



Butterfly News

The newsletter of the South Wales Branch of
Butterfly Conservation

Spring 2006

Major new report issued by Butterfly Conservation



Dusky Thorn moth - one of the moths showing a severe decline. Photo: R. Elliott



Where have Wales' moths gone?

The moth population of Wales is in serious decline, causing concern for the future of many species of birds, bats and invertebrates that feed on them.

The decline is revealed in a new report entitled "The State of Britain's Larger Moths". The precise reasons for decline remain to be determined, though habitat loss and climate change are highly implicated.

Sir David Attenborough, in a foreword to the report, describes its conclusions "significant and worrying". Sir David, who recently fascinated the nation with his BBC series *Life in the Undergrowth*, says: "Moths are valuable indicators of what is happening in our countryside. Other insects too are almost certainly in decline."

The report's key conclusions are:

- * The number of larger moths in Britain has decreased by 32 per cent since 1968
- * Southern Britain - including Wales - has seen a decrease in larger moth numbers of 44 per cent since 1968
- * Twice as many moth species have declined as have increased
- * Sixty-two moth species are believed to have become extinct in Britain during the twentieth century

Subsequent analysis shows that the losses in urban areas have been in the region of 50 per cent. Decreasing populations of some moths in the north have been counterbalanced by increases in others, particularly of those found more commonly in the south. This pattern indicates a response to climate change.

The report, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, has been compiled by the UK charity Butterfly Conservation. It includes data collected by scientific institute Rothamsted Research from a nationwide network of moth light-traps established in 1968. The traps, run by volunteers, have been located in all sorts of habitats from the coast to upland moor, from woodland to private garden. Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation, says: "This long-running data is unique and has highlighted a very serious ecological issue - the decline of common insects."

Butterfly Conservation is now seeking funding for a major new UK Moth Recording Scheme in order to be able to target conservation and reverse the declines.

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E-mail Newsletters

At its last meeting, the S. Wales Branch committee decided to encourage as many members as possible to receive their branch newsletter via e-mail rather than the present postal system. The advantages to this are

- a saving in the use of paper
- a cost saving on postage
- the ability to incorporate colour pictures in the newsletter
- the time to produce and distribute the newsletter is greatly reduced, freeing time for some of our most active volunteers.

Colour printing is too expensive to consider, and the more money we can save on paper and postage the more money we can devote to conservation projects. Obviously, some members do not have facilities to receive e-mail: these members can continue to receive their newsletter as at present. Other people may feel that their computer may get clogged up with lengthy files: the .pdf (Acrobat) format greatly reduces file size and this should not present problems, but if any member trying e-mail distribution feels it causes problems they can freely revert to postal distribution.

I would ask all members willing to change to e-mail for their newsletter to contact Ron Elliott, Newsletter Editor, as follows:

e-mail address: pems.leps@tiscali.co.uk
postal address: Ron Elliott, 10 Flemish Court,
Lamphey, Pembrokeshire, SA71 5PA

Please give Ron your name, the e-mail address to which the newsletter should be sent and your postal address or BC membership number.

Please contact Ron as soon as possible.

DO IT NOW – BEFORE YOU FORGET!

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Martin Anthoney, Branch Chairman.

"The State of Britain's Larger Moths report, published by Butterfly Conservation and Rothamsted Research in February, presents the detailed results of the ground-breaking study of trends in common moth populations, as well as reporting on moth colonisations and extinctions during the twentieth century and progress towards the conservation of UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority moths.

The full-colour report (which runs to 33 pages and includes over 50 photographs of moths) is available from Butterfly Conservation (0870 7744309 or www.butterfly-conservation.org) for £5.00 plus £1.50 postage and packing."

North Pembrokeshire Moth Group Micro moth recording in 2005

2005 proved to be another interesting season for the North Pems Moth Group. We continued our individual and joint macro recording activities and more accurate distribution patterns are now beginning to emerge for many species in the north of the County.

