



Gwent - Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

Issue 13—Autumn
October 2015

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of the Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter!

Once again many of you have been busy recording invertebrates this summer, and this issue brings news of lots of interesting sightings including some brand new species for Wales.

We also have news of some exciting new projects. As part of a Natural Talent Traineeship, Liam Olds has set out to survey the unique invertebrate assemblages of South Wales's colliery Spoil (p13-14), whilst Mark Steer has been searching for a rare rust on round-leaved wintergreen in a bid to discover just how rare it really is (find out how you can help on p5-6).

Meanwhile, others have been reflecting on their past wildlife experiences. Myk Pudlo-Umney tells us about the chance sightings that have shaped his passion for nature conservation (p3-4), while Colin Titcombe looks back at the history of ravens in Gwent – with reference to one particularly special individual! (p8)

Enjoy the issue.

Amy Hicks, SEWBRReC (Editor)

Included in this issue (not all listed):

A Harvestman New to Wales	1
Australian Leafhoppers	2
Why I Do	3-4
Searching for 'Wintergreen Rust' on Round-Leaved Wintergreen	5-6
Recording Highlights from Taf Fechan	7
The Raven in Gwent	8
Bugged	9-10
Interesting Plant Finds 2015	10-11
Colliery Spoil Tips: biodiversity hotspots and important Welsh habitats	13-14
Monmouth Counts Wildlife	15
SEWBRReC Business Update	16

A Harvestman new to Wales: *Leiobunum* sp.



Leiobunum Sp. © Greg Jones

In 2004, a large, dark harvestman in the genus *Leiobunum* was found in the Netherlands. Experts were unable to identify it to species. In 2005 it was again found in the Netherlands and in 2006 also in Germany and Austria. It was subsequently found in Switzerland in 2007 and France in 2009.

It is believed that this harvestman was accidentally imported into Europe. Efforts by the European specialists Wijnhoven, Schönhofer and Martens saw them concentrate on Spain and northern Africa and then Mexico and the southern states of the USA in order to determine its origin: all their efforts have so far drawn a blank.

In 2009 the first British specimen was found in Worksop, Nottinghamshire, and in 2012 it was found in Barnsley, Yorkshire. It has been recorded in increasing numbers in Worksop up to 2015. It has frequently been found in very large congregations.

On 23rd September 2015 I found a specimen on the wall of a building in Maesteg town centre. The species is unmistakable. The harvestmen with the longest legs that have the habit of sitting on walls, *Leiobunum rotundum* and *Opilio canestrinii*, have leg-spans of up to 120mm; my specimen's legs spanned 150mm. Also, its colouration is unique. The dorsal surface is black and the ventral surface pale orange.

All the specimens so far recorded in Britain have been found on the walls of buildings in towns. This would suggest an origin in a warm region as it seeks the "heat islands" of urban centres. This is certainly a species for recorders in Glamorgan and Gwent to search for during the Autumn of this year.

Greg Jones, VC 41 Recorder for Orthoptera

Editor: If you go out hunting for harvestmen this autumn (or any of the other interesting species mentioned in this issue) don't forget to record your sightings online at www.sewbreCORD.org.uk.

Australian Landhoppers



I was playing in the garden one day then noticed some dead and rotting leaves under a large evergreen tree. I took a scoop of the waste and noticed something moving and I dropped it in shock. I sieved through it and found a nest of panicking woodlice and furthermore some small brown creatures crawling away from me. I reached out and as my fingertips touched its body it sprang up about four centimetres in the air to my surprise. I took some more of the material out and noticed a dozen more with the same jumping abilities. I reached out with a collecting pot in my hand and caught six of the minibeasts, and took them to my dad.

Catherine Rowe, aged 10, St Brides Major, Vale of Glamorgan.

Being used to my daughters regularly capturing, prodding and playing with all manner of creeping, crawling and slithering creatures, it was no surprise when Catherine presented me with a collecting pot containing her latest find from the garden. What was a surprise was the odd appearance of the creatures in her pot. Amongst the leaf litter were some small, dark shrimp-like creatures, either lying flat on their sides, or standing up and walking in a rather precarious manner. Catherine told me that they were leaping around when she first disturbed them. I had no idea what they were, although they looked most similar to the sandhoppers that are common on the strandline of beaches. I took a quick photograph (see below) before returning them to the garden.



Arcitalitrus dorienni © Adam Rowe

Over the next couple of days I showed the photograph to Mike Wilson (National Museum Wales) and SEWBReC's own Dave Slade and both gave me the same answer – the Australian Land-hopper (*Arcitalitrus dorienni*). I began to re-search the species online, including its

national and local distribution. I learned that it is a native of Eastern Australia and was first recorded in the UK in the Isles of Scilly in 1925, but is the only terrestrial amphipod found in the UK. As such it has been 'adopted' as an 'honorary woodlouse' by the British Myriapod and Isopod Group (BMIG) recording scheme for Woodlice and Waterlice!

A check of the UK distribution on the NBN Gateway showed 46 records, with just one in Wales (over ten years ago at Brackla, Bridgend). My excitement mounted as I checked our own Local Records Centres Wales data portal

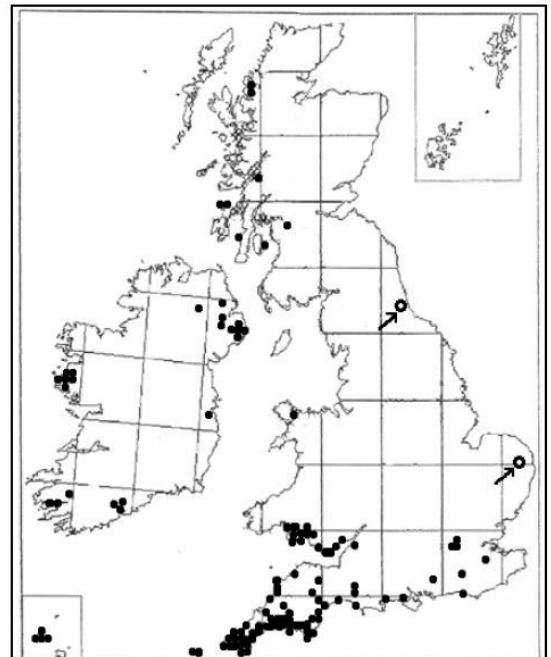
(www.lrcwalesdat.org) only to find that, slightly bizarrely, this held 41

Welsh records. Clearly the NBN Gateway isn't reflecting the true UK distribution of this species, because of insufficient data sharing (something SEWBReC will be rectifying soon ... but that's a story for another issue!).

I contacted the BMIG recording scheme co-ordinator, Steve Gregory, to find out more. He subsequently confirmed that Catherine's record is (excitingly for her) a first record for our 10km square (SS87), and that in total BMIG holds records from

about 120 10km squares across Britain and Ireland. Steve supplied a link to an article he wrote on the species for the BMIG Newsletter in 2012 (see:

www.bmig.org.uk/sites/www.bmig.org.uk/files/news/bmignews25.pdf).



Distribution of *A. dorienni*, to October 2012

The 2012 distribution map it contains and interprets is reproduced above.

Within Wales, records of the species seem to show a southern and possibly coastal bias. Wherever you are in the SEWBReC patch (or beyond), it may be worth having a dig around in leaf litter, as you too may be able to find a new 10km square record! Please report any sightings to us via

www.sewbreCORD.org.uk.

My contact with Steve Gregory has now started a dialogue between us about how BMIG records may in the future be shared with SEWBReC and other LERCs. Watch this space for further myriapod, isopod and amphipod news!

Adam Rowe, SEWBReC Manager

Why I Do

Myk Pudlo-Umney is founder of [Porthkerry Wildlife Group](#) and, after relocating from Barry to Aberdare, recently founded [Dare Valley Wildlife Group](#). He also writes a blog '[Myky Speaks](#)' from which this article originates.

