

RECORDERS' NEWSLETTER



Recorders Newsletter 33 (autumn 2014)

Please find a bumper edition of the Recorders Newsletter. It isn't a bumper edition by design and I apologise for the delay in getting this newsletter out to you: it should have been done in July and then September and now it's December. Thanks for your patience and for the many excellent records and reports.

Bees and others

My garden seems to be a good one for bees. I live somewhere which still has wildflower rich grasslands and grass verges, and my garden has lots of old fashioned herbaceous plants which are rich in nectar and pollen. My tip for a 2015 bee friendly border is black knapweed, grown (of course) from seeds collected from flowers on the verge outside my (or your) house and sown as you would any herbaceous seed. In my opinion that is the very definition of locally sourced wildflowers. In my garden I have three large clumps of black knapweed: these grow in different degrees of sunlight and as a result come into flower at staggered intervals over the summer. This year, the black knapweed flowered abundantly from mid July through to early September and in turn the abundance of flowers abounded with hoverflies and bees.

Particularly fond of the black knapweed flowers were the **leaf cutter bees**. They literally buried themselves in the knapweed flowers, collecting the pollen on the undersides of their abdomens. I found two species in the garden, the smaller and commoner ***Megachile centuncularis*** (which spends the summer months carrying leaves to nest holes in the underside of the double glazing and the front wall) and the much larger, ***Megachile willughbiella***: this is a new species for my garden and it is an extremely handsome white bodied bee. The abundance of leaf cutter bees also explains why we get the cuckoo bee ***Coelioxys inermis***. The pointy tailed female searches the front wall for leaf cutter nests into which she can deposit an egg. The knapweed flowers also attracted a stream of small, long-tailed solitary bees. With care I caught some of these and found there were actually two species: ***Lasioglossum calceatum*** and ***Lasioglossum albipes***. In early August a giant bee turned up, it had a 'fox-red' thorax and a shiny black abdomen, and it landed on the knapweed with an audible 'thud'. It turned out to be a fantastic ***Andrena*** (a large family of mainly small furry bees) solitary bee called ***Andrena thoracia***: it is spectacular, completely unmistakable and a rather scarce species, and I was thrilled it turned up in my garden.

In June I again saw males of the incredible, long-horned bee *Eucera longicornis* in my garden; its favourite flower is **wood bitter vetch** (*Vicia orobus*). It is a rare bee, and something to be really proud of. It is also absolutely unmistakable with its long 'horn like' antenna swept back over its body. On a sunny bank somewhere nearby it must have a breeding colony.

Early in the spring, when the **lungwort** is in flower, the high pitched buzz of *Anthophora plumipes* whines amongst the herbaceous flowers. Anthophora is a bumble bee like bee, with jet black furry females and the equally furry, tawny orange males. Later in the summer the 'rabbit ears' in the border never fail to attract the equally distinctive and impressive **wool carder bee** (*Anthidium manicatum*), while at the same time **ruby wasps** run up and down the front wall looking for mason bee nests to parasite.

What does all this bee stuff go to prove? Well firstly, that my bog standard garden, with my bog standard flowers is full of bees and wasps. Those species are primarily living and nesting and finding a home in the surrounding wildflower rich mosaic of fields, and road verges and road banks. They only come into my garden for my pleasure and enjoyment, and as such they are an indicator of just how rich the local wildflower resource is. A number of these species are nationally uncommon, even rare, and the fact that they turn up in my garden has given me an important glimpse in the diversity of bees and wasps in the local environment. Every year I identify some new species which has buzzed over the garden wall. I suspect the same will be true for many other gardens in many other parts of the County Borough. I suspect RCT has a very rich bee and wasp fauna and it is another illustration of how garden recording

can give us valuable clues about the importance of our local biodiversity.

Weather

Back in the early months of 2014 Mark Evans reflected on the winter gone *'the record 'breakingly' soggy winter has departed, to be replaced (hopefully) by a normal spring and record breaking (for all the right reasons) summer. Well I can dream, can't I? In keeping with every other area of Britain, my small garden recorded its wettest winter on record, though in my case, the records only go back to 1994. The winter was a comfortable leader, but as for December, January and February none of them broke their respective records. Rather, they all came second, though a close second in two cases. What was remarkable was that three extremely wet months followed on, one after the other. Usually an extreme month is followed by a more normal one or the pendulum swings to the opposite extreme, but from roughly mid December to mid February, we had an unbroken run of 66 consecutive days with measurable (0.20mm or greater) rainfall, which is as remarkable as the rainfall totals. That run was ended by a day with light rainfall, which fell below the 0.20mm, but still left a trace in the rain gauge, after which there was another unbroken run of 12 measurable rain days, which reached the end of the month and the end of winter.'*

Marcus Middlehurst sent through another series of excellent weather records for his Ty-Newydd, Treherbert home. His figures show just how far the weather pendulum managed to swing back from the extremes of the winter. They really pick up the remarkably dry year we had between March and the end of July. August stands out as wet, and I remember at the time thinking that was the end of summer, but then we

had September which was exceptionally dry and warm.

