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FRITS ABOUT (YOUR FIELDS), 2020 - No. 2

74 individual and 1 summary report items in this edition - received up to 3rd July 2020



Headlines:

- **LARGER FRITS** now dominate sightings.
- **HIGH BROWN** possibly on course for best ever year?
- So far, **FIVE NEW SITES FOR MARSH FRITILLARY**
- *earliest ever large fritillaries (DGF & HBF) in Wales?*

Photo: Two male High Brown Fritillaries nectaring on Marsh Thistles for first time this year (12 June), having used only bramble flowers for three weeks earlier. Photo: R G Smith

Welcome. This is another Frits About which, due to current COVID related travel restrictions, reflects numbers of reports continuing to be limited this spring and early summer, as BC still wishes to align with regulations in Wales and therefore not encourage travel simply to see or record butterflies. Thus most of the reports come from landowners, particularly smallholders in Carmarthenshire where we have close links with them, but also some in Anglesey, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire, observing fritillaries on their own fields. I've also received a limited number of reports from individuals whilst taking permitted exercise, out & about within their local area, checking on livestock or contractors carrying out professional duties.

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Exciting times continue for Marsh Fritillary in South Wales – 4 new sites, including Cwm Pedol, Letterston, Rhondda Fawr & Tairgwaith – were highlighted in the previous edition. 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.



Left: Trio of large frits (all HBFs), two in copulation, on Old Castle Down, P Dunn.

Right: Different trio of large frits nectaring, two SWFs with an HBF, Alun valley, R G Smith.

Also particularly exciting times for both Dark Green and High Brown Fritillaries which were first seen in Alun valley on 27th & 28th May respectively. Although DGFs have a very widespread distribution in Wales, they have been turning up at apparently previously unrecorded sites, including gardens and smallholders' meadows. HBF is very close to having best ever numbers since our monitoring of South Wales sites on a consistent basis started in 1996. It will be a close-run thing between 2015 and 2020 but, despite poor weather this week, with first females only starting emergence 12 days ago and still going, we hope to have them with us for another week or two at least. So far, SWF reports seem slow, but then it is only end June/early July, after all.

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Paul Dunn (who else!) on 1st July: "I'd seen two or three female High Browns egg laying while doing the transect count, so decided to head back to the best area to see if I could get a photo. It was only a minute or so till a female landed in an area rich with violets, in one of the areas we'd cut this last winter. She was obviously intent on egg laying so I got the camera and watched as she proceeded to start egg laying. After she'd moved on, I carefully turned the first violet leaf nearest to where I'd seen her laying, and there at the top point of the leaf was this beautiful yellow green egg".
"- A dream realised, I'd only been looking for about twenty years!".



Photo on left taken on Paul's mobile phone on 1st July.

Photo on right: On RGS compact camera after more egg-laying on 2nd July, with this egg on dead bracken.

A very grateful thanks to those who have contributed items to this edition. We hope it encourages others.

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 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) – 1 new report

(7 reports in previous edition). Flight period normally late April to end May.

Denbighshire.

Re Eyarth Rocks. Jan Miller posts: "Al Wilkinson - I sent them your record, (**14 on May on 20th.** between 15:48 & 16:18), and as I suggested they say it was probably past peak flight period, given the earliness of everything this year- which is amazing as previous years the peak at Eyarth has been around 25th May (it's always a couple of weeks later than Montgomeryshire). Clare Williams comments: "The earliest record from the Montgomeryshire sites was on 16th April; they were out at the same site last year on 22nd April so not much difference there. Obviously as Richard says it's difficult to gauge whether PBF have been particularly early due to lockdown being in force when we would have been checking sites for emergence. Regarding the number seen at Eyarth this year - the count by your contact on 20th May will have been past the peak and so hopefully numbers will have been much higher earlier on. Last year the peak count was 61 (89/hr) on 16th May with numbers dropping to 17 individuals (23/hr) on 23rd May".

2. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) – 23 new reports

(35 reports in previous edition). 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).

