

## Serious fun

Butterfly Conservation Scotland has run a successful programme of workshops for volunteers, training them to record data in the field. Julie Stoneman explains how the workshops combine lifelong learning, interpretation, and sound conservation.

It is no accident that volunteer workshops run by Butterfly Conservation Scotland (BCS) are an enjoyable experience! We ensure they are set in a relaxed, informal atmosphere, no prior knowledge is assumed, and we use activities to help people assimilate new information. We also make sure there is plenty of time for participants to get to know each other, as well as the local experts and countryside staff who come along to provide support and expertise for the day.

The workshops may be fun, but their aim is serious. Butterflies are undergoing a serious decline as environmental changes affect them very quickly. We have strong populations in Scotland of some of the most threatened species, but they are very under-recorded. We need to recruit new people if we are to check on the health of these colonies or discover new ones, so the workshops are planned to encourage new volunteers to get involved.

Complete beginners often prefer introductory workshops aimed at general butterfly or moth recording; those with more confidence or experience can opt for a more specialist one aimed at a particular species. Many people come to more than one workshop to gain a range of skills, but the key message is that anyone can get involved regardless of previous experience.

After a couple of indoor presentations to set the scene, we visit a local site to see butterflies and moths in their natural habitat and practise skills such as using a butterfly net or carrying out a "timed count". By the end of the day everyone has the experience they need to do survey and monitoring work on their own. It is important that everyone leaves with a specific task to achieve, so they complete a feedback form and indicate how they would like to get involved – from a back garden count to a regular weekly survey, or a visit to one or more specific sites.

This method of recruiting new volunteers was first tried in south west Scotland through the 'Butterfly Guardians for Scotland' project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which ran from 2002 – 2004. This resulted in a massive increase in butterfly and moth recording in the project area, and over 150 new volunteers. We are now rolling out the approach in other areas, starting with the 'Butterflies and Moths Mean Business' project running until December 2005. This is part-financed by the European Community through the Lomond and Rural Stirling and Cairngorms LEADER + programmes, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and SNH.

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Two born-again lepidopterists who went on some of the workshops give their views:

Tony Brotherton

I signed up for one of the butterfly workshops held in Galloway in the summer of 2003. The format was for us raw recruits to foregather for a morning's indoor briefing, learning and identification session, then after lunch to go out into the field for the practical side. I found these workshops great fun and hugely informative.

Since the workshop I've carried out a weekly transect over an agreed route throughout the butterfly season, recording what I see. I find my modest involvement satisfying and worthwhile, and hope it helps BCS' efforts in halting the decline of Scotland's butterflies and moths.

Anastasia Cox

My husband and I attended our first butterfly workshop in Taynuilt last spring. By mixing informative talks with hands-on field experience, the workshop made committed lepidopterists out of us in a day! It was a great way to meet people, and to develop an understanding of our local environment; looking for butterflies really opens your eyes to the details of the natural world, and makes you consider more carefully the subtle balancing act that constitutes a healthy ecosystem.

As a direct result of attending that first workshop, we began monitoring a colony of the rare Chequered Skipper butterfly behind our house. The data we have collected will hopefully help create a more complete picture of their distribution and behaviour in our area. It also provides us with something endlessly fascinating to do on our walk

A child of five would understand this. Send someone to fetch a child of five.

*Groucho Marx*