silver-studded Blues will be seen on the wing late May, with decent numbers of males emerging during June and the females appearing about a week after the males. With my time management hat on I was relaxed and confident that there would be plenty of time for data collection followed by a nice block of weeks to number crunch, write up the findings, and still hit the UCL August deadline. On paper this looked perfect, but nature had other ideas in the form of a prolonged chilly spring causing many butterfly species to emerge late. The early June visits to Purdis Heath didn't cause too many worries, although the lack of flowering bell heather was playing in the back of my mind, however by the third week a mini panic was rapidly setting in. Then, on the 27th June, there was the unmistakable blue of a lone male, freshly hatched and nectaring on the deep purple of mature Bell heather and the heart possibly skipped a beat while I checked for the underside row of black spots with metallic centres to ensure it wasn't a masquerading Common Blue.

Over the following weeks I regularly hit the heath laden down with two heavy rucksacks full of GPS, anemometer, quadrats, thermometers, clipboards, and spare batteries (the latter one I learned the hard way!). Heathland is not renowned for its shade and with 2013 being the third hottest summer on record a big floppy hat and plenty of water was also de rigueur. Over the coming month the Silver-Studded Blue was hunted (although not in an old fashioned collectors way), tracked, counted and the habitat prodded and poked until the heat and the random quadrats' habit

of placing me in patches of painful gorse started to take its toll on my sanity.

So what did all this data show?

On the numbers side of things the total count for the period was 203 male and 41 female, with a peak count of 33 males and 7 females on 13 July, up from 16 and 5 respectively in 2009 and the lows of 2 and 2 in 2010. The flight area in 2009 was a tiny 0.1ha of heathland in the north-west corner, which has now grown to cover 1.03ha spread over three sizeable patches spread across the heath. A 930% increase and not that far off the 1985 peaks of 1.3ha. The females were far more sedentary covering only 0.4ha, admittedly harder to see but also probably lying low to avoid any unwanted advances or having already been mated. In old money a hectare is 2.47105 acres.

The dominant behaviours were nectaring on Bell heather, basking/roosting on Ling heather, and also in-flight. The exhausting of early nectar sources appeared to impact the later observations with adults significantly moving locations. Only the males were territorial and were busy over the whole flight period fending off other males plus other butterfly species, including Small Heaths and late flying Green Hairstreaks. Territorial behaviour was primarily to ensure the continued search for a mate but they also appeared to be protecting nectar sources, a fact not noted in the literature and worth exploring in future studies. Observing females in the act of egg laying is notoriously difficult for this species, a fact that didn't fail to disappoint during this study.

There is still a long way to go in restoring the heathland habitat back to its former glory and the Silver-studded Blue highs of the 1980s, but a high quality mosaic of heather ages and bare earth patches is by no means unattainable. I'm sure the hard work left to do won't come as a surprise to those

volunteers who have frequently braved cold winter winds and gorse scratches, or stood, slightly demoralised, amongst the swaths of sapling birches sprouting through an area nicely cleared only a few short weeks earlier. As a semi-natural habitat heathland does rely on the positive influence of man to ensure it remains in a healthy state. Up until the 1960s sheep grazing and rabbit warrening kept the scrub succession in check, but today this action is dependent on the many hands of volunteers. While there are rabbits on the site, my birthday was spent on my hands and knees counting rabbit droppings, which, other than not being very celebratory, showed very low populations at Purdis Heath. The reasons for this aren't completely clear as the site should be good rabbit country, but myxomatosis was observed on the site. Predation appears to be low with limited fox droppings seen and, while the area is used for dog-walking, nearby reserves have higher paw/foot fall and still sustain healthy rabbit colonies. The non-flight areas data showed a significantly lower percentage cover of heathers, higher cover of scrub, herbaceous and leaf litter, all areas that negatively influence the abundance of the Silver-studded Blue.

A big thank you must be sent to all those people who have supported me during this research. You know who you are and you have been mentioned by name in my final report. The details here are just a taster of my final findings and if you should like more information please do contact me at [darrenflint@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:darrenflint@hotmail.co.uk)

Oh, and I nearly forgot, why the reference to Val Doonican in the title? Well, as part of the habitat analysis, a thing called a drop disk was used to measure the vegetation height. Constructed from a metre ruler and a homemade disk of plastic formed from two charity shop LPs, one of which was the comforting presence of Val.



## Purple Hairstreak, Brown Argus, Comma and Long-tailed Blue

Notes on the photographs inside the front cover

### Purple Hairstreak

*Martin Rogers, a transect walker at Nowton Park, observed and photographed an adult at ground level.*

Martin wrote:

'I was out with my camera this morning and snapped something unusual at a distance. It was a Purple Hairstreak which was flitting about on the grass for some reason, stopping occasionally, before zooming off in the direction of where I saw a Purple Hairstreak in 2011, just 200 metres away. The exact location of this sighting is the patch of longer grass just beyond the very last post in the butterfly transect.'

Rob Parker's reply:

'The Purple Hairstreak larva feeds on oak leaves until ready to pupate. Then it drops to the ground and pupates amongst fallen oak leaves, or is taken into a convenient ants' nest. In summer they emerge early in the morning, and those people who get out early (like you) can be lucky enough to find a very fresh adult drying its wings in the dewy grass. Yours was at the learning to fly stage.'

