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## FRITS ABOUT (YOUR FIELDS), 2020 – No.3

50 individual and 1 summary report items in this edition – received from 6<sup>th</sup> July to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020



### Headlines:

- **MARSH FRIT LARVAL WEBS** now dominating activity.
- **HIGH BROWN** possibly had best ever year?
- **First HIGH BROWN FRITILLARY** egg found
- **Earliest ever large frits (DGF, HBF & SWF) in Wales?**

Photo: Well advanced MF larval web, Llansadrwn, Carms. **9<sup>th</sup> September.**  
Two photos below for different stages of larval development.

Welcome. This is another "Frits About" which, due to current COVID related restrictions, reflects numbers of reports continuing to be limited this year. Thus, most of the earlier reports come from landowners, particularly smallholders in Carmarthenshire where we have close links. I've also received a limited number of reports from individuals whilst taking permitted exercise, within their local area, checking on livestock or contractors carrying out professional duties. More recently relaxation by Welsh Government re numbers gathering outside has enabled a few team MF larval web surveys to go ahead.

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Exciting times continue for Marsh Fritillary in South Wales - 4 new sites, including Cwm Pedol, Letterston, Rhondda Fawr & Taingwaith - were highlighted in the earlier 2020 editions. We were pleased to see recognition of our volunteer project endeavours in Carmarthenshire with the discovery of new occupied MF sites in 2018 & 2019, getting a mention in the June 2020 edition of British Wildlife. However, we mustn't forget the much rarer and long overdue good news for MFs from North Wales this year, which continued with Clare Williams finding first larval web at Morfa Harlech dunes since 2016.



Two photos for different stages of larval development.

**Left:** Bunch of feeding larvae, emerging as drizzle turned to sunshine. **9 Sept.** Llansadrwn, Carms. Photo: RGS.

**Right:** Two second instar larvae barely 6mm long at site between Crynant & Ysradgynlais. Dull day. **11 Sept.** R G Smith.

A very grateful thanks to those who have contributed items to this edition. We hope it encourages others. In South Wales, at least, we think (and hope) the season still has at least a couple more weeks to run before widespread seasonal hibernation of MF larvae.

As always, contributions to Frits About are very welcome - but don't forget to send in your records to [County Butterfly Recorders](#) as well. There is now also a [Facebook discussion group](#) 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](#). Please keep Frits About contributions coming to me at my e-mail address [rgsoverton@gmail.com](mailto:rgsoverton@gmail.com)

Contributions to Frits About are the views of the individuals concerned and do not necessarily represent the views of Butterfly Conservation Wales.

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## 1. Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) - no new reports

(8 reports in previous 2020 editions). Flight period normally late April to end May.

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

(58 reports in two previous 2020 editions). Flight period normally mid May to end June (dry grassland/dog violet habitat) or end May to mid July (rhos pasture habitat and/or uplands). Second broods some years during August.

### **North-west Wales**

Graeme Mathieson on 11<sup>th</sup> August: "After the thunderstorms ... Newborough Forest delivered! .....including 7 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary".

### **North-east Wales**

Simon Mills reports: "My wife and I were delighted and surprised to come across a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary on Andrew Graham's land to the south of NWWT's **Minera Quarry** on 20 August. We had wondered whether they managed a **second brood** but we have never seen one at this time before, so this may be a first for an inland site in North Wales. We had already had a copious and long lasting first brood this year in the area so we have been on the lookout.



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### 3. Marsh Fritillary (MF) – 22 new reports

(43 reports in previous edition). Flight period normally mid May to late June. Flight period about 10 days earlier this year. We are now in larval web visibility season.

#### **Carmarthenshire**

Recognition of last two years' endeavours and success with finding occupied new sites in the county came via an entry on page 367 of Wildlife Reports section of **British Wildlife**, June 2020.

