

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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Cover photo Leigh Woods

Presidential Ramblings - December 2007

The past few months have seen a substantial amount of publicity concerning our fields of interest. Most recently has been the sad news that the culling of badgers is about to resume; whilst we all appreciate that the protection and health of our bovine population is of great importance, I have yet to be convinced that the wholesale deaths of potentially thousands of one of our most loved mammals will yield lasting benefits. The link between badgers and TB in cattle (and deer etc.) has not been proven and I fear that this action may turn out to be another ill judged shot in the dark. The recently concluded 10 year scientific study (Independent Scientific Group - Bourne Report) recommendation saw no meaningful purpose to badger culling, but as some political commentators would say, this was the wrong answer and a further "summarisation" of all available information was commissioned (King Report). This study concluded that widespread culling (largely in the South) was beneficial to the needs of agriculture and a fierce debate currently rages. It seems to me that a firm, but truly independent consensus needs to be achieved in an attempt to resolve once and for all the real causes and practical solutions to the spread and control of this dreadful disease. To permit the mass destruction of such an iconic mammal based on such conflicting data would be an act of woeful folly.

Recent reports of the deliberate shooting of one of our rarest birds, a pair of hen harriers on the Sandringham Estate are disheartening. Reportedly Prince Harry and his shooting companion who were in the immediate vicinity at the time have apparently been interviewed by the police in connection with this incident. No doubt "lack of evidence" will ultimately result in a

failure to prosecute those responsible. Those of us with interest in conservation will undoubtedly recall the wholesale slaughter of wildlife which has taken place worldwide over the years by various members of the Royal Family and political masters. Highlights of past visits to India and Africa for example by Prince Phillip and entourage. resulted, inter alia, in the massacre of scores of our most treasured larger carnivores. It is time that the global laws on shooting for pleasure / entertainment are tightened up and those rules enforced without exception.

The fashion for designer pets in America has reportedly reached new heights with the creation of the Toyger. This peculiar little beast, which resembles in appearance a small tiger is the result of a 15 year breeding programme. The animal additionally displays dog like characteristics. Offspring have been imported into Britain and are currently for sale. Also from America, for the really discerning pet owner, a specially bred hairless (or almost) mustelid. I am refraining from purchasing one of these fine creatures, preferring to wait until later in the year when a miniature long haired hippo becomes available as a pal for our pet collie dog, faithful Freddie. It is a pity that all of the undoubted effort and resources put into such stupid enterprises is not directed towards the preservation of some of our own endangered species.

I have just seen reports emanating from America of the development of a "new" breed of super mouse with the ability for massive feats of endurance. Perhaps in due course the genetic information can after all be of some use to the human race.

Recently I have noticed the return to our garden of a number of birds which deserted us in the early part of this

year, resulting in the exceptionally rapid consumption of seeds and nuts which I regularly offer. Nothing particularly unusual has shown up yet, but it is good to see them once again. Reading reports from the newspapers, it appears that a large number of finches have already been seen in Britain this year. According to the reports, they have flown south because of unusually severe weather conditions in the northern latitudes, this it is suggested, is normally an indication of a very cold winter to come. I feel inclined to place more confidence in this forecast than the abundance of berries which are also supposed to be an indicator of low temperatures to come. I have long been sceptical of the ability of a fruiting body to foretell the future.

Roger Milton

INDOOR MEETINGS SPRING 2008

First, there is a change to note to the list of talks published in our programme card. The talk on Monday 11th February 2008 will now be given by Dr Anne Bryan on the National Parks of England and Wales and that by Dr Elizabeth Chadwick on the Cardiff University Otter Project will be on Thursday 20th March. The full revised programme is now as follows.

The new year will begin for us on Monday 7th January with Dr Robert Thomas of the Biosciences Department at Cardiff University on 'Birds and Climate Change'.

On Tuesday 22nd January we have our annual members' evening. This can always be relied on to produce a varied and interesting selection for our information and entertainment.

The first change as mentioned above is on Monday 11th February when we will now have the talk on 'The National Parks of England and Wales'. Dr Anne Bryan is a longstanding member of the Council for National Parks and regularly presents talks on their work.

