

Butterfly Walk at Cocklawburn

On July 13th, Malcolm Hutcheson led members of Berwick Wildlife Group and their guests on a butterfly walk at Cocklawburn. We were particularly pleased to be joined by Jaci Beaven of Butterfly Conservation and Roger Norman, the Butterfly Recorder for Northumberland. BWG members have been conducting weekly butterfly surveys at Cocklawburn and the numbers seen have been fairly low. This was, however, to change.

Saturday was a glorious day, with a light wind, very favourable to butterflies. The ground was a riot of colour, principally pinks and yellows of geraniums and vetches, although harebells and spikes of viper's bugloss gave touches of blue. The flowers provide the nectar on which the butterflies feed, and different species of butterfly need a range of flowers for nectar and individual food plants at the leaf-eating caterpillar stage. The different plants in their turn grow on different soils, so the variety of soil types at Cocklawburn supports a good variety of butterflies and, indeed, moths.

There were many species flying. We saw male and female Common Blues. The sexes in this case are very different (the males an iridescent sky blue and females dark brown shot with blue) so it is possible to tell them apart easily. There were good numbers of Meadow Browns (milk-chocolate brown with orange on the forewing) and Ringlet (plain-chocolate with several small "eye-spots"), and some Small Heaths (orange with grey). Silver-Y moths were about, and a large number of black and scarlet Burnet moths, most of them the usual 6-Spot Burnet but some the rarer Narrow-bordered 5-spot. Disappointingly, there were no Grayling or Small Copper butterflies, which both occur at Cocklawburn. They may yet appear. Wood Sage was in flower and, since this is a nectar source for the Hummingbird Hawkmoth, it would be worth looking for it here.

As a footnote, the Speckled Wood butterfly has been sighted near Detchant Wood at what must be, at present, the northernmost limit of its range. It seems to be moving north like several other species, so it is worth looking out for this along hedgerows and woodland edges. Please let us know if you see any of them.

Molly.