

SOMETHING FROM THE PRESIDENT

-Seize the moments as they fly
know to live and learn to die-
(St Breward's church sundial
Nr Bodmin North Cornwall)

I was visiting a University recently where I met two young men. I felt sad for them as they had both been sent down for lack of work. (At the same time I thought of the places they had taken up.)

In the two years they had barely attended lectures. They were both likable persons. I asked them for their reasons, they both replied that they were bored stiff with learning. Their ages were twenty and twenty-one. In this day age how can the young be like this. They turn to other things like drugs and low life that they hardly have any future to look forward to in their lives.

Why I am writing this? It is because by the time you read this newsletter I shall have reached my allotted span of three score years and ten. Thereafter every minute will be a bonus and I fully intend to make full use of them.

What a wonderful world this still is, for how much longer I do not

know. Our interests in the various aspects of Natural History and wild life, makes for an interesting and healthy recreation taking us as it does to some of the country's most beautiful places. None of us are armchair enthusiasts and the companionship is first class, long may it be so. This will no doubt be my last insert for the newsletter as I have reached my final few weeks as your President. I have enjoyed it fully and I thank you all, together with the Council for the support I have received.

To our next President – Dr. Joan Andrews my best wishes for a full and fruitful term of office, also to Tricia Wood, the next Vice President. We still, I believe have a vacancy on Council –so come on – arise and be counted, you will enjoy it.

On the closing few words I say Securus ego abire.

Michael Sullivan
President

Indoor Meetings Programme, Autumn 2002.

The new season, in our new home in Llandaff begins with the Annual General Meeting on **Wednesday, 2nd October**, at 7 p.m. At the meeting our President, Michael Sullivan, will hand over to the new President, Joan Andrews, who will serve for the next two years, to Autumn 2004. All meetings thereafter, as advertised in the programme card, will begin at 7.30pm in Lecture Theatre EO.O2 (see E Block on site map).

The first lecture meeting of the programme is on **Wednesday, 16th October**, when Belinda Ashong, a Ranger with the Glamorgan Heritage Coast will talk about her work with the Heritage Coast, which she knows well from her 15 years experience as a Ranger.

On Thursday, 31st October, Dr. David Thomas, until recently a lecturer in Zoology at the School of Biosciences at Cardiff University, has given his talk the intriguing title “Out of Africa there is always something new”. He was born in Kenya, and still runs an immensely popular annual field course there on Tropical Ecology.

Thursday, 14th November, is the date when Joan Andrews will give her Presidential Address. The subject matter will pick up from earlier lectures given to the Society over 100 years ago.

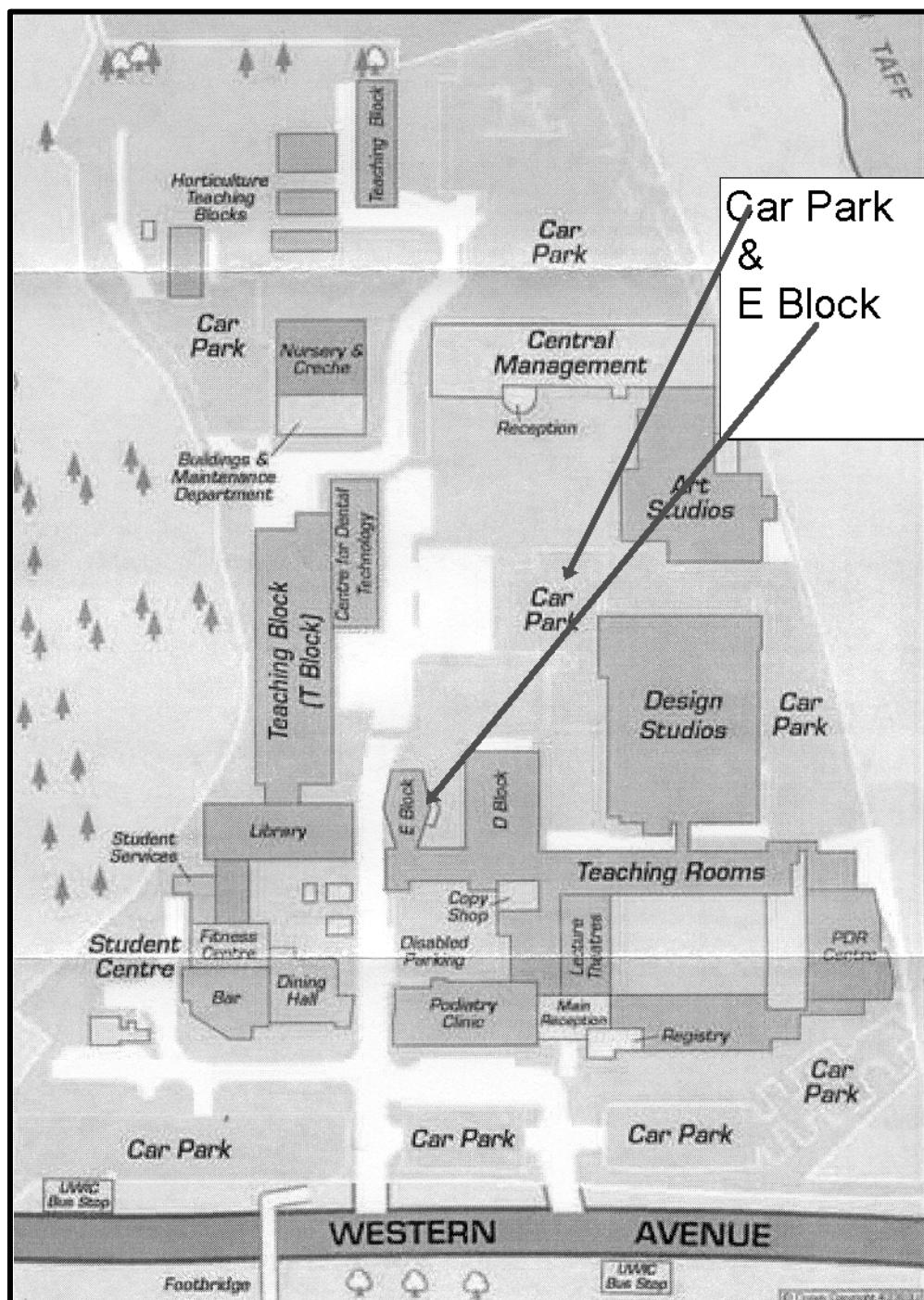
Vaughan Grantham has recently come to Cardiff as County Ecologist after a career in conservation since the 1980's. He previously worked with the Ecology Unit of Greater Manchester. He will be accompanied at our meeting by Melissa Moore, who is now Biodiversity Officer with Cardiff Council after working at Jersey Zoo. They will compare their experiences with the situation in urban ecology in Cardiff. Their visit is on **Wednesday 27 November**.

