



Butterfly News

The newsletter of the South Wales Branch of
Butterfly Conservation

Spring 2005



A new species for Pembrokeshire (and Wales?)

Rhigognostis incarnatella. Photo:
A.D. Lewis

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In April 2004, Tony Lewis, trapping with an 125 watt, 250 volt mercury vapour lamp trap in Newport (SN0538), took an unknown micro. Between us, we agreed that it was *Rhigognostis incarnatella*, a species new to Pembrokeshire. Photographs were taken and the moth was released, without us being aware of its national rarity. Further research showed us the error of our ways. The literature showed that it had previously only been taken in County Durham, England, the highlands of Scotland, the Isle of Man and southern Ireland. There were no other records listed for Wales.

The following June, Tony took another specimen in his trap, at the same location. This time we were more careful and, besides photographing the specimen, we kept it and sent it to Mark Parsons at BC HQ, Wareham. He, in turn, passed it on to John Langmaid for his opinion. After making a dissection of the genitalia, John was able to confirm that it was indeed *Rhigognostis incarnatella*.

In March 2005, two further specimens have been taken at the same site suggesting there is a colony, probably small, in the Newport area. The larvae feed on Dame's Violet (*Hesperis matronalis*), sometimes called Sweet Rocket, of which there are a few, small colonies in gardens in the area. It also occurs, in the wild, as a garden escape

It is also possible that the larvae will feed on other Crucifers which occur in such abundance in the area.

Ron Elliott

“Conservation in action” or “Weekends scrub bashing”?

However you look at it, humans substituting for animals, doesn't sound like a good idea! So, why do it?

Perhaps it is due to our very polarised landscape where, instead of 16/17th century land use spread at low intensity across whole areas, we now have urban or developed areas scattered amongst remaining fields, commons and woods of extremes of land use intensity. Agriculturally, this can range from modern, “improved” (Italian ryegrass) monocultures of factory fields stuffed full of sheep to under-grazed or abandoned commons, marshy or waste ground. Most of our threatened lepidoptera are habitat specialists of unimproved or semi-natural habitats, which, acre for acre, aren't really high scoring in terms of profit yield of grazing stock. Not only have habitats been “improved” but often the stock themselves are hybridised to give higher yields. Many such stock breeds do well on fenced rye grass fields but our fritillary butterflies in particular rely on the traditional grazing breeds which, in going about their business, typically on unfenced commons or marshland, incidentally produce beneficial side effects. Thus, they may usefully trample the bracken or purple moor grass tussocks, keeping rank grasses and scrub species grazed off, without eating out the larval food plant species like Devil's-bit Scabious or the various species of Violets. Perhaps due to the declining popularity of traditional breeds, fragmentation and isolation of natural grassland patches, and dire farming economics, extensive or roaming herds of traditional grazing breeds are just not easily enough available in modern landscapes.

So, in come the conservationists to substitute their saws, scythes and brush-cutters etc. to keep grass sward open and species rich, trying to make up for absence of those side effects of traditional grazing systems. Thus, we do it to preserve the habitats on which our threatened fritillaries etc depend. Ideally, we do it as a one off to be followed by reintroduction or bolstering of suitable grazing: otherwise we could find ourselves doing the same patch every couple of years!

This winter, we had many and varied experiences of letting off steam or burning off calories on weekends with work parties every weekend from early January to mid March!

Our Alun valley high brown fritillary habitat restoration and management project successfully tackled all of the patches planned for its second winter. With the consent of owner and commoners, we extended our work onto adjacent commons. Working with Glamorgan Heritage

Coast staff and their scrub cutting machines, our volunteers cleared by hand tool the larger scrub and bramble items. Between us, we opened up warm sheltered slopes for grazing of about 4 hectares in the Alun valley and three overgrown areas of Old Castle and Ogmores Downs. All areas had modest Violet cover in dense Bracken & scrub, which should now appear as suitable breeding habitat of typically good Violet cover in light/moderate Bracken. Over our six Sundays and two weekdays, we attracted 30 days (225 hours) of volunteer time. Grateful thanks are extended to all concerned including John Sherwood, Chris Lewis, Steve White, Stephen Lowe, Rob & Linda Nottage, the Coed y Bwl gang (Richard Marks, Roy Williams, Nancy Williams & Peter Hatherley), Ben Williams, Russel Habson, Kelly Thomas et al. We hope to have similar success with adult sightings (of butterflies) in newly managed areas as last year. As a bonus, we are also in the advanced stages of arrangements to fence and graze the largest of the Alun valley areas.

