

*CNS*



## **CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

Founded 1867

NEWSLETTER NO.83  
SEPTEMBER 2009

Charity No 1092496  
[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)

Indoor meetings/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)

Cover photo 3 Insects at Merthyr Mawr by Margaret Samuel

## **Presidential Ramblings - August 2009**

It's not too often that, sitting in the study, looking out of the open window, one can become so totally absorbed in the affairs of one's neighbours. I first became aware that something out of the ordinary was going on about three weeks ago when I heard the most loud and raucous screeching emanating from the meadow opposite our house. The pastured field is bordered by a small wooded slope leading to an ancient medieval settlement and is usually inhabited by a modest and normally quiet herd of beef cattle. The culprits were a pair of buzzards who were repeatedly flying from wood to field and vice versa; this they have been doing from dawn to dusk for at least the past 17 days. Their calls are plainly audible for three quarters of a mile or more and the cause of their frenetic behaviour remains a mystery to me. The birds appear to be in good condition and are not being harassed or otherwise apparently distressed. I can only presume that they may have reluctant fledgeling young somewhere in the near vicinity and are trying to get them to take to the wing.

A recent article published by the Royal Society drew attention to the "alien pests" which threaten life on the Galapagos Islands. It would appear that modern methods of travel are set to bring chaos to the islands ecosystem in the form of the dreaded mosquito. A number of native species are at serious risk because they have not evolved any natural immunity to the diseases which the mosquitoes carry.

I suppose that we have only to consider the global spread (almost overnight) of the recent Swine Flu epidemic to realise what a danger as well as an advantage modern air flight poses.

Regrettably my plea in the last Newsletter for a  
(CONTINUED)

successor to Margaret as Indoor Meetings Secretary has met with a deafening silence. **Please** may we have a volunteer, as without a Secretary to keep us in order, the future of our evening lecture programme will be placed in jeopardy.

Roger Milton

---

## INDOOR MEETINGS – AUTUMN 2009

We start our season, as usual, with the Annual General Meeting, at 7 o'clock on **Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September**. This and all our meetings will again be held in the UWIC campus on Western Avenue. The room we are using has yet to be confirmed but direction notices will be displayed in the reception area at the main entrance.

The formal business of the AGM should not take long, and our President, Roger Milton will give a talk after which some refreshments will be on offer to get the season off to a convivial start.

The evening lectures will follow as listed on the programme and the website for 2009 – 2010. All will start at 7.30pm beginning on **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October** with a return visit by Peter Rees who gave us such an interesting and wonderfully illustrated talk on coral reefs. We look forward to some more of his experiences in the under-sea environment.

Our next meeting is on **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October** with Dr Alan Channing of the School of Earth Sciences at Cardiff University, who has been studying how plants and animals live in and are preserved by hot spring systems from many million years ago. His talk on this special environment will be illustrated ranging over his travels in Patagonia, the Canary Islands, Iceland, Yellowstone Park and elsewhere.

A subject of great topical interest will be covered when Professor Roger Falconer of the School of Engineering at Cardiff University gives us a talk on the various controversial proposals for a Severn Barrage. He is very well qualified to give an expert opinion on the options being considered to harvest the powerful tides of the Severn

Estuary. Professor Falconer's talk will be on **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November**.

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November** brings Dr Tim Rich of the National Museum of Wales, a botanist specialising in the flora of Britain and Ireland with a particular interest in the conservation of rare species such as the subject of his talk 'Wonderful Welsh Whitebeams'.

On **Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November** Linda and Rob Nottage will share with us some aspects of their encounters with the wild life of Southern Brazil. In the well worn phase 'Rob and Linda need no introduction' having been valuable members of our society for many years.

Our Autumn season ends with the Annual Christmas Special on **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December**. This is a happy social occasion with informal entertainment, a glass of something and some snacks to enjoy before we meet again in the New Year with the first of the Spring season talks on **Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010**.

Margaret Leishman

Still the Indoor Meeting Secretary after yet another year – now 17 in all. Can someone help?

