



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No 51

February 2008.

*A monthly newsletter covering
Gwent and Monmouthshire Vice County 35*

Editor: Martin Anthony

White Admiral Butterfly in Gwent

Though the sunshine is welcome at this time of year, the temperatures still leave a lot to be desired, and it is a time to think of the butterflies and moths to come in the summer. The White Admiral is one of my favourite butterflies, which has recently been added to both the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority list and the equivalent Welsh "Section 42" Priority list; eastern Monmouthshire is its Welsh stronghold and as such we have a responsibility to safeguard its future.

In 1988 Neil Horton wrote in an article:

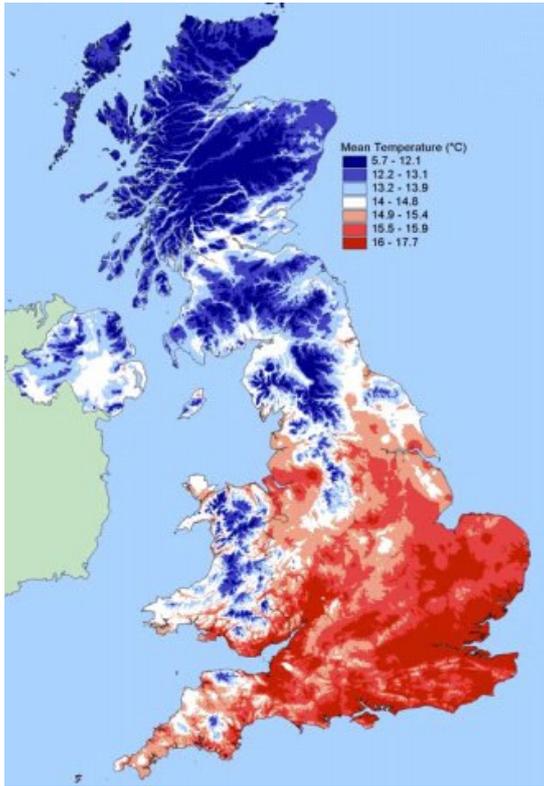
"The White Admiral (*Lodoga carnilla* Linn.), is a striking black and white Nymphalid butterfly flying in woodland in July and early August and whose larval food-plant is the Honeysuckle. It is mainly restricted to the southern and eastern English counties south of a line running roughly from the Wash to the Severn Estuary. Gwent lies at the western limit of its range but over the last forty years the White Admiral has spread into this county. Prior to that time it does not appear to have been found here and I can find no old Monmouthshire records of its occurrence.

I saw my first Monmouthshire White Admirals on 22nd July 1952 in the Angiddy Valley close to Tintern and kept the colony under observation every year until 1962. By this time it had extended its range a further two miles up the valley. Then, however, it completely disappeared from these woods as a result, I suspect, of the extremely severe and prolonged 1962-63 winter.

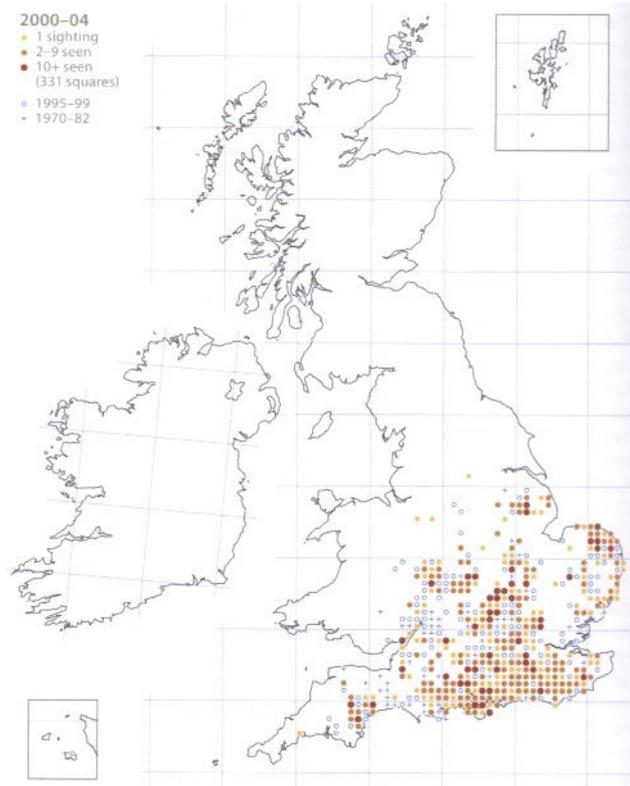
I did not see the butterfly again until 2nd August 1970 when I noticed several flying in the Hendre Woods near Monmouth. This colony has expanded and steadily increased in numbers and still flourishes. In good years it is abundant.

