



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No 168 November and December 2020.

A monthly newsletter covering

Gwent and Monmouthshire Vice County 35

Editor: Martin Anthoney

November and December 2020

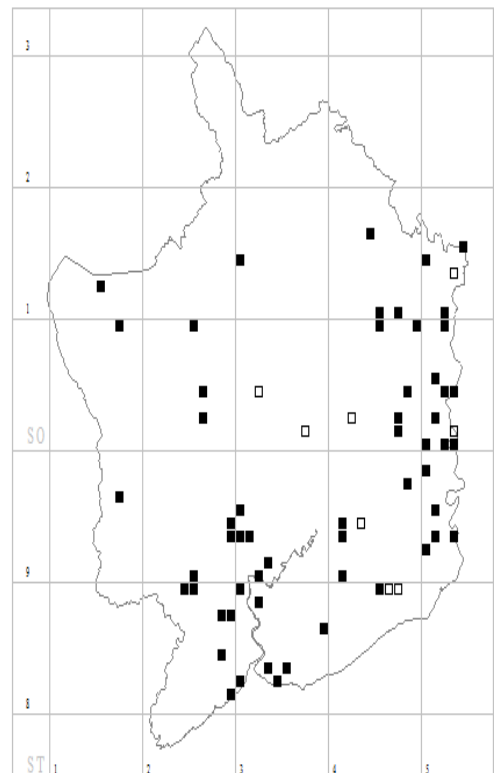
November was a generally mild month with southerly and south-westerly winds, though there were some colder drier spells, particularly near the end of the month. It was often wet and windy around mid-month. The mean temperature for November was 1.2 °C above the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall was 81% of average and sunshine was 97% of average.

Only one butterfly record was received for November, a Brimstone flying on 14th November in Newport (Julia James). Mild nights produced records for 47 macro moths in November, a total only exceeded in 2018 (50 species in 2018, 31 in 2019).

The first and last weeks of December were cold and unsettled, with some snowfalls in places, mainly on high ground, especially during the last week. The middle fortnight was much milder, while continuing unsettled with south to south-westerly winds. The mean temperature for December was 0.4 °C above the long-term average. It was a dull wet month, with 155% of average rainfall and 69% of average sunshine. No butterfly records were received for December, but 18 macro moth species was again only exceeded in 2018 (21 species in 2018, 13 in 2019). December Moth had an excellent season, with some high nightly moth trap totals and many gaps in the distribution map filled in.



December Moth (female and male) and its distribution



Highlights for November and December include:

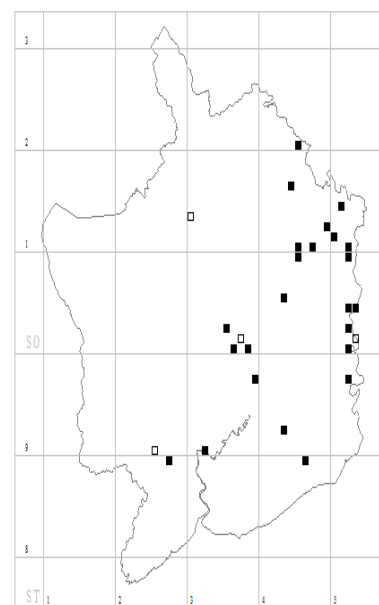
- 6th Nov Juniper Carpet to light at Blackwood. A known site. (Kevin Hewitt)
- 7th Nov Cypress Carpet at Cwmbran (Bob Roome)
Dark Sword-grass and a Sprawler to light at Dingestow (Sam Bosanquet) and
the same two species at Great Crwys (Wendy Tyler-Batt)
- 8th Nov Brindled Green to light at Newport (Roger James)
Deep-brown Dart to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)
- 9th Nov Streak and Oak Nycteoline to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)
Orange Sallow and Autumnal Moth (checked by gen.det.) to light at Tintern. (John Dawson)
- 10th Nov Another Streak, to light at Wentwood. (Nick Felstead)
- 22nd Nov Buttoned Snout found hibernating indoors at Great Cwrt, Hendre (Wendy Tyler-Batt)
A Fox Moth caterpillar and 65 Winter Moth on the Sugar Loaf (George Tordoff)
- 13th Nov Sprawler to light at Abergavenny, with another on 20th Nov. (Andrew and Janet Cormack)