Most people have never seen a live mole. I've been lucky enough to see two. The first was in the late 80s, during my early teens. I was on a concrete taxiway during an air show at RAF Fairford. I felt something on my foot, looked down and there was a mole climbing off my boot! I followed it until it disappeared into the long grass. The second was a couple of years ago at Wenvoe. It was standing in front of me when I got off the bus, and again disappeared into the grass. One thing I'll say about moles is that their fur doesn't look black, more silvery.

With the possible exception of the bat that tried to land in my bandana tails and ended up swinging round and landing on my shoulder before dropping down and flying off, the mole-on-my-foot story was probably the mildest of my physical encounters with wildlife! Twice in my life I've been run over by a muntjac. Twice! Not in the same place, not even in the same county! I was cycling down Cemetery Hill in Bedford one night around half eight, and it was dusk. All of a sudden a muntjac came out of a hole under a wall, and knocked me off my bike. It then proceeded to headbutt me for another minute or two before running off- I can only assume it was an amorous male!

That was the second time, and at least the first was an accident. I was walking my then girlfriend's Dalmatian, when a muntjac leapt out of the ditch by the side of the road, knocking me into the dog. The three of us rolled over each other, and when me and the dog got to our feet, we could see the muntjac bouncing off in the distance! It wouldn't have been so bad, but that day I'd already been knocked over by a brace of pheasants! Walking the dog through a knee-high field, I must have been walking in a perfect straight line towards them because they came up out of the grass about six feet in front of me, and as they went to go either side of me, they hit each other shoulder – not wing-clipped, bounced into me – at nearly the same time, causing me to fall backwards!

Birds aren't always accidental when crashing into me. When our dog Poppy was only a few months old, I was walking her in Finsbury Park, when we came upon a fledgling carrion crow sitting on the grass next to a fence. Poppy's reaction was to play with it. Not play with it like it was a toy, but play with it like it was me or another dog. She wanted it to chase her! Mum and Dad crow however, had very different ideas. They attacked, trying to peck her eyes. I grabbed her and we ran. When they realised they couldn't get to her, they switched to bombing us with poo. We ended up going round half the park before we were let off, but the interesting thing is that it wasn't the same pair the whole time. They chased us a little way before another pair took over, and then again with a third pair. It was very interesting - definitely proved to me that crows communicate! It was also quite scary, scarier than when the buzzard mobbed me - she was just defending her nest as I'd accidentally got too close. I still had to go quite a distance and even then back up to a tree before she would finally go!



Muntjac © Myk Pudlo-Umney

My encounters aren't always so physical. The first time I saw a jay was in Hatfield Forest. We were just wandering around enjoying the woods, when we saw a jay on the ground. It looked a little odd, so we slowed down, shut up, crouched down and crept forward - only to discover that it was anting! I've never seen one do it since, and we only saw it for a few seconds after realising what was happening, but it was long enough! I've seen sparrowhawks catch pigeons, kestrels hovering and catching rodents, a peregrine dive and grab a starling mid-air and various birds of prey being mobbed by other birds (including a peregrine mobbed by a mixed flock of swifts, swallows, and house martins, and a buzzard mobbed by a raven mobbed by a carrion crow!) Accidental sightings like this is what the world is made of. It's far more fulfilling than something you've sat in a hide waiting five hours to see (and that can be

pretty damn fulfilling!)

“The beauty of these things is that they happen throughout your life as long as you think to keep an eye out- you can't be too young or too old.”

One year we were just leaving The Lodge (RSPB HQ at Sandy) when a Ranger came out of the building and excitedly told us a hoopoe had been spotted on site - obviously we went and saw it! While on the subject of the RSPB, I worked in a call centre, calling for various charities, and was briefed to call for them. The script was about songbird decline, and the success of red kite conservation. The first morning of the campaign, on the very same muntjac sparring-ground that is Cemetery Hill, I saw my first ever red kite! My first ever kingfisher was when I was on a school trip to Stowmarket, and I watched as it caught a fish. I've only ever seen one osprey, but that caught a fish and manoeuvred it with its feet. My first ever otter I thought was a dog!

The beauty of these things is that they happen throughout your life as long as you think to keep an eye out- you can't be too young or too old. Last year I saw my first wheatear on Barry beach, just strolling along with friends (me, not the wheatear!). The year before, me and two friends had gone to a place near Pontypridd to see nightjars. We had no expectations - we genuinely thought we'd just hear some churring, and we'd have been more than happy with that. We were wrong. We heard both the call and the churr. While we were waiting for the sun to go down we saw a crossbill, and we knew that was going to be the highlight. Then we heard some churring and located it as coming from a field. We decided not to go into the field as they're a ground-nesting species, and it was that time of year. Then we saw one on a log. I can't describe the excitement! It's one British bird that I've always written off as something I'd never see.

Continues overleaf...

Why I Do (continued)

And I managed to get a photo! Admittedly it's not a good photo - 500mm lens at full zoom just after dusk, no flash, no tripod, BUT I TOOK A PHOTO OF A NIGHTJAR! And then IT happened. Ten feet away on the ground, while two flew around our heads (I cannot tell you just how falcon-like they are in flight!) was a nightjar feigning a broken wing to lure us away - there was a nest in the field! The responsible decision to stay out was the right one. That experience kept me on a high for days!

I hope I don't come across like I'm showing off. I love our wildlife. I want everyone else to as well. There are loads of species I haven't seen - badgers, red squirrels, waxwings, nightingales to name just four. But I like that - I like the fact that I'm not a box-ticker. I can still sit and watch an ordinary great tit go about its business and come away smiling. I'm heading towards my 41st birthday, my memory isn't too good either, yet I remember my firsts, I remember the encounters. I could name others - a ghostly barn owl at night lit by busy London street lights. Great crested grebes courting in Bedford, accidentally walking into a red deer rut in Richmond Park and standing nervously still up against a tree.

I will never understand why not everyone does this. Why don't people marvel at

bullfinches - hell, why don't they even notice them? How can people dismiss water voles as rats - or any other vole for that matter? I often wax lyrical about our ordinary wildlife - magpies, foxes and the like. But there's more to it than that.

In the last ten years I've shown a woman in her late-twenties her first ever hedgehog, and a couple of years ago her first slow worm. Both times, the look on her face was priceless. At the moment, as a movement, we are (rightly) concentrating on getting children into wildlife, educating them so that when they get older they will want to take care of the environment, but I believe we should also be re-connecting adults.



We live our lives seeing species and having experiences for the first time, but to do that we have to be looking at the

world around us. THAT is why I set up Porthkerry Wildlife Group. THAT is why I set up Dare Valley Wildlife Group. THAT is why I will set up similar groups in every town I ever live in. It's not up to the charities to do this - they can't. As far as most people are concerned, because they're the experts, the charities are the "people I give my money to and they spend it on things that I don't really understand, but I don't need to." No, it isn't up to them. It is up to me. It is up to the members of the wildlife groups in Porthkerry and Dare Valley. It is up to you.

We aren't the experts sitting behind a desk working it all out. We are the people in the street, the ordinary people with ordinary jobs. We are the real role-models. Experts are inspiration, but role-models are next door neighbours, cousins, colleagues, drinking partners. We are the ones that prove you can be normal and understand how biodiversity means we can't install a by-pass. We don't lecture or preach, we say "look at that, isn't it amazing". We don't bore people with speeches, we show them things by pointing them out. We don't make them feel inadequate or bored - and most importantly, we have normal lives.

Myk Pudlo-Umney, Dare Valley Wildlife Group

The Big Butterfly Count at Taff Bargoed Park

Members of the public, parents and children participated in a day of fun and activities as part of the Big Butterfly Count 2015 on Taff Bargoed Park. The children visited the park's grassland areas collecting and recording over 200 butterflies, sending the results and then receiving certificates from The Big Butterfly Count. The children also created artwork of the butterfly life cycle to take home with them and to also be displayed on the park's visitor centre walls.

As well as the children and parents having such a fun day out in the park, activities based around recording help towards the park's ongoing wildlife logbook data collection.

Paul Virgin, Environmental & Heritage Warden

Upcoming events at Taff Bargoed Park

October 27th Hibernation Activity
October 29th Tree planting Day

All activities are free. Booking essential.
Children to be accompanied by an adult.

