The diverse and fascinating world of Britain's moths

Moths are one of the most diverse and fascinating groups of insects (lepidoptera) in the UK, yet so often they are overlooked in favour of their day-time counterparts, the butterflies. While the UK is home to fewer than 60 resident species of butterfly, it boasts over 2,500 species of moths. These insects inhabit almost every terrestrial habitat, ranging from urban gardens to remote uplands.

Far from being dull, brown pests that damage clothes, a misconception true of only a tiny handful of species, British moths display an astonishing array of colours, patterns and behaviours. Those who attended the PGP/ Biodiversity Working Group Meet the Moths events on 1st July in Brockweir and St Briavels can testify to this. Species like the vibrant pink and olive green Elephant Hawk-moth or the day-flying Garden Tiger moth rival any butterfly for beauty.

Sadly, British moth populations have faced significant declines over the past 50 years, primarily due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and light pollution. So, anything we can do to try to halt such declines would be helping the ecosystems which they inhabit. Planting nectar-rich flowers, leaving wild patches of grass and wild flowers, and reducing artificial outdoor lighting overnight would all help.

MARTIN MORRIS



Left to right from top, the Dun-bar, Elephant Hawk-moths, Blood-vein moth, Swallow-tailed moth, Eyed Hawk-moth, Pale Prominent **Photographs: Martin Morris**

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ST. BRIAVELS & BROCKWEIR HEWELSFIELD
Parish Grasslands Project

N E W S L E T T E R

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NATURE WATCH
What to look for now



Comma butterfly



Haw berries





Watery relics... the Brockweir Spout, and (right) a Hudnalls dip-well

Where did water came from before the pipes?

In October 2013 the Parish Grasslands Project arranged a mini-symposium on water which was notable for Phil Morgan's papier mache model of the Hudnalls, complete with its natural streams, Corinna Arnold talking about uses of grey water, and a visitor, Peter Golding, demonstrating dowsing outside the Mackenzie Hall.

Water, however, keeps hitting the headlines, notably with this summer's heat and drought and increasing public concern about the state of our rivers, so we are returning to the subject this month. We survived this summer without even a hosepipe ban and we never had to wonder whether the taps would run dry. But, how did local people collect water before the pipes were installed, and how did they survive through droughts?

Our meeting, at 2.30pm on Saturday 17 October, will be about aspects of local water, past, present and future, introduced by local speakers. Andy Stott will talk about local hydrology and the underlying geology that determines water tables and springlines. George Peterken has been collecting information about water sources before the mains supplies arrived. And Robin Pittson and Nick Woodman will outline how they and others have been monitoring water quality in the Wye.

These will be relatively short introductory talks and we will invite the audience to respond with memories, information, questions and opinions. Like all PGP events, members and non-members are equally welcome; there is no admission charge.

GEORGE PETERKEN

Managing for wildlife at Cutt's Orchard

Lessons from the invertebrate and lichen survey apply to other local sites, say **Andy and Gill Stott**

Following on from the item in the last PGP Newsletter (Spring 2026) on the invertebrate and lichen survey of Cutt's Orchard, Brockweir, here we summarise the management advice given by the specialist surveyors, James McGill and Nicola Bacciu. Their advice is also relevant to other similar sites in the locality.

Light grazing (by cattle) in late summer across areas of grassland, marsh, scrub and woodland is beneficial. This disturbs the ground, provides some areas of bare soil and mud, removes old growth, but leaves plants free to flower and seed, and leaves ground undisturbed during the main growing season, thus providing a range of micro habitats and food resources for invertebrates.

Whilst transitions from marsh and grassland to scrub and woodland are often beneficial for invertebrates, birds and small mammals, ultimately, in small areas, transition to woodland ultimately can lead to further loss of open marshy habutats which have already been much restricted in the local area. Cutting and removal of the young alder and scrub can help retain the open character. Even more important is not to drain or infill these wet areas.

Veteran oak trees are important for invertebrates and lichens which grow on the old dry bark. This special habitat can be lost by shading and overcrowding by shrubs such as holly and hazel and dense ivy growth. Grazing in woods can help to keep woods more open though it also prevents regeneration of trees — which is a difficult balance to manage! Selective felling of overcrowding shrubs and removal of young ivy around veteran oaks was recommended.



Light grazing in late summer plays a vital management role in providing a range of micro habitats and food resources for invertebrates

All forms of decaying wood can have value for invertebrates, fungi, or lichens. Standing and fallen deadwood are different microhabitats, as are decaying heartwood, sapwood, branches, twigs, and bark. The simplest rule is that dead wood should be left undisturbed to undergo natural decay processes. If tree felling is necessary for safety reasons near public footpaths, the trunk should, if possible, be left standing as a monolith at least 6 feet high. Aging or dead hawthorn in open grassland and hedges should also be left standing, as these are likely to be colonised by a variety of deadwood insects.

Plan for the future – the highly-valued veteran oaks of today probably started life in a semi-open grazed woodland. Planting (or bringing on) a small number of individual oaks in open fields, with appropriate protection from grazing, will be an investment in the continuity of veteran tree habitats in the landscape, climate change permitting!

Many thanks to James and Nicola for this advice and thanks to the PGP for supporting the invertebrate and lichen survey of Cutt's Orchard. Lots for us to think about and lots of wider relevance as well!



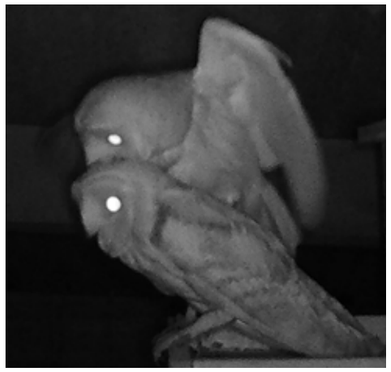


Veteran Oak trees (left) create an important habitat for invertebrates and lichens (right)

It's camera, lights, action at our Barn Owl boxes

In their second breeding season, the PGP-funded Barn Owl boxes have seen plenty of action! A pair of owls occupied a box which we installed in a hay barn just off the Bream Road and delivered seven lovely owl chicks in July. They were ringed by Richard Clarke of the Gwent Ornithological Society before fledging and leaving the barn.

Later on we had reports of owls in a stable on St Briavel's Common where we had



Barn Owl nocturnal activity

installed another box. We set up one of the PGP loan-scheme wildlife cameras and caught some intimate behaviour! To our surprise and disappointment, after mating, the owls disappeared and didn't occupy the box. A third box on Brockweir Common had been visited by owls in the winter but wasn't occupied. The two other PGP boxes remain to be discovered by the new generation of owls.

We are very pleased to see that the PGP scheme already seems to be supporting a growing population of local owls. Keep your eyes open and your ears tuned in for screeching. With many thanks to the PGP members who are hosting and keeping tabs on the boxes.

MIKE TOPP and ANDY STOTT