

RECORDERS' NEWSLETTER



Recorders Newsletter 35 (Winter 2015/16)

Another year and another bumper Newsletter, thanks for all the records and reports, they are very gratefully received.

Kevin Oates

As many of you know, our colleague Kevin Oates died in the summer. It is a terrible loss and amongst the many, many reasons for regret, we have lost a great (and unsung) champion for nature conservation and biodiversity recording. For nearly twenty years, Kevin was a Countryside Ranger with RCT Council (and before that he had a similar role with Rhondda Council). He was a calming presence at LBAP meetings, an avid wildlife photographer (over half the Council's biodiversity photo archive came from Kev), a consistent and excellent contributor to the Newsletter, a driving force behind the biodiversity management of the Council's Countryside sites and a great colleague, with a really deadly dry sense of humour.

Kev's name turns up regularly in the archive of Recorders Newsletter, and he was always leaving me messages about what he'd seen. He was well ahead of the curve when it came to using digital cameras for wildlife identification and, in particular, he got into photographing and identifying fungi. I found the following from Newsletter 9 (back in 2003/4) *'in late October Kev found a further good selection of waxcaps in and around the peregrine viewing platform at Dare Valley Country Park. He has also recorded a superb range of fungi from the Glyncornel Local Nature Reserve. These included Wood Blewitt (excellent edibility), Amanita submembranacea (a close relative of the Death Cap), Earth Fan (Thelephora terrestris) a nationally rare species, the beautiful Russula sanguinea, and the gourmets delight Chanterelle (Cantharellus cibarius). Now there is a nice mix of the beautiful, the weird, the delicious and the deadly poisonous. Kevin uses a digital camera to record fungi and he has found this an excellent means of identification and recording'*.

He was really in his element when he was out and about and one of my fondest memories is 'nightjarring' with Kev one warm July evening, high up on the Llanwanno plateau. It was around the time when we were just realising that nightjars were booming, and as we listened to a cacophony of churring and wing clapping we followed shadowy nightjar shapes as they weaved across the open ground in pursuit of hundreds of (apparently) huge white moths. Far away, over the Neath Valley, there was a thunderstorm, and the western sky was periodically lit up with sheet lightning, which revealed momentary electric glimpses of a starkly beautiful scene,

and its moths and nightjars. I seem to recall we got away just before the heavens opened.

Kev was also instrumental in the adoption of conservation grazing on our Countryside Sites. Many years ago with Becky Davies, we spent a fantastic spring day being shown the conservation grazing work on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Apart from picnicking on Strumble Head and watching **porpoises** and **gannets** feeding in Cardigan Bay, we became convinced that if grazing cattle could successfully mix with walkers on the precipitous coastal cliffs, we should try to gain the same conservation benefits in RCT. He would have been glad to see the recent re-establishment of PONT (The Gazing Animal Project for Wales). A typically pragmatic south Walian, Kev attitude was always to find a way round a problem and to plug on regardless, and so we plug on, and in our plugging on, we'll hopefully continue to build on the things that Kev set up.

Weather

What with record breaking December rainfall, weather is all the rage. Given my obsession with the weather forecast (if only they hand drew isobars on the charts like they did in the good old days), it is amazing how quickly I forget the weather of the recent past. Fortunately, I have our own weather stations to remind me. So starting at the top of the Rhondda Fawr, Marcus Middlehurst sent through his excellent rainfall records from June to December. For June and July, Marcus noted that '*The readings do not reflect the miserable drizzle and mist we suffered most of the time, as the rainfall was very low, often seen sweeping the valley side, but not dropping into the gauge !*' The **June** total of 160.5 mm (with 115 mm on the 1st and 19 rain free days) was closely mirrored with **July's** 187 mm of measurable precipitation (with a high of 37 mm on 13th and 15 dry days). Unfortunately, a disappointingly 'low' high summer then decided to fade still further (as it so often does) into a resolutely wet **August**, with 319 mm of rainfall (maximum of 52 mm on the 26th and 12 dry days), however, in keeping with recent trends, this was followed by an increasingly calm and dry early autumn, with a **September** total of 215 mm (72 mm on the 14th and 20 dry days) and then only 140 mm in **October** (36mm on the 5th and another 20 dry days). Late autumn and **November** was marked by the start of the storm season, with 607 mm of precipitation (highs of 77 mm on the 30th and 70 mm on the 6th and just 4 dry days) and then the even wetter and stormier **December** with 715 mm of rain (63 mm on the 15th) and just 2 measly dry days. All this left Marcus to report a grand 2015 rainfall total for Treherbert of 3,518 mm. I looked back over recent yearly totals from Marcus and these suggests 2015 was a wet one, but not the wettest.

Mark Evans summarised the summer of 2015 in Cwmbach with, '*Well it didn't happen after all. Summer, I mean. I found myself apologising for it, believing that it would perk up and deliver some decent, settled weather eventually, but by early August, the penny finally dropped and I realised we weren't going to get it after all.*

In the whole of the summer, we had only three periods of more than two consecutive days with no rainfall at all. In June, we had two: a run of five days and another of three. There was just one pair of days without any rainfall at all in July and in August there was just a single run of four days.

There were 29 days without any rainfall at all (not just measurable rainfall, of which we had 39 days) in the whole of the summer, which is close to the normal of around two thirds of the days in any given period having some sort of precipitation in them.

I notice that the press are going on about August being the wettest on record, but here in my garden, it wasn't that bad. I have been keeping rainfall records since 1994 and this August was the fourth wettest in that time, with a total of 196.75mm. The wettest was in 2008, with 302.96mm.

Interestingly, looking at the rainfall by season, this summer was the sixth wettest since 1994, but those six wettest summers have all occurred in the last nine years. It makes you think, doesn't it'?

At Christmas Mark commented; *'after an unseasonably good October, what a terrible end to the year we seem to be having. I've attached the updated version of my weather spreadsheet and also the rainfall charts spreadsheet, in which can be seen that we had a drier than average September, followed by a very dry October and then the fourth wettest November, since I've been keeping records. The autumn as a whole was slightly drier than average. Let's hope for some colder weather (but not snow) to come over the winter, because a mild, green winter is never a good thing'.* As I write, with daffodils emerging, catkins on the hazels and blackbirds singing six weeks early, the prospects of a mild, green winter seem more and more likely. Mark concluded *' a strange year, with a drier than average spring following on from a similarly drier than average winter, but then followed by a summer which was wetter than average and the sixth wettest in the twenty two years I have been keeping rainfall records (1994). September and October were very dry; particularly the latter, but a much 'wetter' November resulted in a wetter than average autumn in general. December was the wettest I have ever recorded, not just the wettest December, but wettest month ever! An indication of this is that just over a quarter of the total rainfall for 2015 in my garden fell in December! As for the annual total, well, it was above average (2001.6 mm), but only the tenth wettest in my years of recording. An indication of how unsettled the summer was, between the third week of April and the last week of September, we didn't have a single run of seven consecutive days in which no rainfall occurred. The nearest we got to it was in early September, when we had a six day run with no rainfall, measurable or otherwise. Amongst a wealth of interesting data I was particularly stuck with Mark's record of 253 days in 2015 with some precipitation and 222 with 0.2 mm or more. It makes me wonder why I would ever leave the house without an umbrella!!*

To allow us to compare and contrast with Marcus's Treherbert records (as ever note that Marks rainfall is often half that of Marcus's), the headline figures of Mark's weather records include;

June total of 87.1 mm which included 11 days with 0.2 mm or more of precipitation. The highest maximum temperature was 19.75 degree C and average minimum 8.87 degrees C. The chilly start of the month was marked by a maximum temperature of just 11.2 degrees on the 1st of June, and in the only 'heat wave' of the summer the maximum weighed in with 28.9 degrees on the 30th.

