

# CNS



## **CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

Founded 1867

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MARCH 2010

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[www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](http://www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

LIST OF OFFICERS  
Immediate past President  
Patricia Wood

President  
Roger Milton

Vice President  
Vacant

Secretary  
Mike Dean  
36 Rowan Way  
Cardiff CF14 0TD  
029 20756869  
Email: [secretary@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:secretary@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

Treasurer  
Dr Joan Andrews  
Rothbury Cottage Mill Road  
Dinas Powis  
CF64 4BT  
Email: [treasurer@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

Membership Secretary  
Margaret Leishman  
47 Heol Hir  
Cardiff CF14 5AA  
029 20752882

Field Meetings Secretary  
Bruce McDonald  
5 Walson Close Wenvoe  
CF5 6AS  
02920593394  
Email: [fieldmeetings@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:fieldmeetings@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

Publicity  
Andy Kendall  
Shenstone Ty'r Winch Road  
Old St Mellons Cardiff CF3 5UX  
Tel 029 2077 0707  
Mob 079 6373 2277  
Email: [publicity@cardiffnaturalist.co.uk](mailto:publicity@cardiffnaturalist.co.uk)

Edited, published and printed for the Cardiff Naturalists' Society  
Brian Bond 22 Douglas Close Llandaff Cardiff CF5 2QT  
Tel: 029 20560835 Email: [newsletter@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

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## PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS - March 2010

So it's official! Recent reports suggest that over the past thirty years or so Spring has advanced itself by eleven days. It seems hardly believable, having just emerged from arguably one of the coldest and most severe winters in some parts of the country since 1929, that the ground and the climate in general would be warm enough to support an early blossoming of nature this time around. Indeed only a few days ago, those "who know" were suggesting that Spring will be about a month late this year ! The constant talk of global warming can be confusing. Presumably the current cold spell is a temporary aberration.

One desperately hopes that all forces of nature are in synchronisation between the timing of the breeding cycles and the availability of the food sources upon which they are reliant. Let's hope that the natural world is better prepared for these climatic variations than its human counterparts.

Latest news on the proposed badger cull in Wales (starting in a couple of months time, for a five year period and encompassing a large area of north Pembrokeshire and small part of Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire) is that the assembly government is facing a legal challenge over the cull from Badger Watch and Rescue Dyfed and the Badger Trust. The fellow protest group, Pembrokeshire Against the Cull is also seeking legal advice with a view to joining legal proceedings. In addition, an ex-senior scientific adviser to the UK government is adding his voice to the opposition and challenging the science behind the proposed cull. Dr Chris Cheeseman has gone on record as stating that "the decision flies in the face of the science and could make bovine TB worse". Hopefully WAG will take into account the force of new scientific opinions in addition to the weight of public opposition and revisit their decision. Any decision to destroy large sections of our natural wildlife must be justified by overriding public interest and irrefutable scientific evidence.

We are now coming to an end of our successful winter evening lecture programme and are looking forward to an exciting series of further outdoor events. I hope to see you at one of these in the near future.

Roger Milton

## OUTDOOR MEETINGS March to May 2010

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> March  
Start time 11am

Forest of Dean  
Packed lunch

Trees again with Tony Titchen this time looking at some of the great oaks of the Forest of Dean, a chance to distinguish your *roburs* from your *petraeas*. Meet at the car park of the Speech House Hotel, Coleford, GL16 7EL. This is on the B 4226, Speech House Road. We aim to finish by 3.30pm.

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April  
Start time 10am

Cowbridge  
Packed lunch

A walk in the Cowbridge area of 5-6 miles looking at the local wildlife and led by our President, Roger Milton. Meet in the main public car park in Cowbridge behind the Town Hall (Town Hall postcode is CF71 7AD & car park grid ref. SS99641/74700). Stout footwear is recommended.

