

Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter

Issue 31
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SEWBReC

SOUTH EAST WALES BIODIVERSITY RECORDS CENTRE
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Front page photo: Annual Beard Grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* © Martyn Jones. Find out more on page 6.

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Welcome to the 31st edition of the Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Newsletter.

As we're coming to the end of our 20th year at SEWBRcC, we have lots to celebrate. Significant milestones have been reached with wildlife organisations signing data sharing agreements with Local Environmental Records Centres in Wales (page 4).

Some recent SEWBRcC Recording Grants have gone to *Road to Nature* for a microscope and screen setup perfect for nature outreach events (page 16) and Andrew McGleish for a Solitary Bees identification course (page 17).

Other opportunities come in the form of a call for a volunteer assistant for the Monmouthshire Dragonfly Atlas (page 12), plus a new award for young birders from Glamorgan Bird Club's Robert Bradshaw Award (also on page 12). And book now for the Welsh Ornithological Society conference on the 16th November (page 31).

Articles in this issue jump from White-tailed Eagles, to marine worms, to bees, galls and leaf miners. Repeating themes also arise such as the decline in Curlews highlighted by Verity on page 13 and echoed by Colin's historical notes on page 20.

Katherine Slade, SEWBRcC (Editor)



Plant Galls of Pant Marsh

Jon Mortin, Biodiversity Information Officer,
SEWBRcC

The final BioBlitz of 2024 organised by SEWBRcC was held at Pant Marsh in Pontyclun, Rhondda Cynon Taf on 28th September. Around 30 recorders attended on a glorious sunny day. A data search on Aderyn revealed that no plant galls had been recorded previously at the site so it was just as well that one of the four organised walks would focus on trying to find as many as possible!

Plant galls can be found on most vascular plants and can be induced by various organisms including gall wasps, gall midges, gall mites, some sawflies and fungi. Some galls are fairly easy to spot at the right time of year (such as those on leaves) but others are harder to spot (for example those only found on the roots!).

So the eager band of gall spotters set off to see what we could find. Fairly quickly we spotted Violet Bramble Rust (*Phragmidium violaceum*), Nettle Pouch Gall Midge (*Dasineura urticae*) and two galls on Meadowsweet also caused by gall midges (*Dasineura ulmaria* and *Dasineura pustulans*).

We then headed over to the trees which are generally good for gall finds. On oak we found Artichoke Galls, Common Spangle Galls, Silk Button Spangle Galls and Cola Nut Galls (*Andricus lignicola*) (all caused by gall wasps).

On Alder we found galls of *Acalitus brevitarsus* (a gall mite) and a rust gall (*Melampsorium*). Heading back we spotted galls on Creeping Thistle caused by the Thistle Gall Fly (*Urophora cardui*) and an interesting gall on willow (*Rabdophaga salicis*). Other galls seen included *Taphrina tosquinetii* on Alder, *Aceria macrochela* on Field Maple and Pale Bramble Rust (*Kuehneola uredinis*). So overall 15 plant galls were recorded from Pant Marsh on the day, all new records for the site.

Thanks to everyone who helped in the search!



Oak Artichoke Gall
(*Andricus foecundatrix*)



Galls on Meadowsweet caused by
the Gall Midge *Dasineura ulmaria*



Violet Bramble Rust
(*Phragmidium violaceum*)



Silk Button (*Neuroterus numismalis*) and Common Spangle
Galls (*Neuroterus quercusbaccarum*) on Oak



Roger James 1945—2024

We were greatly saddened to hear of the death of our former Director, Roger James, at the end of July. Our condolences go to his wife Julia and two sons Jeff and Martin.

Roger had a huge influence on nature conservation in south Wales performing many roles including Chair of the Newport City Council's Local Biodiversity Partnership, President Emeritus of Gwent Wildlife Trust, Chair of the Wildlife in Newport Group (Wing) and Chair of the Monmouthshire Moth & Butterfly Group.

He was a valued member of the SEWBReC board of directors from 2010 to 2019. His contribution to the board was marked by his wisdom, his sharp wit, his practical common sense approach, and a deep passion for wildlife.

His enthusiasm for nature was contagious, and he never hesitated to share his expertise with novices and specialists alike.

All-Wales Data Exchange Agreements

Reproduced from "On the Record" by Cofnod

[LERC Wales](#) staff have been working closely together over the last few years on a number of all-Wales Data Exchange Agreements. A couple have been signed over the last few months, with [Amphibian and Reptile Conservation](#) and the [RSPB](#). We are about to sign another one with [Bat Conservation Trust](#) and we've had ongoing discussions with other National Schemes and Societies including [Butterfly Conservation](#) and the [British Trust for Ornithology](#).

Data can, of course, be shared without formal agreements and indeed it often is, whether locally or from national organisations or online recording databases. But sometimes it is sensible to set out the terms of what each signatory can and cannot do with the others' data and the practical details of how and when we should supply data to each other. Avoiding unnecessary duplication where possible is also important in today's increasingly complex web of biological data flows. Agreeing this across four LERCs at once is a sensible way of saving time and effort, both for us and for the National Scheme or Society.

Our agreement with the RSPB made the latest edition of [NBN Network News](#) and will, we hope, inspire many others.



8 September 2024

RSPB and LERC Wales data sharing agreement

In a first for the RSPB, a data sharing agreement has been signed with LERC Wales to ensure that wildlife data works harder for nature...

Image © National Biodiversity Network

New fungi species to UK

Mark Steer, Glamorgan Fungus Group

I have found a fungus over the last few years that I was hesitant to go further than genus - *Hydnum* species. Most field guides list 4 species in UK but I was aware that potentially at least 2 other species had been recently identified in UK.

In 2022 I posted photos on the [Glamorgan Fungus Group's Facebook page](#), and had a comment from Geoffrey Kibby that this looked interesting. He suspected that this might be an example of a species that had only been identified recently in a very few locations in UK. Geoffrey asked me to send him a specimen. I obtained the land owner's permission and collected a specimen which I dried.

On receipt of the specimen Geoffrey advised that this certainly was potentially one of the newer species and that he would submit it to Kew. After a few months I was advised by Martyn Ainsworth at Kew that DNA sequencing had been carried out. This proved to be a good match (identical to sequence from holotype HE611086) to a recently described new species - *Hydnum ibericum*.

This new to science species was described in [Mycologia 2018 p.899](#) from Spain. The morphology of this species is very similar to *H. vesteroltii* and would need ITS sequence data for reliable identification.

So my specimen was the first record for the UK for this species!

Location was in Glamorgan, vice county 41, under mainly Hazel with Oak, Hawthorn and Holly within 5 metres and Ivy ground cover on coal spoil. The Spanish collections were from under *Abies alba* and *Pinus sylvestris* on rich ground. Probably this species will in due course be found in other locations in UK.



All photos © Mark Steer

Some botanical gems in 2024

Stephanie Tyler and Elsa Wood,
Joint vice-county recorders for
Monmouthshire

In Monmouthshire there were two new vice-county 35 records in 2024. Firstly, Slender Oat *Avena barbata* was noticed by John Poland between the Coldra roundabout and the tunnels when travelling along the M4 through Newport on 5 July to attend the BSBI Welsh AGM and field meetings! This grass apparently favours central reservations of motorways and dual carriageways. Then in August, Steph Tyler (SJT) and Elsa Wood (EW) found Northern Yellow-cress *Rorippa islandica* at the edge of a path up to the coal tip at Bedwas near Lower Machen.

During an April meeting of the Monmouthshire Botany Group at Coppice Mawr Wood west of Chepstow, among other good finds, were clumps of Fingered Sedge *Carex digitata*. This was the first record of this species outside the Wye Valley in the vice county and a new hectad record for ST49. The wood and edge of the Mounton Brook produced lots of other interesting plants that day.

Five flowering spikes of Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* (image above) were found in the far west of the county in Cefn Golau Cemetery near Tredegar by Becky Ward, Nadine Morgan and Sheryl Edwards. This is well away from its stronghold in the east and again a new hectad record.

It was the first spring that has been wet enough for the vegetation at Sudbrook on the Severn Estuary not to be dried to a crisp and a large area of Subterranean Clover *Trifolium subterraneum*, 7m x 20m was re-found by Mike Ogden (image opposite) and subsequently by EW. The Rough Clover *T. scabra* and Knotted Clover *T. striatum* were also flowering well on the cliff top. In the pavements of Sudbrook village there were plants of Early Meadow-grass *Poa infirma*, Sea Fern-grass *Catapodium marinum* and Water Bent *Polypogon viridis*, the latter widespread in towns throughout the vice county. The Goldcliff record for *Trifolium orthithopioides* (Bird's-foot Clover) in 2001 was relocated by EW, AW and SJT both on the sea wall in two tetrads and on the track below the sea wall; abundant in both places. There was also a new record of Distant Sedge *Carex distans* located beside the track below the sea wall.

In an attempt to re-find Ty-to-Maen marsh mentioned in Trevor Evans' 2007 flora, SJT and EW found several plants of Leopard Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* var *junonialis* in an adjacent field. Sadly, the marsh has suffered from willow and scrub encroachment and many species mentioned by Trevor had apparently disappeared.

A trip by the Monmouthshire Botany Group to the National Nature Reserve at Cwm Coed-y-Cerrig north-west of Abergavenny, revealed a stand of Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata*, the former seems not to have been recorded there before. Unfortunately, Marsh Fern *Thelypteris palustris* last seen in 2003 was not re-found. SJT and EW obtained permission a week or so later from a farmer to visit a small wetland not far from Cwm Coed y cerrig which SJT had seen in 2012 and were very pleasantly surprised by finding a floating *Sphagnum* carpet with many tussocks of Hare's-ear Cotton Grass *Eriophorum vaginatum* under a light Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* canopy; this quaking bog habitat is very rare in lowland Monmouthshire; there was deeper water with Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and other interesting species and an open marsh adjacent to fields. In August Adrian Wood and SJT re-found a lovely clearing above Cwm Coed y Cerrig with much Betony and Devil's-bit Scabious but of particular note, was a



Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*, Golau Cemetery near Tredegar © Becky Ward and Nadine Morgan



Knotted Clover *Trifolium striatum* at Sudbrook © Mike Ogden

surviving population of Broad-leaved Cotton Grass *Eriophorum latifolia*, first found there in 1990 and last recorded in 2002.