For the first time we turned our attention to the micros. C.G. Barrett set the standard in the 1870's while living in Pembrokeshire but little else was achieved until Norman Lowe's (NL) work in the 1970's and 1980's. There were 'holiday' visits by several micro experts (Langmaid, Pelham-Clinton, Agassiz and Emmet) in the 1980's while Sam Bosanquet made an important contribution at the turn of the century. However, much more needed to be done, so armed with essential micro literature (expensive!) we decided to make a start.

Liz and Philip Rapley (EPR) in Felindre Farchog did well with two new VC45 records - *Yponomeuta rorrella* (Willow Ermine) (pRDB3 status) and *Platytes alpinella* (another pRDB3 status moth). This very local pyralid is associated with coastal sand-dunes in southern and eastern England and the Isle of Man. It is possibly a first record for Wales.

Peter Byles at Pencastell trapped *Platyphilia pallidactyla* (x6) in mid-June, a species previously recorded only once by NL.

Janet Atkinson (JA), also at Felindre Farchog, recorded two unusual synanthropic pyralids, both firsts for VC45 - *Plodia interpunctella* (the Indian Meal Moth) and *Ephestia kuehniella* (the Mediterranean Flour Moth). Their source was probably a stock of imported wild bird food. She also recorded *Stenolechia gemmella* which was another new County record.

Roly Gill, from Penybryn, near Cilgerran, also recorded a first for Pembrokeshire - *Helcystogramma rufescens* (x2).

Tony Lewis (Newport, Pems.). My new County records were *Yponomeuta sedella* (a Nb species) and *Epinotia ramella*. I also recorded 2 further examples of *Rhigognostis incarnatella* (a pRDB1 status species) to add to my first VC45 records in 2004.

In the Spring JA had given me several Dame's-violet (*Hesperis matronalis*) plants, *R. incarnatella*'s food plant, from her garden. When inspecting these plants in June I was pleased to observe an adult *Plutella porrectella* sitting on a leaf. This species also feeds on Dame's-violet and was only the 4th Pems record. Both EPR and JA recorded the pRDBK pyralid *Phlyctaenia stachydalis* in June/July.

Our thanks to Mark Parsons, John Langmaid and Tony Davis for determining the 'difficult' species.

Tony Lewis

West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre - an update



The West Wales Local Records Centre development plan was finalised last September after consultations and interviews with a range of data providers and data users. It has been given the name West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre. This involved a series of presentations to Local Planning Authorities one of which, the PCNPA, has granted a funding commitment for our establishment phase. We are still waiting to hear back from the three county councils with their decisions but gaining their commitment is now a top priority.

We have had further funding commitments from WTB, WDA and EAW. Part of the grant from EAW is directed specifically at sorting out the Water-vole database for Wales - this will be an important job for the LRC during the first year of populating databases.

Presentations have also been delivered to the Recording communities in the three counties. Representatives of the Recording community from each of the three counties are to be elected to the board of WWBIC. Various topics emerged from these meetings which need fuller consideration over the year ahead, they are: accurate geo-referencing of records, use of LRC data for tourism, digital photography, marine recording, geological recording. Invitations to attend these meetings will be posted in a March bulletin / newsletter.

We have had some important breakthroughs in the availability of best software and best datasets to the LRC and these will also be reported in the bulletin. Most recently we are negotiating a lease on an office premises near Whitland on the Pembrokeshire Carmarthenshire border. This site was chosen out of nine investigated because of its central location and the nature of the facilities on offer. For more news on the LRC this month make sure you are on our mailing list by sending your details to Rob Davies, Local Records Officer at: westwaleslrc@bopenworld.com.

In Memoriam Donations

A donation to Butterfly Conservation is a wonderful lasting tribute to anyone who gained pleasure from Butterflies and Moths during their life time. Every donation in memory of a loved one will help save the butterflies and moths from which they derived so much enjoyment. Here are just a few examples of what can be achieved from donations in memory:

A donation of £100 will provide one days' vital habitat management on one of our reserves.

