



Butterfly News

The newsletter of the South Wales Branch of
Butterfly Conservation

Winter 2004

Biodiversity Records Centre start-up in South East Wales

Over the past twelve months, the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (or SEWBReC) has begun to change from a idea on paper to an important part of the local recording community. The not-for-profit company now employs two members of staff and will shortly be appointing a third, and together we are gathering the resources required to make the centre operational.

The main aim of SEWBReC is to hold all available information on our local plants, animals, habitats and sites. This information can then be made available to the people that need it to make better informed decisions and thus help to safeguard our natural history.

Although the centre will not become fully operational until August 2005, we are already providing assistance to local groups. We are assisting the Glamorgan Moth Recording Group, both with data

entry and in preparation for the proposed Butterflies and Moths of Glamorgan. We have provided software support to recorders and will soon have a website that will act as a notice board for events and training courses in the region. We have also taken on the role of co-ordinating the Recorders Forum meetings for Glamorgan and Gwent on behalf of the Biodiversity Action/Advisory Groups.

The area covered by SEWBReC is defined by the twelve unitary authorities of the counties of Glamorgan and Gwent, but does not include the Brecon Beacons National Park. Whilst this may seem an unusual decision (particularly since almost every recorder uses the Watsonian Vice-County system) the National Park is already served by the Biodiversity Information Service, which also covers Powys. Recorders should rest assured that this will not mean that they need to split their records up and send them off in different directions, the Records Centres will do that for them.

Wales was the last country in the UK to have a Records Centre, but could become the first to have complete coverage within the next few years. North Wales is about to produce its development plan which will set the framework for their Centre, and West Wales is due to appoint a development officer in the next few months.

So if you have any records that you want to pass on, or have any other questions relating to recording or the record centre, then please contact Adam Rowe (Manager) or David Slade (IT and Records Officer) at sewbrec@yahoo.co.uk, or by telephone on 029 2081 1234.

David Slade

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Does the Guinness Book of Records beckon for Penllyn?

This is a story about a butterfly. Actually, it's more a story about a butterfly *species*: the common and very familiar, Small Tortoiseshell. The summer of 2003 was spectacular not only for our local butterflies, but also for migrants (butterflies *and* moths) which arrived in rising numbers over the summer. I doubt that I shall ever forget the autumnal sight of 12 Red Admirals crowded onto a single blackberry bush, jostling to feed from its fully-ripened fruits. Both these species of butterfly are migrants, most often crossing the English Channel from the Continent but also on occasions heading south from the English coast into France. There is also a strong resident population of the Small Tortoiseshell and though numbers have fallen in recent years, 2003 was an encouraging year for this and many other species. But, for the Small Tortoiseshell, it might have been even better, because occasionally insects other than butterflies and moths may find their way into Britain from the Continent – and some of these immigrants are far less welcome than others...

In truth, this is more a story about a fly. But they don't have the appeal of butterflies, so I led you into the story with mild deception! Here, a particular *type* of fly is the villain and the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly, the hapless victim.

One day last September...

The story really began in September 2003, when my wife and I noticed quite large numbers of Small Tortoiseshell larvae pupating on a wall of our house. After some days, I carefully removed 15 pupae from their pupation sites because many were found to be soft and discoloured, indicating that they had been parasitised and were 'dead'. Just four were still alive, so these were re-suspended from a garden trellis while the remainder were boxed to await developments. Between 21 and 24 September, a white maggot-

like larva emerged from each of eight 'dead' Small Tortoiseshell pupae and quickly formed a puparium (the fly equivalent of a chrysalis or pupa) about 6mm in length. The remaining three pupae each yielded several, tiny parasitic wasps of the species *Pteromalus puparum* (no common name), which emerged as adults, having already pupated *within* the butterfly pupa. But these wasps are common; it is the others that provided the interest. In many years of butterfly rearing and breeding, I had never previously encountered this form of parasitoid (if it kills its host it's a parasitoid; if it lives within but doesn't kill, it's a parasite). So, I sent some of the fly puparia (and, later, adult flies) to one of the UK's experts in this field, working at the National Museums of Scotland. There, it was identified as *Sturmia bella* (sorry, again no common name!), which is a specific parasitoid of certain butterfly families, including that to which the Small Tortoiseshell belongs. Furthermore, the fly has only recently arrived in southern England and, rather to my astonishment, this was the first record of its presence in Wales!

