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Cover photo – Clifden Nonpareil (Catacola fraxini) Julian Thompson

We’ve dreamt about it, moth-ers all, to see the beauty, be enthralled.
And witness with our own two eyes the marvel of its monstrous size.
To gaze upon its wondrous blue and black of hindwing, and to do
A second take, to certain be - it really was, for all to see
Pensychnant had the Holy Grail; they’d trapped a Clifden Nonpareil!

Steve Palin

Photos taken at the North Wales Moth Meeting at Pensychnant 07.09.2020 – Mark Sheridan
A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

When I wrote my article for the newsletter last year we were about to go into lockdown and it had just been announced that all schools in Wales would be closed in a few days’ time. At that stage social distancing measures were advisory, but your Branch Committee decided it would be inappropriate to run a programme of events and eventually, and with great reluctance, decided to cancel our AGM/Members' Day scheduled for October. In the months that followed many of us used our daily opportunity to leave the house for exercise to study and enjoy the butterflies and moths in our local area. As a nation we reconnected with nature in a way that changed our perception of the natural world and brought into sharp focus the link between our own health and wellbeing and that of our local environment and the planet.

Against the backdrop of a burgeoning pandemic and increasingly restricted freedoms, all conservation charities had to adapt to a sudden an unexpected fall in their incomes, cancelled events and a Membership coming to terms with the sharpest fall in economic activity for over three hundred years. Some of you will know that, as well as being Chair of the North Wales Branch, I am also one of Butterfly Conservation's Trustees. I vividly recall a series of emergency Council meetings (all held by Zoom, something we had not considered possible in the past!) where we assessed the likely impact of the pandemic on our finances and activities and scoped out measures to maintain our core programmes while ensuring the charity remained financially viable. This urgent, unexpected and unwelcome task proved challenging but necessary. Now, after a difficult period of change, Butterfly Conservation is beginning to emerge from the crisis in much better shape than most other charities in the sector. To my mind, two factors have been key in enabling us to cope with this most unexpectedly turbulent and challenging year in Butterfly Conservation's history. These are the dedication, professionalism and flexibility of our staff and the loyalty and generosity of our Members which, taken together, have made possible our robust and effective response to the crisis.

As I write this the Covid vaccination programme proceeds apace and lockdown restrictions are beginning to be eased. However, indoor public events remain largely banned and outdoor events are both discouraged and highly restricted. Consequently, your committee have decided that we will run only a limited event programme this year, and that our 2021 AGM/Members’ Day will be held online. Details of both the events programme and the AGM/Members’ Day can be found in this newsletter.

Finally, as a Trustee of Butterfly Conservation, I am due for re-election this year. I would like to continue with the work of helping steer the charity through the pandemic and contribute to developing its programme for the coming years. As current Chair of the North Wales Branch and a former chair of the South Wales Branch I feel I am well qualified to offer a Welsh perspective on the charity's affairs. I do hope I can count on your vote when the election takes place later this year in November.

Ilija Vukomanovic
BUTTERFLIES AMID A PANDEMIC
by Anna Griffiths

In 2020 I was more grateful than ever to have been able to continue to walk the butterfly transect on the North Wales Wildlife Trust reserve of Bryn Pydew. Despite the lockdowns I was able to walk to the site from my home, so I continued to incorporate it as part of my permitted exercise allowance. The weekly routine helped give a structure and purpose to the chaos of Covid-19 that was unfolding all around us.

In the very interesting article by Sion Dafis on the silver studded blue butterfly in the last BC North Wales Branch Newsletter, he mentioned a number of sites where the butterfly had been released in the past. I was interested to go and see if it was still present at any of these sites. At the time we were restricted to walking within a 5 mile radius of home. This allowed my husband David and I to venture to some of the sites and still comply with the restrictions.

On 31/05/2020 we went to Marl Hall Woods on the southern end of Bryn Pydew. This is mentioned in the article as having been proposed as a site for releasing silver studded blues but with no actual records of such a release having taken place.

After climbing steeply through the woods there is an open limestone outcrop at the southernmost tip of the hill which we assume was the proposed site. It isn’t a very big area and this day, falling as it did at the end of a sustained period of dry weather, the vegetation was very brown and dried up and, apart from a few small tortoiseshells basking on the rocks, there were no butterflies to be seen.

On 13th June 2020 I walked to Rhwilledyn (the North Wales Wildlife Trust reserve on the Little Orme) for my daily exercise. The article mentions the population on the Little Orme as fluctuating. A transect was established here in 2016 and silver studded blues have been recorded each year except 2018 with the highest numbers being in the last two years (2019 and 2020) probably due to increased recording visits thanks to new volunteers coming on board. It was a pleasantly warm 19 degrees with very little wind and I counted 55 silver studded blues and 7 graylings on the south west facing open grassland slopes that they favour. Later that day the news reported 202 new deaths from Covid-19 in the UK taking the total to 41,481.

Face coverings were to be made compulsory on public transport. Also, in the news, in the wake of the death of George Floyd at the hands of the US police, huge protests had been taking place around the world under the banner ‘Black Lives Matter’ and in Bristol a statue of Sir Winston Churchill had been boarded up to protect it in the wake of the demolishing of a statue of Edward Colston, a Bristol slave trader, that was ripped from its plinth and thrown into the harbour. History being re-examined.
On the 15th June 2020 we visited Nant y Gamar, a limestone hill to the south of Llandudno where I had seen silver studded blues in previous years. There is a particular south west facing slope where they occur. The site isn’t very far from the Great Orme – about 2.5km. We saw 40-50 of them there that day and also 12 grayling. The following day 233 Covid-19 deaths were recorded in the UK bringing the total to 41,969 and the footballer, Marcus Rashford, succeeded in getting the government to agree to fund free meals throughout the summer holidays for families who would qualify for free school meals, knowing first-hand the importance of this support from his own childhood experiences.

Back to butterflies, the article mentions a reintroduction that took place in June 1942 when 90 silver studded blue butterflies were taken from The Great Orme to Rhyd y Foel in the Dulas valley. This was during World War II when part of The Great Orme was being used as a Coastal Artillery School. This was the time of greatest upheaval in the country in recent history and we now find ourselves in the midst of the next big story that will become part of history for subsequent generations, but at the moment it is still being written and the outcome is as yet unknown.

We did not know where exactly the butterflies were released, ‘in a hollow inland beyond Rhyd y Foel’ was all we had to go on, so we scouted for suitable sites to look for them.

On the 19th June 2020 we ventured to a limestone hill known as Craig y Forwyn or Maiden’s Crag. It is also called Maiden’s Leap in English, but I mercifully couldn’t find any grim tales of maidens in distress to accompany the name. It lies behind Llanddulas, again less than 5 miles from home. We joined The North Wales Path from a narrow lane and walked upwards through beautiful, broadleaved woodland before emerging onto an open limestone scrub area below the towering cliff of Craig y Forwyn. The weather was overcast and there had been rain, so we were not expecting to find many butterflies. Much to our delight we did see some silver studded blue butterflies and decided we should return once the weather improved to get a clearer idea of their numbers. 173 new Covid-19 deaths recorded that day and in level 3 lockdown the rate of infections was falling by 2-4% daily.

On 24th June 2020 the weather was sunny and warm, so we returned to the same area in the hope of seeing more silver studded blue butterflies. We took the same route as last time and continued on to the top of the hill where the North Wales Path then turns towards Llysfaen and Mynydd Marian. We also climbed onto the top of Craig y Forwyn. Amongst the bracken on the higher slopes, we were thrilled to find quite a number of fritillaries, we counted 22. We patiently watched hoping that they would land but in vain. They were in very active mood and not one would stop for a photograph. Most were, I think, dark green fritillaries but some seemed smaller so possibly small pearl-bordered are present. A return visit is a must to hopefully get accurate IDs. We also counted around 20
silver studded blues. It would appear that this is a good area for butterflies, and we will definitely go back in 2021 (Covid permitting) to get further records.

