

GWENT RECORDERS NEWSLETTER



Issue 3 Summer 2002

At last, the third issue of the Newsletter!

The newsletter has now been passed on to myself (contact details below) and any articles for the next issue are very welcome; if you would like to contribute an article you think may be of interest to both recorders and others working in biodiversity conservation please don't hesitate to contact me. Also, if you have any comments to make about the newsletter and/or the network, I would be very interested to hear from you; please fill in the reply slip at the back of this issue so that we can continue to ensure a relevant and informative service.

CONTACT: Melanie Sutherland, Biodiversity Assistant ✉ Caerphilly County Borough Council, Countryside and Landscape Services, Council Offices, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP12 2YW
☎ 01495 235 253 Fax: 01495 235022 Email: sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

❖ QUICK UPDATES

As many of you may already be aware, Georgina Holdsworth left Monmouthshire County Council in February for warmer climes, namely New Zealand and Australia, and a new job in Brighton. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all her hard work in getting the newsletter and the recorder's network started, on behalf of all the other biodiversity officers in Gwent and members of GGBAG (Greater Gwent Biodiversity Action Group).

There have been other leavers too Thank You and Good Luck to: Nicola Sharpe, Blaenau Gwent CBC, who is now working for the Peak District National Park Authority and Nicola Hawkeswood, who said goodbye to the Gwent Wildlife Trust last month.

• Gwent Species Audit

The draft species list for Gwent was sent out for consultation in October 2001. Due to Georgina's departure, Colin Cheesman volunteered to oversee its preparation. He has received some comments back, in particular on plants, birds, orthoptera and lower plants; but he would still like any additions or comments in order to make sure species of concern/importance in the area are included. At the moment, however, he is snowed under with the preparation and launch of the LBAP for Blaenau Gwent County Borough, but he will be working with Nicola Hawkeswood's replacement at the Wildlife Trust to complete the list in the near future.

CONTACT: Colin Cheesman ✉ Blaenau Gwent CBC, Assistant Head of Environmental Implementation, Strategy and Regeneration Division, Environment and Development Department, Business Resource Centre, Tafarnaubach Industrial estate, Tredegar, NP22 3AA ☎ 01495 355 550
E-mail: colin.cheesman@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

• **Local Record Centre Progress** [Alison Jones, on behalf of the SE Wales LRC Partnership]

South East Wales have started the process towards setting up a Local Records Centre for the area. In September 2001 members of the Glamorgan Biodiversity Advisory Group (GlamBAG) and the Greater Gwent Biodiversity Action Group (GGBAG) came together to identify if there was a need and a desire to set up a record centre in the South Wales area. The overall consensus was positive, and it was agreed to set up a working group to progress plans for a Local Record Centre and devise a strategy for taking things forward.

The Working Group has met on several occasions and it was agreed that if a Local Record Centre was to succeed in South Wales it was important to seek the views and gain support from all potential users at the outset. It was agreed that a Development Officer should be appointed to liaise with all the partners and prepare a Development Plan based on the needs of these users.

The Working Group has been contacting partner organisations to seek funding for the one year Development Officer post, and funding has now been secured or promised from 8 Local Authorities, the Environment Agency, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Welsh Development Agency, Forestry Commission and Countryside Council for Wales. The National Museums and Galleries of Wales, Cardiff has agreed to host the post at their offices and it is hoped to advertise the post in August with a view to commencing the post in October.

Once the Development Officer is in post he/she will be contacting you. The views and needs of recorders in South Wales will be a key part of the consultation process, so please make sure that you let the Development Officer know how a Record Centre could best meet your recording/data handling needs.

CONTACT: Alison Jones, Ecologist ✉ Caerphilly County Borough Council, Countryside and Landscape Services, Council Offices, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP2 2YW ☎ 01495 235 187
Email: jonesa2@caerphilly.gov.uk

• **Wildlife Sites Can You Help?** [Julian Branscombe]

For all you active naturalists out there, Wildlife Sites are something to be kept in mind when you are out and about looking at areas especially rich in wildlife. But what are they?

Wildlife Sites are non-statutory designated areas recognised as being especially rich in wildlife. The network of Wildlife Sites complement statutorily-protected sites (e.g. SSSIs) by maintaining wildlife corridors, providing buffer zones, maintaining local biodiversity and providing opportunities for declining farmland species or widely ranging species of national importance. Many areas of farmland have areas appreciated for their wildlife interest - a field where lapwings nest, an old pond buzzing with dragonflies in the summer, or a hedgerow that provides an important habitat for many small mammals such as dormice. Wildlife Sites within urban areas are just as important, providing wildlife with routes from town to country and vice versa.

Species-rich unimproved grassland is one of our greatest conservation priorities. The Wildlife Trust is particularly keen to have records from any good sites you may know of, but what is a good grassland? The following species are among the good indicators of different grassland types:

Neutral grassland: lady s smock, black knapweed, devil's-bit scabious, pignut, field scabious, meadow vetchling, rough hawkbit, birds-foot trefoil, cowslip, pepper saxifrage, yellow rattle, betony, dyer s greenweed, milkwort, greater burnet, adders-tongue fern.

