

RECORDERS' NEWSLETTER



Recorders' Newsletter No. 29 (Winter 2012/13)

There is a lot talk these days about **ecosystem services**: an un-inspiring term which describes the concept that species, habitats and landscapes can contribute to the economy and human health and should be valued as such. I am still sufficiently old school to believe that the natural world and its habitats and species have an inherent scientific and emotional importance, which is value enough, but as with everything we must move with the times. So if a non-ecological value has to be attributed, what opportunities does the ecosystem service approach offer our biodiversity?

Well, for a starter, our upland hills receive vast amounts of rainfall. Where forestry plantations have carved up the blanket bogs, and heath has been converted to grassland, the rains gush into forestry ditches and over short grazed pastures and pour down valley side streams to rivers below. The rivers rise and low lying places get wet, sometimes very wet. No one really knows what affect global warming will have on our weather, but the early evidence seems to suggest more extreme weather events: so more rainfall and more floods is a not an unreasonable prediction. What can we do? Well an ecosystem services answer might be to restore the upland bogs and heaths and allow these natural reservoirs to act as giant upland sponges which can hold the rainfall and then more gently release it

over a longer period of time. It's called natural attenuation. Will it work; well as mitigation for the ecological impacts of some of the upland windfarm schemes that are being constructed (or will be constructed) in RCT, peat bog restoration schemes have been negotiated. If successful we will start to recover our long-neglected and badly treated blanket bogs: which if you like sphagnum's, cotton-grasses, cross-leaved heaths and sundews would be good enough, but if these restored bogs can be shown to reduce flooding and help to save front room carpets from ruin then ecosystem services are also being delivered. Natural attenuation is certainly a lot cheaper (and more sustainable) way of flood protection than the other options available. Perhaps the eco-systems service approach will help us come to realise that all our upland bogs should be restored as part of a landscape scale flood risk resilience strategy. If these same bogs resound with the drumming of snipe, the flash of black darter dragonflies and the sway of a several thousand flowering cotton-grass heads, then I won't complain.

A similar (pounds, shillings and pence) argument could be made for the sensitive management of our valley slopes and the ffridd and rhos pastures they support. The south Wales valleys are blessed with superb landscapes and a wonderful biodiversity. However, as we know,

during the early spring, hillside and grassland fires are an all too common occurrence in the County Borough. They pose real dangers to people and property, place huge burdens on the Fire Service, denude the landscape, destroy countless wildlife and damage habitats. Grass fires hit the public purse hard.

Termed as 'grass fires' the habitats mainly affected are bracken slopes, and purple moor-grass marshy grassland. These are home to rare and declining species, including high brown and marsh fritillary butterflies, birds such as stonechats and whinchats and thousands of slow worms and common lizards. However, the problem comes when these habitats are not managed, and build up a thatch of dead vegetation, which when dry becomes vulnerable to fire in late winter and early spring.

Bracken slopes and marshy grasslands are of high biodiversity value, but their full potential is only realised when they are properly managed. Management relies on the traditional methods of grazing (with cattle and ponies) and, where the circumstances suit, cutting. Hardy cattle breeds and mountain ponies are ideal for grazing these habitats. As traditional breeds they have been bred to feed on the rough grasslands of the valleys, they are large enough to physically break up the expanse of bracken and tussocks of purple moor-grass, and they are hardy enough to thrive on the sometimes-harsh conditions of the open hill. By controlling the bracken and rank grasses, the cattle and ponies allow a wide range of flowering plants to grow, create a range of habitat conditions, and prevent damaging uncontrolled grass fires. The re-instatement of cattle and pony grazing animals on to these important habitats could realise a sustainable solution to the annual problems of grass fires and their annual costs and implications. There are other examples and so perhaps the

ecosystem service approach does offer us something: a chance in many cases to turn a negative issue into a positive biodiversity outcome, which provides wider benefits.

Weather

The climatic roller coaster has continued to roller coast. Marcus's Middlehurst recorded the increasingly wet autumn in Treherbert, which reached an extremely soggy crescendo in December;

September – Total 170mm.

October - Total 361.5mm, highest 51mm on 11th

November- Total 430.5mm, highest 60mm on 24th, 54mm on 18th, and 56mm on 20th.

