

GWENT RECORDERS' FORUM 2008

The Boardroom, Caerleon Campus, University of Wales
College Newport
Saturday 16th February 2008

Welcome

The day was opened and the Chairman, Martin Anthoney welcomed everybody to the 8th Gwent Recorders' Forum Meeting. A few words were said for Basil Evans who recently passed away, giving thanks for all his work in the Gwent area. Basil will be sadly missed.

South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) update (Adam Rowe)

The Welsh Network of LRCs went "live" in 2007 and this was celebrated with a launch event on 28th November. The gateway website to all four LRCs is available at: www.lrcwales.org.uk

SEWBRc reached the million records mark on 8th January 2008. The landmark record was a bryophyte recorded by Sam Bosanquet: *Sanionia uncinata* (Sickle-leaved Hook-moss) on waste ground in Abersychan.

New Service Level Agreements are confirmed or in progress with Cardiff CC, Neath Port Talbot CBC, Vale of Glamorgan Council and Wye Valley AONB.

SEWBRc has a new website: www.sewbrec.org.uk which has increased functionality, including an Events Calendar and Discussion Forum. Attention was drawn to the Events Calendar and Our Services pages www.sewbrec.org.uk/our-services.page - follow the links to information for Data Suppliers or LBAP. There was also an offer of hosting other groups/organisations' websites (SEWBRc already hosts the Glamorgan Moth Group website).

NBN Gateway: challenges and opportunities

- Potentially important source for displaying and obtaining data at all scales
- Gateway forms UK part of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility
- Access controls can be set to restrict access, but to allow full access to certain approved users
- LRCs in Wales will be starting data uploads of verified CCW datasets this year
- Should we aim to share all data via the NBN Gateway?
- At 1km² resolution or full resolution?

CCW has asked SEWBRc and other LRCs to start a project to verify the accuracy of data extracted from CCW files. Procedures are being drawn up and work will soon be carried out to evaluate the scale of the task. **Help may be required from VC Recordors and other local experts to review records extracted from CCW files. Please let SEWBRc know if you may be prepared to help!** CCW aims to ensure all of its data is made available via the NBN Gateway in future years.

Supporting Recording in SE Wales:

- Various issues for discussion this afternoon
- Future of Gwent Recordors' Newsletter
- Summer Field Meetings
- Discussion of future of Gwent and Glamorgan Recordors' Forum meetings

SEWBRc Staffing update:

Four full time permanent staff

- Adam Rowe – Manager
- David Slade – Senior IT & Biological Records Officer
- Rebecca Davies – Senior Data & Enquiries Officer
- Rebecca Johnson – Data & Enquiries Officer

Two full time temporary staff

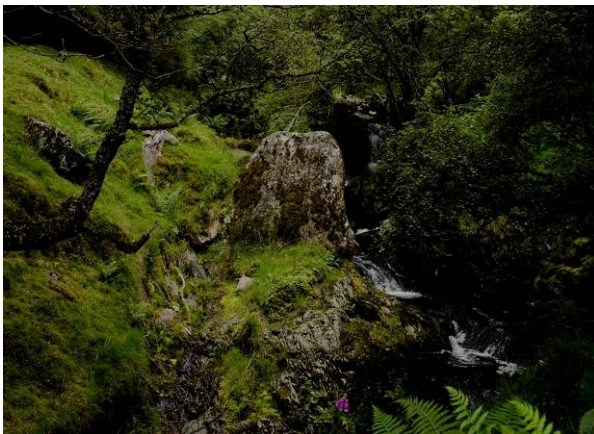
- Lindsay Bamforth – Biodiversity Information Assistant (CCW)
- Emma Koblizek - Biodiversity Information Assistant

Plus increasing numbers of volunteers!

