



# Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

Issue 2  
October 2009

## Bioblitzed!

Welcome to the 2nd Issue of the joint Gwent-Glamorgan Recorder's Newsletter.

The majority of people that responded to the request in the last issue for ideas for a new name for the newsletter suggested that we stick with 'Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter' - as it does exactly what it says on the tin!

We hope you find it an interesting read. If you have any comments or suggestions, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Rebecca Davies (Editor)

### Inside this issue:

Biodiversity Blitz Days	1-3
SEWBRc News	4-6
Bumblebee Habitat Project	8-9
Sustrans Wildlife Champions	10
Birdlife in the Neddern Valley	11-13
HoV Lapwing Project	15
Industrial Melanism	16
Seashore Sightings	17
Gwent Fungus Group	20
The Invasion of <i>Harmonia axyridis</i>	21
North American Aliens	22

SEWBRc's Biodiversity Blitz days were a massive success this year, with a total of **66** people taking the opportunity to join us for one or more of the four held over the summer. A total of **1193** records were collected, with **708** being new species for our database for the areas surveyed. Below is a table showing at a glance the number of records collected at each event.

	Number of attendees	Number of records	Number of new species
Atlantic College	44	446	287
Ebbw Vale Cemetery	10	304	225
Nant Fawr Meadows	7	200	56
Solutia Reserve	19	243	140

### Nant Fawr Meadows

Our first Bio Blitz of 2009 was held on a surprisingly beautiful and sunny day in May, at Nant Fawr Meadows, an area of common land in the heart of Cardiff, which acts as an important wildlife corridor between Roath Park and the wider countryside. Located below Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoirs, this area is adjacent to the recently designated SSSI on the reservoir banks, allocated due to the range of waxcaps found on site. Used by locals for a variety of recreational activities, Nant Fawr Meadows is an excellent example of the value of urban wildlife sites, both for the species found there, and for the people who live in the area.

Despite a relatively small turn out of 7 attendees, a combination of botanical and Lepidoptera expertise ensured a healthy result of 200 species, including 56 which were new to our database. The species list was greatly augmented by a session of tree bashing which revealed an interesting collection of creepy crawlies! The event also included an evening moth trapping session, which

Vale Cemetery in conjunction with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC). Even though the day was a very wet one, a good number of people turned up to survey this small meadow in Ebbw Vale town.

In 2007, management at Ebbw Vale Cemetery was changed on disused areas from intensive cutting to an annual hay cut in late July/August with all cuttings being removed to prevent a build up of nutrients. This part of the site is now a wildflower conservation area and is where our efforts were focused.

Just over 300 species were recorded on the day, with 225 being new to our database for the cemetery. This is a fantastic outcome for the event, thank you to all those who were involved! Probably one of the most exciting records was that of an adult brown hawker which was netted before release at the end of the day.

resulted in records for three UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species: *Diarsia rubi*, *Ecliptopera silaceata* and *Spilosoma lubricipeda*.

### Ebbw Vale Cemetery

Held on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2009, our second Biodiversity Blitz of the year was at Ebbw



Bee chafer © David Slade

## Bioblitzed! (...continued)

### Solutia

The third of our Biodiversity Blitz days was held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2009 at the Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserve, Solutia in conjunction with GWT and Newport County Borough Council. We were lucky to experience a dry day, although it was extremely windy.

Our focus on the day was within the boundary of the

was the most popular of the blitzes, attracting over 40 attendees, including staff and pupils from Atlantic College itself. The College grounds are not open to public access, so many recorders were eager to discover the diversity of species that have colonised the majestic environs of St Donat's castle, which include an array of habitats from woodland to rocky shore



*Adiantum capillus-veneris* © Lindsay Bamforth

reserve and included all meadows and reens. A total of 243 records were collected during the event, with 140 of them being new to our database. A pretty little surprise on the day was this bee chafer (see picture), which posed nicely for our cameras. Another great find was that of the shrill carder bee which is a Biodiversity Action Plan species with few records in Gwent.

### Atlantic College

We ended our Bio Blitz season with a much anticipated event at Atlantic College, based in St Donat's Castle, Llantwit Major. Falling on a rare sunny day in August, this

to ancient walled gardens. We weren't disappointed at the range of biodiversity that was present: an impressive 446 species were seen, of which 287 had not previously been recorded at SEWBRcC.

One of the highlights of the day for many was the opportunity to see *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, aka maidenhair fern. This species is listed on the Vale of Glamorgan Local Biodiversity Action Plan, so its protection is a priority in this area. *A. capillus-veneris* is present in the walled gardens of the college, and one plant was also recorded on the sea cliffs to the east side of St Donat's Bay. The most

### Seaweed hunters at Atlantic College © David Slade



interesting moth record of the day came in the form of a leaf mine on enchanter's nightshade, which proved to be the first Glamorgan record of *Mompha terminella*.

We also took the opportunity to hold a moth trapping session on the evening prior to the main event. This was a success, recording 31 species in all, including two species listed in the UK wide Biodiversity Action Plan which had not previously been recorded at this site: *Ennomos fuscantaria* and

*Hydraecia micacea*.

**Alice Britt & Elaine Wright (Biodiversity Information Assistants, SEWBRcC)**

We would like to extend a huge thank you to all those who attended, it would not be possible to run these events and collect so many records without you! Suggestions for potential biodiversity blitz sites are always welcome, and we hope to hold another successful series of blitz days next summer.



Evening moth trapping at Atlantic College  
© David Slade

## Mystery Species

The following photos were taken at the Biodiversity Blitzes, but their identity remains a mystery... can you help?



1) Photo taken on disturbed ground at Ebbw Vale Cemetery © Elaine Wright



2) Photo taken in wet meadow at Ebbw Vale Cemetery © Elaine Wright



3) Photo taken on a dead tree at Atlantic College © Elizabeth & Tom Roberts

## Species Identification Training Days

In association with Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) and the National Museum Wales (NMW), a series of species identification days were organised this year (non-native and invasive species, leaf-mining lepidoptera, bumblebees, and terrestrial snails & slugs). They have been very successful, in fact we could have filled some of them several times over.

We plan to run more identification courses in the fu-

ture as there clearly is a need and desire for these types of events in this area. If you have any suggestions of taxonomic groups you would like to see covered, please let us know.

*Thank you to WBP for part funding the programme of training events; and to the NMW for hosting and providing the experts for some of the sessions.*

**Rebecca Davies (Senior Data & Enquiries Officer, SEWBReC)**



Non-Native & Invasive Species Training Day © David Slade

## SEWBRReC News

Despite the general economic gloom of recent months, SEWBRReC appears to be weathering the storm rather well, although we are being careful not to be complacent as the worst may still be yet to come – particularly with regard to public sector budgets in the 2010/11 financial year.

As far as 2009/10 is concerned, SEWBRReC kicked off the year with two new three-year partnership agreements with the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and Environment Agency Wales. These agreements provide much-needed stability of income over the po-

tentially challenging years ahead. Funding arrangements also continued with other partners such as Forestry Commission Wales, South Wales Trunk Roads Agency and Gwent Wildlife Trust.

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are now in place with eight out of the twelve Unitary Authorities in the region. A new agreement has been signed with Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council, but unfortunately an existing arrangement with Cardiff City Council came to an end. Work is still underway to try to establish full SLA coverage for the region (the other areas not

currently benefiting from SEWBRReC products and services are Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Newport).

SEWBRReC's income from sales of services to the commercial sector for the first half of the 2009/10 financial year has been affected by the recession, being approximately 25% lower than the same period in 2008/09. Despite this reduction, sales income is still exceeding targets set for the year and is 20% ahead of income from the equivalent period in 2007/08. We are still on target to achieve a commercial income in excess of £30k in 2009/10 –

money which goes towards funding the work of SEWBRReC in mobilising biological data and supporting the biological recording community.

**Adam Rowe (Manager, SEWBRReC)**

## LAUNCH OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS CENTRES (ALERC)

The Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) was formally launched and opened to members from the Local Records Centre (LRC) community on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009.

ALERC has been established to represent, support and provide advice to LRCs in the UK. It exists to:

- Promote and encourage the completion of a UK wide network of LRCs.
- Promote and develop good standards of practice in the collation, validation, management, dissemination and analysis of biodiversity, geodiversity and related data.
- Promote and represent

LRCs at all appropriate geographical, administrative and organisational levels.

- Develop accreditation and professional training for local records centres and their staff.
- Encourage and facilitate cooperation within the LRC community.

Membership of ALERC will be open to all LRCs in the UK including those at a developmental stage. Individual membership is also available to those who have previously worked within an LRC and continue to have a positive interest in their development, and to volunteers who are actively working within a LRC.

