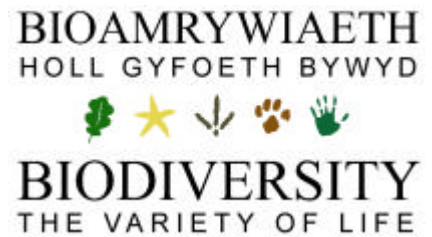


GWENT RECORDERS NEWSLETTER



ISSUE No 1 Autumn 2001

Welcome to the first issue of Newsletter for the Recorders in Gwent

- by the Gwent Local Biodiversity Action Plan Officers

We hope that this newsletter will promote the exchange of information and expertise between recorders working in Gwent. We also hope that it will raise awareness of recording activities and stimulate recording interest and enthusiasm amongst naturalists and those interested in nature conservation across the area.

In this our first issue, we have a number of interesting articles for you. Two are about local sites; the Gwent Levels Wetland Reserve in Newport and the recording that is being carried out there and the Silurian Moth found at Blaentillery Quarry in Blaenau Gwent. We also have a few articles about local and national volunteer surveys being carried out this year, these are; The Gwent Bird Atlas 2001 survey; The Great Nut Hunt; the Winter mammals survey and an Oak polypore fungus survey. There is also lots of other information that should be of interest.

Our aim is to produce a newsletter once a quarter and therefore we are already touting for articles for the next issue! So, if you would like to contribute an article then please contact Georgina Holdsworth (contact details on last page). We would like articles on anything that you think other people would like to hear about, so please don't be shy just send us something!

We have sent this issue of the Newsletter out by e-mail and by post. If you would prefer to receive the newsletter in a different format then let me know (see form on the last page – *small hint* - the pictures are much better by e-mail!!).

Orthoptera recording scheme for Monmouthshire (VC35)

- by Steve Williams (Orthoptera Recorder)

This year has seen the start of a recording effort for grasshoppers, crickets and allied insects in the county. Despite the fact that orthoptera are relatively easy to identify recording in this corner of Wales has generally been neglected. This lack of data is documented by the scarcity of 10km records held in the national BRC database for even the most widespread species such as meadow grasshopper *Chorthippus parallelus*. Therefore, initial work has concentrated on plugging distribution gaps for these commoner species.

On a national scale these are exciting times. Whilst BAP species such as the field cricket *Gryllus campestris* continue to require focussed conservation effort others are rapidly expanding their range across south and west Britain. Locally, the county is well situated to receive new species, and it is possible some are already present.

The potential for pioneering survey work is demonstrated by the discovery of the first Welsh site for the long winged conehead, *Conocephalus discolor*, close to the M4 in Cardiff and the presence of Roesel's Bush-cricket, *Metrioptera roeselii*, just on the English side of the river at Oldbury-upon-Severn (almost opposite Chepstow).

Fieldwork highlights so far include the first county record for Lesne's earwig *Forficula lesnei*, the increasing occurrence of short winged conehead *Conocephalus doralis* and new sites for lesser marsh grasshopper *Chorthippus albomarginatus* and slender groundhopper *Tetrix subulata*.

Finally, thanks are due to those who have already shared their orthoptera records. So, if you would like to help put grasshoppers and crickets back on the map please send details including species, date, location with grid reference and habitat to the address below. All records are gratefully received.

Steve can be contacted at: 8 Snatchwood Terrace, Abersychan, Pontypool, Torfaen. NP4 7BP.

Recording at the Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve

- by Kevin Dupé



The Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve was created between 1998 and 1999 as part of the compensation for the loss of the Cardiff Bay mudflats to the Cardiff Bay Barrage scheme. It is managed by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) in partnership with local farmers, Newport County Borough Council (NCBC) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The Reserve currently totals 420 ha (1000 acres) and consists of four main habitat types: reedbeds (58 ha); lowland wet grassland (246 ha); saline lagoons (11 ha); and saltmarsh (78 ha).

Extensive surveys were carried out prior to construction. These included baseline surveys for flora, invertebrates, badgers, bats, great-crested newts, Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), and Common Birds Census. Last year, surveys were carried out to look at the reed flora and fauna and the invertebrate fauna of the Goldcliff Lagoons.

On-going monitoring for birds includes the key breeding species and fortnightly waterfowl counts, together with Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Winter Farmland Bird Survey (WFBS). This year, because of the national foot and mouth situation, all survey and monitoring was put on hold. However ad-hoc observations in the spring suggested that at least five pairs of little ringed plover, 15 pairs of lapwing and six pairs of redshank attempted to breed.

