

GWENT RECORDERS' NEWSLETTER

Welcome to Issue 10 of the Gwent Recorder's Newsletter October 2006

More articles needed...

A **big thank you** to all those who have contributed to this newsletter!

But, thinking ahead to the next issue, we will want more articles from Recorders – it could be 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 sitings etc to:
SEWBRc, 13 St Andrews Crescent, Cardiff, CF10 3DB.
029 20 64 1110 info@sewbrec.org.uk

6th Gwent Recorders' Forum Meeting February 2006

The 6th meeting of the Forum took place on Saturday 11th February 2006 at The University of Wales College Newport (Caerleon Campus).

Presentations were heard from Adam Rowe (*SEWBRc Update*, and *Analysis of SEWBRc's data-holdings*). Presentations were also provided by various recorders: Sam Bosenquet - *Bryophyte Recording in Monmouthshire VC*, Alan Williams - *Birds of Gwent*, Julian Branscombe - *Invertebrate Recording on Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserves*, Sheila Spence - *Fungi Recording in Gwent*, Shelley Evans - *Fungi Recording*, and Ian Rabjohns - *Gwent Bat Survey Project*.

The workshops considered:

- Are there additional datasets that SEWBRc may not be aware of?
- Are there any barriers (perceived or actual) to data sharing with SEWBRc?
- What steps should be taken (and by whom) to start the process of filling these gaps?
- The future of the species subgroups.

Many ideas were produced for accessing new records, and it was agreed that the species subgroups would continue and take a more pro-active role in supporting LBAP targets, obtaining funding, and organising Gwent-wide surveys. Full minutes of the day have been circulated, but if you would like a copy please contact SEWBRc (see contact details above).

Rebecca Davies, SEWBRc

7th GWENT RECORDER'S FORUM

The 7th Gwent Recorder's Forum will take place at the

**University of Wales
College Newport, Caerleon
Campus**
on
**Saturday 20th January
2007.**

Please find your invitation to the Forum enclosed with this newsletter. Please distribute the invite to any other interested parties and advertise on your websites, and within your organisation/groups where appropriate.

A detailed programme of the day will be distributed shortly. Any requests/suggestions for items to be included in the next meeting should be forwarded to SEWBRc – see contact details above.

SEWBReC is currently midway through its second financial year since it entered its running phase (in August 2005). The 2006/07 financial year has proved that SEWBReC is a very viable business which can be run on a stable financial footing.

Across the whole of South East Wales, support from Local Authorities has been rather patchy (we currently have Service Level Agreements (SLA) in place with only five out of the twelve Unitary Authorities in our region); but stability comes from the consistent support of Assembly-sponsored bodies (such as the Countryside Council for Wales and Forestry Commission Wales) and the Welsh Assembly Government's Department of Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (formerly the Welsh Development Agency). In addition a welcome boost is given to us each year by a small SLA with Gwent Wildlife Trust.

The Greater Gwent area is well represented within SEWBReC's funding partners. SLAs are in place with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (commenced in October 2006), Caerphilly CBC and Monmouthshire County Council. In addition, we remain optimistic of securing an SLA in the near future with Torfaen CBC. Positive discussions have also taken place with both Newport CC and Cardiff CC, so complete coverage of SEWBReC SLAs is still a distinct possibility in the Greater Gwent area.

SAY HELLO... WAVE GOODBYE

In the beginning of May we waved goodbye to our fourth member of staff, Jenny Sneddon. Jenny was mainly working on the CCW Data Mobilisation Project but has now moved on to work in an ecological consultancy in Edinburgh. We wish her well in her new post.

Our newest recruit taking on the mammoth CCW data task is Rebecca Johnson who has come from Carter Ecological Consultancy. Previously, Rebecca trained and worked for a year at the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC).

Data holdings update

Of the 660,000 records that we now hold in our databases, 130,000 are in Gwent which is nearly 20% of our data holdings. This compares favourably with last year, when only 15% of our total records were from this half of our area. There are still an awful lot of Glamorgan Moth records to get past if Glamorgan's lead is to be overturned!

Probably the most significant dataset to be incorporated is Sam Bosanquet's Bryophyte data. This includes all of his records from VC35 from 1996 onwards as well as some records from other recorders which have specifically been sent to him.

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.

THE TOP 10 SPECIES CHARTS!

The current top 10 most recorded species in Gwent is reproduced below, and in brackets their position in the last November's equivalent. It can be seen that our vascular plant records have increased, and pushed Lesser Horseshoe Bat off the top spot and edged butterflies out of the top ten completely - the leading butterfly being Meadow Brown at 17. The most recorded bird on our database is Mallard duck, at a lowly 189 - the only bird in the top 200. However, with the Gwent Ornithological Society due to sign a Data Exchange Agreement in November we should see a rather different picture next year!

Rank	Species	Common Name	Number of Records
1 (3)	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire-Fog	952
2 (4)	Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal Grass	805
3 (6)	Agrostis capillaris	Common Bent	770
4 (1)	Rhinolophus hipposideros	Lesser Horseshoe Bat	734
5 (8)	Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain	729
6 (10)	Lotus corniculatus	Common Bird's-Foot-Trefoil	716
7 (-)	Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup	683
8 (9)	Trifolium repens	White Clover	678
9 (-)	Centaurea nigra	Common Knapweed	670
10 (-)	Festuca rubra	Red Fescue	648

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN (LBAP) UPDATES

BLAENAU GWENT

Putting Wildlife in the Picture!

SNAP! The Biodiversity of Blaenau Gwent Photographic Competition 2006

Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership, with support from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and the Countryside Council for Wales are running this popular competition once again this year.

The competition is open to everyone to join from all ages, and recorders may be particularly interested in entering as they often enjoy taking photographs of what they record! There are 3 main age categories - 11 years and under, 12-17 years, and 18 years and over.