December - Total Rainfall 700.5 mm (highest 108mm on 22nd, 78mm on 19th, 54mm on 28th).

Mark Evans sent the following pithy resume of 2012 *'What a terrible end to 2012. By mid December, I thought we might just scrape in at about 200mm of rainfall by the end of the month, which would have made December's rainfall about average, but then it all went a little crazy and by month's end the total had reached 377.50mm, making it the third wettest December in the nineteen years I've been keeping records. The grand total of 2181.20mm for the year, placed 2012 as my fourth wettest year in that nineteen years period'*.

Paul Marshman also highlighted some particularly wet and 'deluged days', including 44 mm of rain 14th on December with a further 44 mm over the 15th and 16th and 6 inches of rain in 6 days between Jan 24th and 29th 2013.

Marcus also sent me his rainfall totals for Treherbert for the last four years; 2009 total rainfall 2553.3 mm 2010- 2085.38 mm

2011- 2996 mm
2012- 3966.5 mm

There certainly appears to have been something of an upward trend in Marcus's figures and 2013 stands out as a very, very wet year. About the time Marcus's records reached me, I was absent minded looking at my son's 'A Level' Geography book and found myself reading about the Aberdare Mountains of Kenya. These sub-alpine mountains are famed for their prolific precipitation which incidentally is vital for watering Nairobi. Looking at the rainfall figures and comparing with Mark's rainfall from Cwmbach it look like the Kenyan Aberdare Mountains are wetter than Wales's version; however the Kenyan Highlands weren't a patch on Marcus's 2013 rainfall totals for Treherbert. So it looks to me like Treherbert is wetter than both the Aberdare Mountains in RCT and their Kenyan namesake. I mentioned this to Mark and he relayed the story that the Aberdare Mountains, in Kenya, were named in honour of Lord Aberdare: it makes you want to go and see those blue topped, cloud covered African mountains, but if you can't afford the 'plane fare you could always go and look at the 'originals' and our own sub-alpine landscapes.

Biodiversity in Abernant

Every part of RCT has its biodiversity gems: that is the great thing about the south Wales Valleys, there is always something within walking distance of home. The area around Mark Evans Cwmbach home is full of biodiversity gems, and here's one example from last October; *'last Monday, I had the day off and visited the marshy hillside of Blaenant, above Abernant (where Martin (Bevan) flushed the short-eared owl) last winter. It was the first time I'd ever spent any time in exploring the site and was impressed (doesn't take much!) by the quality of a lot of it. The best area is on a*

shallowly sloping section of the south westerly facing hillside, which is slightly terraced, giving a variation in slopes. It is a mixture of marshy grassland and rush, with flushes and associated bogs, the bogs being more prevalent on the more level ground of the terraces.

*I don't know what I expected to find there, especially at this time of year, but noticed a few different types of **Sphagnum**, none of which I could name. I was pleased, though not surprised to find **lemon scented fern**, which was turning yellow and dying back for the winter. In the more boggy, Sphagnum dominated areas, I noticed a lot of **ivy-leaved bellflower** and with it, were patches of **lesser skull-cap**.*

*The whole time I was there I could hear reed buntings calling from the areas dominated by **tufted hair grass** and purple moor grass, though I never saw any of them, as they were undoubtedly on the ground, feeding on the fallen seed of those and other grasses. At one point I flushed a common snipe and from the drier slopes above came the calls of **stonechat** and **meadow pipit**, while flocks of **redwing** flew over from time to time.*

*Given the dismal weather that day, it wasn't surprising that the only invertebrates I saw were two larvae. The first was a startling black and yellow, longitudinally striped caterpillar of the **broom moth**, on a fern frond and the other a large, hairy, **fox moth** caterpillar, sitting low down amongst the grasses on a drier section between two flushes.*

On my way back down towards Abernant, I came upon what could be a (for me) hidden gem of a site. It is a ride through a mixed broadleaved and conifer plantation, on part of the area of landscaped coal spoil. The trees are 5-7 metres tall and the ride quite wide in places, with lots of sparse vegetation for about a fifth of its

500 metre length, the rest being wetter and more lushly vegetated. Seeing it at in autumn only hinted at its potential for butterflies and other insects, particularly in the wider, drier and more sunny section, in which I noticed **common centaury** and **blue fleabane**. I really will have to try and find the time to pay it a few visits, in sunny weather, next summer and it is a pity I couldn't get my car up there, to try some moth trapping. Although I did see a couple of moth larvae, they were tiny and probably micro moth larvae, the only identifiable invertebrate being an adult **harlequin ladybird**, which was shiny black, with two large red comma shaped spots.