### Brown Argus

*Trevor Goodfellow photographed an unusual Brown Argus at Thurston, near Bury St Edmunds on the 14th June.*

Rob Parker commented:

'Generally the Brown Argus has a black spot or fleck on the forewing, whereas the Northern/Mountain Brown Argus *A. artaxerxes* has a white spot.

Occasionally a specimen turns up with the normal black fleck set in a white surround and some years ago I saw a similar specimen on the Devil's Dyke.

This aberration appears to be infrequent in our East Anglian populations.

In *Butterflies of Suffolk*, Mendel & Piotrowski 1986, the illustration of a female Brown Argus

shows the same white spot with a central black fleck - quite possibly to sit alongside a tentatively discredited account of a Northern Brown Argus at Lakenheath Warren circa 1918. One of Richard Lewington's paintings in *The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland* Thomas & Lewington 2010 shows this form.

The Natural History Museum's Cockayne Collection shows it in a male Brown Argus, *Aricia agestis ab. snelleni* ter Haar'.

### Comma

*Pauline Rutherford, a member of the South Yorkshire Branch, photographed this particularly pale Comma at Lakenheath Fen on the 18th September.*

Rob Parker has been in discussion with Alec Harmer, the author of *Variations in British Butterflies*, who says that the Natural History Museum Collection lists only two relevant colour forms, neither of which quite fit this specimen. However, there is a photo of a Comma like this one that has been allocated the title *ab. nov* which means it was considered to be a new variety at the time it was described, *Polygonia c-album ab. nov*.

### Long-tailed Blue

*Chris Overton photographed this male at Dunwich Heath on the 15th August.*

Rob Parker commented:

'It is likely to be a migrant from the continent. During August several adults and eggs were found from Salisbury Plain through the southern counties to the north Kent coast. The Long-tailed Blue is an intriguing butterfly as it occasionally arrives as eggs or small larvae in fresh packs of peas or beans imported from Spain or Kenya. These generally emerge in someone's home and are found freshly emerged in the garden or conservatory.'

## Recording at Northfield Wood

*July and August were a joy for butterfly watchers, but during recent years the trend in butterfly numbers has been downwards.*

*John Walshe comments to Rob Parker about his sightings on 17th July at Northfield Wood, a Woodland Trust property near Stowmarket.*

Between 12:00-13:10 I walked all the rides and paths. You were right about the White Admirals, I counted 15 throughout the wood, it was great to see them as I only ever saw one or two when doing regular transects in the wood in the 90's.

The rides and paths are much more heavily shaded than I remember then, which has undoubtedly led to a reduction in the numbers of butterflies.

I did see three White-letter Hairstreaks along the main north/south ride through the centre of the wood called The Glade, one at ground level and two over an oak, there's still plenty of healthy young elm for them in the NW quarter of the wood.

The full count was: -

Ringlet 64, Speckled Wood 32, Green-veined White 17, White Admiral 15, Meadow Brown 11, Large Skipper 10, Large White 4, Comma 4, White-letter Hairstreak 3, Small White 2.

162 in 10 species, 17.07.2013  
compare to: -

263 in 12 species, 17.07.1999  
178 in 09 species, 16.07.1998  
238 in 14 species, 22.07.1997  
317 in 12 species, 18.07.1996  
331 in 13 species, 21.07.1995

So, a general reduction in numbers since comparable July counts in the late 1990's with increases noted today in only shade loving Speckled Woods & White Admirals.



White Admiral by Beryl Johnson

## Some notes from the AGM

Over 50 people attended the meeting at St Luke's Church Hall, Ipswich on the 21st September.

Mike Dean welcomed members and our guest, Dr Susan Foden, who is a BC Council Member.

He thanked Branch Committee Members for their work in the past year and noted with particular thanks the commitment and hard work of those about to retire from office.

Rob Parker, who has been the County Recorder for the past eleven years, is retiring from this post. Bill Stone has become the new County Recorder.

Rob will continue in the role of Conservation Officer (Butterflies).

Graham Simister, who has been the Treasurer for the past five years, is stepping down. Dominic Hill is to take over the post.

Richard Perryman had joined the Committee during the year and his work on the Branch website, particularly the Sightings page, is proving to be very popular and well used by members.

Helen Saunders has taken a keen interest in conservation work and recording and was welcomed onto the Committee.

Peter Dare has been the co-ordinator for the

Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme since its introduction in the Branch in 2009. He has stepped down from the post and next season the Scheme will be co-ordinated by Twm Wade.

Our membership has grown by 62% since 2010. We have membership in 383 households.

Rob Parker and Tony Prichard gave overviews of the butterfly and moth seasons.

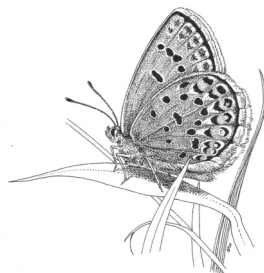
After the coffee break short presentations were made:

Trevor Goodfellow showed photos of some butterflies in the Haughley area. He included a Brown Argus aberration (see separate note).

Julian Dowding reported that the Brimstone and Buckthorn Project had progressed well. There had been a good response to the buckthorn offer and the plotting of Brimstone sightings on the website map had been popular.