How did the fly get into the Small Tortoiseshell pupa?

The explanation almost stretches the imagination. The adult fly lays its eggs on fresh leaves of Nettle, the foodplant of the Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars. The leaves, together with the strategically placed fly egg, are munched by the caterpillar but the egg survives being eaten. Once inside the caterpillar, the egg develops into a larva and – there's no easy way to say this – grows within the caterpillar, feeding upon it while cleverly avoiding damage to any of the caterpillar's vital organs. In this respect, it behaves like a parasite, but once the caterpillar has pupated it is a signal for the

fly larva to become really nasty and the host pupa is killed. The fully-fed fly larva now emerges, forms a puparia and produces an adult fly. And so the cycle starts again.

What does the fly look like?

Sturmia bella is larger than the House-fly and is rather like the Cluster-fly in appearance. These are the flies that hibernate gregariously (hence *Cluster-fly*) in loft spaces during the winter, and seem to appear from nowhere in mild spells. By the way, don't point the finger at Lennox (a local llama!) and his charges for the presence of these flies; the Cluster-fly is another parasitoid – this time of the humble earthworm, and is unconnected with livestock!

So, although 2003 was a great summer for the Small Tortoiseshell, it could be argued that, without the unwelcome appearance of this new parasitoid, numbers would have been much higher. But then, with only a few per cent of butterfly eggs ever making it through to adult stage, the chances are that some other predator would have taken its toll.

A detailed account of these observations was published in the peer-reviewed journal, *The Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation* (2003. Vol. 116, Part 2, March/April), so the local record will be there for posterity - though I really cannot see the Guinness Book of Records being at all interested. Can you? But perhaps that was just another ruse to encourage you to read this article!

**Eddie John F.R.E.S.,
Penllyn, Cowbridge**

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, 5th December 2004

West Williamston Egg Count

Counting Brown Hairstreak eggs at West Williamston Nature Reserve. Meet at 10.30 a.m. at the car-park at SN0033058 for briefing and start counting at 11.00 a.m. Leader: Nikki Anderson.

2nd January 2005

Habitat management in Alun Valley

We have a second year of practical conservation management days, removing scrub invasion from prime south facing bracken slopes in this area famous for its fritillary butterflies. We are very grateful to the owners for allowing us to manage this private land holding for its unique butterfly interest, with almost certainly the best species list in Wales. Volunteers are asked to respect the ownership and privacy of the land.

Thanks to funding from the Aggregates Levy Fund, supported by the Vale of Glamorgan Biodiversity Partnership, we are able to use contractors for the heaviest work, mechanically clearing some scrub and dense bracken where slopes are suitable for machinery. Work for volunteers is likely to vary from raking up material after mechanical cutting to light scrub removal (mostly young hazel) on those slopes too steep for machinery. Bring warm clothes, strong footwear, gardening gloves, a warm drink and lunch if you wish to stay beyond lunchtime. We can supply some hand tools but bring your own if you prefer.

Meet at 10.00 am, parking on B4265 roadside verges at SS899763, at foot of northern edge of Old Castle Down. Please take care not to impede entrances to fields or gateways. (Please note that this is not the same meeting point as last year!). Contact: Richard Smith 01446 793229. (Also if you would like to help but can't make Saturday or Sunday mornings).

Sunday 9th January

Habitat management at Caeau ffos fach

Light scrub and bramble removal and other light management work needs to be carried out in several fields of our marsh fritillary reserve near Cross Hands. Bring warm clothes, strong footwear, gardening gloves, a warm drink and lunch if you wish to stay beyond lunchtime. We can supply some hand tools and gauntlets but bring your own if you prefer. Meet 10.30 am at far end of Co-op car park, just off A48 roundabout at Cross Hands. Contact: Russel Hobson (BC office) or Roy Jones 01792 813600.