By now the virus was escalating in Brazil, India and Mexico with fears that the medical infrastructure in these countries may find it difficult to cope. In the UK Covid-19 deaths had now reached 43,230.

The hot, dry spell was now followed by a rainy, unsettled spell of weather making butterfly recording much more hit and miss. I focussed on collecting the transect data in the better weather so we didn’t manage to do any scouting for silver studded blues elsewhere until their short season was all but finished.

20th July 2020. A reasonably nice day so we decided to go and find Pen y Corddyn Mawr where, according to the article, silver studded blues were recorded as having reached by 1959. This is the site of the largest iron age hillfort in Wales and Roman artefacts have also been found there. It lies inland from Rhyd y Foel and on the opposite side of the valley to Craig y Forwyn. The land is privately-owned, and the footpaths are little used and were quite overgrown, but we did manage to make our way up and out onto the limestone grassland area. We knew that the silver studded blue season was really at an end, but we kept our eyes out just in case and as we descended back down towards the woods, we spotted a single, tatty and worn blue butterfly that we were hopeful was a silver studded blue. Again, a return visit is on the do-list for 2021.

By now lockdown had been eased and we were once again allowed to go out to eat with the government offering to pay 50% of the bill in order to help the hospitality industry get back on its feet. The mood had lifted, and it felt as though we were beginning to come out of the dark times.

How things have changed since the summer. As I write this, in early 2021, we are in the grip of a second wave and grappling with a new strain of the Covid-19 virus which is transmitting faster than the original strain. The number of cases is very high, lockdowns have been imposed countrywide to try and prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed, the whole of Wales is in a tier 4 lockdown with schools, non-essential shops and restaurants all closed. The death rate from Covid-19 has passed the sad milestone of 100,000 in the UK and 2 million worldwide. Vaccinations are beginning to be administered but we still face much uncertainty and cling to the hope that the vaccine will start to bring the virus under control eventually. At present this still feels a long way off.

I hope that by the time the next silver studded blue season comes around the picture will have improved, and we will be able to revisit these sites and those that we were unable to visit, to look for butterflies without the worry of lockdowns or restrictions. Wherever we are in this pandemic we know that the natural world around us will sustain us and help us get through this and hopefully in return we will learn lessons from this experience and do more to protect it.
MOTH RECORDING ON ANGLESEY 2020
by Charles Aron

There were few opportunities for moth trapping during the early part of 2020; although mild, the weather was persistently wet and stormy. This all changed around 20th March when conditions became much drier and more settled. Dry sunny, weather persisted from late March through to early June, ideal for Lepidoptera. After the first week of June the weather became much more unsettled, lacking in sunshine, and very cool at times, especially at the end of June and during the first half of July and this supressed moth catches somewhat but did not prevent a trickle of interesting records through the summer months. The warmth of early April gave rise to three Blossom Underwing records: from Pentraeth, Brynsiencyn and Cemaes. This species was first recorded from the island in 2011. The first two records might well reflect recent colonisation by this moth but the Cemaes record, from an open coastal area, is much more likely to have been the result of migration. During the same period Ian Sims recorded Agonopterix alstromeriana (Brown-spot Flat Body) the larvae of which feed on Hemlock which itself is rather localised on Anglesey. Thus far this species has only been recorded from a few coastal sites on Anglesey. On 19th April Ian Hawkins trapped the attractive little Tortricoid, Grapholita jungiella (Vetch Piercer) at Maes Merllyn, Brynsiencyn. Although this Micro is listed a ‘Common’ in the guide by Sterling and Parsons, this is the first Anglesey record since 1986. It is unlikely to have been overlooked.

On 10th May Ian Hawkins had a bronzy-coloured Coleophora (Case-bearer) at light; there are several similar, rather attractive, bronzy species which are difficult to tell apart. It was confirmed by Andrew Graham as being the first North Wales record of Coleophora frischella (White-clover Case-bearer). A day later Ian had an early Lime Hawk-moth which seems to be gradually spreading over south Anglesey but remains rather scarce.

Having seen the pretty Micro, Micropterix aureatella (Yellow-barred gold) in abundance on bilberry at Conwy Falls in early June 2019, I made it a target species for Anglesey. On 17th May I soon found a specimen, new for Anglesey, in a similar situation in Pentraeth Forest. Thereafter, I found it to be widespread in the forest, often obtained by sweeping. In one spot there were about ten specimens hiding in broom. Another new Anglesey record, Argyresthia trifasciata (Triple-barred Argent), was obtained by beating overgrown Cupressus near Llandegfan. This particular row of Cupressus trees has proved very
productive for Micros, especially *Argyresthia*, which seem to like hiding in the foliage. *A. trifasciata* is actually a *Cupressus* feeder, one of a number of moths on this foodplant which are spreading northwards and westwards in Britain.

On the morning of the 28th May I was bewildered by a strange, blackish moth sitting in the trap. At first I thought it must be an exotic species, hailing from southern climes. I then realised that it was an extreme, dark form of Buff Ermine. It transpired that this rare aberration was close to the completely black *f. totinigra* but differing in having some buff streaks and markings. It, therefore, has been given a new name, *f. subnigra*.

On 2nd June Ian Hawkins recorded *Ancyliis myrtillana* (Bilberry Roller) from his garden at Brynsiencyn, the second record for this site. It seems likely that it arrived from the adjacent mountains, which are, as the moth flies, not very distant. It is also possible that this species might occur on the bilberry areas of Anglesey. The same date produced a tiny Micro in my garden trap at Pentraeth; this turned out to be *Bucculatrix nigricomella* (Daisy Bent-wing), new to Anglesey. This tiny moth, which mines Ox-eye Daisy, is common wherever the foodplant occurs according to Andrew Graham. The rather dingy Pyralid, *Hypochalcia alpenella* (Dingy Knot-horn) came to the garden trap a few days later. This is only the second Anglesey record. *H. alpenella* is a Rockrose feeder and so would have made its way from one of the nearby limestone areas. On the other side of the island Mandy Forde found the striking larvae of Chamomile Shark feeding on Corn Chamomile in her garden close to Llyn Traffwll.
On 8th June Ruth Bond came across a large, hairy caterpillar at Ynys y Fydlyn at the northwest corner of the island. This turned out to be a Grass Eggar larva, an exciting record of a nationally very local moth. There is only one previous Anglesey record, from ‘near Bangor’ in 1945. It would be interesting to look for more larvae, and adults, in coming years, at Ynys y Fydlyn and other coastal sites.

Returning to Pentraeth, on 15th June I had what I thought was a Green Pug in the trap but there was something not quite right about it. It matched the photo of Sloe Pug in the new Moth Atlas perfectly. In 2001 this pug was recorded quite widely in the Benllech and Red Wharf Bay area in the larval state by Mike Hammett. That evening I visited the nearby saltmarsh on Red Wharf Bay. Conditions were calm and very humid. The saltmarsh was teeming with tiny Micros, flying very low amongst the saltmarsh plants, and they included Bucculatrix maritima (Saltmarsh Bent-wing), which mines Sea Aster. This is another moth which is probably common wherever the foodplant occurs and which may be more easily located by looking for mines. Another saltmarsh moth was Phalondia affinitana (Saltmarsh Conch), also dependent on Sea Aster. A couple of days later I was trimming the Cupressus hedge and disturbed three Argyresthia cupressella (Cypress Tip Moth), new to Anglesey in 2019. This tiny Micro was introduced from North America and now is well-established in Britain, including the garden! The cuttings were put in the wheelie bin where there was a specimen of Tachystola acroanthera (Ruddy Streak), which breeds in garden waste, compost heaps etc. This moth, thought to have arrived from Australia, is now quite common on Anglesey. Also, there was the inevitable Epiphyas postvittana (Light Brown Apple Moth) skulking in the hedge, another Australian, first recorded in Cornwall in 1936 and now a common garden species. A visit to Red Wharf Bay, this time below Wern y Wylan, on 11th July yielded frequent Scrobipalpas on the saltmarsh. There are several dingy Scrobipalpa species occurring on this habitat but it is difficult to be certain of the species without genitalia dissection. Another Cupressus-feeding Argyresthia, A. dilectella (Juniper Argent), new to Anglesey, came to light in Pentraeth on 13th July. Later in July a visit to Cors Goch yielded 25 specimens of the tiny Snout relative, Marsh Oblique-barred, at actinic light.
While on the coastal path between Bull Bay and Amlwch on 1st August I noticed a Small Ermine moth at rest on the pathside vegetation. It looked smaller than any Yponomeuta species I'd encountered before. A short distance away there were clumps of Orpine the foodplant of this new Anglesey moth, Yponomeuta sedella. Early August brought the drab-coloured Torticoids, Endothenia ustulana (Bugle Marble) and a probable Cydia fagiglandana (Large Beech Piercer) to the garden. The latter species is close to C. splendana and, if confirmed, would be another new Anglesey record.

