



Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

Issue 6—Spring
May 2012

Invasive shrimp in South Wales

Welcome to the sixth issue of the Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter. It's another jam-packed issue and starting us off is an article on the invasion of the 'killer shrimp' (*Dikerogammarus villosus*) in South Wales (p1-2). Bees are very much flavour of the season with Gwent Wildlife Trust's *Shrill Carder Bee* project (p5), and The Bee Conservation Trust's *Bees for Everyone* project (p10). Steve Bolchover reveals what inspired him to become a beetle recorder (p7); and any herpetofauna recorders will be interested in the research carried out by Cardiff University and WTSWW about the optimal tile size for sampling populations (p8).

Record rainfall in April and a wet start to May has meant that recording some taxonomic groups has been difficult. Hopefully the weather will improve soon so that we can all get out and start recording in the sunshine! Enjoy the newsletter!

Rebecca Davies (Editor)

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D. villosus showing distinctive cones © Environment Agency

Dikerogammarus villosus, commonly known as invasive or killer shrimp, was found for the first time in UK waters in September 2010, at Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire. This was followed by discoveries in November 2010 at Cardiff Bay and Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir, Port Talbot. In March 2012, a fourth population was found at Barton Broad SSSI, Norfolk Broads.

Following the initial sighting, extensive monitoring has been carried out in England and Wales at over 4300 sites (general and targeted monitoring) to check other locations where *D. villosus* might be present, by the Environment Agency, Environment Agency Wales, Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England and water companies. The targeted *D. villosus* monitoring, using traps, is being carried out at ~300 priority or high risk sites (including 40 sites in South East Wales and 22 sites in South West Wales). The criteria for high risk sites includes whether a site is used for water recreation, or has

links to *D. villosus* infected areas, if it provides suitable habitat for *D. villosus* (e.g. artificial hard surfaces, boulder and cobble shorelines), and sites with known zebra mussel *Dreissena polymorpha* populations (as it is thought that the mussel beds provide suitable habitat and even food for *D. villosus*,

which feed on the faeces and byssus threads of the mussels). It was during this dedicated monitoring, that the recent Barton Broad record was made.

D. villosus originates from the Ponto-Caspian region in Eastern Europe, and with the opening of the Rhine-Danube canal, has spread to Western Europe in the last 15 years. It kills a range of native species such as shrimp, insect larvae and young fish (up to 40mm in size). It tends to dominate the habitats it invades, sometimes causing the extinction of native species.

D. villosus usually has a striped back, but can be more uniform in colour. The



D. villosus trap (using cat food as bait and deployed overnight to capture this largely nocturnal species) © Environment Agency

Invasive shrimp in Wales (...cont)

diagnostic feature is the distinctive cones on the tail (see photo). It is generally larger than our other freshwater shrimps, and can grow up to 30mm from tip of tail to tip of head. Additional information on this species can be found on the GB Non-native Species Secretariat (NNS) website www.nonnativespecies.org.

Local risk assessments and management plans have been produced for the first three affected sites, and are under development for Barton Broad. At Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir, the Environment Agency Wales worked with Tata Steel (who own and manage the Reservoir) and the site users, to develop risk assessments and biosecurity measures. Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir is now closed to the general public with only the sailing club and anglers having access. There are relatively few movements of craft into and out of the site and biosecurity controls are well observed. *D. villosus* appears to be contained within the Reservoir and the Upper Mother Ditch system to which it is connected. Potential routes from the Upper Mother Ditch to Margam Moors SSSI have been carefully investigated and two weirs installed to obstruct movement of the shrimps. Fortunately, the habitat in the Upper Mother Ditch is very unsuitable for *D. villosus* which naturally limits spread. In Cardiff Bay, there is a high level of public access and a variety of water recreational activities, such as boating, canoeing and angling. Cardiff Harbour Authority (who manage the

site) have developed risk assessments and biosecurity measures for the Bay, and Environment Agency Wales has also worked with other Cardiff Bay user groups, to help minimise the risk of *D. villosus* spreading from this complex site. This includes supporting the Check, Clean, Dry campaign to stop the spread of *D. villosus* and other invasive aquatic species (see www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry). These few simple steps can really help reduce the risk of spread. Laboratory tests have found that *D. villosus* can survive for up to 15 days in the fold of a damp wader, which shows how important it is to ensure all kit is dry before moving between sites.

In addition to the risk of spread by people's activities, we had initial concerns that *D. villosus* might be able to naturally migrate upstream from Cardiff Bay, into the Rivers Taff and Ely (known populations are currently restricted to the mouths of these two rivers and within the main part of the Bay). Two international experts on *D. villosus* were invited to visit Cardiff Bay and Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir in March 2012 (Dr Dirk Platvoet, Amsterdam University, and

Dr Calum MacNeil, Environmental Protection Unit of DEFA, Isle of Man) to provide a judgement on this and whether monitoring and biosecurity measures were satisfactory. The conclusion was that *D. villosus* are very unlikely to move upstream due to the high flow in these two tributaries (they prefer slow flowing habitat), and that the



Dr Platvoet (far left) at Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir with representatives from Tata Steel, Countryside Council for Wales and Environment Agency Wales © Environment Agency

biosecurity and monitoring work is appropriate.

This work is ongoing, as obviously there is a continued threat. However, thanks are due to all the partners involved, who have helped prevent any further spread of *D. villosus* from the known locations.

Melissa Lacan, Senior Environmental Monitoring Officer, Environment Agency Wales
(melissa.lacan@environment-agency.gov.uk)

What can you do to help?

