



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No 22

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*A monthly newsletter covering
Gwent and Monmouthshire Vice County 35*

Editor: Martin Anthoney

January Indoor Meeting

Nine members attended our annual winter meeting, namely – Martin Anthoney, Roger James, Sheila Dupe, Julian Branscombe, Fiona Illing, Daryl Spittle, Kevin Dupé, David Smith and Richard Clarke. Apologies were received from Ian Smith.

Russel Hobson, Senior Conservation Officer for Butterfly Conservation (Wales) gave a very interesting Power Point presentation on ‘Butterfly and Moth Conservation Projects in Wales’. He showed the wide range of work BC is involved in all over Wales to protect our threatened butterflies and moths. One area of work this year will be to survey more areas for the Welsh Clearwing. A lot of success has been had in North Wales with surveying old birch trees for exit holes. The species has never been recorded in Monmouthshire, but was found in Glamorgan in the early part of the last century. According to Waring, the habitat is ‘open birch woodland and scrub on hillsides of wet, acidic pasture and moorland.’ If you know of any large birch trees in an open, sunny aspect then it is worth looking for emergence holes at 1 –2m above the ground. The pupal case is yellowish brown and 15 –18mm long. Roger James has ordered pheromone lures on behalf of our group, so please contact him if you think you know of a suitable site. The flight season is June to early July.

In the business part of the meeting it was agreed to hold our AGM on National Moth Day and Night, and to combine it with a field meeting at Magor Marsh. This is on Saturday 9th July. The AGM will take place at 7.30pm at the Derek Upton Centre and will be followed by a slide show at 8pm with moth trapping from dusk onwards.

Julian Branscombe raised the issue of a planning application to build a wind farm on Coity Mountain – part of the only known site for the Silurian moth. He explained how the survey work for the Environmental Statement had involved 5 visits looking for adults in poor weather, whilst also carrying out a bird survey! It was felt that it should be established what the larval foodplant and habitat requirements are before a proper assessment could be made of the likely impact of the wind farm. It was agreed that Kevin should send a letter from the Monmouthshire Moth & Butterfly Group outlining our concerns. Russel Hobson would also be sending a letter from Butterfly Conservation .

Kevin Dupé

Cleddon Bog LNR.

Cleddon Bog Local Nature Reserve (SO509044) is situated on the Trellech Plateau about one mile south west of Trellech. Some 17ha in area it occupies the site of a glacial lake and is thought to be a relic of Trellech Common. Together with the adjacent Forestry Commission Broad Meend woodland, it constitutes one of the most important lepidoptera sites in Gwent.



Cleddon Bog

The site is important not for the number of national rarities – only one UK BAP Priority species (White-line Snout) and three Species of Conservation Concern have been recorded – but for its wide range of species, including some for which it is the only Gwent site. 57 nationally notable or local species have occurred there.

Eighteen species of butterfly have been recorded. Silver-washed Fritillary was never common, but Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which used to fly in numbers over the bog, has not been reported since 1987 in line with its disappearance from most of its eastern localities in Gwent. Nor has Green Hairstreak been seen in recent years. Marbled White and Speckled Wood are perhaps the only species which have increased in numbers.

The tally for macro moths stands at 232. Interest starts early in the year, with the day-flying Orange Underwing and in March / April Cleddon Bog is the only Gwent site where Scarce Prominent can regularly be caught. This is one of eight prominents found there, including the thinly-scaled Great Prominent. There are seven species of snout and fan-foot, including the aptly named Beautiful Snout, both of the small White-line Snout and Pinion-streaked Snout and the tiny Marsh Oblique-barred, for which this is the only Gwent site. Thirteen pug species and five footmen, including Four-dotted and Red-necked, show the variety of species present. Other species of interest include the Suspected – its only Gwent locality, Barred Chestnut, Little Thorn, Lead Belle and Satin Lutestring.

Many of the more interesting heathland moths have been lost, with for example neither Wood Tiger nor Clouded Buff being seen since 1969. Nevertheless, there are still many species present which are reminiscent of the upland moors in the north west of the county eg Chevron, Northern Spinach, Narrow-winged Pug, Anomalous and Neglected Rustic.