- Calcareous Grassland:** Quaking grass, Agrimony, Yellow-wort, Stemless Thistle, Fairy Flax, Rock Rose, Restharrow, Salad Burnet, Small Scabious, Thyme, Marjoram, Greater Knapweed, Lady s Bedstraw.
- Acid Grassland:** Tormentil, Heath Milkwort, Moonwort, Heath Bedstraw, Petty Whin, Sedges, Bilberry, Heathers.
- Marshy Grassland:** Tubular Water-dropwort, Marsh Pennywort, Meadow Thistle, Lousewort, Ragged Robin, Marsh Marigold, Lesser Skullcap, Ivy-Leaved Bellflower, Cotton grass, Sharp-flowered Rush, sedges.

At present only certain parts of Gwent have a Wildlife Site System in place. However, this is changing with the appointment of Gemma Bodé as Wildlife Sites Officer at Gwent Wildlife Trust. The South Wales Wildlife Sites System is being developed by the Wildlife Trusts working in partnership with countryside and farming bodies and local authorities. Monmouthshire CC, Blaenau Gwent CBC and Torfaen CBC are supporting the project, and these authorities are a particular focus for Gemma s fieldwork. However, if you think you know of a potential Wildlife Site anywhere in Gwent then please contact Gemma. Recognising these sites will be vital for the future of Gwent s wildlife.

CONTACT: Gemma Bodé ✉ Gwent Wildlife Trust, 16 White Swan Court, Monmouth, NP25 3NY
☎ 01600 715 501 Email: gwentwildlife@cix.co.uk

❖ BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

• Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent's LBAP is still on course for production in August with a grand launch on the 31st, during Wales Biodiversity Week, at Silent Valley Local Nature Reserve. There will also be awards for the new Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Forum logo designed by a student from Ysgol Cymraeg Brynmawr and the new logo for Silent Valley Local Nature Reserve. Everyone is welcome.

CONTACT: Colin Cheesman ☎ 01495 355 550 E-mail: colin.cheesman@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

• Caerphilly

The LBAP for Caerphilly county borough was launched on Saturday 11th May 2002, with over 3,000 people attending the day event in the Sir Harold Finch Memorial Park, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood. It was the first major event of its kind in Caerphilly, with all the partners involved in promoting the LBAP and involving adults and children in various wildlife activities. Activities included pond dipping, bird box making, guided walks, competitions and quizzes, wildflower and tree planting, face painting, storytelling, Brazilian rainforest music, Carnival of the Animals performances by school children, wildlife-friendly plant sale, live snakes, hedgehogs and owls. The LBAP was officially launched by the Leader and Chairman of the council, and Howie Watkins (children's TV presenter, formerly of the BBC's Really Wild Show) helped make the day a memorable one for all involved! The Caerphilly Biodiversity Partnership recently met to discuss the first year of implementation, and will be agreeing priorities for action what Species Action Plans to take forward and what Habitat Action Plans to prepare.

CONTACT: Melanie Sutherland ☎ 01495 235 253 Email: sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

• Newport

Newport s LBAP is currently being re-drafted in response to the public consultation. We hope to publish the document in the very near future.

CONTACT: Rebecca Davies ☎ 01633 232 880 Email: rebecca.davies@newport.gov.uk

- **Torfaen**

Torfaen CBC is running a photo competition as part of their LBAP entitled 'Wildlife on Your Doorstep'. This is a great opportunity for wildlife photographers to have their work published in the Plan and to win a £100 in photo equipment vouchers. The only requirement is entries must depict habitats and species found in Torfaen. The deadline for entries is August 7th. There are two categories: 16 years and under / 17 years and over. For further details, including an entry form

CONTACT: Steve Williams ☎ 01633 648 308 Email: steve.williams@torfaen.gov.uk

Or **Elaine Preece** ☎ 01633 648 045 Email: elaine.preece@torfaen.gov.uk

- ❖ **AQUATIC WARBLERS IN GWENT**

[Richard Clarke]

The Goldcliff Ringing Group is undertaking an investigation into the importance of the Uskmouth reedbeds, Newport, in relation to aquatic warblers (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) during their autumn migration. The investigation aims to establish the extent and regularity of Aquatic Warblers utilising the reedbeds.

The aquatic warbler has the dubious distinction of being the most threatened passerine species in Europe (Grimmet 1988). It is a rare but regular autumn visitor especially to southern Britain. A handful of reedbeds in Wales are also known to provide suitable stop over areas for this warbler. The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) *Action for Wildlife* records 8 sites in Wales where the aquatic warbler has been recorded. The Uskmouth reedbeds (now part of CCW's Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve) are not included amongst these sites; however, the Goldcliff Ringing Group have recorded a total of 4 birds to date (singles in 1996 and 1997 and two in 2001). It is therefore possible that the site is far more important for the species than has been recognised previously.

Aquatic warblers are a secretive species that can be overlooked easily if relying on observation as a means of establishing their presence. Catching birds, by setting mist-nets, has proved to be a very effective means and therefore this approach will be employed during the investigation.

The investigation will involve a series of 3-4 hour early morning visits during August for each of the three years 2002-2004. The focus of these visits will be from the second week until the end of the month, but dependent upon weather conditions. During this period a low volume tape recording of aquatic warbler song will be played to attract birds in the immediate area.

The project will support specific actions relevant to the UK BAP, namely: surveying and subsequently monitoring a potential site used by aquatic warblers. The project has therefore qualified for a small grant under CCW's Species Challenge Fund.

CONTACT: Richard Clarke Gwent Ornithological Society ✉ *Chy Kembro*, 8 Lower Ochryth, Risca, Newport, NP11 6EN ☎ 01633 615 581 Email: richard.clarke@care4free.net

- ❖ **MAPMATE SOFTWARE FOR NATURALISTS**

[Julian Branscombe]

The Wildlife Trust bought Recorder 2000, but I must say I was put off learning it because of the poor press it had about being unwieldy. *MapMate* is the computer software for biological recording that everyone was raving about, so when the Trust ordered a copy, I had a go.

