



## Recorders Newsletter 39 (January 2019)

### Weather

Another take on the 'Beast from the East' came from David Watkins, noted that despite the icy blasts, a pomegranate that he had grown from seed survived outside and subsequently thrived. In my garden I have **alexanders**, grown from seeds from the seed side. This umbellifer introduced by the Romans has a very coastal distribution in the UK, and is frost sensitive. It was just coming into flower when the Beast from the East hit and I was sure it wouldn't recover, but once spring finally got into gear in April the alexanders flowered happily.

Mark Evans summarised weather in Cwmbach in 2018 *'it turned out to be a fairly average year, precipitation-wise. The summer rainfall was below average and the autumn was above, so it all evened out, as it usually does'*.

### Birds

David Harry long list of garden birds in the winter of 2018, included **blackcap**, **goldcrest** and **redpoll**, with in the March freeze **fieldfares** and **redwing** and 20 plus **house sparrows**, with **kingfisher**, **dipper** and **snipe** on adjacent Ewenny Fach.

Where I come from, the hornbeam woods of South East Hertfordshire used to be a stronghold for the **hawfinch**. Which is our biggest, chunkiest finch with a massive stone crushing bill. Well they are another bird species in long term decline and are no longer a familiar site in Hertfordshire. They have always been rare in south Wales, but in January 2018 Graham Powell saw one flying over Sardis Road Car park, Pontypridd and as he recalled *'the wings appeared almost transparent against the blue sky'*. The winter of 2017/18 saw influxes of continental hawfinches to the UK, and some evidently got even as far west as RCT.

The Beast from the East did seem to have a devastating impact on our **chiffchaff** population (see various mentions below). These are our first warbler to return each March, and mostly they winter in southern Europe. The extreme cold of March 2018, which reached down into the Mediterranean seems likely to have been responsible for the lack of chiff-chaffing heard in our woods and parks in April. I didn't hear my

first **chiffchaff** in Pontyclun until the late date of March 24<sup>th</sup>. Paul Marshman saw his first **swallow** of the year on April 7<sup>th</sup> with up to 6 seen flying north up the Rhondda Fawr over half an hour and his first tree pipits on the 12<sup>th</sup> (there were two singing at Llantwit Fardre fields on the 20<sup>th</sup> along with two singing willow warblers and a reed bunting). On April 9<sup>th</sup> up to 6 **sand martins** were flying around Pontypridd and swallows were passing through the Town heading up the Valley on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April. On April 13<sup>th</sup> Paul Marshman had 4 **willow warblers** singing at Glyncornel and heard my first ones from Pantgraigwen road, Pontypridd on the same day. Jeff Williams saw sand martins in Pontypridd on April 15<sup>th</sup>. By April 23<sup>rd</sup> house martins were back in Pontypridd and 3 **wood warblers** were found singing at Glyncornel Local Nature reserve after which Paul M also saw a **goshawk** circling over the nearby Gelli Tips. **Goosanders** stayed late into the spring, with a male and two females at Llwynypia on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 and two (and male and female) in Pontypridd park on May 3<sup>rd</sup> (Ray Edwards). On May 3<sup>rd</sup> Liz Dean heard a **cuckoo** at Cwm Saebren, Treherbert and I heard one in Rhigos on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Jeff Williams saw his first **swifts** of the year with 8 at Pentre on May 4<sup>th</sup> and they were back in Pontypridd on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Mark Evans reported that *'on the 29th of May, I checked on the **nightjars** at Gwaun Helen, above Cefnpennar. It was a perfect evening, with lots of moths on the wing; abundant midges and mosquitoes too. For a short period, I had two males churring, but one male (male B) either went quiet or moved off to another site. A male flew very close; circling me to within three metres and in good light, so I was able to see the details of its plumage. Later a female was seen hunting. The staying male eventually took up the song perch it was using last year.'* Later, *'on the 7th June, Mike Hogan and I checked on the **nightjars** on Mynydd Gethin. The clearfell area up there is too large to be surveyed by the two of us in a single visit, so we confined ourselves to the northern half of the site. Unusually for that site, which is all above 450 m, the weather was good and we recorded definitely three churring males, with a possible fourth (males A and C may be the same bird) and a female. This was by far the largest number of **nightjars** and the most activity we have recorded up there. On way back down, I saw and heard the Gwaun Helen pair'*. Mark and Mike surveying shows that our nightjar populations are still on the rise and are probably of national UK importance.