Tel. Environmental & Heritage Warden, Paul Virgin on 07515189844



© Paul Virgin

M.T.I.B. Visit to Taff Bargoed Park



Members of Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind visited Taff Bargoed Park on the 24th of June and took part in a fun day of environmental activities that included the making of mini

bug hotels. The group also helped the warden Paul Virgin collect Fauna to refurbish the park's large stacked Bug Hotel *Buginham Palace* in the Education area. The group are now looking forward to their next visit, when they will be taking part in the planting of various woodland marginal plants around the park.

Ellen Pedley *Employment Training Officer for M.T.I.B* commented: "Paul made us all so welcome and made our visit fun as well as informative. The group learned about the plants and wildlife in the park and they enjoyed helping to build the bug hotel – even when some spiders came to investigate what we were doing! We are looking forward to our return visit. It is a great way to link learning with helping to keep fit and healthy."

If your community group or organisation would like to join the warden for a visit or get involved in future environmental projects on Taff Bargoed Park please contact Paul: Paul.virgin@merthyr.gov.uk Tel. 07515189844

Searching for 'Wintergreen Rust' (*Chrysomyxa pyrolata*) on Round-Leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia* subsp. *Maritima*)

This summer I have been searching for round-leaved wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia* subsp. *Maritima*) in Glamorganshire (VC41), in the quest for the rust fungus *Chrysomyxa pyrolata*, which is considered rare and endangered in the UK. These surveys have been undertaken as part of the Lost and Found Fungi project, a five year, UK-wide, volunteer oriented fungal conservation initiative, co-ordinated at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (details in the appendix overleaf). Brian Douglas will be giving a presentation at the SEWBReC Forum in November on this project.

Chrysomyxa pyrolata is a rust fungus which colonises *Pyrola* plants systemically, re-occurring year-after-year at the same sites. It can only be seen when it causes orange pustules on the host plant, typically on the underside of leaves (see below left). Like many rust fungi it has an alternate host, in this case infecting cones of some *Picea* species, but the alternate stage has never been reported in the UK. However, we still know very little about the ecology of this rust. Since no-one has actively recorded unsuccessful searches on *Pyrola*, it's possible that it could be very overlooked, and much more widespread than currently thought!

Southport and Barrow-in-Furness (South Lancashire). Both sites have been resurveyed this year, with successful numerous finds, but our knowledge of its true distribution throughout the UK is extremely poor. If we are to claim that this is a genuinely rare species worthy of conservation attention in the UK, we need data on current sites, but also evidence showing that it appears to be absent in other suitable habitats.



UK records of *Chrysomyxa pyrolata* extend back to 1844, almost to the beginning of British mycology. Historical sites are known from Scotland (near Dundee and Edinburgh, last recorded in 1876); in England – in Shropshire (1875), East Gloucester (1920), South Lancashire (1932 – present) and South Wiltshire (1975). In Wales, it has only been reported once, from Anglesey in 1971. Since then, there have only been two sites reported for this rust in the UK, both on *Pyrola rotundifolia* subsp. *Maritima* in dune slacks near



My initial search efforts in South Wales are concentrated on dune slacks at Whiteford Sands NNR, Gower (where there are known colonies of *Pyrola*), with Emma Gilmartin of Cardiff University and the Glamorgan Fungus Group,

Continues overleaf...

Searching for 'Wintergreen rust' (*Chrysomyxa pyrolata*) on Round-Leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia* subsp. *Maritima*) [Continued]

Populations of *Pyrola rotundifolia* subsp. *Maritima* surveyed during this study.

Map data ©
2015 Google.



and Brian Douglas, Paul Cannon and Martyn Ainsworth of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. I then continued the search at Merthyr Mawr NNR and Kenfig Pool NNR, where *Pyrola* populations are also known to occur. Despite finding *Pyrola* in abundance at these locations, the rust did not appear to be present.

I was then alerted by Richard Wistow, Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) County Ecologist, that *Pyrola* is now established on colliery spoil heaps in RCT. I therefore visited a few of these sites including Cwm Colliery, Beddau; Clydach Vale Country Park; Parc Slip NR; and Llanilid open cast mine (which is conveniently only 1 mile from my home, see appendix for details). The site at Llanilid proved interesting, as it now has a 'medieval castle' built on it as part of a film set! Fortunately *Pyrola* was present in abundance at a second nearby location. It was interesting to note that *Pyrola* on dune slacks seems to grow close to creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) whereas on colliery spoil heaps it seems to favour mossy damp places with some small willows (species unknown) and small birch.

Despite finding *Pyrola* at all these sites, there was again no sign of *C. pyrolata*. However, these unsuccessful surveys do cover a significant area within Glamorgan (see above map) suggesting that the rust may be genuinely absent, and supporting the idea that its distribution could be limited by factors other than the presence of its host. If this is true, then it is more

likely to be restricted to the few known extant populations, which may require greater conservation attention to avoid this species becoming extinct in the UK. However, we still need similar surveys throughout the UK to conclusively demonstrate its rarity.

I have a number of other locations that I have not visited. These include Oxwich Burrows, Pelena Forest, and Kenfig marshalling yards. I hope to visit these sites during 2016, and revisit the locations already surveyed in 2015. I would greatly appreciate information on other locations in Glamorgan VC41 for *Pyrola*, preferably with 8 or 10 figure grid references if possible – it can be quite hard to spot in the field!

I would like to thank all those who have provided me with locations for *Pyrola*, particularly Paul Denning, Margaret Samuel, David Barden and the Glamorgan Botany Group, and Richard Wistow, RCT County Ecologist. In addition I would like to thank Brian Douglas for all his help in preparing this article and his continuing support.

Mark Steer, Glamorgan Fungus Group

Appendix:

The Lost and Found Fungi Project

Website: <http://fungi.myspecies.info/content/lost-found-fungi-project>

Contact details: Brian Douglas – b.douglas@kew.org

Datasheet for *Chrysomyxa pyrolata*:
<http://fungi.myspecies.info/sites/fungi.myspecies.info/files/Chrysomyxa%20pyrolata.pdf>

Glamorgan (VC41) county locations searched in 2015:

Whiteford Sands NNR, Gower:

SN3903.0205, SN3913.0188, SN4347.9421, SN4348.9420, SN4348.9422, SN4365.9429, SN4365.9432, SN4365.9433, SN4366.9431, SN4366.9432 and SN445.955

Kenfig Pool NNR: SS78841.82110 and SS78880.82036

Merthyr Mawr NNR: SS86447.76803
Parc Slip NR: SS87009.83529

Clydach Vale Country Park: SS9641.9269 and SS97940.92855

Llanilid open cast mine: SS99708.82101, SS98988.81628, SS99042.81602, SS99023.81617, SS99013.81619 and SS98986.81622

Recording Highlights from Taf Fechan

So, highlights of the year? Well reaching 500 species was quite a milestone for me (it's now up to 531 by the way). The major highlight is always being out in a wonderful reserve full of all kinds of life. Being able to record what is probably just a small fraction of what this place holds is a joy (the extra bonus is there is always new stuff to learn about!).

Favourite species? There have been a few this year: *Lophosia fasciata* was one - a rarely recorded tachinid fly whose antennae caught my eye and seemed to make a few fly experts on the UK Diptera Facebook group as well as the UK Tachinid Recording Scheme very happy. Talking of rare or under recorded tachinids I also managed to record *Subclytia rotundiventris*, a parasite of shieldbugs, not that I had any idea this was a tachinid, it just looked different to anything I had seen before and I thought it worth spending some

time photographing.

As anyone who does any recording knows, ichneumons are a pain so finding the Hymenopterists Forum on Facebook was a highlight. In fact, knowing there are people who can identify some of these often stunning but always enigmatic creatures from photographs was a revelation as well as a highlight, so with much help from some very knowledgeable people *Banchus volutatorius* went on the list (at number 439).

