



Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

Issue 5—Autumn
October 2011

Underground Ecosystems

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter. We kick off the edition by going underground to an ecosystem that is largely unrecorded in Wales (p1-2). The Million Pond Project provides a brilliant example of how a partnership project can produce excellent results on the ground. Sadly, there are tales of woe in Monmouth (p6) with patches of uncommon plants being destroyed; but on a more positive note, sightings of seals in the Rivers Severn, Usk and Wye continue to increase (p9). Why do some people choose to record birds, whilst others search for beetles or bryophytes? Read 'Spotlight on a Recorder' (p11) to discover why moths are the main attraction for one recorder. The i-Spot website (p13) is a brilliant resource for wildlife watchers, and it provides the ideal place for beginners and experts to connect and share experiences. Enjoy the issue!

Rebecca Davies (Editor)

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Underground ecosystems - out of sight and out of mind?

Hypogean (underground) crustaceans, have received limited attention in Wales. They can be found in cave systems, fractured aquifers and river gravels. They can be brought to the surface in springs or areas where water upwells and discharges into rivers. They are often small (<1cm), white and eyeless.

Records, are concentrated at popular caving locations, where these crustaceans are found and where humans can get 'easy' access. This has resulted in concentrated location records, which do not reflect a true distribution.

Unfortunately there is no statutory monitoring or even a detailed baseline study in Wales to assess the distribution and diversity of hypogean crustaceans. European legislation such as the 'Water Framework Directive' has overlooked the importance of our aquifers as an ecosystem in their own right.

A small survey was undertaken in the Carboniferous Limestone aquifer near Ogmere (Environment Agency Wales and Lee Knight). Prior to this survey no hypogean crustaceans had been recorded from this area. Samples were taken from Environment Agency monitoring boreholes, springs and river gravels, all of which source water from the limestone aquifer. Samples were collected using 250µm nets. A drift net was deployed at spring sources for 24 hours and a specialist net was used to obtain samples from boreholes up to 30m deep. A 'Bour-



Proasellus cavaticus – a more common species widely recorded from cave systems in Wales such as Dan-yr-Ogof (Image Lee Knight)



Lee Knight operating a 'Bour-Rouch' pump (Image: Lee Knight)

Rouch' pump was used to obtain samples from river gravels, and a more standard long handled net to sweep for samples within close reach.

Underground Ecosystems (...cont)

'*Microniphargus leruthi* — a first for Wales'

Four of the five known hypogean crustaceans in Wales have been found in this one catchment, leaving only *Niphargus aquilex* unrecorded. The survey confirmed four species of hypogean crustacean (see table below), with the first record for *Microniphargus leruthi* in Wales. This is exciting as *Microniphargus* was only discovered in the UK and Ireland in 2006, and was previously only known from the continent.

This limited survey shows us that

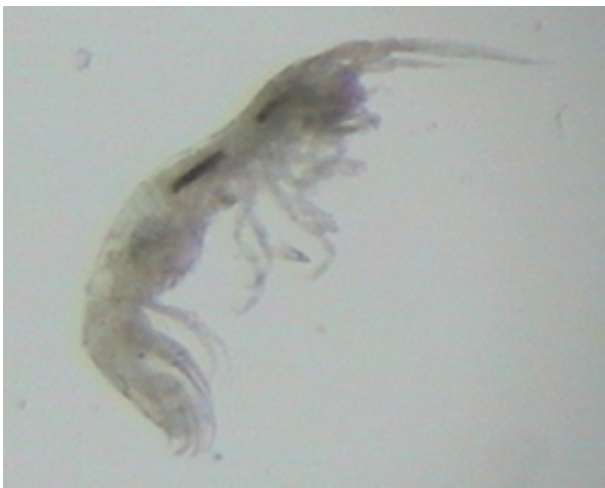
there is a possible wealth of new locations to be identified in Wales. There is also the possibility to discover species never recorded before in Wales. Further sampling and recording will provide vital information on this understudied ecosystem. Hopefully in the future legislation will 'catch up' and there will be a requirement for a responsible body to undertake a detailed survey of our hypogean fauna. Any records should be reported to Lee Knight at the 'Hypogean Crustacean Recording Scheme' (www.freshwaterlife.org/hcrs/thescheme). The website also provides descriptions, distribution

maps and records.

Publication: 'A Review of the subterranean aquatic ecology of England and Wales' is available FREE from The Environment Agency publication catalogue (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/>).

Gareth Farr & Caleb Lambourne,
Environment Agency Wales

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Microniphargus leruthi (1st record in Wales). Image from www.freshwaterlife.org/hcrs.



Crangonyx subterraneus (3rd specimen in Wales). Image from www.freshwaterlife.org/hcrs.

Site Type	Species	No	Notes
Spring	<i>Proasellus cavaticus</i>	14	Also common in cave systems
Spring	<i>Microniphargus leruthi</i>	1	First record in Wales
Borehole	<i>Proasellus cavaticus</i>	3	Common in caves, but first record from a borehole in Wales
Borehole	<i>Crangonyx subterraneus</i>	5	Rare in Wales
River Gravel	<i>Proasellus cavaticus</i>	2	Also common in cave & spring systems
Borehole	<i>Niphargus fontanus</i>	1	Common in caves, but first record from a borehole in Wales

Table: Ogmere Carboniferous Limestone catchment survey results

SEWBRc News



Hellula undalis © Barry Stewart

2 million records and a Welsh first!