As always our autumn programme will be completed by the Christmas Special meeting on **Wednesday 11th December**, hosted by our President. More details will appear in the December newsletter.

I hope there is something of interest to everyone in this first half of the meetings programme. We will resume after the Christmas Holiday on **Thursday 9th January 2003**. Details will appear in the December newsletter.

NEW VENUE

The Indoor Meetings, starting with the AGM on Wednesday 2nd October will all be at our new venue on the Llandaff Campus of UWIC. Please note that the AGM starts at 7.00 pm while all other meetings begin at 7.30pm.



All our meetings will be in Lecture Theatre EO.02 – see E Block on site map.

Field Meetings September 2002 to January 2003.

Saturday 21st September.
Start time 2.00 pm

Parc Slip Nature Park

Our season 'kicks off' with a guided tour at the Headquarters of the 'Glamorgan' Wildlife Trust led by Mike Clarke who gave us a talk on the Nature Park at one of our indoor meetings in January 2000. Please meet outside the visitors centre.{SS882842}

Sunday 6th October.
Start time 10.30 am

Fungus Foray - Castle Coch.
Packed lunch.

Teifon Davies of the Glamorgan Fungus Group will once again lead our annual fungus foray. Meet at the entrance to Castle Coch at the base of the castle ramp.{ST133828} Parking either in the castle carpark or in the streets opposite the carpark entrance. The foray will last all day probably going into the Wenault in the afternoon unless the castle woodland is teeming with fungi!

Sunday 13th October.
Start time 10.30 am.

Sennybridge Army Ranges.
Lunch provided.

As a follow up to the excellent talk given by Lt. Col. Pat Butler and Clive Thomas last January we are to be guests of the British Army for a guided tour of the Army Ranges in the Brecon Beacons. At the time of going to press I have not yet received the full itinerary for the day and I would like to know numbers as they are providing lunch. Please contact me if you wish to attend.

Saturday 2nd November.
Start time 10.00 am.

Llandegfedd Reservoir.
Packed lunch.

This large reservoir in east Gwent is generally good for wintering wildfowl and has a number of hides. We shall expect to be out all day if the weather holds and possibly go onto some other birdwatching sites in the area. Hopefully we shall be guided in the early part of the day which will give us extra access to hides. Please meet at the southern most carpark off the minor road from Pontypool towards Coed-y-paen.{ST328985}

Sunday 12th January.
Start time 9.00 am.

Cardiff Birdwatch.
Packed lunch.

Rob Nottage will be our leader for our first field meeting of 2003, on our now annual birdwatch around local sites. As usual the meeting place will be in Wild Gardens Road at the top of Roath Park and will start with a walk around the lake. We will then move to other sites dependant upon weather conditions - we were very glad of the hide at Forest Farm last year and had some good bird sightings also.

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety code a copy of which is included in this newsletter. The Field Meetings Co-ordinator will also have a copy on the day.

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.

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Barbecue at Southerndown.

A short walk around Dunraven Park preceded our barbecue. The walk started close to the Heritage Coast Information centre going inland initially through Slade Wood. We then crossed onto some farmland, which had recently been included in the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme so creating new permissive footpaths around the park. Part of the habitat creation of the scheme included wide tracks which had been left at the field boundaries creating wildlife corridors. The more eagle-eyed members at slower paces on the walk spotted a hare in one of the adjacent fields. We continued on close to the rubble built stone wall, which surrounds Dunraven Park, and past the Gothic style castellated gatehouse on the drive to Durval Farm.

As we proceeded up the hill towards the sea we could see the smoke rising from our barbecue which had already been ignited and stoked by Mike Dean while we were working up an appetite. A short cut permissive path across fields brought us to the barbecue area above Temple Bay where we all enjoyed our food and drink in a pleasant evening temperature. The only crisis came when we realised we'd brought nothing to douche the flames but managed to get the inferno under control before we left.

My thanks go to Mike for his expert pyrotechnic and culinary skills and to every one who came- next year Porthkerry Country Park!
Tricia Wood.

News Release

No. 2002/6/19

For immediate use



Have you seen this bird in your garden?

Picture of Great Spotted Woodpecker unavailable (ED.)

Garden BirdWatchers needed to monitor Woodpeckers

The British Trust for Ornithology needs more volunteers to help monitor the changing fortunes of garden birds in Wales. Birds like the Great Spotted Woodpecker are among the more striking visitors to Welsh bird tables and researchers need to find out how these wonderful birds make use of gardens and the food that people provide.

