



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No 75

May 2011.

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

Editor: Martin Anthoney

Spring 2011 – The Winners

A severe winter has been followed by one of the warmest, driest springs on record. Warm, sunny days tend to be accompanied by cool, clear nights, so it is no surprise that butterflies and day-flying moths have been more abundant than moths coming to light at night. I would select three species which have fared particularly well this spring:

Drab Looper

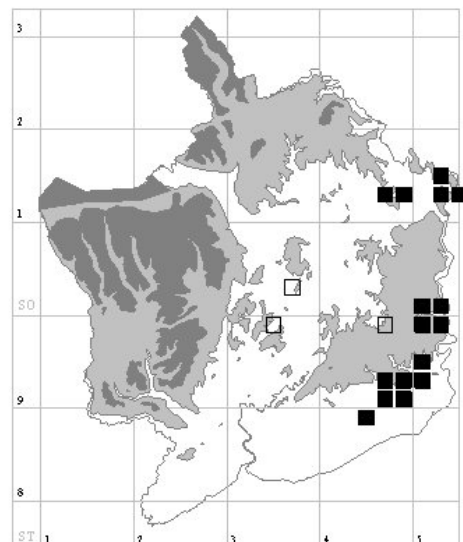
This small, brownish-grey day-flying moth has had its best season in Gwent since 2007. A UK Priority species (Wales Section 42 species) whose foodplant, wood spurge, is limited to the eastern half of Gwent, very encouragingly this year Drab Looper has been recorded from nearly all its previously known sites to which we have been able to gain access. This is despite only the Hendre Wood site producing records in recent years and the moth not being found at two of the sites for over twenty years despite targeted searches. Drab Looper is regarded as a weak flyer so it is unlikely to be a case of the moth spreading out in good years. Could it be that Drab Looper is able to survive in low numbers during years of less-than-ideal conditions but is conspicuous in good seasons such as this warm, sunny spring?

This year's records are:

- 6th May 3 at Redding's Inclosure, Forest of Dean. (Martin Anthoney). First record since 2007.
- 10th May / 16th May 2 and 1 respectively at Ravensnest Wood (Angiddy Valley). (Martin Anthoney).
First records.
- 10th May 1 at Buckle Wood (Angiddy Valley). (Martin Anthoney). First record since 2007.
- 16th May 2 at Glyn Wood (Angiddy Valley). (Martin Anthoney & Roger James) First record.
- 16th May 6+ at Lower Hale Wood (Angiddy Valley). (Martin Anthoney & Roger James). Flying
above the same small clump of spurge where they were last recorded in 2006!
- 16th May Several at Hendre Wood. (Clare Williams). Recorded annually at this site.
- 16th May 2 at Slade Wood (Clare Williams). First records since 1981.
- 19th May 1 at Cockshoot Wood near Chepstow (Martin Anthoney & Roger James). A new site.
- 1st June 2 at Dixon Embankment. (Martin Anthoney & Roger James). First record since 1988.

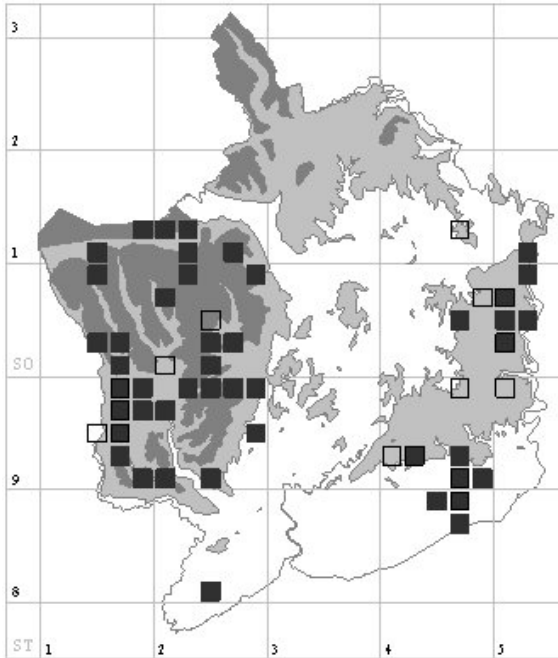


*Drab Looper & its Gwent distribution
(solid squares post 2000, open squares pre 2000)*



Dingy Skipper

Another UK Priority species (Wales Section 42 species), this butterfly has had its second consecutive prolific season and is now really consolidating its position in Gwent. Dingy Skipper thrives on sheltered post-industrial sites where bird's-foot trefoil is established (see article in *Silurian* issue 67, May 2010). Another six new sites have been recorded this year, but particularly encouraging is that the Dingy Skipper distribution pattern now shows groups of post-industrial sites so that it is no longer dependent on the continuing good condition of a few individual sites.



