

RECORDERS' NEWSLETTER



Recorders Newsletter 36 (January 2017)

Best wishes for the New Year and thanks for all the effort and reports that make up this Recorders' Newsletter. As you read on you will see that 2016 was a strange year for our biodiversity. On one hand everything seemed late in 2016, the winter lingered long and the summer was sluggish in arriving, but the year also produced some amazing finds and exciting new records. As ever the Newsletter is nothing without the collective biodiversity effort so thanks again.

Weather

The record breaking wetness of last winter (as recorded in Newsletter 35) did finally abate, but then switched from mild and very wet, to cold and dry. The cool spring of 2016 was a feature of the year and affected much of the wildlife over the coming year.

Marcus Middlehurst sent through his fantastic day by day records for 2016, and also expertly and pithily summarised the weather year in Treherbert. His records reminded me of the wet start to 2016, with January and its 693 mm of precipitation and a February with 372mm (and a high of 60mm on the 6th) before the weather tried to settle down. That doesn't mean to say it was wall to wall dryness. In March, there was still 203mm of rain (high of 40mm on the 27th), although there were fifteen consecutive rain free days, and by April recordable levels had dropped to 105mm: however that masked the fact that April was far from sunny, as Marcus noted that *'early part of the month is all wet, albeit that deposition is very low, it just spoils our days! So we are still having odd weather, I do not record temperatures but they are also unusual'*. The May total was 186mm (high of 48 mm on 20th) and then in June, Marcus noted *'the first 8 days of June have been dry here'*, although as a whole the month still had 203mm of dampness, with a soggy high of 58mm on the 20th, July was similarly damp with 185.5mm and sparked the near desperation comment (that many of us felt at this point): *'I'm hoping for an Indian Summer!'* However, August produced a total 293mm (highest rainfall 70mm on the 1st) and that rose to 338mm in September (58 mm on the 3rd). It wasn't until October that Marcus finally got some form of Indian summer (although perhaps more of a Himalayan foot hills version), as he said *'well here are my latest figures, it gets stranger, this must be one of the driest months (years) on record so far' total rainfall 73mm, highest 27mm on 15th with 22 rain free days but 'there have been a number of misty days!'* As they go, November was also relatively dry with 194 mm of rain and only one short really wet period from

the 19th to the 21st, while December was calm with just 182 mm of precipitation with a pattern of frequent, but not excessive rainfall, which was punctuated by two short, frosty and dry interludes (one at the start of the month and the other starting on Boxing Day). All of this left Marcus's 2016 with an annual total of 3027 mm of precipitation, which given the start to 2016 (over 1,000 mm in the first two months) was surprisingly dry (if that is really the word ?).

From Cwmbach, Mark Evans summed up 2016 with *'pretty average, as far as rainfall totals went, but apart from two wet months to begin the year (January's was exceptional), most of the other months were either average or below. The exceptions were May, June, August and September, all of which were a little above average.'*

Although we rightly remember 2016 as being a poor year, it wasn't exceptionally wet as a whole, but it was unsettled and often cooler than it ought to have been. The main damage was caused by the cool, unsettled summer months, following such a wet winter. Having grown without stopping, right through autumn 2015 and through to the end of January; pushed on by the freakishly warm weather, the grass was then reluctant to begin growing in the spring. The reason for that, as far as domestic lawns were concerned, was that the turf had lost its roots, due to the three months of the worst waterlogging I can remember in forty years of professional gardening. When I began mowing lawns, at the beginning of April, it was like mowing freshly laid turf. The slightest false move and it would part company with the soil beneath and show an absence of roots below 20mm or so. I also saw a few established shrubs die through the season, for the same reason: three months of waterlogging had killed the roots.

Mark also sent me his excellent 'day by day' summary records for the 2016 weather story. A few headline figures included a total 1734 mm of precipitation with 205 days with precipitation over 0.2 mm. So, as previously noted, Cwmbach (in the middle of the Cynon, Valley) has somewhere between a half and a third less rainfall than Treherbert at the top of the Rhondda Fawr. As with Marcus's records, Mark's annual total includes a very wet January 2016 (400 mm of rain) and a pretty wet February, and then the next 10 months in which moderate rainfall seems to have been fairly evenly distributed. So between March and December all months lay within the range of 10 to 19 days with precipitation, the driest months being July and October which had totals of 46 mm. In terms of temperature, Mark's weather records pick out the few short spells of 'hot' sunny weather we experienced, with the early weeks of June peaking at 26 degrees C on the 5th, a short burst in July provided 31 degrees C on the 19th, and another burst of heat in August warmed Cwmbach to 27 degree C on the 16th. His records also pick out the largely frost free early winter, but highlight the short cold snap in late November/early December with a minimum of minus 6.3 degree C on the November 30th.

Paul Marshman's Llwynypia rainfall records for the winter of 2015/16, further highlighted the wetness of last winter, with 16 inches in November, 20 inches in December and 19 inches (which is about 480 mm) in January. Again, Paul's rainfall is higher than Mark's, but considerably less than Marcus. The Rhondda is much wetter than the Cynon, and the cloud forest conditions of Treherbert beats everyone 'hands-down'. The cold spring was in evidence in May when Paul told me that his

average minimum temperature for April was a chilly 2.9 degrees C, compared that with his average minimum for the previous December of 6 degrees.