For further information on *D. villosus* nationally, there is the very informative new Briefing Note 5 (May 2012) on the NNS website:

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/nonnativespecies/alerts/index.cfm?id=3>

This also contains useful information on what you and your organisation can do to support the Check, Clean, Dry campaign, including links to videos on biosecurity guidance for boat users, anglers and canoeists. If you think you have a new sighting, check the identification details on the NNS website, and if you think it might be *D. villosus* it can be reported by email to alert_nonnative@ceh.ac.uk or via the website http://www.brc.ac.uk/risc/alert.php?species=killer_shrimp



Dr Platvoet looking for *D. villosus* at Blackweir, River Taff (just upstream of Cardiff Bay). © Environment Agency

SEWBRc News

Staff Changes & Volunteers

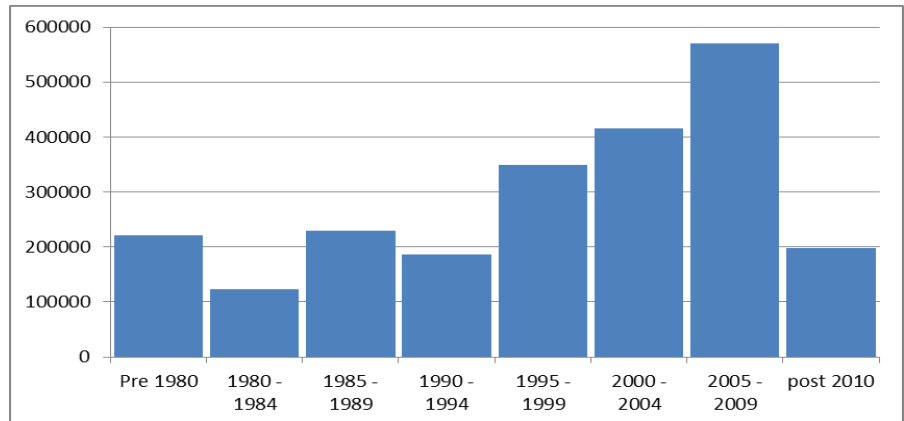
In January, we welcomed our newest staff member, Libby Wilcox. Libby has extensive experience of working in local records centres in England having worked at centres in Newcastle, Somerset, Devon and Worcestershire. Libby is primarily responsible for digitising large data sets, but also helps with data searches, and running events.

A big thank you must go to everybody who has volunteered at SEWBRc over the last 12 months: Caleala Clifford, Amy Owens, Mike Spearing, Lee Johnson, Helen Jenkins, Nicola Stone, and Louise Bebb. Volunteers carry out invaluable data entry work, and many of them have been working hard digitising our (never-ending) historic bird data sets. Without their help, we would never have made such a dent in the data so quickly!

Data Holdings

The SEWBRc database contains 2.3 million records, the vast majority of which are vascular plants (36.5%), insects (33.2%) and birds (21.1%) (see pie chart below). It is also interesting to note that over half of our species records (51.6%) are post-2000 (see bar chart above).

Mallard and Blackbird are the first two species to break the 10,000 records barrier, and Large Yellow Un-



derwing will almost certainly follow them in 2012.

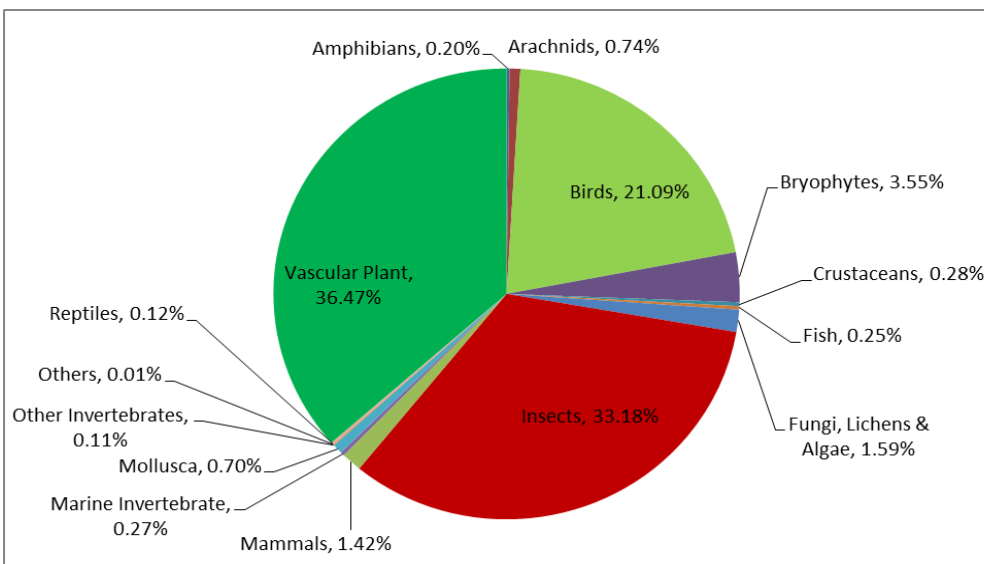
The main contributors to the growth of the dataset in the past 6 months have been South West Wales Amphibian and Reptile Group, Steve Bolchover, Steve Williams, Christian Owen, Colin Titcombe, Stephanie Tyler, Martin Anthoney, Gwent Wildlife Trust and of course the Glamorgan MapMate community. Several ecological consultancies are now also supplying records to us, in particular Sturgess Ecology, RSK Environment, Wildwood Ecology, Jacobs, and Capita Symonds. Thanks to everyone who has sent in records this year—keep them coming!

