

GWENT RECORDERS NEWSLETTER

BIOAMRYWIAETH
HOLL GYFOETH BYWYD

BIODIVERSITY
THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 4 Winter 2002/03

PLEASE SEND COMMENTS AND/OR ARTICLES ☒ By post to: Melanie Sutherland, Biodiversity Assistant, Caerphilly county borough council, Countryside and Landscape Service, Council Offices, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP12 2YW. ☎ 01495 235 253 ✉ By email to: sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

QUICK UPDATES

• GWENT RECORDERS' FORUM MEETING 2003

Recorders' Days have been organised for the past 2 years by members of the Greater Gwent Biodiversity Action Group (GGBAG), to bring together those involved in recording in Gwent, providing an ideal opportunity to meet and discuss relevant issues. The Gwent Recorders' Forum was established at the second meeting in January 2002, a representative of which has been invited to join GGBAG. The next Gwent Recorders' Forum meeting is taking place on Saturday 25th January 2003, which includes the following items: Wildlife Sites; Gwent Species Audit and regional Species Action Plans; and development of a South East Wales Local Record Centre.

Contact: Melanie Sutherland ☎ 01495 235 253 ✉ sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

Wildlife Sites (see article below):

Contact: Gemma Bodé, Wildlife Sites Project Officer ☒ Gwent Wildlife Trust, 16 White Swan Court, Monmouth, NP25 3NY ☎ 01600 715 501 ✉ gwentwildlife@cix.co.uk

Gwent Species Audit:

Contact: Colin Cheesman ☎ 01495 355 550 ✉ colin.cheesman@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

South East Wales Local Record Centre:

Contact: David Slade, LRC Development Officer, c/o National Museums and Galleries of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff ☎ 029 20397951 ✉ David.Slade@nmgw.ac.uk

• WILDLIFE SITES PROJECT

[Gemma Bodé]

The Wildlife Sites Project is progressing well since my appointment at Gwent Wildlife Trust in March 2002 - the summer was busy with a variety of volunteers and myself surveying targeted areas in Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen for potential Wildlife Sites. As you will all remember from the last newsletter wildlife sites are non-statutory designated areas recognised as being rich in wildlife at a local level, maintaining wildlife corridors, providing buffer zones and most importantly maintaining biodiversity. In Monmouthshire we were looking at areas within the Usk Valley, in Torfaen potential sites within urban boundaries, and in Blaenau Gwent larger areas of upland mosaic habitats. In all three local authority areas, we were most interested in finding species rich unimproved grasslands, which remain one of Gwent Wildlife Trust's greatest conservation priorities.

During surveying the landowners we encountered were most helpful, enthused by the project and had a keen knowledge of the wildlife on their land. Earlier in the year the project was presented to the farming and landowner organisations; the National Farmers' Union (NFU), Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) and the Country Landowners' Association (CLA), giving good advice and publishing several articles about the Wildlife Sites Project in their newsletters.

Now surveying has finished for the year, the all-important write up has started. Over 70 sites have been surveyed and assessed so far across Gwent and we are well on the way to developing the criteria for a wildlife site, distinguishing important areas for wildlife at the local level. Hopefully, more areas of Gwent can be surveyed for potential wildlife sites in 2003. If any of you keen naturalists out there have come

across what you think is a potential Wildlife Site then please tell me about it and you could play an important part in the future of Gwent's wildlife.

- **LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS (LBAPs)**

Blaenau Gwent

The LBAP was launched during Wales Biodiversity Week 2002. Contact: Colin Cheesman ☎ 01495 355550 ✉ colin.cheesman@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Caerphilly

The Caerphilly Biodiversity Partnership last met in December to take the LBAP forward. Habitat Action Plans are currently being drafted by the habitat subgroups for inclusion in the LBAP. These will be based on the existing Habitat Statements, but will expand on the conservation direction, with achievable actions and targets. Species subgroups have met to collate information on current action in the county borough, which was used in the UK Reporting 2002, and are preparing additional SAPs, as well as implementing two species plans this year. A Business subgroup has also been set up to pursue funding and possible sponsorship from local businesses, including a second Go Wild! event in June this year (similar to the launch in May 2002, but with a species emphasis) and other possible biodiversity projects.