---

**FIELD TRIP TO EAST ABERTHAW**  
**Sunday June 7<sup>th</sup>**

Our second visit to east Aberthaw took place on a fair day weather-wise and these are the thoughts of Mary Gilham from her many years of experience of this secluded backwater.

**CHANGES AT ABERTHAW OVER FOUR DECADES**

The recent CNS visit to Aberthaw brought home to me the ever changing nature of this 'half way point' where saline water meets fresh on its way up channel, triggering fundamental changes during forty years since I have been visiting.

The saltmarsh fringe under the now fully vegetated 'fossilised' sea cliff was formerly composed of Saltwort, Seablite and Sea Spurrey, backed by a belt of pale yellow Sea Radish. Now it is dominated by Sea Heath



Aberthaw by the lagoons

(*Frankenia laevis*), a new plant for Glamorgan in recent years, but already romping away along the upper tideline both here and at Ogmore Mouth. Its pink flowers appear at the same time as the mauve ones of the accompanying Rock Sea Lavender in August. Our June visit showed the current yellow upshore fringe to be of the brighter Biting Stonecrop.

The new Sea Heath border has now extended westwards around the end of the sea wall which cuts the lagoon off from the sea. Flowers currently blooming in this ground-hugging strip were the pink ones of Sea Milkwort or Black Saltwort and the white ones of the equally succulent Sea Sandwort (*Honckenya peploides*) with a few upstanding sprigs of Centaury.

Interwoven throughout were creeping stems of succulent Rock Samphire, a form very different from the bushy plants of exposed cliffs and concrete groynes. Are these going to withstand the rabbit-grazing and occasional douching with sea water and reach their accustomed height to dominate the rest? Only time will tell. Out beyond the fringing pebbles were the spreading flowers and long fruits of Yellow-horned Poppies.



Long-horned Poppy

The brand new sand dune that has built up on the tip of the sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating outermost storm beach of boulders is still in the pioneering Marram phase, with bordering Sand Couch (now *Elytrigia juncea*). Sea Holly has moved in and even grey Sallow on the innermost face where the salt marsh formerly drained to the sea.

Is this a move back towards the long-lost, much cherished ‘Leys’ with their rare Sea Kale and Sea Pea and so great an expanse of sand as to accommodate a golf course and much else? These were always proudly



Red Valerian and foreshore

referred to by East Glamorganites as the most easterly sand dunes in South Wales.

The semi-permanent quadrats where I studied the rise and fall of the swards of Bee Orchids, to landward of the historic lime kiln, disappeared under the advancing scrub many years ago. This is now knitted together with an impenetrable shroud of Traveller's Joy. The more open stands of Pyramidal Orchids which formed on the new fly ash tips (where rabbits dug their burrows apparently without being asphyxiated by the dust) are now quite scarce. Shrubs and trees have replaced much of the flowery meadow communities developed on the grassed tips and sand of the former estuary, bounded by the substantial stone wall of Pleasant Harbour. Notable features of the young woodland are gangling specimens of Sea Buckthorn which is proving such a menace to native flora on the Merthyr Mawr dunes at the further end of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast.

This fascinatingly dynamic stretch of coast – with its tufa flows, ‘cemented’ and sometimes undercut boulder banks and vegetated aquifers nurturing the rare Maidenhair



Marsh Helleborine soon to flower

Fern on the eastern cliffs – also the pristine, ungrazed Sea Purslane (*Halimione*) saltmarsh with so much of the rare Wormwood (now *Seriphidium maritimum*) – is a much neglected habitat. Sadly time did not permit of our party getting to these special parts. And how come only six people turned up for the walk at all?

Mary E. Gilham  
Photos by Bruce McDonald

## **FIELD TRIP TO CRUMLYN BURROWS**

**Sunday, June 14<sup>th</sup> 2009**

*“Never peel your parsnips in sunshine”*



Crossing the Creek

If this was one mental image we came away with, there were also many visual memories of our day spent rambling around Crumlyn Burrows, not visited for many years by Cardiff Nats. Our leader for the day was Charles Hipkins, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Biology at Swansea University, who combined an extensive

knowledge of botany with a detailed understanding of the local ecology.

