

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1867

NEWSLETTER NO.77
MARCH 2008

Charity No 1092496
www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

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PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS - MARCH 2008

Once again the hunting with dogs debate has flared up and both sides are accusing one another of bias and lack of objectivity. It is interesting to note that to date there have only been two reported successful prosecutions under the Act since it was introduced. We await the outcome of this debate with interest.

Reading an abstract from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences from a recently published European project, scientists in Rome have finally cracked the secret of how birds (starlings in this case) flock together. It appears that the interaction is dependent upon the actions of seven other birds within the flock. Keeping track of this precise number of in-flight near neighbours enables some of the most magnificent displays with which we are all familiar, to take place in the evening skies. This finding is wholeheartedly supported by Italy's National Institute for the Physics of Matter!

Another interesting revelation from America is that recent studies of the male Anna's hummingbird indicate that the chorus of noise (cheeps and whistles) produced to entice females is in fact produced, not vocally by their mouth but by their tail. High speed video analysis has proved conclusively that the loud high frequency noise is the result of the flailing of tail feathers. Apparently this method of sound production is likely to apply to many more varieties of humming bird.

Good news from the Arctic for the polar bears. Recent reports of the disappearance of Arctic Ice have been greatly exaggerated according to the latest survey by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration which revealed that the present area of 13M sq. km. of Arctic ice is actually greater than at any recent time and well above its long term mean.

The recent storms and cold weather could have a devastating and quite unpredicted effect upon St Kilda, home of many nesting sea bird colonies. The exceptional storms have washed up on its shores a trawler (the Spinning Dale) which according to recent reports, is infested by rats.

The National Trust of Scotland has launched "emergency rat procedures" to thwart an infestation. Hopefully they will be in time. Quizzically one might ask what sane and sensible sea dog would put to sea in a small tin ship which was known to be infested with rats; even my elderly granny has experienced the benefits of Warfarin although admittedly not in the same context.

One recent announcement in the scientific press relates to a recently discovered technique of isotopic analysis which enables users to identify (by the use of hair analysis) reasonably precise areas of geographic visitation. Particularly useful in solving crimes but also in identifying previously unknown migration routes and the passages of birds and animals.

On a personal note, I am sorry to have missed a number of recent events because of family illness etc. but hope to be fully back in the saddle shortly; my sincere thanks to those members of Council who have stood in for me.

Roger Milton

EDITORIAL

Cardiff Naturalists' Society is in discussion with the National Library of Wales with a view to having our journals published on their website, Welsh Journals ON-Line. As the copyright of all articles published in our newsletter is held by the authors, it is necessary for the society to obtain their permission.

If any author does not wish their previously published articles to be used, please let the society know and it will be deleted before publishing on the web.

Andy has set out the formal position on page 15.

On a lighter note our congratulations to Dr Mary Gillham on receiving her MBE.

COPY FOR THE JUNE NEWSLETTER
BY 15TH MAY PLEASE Ed

Field Meetings March to June 2008

Saturday March 22nd
Start time 10am

Sully Island
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 earlier. The causeway can be wet and slippery so wear suitable footwear and consider bringing a stick or walking pole for support. 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
Start time 10.30am

Southgate, Gower
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.

EXTRA EVENT on Sunday, April 6th is a joint trip with the RSPB to the London Wetlands Centre, coach price is £14

Sunday April 6th

London Wetlands Centre

Start time 8am

Packed lunch

A return visit to the London Wetlands Centre in conjunction with the RSPB. To reserve a place on the trip, please complete the enclosed form.

Sunday April 20th

Craig-y-Nos

Start time 10.30am

Packed lunch

Craig-y-Nos country park is around 40 acres of what was previously the grounds of Craig-y-Nos castle. We shall be touring the park in the company of warden Ageliki Politis and then going for a 4/5 mile walk after lunch. There should be interesting items of fauna, flora and geology. Meet in the car park of Craig-y-Nos country park, SN 841/158 (car park charges apply, currently £2.50). There are toilets here but no café facilities.

