

The Butterflies of Lough Carra, Co. Mayo: 2014 Second Update

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There are now twenty-five species of butterfly that have been recorded in the habitats around Lough Carra since 2000. This is a remarkable diversity for such a small area and demonstrates the ecological value of the lakeshore habitats. In the 2012 book “Ireland’s Butterflies: a Review” (by David Nash, Trevor Boyd and Deirdre Hardiman) Lough Carra’s lakeshore habitats are categorised as “a nationally important butterfly area”, since when the species list has been increased by two.

The latest addition to the species list has been the Purple hairstreak. We had long suspected that this species would be found somewhere on Carra’s oak trees and in 2012 Ian Rippey discovered a small colony on the Derrinrush peninsula. Since then, we have found at least one further colony in that general area and we suspect that the species is probably quite widespread there as there are plenty of old oaks fringing the peninsula.

The following report summarises the status of each of these 25 species.

Species list

1. Dingy skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>
2. Cryptic wood white	<i>Leptidea juvernica</i>
3. Clouded yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
4. Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
5. Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
6. Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
7. Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>
8. Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
9. Green hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>
10. Purple hairstreak	<i>Favonius quercus</i>
11. Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
12. Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
13. Holly blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>
14. Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
15. Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
16. Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
17. Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>
18. Silver-washed fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>
19. Marsh fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>
20. Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
21. Wall brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
22. Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>
23. Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
24. Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>

Dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*

This species is neither widely distributed nor common in Ireland. The 2001 Millennium Atlas reported no records from the two 10 km² grid squares containing Lough Carra. However, this was probably due at least in part to under-recording in the west of Ireland as the 2006 report recorded its occurrence in the southernmost of the two 10 km² grid squares. It is now known to be present in small numbers in several locations around Lough Carra, mostly in areas where there is still some unimproved grassland.

Cryptic wood white *Leptidea juvernica*

The recent discovery that of the two species of Wood white in Ireland the one that was thought to be Réal's wood white is actually a new species – the Cryptic wood white, has further complicated our knowledge of this/these species. The previous records from Lough Carra had been positively (and reliably) identified as Réal's wood white (Ken Bond, pers.comm.) and not the Wood white *Leptidea sinapis*, so we assume that it is the newly-named Cryptic wood white that occurs around Carra. This assumption is supported by observation of the courtship behaviour which corresponds with that of *juvernica* rather than *sinapis*.

Clouded yellow *Colias croceus*

This migrant species has apparently never been recorded previously in the vicinity of Lough Carra. The Millennium Atlas shows just one pre-1970 record for County Mayo (near Killary Harbour). However, the 2006 report includes records for several locations in Counties Mayo and Galway (but none near Lough Carra) and shows an increase in distribution in both Britain and Ireland. We have seen this species on a few occasions around the lake in recent years, including at Castleburke, Doon peninsula and the Partry House Estate in 2003, and at Kilkeeran in 2007.

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Lough Carra is close to the extreme northwestern edge of this species' range. Despite this, the Brimstone is a fairly common butterfly around the lake, perhaps because there are plenty of Buckthorn and Alder buckthorn trees on which the caterpillars feed.

Large white *Pieris brassicae*

The Large white is normally associated most closely with gardens, allotments and farms where brassica crops are grown as the caterpillars feed on these plants. Since there are few such crops around the lake, except in a small number of vegetable gardens, it is not a very abundant butterfly in the area, although as it is a strong flier it may be seen almost anywhere around the lakeshore.

Small white *Pieris rapae*

As with the Large white, this species is usually associated with domestic brassica crops (such as cabbages) and is most often seen in gardens in small numbers. It is not plentiful in the area, but can often be seen

Green-veined white *Pieris napi*

This butterfly is widespread and common around Lough Carra. Since it is double-brooded, it may be seen in almost any month from April through to September.

Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Although this is by no means a rare species in this area of the West of Ireland, it does not seem to be abundant around the shores of Lough Carra. In the 2003 survey, it was recorded only in one locality (near Kilkeeran), but has since been seen in several sites scattered widely around the lake. Perhaps the increased practice of making silage, instead of hay, has reduced the occurrence of the main food plant for the caterpillars – the Cuckooflower or Lady's smock *Cardamine pratensis* in the fields adjacent to the lake.

