

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



SMALL BLUE NEWSLETTER - 2020



Small Blue © Tayside Biodiversity Partnership

2020 was a strange year with lockdowns and travel restrictions which meant most of the planned training and surveys had to be cancelled. Personally I did not get to see a Small Blue this year. Let's hope things are better in 2021. Some on-line training was carried out by Anthony McClusky.

We were able to carry out some Kidney Vetch planting sessions and most sites were visited at some time during the season with some butterflies being recorded. The weather leading up to the Small Blue flight season was warm and sunny and the first sightings were on May 31st. The warm dry weather led to some patches of Kidney Vetch becoming shrivelled and whilst these recovered with the rains of early June it is not known if this will impact on the breeding success of the butterfly. We will have to wait till next year to find out. Sites that were surveyed for Kidney Vetch towards the end of June showed that it was a good year for the plant.

Thanks to everyone who sent in records, grew KV plants, and helped plant them out.

2021 sees the launch of the SPECIES ON THE EDGE project which includes the Angus coastal sites for the Small Blue (see below for further details).

Review of the sites

Seaton Cliffs - Seahills Farm

Seahills Farm are creating a wildflower strip on the field side of the path which runs from Carlinheugh Bay to Auchmithie. Part of the project included planting up small areas of KV to encourage the Small Blues. With this in mind a hardy group of volunteers met on a chilly day last March to plant out about 200 plants.



KV planting at Seahills

Unfortunately the soil is relatively fertile and a survey of the area in June showed that there were a lot of more vigorous plants eg. dock, white mustard and grasses, competing with



the Kidney Vetch. It will probably only last for a couple of years but will produce seed which may find more suitable habitat. No eggs were found on the KV plants.

Seal's Cave

There were several records from here with 4 being the highest count. In 2019 there were



concerns about the KV as the flowering plant count was down to about 100 plants and the areas on the lower path which previously supported hundreds of plants were devoid of KV. We had considered planting the area in the autumn of 2019 but a survey showed there were hundreds of seedlings in the area. The June survey counted over 1000 flowering plants which will hopefully allow the colony to expand.

Elliot Links

Elliot Links is one of the success stories in recent years. It was thought that KV and the SB were extinct on this site until a few plants and the butterfly were found in 2017. Since then at least 200 plants have been put in and sufficient have survived to maintain the small colony. This year a maximum 6 butterflies and 4 eggs were recorded.



Hatched egg (left); Small Blue (right)



Some views of the Elliot SB site

In September a socially-distanced group of volunteers planted out another 100 or so KV plants grown by Food is Free Carnoustie. For once it was a dry and sunny day. The plants at Elliot survive best on the edges of the paths where the path use prevents the Lyme grass taking over. It does mean that some of the plants are a bit prone to being trampled but overall it seems to be working. We have now planted all the suitable areas and if further planting is to proceed we will need to scrape off the existing vegetation and sow some seeds.



Carnoustie

As in recent years the section near the Barry Burn remained the stronghold for the butterfly with a maximum of 8 being recorded. Areas where we planted KV also show some signs of

colonisation which is encouraging. A survey of the flowering KV plants gave much higher counts than in previous years. A transect route has been established and this was walked a few times towards the end of the flight season but we will have to wait till next year to get the full picture.

Monifieth-Carnoustie Cycle Track

A single SB record was received in 2019 from a small patch of KV growing about a mile north of the Barry Buddon car park at Monifieth. With permission from Angus Council a group of volunteers planted about 150 plants in the area next to the existing patch of KV. The area seems to have a high rabbit population and rabbits love KV so we will have to wait to see how many plants survive but if a few reach the flowering stage they will provide larval food for the butterfly and seeds for future plants. Thanks to Anne for growing the plants.



Barry Buddon

No surveys were carried out in 2020. The MOD seem to have been very busy shooting in 2020 as the site was rarely accessible.

Glamis

Glamis remains the largest SB colony in Angus. This year the peak count was only 30 but site visits were less frequent than in previous years. A transect route has been established and was walked a few times towards the end of the season. The KV population is doing well with about 1800 flowering plants on the railway track and 3000+ in the sand pit. The sand pit area was very dry at the end of May and a lot of the plants on the sandy banks shrivelled but were revitalised by the rain in June. Broom is starting to grow again on the railway track and will need attention in the next year.

Organisational Change

Since she established the Small Blue Interest Group with Kelly Ann Dempsey in 2012, Catherine Lloyd has been the main lead, making sure our achievements are recognised and included in the monitoring of the Tayside Biodiversity Action Plan (2016-26). Catherine has been instrumental in liaising with community groups and individuals and has helped raise awareness of the SB by introducing a Scottish Small Blue Week with Butterfly Conservation Scotland. On behalf of the Group, Catherine and Kelly Ann attended the prestigious Nature of Scotland Awards 2019 to receive the winning Community Initiative Award for “Back from the Brink – Saving the Small Blue”.

As the Partnership’s Co-ordinator role is changing owing to the cut in funding from Angus Council, we will report back directly to the TBP’s Coastal & Marine Working Group where Kelly Ann is the lead. Catherine hopes to keep in touch as a volunteer.

Events for 2021

At the moment it is not known what group activities will be possible in May/June but hopefully we will be allowed to meet up and enjoy Small Blues together and undertake as much surveying as possible.

KV planting. We still have some plants to put out. We are planning to put these on the edge of the cycle track at Elliot Links. Details to follow.

We hope to unveil at least two interpretation panels at Carnoustie. These have been provided with funding from the Carnoustie Golf Links Community Benefits grant.

Discussions are underway about preparing a ‘Small Blue Way’ along the coast.

The main activity will centre around the Species on the Edge project where we hope to increase the number of surveyors and site visits to establish an accurate status of the current SB distribution on the Angus Coast. We will hopefully be welcoming a summer

student placement from Dundee University who will work with Butterfly Conservation Scotland in undertaking baseline monitoring at all sites where the new project will work. This will involve mapping Kidney Vetch abundance at every accessible site.

Species on the Edge – an ambitious new project

Species on the Edge is a bold and ambitious partnership of eight of Scotland's nature conservation organisations striving to conserve Scotland's native wildlife.

Led by NatureScot with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, a programme of work is being developed to improve and secure the survival chances of over 40 nationally and internationally vulnerable species in seven landscape-scale areas around Scotland's coast and islands.



Species due to benefit from the project range from terns to lacewings to toads and include Northern Brown Argus, Small Blue and Marsh Fritillary butterflies as well as several of the rare Burnet moths.

In 2021 the partnership aims to identify suitable sites for the programme, where we can work with local communities, projects, initiatives and landowners to benefit a range of species. The project is in the early stages of development, but it is hoped that it will lead to an exciting programme of work extending over four and a half years.

Small Blue – Mark Searle

Can you help?

Butterfly Conservation Scotland hopes to conduct surveys and habitat monitoring with volunteers at key sites for Small Blue on the Angus coastline in the summer of 2021. Full training and support will be available for volunteers.

If you would be interested in volunteering with surveys and habitat monitoring in any of these areas this summer, please contact David Hill at dhill@butterfly-conservation.org or 01786 459813



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