

CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY
Founded 1876

NEWSLETTER NO.53

MARCH 2002

A large, stylized calligraphic logo consisting of the letters 'C', 'N', and 'S' intertwined in a decorative, cursive script.

PRESIDENT: Michael Sullivan

VICE PRESIDENT: Dr. Joan Andrews

EDITOR:
Brian Bond

SOMETHING FROM THE PRESIDENT

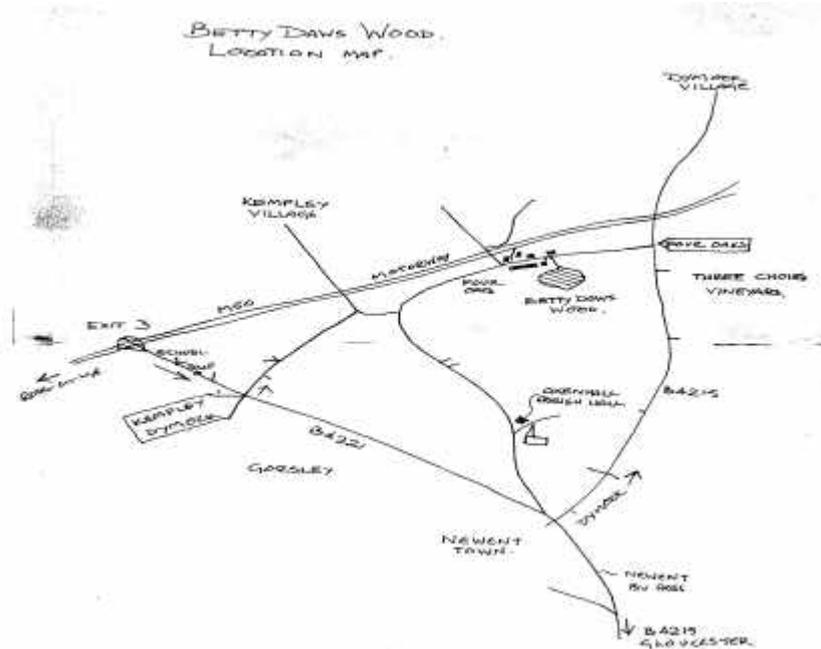
I am sat in my study looking into my rear garden on a very wet Monday morning. I am watching house sparrows feeding on the bird table and other feeders House sparrows would not cause a "TWITCH" but there is something about their behavior which directs attention to them. They do not all feed at once, about half at a time, with one, usually a male perched on top of a bush. Is he the flocks lookout?

Scientists can put men on the moon, send rockets to the planets, tell what is going on millions of light years away. They still cannot tell how Swallows and other migrants find their way back to where they were born and that includes the wonderful mystery of the migrating salmon. Personally I hope they never do, let's keep some mysteries to ponder upon. It is a

cold wet and miserable day. We are not the only country to suffer. Mexico has suffered freezing temperatures, rain and wind. An Estimated 35 million monarch butterflies have perished. This is about a quarter of their entire population. These butterflies spend most of their lives in the eastern part of the U.S.A. and Canada. In autumn they migrate 3,000 miles to Mexico covering about 50 miles a day at a speed of a steady 12-mph. They have to face storms, predatory birds and fatigue, yet millions make it. Which brings me to another thought - The Splitters-

The molecular researchers have given us, two gorillas, two chimpanzees, two wood white butterflies and believe it or not 13 types of sub species of chiff chaff. They haven't managed to find another species of aardvark as yet. It is no use hoping that we are a different species from say pop idol fans or football hooligans. DNA research shows that we are all exactly the same, whatever colour, creed or race we are. Much like the aardvark. Long may it be so.

Michael Sullivan
President



Field Meetings March to June 2002.

Saturday 16th March.
Start time 12.30 pm

Oxwich Seashore.
Packed lunch?

We will be meeting at the carpark at Oxwich Bay {SS503865}. There is a charge for car parking here. I will be there at approximately 12 o'clock as I intend eating my packed lunch there before we start! The trip will start at 12.30 about 1 1/2 before low tide so we can get the maximum time and similarly a finish time of approximately 4 p.m. is expected.

