

CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1876

NEWSLETTER NO.57

A large, elegant calligraphic logo consisting of the letters 'C', 'N', and 'S' intertwined in a flowing, cursive style. The 'C' is on the left, the 'N' is in the middle, and the 'S' is on the right, all connected by thin, decorative lines.

MARCH 2003

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Below is a copy of the Societies response to the planning application at Llanishen reservoir.

Cardiff Naturalists Society

Proposed Development at Llanishen Reservoir.

Cardiff is probably unique as a city in having four identifiable 'Green Corridors' that bring wildlife into the centre of the city. CNS firmly believes that these must be maintained for future generations. Such corridors must be wide enough to allow wildlife to move freely along them without undue disturbance from developments on either side. One such corridor is that along the Nant Fawr Stream and the reservoirs of Lisvane & Llanishen.

As Llanishen Reservoir is no longer used for the supply of domestic drinking water CNS recognizes that the existing status quo cannot be maintained indefinitely. CNS supports the enhancement of the site of Llanishen reservoir in the interests of nature conservation and as an opportunity to further public education in all aspects of wildlife

However, it cannot support the existing planning application until every alternative option that minimizes the inevitable disturbance to wildlife, has been fully explored. It recognizes that the planning application attempts to ameliorate the effects of the development on the biodiversity on the site but it remains concerned about the effects that such a housing development will have being in such close proximity to a wildlife area and in particular the detrimental effects on the wildlife during the constructional phase of the project which will take many years for recovery to take effect. In addition we fear there is a risk of permanent loss of some botanical species from the site. The Society is also concerned that the disturbance to the site by the proposed North East Cardiff development of a further 4,000 homes has not been considered in the WWI design.

CARDIFF BIRDWATCH 12 January 2003

Twenty-one members and friends assembled in Longwood Drive at 9am on this lovely sunny morning. Young and old alike were well wrapped up against the severe frost which had lasted a week but there was no wind to chill our bones further. Rob led the way towards the Glamorgan Canal followed by a straggling army bristling with telescopes instead of pikes and pitchforks. Our 'weapons' were soon put to good use to admire a pair of Bullfinches in the top of a tree. A party of Long-tailed Tits feeding acrobatically nearby were too active for the telescope treatment.

The flow of water and movement of Mallards had kept the canal ice-free, but shallow pools elsewhere were frozen hard. The shrill cry of a Kingfisher announced its arrival but although we had several sightings, views were generally all too brief. However, everyone had ample opportunity to observe at least three Water Rails which were probing the wet flush on the other side of the towpath from the lock. They squealed, skulked and scuttled by turns. Chaffinches and the odd Goldfinch dropped down to the same seepage for a drink. Only a single Siskin was noted feeding on Alder seeds. Where were the usual flocks? Perhaps the female Sparrowhawk which dashed over clutching its prey had been picking off the finches. A single Buzzard was the only other bird of prey seen.

Some dead and dying Alders in the swamp further on were decorated with fungal brackets. There were tiers of the usual *Inonotus radiatus* but one trunk sported a remarkable shelf about half a metre across, possibly a species of *Ganoderma*. Mary Gillham pointed out green patches, frozen into the water surface, of Least Duckweed *Lemna minuta*, a native of the Americas which has spread rapidly in Britain since it was first noted here in 1977.

I had brought a small bag of birdseed to add to food regularly deposited by kind-hearted souls at various points along the towpath. Who could resist the tame Robins which hopped hopefully in the hedges? We enjoyed excellent views of Blue, Great and Coal Tits as well as Nuthatches at these feeding stations. Jays squawked from bushes on the other side of the Canal and made surreptitious forays for food when there was a lull in the passage of joggers and dog-walkers.



A Grey Wagtail was spotted on the Melingriffith Feeder as we walked up towards the hides. At least half a dozen Snipe were eventually discerned from the first hide but only because their feeding movements gave them away. At rest, their russet and straw streaking perfectly matched the mown stems of the marsh plants. A Grey Heron peeped out occasionally from the taller vegetation behind them. A Little Grebe and two Moorhens took advantage of the sunny unfrozen corner of the pool in front of the second hide, but here the main interest was the feeding station beside the artificial Sand Martin bank. We counted at least 35 Chaffinches, 13 Blackbirds, 5 Bullfinches and 5 Reed Buntings amongst the various species thronging the ground.

