

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Jan-15 04:59 AM GMT

Having received most of the butterfly records I am expecting for butterflies in East Lothian last year, I thought I would put together a summary of what has been recorded.

The winter of 2013/14 was the mildest I can remember. For the first time in my lifetime we didn't have any snow here and the Geraniums in our window boxes survived the winter because of the lack of a serious frost. Whether this was beneficial to the butterflies is difficult to determine.

We had a reasonably good spring and the early months of summer were warm and sunny. However, August and September were much cooler than normal and rather grey. This, I think, did have an impact on the butterflies.

Our first frost was at the beginning of October, but winter didn't really arrive until the beginning of December.

2014 was the best year I can remember for butterflies in East Lothian. Many species were seen in much higher numbers than normal. Two new species were recorded here and other species expanded their range.

Small Tortoiseshell, *Aglais urticae*

The first butterfly recorded in East Lothian in 2014 was a Small Tortoiseshell that I found on the pavement near where I work on 28th February. I picked it up and put it on a flower in the sun! Small Tortoiseshells continued to be recorded in good numbers through to 10th November.



Peacock, *Aglais io*

The first East Lothian Peacock was seen on 6th March. They did very well this year with the adults being recorded through to early June. Then in the third week in July the new generation emerged and an enormous number of Peacocks were recorded throughout East Lothian. Their number reduced quite rapidly, probably not helped by the cool weather in the second half of the summer. The last records of butterflies I received in 2014 were both Peacocks flying on 30th November.



Comma, *Polytonia c-album*

The first Comma was recorded here on 11th March and they went on to do very well this year. They were first recorded in East Lothian in 2004, but normally only one or two are seen at a time. In 2014 they were seen regularly and in July when the second generation appeared they did particularly well. On one occasion I saw six on the Buddleia in my garden.



Small White, *Pieris rapae*

The first record of a Small White this year was on 5th April. The great thing about having so many people contributing sightings is that we could see a clear division between the spring generation and the summer generation. The spring Small Whites were seen until the middle of June. The summer generation started to appear in the middle of July and continued through to 26th September.

Green-veined White, *Pieris napi*

The first record of a Green-veined White was on my transect on 11th April. Green-veined Whites are very common here and this year was particularly good for them. The two generations follow a very similar pattern to the Small White.



Orange Tip, *Anthocharis cardamines*

The first Orange Tip seen this year was on 14th May. Thereafter they were seen in good numbers until the end of May. I was pleased to see that they had recovered after a poor year in 2013, which was a knock-on from the flooding we had in 2012.



Large White, *Pieris brassicae*

The first Large White was seen on 18th April. Generally we don't see Large Whites in great numbers here, however in 2014 they were seen in good numbers. The summer 2013 generation was higher than normal and I remember seeing a lot of caterpillars later in the year. However, the caterpillars that hatched in 2014 may not have done so well. Those that hatched in August on the Nasturtiums in our garden perished in the cooler than normal weather. It will be interesting to see how many Large White butterflies emerge in 2015.



Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*

Speckled Woods were first recorded in East Lothian in 2009. Since then they have spread across much of East Lothian. 2014 saw them continue to expand their range along the River Tyne to Haddington, right along the coast and further inland. If they continue like this they will be found all over East Lothian in 2015. The first record of a Speckled Wood this year was on 20th April and they were seen through to 18th October. In one small woodland near Aberlady they were seen in their hundreds, quite unlike anything I have seen before anywhere.



Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*

The first Painted Lady was recorded on 4th May. There were a few more records throughout the year, but they didn't reach East Lothian in any great quantity. I imagine the wet summer in Europe didn't help, as these butterflies migrate, through a few generations, from north Africa.

Small Copper, *Lyceana phlaeas*

The first Small Copper this year was recorded on 6th May. They continued to do well, being seen in good numbers through to the 2nd October.



Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

The first Red Admiral we saw this year was on May 8th. This was a particularly good year for them, particularly once the second generation started to appear in August. They were seen until the 29th November.

Wall Brown, *Lamionnata megera*

Wall Browns were first recorded in East Lothian in 2010. They have continued to spread slowly along the coast and to a couple of inland sites. The first Wall Brown this year was recorded on 9th May and they were seen through to 5th September. On 21st May I saw a male Wall Brown near Haddington, a long way from any other colonies. Despite checking the area regularly for the next few weeks I didn't see any more in that area.

Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*

The first Small Heath was recorded on 21st May. It is a common butterfly along the coast in East Lothian and it is also found in the Lammermuir Hills.

This year they appeared to do exceptionally well.