The British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch project, which runs throughout the year, has been monitoring the changing status of garden birds in Wales since 1995. The latest results have just been published and highlight the continuing problems faced by many bird species. Gardens are an important, but often undervalued, habitat for many bird species and it is essential that we monitor changes in the numbers of birds using gardens from one year to the next. Although Garden BirdWatch currently involves around 400 Welsh gardens, we urgently need to recruit more participants so that we can gain a better understanding of what is happening to some of our less-familiar species like Great Spotted Woodpecker. June is the month when Great Spotted Woodpeckers are more commonly reported from gardens. We need to understand what is happening to our birds and how they use gardens, so anybody with a garden and an interest in garden birds would be welcome to participate in Garden BirdWatch.

The BTO Garden BirdWatch involves participants from across Wales, all keeping a simple record of the birds that visit their gardens throughout the year. It takes very little effort, just noting the birds seen over a morning cup of tea or during Saturday's gardening, for example, and returning a simple form each quarter. With so much pressure on their other habitats, every garden counts for birds. It does not matter how small the plot is, where it is located or whether extra bird food is provided. The BTO are looking to increase the number of people involved in the project in Wales and have an information pack containing more details about what is involved. **This is obtainable from GBW, Room R3, BTO, FREEPOST, IP24 2BR.**

MORE

The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 75 at its HQ in Norfolk, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

News Release

No. 2002/6/19



NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The BTO's Garden BirdWatch is the only nationwide survey of garden birds to run continually throughout the year, providing extremely important information on how birds use gardens, and how this use changes over time. For more information: <http://www.bto.org/gbw/gbwhome.htm>.
2. Some 415 people in Wales take part in Garden BirdWatch.
3. The 'top ten' figures for Wales are produced quarterly; those given here cover the period 'January-March 2002. The percentage figure is the percentage of Welsh gardens reporting each species.

1	Blue Tit	95%
2	Blackbird	94%
3	Robin	92%
4	Chaffinch	90%
5	Great Tit	81%
6	Dunnock	78%
7	House Sparrow	77%
8	Greenfinch	73%
9	Coal Tit	70%
10	Magpie	62%

4. Great Spotted Woodpecker is ranked 21st with some 20% of Welsh participants reporting them in their gardens last winter.
5. Mike Toms, who organizes the BTO's Garden BirdWatch, said 'We urgently need to recruit more Welsh volunteers into Garden BirdWatch so that we can better understand what is happening to garden bird populations within Wales. Although the survey uses simple techniques it produces some amazing results that can be used by conservationists to help bird populations in Wales.'
6. An information pack on Garden BirdWatch is available from **GBW, Room R3, FREEPOST, IP24 2BR**
7. The BTO Garden BirdWatch is funded by participants' contributions & supported by CJ WildBird Foods.
8. The BTO Garden BirdWatch data show the use made of gardens at different times of year and how numbers change from one year to the next.
9. The photograph shown overleaf is available for use in association with this news release. Please contact images@bto.org to request an electronic version.

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EDITORIAL

I received a letter from one of our members informing me of the death of one of our long standing members Mrs Patricia Moore (nee Crowley) OStJ.BA.FSA. who died on May 18th 2002. Especially because of the involvement she had with the CNS, it would be

appropriate if we could include an obituary in our next newsletter.

If any member knew Mrs Moore during her time with the CNS would they send me any information about her service with the Society, or a written article.

Thank you.

Copy for next newsletter 14th Nov.
Brian Bond

Charitable Status

I am glad to let you know that the Charity Commissioners recently accepted the Society's application to be granted legal charitable status, and we are now entered as Charity No. 1092496 on the Central Register of Charities.

In view of the Society's long history and its general charitable objectives, it may seem surprising that we have not previously applied for official registration. Possibly, one reason may have been that, in the past, small local societies like ourselves did not see any great advantage in doing so. In recent years, however, opinions appear to have changed and we are following what has become established practice for societies such as ours.

There are several benefits to be derived from charitable status; more protection for Members' rights now that Council is subject to scrutiny by the Charity Commissioners in administering our affairs; probably improving our status when applying for grants from other organizations; and last but by no means least, obtaining the taxation benefits which registered charities enjoy.

The responsibilities of Council members, as charitable trustees, appear to be somewhat imposing, but if they act with reasonable care and honesty, I do not think that the Charity Commissioners will trouble themselves unduly.

In essence, it does seem to have been a positive step to take.

E.R

Derbyshire – Exchange Visit to New Mills - 24 - 26th May 2002

Eight members of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society travelled to Derbyshire to return the visit made by members of the New Mills Natural History Society to Cardiff some two years ago. Pam now living in New Mills still retains her membership of CNS and entertained us on arrival. New Mills is a small town in the Derbyshire Peak District – once dedicated to the cloth trade – now with one mill still used but only as a sweet factory. We stayed in the Pack Horse Inn on the hills above the town with wide views across the moors - and lulled by curlew calling. Brief walks out from the Inn revealed an excellent network of footpaths leading through small fields with wonderfully well maintained stone walls. The inn abutted a small nature reserve managed by the New Mills society to which they hope to attract flycatchers, although the early risers among us saw only greenfinch, blue and great tit with swallows and housemartins hawking and resting by a new garden pool.

We met nine of our New Mills friends outside the town hall including some familiar faces from the Cardiff visit. They have 70 members despite a population of only 10,000 and a very active programme including away visits – they are off to Mull in two weeks time. We all set off towards Buxton into the heart of the Peak district to reach Deep Dale through which runs a tributary of the River Wye. Butterbur was dominant along the riverbanks and some sweet cicely seen in the hedgerow. Swifts were flying overhead and mallards upending in the river.