Birds

The mild early winter meant that many of the winter visiting birds stayed longer in their northern breeding areas, and it wasn't until January 30th 2016 that Paul Marshman saw his first **woodcock** of year, at that time he still hadn't seen **snipe** or **jack snipe**, although there were two **redpoll** visiting his Llwynypia garden. Jeff Williams saw a woodcock in Glynconel Local Nature Reserve at same time, and he also came across a **red legged partridge** at Llanharry. The colder February weather may have been responsible for the 25 snipe I saw feeding in wet rhos pasture at Cwm fields on February 3rd 2016.

David Harry's Llanharan garden had **greenfinch**, **chaffinch**, **siskin** and **goldfinch** in early February; he also had a visiting **sparrowhawk**. David also had **brambling** in his garden in early March, plus the nightly sight of a roost of 200 **jackdaws**.

A sure sign of spring is the return of the **skylark**, and this year Paul Marshman reported the first singing skylark on the heights above Gelli on February 10th. In March, Kevin Hughes reported a *'quiet January but most notable for two sightings of **short eared owl** on the Ferndale side of Mynydd Ty'n-tyle, the first early January the second on 27th January flushed while walking dog: could be same bird or separate birds. A large flock of **linnets** been wintering and early skylarks are back on the Mynydd'*. Later Kevin noted *'things slowly started to pick up in March. Skylarks, **meadow pipits** and **stonechats** started to take up residence. Other notable sightings were lesser redpolls at Maerdy colliery, a **red kite** over Lluest Wen and I found a **great grey shrike** about a 1/3rd mile north of reservoir. As of now **chiffchaffs** are beginning to arrive so migration is in full flow'*. He also mentioned *'the only butterfly so far was a **brimstone** along the A470 near Rhydyfelin'*.

In April from Llantrisant, Dave Penberthy recorded the return of **swallows**, **chiffchaffs** and **blackcaps** on the 4th. On April 6th Ben Williams emailed that, *'I was working up at Ponty Golf Club yesterday and saw my first swallow of the year'* while I was able to watch up to 20 **sand martins** feeding over Pontypridd on April 11th, with birds coming close to the windows of the 6th Floor of Sardis House. On 19th April at Llantwit Fardre Marsh, whilst checking the **marsh fritillary** habitat I was really pleased to see an obvious breeding pair of **stonechat**, two singing **tree pipits**, as well as **willow warbler**, chiffchaff and **reed bunting** all holding territories (Ben Williams later confirmed the successful nesting of the reed buntings). On the very early date of April 21st there were two very young **coot** chicks on the lower lake at Clydach Vale and two groups of similarly new **mallard** ducklings. By April 22nd dozens of **house martin** were swopping past the upper floor windows of Sardis House along with the first **swift** of the spring. However, on the whole migrants were late in 2016, and by early April, Mark Evan emailed *'I haven't seen a single hirundine yet! Nor have I heard, let alone seen a willow warbler or blackcap. The only migrants I've had so far are chiffchaff, **wheatear** and **ring ouzel**. The RHS Cardiff flower show is coming up, next weekend, which seems to be the traditional date for the Cefnpennar Cuckoo to arrive'*.

The plight of our cuckoos pre-occupies many of us. So I was glad to hear from Paul Marshman that **cuckoo** returned to the Gelli Tips, Rhondda on 28th April, with three birds seen on 5th May. At the same time there were still up to 5 **goosander** on the Rhondda in early May (NB the odd goosander was still recorded right until May 13th): it won't surprise anyone if we do find that goosander are nesting somewhere on the Rhondda or Cynon. Paul saw six young coot on Glyncornel Lake in May and had six species of finch visiting his garden in early May. He mentioned that while chiffchaff and blackcaps were back in numbers, sadly **redstarts** were not doing well. Thankfully by May 6th **wood warblers** were back in Glyncornel (PM) with 3 singing males by the 9th May. When I helped NRW to monitor the SSSI in May, we heard 4 or 5 different singing males: all very gratifying.

While looking for marsh fritillary at Tonyrefail, Ben Williams was able to break the *'monotony of looking for nothing by the song of a cuckoo with a sore throat. He could sing about four successful 'cuckoos' and after that the 'cucks' were fine but the 'oos' had a definite rasping finish. If he tried to carry on the sound got worse and deteriorated into 'cuckerrrs'. But he was not perturbed and carried on by singing three or four successful 'cuckoos' and then had a rest before he sang again. Oh! The joys of watching nature'*. I was also glad to hear a cuckoo at Mountain Ranch above Ty Rhiw in the south-eastern corner of the Borough and with Sue Westwood heard and saw one of Paul's cuckoos on a telegraph wire above Glyncornel Local Nature Reserve.