The Directors of ALERC (chaired by Adam Rowe of SEWBRReC) hope that the Association will provide a voice to represent the LRC sector, as it develops alongside other important players in the environmental information field. One early task for ALERC will be the development and implementation of a simple and workable system of LRC accreditation, which will aim to strengthen the profile and reputation of the whole LRC network.

It is hoped that ALERC will achieve widespread support from the LRC community. With this support and resourcing in place, ALERC will be in a position to tackle a range of issues affecting LRCs,

whilst allowing key LRC staff to concentrate on their local roles, safe in the knowledge that the interests of their LRC are being professionally represented at all appropriate levels.

For further information on ALERC and its planned activities please contact Adam Rowe at SEWBRReC, or visit [www.alerc.org.uk](http://www.alerc.org.uk)

**Adam Rowe (Manager, SEWBRReC)**

## SEWBRc's Data

The SEWBRc database now contains 1.24 million records, with major new datasets coming from Country-side Council for Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Peter Sturgess (Sturgess Ecology), and the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council cSINC project (via David Clements). Also work has continued with both the Glamorgan Bird Club and Gwent Ornithological Society in mobilising the bird records from recent bird reports and in the case of the Glamorgan Bird Club more of their historical records.

## Top 10 Species Charts—Gwent (VC35)

Rank	Common Name	Species	Records
1 (1)	Yorkshire-fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	1867
2 (2)	Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	1774
3 (3)	Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	1655
4 (4)	Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	1464
5 (6)	Common Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	1396
6 (5)	Red Fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>	1373
7 (-)	Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	1355
8 (8)	White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	1343
9 (7)	Common Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	1308
10 (-)	Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	1304

The top ten most recorded species in the county is now completely dominated now by the commonest plant species. In the second table (showing the number of distinct grid references a species has been recorded from), common pipistrelle is slowly being pushed down the list by the plant species.

The final table shows the number of 1km squares that a species has been recorded from, and this is surprisingly different, showing that distribution of Bryophyte records in the database is pretty good and easily comparable to the vascular plants. Common pipistrelle has only been recorded from 206 1km squares and appears at number 103 in this table. There are around 1400 1km squares in VC35.

Rank	Common Name	Species	Sites
1 (1)	Yorkshire-fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	1329
2 (4)	Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	1234
3 (3)	Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	1212
4 (-)	Soft-rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>	1109
5 (-)	Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	1063
6 (2)	Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	1020
7 (5)	Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	1000
8 (-)	Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	994
9 (7)	White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	976
10 (-)	Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	972

Rank	Common Name	Species	1km Squares
1	Yorkshire-fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	483
2	Rough-stalked Feather-moss	<i>Brachythecium rutabulum</i>	481
3	Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	474
4	Common Feather-moss	<i>Eurhynchium praelongum</i>	462
5	Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	450
6	Soft-rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>	446
7	White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	436
8	Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	432
9	Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	413
10	Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	408



## Top 10 Species Charts—Glamorgan (VC41)

Rank	Common Name	Species	Records
1 (1)	Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	7062
2 (2)	Light Brown Apple Moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>	5677
3 (3)	Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>	5347
4 (4)	Heart & Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>	5318
5 (5)	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	5125
6 (6)	Brimstone Moth	<i>Opisthocraptis luteolata</i>	4801
7 (7)	Flame Shoulder	<i>Ochropleura plecta</i>	4666
8 (8)	Dark Arches	<i>Apamea monoglypha</i>	4424
9 (9)	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	4349
10 (10)	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	4276

Rank	Common Name	Species	Sites
1 (1)	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1752
2 (3)	Yorkshire-fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	1680
3 (-)	Purple Moor-grass	<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	1610
4 (5)	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1590
5 (-)	Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	1552
6 (7)	Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	1470
7 (4)	Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	1454
8 (-)	Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	1433
9 (9)	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	1418
10 (2)	Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	1411

Rank	Common Name	Species	1km Squares
1	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1055
2	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	991
3	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	915
4	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	910
5	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	898
6	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	861
7	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	848
8	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	828
9	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	777
10	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	774

Remarkably there is no change at all in the top 10 most recorded species in Glamorgan with Lepidoptera still dominating the table. Plants continue to make inroads on the second table, indicating the number of distinct grid references that the species has been recorded from. However they again do not show at all in the third table which shows the number of 1km squares each species has been recorded from (of which there are around 2400 in total).

**David Slade (Senior IT & Records Officer, SEWBReC)**



Robin © Daniel Read

SEWBReC would like to say a big **thank you** to all the recorders, individuals, groups and organisations that have contributed data to SEWBReC – without your invaluable data and co-operation, SEWBReC would not exist.

## Recorders' Fora 2009

### Theme: Brownfield Sites and Urban Issues

The 2009 Glamorgan meeting took place on Saturday 31st January. Following the theme of this year's fora were informative talks by Dr Charles Hipkin (*Urban Ecology*), Judith Oakley (*The Marine Life Under Mumbles Pier*), Russel Hobson (*Conservation of Butterflies and Moths in the Urban Landscape*), Rob & Linda Nottage (*East Aberthaw Industrial Estates*) and Richard Dodd (*Mammals in Urban Environments*). Additional talks were given by Peter Hill, who discussed the creation of the newly formed South & West Wales Amphibian & Reptile Group (SWWARG) and the Pond Conservation Trust's Million Ponds Project; Steve Bolchover, who gave an

enlightening overview of *Uncommon Beetles in Glamorgan*; and Sean McHugh, who spoke about Wales Biodiversity Partnership and its role. Adam Rowe provided a SEWBReC update.

The Gwent Recorders' Forum was held on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February. Julian Branscombe began proceedings with a talk on *Brownfield Wildlife – Biodiversity's Forgotten Dimension*, which included an introduction to the 'Greenfield vs. Brownfield' debate and a description of brownfield habitat in Gwent and several brownfield biodiversity hotspots. The brownfield sites and urban issues theme was continued in presentations by Ian Smith (*Dragonflies in Gwent: A Comparison of Brownfield & Natural Sites*), Richard Dodd (*Mammals & Urban Envi-*

*ronments*), Sheila Spence (*Fungi in Gwent*), Steve Williams (*A Naturalist in a Post-Industrial Landscape*) and Kevin Dupé (*Newport Wetlands Reserve*). In addition was an introduction to Welsh apple and pear varieties by Martyn Evans, who also discussed the Monmouthshire Orchard Project and invited suggestions of species to look out for; and an extremely informative piece on *The Birds of Gwent* by Richard Clarke. David Slade gave a SEWBReC update.

Each of the 2009 fora also included items inviting input from recorders. Laura Palmer brought our attention to the 500+ species listed in Section 42 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), and requested comments to guide the prioritisation of species for

which identification sheets should be produced and to determine training needs. Discussions were also led on the flow of biological data from, and between, organisations, recording schemes, groups and individuals. SEWBReC have produced a questionnaire which will help us map data flow; please complete one if you haven't already done so. It is available from our website

([www.sewbrec.org.uk/biological-recording-folder/biological-recording.page](http://www.sewbrec.org.uk/biological-recording-folder/biological-recording.page)), or contact us if you would prefer a paper copy.

**Lindsay Bamforth (Data & Enquiries Officer, SEWBReC)**

**Keep an eye out for dates of the 2010 Recorders' Meetings. They will be announced soon.**

## Natur Cymru £500 Writing Challenge

The challenge is to write a thousand word article on a subject of topical environmental or wildlife interest in Wales *which inspires you*. **The winner will receive a prize of £500 donated by WWF Cymru and the first four runners up will receive a year's subscription to Natur Cymru.**

Natur Cymru is the quarterly magazine dedicated to the environment and wildlife of Wales. The purpose of the competition is to stimulate debate and encourage contribu-

tions from anyone with a passion for our natural world in Wales. Articles will be judged by a panel which will be looking for:

- Originality of content
- Use of plain language (Welsh or English)
- Balanced presentation of argument
- The degree to which the article engages with the reader and captures the imagination

In writing the article en-

trants should be targeting an audience that is interested in wildlife and the environment but not necessarily an expert.

The competition is open to anyone apart from staff on Natur Cymru. Articles, along with illustrations (if any), are to be submitted by email to [info@naturcymru.org.uk](mailto:info@naturcymru.org.uk) by 31st March, 2010. The winning article will be published in the Summer edition of Natur Cymru.

