

valleys from their woodland tree roosts to feed on insects over Cardiff Bay. Otter spraint has been found in several places along the Ely and although secluded resting places are lacking in some built-up areas, Leckwith Woods which overhang the lower stretches would seem to provide ideal conditions. Vaughan found a promising selection of Waxcap fungi in pastures south of Plymouth Great Wood. Proposed developments nearby on the northern fringes of the Ely estate will attempt to alleviate the anti-social behaviour problems such as drug-taking which blight some areas there. A local Community Group is actively tackling ways to enhance the district.

Collection of biological data in Cardiff is ongoing so please pass on any interesting or unusual sightings, especially from the river corridors, to Laura Palmer at the Council lpalmer@cardiff.gov.uk. The Rhymney river will be the next to be considered so if any member is familiar with the eastern part of the city and could represent the Society's interests, please volunteer your services to Mike Dean. The workshops are most informative, not intimidating and welcoming of a wide range of ideas and suggestions. You may even get a free lunch!

Linda Nottage

INDOOR AND FIELD MEETINGS

The Indoor and Field meetings Secretary's are putting together next years calendar. They would appreciate any suggestions for trips or speaker's, and any other ideas members may have.

Please send these as soon as possible to Margaret Leishman (indoor meetings) and/or Patrica Wood (field meetings).

Ed

CNS



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CARDIFF RIVER VALLEYS WORKSHOP

On 14th March, Val Ward and I represented CNS at a meeting in the Old Library organised by the Natural Environment Group of Cardiff County Council as a follow up to earlier initiatives which I have reported in a previous Newsletter. The morning session, attended by Val, was devoted to projects for enhancing, promoting and interpreting the River Taff corridor. After lunch and the opportunity to talk informally to other delegates with a wide range of interests there were presentations and discussion groups relating to the Ely Valley Action Plan.

Val was impressed by the diversity of factors and interests, such as disabled access, taken into consideration by Council staff preparing these plans for our city which is second only to Sheffield (my home town!) in the proportion of green space it contains. I was delighted to hear that extensive research has been conducted into the history of Bute Park (with which our Society has been closely involved in past times) with a view to instigating major improvements including a small education centre at the Nursery, better information boards and public toilets. An angling representative informed me that fish, including introduced Grayling, are doing well in the Taff. He also explained that the salmonids that Rob and I watched leaping at Blackweir last autumn could equally have been Salmon or Sea Trout since these species are difficult to distinguish at a distance.

Work is continuing to extend the Ely Trail which will soon link Penarth Road to Grangemore Parc. A diversion away from the river



upstream of Leckwith Bridge will be necessary until the Arjo Wiggins site below Ely Bridge has been developed. Council Ecologist Vaughan Grantham reported on last year's bat survey along the Ely Valley which found 4 widespread species – Noctule, Daubenton's and both Pipistrelles. It seems the Noctules fly down the

There was very little change in September which was no cooler or wetter generally than August. Moreover it was the warmest and almost the driest September I have recorded.

For the last three months of the year total rainfall was 24" and there were 59 rain days, the milder weather continued. It was not until 31st October that we had a cold night with the low of 2.0°C. For the first three nights of November overnight temperatures were below zero and we had four frosty mornings, thereafter, wet conditions returned and the rainfall for the month was the highest of the year. The first week of December was quite stormy and on the 7th there were gales, torrential rain, hail and thunder. Calmer conditions returned and the Christmas period was particularly quiet with no rain but also very little sun. The year ended with three wet days, including a thunderstorm on the 30th and a total rainfall of over two inches.

As a matter of interest I had first sightings in July of two fascinating but not necessarily rare species, these were an elephant hawkmoth caterpillar crossing the drive and a hummingbird hawkmoth feeding from a geranium. I understand the latter could have been a visitor from the south of France.

To summarise:-

The lowest pressure at 0900 GMT was 983 millibars on 17th February and the highest was 1037 millibars on the 21st December. Gales were noted on the 2nd 3rd and 7th December, there was fog on the 6th November and the 20th and 21st December. Thunder was heard on the 10th and 18th May, 11th June, 30th September and 7th and 30th December.

Rainfall in excess of 1" was recorded on the 14th February (1.16") 17th May (1.20") 18th May (1.11") and 10th December (1. 10"). There was frost on the 8th, 11th, 21st, 22nd, 24th and 25th January, 10th and 17th February, 2nd and 5th March, 4th 8th and 9th April, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th November and 9th and 16th December. Snow fell on 28th February and 3rd March.