In 1997 some ninety acres of this dale was purchased by the national charity ‘Plantlife’ and we were met by Grace, the ‘Floral Guardian’, and Peter, a volunteer warden (www.plantlife.org.uk). Loos do not usually feature as an item of interest to CNS but the ones in the carpark were of a special breed – all waste descending a great depth to be subsequently composted and managed without either water or chemicals.

The area of the reserve had previously been leased by the same family from the Chatsworth estate for over 100 years, with cattle being introduced to graze from May onwards. The present plan is to delay grazing till July but details of the regime are still being worked out, as the new owners will need to control the scrub - particularly the many hawthorn seedlings. No fertilisers had been used by the previous tenants and an extraordinary rich flora and fauna has survived with 230+ plant species, 85 bryophytes (includes mosses and liverworts), 40 birds and 22 butterflies recorded so far.

As part of the Southern area of the Peak National Park the rock was one with which we are very familiar – carboniferous limestone.

As we crossed the first stile we were met with great drifts of meadow saxifrage – ‘Saxifraga granulosa’ -not just in one small area but all over the route of our days walk. Crosswort was at its best although the cowslips were almost over – while cuckoo flower, early purple orchid and cow parsley made a stand under a small leaved lime. (n.b. Complete plant list at end of article)ⁱ.

On the rocky outcrops were rock gardens to delight RHS Chelsea visitors. We saw orpine, rue leaved saxifrage, field madder, maidenhair spleenwort, a tiny limestone bedstraw, corn salad, common rockrose and Doves foot cranesbill. At the foot of the bank was brittle bladder fern, mossy saxifrage and water avens. A local speciality – draba muralis or wall whitlow grass – a taller cousin of the garden weed was almost over.

We had an explanation of the niceties of alchemillaⁱⁱ - the commonest in the reserve being A. xanthochlora, then A. glabra - smooth and liking higher places and the least common – A. filicaulis vestita with hairy leaves - all three are present in the reserve.

As everywhere in the district the network of stone walls were a delight – the craft of stonewalling must still be very much alive – walls were home to Sedum acre and shining cranesbill.

Orange tip, green hairstreak and speckled wood butterflies were viewed and pregnant dock leaved beetle and soldier beetle were admired.

Our path wound slowly upward through the valley to open out in an area, which had been home to Romano Britons in the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD. There still remains evidence of boundary walls and of terracing for crops with richer flora surviving to this day where the soil cover was deepened. Spring sedge was looking handsome in the ditch. In one of the numerous molehills an eagle eyed New Mills member introduced us to fragments of ‘chert’. This stone is redistributed silica, which in the Derbyshire district probably served the same function as flint further

South. On the fertile ledges the orchids were particularly showy and set off by the leaves of meadowsweet and meadow cranesbill and the early flowers of yellow rattle and goldilocks buttercup.

We climbed away from the settlement to more open moorland and lunch called – botanising gives an appetite despite the vast breakfasts the Cardiff contingent had enjoyed. The canine member spent his break hopefully eyeing a grazing rabbit. We found mouse browsed nut shells but no sight of the mice.

This area of hillside was carpeted by mountain pansy – predominantly yellow but with one small patch of the purple variety. It is larger and does not have a tricolour form like our dune pansy. The hillside was a site of old lead mines where the ore was mined and washed out of the debris - so any plants growing in the area have to be lead tolerant and as well as the pansy we found the rare spring sandwort.

After lunch those feeling like a climb took off up the hillside where a flourishing patch of moonwort was found. One of the New Mills contingent became excited over what may prove to be a particularly rare moss – *Plagiobryum zieri* - to be confirmed!! We then descended even more precipitously than we had gone up – envying the skylark's effortless mobility. However the climb was further rewarded with a stand of aquilegia and of stone bramble – new to some of us, and another of lily-of-the valley – both at their very best.

We joined the non-climbers to walk out of the valley and were rewarded with a cock redstart singing to be followed by a good view of wheatear on one of the walls. We crossed out of the reserve to the village of Sheldon, with the nearby mine shaft of Magpie Mine. We had seen evidence of the maze of underground workings and subsidence and later were to see where the water used in the mine had been directed underground to the river over a mile away. The clouds came over and a few of the party opted for return by road while the majority braved the rain to turn down back towards the river.

The rain stopped as we reached the valley bottom and the path followed the riverbank. For several of us the highlight of the weekend was splendid views of our first ever water vole. 'Ratty' obliged by wandering along the opposite bank, checking his general toilet and whiskers and posing in a most delightful way. We do not see this enchanting mammal in South Wales. After this display – trout rising to mayfly, a dipper, nesting coot (by Linda and Trish), water crowfoot and mallard and moorhen were almost mundane.

After reaching an old water mill the path turned uphill through the now dripping woods but we had our final delights with birdsnest orchid, toothwort and wood melick before joining the others in the carpark. They had enjoyed a visit to some well dressings – where various villages vie to produce pictures made up of flower and plant materials.

The following day, Sunday, started wet but by the time we met up with our New Mills friends the rain had stopped and we were hopeful of better things to come. The plan was to see something of the 'Dark' peak country where grits and sandstone predominate in contrast to the Southern 'White' peak of yesterday. We drove the few miles to the village of Hayfield at the start of the Pennine Way – the car park was packed with walkers and cyclists gearing up themselves and their machines. Hayfield itself is one of the few pre-industrial villages surviving and in the watery sunshine the gardens and old weaver's houses were very picturesque. These weavers' homes were characteristically three stories high with the looms kept on the top floor. The village boasts the start of one of the very earliest public footpaths opened in 1897 and leading up to Snake pass – now National Trust property. Snake Pass was the site of the mass trespass of 17 years agoⁱⁱⁱ.