Ceredigion

Jerry Moore posted on 3rd **June** (on Ceredigion Birds): "There were **some small pearl-bordered fritillaries** in the **Cyneiniog valley** yesterday".

Mike Bailey contacted us: "I just read the latest BC Wales newsletter, and noticed a lack of info from Ceredigion! I regularly see both **Sm p-b** and Dr green frits in my small field and/ or garden at Troedrhiw seiri, Bontgoch (SN6785). This year I saw both much earlier than in previous years. My **first S p-b was on 16th May.** and first Dk Green appeared on 30th May".

Monmouthshire

Martin Anthoney (VC35 county recorder) comments in the Monmouthshire Moth & Butterfly Group newsletter for May: "Most frequent among the butterfly records were 169 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.....". A few of these records are individually listed as being notable.

15th May First Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary of the season at **Blaenserchan**, rising to **15** by **20th May**. (Chris Hatch).

25th May At least 50 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at **Blaenserchan**. (Rupert Perkins)

Two Small Pearl - bordered Fritillary at **The British** and another **two** at nearby **Pant Glas Slip**. (Chris Hatch).

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2. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Monmouthshire (cont.)

31st May Two Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at **Garn Lakes** (Chris Hatch).

31st May. 30 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary at **Blaenserchan** (Rupert Perkins).

A reliable recorder reported **1 Small PBF** at **Blackrock Quarry** on **24th June**.

North-west Wales

Mandy Forde: "I saw **2 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** on **26 May** near my home, close to **Tywyn Trewan Common** on the Isle of Anglesey at SH326759. Very exciting as I've never seen a Fritillary so close to home before.

Andrew Graham reports: "First brood SPBFs are still to be seen in the hills. Numbers have been so large, and the flight period was so early that we can, maybe, look forward to a widespread second brood. (Time will tell)".

North Wales (somewhere!)

Anna Griffiths posted on **24th June**: "...22 hyperactive fritillaries on NW path above **Llanddulas** today. Sadly not one would stop for a photo but think there were two types, dark green and a smaller one - one or other of the pearl-bordered presumably".

Likely SPBF - ed.

Pembrokeshire

Jane Stone posted (on **25th June**, after watching DGFs at Strumble Head, 3 miles away): "I went home after my walk and went to check one of the fields I graze, I saw **a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary**, **a first** for this field although I have seen single SPBFs on the common (**Waun Ffynnon Clyn**) next door".

Small Pearl-bordered: Jane Stone.



RCT

Richard Wistow was able to get to some sites: "Small pearl bordered fritillary sightings on **Llantrisant common**. Across the **western third** of the common I saw **11 SPBF** scattered about on the **25th of May** and then on the **eastern side another 4 or 5 on June 7th**.

At Dare valley country Park and area I saw **5 or 6 SPBFs** on **May 27th and 28th**. "

Vale of Glamorgan

SPBF was sighted 38 times during Alun valley fritillary transect recording; **28 on 15th June** (mainly on Old Castle Down) and **10 on 23rd/24th June**. Two other old sites were visited, Mynydd Ruthin & Stalling Down, but w/o success despite small patches of suitable habitat.

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3. Marsh Fritillary (MF) – 13 new reports

(43 reports in previous edition). Flight period normally mid May to late June. Flight period about 10 days earlier this year.

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**.

Richard & Kath Pryce: "only had **one Marsh Frit** this year (on the M25 field on 31st May) (SN4712) but we haven't been able to visit there as often as we'd have liked, so there may have been more but we missed them". Also Tony Matthews told us that they've **seen MFs at Tireithin** this year but couldn't give a number. Gwilym Roberts advised that on **16th June**, there were still **three MFs** fluttering in his meadows **near Cross Hands**.

Ceredigion

Geoff Powell has been in touch: "On **30th May** I saw **three Marsh Fritillary** butterflies on the WTSWW reserve **Rhos Marion** (SN 363532) in Ceredigion".

