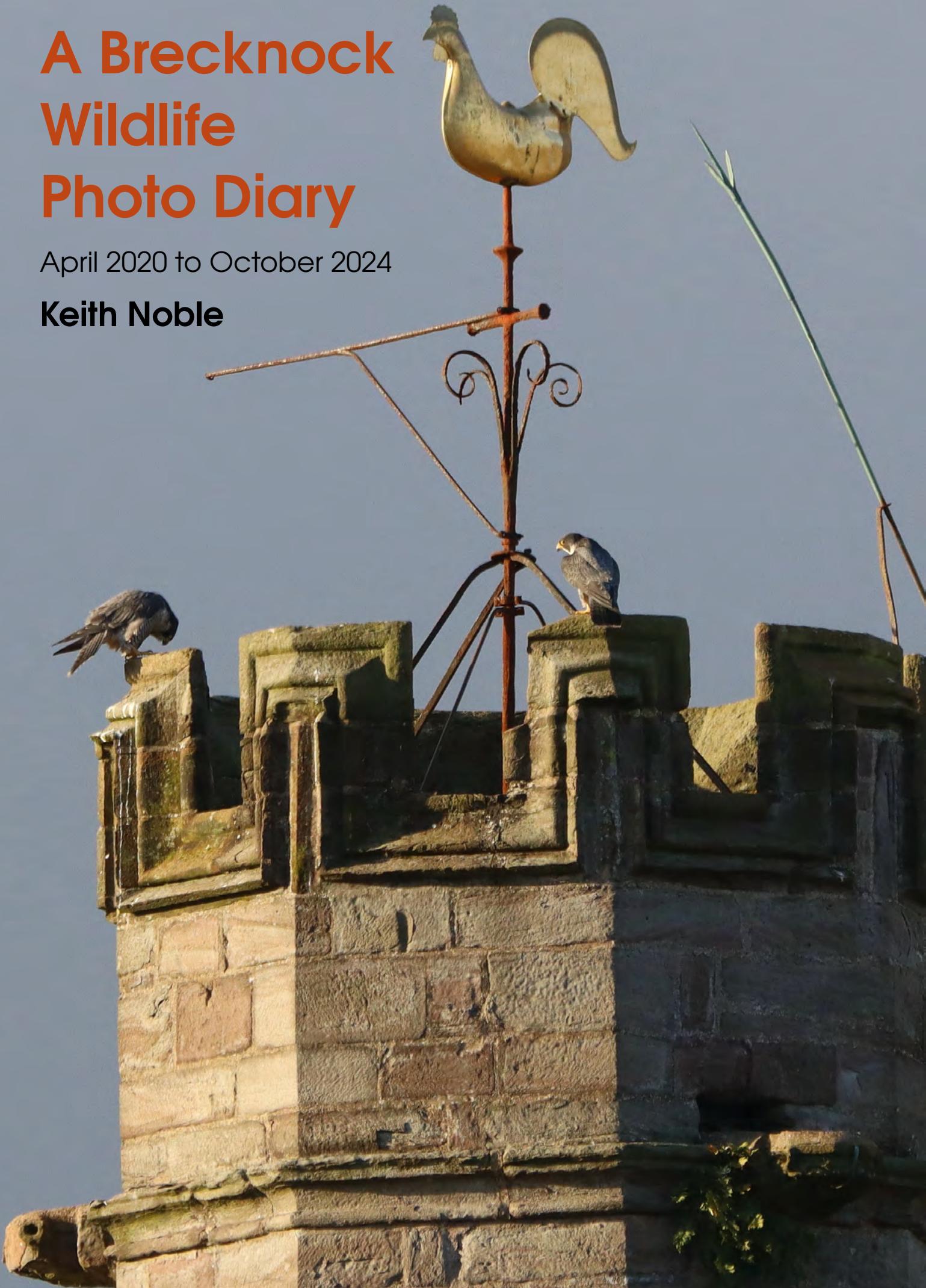


# A Brecknock Wildlife Photo Diary

April 2020 to October 2024

**Keith Noble**





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*Collated by Robert Noble*

First edition, 2025

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## Foreword

Between April 2020 and October 2024, my father Keith Noble maintained an irregular email correspondence with fellow nature lovers, sharing his superb photos of wildlife in and around the town of Brecon, mid Wales. The eighty-four instalments collated here contain more than 500 of his images with the original commentary.

Over the years, as the mailing list grew, the messages became less frequent but more expansive. Keith shared his expert knowledge of the life history, behaviour, and ecology of the featured species. He offered tips on finding, identifying, and supporting birds and insects, and he encouraged his readers to report their own sightings online. He peppered his prose with references to favourite books and memories. Above all, he showed what treasures are to be found in any patch of ground if one simply takes the time to look. As his celebrated predecessor Gilbert White put it, “all nature is so full that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined”.

The geographical range here is not unlike that of White’s Hampshire parish. Due to Covid restrictions, the early observations are largely confined to my parents’ modestly sized town garden. The scope then expands to three primary sites: Brecon and its immediate environs; Llangorse Lake and Common (five miles to the east); and Mynydd Illtyd Common (five miles west). A dispatch from Pant y Llyn – eleven miles north of Brecon – and a few holiday snaps are the only outliers.

The stars of this photo diary are birds (48 species) and flying insects (104). Mammals, spiders, reptiles and amphibians have supporting roles. Plants are just part of the scenery. This taxonomic bias for things with wings reflects both my father’s taste and the local ecology. During his boyhood in Essex and in later life near the West Sussex coast, he most loved watching waders skitter over mudflats. Upon retiring to landlocked Powys, with more time on his hands and fewer vagrant birds around, he deepened his interest and expertise in entomology. He found hoverflies, damselflies, moths and wasps that had seldom if ever before been seen in the region. He became County Dragonfly Recorder for Breconshire and contributed to numerous surveys and reports.

This book is then not only a collection of beautiful wildlife photography but also a testament to the rewards of careful observation, and a seasonal guide to exploring the wonders of your own backyard.

If you enjoy the book then please consider donating to the Velindre Cancer Centre via [velindrefundraising.com](http://velindrefundraising.com).

Robert Noble  
January, 2025



*“If the writer should at all appear to have induced any of his readers to pay a more ready attention to the wonders of the Creation, too frequently overlooked as common occurrences . . . his purpose will be fully answered. But if he should not have been successful in any of these his intentions, yet there remains this consolation behind – that these his pursuits, by keeping the body and mind employed, have, under Providence, contributed to much health and cheerfulness of spirits, even to old age”*

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*  
Advertisement to original edition

*“While sorting Small Quakers from Common Quakers in my moth trap, it struck me that birds are called ‘Little’ and moths are called ‘Small’. The dictionary says little is used with affectionate or emotional overtones . . . not implied by small’. You might ask whether this denotes differences between ornithologists and entomologists, but I know that both are among the kindest of people.”*

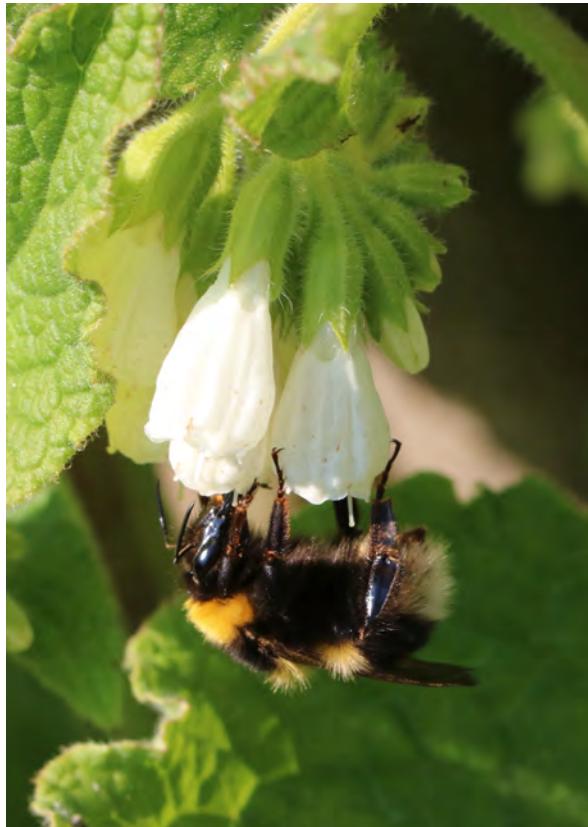
Keith Noble  
10<sup>th</sup> April, 2022



## 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Tree birds

A male Sparrowhawk has been raiding our garden almost daily in recent weeks, and we have had just one visit from a female. He, smaller and brighter coloured, zips through fast and low and sometimes catches a finch; she can take larger birds and I have seen her with a Collared Dove.

From our garden we can hear a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming, and on our morning walk today we watched him in a big oak by the pond behind Brecon Leisure Centre. As we came back down the hill a pair of Nuthatches in a roadside tree were using mud to make the nest entrance just the right size. Newly arrived Blackcaps and Willow Warblers are singing.



## 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Bees part 1

The more common bumblebees are out now – I've seen in our garden Red-tailed, Buff-tailed, Tree, Early, Garden and Common Carder – big queens, and smaller workers with pollen baskets. To find out how to tell which is which, and for much more information, visit the website of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

My photos show Red-tailed – easy, Buff-tailed – collar and abdomen band yellow/brown and buff tail, Garden Bumblebee – yellow collar and bands on rear thorax and front abdomen with a white tail. Note the long face and tongue of this bee.



## 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Bees part 2

Also whizzing around, rather like small bumblebees with a slightly higher pitched buzz are Hairy-footed Flower Bees, *Anthophora plumipes*. If a buff-coloured male stays still long enough you can see how he gets his name. When they are not visiting flowers, especially Lungwort, they chase other bees and today as I was photographing a Buff-tailed on Comfrey I was lucky to catch the moment when a Flower Bee took action to defend his patch. The female is black with conspicuous orange pollen baskets. The picture was taken at 1/1000 second so you can see just how quickly the wings beat.



## 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Four finches and a mouse

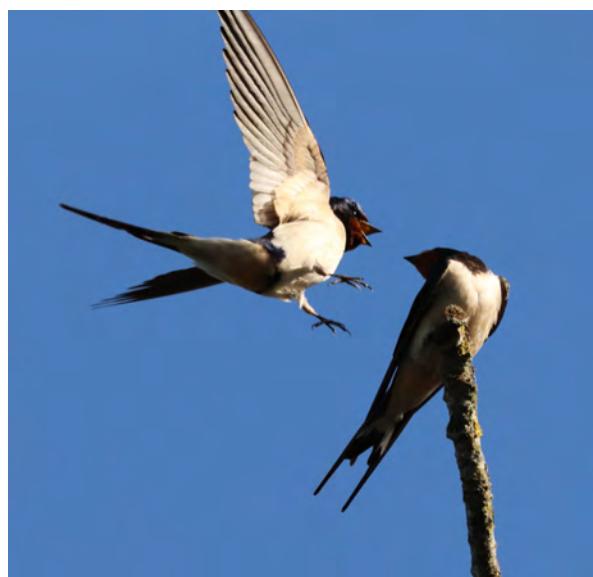
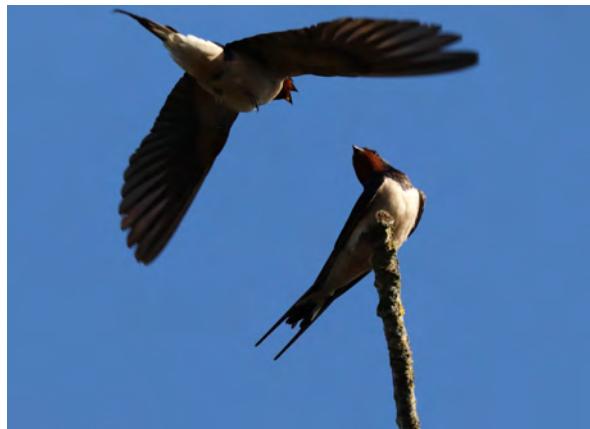
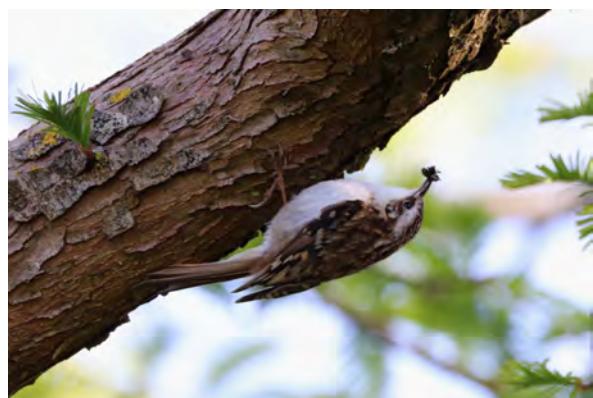
Two pairs of Siskins and Goldfinches now visit our sunflower seed feeders, and single pairs of Chaffinch and Greenfinch. The winter flocks of up to 20 of each species dwindled away from mid-March. New red maple leaves and magnolia flowers make attractive settings for the birds, and a mouse eats the bits that they drop. Breconshire Mammal Recorder Phil Morgan has identified our mice from photos as Yellow-necked, and said that this species is more common here than Wood and House Mice.



## 18<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Early Damselfly and nesting birds

On Thursday 16 April I found a Large Red Damselfly in our garden. I have noted the first emergence from our small pond since 2009 and this is the earliest by eleven days. The usual time is during the first week of May. Warm weather does affect emergence, and also the start and peak of the flying season are now about a fortnight earlier than in 1990. His thorax and eyes will turn red as he feeds and matures over a period of about eleven days. He will then be ready to breed and could live for another month, although the average expectancy is about a week. On the Latest Sightings page of the British Dragonfly Society's website there are now first records starting on 27 March, mostly from southern England, but also Carmarthenshire and Greater Manchester.

I photographed a Blue Tit snipping off the tips of Lavender leaves and taking them to the nestbox – just decoration or something more? We have provided wool for nest lining, but a Goldfinch found the strands too long. I have since cut up the wool. A female Blackbird collects muddy roots and moss from the edge of our pond, (and a male has caught a newt, and will no doubt try for more).



## 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020: Birds and a butterfly

I saw my first Swallow of the year over Brecon on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup>, yesterday at Penlan there were two, and this Monday morning four. In previous years they have nested at the back of the Leisure Centre. While I was taking their pictures a Treecreeper appeared.

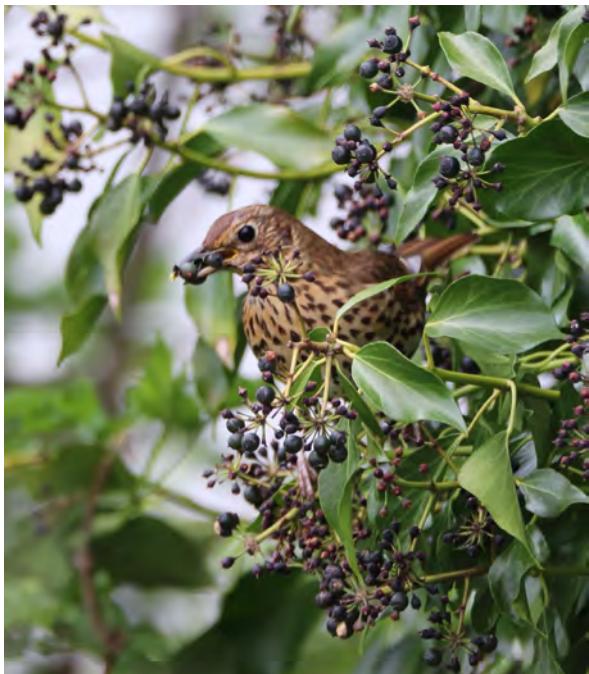
Sometimes you find a butterfly taking an afternoon snooze, like this female Orange-tip, allowing close appreciation of its intricate markings.



## 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020: Damselfly emerging

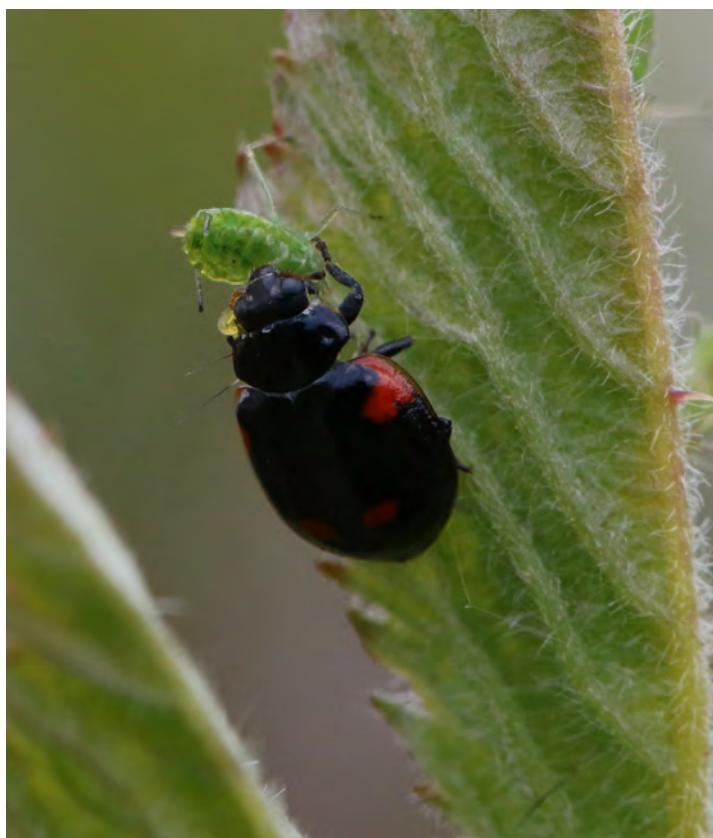
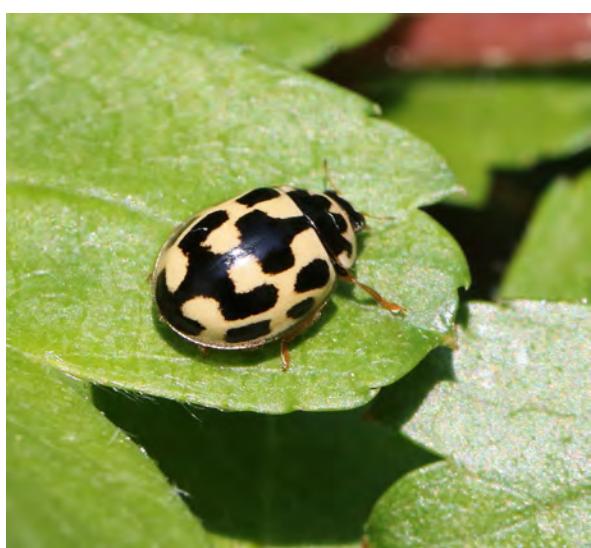
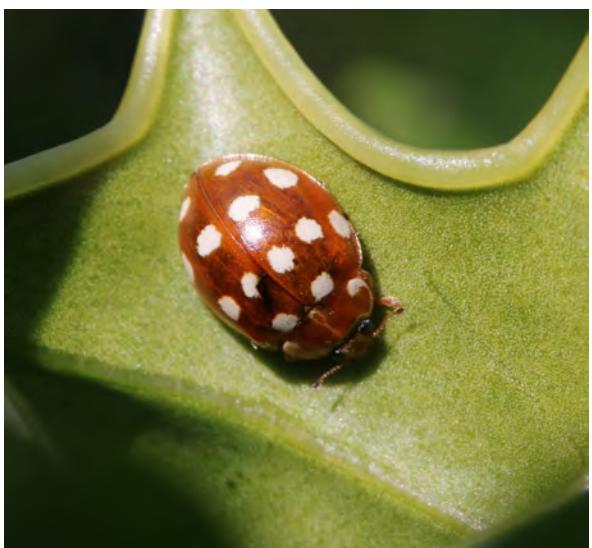
After finding a Large Red Damselfly unusually early on 16<sup>th</sup>, I have been looking for more, and at 11.00 today there was a nymph on the base of the artificial-stone frog that sits in the corner of our small (c. 2 metre diameter) pond. Emergence and development happened quickly so that by 12.30 it was an immature female ready to fly as in the last picture. Another damselfly had emerged nearby.

I removed the exuviae – the empties – as counting them is the best way to know how many leave the pond, and I don't want to count them more than once. As an example of how many more come out as compared with the number of adults seen, on 6.5.18 I saw 3 or 4 flying, 3 emerging, and found 17 exuviae.



## 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Summer visitors

Three or four pairs of Swallows are now around Brecon Leisure Centre when we take our morning walk, and a pair of House Martins. Two Swifts flew over this afternoon. A Willow Warbler hunted small flies through the hawthorn at the back of the garden and stopped for a stretch in our purple smoke bush. It was joined there by another summer visitor, a Blackcap after his drink from the bird bath. He will be flycatching too, but with his heavier bill is probably eating ivy berries, like Blackbirds, and the Song Thrush which is regularly taking away beakfuls to a nest.



