

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.

Small Blue butterfly 2015 update

Weather conditions during the short flight season of the Small Blue (June to early July) often create some challenges for both the butterfly and those trying to carry out surveys and this was certainly true for 2015.

Berwickshire



Small Blue were on the wing along the Berwickshire coast from the early date of 13 May but did not really get going until June, with poor weather hampering their emergence. Through June very good numbers were seen at both of the original sites and it was relocated at all of the new sites discovered in the area last year. Larvae were found at all sites throughout July, confirming successful breeding which is always most encouraging. While looking for late larvae in August one or perhaps two adult Small Blue were seen, undoubtedly from a second brood which has not been observed here before. The evidence from this part of its range is that the butterfly is successfully expanding of its own accord to new sites from its previous two strongholds.

Angus

Once again, the Barry Buddon to Carnoustie stretch of coast provided a high count of butterflies with 50+ recorded on one day in early July. Few were seen at other sites, although much of the suitable coastal cliff habitat is treacherous to explore and this limits recording effort. A search of several disused inland quarries thought to have potential was carried out but with no sightings; however, the small colony near Glamis was confirmed.

Aberdeenshire & Moray

The strong colonies around Portnockie and Cullen were confirmed; further records have yet to come in from this area.

Ayrshire

Dedicated preparatory work carried out by Butterfly Conservation and the Scottish Wildlife Trust at their Gailles Marsh nature reserve near the Ayrshire coast led to the reintroduction of the Small Blue there in 2013. Despite much follow-up searching in 2014, no butterflies were seen and it was feared that the project might have failed. However, this year there were several separate sightings, including one roosting above the Kidney Vetch habitat strips which were specially created in 2010. Others were seen on the adjacent Dundonald Links golf course land. These are clear signs that the new colony is hanging on - time will tell whether it gains strength to remain viable into the future, but it is good news indeed that we have the return of this species to SW Scotland after a gap of several decades.



This report is based on information supplied by Butterfly Conservation members Iain Cowe, Craig Borland, Rose Toney, Nigel Wood and the Scottish Wildlife Trust.