

Wales News, January 2020

Brown Hairstreak discovery in Freshwater East, Pembrokeshire

Anyone who knows George Tordoff will know he has an amazing knack at finding species of interest wherever he goes. David Redhead (Pembrokeshire County Recorder) has commented in the past on an affliction suffered by Brown Hairstreak egg searchers, whereby it becomes impossible to walk past any stand of blackthorn in the winter, even outside the known range of the butterfly, without having a quick look for eggs.

Brown Hairstreak egg (G Tordoff)



So, last November, whilst on a short family break at Freshwater East, George had a quick look. This is a sandy coastal habitat outside the known range in Pembrokeshire - surely there wouldn't be eggs here? But yes, there were! After spotting one, a quick Tordoff family search found 7 in a small area, then more by the beach car park and the pub car park. The eggs are much further south than previous records and at a much more coastal location.

Tordoff family search (G Tordoff)



The find caused much excitement amongst local butterfly recorders and shows how new discoveries are still occurring and our knowledge of species is constantly developing.

The next step was to do a full egg search. Luckily, much of the land at Freshwater East is managed by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority as a nature reserve, making access easy to arrange. Vegetated dune slacks provide sheltered pockets of land where Blackthorn has been growing in abundance. The first search took place on 15th November and, remarkably, 50 eggs were found. Subsequent surveys have brought the total for the area so far to over 80, making this a top 10 site for the species in Pembrokeshire.



Freshwater East habitat (A Rowe)

Further surveys are being undertaken by volunteers in the area which will help inform management of the nature reserve and further inform our knowledge of this species.

Six months in the life of our new Conservation Officer

Last August Andrea Rowe started work with Butterfly Conservation as Conservation Officer, based in Swansea. She shares some of the delights and difficulties she's experienced so far...

"I cover the southern area of Wales and have taken over from George Tordoff (now Senior Moth Ecologist). Starting any new role is always a bit daunting – learning IT systems, finding out where things are filed, remembering how to get in (and out) of the office (if you've visited the Wales office, you will understand!) but, luckily, being from south Wales and having worked in ecology for most of my career, I already knew a lot of my fellow colleagues, so could hit the ground running (well, jogging).

Starting in August meant starting in peak [Marsh Fritillary](#) web survey season. With George showing me the ropes, I was able to visit some fantastic habitats, whilst meeting lots of amazing volunteers, without whom we wouldn't have such incredible data. Visiting the sites also highlighted the importance of volunteer winter work parties – many of these sites no longer receive the level and type of grazing needed to allow Devil's-bit Scabious to flourish and to provide suitable structure and height for the Marsh Fritillary. Without volunteers working to remove scrub, these grasslands easily become unsuitable.



Clouded Yellow, Marsh Fritillary larvae and web, August 2019: Andrea Rowe

September saw more changes in the Wales office, with Dai Rees taking over from Russel as Head of Wales. Web counts continued apace, interspersed with a trip to Manor Yard in Dorset for an induction.

In October, Funding from Natural Resources Wales allowed surveys of three landscape areas to assess habitat suitability for the Marsh Fritillary. I headed to the Rhos Glyn-yr-helyg (Ceredigion) to survey approximately 130ha of habitat. Unfortunately, October was a very wet month - it turned farm tracks into rivers and paper into pulp. After obtaining landowner permissions, habitats were assessed and mapped, to then be digitised back in the office. As well as surveying, it was a delight to meet and chat to landowners, who were often intrigued and fascinated with the survey and the lifecycle of the Marsh Fritillary.

November saw a slight shift to other species including the [Brown Hairstreak](#). Surveys of Blackthorn for the eggs need a keen eye, as the eggs are only about 1mm in diameter. Each time I see one of the eggs, I always marvel at the intricate design - if you have never seen one, it's well worth doing. So, alongside more enthusiastic volunteers, I once again had the pleasure of being able to get outside and do more surveys. I also managed to meet with volunteers, landowners and project partners, to provide advice and to plan future site management for various species including the [High Brown Fritillary](#) in the Alun Valley (my home patch).

Needless to say, the job also involves time spent in front of a computer: digitising, replying to emails and preparing contracts. However, I feel very lucky to be able to get out and about, visiting wonderful sites and working with fantastic volunteers".