Stuart Jones sent a great roundup of birds (and other species) for the Graig Pontypridd, *'during the spring there's been the usual **wood warblers** and **redstarts** in the woods around Shoni's Pond, with at least three singing wood warblers early on. This is an area with a really diverse mix of habitats with broad leaved woodland bordered, marshy rough, grazed pasture and re-wilded slag heaps all sitting within what is probably less than a single square mile. In addition to the **tree pipits**, and **garden warblers** I also saw a male **reed bunting** singing in the marshy grassland at the woods edge. There were loads of common orchids flowering in the grassland and I had a very good view a butterfly which I hadn't seen before and didn't recognise, but later identified as a **small pearl bordered fritillary**. I don't how common these are in RCT but it was a first for me.*

*There's also a lot of wildlife in and around the allotment site. In the years I've had it I've tried to manage my allotment there in as wildlife friendly a way as possible, planting and laying mixed native hedges, putting in small ponds, allowing edges to be left untidy and composting weeds and brush cuttings rather than burning it. Across the whole site there's really healthy populations of amphibians and resident birds like **song thrushes** and **bullfinches**. This year I've been particularly happy to see **greenfinches** start to return for the first time in a number of years and have also had a pair of **hedgehogs** take up residence. Just goes to show that food production doesn't have to go hand in hand with the decimation of wildlife. There's no sign of the **sand martins** that nested last year in the boxes put up around Gelli Wion flats but there are **sand martins** nesting in gaps in the stone wall at the rear of the car park in Dewi Sant hospital'. This last record came to after Ade Williams had also rang me to say that he had been watching sand martins nesting in the drainage holes of the crib-lock wall at the uphill carpark at Dewi Sant. For years I have watched sand martins flying around Pontypridd and from our old offices on the top floor of Sardis House sand martins were used to get fantastic views of birds flying above the rooves of the town. It looks like they are happy to make use of any suitable drainage holes in vertical, or near vertical walls even hundreds of metres from the nearest river. How long they have been in the Hospital is not known, but I did contact the Health Board to let them know what they have. There can't be many hospitals with their own sand martin colonies !!*

In 2019 there is a **willow tit** survey (the web site of the BTO). Along with their very close relative the **marsh tit**, these birds have declined hugely in the last 30 years. Willow tits like wet woodland with rotten stumps into which they excavate their nests. RCT has lots of apparently suitable woodland. This year Richard Morgan has heard and seen both marsh and willow tits around Bronwydd woods in Porth, and in late February in Dare Valley Country Park I saw a marsh/willow tit. The two nearly identical birds are best told apart by their calls and song. I have hopes that both may be less rare than we think in RCT. The BTO and Glamorgan Bird Club are very keen any reports or records.

Tony Swann sent through another excellent summary of the birds of Brynna woods, Llanharan

*The first visit of the year was on 7<sup>th</sup> Jan with 29 species recorded with the highlight being a **red kite**. 10<sup>th</sup> Jan saw a **great black backed gull** fly over heading east. 14<sup>th</sup> Jan was the start of spring for **treecreepers** with 2 pairs playing chase with each other. Good numbers of **redwing** and a few **fieldfares**. 26<sup>th</sup> Jan and the first **stock dove** of the year flew over. A **great spotted woodpecker** was drumming and **song thrushes** were very evident singing their repeated songs high up in the trees. 1<sup>st</sup> Feb heralded a new month with 2 noisy **Canada geese**. 15<sup>th</sup> Feb male **blackcap** seen in my back garden. 21<sup>st</sup> Feb resident passerines showing increasing urgency in pairing off. 4<sup>th</sup> March **green woodpecker** again seen within the woods and male **sparrowhawk** noted flying up the Ewenni Fach rather than just through the wood. 15<sup>th</sup> Mar – 2 calling **chiffchaffs** from the highest trees. 18<sup>th</sup> Mar – the snow brought a large party of **siskin** who flew over the wood without stopping. The snow*

had left the wood pretty birdless and in 2 hours I struggled to find 12 different species.