Morton Jenkins will be leading the trip on seashore ecology detailing mainly with invertebrates and I'm sure there will be some other things to interest us also so binoculars will be useful. We will be investigating at least two different areas in the bay area including the kelp beds but both sites are not too far from the carpark. A trowel would be useful to bring. Waterproof footwear is also a must unless you wish to get wet feet!

Sunday 24th March.
Start time 10.30 am.

Newent.
Packed lunch optional.

A car trip to Gloucestershire starting at Betty Daws Wood, Oxenhall, Newent where we will be meeting at the reserve carpark.{SO 696284} Firstly we will have a guided walk around the reserve by the warden John Anderson to see the display of spring flowers especially the daffodils. We may then go to other woods in the area or to a heathland site in the area. Packed lunch is optional, as there are a number of pubs in the area that do food. The location map for Betty Daws Wood is included in this newsletter.

Sunday 28th April.
Start time 8.30 am {museum}

Barnsley Warren and Clattinger Farm.
Packed lunch.

A cancelled coach trip from last year. We will first be visiting Barnsley Warren for a guided visit to see pasqueflowers {hopefully} also hairy violet, early purple orchid and cowslips are among the other spring flora present on the site. After lunch we shall be going on to our second guided visit to Clattinger Farm, a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Reserve, where notable plants here are downy fruited sedge and snakes head fritillary. Please note that both sites can be very wet so suitable footwear e.g. wellies may well be needed.

The booking form for this trip is included in this newsletter.

Saturday 11th May.
Start time 2.30 pm.

The Graig, Lisvane.

This is an opportunity to investigate the flora and fauna of the Graig approaching it via the valley formed by the Nant Transh yr Hebog. We will meet in the Cefn Onn Park carpark{ST179841}and walk through the park to explore the old woodlands above the Golf course, an area rich in mosses and ferns. We will then climb gently up to the quarry which gives good views over Cardiff.

Sunday 19th May.
Start time 10.00 am

Nature Study Day.
Packed lunch.

The first nature study day this year is to be based around the Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoir site. The intention is to try to identify any rarities which would be adversely affected by the proposed development. As many people know it is not yet clear whether this development will be limited to the area within the current reservoir site or also taking in the "Nant Fawr Meadow" area. The current CNS position is that any plan that is detrimental to wildlife should be opposed, or should be modified to prevent that detriment. So regardless of your personal stance on the development as it stands please join us to help identify the things that need to be protected. The starting point will be at the southern end of the reservoir where the path from Nant Fawr Woodlands crosses into the meadow area at ST 189 815 where there is a small car park outside the Reservoir Lands.

In the afternoon it is intended to visit the northern site of the reservoirs. As ever the aims of our study days are twofold, to gather much needed records but also to learn from each other, identification skills so bring your identification books along.

Friday 24th to Sunday 26th May.
Start time TBA.

Derbyshire weekend.

We will be visiting and be 'entertained' by members of the New Mills Naturalist Society who will be taking us to various interesting sites for flora and fauna in their area. We have arranged some B and B accommodation locally at the Pack Horse Inn, which provides en-suite single and double rooms with colour TV{teletext}, tea and coffee making facilities, radioalarm, toiletries and full central heating{hopefully not needed!}Rates are £36 single and £49.50 for double/twin occupancy. The Inn also provides food.

We expect to take a number of cars so lifts should be available for early or later on the Friday. Please contact me details below if you wish to join this trip.

Sunday 16th June.

Brean Down and Berrow Dunes.

Start time 8.30am {museum}

Packed lunch.

Jeff Curtis will be our leader for the previously postponed coach trip to these two sites in Somerset. A booking form can be found in this newsletter. White rockrose is found at Brean Down which is one of only two sites for the plant in Britain and dune specialty plants at Berrow include *Oenothera stricta*. Both sites are good for butterflies as well as plants.

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety code {copy in last newsletter}

As always it is useful to know who is coming on the trips including car trips so that lifts can be arranged for those in need. Contribution towards driver's petrol is expected.

For coach trips acknowledgements will only be sent if an SAE is included. Refunds are not possible unless there is someone to take your place. Please contact me if you are unable to attend. Watts coaches will be used starting at Bonvilston, main pick up at the Museum and outside the school in Whitchurch. Alternative pick up points can be arranged if reasonable.