Sunday 16th January

Habitat management in Alun Valley *

Details as 2nd January above.

Friday 21st January

Habitat management at Caeau ffos fach

Details as 9th January above.

Sunday 23rd January

Habitat management at Aberbargoed

Scrub clearance at Aberbargoed Grasslands for marsh fritillary butterfly. Meeting point: Heol Tir-y-Lan, Aberbargoed ST158997. 10.00 am to 3 pm. Caerphilly LBAP event. Contact: Alison Jones, 01495 235187 (office hours).

Sunday 30th January

Habitat management in Alun Valley

Details as 2nd January above.

Sunday 6th February

Habitat management at Wern Tarw, near Pencoed

Joint event with Bridgend Biodiversity Partnership. Scrub and bramble removal and other light management work in glorious privately owned rhos pasture fields near Pencoed. Bring warm clothes, strong footwear, gardening gloves, a warm drink and lunch if you wish to stay beyond lunchtime. We can supply some hand tools and gauntlets but bring your own if you prefer. Meet 10.30 am. Further details to follow

Sunday 13th February

Habitat management in Alun Valley

Details as 2nd January above.

Week commencing 14th February

Habitat management at Longlands Quarry

A provisional date for scrub clearance work party for small blue butterfly at Longlands Quarry. Probably 10.00 am – 3.00 pm. Privately owned and operating quarry, so arrange in advance please with Richard Smith 01446 793229.

Sunday 20th February

Habitat management at Penallta Marsh

Scrub clearance at Penallta Marsh for marsh fritillary butterfly. 10.00 am – 3.00 pm. Meet at end of Griffiths Street, Ystrad Mynach, grid ref ST 141947. Caerphilly LBAP event. Contact: Alison Jones, 01495 235187 (office hours).

Sunday 27th February

Habitat management in Alun Valley

Details as 2nd January above.

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Insects other than Lepidoptera attracted to Clearwing lures

The afternoon of 21 August 2004 was breezy but sunny so, despite the breeze and the rather late date, I decided to give my API pheromone lure a final outing before putting it back in the freezer until next year. The area I chose was between Abernant & Llwydcoed, in the Cynon Valley. I managed to find only a handful of suitable looking plants, or groups of plants, of Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* from which I might be expected to lure the target species; Six-belted Clearwing. Trying my API lure for about two minutes at each site (10 to 30 seconds is usually sufficient) it became clear that the moth was, either, not present or the flight period had ended.

While waiting for a response to the pheromone I did on two occasions observe insects attending the lure but not from a member of the lepidoptera.

The first instance was at the first plant I tried. A large Ichneumon was observed approaching from down wind, zig-zagging towards the net bag containing the lure. On reaching the bag, it fussed around it briefly without landing then moved away upwind. Having presumably lost the scent, it dropped down wind again and made another zig-zagging approach to the lure before seemingly giving up and wandering off. I was not able to identify the species of Ichneumon involved but it was large, had a black body and orange/brown legs. It did resemble *Pimpa instigator* but I understand that there are several similar species.

The second instance took place about half a kilometre away from the first, but was of a similar nature, except that two species of Ichneumon were involved:

the same species as before plus a smaller, orange bodied species. Both species approached the site together, from down wind, zig-zagging as they arrived.

After giving some thought as to the nature of this behaviour I can only surmise (probably incorrectly) that the Ichneumons that prey on the larvae of certain moths are tuned into the pheromones given off by the female of the host species. In this way they could locate the plants actually occupied thus saving time and energy when trying to locate larvae in which to oviposit.

I would be very interested to hear of any similar responses to the other pheromones used to lure clearwing moths.

Mark Evans

Editor's Note. This article is reprinted from the October 2004 edition of the Newsletter of the Glamorgan Moth Recording Group with their kind permission.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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Sunday 6th March Habitat management at Tylorstown, Rhondda Fach

Joint event with Rhondda Cynon Taff Biodiversity Partnership. Scrub and bramble removal and other light management work on bracken slopes for fritillary butterflies. Bring warm clothes, strong footwear, gardening gloves, a warm drink and lunch if you wish to stay beyond lunchtime. We can supply some hand tools and gauntlets but bring your own if you prefer. Meet 10.30 am. Contact Richard Smith 01446 793229 for further details.

