

Rusland Horizons

Butterfly and Moth Report

2019

The Rusland Valley is a rich habitat for butterflies and moths, many of which are rare or endangered species. So it is important that we continue to survey the area to gather more information about the health of known populations of these species and to discover new colonies. This will help us work with landowners and volunteers to support and conserve these beautiful insects which play such a crucial role in our environment.

Events

The Rusland Horizons Trust butterfly and moth project ran a series of event during the summer to continue to work of the Rusland Horizons Wings in the Woods project.

10th June: Moth morning at Penny Bridge School

We held a before school moth morning in the school meadow at Penny Bridge C.E. Academy. We were delighted to welcome around fifty children and parents, where they had the opportunity to learn about the moths that inhabit their meadow. It was wonderful to see such an enthusiastic turnout, especially at 8.15am on a Monday morning! This event complemented work that the school are doing to restore the meadow habitat and teach the children about local wildlife.

15th June: Moth morning and Large Heath butterfly survey at Hay Bridge

Despite the rather damp conditions we were very pleased to record over forty species of moth (see appendix for a full list). We also had a very good turnout of human participants too, with a great mixture of ages and experience, from those new moths to experienced lepidopterists. Our survey of Hay Bridge Moss was successful in finding our target butterfly species, the Large Heath, and we had a fascinating impromptu talk on the ecology of the special raised bog environment of the moss from a visiting professor.

17th June: Moth morning at Leven Valley School

We ran a series of sessions introducing each class to moths and the importance of conservation. The children learnt about the moths that had been found in their school woodland area. All the groups were really interested, very gentle with the moths and asked thoughtful questions. The Buff tip was the star of the show and helped the children learn about camouflage.

21st July: Moth morning and butterfly walk at Oxen Park

We had an excellent moth morning at Oxen Park with 50 species of moth (see appendix for a full list). We then took a stroll in the countryside around the village as an introduction to butterfly identification and to encourage people to take part in the Butterfly Conservation annual survey, the Big Butterfly Count. We saw many of the summer species and talked about the distinguishing features of some of the superficially similar species.

Butterflies

There were 29 species of butterfly recorded in the Rusland Horizons area in 2019 (a remarkable diversity given the small area and northern location):

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Small Skipper | 16. Painted Lady |
| 2. Large Skipper | 17. Small Tortoiseshell |
| 3. Brimstone | 18. Peacock |
| 4. Large White | 19. Comma |
| 5. Small White | 20. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary |
| 6. Green-veined White | 21. High Brown Fritillary |
| 7. Orange Tip | 22. Dark Green Fritillary |
| 8. Green Hairstreak | 23. Speckled Wood |
| 9. Purple Hairstreak | 24. Wall |
| 10. White-letter Hairstreak | 25. Gatekeeper |
| 11. Small Copper | 26. Meadow Brown |
| 12. Common Blue | 27. Small Heath |
| 13. Holly Blue | 28. Large Heath |
| 14. Duke of Burgundy | 29. Ringlet |
| 15. Red Admiral | |

There are several more species which are found just outside the RH boundary and may spread into the RH area with luck and conservation efforts. Silver-washed Fritillary is seen in Roudsea Wood just across the Leven from Greenodd. Northern Brown Argus and Dingy Skipper are a little further south at Cape Head and east of Windermere at Whitbarrow where Grayling and Pearl-bordered Fritillary are also found.

RHT volunteers continued to survey sites of the target species for the area (those species where our populations are of particular regional or national importance)

Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary

The Rusland Valley supports nationally important populations of this threatened species. There appear to be healthy and thriving colonies of Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries in the Rusland Valley. Some of the larger known colonies were surveyed again this year on 27th June: 88 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries were recorded at Thwaite Head, Low Dale Park and another site nearby by Richard Evans, 35 at Crag Head, Brantwood by Dave Charles, and 38 at Lord Ling, Oxen Park by Tom, Felix and Rob Fitter and Mary Fletcher. However, there were several reports of sightings in other parts of the valley (Grizedale, Bethocar, High Dam) and these records are helping us to extend our knowledge of the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary distribution locally. Many thanks to the volunteers who undertook surveying/reporting this year, we hope to expand this work to new areas and involve more volunteers in 2020.