The **July** total was 96.35 mm with 22 days with 0.2 mm or more of rain. The average maximum temperature was 19.52 degrees C (with a maximum of 26.4 on July 1st) with a minimum average of 10.93 degrees C.

In **August** there was 196.75 mm with 20 days of 0.2 mm or more rain. Average maximum temperature was 19.10 degree C (a maximum of 23.4 degrees on the 22nd), and a minimum average of 10.25 degrees C.

September's 92.4 mm total had 13 days with 0.2mm or more of rain, a maximum average temperature of 16.68 degrees C (and a maximum of just 20 degrees C on the 11th) and an average minimum of 7.06 degrees C.

October had only 78.7 mm of rain, with 12 days of 0.2 mm or more of rain, a maximum average of 14 degrees C (17.5 degrees C the highest on the 1st), and an average minimum of 5.93 degrees C.

November's 309.6 mm, with 26 days of 0.2 mm or more of rain reflecting the autumnal storms that started to sweep over us. Things were mild with a maximum average of 11.71 degrees (16.8 degrees the highest on the 1st), and an average minimum of 6.54 degrees. However we did have a tiny taste of winter with two nights with below freezing temperatures, the minimum low of -2.9 on the 23rd.

December boasted 505.55 mm of rain with 0.2 mm or more on every single day. The average maximum temperature was a staggering 11.41 degree C and average minimum of 6.95 degree C. However, those figures look even more abnormal when you see that there were 12 days in which the maximum temperature was over 12 degrees C (with a high of 13.6 degree C on the 19th), and that the lowest maximum for the whole month was as high as 8.4. There was not a single December frost, with the lowest minimum temperatures of 1.3 degree C.

From Llywnypia, Paul Marshman also mused on the vagaries of the year. He noted how August has become a regularly damp and often dull affair. Looking back over his recent records for his garden he noted that the 8.8 of rain this August, was nothing unusual, with 9.2 inches in the same period in 2014, 7.9 inches in 2013 and 8.8 inches in 2012. He also marvelled at the meteorological excesses of December, with the average maximum temperature of 11.2 degree C being a full 1.1 degree C higher than his previous record winter month of January 1974. He also noted that the minimum average temperature of 6.3 degree C was higher than the maximum average of December 2010, which was 3.6 degree C (when there was a minimum average of -3 degrees C). Paul also noted that while he had 20 inches of rain in December (and another 16 inches in November) this was not an unusually wet December, and gave him a 2015 total of around 90 inches or about 2,250 mm. So, in summary, December 2015 was not unusual wet one for the Rhondda (although it was in Cwmbach in the Cynon), but it was an amazingly, record 'breakingly' mild one.

Mark Evans also commented on another interesting little variation in the climate of RCT and the form of precipitation experienced. He mentioned that '*Alan Rosney (in Nantgarw in the far south-east of RCT), records a significant amount of his summer rainfall in the form of showers, his rainfall records in hot weather often exceeding mine, as the Vale and areas bordering it are more prone to thundery downpours than we are up here. We tend to get the more mundane kinds of rainfall and miss out on thunder storms.*

Birds

From Stuart Jones we had an excellent summery of some choice records from the Graig, Pontypridd: '*The newsletter has reminded me about some recent sightings in the Graig area that I'd been meaning to send in. In Gelliwion woods in early June there were at least two singing **wood warblers** this spring and a **spotted flycatcher**,*

whilst in the surrounding area there was a **cuckoo** calling - the first I've heard on the Graig for at least ten years. **Red kites** also appear to be colonising the area. I regularly see a pair walking back to the Graig from Treforest via the Pontypridd Circular - I even saw one over Pontypridd town centre this morning. Also, thought you might be interested in below link to the *Birds of Breconshire* published in 1899 which mentions sightings on Golden Eagles in Glamorgan - unfortunately though the author and his friends tended to shoot pretty much anything they found interesting, <https://archive.org/stream/birdsofbreconshi00phil#page/n7/mode/2up>

Paul Denning and Ade Meredith found a singing **reed warbler** at the reedbeds at Cwm Colliery in early June, from the reeds that Paul had heard one in 2014. This strongly suggests that these uncommon birds (well uncommon in RCT) may be breeding. I saw a **goosander** flying over Pontypridd on June 9th, which got me wondering if these giant ducks might be staying to nest.

Cuckoos do seem to have had a better 2015, and in June Barbara Castle heard one close to Gelli Wrgan Farm (on the edge of the St. Gwynno Forest near Ynysybwl) which was '*on and off all day yesterday, 24th June. In fact so persistent he was beginning to drive us mad!*' Barbara Castle reported some nice sightings for her Cynon Valley garden with a male **linnet** (first in 20 years), **blackcap** and **green woodpecker** all noteworthy (however at the same she also noted that absence of **greater spotted woodpeckers** this year). She also has been lucky enough to have had '*regular views of a **tawny owl** this summer in front of the house on the electricity line*'.

Also in June, Paul Marshman reported at least 2 'churring' **nightjars** in the cleared (but now growing over) forestry above Glyn cornel. Paul pondered on how long this hillside will remain suitable as nightjar habitat, 11 years after they had first colonised the site. David Harry reported a possible **grey partridge** from Llanilid: these are now rare birds in RCT. David also reported breeding **dipper** from the Ewenny Fach in Llanharan with juveniles feeding in the river.

Pontypridd's nesting **swift** left on bulk around the 5th of August, although a bird or two was still around until the 13th, when I saw my last one of the summer. However, on every day in August, Paul Marshman was still able to report small numbers passing down the Rhondda Valley, and there were 6 to be seen on the 2nd of September. As we have speculated before, what Paul sees must be northern birds with late clutches, which have managed to beat the on-coming autumn and slip away quietly south. Being swifts they are probably somewhere over the Bay of Biscay a day or so later: they slip away at speed. **Swallows** and **martins** hang on with us a little longer. On the 12th of August I saw a hundred or more **house martins** chirping and feeding over Llanwonno Church (the Brynffynnon Pub had lots of still active martin nests crowded under its eaves and there were two swallow nests high up in the Church porch).

As a sign of the times Paul saw his first **whinchat** on the 18th of August. This was not a breeding bird but one passing back down the Rhondda from somewhere else. Until recently the Rhondda was a stronghold for whinchats, and I note in the *Birds of Glamorgan* that Paul had 15 pairs on his Llwynypia patch in 1976. Now Paul only sees them very occasionally in the spring or autumn: a small bird but a big change in distribution. A clear sign of autumn are flocks of **mistle thrushes** and this August Paul was seeing flocks of up to 35 on Llwynypia hillside or resting on the power

cables on Penrhys hill. Paul was also glad (after a few years absence) to see a **barn owl** in Llwynypia on August 28th. Alan Rosney saw a barn owl at Llanwanno during nightjar visits, and Barbara Castle saw another barn owl near the Treforest Industrial Estate on September 20th, unfortunately I saw a dead barn owl on the Church Village Bypass (not far from the Tonteg roundabout) a little later on the 28th. Lily Woolrich saw a red kite over Trebanog in June, and watched a male blackcap collecting food in Glyn cornel car park (for a nearby nest). I saw a red kite circling over Treforest on June 24th and another over Penygraig Rhondda on September 3rd, and Sarah Illsley saw one over Ty Elai, Williamstown on January the 6th.

