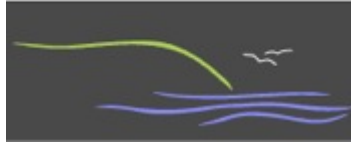


Scarborough Field Naturalists



NEWSLETTER

Hello everyone

Hope you are keeping well and surviving this long lockdown. It looks certain now that we will not be able to hold any indoor meetings until at least September. As such the Committee has discussed the issue of the annual subscriptions. We have decided that subscriptions for paid up members will be rolled over for 2021 – a subscription holiday. There are a few members who had not paid in 2020 before we shut down the indoor meetings after March and this is a reminder that subs for these members are due and will cover 2020 and 2021. If you are not sure if you are 'paid up' please contact our treasurer Sue Thompson (seraphinathompson58@gmail.com).

Nick Gibbons

THE NEW YEAR PLANT HUNT

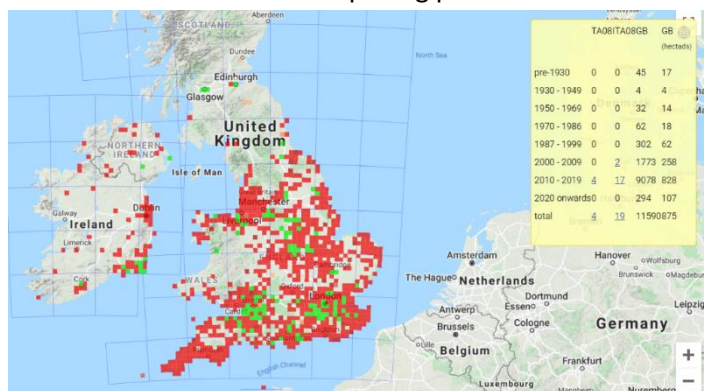


2021 has been the tenth year of the New Year Plant Hunt organised by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI). It takes place every year between the 1st and 4th January. The task is to take a walk of up to three hours and record every species of plant in flower. Anyone can take part and results can be reported either via an App as you walk, or later via the BSBI website. The results from around the country are available on the website. This year the longest list was 86 flowers from the island of Jersey. The three commonest flowers seen nationally were Daisy, Groundsel and Dandelion.

I have taken part several times and this year took a rather rainy walk from Hutton Buscel to Forge Valley and back through Yedmandale. Some wild flowers do regularly bloom through most of the year such as White deadnettle, Common chickweed, Gorse and Annual meadow grass. Some of the best places to find flowers in January are arable field margins and waste sites including gardens. This year I managed to find 38 species of plant in flower. There were some surprising plants which have

persisted because of the mild autumn such as Field scabious and Green alkanet. Others are early spring flowers such as

Winter heliotrope and Dog's mercury. I did find a flowering grass which I couldn't initially identify. This turned out to be Water bent (*Polypogon viridis*) which was growing in gravel in West Ayton. It is a neophyte, that is a plant that has only been seen in recent years, and was initially found in the Scilly Isles but is spreading northwards.



Louise Thompson

TROUTSDALE BUTTERFLY SURVEY

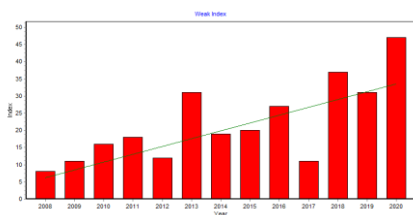
Attached are some of the graphs of our butterfly surveys at Troutsdale grazings over the last 10 years or so. I wish I could say that I had done the analysis myself but it was kindly done by Dave Wainwright at Butterfly conservation.

The surveys comprise of 7 transects from Broad Head Farm and then around the main Troutsdale fen. They therefore include forest track, rough grazing grassland, scrub and the fen itself. Up until the end of 2019 we grazed it with a small herd of Dexter cattle (25-35 head). Some cutting of the grassland took place for hay, so that particular meadow would be ungrazed until August at the earliest. Low inputs of farmyard manure would be spread on the meadow between January and March. Weather permitting cattle would be on the area between March and December, although some wet winters would require them to be brought in late October. From the middle of 2020 the management of the fen is now grazing by 6 Exmoor ponies.