April 13<sup>th</sup> and what at last seemed to be a hint of spring. **Willow warblers** and **blackcaps** were at last evident joining the few **chiffchaffs** that had been here since before the last snow. Still no sign of a hirundine in the area. April 21<sup>st</sup> was a visit with South and West Wales Wildlife Trust group visit. The first **garden warbler** was eventually seen singling from dense cover with an earlier **blackcap** allowing a good song comparison. April 22<sup>nd</sup> saw the first **barn swallow** over the woods for this year. Very late and my first local hirundine sighting of the year. This was the 50<sup>th</sup> species of the year and 2 weeks slower to reach compared to last year. April 29<sup>th</sup> produced a pair of fly over **sand martins**. Only 1 **chiffchaff** was calling compared to 2 **garden warblers** and numerous **blackcaps**. A **green woodpecker** was in the field to the north of the wood and has remained in the vicinity since the 'proper' winter ended. Still very cold for late April with the monthly total reflecting the weather. 5<sup>th</sup> May on a beautifully warm morning. The highlight was a calling male **cuckoo** that stayed for over an hour before moving north. Still no **house martins**. 6<sup>th</sup> May and the first 2 **swifts** were feeding over the wood in the evening along with 2 **barn swallows**. 7<sup>th</sup> May on another warm evening watching birds flying over the wood with the remarkable sighting of a pair of **eurasian dotterels** heading north at 1815. My first sighting of this species migrating north of Brynna Woods. Later a **rook** was flying round and finally first 2 **house martins** at last put in an appearance. 28<sup>th</sup> May saw a male **great spotted woodpecker** carrying food. Nest must have been well hidden. The first few days of June were mainly fly overs and included a pair of honking **Canada geese**, **red kite**, **raven** and **rook**. 21<sup>st</sup> June seemed the day for **eurasian jackdaws** to be carrying sheep's wool for their nests. First tailless **Jackdaw** observed, a portent for the summer moult due to start shortly. 30<sup>th</sup> June and 8 **long tailed tits** were together. I assume a family group rather than a tit flock.

5<sup>th</sup> July a solitary **rabbit** seen. How many others are hiding! Garden warbler present with 3 seen. 20<sup>th</sup> July **common lizard** found sunning itself by the railway crossing. A most unusual record and reflects the great summer we are enjoying. 27<sup>th</sup> July 2 **stock doves** flew over heading north. Species are becoming harder to see and hear as the moult is underway. 3<sup>rd</sup> August female and very noisy young **sparrowhawk** were the visit highlight. 9<sup>th</sup> August 100+ **jackdaws** dining on flying ants in the fields south of the reserve across the railway line. Sadly these fields will be lost as it is to become a housing estate. This area is used by both **redwing** and **fieldfares** during the winter months. 19<sup>th</sup> August an unexpected treat was 1 **common swift** flying southwards and trying to feed in the drizzle. 13<sup>th</sup> Sept a **goshawk** flying northwards was the first of the year for this site. 24<sup>th</sup> Sept **jay** actively burying acorn and 2 **nuthatches** prising open acorns, something I have not noticed before. A 'chiffchaffing' **chiffchaff** in the warm sun was a surprise as was the late male **blackcap**. 29<sup>th</sup> Sept first autumnal flock of tits, primarily **long tailed**, **blue** and **great tit** but with a **treecreeper** keeping up together with 1 **coal tit**.