If you have any questions about the competition

please send an e-mail to: [huw.naturcymru@btinternet.com](mailto:huw.naturcymru@btinternet.com)

To view the winning articles from last year, and to see the rules and tips for the competition please go to [www.nature2010.org.uk](http://www.nature2010.org.uk)

(Article text taken from [www.nature2010.org.uk](http://www.nature2010.org.uk))

## The Bumblebee Habitat Project

# The Bumblebee habitat project



The counties of Gwent and Glamorgan provide critically important habitat for one of the UK's rarest bumblebees. Relatively common until the mid 1900's, the shrill carder bee *Bombus sylvarum* has since been subject to dramatic declines. Its plight is so worrying that a new project has been launched to help conserve this handsome little bumblebee, so named for its high-pitch buzz. The bumblebee habitat pro-

ject, run by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT), hopes to conserve the shrill carder bee by working with farmers and other land managers to increase the extent and quality of foraging and nesting habitat that is available for this and other rare bumblebees.

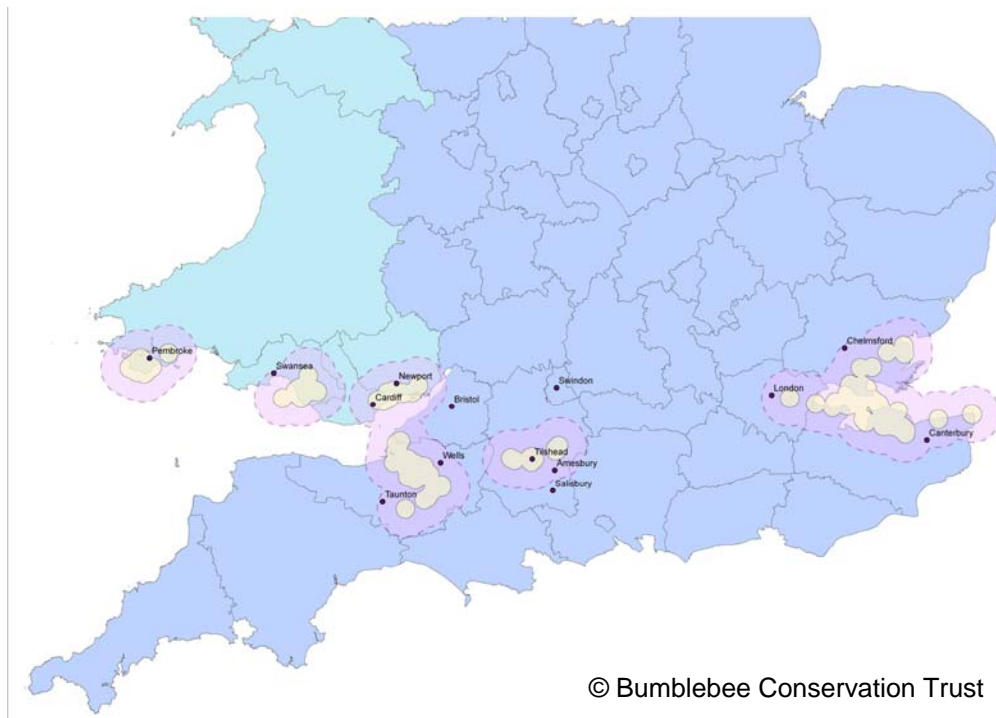
As with other bumblebees, the main cause of decline of the shrill carder bee is loss of flower-rich habitat. Records show that it is now

restricted to just six populations, three of which are in South Wales, in Gwent, Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire, with further populations on the Somerset Levels, Salisbury Plain and on the Kent and Essex coasts.

The shrill carder bee, along with several others, is a UKBAP (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) priority species, in recognition of its precarious status. Bumblebees seem to be particularly vulnerable, perhaps because they are social insects that live in large colonies, each using resources from up to 1km from the nest. As a result, a viable population may require more than 10km<sup>2</sup> of suitable

flower-rich habitat. A landscape-scale approach is therefore essential to ensure conservation of this species. We provide advice and support to other conservation organisations, farming advisors and private landowners to enable effective conservation, restoration and creation of habitats for bumblebees.

The ideal habitat for the shrill carder bee is semi-natural, flower-rich grassland. Traditionally managed hay meadows and calcareous grasslands provide a diverse range of flowering plants including pollen-rich species like red clover, yellow rattle and bird's-foot-trefoil. One of the main challenges for conservation of the shrill carder bee is that it is a late-emerging species, and so needs suitable foraging habitat from late May through until mid September, long after many species-rich grasslands have been cut or grazed-off. It is therefore important to look at the landscape from a bumblebee's point of view – 'where will I eat today?' – to identify and conserve pockets of late-flowering forage plants in hedge-rows, banks and late-cut fields, as well as manage meadows and pas-



© Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Thanks to CCW, NBN and the committee and members of BWARS for access to their data holdings

## The Bumblebee Habitat Project (...continued)

tures to ensure small patches are left to flower for a little longer. It is important not to change the management across the entire area of a flower-rich site, as this is likely to diminish its spe-

flower-rich edges in more intensively-managed grasslands. Small changes to timing and method of hedge, ditch, bank and verge management can also make a huge difference

where there is the potential to link populations. So if you think you may have some suitable land or have any queries we would be delighted to hear from you.

The bumblebee habitat

black band across the thorax, an orange tail and, of course, a distinctive buzz! If you have any new records, or are interested in recording bumblebees, please get in touch (or contact BWARS

[www.bwars.com](http://www.bwars.com)).

As Conservation Officer for England and Wales I will certainly be kept busy working to conserve the shrill carder bee and other bumblebees across my 'patch'. If you would like to help by joining BBCT, volunteering your time or otherwise supporting my work it would be fantastic to hear from you.

Please visit [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org) for more information.



© Bumblebee Conservation Trust

cies diversity. However, small patches cut late on rotation can offer really important forage later in the season, particularly if they are host to the shrill carder bee's favourite plants, such as legumes and labiates, together with devil's bit scabious and red bartisia, both of which flower after many other species have set seed.

Even outside of flower-rich grasslands, there is a lot that farmers and other land managers can do to provide bumblebee habitat. This can include providing forage plant crops in the margins of arable fields, or

for bumblebees. It is important to remember that bumblebees also provide a fantastic pollination service, which is key to good production in many arable and horticultural crops.

We are therefore very keen to hear from anyone who owns or manages land that could provide habitat for the shrill carder bee. We can provide support and advice and, in some cases, free wildflower seed, in the bumblebee habitat project's target areas. We may also be able to provide assistance to those outside of these areas, particularly

project has much to thank the hard-working committee and members of BWARS (Bees, Wasps, Ants Recording Society) for their work to provide accurate and detailed records of past and current bumblebee populations, and these records have been used to target the conservation effort for the shrill carder bee. Of course, the more people out there recording, the better, as continually updating the distribution maps is very important to prioritise our work. The shrill carder bee is relatively simple to differentiate from the other carder bees as it has a

**Dr Pippa Rayner**  
(Conservation Officer – England and Wales, Bumblebee Conservation Trust)

## Sustrans Wildlife Champions

Sustrans coordinates the National Cycle Network, which extends to 12,000 miles across the UK and 1200 miles in Wales alone. Approximately one third of the Network is traffic-free; along riversides, old railway lines and canal towpaths, and provides not just an environment for healthy and sustainable transport, but also green space in its own right. For example, on a disused railway line, a 2.5m wide walking and cycling path will typically account for just 10% of the total area the remainder will be green space. Individual sections of traffic-free cycle paths can run for many miles, connecting to other green spaces and acting as wildlife corridors, linking habitats and species which would otherwise be isolated from each other. These paths can also help increase people's knowledge of the natural environment, through experiencing plants and animals at first hand.

Sustrans has recently started an exciting new project in Wales called 'Wildlife Champions' that will help us manage the National Cycle Network (NCN) to preserve and promote biodiversity and also to involve new groups of people in understanding the natural world

around them. The scheme will recruit, train and support volunteers to become champions of the network in their area by adopting a 1km section of their local greenway, which they will survey and record the plants and animals that they find. No experience is necessary; in fact complete



beginners are actively encouraged to get involved. Equally, those with experience are encouraged to participate in this exciting project. The records completed by Wildlife Champions will be entered into SEWBRc's database and local authorities records, and will also allow Sustrans to record and promote the diversity of wildlife on the National Cycle Network and guide our route management plans to help improve

the local environment.

We are initially piloting the scheme in SE Wales, by running a series of one-day training courses for people interested in becoming volunteers. Training includes species identification and survey skills, so anyone will be able to become a wildlife

champion, regardless of their background or experience. We are initially piloting the scheme in SE Wales, by running a series of one-day training courses for people interested in becoming volunteers. Training includes species identification and survey skills, so anyone will be able to become a wildlife

on the importance of species recording. The participants were then taken out on to the Taff Trail (route 8 of the National Cycle Network) to carry out a short survey, where over 20 species were identified, two of which were invasive species (harlequin ladybirds and Himalayan balsam), which helped to emphasise the importance of the surveys.

