

CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1867

NEWSLETTER NO.58

A large, stylized calligraphic logo consisting of the letters 'C', 'N', and 'S' intertwined in a decorative, cursive font.

JUNE 2003

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PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS MAY 2003

As we read of the devastation in Iraq we can only be profoundly thankful for the beauty of our own environment and our good fortune to live in such a lovely part of the world. We have both the hills and the sea and in particular we have the off shore islands of Wales here on our doorstep.

I, like others in the Society, have been able to visit many of them – often under the expert guidance of fellow members.

Some of my own highlights come to mind. Flatholm last year, visited with my cousins and a party of kids from the most deprived area of Barry, enjoyed by us all. Here the wild leek was at its best - possibly introduced by the monks many centuries ago. 'Plantlife' have mounted a campaign to identify a 'County flower'. Should not the wild leek or perhaps monkshood be more suitable than the current suggestions of wild daffodil or dune gentian, neither native to our City? The gulls on Flatholm are threatened by disease carried from our rubbish dumps and despite their dive-bombing one hopes a solution can be found. Inevitably I found the history of the isolation hospital particularly poignant. How many know that as late as 1900, the Medical Officer of Health for Cardiff removed to Flatholm one of the last victims of the plague in the UK?

I've recently been fascinated by the story of Steepholm – 'Steepholm – legends and history' told by one of its wardens – 'Rodney Legg' and recommend this tale of the past.

Two wonderful weeks, both led by Mary - Dr Gillham, for the then Extra Mural Department were spent on Bardsey and on Lundy. At Bardsey I remember an afternoon sitting alone above a small cove watching a family of choughs – as the young called to their parents flying in with food. Later the same day we joined the Warden for an evening visit to the colony of Manx shearwaters and listened to the evocative sounds made as parents found the right burrow.

I treasure a video of Grassholm, made on the day the Merthyr Naturalists' Society had a memorable landing on the island – eye to eye with the nesting gannets and their fledglings. The sights and sounds were brilliant even if one's sense of smell could have been less evident.

Perhaps best of all have been days spent on Skomer and Ramsey, sometimes introducing family and friends to the joy of puffin watching, on other occasions with fellow naturalists. How many were on Skomer the day of the storm when all the burrows were flooded and Manx shearwater and storm petrels came up and flew at midday?

Some of us will have had the opportunity, by the time this newsletter reaches you, to spend a few days on Skokholm and this stay will no doubt renew our intent as individuals and as a Society to support all who strive to conserve our environment.

Joan Andrews

Field Meetings June to September 2003.

For field meetings on 3rd, 14th & 18th June see March newsletter No 57

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF MEETING PLACE AND START TIME

Saturday 28th June.

Taf Fechan Reserve.

Start time 12 noon

Packed lunch.

The Taf Fechan Local Nature reserve lies two miles north of Merthyr Tydfil town centre. It is situated in the Taf Fechan Valley between the river bridges of Pontsarn and Cefn Coed y Cymmer. We shall be guided on our visit by one of the members of the Merthyr Tydfil and District Naturalist Society, Terry Barry. Meet up with other members of the Merthyr Naturalists at the Black Patch lay-by, Cefn Coed on the road to Pontsarn.[SO 034085]

Sunday 6th July

Caerphilly mountain.

Start time 10.30 am

Packed lunch.

Caerphilly countryside warden, Simon Greenfield will be leading us for this visit investigating mainly the flora on different habitats in the area but I'm sure there will be plenty of other things to see. Please meet at Caerphilly Common carpark [ST 156854]

Tuesday 15th July.

Friar's point.

Start time 7.30pm

PUBLIC WALK.

Our second public walk is in the Vale to see the 'other side' of Barry Island. This walk is open to all so please bring non-members along. Meet at the carpark [ST112665] - parking fee may need to be paid.

Sunday 20th July.

Nature Study Day.

Start time 10 am.

Packed lunch.

A second visit to the Nant Tranhshyrhebog area to the north of Cefn Onn Park, a rich mixed woodland and grassland area for which there are simply not many records. We shall be going to a slightly different location on this visit. There is a lot to see, so once again it may take all day, and members may wish to bring a packed lunch to take on-site [the alternative being to take a short break in the nearby Ty Mawr public house]

Remember you don't need to be an expert [although we hope to have some on hand] we need as many sets of eyes as possible on these days, and we do take a little more time in looking at things so they are great days to practise with your identification guides, and really increase your abilities in identifications

Meet in Cefn Onn Car Park [ST 179814]

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF MEETING PLACE.

Wednesday 6th August.

Evening bat walk.

Start time 9.30 pm.