Contact: Melanie Sutherland ☎ 01495 235 253 ✉ sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

Cardiff

Cardiff published its LBAP *Wild About Cardiff* in November 2001. This framework document will be supplemented with Habitat and Species Action Plans (HAPs & SAPs) that will be produced in tranches. This approach was adopted to allow a focus on implementation of the Action Plans. The first tranche (3 HAPs and 5 SAPs) are currently awaiting formal approval. One of these SAPs is for the water vole. A recent article published in the St. Mellons Community Linx Newsletter by Jo Brookman (Healthy Living Centre, St. Mellons), showing how to identify a water vole from a brown rat, has already yielded two reported sightings. It is hoped to follow this up with survey work with the Wildlife Trust.

Contact: Melissa Moore, Biodiversity Assistant ✉ Cardiff CC, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff ☎ 029 2087 3268 ✉ MMoore@cardiff.gov.uk

Monmouthshire

The draft LBAP has just been printed and will be distributed for consultation in the near future. If you would like to receive a copy for comment, please Contact: Jerry Lewis at Monmouthshire County Council ☎ 01633 644856 ✉ jerrylewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Unfortunately, there is no progress on employing a replacement Biodiversity Coordinator for Georgina Holdsworth.

Newport

The City of Newport's LBAP nears publication - it is currently being re-drafted in response to the public consultation and it is hoped to publish the document in the very near future. In the meantime the Monmouthshire-Brecon canal HAP and SAPs such as dormice, otter, and bats are being implemented.

Contact: Rebecca Davies, Biodiversity Officer ✉ Newport City Council, Countryside & Conservation Team, Civic Centre, Newport, NP20 4UR ☎ 01633 232 880 Fax: 01633 232756 ✉ rebecca.davies@newport.gov.uk

Torfaen

Torfaen's LBAP consultation draft was launched on Wednesday 28th August during Wales Biodiversity Week. Over 60 people were entertained with a series of biodiversity related presentations. Councillor John Marshall, Executive Member of the Department for the Environment, welcomed everyone and introduced the morning session. This involved a series of speakers from education, business, biological recording and the voluntary sector, with case studies on their contributing to the LBAP. Also, the winners of the *Wildlife on your Doorstep* photographic competition were presented with their prizes. In the afternoon, invitees

had the chance to visit the proposed Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Henllys Open Space. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Comments and recommendations on the consultation draft received by Tuesday 15th October will be taken into consideration for the final document. The draft LBAP comprises 24 Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and approx. 50 Species Action Plans (SAPs), which will be implemented over a period of 10 years. The LBAP was put together by the Torfaen Partnership Group - a composition of environmental organisations, interested members of the public and residents' groups, all of which have an interest in Torfaen's natural environment and biodiversity. Contact: Kris Roberts, Ecologist ✉ Torfaen county borough council, Countryside Projects, County Hall, Cwmbran ☎ 01633 648 308 📧 kris.roberts@torfaen.gov.uk

- **A NUTTY ADVENTURE!**

[Rebecca Davies]

Nine eager students wanting to learn more about dormice went nut hunting on a cloudy September morning. Organised by Newport City Council, the training session was led by local mammal expert Janice Kinchington, and took place at a GWT Nature Reserve - *Croes Robert Wood* in Monmouthshire. Hunting for dormice-chewed hazelnuts is quite a task when the site is on a hill, and you have mud, deep leaf litter, brambles and fallen branches to contend with. Indeed, our first search spot proved to be a bit of a challenge. Thankfully, our second search spot was much easier. Hundreds of hazelnuts were littered around our feet. Our biggest problem came from identifying what had gnawed each nut - was it squirrel, wood mouse, vole or dormouse?

The workshop was very successful. Everybody learnt much about dormice and by the end of the day felt that they could positively identify the presence of a dormouse from nibbled hazelnuts. I intend to organise many more of these training sessions for a variety of different species in the future. Hopefully, those that attend these courses will undertake surveys that will provide invaluable information on the distribution of species. If you would like to learn more about different species, and are able to survey local areas, join some of these training sessions.