The Wildlife Champions project is linked to a range of organisations, and to date we have developed it in partnership with SEWBRc, Local Authorities and National Museum of Wales. Anyone who is interested in becoming a wildlife champion, or would like to find out more about it should contact Roanna Larson, Georgina Harper or Sarah Goddard at Sustrans on 029 20650602.

**Georgina Harper  
(Sustrans)**

[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

A training day was held in September at Forest Farm in Cardiff, in partnership with Cardiff County Council, SEWBRc and the National Museum of Wales, where volunteers were given a superb introduction to the biodiversity of the local area by Laura Palmer (Cardiff CC Ecologist), and Lindsay Bamforth (SEWBRc) gave a talk

## Birdlife In The Neddern Valley - A Personal Record

The following notes on the birdlife of the Neddern Valley (the shallow valley which links Caerwent and Caldicot to the Severn Estuary) span the last fifty years and are based almost entirely on a series of casual observations made by the author during this period of time -1958 to 2008 (Colin Elliot has provided records for the early – mid 1980s).

Initially the Neddern lying between the Severn Estuary and a point just to the south-east of Caerwent was a tidal estuary. The construction of the Severn sea-wall and associated sluices brought an end to this tidal regime and the Neddern as we know it today, changed from being a brackish water environment to one of freshwater streams (Crick Brook and Neddern Brook), marshes and seasonal 'lakes' (floods following heavy rain).

I first knew this area during the 1950s, and late in that decade began to make notes on what I saw there. During this period the drainage management was such that the winter floods took a long time to clear, so providing a suitable breeding ground for the like of mute swan, shelduck, mallard, moorhen, coot, lapwing, redshank, common snipe, yellow wagtail, sedge warbler, reed bunting and cuckoo. In my experience the first attempts to improve the drainage of the Neddern came in the summer of 1961, followed by a second dredging about ten years later. Although the flood waters were evacuated more quickly as a result of this, the overall impact was only partial and the area

has remained a vibrant wildlife habitat.

During the early years of my visits to the Neddern Valley access was generally permitted to everyone by all of the landowner/tenants and people walked the valley regularly, often with dogs. Since the 1980s to 1990s however, access has been largely denied (except for footpath access) and this has resulted in a great proliferation of bird numbers. As well as the usual avian occupants the Neddern has also attracted some species regarded as scarce or even rare. These include greylag goose, gadwall, goldeneye, golden plover, wood sandpiper, jack snipe, grey phalarope, barn owl, great grey shrike, brambling and tree sparrow. In addition to those already mentioned, other species known to breed here over the years include common buzzard, kestrel, lesser spotted woodpecker, little owl, grey partridge and, only recently, little grebe.

The chart (page 13) summarizes the birds present over the sequence of years. Because of the essentially casual nature of the records (e.g. no visits made between 1988 and 1996) many years are left blank. This does not mean that the birds were not there of course, only that I was not there to record them. A 'dash' in the column for any year means that the

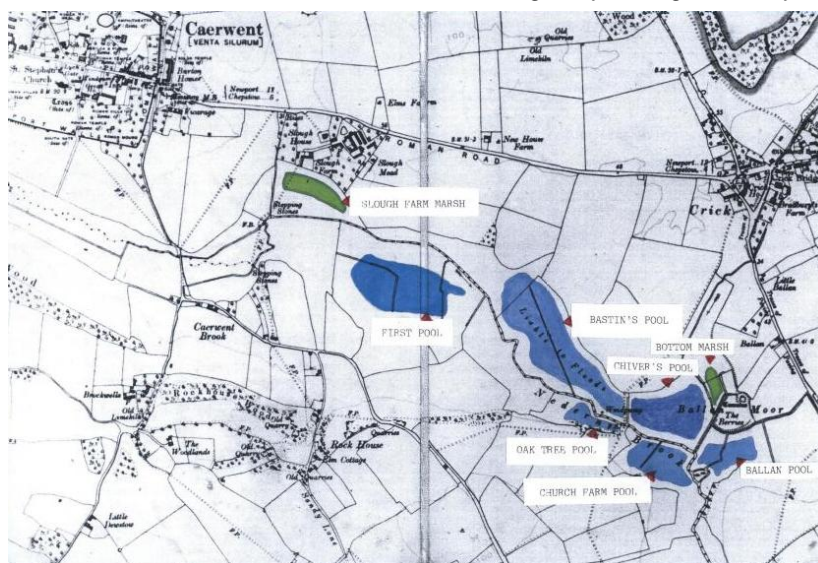
relevant bird was present but no figures were provided. Where numbers are given they represent the largest number of the relevant species recorded in that year. Each year is only given enough space to accommodate two-figure numbers so any counts over 99 are given an asterix - the actual numbers counted, or estimated, are given here in the order of their listing in the chart –

mallard (116 in 2002, c.100 in 2007 and 168 in 2008); teal (c.300 in 1968 and 130 in 1970); wigeon (c.2000 in 1997, 158 in 2000, c.100 in 2001, c.150 in 2002, c.200 in 2007 and c.300 in 2008); lapwing (c.100+ in 1971, c.200 in 1997, c.400 in 1998, c.700 in 1999, 881 in 2000, c.825 in 2001, c.200 in 2002, c.100 in 2007 and c.1000 in 2008); redshank (c.100 in 1977, c.100 in 1978, c.100 in 1983, c.100 in 1986, 296 in 2000, 209 in 2002 and 102 in 2008); black headed gull (c.300 in 1970, c.1500 in 1971,

c.200 in 1983, c.1700 in 1999, 365 in 2000, 152 in 2001, c.200 in 2007 and c.1000 in 2008); herring gull (197 in 1971); and common gull (c.250 in 1971).

Because these records do not truly indicate the overall presence of all bird species I have provided a continuous yellow 'band' suggesting the realistic span of regular occurrence by extrapolation. In the case of those which remain, there has most probably been no regular occurrence, only sporadic occurrence (e.g. in the great crested grebe and the cormorant).

Three other birds should be mentioned here as additional cases, additional, that is, to those mentioned in the chart. The first of these is the gadwall which I first noted on the Neddern floods as recently as the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2000 when just one bird was present. Two gadwall were noted on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and during 2008 a pair were seen regularly through January,



Map of the main Neddern Valley pools

## Birdlife In The Neddern Valley - A Personal Record (continued...)

February and April. On the 17th November four gadwall were present and five on the 18th November. In contrast to the recent appearance of the gadwall in the Neddern Valley is the former presence of the black tern, but only as a passage migrant. This species was first noted during the autumn of 1958 when a couple were noted in transitional plumage. During the spring of 1959 up to 17 black terns in full breeding plumage were observed over a period of five days (21st - 25th June) and then another bird (birds?) was seen in the late summer and autumn of 1960, but there have been no sightings made since.

The third species which deserves some attention is the water rail. Between 13th December 1959 and the 22nd April 1961 I saw this species on eleven occasions, usually single birds, but occasionally two. In those days every part of the Neddern's swamps and marshes would be investigated - a style of bird recording frowned upon today because of the obvious disturbance factor. But without such intrusive investigation this bird in particular, and to a lesser degree the common snipe and moorhen also, are very difficult to evaluate in terms of population levels. Because this intrusive method is no longer used I have not included the water rail in the species chart, though it may well still occur. During 2008 regular counts and observations were made in the Neddern Valley culminating in the sighting of 68 bird species (see list).

Like 2007, 2008 was a very wet year with unusually

high water levels during the summer. Unlike 2007 when little grebes decided on an attempt to breed during the second half of the summer, no such unusual nesting behaviour was noted in 2008 until the 21st October when a pair of black swans (*Cygnus atratus*) built a nest in the middle of Bastin's Pool (see map of the main Neddern Valley pools).

The initial sighting of the species here was made on the 29<sup>th</sup> September when a single bird was seen. On the 8th October a pair was seen and on the 13th October the first signs of possible nest construction. By the 21st October a nest was almost complete but heavy rain fall over several days during early November meant that the nest was in imminent danger of submersion. Despite desperate attempts by the swans to raise the level of the nest it was all to no avail and the pair had deserted by the 15th November when I found them occupying the lower pools of the valley. By the 26th November it was just possible to wade out to the nest which was found to contain five eggs.