As ever wintering birds moved in as the summer migrants departed, and Paul Marshman saw his first goosanders on the 29th of August, with a flock of 10 on September the 1st, Liz Dean saw several goosanders on the Taff in Pontypridd, while I saw my first one on the River Ely, at Miskin, in early January 2016. There was a rash of **kingfisher** sightings from Gareth Henson in late September with 3 sightings on the Taff in Pontypridd and another at Barry Sidings. David Harry reported the successful rearing of two cygnets by a pair of **mute swans** in Llanharan: mute swans are a scarce bird in RCT. David also noted that there is still some of the trichomonosis disease in **greenfiches** visiting his garden. In November Ben Williams had two **reed buntings** in his Tonteg garden (a sign that winter, of some sort, was just about with us). However, the award for least likely RCT bird of 2015 went to the **kittiwake** seen on the River Taff River bank near the White Bridge, Pontypridd. This came after several days of wild weather and this poor kittiwake had, as they say, been 'wrecked' and left far from the open sea.

In the late summer Lyn Evans summarised his 2015 records for both his back garden feeders and the local patch at Glyn cornel; *'It has been great to see numbers of greenfinch increasing this year at the feeders. Following on from the disease problems they have suffered recently they do appear to be bouncing back with up to 5 individuals attending at one time. The local **bullfinch** population appears to be also increasing with a couple of newly fledged youngsters appearing with both parents recently. It has also been good to see lately a couple of **lesser redpoll**, an adult male and what appears to be a juvenile judging by plumage or lack of, they have appeared quite regularly over the last week or so along with the regular **siskins** and goldfinches (both in small numbers) although the goldfinch count goes up dramatically during the colder spells of our winter months with regular appearances of 25 or more queuing up in the Cherry tree at the top of the garden. With the regular numbers of birds attending it is inevitable that they occasionally attract the local **sparrowhawk** although not for the last 6 weeks or so, as presumably there are plenty of easy pickings with the newly fledged youngsters out there so she does not need to visit. Every cloud has a silver lining and with the approach of the autumn and winter months the numbers visiting the garden will increase'*.

Mark Evans sent through his **raven** roost summaries. As he describes *'the roost started with high numbers for the winter period, and in June and July reached the second highest counts for the roost, but the decline from there has been slightly steeper than previously, the current count being unremarkable. Based on the averages, which can only be a very rough guide, due to missing counts in previous years, 2015 was a good year for the roost.*

As usual with the raven counts, half the joy is in the other species heard and seen while there. During the summer months, the first birds to be heard singing are always

stonechat, followed by **wren**, **robin** and yes, **skylark**. The last are usually the linnets. A couple **grasshopper warblers** were heard reeling on a couple of occasions: always welcome.

I have a suspicion that during the weeks closest to the summer solstice, there may be a certain amount of to-ing and fro-ing by the ravens between the roost and the Bryn Pica Tip, throughout the very short nights. As to the numbers involved in this nocturnal coming and going and whether it significantly affects my counts, it is impossible to tell'.

Birds of Llanharan Marsh and Brynna Woods

Tony Swann provides excellent records and reports from the Wildlife Trust Reserves at Brynna Woods, Llanharan. Split into seasonal reports he noted;

'Spring (total number of bird species seen in April 44, May 45 and June 41)

The second week of April marked the start of the main arrival of migrants.

*Blackcaps on the 9th and as usual males were first, with 4 singing straightaway. 13th April was brilliant with my first ever sighting of a **tree pipit** at the top of a large tree in an adjacent field across the railway line singing its head off. I have seen them just over a mile away at the nearby Llanilid site previously but never here.*

*20th April and a **common whitethroat** and on 24th April a late migrating **sand martin** passed through.*

*May heralded the return of the **garden warblers** with 3 territories identified plus a good number of common swifts, as usual one has its nest above my office in the roof eaves and soon I will have the sound of a scratching chick and the incoming return of a parent with food to keep me company. The highlight for May was a **hobby** passing through and heading towards Llanilid: at least 2 hobby have present been feeding on House Martins in that area (another first for me for Brynna Woods).*

Spring and early summer has been busy with a BBS and a WBBS Surveys plus 3 ongoing house martin surveys for the BTO' Tony asked 'Can you give a plug for the BTO House Martin surveys. Their website holds some details of next year's programme which will feature House Martin nest surveys and this will be possible for some from their backgarden. The web link is :-

<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey/house-martin-nest-study-2016>.

*May and June saw successful breeding for many species with numerous fledglings present. Early June and the rock hard Ivy berries started to soften and this led to many frenzied feeding sessions for the local **blackbirds** and **song thrushes** with the berries lasting for a couple of weeks. In mid-June two Highland cattle calves returned to the marsh, one soon managed to climb over the extended fencing and relished in feeding the wrong side of the fenced pasture with the other calf watching intently – just like children !*

*The second half of June saw the regular return of the red kite with at least 1 bird seen daily over Llanharan. By the end of June, the woods started to become quieter with breeding activity diminished and some birds starting their summer moult – **jackdaws** with practically no tail feathers become more common. Singing migrant males were **chiffchaff**, **willow warblers** and Blackcaps but with reduced numbers compared with April/May.*

Aside from the report, sadly no **common crane** has been seen by me, I live in hope. The wandering pair referred to (Recorders Newsletter 34) may well be the 2 birds that have spent some weeks on the Goldcliff area and return nightly to the Goldcliff reserve (currently not back until 2100 hrs and then off early in the morning) this suggests that they have found sufficient food in the meadows of the area not to look to move on. They are very likely to be Slimbridge reared birds as opposed to a wandering pair from North Norfolk.

Summer (total number of bird species seen in July 33, August 38 and September 27).

July was the start of the quiet period post breeding but highlights included a migrating cuckoo on the morning of the 18th. First I have seen since before 2002. Through the month, occasional sightings of common whitethroat and willow warbler must have been post breeding dispersal birds. It always amazes how difficult it is to find **goldcrest**, **coal tit** and **dunnock** once they bred.

August continued in the same vein and it wasn't until the end of the month that the moult had been completed for the smaller passerines and they started calling again. My August highlights were a single red kite, a bird that does not show up in this quarter, although is regularly seen during other quarters. The exceptional sighting for Brynna Woods was a pair of green woodpeckers, a species not recorded since 2012. The first autumn tit flock was noted in the last week of the month.

September saw the complete disappearance of warblers with the exception of a few chiffchaffs. My highlights were a pair of **siskins** flying over and a **pieb wagtail** (not a bird that frequents this site). A solitary spotted flycatcher on the 15th.

Autumn (total number of bird species seen in October 30, November 32 and December 38)

3rd October saw the first winter sighting of a **grey wagtail** and also the first winter group of thrushes (5 mistle thrushes). 22nd/23rd Nov saw the first proper frost and magically overnight **redwings** arrived and were feeding in an adjacent field next morning. Red berries were their choice whilst the blackbirds were still ground feeding. A single mistle Thrush also joined in and couldn't decide between berries or worms! 8th December two **buzzards** circling around together for a while with occasional mock food passes before one flew off, was it a case of 'you're not for me' or 'see you in the spring darling'? 20th December a pause from days of rain saw three **lesser redpolls** feeding on alder at the east end of the site (a species that only appears in winter for this site). 28th December, although still very mild, redwing numbers have built up and a group of 14 were seen today but no **fieldfares**.