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

Andrew Graham comments: "A report of **four adults** at **Cors Erddreiniog** on the **31st May** from Chris Owen shows that the species still hangs on, by a thread, on Anglesey. Quite why it doesn't either go extinct or build up in numbers is hard to understand. There have been no reports from anywhere else on the island for years now.

One late (for 2020) adult still flying at **Tir Stent** on the **16th June**.

Annie Seddon counted **508 adults** at **Cae Pencefn, Dolgellau** on the **20th May** in 105 mins. (4.8 per minute). If anything she feels that she was under-counting! Jonathan Chapman reported a singleton at **Gelliwyd Fawr, nr. Dolgellau**. This site has been the subject of habitat restoration with Highland Cattle grazing and *Succisa* planting so the fact that the butterflies have spread from the nearby colony at Llwyniarth / Maes Angharad gives hope for the future".

In a separate conversation with Jan Miller in mid June, Andrew says of MFs: "Almost over now! The first report was as early as the 9th May which is exceptional. I thought I wouldn't get to see one myself this year what with the restrictions but we stopped off yesterday after shopping in Dolgellau and I did see one butterfly in about three hours spent in prime habitat. So, I think your correspondent is going to have to wait until next year".

Ystradgynlais metapopulation (including Ystradgynlais, Crynant & Seven Sisters): No reports at all from this metapopulation so far this year.

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4. Dark Green Fritillary (DGF) - 25 new reports

Flight period normally early June to mid July.

Bridgend

Mike Clark comments, on 11th June: "..... it also been a good year for Dark Green Fritillary on the **(Kenfig)** dunes",

Carmarthenshire

Colin Law sent a record of DGF from his garden in **Ffarmers** on the 17/6.

Ceredigion

Mike Bailey contacted us: "I just read the latest BC Wales newsletter, and noticed a lack of info from Ceredigion! I regularly see both Sm p-b and **Dr green frits** in my small field and/ of garden at Troedrhiw seiri, **Bontgoch** (SN6785). This year I saw both much earlier than in previous years. My first **DGF** appeared on **30th May**."

Jerry Moore posted on 3rd **June** (on Ceredigion Birds): "**Salem/Bontgoch**. A dark green fritillary has visited our garden again (first one being a few days earlier, possibly **30th May**) and I managed to photograph one on rough grazing near the house".

Monmouthshire

A reliable recorder reported **1 DGF** at **Blackrock Quarry** on **24th June**.

North Wales (somewhere!)

Andrew Graham comments: "Nothing very specific but it seems that DGFs are doing well, with reports from all over the place. E.g. John Hicks comments: "Dark-green Fritillaries seem to be having a good year, we counted 19 plus more whilst walking back along Benar road."

In a separate conversation with Jan Miller in mid-June, Andrew says: "There seem to be a lot of Dark Green Fritillaries around. I've only seen one but other people are reporting large numbers. We do get them at our Minera Quarry site but in surprisingly low numbers which is puzzling as the violets are abundant, as are the Small Pearls. Maybe we will see lots in the next week or so. Hope so".

Peter Brown posted on **16th June**: "Not going to win any Prizes but at last I got some sort of photo of a **Dark Green Fritillary** up on **Nant-y-Gama** this morning. Oh andyesterday I saw another Dark Green Fritillary at a different part of Nant-y-Gama.

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Dark Green Fritillary, North Wales (cont.)

Anna Griffiths posted on **17th June**: "Saw a few dark green frits on a walk yesterday and then one turned up in the garden today - that's a first!"

Anna Griffiths posted on **24th June**: ".....22 hyperactive fritillaries on NW path above **Llanddulas** today. Sadly not one would stop for a photo but think there were two types, **dark green** and a smaller one - one or other of the pearl-bordered presumably". *Likely SPBF - ed.*

North-east Wales.

Ian Gorton posted: "Dark Green Fritillary at **Gronant Dune 13/6/2020**".



Dark Green Fritillary: Ian Gorton.

North-west Wales.