Funding

SEWBRc's financial position remains very secure, despite the gloomy wider economic picture, as the UK now finds itself in the second

dip of a double-dip recession. Public sector funding cuts have impacted on SEWBRc, mainly through reduced Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with a few Local Authorities during 2011/12. Although not all SLAs are yet formally in place with the Local Authorities for 2012/13, the good news is that we have not seen any further funding reductions. As things stand it seems very likely that we will have some form of agreement with 10 out of the 12 Local Authorities in our area during 2012/13. We are delighted that we finally have agreements in place with Newport and Neath Port Talbot Councils, so the two current gaps in our provision of services to Local Authorities are in the cities of Cardiff (where there have been two previous agreements for the supply of species data layers) and Swansea (with whom we have sadly failed to establish an agreement in our eight years of existence). If any readers seeing this wish to nudge their Local Authorities in the right direction on our behalf, this would be most welcome!

Another concern (which thankfully seems to have been unfounded) was that we may struggle to continue to receive the levels of funding we have been used to receiving from the three bodies (Countryside Council for Wales, Environmental Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales) who



SEWBReC news (cont...)

are due to be merged into a new Single Body, which will start functioning in April 2013. Instead it seems highly likely that we will have new two or three year agreements in place with each of the three bodies in the very near future. Although the agencies will be merged it is reassuring that the new multi-year agreements will help provide us with some financial security, as we make the transition towards a single agreement with the new Single Body. In fact, we still hope that this agreement may also be expanded into one which encompasses the Welsh Government (WG) and its Departments, as well as the Single Body. One further piece of good news is that we have received our first ever direct funding from the WG section responsible for the new Glastir agri-environment scheme. Although the sums involved are small, we are pleased to be feeding information into decisions relating to the 'targeted element' of Glastir.

A final issue in this brief update is to report that our sales of products and services to the private sector have continued to grow, despite the apparent recession. Total sales in this category for the 2011/12 financial year reached over £51,000 (up from £42,000 in 2010/11), far exceeding our expectations and making a massive contribution to the financial stability of SEWBReC as a business.

Welsh Local Records Centres: Digitally Networked Businesses?

Over recent years the LRCs in Wales have been working together increasingly closely on many issues. One of the main drivers for this increased co-operation has been the clear demand from our customers (such as Countryside Council for Wales, Environmental Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales) to receive all-Wales datasets, rather than to receive separate datasets from each LRC. Technical staff within the four Welsh LRCs have been working together, firstly to ensure standardisation of data structures and then to enable the delivery of merged da-

tasetts to happen. To date, the rather laborious task of 'knitting' the four datasets together has been undertaken by Cofnod, the North Wales LRC, but several different approaches are being considered for automating and simplifying the whole procedure for such data supplies. We have long recognised however that significant improvements may be expensive and that we would need to share resources and technical expertise to ensure that any developments would benefit all four LRCs.

Against the backdrop of this growing need to work more closely together on technical issues, the LRCs have been fortunate to attract the attention of the 'ICT Exploitation Department' within the Welsh Government's Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science (BETS) Department. Initially the four LRCs each received ICT diagnostic visits, from which the consultants working for WG concluded that the Welsh LRCs may be a suitable 'cluster' of businesses that may benefit from involvement in its 'Digitally Networked Business' (DNB) programme, which aims to promote the use of technology to improve businesses. As a result, two workshop sessions were arranged by the WG (one for LRC staff and one for a wider group of LRC stakeholders) and a report has been drafted making recommendations for further work to develop the DNB project. At present it is unclear exactly what will happen next, when it may take place and exactly what form the support for LRCs will take. What does seem certain is that if the DNB project does progress, the Welsh LRCs, their data suppliers and their users, could benefit from technological improvements that far exceed those that we could hope to achieve within our current business models.

We will endeavour to keep you posted on any future developments, but if you wish to know more in the meantime, please contact Adam Rowe or David Slade at SEWBReC.

Recorders' Fora 2012

Both Recorders' Fora were very well received this year, with just over 40 people booking for the Gwent event and a whopping 70 people at Glamorgan!

Kicking us off at both events were **Dr Neil Price** and **Dr Dan Forman** (*Swansea University*) with a thought-provoking presentation on biological recording from an academic's perspective.

There were also a wide range of stimulating talks from local recorders, societies and organisations: **Gareth Farr** (*Environment Agency*), **Richard Dodd** (*Valleys Bat Group*), **Rob Parry** (*Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales*), **Ffion Davies** (*Swansea University*), **Tom Sharpe** (*National Museum Wales*), **Dr Stephanie Tyler** (*Monmouthshire Meadows Group*), **Julian Carter** (*National Museum Wales*), **Dr Gethin Thomas** (*Swansea University*), and **Paul Smith** (*Rust Fungi Recorder*).

David Slade (*SEWBReC*) concluded proceedings with a SEWBReC update at the Glamorgan event, but unfortunately had to forgo his talk at Gwent due to the snow. Ever worsening blizzard conditions meant that we had to finish up earlier than planned as driving conditions became increasingly worse over the afternoon. The Glamorgan event concluded with a guided tour around the Botanical Gardens at Singleton Park.

Presentations are available on the SEWBReC website or on request. If you would like to give a presentation at the 2013 fora, please contact SEWBReC.

A big thank you to all the speakers and attendees who once again made the two Recorders' Meetings a complete success!

SEWBReC Staff

Bee Inspired about Shrill Carder Bees!

Bumblebees in Gwent will soon be given a real boost with the launch of Gwent Wildlife Trust's Shrill Carder Bee Project.

The Shrill Carder Bee is sadly facing national extinction in the UK, and has a stronghold on the Gwent Levels. This two-year project will involve working with landowners and the public to raise awareness about this rare bee, with an emphasis on restoring, reconnecting and recreating the flower-rich habitat on which it depends.

Supported by Bumblebee Conservation Trust, HDH Wills Charitable Trust, The

D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, The Hamamelis Trust, Mercers Foundation and Will Charitable Trust, the Shrill Carder Bee Project aims to boost populations of this rare bumblebee in Gwent.