Contact: Rebecca Davies ☎ 01633 232880 📧 rebecca.davies@newport.gov.uk

- **MONMOUTHSHIRE SHOW 2002**

[Jerry Lewis]

Countryside Matters has done it before, and in August they did it again, landing first prize for *Best Stand* at the Monmouthshire Show! Their stand was activity based and used fun and fascinating facts to generate an interest in conservation and the environment. The original *Countryside Matters* partnership came together in 1987 and has appeared at agricultural shows ever since. Organisations attending this year's show were: Coed Cymru, Gwent Bat Group, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Countryside Council for Wales and Monmouthshire County Council Countryside Service. The long-term partnership has reaped major benefits for biodiversity and for all the organisations involved. The most popular feature this year was the new Biodiversity Activity Trail, which attracted hundreds of adults and children. Created by Monmouthshire Countryside wardens (Denis Manning and Mark Langley) and the former LBAP Officer (Georgina Holdsworth), it will now tour the Council's schools as part of Monmouthshire's Environmental Education Programme. Over 10,000 children used the previous trail (based on the Country Code), so it promises to be a very busy time for Denis and Mark! Anyone who would like more information about the trail should contact Mark on 01291 691237. Contact: Jerry Lewis ✉ Monmouthshire County Council, County Hall, Cwmbran ☎ 01633 644 856 📧 jerry.lewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk



Photo 1: The *Countryside Matters* team



Photo 2: Denis Manning and Mark Langley (3rd & 4th from left) display the winning cup and certificate

• **GWENT AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE GROUP**

[www.froglife.fsnet.co.uk]



**Herpetofauna
Groups of
Britain and
Ireland**

The Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (HGBI) is the body that promotes and helps to co-ordinate the work of Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs) in Britain and Ireland. These are groups of volunteers that do much of the herpetological conservation work around the country. Most groups operate at county level.

ARGs are involved in numerous projects, including:

- practical conservation tasks such as restoring and maintaining habitats
- helping with 'Toads on Roads' patrols
- providing education to schools and local groups
- survey work
- maintaining records for sites where species are known to be present
- giving advice to planners and local councils
- keeping a watching brief on planning applications to make sure important sites are not destroyed
- liaising with the police or RSPCA in cases of cruelty

What does the HGBI do? The HGBI, an umbrella group for all the ARGs, has representatives from regions in the UK. They meet annually on a regional and national basis to exchange information on activities and develop policy. This information is collated to provide an overview of the country as a whole, so that the needs of native herps can be assessed. HGBI also provides the ARGs with information leaflets and advice, and produces policies and guidelines for essential work.

A Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group (GARG)? A meeting was held on Tuesday 17th December to discuss a Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group (GARG) with interested parties. The group discussed what they would like to achieve and how it would be done. The majority of attendees were from Newport and it was felt that in order for the group to succeed, representation from the rest of Gwent was required. It was agreed to advertise the group more widely using a variety of publications and established organisations. At the next meeting, a guest speaker from Froglife will be giving a presentation on the role of ARGs and the important work they carry out. If you would like to help the conservation of amphibians and reptiles by joining this group, please contact: Rebecca Davies, Biodiversity Officer, Newport City Council ☎ 01633 232880 ✉ rebecca.davies@newport.gov.uk

Remember: expertise isn't necessary - enthusiasm is!

Further information on ARGs is contained in *The Herpetofauna Workers Guide*, available from Froglife.

• **LBAP BRYOPHYTES IN GWENT: LIVERWORTS**

[Sam Bosanquet]

Following the 2001 and 2002 Recorders' Days, I compiled a Long List of Bryophytes of Conservation Concern in Gwent, which totals at approx. 50 species. This was then whittled down to a Short List of 12 species that are of particular interest or are particularly threatened in the county. One UK BAP species was added as it may still occur here. The aim is to ensure these 13 bryophytes are covered in Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). This article introduces these short list liverworts in order to gain interest and encourage recording of new colonies.

