



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No 52

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

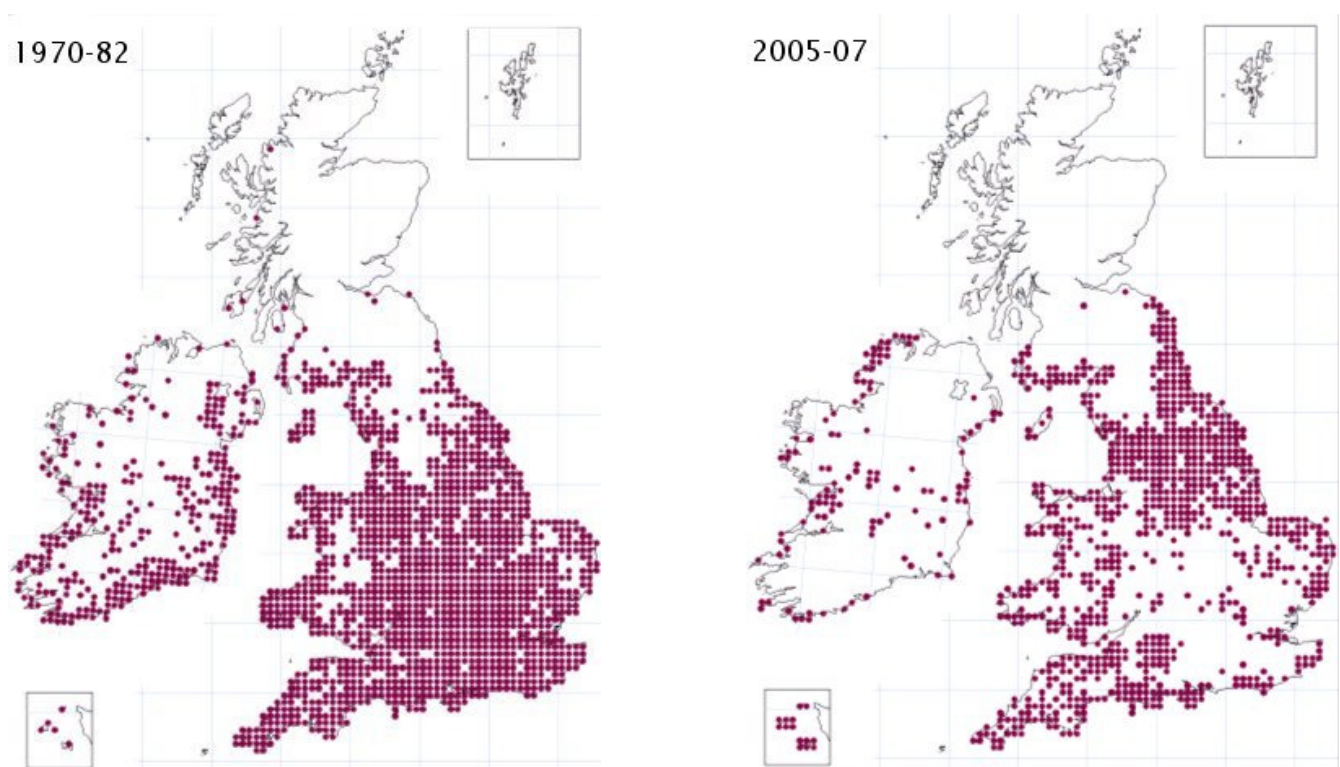
Editor: Martin Anthoney

Wall Brown Butterfly in Gwent

Like the White Admiral featured in last month's newsletter, the Wall Brown (*Lasiommata megera*) is a new addition to the UK BAP Priority list and the corresponding Welsh Section 42 list.

In his 1994 book, Neil Horton described the Wall Brown as "frequenter gardens, dry south-facing banks and sunny woodland rides and lane sides. Though widespread and fairly common in Monmouthshire it is decidedly less common than thirty and forty years ago".