Twm Wade showed a movie in DVD form of butterflies that he had seen mostly in West Suffolk.

Darren Flint gave an overview of his MSc thesis work that he carried out during the summer months on the Silver-studded Blue at Purdis Heath. (See his main article for an overview of his work.)



Silver-studded Blue  
by Douglas Hammersley

## **Butterfly Conservation Suffolk Branch**

*Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31st March 2013*

	2012/13	2011/12
<b>INCOME</b>		
Membership Subscriptions	£2,258.05	£1,569.00
Brimstones and Buckthorn Private Donations	£168.00	£670.00
All Gift Aid (including on above)	£60.45	£295.00
Suffolk Naturalists Match Funding (Brimstones and Buckthorn)		£500.00
Bank Interest	£0.58	£1.52
Donations/General Fundraising	£450.00	£890.00
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<u><u>£2,937.08</u></u>	<u><u>£3,925.52</u></u>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
SNS Conference		£75.00
Newsletter/Programme	£684.00	£1,111.00
AGM - hire of hall/Refreshments	£55.00	£35.87
Office Expenses/Petty Cash	£1,113.00	£496.60
Brimstones and Buckthorn costs incurred		£1,619.00
Insurance	£6.05	£4.93
Purdis Heath Restoration		£55.00
Travel expenses	£99.48	£175.53
SWT - Knettishall Heath Appeal		£100.00
Ipswich Heaths Butterfly Conservation Project	£1,000.00	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<u><u>£2,957.53</u></u>	<u><u>£3,672.93</u></u>
<b>SURPLUS/DEFICIT FOR YEAR</b>	<u><u>-£20.45</u></u>	<u><u>£252.59</u></u>

### *Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2013*

Balance 1st April	£2,111.39	£1,208.99
Surplus (deficit) for year	-£20.45	£252.92
<b>Balance 31st March</b>	<u><u>£2,090.94</u></u>	<u><u>£1,461.91</u></u>

## Late Summer Butterflies at Alton Water

### Sunday 25th August 2013

*Bill Stone*

Alton Water reservoir is one of my favourite local 'butterflying' haunts and is a venue that I visit frequently during the year. As such, I thought that it would make an interesting butterfly walk for BC Suffolk members. The park area surrounding the reservoir totals over 400 acres and offers a variety of accessible woodland, grassland and traditionally managed meadows. Given this mixture of habitats a variety of butterfly species can be found through most of the year.

The meeting place for the event was in the main Stutton car park and by 10am, 15 members had gathered together for the walk. The weather forecast was for a grey start but with the sun due to appear around lunchtime with temperatures rising to 23°C. So, after a brief health and safety talk and a summary of the plan for the day the group set off towards the south shore.

On leaving the car park we found our first butterfly in the form of a tatty Speckled Wood which had no doubt been damaged by the torrential rain that had fallen on Suffolk the day before. Walking across the first piece of grassland towards Rabbets Wood we soon came across Large White, Green-veined White and Small Tortoiseshell. As the wind was still quite cool I decided to lead the group towards the reservoir edge and here we found some sheltered areas along the lower footpath. Butterflies were also sheltering here and we added Peacock, Meadow Brown and Small White to the day list along with several more Small Tortoiseshells.

Whilst walking through some of the small Oak trees, bramble patches and clumps of Rosebay Willowherb we started to see

several species of Odonata with Common Blue and Azure Blue Damselflies being recorded along with Ruddy Darter, Emperor Dragonfly and Migrant Hawker. Further along the path we also found good numbers of Willow Emerald Damselflies including several pairs flying in cop. A few moths were also recorded here, with Straw Dot and Vapourer being seen well.

Exploring the patches of grass and ragwort produced the first of many Common Blue butterflies together with a very brief view of a skipper species that flew before it could be positively identified. Continuing along the path we came across several large patches of flowering Mint and found our first Painted Lady of the day, again a tatty individual sheltering from the wind. More Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells were also found nectaring and resting out of the wind and soon a Gatekeeper was found too. Several Wasp Spider nests were found by some of the group, giving us a chance to examine this fascinating spider and the intricacies of the web construction.

Walking through Rabbets Wood brought us out onto a network of footpaths around the dragonfly pools. Here we came across several large patches of Common Fleabane and more Mint. Checking these closely proved worthwhile with some wonderfully fresh Common Blues being found together with more Small Tortoiseshells, whites, Peacocks and our first Small Copper of the day. A Red Admiral was also seen briefly by some of the group but it didn't linger for the rest to enjoy.

Further along this path and just where it rises to enter Larch Wood a damp area covered in Mint was found and this proved to be a living 'carpet' of butterflies. Nine

species of butterflies were seen over this patch of Mint alone, including our one and only Holly Blue for the day.

With the wind dropping and temperatures rising I decided to head back towards the car park and we called in at the small wildlife refuge to check some of the reptile mats. Here we were rewarded with views of both Grass Snake and Common Lizard. This area was also a magnet for Migrant Hawker dragonflies with good numbers seen patrolling the footpaths.

Retracing our steps we started to see more Common Blue butterflies than seen earlier and also our first Brown Argus of the walk. Further along the path a Small Heath was seen briefly by a lucky few, with a second one also noted briefly.