Northern Winter Moth (Rupert Perkins)



Buttoned Snout (Wendy Tyler-Batt) and its distribution



- 26th Nov Red Sword-grass to light at Pentrepiod, Pontypool. (Rupert Perkins)
- 28th Nov Northern Winter Moth at Pentrepiod, Pontypool. (Rupert Perkins)
- 1st Dec Grey Shoulder-knot to light at Newport (Roger James)
- 2nd Dec A very late Dark Arches to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)
Scarce Umber at Catbrook (Richard Clayton)

3 rd Dec	The first new season Pale Brindled Beauty to light at Melbourne Way, Newport. Also a Scarce Umber	(Roger James)
5 th Dec	The last Silver Y of the year at Melbourne Way, Newport	(Roger James)
7 th Dec	An Early Moth to light at Risca.	(Martin Anthoney)
11 th Dec	22 December Moths to light at Catbrook (Richard Clayton) and 20 at Llandogo (Gail Reynolds)	
15 th Dec	Cypress Carpet to light at Risca.	(Martin Anthoney)
25 th Dec	Larval bore hole of Lunar Hornet Moth found in a Blaenavon tree.	(Lee Gregory)

Butterfly and Macro Moth - Summary for 2020

. 2020 was warmer than usual for Gwent with mean temperature *ca* 0.3⁰C above the annual average. With rainfall *ca* 105% it was also one of the wettest recent years, and a record sunny spring was a major contributor towards it being a sunnier year than average (sunshine *ca* 105%), so 2020 was remarkable for being ranked in the top ten years for all three variables. Notable extreme events during the year included heavy-rainfall events in February, numerous incidences of flooding in the autumn and early winter after two storms and several short hot spells, including the Easter bank holiday and August; temperatures exceeded 30 °C somewhere in the UK on 13 days during the summer, including one final hot day on 15th September. July was the only month with temperatures generally below average.

However, 2020 will principally be remembered for the coronavirus (Covid 19) pandemic, with lockdowns and travel restrictions of varying ferocity making lepidoptera recording very difficult. In the event, restrictions on moving around Gwent caused fewer problems than the closure to access of several important large sites, aggravated by out-of-county daytrippers flocking, against regulations, to the most scenic parts of the county. Unsurprisingly, 2020 records were more heavily weighted than usual towards recorders' own gardens. With running a garden light trap one of the few biodiversity pastimes not restricted by Covid19, there was a clear increase in people running moth traps, with comments such as "The moth trap was my saviour" or "Using the moth tap regularly kept me sane" not being uncommon! We are lucky that, apart from a perennial shortage of recorders in the north of the county, in Gwent we have a good geographical spread of recorders and species numbers kept up well. The species totals for Gwent (VC35) in 2020 were 35 butterflies and 474 macro moths, very close to the 2019 figures. Figures for micro moths are not available yet. Increased moth trapping produced a rise in macro moth records, but unsurprisingly the butterfly records are down 20% on the previous year.

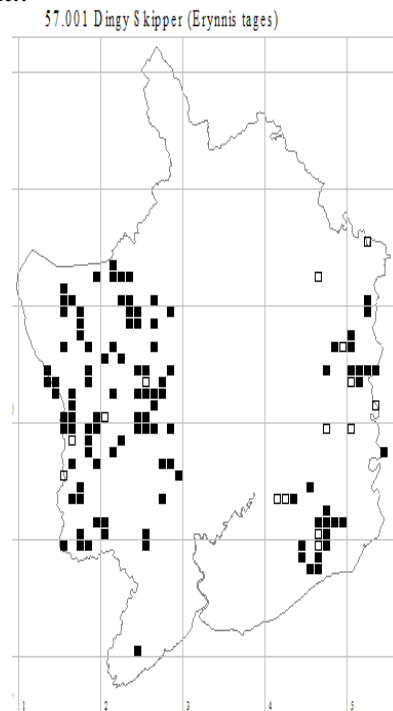
	Butterflies	Macromoths	Micromoths
Number 2019 Records	7,087	19,745	n/a
Number 2020 Records	5,611	20,580	n/a
Number 2019 Species	37	472	n/a
Number 2020 Species	35	474	n/a
Species now on VC35 list	50	589	847