On **26<sup>th</sup> August**, Andrea, with volunteers Dai, Francis, Paul G and Tomos found **16 webs** over 5 fields (4 fields previously recorded) at **Tir Philip**, a private site in Capel Dewi in Tywi valley, but apparently separated from the massive Mynydd Mawr/Amman metapopulation by a few kms.

At another Tywi valley site thought to be separated from known metapopulations, near **Llansadwrn**, 8 of us spent the day (**9<sup>th</sup> Sept**) searching several fields where owners had seen MFs during flight season. After thorough searching, we'd managed to find **20 larval webs**, spread across two fields either end of the smallholding. Fortunately, owners are passionate about nature and very amenable to the right level of grazing and value biodiversity particularly for their holiday let business.

Sadly, Alan Clarke reports the **apparent loss of habitat and MFs** this year from a long occupied site in **Taliaris**, which would have been next nearest to Llansadwrn.

Dave Bannister checked out a site in **SN5330**, near **Brechfa** where only adults previously recorded and found **5 larval webs** on weekend of 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> September.

BC South Wales branch volunteers worked with Julie Bowes from Welsh Government to help monitor marshy & neutral grassland near **Alltwallis** on **15<sup>th</sup> September**.

Good news is that we found **24 webs** in total which is easily the highest total in several years of monitoring of that site. Sadly, it was slightly counter-balanced by not yet finding any webs this year at an adjoining smallholding to south, where up to 20 webs have been recorded in last four years, but where the fields were under water for several consecutive days last winter. However, a new management approach is being put into practice by owners and this should certainly help.

#### **Pembrokeshire**

Bob and Annie H, John S, Adam R and landowner Terry joined Andrea on 11th September to survey **Yerbeston Tops**. Unfortunately no webs were recorded at **Shortland/Copybush** due to scrub encroachment and grazing, but at **Knapps Farm** we found 14 larval webs (up from last year). It was fantastic to do the survey with Terry who is so full of enthusiasm for his site and the Marsh fritillary.

#### **Powys**

On **2<sup>nd</sup> September**, Steph Coates searched **Vicarage Meadows SSSI**, a WTSWW reserve near Abergwesyn (Brecknock) where MFs had been recorded with last 5 years but was unable to find evidence on the day, despite some suitable habitat.

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## Heads of Valleys (BBNP & RCT)

Ben Williams reports: "I went up to **Ger y Bont** (private site near Hirwaun) today (**31 August**) and did a larval web count. I found **58 webs**, 2 more than last year, and the caterpillars were of good sizes. One web, I had a close look at, had cats about 10mm. There were loads of Peacocks, Red Admirals and Small Tortoiseshells feeding on the DBS. I also counted 4 Painted Ladies; I haven't seen many of those this year".

Then (**1<sup>st</sup> September**) I went out today and went to **Hirwaun** and had a look at the fields either side of the main road to Brecon. We went there once and found them badly overgrazed. They have not had animals on them for a few years and I counted **60 webs on the West side and 68 on the East side**. The webs here were a mixed bunch some had small caterpillars whilst others had large caterpillars. However, the East side has seen some activity on it and part of has been bulldozed and the trees put on a bonfire. Also, the main part had some pegs and tapes placed on it so it could be that area is also going have some attention. On my way home, I met **Nick and Liz Felton from NRW** along with a gang of others and they were preparing to survey the same areas so I had saved them a job. They had also surveyed a site at **Woodland Park** and found **over a hundred** there."

## Neath Port Talbot

The newly discovered site at **Tairgwaith** (previous edition) turns out to be both a SINC site and owned by NPT CBC.

## North-west Wales

Clare Williams comments: "I went to **Morfa Harlech NNR** on **1st Sept** to look for webs despite the negative results of the past three years and no decent numbers since 2014. Thankfully some good news to report at last, after about 1.5 hours of searching **one large web was found**. Further searching for three-quarters of an hour didn't yield any more. The last time a web was found at Morfa Harlech was in 2016 and this was a single small web; zero webs were recorded in 2015 and prior to this it was 245 webs in 2014. The last adult records were 10 in 2016. The presence of the butterfly in 2020 means that either it was hanging on in the NNR undetected in previous years or that it has recolonised".