On 2nd August 1977 I saw a single White Admiral in St Pierre's Great Woods. Ten years later a number were to be seen there and this year, 1988, it is numerous. Last year Mr Trevor Evans saw several in woods near Moun-ton and I saw it in woodland in the vicinity of Whitebrook. Mr C. Elliot informs me that it had also reappeared in 1985, 1986 and 1987 in one of its old haunts in the Angiddy Valley.

Thus it would seem that the White Admiral is now firmly established in eastern Gwent and is extending its range."

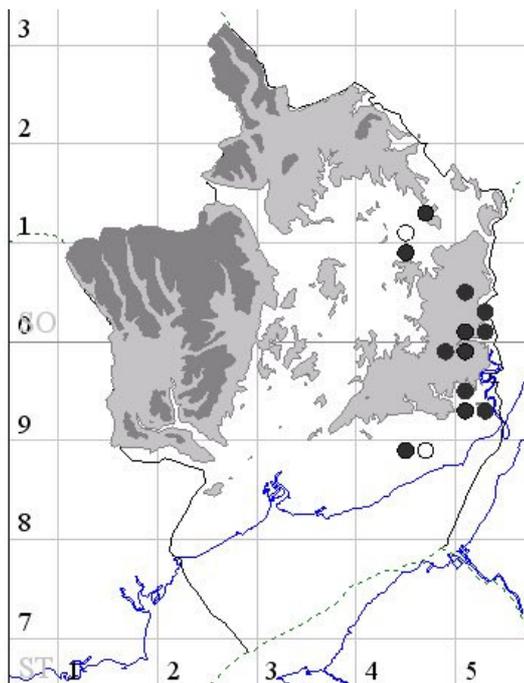


Mean Summer Temperatures 1970-2000



White Admiral UK distribution 2000-2004

As can be clearly seen from the two maps, the distribution of White Admiral in the UK seems to show a correlation with climate, though other studies failed to find a link between abundance and summer weather. Monmouthshire and the Wye Valley are on its western limit, and in such circumstances, it is likely to be more susceptible to variations in abundance. Global warming could help secure its future in the area, and possibly lead to further expansion. The species only colonised Monmouthshire just over fifty years ago, but a series of warm summers since 2000 have helped it spread, culminating in the glorious summer of 2006 when 16 records from 11 localities in the east of the county, representing some 67 individuals, were submitted. Sitting next to my car in the Angiddy Valley with double figure numbers of White Admiral flying above my head was a sight to remember.



White Admiral distribution in Gwent

*(Solid dots represent records since 2000.
Open circles are sites where only pre-2000 records exist.
Light grey > 100m altitude.
Dark grey > 300m altitude.)*

In contrast, the poor summer of 2007 produced only a single White Admiral record for the county. All is not lost, though. Though the butterfly is usually seen in sunny weather when it comes down to feed, particularly on bramble flowers, or glide along a ride, it is essentially a butterfly of shady woodlands. Sometimes individuals can be seen flying through dark, dense, woodland. In bad weather I have seen the butterflies retreat to the canopy, particularly sweet chestnut, where they are reputed to feed on honeydew from aphids, but are rarely encountered. The larvae feed on honeysuckle, often straggly shoots in light shade but an open situation such as a ride edge.

In recent years the adult flight period has extended from late June to early August. In southern England, there have been second generations during September in several recent years, but whether we will see this in woods on the edge of its range is open to doubt.

A few questions remain. One individual was reported from the forest near Draethen in east Glamorgan in 1997 and one historical (1906) record exists for the same area, but otherwise Slade Wood remains the most westerly site in south Wales for White Admiral. Slade Wood is only a few kilometres from the large area of Wentwood, yet there have been no sightings of it in Wentwood even though it has been established in Slade Wood for thirty years. What has it got against Wentwood?