Rhos pasture featured in four of our other work party tasks. We assisted Caerphilly LBAP partnership with scrub removal from two of their ungrazed Marsh Fritillary sites, including Aberbargoed, still regarded as one of the best examples of a Marsh Fritillary population in the UK, although now urgently in need of grazing and security of future management. We were treated to a beautiful snow clad but dry, sunny winter day for our very visible activities there. We also had two days at BC's Carmarthenshire reserve for Marsh Fritillaries, “Caeau ffos fach” at Cross Hands, clearing scrub and invasive bramble, as a prelude to this year's grazing by local ponies. It was good to see Roy & Neil Jones again on the first of those days.

Finally, four of us went to Longlands Quarry in the Vale, where Small Blue is hanging on around small parts of the rim of a quarry, on which working resumed some 5 years ago. As far as we know this is UK's only known example of this species surviving in a working quarry. We managed to secure a planning condition and agreement with and support of the owners, that they ensure rim remains undamaged limestone grassland sward. Fortunately, Rabbits still graze the rim, keeping a tight grassland sward with areas of bare ground in which Kidney Vetch survives. However, Blackthorn and Bramble scrub was invading about ten square metres of the north-east corner of the rim. This has now been cut back, extending the open area slightly once again. We monitor the Small Blue by egg count and Kidney Vetch inflorescence count transect twice a year, once in May/June and again in July/August. Anyone wishing to help with these interesting monitoring visits, should contact me

Richard Smith.

More Brown Hairstreak populations, including Tir Gofal farms.

Our volunteer surveys across Carmarthenshire this winter have included previously unvisited Tir Gofal farms, with some potentially encouraging results. We have visited 14 of these farms, five of which were already known to us with four of them being sites of our annual egg count transects. Indeed one holds probably Wales' largest Brown Hairstreak population with > 500 eggs counted in early 2004. So we were particularly pleased to be able to report this winter on another nine, situated at low altitudes (<150m) in 10 km. grid squares which appear to be within the species current range.

The two farms in the far west, near Llanboidy and Efailwen, were the only ones not to reveal current populations, but even here we did manage to confirm presence at other sites in the same 10km squares. The seven farms with newly found populations were spread across six 10 km. squares. They revealed only a very modest 38 eggs and 970 metres of good condition hedge but, significantly, 10,890 metres of potentially suitable hedge which includes sufficient amount of Blackthorn but is either too old, leggy and gappy or over-flailed or damaged by stock. By comparison the three of our four already known Tir Gofal sites, where habitat data was recorded were parts of populations including 752 eggs, 20,500 metres of good condition hedge and 44,105 metres of potentially suitable hedge.

If the management of the potentially suitable hedges on these seven TG farms can be improved, to achieve a similar ratio (30:70) of "good: potential" hedges as in the best areas, then a significant increase should be possible in the total annual egg counts to between 120 and 240 fairly quickly, a three to six fold increase. Tir Gofal already supports fencing from stock to encourage regeneration of older or damaged hedges, with planting up of gaps if necessary. Feedback from a useful meeting with the Tir Gofal team is encouraging in that they felt that rotational trimming management could easily be encouraged. It would be good to revisit the seven farms in two or three years time to see progress.

Our other main activity was annual egg counting on the 11 "transect sites", set up to provide a representative cross section of brown hairstreak populations across the county. Overall, we counted 491 eggs across these transects, giving an average of 45 eggs per transect or one egg every 14 metres. This was about 18% down overall on last year, although including the 2 transects in

Pembrokeshire, the "west Wales" picture was only 10% down at 52 per transect (compared to 60 last year or one egg every 15 metres). There were quite dramatic changes in several individual sites, where visually habitat looked unchanged. For instance, the southern transect field of Berthllwyd farm, was still full of young Blackthorn scrub but egg count down from 112 to 18! Perhaps, a change of master tree might explain: we just don't know. Fortunately next door at Cwmduhenn, the scrub next to master trees found by Mike & Diana Clark last year, still shows a very healthy egg count. On the other hand, two hedges of a field at Bontfaen near Pencader showed an increase from 15 to 57 eggs, also unexplained. Several other transects were consistent: +/- 20%, e.g. Pwllau, Pantybrodyr, Pont Tyweli and Broad Oak. Two of our short transects, with usually half a dozen or so eggs, Llwynceilyn & Capel Dewi showed big increases of 50% & 500% respectively, but in context still fairly modest numbers overall. We hope to try to extend survey to whole of the latter farm next year.