Arriving back at the car park we said goodbye to a few members before enjoying lunch. It had been a good day so far with fifteen species of butterflies seen along with the high numbers of Small Tortoiseshells.

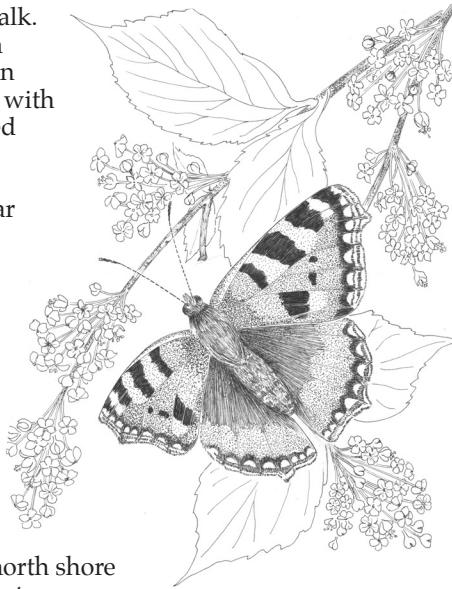
After lunch we made our way over the dam towards the north shore to explore the north-east corner. Numerous 'blues' were found whilst walking towards the dam and whilst crossing it both Common Blue and Brown Argus were identified. It was interesting to note the variety of colouration of the female Common Blues with typical brown types being found along with purple/blue varieties too.

We did a short circular walk through the grass area before I took the group onto the reservoir edge to explore the extensive patches of Mint, Fleabane and other flowering plants. By this time the sun was out and there were butterflies everywhere. Working our way slowly along the edge we saw large numbers of Small Tortoiseshells together with more Common Blues, whites and Peacocks. Another Painted Lady was found, this time in a much better condition and a couple of pristine and very bright Red Admirals were also enjoyed. Turning a corner revealed a flash of orange and yellow and a Clouded Yellow butterfly flew into view! I quickly called the group

together and we were all able to get some great views of this exciting migrant butterfly. We moved on further and I thought our luck was in again this time with a Grayling. However, despite the zigzag flight and the fact that it flew straight to the ground, closed its wings and tilted itself to one side it turned out to be a Meadow Brown!

Returning to the car park we found that a Comma had been seen earlier by several of the group, so that brought the day's total to 17 species. All agreed that it had been a great Suffolk butterfly day with the highlights being the incredible numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and the Clouded Yellow.

Small Tortoiseshell by Beryl Johnson.



## Visiting The Monarchs

*Richard Stewart*

This must be the number one butterfly experience anywhere in the world. Monarch butterflies in their millions overwinter among the Oyamel Pines in the mountains of Mexico, having entered the Guinness Book of Records as a result of their journey, sometimes over two thousand miles, to get there. The return journey takes several generations of butterflies, extending right through to Canada, until milkweed, the larval food plant, stops growing.

I had assumed, from reading beforehand, that Marie and I plus the rest of our group would arrive at a fairly remote site, with a handful of other visitors. The reality was a Mexican bank holiday, with thousands there and a plethora of hastily erected stalls selling cheap replicas. Despite long queues our guide's fluent Spanish got us in quickly, along a trail well wardened though later on they had to open up a side route because of the numbers involved.

Unfortunately the combination of a bouncing local bus, a bumpy back of truck ride up to the site and high altitude meant Marie just couldn't go on but she insisted I carried on while she sat on a seat, with a few Monarchs for company. Butterfly numbers grew as the altitude increased, first fluttering around like falling brown and orange leaves then in numbers that meant you had to tread carefully to avoid squashing them.

Then I came to the first cluster, hanging from a bough and fortunately close to the path so I could take photos. It was a sobering thought that in just this one bunch were more butterflies than I would see in a whole year back in Britain. Sometimes the sheer weight breaks branches, making it perilous if this happens late in the day or at night and mortality can be high, increasing if the weather suddenly changes. Although Monarchs are poisonous to most predators one resident, the black-eared mouse, has adapted to cope with these toxins.

Despite hearing learned people saying they don't feed during overwintering, we actually

observed many, in periods of sunshine, flying out to nectar on tall American golden rod. It was obviously disappointing for Marie but two years later, with the same leader, we returned. This time it was much quieter and although the main clusters were higher up we both repeated 'go slow' every few seconds and got to the area where enormous clusters were hanging from many branches, then suddenly breaking free and flying high into a deep blue sky. More were gathered on the ground, where a small stream trickled across. I put on my most pleading expression and the vigilant warden allowed me to take a few steps off the path to get close up photos of the Monarchs covering the moist soil.

It took some years to find a person willing to take us but nowadays several companies have trips, notably Greentours and Naturetrek. These stick to the larger sites while others are kept away from tourists and are the focus of scientific work. The butterflies are still threatened at these overwintering sites by illegal logging and climate change. Recently the town of Anganguero, heavily dependent on ecotourism linked to monarch visits, was almost completely destroyed by flooding and landslides.

If you decide to go, do research beforehand. I would recommend three books or, of course, websites. The books are: *Nomads of the Wind-* Arnt etc. pub. Papadakis 2008, ISBN 978-1901092929-only partially about Monarchs but superb photos.

*Four Wings and a Prayer-* Halpern, pub, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001 ISBN 0297842218. This is a good mix of vivid description and scientific research about migration routes and techniques.