Moving away from rarities and difficult species, seeing my first gorse shieldbug was definitely a highlight. I think it's a most elegant and beautiful thing and it entered the list at number 485. Finally the last species you see is always a highlight just because it's new, so the leaf mining micro-moth *Tischeria ekebladella* (the latest species as I write



Lophosia fasciata © Graham Watkeys

this) is my final highlight. Of course there have been many more (the mouse pee pinkgill, lurid bolete and hieroglyphic ladybird spring to mind) but unfortunately I can't write about them all.

Graham Watkeys, Taf Fechan Warden

You can find the Hymenopterists Forum on facebook at:

www.facebook.com/groups/HymenopteristsForum88/.

Number 500



Calliphora vomitoria © Graham Watkeys

The day was beginning to look rather Spartan but having reached 499 the previous day with a Cream-spotted Ladybird I was as determined as Leonidas.... Ok so trying to unobtrusively crowbar references to Thermopylae (I really wanted to use the word phalanx) into an article fundamentally about a "Bluebottle" is more difficult than it seems and should probably go under the heading "It seemed like a good idea at the time" plus the fact I've just realised it was "The 300" not "The 500" (although most historians put the actual number at around 1400 which

only goes to prove the saying "never let the truth get in the way of a good story" or that the Spartans had a really good communications officer) so let's forget this ever happened and move on, anyway back to the point. Where was I? Ah yes, Number 500.

Despite some heroically intensive bimbbling it was actually looking rather Spartan with not much about until a flash of blue caught my eye, this flash of blue landed on a nearby Birch leaf. This flash of blue was quite happy to stay on the nearby birch leaf (which is quite a rare occurrence with flashes of blue on birch leaves). I admit I had to squash the thought "Oh it's only a Bluebottle" and I nearly moved on but as this particular flash of blue was happy to sit as I poked my camera in its face I took its picture (side view, top view and front view).

Despite being common there are only 251 records of *Calliphora vomitoria* (which is what it turned out to be) across Wales and if I'm honest despite this low number I was hoping for a more glamorous species to sit as Number 500 on my list but there you are. I subsequently found out that *Calliphora vomitoria* is one of several flies that go under the name "Bluebottle" and as they all have the same vitally important though, let's face it, rather unpalatable life habit my mind just refuses to consider what that black fluid it's blowing bubbles with actually is.

So ladies and gentlemen Number 500 on my Taf Fechan species list, the Bluebottle!

Graham Watkeys, Taf Fechan Warden

This article was originally a blog post on Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales' East Glamorgan News page: <http://www.welshwildlife.org/eastglamnews/>

The Raven in Gwent

Today, when we are continually being made aware of declining bird populations, it is good to know that such diminishing numbers are not to be found in all species. Some are still doing well and among these is the Raven (*Corvus corax*).

In a booklet published by the Cardiff Naturalists' Society (reprinted from the Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society Vol. LXX., 1937) entitled 'The Birds of Monmouthshire', the authors (Geoffrey C.S. Ingram and H. Morrey Salmon) inform us that during the 1930s Ravens were only known as breeding birds in the north and north-west of the county, with less than a handful of nest-sites known. Where substantial amounts of food are made available to them in these areas they can occur in some numbers, twenty to thirty birds being given as an example of their abundance.

During the late medieval period and beyond into the 16th and 17th centuries Ravens were common scavengers in Britain's cities (today they still nest on cathedrals in Liverpool and Truro) but beyond that they were persecuted to such a degree that their numbers fell and their occurrence limited to the wildest parts of the country.

My own recollections of Ravens in Gwent began in the 1950s when they were known to nest on the cliffs above the Wye at Chepstow. The first record that appears in my diaries comes from the Brockwells Farm, Caerwent on the 2nd May 1959. At this time Ravens flew over the Caerwent area from time to time, mostly from north to south or vice versa.

Over the next decade I continued to see the occasional Raven in the south-east corner of Gwent, with most of my records still coming from my visits to the counties northern hills. However, on the 2nd May 1971 I found my first Raven's nest. It was situated in a pine tree near Five Paths in Wentwood Forest. Below the nest an adult Raven lay dead, and nearby there was a young Raven which had, perhaps in desperation, left the nest. Exactly what had taken place here we

will never know but the circumstances were such that a decision was made to take the orphan into care.

Trevor Evans, who was with me at the time of the discovery, took the Raven corpse away and skinned it in an attempt to ascertain the cause of its death. The birds skin was intact – no shot holes – so it had died from some other cause.

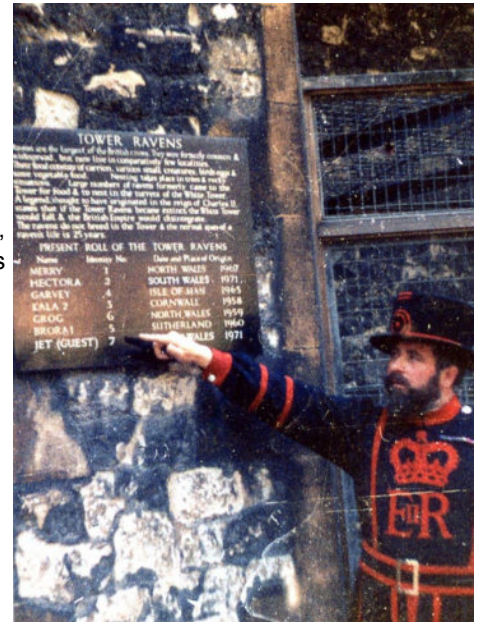
During the following months the young Raven fed well on chicken offal and soon developed into a fine, glossy black specimen of its kind. The deep guttural croaks produced caught the attention of the local Carrion Crows but the Raven paid them no heed whatever. It was far more interested in any buzzing insects that may pass by and, if they came too close, they would be expertly plucked out of mid-air and swallowed.

An old washing-up bowl served as a bath and bathing seemed to be a particular pleasure (see photograph below taken by Nigel Evans following a Raven bathing session)

The problem arising now was one of imprinting – the young bird became very tame, too tame for release into the wild, and so he was offered to the Tower-of-London. 'Wentwood Jet' was accepted as the 7th Raven at the Tower (a sort of 'reserve' since the official number of Ravens at the tower is six) by the resident governor of the time Major General Raeburn. Tom Lock, a friend of mine and former London Bus-driver, volunteered to take Trevor and me, along with Wentwood Jet, to London in July of the same year, and here the Raven was introduced



'Wentwood Jet' as the young Raven became known, following a bathing session (image by Nigel Evans)



Jack Wilmington 'Keeper of Ravens' shows Jet's name on the Roll of Tower Ravens © Colin Titcombe

to Jack Wilmington, the tower's 'Keeper of Ravens' (see photograph above).

In recent times it has become obvious that Raven numbers have increased considerably and they can now be seen regularly in most parts of the county. Large numbers still gather at major food sources and, in July 2011, 50 or more were estimated to be feeding on the Silent Valley rubbish tip near Ebbw Vale. And on the 8th October 2004, while on a walk at Graig-y-darth (Trelleck to Monmouth) we disturbed a flock of 27 Ravens which had been attracted to a sheep carcass down on one of the fields.

So, Ravens, having been familiars in British towns and cities during historic times, are now behaving similarly in rural Gwent. While not exactly garden birds, they are moving closer to humanity once more. Two of my friends, living near Raglan and Abergavenny respectively, have Ravens nesting annually in trees close to their houses – literally within 50 metres of their front-doors! Now that is quite some improvement on the scarcity of the 1940s, '50s and '60s.

Colin Titcombe

Bugged!