On May 16th David Harry reported a **dipper** on the stream outside his Llanharan home, plus 20 **house sparrows**, and in early June Alan Rosney sent the following from a Glamorgan Bird Club event, *'we had 21 for our **nightjar** walk in Llanwonno last night. Churning was short and sharp at around 10 o'clock. We saw three nightjars and heard another. At one point a cuckoo was flying with the nightjars'*.

Tony Swann sent his excellent summaries of bird (and other) records for 2016, from the Wildlife Trust's Brynna Woods Nature Reserve at Llanharan.

Winter - total number of bird species seen

January – 37 February - 36 March – 41

January was both wet and quiet - the most interesting was siskin on 19th and a group of 10 approx lesser redpolls on the 25th.

*February continued in the same vein with siskin on 5th and 23rd together with overwintering reed buntings. **Scarlet elf cups** were showing well before the month end – likely to be my only attempt at fungi ID !*

March and hopefully the prelude to Spring

*4th yielded 30+ **fieldfare** and lesser numbers of **redwings** in an adjacent field at the south west edge – across the railway line. I am assuming the large numbers of fieldfare are part of the gatherings they make prior to northward migration.*

Resident passerines were becoming more vocal as a prelude to the new breeding season.

*20th the dry spell has brought life back to the woods but as yet no migrants from the south have arrived. 5 redwings were still about. The ivy berries are beginning to soften and the **blackbirds** start to become very territorial when they have a good tree to feed from. Reed buntings are still evident but the over wintering **grey wagtail** appears to have moved on. The mammal highlight was a **stoat** crossing a path just in front of me.*

21st the monthly bird walk organised by the South and West Wales Wildlife Trust found fieldfares and redwing on a field to the south west over the railway line. My highlight was whilst waiting to others to arrive at the west end of the site – 2 **lesser spotted woodpeckers** that flew from the south west and on into the wood. During the walk they could not be relocated – did they stay or did they go straight through? My first ever sighting of this species that used to have a toehold on the south western fringes of the old opencast site at Llanilid many years ago. Anyone interested in taking part in the walks need only check on the Trust's website for future dates and times

27th the first chiffchaffs were heard and seen – 9 days later than last year.

30th flyover by **green woodpecker** at southern end of Brynna – south to north

Spring total number of bird species seen

April – 40 May - 42 June –

3rd April kept hearing a **common buzzard** calling quite close by but couldn't find – odd! Eventually I found the bird, it was a **Eurasian jay** doing a brilliant impression, good enough that not a **grey squirrel** was in the area. I have never heard or seen this before but I recall some recent comments in the birding press that this can occur.

5th April blackcaps have come back with 2 singing males and third silent. Jackdaws and jays collecting nesting material and most of the residents seemed to have paired off already.

After two weeks away, 8th & 14th May visits resulted in swifts, house martins and assorted warblers. Migration was extremely visible and enjoyable. Birds seemed to sing and call all through the site.

22nd May a visit to the woods at noon resulting in a most remarkable 3 hours. At the edge of the wet wooded eastern part, I was stopped in my tracks by the call of a **lesser whitethroat**. It took some 15 minutes to be able to get a view of this bird and confirm same. I have never recorded this species here before. The rest of the time was taken with enjoying the normal late spring residents complete with a greenfinch moving through the area and stopping every so often to give its wheezing call. 38 species seen – the best ever from a previous high of 32 on a May visit.

Garden warblers were very visible compared to the usual fleeting views. Never did I expect so many especially away from the normal high of early mornings. A visit to remember!

3rd June late in the evening heard and then saw the outline of a female **tawny owl** flying out of the wood towards the north east. The bird continuously gave contact calls and must have young on the wing in the area. Over 20 years since last seen in Brynna Woods.

14th June on a very wet morning there was a solitary **rook** preening on nearby house before flying off and over the wood. This species has been absent for over 30 years from the site and then were only flyovers to and from a roost at rear of Llanharan House. The closure of the opencast saw the roost move on as their food source no longer existed once coal extraction ceased and the ground was undisturbed.

25th June adult and juvenile **great spotted woodpecker** at Llanharan end of site. Good to see the juvenile.

Summer monthly total number of bird species seen

July – 30 : August - 35 :

13th July the wood seems full of juveniles with **robins** and blackbirds being the most visible.

14th July an early morning visit to a daughter yielded a flyover two old **mute swan** juvenile, never seen one over the woods before, the swan was flying west to east and is likely to be on the move as the parents will have this year's young to care for without last year's still hanging around !

17th July mid-morning a pair of **black-headed gulls** flew over heading south west, a species not seen every year at this site. Later in the afternoon, I managed to work the area after 50 hours of rain came to an end. Numbers and variety were low and reflects that many birds had sought food elsewhere than a dripping and very damp woodland.

31st July last day of the month and the woods were very quiet after some more rain combined with the start of the post breeding moult. It took over 2 hours before I managed to see a robin !

6th August juvenile sparrowhawk together with the adult birds. A great deal of contact calling must have been a very early first venture away from the nest.

19th August a wet morning brightened up by a **cormorant** flying east to west, last time I saw this species over the woods was in 2010.