Crumlyn Burrows lies to the south of Fabian Way which runs into Swansea Centre and combines salt marsh, dune, foreshore and woodland. It is an SSSI and with few people about apart from the odd dog-walker and fisherman it retains its wildness despite the proximity to Wales' second city. As we crossed the road and headed into the reserve the ground was carpeted with Common Storksbill, *Erodium cicutarium*, with a splash of yellow on the verges from Small-flowered Evening Primrose, *Oenothera cambrica*. The wet areas were full of Horsetails intermingled with Dutch Rush, *Equisetum hyemale*, distinguished by black rings, solid rather than hollow stems and being unbranched. Some time was spent on the Willowherbs, our first being Spear-leaved Willowherb, *Epilobium lanceolata*, where the stigma has 4 lobes rather than the club-shaped Willowherbs.

The next challenge was to sort out the many Mustard-like flowers. Hoary Mustard, *Hirschfeldia incana*, has thin fruits adpressed to the stem described as looking like an old-fashioned clothes peg whereas our next find, Wallflower Cabbage, *Coincya monensis* ssp. *cheiranthus*, had distinctively larger flowers and is classified as a rare casual but occasional or locally frequent in South Wales. Later we were to see Sea Radish, *Raphanus sativus*, another splash of yellow but with its

conspicuous fruit like a short string of beads.

Always a struggle to identify are the many dandelion-like flowers which grew abundantly in the differing habitats through which we walked. The Dandelions, *Taraxacum* sp., have thick but hollow stems whereas with the next species Charles explained how to bend back the leaves so that the hairs stand proud and the fact that the hairs were forked suggested it was Lesser Hawkbit, *Leontodon saxatilis*. Hidden away in a very overgrown area Charles pointed out Field Wormwood, *Artemisia campestris*, very rare nationally and only found in Breckland and South Wales. As we headed into the drier sandier areas Mouse-ear Hawkweed, *Pilosella officinarum*, predominated with untoothed leaves and pale underside accompanied by Cat's Ear, *Hypochaeris radicata*, with wavy-toothed and bristly leaves and the sterile bracts the same colour as the petals.

With the day warming up steadily, a selection of insects presented themselves for inspection. Small Blue and Common Blue butterflies skirmished with Small Heaths whilst the recent irruption of Painted Ladies resulted in a scattering of much-travelled specimens. Linda Nottage found a Mottled Grasshopper and a Poplar Leaf beetle posed close to the trees from which its name derives. A Beautiful Demoiselle damselfly flew past, well away from any moving fresh water and a Garden Chafer tried to keep a low profile on a Crack Willow. A Brown Argus added interest but the high point came with the Dark Green Fritillaries, active and fast-moving but rewarding when occasionally found at rest.



Diseased Hairy Rockcress

A somewhat precarious crossing of the creek that bisects the Burrows brought us to an area of saltmarsh adjacent to the dunes with the attendant usual suspects; Thrift, *Armeria maritima* ssp. *maritime*, Sea Bindweed, *Convolvulus soldanella*, Sea Milkwort, *Glaux maritima*, Sea Sandwort, *Honckenya peploides*

and Sea Purslane, *Atriplex portulacoides*. A puzzling find, appearing initially like one of the *Alliums* was identified by Charles as a diseased

form of Hairy Rockcress, *Arabis hirsuta*. The area is particularly good for grasses and sedges with Charles pointing out Sand Sedge, *Carex arenaria*, False Fox Sedge, *Carex otrubae* and the Long-bracted Sedge, *Carex extensa*.



Long-bracted Sedge

Heading further into the dunes Charles pointed out the dune versions of Wild Pansies, *Viola tricolour*, noting that at Crumlyn they are not 'tri-coloured' but exclusively yellow. Nearing the foreshore a clump of Wild Parsnip, *Pastinaca sativa*, came into view, Charles warning of the dangers of getting any sap from the plant on the skin. He had been consulted when children playing at a public playground had developed severe rashes, the cause eventually established as being the strimming of the surrounding vegetation which included Wild Parsnip. If the furocoumarins in the plant are absorbed in the skin, exposure to light can set off the reaction that causes the rash and this risk extends to cultivated parsnips although supposedly not if only the root is being handled.