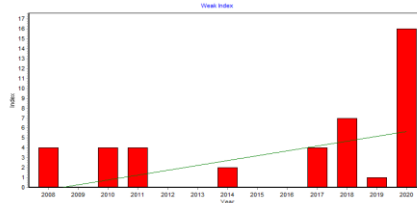
With the exception of some scrub clearance no mechanical or other human interference took place on the fen.

A caveat. It is possible the decline of the Small Heath is due to our identifying it incorrectly (i.e. mixing it up with Meadow Browns). We are hoping to improve our skills next year. Sadly, the Small Copper decline was all too noticeable over the 10 years.

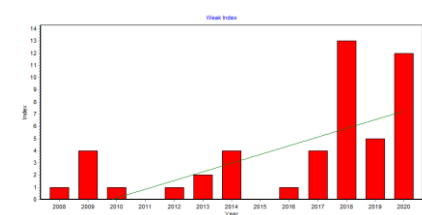
Steve Bushell



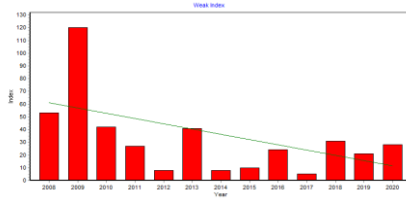
Small skipper



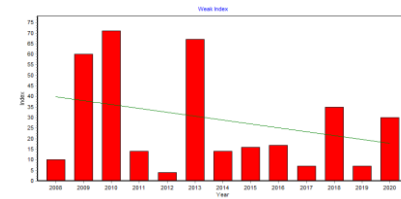
Large skipper



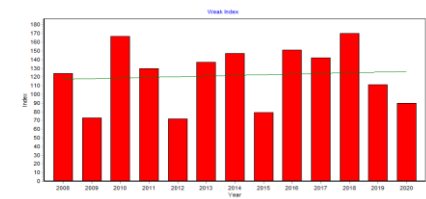
Brimstone



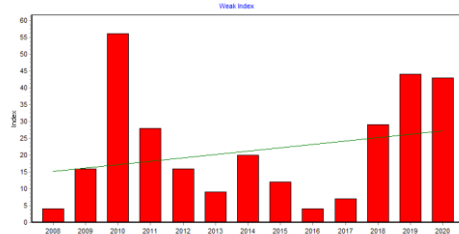
Large white



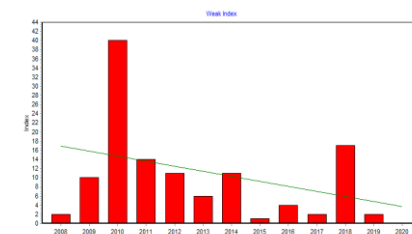
Small white



Green-veined white



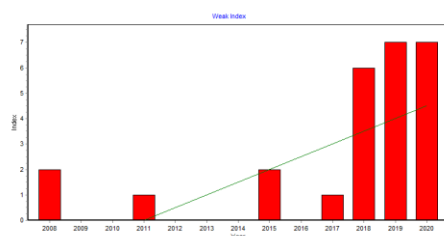
Orange tip



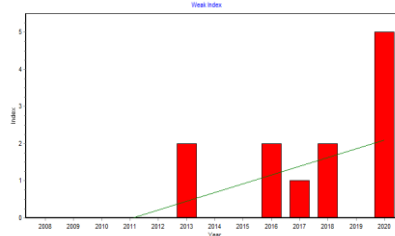
Small copper



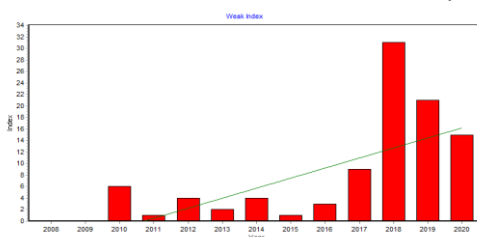
Common blue



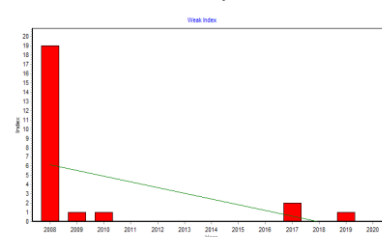
Small pearl-bordered fritillary



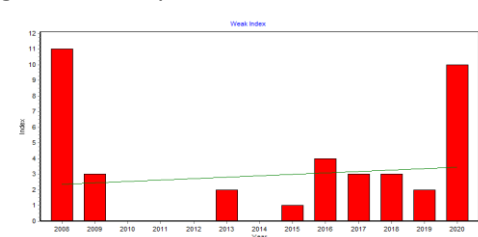
Dark green fritillary



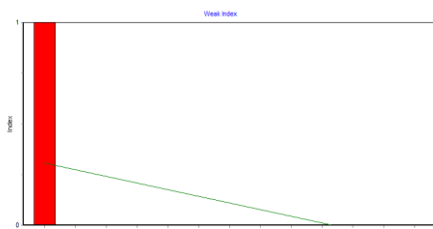
Speckled wood



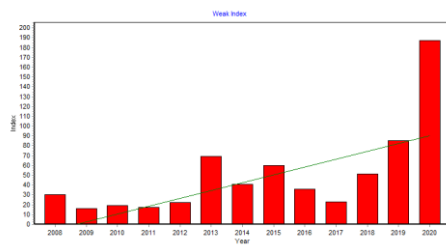
Wall



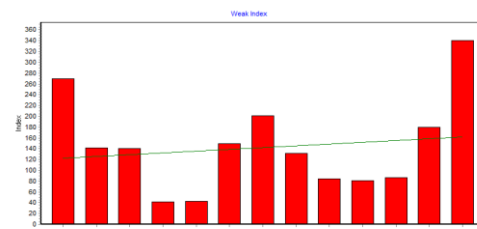
Marbled white



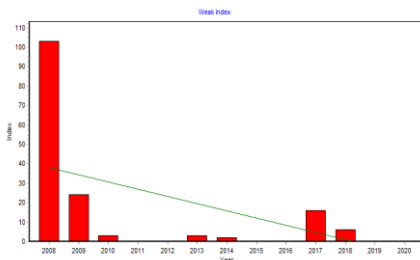
Gatekeeper



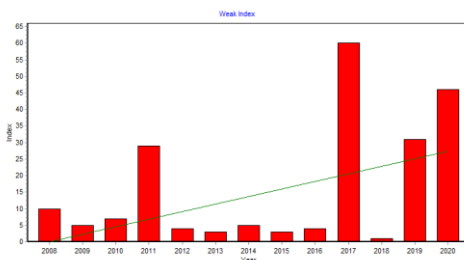