Birds

I missed a really important record from Stuart Jones from the last Newsletter letter reporting 'a **wood warbler** sighting in Gelliwion woods in the summer'. As Stuart mentioned '*the woods are a fantastic habitat and I think registered as an SSSI but are being badly damaged by off-road bikes*'. Wood warblers are increasingly uncommon in RCT and are certainly a key and struggling species. It reminded me that I also forgotten to mention that last spring, with Ray Edwards and Kevin Oates, I also heard and saw a wood warbler singing from beech trees on the cyclepath between Barry Sidings and Maesycoed, Pontypridd: so perhaps wood warblers aren't quite as rare as we feared.

The changing of the 'migratory guard', was obvious on the 21st of October when Paul Marshman saw a dozen **swallows** 'fleeing' south past Llwynypia followed by redwings fleeing from somewhere further north, which by late October, would have certainly colder than RCT. Paul followed this with **woodcocks** (Glyncornel woods), **brambling** (in garden), **fieldfare**, more redwings and the 5 **goosanders** all of which were seen by the end of October.

Mark Evans also had some late swallows '*While in work, in Cwmbach, on Wednesday 24th I saw a small flock of six swallows flying fast, just above tree top height, heading down the valley, obviously in a rush to get South as quickly as possible*'.

Red kites have put in various appearances this winter in Llwynypia (Paul had 6 sightings in December) while in March, Lily Woolrich reported that '*approx 10 days ago I saw a red kite at the top of Penrhys Hill, around 1500 hrs. I'm a keen birder and haven't ever seen one that far down*'. At around the same time myself and Phil Bristow watched two red kites floating over the hillsides above Williamstown, and a further bird, together with territorially tumbling **ravens** on the hillsides above Tower Colliery in February.

Highlights from Paul's patch was the **black redstart** which turned up on the roof of the new Llwynypia Hospital in early November (Paul had previously seen one on the old Llwynypia Hospital on the 5th of November 1994) and 3 **waxwings** which he saw from his window on December 5th. Paul also had 6 finch species in his garden in early Jan: including **redpoll** and male brambling, plus a **bullfinch** which was struck down with the trichomanes bird virus and sat unhappily on his shed. Stonechats rarely visit gardens, but the cold post Christmas weather meant that on two occasions Paul had male birds visiting his garden. In the snow of January, he also witnessed some charming corvid behaviour involving a **carion crow** gambling in the snow. Paul described watching the bird climb up a snowy roof, with its wings slightly open before on getting to the ridge apex, it turned around and rolled down the sloping roof through the snow, catching itself at the gutter it did this several times, before not catching itself and tumbling off and out of sight. I remember (many years ago)

watching and listening to 'Jackanory' and the tales of 'Mortimer the Raven' read by Bernard Cribbins. I recall Mortimer gambled in the snow, in between driving taxis and raiding refrigerators. It all comes from being intelligent: exploring and experimenting is all part of a corvid's natural outlook on life.

We have the occasional grizzly tale (sparrowhawks drowning magpies in ponds – that kind of thing), but in November, Ben Williams sent an account of a particularly grizzly encounter and an even grizzlier picture *'last week I had two bramblings in the garden, a cock and hen. The cock disappeared after a couple of days but the hen stayed on. I went home one day, looked out, and saw a bushy tailed little b..... eating the hen. I didn't see it catch the bird so it may have flown into the window and the squirrel taken advantage of the situation. What a sad end after coming so far. The squirrel didn't eat all the bird but as soon as it dropped the carcass a Magpie swooped in took what was left. I have attached a photo* (Ben's picture showed a very content squirrel devouring the feathery remains of a brambling). Ben also has **reed buntings** in his garden around the same time.