Tricia Wood..

EDITORIAL

ENDANGERED BEETLE STUDY AIMS TO DISCOVER THEIR SECRET

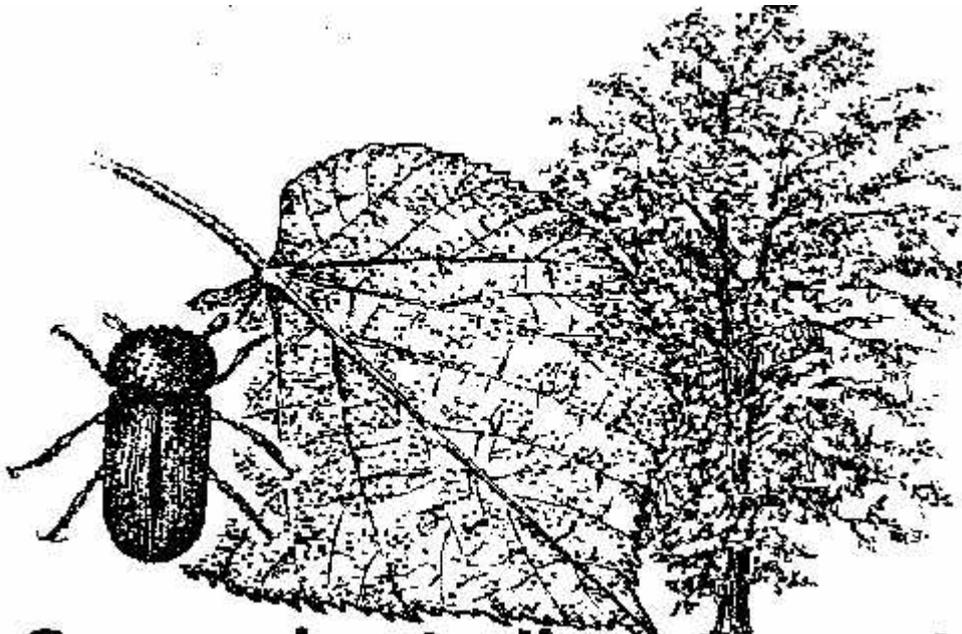
The Lime Bark beetle (*Emoporus tiliae*) affectionately known as “ET” is now considered an endangered woodland species and a priority for conservation. Tony Drane (not known if he is related to our late founder member Robert Drane) Britain’s top lime beetle expert. Has been engaged by the Forestry Commission to carry out a study of the beetle’s distribution and status.

The study has covered six counties, so far the beetle being only found in two, confirming the rarity of the species. New records of its existence have however been found in several woods, many are being actively managed by re-introducing coppicing. “It was exciting to find a totally new stronghold for ET” explained Tony Drane “The fate of ET is

bound up with the conservation of our native lime woods, where it breeds in moribund branches in the tree tops or in dying coppice poles”,
It is not a pest species and does no harm to trees, only taking up occupancy once timber is cut or dying.

Emoporus tiliae is a small brown beetle specific to small leaved lime, confined mainly to ancient semi natural woodland in England and Wales.

If any member finds ET could they let me have details and I will pass them on to Tony Drane.



Copy deadline for the June newsletter is the 14th May please
Brian Bond

RINGS AND THINGS

Some of the many Mute Swans which congregate at The Knap, Barry (record counts in January of 160 birds) and Cosmeston Lakes have been fitted with numbered coloured leg rings so they can be easily identified. The individual labelled K86 which was at Cosmeston in November 2001 had previously been reported there in 2000. Although this Swan is unlikely to travel far, you may like to check if it commutes to other local waters.

Rob and I were lucky enough to spot a colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit on the River Exe at Topsham in mid-December and, taking careful note of the colours (white above red on left leg, white above pale green on right leg) reported our sighting to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The information returned by the researcher was that this bird had been ringed as an adult female in Western Iceland on 27 April 2001 and had already been seen at Bowling Green Marsh (the RSPB Reserve nearby) on 4 dates between 30 July and 29 September. The cooperative ringing project partners are the University of East Anglia and the Farlington Ringing Group. They hope to learn more about the population ecology and migration strategies of Black-tailed Godwits. We were delighted to have added a tiny piece to the information jigsaw.