Otters are monitored by counting the numbers of spraints on 25 concrete sluice structures across the Reserve on a fortnightly basis. There have also been several sightings of otters and prints have been found. It is proposed to train our voluntary wardens in water vole survey techniques this September, then to survey for them next year.

The Reserve is a rich site for invertebrates and is likely to attract more and more interest from entomologists and other specialists as the created habitats mature and the reputation of the site increases.

Since the end of May, some of the foot and mouth restrictions have been lifted and Michael Kilner has visited the Reserve to record spiders. He identified a new species for Wales, *Hypomma fulvum*. Steven Rogers has been visiting the Reserve on a weekly basis to record water beetles.

Other specialists are very welcome to visit the Reserve by arrangement. This will add to our knowledge of this developing site and may even influence how we manage it.

Please contact Kevin Dupé, Assistant Warden, to arrange a visit. ☎ 01633 275567 or e-mail: k.dupe@ccw.gov.uk.

Stop press: The list of Species of Nature Conservation Importance in Gwent

The draft species list for Gwent will be finished by the end of September and will be sent out to you for consultation at the beginning of October.

Not your copy of the newsletter? Would you like to be on the mailing list? If so please contact Georgina Holdsworth at GeorginaHoldsworth@monmouthshire.gov.uk ☎01633 644828, ✉ Monmouthshire County Council, Env. Dept., County Hall, Cwmbran NP44 2XH.

The Silurian Moth *Eriopygodes imbecilla* - by Nicola Sharpe

The Silurian is a Palaearctic species, widely distributed as an alpine moth in the mountains of Europe. It was unknown in the UK until 1972, when it was observed in the hills of north-west Monmouthshire (Vice County 35) at an altitude of 1,400ft. Mr. D.S. Fletcher of the British Museum of Natural History (BMNH) identified the moth and named it 'The Silurian'. Its status was later confirmed as a resident British species in 1976.



Photo 1: The Silurian.

Photo provided courtesy of CCW

It flies in late June to mid- July. There is a diurnal flight on hot sunny afternoons and at night the males especially come readily to light. Adults come to light mostly after mid-night, most frequently during the two hours before dawn. Not a great deal is known about their preferred habitat although they have been observed on high bilberry moorland. Their probable larval food plant is the bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, which grows most frequently by streams, in gullies and along sheep paths. Since the occurrence of bedstraw seems to be associated with steep paths and other minor disturbance, light grazing by sheep seems to provide optimal conditions. Thus, the Silurian could be lost if grazing is either too intensive or abandoned over its range.



Photo 2: Blaentillery quarry gully (SO225075-SO225076). Photo provided courtesy of CCW

Adult males of the Silurian moth have been found in good numbers at Blaentillery Quarry in Blaenau Gwent County Borough (BGCB), (VC35). They particularly favour gullies and 11 Silurian moths were recorded on 23rd June 2001 in high mountain gullies around Abertillery in BGCB (see photo 2). The moth is known to occur over an area of 4km in extent from north to south. Moths were also trapped some distance from the gullies, though not in such large numbers. This is the only locality from which the moth has been reported annually since its discovery. It is likely to be more widespread than this since few other areas similar in habitat have been searched, and many surveys have only

concentrated on previously recorded sights. More surveys covering a greater range are required for us to gain a greater understanding of their preferred habitats, location and population size.

Threats to survival

Fire: Moorland fires are the greatest threat to the Silurian. However, it is unlikely fire would cover all the ground occupied by the moth in any season and as the habitat is presently largely contiguous, the moth should be able to move from one part to another to re-colonise burned areas if and when vegetation recovers. Nonetheless fires must be avoided.

Changes in grazing levels: Both severe over grazing and long-term abandonment of grazing could result in the decline or disappearance of the moth.

Land-use: Destruction of the moorland would be highly detrimental to the Silurian population.

Management & Conservation: The lack of sound ecological information of the requirements of this species makes it difficult to determine if the site is deteriorating or in need of special management to conserve the population. More detailed reporting and basic monitoring is necessary. However, fires must be avoided and low intensity grazing encouraged.