The Gwent Short List:

<i>Phaeoceros carolinianus</i>	Carolina Hornwort	<i>Myrinia pulvinata</i>	Flood-moss
<i>Riccia huebeneriana</i>	Violet Crystalwort**	<i>Orthotrichum sprucei</i>	Spruce s Bristle-moss**
<i>Ricciocarpos natans</i>	Fringed Heartwort	<i>Seligeria campylopoda</i>	Bantfoot Bristle-moss
<i>Anomodon longifolius</i>	Long-leaved Tail-moss	<i>Splachnum ampullaceum</i>	Cruet Collar-moss
<i>Grimmia laevigata</i>	Hoary Grimmia	<i>Splachnum sphaericum</i>	Round-fruited Collar-Moss
<i>Grimmia ovalis</i>	Flat-rock Grimmia	<i>Weissia multicapsularis</i>	Many-fruited Beardless Moss**
<i>Hedwigia ciliata</i>	Fringed Hoar-moss		

Description of three Liverworts:

When people think of liverworts, they tend to think of *Marchantia polymorpha*, a thallose species (i.e. flattened and undifferentiated - without a stem and leaves), which thrives in plant pots. The beginner soon finds out that these only make up about one-fifth of the national liverwort flora and that leafy liverworts (which look rather like flattened, translucent mosses) form the bulk of the 120 or so species we have in Gwent. However, strangely enough, all 3 LBAP species I've selected are thallose!! We do have several rare leafy species (e.g. *Barbilophozia kunzeana* and *Scapania cuspiduligera* nearly made it on to the short list), but these 3 liverworts are slightly more threatened and are easier for non-bryologists to spot.

1. Carolina Hornwort was included in the last issue of this newsletter. No further colonies have been found since then, but this is not surprising for a species found in stubble-fields. This winter I will be visiting several farms that have recently joined the Countryside Council for Wales Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme, to check stubble fields that the owners are being paid to manage. I hope to find Carolina Hornwort on at least some of these farms.

2. Violet Crystalwort looks like 6 or 7 bluey-green 'Y's arranged in a 7mm diameter rosette, with the base of the 'Y' in the centre of the circle. The first part of its name comes from a tendency for the violet colour of the rosettes late in the season; the second part from the crystal-like appearance of these little plants. 6 species of crystalwort have been recorded in Gwent, the commonest two (*Riccia glauca* and *R. sorocarpa*) occur in arable fields at scattered sites across the county and the rarest (*R. crozalsii*) was recorded once in the late 19th century.



Violet Crystalwort grows on the exposed margins of reservoirs when water levels are low. It is known from about 25 sites in Britain with a concentration in the Brecon Beacons. There is one significant other species which leads to some confusion: the Blue Crystalwort (*Riccia cavernosa*), which also grows on reservoir margins, but is distinguished by its larger thalli and as less Y-shaped and spongier. The county's only colony is at Llandegfedd Reservoir where I estimated more than 1.5 million rosettes in August 2002! The dry weather in September/October 2002 has led to low water levels in many parts of South Wales and has provided the perfect opportunity to try to add Violet Crystalwort to the Gwent flora. I hope to search the county's reservoirs some time in October. **If anyone knows of a reservoir with low water levels I'd be pleased to hear from you; likewise anyone who wants to join me Crystalwort hunting would be most welcome!**

3. Fringed Heartwort is closely related to the Crystalworts and has an even more bizarre life history. It spends the summer floating on the surface of ditches and pools, sinking to the bottom in the autumn to hibernate. Parts that don't rot resurface in the spring to start growing again. It never fruits in Britain, reproducing asexually by moving around on the feet and feathers of waterfowl.



The first part of the name comes from the fringe of blackish ventral scales that hang down from the thallus; the second part from its overall shape. These little hearts are about 5mm across and sometimes aggregate together into rosettes a bit like a Crystalwort. They have only been spotted once in Gwent, as far as I know, in a reed at Magor by B & C Scotter in 1973. There is only one other floating liverwort in Monmouthshire: *Riccia fluitans* Floating Crystalwort has much longer, narrower thalli that usually weave together into

rather shiny, light green mats. This species has also been recorded at Magor (by George Garlick in 1981) and has a second county site in a reed bed behind the CCW office at St Mellons. I have never seen either of these floating liverworts on the levels despite a fair bit of searching. If anyone finds either of them I would be very pleased to receive details. Contact: Sam Bosanquet, British Bryological Society recorder for VC35 ☒ c/o Dingestow Court, Monmouth, Gwent, NP25 4DY ☎ 01437 771 300
✉ S.Bosanquet@ccw.gov.uk

• **RIVER MONNOW AND LOWER WYE TRIBUTARIES**

[Stephanie Tyler]

In 1978 and 1979 I began surveys of river birds, notably dippers and grey wagtails, along the River Monnow from the Black Mountains to Monmouth, and on the lower Wye tributaries, notably the River Trothy, White Brook and Angidy Brook. Although I regularly visited nest sites during the 1980s and early 1990s, I decided to carry out a full survey this year (2002). I walked the Monnow from Craswall to Monmouth, the lower Wye from the Hereford border to Brockweir, the lower Trothy, all the Angiddy Brook and Mally Brook, as well as spot checks on the White Brook and Mork Brook (the latter into Gloucestershire). I walked most of the sections two or three times.