Also in December, Rob and I attended the BTO annual weekend conference in Derbyshire. There were fascinating lectures on a wide variety of topics related to the theme of Ringing and Migration. Most interesting was an expert presentation by an Italian ornithologist who co-ordinates research into the broad-front migration of passerines across the Mediterranean Sea and the use they make of small islands for refuelling on their spring journeys northwards. Surprisingly, the preferred food source for many of these warblers etc is flower nectar. Mist nets are set up on the island headlands and trapped birds are ringed before being released unharmed. I asked if there had been any retraps showing individuals using the same route from year to year. There had been only one such case but that was a remarkable Redstart which was caught on the same island on the same date the following year. Not only that but it was within an hour of its original capture time and in the same line of nets!

Linda Nottage

Fossil Foray (Darrel Opencast Site Seven Sisters)

17 Nov 2001

Allan Cuthbertson Vice president of the SouthWales Geologists association (<http://www.swga.org.uk>) lead us on this extremely fun and informative day out .

The first challenge of the day was to find the quarry. Not so straightforward as the entrance to the quarry was up a very unpromising lane entrance in Seven Sisters. Having had similar trouble the previous week on a SWGA trip to the same site Rhian and I were familiar with the track so whilst Allan gave the mandatory safety talk I returned to the main road to be a visible locator for our last remaining stragglers.

Once we were gathered and all helmeted and ready we set off to the main part of the quarry. Some on foot and some being chauffeured in Allan and my 4WD vehicles. Our first stop was to see the fossil trees in place in the quarry face. Here I had my first surprise as I had not expected the place to have changed so much in one week. Where the previous week we had been sliding sideways in axle deep mud there were now chipping topped roadways, and the fossil trees we had seen last week had been replaced by a large hole in the quarry floor.

There were however plenty still to see and we were suitably impressed by the 2 foot across and 5 foot high stumps. Allan described to us how he had been working out that they were in about the same distribution as you would have expected in a modern mature woodland and therefore it was likely that this was indeed the case with a whole woodland being swamped and submerged.

He showed us the way that some of the trees had been bent over at the top and also how the trees had partially collapsed as they rotted with their lower parts surrounded by mud giving twisted stumps left in the ground.

After this we headed off to do some fossil collecting of our own, stopping on-route to look at some fossilised branches. Allan gave us another brief talk and asked us to look out for some particular types of fossils including the cones of *Lepidodendron*.

The fossils that we were able to collect on our own were a lot smaller and a lot finer in their preservation, most were small leaves and leaflets in silt / shale layers. The trouble with this type of preservation is that although the preservation is

fine, the resulting rock is very friable and breaks up into small pieces if it gets wet or dried out. It does have the advantage however that the rock is very easy to split apart to get at the fossils.

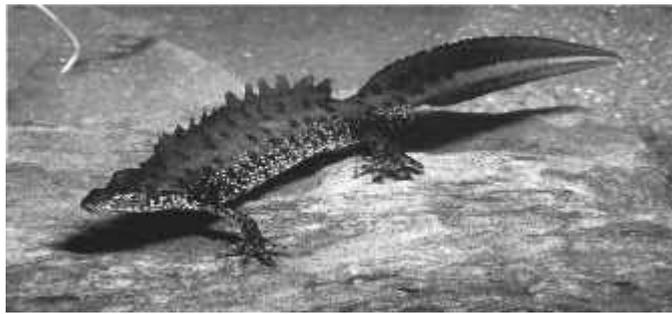
The next hour was a blur of hammering and Ooo's and Aahh's as people turned up one fossil after another. Leaflets of *Neuropteris*, *Alethopteris*, and *Sphenopteris* abounded as did small whorls of *Annularia*. Everyone was finding something and everyone seemed happy. We'd found plenty, but not really a lot that would be worth taking home. Then just as we were finishing Rhian opened up one last block and discovered a nice large (7cm long) *Cycloperis* leaf and I opened up another and found a *Lepidodendron* cone.

We finished by taking a look at some of the sections of fossil tree that the quarry owners had kindly put to one side so that Allan could make arrangements to get them moved to suitable institutions such as the National Museum and the local community centre. We gathered back at the cars at which point Tricia discovered she'd lost her passenger. Oh well I thought... another chance to get my car muddy. Passenger duly turned up whilst I was looking so all's well that ends well.

