

Green Hairstreak butterfly hunt at Sergeantlaw Moss, Paisley, on 21 May 2023

On an overcast Sunday morning a group of ten intrepid butterfly hunters set off towards Sergeantlaw Moss in the hope of seeing some Green Hairstreaks (*Callophrys rubi*). On the way, we crossed over an old drystone dyke and Craig Postlethwaite was able to help us identify a number of lichens growing on the rocks.



Lichens: *Diploschistes scruposus* *Stereocaulon vesuvianum*

We then walked across a damp field where there was plenty of Lady's Smock in bloom. This is also known as the Cuckooflower because the pale lilac flowers are said to appear at the same time that the first Cuckoos arrive back in the UK. As if to prove the point, a cuckoo started calling in the distance from over towards the Caplaw area. We heard a number of other birds on our walk, including numerous Willow Warblers, Chaffinch and a Song Thrush.

As we approached the woodland at the boundary of Sergeantlaw Moss a couple of Roe Deer bounded off. The woodland is predominantly birch and Blaeberry grows along the intersection between the trees and the bog. This is an ideal habitat for Green Hairstreak butterflies which nectar on the Blaeberry flowers and lay their eggs on the leaves. I had visited the site a few days before and spotted this Green Hairstreak on Heather.



Green Hairstreak butterfly



Blaeberry in flower

Green Hairstreak butterflies perch on plants with their wings closed offering them excellent camouflage against the green leaves. Our best bet of seeing one was to spot it in flight. Males often perch on the lower branches of trees in search of females and will fly in battle with rival males. The upper side of Green Hairstreaks' wings are brown and that is that is what you see when they are in flight. We walked the length of the edge of the bog looking for a brown-coloured butterfly, often catching sight of what we thought might be a Green Hairstreak, then disappointed to find it was a Common Heath Moth.



Looking for Green Hairstreak butterflies



Common Heath moth

We did spot plenty of other insects of interest during our walk, including a heather beetle (whose larvae feed on the roots of Heather and adults feed on the stems and leaves) and a click beetle, so called because when disturbed it jumps to ground with quite a loud click sound. Swallows were seen flying low across the moss, snacking on the insects rising from heather and other plants and lichens



Heather beetle



Click beetle



Garden Tiger moth caterpillar



slug



Hare's Tail Cottongrass and moss



Cladonia pyxidate



Cladonia portentosa

Sadly, the sunshine which would have encouraged the Green Hairstreaks into activity didn't make an appearance, so neither did the butterfly. On the walk back to the carpark however, we did find a number of other butterflies which sat very still allowing us to get close-up photographs of them. These were Orange -tips and Green-veined Whites roosting on flowers in the damp grassland and on the Lady's Smock we found a number of the tiny, bright-orange eggs of the Orange-tip.



Butterflies: Orange-tip female and egg Green-veined White

Despite the non-appearance of our target species we had a very enjoyable afternoon exploring Sergeantlaw Moss.



Kirsty Menzies

Thanks for additional photographs: groups by Bill Gray; lichens and beetles by Craig Postlethwaite

Notable Species seen/heard

Insects

<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i> -	Orange-tip butterfly
<i>Pieris napi</i>	Green-veined white butterfly
<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>	Common Heath Moth
<i>Arctia caja</i>	Garden tiger moth
<i>Lochmea suturalis</i>	Heather beetle
<i>Dolopius marginatus</i>	Click beetle sp.

Lichens

<i>Stereocaulon vesuvianum</i>
<i>Diploschistes scruposus</i>
<i>Parmotrema perlatum</i>
<i>Cladonia portentosa</i>
<i>Cladonia pyxidata</i>

Flowering plants

<i>Betula</i> sp	Birch sp
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	Lady's Smock
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	Bilberry
<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	Hare's Tail Cottongrass
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath

Birds and mammals

<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow
<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	Roe Deer