23rd August robins having completed their moult were back calling. The first mixed tit flock of the autumn was noted with great, blue, coal and 15+ **long-tailed tits** plus a solitary **treecreeper**.

11th September first autumn chiffchaff in full voice.

20th September **grey wagtail** has returned for the winter. The new raised viewing platform overlooking the cattle meadow is under construction and will be a welcomed additional facility.

Autumn monthly total number of bird species seen

October – 29 : November - 35 : December – 40

10th October – redwings, 3 in total, are the first winter visitors.

31st October – **rabbit** in the woods, most unusual sighting, so far, this year.

29th November – at last we are in a spell of cold fine days and species numbers have increased with 27 being seen in 3 hours today. Winter visitors have been restricted to redwing only and these have only reached double figures once, 60 flying over on the 23rd in three groups.

3rd December – a single **common gull** flew over from west to east, nice and low so the buoyant flight could be easily seen. The first sighting of this species, for me, at this site.

17th December - I found my first overwintering reed bunting, a smart juvenile.

24th December – A adult **yellow-browed warbler** at the east end in the wet area between bridleway and old ogmore branch line. This made my Christmas and was totally unexpected. Went back for a further 2 visits hoping to capture it on camera but to no avail.

31st December – an afternoon visit produced 3 fieldfares

Another very productive year with 63 species recorded. 5 new species noted with the best being a pair of lesser spotted woodpeckers and a single yellow-browed warbler which would have travelled from its breeding grounds in Siberia.

Tony's yellow-browed warbler is a particular wildlife highlight of 2016. The bird looks like a small chiffchaff, but with a bright yellow eye stripe and two bright yellow wing

bars. As Tony says, they breed in the stunted birch and willow scrub of the Siberian taiga, and occasionally turn up in the winter Britain. It is a cracking record.

On June 18th, Paul Denning heard a **grasshopper warbler** singing in Rhos Pasture at Tonyrefail. In July, and very pleasingly, Paul Marshman reported that a single pair of **whinchat** had successful breed on hillside at at Cwm Bodwingallt, Gelli (in and amongst 5 pairs of stonechat using the same hillside). As we've discussed before, whinchats were once common and characteristic of most of our valleyside ffridd. Paul had many pair breeding on the hillsides around Llwynypia at a time when (because of colder winters) stonechats was a much rarer bird. It is a number of years since Paul recorded young whinchat on his patch.

In July, Paul Denning emailed that '**reed warblers** seem firmly established at Cwm Colliery, with at least 3 singing males'. That was great news, but the email continued with an amazing report that, '*I was at Clydach Vale Countryside Park last week and found a recently deceased 2nd year gannet up near the quarry, unsurprisingly my first record of **gannet** from the Rhondda! It was probably blown in during the strong winds a couple of weeks ago*'. This incredible record follows on from the report in the last Newsletter of a 'wrecked' **kittiwake** blown in, and left high and dry in Pontypridd.

The return of winter thrushes is always a landmark in the year, and Paul Marshman saw his first redwing flocks on October 3rd passing over Llwynypia. The south-easterly path they were taking suggests these may have been Icelandic birds. Paul saw a woodcock on October 13th (very early compared with the very late appearance in the previous winter), as well as snipe and up to 3 goosander on the Rhondda. On the 31st he also saw **kingfisher** on both Clydach Vale lakes, with **little grebe**. In the previous week, he had also seen **red kites** on three occasions over Llwynypia. In December, Hazel Penberthy told me of the wintering blackcap in her Llantrisant garden.

Mark Evans sent through the summary of his 2016 **raven** roost monitoring records for his Merthyr/Cynon Valley roost. This astonishing roost produced the second highest annual average count since Mark started monitoring in 2002. Also, 2016 produced the two highest ever monthly counts, with 577 in June and 505 in July. This roost must be 'drawing-in' birds from a very wide area of south Wales. Ravens are super-intelligent birds, and as Mark has described it, these huge summer assemblages of adult and first year young must surely have a greater benefit than just a sense of security in numbers. We simply don't know what information is gained and given in the cacophony of individual 'croaks', 'honks' and 'cawls' that a 500 strong raven roost produces.

Plants

Paul Marshman saw **lesser celandine** in flower on February 10th 2016, a full month earlier than 2015: a clear result of the mild early winter weather. Paul also had flowering **early dog violet (Viola reichenbachiana)** at Glyncornel, a species which usually likes base rich soil.

The **green winged orchids** at Cefn Parc Cemetery, Llantrisant had another disappointing flowering show. In May, Margaret Harding emailed that '*went back to*

check and I found 2 in the top corner of the one field and 9 in the lower area of the second field. I know it sounds silly but every year there has been 1 that is pink and it is my favourite but this was missing, so went back today and still no sign'. I also counted the orchids on a couple of occasions and in total I found 13 flowering plants. However, as has been said before, the hay meadow displays at Cefn Parc were spectacular and well worth a visit next spring/summer. Also, green winged orchids are renowned for the time taken to establish new plants and we hope it is just a matter of time (and continuing the hay management) before the population starts to build up again.