I am impressed. I am not used to databases, but in an hour and a half I had the programme installed, and I understood it well enough to put in a night's catch data from my moth trap. I've learnt a few easy shortcuts (readily found from the 3 sides of A4 which are provided as the comprehensive introduction - no daunting thick manuals here), and now it is really quick to put all my records in. This software looks like transforming me from someone who has always identified a

lot of wildlife but has been horribly sloppy about writing it down and pulling the records together at the end of the year.

MapMate comes with species lists readily installed (with lots of recognised synonyms) for just about everything but fungi, with regular downloads available so you can follow the dreaded name changes, and an indication of the national status for a lot of species is also included.

MapMate will compile site lists, life lists and distribution maps (base maps of VC35 and all the local authorities in Gwent are already installed), whatever you could possibly want really. One neat feature is that you can use e-mail to share your records with others, such as a county recorder (if they are using it). Each time you share records, only new records will be passed across, so there is no need to sort out what you have entered onto the software since the last time you submitted anything electronically. I haven't worked out how to do this, but as an experiment I have a speckled bush-cricket record to send to Steve Williams who also uses *MapMate*. I understand *MapMate* is in use with the Powys & Brecon Beacons National Park Local Records Centre (BIS), with this facility presumably being one of the reasons why.

MapMate is also cheap. The latest version now costs £25.00, whereas it used to be just a tenner, but it still seems excellent value. It can be ordered online at www.mapmate.co.uk (or e-mail sales@mapmate.co.uk). The website gives a good introduction, but to avoid the online ordering fee, send a cheque to: Teknica Ltd, The White House, Montacute Road, Stoke Sub Hamdon, Somerset, TA14 6UQ.

❖ FUNGUS FORAYS

[Julian Branscombe]

The Gwent Wildlife Trust has organised three fungus events this autumn:

1. **Saturday 21st September** - meeting at 2:00pm on the bridge over the Afon Lwyd (SO 285 006) by Pontypool Leisure Centre, for a foray around Pontypool Park
2. **Sunday 29th September** - Elsa Wood is leading a foray from Whitestone's car park, Tintern (SO 525 029)
3. **Saturday 12th October** - Ray Woods is running *An Introduction to Grassland Fungi*, around Abergavenny. Pre-booking on this is essential and spaces are filling up fast, so contact the Trust Office to see if you can book a place

I am an enthusiastic beginner when it comes to fungi, having learnt a fair bit from going out occasionally with the Leicestershire Fungus Study Group during a couple of autumn's, before I moved to Wales. I therefore ask whether anyone would be interested in reforming the **Gwent Fungus Group?** Shelley Evans is keen to encourage us, and I am pretty sure we could find expert leaders for forays on a fairly regular basis, so do get in touch if a group appeals to you. What we really need is someone who could take on the simple job of running the Group, taking subs, maintaining a mailing list and circulating information on events. I am particularly keen to hear from you if you are just that person!

CONTACT: Julian Branscombe ✉ Gwent Wildlife Trust, 16 White Swan Court, Monmouth NP25 3NY
☎ 01600 715 501 Email: jbranscombe@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk

❖ BIRDING IN CARDIFF, MAY 2002

[Vaughan Grantham]

Ospreys, which winter in Africa and breed in Scotland and Scandinavia pass through Wales in small numbers on spring and autumn migration. They usually just fly through in a few minutes, especially in spring when they are returning to their breeding territories. This spring an adult bird lingered at Peterstone Gout (Gwent Levels, Newport, ST 28 80) for at least five days from 7th - 11th May. During

its stay it caught several fish in the Severn Estuary and ate them on nearby perches. It could often be seen perched on posts in the river, fence posts, telegraph poles and even an electricity pylon. This magnificent bird was seen at close quarters by many local birders, who will be hoping it returns in the autumn.

A yellow wagtail, now sadly a very scarce breeding bird in Gwent was also present in the area. A flock of six whimbrels, also heading for northern Europe, were present on the estuary at the same time. In the extreme south of Gwent a pair of lapwing had been present and displaying near Lamby Way landfill site from late March until at least 8th May. However, no young were seen. In this and adjacent fields I counted 230+ carrion crow, so not the best choice of nest field! This is the only pair of lapwings I know of in Cardiff.

CONTACT: Vaughan Grantham ✉ Cardiff County Council, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff ☎ 029 2087 3227
Email: vgrantham@cardiff.gov.uk

❖ **CAROLINA HORNWORT (*Phaeoceros carolinianus*), A RED DATA BOOK
BRYOPHYTE WITH ITS BRITISH HEADQUARTERS IN GWENT?** [Sam Bosanquet]

Hornworts are a group of bryophytes that look very similar to liverworts. The British species grow as dark green rosettes, up to 4cm in diameter. Four species are known from Britain, all of which have been recorded in Gwent; none are at all common in the county. *Anthoceros agrestis* is relatively widespread in north-eastern Monmouthshire, growing in cereal stubble fields. *Anthoceros punctatus* has been recorded once, on colliery spoil above Cwmbran by SDSB in 1999. *Phaeoceros laevis* has been recorded from widely scattered sites but may have been confused with *P. carolinianus*; the only confirmed record is from a clay ride in Highmeadow Woods. The rarest British species, *P. carolinianus*, had been recorded just once in the county before 2001.