A donation of £300 will buy a moth trap, so volunteers can carry out on going survey work.

A donation of £500 will enable us to run a training event for landowners and farmer on better land management for butterflies and moths.

There are many ways to give in memory. For example:

you could make a donation to Butterfly Conservation instead of buying flowers for a funeral

you can make a one-off donation at any time, or

you can donate on a regular basis, for instance to commemorate a loved ones birthday or an anniversary.

If you would like to make a donation in memory of a loved one, then their name will be written in the *In Memoriam* book, which is held in the reception at the Lulworth Office. If you would like to write a few words about your loved one, we would be happy to include these in the book as well. We will send a certificate to each donor marking the gift. We will also, with the permission of the family, mention the donation in our annual review.

In Memoriam gifts can be arranged through funeral directors or direct to Butterfly Conservation. All donations, not matter how small, are gratefully received and acknowledged.

If you would like further information or would like to discuss your gift in person please contact Christine Simpson on 0870 7744309 or email csimpson@butterfly-conservation.org

Thank you for thinking of us at this time

BRANCHES LIAISON MEETING - 11th March 2006

On Saturday 11th March I represented South Wales Branch at a Branches Liaison Meeting in London. Sixteen of Butterfly Conservation's thirty two branches were represented.

The early sessions were devoted to finance and administration. Some of the main points to emerge were:

A grant has just been obtained from Countdown 2010 and Esme Fairburn Foundation to finance BC Regional Officers for England

£135,000 has been donated to HQ projects from the branches since 2003

Updated Branch Rules are to be presented at the next national AGM

Each branch will be required to have a financial reserves policy to stop "unused money" accumulating in branch bank accounts.

A new membership leaflet should be available by May

·With its membership of 235, South Wales Branch is midway in the membership "league table". Hampshire is at the top with 814 members whilst the Isle of Man has only 19 out of BC's total membership of nearly ten thousand.

·A presentation was given on the distribution of BC members amongst the various socio-economic groups. Unsurprisingly, membership of the society is skewed towards more affluent social groups, but interestingly the submission of butterfly records is much more evenly spread over the groups.

An attempt is to be made to estimate the total time worked by volunteers for Butterfly Conservation for use in supporting grant applications. Each branch will be asked to supply a figure for its volunteers as part of this exercise. To help, I would be grateful for any branch members who can supply me with an estimate of the number of hours for which they have volunteered in the past year; this includes attending meetings, helping with practical conservation work, time spent recording lepidoptera and collating the results, admin work done at home etc.

The afternoon was devoted to projects

·Save Our Butterflies Week is scheduled for 22nd – 30th July. It is intended as a week of events publicising the work of Butterfly Conservation.

·Butterfly Conservation has proposed 15 butterflies and 126 moths (including the 71 species with the greatest % decline in The State of Britain's Moths) for inclusion as UKBAP species

·Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation, gave an update on the progress of BC's national projects.

·A report was given on efforts being made to identify disease-resistant elm trees suitable as food plants for White-letter Hairstreak and other species.

·The day ended with a discussion on the Awards for All national lottery grants programme.

Martin Anthony



Above left: An aberrant Wall butterfly found by Arthur Chater at Penparc, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion (SN2048) on 23rd August 2005. Above right: A normal Wall butterfly

Back from the brink?

Many of our wildlife species adapt very well to changing environments. Some need a helping hand. Many of these used to be helped inadvertently as an accidental side effect of our previously inefficient agricultural practices! To some extent, many of our fritillary butterflies are still firmly in the latter category. They are habitat specialists, in the sense that not only do they require certain unimproved semi-natural grasslands in which to breed but within these habitats they require pockets of very specialised micro-habitat conditions.

