



*Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary*

On Saturday the 21st June I co-hosted, with our President Peter Macdonald, a walk for the Berwickshire Naturalists Club at Gordon Community Woodland. There was a reasonable turn out for a very muggy and hot day. A group just large enough to keep tabs on. I have been, in the past, involved in leading some huge groups on walks where mutiny and insurrection are very tricky to put down. Leading walks for specific species, in this case, Butterflies, can be awfully unpredictable. Now I prefer unpredictable, but some who do attend walks do turn up to see the target species which in this case was the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. So very specific...and that's the trouble. You just can't dream these things up and homework and a knowledge of the current situation and location is key to finding your target for the attending audience. Patience is always a virtue and it's something every naturalist worth their salt must possess in spades.

We wandered slowly around the Community Woodland finding lots of interesting distractions. Wonderful flora like the Northern Marsh Orchid, Valerian, Ragged Robin, Heath Bedstraw, Water Avens etc, Insects such as Damselflies, and Day Flying Moths which included the Six-spot Burnet, Small Argent Sable, and Yellow Shell. We even stumbled across a very large Poplar Hawkmoth along the way. We stepped away from the main path for a few minutes to study a damper area of grassland that holds a few Marsh Thistle, and it was hoped that it was there at this cross point that I could locate a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary for the group to see. The worry was that we had arranged the walk much earlier in the season whereupon the average flight time of this Butterfly species would have been prime. Unfortunately, the season through Spring was very dry and unseasonably warm forcing a very

early appearance of the Fritillary. I knew that to find one on Saturday would be tough and it was here on a little rickety bridge over a wet reed filled ditch that I bet all my money on seeing our target species. We waited no more than a few minutes when out of the haze of blue green sedge a single Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, looking the worse for wear alighted perfectly on a Marsh Thistle top a few meters away from the group giving everyone a view. Some have said, on other trips, that I have a box full of trained Butterflies that magically appear when required...which would make life much easier, but the Butterflies do what they do, Creatures of habit and habitat. Once you learn this you can find them wherever they may be.

With the target species found we went onto find Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Green-veined White and Small Tortoiseshell as well as a developing number of Caterpillars of the Peacock Butterfly. Our later start meant that the group were now weary and in need of lunch so we began tracking back to the lodge that sits by the side of a Pond with seating. A very pleasant spot. On our way some fun was had when Peter with help from the group began searching for the elusive Broad Leaved Helleborine. It had just been recently discovered at the Community Woodland. Armed with a map, and a grid reference the group spread out as if hunting a great treasure...and the treasure was found!! The Orchid has still to flower, but we all saw it and moved on to find another rarity nearby the Adder's-tongue Fern, and that was a little easier to find and well documented at the Community Woodland site. We finally retired by the pond for gossip and catch ups as well as a well-earned lunch. A very decent way to spend a Saturday.

Unfortunately, my camera was playing up on Saturday for one reason or another so photographs were very few and very likely boring so I have taken some liberty in posting these photographs of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary that were taken this year 2025 at Gordon Community Woodland a good few weeks before Saturday's walk knowing whilst taking these photographs that by the time the walk came around these beautiful Butterflies would be very, very hard to find.

Thank you to Peter for support and all in attendance.

Iain Cowe.