March total rain 177mm (highest fall on 2nd 30mm)

April total rain 219mm (57mm highest fall on 6th), 17 dry days! (Not any record but unusually dry for April).

May total rain 255mm (highest rainfall tied 9th and 10th on 30mm).

June total rain 128.5mm (highest 45 mm on the 4th, 19 rain free days).

July total rain 128.5mm (highest on 4th 45mm)

August total rain 364.5 mm (highest 50mm on 1st 48mm on 9th).

September total rain 36mm (highest 19mm on 25th, only 4 days had any precipitation in Tynnewydd!

October total rain 422mm (highest 65mm on 5th).

Paul Marshman also reported his driest ever September with just 13 mm of rain (and his second ever driest month – the driest being February 1986 when a month of dry, hard frost produced just 1mm of precipitation), it was also the warmest September he has recorded. The dryness of September was broken in the early hours of Monday 6th when Paul recorded 4 times the September rainfall in an 8 hour period, which is reflected in Marcus's 65 mm on the 5th.

Birds

Early spring/late winter reports came from Meriel Gough who noted that '*January and February were both warm*' the results of which had her wondering '*how long evolution would take for passerines to develop feet more suitable for aquatic environments, especially the ground feeders*'. Meriel supplied a summary of her monthly BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) Winter Thrush Survey for the Llantrisant area and noted that '*the high **starling***

*numbers for Jan and Feb 2014 reflect a small wintering flock that were nightly roosting less than 1 km from the wood and could be seen amassing nightly from my house (total flock was 100 +). This is the second year of this BTO Survey that encompasses the whole of the UK, covering October through to April, and will help by providing an in-depth set of records illustrating the species increases with the arrival and overwintering of thrushes from mainland Europe. Some details are already available on the BTO website'. As part of the Winter Thrush survey, Meriel also noted other birds from her early March survey, '*the local birds were in song and there were pair of **treecreepers** who were calling and ascending the same tree – something that just doesn't happen outside the breeding period. A little further on a **greater spotted woodpecker** was loudly drumming overhead on a dead branch. A pair of **bullfinches** was also recorded, moving back into the wood for emerging new buds'. Later in March '*the final walk round on the 31st March illustrated how quickly bird populations change with the seasons. **Chiffchaffs** were everywhere and I counted 12 singing males. Newly in and also singing, were both a **willow warbler** and a **blackcap** and, as a reminder of the winter past, 1 **redwing** still remained. The usual residents were all in song from wrens to nest building **carrion crows**'. Meriel also reported '**stonechat** on the Graig (Llantrisant) and **tawny owls** calling around Old Llantrisant since early January 2014'.***

In March, Mark Evans sent through **raven** records, '*Saturday, I took advantage of a dry night and morning to get my March raven count done. When I arrived at the place from which I count them, there was hill fog, but it wasn't too dense, so I decided to stay and see what happened and not long after, it cleared. It was nice, while*

*waiting, to see Venus dazzlingly bright on the south eastern horizon and to hear a dawn chorus, mainly made up of **thrushes**, but also a couple of stonechats and even a distant **mallard**. Just after the ravens had started flying out of the roost, at 06:15, a **woodcock** flew close by me. The count was an easy one and the total of 167 an encouraging one, as it was the highest ever March total for the roost.'*

Also in March, Paul Marshman saw a late wintering **jack snipe** on his Llwynypia patch, on the same day he saw his earliest ever **wheatear**, a male on the sheep walks above Llwynypia. He also reported a small two nest **rookery** that has become established on the Penrhys Hill. On March 14th Paul saw a **white wagtail** at Penrhiwfer (his first in RCT). White wagtails are the continental version of our **pie'd wagtails** (which is a British sub-species of the white). Chiffchaffs were singing from Glyn cornel Local Nature Reserve on March 19th (I heard then around Pontypridd on the 24th) and the return of **sand martins** (Trehafod) by the 21st.

Around the same time, David Harry had **redpolls** in his Llanharan garden. Paul Marshman then recorded blackcap, back in Glyn cornel on April 1st and willow warbler by the 2nd, on the same day Paul saw three wintering female **goosanders** on the Rhondda and was still seeing goosanders up to May 13th, while a **greylag goose** was on Glyn cornel Lake on April 24th, with a **coot** (Paul reported 3 families of coot on the nearby Clydach Vale lake). On the 28th Paul recorded 2 **wood warblers** singing at Glyn cornel (the first being on the 25th), with **redstart** and **garden warbler** on the same day. In his Llwynypia garden there were two redpolls by the 30th, with tell tale courtship feeding indicating they are breeding locally.

May 6th saw the welcome return of the **swifts** to Pontypridd.