In order to stimulate our circulatory systems and warm our extremities we decided to press on at a faster pace towards the Taff by the Radyr footbridge and then follow the river back to our parked cars. Sharp eyes spotted a Dipper under the far bank. It posed obligingly for even the stragglers to catch up and enjoy a good view through a 'scope. Indeed, it seemed reluctant to enter the water at all. Another Heron and Kingfisher,

beautifully illuminated, as well as at least five Dabchicks were seen along this stretch of the river.

Lunch was uppermost in our minds when we returned to our starting point but after a brief discussion we agreed to reassemble by the entrance to Hamadryad Park at 1.30pm and some of us chose to drive to the Clarence Embankment before attacking our sandwiches. By the time we set off again, refreshed, the sky had clouded over but it remained dry. Gates close to the, now boarded up, Royal Hamadryad Hospital give access to the new Park where a broad path borders the River Taff and leads under the dual-carriageway link road to the Cardiff Bay wetlands and the St. David's Hotel. We enjoyed frequent sightings of Kingfisher along this stretch and good views of about 20 Teal, a Common Gull and 5 more Little Grebes. Various birds were flushed from the rough grassland and detritus on the riverbank including Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Linnets and one or two Snipe.

There were large numbers of Coot both on the Taff and in the Bay. We estimated around 150. More exciting was the pair of Goosanders which flew in to preen and pose. The zigzag boardwalk near the yacht club gives good views along the fringe of former saltmarsh which provides a refuge for ducks including, on Sunday, 3 Shovelers, a lone



Redshank and 2 or 3 Curlews which flew off, calling. At least 13 Cormorants were loafing on the pebble ridge together with an assortment of gulls. A male Stonechat was seen by some of the group as we walked towards the hotel and others spotted another Water Rail in a creek below the curlew statues. We explored the new waterside walkway under the hotel and were rewarded with close views of two Great Crested Grebes and the dock containing the

three-masted replica of the Endeavour which is presently undergoing refurbishment.

Small pre-roosting flocks of Starlings began to settle in the rigging and on one of the massive cranes which dominate the Bay's skyline as building development continues apace. Will the new blocks of luxury flats and public edifices be as enduringly attractive and stylish as Windsor Esplanade and the Pierhead Building? We retraced our steps through Hamadryad Park and dispersed well-pleased with our day out. A very creditable total of 56 species of birds was seen by the group and several participants had been introduced to new birds and new venues.

Linda Nottage

Waxcaps at Llanishen Reservoir.

Since plans to build houses on Llanishen reservoir in North Cardiff first became public, 18 months ago, there has been a lot of interest in the biodiversity of the site. Cardiff Naturalists have contributed many useful records following field visits to the reservoirs in May and August 2002. It has become apparent that the main biological interest of Llanishen reservoir is not its birdlife, for which the reservoir was first declared a Site of Nature Conservation Importance, but the unimproved grasslands which cover the reservoir embankments. These grasslands are home to a wide range of wildflowers, but also a diverse array of rare waxcap fungi (*Hygrocybe* spp.).

Waxcaps are grassland fungi that are often brightly coloured and typically have caps that are either waxy or in some cases glutinous and slimy. They were once common throughout much of Europe where they are typically found in grassland that is grazed, but which is not treated with chemical fertilisers. Such a combination is becoming increasingly rare due to the widespread use of fertilisers on agricultural land. As a result the numbers of waxcap fungi have plummeted. They now feature prominently on the fungal red-data lists of many European countries.