Furthest east is a cluster of traditional meadow sites supplemented by heathland restoration projects in the Trellech area.

To the south-east another cluster has Slade Wood supplemented by the new Rogiet Country Park, the new Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserve at Minnetts Field and the regenerating area around Ifton Quarry. The colonies on the regenerating coal tips of the western Gwent valleys have been discussed in previous articles, but another cluster is emerging in the north west based on old quarries in the Clydach area southwards into the Forgotten Landscapes Project around Blaenavon.

Perhaps the most encouraging 2011 Dingy Skipper record is of individuals on post-industrial land near St Mellons, the first time the species has been recorded from the outskirts of Cardiff that extend into the south west corner of VC35.

Dingy Skipper & its Gwent distribution
(solid squares post 2000, open squares pre 2000)

20% of the Dingy Skipper records received in 2010 and 2011 involve double figure counts with 150 in a single visit to Blaenserchan being the highest count.

In 2011 Dingy Skipper has been recorded from 15 sites between 22nd April and 31st May, including the six new sites.

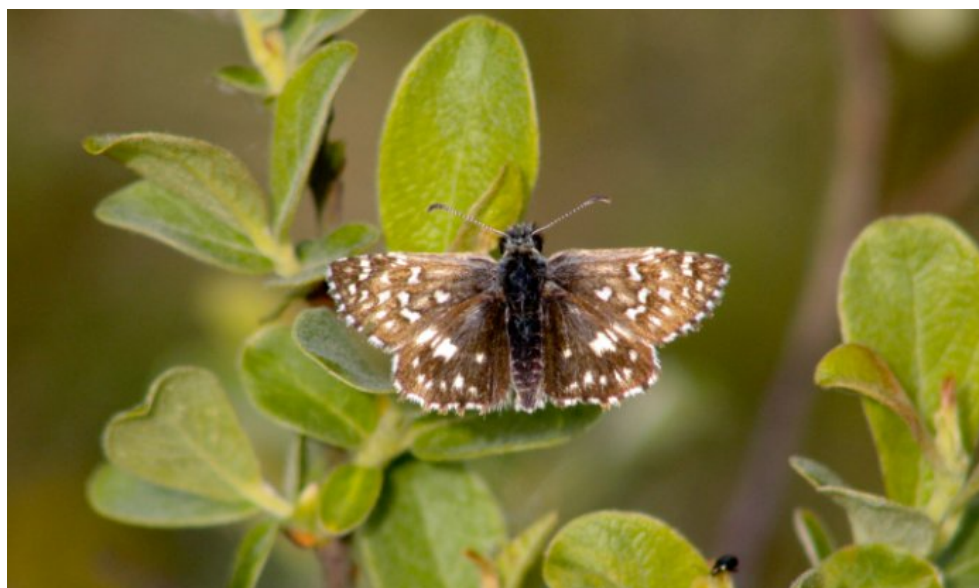
Dingy Skipper



Orange-tip

Although a common butterfly, Orange-tip, particularly the male, is readily seen and identified – it can even be spotted during car journeys. This spring, the abundant sunshine has allowed the butterfly to be on the wing for much of the time leading to a spectacular increase in records, with 87 records reported compared to an average of 29 per year over the previous decade. These records are well-spread over the county and clearly show the absence of Orange-tips from much of the agricultural centre of Gwent.

- 5th May Little Thorn, Sharp-angled Carpet and Alder Kitten at Penallt (Stephanie Tyler)
- 6th May. Dingy Skipper at Ifton Quarry. A new site. (Martin Anthoney)
 Five Little Thorn in Penhow Woodlands NNR. (Martin Anthoney & Roger James)
- 8th May Dingy Skipper at St Mellons on the outskirts of Cardiff. Two more were recorded on 14th May. A new site. (Michael Field)
- 11th May Two Eyed Hawk *in cop* at Newport (Friars Road) (Maria Jobes)
- 12th May Dingy Skipper at Gwent Wildlife Trust's Minnetts Field Reserve. A new site. (Martin Anthoney)
 Little Thorn in Glyn Wood (Angiddy Valley). (Martin Anthoney)
- 19th May A singleton Grizzled Skipper at Blaenserchan. The first confirmed record for this species away from the Caerwent area. A second possible individual was seen two days later, but not close enough to be confirmed. Also Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. (Rupert Perkins)



Grizzled Skipper
(Rupert Perkins)