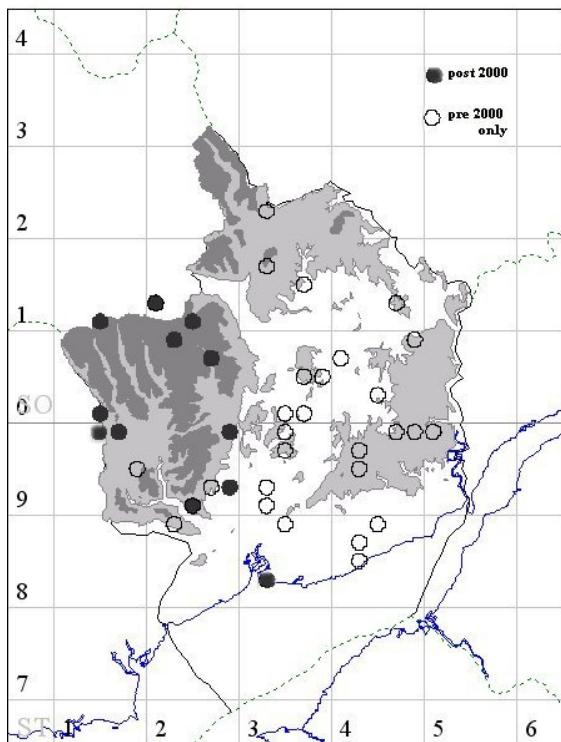
The butterfly is named after its habit of spending up to three-quarters of its time basking on walls or rocks to regulate its body temperature. There are two generations per year, with adults flying in May / June and again in July / September, though it is usually only found in sparse numbers.



*Changes in the distribution of the Wall Brown from ca. 30 years ago
(Courtesy of Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation)*

The reason for its inclusion as a UK BAP Priority species can clearly be seen from the above maps; despite some colonisation northwards, it has declined substantially in the past 30 to 40 years, particularly in central southern England. With an estimated decline of over 70%, for some reason the second generation has been much more badly affected than the spring generation (45% decline). The most stable, high population-density sites contain a significant proportion of bare ground, such as coastal dunes, chalk grassland and post-industrial land. The Wall Brown distribution seems to be moving towards a coastal and upland one. This is certainly confirmed by results for Gwent this century, which show a clear contraction of range westwards and upwards:

1615 Wall (*Lasiommata megera*)

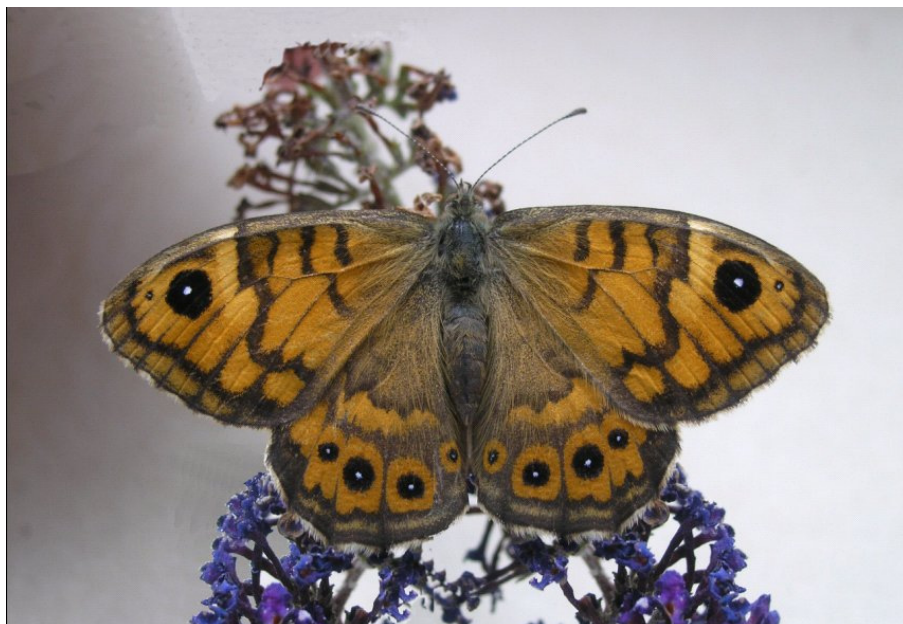


Wall Brown distribution in Gwent
(Solid dots represent records since 2000.
Open circles are sites where only pre-2000 records exist.
Light grey > 100m altitude.
Dark grey > 300m altitude.)

Since Gwent is on the range edge for many species or distribution changes, national trends often seem to be magnified in the county trends.

The Wall Brown distribution in Gwent is now very close to that of the Grayling, which in view of the many similarities in behaviour between the two species is perhaps hardly surprising. Certainly though, Neil Horton’s “sunny woodland rides and lane sides” to find the butterfly are now more likely to be regenerating spoil tips and sheltered upland sites.

Wall Brown



Wall Brown larvae feed on a range of grasses such as tor-grass, false brome, cock’s-foot and various bents. The eggs are laid on dry brown vegetation or exposed root tips in warm sheltered sites, often associated with disturbed ground. Research suggests that egg temperature in such conditions can be twenty degrees warmer than ambient temperature.

Many questions remain. Why has the second generation been harder hit than the first? Why are the grass-feeding Wall Brown and Grayling and the violet-feeding Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary all now restricted to essentially the same area of upland Gwent? If climatic changes such as global warming are involved, what stages in the life cycle are affected?