Rather than at Bute Park, we shall meet our guide Danielle Cowell from the Bat group outside the Riverbank Hotel, 53-59 Despensers Street, Cardiff across the river from the Stadium - a favourite bat haunt apparently. We shall then take a short walk around the best bat sites in the city.

EXTRA FIELD MEETING- COACH TRIP

Saturday 13th September.

WWT reserve London Wetland Centre.

Start time 8.00 am{museum}

Packed lunch or use WWT café.

The award winning London Wetland Centre is the first project of its kind in the world - more than 40 hectares of created wetlands in the heart of a capital city. Opened in May 2002, the SSSI-designated reserve offers the chance to see rare and beautiful wetland wildlife just a stone's throw from central London. An earlier than normal start and a later return [approximately 8pm back in Cardiff] will ensure we have the maximum time there. A guided tour of the reserve has been arranged. A booking form for this coach trip can be found in this newsletter.

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety Code.

It is useful to know who is coming on the trip especially if you are willing to give a lift to those without transport. Please contact me if you need a lift and hopefully I can arrange one. Contributions towards drivers' petrol is appreciated.

For coach trips acknowledgements will only be sent if a SAE is included. Refunds are not possible unless there is someone to take your place. Please contact me if you are unable to attend. Watts coaches will be used starting at Bonvilston, main pick-up at the museum and outside the school at Whitchurch. Alternative pick-up points can be arranged if reasonable.

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EDITORIAL

EXTRA FIELD MEETING

I have been asked by John Zehetmayr from the Lavernock Point Nature Reserve if we would like to make a short visit on Saturday 26th July 2003 at 13.00hrs

Tricia has agreed to this and Jeff Curtis will be the meeting's co-ordinator.

A small car park is close to the nature reserve

There is also an open day on Sunday 27th from 11am

Copy for the September newsletter by Aug 20th please

THE RADYR COMMUNITY WOODLAND, 25th MARCH 2003

To the accompaniment of the clanking of JCBs I threaded the complex of new roads and mini roundabouts flanking the hundred half-built luxury homes beside Junction Terrace on the old railway marshalling yards just north of Radyr Station. Mercifully the Nature Reserve remained unscathed, but bordered now by a newly bulldozed slope from the built-up railway land by the Taff.

The woodland pool at the north end was as tranquil as ever, backed by patches of golden kingcups and dotted with mangrove-like alders and columns of the rare tufted sedge (*Carex elata*) (See "A Natural History of Cardiff", page 277). A pair of mallard sneaked off into the shrubby swamp where they would probably nest. Two moorhens made a comical exit, heads bobbing back and forth as they swam, like that of a hen with St. Vitis dance, but increasing speed at intervals by running along any log or branch pointing in the right direction.



Bullfinches feeding on Osier

I followed the stream down, surprising another pair of mallard which paddled off unconcernedly through a mini forest of shade horsetail. One of the four grey squirrels spotted during the next hour hopped away across the black quagmire, scarcely his contact with the three inches long footbridge where the Burned Mound on the water course. Bordering magnificent display of obviously planted, but

I sat awhile on a out greenfinch from tits from their creeper returned to the time and again, to walking upside down. Constantly on the move, at a respectable pace, these birds are superbly easy to watch. Everything else stays quite still until finally spotted, then flies into another tangle, too fast to follow, chuckling silently until it can gaze into the focussed binoculars and take off again.



Tree Creeper

wetting his feet so brief was earth. Dark minnows two to created ripples by the stream serving the Iron Age scarp above joins the main the grass alongside was a primroses and daffodils, none the worse for that.

handy bench, sorting chaffinch and long-tailed commoner kin. A tree alder branches overhead display its prowess at

Following another recently installed boardwalk winding through the sodden alderwood, I was surrounded by a spreading thicket of kingcups, grading back into bordering celandines. The whole was permeated with flowering golden saxifrage while delicate wood sorrel petals peeped from shamrock leaves on mossy alder boles. It was good to see such a fine display of flowers after the bleak months of winter, but the real spectacle was yet to come in the shape of spreading swards of wood anemones on the mounded scarp base of Hermitage Wood. The snowdrops along the eastern ditch were well past their prime but colour was beginning to show on the yellow archangel, some with variegated leaves, some plain. In a few weeks this would be a bluebell wood, and the generous peppering of tiddliwink-sized Himalayan balsam cotyledons promised a more flamboyant display of pink for later on.



