

# **The Butterflies of Lough Carra, Co. Mayo.**

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## **Summary**

Twenty three species of butterfly have been recorded in the habitats around Lough Carra. This is a remarkable diversity for such a small area and demonstrates the ecological value of the lakeshore habitats.

A brief survey of all butterflies was carried out around the lake during 2003, and the distribution maps from this survey are included below for some of the species. However, it should be stressed that these maps show what we believe to be the “minimum” distribution and are certainly not intended to be definitive. Further survey work is expected to show that several species are more widespread than the maps indicate.

Fieldwork is continuing in 2008, sponsored partly by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and new information will be included towards the end of the year. We hope that the species tally may even increase if we find one or more of the other species that might occur.

The following report summarises the status of each of these 23 species and, where it is appropriate, a map shows the approximate locations where the less common species are found based on all our records from the last eight years.

## Species list

1. Dingy skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>
2. Réal's wood white	<i>Leptidea reali</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. Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
10. Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
11. Holly blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>
12. Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
13. Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
14. Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
15. Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>
16. Silver-washed fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>
17. Marsh fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>
18. Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
19. Wall brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
20. Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>
21. Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
22. Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>
23. Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>

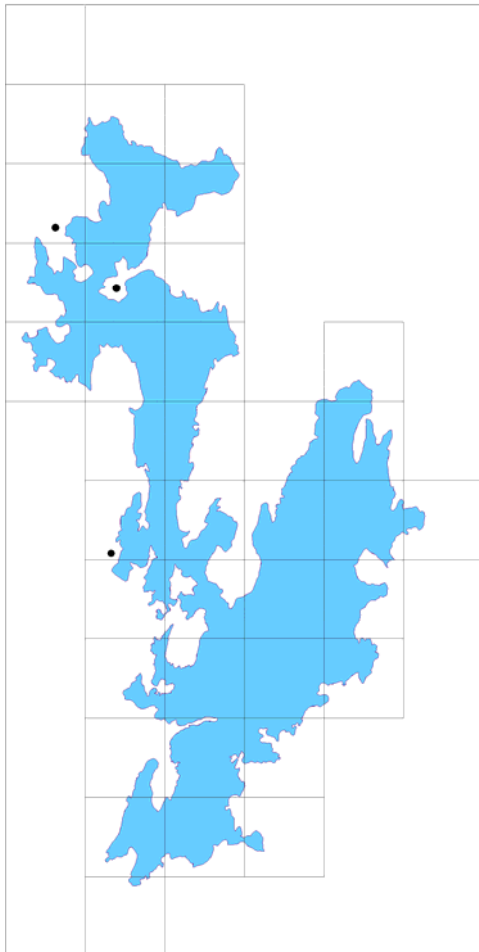
In addition to these 23 species already recorded around Lough Carra, there are a few others that might occur. Most likely among these are the Green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* and the Purple hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*. The former is known to occur a few kilometres to the North of the lake and the latter is known to occur in at least one location in woodland near the neighbouring Lough Mask. 2008 may see the species inventory for Lough Carra increased.

## Dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*

This species is neither widely distributed nor common in Ireland. The 2001 Millenium Atlas reported no records from the two 10 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> grid squares. It is now known to be present in small numbers in at least three locations around Lough Carra: in the scrubby grassland at the western end of the Kilkeeran causeway, on the Doon peninsula and in the limestone scrub around the track leading to Church Island. The approximate locations are shown in the following map.

Fieldwork in 2008 will investigate this species further to determine its status and define its distribution more precisely.