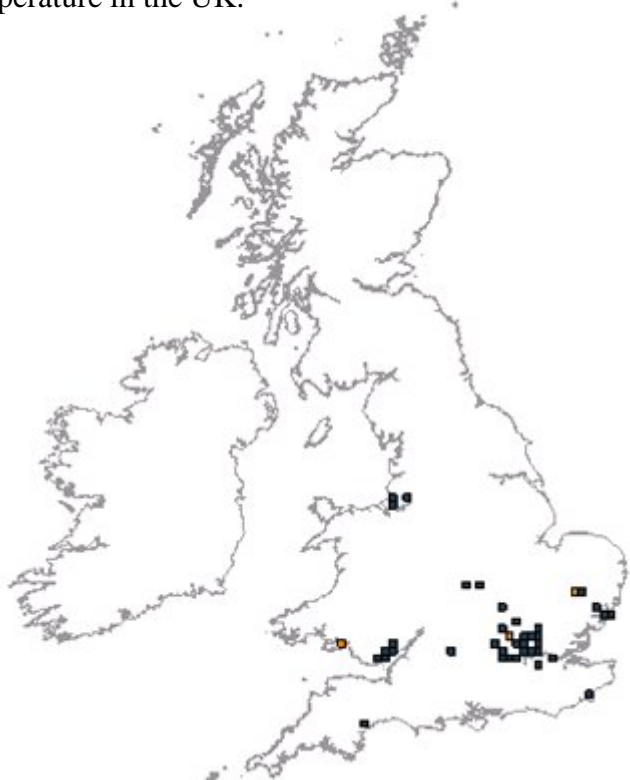
- 19th May Little Thorn in Cockshoots Wood near Chepstow. (Martin Anthoney & Roger James)
 Dog's Tooth, Figure of Eighty and Gold Spot to light at St Brides.
 (John Morgan & Diana Westmoreland)
- 20th May. The first Large Skipper of the season at Penallt. (Ian Rabjohns)
- 21st May. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Blackrock Quarry, Clydach. (Jeremy Richards)
 Plus a further six at Blaenserchan. (Martin Anthoney & Rupert Perkins)
- 24th May. An impressive 200 Marsh Fritillary, together with Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and Dingy Skippers, at Aberbargoed. (Bill Jones)
- 25th May. Four Dingy Skippers at Rogiet Country Park. A new site, the Country Park has been open less than a year. (Martin Anthoney).

- 27th May. Eleven Dingy Skipper at Sirhowy Hill Woodlands. Yet another new site for this butterfly. (Martin Anthony and Rodney Morris)
- 28th May. Alder Moth to light at Llandogo. (Linda Pullin)
- 30th May. Brown Rustic to light at Rassau. (Rodney Morris)
- 31st May. A Dingy Skipper at Branches Fork Reserve, Pontypool. The sixth new site for this species during May. (Rupert Perkins)

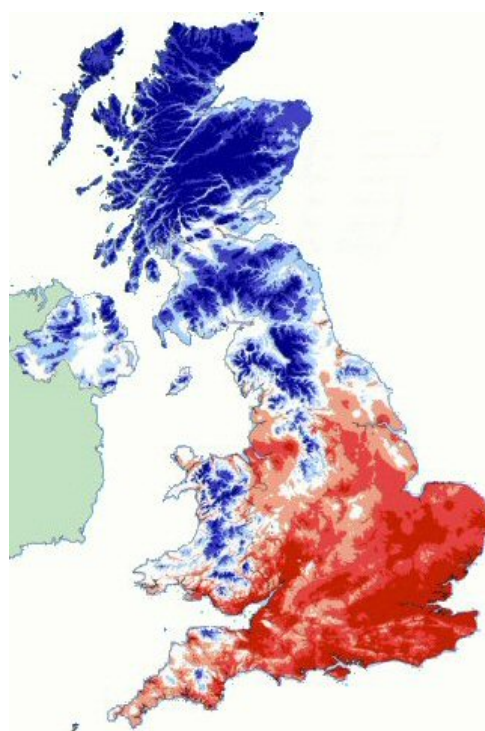
Gwent, Temperature and Lepidoptera Distribution (Part 3) – Small Ranunculus

This article is the third in a series based on a short talk I gave to the first BC National Moth Conference in Birmingham in January. An increase of 1°C in the mean summer temperature in Gwent over the thirty year period 1970 to 2000 may have affected the distribution of several moth and butterfly species. One interesting possibility is the Small Ranunculus moth, which up to 1900 was common in Britain, mainly in eastern and southern counties. It then suffered a catastrophic decline, and by 1912 it had disappeared from most of its range. The last record was 1941, and it was assumed to be extinct in Britain until it reappeared in Kent in 1997 and Newport in 1999 when Roger James caught one at light. It was subsequently proved to be breeding at several sites in Newport. (see Roger James' two-part article in *Silurian* issues 33 and 34, March and April 2006)

There seems to be a correlation between areas in Britain where Small Ranunculus has reappeared and mean summer temperature. The distribution by 2009 is shown next to the map of mean summer temperature in the UK.