From a volunteer experience perspective, we were really pleased with the good turnouts of people from across Carmarthenshire and adjoining parts. It was good to see some new faces becoming regulars. Thanks particularly, to Ken & Rosemary who regularly came across from Tenby, cheerfully enduring a couple of days with low (none!) egg numbers and miles of hoofing across fields! Also thanks to Angela & Valerie for joining us on some days in the west and to Stephen & Anne likewise. Alan & Julian were stalwarts once again and added their "birding" input, as did Martin our new county butterfly recorder. Thanks, also to John, our branch treasurer, who regularly travelled with me and kept me sane and (almost) organised! Good to see Tony and Rhiannon each coming some distance to join us and not forgetting Fiona, George, Neil, Lin, Ben, Anna and Kelly. We didn't lose anyone, (at least permanently!) and enjoyed some superb sunny and clear winter days deep in Carmarthenshire. It was particularly pleasing to be able to take a party of 15 around the huge site just west of Carmarthen, to do the egg count and see Mike's master tree find. We are very grateful for the enthusiastic co-operation of the owner. We hope to arrange a visit again this summer to see adults, so those interested should register that interest (with phone number) now with Richard Smith, if they have not already done so. The visit will be arranged at short notice to try to maximise good weather, probably during August. Last year, we saw 19 adults in three hours, with good photo opportunities.

Overall this winter, including the Tir Gofal farms, we've added 17 new 1 km. grid squares to the Brown Hairstreak map for the county. (We added 12 others last year).

Finally, thanks once again to Carmarthenshire
(Continued on page 5)

South Wales Pooled Dataset project

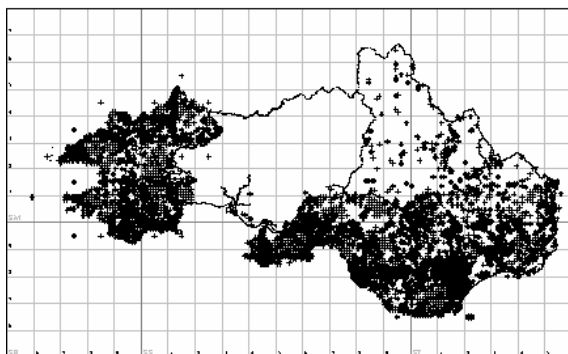
In November 2004 a group of South Wales Lepidopterists met to discuss a variety of issues relating to the Butterflies and moths in the region. One of the topics that was debated was the possibility of pooling the data that already exists across the region so that distribution maps for the whole of South Wales could be produced.

So far the county groups represented include Pembrokeshire, Glamorgan, Brecknockshire and Monmouthshire. The project is being coordinated by the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre SEWBRcC), using MapMate. The first version of the pooled dataset was circulated to the county recorders in January. It contained over 370,000 records of over 1700 species. Once the project has been completed the dataset should become more widely accessible.

Work still needs to be done to standardise the way subspecies are recorded, and we hope to have a provisional list of species circulated to the county recorders involved in the coming weeks. It is also hoped that the Carmarthenshire records could be incorporated at some point in the future to complete the picture.

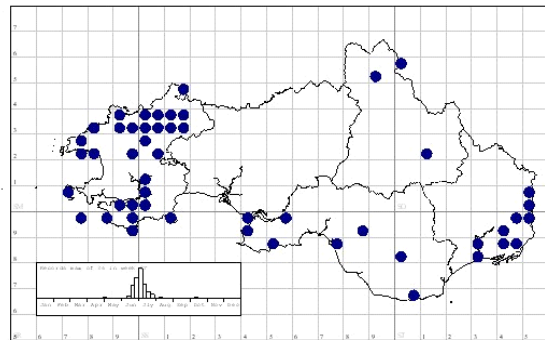
If you have any queries regarding this project, please contact either your local county recorder or David Slade (info@sewbrec.org.uk).