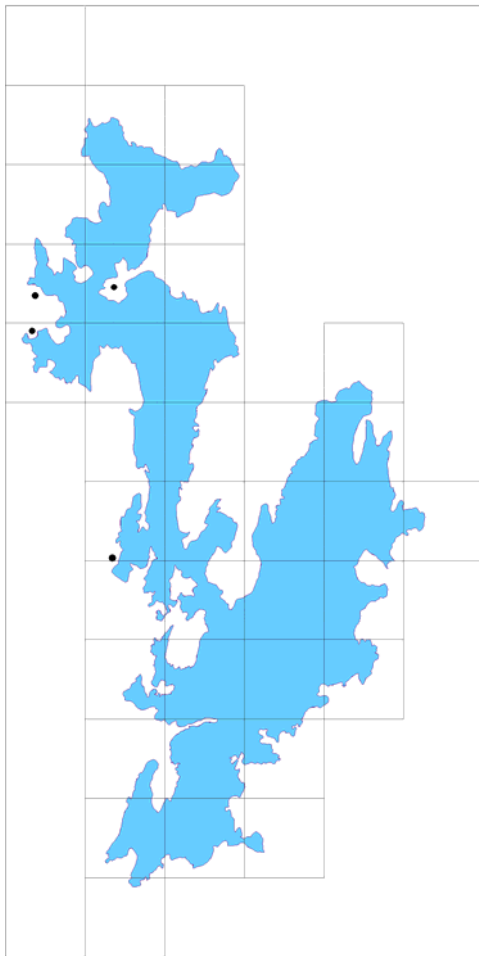
### Dingy skipper sites



## **Réal's wood white *Leptidea reali***

The recent discovery that there are two species of Wood white in Ireland has complicated our knowledge of this/these species. However, the only previous record from Lough Carra (in 2005) was positively (and reliably) identified as Réal's wood white (Ken Bond, pers.comm.), so we assume that it is this species alone that is now known to occur in at least four locations around the lakeshore. These are shown in the map below. As with the Dingy skipper, fieldwork in 2008 will investigate this species further to determine its status and define its distribution more precisely.

### **Réal's wood white sites**



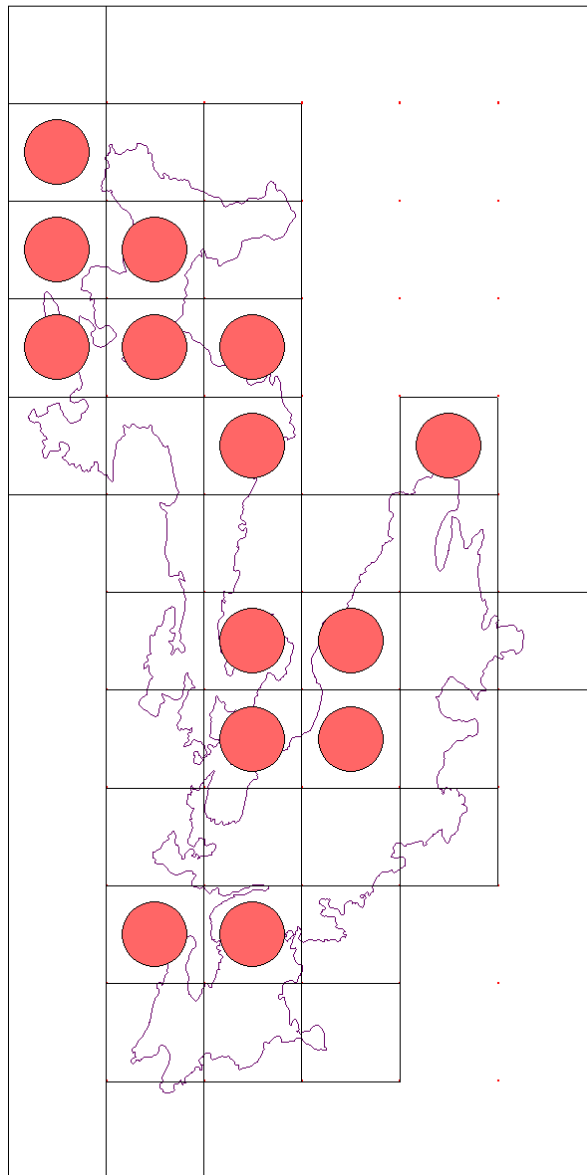
## **Clouded yellow *Colias croceus***

This migrant species has apparently never been recorded previously in the vicinity of Lough Carra. The Millenium 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. Since it is migratory, arriving from southern Europe and North Africa, there is little point in including a map of Carra to show the locations where specimens have been seen. If this species continues to expand its range northwards, as seems to be the trend, it may be seen more frequently around Lough Carra.

## **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. The map below shows those grid squares where the species was recorded during a survey in 2003.

