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"FRITS ABOUT, 2016 - No.3"

(78 new report items in this edition - received from 27th May to 13th June 2016)

Dear all,

This is probably not going to be one of our greatest years for Fritillary butterflies in Wales - at least not so far! But let's keep hoping....

Pearl-bordered Frits (PBFs) seem to have done OK, but not best numbers by any means, an exception perhaps being Ewyas Harold Common (just 1.5kms into Herefordshire). Better news for Small PBFs, which have done better than last 2 years on the dry grassland/bracken habitat in Alun valley and also appeared again after 20 year absence on another site managed for High Brown Frit (HBF) habitat. Since their start up on rhos pasture sites, singletons have come to our attention at 5 or more sites where they've not been reported for some years, if at all.

As well as late appearing and possibly early going over, Marsh Fritillaries (MFs) do seem to be hard to connect with in anything but small numbers. For context, in 2016 generally, 12 MFs counted in any one visit, puts Y Gweynydd in Glanamman joint fourth place in Wales with two other Carmarthen sites: Median Farm/CFF and Tir Eithin in the MF numbers game. The largest numbers that I'm aware of so far are Castlemartin (where it took 3 people to amass just over 250 in one day), 59 at Aberbargoed and 26 at Nant y Rhos SSSI near Crynant. So, not the best year to find new sites - although both George and NRW staff may have done just that (or at least confirmed old or unofficial records) in east Carmarthenshire! Many sites, particularly those burned last winter, have shown nil returns, even if based on just one visit - perhaps the combination of wettest ever winter, then burning, then extremes of temperature in May have just been too much? Another curiosity is finding two fields full of flowering Devil's Bit Scabious in Glanamman on 9th June - MFs were 4 fields over in a field of "regular" DBS, so no chance of a photo of MF on its foodplant inflorescence!

The bigger Frits are now starting up, with Dark Green Frit appearing in the Alun valley last Monday and HBFs the following day, with both also being seen during a brief sunny spell yesterday.

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Photo 1: Freshly emerged male Marsh Fritillary, Seven Sisters, 8th June (RGS).

*As always, contributions to Frits About are very welcome - but **don't forget to send in your records to county recorders as well**. There is now also a Facebook discussion group <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ButterflyConservationSouthWalesBranch/>> set up & run by Mike Bright of BC's South Wales branch, in addition to North Wales branch's Facebook page and BC Wales Facebook page. Judy in the Wales office will be pleased to receive feedback on the E-news generally, but please keep Frits About contributions coming to me but at my new e-mail address of rgsoverton@gmail.com.*

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1. Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) - 4 new reports

Ceredigion

No more reports. .

North-east Wales

Jan Miller on Facebook group "Visited **Eyarth Rocks** again on Wednesday (**8th**) morning with NRW. We had 3 fresh Small PBF and **two worn PBF** - including one on Nant Clywd Estate. Lucy (BC reserves officer) stayed in the afternoon and had another **couple of PBF** and a Wood Tiger".

Jan Miller posted on Facebook group "BC Wales Conservation officer says.....I managed a count on Friday (**20th?**) in only 50% sun but 15.80C. Had **22 in 40 minutes** so numbers comparable to last year. They were all fresh (no tatty ones) so had not reached peak yet and they were distributed across all parts of the site. If anyone else gets chance to visit and do a count please let me know the results" - *(I can only assume this refers to **Eyarth Rocks** - Ed).*

Nearly Wales

Ewyas Harold Common (just 1.5kms into Herefordshire). Ian Hart reports on **3rd June**: "I went to **Ewyas Harold Common/BC Reserve this am**. There was **one PBF** on the plateau area of the Common, very worn. I think this is the end of their flight period. No record of a SPBF."

2. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) - 25 new reports

Brecknock

Russel Hobson: "Went to **Vicarage Meadows** yesterday (**9th June**). I had **15 Small PBF in 37 minutes** - all fresh and mainly males being territorial but no Marsh Fritillary. On riverside field I had **2 Small PBF in 30 mins** and no Marsh Fritillary".

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Carmarthenshire

George Tordoff & RGS on **8th June**, counted 6 MFs, 2 late Green Hairstreaks and **an SPBF** at a known MF site in **SN6420/6520** near **Trapp**.

Ceredigion

Russel Hobson: "Ran a training day at **Cwm Soden** yesterday (**26th**) Lots of freshly emerged **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** and using much more of the site - from the coast path to the meadows - than Pearl-bordered Frits."

