

Ayrshire Butterfly Report 2003

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Introduction

All in all 2003 was an excellent year weather-wise for butterflies. 23 species were recorded from throughout the county from February to November. This was a very good year for two of our best-known species, the migrants, Red Admiral and Painted Lady. They were on the wing throughout the season and a large number of records were submitted for both. Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock emerged from hibernation in late February and early March and again records showed these species to be common throughout the county. The Whites were recorded in reasonable numbers with the exception of Orange-tip for which less than 20 records were received.

The less widely recognised species, some of which are restricted by habitat were not as well recorded. Northern Brown Argus, Grayling, Ringlet, Small Heath and Large Heath all produced relatively few records in comparison with previous years. This is due in part to some species having a poor season while others were simply under-recorded.

The first butterfly of the season was an early emerged Peacock on the 24th February, this was followed three weeks later by another over-wintering species the Small Tortoiseshell on the 15th March. Also at this time the first migrants of the year were noted, 2 Painted Ladies on the 17th followed by a Red Admiral on the 5th April. By mid April all the Whites had emerged, Green-veined White on the 6th, Small White on the 13th and Large White and Orange-tip on the 16th.

No further species were recorded until the 30th May when 2 Small Heath were spotted at Kilcase Wood, this was closely followed by Small Copper and Wall on the 31st. June saw the emergence of several summer butterflies; Ringlet on the 8th, Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Northern Brown Argus on the 12th and Dark Green Fritillary on the 29th. July provided the first record for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the 2nd and by late July early August the last of the Browns had been recorded; Scotch Argus on the 27th July and Grayling and Large Heath on the 4th August. The final three species seen in Ayrshire during 2003 were each recorded once. A Clouded Yellow was spotted at Portencross on the 16th August, 4 Purple Hairstreaks at Shallochweck Burn on the 17th and, for one lucky observer, a Comma in Fenwick in October.

By August and September the year had ended for many species, but as has already been stated the Vanessids enjoyed a very good season with the final records for these species as follows; Peacock on the 26th September, Painted Lady and Small Tortoiseshell on the 2nd October and Red Admiral on the 16th November.

The 2004 Season

Any records of butterflies in Ayrshire this season will be gratefully received, especially of those species that were less frequently recorded during 2003. To submit a record please include species name, numbers, locality, date and a 6-figure grid reference if possible, (if not a four-figure reference would be acceptable). In addition, any comments on behaviour, habitat and weather would also be very welcome.

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Thanks also to Butterfly Conservation and the Scottish Wildlife Trust for making additional records available.

SYSTEMATIC LIST – AYRSHIRE 2003.

Guide to content:

STATUS = UK status of each species has been included for comparison.

FLIGHT PERIOD = Unless otherwise stated emergence / arrival times given are for the UK.

DESCRIPTION = A short description has been provided for a few of the less familiar species.

RECORDS = A summary of records submitted for each species in Ayrshire during the 2003 season.

Whites & Yellows (*Pieridae*)

Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

STATUS: UK = Regular migrant / AYRSHIRE = Scarce migrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Can be found in Ayrshire from June-October (single generation, in exceptional years two generations).

DESCRIPTION: The home range of the Clouded Yellow is North Africa and southern Europe, but each year migrating adults spread northwards arriving in Britain in varying numbers in May and early June. Ordinarily less than 500 Clouded Yellows are recorded in Britain annually although spectacular influxes occur from time to time when conditions are favourable. One such “Clouded Yellow Year” was 1947 when an estimated 36,000 butterflies arrived. Normally Clouded Yellows are much less widely distributed than other regular migrants such as Painted Lady and Red Admiral with the majority occurring in southern coastal areas and only a few spreading as far north as Scotland.

RECORDS: Only one record of this species in Ayrshire, an individual noted at Portencross on 16th August. This sighting coincided with the peak time of emerging offspring from summer breeding Clouded Yellows in the south.

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

STATUS: UK = Common resident / AYRSHIRE = Moderately common resident / migrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: April – October (two generations).

RECORDS: This large, fast-flying species was recorded at numerous points all over the county in 2003, the earliest record being that of a spring adult at Maybole on 16th April. The species was also seen in ones and twos at Dean Castle Country Park in Kilmarnock on the 23rd and 29th April.

From early May through to the end of June the species was widely recorded, but again only in ones and twos. There was a marked increase in numbers from July onwards when the second generation was on the wing, although even then counts were quite low.