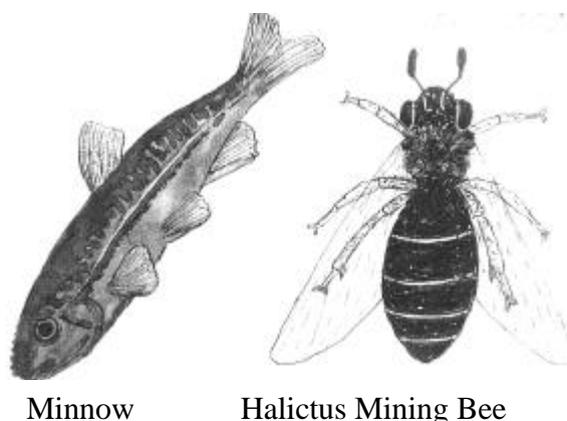
Kingcup or March Marigold

not seen this type of growth before. Even the early wood violets (*Viola reichenbachiana*) overtopped them.

The Anemones were of normal height, four to six inches. The previous day, when approaching Castel Coch along the Taff Trail from the north, I had encountered a large patch in a sunny clearing of the beechwood where no Anemone flower was more than one to two inches above ground, springing straight from the slender rhizome. I have

The open Kingfisher Pool, newly cleared, still held a pair of moorhens. Another seat and a delightful ten minutes watching four bullfinches, two male and two female, feeding in the willows a few yards away. They tweaked chunks from the ripe catkins, rolled them around in their beaks, as when shelling seeds, and then discarded them, having presumably squeezed out the nectar and pollen.. (My locals have left the Forsythia flowers alone this year.) Some blue tits watched for a awhile and then started doing likewise

A jay came loping past, a combination of pink breast and white rump, then worked his way across the grass towards me, showing off the black-spotted white crown and blue wing feathers that country gents no longer wear in their hat bands. One of several wood pigeons was fussing about its fragile nest platform, another pair was conjugating, among much flapping of wings. Following the ancient hedge back, I disturbed blackbirds, dunnocks, robins, starlings and a noisy wren. A buzzard sailed out from Forest Farm over the two railway lines to circle in the thermal raised by the bulldozers.



Minnow

Halictus Mining Bee

Another manifestation of spring the next day on the cliffs at Llantwit Major involved a loose colony of several dozen Halictus mining bees with three narrow yellow stripes on the black abdomen and gingery fluff on the thorax. They hovered over the pale baked clay of the worn steps leading up the cliff. Some had started to excavate nesting burrows: most were still prospecting for suitable sites. The only nearby flowers to furnish the new homes with nectar and pollen were those of Danish scurvy grass. Noises off here were crowing pheasants, cooing wood pigeons and the dull song of a chiff chaff.

The cliff path at Lavernock next day was bordered by deep purple sweet violets interspersed with the fresh green flowers of spurge laurel and persistent orange seeds of gladdon Iris. Four greenfinches entertained me during lunch, tweaking off three inch lengths of dead stems stout enough to hold their weight and with obvious difficulty, trying to hold too many at once and dropping most

Mary E Gillham

INDOOR MEETINGS PROGRAMME, AUTUMN 2003.

The Annual General Meeting opens our new season on Wednesday, 24th September 2003, at 7 p.m. As last year, we meet nowadays in Room EO.02 on the UWIC Llandaff Campus. After the brief formal business of the meeting, we will visit 'Some Caribbean Islands' in the entertaining company of Mairead Sutherland - a former President of the Society and one of our longest-serving members.

On Wednesday, 8th October, the first full-length talk for the winter series will be by Linda Nottage, on 'Spring in the South of France'. This follows Linda and Rob's visit in Spring this year, and will be a taste of what is in store for those who join the proposed trip to the area being arranged by Linda and Rob for the first week of May 2004.

Nicola Hutchinson is the Woodland Biodiversity Officer with the Cardiff Parks Department. She is coming to talk to us about her work in the city on Thursday, 16th October. She will undoubtedly be able to give an enthusiastic account of the great variety of trees to be found in our local parks.

For something completely different, we have a visit from Simon Allen on Wednesday, 29th October. He founded and runs the Gower Bird Hospital, having given up his former career in electronic engineering to devote himself full time to wildlife rehabilitation and research.

Derek Moore is the Chief Executive of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, after many years working for wildlife trusts in the South of England. His special interest, since childhood, is in birds, and his talk on Thursday, 13th November, will be on Birds and their Habitats in East Anglia - an area he knows well, having been Director of Suffolk Wildlife Trust for 15 years, and County Bird Recorder and Editor of Suffolk Birds from 1978-84.

Our Field Meetings programme last year included a visit to Llandegfedd Reservoir, escorted by the Head Ranger, Richard Poole, who is coming indoors to talk about the wildlife on his patch, on Wednesday, 26th November.

As ever, the Autumn indoor meetings conclude with the 'Christmas Special' on Wednesday, 10th December, concocted by our President, Joan Andrews.

The second part of the winter programme of indoor meetings will resume after Christmas, in January 2004. Details in the December Newsletter.

Margaret Leishman
Indoor Meetings Secretary.

August 2003.