*Wings in the Meadow-* Brewer, 1967 pub Dent ISBN not known and probably out of print-a fascinating study as, when it was written, the overwintering sites weren't known to the outside world.

## The Birdfair from a ‘butternutter’s’ perspective

*Bill Stone*

The Birdfair is an annual event running for over a weekend for three days in August at Rutland Water. This year it has celebrated its 25th anniversary and the event continues to go from strength to strength. Eight marquees were in place this year along with numerous other displays and exhibitions set up to welcome and entertain visitors from all over the UK, Europe and beyond. Several international conservation organisations are present along with numerous smaller groups representing individual reserves or championing particular conservation efforts.

Although it is called the Birdfair it is also celebrated as the ‘international wildlife event of the year’. It seeks to provide accessibility to a number of non-ornithological interests and highlight particular areas of natural history that are shared by many bird watchers. So with this in mind what is there to entertain a ‘butternutter’ amongst the numerous marquees, talks and demonstrations?

If you love books on wildlife then the Birdfair is a great place to be. Large organisations such as the Natural History Book Service (NHBS) and Subbutteo Natural History Books are present selling the latest books as well as having a comprehensive selection of popular titles. I visited the WILDGuides stand and was able to look through a pre-issue copy of the forthcoming book *Britain’s Day-flying Moths*. If you are looking for an older book or a particular edition then specialist natural history booksellers such as Calluna Books, Second Nature and Pemberley Books may be able to help you. One other thing worth mentioning is that a number of new books are available complete with their authors! So, you can get your book signed too.

The Birdfair has a separate marquee devoted to artwork. This covers not only oils, watercolours and pastels but also carvings and modern constructions using everything from beer cans to shopping trolleys! There are some incredible pieces of art to marvel over and in many cases the artists are present so you can get the story behind the piece or picture too. A favourite of mine and probably many of you is Richard Lewington.

Richard is always very friendly and welcoming. It’s a great chance to talk to him about current and future projects as well as look at some of his artwork up close and even buy some of his work.

If you are in the market for some new optical equipment or even seeking advice about a repair then the Birdfair offers a large number of stands for you to visit. All the ‘big guns’ are there such as Leica, Zeiss and Swarovski and you can check and handle the latest products from these companies or the other smaller brands. It’s a great opportunity to handle a lot of similar items especially if you are looking to buy a pair of binoculars or a telescope. Of note, this year the binoculars of choice for a lot of ‘butternutters’, the close focussing Pentax Papilio were available at some great prices. I’m sure you could have played one or two sellers off against each other for an even better price!

Continuing the equipment theme, a number of exhibitors, such as Garden Nature and the NHBS offer items such as: bat detectors, ‘pooters’, moth traps, butterfly nets, bug viewing trays and nest boxes. This year, I was fascinated by some of the items found on the ‘One Stop Nature Shop’ stand, especially their digital microscopes and the new portable USB microscope scopes that you can take into the field.

If you are looking for a holiday or trip away then the Birdfair is perhaps one of the main events for promoting wildlife and natural history tourism. Numerous stands offer travel opportunities both in the UK and abroad encompassing everything from day trips through to month long expeditions. You can easily book an escorted trip to see Monarchs in Mexico, Tigers in Asia or albatrosses off Australia! In fact, if your budget is big enough you could quite easily book up the next three years travelling and watching wildlife, not a bad thought!

In order to convince you to travel and explore there is a very varied programme of talks and presentations running throughout the Birdfair weekend. These are often led by various



personalities such as Chris Packham, Bill Oddie and Matt Baker to name but a few. With butterflies, moths and other insects in mind, this year there were talks covering subjects such as 'Moth trapping' by Tony Davis, 'Butterfly watching in Borneo' by Honor Phillipps, 'Wilding up your garden' by Steve Lovell, 'Britain's Hoverflies' by Stuart Ball (co-author of the new guide *Britain's Hoverflies*), 'Dragonflies- the birdwatchers insect' by Ruary Mackenzie Dodds (a man always worth listening to) and 'The dire strait of Britain's Butterflies' by Butterfly Conservation's own Dr. Martin Warren.

Talking of Butterfly Conservation, BC have their own stand at the Birdfair and are ably supported by the East Midlands Branch. It's worth a visit

not just to show your support but also to catch up with the BC staff members and old friends that pass through. Other 'butternutter' friendly stands to visit include the British Dragonfly Society and the Dragonfly Project, Buglife, Botanical Society of the British Isles, Plantlife and the British Arachnological Society (BAS). This year the BAS had some wonderful spiders on display and some fantastic photographs too.

There are lots of other things going on at the Birdfair which I haven't managed to cover in this piece. If you haven't been before or perhaps not for a few years then it's certainly something worth going to see. Next year's event has been confirmed for the 15th, 16th and 17th August 2014. I hope to see you there!

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## 'Britain's Day-flying Moths' - a new identification guide

*A review by Tony Prichard*

'Britain's Day-flying Moths - A field guide to the day-flying moths of Britain and Ireland' by David Newland, Robert Still and Andy Swash. Published by Princeton. ISBN - 978-0-691-15832-7

This is a new moth identification guide that may be of interest to the more diurnal of lepidopterists. There have been previous guides to day-flying moths that have been rather limited in scope, only covering the most common and widespread of day-flying moths. This book goes much further and covers 155 species of day-flying moth, covering all the macro-moths that are thought to be day-fliers and a selection of the more common and easily identifiable day-flying micro-moths. The book begins with some general introductory pages covering topics such as moth biology, moth identification and where to find day-flying moths.