28<sup>th</sup> Oct my first visit of the quarter following a couple of weeks away on the Isles of Scilly. Both variety of species and bird numbers in general were low. The ground is still hard after the dry summer. 29<sup>th</sup> Oct a fly over of 30+ **redwing** from an overnight roost in the wood at first light. 31<sup>st</sup> Oct a 'cronking' **raven** flew over, this species has been missing of late from the area. 6<sup>th</sup> Nov a **Siberian chiffchaff** flew into the lower part of the wood from the old BMX track south of the railway line. Good views were enjoyed as this is a rare visitor to this site. 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, species numbers still remain low and the highlight was a family group of **common buzzards**. Both parents and 2 young birds who were calling loudly as they attempted to find the thermal that one of the parents was using to soar. Eventually after much calling, I guess from frustration, both young birds latched onto the thermal and began to gain height. 25<sup>th</sup> Nov at last species numbers broke the 20 seen on a visit. The east end of the site held a mixed flock of **lesser redpoll** and **siskin** feeding high up in the Alders. 14<sup>th</sup> Dec the rain has done its work and softened the ground. This has returned species numbers to a more normal level... 3 hours yielded 24 but the mild weather meant no northern migrants were present. 21<sup>st</sup> Dec a wet and windy day saw a **black-headed gull** being blown westward, a species that is very rarely recorded. 22<sup>nd</sup> at last a break from the rain. 2 **grey wagtails** were feeding in the guttering of a house bordering the north side but best of all, was a flock of 20+ **common linnets** that flew over heading south but didn't stop. 31<sup>st</sup> Dec a final visit of 2018. Nothing of note. Species numbers amounted to just 20 in 3 hours. 2018 yielded 61 different species with the pair of Eurasian Dotterell clearly the highlight of a relatively uneventful year.

In September Ann Gibbons reported a Red Kite over Gilfach Goch

Peter Morris emailed 'I thought I'd update you on the state of avian wildlife over the last winter at the top of the Clydach Valley here in Old Ynysybw. We've had the usual myriad of **robins**, we had around 7 at one time! **Blackbirds**, **nuthatches**, **great, coal and blue tits**. These are the usual culprits at our various feeders. This year, though, we've had a colony of 5 or six **sparrows** in our hedge, and a colony of **long-tailed tits**, about 8 of them. In previous years they've usually arrived in autumn and spring and then flown off, but this year they overwintered. Lovely small things with tails longer than their bodies! Also overwintering were a pair of **pieb wagtails**. They're hooligans at the bird-table. A pair of **greater-spotted woodpeckers** were regular visitors all winter, as were **dunnocks**, and **chaffinches**. Occasional visitors were a pair of **goldfinches**, **wood pigeons**, **collared doves**, **bullfinches** and **siskins**. Flying overhead there are the usual **crows** and **magpies**, with the occasional **jay** spotted on the ground in the grass. A **buzzard** now and then decided to use our plum tree as vantage point. We also noticed a few **frogs** in one of our ponds, but this was just before the 'Beast From The East' and storm Emma, so I think the frogspawn all froze. I also have a leak somewhere in the pond, so one of my jobs this summer is to find and repair that'.

## Plants

Paul Marshman as mentioned in the past how certain woodland flowers recorded from the Llwynypia area a century or so ago are now rare or non-existent in the local woods. One of the scarce species in woodlands in the Rhondda is **wood anemone**, but in 2018 Paul was glad to see the best flowering he has seen in Glyn cornel. Paul also reports a really good show of **sweet violets**. Glyn cornel woods was, until 30 years ago grazed by sheep and had a very shrub and ground layer. Since the sheep have gone the wood has undergone a dramatic natural change with a dense regenerating understorey. The change in structure has been reflected in shifts in woodland bird communities with a loss of **pieb flycatcher** and **redstart**, but an increase in **blackcaps** and **chiffchaffs** (and others). Through decades of recording Paul has witnessed first-hand (and recorded) these changes in flora and fauna.

The **green winged orchid** count from Cefn Parc Cemetery was just 7 flowering plants in 2018, while these orchids are refusing to spread, the common spotted orchid numbers number into the hundred, and the flower rich hay meadow grassland is spectacular. In May 2 new sites for **Monk's-hood** were found on the Nant Dowlais at Llantwit Fardre.