The rather spectacular, transluscent, white Palpita vitrealis (Olive Tree Pearl) came to light in the garden in mid-August. I had seen many an illustration of this distinctive migrant Pyralid but never the moth itself. This moth arrived after a period of quite warm, humid north easterly winds and so is likely to have come from the east rather than the more usual southerly direction for migrants. Around the same time Derek Cawthorne trapped an Old Lady at Wern y Wylan.

The lack of records suggest that this large Noctuid is uncommon (I have only trapped it once in nearly 50 years) but apparently it is only weakly attracted to light but visits sugar much more readily. An incentive to do more sugaring!

Following an unsettled start to September there was a period of warmth and dryness, with some migrant activity, giving rise to a number of Vestal records from various sites on the island, along with Dark Sword-grass, Rush veneer and Udea ferrugalis (Rusty-dot Pearl). On 14th September a trapping session at Tyddyn Adda, Llanddaniel, in perfect conditions yielded a variety of moths from marshland and woodland edge. Interesting species included Brindled Green, Brindled Ochre and the migratory Gem. Green Carpets were unusually abundant at the site.

The rest of the autumn was mostly unsettled and wet and while there was the usual spectrum of autumnal moths there were no further notable periods for migration.
FLOWERS IN THE SKY by Tony Pope

Initially it was a love of anything in nature which brought me into contact with butterflies but then quite by chance I came across a Green Hairstreak while leaving the moor after a day on bird of prey surveys, I had never seen one before and a passion was ignited there and then. A desire to see and learn more about these “flowers in the sky” as they are described in older books and manuals. After that day it was a case of researching and finding the rest of them. I have spent a great deal of time and effort to track down all the recognised, resident British species plus one or two additional rarities. I have photographed them all and collected dozens of reference books over a period of time, some are from the 19th century, with dated information and methods to kill the unsuspecting individual caught in a collector’s net. ...in the book, The Butterflies of the British Isles author Richard South says “for the happy dispatch of insects the cyanide bottle is frequently used”.... Now that collecting is quite rightly frowned upon the later books are more politically correct publications with the latest scientific info available, some older copies are signed by their famous author like “L. Hugh Newman” some are famous like Frohawk Vol 1 and 2 which I am sure some butterfly enthusiasts would sell their soul for. One or two are by more recent famous butterfly people such as Mathew Oates, Patrick Barkham and Peter Eeles. I have leaflets, Newsletters and notes, homemade maps and route information...Definitely a passion and an obsession. This brief essay is a way of explaining some of the background which fuels that passion, that obsession. A brief look at how butterflies have been perceived and one or two memories. On butterfly trips I have seen the worst of people...grown men clamouring to get images of a Swallowtail, pushing and shoving to gain the best vantage point...so much so, that to her eternal credit the young lady who had found it kicked the reed stem it was on so it went on its way, away from the irresponsible few!!! ...I have seen the best too..while at a site for Black Hairstreak, notoriously difficult to see at times, a young man arrived with his dad..a very frail, very poorly looking man who had asked his son to bring him to the site so he could see this beautiful butterfly ....those of us on site had been there for hours with very little success but as this man was being pushed in his chair (no mean feat in that place) a newly emerged Black Hairstreak dropped out of the canopy onto a Bramble at head height to the man so that he could almost touch it ..his smile was a
picture ....no one approached and the man took the small pocket camera from round his neck and shakily tried for pics ...it flew off, as they do, so no one else got to take pics and no one cared either ... I will never know if he got them pics but I think everyone there smiled and appreciated that he had the chance. The one butterfly enthusiasts have to see is the Purple Emperor, this stunning butterfly has its own followers, devotees even!! In July 2014 I was lucky to meet and speak to one of these people, a tall immaculately dressed man in his fifties, in white trousers with a Barbour Tattersall shirt (I looked the pattern up) complete with tie, Panama hat, with a Blazer over his arm, he was carrying a small wicker picnic basket and was well spoken with a cut glass accent ....very very posh .. .... “ I come every year from Leicestershire you know, bring my lunch and spend the day with his eminence the Emperor, never miss, tradition, everyone should do it ” . I had seen his eminence earlier and when I saw another one later, I thought of my new friend and agreed, everyone should do this.

Away from the thrill of seeing these beautiful creatures in their habitat and believe me some of them live in the most beautiful parts of our countryside there is a background story of real interest, the way people have admired their beauty, the way generation after generation have perceived butterflies over the centuries...looked at them with reverence, respect and sometimes awe.

We all know the life cycle ...no need to worry , I am not going into scientific detail here but that sequence of change from egg to larva then pupa and the incredible metamorphosis to the last, adult stage , ”the imago “, could have given rise in ancient times to the belief in an afterlife , rebirth and even immortality ...Ancient people were very in tune with nature and butterflies are seen on tombs , jewellery etc in many older cultures including Egypt and the Aztecs.

**In various cultures around the world butterfly symbolism represents the world of the soul or the soul itself.**

There is a belief in the myths and legends of Ireland and other places that Butterflies are the souls of the dead, apparently in Ireland each different colour butterfly has a different interpretation...white is the soul of a child ...yellow will mean success will come your way, while black or brown will mean unfortunate events ...a Blue butterfly is a lucky charm. I
found a mythical story about Midir and Etain while looking this subject up and it was fascinating .... look it up, I have ordered my copy 😊

Aristotle gave the butterfly the name Psyche ..Psyche is the goddess of the soul...in art she is represented as a maiden with the wings of a butterfly.
The French for butterfly is Papillon, a free spirit, free to roam.
In Japan the butterfly represents the young maiden and marital bliss. In China it symbolizes immortality as well as marital bliss.
As in Ireland butterfly colours have various meanings in India ..yellow is hope ..while white signifies good luck.

In his book “The Butterfly Isles “ Patrick Barkham informs us that in the Second World War Jewish children in Nazi concentration camps wrote poems about butterflies and carved them on walls.
I found references to the butterfly being a symbol of the power to change, a sign of recovery as used by addiction therapists ...

“IF nothing ever changed there would be no butterfly “

Butterflies can be creatures of great diversity ...some are very large while some are very small ... some fly high in the treetops while others barely leave the ground....there are species which travel thousands of miles over continents while some do not venture further than twenty yards from where they emerged.....some are so colourful they take your breath away while others are so drab only butterfly enthusiasts will notice them....some species live for barely a few days in the adult form while others live for a year or more ... some species live in a range of habitats others have to have specific ground conditions with specific plants and insects to support their life cycle...some live in long grass, some in short ... some live on rocky terrain others in well maintained gardens, there are species which are so numerous they fill the skies while others are so rare only a few people ever get to see them.