The SEWBRc database recently reached the 2 million record mark. The species in question was the first Welsh record of Old World Webworm (*Hellula undalis*). The moth was taken by Barry Stewart at Nit-ten Field on Gower, on the 2nd October during the unseasonably mild weather. Usually found in the tropics, and around the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, it is a pest of crucifers in its natural range.

Species ID Training Days

Following the success of the identification courses held over the last two years, and with funding from Wales Biodiversity Partnership, three species identification training days were held earlier this year covering butterflies, rocky shores, and leaf mining lepidoptera. The final (fully-booked) course for this year encompasses shield bugs and takes place in early November. All the courses have been very popular and very well received. Over the last three years, over 150 attendees

have covered 11 different topics from bumblebees and bryophytes to molluscs and orthoptera. If you have any suggestions for future courses, or you are able to lead a course next year, please contact SEWBRc.

Bioblitzes

2011 saw a large increase in the number of Biodiversity Blitz Days in Wales, with several being run independently of SEWBRc. We are delighted to see that this style of event is being adopted as a useful tool to accrue records for a specified site, and also being used as a training / engagement opportunity by many organisations. Our own blitzes this year took place at Penhow Woodlands (Gwent) and Wenvoe Orchid Fields (Glamorgan).

Penhow Woodlands, located to the east of Newport, consists of ancient semi-natural woodland covering the slopes and summits of limestone hills. The site is surprisingly under recorded, considering its designation as both a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This may be due to the difficult access to the site, and lack of parking facilities, which we managed to overcome thanks to a friendly local farmer allowing us to park in his yard! There

was a reasonable turn out of 11 attendees with an excellent range of expertise present, resulting in a species list of 211 for the day. Of these, 165 species had not previously been recorded on site, an impressive 78% of our total. Despite a gloomy start resulting in sluggish invertebrate activity

(pardon the pun!) during the morning, the arrival of the sun in the afternoon ensured there was plenty to see, including a Longhorn Beetle (*Leptura maculata*) which posed nicely for the camera.

Our Glamorgan blitz took place at Wenvoe Orchid Fields, a community managed site to the west of Cardiff.



Leptura maculata © Elaine Wright

As well as the orchid fields, we were also offered a unique opportunity to survey the adjacent Whitehall Quarry, a landfill site which is generally closed to public access. There was an excellent turn out of 20 bright eyed and bushy tailed attendees, with again an excellent range of expertise and knowledge present. Another slow and gloomy start didn't stop our naturalists gathering a brilliant total of 469 species for the day. Wenvoe Orchid Fields are relatively well recorded, but we still managed to discover 235 new species, a brilliant 50% of our total. Species lists for both days are available on our website.

Keep an eye out for the dates of the 2012 Record-ers' Meetings, they will be announced very soon

Dave, Becky & Elaine,
SEWBRc



Wenvoe Bioblitz Attendees © David Slade

Million Ponds Project



Pond Conservation

Landowner creates superb wildlife habitat with the help of the Million Ponds Project.

On an unusually warm day in late September, I sit by a sizeable pond on the edge of Welsh woodland watching a female common hawker dragonfly dipping the tip of her curled body into the shallow water at the ponds edge. She is depositing eggs. All around me there is evidence of nature rapidly colonising the pond and surrounding terrestrial habitat. The pond has wandering edges, with large areas of very shallow water already displaying an impressive diversity of colonising vegetation. Invertebrate life is everywhere, and an immature frog clambers through the re-covering ground cover to my side.

Although I have had the privilege to observe this colonisation process many times before, it never fails to amaze me. The pond I am sitting by is less than a year old. Already, nature has taken a firm hold, and the pond is literally pulsing with life. If it wasn't for the few indications such as the large south-facing bank of earth behind me liberally sprinkled with the kind of pioneering and soil repairing vegetation that indicates that the ground was disturbed less than 12 months previously, then I could be forgiven for thinking that the pond was natural and not man made.

No pond liner has been used, rather a test hole was excavated initially to discover whether it would hold water, and then the beautifully shaped wetland habitat was created.



investing in the environment

The edges of the pond wander in and out in an intricate pattern creating multiple edge habitats. Such edges are capable of supporting an incredible diversity of plant and animal life, far more so than would be the case with a straight edged traditionally designed man-made pond. There is no sign of potted plants or introduced lilies either. The pond has simply been excavated, and the colonisation of plants and animals permitted to follow its natural course. The south facing bank behind me has also been deliberately created whilst being mindful of the needs and requirements of biodiversity. The bank is in fact a hibernation site. Below the intermittent soil surface of the bank, is a hidden combination of buttress roots, brash and rubble

more impressive is that this pond is the last of several that I have visited today, and all are displaying the same encouraging level of early stage colonisation by plants, invertebrates and amphibians. All of the ponds that I speak of have been created in Bridgend, on land owned by Mr Les Parslow. The ponds were created with support from **The Million Ponds Project**, a bold initiative led by **Pond Conservation** to create good quality wildlife ponds across England and Wales. Funding was provided by **Biffaward**.

Les has worked closely with South & West Wales Amphibian & Reptile Group (SWWARG) throughout the process of designing and excavating the ponds. Les's ponds were excavated during the early winter months reducing disturbance to a minimum and providing a full active season from spring onwards for the ponds to begin to establish themselves as ecosystems. Such a working partnership ensures that the maximum benefit for the greatest amount of species is achieved with the

creating a subterranean network of chambers, nooks and crannies which can be accessed by a diversity of species and which will also be below the frost line once winter arrives ensuring safe frost free hibernation.