Martin Anthony

National Butterfly Recorders' Meeting

The annual National Butterfly Recorders' Meeting, organised by Butterfly Conservation, will be held in Birmingham on March 29th. Anyone interested in butterflies is welcome, but advanced booking is required and there is a registration fee of £5 payable on the day. Butterfly population trends for 2007 will be revealed and guest speakers Dr Robert Wilson (Exeter University) and Carolyn Jewell (York University) will present different aspects of how climate change is affecting butterflies. There will also be an update on the research being carried out by Oxford Brookes University into the Wall Brown. Anyone interested in attending should contact Diane Garland at Butterfly Conservation (01929 400209 or info@butterfly-conservation.org).

Volunteers Required For Butterfly Monitoring

Torfaen County Borough Council in partnership with Countryside Council for Wales is looking for volunteers to take part in a butterfly survey of its six Local Nature Reserves at:

- Garn Lakes (Blaenavon) SO233100
- Cwmavon Corridor (cycle route between Blaenavon and Garndiffaith) SO256080 to SO263044
- Tirpentwys SO255004
- Cwmyrnyscoy Quarry ST283997
- Church Wood and Spring Vale Ponds ST957959
- Henllys Open Space ST275936

Surveys will follow the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme methodology of weekly recording throughout the period April to September.

If you are interested or wish to know more please contact Steve Williams, Senior Ecologist, Torfaen County Borough Council on Tel: 01633 648256 or Email: steve.williams@torfaen.gov.uk

Newport Report

Long periods of frost followed by wet and windy weather has resulted in poor moth records, mostly from my garden in Melbourne Way. On 20th January I recorded Oak Beauty followed by another on 7th February. On 30th January three new species for the year were trapped- Pale Brindled Beauty, Dark Chestnut and Common Quaker.

On 7th February, Kevin found a Herald at the nearly-completed interpretation centre building at Uskmouth. On the same date I saw my first Hebrew Character of the season, and on 9th February I recorded Early Grey and Dotted Border. Another long gap until Chestnut appeared on 15th February, then things picked up a bit towards the end of the month with my garden seeing Small Quaker on 20th, Clouded Drab, March Moth and Angle Shades on 23rd, Tawny Pinion on 28th and Twin-spot Quaker and Early Thorn on 29th February.

Not wishing to see me idle throughout the summer (as if!) Dave Slade of SEWBReC has suggested another micro safari. The beast in question is *Infurcitinea argentimaculella*. The adult is described as being brown with a copper sheen with silvery white wing markings and wingspan of 8-9mm. The adult will not be the object of my quest but rather the larval stage. It lives in a spun silken tube covered in "foodplant", the lichens *Lepraria incana* and *L. aeruginosa*. The former is a bright green verdigris colour and grows in damp shady places on trees, soil and rocks which are out of direct sunlight and protected from rain. Tubes containing larva may be seen on the surface of the lichen from April to June. My first area for investigation will be Newport Cemetery (purported to be the oldest municipal cemetery in Wales and one of the oldest in Britain). It is surrounded by an Old Red Sandstone wall and has many old gravestones which should provide ideal conditions for the growth of the lichens. I will detail progress in my next report.

Roger James



Infurcitinea argentimaculella
larval tubes

(Dave Slade)

Recent Highlights

Another new micro for the county

During the last few years Robert Holman (Cheltenham) has been tracking what seems to be an expansion in the range of the leaf-mining micro moth *Phyllocnistis saligna* in the valleys of the Rivers Severn and Avon in Gloucestershire and adjoining counties.

In October 2006 he also found mines at Ross-on-Wye and in October 2007 recorded mines in the twigs of crack willows growing on the Herefordshire side of the R Wye at Kerne Bridge and Lower Lydbrook. To check whether the moth might have moved further down the Wye, on 5 January this year Robert went down to Monmouth and found a small number of mines in pollarded crack willows by the

Wye north of Monmouth up to just beyond Dixton. The records were 6 mined twigs from SO 5113 and 4 from SO 5213; all in VC 35.

According to Sam Bosanquet, *Phyllocnistis* is an uncommon/overlooked genus in the county. *Phyllocnistis unipunctella* was the only member of the genus recorded in Monmouthshire prior to Robert Holman's *P. saligna* records. Sam had recorded *unipunctella* four times at Dingestow, and there is one record by the late Maitland Emmet from Monmouth.