## Tonyrefail & south RCT.

RGS led two small groups to search southern end of **Rhos Tonyrefail SSSI** for larval webs. On **26<sup>th</sup> August**, with help from volunteers, Lucie & Keira, plus Rob Parry, we found **4 larval webs** and then on **2<sup>nd</sup> September**, Francis, Lucie & RGS added **11 more**. So that's **15 larval webs** across about 20% of the entire site, which suggests a good year but access to rest of site 16 & 17 depends on NRW obtaining it.

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### Ystradgynlais metapopulation (including Ystradgynlais, Crynant & Seven Sisters)

Andrea reports: "Weavers Road (with volunteer & WTSWW) on 27/08 in weather that took a turn for the atrocious: **0 webs**

**Nant Gyrlais** (with volunteers & WTSWW) on 27/08: **11 webs** (some still very small), slightly down on last year but weather turn a turn for the worse and due to Covid issues, WTSWW hasn't managed to graze yet this year".

On 10<sup>th</sup> September, RGS, Francis, Gareth & Nicola (NRW) did the transect counts on edge of **Seven Sisters** Forest finding **11 webs** on southern side of track and **19 webs** on northern side. We didn't have time to include the 60 hectares of grazing units, or the 30 hectares of other suitable habitat nearby, which were all first recorded as occupied by MFs in 2018.

On 11<sup>th</sup> September, RGS, Francis, & Rose Revera (NPT Biodiversity) counted **12 larval webs** at one end of the "pony field" which is currently in a management agreement between owners and BC and lightly grazed with cattle. Most of these larval webs were small and tight with some second instar caterpillars, a couple of which measured only 6mm in length. The SSSI next door was still being grazed by cattle, so we'll return later in the month once vegetation has settled down again.

### Ceredigion

Andrea and Paul G visited **Rhos Llawr-cwrt** and met up with David Woolley on 9th September and the sun appeared! Apart from hundreds of Four-spotted orb weaver (*Araneus quadratus*) spiders, we found 26 webs in total (down from last year but the habitat was looking very good with masses of scabious) - see photo, right.



Surveying at Rhos Lawr Cwrt using string to mark line: A. Rowe

### Swansea

**Gower Commons:** Andrea started surveys on **Fairwood** and **Welshmoor** Commons on 33rd/4th September, but initial results don't look very positive, with very low numbers. Webs were very small though, so it may still be early, so she has decided to wait a week or so before finishing them off. Another major factor (apart from the usual grazing issues) could be the spate of fires which happened around lockdown. Fingers crossed return visits will be more positive.

**North Swansea:** Andrea, Judy and Paul G visited Clyne Valley South (no luck) and **Grovesend Common** on 7th September. Grovesend had some decent patches of Devil's-bit scabious and in total 5 good -sized occupied webs were found along with 1 empty web. These are the first records since 2016 and although suitable habitat is currently limited, there is a lot of potential for restoration. The site is a really interesting one with a mix of habitats - it's one we'll head back to look for Grizzled Skipper next year.

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## 4. Dark Green Fritillary (DGF) – 7 new reports

Flight period normally early June to mid July.

### **Carmarthenshire**

Ian Morgan: "I had a **single dark green fritillary** today, feeding at thistle flowers at: South of Teague`s Wood, **Marros**, Carms SN 192075, **20.7.20**".

### **Merthyr Tydfil**

Kathleen Job posted on **8<sup>th</sup> August**: "I saw this Fritillary out walking my dog (at least I think it was the same one not two...) and was thinking Dark Green even though there's no obvious green colouring?". Yes, DGF id'd from photos - ed. Presumably in **Merthyr**?

