



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1867

NEWSLETTER No. 120

September 2020

Charity No. 1092496

LIST OF OFFICERS 2019/2020

President

Position vacant

Secretary

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Membership Secretary

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Indoor Meetings Secretary

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Field Meetings Coordinator

Position vacant

Newsletter Editor

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Publicity Officer

Andy Kendall

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Also on Council

Mary Salter, Gill Barter, Marie Makepeace, Stephen Howe, Patrizia Donovan



<http://www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk>

www.facebook.com/groups/CardiffNaturalists

Twitter: @CardiffNats

<http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.com>

Cover: Sparrowhawk on garden fence. Photo: Eirian Edwards (p. 22).

(wild)life during lockdown

Following a suggestion by Linda Morris, we asked our members if they would like to write about their experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown. A number of you reported back, and this newsletter features those reports.

Many people have said they enjoyed taking more time to observe and appreciate the wildlife in their local areas. It was widely reported that birdsong sounded louder, and the air seemed cleaner in and around Cardiff. There was much less traffic on the roads, and airplane trails were absent from the sky.

Lockdown highlighted the importance of gardens, and neighbourhood parks, fields and woods, and the role they play in our wellbeing, for both our physical and mental health.

Observing wildlife in all its forms was a great balm at a time of great uncertainty. The need to preserve nature in both urban and rural areas has never been clearer.

Yet, nature conservation organisations have had their work disrupted and reporting funding difficulties, for example, due to less income as fewer people visit flagship nature reserves.

As lockdown eases, it is important that we continue to share our enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, nature with others.

Cardiff Naturalists' Society has played an important role since 1867 in informing the people of Cardiff and surrounding areas about the flora, fauna and natural landscapes within easy reach of their homes. Members have played a key role in protected and promoting the wildlife of the Cardiff area. Long may it continue.

Stephen Nottingham

President & Secretary roles open: Cardiff Naturalists' Society

Our last President, Anthony Campbell, decided to stand down from the post with immediate effect on 13 February 2020.

This leaves the Society with the problem of finding a new President, coupled with the fact that I wish to stand down as Secretary having undertaken the role for many years.

I can only ask the membership to consider volunteering to take on these rewarding roles, before the AGM to be held late in 2020.

Mike Dean

Secretary
Cardiff Naturalists' Society

secretary@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

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**Deadline for submissions to next newsletter:
Monday 4 January 2021**

Future Events of the Society

We are living in unprecedented times due to the spread of the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. Cardiff Naturalists' Society's first priority is to protect the health of its members and to minimise the risks of exposure to the virus. It will comply with all recommendations issued by the UK Government and the Senedd to the best of its ability. It was to this end, that the last 'Indoor Meeting' was cancelled together with a proposed Council Meeting (we continue using electronic means of communication).

It was originally anticipated that Indoor Meetings would resume in September 2020. However, due to the continued closure of the University of Cardiff, where our meeting room is located, this can no longer happen. Realistically, it may not be not until early next year before we can resume meetings. However, we are exploring the possibility of virtual meetings. Due to the changing situation, you can keep up-to-date via the Society's webpage, social media (see page 2), and e-mails that we will send out to members.

We all have to take precautions as recommended and remain positive. Council can only wish all our members good health and we hope for a return to normality as soon as possible.

Indoor meetings will restart as seen as we are able to organise them at the University, starting with our AGM. All indoor meetings begin at 7.30 p.m. and are held in the Main University Building, Park Place, Cardiff CF10 3AT. Follow signs inside the building for room location (which varies according to room availability, though it is usually in the same area of the building).

For all the latest information and additions to the CNS Meetings Programme:

<http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/p/programme.html>

Margaret Leishman

Mike Dean:

Margaret Leishman passed away peacefully on 21 March 2020. There was a cremation on 2 April, but members were not expected or advised to attend due to the COVID-19 situation. After all this is over, it is suggested that her ashes be spread at one of her favourite spots and members may wish to attend at that time.