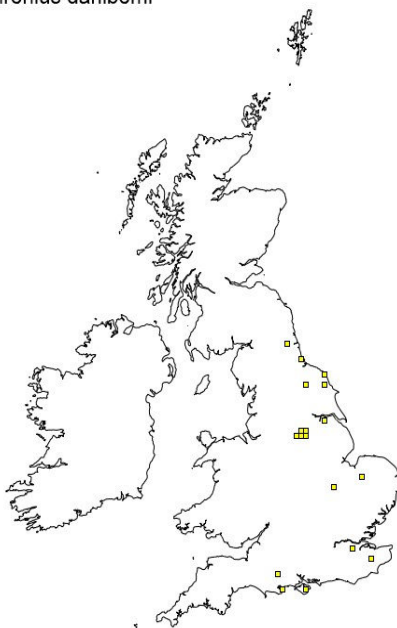
In June 2015, I ran a moth trap for the bioblitz, at Gwyl Taf nature reserve, near Edwardsville in the Taff Valley. Having released some micro-moths back at the site the following morning, I noticed a reasonably large leafhopper, with distinctive dark venation, contrasting with the pale blue green ground colour of its wings. I photographed it, more in hope than expectation of being able to identify it.



The original discovery © Mark Evans

A day or two later, I went on the excellent 'British Bugs' website (<http://www.britishbugs.org.uk>), and after trawling the gallery there seemed to be just one close match, this being *Sonronius dahlbomi*, but on checking its status, I could find no records in Wales and a generally central, south and eastern UK distribution.

Sonronius dahlbomi



UK Distribution of *Sonronius dahlbomi* © NBN Gateway

Wondering if I had made a mistake, I went through the gallery again, several times, but each time it is to *S. dahlbomi* I returned.



Sonronius dahlbomi, nymph © Mark Evans

I sent a query, attaching a photo, to the authors of the website; Tristram Bantock and Joseph Botting and it was the latter who promptly replied provisionally confirming my identification (he also copied in the recorder for this group, Alan Stewart) and asking if I could revisit the site to look for nymphs. He was particularly interested in establishing what food plant it was using, having found it using common hogweed at a site, near Llan-drindod. On the British Bugs website, rosebay willowherb and raspberry are given as possible the food plants and both were certainly present where I found that individual, but as I was to confirm, hogweed wasn't.

As well as his own observations of the species on hogweed, he referred to a comment by Herbert Nickel, a German Hemipterist, regarding "hogweed (or possibly another umbellifer) when he finds it in Germany and apparently regards the records of it allegedly using rosebay willowherb and raspberry as probably spurious."

It was a week or so before I was able to return and immediately on entering the site, I found an adult on a bracken frond. After a short search, I found another couple of adults on raspberry leaves and two nymphs on bramble and raspberry.

I also found a few exuviae under-

neath the leaves of rosebay willowherb, but that was more or less it: not much of a colony. I tried searching deeper into the vegetation, away from the path, but couldn't find any in there at all. It was also clear that hogweed wasn't present on that part of the reserve.

Casting my eyes towards the river, I could see a lower path, alongside which was quite a lot of raspberry, so I went down there, to search. Those raspberry plants were completely devoid of *S. dahlbomi*, but then my attention was drawn to the thousands of young plants of Himalayan balsam lining the path.

They varied in height from just a few centimetres to around 30 centimetres tall and were obviously subject to regular disturbance and trampling, but on those plants, I discovered dozens of adults and nymphs.



Young Himalayan balsam plants © Mark Evans

This discovery sparked off some discussion between Alan, Joseph and Tristram, the conclusion of which seemed to be that the species is probably polyphagous and has a preference for rank vegetation in damp habitats.

Gwyl Taf nature reserve appears to be only the second known Welsh site for

Continues overleaf...

Bugged! (Continued)

this species and the only one in Glamorgan (VC41). I have looked at other similar sites, such as Pwll Waun Cynon nature reserve; a floodplain site in the Cynon valley, which has all of the suspected food plants present, but with no success, so far.

This species must be present elsewhere in South East Wales, so if you know a damp site, with rank vegetation which includes some or all of the above food plants, check it out next summer: you never know!



S. dahlbomi nymphs on Himalayan balsam
© Mark Evans

I would like to thank Jennifer Pilkington, of Gwyl Taf nature reserve, for inviting me to trap there; Joseph Botting, Tristram Bantock and Alan Stewart for their interest and help.

The distribution map is reproduced courtesy of the NBN Gateway. All the photos are my own, so I have no one to blame but myself.

Mark Evans

Interesting plant finds 2015

As well as our monthly walks with the Monmouthshire Botany Group, we have been out most weeks throughout the year visiting poorly recorded tetrads. There have been so many interesting finds but a few of the highlights are given below as well as some excellent records by Andy Karran, Heather Colls, Paul Green and other botanists.

Great Broomrape *Orobanche rapum-genistae* whose host plant is Broom *Cytisius scoparius*, was considered an extinct plant in Vice County 35 but Andy Karran found and photographed a flowering spike near Cefn Garw in SO41G in June.

Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* was also thought to be extinct in the county but a single small plant was found last

year near Llanhilleth, Crumlin and another small specimen was found this September in a bog south of Tredegar. The bog also provided Marsh St John's Wort *Hypericum elodes* and Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. Then Elsa Wood and her husband Adrian found eight fine plants of Royal Fern on 4th October in a dry reservoir bed at Cwm Lickey.

Another bog off the Sirhowy Valley walk also produced some goodies including large areas of Ivy-leaved Bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederacea*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor* and a fine Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* tree. We were surprised to find abundant Great Yellow-cress *Rorippa amphibia* at the edge of the Sirhowy River south of Tredegar; the first record in the west of the vice-county. Heather Colls also had an exciting find of another yellow-cress *Rorippa austriaca* at Troy Station near Monmouth.

During a survey within the Goldcliff lagoon area of Newport Wetlands Reserve, access possible thanks to Tom Dalrymple and Kevin Dupe, we found a number of interesting species including Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* and on the drying mud abundant Oak-leaved Goosefoot *Chenopodium glaucum*, a rare plant in Wales. Then Steph Tyler found a population of this

goosefoot in a farm gateway on Lydart Hill, Penallt. This is only the second inland record of the species, the first being found by EW at the edge of a muck heap near Trellech last year. Muck heaps are excellent places to look for unusual goosefoots and other scarce species and we always detour if we see a muck heap in the distance!

Coal tips are also rewarding habitats for botanists and at many old tips in the western valleys we have found large populations of Lesser Cudweed *Filago minima* and occasionally Common Cudweed *Filago vulgaris* too as near Mynydd Varteg. The best place for the last species though is within the MOD property at Caerwent where it occurs along roadsides and on the disused railway line there.

Quarries are also good hunting grounds and Leyton Williams found Common Wintergreen *Pyrola minor* in Cwmyrnyscoy quarry near Pontypool. On another visit to the quarry the botany group found several plants of the Leopard orchid, *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* subsp. *junialis*.

In allotments near the Severn Tunnel Junction at Rogiet Small Nettle *Urtica urens* was flourishing. A visiting

Continues overleaf...



Lesser Skullcap, *Scutellaria minor* © David Hawkins

Interesting plant finds 2015 (continued)

botanist alerted us to a patch of grass by the coastal path in Bulwark, Chepstow with Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa* and the alien Annual Beard-grass *Polypogon montspelliensis*. When we visited this site we also found the alien Water Bent *Polypogon viridis* which is turning up everywhere.

Grass-leaved Pea *Lathyrus nissolia* continues to be found in new places; Sam Bosanquet saw two patches in late September in a pasture at Dingestow Court well away from any previous records.

It is well known that salting the roads in the winter has encouraged the spread of Danish Scurvy Grass *Cochlearia*

danica and Lesser Sea-spurrey *Spergularia marina* but more halophytes are now establishing inland. Paul Green found Sea Fern-grass *Catapodium maritimum*, Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia distans* in a layby near Raglan along with Narrow-leaved Pepperwort *Lepidium ruderale*.



Small Nettle *Urtica urens* © David Hawkins

along with Narrow-leaved Pepperwort *Lepidium ruderale*.