During 2024 Martyn Jones again monitored the population of Orange Balsam *Impatiens capensis* in reens west of Newport and also the very large population of Marsh Helleborines *Epipactis palustris* at the old Alpha Steel lagoons. Whilst at the last site he recorded Annual Beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* too (image right and front cover). We now have records of this attractive alien grass in 16 tetrads, all but three on the low-lying Levels. In June Anthon y O'Leary found the very rare Pennyroyal *Mentha pulegium* near the Rhymney estuary.

Another excitement was Lowri Watkins finding Wild Licorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos* at Rogiet Poor Land in late July (image overleaf). This is only the second extant record of the species in the vice-county, the other being at Llanmelin Hill Fort. Many years ago, Trevor Evans and Colin Titcombe had rescued a patch of this rare species from a track in Slade/Minnetts Wood which was about to be re-surfaced. They grew on plants in their gardens and one of the sites where plants were re-located was Rogiet Common aka Rogiet Poor Land. EW remembers plants there in the 1990s before Gwent Wildlife Trust acquired the land



Annual Beard Grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* © Martyn Jones



Wild Licorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos* at Rogiet Poor Land in July © Lowri Watkins

as a nature reserve but since then Wild Licorice had not been seen until 2024 when Lowri found a large patch of it.

Then in August Lauri MacLean found Lesser Centaury *Centaureum pulchellum* on a track at Broadmeend near Trellech. It had probably been accidentally introduced from other sites during repairs to the forest tracks but was the first record for SO50 within Monmouthshire.

In many meadows in eastern Monmouthshire *Euphrasia rostkoviana* (Rostkov's Eyebright) has had an amazing year with huge widespread patches where formerly it was quite restricted. By contrast, *Rhinanthus minor* (Yellow Rattle) has much diminished in some meadows.

Visits to various waterbodies in August and September showed that Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) is still thriving at Wentwood Reservoir and Waun y Pound ponds near Beaufort. Stoneworts were found including *Chara globularis* at Bryn Bach lake and *Nitella flexilis* at Waun y Pound ponds, where Horned Pondweed *Zannicellia palustris* was also seen by Tim Oliver, EW and SJT. Otherwise, the waters were dominated by aliens – Curly Pondweed *Lagarosiphon major* and both species of pondweed *Elodea canadensis* and *E. nuttallii*, as well as New Zealand Pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii* at Waun y Pound. A visit to a small pond at Gallows Green near Cwmavon revealed that Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, found originally by Trevor Evans, was still thriving despite the pond being almost dry in September.

After a productive visit to a large pond near Newcastle, SJT and EW noticed in the distance a field of sunflowers. They were able to eventually find this field and were pleased to identify much Gold of Pleasure *Camelina sativa*, a distinctive crucifer, growing with the Sunflowers. Whether these were the result of seed contamination or a deliberate crop is not known.

Excursions onto the uplands near Bal Mawr and Bal Bach between the Grwyne Fawr and Llanthony valleys between July and September were rewarding with many species found in the flushes alongside small streams. On a joint visit with Glamorgan Botany Group and Monmouthshire Botany Group around New Tredegar, Ivy-leaved Bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederifolia* was found in two flushes.

Sabellaria alveolata: An Insight into the Honeycomb Worm

Paul Challinor

Introduction

In my naivety I used to consider reefs as only occurring in tropical water created by corals and bejewelled with brightly coloured fish and sea anemones. But as I got older, not necessarily wiser according to the family, I have learnt that there is more to see than tropical reefs. Recently undersea exploration has shown that reefs can occur in colder waters as well, with a mile long reef recently discovered off the eastern seaboard of England. But today we'll look at a different reef, one created by a single creature, often to the exclusion of everything else. If you go down to the beach anytime of year you may come across large formations of sandy mounds created by the Honeycomb Worm - *Sabellaria alveolata*.



A large reef created on the rocks of Ogmores Beach

Sabellaria alveolata, commonly known as the honeycomb worm, is a fascinating marine polychaete worm that plays an essential role in coastal ecosystems. Known for its ability to create reef-like structures, this species is most recognisable for the intricate honeycomb-patterned tubes it constructs from sand and shell fragments. These formations create complex, biodiverse habitats for a variety of other marine species. Found predominantly along the Atlantic coasts of Europe, *Sabellaria alveolata* is especially significant to the UK, where its reefs are often prominent along the western coastline. Ogmores is perhaps the best beach I've found in south Wales, but it can also be seen on the Gower Coast as well.

Morphology

Sabellaria alveolata typically reaches up to 30–40 mm in length and has a segmented, cylindrical body. Like other polychaetes, it is divided into three main regions: the head, trunk, and pygidium. The head has specialised appendages such as palps and tentacles, used for feeding and sensory functions. Its body is covered with bristles, or chaetae, that assist in locomotion and protection.

The most distinctive aspect of *S. alveolata* is its tube-building behaviour. The worm secretes mucus to bind together sand grains and shell fragments, creating protective tubes. When these tubes are clustered together, they form large, honeycomb-like reefs, some extending over vast areas of rocky or sandy shorelines.

Life Cycle

Sabellaria alveolata is dioecious, that is there are separate male and female genders. When the worms are mature, the abdomen of the female becomes bright pink or violet, because of the colour of the eggs. Reproduction occurs in July when the worms spawn en masse. Once fertilised the larvae are small measuring about 80 µm and spend up to 9 months in the plankton. During this time they are subject to currents which help disperse the species across various regions. After this period larvae are strongly stimulated to settle by the presence of existing colonies or the remains of dead ones.

Once the larvae mature and reach a suitable settlement stage, they sink to the seabed and begin constructing their characteristic tubes using the surrounding sediment. The larvae select areas where adult worms are already present, known as gregarious settlement, which allows them to benefit from existing reefs. As they grow, they continue building and reinforcing their tubes, reaching full maturity within a year or so. Adult worms can live up to several years, depending on environmental conditions.

Habitat

Sabellaria alveolata is typically found in the intertidal zone, favouring areas with strong wave action and an ample supply of sediment. Its preference for exposed shores with a good balance of sand and rock allows it to construct reefs on hard substrates such as rocky outcrops or artificial structures like seawalls. Ogmores provides all of these factors, a wide sandy beach backed by the conglomerate rocks of ancient river systems.

These reefs are highly dynamic, often expanding and contracting in response to changes in sediment supply, tidal patterns, and wave energy. In the UK, they are especially abundant along the western coasts, such as in Wales, Cumbria, and parts of south-west England, particularly in locations with a mixture of sand and gravel beaches.

Food

As a filter feeder, *Sabellaria alveolata* consumes organic particles suspended in the water, including plankton and detritus. The worm uses its tentacles to capture food particles from the water column, filtering them through its mouth. This feeding strategy relies heavily on water movement, which is why the species thrives in areas with strong currents and wave action that continually supply fresh particles.

Predators

While the tough sand tubes provide some protection, *Sabellaria alveolata* is still vulnerable to a variety of predators. Common predators include crabs, starfish, and certain species of fish, all of which are able to break into the tubes to reach the worms. Birds such as Oystercatchers may also feed on *Sabellaria* reefs, especially at low tide when the structures are exposed. Human activities such as trampling and harvesting can also negatively affect reef populations, particularly in heavily visited coastal areas.



Extensive reefs of *Sabellaria alveolata* at Ogmore

Population and Distribution in the UK

In the UK, *Sabellaria alveolata* is distributed primarily along the western and southern coasts, with significant populations found in Wales (e.g., Burry Inlet and the Gower Peninsula), the north-west coast (Morecambe Bay, Cumbria), and the Severn Estuary. It also occurs in parts of the south-west of England, particularly in Devon and Cornwall.

Reef development and density can vary widely depending on local environmental factors, including sediment availability, tidal exposure, and human interference. In areas with ideal conditions, *Sabellaria* reefs can span several kilometres. While populations remain relatively stable in many areas, the species is sensitive to environmental disturbances, and some UK populations are under threat from habitat degradation, climate change, and coastal development.

Conservation efforts in the UK focus on monitoring these reef systems, as they are important for both biodiversity and coastal protection. In some locations, *Sabellaria* reefs act as natural barriers, reducing erosion and providing habitats for various species of invertebrates, fish, and marine plants.

Etymology of the Binomial Name

The binomial name *Sabellaria alveolata* originates from Latin. “Sabellaria” is derived from “sabellum,” meaning “sand,” which refers to the worm’s remarkable ability to build its tubes from sand grains. The species epithet “alveolata” refers to the honeycomb-like appearance of the reef structures, with “alveolus” meaning “small cavity” or “hollow,” a reference to the individual compartments within the reef. Together, the name encapsulates the worm’s sand-based tube-building and the characteristic shape of its reef formations.



A close up view of the protective sand tubes

Taxonomy

Sabellaria alveolata belongs to the phylum Annelida, class Polychaeta, and family Sabellariidae. Polychaetes, or bristle worms, are a diverse group of segmented worms known for their numerous bristles (chaetae) along their bodies. The family Sabellariidae is characterised by its species' ability to construct tubes from particulate matter, a behaviour particularly notable in *Sabellaria alveolata*.

The species was first described by the French zoologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in 1818. Over the years, its taxonomic placement has remained stable, with little change to its classification within the broader polychaete grouping. *Sabellaria* species are widespread globally, but *S. alveolata* is particularly prominent in temperate regions of the northeastern Atlantic, including the British Isles.