## 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020: Minibeasts

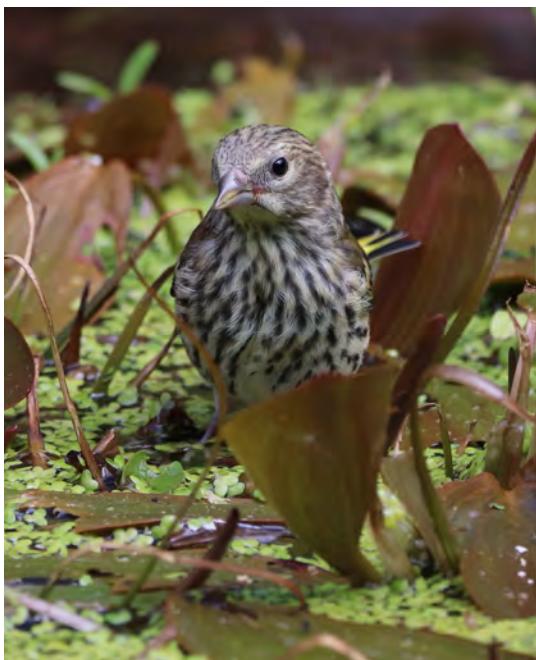
I spent a while this sunny morning finding insects warming up along our garden hedge. Several tiny – less than 5 mm – insects that I had never seen before turned out to be nymphs of a planthopper, *Issus coleoptratus*, not common in Wales. *Issus* planthoppers are the only animals known to have gears. These synchronise each pair of legs so that when they jump at high speed they travel straight. This was described, with electron microscope pictures of the gears, in the journal *Science* in September 2013, and there is a presentation ‘Mechanical gears in jumping insects’ on YouTube – worth a look.

There were also four sorts of ladybird: the Harlequin (top right) in one of its many forms, red with black spots, the large Asian invader which out-competes and eats our native species; Cream-spotted with fourteen spots on brown; 14-spot black on yellow; and a four-spotted red on black form of 2-spot, eating an aphid. Ladybird identification can be confusing.



## 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020: On finding a first Kitten in Spring

Last night I caught a kitten – a Sallow Kitten in my moth trap. The three British kittens are named after their caterpillars' chief food plants, Sallow, Alder and Poplar. They are closely related to the Puss Moth. In 'Emperors, Admirals and Chimney Sweepers, the weird and wonderful names of butterflies and moths', Peter Marren writes "The Puss Moth is famous, but which is the pussy, the moth or its fantastical caterpillar? The former is as fluffy as a white Persian cat, but perhaps it is the caterpillar that really deserves the palm with its cartoon-like 'face' (Tom in Tom and Jerry) and its angrily waving tail". Kitten caterpillars are similar in miniature, and their twin 'tails' earn the group's Latin name *Furcula* – fork. As I had never caught a kitten before, I checked its status on the Brecknock Moth Group website, [bmgs.b-i-s.org/moths](http://bmgs.b-i-s.org/moths), and found a map with all the details of 101 previous records, among the amazing 255,000 which County Moth Recorder, Norman Lowe, has verified and collated. Asleep in an egg box, it is a very pretty moth.



## 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020: Garden birds

Blue Tits are making hundreds of feeding visits to the nestbox, often with small green caterpillars. All the birds here use the pond to bathe and drink, especially finches – sunflower seeds make you thirsty. Siskins have been bringing in streaky brown young birds, but I have not seen any young Greenfinches or Goldfinches yet. A pair of Song Thrushes visit but are usually chased away by Blackbirds which treat them as badly as they do other Blackbirds. One thrush recently managed to have a bath undisturbed. I noticed that it did not shut its eyes but used its translucent nictitating membrane, a sort of third eyelid. They have also been doing this when grabbing ivy berries, a large part of their diet still.



## 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020: Two moths and a bird

As a child, my favourite presents and rewards were Observer's books and I can well remember choosing the Larger British Moths when it first appeared nearly seventy years ago. First in the book is the Lime Hawk-moth and I was very pleased to catch one recently. It reminds me of the futuristic swept-back shape of the Victor bomber, aeroplanes being another of my early interests.

On warm mornings now Longhorn moths flutter and flirt on sunlit oak leaves. Males have longer antennae than females, (do they select the males with the longest horns?). Some of the scientific names of small moths celebrate great naturalists. This one, *Adela reaumurella*, was named by Linnaeus in 1758 to honour the memory of the French scientist, René de Réaumur. If he is remembered here it is probably for the thermometer scale he invented, although he became a Fellow of our Royal Society for many achievements in physics and entomology; he produced six volumes describing all the known insects except beetles. Paris commemorates him in the name of a Metro station.

When we are having breakfast this Robin is likely to appear at the window, and it has even come indoors. It usually eats one suet nibble and takes one away.



## 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020: Blues

Two similar damselflies are appearing now, Common Blue and Azure, but when newly emerged they are basically a pale shade somewhere between pink and grey. So I was not surprised to receive a good photo of a pink immature damselfly for help with identification. Common Blues differ from other blue damselflies in having broader pale stripes on top of the thorax, and on males the tail end segments 8 and 9 are plain with no dark marking, as in my first picture. The other photos are of Azure Damselflies; a pink immature male, an older blue male with a face-to face portrait, and a green and black female. I saw these at Penlan ponds, Brecon. Elsewhere several other species have been noted in Latest Sightings at [www.british-dragonflies.org.uk](http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk).

And up on Slwch Hill above Brecon I found another Common Blue, a butterfly.



## 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020: Beautiful Demoiselles

During a walk beside the Usk I found Beautiful Demoiselles on the hedge where the path goes under the Brecon bypass bridge. Males have metallic blue bodies and almost black wings, females are green with brown wings. One of the males was eating a fly – there were swarms over the river. Demoiselles differ from many other dragonflies in living by rivers and streams, their nymphs taking two years to develop under running water. I have recently received sightings and photos from around Crickhowell, from the Llynfi at Talgarth, and the Tarell valley near Libanus. With them I found one Banded Demoiselle. To show the differences I have attached two pictures (top left and bottom) I took in previous years by the Wye near Galesburg and at The Warren, Hay. Body colours are similar to Beautiful but the male's wings are clear with a dark blotch and the female's light green.



## 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020: Small is beautiful

Here are recent photos from our garden and walks at Penlan and Slwch Hill, Brecon. More than 2,500 moth species are on the UK list. They are split into macro-moths and micro-moths, roughly big ones and little ones with some exceptions. *Pyrausta aurata* (top row) is a micro-moth, Small Yellow Underwing (bottom row) is a macro-moth, but they are similar in size and each would fit comfortably in the circle of a 5p coin or on a buttercup flower. *Pyrausta* is sometimes called the Mint Moth, but most micros do not have well-accepted English names, unlike all the macros. Its caterpillar eats mints and other herbs such as thyme in my first photo. The food plants of Small Yellow Underwing are Common and Field Mouse-ears. On the Brecknock Moth Group website you can see 56 records of *Pyrausta* and 40 of Small Yellow Underwing, compared with 5,122 of Large Yellow Underwing which comes frequently to moth traps, sometimes more than a hundred in one night.

(Macro or Micro? I take close-up photos with a Tamron Macro lens on a Canon body; if I used Nikon a similar lens would be a Micro-Nikkor.)



## 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020: Newts

On a couple of warm nights last week I taped a torch to a tripod and used it to light a corner of our little pond where I had cleared away some of the duckweed. Palmate Newts emerged through the pond weed from the deeper water onto shallow stone edges. They will not be in the pond much longer now, after the females have laid hundreds of eggs, each individually wrapped in a folded leaf. The name derives from the male's webbed feet developed as part of his breeding attire. I see a resemblance to Gollum in the Tolkien films; in 1973 a genus of ground sharks from the Pacific was named Gollum after the description in the books. I have sometimes seen a Blackbird catch a newt, but so far not this summer although they are clearly hungry and quarrelsome. With the ground hard and dry, we are providing suet nibbles and apples; I have watched a youngster taking Mahonia berries.



## 6<sup>th</sup> June 2020: Four minute seconds

These moths are tiny, and when I found them in our garden four of them had only one previous record on the Brecknock Moth Group's excellent website, [bmgs.b-i-s.org](http://bmgs.b-i-s.org). So they are four minute seconds. The other pictured here, *Grapholita compositella* (top), was a third in 2017, and has appeared every summer since on Red Clover in our mini-meadow. (Some of the smallest moths have the longest names; from my rusty memories of Latin and Greek I reckon this one refers to the print-like markings).

On the hot afternoon of 1 June I thought I had glimpsed this one again, but a photo proved it carried a crescent moon, hence *G. lunulana* (middle left), only previously recorded in the county in 1992. I then checked our leylandii hedge for *Argyresthia trifasciata* (middle right) which I first saw here in 2016, hardly bigger than a whitefly with three bars on its gold wings. Instead I found *A. cupressella*, the Cypress Tip Moth (bottom left). These two species, whose caterpillars live inside the leaves and shoots of Cypress, are aliens which presumably arrived in imported plants and are spreading north and west. *Trifasciata* was first seen in Britain in 1982, *cupressella* from North America in 1997, reaching Wales in 2009.

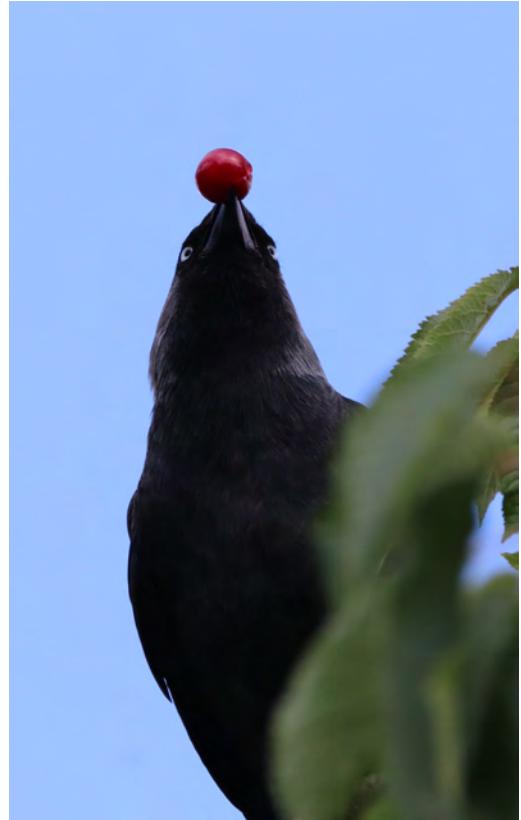
Back by the meadow, I followed another little UFO which turned out to be *Metalampra italica* (bottom right), first noted in Britain in 2003, whose caterpillar feeds under the bark of dead trees and shrubs – my third second in one afternoon. Our 1,600-plus species of micro-moths are easily overlooked but can become fascinating.



## 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020: Birds and a Bee

Called in from the garden for an afternoon cuppa, I showed Alison the first of these photos and asked “What is it?” – “A bee” – “What sort?” – “I’d call that a long-horned bee” – “You’re right”. Of all Britain’s 270+ bees this might be the easiest to name. As usual when I find something new I consulted Aderyn, aderyn.lercwales.org.uk. Via Distribution Maps, Species-Wildcard, Scientific Name, I reached a map of the 103 records in Wales of *Eucera longicornis*, all in the south, apart from six at Radnorshire Wildlife Trust’s Gilfach reserve. Breconshire was blank, I had found a county first. I sent a note and photos to the Bee Recorder for Brecks and Rads, Janice Vincett (who spoke to U3A’s Wildlife Group early this year and has helped me to identify some bees I was unsure of).

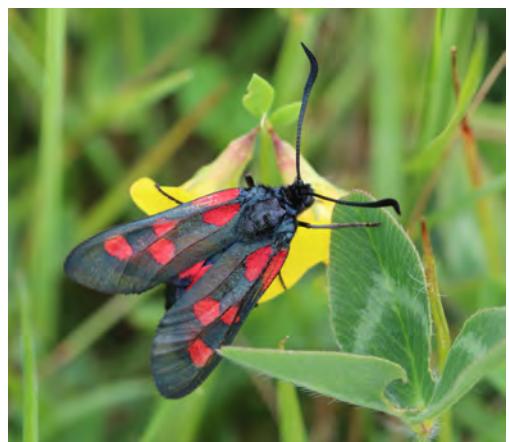
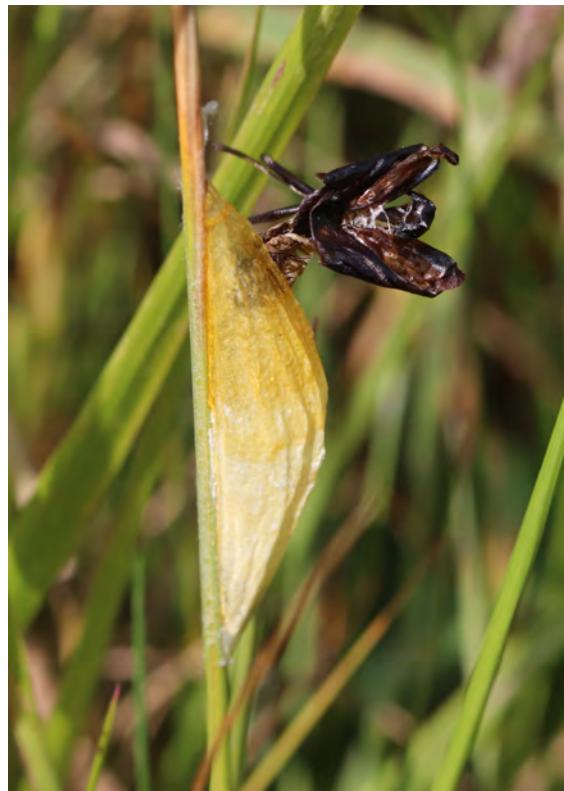
On a morning walk, I was pleased to see that two pairs of House Martins are at last repairing past years’ nests on the old Brecon High School. It looked as if one pair was taking back to its own cup fresh-laid mud from the other one round the corner, and one thief was caught and dangled by a resident. The final picture might be a kiss, courtship-feeding, or a mud-pass?



## 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020: Pink elephants and cherry-pickers

When I find hawk-moths in my moth trap they are usually docile and can be gently placed on a suitable plant to have their pictures taken. For the Small Elephant Hawk-moth (top left) I chose Abutilon just for the colour. There was more reason in choosing Red Valerian for the Elephant (top right) as its flowers are among the favourites of nectaring insects, (including a regular Hummingbird Hawk-moth at this time last year). The moths are named of course for their large caterpillars which look like elephant trunks, and we watched one grow steadily last August eating leaves of a fuchsia, an alternative to willowherbs.

A walk this week took me to Bishops Garden under Brecon Cathedral where birds were feasting in a cherry tree. Blackbirds of various ages were stabbing and tearing the fruit and one carried away a beakful as if to feed young. Blackcaps were more delicate, and Jackdaws used their feet to hold and bite the cherries. I tried one but it tasted bitter.



## 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020: Moths and Butterflies

I spent a pleasant couple of hours on Slwch Hill this afternoon, trying to photograph moths and butterflies in the brief moments when the breeze stopped shaking them about. Many of the Burnet moths were flying red blurs, but they made colourful pictures when they settled to take nectar. Some were mating which they may do straight after emerging from papery cocoons. I remembered a day on the South Downs when our daughter, then aged about seven, bejewelled her arms with many shiny pairs of Burnets. I found two sorts today, Six-spots (top left; middle left) and Five-spots. Their chief food plant is Bird's-foot Trefoil and the field was bright with splashes of Eggs and Bacon, and Red and White Clovers. There were other moths too, many Meadow Brown and Small Skipper butterflies, a couple of Small Tortoiseshells and a Comma.

Fields of waving grass and wild flowers, alive with butterflies and moths, bees and grasshoppers are no longer common and the one I visited above Camden Crescent is threatened. An Appeal has been made against the National Park's refusal to allow the building of 30 houses there.



## 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020: A new Powys dragon

On Thursday 24 June, Mark Waldron and his family visited Llangorse Lake-side for a picnic. Mark, as usual, went looking for wildlife and found two Scarce Chaser dragonflies. A couple of his fine photos are attached and they prove not only presence but also evidence of breeding. The blue male has smudges on his abdomen where the clasping legs of a female have rubbed off some of his pruinescence – bloom – during mating, as demonstrated by the pair of Black-tailed Skimmers (bottom right). Immatures and female Scarce Chasers are usually orange but this female is dusky with old age.

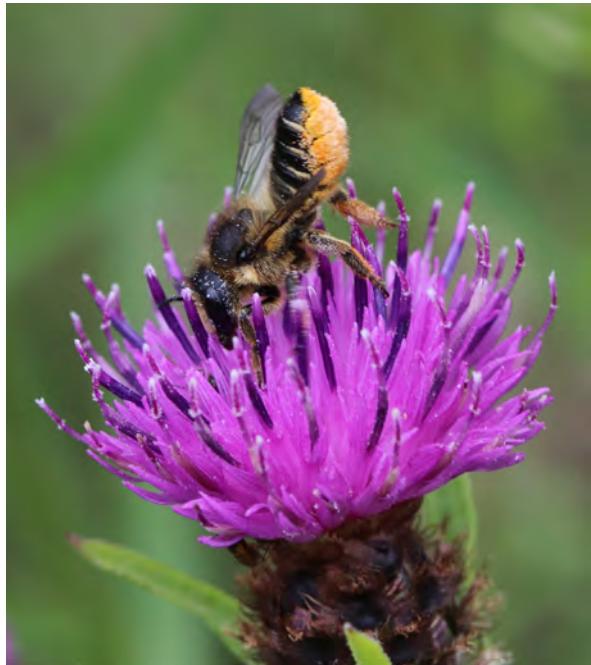
The Scarce Chaser is a Red Data (Near Threatened) Species which has been spreading west from southern England. Its map on the Aderyn website ([aderyn.lercwales.org.uk](http://aderyn.lercwales.org.uk)) shows four previous records in Wales, Mark's are the first for Powys. More information about this and other dragonflies is at [british-dragonflies.org.uk](http://british-dragonflies.org.uk).

Other recent reports have included early sightings by Mike Tompkinson at Sarnau of Emerald Damselfly on 16 June and Southern Hawker on 23<sup>rd</sup>, and from Ann Payne – Banded Demoiselles at Jubilee Bridge near Merthyr Cynog on 27<sup>th</sup>.



## 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020: Sunny Sunday

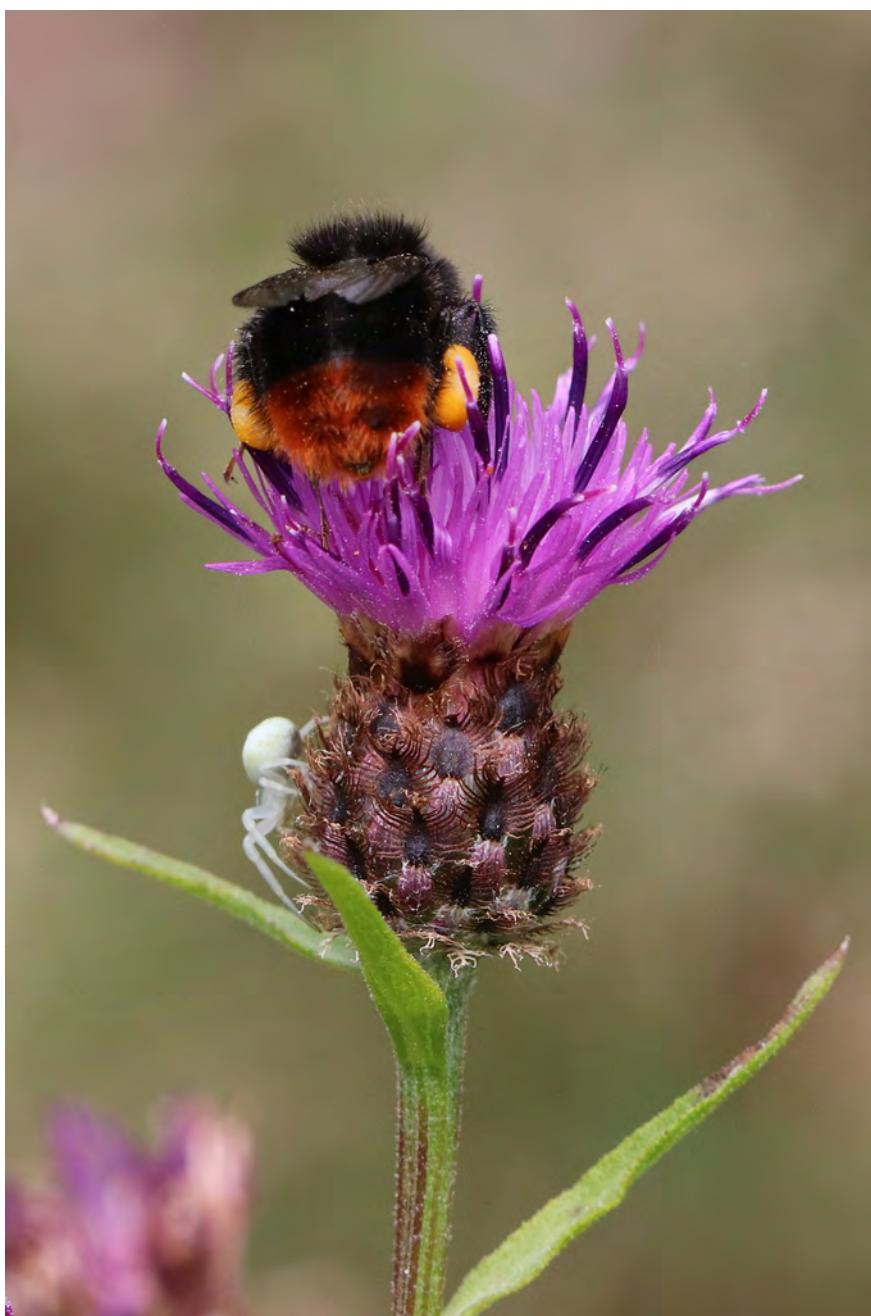
This morning our hand-fed Robin sunbathed after a wet night, and a single Comma nectared on the Buddleia, reminding me that it is time to spend fifteen minutes on the [bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org](http://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org). Along the Camlais stream on Mynydd Illtyd I found three Keeled Skimmers (second row, right) and Golden-ringed Dragonflies (third row, right), and Azure, Large Red and Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies including this pair (second row, left). Three Emperors and five Four-spotted Chasers (third row, left) flew around the Traeth Bach pool. Back home I nearly trod on another sunbather, a young Blackbird. More of this weather, please.



