

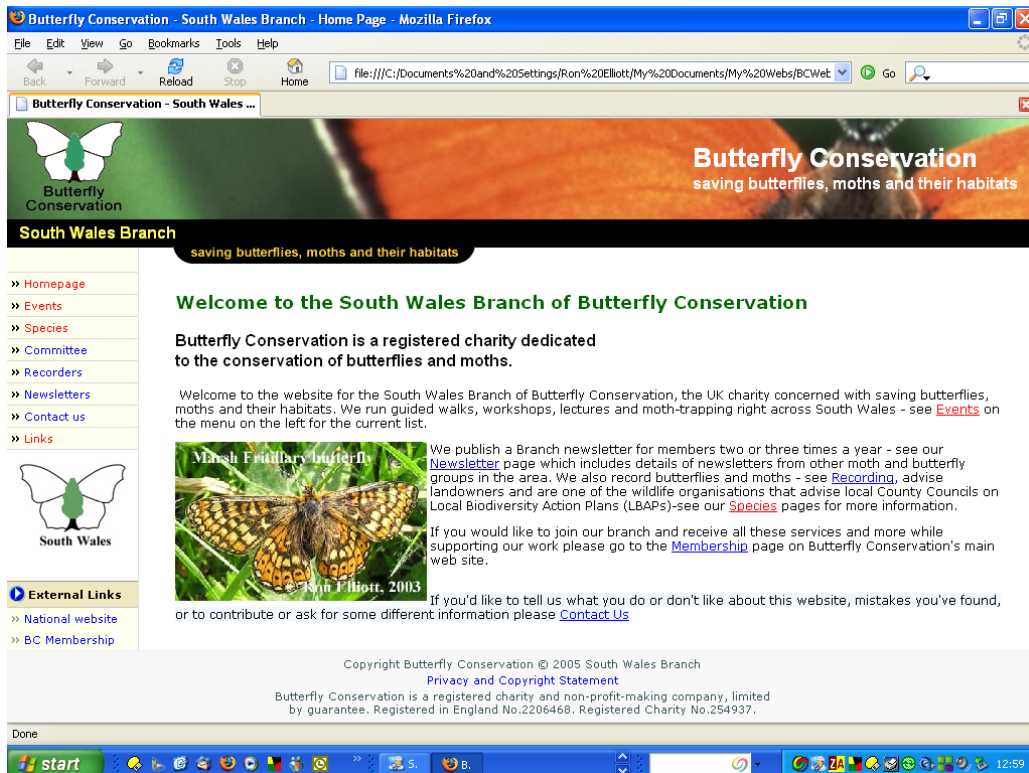


Butterfly News

The newsletter of the South Wales Branch of
Butterfly Conservation

Winter 2005

New Branch web site launched



In October 2005, a new web site for the South Wales of Butterfly Conservation was launched. It can be found at <http://www.southwales-butterflies.org.uk> and contains several pages devoted to the Branch Committee, County Recorders, events, species, newsletters and links. There is also a Contacts page allowing messages to be sent to the Branch. The screen dump above shows the Home Page for the site.

The Newsletters page gives links to newsletters from various groups in the area (including this one).

ON OTHER PAGES

2. Rearing a Humming-bird Hawk-moth
2. Wanted Egg Searchers
3. Mostly Good News for Marsh Fritillary Butterflies

Normally, the last year's editions of these newsletters will be available but older copies will be archived for access. Also included are copies of the newsletter produced by our sister Branch in North Wales.

The Species pages give links to various species of butterflies and moths that are included in Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) in South Wales

There are also links to the main Butterfly Conservation web site and the membership pages..

Why not point your browser at <http://www.southwales-butterflies.org.uk> and let us know what you think.

Rearing a Humming-bird Hawk-moth



An adult Humming-bird Hawk-moth

Photo: Peter Byles

On 28th June I noticed a Humming-bird Hawk-moth working its way around a Honeysuckle that was heavily covered by Common Cleavers. It inspected the ends of the branches with flowers and small seeds and I realised it was laying eggs. I followed it until I saw it lay on a part of the plant I could reach. I cut the stem of that branch and took it to watch it develop.

The egg was attached to the bristle of a small seed and, when laid, was a translucent pale green which started to turn golden after 4 days. By Day 6 the gold had moved to the top of the egg. The following day it hatched leaving a lid still attached but chewed. The larva had moved away from the empty egg case and, after a little searching, was found. It was yellow with four lines of black spots and a noticeable black spine, the head was a darker grey-yellow and the whole larva was approximately 2 mm. long.

The next day it was feeding on a seed capsule and fresh material was added for it. Within an hour it had moved on to the fresh material and was feeding on a flower. By Day 9, the larva had changed colour and was a darker more green colour and was still on the Cleavers, resting on the furred leaves.

By Day 12, the larva had reached 7 mm. long and was now a uniform green without the previous 'see-through' look. By the evening, it had shed its skin and was resting in a typical pose with the head up and the spine erect. The spine appeared quite long in relation to the body size and four white lines appeared on the body, two on each side. Later, I noticed that the larva had eaten its shed skin and was moving to fresh food plants. It started to feed immediately at the growing tip.

On Day 14, the larva had expanded to 12 mm. long

and had eaten most of the plant tip. It moved down the branch and started eating some of the leaves lower down. By Day 16 it had reached 17 mm. in length and was moving around during the day. It still preferred the small leaves at the tip of the plant rather than those lower on the stem. The larva seemed to be expanding almost visibly and was 25 mm. long by the next day. Sometime later on the same day, it had settled on the stem, head downward, apparently pecking at the stem. An hour later, it was attached by its prolegs into the notch it had made and cast its skin once again. This time, however, it did not eat the discarded skin.