Scientists discovered in the early 1990s, some of the secret needs of the superb and majestic High Brown Fritillary, then and still one of Britain's most rapidly declining butterfly species. It needs violets growing in bracken, and ground temperatures of around 32C during the spring period to develop so rapidly! The caterpillar, which hatches from its egg in March/April, feeds only on violet leaves and has to reach maturity as a butterfly in June, so how on earth would it find such warm micro-habitat? Basically, it thrives in a light covering of dead bracken litter in sunny, sheltered aspects. The bracken litter needs to be deep enough to provide a warm air pocket, like a string vest, but not so deep that it shades out the violet plants. Bracken is often thought of as purely a pest species, invading otherwise productive grassland. To some extent, that is true. Better to think of it as a substitute woodland canopy. But like most land, left unmanaged it will eventually turn to permanent woodland. So, like woodland, the bracken needs to be managed, otherwise it gets too dense, preventing the understory of both violets (or other woodland ground flora) and of grass. Traditionally, although they wouldn't eat it, grazing ponies or cattle would break up the dead bracken by trampling amongst it. Lose the violets and you lose the fritillaries. Lose the grass and there's nothing for grazing animals to eat, so bracken gets denser still, eventually also losing the violets. Where ponies or cattle no longer graze, sometimes it was necessary to fire the bracken by either swailing (controlled burn) or uncontrolled burns, particularly where gorse was also invasive. Also bracken used to be cut for animal bedding in winter, but this is uncommon nowadays.

Common land often held stands of bracken. Perhaps because it was "common" land, it was not improved by fertiliser or ploughing & re-seeding with rye grasses. Often, the bracken became dense, not cut or grazed. Many commons in south Wales are open to now busy roads, which deters owners from grazing valuable stock, particularly larger animals like cattle or ponies. Fencing can be problematic, although it may become easier in

future. Burning, particularly near human habitation can become anxiety provoking, if not dangerous. These commons are where many of these specialised species live, so we had to find a substitute set of practices to replicate as best we could these semi-natural conditions. Enter the Vale of Glamorgan Local Biodiversity Partnership's funding application to the Aggregates Levy Fund, based on our earlier small scale experimental plots. That was 3 years ago, so what has been achieved?

Three winters of Sunday morning volunteer work parties, with specialist machinery support from Glamorgan Heritage Coast, have started to make a difference. The Alun Valley & Old Castle Down was clearly an important core site for high brown and other violet feeding fritillary species. During the late 1990s, three other sites locally lost their populations. Over the three winters, we've gradually opened up the dense bracken and scrub, with a combination of hand tools and mechanical brush-cutters. The response of the butterfly seems to have been immediate! The 2003/2004 increase in population was 36% whereas the next year's increase rose dramatically to 100%.

Thanks to co-operation of a private landowner and grazier, we now have a large part of the best south facing slopes grazed by horses. Sheep still graze the common on Old Castle Down in modest numbers, but some sort of additional management will still be necessary to maintain the habitat. Earlier this month, we visited a selection of Devon commons, which still support the high brown and other fritillaries. Several key differences struck me. Winter pony grazing breaks up denser bracken stands producing an even distribution of suitable habitat. Large areas of common land at regular intervals along several key river valleys provided a huge habitat network resource. Scrub was largely absent from many of the best commons, despite which, curiously, Devon has a booming population of Dartford Warblers. Many if not quite all of the key sites were under some kind of beneficial agri-environment scheme or protective designation such as SSSI, AONB, Countryside Stewardship etc. Plenty of food for thought. Not least, the Exmoor HBF sites are almost as close to our core site as those previously occupied in south Wales. Winter work parties and volunteer weekly adult count "transect" walks will hopefully continue. Hopefully, follow up grazing will increase. We've gone through some of the habitat restoration, but nothing stands still and we now need to keep a regular supply for future. It's a partnership of grazing animals and conservationists. Your help would be very much appreciated.