The aim of the competition is to encourage interest and recording of biodiversity within Blaenau Gwent, and to raise awareness and appreciation of the importance of biodiversity through the use of photography. One of the rules of the competition is that entrants are encouraged to take photographs of habitats and species listed in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, copies of which are available in all local libraries or downloaded from 'The Web of Life' accessed through www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk. Therefore, the competition is not just about raising awareness, it can also generate useful biological data on priority habitats and species as well and therefore help to meet targets within the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. All useful records generated from the competition are passed onto SEWBRc.

The closing date for the competition is **Friday the 20th October 2006** so get those entries in! A prestigious Award Ceremony will be held on Wednesday 29th November 2006 where winners will be presented with their prizes and all winning entries will be displayed at a special exhibition for at least 2 weeks following the Award Ceremony.

For an application form, please contact **Deb Beeson**.

Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme (B.A.G.S)

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council runs the Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme in partnership with the Countryside Council for Wales and the European Union offering small-scale grants for landowners, schools, the private sector and community groups. To date, over 80 site visits have been carried out and advice given on sustainable land management and 22 grants awarded helping to deliver targets within the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme has received widespread publicity and acclaim. It was recently featured in a Wales Biodiversity Partnership document as one of 11 successful showcase projects delivering local biodiversity action in Wales and endorsed by Carwyn Jones, Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside. Copies of the document are available from the Wales Biodiversity Partnership on tel. 01248 385743.

The types of projects that the Scheme will fund include; managing churchyards and wildflower areas, provision of bird and bat boxes, creation of ponds and wetland, special projects benefiting priority LBAP species and native hedge-planting and hedge-laying. Recorders may be interested in learning that the scheme will also fund local surveys providing that this leads to practical action on the ground.

The Scheme recently funded a badger survey of woodland sites within the Borough carried out by Gwent Badger Group and a survey to identify the location of the breeding site of the rare Silurian moth at its only known UK locality on moorland near Abertillery. Both species are Local Biodiversity Action Plan species and the Silurian is RDB2 – Vulnerable, and has been put forward for selection as a UKBAP species in the UK. Both surveys unearthed some very interesting results. For instance, the Silurian Moth survey led to the exciting find of larvae of the moth being discovered for the first time in the wild in the UK! And its discovery will ensure that we do all we can to protect and enhance it in the future. This is particularly important as the locality where it has been found lies within the area of the proposed Pendragon Fach Wind Farm Energy Project development.

If recorders have a project idea that they wish to discuss, please contact **Mel Stewart**.

Go Wild! 2006 Update

The event took place on Saturday the 10th June 2006 at Parc Bryn Bach in Blaenau Gwent to celebrate Wales Biodiversity Week and raise awareness of biodiversity. The event was a huge success with over 2,000 visitors attending despite some small set backs such as two of our banners being stolen!



7 councillors attended the event and over 40 organisations took part as well as the Police, Fire Brigade and St. Johns Ambulance. The Ebbw Vale, Antigo and Blaine Air Cadet Squadrons did a fantastic job of helping to steward the event, managing car-parking areas and litter picking. The event was launched by the mayor and mayors of Blaenau Gwent who gave speeches as well as the chair of the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership. Activities included bird box making and woodcarving workshops, guided nature walks, bird-watching and meeting wild owls, toads, frogs, newts, bees and other insects, and the event was also attended by special guests – Belinda and Bettie, a pair of short-clawed otters.

Above all everyone enjoyed the day and the public had an opportunity to learn more about the importance of their local biodiversity and how they can become more involved. Many thanks to all those partners and recorders who contributed to the event. The event will be held in Caerphilly next year (for further details, contact **Mel Sutherland 01495 235253**) but will be back in Blaenau Gwent in 2008.

Biodiversity Postcards

The Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership is trying to raise awareness and encourage recording of 6 Local Biodiversity Action Plan species. There is a lack of data on the status and distribution of these species within the LBAP. As part of this project, recording postcards have been produced for 6 priority species. These include adder, barn owl, great crested newt, skylark, small pearl-bordered fritillary and water vole.

Recorders working in the Blaenau Gwent area are asked to keep an eye out for these species and to pass records onto Deb Beeson. All information will be passed onto SEWBReC to digitise. For further information or copies of the postcards, please contact **Deb Beeson**.

**Contacts: Deb Beeson 01495 355702 Deborah.Beeson@Blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
Mel Stewart 01495 356070 melanie.stewart@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk**

CAERPHILLY

Melanie Sutherland has been seconded to concentrate on the Local Development Plans (LDPs) for the next twelve months, and Margaret Iles has been taken on as the Temporary Biodiversity Officer for Caerphilly to cover for her.

The following events were held for the National Biodiversity Week:-

- The Biodiversity Roadshow @ McArthur Glen
- Go Wild Event @ Bryn Bach Park
- Wildlife On Your Doorstep @ Nelson park

PROJECTS:

Great Crested Newt Surveys – were carried out this summer on ponds that had no records within the borough.

Dormouse Surveys – these will be carried out again this autumn as last years surveys took longer than expected. Volunteers can re-visit or start to survey their sites (allocated grid squares) to obtain records of hazelnuts from September-October when the vegetation has died back.

Management of Halt Pond and Creation of New Ponds for Great Crested Newts in Rudry – the Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group (GARG) applied to the Countryside Council for Wales Species Challenge Fund in May 2006 to cover the costs of creating three 'satellite' ponds on land at Branch Cottages, Rudry, to encourage the dispersal of newts from Halt Pond to the surrounding area, particularly other ponds in the south, towards Rudry Common. GARG is the applicant and Caerphilly CBC is acting as the agent. The application will hopefully be determined by the 25th October and the works will hopefully commence at the beginning of November.

Highway Issue – A meeting was held with ourselves, Highways and Park Services to discuss the issues of Roadside Verges, Hedgerows and woodchip piles. The meeting was very successful as everyone was extremely enthusiastic.