Flintshire & N E Wales

Sam Bosanquet advises: "On **1st June**, we saw a **fast-flying Frit** sp as we walked to Bryn Mostyn (SJ198576), followed by at least **two** at Bryn Afon (SJ187583). They looked rather dark orange and I was really hopeful that we had discovered some Pearl-bordered, but I managed to grab a flight photo at Bryn Afon and eventually stalked a Frit at rest, and my pictures seem to show hoops around the wing margins indicating these are **Small PBs**".

Jan Miller on Facebook group "**Small PBF** (also) reported on **Holywell Common** on **6th June**."

Jan Miller on Facebook group "Visited **Eyarth Rocks** again on Wednesday (**8th**) morning with NRW. We had **3 fresh Small PBF** and two worn PBF - including one on Nant Clywd Estate. Lucy (BC reserves officer) stayed in the afternoon and had another couple of PBF and a Wood Tiger".

Monmouthshire

Aberbargoed Grasslands, Mark Allen: "I saw 59 Marsh Frits and **18 SPBF's** on the **4th of June**. The Marsh Frits were seen in all but one of the five fields visited but in lower numbers than in recent years".

Linda Morris on Facebook Group "Visit to **Aberbargoed Grasslands** today (**4th June**), cloudy & warm, **1 Small PB Fritillary** seen, a few Marsh Fritillaries down in the tussocky grass, and an unexpected Small Elephant Hawkmoth".

Neath Port Talbot & northern border with Powys.

On **8th June**, George Tordoff & RGS counted 3 freshly emerged male MFs at **Seven Sisters** on the regular counts sections just outside the grazing units. We also had 3 at a BC agreement field and 26 at an SSSI near **Rhos Common**. At **both sites**, George also noted **an SPBF** - possible firsts for both.

Pembrokeshire

No new reports.

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Rhondda Cynon Taff

Ben Williams went to **Clydach Vale** on **3rd June**: "I went out today to Clydach Vale to look for **SPBs**, better luck there, I saw **12**, all as fresh as daisies". Gareth Henson counted **30+ SPBFs** on **10th June**. Alun Hughes reports (**6th June**) "Marsh Frits out at **Tonyrefail** - **M.FRITS X 25, SPB FRITS X 5**"

Paul Denning: "I saw **two SPB Frits** on **Llantrisant Common** on **31st May**".

Adrian Meredith on 6th June "Penrhiwfer yesterday (**5th**). No Marsh Frits seen and only **one Small Pearl-bordered Frit.**" (*Lucie Bromfield on 7th June had same result. Last MF records were of a single male on 4th June 2013 - Ed*).

Swansea

David Moore reports on UK Butterflies blog: "**3rd June**. An hour and a half on **Fairwood Common** on the Gower in Swansea this afternoon returned 7 Marsh Fritillary and **4 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary**".

Vale of Glamorgan

Andrea Rowe e-mailed on **30th May**: "Over **10 SPBF** seen this morning on walk over **Old Castle Down** and opposite side of valley up Roman road".

Over the **three weeks of flight period so far**, peak counts have been 13 on Upper North, 24 on Upper South, 5 on Lower, 20 on OCD and 28 on Pant St Brides circuit, making **90 SPBFs at peak**, across **Alun Valley, Old Castle Down and eastern Ogmere Down**.

3. Marsh Fritillary (MF)- 45 new reports

Anglesey

Chris Jones on Facebook Group: "At least **four Marsh Fritillaries** at **Cors Erddreiniog**, Anglesey earlier today (**8th June**).

Brecknock

Russel Hobson: "Went to **Vicarage Meadows** yesterday (**9th June**). I had 15 Small PBF in 37 minutes - all fresh and mainly males being territorial but **no Marsh Fritillary**. On riverside field I had 2 Small PBF in 30 mins and **no Marsh Fritillary**. It might be a bit early still for MF there this year but I won't get chance to visit again".

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Carmarthenshire

George Tordoff on 2nd June: "Started our Marsh Fritillary 'colony health check' surveys today. These are done every 5 years at out of the way sites which don't tend to get visited otherwise. Anyway, a good start with **12 MF** at **Tir Eithin** farm in Carmarthenshire.

Median Farm/Caeau Ffos Fach (BC's reserve in Cross Hands)

31st May: Russel Hobson didn't find any MFs on wing.

7th June: Linda Morris posted on Facebook group forum "A disappointing ankle-wrenching search for Marsh Fritillary yesterday at **Caeau Ffos Fach**, in 25C. Waded through 3 of 5 fields of really deep rhos pasture and found **1 butterfly (MF - Ed)**.