What is even



One of the newly created ponds in Bridgend ©Peter Hill

Million Ponds Project (cont...)



Resident toad ©Peter Hill

minimum amount of both effort and disturbance necessary whilst undertaking pond creation. By carefully following the guidelines provided by the Million Ponds Project, such partnerships have achieved good results for biodiversity.

It is important to create diversity of habitat when creating ponds and each of Les's ponds is slightly different. Some are larger, more sprawling and deeper in places than others and some are considerably smaller and shall-

lower even to the extent where one or two may be ephemeral. Ephemeral ponds may completely dry out during dry summers which is actually of benefit for certain plant and invertebrate species life cycles. What all of the ponds do have in common are large areas of shallow water that provide sanctuary from predators for invertebrate and amphibian larvae.

Boosting invertebrate and amphibian populations, as the Million Ponds Project certainly does, has incredible stabilising potential for

ecosystems. The entire food web directly benefits from increased and more stable population levels of invertebrates and amphibians. Multiple bird species benefit significantly from abundance of invertebrate life and for top predators such as the grass snake, polecat and the otter, amphibians form a sizeable portion of the diet.

Aside from the obvious benefits for biodiversity, an established network of ponds is not only a peaceful and therapeutic place to relax and unwind, but also a fantastic educational resource. Organized pond dipping trips have long fascinated children and are an excellent method of demonstrating food webs and delivering interactive ecology lessons. Pond dipping sessions help to start children along the track of working with nature rather than against it, to benefit from the great diversity that is nature's university!

Perhaps you are a landowner who would enjoy increased levels of natural and fascinating wildlife on your land, or perhaps you may know someone who is?

The Million Ponds Project is waiting to hear from you.

Peter Hill, Conservation Officer, South and West Wales Amphibian and Reptile Group (SWWARG)

Useful contacts:

Pond Conservation (Home of the Million Ponds Project)
www.pondconservation.org.uk

Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the UK
www.arguk.org

SWWARG
www.swwarg.co.uk

Gwent Police Wildlife Crime Mission Statement

Gwent Police is committed with our partners to protect the environment of our policing area by policing intervention, through raising awareness of the effects of the unlawful actions of individuals and uncaring and unlawful development. Specially trained officers throughout the Gwent Policing Area are working with partners to raise awareness through education, advice and enforcement.

National Priorities:

- Hen harriers;
- Bat crime;

- **Illegal trade in endangered species**

Welsh Priorities:

- **Damage to SSSIs from illegal off-roading, and illegal burning;**
- **Protection of European Protected Species affected by unlawful development.**

If you think a crime against wildlife or the environment has been committed in your local area, please report it immediately.

There is a list of the Gwent Police Wildlife Crime Officers and their email addresses available on the SEWBRc website (www.sewbrec.org.uk/contacts/contact-us.page). Go to 'More Links...' at the bottom of the page, and click on *Gwent Police: Wildlife Crime Officers (Word document)*.

PC Robert Maddocks,
Gwent Police

Tales of Woe

Tales of Woe in my local patch

Over the last two years three species of uncommon plants have been destroyed in my home village of Penallt, a small dispersed village near Monmouth in eastern Monmouthshire on the side of the Wye Valley.

In 2008 a patch of Wood Vetch *Vicia sylvatica* appeared between the road and hedge near the top of Lone Lane; then in early 2010 new house owners on the other side of the hedge dug a trench – right through where the Wood Vetch grew. Exit the Wood Vetch.

I found a clump of Black Horehound *Ballota nigra* just inside the gate into Bush Farm, part of the Gwent Wildlife Trust holding by Pentwyn Farm in 2007. Although not a rare plant by any means, it is increasingly scarce and it was not recorded in the Penallt tetrad in Trevor Evans' Flora of Monmouthshire. I marked it with bamboo poles after the Trust has cut it back in mistake for nettles and I told the Trust about it. The plant survived until spring 2011 when a GWT staff member put in a fence post right by it, not realising it was so close. To be fair the bamboo poles had been moved and it was a genuine er-

ror.

For years I had noticed a mallow growing on a verge by the farm down our lane but only looked at it closely in 2010 when I realised it was Dwarf Mallow *Malva neglecta*, a creeping species with small white flowers. Noted in Trevor Evans' Flora as growing at a limited number of sites in Vice County 35 where it has markedly declined, Trevor also describes the causes of the decline. The Lone Lane record was a new site, between a wall and the road close to the entrance to a small farm. After finding the Black Horehound site destroyed I went down to let the landowner know about the mallow, in case an accident happened there, only to find he had applied herbicide to the verge just where the mallow grew! Exit the mallow.

Penallt probably has the greatest concentration of clumps of Giant Bellflower *Campanula latifolia* in the vice county but unfortunately many are on road verges and this year they have suffered



Black Horehound (*Ballota nigra*) ©Trevor Evans

again from road verge cutting and from vehicles driving onto the verges. Three clumps were flattened!

It is not all doom and gloom thank goodness. Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris* still thrives at Penallt Old Church despite being thought extinct in VC35. Greater Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* turned up in June 2011 in a lovely hay meadow, owned and managed well by a local potter, where Green-veined Orchids (*Orchis morio*) also appeared three years ago. The meadows are in a different tetrad to the established Butterfly Orchid site at Pentwyn. Six or seven patches of Oak Fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* were found above a pasture, reclaimed from brambles in the adjacent valley of

Whitebrook and another patch was reported by John Dransfield in his garden at the nearby village of The Narth, adjacent to Manor Wood. In mid June Pat Johns and I counted more than 340 plants of Narrow-leaved Bittercress *Cardamine impatiens*, a species largely confined to the Wye Valley in VC35, along the old railway line below Penallt between Redbrook and Whitebrook.