South Wales Lepidoptera - Recorded Sites



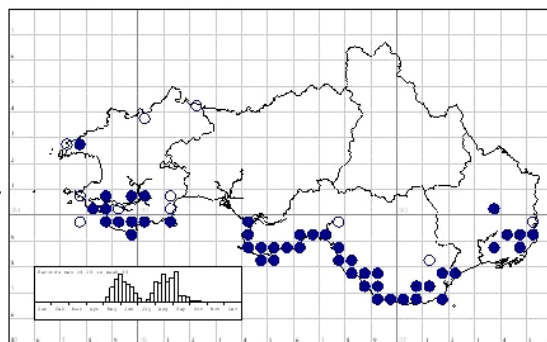
Recorded sites in South Wales used in the dataset

Scarlet Tiger (*Callimorpha dominula*)



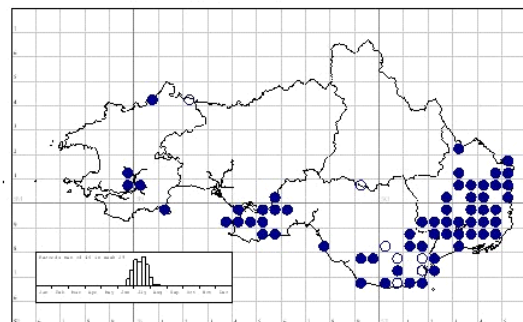
Distribution map for Scarlet Tiger moth

Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*)



Distribution map for Brown Argus butterfly

Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*)



Distribution map for Marbled White butterfly

Read more about the Brown Hairstreak butterfly in Carmarthenshire

If anyone wants to read more about the Brown Hairstreak in south-west Wales, a report of the Carmarthenshire surveys has recently been published by BC Wales office in Swansea, contact Kelly Thomas (0870 770 6153). Annual updates will be produced, available from Richard Smith.

Finding the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

A glance at the distribution map in "The Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain & Ireland" will show a widespread distribution across 10-km squares in Wales for the 1995-1999 recording period. The situation for the 2000-2004 recording period is currently being looked at, but it is already clear that there are considerable gaps compared to 5 years earlier. Across the South Wales branch area of Breconshire, Carmarthen, Ceredigion, Glamorgan, Gwent, Pembrokeshire and Radnorshire there seems to have been a net 43% decline in the number of recorded 10-km squares in just five years.

Cause for concern

If this reflects a real loss, rather than absence of recorder visits, then it is seriously worrying. We should perhaps be more alarmed because SPBF was classically thought in the 1990s to be well distributed across Wales and not declining as fast as other fritillaries because of its ability to survive in more than one habitat type. In my local area in the Vale of Glamorgan, it survives on dry grassland with dog violets under bracken, whereas a few miles north in the valleys it thrives more readily on marsh violet in wetter rhos pasture. This latter habitat must have been a saviour because marsh violets on wetter unimproved areas seem to have survived the massive increases in sheep numbers across Wales, which factor seems to have had a significant negative impact on marsh fritillaries.

However, we need to try to identify whether the most recent gaps are real, particularly as SPBF has not yet been afforded any priority biodiversity status in Wales.

What you can do to help

If you are willing to visit grassland or bracken sites with violets in 10-km squares with no current (2000-2004) records during the flight period, please get in touch urgently. It flies in lowland areas from late May to late June and slightly later, usually to mid July in upland marshy areas. All we

require is at least one visit with suitable sunny weather within the flight period. When you contact us, we will send you a simple information and identification pack with easy instructions and recording cards. If the sites do not have public access, you will need to gain permission of the landowner. We are targeting two types of locations: first priority are those in 10-km squares with no records in 2000-2004 but where it was recorded in 1995-1999. There appear to be 44 such areas across south Wales. A second priority is any open areas with violets but no current or recent records for those sites.