Tim Rich recorded the very rare dandelion species **Taraxicum berthae** from Cwm Tips Beddau in spring 2018. It may come as a surprise to discover that there are many different species of dandelion, but there are, and the same thing applies to brambles.

David Barden has been looking at the flora of the Royal Glamorgan Hospital and along the wet floodplain grassland along the River Ely he has come up with a fantastic list, including **early marsh orchids**, which as David pointed out only has 2 post 2000 records for Glamorgan east of Kenfig.

Richard Penrose sent me a summary of his university project from Forest wood Quarry, near Llanharan, and amongst an excellent NVC survey recorded **herb Paris**, **bee orchid** (including white forms), **greater butterfly orchid**, **twayblade** and **toothwort**, which adds up to a classic list of limestone scrub/woodland species.

In July Stuart Jones showed me some of the highlights of his patch at the Graig, Pontypridd. This included some marshy grassland I was previously unaware of with the diminutive beauty **ivy-leaved bellflower**.

## Fungi

Mark Evans sent me an update on the Kew Gardens 'Lost and Found' Fungi species work and he confirmed that **Hypoxylon fuscooides** has been found on alder trees in two places in the Cynon Valley and another in Merthyr Tydfil. **Hypoxylon fuscooides** is a newly discovered species, described as an ascomycete which forms cushion like warts on alder and distinguished by a purple reaction with potassium hydroxide. Mark also paid a visit to the SINC 135 site (Beddau East) with Carys Romney, 'it is a nice site, with lots of potential for discovery. The first thing I found, on getting there was the **Willow Glue fungus (Hymenochaetopsis tabacina)** which is the host species of **Willow Gloves (Hypocreopsis lichenoides)** and **Fringed Cup (Encoelia fimbriata)**. I will be visiting the site again, in February, when the two rare fern rusts that occur on **Polystichum setiferum**, will be in season'.

Paul Denning recorded and photo'd the very rare **date waxcap** at Llantrisant Common SSSI, a new species for RCT and an indicator of the complex soil biology of sites like Llantrisant common, which have a long history (centuries, even millennia) of undisturbed soil structures.

### **Butterflies and Moths**

Mark Evans and Mike Hogan have recorded the numbers of **herald** moths hibernating in Cefnglas tunnel for many years, In January 2018 there 38 and in January 2019 35. However these totals have more than halved from a peak of 82 recorded in 2013.

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, Nick Sharp had a fantastic sighting of 41 **small blue** butterflies along the disused railwayline south of the old Cwm Colliery at Beddau. The butterflies (which are the smallest British butterfly) had hatched on mass from the **kidney vetch** that grows on the lime rich railway ballast. The small blue is really a coastal butterfly in South Wales, but its foodplant has spread up into the Valleys along railway lines and on lime rich brownfield sites and colliery spoils, and although definitely still rare it is worth looking for. I am sure there are more undiscovered sites in RCT. **Orange tips** had a great spring, there were lots enjoying the **cuckooflowers** at Nant Celyn, Efail Isaf and in damp fields at Rhigos. The sunny warm summer certainly suited some of our butterflies, at a hay meadow the Council manages in LLanharan I never seen so many **common blue** butterflies before, on a hot June day I saw literally hundreds flying over the **bird-s-foot trefoil** rich grassland.

Margaret Harding reported a rather disappointing butterfly summer from Beddau, *'not many butterflies around this year but the white is around I had 8 yesterday all flying around but no idea how to identify the small and large is there an easy way. Last week I saw a **brimstone** in the garden but too quick to capture on my camera. Yesterday I had a **red admiral** but the wing was damaged and today a **comma** so they are about. Have seen a **speckled wood** a few times. My neighbour Maralyn had a wasp nest in her greenhouse but they have now deserted it. Also, back again the **cinnabar moth** caterpillars on the ragwort not as many as normal and don't seem to be eating the leaves more on the flowers this year. Last week I had a **hedgehog** in my garden which I have not seen for years*

In March 2018 we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of Butterfly Conservation with the 'Great Llantrisant Rake Off' on Y Graig Common, Llantrisant. On a damp day an excellent turn out of local butterfly enthusiasts (and many familiar faces) helped rake up the recently cut bracken on a slope being restored as fritillary butterfly habitat. It was wet but satisfying work. In the summer I was glad to see the recovery of violets in the opened sward. The slope were recut in the summer and again in the autumn by the South Wales Fire Service, so the Great Rake Off has started something.