Green Hairstreak, *Callophrys rubi*

On 30th May a Green Hairstreak was reported to me just outside East Lothian. The following day I found some, again within feet of the East Lothian border. However, as butterfly records still use the old Vice County areas both of these records turned out to be East Lothian records. There are old records of Green Hairstreak in other areas in East Lothian, but despite looking for them, I have never seen them there. Now I know what habitats they like I will need to spend some time looking for them this year.



Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*

The first Common Blue was recorded on 1st June. They did really well this year and were seen in good numbers. They were seen through to 19th August.



Northern Brown Argus, *Aricia artaxerxes*

There are only four colonies of Northern Brown Argus in East Lothian that I am aware of. Three of them are very small, only a few feet across. The first record of a Northern Brown Argus was on 11th June. They did really well this year, with good numbers being seen at the main site. The other sites are perilously clinging on, but work is being done to try to ensure their future survival.



Ringlet, *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Ringlets bounced back in 2014 after a poor previous year. They were first recorded on 14th June and continued in very good numbers until 9th August, which is very late here.

Grayling, *Hipparchia semele*

Graylings appear to only occur at three sites in East Lothian. Unfortunately one of these sites is earmarked for development, so may soon be lost. 2014 was a good year for Grayling. The first record was on 16th June and they were seen through to 24th July.

Meadow Brown, *Maniola jurtina*

The first Meadow Brown was seen on 16th June. Again, they did really well, being seen in good numbers right through to the end of August. I also saw a very ragged individual on 5th September.

Dark Green Fritillary, *Argynnis aglaja*

Dark Green Fritillaries are never seen in great numbers here. They mainly occur along the coast and in the Lammermuir Hills. The first record for 2014 was on 16th June. Numbers on the coast were about average, but they seemed to do well in the Lammermuirs.

Large Skipper, *Ochlodes sylvanus*

The most exciting news this year was the arrival of Large Skippers into East Lothian. They have been expanding their range in the Scottish Borders for a number of years and in June they were found just over the border within sight of East Lothian. Despite searching suitable sites on our side of the border we weren't able to find any here. However, on 19th June I received a report that one had been found a couple of miles inside East Lothian. Six days later I was walking along a road verge and spotted one right in front of me. This is the same area that Wall Browns and Speckled Woods first entered East Lothian, so I am looking forward to hearing about Large Skippers working their way along the coast.



Small Skipper, *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Small Skippers were first seen in East Lothian in 2011 at Aberlady. A couple more were seen in 2012 and in 2013 they had increased considerably. In 2014 they not only increased in numbers again, but they were also seen at a number of sites, quite far apart. They seem to have spread right along the coast to Levenhall and were found at a couple of inland sites. They were seen between 30th June and 5th August.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, *Boloria selene*

I found Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries for the first time in East Lothian last year. As far as I am aware they only occur at one site. They were seen there again this year on 11th July and again a few days later.

So, 2014 was another great year for butterflies in East Lothian. Two more new species were recorded and I wonder how long we can continue to find new species here! The sad news was that I didn't receive any reports of Holly Blue this year. It would be sad if they have died out here, having been seen at a few sites in 2012.

Now that I am receiving records from the Ranger Service and about 15 volunteers, we are beginning to build up a really good picture of how butterflies are doing here. There is a lot to look forward to in 2015. It will be interesting to see if Large Skippers increase in numbers or extend further into East Lothian. Now that I know what sort of habitat Green Hairstreaks like I am going to check out some of the areas where they used to occur. I wonder if there will be any more new species this year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 25-Jan-15 05:59 AM GMT

I find it interesting that you consider 2014 to have been largely a good year for butterflies in your region. I suppose East Lothian is one of the most exciting areas in which to study butterflies as all the evidence seems to point to butterflies increasing their range northwards, and your 'patch' is right at the heart of this battlefield.

By contrast, last year was fairly disappointing in south Wales. 2013 saw better than average tallies of High Brown and Dark Green Fritillaries, Small Blues, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Small Coppers, Brimstones, Small Whites and Small Skippers.

2014 was really only notable for larger than normal abundance of Green Hairstreaks.

I was rather hoping for a cold blast this winter but this seems fairly unlikely now (unless February turns up the goods).

