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"FRITS ABOUT, 2017 - No.2"

(97 new report items in this edition - received from 21st September 2016 to 30th May 2017)

(77 new reports of 2017 activity, plus 20 new but late reports of 2016 activity)

Dear all,

This edition is the first Frits About 2017 to include 2017 activity - it is "No 2" only because "No 1" was used to convey the 2016 Summary of Marsh Fritillary in Wales report, a couple of weeks ago.

So you've read now of the difficulties for MFs generally in Wales in 2016, but for completeness, I've added a short section of the 2016 MF reports received after "Frits About 2016 No 5" (issued 21st September 2016). There are also reports of late 2016 sightings of Dark Green, High Brown and Silver-washed Fritillaries. All 2016 sightings are on a grey background to distinguish them from 2017 sightings.

This year, PBFs did eventually get going after some false dawns of early weather opportunities on a couple of days in April. Most of the successful reports came in during the first two weeks of May, whilst I was in Bulgaria, so notes on PBF are a little retrospective, as we are now into flight season of the dry grassland/bracken/dog violet feeding SPBFs.

So, as we embark upon the main MF flight season, let's hope that resilience of Wales' MFs will show through in 2017, as it did in 2013 after a poor previous year.

There are already reports of MF adults from 23 locations in South Wales.

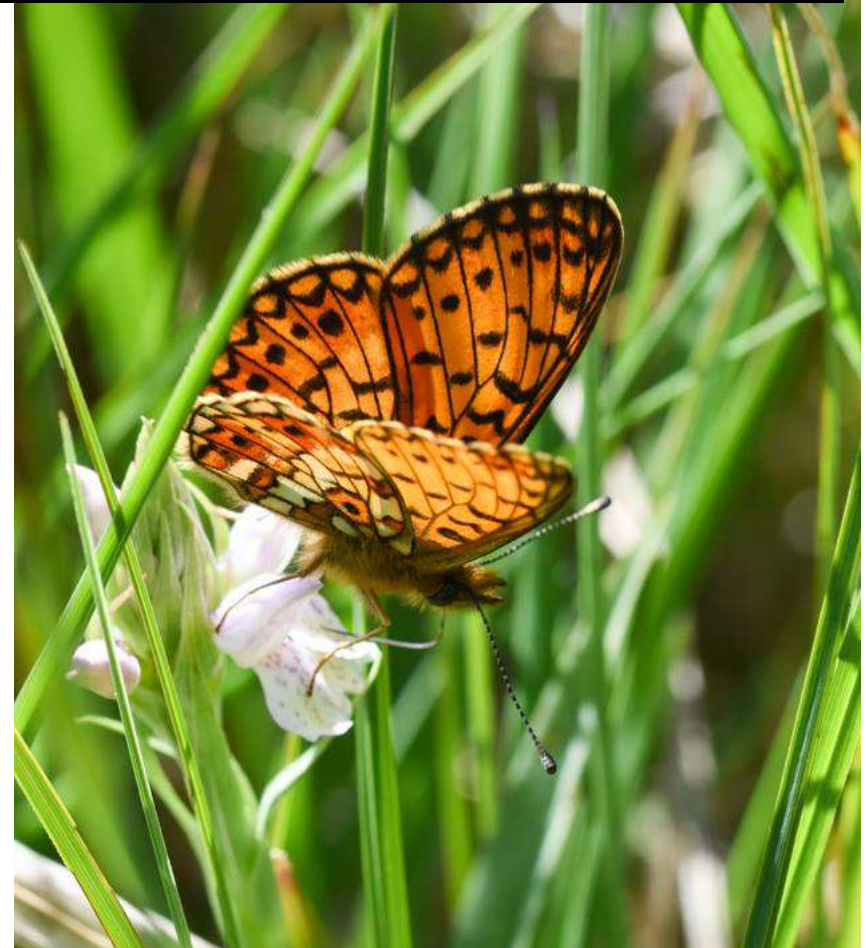


Photo: Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Llantrisant Common, by Paul Denning via Facebook.