All in all a lovely afternoon out, Allan was a wonderfully enthusiastic and informative leader and with about ½ a box full of fossils to identify and catalogue at home so quite profitable as well. If you'd like to see more pictures of the fossil trees then take a look at Allan's website at

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ross.cuthbertson/>

Andy Kendall



GREAT CRESTED NEWT PILOT MONITORING PROJECT

FROGLIFE is looking for volunteer newt surveyors in Glamorgan who can spare some daylight and night-time hours during spring 2002 to check all the ponds in allocated 1km squares. A training course has been arranged at Kenfig on 16 March.

If you are interested, please contact Froglife on 01986 873733 or e-mail froglife@froglife.org

PLANS AND DEVELOPMENTS

I have received good news from the Twmpath Fields Preservation Campaign that the developer's appeal against Cardiff County Council's refusal of planning permission has been rejected. CNS has written in support of this long-running Campaign, citing the valuable wildlife habitat of these horse pastures in Rhiwbina. There are interesting waxcap fungi, meadow flowers and a stream running along the bottom edge of the site which forms an important wildlife corridor. Safe for the moment!

There is, on the other hand, considerable uncertainty about development on the Llanishen/Lisvane Reservoir site. Details of bird and insect life there have been fairly well documented over the years but if you have any interesting records of flora and fauna they could help to ensure that planning decisions are made on a properly informed basis. CNS needs to have accurate information with which to justify objections to any particular scheme or suggest less damaging alternatives or even enhancements for wildlife.

Developments continue around Cardiff Bay but it hasn't deterred birds from feeding there. A large mixed flock of finches totalling over a hundred, mainly Chaffinches with smaller numbers of Linnets and Greenfinches plus a few Bramblings, were fairly obvious when they flew up into the small trees near the St. David's Hotel but quickly vanished when they dropped into the marsh vegetation to feed on weed seeds. Across the Bay, near the Red House Inn, a long-staying adult male Long-tailed Duck in immaculate winter plumage has delighted many bird-watchers. On 22nd January, Rob and I had the pleasure of

observing not only this superb drake but also both Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes close to the shore. Through our telescope it was easy to pick out the subtle differences in winter plumage between these easily-confused species. Resident Great Crested Grebes, meanwhile, had moved into full display mode and were chasing off other birds which encroached on their territories.

During the CNS Nature Study Days we were impressed by the diversity of Grangemore Parc and so, after our success at the Bay, decided to dodge the showers for a quick winter tour of the site. We were not disappointed and noted the following - snatches of Skylark song, a soaring Buzzard chased by Crows, a pair of hovering Kestrels, a pair of Stonechats and later a small flock of

Linnets by the River Ely and a single Reed Bunting. However, the highlight of our walk was a very smart cock Black Redstart feeding on the waste ground near the gasometers of the adjoining industrial site. Despite the bird's quivering rusty tail, sooty plumage and white wing flashes it was difficult to pick out amongst the mossy clinker and Buddleia bushes. It just goes to show how nature-rich many brown-field and inner-city places can be; far more exciting than most of our countryside these days!

Linda Nottage

WEATHER REPORT 2001 ©

MONTH	MEAN TEMPERATURE			RAINFALL			BAROMETER
	09.00 GMT	MAX	MIN	TOTAL		RAIN DAYS	MILLIBARS
	°C	°C	°C	INCHES	M.M	0.01" or more	
JANUARY	3.2	6.1	1.4	4.82	122.0	16	1007
FEBRUARY	5.2	9.0	2.2	4.95	126.5	14	1016
MARCH	5.8	10.5	3.6	6.66	170.5	*	1002
APRIL	11.1	13.9	4.8	5.31	135.0	15	1014
MAY	16.5	19.4	9.0	1.63	41.0	8	1019
JUNE	18.7	22.3	11.0	1.86	47.5	8	1018
JULY	19.2	21.4	12.9	6.70	169.5	16	1014
AUGUST	18.4	21.6	13.0	7.34	185.0	20	1016
SEPTEMBER	15.2	18.8	10.1	2.12	53.5	14	1016
OCTOBER	13.4	16.7	9.5	10.15	258.5	*	1012
NOVEMBER	7.9	11.2	5.4	5.21	131.0	16	1025
DECEMBER	4.2	6.9	2.1	2.02	50.0	11	1025

* Figures not available

A calmer year than 2000, slightly cooler but considerably drier. The most significant feature was that average temperatures for the month of October were at their warmest since records began in 1659. Clear night skies provided frequent opportunities for excellent views of the International Space Station on passage over Cardiff.