Re: Nick Morgan

by IAC, 25-Jan-15 09:34 AM GMT

Nicely done Nick. Some very nice photos as well. A memorable year, no doubt about it. More to come I reckon. I always keep my ear to the ground every season for interesting snippets of information from the north of England on butterfly distribution, and especially news of any population shifts north. From what I have gathered over this past few years, we will be waiting a while for the next wave of wanderers. Brown Argus have been known for a while from the south of Northumberland. No shift northwards yet on the east side. But I did hear that Brown Argus may be breaking through in the North West. I confirmed close to Whitehaven I believe. Unlikely to have been Northern Brown Argus. Brown Argus would be quite interesting in Scotland considering our NBA colonies and what it might mean for them...one for the future perhaps. Gatekeeper are not budging from their current distribution much, though there have been sightings in the Scottish Borders for a number of years now that have been discarded fairly quickly as Meadow Brown///and that is probably right enough. White Letter Hairstreak is a possibility. It keeps popping up in Northern England fairly erratically. We do have some very suitable habitat for this species, and have had for a while. Lots of suitable Elm suckers at a good age now. Purple Hairstreak are very likely present in East Lothian as well as the Borders. They will have been present for many years...finding them is quite a job...they have eluded many sharp eyes for many years. Holly Blue probably present still in East Lothian and Scottish Borders....where though? I have only seen ghost butterflies of Holly Blue...twice out of season blue butterflies on the coast. I say out of season meaning...not expecting to see Common Blue in early May. I saw one blue butterfly flying among cliff top shrubbery a few years ago....it got away before I could get close...I am very sure they are still around.

Essex Skipper...maybe? For East Lothian...Scotch Argus and Large Heath...cant remember if you have any Large Heath up in East Lothian anymore. They are disappearing fast in the Scottish Borders, sadly. Scotch Argus would be a long shot, most of the Borders Scotch Argus are in the west now. Dingy Skipper, not a butterfly on the move...but...well...in the Scottish Borders there are very few habitats suitable for this species. However in East Lothian there are plenty that match similar habitats used by the Dingy Skip in Northumberland and South West Scotland...post industrial sites being very

popular.....that's a very long shot indeed....find Dingy Skipper in East Lothian and expect a reward 😊

In the Borders we have historical, some hysterical, records for Silver Studded Blue, unlikely to have been, Silver Washed Fritillary, who knows...unlikely, Large Tortoiseshell, maybe, a secretive species, unlikely now, Marsh Fritillary, still possible, but unlikely to still remain, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, perhaps in the west of the region. All of these 19th century records were by collector naturalists at a time when there would have been great competition to find the most exotic species in the region...so pinches of salt more than likely added. The exception is the Silver Studded Blue record from the 1980s up at Abbey St Bathans, it caused great excitement at the time only for that record to have been a duplicate of an earlier record from the 1880s...this record was since discarded as it never appeared in any of the lists of Lepidoptera for the Eastern Borders throughout the remainder of the 19th and early 20th century.

Well Nick...that's my ramble over, thanks for inspiring me with your report. I am looking forward to hearing what you find next season up in East Lothian.

Iain.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Jan-15 10:43 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

I find it interesting that you consider 2014 to have been largely a good year for butterflies in your region. I suppose East Lothian is one of the most exciting areas in which to study butterflies as all the evidence seems to point to butterflies increasing their range northwards, and your 'patch' is right at the heart of this battlefield.

By contrast, last year was fairly disappointing in south Wales. 2013 saw better than average tallies of High Brown and Dark Green Fritillaries, Small Blues, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Small Coppers, Brimstones, Small Whites and Small Skippers.

2014 was really only notable for larger than normal abundance of Green Hairstreaks.

I was rather hoping for a cold blast this winter but this seems fairly unlikely now (unless February turns up the goods).

David,

It is interesting that different parts of the country had different results with their butterflies. I think that last year we didn't have any period of poor weather earlier in the year. Yes, the winter seemed to drag on a bit, but once spring arrived the weather was reasonably warm and dry until August. The second half of the year was not so good, but probably we will see the impacts of that in 2015. I would have to go back to about 2008 or earlier to find a comparable year, but then we didn't have many of the species we regularly find now. The two that stand out are Speckled Woods, which were so numerous this year and Small Skippers, too. What was also notable was butterflies like the Large White and Comma which are normally seen in ones or twos were far more numerous than I have ever seen.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Jan-15 11:08 PM GMT

Iain,

Interesting to read your thoughts on potential new species. I had a similar discussion with someone at work recently and we wondered if Gatekeepers or Brimstones were expanding at all. I spent days looking for eggs and later adult Purple Hairstreaks with Abbie Marland last year without success. We concentrated much of our effort on Aberlady and Gosford. Somewhere like Woodhall Dean may be a possibility with the ancient oaks there. I spent a day looking for eggs, but didn't manage to get back when adults could have been flying. I did look for adults in 2013 on one occasion.

I do fear for Holly Blues here. There were none reported from the Newhailes/Brunstane area last year. The previous year, I think there was only one record. It was early 2012 that we found the new colony at Aberlady and we had three other records from North Berwick, Gullane and Dirleton.

Unfortunately the summer was a complete wash out and I think it finished them off here.

