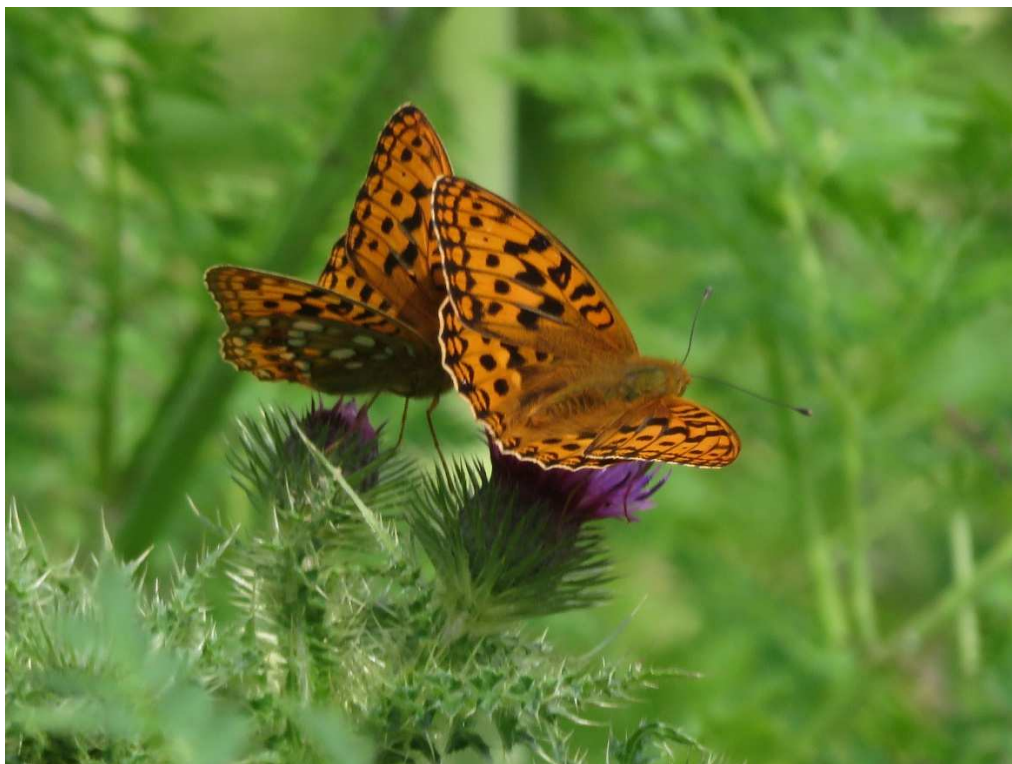


## **Behind the scenes, were amazing 2020 successes for our High Brown and other Fritillaries.**

Everyone will have a different account of how the Covid veil has affected them. I was lucky that by end of March, we'd got most of our winter management work and surveys done and I was looking forward to getting back to allotment, garden and domestic jobs for a few weeks. Of course, the fine warm weather helped no end and it was a few weeks before I started to think about flying Marsh Fritillaries. I couldn't do much about it, as all of the sites are more than 5 miles from my home. I did contact our many smallholders whose fields have them, so at least we had some news. However, having visited Alun valley to check essentials by bicycle earlier, I realised that it is just within the June travel guidelines and so did Paul Dunn. Also we could cover the site between us w/o breaching social distancing or having to involve other volunteer transect counters. So we did and it all evolved rather well for us and the High Browns on the site.

There were exciting times for both Dark Green and High Brown Fritillaries which were first seen in Alun valley on 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> May respectively, the latter appearing to be earliest 2020 HBF record in the UK and possibly earliest ever HBF record in Wales (at least in 40 years that RGS has lived in Wales). By 2nd June, Paul Dunn & RGS estimate at least 80 HBF sightings in Alun valley, its one remaining Welsh site. DGFs were by then reported from several sites – as recounted in Frits About 2020. Although DGFs have a very widespread distribution in Wales, they have been turning up across Wales at apparently previously unrecorded sites, including gardens and smallholders' meadows.