Wednesday April 30th

Roath Park

Start time 8pm

A joint event with the Cardiff Bat Group using bat detectors to identify the bats that frequent Roath Park. This will be a good opportunity for beginners to get to grips with the local bats and for the more experienced to brush up on their bat detection skills. Bring a torch. Meet at Wild Gardens road at the north end of Roath Park.

Saturday May 3rd

Merthyr Tydfil

Start time 10.30am

Packed lunch

A return visit to the Taff Fechan nature reserve where we hope to be joined by members of Merthyr Tydfil Naturalists Society. This 4 mile walk takes us along both banks of the Taff often frequented by Dippers and where we should see Meadow Saxifrage and Water Avens. Park at the upper car park by the entrance to Cyfarthfa Castle, SO 041/073, which has toilets and café.

Wednesday May 7th

Wenallt

Start time 6pm

After being rained off in 2007 we are hoping that the weather will be kinder to us this year on this public walk. The walk takes us through the woodlands of the Wenallt. The woodlands lie 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 car park and picnic site) on the Wenallt road, (ST 153/837).

Saturday May 17th

Lavernock

Start time 10am

Jeff Curtis will be hosting this return visit to the Lavernock Nature Reserve, an SSSI, which we last visited in August, so this will be an opportunity to see a different range of insects, birds and flowers. The visit will take 2/3 hours. Meet at the reserve entrance off Fort Road at ST 182/682.

Saturday May 31st

Peterston-super-Ely

Start time 10am

Packed lunch

Note, Peterston-super-Ely NOT Pontyclun as printed on blue card

Rob and Linda will be leading this all-day 5-mile ramble along the Ely Valley where we hope to see rare plants such as Monkshood, a Sand Martin colony and a lake with breeding waterbirds and dragonflies. Meet at 10am in Peterston-super-Ely, ST 081/761, in the lay-by near the footbridge over the river, west of the Sportsman's Rest pub. The route is mainly level but with many stiles and could be wet underfoot.

ADVANCE NOTICE – the Coryton roundabout walk on Wednesday 11th June will start at 7pm – not 6pm as stated on the blue card. This is to avoid the traffic congestion problems around Coryton during the rush hour.

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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Telephone number 02920 593394 E-mail bruce7@btinternet.com

Field Trip to Bridgwater Bay on Sunday 18th November 2007

This was a joint field trip with the local RSPB Group and as we set off from Cardiff in torrential rain everyone on the coach was hoping that the weather would improve by the time we reached our destination. Unfortunately this was not the case and it was on with waterproofs to walk out to the hides overlooking Bridgwater Bay. By this time the weather had deteriorated even further and the wind was blowing a mixture of hail and rain straight into the hides making viewing almost impossible.

Stear Point is probably the best place in Somerset to see large concentrations of waders and from what we managed to see, that was evidently true. The tower hide which proved to be the best place to shelter from the weather is part of the Parrett Trail. After lunch everyone meandered back to the coach birding en route as by now the weather had slightly improved. Once back at the coach, the verdict miss and head straight back to Cardiff.

Even though the day had not been conducive to bird watching everyone seemed to agree that it was a challenge spotting birds in such bad conditions.



Species List

Little Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Shelduck, Mallard, Wigeon, Pintail, Kestrel, Pheasant, Moorhen, Lapwing, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Dunlin, Herring Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Meadow Pipit, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Redwing, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Starling, Magpie, Carrion Crow.