Also in the autumn, at Llantrisant Common, with Sue Wistow I saw at least 20 **snipe** plus a **woodcock**, while with Kevin Oates there were 30 plus snipe in the rhos pastures of Cwm Fields and another 30 plus on marshy grasslands fields at Llantwit Fardre Marsh. Our wetland sites must hold large numbers of wintering snipe, although unfortunately very few, if any, breeding birds. One evening, in the gathering winter gloom, I saw a woodcock dive for cover into rushy ground, as I drove on the Church Village By-pass near Efail Isaf, and Phil Bristow and myself flushed a snipe and woodcock from the same tiny mountain stream above Tower Colliery during frozen weather in February: in amongst icicles,

bunched like deformed banana's on the weighed down grass of the stream edges, there was just enough soft ground for the birds to probe for worms. Also this winter I have seen the not so common **kestrels** hunting over the Church Village By-pass, Llantrisant Common and Tower colliery.

Lesley Jones sent me the following *'Reading the latest edition of the Recorders' newsletter has inspired me to take up my pen (the network is down). In Taff Street (Ferndale) garden **sparrow** numbers are just about holding out despite predation by a growing resident cat population and an opportunistic **sparrow hawk**. It's routine now to see up to 20 sparrows perched along the garden trellis (makes a great photograph). They feed daily from my neighbour Ray's bird table, a joint effort this as my St John's Wort shrub provides the cover! On a rare sunny evening in August I stepped out on to the patio on my return from a hard day in the office when I was shocked by the sparrow hawk rising from under the geranium shrub; where it was stalking the sparrows on the bird table. It rose noisily and flew across my path to take a bird off the table; I recovered from my shock in time to see it fly off with the sparrow hanging from its feet heading for the nearest allotment. What an experience and not a single neighbour around to witness it with me! The hawk has been seen on subsequent occasions, no doubt having a good feed on a regular basis'*.

Mark Evans emailed me in early November *'yesterday, I took a stroll through the forest from Mynydd Beili Glas to Mynydd Tynewydd, to see what sort of mess the wind farm contractors were making there: bad, but not as bad as I'd feared. At least they seem to have avoided the main part of the bog.*

On my way there, I scanned Lluest Wen reservoir from Bryn Gelli and saw four red-head geosanders and a drake

mallard. *The goosanders were my first for this winter period, which was pleasing. Less pleasing was the sight of the small quarry, I'd previously reported containing Parsley Fern, now completely re-landscaped and barren of any vegetation. As I plodded on over Bryn Gelli, I flushed five reed buntings from the roadside ditch and watched them, flit lazily over the moor and flop down in the **purple moor grass**. A little further on I saw another two and heard first a stonechat, then my first fieldfare of this winter period. This morning, I counted the ravens and while doing so saw my first woodcock of the autumn, which flew over me and on into the conifer plantation behind me. The Raven total was a so-so 107'.*

In December, Kevin Oates and Ray Edwards saw 3 **dippers** fighting on the Taff at Abercynon, plus 4 goosanders (1 male). Kevin also saw a dipper on the Nant Cae-dudwg at Cilfynydd on the 15th of December and on January 2nd 3 goosanders (one male) at the Marks and Sparks footbridge by Pontypridd Park. In the February, I also saw some classic dipper territorial action, this time on the confluence of the River Ely and River Clun in Pontyclun: here I was watching a male singing on river shingle at the mouth of the Clun, suddenly, with a huge kauffle two other birds (a pair) came hurtling down the Clun and virtually assaulted the first bird, this escaped by crash landing in the river, and then whizzing off back down stream to Pontyclun. It looked very much like the confluence of the two rivers marks the boundaries of those two dipper territories.