### NOTES

1) *In the species chart the years from 1958 to 1991 are bordered by a blue band which represents the years of regular disturbance by walkers and wildfowlers alike. The following sequence bordered by an orange band represent the years of limited disturbance, and consequently higher numbers of most species present.*

2) *Records made between the 20th November 1999 and the 11th March 2000 - and those made between the 4th December 2001 and the 12th*

*March 2002 were made on a more organised and thorough basis as part of an official survey for Monmouthshire County Council and the Gwent Ornithological Society, to whom I am most*

*grateful for permission to use the relevant material in this article.*

**Colin Titcombe**

Teal	Robin	Great Spotted Woodpecker
Mallard	Mistle Thrush	Cormorant
Wigeon	Canada Goose	Herring Gull
Gadwall	Shoveler	Common Whitethroat
Mute Swan	Shelduck	Chiffchaff
Black Headed Gull	Moorhen	Garden Warbler
Common Gull	Magpie	House Sparrow
Lesser Black Backed Gull	Long Tailed Tit	Lesser Whitethroat
Blackbird	Little Egret	Willow Warbler
Song Thrush	Goldfinch	House Martin
Tufted Duck	Rook	Swift
Pied Wagtail	Jackdaw	Wren
Wood Pigeon	Redwing	Common Snipe
Redshank	Starling	Jay
Great Tit	Pintail	Raven
Carrion Crow	Greenfinch	Black Swan
Duncock	Chaffinch	Scaup
Common Buzzard	Green Woodpecker	Meadow Pipit
Lapwing	Stock Dove	Kingfisher
Grey Wagtail	Grey Lag Goose	Bewicks Swan
Little Grebe	Blue Tit	Goldcrest
Coot	Swallow	Pochard
Grey Heron	Blackcap	

### Neddern Valley Bird List 2008



Deserted black swan's nest and eggs on Baston's Pool, The Neddern Valley, Gwent (26th November 2008) © Colin Titcombe

Chart showing bird numbers recorded in Neddern Valley (1958-2008)

Bird Species	1958	1968	1978	1988	1998	2008
GREAT CRESTED GREBE	2	1				1
LITTLE GREBE	25	12	3			76
CORMORANT						1
LITTLE EGRET	15	3642	13	3	1	21624
GREY HERON		7				61014
CANADA GOOSE	1					613
WHITE FRONTED GOOSE	6	14		23		
MUTE SWAN	15480	183	1	335522		1428
WHOOPEE SWAN	28					
BELWICKS SWAN	101	142416412	5	1618	2112	1
SHELDUCK	12	62414	132	18	14	1826
MALLARD	14282	232	121172222	610	2	4**
TEAL	4201	6230	*503			3348
WIGEON		2028	4030	*		**
PINTAIL						24
GARGANEY	818	4	42			
SHOVELER	22	5420	5	330	7	428
POCHARD	111	13	1	6		3
TUFTED DUCK	22					912
GOLDENEYE	2					
MOORHEN	4012	33212	222	22		2521
COOT	4149	4	12	212	310222	3838
LAPWING	250	204	2	252	2	60**
DUNLIN		415				
REDSHANK	30	3	2	44530	3530	50*
CURLEW	8	21		1920	3	
COMMON SNIFE	9	2		10762		38
BLACK HEADED GULL	2	18				**
LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL		2		36		37
HEPKING GULL	1			30*		5
COMMON GULL				4*		
YELLOW WAGTAIL		2				752

## Management Changes at Harold Finch Memorial Park

The Harold Finch Memorial Park is the grounds of Pontllanfraith Council Offices, where the Go Wild! event is held. It contains two designated areas, a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Local Nature Reserve (LNR); it also contains a public park, a pond and a large area of regularly cut amenity grassland. Habitats include hay meadows, amenity grassland, wet meadow, a partially planted wildflower area, hedgerows, a pond, streams and woodland. The site is open to the public and is well used by dog walkers, families and council staff, and for easy access between the communities of Pontllanfraith, Blackwood and Woodfieldside. The site is owned by the Caerphilly County Borough Council's Park Services Department and is managed by Caerphilly County Borough Council's Countryside and Landscape Section.

The SSSI and LNR have been managed sympathetically as meadows for several years. The amenity grassland has always been cut frequently to maintain a manicured area, by the council's Park Services department as part of a long-term contract.

The LNR part of the site has been more inten-

sively managed for amenity purposes through frequent cutting which has resulted in a grass-rich sward in most areas. However, there are patches of wildflowers and elements of the SSSI meadows can still be found within the amenity grasslands, including lady's mantle and orchids. A relaxation in the number of cuts has provided a chance for wildflowers to return and increase the biodiversity of the site.

The Countryside and Landscape Section carried out a survey of the amenity grasslands within the LNR and

those adjacent within the public park after they had been uncut for a few weeks. This was to inform the existing species composition of these areas and to provide a baseline for future monitoring. Within weeks of the relaxation of cutting, the green manicured area was a mass of yellow, pink and white from the lady's smock, dandelions, buttercups and daisies. Several weeks later common spotted orchids started to appear and as the weeks passed the numbers increased. A small patch of heathland has started to develop in one corner of the site

and devil's bit scabious is appearing over the rest of the site. As the site is well used by walkers, dog walkers, local residents, families and school children for a variety of reasons, paths have been cut through the area allowing access. Due to the amenity grassland site being so species rich just from a reduction of cutting for one season, the site will be continually managed for biodiversity in the future as a continuation of the SSSI and LNR.

**Maggie Iles**  
(Biodiversity Assistant, Caerphilly County Borough Council)



© Caerphilly County Borough Council

**Several weeks after changing the cutting regime, wild flowers began to flourish**

## Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project – 2009 Monitoring Update

Monitoring of lapwing breeding sites in the Heads of the Valleys area has continued in 2009. With the help of 8 volunteer surveyors, 23 sites across Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly, and Merthyr Tydfil were monitored.

**“...there were almost 20% less breeding lapwing present in the areas monitored when compared with the outcome of monitoring the same sites in 2008”.**

Analysis of the results indicates there were almost 20% less breeding lapwing present in the areas monitored when compared with the outcome of monitoring the same sites in 2008.

Monitoring was carried out using a standard five visit breeding wader survey method. On each monitoring visit, the total number of adult lapwings, number of adult birds behaving as if with young and number and growth stage of chicks were recorded. Information about land use and livestock numbers, habitat type, (vegetation height, percentage rush cover, presence of wet features: ditches, pools and flushes), field boundaries and pres-

ence of predator vantage points, were also recorded.

Surveys were also carried out for predators. Numbers of corvids (crows, magpies) and raptors were observed during the survey period and scat surveys for mammalian predators (foxes and badgers), were carried out, based on presence of scats on a transect of approximately 1km in length for every 1km grid square monitored.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint what may have caused this apparent decline some interesting changes in nesting sites were observed between the two years. In particular, traditional strongholds for breeding lapwing in Blaenau Gwent, for example, Rhyd y Blew, Bryn Serth and Beaufort Hill were abandoned in favour of ‘new’ breeding sites on less disturbed farmland habitats. One site that maintained its

importance as a lapwing breeding site was Parc Bryn Bach also a Local Nature Reserve. Following significant management work over the last two years, a pair of lapwing bred again in 2009 successfully fledging two chicks, a very encouraging result.

Along with post-industrial sites, farmland and common land within the Heads of the Valleys area are vital for breeding lapwing with disturbance issues and increasing pressure placed on sites where they may have relied in the past for breeding habitat. This year's survey has highlighted that a significant number of lapwing nested on sites that are allocated as development sites and nearly a third were subject to disturbance by illegal off-road motorbike activity, for example on sites such as Gelligaer Common, Cefn Garn yr Erw and Bryn Serth.

The RSPB Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government (Department for the Economy & Transport) and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. More details are available from Camilla Smith, RSPB Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project Officer on 01495 355826, or [camilla.smith@rspb.org.uk](mailto:camilla.smith@rspb.org.uk).

**Camilla Smith (Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project Officer, RSPB)**



© Camilla Smith, RSPB

## Industrial Melanism

### Industrial melanism in meadow spittlebugs; what has happened in the last 20 years?

Industrial melanism is “adaptive melanism (dark coloured morphs) caused by anthropogenic alteration of the natural environment in terms of industrial pollution”. Most will know of the industrial melanism shown in some adult Lepidoptera - the peppered moth is perhaps the best-known example.