In 1980 Jean Paton and Roy Perry recorded *Phaeoceros carolinianus* new to Wales, growing with *Anthoceros agrestis* in a cereal stubble field at Llancayo, north of Usk. This field was visited briefly by SDSB in 2000 and is now a Maize field; it was considered unlikely that the nutrient-sensitive *Phaeoceros* would have persisted. In late December 2001 SDSB was tetrad-bashing in SO30Y and found a population of at least 50 *P. carolinianus*, growing with a few *A. agrestis*, in cereal stubble near Rhiw-las. A few weeks later a search of an arable field at Dingestow revealed two *P. carolinianus* and almost 100 *A. agrestis*. Finally, in March 2002 at least 35 *P. carolinianus* were found with several hundred *A. agrestis* in 1 year old set-aside near Llangattock Vibon-Avel.

The British Red Data Book mentions just 4 localities where *P. carolinianus* was recorded between 1910 and 2000 - two in Surrey, one in Cornwall and the Llancayo site. Three records in as many months suggested that Gwent either holds the majority of the British population of this species, or that it has been overlooked elsewhere in the country, or SDSB was misidentifying it (!). A specimen from Llangattock Vibon-Avel was confirmed by the national liverwort recorder, Tim Blackstock, so the last option seems unlikely. The species is only subtly different from *P. laevis* but there is no reason to think that it has been widely overlooked by other bryologists. I may be proved wrong but it seems that our Old Red Sandstone might provide precisely the kind of conditions that *P. carolinianus* needs.

A soil sample from Llangattock Vibon-Avel had a pH of 7.65 (measured by Mark Hill at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Monk's Wood). Associated species suggest that the clay is neutral as they include mild calcicoles, such as *Enthosthodon fascicularis*, and mild calcifuges, including *Tortula truncata* and *Dicranella staphylina*. One thing is for sure - nutrient and herbicide inputs need to be low for the hornworts to thrive. Most of the Dingestow field was devoid of bryophytes but the unsprayed edge supported the Hornworts and *E. fascicularis*. It is also important that stubbles are left through the winter as the Hornworts fruit late in the year and are unable to complete their reproduction if they are ploughed in the autumn. Finally, it appears that the

Hornworts may favour slightly damp areas - the Rhiw-las colony is in the lowest-lying part of the field.

The importance of arable fields for birds and annual plants is well known to conservationists; their importance for bryophytes is less well known. The British Bryological Society are starting a three year survey of arable fields across Britain and this should help put Gwent's arable bryoflora into context. Meanwhile it seems prudent to include Carolina Hornwort in the Monmouthshire LBAP.

CONTACT: Sam Bosanquet ✉ Dingestow Court, Monmouth, Gwent, NP25 4DY ☎ 01437 771 300
Email: S.Bosanquet@ccw.gov.uk

❖ RECORDING FUNGI IN GWENT

[Shelley Evans]

Pink Waxcap Survey

An excellent and very easy way to start your expertise in looking at fungi is to take place in the national survey for the pink waxcap (*Hygrocybe calyptiformis*). It is included in the Biodiversity Guidance for Gwent and is a UK priority species. Organised by Plantlife, the plant conservation charity, in partnership with the British Mycological Society (BMS) and supported by other members of the Fungus Conservation Forum, this summer is the first time that such a populist survey approach has been taken with a fungus in the UK. Plantlife have previously targeted plant species, so this switch to a mycological theme is a particularly significant milestone for fungal conservation in the UK.

The aim of the survey is to generate further information on waxcap sites nationally and to raise awareness and engage public interest in fungi. The pink waxcap (*Hygrocybe calyptiformis*), being such a beautiful and distinctive species to look out for, is an ideal choice. It is a flagship species for a declining habitat whose mycological import is often neglected or ignored by conservationists working on other groups of organisms. Previous publicity funded by its presence on the UK priority BAP list and amongst mycologists involved in the BMS Waxcap Grassland Survey has already had a remarkable effect. The number of known sites for the species in the UK has increased from 46 in 1999 (Tranche 2 Action Plans) to a current estimate of 250 sites.

The Pink Waxcap Survey will run from now until the end of the year, and to achieve maximum response it is incorporating two additional distinctive waxcaps in the search: the parrot waxcap (*H. psittacina*) and the blackening waxcap (*H. conica*). These are much more common and more likely to be encountered, so they will help stimulate the public hunt. Everyone is encouraged to take part and a small prize is being offered by the BMS to the first record, authenticated by a photograph, of *Hygrocybe calyptiformis* found this year and submitted as part of the survey. Recorded dates for the species entered in the BMS Fungal Records Database (BMSFRD) range from 7th August (Co. Down, N. Ireland) to 15th December (Warks).

The pink meadow waxcap is often an indicator of a quality waxcap site and where it fruits there may well be other threatened waxcaps, coral-like fairy clubs and black or olive-green earth tongues (the latter also a priority BAP species *Microglossum olivaceum*). The pink waxcap is bright pink when young, fading later to a dusky pink, and has a very pointed, waxy cap and pale pink stem and gills, particularly liking cropped mossy grass.

Full survey details and recording forms will be available from 13th August, contact Plantlife at www.plantlife.org.uk or phone 020 7808 0118. Details and forms will also be incorporated in the autumn issue of Field Mycology with a full press launch on 20th August.