So far, seventeen species of waxcap have been recorded at Llanishen reservoir. I say “so far” deliberately, because the fungi were not discovered until right at the end of the season in mid-November, and 2002 proved to be a very disappointing year for fungi due to the long dry spell in September. This is an exceptional diversity of species and gives every indication that Llanishen reservoir is a site of national importance for these fungi. There has been comparatively little work done on the distribution of fungi in the UK, but to put the site in a wider context, it would be in the top 20 sites for waxcap fungi in Denmark (Boertmann 1996), and if it was in Ireland, it would be the twelfth best site in the whole of Eire and Northern Ireland (McHugh et al. 2001).

The most significant species found at Llanishen is the pink meadow waxcap (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*). This is a UK Biodiversity Action plan priority species, a UK red data list species, and is likely to be added to Appendix I of the Bern Convention in the near future. Almost as exciting is the presence of the crimson waxcap (*H. punicea*). This species is normally only found on the highest quality waxcap sites, and is usually uncommon. On the reservoir embankments, in late November, there were over 200 fruiting bodies of this exceptionally striking, bright red, fungus. Aside from these two species there are a further four species that are on the provisional European red data list for fungi. It is also worth noting that all waxcap fungi are priority species on our own local Biodiversity Action Plan: *Wild About Cardiff*. For fungi aficionados I have included a full list of the species found at Llanishen at the end of this article.

Llanishen reservoir is likely to be such a good site for waxcaps as a result of two factors. Firstly, the reservoir embankments, not being used for agriculture, have never been treated with chemical fertilisers. Secondly, under the terms of the Reservoirs Act, the embankments need to be mown regularly so that engineers can check for leaks and earth movements. This mowing, simulates grazing, and provides the combination of conditions that are needed by waxcaps. Interestingly, the role of waxcaps in the grassland ecosystem is not well understood. Some recent research by Gareth Griffiths and colleagues from the University of Wales at Aberystwyth used stable isotope analysis to look at the nutritional ecology of the meadow waxcap (*Hygrocybe pratensis*). Their results suggest that waxcaps could be deep humic decayers rather than normal surface litter decayers (Griffith et al. 2002). However this is only a preliminary study on just one species.

Obviously, the proposal by Western Power Distribution to partially drain Llanishen reservoir and put a housing development on the site is a serious concern. Especially as this scheme will involve completely stripping out the existing embankments on which the waxcaps are found. There is no evidence that they can be transplanted successfully and it would be a great shame if this important site, so recently discovered, was now to be lost.

The following species of waxcap fungi have been recorded at Llanishen reservoir. If the site still exists next autumn, and if there is still public access, I hope that the Society will arrange further field visits in an attempt to establish a more complete species list.

Species List

Hygrocybe aurantiosplendens Haller
Hygrocybe calyptriformis (Berk)Fayod
Hygrocybe ceracea (Wulfen:Fr)Kummer
Hygrocybe chlorophana (Fr:Fr)Wünsche
Hygrocybe coccinea (Sch:Fr)Kummer
Hygrocybe colemanniana (A. Bloxam) P.D. Orton & Watling
Hygrocybe conica (Scop:Fr)Kummer

Hygrocybe fornicata (Fr.) Singer

Hygrocybe insipida (Lange ex S. Lundell) M.M. Moser
Hygrocybe irrigata (Pers.) M.M. Moser
Hygrocybe pratensis (Per:Fr)Bon
Hygrocybe punicea (Fr:Fr)Kummer
Hygrocybe psittacina (Sch:Fr)Kummer
Hygrocybe reidii Kühner
Hygrocybe quieta (Kühner)Singer
Hygrocybe russocoriacea (Berk. & Mill.{?}) P.D. Orton & Watling
Hygrocybe virginea (Wulfen)Orton & Watling

References Cited

- Griffith, G.W., Easton, G.L. & Jones, A.W. (2002). Ecology and diversity of waxcap (*Hygrocybe* spp.) fungi. *Bot. J. Scotl.* 54, 7-22.
- McHugh, R., Mitchel, D., Wright, M. & Anderson, R. (2001). The fungi of Irish grasslands and their value for nature conservation. *Biology & Environment* 101B, 225-242.
- Boertmann, D. (1996). *The genus Hygrocybe, Fungi of Northern Europe*, 1 (2nd printing), Danish Mycological Society.