I was delighted to see **marsh fritillary** caterpillars sunning themselves at Llantwit Fardre Marsh on April 20<sup>th</sup> and butterflies were flying by the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, peaking at 16 seen on June 6<sup>th</sup>. In the autumn Ben Williams and George Tordoff had found 22 larval webs, so fingers crossed for a really good flight period in 2019. **Marsh fritillary** had a great year in their northern metapopulation area centred around Hirwaun

numbers of adults were good and new sites were colonised ,with up to 50 larval webs being found on one site in the autumn. At Tonyrefail the population improvements were more modest, but the main population on the slopes below Trebanog maintained itself and the newly colonised site the Waun seems to have become established (which is good news). During the searches for marsh fritillary at Tonyrefail there were very pleasing records from several places of **small pearl bordered fritillary** and **green hairstreaks** and even a record of the **mother shipton** moth. While I was finding areas of new (potential) **marsh fritillary** habitat near Rhigos, I was also delighted to see a **green hairstreak**. On April 20<sup>th</sup> Paul Marshman also had **green hairstreaks** near the Virgin Mary well at Llwynypia. Special mention for all their hard work in **marsh fritillary** monitoring must go (in no particular order), Ben Williams, Richard Smith, Lucie Bromfield, George Tordoff, Paul Denning and Lorna Baggett.

**Small pearl-bordered fritillary** like marsh violets on wet rhos pastures, but they also have colonies that use dog violets of drier grassland and bracken slopes. They seem to particularly like colliery spoil grassland, which is where Ben Williams had a fantastic count of 48 **small pearls** flying at Clydach Vale on June 6<sup>th</sup>.

In later June I very pleased to see **white letter hairstreaks** flying around the tall **wych elms** trees on the Broadway in Pontypridd (just a few hundred yards from the railway station). Alan Rosney reported a **white letter hairstreak** from his Nantgarw Garden Lawn, in the same place as he saw one two summers ago. At Bryn Picas Tip was really glad to see a wall brown on June 11<sup>th</sup>, with my favourite bumble bee the **bilberry bumblebee** (*Bombus monicola*).

In the autumn Ben Williams, with his 'Butterfly Conservation' hat on, and with Council staff from the Tidy Town team once again spent time managing important fritillary butterfly habitats in the Church Village, Llantrisant and Tonyrefail area. The importance of site management in the retention some of our most vulnerable habitats can't be overestimated and The Team always do a fantastic job.

### **Bees and other things**

In the summer Liam Olds sent through the following '*I was out on Cwm Coal Tips yesterday (Friday) looking to collect some **green tiger** beetles for the BBC to film in a studio set-up. Didn't actually find any, which was unusual (perhaps they seek shade during very hot weather?) but seen plenty of other things. I found my first ever **Western Bee-fly** (*Bombylius canescens*), which in last year's status review was classified as Nationally Scarce. Also **Ornate-tailed diggers wasps** (*Cerceris rybyensis*) and Cwm is still the only coal spoil site I know of that supports them, lots of solitary bees, **banded general soldierflies** (*Stratiomys potamida*) in the flushes, lots of dragonflies, spider-hunting wasps etc. I think I took the site a bit for granted as it was among the first sites I ever studied, but yesterday reaffirmed to me that this is the best quality coal tip I have ever visited for inverts'.*

Paul Marshman saw **beautiful demoiselle** damselflies on the Rhonda Farw at Gelli in early June and I was pleased to see a dozen or so on the River Taff at Cilfynydd later in the month as well as **broad-bodied chaser** dragonflies.



The summer heat seemed good for **hornets**, I saw them on several occasions through the summer and autumn in and around Llantwit Fardre Fields: and in August I saw one actively hunting **common blue** butterflies along the Church village by-pass.