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May  
Start time 6pm

Dinas Powys

A walk from Dinas Powys into Cwm George with Joan Andrews to look at the local wildlife and, hopefully, to see Herb Paris and possibly other rarities. Distance 2-3 miles. Coffee/tea afterwards at Rothbury Cottage. Meet at the footpath entrance to the fields off Mill Road (ST 15471/71645). Park in either Greenfield Avenue or Stacey Road

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May  
Start time 10am

Cathays Cemetery  
Half day

Steve Howe will be leading this walk around Cardiff 's most remarkable Victorian cemetery, Cathays Cemetery, and this time we shall be looking at the wildlife, geology and history. Meet in front of the chapel by the entrance on Fair oak Road . (Grid ref. ST 18281/78580).

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> May  
Start time 10am

Penllergare  
Packed lunch

A chance to explore this great Victorian estate on the outskirts of Swansea.

Much of the landscaping took place from the 1830s instigated by John Dillwyn Llewellyn but during the twentieth century neglect and vandalism took its toll before the Penllergare trust was formed in 2000. In the morning we shall be guided around the estate by Jennie Eyers, Head of Community and Education at the Trust looking at the history and local wildlife. In the afternoon we shall either continue to explore the estate or try another good spot for wildlife in the area. To get to the start point take M4 to Junction 47 and on the first roundabout from the exit slip take first left heading back parallel with the M4 and after a few hundred yards turn right into the Civic Offices (SS 62530/99320 – Civic Offices postcode SA4 9GJ). Park and then head back towards the entrance where you will see the access to the Penllergare estate on your right (east of access road) where we shall meet. Note there are NO toilets or refreshments on the site – so use the services at junction 47 before arriving. For more information go to [www.penllergare.org](http://www.penllergare.org)

## FUTURE EVENTS

There are likely to be several additions to the published programme as opportunities arise. Check the Cardiff Naturalists' website for updates.

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010. The published walk around Cardiff Bay is dependent on the completion of Pont y Werin, the footbridge over the river Ely which was originally scheduled for April. Latest information suggests June so we might still be OK but check the newsletter and website for updates in case we need to postpone it.

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2010. An evening walk around Kenfig National Nature Reserve looking at the later orchids and Helleborines in particular, led by Roy Bailey-Wood.

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010. A walk round Hailey Park, Cardiff looking at flowers and insects. Joint event with the Friends of Hailey Park starting 6pm or 6.30pm – to be confirmed.

ANCIENT TREES. The Woodland Trust have a programme aimed at recording ancient trees and members of the public can take part in this and record old trees in their neighbourhood. We are planning an event in the

Continued on page 6

Autumn when one of the Trust's surveyors will accompany us on a field trip and explain how to measure and record particular features of old trees.

Whilst we have many good stretches of woodland around Cardiff this is an opportunity for members of Cardiff Naturalists' Society to suggest sites which they believe have some good mature trees and we shall pick one of these woods for our trip. Any suggestions to the Field Meetings Secretary with brief details of the location of the woods and why you think they might be suitable for a visit.

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### **A WINTER STROLL IN FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK**

It was the bank holiday after boxing day. Most but the untrodden snow had melted and the air trapped in ice-sealed puddles gleamed white in the winter sunlight. A moorhen was ice-skating in the frozen half of Sheep's Bane Wood while a gaggle of ducks chased and splashed in the other half. The frosted field beyond was bobbing with foraging redwings, seeking respite from Scandinavian frosts

I had followed the east bank of the Taff downstream to Velindre, where three newly opened and emptied hens' eggs by the road showed where some Corvids (or others?) had breakfasted. Beyond the cottage gate hens and bantams clustered along shelves in the porch or potted on the lawn. It was all the same to them who benefitted from their offerings.

Plump ivy berries were still green. These would be feeding blackbirds and wood pigeons next April and May, long after the accompanying alder catkins had shed their pollen. Sunlight shimmering on the canal water set in motion by sparring water fowl was reflected in replicate waves on the pale trunks of newly felled forest giants alongside.