Stan Jones

Presidential Amblings - February 2007

Time has passed so quickly since Christmas but I feel it would be remiss not to mention against all odds, the success of the Society's Christmas Special Meeting which was held on what was probably weather wise, the worst evening of the entire year. Twenty four firmly resolute members braved torrential storms to hear Jeffery Boswall deliver a thoroughly absorbing talk on the Language of Birds. Jeffery endured a frustrating and somewhat epic train journey from Bristol arriving about two hours late because of the collapse of a bridge over the rail line and extensive flooding.

His determination to press on with his visit to us was much appreciated and rewarded, at least in some part, by the excellent fare on offer later in the evening.

We are now almost at the end of the Indoor Meetings for this winter and just into the start of the 2007 Field Meetings' programme, I would like to thank both Margaret and Patricia for preparing such an excellent and varied range of subjects for our study, needless to say our thanks also to the professionalism of our lecturers who almost invariably turn up on the right day and in the right place!

On a more local note, I have noticed, and not without some concern, that the variety of birds visiting our bird table / feeders is considerably reduced when compared with the last couple of years. I have not changed the feed or positions of the feeders and local conditions remain apparently unaltered, but now I am only receiving regular visits from sparrows, blue tits and the occasional robin. Has anyone else experienced this trend or am I alone?

At the moment it appears that the spread of Avian Flu from the Matthews' processing factory has not spread.

Having personally visited the Csongrad area in Hungary (from where the outbreak was traced) many times, I can but express little surprise that standards of safe animal husbandry are under question. With Romania joining the EEC, and from what I have seen of the country on my last trips, I can confidently predict that the latest outbreak will unfortunately not be the last.

Roger Milton

Field Meetings April to June 2007

Saturday April 28th Barnsley Warren/Clattinger Farm

SORRY THIS TRIP HAS BEEN CANCELLED DUE TO A NUMBER OF REASONS BUT HOPEFULLY MAY BE REARRANGED FOR A FUTURE YEAR.

Wednesday May 9th Wenallt
Start 6.00pm

Our first public walk this year will be through the woodlands of the Wenallt. The woodland lies on the southern rim of the South Wales coalfield basin and the walk will descend along the eastern margin of the woods, follow the scarp then back up through the lower wood. Meet at the summit car park just north of the radio masts (NOT the lower carpark and picnic site) on the Wenallt road (ST 153837)

Saturday May 19th Gower– butterflies.
Start 10.30am Packed lunch

We are revisiting the site we tried two years ago hoping for much better weather on this occasion! Richard Smith will be our guide again and we will hope to see Marsh fritillary at Welsh Moor along with narrow bordered bee hawk moth and bog bush cricket, plus also Green hairstreak at nearby Pengwern Common. Welsh Moor consists of a wide range of typical rhos pasture flora which is impressive even in bad

other hand it was the wettest year since 2001, but still drier than the average for the past 14 years.

January was relatively mild and fine. There was a frost on six occasions and in the fourth week overnight temperatures ranged between 2.0°C and -2.5°C

February was a little cooler, especially at the start with temperatures between just 3.5°C and 1.0°C until 4th of the month. The first snowfall of the year occurred on the 28th.

There was further snow on March 3rd and the 11th but the main feature of the month was the rain which fell nearly every day in the first 14 days and several days thereafter, amounting to 6.26" in total.

The first two weeks of April were also rather cool with three frosty mornings, overnight temperatures dropped to zero on the 4th and 9th but the 14th was the warmest day of the year so far with a minimum of 16.5°C. For the remainder of the month there were a good number of fine days and a top temperature of 20.0°C on the 21st.

May was the second wettest month and had a second highest number of rain days, it was also the wettest May so far in my records. Persistent rain on the 17th and heavy showers on the 18th resulted in a total rainfall exceeding 1.0" on both days, nevertheless, there were 12 fine days and temperatures were generally comfortable.

June was the second warmest month with temperatures over 20.0°C on 26 days and the top temperature of 28.5° on the 10th, the exceptions to the general trend were the 21st with the maximum temperature of 18.0°C and the wind reaching to near gale force at times, and the 26th with the temperature of 15° and rain all day.

July was a month to remember, very warm from the start with temperatures rising to 31.0°C on the 3rd and 4th. Slightly cooler conditions prevailed until the 12th but we then experienced an almost unbroken string of glorious days with steadily rising temperatures, the average maximum for the seven days up to the 19th July was 28.0° with 34°C being breached on the 19th, on that day at Gatwick the maximum was 36.3°C the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK, and in Wales the highest reported temperature was 34.2°C at Penhow. For the remainder of the month the average maximum temperature was 26.0°C but the last day was very wet with over three-quarters of an inch of rain.

The cooling down process continued throughout August with top temperatures mainly in the low 20s and some rain on 13 days.

conditions. We will be walking from here along tarmac then forest roads. Please remember insect repellent!