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Please do send brief frit-related snippets during the coming weeks; we'll aim to get another edition out around middle of June.

Good luck in your searches and don't forget to contact George, Julia or myself if you wish to help with group survey visits.

Richard Smith

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 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.

1. Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) - 32 new (2017) reports

Ceredigion

Cwm Soden PBF's were about three weeks late this year, reports Russel Hobson. "Despite regular visits in weeks beforehand, the first sightings were not until **2nd May**, independently by Vicky Squires (**3**) and Maggie Sproule (**5**). The day after (**3rd May**) Jenny Higgins failed to see any. On **7th May** I counted **16** in 45 minutes and Maggie saw **6** in the lower meadow. On **10th May** Julia Pschera had **11** in 35 minutes".

18th May: Ben Williams: "I went down to Cwm Soden and saw 18 Frits but could only definitely say that **one was a PB** and **one was a SPB** the rest were unidentified. Some were a 'bit old' and I suspect that they were PBs. The SPB was fresh and in the woodland glade alongside the river along with two other Un IDs".

Montgomeryshire and Marches

w/c **24th April**: The earliest record was at **Llanymynech Rocks** by Simon Spencer, who found 1 PBF on the wing.

28th April. First PBF's (3 no) at **Ewyas Harold Common**, Herefordshire, yesterday (27th).

2nd May: Ian Hart from **Ewyas Harold**: "We undertook a count today 10.30-12.30, Sunny periods 12-15C and recorded a total of **19** (nineteen) butterflies. My guess is still many more to emerge, peak possibly one week from today, weather permitting".

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3rd May: Tammy Stretton reports "Weather slightly better today than the forecast suggested; i.e. it stayed sunny for longer. Despite cooler temperatures and stronger winds, I did see some PBFs, as follows: **Y Figyn East** - 1 in 23 minutes (+ 6 other Lepidoptera species); **Fron Hydan** - 2 in 26 minutes (+ 3 other Lepidoptera species); **Allt Dolanog** - **none seen** (& very little invert activity generally).

7th May: A count was undertaken by I Hart/D Fenton at **Ewyas Harold Common** in good weather today and **120** butterflies were recorded. 58 of these were in Area 13, the large block of bracken in the centre of the Common with a further 15 in adjacent Area 15.

13th May: David Moore found **12 x Pearl Bordered Fritillaries** seen at **Ewyas Harold Common**, on the Herefordshire/Monmouthshire border.

17th May: Visitors to **Llanymynech Rocks** on Sunday report seeing **both PBF & SPBF**.

19th May: Managed to survey 4 sites yesterday, as follows: **Allt Dolanog** - 0 PBF in 31 minutes, but did see **5 SPBF**; **Y Figyn East** - 5 PBF in 28 minutes = **11 PBF/hr**; **Y Figyn West** - 0 PBF in 29 minutes; **Y Frochas** - 1 **unconfirmed PBF** in 18 minutes

22nd May: Tammy Stretton advises that she surveyed **Fron Hydan** and saw no fritillary butterflies. Isobelle Griffith surveyed **Llanymynech Rocks and Hill** - no fritillaries at the latter, but **Small Pearl found on the reserve**.

Mon 22nd May - **Fron Hydan** - 0 PBF in 33 minutes; **Llanymynech Rocks** - 5 SPBF in 35 minutes; **Llanymynech Hill** - 0 in 16 minutes.

Tue 23rd May - **Y Golfa** - 3 PBF + 3 SPBF in 63 minutes; **Middletown Hill** - 2 PBF in 35 minutes.

Thu 25th May - **Y Frochas** - 2 unidentified frits in 30 minutes; **Y Figyn East** - 1 PBF, 1 SPBF + 1 unid frit in 24 minutes; **Y Figyn West** - 2 PBF in 25 minutes.