Stephanie Tyler

The Gwent Orchards Project: A survey update

We are now well into the second year of the Gwent Orchards Project, an exciting project run by the Gwent Wildlife Trust to help re-instate our Welsh orchard heritage. The focus has very much been on surveying traditional orchards across the old county of Gwent this year. As a result of the hard work of our survey volunteers we have finally got, for the first time, a much clearer picture of the state of our orchards as they are now.

By comparing figures 1a and b, we can clearly see that the number of traditional orchards has declined dramatically in the past century. Although this is not a particularly positive picture, it is

close to what was predicted (hence not entirely unexpected). This data then enables us to plan future work with local partners to improve the situation by improving key relict orchards and planting new ones in orchard-poor areas.

‘These surveys unearthed some interesting species, including a possible new species to Wales’

As well as surveying orchards as a habitat, we were also awarded some additional funding from the Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Development Fund to complete some more thorough invertebrate sur-

veys. These surveys unearthed some interesting species, including a possible new species to Wales. The ‘new’ species is the aptly named pear weevil, *Magdalis (Panus) barbicornis*, which was found in an old traditional orchard in Tintern.

As well as this find, a number of species of low incidence in Wales were found. The tumbling flower beetle *Mordellistena neuwaldeggiana*, which relies on dead wood habitat to survive, has only a handful of Welsh records and another, the narrow-waisted bark beetle *Lissodema denticolle*, has even fewer. Another is the red belted clearwing *Synanthedon*

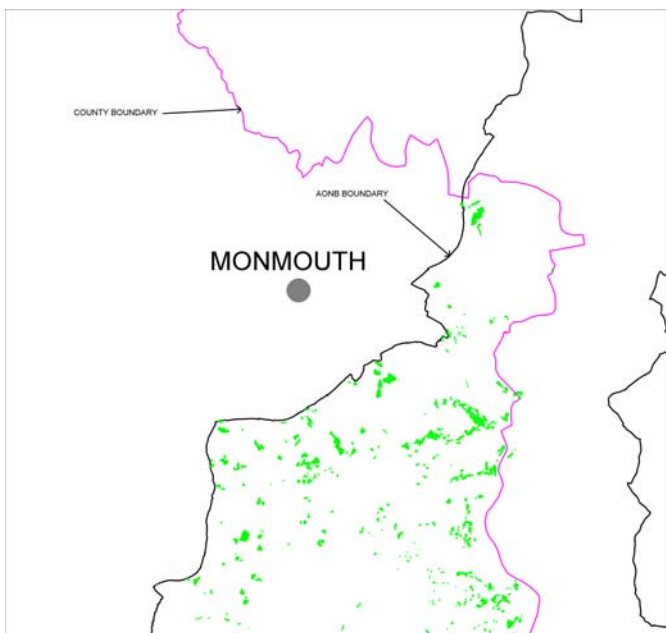


Fig 1a: 1890 (orchards shown in green)

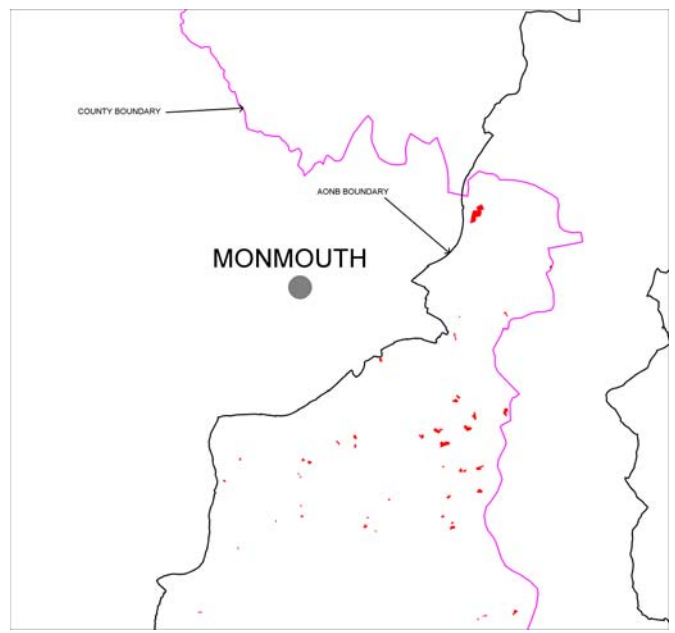


Fig 1b: 2011 (orchards shown in red)

Figures 1a and b show a comparison between the extent of orchards within a portion of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Monmouthshire in 1890 (fig 1a) and 2011 (fig 1b). This portion of Gwent has had almost all of the surveying completed for it so far, hence it is used as an example of a fairly complete data set. (Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown Copyright and database right 2005. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey License number: 100016400.)

The Gwent Orchards Project: A survey update (cont...)

myopaeformis. Vacated pupae were found in the heartwood of an apple tree in an old orchard near Mitchel Troy in Monmouthshire. This moth is a nationally notable species known to inhabit old fruit trees, where it lives under the bark until emerging as an adult in June – August.