Eventually emerging onto the foreshore we were directed towards the well-established clumps of Sea Stock, *Matthiola sinuata*, which,

although in decline here, is still one of the best locations for it on the Glamorgan coast. The rosettes take some years before flowering, after which vegetative offshoots can be seen emerging from the base. It was at nearby Baglan Bay that the



On the edge of the dunes



Prickly Saltwort

Reverend John Lightfoot first identified Sea Stock. Prickly Saltwort, *Salsola kali*, poked through the sand not far from the upper tide zone – the plant familiar in Hollywood Westerns as Tumbleweed. From the shore of the River Neath our return route

took us along the seaward side of the creek with the warming day increasing the sightings of invertebrates. The birders also were not disappointed with views of Bulfinch, Egret, Reed and Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings amongst many others. Good weather, a richly-varied biodiversity and an excellent guide had resulted in a most enjoyable outing.



One of the many garden escapes

Bruce McDonald

Species lists compiled by Linda and Rob Nottage, Margaret Samuel and Andy Kendall. See website for all species seen.

Photos Bruce McDonald

## **Obituary: Joyce Lloyd**

Sadly Dr. Joyce Lloyd passed away in April 2009, aged 87. She was one of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society's remaining members from the days when Presidents' Receptions were held in formal attire in the main hall of the National Museum.

Both she and her husband, Professor Harold Lloyd, served as presidents of the Society and she was a faithful attender at meetings until her last few months. She will be greatly missed.

The funeral was held in the Lady Chapel of Llandaff Cathedral and the Crematorium, with a reception at the New House Country Hotel, Thomhill on 20th April.

A mycologist in her professional life, she was interested in all aspects of natural history and landscape. It seems appropriate here to record a poem which she wrote on the subject of the Severn Bore when she was still a schoolgirl, and which was read at the funeral.

### **A SONNET ON THE SEVERN**

**By Joyce Lloyd, nee Hawkes 1939**

Between these widening banks you flow along.  
Your water laps against the dock's drab sides.  
But in the meadow with the warbler's song.  
It's there I see the beauty of your tides.

A distant murmur, then a sullen roar -  
A wall of water swirls against the edge.  
The tang of salt that comes up with the bore.  
Brings near the sea to inland field and hedge.

The first crest passes, then a second breaks.  
Which strives to catch the one that's on ahead.  
And with its effort farther splashing makes.  
And glubs the reeded inlets of its beds.  
A final gushing and the noise is gone.  
And smaller plashings ripple, on and on.

## Costa Rican Adventures

One of the wildlife highlights of our Costa Rican honeymoon in March



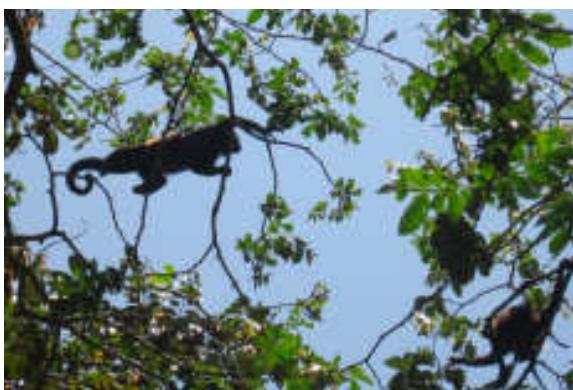
Resplendent Quetzal, Monteverde  
(our guide took this for us down his telescope)

was seeing a pair of Resplendent Quetzals, which were just as magnificent as they sound. The male was astonishingly colourful with beautiful green and red plumage and remarkable tail plumes that were possibly over a metre long and certainly over twice the length of the bird's body. The Quetzal is one of the top species to see for every birder who goes to Costa Rica, but despite our guidebook saying they can be difficult to spot,

the pair we saw were conveniently sitting in a tree above the car park, apparently digesting their meal of Wild Avocados. The Avocado fruits are eaten whole and the stones regurgitated, helping to disperse the seeds. The Quetzal is found in the montane cloud forest of Central America from southern Mexico to Panama but is now an endangered species mainly due to habitat loss. However, Costa Rica itself now has a good reputation for wildlife conservation with 25 per cent of the country being protected by a network of national parks and reserves.