Small Ranunculus Distribution 2009



Mean Summer Temperature 1970-2000

Most of the dots on the Small Ranunculus distribution map are in the vicinity of ports and estuaries: these tend to be more readily accessible to immigrant species but there is also the possibility that they are good sources of post-industrial land where the ruderal foodplant, prickly lettuce, can thrive. Prickly lettuce is known to have occurred in ruderal sites in Gwent since at least 1973, 26 years before Small Ranunculus arrived, so spread of Small Ranunculus is not governed solely by availability of habitat or foodplant. The dots match up well with the darkest red (warmest) areas on the temperature map. Is it

just coincidence that Small Ranunculus has recolonised the warmest areas, or has the rise in temperature over the past thirty years helped the re-establishment of Small Ranunculus?

Martin Anthony

Newport Report

Moths

First Newport records for 2011:

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| 1 st May | Haisboro Avenue | Alder Moth and Small Square-spot |
| 3 rd May | Haisboro Avenue Melbourne Way | Poplar Hawk, Pale Tussock Clouded-bordered Brindle, Cream Wave, Chocolate Tip, Cabbage Moth, Mottled Pug |
| 4 th May | Uskmouth Goldcliff | Silky Wainscot Green Carpet, Setaceous Hebrew Character, Obscure Wainscot |
| 5 th May | Goldcliff St Brides | Burnet Companion Burnished Brass |
| 6 th May | Penhow Woodlands (Coed Wen) Melbourne Way | Little Thorn (5), Silver-ground Carpet Red Twin-spot Carpet, Light Brocade, Vine's Rustic, Marbled Minor, Peppered Moth, Tawny Marbled Minor, Dark Arches |
| 9 th May | Allt-yr-yn | Mother Shipton |
| 10 th May | Melbourne Way Newport Stadium (ST334866) | Miller, Ingrailed Clay, Common Wave, Common White Wave, Treble-bar Scarlet Tiger larva |
| 14 th May | Gaer Park Lane | Treble Brown Spot |
| 15 th May | Wentwood Reservoir Melbourne Way | Fox Moth larvae (2) Lime Hawk, Heart and Club |
| 20 th May | Melbourne Way Home Farm, Caerleon | Angle Shades, Shears, Nutmeg, Flame, Willow Beauty, Rivulet, Turnip Moth, Light Emerald Large Yellow Underwing |
| 25 th May | Home Farm, Caerleon | Scorched Carpet |
| 27 th May | Melbourne Way | Mottled Beauty, Small Dusty Wave, Light Arches, Green Pug, Marbled White-spot |
| 31 st May | Haisboro Avenue | Scalloped Hook-tip |

Small Eggar Web Update (per Kevin Dupé):

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| 5 th May | 1 web on main road near Redhouse, Goldcliff 3 webs at Saltmarsh Grassland, Goldcliff |
| 17 th May | 4 webs at Whitson. |

Thanks to the recorders:

| | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Home Farm Caerleon | Kath & Chris Jones | Haisboro Avenue | Sheila Dupé |
| Uskmouth, Goldcliff and Gaer Park Lane | | Kevin Dupé | |
| St Brides | John Morgan & Diana Westmoreland | Melbourne Way | Roger James |
| Allt-yr-yn | Roger James | Newport Stadium | Kevin Dupé |
| Penhow Woodlands | Martin Anthony & Roger James. | | |

Butterflies

A full report will appear in the next edition of the Silurian.

Roger James

Dates for your Diary 2011

- Thursday 9th June. Moth & Bat Watch at Newport Wetlands NNR, 8.45pm until 11.30pm.
(Monmouthshire Moth & Butterfly Group and CCW).
Meet in the car park. Please bring a torch.
- Saturday 11th June. *Go Wild* show in the grounds of the Council Offices, Pontllanfraith.
Fun for all the family 11am to 4pm.
- Friday 17th June. Moth Trapping at the Environmental Resource Centre, Ebbw Vale.
Led by Rodney Morris, cost £3 or £6.
Booking essential: phone Gwent Wildlife Trust 01600 740600 for details.
- Saturday 16th July. Trapping and Identifying Moths. Tidenham Chase, Chepstow.
Led by Val Jackson. For details, contact Gwent Wildlife Trust 01600 740600
- Saturday 16th Oct. Butterfly Conservation (South Wales Branch) Members' Day and AGM.
Kenfig NNR Visitors' Centre.

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