Mid-August was the peak time for the species with 9 at Portencross on the 14th and 7 noted at Ardrossan on the same day. The highest count of the year was at Portencross, this time on the 16th when over 20 were seen.

For the rest of August and the early part of September numbers tailed off again, although notably there were 5 on 23rd August and 7 on 16th September, both these reports coming from Crosshill. The final report of the season was fairly early with 3 observed at Culzean on 17th September.

Small White *Pieris rapae*

STATUS: UK = Common resident / AYRSHIRE = Common resident and migrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: April – October (two generations, occasionally three).

RECORDS: This highly mobile species mirrored the distribution of Large White, with records coming in from throughout the county. The earliest records were from Dean Castle Country Park where singles were noted on the 13th, 14th and 15th April. 8 were seen along the Kilmarnock to Irvine cycle path on the 18th. After that no sightings were recorded until the 9th June when 4 were reported from Croy Shore.

First generation numbers were very low and individuals only recorded at a few sites. From mid-August onwards as the second generation emerged records started to pick up, but only one double figure count was recorded from Portencross on the 16th August. The final record of the season was fairly early with 8 observed at Strathmore Park, Irvine on 8th September.

Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

STATUS: UK = Common resident / AYRSHIRE = Resident and abundant in suitable habitat.

FLIGHT PERIOD: April to September (two generations, three in good years).

RECORDS: A single butterfly at Crosshill cemetery opened the season early on 6th April and numbers increased quickly after the second week of the month, 6 were recorded at Maybole Station on the 16th and 48 were counted on the Kilmarnock to Irvine cycle path on the 18th.

Second generation numbers greatly succeeded the first generation with double figure counts coming from Afton Reservoir on the 24th June, Craigton Plantation on 6th August, Dunaskin on 14th August and on the Hurlford to Galston Railway Line on the 24th August. But by far the largest count was at Northcraig Reservoir, Kilmarnock on the 4th August where over 200 individual butterflies were recorded. The final record of the season came from Dean Castle Country Park where a single was observed on the 10th September, perhaps a slightly earlier end to the season than expected.

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

STATUS: UK = Common resident, range expanding / AYRSHIRE = Resident and possible migrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Mid-April to early July, but in Scotland flight period is on average 2 weeks later (single generation)

RECORDS: Only 17 records for this species were submitted during 2003 all concerning only 1 or 2 individuals, the exception being on the Kilmarnock to Irvine cycle path on the 18th April when 32 were recorded. First record of the season was from Maybole station on the 16th April, around two weeks earlier than expected reflecting the very mild spring of 2003. Regular sightings were reported throughout the second half of April, from Newmilns on the 17th, Townholm, Kilmarnock on the 18th and Dean Castle Country Park on the 23rd and 29th. No records were submitted for May, which is unusual as this is the peak time for this species and it was not until 3rd June that sightings began again. The season closed with one record from Dean Castle Country Park, Kilmarnock on the 9th July.

Hairstreaks, Blues & Copper (*Lycaenidae*)

Purple Hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*

STATUS: UK = Resident and widespread over southern England and Wales, range expanding / AYRSHIRE = Scarce resident, under-recorded species.

FLIGHT PERIOD: July to early September (single generation)

DESCRIPTION: Woodland species, restricted to oak trees, suitable single oaks may support a colony. Easily overlooked species, adults spend most of their time in the canopy. More active in late afternoon and early evening when they may congregate on a few sheltered trees.

RECORDS: An apparently poor season for Purple Hairstreaks with only one record submitted, this was of four butterflies at Shallochwreck Burn on the 17th August.

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

STATUS: UK = Common and widespread resident throughout Britain found in a wide variety of habitats / AYRSHIRE = Resident.

FLIGHT PERIOD: May to September, but in Scotland emergence is on average one month later (two generations, but sometimes three and exceptionally four may occur in the south in warm summers).

RECORDS: The first record of the season came from Finnarts Point on the 31st May. 4 were recorded at Gales Marsh on the 3rd June and a further 2 at Turnberry Golf Course on the 14th, records for the first generation concluded with a single sighting on the 24th June at Bogside.

Records of second generation Small Coppers exceeded the first, however counts were still relatively low compared to previous years. The first of the second brood was noted on the 27th July at Knockentiber, with further single records coming from Ardrossan on the 14th August, Dean Castle Country Park, Kilmarnock on the 15th and finally from SAC, Auchincruive on the 10th September. By far the best count came from Portencross on the 16th August where numbers reached double figures. The season finished with a single record of a third generation adult flying in Dundonald on the 3rd October.