Waxcap Grasslands of Gwent and their Management

The colourful and fascinating world of Waxcaps, Fairy Clubs and Earth Tongues may all sound like things from a children's storybook but in fact they can have a major presence in many of our local unimproved uplands, unfertilised fields and lawns, as well as more surprisingly in many of our churchyards and cemeteries. They are a key part of a threatened group of fungi that fruit in grassland habitats, but they are a rather picky group, choosing only grasslands of the highest quality, those unimproved by the application of fertilizers and chemicals, and where grazing or mowing keeps the sward short. They do not approve of man's attempts to artificially boost productivity and such intense farming has depleted their habitat and seriously reduced their numbers. Since the 2nd World War, 95% of Britain's hay meadows and 80% of chalk pasture have disappeared. High calibre, top quality waxcap grasslands are in short supply and across the UK and Europe these fungi are on Red Data Lists and of high conservation concern.

Yet certain areas of the UK, like the unimproved pastures and uplands of Gwent have proved to be European strongholds envied by European mycologists. One site on the Blorenge, near Abergavenny, boasts 27 species of waxcaps placing it amongst the top five sites in the UK, and of international conservation importance. Any site with more than 9 species of waxcap is currently rated as regionally important, and there are several such sites in Gwent and undoubtedly many more are waiting to be discovered.

Waxcaps are amongst the most startlingly beautiful of our fungi with their bright greens, reds, yellows and even blues; their classic pointed pixie caps and their textures ranging from the waxiness of butter to the slipperiness of eels. They are a colourful sight glistening in the green mossy grass on a typical dewy late summer or autumn morning. They are not difficult to spot at a time of year when there is little else brightly growing in the grass. The good news is that many of our lawns, churchyards and cemeteries are natural nature reserves, havens not just for flowers, lichens, insects and butterflies but for these threatened fungi too. Most are chemical free zones where neat mowing mimics grazing. But it is vitally important that we get the message across especially to gardeners that to conserve this natural heritage it is essential to keep chemicals off. We need to buck the trend in lawncare promoted by the big chemical producing conglomerates and do all we can to make it fashionable to cultivate deep, springy mossy grass in our lawns, parks and churchyards.

Gwent Oak Polypore Challenge

It is time once again for searching Gwent for the oak polypore (*Piptoporus quercinus*) another priority BAP species featured in the poster in Issue 1 of the Gwent Recorders Newsletter. Although it has not yet been recorded from Gwent active searches last year were severely hampered by the Foot & Mouth outbreak, so renewed search this summer is more likely to be productive.

Look out for this bracket species from late June through to early September. In shape, size and texture it is very similar to the birch polypore (*Piptoporus betulina*). It grows up to 19cms across and may persist in an old blackened mummified state well into the following spring before disintegrating. When fresh and mature, the upper surface is streaked rich chestnut brown tinged with yellow. It has a white edge and lower pore surface. The pores are small and circular darkening with age and the soft fruitbodies can sometimes bruise vinaceous. Depending on the stage of development, check out chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), beefsteak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*), and weeping oak polypore (*Inonotus dryadeus*) for possible confusions. All have proved possible look-alikes foiling even the experienced!

The stronghold for the oak polypore is definitely in the UK where it is associated with the 'veteran' oaks given publicity through Jerry Lewis's article in Issue 2 and through excellent schemes like the Veteran Tree Initiative and the Ancient Tree Forum. Just to clarify, a 'veteran' oak is one with a large (2 metre or more) diameter at chest height and probably over 250 years old, often with lots of knotholes or hollows and appearing 'stag-headed'. The classic 'blasted' oak *Piptoporus quercinus*

can grow on both living and dead standing trees but can also fruit regularly on fallen trunks, branches and even quite small fragments splintered from suitable disintegrating veterans. It predominates in sites with many suitable trees but is also found on isolated oaks.

The oak polypore is one of only four UK fungi protected by law from collection through Schedule 8 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. A good photograph and description emailed to myself should eliminate some potential false identification, but otherwise a permit is needed to collect discrete wedges for microscopic confirmation. So if you think you have oak polypore you will need to seek advice from English Nature who is the Lead Partner for the species: contact Tel no. 01206 796666.

There were only six known sites published in the 1999 Tranche 2 UK BAP compared with 22 in a recent report funded by English Nature. Publicity last year for the species proved most successful with eight new UK sites: at Epping (Essex), Ashted and Petworth (Surrey), Kedleston Park (Derbyshire), Brockworth and Forthampton Oaks (Glos.), Bradgate Park (Leics.), and Captain's Wood (Suffolk). To date there are no Welsh sites and the nearest site to Gwent is still Moccas Park near Hay-on-Wye, where it is found fruiting on several trees.

Putting Mushrooms on the Local Map

Though now based in the deep dry south near Salisbury, I do remain, albeit remotely, the Gwent recorder for fungi, and on visits home continue to actively record in Gwent, particularly at sites in the Abergavenny area. Although with my migration south, the Gwent Fungus Group, which I ran for five years, has now discontinued, the individual members still continue their interest in fungi. I now hope through this newsletter to be able to generate some new interest in recording Gwent fungi amongst the readership.

There is no denying that fungi are a difficult group of organisms to gain skilled competence in identifying and ultimately require monographs, chemicals and microscopic investigation for critical IDs. Even then problems can sometimes only be resolved by consulting national experts in a particular group. However, even for the complete novice, they are an extremely colourful, variable and, being static, easy to find group of organisms, which will reward a little persistence with a decent field guide like Roger Phillips' *Mushrooms and Other Fungi of Great Britain and Europe*. Given the limited number of recorded sites in the region, it is well worth the relative beginner - turning detective and noting the more distinctive species they can manage to identify when out visiting sites. Every record counts.