CARDIFF BIRDWATCH 20th January 2008



There was to be no respite from the wet weather which had prevailed since the start of the year, although the strong westerly wind was exceptionally mild. A

hardy group of 14 members of CNS and the local Wildlife Trust accompanied by 2 dogs set off at 9am from Wild Gardens Road for an anticlockwise circuit of Roath Park Lake on our annual joint birdwatch. The Nant Fawr stream was a brown torrent as it flowed into the Lake and gushed down the outflow at the southern end. Waterfowl were abundant as usual including plenty of Mallard, Tufted Duck and Pochard. The Mute Swan flock numbered well over 50 with a good proportion of juveniles and we spotted a single Black Swan. Ruth encouraged us to look closely at the Greylag Geese, two of which sported plastic rings – B6U and B6Z – which she told us had been put on them as goslings at Llanwern. At least 3 other Greylags only carried BTO metal rings on their left legs but we were not able to get close enough to read these numbers fully. Other geese on the Lake included several Canadas, 3 Barnacles and far too many white “domestic” types.

Surprisingly, there were only 3 Cormorants at their usual island roost and no Herons. Remarkably, Little Grebes numbered at least 25 in a loose aggregation near the southern end, with accompanying Black-headed gulls hanging around the diving birds, hoping to steal their catch. A few Great Crested Grebes, Moorhens and Coots also patrolled the water. Small birds were



scarce but included both Grey and Pied Wagtails. Our circuit of the Wild Gardens was enlivened by a flock of Long-tailed Tits and a Jay. A clump of Lesser Celandines brightened the day there and the sweet almond

scent of Winter Heliotrope also added cheer. In the Park there was perfume too from Christmas Box (*Sarcococca sp pictured*) pointed out by Bruce and the sight of abundant pink blooms on the Camellias.

Rain continued to fall so a depleted party decided to head for Forest Farm with the prospect of dry hides in which to enjoy our picnic lunch. From Longwood Drive we made for the Glamorgan Canal where a Dipper (spotted by Clive) posed by the swollen inflow cascade. When, later, we reached the swirling brown Taff flooding over Radyr Weir it was easy to understand why the Dipper had been forced to forgo its usual feeding site. There were the expected Mallards and Moorhens along the Canal. Robins, Tits and Nuthatches frequented the regular feeding stations. Jane told me that the Blue Tit we saw last January (and which she had nicknamed Pinocchio because of its extended beak) survived until June even though its bill continued to grow to half an inch or more. We turned up the path by the Melingriffith feeder canal where 4 bright Siskins were searching the ground for fallen seeds beneath the Alders. Later, near the second hide, we watched a flock of 20 or more of these delightful yellow finches. From the path we could see 5 ♂ 6 Herons hunched at the field's edge while a tiny Goldcrest silently scoured the hedge for morsels

of food.

Our group split between the two hides so there was a seat for everyone and chance to continue wildlife watching in relative comfort while enjoying our refreshments. Snipe seem to have deserted this roost and Water Rail failed to put in an appearance but a smart Little Grebe materialised briefly from the reeds, a pair of Mallard performed their full mating display and a Kingfisher delighted with his fishing exploits. Eventually the expected flock of finches dropped down to the usual feeding station by the Sand Martin wall, but they were very wary, frequently flying back to the safety of the trees and making it difficult to fix on the single Brambling among the 20 or so Chaffinches. Half a dozen Reed Buntings, a cock Bullfinch, Dunnocks and Blackbirds mixed with the feeding flock.

We caught up with the Chaffinches again on our way to the river and picked out the lone Brambling with them at the side of the track. There were no thrushes in the fields and few birds along the Taff Trail, now with a tarmac surface! The race of muddy water over the Weir and the mini Niagara over-spill from the feeder were impressive sights as we made our way back to our cars soon after 2pm. Considering the poor weather, our tally of over 40 species of birds was good and we were all happy to head off home to dry out.

Although birds had been the main focus of the day, we also managed to see a surprising number of fungi at both sites including the tiered brackets of Turkeytail, Hairy Curtain Crust and Smoky Bracket on stumps and logs as well as the larger Blushing and Lumpy Brackets and distinctive Jelly Ear. These recommended English names are less daunting than their scientific equivalents and will become familiar with regular usage. Among the toadstools, Velvet Shank and Sulphur Tuft provided a splash of colour as did the Scarlet Elf cups spotted by Bruce near the Canal.