Northern Brown Argus *Aricia artaxerxes*

STATUS: UK = Scarce Resident / AYRSHIRE = Resident on the coast in central and southern Ayrshire. Under-recorded, Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

FLIGHT PERIOD: June to mid-August (single generation).

DESCRIPTION: Found on sunny, south facing, grassy slopes where the food plant Common Rock-rose is present.

RECORDS: Single record from Pinbain Burn on 12th June. Previous years have however, produced more records from this area where small but significant colonies are known to reside.

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

STATUS: UK = Common resident / AYRSHIRE = Locally common resident.

FLIGHT PERIOD: In Scotland and northern England - June to September (single generation). Elsewhere – May to September (two generations).

RECORDS: First record from Gales Marsh, where 1 was on the wing on the 12th June, followed by 2 at Turnberry Golf Course on the 14th and another 1 at Gales on the 16th. The main emergence occurred in late June with 25 counted at Gales on the 29th. Peak numbers were flying late June to mid July: 25 at Gales on the 29th June, 23 on the 9th July and 20 at Spallander Woods, Patna, on the 13th July. Few records were submitted after this, with a final report of 5 noted at Gales Marsh on the 18th August.

Emperors, Vanessids & Fritillaries (*Nymphalidae*)

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

STATUS: UK = Regular and widespread migrant / AYRSHIRE = Regular migrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: April to November (single generation).

RECORDS: This conspicuous butterfly was the most commonly reported species during 2003. A strong-flying migratory species, the Red Admiral can be found in almost any habitat. First record was from Culzean shore on the 5th April, with no further sightings reported until the 31st May at Shallochwreck and the 2nd June at Dean Castle Country Park. Sightings dwindled again until the 26th June when a steady stream of records began to be submitted from throughout Ayrshire. These all consisted of single figure counts and sightings of individual butterflies and it was not until early September that numbers began to build up. 20 were recorded at Dean Castle Country Park on the 6th of September, 34 in a garden at Crosshill on the 16th and 11 at Culzean on the 17th. By early October numbers had dropped considerably, with only three records submitted for the month, 1 from Springside on the 1st October, 5 recorded at Burnside Farm, north of Girvan, on the 2nd and 1 at Woodroad Park, Cumnock on the 7th. Final records in November concerned singles at Auchinleck on the 3rd and on Great Cumbrae on the 16th.

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

STATUS: UK = Regular migrant, sometimes occurring in very large numbers / AYRSHIRE = Irregular migrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: April to October (single generation, but may produce several broods if weather favourable).

RECORDS: 2003 proved to be a good year for Painted Lady with reports received from all over the county. The first record of the species came from Dean Castle Country Park, where two very ragged individuals were spotted on the 17th March, more than two weeks earlier than might normally be expected. From that date no other sightings were recorded until the 30th May when an individual was seen at Mossgennoch Wood. In accordance with the peak immigration time for the UK, records picked up at the very end of June and continued through to October. Most records were of one or two individuals but notable exceptions included 17 at Bennane Head on the 25th June, 15 between Knockentiber and Southhook Bridge on the 9th August, 52 at Ballantrae on the 11th, 15 at Galston Marshes on the 24th and 36 on the disused Hurlford to Galston railway line on the same date. Regular sightings of the species continued throughout September although all were single figure counts. The

season ended with three individuals recorded at Burnside Farm, north of Girvan on the 2nd October.

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

STATUS: UK = Widespread, common and resident / AYRSHIRE = Common resident – over-winters.

FLIGHT PERIOD: March to October (single generation).

RECORDS: This familiar butterfly was one of the most numerous recorded Ayrshire species in 2003, but with the exception of a handful of records there were few double figured counts. The season began with a sighting of a single butterfly beside the River Irvine near Shewalton on the 15th March, followed by another at Drybridge on the 26th. Records picked up in April with 9 recorded at Dean Castle Country Park, Kilmarnock on the 15th and 31 along the Kilmarnock to Irvine cycle path on the 18th. Records for May and June were pretty poor, but with the new generation beginning to emerge in July numbers began to rise. By late July counts were into double figures with 12 at Eglinton Country Park on the 26th. August proved to be the best month for the species with 15 recorded on the disused Hurlford to Galston railway line on the 24th, 13 at Dean Castle Country Park on the 29th and 15 at Troon on the 31st. Reports continued throughout September, and the final record of the season was of 2 at Burnside Farm, north of Girvan on the 2nd October.