Conclusion

Sabellaria alveolata is a species of great ecological importance along the UK's coastline. Its ability to form complex reef structures not only supports a diverse range of marine life but also offers coastal protection. Understanding the life cycle, habitat preferences, and challenges faced by this species is key to conserving its populations in the face of environmental changes and human impacts.

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Volunteer needed!

Monmouthshire Dragonfly Atlas Assistant

Reproduced from [the British Dragonfly Society website](#)

The [Monmouthshire 2030 Dragonfly Atlas Project](#) was set up in 2020 by Monmouthshire County Dragonfly Recorder Steve Preddy. The aim is to produce Monmouthshire's first dragonfly atlas in 2030. We hope that together we can cover every part of the county and record the dragonflies present, and from these records produce a comprehensive and detailed set of distribution maps.

The project will also help to identify and gather data about important dragonfly sites, which could be used to help with conservation efforts. Steve is now looking for a volunteer assistant to help him complete the second half of the project.

Role description: Encouraging our existing recorders to visit under-recorded areas, finding new recorders to join them, keeping in contact with recorders about their progress, and working with recorders and the project organiser to overcome any unforeseen problems and challenges.

Location: Volunteer can be based anywhere.

Skills required: Strong communication skills, basic computer skills, and a basic understanding of recording dragonflies.

If you would like to find out more please [drop Steve an email via the British Dragonfly Society website](#).



Common Clubtail © Dave Smallshire



Launch of Glamorgan Bird Club's Robert Bradshaw Award

Glamorgan Bird Club are pleased to announce a new award scheme named in honour of former trustee Rob Bradshaw. Rob played a big part in the Club's initiative to encourage more young folk to take up birding. It was therefore thought that a very fitting tribute to Rob would be for the award to recognise the contributions made by younger birders

(under the age of 24) to bird watching or bird conservation in our area.

The Robert Bradshaw Award will be in the form of a £250 voucher or bursary, which might be used by a young birder to enhance their birding experience or support their conservation work. This could be by purchasing birding resources or to help with the costs of attending a birding trip or event.

Although any GBC member may nominate a young birder for the award, the nominee need not necessarily be a Club member. To be eligible the nominee must either reside in East Glamorgan or have carried out their conservation work within this area. Up to one award will be made each year; the opening date for the submission of nominations is October 1st 2024 and the deadline for this inaugural year's nominations is 15th January 2025. The announcement of the 2024/25 Award recipient will be made at the Club AGM, in April 2025.

For further details go to the Glamorgan Bird Club website and scroll down to the [Latest news](#) section. The award guidelines and a nomination form are available from GBC treasurer, Tim Adcock: treasurer@glamorganbirds.org.uk

Gwent's Breeding Curlews 2024

Verity B Picken, Gwent
Ornithological Society



© Gary Howells

Due to the drastic decline in numbers, Curlews are predicted to become extinct as a breeding species in Wales by 2033. The species is now considered the most pressing bird conservation priority in the country and an action plan for their recovery has been set up by Gylfinir Cymru / Curlew Wales. The [Gwent Ornithological Society](#) has been surveying and monitoring breeding Curlews in the county over the last four years.

At least 19, possibly 22, breeding pairs were found in 2024, a similar number to last year. Most territories were in farmland in the north and east of the county but one was on the Usk floodplain and seven were on moorland or on the ridges of Gwent's western valleys.

A few sites which held breeding pairs last year yielded none this year; was there early disturbance, had they moved to a nearby location or had one of the pair died? Other sites clearly held breeding pairs but we were unable to precisely identify the nest field in spite of spending many, many hours watching. To our huge delight these frustrations were offset by finding three nests (scrapes) with eggs and seeing chicks at two further sites.

GOS works with the various organisations set up to conserve Curlews in Wales. Two of our sites fall within ICA 12, one of the twelve Important Curlew Areas designated by Gylfinir Cymru (Curlew Wales), and this year the monitoring of some Gwent sites was shared with Curlew Connections Wales, a three-year project funded by Welsh Government. In early March a number of Gwent volunteers attended a training day run by Curlew Connections in Libanus; the topics covered included survey methods, monitoring and nest finding. Ten of us returned in April when Andy King kindly demonstrated how to erect the electric fences provided by the Welsh Government Nature Networks funding scheme via NRW.

One of the shared sites was Llanwenarth which, in the past, has held two, sometimes three, breeding Curlew pairs but strangely this year the one pair which arrived abandoned the site. Further north, one, possibly two, pairs attempted breeding in the Gavenny valley but frustratingly, neither we nor the very helpful farmer were able to locate the nest.

Three Curlew pairs arrived at Brynygwenin but the finding of cut wing feathers, clearly bitten off by a fox, reduced the number to two. The farmer here kindly gave permission to erect an electric fence to keep out foxes and badgers and happily this nest produced two chicks. Two other eggs in the clutch were predated by crows after the chicks had left – interestingly, the embryos in these eggs had failed to develop. Although only one nest was found here, we believe at least one chick from a second pair was raised successfully and most probably fledged.

One of the electric fences provided by NRW was, by kind permission of the farmer, used to guard a nest near Grosmont (found with the kind help of Chris Wells from Herefordshire). This pair sadly abandoned the clutch of four eggs towards the end of the incubation period. The eggs were sent under licence to Sheffield University where analysis showed that all four had been fertile but that, mysteriously, each embryo had failed to develop at a different stage of the incubation period.

The third nest, found near Llangattock Lingoed, held three eggs – a fourth would probably have been laid a day later. Disappointingly, we were unable to put up a fence and the outcome here is unknown.

In the east of the county, the Trellech/Llanishen area was home to two, probably three, pairs. Alarming Curlews chasing off crows and Red Kites clearly indicated the presence of nests but both to our disappointment and that of the very accommodating farmers, we were unable to find them. Much to my delight, however, two tiny chicks emerged briefly from an area of rough, long grass, the first of this year's total of five chicks seen.

Curlew pairs returned to their traditional territories at nearby Newchurch and also at Llangybi (in central Gwent) but breeding attempts at both locations failed.



Job done! Fence erected by Lee Ashcroft, Kevin Hewitt and Richard Clarke © Verity Picken

The western valleys were monitored with the welcome help of Caerphilly County Borough Council ecologists and a small group of volunteers. The Bedwellte ridge yielded four pairs: chicks clearly hatched at the usual site near Markham at the southern end of the ridge as the male was seen chick-guarding in a field three away from the nest field. One fledged here in 2023 but we suspect this year's chicks were predated a week or two before they were due to fledge. Gelli-gaer Common held a pair but no nest was found.

Finding nests in moorland is nigh on impossible but calling heard from deep in the bracken and seeing chick-guarding behaviour led us to suspect that at least three pairs bred at Trefil. Monitoring such a huge area is difficult and more help is undoubtedly needed here.



A probably incomplete clutch found in early May © Verity Picken

Aggression towards a gull at nearby Blaen Rhymney indicated at least one chick and, given the late date of 4th August, very likely one that had fledged. Finding a colour-ringed Curlew a few fields away was exciting: the combination of colour rings indicated that it had been ringed by Tony Cross but unfortunately the bird was too distant to read the number on the ring and subsequent searches didn't relocate the bird. This area warrants further searching next year – as all our sites do!

To conclude: this year's monitoring revealed a minimum of 19 pairs, three nests, five chicks from three different broods and one, perhaps two, fledged chicks. Given that Curlews were occasionally seen at other sites (I was alerted to two more right at the end of the season) it's very possible there are more pairs out there. We **must** find them



Day-old chicks at Brynygwenin © Verity Picken

and protect their nests if we are to prevent the extinction of this stunning bird as a breeding species – too few chicks survive to replace their ageing parents. With more volunteers we will be able to find more nests and put protective measures in place.

I thank those farmers who allowed me to walk their land, who told me in advance when they planned to mow or move livestock, and who allowed us to erect fences to safeguard nests from predators. Their support is vital and hugely appreciated.

My thanks go, of course, to the many people who send their sightings to the dedicated email address curlew@gwentbirds.org.uk as this alerts us to those areas which need monitoring.

Regular reports from those who are lucky enough to have breeding Curlews near their homes or who frequently walk the same area (Scott Crichton, Duncan Powell, Simon Maggs, Gillian Knowland, Mark Heffernan, Ruth Ruby and the many Brynygwenin residents) were invaluable. Gary Howells again kindly kept an eye on the Trefil moorland.

Finally, I am particularly grateful to Lee Ashcroft, Chris Stone, Sian Howley and Arthur Pitcher who all put in many long, patient hours of monitoring.

SEWBRc Recording Grant

We offer grants for recorders to support wildlife recording in south east Wales.



One grant recipient this year was Road to Nature community group in Newport, who received a digital microscope and screen setup that they have already made good use of in outreach events (shown in photos, all © Road to Nature). Find out more about the group on Twitter/X [@1RoadToNature](#) and [Facebook](#). We also providing funding to Andrew McGleish to attend a training course, see article opposite for his experience.



The SEWBRc Recording Grant is primarily aimed at funding opportunities for existing recorders to enhance their recording efforts; or for group projects with the potential to reach a number of new recorders.

Small grants up to a maximum of £500 are available for items such as:

- Field/lab equipment
- Travel expenses
- Identification guides
- Software
- Attending courses
- Running courses and workshops
- Promotional material
- Atlas and checklist publication



A **Books Grant Scheme** for up to £75 for field guides, taxonomic keys and other relevant publications is also available.

Download the application forms for both grant schemes from [SEWBRc's website](#).

SEWBRc Membership and Governance

SEWBRc membership is open to anyone with whom a working relationship exists (including individual recorders, local groups and partner organisations). If you would like to become a member of SEWBRc, please complete and return an [application form](#).

The SEWBRc board of Directors is drawn from our membership and steers the development of the company, providing advice and support to the CEO and staff.

Current SEWBRc board of Directors: Steve Bolchover (Chair), Alison Jones (Vice Chair), Stuart Bain (Treasurer), Kate Stinchcombe, David Clements, Andy Karran, Alex Wilson, David Lee, Kirsty Lloyd.