## 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020: On knapweed part 1

In our garden meadow patch Common Knapweed flowers are attracting insects now. As well as bumblebees there are leafcutters. Females snip neat circles from leaves to wrap their eggs with a food supply of nectar and pollen. Instead of baskets on their hind legs like bumblebees they have brushes under their abdomens, conspicuously orange on the Patchwork Leafcutter, *Megachile centuncularis* (top left). Among the hoverflies *Scaeva pyrastri* (top right), a migrant which arrives in varying numbers each summer, is one of the easier to recognise by its white-on-black markings. On the scarcer *Scaeva selenitica* (middle left) these are pale yellow. As with many other hoverflies its larvae eat aphids so providing pest control as well as pollination.

For more than a fortnight I have been seeing one or two micro-moths out each evening and discovered that *Eucosma hohenwartiana* is laying eggs on closed flower buds of knapweed where its larvae will feed inside.



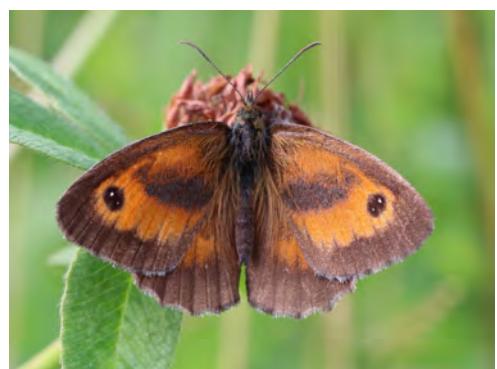
## 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020: On knapweed part 2

And lurking in the open flowers is a crab-spider *Misumena vatia*. This female is basically white but over a period of about three weeks could turn yellow if it sees that as a better match for its hunting site, (but purple is impossible). The one I am watching is small, little bigger than a peppercorn, but they can grow to pea-size. They ambush insects, even bees bigger than themselves, grabbing with their legs, biting with venomous fangs, injecting digestive enzymes and sucking their prey dry. Could there be one in your garden? There are only three previous records for Powys, and you can find out where and when on the Aderyn Distribution Map at [www.bis.org.uk](http://www.bis.org.uk).



## 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020: A Red-and-White-letter Day

On the way back from our exercise walk this morning around the playing fields above Brecon, I lingered to look for butterflies in the long grass and hedge by the tennis courts. There were Meadow Browns, a Small Skipper, a Common Blue and an obliging Small Copper which settled for a series of photos. As it flew away I noticed a slightly larger drab butterfly drop onto the brambles which proved on a closer look to be a White-letter Hairstreak. It came down to nectar on a head of Hogweed, posing beautifully for the camera. White-letter Hairstreak has become very scarce as Dutch Elm Disease has killed its caterpillars' food plant. There are several dead trees beside these playing fields and more being lost year by year around Brecon, so I was very pleased to find this butterfly still with us.



## 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2020: Big Butterfly Count

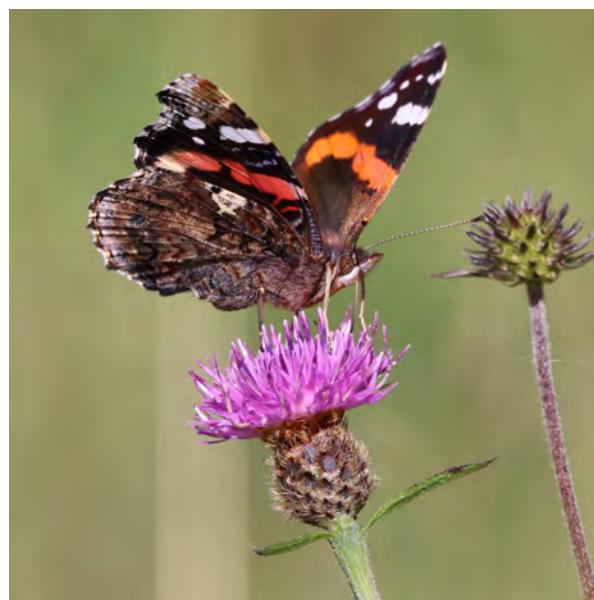
Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count continues until Sunday 9 August. So far 85,000 people have recorded more than a million butterflies. My own contribution has been 101 butterflies of 13 species during three 15-minute counts around Llangorse Lake, and one at Penlan, Brecon. Pictures of Peacock, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Green-veined White, Small Copper, Holly Blue (middle left) and Common Blue (top right; middle right) are attached. Warm weather later this week should be good for taking part: [bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org](http://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org).



## 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020: Friday at the Lake

The morning was hot and clear, ideal for searching the Devil's-bit Scabious now starting to open its flowers and turn large parts of the meadows as blue as Llangorse Lake. My target was a tiny shiny moth for which this is the caterpillar's food plant; I had seen two nearby a week before and wanted better pictures. In the course of about an hour I found six females ovipositing into the flower buds of Devil's-bit. I thought they were all *Nemophora cupriacella* but checking my 137 photos turned up one *Nemophora minimella*. These similar species are very local and in Wales *N. cupriacella*, also known as Coppery Long-horn, has been recorded only a few times, see its Distribution Map at [aderyn.lercwales.org.uk](http://aderyn.lercwales.org.uk). It is unusual in being parthenogenetic – no males are known or required. *N. minimella*, however, does have males, with particularly long horns as in this shot (middle left) from a 2018 bioblitz at the Wildlife Trust's Cae Lynden reserve. This used to be the football field of Cwm Wanderers but is now Rhos pasture with Devil's-bit, one of the sites around Ystradgynlais important for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

On my two recent visits to the Lake I kept a note of dragonflies: Emperor (three photos), Golden-ringed, Southern, Migrant and Brown Hawkers, Black-tailed Skimmer, Common Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Common Blue, Emerald and Blue-tailed Damselflies. The birds included single Great and Little Egrets, Kingfisher and Common Sandpiper.



## 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020: Sunny weekend part 1

The rain stopped for the Bank Holiday and I spent much of Saturday at Llangorse Lake between the car park at Llangasty and the Bird Hide (which is still closed). There were plenty of Migrant Hawkers including this mating pair, but the Hobbies which have been hunting them recently didn't appear. I was pleased to find five Ruddy Darters in their third season here, each keeping to his own short stretch of shoreline. Knapweed and Devil's-bit Scabious attracted bees and hoverflies, Small Tortoiseshells and Red Admirals – no Painted Ladies yet.

Silver Y moths are coming into our garden as the light fades. With the Buddleia nearly finished, Valerian is the favourite with Evening Primrose, Ceratostigma and Abelia. I can't recall Agapanthus being recommended for wildlife gardens but the moths were probing its blue tubes.



## 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020: Sunny weekend part 2

Today I visited Traeth Bach, the biggest of the pools on Mynydd Illtyd which have benefited from this wet August. The dragonflies were Common Hawkers, Common and Black Darters (top left). Scanning fence posts to see if any were perched there, I found a basking Lizard. After some distant shots with a long zoom I moved in until I was taking portraits with a macro lens. I think she was allowing a slow approach relying on her quick reactions to get away, like the TV Gunslinger “You let someone else be the first one to draw – On your speed you depend”. Funny how that song sticks 60 years on.

The moth trap is out now for National Moth Night. I wonder what the morning will bring.



## 5<sup>th</sup> September 2020: Marmalade and mimicry

Few of the British hoverflies – there are more than 280 species – have common names. *Episyrphus balteatus* (top left) is one of them, known as the Marmalade Fly on account of its colouring. It is common and can become even more numerous when migrants arrive from the Continent. Its blind larvae eat aphids, sucking them dry. Many other hoverflies are yellow and black like wasps, and this may give some protection from hunting birds. *Sericomyia silentis* (top right) is one of the better mimics. Its larvae are rat-tailed maggots, the ‘tail’ being a breathing tube as they live in water, filter-feeding on micro-organisms among rotting vegetation. *Helophilus* (*H. trivittatus* middle left; *H. hybridus* middle right) and *Eristalis* (*E. horticola* bottom left) larvae are similar.

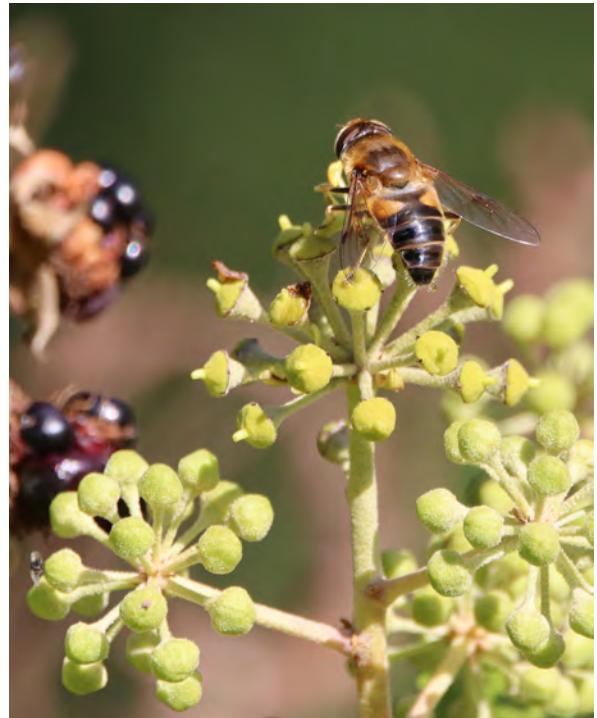
These pictures were taken recently at Llangorse Lake where Devil’s-bit Scabious is attracting many hoverflies and bees, especially the Common Carder Bee. *Arctophila superbiens* (bottom right) mimics carder colours but its big compound eyes and single pair of wings lessen its disguise.

The Breconshire and Radnorshire Bee Recorder, Janice Vincett, now has a recording page and blog which you can find at [midwalesbeesandwasps.com](http://midwalesbeesandwasps.com) – have a look.



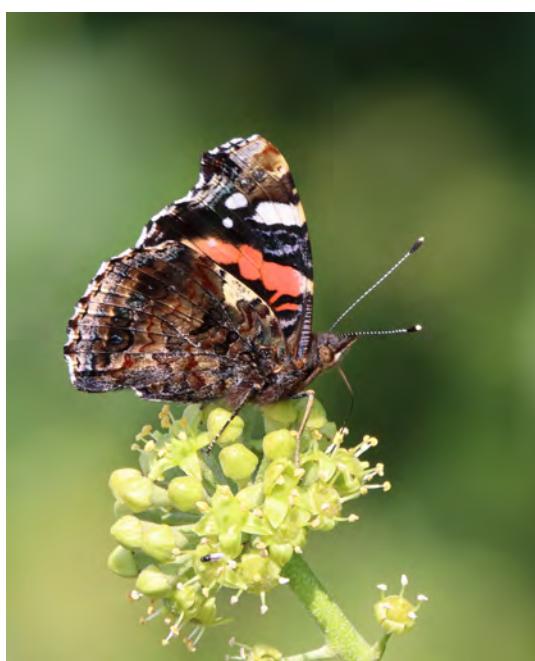
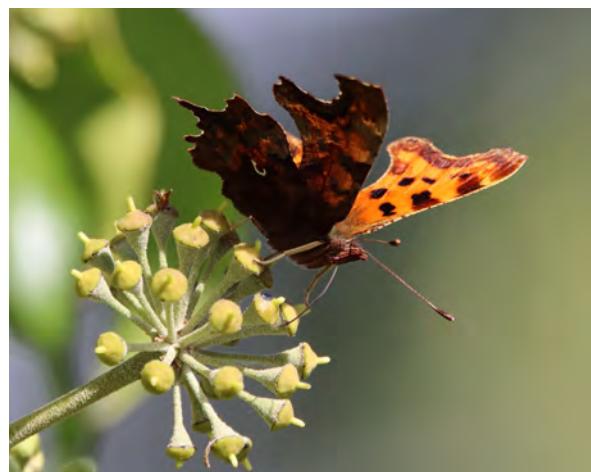
## 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020: Dragons

Walking from the small car park below Llangasty church on Saturday morning, I found Migrant Hawkers (top row; middle left) in the hedges, still warming up after a clear cool night. One female allowed me to hold the camera six inches away and photograph the many thousands of lenses in her compound eyes. I have not counted these but read that one American dragonfly has 28,000 lenses in each eye, brilliant equipment for an aerial hunter. I kept a count of ones and twos on my way round the Lake to Llangorse Common, and on my way back in the warm afternoon many more were active, including about 30 flying together in the sheltered part of the meadow east of the Hide. Some were paired. A total of 84 Migrants was my highest ever but surely only a sample of the true numbers around the whole site. Among them I picked out two Southern Hawkers (middle right; bottom left), longer and greener, with large 'headlights' on the thorax. A few Common Darters included a pair in tandem (bottom right), frequently dipping to the water for the female to lay an egg. They were too quick for me to catch the moment of ovipositing, but I was pleased to keep a few flight shots among many blurred failures. This one, taken at 1/800 of a second, shows how fast the wings move. Each wing is controlled separately and can twist and flex for aerobatic mastery.



## 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020: On Ivy part 1

Ivy is now an important source of nectar and pollen for many insects, including *Colletes hederae*, the Ivy Bee (top left, and on the left in the bottom photo). It was described as a new species in 1993 and reached Dorset in 2001. Since then it has spread across much of southern Britain, tracked by BWARS – the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society, which welcomes sightings for their survey at [www.bwars.com](http://www.bwars.com). In late September I found and photographed two in the lane by Brecon Sewage Works and another two opposite the Job Centre in town. About the same size as a Honey Bee (on the right in the bottom photo) it has an orange-buff thorax and broad bands on the abdomen. With the bees and wasps now there are many *Eristalis* hoverflies (top right), commonly known as drone-flies, which mimic bees.



## 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020: On Ivy part 2

A few butterfly species including Comma, Red Admiral and Small Tortoise-shell are nectaring before they spend the winter as adults, unlike most others which do so as eggs, larvae or pupae. Sometimes they hibernate in buildings, but like it cool and dark, so do not come into our warmer houses as often as they used to. Today I photographed a micro-moth on a bedroom window, *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*. With my small Latin and less Greek, I recognise the reference to its spiny feet, but it is also known as the Beautiful Plume. This species spends the winter as an adult and I first thought that the three I found had come inside for that purpose, until I realised that Pelargoniums are one of their caterpillar's foods and Alison had brought several plants indoors out of this dirty weather. When the sun returns I'll be looking for more Ivy Bees.



## 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020: Peregrines

Both Peregrines were up in the sun yesterday morning on the top turret of St.Mary's, Brecon. When they were not preening, with contortions to reach awkward areas, they did very little. "Sometimes I sits and thinks, and then again I just sits". I wonder if Peregrines do think and dream, and about what? If they have hunted successfully at dawn there is little they need do for the rest of the day.

The pair is on the church tower for most of the year apart from a few weeks in early summer when they go somewhere more private to nest. The tower is their place to spend the night and much of the day, choosing perches out of hot sun or hard rain (although they seem to like a gentle shower). It provides a fine view over the town and its pigeons, Jackdaws and Starlings – but they catch a great range of other birds. More than a hundred prey species are known to have been taken in south Wales. Breconshire Birds Annual Report 2019 mentions Lapwing, Woodcock, Common Tern, Kingfisher and Redwing. The Report should be available in a few weeks; look out for a notice as well as the latest sightings and photos on [www.brecknockbirds.co.uk](http://www.brecknockbirds.co.uk).



## 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020: Egrets and Swans

At Llangorse Lake on Tuesday I took pictures of two of my favourite subjects, Little and Great White Egrets. They are now regular at the Lake outside the breeding season, and often seen by the Usk and Wye, and at other watery places. The latest annual Breconshire Bird Report records totals of seven Little along the Wye between October and December, and six Great White at Llangorse in November. Birds that were unknown here when Martin Peers and Mike Shrubb wrote Birds of Breconshire in 1990 have become familiar, and although there is no evidence yet of breeding in our county, 147 Little Egret nests were noted elsewhere in Wales in 2017.

On a previous visit ten days ago I watched a pair of swans flying towards me, thought they might make a good picture and raised my camera. As they came closer I realised that they were making short musical calls – not Mute Swans but Whoopers. They circled the Lake calling for a few minutes before heading away south. Perhaps the sailing race put them off joining the seventy Mute Swans on the water. Just a few Whoopers turn up occasionally in Breconshire; a better place to look for them is the Tywi valley west of Llandeilo. Most of about 25,000 which are arriving in Britain now from Iceland, after a sea crossing of roughly 1,000 kilometres, winter in Scotland, northern England, and Ireland where their music is the source of legends and poetry.

With lockdown imminent I can see that most of my natural history will be garden-based for some time. So I am pleased that finches are coming to Vine House Farm sunflower seed. With up to 15 Goldfinches we have a few Chaffinches, Greenfinches and Siskins. Yesterday and today a male Brambling joined them.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020: Garden birds

Goldfinches are the most numerous of our garden visitors now with up to thirty on and under the sunflower seed feeders. With them are half a dozen each of Greenfinches, Chaffinches and Siskins, and yesterday and today they attracted two different Sparrowhawks – a youngster and an adult male. Ten days ago a Brambling came in and stayed for three days, but his fluffy appearance indicated that he was not fully fit, possibly from trichomonosis which has seriously reduced the Greenfinch population and affects other finches. Wash hands against Covid, and feeders against trichomonosis. We also put out suet products, particularly for tits; Long-tailed Tits appeared this morning and I hope they will keep our garden as part of their circuit.



## 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020: Hedgehog and Blackcaps

Blackcaps visit our garden in Brecon every winter, typically arriving during the second half of October. My first sighting this year was on 25<sup>th</sup>, then occasional brief glimpses until today when I was able to photograph a female taking nectar and pollen from mahonia flowers. More often recently I have seen them with Blackbirds, Starlings and Jackdaws feasting on apples in a big tree nearby. Most Blackcaps which breed in Britain, Ireland and on the continent move to southern Europe and north Africa for the winter, but some from central Europe head north west to Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia, coming into gardens for the food we provide. A recent paper describes the results from fitting geolocators on hundreds of Blackcaps in Germany, Poland, Austria and the Netherlands, as well as birds wintering in Britain and Ireland. These small devices track the birds by recording day length to fix latitude, and the mid-point between dawn and dusk for longitude. They showed that Blackcaps wintering with us span 2,000 km across Europe from Spain to southern Poland, and on average arrive back on their breeding grounds ten days before those which winter in southern Europe and north Africa.

For weeks we have been putting out dry cat food (not fishy varieties) every night for hedgehogs, rarely glimpsing one but finding droppings. Today I was lucky and watched one out in the middle of the day, snuffling about under the bird feeders and in our mini-meadow.

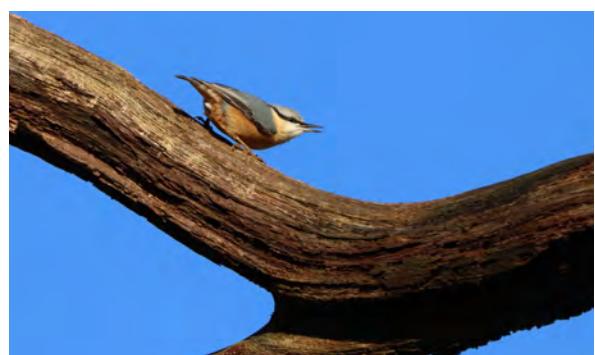


## 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020: Blue, Coal and Long-tailed

Blue Tits are taking nectar and pollen from our Mahonia as well as the food we put out for them. They also investigate any nook or cranny that might contain a minibeast, poking about street lamps for small flies attracted there, picking them from fences, windows and spiders' webs, even looking into scaffold poles. A couple of Coal Tits come for sunflower seeds, usually taking away just one to eat elsewhere or hide for later. Long-tailed Tits flock through quickly and particularly like suet bars and nibbles.

I have just finished entering and verifying all the Breconshire dragonfly sightings which people emailed to me this year, and have verified all those which were submitted through recording sites. Thank you, everyone who contributed. Any further records will be most welcome.

British Dragonfly Society produces a regular free email newsletter, which you can request from [british-dragonflies.org.uk](http://british-dragonflies.org.uk). Our local records centre also emails newsletters, and the recent Autumn issue with something for everyone interested in local wildlife is at [www.bis.org.uk](http://www.bis.org.uk).