Birds: **Dipper** territories were found at all the sites where they were previously recorded in the late 1970s and in the early 1980s, with a few notable exceptions. On the Monnow (20 territories) dippers were absent during the breeding season from the lowermost reaches at former sites at Tregate Bridge, Rockfield, The Forge at Osbaston and at Monmouth (in the walls below the old Post Office). They were also absent from several traditional sites on the lower Trothy and lower Mally Brook. This may be linked to recent high water levels in spring and high turbidity (high silt loads due to run off from ploughed farmland). Such conditions make it difficult for dippers to find aquatic prey, as they hunt by sight, preferably in clear shallow water. The high silt loads may adversely affect preferred prey, smothering caddis fly larvae and mayfly nymphs on rocks on the riverbed (?). If spates and high spring water levels become the norm through global warming, dippers may contract to the headwaters where spates are less dramatic and there is less run off (moorland). One of eight territories on the Angidy Brook near Ravensnest ponds was also vacant, but this was possibly due to disturbance and fishery works.

Grey Wagtails, by contrast, were every bit as abundant as 20 years ago, being present at all regular sites bar one, and on numerous tiny side tributaries. Almost 40 pairs were found within the study area. Despite national concern about declines expressed by the British Ornithological Society (BTO), grey wagtails are no cause for concern in Monmouthshire. However, the migrant yellow wagtail was scarce, with only two territories along the Monnow Valley and absent from many former sites. Many pairs were located away from the valley in arable fields – onion fields, wheat fields, flax fields. So yellow wagtails appear to have moved from old flood pastures in the valleys to farmland habitats, rather than suffering any decline. Around 8 **kingfisher** territories and three nests were found on the river Monnow. Another territory, possibly two, were found on the lower Trothy and another on the Mally Brook. Birds were also seen on the lower Wye near Redbrook, near the White Brook confluence and on the Angiddy Brook. Kingfishers have quite long territories of 3 – 6 km, so pairs on the Monnow are reasonably packed. **Common sandpipers** had a bad season due to the high water levels in late May when they should have been sitting on nests on river shoals. Most of the shoals apart from the middle and upper Monnow were under water at this time. However, 7 territories were located at Llangula to near Longtown on the national border. If there are no spring floods in spring 2003, pairs may nest further downriver at old haunts near Kentchurch, Grosmont or between Skenfrith and Tregate Bridge. One excitement was the discovery of a female **goosander** with a brood of six ducklings on the middle Monnow, the first breeding record of this beautiful sawbill duck on this river. Several pairs have bred on the Usk in Monmouthshire (Gwent) for nearly 30 years. Other birds included growing numbers of **canada geese**; several pairs of **mute swans**; numerous **mallard**, c. 230 pairs of **sand martins**, colonies of which were harried by **sparrowhawks** and **hobbies**; **piebald wagtails** and two pairs each on the Monnow of **sedge warblers** and **reed buntings**.

Mammals: Apart from **rabbits** and **grey squirrels**, mammals were not over-abundant, but I did see **mink** and one memorable May afternoon I disturbed an **otter**.

Plants: Occasional remnants of species-rich grassland on the valley sides and the superb spikes of viper s bugloss were noted sporadically down the river. This spectacular flower is listed in Trevor Evans' *Rare Plants Inventory for Monmouthshire VC35*, as it is very restricted, occurring in a few patches along the Monnow. In addition to plant hunting in the Monnow Valley, I have been liaising with Trevor Evans over some of the species listed in the *Rare Plant Register* and over potential candidates for this list. Both Trevor and Colin Titcombe, in particular, and I have been actively re-checking many old sites for rarities such as **oak fern**, **greater butterfly orchid**, the beautiful **spreading bellflower** and **wood chickweed**. We considered added **flowering rush** to the list of rarities as it has declined dramatically in reens on the Gwent Levels, possibly because of the general low water level maintained in the reens. I then found plants growing by the Wye between Redbrook and Whitebrook and through binoculars from Bigsweir Bridge found three more clumps! Trevor then found about 100 plants around Hendre Lake near Cardiff. Not to be outdone I surveyed a 2km stretch of the Wye between Redbrook and Lixox Wood towards Monmouth and located 141 clumps! Fortunately, therefore, we can safely say that flowering rush is not yet a rarity.