A full electronic version or hard copy of this presentation may be obtained on request from SEWBRc, 13 St Andrews Crescent, Cardiff, CF10 3DB, Tel: 029 2064 1110, E-mail: info@sewbrec.org.uk

TALK

'Climate change and Welsh rivers: hot gossip or sound science?' (Prof. Steve Ormerod)



Why might headwaters be important?

- Increasingly emphasised in legislation (e.g. Directives 92/43/EEC and 2000/60/EC)
- Globally significant functions (solute and energy transport, migratory fishes...)
- Ecotonal nature: interaction with riparian zone (birds, mammals...)
- Extensive habitat network (e.g. > 20,000 km in Wales alone; 80% of UK river length)
- Physically complex: disproportionately large species richness per unit volume, due to physical diversity

Headwaters are likely to be highly climate-sensitive:

- Ecological dependence on hydrology, hydraulics, connectivity, floods/droughts
- Small thermal mass - strong link to air temperature
- Characterised by ectothermic organisms

- Interactions between temperature, oxygen, metabolic activity, growth, development, production, decomposition...
- Likely interactions between climate and other pressures: land-use, flood defence, abstraction, nutrients, acid rain
- Stream ecosystems track large-scale climatic phenomena (e.g. North Atlantic Oscillation)

Evidence from the Llyn Brienne project (established in 1981). We asked:
 Has there been any change in stream temperature or discharge volume?
 Has there been any response in invertebrate composition or abundance?
 How might any climatic effects interact with recovery from acidification?

Conclusions:

- Clear evidence of climate-change effects on streams and stream biodiversity in Wales
- Species-rich streams most sensitive
- Projected future effects on richness are large; rarer, cold-water species most at risk
- Abundances might decline under future climates with consequences for energy transfer
- Greater sensitivity to temperature than discharge, but flood, drought and flow effects are poorly understood
- Acidification is still a large problem in upland Wales & recovery will be affected by climate (warm, wet winters can cancel out 10 years of recovery from acidification)
- Climate monitoring and management in streams is rudimentary: resilience, resistance and adaptation are poorly understood

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RECORDERS' UPDATES

Blaenau Gwent Dipper & Grey Wagtail Project (Dave Cooksey)

Dipper are suffering from a lack of nesting sites in the Blaenau Gwent area, so a project to provide artificial sites by installing nestboxes has been established. Nestboxes are best situated in a position overhanging the river, usually mounted on bridges, but siting on trees may also be effective. Thirty-two boxes have been erected along the River Ebbw & Ebbw Fach, and 10-12 are expected to be occupied by Dipper. DC has also noted a potential Goosander nesting site in a large riverside tree hole.



The area is full of brownfield sites, still recovering from heavy industry, but Dippers are now returning. The main Dipper route up the river at Abertillery was blocked with rubbish (now cleared). The bulk of the River Ebbw runs through some very busy populated areas, but Dipper are present even here. There was no evidence of Dipper at Cwmcelyn, and here they may have been isolated by a long piped stretch of river.

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The South Wales Dormouse Survey (Sorrel Jones)

Dormouse Facts

- Distinctive golden coat and furry tail
- Weighs the same as two £1 coins
- Spends three quarters of its life asleep
- Can live for up to five years

Dormice in Decline

- Dormice have become extinct in half of their former range
- This is thought to be due to changes in woodland management and habitat fragmentation
- They now have legal protection and are a UKBAP priority species

Dormouse Conservation

- Woodland management
- Improving connectivity
- Captive breeding and reintroductions
- Surveying and monitoring populations

You can help! The South Wales Dormouse Survey is asking for volunteers to look for and report dormouse signs in their local woodlands and hedgerows. The data can then be used to help target conservation efforts and protect dormouse habitat.