## 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020: Tweezers

Treecreepers visit our garden rarely, so I was pleased to grab a few shots when Alison spotted one at the pond on Wednesday. It then moved quickly in the smoke bush with grappling claws and curved beak for winkling out minibeasts. On the same day came a Blue Tit with a similar-looking beak. Only the upper mandible was deformed and it seemed to have no trouble picking out sunflower seeds, nibbling a suet bar and probing mahonia flowers. I see treecreepers regularly by the Usk and Canal where there are plenty of mature trees, many with breaks and holes and crevices to explore. Nuthatches are there too, this one in a brief sunny spell on Saturday morning while I was doing the monthly winter BTO WeBS survey, counting all the water birds between Brynich and Brecon. Alternative names are Nut Jobber and Woodhacker, but this bird was delicately tweezing out tiny morsels. I was reminded of a pair which came to a previous garden and could be easily told apart by their different table manners.



## 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020: Humbug

Head-on, a Coal Tit can look like a badger, a humbug or a bullseye. (Can you still buy clove balls and winter mixture, are gobstoppers as big as they used to be, and is there honey still for tea? Do these comfort-eating thoughts come from the season, the dismal weather, receiving a big box of Lindor for our recent wedding anniversary or watching the Vicar of Dibley's repeated Crunchie bar hangover?)

But back to the birds. Coal Tits are doing better than most woodland species. Their fine bills are adapted to pick seeds from cones, and insects and spiders from bark. They benefited from the increase of conifer plantations, and feeding in gardens helps them through the winter. They often take away a seed or piece of peanut to hide or cache. A study has shown that their memory of where they hid the food lasts for less than six weeks, but they continue to find some as they focus their foraging on likely areas.

In the new Breconshire Birds Annual Report for 2019 there are records of winter flocks of up to 20 Coal Tits in favoured woodlands. The first year of a survey to locate the rarer Willow Tit by playing calls and songs to encourage responses produced many more records than usual, and Marsh Tits responded too. As well as details of 176 species and sub-species seen last year, the best total for a long time, contents include a paper on the increasing number of breeding Barnacle Geese and the Llangorse Lake Ringing Report – 2,477 birds ringed of 47 species.

We have two Coal Tits in our garden every day now. They are often here at the same time but seem not to pay much attention to each other. Being so small they are dominated by other birds, including two quarrelsome Robins. If the Robin's song is really a fierce territorial challenge, it can still sound sweet to us and brighten mid-winter days. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



## 29<sup>th</sup> December 2020: Sprawk

I am sitting at the kitchen window with a fresh cup of tea and the Beethoven Violin Concerto about to start when he flies into the magnolia. So quickly upstairs, kneel down, open the window slowly just enough to rest the big lens hood. I am lucky, he usually leaves before I am ready. The light is poor but he stands out against the background of the cream hospital wall across the road. The first pictures are spoiled by the twig right in front of his eyes and I will him to relax or lean forward. I feel trebly free to wait – I am retired, isolating and it is a Bank Holiday. I can admire the intricate barring of his underparts and note the white blotches on his coverts. His eyes are big and bright, forward-facing, his stare intense and piercing. When finches return to the branches above he watches them but does not hunt. I think he has eaten recently, his crop looks bulgy. It is forty minutes with tea and music finished before he stretches and takes off looking straight at me. A close encounter of the bird kind. That was good.



## 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021: Tiddly-om-pom-pom

One of our regular exercise walks takes us down to peer over the postern bridge at Brecon Castle. Often we see a pair of Dippers on the rocks or hunting under the fast water of the Honddu. Sometimes a Heron is there too, close enough for a portrait. We carry on to Watergate and along the Prom to the weir. A different Heron fishes in the rapids. On a recent day when I left my camera at home we saw it catch a trout – that picture was one that got away. Often it is standing on one leg, head hunched into shoulders. I suspect it spends many hours like that and I wonder if Herons day-dream. Today two Little Grebes were diving in the calmer water off the Boathouse, coming up for just a second to catch a breath. A Grey Wagtail was tittering, tottering on a washed-up log and a Kingfisher flashed by.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021: Rodents part 1

I try to hang the birds' seed feeders out of reach of squirrels without success. The best way I know is to put up a sort of washing line, hang the feeders from that, too high for jumping from the ground, and thread plastic bottles on each end. These rotate to throw off squirrels. A local garden I pass on exercise walks uses this method.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021: Rodents part 2

Mice have a hole under the top step to our lawn, just ten feet from a window, and dash out for seeds or suet nibbles. Sometimes I have seen the amber band between the front legs, indicating Yellow-necked Mouse rather than Wood Mouse. We like seeing them in the garden, more so now that they can no longer get into the tool store, gnaw chisel handles and make nests from rags and paper face masks.

My Big Garden Birdwatch found 19 Siskins, but little else: 6 Blackbirds, twos of Blue Tit (looking into a nest box), Chaffinch and Dunnock, and a Goldfinch.



## 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021: Wee sleekit

I had been wondering if it was the same mouse that appeared each early morning, until today when two looked out of the hole. They emerged in the half-light to collect sunflower kernels. Instead of using on-camera flash, producing a bright dot in the mouse's eye, I am now setting high ISO for natural light which gives a reflection of the whole house, like an Escher print of a crystal ball.

The goldcrest has been back to search the miniature conifer, and a wren. Blue tits are visiting a nest box, and I have had to move feeders to stop him chasing away the siskins. Crocuses and snowdrops opened in brief sunshine today – bees by the weekend?



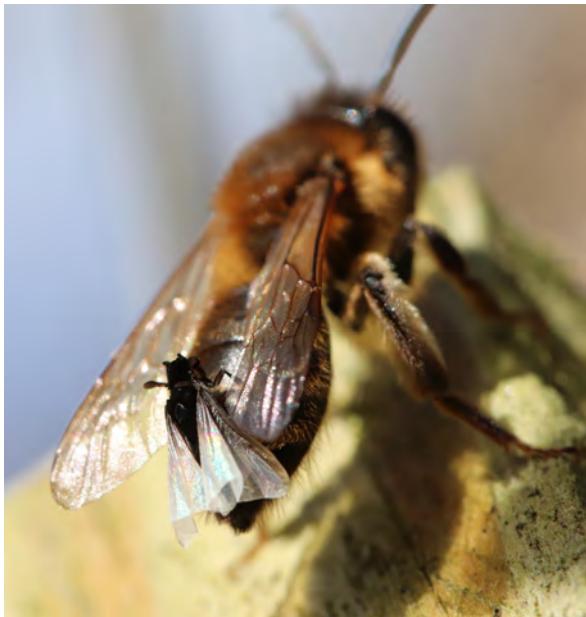
## 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021: Butterfly and bees

The first butterfly of Spring is always welcome and today's Small Tortoise-shell was a smart one – sometimes after hibernation they look faded and ragged. It was shivering to warm up and I took some pictures with a slow shutter speed to show this. Where fritillaries are pearl-bordered, tortoise-shells are sapphire-beaded.

I saw my first Honey Bees eleven days ago, getting right down into crocuses for nectar (middle left) and shaking pollen from erica flowers. Another bee of similar size on a snowdrop puzzled me. Instead of the orange pollen baskets which are special to Honey Bees, it had brushes on its hind legs and a furry thorax. I sent photos to the Recorder for Bees and Wasps in Breconshire and Radnorshire, Janice Vincett, who identified it as *Andrena nigroaenea*, the Buffish Mining Bee (middle right; bottom left). I have seen a few other sorts of miners in our garden and sometimes traced one back to what looked like a tiny volcano in a flower bed. With 67 of the 270-plus species, they are the largest genus of bees in Britain and Ireland.

On Sunday I was reading on Janice's excellent website about the bumble bees she has seen recently. She wrote that other bees had already been noted, and we should look on Lungwort for *Anthophora plumipes*, the wonderfully-named Hairy-footed Flower Bee. And yesterday I did that and found one (bottom right). Males are tubby like a small bumble bee, buff-coloured and very quick flyers. Females come out a bit later, black with orange hind legs. BWARS, the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society has a survey asking for records of this species, see [www.bwars.com](http://www.bwars.com).

Janice Vincett's website is [www.midwalesbeesandwasps.com](http://www.midwalesbeesandwasps.com)



## 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021: Alien

A warning to the curious (M.R. James). What follows is less All things bright and beautiful (Mrs C.F. Alexander), more Nature red in tooth and claw (Alfred, Lord Tennyson).

Yesterday I was photographing a bee in the garden to check its identity when I realised that it was carrying what looked like a fly. The bee was *Andrena scotica*, the Chocolate Mining Bee (to coat honeycomb for Crunchie bars), and the other insect was a male *Stylops*. He would have hatched from a pupa in the body of a bee to go searching for a female pupa in another bee. That is how I first saw *Stylops* last year as a tiny head peeping out between the tergites – segments – of a mining bee. He will inject sperm through the head end of the female from where it travels along a canal to fertilise her eggs. These hatch into larvae which drop off onto flower heads and wait for another bee to carry them to her nest. There they penetrate bee grubs and live in their developing hosts, pupating inside the adult bee (which is rendered sterile and intersex). Some *Stylops* then hatch out as winged males, others remain inside as females and so the cycle continues.

Apparently few people have seen a male *Stylops*, but more know its appearance for it figures as the emblem on the official seal and logo of the Royal Entomological Society. Does this tell us something about entomologists, and does their majestic Patron know the insect's life history?

I also attach two pictures of a predatory Moorhen on the pond behind Brecon Leisure Centre.

Aye, aye, that's yer lot (Jimmy Wheeler).



## 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021: Colours

Against a green background the colours of our garden are yellow, white and blue. Any specks of red and orange catch the eye, an Orange-tip on grape hyacinth or a Tawny Mining Bee on cherry blossom. A vivid Lily Beetle is less welcome and I crush it after taking its picture. You must be quick or the beetle drops to the ground, flipping upside down to become invisibly black. They can do a lot of damage to our lilies, and the damp patch of fritillaries by the pond, on which they probably arrived from a garden centre. And their grubs are disgusting.

Ladybirds are out now, and we received a picture this week of grandson Thomas learning numbers by counting spots on an identification chart. Some are easy like this Seven-spot, but one of the smartest I saw last summer with four scarlet blotches on black was a form of Two-spot, and the yellow Fourteen-spot looks pixellated. I saw more Seven-spots on reeds at Llangorse Lake while looking for emerging damselflies. No success yet but I expect to see some soon, Variable and Common Blue there, and Large Red in the garden.

Yesterday I stumbled upon three Yellow Wagtails feeding in wet tractor ruts by the Llynfi stream at Llangorse Common. They actually walked closer, perhaps treating me like one of the ponies they feed among here, or the cattle and goats of their African winter. White Wagtails are also passing through on their way to Iceland. Some Wheatears travel even further, and unlike a pair we saw in a likely nesting spot on Mynydd Illtyd, longer-winged birds will reach Greenland and Arctic Canada, an amazing journey for such a small bird. (Flight Lines by Mike Toms of the BTO, illustrated by members of the Society of Wildlife Artists, is a beautiful book about bird migration).



## 19<sup>th</sup> April 2021: At Pant y Llyn

The lake was bright blue under a cloudless sky. While I was looking at Wheatears, Alison watched a mini-whirlwind spin across the water, raising bubbles as it went like an Aero advert. On hills to the west stood the rectangular evergreen blocks and straight hedges of the Training Area, like troop squares and lines on a battle diorama. The view north was quite different over rolling green farmland around and way beyond Builth Wells. On our Saturday morning stroll we had this grand landscape all to ourselves. A Heron stood in the swamp behind the lake, a place I shall visit again this summer for its dragonflies, and a pair of Curlews flew over, singing. We found two pairs of Wheatears on AOTs – Apparently Occupied Territories – where nests could be tucked under rock ledges. One male stood guard on a crag like a climber posing on a summit. Our drive home started down the track to Erwood and a browse around the recently re-opened Craft Centre.

We have seen more Wheatears and Curlews about the western slopes of Mynydd Illtyd. This Wednesday, 21 April, is World Curlew Day. The Welsh Ornithological Society is asking for records of Curlews to guide efforts to reverse the sad decline of this key species in our countryside. Information about the Day, and a simple Curlew recording form, are at [www.birdsin.wales](http://www.birdsin.wales).



## 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021: Greenery-yallery

The Bank Holiday rain is gusting near-horizontal this afternoon, so I'm sorting photos from some better days last week. At Llangorse, half a dozen Yellow Wagtails chased flies around the feet of sheep and ponies. They are a lovely treat when they pass through in Spring and Autumn. In 1990 Martin Peers and Mike Shrubb wrote in 'Birds of Breconshire' that there were concentrations after breeding of 50-60 birds at Llangorse Lake and in the Wye valley near Glasbury, and a county population of perhaps 35 to 40 pairs. But in the 2019 Breconshire Birds Annual Report ([www.brecknockbirds.co.uk](http://www.brecknockbirds.co.uk)), Andy King noted only 7 as the best count in autumn, and 3 breeding pairs. The UK population has plummeted and the species is Red Listed.

For a different reason Greenfinch numbers have halved, hit by the parasitic disease trichomonosis. On Saturday morning I spent a couple of hours around the north-east part of Brecon, one of eight sections of the town now being surveyed to see how the species is managing here. Coming home after a fruitless search I found a female and two males at our sunflower seed feeders, one of them sang from the top of the hedge. We still have up to eight Siskins at the feeders, and coming to drink at the corner of the pond which has not been netted to stop a rogue Blackbird catching newts. He's still looking but I hope we have him beaten.

I think our Blue Tits in the box on the summer house have eggs now. He is courtship-feeding, giving her morsels of Wilko's wildly tasty peanut butter with mealworm.



## 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021: An emergence part 1

I arrived in the car park below Llangasty church mid-morning on Wednesday and sat in the car waiting for the rain to stop. Ben Mullen of the Biodiversity Information Service had agreed to meet me at 1.00 and record a piece for Wales Nature Week 2021 and I was early to do a recce. We wanted to show some of the early dragonflies at Llangorse Lake with tips on how to find and identify them, but when I did venture out under heavy grey clouds in a stiff breeze I could not find any. I nearly phoned Ben to discuss postponing (and found out later that he had phoned my home with the same thought). Then about noon the wind slackened, the sky turned deep blue and many fresh damselflies shimmered in the sunshine. I found them emerging at the water's edge and climbing reed stems to break out of larval shells and expand bodies and wings. Identifying the species required care and photographs as their colours and markings were not yet clear, but I found that most were Variable Damselflies, with a few Common Blue (top) and Red-eyed. Two Hairy Dragonflies (bottom) were asleep in the brambles.



## **21<sup>st</sup> May 2021: An emergence part 2**

The hundreds of flying insects attracted hunting Hobbies, the sharp-winged falcons newly arrived from South Africa that make flight look so easy and exciting. So when Ben joined me we enjoyed a fine afternoon, and our recording will be one of the many events of Wales Nature Week, 29 May to 6 June, see [www.biodiversitywales.org.uk](http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk).



## 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021: Dragons and damsels

Back from a lovely long-awaited trip to see family in Sussex and Norfolk, last Monday 7 June I took a look at the Camlais stream and west end pool on Mynydd Illtyd and saw just one dragonfly, a Four-spotted Chaser. On Sunday 13th at Llangorse Lake I found three Emperors and five Hairy Dragonflies (following two there on 19 May). From other people I have received records in the past week of Emperor, Broad-bodied and Four-spotted Chasers, and a fine picture of an immature Black-tailed Skimmer by Mark Waldron (top left). I agree with Mike Tompkinson reporting from Sarnau that the dragonflies so far this season are few, and two or three weeks late.

Common Blue Damselflies, however, have been out in hundreds, with smaller numbers of other species, and Banded and Beautiful Demoiselles by the rivers. I was very pleased to see about thirty Red-eyed Damselflies between Llangasty and Llangorse Lakeside on Sunday. The first record of this species at the Lake was of a single male in 2017 and this is its only regular site in Breconshire. They included a few pairs and typically most were on lily pads and other floating leaves. My pictures show a female Red-eyed, and a pair taken from the Crannog.

Llangorse Lake now has a wide band of blue-green algae scum around its fringe. This is harmful to animals including people – if you visit take care.



## 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021: Dragons

I spent a couple of hours this morning at Llangorse Lake where two male Emperor Dragonflies (top right) patrolled their stretches of the Llynfi outflow stream, scrapping when they met. Another two were at Llangasty with six or seven male Ruddy Darters (top left) spread along the edge of the first field, returning to favourite perches including this Flowering Rush.

On Saturday the Camlais stream on Mynydd Illtyd was good for Common Darters, Keeled Skimmers (middle left) – a total of about twenty including a few pairs, and four Golden-ringed Dragonflies (middle right). Two males (bottom left) and a female Beautiful Demoiselle flirted below the bridge. At the pool by the western cattle grid about twenty Four-spotted Chasers lived up to their name, and a Black Darter posed for a portrait (bottom right).

The hot weather is bringing out other species, with recent records of Southern and Brown Hawkers and Black-tailed Skimmer reaching me through WiReD, iRecord and the Brecknockbirds website. My thanks to all contributors.

Enjoy the sunshine sensibly.

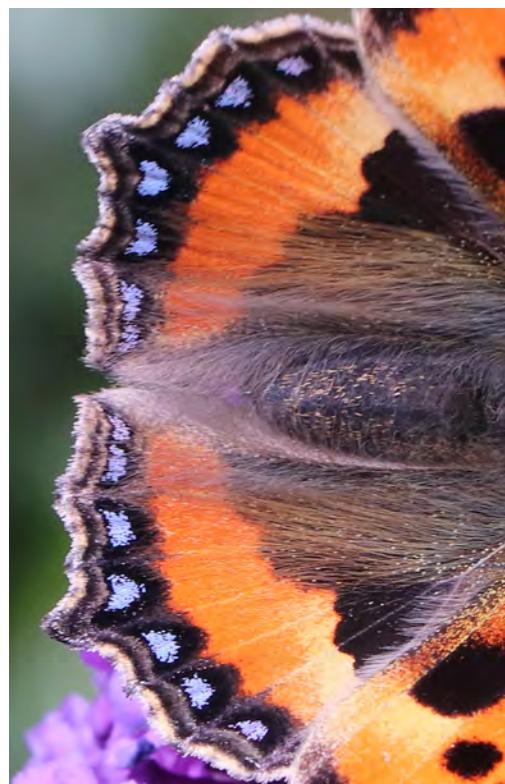
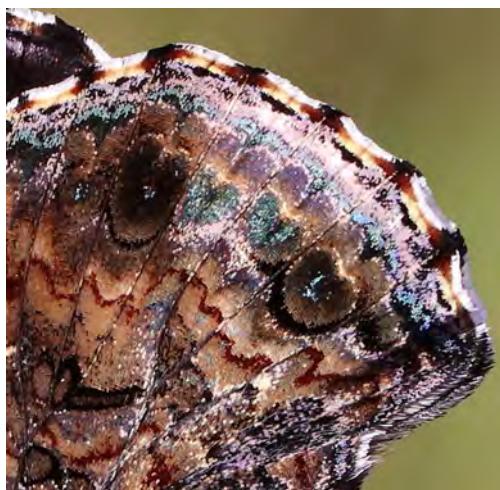


## 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021: Bugs and beetles

I am browsing a big new book with more than 2,600 pictures. The WILDGuide ‘Britain’s Insects’ covers 1,653 of our almost 25,000 species which include nearly 2,000 bugs and (as Haldane remarked), an inordinate number of beetles, more than 4,000. I am still (or again) childishly fascinated by small strange things. A few years ago at Llangorse Lake I first noticed orange Fleabane Tortoise Beetles, *Cassida murraea* (top left). Since then I have seen green less mature adults (top right) and weird larvae (second row) which chew holes out of the leaves. As a sort of disguise and defence they carry their shed skins on tail-spikes over their backs.

This summer I found green Thistle Tortoise Beetles, *Cassida rubiginosa* (third row, left), in our garden’s wild patch where they scrape off the outer layer of Knapweed leaves. The larvae carry and sometimes wiggle a lump of their own faeces. However, a Red-spotted Plant Bug, *Deraeocoris ruber* (bottom left), was not deterred and used its rostrum, a sort of piercing straw which is the defining feature of a bug, to suck out a victim’s juices.

On Mynydd Illtyd yesterday I noted a dozen Odonata species – Beautiful Demoiselle, Azure, Large Red, Scarce Blue-tailed and Emerald Damselflies, Southern and Common Hawkers, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Keeled Skimmer, Four-spotted Chaser, Common and Black Darters. I photographed a Darter and the Demoiselle, Black and Beautiful. A new booklet about Mynydd Illtyd is now on sale at the National Park Visitor Centre and Brecon Tourist Information Office – see [www.blfhs.co.uk](http://www.blfhs.co.uk).



## 19<sup>th</sup> August 2021: Butterflies

Yesterday there were just three butterflies on our Buddleia, a Red Admiral, a Peacock and a Small Tortoiseshell. Quantity poor, but quality fine as each was freshly perfect. Cropping the photos shows the thousands of scales that make up their patterns. The underside of a Red Admiral reminds me of the texture and subtle colours of an ancient tapestry.

2020 was considered a poor summer for butterflies, and to me this season seems worse. Perhaps there is still time if the sun returns and some immigrants arrive. I saw a few Painted Ladies during a lovely weekend in Sussex and hope they might come here soon.