Margaret was a long-standing member of Cardiff Naturalists' Society, and served as Hon. Membership Secretary & Indoor Meetings Secretary for more years than I can remember.

Andy Kendall:

In Newsletter 88, in 2010, we recorded our thanks to her:

“The society would like to record its thanks .. to Margaret Leishman who was our Indoor / Membership Secretary for over 17 years.”

In my first edition as newsletter editor I noted that Margaret had often commented on my abuse of commas and apostrophes in written text and had failed to be able to train me effectively. I hope that I have improved a little over the years, but I also hope that she would forgive me for any that I have misapplied in this message. Farewell Margaret!



Joan Andrews:

Margaret and I met in the early 1970s. We soon understood our shared love and ignorance of Natural History. We were both members of Merthyr and District NHS, and later of CNS.

Mary Gilham was at that time in the Extra Mural department and led many visits across the UK and occasionally further afield. In particular – I remember Galway and the Aran Isles with both Mary and Mairead Sutherland as a particular delight to both of us, with its unique natural history and idiosyncratic life style. Another visit with Mary took us to the Hebridean islands of Islay and Jura, where Margaret demonstrated one of her unique talents to use her comb to draw the reluctant corncrakes out of the reed bed.

Then we both greatly enjoyed the visit that Rob and Linda Nottage organised to the Haute Alpes, staying at an excellent gite owned by the family of one of our members – usually for hot air ballooning but great for the friends from CNS.

All who knew Margaret, behind her quiet facade, enjoyed her deep knowledge of natural History, her outstanding skill with English grammar and her unassuming wit.

For those of us with busy working lives it was and is the dedication of the Margarets – (O Margaret – where does that comma go?) of this world, including our present officers who make CNS what it is and long may continue to be.

To our friend - Margaret



*Cardiff Naturalists' Society outdoor meeting, 26 May 2002.
Left to right: Margaret Leishman, Joan Andrews, Patricia Wood and
Linda Nottage (photo: Rob Nottage).*



Margaret Leishman and Joan Andrews, in Brittany.

Easter Sunday 2020.....coronavirus meanderings

Linda Morris

12 April 2020

Covid-19, who can ignore it, the sad statistics, the daily late afternoon government briefings, the uncertainty. Well, I'm one of the fortunate ones, I can ignore it now and again, as I have a garden bordering common land and woodland. I can sit outside, take in the wildlife, plants and birdsong and go for a gentle walk nearby for my permitted daily exercise.

I'm sitting in a south-west facing garden in late afternoon warm sunshine. The air is full of birdsong, coming from all directions, crows crowing from treetops, goldfinches twittering, blackbirds calling and randy wood pigeons chasing each other across the garden and over the fence. The bird feeders are still, but every so often blue tits, great tits and goldfinches fly in and have a drink in the birdbath. This morning a pair of sparrows were jumping around following each other round some flowerpots on the patio.

There are flowering forget-me-nots self seeded in the flowerbeds and lawn edges which yesterday attracted a male orange tip butterfly. Primroses are still in flower, as are cowslips, and in the front lawn I have seen the spotty pointed leaves of 11 common spotted orchids poking through which have seeded themselves. Bees have also found the garden with violets blooming in the cracks between the patio slabs and rosemary shrubs in full flower.



Yesterday we planted some runner bean seeds in the greenhouse from last year's crop and the rhubarb has already given us crumbles and an almond cake. A couple of days ago in the greenhouse a bright comma butterfly was photographed too.

Walking today found me in a beech wood bright with spring green leaves and an abundance of wild garlic which is just starting to flower. In a day or two there will be a green and white carpet with the smell of garlic on the wind. Cutting across from the wood to home is an area of common land, a favourite haunt for dog walkers. I see it differently as it has soggy patches and warm sheltered corners. The soggy patches are cuckoo flower habitat and once it starts to flower, as now, orange tip butterflies are on the wing, the males looking for females who lay their orange eggs on this their larval food plant. Later on, common spotted orchids can be found and last year was the first to find some bee orchids. In the warm corner the first peacock butterflies have been spotted as well as brimstone and today a perfect speckled wood, angled to the sun with its wings open, was warming up settled in the dead leaves and grass.