Tony Swann sent me his regular report from Llanharan Marsh and Brynna Wood. *'The highlight of the (first) quarter in respect of the irregular sightings was a female **hen harrier** on 19th April: whilst regular at nearby Llanilid (old opencast site), flyovers are very few and far between. Migrant numbers were high and early, the main breeding species being chiffchaffs, blackcaps and garden warblers. **Sedge warbler** and **common whitethroat** were notable absentees and only one sighting of a willow warbler was recorded. **House martins** and swifts feed over the marshy areas when the air temperature is cool. The first quarter is over and the weather and daylight hours have both improved but the peat areas for the marsh are going to take months to dry out'. After years of watching the wet pastures at Brynna Woods grow over, Tony was pleased to see the impacts of scrub clearance and Highland cattle grazing that the Wildlife Trust have recently undertaken 'much of the saplings have been cleared at some of the smaller trees have been cutback. Hopefully whitethroat will reappear and maybe, after a break of over a decade, a **grasshopper warbler** reeling away and the very devil to find'. Later in the summer Tony commented, 'on my visit of 15th July, I became instantly aware of how quiet the wood was. The ubiquitous calls of the chiffchaff could not be heard together with a visible absence of passerines, especially the summer migrant. In fact all the calls belonged to **robins**, **wrens** and **blackbirds**. The summer moult had begun in earnest and it will be interesting to record when it is over'. He noted that 'this summer was an excellent period for juveniles especially when I came across a family group of newly fledged **goldcrests** on the 30th June - always*

difficult to find as young. All the normal woodland birds raised young and the weather ensured that the success rate was high. Weather wise, this quarter was a joy to go out in, dry, sometimes sunny and warm. By the end of June leaves were just starting to be shed, much earlier than normal. Natural fruit and nuts are both developing well and this will be a brilliant food source for the next two quarters. A **red kite** is regularly seen over Llanharan but not from the site itself, yet !' and 'finally on 26th July, I was able to see a party of young common whitethroats down at the cattle paddock – a rare breeding bird for the site. In the autumn Tony noted '20th September was the first day back for singing birds throughout the wood and even included one chiffchaff calling as if it were March. The best bird of the quarter was seen on the afternoon of 7th September on the nearby old opencast site at Llanilid – a juvenile **dotterel** on bare stony ground east of the film studios.' The dotterel is a really great record, it breeds in the Highlands of Scotland, but passes through South Wales on migration, I have tried and failed to see it on a couple of occasions on the hills above Pontypridd.

Jonathan Barrett had a productive spring and summer; in April 'I was out today in the Maerdy area up near the reservoir when we spotted a **dipper** on the stream between the two reservoirs. We sat watching it for about 10 minutes. Then as we were by the first reservoir we saw a small aquatic bird which kept diving and resurfacing. It was very small and I had never seen such a bird, but with the aid of my book which I carry with me I was able to positively identify it as a **little grebe**. I am not sure on how common they are but I have never seen one'. Little grebe are certainly not common in RCT and I wasn't aware they occurred at the top end of the Rhondda

Fach. Jonathan regular saw red kite above the Rhigos Mountain and Ynyshir, and in July a **kingfisher** 'at the first reservoir that is between Maerdy and Lluest Wen' and a '**merlin** on two occasions in the past fortnight at Lluest wen'.

In May, Jonathan 'heard my first **cuckoo** of the year, it was on the Nant Y Gwyddon Landfill site near Pentre'. As well as 'lots of **green woodpeckers** around the entrance to the Maerdy Colliery site, as well as a lot of **grey herons** on the river walk at the same site'. Later in May he reported 'I'm not sure if there has been a cuckoo explosion in RCT this year but I am hearing them almost every day when I am out'. Ben Williams helped to confirm the 'good' cuckoo news, 'heard three cuckoos in the Tonyrefail area. I know they were three different birds as two were singing together and the other was at a different site and too far away'. Paul Marshman reported his first Rhondda cuckoo of the year on April 20th and heard them throughout the spring: again they seemed to have a better year than in recent times. Glyn Hughes 'saw a **red kite** on Easter Monday above Mynydd Meio' and asked 'are these becoming more common in the area now?' and heard a cuckoo for the first time in many years in this area - twice in one day. One in St Gwynno Forest and the other on the mountain opposite Ferndale'.

In June, Ben Williams had excellent views of a female **goshawk** hunting in Tonyrefail, but he joy was slight tempered with the lament that 'I had stopped for a pee and thereby missed a chance to get a photo'. While Paul Denning heard a **reed warbler** singing in the reedbeds at Cwm Colliery: reed warblers are a decidedly uncommon bird in RCT. Paul also reported 'garden warbler near Cae'r ysgol (Tonyrefail), and seen quite a few cuckoos, probably

because of the large numbers of **meadow pipit** around Tonyrefail'.

Mark Evans continues to monitor his huge raven roost, and the **nightjars** on the Merthyr/Cynon boundary. Summer can be a tiring time for an ecologist, but the efforts are rewarded: *'I was out moth trapping until dawn on Friday night, then after an hour and a half sleep, I was back up and about for my normal Saturday activities, then an early night and up again at 02:30 to do a raven count. I got to my counting spot at 03:30, set up and waited, all the while being entertained by the pre-dawn chorus of stonechat, **skylark, reed bunting, dunnock**, wren, robin, **song thrush, blackbird** and cuckoo (2). Although there was a pale blue glow in the north east, it was essentially dark, with the stars shining above and even the international space station passing over at one point. Watching the brow of the hill that separates me from the roost and which acts as my eastern horizon, I noticed a large bird appear low over the ground, briefly silhouetted against the pre-dawn sky. It dropped below the horizon and was lost to sight. I kept scanning the horizon and sky above it for a few minutes and eventually saw in the distance, flying purposefully away from me, the unmistakable shape of a **barn owl**.*