January was a typically cold month with temperatures at or below zero on nine nights between the 14th and 28th and on two mornings at 09.00 GMT. The lowest temperature was -2.0°C on the night of the 19th and the lowest daytime temperature was 1.5°C on the 16th. Frost was observed on eleven mornings between the 3rd and the 29th and there was a slight fall of snow on the 21st. Daytime temperatures were warmer in

February but overnight temperatures were at or below zero on eleven occasions with a minimum -2.5°C on the night of the 24th. There were nine frosty mornings and snow on the night of the 23rd. A clear spell in the middle of the month resulted in over nine hours of sunshine every day between the 13th and 18th with pressure reaching 1041 on the 17th. Sub-zero overnight temperatures persisted until March 4th when -3.0°C was recorded. Thereafter, the usual March pattern of showers or longer periods of rain was restored.

It was generally cold for most of April with a few days when the temperature did not reach double figures. The highest temperature at 15.5°C was recorded on the 26th and 27th. Rainfall was about normal for

the month but a very wet spell between the 22nd and 25th gave rise to total rainfall of 2.26" including 1.08" on the 22nd. There was a cool gloomy start to May but conditions improved towards the end of the second week with daytime temperatures above 20 ° C on sixteen occasions and a high of 24 ° C on the 12th. The temperature also reached 20. ° C or more by 09.00 GMT on five mornings. This generally fine weather continued for most of June and the temperature peaked at 29 ° C on the 25th and 26th. Both these days were very hot and humid with temperatures of 25 ° C and 24 ° C respectively at 09.00 GMT and a sweltering 18.5 ° C overnight on the 25th. The sultry weather persisted for the first week of June and after a searing 30 ° C (86 ° F) on the 3rd an overnight thunderstorm produced 2.5" of rain. Further thunderstorms followed on the 4th, 6th and 7th and showery conditions remained for the next two weeks with gale force winds on the 11th and another heavy downpour of 1.53" on the 17th. The month ended with a fine, dry spell with temperatures reaching the high twenties from the 28th onwards. Showery conditions returned in August and continued for most of the month. However, the weather was not as poor as it appears from the bare statistics because on nine occasions the rain fell overnight after fine or

mainly fine days. September was much drier with nearly half of the total rain on the 30th and there were only eight instances of rain falling during daylight hours. For the first eight days maximum temperatures were just above 20° C but it was generally cooler for the rest of the month.

And so to October, which was at its warmest nationally since records began. It was also a very wet month with a fall of 1.10" on the 7th and a fairly short downpour of monsoon proportions on the 8th plus a few light showers amounting in all to 0.90". In spite of mainly northerly and easterly winds November was fairly mild. Overnight temperatures fell to zero on two occasions and frost appeared on the 15th and 26th but the month ended with heavy rain for the last three days, including 1.07" on the 30th. Winter took its grip in December with ten instances of overnight temperatures at or below zero ending with -0.4° C on the 31st. The daytime temperature on the 31st did not get above zero until after 11.00 GMT and the maximum was only 2.0° C. There was frost on nine mornings and very light snow fell on Boxing day. Clear night skies were a feature for much of the month and these afforded excellent views of a brilliant full moon from the 29th to 31st being led on its evening journey by a bright Jupiter.

To summarize: -

The lowest pressure at 09.00 GMT was 975 millibars on 2nd January and the highest was 1041 millibars on 17th February.

There was a gale on July 7th.

Thunder on 3rd, 4th, 6th and 7th July.

Frost on 3rd, 7th, 9th, 10th, 13th, 14th, 19th, 20th, 28th and 29th January.

9th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 23rd and 25th February.

2nd, 3rd and 5th March. 18th, and 26th November and 2nd, 9th,

10th, 11th, 16th, 23rd, 28th, 30th and 31st December.