The main bulk of the book is taken up with the section of species accounts, with one page for each species. Following the species accounts there are a few smaller sections, notably a tabulation of the species against habitats in

which they can be found and a section on conservation and legislation.

For a field guide there is a fair amount of information for each species covering its status, habitats where it can be found, when the moth is flying, any confusion species, foodplants and a small distribution map.

Help on identification is also covered in the text when required, although some diagrams to illustrate identification features would have been a very useful addition. Almost all the photos are of good quality and show live moths with just the odd exception where the quality is not so good. One unfortunate mistake is that the picture given for Latticed Heath is actually a Common Heath moth, which may lead to some mis-identifications.

Overall this is a well-produced book that would make a useful addition to your library if you are interested in identifying those odd moths that you see while out and about looking for butterflies.

## Brimstones and Buckthorn initiative

Julian Dowding



The latest efforts to encourage Brimstone butterflies to spread into the east of the county and also to raise awareness through butterfly gardening has already shown signs that it is beginning to work, even though it is early days yet. For those that are new to the Branch, it might be helpful to outline what has happened.

It is a well-known fact that female Brimstone butterflies are very good at finding Buckthorn bushes on which to lay their eggs. Buckthorn is the only known larval food plant of the butterfly and as these are scarce in the east of the county, a good way of increasing the population in the areas where they don't appear is simply to plant the bush in the knowledge that the Brimstones will find them.

With this in mind, Suffolk Branch and Suffolk Naturalists' Society provided generous funding to buy and send out 1,135 small Buckthorn bushes to 242 households in the winter of 2011/2012. Most of the recipients lived in the east of the county. Bushes have now passed through their second summer and emails were sent out to those involved in the initiative to ask how things were

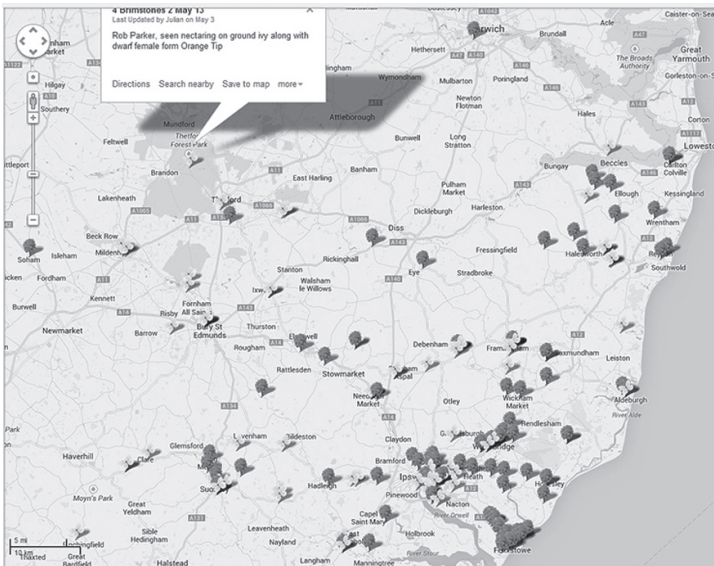
going. It is pleasing to be able to report that some have already had Brimstones visiting. Mainly they are sightings of Brimstones visiting the gardens and/or near to where bushes were planted, and some even found caterpillars on their still small bushes. These records together with those of bushes planted have been plotted on a Google map which can be found at:

<http://greenwings.co/page/brimstones--buckthorn-2571> and <http://www.suffolkbutterflies.org.uk/brimstone.html>

Please be aware that there are now four pages of records on this map. They can be accessed by selecting 'View new Brimstone map in a larger map'. Once the map is open, simply scrolling down the left hand side to the bottom of the page enables you to select each page.

For those of you with Buckthorns, please continue to tend them. They are usually a little slow to get going and take about 3 to 4 years to establish properly. It's always worth mulching around them with whatever comes to hand, be it well rotted compost, grass clippings or pieces of old carpet. In time, we are pretty confident that you will find Brimstones visiting your garden in spring, looking for somewhere to lay eggs. Males are sometimes as early as February if it's sunny. They will be either looking for a source of nectar to supply energy after their long hibernation or a mate. Females usually visit from about May onwards.

Please continue to send records to us at [brimstones@suffolkbutterflies.org.uk](mailto:brimstones@suffolkbutterflies.org.uk)



## Visit to South Cumbria

### Sunday 7th – Tuesday 9th July 2013

*Peter Maddison*

The village of Arnside is situated in the southeast corner of Cumbria. To the north is the Kent estuary and beyond there are distant views of the Lake District mountains. Immediately to the south is the limestone hill area of Arnside Knott and Gait Barrows, which are famed for their invertebrate species and special flora.