Observers: Karen Wilkinson.

Company Secretary: Rebecca Wright-Davies.



Solitary Bees identification course

Andrew McGleish

Back in spring this year I attended a Solitary Bee Identification course thanks to the support of a study grant from SEWBRc. The course was run by the Field Studies Council at their centre in Preston Montford, Shropshire. We have about 220 species of solitary bees in the UK, with some expanding their range into Wales from the south of England. They are undoubtedly under-recorded; some are very distinctive, whilst others are difficult or impossible to identify from photos.

The main aim of the course was to teach us how to identify Solitary Bees to genus in the field. As well as picking out the key physical characteristics, we learned about the importance of knowing how the bees feed, breed and nest.

Teaching was a mixture of field trips, classroom sessions and microscope work. Ian Cheeseborough was the tutor, with back-up from two BWARS (Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society) stalwarts, Clare Boyes and Richard Dawson, so there was always an expert at hand to answer questions, or give a second opinion on an identification. This was particularly useful when learning how to identify specimens by using keys, since the details aren't always obvious to a beginner.

The atmosphere was relaxed, which was very welcome since it's years since I've been on any kind of course. I felt the course gave me a good framework for my own learning. Additionally there were lots of little hints, tips and tricks, a bunch of good contacts, another WhatsApp group and the "feel good factor" of being part of a community with shared interests. Thanks again to SEWBRc for the grant, and the loan* of a microscope so I can turn my specimens into records.

*[Ed: Find out more about our [Loan Scheme on our website](#)]



All photos © Andrew McGleish

WOS Grant News: the Welsh Ringing Course 2024

Owain Gabb (via [Welsh Ornithological Society](#))

The Welsh Ornithological Society was very pleased to offer a grant to help fund this year's Welsh Ringing Course which was held over the long weekend of 6-9 September. Despite some very challenging weather conditions, it was a very successful event. Owain Gabb of the [Gower Ringing Group](#) tells us more.

The Welsh Ringing Course was first hosted by Gower Ringing Group in 2015 and this was the eighth running of it. We were delighted to welcome ringers from groups all across south Wales, the west of England, Northumberland and Ireland. One of the objectives of the course is to make ringing permit assessments of a new generation of ringers. Seven of this year's twelve attendees were considered for permit upgrades with the remainder attending for more experience towards mist netting endorsements. Eight ringing trainers were present for the duration of the weekend to make these assessments.

The itinerary included daytime mist netting and (attempts at) whoosh netting at Oxwich Marsh, spring trapping in the intertidal zone at Overton and dazzling of waders at Whiteford Burrows and Weobley on the Burry Inlet. Chris Redfern delivered talks on aspects of Arctic Tern ecology, including the results of satellite tagging and what it had revealed about tern migration, and the (possibly counter intuitive) positive effects of visitor activity on the Farne Islands on tern productivity. These talks showed how ringing efforts can lead to projects that significantly improve our ecological knowledge of a species and were very well received.

The course was hugely weather affected. While wind speed was (thankfully) relatively low on all days but the Monday, heavy rain and regular showers severely limited and curtailed our activities on the Friday and Saturday respectively, and led to a late start on the Sunday. To illustrate the extent of the rain, there was a flood warning issued for the Ilston Brook, which runs past the centre we were staying in. The brook duly rose, but it was the flow of water down the road, which became a raging torrent and flooded the car park of our lodgings (partially submerging and damaging several cars belonging to participants) that was the most dramatic result of the weather. The following morning the South Gower road was littered with deep pools and abandoned cars.

A total of 412 birds of 37 species were processed (as compared with 853 birds of 34 species in 2023). The difference in the overall number of birds between years points to the effect of the weather. However, the tides were more favourable for catching waders in 2024 than in 2023, and a break in the weather on Sunday evening provided an opportunity to target them.

Daytime Mist Netting

Mist netting sessions were held at Oxwich on three of the four days. Mist nets were set in habitats including reed bed, fen and damp scrub. Unfortunately, unprecedented levels of rainfall on the Friday night meant that a good proportion of the available net rides had several feet of water in them on the Saturday and Sunday: of the 760 m / ~ 2500 feet of net ride we had ready, approximately a third were very challenging or impossible to use. An added challenge was that the weather seemed to have led to birds clearing out of the area, resulting in atypically quiet mist netting sessions.

The most commonly captured species during mist netting sessions was Blackcap, with 52 birds ringed and two recaptured. It appears to have been a less productive year for the species than in 2023 (over 150 Blackcaps were captured during the equivalent course and the numbers throughout the later summer and early autumn were considerably higher). Of note were two Kingfisher, three Grasshopper Warbler, two Garden Warbler (not a bird we catch in number in Gower), two Tree Pipit and nine House Martin. The latter were tape lured into mist nets when the cloud base dropped in the late morning and they began to forage over the marsh. Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warbler were all caught in small numbers (peak passage of the former two long distance migrant species is over – the latter is a resident that undertakes



Tony Cross (trainer) and 'Team 1' © Gower Ringing Group

within-UK dispersive movements in the autumn). Despite daily passage of Grey Wagtails overhead, we could not attract them down into our nets, which was disappointing.

Unfortunately, there was very little passage of pipits evident. We were not able to lure them into our whoosh netting area (this had proven successful in 2023), with the two Tree Pipit and two Meadow Pipit captured on the course both being in mist nets. Participants were talked through the technique by Chris Jones, who has used it in recent years to capture large numbers of Linnets (as part of a BTO Recapture Adults for Survival project) and whose recent whoosh net captures include Chough.

Spring Trapping

Spring trapping was undertaken on the storm beach at Overton on the Sunday afternoon. The session was led by Miguel Lurgi, who is doing a population study of Rock Pipits in Glamorgan.

One Rock Pipit was captured and colour-ringed, with a White Wagtail, a Wheatear and a Robin the other captures while participants were present.

Wader Dazzling

For many of the participants the highlight of the course was dazzling waders. Two teams went out on the Sunday night. Team 1 went to the grazing marsh at Weobley, with Tony Cross leading the dazzling effort, while Team 2 went to the shingle ridge at Berges Island / Whiteford Point with Ed O'Connor leading.

The results were excellent, with a combined total of 55 Ringed Plover, 25 Dunlin, a Curlew Sandpiper and a Little Stint captured. The number of Ringed Plover caught comfortably exceeded our total for the species in any previous session / year. Both Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are very infrequently captured in Wales, with the most recent available BTO data indicating 14 captures of the former and three of the latter in 2022.

Participants were given the opportunity to try dazzling, with many successfully capturing birds using the technique. In accordance with BTO protocols birds were held in pens and ringed under (subdued) red light prior to their release.

Acknowledgements

Feedback on the weekend from attendees was very positive. Despite weather conditions that were challenging, forecasts that changed rapidly and often didn't reflect conditions on the ground, and a constant resulting need to reassess and change plans, everyone remained upbeat over what was a very tiring weekend.

We would like to thank the Welsh Ornithological Society for grant funding towards the course. We try and keep the charge for the course as reasonable as possible (so as not to exclude those with limited financial means), and this funding together with the course fee has allowed us to largely cover our costs. We are also hugely grateful to the Gower Society for their ongoing support to our efforts at Oxwich, and the contribution this makes to allow us to continue to train many of the next generation of ornithological data gatherers and researchers in south Wales.

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Species Name	Ringed	Recaptured	Total
Blackbird	2	2	4
Blackcap	52	2	54
Blue Tit	18	17	35
Cetti's Warbler	4	4	8
Chaffinch	12	5	17
Chiffchaff	34	2	36
Curlew Sandpiper	1		1
Dunlin	25		25
Duncock	3	5	8
Garden Warbler	2		2
Goldcrest	12	2	14
Goldfinch	5	5	10
Grasshopper Warbler	3		3
Great Spotted Woodpecker		3	3
Great Tit	1	6	7
Greenfinch	9	2	11
House Martin	9		9
Kingfisher	2		2
Little Stint	1		1
Long-tailed Tit		1	1
Meadow Pipit	2		2
Pied/White Wagtail	1		1
Reed Bunting	1	1	2
Reed Warbler	22	13	35
Ringed Plover	55		55
Robin	7	12	19
Rock Pipit	1		1
Sedge Warbler	12	3	15
Siskin	4	3	7
Stonechat	1		1
Swallow	2		2
Tree Pipit	2		2
Turnstone	2		2
Wheatear	1		1
Whitethroat	2		2
Willow Warbler	11		11
Wren	1	1	2
Grand Total	322	89	411

Table: Summary of birds ringed during the weekend

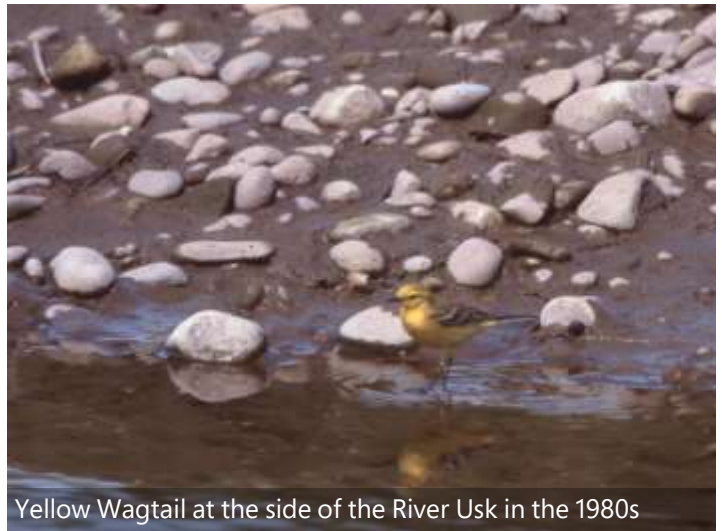
On This Day (16th June)

Colin Titcombe

Here follows a selection of diary entries relating specifically to the 16th of June, and all from parts of Gwent.

