



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

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

Editor: Martin Anthony

Burnet Moths In Gwent

The Burnets are day-flying, highly-coloured moths of the family *Zygaenidae*. Like most highly coloured, obvious, day-flying species both the adults and larvae are toxic to non-insect predators such as birds and release cyanide when attacked. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to see birds take burnet moths. In most cases this will be young birds learning a very salutary lesson, but there is evidence that some species such as cuckoos and starlings can learn to tolerate the distasteful toxic liquids. Burnets have a characteristic thickening and hook on their antennae which sometimes lead to them being mistaken for butterflies.

The species most likely to be seen is the Six-spot Burnet, which is common, particularly in the south of the county.



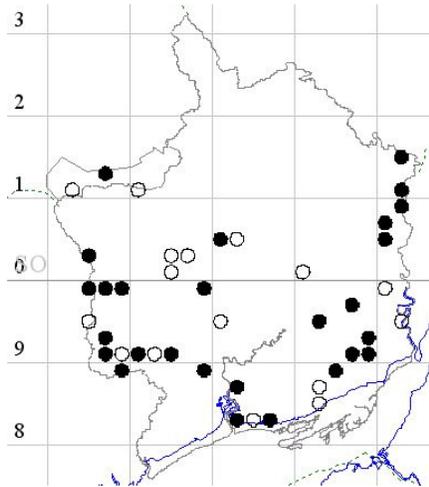
Six – spot Burnet
(Zygaena filipendulae)

The spot(s) nearest to the head are always counted as two, even though in many cases, as in the example photographed, they fuse to give a single large spot. i.e. on each wing Six-spot Burnet (left) has four spots plus the spot(s) close to the head.

Five-spot Burnet and Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet (below) both have three spots plus the spot(s) nearest the head on each wing.

Narrow-bordered Five – spot Burnet
(Zygaena lonicerae)





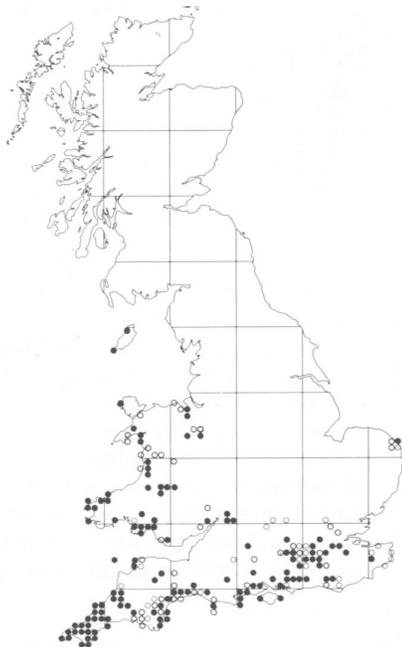
Distribution of Six-spot Burnet in Gwent.

*Open circles represent pre-2000 records
Solid circles represent post-2000 records*

The adults fly from late June to early August, sometimes in large numbers, above hay meadows, roadside verges, woodland rides and regenerating tips where the larval foodplant, birds-foot trefoil, is abundant.

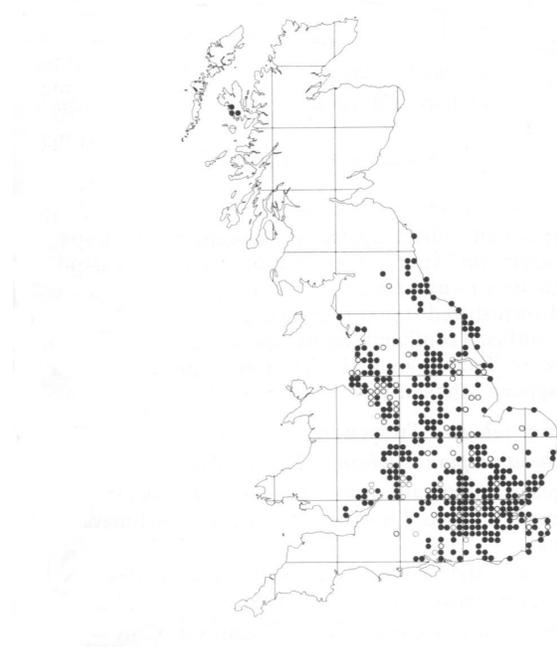
The situation is much more difficult with the Five-spot Burnet (*Zygaena trifolii*, subspecies *decreta* and *palustrella*) and Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet (*Zygaena lonicerae*) moths. These two species are very similar and the distinguishing “narrow border” of the latter name refers to small differences in the width of the black margin around the red hindwing, not visible when the moths are at rest. Knowledge of their distribution is clouded by widespread misidentifications. My predecessor as county recorder, Neil Horton, was in communication with W. G. Tremewan, perhaps the leading British authority on this family, and their conclusion was that whilst Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet was fairly common in Gwent, only one confirmed colony of Five-spot Burnet was present. This colony, found in the Angidy Valley near Tintern in 1969, has long since disappeared.