Green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

An uncommon species around Carra, although there are strong colonies a few kilometres away in the lough's catchment. It has been recorded near Moorehall and on the Kilkeeran peninsula.

Purple hairstreak *Favonius quercus*

At least two colonies exist on the oaks fringing the Derrinrush peninsula. A maximum of five individuals have been seen at each colony in 2013 and 2014, but it is likely that they are more numerous than this would suggest, and we are convinced that there will be more colonies discovered in that area.

On 3 August 2014, we located another colony on an oak tree in the Doon woodland where we had long suspected this species might occur. There are several old oaks in the woodland there and further time spent looking for them in the right conditions will probably result in further finds.

It is also possible that they will be found in other woodlands around the lakeshore.

Small copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

This species occurs widely around the lakeshore, but is not at all abundant. It is easily overlooked.

Common blue *Polyommatus icarus*

The Common blue occurs quite commonly, although never in large numbers, on the grassland around the lakeshore, especially where natural or semi-natural limestone grassland remains intact.

Holly blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Until 2007, this species had never been recorded in either of the 10 km² grid squares containing Lough Carra, and there had been very few records in Counties Mayo and Galway. In 2007, it was seen in the woodlands on the Doon peninsula and on Deer Island, since when we have seen it in many locations around the lakeshore. It has clearly become well established here.

Red admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

This migratory species arrives each year from North Africa and continental Europe, although there may be a few individuals that overwinter here. It may be seen anywhere around the lake where there are suitable nectar plants (such as Hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, or buddleia), autumn fruit (such as blackberries or windfall apples) or nettles *Urtica dioica* (on which the caterpillars feed).

Painted lady *Vanessa cardui*

Another migratory species, the Painted lady arrives from North Africa and Europe, often in large numbers, and may be seen in almost any habitat around Lough Carra.

Small tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Probably the best-known of butterflies in Ireland, this is a common and widespread species occurring in many habitats around Lough Carra.

Peacock *Inachis io*

A widespread and common species around Lough Carra, often seen where there are suitable nectar plants (especially Hemp agrimony and buddleia).

Silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

This species is widely distributed in Ireland, occurring mostly in broad-leaved woodlands. The 2001 Millennium Atlas reported no records from the two 10 km² grid squares containing Lough Carra. However, this was probably due to under-recording in the west of Ireland as the 2006 report recorded its occurrence in the both of the two 10 km² grid squares. It is likely to be seen wherever there is either broad-leaved

woodland or mature hedgerows and often occurs in quite large numbers. It is not unusual to see ten or more in one area.

Marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*

This uncommon species is known to be in severe decline in Ireland (Fox et al., 2006). It occurs in many locations around the lakeshore, especially where reasonably large areas of fen habitat remain. However, in many of these locations the habitat has become degraded (usually through overgrazing) and there must be serious concern that this species might disappear from Carra.

Speckled wood *Pararge aegeria*

A widespread and common species, the Speckled wood occurs in and around most of the woodlands and hedgerows.

Wall brown *Lasiommata megera*

Although this is a widespread species in Ireland, it had not been recorded in either of the Lough Carra 10 km² grid squares in the Millennium Atlas. However, in the 2006 report, it was recorded in both. In the 2003 survey, we recorded it in just one location, since when we have not recorded it. It is clearly not common in this area and, since it is known to be in decline throughout the British Isles, further investigation of its status around Lough Carra would be valuable.

Grayling *Hipparchia semele*

This has clearly been an under-recorded species in the past, since the Millennium atlas showed no records for the Lough Carra area and even in the 2006 status report there are just two single sightings, one in each 10 km² grid square. Our records show at least seven separate sites where the Grayling occurs, always in association with exposed limestone or limestone pavement.

Meadow brown *Maniola jurtina*

The Meadow brown occurs almost everywhere around the lake where there is grassland, even in woodland rides and glades. It is very abundant throughout the area.

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Much less widespread than the Meadow brown, the Ringlet is, nonetheless a common butterfly around Lough Carra.

Small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

The Small heath is found in small numbers in many of the open habitats, including limestone pavement, grassland, fen and sparse scrub.

References

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