Meadow brown



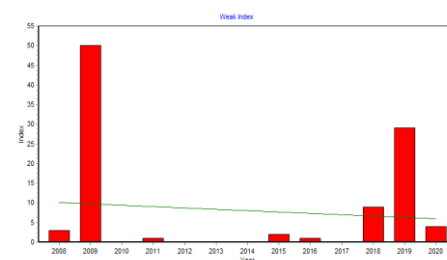
Ringlet



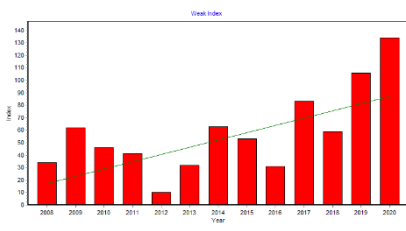
Small heath



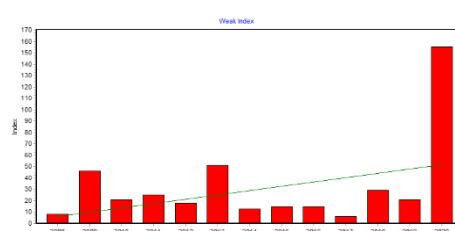
Red admiral



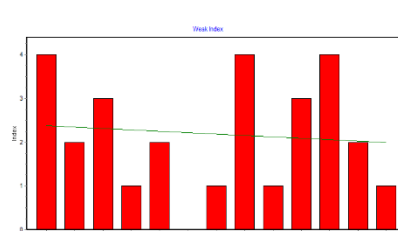
Painted lady



Peacock



Small tortoiseshell



Comma

May Moss – a never-ending story

In 1972 a young PhD lecturer called Margaret Atherden from the College of Ripon and York St John gave a talk about the work of the then Yorkshire Naturalist's Trust and was recruiting volunteers for an area group. Having recently acquired a second-hand set of wheels (a Viva HA De-luxe!), I put myself forward and so began a friendship that has lasted almost 50 years. In 1974 Margaret, myself, my girlfriend now my wife Sue, Gordon Simpson and a Forestry Commission surveyor called Martin Hodgson visited May Moss, a remote site on the eastern North York Moors to set out some 'permanent' long lines called transects along which we would record the vegetation. Margaret knew the site well having carried out research there for her PhD and, along the way, rediscovering one 'lost' plant, Bog Rosemary and one 'new' rarity Cloudberry. Along the three transects we recorded the plants at 25m intervals in 1m squares or quadrats. This was the first systematic recording of May Moss a site which climatically should not exist in our area.

