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Evacuee rations at Pavilion
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 Muller Milk - 2,803 tins
 Carnation Milk - 2,820 tins
 Corned Beef - 4,346 tins
 Chocolate - 4,783 Bars
 Biscuits - 5 tins Unopened
 393 - refashed.
 27 Empty biscuit tins

J. S. Shaw.

THE BUTTERFLIES OF THE ISLAND OF BUTE

J.A. Gibson

Introduction

The British butterflies are among the best known creatures of our countryside. Virtually all naturalists are familiar with at least the common species, which makes it all the more remarkable that no information on the butterflies of Bute has ever been published in any previous volume of the Society's *Transactions*.

A search through the recently published reference bibliography of the local lists of British lepidoptera (Chalmers-Hunt, 1989) also reveals no known detailed account of Bute butterflies. Many papers are listed for the neighbouring island of Arran, but there is virtually nothing at all for Bute. This is even more surprising, so the need for a separate account of the butterflies found on the Island of Bute is clearly long overdue.

To a very large extent the study of our Scottish butterflies has been completely revolutionised during the past decade, by the publication of Dr George Thomson's magnificent book on *The Butterflies of Scotland* (1980). Dr Thomson covers the distribution of all butterflies throughout Scotland, with both written text and 10 km-square distribution maps, in a truly masterly fashion, a contribution to our permanent knowledge of the subject which has placed all other naturalists forever in his debt. Nevertheless, it is still the responsibility of the local naturalist to collect together whatever information he can on local distribution. Only thus can our knowledge be kept up to date, and any changes in distribution or population recorded.

Although not primarily an entomologist, I have been interested in butterflies all my life, so that these collected notes, which are based entirely on my own observations on the island since the mid-1930s, now span a period of well over fifty years on Bute.

To the best of my knowledge, the butterfly population of the Island of Bute is not significantly different from that found in other parts of the Clyde area, but it is always worth while preparing separate lists of the fauna and flora found on any island, since just occasionally these show surprising differences from the neighbouring mainland or other islands. With this in mind, therefore, these notes are here offered as an attempt to fill a gap in our knowledge of Bute natural history.

Systematic List

In the following Systematic List the arrangement and nomenclature follow Thomson (1980). For the commoner butterflies I list the dates of

their main seasons. These are the average dates I have found on the island over the years, and they may well differ from the season-dates found in other parts of Scotland.

LARGE WHITE *Pieris brassicae*

Fairly common and well distributed. More common in gardens and fields, but also occurs on the moors. Population somewhat variable, and rather scarce in some years. Main season, mid-May to mid-September. Also found on Inchmarnock.

SMALL WHITE *Pieris rapae*

Very common and widely distributed in all areas, from the shores to the moors. By far the commonest butterfly on Bute. Main season, early May until end of September. Common on Inchmarnock.

GREEN-VEINED WHITE *Pieris napi*

Common and widely distributed in all areas. In some years nearly as common as the Small White, but my personal view is that there has been a distinct reduction in numbers during the past ten years or so, although still quite common. Main season, early May until end of August. Found on Inchmarnock.

GREEN HAIRSTREAK *Callophrys rubi*

Small numbers, mainly around birch woods and fringes of moors. Very variable in population, and some years not seen at all.

SMALL COPPER *Lycaena phlaeas*

Fairly common and well distributed, although in my experience commoner away from developed areas — mainly found on fringes of moors, hillsides, woodlands, dunes and shores. A fairly long season — early May until late September. Well known on Inchmarnock.

COMMON BLUE *Polyommatus icarus*

Fairly common and well distributed in most areas, from shores to the moors, although in some years distinctly scarcer. A shorter season, mainly July and August. Found on Inchmarnock.

RED ADMIRAL *Vanessa atalanta*

Well known and fairly common all over the island, although often confused with the Small Tortoiseshell. Regular in gardens, where commonly feeds on buddleia and on nettles. Main season, early June to end of September. Has been seen on Inchmarnock.

PAINTED LADY *Cynthia cardui*

Well known and fairly widely distributed in small numbers, but population can vary very considerably from year to year, and some years very few seen.

SMALL TORTOISESHELL *Aglais urticae*

One of the commonest butterflies on Bute, in numbers second only to the Small White, and even commoner in some summers. Widely distributed everywhere, from shores and gardens to well out on the moors; particularly well-known on nettles. Frequently confused with the Red Admiral by the average person. A long season, from end of April until early October, and well known to hibernate in buildings over the winter. Common on Inchmarnock.

PEACOCK *Inachis io*

Certainly well known, but distinctly variable in numbers. Some years actually not uncommon, e.g. on garden buddleia, and other years hardly any seen at all. I have seen it on Inchmarnock.

SMALL PEARL-BORDERED FRITILLARY *Boloria selene*

Certainly occurs on Bute, but numbers very variable and in my experience also very local. Most of my records are from the south of Bute, on low moorland, edges of woods, and marshy areas, but I do have a few records from the north-east of the island, and have also seen it on Inchmarnock.