Clusters of orange velvet shank toadstools (*Flammulina velutipes*) at tree bases gleamed against the snowy backdrop. These resemble the commoner sulphur tuft toadstools but emerge undamaged after being frozen and were as spritely at the end of another three weeks of frost and snow as before.

Two dapper nuthatches were sharing grain with a couple of chaffinches, while a coal tit joined more colourful cousins at another of the feeding stations, selecting tiny cubes of cheese from among the corn. A wren? No; much too small. An elegant goldcrest was pecking its way assiduously along far reaching bramble trails. These tiny birds are particularly vulnerable to cold and there were three more weeks of snow to come. A diligently probing

grey wagtail soiled his yellow waistcoat as he worked his way systematically across the muddy shallows of the broad hollow where we sometimes see scurrying water rails.

And then the substantial shadow beyond took form, rufous and soft-treading over the silvered crust of melting snow. Reynard paused in his apparently aimless pottering and set off discretely towards a matter of greater interest. The targeted heron watched his stealthy approach with no visible tautening of muscles, then rose languidly, flapping disdainfully low over the potential adversary's head. Another of these statuesque fishers took wing soon after but the fox, once thwarted, lost interest and resumed his inconsequential loitering,

"There, going left behind that big tree, now to the right, splashing through that puddle." Me, doing a running commentary for the little group I had waylaid on the towpath by the lock, far above. Old habits die hard! They couldn't see the goldcrest and didn't particularly want to see the two jays, but a fox was different. I moved on, past the mossy ruin of the old canal house. The best was yet to come. As I passed two anglers on the Radyr footbridge over the Taff, headed for home, I glimpsed a speeding kingfisher: an apt finale in this winter wonderland.

But there was more. On New Year's Eve four goosanders were being bowled down the Taff below Radyr Weir, plunging at intervals beneath the surface. Relatively new winter visitors to our Welsh rivers from further north, these were the first I had seen this year.

I didn't see the bittern in the patch of reeds targeted by 4 mighty lenses mounted on tripods in the northern hide on 17th January. Surely our first, although here for more than a week by the only patch of water now ice-free. A water rail stalked over the residual ice farther along and two reed buntings commuted across. The southern hide yielded a kingfisher, 'caught' successfully by 3 more digital lenses as it rested and fluttered with a jay close overhead. Snipe had been seen here earlier.

MARY E. GILLHAM

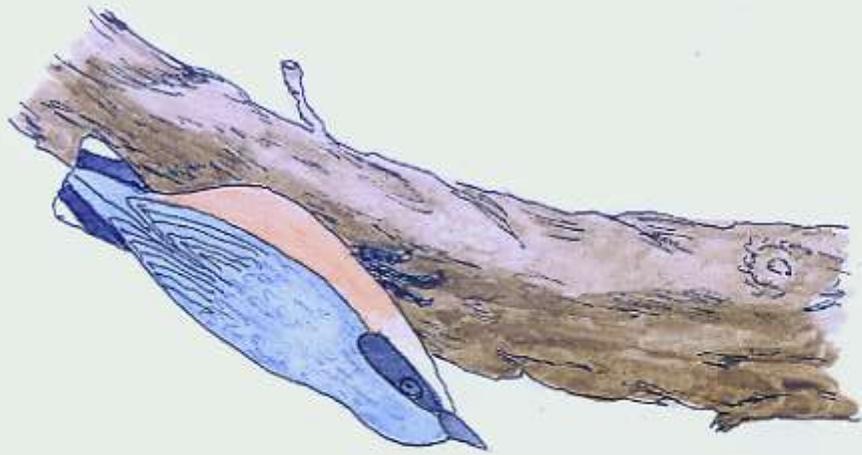
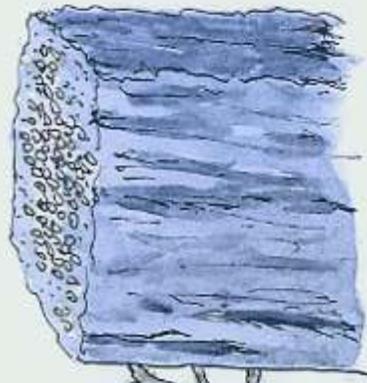
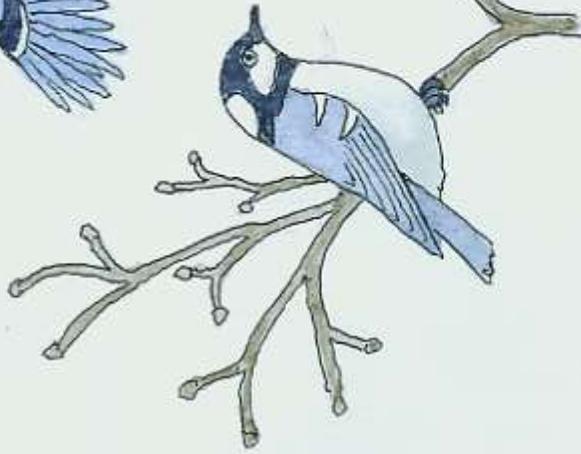