Bumblebees are important for a variety of reasons. They are one of our most important pollinators. It is said that if bees were to disappear the cost to the UK economy could be up to £440 million per year! Bees visit flowering plants as they collect nectar and pollen. Whilst doing this they perform a vital function of transferring pollen

from plant to plant, thus enabling plants to reproduce. Managing land to benefit bumblebees also benefits many other species, ranging from native wildflowers and insects, through to people.

A major part of the project will involve participation from volunteers and local landowners. That's where you come in! We urgently need volunteers to help us carry out bumblebee surveys on sites in Gwent. You don't need any special biological knowledge as we will provide training for you – all you need is enthusi-

asm! We'd also love to hear from landowners who would be interested in managing their land to benefit bumblebees.

If you would like to get involved or would like any further information please contact **Nicola Stone, Conservation Officer at Gwent Wildlife Trust**, on nstone@gwentwildlife.org or 01600 740600.

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Botanical Society of the British Isles in Monmouthshire vc35

After 40 years as BSBI Recorder for VC35, Trevor Evans is standing down at the Society's AGM in June 2012. He wants to devote more of his time to fieldwork and less to sitting at a computer. We owe Trevor a huge vote of thanks for all he has done as Recorder over the last four decades and he leaves a wonderful legacy in his excellent *Flora of Monmouthshire*, which shows us the status and distribution of all plant species found in the vice-county, and in the Rare Plants Register for Monmouthshire. Elsa Wood and I are taking over as Joint Recorders; Trevor is a difficult act to follow and having two new Joint Recorders shows what an enormous amount of work he did single-handed.

Elsa and I are very keen to

persuade all of you with some botanical expertise to record plants in your local patch or indeed anywhere in the vice county for the planned New Atlas of flowering plants and ferns. We would also like to initiate regular field meetings for members and indeed for anyone interested in plants in Monmouthshire VC so that we can carry out surveys together at some sites and in poorly-covered squares. Hopefully we can involve botanists throughout the vice-county and form a local botanical group.

We plan our first meeting at Penpergwm Pond near Usk (G.R. SO326099) meeting at 10.30 a.m. on Sunday 29th July. If you are able to come, please contact us if you need further details and directions.

We hope very much to

involve all botanists in the Threatened Plants Project in 2012. Of the ten species listed for 2012, three are found in the vice-county. One *Anacamptis morio* Green-veined Orchid is quite widespread in the east of the county and the second Slender Hare's-Ear *Bupleurum tenuissimum* occurs along the coast between Chepstow and Cardiff (see Trevor's Atlas). The third is *Persicaria minus* Small Waterpepper which was recently found at Penpergwm Pond. Another species Corn Buttercup *Ranunculus arvensis* used to occur in arable fields in Monmouthshire but there have been no records since 1977. Please look out for this species too – it may just turn up somewhere. By the time you read this the flowering season for *Anacamptis morio* may be

over but if you know of any site for this orchid or for the other threatened species then do please let us know.

Stephanie Tyler & Elsa Wood

(email: Stephanie at steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com and Elsa at in-f@thenurtons.co.uk)

Changing Times

In the world of natural history study we are all very well aware of changes made in taxonomy and nomenclature. Scientific names have to be relearnt on a regular basis. Sometimes new names are brought in only to be reversed a year or so later. It can all be very confusing. And it is not only the scientific names that may be changed – it can happen to the common (vernacular) names too. What was once Black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) is now Common Knapweed, but still of the same scientific name. The former Ivory Waxcap fungus (*Hygrophorus eburneus*) is now Blotched Wood-wax fungus and changes have been suggested for the common names of some birds too.

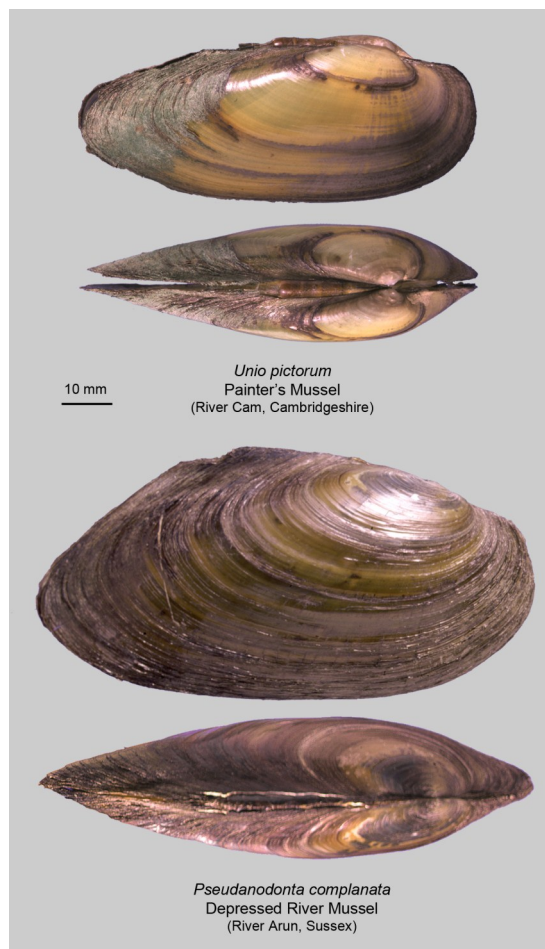
Advancing technology has added a new dimension to the once contentious ‘lumpers and splitters’. In recent times some life-forms which we’ve considered to be just one species have now been found to be two. Take, for example the once familiar Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). This has now been divided into two separate species – the Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and the Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*). Similarly the well-known Long-Eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*) was once thought to be the only *Plecotus* species in Britain. We now recognise a second species, the Grey Long-eared Bat so they are now referred to as the Brown Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*) and the Grey Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus austriacus*); this second species being much rarer and restricted to some southern counties of England.