Marc Hughes included a photo of a **DGF** from his visit to "**Orme**" on **22nd June**. On **5th July** "**Over 20** Dark Green Fritillary on the **Great Orme** this morning sheltering from the wind in Heulfre Gardens".

Mandy Forde sent this report on **2nd July** from **Anglesey**: "Just saw **4 Dark Green Fritillary** butterflies in my wildflower meadow at Caergeiliog on the Isle of Anglesey. Feeding on Creeping Thistle, Marsh Woundwort and Corn Marigold. Never seen them on my land before, but the meadow has only had it's first flowers this year after being overgrown with long un-cut grass for at least 10 years and probably a lot longer".



Dark Green Fritillary: Mandy Forde.

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Dark Green Fritillary (cont.)

Pembrokeshire

Jane Stone had some interesting observations, on **25th June**, which I've reproduced in full, as they rather typify behaviour of violet feeding fritillaries in bracken. "I think that Dark Green Fritillaries are horrible to try to photograph. The rotters fly close to the ground around the bracken stems and never seen to land anywhere near me. They're almost as impossible to count as they meet up with each other and then part ways to be joined by another, change direction and so on. I had a very frustrating morning today, on the coast path near **Strumble Head** (3 miles on the road from home) I think I saw around 30 but wouldn't swear to it. I finally managed to get 1 picture....but it was still trying to hide!

I went home after my walk and went to check one of the fields I graze, I saw, for the **first time**, a **Dark Green Fritillary** - then a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, both firsts for this field although I have seen single SPBFs on the common next door.



Dark green Fritillaries: Jane Stone

RCT

Frank Sengpiel posted: "**The Gap, Abercynon** yesterday (**26th June**) afternoon, a **couple of Dark Green Fritillaries**". Also Phill Blanning saw a **couple** on **2nd July**. Again on **2nd July**, Tate Lloyd reported: "**Good numbers** of dark green fritillary (including some fresh females)".

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 1st & 24th 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 summary report

Flight period normally early June to early August. Only one current site in Wales in [Vale of Glamorgan](#).

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 identified HBF, identified DGF and the (some years, some weeks vast numbers of) unidentified 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 unidentified 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.