Fri 26th May - **Llanymynech Hill** - 0 in 22 minutes.

Issy was also hoping to survey **Allt Dolanog** today, but I have not heard from her yet; sadly, I am not holding out any great hopes for PBFs there, although the SPBFs seem to be doing ok at present. Most sites now seem to have passed their peak, but if we get the weather next week, we could do with revisiting Y Figyn West and Y Frochas one more time".

North east Wales

Russel Hobson reports: "We had an excellent count of Pearl-bordered Fritillary at **Eyarth Rocks** yesterday (**24th May**) with **42 in 39 minutes** on the transect. We also walked over the **Nant Clwyd Estate** to the south and saw **individuals widely dispersed** including **three** in some excellent breeding habitat at the southern end of the ridge."

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2. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) - 17 new (2017) reports

Carmarthenshire

Paul, Judy and George at **Pembrey Forest** yesterday (22/5): a **Small PBF** seen in flight.

Ceredigion

18th May: Ben Williams: "I went down to **Cwm Soden** and saw 18 Frits but could only definitely say that one was a PB and **one was a SPBF** the rest were unidentified. Some were a 'bit old' and I suspect that they were PBs. The **SPB was fresh** and in the woodland glade alongside the river along with two other Un IDs".

Gwent

Karen Wilkinson advises: "**Small Pearl-bordered** out at **Aberbargoed** yesterday (**22nd May**), found by the Teen Rangers. We only looked in the big field so not sure if they were anywhere else". Mark Allen: "Went out yesterday, **25th** and counted 101 MFs and **4 SPBF**. This was on fields where we would expect to see them. Of the 5 fields visited MFs were found in all of them".

Montgomeryshire and Marches

22nd May: Tammy Stretton advises that she surveyed **Fron Hydan** and saw no fritillary butterflies. Isobelle Griffith surveyed **Llanymynech Rocks and Hill** - no fritillaries at the latter, but **Small Pearl found on the reserve**. (*See also 3 later reports under PBF - Ed*)

Swansea

Sylvie Herault reports from **Pengwern Common** on **Saturday 20th May**, **5-10 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary**. John Williams added on **30th May** **2 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary at Carter's Footbridge near Pengwern**. David Moore reports (via UK Butterflies): "**A couple of Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries** seen on **Fairwood Common, Swansea** on Monday afternoon (**23rd**):

Tonyrefail & South RCT

Ben Williams: "I went over to the Bypass Fields today (Fri **26th**) and had a look around. I followed the same path as last time and took 45 minutes. It was very hot and windy and I saw 10 MFs and **1SPB**". Paul Denning: "I had **4 SPB Frits on Llantrisant common** on Friday morning". (**26th May**).

George Tordoff: "**Eight Small Pearl-bordered Frits** at the **Graig, Llantrisant** today (**27th**)."

Vale of Glamorgan

In the deepest Alun valley, Paul Dunn had **1 SPBF** on **11th May**, but by **19th May** RGS had got a count of **4**. During habitat sampling activities on **25th & 26th May**, **dozens** were encountered each day.

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From 2016, previously un-reported:

3A. Marsh Fritillary (MF) - 13 new (2016) reports

There were a small number of web reports after our last 2016 Frits About. I've summarised reports by metapopulation where already indicated by landscape scale habitat studies or by county otherwise. I hope this doesn't detract from detail of county reports but often "metapopulations" are more useful and of course MFs don't understand vice county or unitary authority boundaries!

Carmarthneshire

George Tordoff: "My final web of the season was the extra web at **Caeau Ffos Fach** on **4th October**, which we missed during the main count. This was in the top field and was a closed 'pre-hibernation' web with black larvae".