*Also in the spring, Margaret noted that on the River Clun where 'they have been clearing along the bank the **wood anemone** really were out in force and I found a nice patch of **ramsons**'. Margaret also keeps a eye on the flora and fauna of Cwm Colliery, Beddau, She 'went to the Cwm 12th June to check for my **bee orchids** but was devastated to find the undergrowth all cut back so no sign all. Also checked the area of the **round leaved wintergreen** to find that it was all flattened and old carpet dumped there. Went on 25th June to check again found 1 poor specimen bee orchid, this is in the car park area near concrete walls. Then went to area where wintergreen is found there are usually many orchids just 2 there'. However 'across to the flat area was happy to find orchids everywhere despite them extending the railway timber sleepers and steel track. There were orchids hidden everywhere ,the amount of **red clover** had increased too' Also '**foxgloves** are having a good year as you come from Clydach Vale down to the roundabout before McDonalds I have never seen so many. The **primroses** have had a good year too along the Tonyrefail bypass'.*

*On June 18th, Paul Denning mentioned 'just to let you know that I found bee orchids today on the roundabout by Macdonalds on the A473, where they are doing a lot of work. I haven't seen any yet at the end of the dual carriageway by Matalan, but I'll keep looking'. Nia Honeybun also saw bee orchid in the Llantrisant area. While on June 21st I was very pleased (and surprised) to drive past a **pyramidal orchid** in full flower on the main road verge by Tesco, Aberdare.*

Fungi

*Sometimes fungi are so unmistakable, it is relatively easy to be sure of what they are. However sometimes (well actually quite often) the fungus you find could be one of two or three (or more) very similar species: at that point forensic detective work is called for. I fairly often see beautiful **scarlet elf cup** fungi growing in wet woods in RCT, but I never know which beautiful scarlet elf cup I have seen. To figure that out takes effort and expertise: just to illustrate the point, in early February, Mark Evans sent the following 'on the weekend, I rediscovered a standing dead ash trunk, which is quite rotten and supporting a healthy population of the stunningly beautiful fungus **green elf-cup (Chlorociboria Sp.)**. I originally discovered it here in 2012 and it was good to see it still thriving, especially as although the stained wood is occasionally found, this is the only regularly fruiting colony I have ever found.*

*As you may know, there are two species of Chlorociboria, (**C. aeruginascens** and **aeruginosa**) which in the field look for all intents and purposes the same. The only way to be sure is to examine and measure the spores, because, luckily, the spores of the latter species are much larger than the former. I collected a single cup and at*

home placed it on a microscope slide, closely covered to avoid it drying out, leaving it overnight. By the following day, there was a deposit of white spores on the slide, so I was able to put a spot of water and a cover slip on them and get them under the microscope. All the spores I measured were around 6 - 7.5 micron in length and up to 1.5 microns wide, so fitted comfortably into the size range for *C. aeruginascens*. The same day, I collected a fruiting body of scarlet elf cup, in order to find out whether it was **Sarcoscypha austriaca** or **S.coccinea**. I obtained a mass of mature spores on a microscope slide by the same means as with the *Chlorociboria*, but before examining them, I first scraped off a sample of the whitish tomentum which coats the outside of the cup and mounted it on a slide. Under the microscope, at x100, the hairs of the tomentum were clearly curled, rather than wavy or straight, which immediately pointed to *S. austriaca*; *coccinea* having waved or straightish hairs. Examining the spores, most had the rounded ends; a feature of both species, but there were also spores present which had more or less squared off ends, something *austriaca* has, but *coccinea* doesn't. The latter has only spores with rounded ends. The clincher was the presence of a handful of spores, from the ends of which were budding other spores. That is something that *coccinea* doesn't do, so that elf cup was scarlet (*S. austriaca*), not ruby (*S. coccinea*). It is nice to get a definitive identification with these awkward pairs of species and an interesting and enjoyable process.

While we are on the subject of microfungi, the next time you see some **herb robert**, take a close look at the older, overwintered leaves and you will probably see a scattering of tiny, raised black dots on some of them, the dots often extending onto the petiole. Those are the fruiting bodies of a fungus called **Coleroa robertiani**. I have found it everywhere I've found the plant, but sometimes I've had to search for a bit before finding the fungus. It is apparently common, but under recorded'.

The Glamorgan Fungi Group is going from strength to strength, and all sorts of rare and uncommon species are now being found in south Wales. 2016 has been a bumper year for outstanding finds. To start with Mark Steer sent me the following;

A woodwart on alder - Hypoxylon fuscoides

This is a species on Kew's Lost and Found Fungi Project 100 Priority list and had only been recorded at 1 UK site previously. However Emma Williams Glamorgan Fungus Group set out recently to try to find this in Glamorgan VC41 and searched for woodwart on Alder at the old Coed Ely Colliery site near Llantrisant.

This species is virtually identical to **hazel woodwart Hypoxylon fuscum** which also occurs widely on Alder. However, there is a simple chemical test that gives an initial separation – Potassium hydroxide solution (KOH) produces a purple reaction with **H.fuscoides** whereas yellowy brown with *H.fuscum*.