In 1976 Sue and I moved to the Durham Pennines to work for the Forestry Commission for 18 years so for us May Moss was on the 'back burner'. Margaret however kept on and convinced an, at the time, sceptical Forestry Commission of the unique qualities of this special place. The main area of May Moss would not be planted with conifers. This in itself was a major achievement. Not satisfied with this Margaret then went on to get the site designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest or SSSI decades before the rest of the upland area was protected.

In 1994 Sue and I returned to North Yorkshire where I took over managing recreation for the Forestry Commission in the county. I didn't have much time to get re-involved but watched from the side-lines with great interest as Forestry Commission policies on biodiversity evolved and scientific understanding of the value of deep peats improved. Around the Millennium the Forestry Commission tried to raise funding to remove the timber crop from areas adjacent to May Moss and restore and protect the peat and biodiversity. Unfortunately, this attempt failed although conifers were cleared on the west side of the site.

In 2002 I moved from recreation management to take up the newly created role of 'Biodiversity Officer' for the Forestry Commission in Yorkshire and gradually May Moss once again became a 'hot topic'. With its history of monitoring, its deep peat, its rare habitats and species, its conservation and monitoring became a priority not just for the Forestry Commission but for the North York Moors National Park and Natural England as well. With the help of National Park Volunteers we started repairing and resurveying the old transects and, in 2009, with the help of a substantial grant work began on 'areas of interest' to the east and south of the SSSI. Liverpool University under the guidance of Professor Richard Chiverell installed state of the art climate monitoring equipment on a site which he regarded as 'unique'. The Forestry Commission began the mulching or removal of conifers and the blocking of drains. We all knew there were no quick fixes, the existing SSSI was already protected but the some of the surrounding areas could take decades to recover their ability to create peat and achieve a balanced biodiversity. Transects were extended and added to cover the

'restored' areas and the former 'RadHaz' site to the north. Transect monitoring and maintenance, with help from the Forestry Commission, National Park and Place volunteers, is now taking place annually, even against all the odds in 2020, and will be happening again this year.

So, is it worth all the effort? Absolutely!

The greater part of the original mire was never planted with conifers. Areas to the east, west and south of the main area have been cleared of conifers and are gradually returning to upland heath and mire. The deep peats are protected and excessive erosion reduced.

To the north the Forestry Commission-owned former RAF Fylingdales 'RadHaz' site has been added to the study area as the largest section of upland heath not burnt or cut for grouse shooting on the North York Moors.

The area supports breeding nightjar, curlew and greylag goose, feeding hobbies, large heath butterflies and water voles. As well as its two established rarities of Bog Rosemary and Cloudberry (this latter is severely declined). A 'new' species can be added to the list thanks to Wendy English who spotted Stagshorn Clubmoss on one of the restored areas in 2020.

Natural England have added the site to their national long-term monitoring with periodic visits by groups of experts carrying out diverse recording.

Anyone can visit the site as it is owned by the Forestry Commission however be aware that it can be a long walk in (unless you have permission for a vehicle). It is also not a site to take lightly. It is several hundred hectares of pathless waterlogged blanket bog, fen and mire that can catch out the unwary. If you want to carry out study or research on the site the first point of contact is Cath Bashforth (cath.bashforth@forestryengland.uk) who can arrange for vehicular permissions and let you know what other people are doing. I produce an annual newsletter to keep the 'interest group' up to date and report any findings.

Hopefully in 2024 we can produce a '50 years on May Moss' publication, wouldn't that be good.

Brian Walker



National Park Volunteers carrying out a survey in 2010



Bog Rosemary (Andromeda polyfolia) in flower



A view across May Moss in 2016



Measuring peat depth and quality in a cleared area in 2014