However there are a good number of other insects in which this has been shown and among them the common spittlebug *Philaenus spumarius*. This is an abundant insect in many habitats in the UK and continental Europe. It is a xylem sap-feeding insect feeding from a wide range of herbaceous plants. There is one generation each year, overwintering as eggs and the nymphal stages are present within spittle masses on the host plant. The adult insect occurs in a wide range of colour forms, which depends on the amount of darker pigmentation. The proportion of the different forms in different locations has been widely investigated both in the UK (e.g. Lees et al. 1983 Biological Journal of the Linnean Society 19: 99-114) and especially in Scandinavian localities.

There are a number of dark forms, which are found to occur in relatively low percentages in most of the UK. Around 30 years ago dark forms were found to predominate in the vicinity of the ‘Phurnacite’ factory in the Cynon valley in South Wales. The results of a sampling programme were published by Lees & Dent (1983 Biological Journal of the Linnean Society 19: 115-129). The factory was a significant source of local particulate air pollution and Lees & Dent found a strong relationship between the combined melanic morphs in the proximity of the factory. Over 98% of the insects were melanic immediately adjacent to the factory and this percentage declined to normal proportions for South Wales 1.5-6 km depending on the direction away from the factory. The melanic frequencies were far

higher than any found elsewhere in the species range in Europe, Asia and North America.

It was suggested that the relationship was due to the selective effects of the local air pollution from

**“A change in melanic frequency occurred in less than 40 generations since the factory was first operated.”**

the factory. It was not clear if selective predation, direct effects of pollution or thermoregulation are the factors involved in the prevalence of melanic forms. This change in melanic frequency (reported in 1983) occurred in less than 40 generations since the factory was first operated from 1942 (and expanded from 1951-1968).

The factory was removed around 20 years ago. What would be the proportion of melanics at the original sites some 20 years later? With the benefit of a Nuffield Science Bursary to Jenny O’Neill, a second year student from Cardiff University, we have this past summer sampled from as many of the original sites both in the Cynon Valley and in the Cardiff Docks (as a similar relationship was also found in the Cardiff Docks area).

Preliminary results, based on evaluation of over 8000 specimens from around 50 sites show that percentages of melanic morphs have decreased from the peak of 98% to around 50%. Full results are under analysis.

**Dr Mike Wilson (Head of Entomology, National Museum Wales)**



**Melanic and non-melanic forms of *Philaenus spumarius* © National Museum Wales (James Turner)**

## SEASHORE SIGHTINGS - HIGHLIGHTS IN GLAMORGAN 2009

As a professional marine biologist, I have been investigating the seashore along the Glamorgan coast throughout 2009. I have undertaken many of my own surveys but also during public and school events, have noted all sightings encountered.

Some of my highlights for this year include the rosy featherstar (*Antedon bifida*) living under boulders at Oxwich. This beautiful creature has ten feathery arms and a claw-like structure below which it uses to 'walk' along the rocks with. It is an excellent swimmer and a joy to observe in rockpools.

Many people will not realise that we do in fact have corals living around our coast. The soft coral

deadmans fingers (*Alcyonium digitatum*) comprises colonies of animals. Each 'finger' is a separate colony. In water, the tiny coral polyps will protrude into the current and feed using a ring of tentacles armed with stinging cells.

The tiny cushionstar (*Asterina phylactica*) is found in coralline pools mainly on Worm's Head causeway, Gower. It was only described in 1979 and very little is known about it. This animal is up to 1.5 cm across and recognised by the distinctive star pattern on its surface.

Butterfish (*Pholis gunnellus*) were fairly common this year. They are long and eel-like with about 11 dark spots along the

dorsal fin. The butterfish is covered in a layer of slime which helps it survive out of water at low tide. It can be found under rocks and seaweed.

Stranded jellyfish, mainly the dustbin lid or barrel jellyfish (*Rhizostoma octopus*) have been in abundance this summer around our coast. I was lucky enough to find some live specimens just offshore and observe their amazing structure and ballerina-like movement patterns.

In previous years there have been mass strandings of by-the-wind sailors (*Velella velella*). However, this year sightings have been quite rare. This strange creature lives on the

surface of warmer waters of the World's oceans and is a colonial animal called a hydroid. The direction of the sail along the float will determine the direction of travel.

I would urge you to record any interesting seashore sightings and report them to myself at [info@oakleyintertidal.co.uk](mailto:info@oakleyintertidal.co.uk) as I am the new County Recorder for this group. These will be collated and verified before being submitted to SEWBRc and MarLIN.

**Judith Oakley (Oakley Intertidal and City and County of Swansea)**



Rosy featherstar (*Antedon bifida*) © Judith Oakley ([www.oakleynaturalimages.com](http://www.oakleynaturalimages.com))



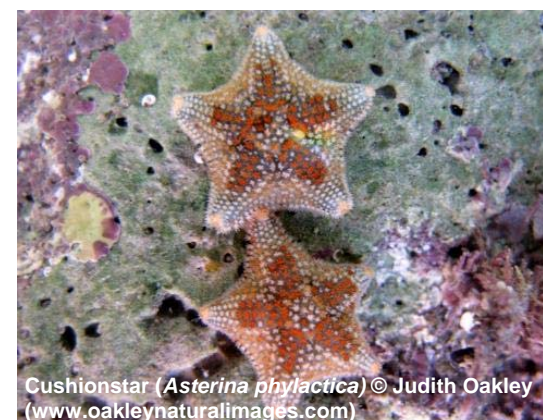
Butterfish (*Pholis gunnellus*) © Judith Oakley ([www.oakleynaturalimages.com](http://www.oakleynaturalimages.com))



Deadmans fingers (*Alcyonium digitatum*) © Judith Oakley ([www.oakleynaturalimages.com](http://www.oakleynaturalimages.com))



By-the-Wind sailors (*Velella velella*) © Judith Oakley ([www.oakleynaturalimages.com](http://www.oakleynaturalimages.com))



Cushionstar (*Asterina phylactica*) © Judith Oakley ([www.oakleynaturalimages.com](http://www.oakleynaturalimages.com))



Dustbin lid or Barrel jellyfish (*Rhizostoma octopus*) © Judith Oakley ([www.oakleynaturalimages.com](http://www.oakleynaturalimages.com))

## Vale of Glamorgan LBAP Update

The Vale of Glamorgan Biodiversity Partnership has had a successful year with good results from the projects that have been carried out and the culmination of the review of the Vale's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).

The Vale's LBAP has been transformed in the last few years and the end of 2009 sees the close of this review with the new, slim line LBAP currently out for consultation. Compared to the 2002 one which was 225 pages long this one is much more usable, easily updated and interactive. After the consultation period the species and habitat list will be a material consideration in planning decisions made by the council.

It is based around seven broad habitat types, with priority species and habitats associated to these. This allows management work done on a habitat to be recorded against all the species it helps, because although it may have been targeted towards a specific charismatic species it will tend to improve the habitat for other species using it too. An example of this is the tree sparrow

feeding project that was carried out again this year to help maintain the population in the Vale. Glamorgan Bird Club, with the aid of CCW grant, have helped create a sacrificial arable field margin using a diverse annual seed crop, plus they provided additional hanging feeders during the middle of winter. Providing food for the tree sparrows has helped the club try and identify its wintering grounds and aided the birds during their breeding seasons. Although there was one successful fledging from the specially provided nest boxes the club also put up the population seems to have decreased this year. However the feeding project has also attracted linnet, yellowhammer, reed bunting, song thrush, dunnock and the occasional grey partridge all of which are priority species on the LBAP and many of which are red listed as birds of conservation concern.

There have been a number of other LBAP partnership projects carried out this year that are supported by CCW grants, which have helped expand habitats, monitor species and improve re-

sources for them.

A bird ringing project to start looking at the linked use of wetland areas across south east Wales involved monitoring the birds at Cosmeston Lakes. In its first year highlights of the work were Cetti's warbler and water rail, and it is hoped that the project can be extended in the future to increase the areas assessed to see what sort of areas the birds use.

At Atlantic College in St Donat's a traditional orchard has been expanded and its traditional management has been maintained to encourage a wildflower meadow below it. This is an important habitat for many insects, birds and small mammals that will feed on the fruits of the trees and seeds of the plants in the grass.

Wildflower seeds were sown at Victoria Park in Barry to create a wildlife haven in the middle of a well used park, and the mini-meadow has already started attracting butterflies and bees. More yellow rattle will be sown this winter to further knock back the amenity grass and let more and more herbaceous flowering plants come through next

summer.

The LBAP booklet – *Wildlife in the Vale of Glamorgan* – is nearly complete. This booklet supports the review of the LBAP giving an introduction to the new layout, its aims, and protected habitats. Produced in collaboration with artist Graham Brace it gives an overview of the types of networks found in each broad habitat type and where you can go to see examples of them within the Vale. It is being produced bilingually - back to back, and should be available around Christmas from all the Vale of Glamorgan Council offices.