- **Grass verges** – an audit needs to be instigated to determine the locations of our high quality grass verges. If our bid for funding is accepted we can carry out the audit at the beginning of next year. Someone will be employed to carry out the audits at the beginning of next year. The audit will then give us an idea of how many verges there are and how large an area they will include.
- **Hedgerows** – the issue of flailing hedgerows need to be addressed. Fifteen pilot hedgerows have been chosen which include those without health and safety issues regarding highways. Ideas will be looked at to adopt a strategy for the management of hedgerows within the borough.
- **Woodchip** – the issue of leaving woodchip piles on roadside verges needs to be addressed. Most of the piles are so large they prevent wild flowers e.g. bluebells from growing for a couple of years. Ideas for utilising woodchip will be looked at.

Caerphilly in Bloom – the Caerphilly in Bloom Wildlife Garden Category has been running for the last four years. This year several schools entered their wildlife gardens as well as the residential gardens that entered. As we found it difficult to compare the schools with the residential gardens we decided to split them into separate groups. Next year a separate category will be available for schools and domestic gardens. This year's presentation took place on Friday 22nd September in the Chamber at Pontllanfraith Offices. The results were:-

Schools: 1st Place Rudry Primary School

2nd Place Pontllanfraith Primary School

3rd Place St Gladys Primary School

Residential: 1st Place Mr & Mrs R Kingham

2nd Place Mr & Mrs B Steer

3rd Place Mrs R Oates

Highly Commended – Mrs G Iles

Contact: Margaret Iles ILESM@CAERPHILLY.GOV.UK

CARDIFF

Hawfinch project – after the Hornbeam surveys the Glamorgan Bird Club launched public appeals for sightings which generated an excellent response. These are now being followed up by experienced bird watchers. A winter feeding station was run from January to March 2006 with volunteers going out twice a week to scatter seed at Castell Coch and Forest Fawr car parks. They checked the areas for signs of disease and predation and noted counts of bird species using the food and in the area. The results of the surveys and feeding project are being assessed and a meeting will be held soon to discuss the future of the project.

Waxcaps - The Llanishen Reservoir grass banks were designated as SSSI due to the fungal interest. Other sites surveyed last season had high species counts of waxcaps and these will be resurveyed soon.

SPG - The Biodiversity SPG was adopted by full council in June.

Logo - The Cardiff Biodiversity Partnership now have a logo - a simple drawing of a Bluebell stalk.

Bulletin - 3 Issues of the Biodiversity Bulletin have been produced and people are being encouraged to read it online.

BARS – the status and trends are being put onto the system where known, mostly taken from Priority Habitats Wales.

SURVEYS

- **River Ely** - Over the summer the Environmental Advice Team has been conducting biological surveys along the River Ely. In August, aquatic plants were surveyed at set points along the river, the 2003 Otter survey sites were revisited with positive signs of both Otter and Mink being found along the river. Bat surveys found Daubenton's, Common & Soprano Pipistrelles.
- **Dormice** - Surveys are planned for several new sites and records have been received from the M4 widening study evidencing that Dormice are more widespread than previously known.
- **Pied Flycatchers** - Were recorded from the only known breeding site at Coed-y-Bedw (Wildlife Trust) where a total of 19 young were fledged from 4 boxes.
- **Amphibian surveys** - As part of the Council Biodiversity Indicators the Environmental Advice Team and Park Rangers undertook amphibian surveys at a number of ponds throughout the county. These will be repeated annually to monitor fluctuations in the amphibian population.
- **SINC surveys** - Each year Cardiff council is committed to re-surveying 10% of its Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. So far this year 18 sites have been covered in line with the regional guidelines as amended for Cardiff.

Contact: Laura Palmer 029 2087 3268 lpalmer@cardiff.gov.uk

MONMOUTHSHIRE

- Councillor Chris Woodhouse launched the LBAP on April 21st at the GWT Magor Marsh Nature Reserve. Thank you to the 12 LBAP partners who attended. Thanks also to the Gwent Wildlife Trust for hosting the event and special thanks to Julian Branscombe for giving an excellent guided walk around the reserve.
- Partners have been assisting SAP writing (Waved Carpet, Argent and Sable, Turtle Dove, Spreading Bellflower, Lesser Horseshoe, Greater Horseshoe). This year we will be looking for partners to help with three or more of the following: Great Crested Newt, Slow Worm, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Scarce Hook Tip, Drab Looper, Lesser Butterfly Orchid, and species statements for Natterer's Bat, Brown Long-eared Bat, Whiskered / Brandt's Bat, Bumblebees.
- A Biodiversity Action Workshop was held on the 12th September. Partners had a busy morning learning about BARS, making the Grassland HAP more BARS compatible and pushing progress forward on the Linear Features Action Plan.
- Monmouthshire Biodiversity logo competition was held in the spring and the Monmouthshire Countryside Service carried out a school's event at the Old Station Tintern for Wales Biodiversity Week.

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Monmouthshire (SINCs)

As many recorders will know the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Monmouthshire have so far only included grassland sites. Other sites important for different habitats and species present now need to be identified. If you are familiar with the Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales and / or wish to be involved in the identification process, please contact Monmouthshire's Biodiversity Assistant, Kate Stinchcombe.

New Monmouthshire Biodiversity Partnership Webpages

If recorders / groups wish to recruit surveyors, promote casual sightings / surveys in Monmouthshire or advertise survey events they can do so on the Monmouthshire Biodiversity Partnership WebPages (www.monmouthshiregreenweb.co.uk/biodiversitypartnership). Please email information to Kate Stinchcombe.

Contact: Kate Stinchcombe katestinchcombe@monmouthshire.gov.uk

TORFAEN

Torfaen is in the middle of designating six local nature reserves after public consultation earlier this year.

The Wildlife Sites Project is continuing to designate sites on a regular basis. Recorders may recall a letter from Kris Roberts calling for site information to be included into the updated phase 1 habitat survey and the Local Development Plan. Sites will also be tested against the Wildlife Sites criteria. Many thanks to those who have sent in information, but we would still like to hear back from any recorders with further information.

In May, the 'Make a Change' event was held to raise awareness of biodiversity in Torfaen and other sustainability issues. Members of the partnership attended and contributed to workshops in the afternoon.