Dr Bruce Campbell is Museum Officer at Newport Museum and Art Gallery. He has worked in museums for over 30 years. His interest is mainly in the natural sciences and his talk on 'Wildlife in the Home' on Wednesday 22nd February will be a fascinating insight into what we may sharing our lives with unawares!

Joan Andrews, a former President of CNS, is taking us on a visit to 'Kazakhstan, the land where apples come from'. Monday 10th of March is the date for this.

On Thursday 20th March the talk on 'The Cardiff University Otter Project' moves from its previously listed date. Dr Elizabeth Chadwick has studied amphibian ecology and the impacts of climate change. She has managed this otter project for the last four years. Her talk will bring our 2008 Spring Season to an end

Indoor meetings will resume in September 2008. Suggestions for subjects and speakers will be welcome.

Margaret Leishman, Indoor Meetings Secretary

WANTED



**ONE VICE-PRESIDENT
TO SERVE ON THE CNS COUNCIL**

Salary: Zero!

Rewards: Job Satisfaction & Kudos

Are you or anybody you know willing to become Vice-president on the CNS Council? The duties are minimal, standing in for the President when necessary e.g. to chair Council Meetings or to introduce the Speaker at Indoor Meetings. Progression to President is the normal course of events.

Field Meetings January to March 2008

Sunday January 20th Cardiff Birdwatch
Start time 9am Packed lunch

This regular event starts with a stroll around Roath Park and then moves on to other sites in the Cardiff area. Meet at Wild Gardens Road on the north end of Roath park.

Saturday March 22nd Sully Island
Start time 10am Packed lunch

A geology outing led by Tom Sharpe which will involve crossing to Sully Island and looking at the rock strata there as well as exploring the Sully foreshore with its dinosaur footprints. This is a full day but members wishing to shorten the day will be able to return to their cars early. Meet in the car park at Sully Sports and Leisure Club. This is on the Sully to Penarth road, the B 4267, at Grid ref: ST 162/678. From Penarth it is on the left just as you reach Sully; from Barry, go through Sully and it is on the right at the far end of the village.

Saturday March 29th Southgate, Gower
Start time 10.30am Packed lunch

This quiet but accessible village on Gower is the start point for a walk along the coast where we hope to see birds and wildflowers. This should be an opportunity to see Yellow Whitlow Grass growing on the cliffs. This pretty Alpine is found only here in the whole of the UK and it is the County Flower of Glamorgan. The walk takes us via Gravesend to the secluded Pwll Du beach and back via the Bishopston Valley; 5/6 miles of walking but individuals can shorten it by walking back along the cliff-top path or road. Meet at the National Trust car park (Grid ref: SS 554/874) at Southgate (NT members free so bring your cards, otherwise charges apply). Southgate is South West of Bishopston – take the B 4436 at Black Pill just before Mumbles and keep going through Kittle and Pennard to Southgate. Go through the village – car park at far end on cliff top. Southgate has a good cafe and there are public toilets.

DIARY DATE:

EXTRA EVENT on Sunday, April 6th is a joint trip with the RSPB to the London Wetlands Centre, price £14. [Full details in the March newsletter.](#)

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety Code. If you have a lift with another driver, contributions towards drivers' petrol are appreciated.

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Appeal for help from your new Publicity Officer

I have recently agreed to take on the role of publicity officer for the Society and would appreciate your help in some things that I hope to do.

In the past we have relied on our leaflets and posters as our main method of advertising, with occasional free adverts in Council publications and what's on listings in the Newspapers. We saw that the world has moved on from where such methods are the primary means of getting information and as you know Phill Blanning and then Bruce McDonald put together for us a society website (www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk).

At a recent council meeting a number of ideas were discussed and there are many ways that you can help us. Here are a few where some immediate feedback would be appreciated.

There are many local newsletters and newspapers for regions of the city and surrounding areas, and it may well be appropriate for us to send a short note regarding any trips we have in such areas or indoor meetings where relevant. Whilst Ideas are in the early stages any copies or contact details for your local free newspapers & newsletters would be appreciated.

There are also many on-line what's on systems and we shall be utilising these as much as we can, so I have agreed with Bruce to give it a revamp and look at getting some more content onto the site. I would very much appreciate links to sites that people think should reference our site and would also like to get some Welsh language content onto our site and would appreciate a volunteer who would be able to translate a few pages of text for me.