8th June: Dave Bannister: "Only saw **one MF** and that was in the middle left hand field of CFF as you go down from Median Farm. It was patrolling in a patch of ground flattened by the grazing animals in the left hand corner as you go in. It looked very fresh and I presumed it was a male as it was patrolling an area. I did all the fields in Median Farm plus all of CFF except for the large field by the entrance from the road (hips had had enough by then)".

9th June: George Tordoff: "did timed counts (zigzag walks) in all 8 SSSI fields this afternoon in **stultifying heat** and had **12 MF**, 4 at Median (2 each in east and west SSSI fields) and 8 at CFF (6 in top field and 2 in upper middle field). Mostly males but at least 3 females."

Colin Jones on Carms Moth & Butterfly blog: "A nice sunny afternoon (**5th June**) and Alan Clarke, Julian and I counted **at least a dozen marsh fritillary** butterflies in a field near Halfway".

RGS on **6th June**: "An interesting day of **Marsh Fritillary** sites on Monday. I found Marsh Fritillaries in **very small numbers** at a site **above Glanamman**, a site in **Upper Brynamman** where we did some management work with WTSWW in March, and a rather floriferous site between **Cwmgors** Industrial Estate and the old railway from **GCG** to Abernant colliery. Sadly, the latter site had suffered deep burning across two thirds of the area, with just **2 male MFs** in unburnt northern third."

George Tordoff & RGS on **8th June**, counted **6 MFs**, 2 late Green Hairstreaks and an SPBF at a known MF site in **SN6420/6520** near **Trapp**.

George Tordoff on **9th June**: "Might have found a new site this morning, a fantastic bit of fen meadow **near Temple Bar** in SN5817. I had **9 MFs**. Not sure if this is a new site or if it's the field behind the Temple Bar you mentioned yesterday?" (*Ed - sounds like it is one that Neil Matthew mentioned to me a couple of years ago, but may not be submitted as a record as such*). Looks from aerials like there might be other fields worth checking further upstream".

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RGS on 9th June: "Fen Meadow in **Cwmgors** (small part of Parc Howard, pony club fields owned by NPT CBC but in **Carms!**). SN7010. **3 MFs in a 15 min** timed count - Two males & one female, all nectaring on either bog bean or buttercup. Water table still very high after last winter's rains, highest I've experienced in four years, so visit not for the fain-hearted!.

Two farms (part of an SSSI on **Betws Mountain**) **SN6511**. No butterflies at all on one of those farms, in a 45 minute whizz around, save one *GVW* and one Speckled Wood. Habitat looks great. As this site is high up an essentially north aspect hillside, I concluded that next week would be a more rewarding visit time. However, it appears I was unlucky on the day, as a small group from NRW found **6 MFs on one of the farms and 2 MFs on the other one, on 8th June**. These may well be the first records from this SSSI for a couple of decades at least.

Private SSSI fields in **Glanamman SN6514**. "Having found just **7 fresh male MFs on Monday**, I'd hoped for better numbers yesterday. I managed **12 MFs**, mostly in lower and most western field, plus 8 Small Heath and **3 SPBFs** (latter may both be new records for site).

North of Mountain Road, **Glanamman. SN6614**. "Although I didn't have access to the fields themselves, they are visible from common above. No butterflies seen. There are three meadows, on north side of Mountain Road, the upper two are horse-grazed but fairly species rich and the lower of the three is shut up for hay and looks fantastic, with obvious stands of *Cirsium Dissectum*. I mention this, as there is something rather fantastic going on - two of the fields held Devil's Bit Scabious well into flower!



Photo 2:

Meadow at Mountain Rd, Glanamman - Should we be seeing flowering Devil's Bit Scabious in early June? (Credit RGS).

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Ceredigion

No reports of adults yet.

Monmouthshire

Aberbargoed Grasslands. Mark Allen "Saw about **20 Marsh Frits** yesterday (**31st May**) but weather was too breezy to get a good count. No SPBFs yet."

"I saw **59 Marsh Frits** on the **4th of June**. The Marsh Frits were seen in all but one of the five fields visited but in lower numbers than in recent years".

Linda Morris on Facebook Group "Visit to **Aberbargoed Grasslands** today (**4th June**), cloudy & warm, 1 Small PB Fritillary seen, **a few Marsh Fritillaries** down in the tussocky grass, and an unexpected Small Elephant Hawkmoth".