We walked up towards a stand of tall beech trees possibly planted to mark old shafts and keep cattle from roaming. As the rain set in we sheltered while Ron told us something of the history of the area. He and Derek have recently written and published an account of their findings^{iv}. Hayfield is mentioned in the Doomsday Book ('hay' meaning hedge rather than our current usage) and the surrounding area described as 'waste' land. As such it probably remained well wooded from the time of the Norman's till the reign of Charles I and was used as a Royal Hunting lodge. Illegal squatters gradually settled within the Royal preserves and farmed sheep and grew hay. Whole communities as well as individuals were fined for illegal tree felling. However forest law ended when Charles, strapped for cash, planned to sell off parts of the forest. The area was mapped out – these maps surviving to today. Even some of the present day hill walls can be identified although orientation on these old maps is difficult, as the 17C cartographers did not orientate their maps to the North. King Charles' plans to divide the land between himself and sundry tenants ended with his execution. Derbyshire as a whole opted for Cromwell and with the accession of Charles II much of the land was sold to outside landowners although some of the unimproved hill tops stayed in common ownership right up to 1840.

We heard briefly how most villages had an engine house and local mine right up to the 19th century. Few became mechanised and mining died out as villages grew and became industrial towns with the great growth of the wool industry. My notes were by now becoming a soggy mess and all of us agreed to move on.

We climbed to where there would normally be grand views of Kinder Scout, rewarded on the way by curlew and lapwing flying over. The area boasts nesting redshank and golden plover but all were too wet to venture out. There were areas of heather burning for grouse and of where introduced Rhododendron ponticum had been cut back. As we squelched on our way we were treated to thunder and lightning before reaching the carpark and drying off at Mary and Ron's home, followed for us by the long drive home through the murk.

Despite the rain even Sunday was enjoyable but Saturday in the Deep Dale was a special day we will long remember. A big thank you to the members of New Mills Natural History Society and to Grace and Peter representing Plantlife.

Thanks to Tony and John of New Mills and to Linda and Margaret for vetting this article.
Joan Andrews

PLANT LIST

<i>Minuarta hybrida</i>	Spring sandwort	Mercurialis perennis	Dog's mercury
<i>Stellaria holostea</i>	Greater stitchwort	Polygala vulgaris	Common milkwort
<i>Silene dioica</i>	Red campion	Viola riviniana	Common dog violet
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow buttercup	<i>V. lutea</i>	Mountain pansy
<i>R. ficaria</i>	Lesser celandine	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Common rock-rose
<i>R. auricomus</i>	Goldilocks buttercup	<i>Anthiscus sylvestris</i>	Cow parsley
<i>R. penicillatus</i> ssp. <i>pseudofluitans</i>	A stream water crowfoot	<i>Myrrhis odorata</i>	Sweet cicely
<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>	Columbine	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather
<i>Meconopsis cambrica</i>	Welsh poppy	<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell heather
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	Cuckoo flower	<i>E. tetralix</i>	Cross leaved heath
<i>Draba muralis</i>	Wall whitlow grass	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	Bilberry
<i>Arabis hirsuta</i>	Hairy rock cress	<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	Crowberry
<i>Sedum telephium</i>	Orpine	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Primrose
<i>S. acre</i>	Biting stonecrop	<i>P. veris</i>	Cowslip
<i>Saxifraga tridactylites</i>	Rue-leaved saxifrage	<i>Sherardia arvensis</i>	Field madder
<i>S. granulata</i>	Meadow saxifrage	<i>Cruciata laevis</i>	Crosswort
<i>S. hypnoides</i>	Mossy saxifrage	<i>Galium sterneri</i>	Limestone bedstraw
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Meadowsweet	<i>Myosotis arvensis</i>	Field forgetmenot
<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	Salad burnet	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Bugle
<i>Alchemilla xanthochlora</i>	Lady's mantle	<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>	Wood sage
<i>A. glabra</i>		<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove
<i>A. filicaulis</i> ssp. <i>vestita</i>		<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	Germander speedwell
<i>Rubus saxatilis</i>	Stone bramble	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Yellow rattle
<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	Wild strawberry	<i>Lathrea squameria</i>	Toothwort
<i>Geum rivale</i>	Water avens	<i>Valerianella carinata</i>	Keel-fruited cornsalad
<i>G. urbanum</i>	Herb bennet	/ lambs lettuce	
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily of the valley
<i>P. anserina</i>	Silverweed	<i>Allium ursinum</i>	Ramsons/wild garlic
<i>P. tabernaemontani</i>	Spring cinquefoil	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scriptus</i>	Bluebell
<i>Geranium pratense</i>	Meadow cranesbill	<i>Orchis mascula</i>	Early purple orchid
<i>G. robertianum</i>	Herb robert	<i>Neottia nidus-avis</i>	Birdsnest orchid
<i>G. lucidum</i>	Shining cranesbill		
<i>G. molle</i>	Dovesfoot cranesbill		

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- i 'The Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe', R. Fitter, A. Fitter and M Blaney, Collins
- ii 'The Concise British Flora in Colour', W. Keble Martin , Ebury Press
- iii 'Kinder Scout – portrait of a mountain', Ed. Roly Smith, Pub. Derby County Council
- iv 'Seventeenth Century enclosures of the commons and wastes of Bowden Middlecale in the Royal Forest of Peak', Derek Bromhead and Ron Weston, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol. 121, 2000, 244-286.