Silurian facts:

- The larva of the Silurian moth has still not been found in the wild in Britain.
- It remains a mystery that, whilst the probable food plant is widespread and common, the moth is not. This raises questions regarding whether or not there exists specific site factors that are suitable for the moth not already accounted for or that these moths have simply been under-recorded on other sites.
- Female Silurian moths are seldom seen and appear to fly only rarely.
- Where the moth occurs it can be numerous, as many as 50 occurring in one trap per night.

Further information on the Silurian, moth identification and surveying is available from:

Dr. Martin Anthoney - ☎ 01633 612272 . e-mail: martin@chemlep.demon.co.uk

Nichola Davies - Butterfly Conservation. Welsh Development Officer, 32 Cambridge Street, Uplands, Swansea, SA2 0ND. ☎ 01792 367465. e-mail: nicholadavies@cix.co.uk

Nicola Sharpe - Blaenau Gwent CBC, Business Resource Centre, Tafarnaubach Industrial estate, Tredegar, NP22 3AA. ☎ 01495 355716. e-mail: Nicola.Sharpe@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Gwent Ornithological Society Breeding Bird Atlas 2001 - by Jerry Lewis

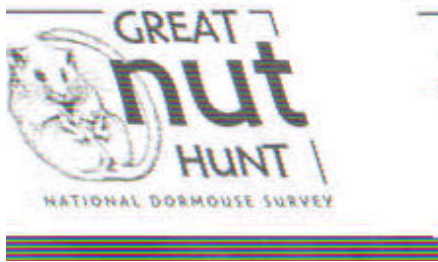
The production of the Gwent Bird Atlas in 1987 was a major step forward for the Gwent Ornithological Society. It elevated the County to the ranks of only a handful of English counties and was the first Welsh county to produce a tetrad (2km x 2km) breeding map of all species of birds breeding in the county (all except the very rare species).

Fieldwork is now underway for a second atlas, the 2001 breeding season being the 4th of a 5-year survey period. The aim being to chart the expansion and contraction of the county's breeding birds in the years since the first Atlas. Many species will follow national trends, for example, Tree sparrow and Grey Partridge are now very uncommon, but others may not. The national declines of Song Thrush, Yellowhammer, Skylark and Bullfinch are all between 50% and 60%, but these species are probably still relatively common in Gwent. Either way, the results will be very interesting and will provide basic data for the LBAPs in the Gwent area.

The 2001 survey aims to record all of the breeding species in each tetrad of the county using a variety of codes to decide possible, probably or confirmed breeding. Possible breeding would involve a single sighting of a species in suitable breeding habitat. Probably breeding would involve seeing a pair and confirmed breeding would include finding a nest of seeing adult birds carrying food for their young. A distribution map of each species is then produced and additional work is also being undertaken to estimate the number of each species in the county.

If you are able to help with the final survey year, or have breeding records for anything but the most common species, please contact Al Venables (029 20874307) or Jerry Lewis (01633 644856). Copies of the original atlas (£4 excl. p&p) are still available from Jerry Lewis.

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The Great Nut Hunt 2001 by Andrea Rowe

The first Great Nut Hunt was launched during National Dormouse Week in 1993. During the course of the survey more than 11,000 survey packs were sent out to a wide range of 'potential nutters', including schools, Wildlife Trusts and many individuals. By April 1994 1,878 survey sheets had been returned. Almost 6,500 people had taken part, putting in more

than 3 years worth of time, making this the largest survey of the dormouse ever undertaken anywhere in Europe. During the course of the survey nearly a quarter of a million nuts were examined - over 13,000 of these were sent in to be checked personally by the Chief Nutter, who found that a total of 1352 nuts had been opened by dormice.

Overall, the Great Nut Hunt found 334 sites with dormice in England and Wales. Many other sites proved to be negative, providing the first large-scale confirmation of the disappearance of the dormouse from much of its former range. For example, dormice were known from 20 sites in Yorkshire at the end of the 19th century but searches at 83 sites there during this Great Nut Hunt failed to find any evidence of their presence (I'm afraid that the reproduced map quality is not great - and really rubbish if you've got a printed copy - but a larger map can be seen at the web address below).