The ravens started flying out at 04:15 and in contrast to the usual pattern of the fly out, where they leave in small groups and pairs, this time most of them left in three large groups, with birds suddenly filling the sky, which is spectacular and exciting to see, but a nightmare to count, even when using my trusty hand tally. After the first such burst of activity, during which, in five minutes, 189 birds were counted; there was a lull of twenty minutes before the next birds appeared. Eventually, at 05:35, the last half dozen birds flew lazily past, heading for the

Bryn Pica tip and it was time to pack up and head for home and breakfast. The total for the count was 426, which was easily the largest ever June count and only one short of the all time record for the roost.

On Monday evening, Mike Hogan and I checked on the Mynydd Gethin nightjars, the site in question being a large area of clear fell and fairly recent replant, which straddles the border with Merthyr. As dusk fell, a distant male was heard churring briefly and faintly on the Merthyr side of the site (Booo!), but soon after another male started churring much closer by, this time on the RCT side (Hurrah!), then both could be heard together. Not long after, the male from the Merthyr side was seen flying across the border and down into the RCT bird's territory, emerging shortly after in the company of a female (Booo!) and they crossed back into Merthyr, accompanied by wing clapping and displaying, before disappearing. The RCT male kept on churring loudly and continuously all through this and didn't challenge the Merthyr male. It was still churring as Mike and I made our way back to our cars'. Paul Marshman visited his local Rhondda nightjars, above Glynornel, on June 3rd and watched one male bird churring and then two male birds (white wing patches on both birds) chasing each other, and by June 19th Paul heard three calling males from the same site.

In June I visited an urban barn owl nest site in an old school in the Rhondda. This is a known nest site and the birds nested once again in 2014. In August two pairs of coot were now on Glynornel lake and 40 **Canada geese** (Paul Marshman). Marcus and Maris Middlehurst picked up on the often quiet summer garden scene *'having had to get rid of our fascinating rats (sadly) there has been almost no wildlife (other than birds and Maris says squirrels) in our*

tiny garden, but I was amazed to see two very high level herons 2 days ago, I thought they skimmed the tree tops, and a little wren yesterday hopping around a planter just under the bathroom window.'

Peter Morris sent through his bird records for Clydach Vale *'the following we see regularly: **coal tits, great tits, blue tits, nuthatches**, robins, blackbirds, dunnocks, crows, **magpies** (lots of the above). We used to see a colony of eight **long-tailed tits** every autumn and spring on their way from somewhere to somewhere else, but this winter we've seen them often. Maybe the mild winter tempted them to stay, two, maybe three pairs of thrushes same of **chaffinches, greenfinches, bullfinches, house sparrows, great spotted woodpeckers, the odd **siskin, a buzzard** or two, **jays**, a heron, and **goldfinches**.'***

Therese and Eddie Charnock sent through reports from their Miskin (Pontyclun) garden. *'Probably due to the mild winter our commoner garden birds seemed to do quite well. Winter visitors included a great spotted woodpecker, a nuthatch, and a pair of bullfinches who have remained in the garden. For the RSPB January garden count we recorded 12 **goldfinches**, there pairs of chaffinches but only one house sparrow'*. They also noted a recovery in greenfinch numbers although they still found four birds which *'appeared to have succumbed to the trichomanes parasite and also a dead chaffinch'*. However, as many of us have noticed, there were no garden starlings, although the sight of *'two dozen starlings on a lampost'* seen during a drive *'was a joyful sight'*. I can remember when winter gardens used to full with squabbling starlings, and how little I really regarded them. How times have changed. Now when I see a starling in superb spangled summer plumage or hear its song of squeaks,

whistles, gulps, rattles and brilliant mimicry, I realise what we have lost.

Paul Carsons **swallows** at his Cwmbach home produced two successful broods this summer. One of my own special wildlife highlights (one I can witness only because of where I live) is the autumn migration of swallows on their eastwards passage along the River Ely and over Miskin. The key times to see this movement of birds is a still and warm late afternoon/early evening in September. This year I watched several hundred birds pass over in small groups of long-tailed adults and stubby tailed juveniles for an hour and a half before dusk on September 18th and three days later a thousand swallows swept through in a 10 minute burst as darkness fell. You need to live in a valley to really see such bird movements, and I find myself spending autumn dusks staring into the western skies, shielding my eyes from the lowering sun and watching for the swallows to come through the Ely gap: it is strangely moving experience. Paul Marshman had an even better count with 1500 swallow passing through the Rhondda on September 28th and 2 swallows as late as October 7th. On August 8th with Kevin Oates I watched a flock of 300 house martins feeding and settling on power lines on the floodplain pastures at Cilfynydd. The air was full of chirping martins and it was another moving sight and sound. This year the swifts seemed to leave earlier than usual (perhaps a reflection of the warm summer) with the bulk gone from Pontypridd by July 28th.