Knowing that I had a supply of KOH solution Emma brought me a large bag of alder 'twigs' with woodwart on them. I cut off a number of fruit bodies from each and placed them on microscope slides and put a drop of KOH solution on them and within 10 seconds a colouration became apparent. Initial specimens showed yellow brown – indicating *H.fuscum* then from one twig I started to get a purple colouration!

*This 'twig' was despatched to Kew and Brian Douglas confirmed by microscopic examination that indeed Emma had found *H.fuscoides*! This was also confirmed independently by Mark Evans.*

*Kew were keen that we look again at the Coed Ely site to try to determine how widespread this species is. A return visit was made with Emma, her young son Callum and myself armed with KOH solution and specimen tubes so we could check in the field. Initially we were finding plenty of *H.fuscum* but then we started to see the purple colour indicating *H.fuscoides*! We now have accurate grid references for those trees having the target species so if necessary we can return to them. Also a number of 'twigs' have been retained for further investigation.*

*It remains to be seen if *Hypoxylon fuscoides* is present elsewhere in Glamorgan – quite a task given the prevalence of alder!*

Mark and Emma Williams also kept me informed of the finding of another rare fungus: **hazel gloves**, which have been found in the Llantrisant area. Emma sent me the following, 'you may well recall Mark contacting you November last year, in regards to my son Callum having found ***Hypocreopsis rhododendri***, hazel glove fungus. Unfortunately, due to a complicated sexual morphing that it goes through, Kew were unable to confirm that it was either the above or a new species as DNA changes throughout life cycle. Having waited and returned monthly to site to check for its return, I was overjoyed to find it Saturday 24th September, and took a sample before the squirrels finished it off. It was at the all important stage of spore-ing, which is vital for identification, and, under guidance of Brian Douglas of Kew, was able to isolate spores and obtain microscopic images. Although these need measuring, Brian is happy to confirm that it is indeed *Hypocreopsis rhododendri*, hazel glove, and can be recorded as such'. Emma sent me some fanatic pictures of both the spores and the whole fungi, which certainly looks 'glove like'. Hazel glove is a rare species of old hazel coppice. It is another significant find.

The rare fungi records kept rolling in (or 'pinging in' by email from Mark Steer); 'another one to add to list. I've had confirmation from Nigel Stringer (Carmarthenshire Rust expert) that rust I found on alder is ***Melampsorium hiratsukanum***. Very similar to ***M.betulinum*** (sometimes on alder, but for which birch is the main host) which it may have been confused with in the past. FRDBI has only 62 records for this but I think this is not the complete picture. I found it earlier in the year at Crymlyn Bog and I think Nigel has quite a lot of Welsh records'.

In the meantime, Emma sent further information from a Glamorgan Fungi Group visit to the beautiful glacial landscape of Penpych and Cwmsaerbren (Blaenrhondda), 'I have spent past 2 days at predominantly Penpych and amassing quite a list! Some rare to uncommon species: including the **parastic bolete**. Many more rare fungi have turned up including the **green foot fibrecap**, **purple stocking webcap**, ***Cortinarius varicolor*** and **variable webcap**, to name just a few!'

To round off an extraordinarily productive fungi year, Mark Evans found **fringed cup (*Encoelia fimbriata*)** at Penywaun. He sent me picture showing clusters of the fringed cup, growing on a moss covered branch, and looking like clusters of olive green sea anemones in some seaweed cloaked rock pool: an incredible looking

things. I checked the distribution of fringed cup on the National Biodiversity Network web site and it looks like Mark's record is the only one !

Lichens

Hard on the heels of the fringed cup, Mark Evans sent the following; *'I paid a visit to Pwll Waun Cynon Nature Reserve (Mountain Ash) this afternoon, for a look around. I discovered a lichenicolous fungus on the lichen **Xanthoria parietina**, growing on a small hawthorn, alongside the hay dump. While I was setting the camera up for a photo of it, I noticed a yellowish foliose lichen on an adjacent branch. I photographed the Xanthoria and collected a specimen of the fungus, then I turned my attention to the other lichen. Although it was a small individual (15-20mm across) there was no mistaking **golden-eye lichen (Teloschistes chrysophthalmus)**, with its fringed, yellow apothecia'*. This is the second golden-eye lichen record from the Cynon Valley. This golden eyed and 'sun ray' fringed lichen was, until very recently, considered to be very, very rare in the UK. Even though it has now been recorded more frequently in coastal places like Dorset, it is still a very exciting and noteworthy find, particularly in an inland location like the Cynon Valley. As Mark has mentioned it is amazing that such rare lichens are thriving in the Cynon Valley. It is testimony to the good and improving air quality of the south Wales Valleys.

Butterflies and Moths

2016 was a very peculiarly one for our butterflies. The combination of a wet mild early winter, and then a long protracted cool late winter and spring seems to have really affected those butterflies that hibernate as adults. So, Ben Williams noted in April *'butterflies seem to be slow this year I have only seen two **brimstones** and two **commas** so far. Last year both species were abundant and I expected to see more flying this spring but perhaps the wet got to them'*. That indeed was the case, and brimstones, **small tortoiseshells**, **peacocks** and commas were all thin on the ground this summer. To illustrate Margaret Harding noted in the autumn, *'so pleased to have 1 butterfly in my garden at last, **red admiral**, I have been so disappointed this year, but curious to see what the butterfly count shows for the rest of the country'*.