Saturday June 30th
Start time 10.30am

Dinas Reserve
Packed lunch.

A trip to this mid Wales reserve to discover the beauty of Welsh woodlands with resident red kites, ravens and peregrines and summer-visiting pied flycatchers, redstarts, wood warblers and tree pipits.

A boardwalk trail goes through the oak wood and continues to the fast flowing river where dipper and grey wagtail may also to be seen. Some parts of the nature trail are rugged and steep. Meet at the visitors' carpark. RSPB members park free and a donation of £1 is requested from non –members. The reserve is located 10 miles north of Llandovery on the minor road to Llyn Brianne. (SN 788471)

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

It is always 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.

Patricia Wood 20, Dryden Road, Penarth, CF64 2RT
- telephone 029 20701754.

Please note work number and Email address no longer current.

Copy for the June Newsletter
By 15th May please
Ed.

Most of the party then drove to Longwood Drive for a stroll around Forest Farm, along the canal up to the hides and back alongside the River Taff. As it was nearly noon, some of us made inroads into our packed lunches while waiting for the stragglers to assemble. A Great Spotted Woodpecker hammering away high in the beech wood was difficult to pick out but 2 Treecreepers performed well in the canal-side trees, appearing to hop effortlessly along the underside of branches probing for invertebrates.

There were the usual Robins, Dunnocks, Tits, Nuthatches and Chaffinches visiting the various feeding stations – perhaps fewer than in previous years, reflecting the mild conditions. One Blue Tit caught my eye because it had a greatly extended bill (maybe just the upper mandible) so that it appeared to be carrying a fine twig. Jane, a regular visitor here, had seen it before and nick-named it Pinocchio.



We squeezed into the hides to enjoy our refreshments and bird highlights such as Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Bullfinch and Reed Bunting. Disappointingly, of Snipe and Water Rail there was no sign. However, we were fascinated to watch a Rabbit making repeated visits to gather mouthfuls of dried grass as bedding. We presumed she was lining her burrow nest prior to giving birth.

From the Radyr footbridge we had excellent views of a Dipper, motionless on the river-bank apart from its winking nictitating membrane. Later there were 2 chasing up and down by Radyr Weir. However, there was considerable disturbance along this stretch of the Taff from anglers and, especially, a party of canoeists who were practising their manoeuvres. By 3 o'clock we returned to our cars satisfied with the variety of wildlife we'd seen and a bird list comprising nearly 50 species.

Linda Nottage

CARDIFF BIRDWATCH 28th January 2007

Over 40 members of CNS and the local Wildlife Trust assembled at 9am in Wild Gardens Road for our annual joint birdwatch. Although cloudy, it was pleasing to enjoy fairly mild, dry conditions and light winds after the storms and frosts earlier in the month. With such a large group it was inevitable that we would become well strung out as, led by Rob, we made a clockwise circuit of Roath Park Lake, but birds were easy to see and so there was little need for telescopes.

At least 4 Dabchicks dived repeatedly near the islands while their larger cousins the Great Crested Grebes indulged in some courtship display. One pair brought beakfuls of weed from their dives in an unsuccessful attempt at early nest-building beneath an overhanging willow. The only Heron spotted was standing hunched and miserable beside the out-flow stream, but 19 Cormorants flaunted themselves in the guano-splattered trees of their usual island roost.

Apart from a family of 5 juveniles, the scores of Mute Swans appeared to be adults. Two Black Swans showed off their ruffled black plumage, for which Graham's expression "frilly knickers" seemed particularly apt. They were part of a now depleted collection of pinioned wildfowl of which only single Red-breasted and Barnacle Geese, Common and Ruddy Shelducks, a Muscovy and 2 Rosybills seem to remain. We all had good views of Pochard and Tufted Ducks as well as the usual waterfowl and abundant gulls, but passerines were more elusive.

Most of us saw tits, Goldcrest and Goldfinch in the Wild Gardens, but only Sue was lucky enough to spot a Blackcap. Underfoot, Winter Heliotrope was in flower as expected but the shiny yellow stars of Lesser Celandine were a welcome sign of early spring. Camellias blooming at the southern end of the lake added a splash of colour while Daphne and Lonicera shrubs supplied delightful fragrance nearby.

Trip to Kidwelly Key – November 29th 2006.

A total of 14 of us assembled on Cardiff railway station for our trip to Kidwelly Key.

We travelled first to Swansea then onto our connecting train – all one carriage of it! – to Kidwelly – our party swelling the numbers of passengers considerably much to the surprise of the guard working that day. I'm sure it was much like the early days of the society when train carriages were booked for members only!