**Brimstone**



### **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.

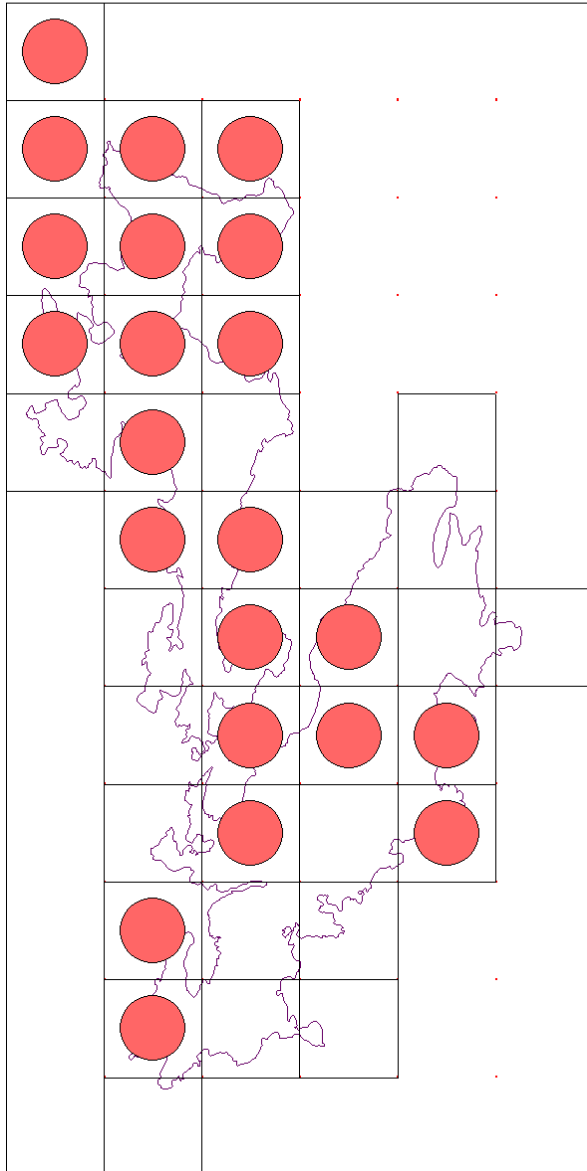
### **Small white *Pieris rapae***

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 (see map below of records from the 2003 survey). Since it is double-brooded, it may be seen in almost any month from April through to September.

### Green-veined White



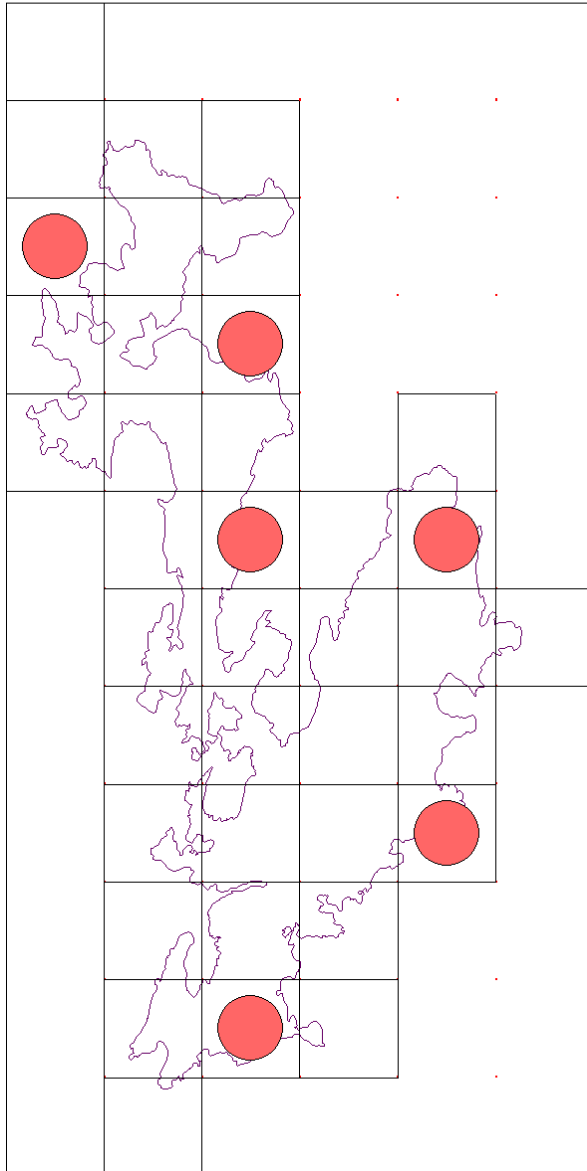
## **Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines***

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 Ladys' smock *Cardamine pratensis* in the fields adjacent to the lake.

## Small copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

In the 2003 survey, this species was recorded in six of the grid squares, as shown in the map below. However, it is easily overlooked and almost certainly occurs more widely than this suggests.