This article was inspired by, and contains information from, the excellent talks given by Richard Fox (Butterfly Conservation) and Rebecca Harker (Oxford Brookes University) at the BNM meeting in Birmingham on 29th March, to both of whom thanks are due.

Martin Anthoney

Johnson Safari Moth Trap



I have done some experimenting with this trap, which is composed of white netting, a base and top ring stretched by three supporting arms. The upper netting forms a cone with provision for a light source which can be anything from an 8W actinic tube up to a 125W Mercury Vapour bulb.. The trap can be placed on the ground, preferably sitting on a white sheet, or hung in a tree by the straps provided. The white netting of which the trap is composed enhances the fluorescent effect of the UV light to the extent that the whole trap glows.

I have used it in both this country and in New Zealand, equipped with a 40W actinic U-tube. It certainly attracts moths, but retention is a problem. A zip on the side allows for egg boxes to be placed inside, but when the trap is unzipped the whole trap vibrates causing disturbance to the moths inside, particularly geometers and micros. It also requires a certain amount of dexterity to remove the egg boxes for inspection. From my experience, I would use it as an attended trap, particularly in woodland where it can be hung on a convenient branch or for travelling, particularly abroad where luggage weight

can be a problem, although my preference would be for a lightweight aluminium Skinner trap.

When travelling abroad, in this time of increasing security at airports, the choke etc with its box and protruding wires can look a little suspicious in luggage. My suggestion to avoid any problems is to tape a wiring diagram to the choke plus a copy of Waring and Fry's AES guide to moth traps. I have taken my equipment to Switzerland (once) and New Zealand (three times) without problems, but you never know!

Roger James

The Silurist ?

When I received a copy of the recently-published *Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales*, I naturally looked for any reference to butterflies and moths, which I found in a short article under "Insects". I was disappointed to find it included a number of glaring errors: our own speciality, the Silurian, has suddenly changed its name to *Silurist* ! The more complicated scientific name, *Eriopygodes imbecilla* was correctly spelt. The article states that the moth was discovered in 1972 (correct) on moorland near Usk (incorrect), when, as we all know, it was found in the north west of the county.

This erudite volume, extending to some 1059 pages, has been a long time in preparation and is truly encyclopaedic; a shame that inadequate proof reading detracts from the overall impression of the book.

Roger James

Moths Count Update

It is almost a year since Butterfly Conservation officially launched Moths Count. This partnership project aims to raise awareness of the importance of moths, stimulate and encourage moth recording in the wider community, and to establish an ongoing National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS) for macro-moths. The NMRS database will provide status, trend and distribution information which will, among many other things, help to identify conservation priorities for the 900+ species of macro-moth.

The Moths Count team has been very busy arranging public moth events to draw in new people to moth recording. In 2007, 33 of these free events were held, attracting over 700 people, many of whom had no previous mothing encounters! Several were held with primary schools. The project also developed Garden Moths Count, a simple 'citizen science' survey of distinctive, common moths aimed at the gardening public and their families. Attractive and informative leaflets and fact sheets were produced to

help people find out more about moths and moth recording. We believe that engaging and enthusing new people, especially children, is important for the future of moth recording.

Our free training events, which aim to support and enhance the skills of the existing moth recording community, were highly successful in 2007. Over 300 people attended a range of training courses and feedback was very positive. The training was aimed at moth recorders with varying levels of experience from 'introduction to moths' events through to identifying difficult moths by their genitalia and surveys for UK Biodiversity Action Plan moths. At least 70 more public moth events and training workshops are planned for 2008. For further details of events near you please visit www.mothscount.org.

Much behind the scenes work has been going on leading to the establishment of the NMRS. Database hardware and software have been installed, the NMRS data policy has been circulated and a national recording network has been developed. For the first time in a quarter of a century, we have a national recording scheme that covers all of the macro-moths! The national network continues to grow and 25 new County Moth Recorders have been recruited to fill gaps. The four national gatherings for moth recorders held in 2007 were a huge success. These meetings took place in England, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man. In the autumn we will be holding a meeting in Northern Ireland and discussions are underway for a visit to the Channel Islands. Further national meetings are planned in 2009, and further details will follow once dates and locations have been finalised.

Progress with the National Moth Recording Scheme database is forging ahead and County Moth Recorders are being approached for copies of local datasets. At the time of writing, we have collated 23 vice-county datasets, equating to around 2.5 million moth records! These are currently being formatted for incorporation into the NMRS database. A further wave of dataset requests will go out shortly. Over the next few months, the NMRS database will continue to grow not only in the number of records, but also in geographical coverage. Later this year, we hope to produce the first provisional distribution maps through the Moths Count website – the first time national maps have been available for all of the macro-moths. How can you take part in the NMRS? It is easy, simply continue to send your moth records to your County Moth Recorder.