### **Monmouthshire**

**20th July. 2 Dark Green Fritillary at Blackrock Quarry, Clydach** (Mike Hoults and Val Deisler)

**22<sup>nd</sup> July. Dark Green Fritillary at Central Valley, Ebbw Vale** (Jane Corey)

**26<sup>th</sup> July. 2 Dark Green Fritillary on the Blorengie** ( Ian and Janet Cormack).

### **Pembrokeshire**

Frank Sengpiel posted on **25<sup>th</sup> July**: "A week away in **Angle**, Pembs. Today we visited **Stack Rocks** / the Green Bridge of Wales; the butterfly highlight were two dark green frits, one fresh looking."

### **Vale of Glamorgan**

Results of the 6kms of Alun Valley Fritillary transects so far show sightings of **definite DGF total 53** over the 4 weeks (28 hours) of recording **between 1<sup>st</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> June**. The site is managed principally for HBF and 2020 results so far show a huge shift towards HBF over its very similar relative.

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## **5. High Brown Fritillary (HBF) – one updated summary report**

*Flight period normally early June to early August. Only one current site in Wales in Vale of Glamorgan.*

**In summary, doubtless 2020 has been one of the best three years since our consistent monitoring began in 1995. We're busy with MF larval web surveys during September, but will get some more precise analysis of figures done over autumn, which we'll need for management planning anyway.**

*As many will know, we've operated a monitoring project for High Brown Fritillary in Wales since 1996, based on fixed transect routes covering the main flight and habitat areas at each site (there were 4 sites in 1996 but by 2000 this was down to one – the Alun valley). We started regular management there every year from 2000 and, as management progressed over the 20 years since, transect routes were extended to include newly restored habitat patches and flight areas across what is a very large site, effectively now most/all of a metapopulation. The methodology is based on sightings of id'd HBF, id'd DGF and the (some years, some weeks vast numbers of) unid large fritillaries. An index is produced each year of total estimated HBF sightings per observer hour (estimates include ratio of definite HBF:DGF applied to unid each week). We stick to this methodology rigidly, not necessarily because it's the best (and certainly not perfect) but for consistency to be able to measure year on year trends in sightings per hour.*

*So far in 2020, as an index (HBF sightings per hour) we're already **52% up on first four weeks of last year**. At 30 HBF sightings per hour so far, **we're above the previous best year to date (2015)** which came out at 31 for first four weeks or 27 for first 6 weeks. So, although we may be just past our HBF peak numbers this year with another two weeks potentially useful data to come, total sightings of HBF at 826 already exceed total for 2015. So it'll be a close-run thing as to whether we exceed 2015 in index terms. What is very clear this year is the consistent high ratio of HBF to DGF, averaging 10:1 across the 6kms of route through area covered, undoubtedly the best we've ever had. 2015 was of course, overwhelmingly influenced by the Old Castle Down transect result for first week of July at 295 sightings, with that extraordinary eruption of southern end of Old Castle Down. We probably won't see that or similar this year. This year evidences a fantastic spread across all sections of all five transect routes and thus the importance of all the habitat sub-sites to the overall situation.*

*Not directly related to numbers/transects, but interestingly Paul Dunn has been keeping a careful eye on appearance of female HBFs. It wasn't until 17th June, 3 weeks after the first male, that first female was identified! Since then Paul has witnessed no less than 4 mating pairs and I witnessed several times egg-lay search behaviour of a female on Tuesday (23rd), whilst shading behind a bush whilst lunching. See also panel in Headline at start of this issue.*

*Below is the table/graph of HBF sightings per observer hour since we started showing results this way. (Squares in 2016 to 2019 represent extra data from additional transect route.) Will 2020 take us just off the scale?*

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**Old Castle Down and Alun Valley High Brown Transects 1999-2019**



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## 6. Silver-washed Fritillary (SWF) - 19 new reports

Flight period normally late June to early September.

### **Carmarthenshire.**

Ian Morgan: "A silver-washed fritillary (x1): near **Brynhenllys Bridge**, Carms **SN 755125**, **22.7.20**.

Belinda Jackson on **8<sup>th</sup> August**: "**Silver Washed Fritillary** finally agreeing to nectar in the **garden** but still very flighty. Seen here on buddleia weyeriana".