They are vulnerable yet strong ...fragile but hardy
They have dramatic, contrasting names ...
Monarch .... Gatekeeper... Purple Emperor...Dingy Skipper
They are a special being in our world and should be appreciated as such.... some are struggling to survive ..habitat loss , pesticides , global warming ..sheer neglect ....it is time to try and turn that tide and get these creatures back in the forefront of our minds ..to ensure future generations can see them , gasp in awe at their beauty and grace , marvel at the change they go through in the same way earlier generations have.
I have left my favourite Butterfly saying until last a Buddhist saying
A quote which I really believe can be a real source of comfort to people at a time of great sadness and loss.

…” yesterday is a memory, today is a gift, that is why it is called the present. What the caterpillar perceives as the end, to the Butterfly is just the beginning. Everything that has a beginning has an ending. Make your peace with that and all will be well. ‘
Moth trappings were restricted to our back garden, mainly due to the pandemic restricting vehicle use. Numbers were predictably on the low side, but covered the usual range of species, with Hebrew Character being the most common. Small Quaker, Double-striped Pug, Brindled Pug, Brown Silver-line, Buff Ermine and Scarce Umber put in a good innings.

I had 13 new species, which included Streamer, Scorched Wing and Satyr Pug. The rest were micros, including Dysteriocrania subpurpurella, Common Oak Purple, whose leaf mines I found on Oaks in Cwm Bowydd.

I thought I saw Orange Underwings, also in Cwm Bowydd. I had a very fleeting glimpse of two orangish moths twirling together as they dashed past. As there were no Birches in the immediate vicinity, this has to remain unconfirmed until I get a chance to look in 2021. A Garden Carpet caterpillar was found feeding on the Water Cress in our greenhouse, and we had a Humming-bird Hawkmoth on Buddleja in August. Another pleasing daytime find was a Buff Arches, sitting on a front door in another part of town.

The moth highlight was the large numbers of Scarce Umber in our High Street at the end of November. Most years there are usually a few, trapped by the street lights. There were as many as 40, along the 180m section from our house to the Co-op. They were on pavements, walls and shopfronts, predominantly near street lamps. The poor things were trapped there for several days, many getting trampled. Presumably the females are on the trees, of which there are three near our house and more by the Co-op. I saw a few elsewhere in town, but not in these numbers. Despite the restrictions, my exercise walks were able to take me to a lot of my routine butterfly recording areas. Numbers were considerably down, except during the very early hot spell, when Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells were common. I had a good time finding and counting Orange Tip eggs. I found Green Hairstreak in two of my familiar sites at the end of April and the end of May, just two on each occasion. There was a smattering of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in the usual places.
The highlight of the year for me was Dark Green Fritillary, two this time, in exactly the same spot in Cwm Bowydd as 2018’s find. Last year we had some Russian Kale in our veg patch, some of which we enjoyed, while the rest of it supported a healthy colony of Large and Small White caterpillars. At the end of March this year on an occasion when our bathroom window, a modern double-glazed unit, was open, I found a freshly emerged female Large White sitting inside the frame. Within the hollow section at the top was the empty chrysalis case. This window is on the first floor, about 15 metres from the veg patch, quite a march for a caterpillar, which must have arrived when the window was open. Equally amazing is that she emerged while it was also open. After a rest, and releasing meconium, I watched as she did the characteristically confused maiden flight high above the garden and then landed, with what looked like relief, on a nearby tree. This was really too early for the species, being forced, I suppose, by the domestic conditions. Large Whites aren’t common around here and during the next couple of weeks I had several sightings in the town, of what I imagined might have been “mine”! The only others I recorded all year were one in Cwm Bowydd in June and one at Gwaith Powdwr at the end of July. In April I found an emergent male Small White sitting on the garden path next to the veg patch.

It was a real treat to find a male Meadow Brown, emergent, in our garden at the end of June, on my strip of long grass along the edge of the lawn, left for just such a purpose. I could tell he was freshly emerged by his appearance and behaviour. He was quite happy to wander onto my finger, do some meconium, and sit patiently on the bush to which I directed him. Eventually he performed his maiden flight. We normally get only Whites and Vanessids in the garden, so this was delightful proof that his mother must have visited last year. There was a Ringlet in the garden at end of July, the same day we found the Garden Carpet caterpillar. I saw several Large Skippers, mainly lone individuals in scattered locations, and one each of Wall and Small Copper, the latter being in a place where I nearly always see at least one. The only Grayling of the year was during my visit to Gwaith Powdwr, where I also had my "fix" of Gatekeepers, which don’t usually occur up here.

As I finish this article, snow has been falling, reminding me of all those eggs, larvae, pupae and adults in hibernation, waiting to delight us all when the time and weather are right.
2021
LEPIDOPTERAN CROSSWORD – Mostly! No2
By Paul Board

1 __________ _ primaria, Early Moth, so named as it often appears as early as January (6)
5 Small __________ _ (Photo 1) (6)
9 Elemental symbol of the precious metal in the name of 8 Down (2)
10 Poison once used in 'Killing Jars' of butterfly collectors (7)
11 Somewhere in the garden where you might find a hibernating butterfly (4)
12 Acidity/alkalinity scale invented by the director of the Carlsberg brewery laboratory in 1909 (2)
13 Home continent of the Swallowtail Papilio xuthus (4)
14 Oruga antiqua, a day-flying moth named after its invisible scent trail (8)
17 Cistus __________ _ (Photo 2) (8)
19 Book about rewilding by George Monbiot (5)
21 Orthosis __________ _ , Northern Drab Moth (5)
22 Lomographia __________ _ , Clouded Silver Moth (8)
24 Name of a moth and a herb historically used in absinthe (8)
26 Plant that precedes ‘Dagger’, ‘Leopard’, and ‘Tussock’ moths (4)
29 Aglais __________ _ , butterfly in Photo 3 (2)
30 See 8 Down (4)
32 Feature highlighted in Photo 3 (7)
33, 7 Down __________ _ Daisy, Leucanthemum vulgare, a butterfly-friendly plant (2)
34 US conservationist whose book Silent Spring alerted the world to the damaging environmental effects of pesticides (6)
35 Common __________ _ Beetle, referred to on page 23 (6)

Across

1 Brown Fritillary, a butterfly to which 25 Down is dedicated (4)
3 See 15 Down (5)
4 Vanessa __________ _ , both parts of this binomial being the subjects of a poem by Jonathan Swift (Photo 4) (8)
5 __________ _ crawlies, a child's term for some insects and spiders (6)
6 Grazing land (7)
7 See 33 Across (3)
8, 30 Across Butterfly in Photo 5 (6-7, 4)
9 Butterfly Conservation's iRecord Butterflies has one (3)
15, 3 Down __________ _ , Butterfly Conservation Reserve near Ruthin and home to 3 species of Fritillary (6, 5)
16 Genus of large butterfly, named after the Greek god of dreams, once highly prized by collectors, the largest (M. hercuba) having a wingspan of 20 cm (6)
18 Endangered food plant of the butterfly shown in Photo 6 (3)
20 Gemstones also describing various British moths (of which there are 9 species), including 'Blotched', 'Common', 'Grass', and 'Sussex' (8)
23 Silky case spun by the larvae of the Bombyx mori moth (6)
25 __________ _ Allotment, Butterfly Conservation Reserve in Lancashire (5)
27 Type of skipper first recorded in The Entomologist in 1890 and named after the English county where it was discovered (5)
28 __________ _ Moth, Macrostemum rubi, named after its rich reddish-brown colour (3)
29 Williams, Welsh Naturalist, writer and TV Presenter (4)
31 Meadow (3)
#GREEN Butterfly Conservation: Developing Places, Delivering for People

We are writing to ask for your help on an exciting new project that will help Butterfly Conservation become more inclusive, broaden its reach and ensure its sustainability. To help Butterfly Conservation protect, conserve and increase butterfly and moth recovery they need to work with others and want to increase their volunteer capacity and stakeholder engagement to do this.