DARK GREEN FRITILLARY *Argynnis aglaja*

Fairly well known, but in small numbers, on open moorland, woodland clearings, shore-edge, etc.; commonly found on thistles. Has been seen on Inchmarnock.

SCOTCH ARGUS *Erebia aethiops*

Although apparently fairly well known in neighbouring parts of the West of Scotland, in my experience this butterfly is not really common on Bute, and is confined to the edges of moors, forestry clearings, and marshy areas. All my own records are from the south of the island. I have only ever seen it in small numbers, and some years it appears to be completely absent. More information would be very welcome.

GRAYLING *Hipparchia semele*

Well known and widely distributed, from the shores to the highest hills and moors, although much less frequently found in gardens or other cultivated areas; particularly well known around rocky headlands near the sea. In some years it is particularly common, and can rise locally in small clouds from favourite areas. A fairly short season, mainly early July to mid-August. Often seen on Inchmarnock.

MEADOW BROWN *Maniola jurtina*

Common and fairly widely distributed in all areas, although not so common in the gardens or woodlands — more on the shores, grasslands and edges of moors. A fairly short season, July and August. Many records from Inchmarnock.

SMALL HEATH *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Common and widely distributed, from the shores to the highest moors, although less often found in the gardens or other cultivated areas. Main season, mid-May until end of September. Often seen on Inchmarnock.

Other Bute Butterflies

The above Systematic List is based entirely on my own personal notes during the past fifty years, and in my view all the butterflies included are species which can be seen relatively easily on the Island of Bute by any other interested naturalists.

In the *Butterflies of Scotland* (1980), however, Dr Thomson notes several additional species which have been recorded from Bute in the past. I have seen none of these butterflies myself on the island, but to ensure the completeness of the records it is worth summarising the known information, as undernoted:

LARGE SKIPPER *Ochlodes venatus*

Dr Thomson draws attention to a possible mid-eighteenth century record by the Rev. Dr John Walker. From Walker's Latin description "it is almost certain that he was referring to the Large Skipper" (Thomson, 1980), and certainly the Large Skipper may have been more widespread in Scotland in Walker's time. It now occurs in South-West Scotland, but there is no other known record for Bute.

WALL *Lasiommata megera*

Probably found on Bute by the Rev. Dr John Walker in mid-eighteenth century (Thomson, 1980). At that time the Wall butterfly may have been not uncommon in some parts of Scotland, but by the mid-nineteenth century it had greatly decreased in numbers and had become extinct in many places. Dr Thomson indicates, however, that it is now slowly spreading from the south and apparently returning to some parts of Scotland.

In view of this, it is relevant to note that the Biological Records Centre received a record card for the Wall butterfly from Bute in 1975. This came from Mr B. Simpson, of West Kilbride, who reported several specimens of the Wall butterfly, both males and females, from St Blane's Hill on 28th June 1975. Since then I have visited this site repeatedly to search for the Wall butterfly, but without success, and with the preparation of this list in view, attempts were made to contact Mr Simpson for more information. Unfortunately, however, he no longer lives at his previous address in West Kilbride. There is no other known record.

ARRAN BROWN *Erebia ligea*

One doubtful record from the north end of Bute in July 1871 (Thomson, 1980).

LARGE HEATH *Coenonympha tullia*

In addition, lest it be thought that the Large Heath butterfly has been accidentally omitted from the preceding lists, it is just as well to emphasize that, possibly surprisingly, I have no record of the Large Heath from Bute, although I have, in fact, found it on Ailsa Craig (Gibson, 1952). I may have overlooked it on Bute, although I do not think this is very likely, and suspect that if it does occur it must be in very small numbers indeed. Needless to say, I shall be very grateful for any additional information.

There may well be records of other Bute butterflies in the literature which I have overlooked, and if anyone knows of any additional information I shall be most grateful to receive the relevant details.

Summary

During the past fifty years I have recorded sixteen species of butterflies on Bute. In my experience, by far the commonest are the Small White, Small Tortoiseshell, Green-veined White, Grayling, Large White, and Meadow Brown, which together make up the vast majority of the Bute butterfly population. Other fairly common butterflies are the Small Copper, Common Blue, Red Admiral and Small Heath. The others are seen less readily. In addition, I give notes on several other species, recorded in the past, which I have not personally seen.

I trust that the publication of these notes will stimulate others to add to the known information.

References

- CHALMERS-HUNT, J.M. (1989). *Local Lists of Lepidoptera; or a Bibliographical Catalogue of Local Lists and Regional Accounts of the Butterflies and Moths of the British Isles*. Uffington, Oxfordshire: Hedera Press.
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- THOMSON, G. (1980). *The Butterflies of Scotland. A Natural History*. London: Croom Helm.