Nicola Nesbit posted on **3<sup>rd</sup> August**: "We made a special trip all the way to Pembrey Forest to see **Silver Washed Fritillaries** a couple of weeks ago....guess what we saw today less than a mile from our house along the **Cross Hands to Tumble Cycle Track!!** 😊 I had no idea that they were round here, there is a nice area of oak woodland with lots of bramble along that stretch."

### **Merthyr Tydfil**

Graham Watkeys posted a photo of an **SWF** in slightly tatty condition on **28<sup>th</sup> August** at **Taf Fechan** nature reserve.

### **Monmouthshire**

**3rd July.** 2 **Silver-washed Fritillary** flying at **Whitelye Woods** (Richard Clayton).

**16th July.** A **Silver-washed Fritillary** at **Cefn Mawr Wood, Monkswood** (Nick Felstead).

**19th July.** 2 **Silver-washed Fritillary** at **Hendre Wood** (Wendy Tyler-Batt)

**20<sup>th</sup> July.** 5 **Silver-washed Fritillary** in the area of **Wentwood Gate** and 1 at **Cuhere Wood**. (Martin Anthoney and Roger James)

**20<sup>th</sup> July.** 2 **Silver-washed Fritillary** at **Broad Meend, Trelleck** (Gail Reynolds).

**30<sup>th</sup> July.** 2 **Silver-washed Fritillary** at **Hendre King's Wood** (Stephanie Tyler).

**7th Aug.** 1 **Silver-washed Fritillary** at **Blackrock Quarry**, Clydach (Mike Houlst and Val Deisler).

**7<sup>th</sup> Aug.** 2 **Silver-washed Fritillary** at **Trellech** (Martin Anthoney and Roger James)

### **North-east Wales**

Jon Wainwright: "On a wander around **Loggerheads** yesterday (**6<sup>th</sup> July**) and went for a nosey for adders on the limestone pavement hidden behind the bench viewpoint above the cliffs. No adders but a pleasant surprise of what I reckon is a **Silver Washed Fritillary**. Never seen them there before - only at Marford Quarry.

Steve Andrews posted on **24<sup>th</sup> July**: "Bimble around **Marford Quarry** this afternoon - excellent 😊". To which Simon Mills responded: "Nice pictures Steve. Good to see the Silver Washed are still about.....".

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### Neath Port Talbot

Lee McMurray posted on 7<sup>th</sup> August: "A female **Silver-washed fritillary** at **Clydach** yesterday. Always enjoy seeing these".

### Pembrokeshire

Frank Sengpiel posted on 22<sup>nd</sup> July: " There are still a lot of flowering meadows, verges, hedgerows here in Pembrokeshire, and lots of butterflies too! Most of these were taken around Angle, but yesterday's highlight were 3 Silver-washed Frits around the **Bosherston lily ponds** (managed decent shots only of 1)".  
Carrie Lear posted on 2<sup>nd</sup> August: "Went for a walk by the **Brynberian river** (north edge of Presili Mtns), wasn't expecting to see so many lovely butterflies, really beautiful"

Nicola Nesbit posted on 8<sup>th</sup> August: "Everywhere I go this summer I seem to find **Silver Washed Fritillaries!!** A tatty looking female was on the path from Amroth to Colby Woodland Gardens".

### Swansea

John Williams: "Today (8<sup>th</sup> August) I recorded a **male Silver Washed Fritillary** in my garden at **Penclawdd**[SA4 3LS] the first record of this species in my garden and I've been recording for 10 years here. The specimen was a bit worn".

### Vale of Glamorgan

SWFs fly in the Alun valley and **18 sightings** were recorded during the weekly transect counts of large frits starting on 19<sup>th</sup> June.

**This newsletter was compiled from reports received or available up to 2pm on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Richard Smith, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020.**



Photo: SWF, Pembrokeshire: Frank Sengpiel, - slight aberration of male? - Ed.

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