1968. At Llansantffraed today I saw a Little Owl, and later, a second at Tredegar Park, Newport. On land near Raglan, during the past two days, I saw Yellow Wagtails, Curlews and Grey Partridges.

1973. Today it has been sunny and very warm. While walking in our orchard, here at The Brockwells (Caerwent), a bird call caused me to look up into the elm trees across the road. There, in the upper most branches was a Lesser



Yellow Wagtail at the side of the River Usk in the 1980s

Spotted Woodpecker, working away in its search for food.

1977. At Wentworth Lodge today, we saw several Common Lizards and also a Minotaur Beetle (*Typhaeus typhoeus*). I checked on the nest of the Garden Warbler and found that the young are now fully fledged.

1978. On my way up to Wentwood this morning I saw a Brown Hare in the field close to the Coed Gwent Bungalow.

1997. This evening, between 9 o'clock and 9.30, there were large numbers of Swifts over Brockwells Farm, mostly above the Upper Rodge Wood and the Shirefield area. At one time I counted 60, but then had to give up because of the high speed toing and froing. Numbers must, I think, be calculated in hundreds.

2004. Today, a mostly sunny and very warm day, Broad-



Male Minotaur Beetle

bodied Chaser Dragonflies, Club-tailed Dragonflies and both Banded Agrion and White-legged Damselflies were all noted along the River Wye at Llandogo.

2010: In the Usk Valley at Llanwenarth today we saw a Peacock Butterfly, 2-spot Ladybirds, 7-spot Ladybirds and Harlequin Ladybirds, as well as the larvae of the Mullein Moth (*Shargacucullia verbasci*) [now *Cucullia verbasci* – Eds] which were feeding on the leaves of Water Figwort.

2013. House Martins have now almost completed two nests on a house in Llandogo, but would appear to be under threat from Jackdaws and House Sparrows. The number of House Martins in Llandogo this year is quite low.

2015. Today I walked along the flank of the Wye Valley from Llandogo to Whitebrook, and then back again along the river. Between Whitebrook and a point opposite 'The Florence' I counted 56 Banded Agrion Damselflies, and a further 40 of this same species between the Bigsweir Islands and 'The Holm', Llandogo.

2021. Today I walked down to the River Wye below Llandogo and more specifically to the Coed Ithel Fishery Wall which has been inaccessible so far this May/June period due to high water levels. Here I found 16 *Gomphus* (Club-tailed Dragonfly) exuviae – only one fewer than the total found throughout May and June 2020.

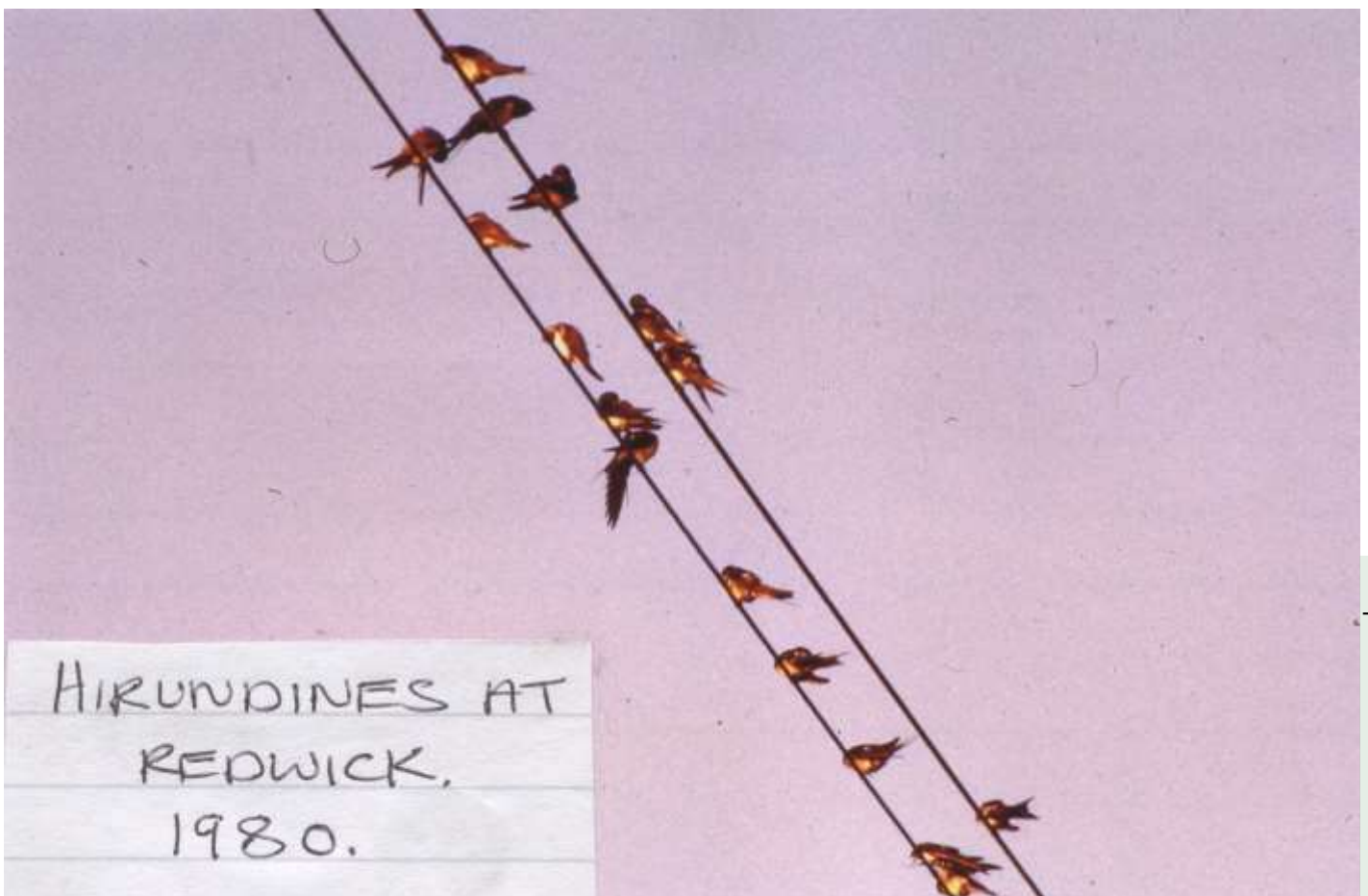


Male Banded Agrion Damselfly along the River Wye at Llandogo

Comment

Species mentioned on the foregoing page were typical of their time, but as we are all very aware, times are changing, and the following lines contain my observations on some of these changes.

1. **1968 and 1973:** All of the birds noted in my 1968 entry were common at that time – this is no longer so. The same applies to the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker seen on the 16th June 1973.
2. **1977:** The Minotaur Beetle is just one member of the family Geotrupidae whose numbers have become reduced in recent times. In our local Wye woodlands the Woodland Dor Beetle (*Anoplotrupes stercorosus*) is now even more scarce.
3. **1978:** The Brown Hare, once so abundant in the 1950s and 60s (the era of the disease Myxomatosis), is now scarce in Gwent. Rabbits, however, are now quite numerous, having recovered from the initial devastating effects of the Myxomatosis disease (which was probably intended to wipe them out).
4. **1997 and 2013:** Sadly the number of Swifts seen on the evening on the 16th June 1997 may never be seen here again. This year (2024) numbers of Swifts in our local villages of Llandogo and Tintern would appear to hover around 4 pairs in each village. These low figures probably reflect the diminished populations of insects and arachnids that such birds feed on. The same sort of decline is also to be found in House Martins, but not to the same degree. Whereas in Llandogo their numbers have fallen away significantly, in Tintern the population remains strong.
5. **2004, 2015 and 2021:** Of recent years much has been said about the pollution of our rivers, and the fall in water quality in the River Wye has been a matter of great concern. One of the indicators of such problems was the flowering (or rather, the non-flowering) of the River Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus fluitans*). The general lowering of riverine insect populations has also been apparent. One local specialty, the Club-tailed Dragonfly, has, in my experience, been most obviously affected. My record of the 16th June 2021 states that in my regular monitoring spot I found 16 Club-tailed exuviae, following which the number found decreased in each successive year until in June 2024, having made two searches at the site (on the 13th and 20th) I failed to find any at all.
6. **2010:** And finally, perhaps a bit of good news? My entry for 2010 refers to the larvae of the Mullein Moth noted in the Usk Valley at Llanwenarth. This is one insect species which appears to be doing quite well, that is if my observations at Llandogo are anything to go by!



Hirundines at Redwick, 1980. A post-breeding gathering of Hirundines prior to their long southward migration. Sights such as this are now becoming rare in the area where I live.

More Mapping of Leaf Miners

Dave Slade, Senior IT and Biological Records Officer, SEWBRc

Back in the first SEWBRc newsletter in 2008 I set out my potentially foolhardy attempt to map the distribution of *Lyonetia clerkella* in Glamorgan, essentially to prove that it could be found in every 1km square in the county. This endeavour eventually fell foul to general pressures of life, but how has the recording of leaf mining moths fared in the 16 years since that article?



Lyonetia clerkella © David Slade

In fact there has been an upsurge in interest in recording leaf mines over the past few years. A combination of social media and the obsessive nature of recorders (including me) means that it has become easier to mobilise people to look for things as they arrive – *Stigmella aceris* being a great example with a group of recorders going out and finding it in new squares across the county (Map One).

But we are again in the situation similar to the one I highlighted in 2008. We have more records of a species that has only been in the county for 5 years (*Stigmella aceris*, 278 records) than the Sycamore feeding equivalent that has been present in the county probably as long as the tree (*Stigmella speciosa* with 67 records, Map Two). To be fair, the mines of *Stigmella aceris* are much more obvious than those of *Stigmella speciosa*, particularly when the maple leaves start to turn yellow, but still, that's four times the number of records for a species that was first recorded in 2019.