Our two week trip took us from the Caribbean coast to the Pacific coast stopping at various locations in between. Guided boat trips along the canals and rivers of Tortuguero National Park in the north east of the country were a hugely enjoyable way to start the tour. Tortuguero is most famous for its large turtle nesting beach – an important nesting site for the Green Sea Turtle, Hawksbill Turtle and Leatherback Turtle. Some of the highlights of these two days included troops of Howler Monkeys and Spider Monkeys, Three-toed Sloth, Green Iguana, Basilisk Lizard, Spectacled Caiman, Black River Turtle and a variety of birds from Bare-throated Tiger Heron to Amazon Kingfisher and Rainbow-billed Toucan. While on these boat tours, we regularly heard loud snapping noises coming from the forest, almost as if someone

were firing a rifle. A guide told us that this noise was made by the White -collared Manakin, a bird whose wings are modified to make various snapping and rustling noises. The male has an elaborate mating display and uses these wing noises in its display.



Howler Monkeys, Tortuguero National Park  
the canopy.

One of the most unique places we stayed at was a jungle lodge where the tree house style rooms had walls consisting of a fine mosquito mesh. We really had the feel of being in the middle of the jungle even when inside. We were surrounded by continuous jungle noises from the birds, frogs, insects, howler monkeys and fruits crashing down through

At La Selva Biological Station in the Sarapiqui region of central Costa Rica, we were treated to a morning guided walk. Highlights included seeing large numbers of a bird called Montezuma Oropendola (also seen throughout the trip). These birds nest in colonies and have distinctive, woven, basket-like nests, about a metre long, which hang down from branches high up in the trees. Our guide found an old nest that had fallen out of a tree and passed it around the group – it was surprisingly light for its size. As well as innumerable Leaf Cutter Ants crossing the forest



Nests of Montezuma Oropendola, La Selva Biological Station

paths we also saw a large Bullet Ant nest. Our guide told us that he knew from personal experience that a Bullet Ant sting causes 24 hours of agony – we kept our distance! Our guide also pointed out the medicinal properties of some of the plants including a plant traditionally used as an anaesthetic. He invited us to chew part of a leaf, which gave the temporary sensation of having a local anaesthetic at the dentist.



Srrangler Fig where the host tree has died,  
Monteverde.

In Monteverde we saw the Strangler Fig at various stages of its life cycle. The plant starts life as an epiphyte, where it grows on its host tree and starts to send roots down. It gradually engulfs the host, until, after it has become well established, it eventually causes the host tree's death. Our guide was keen to stress that the Stranger Fig is not a parasite as it does not feed directly on the host plant, but kills the host by out-competing it for light and nutrients.

In Manuel Antonio National Park, on the Pacific coast, we were able to get good close up views of both Central American Squirrel Monkeys and White Faced Capuchin Monkeys – the latter had in fact become rather too used to people and were cheeky enough to steal sandwiches from peoples hands. The Squirrel Monkey population has declined steeply since the 70's, but is now protected in Manuel Antonio and Corcovado National Parks. Other highlights of this forest walk included the Lesser Nighthawk, a line of Long Nosed Bats asleep under a branch, a Red-eyed Tree Frog, Two and Three Toed Sloths and a Green Iguana in its red and orange breeding colours. Just outside the national park, our guide pointed out a bird called the Common Potoo. Related to Nightjars, this bird is difficult to see because it is nocturnal

and well camouflaged - during the day it perches upright on tree stumps to look like part of the tree. The individual we saw was sitting with a juvenile which was apparently being trained to sit in that way!

We have so many memories to treasure of the wildlife we saw in Costa Rica. The colour and variety of the birds was truly amazing -



Female Three-toed Sloth, Manuel Antonio National Park



Green Iguana in breeding colours, Manuel National Park

apart from a few common species, we hardly ever saw the same bird twice. One of our lasting memories will be of walking through the lush forests surrounded

by the sights and sounds of its varied animal life. Can't wait to go back one day.