Conversely, what my first book on fungi referred to as the Conical Waxcap (*Hygrophorus conicus*) and the Blackening Waxcap (*Hygrophorus nigrescens*) have now become the single species Blacken-

ing Waxcap (*Hygrocybe conica*) [*Mushrooms, Roger Phillips, Macmillan, 2006*].

When I first began to explore freshwater habitats in Gwent (then the old county of Monmouthshire) a visit to St Pierre Lake (Chepstow) in 1961 revealed the presence of the large bi-valve known as the Swan Mussel (*Anodonta cygrea*). In subsequent years, as a car-owner, I was able to explore more widely and found new sites for freshwater mussels – the River Wye, Gwent Levels Reens and the canal system among them. My books at the time only mentioned two species of *Anodonta* mussel, the second one being the Duck Mussel (*Anodonta anatina*) and it was to this species that many of my early finds were attributed. One early source of information how-

ever [*Animal Life in Freshwater, Helen Mellanby, Methuen, 1953*] did mention another genus and single species which was *Pseudanodonta minima*, but this was given a rather restricted distribution. During the summer of 2000, on a visit to the Cefn Goleau Pools (Tredegar), two species of mussel were found, the now familiar Swan mussel, but also a new one to me – the Painter’s Mussel (*Unio pictorum*). My book on molluscs by Horst Janus [*The Young Specialist Looks at Land and Freshwater Mollusc, Horst Janus, Burke, 1965*] suggests just two Welsh counties for the occurrence of this species – Montgomery and Brecon. The Brecon border is only a short distance from Tredegar so *Unio pictorum*’s presence here was quite under-



© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

standable.

In recent years I read a report of the Depressed River Mussel having been found in the River Wye. My more recent books were now naming this species as *Anodonta complanata* [*British Shells, Nora F MacMillan, Warner, 1968*] and describing it as ‘uncommon’. Since I was, by this time, living in the Wye Valley I decided to investigate. Finding concentrations of mussel shells at two sites between Llandogo and Whitebrook I checked through these and found that at least some of them could well be the ‘uncommon’ *Anodonta complanata*.

Changing Times (cont...)

It was about this time that I had the good fortune to meet Dr Ben Rowson of the National Museum of Wales. Ben introduced me to a book specifically concerning freshwater bivalves, one of its three authors being his colleague Graham Oliver (Head of Department, Biodiversity and Systematic Biology, National Museum of Wales). In this book [*Freshwater Bivalves of Britain and Ireland, Ian Killeen, David Aldridge and Graham Oliver, FSC and National Museum of Wales, 2004*] it is stated that *Pseudanodonta com-*

planata 'comprises as much as 80% of the mussel fauna in the lower River Wye'.

I now decided to take the shells I had collected locally to the National Museum of Wales in order to get the identifications verified. I also took specimens of *Unio pictorum* to make sure my identification was correct. The verdict was that all of the shells collected from the banks of the River Wye were of the Depressed River Mussel *Pseudanodonta complanata*. *Unio pictorum* was confirmed as such but it also transpired that the

specimens represented the first Gwent county record for this species.

Acknowledgements: *I would like to thank both Ben Rowson and Graham Oliver for enlightening me with regard to the true identification and status of freshwater mussels in Gwent.*

Colin Titcombe

Spotlight on a Recorder: Steve Bolchover, Coleopterist

Beetles have fascinated me for something over 50 years. As a youngster growing up in suburban Manchester, I was the one who kept the ant farm, who had to get the spiders out of the house (to save the terrified beasts from my mum), who infested the house with woolly caterpillars because I hadn't secured the lid. I loved the books by Jean-Henri Fabre, the incomparable observer of the insect world, and I liked the idea of championing invertebrates in a world where most people seemed to think that Nature comprised only birds, mammals and plants, and insects were taken into account essentially because they were bird food.

In those days Manchester University museum had a club where kids came in on a Saturday morning to sketch specimens on display, and through this I discovered the Manchester Entomological Society and Colin Johnson, a coleopterist who had recently been appointed to the curatorial staff in the museum. We went collecting beetles together, and Colin helped me identify them and allowed me free rein to consult

the excellent collection in the museum. So, to a point, beetles became my prime interest because I met an enthusiastic specialist in the group.

But beetles also ticked a lot of boxes for me. Many of them are extraordinarily attractive, particularly when seen through a microscope. There are many rare species – wonderfully exciting should you find one. But there is also a very wide range of relatively common species, plenty to excite interest all the time. And there is the challenge of identifying them. I quickly learned that you can't just compare your specimen with pretty pictures, but that you have to be systematic and to learn to use keys.

In those days insect photography was an expensive arcane pursuit, and by today's standards, the results tended to be pretty poor. Studying insects involved making a collection of pinned or carded specimens, and in the case of beetles and many other groups, this is still true, and is likely to remain true. It's unusual to be able to identify a beetle from a photograph, even given the wonders of modern digital pho-

tography and reasonably priced equipment. And there can be great satisfaction in honing your curatorial and taxonomic skills.

But for me the chief interest in beetles lies in their success as a group, and in trying to fathom out why this is the case. JBS Haldane succinctly expressed the fact when he responded to a cleric's desire to know what he had deduced about the mind of the creator after spending many years studying the creation: he had an inordinate fondness for beetles. The 400,000 beetle species that have been described surpass all other orders of plants or animals. Even in Britain, with our relatively sparse fauna of only 4000 species, we have nearly as many as all of the mammals in the whole world. Truly, they are a fascinating group, a challenge to study, and endlessly rewarding.

