



Update to the Branches within the North England Region

One of the most frequent (and, it has to be said, most deserved) criticisms I receive is that communication with the Branches is not as good as it might be. Although articles and reports are produced and circulated, these are often completed on a timescale requested by funders and BC staff rather than by the Branches. Which is, I acknowledge freely, both poor practice and unfair. Accordingly, I have decided to circulate periodic updates on work undertaken by myself and colleagues within our region so that everyone is aware of what has taken place, and where, as well as outlining the various projects with which we are engaged. Hopefully, there will be bits that can be cut and pasted into various newsletters (feel free to include the entire document if you wish) or that can be added to the excellent Branch websites. At the foot of each section, I have included various ways in which members can lend a hand with the work of the Regional Office. Give me a ring on 01388 488428 or email dwainwright@butterfly-conservation.org if there's anything you could devote time to.

So here goes: Branch by Branch, and in no particular order:

North East Branch:

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Introductions. This work has been undertaken in conjunction with Durham Wildlife Trust. Releases of captive-bred stock have been undertaken at two County Durham sites. The first introduction, at a site named Black Plantation, was undertaken in 2014. In total, 177 larvae, most in the final instar, were released. The site was, and is, monitored by weekly transect. During the release year, several double-figure counts were made which is in keeping with counts made over many years at some of the county's smaller, "natural" sites. The measure of initial success was, of course, whether the species would be present in 2015 as that would mean it was capable of breeding on-site. It was and its numbers were similar to those of the release year, despite some pretty poor weather up to and including the flight period. Adults were also seen at the second site, Spurlwood Gill, where exactly 100 larvae were released in 2015 and I hope to report that they too bred successfully before too long. BC staff undertook the captive breeding, DWT will continue to manage the sites.

Help needed with: resurveys of northern brown argus and dingy skipper sites; habitat condition assessments for Northern Brown Argus sites; monitoring of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Spurlwood Gill. Just in – volunteer for long-running Thrislington

NNR transect. Should be especially interesting as the data series goes back to the 1990s.

Cheshire Branch:

Argent and Sable Surveys. As part of the ongoing “Meres and Mosses” project, hosted by RSPB, it is hoped that members will assist with surveying sites for this rare moth. Training is to be organised by BC staff; aims will be to confirm that the species survives at Cheshire’s only known site, assess its abundance and determine whether management would benefit the species. Potentially suitable sites will also be surveyed and new populations hopefully detected.

Help needed with: see above. Survey monitoring of Belted Beauty moth at Meols Common on The Wirral.

Lancashire Branch:

Management and monitoring of key fritillary sites:

A considerable amount of work is undertaken in what, in terms of rare species, is probably *the* most important landscape covered by the Northern England Region: the Morecambe Bay Limestones. The work dovetails with that undertaken in the Cumbrian part of the landscape and includes:

- Managing BC’s only reserve that supports a population of the High Brown Fritillary

Collating and analysing transect data from monitored Morecambe Bay sites. High Brown Fritillary netting licences for transect walkers are obtained from Natural England and distributed by staff to ensure correct classification of High Brown and Dark Green Fritillaries, which can be a challenge.

- Facilitation Fund. This funding stream derives from Natural England, the statutory government body tasked with delivering biodiversity targets for England. This particular pot of money is disbursed to organisations who can deliver advice on management practice that best delivers benefits to target species and habitats while managing land in a way that is economically sustainable – a challenging task under current financial constraints. The aim is to ensure land managers work together and, where possible, submit complementary grant bids, either to manage woodlands or the farmed landscape so that the landscape as a whole is managed in a manner appropriate to the habitats and species being targeted. The bidding process to obtain this fund was a competitive one and was dependent upon BC staff being able to demonstrate relevant expertise in habitat management and grant applications. We were required to sign up a worthwhile number of landowners to the project whose holdings exceeded 2000 hectares when combined. The fund is administered by Martin Wain who disseminates advice

to his landowners via a series of site visits, training days and practical demonstrations. The current round of funding lasts for five years and we are currently within the first year of that timeframe. More information on the Facilitation Fund is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund/guide-to-countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund>

Help needed with:

Work parties at Myers Allotment

Habitat condition assessments at Warton Crag

Monitoring of species across wide landscape areas.

Cumbria Branch

Facilitation Fund work: see Lancs Branch

Morecambe Bay Limestones Woodlands project:

This is a 3-year project funded by Landfill Tax redistribution company, WREN. The grant award includes approximately £115k to be spent on management of around 16 woodland sites in Cumbria and follows on from previous projects funded by GrantScape and SITA. By the expiry of this project, BC will have spent in the region of £350k on managing these important habitats and will have played a role in securing grants to landowners to around twice that value. Monitoring of work sites continues and although results suggest that High Brown and Pearl-bordered Fritillaries have not responded as well as hoped, Dark Green, Silver-washed and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Northern Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper and White-spotted Sable moth most certainly have.

Higher Level Stewardship agreements:

BC staff continue to advise on the content of agreements on land that supports key species. We have been especially active in the Winster and Rusland Valleys as well as the Morecambe Bay Limestones.

Species monitoring:

Data from around 18 monitored sites is collated and analysed. High Brown Fritillary netting licences for transect walkers are obtained from Natural England and distributed by staff.