There are a few areas in the Lammermuir Hills that I would love to check out. A few spots around Crystal Rig wind farm away from the managed grouse moors. Could there be hidden colonies of butterflies still to be discovered? It would be amazing to find Large Heaths or Scotch Argus.

Of course I am still waiting to find some Small Blues on the East Lothian coast, too!

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 26-Jan-15 04:06 AM GMT

Just as a matter of interest, Nick, which species do you think is most likely to be the next to turn up in your neck of the woods?

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Jan-15 02:39 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Just as a matter of interest, Nick, which species do you think is most likely to be the next to turn up in your neck of the woods?

David,

It is difficult to imagine any more species arriving here. I still can't believe that we have had six new species establish themselves here in the last eight years! The only butterfly that I think we have any real chance of discovering is the Purple Hairstreak. They are north of here in Fife, so can manage our weather. I often wonder if there is a little population hidden away somewhere.

There are Small Blues in the borders, not far away from us, but they would have to jump quite far between areas of Kidney Vetch, so I think they are unlikely to make it up here. Large Heaths are found in the Borders, so could they buck the trend and expand up here. The butterfly that would really excite me would be to find some Scotch Argus in a hidden valley in the Lammermuirs. I hear they are quite specific in their habitat requirements, but I live in hope!

Common butterflies down south such as the Brimstone may occasionally stray up this way, but we don't have any buckthorn for them to breed on! And I wonder what stops Gatekeepers spreading further north?

I can't think of anything else that is likely to make it here. It would be lovely if Holly Blues could re-establish themselves here. Maybe there is a possibility they will spread northwards.

Iain (IAC) is best placed to predict our next species as they will most likely have to spread through the Scottish Borders before reaching here.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 29-Jan-15 06:37 AM GMT

Interesting report Nick and timely as I'm about a quarter of the way through mine (Skippers and Whites written 😊). It's interesting to see you observe higher numbers of Large White this year as down here they were well down, one mans gain is another mans loss I suppose 😊 😊

Have a goodun

Re: Nick Morgan

by IAC, 29-Jan-15 11:35 AM GMT

Nick..Brimstone butterflies have been sighted up here at least once every year. Photographic evidence is quite hard to come by. A few years ago a photograph was taken of a Brimstone in flight around the railway line at Spittal, Berwick Upon Tweed. My theory is that these Brimstone sightings, sporadic as they are, are possibly being imported from down south via nurseries and garden centers. It would have been interesting to see if there was any Buckthorn that had been newly planted and then to trace its origin. Brimstone can wander quite far from there population centres...however a few hundred miles is perhaps a little to far to be a wandering migrant...possibly. I just cant say how much Buckthorn exists in Scotland as a whole. In the wild it is very rare, however in towns and cities....?

Daids question is impossible to answer just now. Not likely to be anything soon. Comma, Speckled Wood, Large Skipper, and Wall Brown have all been recorded in the south of Scotland in previous centuries...as far back as the 18th century. Orange Tip and Peacock have also returned to previous haunts this past 50 years after local extinctions. Small Skipper is though quite a different thing altogether as they had previously never been recorded in Eastern Scotland. Hard to believe when you see them in their hundreds in July time.

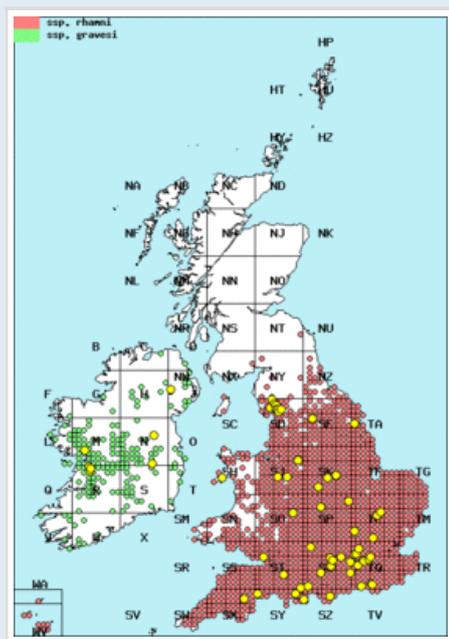
Gatekeepers simply wont shift north until they are forced to change. Butterflies are evolving all the time to suit conditions...and when conditions dictate perhaps a trigger to expand occurs...a trigger that the Small Skipper has clearly responded too. I will leave the causes for these adaptations to the experts...I have not got a clue. All I know is, that we are very lucky indeed to be witnessing first hand a natural phenomenon that may be unprecedented since perhaps the last ice age. We are all quite butterfly orientated here, but I have noticed a large number of new insects of all groups invading from the south. My second love the Dragonflies and Damselflies are much more common and diverse than they ever were. The Banded Demoiselle is now one of the most common riverside Damselfs... And then there is the annual additions to the moth list, the bird list....and on and on. We are almost guaranteed something new every season to lookout for.....which is nice. 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