We continue to search for the noble chafer beetle, *Gnorimus nobilis* (Fig. 3). The beetle prefers old plum trees (particularly the Blaisden Red variety) and cherry trees, although it has been recorded in other fruit tree types and even oak trees in the New Forest. It also seems to prefer orchards which are more open and exposed, rather than densely planted and scrubbed orchards. Send your sightings to Alice Rees, Gwent Orchard Project Officer, 01600 740 600 arees@gwentwildlife.org and SEW-BReC (including a clear photograph if possible to aid validation).

The project is due to complete in June 2012 and in the remaining time we intend to continue surveying orchards in Gwent.

Alice Rees Gwent Orchard Project Officer, Gwent Wildlife Trust



Fig 2: A wildlife rich, old traditional orchard with evidence of recent replanting (photo: A. Rees).



Fig 3: Noble chafer *Gnorimus nobilis* (photo: Paul Brock).

Seals in the Severn, Usk and Wye

Of recent years (1990s to the present time) it has become apparent that, probably as a result of increasing seal numbers generally, an expansion of range has taken place with many more sightings made in the Severn Estuary and tidal reaches of the rivers Usk and Wye.

Most reports simply mention 'seals', without any species clarification, but in my experience sightings made in the lower Severn Estuary, and in the rivers Usk and Wye, are mostly those of the Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*). However, records from the upper (Gloucestershire) part of the Severn Estuary are said to be those of the Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*). This information comes from two principal sources - a book on the distribution of British mammals (Henry Arnold, 1993), and a recent communication with the records office of the Gloucestershire Naturalists Trust.

Other reports of seals (species not stated) in the upper Severn Estuary can be gleaned from the pages of a book by Brian Waters (*Sever Tide*, Dent, 1947) in which a 'seal' was seen as far up the river as Deerhurst in 1933, another died on the bank of the river at Arlingham while another swam into a lave-net when the intended catch was undoubtedly a Salmon. Such an occurrence was also reported to me by the lave-net fishermen of Caldi-



Grey Seal © Colin Elliot

cot in the 1950s. With regard to the Common Seal specifically, it has been claimed by some that they were breeding in the Severn Estuary off Gwent in the 1950s (see *The Cardiff Region, A Survey*, Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1960), but this is not accepted by all authorities.

Whatever the case may be it is certain that Grey Seals are now being seen in Gwent waters far more frequently. In June 2001 I saw a Grey Seal in the Severn close to the mouth of the River Wye, and reports from the Wye itself came to me during 2003, 2006, 2010 and 2011. Of these the reports for 2006 stand out because of their number. There were at least four separate reports from three different locations along the river Wye - Piercefield, Llandogo and Redbrook, and also reports from the River Usk - the Moorings at Newport and from Newbridge.

Sifting through the reports and their timings, and also those of my own sightings, it seems that the Grey Seal is most active at the time of the incoming tide, and evidence suggests that these periods of activity coincide with a run of fish up the river with the tidal flow.

During the winter of 2010 - 2011 Otters were regularly seen in the River Wye at Llandogo. The sightings were so frequent, and regular that I invited photographer friends to attempt to get some images. First Chris Hatch tried and was successful on only the second visit. I then got in touch with Colin Elliot and suggested he might like to try his luck. Colin made several visits and on the 23rd March, just four days after the equinoctial full moon and consequent high tides, he managed to get his photograph - not of an Otter but of a Grey Seal!

Postscript: On Tuesday the 11th October (2011) Chris Hatch and I visited the area of the lower Wye below Pierce Woods (Chepstow), this stretch of the River being named Longhope Reach. It wasn't long before Chris spotted a Grey Seal drifting slowly down-stream with the receding tide.

Colin Titcombe



Otter © Chris Hatch

Photographs are not the (complete) answer

Specimens are vital for most identifications

How many species of insect or plant can be identified in the field? What percentage of insects can be identified with certainty with critical examination of morphology or colour patterns? Yes, I will accept that most butterflies or dragonflies can be identified confidently even without capture, but even then there are some you would need to be careful about. Many moths can be clearly separated- but get down to micro-moths and groups such as 'pugs', and many would struggle. For most other groups of insects we might agree that 10% at most could be determined in the field, although a colleague has suggested that perhaps 50% of Diptera could be 'guessed at' by an expert. For the rest there is the absolute need to examine under a microscope (or at least a good hand lens), compare specimens and consult literature, or even consult specialists. Only then can you safely record your find. In those families that may be most important for conservation evaluation, microscopic identification is essential in the majority of species.

In a period of rapid change of distribution for many species, and with others arriving new to Britain, it is vitally important we record even common

and 'well-known' species with the best verification and the best data we can. Against this background we have better and better digital photography and superb images that are widely distributed and available on websites, which for some people means that specimens do not need to be taken. There is no doubt that high quality images on various websites have greatly assisted and helped many identification- even discovered species new to Britain. Only a few weeks ago a leafhopper was photographed in the London area that was a (expected) new addition to the British fauna. But that species is highly distinctive in its coloration and cannot be confused with any other. However, I would still want a specimen of the species in a collection that would serve to fix that record for the next generation of specialists and recorders. Like other taxonomists I routinely examine specimens collected by previous generations. This is an essential part of taxonomic research. Some of these might be specimens of published records that some years later need to be checked as better knowledge changes the taxonomic status of the species or biological differences in populations become apparent etc.

