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CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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Cover photo. See page 3

PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS

.When I travel around Wales I always like to make a detour to visit a remote location. So heading to Aberystwyth I decided to explore the Carmarthenshire Fans. At Llandovery I headed towards Myddfai. This is a historic centre of physicians who for centuries were experts in using herbs and natural remedies to hopefully cure illnesses.

According to the village web site; The “Physicians of Myddfai” were herbalists in the twelfth century. Contrary to the prevalent view that the medieval times were a time of darkness, it was in fact a period of immense cultural importance, with the first universities being founded and monastic schools established. A range of new knowledge became available through translation, including medical texts.

In about 1177 AD the Lord Rhys (1132 – 1197) ruler of the kingdom known as Deheubarth was instrumental in sponsoring the monasteries of Talley and Strata Florida. As the name of the latter - meaning the “Layers of Flowers” – suggests, these abbeys also flourished as schools and hospitals of herbal medicine.

Myddfai is a tiny village but I was after the even smaller hamlet of Llanddeusant. According to the guides the LLyn y Fan Fach reservoir is a good location to bird watch. Unfortunately I left home too late and the reservoir site included a long walk which I had not planned. So I returned Myddfai where I saw a low flying Red Kite. The bird was having difficulty and suddenly something dropped. The bird swooped to the road but was too timid to land. I waited but the Kite departed.

On a closer inspection the Kite had dropped the family tea. There was a very wet and bedraggled creature dead on the road. I will award the prize of a free glass of wine to the first person who identifies the lost meal. (see cover photo Ed)

Chris Franks

FIELD MEETINGS - January to April 2012

Sunday 8th January

Cardiff Bay

Start time 9am.

All day (packed lunch)

The annual birdwatch led by Linda and Rob Nottage starts at Channel View this year to look at birds in the bay. We shall walk as far as St Davids Hotel and back. We may move on to another location later such as Forest Farm or Roath or Bute Park. Start at Channel View Leisure Centre where there is free parking both at the water's edge and by the Leisure Centre (OS ref: ST 18161/74339 or postcode CF11 7HB). This is on Jim Driscoll Way, off Avondale Road just west of the Clarence Road Bridge. Mobile on the day only 07901 707 300

Saturday 25th February

Ogmore

Start time 10am

All day (packed lunch)

A geological walk led by Steve Howe up Pant Norton to Pant-y-slade then Ogmore-by-sea and back (around 4.5 miles, 7.2 kms). Part of the route is covered in Steve's book 'Walking the Rocks' co-authored with Geraint Owen and Tom Sharpe. Start at the free car park (NOTE: not Ogmore Beach car park) on the right hand side (alongside the river) of the B 4524 half-way between the Pelican Pub and Ogmore Beach at SS 8741/7625.

Sunday 25th March

Blaenavon

Start time 10am

All day (packed lunch)

This will be an opportunity to see some fascinating man-made landscapes in the area above the World Heritage site led by Rhian Kendall of the British Geological Survey who will be

able to explain how this landscape is a product of what is beneath our feet and also provide an insight into her own explorations beneath the hills in this area. With fossil trees and caves amongst the coal and iron, the topics covered will be wide ranging. The walk will be of about 5 miles over fairly decent footpaths in the main and with an option to cut out 2 miles if the weather is inclement. A packed lunch is needed and there are only toilet facilities if the pub is open and that is not guaranteed this time of year. Meet at Keepers Pond car park (SO 254 107) at 10:00 am.

Saturday 28th April
Start time 10am

Parc Tredelerch
Half day

Cardiff Naturalists are helping out Cardiff City Council by surveying Parc Tredelerch for plants in particular but anything else we spot whilst we are there. Our September visit added a dozen or so new species. This visit aims to pick up some Spring flora and fauna. All welcome whether experienced or new to wildlife. Meet at car park off Lamby Way at grid ref. ST 21932/78382. Mobile on the day only 07901 707 300

Please attempt to get to the start of the event in plenty of time so that we stand a reasonable chance of doing any admin and getting away on time.