It is interesting (at least to me) to see how leaf mine recording has changed since the article - not that I take any credit for this recording effort! In the maps blue dots are records prior to 2008, and the smaller red dots are from 2008 onwards. Some areas have seen a great increase in records (notably in the east of the county and the Vale of Glamorgan). Recorders in the west and Lynfi valley have clearly had their minds on other things, having reached a point where these areas were well recorded.



Map One



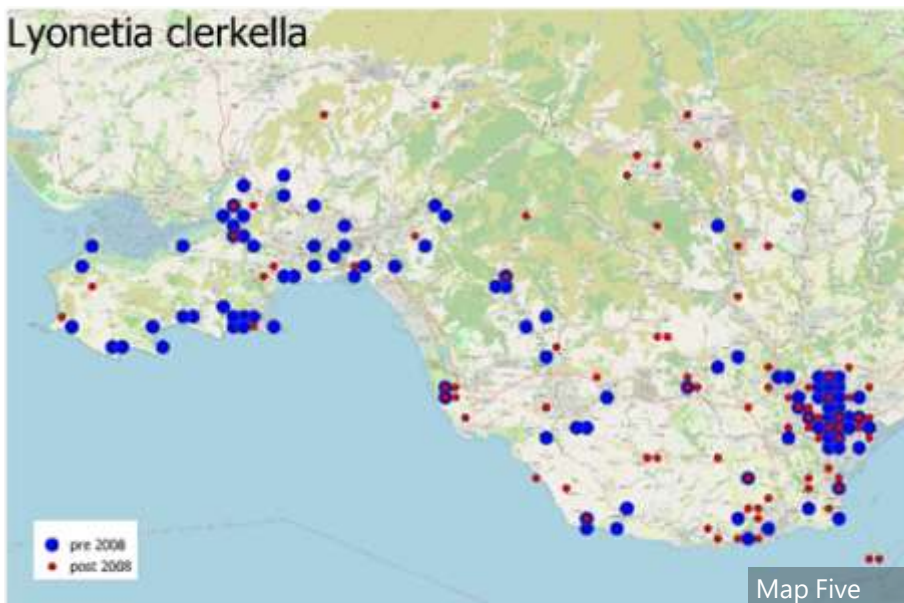
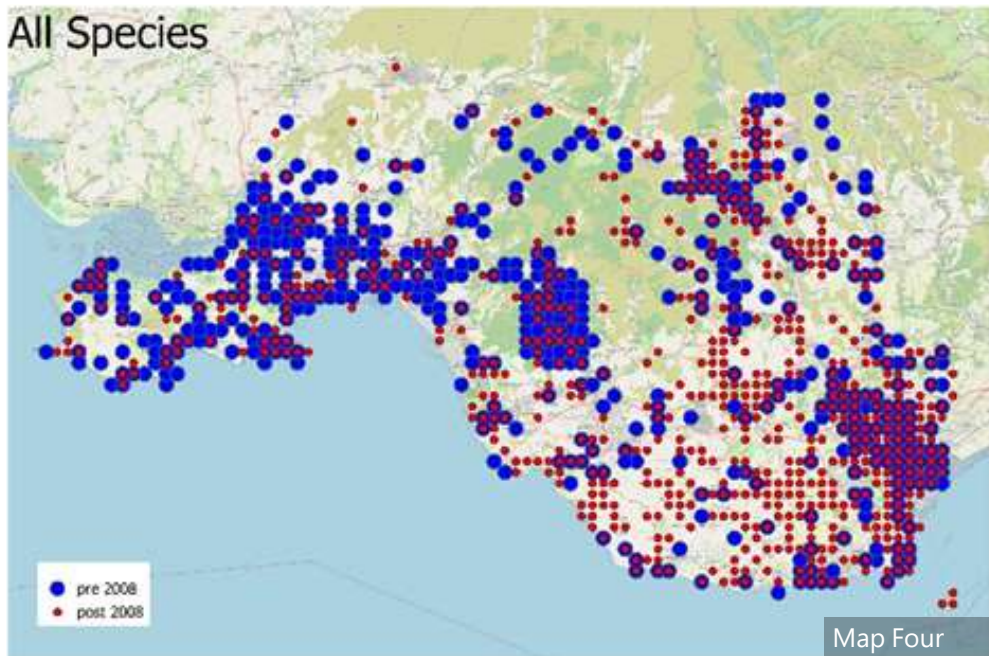
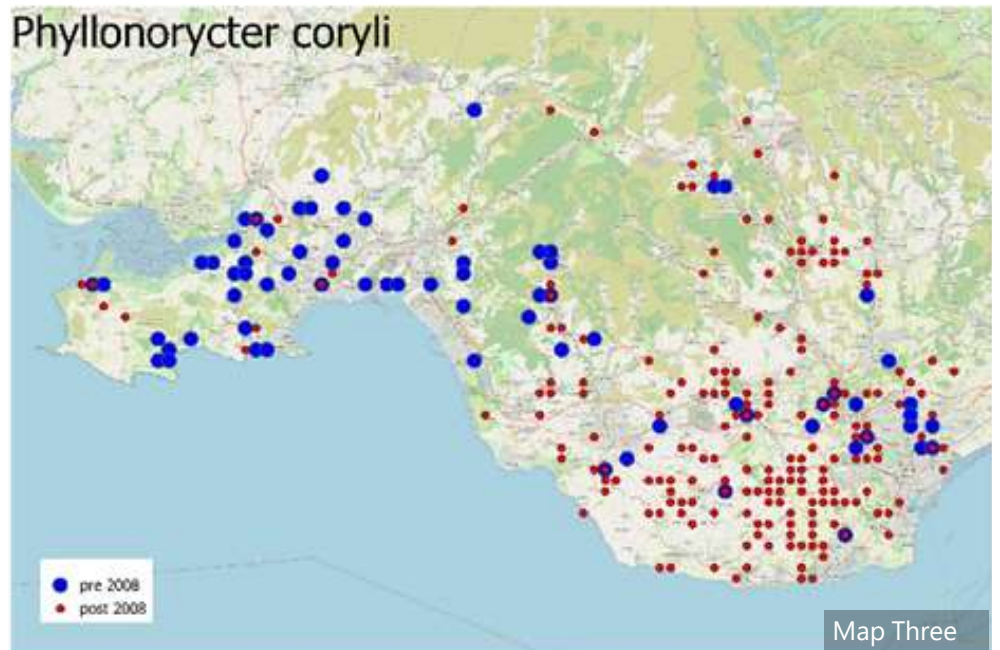
Map Two

Top ten most recorded species by unique 1km squares	Squares
<i>Stigmella aurella</i>	549
<i>Phyllonorycter coryli</i>	328
<i>Lyonetia clerkella</i>	303
<i>Cameraria ohridella</i>	277
<i>Caloptilia stigmatella</i>	257
<i>Coptotriche marginea</i>	240
<i>Gracillaria syringella</i>	238
<i>Aspilapteryx tringipennella</i>	217
<i>Dyseriocrania subpurpurella</i>	207
<i>Stigmella salicis</i>	157

Top ten most recorded species by total number of records	Records
<i>Lyonetia clerkella</i>	1238
<i>Stigmella aurella</i>	630
<i>Cameraria ohridella</i>	401
<i>Aspilapteryx tringipennella</i>	396
<i>Phyllonorycter messaniella</i>	356
<i>Phyllonorycter coryli</i>	349
<i>Caloptilia stigmatella</i>	323
<i>Coptotriche marginea</i>	297
<i>Gracillaria syringella</i>	292
<i>Stigmella aceris</i>	278

Phyllonorycter coryli (Map Three) is one of the more obvious leaf miners, causing the pale blotches on the upper-side of the leaves of Hazel. It would be tempting to interpret the map as a huge expansion in range, particularly into the Vale of Glamorgan. However, looking alongside the map showing records of all species of leaf mining Lepidoptera (Map Four) we can see that no leaf miners were recorded from these squares prior to 2008, so recording effort is actually responsible.

As I pulled these figures together, I was pleased to see that there have been more leaf miner records generated in Glamorgan since the beginning of 2009 than there had been up to the end of 2008. That there are far more records of *Lyontia clerkella* (Map Five) than any other species in this group – over 10% of the total records in fact – is perhaps a reflection of my efforts following the last article on this subject. Or perhaps not. Either way, I may not have fulfilled my aim of getting leaf miner records in every 1km square, but I do feel that we are a bit closer to having a decent baseline dataset for leaf miners.



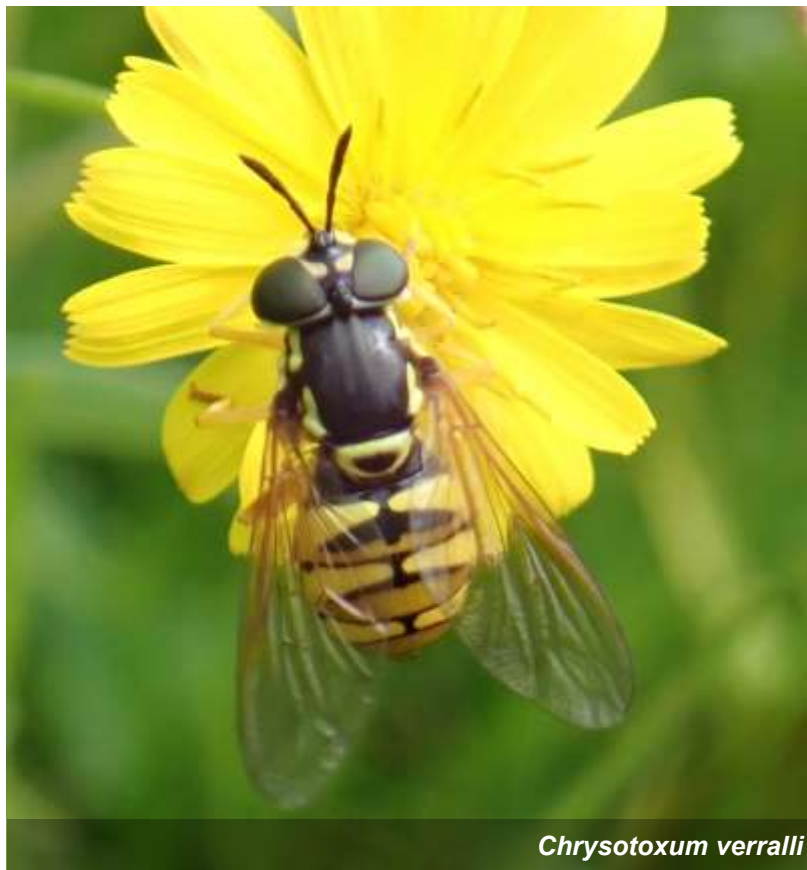
Recording Taf Fechan 2024

Graham Watkeys

This year has been tough. A very poor start to the year meant many species have been absent or extremely late, the main and obvious losers have been the butterflies with worryingly low numbers although they have picked up late in the summer, at least in terms of diversity, if not numbers. Despite this unpromising start I have managed to add 122 new species to the reserve list (to date) which brings the total number to 2165.