“OUTDOOR CARDIFF” 5 FEBRUARY 2008

Today, on behalf of CNS, I attended two meetings about Cardiff's Countryside Strategy. The morning forum down at the Bay covered many aspects, presentations and workshops especially concerning the River Valley Action Plans and improving public access to green spaces. Newly launched is a South East Wales Rivers Trust promoting working partnerships to improve the water environment. Salmon are now swimming up the Taff as far as Merthyr Tydfil. On the Rhymney River, members of the Bute Angling Club are monitoring invertebrate life on a monthly basis by sampling for certain caddis and mayfly larvae and water shrimps. They would be glad to hear from anyone who would like to pull on their wellies and do the same for the Ely and Taff – training and net supplied!

Cardiff County Council is developing a website to cover all aspects of “Outdoor Cardiff”. The Ramblers Association has a website www.cardifframblers.org.uk from which details of a dozen or so walks around the city can be downloaded. There have been improvements/developments on all three river valley trails with inputs from various local groups. For example, the Ely trail has been extended north of Leckwith Bridge and sections of the Taff Trail have been tarmaced.

Tricia Cottnam has been appointed to develop coastal access for Cardiff following the Welsh Assembly initiative for a footpath around the whole coastline by 2012. There are many problems to be resolved but she has made an enthusiastic start. A new footbridge across the River Ely to Penarth is projected as part of the successful Sustrans bid for the People's £50 million Lottery fund. More immediately, it should soon be possible to walk from the Norwegian Church across the Barrage since access across the docks has been agreed.

Cardiff's Woodland Biodiversity Officer explained how the city's resources are being put to good use. Timber from a wind-blown cedar in Heath Park has been used for attractive durable signage around Cardiff. Woodland management includes leaving piles of logs as invertebrate habitat. Standing deadwood – good for Stag Beetles and other creatures – is being created at Forest Farm by ring-barking suitable trees. Surveys

have confirmed the presence of Dormice at Transh yr Hebog.

The evening meeting of the Cardiff Biodiversity Partnership at Forest Farm was a cosy affair around the large farmhouse kitchen table. Some of the morning's topics were discussed at greater length. Ecological Connectivity joins Biodiversity and Awareness Raising among the buzzwords but it was encouraging to hear how much effort and expertise is being expended in pursuit of a better environment for both people and wildlife. There is a general lack of information about mammal distribution in Cardiff so if you see Hedgehogs in your garden (or even squashed in the road!) please pass on the information to Laura Palmer at the Council lpalmer@cardiff.gov.uk.

Ideas for improving Cardiff's green spaces and access to them are always welcome. I'll be happy to pass on your suggestions. Don't forget the Cardiff in Bloom competitions in the summer including a prize for the best Wildlife Garden. Why not have a go?

Linda Nottage

Although one of those who have been Naturalists the longest, beaten, probably, by Mary G., I have never actually written to the Newsletter before. Now, I must congratulate Roger Milton on his deeply-felt and excellently-written leader in the December issue.

I agreed with absolutely every word he said, and so, I know, would Eric have done. Roger decried the unnecessary culling of badgers, a creature against whom there is no substantial incriminating evidence. That anyone can deliberately set out with guns against such beautiful and defenceless creatures as birds seems utterly barbaric. We deplore the custom on much of the Continent of shooting wild birds of passage in the spring, but is the deliberate rearing of chicks for 'sport' any more morally defensible? Fox-hunting has been abolished; it would be wonderful if the shooting of grouse and pheasants could follow. Elephants are slain for their ivory to make ornaments, furry¹³ mammals for their pelts to become

decorations, and other creatures for their supposedly aphrodisiac qualities. Bulls are tortured, bears cruelly baited, and precious habitats for other animals are threatened and eroded. It is happening here, in this place. We can protest, support charities, and petition. It sometimes appears to make little difference, but I am convinced that, in the end, it does.