Indoor Meetings
Autumn 2011 and Winter 2012

Autumn 2011 An additional meeting not shown in the published programme our fellow member Dr Joan Andrew will present a talk on Monday 12th December 2011 the title

“ A mountain kingdom Bhutan”.

Joan has a long attachment to the high places of the world and has been fortunate to travel - from Pakistan to China and Afghanistan, through China ...via the Karakorum Highway, to Yunnan on the Tibetan border, Kazakhstan and Nepal, now probably her last chance to see more of the unique customs and flora and fauna of ...great mountains.

Indoor MeetingsWinter 2012

The Winter series of evening lectures for 2012 will follow as listed on the programme and website.

Wednesday 18th January Members Evening

Any members who have Natural History holiday/interesting photographs to show on the evening. Please contact Hilary Wicks before 11 January 2012

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 24th January - David Slade of SEWBReC* with a talk entitled “Small can be Beautiful – the micro moths of Glamorgan.” *(South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre).

An introduction into the unsung heroes of Glamorgan’ s Lepidoptera fauna, showing that micro moths can be just as attractive as their larger counterparts and can often tell us a great deal about our environment.

Dr Rob Thomas (Cardiff School of Bioscience) will present the next

talk on Thursday 9th February the subject “Birds, ecosystems and climate change”. I am painfully aware that climate change poses a major threat to biodiversity, but what will the impacts be and how will those impacts unfold? In this talk, I will give an overview of my recent research from Cardiff University and elsewhere which addresses these questions, using long –distance migratory birds as a group of animals that are expected to be highly sensitive to the effects of climate change. As well as “hot off the press” research findings, the talk will feature award- winning photographs by one of my PhD student, Adam.

A change of subject for our second talk on Tuesday 21st February by Elizabeth Walker, from The Archaeology Department, National Museum Of Wales. On The Caves of Cefn Meiriadog Denbighshire; a Bishop, Darwin, a chimney sweep, and mines and science.

The Parish of Cefn Meiriadog is located in the beautiful Elwy Valley and has long been a place of interest for antiquarian visitors and later scientists. The limestone cliffs flank the valley contain caves that have become highly significant to our understanding of the Pleistocene period in Wales and the relationship between the deposits within the caves and their use by hominins, anatomically modern humans and other mammals. Early visitors include Thomas Pennant 1778- 1783 and in the early 19th century landowner Edward Lloyd of Cefn. Darwin’s tour of North Wales with Professor Adam Sedgwick took them to Cefn Caves on Saturday 6th August 1831 on their journey from Llangollen to Abergele. The Reverend Stanley, later to become, the Bishop of Norwich, visited Cefn in 1833 and described how the landowner Lloyd had excavated the largest cave in the valley for thirty yards dismissing most of the ancient animal bones he found to use as fertilizer on the meadows below. Stanley was the first to undertake any formal excavation in the cave. Yet as debates about the antiquity of the deposits and extinct mammals were raging in the geological Society of London, it was to be a chimney sweep from Rhyl who grabbed the national newspaper headlines with his reported discoveries.

More recently excavations undertaken by Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales in both the main Cefn Caves and

Pontnewydd Cave have changed our understanding of a human presence in Wales.

The meeting on Thursday 8th March will be in two parts, a talk by Ellie Sherrard-Smith on “**Parasites of the Eurasian otter**”.

Parasites have a major influence on the health and stability of all ecosystems. The Eurasian otter is a top predator in the UK and a sentinel species for freshwater health. Cardiff University Otter Project examines otter cadavers from across England and Wales – most (over 90%) of these have been killed on the roads. This project is one of the longest running surveys on wild animals ever undertaken and allows the examination of various aspects of otter ecology through time and space. This talk will focus on macroparasites of the otter in England and Wales.

Plus if possible a talk by the student awarded the Ursula Henriques Bioscience bursary.

