

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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LIST OF OFFICERS
Immediate past President
Roger Milton

President
Vacant

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

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

Indoor Meetings Secretary
Hilary Wicks
02920257012
Email:indoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

Membership Secretary
Elizabeth Cooling
02920387538
Email: membership@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

Field meetings Secretary
Bruce McDonald
5 Walson Close Wenvoe
CF5 6AS
02920593394
Email: fieldmeetings@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

Publicity
Andy Kendall
Shenstone Tyr Winch Road
Old St Mellons Cardiff CF3 5UX
Tel 029 2077 0707
Mob 079 6373 2277
Email: publicity@cardiffnaturalist.org.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

Cover photo 'Northern Marsh Orchid' by Bruce McDonald

EDITORIAL

At our AGM in September Roger Milton finally stood down as President of the CNS, after an extended term in office.

We were not able to fill the post of President, which at present is vacant. The Council is working hard to find a suitable President and have a possibility in mind.

The society would like to record its thanks to Roger for his efforts and staying in the post for an extra few years, our thanks also go to Margaret Leishman who was our Indoor / Membership Secretary for over 17 years. We were more fortunate here finding an indoor meetings secretary last year in Hillary Wicks, and now Elisabeth Cooling has taken over as Membership secretary, we hope we have their services for many years to come.

Mary Gillham wrote to me pointing out a couple of errors in the last newsletter, where I mixed the captions for Toothwort and Spurge on page 10, also the correct spelling of Charophyte on page 32. Mary also noticed that the newsletter numbering was out of sequence, it is correct from the last issue. If any member keeps past issues and would like a new cover page correctly numbered please let me know. Best wishes to all our members for Christmas and the New Year.

Brian

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Copy for the March Newsletter by
17th February 2011 please Ed.

OUTDOOR MEETINGS January to March 2011

Saturday 8th January

Roath Park

Start time 9am

Packed lunch

The new year starts with our annual birdwatch led by Rob and Linda Nottage. We shall be at Roath Park in the morning before heading on to Cardiff Bay in the afternoon. Meet at Wild Gardens Road at the north end of Roath Park.

Saturday 26th February

Candleston

Start time 10am

Packed lunch

Steve Howe of the National Museum of Wales will lead this walk of around 7/8 kms in the Merthyr Mawr area where we could be looking out for anything from Geology to Ornithology. From Candleston Castle we will walk via Cwm y Befos to Newton Beach and then back along the coast and estuary. Meet in Merthyr Mawr car park (SS 8714/7722).- charges may apply.

Saturday 26th March

Gower

Start time 10am

Packed lunch

In 2008 we visited the Gower cliffs to see the Yellow Whitlow grass but it poured down. This time we take a different route to include Pennard Castle, a new river crossing and restored lime-kilns. In the wild this pretty alpine grows on Gower and nowhere else in Britain. Hopefully the weather will be kinder. Park at the National Trust car park at Southgate (bring a membership card if you are a NT member – otherwise there is a charge for parking). Walk is around 8 kms, mostly sandy beach and cliff top. Café and toilets at the start. Car park at SS 5533/8746 - postcode SA3 2DH.

Indoor meetings January to March 2011

Members Evening Monday 17 January 2011

Members who are interested in showing their wildlife holiday / interesting photography during the evening, would you please contact Hilary Wicks by email indoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk or telephone 02920257012 by 7 January 2011 each member will have 10 to 15 minutes depending on numbers.

January 25th

The ecology and conservation of the African Wild Dog
Presented by Dr. Dan Foreman

February 15th

Panama-”Much more than a canal”
Presented by Linda and Rob Nottage

March 2nd

The making of “Rhys to the rescue”
Presented by Dr Rhys Jones”

March 14th

Conservation & Research at the National Botanic Gardens of
Wales.

Presented by Dr Natasha de Vere

Hilary Wicks Indoor Meetings Organiser

The Sessile Leaf: A Footnote

In the last issue Mary Gillham commented on the ‘Sessile leaf’ caption to the photo. The caption actually read ‘Sessile stalk’ – possibly a more helpful caption would have been ‘Leaf stalk of Sessile Oak’ and this reflected the text which referred to the photo. At a time of year when all the acorns have been snaffled by jays and squirrels and the leaves are no longer on the twigs, the two most useful identification clues for the Sessile Oak are arguably the longer stalks on fallen leaves and the pronounced terminal buds

Bruce McDonald

FIELD TRIPS TO KENFIG & HAILEY PARK



'Colour variations on Six-Spot Burnet Moth'

We have had many excursions to Kenfig National Nature Reserve and one might wonder what else there is to say. However, our trip led by Roy Bailey-wood still managed to come up with a few surprises on a fine and very informative evening. The focus was orchids and of these we had plenty but to pick out the more notable features we had huge numbers of Fragrant Orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea*; one Fen



'Ochroleuca variant of Marsh Helleborine'

Orchid *Liparis loeselii*; the ochroleuca variant on the Marsh Helleborine, *Epipactis palustris* and even a couple of candidates for Northern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella* (see cover photo Ed) in amongst the predominantly Southern Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. *Purpurella* is characterised by a diamond-shaped lip.