I was introduced to Cleddon Bog by Neil Horton, who insisted in his 1994 book on calling the site Trellech Bog, the name by which he had known it in his earlier years. Apart from the lowland peat bog and the coniferised woodland, the interface area between boggy heathland and woodland, where patches of bilberry and heather grow under fairly open rowan and other broadleaved trees, contributes many important lepidoptera species such as the Bilberry Pug and Welsh Wave moths.

Welsh Wave



It is hoped to carry out management work on the bog to reduce encroachment, but it is important that any clearance work does not harm the interface area between bog and woodland.

Martin Anthoney

O.T.D.? R.I.P.!

Have you noticed that words can change their meaning depending on who is using them? To a conservationist “improved grassland” usually means a sward of rye grass: improved for milk yield, but for biodiversity extremely poor. Similarly, to “develop” an area, especially in an urban context, often means housing, factories etc but to an urban ecologist it may mean the destruction of a fascinating and diverse habitat.

Well, the Old Town Dock (OTD) in Newport is being developed. For about five years I have been studying the wildlife on this site. So much infill was used in filling this dock it is impossible to discern what the substrate is plus the fact some of the rock used in the infill probably came from all over the world as ships’ ballast. The diversity of substrate and the very shallow soil led to a great diversity of plantlife. It was without doubt one of the finest examples of short ruderal habitat I have ever seen.

Here grew bee and pyramidal orchids, mullein, sea carrot, clover and birdsfoot trefoil in abundance. Oxeye daisy, tansy, black knapweed and forget-me-not all contributed to the floral diversity with the occasional appearance of broomrape to make a botanist’s eyes light up.

Because of the range of plants present and the fact that it was a warm site with patches of bare earth for insects to bask it was a wonderful place for butterflies and moths. Meadow Browns, Common Blues and Small and Large Whites were there in abundance. Marbled White had a small colony and later in the summer the flowers of buddleia were liberally studded with Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral.



Six-spot Burnet larva

Of the day-flying moths, there was a large colony of Six-spot Burnet. On one occasion I counted 65 larvae of the species tucking in to the ample supply of birdsfoot trefoil. In 1999 Kevin Dupé and I estimated a population of 100+ Burnet Companion present on a single day. Similar numbers were encountered the following year. Latticed Heath was there and it was not unusual to see 50+ on a warm summer’s day. We never attempted night time trapping. Piles of discarded beer cans and the occasional syringe suggested that a nocturnal visit to this part of Newport might be unwise – we may be daft but we are not stupid.



Burnet Companion

Great as this site was for biodiversity you could not defend it on the grounds of aesthetics. Mounds of tyres, burned out cars and the detritus of a could-not-care-less society did not make it a place of great beauty although it could have qualified for the Turner prize.

When I was asked (frequently) what satisfaction I derived from visiting the site I used the analogy of the Buddhist monk who was contemplating the perfection of the cone of Mount Fujiama. In the foreground and middle ground of this view was the ugliness of a sprawling city. He was asked whether this didn't spoil his enjoyment but he replied that he was enjoying the wonder of Fuji's cone, not what lay in front of him. Exactly. I was enjoying the plants and insects, not the rubbish, and *they* did not seem to mind the rubbish.

Roger James

Newport News

Our first records for the new year came from the recently re-named Newport Wetlands Reserve with a Drinker larva at Uskmouth on the 7th January and another at Goldcliff on the 10th. There was then a long wait until 24th Jan when I recorded Pale Brindled Beauty at Summerhill. On 30th at the same site I recorded Early Grey, Common Quaker and Clouded Drab. Early Grey really lived up to its name and according to my records for Newport was at least three weeks earlier than any previous record. Similarly with Common Quaker which was also about three weeks early and Clouded Drab exceptionally early.: over the past five years I have had to wait until early March before it made an appearance. On 2nd February I recorded Grey Shoulder-knot and Hebrew Character, both again very early records.