Anyone with past or current fungus records is encouraged to send them to me for incorporation into the BMS Fungal Records Database, the UK repository for fungus records, capable of interaction with local record centres. Once a better geographical spread of records in Gwent has been achieved I then hope to produce a mycota for the whole region.

Records can be accepted in almost any format, even legible handwritten ones, but for greatest ease and speed of use, those with Access capabilities are encouraged to record electronically using the MycoRec package. This is tailored specifically to the needs of fungi and includes a full dictionary of current fungus names. It is available on the web for free download at www.fieldmycology.net together with national information on fungus recording including distribution maps for selected species. For those who have never recorded fungi the basics are included in this simplified recording form, which can be photocopied for future use.

Anyone interested in furthering their skills in identifying mushrooms and learning more about their biodiversity and conservation should subscribe to **Field Mycology** (4 issues with excellent colour photos @ £16.00) from Journals Customer Services, Cambridge University Press, FREEPOST, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 1BR.

If you have any fungus records to contribute, or need further information then please **CONTACT: Shelley Evans**, British Mycological Society Conservation Officer and Fungus Recorder for Gwent
✉ Icknield House, 8 Saxonhurst, Downton, Saxonhurst, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP5 3JN ☎ 07940 577 165
E-mail: shelley-evans@myco-services.freeserve.co.uk

❖ ORTHOPTERA OF MONMOUTHSHIRE

[Steve Williams]

2001 Highlights

The year heralded the first complete season of recording effort for grasshoppers, crickets and allied insects for VC35 (Monmouthshire/Gwent). By the end of the season a large batch of record cards detailing the work of a few stalwart recorders were complete and safely dispatched to John Widgery, the organiser of the UK recording scheme. It transpired that the year had been successful in putting the county firmly on the orthoptera recording map for the first time.

Records submitted included an incredible 28 new 10km records, including three each for **short winged conehead**, *Conocephalus dorsalis*, **lesser marsh grasshopper**, *Chorthippus albomarginatus* and two for **Lesne's Earwig**, *Forficula lesnei*. The latter species, plus **lesser Earwig**, *Labia minor*, netted by Sam Bosanquet at Dingestow, were new to the county.

One of the most bizarre occurrences came from Shirley Rippon. Shirley had purchased a magnolia tree from a garden centre in mid-Wales and on arrival back at Abergavenny noticed a very large and lethargic brown grasshopper clinging to the stem. After a spell trying to identify the mystery invertebrate she contacted the Gwent Wildlife Trust who passed the query onto me. A mid-evening meeting ensued in a car park in Abergavenny where another attempt was made to establish its identity. Eventually the mystery was solved. **Egyptian grasshoppers**, *Anacridium aegyptian* are sometimes imported accidentally into this county on produce. The arrival of this native of the Mediterranean region tied in with the fact that the magnolia tree had recently arrived as part of a delivery of pot grown plants from Italy.

Bat Detectors for Orthoptera Recording

Whilst out recording the activities of local bats near his home in Pontypool, Leyton Williams-Davies picked up signals on his detector at a frequency outside the normal bat range. After further investigation the signals were attributed to the short tick produced by the song of the **speckled bush-cricket**, *Leptophyes punctatissima*.

All serious orthoptera recorders will testify that the use of a bat detector is another very useful tool for identifying grasshoppers and particularly bush-crickets. In fact, because some crickets are so difficult to see in the field the only way of recording their presence is through the use of an ultrasound detector. It is also said that with the aid of a detector it is possible to drive around at night and record bush-crickets in 25 or more tetrads per hour. I'll let you know in my next report if this works!

Targets for 2002

Although we are off to a flying start there are still large gaps in our knowledge. My own recording in Torfaen and surrounding locations has been enough to develop a broad picture of species distribution locally. Data from Kevin Dupe from the Newport area and Sam Bosanquet for Dingestow mean that a picture is now developing for these areas. But large sections of the county remain poorly recorded. The neighbouring county of Gloucestershire is known for its good diversity of grasshoppers and crickets, so there is a very good chance the Wye Valley supports some hidden treasures. This also applies to the Gwent Levels, where it would be nice to re-locate the **great green bush cricket**, *Tettigonia viridissima*, with its a very loud, continuous, rattling call not too dissimilar to the song of the **grasshopper warbler**, *Locustella naevia*.

And Finally. . . .

Thanks are due to Sam Bosanquet, Julian Branscombe, Kevin Dupe, Graham Harris, Jerry Lewis, Shirley Rippon, and Leyton Williams-Davies for sharing their data with me.

If anyone would like some orthoptera recording cards for the coming season, you can either contact me (details below) or order on-line from the Biological Records Centre at www.brc.ac.uk

CONTACT: Steve Williams, Orthoptera Recorder ☒ 8 Snatchwood Terrace, Abersychan, Pontypool, NP4 7BP ☎ 01495 774 658 E-mail: steven@aol.com

❖ EXTRACTS FROM COBWEBS, THE SOUTH WALES ARACHNID GROUP NEWSLETTER

[Mike Kilner]

The excellent Collins Field Guide to the spiders of Britain and Northern Europe, by Roberts (1995) - if you don't yet have a copy, I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

Jumping Spiders Indoors?