During 2008, we will also start to put together a critical species booklet. This will be an up-to-date resource about moths that are troublesome to identify. We will continue to support the existing moth recording community in various ways including the provision of an extended program of training events. Don't forget National Moth Night (and day) on 7 June 2008; as ever, many events have been planned by local moth groups, natural history societies and Butterfly Conservation branches for the annual celebration of moths and moth recording. With a daytime element and the first ever target habitat (orchards), there is every reason to organise a public event and introduce new people to the wonderful world of moths. Garden Moths Count will run again this year from 21 June to 6 July; this two week window will hopefully provide some great conditions for moths. There is also a year-long online survey of the Humming-bird Hawk-moth being carried out in association with BBC Radio 4. The beauty of these Garden Moths Count surveys is that participants do not need any specialist equipment or knowledge to get involved so they are ideal for friends and family who are not yet active mothers. For further details visit www.mothscount.org.

The recruitment and engagement of the public will also continue so we have another busy year ahead of us! The Moths Count team would like to thank all of the enthusiastic individuals and organisations who are continuing to support this exciting project.

For more information about the Moths Count project or National Moth Recording Scheme or to join the project mailing list please visit www.mothscount.org or contact nmrs@butterfly-conservation.org, 01929 406009 or Butterfly Conservation, Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Dorset BH20 5QP.

Zoë Randle and Richard Fox, Moths Count, Butterfly Conservation.

Newport Report

Butterflies

Poor weather has meant that I have very little to report. On 27th March Sheila Dupé saw one Red Admiral at Goldcliff, Gareth Tonks saw another near the Transporter Bridge, whilst I saw two Small Tortoiseshell on the same date at Newport Cemetery.

Moths

Another slow start to the month with the first moths of March appearing on the 7th in the form of Satellite, Nut-tree Tussock and Lead-coloured Drab at Melbourne Way. On 14th I recorded Double-striped Pug and Yellow Horned, followed by Grey Shoulder-knot on the 21st. I had Red Chestnut on 28th March, a first site record.

It has been a very slow start to the year with only 23 species recorded thus far. We had recorded 33 species by the end of March 2007 although 2006 had only produced 13 species. We await April with some trepidation – will it be a mini summer like last year or will the present chaotic weather continue?

Roger James

Recent Highlights

March has generally been an extremely slow month in Gwent, with very few records submitted and snow over Easter! Things seemed to have picked up in the last few days of the month, so perhaps the future is brighter (both literally and metaphorically!).

First 2008 dates

2008 first date	species and location	2007 first date	2006 first date	2005 first date
1 st March	Male brimstone butterfly at Chepstow Castle dell, (Shelley Cross)	7 th March	19 th March	23 rd March
7 th March	Satellite	-	20 th March	11 th Feb
	Nut-tree Tussock	8 th April	22 nd April	21 st April
	Lead-coloured Drab	-	10 th April	24 th March
	all at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)			
14 th March	Yellow Horned	9 th March	27 th March	9 th March
	Double-striped Pug	26 th March	16 th April	9 th Feb
	at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)			
17 th March	Pale Pinion at Llandogo (Simon Phipps)	-	2 nd April	20 th March
21 st March	Grey Shoulder-knot	2 nd Feb	-	19 th March
	at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)			
26 th March	Red Chestnut at Risca (Martin Anthony)	5 th April	10 th April	16 th March
31 st March	Brindled Pug at Risca (Martin Anthony)	16 th March	27 th March	20 th March
	3 Small Eggar at Redhouse Barns, Goldcliff (Kevin Dupé)	28 th March	4 th April	-

Dates for your Diary 2008

- Sunday 11th May Moth trapping at Waunfawr Park, Crosskeys. Details to follow.
- Saturday 31st May Roger James & I will be doing a butterfly identification and recording course at Parc Cwm Darran and Aberbargoed Grasslands. Details from Gwent Wildlife Trust (phone 01600 740600).
- Saturday 7th June National Moth Night. Target species this year are *Anania funebris* (a pretty day-flying micro which does occur in our county), Bordered Gothic, Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk and Orchards as a new UK BAP priority habitat.
- Saturday 14th June “Go Wild” show, this year in Blaenau Gwent at Bryn Bach Park, Tredegar.
- Saturday 25th October Butterfly Conservation (South Wales Branch) annual members’ day of talks etc. Details to follow.

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