With funding from the Welsh Government Green Recovery Grant, the #GREEN Butterfly Conservation – Developing Places, Delivering for People project will:

1. Build our understanding of and strengthen the existing volunteer network.
2. Identify new approaches to attract new audiences and volunteers across Wales.
3. Identify approaches, tools and materials to better engage with young people, under-represented groups and Welsh speakers.
Planning Aid Wales (www.planningaidwales.org.uk) has been commissioned to deliver this important project and would like to hear your views!

**Survey**
As a valued Butterfly Conservation member / volunteer in Wales, the project team would really benefit from hearing from you. You can provide your comments by using the link below:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk/bcsurvey

The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. If you can add any further comments on your experiences this will be particularly useful to the study.

**Please therefore provide us with as much information as you can via the survey. All answers will be treated with complete confidence; no personal information will be shared with others (see privacy notice within the survey).**

Please provide your comments by the 14th June 2021. If you would like to download a word version of the survey to complete, please click the link on the webpage. Alternatively, please email deb@planningaidwales.org.uk and a copy can be sent to you – the survey is available in English & Welsh (please state your preference).

Thank you very much for your time. We look forward to hearing from you.

*Planning Aid Wales Project Team*
2021

Butterfly and Moth Events 2021

Monday 7th June & first Monday of every month 7pm
North Wales Moth Group Meeting
Come along to our monthly meeting whether you’re a time-served trapper, a beginner or just want to know more – and we even talk about other wildlife! All welcome.
Pensychnant Conservation Centre, Sychnant Pass, Conwy, LL32 8BJ. (GR: SH 752 770)
Contact Julian Thompson for more information 01492 592595

Friday 25th June 10pm-11.30pm  Glow-worms and Moths
Essentially an event to see these glowing beetles on the Great Orme but come to see the variety of moths attracted to the moth traps. Bring torch.
Meet at Pump House Shelter, West Shore, Llandudno (GR: SH 770 822)
Booking essential with Mark at 07505214073 / mark.sheridan.mgc@gmail.com

Sunday 27th June 2-4pm  The Great Orme ‘Kaleidoscope’
This short ramble will give ample opportunity to view the spectacle of the Orme race of silver-studded blue butterflies and other wildlife on this special headland.
Llandudno: West Shore Toll House (GR:SH 768 823)
Booking Essential with Mark at mark.sheridan.mgc@gmail.com / 07505 214073

Thursday 8th - Sunday 11th July  National Moth Night
We will trap and do some dusting from 9pm on Thursday. On Friday at 11am, we’ll examine the catch with a cuppa. Discover that moths are not just boring and brown. Theme – Reedbeds and Wetlands.
Held at Pensychnant  Contact Julian Thompson on 01492 592595 for info.

Saturday 10th July  Clearwing Search at Minera Quarry
Andrew Graham will lead us in search of the Lunar Hornet and Six Bordered Clearwing moths - two wasp-mimics - by using pheromone lures. Both are common in Minera Quarry – but good weather needed!
Meet at NWWT car park at SJ258519, at the end of Maes y Ffynnon Road
Booking Essential - Contact Ian Gorton via Facebook

Sunday 18th July 2-4pm  Bryn Eury’s Lepidopteran Delights
Paul Board will lead us along his regular butterfly transect route to see day-flying moths, butterflies and other wildlife – after checking the moth trap put out overnight. Spectacular views from the top.
Meet at 122, Dinerth Road, Rhos on Sea (SH 827 802)
Booking Essential with Mark at mark.sheridan.mgc@gmail.com / 07505 214073

Weekend 24th-25th July  Ashworth’s Rustic Weekend
Our annual search for Pensychnant’s rarest moths the Ashworth’s Rustic and Weaver’s Wave. Traps set at 9pm - stay all night!! Or come at 11am on Sunday to see the catch over a cuppa.
Held at Pensychnant  Contact Julian Thompson on 01492 592595 for info.
North Wales Branch AGM/Members’ Day
Saturday 9th October 2021 2pm via Zoom

The North Wales Branch AGM/Members’ Day will be held at 2.00pm on Saturday 9th October. Due to the uncertainty of the situation regarding Covid we have decided, this year, to hold the meeting online. The meeting will comprise a brief AGM followed by a talk by local lepidopterist Vic Hitchings. Vic gave a very well received talk at one of our Members’ Days a few years ago entitled “Around the World in Eighty Butterflies.” This time he will be concentrating on those species that can be found in North Wales.

The program will be as follows.

2.00pm Brief AGM.
2.20 pm Election of Officers.
2.30pm The Butterflies of North Wales  Vic Hitchings.
Vic’s talk will start with an overview of the butterfly fauna of North Wales, then look at how to differentiate the species, briefly review the common species and finally examine some of the less common (or even rare) species and where to see them.

3.30pm (Approx) Close.

This event will be presented on-line via the Zoom app and you will need a desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone to view but is not necessary to have a webcam or microphone.

To book your place, please send an e-mail request to mark.sheridan.mgc@gmail.com

Ilija Vukomanovic  Branch Chairman

Welcome

to all our new members who have joined during the past year.
We look forward to meeting you at an event or our AGM.

WE NEED YOU

If you would like to know more about your committee, become involved in any of its activities, or maybe even join us, please let us know. Find contact details on the back page – we’d love to hear from you!
THE WIDER COUNTRYSIDE BUTTERFLY SURVEY

The Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS) is probably one of Butterfly Conservation’s less well-known recording schemes. It is widely accepted within ecology that wildlife monitoring isn’t something which should only occur on nature reserves but is rather something which needs to happen across all habitats in order to create a reliable picture. The WCBS aims to fill in the gaps left behind by traditional butterfly surveys which tend to focus on butterfly rich areas, or those which are being actively managed for butterflies.

Within North Wales there are 45 1km squares which have been selected at random and vary in habitat from moorland, to urban fringe with everything in between. Sadly, of those 45 squares, only about 50% have ever been surveyed, and some of those are no longer being surveyed, meaning a gap in the data for the sites. This year I would like to get the most volunteers out as is possible, to gather more WCBS data, it is the perfect excuse for going out for a walk on a nice weather day and shouldn’t be too taxing! Some of the squares simply have a data gap, whereas others have never been surveyed before, so who knows exactly what you might find out there?

If you would like to help, it is simply a case of getting in touch with your location, or areas which you pass/visit regularly (contact details at the bottom), if there are available squares local to you or these areas then the details will be sent across for you to select as many as you would like to survey. The survey method asks for 2 visits per square to walk a transect and record any butterflies seen, one each in July and August, but additional visits are also welcomed. The data is then entered onto a centralised system for analysis.

Interested? Contact Amy Green at wildswimmingwolf@gmail.com
TRAPPED IN LOCKDOWN by Paul Board

Many of us turned our hands to other things last year, some through necessity, some through just being ‘confined to barracks’ for a while. Ironically as the daily news briefings got ever worse and our world was turned upside down, nature flourished, and we were treated to the sunniest British spring on record.

With lockdowns, amateur naturalists like me were forced to get to know their ‘local patch’ in greater detail rather than taking the No 12 bus further afield. And what could be more local than the garden? ‘Dig for Britain’ comes to mind for me, turning our little garden into a fruit and veg plot (albeit a humble one and thank goodness for Battys Nursery home deliveries). But not just that. Thanks to my near neighbour and good friend Anna Griffiths and the periodic loan of her kit, after previous encounters with day-flying moths during my Bryn Euryn butterfly transects, I was introduced to the arcane art of moth-trapping the more nocturnal varieties, using an actinic lamp and plenty of egg boxes.