Thomas and Susan Simcock

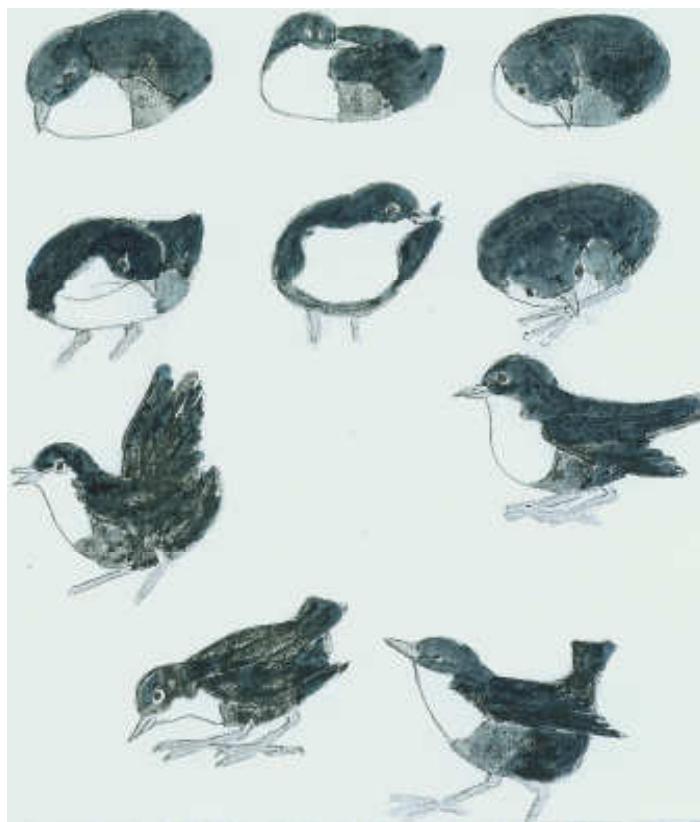
## DIPPER WATCHING

On the 18th July I had the good fortune to witness a ten minute spell of preening by a dipper just a few feet below me on the River Gavenny at Abergavenny. Said to be five inches long, this one was egg shaped as I sketched it in every conceivable position.

Throughout the ablutions the white nictitating membrane or second eyelid flicked constantly across the beady eyes. Satisfied at last, it stretched its stubby little wings, stood erect and commenced the clockwork bobbing for which it is famous, but which it had indulged in only half-heartedly or not at all during the ablutions.

Its patience then, peering into the stream for likely prey, outlasted mine, but it passed me later, flying low over the water and lingering again below the little weir.

Mary E. Gillham



## **FIELD TRIP TO MERTHYR MAWR**

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July**

Our mission was to seek out misbehaving mediaeval nuns. Well, perhaps not the nuns but at least a floral link to them. And after some years absence from Merthyr Mawr our return visit did not disappoint.



Merthyr Mawr Dunes

Whilst we were there mainly to view the wildlife the site also contains much of historical and archaeological interest and is a Schedule Ancient Monument with remains from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages as well as the Roman period.

Traditionally used for grazing by livestock and also rabbits as implied by the word ‘warren’, the grazing was probably at its best before Tudor times when violent storms brought huge quantities of sand inland.

From where we started at the car park near Candleston Castle we could see the Monterey and Scots Pines planted from 1834 in an attempt to stabilise the land. Not long afterwards Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*, was also planted but the decimation of the rabbit population from myxomatosis in the mid twentieth century reduced this control on the plant and it spread rapidly over the site. More recently sections of Sea Buckthorn have been removed and grazing introduced to a fenced-off area of 54 hectares.

Setting off across the dunes which include the highest in Wales, we immediately encountered colourful stands of prostrate Common Storksbill, *Erodium cicutarium*, and spires of Rosebay Willowherb, *Chamerion angustifolium*, with an intermingling of Pansies, *Viola*



Brown Argus

*tricolour*, which here come in different colours unlike the yellow-only versions we saw at Crumlyn Burrows. There were good numbers of butterflies; Common and Small Blues, assorted Vanessids and a Brown Argus.