Goldcrest on stinging bramble

Nuthatches and

MARY GILLHAM

Coal Tits at one of the  
canalside feeding  
stations,



Glamorgan Canal, Forest Farm Country Park, 29th Dec. 09. 238

## FIELD TRIP TO ROATH LAKE AND FOREST FARM

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January



'Game, set and match'

particular, nicknamed Murray, displaying formidable technical skills with a tennis ball. A distinct lack of interest from his fellow gulls meant that boredom soon set in but it had been an interesting diversion for the bird-watchers.

Roath Park Lake, opened in 1894 and regarded as one of the largest man-made lakes to be constructed within a city boundary, can always whet the appetite of birders and, whilst there were no rarities on show, one can expect a fair diversity of gulls, dabblers and divers at any time of year. Notable this year has been the large numbers of Little



'Greylags from Llanwern'.

Grebes with one count showing 19 congregating together. Geese are usually patrolling the perimeter and it was pointed out that the rings on the Greylags indicated they had come from the Llanwern area. Moving onto Forest Farm after lunch the use of a recording of calling Water Rails again produced a positive response from the significant numbers of local birds of this elusive species. Despite the cold, the weather had been favourable and it had been a good start to the season.

Bruce McDonald

Photos by Bruce McDonald

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Linda sent me the following suggestion for the unknown species in last month's newsletter. Photos reproduced below

Could the unknown top left in the Oxwich article on page 14 of the December Newsletter be Star Ascidian - *Botryllus schlosseri*? The other unknown may be a sponge.

Linda Nottage



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17<sup>th</sup> MAY 2010 Ed.

## Adders at Parc Slip

We thought you might be interested in this photo . We came upon this heap of adders whilst walking our transect at Parc Slip Nature Reserve on the 5th March. 2009 There were approx 5 adders curled up together by the side of the path sunning themselves.



We also saw 30 species of birds including Lapwing, Snipe, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Redpoll, Bullfinch, and Reed Bunting. Also our first butterfly of the season - a Red Admiral.

Margaret and John Samuel

### Apologies to Margaret and John

Margaret and John sent me the above photograph last year but it became lost in a pile of emails and missed being placed in last April's Newsletter.

Ed.

## WEATHER REPORT 2009

MONTH	MEAN TEMPERATURE			RAINFALL		BAROMETER	
	09.00GMT	MAX	MIN	TOTAL		RAIN-DAYS	MILLI-BARS
	°C	°C	°C	INCHES	MM	0.1"OR MORE	
JANUARY	2.4	6.1	-0.4	7.53	189.0	19	10007
FEBURARY	4.2	8.2	2.4	2.01	50.0	10	1014
MARCH	6.4	11.7	2.9	2.59	66.0	12	1014
APRIL	10.2	14.1	6.4	2.62	67.0	14	1011
MAY	12.8	18.0	8.7	3.71	80.5	12	1019
JUNE	15.8	22.1	11.1	5.74	142.0	9	1015
JULY	16.3	20.8	12.8	10.52	261.0	24	1012
AUGUST	15.8	20.0	12.3	4.28	107.5	16	1013
SEPTEMBER	13.9	19.0	9.6	1.94	48.5	6	1022
OCTOBER	10.6	15.0	8.3	4.48	115.0	20	1015
NOVEMBER	7.4	10.0	4.9	11.01	279.5	26	999
DECEMBER	2.6	5.7	1.0	5.71	145.0	17	1005
AVE'/TOTAL	9.9	14.2	6.6	61.16	1551.0	185	1012