If you would like to be kept informed about local projects and receive local biodiversity updates by joining the Vale's Biodiversity Partnership, please email your details to [ecology@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:ecology@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk).

**Liz Stewart (Assistant Ecologist, Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council)**

## Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership

Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership has been able to designate 5 sites in the borough as new Local Nature Reserves including Parc Bryn Bach, Sirhowy woodlands, Beaufort Hills, Parc Nant Y Waun and Cwmtillery Lakes. All sites have a rich biodiversity, which can be enjoyed by all including members of the local community and visitors from outside the area. The designation was celebrated at a number of events, which were held

over the summer at the different sites.

A further 5 sites have been identified and will be designated over the next few years. Work has already begun to produce ecological management plans for Six Bells Colliery Site and Roseheyworth Community Woodlands, as part of the designation process.

In addition to this, 128 sites have been identified as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) or local Wildlife

sites as they are also known. These sites contain a variety of habitats ranging from grasslands and woodlands to post industrial and mosaics of many habitats.

The bird sub group has been active this year, working on a number of projects to protect threatened bird species across Blaenau Gwent. This has included the dipper, barn owl and long eared owl projects, which have involved erecting boxes up at sites with suitable habitat, to encourage

nesting.

A new assistant ecologist has recently been appointed – Katie Partington, who will be working alongside the ecologist, within the countryside team at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

**Claire Pooley  
(Ecologist, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council)**

## CUBS – The Cardiff Urban Bat Survey

This summer more than 120 volunteers across Cardiff have been involved in the largest bat survey ever undertaken in the city. Sixty 1km squares of the city were surveyed as part of the Cardiff Urban Bat Survey (CUBS) and it is anticipated that the results will give a broad picture of bat activity across Cardiff.

In Spring this year a call went out from Cardiff Bat Group asking members of the public to 'adopt' a 1km square of Cardiff, usually the area where they lived. Volunteers were then provided with bat detectors and training and asked to plan their own survey route within their square. They then went on to survey their area for bat activity three times; at the beginning of June, the end of July and in mid September.

The survey was organ-

ised by Steve Lucas, Wales Bat Officer for the Bat Conservation Trust, and is one of four urban bat surveys conducted around South Wales this Summer, the others being in Swansea, Newport and Neath.

Catalena Angele, secretary of the Cardiff Bat Group and 'local organiser' for the Cardiff Urban Bat Survey said "Take up for the survey was phenomenal in Cardiff, with many more volunteers than anticipated. People were very enthusiastic about learning more about the bats in their local area and loved being able to hear bats with the bat detector".

No expert knowledge of bats or previous survey experience was required as full training was provided by Steve Lucas. Training was given on how to recognise

'echolocation calls' and 'feeding buzzes' and volunteers were loaned a bat detector for the full five month survey period, allowing them plenty of time to practice and to gain experience in listening to bats.

Traditionally, wildlife surveys tended to focus on areas outside of the city centre which was often considered to be wildlife-poor. However, urban areas are increasingly recognised as valuable habitats for some species. Evidence suggests that streets, gardens and parks are frequently used by bats as feeding sites, and that houses and other urban buildings are used as roosts. This survey aims to measure how valuable Cardiff's urban centre is to the bat population in the area.

Survey results have now been sent back to the Bat Conservation Trust where they will be analysed and a report for each city will be published in 2010. Catalena said "The data that the volunteers collected this summer will be of direct value in planning bat conservation efforts in and around Cardiff in the future. I think that people really appreciated being given this opportunity to make a real contribution to conservation in their local area. We are all very eager to see the results!".

**Catalena Angele  
(Secretary, Cardiff Bat Group)**

## SPOTLIGHT ON A LOCAL RECORDING ORGANISATION: GWENT FUNGUS GROUP



***Hygrocybe punicea* (crimson waxcap).** One of the many species of waxcap found at St Woolos Cemetery, Newport. © Gwent Fungus Group

The Gwent Fungus Group has been in existence for many years, however after a few years gap, when the original group leader moved away, it was re-launched in 2005 by George and Sheila Spence who run the group today.

We have close links with both the Association of British Fungus Groups and British Mycological Society, being affiliated to both associations as well as having regular contact with our neighbouring fungus groups in Glamorgan, Herefordshire, the Forest of Dean and Cotswolds.

Fungus forays are arranged for members throughout the Spring and Autumn to identify and record the fungi found at various sites in Gwent and as part of our outreach events we have taken a stand to the Monmouth Show for the last few years as well as other events in and around the Old Monmouthshire area.

Members of the group have also been involved in survey work for CCW and have links with Monmouthshire Meadows and the Living Churchyard project, both organised by the Gwent Wildlife Trust.

Sheila has been closely involved in mycology and field recording for many years, particularly since she attended a 3 year course on fungi through Nottingham University back in the very early 1990's. It now takes up a large part of both Sheila and George's lives and they enjoy passing on their knowledge and enthusiasm to other people, particularly through classes, such as those run by GWT, and their outreach activities at shows and other public events.

One of their most recent achievements was recording fungi at Newport's St Woolos Cemetery where the huge

amount and diversity of grassland fungi proved it to be a site of real importance, both in Wales and the UK overall. Until sites like this are properly surveyed on a regular basis many will be lost to the Nation as more and more of these hugely important sites are 'improved' and developed.

On a grander scale, George and Sheila again hosted the British Mycological Society's Roadshow at Malvern Autumn Show where they were awarded a RHS Gold Medal for their educational stand. Enthusiasm and educating people about the wonders and magic of fungi, so often popping up out of nowhere overnight, is hard work – but great fun and enjoyed by both local field

mycologists and some of the UK's top scientists alike.

If you would like to find out about joining the Gwent Fungus Group please contact George & Sheila by email: [gwentfungusgroup@btinternet.com](mailto:gwentfungusgroup@btinternet.com) or telephone 01531 631736 for further information. Our website address is [www.gwentfungusgroup.org.uk](http://www.gwentfungusgroup.org.uk) where you can also find out more about this group and its activities.

**Sheila Spence**  
(Chairman of Gwent Fungus Group)



**The Gwent Fungus Group's stand in the Countryside marquee at the Monmouth Show 2009 © Gwent Fun-**

## The invasion of *Harmonia axyridis*



*H. axyridis* adult © David Slade

Many people will be aware of the fact that we have a new ladybird in the British fauna. *Harmonia axyridis* was first found in Britain in the summer of 2004, and since then it has spread rapidly through the country. It is now well and truly established in South Wales, and it is spreading west. It was found in Bristol and South East Wales a couple of years ago; Greg Jones tells me that he found it in Bridgend in October 2008, Barry Stewart

also saw one, and I saw both larvae and an adult in my garden in Gowerton to the west of Swansea this year. One also turned up in Margam Park on 13th September, at a beetle identification training event.

Sometimes called the harlequin ladybird, this beast has a fearsome reputation. It has been described as the most invasive ladybird on the planet, and lived up to that in North America, where it has become the dominant

species after being introduced in 1988. It is feared that it will pose a significant threat to our native species, both because it may out-compete them and also because it is said that the harlequin larvae will eat the larvae of other species as well as their normal diet of aphids.

*Harmonia axyridis* has very variable markings, but may be recognised reasonably easily. It is a large ladybird (7-8 mm, like the 7-spot, *Coccinella 7-punctata*; larger than most other common species). It has brown legs (the 7-spot has black legs), and it has a broad ridge at the base of the elytra.

**Steve Bolchover**  
(VC41 Beetle Recorder)

### Spotted in Caerphilly County Borough

Jon Hole (Chief Countryside Ranger for Caerphilly County Borough Council) spotted the first harlequin ladybird for Caerphilly County borough whilst out with a college group. The ladybird was found in Waunfawr Park, Risca on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009. This individual was one of the dark specimens with the red markings. The sighting was sent to the harlequin ladybird organisation.

**Maggie Iles**  
(Biodiversity Assistant, Caerphilly County Borough)



*H. axyridis* larvae © David Slade



*H. axyridis* pupa © David Slade

## Two North American alien bugs arrive in South Wales

### *Leptoglossus occidentalis* (Heidemann) Western Conifer Seed Bug

This large impressive coreid bug was first noticed in the UK in 2007 and appears to have arrived in large numbers each autumn since then. It finally arrived in south Wales in autumn 2009\*. Other records have come from Yorkshire and west of England. The species has conquered a large part of Europe within just a decade and because of its high reproductive and dispersal capabilities further spread and establishment of the species in Europe is very likely.