Across Wales **marsh fritillary** seemed to suffer badly from the weird winter weather and the long cold spring. Still, Ben saw marsh fritillary at sites in Tonyrefail and Hirwaun in late May and on June 8th Lucy Blomfield *'cycled to Tonyrefail east today, 30 marsh fritillary's in total, 22 of them in field 17, only 8 in field 16, a lot looked like they had seen better days'*. The newly found marsh fritillary colony in Church Village produced 11 males seen in an hour (seen by Ben). Unfortunately, the cool weather in the second week of June didn't produce the big numbers we had hoped for. Ben also mentioned *'that Richard Smith and I went up to Clydach Vale although there were no small pearl bordered fritillary flying up there, we did see 1 **dingy skipper**, 3 **small coppers**, 4 **orange tips** and 2 **green veined whites**, so that wasn't all bad'*. In early June, Alan Rosney *'went out with Paul Denning this morning to a couple of sites in Tonyrefail. Saw 5 **green hairstreaks**, 7 marsh fritillary and a couple of orange tips'*.

In July, Ben *'went down to Treforest Industrial Estate this morning to look for **white letter hairstreaks** on my favourite elm tree. I saw four individuals flying around despite the high wind. Sadly the tree has Dutch Elms Disease and probably will die*

*in a few years so I will have to look elsewhere for another site'. Dutch elm disease is present in RCT and periodically kills off the mature **wych elms** that the butterfly's larvae feed on. Fortunately, and unlike English elm, the impacts on our native wych elm is less wholesale. All the same it is a shame that Ben's main elm has gone, it was a very fine tree.*

In the late summer, Ben was back in Tonyrefail looking for the larval webs of the marsh fritillary, 'I went over to Tonyrefail this morning and with Paul Denning and Lucy Blomfield we counted 37 larval webs on Site 16. Down by quite a bit on last year but still a good number. The webs were mainly large with good numbers of caterpillars, averaging approx 6mm in length'.

*As part of the very successful Dare Valley SewBrec recording day on July 21st, Mark Evans was on hand with his moth trap and recorded 84 species, he explains ' Martin Bell and Martin Bevan helped me lug all my stuff up the incline to the top of the tip, where we set up my Skinner trap. Before they arrived, I also set up a 15 watt Heath trap just inside the woods, on the lip of Cwm Nant-rhiw-llech, about half way up the incline. Despite a sharp little shower (the only one, thankfully) just before midnight, we trapped until 03:25 and had a decent catch, between the two traps. The highlights were two micro moths, which turned up while I was down with Dave Slade and were photographed by Martin Bell: **Argyresthia pygmaeella** and **Agonopterix nervosa** were both new species to the square SN90, but as expected, most of the species caught at the skinner trap were new to the site (SN9702). I've attached the full list'.*

*In June, George Tordoff visited Y Graig (Billy Wynt), Llantrisant and saw the beautiful black and white micro-moth **Anania funebris**. Y Graig seems to be the best site in Wales for this rare species. George also noted, 13 **small pearl bordered fritillary**, with 5 feeding on a single Green Alkanet plant. As Richard Smith noted 'the 13 small pearls is tremendous news because they seemed to disappear from the site in the early 2000s, well before the recent years of productive restoration management. I've not seen them since, although my visits are occasional to be fair. Richard W did observe a female **dark green fritillary** egg-laying last year, which seems to be a new species for the site. So yet further news that species do eventually find great habitat! Let's hope **high brown fritillary** is next!'*

*Over the years we have collectively noted the changing fortunes of our butterflies, and this summer Paul Marshman mentioned that **gatekeepers** were now the commonest butterfly on his Llwynypia 'patch', this is despite the fact that gatekeepers had only colonised his bit of the Rhondda as recently as 1995. Similarly **ringlet** first appeared last year (2015) and this year Paul saw them on a few sites in his area. So this is another species which has moved in (ringlet were extremely common this year in the Llantrisant area and seemed to have no problems with the weather). Paul contrasted these colonising species with the plight of **small tortoiseshells**, which have gone the other way (from the ubiquitous to an occasional fleeting glimpse). NB finally, in October I did see a few small tortoiseshell and comma (perhaps suggesting better things next year) and a couple of red admirals did spend that month in my garden feasting on rotting pears under our lichen encrusted pear tree.*

Bees and other things

There is strong evidence that natural regeneration of habitats (from the local seedbanks) works better than wildflower seeding. As an example an area of the Albion Tip, Cilfyndd that was disturbed for engineering works was left to recover naturally. Liam Olds sent the following in May, *'I've been out at Albion Tip today surveying for solitary bees. I just wanted to say that leaving that bottom section alone to naturally regenerate was a good idea. I have seen lots of evidence of mining bees nesting in the exposed spoil. There were lots of what are likely **Halictus rubicundus** females nest searching; also seen lots of **Lasioglossum morio** nest searching and observed a few nesting burrows too. I also had **Andrena bicolor**, **Andrena nitida** and **Andrena migroaenea** all in that bottom section. Lots of **Nomada fabriciana** females looking for host nests too. The amount of beetles in that bottom section is unreal - loads of **ground beetles** running everywhere. I remember from last year that there was a ground beetle under almost every single stone you overturned in that bottom section...they obviously like all the bare ground. I really should run pitfall traps there. Anyway, I just thought you'd be pleased to hear that leaving that bottom section is proving beneficial to the insects'*.