Richard Cowie

Field Meetings April to June 2003.

Sunday April 6th
Start time 10.30 am

Gwent Levels Reserve
Packed lunch.

A springtime return visit to the newly created reserve. Once again we will be guided around the reserve initially and would expect to stay for most of the day.

Meet at the reserve car park on the left just before Uskmouth power station entrance (ST 334 835).

Saturday April 26th
Start time 2.30 pm

Ruppera Woodland

An afternoon visit to Coed Craig Ruppera led by one of the Friends of Ruppera, hopefully by Meg Park also a CNS member. The Friends are involved in work going on to restore the original landscape features and native trees and therefore encouraging the return of the biodiversity of the site. Our visit should coincide with the best time for bluebells.

From the A468 Newport to Caerphilly road, take the turning at Lower Machen, signposted 'Dreathen'. After ½ mile turn left in front of the Holly bush Inn. The woodland entrance and carpark is approximately ¾ mile along the lane on your right (ST 229 871).

Sunday May 11th
Start time 10.00 am

Nature Study Day
Packed lunch.

As part of our ongoing efforts to record the nature of poorly recorded and/or threatened sites we have been asked by our Friends in the Parks Department to look at a couple of sites this year. The first will be the Nant Tranhshyrhebog area to the North of Cefn Onn Park, which is a rich mixed woodland and grassland area for which there are simply not many records. This is an area that some members who are also members of the South Wales Geologists Association visited last year and includes both limestone and sandstone areas, and therefore habitats. There is a lot to see here so it may take all day, and members may wish to bring a packed lunch to take on-site (the alternative being to take a short break in the nearby Ty Mawr public house (excellent food and Peacocks in the garden). Depending on timings we may visit a second site on this day, or we may hold this to a later date.

Remember you don't need to be an expert (although we hope to have some on hand) we need as many set's of eyes as possible on these days, and we do take a little more time in looking at things so they are great days to practice with your identification guides, and really increase your abilities in identifications
Meet in Cefn Onn Car Park (ST 179 841)

THE TRIP TO STACK ROCKS ON SUNDAY MAY 18th IS POSTPONED TO 2004. THE WEEKEND TRIP TO SKOKHOLM IS NOW FULL.

Tuesday June 3rd
Start time 7.30 pm

Cardiff Bay Walk.
PUBLIC WALK.

An evening stroll alongside the main Bay area to the new Nature Park by the side of the St. David's Hotel. The walk is advertised in the Cardiff walks booklet so we hope to see members come along to encourage new members to join. We shall stop at one of the cafes en route on our way back. Meet by the Norwegian Church entrance, Cardiff Bay.

Saturday June 14th
Start time 7.30 pm

Barbecue at Porthkerry
Bring food to cook!

Our now annual barbecue is at Porthkerry Country Park. We shall have a short evening stroll around part of the park while the pyrotechnics are being organised. Meet at the main car park (where the cafeteria and toilets are) (ST 085 668)

EXTRA FIELD MEETING

Wednesday June 18th
Start time 7.00 pm

Grangemore Park
PUBLIC WALK.

As part of Cardiff Biodiversity Week we have arranged an extra evening meeting. We shall be returning to Grangemore Park, a site that the CNS has been visiting in the last two years, to investigate the ongoing improvement to biodiversity on that site. Once again this will be a public walk and we hope that a number of members can join us to encourage new members.
Meet at the park entrance opposite McDonalds on the Cardiff Bay Retail Park.

Saturday 28th June.
Start time 10.00am

Taf Fechan Reserve.
Packed lunch.

The Taf Fechan Local Nature reserve lies two miles north of Merthyr Tydfil town centre. It is situated in the Taf Fechan Valley between the river bridges of Pontsarn and Cefn Coed y Cymmer. We shall be guided on our visit by one of the members of the Merthyr Tydfil and District Naturalist Society. Meet at the northern carpark and picnic area at the Blue Pool, Pontsarn (SO 045 097).

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety Code.