What to look for

- Collect as many nibbled hazel nuts as you can find!
- Analyse them with a hand lens
- Look for smooth opening with diagonal tooth marks
- Send any that you find to: South Wales Dormouse Survey, Sorrel Jones, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Seddon House, Dingestow, Monmouth, NP25 4DY



Reporting back

- Download a survey pack from www.gwentwildlife.org/dormousesurveynuts.htm
- Make sure you have permission from the landowner
- State clearly where and when you found your hazel nuts
- Don't forget to include your contact details

Nuts nibbled by other small mammals (wood mouse, bank vole, grey squirrel etc) are also useful in providing records. Please include these records in addition: they will be passed to SEWBRc and will be used in compiling the forthcoming South Wales Mammal Atlas!

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Otter spotting in Gwent (Kerry Rogers)

Bridge Survey – looked at spraints as evidence of otter activity at 37 sites along the rivers Sirhowy, Llwyd, Ebbw & Ebbw Fach.

Training Events – there were several last year and it is hoped that there will be more in 2008.

The aim will be to get volunteers get set up with a patch to monitor on a regular basis. The upper valleys in particular will be targeted, as there are large tunneled stretches. In 2007, the sea wall was surveyed, but no evidence was found of otter activity, so it's hoped that it will be possible to re-survey. The group may also start looking at otter diet through spraint analysis.

The Gwent Otter Spotters hope to be more active this year. Do get in touch if you are interested in getting involved. Please forward any records to Kerry Rogers (CCW, Castleton Court, Fortran Road, St Mellons, Cardiff, CF3 0LT, K.Rogers@ccw.gov.uk, 02920 722400) or to Gemma Bodé at the Gwent Wildlife Trust, and these will be passed to SEWBReC.

Gwent's Living Churchyards Project (Rebecca Price)

A three year project covering Gwent. The aims are to:

- Increase awareness of churchyards & burial grounds as sites of value for wildlife.
- Provide support and advice on management.
- Use wildlife and heritage interest to focus community action & get people involved. The aim is to establish 25 churchyard groups - involving local people is key to making the project sustainable!

Churchyards are home to some of our finest displays of wildflowers, veteran trees, mosses & lichens as well as lots of other wildlife, having escaped modern farming methods and artificial fertilizers. They host a variety of key habitats & species: remnant meadowland, bats, dormouse, mistletoe, reptiles, birds.... Of the 1700 British species of Lichen, over 1/3 have been found in churchyards.



What the project can offer- developing skills & interests:

- Help setting up churchyard 'friends of' groups
- Baseline wildlife survey
- Management Plan
- Help developing skills to monitor & manage for wildlife
- TRAINING PROGRAMME
- Help organising local events centred on churchyard – walks, talks
- Links with CFGA project
- Information Pack, Newsletter & website
- Help developing Interpretation
- Yearly Seminar
- Support for grant applications

Progress so far...

- Pilot projects – e.g. Penterry Church, Llandogo, St Mary's Tintern, Grosmont
- Spreading the word & developing links
- Visits to interested groups
- Targeting 'good sites'

How you can help!

- Spread the word – project leaflet, link on your website:
www.gwentwildlife.org/livingchurchyards
- Tell me about churchyards with wildlife appeal! Gwent Wildlife Trust, Seddon House, Dingestow, Monmouth, NP25 4DY (01600 740358) rprice@gwentwildlife.org
- Willing to run a course/give a talk as part of our churchyards training programme? (with remuneration!)
- Willing to input into guidance for churchyard management?
- Happy to be on our list of contacts for groups –for advice/surveys?

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RSPB Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project (Camilla Smith)

The Heads of the Valleys Project

- Project coordinated by RSPB Cymru
- Partnership working with Department for Economics & Transport and Blaenau Gwent CBC
- Aim: '*...creation of a sustainable network of suitably managed sites for breeding lapwing within the Heads of the Valleys area...*'
- Lapwing specific conservation (UK BAP & LBAP species)
- 77% decline between 1988-98
- Targeted habitat management
- Monitoring of breeding populations

The Heads of the Valleys

- Former stronghold for breeding lapwing
- Threats are: habitat loss due to development / lack of management, disturbance (even dog walkers), predation (foxes, small mustelids, corvids, birds of prey)
- Selection of post industrial sites is common