Phyllocnistis saligna is a new species for Monmouthshire, but is it spreading, or is it just that Robert and others have worked out how to find it? It would be useful to check Crack Willows elsewhere in Monmouthshire; anyone interested in further information please contact Sam Bosanquet (details at the end of this newsletter).

Large Tortoiseshell

On 7th April last year Steve Williams was near the old Pontypool Hospital at Pontnewynydd (SO276024) when he spotted a Tortoiseshell butterfly which seemed unusual in both appearance and behaviour.

Steve was able to photograph the individual, which is clearly a Large Tortoiseshell, only the fifth county record and the first since I saw one at Wentwood in 1979.



Large Tortoiseshell

(Steve Williams)

Apart from its larger size, it can be identified from Small Tortoiseshell by the greatly reduced blue colouration on the wing margins, the absence of a clear white spot on the forewing and the presence of an extra black spot in the bottom corner of the forewing (seven in all on the forewing). It is a much stronger flyer, and can soar high into the canopy.

Probably extinct in Britain, the elm-feeding Large Tortoiseshell still occurs as an uncommon immigrant. In 2007 there were an unusually large number of records in southern England from March to July. It is thought the early records may have arisen from 2006 immigrants which survived our mild winter. In the spring the adults often feed on willow flowers.

First 2008 dates

2008 continues the trend in recent years of a very mild January and February, with only 2006 in recent times being closer to “normal”, cooler, conditions. There have been several reports of early, presumably over-wintering, Red Admirals – these days I am almost coming to expect to see a Red Admiral in my garden during January / February, usually feeding on their favourite winter heathers. This year though, the numbers of Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells reported almost match those of Red Admiral, a definite increase on 2007.

16 species of macro moth were recorded by the end of February, very close to the 17 species for the comparable period last year. Eight of these set new record earliest dates, beating records set only one or two years ago.

2008 first date	species and location	2007 first date	2006 first date	2005 first date
20th January	Oak Beauty at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	29 th Jan	21 st March	6 th Feb
23 rd January	Dark Chestnut at Risca (Martin Anthoney)	10 th Jan	14 th Feb	1 st Feb
27 th January	Red Admiral at Cuckoo Wood (Gail Reynolds)	14 th Jan	14 th Feb	1 st Feb
	Peacock at Beacon Hill, Trellech (Ian Rabjohns)	3 rd Feb	30 th March	18 th March
30 th January	Pale Brindled Beauty	14 th Jan	13 th Feb	24 th Jan
	Common Quaker both at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	1 st Feb	20 th March	2 nd Feb
7 th February	Herald at Uskmouth (Kevin Dupé)	3 rd Feb	6 th June	15 th March
	Hebrew Character at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	19 th Jan	24 th March	2 nd Feb
	Chestnut at Risca (Martin Anthoney)	30 th Jan	13 th Feb	20 th Jan
9 th February	Early Grey		24 th March	30 th Jan
	Dotted Border both at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	22 nd Feb	9 th March	5 th Feb
	Small Tortoiseshell at Llandogo (Gail Reynolds)	6 th March	8 th Feb	1 st Feb
20 th February	Small Quaker at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	24 th Feb	25 th March	12 th March
23 rd February	Clouded Drab	24 th Feb	20 th March	30 th Jan
	March Moth	8 th March	21 st March	9 th March
	Angle Shades all at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	1 st April	27 th April	3 rd March
28 th February	Tawny Pinion at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	9 th March	4 th April	8 th March
29 th February	Twin-spot Quaker	8 th March	25 th March	16 th March
	Early Thorn both at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	10 th March	29 th March	22 nd March

Dates for your Diary 2008

- Saturday 29th March National Butterfly Recorders' meeting in Birmingham. See article above.
- Sunday 11th May Moth trapping at Waunfawr Park, Crosskeys. Details to follow.
- Saturday 31st May Roger James & I will be doing a butterfly identification and recording course at Parc Cwm Darran and Aberbargoed Grasslands. Details from Gwent Wildlife Trust (phone 01600 740600).
- Saturday 7th June National Moth Night. Target species this year are *Anania funebris* (a pretty day-flying micro which does occur in our county), Bordered Gothic, Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk and Orchards as a new UK BAP priority habitat.
- Saturday 14th June "Go Wild" show, this year in Blaenau Gwent at Bryn Bach Park, Tredegar.
- Saturday 25th October Butterfly Conservation (South Wales Branch) annual members' day of talks etc. Details to follow.

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