More recently Trevor has been locating scarce arable plants. Heather Colls reported **sharp-leaved fluellen**, *Kicksia elatine*, growing near Middle Hendre, Monmouth, and subsequent visits by Heather, Trevor and I revealed not only masses of the fluellen plants, but also the very rare **lesser quaking grass**, *Briza minor*, **scarce buttercups**, *Ranunculus marginatus* and **small toadflax**. Trevor visited other arable fields across the county and re-found the other fluellen *Kicksia spuria* near Kilpale and in one field, numerous **field woundworts**, *Stachys arvensis*. All these old cornfield weeds are sadly, rapidly disappearing.

Important flower-rich grasslands too are still disappearing. This is now less through agricultural improvements than through neglect or lack of grazing. Bracken, bramble and scrub are invading many steep species-rich pastures in the Wye Valley. I was particularly saddened to find this summer that one wonderful area of acid grassland and mire at Pen-y-van near The Narth, that I surveyed back in 1979, was rapidly disappearing under brambles, gorse and young trees. This small site is hugely important for its diversity of plants, notably the **ivy-leaved bellflower**, *Wahlenbergia hederacea* and **marsh St Johns wort**, *Hypericum elodes*, because it is the only known location for these species in eastern Gwent. Another locally important boggy area at The Narth, once a site for **bog asphodel**, *Nartheicum ossifragum*, is also suffering the same fate. The possible formation of a local group in Whitebrook to encourage appropriate management of flower-rich grasslands in this area of the Wye Valley is an exciting new initiative, based on the success of a group across the Wye on St Briavels Common, England.

Contact: Stephanie Tyler ☒ steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

- **CORS CRYCHYDD REEN** [Linda Nottage]
A few years ago Cardiff County Council planners and engineers created a new reen to the east of the Lamby Way tip and the River Rhymney. Footpaths alongside this new waterway eventually (about a mile) lead to the Severn Estuary. On a recent visit in September the fringing vegetation and floating frogbit was well developed and it was encouraging to see at least 3 families of little grebes with broods of 2-3 well-grown young still being fed by the parents, plus moorhen and coot families. As the Ecologist for Cardiff CC, Vaughan Grantham, suggests, this indicates a current absence of the predatory mink. There were also an adult pair of mute swans without cygnets, a kingfisher, which put in a brief appearance and 15 or more goldfinches, which took advantage of abundant weed seeds. Migrant birds in the area included whinchat, redstart, swallow and sand martin. The fresh easterly wind depressed dragonfly activity, but common darter and migrant hawk were seen. Butterflies included small white, small copper, common blue, small tortoiseshell and meadow brown. The silver Y moth and lesser marsh grasshopper added to the insect tally. If you have the chance, this reen and the newly created angling lake on the other side of Lamby Way are well worth a visit.
Contact: Linda and Rob Nottage, Cardiff's Naturalist Society ☒ linda@nottages.freeserve.co.uk
- **IN SEARCH OF THE ELUSIVE LESSER EARWIG (*Labia minor*)** [Steve Williams]
The round up of orthoptera highlights for 2001 that appeared in the last edition of this newsletter mentioned Sam Bosanquet's new county record for the lesser earwig. If my memory serves me right this

earwig was attracted to light and subsequently netted by Sam while out moth tapping one evening. A report in the national newsletter of the orthoptera recording scheme sheds light on an easier and more productive field technique for recording this species.