Ceredigion

Em Foot of WTSWW advised: "We surveyed **Rhos Pil Bach** for marsh frit webs on **15th Sept** but **didn't find anything** (we may check again). We have done 2 days at **Rhos Glyn yr Helyg** this week and will be going back next week. Although numbers are definitely down on last year (which was an amazing year for the site) they are still good. Caterpillars and webs still generally small. Better than previous years". Final tallies were: **Rhos pil Bach** was re-checked on 25/9/16 and still **no webs** found. **Rhos Fullbrook** was checked on 28/9/16, **no webs** found. **Rhos Glyn yr Helyg** was checked on **21st, 22nd and 29th**, to cover the whole site. **313 webs** were found. All were generally small. Though down on last year this is great number for the reserve in recent years. They were still spread across the whole reserve, just!

Heads of Valleys/Brecon Beacons

Lucy Emery reported from some of the A465 study sites (being monitored on behalf of Welsh Government): **Bryncarnau grasslands: 117 webs** (3 adults seen earlier in year); **site in SN9407: No webs** (no Adults seen earlier in year); **Hoel y graig: 1 web** (no Adults seen earlier in year); **Ger-y-bont, Croesbychan: 2 webs** (no adults seen earlier in year); **East of mount road: No webs** (1 Adult seen earlier in year).

North-west Wales

Helen Bantock: "The results for the Harlech Marsh Fritillaries are desperately disappointing this year, but not unexpected. BC were not allowed to survey the farm in lower Harlech, whose new tenant has damaged the habitat, as there is an ongoing dispute between the tenant and NRW. As far as the NNR site goes, although the vegetation has partially recovered from overgrazing, the site has been so hammered over the last two years that only a handful of adult butterflies were seen and only one, pathetic, very tiny web".

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3B. Marsh Fritillary (MF)- 38 new (2017) reports

Carmarthenshire

Cwmgwili: George Tordoff found a single **MF larva** on a new field at **Cwmgwili** on **5th May**.

Caeau Ffos Fach: **3 late instar MF larvae** in the top field at **Caeau Ffos Fach** on **5th May**.

Amman valley - Isabel Macho found **1 newly emerged MF** next to **Ynys Dawela** on **19th May**.

Mynydd Mawr - Amanda Evans saw **2 MFs** at a site near **Llyn Llech Owain Country Park** on **Thursday 26th May**.

Median Farm: - George Tordoff had **3 male MF** in eastern SSSI field (bordering Caeau Ffos Fach), where RGS had **none** an hour earlier - **26th May**.

Caeau Ffos Fach: George Tordoff had **13 male MF** in **top field**, none in other fields, where RGS had **11 in 15mins**, an hour earlier - also **26th May**.

Graig Farm, Cynheidre: George Tordoff had **2 male MF** on **26th May** (first site visit since 2013, so it's good to know they're still there)

Harford: Julia Pschera reports: "I thought you may be pleased to hear that I saw **one marsh fritillary** in Geoff's field at **Harford** on **Friday (26th)**. This is the first record there since George found webs in 2012 (and the gap is unlikely to be due to a lack of recording effort since I have checked both for webs and for adults every year since). Since the work party in March I have removed some of the thatch of dry grass that was smothering the scabious, so am hoping that any individuals that find their way into the field may decide to lay eggs. There's certainly some suitable habitat now. Fingers crossed!"

RAF Pembrey: Russel & Bob Hobson and George Tordoff had **8 MF** in the afternoon of **26th May** (including at least 2 females). It was very hot but also very windy, which made our searches a bit challenging.

Pembrey: Paul Gadsby, Judy Burroughs and George Tordoff at **Pembrey Forest** on **22th May**: a **single** newly-emerged **Marsh Frit** (with slightly floppy wings) near the entrance to the bombing range.

Salem Common: Vaughn Matthews - "**Sunday (29th)** I went to **Salem Common** to look for marsh fritillaries and was fortunate enough to see **quite a few** on the wing - difficult to say how many but they did include **a mating pair**."

Temple Bar (near Carmel): RGS and Amanda Evans counted **16 MFs** in **11 mins**, on a timed count circuit of the field, on **26th May**.