High Brown Fritillary

This is one of the most threatened butterflies in the UK where it has suffered a decline of over 90% since the 1970s. The Morecambe bay area is now one of only 4 areas of the country where they are still found, the others being in Southwest England and South Wales. Survey work this summer has shown that the species continues to cling on in the Rusland Valley with 2 seen at the known site near Ickenthwaite on 6th July. One was seen at Hay Bridge last year but there were no sightings there this year. Also, there were none seen at China Plantation in Grizedale for the 5th year running which should mean this is now regarded as an extinct population. There has been major felling adjacent to the site and this may have had an impact on the population. However the survey was conducted relatively late in the season and in poor weather so it would be worthwhile continuing to survey this area over the next few years.

Duke of Burgundy

There were no sightings from Grizedale this year to build on the exciting finding of one last year. More surveying next year would help to confirm this as a viable colony. There has ongoing work by Butterfly Conservation of the population near High Dam.

Large Heath

Our Rusland Horizons event at Hay Bridge this year was successful in finding this species on the moss. It was also reported on another moss in the south of the area. Ongoing monitoring of these sites and identification of others in the Rusland Valley would help build our knowledge of the health of our local populations.

White Letter Hairstreak

A colony at Rusland continues but there were no other reports this year from other locations in the Rusland Valley. Surveying the area for elms (the larval food plant around which the adults are usually found) would help us target future survey work for this species.

Moths

The moth events around the Rusland Valley this year have been a great success, highlighting the variety and beauty of these amazing insects and raising awareness of the importance of conservation. There are several moth special which are a conservation priority for the Rusland Valley.

Argent and Sable

There were no reports this year of this very rare species, which has been found near Oxen Park in recent years, despite surveying being undertaken by Butterfly Conservation. Further surveying is needed to assess to status of the Rusland Valley population.

Netted Carpet

This is another very rare moth and is found near patches of its larval food plant, Touch-me-not Balsam, near Brantwood. The population is monitored by the National Trust with annual larval survey.

Plans for 2020

1. There will be an evening talk this spring by Chris Winnick, Chair of Butterfly Conservation Cumbria, about the butterflies and moths of the Rusland Valley and Cumbria. This will also be an opportunity to share information about the work of the butterfly and moth project and encourage more local volunteers.
2. We plan to continue to survey the Rusland Horizons area for our target species. The more people we have gathering information about our special butterflies and moths, the better we can help to protect them, so if anyone would like to volunteer to survey known sites, look for new ones, or simple report their sightings, please contact us. butterflies@ruslandhorizonstrust.org
3. We will be organising butterfly and moth events with both local schools and with the wider community again this summer.
4. We hope to arrange some practical conservation work days to help manage the habitat in key sites for our target species, in collaboration with Butterfly Conservation and the local landowners.

Details and date for all these events will be advertised on the Rusland Horizons website.

Appendix

Moths: Hay Bridge - 15th June

Agapeta hamana
Brown Silver-line
Buff Ermine
Buff Tip
Campion
Clouded Bordered Brindle
Clouded Buff
Common Carpet
Common Swift
Common White Wave
Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet
Dusky Brocade
Engrailed
Flame
Flame Shoulder
Foxglove Pug
Green Carpet
Green Oak Tortrix
Green Silver-lines
Heart and Dart
Ingrailed Clay
Iron Prominent
Light Emerald
Lychnis
Map-winged Swift
Marbled Brown
Marbled Minor
Marbled Orchard Tortrix
Marbled White Spot
Middle-barred Minor
Nutmeg
Nut-tree Tussock
Oblique Carpet
Pale Shouldered Brocade
Pale Tussock
Poplar Hawk
Sandy carpet
Shoulder Stripped Wainscot
Silver-ground Carpet
Small Angle Shades
Small Elephant Hawk
Treble Lines
White Ermine
White Pinion Spotted

Moths: Oxen Park - 21st July

Antler
Barred Straw
Beautiful Golden Y
Bright-line Brown-eye
Brimstone
Broad bordered yellow underwing
Buff tip
Buff arches
Burnished brass
China mark
Clay
Clouded border
Common footman
Common rustic
Dark arches
Dotted clay
Double square spot
Dunbar
Dusky brocade
Early thorn
Flame
Flame shoulder
Foxglove pug
Ghost
Gold spot
Green pug
Heart and dart
Large yellow underwing
Lesser swallow prominent
Light arches
Light emerald
Marbled minor
Mottled beauty
Muslin footman
Old lady
Peppered moth
Plain golden Y
Poplar hawk
Riband wave
Scalloped oak
Silver Y
Single dotted wave
Slender brindle
Small angle shades
Small dotted buff
Small fan-footed wave
Smoky wainscot
Straw dot
True lovers knot
Uncertain