A relatively quiet quarter but the year, as a whole, was very rewarding. It was the first year I tried the PATCHWORK CHALLENGE for the reserve and was delighted with 64 species in total: my best ever year. The problem is whether it was down to the added attention trying for species and points for the Challenge or was it the benefits from the work carried out by the Wildlife Trust or a bit of both. Perhaps it will be clearer after another go in 2016 or not!

Save our Swifts

The Glamorgan Bird Club is looking to do something very specific and very positive for our swifts. As Alan Rosney explains 'Swifts are remarkable birds. They are our fastest flying bird (in level flight – peregrines are faster when stooping on prey) and spend the first three or four years of their lives in the air, never coming in to land. They eat, sleep and mate on the wing. They live on average for 5 years, however the

oldest recorded Swift was 18 and it is estimated that it flew over 4 million miles in its life time.

However Swifts are in trouble. Surveys have shown that their population has halved in the UK over the last 20 years. Indeed they are now amber listed. A lot of research has gone in to the reasons for this decline. Other species appeared to have suffered as a result of climate change. This does not seem to be a factor in the decline in Swift numbers. Their arrival dates haven't altered (usually the first week in May) and the habitat in their wintering grounds is little changed. Is the lack of nesting sites a factor? Many of the Swifts' traditional nesting sites, such as old chapels, schools etc. have been demolished or renovated, with the resultant loss of nesting sites.

The Glamorgan Bird Club together with Swift Conservation are working to try and reduce this decline by erecting nest boxes. The main problem is that Swifts do not take readily to boxes. They nest in loose colonies and are more likely to use boxes that are close to existing nest sites. (Experiments have been undertaken by playing Swift calls to attract birds to nest boxes with a fair degree of success). We need to know where Swifts are nesting and this is where we need your help. We hope to recruit a number of "Swift Champions" who can survey their local area and pin-point where Swifts are nesting. It isn't as easy as you'd think, however we can help with survey methods. Also we'd like you to spread the word – tell your neighbours about these fantastic birds. Encourage them to erect nest boxes under their eaves. If you know of a building that is being renovated, where Swifts have bred, encourage the developers to incorporate Swift bricks or boxes as part of their plans.

If you can help, please get in touch. Alan Rosney alanrosneyatgmail.com

Tirfounder Fields Report Dec 2015

James Burton sent through a fantastic summary from Tirfounder Fields, a wonderful wetland in the heart of the Cynon Valley. *'The year at Tirfounder Fields in Cwmbach usually begins with a great flood, and this year was no exception which had me jumping over large clumps of rotting pondweed to spot four goosander, 25 teal and a flock of 12 hungry bullfinches and as many long tailed Tits. The usual resident willow Tits were calling from early Jan to Apr, with the unexpected arrival of a passing Chiffchaff on the 18th of Jan.*

While keeping an eager eye out for the spring migrants I was surprised by a little furry face that popped out from behind a wall on the Aberaman bridge on the 10th March. This young weasel was very nervous, but evidently just wanted to cross the road and was in no hurry to do so while a 'giant' with a video-camera sat staring at him. I placed the video with all other Cwmbach wildlife on my Youtube channel that can be accessed through

<http://www.spookspring.com/Tirfounder/TirFounderFields.html>

Spring migrant arrival dates were 14th Mar chiffchaff., 6th Apr Willow Warbler, 10th Apr blackcap 16th Apr sedge warbler, 17th Apr reed warbler, 19th Apr swallow & Whitethroat, 23rd Apr sand martin and garden warbler and 4th May house martin.

The 'usual suspect' list of migrants came, sang, fed, bred and left by the end of July, which usually leaves me twiddling my thumbs, but kingfishers, dippers, flocks of siskin, little grebes, reed buntings, water rail, greater spotted woodpecker and

passing **sparrowhawks** still bring great interest, all of which are breeding on or close to the site. The **greylag geese** also bred successfully this year again with 7 young between them, all of which seem to have survived, they being herded off to Aberdare Town Park to join the pair of **Egyptian, Canada and Chinese geese**.

Then in September I take a back-seat and don't expect anything unusual to turn up, especially in months of overcast weather. But it is a mistake to sit on your laurels when in the natural world, as the crowning glory of another successful ornithological year came with the arrival of a **Cetti's warbler** to the site on 29th Sept, while going to the shops! It caused some excitement among other local birders, and we suspect because it is giving its startling, unforgettable, trilling call from the rushes that it is a mature male that has come up from either the Swansea or Cardiff coastal groups, and being so successful there, and with the weather warming up, they expanding into new territories. I heard him call on 16th of Dec, so I believe if the weather holds out we could see him a permanent and maybe breeding resident!

Off site down at the Phurnacite Ponds the successful pairing and breeding of two baby swan cygnets came to tragedy when the male apparently crashed into power lines, so we are told, and they mother and babies fledged, presumably back to their owner in Windsor. I was delighted to encounter a **crossbill** at Llyn Fawr near Hirwaun, but astonished when 12 of them flew past at Baverstocks forestry in Sept. Another highlight of the year was spotting three tree Pipts, two **redstarts**, two winchats, and two **wheatears** within yards of each other near Cefn Y Gyngon in the Dare Valley Country Park on 16th May, all of which gives me the satisfaction of knowing that the barren wastes of Aberdare still throws up surprises.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Barbara Castle pithily summed up the healthy amphibian status on her garden with '**frogs everywhere- hurray!**' While in July, Sue and Fiona Wistow saw an **adder** on Llantrisant Common while looking for **Cornish moneywort (*Sibthorpia europea*)**

Mark Barber forwarded the following call for help from the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) Trust, which 'needs more people to take part in our monitoring scheme— the National Amphibian and Reptile Recorders Scheme (NARRS) - in the southern half of Wales. If you are interested please read on.

You can monitor reptiles or amphibians, or both. Phase 1 involves a randomly selected 1km square near your postcode. It's great if you can do this, but phase 1 can prove challenging as you have to seek landowner permission, sometimes the square isn't suitable, or you don't find creatures! Please do sign up if this suits your needs though, as phase 1 is collecting important information.

Phase 2 involves picking a site with a known reptile population or a pond with a known amphibian population. This could be your garden, local park, nature reserve, common land, farm, etc. You still need landowner permission but this should prove easier if you know the site, the staff or farmer.

For the amphibian monitoring you need to undertake 4 surveys from March to May. Go and have a look at the pond in January/February (this could count as one of your surveys if you find toads and/or frogs breeding). Consider setting provisional weather dependent dates in your diary. One survey in March (if warm enough), two in April, and one in May. I would advise night time torching in March, April and May, and one

day time visit searching for newt eggs in April. ARC can lend you a torch if you don't have one. ARC is particularly keen on more great crested newt ponds being monitored.

Same for the reptile monitoring – 4 surveys. You can survey a site without using roofing sheets as refugia, but this more challenging, you need to be an experienced spotter and the weather has to be perfect. Most sites should have at least 30 refugia out within the 1km square, ARC can lend you refugia if you need them, and/or help put them out. Ideally the refugia have to be out by mid-February, as they need time to bed in so they are ready for Spring. Again, put dates in your diary. One in late March, April, May and then at any point from June to September.

If you feel you need training/mentoring let me know. Everything you possibly need is on <http://narrs.org.uk/> - please register before Spring. Get in touch if you need any help.'

Given that so many of us have garden ponds and/or live right next to superb reptile habitat, this survey looks like a project where we could excel.