Small Blue on the Cumbrian Coast:

BC and Cumbria County Council have entered into an agreement whereby we will be paid to manage several hectares of land for the Small Blue near Workington,

including an area of slightly over one hectare from which topsoil has been removed and where Kidney Vetch seed has been sown. These are growing well and it is hoped the butterfly will colonise from nearby sites. The arrangement was reached as mitigation for the loss of a site that is being developed as a transport hub. Stock was also transferred from this site to one near Barrow that is not currently threatened. These appear to have bred successfully. Branch members continue to liaise with local authorities regarding other proposed developments.

Netted Carpet Steering Group:

BC remains an active partner and staff continue to assist with species monitoring on an annual basis. It is likely our role will increase through the Rusland Horizons projects (see below).

Rusland Horizons:

This lottery-funded project is hosted by Lake District National Park. As with all such projects, its remit is to involve local people by enabling them to better engage with their local heritage, natural or otherwise. The area encompassed by the project is the Rusland Valley wherein are located a number of sites that support key species including High Brown, Dark Green and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Duke of Burgundy and Netted Carpet. BC is likely to host one strand of this project, prospectively entitled "Wings in the Wood"; its aim will be to stimulate survey and monitoring of these key species, undertake habitat condition assessments and so forth. Recorders old and new will be most welcome once the project gets underway.

Help needed with:

Transects. There are a number that have been discontinued and a number of sites that would benefit from regular, systematic monitoring. Annual Netted carpet larval counts (September).

Habitat condition assessments for Pearl-bordered and High Brown Fritillaries. Of increasing importance as these species continue to decline. Causes may well be climatic but it's likely that its impact is transmitted to butterfly populations through subtle changes to the species' habitats. If we know what those changes are, we *may* be able to devise management that addresses them.

Surveys. Targeting the two above-named Fritillaries in particular, particularly in the Winster, Rusland and Backbarrow areas.

Yorkshire Branch

Dukes and Pearls project: This five-year project, funded by WREN, is now complete. A total of almost £125k has been spent on scrub control, felling, coppicing and, grass and bramble management at 34 sites in the North York Moors. The work was targeted at known and potentially suitable Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy sites. At the project's inception, there were two extant Pearl sites in Yorkshire; there are now four and possibly five. Despite low numbers in 2015,

numbers show a significant increase overall at core sites over the last five years. Three of these sites are now monitored by weekly transect.

Duke of Burgundy has recolonised three sites, been discovered on a further two and has been reintroduced to another during the life of the project while numbers on core sites have increased substantially.

Although this project is now complete, BC does have long-term plans for these two species in the North York Moors landscape. Having undertaken most of the heavy-contractor-led work, the next three years' will involve mainly volunteers, with a smaller amount of contractor work if funding can be secured. In the meantime, further potentially suitable sites will be identified and contacts with relevant landowners made before a much larger bid to cover another period of heavy, landscape-scale management is developed.

Conserving the Dark-bordered Beauty: Funded by some £16k from Yorventure, a substantial donation by the Branch and a significant one by a Branch member, this project aims to reverse the fortunes of this declining moth at its remaining English site. Capital works will include the installation of grazing exclosures and the purchase of Creeping Willow plants (the larval host plant of the moth), while further purchases will include tools and light traps. There will be substantial volunteering opportunities for activities such as scrub control, fencing, survey and monitoring, habitat assessments, growing on creeping willow seedlings as well as planting these out on site (Strensall Common near York) once they are ready.

Argent and Sable management: BC staff led one work party at Boltby and will do so at the species' other Yorkshire site, Bishop's Wood. It is hoped that a small amount of management for the species can be undertaken on an annual basis.

Monitoring: BC staff have played an active role in increasing the numbers of transects walked in North Yorkshire. In partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, we have trained volunteers so that most of the Trust's northern reserves (about 18 sites) are now monitored weekly throughout summer. This is in addition to a similar number of sites monitored weekly by BC's own volunteers who also undertake a number of single-species transects for species such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Forester moth.

Help needed with: monitoring butterflies and moths by transect at the following sites: Boltby Forest (Argent and Sable, Dingy Skipper), Pickering Woods (transect started last year but recorders unable to continue; Duke site, possibly Pearl-bordered Fritillary), Hawnby (excellent Duke site; current recorder needs to share workload), Strensall (Dark-Bordered Beauty, general butterflies inc. Green Hairstreak).

Work parties: see above

Lastly, I am compiling an inventory of potential Small Blue sites throughout the North of England region. The species tends to favour a mosaic of sparse and tall vegetation – with lots of Kidney Vetch. I'd be interested to know of such sites so that their ownership and potential for management can be investigated. The Small Blue faces considerable problems in Cumbria as an ever-increasing number of the brownfield sites it occupies are scheduled for redevelopment; the same lack of long-term security applies to the two Yorkshire sites on which it is found. At best, the species faces a massive loss of its habitat: at worst, total extinction. It would make a lot of sense to investigate the feasibility of introducing the species to potential sites in order to mitigate ongoing losses, which simply cannot be achieved in the network of sites where it is found at present. So let me know of potentially-suitable habitat.

I hope you found this update interesting and informative. Doubtless there are aspects of work undertaken by Martin and myself that have been omitted. Similarly, I have only mentioned in passing the excellent work undertaken by every one of Northern England's five Branches as this tends to be passed between Branches through various media. I'd be delighted to receive feedback as to whether you think periodic updates of this type are useful; don't hold back, there are bound to be ways in which communication can be further improved.