Late April/early May 2005

Member's Day

Member's Day with talk on Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary study in North Wales forest and site visit to Merthyr Mawr NNR. Further details to follow.

9th July 2005

National Moth Night.

Trapping throughout the area. Please send details of both public and private events to the editor for publication in the next newsletter by the end of March 2005

9th July 2005

Member's Day and National Moth Night

Member's Day and National Moth Night at Magor Marsh Centre. Further details to follow.

Pembrokeshire Moth Report, 2003 now available

The 2003 Moth Report for Pembrokeshire is now available. It can be downloaded from the Pembrokeshire Lepidoptera website at <http://mywebs.tiscali.co.uk/pembsleps>. The report is in the form of a 'zipped' Acrobat file which, when 'unzipped' can be read on screen using Adobe's free Acrobat Reader. Regrettably, hard copies are not available.

The report draws together all records for 2003 for micromoths and macromoths in Pembrokeshire and covers 11,915 records of 475 different taxa from 23 different families.

The Status of Blair's Shoulder-knot (*Lithophane leautieri hesperica*) in VC41.



This article is in response to the many observers who have sent either text or email with messages stating that they have trapped this species within the last few weeks. Blair's Shoulder-knot, or the Stone Pinion as it was once called, first appeared in Great Britain in 1951 on the Isle of Wight. It then spread quite rapidly throughout southern England by the late seventies. The first Welsh record was here in Glamorgan, at St. Mary Church near Cowbridge

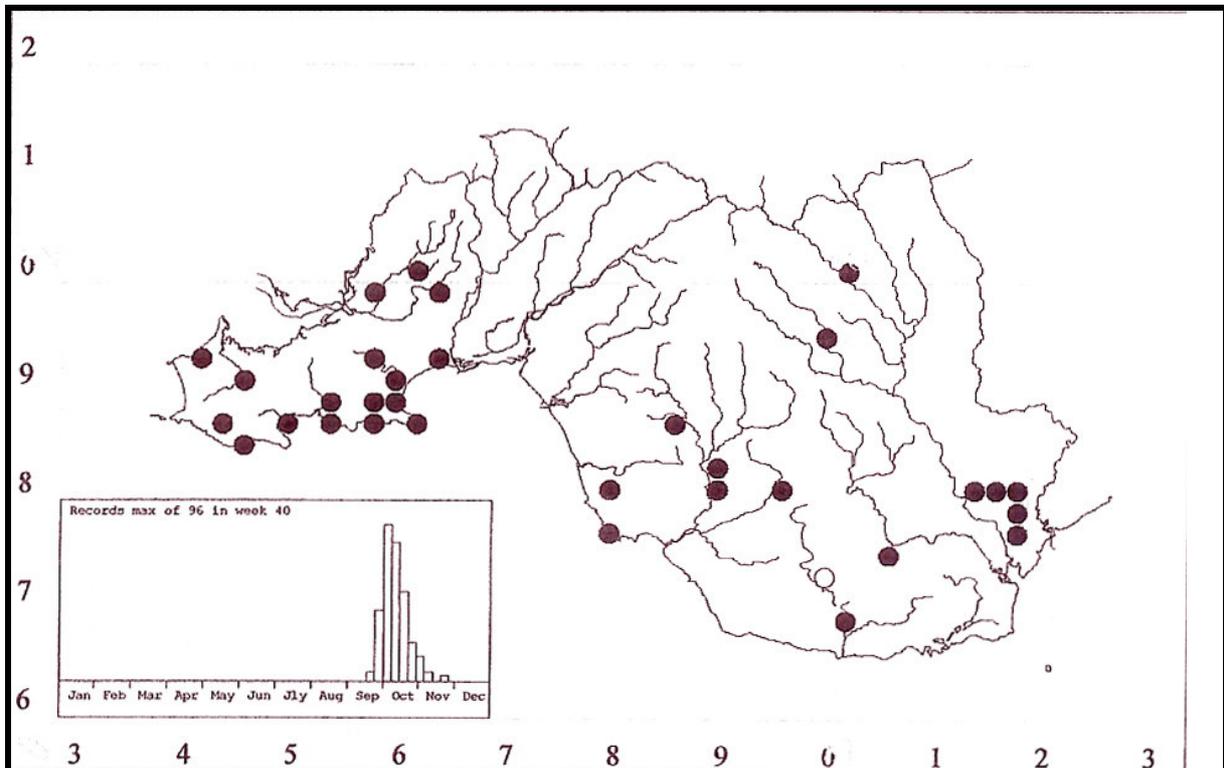
in early October 1979, closely followed by another at Usk, Monmouthshire (VC35) on 17th Oct. 1979. The next known record for VC41 was at the Rothamsted Garden Survey in Penylan, Cardiff in 1990. The third Glamorgan record was at Kenfig NNR on 14th Oct. 1992 when 3 individuals were trapped. This was the same night the Kenfig NNR reserve centre was broken into and the only thing the thieves didn't