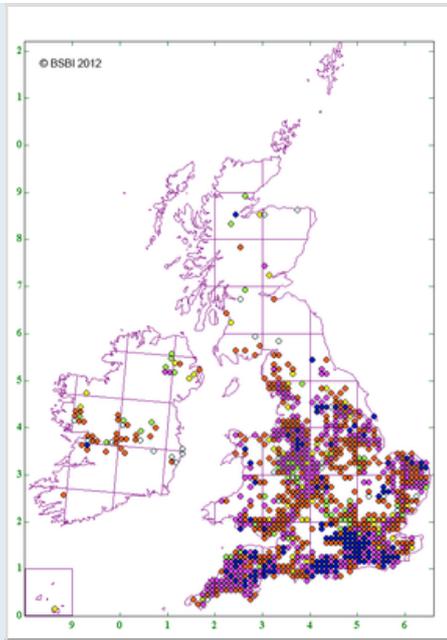
by David M, 29-Jan-15 10:28 PM GMT

Thanks for the feedback, guys. I'm sure Purple Hairstreak & Holly Blue are lurking somewhere up there. As for Brimstones, it's interesting to compare the distribution atlas for the butterfly itself alongside that of its foodplant:

Brimstone: [http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/distribu ... ies=rhamni](http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/distribu...ies=rhamni)



Alder Buckthorn: <http://www.bsbimaps.org.uk/atlas/hectadmap.php?spid=839>



The information seems to suggest that where the LHP is found, the butterfly too is likely to be about.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-Jan-15 07:31 AM GMT

That is interesting to see David. If I had a bigger garden I would be tempted to plant some buckthorn!!

Have you seen any new species moving into South Wales in the last few years?

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 30-Jan-15 08:30 PM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

Have you seen any new species moving into South Wales in the last few years?

Only Essex Skipper to be honest, Nick. Having an ocean immediately south of us presents a bit of a barrier to some of the English species for which there is suitable habitat here.

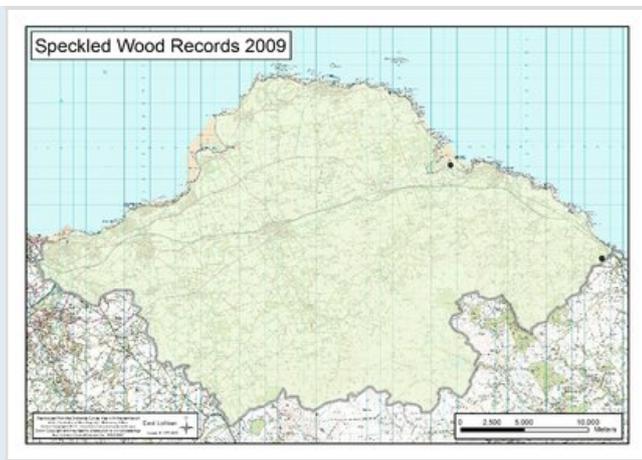
Lineola seems to be creeping west (established round the Cardiff area now). I keep checking the the golden skippers at the Alun Valley High Brown site near Bridgend as I wouldn't be surprised to see Essex turn up there at some point. I also think Brown, Purple and White Letter Hairstreaks are probably much under-recorded.

The sad aspect is the loss or near loss of some species here over the last few decades, notably Pearl Bordered and High Brown Fritillary. That said, Marsh Fritillaries can be found in numbers at the right locations and species such as Small Blue, Dark Green Fritillary, Grayling, Dingy Skipper & Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary are relatively common if you know where to look.

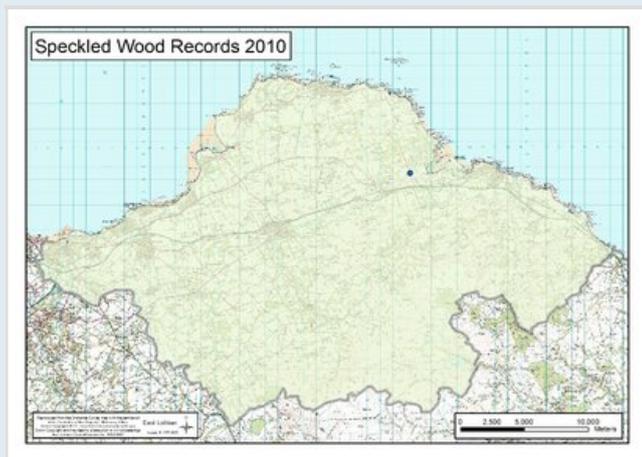
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Mar-15 06:31 AM GMT