By September 12th Paul Marshman saw 12 goosanders, returned for the winter, and flying up and down the Rhondda Fawr. He also saw a kingfisher on GlynCornel lake. In Pontypridd I was aware of the first **redwings** of the winter on October 15th when a series of flocks came through.

Tirfounder News

James Burton keeps a keen eye on the wonderful wetlands at Tirfounder Fields, Cwmbach and he sent me the following resume of a year's activity there: *'The major event this year was the 'great flood' in January which saw an inundation of probably a metre or so of flood water covering the whole site, nearly leading to the inundation of the new homes (a bank was heightened recently to this effect). Although inconvenient for traffic, it helped to clear the pond of an accumulation of invasive Canadian pond weed from the waterways, and brought in silt and fish helping to revitalise the area. Among the usual flocks of siskins, long tailed tits, goldfinches, herons I was blessed with an audience with the elusive **willow tit** in spring, who seems to only turn up to 'mark' his territory from January to March. Where they are nesting and whether they feed on site in summer remains a mystery, but it seems conclusive that if they are calling here, then they feed here intermittently. From listening to their calls alone, at one time I heard 2 males calling while watching a third. According to Bird Track, they have been spotted throughout the Valleys, so by no means an isolated population. I find it remarkable that I can spot up to 45 robins and as many blackbirds on the site on one visit, sometimes in their noisy parliaments, and then only a handful on another occasion, it may be an annual 'fight' for rights' to this premium site.*

Some other memorable moments include spotting 3 kingfishers at once, two males appeared to be calling (very close to me) to a female upstream, and there is never a bird trip when they fail to turn up. I was also over the moon to spot my first otter on site in May, after being sceptical about their presence. A female (I assume) scrambled underneath rocks near the fishermen's

*platform looking for crustaceans, this joy was followed by the appearance of mink on several occasions. Every other migrant species that was expected to turn up and breed on site has, (garden, sedge, reed, blackcap, whitethroat, chiff chaff, swallow, swift, sand martin, house) but I do note I have not seen any **snipe** or **grasshopper warblers**, but of course they are always well hidden. Also the greylag geese did not breed this year, one assumes they were either victims of predation, hunting or even displaced by the **Canadian geese** which were seen on the 'usual' nest site in the spring, who also sometimes turn up in large flocks. The main flock of greylags are now located at Aberdare Park, where they interbreed with the Aylesburys and chinese geese. Only one remains on the pond permanently, with a damaged wing, presumably shot. I missed the redwing flocks this year, even when I started to venture out again in November the Hawthorns were already stripped, so one may say they had their fill and moved on, as I videoed a flock of 70 of the Ynys fields this time last year. As I write this the annual spring of teal hide in the back-pond with their wistful whistling giving them away and will expect the usual pair of goosanders to turn up soon.*

Amphibians and Reptiles

Meriel Gough reported, *'frogs spawned the first week in April in 2013 and this year the week commencing 17th February in Llantrisant, both of these are really late, the norm has been the last week of January for the first 12 years that I lived in Llantrisant.*

Jonathan Barrett saw an *'abundance of **common newts**'* at Lluest wen reservoir. These were probably **palmate newts** which seem to be real specialists of the acid pond, pools and puddles of the Valleys. In July, Jonathan also saw a **common lizard** in the

Llanwonno Forestry. In the same neck of the woods, Jill Price found *'a dead **slow worm** on the side of the road just passed the Brynfynton Pub, by St Gwynno's Forestry, Ynysybwll'*.

In early May, Therese and Eddie Charnock *'noticed two newts swimming around in our largest water feature, but last week I counted five. We always have frogs in the garden but never manage to get frog spawn'*. Peter Morris has frog spawn in his Clydach Vale ponds, this year it appeared earlier than usual.

Mammals

David Harry had two **lesser horseshoe bats** in his Llanharan wood shed by March 10th. They didn't appear to breed in his shed this year, although they were back and forth at various times with up to 5 being present. This garden is close to a major lesser horseshoe maternity roost and it looks like bats shift between the two sites over the summer. It gives a glimpse into how a big bat roost functions, and how smaller, nearby roost sites can be very important. David also saw a large bat feeding in daylight over his garden as late as October 18th.

Jill and Wynford Price sent the following from late November *'out and about in the forest yesterday enjoying the fine weather I was lucky enough to meet up with a **weasel**....as curious about me as I was about him. I will send you the photo as soon as I can. I travelled on, sat down in a patch of spruce for five mins and saw a male and female **goldcrest**. Ideal spot for them. No photo as the camera noise spooked them'*.

Jonathan Barrett had a potential record of a **water vole** at Lluest Wen Reservoir. I say possible because we don't have any known populations in RCT, but Lluest Wen

Reservoir is away from the main areas of mink and it is the sort of place that water voles might just have survived. I need to find time to check out Jonathan's report.

Peter Morris gave some thought to the mammals he sees in around Clydach vale and noted that *'we don't see much of: we've **rabbits** at the bottom of the garden, a **fox** or two wanders past occasionally and the odd **hedgehog**. I think. From now on I'll try and keep a closer record'*.