The native range is likely to be west of the Rocky Mountains in North America, from British Columbia to Mexico. Since the 1950s the species spread eastward and reached the east coast in the 1990s. The first European records date from 1999 near Vicenza (northern Italy). The species spread in

Italy and later rapidly elsewhere in Europe. It was recorded in 2002 in Switzerland; 2003 in Slovenia and Spain; 2004 in Croatia and Hungary; 2005 in Austria; 2006 in France, Germany and the Czech Republic and 2007 in the United Kingdom, the Slovak Republic, and Poland.

From the first record in northern Italy there seems to be natural spread to Switzerland, Slovenia, and Croatia and nearby countries, but the isolated records in Ger-

many (Berlin) and the United Kingdom (Weymouth, Dorset) point to repeated introduction or secondary translocation within Europe from the south to the north.

*Leptoglossus occidentalis* overwinters as an adult in crevices or similar places under bark or other structures. The species is capable of flying long distances, but also can be translocated as egg, nymph, or adult with its host plant (conifers).

It may enter buildings in large numbers in autumn and so become a nuisance to people. It feeds on the young seeds or flowers of conifer species, with a preference for Pinaceae



*Leptoglossus occidentalis* © Rebecca Sharp

(*Pinus* sp., *Pseudotsuga menziesii*); but it has also been observed on *Picea*, *Cedrus*, *Abies* and *Juniperus*. Feeding causes reduction of seed fertility, but no economic impact is known so far in Europe, whereas the species is regarded as pest in its native range.

Further details can be obtained from W. Rabitsch (2008) *Alien True Bugs of Europe* (Insecta: Hemiptera: Heteroptera) *Zootaxa* **1827**: 1-44.

**Dr Mike Wilson (Head of Entomology, National Museum Wales)**

\* *L. occidentalis* was spotted in the offices of the Neath Port Talbot Countryside & Biodiversity Unit in Baglan in September. It was also recorded in Swansea in October. The sighting in Baglan is the first known record in Wales.

### *Prokelisia marginata* (van Duzee) (Hemiptera: Delphacidae)

Immigrant species are more likely to be noticed if they are found on a crop plant or an ornamental, where in the absence of natural enemies or predators they may multiply quickly and cause damage. In natural habitats, however, immigrant species may be less readily noticed, unless collected by a specialist.

In September 2008 large populations of the small delphacid planthopper *Prokelisia marginata* were found on *Spartina* marsh in Southampton water, Poole Harbour and also marshes to the east of Southampton. Its discovery on the south coast was made by a chance finding of migrating indi-

viduals about 30 miles north of Southampton.

This is the third area where the species has been found in Europe, the other two being the Algarve area of Portugal and extending into Spain and the coastal area of Slovenia. It is difficult to say how long the species has been present in the UK. In 2008 no specimens were found in the Severn Estuary. However, in August 2009 adults and nymphs were found on the scattered *Spartina* stands, both near the Severn Bridge and at Peterstone Wentlooge near Cardiff, and abundantly at Bridgewater Bay in Somerset. This summer has also seen the species found in

Norfolk and the Thames estuary. A visit to the north Gower marshes failed to find any specimens in September 2009.

In the USA, *P. marginata* is abundant on the extensive coastal marshes, especially on the East Coast. Densities of the planthopper may exceed 2000 per square metre. It has been the subject of many ecological studies in the US and there is an extensive literature on the species.

**Dr Mike Wilson (Head of Entomology, National Museum Wales)**



© National Museum Wales (James Turner)

## Parrots in Deri?

It was during July, when we had the warm front that brought over the surge of painted lady butterflies, that I spotted the unusual bird sat on the roof of a house in Deri.

At first glance, I thought it was an escaped parrot, but after another glance, whilst watching it fly away into the woods I realised it was not a parrot, but I wasn't sure what it was.

A couple of days later, my cousins told me about an unusual bird that was perched on their roof. They were attracted to its call as it was very different and very noisy. When they described this bird, I realised it was the same bird I had seen a couple of days

previous.

On my return to work on the Monday I rang Geri Thomas and Dave Beveridge and described the bird that myself and my cousins had seen in Deri, which was the size of a crow, brown, with a blue breast. Once they had got over the excitement they managed to tell me it was a roller! This is apparently the first sighting in Glamorgan for this species.

**Maggie Iles (Biodiversity Assistant, Caerphilly County Borough Council)**

### Editors Note:

*The European roller (Coracias garrulus) is the only member of the roller family to breed in Europe. It is also found in North Africa, Iran, Siberia, Iraq and east to China. It is rarely seen in the UK although a few individuals have been spotted on the eastern coast of the UK in the past. It is a stocky bird, the size of a jackdaw, mainly a vivid blue colour with a brown back. The European roller is classified as Near Threatened (NT) by the IUCN.*

## 'Birding in Glamorgan'

The Glamorgan Bird Club (GBC) recently launched a new "where to watch" guide to the birds of Glamorgan. The book was officially launched on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October at Kenfig National Nature Reserve. The day included a bird ringing demonstration, a guided walk around the Reserve and also incorporated the grand opening of the new GBC library trolley.

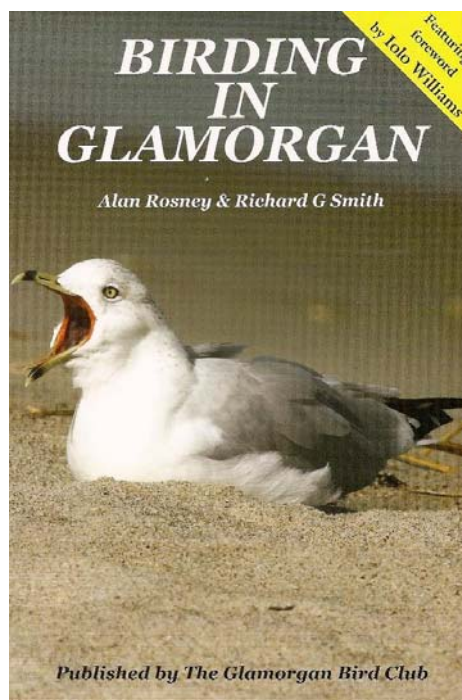
Included in the book are 53 site guides from right across the old county of Glamorgan. SEWBReC have contributed by providing a coloured map of Glamorgan. Each site guide has a sketch map, access details and a list of the species that are likely to be encountered. There

is also a comprehensive table of where to see specific species and details on the rarities that have occurred in the county. Throughout the text are colour plates illustrating both species and habitats and a series of black and white vignettes from local artists. At the back of the book is a list of useful contacts and a county checklist.

Copies of 'Birding in Glamorgan' are available for £14. Please contact Alan Rosney on 01443 841555 for more details.

**Alan Rosney  
(Glamorgan Bird Club)**

[www.glamorganbirds.org.uk](http://www.glamorganbirds.org.uk)



## Events

### The Conservation of Amphibian and Reptiles in Wales: One Day Conference and Networking Event

*Date:* Saturday 28th November 2009

*Location:* Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea

*Cost:* £26.50 for non ARG members and £22.50 for concessionary (includes teas/coffees, lunch & pastries).

Contact Chaela Carrell for further information.

Email: [chaela\\_carrell@msn.com](mailto:chaela_carrell@msn.com)

Web: [www.swwarg.co.uk](http://www.swwarg.co.uk)



© Daniel Read



© David Slade

### The Golden Great Nut Hunt

This year is the 21st anniversary of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP). In celebration of this and to launch the third Great Nut Hunt, the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) have hidden 20 silver nuts and 1 golden nut in woodlands in England and Wales. Whilst you are searching for dormouse-nibbled hazel nuts, keep an eye out for one of the 21 flags representing the golden and silver nuts. If you find one, you should take it home, and then contact PTES to collect your reward.

To take part in the Great Nut Hunt and to receive your free survey pack, call 020 7498 4533 or visit [www.greatnuthunt.co.uk](http://www.greatnuthunt.co.uk). Survey packs contain more information about the silver and golden nut prizes, information about the hazel dormouse, a recording form, guides on how to identify hazel trees and nibbled nuts, and instructions on how to determine a grid reference. Their website also has a handy 'find your nearest woodland' function. By simply typing your postcode into the search facility, it provides you with the three nearest woodlands they would like you to search, with a map showing the locations.

Happy hunting!

**Please remember you can advertise your events and training courses for free on the SEWBRc website. Please send details to Lindsay Bamforth ([info@sewbrec.org.uk](mailto:info@sewbrec.org.uk))**

**The SEWBRc website can be found at [www.sewbrec.org.uk](http://www.sewbrec.org.uk)**

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!

### Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

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