Early 2017 adult MF emergence photo, north of Ynys Dawela in Brynamman on 19th Credit: Isabel Macho

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Ceredigion

David Woolley reports: "I saw the **first MF** on the wing at **Llawrcwrt** on the **22nd May**. Yesterday the **26th** there were **6** on the transect route that has been walked for the last 33 years. It looks like being an improvement on last year when the full annual index was only 7, and the worst on record".

Gwent

Karen Wilkinson advises: "Marsh Frits out at **Aberbargoed Grasslands NNR** yesterday (**22nd May**), found by the Teen Rangers. We only looked in the big field so not sure if they were anywhere else". Mark Allen: "Went out yesterday, **25th** and counted **101 MFs** and 4 SPBF. This was on fields where we would expect to see them. Of the 5 fields visited MFs were found in all of them".

Heads of the Valleys (Hirwaun/Penderyn)

24 May: 12+ MF at **Cwm Cadlan** (Jamie Bevan). Facebook - posted by Karen Wilkinson

26 May: 10 MF at **Woodland Park, Blaen Cynon SAC** (Scott Hand). Facebook - posted by Karen Wilkinson

North-west Wales

Helen Bantock reports: "**No MFs** yesterday (**22nd**) at **Harlech NNR**. This is always an early site so following the finding of only two tiny webs last autumn I feel this site may have been lost. We are not allowed to visit the other Harlech site, where the habitat has also been damaged".

Pembrokeshire

Bob Haycock reports: "Hi David, Just to let you know that last **Saturday (20th)** whilst out checking cought sites and starting to undertake early species seabird monitoring in **Castlemartin Ranges West** (Annie looking for bees) we noted **marsh frits on the wing** at expected locations **between Berryslade and the Wash**. Not many individual MFs that day but all were looking quite fresh and scattered throughout. My guess is that most of these would have emerged a few days earlier. One female watched seemed to be about to lay eggs".

David Redhead reports: "Went to **Castlemartin Ranges** today and saw **500+ Marsh Fritillaries** on or near **Linney Head** (SR8896/SR8897). **487** of these (**MFs**) were counted on 5 timed counts between 10.45 & 12.30 corresponding to areas where the web transects were carried out on 23rd August 2016. Temp 18C (at start), partial sun, slight breeze".

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Swansea

Gower Commons: Sylvie Herault reports from **Pengwern Common** on **Saturday 20th May, 10-15 Marsh Fritillary**.

Chris Manley spotted a "very smart and obliging" fresh MF, near **Mynydd-Bach-y-Cocs** on **19th May**.

David Moore (via UK Butterflies) on **22nd May**: "Welsh Marshies are out! Saw **three or four** during a quick recce at **Welshmoor** on the Gower on **Sunday afternoon**.

Paul Parsons saw **4 Marsh Fritillaries** at **Pengwern Common, Gower** on **24th May** (via Facebook group).

Mark Hipkin (on Facebook): "I popped in on **Welshmoor** on the way home yesterday **evening (26th)**. It was a bit windy but I managed to find **3 Marsh Frits** at the southwestern end of the site. Spent about 45mins looking for Marsh Frits though this was interrupted somewhat by the obligatory search for **Green Hairstreaks**, of which there were about a dozen along the southern boundary".

John Williams: **25th May - 7 Marsh Fritillary** (and 2 Green Hairstreak) on

Welsh Moor; 26th May - 4 Marsh Fritillary in **Cartersford Bridge area of Fairwood Common**

Tonyrefail (and South RCT)

Ben Williams: "I went over to the (Church Village) **Bypass Fields** this morning (**24th**) and saw a total of **12 MFs**, all very fresh and males. The walk took me about **45 minutes**. I must admit I was relieved to see them especially as we didn't find any larval webs last autumn. There were three in fields 1 and 3 and six in No 2 (the middle field). There should be a lot more by the weekend. I also saw 2 other frits which I thought were SPBs but I didn't get close enough to identify them.