With the publication of the *Hybrid Flora of the British Isles*, we are beginning to record more hybrids in the county. The hybrid between Curled Dock *Rumex crispus* and Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius* seems to occur commonly – it is called *Rumex x pratensis*. There are also 2 recent records for the hybrid between Dog Rose *Rosa canina* and Field Rose *Rosa arvensis*: *Rosa x irregularis*

**Steph Tyler and Elsa Wood,
Joint VC 35 Plant Recorders**

SEWBRc Events Update

2015 was another season of interesting and enjoyable SEWBRc recording events. Many thanks to everyone who attended/contributed. Our four species identification & recording courses (funded by Wales Biodiversity Partnership) were a popular choice, with 44 people applying for the 37 spaces available. The topics this year were *An Introduction to Spiders*; *An Introduction to Coastal Plants*; *An Introduction to Lichen*; and *An Introduction to Solitary Wasps*. The lichen course was a runaway winner in the popularity stakes, with 23 applicants for the 10 available spaces. We may run this course again



'An Introduction to Solitary Wasps' involved looking at some of National Museum Wales' extensive specimen collection © Elaine Wright

in 2016, as it was so popular!

Please get in touch if you have any suggestions for future course topics, particularly if you can suggest a trainer as well as a topic.

Our two Recorders' Field Days were enjoyable, and reasonably sunny, considering the variable summer weather this year. Thirteen attendees dropped in to help with species recording at Grangemoor Park in July, helping to build a list of 275 species for the day. The highlight was a fly, *Merzomyia westermann*, found by George Tordoff – this has been confirmed as the first record for the species in Wales!

A handful of attendees came to our Recorders' Field Day at Twmbarlwm in August, including members of the Twmbarlwm Society, who were keen to find out more about the wildlife on the site they help maintain. Records of 144 species from the day have been received so far, including the impressive looking *Staphylinus dimidiaticornis*, a beetle not previously recorded in Gwent.

We always welcome site suggestions for



Merzomyia westermann: a first for Wales!
© George Tordoff



Recorders and a 'recordee' at Grangemoor Park
© Elaine Wright

Recorders' Field Days, so please get in touch if you know of somewhere that we should visit.

**Elaine Wright, SEWBRc Acting
Senior Data and Enquiries Officer**

SEWBRc's Online Data Tools

SEWBRcCORD

SEWBRc's online data entry portal, SEWBRcCORD (www.sewbreCORD.org.uk), continues to prove an extremely popular tool to enable recorders to share their sightings and photos with us. The number of records has continued to grow rapidly, with the current total number of records now standing at just over 54,200. As ever, we would like to pass on our great thanks to everybody who has taken the time to enter their sightings into SEWBRcCORD. Your records are rapidly incorporated into our main database, where they are frequently used to inform decisions that may affect biodiversity.

If you have not yet tried using SEWBRcCORD, please visit www.sewbreCORD.org.uk and click on the 'Create new account' link. You will then receive an activation email. If that doesn't arrive in your email inbox, it may have been moved to your junk or spam folder. If you have any difficulties registering, or if you have registered in the past but never activated your account, please contact Dave Slade (david.slade@sewbreCORD.org.uk) who will issue you a new password and help you get up and running.

LOCAL RECORDS CENTRES WALES DATA ACCESS TOOL (DAT)

This tool, found at www.lrcwalesdat.org, opens up access to the combined resource of wildlife records held at the four Welsh Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs), including SEWBRc. Without the need to register, any user can access two useful functions:

See species records we hold around a given point:

This gives a summary of species records we hold for the 1km grid square in which a chosen point lies. Records of sensitive species are excluded from the summary list, but the number of such records found will be shown.

See a distribution map for a species: This option will produce a 10km-square Wales distribution map for a given species. Zooming in allows you to see a 1km-square distribution, although sensitive records will only ever be shown at 10km-square resolution.

Further functions of the DAT can be unlocked for registered users (mainly public sector customers), enabling them full access to all LERC data holdings across Wales.

Work is well underway to develop the next generation of online data access to LERC Wales data. Look out for news on progress and links to new tools in forthcoming editions of this newsletter and via the SEWBRc website.

Pollinators for People Project

SEWBRc has embarked on a project with Natural Resources Wales, focussed on the Rhondda catchment, and aimed at engaging people in Rhondda Cynon Taf with pollinators and the some of the plants they serve. Things were initiated with a 'train the trainers' day at Daerwynno Outdoor Centre where Adam Rowe and Dave Slade presented an introduction to biological recording for local community leaders and interested groups. This was a precursor to the Biodiversity Blitz Day held at the same location on Saturday 25th July – a well-attended event that turned up some interesting species, among them the first modern record in Glamorgan for the exquisite micromoth *Nemophora cupriacella*.

The next phase will see the production and dissemination of a simple recording card including photographs, identification tips and a few facts about ten important pollinators and pollinatees: Red Admiral, Peacock Butterfly, Hummingbird Hawk-Moth, Honey Bee, 7-spot Ladybird, Bilberry Bumblebee, Ragged Robin, Pyramidal Orchid, Himalayan Balsam and Common Knapweed. The list has been carefully curated with the intention of inspiring the general public to keep an eye out for some of the more easily recognisable wild denizens of RCT, but also in order that we might gather some useful new records. It is hoped that the project can encourage people in the Rhondda to learn about their natural environment, and to continue recording the wildlife they see around them.



Nemophora cupriacella © David Slade

David Hawkins, LEMUR+ Biodiversity Information Management Trainee

Colliery Spoil Tips: biodiversity hotspots and important Welsh habitats



Flower-rich grasslands at Cwm Colliery, Beddau © Liam Olds

The pivotal role of coal mining in shaping the British way of life cannot be underestimated. For centuries, coal mining has been an essential part of British industry. Historical findings suggest coal was used by Britons even before the arrival of the Romans, with evidence suggesting the Romans learned about coal mining and its uses from Britons. At its peak, the British coal industry employed more than a million people, making it one of the country's most important industries. Many regions were dependent on it, particularly South Wales. With its provision of high quality coal, South Wales was at the epicentre of the global industrial revolution.

The South Wales coalfield covered an expansive area, from St. Bride's Bay in the west to Pontypool in the east. At its peak, the coal industry employed some 232,000 people in 620 coal mines across South Wales. In 1913, 57 million tons of coal came up from these mines – a fifth of the entire output of the United Kingdom. The effects of World War I and the post-war depression, however, brought about a decline in the industry. By 1936, 241 collieries had closed and the workforce had halved. Following a brief revival post-Second World War, the industry continued to decline throughout the second half of the 20th century. By the end of



Extensive bare ground at Cwm Colliery, Beddau © Liam Olds

that century, just one deep mine remained in Wales. The coal industry, the most important industrial, social and political force in modern Wales, had all but vanished.

Nearly all the signs of this once thriving industry have been lost with colliery buildings demolished and shafts capped. One thing has remained however; the numerous colliery spoil tips littering the landscape. Centuries of intense mining activity ultimately generated excessive quantities of waste, which was subsequently tipped upon our valleys' sides. Such spoil tips have become an iconic feature in the landscape of the South Wales valleys, an industrial and cultural legacy from our rich mining history.

Following the Aberfan disaster in 1966, many spoil tips were cleared amid fears of similar tragedies lying in wait. Those deemed stable remained, left undisturbed to naturally revegetate over time. Once black eye-sores in the landscape, these spoil tips are now greener than ever before. They have undergone a radical transformation, clearly displaying the resilient nature of our wildlife. Often overlooked and under-appreciated, many now support habitats and wildlife of considerable local biodiversity value.

So, what makes colliery spoil tips biologically interesting?

A colliery spoil tip is highly diverse landscape of varied topography, aspect, substrate composition, hydrology, pH, and levels of disturbance and neglect. This variation allows for the formation of complex habitat mosaics in close proximity. As such, colliery spoil tips can support mosaics of wildflower-rich grassland, heathland, bare ground, wetland, scrub

and lichen heath – ideal environments for invertebrates, many of which require two or more habitats to complete their lifecycle.

These habitat mosaics enable a single site to support rich assemblages of habitat specialists, alongside more generalist species.

The presence of bare ground is of particular importance, creating warm

microclimates in which thermophilic invertebrates can bask. This bare ground also provides invertebrates with burrowing and ground nesting opportunities, and provides foraging areas for visual predators such as spiders and ground beetles. Although common, the none-the-less impressive green tiger beetle (*Cicindela campestris*) is a regular sight in such areas.