It is useful to know who is coming on the trip especially if you are willing to give a lift to those without transport. Please contact me if you need a lift and hopefully I can arrange one. Contributions towards drivers' petrol is appreciated.

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EDITORIAL

Members may be interested, that the Glamorgan Record Office has co-ordinated the diaries of our founder member Robert Drane from 1881 up to his death in 1941.

The uncensored opinions of Robert Drane are recorded in his diaries and include accounts such as the Marquess of Bute's admirable behaviour during a fire in the castle in 1861.

You may notice the absence of our regular yearly weather report, unfortunately our member who collates the information through the year, has moved and was unable to collect data.

We hope Stan will be able to record next year's weather for us.

Copy for June newsletter by 10th May please.

Field Safety Code

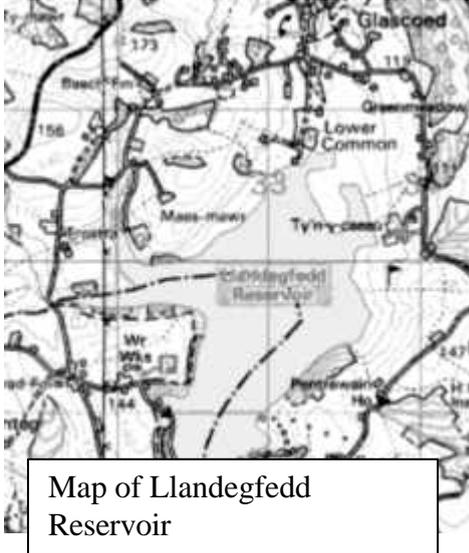
All participants in field meetings organised by the CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY are expected to take every reasonable precaution to ensure the safety of themselves and other participants, and to behave in a responsible manner at all times.

PLEASE READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY

- A field meeting co-ordinator will be identified at the start of each field meeting. Any safety issues that arise during the meeting must be reported to that person.
- All participants should sign the field's meetings attendance book at the start of each field meeting, which will be held by the field meeting co-ordinator. Anyone leaving before the termination of the meeting should inform the field meeting co-ordinator.
- Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult, who will be responsible for their behaviour.
- All participants should be dressed appropriately, including sensible footwear and warm, waterproof clothing, and taking into account likely weather conditions.
- On all field meetings participants should be aware of the following and:
 - Beware of slippery or loose rocks, scree and slopes and never climb rock faces
 - Keep away from edges of cliffs and other steep drops
 - Never stand under overhangs or on them
 - Be aware of traffic when near roads
 - Do not drift away from the group – if you need to leave the group inform someone else first.

Field Trip to Llandegfedd Reservoir – November 2nd 2002

Llandegfedd Reservoir is about 10 miles to the north of Newport and 5 miles to the west of Pontypool. It was constructed in 1966 to serve the needs of Cardiff. An earth dam was built across the Sor Brook Valley to create an area of water about 430 acres. However, the reservoir is unusual due to the fact that the inflow of water by natural drainage is only about 1½ %, the balance being provided by water from the Prioress Mill pumping station on the River Usk. The cost of energy results in the water from Llandegfedd being expensive when compared with other reservoirs in Wales. The pumps can feed up to 80M gals per day and in the height of summer when demand is heavy the reservoir can provide up to 45M gals per day to Cardiff.



Map of Llandegfedd Reservoir



View of the Reservoir from the north.

Unfortunately it was a very wet day for the field visit but nevertheless 10 brave souls decided to face the weather and met in the car park of the visitor centre to the east of the dam. We were met by Richard Poole, the warden for Llandegfedd, who turned out to be a keen ornithologist and a font of knowledge about the area. He suggested the party drove to the north end of the reservoir which is the main conservation area and where there is a classroom and observation area. This is largely used for school parties who participate in various projects from pond dipping to bird watching.