Buoyed up by that find, I went over to **Ton yr Efail** and saw **6** on the main site (16) but none in Millichap's field; that was a 1hour walk and again all males".

Ben Williams: "I went over to the Bypass Fields today (Fri **26th**) and had a look around. I followed the same path as last time and took 45 minutes. It was very hot and windy and I saw **10 MFs** and 1SPB. The butterflies I saw were mainly ones that I had disturbed and they were not fritting about as they were previously, so I suspect there may have been more hiding away from the wind".



*Early 2017 adult MF emergence photo, Mynydd y Bach Cocs on Gower Commons on 20th.
Credit Chris Manley*

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Lucie Bromfield: "Good news, went for a walk today (26th) and encountered a **marsh frit** on field 29! (photo supplied- Ed). Carried on up to the top fields and spotted **4 in field 17**, and **1** tucked right in the corner of **16**. This was right near a patch that had been burned over the winter, the butterfly looked freshly hatched too so must have been very lucky to avoid the fire". (This makes 5 local sites found to be occupied in last two years - a welcome increase on the previous 2 years when we seemed to only have two - Ed)

Ystradgynlais metapopulation (including Ystradgynlais & Seven Sisters)

Chris Jones of BWT posted on Facebook observations of **3 MFs** and some caterpillars on **17th May** at their reserve at **Cae Linden** in Gurnos, near **Ystradgynlais**. By **22nd**, we'd counted **5 males** and **1 female**. On **25th May**, BWT had a count of **3 Marsh frits** on **Ystrad Fawr reserve - Area 8**".

RGS visited 3 sites in conservation management to south of Ystradgynlais on **26th May**; Nant y Rhos SSSI had **72 MFs in 19 mins** timed count; pony field had **10 MFs in 10 mins** and **1 female MF** was found in NE corner of **Rhos Common**. It was good to actually see an MF on the common, where we had decided to avoid unnecessary monitoring in last two years to allow cattle to settle down.

4. Dark Green Fritillary (DGF) - 1 new (2017) report & 1 new (2016) report

Carmarthenshire

Pembrey: Paul Gadsby, Judy Burroughs and George Tordoff at **Pembrey Forest (22/5)** a **Dark Green Frit larva** racing along at top speed (photo right, credit George Tordoff).

From 2016, previously un-reported:

Ceredigion

Lin Gander: "I only have a belated but very enjoyable record of c. 20 newly hatched Dark Green Frits along the Llangrannog path above the church and old quarries. SN319542 on 22nd June [2016]!"



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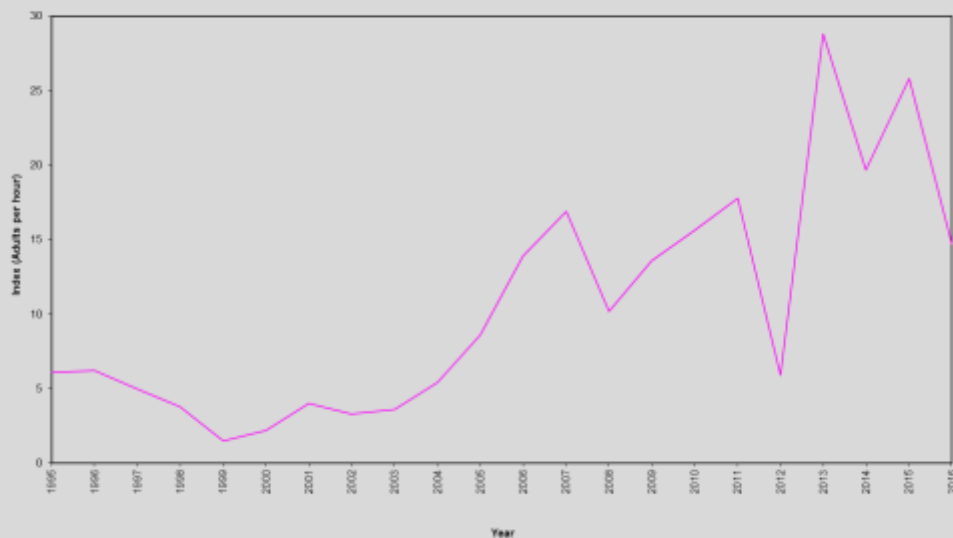
5. High Brown Fritillary (HBF) - 4 new reports