A nesting tube survey for dormouse is being carried out in 10 sites in Torfaen. No results have been gathered so far but a wider search for hazel nut opened by dormice is being organised. Any records of dormouse are gratefully received!

Habitat management for lapwing is due to take place in Blaenavon over the next few weeks, hopefully this will provide more suitable areas for breeding next spring.

Autumn lady's tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) was found this year in the grounds of County Hall, Cwmbran and was saved from the mowers by minutes. Is this a first record for Torfaen? *{Editors note: According to the SEWBRc database it is a first for the Torfaen area}.*

Colin Titcombe and Steve Williams will be running a short course of evening classes for adult learners on the biodiversity of Torfaen. The course begins on the 17th October.

Contact: Rebecca East at Rebecca.East@torfaen.gov.uk

GWENT BAT SURVEY PROJECT

[Richard Dodd]

What Is The Gwent Bat Survey Project?

The project was initially set up under the Greater Gwent Biodiversity Group in 2005 to gain greater knowledge of the distribution of bats in Gwent.

Until now, knowledge of distribution has been confined to the discovery of bats using various man-made structures and occasionally trees. This only gives a limited view of the true distribution of the various species.

The project will survey bats in the wider environment while they are out foraging at night. All of the UK's 17 species (twelve so far in Gwent), produce distinctive calls when they are hunting their insect prey; these can be recorded and analysed on computer programs to enable us to identify the species using any area. It may also help to establish the presence of our rarer bats which exist only in small numbers and often only in woodland where they are very hard to find.

What Does The Field Survey Involve?

The actual survey work involves walking slowly on transect lines through the selected grid squares, attempting to pass a wide variety of habitat features within the square, while taking time-expanded recordings of bats onto a mini-disc recorder. This is expected to take up to two and a half hours from dusk onwards. Repeat visits may be necessary to some areas. These recordings are later analysed.

The survey period is between June and September.

How Will The Data Be Used?

The information gained will be mapped and made available to local authority ecologists and planning departments in order that these legally protected animals can be properly considered where developments are proposed.

The data will also be fed into national distribution records. This will enable future changes in distribution to be monitored and help raise a greater awareness of the most vulnerable species.

How Can You Help?

You can help in a variety of ways, by:

- Passing information to the co-ordinator on bat roosts or places where many bats are seen feeding
- Offering your land holding/farm as a sample to be surveyed for the project
- Passing this information to others who you think may be interested
- Becoming involved as an assistant/trainee on the surveying team



Lesser Horseshoe Bat
(*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)

Contacts:

Ian Rabjohns (project co-ordinator),
Gwent Bat Survey Project,
Mill Bank, Lone Lane, Penallt, Monmouth, NP25 4AJ.

Richard Dodd (project administrator),
Bat Conservation Trust,
Unit 7 Castleton Court, Fortran Road, St Mellons, Cardiff, CF3 0LT.

The Hunt for Gwent's Great Grasslands – Progress of the Gwent Grasslands Initiative [Rebecca Price]

The search has continued with pace for Gwent's remaining species-rich grasslands. Joined this year by Francis Ryan our second field surveyor, we have continued in our programme to revisit the semi improved grasslands within Monmouthshire (as highlighted in CCWs 1991 Phase 1 survey). This has been done with the view of identifying sites of Local Wildlife Site standard and also to identify sites suitable for grassland restoration. We found a number of species-rich grasslands, along with many enthusiastic landowners who we've been working closely with in order to sensitively manage these important sites.

Monmouthshire:

Surveying this year included an area extending to the north and south of Usk, including Llangybi, Gwheleog and Glascoed. Moving to the east of Usk, Llangwm, Earlswood and Devauden were also explored.

Surveying has revealed some wonderful pockets of species-rich grassland with Gwehelog, Llangwm and Earlswood in particular hosting a number of candidate Local Wildlife Sites. Grasslands were predominantly neutral but it was exciting to find some species-rich acid sites in the Llangwm/Earlswood area, which are rather rare in Monmouthshire.

Species of note:

Along the way, in addition to the more typical species-rich grassland species we've been lucky to find a few of more particular note. These include a good population of *Trifolium fragiferum* (strawberry clover) and also some *Inula helenium* (elecampane) on pasture adjacent to the River Usk near Llanhennock. Both are 'Contributory Species' within the Guidelines for Wildlife Site Selection in South Wales that help to designate a site.

We have also been lucky to find *Genista tinctoria* (Dyer's greenweed) as part of the sward on quite a few of this year's sites and *Cirsium dissectum* (meadow thistle) was part of a few of our wetter meadows. It was also a good year for orchids with a number of the meadows exhibiting fine displays of *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* (common spotted orchid) along with *Listera ovata* (common twayblade) and *Dactylorhiza maculata* (heath spotted orchid). Particularly magnificent was a field hosting hundreds of native wild daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) located just down the road from Gwent Wildlife Trust HQ.

Blaenau Gwent:

Surveying in Blaenau Gwent also revealed a variety of species-rich grasslands. Focusing on the Sirhowy Valley a Phase 1 survey was undertaken, identifying CWS along the way. The most interesting sites were a series of calcareous enclosures in Trefil where species-rich swards included fairy flax (*Linum catharticum*), silver hair grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) and wild thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*). Further south the steep valley sides near Bedwellty pits supported mosaics of acid and neutral pasture while the valley bottom, though more improved, supported pockets of acid grassland with frequent ant hills. Large areas of reclaimed spoil exhibited developing grassland swards and hold the potential for future botanical interest. Species of particular note included *Cirsium acaule* (dwarf thistle) (Trefil) and *Filago minima* (small cudweed) (Bedwellty Pits) both of which are 'Contributory Species' within the Guidelines for Wildlife Site Selection in South Wales that help to designate a site.

Wildflower Seed Harvesting:

In a further effort to bolster Gwent's meadows we've also been busy harvesting wildflower seed for use in creating new wildflower meadows in the area.

