



ABG News

Avon Butterfly Group



Autumn 2007 **BUTTERFLY PROJECT**

Silver-washed Fritillaries

Jon Mortin

The Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia* is the most common as well as the largest Fritillary in our area.



It is found in woodlands where the caterpillars feed on Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*. The adults can be seen in July and August often visiting Bramble flowers or engaging in their elaborate courtship displays in sunny glades. The females can sometimes be seen weaving between trees before laying their eggs under or even on the tree trunks. When the caterpillars hatch they eat a light breakfast of their own eggshells before hibernating. The following spring they then have to make their way down and search for a violet plant to feed on.

South-western parts of England and Wales are a stronghold for this species, which has become extinct in many other parts of the country. Even here it seems very sensitive to habitat changes. At Wetmoor in South Gloucestershire the population crashed between 1996 and 2000. Conversely, with appropriate management, opening up the woodland canopy, numbers can increase dramatically. In Leigh Woods the species appeared to have completely disappeared with no records for over ten years. Then, following the re-introduction of coppicing, it re-appeared. From 1995 to 1999 it was recorded every year in Leigh Woods. Since then, we have no more records on our database, which might

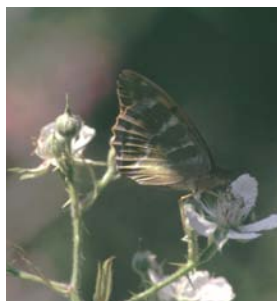
mean a real decline or it might mean people have not been sending us their records!

A happy footnote to this tale is that one of our volunteers, Kate Buss, has just recorded and photographed a female Silver-washed Fritillary in her garden in Leigh Woods. This is only the 11th record we have from this area and the first for eight years. It is also the first from outside the Nature Reserve and just goes to show that it's worth keeping a look out for the wildlife in your garden and not just in your local nature reserve!

Identification Notes

As Jon notes; Silver-washed Fritillaries are the largest of our fritillaries - the first time I saw one flying I thought it was a bird, my brain couldn't accept something that size being a butterfly. The name comes from the silver streaks on the underside (sorry, not a great photo below). The most likely "confusion" species is the Dark Green Fritillary, which has a similar upperside but silver spots on the green background on the underside - see the photo.

Dark Green is much more a grassland species and the adults seem to particularly feed on purple flowers; thistles etc. Silver-washed, despite the photo above on a Marsh Thistle, is commonly found feeding on Bramble flowers.



Dark Green Fritillary
- silver spots

Silver-washed Fritillary
- silver streaks



Marsh Fritillary

Local wildlife artist, Greg Poole, recorded a Marsh Fritillary from the shores of Blagdon Lake in June last year.

Marsh Fritillary is effectively extinct in our area as it no longer breeds. The usual larval foodplant (Devil's-bit Scabious) is plentiful however, and it is sad that changes in grazing, particularly in recent times, has led to the butterfly's demise.

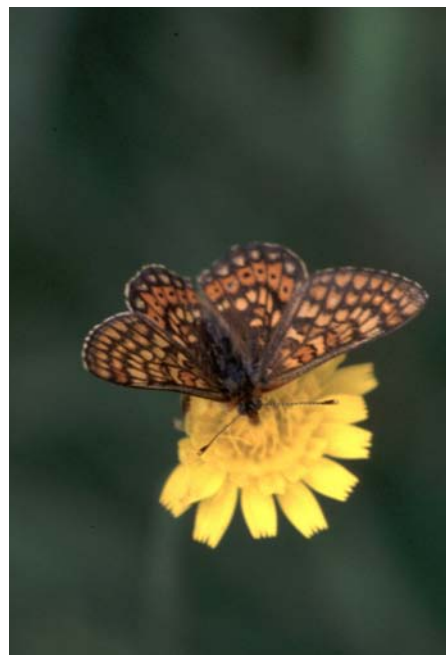
Marsh Fritillary has a fascinating history in the region (see *Butterflies of the Bristol Region*, Barnett *et al*, available from BRERC at the amazing price of £14.95, or £10 if you contributed records).

The story nationally, and across Europe, is similar. Marsh Fritillary has suffered a rapid decline due to the loss and abandonment of flower-rich grassland.

The life-cycle of this butterfly is also interesting; from July until mid September the brown-black, spiny caterpillars feed together on scabious leaves inside a silken white web.

Counting larval webs is the established method of monitoring for this species.

The butterfly seen is probably a wandering individual, and may, in fact, have been captive bred and released.

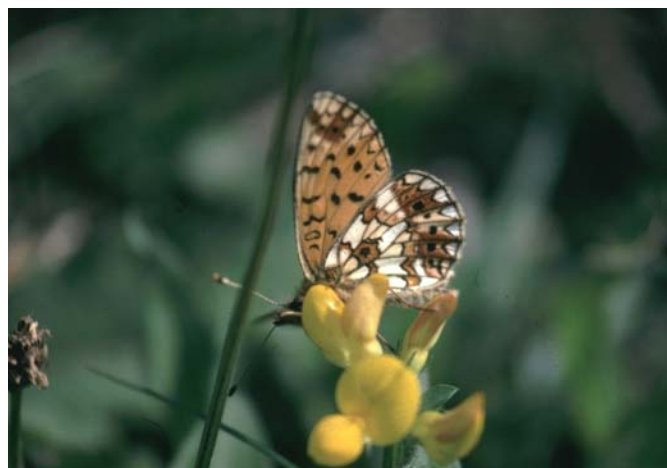


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

We also received a record of a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary from Ashton Court Meadow by an AWT volunteer. That's what happens when you move offices, the wildlife at the old place gets really exciting!

At present, in our region, Dolebury Warren in the far south of North Somerset, is the only confirmed breeding colony for this fast-declining butterfly.

Again, this may be a released wandering individual, but it is a good location for this lovely little butterfly, and the preferred foodplant for the larvae (Common Dog-violet) is certainly present.



Glanville Fritillary

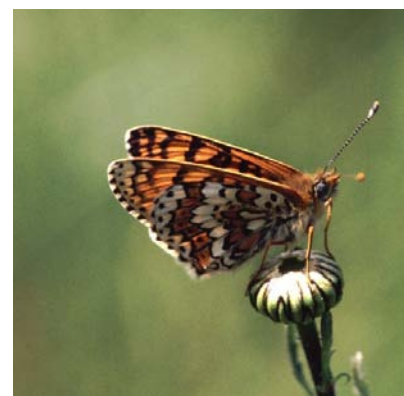
As this has turned into the "Fritillary Edition", I thought I'd mention the Glanville Fritillary.

The main foodplant of this gorgeous little butterfly is the extremely common Ribwort Plantain, but the butterfly is temperature-limited, being at the extreme northern limit of its European range in the British Isles.

There is one introduced colony in the BRERC region which appears to be persisting, although no records from this summer have yet reached our database.

The Glanville Fritillary is a controversial butterfly because it raises questions such as - should management of a site focus on a species which isn't present naturally?

And of course it raises questions about the ethics of releasing butterflies into the wild. Introduced populations typically fail, the one in our region is an exception.



All photographs by Abigail Pedlow