It is hoped that the **2nd Great Nut Hunt in 2001** will:

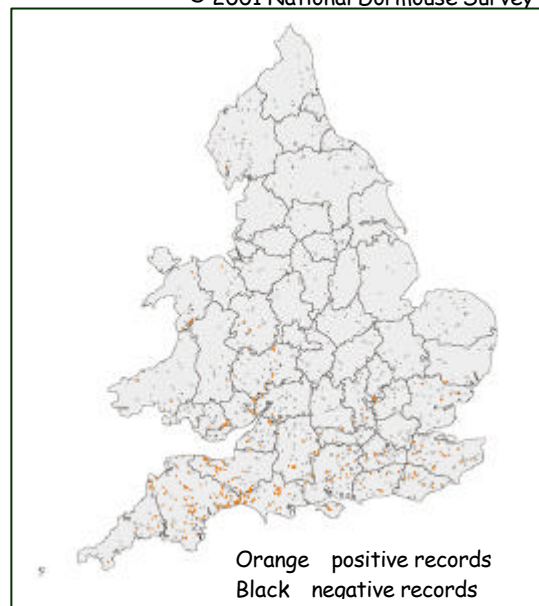
- *Find more sites with dormice* - this information can then be used to help to encourage sensitive management of woods with dormice, prevent the loss of more woods and persuade land managers to plant trees and hedges to increase connectivity of woodland fragments.
- *Revisit sites which had dormice at the time of the last Great Nut Hunt to see if they are still there.* Those who took part in the first Great Nut Hunt will be encouraged to visit the same sites as before, even if no nuts were found then - and also to visit some new sites as well!
- *Find potential reintroduction sites.* These would be large woods (over 20 hectares) which are managed sympathetically, and support a good range of trees and shrubs, including hazel.
- *Show how important the dormouse is as an indicator of the health of our woodlands and hedgerows.* This will emphasise the importance of ancient woodlands and hedgerow management.

Taking Part is really very simple. The Great Nut Hunt was officially launched on the 6th of September by Bill Oddie. If you or anyone else you know would like to take part and would be willing and able to visit a local wood this autumn or winter please visit the website at www.greatnuthunt.org and register your interest or ring Oliver Bennett, the dormouse co-ordinator at The Mammals Trust on 020 7498 5262. A survey pack will be sent out giving details of the survey method and a form to send in once you have completed your survey.

This article is based on information from the Great Nut Hunt website - thanks to the 2001 National Dormouse Survey and the Mammals Trust UK for allowing reproduction of the map and logo.

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Volunteers NEEDED to help monitor winter mammals - by Andrea Rowe

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and The Mammal Society are calling for volunteers to participate in a new mammal monitoring project. The call for volunteers follows July's announcement that the BTO and The Mammal Society have been awarded a government contract, funded by the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), to design and run a multi-species mammal monitoring pilot this coming winter.

Up until now, there has been no national monitoring scheme for land mammals in Britain. Results from these surveys will be used as a basis for long-term future mammal monitoring in the UK, and will also help to provide vital information about the health of our countryside.

Volunteers who take part in the project will be allocated a 1km plot of land in their local area where they will be asked to walk a transect across their plot making a note of all mammals seen. Participants will be asked to walk the transect twice - once early morning between October and December 2001 to record all mammals seen, and once between January and March 2002 to record all signs of mammals seen such as prints, nests and droppings. No prior experience is necessary as guidelines and identification notes will be provided, but it would be helpful if volunteers could identify all British land mammals and their signs.

To find out more about the project or to volunteer to take part, please contact: Mike Toms at the BTO on 01842 750 050 or e-mail mammals@bto.org or The Mammal Society on 020 7498 4358 or e-mail enquiries@mammal.org.uk

A Gwent Amphibian & Reptile Group (GARG??) by Andrea Rowe

You will all probably be aware that there is a network of Amphibian & Reptile Groups (ARGs) up and down the country. These groups aim to promote knowledge and recording of amphibians and reptiles as well as providing training sessions, organising events and site visits for members and generally helping to co-ordinate action for these species within a local area.

At the moment, there is no ARG in existence for the Gwent area and we would like to gather your views on the possibility of setting one up. So, if you are interested in amphibian and reptile conservation and recording, please get in touch with Andrea Rowe, Biodiversity Officer at Newport County Borough Council on 01633 232880 or email andrea.rowe@newport.gov.uk and let her know your views.

Are you interested in a Recorders meeting?

At the Recorders Day in December 2000 it was noted that there was a lot of phone number swapping and networking going on amongst the participants. Therefore, if you are interested, we (the LBAP officers) are willing to organise another meeting for December/January to facilitate the communication between you. The meeting would not have to be as long as the last one, perhaps half a day, and we would endeavour to provide another buffet lunch.