Every week I am sent im-

ages of specimens and invited to comment on their identity. Some might be dead specimens and it is clearly a quick and efficient method of being able to comment without the expense of packing and sending the specimen, let alone the time taken for the painstaking examination required for proper identification. Others might be living specimens- it is possible that the response is to genus at best with a comment that there are 20 species that look like that and without a specimen you can go no further. But what happens when someone is 'claiming' the occurrence of a rare species- perhaps a first record to a county and only has a photograph. If the rare species is similar to more common species and requires careful examination, how can we accept the record? The short answer is we cannot! No specimen no record. This is not the place to discuss in detail 'voucher' specimens- basically samples from survey or fieldwork that are preserved for the future. I am, by necessity, 'careful' over identifications made by others unless I have some reason to have confidence in them. How can we be sure that records of 'important species' based on photographs or identification in survey reports are correct – without specimens?

My emphasis in these comments is towards insects but is a comparison with the bird world useful here? Rarity committees evaluate the description primarily and use images as (strongly) supportive evidence. Many birds can be identified well enough from a single photo while others would need a series showing the bird in various attitudes. Records are assessed by both description and images as well as by the calls the birds made and in some cases direct measurements of their anatomy, wing formula etc. Validating insect records also relies heavily on description with photographic evidence of much lower value. Direct measurements are far more important for insects and confident identification frequently requires critical examination or even dissection of anatomical features, especially genitalia. Fortunately for birds, it is not necessary to dissect their private parts.

Mike Wilson (*Head of Entomology*) & **Adrian Plant** (*Curator: Diptera*),
National Museum Wales

Spotlight on a Recorder — David Slade, Lepidopterist

I became interested in moths during one of our many family holidays to Portland in Dorset. Back in the late 1970s, one of our trips coincided with the visit of Norman Hall - the first Lepidopterist I'd ever met. Norman allowed us to watch as he sorted the contents of his Robinson light trap - a real novelty item back then. However, far more exciting to the young Slades was watching him find caterpillars using a beating tray. It was not long before my brother and I were out in the observatory garden with an upside down umbrella giving the local blackthorn bushes a real bashing. I still bump into Norman every now and then at meetings, and it embarrasses him greatly to know that it is largely his fault that I am now a fully fledged Lepidopterist. In fact I think that he is largely responsible for getting the Portland Bird Observatory into moths which helped popularise the group with the birding community at large.

So why moths? Having been brought up in a birding family, spending hours staring at the sea in howling wind and driving rain, in the vain hope that something might fly past, never really captured my imagination. In contrast, moths can be remarkably easy to catch - just stick a box in the garden over night with a light on it, and in the morning there is more than likely going to be



Elephant hawkmoth © David Slade

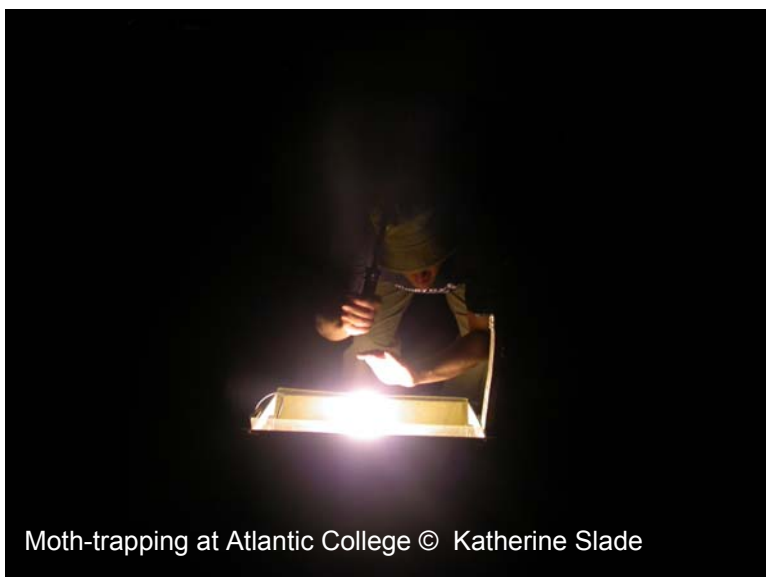
something inside. You just have to get up early enough to beat the Blackbirds to the ones that didn't make it into the box!

If you were one of those kids that wished you could have Christmas every day, then I heartily recommend getting a moth trap. You really never know what you are going to find when you open the trap in the morning. Yes, it could be completely empty, particularly in the winter months. The chances are, however, that it will contain one of our common but still spectacular moths like the Elephant Hawk-moth. We have even been lucky enough to catch a first for Britain in our Somerset trap – the Goosefoot Pug.

Moving to Wales, and particularly working in the National Museum Wales really allowed me to hone my skills and become familiar with the more obscure and poorly recorded micros. It was at this point that I got involved with the Glamorgan Moth Recording Group, assisting the then County Recorder for East Glamorgan, David (Jake) Gilmore to translate the historical texts into modern taxonomy and thus create this invaluable baseline for the moths of Glamorgan.

There is no doubt that the face of moth recording has changed in my time in south Wales, and the popularity of the group continues to grow. New books and the internet has made it much easier to identify most of the British fauna, and Butterfly Conservation's 'Moths Count' team, and the National Macro Moth Recording Scheme has done wonders in tapping into this new enthusiasm with UK distribution maps for many species now available. Now all we need is a scheme that includes the micros...