On Saturday 6th July we travelled to Arnside in independent groups from Suffolk. Arriving in good time during the afternoon and wanting to make the most of the hot sunshine – excellent butterfly weather that continued throughout the weekend - Richard and Marie Stewart and I made a quick visit to Gait Barrows. Within 100 metres of parking the car and following the northern Yew Trail we had identified our first Northern Brown Argus and not much further on, within a glade just off the track, we spotted a High Brown Fritillary. It flew between nectar sources, small clumps of flowering thistles, and showed itself in perfect condition. Wow! That was two new species for me and we had only just arrived! Large Skippers were plentiful and there were Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, a male Common Blue and a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

The seven members of our group staying in Arnside met up during the evening, a hot, sultry evening memorable for the sunset over the estuary and the numerous circling, screaming swifts that nested under the eaves of the hotel. It was not so memorable for the fish pie that unfortunately caused Alan and Beryl Johnson to miss the following day's walk!

### **Gait Barrows**

*Sunday 7th July*

Arriving at the car park for a mid morning start we were soon met by Stella and Roger Wolfe who were staying close by and within easy walking distance, and we were soon off along the Yew Trail, keen to revisit the sites of our observations of the previous afternoon. Some searching produced a rather worn Northern Brown Argus but a High Brown Fritillary in the same area as the one seen yesterday was an exciting find and whilst it was nectaring both the upperside and underside of the wings could be examined in close up. Aren't close-focus binoculars such as Pentax Papilio just brilliant?! Although it continually flitted between nectar sources it remained poised long enough for photographers to get their fill too. Later, another High Brown Fritillary was seen, but not before Grayling, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper, Dingy Skipper and several more worn Northern Brown Argus were recorded. A Wood Ants nest was an interesting find, as were the spent flower heads of a colony of the Lady's Slipper Orchid. Wall Rue, Herb Paris, Plowman's Spikenard, Common Rock-rose and Wild Thyme were all recorded.

In the afternoon the Limestone Trail was followed. The path leading down to the pastures was lined with clumps of flowering knapweed, clover and Betony and in the shelter provided by the neighbouring woodland a couple of High Brown Fritillaries were seen and another large fritillary, that might have been a High Brown or was it a Dark Green? It wouldn't

stop for an id, unlike a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary that Richard identified after he'd circumnavigated a hawthorn and deep bracken! I made the comment that we hadn't seen a good argus yet, which brought the quick response, 'No, haven't had a good Argus since the editor changed.' Not all of the group was amused!

The limestone pavement on this trail is fascinating. Shaped in glacial times the rock has been eroded further by rain and surface water to leave flat rock 'clints' surrounded by deep fissures 'grikes'. In the grikes plant growth is restricted but ash, rowan, yew and juniper grow slowly, as well as invasive dog rose and bramble. Rigid Buckler Fern was noted but it was not until later that Stella and Roger found plants of the Dark Red Helleborine.

Two more Dinky Skipper, more Large Skipper, two Speckled Wood, a Comma, several Large and Small White butterflies as well as a 'polished' Northern Brown Argus completed a fascinating day on the reserve.

### **Arnside Knott**

*Monday 8th July*

The good weather continued and in the heat of a mid morning start we were delighted to find abundant butterflies across the hillsides of the Knott. Flowering knapweed, thistles and bramble provided nectar for about 40 Dark Green Fritillary and about 15 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary which were seen primarily on the slope below the stone topscope and further along the sheltered sections of the ridge. No High Brown Fritillary was seen here but Small Heath and Grayling were new species to add to the day's list and there were some good specimens of the Northern Brown Argus. Large Skipper, Large White and Speckled Wood were recorded. Some plants of note were Common Spotted Orchid, Eyebright

and an extensive bed of Hemp Agrimony which was not yet in flower but within a couple of weeks would become a nectar magnet for bees and butterflies. Skirting around past the trig point and on to the wood we had fine views out over Morecambe Bay. In the cool shade of the lower slopes Dog's Mercury and beds of pungent Ramsons were found.

Lunch was eaten in the shade in the vicinity of the car park but as the heat of the afternoon seemed to be overwhelming the butterflies, they had sought out their own shelter, we decided to return to the hotel. Later in the afternoon, several members of the group walked along the riverside path to Gubbins Wood Reserve, where in the meadow Dark Green Fritillary, Large White and Meadow Brown were seen.

### **Meathop Moss, Latterbarrow and Foulshaw Moss**

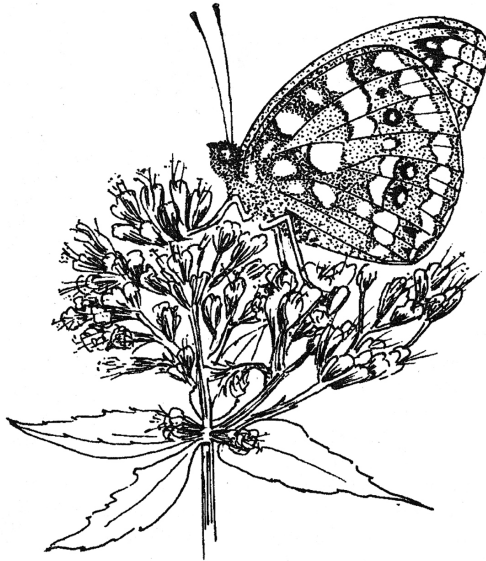
*Tuesday 9th July*

Meathop Moss, a lowland raised peatbog, lies to the north of the Kent estuary. It provides habitat for many interesting species of plants and invertebrates, and is favoured by the Large Heath, the third species on our weekend's target list. On-going restoration work to secure the high water table of the mire has been undertaken in recent years and new access routes are being created.