touch was the moth trap, which along with Glamorgan's 3rd record of Blair's Shoulder-knot was an immaculate Merveille du Jour, which became our club's emblem.

Blair's Shoulder-knot has been recorded annually in Glamorgan since 1995 with, to date, 344 records being received for this species from sixteen 10km squares. Only one of those records however is larval, that of caterpillars found on Leyland Cypress *X Cupressocyparis leylandii* in Bonvilston on 5th July 1999. The maximum count was on 11th Oct. 1995 when 17 were trapped at Llanishen, Cardiff. The earliest date recorded is 16th September and the latest that this species has been found is 20th November. However the majority of records have come during October.

The distribution of this species within the county really centres

(Continued on page 6)



Map showing the distribution of Blair's Shoulder-knot in Glamorgan (map supplied by Barry Stewart)

(Continued from page 5)

on two main areas; Swansea and Cardiff, although regular trapping at a Porthcawl garden has produced over 50 records (see map on Page 4). However elsewhere in Glamorgan its occurrence is rather sporadic, usually following a more urban pattern

than being found in more open habitats away from towns and cities. This is primarily to do with the preferred food plants which, as mentioned earlier, includes Leyland Cypress along with Monterey *Cupressus macrocarpa* and Lawson Cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*. These trees are favoured garden plants, so it's not really hard to see why this species tends to favour residential areas. Those observers who keep trapping well into autumn, are often rewarded, not only the chance to see Blair's Shoulder-knot, but also some of the most beautifully marked moth species found in Great Britain. Many of them are under-recorded in Glamorgan simply because of the fact that they are late flying autumnal species and recorders have put away the trap. It is also worth checking ivy blossom at this time year, especially on cooler nights, when not much is coming to light. Moths really love nectaring on ivy blossom. An example; we ran a trap at Summerhouse Point on a cool clear night and had one Angle Shades to MVL and 53 on ivy blossom. So more autumn records please.

David Gilmore

Editor's Note. David Gilmore's article is reprinted from the October 2004 edition of the Glamorgan Moth Recording Group's Newsletter with their kind permission.

Blair's Shoulder-knot in VC45

The first record for Blair's Shoulder-knot in VC45 (Pembrokeshire) was made by Bob Haycock who recorded it in Lamphey (SN0100) in October 1989. I recorded it the following year, also in October, in the same 1km square but at a different site.

There followed a long gap with no records until Sam Bosanquet recorded it at Steynton (SM9207) in October 2000.