David Slade, Lepidopterist



Moth-trapping at Atlantic College © Katherine Slade

Torfaen LBAP Update

LBAP Review

Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership is still in the process of reviewing its biodiversity action plan. It is understood that the new plan will adopt an ecosystem approach to deliver biodiversity gain in combination with wider social and economic objectives to progress further towards sustainable development.

An ecosystem approach will provide a framework for looking at whole ecosystems in decision making, and for valuing the ecosystem services they provide, to ensure that society can maintain a healthy and resilient natural environment now and for future generations.

Biodiversity Management Systems (BMS)

The Biodiversity Management Systems project is developing new ways of working to manage biodiversity issues within planning and project design/inception in Torfaen. The project proposes a four tiered land classification for biodiversity that will provide information targeted on the decisions made within different Service Areas in the Council. This approach could be used to manage all ecosystems services to provide a coherent approach to managing green infrastructure.

The Welsh Government is developing national legislation/policy on sustainable development, environment and planning, incorporating ecosystems thinking, through the Networked Environment Region (NER) and Natural Environment Framework (NEF). National strategies and policies require a realistic delivery mechanism for day to day decisions made at the Local Authority scale. Systems developed from both bottom up and top down have the greatest likelihood of successful outcomes.

Objectives

To develop new processes in the Council to support decision making relating to the wise use of green infrastructure assets in the borough.

To provide evidence to the Welsh Government that an ecosystem services approach can be used to deliver sustainable outcomes in a Local Authority;

The two objectives are complementary to the development of a working model for national strategies and local delivery of effective green infrastructure management.

Outcomes

Effective/efficient decision support to protect and manage green infrastructure.

Faster decision making (especially in planning).

Improved ecosystem services achieved from the green spaces within Torfaen.

Increased funding to improve infrastructure.

Neighbourhood Services established at heart of the Council's core priorities.

Evidence of effective delivery mechanism for development of national policy.

The South-east Wales Wetlands Project

A small amount of funding has been offered to Torfaen from the Environment Agency Wales to support the creation of a number of wetland habitats on both Henllys and Garn Lakes Local Nature Reserves.

The purpose of the project is to enhance the two known populations of great crested newt in the county borough, one in the north at Garn yr Erw in Blaenavon and one in the south on the hillsides of Henllys in Cwmbran. Both populations are small and are at risk of dying out. Much more needs to be done to create the habitat they need as soon as possible and doing this work we can help deliver some of the actions set out by the Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership in its Local Action Plan.

As well as biodiversity loss the other

drivers for the project include; ecosystem restoration, environmental resilience in terms of climate change, improved water quality, carbon storage and above all an amazing educational resource for local communities to visit and enjoy.

Llantarnam Abbey

Torfaen County Borough Council is working in partnership with Llantarnam Abbey to enhance the site for environmental education. Projects worked on so far include; bat surveys (which we have identified a significant colony of lesser horseshoe bats); access improvements for woodland and riverside walks; meadow restoration; and improvements for barn owls.

Local Nature Reserve

Work is progressing to designate Torfaen's 7th Local Nature Reserve at Llwynceilyn Cemetery in Hollybush, Cwmbran.

Sustainability Week

This year's *Sustainability Week* focused on biodiversity and promoted ecosystems and their services. A short film was shown for the first time encapsulating Torfaen ecosystems, then Bristol based theatrical group – Desperate Men, performed a very educational show using Darwin and the Dodo to explain why ecosystems and sustainability are so important. Sustainability training on Biodiversity was then offered to all those with an interest.

Kris Roberts, Ecologist, Torfaen County Borough Council
(Kris.Roberts@torfaen.gov.uk)

i-Spot...your place to share nature



Increasing public engagement and understanding of local wildlife and biodiversity has long been a priority for conservation organisations, government bodies and also of the many individual experts and passionate people working out there 'in the field'.

www.iSpot.org.uk is an innovative approach to public engagement with nature. It is a website operated by the Open University and was developed as part of the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project (www.opalexplornature.org).

iSpot aims to create a social network around biodiversity, connecting beginners with experts



Buff Tip Moth Caterpillars (*Phalera bucephala*). Observed & photographed by Clare Flynn, Biodiversity Mentor for Wales (<http://www.iSpot.org.uk/node/216339>)

and encouraging a new generation of naturalists and recorders. It is open to all – from the casual watcher of wildlife programmes, community groups and schools to experts who are leaders in their chosen field. It is designed to help people share their love of wildlife, to learn more about the nature they see around them and to get help from others in identifying their wildlife observations. For beginners wishing to take their understanding a step further, iSpot is also an element of the OU course, Neighbourhood Nature, which focuses on connecting people with the wildlife and habitats in their own locality and developing an understanding of surveying techniques and recording.

For organisations, professionals and 'expert' individuals, iSpot provides a forum to share their expertise with the wider public and to link with other organisations and specialist individuals throughout the UK. At the time of writing, 65 Biological Recording Schemes, Societies and Wildlife Organisations were registered on iSpot. These range from the 'biggies' such as the RSPB, to the highly

specialised such as the British Lichen and British Dragonfly Societies. Local groups are also signing up, for example, Glamorgan Moth Recording Group, Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership and the Cardiff Naturalists Society. Each organisation has its own identification badge allocated on iSpot which all members of that group can be identified by. In addition there is a direct link from iSpot to each organisation's own website, thereby facilitating the communication and networking process.

iSpot is still evolving. At present, users are able to see the NBN distribution for any species which is identified and one of the priorities for the technical team is to now make the geographical distribution of iSpot observations available to users. The site hosts an ever increasing set of interactive and user-friendly identification keys. The next step is an 'App' which will allow observations to be uploaded to iSpot from mobile devices in the field, giving the potential to get immediate feedback from other on-line users. The well designed reputation system also supports the accuracy and validity of identifications given and agreed with on-line.