Plants

It's not just things with legs and wings and fins that can exhibit dynamic dispersal. The changes in plant distribution can be surprisingly rapid. Paul Marshman has kept an eye on his Llwynypia patch for 'some time now', and that context means he has seen the vagaries of botanical change. In particular Paul has noted the spread of a number of waste ground species, that would traditionally be considered to be eastern or coastal species. So he mentioned how **common mallow** and a tall yellow flowered crucifer (which I can't remember if we agreed was **black mustard** ?) have invaded Llwynypia in recent times and how **wild parsnip** has cropped up on Ferndale Road this August, and the highly invasive **Canadian fleabane** is now establishing. Most of these things are spreading as a result of that most dynamic of vectors, human activity. Paul also recorded **monkeyflower** (a native of western North America) in wet patches and he also noted how well the beautiful **bog pimpernel** was fairing in 2015, with large patches sprawling over flushed ground on his Rhondda hillside walks.

Mark Evans recorded well over a hundred flowering **pyramidal orchids** in the NRW plantations at Bryn Due (near the old Baverstocks hotel), but he noted that the area '*had once more been driven over by heavy machinery*'. Margaret Harding saw three **bee orchids** at Cwm Colliery in June, Nia Honybun reported bee orchids, and lots of **common spotted orchids** at the entrance to the Talbot Green Business Park, while Jeff Williams saw bee orchids in the Rhondda and Martin Bell reported more from the Naviation Park, Abercynon, '*2/3 spikes there two years ago, 23 spikes last year and 54 on Friday June 19th*', unfortunately Martin late reported they have been mown (although that shouldn't stop them coming up next year). I was glad to find some in the wildflower verges being left by RCT Parks Department at Miskin (along with hundreds of common spotted orchids). Paul Marshman and Paul Denning both reported that there were only a very few **Deptford Pinks** flowering at Clydach Vale. I visited the site later, and the ledges have become overgrown: we need to manage the quarry ledges to ensure more set seed in future summers, and I need to get that done.

Margaret Harding has kept a close eye on the **round-leaved wintergreen** colony at Cwm Tip, and sent me a series of pictures showing the plants coming into flower. There were a dozen or so present. Meanwhile Mark Evans and Martin Bevan have found large colony (150) of **common wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*)** near the Pirelli Cables factory at between Robertstown and Llwydcoed. As Mark describes '*the site is on red ash coal spoil and is well vegetated, with willow, birch and alder scrub, under which most of the Pyrola grows....clustered in various sized groups, mainly in the dappled shade of the willows, with scattered, sometimes stressed plants, in the more open areas*'. According to the Flora of Glamorgan common wintergreen was described in 1994 as '*very rare, and possibly extinct*', while round-leaved wintergreen is '*locally common on sand-dunes*' and dune slacks. In recent years, both wintergreens species have started to become important colliery spoil indicators, and in doing so both have helped to re-affirm the re-assuring dynamism of nature.

Fungi

Linking seamlessly on from the records of wintergreens or *Pyrola* species, Mark Steer sent me the following wintergreen detective story with a fungal twist;

*This summer I have been out searching for this round-leaved wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia* subsp *maritima*) in Glamorgan VC41 as part of the Kew 'Lost and Found (Fungi)' Project: <http://fungi.myspecies.info/content/lost-found-fungi-project>. Brian Douglas from Kew will be giving a presentation at the SEWBRcC Forum in November on this project.*

*One of the top 100 fungi on this project occurs on this *Pyrola* – a Rust Fungus *Chrysomyxa pyrolata*. This Rust has rarely been reported from the GB&I with only 2 recent sightings on *Pyrola* in dune slacks near Southport and Barrow-in-Furness. It was found on Anglesey in 1971 and historically at a few sites in Scotland. One stage of the Rust is reported to occur on *Picea* spp. but never found in GB&I.*

*Initial efforts were concentrated on dune slacks at Whiteford NNR, Gower, Merthyr Mawr NNR and Kenfig Pool NNR where there are well known colonies of the *Pyrola*. Despite finding the *Pyrola* in abundance at these locations the Rust was not found!*

*I was then alerted by Richard Wistow RCT County Ecologist that the *Pyrola* is now established on colliery spoil heaps in RCT. I visited a few of these sites including Cwm Colliery, Beddau, Clydach Vale Country Park, Parc Slip NR and Llanilid open cast site (only 1 mile from me!). I successfully found the *Pyrola* at these sites but again no sign of the Rust! Llanilid proved interesting as the initial location I had now has a 'mediaeval castle' built on it as part of a film set! However a second location there provided me with the *Pyrola* in abundance.*

*I have a number of other locations that I have not visited including Oxwich Burrows, Pelena Forest and Kenfig marshalling yards which I hope to visit (and re-visit the locations already surveyed) during 2016. Also I would appreciate information on other locations in Glamorgan VC41 for the *Pyrola* preferably with 8 or 10 figure grid references as it can be quite hard to spot!*

*The *Pyrola* on dune slacks seems to grow close to Creeping Willow *Salix repens* whereas on colliery spoil heaps it seems to favour mossy damp places with some small willows (species unknown) and small birch.*

Locations searched in 2015:

Whiteford NNR, Gower SN3903 0205, SN3913 0188, SN4347 9421, SN4348 9420
(plus 7 other locations)

Kenfig Pool NNR SS78841 82110 and SS78880 82036

Merthyr Mawr NNR SS86447 82803

Parc Slip NR SS87009 83529

Clydach Vale Country Park SS9641 9269 and SS97940 92855

Cwm Colliery ST06531 86433 and ST06539 86427

Llanilid open cast SS99708 82101, SS98988 816 26, SS98991 81606, SS99042
81602, SS99023 81617, SS99013 81619 and SS98986 81622

I would like to thank all those who have provided me with locations for the *Pyrola* particularly Paul Denning, Margaret Samuel, David Barden, Glamorgan Botany Group and Richard Wistow, RCT County Ecologist. Also thanks to Brian Douglas at Kew for all his help and support. (Mark Steer, Glamorgan Fungus Group marksteer150@gmail.com)

Mark Evans has started to explore the micro-fungi, 'Over the last couple of years, in the course of searching the darkest recesses of Sallow thickets for **cobalt crust (*Pulcherricium caeruleum* [*Terana caerulea*])**, I sometimes came across small forests of tiny black fungus fruiting bodies, covering dead sallow wood. To the unaided eye, it resembles a sort of coarse black stubble, each fruiting body being up to 2mm tall and perhaps 0.50mm wide. Through a hand lens, each fruiting body is roughly chisel of axe shaped. In fact, being interested in prehistoric flint work, what they most remind me of is tiny Neolithic polished stone axe heads.

Frustratingly, despite repeated attempts and purchasing the bible of micro fungi; 'Microfungi on Land Plants.' by Pamela and Martin Ellis, I failed to find out what it was, that was until New Year's Day, when I found myself in Dare Valley Country Park and not seeing much in the way of bird life- the reason for going there. I began searching for microfungi to take home, for possible (improbable, given my level of skill) identification. I thought of '**sallow stubble**' and wanting a specimen to get under the microscope, I ducked into a small group of Sallows and after a little searching came away with a specimen or two. The advantage with dabbling with microfungi, is I at least knew I had an Ascomycete species and I was able to refine my search online, so instead of just asking for 'Microfungi on Sallow.', which got me nowhere, I searched 'Ascomycetes on Salix' and there it was. Lots of photos of it and at long last, a name. I searched the results, to make sure they were all referring to the same genus and species and they were: ***Glyphium elatum***. I consulted 'Microfungi on Land Plants' again and found it under Honeysuckle of all things, because the authors had only ever found it once- on Honeysuckle in the Channel Islands and although they acknowledged that it had reportedly been found on some other species of trees and shrubs, by other authors, they regarded it as rare. I don't know where they live, but around here, it seems to be fairly common, especially on damp, dead sallow branches, but I have also found it on dead **wych elm**, in Llwydcoed. There are some really good stereo photos of it at <http://www.eboehm.com/glyphium.html>.

