

WBPSG10

PAPER TO NOTE:

10 February 2010, Caerphilly

Title: Building Taxonomic Capacity in Wales – Hymenoptera Project

Produced by: Stephen Bladwell, Wales Species Expert Group

Background/Progress:

Between November 2008 and June 2009 WBP piloted a project with lichenologists to link, support and mentor interested field naturalists building the capacity within Wales in this taxonomic field. Action was focused on getting experts teamed up with volunteers of different skill levels, out in the field together, carrying out practical actions and/or surveillance work. Actions were reported on Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) and data collected was shared with the relevant Local Record Centres.

In September 2009, the Species Expert Group (SEG) was asked to identify and outline the next three taxonomic areas to which this initiative could be extended to provide the best strategic benefit for wildlife conservation. In addition to the initiation of these projects (the first of which is outlined below) SEG recommends:

1. Strategic benefit needs to be framed in terms of current resource (or lack thereof) urgency of action and practical conservation outcome.
2. These projects must be a long-term investment in building the capacity of Welsh knowledge and expertise in these respective areas
3. The need for the programme to operate at a number of levels – i.e. there is a need for a pool of good amateur naturalists and an equal need for a higher level of expertise in each of the taxonomic fields to support good decision-making.
4. Appropriate resources need to be allocated to keep the programme operating effectively i.e. there needs to be an ongoing investment in development of this knowledge resource.

Plan/Proposals:

The Hymenoptera includes sawflies, wasps, ants and bees. They are minute to moderate-sized insects, usually with two pairs of membranous wings, the front pair much larger than the hind pair. Hymenoptera are an important component of the biodiversity of Wales, vital to functioning ecosystems and food production systems.

The proposed project would start with bumblebees, building the capacity to correctly identify both from a taxonomic and a habitat requirement/land management perspective. From this, the project would expand to encompass other priority Hymenoptera species in a staged process.

Bumblebees provide an excellent means of introducing people to the fascinating world of the Hymenoptera. There are 24 species of bumblebee currently in the UK, 20 of these occur in Wales of which six are relatively common and widespread. Learning how to identify the common species is an accessible and simple way of developing the skills needed to identify other Hymenoptera. The common species can be easily identified, after which there are the other species to learn (although not all species appear in one location), including several relatively common cuckoo bumblebee species. Identification of the rarer species requires more detailed examination and understanding of bumblebee anatomy. Once these skills have been acquired it is envisaged that identification of the ca225 solitary bee species could follow, with progression onto other Hymenoptera as skills and knowledge are acquired.

The widespread loss of flower-rich habitats has had a dramatic impact on bumblebee populations, with many species now thought to be in decline, ten species in significant decline and two species already extinct in the UK. Though they are commonly seen there is a paucity of up-to-date accurate records of species abundances and distributions, which are vital in order to prioritise conservation efforts.

Bumblebees have received relatively little focus from within conservation organisations and are often overlooked during site visits and surveys. Bumblebees support wild and agricultural plants through provision of pollination services and so contribute significantly to conservation of biodiversity as well as being of value in their own right. It is important that the skills of the few very good Hymenoptera specialists are passed onto others in conservation organisations, to ensure skills are not lost and that this group of species receives the attention it requires.

Key contacts:

Mike Howe, CCW

Adrian Fowles, CCW

Pippa Raynor, Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Action Requested:

- Support the development of the Hymenoptera Project in line with the way the Lichenology Project was developed and is being implemented.
- Agree for the need to undertake this programme in line with the recommendations made by the SEG in the above paper
- Agree SEG will continue to identify the areas/taxonomic groups this programme will continue to develop