Tony Swann, sent me the following highlights from Llanharan Marsh/Brynna Woods, *'this autumn has been quiet. The year's weather has continued on a mediocre basis. The damp (being generous) spring and summer has led to marked shortfall in berries across the board except for ivy. The main deficits this*

winter have been sloes (no gin) and holly. This has been reflected in the absence of redwing in the wood. The most interesting sightings were;

*'On 21st November, a flock of 40+ **lesser redpolls** flying over the wood, north to south, but not observed to drop down. 27th November, 2 woodcocks drinking from a rain created small stream. I assume that these birds had flown in the previous night. 7th December at 1500, 2 woodcocks disturbed from a daytime roost, very close to bridleway and not a usual daytime resting area. Both sightings are assumed to be birds from either Europe or Asia that had flown in the previous evening and hadn't settled in'. As Tony says 'I am always reluctant to disturb birds during the daytime, just for the sake of recording their attendance as winter cannot be the easiest of times.'* Every time I stumble across snipe or woodcock in wet grassland I feel guilty to have disturbed them.

Dawn Thomas, had an amazing report, *'I have about 16 acres in Cwmaman and the birds I have there are **robins, magpies, jays, woodpeckers, owls, ravens, goshawks, buzzards, heron** and about 2 winters ago three of us watched a bird for a couple of minutes, not one of us had seen a bird like it before, so we done some research and it was an **American robin**. We realised how rare it was and I emailed the RSPB but didn't get a reply. I also have **pheasant** on the land in the winter but haven't seen any yet this winter but I'm sure I will, last year I had one eating out of my hand'*. This is the first American Robin report I have had in RCT, for those of you who don't know the American robin is a colourful North America version of our **blackbird** and no resemblance to the robin of Christmas cards. Infamously, in the Disney version of Mr Poppins, not only did Dick Van Dyke's cockney accent stretch incredulity to breaking point, but Julie Andrews sang to a robotic American Robin instead of a

London cock-Robin: I could cope with a story about a witch and an ensemble of dancing chimney sweeps, but the robin fiasco ruined the film for me.

One of the signs of spring is the return of **skylark** to our hills. This year Paul Marshman recorded their return to the hills around Penrhys (Rhondda) on February 4th, which is later than last year, but given the freezing weather is hardly surprising.

Mammals

In late October I had a report of a **stoat** from one of the ladies at Beddau Library. Kevin Oates passed on a report from Angharad Morgan of a **mink** that her sister saw at the old Bwl Inn, Ynysybwl in October. The morning after the big snow falls in January I found mink or **polecats** tracks (they are too difficult to differentiate) wending their way across my front garden.

In the autumn, Wendy Jenner pointed out something, which then (in the following few weeks) became obvious to me, *'One point arising from your Newsletter - we have also noticed the frequent 'run over' (grey) squirrels recently - we found 3 within a few days, one of which was up a quiet lane so unlikely to be run over. They looked to me as though they have fallen from trees, as they were intact apart from a bulging eye, and rather large and in good condition. Has anyone done an autopsy on one? Or are they so fat on all the peanuts they've eaten that they've misjudged the branches that will hold them?'*

Alex Brown had an enquiry that I couldn't answer (and I still can't), but maybe you can? In Alex's words *'Just a quick question if I may? I have an allotment shed and on Saturday I noticed a pile of 'dung', all within the same place (very neat and tidy). How would I best go about*

identifying the creature? I suspect it's a small mammal of some kind, but I'd like to find out exactly. For reference, they (the droppings) were approximately 3-4 cm in length and the diameter of a pencil'.

The autumn and winter also brought a series of reports of dead young **hedgehogs**. It seemed that the rubbishy summer weather of 2012 didn't allow many young hedgehogs to fatten up (despite the superb abundance of slugs), perhaps the cold and wet of high summer meant that breeding was put back and there just wasn't time for many to eat enough to last through hibernation: the cold of late winter seems to have caught out those that had to wake up and feed.

Moths

Herald moths are very beautiful, fox and russet brown moths, which are most often found hibernating in outbuildings and cellars. In December, Mark Evans and colleagues record heralds from some tunnels in the Cynon Valley and Mark reported that this year counts of the moth were low, as Mark says *'I'm afraid that heralds are suffering in the same way as most other spring and autumn flyers, from the poor weather'*. Butterfly Conservation recently reported that many garden moth numbers are at an all time (recorded time) low: things like garden tiger moths and their 'woolly bear' caterpillars are now a rare and wondrous sight. Something fundamental has happened: up until 20 years ago summer tea times were always full of the cry *'watch the flies'* as house flies weaved lazy flight paths over the dinner table, or waited on the *'off white'* paintwork of the kitchen door frame. This is no longer the case. So where did all the house flies go? We wonder why garden bird numbers have declined, the loss of small, annoying flies, must be part of the reason: and perhaps their demise is due (or partly due) to the same factors that are affecting our moths.