Our initial objective was to locate Birthwort *Aristolochia clematitis*, an uncommon plant in Wales with a few locations in South Wales and one other in Anglesey. A grid reference (SS

85956/76703) and GPS led us unerringly to the large and spreading clump of it which can now be found up to 100 metres from the main stand. Used traditionally to induce childbirth or help ensure the placenta was expelled, *Aristolochia* means ‘excellent birth’ hence Blamey, Fitter and

Fitter’s amusing reference to it in ‘Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland’ as ‘a drug used to save peccant mediaeval nuns from their misbehaviour with peccant monks’. This was a good time of year to see the plant as the gooseberry-shaped fruit were much in evidence but there were still plenty of flowers to be seen.



Birthwort

The dune slacks produced their own varied floral types, one in particular displaying large numbers of Round-leaved Wintergreen, *Pyrola rotundifolia*. A pre-flowering orchid had us guessing for a while

until further specimens revealed it to be Green-flowered Helleborine, *Epipactis phyllanthes* – a nice find and quite widespread in this slack. Lunch was taken on the edge of the dunes and from there we descended to the beach. This stretch was undistinguished botanically but as we headed back along the Ogmore riverbank many of the salt-marsh plants that we had seen at Crumlyn Burrows were again on show with one

curiosity being a Fig Tree which has been happily growing here for many years. Another foray into the dunes brought us back to the car park – the weather had been good and the wildlife as impressive and varied as ever.



Green-flowered Helleborine

Bruce McDonald  
Photos by Margaret Samuel and Bruce McDonald

## **CLYDACH VALE COUNTRY PARK 8th AUGUST 2009**

Twelve CNS members assembled in warm sunshine to explore a venue new to many. We were fortunate to be joined by two local volunteers with Communities First, David Jones and Spencer Coombes, who enhanced our visit by recounting first-hand tales of this former colliery site. Before setting off we were treated to a potted history of the community which developed as first the Gorki drift mine and later the Cambrian pit with associated washery, coking plant and huge waste tips dominated the valley.



Cambrian Colliery

heard how the 50 small Bush houses averaged 10 children apiece, one poor woman having a family of 22. The Bush “gang” had a fearsome reputation with the other schoolchildren. It was heartening to learn that when in 1969, prior to reclamation of the valley, the Bush houses were pulled down the tight -knit community was moved en bloc to terraces in Trellaw so they retained exactly the same neighbours as before.

The Cambrian pit closed in 1965 following an underground explosion in

Old photographs – in particular of now-demolished terraces built in 1880’s by George Bush (no, not the US president!) - testified to the harshness of miners’ families’ lives. When he was only 11, David’s father died of pneumoconiosis. We



Double Pink Bramble



By Quarry pool



Clydach Vale April 2009

which 31 died. On our walk we paused for photos beside the winding wheel and plaque which stand as a memorial to the lives lost. Later in

the afternoon we met another interesting local man whose father died in the disaster, but he spoke with pride about the best steam coal mined there which was shipped around the world to power the British Navy. Now that the spoil tips and colliery buildings have been cleared away and the site re-landscaped in the last 30 years with lakes and extensive tree-planting it is hard to imagine the dirt and noise of former industry.

We enjoyed our history lesson from the café terrace (sadly the café was not yet open) overlooking the lower lake with its large numbers of waterfowl especially Mallard, some still with broods of half-grown ducklings, and Coot and Moorhen families too. Elsewhere in the valley, birds were few and far between although a Grey Heron stalked the upper lake where we ate our picnic lunch, 2 Buzzards soared over, a Green Woodpecker called and a lucky few spotted a Dipper on the stream.

The only mammal was a dead Common Shrew near the café but there were plenty of insects especially butterflies. The commoner ‘Browns’ included a Small Heath; Peacocks and Painted Ladies were drawn to the Buddleia bushes; Small Skippers nectared on Knapweed and a Small Copper glowed in the grass where Silver Y moths fluttered. Six or seven Green-veined Whites clustered around a damp patch on the path, possibly probing for minerals where a dog had peed. An impressive Golden-ringed Dragonfly patrolled the streaming path below the old quarry but there were few Damselflies.