I am writing this report on the day after the heaviest snowfall in Cardiff for some time and I cannot resist commenting on the picture it presents. Every surface, down to tree branch, telephone cable and television aerial is capped in snow, an amazing spectacle. But to return to 2009, there was another wet start to the year, more significantly, this was the coldest January I have recorded and the average minimum temperature was  $-0.4^{\circ}$  C. Overnight temperatures were below zero for the first ten nights then the rain took charge and there were only three dry days during the rest of the month.

February started with another cold spell and there was snow on the first five days. This was followed by a lengthy spell of high pressure we had only three rain days in the second half of the month. March started with a few frosty nights and sub zero temperatures, there were also eight rain days. From the 14<sup>th</sup> onwards it was mainly fine and sunny with a mere 0.37 inches of rain on four days towards the end of the month. The highest temperature was 15<sup>0</sup> C on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

April was a generally fine month with temperatures between 15<sup>0</sup> C and 19<sup>0</sup> C on nineteen days. Although it was a little wetter than March the rain fell overnight on seven occasions. There was a considerable improvement in temperature in May and on the last three days summer heat was recorded with readings of 25<sup>0</sup> C, 25<sup>0</sup> C and 26<sup>0</sup> C. It was wetter than April. But most of the rain fell in the third week. The heat continued during early June but on the 6<sup>th</sup> of the month we had torrential rain amounting to 3.75 inches, the highest daily rainfall I have ever recorded. Better weather soon returned and towards the end of the month we experienced temperatures of 25<sup>0</sup> C and 26<sup>0</sup> C.

July can best be described as a miserable month with 24 rain days and a total rainfall of 10.32 inches. The warmest period was between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> but for the rest of the month the highest daytime temperature was 22<sup>0</sup> C. August was much drier, but even cooler than July. Highs of 24<sup>0</sup> C were recorded on two days but on six days the range was between 16<sup>0</sup> C and 18<sup>0</sup> C. Better conditions returned in September after a stormy second day which produced over half the months total rainfall. Thereafter we had mainly fine days with temperatures ranging between 17.0<sup>0</sup> C and 23.5<sup>0</sup> C.

October was a calm month with few windy days. There were twenty one rain days including one when the term "trace" applied. This refers when water is apparent in the rain gauge but amounts to less than 0.01 of an inch.

November was the wettest month of the year with only four days without any rain. The wettest day was the 25<sup>th</sup> when very heavy showers amounted to nearly an inch. It also became fairly cold towards the end of the month and an overnight temperature of -2.5<sup>0</sup> C was recorded on the 39<sup>th</sup>.

The 09.00 temperature on December 1<sup>st</sup> was -0.5<sup>0</sup> C but rain came on later in the day and on each day until the 9<sup>th</sup>. Cold conditions returned on the 17<sup>th</sup> and -6.0<sup>0</sup> was reached on two nights. Snow fell on the 20<sup>th</sup> but the year ended on a calm note.

To summarise:

The lowest pressure at 0900 GMT was 975 millibars on January 1<sup>st</sup> and the highest was 1036 on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Thunder was heard on June 25<sup>th</sup>. There was rainfall in excess of 1" on January 21<sup>st</sup>, June 6<sup>th</sup>, July 29<sup>th</sup>, September 2<sup>nd</sup> and August 5<sup>th</sup>. Snow fell on January 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> and there was frost on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, April 4<sup>th</sup>, November 11<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

Stan Jones