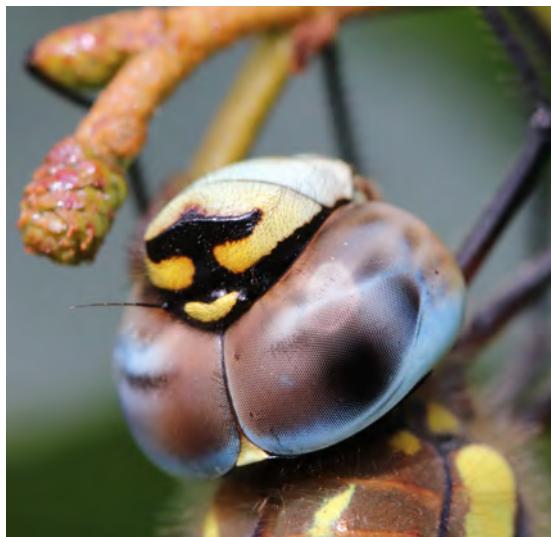
## 24<sup>th</sup> August 2021: Tigers

I am watching a clump of Canadian Goldenrod in our garden. It is a bit more than a metre square and the flowers are at head height, ideal for observation and photography. At times there must be more than a hundred insects on the flowers, mostly Honey bees and *Eristalis* hoverflies including the Drone Fly *E. tenax*. The total number of species – bees, wasps and flies, a Common Blue butterfly and a Common Carpet moth – is about twenty.

Yesterday I took pictures of single *Helophilus* hoverflies, *H. trivittatus* in the morning (top left), *H. hybridus* early afternoon (top right) and *H. pendulus* at teatime (middle left). The WILDGuide ‘Britain’s Hoverflies’ sticks to the scientific names with a few well-known exceptions, saying “Common names catch on because they sum up some aspect of the species’ appearance, behaviour or habitat in a way that is memorable. Contrived names seldom manage this and often end up being no more memorable than the scientific name they try to replace”. However, I discovered that these three have been given English names, respectively Large Tiger Hoverfly, Marsh Tiger Hoverfly and Tiger Hoverfly. The new WILDGuide ‘Britain’s Insects’ uses English names for all species, explaining on page 5 that “Popular groups, including butterflies, larger macro moths and dragonflies have long-standing English names that are in widespread usage. For those ... that do not have English names, these have been created for the purposes of this book ...”. Discuss.

*Helophilus* means marsh-loving, and the larvae are rat-tailed maggots, the ‘tail’ being a breathing-tube. They filter-feed on micro-organisms that decompose rotting vegetation in ponds, ditches and other wet places. The adults range widely and *trivittatus* is known to migrate here from the Continent. They visit flowers to eat pollen. *H. pendulus* is very common and widespread, frequent in our garden, but until yesterday I had seen *trivittatus* and *hybridus* only at Llangorse Lake. Maps in Aderyn show 3,700 records of *pendulus* in Wales, only 411 for *trivittatus* and 249 for *hybridus*, mostly around the coast ([www.aderyn.lercwales.org.uk/public/distribution](http://www.aderyn.lercwales.org.uk/public/distribution)).

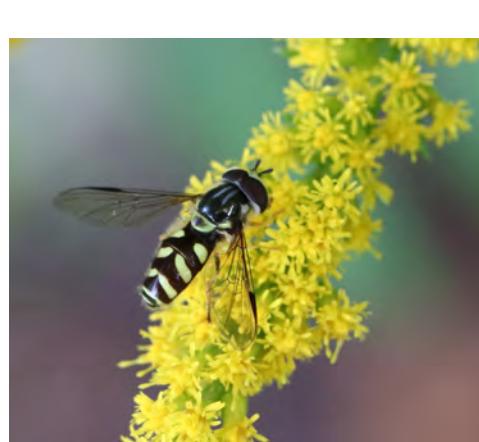
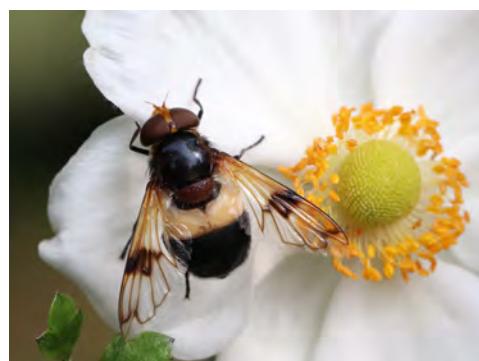
Since my recent moan about the lack of butterflies I had a better day at Llangorse, so here are Painted Lady, Common Blue and Small Copper.



## 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021: State of Dragonflies

British Dragonfly Society has just produced ‘State of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland 2021’. It sets out the mixed fortunes of our 56 species over the last 50 years, and the effects of changes in climate and habitat. It is available on the BDS website [british-dragonflies.org.uk](http://british-dragonflies.org.uk) where you can also find more about these insects, identification, conservation, events and how to join and volunteer.

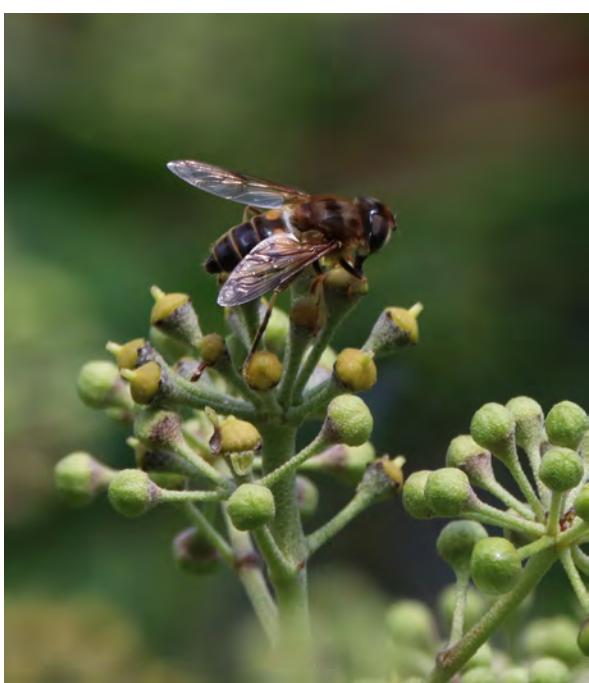
There is information about the best places in Wales to see dragonflies including Llangorse Lake where I was yesterday. The most numerous of the dragonflies there now is Migrant Hawker, which like 40% of species has spread north and west, moving into Wales from about 1990. Migrants are slightly smaller than the few Southern and Brown Hawkers which are also present (and Common Hawker which is not, preferring acid waters in the hills, such as on Mynydd Illtyd). It is possible on a warm day to see ten or twenty in one field of view, hunting smaller insects. They in turn are caught by Hobbies – two were dashing over the reeds by the Hide yesterday. When not active, Migrant Hawkers hang about in trees. I found one asleep, allowing me to photograph its compound eyes from 5 inches away with a macro lens at closest focus.



## 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021: Mimics

*Volucella zonaria* is the largest of Britain's hoverflies. This week one is visiting our Buddleia, slowly spiralling a panicle and probing for nectar, flower by flower (top row; second row, left). It is also known as the Hornet Hoverfly, not only looking rather like a Hornet but laying eggs in the tree-hole nests of that and other social wasps, where its larvae scavenge for dead grubs, dropped food and other matter among the debris in the bottom of the cavity. The Hornets are surely not deceived by the similarity but they allow entry, as also to the very different Great Pied Hoverfly, *Volucella pellucens* (second row, right) which has a similar life history. Perhaps the hoverfly larvae earn their tolerance by helping to keep the nest hygienic. However, resembling a dangerous or poisonous insect can be a defence against predators – Batesian mimicry, first described by Henry Walter Bates in butterflies on his return from eleven years up the Amazon. (His companion explorer, Alfred Russel Wallace, set off for home after five years, only to lose all his collected specimens and nearly his life when the ship went down in flames. He had more adventures with better fortune in the Malay Archipelago, whence, as every Welsh schoolchild should know, he shared his ideas about natural selection with Charles Darwin.)

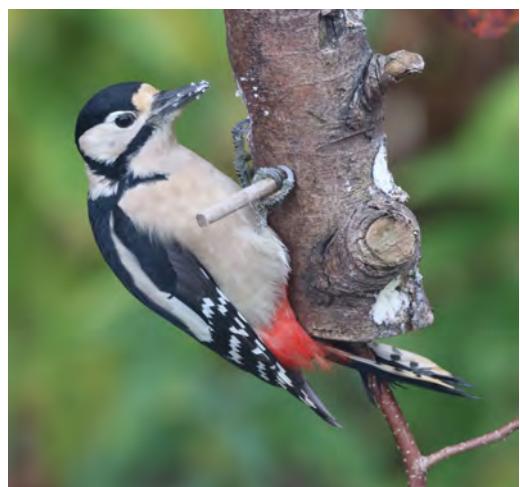
There are other black and yellow hoverflies out now on Buddleia, Ice Plant and Japanese Anemones. Here are *Myathropa florea* (third row, left), known as the Batman Hoverfly from the dark mark on its thorax, *Sericomyia silentis* (third row, right), *Episyrphus balteatus* (bottom left) – the Marmalade Fly from its appearance not its diet, and *Dasyphorus albostriatus* (bottom right). I have recorded about 35 species in our garden, keeping to those which are not too hard to recognise, and taking pictures to check details. The WILDGuide 'Britain's Hoverflies' has helpful symbols to indicate the level of difficulty in identifying 165 of the total 281 species. Distribution maps on Aderyn, [aderyn.lercwales.org.uk/public/distribution](http://aderyn.lercwales.org.uk/public/distribution) suggest that *Volucella zonaria* and other hoverflies are under-recorded. Sightings, ideally with photos, can be entered through WiReD at [bis.org.uk](http://bis.org.uk).



## 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021: On ivy

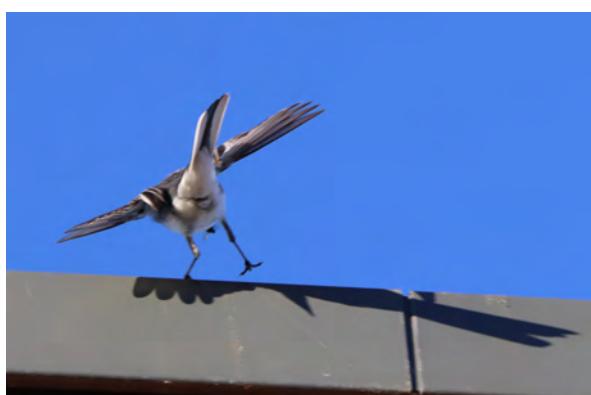
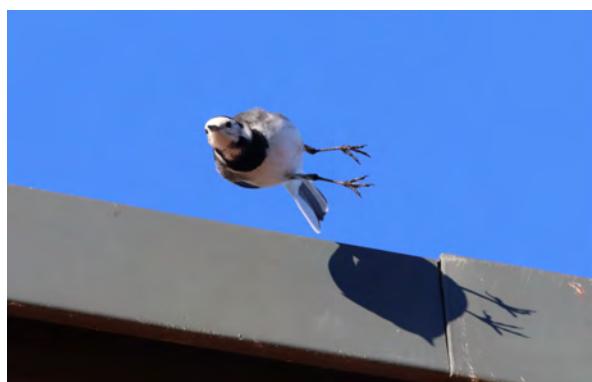
Ivy flowers provide food for insects after most other sources are finished. Birds feed on the berries well into the following Spring. This afternoon two blocks of ivy growing up trees in our garden were alive with hundreds of insects. More than half were wasps. There were many flies including Bluebottles and hoverflies – *Eristalis* (middle left), *Syrphus* and *Myathropa*. The activity looked frantic with lots of pushing and barging. I saw only two Honey Bees, one attacked by a wasp which I think killed and carried it off. Best were half a dozen Ivy Bees (top right with wasp; bottom right). Similar in size to Honey Bees, Ivy Bees have short buff ‘fur’ on the thorax and bright bands on the abdomen. They emerge in September, later than other bees, in time for the flowering of ivy, and will be around into early November.

The Ivy Bee, *Colletes hederae*, was new to science in 1993, described from southern Europe. It reached Dorset in 2001 and has spread north through Britain, tracked by the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society, BWARS. An account of the survey, with a map of distribution up to 2016 is under Maps and Records on its website [ww.bwars.com](http://www.bwars.com). I first saw one on Hogweed near Brecon in 2017, and then noted a few on ivy in our garden and elsewhere around the town last autumn. Sites included a large block of ivy on the warehouse opposite the Job Centre, and I saw a few again there yesterday. There is an opportunity here to help record the spread of a new British insect, either at BWARS or through WiReD at [bis.org.uk](http://bis.org.uk).



## 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021: Peanut Butter for Birds

Hanging in our Purple Smoke Bush is a stick with holes drilled to hold Peanut Butter for Birds – “wildly tasty, not for human consumption, contains nuts”, and beef fat, wheat flour, seeds and dried mealworms. Numerous Blue Tits and one or two Great and Coal are frequent feeders. Yesterday’s frosty morning brought in a dozen Starlings to fight over the food like starvelings. They gave way, however, to a female Great Spotted Woodpecker which has been coming here for the past week. Woodpeckers are rare visitors to our garden, although they nest on the hill above and we hear their drumming. I hope she will become a regular.



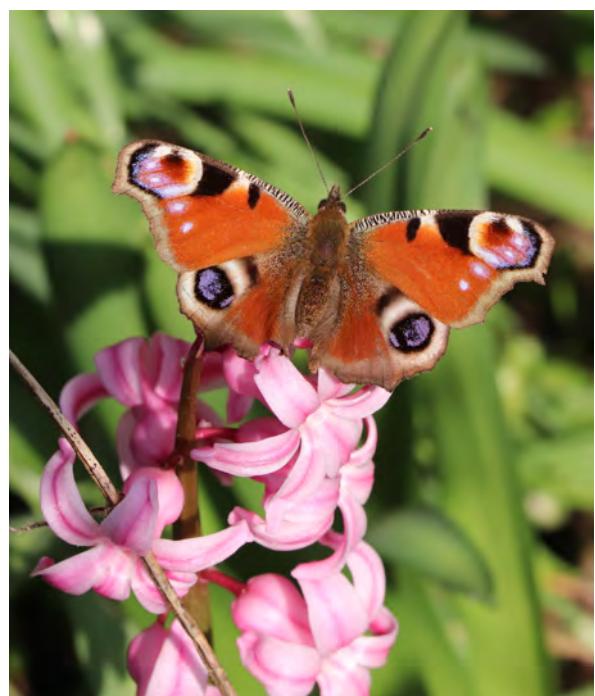
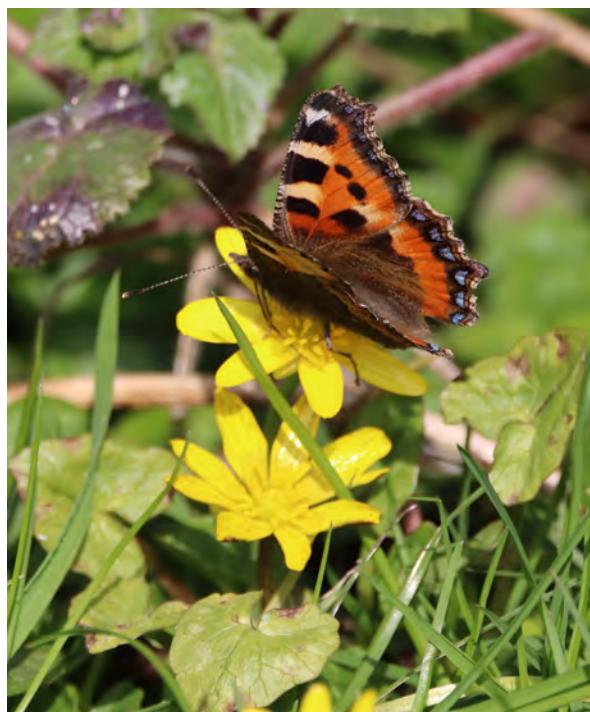
## 15<sup>th</sup> January 2022: 100 greenbottles hanging on the wall

I guessed a hundred, but when I counted them there were 151, and on a closer look some were bluebottles. The wall was the purple sandstone surround of the great blue-sky-reflecting windows of the new south face of Y Gaer in Brecon. The flies were sunbathing. Pied Wagtails walked or ran along the top of the building, stopped to peer over the edge, and dropped off to chase flies with great agility. I managed a few pictures of take-off, more of wings and tails dashing out of frame, but could not follow and freeze their aerobatics. Jackdaws looked in but lacked the necessary skills. For half a dozen insectivorous birds, Y Gaer on Thursday and Friday provided a feast. I was reminded of pictures I took previously of a flycatching Grey Wagtail in the same place and found that it was a year ago today. In winter Grey Wagtails will leave the banks of the Usk to hunt for food on roofs in town.



## 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2022: Otters

I was looking for ducks, walking beside the Usk through the Brecon Show Field for the Wetland Bird Survey. Like some 3,500 other volunteers I count all the waterbirds in my patch once a month between September and March. Ty Mawr Pool at Llanfrynnach held only three Moorhens, two each of Mute Swan and Coot, one Canada Goose and a flock of gulls. Along the river from Brynich Lock I had counted 20 Mallard, a pair of Goosanders, a Heron, a Moorhen and more gulls – a quiet morning. But now, obscured by water-side bushes, I could see movement and circles of disturbed water. A head appeared, then a rounded back slipped back under, and I realised I was watching an Otter. With clearer views I could see there were more than one, and they were gently drifting downstream towards me. Three came along together and I was able to keep up with them and take photos. When I checked the pictures on the computer I had taken 174 in 13 minutes. Here are a few.



## 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022: Spring has sprung part 1

Warm sunny days have brought out butterflies and bees. Comma, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock are usually the first to appear since they hibernate as adults. I hope soon to see Holly Blue and Orange-tip which spend the winter as a chrysalis. Now the butterflies particularly like Lesser Celandine in the lawn and border edges, and Hyacinths planted out after several Christmases.



## 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022: Spring has sprung part 2

Hairy-footed Flower Bees, *Anthophora plumipes*, zip around like small hyper-active bumblebees. They have long tongues to probe flowers of Lungwort – Pulmonaria, and Comfrey. I think there are four buff males in the garden, each with his own patch and ready to chase off an intruder, not only of his own species, but also bumblebees. They are also alert to pounce on a visiting female – black with an orange pollen brush.

Many Chiffchaffs arrived early this year, locally from 13 March, and I have seen a first Sand Martin and heard a singing Blackcap. The forecast for next week is colder. This March may not go out like a lamb.



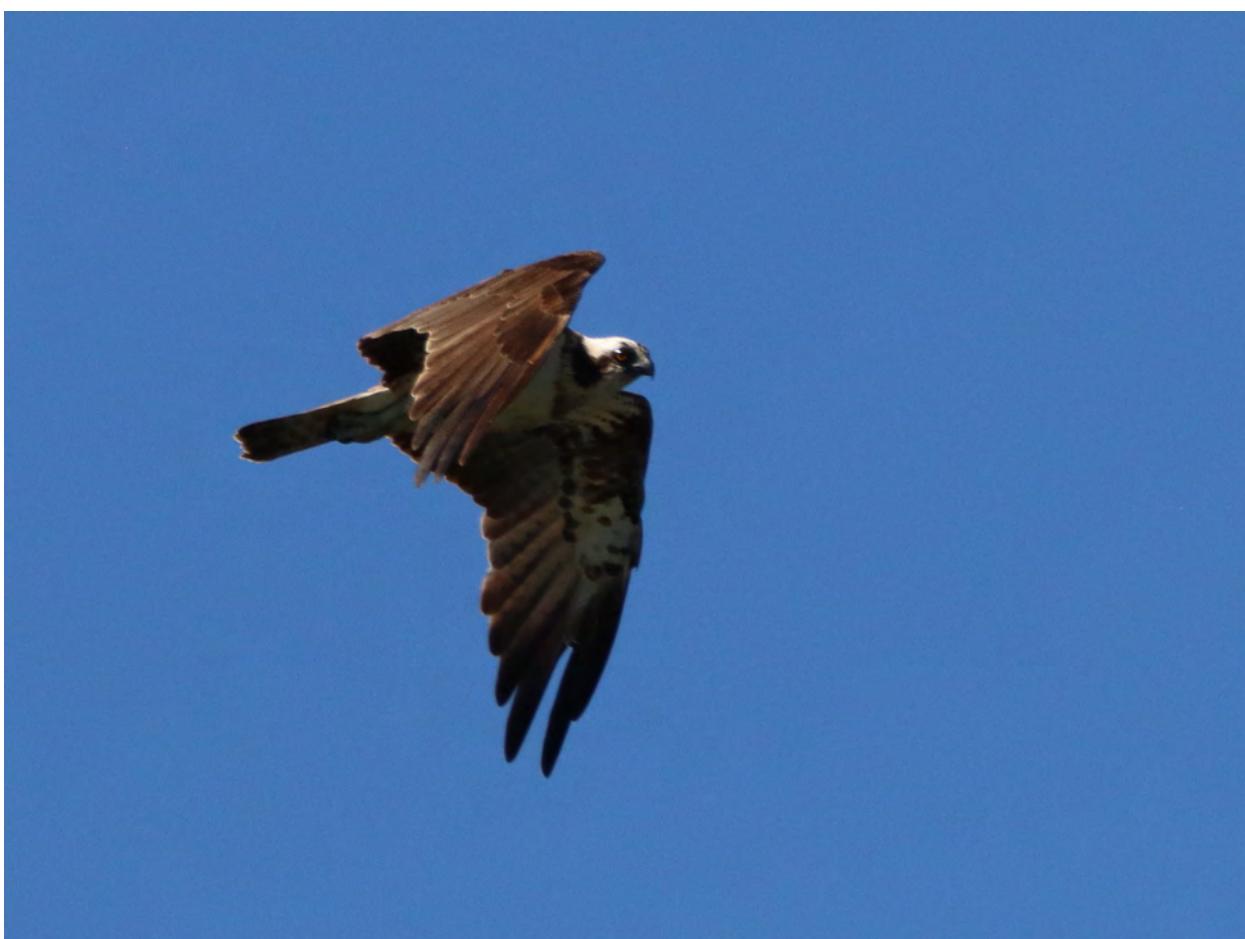
## 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022: Little things please

On Friday I watched Little Egrets in ‘Rushy Field’, on the right after crossing the bridge from Llangorse Common. They were fishing in the shallow flood. One stopped to shake its plumes – aigrettes. I wondered if its feet were turning a deeper egg-yolk yellow for the breeding season.

