



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

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

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Two Early Pioneers

As part of this occasional series looking in detail at some of the early Gwent lepidopterists, this article covers two of the earliest known recorders, Charles Conway and George Lock.

Charles Conway (1797 – 1860)

In 1833 Charles Conway produced the first published list of lepidoptera in the county (Mag. Nat. History 6: 224-278 and 541 – 544 1833). This list covered the butterflies to be found in the vicinity of Pontrhydyrun where Conway was managing partner of the tin plate works (established 1806). Pontrhydyrun (“ the bridge of the ford of the ash trees”) is now part of Cwmbran. The Conways were a large and wealthy family in the area, who in addition to setting up the tin plate works also founded the local Baptist church in 1815.

In addition to recording butterflies, Charles Conway was a member of the Botanical Society of London and is best known for his collection of plants (1822 to 1852) which was purchased by the Cardiff Municipal Museum in 1870 and subsequently formed the basis of the Welsh National Herbarium.

Conway’s butterfly list contained 36 species:

Small Skipper	Green-veined White	Red Admiral	Silver-washed Fritillary
Large Skipper	Orange-tip	Painted Lady	Marsh Fritillary
Dingy Skipper	Brown Hairstreak	Small Tortoiseshell	Speckled Wood
Grizzled Skipper	Purple Hairstreak	Peacock	Wall
Clouded Yellow	Small Copper	Comma	Marbled White
Brimstone	Brown Argus	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Gatekeeper
Black-veined White	Common Blue	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Meadow Brown
Large White	Mazarine Blue	High Brown Fritillary	Small Heath
Small White	Holly Blue	Dark Green Fritillary	Ringlet

Although 31 of the 36 species are still present in the county, some of the records may be a surprise to modern lepidopterists. In the 1830s the Black-veined White, though already in decline nationally, was still common in south Wales. It disappeared from the county ca. 1893 and from Britain ca. 1925. Though probably climatic rather than habitat-based, its extinction has never been fully explained. Another extinct species is the Mazarine Blue. Already on its last legs in south Wales by the 1830s, Conway recorded it from only one meadow. The last British colony disappeared in 1904.

Conway’s Brown Hairstreak is the only record for the species in Gwent: without further detail it is impossible to judge whether this was a mis-identification or whether it is another species which has become extinct in the county. We can be more certain about Pearl-bordered Fritillary (last county record 1986) and High Brown Fritillary (last county record 1992). Marsh Fritillary could be the next species to go: described by Conway as “so abounds in this neighbourhood that almost any quantity might be captured during the season” it is now down to a single site in the county.

The only two species not in Conway's list which are present in the area today are Grayling and Green Hairstreak, both occurring today in the upland parts of Torfaen – a coincidence or not?

George Lock

In his book *The Natural History of British Butterflies*, published in 1871, Edward Newman included several records supplied by one George Lock. Neil Horton in his 1994 book stated: "I have been unable to obtain any information about George Lock. Although his Monmouthshire records are of great interest unfortunately one or two of them are rather suspect....Neither has it always been possible to recognise with certainty the localities he named but this is no fault of his but is due to the change in local place names".

Intrigued by the absence of any records from George Lock before 1871 or, more importantly subsequently, I set out to try and find more about him. Armed with an important weapon not available to Neil Horton – the internet - a search of the 1871 census for Newport, where most of his records originated, yielded only one likely candidate, a 27-year-old bath attendant, George Lock, living in St Woollos, Newport, with his wife and two children. Born in Devon in 1844, reference to earlier censuses suggested he moved to Newport in the 1860s.

Could this be the George Lock mentioned by Newman? A search of later censuses produced a shock: George Lock died in Dec 1871 and his widow and children moved away to Bristol. Perhaps this is the reason why there was only one set of records from George Lock – before his early death aged 27 he would have lived in Newport for less than ten years. Proof no, but the evidence fits with this being the George Lock who produced the second published list of butterflies for the county.

Newman's book contained twelve George Lock records:

Black-veined White	Common, its range extending from about a mile below Cardiff to a place called Llanwern, a distance of about fifteen miles.
Wood White	Scarce and only taken in St Julian's Wood
Marbled White	Common near Heullis' Wood
Dark Hairstreak (<i>Thecla pruni</i>)	I have taken a single specimen in St Julian's Wood
Silver-studded Blue	Common at Castle-y-Bwch
Mazarine Blue	I have taken one specimen at St Julian's
Comma	Rather scarce in St Julian's and Heullis' Wood
Dark Green Fritillary	Rather scarce, Heullis' Wood
High Brown Fritillary	Rather scarce, Heullis' Wood
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Common
Greasy Fritillary	Very common near Heullis' and St Julian's Woods
Gatekeeper	Common

Greasy Fritillary is an old name for Marsh Fritillary, so-called because as the wing scales wear off the butterfly gains a shiny or greasy appearance. Dark, or Black, Hairstreak was only discovered as a British species in 1828 and this is almost certainly a mis-identification of White-letter Hairstreak. Of Silver-studded Blue, Neil Horton wrote: "Castell-y-Bwch lies just to the south of Cwmbran New Town and I have known the area since boyhood. It has always seemed to me a most unlikely site for this insect and I find this record very suspect." 30+ years after Conway's list, Black-veined White and Mazarine Blue were still hanging on in Lock's time.