The 44 10-km squares in the first priority category are listed in the panel below. Please contact us if you are willing in principle to visit one or more of these areas. We can usually provide exact locations of the old records. In some cases, to encourage visits to areas where recording is particularly sparse, we can contribute towards travel costs, if agreed in advance.

Richard Smith

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Wales 2000-2004 (open circles = present 1995-99)

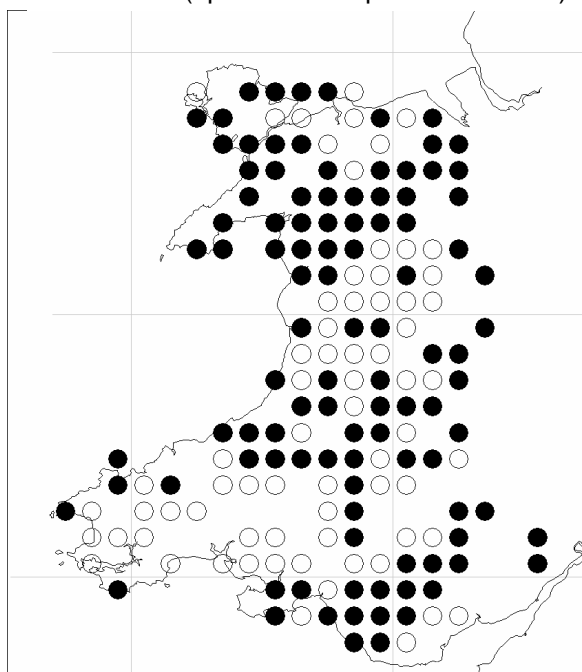


Table of 10kms squares with records of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in 1995-1999 but not 2000-2004.

10km sq.	Notable places in the square.	10km sq.	Notable places in the square.
	PEMBROKESHIRE		BRECONSHIRE & BBNP
SM82	Solva, Newgale, Brawdy	SN71	Brynamman, Ystradgynlais
SM81	Broadhaven, Little haven, Nolton	SN72	Llanddeusant, Llangadog
SM80	Dale, Herbrandston, Milford Haven	SN73	Llandoverly, Llanwrda, Cilycwm
SM91	Haverfordwest, Johnston	SN93	Llanfihangel Nant Bran, Merthyr Cynog
SN01	Martletwy, Llawhaden	SN94	Llangammarch Wells
SN02	Clarbeston, Puncheston	SO01	Pontsticill, Taff Fechan
SN03	Upper Gwaun valley & Prescelis	SO11	Llangynidr, Beaufort
SN10	Tenby, Kilgetty, Saundersfoot	SO03	Lower Chapel
SN12	Efailwen, Login, Llanglydwen		RADNORSHIRE
	CARMARTHENSHIRE	SN86	Claerwen Reservoir
SN22	Meidrim, Felindre	SN87	Upper Elan valley
SN30	Pembrey Forest. Llansaint	SO05	Builth Wells, Newbridge on Wye
SN33	Drefach-Felindre, Cwmdud	SO07	Abbeycwmhir, Llanbadarn Fyndd
SN40	Burry Port, Kidwelly, Pontyates	SO17	Llanbister, Beguildy
SN41	Cwmffrywd, Llangynderyn, Crwbin	SO24	Hay on Wye
SN50	Llangennech, Hendy. Llannon		GLAMORGAN
SN51	Cross Hands, Tumble, Llandarrog	SN60	Clydach, Cwm Cathan
SN53	Brechfa, Abergorlech	SN80	Glynneath, Resolven, 7 Sisters
SN63	Talley, Llansawel, Llansadwrn	SN90	Hirwaun, Penderyn, Cwmdare
	CEREDIGION	SS68	Mumbles, Llangland
SN34	Ffostrasol, Newcastle Emlyn	SS79	Neath, Tonna, Cwmafan
SN44	Rhydowen, Cwrtnewydd, Llandysul	ST07	Llancarfan, Bonvilston, Aberthin
SN65	Tregaron, Llandewi Brefi	ST18	Taff's Well, Caerphilly
SN67	Llanilar, Llanafan		GWENT
SN68	Borth, Bow Street, Capel Bangor	ST28	St Mellons, Machen, Rogerstone
SN78	Ponterwyd		

If you would be willing to help, please contact Richard Smith 01446 793229 (e-mail rgsoverton@boltblue.com) or your local county recorder (contact details on last page of this newsletter).