Butterflies

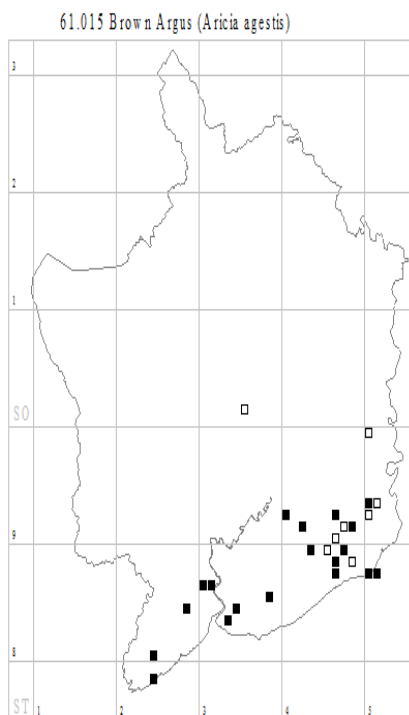
For 2020, lack of records is more likely to be caused by lack of recording rather than lack of butterflies. Hardest hit were Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper, the early skippers flying in April/May. No Grizzled Skipper records have been received this year and only half the 2019 number of Dingy Skipper, normally widespread and common in both the west and east of Gwent..



Dingy Skipper and its distribution



Only four immigrant Clouded Yellows were reported, and only two Brown Argus, a species now seemingly confined to the coastal belt.



Brown Argus (Michael Field)

Painted Lady had a poor year, with a count over 2000 in 2019 reduced to only 55 in 2020. Nine White Admirals were mostly recorded in the Wye Valley, but one of the saddest sights in 2020 was the decimation by large scale felling of the important White Admiral site at Slade Wood, Rogiet. However

valid the reasons for felling, why does it have to be done in such a messy, untidy fashion? Much of the honeysuckle foodplant has now been lost.

The only species which records suggest had a good year were Large and Small Whites and Small Copper.

Macro moths

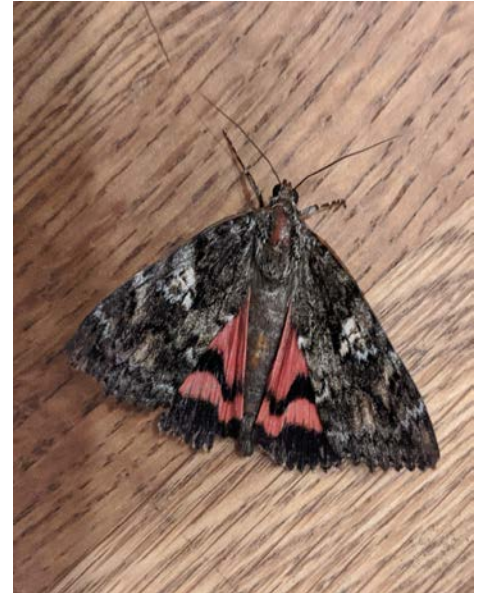
Of the 474 macro moths recorded in 2020, three were new additions to the Gwent VC35 list:



Shining Marbled
(*Pseudeustrotia candidula*)
(Sam Bosanquet 25th June)



Fen Wainscot
(*Arenostola phragmitidis*)
(Kevin Dupé 16th July)



Dark Crimson Underwing
(*Catocala sponsa*)
(Martyn Jones 18th Aug)