Regarding the place names, St Julian's Wood is still extant on the Caerleon Road, but the location of Heullis' Wood has been a mystery. Suspicious of its similarity to Henllys, near Cwmbran, I checked with the original (1840 – 1880) OS map of the area. The names are hand-written and on the map "Cwrt Henllys" looks remarkably like "Cwrt Heullis". In Lock's time this would have been an important and well-wooded estate: remnants of the broad-leaved woodland are still to be seen amongst the modern conifer plantations and reservoir (Pant-yr-eos) of the area. Could this have been "Heullis' Wood"?

Thanks are due to Roger James for supplying the list from Newman's book and for other information in this article.

Martin Anthoney.

Hmm.....Hmm.....Hawkmoth

On Tuesday of this week (Oct 24th) I observed a Humming-bird Hawk Moth on a neighbour's fuchsia bush. Nothing unusual about this, although rather late in the season. My partner and her daughter had never seen one before and were fascinated!

An hour later I was in my local SPAR shop when another Humming-bird Hawk Moth entered the shop. It flew to the back of the shop where there are racks of birthday and greeting cards. Some of the cards are illustrated with high quality photographs of flowers. The moth immediately attempted to nectar from them! As it moved from card to card it became frustrated and confused. Eventually it flew off and hid behind packs of guinness tins. My query is this. As a mainly continental species why did it choose guinness and not the adjacent tins of lager!

I returned the confused insect to its normal environment.

Mike Sayce

Wentwood Consultation

On 18th October I attended, on behalf of Monmouthshire Moth and Butterfly Group, a seminar held by the Woodland Trust arranged to let various interest groups have an input into the management of the part of Wentwood recently purchased by the Trust.

We were told that the consultation exercise was to include historic landscape, public access and conservation / biodiversity. Based on the various inputs a draft plan should be completed by the end of the year and sent out for consultation. It is hoped that the final plan will be available by the spring of next year.

We were informed that there will be no large-scale clear felling but existing woodland rides will be retained and maintained and pockets of ancient woodland will be allowed to migrate into surrounding areas. A recent survey has revealed that there are small areas of heathland communities which are re-establishing in areas where conifers have been felled. The dominant species appears to be bilberry.

There are small areas of grassland classified as mainly neutral with some areas of marshy grassland. There is a misconception (certainly my own!) that historically Wentwood was all woodland. Historical research has shown that it was once a mosaic of habitats including woodlands, wood pasture, heathland, grassland and wet woodland along the valley bottoms. At this point in time, it is impossible to discern the earlier pattern of distribution but it was thought that lack of restrictions would allow the imaginative regeneration of many areas. It was stressed throughout that effort would be directed to maintaining and increasing the biodiversity of the Woodland Trust holding.

Certainly the restoration of mixed and deciduous woodland, the maintenance of rides and the increase in heathland and grassland should benefit the Lepidoptera.

Roger James

Newport Report

(a) Butterflies

Sheila managed to do one more transect walk on 4th October. As was to be expected, numbers were drastically reduced with 30 individuals of 6 species including 17 Speckled Wood, 1 Peacock, 2 Red Admiral, 2 Painted Lady, 3 Large White and 5 Clouded Yellow. Over the past week or so I have seen a few butterflies, including Small White on 26th October and Red Admiral on 30th.

(b)(i) Moths

At Summerhill I had Red-line Quaker on 5th October and Green-brindled Crescent on 7th. On 10th, Kevin recorded Figure of Eight at Red House. This is an infrequently recorded species in Newport, this being only the ninth record since 1999. Another scarce Newport species came to light on 10th and 18th October at Summerhill: the Sprawler has only been recorded at this one site.

On 12th October Kevin recorded Feathered Thorn and Yellow-line Quaker on the Gaer. The last record I have for the month was November Moth on 14th.

So far as I am aware, these records are incomplete – on 29th October I moved from Summerhill to Melbourne Way. I have been without a phone and e-mail for a number of days, a situation which I hope will be rectified in the very near future! My new address is shown below. Many thanks as always to my Newport correspondents.