Other societies that some of us are members of use electronic distribution of newsletters to keep costs down. If you would consider such a suitable alternative please let me know on the email address given and we will consider this at a future council meeting (please note there is no intention to remove the paper copy for those who prefer such)

Also it would be possible to send email reminders before meetings or updates to a distribution list. Once again if you are interested please let me know at the email address given.

Finally we will still generate posters and leaflets and when we have them your assistance in distributing them would be appreciated.

If you have any other ideas or can offer help with the items listed above please contact me on the details below

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Leigh Woods September 15th

So what did Humphry Repton have in common with the Luftwaffe? Which tree is prone to changing sex and what was the connection between Chequers, the name of several pubs, and an indicator species of Ancient Woodland? These, and many other secrets, were to be revealed by Tony Titchen, dendrologist and raconteur, on our field trip to Leigh Woods near Bristol.



On a sunny September day a small group of us assembled on Humphry Repton Avenue, named after the late 18th century landscape gardener responsible for laying out the grounds around the country house, Leigh Court. It is also called Coronation Avenue after the 1953 coronation although the tree planting started in 1951 – so, how did the prescient foresters anticipate the demise of George VI? In truth the

1951 planting was to commemorate the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 but was then changed two years later to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

The avenue consists of magnificent rows of Purple Beech, *Fagus sylvatica atropurpurea* – Tony was at pains to stress its correct common name, rather than Copper Beech. Then, setting off into the adjacent woodland we noted the many Hornbeams, *Carpinus betulus*, native to Bristol whereas Beech is not. The word ‘horn’ denotes hardness and it was used where toughness was a requirement, such as for axles on carts. Whilst the seeds of the Hornbeam are distinctive and the trunk has a sinewy appearance, the leaves are not dissimilar to several other woodland species. A useful diagnostic is to look at the reverse of the leaf where the veins are particularly prominent.

We observed the two common species of Oak, the English Oak, *Quercus robur*, with stalked acorns and short-stalked leaves, and the Sessile Oak, *Quercus petraea*, the exact opposite. Tony stressed that the Sessile Oak was choice of foresters because it has a more upright habit in contrast to the English Oak’s tendency to spread. Silver Birch, *Betula pendula*, was common, popularly known as the Lady of the Woods, with characteristic diamond shapes on the bark, particularly towards the base but we also saw Downy Birch, *Betula pubescens* with the foliage veins and shoots covered in short, soft, shiny white hairs and double serrations on the leaves. Tony also pointed out the differences between the two subspecies of Scots Pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, with the Scottish variant having a rounded cloud-shaped top and the European version being flat-topped



Whilst Leigh Woods has patches of ancient woodland, the bulk of the trees have been planted in the last 200 years and useful information on the woods has been provided by the Luftwaffe who took extensive aerial reconnaissance photos before World War II. Frequent depressions in the ground turned out to be saw-pits, the

man holding the top of the saw being known as the 'top dog' and the man in the base of the pit the 'underdog'.

There were several examples of Small-leaved Lime, *Tilia cordata*, often referred to as Pry in the past. The leaves are heart-shaped with small tufts of hairs on the axils. It is an indicator species of ancient woodland and is dominant on limestone. Whilst the seed does not currently set in the UK, some speculate that with global warming it might start to do so again. It was a useful tree, regularly coppiced and the bass fibre used to make ropes including those that towed the sarsens to Stonehenge. We also noted the Large-leaved Lime, *Tilia platyphyllos*, sometimes known as the Linden with hairs on its shoots.

As we progressed through the woods we found Sweet or Spanish Chestnut, *Castanea sativa*, introduced by the Romans and then a small glade revealed the Wild Service Tree,



Sorbus torminalis, with its maple-like leaves. The berries from the tree used to be known as 'chequers' and they were blanched and then sold in local markets and made into ale. Many pubs called the Chequers are named after this. The Bristol area is renowned for its unusual and rare Whitebeams and a short detour revealed the Bastard Service Tree, *Sorbus X thuringiaca*, a hybrid between the Mountain Ash and Whitebeam and close by, the locally discovered *Sorbus bristoliensis* next to a Common Whitebeam, *Sorbus aria*, making comparison between the three much easier. Then we looked at varieties of galls on oaks, noting that the Knopper Gall only occurs on *Quercus robur* or its hybrids – a handy identification hint.