In October 2007 when we moved from Sussex to Brecon I saw a Little Egret fly across Llangorse Lake. It was the only one reported there that year. In the latest Breconshire Bird Report for 2020, Little Egrets are recorded as present in every month with a peak of eight in August. During the past winter there have often been more than twenty.

On 26 March I photographed two Little Ringed Plovers feeding around puddles in a Llangorse field, and four on 1 April. They are among our earliest summer migrants and attempt to breed on the shingle Point at Llangasty. Other Breconshire sites are in quarries. The excellent new book, ‘The Birds of Wales’, reckons that the Welsh population is now in the order of 150-200 pairs with the greatest number on shingle banks along the Tywi and its tributaries. The first pair in Britain bred in 1938, and my best childhood friend showed me chicks on a rubbish dump beside a sewage works on the London/Essex border in the late 1950s. Kenneth Allsop’s novel of 1949, ‘Adventure Lit Their Star’, about protecting these rare birds from an egg collector, is a good read.

While sorting Small Quakers from Common Quakers in my moth trap, it struck me that birds are called ‘Little’ and moths are called ‘Small’. In books I found 15 birds with Little in their names, and 34 moths with Small. There was just one exception, the Little Thorn moth. The dictionary says “*little* is used with affectionate or emotional overtones ... not implied by *small*”. You might ask whether this denotes differences between ornithologists and entomologists, but I know that both are among the kindest of people. My little mind – I try not to be small-minded – has wandered into etymology. Enough.



## 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022: H is for ...

... hiatus and hothpotch. It has been a while since I sent out one of my occasional emails, and one or two people have kindly mentioned that they have been missing them. So here is a mixed batch of recent observations and pictures.

... hawk, not goshawk but fish-hawk. On Sunday, before joining botanist John Crellin and his group to look at plants from Llangorse Lakeside, I stopped in the little car park below Llangasty church to look for birds. An Osprey flew past, I grabbed some shots against the light and watched it dive for fish. During a fascinating outing as far as the lovely Ty-mawr meadows, I learned many things including that the thousands of yellow dandelion-looking flowers were Catsears, not hawkbits or hawksbeards or hawkweeds as I thought they might be. In ‘The Illustrated Plant Lore’, (£1 from Powys Library withdrawn stock), Josephine Addison writes of hawkweeds, “Older writers claim that ... birds of prey were believed to strengthen their eyesight on this genus of plants”. Our own eyes frequently turned from the plants on the ground to an Osprey overhead, and then two calling as they circled together. Back at Llangasty in the afternoon I was able to take some more pictures of the same bird I had first seen, with a distinctive gap from a missing or broken primary feather in its left wing. As the number of breeding pairs in Wales gradually grows we might look forward to their nesting locally.



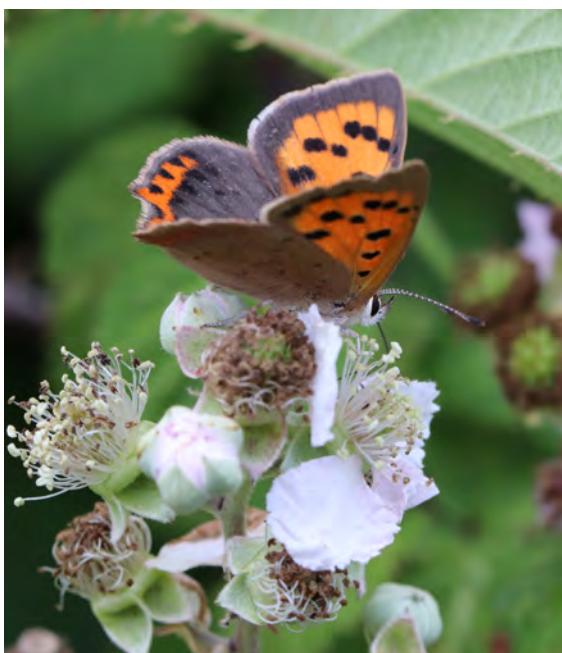
## 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022: ...and also for ...

... hornet, or rather, Lunar Hornet Moth. Norman Lowe has acquired and shared among a small group of moth-ers, some traps and pheromone lures for various clearwing moths. These handsome insects, quite unlike the common image of moths, are rarely seen when they emerge from the trunks of their preferred trees, but this project has now caught and released unharmed all its target species. Much the biggest and the only common species is the Lunar Hornet Moth. I was very pleased to take some photos of three lured to willows in Island Field, Brecon. Unlike some other mimics such as the Hornet Hoverfly *Volucella zonaria* whose larvae scavenge in hornet nests, the moth's only connection is its appearance.

... *Hylaeus hyalinatus*, Hairy Yellow-face Bee. These tiny bees, a little bigger than an ant, occupy two old sheep skulls among the stonecrops on the small green roof over our recycling boxes. The males of the twelve British species can be separated by the shape of the face and its yellow markings. And if you use a macro lens at closest focus, you can see that *H. hyalinatus* really is hirsute. The bees sit looking out of small holes in the tops of the skulls which I suspect lead into the brain cavities, where presumably they nest. Elsewhere one of our bee hotels, with many bamboo tubes already filled with mud or masticated plant material by Red, Blue and Orange-vented Mason Bees, is now being occupied by Willughby's Leafcutter Bee, (named in honour of Francis Willughby 1635-72, a first edition of whose Ornithology published posthumously by John Ray is now on sale for £5,673. I shall buy Tim Birkhead's biography 'The Great Mr. Willughby' for £4.99).

... Hedgehog. Instead of only making an appearance after dark, detected on a trail camera among images of various cats, our hedgehog now comes out in the late afternoon. We feed it mealworms and can hear it crunching them up. It is becoming less wary and yesterday evening came up to sniff my slippers while I was watering plant pots. (Addendum: I have now been advised that dried mealworms can cause metabolic bone disease in hedgehogs. Sunflower kernels which we feed to the birds and are dropped under the feeders can be similarly harmful. Best to provide water and a properly balanced hedgehog food.)

... Hotspot, not a reference to the current weather but a designation awarded by the British Dragonfly Society. On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup>, Llangorse Lake will become the first Dragonfly Hotspot in Wales, recognising the site as a top place for dragonflies and for people to appreciate them. Between 10.00 and 4.00, staff and volunteers from BDS and supporting organisations will be at Lakeside to unveil a new information board and offer free dragonfly-related activities. I hope to see some of you there.

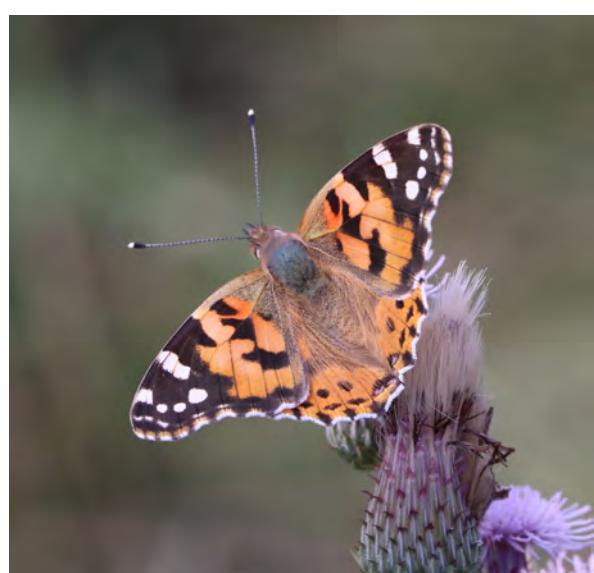
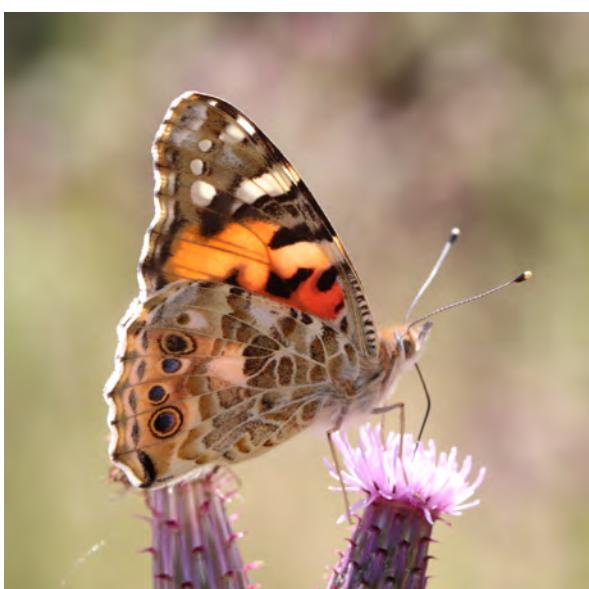
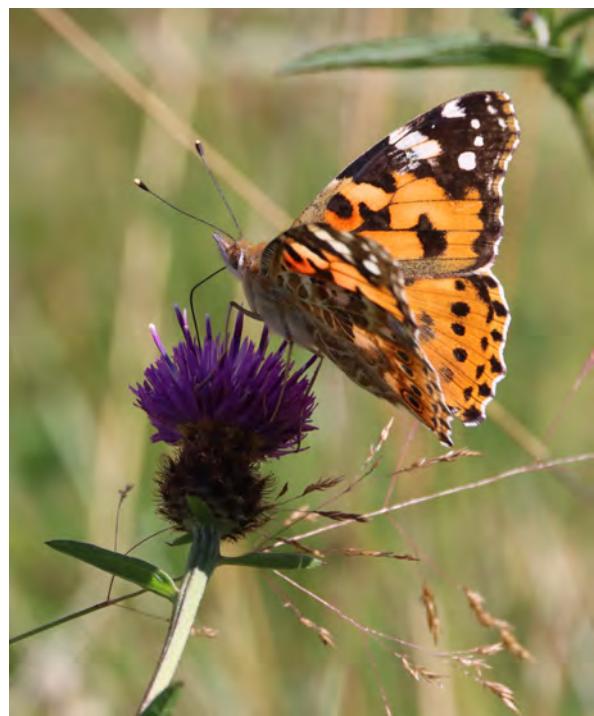


## 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022: Big Butterfly Count

Big Butterfly Count continues until Sunday 7th, a citizen science opportunity for many people to contribute to knowledge of numbers and trends. The method is simple – count all the butterflies you find in 15 minutes and enter them at [bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org](http://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org)

So far 44,000 people have made 61,000 counts of 552,000 butterflies. Today I made three counts on the lower slopes of Slwch Hill, Brecon, in two fields where an Inspector, to the surprise and dismay of many local people, approved an Appeal against the National Park's refusal of planning permission for houses. I followed the edges of the fields, so adding bramble fringe and two overhanging garden Buddleias to the rough parched grass, thistles and Birdsfoot Trefoil. My combined total in 45 minutes was 92 butterflies of 10 species – 51 Meadow Brown, 10 Common Blue, (8 Small Skipper not among the Count selection), 6 Gatekeeper, 6 Small Copper, 4 Peacock, 3 Red Admiral, 2 Large White, single Painted Lady and Small Tortoiseshell.

The result was better than I had hoped for, as our Buddleia in full bloom for more than a week has attracted very little. I shall make some more counts this week in other places as a simple and enjoyable way of contributing to the knowledge needed for conservation.



## 5<sup>th</sup> August 2022: Painted Lady

I made two more 15-minute Butterfly Counts yesterday. The first was in a field by Llangorse Common, very promising with Meadowsweet, Marsh Ragwort, Water Mint and thistles, but I found only one Large and seven Green-veined Whites. The second at the other end of the Lake Trail at Llangasty, where the field was bright with purple heads of Knapweed, produced five Meadow Browns, a Small Copper and a Painted Lady. Butterfly Conservation says that low or even nil counts all help towards the survey.

A mother and child came along and asked, as people do when they see my binoculars and camera, if I had seen anything interesting. I showed them the Painted Lady, open-winged sunning itself on a patch of bare earth. The little girl asked “Why is it called a Painted Lady?”. I said it is pretty and brightly coloured, and told them about the great northward migration out of Africa. “Why is it called a lady?”. “Ladies are pretty. Do you know there is another butterfly called the Red Admiral. An Admiral is in charge of a fleet of ships. Perhaps the Painted Lady is the Red Admiral’s friend”. They continued their walk and I took more photos.

In ‘Bugs Britannica’ and ‘Emperors, Admirals and Chimney Sweepers’, Peter Marren writes that many of our current English names for butterflies were first published by James Petiver in 1717, including the Painted Lady. “The allusion is to the cosmetics used by fashionable ladies who painted their faces with rouge, kohl and white lead”, their eyes outlined like the markings on the butterfly’s wings. This is a butterfly whose underside looks as good as its upper, especially when viewed glowing against the light.

In 2009 there was a huge invasion of millions of Painted Ladies and on 30 May I took part in a weekend survey to help assess their numbers and movements. For two hours I sat on Slwch Hill, Brecon and counted all the butterflies that passed within ten metres. They were flying north, precisely fifty in the first hour and fifty in the second. I submitted my results with the feeling that there would be a strong suspicion that I had estimated or rounded the numbers. I hope you believe me.

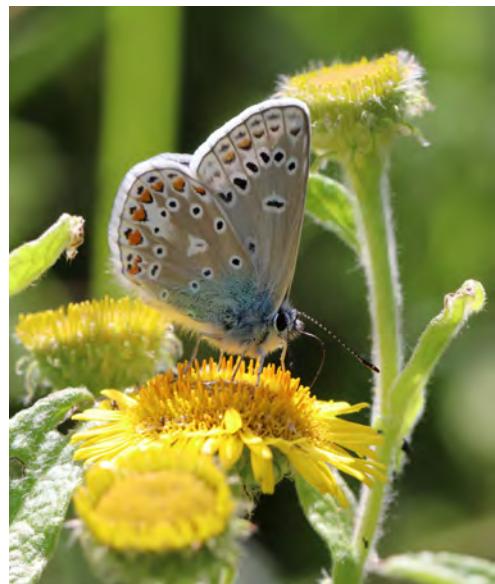
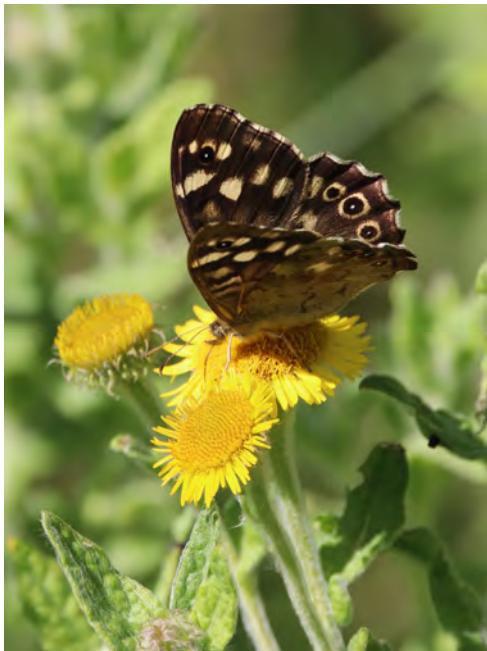


## 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022: Dragonflies

Some pools on Mynydd Illtyd dry out during most summers. This year even the biggest one by the western cattle grid was just a puddle when we looked there on 6 August, and the Camlais was reduced to a trickle. Along the stream there were still dragonflies in variety but small numbers: Southern and Common Hawkers, one Golden-ringed, 2 Keeled Skimmers (second row, left), 5 Common Darters (second row, right), several Azure Damselflies including pairs ovipositing (third row, left) and single Blue-tailed and Large Red.

Llangorse Lake has shrunk, the water's edge has receded and dragonflies on a recent visit were hard to find, just 2 Emperors and a Migrant Hawker. But yesterday at a lovely clear private pool near Glasbury was better. Three male Emperors were disputing ownership with chases climbing above the tree tops, while a female laid eggs in the weed. I had glimpses of Brown Hawker and Common Darter, and photographed Emerald (third row, right) and Common Blue (bottom row) damselflies, the latter mating and ovipositing.

It is trying to rain now, should try harder.



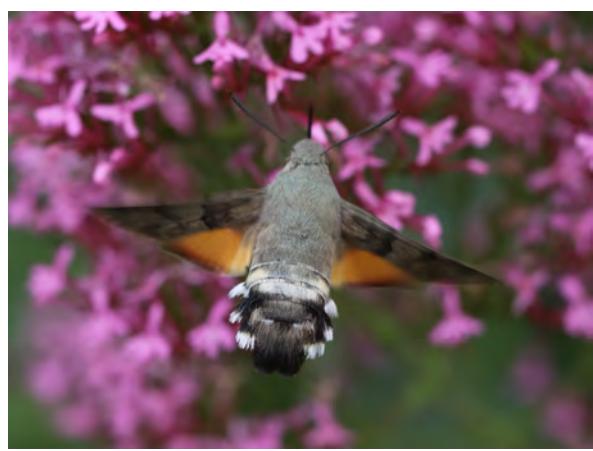
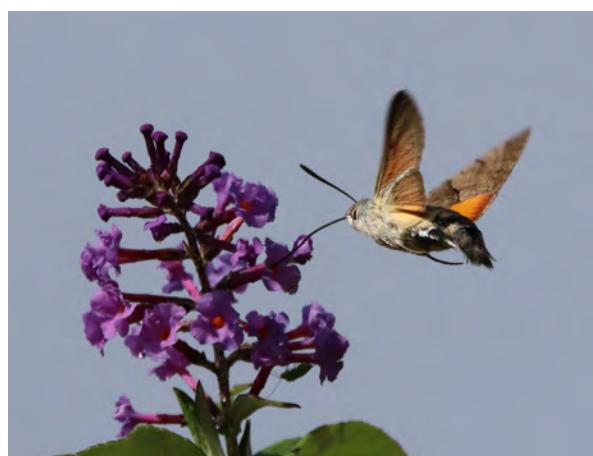
## 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022: Twitchers

Where the fields at Llangorse Lake are lightly grazed there are now lovely large spreads of blue, yellow and lilac from flowering Devil's-bit Scabious, Fleabane and Water Mints. Butterfly numbers there have not been great so far, but I have noted a dozen species this month.

Many smaller insects are attracted to the nectar, or eat the plants, some on just one type. Fleabane is food for its own orange Tortoise Beetle, larvae of the Dusky Plume and a decasyllabic micro-moth, *Digitivalva pulicariae*. On Friday I found another tiny moth which I had never seen before. It moved around one flower-head probing florets with a long tongue. Taking sharp photos was tricky as the flower too was moving in the breeze, so I knelt down, set the macro lens to manual minimum focus, waited for brief moments of stillness and took many pictures.

A few turned out well and I was able to identify *Tebenna micalis* (bottom two rows), a migrant first found in Britain in the 1980s, which has sometimes remained to breed on Fleabane in the south. The Distribution Map on Aderyn, aderyn.lercwales.org.uk, shows no previous records in mid-Wales, but 25 elsewhere, mostly around the coast and islands. On the NBN Atlas I discovered that it has another name, the Vagrant Twitcher. This name would refer to its wanderings and its jerky movements.

Twitcher is also used to denote birders who go to great lengths to see rare birds and add them to their lists. It is also often misused to refer to anyone with some interest in or affection for birds, from Professor Swarovski splitting species by their DNA, to Iris Peeby who puts out peanuts for Blue Tits. The origin of the word was settled by Bob Emmett writing in 'British Birds', August 1983. He told how, in the 1950s, his friend Howard Medhurst would ride pillion on Bob's Matchless; "on arrival at some distant destination, Howard would totter off the back of my machine and shiveringly, light up a cigarette. This performance was repeated so regularly up and down the country that it became synonymous with good birds, and, as we all felt a slight nervous excitement at the uncertainty in seeing a particular bird, it became a standing joke, and John and I would act out a nervous twitch to match Howard's shiverings. This led us to describe a trip to see a rare bird as 'Being on a twitch'. Inevitably this led to the term 'twitcher'." The word came into popular use, replacing 'ticker', applied when I was a teenager to birdwatchers who kept their tally by ticking the list in the Peterson Field Guide.