If this is a polemic, I don't care. I am following a family tradition. My father, an expert rider, and decorated for bravery towards horses in his care during battle, protested yearly about the Grand National. As you know, Eric spent much of his life trying to protect the environment and everything in it. I like to think they made a difference.

As a Classicist, I have no difficulty with Latin names, but I very much admire the people who have the knowledge to distinguish between lesser known birds, and the many varieties of plants. I know that journals like this need to include reports on meetings and the activities of members, but it was so refreshing to read a piece on the wider issues with which we are all concerned. The **CNS** was founded by men and women who believed in research - we have, at least, moved on from killing and stuffing everything for that purpose. They also felt that others should have the opportunity to **learn** about Natural Sciences.

I have to admit, I miss the Archaeology Section. One of our best ever lectures was by a little old gentleman who looked exactly like one of the pterodactyls, the subject of his lecture. He cared very much about them and wanted to share his knowledge with us

It is good to know that our present President is following in the footsteps of such people. I don't mean that he also looks like a pterodactyl, but he shows not only passion but compassion.

Thank you, Roger

CORINNE RENSHAW

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Andy Kendall

WEATHER REPORT 2007

MONTH	MEAN TEMPERATURE			RAINFALL		BAROMETER	
	09.00GMT	MAX	MIN	TOTAL		RAIN-DAYS	MILLI-BARS
	°C	°C	°C	INCHES	MM	0.1" OR MORE	
JANUARY	6.5	9.4	4.6	8.2	209.0	22	1014
FEBURARY	5.6	9.4	4.0	7.34	186.0	19	1000
MARCH	7.5	12.7	4.1	4.36	110.5	11	1011
APRIL	12.7	19.4	8.9	0.97	24.0	3	1021
MAY	14.1	18.1	9.6	7.15	183.0	18	1010
JUNE	15.4	21.2	12.8	5.80	149.0	16	1009
JULY	15.5	20.0	12.1	9.38	235.0	22	1011
AUGUST	16.8	22.4	11.7	3.65	91.5	12	1018
SEPTEMBER	14.5	19.2	10.3	2.16	53.5	12	1021
OCTOBER	10.5	14.9	7.8	3.02	76.5	13	1022
NOVEMBER	6.5	10.8	4.3	4.46	113.0	14	1016
DECEMBER	3.7	7.2	1.9	7.55	190.5	13	1016
AVE'/TOTAL	10.8	15.4	7.7	64.04	1621.5	175	1014

In terms of averages the year was almost a complete match with 1999. The only exception were the 09.00 average temperature at a degree and a half cooler and the number of rain days down by 25. Both years were reported as setting records for warmth nationally; the warmest since 1659 in the case of 1999 and 2007 as the second warmest since official records began.

January's rainfall was the highest since 1999 but there were several fine days with rain occurring overnight. Daytime temperatures reached double figures on nineteen occasions and there was only one instance when the minimum temperature fell below zero.

February began with a run of freezing temperatures and snow fell on four successive days. During this period barometric pressure dropped from 1000 to 977 millibars. Thereafter the month was generally mild and wet. Most of the rain in March fell in the first week. The remainder of the month was mainly fine and dry but ended with a thunderstorm on the 31st

The fine weather continued through April with temperatures considerably higher than in March, including a daytime average of nearly 20° C. Rain fell on only three consecutive days. It was also reported that the year ending 30th April was the warmest nationally since reliable records began.

Dismal conditions returned in May with eighteen rain days, including two falls of over 1" and average daylight temperatures lower than in April. Except for the first ten days.

June was little better and there were thunderstorms on the 15th and 16th. However, daylight temperatures were much improved reaching over 20° C on twenty occasions and a high of 25° C on the 11th.