Year 1 of the Project

- Established network of recorders to monitor sites
- Liaison with Local Authorities, Bird Clubs and individual naturalists in the project area
- Supervised contractors on two sites undertaking management work
- Identified management zones for lapwings
- Completed most of the Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Strategy

Lapwing Monitoring

- 30 sites surveyed and compared to historic data.
- Population status was estimated at 31 breeding pairs in the key area.
- Productivity was estimated at 0.19 chicks per pair. (0.7 chicks per pair required to maintain a stable population)
- The range of lapwing was found to have dramatically declined compared to historical data.
- Breeding was not found to occur on all occupied sites.

Lapwing Monitoring Results

- Habitat fragmentation & degradation may be deterministic factors affecting lapwing population dynamics.
- The uncharacteristic weather also has had a negative impact on breeding lapwing in 2007.
- The selection of suboptimal habitats & high corvid densities also has had a negative effect.
- The survey identified lapwing management zones within the key area to use as a basis for targeted habitat management and searches for potential lapwing mitigation/compensation sites.

What next....

- Continuation of lapwing monitoring
- Management of the mitigation areas
- Seek opportunities for new lapwing breeding habitat e.g A465 dualling
- Draw down funding from Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Strategy and Europe to support habitat management work and long term work
- Continue to work in partnership with Local Authorities, local bird groups and individual naturalists.

For more information, please contact: Camilla Smith, Heads of the Valleys Lapwing Project Officer, Blaenau Gwent CBC, Business Resource Centre, Tafarnaubach Industrial Estate, Tredegar, NP22 3AA; Tel: 01495 355826, Mob: 07889 615749; Email: camilla.smith@rspb.org.uk.

Wildlife Sites / SINCs in Monmouthshire (Kate Stinchcombe)

Explained the subtle difference between Wildlife Sites (where landowners are involved in the process) and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation – SINCs (which is a planning term).

The Importance of Wildlife Sites (non-statutory designations)

- Target for favourable management – LA21
- Planning tool – UDP policy
- Raising public awareness
- Ecological Connectivity
- Monitoring biodiversity across the County

The Existing System

- Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales - 2004
- Sites identified via Gwent Grasslands Initiative – 300 species rich grassland sites, >700ha.
- Sites taken to SINC expert panel – GWT, MCC, CCW



Future Work in Monmouthshire

- Working with GWT – thresholds, priorities and mechanisms
- Project work to identify habitats e.g. woodland, recommendations by specialists
- Working with EA - Watercourses
- Public participation survey possibilities - hedgerows
- Widen expert panel – Biodiversity Partnership sub-group
- Recognition of non-statutory sites in Local Development Plan process

Safety in numbers! – working with our neighbours:

Caerphilly SINC review (2003 under UDP)

- SINC Review steering group
- 200 sites (186 existing, 14 additional)
- Field Survey - further recommended for some sites
- Watercourses – blanket approach (riparian zones act as good wildlife corridors)
- Largely designated for habitat value, a few for Lesser & Greater Horseshoe Bats
- Review: most surveys in poorer condition in 2007
- Some sites on the edge of the County e.g. watercourses / uplands

Blaenau Gwent

- First SINC project
- Expert Panel BGCBC, GWT, CCW, SEWBRc
- 64 sites in 1st Tranche , largest site over 900ha!
- Future priorities: ponds, mesotrophic lakes, watercourses
- Local recorder nominations
- LDP process – deadline for input April '09

Torfaen

- SINC expert panel - CCW, GWT, TCBC, Capita Symonds, Welsh Water
- Over 100 sites designated
- SINC designation handbook produced
- Review criteria 2008/9 – e.g. thresholds
- Local Development Plan screening for SINC sites