This time we would like you to decide on the content. What would you like to hear about? Would you be interested in hearing about the National Biodiversity Network? or the work of another organisation? Would you be willing to give a presentation to tell people about what you had been up to over the summer or last summer (given the difficulties with foot & mouth this summer). Would you like to discuss recording techniques or database packages?

Please, let me know what you think by answering the questions on the feedback sheet and sending them to Georgina Holdsworth (the contact details are below).

*Not your copy of the newsletter? Would you like to be on the mailing list? If so please contact Georgina Holdsworth at GeorginaHoldsworth@monmouthshire.gov.uk ☎01633 644828, ✉
Monmouthshire County Council, Env. Dept., County Hall, Cwmbran NP44 2XH.*

A New Biodiversity Officer for Blaenau Gwent and a call to the LBAP forum

- by Nicola Sharpe

Hello! I am the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Officer (LBAP Officer) for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. Before coming into post, I was a technical assistant for a Woodland Consultancy in Norfolk. Since my appointment in March 2001, I have compiled the Local Biodiversity Action Plan draft, with assistance from various other organisations and yourselves. It will be launched shortly at Bryn Bach Park. This document describes the importance of biodiversity in Blaenau Gwent and identifies important Habitat (HAPs) and Species Action Plans (SAPs) in the County Borough. In the front of the LBAP there will be an invitation to participate in the forum group. We would like to encourage as many people as possible into the forum. So if you would like to participate please return the reply slip.

Other news is that a biodiversity leaflet for Blaenau Gwent is currently being published. The leaflets will be widely distributed and hopefully you should receive one soon.

If you would like more information about the LBAP process in Blaenau Gwent or you would like a copy of the LBAP and/or the Biodiversity leaflet please contact Nicola on: 01495 355716 or e-mail her at: Nicola.Sharpe@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.

Caerphilly County Borough Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP):

Consultation draft and launch

- by Melanie Sutherland

The Caerphilly County Borough Council LBAP is now available for consultation and will be launched in Spring 2002. The consultation draft is in 3 volumes. Volume 1 is an overview of the biodiversity process, volume 2 contains 10 habitat statements and volume 3 has 51 species action plans and 2 species statements. The species and habitats selected for action in the LBAP were agreed by the local biodiversity partnership due to their current status and distinctiveness in Caerphilly County Borough.

The consultation draft is available in a 'read only' format that can be emailed to interested parties, and we are also looking into publishing it on the internet for easy access to a much wider audience.

If you would like further information on the Caerphilly LBAP please contact Melanie at:

Melanie Sutherland, Biodiversity Officer, Countryside and Landscape Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Directorate of Technical Services, Council Offices, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP2 2YW, Tel: 01495 235187, Fax: 01495 235022, Email: sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

New publication:

Field Mycology (2001) by The British Mycological Society, Cambridge Uni. Press.

The British Mycological Society has just released a new field guide called Field Mycology (available from Cambridge University Press, £16.00 for a 4 issues subscription). It is devoted to the study and identification of Fungi; it has great colour pictures; an excellent quality very accessible keys to different groups; ID tips and articles on ecology and conservation. (and no recipes!!).

If you would like further information please contact Shelley Evans, BMS Conservation Officer at Joseph Banks Building, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AE. e-mail: conservation@britmycolsoc.org.uk

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Feedback

Reply slip for the GWENT RECORDERS NEWSLETTER

I would/ would not like to receive the newsletter again (please delete as appropriate).

I would prefer to receive my copy by e-mail*. My e-mail address is:

Other address amendments (postal):

Do you know other people who would like to be sent a copy of the newsletter? Please include their details below.

* We would like to be able to e-mail the newsletter to you rather than post it. This is a more sustainable method of production and cuts down on our costs.

I will be able to write an article for the next Newsletter on:

(deadline for articles is 10th December 2001)

Reply slip for the RECORDERS DAY

Yes, I would / No, I would not be interested in attending a Recorders meeting.

(If you said no, please could you tell us why you would not be interested, thank you)

I would be able to do a talk/presentation on:

I would like to hear a talk/presentation about:

Please return this page by email or post before 31 September 2001 to Georgina Holdsworth at GeorginaHoldsworth@monmouthshire.gov.uk or Env. Dept. County Hall, Cwmbran NP44 2XH. Thank you.

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