Butterflies

In March, Mark Steer reported good numbers of **brimstones** flying in the spring sunshine at Brynna Woods, Llanharan. While in April, Ben Williams saw **small tortoiseshells**, a **peacock** and lots of queen bumble bees looking for nesting sites in the new Council managed Rhos pastures in Llantwit Fardre. He also saw three **field voles** scurrying through the *Molinia*. I saw **orange tips** and brimstone in Abercynon on April 14th and soon after lots of small tortoiseshells and peacocks at Dare Valley Country Park. A bank of verge side nettles on Pantgraigwen Road, Pontypridd had six or seven small tortoiseshell larval webs in late April. The recent recovery of this beautiful butterfly is a great thing. On April 28th orange tips and **green veined whites** were enjoying the cuckoo flowers in the Pontypridd Park Wildzone, as were a dozen or so **bee flies**.

In early, May Paul Marshman reported two **green hairstreak** colonies, one from near Bodwenarth Woods, Llwynypia and other above the old Llwynypia Hospital. While Therese and Eddie Charnock saw a **painted lady** and peacock in their Miskin garden in early March.

In May, Ben went out onto the Llantwit Fardre bypass fields to look for marsh

fritillary butterflies, he had no luck but 'did see four brimstones, 12 green veined whites and 54 **common blues** on the area beside the road'. However at Tonyrefail he had more luck with **marsh fritillary** 'looking around the two sites where I found larval webs last autumn and low and behold one very fresh male MF. In just hope he can find a female'.

Ben and Richard Smith and Paul Denning put in a lot of effort at Tonyrefail in order to find Marsh Fritillaries. Thankfully their efforts were rewarded. It may not have been a bumper year for the butterfly in Tonyrefail, but it was much better than 2013. Paul reports 'I had a count of at least seven marsh frits', including a couple of males chasing each other'. 'Good news after last year!' While Ben went to the same site, at a different time and reported 'I went to see if the MFs there were still flying; they were and I saw 5 MFs; 3 **small pearl bordered fritillary** ; 3 **large skippers** and a small tortoiseshell. I didn't spend long (20mins) on this site as there were lads on Motorbikes up there and I didn't want them to see what I was doing'. The work continued in the autumn with searches for larval webs. As I have said, there are a few dedicated marsh fritillary butterfly workers in RCT, and Ben Williams is one of the few. Last year he composed a poem of woe after fruitless hours of search for marsh fritillary larval webs. The autumn of 2014 was much better, and Ben was inspired to rhyme again (if inspired is the word....); 'Last year I wandered about for hours
Looking through those bloody flowers
Looking for them Marsh Frits
Finding some and getting thrilled to bits
Got carried away and wrote in prose
On just finding two of those
But this year we didn't start late
And went and found **Thirty Eight !!!**
My head hurts'

Paul Denning had an amazing count of 'ten **green hairstreaks** feeding on **bogbean** above Cae'r Ysgol - The most I've ever seen'. Thanks to the survey effort we certainly know that small pearl bordered, brimstones and green hairstreaks did well this year.

Also due to Richard Smith and Ben Williams (and others) hard work, we know that the marsh fritillary butterflies did really, really well this year in their other meta-population area, at the northern end of the Cynon Valley. Hundreds of adults were seen flying in several parts of the Blaencynon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Hirwaun, and in other SSSIs in the area. We also had the very encouraging spread of the butterfly onto land being specific managed for marsh fritillary habitat on the Hirwaun Industrial Estate where Peter Sturgess found 20 or so larval webs in the autumn.

Another new site for marsh fritillary butterflies was found by Mark Evans on a Council owned part of a new Site of Special Scientific Interest at Penywaun. As he describes 'on Friday May 30th, having finished a job sooner than expected and with an hour or so to spare, I was passing the tramroad that leads to the Gamlin adit and decided to drive up there and have a walk around the old meadow that lies between the tramroad, the bypass and Nan-yr-hwch. I've always thought that this meadow was something a bit special, but the reason for my decision was the presence there of lots of **goldenrod** and I was hoping, maybe, to see **Anania funebris** (a spectacular, rare black and white micro-moth which feeds on goldenrod). On getting there, I immediately noticed that most of last year's bracken, around the Northern side had been burned and so the goldenrod really stood out. I

spent quite a while wandering through the likely looking areas, but there was no sign that they are there. As time was running short, I decided to cut across the marshy middle of the field, walking up slope, towards the north-west corner. Along the way, while wading through an extensive area of thigh deep meadowsweet, I came upon a colony of several dozen emperor moth larvae, munching away on it and also saw a dingy skipper.

After crossing a drier stretch of field, I came to a fairly level area (SN 9855 0455), which was marshy and spotted a large queen bumble bee on the flower of a southern marsh orchid and having photographed it, I was just about to leave, my spare hour being almost up, when an orange butterfly flew past me and settled on a buttercup flower a little way off. I realised instantly what it must be and sure enough, on getting to it, there was a lovely fresh female marsh fritillary. Although this isn't a known site for Marsh Frit', it is quite close to the Tir Mawr fields, and as such, must be part of the Llwydcoed meta-population'.