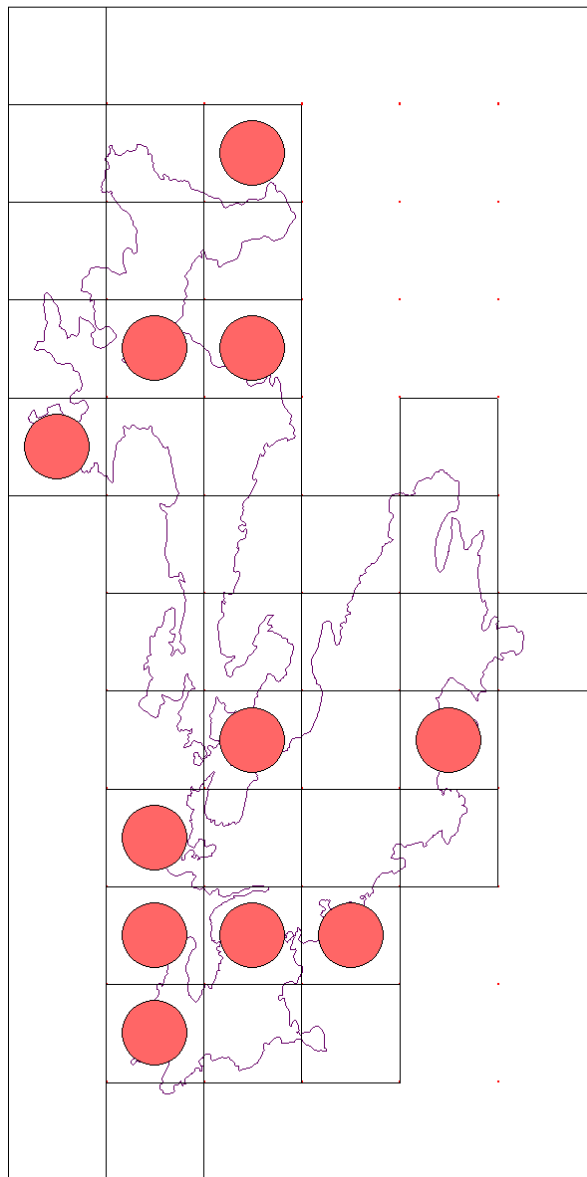
### Small Copper



## 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. In the 2003 survey, this species was recorded in eleven of the grid squares, as shown in the map below.

**Common Blue**

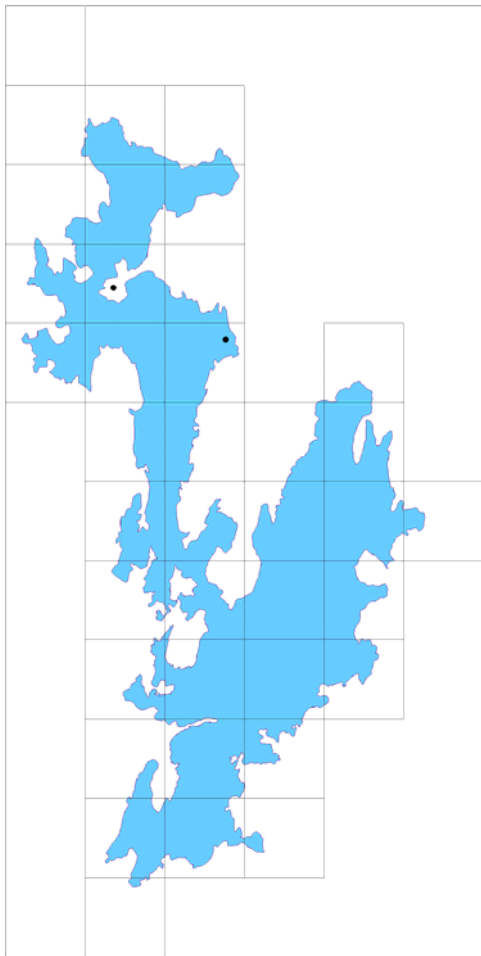


## **Holly blue *Celastrina argiolus***

Until 2007, this species had never been recorded in either of the 10 km<sup>2</sup> grid squares containing Lough Carra, and there have 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 (see map below).

Fieldwork in 2008 will investigate this species further to determine its status and define its distribution more precisely.

### **Holly blue sites**



### **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). Since it is migratory, arriving from southern Europe and North Africa, there is little point in including a map of Carra to show the locations where specimens have been seen.