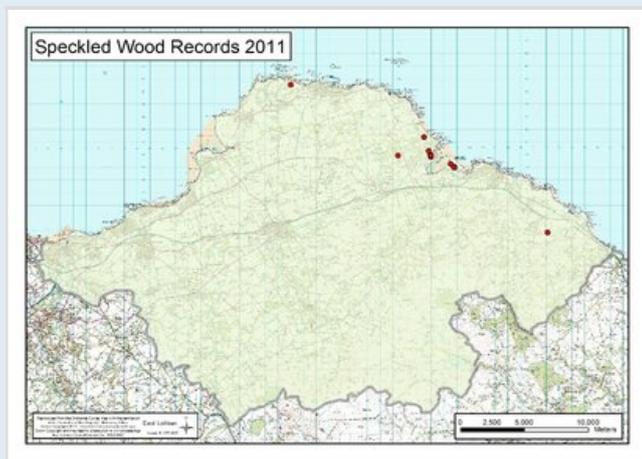
I have been mapping our Speckled Wood records onto GIS, which shows very nicely how they have spread since they first appeared in East Lothian six years ago. As with some other species the first record was at the eastern corner of the county.



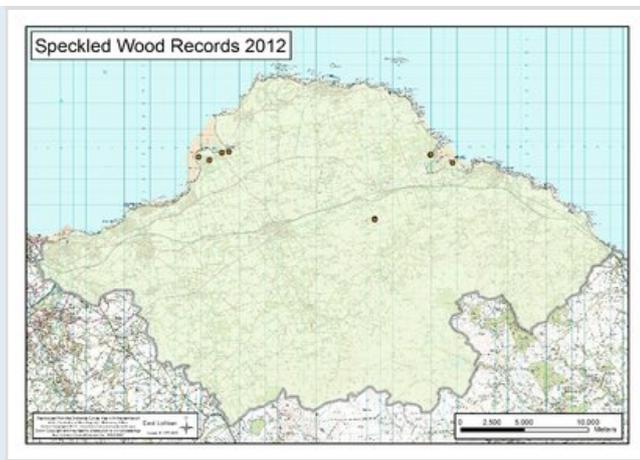
Only one record was received in 2010, but I am sure there were others hiding out there somewhere!



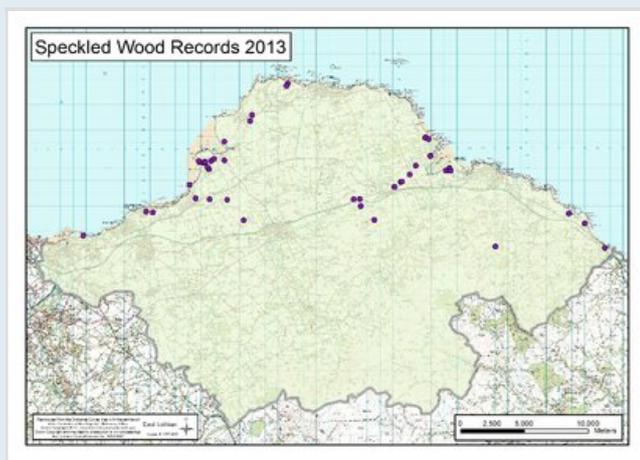
In May 2011 I found a pair of Speckled Woods in John Muir Country Park and subsequent visits in June and September found them at exactly the same spot. They were also seen in various other locations within the park. That year we also received records from Innerwick and at Yellowcraig about 12 kilometres west.



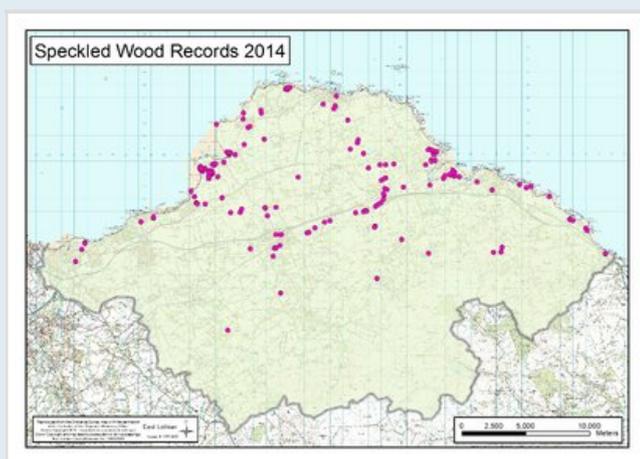
Despite the poor summer of 2012 I still received a number of records of Speckled Woods. They continued to be seen at JMCP and one was seen on two occasions in a small woodland close to Traprain Law. Most exciting were a number of records received from the Aberlady area, another large leap away.