Seed has been collected from some of the best meadows in Gwent including Nature Reserves at Pentwyn Farm in the Wye Valley and Springdale Farm near Usk. This was done using a specially built seed harvester followed by the seed being dried and carefully sieved. Over the next few weeks the ground will be prepared and the seed sown at a number of chosen receptor sites. The wait then begins to see what wildflowers appear next year! With time and careful management the sites should flourish benefitting wildlife and giving more people the chance to enjoy the delights of a wildflower meadow.

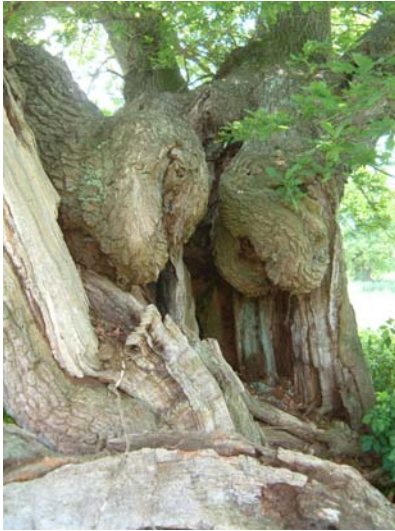
Contact:

Rebecca Price, Gwent Grasslands Initiative Officer,
Gwent Wildlife Trust, Seddon House, Dingestow, Monmouth, NP25 4DY. 01600 740358
rprice@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk

VETERAN TREE SURVEY UPDATE

[Steven Rogers]

We all know the wildlife value of veteran trees as bat roosts, nest sites and homes for a myriad of specialist invertebrates and other animals and specialist fungi. But veteran trees are also important in a cultural and historic context. They may be centuries old and much bigger than an average tree. They can be so long lived they become ancient monuments in their localities and even live on in place names, as at Great Oak near Raglan. Royal Oak is a popular name for pubs, as is Chequers, the common name for the service tree. At Llantilio Crossenny there is an ancient oak in a cider orchard that is about 33 feet round and 10 feet across and is probably about 800 years old. It is still alive and producing new leaves every spring. Trees like this are some of the oldest living things on earth.



So why have so many disappeared from the landscape in recent years? The main reason is, of course, built development, infrastructure projects and intensive farming methods. In some cases, even though individual trees were protected during building work, they suffered premature death because the roots were damaged or paved over. Trees need good access to water and cannot survive when the surface water is drained away. On farmland there can be an unexpected loss of veteran trees when deep ploughing damages the roots.

At the Gwent Wildlife Trust we decided it was time that these trees were recorded so that the information would be available to bodies that could help ensure their future protection. We decided that the only way we could cover the Gwent area was through volunteer involvement. We, therefore, began an awareness raising campaign in September 2005 using local and regional media, Trust publications and websites including Monmouthshire Greenweb, the Wye Valley AONB as well as our own. We also successfully sought funding from CCW and Monmouthshire County Council's LA21 grant scheme to help cover project costs.

A volunteer survey training day was then organised based on the English Nature Veteran Tree Initiative guidelines. 18 volunteers attended and learnt how to identify and record veteran trees. A further 22 volunteers, who did not attend the training day, were also enlisted, bringing the total number of volunteer surveyors to 40. To provide further support, and encourage the submission of incidental records, the GWT website was updated with a downloadable survey form and explanatory notes and we maintained our media awareness raising campaign throughout the winter months. More than 70 1km grid squares were adopted by volunteers!

We also contacted a host of other organisations in the hope of either recruiting volunteers or gaining records from them. This proved to be less fruitful. Only the National Trust responded with a significant list of records for veteran trees within Gwent.

As records came in we were able to give the task of data collation to a willing volunteer. These have been forwarded to SEWBReC and will soon be available to Local Planning Authorities, Statutory Undertakers, Ecological Consultants, Tir Gofal staff and the like. SEWBReC now holds a total of 314 records and they are still coming in.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the volunteers and partner organisations whose enthusiasm and cooperation made this survey possible. Particular thanks should go to Chris Cooper of Monmouth who single handedly took on more than 15 1km grid squares!

If you would like to take part in the survey all the details can be found on the GWT website at: www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk/gwent including advice on how to care for veteran trees.

Contact: Steven Rogers (Conservation Officer)
srogers@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk

BROWN HARE AND LAPWING SURVEY SPRING 2006

[Steven Rogers]

Over the last few years, there has been a growing recognition that partnership working yields better results and less overlap than projects being delivered individually by the wide number of organisations responsible for nature conservation in SE Wales. The trigger that really crystallised the partnership approach was the advent of the community Strategy process in 2000.

Following various informal discussions it was agreed that a liaison group of the 5 Gwent LAs and GWT should be established to discuss LBAP implementation. Following the agreement of CCW to part fund GWT's involvement through the Partnership Project Funding scheme, the first meeting was held in October 2005.

A number of potential project ideas were considered, but a brown hare and lapwing project was settled on as both of these species continue to experience significant rates of decline and either one or the other of these species occur in all Gwent LAs. Furthermore, it was late in the year and it was known that survey work for these species is best conducted in late winter / early spring. So, this meant we had time to develop and implement the project.

Our aim was to help stop this decline, and encourage species recovery. The survey was designed to:

- assess the status and distribution of the species in Gwent
- raise awareness of the reasons for their decline
- aid recovery through land management advice, the land use planning system and the LBAP process

We agreed that a local authority funded postcard, awareness raising and survey form would be the most cost effective way of reaching the widest possible audience. The objectives underpinning this approach are set out below.

Objectives:

- Design and distribute a postcard survey form targeted on land managers/owners.
- Raise awareness through all available media including: press releases, web sites, farming publications, radio, television and school competitions, etc
- Provide information to land owners / managers on improved land management via RSPB and the Game Conservancy Trust; this advice to be advertised on the survey card.
- Submit new records to the appropriate national monitoring schemes.
- Submit new records and collate all existing records to SEWBReC to produce a database of information and distribution maps.
- Make this information available to LA Biodiversity Officers for use in LBAPs and the Land Use Planning System.