Roger James
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Recent Highlights

The continuation of mild weather for another month has led to another good haul of immigrant records, though on a lesser scale than September. Amongst the butterflies, Red Admirals are everywhere and the previous latest date for Clouded Yellow in the county (24th October) has already been beaten. The latest Humming-bird Hawk record (11th November) must also be in danger if mild weather continues.

A small detail which will stick in my memory is the behaviour of Grey Shoulder-knot moths. I found one sitting on the outside wall of my house near the moth trap on 11th October. Three weeks later (1st November), through mild weather, rain, wind etc. it is still in exactly the same position, save for an occasional rotation to adjust for changes in wind direction. By now, it has been joined by four other individuals, all displaying exactly the same behaviour. Other species are to be found on the wall but they never stay for more than one or two nights. Perhaps Grey Shoulder-knots know when they are in sympathetic hands!



*Grey Shoulder-knot
and
Blair's Shoulder-knot
on an outside wall.*

“Early Sept”	Merveille du Jour at Bettws, Newport.	Gareth Tonks
23rd Sept.	After his successful search for Silurian larvae, Paul Waring ran two light traps at Cwm Celyn Farm. Highlights were a Delicate (2 nd county record after the first in July), Small Mottled Willow, Pearly Underwing and a set of Thorns – August, Canary-shouldered, Dusky and September.	
25 th Sept.	Scarce Bordered Straw at the Gaer, Newport.	Kevin Dupé
27 th Sept.	Vestal at the Gaer, Newport.	Kevin Dupé
2 nd October	Third and fourth county records of Delicate, on 2 nd and 10 th , at Summerhill Avenue, Newport.	Roger James.
3 rd October	3 Clouded Yellow and 4 Small Copper at Lone Lane, Penallt. Both species seen intermittently until 13 th Oct.	Stephanie Tyler.
10 th October	Painted Lady and several Red Admiral at Risca.	Martin Anthoney.
	Pearly Underwing and the uncommon, in this county, Figure of Eight at Red House Farm, Newport.	Kevin Dupé
	Sprawler, another uncommon species in VC35, at Summerhill Avenue, Newport. Roger also had no fewer than 40 Blair’s Shoulder-knot in one night and another second-generation Swallow-tail moth.	Roger James.
11 th October	Autumn Green Carpet to light at Brynmawr. A second turned up on 15 th . Only the sixth and seventh county records.	Jeremy Richards.
12 th October	Immigrant Gem at Newbridge ST 207974.	Dave Beveridge.
	Merveille du Jour at the Gaer, Newport.	Kevin Dupé
13 th October	Scarce Bordered Straw to light at Brynmawr (Jeremy Richards), another, together with Merveille du Jour, at Haisboro Avenue, Newport (Sheila Dupe) and a third, plus Pearly Underwing, to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney). Obviously an influx.	
	Another Gem at Summerhill Avenue, Newport.	Roger James.
14 th October	Yet another Brown-spot Pinion this year, plus 2 Merveille du Jour and Red-green Carpet at Beacon Hill, Trellech.	Ray Armstrong.
15 th October	5+ Clouded Yellow, Large and Small White and Red Admiral at Sudbrook.	Ed Stevens.
16 th October	Common Footman (extra generation?) at Risca.	Martin Anthoney.
18 th October	Female Clouded Yellow, Severn Crescent field, Chepstow.	Shelley Cross.
	Feathered Ranunculus to light at Risca, and another on 20th. Although a common species further west in Wales, it is rare in Gwent and these are only the fourth and fifth county records.	Martin Anthoney.

Two more Scarce Bordered Straw at Haisboro Avenue and, plus a Gem and Merveille du Jour, at Summerhill Avenue, Newport. Sheila Dupe and Roger James.



Feathered Ranunculus



Feathered Thorn

19 th October	Merveille du Jour and three Grey Shoulder-knot at Risca.	Martin Anthony.
20 th October	Late Humming-bird Hawk seen in an Abergavenny garden. Convolvulus Hawk at rest at Llanthony Abbey.	Chris & Julie West Stephanie Tyler.
24 th October	Merveille du Jour in the floodlights at Sessions House, Usk. SO377005. 2 Humming-bird Hawks at Shirenewton. Clouded Yellow at Bulwark Chepstow ST 533 927	Ian Smith. Mike Sayce Shelley Cross
28 th October	Second generation Dark Arches at Risca.	Martin Anthony
29 th October	3 Clouded Yellow and 1 Red Admiral at Collister Pill. Many Red Admiral, some Painted Ladies and a Clouded Yellow at Uskmouth. Red Admiral and Painted Lady at Silent Valley NR.	Hadyn Jones John Bennett Lee Parsons
30 th October	Pearly Underwing, and a very late Willow Beauty, to light at Risca.	Martin Anthony

Next Issues

Over the winter months, there will only be two issues of the Silurian: one in late December and one at the end of February.

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