Richard Smith

RESERVES SEMINAR, 18/19th MARCH

BC organised a reserves seminar/workshop over this weekend in Salisbury, which was reasonably convenient for attendance by representatives of branches in the southern half of UK and indeed for access to Bentley Wood, the chosen practical site (more later). A selection of branches fielded representatives, roughly matching (with some notable exceptions) the 31 reserves which BC currently has "on its books". Not all branches have reserves in their areas and some (e.g. Hampshire, West Midlands, Devon, Dorset & West Country) have more than one.

Volunteer effort on reserves is vitally important to BC across Britain, with estimated volunteer time last year of 1,300 days equating to 6 extra members of staff! The 500 hectares of land managed as BC reserves help to protect 27 key butterfly & moth species. The last seminar in 1999 featured mostly grassland reserves, so the balance was shifted this time. Over the weekend, we heard presentations of issues from several reserves. At Catfield Fen (Norfolk) health & safety issues play a crucial part in minimising the risk of drowning of volunteer workers! Grafton Wood (Worcs) is a fine example of a long managed & monitored brown hairstreak population. Oaken Woods (Surrey), Ryton Woods (Warwickshire), Alner's Gorse (Dorset) & Prestbury Hill (Gloucs) all very much emphasised the overall aim of securing management of the surrounding landscape habitat as well as the parcels of land under our direct control.

Most of you will be aware of 2 reserves in Wales: Caeau Ffos Fach near Cross Hands in South Wales branch region and Eyarth Rocks in Denbeighshire within the North Wales branch region. In south Wales, we are perhaps a little unusual in that we also manage other land (around 200 hectares in extent) in at least 3 other locations by formal or informal voluntary agreement, including some of Wales' most important sites for Brown Hairstreak, High Brown Fritillary & Marsh Fritillary. This "wider landscape" based approach does spread our volunteer management resources rather more thinly than having just one small "BC reserve" might suggest! A glance

at our branch events schedule provides some flavour of this.

Inevitably, over the weekend, we needed to get to grips with the rather more tedious sounding concepts of risk assessments, health & safety, single farm payments & cross compliance and agri-environment schemes. It was salutary to hear of another major UK conservation organisation which had recently lost its insurance cover following failures on health & safety issues. It made us think that any failure by any one of us could seriously damage our entire efforts across the whole country! Overall, we came out with a clear vision of the need to carry out the risk & safety issues without spoiling the huge amount of enjoyment which volunteers (including ourselves) gain and expect out of helping with practical management tasks.

Finally, the practical access available to Bentley Wood, near West Dean, was valuable in providing a real life discussion situation. This ranged over several aspects such as information boards, grazing issues, control of natural foes (in this case a stupendous deer population) and conflicts & compromises with management regimes for different key species on site. Surprisingly for a wood, it contains extensive pasture with Marsh Fritillary (edge of Salisbury Plain), and semi-open areas for Pearl bordered Fritillary. Less surprisingly, Silver-Washed Fritillary, White Admiral, White Letter Hairstreak & Purple Emperor are present. Perhaps the biggest surprise, to me anyway, was that despite the very high degree of expertise in butterfly habitat management demonstrated by David Lambert, the site manager, the wood is an independent conservation trust. David clearly has close and mutually beneficial links with BC expert staff. David's hot tip is that Purple Emperor has been about during the last week of June in recent years, so don't necessarily wait until mid July, when they can be elusive and (human) visitor numbers usually peak!

Overall, despite missing the rugby, it was an uplifting and enjoyable weekend, thanks hugely to the hard work of John Davis and excellent chairmanship of John Bacon.

Richard Smith

IN BRIEF

more brown hairstreak distribution detail from this winter

Now, at the end of March, we are expecting the blackthorn bloom to happen imminently, as the weather at last turns mild if wet! The prolonged dry & cold spells recently, have enabled us to cover much more of the expected range of the species by our egg & habitat surveys, particularly in Carmarthenshire. We've managed 139 volunteer days, roughly double previous years, with two outings during several weeks.