BREAN DOWN and BERROW DUNES
16th June, 2002



As if to welcome us to Brean Down, a Peregrine Falcon glided effortlessly towards us as we left the carpark. Our coach had had to negotiate a circuitous route in order to avoid the annual Burnham and Berrow Triathlon but at last our 25-strong party had arrived.

Avoiding the steps which climb steeply to the top of the Down, we set off up a more gradual incline to the East and immediately our leader, Jeff Curtis, started pointing out interesting plants on either side of the path such as Pellitory of the Wall, Wall Pennywort, Wall Rue, Bugloss, Spotted Medick and Milk Thistle, so-called because of its attractive white-veined leaves which were given to nursing mothers in the Middle Ages to increase their milk supply.

We eventually emerged onto the Down which is a peninsula projecting westwards into the Bristol Channel and which, along with Flatholm, Steepholm and Lavernock Point, is composed of Carboniferous Limestone and harbours a number of rare species of plant. It is particularly rich on the rocky south-facing slopes and this was the side we started along. Jeff pointed out tufts of Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*), a nationally rare species found also at Crook Peak. This, together with the “tick” of the day, the beautiful White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum appeninum*), which we saw in abundance on the cliff edge and which is found only here and in Devon, are listed in the British Red Data Book. Another rarity which Jeff located was the Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) but it was the wide range of uncommon plants such as Yellow-wort, a member of the Gentian family, Small Scabious and Fairy Flax, to name but a few, which enthralled us.

Down below us on the steep southern slopes feral goats were grazing. These, along with the rabbit population and Welsh Black cattle in winter, help to maintain the ecosystem. We crossed over to the north side of the Down to have our lunch looking over the water towards Weston-super-Mare and watching windsurfers tacking to and fro. A Large Yellow Underwing fluttered past as we sat down amongst what seemed to be hundreds of pupae and caterpillars of the Burnet moth – it was all we could do to keep them out of our sandwiches! Their actual foodplant is Birdsfoot Trefoil of which there was plenty nearby. A Lackey moth caterpillar had been seen earlier on some Bracken. No sooner had we regained our feet than Mike Dean found the first of about four Bee Orchids – it’s always a thrill to see them. Our tally of orchids for the day was three including Pyramidal and Common Spotted.

We continued along the top of the Down noting such plants as Horseshoe Vetch, the foodplant of the Chalkhill Blue butterfly. Earlier we had seen a Painted Lady, Common

Blues and a Large White and now a Small Heath just as we reached the highest point of the Down, 100m above sea level, where suddenly the ground drops away to reveal the Palmerston Fort guarding the tip of the headland. The view across to Steepholm Island and over the Channel to Wales is stunning.

We all descended in a long line noticing that the vegetation was being strongly influenced by the oceanic conditions - we came across plants such as Thrift, Danish Scurvy-grass, Sea Mayweed and Sea Campion. The National Trust has recently restored Brean Down Fort and installed interpretation boards. I personally preferred it as a ruin when it had an air of mystery about it! The Fort was completed in 1871 and was part of a line of forts across the Bristol Channel built against attack from Napoleon III. In 1900 a soldier fired his gun into a powder magazine, killing himself and causing extensive damage. Subsequently the Fort was not used again until it was refortified during World War II.

Jeff pointed out two species of Poppy - Opium and Long-headed - and two species of Swinecress. Linda, meanwhile, found an iridescent Green Tiger Beetle. We just missed out on a cup of tea as we started back along the military road and passed a couple in a car heading for the Fort ready to serve teas from 2p.m. This track along the northern slope passes through scrub including Hawthorn and Wild Privet and it was here that we had the best sightings of birds such as Stonechat, Linnet, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Willow Warbler, and the most unusual one of all, a Parakeet! – admittedly in a cage in a cyclist's backpack. At the eastern end we split into two groups, one to return by the same route and the other to descend by the steps, both to meet for a welcome cup of tea at the bottom before setting off for our second venue.

The journey to Berrow Dunes took only about ten minutes and for the second time afforded us a wonderful display of Round-headed Poppy and Fragrant Evening Primrose along the coast road. Jeff pointed out several paths through the dunes to the beach. Our route crossed Berrow Golf Course where, having avoided the golf balls, we arrived at a sand dune covered in Fragrant Evening Primrose (*Oenothera stricta*), an escape from North America which grows abundantly in this area. Other notable plants included Haresfoot Clover, Rough Clover, Honewort, Common Broomrape and Flixweed, one of the rarer members of the Cabbage Family. A little further on along a fairway we encountered some Swedish photographers suffocating some clover - *Trifolium suffocatum* - a rare variety, obviously destined to become even rarer! Unfortunately our visit happened to coincide with the three-mile running stage of the aforementioned Triathlon so our examination of the flora was punctuated every few seconds by the shout "Runner" which required us to make way on the single-track path for each breathless triathlete to come pounding through. This was particularly difficult on the boardwalk over an extensive reedbed where we heard the Reed Warbler's scratchy song and thought we saw, thanks to Rob, two Bearded Tits flying over our heads. Rob had already identified the song of a Cetti's Warbler in a hedge nearby – a first for me. We waited for a while but the birds were playing hide and seek in the reeds so we dropped down through the last sand dune to the beach just as the last runner puffed past.

A stroll along the sand was very pleasant and produced Sea Sandwort, Sea Couch-grass and Sand Couch-grass, but time was going on so Jeff decided to head back the way we had come. At the far side of the boardwalk we tried unsuccessfully to identify some

caterpillars on Wild Celery and noted Hemlock Water Dropwort nearby. On the dunes Jeff pointed out Mignonette and Common Evening Primrose alongside the rarer variety.