July was wet and miserable giving rise to the highest monthly rainfall of the year and temperatures hardly appropriate for high summer. The wettest day, with just over an inch of rain, was Friday the 13th.

August turned out to be a little warmer and much drier, particularly towards the end of the month. Most days could properly be described as fine and five of the rainfalls occurred overnight. The dry spell continued into September with no rain being recorded between 21st August and 15th September. Calm conditions were a particular feature of the first half of the month. Temperatures held up well into October and included a maximum of 19° C on the 12th and 18° C on the 15th. The rest of the month was cooler but mainly fine.

November's readings were generally consistent with the normal for that month except for a -2.5° C on the night of the 23rd.

The first eight days of December were stormy with gales, thunder and over five inches of rain. Calmer conditions then took over until the Christmas period but it was cold and frosty with overnight temperatures below freezing on several occasions. The year ended on a quiet note with nothing significant to report.

To summarize :-

The lowest pressure at 0900 GMT was 977 millibars on 12th February and the highest was 1034 millibars on the 2nd November. Gales were noted on the 11th January, 28th February and on 1st and 2nd December. Thunder was heard on 20th and 21st January, 28th and 31st March, 15th and 18th June, 16th and 19th July and 8th December. There was rainfall in excess of 1" on 4th March, 10th and 13th May 13th July, 16th October and 1st and 8th December. Snow fell on 7th and 10th February and there was frost on 22nd January, 4th, 5th and 6th February, 1st¹⁷ March, 24th November and 11th, 13th and 19th December.

Stan Jones



How you can help

Over the next 4 years, birdwatchers will be logging birds all over the country to help map their distribution and abundance during the breeding season and in winter. This was last done 20 years ago, and identified some significant losses, particularly in farmland birds. What has happened since, and will woodland species show a similar story this time? There have been gains too, with Little Egrets and Dartford Warblers appearing locally.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Bird Atlas 2007-2011 project aims to clarify the current situation and provide the data to drive future conservation effort.

Birdwatchers of all abilities can get involved in one way or another. There are three levels of participation:

1. Taking a walk or going birdwatching any time, anywhere. Your records can help to fill in the squares on the Atlas maps. Seen a hovering Kestrel, the blue flash of a Kingfisher or a Barn Owl at dusk?
2. Know your birds? Birdwatchers are needed to visit 2km by 2km tetrads to identify and count all of the birds they find there.
3. A third of the UK's birds are found in gardens. By becoming a member of the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch you will be able to register your birds on the national map.

You can find out more about the project from the atlas website www.birdatlas.net. There you can see where more effort is needed and what progress has been made so far, including maps that are updated daily. Or for more information please contact Rob Nottage, the BTO local representative, email nottage@dsl.pipex.com, phone 01446 781423.

The New CNS Website is now on-line and looking for visitors...

The site can be found at the same address as previously (www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk) and has a nice new look and feel. It's easier to find your way around and there is some new content for you to take a look at. We've been added to some websites that I have contacted and we're clearly at the top when you "Google" us. We've even had a contact from Canada looking for information.

Some new features are...

- Newsletters are now sorted and indexed so that you can find an article that you may be looking for.
- New Cardiffnaturalists.org.uk emails for your officers so you can get in touch with them more easily
- New Species listings from surveys carried out by the members of the society at a number of local locations
- New News pages with links to other parts of the environmental web (some content for which I thank Bruce McDonald)
- And of course a grand mention of our most honoured Honorary member Dr Mary Gillham **MBE**

We're still on the lookout for someone to translate some pages into Welsh for us so please contact me if you can offer some help.

There is still some work to do and as time allows I still have some more ideas for some new content so please pop in now and **don't forget to pop back as often as you can.**

Like Brian I'd love anything you can write for us, and if you can publicise us please let everybody in every organization you are involved with know both about the society and the website

Regards
Andy