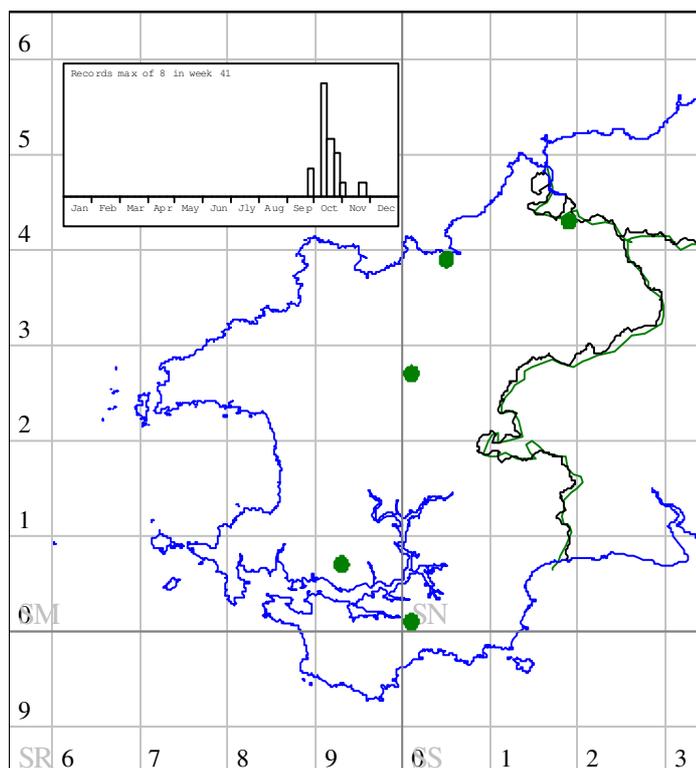
Since then it has been recorded every year with records from Wallace Moor (SN0126), Newport, (SN0538), Penybryn, near Cilgerran (SM1843) and Lamphey (SN0100). There is no

distinct pattern to the distribution as the capture sites cover the whole County from top to bottom, as can be seen from the distribution map below.

There are now 20 records for the County in total. The extreme dates range from the earliest on 26th September (2002) to the latest on 19th November (2003), although, as in Glamorgan, the majority of records occur in October. Numbers are always small in Pembrokeshire, with the maximum catch being two at Newport in October 2001.

Ron Elliott.

2240 *Lithophane leautieri hesperica* (Blair's Shoulder-knot)



MapMate map showing the distribution of Blair's Shoulder-knot in Pembrokeshire

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

A very late moth!



This little Tortrix moth, with the very awkward name of *Pseudagyrotoza conwagana*, is usually found on the wing from about mid-May to early-August. Its size, shape and colouration make it quite distinctive.

On 8th November, Tony Lewis took one in his MV trap at Newport, over three months later than usual. All previous Pembrokeshire records have been between 2nd June and 5th August. The specimen was very fresh, as if it had just emerged.

The species is fairly common throughout the U.K. and the larvae feed on Ash seeds and Privet berries.

Beginners Luck ?

Most members of the North Pembrokeshire Moth Group have successfully recorded a first or second vice-county record during their first year of trapping:

Mel Ouseley - *Blastobasis decolorella*
Roly Gill - *Diurnia lipsiella*
Tony Lewis - *Tinea trinotella*
Liz/Philip Rapley - *Palpita vitrealis*

This year, Janet Atkinson joined the Group when she acquired a Skinner MV Trap and soon presented me with a mystery micro. His provisional ID was *Mompha divisella*. Digital photos were sent to Ron Elliott, our County Recorder, who confirmed that there was only one previous record, from a list by the famous Victorian entomologist, C. G. Barrett, published in a tourist guide to Tenby in 1875. It is currently a Na species so Ron decided that expert opinion was needed and the specimen was sent to Mark Parsons at Wareham who, after dissection, confirmed the identification.

In the meantime, at the BC South Wales Branch AGM, Ron had spoken to David Slade who mentioned that he had *M. divisella* breeding on Broad-leaved Willowherb in his garden, the larvae inducing pea-sized galls on the stems of the plant. Marsh and Spear-leaved Willowherbs are also used.

Now we all know what to look out for next season. And as for beginners luck ? Well it's more a case of enthusiasm and perseverance.

Tony Lewis

Electronic Newsletter

Do you have e-mail facilities available? More and more people do nowadays. Do you have a copy of Acrobat Reader on your computer? This is a freely available (and free) utility for reading files in a format called 'pdf'. These are image files that resemble electronic books. The content can be read from the screen or printed on any connected printer.

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 this format. 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.



Zelleria hepariella. The grid is 1 mm x 1 mm

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

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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)

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