2013 was a fantastic year for butterflies and Speckled Woods seemed to do as well, if not better than most species. They spread for six or seven kilometres up the River Tyne from JMCP and continued to do very well in the woodland around Aberlady, spreading westwards along the coast to Port Seton. They also seemed to be spreading along the woodland on the Longniddry to Haddington Railway Walk towards Haddington. Late in the season, records were received from Skateraw and Thorntonloch, nicely filling in a gap on the east coast and in November a record was received from the coast on the west of the county, showing that they had spread the length of the East Lothian coast in five years!



In 2014 Speckled Woods continued to expand their range, following the River Tyne up to Haddington and moving inland towards Gifford and Saltoun Woods. In late summer they became the most numerous butterfly seen in many parts of East Lothian, and on 10th September I saw over 400 in a wood near Aberlady.



The increase in Speckled Wood records again last year must have been partly attributable to more people looking for them and sending records in, but I think we have still built up a pretty good indication of how the species has spread over this time. The rate of spread of the species seems quite remarkable and it is difficult to understand why Speckled Woods are extending their range at such a rate. It is easy to label this as another consequence of climate change, but since 2009 we have experienced two of the coldest winters in recent history and the wettest summer on record! I am really looking forward to seeing if Speckled Woods spread to the remaining areas of East Lothian this year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 06-Mar-15 06:49 AM GMT

Excellent graphic, Nick.

Looks like they've colonised comprehensively in your 'patch'.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Mar-15 05:44 AM GMT

Inspired by my visit to Inchkeith island to look for over-wintering butterflies last November, I have been occupying myself this winter looking for hibernating butterflies here in East Lothian.

I started by looking in a local ruined castle. It has an underground chamber, which I thought could be perfect for butterflies to shelter in for the winter. I didn't find any in the main chamber, but the tunnel leading into it had two Peacock butterflies in it, just behind this arch:



I think there was too much light in the main chamber, but the tunnel was very dark.



After that a friend and I were given permission to have a look around the buildings on a large estate near the coast. We checked out some of the buildings, including the boathouse and curling house, but they were both too light. Unfortunately, the most likely buildings, including an ice house were locked up. However, we found an old stone shed in the walled garden and sneaked a look around the door. There in the rafters we spotted several Peacock butterflies. Unfortunately, my camera couldn't focus on them in the dark. We think there were at least 18 in this group and there were two other smaller clusters.



On another occasion I checked out the old bread oven in another castle.



Initially, I thought there was nothing there, but then I noticed a Small Tortoiseshell in the crack between two stones.



It wasn't until I was looking at my pictures that I noticed that what I thought was one butterfly turned out to be two roosting next to each other. These two are perilously close to a spider's nest.



There were 16 butterflies in total scattered around the oven. I found it interesting that the first two locations had only Peacock butterflies and this castle had only Small Tortoiseshells.

At work, I met an archaeologist and I mentioned to him what I had found and asked him if there were any other old buildings he could recommend. He suggested a ruined house on the coast that had an old bread oven in the cellar.



Sure enough when we looked inside the bread oven there were some Peacock butterflies.



Some of them were rather worn, showing the colour of the upper side of their wings. We found eleven Peacocks there. At each of these locations I also spotted Herald moths and mosquitoes sharing the winter accommodation.

I rent an old barn on a nearby farm where I keep a couple of old cars and our log supply. Last weekend I was collecting some logs when I noticed some butterfly wings on the floor. The more I looked the more I found. I counted over 100 individual wings, which would mean at least 25 butterflies. Most of the wings were from Small Tortoiseshells, but there were about ten Peacock wings, too.



A couple of years ago we stapled some thick polythene sheeting across the rafters to stop pigeons roosting there. This must have created a nice dark space for butterflies to hibernate. Unfortunately, I guess it is also home to several spiders, which have been enjoying a good feed. I hope that a good number of butterflies have managed to make it through the winter and will soon be flying around the farm.

Last week I received my first 2015 record of a butterfly flying in East Lothian. I am excited to think that I will soon be seeing butterflies again. But, strangely, I am looking forward to next winter now that I know the sorts of places to look for hibernating butterflies!

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 11-Mar-15 06:08 AM GMT

Excellent detective work, Nick.

Just goes to show how many hibernating butterflies become victims of predation.

Re: Nick Morgan

by bugboy, 11-Mar-15 06:50 AM GMT

Hi Nick, Great set of pics of hibernating butterflies.