The thin, nutrient poor soils are another key feature. The stressed conditions prevent dominant plant species from taking-over, slowing vegetation succession and leading to the formation of flower-rich grasslands. The strong assemblage of nectar-rich, stress tolerant annuals provide abundant forage for bumblebees, honeybees, solitary bees, hoverflies, beetles, butterflies and moths. With reports highlighting growing evidence for declines in pollinator species, it is clear how important these sites are to their future well-being of



Flower-rich grasslands at Coedely Colliery © Liam Olds

pollinators in the South Wales valleys. Colliery Spoil Traineeship

For those of you who don't know me, I am currently undertaking a 12-month project as part of The Conservation Volunteers Natural Talent Traineeship scheme – funded by The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. This scheme responds to identified skills shortages in

Continues overleaf...

Colliery Spoil Tips (Continued)

the conservation sector by providing trainees with the opportunity to develop expertise in less well known species, habitats, or a mixture of both. Based at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, my traineeship focuses upon colliery spoil tips and the diversity of invertebrates these sites support. Over the course of spring and summer, I have been surveying colliery spoil tips in the south Wales valleys to gain greater insights into the invertebrate assemblages supported by these sites.

Key discoveries and lessons learnt

Throughout this project, it has become apparent that colliery spoil tips are important habitats for pollinators in the south Wales valleys. The abundance of nectar-rich annuals act as a highly valuable foraging resource for a wide variety of pollinator species. Spoil tips are a particular haven for bumblebees, supporting at least 13 different species including the scarce brown-banded carder bee (*Bombus humilis*) and mountain bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*). Their importance for solitary bee species is only now beginning to be recognised. Much work is needed to identify specimens over the winter months but it is clear that these sites support species from a wide variety of genera including *Andrena*, *Halictus*, *Lasioglossum*, *Megachile*, *Nomada*, and *Spechodes*.

Colliery spoil tips also support interesting butterfly assemblages. In addition to the common butterfly species, small pearl-bordered fritillary (*Boloria selene*), dark green fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*), dingy skipper (*Erynnis tages*) and

grayling (*Hipparchia semele*) are also familiar sights. Marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*) has also made an appearance, favouring areas of tall, unimproved grassland.

Despite the bulk of my identifications still to be done, some rather interesting discoveries have been made. For me, the most exciting discovery so far has been the discovery of the heather shieldbug (*Rhacognathus punctatus*) at Albion Tip, Cilfynydd. Despite being widespread, this species is scarce and according to a recent paper published by Alex. J. Ramsey in 2013, this species has only been recorded from nine sites in Wales. Interestingly, all records in Wales are from high quality wetland habitats partly or entirely designated as National Nature Reserves. It is likely, therefore, that this is the first record of heather shieldbug on a brownfield site in Wales, and possibly even the UK – who knows. Another exciting discovery was that of *Cheilosia lasiopa*, a widespread and locally frequent hoverfly species which appears to be only the 4th record for Wales and the first record for south Wales. Other key finds include: the scarce hoverfly *Scaeva selentica*, the locally distributed six-belted clearwing moth (*Bembecia ichneumoniformis*), and an uncommon lacebug species



Heathland at Gelli Tips © Liam Olds



Lichen-heath at Maerdy Colliery © Liam Olds

Agramma laeta. I am sure many other interesting finds await discovery and I look forward to finishing my specimen identifications over the coming weeks. Stay tuned for a complete update in the next recorder's newsletter.

Liam Olds,
TCV Natural Talent Trainee – Colliery Spoil Habitats,
National Museum of Wales

Tel: 02920 573170 / 07947141080

Email: Liam.Olds@museumwales.ac.uk

SEWBRc Membership

SEWBRc is run as a not-for-profit company and is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors which is drawn from its membership. By becoming a member of SEWBRc you will be automatically invited to attend our Annual General Meetings and you will be eligible to stand for election to the Board of Directors.

Subject to Board approval, SEWBRc membership is open to anybody who:

- Has read SEWBRc's Memorandum and Articles of Association* and supports the aims of the company;
- Understands that as a Member of the Company they accept a liability not exceeding £1 if the Company should be wound up.

We are currently very keen to grow our membership and to this end we have included a copy of our membership application form with this newsletter mail-

ing. Please consider joining and have your say in the future direction of SEWBRc – we need your expertise and enthusiasm!

* The membership form gives details of where to find the Memorandum and Articles of Association via our website. If you don't have access to the internet but are interested in joining, please get in touch and we will send you a copy.

Monmouth Counts Wildlife

On 26th and 27th June Monmouth discovered the wildlife on its doorstep with the help of a wide range of wildlife specialists and enthusiasts. On Friday 26th June 150 children from Overmonnow Primary School took part in pond dipping, hedgerow exploring, minibeast hunts, river dipping and finding out about birds. On Friday evening 20 local people took part in a bat survey in the cemetery and along the river Monnow in perfect weather conditions seeing and hearing pipistrelle and noctule bats feeding on insects in large numbers. Light traps were set overnight at Vauxhall to attract moths, and these were opened on Saturday morning. Highlights in the moth trap included Eyed Hawk Moth, Elephant Hawk Moth, Ghost moth and Buff Arches, proving that not all our moths are dull and brown.



Moth Trapping © Sue Parkinson

A wide range of activities and walks were on offer on Saturday 27th June, with canoe safaris down the Monnow proving very popular, expert commentary on the wildlife was provided by the Wye and Usk Foundation. Natural Resources Wales demonstrated kick sampling in the river, and collected a range of species, for

people to see, that highlighted the high quality of the water in the Monnow. There was also a demonstration of coracle paddling; these ancient hide-covered craft were used for fishing and transport on many Welsh rivers in the past.

Botany walks were offered, to explore the plants and wild flowers of Vauxhall and Two River Meadows, both of which have a range of interesting plant life which support an equally interesting insect fauna.

The event was fortunate to be supported by Ben Rowson, specialist in molluscs at National Museum Wales who led a short walk to find snail shells. It was too dry for slugs, and none at all were found, but the group did discover 17 different species of snail which were identified with his help. Ben also found a rare snail in the river, possibly the first record for Monmouthshire of this species.

This snail was identified by Dr Ben Rowson as a River Nerite *Theodoxus fluviatilis*. Ben later said "it is not quite a new vice-county record but it is remarkably rare in Wales, only just sneaking into a few rivers in the SE. For me it was the first time to find this species alive."

Viewing snail shells through a microscope revealed the true beauty and diversity of their shapes, coil patterns and colours. The event was also fortunate in having the services of a mining wasp expert from Bristol Museum, who spent much of the day collecting specimens from the extensive colony of various mining bees and wasps in the sandy cliffs along the banks of the Monnow.

The We Count for Wildlife event was enjoyed by many local people who spent several hours on the riverbank exploring various habitats and discovering the remarkable wildlife diversity that lives around the edges of the town. A final species count for the event was 307. The event was organised by Monmouthshire Environment Partnership, in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust, Wye Valley AONB and Monmouthshire Countryside Service, and supported by a wide range of local and regional groups and organisations, as well as volunteers. It was funded by Natural Resources Wales' Sustainable Development Fund in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**Sue Parkinson ,
Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Group**



Canoe Safari © Sue Parkinson

SEWBRc Business Update

Despite earlier concerns about how SEWBRc would fare in the face of public sector funding cuts, we currently find ourselves in a solid position financially. A Partnership Agreement has recently been established with Natural Resources Wales (our first new agreement since NRW was formed), which emphasises the value this vital user of our products and services places on the work we do. We are currently enjoying a high level of engagement at a policy level and are hopeful of some direct funding from Welsh Government to help meet its own biodiversity data needs, but also to reflect the important role of the Welsh LERCs in contributing to the evidence base that will be used for reporting on the emerging Wales Nature Recovery Plan and the first State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR), which is due to be published in 2016.