Richard explained that Welsh Water in fact own about 1000 acres of land around the reservoir, much of it let to tenant farmers who have to follow strict rules to avoid run off waters being contaminated with fertilisers etc. However, this has enabled them to apply for organic status. To aid conservation, grass cutting for hay is delayed until the end of July to allow ground-nesting birds to finish nesting. There is a wild fowl meadow which is only cleared every two years. This presents an opportunity to provide a wide bio-diversity for wildlife. The reservoir is stocked with 25,000 Rainbow Trout every year for the anglers but there are also Perch, a favourite for the Cormorants, and many large Pike. Other fish in Sor Brook and the reservoir are Dace, Lampreys and Chub. Richard also said that a breeding site had been established for a Hobby, which had been occupied. There are about 23 Heron nesting sites in the immediate area of Llandegfedd. He stated that there were Woodcock also in the vicinity. There are also several active badger sets around and some evidence of otters. (A survey is currently ongoing to establish numbers and locations.)

Observing the reservoir from the dry comfort of the veranda of the classroom, the following were observed:

- About 6 Cormorants
- Numerous Mallard
- Meadow Pipits
- A small group of Lapwings
- About 10 Pied Wagtails
- A Pochard
- 2 Little Grebe

We then walked round to the area of the hides. The first of which was by a small pond which had been created. There we were able to see:

3 Snipe together
A Little Grebe.
A jay
A Wren
A Goldfinch
Possible Long Tailed Tits
A Moorhen
Blackbirds

Richard confirmed that there was a Little Owl breeding in an oak near the pond. We then moved on to a further hide overlooking an inlet of the reservoir which was largely dry due to the low water. We saw the following:

At least 50 Goldfinches
A further 2 Grebes
A Widgeon
A Teal
A Tufted Duck

We then walked back to the classroom where we were able to eat our packed lunches in comfort. We then thanked Richard and decided to call in at the Ynysfro Reservoirs near Fourteen Locks by junction 27 on the M4. When we arrived we found parking to be difficult as restoration work was being carried out on the canal with the long-term aim of bringing the locks back into operation. By then the rain had set in and it was a quick dash down to the reservoirs where there were a large number of birds on the water but through rain soaked binoculars we were only able to confirm the following:

Several Mute Swans
Coots
Numerous Mallards
Several Pochards

This concluded a very interesting day.

Mike Dean

PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS

FEB 2003

Despite these bitterly cold days, evidence of Spring is everywhere - my snowdrops are almost over, camellia, daffodil and primrose all bursting. Two recent winter days will stay long in my memory. First in January when the ambient temperature measured minus four, we walked the Whitchurch canal and were rewarded with splendid views of water rail. The birds were unable to skulk in the frozen mud so displayed for CNS. As we walked +-round Forest farm to the banks of the Taff we saw snipe by the part-frozen lake, bullfinch and nuthatch on the feeders and for many of us our first ever dipper within Cardiff. After lunch we adjourned to the lower reaches of the Taff and from the reclaimed wasteland enjoyed goosanders and a very showy kingfisher. More recently when we visited Llanelli WWT on another cold but sunny day we enjoyed hearing and seeing how the new areas of the reserve have developed since our last visit in 1999. Again a water rail obligingly displayed itself for some of us, as did a wild male smew - even if the barn owls had been eaten by the local goshawk.

These highlights all had for me a common theme. The sites we visited have all been used or perhaps abused by man. In the 1800's the Merthyr canal was one of the busiest in the world as the South Wales ports sent the riches of the valleys across the seas. In the area of Cardiff Docks - we may have lost the battle of the barrage but do now have areas of public park that wildlife is taking back for its own use. Later this year the Society will be leading a public walk on what was once Cardiff's biggest waste tip. Llanelli too is an example of man's commercial interest being harnessed for wildlife - all the human sewerage for the area is channelled through the specially designed filtration areas of reeds -giving a cleaner Lougher estuary and the finance from Welsh Water making possible the doubling in size of the reserve.

These associations with our commercial past bring me to the matter of Llanishen Reservoir. Cardiff Council invited response on proposals contained in a report by the Wildlife and Wetland Trust for use of the area of the present reservoir and the land within the reservoir fence. Council of CNS has looked at these proposals and our response is reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter. We shall continue to monitor the matter and would welcome views from all members who have looked carefully at the details of the current and any subsequent proposals.