How recorders can get involved in Monmouthshire

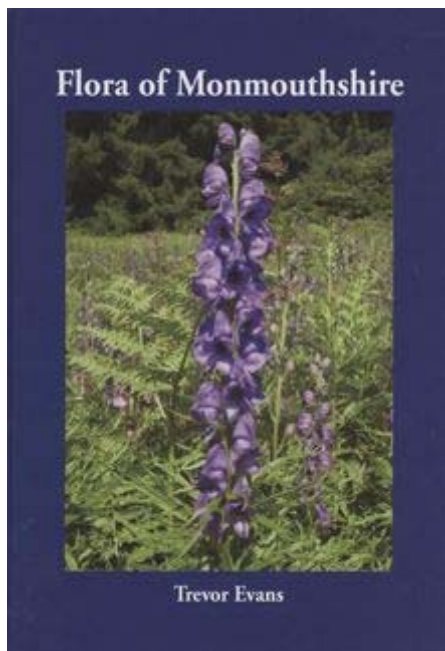
- Help with thresholds and species lists
- Join the SINC expert panel
- Identify sites using the Guidelines and additions made for Monmouthshire
- Nominate sites using survey forms
- Provide management advice for landowners
- Future monitoring of sites

Key Contacts

- Gwent Wildlife Trust rprice@gwentwildlife.org
- Monmouthshire County Council katestinchcombe@monmouthshire.gov.uk
- Caerphilly County Borough Council sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council deborah.beeson@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
- Torfaen County Borough Council steve.williams@torfaen.gov.uk

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Flora of Monmouthshire (Trevor Evans)



Copies available from Trevor Evans for £15.00. 644pp.

Tim Rich & Trevor Evans discussed the book and quickly realised that in order to keep costs down, everything but the printing of the book would have to be done themselves.

Trevor recounted the hurdles they'd had to overcome in the process: from software issues, page sizing, and fitting in the mapping, to problems with the find-and-replace function and a misbehaving auto-correct tool!

He apologised for any errors, though these are few and are covered by the omissions sheet. Trevor finished off by giving thanks to everyone who had been involved.

On the subject of climate change, Trevor gave a quick personal view of how the flora of Gwent was changing. He is noticing a more Mediterranean flowering cycle: plants blooming earlier in the year, followed by a long dry spell and a further flowering period late on. Observations of species

whose flowering times increasingly overlap include primroses and cowslips; Bee orchids were noted to be in full fruit by the third week of June (previously their peak flowering point).

TALK

'Conservation in Gwent: A Personal View' (Colin Titcombe)

Colin started his talk by describing the variety of global land forms and geology which contribute to the variety of life. Our planet has undergone six major extinction events, but only the last one (which started at the end of the last Ice Age) could have been influenced by man.

How we perceive loss of biodiversity can be subjective: a Greek author described Crete as a shadow of its former beauty whereas visitors now see it as a botanical paradise – it's all relative. For example, the arable fields with displays of tulips in the margins delighted the tourists, but the locals could recall when entire fields were covered with tulips as the old fashioned ploughs never dug deep enough to disturb the bulbs.

Many different habitats have been created by man's interference, and sometimes this may have provoked an increase in biodiversity, although there has been a reduction in "naturalness".

Farming arose in Mesopotamia c.5000 years ago, and permanent structures for housing were first built as people settled the land. In the Pampa, the indigenous vegetation was badly affected by the introduction of alien crops, grasses and their weeds by European farmers. Nowadays, the farming of monocultures creates pest problems.

An example of where man's influence can be beneficial is well-managed forestry: natural levels of biodiversity can improved by creating a mosaic of different habitats (coniferous, broadleaved, open-spaces, coppiced, high forest, etc)

Fisheries are also problematic as over-fishing can be disastrous for marine biodiversity, but historical fishing communities cannot be denied a living by harsh catch quotas. Discarded angling waste (hooks & lines) can also be harmful to wildlife.

A transport network is essential for us to be able to export and import food amongst other things, but this creates pollution and disturbance. Mustelid RTAs are one of the direct negative impacts of traffic on the roads.