If this is not possible to arrange, another talk will be included for the second part of the evening.

The last indoor meeting will be held on Tuesday 27 March with a talk by **Cameron Lewis (South Wales Trunk Road Agency)** on **Urban tree and woodland management**.

The importance of trees and woodland in the urban environment and the pressures routinely faced in their successful establishment and management.

All meetings will be held at Lecture Theatre room d106 UWIC Llandaff Campus Western Ave. Llandaff Cardiff and commence at 7.30pm.

FIELD TRIP TO COEDARHYDYGLYN

Sunday 3rd July



Glorious weather greeted our visit to Coedarhydyglyn to sample the delights of its garden and arboretum in the company of Tony Titchen. And what helped to make the day such a success was the welcome given by the owners, Rhodri and Annabelle Traherne, who allowed us to meander at will around the grounds of this fine estate.

RESINOUS CONES ON A FIR

But before launching into Tony's dendrological nuggets of wisdom, a few words about the history of the estate largely taken from the reference at the end of the article. As far back as 1540 Rice Merrick, who lived nearby at Cottrell suggested that 'Riglin' had once been a park, possibly land owned by the Flemings and



COEDARHYDYGLYN HOUSE

Malefants who were lords of St Georges and Wenvoe and would have lived at a manor house now known as Castle Farm.

When the Malefants died out the manor reverted to the Cardiff Castle estate before being sold to a London lawyer, Abraham Barbour, in the 1720s. A local family of farmers, the Llewellins, then took it over and



BLUEBELLS, LATE SPRING

from their ownership has passed unbroken to the Trahernes of today. For most of this time the estate was referred to as Coedriglin and it was not until recently as 1900 that the spelling was altered to Coedarhydyglyn.

Construction of the present house started in 1820 although the first house at Coedriglin had been built just a quarter of a mile away and was little more than 50 years old. The architect was believed to have been Edward Haycock who also worked on nearby Cwrtyrala at Michaelston le Pit. Whilst a formal garden had been created, it was in the first decade of the 20th century that Llewellyn Edmund Traherne made an

impact by developing the Dell into a woodland and water garden,



THE DELL



RHODODENDRONS IN LATE SPRING

planting exotic shrubs and introducing a Japanese-style bridge and tea-house. The cypress garden and pinetum came later with Sir Cennydd and Rowena Traherne and some unusual rhododendrons. Whilst the latter were well past their flowering period photos taken on an earlier visit in May give some indication as to the colour they generate in late Spring above a carpet of bluebells.



As ever with Tony, there is a lot of information on offer so if you are into trees it is best to attend the event. However, here are a few of the items that Tony referred to. Close to the house is a majestic oak, a Lucombe Oak, or to give it its full designation, *Quercus x hispanica* 'Lucombeana'. Originating in 1762 as a cross between *Q. cerris* and *Q. suber* it was raised by the eponymous Mr Lucombe who was supposedly so fond of the tree that he felled the original and kept the resulting planks under his bed for his coffin. The tree retains its leaves over winter.

LUCOMBE OAK

From here we drifted back along the drive to note a *Nyssa sylvatica* - a fine tree in its own right but here we had the champion. These are measured by TROBI, the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland who determine whether a tree is the largest of its species in the UK and therefore worthy of designation as a champion. *Nyssa sylvatica* is a medium-sized tree, known also as Tupelo or Black Gum, originating in North America but now extensively planted in parks and arboreta. With fine autumn colour the tree is also a source of berries particularly for migrating birds in the US.



BUDS ON TROCHODENDRON

Close by was another North American species, this time *Kalmia latifolia*, also known as Ivybush or Calico Bush. Another name was Spoonwood as native Americans used the wood for making their spoons. Next was an unspectacular large bush or small tree although Tony considered it to be a particularly good specimen and this was *Trochodendron aralioides*. A quick continent switch indicated that this originated in east Asia including Japan and Taiwan and it is the only surviving species of the *Trochodendron* genus.