Peter Sturgess sent me a list of 14 waxcap fungi he has seen at Aberdare Cemetery, the full list being ***Hygrocybe calyptriformis*, *H. chlorophana*, *H. chlorophana* var *aurantiaca*, *coccinea*, *H. conica*, *H. flavipes*, *H. glutinipes*, *H. insipid*, *H. intermedia*, *H. pratensis* var *pallid*, *H. psittacina*, *H. punicea*, *H. quieta*, *H.***

reidii and H. virginea. I have been working with the RCT Cemeteries Services and Ben Williams/Butterfly Conservation/Tidy Towns and this year some areas of wildflower rich grassland have started to be managed as wildlife habitat. As with many Cemeteries it is an interesting site to visit and record, and if you go in the autumn look in the shorter, lawn areas for the yellows, whites, oranges and reds of the different waxcaps.

Butterflies and Moths

Although the summer weather continued to disappoint, we did have some good butterfly records. The **small pearl bordered fritillary** is one of our most beautiful, engaging and special butterfly and they seem to have done OK in 2015. I saw several in marshy grassland next to Llantrisant Common in June and one at a new site in marshy grassland next to Treorchy Cemetery on the 18th, on the same day Paul Marshman saw another little further down the Rhondda on Llwynypia Hillside and on the same day he reported that a friend had seen a **dark green fritillary** at Ynyshir. On the 25th of June in a peat bog on Mynydd Portfref (high above Llanharan) I saw 10 or more small pearls along with a **red admiral**, **painted lady** and **black darter** dragonfly. On the same on the Public Right of Way near to Gelli'r-haidd uchaf Farm I watched several **emperor** dragonflies and **azure blue** damselflies on small ponds, with **common blue**, **small heath** and **large skipper** butterflies, and down on the Parc Eirin plateau I watched large numbers of common blue, **ringlet**, **meadow brown** and **small skipper** butterflies, plus another small pearl bordered fritillary and lots of day flying **burnet companion** moths.

Ben Williams visited the Rhos Tonyrefail in SSSI in July and as well as finding three small, marsh fritillary larvae webs, also saw '*large numbers of ringlet and meadow browns flying about and a few small and large skippers, with one dark green fritillary*'. In July Alan Rosney was lucky enough to have a **white letter hairstreak** in his Nantgarw garden. Ben Williams reported, with regret, the succumbing to **Dutch elm disease** of his favourite white letter elm tree on the riverbank in the Treforest Industrial Estate. Dutch elm disease remains an occupational hazard for our wych elm trees.

With Ade Meredith, Paul Denning found lots of **small blues** at Cwm Colliery on June 4th. Small blues are one of success stories, they have started to shift 'in land' from dune and limestone cliff grasslands along the Glamorgan coast to start to use the flower rich colliery spoil grasslands of RCT- what they need is kidney vetch (larval foodplant) and warm sunny aspects (don't we all). Paul also reported that Gary Welsby had '*photographed a **marbled white** at Cwm Colliery grasslands*', and that '*this is an interesting record as the grasslands are perfect habitat for them....I'm certain they're breeding somewhere in the area*'. If you look at a butterfly atlas you'll see a gap in the marbled white distribution which pretty much equates to mid and south Glamorgan, however in recent years that gap looks like it might start to close. Marbled whites are beautiful and unmistakable black and white cabbage white sized butterflies, so keep an eye out next July.

By Mid July Paul Marshman had seen **dark green fritillary** at Clydach Vale. Paul also noted how **gatekeepers** are now amongst the most common butterfly in Llwynypia, although they had only arrived from 'down the Valley' as recently as 1995: evidence of the natural dynamics in action. A similar situation seems to be reflected in the increasing abundance of ringlets in the Rhondda. The rather

disappointing August weather was reflected by Margaret Harding's comments that her garden butterfly count had recorded just three species, 'a *white, peacock and speckled wood*', as She said '*I can honestly say it is the worse summer count I have done, but whatever time it would been the same*'. However on August 18th with Mark Barber and Pete Hill of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, I was delighted to see a very battered female dark green fritillary laying eggs on violets at Y Graig Common, Llantrisant. Pete took some excellent pictures which were forwarded to Butterfly Conservation as evidence/ vindication of the success of the grazing and habitat management work undertaken on the Common. I was almost as pleased to see two **wall browns** flying around the remains of the Billy Wynt windmill (on the top of Y Graig). Walls used to be a common butterfly of my youth (well even into my mid twenties), but some unexplained population collapse then ensued, and now these beautiful butterflies are a rare thing.

Summer migrant species seemed scarce this year, although Margaret Harding saw a painted lady in June, and Paul Marshman saw a **humming bird hawkmoth** in late August, and I saw one in my Miskin garden in June. The late summer spilled into a late autumn, and my ancient clumps of Michaelmas-daisy (which through the longevity of vegetative propagation must be at least 90 years old, being traceable back to a Tottenham garden in the mid 1920s) were still in full flower in mid October and sported up to seven red admiral, and a couple of **commas** and **small tortoiseshells**, and late flying male **brimstone** (which stayed feeding on the daisies for several days).

In late August we had a red letter day when Julian Woodman and Sue Westwood discovered marsh fritillary larval webs at a site at Llantwit Fardre. This was a welcome return for the butterfly to this southern most part of the Borough. Ben Williams also visited and found a couple more webs later in the autumn. Ben also continued his vital monitoring work on Rhos Tonyrefail SSSI; '*having had a bad attack of cabin fever, I went over to Ton yr Efail this afternoon. Well !! the sun was shining and it seemed a shame to waste it and I needed to get my eye in. I did a search for larval webs and found **78** at one site the main open grassland area that gets burned most years. They were quite well spread out and the webs more difficult to find, probably because of the wet, so I probably missed some. The caterpillars were mainly very small, approx 2-3 mms. Another thing I found was that some of the webs had very small numbers of caterpillars in them; in one I counted only five caterpillars and even a search around the area didn't reveal any more (I thought that they might have been a breakaway group from a larger web). This is the best number that I can recall for some time (a 100% increase) so hopefully they will start to spread around a bit. The scabious is not in bloom yet but the flower buds can be seen above the other vegetation*'. Later he went to another part of the SSSI and '*found 23 webs in that field (this is the field where we found 4 larval webs last year for the first time ever). The cows have free access to that field and are doing a great job. The last time I did a habitat survey there it was really difficult to walk through parts of the field but they have munched most of that away and now its much easier and I suspect the scabious is gaining from it. The majority of the webs were in the centre of the field and were much easier to find today; with larger caterpillars and sunning themselves out in the open*'.

So we had some excellent news on marsh fritillary fortunes and it is a reward for the many hours of web searching that Ben and Richard Smith, and others, diligently undertake each autumn.