Neath Port Talbot & northern border with Powys.

On **8th June**, George Tordoff & RGS counted **3 freshly emerged male MFs at Seven Sisters** on the regular counts sections just outside the grazing units. We also had **3** at a BC agreement field and **26** at an SSSI near **Rhos Common**. At both sites, George also noted an SPBF - possible firsts for both.

Pembrokeshire

Julie Garlick: "**Half a dozen MFs** out at **Ffynnon Samson** (Llangolman) yesterday (**30th May**) - but I expect to find more on a later visit (cold breeze yesterday). They're often feeding on marsh orchids there at this time of year - but not a single one in flower there at the moment".

David Redhead: "John Steer & I went in search of **Marsh Fritillaries** yesterday (**30th May**). **Common Bach** at least **5 adults**. **Puncheston Common** - **zero**".

David Redhead on **5th June**, in a note to Bob & Annie Haycock re **Castlemartin**: "On my return to the car I did another timed count in much the same area as where the three of us counted **205** in **25 minutes**. I started at SR 8907 9573 and 740 metres and 15 minutes later arrived at the parking space at SR 8836 9585 with a count of **49** which included a mating pair. So both counts gave circa **3 Marsh Frit adults per minute per recorder**".

Maggie Sproule: "Have just (**2nd June**) had a lengthy stomp on Waunlwyd common, **Mynachlogddu**. My usual stomping ground! At last! **Three!** Spread far apart, all pristine. We are usually at the peak now. I can't check at **Blaen Cleddau**.....six very large, pushy heifers keep meeting me every time I go to the gate. They won't leave me alone and it is hazardous enough without that! Will keep checking Waunlwyd".

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Rhondda Cynon Taff

On 29th May, Paul Denning advises: "I had my first Marsh Fritillary at Tonyrefail this morning, alongside the road in unit 16". By 2nd June "there were 8-10 Marsh Frits at the top of the field in unit 16 this morning".

Ben Williams went out on 3rd June to have another look around at the Bypass Fields, Church Village - after a 1 hour transect I saw only 1 male MF. I don't understand it the conditions were perfect and I expected to see many more. I then went over to Ton yr Efail and did not see any Frits on a 1 hour walk". Liam Olds saw 2 or 3 there, first week of June.

Ben Williams on 7th June: "I went up to Hirwaun yesterday to look at the sites we worked on over the winter. These sites in Hirwaun and Penderyn look very good, although there is still some work to be done. At the SN9407 site, there are now two horses and a pony grazing the field, some parts are very trampled but there are areas where the MFs could still be hanging on. We will only know when we or somebody goes back to do a larval web count later on. I didn't see ant MFs at any of these sites, I think we have missed them this year".

Lucie Bromfield (8th June): "Cycled to Tonyrefail east today, 30 Marsh fritillaries in total, 22 of them in field 17, only 8 in field 16; a lot looked like they had seen better days, including this faded example in the photo".

Adrian Meredith on 6th June "Penrhiwfer yesterday (5th). No Marsh Frits seen and only one Small Pearl-bordered Frit." (Lucie Bromfield on 7th June had same result - Ed).

Swansea

David Moore reports on UK Butterflies blog: "3rd June. An hour and a half on Fairwood Common on the Gower in Swansea this afternoon returned 7 Marsh Fritillary and 4 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary".

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4. Dark Green Fritillary (DGF) - 4 new reports

Vale of Glamorgan

The first **two DGFs** were noted in the **Alun Valley**, by Paul Dunn on **6th June**. **Several** were seen also on **7th June** (Paul & RGS) and on afternoon of **12th June** (Ben Williams & RGS) whilst brush-cutting the transect route path.

5. High Brown Fritillary (HBF) - 2 new reports

Vale of Glamorgan

Paul Dunn spent a couple of hours in the lower meadow this morning (**7th June**), "Must have been 10 - 20 large Frits all tumbling up into the sky! **First High Browns** appeared at about 10.30, got lots of nice shots but nothing wonderful! All were in great condition".

On afternoon of **12th June**, whilst brush-cutting the transect route path, Ben Williams & RGS saw up to **3 males and one female** in Alun valley.

6. Silver-washed Fritillary (SWF) - no reports

This newsletter was compiled from reports received up to midday on **13th June**, but do keep reports coming in and I'll pass on to BC Wales office as soon as enough received or to suit their dates. Many thanks to all contributors and apologies if I've missed any out!

Richard Smith,
13 June 2016

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