Our cottages are nestled at the base of Bryn Euryn in Rhos-on-Sea. As a non-Welsh speaker, I like to believe that ‘Bryn Euryn’ means ‘Hill of Gold’. And after all, an old term for lepidopterists is ‘Aurelians’, meaning ‘the golden ones.’ However, a more prosaic translation could be ‘Hill of Plums’ (and I have had the pleasure of foraging from a few damson trees on the hill). Perhaps a reader could put me right! Either way, with mixed woodland and unimproved limestone grassland above us, our cottages attract a fair variety of wildlife and see Anna’s article in this issue. Moths (and other creepy crawlies that made it into the trap) were no exception. From the LBJs to the real show-offs of the moth world, the Dun-bar (left) to the Elephant Hawkmoth. Beetles like the magnificent Cockchafer (above) or the Common Sexton (below). As a beginner, and with the help of friends and Field Guide, I focussed on the macros rather than the micros (although the distinction between the two is not always clear-cut), checking both looks and sizes against Richard Lewington’s superb to-scale illustrations before releasing my quarry. Identification was sometimes tricky if not downright dubious. Not all moths are in as pristine a condition as the illustrations! Like a
stamp-collector, I peppered my Field Guide with little sticky dots against each species I’d seen (including the Peppered Moth - left). As a cruciverbalist, I am fascinated by words and their provenance (you may have guessed that already). And etymology and entomology make quite a combination, particularly when it comes to the sometimes archaic lexicon of lepidoptery. ‘Butterfly’ is both an anagram and Spoonerism of ‘flutterby’ (anagrams and Spoonerisms being two of the tricks up the sleeves of cryptic crossword compilers). I have yet to weave ‘Cryptic Wood White’-into one of my puzzles but one day I won’t be able to resist the urge. I assume it’s called ‘Cryptic’ as it took DNA analysis to separate it as a species, a technique I am sure far less onerous than the tried and tested microscopic dissection and comparison of the most intimate and intricate genitalia, which was also used. (Note the crossword in this issue is not cryptic, but for any gluttons for punishment reading this, I am sure it could be arranged for another issue, subject of course to editorial approval).

As for the binomials (and you’ll see some in the crossword-sorry!), I wish my Latin stretched further than the two years of lessons I had as an 11 and 12 year-old at Ilminster Boys’ Grammar School before it closed (like many Grammar Schools did in the early 1970s). Google Translate doesn’t do Latin (I checked). And some of those Linnaean and post-Linnaean creations are just all Greek to me. Did you know that the superb Morpho butterflies (unfortunately not residents of the British Isles) get their name from the Greek god of dreams Morpheus (who also gives his name to morphine)?

On the rare occasions when dreams evade me, I have a trick. I run through words on a particular theme in my mind, A through to Z, and I’m often pushing up the Zzzs before I finish. Be it dog breeds, birds I have seen, or countries I have visited. Yet so far, the letter X is a disappointment (no country beginning with an X, though I once had the pleasure of swimming in the azure waters off the seaside resort of Xlendi in Gozo). Why this digression? Fret no more my friend, the treasure trove of lepidoptery hits every letter! OK, you may have to resort to the scientific names, but the majority of the micro-moths have no common names anyway.

Whether common name or scientific, with a little detective work*, they provide back stories far more fascinating than any X-Factor could fabricate. By way of example (and I was lucky enough to trap a couple), let’s return to the Elephant Hawkmoth (above), once known simply as ‘The Elephant.’ Nothing remotely elephantine about the moth, but the
caterpillar looks like a trunk. OK, that’s easy. What about the scientific name? *Deilephila elpenor*. *Deilephila*? Evening-loving. *Elpenor*? Elpenor was a character in Homer’s *Odyssey*, being turned into a pig by Circe after he fell off a roof in a drunken stupor. Why pig? The moth, if you look, has quite a rotund body.

I look forward to another year of lepidoptery, moths perhaps from the rare Ashworth’s Rustic (discovered by Joseph Ashworth in Llangollen in 1855) to the common *Zeuzera pyrina* (Leopard Moth), either in the early hours in the garden, or day-flyers and flutterbies on the (hopefully) sunny ‘golden’ slopes of Bryn Euryn. (And completing my soporific A to Z in real life).
Thanks again Anna!

* I googled ‘Columbo Butterfly’ just in case there was a Columbo butterfly (you’d think there’d be a fair chance, wouldn’t you?). Instead I got ‘Butterfly in Shades of Grey’. Apparently the eighth episode in Season 10. The mind boggles.
(All photos taken by Paul Board)

Reference material -
INTRODUCING MYSELF AS THE NEW CMR FOR VC49 by Bruce Richmond-Hurst

I would just like to say hello to everyone and introduce myself, as the new vice county moth recorder for VC49 (Caernarvonshire.) I have taken on this role after being invited to do so, by Julian Thompson my predecessor. I am proud to have the opportunity to embark upon this important role. I am still learning the ropes as such, so I do ask for your patience! I have been studying moths, making records and ‘mothing’ for about seven years. I will endeavour to answer your moth queries of macro moths and with the help of Andrew Graham answer queries concerning micro moth, leaf mines and various stages of moth life cycles. I will also gladly accept your moth records.

The Vice County 49 area includes, the mainland parts of Gwynedd and Conwy, from the Llyn Peninsula to just North of Porthmadog, above Meirionethshire (VC48) and stretching across the area to Llandudno including Snowdonia, Caernarfon and Bangor to the edge of Denbighshire (VC50.) If you are unsure if you are within the VC49 boundary, you can check by using the North Wales Lepidoptera Database run by Andrew Graham at http://www.trawsgoed.com/ and clicking on vice counties.

If you wish to submit moth records to me, I will verify them for you and include them into the VC49 Moth Database on behalf of Butterfly Conservation, to gather and maintain data for the NMRS. If you want to submit records and you kindly do so, you still own your submitted data however, you are agreeing to making that data accessible to whoever wishes to use it for scientific purposes. You may enter records either by publishing them on iRECORD, LERC, COFNODE or by downloading one of the spreadsheets developed by Andrew Graham at the North Wales Lepidoptera Database. The latter will require you to use EXCEL from MICROSOFT, which does require payment to MICROSOFT of course. If you do not want to buy EXCEL, you can use the formats of iRecord and COFNODE which are free. If you wish to submit using the medium of Welsh, then you can use COFNODE. I am not set up to use MAPMATE I’m afraid. If there is anything I can help you with including moth identification, feel free to contact me by email bruce.richmond51@yahoo.co.uk

Anyway, best wishes and happy mothing, let us hope the weather remains warm and conducive to mothing! All the best, Bruce.

A Screenshot of our last North Wales Moth Meeting in May with Bruce in the bottom right. We've held these on Zoom during the Lockdowns over the past year. Many thanks to all who zoomed and shared their moths at our meetings.
A YEAR IN A COUNTRY GARDEN
(or ‘you’ll never guess what I’ve just seen!’)
by Trefor Thompson

Our garden is a little oasis of wildlife friendliness in a fairly intensively farmed part of the Vale of Clwyd. At almost one and a half acres there is enough space to create a range of habitats that, hopefully, might appeal to a wide variety of species of all types. In that space we have trees of all ages, a little wood of native species, uncut grassland, a pond, orchard, lots and lots of nettles, thistles and other tall herbs and a succession of flowering plants in the more formal areas. A range of old outbuildings are favoured by the swallows and the occasional barn owl as well as over-wintering butterflies. Developed over 30 years from predominantly grazing land (a few sheep and a pony were the previous owner’s way of keeping the area under control) the transformation has amazed us and has been extremely successful. The birds that now visit us regularly include flocks of colourful goldfinches and lovely little siskins in great numbers. Bramblings and fieldfares come every winter and swallows, house martins, willow warblers and spotted flycatchers return every summer to nest and raise their young. Until recently swifts nested over a window but as is the trend they have now disappeared. Occasional rarities (for us) have included a hawfinch, skylark and a group of five reed buntings. On the mammal side we have badgers regularly visiting and stoats and weasels appear occasionally. Sadly, rarely a hedgehog any more but we keep trying to provide the right cover. Frogs, newts, and toads in abundance and invertebrates too numerous to mention including over 100 moths including the spectacular hummingbird hawk moth, garden tiger, elephant hawk and small elephant hawk moths.