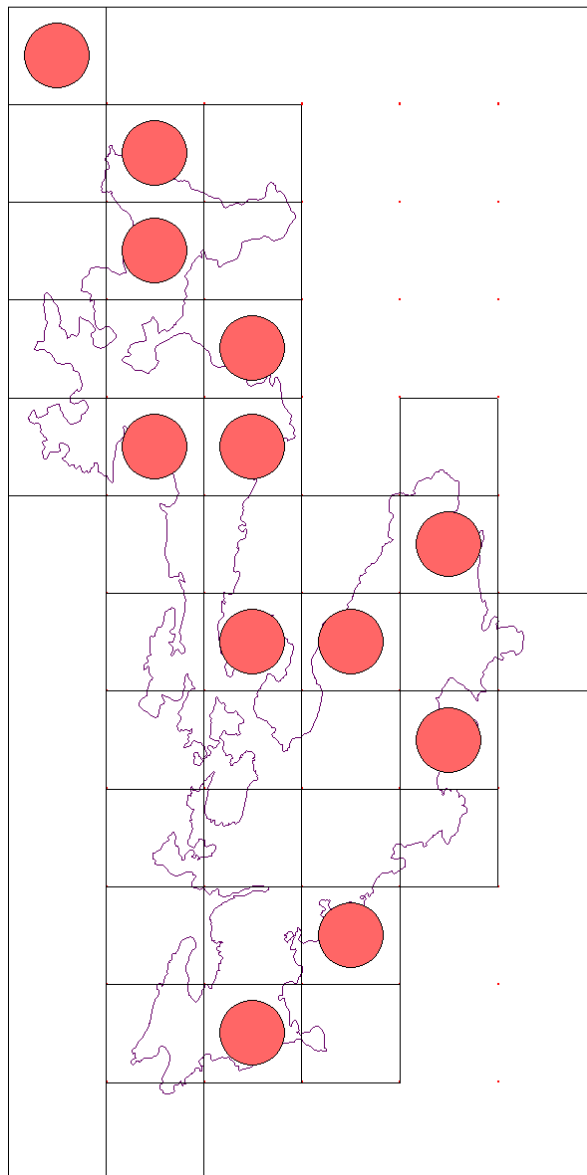
### **Painted lady *Vanessa cardui***

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. In the 2003 survey, it was recorded in the majority of grid squares and, since it is a strong flier and highly mobile, it is likely to occur throughout the area.

## 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. The following map shows the grid squares in which it was recorded in the 2003 survey, but it is known to occur more widely than this suggests.

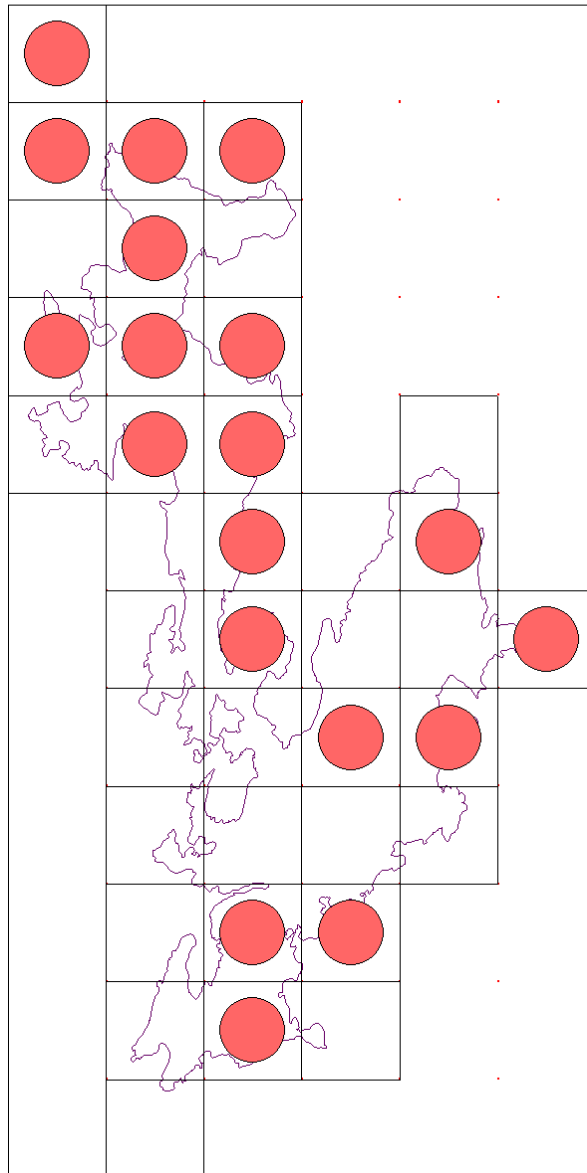
### Small Tortoiseshell



## Peacock *Inachis io*

A widespread and common species around Lough Carra, often seen where there are suitable nectar plants (especially Hemp agrimony and buddleia). The map shows where the species was recorded during the 2003 survey.