In volume 2 of *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain* (Harley Books 1985) Tremewan’s account of the burnets included maps for these two species based only on records whose authenticity could be checked to try and remove the problems of misidentification. The results were



Five-spot Burnet

(solid circles post 1980 records, open circles pre 1980 records)



Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet

As the maps show, Five-spot Burnet occurs in west Wales but not in Gwent and the reverse is true for Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet. Without strong supporting evidence, records of Five-spot Burnet in Gwent will not be accepted.

Food plants for the Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet include meadow vetchling, clovers and birds-foot trefoils. Flying from mid-June to late July, it usually appears before the Six-spot but does not continue as long. With similar flight times, and occurring in similar habitats, the two species are often found flying together. Five-spot Burnet has significant differences between its two subspecies. *Zygaena trifolii* ssp *palustrella*, the one formerly found in the Angidy Valley, feeds on common birds-foot trefoil in limestone meadows, and can be recognised because it flies earlier (mid May to mid June) than the other burnets. *Zygaena trifolii* ssp *decreta*, not recorded in Gwent, tends to inhabit marshes, wet moorland and damp meadows where it feeds on greater birds-foot trefoil and tends to fly slightly later (July to early August) than the Narrow-bordered. Both subspecies of Five-spot Burnet tend to be slightly smaller, more “squat” and rounded in appearance than the Narrow-bordered Five-spot and individuals with the middle two spots fused are not uncommon, a variation much rarer in the Narrow-bordered Five-spot.

The Forester moths, which are members of the same family, will be covered in a separate article in a future issue of the newsletter.

Martin Anthony

Wider Countryside Butterfly Project – Help needed again

Since 2005, Butterfly Conservation (BC) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), with the help of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) have been developing a new method to monitor more effectively the changing abundance of widespread butterflies across the whole countryside. Butterfly Conservation have secured funding to continue the pilot of this project for a further year.

Volunteers are needed to cover as many of the following randomly-selected 1 km squares as possible:

Square	Location	Comments	Postcode
SO1809	Ebbw Vale / Blaina		NP23 4QQ
SO1906	Cwm / Blaina		NP13 3EJ
SO2304	Abertillery		NP4 7UQ
SO2405	Abertillery / Garndiffaith		NP4 7UA
SO2706	Cwmavon		NP7 9ET
SO3008	Llanover		NP7 9HY
SO3804	Trostrey / Gwehelog		NP15 1RH
SO3909	Raglan (Bryngwyn)		NP15 2BW
SO4106	Kingcoed (just west of A449)	Covered	NP15 2HX
SO4410	Dingestow		NP25 4DJ
SO4605	Llangovan		NP25 4PP
SO4706	Llwyn-y celyn / Croes Robert	Covered	NP25 4JP
ST2390	Risca / Pontymister (Dan-y-Graig)	Covered	NP11 6DQ
ST2494	Cwmcarn (above Scenic Drive)		NP44 6JU
ST3582	Newport Goldcliff		NP18 2AU
ST3585	Newport, near Pye Corner south of Llanwern steel works		NP18 2DY
ST3884	Newport Goldcliff		NP26 3DF
ST3990	Llandevaud		NP18 2AD
ST3994	Newbridge-on-Usk		NP15 1ND
ST4598	Wolvesnewton		NP16 6NY
ST4994	Itton		NP16 6BL

Volunteers are asked to record the butterflies they see whilst walking two parallel 1-km long survey lines across the 1km square allocated to them. A minimum of only two visits is required, one in July and one in August, though additional visits are encouraged. Anyone who might be interested in recording one of the squares not yet covered please contact me for more details (contact details at the end of this newsletter).

Martin Anthony

Newport Report

Butterflies

Poor weather conditions have meant a very slow start to the season. The transect at Uskmouth on 2nd May produced 79 individuals of 6 species, 30 of which were Orange-tips, one species which seems to be having a good year. Sheila's efforts on 7th May saw 100 individuals with Orange-tip again present in numbers. Peacock numbers were up to 22. The 13th May showed no great increase in overall numbers with just 111 individuals, 64 of which were Green-veined White. The last transect date was 21st May which produced just 70 butterflies of 4 species with Green-veined White again dominant.

The Solutia Meadows Reserve now has a circular walk and whilst attending a function there on 12th May I took the opportunity to look for butterflies. In quite a short distance I saw 8 species including, to my surprise, a Painted Lady and Red Admiral. If you go for a walk on this reserve keep a look-out for Grass Rivulet moth. It has never been recorded from this site but the larval food plant, yellow rattle, is there in abundance.