Walking home a great spotted woodpecker was drumming and as Easter Sunday's go, it was a very satisfactory day of self isolation.





Photos (pp. 10-12 Linda Morris.

Lockdown in the Vale Linda Nottage

26 April 2020

We are fortunate to live in a small Vale of Glamorgan village with quiet lanes & public footpaths in all directions within a 2 mile radius of home. For the past 5 weeks we've been able to enjoy daily exercise in the sunshine (keeping a safe distance from the very few other walkers) while incidentally adding wildlife records to local one kilometre squares.

We usually range widely across the Vale counting rook nests – this year we visited our nearest 3 rookeries and totalled 75 nests in St. Nicholas, 30 in Bonvilston & 26 by the Llantrithyd deer park.

Finding at least 30 scarlet tiger caterpillars feeding on green alkanet beside the A48 was a thrill. Perhaps one of the emerging moths might make it to our trap. Catches so far have been meagre although waved umber, streamer, water carpet & lesser swallow prominent added interest to the commoner Hebrew characters. There have been plenty of orange-tips & a few holly blues among the 10 species of butterflies so far. Eggs of the former have been found on garlic mustard and lady's smocks including in our garden. Dock bugs and green, gorse & hairy shieldbugs have been sunning themselves.

Eristalis pertinax hoverflies have been amazingly abundant, now joined by attractive *Epistrophe eligans*, *Leucozona lucorum* & the ramson specialist *Portevinia maculata*. Incidentally, ramsons seems to be on the march around here, colonising verges and woodland. Early purple orchids seem to have flowered well too.

New for us are the distinctive spider *Gibbaranea gibbosa* and orange-tailed & chocolate mining bees with nomad & other bees still to be sorted out. Steve Bolchover, county beetle recorder, kindly confirmed ID of the impressively-named ground beetle *Abax parallelepipedus*.

With no golf balls flying on our local course, we've been able to stray from the right of way to explore the ponds and other features. We hope for dragonflies later but a mass of pond water-crowfoot made an attractive sight while 2 hares and a pair of stonechats also lifted our spirits.



Gorse shieldbug



Epistrophe eligans (female)



Orange-tailed mining bee



Scarlet tiger caterpillar and green alkanet flower

Photos (pp. 16-17 Linda & Rob Nottage).

Lockdown in Old St Mellons

Andy Kendall

30 April 2020

We are lucky that our garden is large and that the lanes outside our house are some of the quiet country lanes that it is possible to go for walks along.

As awful for many as it has been, the start of the lockdown could not have come at a better time weather wise and we have been loving being able to work in and enjoy our garden and our local area in relative quiet.

Late last year I moved the pond which was located on our patio to a more sensible place on the edge of the lawn. We were also lucky to have put an order in for new native plants early in the year which arrived just in time and we have been really pleased to see how well it has come on with a large amount of frogspawn nicely developing into tadpoles. We have even spotted a newt (as yet unidentified) and lots of pond skaters and other insects.

Another side effect of the pond move was that we had an awful lot of plant material from the old location that we did not want to put into the new one. It's filled up one and a half of our composters, and we have recently seen a slow worm enjoying the warmth and a wasp building its nest in the top of one of them.

The local lanes have been a delight and we have enjoyed the displays of wildflowers in the verges with Lesser Celandine, Wood Anemone, Bluebell, Dandelions and Daisy creating a visual feast for the eyes. The Cow Parsley and Jack by the hedge are coming along now to succeed them, and the fields are going yellow with the rape flowers.

The verges are in place backed by wonderful Hawthorn hedges and the St Marks Flies have been floating in front of them with their legs dangling as you walk past. They have also provided an unintended protein supplement when taking the bike for a spin instead of walking with the camera.