An enclosed sallow lined track leads from the road to a lush meadow and then on to the open Moss, where there is a broad expanse of flowering Cotton Grass, Bog Asphodel, Bog Rosemary and Cross-leaved Heath. In the hot sunshine a lizard or two basked on the boardwalk, whilst nearby in the peaty runnels Round-leaved Sundews were found. It wasn't long before our first Large Heath was observed, a steady individual that allowed a few quick photos to be taken. A little further onto the Moss

numerous Large Heaths became evident, flying low in every direction, hardly pausing at each nectar source. Standing at the end of the boardwalk Richard counted the Large Heaths he could see in a 360° rotation: 50+ and counting. Four-spot Chaser dragonflies, various blue damselflies and numerous Purple-bordered Gold moths caught our attention. Time passed and in the midday heat we moved on to Latterbarrow, a small meadow and woodland reserve where shade was welcome for our lunchtime stop. We thought of Alan and Beryl who, having missed our Gait Barrow walk, elected to visit there today and we imagined them watching High Brown Fritillaries, which they reported later they had been doing. At Latterbarrow Oxe-eyed Daisy was profuse, but the meadow was filled with Scabious, Lady's Bedstraw, Betony and flowering bramble which was a favoured nectaring plant of a flighty Dark Green Fritillary. In the drier, stony parts Common Rockrose grew and it was here that we found Northern Brown Argus, the amount of white in the forewing spot being quite variable, even in fresh individuals.

Our third reserve visit of the day



was to nearby Foulshaw Moss, a 350 acres raised peat bog. Much drainage and degradation of the peat has occurred here, but the Cumbria WT and Natural England have done much restoration work to retain water on the Moss. Cotton Grass was not so plentiful here but where it was found around the excavated ponds it grew and flowered in startling abundance. Some Large Heath butterflies were counted but they were not as plentiful as at Meathop, perhaps the afternoon sun was discouraging them from flying. Dragonflies took our eye, Jim was in his element, and good sightings were made of Emperor, Four-spot Chaser, Large Red Damselfly, Emerald Damselfly, Azure, Blue-tailed and Common Damselflies. But the introduced White-faced Dragonfly, photographed that morning by another visitor, remained elusive.

We returned to Arnside and the following day, whilst some members of our group departed for Suffolk, others remained to extend their stay in the area. It had been a most enjoyable long-weekend: rare butterflies, good company and fine weather.

**These haiku were written during the recent Suffolk Branch trip to Arnside Knott and the surrounding area. Our hotel overlooked the estuary of the river Kent.**

*Richard Stewart*

Nothing is so sad  
Or hauntingly beautiful  
As a curlew's cry.

...

First fritillary  
A High Brown on tall thistles  
The rarest of all.

...

The unexpected  
A worn Dingy Skipper rests  
Its life span ending.

...

It's too hot to sleep.  
Lying in bed I listen  
To the dawn chorus.

...

Morning comes softly  
With calls of wakening gulls  
Bubblings of curlew.

...

From my bed I watch  
Early hunting swifts catching  
Sunlight on their wings.

....

On limestone pavement  
Graylings get closer, basking  
In reflected heat.

...

By a lonely pond  
Blankets of white cotton grass  
Swaying in the wind.

...

The first vanessid  
Small Tortoiseshell on the beach  
Basking in sunlight.

...

Sunset sand becomes  
A dappled Shibori cloth  
Appliqued with gulls.

## Visit to South Cumbria



Cotton Grass and dragonfly ponds at Foulshaw Moss

Photo by PRM



Meathop Moss Photo by PRM



Large Heath on Cross-leaved Heath Photo by JF



Round-leaved Sundew Photo by PRM



Ros and Jim at Meathop Moss Photo by PRM



Photo by Jim Foster    High Brown Fritillary at Gait Barrows NNR (Lancs.)    Photo by Peter Maddison



The Kent Estuary from Arnside Knott    © JF



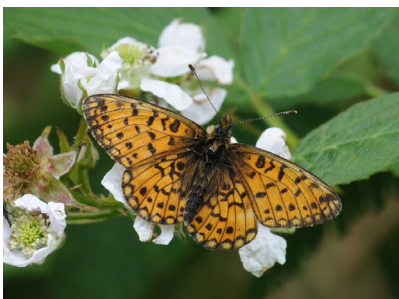
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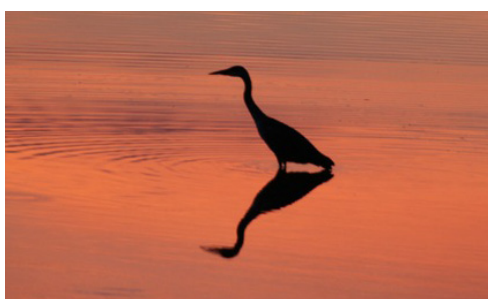
Limestone pavement 'clints' and 'grikes'  
at Gait Barrows NNR    © PRM



Northern Brown Argus    © PRM



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary    © PRM



Grey Heron at sunset    © JF