However, it is the butterflies that are the focus of this article and those which occurred in one year in particular – 2018. Whilst we have always been interested in butterflies our enthusiasm really took off after reading Patrick Barkham’s popular work ‘The Butterfly Isles’ back in 2012. From then on we started to look much more carefully at what was around us and to adapt several areas to improve the butterfly habitat. So far, we have recorded 21 species in the garden. Averaging around 14 species each year 2018 turned out to be a bumper year notching 18 species.
The year started quite normally with the usual spring sightings - holly blues, orange tips
and other whites, speckled woods and peacocks in April through May. But it was July that turned out to be the really remarkable month, and one unlike any others before or since. The first meadow brown had appeared on the 5th followed by a ringlet the next day. Then a small tortoiseshell a couple of days later which, in that year and in this area, was unusual as the numbers had plummeted and were worryingly low. A week later having completed my morning prowl around the garden I first uttered those immortal words – ‘you’ll never guess what I’ve just seen’. It was a white letter hairstreak feeding on creeping thistle flowers. An absolute first for this garden or indeed, as far as we know, for anywhere in the immediate vicinity. We know they are at Pool Park and Eyarth Rocks a few miles away. It stayed a couple of days and was gone.

The next time those words were spoken was three days later when I was able to triumphantly announce that we had a dark green fritillary feeding on the spear thistle flowers in what we fondly refer to as one of our wilderness areas. Now that was unexpected as the nearest site where they thrive is Eyarth about three miles away. Maybe it had strayed from there and we were fortunate enough to have seen it on its travels. But there was more to come in an even less probable form. This time we were both pottering around outside when I spotted ‘it’. Hurtling round to the back garden those famous words tumbled out almost hysterically to which my other half replied with commendable and remarkable calmness ‘was it a clouded yellow?’ Well yes it was, and that response floored me as she had just seen it before it reached me. An extraordinary chance encounter of a species rarely recorded in north Wales and even less so in the Vale of Clwyd. This little insect was moving a great speed (as they do) in a dead straight line heading very determinedly northwards. The chances of us both being on its flight path at that precise moment is in itself incredibly small. But there it was, one of just a handful of clouded yellows recorded in north Wales that year.

‘You’ll never guess what I’ve just seen’ had one more airing that summer some three weeks later when a small copper turned up in our little meadow. Another unlikely species as their favoured sorrel is not found around here. So ended an extraordinary year. 2019 reverted to some degree of normality though of note was the rare appearance of a wall brown (we are lucky to see this species more than once a year). Enjoying the moment as it basked on a (stone) wall it eventually took off when, enter stage right, a male blackcap plucked our little wall brown in mid-flight. Maybe we should be thankful that the said blackcap wasn’t around the previous summer!
AMAZING 2020 SUCCESSES FOR HIGH BROWN & OTHER FRITS
by Richard Smith & Paul Dunn

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 27th & 28th 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.

![Trio of large frits (all HBFs), two in copulation, on Old Castle Down, P Dunn.](image1)

![Different trio of large frits nectaring, two SWFs with an HBF, Alun valley, R G Smith.](image2)

• **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!”
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!
INTERESTING SPECIES & SOCIAL MEDIA IN LOCKDOWN by Jan Miller

Having just taken over as butterfly Vice County Recorder for the Flintshire and Denbighshire Victorian Vice Counties — (which turns out to include most of modern-day Conwy and Wrexham too)— just before the Covid-19 pandemic curtailed many of our recording activities in 2020, it has been a difficult time to get a handle on what the strange weather changes are also showing. Trying to get my head round our local biological Record Centre Cofnod’s database (with the amiable help of staff Aisling and Richard) began to reveal that in fact we simply don’t have enough records on a county basis to make generalisations. So, this is a plea to you to SEND IN MORE RECORDS!

The Vice Counties of North Wales

This map shows the boundaries of all the Vice-Counties covered by Cofnod’s area. The central black line indicates the old border between Gwynedd and Clwyd, which is used to divide the recording area for some recording groups.

You may not feel competent enough to tell the difference between some species, but most of us carry a smart phone with a pretty good camera these days and if you try to get a photo of the underside of any butterfly that will help clinch its ID in our part of the
LERC phone app.

- Makes recording so much easier for everyone!
- https://www.lercwales.org.uk/app.php

world. Now you can just send your record into Cofnod directly using the LERC app on your phone- find it for free on the Cofnod home page https://www.cofnod.org.uk/Home (you can also send in photos of anything else like wildflowers, beetles, birds, fungi, etc. – good fun on a walk)

The most important thing in my small locked-down neck of the woods was a very early and very warm spring. This meant some scarce species appearing as adults early enough, and in good numbers, to produce a second generation later in the year, which has been unheard of in my experience of the last 20 years. First surprise was the sudden appearance of large numbers of Essex Skipper on the North Cheshire/Wales border. I was alerted to this from the BC Cheshire Branch Facebook page. Then Andrew Graham (County Recorder for Gwynedd and Marionethshire) went to check on Broughton shopping park and found dozens of them, he said; We did go out today, 24th July 2020, and there were lots of Essex Skippers (20+) at a rather wonderful brown field site just in Flintshire (Broughton Shopping Centre, SJ352639). I should imagine they are now also present in many other parts of North Wales near the border. Funnily enough every one we checked was an Essex Skipper and we didn’t see any Small Skippers. This I shared with various social media groups and this useful ID chart (right) came winging back to me.

Andrew Graham has a particularly useful website to look at for all things Moths and butterflies at- http://www.trawsgoed.com/NWLeps.aspx#

He says in NE Wales our special butterflies to look out for are the special county butterflies: Grizzled Skipper, Silver-studded Blue, univoltine Brown Argus, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Silver-washed Frit and now Essex Skipper.
Now I have a particular interest in Fritillaries as that is what first piqued my interest when I went to Eyrath Rocks, near Ruthin to see the rare Pearl-bordered fritillaries and Grizzled Skippers, before it was a BC reserve, with Rob Whitehead in the late 1980s. In those days the peak flight period was the first week of June. Since the 2000's it has been the last week of May, and this year it was even earlier (we think, because we were not allowed to go up and see as most of us lived more than 5 miles away during the flight period which fell in the height of the lockdown!) Facebook came to my rescue! The North Wales BC Branch page has been full of photos from lots of people showing what species they have seen on their patch. Luckily, we had this from Al Wilkinson that 17th May 2020 showing a well-worn (and thus old) individual.

‘Hi Jan, I did make it up to Eyrath Rocks again on 20th. May and counted 14 PBF between 15:48 & 16:18.’

So, I sent out some questions to BC staff in other areas -

‘Hi Clare and Richard,

Interesting little bit more info about PBF numbers at Eyrath Rocks this year, have there been other reports of PBF being that much earlier? The SPBF and DK Green up here are at least 3 to 5 weeks earlier than normal.’

Richard Fox, BC staff at Head office said - ‘Many species are running two weeks early in terms of their first UK sightings at present. We missed the start of the PBF flight period due to lockdown, so I don’t know whether it was particularly early down here or not, I’m afraid. Best wishes Richard’

Clare Williams, now BC staff looking after Welsh reserves, said, ‘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 Eyrath 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’.

Here are graphs from the Cofnod data of our local Fritillaries for the last 5 years. These butterfly caterpillars all feed on Dog violets (Viola riviniana) and Marsh violet (Viola palustris) in the case of Small Pearl-bordered fritillary, which means it has been able to migrate to wetter areas and has done better in the last 5 years that any of the others. (The books say some other viola species can be used, but I have not found that locally yet).
Basically, you can see that they have all shifted their peak flight period to a month earlier. At the same time butterflies on the continent are going up mountains and coming north to find their optimum temperature range. This means, according to Prof. Chris Thomas (brother of Jeremy of Large Blue fame) that Britain could become a special reserve for many species that have been living further south for 1000s of years. Which is quite an exciting thought! And why I am growing larval foodplants for some of them, to be ready!