Moths

In contrast to the butterflies, we've done rather well on moths over the past month, recording in excess of 70 species new for the year. On 30th April I recorded White-spotted Pug at Melbourne Way with Bright-line Brown-eye and Garden Carpet on 2nd May. On the 5th Sheila and I both had Ruby Tiger and Swallow Prominent whilst I included Figure of Eighty, Vine's Rustic, Silver Y, Pebble Hook-tip, Waved Umber and Dark Sword-grass in the catch. Another good night on 6th saw Kevin recording White Pinion-spotted at Gaer Park Lane and Poplar Hawk, Spruce Carpet and Streamer at Goldcliff. On the following night Kevin saw Scalloped Hazel and Small Waved Umber at the same site.

On 8th May Kevin discovered the first Small Eggar larval web for the year at Goldcliff. Since then he has found an additional eight webs in the area. On the same date Sheila trapped Common Marbled Carpet at Haisboro Avenue plus a Small White Wave (surprisingly only the second Newport record), and added to the list on 10th May Buff Ermine and Treble Lines. The next three days saw a flurry of activity: on 11th Kevin recorded Chinese Character, Scorched Wing and Silver-ground Carpet at Goldcliff with his home site on the Gaer producing Poplar Grey, Grey Dagger, Yellow-barred Brindle and a first for Newport, Glaucous Shears. On 12th May Sheila was delighted to find an Emperor moth in her garden together with a larval web of the Lackey. On the same night Kevin trapped both Silky and Obscure Wainscots at Uskmouth reed beds.

On 13th May I had Maiden's Blush, Mottled Pug and a very early Grey Arches, whilst Kevin caught Green Carpet, Gold Spot and Dog's Tooth at Goldcliff with a Cinnabar at the same site on 14th. I had another good night on 16th, trapping Pale Mottled Willow, Common Swift, Rustic, Clouded-bordered Brindle and a melanic Peppered Moth. Sheila produced two new species on 17th with Heart and Dart and Marbled Minor. Small Square-spot was trapped at Goldcliff on 18th with an Oak Eggar larva on the same site on 19th. Meanwhile at Haisboro Avenue Sheila discovered a Copper Underwing caterpillar. On the same night I trapped a moth which I passed on to Martin for confirmation: it turned out to be a first Newport record of Devon Carpet. Back to more mundane fare on 21st May, with Common Wave, Flame Carpet and Heart and Club at Melbourne Way and Burnet Companion at Uskmouth. Kevin had a rush of records on 22nd with White Ermine, Marbled White-spot and Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet at Goldcliff and Orange Footman, Iron Prominent, Limespeck Pug and Broad-barred White on the Gaer.

On 23rd May I caught Light Emerald and Shoulder-striped Wainscot with Sandy Carpet, Common Wainscot and Shears, Kevin trapping the first Large Yellow Underwing at Goldcliff the same night. All in all a satisfactory month – lets hope numbers hold up for the rest of the year! My thanks to my fellow Newport mothers for getting their records to me so promptly.

Roger James

Recent Highlights

May proved a mixed bag of weather. Despite some warm, sunny days and warm nights, the very high rainfall and winds, frequently easterly, left an overall impression of a relatively poor month. Not many people seem to have been as fortunate as Roger in May (see previous article). Certainly, I have received considerably more important butterfly records than moth records with only a trickle of noteworthy moth records reinforcing my own impression that moth numbers and species are well down this month.

MoD Caerwent Training Area

On 21st May I was fortunate to accompany Oliver Howells (MoD) to the MoD Training Area at Caerwent. Since I was last there in 2004, use of the area for military training has increased ten times, making access for conservation purposes much more difficult. On this occasion about 25% of the base was out of bounds but we still recorded 16 Grizzled Skipper and 8 Dingy Skipper spread, in small numbers, at locations throughout much of the base. It is reassuring that the only regular colony of Grizzled Skippers in the county is still surviving. In addition to Common Blue, Small Heath, Orange-tip, Green-veined White, Large White, Small Copper, Speckled Wood and Burnet Companion moth, the highlight was the discovery of 5 Drab Looper moths, a new site for this UK Priority species and the furthest west colony in the county.

Dingy Skipper



Dingy Skipper

It has been a strange year for Dingy Skipper. Along with Holly Blue it is the only butterfly which has flourished in the west of the county this year. Roger James and I have recorded it from five localities, all regenerating industrial sites, in the west of the county. It was present in double-figure numbers at three sites and two were new sites for this butterfly, recently categorised as a UK Priority species.

In contrast, with the exception of MoD Caerwent (above), I have yet to receive a record this year from any of its known meadow sites in the east of the county. Roger and I visited five such sites but failed to find Dingy Skipper at any of them. Coincidence, or is there something about the post industrial sites that has benefited Dingy Skipper over the past season?