Early Moth

At Red House, Goldcliff, Kevin recorded Winter Moth on 3rd with Early Moth at Goldcliff on 4th. Red House, currently the workshop and vehicle depot of CCW at the Wetlands Reserve, is scheduled to become the new Reserve HQ. This has some major benefits. Not only will the staff and visitors get away from the penetrating pong of the sewage treatment plant where they are currently housed but it also opens up the opportunity for more frequent trapping at the new venue. Another welcome development on the Reserve is the placement of a small portacabin near the reserve car park for use by voluntary wardens and staff. After conducting a small party around the reserve to see the starling roost on a freezing cold day in January the warmth and comfort afforded by this new amenity was much appreciated. The good news for nothing is that it has mains electricity and will obviate the need for generators when trapping on the Reserve.



But back to the moths. On 6th February I recorded Oak Beauty at Summerhill whilst Kevin had Chestnut on the Gaer on 7th and two Dotted Borders at Goldcliff on 8th. On the 9th the first pug of the year was a Double-striped at Summerhill. I had a Satellite on the 11th and Dark Chestnut on 14th. This is the last record I am able to report with the editor's deadline looming. It will be interesting to note whether the records for the rest of the year show an increase in the number of species making early appearances.

I have completed the Newport Moth Report for 2004 and it has kindly been printed by the Countyside Service of Newport CC. Last year we recorded 322 macro moths and 38 micros. We added 11 new macros and 2 new micros to the all-time list.

We have lost Darryl Spittle as a Newport recorder: he has moved out of our area but will still be submitting VC35 records to Martin. Working in a sparsely recorded part of Newport (Rogerstone) Darryl made a valuable contribution to our moth records of Newport.

Roger James

Recent Highlights

Yet another year starts with a series of amazingly early records, but as I look at the snow falling outside as I type this, yet another false spring where cold east winds set in to decimate the early starters. Mind you, the bumble bee I can see outside looks quite pretty flying in the snow!

The only butterfly records I have received to date are:

1st Feb Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral flying in my Risca garden
16th Feb Another Red Admiral at Penallt (Ian Rabjohns). Presumably both Red Admirals had managed to overwinter.

First 2005 dates for moths are:

20th Jan Chestnut (Risca)
24th Jan Pale Brindled Beauty (Summerhill, Newport)
30th Jan Early Grey, Common Quaker, Clouded Drab (Summerhill, Newport)
1st Feb Dark Chestnut (Risca)
2nd Feb Grey Shoulder-knot, Hebrew Character (Summerhill, Newport)
Early Moth (Risca)
3rd Feb Winter Moth (Goldcliff)
5th Feb Dotted Border (Risca)
6th Feb Oak Beauty (Summerhill, Newport)
9th Feb Double-striped Pug (Summerhill, Newport)
11th Feb Satellite (Summerhill, Newport).

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 23rd/30th April

Butterfly Conservation Members' Day.

Talk on Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary study in a North Wales forest by Nigel Bourn, followed by a site visit to Merthyr Mawr NNR for Grizzled & Dingy Skipper, Brown Argus and early spring species. Meet 11am at Glamorgan Heritage Coast Centre, Southerndown. Possibly combined with moth trap night before or after.

Contact: Richard Smith 01446 793229.

Friday 10th June

Newport Wetlands Reserve Moth Watch - trapping and identifying moths near the Reserve car park after dusk. Leader: Kevin Dupé, Reserves Manager Newport Wetlands

Meet: Reserve car park, Uskmouth ST 334834

Time: 9.00pm - midnight

Saturday 9th July 2005

National Moth Night. We hope to be running an event at Magor Marsh, with a site visit to either Magor Marsh or Slade Wood in the afternoon, then an early evening talk followed (weather permitting) by a barbecue and light trapping.

Sunday 24th July

Butterflies and Moths – a walk at Uskmouth to observe these beautiful insects.

Leader: Martin Anthoney.

Location: Uskmouth

Meet: Newport Wetlands Reserve car park ST 334834

Time: 2pm – 4pm

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