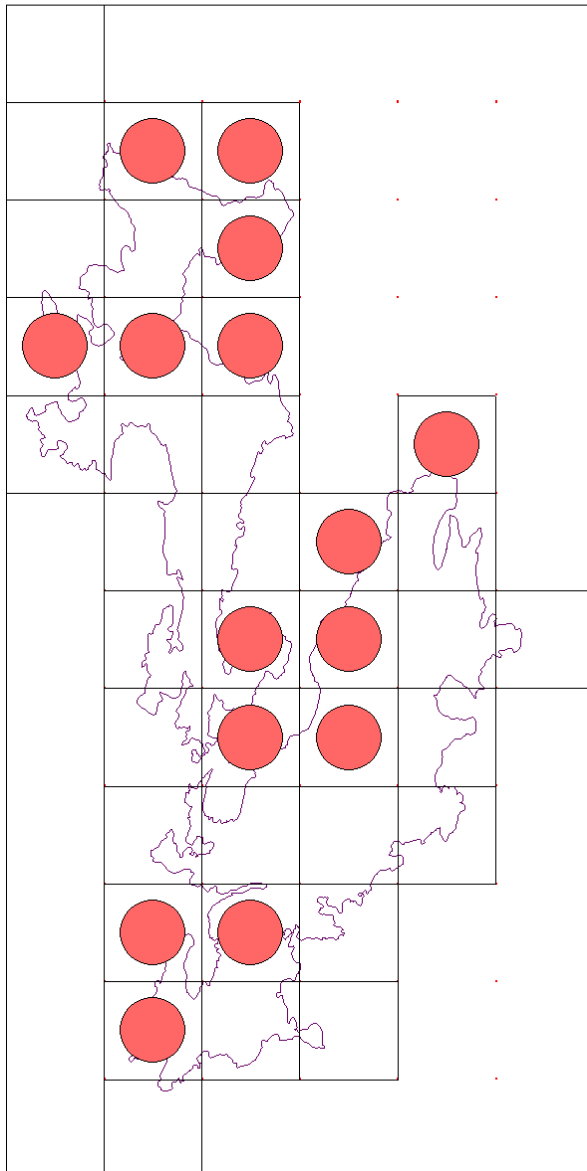
### Peacock



## Silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

This species is widely distributed in Ireland, occurring mostly in broad-leaved woodlands. The 2001 Millenium Atlas reported no records from the two 10 km<sup>2</sup> 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 both of the two 10 km<sup>2</sup> grid squares. The map below shows where it was recorded in the 2003 survey, but work since then has confirmed its presence in several other grid squares. It is likely to be seen wherever there is either broad-leaved woodland or mature hedgerows.

### Silver-washed Fritillary

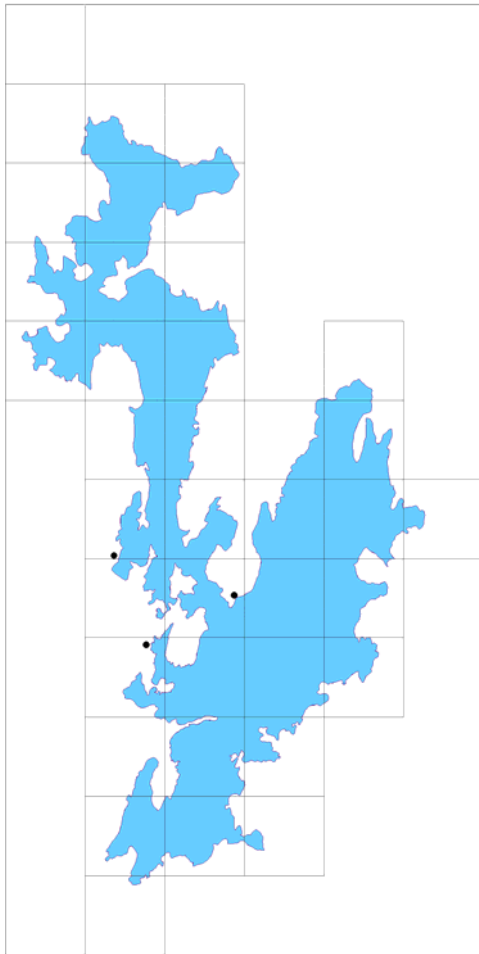


## **Marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia***

This uncommon species is known to be in severe decline in Ireland (Fox et al., 2006), and is currently known from three sites around Lough Carra (see map below).

Fieldwork in 2008 will investigate this species further to determine its status and define its distribution more precisely.