Having reached the perimeter of the garden area we worked our way down into the Dell with its quaint Japanese features, Andy Kendall capturing the gorgeous colour of the *Corylus*. However, unlike our common Hazel



RED FILBERT



MEXICAN WHITE PINE

(*avellana*) this was a Filbert (*maxima*), sometimes called Red Filbert or Purple Hazel. The Tudors were particularly fond of them and the Red Filbert is considered to be a very old variety.

Lunch followed with some basking in the continuing sunshine whilst others sought the shade. From there we ascended gently before arriving at the pinetum – Rhodri’s speciality. The trees are all clearly labelled so identification is no problem – just as well as there are some unusual varieties on display. We dutifully carried out Tony’s ‘ouch!’ test on the Colorado Spruce, *Picea pungens*, and confirmed that the needles were

sharp. The massive cones of Noble Fir, *Abies procera*, were self-evident. The photo shows *Pinus ayacahuite*, or Mexican White Pine, native to central America and southern Mexico with needles in groups of five. Visitors to Westonbirt may have noted the large cones of *Pinus x holfordiana*, the natural hybrid that occurred there between *ayacahuite* and *wallichiana*. Whilst several of the trees are still young there is little doubt that Coedarhydyglyn has the potential to be one of the best pinetums in South Wales.

A first visit to this estate for many but even those who had been in the past were well-rewarded. A grand day out with our largest turn-out of the season.

For more on this and other gardens in the Vale of Glamorgan, try *Historic Gardens in the Vale of Glamorgan*, edited by Hilary M. Thomas.

Bruce McDonald
Photos by Andy Kendall and Bruce McDonald

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As many of you know Brian has decided to stand down after 10 years of excellent service to the society as editor

Those of you who were at the AGM will know that I offered to take over this role and the first thing I need to do is to thank Brian for all that hard work and also for keeping going for one more issue because the deadlines did not fit well with Holiday plans that I already had booked. I will therefore be taking over properly in 2012

It's important that we keep up a high quality newsletter as not all our members are email enabled, it's also nice to sit and read away from a computer sometimes (I should know – Rhian thinks I'm married to it sometimes!)

I hope to be able to keep up Brian's high standards in getting the newsletter out to you all on-time and to that end I will be sending out email reminders asking for news and articles so please put your thinking caps on and get ready to get writing. If you have anything you need a help with either in typing up or processing some pictures for use please do not hesitate to get in touch with me

Andy Kendall

As this is my last issue as Editor, I would like to thank all who have contributed to the newsletter's, all articles have been of a high standard. I wish Andy an enjoyable time as Editor, and I know we will have a newsletter to look forward to.

Brian
Now ex Editor

FIELD TRIP TO PARC TREDELERCH
17th September 2011



TYPICAL BRITISH WEATHER

Our latest trip to Parc Tredelerch took place on a day when short bursts of sunshine were interspersed with torrential downpours. The name of the park is unknown to many but more will recognise it as Lamby Lake off Lamby Way, Cardiff. The City Council had asked us for any species records we might have, so this was an opportunity to add a few to our existing lists which had been compiled by Rhian Kendall.

Previous visits had taken place on the 4th and 11th June 2000, 20th August 2000 and 23rd May 2004 and involved several members of the Society. This visit in September was aimed at

picking up some later species and a further visit scheduled for Spring 2012 should locate some of the Spring fauna and flora. With a substantial gap since the last visit one would have expected to note some introductions and this proved to be the case. One category includes deliberate introductions – here by the Parks Department. One such was Purging Buckthorn, *Rhamnus cathartica*, which was included in the extensive swathes of tree and shrub plantings. Another example was Common Rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus* – the best way to check for the local fish is to ask a fisherman who is usually quite happy to wave a gasping specimen at you.