If you, your group or organisation would like to



Ettlinger's hybrid orchid (*X Dactyloдения ettlingeriana*)

Observed & photographed by Tim Rich / National Museum Wales (<http://www.iSpot.org.uk/node/216123>)

find out more, then go on-line and have a browse at www.iSpot.org.uk. If you already know your wildlife and are able to spend a bit of time helping others on the site that would be much appreciated. If you have any questions, for example how your organisation can be badged on iSpot, then please contact Clare Flynn, Biodiversity Mentor for Wales.

Clare Flynn, Biodiversity Mentor for Wales, clare-flynn@open.ac.uk

Roesel's bush cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*)



Roesel's bush cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*) © Steve Williams

Expansion of Roesel's bush cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*) in Monmouthshire (vc35)

Until the 1980's Roesel's bush cricket was restricted to suitable grassland habitat in South East England. Since this time it has undergone a remarkable expansion in range across the south towards the Monmouthshire border- the first county record for Gloucestershire (vc 33/34) was in 1999. This pace

verges.

Since the first Welsh record from the outskirts of Cardiff in 1999 the long winged conehead has spread quickly in south Wales and is now widespread in lowland Monmouthshire, conversely the Roesel's bush cricket has been slower to colonise, however its eagerly awaited arrival and expansion now appears to be underway.

of expansion has been mirrored by the long winged conehead (*Conocephalus discolor*) as both species use similar rank grassland/scrub niches. These changes are considered to be in response to changes in climate and the relaxation of traditional management practices along road

The first county record for Roesel's bush cricket was from Dingestow Court, found by Sam Bosenquet in August 2007. This was followed by unconfirmed reports from the Newport area namely Solutia Meadows in 2009. In July this year a report was received from Roo Perkins from a road verge near New Inn, Pontypool. Shortly afterwards a number of individuals were located and photographed on the 15th August 2011 at Llandegfedd Reservoir.

The Llandegfedd Reservoir record was located by its distinctive stridulation followed by a hand search of vegetation in order to locate the insect, a number of individuals were subsequently found.

Please forward all sightings of Roesel's bush cricket and other orthoptera to Steve Williams, email: grasshoppersvc35@aol.com

Steve Williams, Vice County Recorder - Orthoptera (VC35)

Mitten Crab Recording Project

Chinese mitten crabs (*Eriocheir sinensis*) are officially listed as one of the World's 100 worst invasive species. They can cause damage to fishing gear and river banks, block intake screens, modify natural habitats and compete with native species. It is this economic and ecological damage that makes this crab such an unwelcome arrival. The full extent of these exotic pests in English and Welsh waters is currently unclear and a consortium of research institutes is requesting mitten crab sightings from members of the public, anglers and waterway workers, to clarify the distribution of

this species.

Key features to look for:

- Grey-green to dark brown crab
- Long walking legs
- Squarish body up to 86 mm across
- Dense brown 'fur' on the white-tipped claws (nb. juveniles may lack 'fur' on claws)
- Habitat: rivers, brackish water estuaries, rarely along the marine in-shore coast
- 4+4+4 pattern of teeth around front of shell

If you think you have spotted one, please take a photo from above, use a 50p coin for scale, and try to show

the claws clearly.

NOTE: Claws are very powerful, please handle with care!

Find out more information and record your sightings of this invasive species at the mitten crab website www.mittencrabs.org.uk or by text or picture message to 07806 938789.

WBP—Book Award Fund

Wales Biodiversity Partnership – Book Award Fund

The Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) is offering a small grant to all Vice County Recorders in Wales.

This can be used towards the purchase of identification books, keys, CDs, or other small equipment.

A claim can be up to £25, and may only be claimed once in each financial year. The invoice date must match the financial year in which the claim is made. To claim, please



Bioamrywiaeth Cymru
Biodiversity Wales



PARTNERIAETH BIOAMRYWIAETH CYMRU

WALES BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

send the form below together with your receipt (s) to the following address:

*Sean McHugh
WBP Communications Officer,
Wales Biodiversity Partnership,
C/O Wildlife Trusts Wales,
Baltic House,*

*Mount Stuart Square,
Cardiff Bay,
CF10 5FH*

E-mail: s.mchugh@welshwildlife.org
Phone: 02920 480 070 (direct)
Phone: 07817 148524 (mobile)

Name:		
Address:	Line 1	
	Line 2	
	Line 3	
	Post Town	
	Post Code	
Email address:		
Contact telephone number		
I am the VC Recorder for:	Vice County Name	
	Taxonomic Speciality	
Item (s) grant claimed for		
Receipt attached?		

www.bioamrywiaethcymru.org.uk / www.biodiversitywales.org.uk

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Biodiversity is our life. Ein bywyd ni yw bioamrywiaeth

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A big thank you to all those who have contributed to this newsletter! But, thinking ahead to the next issue, we want more articles from Recorders – it could be just a list of species you have recently recorded, or an update of where you have been surveying in the last year. This is an opportunity to plug your favourite recording location, to raise awareness of the species that you record, and to communicate to a wide range of individuals about your hard work!

Please forward any comments, articles, events, species sightings etc to SEWBReC.

Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

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13 St Andrews Crescent

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