In July, Paul Denning recorded the beautiful **mountain/bilberry bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*)** *'feeding on flowers by the top lake car park'* at Clydach Vale. As mentioned before many insect species are on the move, moving north with warmer weather. While mammals and birds take a little longer to react, the spread and colonisation of northern areas by southern insect species has been much quicker. The collective (and on-going) movements of insect species in a northerly direction, is an incredible natural phenomenon, and one we can all witness. The latest species to react is the **ivy bee (*Colletes hederæ*)** which looks like a very boldly striped honey bee and which is the last bee of the year to appear. It makes its appearance in mid September and feeds (almost) exclusively on ivy flowers. It has colonised Britain in the last few years. This year I found a female feeding on ivy in my backgarden in mid September, Sue Westwood then saw three of them the next day on ivy in Talbot Green and Liam noted *'funnily enough, I recorded them in Talbot Green on Saturday too, as well as Ynysmaerdy Industrial Estate (by the Royal Mint)'*. Last year ivy bees were only recorded along the coastal fringe of Glamorgan, and this year we actually saw their colonising front reach RCT. Within a year or two they are likely to become a familiar species feeding on flowering ivy throughout the County Borough. Interestingly, an Efail Isaf record last year from Jay Kynch reported, *'I thought I had found ivy bees at Lan farm but they turned to be **European hornets**'*. Jay was just one autumn too soon, but hornets are an excellent record in themselves (and another species which 20 years ago was not found in RCT). This year I have seen them on several occasions at Llantwit Fardre Marsh.

Liam Old has been continuing his colliery spoil invertebrate assessment work. A particular habitat of colliery spoil is seepage or wet flush. While most of these mini-rivulets are acidic, sometimes they flow with calcareous water. Liam and I saw tufa (calcium carbonate) deposits on flushes at Cwm Colliery. Liam has also recorded some rare **soldier flies** from certain seepages on certain tips; the larvae of soldier fly live in the seepages. Soldier flies are colourful things with blues, greens, gold's and bronze markings. Many of them have been given English names based (rather pleasingly) on vaguely military lines (so Brigadier and General and the like). Of the soldier flies Liam has recorded, the **Hill Soldier (*Oxycera pardalina*)** has perhaps

been the pick and as Liam describes *'is widespread but very scarce (so still a nice record) and is strongly associated with calcareous seepages (which is interesting)'*. So our colliery tips have another string to their biodiversity bow, base rich flushes: now who would have thought it?

Emma Williams sent a picture of a beetle with 'long black' antennae and a 'red' body. I thought it was a longhorn beetle, but I was wrong, and as Emma explained, *'another spot of good news is that I accidentally spotted a nationally scarce beetle close to the entrance drive to Penpych yesterday, **Platycis minutus!** Platycis is separate group from Longhorns, it's appearance threw me also, but it was Longhorn group that advises I bring it to the attention of the ecological officer for the area due to its rarity and in order to ensure that woodland habitat is (hopefully!) protected'*.

Finally, Christopher Lawrence and Liam Olds have spent last summer defining and re-defining the presence of the **mirid bug *Adelphocris quadripunctatus***. Having come across one from near a balancing pond on the Church Village By-pass, Christopher and Liam have now variously found the bug within grassland areas at Beddau, Llantrisant Common, Coedely and Clydach Vale. Amazingly these records are the first British records in many years, and those previous records were all from the South of England. Further work has now found this brown and yellow bug in other south Walian locations. It seems to be particularly associated with common and greater bird's-foot trefoil. No one knows whether the species has always been in south Wales all along, or whether it has colonised in recent times. It is just one more of the series of amazing wildlife records in RCT in 2016.

Mammals

Alan Roberts contacted me regarding a dead **otter** on the A4093 by Hendreforgan, Gilfach Goch, which the Park's department picked up and Cardiff University collected for tests. David Harry had one **lesser horseshoe bat** in garden woodshed in early February and an individual was also present in early May. While at Tonyrefail looking for marsh fritillary webs, Ben Williams, with Paul Denning and Lucy Blomfield *'saw a **harvest mouse**. Paul spotted it running through the long grass and we all watched it until it dived down into the undergrowth'*. As we have said before, harvest mice are not really species of wheat fields (as so often thought) what they really like is rhos pasture and tussocky purple moor-grass.

Thanks again for the records and support. I will endeavour to produce the next newsletter much quicker. Please keep the reports coming. Thanks and all the best for 2017.

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