Next day it was looking sleek in its new skin but the spine had faded to grey-green with black spots, a yellow tip and a small black band. The lower cream body line was gently scalloped and the tips of the legs were pink. It had grown to 35 mm long. By the following day, it had grown to a length of 50 mm and turned to a purply-brown colour and was placed in a small box with some dry earth and leaves ready for it to pupate.

On the 14th August it was missing from the container and I found it as a large pale hawk-moth pupa wedged between a couple of roof slates near the container. The pupal case was translucent and the contents appeared white with black spots.

It eventually emerged on 2nd September when it was found halfway out of its pupal case looking, unmistakably a Humming-bird Hawk-moth

Janet Atkinson

WANTED EGG SEARCHERS

I have been asked by Butterfly Conservation Wales office to co-ordinate volunteers and carry out a survey of known post 1995 Brown Hairstreak Egg locations and Blackthorn hedgerow assessment within 1 km of the same localities, in Pembrokeshire. This is carrying on from the dedicated and successful work that Richard Smith and other volunteers (including some of you) have been carrying out in Carmarthenshire. A similar exercise is also being carried out in Ceredigion. If you are able to help please let me know (see contact details below) and I can then let you know, a few days beforehand (according to the weather forecast), which area we will be covering and where we will be meeting.

I do hope you will be able to help - the more the merrier!! If you know anyone else who may like to assist please pass this message on.

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Mostly good news for Marsh Fritillary Butterflies

2005 has been an interesting year across our Branch's region for Marsh Fritillary butterflies.

In the field, things got off to a very unpromising start with planned visits to see them on the wing in Gower in mid May, pretty well washed out by bad weather. It was late May before reasonable numbers were seen on the wing at some of the stronger sites. The big field at Aberbargoed produced a timed count of 47 in 50 minutes, all freshly emerged on the 27th May.

Then Castlemartin (Pembs) produced eruptions. To quote Bob Haycock:

"The core area I walked recorded a peak of 470+ Marsh Fritillaries in 20 minutes timed search along a transect. In all, well over 1,000 Marsh Fritillaries were estimated to be on the wing in the main area. In places they were so dense that I estimated at least 1-2 butterflies per metre! For the first time I actually found it hard to walk through an area of grassland without treading on copulating pairs of Marsh Fritillaries. I have never witnessed butterflies of any species in such local profusion in this country before."

This is probably a classic example of an Marsh Fritillary population boom, every few years. But what a sight to witness!

Numbers at Rhos Llawrcwrt (Ceredigion) were on the up this year. The first were on the wing on 26th May, which is average for this site. Annual index will end up between 450 and 500 compared with 80 last year. By 20th June, David Woolley reported: "80 today, but a lot of them a bit tired". By then, we were also approaching the end of the flight season in Glamorgan and south of Cross Hands (Carms), most sites were now in small numbers, with males in particular looking quite worn.

However, in the meantime, something else special had come along. At a site in Ystradgynlais (upper Swansea valley, at the southern edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park) they had been freshly emerging in good numbers much later, on 13th June. On that warm, balmy Monday, I counted 64 in 16 minutes in a tiny field, where we had found 16 larval webs in September 2004. Crossing to the north of the minor road, I then counted another 26 in 9 minutes. Significant for me though was that the habitat to the north had been searched for adults and webs several years recently without success. I actually

watched adult Marsh Fritillaries flying over gardens, between houses and across the road between the branches of mature oaks at a height of 5 to 10 metres above the ground. I had certainly not witnessed this kind of "colonisation in action" before and, traditionally, the species is said to be constrained by moderately tall hedges. By Saturday (18th June), many were still very fresh looking, including a newly mated female egg laying north of the road. A volunteer web count day in late August, totted up just over 100 larval webs. Happily, the landowner is sympathetic and we are organising a local volunteer scrub clearance day to restore and increase habitat (see events).

More good news came with the addition of a total of 4 new populations discovered in the Ystradgynlais area, including the first for some time just over the border in Neath Port Talbot around Crynant. We are also hopeful of accessing funding to set up the early stages of management projects in the area. Similarly, Butterfly Conservation Wales (BCW) office secured some funds from Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) for a small pilot management project based at Tonyrefail, which is under way this winter. The Tonyrefail area holds a high concentration of suitable habitat and several land holdings in different ownerships that still contain viable populations across the local landscape area. Perhaps the only less encouraging news was our failure to find larval webs (or adults) across any of the recently occupied sites in Bridgend. However, several are large, with access difficulties, and we hope to target searches for adults next June.

Our reserve at Caeau Ffos Fach near Cross Hands (Carms) also produced a good year, despite difficulties with grazing. Good numbers of adults were seen on a local open day in mid June and the larval web count produced over 150 webs in September. Funding is now available to secure grazing, hedgerow and scrub management, and improved access. However, volunteers are still required to help with hand tool scrub management (see events).

Overall then it has been a positive and interesting year, with much to be done next year to continue to secure both site management and populations.

Richard Smith

Butterfly and Moth Recording - County Recorders in South Wales

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Contributions

Contributions to this newsletter are always welcome. They can be on any subject relevant to the Branch's activities.

Please send them to me at either 10 Flemish Court, Lamphey, Pembroke, SA71 5PA or direct by e-mail to pembs.leps@tiscali.co.uk.

**R. Elliott,
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If so, let me know at my e-mail address (pembs.leps@tiscali.co.uk) and I will send you future versions of the newsletter (in full colour) in this format. It will take just a few minutes to download.

Alternatively, copies are now available from the Branch web site at <http://www.southwales-butterflies.org.uk>.



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