On our arrival at Kidwelly we were met by another 6 members who had gone by car. We walked from the station to the Key itself finding a number of expected hedgerow birds including a wintering flock of redwing and fieldfare. Over-wintering birds such as chiffchaff had been seen in the past but not on our visit.

Once at the Key we were greeted by an excellent display of birds as the tide was in and pushing the birds high up into the estuary for feeding and closer to us for viewing. Birds seen included great crested grebe, cormorant, grey heron, shelduck, teal, pintail, oystercatcher, lapwing in good numbers, dunlin, curlew, redshank and greenshank. A party of red breasted merganser were out on the water and we had distant views of golden plover.

When we felt we had exhausted the Key itself and had our 'al fresco' lunch, we took a walk along the canal which runs close to the estuary. I believe everyone had good views of kingfisher here. We then continued along a footpath and to a bridge over the railway seeing mute swan, coot, moorhen and gadwall along the way.

Sea radish and red campion were in flower, and one shaggy inkcap and horse mushroom were present in the grassland by the canal.

We returned to the Key along the same route to find a distinct lack of birds at the site now the tide had turned and exposed vast expanses of estuarine mud. As the light was starting to worsen and we had probably seen all we were going to see we decided to take the earlier train back to Cardiff – the system being to hail the train to ensure that it would stop at Kidwelly!

Continued on page 8

Our only slight disappointment with the trip was the distinct lack of any birds of prey during the day, apart from a short view of a sparrowhawk seen by a few.

Many thanks go to Jeff Curtis for his suggestion of and guidance on the trip and to Rob and Linda for providing a species list.

Patricia Wood.

Gower Geology – Saturday February 10th 2007.

We had a very disappointing turnout for our trip to Rhossili led by Steve Howe – luckily our party was doubled by Japanese! The bad weather, including snow, the previous day had stopped most people joining up for the trip which was a real shame as the day was extremely enjoyable and none too cold – though after lunch the weather did deteriorate to heavy rain.

We started along the left of the churchyard in Rhossili and up onto the path where we had a view of Rhossili Bay. There are a number of springs here as the water draining of the hill above could flow through the cracks in the Old Red Sandstone but not through the Lower Limestone Shales below so the water was forced to the surface along the hillside as springs.



Rhossili village on top of the hill

Looking out to Rhossili Bay itself, Steve explained how, during the last ice age, the sea level was much lower than it is now as the water was locked as ice. Once the village of Rhossili was much lower on the beach but the inhabitants relocated the

village to its higher cliff top position due to drifting sands.

We then walked up to the cairn on Rhossili down, 193m above sea level, which is the highest point on Gower. Crags of Old Red Sandstone conglomerate containing pebbles of quartz cemented in a matrix of

sandstone occur close to the triangulation pillar. From here we could see the high ground mostly open common land and lower enclosed farmland. The Old Red Sandstone is very resistant to erosion and so forms the highest ground. This is bounded by Carbonaceous Limestone which flanks the folds of sandstone. The overlying Millstone Grit is most easily eroded and forms the bays around the Gower. Folding of the landscape which occurred at the end of the Carboniferous period about 300 million years ago squeezed the rocks in South Wales and pushed them upwards forming mountain chains.

We then walked down along the east flank of Rhossili Down and into Middleton. We went through the village and along a footpath to the edge of Mewslade valley and a small disused quarry. Mewslade is a narrow steep sided valley which ends abruptly inland. There is no river flowing along it; instead water drains underground through caves in the limestone which forms the rocks in the valley. Such ‘dry’ valleys are known locally as ‘slades’. The valley was probably formed during the last glaciation when the edge of an ice sheet lay just to the north. Frozen ground would have prevented water entering the caves so it would have flowed over the surface and cut through the limestone due to the debris it was carrying.

We then went down to the mouth of Mewslade to have our lunch watching large waves crashing onto the rocks on occasions in spectacular fashion. Here Steve also showed us the fault line of the Mewslade valley marked by thick veins of calcite and broken rock.

After lunch we climbed to the cliff top and followed the coast line round to opposite Worms Head. Here we had good views of crough feeding along the grassy cliff top and also of a diving shag in the sea close to shore.

We dipped down onto the rocky beach at one point to where there was a layer of cemented material with pebbles and shells of coiled snails and limpets (*Patella sp*). The sea is now eroding this cemented area, which is a raised beach, formed during the last interglacial period about 120,000 years ago. Here there were good numbers of oystercatchers along the rocky shore.

Opposite Worms Head we looked at the numerous foldings of the rocks before turning inland and walking back to the carpark at Rhossili and a welcome cup of tea/coffee at one of the cafes.

Many thanks go to Steve for leading this trip.

Patricia Wood.