## **Mammals**

David Harry reported in March that two lesser horseshoe bats had used coal shed all winter but disappeared in the freezing weather in March. I assume they must have relocated to another hibernation site, bats are not torpid and inactive all winter, and shift within and sometimes between hibernation sites during the winter as ambient temperatures change. A big freeze like we had in March probably meant that David's coal shed was just too cold for them and they moved.

Paul Denning saw a **harvest mouse** while looking for marsh fritillary at Tonyrefail. As you will have read above we had a number of **hedgehog** reports this year, I regularly see run over hedgehogs in my travels around RCT: I try to remember to send the records to SewBrec.

The **lesser horseshoe bat** maternity roost in the Llanharan area had record counts. Led by Ade Williams the Valleys Bat Group recorded a maximum count of over 400 bats. I helped with the count on June 26<sup>th</sup> with 350 odd bats emerging from the two main roost. It is a fantastic experience watching and listening to hundreds of lesser horseshoe bats in the warm twilight of a June evening- it was even worth the hay fever !! David Harry had small numbers lesser horseshoe bats in his coal shed through the winter of 2018.

We don't have many records of deer in RCT, to some extent our woodland groundflora are perhaps richer for their absence (the growing deer populations of East Anglia are a major problem for their woodland flowers and bird species such as nightingale), but as deer populations boom elsewhere they are bound to colonise our landscapes. So it was not such a surprise to see on June 16<sup>th</sup>, a dead deer, killed on the Church Village By-pass near to the Llantwit Fardre roundabout. Ben Williams also saw it and stopped and identified it as a buck **roe deer**.

In January 2019, Suraj Vaghani and Liver Jefferies saw 3 **otters** on the River Ely whilst inspecting a bridge, *'when I first noticed the otters, I called the boys over to have a look, but of course by the time they popped over the otters had gone – (typical) but when under the bridge 1 otter popped up next to us and swam away'*. This winter we also had lots of reports of an otter seen frequently by people on the Rhondda in the Hopkinstown/Trehafod area, there was some fantastic footage taken on someone's phone.

There is also very exciting news about **water voles**. Through work undertaken by Scott Hand, Rob Parry and Halyey Bartlett we now know that there is a population in the forestry plantations and peat bogs above the Rhondda. These populations seem to occur across the hillsides and based on streams and pools spread out in the summer to feeding on rushes and grasses of the upland relic bog and marshy grassland habitat. Mark Evans sent also through pictures of vole dropping and feeding evidence from above Llwydcoed that he took a few years, those look like

water vole too. This is a new discovery and gives real hope that the species survives in good numbers in our uplands. This discovery could prove of national importance.

In February 2018 we received reports of dead **badger** from the upper lake Clydach Vale. We collected it and there were no signs of it being in a fight with dogs, or anything else. How it got into the lake was however a cause of concern, because it did look like the animal had just drowned. The incident was reported. There were also two dead badger cub run over in different places in the Church Village area in April.

### **Amphibians and Reptiles**

In 2018 I had clump of frog spawn in my garden pond on Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, by 20<sup>th</sup> 13 frogs of which 3 were females with 4 clumps of spawn, and by the weekend there were 40 frogs in the pond. After that flurry there was a second smaller spawning in March (17<sup>th</sup>) with 4 or 5 frogs. Despite the frozen pond in March, the pond was full of tadpoles with the first free swimming on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and (given their early start) the froglets emerged from the pond early this summer. In his part of the Rhondda David Kerr had his first frogspawn on January 30<sup>th</sup> in 2018.

Gareth Henson saw toad sand toad spawn at Barry Sidings, Hopkinstown on April 6<sup>th</sup>. In June Mike Reeves reported a **common lizard** in his Beddau back garden

In contrast in 2019 my garden pond didn't have any frog spawn until February 7<sup>th</sup>. There were up to 15 frogs in the pond a week later and there are now 5 or 6 clumps of spawn.

### **Signal Crayfish**

Ben Williams found **signal crayfish** in the River Taff at Garw Nant, the first time Ben has found these alien crayfish in the Taff.

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