

Do you know your cranefly from your chequered skipper?

There are countless species of insect the world over, each and everyone having its place and a job to do – they are nothing short of amazing individually and as a group!

It's National Insect Week and I was reminiscing on my first encounters with insects – as a young schoolboy – chasing cabbage white butterflies around the overgrown margins of the local 'Rec' – The Recreation Ground.

It was as a postgraduate I started to take a serious interest in the insect world.

It was at university in Bangor, North Wales, that I first met *Chrysolina* cerealis whose only known outpost in the British Isles was high in the Snowdon mountain range.

Fieldwork involved long days searching the spongy lakeside turf comprising compact, tightly grazed mountain grasses and wild thyme upon which the tiny Welsh population of this 'leaf' beetle depended.

I think I was lucky with no real rain in that year's early summer, but boy could it be windy!

Philip King, visitor experience manager at Torquay Museum

That was all a long time ago so imagine my excitement when I discovered Torquay Museum had a leaf beetle collection and there it was – just as beautiful as I remember, bringing back memories of simpler days!

Individual examples of the museum's entomology collection can be found dotted around the galleries and, from time to time, a full case comprising rows of brightly coloured butterflies or beetles will appear.

This is truly the tip of an iceberg as the museum's insect collection is the largest by number – 120,000 specimens – of all our collections.

Such collections represent the way butterflies and moths or even flies and beetles were 'enjoyed' by collectors or

amateur naturalists for many centuries.

When they were well recorded, the data held with these collections can help us understand the changes in the distribution of species and even show us examples that are sadly extinct.

Today, I hope, we have a more enlightened view of the role of insects in the life of the planet we share with them.

However, it is acknowledged that a combination of changes in land use – habitat loss – and climate change threaten many species, and in Britain, butterfly wise, we seem to be doing worse than Europe.

Butterfly conservation have recently published a new red list of Great British species, you can see this on their website www.butterfliesandmoths.org/news-and-blog

If you want to try the Big Butterfly Count 2022, running from July 15 to August 7, Butterfly Conservation provide all the resources you need to join in, including a really handy app.

All you have to do is decide on your place to spot butterflies and moths, watch for 15 minutes then record.

In 2021, more than 15,000 counts



A drawer of African butterflies after in-house conservation.

Credit: TORQUAY MUSEUM

were registered, so this year – have a go and help build a better picture of how our native species are doing.

Have a look at the National Insect Week website too – it's full of facts and activities for all ages www.insectweek.co.uk

We can all make a difference for insects: let the long grass grow behind the shed, sow native flowering plants, make a bug house, create a compost heap or fill a black bin liner with fallen leaves, make a few holes in it and tuck it out of sight... an insect will surely find it – and thank you for it.



Chrysolina Cerealis - the Snowdon rainbow beetle. Credit: TORQUAY

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