Small Blue butterfly - update for 2014

This conservation priority species is restricted in Scotland to scattered colonies along the east coast, which stretch from the Borders to Angus, the Moray Firth, Speyside and Caithness, but it remains scarce with many colonies small, isolated and therefore vulnerable. Whilst its caterpillars are reliant on Kidney Vetch, a very widespread plant, other site conditions are necessary for a colony to be successful and survive.

Survey work to confirm known colonies and to seek out potential new sites continued in many areas during 2014. The generally small colony size and short flight season at a time of year with variable weather mean that it takes several years to ensure a comprehensive coverage. There is an active Small Blue Interest Group led by the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership and another successful volunteer training day was held at Arbroath in June. The NE Scotland Biodiversity Partnership steers work in Aberdeenshire, while strong co-operation exists along the Borders and North Northumberland coast.

In **Aberdeenshire**, the strong colony at Portknockie was confirmed, but several other checked sites gave negative results. Further south along the **Angus** coast good numbers were recorded at Barry Buddon and on the Arbroath cliffs together with sightings at a few other scattered sites. These included small numbers at a relatively recently discovered site near Glamis Castle.

The most exciting and encouraging results came from **Berwickshire**, where four new potential colonies were discovered - three at the coast and one about five miles inland at a former quarry site. There are two well-established coastal colonies already and a spread from these has been anticipated over recent years, so it was very good news that evidence of breeding (eggs and caterpillars) was also noted at the new sites.

The first adult Small Blue of the year was seen on 13 May

Photos: Iain Cowe

These Small Blue caterpillars were found at one of the new coastal sites

This report is based on information supplied by Butterfly Conservation members Iain Cowe, Rose Toney, David Lampard and Helen Rowe.

Barry Prater
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