At Clydach Vale, in June, Ben spent a great hour and a half which 'revealed 45 small pearl bordered fritillary, 1 dark green fritillary (freshly hatched); 40 small heaths, 1 common blue; another brimstone!!; 10 large skippers; 4 small tortoiseshells and 3 green veined whites. This site is buzzing at the moment, there were butterflies everywhere. However, it does look like it is going to need a little bramble management soon'. I found small pearl bordered fritillary on several places on Llantrisant Common.

In May, Paul Denning found a new small blue butterfly colony along the old railwayline in Beddau. This is the fourth small blue colony that I know of in the

Llanharan/Llantrisant area (we also have at least one in the Cynon valley and a possible one in the Rhondda). The small blue is nationally declining and increasingly rare species, and its spread onto species-rich railwaylines and brownfield areas in RCT is one of the few areas of expansion in its UK range. Paul also saw a male clouded yellow at Cwm Colliery and I came across one in September in Tonteg. While Steve Murray was looking at common blues 'up on the Lady Windsor Spoil heaps I have found a colony of blue colour variants females. Much prettier than the brown...'

Margaret Harding has also seen quite a few small tortoiseshell and speckled woods in and around Beddau this year. In early July, Kevin Oates saw a large fritillary, which was probably a dark green fritillary from Peace Park, Mountain Ash and common blues in Abernant. In August Paul Marshman watched purple hairstreak deport themselves around the tops of oak trees (which were on the slope beneath him) at Bodwenarth wood, Llwynypia.

Moths

Mark Evans sent the following, 'Over the past month or so, I have, when I get the chance, been checking all the broom I can find for the mines of a micro moth called *Trifurcula immundella*. I first found it at Blaen-nant, while searching for rust fungi, but there are two more or less identical mines to be found in the stems of broom, the other species being *Leucoptera spartifoliella* and I wasn't at all sure which one I'd found. Luckily, protruding from the end of one of the mines I found a tiny, glossy amber coloured larva with a black head, which was not at all happy. It seemed to have been injured in some way and was almost immobile, so I collected and photographed it while it was still alive and after posting the photos on the Glamorgan

Moth Recording Group blog, I had some good advice from George Tordoff, including this link

<<http://microleps.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/moths-on-broom-in-winter.html>> about what to look for to distinguish the mines of *T. immundella*, by looking for the minute egg shells still adhering to the broom stems. A couple of days later I confirmed the presence of *T. immundella* at Blaen-nant, which was the first confirmed record for VC41 and since when I have confirmed its presence in six other localities in RCT and one in Merthyr. Of the last two records one was of mines on broom I spotted (while going home from the recorders' forum) growing alongside the road that climbs up the Rhigos mountain, from Treorchy. The plants were in the area where the road crosses the landslip. The other record was on the Aberdare ironworks site, Llwydcoed. I have spotted a couple of other sites with broom since, but haven't had a chance to check them for mines.'

I was glad to see a **hummingbird hawk moth** (the only one I saw all summer) in my Miskin garden on June 1st, and in June I saw lots (10 or more) **chimney sweep** moths from Council owned SSSI fields at Penywaun, and I also saw the moth in two other wet fields along the river Cynon between Llwydcoed and Penywaun. Looking at my new (and excellent) Glamorgan Moth Atlas I now realise just how rare the chimney sweep moth is and how important this area of wet grassland is. You can't mistake the chimney sweep; it is a distinctive, small, sooty black day flying moth. Micro moths are, as the name suggests, generally rather small and difficult to identify. However armed with new Field Guide to Micro-Moth (British Wildlife Publishing), I have finally been able to start to identify some (although not all) of these rather tricky characters. My garden has wild

privet bushes (grown from locally collected seed), and this June it had clouds of a small micro-moths on and in it. I caught one, and admired it under the microscope. What had previously appeared to be a rather boring beige coloured speck turned out to have scale coated wings of incredible beauty: a complex mosaic pattern of creams, browns, yellows and oranges. Checking the book I discovered it was something called ***Pseudargyrotoza cobwagana*** a moth which lives on wild privet. I've also discovered that the apple trees have the **barred fruit tree tortrix** and that the beautiful lichen mimic ***Dipleurina lacustrata*** spends its days merging within the lichens on the back wall. None of these are rare species, but it's nice to know what they are.

Fungi

Mark Steer has been keeping a very keen eye on the fungi at **Bryнна Woods Summer 2014**. 'Although it's been mainly very dry this summer I have spotted quite a few fungi including some species that are not well recorded.

Most exciting find was a possible specimen of ***Willow Gloves Hypocreopsis lichenoides*** which has only 1 Welsh and 24 UK records on the BMS database. This is a Red Data List 'critically endangered species. I have a specimen with Aberystwyth University where I hope they will be able to confirm by DNA analysis'.