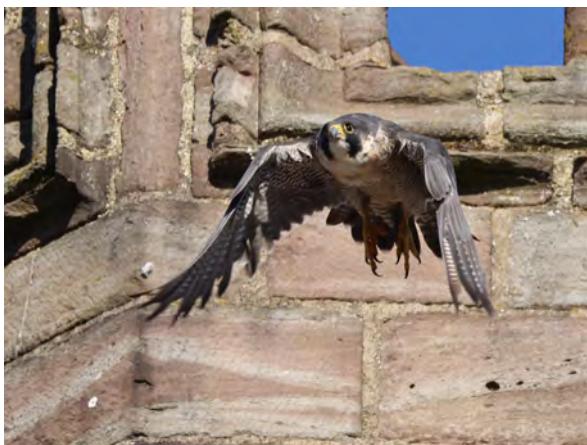
## 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022: Merrylee-dance-a-pole

“Only on the hottest and longest of summer days did the radiant being delight our eyes; to have seen it conferred high honour and distinction on the fortunate beholder. We regarded it with mingled awe and joy, and followed its erratic and rapid flight with ecstasy. It was soft and warm and brown, fluffy and golden, too, and created in our infantile minds an indescribable impression of glory, brilliance, aloofness, elusiveness. We thought it a being from some other world . . . and I longed to be a Merrylee-dance-a-pole myself to fly off to unheard-of, unthought-of, undreamed-of beautiful flowery lands.” W.H. Hudson, in The Book of a Naturalist, 1919, quoting from a letter he had received.

On a Monday morning many years ago at my RSPB desk, I took a call from a lady who had been at a wedding that weekend and had been amazed to see a hummingbird hover at the bride’s bouquet as she left the church. When I gently explained that what she had seen was a Hummingbird Hawkmoth, she was at first incredulous and then seemed disappointed. I felt almost guilty for disillusioning her.

Since October 1959 when I sketched it in my first nature notebook, I have always enjoyed seeing this insect and now take photos whenever I have the chance. It is chiefly a summer immigrant, in varying numbers each year, and a few may hibernate here. For a few years in Sussex our small front lawn grew Lady’s Bedstraw instead of grass; one summer I found caterpillars of Small Elephant Hawkmoth, and in the next one Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

The long proboscis probes tubular flowers. I have recently watched them at verbena, valerian, agapanthus and buddleia. (Last year another hawkmoth was recognised as a full species, Wallace’s Sphinx, *Xanthopan praedicta*. In the 1860s Darwin and Wallace predicted that the Madagascar star orchid, for pollination, would need a hawkmoth with an extremely long proboscis to reach the flower’s nectar. The moth was found in 1902. Its proboscis is up to one foot/30 cm long.)

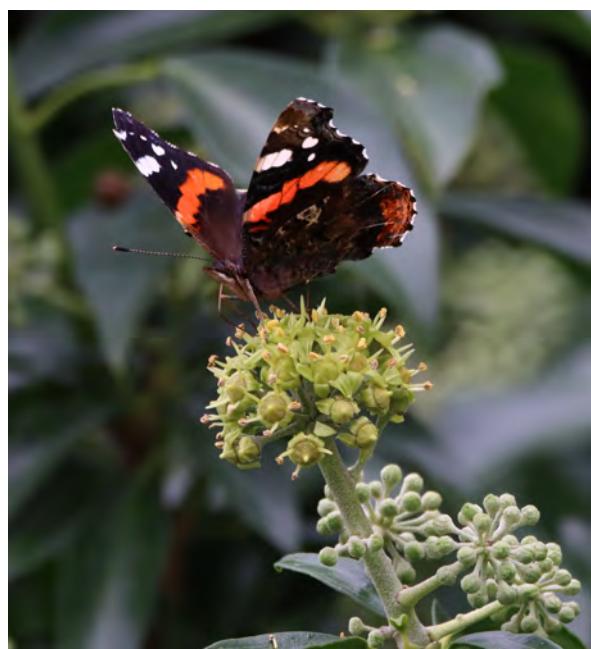


## 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022: Pilgrims at St. Mary's

This fine morning they are both on the tower, one on the crenellations, the other on the surrounding ledge below. Often now one will perch right up on top of the turret. They appear to have an easy life, spending much of their time preening, looking around or just dozing.

As thousands of thrushes and other winter migrants arrive by night from this first week of October, the Peregrines will be out hunting with huge eyes and a waxing moon. I expect to find the stripey heads of Redwings under the church. Sometimes they take a Woodcock or a Teal, making a good meal to sleep off next day.

The Visit Brecon tourist office and St. Mary's have a leaflet about these birds, printed by the Town Council.



## 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022: H is for ...

This hornet was slowly moving around twigs of a small Christmas tree by our front door. I couldn't work out why it was there but it allowed me to take some very close photos. After several minutes it crawled down the tree and walked away to the front hedge. October is the month when I expect to see Hornets and they are usually in blocks of Ivy. Not only do they visit the flowers for nectar and pollen, but like other wasps they hunt the flies and bees that are also there in large numbers now.

Wasps and *Eristalis* hoverflies make up the bulk of these gatherings, with some Honey and Ivy Bees, and Red Admiral butterflies. The Ivy Bee was described as new to science in 1993 and reached Britain in 2001. It has spread fast and is now well into Wales and Scotland (making the distribution maps that I could find look in need of an update). I first saw it in Brecon in 2017 and have found it here each autumn since. The orange thorax and stripes on the abdomen are distinctive, and local sightings can be entered at [record.bis.org.uk](http://record.bis.org.uk).



## 8<sup>th</sup> December 2022: Rail ways

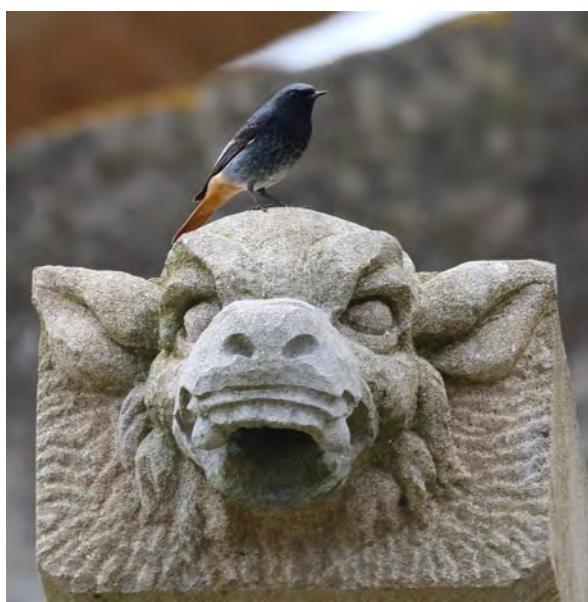
The Hide at Llangorse Lake is worth a visit now. Train your eyes down the track to the platform at the water's edge and you might catch striking views of Water Rails. More often heard squealing than seen, they have lately been coming out to cross the shallow flood or stalk along the edge. Two watchers on Tuesday told me they had seen four at a time and probably six in all. On a recent visit a Great White Egret stood for a long time apparently looking not at the water but into the reeds and I wondered if it might be waiting for a chance to grab a Rail. At dusk, about four o'clock, thousands of Starlings flocked in to hunker down in the reedbed right by the Hide, but I failed to see any of the raptors which have been hunting them – see the Brecknockbirds website.



## 18<sup>th</sup> December 2022: Winter visitors

During this cold spell we have put out plenty of food for the birds – sunflower seed bits, suet nibbles, peanut butter, fat balls and apples, even part of an over-ripe melon – and the birds have flocked in. Blackbirds have totalled up to 28 and Goldfinches 24. We have been able to pick out some individual Blackbirds by their white dots and dashes. As they come and go it is clear that more birds use the garden than are present at one time.

The first of the more unusual visitors was a female Blackcap on 8 December, followed by a male from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>. Three Redwings and a Fieldfare have been here since then, a sample of the wintering populations estimated at 690,000 and 720,000 on the RSPB website. Today's thaw is welcome but we have enjoyed seeing birds that have come in from the cold.

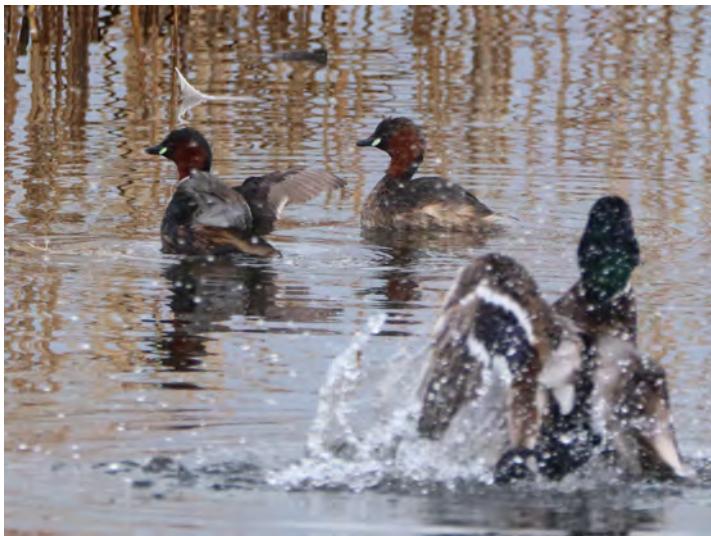


## 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023: Red and black

In Brecon on Boxing Day she posed for a picture on a parking sign at St. Mary's church. Next day she was hanging around recycling bins, and then by the corpse of a Woodcock dropped by one of the tower-top Peregrines. Perhaps there were maggots or flies to eat. Since then she has stayed in the town centre within fifty yards of those first sightings, usually on a rooftop – a perky Robin-shaped bird with a quivering tail.

Black Redstarts are rarely seen in this part of Wales. Occasionally a pair has nested in a quarry, but they turn up from time to time out of season in towns. In London they first became established on bomb-sites, and about 65 pairs now breed in Britain, many in industrial parts of cities. More birds appear on the coast as passage migrants.

On the continent they are more common and widespread. While the Brecon female is attractive with her big eyes and soft colours, males are more strikingly marked like the one I photographed on another St Mary's at Castro Urdiales in northern Spain (bottom row).



## 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023: Big Bill again

The path from the Hide to the jetty at Llangorse Lake has been under water for much of the past winter, giving fine views of Great White Egrets and glimpses of furtive Water Rails. On a recent visit I watched a Heron fly in and stand, for a while on two legs, then on one. A pair of Little Grebes swam past. Eventually it crept along the edge of the path, stretching its neck to peer into the reeds. After the stealth came the grab, wings spread for balance, and out it came with a fine catch, (a Rudd?). It held the flapping fish for a while before swallowing it, gradually and with some difficulty, and then resumed its standing still as a plastic model.

Summer Time starts on Sunday, and summer visitors are already here. I saw Chiffchaffs on Friday, a Blackcap on Saturday and, most surprisingly, a Hummingbird Hawkmoth flying through our garden yesterday. The Brecknockbirds website also records recent Sand Martins, Wheatears and a Little Ringed Plover.

Andrew King and I will be showing the dragonflies, birds and butterflies of spring and summer at Llangorse lake, in the Llangorse Community Centre next Monday 27th at 7.30. If you're not reading this abroad in England, Scotland, the Netherlands or Australia, and are close enough to come along you will be most welcome.



## 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023: Damsels

The warm weather of the last ten days had brought out damselflies in thousands at Llangorse Lake. On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> there were so many erupting from bramble patches and iris clumps that they looked like swarms of giant midges. About 99% are Variable Damselflies (top row; middle left), with a sprinkling of Blue-tailed (middle right), and one or two Common Blue. Variable is usually the earliest to emerge at the Lake, but is around for only a few weeks; Common Blue appears soon after and takes over as the commonest for most of the summer. Many of the damselflies now are in dull shades of pink and black before they mature to blue.

Today a few Red-eyed Damselflies (bottom left) were out on lily pads or patches of blanket weed in the bay beside Llangasty car park. In flight they looked a bit bigger and more solid than the other damsels and flew fast and low. Two or three Emperors were cruising around and a male Hairy Dragonfly (bottom right) basked in the hedge at the far end of that field.

I was with Nicky Hodges, who is working for a Masters at University of South Wales. For her dissertation she will be surveying dragonflies and craneflies at the peat restoration areas on Waun Fach in the Black Mountains above Grwyne Fawr. If any of my readers might be interested in helping Nicky, please contact her.

I have also had a request from Steve Preddy, the Dragonfly Recorder for Monmouthshire. Steve has produced maps of all the dragons and damsels of his county – see the link on the British Dragonfly Society website [british-dragonflies.org.uk](http://british-dragonflies.org.uk) He plans to complete the Atlas by 2030 and is keen to fill gaps in the coverage, especially in the Black Mountains. Steve and I will be very pleased to receive sightings from the Monmouthshire and Breconshire parts of this under-recorded area. Please let me know if you think you could contribute and I'll put you in touch with Steve.

My thanks to the people who have let me know what they have seen recently, including Beautiful Demoiselles, Large Red and Azure Damselflies and Broad-bodied Chaser.



## 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023: Beware of moths part 1

This morning I caught a Lunar Hornet, not a wasp but a moth. It came to a trap containing a small phial of synthetic pheromone lure which attracts the males of this one species. The top entrance acts like that of a lobster pot, the moth can be seen in the transparent base and released, unharmed but frustrated. Mimicking the appearance of a Hornet should give it protection against predators such as birds and small mammals. Attached for comparison is a picture of a real Hornet which settled on a small Christmas Tree by our front door last autumn.

Breconshire Moth Recorder, Norman Lowe has provided traps and lures for nine species of clearwing moths to twenty-one surveyors around Breconshire. He has emailed regular news about their successes, and the number of people who have so far caught each species is: Yellow-legged 11, Lunar Hornet 7, Currant 5, White-barred 3, Red-tipped 3, Red-belted 2. The survey is greatly increasing our knowledge of this group which has rarely been recorded here until now. Adults fly by day but are elusive and caterpillars live under the bark of particular trees (or stems in the case of Currant Clearwing). All have transparent wings and colours and patterns which mimic wasps.



## 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023: Beware of moths part 2

I have attached a picture of Yellow-legged Clearwing from a previous summer. I have yet to see any of the others, but you can find them all on the UK Moths website, [ukmoths.org.uk/species](http://ukmoths.org.uk/species).

Clearwing moths pretend, but the bright colours of burnet moths indicate real danger. All stages of their life cycle can produce hydrogen cyanide as a deterrent against predators. They derive it from the foodplant, Birds-foot Trefoil and can produce more themselves. Adults may also emit toxins to complement pheromones in attracting the opposite sex, and transmit them in mating – there is a good account on the Natural History Museum website, [nhm.ac.uk](http://nhm.ac.uk)

Last week I found dozens of Six-spot Burnets (top right) in the field above Camden Crescent, Brecon, and some Five-spots (bottom left) near Tredomen. On sunny days now there should be many whizzing about or nectaring on Knapweed flowers in the Ty-mawr meadows at Llangorse Lake.

I also spent several hours last week after dragonflies by the slipway and along the Llynfi outflow at Llangorse Lakeside. On the Saturday we had held a Dragonfly Hotspot event with British Dragonfly Society, and a Biodiversity Information Service walk. Helped by enthusiastic children we found many damselflies and various minibeasts. Bob Dennison, the Dragonfly Recorder for Radnorshire was with us and returned next day with some of his local naturalists. They found species we had missed including Black-tailed Skimmer and Hairy Dragonfly. And four of them watched for two or three minutes at close range a hawker with a plain brown body and colourless wings. Bob's description eliminates the large dragonflies we usually find here and fits Norfolk Hawker, a remarkable find in Wales so far from its expanding base in eastern England. National expert Adrian Parr commented that Norfolk Hawker has been doing amazing things in the last three or four years, setting up breeding colonies along the south coast of England, with recent wanderers reaching south Devon, North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. I tried hard on following days, saw Emperors, Broad-bodied Chasers (bottom right) and Banded Demoiselles but the rare one eluded me.



## 8<sup>th</sup> August 2023: Blues

Last Friday I carried out a Big Butterfly Count in one of the Ty-Mawr meadows at Llangorse Lake. In fifteen minutes along about 200 yards of the Trail I noted 21 Common Blues (top two rows), 17 Meadow Browns and a Peacock. I couldn't remember when I last saw so many Blues, and felt it worth reporting to the County Butterfly Recorder, Andy King.

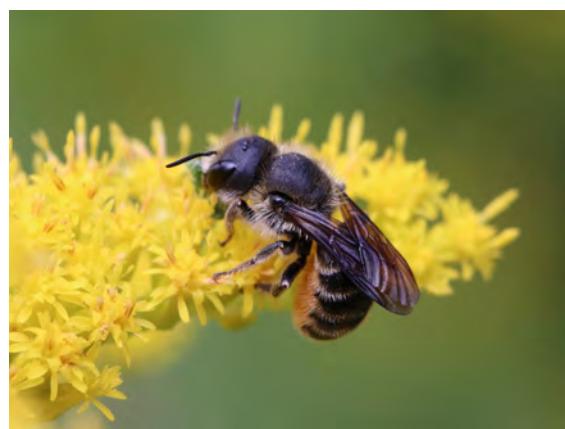
On Sunday I made a second Count, about 180 yards beside the hedge between the two meadows and this total was remarkable: 60 Common Blues, with 50 Meadow Browns, 3 Large Whites, 2 Small Coppers and a Ringlet. When the sun was out there were blues fluttering everywhere across the meadows and I reckon there must have been hundreds.

Why so many now? This Spring small caterpillars, which had overwintered after hatching from eggs laid at this time last year, fattened up and pupated. Adults flew in May/June and the butterflies I saw recently were their offspring, a second brood freshly-emerged and looking very smart. Were the exceptional numbers due perhaps to high caterpillar survival through the winter, or fine weather for the first adults in early summer? Clearly plenty of pupae came through wet July to emerge now.

Whatever the reasons, they were a pleasure to see and photograph, and a credit to the traditional management of these remaining hay meadows, with plenty of Bird's-foot Trefoil, the caterpillars' preferred food plant. I like the colours of dusky purple-sheened females as much as the bright blue of males, and the undersides are beautifully marked.

Fleabane is now flowering elsewhere at the Lake, attracting many visiting insects. Among them were more Common Blues, and also Holly Blues (bottom row) with their chalky underwings. They generally keep their wings shut or half-open like the female which I photographed showing her dark-bordered upperside.

If the forecast is right there could be some sunshine and butterflies here by Thursday.



## 18<sup>th</sup> August 2023: Raiders of the Bee Hotels

Orange-vented Mason Bees, *Osmia leaiana*, have been busily filling the tubes in our bee hotels for some weeks now. She lines the bamboo with mastic – chewed plant matter – and uses the same stuff to seal a series of cells, each containing an egg and a food supply of pollen and nectar. The ends of the full tubes, green fading to brown, can easily be told from those filled earlier by Red Mason Bees, *Osmia bicornis*, which use mud instead.

Many bees, wasps, hoverflies and other insects are now on the flowerheads of Canadian Goldenrod, *Solidago canadensis*, and among them strange ‘long-tailed’ Javelin Wasps, *Gasteruption jaculator* (middle left; bottom left). Last week I saw one in action at a Mason Bee Hotel. After a look around, and using her hind legs to pick up sound vibrations which help to find an occupied nest, she inserted her long ovipositor into a bamboo tube, leaving the white-tipped sheath outside. Hatching from an egg injected into a bee cell, a *Gasteruption* larva is thought to eat the bee’s egg and food store.

The previous day I had watched another raider lay eggs at the same hotel – the Bee Darwin Wasp, *Ephialtes manifestator* (middle right; bottom right), an ichneumon with orange legs and an ovipositor longer than the rest of her body. Her larvae will eat those of the Mason Bee.

*Gasteruption jaculator* is easy to identify. *Ephialtes manifestator* needs more care and I checked my identification against the Natural History Museum website’s Beginners Guide to Ichneumons, (there are about 2,500 species in Britain). I have seen *Gasteruption* in our garden for three summers now, but *Ephialtes* on 24 June and again a week ago was new. Neither is common in Wales and according to the Distribution Maps on Aderyn – aderyn.lercwales.org.uk – they have not been recorded elsewhere in Breconshire. Could they be in your garden?