Lunch was taken in a glade enlivened by sightings of the Speckled Wood butterfly, *Pararge aegeria tircis* and a Hawker dragonfly and we then headed down to Paradise Bottom, the wilder section of the woods with fine views. A question was asked about Ash trees, *Fraxinus*

excelsior,

that do not appear to have seeds or 'keys' and Tony pointed out that in Britain the Ash is typically hermaphroditic and even prone to changing sex during its lifetime. In North America and Asia it is dioecious. We were told that the buds of Rowan or Mountain Ash are usually grey in Europe and red in Asia although in North America they can be either. A specimen of the Grey-budded Snake-bark Maple, *Acer rufinerve* was found, characterised by brown-red hairs on the back of the leaf and then a striking Wellingtonia, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, also known as the Giant Sequoia or Sierra Redwood. This is a fire climax tree, needing forest fires to activate germination.



As we headed deeper into the woods Mary Gillham pointed out the Fern Gall, *Chirosia betuleti*, whilst Tony drew our attentions to Southern Beech, *Nothofagus raulii*, and Noble Fir, *Abies procera* or *nobilis*. Finally we paused by a Lucombe Oak, *Quercus X hispanica*, a hybrid between the Turkey Oak and Cork Oak. This specimen was actually a form known as the Fulham Oak, probably grown by the local Garroways nursery in the 1840s.

With our notebooks and brains now full our thanks went to Tony for the vast amount of information he had shared with us and we look forward to another session with him in 2008, probably in the Forest of Dean.



Bruce McDonald

2 Days in June (when it wasn't raining!)

The weather forecast was poor for South Wales during the first weekend in June 2007, but promised better further east. So after consulting the English Nature Website, Metcheck and a map, Linda and I set off to Pewsey Downs in Wiltshire where I vaguely remembered a CNS field trip some years ago. Milk Hill and Knap Hill are unimproved limestone hills with panoramic views across the Wiltshire countryside and a wonderful flora.

On my previous visit I'd remembered seeing just two spikes of Burnt Tip Orchid but this time there must have been over a hundred. An Orchid I didn't remember seeing there was Lesser Butterfly, and although not as numerous as the Burnt Tip, this time we saw plenty.



Burnt Tip Orchid



Lesser Butterfly Orchid

Two other Orchids in flower, although not so numerous were Fragrant and Common Spotted, but we didn't find Frog Orchid which is here, maybe because it was many years since I'd seen

it and didn't have my eye in! We did however find another speciality of the site and in plentiful numbers. This was Early Gentian, a specialist of limestone, differing mainly from Autumn Gentian in its flowering time, May/June as opposed to July-September



Early Gentian

What we didn't expect to see however were Marsh Fritillary Butterflies. These were numerous and very active. We did eventually manage a few photographs, the best being when one



took a fancy to Linda's camera and settled there for several minutes, but it was not until we were back home and got the books out that we realised what it was! It turned out however that it's larval food plant, Devil's Bit Scabious was the attraction.

Marsh Fritillary

Two weeks after this visit we joined the South and West Wales

Wildlife Trust field trip to Parsonage Down and Morgan's Hill, also in Wiltshire. At Morgan's Hill the Fragrant Orchids were putting on a wonderful show with a few pure white specimens amongst them. Lesser Butterfly Orchids were just finishing and we managed to find just two 'late' flowering Fly Orchids.



Morgan's Hill



White Fragrant Orchid



Fly Orchid

Not so many butterflies were evidenced but we did record the first Marbled White of the season for our local guide, plus a whole mass of glistening black Peacock caterpillars on their nettle food plant. After lunch at the canal basin in Devizes we moved on to Parsonage Down, a working farm owned by



Tractor transport

English Nature. After disembarking from the coach we were loaded onto a tractor trailer, to sit on bales of hay and towed to the top of the farm.

Here there was masses of Dropwort, plus the elusive Frog Orchid, (got my eye in now!), and hundreds of Fragrant Orchids. The only thing distracting one from the flowers were the wonderful views of the surrounding Wiltshire countryside.