To ensure the widest possible distribution of survey cards and awareness raising information, we built up a wide ranging partnership including: the Game Conservancy Trust, RSPB, FUW, NFUW, CCW, Tir Gofal, Gwlad, CLA, FWAG, GOS, Monmouthshire Greenweb and Wye Valley AONB. This was supported by a local and regional media campaign and survey cards were distributed mainly through the farming unions and Tir Gofal. The RSPB and the Game Conservancy Trust provided additional support by providing appropriate land management advice. Finally, all partners with websites made the survey card available in downloadable format.



Over 1000 survey cards were distributed and this resulted in just fewer than 100 responses. SEWBReC have now produced distribution maps and, surprisingly, they reveal no particular pattern to the distribution of either species. In fact, brown hare would appear to be evenly distributed across the whole area, meaning that targeted effort cannot be focussed on specific areas for land management advice. Are brown hares beginning to occupy atypical habitat as traditional sites disappear?

The survey results are now available to LPAs, Statutory Undertakers, ecological consultants and the like through SEWBReC and this should help protect the species through the planning process.

What happens now? Fortunately for lapwings, a new project officer for

the valleys has just been appointed through a partnership led by the RSPB. But, the circumstances for brown hares are less promising. In the absence of funding it will not be possible to recruit a specialist officer. The liaison group has therefore decided to concentrate its efforts on the best use of existing staff resources and budgets. This will include targeting effort on land holdings under the control of the partnership's members and through continued liaison with Tir Gofal and the other Tir schemes to incorporate brown hare conservation action into farm agreements.

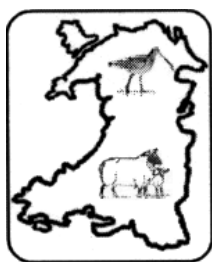
Land management advice and survey forms can be obtained from:

Brown hare <http://www.gct.org.uk/conservationguides.asp?PageId=13>

Lapwing http://www.rspb.org.uk/countryside/farming/working/operation_lapwing/index.asp

Contact: Steven Rogers (Conservation Officer) srogers@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk

ENCOURAGING WILDLIFE RECORDING ON TIR GOFAL FARMS [Simon Spencer]



Most Tir Gofal farmers are very sympathetic to the wildlife on their farms and would not only wish to know more about what was on their farms but would take steps to preserve what was interesting if they knew about it and knew how to protect it.

Wildlife recorders are always keen to find new places to visit where wildlife is abundant. They particularly like places where little or no recording has taken place in the past so they can find some undiscovered gem. They also like places where it is easy to get permission to visit and they feel welcome. Farmers are also very familiar with their land and usually know the best places on the farm to visit so the recorders know they will get some direction and maybe a lift in the Landover to the best spots.

The **Tir Gofal Farmers Association** wishes to bring wildlife recorders and Tir Gofal Farms together. As you will no doubt know there are now Local Record Centres that cover the whole of Wales that collect records from local recorders and put them into a computer database. We are therefore encouraging our members and all Tir Gofal Farms to contact their Local Record Centre and register the fact that they are a Tir Gofal Farm and that they would encourage recording on their farm. The farm name, a map reference, brief directions and contact phone number and name are all that is required. Farmers could express an interest in birdwatchers or butterfly experts etc but they have been warned that they won't always necessarily be any prepared to come. They are also reminded that recorders are normally amateurs who do their recording in their own time and at their own expense so they will need to be tempted to put their farm on the top of the list. The example given was 'an offer to switch on a moth trap at dusk may well tempt the local moth recorder who can then come out in the morning to look at the catch'. We would expect recorders to provide their findings both to the Local Record Centre and to the Tir Gofal Farm. This is very important. A photocopy of the list of species should be supplied at least. Tir Gofal Officers will also appreciate the information either direct from the farm, or the recorder or via the LRC database which could take some time.

Ultimately if we are really going to protect the rare and declining wildlife in Wales we need to know where it is and we need to agree specific management prescriptions with the farmer to protect it. Tir Gofal will eventually have to move in this direction. In the meantime that wildlife will often have to rely on the goodwill of landowners.

Any scheme where people are concerned can have problems. We hope that by using the local record centres that the details of TG farms who would welcome recorders only goes to sensible and proper people and that they behave appropriately on farms. If the scheme is a success then it can only promote the need for properly funded Local Record Centres.

The **Tir Gofal Farmers Association** (www.spanglefish.com/TGFA) aims to represent the views of Tir Gofal Farmers. Its membership is restricted to those farms that receive Tir Gofal agri-environment payments. It was formed after the Assembly decided to cut payment rates to these farms part way through their ten-year agreements. This not surprisingly caused indignation. It is hoping to set up a labelling scheme to promote the marketing of produce from Tir Gofal farms. It also aims to work with conservationists and others to improve the delivery of conservation on farms by improvements to the Tir Gofal scheme.

Contact: Simon Spencer (Chairman Tir Gofal Farmers Association) cerisyi@btinternet.com

OTTERING ACTIVITIES WITH THE GWENT OTTER GROUP (GOG) [Gemma Bodé]

The Gwent Otter Group (GOG) is over a year old now and we have over 60 volunteers registered as Otter Spotters. We had a slow start to the years surveying starting with a survey along the canal at 14 Locks at Newport. A low number of volunteers turned up and although no spraints were found along this stretch we had a lovely walk in the Spring sunshine.

On April Fools Day at our next meeting we had a really good turnout but were thwarted by the recent heavy rainfall, and our planned survey of the Usk at Abergavenny had to be changed for fear of losing a few otter spotters downstream. We decided to all head off to the Canal at Gilwern but of course this led to any latecomers wondering where GOG had vanished to. The size of the group allowed us to split with the Abergavenny local group of the Gwent Wildlife Trust and associated volunteers learning about looking for signs of water voles to help with their planned surveys. The Water Volers eventually met back up to find the Otterers having a good sniff at some spraints found under one of the bridges along the canal, in order to confirm of course, with that familiar whiff of jasmine tea, that otters had not long been at that very spot.