Peacock *Inachis io*

STATUS: UK = Widespread and common / AYRSHIRE = Resident – over-winters.

FLIGHT PERIOD: March to September (single generation).

RECORDS: Peacock adults generally emerge from hibernation in March although in good years during mild spring weather can be recorded on the wing as early as February. This was the case in 2003 when the first record for the species came from Culzean on the 24th February. No reports were submitted for March, but over-wintering adults were seen on the wing from early April to late June although sightings were unusually low for this time of year. The earliest report of first generation butterflies came from Dundonald on the 2nd July, with peak numbers flying in August: 10 at Ballantrae and 19 between High Ballochdowan and Shallochwreck Glen on the 11th; 7 at Dunaskin on the 14th and 9 at Tallaminnoch on the 30th. By September numbers decreased again with the final records from Springside and Dean Castle Country Park on the 26th.

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

STATUS: UK = Common resident in England and Wales / AYRSHIRE = Vagrant.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Late March to October (two generations).

DESCRIPTION: The Comma butterfly is widespread and common throughout much of England and Wales, but is believed to be extinct in Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man. However, during surveys for the Millennium Atlas records were submitted from these areas of vagrants, indicating the possibility of colonization.

RECORDS: A single report was submitted for this species from Fenwick in October 2003.

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene*

STATUS: UK = Resident but has declined in England / AYRSHIRE = Resident, under-recorded. A “Species of Conservation Concern” in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Late May to July, generally emerges a month later in Scotland (single generation).

DESCRIPTION: Although widespread in Scotland and Wales this butterfly is now on the verge of extinction throughout southern-central England.

RECORDS: Only two records were submitted for the 2003 season, the first coming from Loch Braden on the 2nd July and the other from Dean Castle Country Park on the 2nd August, corresponding to the later emergence of this species in Scotland. Both records were of single butterflies.

Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*

STATUS: UK = Resident, most widespread of the fritillaries / AYRSHIRE = Resident and locally common, under-recorded species.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Early June to late August (single generation).

DESCRIPTION: Large and powerful butterfly that occurs in a range of flower-rich grasslands. Main larval food plant is Common Dog-violet, but where this is absent Hairy Violet and Marsh Violet is used.

RECORDS: Only 2 reports of this species, 29th June 2 individuals recorded at Gailes and a single butterfly at Carrick Forest on the 4th August.

Browns (*Satyridae*)

Wall *Lasiommata megera*

STATUS: UK = Widespread and resident across England, Wales and Ireland, also in southern Scotland, mainly coastal / AYRSHIRE = Resident – local in central and southern areas, predominantly coastal, under-recorded species.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Early May to September, although emergence is generally 2 weeks later in Scotland and northern England (two generations).

DESCRIPTION: Aptly named after its habit of basking on walls and rocky outcrops. Widely distributed the Wall rarely occurs in large numbers, forming discrete colonies.

RECORDS: Few reports were received for this species. The first sighting of the season came from Finnarts Hill on the 31st May, but after this there were no further records until August when the second generation was on the wing. Records were submitted of 3 at Ballantrae and 2 between High Ballochdowan and Shallochwreck Glen on the 11th. The final report of the season was of 26 butterflies noted at Shallochwreck Burn on the 17th.

Scotch Argus *Erebia aethiops*

STATUS: UK = Resident and widespread throughout Scotland, but absent from Ireland and Wales and only found in two areas in northern England / AYRSHIRE = Resident, abundant in the south. Recognised as a “Species of Regional Priority” by Butterfly Conservation.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Late July to early September (single generation).

DESCRIPTION: Found predominantly in Scotland this species occurs on damp grasslands and bogs, where the main larval food plant, Purple Moor-grass, grows. It often occurs in very large colonies, numbering well into the thousands.

RECORDS: The season started with a report of 4 adults flying around the west shore of Loch Doon on the 27th July. On the 4th August a survey carried out in the Carrick Forest provided 25 separate records of Scotch Argus, ranging from sightings of single butterflies to colonies of up to 100 individuals. Further records included a count of 51 on the 5th August along the roadside between Brodick, Machrie and Loch Ranza on the Isle of Arran and 19 in Craigton Plantation on the 6th. The final record of the season came from Portencross where one individual was sighted on the 14th.