Steve Bolchover, Coleopterist

Parc Slip Wildlife Survey, South Wales

A species monitoring project using artificial refugia ('tins') has been taking place at Parc Slip Nature Reserve (owned and managed by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales) in South Wales. The use of artificial refugia for surveying herpetofauna is, of course, very familiar to ARG (Amphibian & Reptile Group) members, but there is some indecision about what size refugia samples a greater species diversity and a greater number of individuals. The survey at Parc Slip addressed this by using two different sizes of refugia, 1m² and 0.5m², arranged in sets containing one 1m² refugia and four 0.5m² refugia (see photo on right), to allow direct comparison of the effectiveness of the two different sizes. The material used for the refugia was corrugated bitumen roofing sheets, which were relatively cheap and easy to cut to the correct size compared to metal. The refugia were checked four days a week, and features such as age class and sex were recorded for each individual seen beneath them.

From August 2010 to June 2011, there was a total of 2858 reptile, amphibian and small mammal sightings. Surprisingly, the highest percentage of the total sightings was small mammals, even discounting the sightings

from winter when the herps were hibernating! Therefore, it is worth keeping a record of any small mammal sightings beneath tins.

Overall, the most effective refugia size was 1m², with 63% of the total sightings. If surveying for all the herpetofauna in an area, it is therefore advisable to use larger refugia. However, not all the species showed a preference for the 1m² refugia. For herpetofauna, 1m² refugia were most effective for surveying adders and grass snakes, whereas 0.5m² refugia produced higher numbers of sightings of common toads, slow worms and common lizards than 1m² refugia. Therefore, if surveying for a specific species, the sheet size which produced the highest numbers of sightings for that species should be used. Great crested newts showed no significant preference for a sheet size, so using the smaller sheets would minimise survey costs, without reducing capture rates.



Temperature and humidity beneath the two different sheet sizes were tested to determine whether these factors had an influence on refugia size choice by species, but there was no significant difference between the two different sheet sizes. It is possible that other factors such as body size or social interactions influenced refugia size choice by a species, but further research is needed to confirm this.

If you require any further information of this project, please feel free to contact info@welshwildlife.org

**Rose Revera, Cardiff University
and the Wildlife Trust of South
and West Wales**



Dormice Monitoring

A new volunteer dormouse monitoring scheme has started at the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales' Brynna and Llanharan nature reserve in Rhondda Cynon Taff. All the data gathered will be contributed to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme.

Dormice are small mammals, weighing about the same as two £1 coins. They have a bright golden-brown coat, with a thick furry tail and large (adorable) black eyes. Dormice were once widespread throughout much of Britain but over the last 100 years their range has decreased dramatically – primarily due to changes in woodland management, the loss of hedgerows and habitat fragmentation.

Last autumn, the Wildlife Trust installed 50 specialised dormouse nest boxes at Brynna Woods. The nest boxes are similar to bird boxes but have an entrance hole at the back of the box, facing the tree. The boxes provide a safe, weather-proof home for dormice and other small mammals (such as wood mice) but they



A licenced volunteer checking a dormouse box for signs of use



Dormouse asleep in nest © People's Trust for Endangered Species

also make monitoring a species which is shy, secretive, nocturnal and spends much of its life high in the woodland canopy much easier!

We'll be checking the boxes each month, recording the number, sex and weight of any dormice (or other mammals) that we find. All our data will be sent to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme, which having been set up in 1988, is the UK's longest-running mammal monitoring programme, collating data from across the country. The scheme is managed by the People's Trust for Endangered Species and tracks annual and long-term population changes, keeping an eye on this vulnerable species.

As well as monitoring boxes, dormouse surveys often search woodlands for nibbled nuts. Although many animals eat hazelnuts, dormice open them in a distinctive way: leaving a neat, smooth inner rim and angled marks on the nut's surface. When installing the nest boxes, three hazelnuts were placed in each – providing food for the dor-

mice and a monitoring tool for volunteers (a method reported in Dormouse Monitor, Autumn 2011).

We carried out our first nest box check in April and although there were no signs of dormice, one hazelnut in Box 47 had been gnawed open by a wood mouse. Without this monitoring method, there would have been no sign of any mammal activity. Even though the boxes haven't yet been used by dormice, they are providing valuable nest sites for blue and great tits - with 13 of the boxes providing cosy homes for brooding birds.

Dormice are unique amongst the UK's smaller mammals as they hibernate over the winter in woven nests under the soil surface, at the base of tree stumps or under log piles. We've placed a small number of disused ridge tiles at the bases of some of the trees to provide artificial hibernation sites and next year we'll be monitoring each to see if they've been used (as reported in Dormouse Monitor, Spring 2010).

The Monitoring Programme asks surveyors to check boxes each month until November and with any luck it won't be long before we start finding dormice.

Richard and Chloë May, volunteer surveyors for the WTSWW

Find out more about dormice:

www.welshwildlife.org

<http://ptes.org/index.php?cat=123>

[www.arkive.org/common-dormouse/
muscardinus-avellanarius](http://www.arkive.org/common-dormouse/muscardinus-avellanarius)

[http://greenboot.co.uk/dormice/
dormouse-monitor/](http://greenboot.co.uk/dormice/dormouse-monitor/)



A great tit trying to brood one of the hazelnuts we're using to monitor box use

Bees for Everyone

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust is about to launch an ambitious and exciting UK-wide project called '**Bees for Everyone**'. It is the most ambitious project aimed at conserving bumblebees and their habitats in the UK to date.

'Bees for Everyone' will have an outreach strand which will aim to raise awareness of the importance of bumblebees and the problems they face. We will use innovative approaches to engage with people of varying ages and backgrounds and encourage active public participation in conservation work, wildlife gardening and bumblebee monitoring.