Frog Orchid



Dropwort



Fragrant Orchid

During our return journey to the farm the tractor took us through 'The Stoke Herd of Pedigree Longhorn Cattle'. What

wonderful animals, with huge horns that in some individuals threatened to begin growing into their noses, a potential problem that occasionally has to be attended to by trimming.



Pedigree Longhorns, Parsonage Down

We arrived back into the farmyard ready for a cream tea and a refreshing cuppa. However this was not to be as the coach was ready for off and this was a working farm.

The Wiltshire Downs in the summer are well worth the trip for orchids, butterflies and rolling countryside. Hopefully the Nat's may put this on the list for a future field trip. If not Wiltshire is an easy drive away and the excellent English Nature website has information and directions for all its reserves.

Phill Blanning and Linda Morris

Field Trip to Cardiff bay and Hamadryad Park October 13th

Despite the murk and the drizzle, 11 enthusiasts turned up in Cardiff Bay for a short exploration of the Nature Reserve and Hamadryad Park. It was Sunday, October 13th and the event was led by Vaughan Grantham of Cardiff City Council's biodiversity team and ecologist Zoe Banks.



As we stood by the Curlew sculptures, good numbers of Goldfinch flashed back and forth over the lagoons and we saw our first Kingfisher of the day. Vaughan believes that this is now the best place to see Kingfishers in Cardiff with 8 juveniles being caught in a recent mist-netting exercise. It is

assumed that these were dispersing from original nest sites on the Taff and Ely rivers. The mist-nets had also trapped Cettis Warblers, a Wryneck and no less than 135 Reed Warblers.

We then headed out on to the boardwalk and in addition to the legion of Gulls, Coot, Mallard and Cormorants we counted 13 Great Crested Grebe and 23 Tufted Ducks. Teal were also in evidence and a Kestrel posed conveniently on a metal signboard. Vaughan reported that Moorhen were now present as the vegetation had built up around the margins. The area was also proving to be good for flora. Dittander was hanging on as a saltmarsh relic along with Sea Arrow Grass and Sea Clubrush. We saw some healthy clumps of the scarce Marestalk, *Hippuris vulgaris*, frequently confused with members of the Horsetail family.

Hamadryad Park, in contrast, was guarding its secrets jealously. The small lagoon where Little Grebe are regularly seen was devoid of birdlife and most of the movement on the River Taff came from an armada of oarsmen. However, we found Goats Rue still in flower

along with Toadflax, Bristly Oxtongue and Chicory. Pausing to study the retained façade of the old Hamadryad Hospital that gives the park its name we compared it with a photograph of the original HMS Hamadryad, a frigate that was used as a hospital ship for the many seamen that passed through Cardiff docks.



As we headed back, the improvement in the weather was marked by sightings of Red Admiral and a Migrant Hawker dragonfly. Vaughan and Zoe had given us a great insight into developments in the Bay, the variety of wildlife that has already appeared and some tantalising glimpses of what could be expected in the future.

Bruce McDonald

Henry Moore and the Ladybirds



So how come the Ladybirds were so fascinated with the sculptor Henry Moore? It was October 29th and the venue was Kew Gardens, London. At a time of year when most self-respecting insects would be keeping a low profile Ladybirds were everywhere, not least on the Henry Moore sculptures that formed part of the special exhibition of his work.

One in particular, shown in the photo, was covered with the beetles. This was called Large Two Forms and the reason for the particular interest was that on this sunny day the bronze had warmed up noticeably and the ladybirds could presumably detect the heat it was radiating. But which species? Clearly not our familiar 7-spot Ladybird. A quick glance at the



two photos might suggest different species but they are in fact different forms of the Harlequin Ladybird, *Harmonia axyridis*, Britain's newest ladybird and living up to its reputation as the most invasive ladybird on earth. The variant with all the spots is Succinea and the one with the two 'eyes' is Conspicua. In America it is called the Halloween ladybug because of its tendency to gather in houses at this time of year so it was no co-incidence that this was two days before

Halloween. Whilst they may be bad news for aphids they are also not good for our native species of ladybird which they will out-compete. They will bite humans if hungry and can taint grapes growing in vineyards. Whilst heavily concentrated in London, the Home Counties and East Anglia their spread has been dramatic so expect to see them in South Wales soon!



Bruce McDonald

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Ed.