From 2016, previously un-reported:

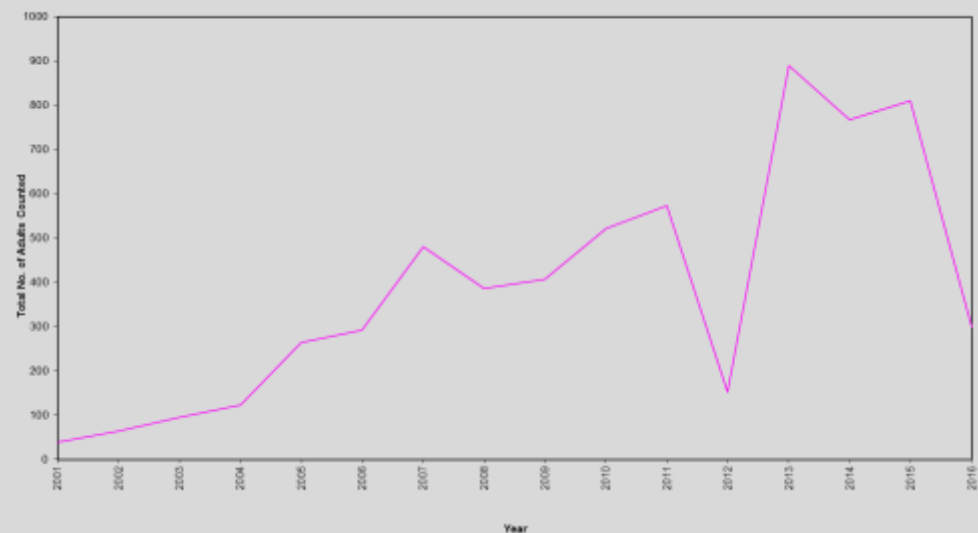
Vale of Glamorgan

As predicted the 2016 index of 14.29 sightings per observer hour, although 47% down on 2015 is still 6th best index result within the last 12 years, so hopefully given the exceptionally low numbers of most butterflies in Wales this year, our High Browns are more robust than average. (For instance, 2016 MF numbers seem generally worse than even that very wet summer year of 2012, whereas HBFs in 2016 are nearly three times their index in 2012). As Paul Dunn observed "they have been widely present but thinly spread".

Old Castle Down and Alun Valley High Brown Transects 1995-2016



Old Castle Down and Alun Valley High Brown Transects 2001-2016



3rd May: RGS found a **new habitat sub-site** on **Ogmore Down** with copious violet, litter and feeding damage, but too dull & late in day to look for caterpillars.

11th May: Paul Dunn reports "First 2017 HBF larva was 12th May in "Steve's area" below the gun club. There's lots of feeding damage there. It was an orange one and about 15mm long".

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6. Silver-washed Fritillary (SWF) - 4 new (but 2016) reports

From 2016, previously un-reported:

Brecknock

Andrew King: Interesting records: **SWF adult** at **Ty Mawr Wood, Llangasty** (SO129261) on **27th August** (Mark Waldron) and again/another seen there on **31st August** (Keith Noble). First records from this site for many years, and probably not missed in the past as one of the best walked footpaths by naturalists in the county.

Ceredigion

Em Foot: "Silver washed records. We had 2 at **Coed Maidie** in Llechryd on **8th August**. One of my volunteers gets them in his garden in **Rhyd Lewis** too".

This newsletter was compiled from reports received up to midday on 30th May, 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,
30 May 2017.**

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