'Bees for Everyone' will also have a conservation strand which will make a significant contribution to the UK Biodiversity Action Plans (UK BAPs) of six bumblebee species, as

well as for several UK BAP priority habitats, through conservation work to safeguard, restore and create valuable bumblebee habitats. As part of the 'Bees for Everyone' project we now have Conservation Officers in Scotland, England and Wales. For more information about our conservation work in Wales, please contact Sinead Lynch at sinead.lynch@bumblebeecconservation.org.

Recording bumblebees

In Wales we are lucky enough to have five of the seven UKBAP species, with one of the UK's rarest bumblebees – the Shril carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) – occurring in three main population areas along the south coast, including places such as the Gwent Levels, Kenfig National Nature Reserve, and

Pembrokeshire. Also keep a look out for the distinctive Blaeberry bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*) which can be found in on areas of heathland, moorland and upland pastures/meadows.

One key aim for the project is to encourage more people to get involved in monitoring of bumblebee populations across the UK. We will be delivering identification training events across the country, as well as providing advice on surveying and identification on our brand new website. We hope to build on the success of our BeeWalk programme, which saw 100's of volunteers across the UK take on a small bumblebee transect, by encouraging more recorders to take on a transect.

Surveying bumblebees offers a great chance to explore new parts of the countryside, develop new skills, keep fit, and make a

very real contribution to conservation. Data collected is important for long-term monitoring of bumblebee population changes in response to climate change and land use change. If you are interested in getting involved with BeeWalk, please get in touch with Bumblebee Conservation Trust at bee-walk@bumblebeeconservation.org.

Records of common and rare species alike are vitally important, so please record any bumblebees you see and submit your records to SEWBReC!

Sinead Lynch, Conservation Officer, Bumblebee Conservation Trust

SUSTRANS' WILDLIFE CHAMPIONS

Sustrans coordinates the National Cycle Network (NCN), which extends over 13,000 miles across the UK and 1200 miles in Wales alone. After a successful pilot in South East Wales the Sustrans Wildlife Champion project, which aims to audit, manage and promote the biodiversity on NCN, is rolling out Wales wide.

Approximately one third of the NCN is traffic-free; along riversides, old railway lines and canal towpaths, and provides not just an environment for healthy and sustainable transport, but also green space in its own right.

Wildlife Champions are volunteers that adopt a section of their local traffic free sections of the network and are responsible for monitoring the biodiversity along this route by regularly collecting data on the different species they see in their adopted section. The data recorded by Wildlife Champions is shared with the local biodiversity records centres across Wales and will allow Sustrans to maintain, manage and promote the diversity of wildlife on the National Cycle Network as well as organise workdays and influence route management plans.

So far well over 50 Wildlife Champions as well as a range of youth and community groups have volunteered and are regularly surveying sections of the NCN. Volunteers are ranging from professional ecologists to complete novices and it is really encouraging to see new groups of people so enthusiastic to learn about the environment around them.

Volunteers are supported with information packs, identification resources as well as training sessions, the most recent being in Cardiff at Bute Park Education Centre in March with the next session to be held in Pontypool on the 9th



June. Volunteers are also invited to get involved with a range of workdays that improve and manage the biodiversity along the routes and this month a group were supported to erect 50 dormice boxes in Monmouthshire. The project has also developed partnerships with a range of organisations. In April, Roger James from Gwent Wildlife Trust led Wildlife Champions on a wildlife walk along the Monmouthshire-Brecon canal to improve volunteers plant identification skills. This will be repeated throughout the year.

In Wales the NCN runs through 68 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and there are some amazing species to be seen and recorded. Unfortunately there have already been lots of recordings along the greenways of non native, invasive species such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and the Harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*). As well as invasive and rarer species Wildlife Champions will play a big part in helping to record the more common species across Wales, a lot of

which are in decline and often go unnoticed due to the lack of data.

Anyone who is interested in becoming a wildlife champion, or would like to find out more information should contact Naomi Taylor, volunteers-cymru@sustrans.org.uk 02920 650602

**Naomi Taylor, Project Officer,
Sustrans**

www.sustrans.org.uk

Wanted: Traditional Orchard Survey Volunteers

Traditional orchards are a much loved part of our British heritage and countryside, yet existing data about the amount of this Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitat in Wales is out-dated and incomplete. The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), with funding from the Countryside Council for Wales and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, is therefore undertaking the first-ever national survey of traditional orchards in the country.

Traditional orchards are hotspots for biodiversity and support a wide range of wildlife and plants due to the combination of old trees and natural management with the absence of pesticides and fertilisers. At least 1800 different species are associated with the habitat, including many species which are rare or scarce. These wildlife refuges are becoming increasingly rare due to the intensification of agriculture, pressure from land development and our increased reliance on imported fruits. With this loss of habitat we also face losing rare fruit varieties, traditions, cus-

toms and knowledge.

Researchers at PTES are currently combing aerial photographs of the three and a half million hectares covering Wales. The work will result in a comprehensive inventory of traditional orchards in Wales, with information on the condition, age, boundaries and management status made widely available. This vital resource will help to underpin the conservation of this threatened habitat, as well as raise awareness about the importance of traditional orchards in the ecological landscape.

The project now needs hundreds of volunteers to verify their findings on the ground, by checking for characteristics of traditional orchards as well as recording the species, age and condition of the fruit trees they find. PTES are also



interested in hearing from orchard owners and managers or anyone else with any local orchard knowledge. The help of volunteers and input of local knowledge are essential to ensure that the resulting inventory is as complete and accurate as possible. If you would like to get involved, or for further information, please contact Lauren Alexander, Orchard Liaison Officer, on 020 7498 4533 or e-mail lauren.alexander@ptes.org.

Lauren Alexander, Orchard Liaison Officer, PTES

WBP—Book Award Fund

The Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) is offering a small grant to all Vice County Recorders in Wales. This can be used towards the purchase of identification books, keys, CDs, or other small equipment.