Bees and other things

I was very pleased to see the **mountain bumble bee *Bombus monticola*** (the ancestors of which must have flown for thousands of years over the wimberry slopes of the Rhondda) and the **tree bumble bee *Bombus hypnorum*** (which has colonised Britain in the last decade or so) flying together over flowery banks next to Treorchy cemetery on June 18^h. I also saw **brown banded carder bee *Bombus humilis*** on Llantrisant Common on the 15th. Liz Dean had two **hornets** in her Treforest garden in late September, while Paul Denning recorded both **hairy shield bugs** and **dock shield bugs** at Cwm Colliery in June.

Colliery Spoil Invertebrates by Liam Olds

Liam Olds has spent the summer surveying the invertebrate interest of RCT's colliery spoil habitats and the winter identifying them deep in the vaults of the National Museum. He is on a one year TCV (Trust for Conservation Volunteers) Natural Talent Traineeship. His work is truly ground breaking and because of Liam's work we know vastly more about colliery spoil invertebrates than we did: hopefully it is only the start. Liam has kindly provided the follow excellent summary, which deserve reproduction in full (NB recently a beautifully illustrated and superbly designed identification book for the British Bees was published called 'Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland' by Steven Falk and published by British Wildlife).

Colliery spoil tips are an iconic feature in the landscape of the south Wales valleys, an important visual reminder of our rich industrial heritage. Despite being an important part of our identity as south Walians, colliery spoil tips are readily overlooked and underappreciated. Over the past twelve months, I have been conducting a study into the invertebrates found on colliery tips to highlight the biological importance of these sites, and attempt to raise the public profile of these amazing but often threatened habitats.

Decades of abandonment - following the widespread closure of our collieries - has enabled a wide variety of species and habitats to colonise our spoil tips. As a result, many now support habitats and wildlife of considerable local biodiversity value. Despite a good understanding of the flora and vertebrate fauna associated with these habitats, rather little is known about the invertebrates that occupy these habitats. As Richard Wistow said in his previous newsletter '...other than butterflies, some moths and tiger beetles, we really don't know how important colliery spoil is for other invertebrate groups'. I have attempted to address this issue by conducting numerous invertebrate surveys on sites across Rhondda Cynon Taff. I have conducted this project as part of my entomology traineeship at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. Although the results are not complete at present, I hope that they emphasise the importance of colliery spoil tips to a whole host of invertebrates and perhaps make you think differently about these so-called 'brownfield' or 'derelict' sites.



Left: The impressive flower-rich grasslands on many spoil tips act as an important foraging resource for many pollinator species including bees, butterflies, moths, hoverflies and beetles. This picture was taken at Cwm Colliery, Beddau.

Right: The heathland habitats that have developed on many tips support numerous upland specialised invertebrate species including the **bilberry mining bee (*Andrena lapponica*)**, **mountain bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*)** and **heather shieldbug (*Rhacognathus punctatus*)**. This impressive heathland has developed on Gelli Tips, Rhondda Fawr.

Following discussions with Richard Wistow (County Ecologist), six colliery spoil tips were identified as study sites. These were as follows: Albion Tip (Cilfynydd), Clydach Vale Country Park, Coedely Colliery, Cwm Colliery (Beddau), Dare Valley Country Park, and Gelli Tips. I would now like to share some of the results I have collected to date, which I have conveniently split into the different invertebrate groups below.

Hymenoptera – Aculeata (Bees & Wasps)

A total of 78 bee and wasp species were identified on the six sites. Of these, 65 were bee species – which equates to almost 25% of the British & Irish Fauna! 37 species (~47%) were not common (i.e. they were localised, scarce, rare, RDB-listed or UK BAP species). The total number of species identified on any one site varied from 19-45 species; on average, 27 species were recorded on each site. Between 37 and 50% of species identified on any given site were uncommon, with an average of 42%. Here are some of those species along with a brief description of their status and associated habitats:

- ***Andrena coitana* (Small Flecked Mining Bee)** – discovered at Clydach Vale, this mining bee is considered scarce across Britain, predominating in heathland and moorland districts*
- ***Andrena dorsata* (Short-fringed Mining Bee)** – discovered at Coedely Colliery, this mining bee is considered very rare in Wales and it is known to utilise a variety of habitats including heathland and brownfield sites*
- ***Andrena lapponica* (Bilberry Mining Bee)** – discovered at Gelli Tips and a new Glamorgan vice-county (VC41) record, this is a localised species associated with heathland habitats*
- ***Andrena similis* (Red-backed Mining Bee)** - a nationally scarce mining bee discovered at Gelli Tips and Dare Valley Country Park, this species utilises a variety of legume-rich habitats*
- ***Andrena wilkella* (Wilke's Mining Bee)** – discovered on almost all sites, this mining bee is locally common in England but much scarcer in Wales. This

species utilises a variety of habitats including legume-rich grassland and heathland*

- ***Anthidium manicatum* (Wool Carder Bee)** – discovered at Dare Valley, this impressive carder bee is considered scarce in Britain; it utilises a variety of habitats including gardens, heathland, wood rides, wetlands and brownfield sites*
- ***Bombus barbutellus* (Barbut's Cuckoo Bee)** – discovered at Clydach Vale, this bumblebee is widespread and locally frequent in parts of England, but is much scarcer in Wales*
- ***Colletes daviesanus* (Davies' Colletes)** – discovered at Albion Tip (Cilfynydd), this bee species is considered scarce in Wales and exploits a wide variety of flowery habitats*
- ***Epeolus cruciger* (Red-thighed Epeolus)** – discovered at Dare Valley, this is a locally frequent species in heathland districts*
- ***Hylaeus confusus* (White-jawed Yellow-face Bee)** – discovered at Clydach Vale, this species is considered locally common in southern England, but is scarcer in Wales*
- ***Lasioglossum cupromicans* (Turquoise Furrow Bee)** – discovered at Gelli Tips, this species is generally very scarce away from the English Midlands, northern England and north Wales*
- ***Gymnomerus laevipes*** – a Nationally Scarce solitary wasp species that was discovered at Coedely Colliery

*according to the 'Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland' by Steven Falk (2015).

Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths)

In total, 23 butterfly species were identified on the colliery tips. In addition to the six sites, I also made a visit to Maerdy Colliery to record butterflies. **Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*)** butterflies were a common sight on all the spoil tips I visited, and I believe the records at Cilfynydd, Coedely Colliery and possibly Maerdy Colliery are new sites for the species. Small pearl-bordered fritillary (*Boloria selene*) were still present at Clydach Vale, Dare Valley and Gelli Tips. It was also recorded at Maerdy Colliery, a possible new site for the species. Dark green fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*) was recorded at Cilfynydd, Clydach Vale, Dare Valley, Gelli Tips, and Maerdy Colliery – with possible new site records for Cilfynydd and Gelli Tips. It was encouraging to see healthy numbers of small blue (*Cupido minimus*) at Cwm Colliery (Beddau), a must-visit place to see this wonderful butterfly in R.C.T. Dingy skipper (*Erynnis tages*) was present at Clydach Vale, Coedely, Cilfynydd, Beddau, and Dare Valley - with Clydach Vale and Cilfynydd being possible new sites for the species. Marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*) was also recorded at Cilfynydd, which is also possibly a new site for the species. Finally, the **six-belted clearwing moth (*Bembecia ichneumoniformis*)** - a Nationally Scarce B species - was recorded at Coedely Colliery and Beddau, both of which are likely new sites for the species.

Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies)

Many of the dragonfly and damselfly species recorded on the spoil tips were what you would expect, common and widespread species including **golden-ringed dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*)**, **southern hawkler (*Aeshna cyanea*)**, **broad-bodied chaser (*Libellula depressa*)**, and **emperor dragonfly (*Anax imperator*)**.

Rather interestingly, **keeled skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*)** was found at Coedely Colliery, which has been seen in fairly good numbers. This species is associated with acid, boggy regions and at Coedely it is utilising the drainage channels and swampy pools for breeding.

Diptera (Flies)

Unfortunately, I cannot comment much on the fly records to date. Although most have been identified, the status of most of these species (i.e. whether they are common, local, scarce etc.) has not been yet been researched. Of those that I have researched, some interesting species have been identified. These include:

- ***Stratiomys potamida* (banded general)** – a fantastic-looking soldierfly species that was discovered at Cwm Colliery, Beddau. This species is associated with a variety of non-brackish wetland types, and is usually evidence of good water quality. There is great potential to identify more wetland fly species at Cwm Colliery.
- ***Cheilosia lasiopa*** – discovered on the twin tips at Dare Valley, this hoverfly species appears to be 1st record for south Wales.
- ***Scaeva selenitica*** – a scarce hoverfly species recorded at Cilfynydd, this species is found on coniferised heathland.

Hoverflies were the principal fly group of interest in my study, however with hindsight, other fly groups should have been covered too. I believe there is huge potential for finding species of interest among other groups including **Picture-winged flies (*Tepritidae*, *Ulidiidae*)**, **Snail-killing flies (*Sciomyzidae*)**, **Soldierflies (*Stratiomyidae*)**, **Robberflies (*Asilidae*)**, **Long-legged flies (*Dolichopodidae*)**, **Thick-headed flies (*Conopidae*)**, and others.

Heteroptera (True Bugs)

I am currently in the process of preparing my bug specimens ready for identification. The shieldbugs are the only group of bugs I have identified so far, with 10 species identified in the field. To my surprise, the **heather shieldbug (*Rhacognathus punctatus*)** was identified at Cilfynydd. As the name suggests, this species is associated with heathland habitats where it feeds on the larvae of the **heather beetle (*Lochmaea suturalis*)**. A recent paper published in 2013 stated that this species has only previously been recorded from 9 sites in Wales, all of which are partly or entirely NNRs. It is therefore likely that this is the only record of the Heather shieldbug on a 'brownfield' site in Wales, and possibly even in Britain.

Homoptera (Leafhoppers & Planthoppers)

During the summer of 2015, I was involved in a small research project with Dr Mike Wilson, Head of Entomology and Hemipteran expert at National Museum of Wales. Along with two students undertaking Nuffield Research Placements at the museum, we conducted a study into the leafhoppers and planthoppers found on colliery spoil tips. We surveyed all six of the R.C.T study sites, along with additional sites around Merthyr Tydfil and Glynneath. We recorded a total of 50 species, which according to the experts is pretty impressive. Mike was so impressed with the findings that he plans to repeat the study next year with more students, potentially looking to generate more robust data to aid publication.

I hope that by reading these preliminary results you recognise the biological importance of colliery spoil tips and how important it is to conserve these habitats in

R.C.T. I am still in the process of collating my results, which I look forward to sharing in the next edition of the Recorder's Newsletter. As it stands, approximately 750 individual species records have been generated, with a number of different invertebrate groups still requiring identification. Unfortunately, funding for this project is now over, however, I do hope to continue this project if at all possible. If you wish to contact me, please email me at collieryspoil@gmail.com. Also, please follow the project on Twitter @collieryspoil and on Facebook via www.facebook.com/collieryspoil, and visit the website at www.collieryspoilbiodiversity.wordpress.com. Stay tuned for further updates!

Bryophytes (Mosses and Liverworts)

Mark Evans found more of the aptly named **goblin gold** moss, shining back at him from at a couple of new Cynon Valley sites, including a small quarry at Tarren-y-bwllfa. Barry Stewart made me aware of an excellent bryophytes identification site called the South Wales Bryophyte blog <http://southwalesbryos.blogspot.co.uk/>

Mammals

Ade Williams reported a record breaking 290 **lesser horseshoe bats** from their maternity roost in the south west of the County. That represent an exceptional progress in the fortunes of that colony and that is due in large part to the hard work of Ade and Barry Long (who unfortunately died recently). David Harry had five lessers in his Llanharan shed in early August, and seven on the 7th of October and four on the 9th. Jeff Williams reported a **long eared bat** in a Rhondda shed in September.

Paul Marshman mentioned an **otter** seen by a friend in Treorchy, while Jeff Williams reminded me of the dead **white mole** that he was shown and that he sent me pictures of: white moles are rare things. In our quest to reassure ourselves that **hedgehogs** are still with us, I was glad for David Harry's report of hedgehogs in his Llanharan garden, and I was very happy to watch a hedgehog on several nights feeding on grass verges in Miskin. Finally, Guy Watkins showed me rather harrowing footage taken from his mobile phone camera in broad daylight near Sardis car park in Pontypridd. Guy was filming a large, clearly streetwise and fearless **brown rat** that was loitering on the pavement, when suddenly a **mink** 'rockets in' from out of shot, and in a blur of dark brown fur high tackles the rat around its jugular, the footage ends with much terrible squealing and squeaking: it didn't end happily for the rat. It was nature red in tooth and claw and I didn't sleep for a week.

Wildlife Recording

South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) has been contracted by RCTCBC to run a series of training events to teach the **skills of biological recording** to members of three local communities across the County Borough. In each location we will be running a one-day '**Introduction to Biological Recording**' **training session**. This will be an indoor session which will target people with an interest in their local wildlife, but with little or no experience of recording. The course will cover subjects such including:

- The basics of biological recording: what we need to record and why; and
- How to turn wildlife sightings into biological records which will be used to protect, conserve and enhance the local environment.

In each location, we will subsequently be running a **field recording day** (mini BioBlitz) which will involve those who have attended the training sessions, plus members of the wider community. ***In addition we are also extremely keen to involve experienced local recorders and experts to lend your expertise, to demonstrate your field and identification skills and to inspire local people to engage with biological recording in their local area.***

At present two training sessions have been arranged:

Monday 15th February: 10.15am-3.30pm, **Blaenycwm Chapel, Wyndham Street, Tynewydd, CF42 5BT.** This event will be followed by a field recording day in the nearby **Cwm Saerbren SSSI** on a midweek date (to be confirmed) in late March.

Saturday 5th March: 10.15am-3.30pm, **Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Gymraeg Llantrisant**, Ffordd Cefn-yr-Hendy, Miskin, Pontyclun, CF72 8TL. This event will be followed by a field recording day in the adjacent, proposed **Cefn-yr-Hendy public open space**, probably on a Friday evening (to be confirmed) in May/June.

The third pair of training and field events will take place at **Dare Valley Country Park**, Aberdare, although no details of dates are yet available.

Places on each of the training events are limited, but the field recording days will be open to all. If you are interested in attending one of the training sessions, or if you think you may be able to offer your expertise at a field day (subject to confirmation of dates), please email adam.rowe@sewbrec.org.uk. Full details will be published via the events page of the SEWBReC website in due course (see: <http://www.sewbrec.org.uk/event/events-calendar>

Anyway that must be enough. We have a thought that we might produce another 'short' newsletter in March which can list all of the wildlife or similar events happening in RCT in 2016. So if you have anything planned, let me know and we can include them. Thanks again, and here's to a happy and biodiversity rich 2016.

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