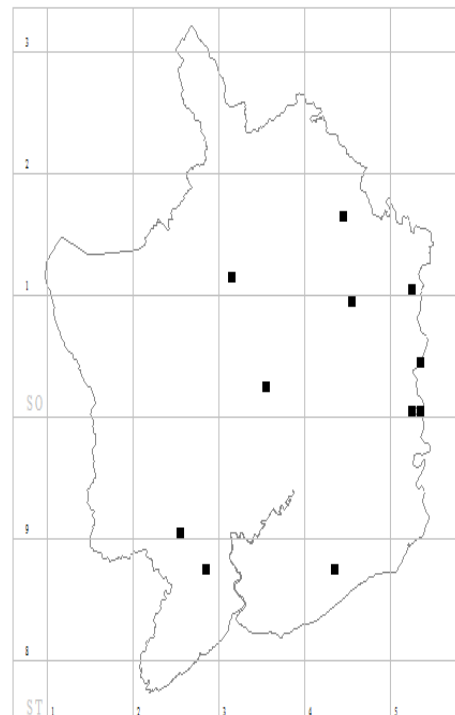
Bringing the VC35 total to 589 macros.

Shining Marbled and Dark Crimson Underwing were also first records for Wales.

For several people, the highlight of 2020 would be their first sight of Clifden Nonpareil. After the first two Gwent VC35 records in 2018 and five in 2019, 2020 produced thirty individuals to light at nine different sites.



Clifden Nonpareil (*Catocala fraxini*)
(Hazel Mitchell)



Clifden Nonpareil records 2018 - 2020

A recently received list from Lee Gregory of 2020 Blaenavon records contained some interesting species:

Three Grey Scalloped Bar on 15th (1) and 25th (2) May were only the 4th, 5th and 6th Gwent records. A mainly northern species of heather moorland it is rare in southern Britain, though probably under-recorded.

A Light Feathered Rustic came to light on 27th May. This species used to occur in the Clydach area, but this is the first Gwent record since 2005.

A male Silurian moth to light on 15th June. The only Silurian record received in Gwent this year.



Grey Scalloped Bar (*Dyscia fagaria*)
(Lee Gregory)



Light Feathered Rustic (*Agrotis cinerea*)
(Lee Gregory)

Other significant 2020 Gwent macro moth records include:

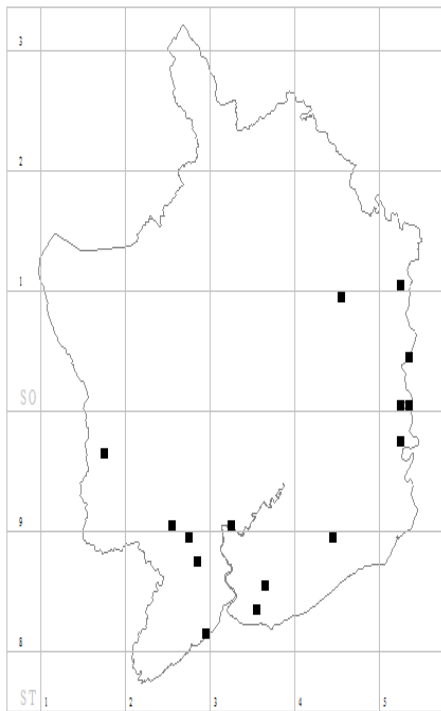
- 6th May Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk nectaring on apple blossom at Pentrepiod, Pontypool.
Only the third Gwent record and the first since 1933 (Rupert Perkins).
- 29th May A Pine Hawk (*Sphinx pinastri*) to light at Tintern (John Dawson). The second Gwent record
after one at Dingestow on 28th July 2019.
- 15th June The sixth Gwent record of Bird's Wing moth to light at Tintern (John Dawson)
- 17th and 29th July. Two Suspected moths, eighth and ninth Gwent records, at a new site in Blackwood
(Kevin Hewitt)
- 21st July (Kevin Dupé) and 15th Sept (John Dawson), the sixth and seventh Gwent records of Kent Black
Arches.