Then there are those that are spreading naturally throughout



MIGRANT HAWKER

the Cardiff area but may have been more restricted in distribution 7 years ago. A classic example is Goats Rue, *Galega officinalis*, now galloping along the arterial routes within and out of Cardiff. Then there is *Taphrina alni*, the Alder Tongue Gall, mentioned in the previous issue of the Newsletter which started spreading out from the south of England in the last century. We noted it during the summer at Parc Bryn Bach off the Heads of the Valleys road so it is likely to turn up anywhere in this region.

Another category includes the late flyers or growers. We noted a Migrant Hawker dragonfly, *Aeshna mixta*, which is on the wing through to October. And Field Scabious, *Knautia arvensis*, tends to flower from July through to September. Inevitably our surveys are constrained by who turns up on the day and the limitations of our areas of expertise. We seldom record slugs and snails but, hopefully with next year's tutelage from Ben Rowson (see Field Trip to Leckwith Woods in August 2012) we could start to flex our molluscan muscles. As it was, in addition to the Garden Snail, *Helix aspersa*, we also found a Kentish Snail *Monacha cantiana*, another example of a steadily spreading species.

Bruce McDonald

Photos by Bruce McDonald

Indoor meeting's reports
From our Blog

**Annual General Meeting and Birding in the
Balkans September 21st 20011**

The 2011 indoor season kicked off with our AGM and an excellent talk by Paul Bowden on Birding in the Balkans

Paul showed some excellent pictures and videos in his short presentation on his trip to visit a friend and fellow birder for a week in the sunshine - YES SUNSHINE !

Paul of course is not just a birder, but showed some really good pictures of the insects he saw along the way.

It was a real tonic to see some blue skies at this time of year

**The Valleys from Green to Black and Back
September 27th 2011**

Dr. David Llewellyn gave us an excellent talk tonight about the history and environmental work going on in the Valleys Regional Park which can be see in great detail on their website <http://www.thevalleys.org.uk/>

David is a captivating speaker and clearly passionate about the work he is doing in the projects initiative to co-ordinate, drive and promote activities related to the environment and heritage and associated tourism activities across the valleys of south Wales, working in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly Government's Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys Regeneration Programmes, with marketing through the Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign, to change the reality and perceptions of the Valleys as a highly-

desirable place to live, work and visit.

He also showed us many of the wonderful places you can visit as it says on the official Valleys tourism website <http://www.thevalleys.co.uk/> **"The world is just waking up to the fact that The Valleys are home to a captivating choice of attractions and places to visit"**

Danau Girang Field Centre **October 3rd 2011**

Benoit Goossens gave us a fascinating insight into how a new field centre can be a centre for some fascinating scientific work.

He came across the Danau Girang Field Centre as an empty building which had been developed with grant aid, but no longer term plan for its use had been put into place (how often do you hear such tales!)

He developed a collaborative plan for Cardiff University to get involved with the Sabah Wildlife Department and through seeking external sponsorship from other organizations and has developed the centre into a thriving centre for ecological studies

The centre opened in 2008 and has gone from strength to strength, and we were treated to a number of insights that have been gained by using state of the art camera systems that capture images day or night when there is movement

You can read more about the field centre on the Cardiff University Danau Girang Field Centre page

Butterflies and Underwater Exotics

Cate Barrow entertained us royally last night with three talks, one about Butterflies and two about underwater exotics all supported by her excellent photography

She described herself as not being a Butterfly expert, but though leveraging the expertise of others including our very own Jeff Curtis and by spending a lot of hours in the field she has already done very well on reaching her goal of photographing all the UK butterflies

After that insect fest she showed us some of the underwater work she's being doing in various parts of the world including New Zealand, Australia and the Maldives. Fantastic pictures of sharks, loads of smaller fish and many of the varieties of underwater invertebrates such as crabs, corals and polyps of many kinds. She also shared some of the complexities of taking pictures in the underwater environment

Some more of Cate's pictures can be seen on the [Bristol Underwater Photography Group website](#)

For anyone who loves looking at really well executed pictures of wildlife she's already offered to entertain us again next year so we're already looking forwards

Reports by Andy Kendall