### **Marsh fritillary sites**



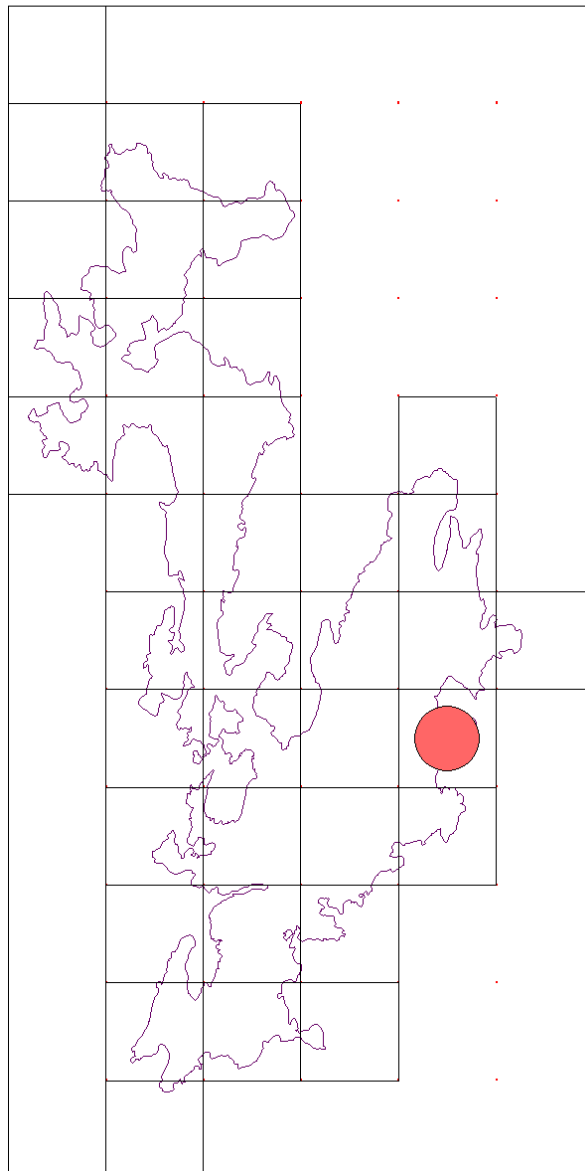
## Speckled wood *Pararge aegeria*

A widespread and common species, the Speckled wood was recorded in almost all the grid squares in the 2003 survey.

## Wall brown *Lasiommata megera*

Although this is a widespread species in Ireland, it had not been recorded in either of the Lough Carra 10 km<sup>2</sup> grid squares in the Millenium Atlas. However, in the 2006 report, it was recorded in both. In the 2003 survey, we recorded it in just one location (see map below). 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.

### Wall Brown

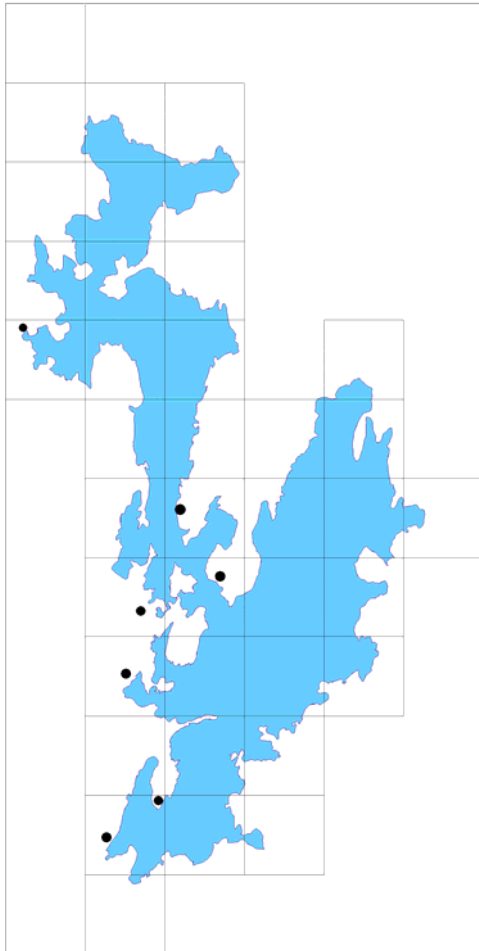


## **Grayling *Hipparchia semele***

This has clearly been an under-recorded species in the past, since the Millenium 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 km<sup>2</sup> grid square. Our records show at least seven separate sites where the Grayling occurs (see map below), always in association with exposed limestone or limestone pavement.

Fieldwork in 2008 will investigate this species further to determine its status and define its distribution more precisely.