By the end of the trip we had seen around a hundred species of plant, not to mention the birds, butterflies and other objects of interest. Even the weather had been kind to us despite gloomy forecasts - a very satisfactory and rewarding day. Many thanks to Jeff for his expertise.

Mary Salter

PLANT LIST, BREAN DOWN and BERROW DUNES

Common Mallow	Early Forgetmenot	Goldnote Grass
Milk Thistle	Eyebright	Bugloss
Spotted Medick	White Rock-rose	Honewort
Black Medick	Common Rock-rose	Hop Trefoil
Scarlet Pimpernel	Small Scabious	Sand Catstail
Pellitory of the Wall	Wall Speedwell	Fragrant Evening
White Campion	Germander Speedwell	Primrose
Sea Campion	Common Milkwort	Common Evening
Wall Pennywort	Purging (Fairy) Flax	Primrose
Common Broomrape	Sea Radish	Flixweed
Ivy Broomrape	Pyramidal Orchid	Bittersweet
Herb Robert	Bee Orchid	Sea Sandwort
Shining Cranesbill	Common Spotted Orchid	Sea Couch-grass
Long-stalked Cranesbill	Sheep's Sorrel	Sand Couch-grass
Cut-leaved Cranesbill	St. John's Wort sp.	Wild Celery
Dovesfoot Cranesbill	Horseshoe Vetch	Hemlock Water Dropwort
Wood Sage	Dwarf Thistle	Mignonette
Bristly Oxtongue	Thrift	
Agrimony	Opium Poppy	
Salad Burnet	Long-headed Poppy	
Mouse-ear Hawkweed	Round-headed Poppy	
Wall Rue	Danish Scurvy-grass	
Centaury	Sea Mayweed	
Birdsfoot Fenugreek	Quaking Grass	
Birdsfoot Trefoil	Wild Carrot	
Least Birdsfoot Trefoil	Swinecress	
Somerset Hair-grass	Lesser Swinecress	
Early Hair-grass	Celery-leaved Buttercup	
Silver Hair-grass	Tormentil	
Sea Fern Grass	Yellow Rattle	
Sea Clover	Dropwort	
Field Madder	Pignut	
Houndstongue	Field Forgetmenot	
Wild Thyme		
Yellow-wort		
Biting Stonecrop	Haresfoot Clover	
Common Storksbill	Suffocated Clover	
Sea Storksbill	Rough Clover	



Brean Down Fort.

WHITEFORD BURROWS, GOWER on 7th JULY 2002

Eleven members assembled at Cwm Ivy to meet David Painter who is the CCW Officer responsible for Whiteford as well as other sites in the Swansea/Gower area. David has led previous visits for CNS and his knowledge of this 2000 acre National Nature Reserve (NNR) is second to none. He unlocked the gate so we could drive down the steep track and along the Monterey Pine avenue to park closer to the dune system. The day was cloudy with a few bright intervals and a westerly breeze. Sunshine would have been a bonus in this so far non-existent summer but we were happy to settle for a dry day.

Before leading us on a tour of the Reserve, David explained that it consisted of roughly equal areas of three habitats - beach, dunes and saltmarsh. The land, which stretches northwards from Llanmadoc to guard the Burry Inlet, is owned by the National Trust - one of their first coastal purchases under the Enterprise Neptune scheme. However, management is supervised by CCW to ensure that the special flora and fauna of the site including Fen Orchid, Petalwort (a minute liverwort) and *Vertigo angustior* (a tiny snail) are preserved. During our visit we did manage to see the first of these.

Erosion is eating into the northern end of the west-facing coast where 30 metres has been cut back into the dunes in only 10 years but, in contrast, sand is being deposited at the southern end. The extensive saltmarsh is grazed by the free-ranging ponies and sheep of commoners to create a close-cropped turf intersected by many muddy creeks. CCW's management effort is concentrated on the dune system which, ideally, needs more grazing. Although the ponies have open access, they seem to prefer the salty bite of the saline flats and use the dunes for shelter at night, high tide and in severe weather. Sheep are less suitable as grazers in this habitat so the bulk of the nibbling is done by the rabbit population.

During the late 1950s, blocks of exotic conifers including Lodgepole Pine and Douglas Fir were planted in the dunes. These plantations have become a major landscape feature as well as providing suitable habitat for Fungi, Grey Squirrels and birds such as Crossbills. Gradual removal of these alien trees to return the dunes to their original flora has to be sensitively done so that the benefits of shelter and landscape are retained. Not all the conifers will be felled but considerable thinning will be carried out. It was fascinating to hear from David about the many management problems involved in conserving this reserve but even more enjoyable to see the results of his efforts.

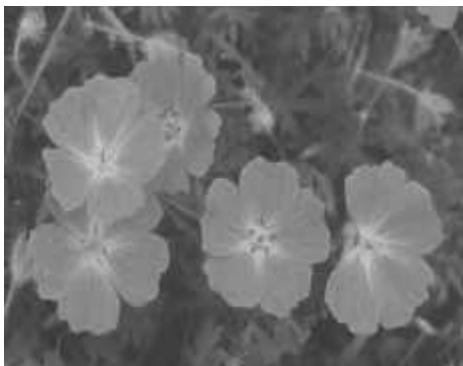
We made a clockwise loop of the dune system, heading first towards the beach, then northwards through a chain of slacks and eastwards to the pines before returning along the marshy fringes of the salttings.