Fungi

Mark Evans has sent me some fantastic picture of an unmistakable indigo blue fungus called ***Pulcherricium caeruleum*** or **Colbat Crust**: having seen the pictures I can vouch for the subtle beauty of this fungi. Marks has 'been beavering away at finding *P. caeruleum* in as many 1km squares in the Cynon valley as contain suitable habitat and trying to find it on new host species. To date, I have recorded it in 23 squares (including 3 in VC42) and on six different hosts, though willow, ash and bramble are the most commonly used hosts. I find that a torch is an indispensable aid to finding it, as it tends to grow in very shady places and then on the even shadier undersides of stems, branches and twigs, coupled to which is its colour. In deep shade, indigo just doesn't show up until you shine a light on it'. Mark listed some of the sites he has seen it 'I recorded it in a Trealaw garden (identified for me by Mervyn Howells), on dead privet stems a few years ago and then in a Crickhowel garden, on an old, partially rotten Hazel wattle fence, the same year, but not since.... in the Cynon Valley and have so far found it on a fallen, dead Ash branch, alongside the old tramroad, between Trecynon and Penywaun, then on a standing dead willow branch, in a wet wood, at Maesyffynon, Aberdare and also in Werfa, Abernant, on dead willow twigs again, which is where I took the above photo. There are no records shown for Glamorgan on the National Biodiversity Network, not even my Trealaw record, but this apparent rarity is undoubtedly due to it being overlooked and under recorded.

In November Mark reported 'I went to the lower end of Cwm Nant-y-Gwyddel, to search for *P. caeruleum*, which I eventually found on some dead Ash branches. While there, I also found a **wood wart** growing on dead Ash, which Mervyn identified as ***Hypoxylon***

howeianum, plus **dead-man's fingers** and ***Exidia recisa***, but the highlight had to be **Green Elfcup (*Chlorociboria aeruginascens*)** growing on standing dead Ash trunks. According to Roger Phillips, it is usually to be found on Oak, but this was definitely Ash'. Mark sent me a picture and green elf cap is a truly fantastic fungus, living entirely and absolutely up to its name.

Amphibians

The year the prize for the first **frog spawn** of 2013 was an honourable tie, with both sites coming from the Rhondda. Paul Marshman's was at Cwm Bodwenarth Woods (in a cart track) on January 30th, and on the same day Dave Kerr reported 'three batches in the large pond this morning. Lucky that we had all that snow and rain as there was not much water in the pond before that and it is a week later than last year'. Much later in February, high on the hillside above Tower Colliery, I was intrigued to find out what a heron was feeding on in a small upland pool. When I got there I found the pool full to bursting with frozen spawn, and I could only assume the heron was scooping up the icy treat. My own lowland sheltered pond, was much much later in getting its first frog spawn: on the morning of March 7th (weeks after the hardy Rhondda frogs were breaking the ice high on their windswept mountain top ponds, I watched as two frogs spent the morning thrashing around the shallows of my soft southern pond, depositing the large clumps of spawn.

Beetles

There has been a lot of talk of the impacts of native ladybird munching **harlequin ladybird** and its relentless spread across Britain. Whether this new species (which I see regularly in my garden) is actually wiping out our smaller native ladybirds has still to be established. However if you

want to see **harlequin ladybirds** go to the Cricket Pavilion in Pontypridd Park, for whatever reason they love to hibernate in that building and on occasions crowd the windowsills. Mark Evans sent me the following *'Having told you that I had a black harlequin ladybird, with comma shaped red spots, I have now come across this*

<http://www.eakringbirds.com/eakringbirds/3/insectinfocuskidneyspotladybird.htm> so as mine was very shiny and on a willow, could it in fact have been kidney **spot ladybird**? I didn't have my camera with me, so unless I come across one there again, I'll never know. Well I have a willow (grey willow) in my garden and I have found kidney spot ladybirds on that, so I reckon Mark was right. It shows that every slightly unusual ladybird that one finds isn't necessarily a harlequin (which is very variable in their appearance).