Large numbers of butterfly wings on the floor as you describe and illustrate is normally a sign of bat predation where they have eaten the body and discarded the wings. If they were spider meals the wings would most likely still be attached to the empty husk bodies and wrapped in silk. It's also unlikely spiders would feed on hibernating insects since they rely on and react to motion whereas bats would probably be able to smell their prey in this situation (I actually have no idea how good a sense of smell bats have but they are mammals so I'm assuming it's quite good). Perhaps it would be a good idea to contact your local branch of the Bat Conservation Trust to confirm if there are any around? 😊

Buggy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Mar-15 06:53 AM GMT

Thanks David. Yes, there is still so much more that I would like to know. I guess that thinking about the number of Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells I see flying in late summer and the much smaller number I see in the spring tells us something about how many don't make it through the winter.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Mar-15 06:56 AM GMT

"bugboy" wrote:

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Buggy

Thanks for the information Buggy. There are bound to be a lot of bats around the farm as the farmer has gone to a lot of effort to provide great habitats all over the farm for wildlife. That is where I often run my moth trap. It would be interesting to have a peek in the space created by the polythene to see if there are any bats up there.

Re: Nick Morgan

by bugboy, 11-Mar-15 07:08 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

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No worries Nick, Looking at your pictures it would be hugely surprising if there weren't bats in those areas. Just worth pointing out that it's illegal to disturb bat roosts anywhere in the UK. Not sure if 'having a peek' constitutes disturbing. If you can lay your hands on a bat detector though you will be able to identify what species are about from their sonar.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Mar-15 07:56 AM GMT

Ah, good idea. My dad has a bat detector I could borrow.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Chris Jackson, 12-Mar-15 11:24 PM GMT

A very interesting report about hibernating butterflies in old castles, Nick.

Those discarded butterfly wings remind me down here of mantises. The mantises hide in buddleia bushes and very deftly catch all sorts of flying insects, and they also unceremoniously discard the wings of their BF victims at the foot of the bush.

Cheers, Chris

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 13-Mar-15 07:18 AM GMT

Interesting report Nick - I'll have to see if there are any old ruins round this way for some hibernation action next winter 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Mar-15 07:33 AM GMT

Thanks Chris and Wurzel. Yes, this is a great way of keeping yourself occupied during the winter months. Tomorrow I am picking up a key from the factor of a local estate for an ancient abandoned house. It will be interesting to see if there are any butterflies there. So far, I have only found Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. I am sure there should be some Commas out there somewhere. I even thought that possibly a Red Admiral may have tried to hibernate up here. Now I know the sorts of places to look, I will be putting in more effort next year to check out potential overwintering places.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 14-Jun-15 07:05 PM GMT

A combination of personal disasters and lousy weather has rather limited my butterfly sorties so far this year. However, on the few occasions I have managed to get out I have been very pleased with what I have seen.

Butterfly numbers have generally been very low, with cold weather through most of April and May. Numbers of whites have been very low, but Orange Tips have managed to cope better with the weather.



There are still quite a few Orange Tips flying.

After two previous visits to a site where we found Green Hairstreaks last year we at last found them on 26 May. Up until that time the ground temperature had been very cold and any sunny weather usually followed a sharp frost. We had noticed that when you buried your hand into the tussocks where the Green Hairstreak chrysalis would have been, it was very much cooler than the air temperature. It was fantastic to see these butterflies again.



I noticed last year that all of the Green Hairstreaks that I found were within about 10 metres of Spruce plantations. I had assumed this was because the trees offered shelter. Those that we found this year were along the edge of a Pine plantation and in a clearing. As we watched them we noticed that they regularly flew up into the Pines and settled on the young shoots. On two occasions a pair of Green Hairstreaks spiralled up into the trees together and immediately start mating. I wonder if this is behaviour that has been observed elsewhere?



Last week a friend and I drove down to the Scottish Borders to look for Small Blues at a site just north of the English border. We were not disappointed and managed to pick the best weather of the week. We estimate that we saw about 40 Small Blues in this colony.





There were plenty of Small Heaths flying and a few Wall Browns, hinting that if the weather remains good we may still have a good year ahead of us.



While we were down there we popped along to another coastal site renowned for its colony of Northern Brown Argus. Once we found the specific site we were not to be disappointed. Below a steep hillside covered in Rockrose was a patch of Valerian where we saw about 20 Northern Brown Argus.





We also saw our first Common Blue of the season.



There are plenty of other species still to appear. It will be really interesting to see if the second generation of whites is more successful than the first. I have seen hardly any Small Whites so far this year. Also after a bumper crop of Speckled Woods last autumn, they have been noticeably reduced in numbers. This is a strange thing to say, as they only first appeared here in 2009, but they had been increasing and spreading at an amazing rate. Again, I am hoping that the next generation will be more numerous than the first generation this year.