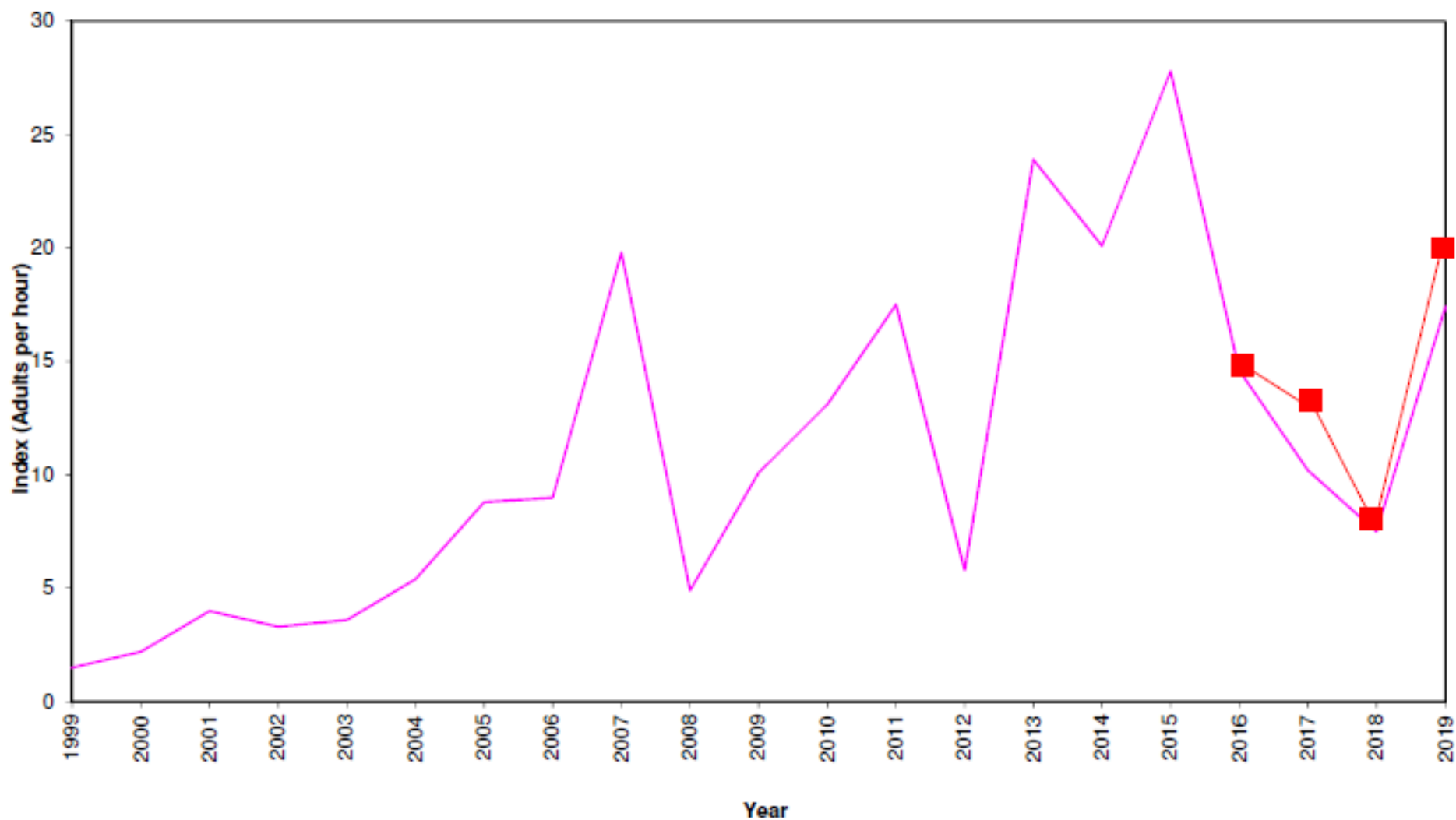
Not directly related to numbers/transects, but interestingly Paul Dunn has been keeping a careful eye on appearance of female HBFs. It wasn't until 17th June, 3 weeks after the first male, that first female was identified! Since then Paul has witnessed no less than 4 mating pairs and I witnessed several 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) - 12 new reports

Flight period normally, late June to early September.

Carmarthenshire.

Dave Bannister e-mailed me on 4th June to say: "Starting to see SWF in forest and garden.

Rosie Carmichael saw SWFs in **Brechfa forest** around the 18/6.

Belinda Jackson, near **Abernant**, noted "A long way off but the **Silver-washed Fritillaries** are out at the barn. We saw **2** this afternoon" on **23rd June**. Again on **2nd July**: "Saw **2 Silver-washed fritillary** for sure, possibly 3. They're still very active and don't settle for any length of time. This one had a deformed hind wing but didn't stop it getting out of shot".

Richard & Kath Pryce: "Kath and I were at our land at the Garn yesterday (**2nd July**): **3 Silver-washed Frits** in a sheltered woodland-edge glade where we saw them 2 years ago (SN4612).

Ceredigion.

Geoff Powell advised: "On the **23rd and 24th of June** I saw a **Silver-washed Fritillary** in my garden (SN 338472) near **Rhydlewis** in Ceredigion".

Monmouthshire

David Jones posted a photo on BC South Wales Forum on **28th June**, of an SWF near **Caldecot**. George Tordoff commented he'd heard that good numbers in Forest of Dean on 23rd June.

Vale of Glamorgan

SWFs fly in the Alun valley and were first spotted this year by Paul Dunn on **19th June** - two fresh males - but by **21st** Paul noted 6 or 7, including at least one female. Now regular on transect routes plus **5** seen yesterday (**2nd July**).

This newsletter was compiled from reports received or available up to 3pm on 3rd July 2020.

Richard Smith

3rd July 2020.

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