Suspected
(Hazel Mitchell)

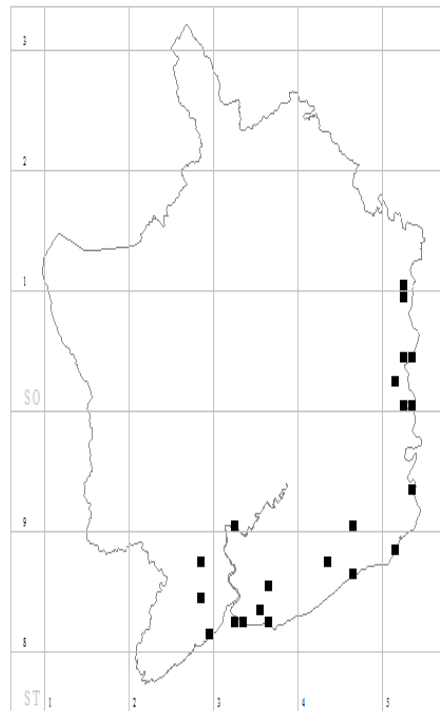


Kent Black Arches

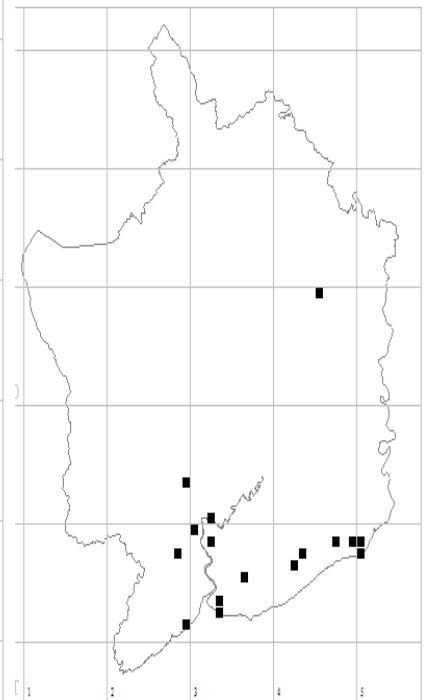
Five Brussels Lace, nine Buttoned Snout, eleven Double Line, fourteen Four-spotted Footman, thirty-seven Jersey Tiger and sixteen L-album Wainscot records all represent increasing species.



Four-spotted Footman distribution



L-album Wainscot distribution



Jersey Tiger distribution



As with the butterflies, day-flying moth records were well below average. It proved impossible to do any surveying for important species such as Drab Looper.

Apart from 62 Dark Sword-grass and an abundance of Silver Y, 2020 was not a good year for immigrant macro moths. The highlights were Convolvulus Hawks, with two adults to light near Newport on 27th August (Kevin Hewitt) and 26th Sept (Roger James), and more surprisingly, a large Convolvulus Hawk caterpillar in an Usk garden on 1st October.

Twelve Humming-bird Hawks were well below average. Other immigrants were 1 Delicate, 1 Gem, 2 Pearly Underwing, 4 Small Mottled Willow and 1 Vestal.

Wales Moth List 2019

An updated Wales Moth List, now including 2019 records, is available to download from the BC Wales website:

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/welsh-office/wales-moth-list-2019>

Dates for your Diary 2021

Keep up to date with the MMBG blog/ website

<http://gwentmothing.blogspot.co.uk/>

MMBG – Contact Names and Addresses.

Secretary: Kevin Dupé
120 Roman Way
Caerleon
Newport
NP18 3FS

Phone 01633 547897

e-mail Kevin.Dupe@btinternet.com

Chairman: Roger James
44 Melbourne Way
Newport
NP20 3RF

Phone 01633 215627

e-mail smallranunculus@uwclub.net

or in case of problems juliajames@uwclub.net

Treasurer: Sheila Dupé
18 Haisbro Avenue
Newport
NP19 7HY
Phone 01633 256475

Website / blog <http://gwentmothing.blogspot.co.uk/>

Queries to Richard Clarke

e-mail chykembro2@aol.com

Newsletter Editor & Recorder for
Butterflies & Macro Moths
Martin Anthoney
23 Malvern Close
Risca
Newport
NP11 6QY

Phone 01633 612272

e-mail chemlep@btinternet.com

Recorder for Micro Moths
Sam Bosanquet
c/o Dingestow Court
Monmouth
Monmouthshire
NP25 4DY

e-mail sambbryo@aol.com

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