Spencer and David accompanied us until lunchtime, eager to pick our brains about the flora and fauna with a view to preparing a booklet about the site. Interchange of information kept progress to a slow pace. The fenced plantings consisted of a variety of (mainly native) deciduous trees and shrubs – the ripening Rowan berries an attraction for birds. In more than one of these plantations our eyes were drawn to the pretty pink pom-pom sprays of a double-flowered Bramble which was a novelty for most of us. In several places in full flower beneath the trees were unlikely patches of Round-leaved Wintergreen, a plant more familiar from the Kenfig Dunes. We passed seedheads of marsh orchids in several places but in the afternoon, Graham spotted a single Pyramidal Orchid flowering under the trees.



Deptford Pink

These expected colonists add spice to the mainly common and widespread flowers of the site such as Ragwort (with a scattering of Cinnabar Moth caterpillars) in the grassland and Angelica, Meadowsweet and Marsh Woundwort fringing the lakes. Choicer plants noted were Common Valerian and Ivy-leaved Bellflower but the floral highlight was provided by the tiny carmine stars of Deptford Pink. At least 30 plants were flowering in the unlikely setting of

quarry ledges by a small waterfall. Most of us scrambled up to take photographs. The dainty Pinks were surrounded by a sea of reddish-purple Betony.

After paying homage to this rarity, we made our way back to the car-park by a higher path giving views of the colourful terraced houses of Clydach Vale and the now green and wildlife-friendly valley. Refreshments at the café provided a pleasant end to the stroll for some of the group.

Linda Nottage

## **OTHER FIELD MEETINGS IN BRIEF**

### **GRASSES COURSE 5<sup>th</sup> July**

The first such event run by Cardiff Nats for some time, the course was heavily oversubscribed and resulted in several new members joining the Society. Led by Libby Houston, discoverer of a new species of Whitebeam which is also called after her, the course started with indoor tuition on identifying grasses followed by several hours on the Orchid Fields near Wenvoe where a total of 28 species of grass were found. The weather was kind, the tuition exemplary and the grasses obliging. We plan more such courses for the future.



In amongst the Grasses

### **INVERTEBRATE DAY 19<sup>th</sup> July**

Heavy showers and increasingly blustery conditions were the last things one wanted for a day looking at insects! Yet we persisted for some 3 hours and were rewarded by finding large numbers of different



### Invertebrate Day

species. The day was led by Dr. Ray Barnett, Chief Curator at Bristol City Museum who also heads up the Invertebrate section of Bristol Naturalists' Society but we were also joined by David Clements who runs an ecology consultancy based in Penarth and has a particular interest in invertebrates. Whilst only 3 Cardiff Nats members turned up, fortunately many more non-members attended, helping to make the event worthwhile. Photos taken on the day by Beth Barker can be viewed on the Internet by typing in:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bbcranford/sets/72157621740354342/>

### HAILEY PARK 23<sup>rd</sup> July

On our return visit to Hailey Park we were blessed with a fine evening and were looking forward to seeing how the wild area had progressed in the last 12 months. A good showing of Marsh Woundwort, Melilot, Common Knapweed and Wild Parsnip provided colour to the occasion but the main interest was the Sandmartins down by the River Taff and the Broad-leaved Helleborine lurking in the bushes. This is an important haven for Cardiff wildlife and the Society will continue to provide whatever support it can particularly where re-development threatens.

Bruce McDonald

In contributing to the Cardiff Naturalists' Society Newsletter you agree to grant us a royalty-free, non-exclusive licence to publish and otherwise use the material through web as well as print publishing worldwide. This will be in the format of a pdf copy of the newsletter unless otherwise agreed with you. And may include the publishing of the material by the National Library of Wales who have requested permission to do so and are prohibited from altering the material in any way.

(See the **Newsletter Terms and Conditions on the Cardiff Naturalists' Society website** for the full terms of conditions.)

It's important to note, however, that you still own the copyright to everything you contribute to CNS Newsletter and that if your images and/or text is accepted, we will endeavor to publish your name alongside it in the Newsletter and/or website wherever it is used.