Specific surveys were conducted in Hertfordshire, Somerset and just over the county boundary in Gloucestershire. The result of the study was remarkable, every 10km square within the three-targeted counties were found to contain the lesser earwig. The technique employed to locate the hitherto elusive earwig involved digging into, or turning over the surface of, dung heaps to a depth of about six to twelve inches. These dung heaps, which are best composed of horse dung and straw, are commonly found in rural and suburban areas and are often accessible due to their close proximity to roads or public footpaths. A trowel and a pair of gloves might be considered essential field equipment, but in their absence and faced with the prospect of a new 10km record, bare hands could be employed to dig deep but wash hands before that packed lunch afterwards! On the basis of this fieldwork it is reasonable to expect that a local search could produce a similar result in Gwent. There are only ten 10km square records for the lesser earwig in Wales, and the result of this survey clearly illustrates the scope for adding more records and building a better understanding of the earwig's true distribution.

Contact: Steve Williams, Orthoptera Recorder ☒ 8 Snatchwood Terrace, Abersychan, Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 7BP ☎ 01495 774 658 ✉ steven71596@aol.com The national orthoptera newsletter is now available on line at: <http://www.brc.ac.uk/downloads/OrthopteraNewsletter28.pdf>

• **WINTER MAMMAL MONITORING PROJECT** [The Mammal Society]

Volunteers required for the Mammal Society's Winter Mammal Monitoring Project

This is a pilot mammal monitoring project run jointly by The Mammal Society and the British Trust for Ornithology, and funded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Volunteers are required to take part in its second year between October 2002 and March 2003. They will be asked to survey 1km squares, somewhere near their home, for signs (footprints, droppings, feeding remains) and sightings of mammals. No prior experience is necessary, but it would be helpful if volunteers can identify all British land mammals and their signs. However, if not, the society will be supplying relevant information, but also suggest investing in a good field guide! You can read about the project, and get full details on-line at: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/winter_m_m_volunteers.htm or:

www.mammal.org.uk To sign up now contact: The Mammal Society ☒ 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG ☎ 020 7498 4358 Fax: 020 7622 8722 ✉ enquiries@mammal.org.uk

The Mammal Society is the voice for British mammals and the only organisation solely dedicated to the study and conservation of British mammals.

• **KNOW YOUR VOLE** [Wildlife Trust press release: 14th October 2002]

The UK's fastest declining mammal the water vole, faces a further threat to its survival due to a significant number of cases of mistaken identity. A new initiative "Know Your Vole" was launched on 14th October 2002 by The Wildlife Trusts, which aims to halt the further decline of the water vole and help the species recover across its former range. Many people mistake the endangered water vole for the brown rat and accidentally poison them or disturb their homes. Water voles have disappeared from almost 90% of the sites they occupied in the UK in the last 60 years due to the loss of their riverbank homes and being preyed upon by the non-native American mink.

The "Know Your Vole" initiative is one of several Wildlife Trust projects to help the recovery of the water vole, by raising awareness of its characteristics and getting people to take an active part in reporting any discoveries of the vole to the Wildlife Trusts. The Trusts will provide identification guidelines for the general public, whilst providing technical information on identification to pest control professionals and developers to avoid further cases of mistaken identity.

When is a water vole really a water vole? There are some very clear characteristics to distinguish a water vole from a rat. The water vole has **small hidden ears** (*the rat: large ears*), **silky mid-brown fur** (*the rat: grey brown fur*), a **blunt nose** (*the rat: a pointed nose*) and a **shorter furry tail** (*the rat: long, pink, scaly and hairless*

tail). Water voles feed on waterside vegetation whereas rats are opportunist feeders and will eat a variety of food.

How can you help? The Wildlife Trust are calling members of the public to inform their local Wildlife Trust when they spot a water vole information, including where the water vole was seen, the name of the nearest village/town, the date and the observer's contact details, should be recorded on a 'Know Your Vole' postcard. These are available by sending an A5 SAE to: **The Wildlife Trusts, Waterside, Mather Road, Nottinghamshire, NG24 1WT** or by recording the details on the website of the Wildlife Trusts: www.wildlifetrusts.org

- **BEE IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP**

[Mark Pavett]

Following on from the successful workshops held in previous years, a bee (genus *Andrena*) identification workshop is being held at the National Museum of Wales on Saturday 1st March 2003. The workshop will begin at 10.30am and finish around 4.30pm and will be led by Mike Edwards. A meal can be bought at the restaurant in the museum or a pub, etc. can be visited in Cardiff. If you have your own microscope and/or light could you please bring them? If not, then we will do our best to provide you with one at the museum. Our **Annual Field Meeting** will take place on Saturday 28th June 2003 at Overton on the Gower (same site as last year). Hopefully, as well as learning about aculeates we will be able to generate some records for this important site. We will also be joined by some of the wardens of the Gower. We will meet at 10.30 am at Overton SS.460851 (marked on pathfinder 1126).