### **Grayling sites**



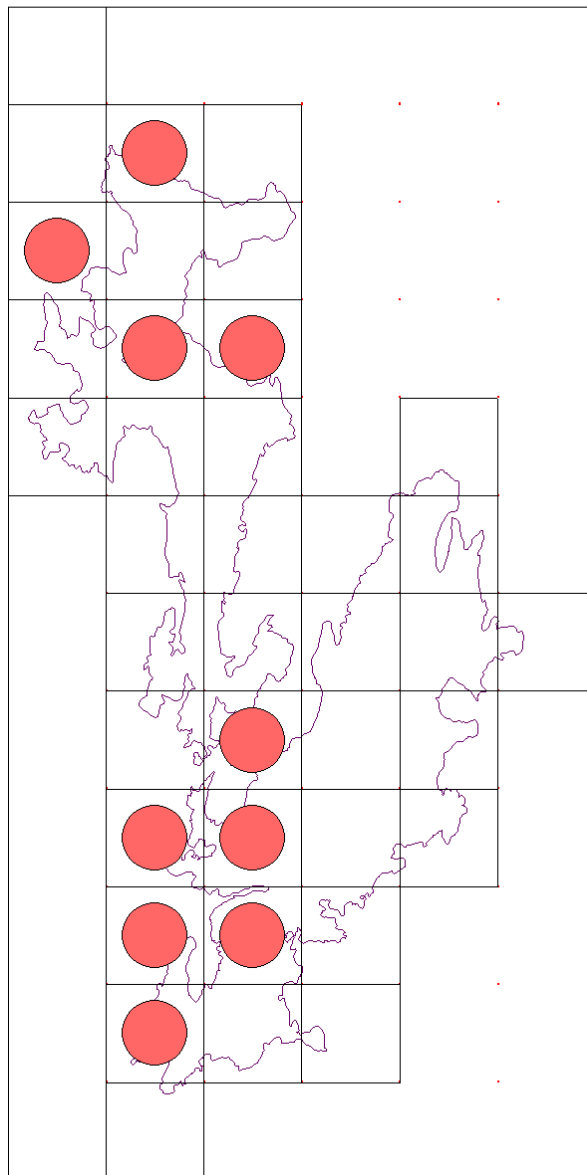
**Meadow brown *Maniola jurtina***

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 and was found to occur in ten grid squares in the 2003 survey (see map below).

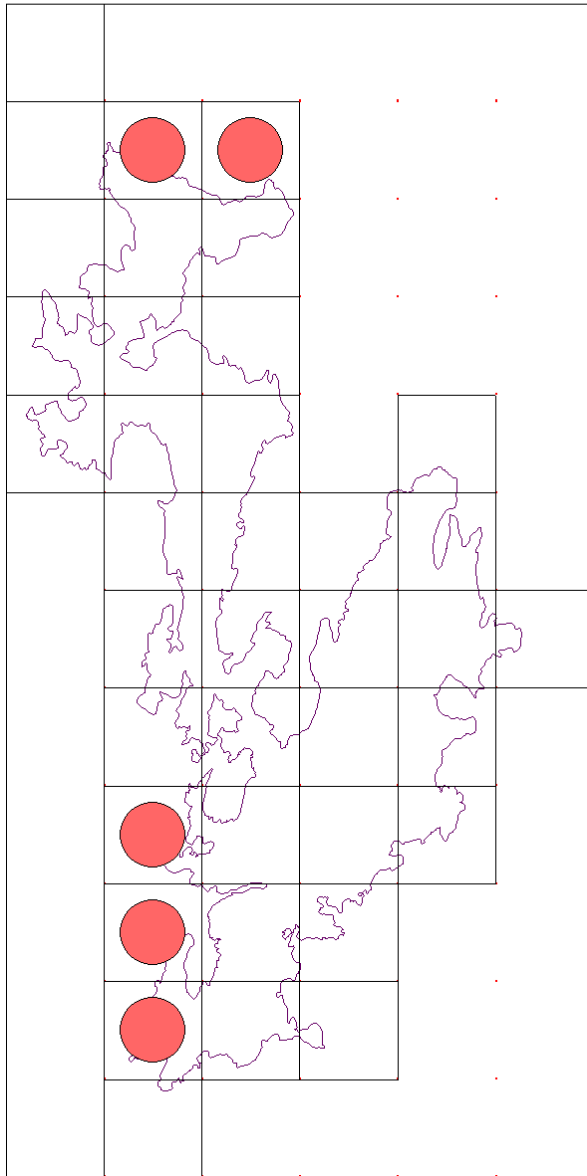
**Ringlet**



## Small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

In 2003, the Small heath was found in just five grid squares (see map below), although since then we have seen it in a few other locations.

### Small Heath



## **References**

Asher, J., M. Warren, R. Fox, P. Harding, G. Jeffcoate and S. Jeffcoate. 2001. The Millenium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Fox, R., J. Asher, T. Brereton, D. Roy and M. Warren. 2006. The State of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland. Pisces Publications, Newbury, UK.