Springtails

Mark Evans also sent me some fantastic close up pictures of a ***Dicyrtomina ornata*** springtail (tiny, springy-tailed soil invertebrate) that were attracted to a dab of sugar solution he had left for a winter flying **spruce carpet** moth. Mark took pictures of the springtails and recorded a distinctive body pattern, as Mark describes *'there are only two globular springtails in the UK with that sort of patterning, the other being D. ornata. The differences between them are the colour of the antennae, which in D. ornata changes gradually from a pale base to a darker tip, while in D. saundersi, the change occurs suddenly, about half way along. The other difference is in the little patch of dark pigment at the posterior end of the abdomen, which is just a small dark patch in ornata, but forms that TV aerial pattern in saundersi'*. With our first springtail identification, this opens up a whole new area of LBAP research.

Bumble and Cuckoo Bees

Sinead Lynch, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's Wales Conservation Officer sent through a really interesting record of a male cuckoo bee ***Bombus rupestris***, from Bryncethin (near our Llanharan boundary with Bridgend). *Bombus rupestris* is one of those bees which have undergone a sharp national decline. As a cuckoo bee they are also one of that interesting group of bumble bee species which parasitize the nests of ordinary bumble bees, to do so, cuckoo bees mimic the appearance of their hosts. In this case *Bombus rupestris* mimics the common red-tailed ***Bombus lapidarius***: the big back red tailed bumble bee of many a back garden. Cuckoo bees appear later in the summer than the ordinary bumble bees and do so as the bumble nest are up and running; when you get your eye in they are quite easy to find. Firstly they lack the natural vim and vigour of a bumble bee, no ceaseless buzzing and foraging for them, indeed in high summer most of the bees on a buddleia bush will often be slow moving, sluggish cuckoo bees. Secondly, they lack the full furriness of a bumble bee's thorax – there is usually a bald spot where a bumble bee has a full luxuriant coat. So, just another interesting angle to the bees of your back garden, spot the difference between the bumble bees and their cuckoo mimics and if you can find a *Bombus rupestris*.

Ferns, Cave Spiders and Bats

In November Mark Evans sent me an email in which he recounted a visit to a cave in the Cynon Valley. The site sits in a very humid location and, the *'flora along those sorts of rock exposures is always interesting and often promises something exciting. As well as the usual **hart's-tongue, maidenhair spleenwort, broad buckler, and male fern** there were **soft shield fern and hard shield fern**, as well as **sanicle**. I had only just started*

*investigating it when I came across the entrance to an adit.....I could see that it went in a fair way, so decided to check it out for hibernating herald moths and went back to the car for a torch. It was a bit of a crouch to get in, then it increased in height a bit, allowing me to carry on, still crouching a bit. Checking the walls and roof, there were no moths, but plenty of the magnificent **cellar spiders (Meta menardi)** and some of their large egg sacks hanging from the ceiling. I hadn't gone in more than a few yards, when the roof raised in level and I was able to stand. Shining the torch around, there were still no moths, but dangling from the roof was a single **lesser horseshoe bat**, so that was the end of my adventure in that tunnel and I quickly made my way back out'.*

would prefer paper or email or Welsh, please don't forget to let us know.

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Re-appearance of Darran Park Lake Jellyfish

In a much earlier Newsletter there was a report of an old record of the tiny sub-tropical jelly fish ***Craspedacusta sowerbii*** in Darren Park Lake. However crazy this may seem *Craspedacusta sowerbii* is known for turning up (and disappearing again) from such un-jelly fish lake water bodies as Darran Park lake. Recently Vic Doyle alerted us to its return (or re-discovery) '*I feel compelled to tell you that Phil Rumble from Ferndale has discovered freshwater jellyfish in Darran Park Lake Ferndale, and I think it is a subject worthy of some research, what should we do? Phil and I are members of The Lake's fishing club*'. The thing to do Vic is keep on eye on it and record how its numbers react to the weather and season: we may then learn something about this most unexpected resident of the Park.

Anyway, thanks again for all your reports and once again apologies for any I have missed. Remember if you are moving house or changing your email address,