Mark Winder sent me an immature specimen of *Pseudeuophrys lanigera* (formerly *Euophrys lanigera*) from inside his house. All of the *Euophrys* group jumping spiders are small and brownish, and can be recognised by their white or cream-coloured palps. *P. lanigera* is almost always found in or around houses, and is usually the most commonly encountered species. Look out also for *Salticus scenicus*, the zebra spider, which frequently wanders into buildings in summer.

***Argiope bruennichi* Does it occur in Wales?**

Argiope bruennichi is a spectacular-looking spider. Its large size, enormous web with a distinctive stabilimentum (see the picture in the Roberts field guide, page 73), and characteristic black and yellow stripes should make it unmistakable. As yet there are no official records from Wales, but the spider is known to be slowly spreading northwards, and a few years ago a specimen cropped up in Derbyshire, about 200 miles away from the nearest record of the species. So occurrence is certainly possible.

Therefore, I was interested to learn of a record for this species from the churchyard at Trostrey church, near Usk, from August this year. SWAG member Graham Harris records a single spider from the hedgerow bordering the churchyard. Unfortunately, there being only a single specimen, Graham was understandably reluctant to capture it, and when I returned to the site in mid-October the relevant area had been mowed. Several times. No spider.

I spoke to Peter Harvey, head of the spider recording scheme, about this record, and he said that he was unwilling to accept the record without a voucher specimen since this would be a first record for Wales. He added that *Argiope* occurs in numbers in his local area (Essex) and that reports of *Argiope* often turn out to be *Araneus diadematus*. This might seem surprising given the distinctive appearance of *Argiope*, but apparently it happens. So for now, at least officially, *Argiope bruennichi* remains absent from the Welsh list. Graham and I will both be returning to Trostrey church next year.

What to look out for

The spider likes long grass, especially field margins and areas of uncut rough grassland, where it makes its large web close to the ground (so it isn't as obvious as it might be). Look out for the stabilimentum in any large webs that you find, and note also the appearance of the males, which are much smaller and differently marked (they may crop up in sweep nets). Coastal grassland is probably the best bet, as the main stronghold for the species nationally is the south coast, but they also balloon rather well, so any suitable habitat is well worth checking. Look out for them from

mid-summer onwards, and if you do find one, try to get a photograph or a live specimen. I expect to confirm the occurrence of this species in Wales by this time next year.

The Search for Raft Spiders at Uskmouth Reserve

In late September 2001, Richard Gallon (the county recorder for Gwynedd) and myself were engaged to survey the Uskmouth reserve near Newport. The object was to try to find evidence of Raft spiders (genus *Dolomedes*). The hope was that we would discover the very rare (Schedule 1 protected species) *Dolomedes plantarius*, previously known only from 2 or 3 sites in south-eastern England. One cautionary note; *Dolomedes plantarius* is a protected species, and a special licence is required before it can be searched for or handled. Speculative surveys for this species are not encouraged. The commoner *D. fimbriatus* is recorded from Glamorgan, but as yet neither species has been confirmed in Gwent.

We were out of luck. Late September is really too late in the year to look for *Dolomedes*, and we failed to find anything at all. This is not to say that it isn't there, just that we were too late. However, the three days were not totally wasted. Most particularly a huge population of the notable *Tetragnatha striata* was found in the reedbeds.

If you have any spider records or articles for the next issue of Cobwebs, please CONTACT:

Michael Kilner, ✉ 58 Llandegfedd Way, New Inn, Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 0RG ☎ 01495 760 020
Email: MichaelDKilner@aol.com

Membership of the South Wales Arachnid Group (SWAG) is only £2.00, and in order to simplify admin, the fee becomes due on the 1st of March each year. If you would to become a member of SWAG or to receive Cobwebs, please **CONTACT: Mark Winder** ✉ 'Endsleigh', Blue Anchor Hill, Penclawdd, Gower, SA4 3LZ. Please make any cheques payable to South Wales Arachnid Group .

❖ BEE ORCHIDS IN GWENT

[Jerry Lewis]

Bee orchids are uncommon in Gwent and, although Trevor Evans BSBI recorder for VC35 (Gwent) has a long list of sites, most no longer have bee orchids recorded on them. This is partly due to the nature of the plant, preferring disturbed ground, where the initial colonists are rapidly overtaken by succeeding vegetation. Most sites only have a handful of spikes, with occasionally up to 100 having been recorded at the very best locations.

enclosures were erected, in total area about the size of a tennis court, and in June 148 spikes were counted, the fencing obviously doing its job very effectively.

In June 2002 a count of 526 Bee and 1 Pyramidal orchid was made (only 6 were outside the fenced area and still being

In June 2000, Dave Chappell, a Caerwent Community Councillor, contacted me about a site where he had found some bee orchids. The site comprised an area adjacent to a mothballed quarry where topsoil had been stripped some years before. In 2000, 48 spikes were found making it the largest Gwent site that year. During a visit in May 2001 it became apparent that rabbits were eating many orchids, so Dave and Georgina Holdsworth contacted the quarry manager (Ian Bradbury of Hanson Aggregates) who was more than happy to erect rabbit fencing to prevent the damage being done. Two



© CCBC 2002

nipped off by the rabbits) making it by far the largest site ever recorded in Gwent.

Future monitoring of the site will ensure that any additional management work that needs to be done is identified at an early stage. This will hopefully prevent the site going the same way as many others, where bee orchid have been out-competed by more vigorous plants.