A WhatsApp group was started by our local naturalists on Halkyn Mountain (less than 5 miles from me) and meant we could keep each other informed of special sightings – including orchids and other rare wildflowers, fungi, birds and butterflies, then we could meet and keep socially distanced walk to show them to each other.

[14:33, 02/06/2020] Jan Miller: ‘well that was a very good Timed Count at the Rhes y Cae Triangle- 21 SPBF in 30mins., plus 14 Small Heath and 1 Common Blue’ - we got the grid ref on our phones and sent into the record centre using the LERC app.
Ieuan ap Sion lives across the road from this site and had loads of them on Sweet Rocket (Hesperis matronalis) in his garden (see pic right). In previous years we have only counted 2 or 3 SPBFs there, plus the occasional single Dark Green Frit and Silver-washed Frit. There are great mats of dog violets under the edge of the gorse and bracken where the sheep can’t get in to graze them off. This is why gorse and bracken are so important for the habitat of these rare fritillaries! Many volunteers on reserves seem to think that bracken bashing can be done willy-nilly because it is no good for anything; but this really is not true. Rob Whitehead, David Hinde and I did some experiments on this some years ago and I wrote it up and presented as a poster at the International Symposium of the Future of Butterflies in Europe in the Netherlands in 2012.

National Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary UK trends as follows:
Abundance from UKBMS: 68% decrease (1976-2017)
Distribution trend from BNM: 76% decrease (1976-2014)

We did ask them if a new designation was possible but NRW said funding is just not going to cover that at present. We local naturalists are sure that the sudden increase in SPBF and Dark Green Frit. as well as wild Bee orchids, Frog orchid, Lesser Butterfly and other orchids plus birds like Grasshopper Warbler, Sky Lark, Barn Owl, Red Kite, Peregrine, Kestrel etc. is all due to the reduced grazing due to it not being profitable anymore. Unfortunately, NRW and Flintshire CC have secured funding from the Welsh government to put in new cattle grids and subsidise the graziers to put more sheep on again – principally because they are afraid that scruppling over will just cause them more contractors’ expense in a few years’ time. They say stocking density is down to about 1,000 animals now and they want to increase it to 1,500 or more. They also plan to roll bracken (under which the dog violets grow, just like at Eyarth Rocks) and clear gorse. Stocking density was well over 2000 animals in the 1990s. It is going to be even more important to establish regular species/habitat monitoring schemes if the sheep grazing pressure is going to increase to 1600 animals.

I sent these concerns to head of research at BC HQ, he replied -

‘That does sound challenging Jan – and meaningful evidence from the reduced grazing though need to appreciate that those orchids were already there and have just become more visible but if the sward goes further the other way they might not persist? It’s the difficulty of habitats that become better by relaxing the grazing but can only be like that if there is the precursor heavier grazing. The need for pulse grazing is increasingly appreciated but the mechanisms are so elusive especially for big sites. This recent British Wildlife article on chalk grasslands highlights issue. The presence of violets other than those under bracken may itself be dependent on sufficient grazing / disturbance. Also,
the key plants of Calaminarian grassland seem to be small and needing short open
swards and relaxed grazing could be considered a negative for that. The SAC and SSSI
interests will trump the presence of SPBF and those birds in terms of priorities for
management rationale. The Common Land status will be a big challenge for this site and
the means of controlling the grazing (assume is just sheep?) will be in hands of NRW &
FCC and dependant on whether they want to take on the challenge of setting up an
agreed and regulated management scheme for the common if one doesn’t already exist?
The fear of scrubbing over of large sites does loom large.
Meanwhile for SPBF perhaps we can only focus on identifying the key bracken areas they
need and getting agreement to not have them managed with an eradication objective –
i.e. just period intervention for preventing spread. And keep up the monitoring- that will
provide the data that will help discussions and the setting of a management rationale
and approach.’ Best wishes, John Davis.

As for Marsh Fritillary (Euphydryas aurinia) which has become extinct over 60 percent of
its former range in the UK over the past 30 years (not the same family as the other
fritillaries and does not feed on violets and no longer occurs in North East Wales but used
to be common in Flintshire up until the 1960s).
Andrew Graham said ‘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. 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. I did see a few Brimstones at Minera and
people are reporting them from all over the place these days. One site in particular, Marl
Hall Woods, has a good population and it turns out that a garden plant, Rhamnus
alaternus, (known as Italian or Mediterranean Buckthorn) has gone rampant there. You
are the expert on this subject. Do you think this plant is widely grown in gardens
nowadays and this could account for all the Brimstone sightings from areas without the
wild food plants? I think it’s built-up areas that seem to have the butterfly so that would
make sense. (We do know that Brimstones wander widely and turn up anywhere on
occasion’

I also saw more Brimstones this year- patrolling my specially planted hedge of Purging
Buckthorn, but I don’t know this shrub – have you seen it locally?

So those are some of the interesting bits I have received over the year- please join our
Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/groups/277847912412601/ to join the
discussions and add your photos! E-mail me Jan Miller at Jan@wells.co.uk or visit my
website at www.7wells.co.uk where you can obtain lots of butterfly and moth plants.
BUTTERFLIES OF MONTGOMERYSHIRE (VC47)

The document available to view on the Butterfly Conservation North Wales website here https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/butterflies_of_montgomeryshire_2021_compressed.pdf outlines the butterfly species recorded in Montgomeryshire, focusing on the county status of each species and their basic biology, rather than their identification.

Montgomeryshire (vice-county 47) is relatively under-recorded in terms of butterflies, and as a result, the data used to produce this summary are unlikely to fully reflect a species' distribution.

This document is by no means comprehensive, nor is it a field guide. It has been produced to allow people to ascertain the county status of each species. All butterfly records from around VC47 are very welcome and should be sent to the county butterfly recorder, Douglas Boyes: info@douglasboyes.co.uk

Please feel free to use this email for any identification queries, further information, etc.

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Paul’s CROSSWORD SOLUTION

T H E R I A C O P P E R
I O T S R A Y
A G C Y A N I D E S H E D
P H K L L E T
P A S I A V A P O U R E R
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B L U E O C E L L U S O X
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C A R S O N S E X T O N
County Butterfly and Moth Recorders

Send records by e-mail to the appropriate recorders’ e-mail below.
To check which Vice County (VC) you’re in go to herbariaunited.org/gridrefVC/
Find more at butterfly-conservation.org/110/recording-and-monitoring.html
See records of N. Wales butterflies and moths at trawsgoed.com/NWLeps.aspx

Butterfly Recorders

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Merionethshire VC48, Caernarvonshire VC49 and Anglesey VC52
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Trawscoed, Llanuwchllyn, Bala, Gwynedd LL23 7TD. 01678 540370

Denbighshire VC50 and Flintshire VC51
Jan Miller Jan@7wells.org
Saith Ffynnon Farm, Downing Road, Whitford, Holywell, CH8 9EN. 01352 711 198

Moth Recorders

Montgomeryshire VC47 (All species)
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North Wales Branch

Visit our website at butterfly-conservation.org/304/north-wales-branch.html

- learn more about our North Wales reserve at Eyrath Rocks
- view previous branch newsletters
- discover recommended places for seeing butterflies
- read the latest news from Butterfly Conservation

Join our Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/277847912412601/

- to post your sightings of butterflies and moths
- to ask for help with species identification
- to keep up to date with your local events
- to share interesting Lepidoptera-related news

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Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter.

If you, too, would like to see your article in print, the next newsletter deadline will be 28th February 2022. I look forward to hearing from you with your contribution!