Grayling *Hipparchia semele*

STATUS: UK = Resident and predominantly coastal, range declining in some areas / AYRSHIRE = Resident, fairly common in suitable coastal habitats and recognized as a "Species of Regional Priority" by Butterfly Conservation.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Early July to mid September (single generation)

DESCRIPTION: Highly variable species, distinct races identified in northern Scotland, Ireland and on Great Ormes Head in north Wales. Difficult to spot unless in flight - wings are kept closed when at rest.

RECORDS: Only two records were submitted for this species. The first was a count of 20 from a former industrial area at Moorfield in Kilmarnock on the 4th August. This is much lower than counts from this inland colony in previous years and may be partly due to habitat changes that have taken place on the site. The only other record was of 4 at Shallochwreck Burn on the 17th August. It is likely that this species was seriously under-recorded during 2003, particularly in coastal areas.

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

STATUS: UK = Common and widespread resident / AYRSHIRE = Common resident.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Early June to September (single generation).

RECORDS: The season got off to a flying start with 38 recorded at Gales Marsh on the 12th June. No further sightings were reported until the 24th when the species became noticeably widespread throughout the county. Numbers peaked mid-July when counts included 15 at Haugh Farm in Mauchline on the 8th, 65 at Gales Marsh on the 9th and 30 at Spallander Woods, Patna on the 13th. Numbers began to tail off by the end of July and throughout August, but during this period 7 were recorded at Northcraig Reservoir on the 4th August, 11 at Craigton Plantation on the 6th and 8 at Dunaskin on the 14th. The final report of 2003 came from Gales Marsh on the 18th August where two individuals were seen.

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

STATUS: UK = Widely distributed across England, Ireland, Wales and lowland Scotland / AYRSHIRE = Resident, locally common.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Late June to mid August (single generation).

DESCRIPTION: Ringlets occur in colonies ranging in size from a few individuals to many hundreds. They occur in areas of tall grassland, mainly along woodland rides and glades as the larvae feed nocturnally on grasses such as Cock's foot, Tufted Hair-grass and Common Couch-grass.

RECORDS: The season started early for this species with an individual recorded at Bogside on the 8th June. By and large counts were exceptionally low for this species which has previously been recorded in it's hundreds from a number of areas in the county. Counts included 5 at Bennane Head on the 25th June, 5 at Dean Castle Country Park, Kilmarnock on the 26th and 3 at Gales on the 29th. Only one double figured count was received for the season from Dundonald on the 2nd July. The final record of the year came from Dean Castle Country Park where a single individual was flying on the 3rd August. All in all it appears to have been a very poor season for Ringlet.

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

STATUS: UK = One of the most widely distributed butterflies in Britain and Ireland / AYRSHIRE = Common and widespread resident.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Varies throughout Britain, generally early June to September (single generation in Scotland and northern England).

DESCRIPTION: Highly variable butterfly, emergence times and number of broods vary in different areas of the country. Generally it is on the wing from early June, however in the far north it can emerge as late as July. Known to produce two and sometimes three generations a year in the south of Britain.

RECORDS: The first and second records for this butterfly were earlier than expected; 2 at Kilcase Wood on the 30th May and 2 at Portandea on the 31st. Records were submitted throughout June and July, but numbers were low compared with other years; 22 at Gales Marsh on the 12th June and 6 at Bennane Head on the 25th. Previous years have recorded peak numbers in July but the only double figured count for that month in 2003 was from Gales Marsh on the 9th where 29 butterflies were seen.

Only two reports were received in August, 1 at Ballantrae on the 11th and 3 at Gales Marsh on the 18th. In general this was a poor year for Small Heath records, but as with other species this may have been due to under-recording.

Large Heath *Coenonympha tullia*

STATUS: UK= Widespread and locally common in Scotland, Ireland and northern England / AYRSHIRE = Resident. Under-recorded; Species of Conservation Concern in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Mid-June to early August (single generation)

DESCRIPTION: A species of lowland raised bog, acidic moorland and upland blanket bog, where the caterpillar's food plant Hare's-tail Cotton Grass occurs.

RECORDS: Only one record was submitted for Ayrshire during 2003 from Loch Muck on the 4th August where a single butterfly was noted. In comparison 25 individuals were recorded in the vicinity of this site on the 11th July 1998.