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

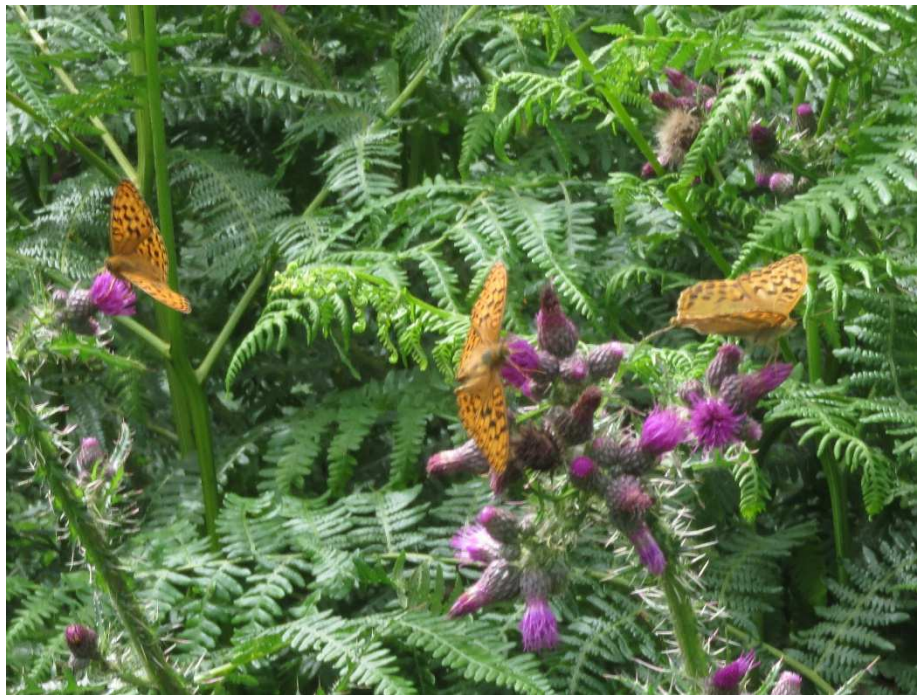


- **Female Emergence:** By third week of June, HBF was already very close to having best ever numbers since our monitoring of South Wales sites on a consistent basis started in 1996. It would clearly be a close-run thing between 2015 and 2020 but, despite poor weather late June, with first females only appearing on 17 June (20 days after first male and by which time we'd already had 565 male HBF sightings) and still going, we hoped to have them with us for another week or two at least.
- **Dispersal:** in 2019, one of our volunteers, Stuart Morton produced a photo of an HBF in his Bridgend garden. This year photos appeared on BC South Wales branch Facebook group, which looked to be of HBFs, one from near Laleston and one from near Brackla (both Bridgend).

- **Mating pairs:** within next couple of weeks from first noted female emergence, several mating pairs were encountered by Paul and even I had encountered two. They were all spread across the site.



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



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

- **Egg-laying** (Holy Grail?). Both of us have often, over the years, seen egg-laying procedure, whereby females crawl over bracken litter, usually on the ground probing with their abdomens next to violet leaves poking through. Previously, we looked for eggs but never found them.

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! "

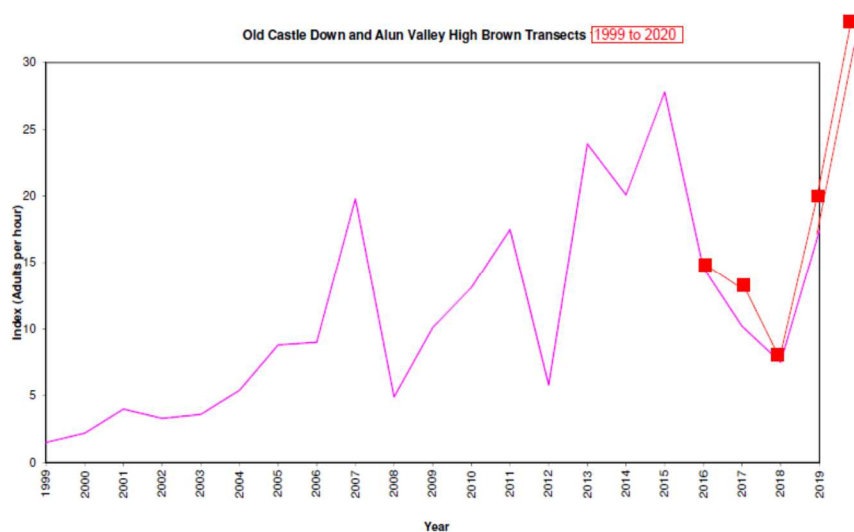
Photo on left taken on Paul's mobile phone on **1st July**. Egg laid under violet leaf.

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





- **Adult sightings count:** we both felt that 2020 had already been a good year by the numbers of sightings in first three weeks – 565. Adding in a couple of later weeks of counts in average conditions, we achieved total adult sightings of 882 based on original four transect routes operated or 1,039 adult sightings including the additional Pant St Brides route results. It doesn't really matter to most of us exactly how the numbers are interpreted – we are just pleased that it is fairly obvious that 2020 was actually or very close to our best year for HBF in South Wales in all the years since 1996 that we've managed the site and monitored the numbers to a consistent methodology. We'll leave Head Office boffins to do as they will with the figures. I gather from talking to Dan Hoare that West Country and Lake District results have also been an improvement on 2019.



- So thanks to all our partners, volunteers and colleagues, but only regret that only Paul & I were there to record it!