Local Authority use of SEWBRc's products and services is becoming rather patchy, with one Council not renewing its funding agreement for 2015/16. We are currently working on a study to examine the possible impacts on biodiversity of our data not being fully utilised in the planning process. This study aims to gauge the adequacy of the biodiversity information available to planners and ecologists to determine planning applications, in situations where they don't have access to our data services. Examples have already been unearthed where we can demonstrate that important records were not considered in the decision-making process. We hope the study will generate some facts and figures to help us to cement the case for why planners and ecologists need access to our data. We are also addressing this issue at a policy level, having raised our concerns directly with Welsh Government that some local authorities seem unable to afford to use our services, and that biodiversity may be suffering as a result.

As has often been reported in previous editions of this newsletter, SEWBRc's commercial sales are continuing to grow. 2014/15 proved to be another record year for sales. Clearly this is good news that developers and their appointed environmental consultants are increasingly coming to us for their desktop data

trawls prior to their site-based surveys. LERC data trawls are increasingly requested by planners via their policies and their supplementary planning guidance, as well as being included in industry best practice guides. Three challenges currently exist with regard to desktop data trawls.

- To ensure that adequate LERC searches are required by planners and by best practice guidance, thus preventing the temptation to find alternative, free, online alternatives to commissioning work from us. We still find examples of consultants' reports which are prepared without accessing our data, but this problem has been greatly reduced following the 2013 launch of our reduced-price 'Bat and Roof-nesting Bird' (BARB) search. This is widely praised as an exemplar product and similar products are now being developed and adopted by other LERCs across the UK.
- To ensure that the information we supply is treated sensitively by our users. Over the years we have unfortunately been alerted to a number of examples of our reports being published or appended to reports which then go into the public domain. We will shortly be issuing clear guidance to all of our customers, setting out exactly what they can and cannot do with the data we provide to them.
- To encourage commercial consultants to share the data they gather with us. Some of the most important records of protected and priority species are gathered by commercial consultants acting on behalf of their clients. It is important that we at SEWBRc receive as many of these records as possible to keep our databases as up-to-date and accurate as possible. A lot of smaller consultancies are already very good at ensuring their records are shared with us, with many including clauses in their contracts to state that records will be supplied to LERCs. SEWBRc will be contacting its customers to explain how we can help them to

submit their records directly to us, or how they can enter the data themselves via the new Consultants' Portal (<http://www.consultantsportal.uk/>)

One aspect of the new Partnership Agreement with NRW is their requirement for the Welsh LERCs to upload records to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway by the end of 2015. LERC Managers and Boards across Wales are in agreement that we urgently need to ensure that our data is visible at the UK scale, so that UK distribution maps no longer show huge data gaps for Wales. Records will be uploaded to the Gateway at full resolution, but 'Access Controls' will be applied to ensure that only those that obtain our permission will be able to view or download full resolution data. The vast majority of users will only be able to view data at a coarse resolution. This coarse resolution data will act as a shop window for the wealth of data that is held in the Welsh LERC and will signpost users to the LERCs so that they can access our full range of (chargeable) services. After taking a watching brief over the NBN Gateway for many years, myself and the other Welsh LERC Managers are now 100% convinced that uploading data to the NBN Gateway will have no detrimental impact on our businesses, and may in fact have a positive impact due to increasing the exposure of our data holdings. We would not be recommending data was uploaded unless we felt it was the right thing to do.

Over the coming weeks we will be in touch with all of our major data providers to confirm that they are happy for us to upload their data to the NBN Gateway and to discuss any concerns or issues they may have. The wishes of our data providers are of paramount importance to us, so if for whatever reason you do not wish us to upload your data, it will not be uploaded!

Happy recording!

Adam Rowe, SEWBRc Manager

Gwent Glamorgan Recorders Forum Autumn 2015

Join the SEWBReC team and wildlife recorders from across south east Wales for the annual Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Forum! A great opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and learn about the wildlife recording efforts taking place in Gwent and Glamorgan. The event is taking place at Park Inn Cardiff North, and the programme is shown below.

This event is free (including lunch!), but booking is essential. The booking deadline is Friday 13th November.

Please contact SEWBReC to secure your place: email: info@sewbrec.org.uk / tel: 029 2064 1110

We still have some 5 min speaker slots available, so do get in contact if you would like to speak briefly about a conservation project, your own species recording efforts or promote a local wildlife group. We will also have space for leaflets and posters, so let us know if you would like to bring some materials with you.

PROGRAMME

09:30 - Arrival, registration and tea/coffee

10.00 - Chairman's welcome and introduction

10:05 - It's never too late to start a long-term monitoring project: confessions of a birdwatcher (*Dr Rob Thomas*)

10:50 - Square-bashing Surprises (*Linda Nottage*)

11:05 - Comfort Break (20mins)

11:25 - Bryophytes of Glamorgan (*George Tordoff*)

11:50 - SEWBReC update, EGM & AGM (*Adam Rowe and Colin Cheesman*)

12:45 - Lunch (Complimentary)

13:45 - Welcome back

13:50 - Soapbox Sessions

14:20 - Lost and Found Fungi Project at Kew Gardens (*Brian Douglas*)

14:40 - Margam Bat Project (*Megan Price and Neil Price*)

14:55 - Plants on the Gower (*Colin Cheesman*)

15:20 - AOB & closing remarks

15:25 - Tea & Chat: an opportunity to informally chat with SEWBReC staff & other attendees whilst enjoying a cup of tea/coffee, or head home early if you prefer!

16:00 - Departure

The Last Page

Three Million Records Reached

Last month SEWBRc reached an important milestone when the number of records in our database ticked over the three million mark. Record number 3,000,000 was a Sap Beetle *Omosita colon*, and was recorded in Aberbargoed by Christian Owen.

Almost everyone reading this will have submitted at least a few of the three million themselves – so a big thank you to you all.



Number 3,000,000 © Christian Owen

Recorders' Forum Events 2015

You may recall from the previous newsletters that during 2015 we are trialling new formats for our Recorders' Forum events. The trial is being conducted in a bid to identify the most effective ways of providing information and support to our local recording community within the confines of the limited staff and financial resources available to us.

The first part of this trial was the joint Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Forum which took place in Caerleon in January. The second stage of the trial is the second joint Forum and AGM event which is taking place on Saturday 21st November at the Park Inn by Radisson, North Cardiff.

In late 2015, after both events have taken place, we will seek detailed feedback from participants and choose the most popular format for future events.

Adam Rowe, SEWBRc

SEWBRc Staff Announcements

After nine months at SEWBRc as part of a LEMUR+ Traineeship, Dave Hawkins will soon be saying goodbye as he is due to graduate this November. Dave has enthusiastically thrown himself into the world of biological recording whilst here at SEWBRc and has really become part of the team. We wish him the best of luck for the future.

Earlier this summer our temporary Biodiversity Assistant Charlene Davies also departed to pastures new. After working part time for both SEWBRc and Gwent Wildlife Trust, Charlene has now taken on the role of GWT's Water Vole Project Officer (another maternity cover post). We wish her all the best in her new role.

The Easily Overlooked

The breadth and depth of our biological data holdings is improving all the time. But recent discoveries by two members of the SEWBRc staff in Cardiff illustrate how much still escapes our collective notice or attention. Larval mines of the flies *Phytomyza fulgens* and *Phytomyza vitalbae* were found on the leaves of Old man's Beard *Clematis vitalba* in Cardiff. For *P. fulgens* this represents only the fourth and fifth records in Wales, while *P. vitalbae* had only been recorded six times before in the country. There can be little doubt that these are both common species - just very overlooked!

David Hawkins, LEMUR+ Biodiversity Information Management Trainee

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

Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

SEWBRc, 13 St Andrew's Crescent
Cardiff, CF10 3DB

Telephone: 029 20 64 1110

Fax: 0843 265 2714

E-mail: info@sewbrec.org.uk

Web: www.sewbrec.org.uk

Follow us on Facebook & Twitter:



www.facebook.com/sewbrec



www.twitter.com/sewbrec