Martin Anthony

Important records for the month include:

3 rd May	Red Sword-grass to light at Rassau.	Rodney Morris.
	Silver Cloud and Orange Footman to light at Osbaston, near Monmouth.	Ian Smith
4 th May	Scarce Prominent, Broken-barred Carpet at Trellech	Ray Armstrong
6 th May	Devon Carpet and 17 other species to light at Graigwith Farm ST351963	Roger James & Martin Anthony
7 th May	White-marked, Seraphim and 25 other species to light at Lone Lane, Penallt	Martin Anthony
	4 Dingy Skipper, Orange-tip, Holly Blue and Speckled Wood at Blackrock, Clydach.	Richard Smith
	Also reported by Jeremy Richards on 8 th May.	
9 th May	Chocolate-tip at Trefil.	Luke Phillips
10 th May	Broom-tip to light at Coedymoeth, Aberbargoed	Christian Owen
11 th May	Glaucous Shears, a first for Newport, at Gaer Park Lane.	Kevin Dupé
12 th May	Both Silky and Obscure Wainscots at Uskmouth reed beds.	Kevin Dupé
	Painted Lady at Solutia Reserve, Newport.	Roger James
13 th May	13 Dingy Skipper and five other butterfly species at Wyllie (ST176934).	
	10 Dingy Skipper plus nine other species at Aberbargoed.	
	2 Dingy Skipper, Wall Brown, Green Hairstreak, Small Heath and six other species above New Tredegar (SO140038).	Roger James & Martin Anthony
	2 Beautiful Yellow Underwing at Broad Meend, Trellech.	Ray Armstrong
14 th May	Small Yellow Underwing, Grass Rivulet and Burnet Companion (but no Dingy Skippers) at New Grove Meadows.	
	Grass Rivulet abundant (>50) at Maryland (SO519058).	Roger James & Martin Anthony.
19 th May	Devon Carpet, a first for Newport, at Melbourne Way.	Roger James.
30 th May	Dingy Skipper, Grass Rivulet and Burnet Companion on industrial land adjacent to Penllwyn Grasslands SSSI, Blackwood, (ST164962).	
	11 Dingy Skipper, Small Heath and six other species at Markham tips (SO165020).	Roger James & Martin Anthony.
31 st May	Marbled Brown, Satin Lutestring, Orange Footman, Grass Rivulet, Satin Wave and Square Spot amongst others to light at Beacon Farm, Trellech.	Ray Armstrong

Dates for your Diary 2008

- 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.
Events organised in the county are:
- 9pm to ~ midnight at one of the orchards in the Nurtons, Tintern, by kind invitation of Elsa and Adrian Wood. Anyone interested in coming must contact Martin Anthoney beforehand (contact details at the end of the newsletter).
- 9 pm to midnight at Newport Wetlands Centre. Please bring a torch and warm clothes. Detectors to identify bats will also be used.
Leader: Kevin Dupé, Reserve Manager Newport Wetlands.
- 9.30pm to 1am at Gwent Wildlife Trust Magor Marsh Reserve.
Leaders: Denis and Val Jackson, GWT.
Cost £3 for GWT members, £5 for non-members
Advance booking essential (call GWT on 01600 740600)
- Saturday 14th June “Go Wild” show, this year in Blaenau Gwent at Bryn Bach Park, Tredegar.
11am to 4pm. A free family fun event organised by the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership.
For further information please contact BG ecologist on 01495 355702.
- Wednesday 23rd July In cooperation with Newport CC, a bat and moth watch at Allt-yr-yn LNR from 8pm until late. Further information from Roger James (see details below)
- Saturday 25th October Butterfly Conservation (South Wales Branch) annual members’ day of talks etc.
Details to follow.

MMBG – Contact Names and Addresses.

Secretary: Kevin Dupé
44 Gaer Park Lane
Newport
NP20 3NE

Phone 01633 216599
e-mail k.dupe@ccw.gov.uk

Treasurer: Sheila Dupé
18 Haisbro Avenue
Newport
NP19 7HY
Phone 01633 256475

Newsletter Editor & Recorder for
Butterflies & Macro Moths
Martin Anthoney
23 Malvern Close
Risca
Newport
NP11 6QY
Phone 01633 612272
e-mail Martin@Chemlep.Demon.co.uk

Chairman: Roger James
44 Melbourne Way
Newport
NP20 3RF

Phone 01633 263374
e-mail smallranunculus@btinternet.com
or in case of problems
julia.james@btinternet.com

Recorder for Micro Moths

Sam Bosanquet
Dingestow Court
Monmouth
Monmouthshire
NP25 4DY
Phone 01646 690102
e-mail s.bosanquet@ccw.gov.uk