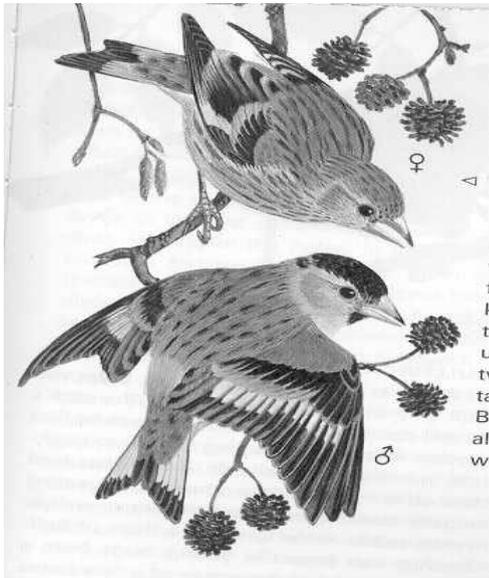
Snow on 24th February and 26th December.

STAN JONES

JANUARY BIRDWATCH - THE ANNUAL TWITCH

A complete change from my New Year's Day birdwatching in Florida - no Snail Kites or sunshine. In fact it rained and then it rained harder, and then just for a change even harder. However we did not know that when we set off full of optimism.

Our start was at Roath Park Lake. A unanimous decision took us into the Wild Garden searching for woodland birds. A phantom Song Thrush teased us, but we did see birds, Especially pleasing was the



flock of Siskins in a small Alder, or was it Birch? Despite the gloom everyone managed 'scope views, the males yellow catching the eye. One Nuthatch turned into two and performed well. Some glimpsed a Sparrowhawk as it sped over, I didn't, nor did I see the probable Peregrine over The Lake.

In the trees at the end were more Siskins, this time joined by some Goldfinches. A few duck and Herons did not entice our party to venture around The Lake itself. Seeking shelter we headed off to Forest Farm

As we set off down the towpath a Kingfisher revealed itself, as it was to turn out, this was to be the first of many sightings. The increasing rain drove us into the hides. In two ways this was a blessing - we were dry and the birds gradually appeared, proving that often the best way to bird watch is to sit and wait, even if one members lunch was delayed by one hour (he was going to wait for a break in the rain!).

Two Snipe turned into five, Bullfinch arrived, Treecreeper scurried on a dead tree, Redwings scrutinised the grass, Reed Buntings fed with the large Chaffinch flock and a Water Rail arrived on cue.

By now there was no enthusiasm for a trip to the Bay, a pity, for on the way home I had excellent views of the male Long Tailed Duck and Slavonian Grebe close inshore by The Red House. Everyone else went home to dry off.

My thanks to Rob and Linda for leading a memorable walk.

Jeff Curtis

WOODLAND WILDFLOWERS NEED YOUR HELP

In CNS Newsletter no. 49 in March 2001 I wrote about Cardiff's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and the Biodiversity Indicators which can be used to monitor the continuing health of our environment. Cardiff County Council's LBAP has now been published and Vaughan Grantham, the new County Ecologist, is working hard to implement its requirements. He is supported by an Action Forum consisting of many local groups including CNS.

I have volunteered **YOU** to help with long-term monitoring of woodland wildflower carpets which have been chosen as a Biodiversity Indicator.

The methodology has recently been devised by Vaughan and involves mapping the extent of carpets of **Bluebells, Ramsons (Wild Garlic) and Wood Anemones** and estimating the proportions in which they occur. This year will be in the nature of a pilot study to produce an accurate base-line so that future changes (for example, due to global warming) can be measured.

Ramsons



I am hoping that the various "Friends" groups will monitor their own patches of woodland, leaving CNS members to cover as many as possible of the remaining woods in Cardiff.

Vaughan will supply large-scale maps of each wood and a simple form on which to record your findings. Photographs can also be used to document the state of our woods. Any other wildlife information you can gather at the same time will be most welcome. You never know what you might see. Hazelnuts eaten by Dormice have been found on the Wenallt this year!

Everyone enjoys a stroll in the woods in Spring. Add purpose to your amble by contacting me to adopt a woodland for this survey.

Linda Nottage

Wood Anemones