However probably the best aspect has been just sitting in the garden and enjoying the overwhelming sound of birdsong with Robin, Blackbird, Wren, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Jackdaw, Blue Tit and Magpie being the most common in sight and the Chiffchaff sounding loudly, but a usual out of sight.

We are at last gifted some rain which is a welcome relief for the garden because the 4 water butts were all empty and the threat of having to pay to water the plants was looming (we're on a meter), we will miss the garden for a few days, but it will be worth it in the near future because we have trays of seedlings ready to go now the ground has warmed up and is soft enough to plant into.



Lockdown near Rudry

Elaine Harper

I was visiting our son and 4 grandchildren in Melbourne, Australia at the beginning of March for 3+ weeks when the C Virus became v. Close....I managed to get on Qatar airways last but one flight to Cardiff via Doha....leaving the family 10 days early, sadly.

However after quarantine for 2 weeks spring and glorious sunny days became a treat as I took my daily exercise into the nearby countryside amazed to find a profusion of wild flowers and each species appeared particularly colourful. The bluebells near Rudry seem especially blue this year ! .I have included some photos which I hope some folk will enjoy ...

In our back garden we have counted 7 different butterflies. Holly Blue, Orange tip, Large and Small white, Brimstone, Peacock, and Speckled Wood. We have a pair of Bluetits nesting in one of our nesting boxes and Raven and Buzzards are often heard and seen overhead.





Looking on the bright side of lockdown

Teresa Jenkins

8 May 2020

Lockdown coincided with a veritable flood of early Spring activity combined with glorious sunshine and provided a perfect excuse to just stop and look. The bare trees in March made it easy to find chiffchaffs, nuthatches, greenfinches and even a solitary redwing. There were excellent views of a greater spotted woodpecker drumming on an ash tree. It used the main trunk near the stump of a broken branch for a session of drumming, then it would move away a metre or two, as if checking for a response, before returning to the same spot to drum and repeat the sequence.

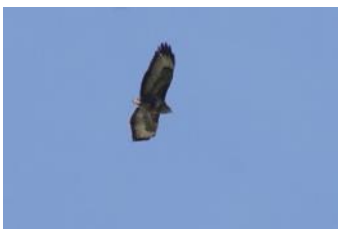
It has been a good time for raptors. We have a local celebrity buzzard, easily distinguished from the others because it has no tail. This is its third season at least. Several good views with binoculars convinced me that its tail is genuinely missing. Its feet can be seen trailing behind its body and it seems to fly extra fast to make up for a loss of manoeuvrability or maybe it can steer with its feet? Also fast and silent are the red kites which have been gliding over the area regularly. There have been many views of sparrowhawks usually whizzing past in a blur but occasionally stopping for a breather in the garden.

Sightings on various walks along the country lanes include a pair of kestrels over a field of vivid yellow rape, being half-heartedly harassed by crows, and on another day a flap- flap- sail- long - square- tail goshawk suddenly diving near woodland.

One day I found a nest in the garden with a female black bird feeding a single well- grown chick. Two days later, there was a terrible commotion and I was just in time to witness a male blackbird chasing off a magpie which must have predated the nest and was quite possibly a serial killer accounting for the absence of other chicks.

I'm full of admiration for a pair of blue tits determined to create a home for the future in the woodshed which will definitely be magpie- proof. I have watched these little birds take a good 30 seconds to squeeze themselves under the flat roof followed by knocking sounds worthy of a much bigger bird while they chip away at the wood leaving a sprinkling of sawdust on the ground beneath. I hope it pays off, they have been at it for weeks.

It has not just been the birds providing entertainment this Spring. There has been plenty of time to observe butterflies and other insects, wild flowers, a field vole scuttling about the garden and once, a poorly bat flying in the middle of the day. With the help of trail cameras placed near a lot of scat, a pair of courting hedgehogs were recorded on Easter Sunday evening. Maybe less traffic will result in less roadkill making lock-down a good thing after all, if only for wildlife, the environment and naturalists.