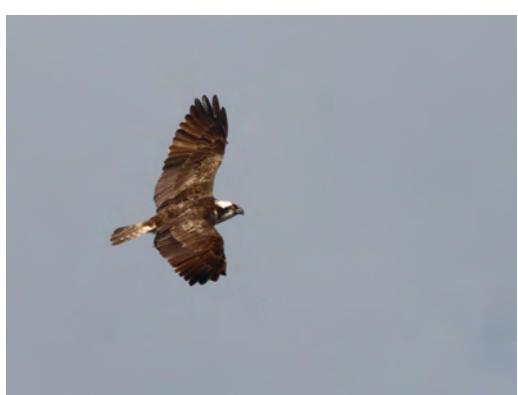
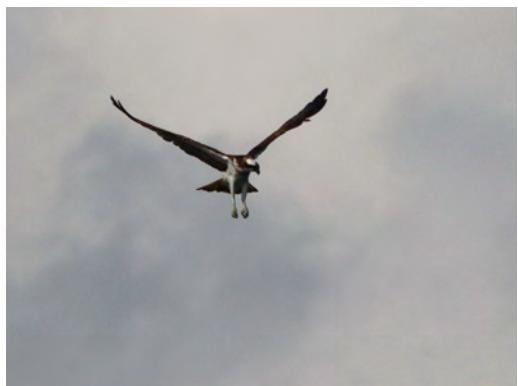


## 24<sup>th</sup> August 2023: Mynydd Illtyd Dragons

When the sun came out on Mynydd Illtyd this afternoon so did the dragonflies, and the view to Pen y Fan and Cribyn was lovely. 19 Common Darters, 3 Emperors, 3 Common Hawkers, and 2 Golden-ringed Dragonflies was a poor count compared to some previous years, but clearly better than last August when the Traeth Bach pool by the western cattle grid was a puddle and the Camlais stream was almost dry. Today the stream was running and the pool was near its proper size.

A Golden-ringed Dragonfly posed for a portrait. I often receive sightings of this species from walkers in the hills, sometimes supported by good photos as they return to favourite perches. The Hawkers would not settle and I tried some flight shots of a patrolling Emperor. The two pictures attached give an idea of the speed of its wingbeats, taken at 1/2000 and 1/1600 second.

If you would like to watch me attempting to shoot flying dragonflies at Llangorse Lake, there is a short piece in BBC Countryfile this Sunday 27th, when the programme visits Bannau Brycheiniog.



## 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023: Osprey

Friday afternoon was fine and sunny and I went to the Lake to look for dragonflies. There was an obliging Common Darter straight away, on the wall of the car park below Llangasty church. I was able to get close enough to photograph the bulbous compound eyes – all the better to see you with – and the bristly legs – all the better to catch you with. More Darters were basking on warm rocks, some marked with otter spraints, along the water's edge. Migrant Hawkers patrolled the fringe of reeds and a Hobby, dragonfly-hunter, zipped past.

At 3.00 I picked out a high distant raptor, most likely a Buzzard or Kite, but as it came nearer it looked long-winged and there was white about the head. I kept taking pictures as it became an Osprey, hovering with long legs lowered and then stretched forward as it dropped into a fast diagonal dive. Reeds hid the grab but I watched it carry off a small fish.

As you may now read at [www.brecknockbirds.co.uk](http://www.brecknockbirds.co.uk) Ospreys built a nest in the Usk valley this summer. It is on private land and strictly protected by law. We can look forward to the exciting possibility that the pair returns and raises young next year.



## 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023: Wild in the garden part 1

Grey Squirrels. I have mixed feelings about them now, but as a child I loved to hand-feed them in the park with peanuts – as did our children. From inside the house on recent mizzly days it has been fun to watch a pair in the garden, upside down after the birds' sunflower seeds, stretching for berries, taking apples intended for thrushes and leaves to a drey hidden in the ivy-covered hawthorn.



## 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023: Wild in the garden part 2

Peanut butter for birds is a favourite here with Blue, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, and I have also watched Blue Tits taking natural foods – seeds of Birch and Alder, and nectar from Mahonia. These birds are with us every day with a dozen Goldfinches. Occasionally there is a Blackcap, Great Spotted Woodpecker or Goldcrest and on 6 November a great surprise. Alison noticed that a cat climbing the steps to our back lawn glanced at a lump on the grass but carried on past. When she had a better look she found that the lump was a sitting Woodcock. It stayed still while I went out and took its picture, and for some time afterwards. At that time thousands of Woodcocks would have been arriving by night across the North Sea. As this one had a few loose feathers I wondered if it was in shock after escaping a predator, (perhaps a Peregrine although they seem not to have been occupying their usual perches on St. Mary's Church in recent weeks).

Happy Christmas and New Year.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2024: Spring Siskins

Ten days ago there were a dozen Siskins in our garden, following the first five the day before. Next day I reckoned fifty plus, and sometimes since, at least a hundred finches. Subtracting Goldfinches and Greenfinches gives more than 80 Siskins and I think this is the most I have ever seen here. Although we have six hanging feeders filled with sunflower bits this provides perches for only about thirty birds so there is squabbling. In most winters the largest numbers of finches come to the garden in March. Natural seeds are getting scarce and the birds need to get into breeding condition and move out, some to northern Britain, Norway and Sweden.

The flock attracts a regular Sparrowhawk. If he stops here instead of just dashing through I can recognise him by odd white feathers in his wing coverts. One recent day when the rain stopped and there was some light and shade, I took a portrait which shows a hawk's special ability to adjust each pupil independently of the other.



## 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024: On Mynydd Illtyd

On Sunday we drove up to the Visitor Centre on Mynydd Illtyd to deliver some books – about Mynydd Illtyd. On the way I had a look for Golden Plovers in their favourite place. The biggest numbers are often in November as they pass through, or arrive to spend the winter here. The maximum count in the 2022 Breconshire Birds Report was of 359. By now most have left but some particularly smart birds in breeding plumage may stop off on their way north. I watched a couple of walkers unknowingly approach a flock of 23. When, as I feared, the birds were flushed they made a short flight to land right in front of me, allowing some pictures before they walked back to settle down where they came from. They spend much of the day loafing.

There were Stonechats in the gorse, singing Skylarks and recently-arrived Wheatears. A Curlew flew calling from the hill to land among sheep and lambs below. And then the big surprise. A Roe buck came bounding by. My camera records that it was in view for just 18 seconds and 67 pictures, a brief but wonderful encounter.

I looked up Roe Deer in our Handbook of British Mammals to read “Believed to be absent from Wales”. However, the information in this second edition dated from 1964. The British Deer Society website was up to date. Roe Deer moved into Wales during the 1970s and are now present across much of the centre of the country and patchily towards the coasts. Locally the Distribution Maps at Aderyn show no records for Mynydd Illtyd itself but a couple in the same 10 km square. It has been recorded much more frequently in and around the forests west of Sennybridge, around Llaneglwys, and the Black Mountains.



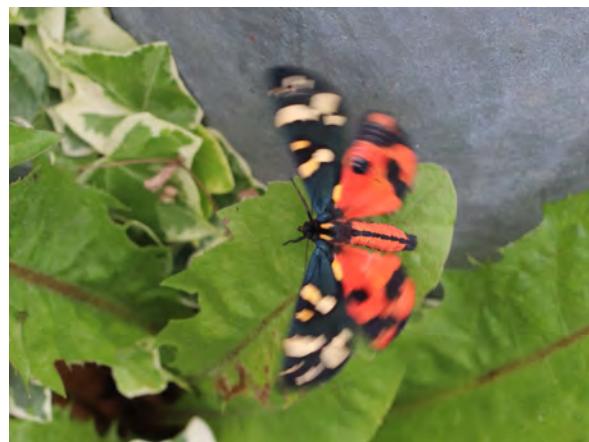
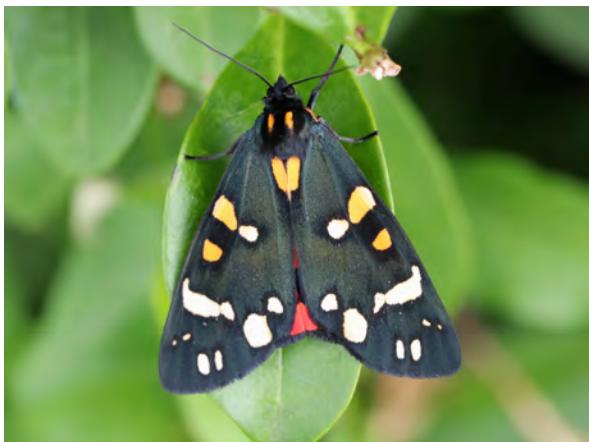
## 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024: Dragonflies

On Tuesday at Llangorse Lake I found four species of damselfly but no dragonflies yet. As usual early in the season nearly all were Variable Damselflies (top row; second row, left) and there were many hundreds. When freshly emerged, blue damselflies are a shade of dull pink and the wings very shiny. They change colour as they mature, abdomen before thorax. I picked out one Blue-tailed Damselfly (second row, right), a handful of Common Blue (third row, left) and three female Red-eyed (third row, right).

Then, yesterday, Mark Waldron sent me a picture of a male Hairy Dragonfly in dead bracken by a footpath on Allt Filo (bottom right). This is the first time in Breconshire that a Hairy Dragonfly has been seen away from the Lake where a few have been noted in early summer each year since 2014. The surprising location near Llanfilo is about 7 km north of Llangorse.

On Sunday 9 June at Llangorse Lake I shall be leading morning and afternoon visits for those who would like to learn more about identifying and recording dragonflies. The event is free but places must be booked.

When not after damsels I spent some time in the Hide trying without success to photograph a too-distant Black Tern. Hearing yelping calls from a black-backed gull, I looked up to see an Osprey flying in. It passed so close that my photos clearly show its ring, Blue 496. This three-year-old male was ringed at Llyn Clywedog near Llanidloes, and has been visiting the nest at Talybont, where an unringed pair is settling in. For regular news and pictures see [www.uskvalleyospreys.org](http://www.uskvalleyospreys.org).



## 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024: Tigers and Dragons

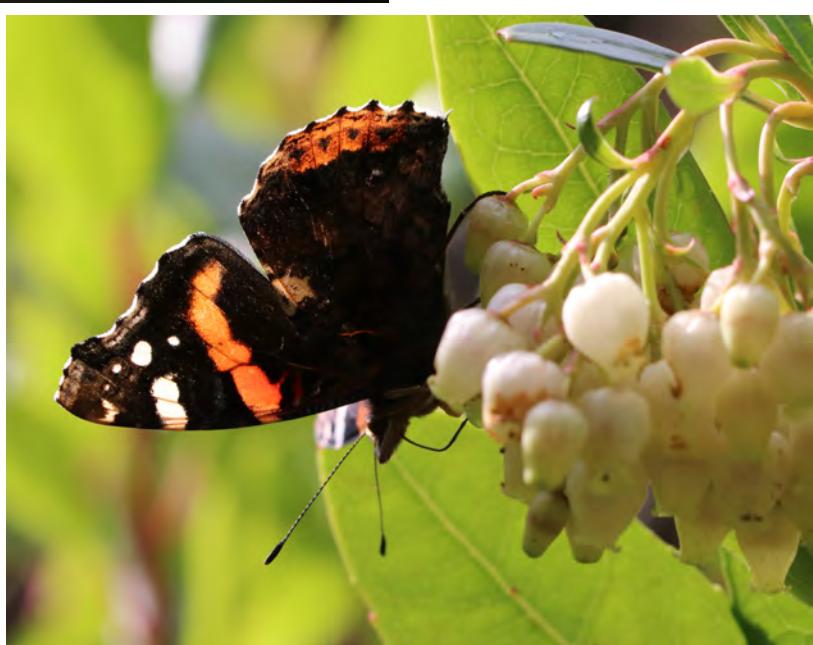
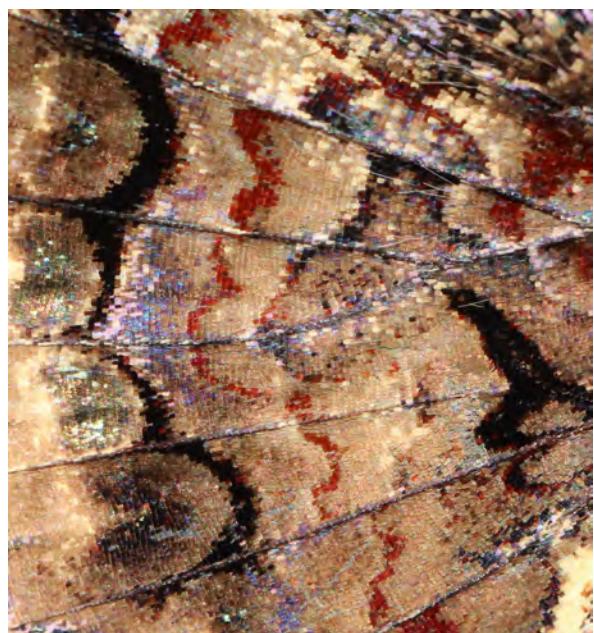
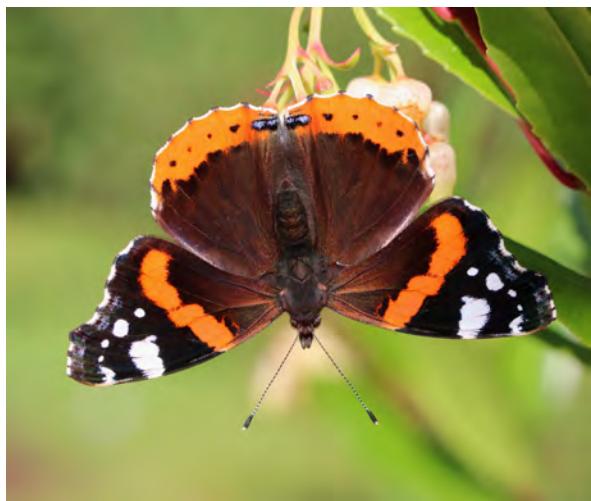
Back in April I noticed that a small patch of Comfrey by a neighbour's garden gate was being eaten by Scarlet Tiger caterpillars – I counted 23. On a warm afternoon ten days ago Alison told me that the adults were flying. Several were fluttering around together, more like butterflies than the common image of moths. Settled they were handsome, and in flight brilliant.

On Thursday I caught another remarkable moth. The Lunar Hornet is the largest of our local clearwings; others look like small wasps. Now that we are able to put out traps with pheromone phials to attract particular species, we are learning much more about the distribution of these formerly elusive moths.

At Llangorse Lake countless thousands of damselflies swarmed from the water's edge in a huge synchronised emergence on sunny 14 May, and there have been plenty of Variable, Common Blue and Blue-tailed since then. I was especially pleased to see dozens of Red-eyed Damselflies, a species which I first noted here as just a single male in 2017. A male damselfly's tail-end claspers are supposed to fit behind the head of a female of the same species, so it was a big surprise to find a Blue-tailed Damselfly and a male Red-eyed in tandem.

Mid-June we had a lovely sunny day on Skomer and of course spent a lot of time with the Puffins. These three reminded us of John Cleese and the two Ronnies – “I look up to him because he is upper class, but I look down on him because he is lower class.” “I know my place.”

On Monday 8 July, 10.00 to 4.00, we have a special Dragonfly Hotspot event at Llangorse Lakeside. Everyone is invited to join British Dragonfly Society, County Recorders and other enthusiasts to explore the varied wildlife of the Common, meadows and Lake – plants, butterflies and moths, dragonflies and everything else we come across. I look forward to seeing many of you there.



## 11<sup>th</sup> October 2024: Butterflies

Two Red Admirals have been probing nectar from our small Strawberry Tree. They were so absorbed as to allow many close photos. Some butterflies at this time of year are faded and ragged but these were perfect, flag-flashy above, undersides subtly shaded and textured as old tapestry. Against the light they glowed like stained glass.

This year I have seen far fewer butterflies than usual. Butterfly Conservation has prepared a letter to the Government declaring an emergency and pressing for action. More than 40,000 people have signed. If you wish to add your support before the window closes on Sunday visit [butterfly-conservation.org](http://butterfly-conservation.org).



# Index of photographed species

- Bee  
Buffish Mining, 93  
Chocolate Mining, 95  
Hairy Yellow-face, 137  
Hairy-footed Flower, 7, 93, 131  
Honey, 93, 121  
Ivy, 65, 121, 151  
Long-horned, 37  
Orange-vented Mason, 169  
Patchwork Leafcutter, 47  
Tawny Mining, 97
- Beetle  
Fleabane Tortoise, 111  
Lily, 97  
Thistle Tortoise, 111  
Blackbird, 11, 23, 39, 45, 101  
Blackcap, 17, 39, 75, 155  
Brambling, 71, 73  
Bumblebee  
Buff-tailed, 5, 7  
Garden, 5  
Red-tailed, 5
- Butterfly  
Comma, 45, 67, 129  
Common Blue, 27, 53, 115, 139, 145, 167  
Gatekeeper, 53  
Green-veined White, 53  
Holly Blue, 53, 167  
Meadow Brown, 53
- Orange-tip, 13, 97  
Painted Lady, 115, 141  
Peacock, 53, 113, 129, 145  
Red Admiral, 57, 67, 113, 121, 139, 145, 151, 187  
Small Copper, 51, 53, 115, 139  
Small Skipper, 41  
Small Tortoiseshell, 57, 67, 93, 113, 129  
Speckled Wood, 145  
White-letter Hairstreak, 51
- Chaffinch, 9  
Chiffchaff, 131  
Cormorant, 153  
Curlew, 99
- Damselfly  
Azure, 27, 143  
Banded Demoiselle, 29  
Beautiful Demoiselle, 29, 109, 111  
Blue-tailed, 161, 183, 185  
Common Blue, 27, 103, 143, 183  
Emerald, 143  
Large Red, 11, 15  
Red-eyed, 107, 161, 183, 185  
Scarce Blue-tailed, 45  
Variable, 161, 183
- Deer

- Roe, 181
- Dipper, 85
- Dragonfly
- Black Darter, 59, 109, 111
  - Black-tailed Skimmer, 43, 107
  - Broad-bodied Chaser, 165
  - Common Darter, 63, 143, 171, 173
  - Emperor, 55, 109, 171
  - Four-spotted Chaser, 45
  - Golden-ringed, 45, 109, 171
  - Hairy, 103, 161, 183
  - Keeled Skimmer, 45, 109, 143
  - Migrant Hawker, 57, 63, 117
  - Ruddy Darter, 57, 109
  - Scarce Chaser, 43
  - Southern Hawker, 63
- Egret
- Great White, 71, 153
  - Little, 71, 133
- Fieldfare, 155
- Goldcrest, 91
- Goldfinch, 9, 11, 23, 71, 73
- Grebe
- Little, 85, 159
- Greenfinch, 9, 23, 101
- Hedgehog, 75, 137
- Heron
- Grey, 85, 159
- Hobby, 105, 173
- Hornet
- European, 151, 163
- Hoverfly
- Arctophila superbiens*, 61
  - Dasyphyrhus albostriatus*, 119
  - Episyrphus balteatus*, 61, 119
  - Eristalis* sp., 65, 121
  - Eristalis horticola*, 61
  - Helophilus hybridus*, 61, 115
  - Helophilus pendulus*, 115
- Helophilus trivittatus*, 61, 115
- Myathropa florea*, 119
- Scaeva pyrastri*, 47
- Scaeva selenitica*, 47
- Sericomyia silentis*, 61, 119
- Volucella pellucens*, 119
- Volucella zonaria*, 119
- Jackdaw, 39
- Ladybird
- 14-spot, 19
  - 2-spot, 19
  - Cream-spotted, 19
  - Harlequin, 19
  - Seven-spot, 97
- Lizard
- Common, 59
- Martin
- House, 37
- Moth (macro)
- Elephant Hawk-, 39
  - Five-spot Burnet, 41, 165
  - Hummingbird Hawk-, 147
  - Lime Hawk-, 25
  - Lunar Hornet, 137, 163, 185
  - Sallow Kitten, 21
  - Scarlet Tiger, 185
  - Silver Y, 57
  - Six-spot Burnet, 41, 165
  - Small Elephant Hawk-, 39
  - Small Yellow Underwing, 31
  - Yellow-legged Clearwing, 165
- Moth (micro)
- Adela reaumurella*, 25
  - Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*, 67
  - Argyresthia cupressella*, 35
  - Argyresthia trifasciata*, 35
  - Eucosma hohenwartiana*, 47
  - Grapholita compositella*, 35
  - Grapholita lunulana*, 35
  - Metalampra italica*, 35

- Nemophora cupriacella*, 55
- Nemophora minimella*, 55
- Pyrausta aurata*, 31
- Tebenna micalis*, 145
- Mouse
  - Yellow-necked, 9, 89, 91
- Newt
  - Palmate, 33
- Nuthatch, 3, 79
- Osprey, 135, 173, 183
- Otter, 127
- Peregrine, 69, 149
- Plant Bug
  - Red-spotted, 111
- Planthopper
  - Issus coleoptratus*, 19
- Plover
  - Golden, 181
  - Little-ringed, 133
- Puffin, 185
- Rail
  - Water, 153
- Redstart
  - Black, 157
- Redwing, 155
- Robin, 25, 45, 81
- Siskin, 9, 23, 89, 101, 179
- Sparrowhawk, 3, 73, 83, 179
- Spider
  - Misumena vatia*, 49
- Squirrel
  - Grey, 87, 175
- Starling, 123
- Stylops, 95
- Swallow, 13, 17
- Swan
  - Whooper, 71
- Thrush
  - Song, 17, 23
- Tit
  - Blue, 11, 23, 73, 77, 79, 89, 101, 123, 177
  - Coal, 77, 81
  - Great, 123
  - Long-tailed, 73, 77, 177
- Tree creeper, 13, 79
- Wagtail
  - Grey, 85, 125
  - Pied, 125
  - Yellow, 97, 101
- Warbler
  - Willow, 17
- Wasp
  - Common, 121
  - Ephialtes manifestator*, 169
  - Gasteruption jaculator*, 169
- Wheatear, 97, 99
- Woodcock, 177
- Woodpecker
  - Great Spotted, 3, 123
- Wren, 91

# Biography