A claim can be up to £25, and may only be claimed once in each financial year. The invoice date must match the financial year in which the claim is made. To claim, please send the form below together with your receipt(s) to the following address:

Bioamrywiaeth Cymru
Biodiversity Wales

PARTNERIAETH BIOAMRYWIAETH CYMRU
WALES BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

**Sean McHugh,
WBP Communications Officer,
Wales Biodiversity Partnership,
C/O Wildlife Trusts Wales,
Baltic House,
Mount Stuart Square,
Cardiff Bay, CF10 5FH.**

E-mail:

s.mchugh@welshwildlife.org

Phone: 02920 480 070 (direct),
07817 148524 (mobile)

Sean McHugh, WBP Communications Officer

Name:		
Address:	Line 1	
	Line 2	
	Line 3	
	Post Town	
	Post Code	
Email address:		
Contact telephone number		
I am the VC Recorder for:	Vice County Name	
	Taxonomic Speciality	
Item (s) grant claimed for		
Receipt attached?		

Biodiversity Blitzes 2012

Tymawr Convent, Lydart, Monmouthshire Saturday 23rd June, 10am to 4pm

Tymawr Convent is located in Lydart, near Monmouth, and encompasses around 25 ha of land. The site lies within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and an area of neutral grassland (MG5) has been designated as a Wildlife Site/Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

The convent is a member of the Monmouthshire Meadows Group, and their grounds are now sympathetically managed by Gwent Wildlife Trust under a farm tenancy agreement. The grounds host a variety of habitats such as species-rich meadow, wet pasture, orchard, pond, stream, woodland and hedgerows. Species such as green-winged orchid, yellow rattle, quaking grass and tway-blade orchid have recently been recorded in the meadow.



Join us on the biodiversity blitz and help us add to the existing knowledge about the site.



© David Slade

Cefn Pennar Uchaf Farm, Mountain Ash Saturday 14th July, 10am to 4pm

This is a unique opportunity to visit a sympathetically managed farm in the Cynon Valley. The site covers a range of interesting habitats, including recovering heath, acidic grassland with many ant hills, pond, stream, a marsh / bog area, hedgerows and impressive dry stone walls.



Image courtesy of Laurie Campbell

There is a mature monkey puzzle tree on site, and small pearl bordered fritillaries are regularly seen. Part of the farm has been designated as a SINC, which encompasses the adjacent Mynydd Gethin. The site is sure to contain a wealth of interesting species which are as yet un-recorded.

Join us on the biodiversity blitz and help us add to the existing knowledge about the site.

The events are **free** and open to all wildlife recorders, so please feel free to pass this information onto other naturalists who may be interested in attending. **Please note that both sites are privately owned and there is limited parking, so please ensure you register your interest with SEWBRc so we can send you further details of the event.**

Other events

Biodiversity Blitz Day

Blaenavon World Heritage Site (Monmouth-Brecon Canal)

Friday 8th June 2012, 10am to 3pm

- The Forgotten Landscapes Partnership are celebrating the 200th birthday of the Monmouth-Brecon Canal this year. Why not join the biodiversity blitz to record wildlife along part of this historic waterway?
- Suitable for beginners as well as experienced wildlife recorders. Children accompanied by an adult welcome, but not suitable for very young children.
- Starts and finishes at Goytre Wharf. Café available or bring your own lunch.
- **Free event, but booking is essential.** Telephone: 01495 742333
www.visitblaenavon.co.uk

Go Wild 2012

Parc Bryn Bach, Tredegar

Saturday 16th June, 11am to 4pm

- **Free** family event.
- Meet lots of wild animals from otters to owls to bats, amphibians and reptiles. Get involved with face painting, bird box making and woodwork.
- Organised by Blaenau Gwent's Biodiversity Partnership to celebrate Wales Biodiversity Week.

SEWBRc 2012 Training Courses

2012 saw the majority of the SEWBRc / Wales Biodiversity Partnership training courses move from autumn to spring, meaning the course season is already well underway. This move was made with the aim of giving the attendees the opportunity to start using their new skills right away, rather than letting them get rusty over winter!

As always, these free courses proved immensely popular, with 126 applications for the 35 spaces available. 62 individuals applied for spaces, with most opting to apply for two or more of the four courses being run. The most popular course has proved to be the Woodland Plants, with a massive 44 people applying for the 8 spaces on offer. Places were allocated using a very scientific method of pulling names out of a hat, and the lucky applicants have now been informed.

The first course of 2012 was Preserving Voucher Specimens, held in partnership with National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. This course gave an

excellent background on the collections of specimens held at the Museum, the importance of collecting specimens when recording, and a practical session on how to properly preserve specimens. Attendees were provided with guidance on starting their own collection, and encouraged to return to the museum with further queries or to refresh their training.

The second course was Woodland Plants, held at Coed Craig Ruperra on a (thankfully) beautiful sunny day in May. Course attendees learnt how to identify a wide range of flowering plants, trees, and ferns, with a few grasses and sedges thrown in for good measure.

So far, we have received excellent feedback on the courses:

"The course covered a subject very rarely taught and I have never known where to get this sort of training from before."

"Excellent course and very informative. The day seemed to go in an instant."

"The day was very well organised and relaxed."

"The course was well led with a guide that was more than knowledgeable about the plants."

Hopefully the remaining courses (Beetles of Crymlyn Bog, and Dragonflies & Damselflies) will prove as interesting and fun, and generate useful records for SEWBRc as well as expanding the skills of local recorders.

We always welcome offers to run courses, or suggestions for topics which could be covered. If you have any bright ideas, please get in contact; and watch this space for the 2013 courses!

Elaine Wright, SEWBRc

Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

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Join SEWBRc on Facebook
www.facebook.com/sewbrec

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!