There have been several highlights but perhaps the most pleasing has been a new species of Hoverfly *Chrysotoxum verralli* which has brought the total number of hoverflies recorded here to 101.

Sawflies have also been somewhat of a theme with 11 new species (plus two pending) including some rarely recorded species and a new to Wales. The majority of these have been larvae, which probably means I have been staring at leaves for a good amount of time.



Chrysotoxum verralli



Cephus spinipes



Pachyprotasis simulans – a Goldenrod feeder classed as endangered in the recent Red Data list for Sawfly.



Tenthredo zona



Nematinus steini – first Welsh record

I think the next selection should come under the weird, the wonderful and the quite interesting.



Atlantoraphidia maculicollis

I found my first ever Snake Fly this year which definitely comes under the former of those designations. They are associated with dead wood and the adult is usually a high canopy dweller which makes them somewhat difficult to find.



Aulagromyza heringii. I have been searching for this species of Agromyzid leaf miner off and on for at least a decade without any success until this year. It is a late season Ash feeder with mines appearing from September onwards which can make it difficult to find although it is not considered rare (apparently).



Platycis minutus. Another uncommon species that breeds in dead wood (hmm maybe a theme developing?)



Macronychia dolini. A nationally scarce species whose larvae live as inquilines inside the nesting chambers of *Ectemnius* sp. Wasps. Another associate of dead wood or at least its host is as it excavates its nesting chambers in it.

White-tailed Eagle Study and a Kenfig Connection

Lucy Rowley (via [Welsh Ornithological Society](#))

There's a lot of work being done in Wales on White-tailed Eagles at the moment. Sophie-lee Williams will be giving a talk at this year's Welsh Ornithological Society Conference on the potential of restoring White-tailed Eagle to south east Wales and Lucy Rowley is currently conducting PhD studies on the species at Cardiff University. We asked Lucy to tell us a bit more about her work.

I am studying the genomic monitoring and spatial analysis of reintroduced White-tailed Eagles on the British Isles, supervised by Dr Frank Hailer and Dr Rob Thomas. My research investigates the genomics of White-tailed Eagles on the British Isles and across the entire Eurasian distribution, in particular the interplay of genetic drift, mutation, selection, gene flow on local gene pools and adaptation. My work aims to provide insights into the evolutionary history of the species, and to inform on the genetic health of reintroduced and other bottlenecked populations. To date, there has been no comprehensive genetic monitoring of the reintroduced population in the British Isles, raising questions about their genetic diversity and internal relatedness.



Lucy looking down the scope at a pair of White-tailed Eagles (photo below) on the Isle of Wight

I am also studying the spatial movements of White-tailed Eagles that were reintroduced to the Isle of Wight, to determine what habitats the individuals are utilising across the British landscape. As White-tailed Eagles are not currently a breeding species in Wales, I hope that my findings will influence the anticipated introduction to Wales.

Historically, White-tailed Eagles were a breeding species across all of Britain including Wales, but the species became extinct in the early 20th century due to human persecution. However, huge conservation efforts led to the first successful reintroduction to the British Isles in 1975, where eagle chicks were collected from Norway and translocated to Scotland. Since then, there has been a huge effort to

restore the species to the British Isles, there are now >150 breeding pairs in Scotland, England and Ireland.

The restoration of Welsh White-tailed Eagles is being led by Eagle Reintroduction Wales (eaglereintroductionwales.com), who are also a partner on my PhD. Working with Eagle Reintroduction Wales has given me the chance to work with the public at county shows and engagement events, to determine and hopefully influence perceptions of a White-tailed Eagles reintroduction in Wales. This is a great opportunity for me to engage and discuss the reintroduction with the public, and hear their opinions on the project.

During my PhD, I have been lucky enough to join White-tailed Eagles experts in the field to visit nests and release sites in the Isle of Wight, Ireland and Scotland and assist with the monitoring and ringing process. This was an invaluable experience and very rewarding to see the beautiful eagles in their natural



habitat. I am also lucky enough to work with many collaborators and White-tailed Eagles experts across the globe, and I am currently collecting samples from across Eurasia for my studies. The samples span all the way from Greenland to Japan.

The history of the Welsh White-tailed Eagles is another interest of mine, and I have been collaborating with Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales to assess the skin collection and records available for genetic studies. During a visit to the museum collection, we discovered a historical watercolour painting of a pair of White-tailed Eagles near Kenfig, dating back to 1816. Further details of this will be published in the coming edition of *Milvus* [the WOS journal]. I now look forward to seeing the White-tailed Eagles in the Welsh skies once again.

This article is reproduced with kind permission from the autumn edition of the Welsh Ornithological Society newsletter.

Please see their website for news, events and how to become a member: birds.wales



Irish White-tailed Eagle chick at 8 weeks old, handled and ringed under licence in 2023



Lucy's photo of a commute to a White-tailed Eagle nest site in Scotland with eagle expert, Justin Grant, June 2024

Historical Records and Mary Gillham's Diaries

Katherine Slade, Biodiversity Data and Enquiries Officer, SEWBRc

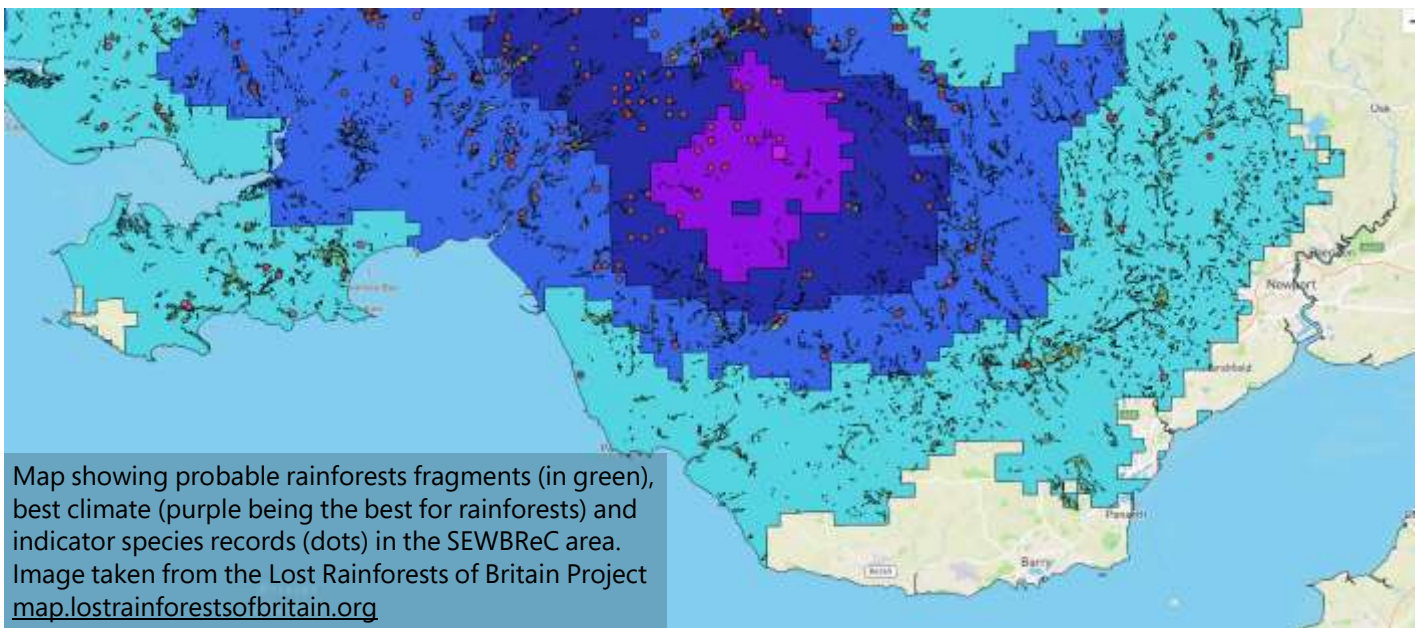
One of the tasks of staff at SEWBRc is to seek out new sources of biodiversity data and to digitise them so that they feed into data streams for among other things, conservation efforts and decisions on planning applications. Records older than 20 years can be seen as historical, especially in a planning sense. Far from being irrelevant and out of date though, they can tell us about the ecological history of an area in a variety of ways.

Historical records can give us a better understanding of how our wildlife and the landscape it inhabits is changing over time. For example, species susceptible to sulphur dioxide in the air, such as the epiphyte liverwort *Radula complanata*, declined as coal power became widespread. There were just 3 records for Glamorgan in 1994 (Perry 1994, Flora of Glamorgan), but the species has subsequently recovered and is now common.