The dry dunes were a riot of colour - pinks of Restarrow, Centaury and Red Clover, blue Viper's Bugloss, white Dewberry and Burnet Rose, purple Wild Thyme and many shades of yellow from Kidney Vetch, Hop Trefoil, Lady's Bedstraw, Biting Stonecrop, Long-rooted Catsear, Yellow Rattle and Yellowwort. There were also patches of Rockrose and the dainty faces of Dune Pansies while contrasting splashes of magenta were provided by Bloody Cranesbill and Pyramidal Orchids. Only one flowering spike of Bee Orchid was detected amongst the mass of other blooms. David

pointed out a patch of Red Valerian, a recent colonist of the dunes and which is a rich source of nectar for insects.

Despite the dull conditions, Marbled White Butterflies were much in evidence throughout the grassy areas but only small numbers of other butterflies were seen. Small Skipper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown and Small Heath are widespread species but Small Blues, a newly emerged Dark Green Fritillary and a very worn Painted Lady were more notable. A Lesser Yellow Underwing as well as adult and larval Cinnabar Moths also attracted attention as did the larvae and pupae of Burnet Moths. Glistening drops of moisture from overnight drizzle highlighted the extensive webs of funnel spiders *Agelena labyrinthica* which retreated to their silken tunnels when disturbed. Three species of grasshoppers were identified and several crimson Poplar Leaf Beetles were easily spotted on Creeping Willows in the hollows.

Much searching in the dune slacks revealed only about a dozen Fen Orchid plants, none with flowers, although there were plenty of others in bloom including Marsh Helleborine and both Early and Southern Marsh Orchids. Bog Pimpernel carpeted many of the slacks with its pretty pale pink flowers and Jeff Curtis drew attention to the subtle attractions of Adderstongue Fern and Variegated Horsetail. Still in bud at the edge of one hollow were possible Green-flowered Helleborines. More confidently identified were Broad-leaved Helleborines close to the conifer plantation. Apart from Wild Clematis, orchids and Polypody Fern there was little growing under the trees. Calls and songs from Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Chiffchaff and Treecreeper among others indicated that some birds found the plantations a congenial habitat.



Bloody Cranesbill



Marbled White Butterfly

In contrast, apart from Whitethroats, finches such as Linnets and over-flying Buzzards, there were few birds in the dunes. Out on the beach and mussel-beds, at least 50 Oystercatchers were feeding on an incoming tide. Only a scattering of Herring Gulls haunted the shore but there was a large roost of these birds on the saltmarsh. A dozen or more Shelduck and Mallard together with two or three Grey Herons could also be seen there while Swifts, Swallows and House Martins hawked over for insects.

Through binoculars we observed that the saltmarsh was a closely-grazed carpet of Thrift, mainly gone over and being replaced by a carpet of purple Sea Lavender just coming into bloom. The important transition zone from saline to freshwater marsh had abundant rushes as well as Marsh Mallow, Ragged Robin and Yellow Flag. Some of the mares with their delightful leggy foals were feeding here and a Reed Bunting sang.

Whiteford NNR is such a rich and varied site that I have only managed to include some of the species we enjoyed and some of the information imparted by our excellent guide. In conclusion I must mention David's way with slugs. We watched with a mixture of admiration and repugnance as he held and stroked a large specimen of *Arion ater* to make it "dance". Unfortunately the slug did not oblige and I'm reluctant to repeat the experiment myself!

Linda Nottage

MERTHYR MAWR NNR

Merthyr Mawr dunes have at last been officially designated as a National Nature Reserve. Rob and I attended the ceremony there on 3rd July, just a few days before the CNS visit to another superb Glamorgan dune system. We missed the short morning walk but arrived in time for coffee and cakes and the opportunity to chat to friends and CCW staff including Mary Gillham, Gill Barter and David Painter.

In the marquee Roger Thomas, CCW Chief Executive, introduced four speakers who entertained and informed us with complimentary and complementary remarks about the new reserve. Murray McLaggan, the landowner, spoke knowledgeably about its history while Michael Hughes, CCW Chief Warden, concentrated on the site's natural history interest. CCW Chairman, John Lloyd Jones, dwelt upon the recreational use of the reserve and Carwyn Jones, the local AM, stressed the theme of sustainability and encouraged us to value the jewels on our doorstep while shame-facedly admitting that although he had lived in the area for 30 years he had never before set foot on the site!

We were not invited to the buffet lunch with strawberries and cream laid on at Merthyr Mawr House but enjoyed our own picnic in the dunes while waiting for the afternoon guided walk. Duncan Ludlow, Reserve Warden, led us first up a giant sandhill to the top of the scarp from where we had a panoramic view of the NNR. The success of management work to remove invasive Sea Buckthorn was evident. Contractors and volunteers supervised by CCW have done a wonderful job, especially considering the constraints imposed by both the biological and archaeological sensitivity of the site, and will continue to tackle this problem. A few pale pink spikes of Viper's Bugloss stood out amongst the abundant normal blue form. Small Bugloss, Wild Mignonette and Dune Pansies also caught the eye.

We made our way to Burrow's Well which was overhung with bushes and across the dunes to the ever-expanding patch of Birthwort. Here again is a possible problem species which could become dominant - already it has spread to one of the dune slacks. Considerable effort has been expended to clear invading scrub from the main slack where we enjoyed the display of orchids. Brief showers and a fresh cool wind reduced sightings of insects but we did disturb Small Skipper, Ringlet and Small Heath Butterflies from the paths and potted up a pair of Great Green Bush Crickets for a closer look before release. Merthyr Mawr Warren is fully worthy of its new NNR status and I'm sure CNS groups will continue to favour the site for field trips.

Linda Nottage