Species introductions (e.g. black rats, brown rats, grey squirrel, little owl, koi carp, terrapins, hare, rabbits, pheasants) have had wide ranging effects on our island biodiversity. Pheasants can have a damaging effect on other species; In East Anglia they were found to be preying on young adders in large numbers. They are also suspected of picking off Fritillary larvae feeding on Violet leaves. Domesticated animals like cats may also be a problem as hunters of our native fauna.

Lemmings in Lapland provide an example of how food chains can suffer when a lower species is affected. Denser concentrations of reindeer on the lichen heaths are degrading the habitat. This is thought to be responsible for the lemmings not having reached a peak in many years, leading species predatory upon the lemmings to suffer.

Global warming is particularly having an effect on hibernating species (such as hedgehogs and dormice) which are now active at times when there is no food available, and are thus using up their energy reserves before the spring.

However, the greatest problem that nature faces is the number of people worldwide. Perhaps the best thing we can do to conserve our worldwide wildlife is to reduce our population. Colin then concluded with a quote from Ian Stewart that it isn't the planet we need to look after, it's ourselves: The planet will be here long after our species has gone!

DISCUSSION

Changes in the future format of the Recorders' Forum meeting

It was asked whether the attendees would prefer an altered format to the meeting. There was an overwhelming response in favour of keeping the format as it stands. It was thought that an evening would not allow sufficient time, and people were happy to keep the day on a Saturday as long as it did not clash with the rugby fixtures! There was no real interest in creating a combined event with the Glamorgan Recorders' Forum and the general consensus was that it would be a shame to change the current format. It was also noted that it may be important to keep the Forums separate, as a way of keeping the groups' own identity. It was agreed that the mix of long and short talks worked well, giving an interesting balance and allowing amateur recorders to have their say. Martin Anthoney also mentioned that although he is happy to continue to act as Chairman, if anyone else was keen on taking up the role that they would be welcome to step forward.

Field Meetings

In July 2007, the first Gwent biodiversity blitz event was held at Cwm-du (Blaenserchan). Full details can be downloaded from the SEWBReC website:

www.sewbrec.org.uk/services-folder/data-suppliers-pages/recorders-days.page

It is hoped that future events for both Gwent and Glamorgan will be arranged for Summer 2008, and recorders will be welcome to attend one or both events. Provisional dates are Saturday 12th July and Saturday 16th August. The aim is to visit under-recorded sites, and recorders were

encouraged to put forward ideas for venues, remembering that landowner permission and sufficient parking space are important considerations.

Joint Recorders' Newsletter (with Glamorgan)

Recorders at the Glamorgan Forum expressed interest in having a joint newsletter with Gwent. Currently they do not have a newsletter, and it was suggested that creating a combined publication could be successful in generating a broader range of articles, involving more writers and being particularly useful to recorders in the west of Gwent in knowing what their Glamorgan neighbours have been up to! Not having two separate publications would also ease the time and work pressure on Rebecca Davies.

There were mixed opinions, but the main concern was not losing the paper format for those who did not have access to a computer (or to broadband internet). Without any strong objections to creating a combined newsletter, it was agreed that it would go ahead next year.

A.O.B

Mammal Atlas (Richard Dodd)

This is in the early planning stages, and is probably about 5 years from completion (2013). Although there are plans to produce an interim report in 2010. Richard Dodd encouraged organisations to come forward for the steering group, the first meeting of which will be in March. The aim is to have about 30 people on board.

The first part of the project will involve just getting people freely recording, the data from which can be used to create an interim report (a summary) to promote more targeted recording, and provision of training on survey techniques is planned. Anyone wanting to get involved is advised to contact SEWBReC.

Thanks

Martin Anthony concluded that it was very reassuring and encouraging for the future to see that so much recording was going on in Gwent! He then expressed his thanks to SEWBReC, and in particular Rebecca Davies for organising the event, and to everyone there for participating.