CONTACT: Jerry Lewis ✉ Monmouthshire CC, County Hall, Cwmbran ☎ 01633 644 856
Email: jerry.lewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk

❖ SNAKE TISSUE SAMPLES WANTED FOR STUDY

[www.froglife.fsnet.co.uk]

Rhys Jones, based at Cardiff University, needs samples of snake tissue for a study of the genetics and distribution of adders *Vipera berus* and grass snakes *Natrix natrix* throughout Britain (and Europe). Rhys is looking for samples of, or whole, dead snakes or snake sloughs. He needs to know where the snake originated.

If you have access to such tissues (e.g. preserved road kills, or collected sloughs) please **CONTACT: Rhys Jones** ✉ G10, BIOSI 1, Main Building, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff CF10 4BT ☎ 029 2087 5776 (Lab) Email: JonesR9@cf.ac.uk

❖ AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE GROUP FOR GWENT?

[www.froglife.fsnet.co.uk]

In the last Issue of the newsletter Andrea Rowe (Newport) reported on the possibility of setting up a Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group (GARG). A network of these groups is currently being set up throughout the UK and there are three in Wales: Dyfyd-Powys (Fred Slater, 01597 860308); Gwynedd (Frances Cattnach, 01248 351541) and the third in North East Wales (Matthew Ellis, 01352 706600).

If you are interested in amphibian and reptile conservation and would like to see a group set up to promote and record these species in Gwent, please **CONTACT: Rebecca Davies** ☎ 01633 232 880
Email: rebecca.davies@newport.gov.uk

❖ NEWPORT FESTIVAL OF WILDLIFE 2002

Monday August 26th 2002, 11am - 3pm at Tredegar House, Newport

Discover the wildlife of Newport; stalls and displays from a wide variety of organisations including Gwent Badger Group, Gwent Beekeepers Association, Gwent Wildlife Trust, British Dragonfly Society and the RSPB. Activities and events will be held throughout the day. IT S FREE!

CONTACT: Angela Charlton, Youth and Communities Officer, RSPB ☎ 01547 530 645 Email: angela.charlton@rspb.org.uk

❖ NATIONAL MAMMAL WEEK 2002

[www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal]

Saturday July 6th - Sunday July 14th 2002

The Mammal Society's National Mammal Week is a week of events and activities to raise awareness of British mammals and involve people of all ages in efforts to protect them. Mammal events and activities for all the family will be taking place all over the country from Saturday 6th to Sunday 14th July 2002 to celebrate The Mammal Society's National Mammal Week.

To find out what's going on near you and how to get involved check out the events list on the website. If you or your organisation would like to take part in National Mammal Week 2002 by organising an event then you can use the electronic form on the website to register your event. Registering your event means that it will be included in the National Mammal Week Events List and in all The Mammal Society's publicity. You will also receive a National Mammal Week information pack to help with the event.

Events can be anything to do with mammals e.g: painting competitions or mammal mask making, storytelling, bat or badger watches, talks to local schools or community groups, walks looking for tracks and signs of mammals or practical conservation tasks such as putting up nest boxes.

- **Current Events in Wales:** (full listings on the website)

Ceredigion: Cetacean Survey Training Course on Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th July, Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife centre, New Quay. Learn all about British cetaceans, how to survey for them and contribute to their conservation. Prior booking essential, costs £89.

CONTACT: The Mammal Society ☎ 020 7498 4358

Flintshire: Wotta l'otter fun! on Tuesday 9th - Friday 12th July 10.30am - 3.30pm, River Alyn, Mold [grid ref. SJ645241 - SJ637247] with BTCV Cymru and North Wales Wildlife Trust help carry out riverside conservation work, encouraging otters to use the area. No cost.

CONTACT: Lisa Williams ☎ 01978 261 538

❖ NEW PUBLICATIONS

[www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal]

Two new identification guides have been published by The Mammal Society and the Field Studies Council as part of the AIDGAP series (Aids to Identification In Difficult Groups of Animals & Plants). The guides are laminated and are ideal to take out into the field.

A Guide to British Bats has been written by bat experts Kate Jones and Allyson Walsh, it covers the identification of all British bats in the hand and in flight, and is illustrated with colour photos by Frank Greenaway, as well as diagrams and sonograms. The cost is £2.50 (for 8 pages)(including p&p).

A Guide to British Mammal Tracks and Signs is written by Simone Bullion, the author of the popular *Key to British Land Mammals*, which was published in the same series in 1998. It covers the identification of all mammal field signs; footprints, droppings, nests, burrows and feeding remains. There is a useful table that shows which field signs can be reliably used to distinguish different species, for example deer droppings are very similar for all 6 species of deer in the UK, while hedgehog droppings are highly distinctive. The cost is £3.25 (for 12 pages) (including p&p).

For more details or to buy **CONTACT: Georgette Shearer** at The Mammal Society ☎ 020 7498 4358
Email: sales@mammal.org.uk

FEEDBACK

Reply Slip for the Gwent Recorders Newsletter

I would/ would not* like to receive the newsletter again (*please delete as appropriate)

I would prefer to receive my copy by e-mail*

My e-mail address is:

Postal address amendments:

Do you know other people who would like to be sent a copy of the newsletter?
Please include their details below.

* We would like to be able to e-mail the newsletter to you rather than post it. This is a more sustainable method of production and cuts down on our costs.

I would like to write an article for the next Newsletter on:

NB. Deadline for articles is Friday 7th September 2002