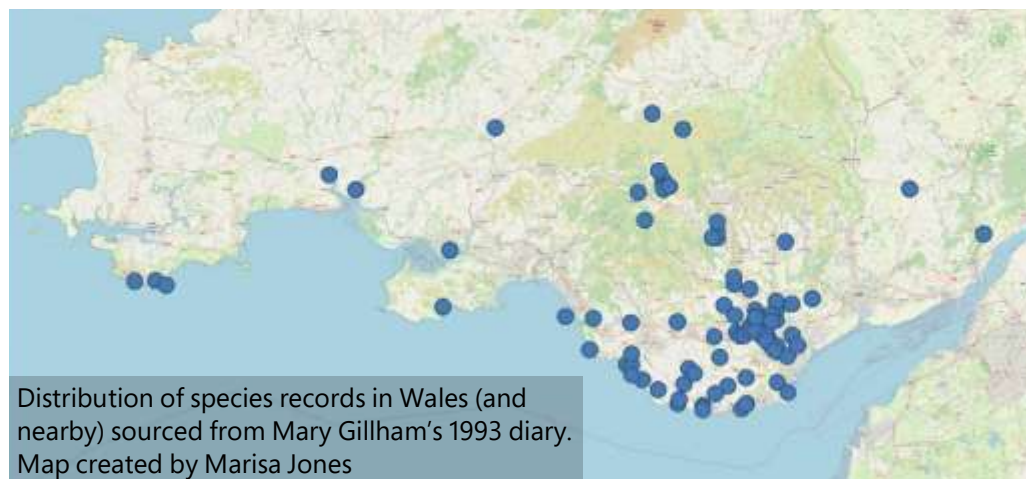
Combining new and old records can also provide information on the speed and pathways of introduction of non-native species.

For under-recorded areas or species, historical records may be the only records currently available, so are immediately relevant. Many specimens are yet to be digitised in the Amgueddfa Cymru-Museum Wales, and a deep dive into the herbarium by researchers can mean sites for rare species are rediscovered.

Older species records may give hints to habitats that have since disappeared. These data can inform on habitat restoration and potential rewilding. The [Lost Rainforests of Britain](https://lostrainforests.org) project mapped the location of the surviving fragments of temperate rainforest, combining climate data with Ancient Woodland maps. This map was overlaid with rainforest indicator moss, liverwort and lichen species records, including data from Wales's Local Environmental Records Centres, the British Bryological Society and the British Lichen Society. The maps produced show likely existing temperate rainforests, but there is also potential to infer areas rainforests could have existed historically and so could be expanded into in the future by natural regeneration. View Britain's rainforest maps here: lostrainforests.org/2022/10/21/new-maps-reveal-britains-lost-rainforests



One source of historical data SEWBRc are working on are Dr. Mary E. Gillham's diaries, which are part of the remaining items left to be digitised from the [Mary Gillham Archive Project](https://marygillhamarchive.org). We've just finished extracting her 1993 diary, giving us an additional 802 records in the SEWBRc database.



Aberthaw coast 30 years on

One interesting way to use Mary's biological records is to revisit sites in the SEWBReC area and see how habitats and species have changed. On 15 February 1993, she visited the coast near Aberthaw power station, at Gileston beach. This is a section of the coast with distinctive large concrete anti-tank blocks installed during World War 2 and large ridges of pebbles and sand. In 1993 Mary noted that "1981 drainage of the freshwater walls pool has changed it to a salt creek and that it was dominated by *Suaeda*/*Vaucheria* with *Spergularia*, *Aster* etc." She also recorded Skylark, Pied Wagtail, Curlew, Hairy Bitter-cress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) and Grey Speedwell (*Veronica polita*).

15 GILESTON STORM BEACH 1981 drainage of fresh-water walls pool has changed it to salt creek d. by *Suaeda*/*Vaucheria* with *Spergularia*, *Aster* etc. New sandpit. Massed *Helicella* shells 2' spp. in buried sand behind Limpets, where Sian Wms. told me 1990 floods. In fl. massed *Urtica* English scurvy grass skylark singing throughout, curlew, pied wagtail

Mary's diary entry for 15 Feb 1993



The Walls Pond, Gileston Village, cement works October 1981 © Mary Gillham



Saltmarsh habitat at Gileston in May 2024 © Katherine Slade

Visiting on 18 May 2024, I recorded the coastal and saltmarsh specialist plants Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*) and Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) that Mary saw, plus Glasswort (*Salicornia*), English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*) and Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*).



Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*) © Katherine Slade



Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) © Katherine Slade



English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*) © Katherine Slade

Uses for Historical Photos

It's not only historical species records that are useful. Mary's extensive notes on the environment and places she visited as well as photos have been finding their way around the world. Some of the interesting projects that have contacted us about using her images have included:

- The UWA Dental School, Nedlands in Australia, is researching the 400-year-old human skeletons from the Batavia shipwreck in the Abrolhos Islands off the coast of Western Australia. Mary's photos showing the extent and depth of the subterranean nest of a Wedge-tailed Shearwaters which disturbed the skeletons may help to reunite the teeth with the appropriate skeletons from a mass shallow grave.
- The RephotoKenya project have been taking repeat landscape photos in Kenya to note the changes in vegetation, with Mary's photos being included in the sequence. [facebook.com/RepeatPhotoKenya](https://www.facebook.com/RepeatPhotoKenya)
- An image of Elm Bark Beetle destruction of an Elm tree was requested for potential use in an art installation on environmental issues in Colorado.

"Superfluous" Details

Mary's style of writing includes asides that are usually removed from biological records due to the need to present information succinctly. This extra information may spark the interest of people looking at why our landscape is the way it is. For example in her 1993 diary she records at Monknash, Peregines "*perch on bluff to east beyond cliff embankment, which is below cavity in two lower cliff shelves leading up to cave - this enlarged when tried to dynamite out a wreck*".

A couple of social history stories also made an appearance in 1993. Castellau Woods, west of Beddau in a "*beechwood with some oaks and a few birches. Primitive faces [are] carved into Pennant Sandstone of east facing crag on west side of valley, later taken over for Christian ceremonies*". In 1993, Mary noted that the wood was the "*same as 1972, but Golden Saxifrage [was] gone from floor of rock*", recording a potential change and degradation of the habitat.

In another aside, Mary notes that the "*wood at Forest Farm [in north Cardiff] is called 'Sheep's Bane Wood' because sheep got stuck in the marsh*." This name is not used on the OS maps (historical or current) but is a well-known local name. For further reading see page 4 of the [Friends of Forest Farm newsletter 2002](#).

She also includes interesting facts about plants that she presumably heard about on walks with other people. On a walk around Morganstown on 21 October 1993, she notes that Japanese Knotweed was used to make peashooters by boys. Whether this was in the 1990s, or in the past, it is not clear, but Pysen saethwr in Welsh, and Pea Shooter in English, are recorded common names for the plant ([CABI website](#)) which was deliberately introduced to the UK in the mid-1800s.

Mary records that *Coprinus picaceus*, Magpie Inkcap was used as "*ink to sign doc[ument]s*" making them "*unforgeable as the spores... could be recognised with a microscope*."

In a warning that many plants in the Apiaceae can be dangerous to humans, Mary notes with horror that "*Yellow Parsnip, young leaf rosettes contain burning chemical fumano-cumarin! Acts like burn on skin, particularly fair skin, serious. Children writing on grass, right handed ones turned up at school with burned left arms, and vice versa. Similar to but not the same as Giant Hogweed. Common on chalk, more dangerous, but only in young leaves, rest OK*."

Eclectic and Informative

This article demonstrates the eclectic nature of Mary's nature diaries, including important historical biological records that can inform on current conservation and planning processes in a meaningful way. Amongst these are interesting and invaluable notes on the nature and social history of the SEWBReC area (and beyond). With a few fun facts about plants thrown in!

If you want to read more about the Mary Gillham Archive Project and its results, visit: marygillhamarchiveproject.com
Data from Mary's remaining diaries are continuing to be entered by SEWBReC staff and volunteers.

Not so common names

Mary grew up in London in the 1920s but travelled extensively in the UK and beyond so it is not possible to place where she learnt these names. As well as Keck for Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Milkmaids for Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) and Durmast Oak for Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), she records an interesting local name of Leadwort used in the Peak District for Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*). Mary's notes that this plant "indicated to miners in the past where lead was to be found." Further information can be found on the [Flora of Derbyshire website](#).



Action for Welsh Birds: the 2024 WOS Conference

09.30 to 1730 Saturday 16 November 2024

Aberystwyth University

Birdwatchers from across Wales will once again gather in Aberystwyth on 16 November for the annual Welsh Ornithological Society Conference. Yes, it will feature lots of fascinating talks, but the event has also become a big social occasion which welcomes birders of all abilities and ages. There will be plenty of opportunities to chat with old friends and make some new ones during the day too.

The theme of this year's conference is 'Action for Welsh Birds' and the talks will focus upon what grass root birders, volunteers and communities are doing to conserve birds in Wales. We'll hear about work on Black Grouse, Swifts, White-tailed Eagles, wintering Woodcock, colour-ringing waders in Pembrokeshire and farming with birds. Of particular interest to those within the SEWBReC region will be Daniel Jenkins-Jones' talk on a local Green Sandpiper project in the Ely Valley. Also, the results of the 2022-23 Wales Rook Survey, organised nationally by WOS, will be shared at the conference. BTO Cymru and RSPB Cymru will be there too and will bring us up to date with the latest news from both organisations.

Lunch, teas and coffees are included in the price and there will be an opportunity to visit the many stands during breaks from the talks and to win some fantastic prizes in the raffle and the silent auction. You'll also be able to purchase and take home a copy of *The Birds of Wales/Adar Cymru* for a bargain price of £20 (rrp £50).

WOS President, Iolo Williams, will be there to present this year's Lifetime Achievement and Student Awards and he'll end the day with his reflections on the conference and, no doubt, on the challenges we must overcome together to save nature in Wales.

**For more information about the conference and how to book your place,
please visit: birdsin.wales/conference**





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