

Small Blue *Cupido minimus*

The Small Blue can be found from mid May and throughout June with occasional sightings of second brood adults in August. The habitat where it can be found should contain the food plant Kidney Vetch as a minimum requirement. The adults like to shelter near the base of shrubs, and can quite often be found in numbers around a favoured bush. They will nectar openly on Kidney Vetch, Birds-foot Trefoil and Thyme. In flight, the combination of the dark upperwing and silvery underwing create a shimmering spinning coin effect. They tend to fly very close to the vegetation. Males, even in hot sunny conditions, will spend most of the time basking in grassy hollows waiting for females to fly by. The females are the most active. Very low-key they hover and flutter at ground level going from plant to plant testing the suitability of each flowerhead for egg laying.

You can try looking for the egg stage of the butterfly by carefully examining the Kidney Vetch flowerheads. Check half opened flowerheads, as these are favoured by the females. If the patch of Kidney Vetch is extensive, have a look for isolated plants on the periphery as again these are preferred. The eggs can be looked for from late May through to early July.

The caterpillar stage can also be looked for in late July and August but that can take some patience. They can be found on the Kidney Vetch flowerheads. The ant in attendance here gives you an idea of scale.



Adult Small Blues. Males have a blue scaling on the upperwing that females lack. Underwings of both adults are the same.



The egg shown here and magnified, sits tightly between the Kidney Vetch buds, and can be seen quite easily with the naked eye. There can be more than one egg present on each flowerhead. As far as we know the Small Blue is the only egg likely to be found within the Kidney Vetch flowerhead.



Typical habitat pictured above is usually steep and eroding, such as scree and boulder strewn slopes. Dune systems, quarries and unstable grassland can also harbour the plant. The flowers of Kidney Vetch are visible from late May on local sites.

Text and photographs by Iain Cowe, with inputs from Duncan Davidson and Barry Prater

Small Blue and Kidney Vetch Survey in Angus: Guidance Notes

The Small Blue has been found at many sites on the Angus coast from Buddon Ness to Kinnaber N of Montrose and also inland on disused railways from Friockheim to Glamis.

Areas at the coast where there are few or no recent records include East Haven to Elliot, Gaylet Pot to Auchmithie and from red Head all the way N to Kinnaber. There are many inland railway sites around Friockheim with no records since 1995 which should be checked.

Sightings of Small Blue adults, eggs or the caterpillar would be excellent. Reporting any Kidney Vetch that you come across would also be very useful as an indicator of potentially suitable habitat. Try and get a good grid reference for anything you report, preferably using a GPS, and a photo of any quality would definitely help. Negative results should also be reported.

More information on likely sites to visit is available from David Lampard, who is also the person to report your sightings to. David's contact details are:

Tel: 01382 432384, email: dlampard@clara.co.uk
address: c/o the McManus collections unit, Barrack Street, Dundee. DD1 1PG.