'Other species identified:

Tricholoma stiparophyllum only 60 UK records

Willow Shield Pluteus salicinum again not many records certainly in VC41

Poplar Fieldcap Agrocybe cylindracea again only 2 records in VC41

Blackening Waxcap Hygrocybes conica
Alder Tongue Taphrinaalni

Marasmiellus candidus
Twig Parachute Marasmiellus ramealis
Fairy Inkcaps Coprinellus disseminatus
Glue Crust Hymenochaete corrugata
Dripping Bonnet Mycena rorida
Bulbous Bonnet Mycena stylobates
Collared Parachute Marasmius rotula
Leopard Spot Earthball Scleroderma areolatum
Common Earthball Scleroderma citrinum
Bark Bonnet Mycena speirea
Oak Mildew Erysiphe alphitodus very prevalent this year along with mildews on courgette and pumpkin leaves!
Beefsteak Fungus Fistulina hepatica

In early December, Mark reported 'a very exciting find recently but just across the County border on Mynydd y Gaer, **Powdercap Strangler Squamanita paradoxa**. Mynydd y Gaer is proving to be a hotspot for Waxcaps (Hygrocybes). Llantrisant Common is fairly similar habitat and has quite a few fungi as well. Glamorgan Fungus Group is planning to do a Foray there in 2015'.

Mark also let us know that 'the newly reformed Glamorgan Fungus Group has been very active with a number of Forays organised with more being arranged for the Autumn. If you would be interested to find out more about the Group please email Mike Bright, Secretary: glamorganfungi@gmail.com.' Having seen the first addition, the group produces an excellent newsletter with lots of colour pictures.

Steve Murray sent me a fantastic picture of '**Geastrum triplex**' from 'just outside my work today (Bryncelynnog Comprehensive, Beddau)'. *I looked it up and it is an unmistakable, and spectacular relative of the puff balls, a large beige coloured fungi, which when ripe peels opens up star like to*

reveal a round spore sac'. I commented that it looks just like the pictures in the books, to which Steve added '*always nice when a fungi actually behaves and looks like it should! They are not normally so accommodating! Even has the halo around the pore*'.

Spiders

In October, Rob Davies sent me a picture of a beautiful, fat bodied red hued spider he had found on the road at Brynffynnon. I emailed back '*great picture. I am not a spider expert, but I do know this one. It is one of the orb spiders (like the common garden orb spider), but is a specialist of heathlands and marshy grasslands called **Araneus quadratus** – it is a spectacular thing and I seem to remember reading that when they get to being mature adults they are the heaviest British spider. When I walk across rhos pasture sites in the early autumn I try very hard not to walk through the webs of these things, but I nearly always come away with one attached to me somewhere (which can come as a bit of a shock a few hours when you realise there is a huge red spider climbing up your shoulder). I wonder if the one you saw had ended up on a road by similar means*' Rob's responded '*I think I walked into it's web when I was walking along the top road going to the Brynffynnon and it stuck to my shorts. I had a bit of a shock when I saw the size of it!!! The side of the road is marshy grassland before turning into the forest*'.

Snails

Whilst planting out the courgettes (which came to nothing) Sue Westwood found in her Miskin veg patch, a small snail which was semi-conical, strongly keeled, with a white spirally band. It turned out to be **Hygromia cinctella**. This is a

Mediterranean species which has colonised the milder parts of Britain, and may be a new species for RCT.

Plants

In early May I recorded 20 **green winged orchids** flowering at Cefn Parc Cemetery, Llantrisant. Margaret Harding keeps an informed eye on the wildflowers of Llantrisant and in May also *'went to Cefn Parc and the green winged Orchids are there, 11 in the one field, and after all this time found 3 in the other field. One at the top one in the middle and one near the baby section, had been told there were more than the one I kept finding each year. The only difference was the grass was shorter so it was easier to look for them. I am so busy with work don't get the chance to go walking so was determined to check out the orchids and the cowslips but they were only just starting to flower'*. The coal tips at Cwm Colliery are a favourite botany spot for Margaret and in June she *'went to the Cwm last Sunday looking by a concrete wall and walked round the corner to find 13 **bee orchids** hidden amongst the grass never seen them here before luckily I took some photos before my camera decided to pack in everything looked pink'*. Later in the summer she reported on the **round leaved wintergreen** colony She found last year *'thought you would like the good news that I have been back to the Cwm and discovered a lot more this year, over 40 plants they seem to be higher up to where I remember them and at different stages'*.

In June Ann Bennett *'counted over 30 **early purple orchids** and lots of **monk's hood** on Pant marsh last week'*. Whilst walking on a footpath near his home Paul Denning

*'noticed **grass vetchling** growing at ST0661083935, a species I've never seen in RCT before'*. In RCT grass vetchling is reasonably common around the Aberdare area, but it is much scarcer elsewhere.

Marcus Middlehurst commented, *'Maris has been excited to see some cream and yellow orchids on the old railway embankment across the river from our house..... We are going to need trackers soon with Machetes to fight our way through the bramble bushes growing rapidly over all the paths and even over formerly open spaces! - but the blackberries will be nice over Christmas!'* I am not sure what those cream and yellow orchid are and next summer I will try to visit to check them out.

Well that probably enough for now. We won't be as late doing the next newsletter. As ever thanks for the records. I am bound to have missed or mislaid some of your records and I can only apologise in advance for anything I have missed out.

If you would like a Welsh language version of the Newsletter then please let us know. Happy Christmas.

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