Incidentally, don't forget that our Member's Day on Saturday 30th April, includes a talk on SPBF based on 3 years research by Butterfly Conservation into its ecology in a north Wales forest.

Butterfly and Moth Recording - County Recorders in South Wales

Brecknockshire:

Andrew King, Heddfan, Pennorth, Brecon, Powys. tel: 01874 658351 (Butterflies)

Norman Lowe, 6 Tai Canol, Llangorse, Brecon. Tel: 01874 658453 (Moths)

Ceredigion:

Ms Lin Gander, Conservation Officer, The Wildlife Trust South & West Wales, Penwalk, Llechryd, Cardigan, Ceredigion, SA43 2PS, tel: 01239 682405

Carmarthenshire:

Martin Lovell (Butterflies), Gelli Isaf, Rhydcymerau, Carmarthenshire, SA19 79Y, tel: 01558 685060.

Jon Baker (Moths), 14 Job's Well Road, Carmarthen, SA31 3HG, tel: 01267 221681

Glamorgan:

Barry Stewart, 36 Pencaerwn Road, Penyrheol, Gorseinon, Swansea SA4 4FU, tel: 01792 539447, e-mail: moonmoths@ntlworld.com

Monmouthshire:

Martin Anthoney, 23 Malvern Close, Risca, Gwent NP1 6QT, tel: 01633 612272

Pembrokeshire:

Ron Elliott, 10 Flemish Court, Lamphey, Pembroke SA71 5PA, tel. 01646 672508, mobile: 07974 948048, e-mail: moths@tiscali.co.uk, website: <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/pembsleps/>

Radnorshire:

Joyce Gay, c/o Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, Warwick House, High Street, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 6AG, tel: 01597 823298 (Butterflies)

Caroline Moscrop, Floor 3, Gwalia, Ithon Road, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 5RP. Tel: 01597 827400, e-mail: c.moscrop@ccw.gov.uk. (Moths)

Contributions

Contributions to this newsletter are always welcome. They can be on any subject relevant to the Branch's activities.

Please send them to me at either 10 Flemish Court, Lamphey, Pembroke, SA71 5PA or direct by e-mail to moths@tiscali.co.uk.

**R. Elliott,
Editor**

BRANCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman & Moth Officer:

Martin Anthoney, 23 Malvern Close, RISCA, Gwent NP11 6QY, tel: 01633 612272, E-mail: martin@chemlep.demon.co.uk

Branch Organiser & Secretary:

Martin White, 21 Highmount, Maritime Quarter, Swansea SA1 1YE, tel: 01792 477984

Projects & Events Co-ordinator:

Richard Smith, 28 Llanmaes Road, Llantwit Major CF61 2XF, tel: 01446 793229, E-mail: rgsoverton@boltblue.com

Treasurer:

John Sherwood, 92 Broadway, Llanblethian, Cowbridge, CF71 7EY, tel: 01446 772119, E-mail: JohnandRuthSherwood@compuserve.com

Newsletter Editor:

Ron Elliott, 10 Flemish Court, Lamphey, Pembrokeshire, SA71 5PA tel: 01646 672508, E-mail: moths@tiscali.co.uk, Web: <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/pembsleps>

Members

Mike Clark, 1 Heol Pont George, Hazelgrove, Pyle, CF33 6JB, tel: 01656 743343, E-mail: mj-dg@clarkwildlife.fsworld.co.uk

Barry Stewart, 36 Pencaerwn Road, Penyrheol, Gorseinon, Swansea, SA4 4FU, tel: 01792 539447, E-mail: moonmoths@ntlworld.com

Electronic Newsletter

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If so, let me know at my e-mail address (moths@tiscali.co.uk) and I will send you future versions of the newsletter (in full colour) in this format. It will take just a few minutes to download. The cost of printing or copying the newsletter and sending it through the postal service is a large expense. Subscribing to the electronic version will save the Branch, (and Butterfly Conservation) a lot of money.

R. Elliott, Editor.



Butterfly Conservation (Wales Office) 10 Calvert Terrace Swansea, SA1 5AR
Tel: 0870 770 6153, E-mail: wales@butterfly-conservation.org