Buzzard without a tail. Photo by John Andrew.



Sparrowhawk on a garden bird feeder. Photo by David Edmunds.

Notes during Lockdown

Eirian E Edwards

“Lockdown” – strange word, strange times – but it brings some unexpected pleasures too. I have never before sat for such very long periods enjoying the birds in my garden. Yes, I knew I had a great variety for a small garden in a city, and I have enjoyed watching/photographing them through the years. The usual dunnocks, sparrows, pigeons, magpies, crows, blackbirds and robins – just what you expect, but I had not paid much attention to their habits before now.

I love my acrobatic blackbird who leaps up at the fat ball, and his friend who clings to the pole, stretches out for a peck, but by then is slithering down the pole! And there's the other one who can always fly in, grab on to the frame and peck happily away. If you were ever in doubt of the meaning of 'pecking order' – just watch the sparrows/dunnocks. How intimidating they can be, bullies indeed! And then there's the pigeon fights – bang, one has crashed into the window – he's ok, but I had a bit of a start. I just love the goldfinch – we obviously have flocks of them in the area – they really are a joy to see – quite cautious, usually sitting on top of the washing line initially, having a good look round before settling on the feeders [only sunflower seeds, never on a mixture]. And then come the wren, siskins, the greenfinch [after a bit of an absence in recent years due to a virus], the bullfinch, and joy of joys, the jay – initially chased away by a magpie. I had never realised how important a feature my water trough was – very often the birds, large or small, just visit for a drink, not for a feed. The hours go by....

One day, I was amazed to see a Sparrowhawk sitting on my garden fence (see cover photo).

Gardening itself is much as normal – not very extensive and very dependent on perennials or self-seeding plants. The difference now is that some of your friends are walking past and stop for a chat, their routes have become a bit more varied. For the first time I have had to get plugs through the post for my *Thumbergia*. They seem to have come on well, so currently am hardening them off before planting out in their usual position.

Then it's my walks from home – slightly shorter and oftener than usual as I have always loved going around Bute Park, to Kenfig Nature Reserve or anywhere along the sea – these walks are what I really miss when we are told to 'stay at home'. At this time of year, I would always be down at Kenfig looking at the orchids before setting off on some organised trip to Italy, France or Greece to see a wider variety of these fascinating plants. But it's not to be this year. At some time I'll go to the Coryton roundabout to see their selection, which is always an interesting walk.

I am lucky to live close to two small streams – the Rhydwaedlyd Brook and the Nant Cwmnofydd. My usual walk has taken me along the former through the years, extending it around Hill Snook Park, Cae Delyn Park and Parc-y-Pentre. But in lockdown, you have to choose your time as you have serious competition from the dog walkers, some of whom are quite irresponsibly walking badly controlled dogs without leads. Who cares, they say? – Sorry, I do and don't want another experience of three of them trying to jump up on me at the same time – answer, always take a walking stick as a visible deterrent. But the new walk I found was along Nant Cwmnofydd – the extension of a previous walk I had done. This is a lovely stream that reminds me very much of my childhood walks along the upper reaches of the River Kenfig. Whereas I had previously been walking past Y Twmpath on to the Wenallt and into the woods, I now found a long walk along the stream, complete with stepping stones to cross and with no dogs in sight. What a great find – how is it that I had never turned in that direction before?!



Photos by Eirian Edwards.



*Buzzard and grass snake at Forest Farm.
Photos by Phill Blanning,*



*Brown Angus at Old Castle Down, bluebell wood and squirrel.
Photos by Mary Salter.*



*Rosemary Leaf Beetle and Marsh Helleborine/
Photos by Linda Morris.*



COVID-19 signage at Cosmeston Lakes Country Park, after the park re-opened from lockdown in May 2020. Photo: Stephen Nottingham.

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