We now know rather better where the population around the north of Cwmffrw village actually extends to.....at least 3 more farms northwards including north of A48 dual carriageway. We've found more evidence of modest populations north of Whitland, extending up the valleys of Afon Cynin & Afon Dewi Fawr to Gelliwen & Meidrim where we had previous evidence. Thanks to Isabel Macho, we've also got a better idea of extent of population around Cilycwm. Perhaps most rewarding was that following up a chance find of roadside eggs by Julian Friese, we spent 3 whole days

with four of us counting 329 eggs across 3 adjoining farms in the Cothi valley. Curiously, the 3 strongest (in terms of egg numbers & concentration) sites in Carmarthenshire during last 3 years, are all "new" sites without historical records closer than about 2 miles away. Of the "transect" site annual egg counts, overall totals are about 10% up but with wide fluctuations at many sites. Probably the highlight would be finding 113 eggs in a stretch of 125 m of hedge at Berthllywd farm, bordering Cwmduhén.

Some volunteers have also been involved in surveys of Pembrokeshire, Brecon Beacons National Park (between Ffairfach & Rhydysaint) & Cerdigion, where some useful finds have also been made. We also held, at the National Botanic Gardens, a well-attended "Hedgerows for Hairstreaks" management demonstration day for site owners. This coincided with the launch of another information sheet, on blackthorn, in Carmarthenshire LBAP partnership's Hedgerow Leaflets. With the egg hunt season closing, data entry & analysis awaits!! I'll try to bring you some more news in a future issue. Meanwhile, don't forget our summer outings.

Richard Smith

How one woman's gift will make a world of difference.

When Pamela Lewis was alive, she visited Butterfly Conservation's reserve at Prestbury Hill in Gloucestershire. She was inspired by that wonderful place and its profusion of butterflies. When Pamela died she remembered Butterfly Conservation in her Will with a generous gift. In 2005 we used Pamela's legacy to create a new nature reserve at Alners Gorse so that we could conserve one of the most important areas in Dorset for the Marsh Fritillary (and countless other rare butterflies and moths). We shall be using this new reserve to show other landowners from this beautiful part of Dorset, and further afield, how to create and maintain the habitat that the Marsh Fritillary needs for it to thrive.

In time, Pamela's influence on the conservation of the Marsh Fritillary could be enormous. We welcome legacy gifts of any size and every legacy we receive is put to work to make a lasting difference. This could be through our educational work with young people, or in the development of a landscape conservation project in an important butterfly area, or by paying for the ongoing management of our nature reserves.

Leaving a legacy to Butterfly Conservation will not cost you anything in your lifetime and could reduce the amount of inheritance tax your family may have to pay on the value of your estate, as all legacy gifts to charity are free of tax. Best of all, though, you will be making a lasting contribution to the conservation of Britain's butterflies and moths.

Butterfly Conservation relies heavily on the support of its members and friends, so please will you consider making a gift to the Society in your Will?

To talk informally, and in confidence, about helping Butterfly Conservation with a gift in your Will, please telephone David Bridges on 01403 256175, or write to him at our Lulworth offices.

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:

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

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Ron Elliott, 10 Flemish Court, Lamphey, Pembroke SA71 5PA, tel. 01646 672508, mobile: 07974 948048, e-mail: pembs.leps@tiscali.co.uk, website: <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/vc45leps/>

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 pembs.leps@tiscali.co.uk.

**R. Elliott,
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Electronic Newsletter

Do you have internet access?

Do you have a copy of Acrobat Reader on your computer?

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Alternatively, I can send it to you direct via e-mail. Just let me know at <pembs.leps@tiscali.co.uk> together with your postal address or BC membership number (so that we can remove you from the postal list.

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