If you are interested in attending either of these please contact: Mark Pavett ✉ National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff ☎ 029 20573122 or ✉ mark.pavett@nmgw.ac.uk

- **EVENTS**

RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 2003

Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th January

To take part you need a Big Garden Birdwatch 2003 form available from:

RSPB Cymru, Sutherland House, Castlebridge, Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff, CF11 9AB
029 2035 3000

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

World Wetlands Day (RAMSAR)

Sunday 2nd February 2003

<http://www.naturenet.net>

National Nestbox Week

Begins on Valentine's Day every year: Friday 14th February 2003

The aim is to get as many people as possible to put up nest boxes in order to help breeding birds and other wildlife. This year BTO are paying particular attention to the House Sparrow, which has been in serious decline for a number of years.

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU
01842 750030

info@bto.org

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

World Day for Water (UNESCO)

Saturday 22nd March 2003

<http://www.naturenet.net>

National Moth Night

Saturday 12th April 2003

Gwent Recorders Newsletter Winter 2002/03

This is jointly organised by *Atropos* and *InsectLine* and it is hoped that raising awareness will encourage the general public to understand more about these usually elusive creatures and maybe even encourage people to start recording for themselves. For the more serious enthusiast there are two target species for 2003, intended to give an emphasis to some of the more important under recorded species, recording at particular times of year or in particular habitats can bring in some significant records. For 2003 these will be the **Orange Upperwing** *Jodia croceago* and **the Sword-grass** *Xylena exsoleta*. To make it even more interesting there are even a number of prizes offered for different categories such as the most unusual location at which moths were trapped!

<http://www.nationalmothnight.org/>

<http://www.insectline.co.uk>

<http://www.atroposuk.co.uk/>

International Dawn Chorus Day

Sunday 4th May 2003 (first Sunday in May every year)

www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/wtsww/events.htm

Be Nice to Nettles Week

21 - 30th May 2003

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

Backyard Biodiversity Day

Friday 20th June 2003

The purpose of this day is to:

- Encourage young people (and their teachers, youth leaders and parents), to look for and record a range of wild organisms in very local habitats such as gardens, school grounds, parks, roadsides.
- Invite young people and their teachers, youth leaders and parents, to take part in a national survey of a limited number of 10 common plants and animals. This survey to provide a data set that can be used for various purposes by schools.
- Stimulate a wider appreciation of local biodiversity through school assemblies, drama, writing, environmental work and other activities at school on that day.
- Initiate longer-term activities such as keeping a nature diary.
- Provide a starting point for longer investigations of a scientific nature.

Website: <http://www.biodiversityday.org/>

No details on the website as yet for Backyard Biodiversity Day 2003, if you would like to receive notification please email: abe@gondar.co.uk

Beachwatch 2003

Saturday 20th & Sunday 21st September 2003

Beachwatch is an annual event which takes place on the 3rd weekend of September every year. Thousands of volunteers from all across the UK visit their chosen beach, remove all the litter from it and record what they find. Through these efforts, the Marine Conservation Society can monitor litter on Britain's beaches, raises awareness of the issue of marine debris, and encourage action to reduce marine pollution at source.

Website: <http://www.mcsuk.org/>

1. YOUR CONTACT DETAILS

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Post Code: _____

Tel No: _____ Fax No: _____

Email: _____

(please include your email address for sustainable distribution)

2. ARTICLES

I would like to write an article for the next issue of the newsletter on: _____

NB. Deadline for articles is: Friday 27th June 2003

3. RECIPIENTS

Do you know anyone who would like to receive the newsletter?

If so, please include their details below:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel No (optional): _____

Email: _____

(please include an email address for sustainable distribution)

THANK YOU

Please return to:

Melanie Sutherland, Biodiversity Assistant, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Countryside and Landscape Service, Council Offices, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP12 2YW