The next few meetings took GOG along the Ebbw and also some surveys were carried out along the sea wall down in the southern part of Gwent but there was little evidence of otters found down there.

At the last meeting in August volunteer numbers were low most likely due to Summer holidays. With this in mind we decided to have a look along the River Usk by Chainbridge and practice some habitat survey assessments of vegetation along the river including looking at potential lying up sites for otters. We split up into pairs and unfortunately my partner and I were stuck on the side of the river with an enormously long maize field with the maize sometimes going right up to the edge of the steep riverbank. The other pairs walked along the opposite side not only finding lots of lying up sites and spraints but one pair upon their return gleefully told us they'd actually seen an otter! In broad daylight this was a great spot for them, and the rest of the group were green with envy, but this was a really good sign for the otters on the Usk and a sighting which some would never have thought possible 20 years ago.

More surveys are planned for rivers and stream across Gwent including the Gwent levels. If you are interested in joining us then please get in touch.

Contact: Gemma Bodé at Gwent Wildlife Trust, gbode@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk, 01600 740358



Water Vole (*Arvicola terrestris*)
Photo: James Packer

NEW SPECIES RECORDS

FIRST CEDAR CUP (*Geopora sumneriana*) RECORD FOR WALES! [Sheila Spence]



Geopora sumneriana (Cedar Cup)

Both Spring and Autumn have provided us with exciting finds this year already. Sam Bosenquet contacted me in April to say he had found what he thought was the Cedar Cup fungus during a Bryophyte recording session at Devauden churchyard. On checking his photograph, followed by a visit by myself, and a few other members of the group, to this small churchyard I confirmed that yes, it was *Geopora sumneriana*. This is a first, not just for Gwent but also for the whole of Wales!

The Cedar Cup is, as you might expect, a cup fungus that grows in the Spring, mostly under Cedar trees although I believe it has occasionally been recorded under Yew. It emerges from the soil, growing in

conjunction with the trees roots, as a rough, brown ball, eventually splitting open at the top to reveal the smooth, creamy inner surface.

The second really exciting event of our recording year was during a day course run by Gwent Wildlife Trust when firstly *Leucopaxillus gigantea*, the Giant Funnel, was found in one of the meadows at Pentwyn Farm.

This huge fruit-body was growing in a ring and had been pointed out to us by Gemma Bode of the GWT, both for identification and to show the class. Although not that rare is becoming increasingly uncommon and there are no previous records for Gwent in the BMS record database. (There are I believe, from a quick scan of FRDBI, only three other sites in Wales where this fungus has been recorded.)



Leucopaxillus gigantea (The Giant Funnel)

Whilst walking back across the field two members of the party came across some more fungi in the grass, on being handed a specimen I was immediately very excited as I was sure I knew what it was – *Entoloma bloxamii*. This is a red data list grassland species only recorded once before in Gwent, last year at New Grove Meadows, which is also a Gwent Wildlife Trust reserve quite close to Pentwyn Farm. The generously sized, purple hued cap and purple, fading to yellowy-cream stem, is quickly identifiable when in good condition but just to be sure I took a sample home for further checking of spores which confirmed my original identification.

We are now collating past records and looking for potential sites for recording waxcaps, in particular the Date Waxcap; *Hygrocybe spadicea* and the Pink Waxcap; *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* which along with *Microglossum olivaceum*, the Olive Earthtongue and *Clavaria zollingeri*, the Violet Coral. Any suggestion for potential sites or confirmed records gratefully received.

Contact: Sheila Spence Tel: 01531 631736 Email: gwentfungusgroup@btinternet.com

FIRST DEER RECORD FOR BLAENAU GWENT

[DEB BEESON]

A young male Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) caused concern when it became trapped within the grounds of Glanhwy Primary School in Tredegar on Wednesday 9th August 2006.

The young deer was first seen by local resident Andrew Parker while out walking his dog along the lane by the side of the school in the early hours of the Wednesday morning. Andrew then reported the incident to the RSPCA and Council's Biodiversity Officer Deborah Beeson who visited the site.

This is the first deer record for Blaenau Gwent so is quite a find! According to data from SEWBReC, the closest Roe Deer record is for the Crickhowell area. How the deer came to be at Glanhwy School is a complete mystery. According to the Wales Deer Initiative, it is not unusual for them to turn up in urban areas this time of year as young males are often looking for a rutting location where they can mate with females in the Autumn. Therefore, it is quite possible that another male defending his territory had chased it some distance. Deer also tend to occupy large territories so it is not unusual for them to travel some distance. They can even swim so it is possible that the deer has travelled for some distance along the River Sirhowy that was in low flow with the dry weather.



Photo by: Andrew Parker

The advice from both the RSPCA and Wales Deer Initiative was to allow the deer time to find its own way out of the school as wild deer are very prone to stress if they are moved. The difficulty was that it was trapped in the school grounds and surrounded by high fencing on all sides and locked gates. The Biodiversity Officer arranged for the gates to be left unlocked each night and we all had a worrying few days checking on its progress. By Monday, there was no sign of the deer, so we all assumed that the deer had found its own way out safely and breathed a sigh of relief! Unfortunately, we had a report two weeks later that the deer had showed up again and was injured and very distressed. The police were called and sadly a vet put the animal down.

For further information or to report any deer sightings or other wildlife records in Blaenau Gwent, please contact Deb Beeson on 01495 355702. To report injured wild animals please contact the RSPCA on their 24 hour national cruelty and advice line 08705555999.

A WORD FROM BRECKNOCK WILDLIFE TRUST

[STEPHANIE COATES]

Brecon Beacons National Park Wildlife Sites Project

The Wildlife Sites system is a recognised and well-established designation with many planning authorities. The UK's county-based Wildlife Trusts have been key activists in promoting the system and renewed effort is just beginning in the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP). A Brecknock Wildlife Trust project from 1999-2001 identified about 40 potential sites in Brecknock. More recently, Gwent Wildlife Trust has identified important grassland Wildlife Sites (WS) in Blaenau-Gwent and Monmouthshire.

