

You never forget your first Clifden Nonpareil!

The Clifden Nonpareil is the Victorian collector's classic all-time favourite moth, the 'Blue Underwing'

The name "Clifden Nonpareil" is derived from the location of the first British records, at the Cliveden estate in Berkshire in the 18th-century, "*nonpareil*" meaning "without equal" in French. (Or as Sinead O'Connor would have it "nothing compares")



Clifden Nonpareil pictured in Cardiff

In the British Isles it was formerly resident in certain parts of Kent and Norfolk during the middle part of the 20th century, but it became extinct as a breeding species and for many years was only recorded as an occasional immigrant.

In recent years it has been increasing again and is now considered to be recolonising. Once again it is a breeding species in some southern counties. However, there are not many records for this magnificent moth in Pembrokeshire, despite there being increasing records in SE Wales, so I honestly thought I was never going to see one.

I had read all about other people's experiences and I was puzzled to see that rather than remarking on the unusual pale blue band on the underwing (blue is a very uncommon colour on lepidoptera) they remarked on the amazing size of the thing. Well, now I understand why!

It was a grey and rather miserable morning on the 1st October when I went out to check the trap at 7:30. It was situated under the porch, which is my location of preference if the forecast is wet. I always check around the nearby walls as moths often perch there – and much to my astonishment there was a very large triangular moth low down on the wall next to the downpipe. I knew immediately what it was and went to get my husband out of bed as I knew he would be interested and he is also very good at handling moths. He encouraged the moth into a jam jar – and it wasn't big enough! The moth couldn't spread its wings properly – in fact it pretty well touched both sides even with the wings un-spread. So we went to get a nice big Pyrex dish, but by this time the moth was getting a bit fed up and decided to fly off – looking like a small bird as it did so.

The moth was in pristine condition, so where did it come from? A migrant or a local breeder? The



In the jam jar

large greyish caterpillar feeds mainly on aspen (*Populus tremulosa*) but there are no aspen trees nearby. So perhaps it has diversified to willows?? Or maybe it blew in from eastern Wales? Who knows.

But just like all the others I find myself remembering the huge size of the moth rather than the lovely blue!! The wingspan 75 – 95 mm – just look at it on a ruler – it is huge! And to see the blue coloration I suggest you Google it!

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