The new project is being carried out by Brecknock Wildlife Trust on behalf of BBNP with assistance from other Wildlife Trusts in the National Park. It is funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. A steering group panel with representatives from conservation and farming backgrounds will assess the quality of potential sites against a robust set of criteria. The Wildlife Sites Project aims to identify WS with the landowner's permission, to highlight their importance, and encourage sympathetic management and entry into environmental grant schemes.

This current 18 month project which commenced in August 2006 is funded only to identify Wildlife Sites in the Park area. There will be just one survey season so I would like to hear from any recorders who can help me. I expect to use an extended phase 1 survey method and this will be a steep learning curve for me as I am not an expert botanist. I am more of a generalist; my recent job history includes bird surveys, reptile translocation and rhododendron mapping. Depending on time constraints I would like to do more in depth vegetation or other species surveys on certain sites. Therefore I would welcome anyone who can help with surveys. I could also arrange field meetings on certain sites. Please feel free to recommend sites which hold priority species or habitats as the Phase 1 habitat maps I have are quite limited. The facilities at the *Biological Information Service for Powys and Brecon Beacons National Park* (BIS) are proving a great help for gathering information about sites quickly and easily so please keep the records coming in! The function of BIS is hugely beneficial to this project.

Contact: Stephanie Coates, Brecon Beacons Wildlife Sites Project, Brecknock Wildlife Trust, Lion House, Bethel Square, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7AY. 01874 625708 scoates@brecknockwt.cix.co.uk

THE HORSE CHESTNUT LEAF MINER HUNT!

[DAVID SLADE]

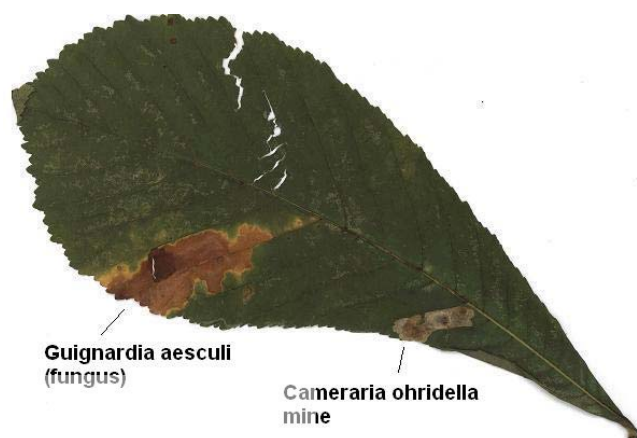
You can help us track the progress of one of Britain's newest invaders. The Horse Chestnut Leaf miner (*Cameraria ohridella*) is a small, orange and white moth much like a number of similar British species, however it is the only moth that mines the leaves of the Horse Chestnut, and as such can be readily identified without ever needing to see the moth itself.

The mines consist of pale blotches on the leaves, where the tiny caterpillars have eaten out the green parenchyma. These are initially yellow in colour, but turn brown as they age. The only thing that can be confused with the mine is the damage caused by the fungus *Guignardia aesculi*, but the mine should be translucent if held up to the light.

This particularly virulent invader was first discovered in Macedonia in 1985 and it spread rapidly through Europe. It was discovered in central London in 2002 and has spread equally rapidly across England, reaching Newport last year and now Cardiff this year.

The moth has also been recorded from Sycamore and Field Maple, but as there are other insects feeding on these trees in the UK, more care needs to be taken to identify these mines.

The progress of the moth in the UK is being closely monitored by the Forestry Commission, and more information can be found at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-68JJRC>.



EVENTS & WEBSITES OF INTEREST

- **NARRS website has been launched**

<http://www.narrs.org.uk/>

NARRS is a national wildlife-monitoring project to measure trends in the conservation status of all UK species of frog, toad, newt, lizard, snake, turtle and terrapin.

NARRS has been developed by The Herpetological Conservation Trust in partnership with many other organisations.

- **Autumnwatch (from 2nd October 2006 on BBC2)**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/animals/wildbritain/autumnwatch/record/index.shtml>

The Autumnwatch survey is run by the BBC in association with the Woodland Trust and the UK Phenology Network.

Autumnwatch 2005 was the biggest survey ever into the arrival of autumn across the UK, with more than 21,000 people taking part. Their aim is to build on last year's survey by getting as many records as possible from people of when they first see a ripe blackberry, ripe conker, flowering ivy, ripe hawthorn berry, tint of oak, and when they last see a swift.

British Entomological & Natural History Society Regional Meeting: Recording and Conserving the Invertebrates of Wales

A series of talks on entomological activities in Wales, with behind the scenes tours in the National Museum of Wales. The aim of the day is to give amateur entomologists and other interested people an opportunity to discuss current knowledge of the invertebrates of Wales. There will also be the opportunity to view the collections.

Starts 10.30am Saturday, October 28th 2006 at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

11.00am: Insect collections in the National Museum of Wales and what we use them for.

Mike Wilson (Head of Entomology Section, National Museum of Wales):

An introduction to the history and scope of the insect collections in Cardiff.

11.30am: The Moths of Glamorgan: progress and the future

David Slade (SEWBReC, Cardiff)

12.00pm: From recording to conservation action – Case studies from the Lepidoptera of Wales

Russel Hobson (Senior Conservation Officer, Butterfly Conservation)

LUNCH 12.30 – 1.30

1.30pm – 3pm. Discussion on Future recording and conserving the invertebrates of Wales:

Which groups are best known in Wales?

Accessibility to collections; how can museums be more user friendly?

Improving links with the Amateur and the Museum

Future recording in Wales

3.30pm Collections Tour

An evening meal could be arranged if enough people are interested.

It would be helpful if those intending to participate would contact:

Mike Wilson, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

Email: mike.wilson@museumwales.ac.uk Tel: 02920 573263