Hailey Park was different in that we



'Eriophyes inangulis on alder'

had several families and it was good to have a host of children scattering grasshoppers and bush-crickets in every direction. A combination of sweep nets and inspection pots allowed us to show many invertebrates close-up which included both short and long-winged Coneheads. And when the hubbub had died down we noted *Eriophyes inangulis*, a gall on alder with the swellings in the leaf margin.

Bruce McDonald
Photos by Bruce McDonald

ADVENTUROUS TACTICS IN RADYR

How to be a successful alien? Exploit bizarre sites, spurned by others.



Intrepid invader

This outside rose-pink bouquet of Himalayan Balsam exploded midstream in the taff in July 2010 and survived ensuing weeks of flash floods.

The stranded, storm-tossed tree that had helped had been there long enough for most of the soil to have washed from the roots during spates. No matter! The



balsam's main rival Japanese knotweed , Doomed tree provides a helping hand

another from the east, had annexed the entire west bank alongside the Valleys’ “Commuter line”. Innovation was called for.

Within the dark confines at the head of the narrow corridor to the salmon traps another cheerily flowering balsam plant had reached up 4 feet towards the light ! These beautiful, plucky plants should be allowed to continue serving our bees and apiarists far into October when the less innovative have given up. It grieves many of us to see so many felled in their prime to make way for nettles and brambles. All were aliens when the ice retreated to allow them in.



Radyr Weir. Note closed doors of Salmon traps on extreme right, beside salmon pass

Mary E Gillham
Photos by courtesy of Gordon J Robinson
19 Cwrt Brynteg Radyr

CWM RHONDDA FACH from MAERDY 31 JULY 2010

From the northern outskirts of Maerdy beyond the automotive parts factory and water treatment works a metalled track follows the river for 2 miles to the Pont Lluest Wen reservoir, giving easy access to the upper valley. A select group of 7 members set off and were soon joined by Susan and Tom who later provided invaluable assistance in keying out the identification of small white trackside flowers. We paused by a footbridge to inspect the memorial plaque to a local man who fought in the Spanish Civil War. Here we spotted the only Dipper of the day, a juvenile, although further upstream both Grey and Pied Wagtails were seen.

Birds tend to be less visible at this time of year, but a couple of Cormorants flew to the upper reservoir where there was also a small party of Mallard. Five of these ducks also dabbled on the fringes of the lower lake while large Coot chicks peeped to be fed by their parents. Ravens announced their presence overhead with deep cronks, Willow Warblers still sang and a mixed flock of Blue, Great and Coal Tits foraged in the willows by the river. The ringing calls of Green Woodpeckers were heard in a few places and one perched obligingly at the top of a conifer for all to see. Jay and Redstart were elusive but a Siskin feeding on seeds of Marsh Thistles beside the track showed well and was photographed by Graham.

Carlina Thistles were abundant close to the roadway, perhaps enabled to colonise by lime-rich construction materials. Eyebright, Wild Thyme, Fairy Flax and Birdsfoot Trefoil studded the short turf with occasional clumps of Harebell, Blue Fleabane and Small Toadflax. The more acidic nature of most of the hillsides was shown by abundant Ling with smaller patches of

Bell Heather Cross-leaved Heath and Western Gorse. Bog Asphodel and Heath Spotted Orchids flowered in damper sites in the lower valley. Sheepsbit and low-growing Ivy-leaved Bellflower and Bog Pimpernel were also admired, as were the reddish rosettes of Round-leaved Sundew standing out against the pale cushions of Sphagnum.



Maerdy Lunch on the Drovers Bridge .
Photo by Bruce McDonald

We enjoyed our picnic by the picturesque little drovers' bridge over the river before climbing up to the higher dam. We didn't spend long viewing the reservoir because of the chilling wind in our faces but turned to retrace our steps down the valley. It was unfortunately unseasonably cloudy and cool but an all too brief sunny interval brought out the butterflies

– Green-veined Whites, Common Blues, Meadow Browns and Small Heaths with single Small Copper and Small Tortoiseshell whose caterpillars we also saw on a patch of Nettles. A dying Grayling was found later on the road. The only mammals we encountered were a few sheep and an unexpected herd of Highland cattle grazing the hillside above us.

Below the lower dam we crossed the river and wandered slowly back through the old colliery site. Although demolished less than 20 years ago, nature is rapidly covering the scars with vegetation and all kinds of flora and fauna are colonising. We turned over assorted pieces of debris to briefly expose Toads, slugs and ants' nests. Bruce found a beautiful Burnished Brass moth, while the hairy caterpillars of Cinnabar and Knotgrass moths were also seen. We briefly turned over a dung beetle crossing the path

revealing its iridescent electric blue underparts and a clinging mite. A striking Staphylinid beetle was later identified for us from photographs as *Platydracus stercorarius*.



Platydracus stercorarius (Staphylinid)



Mint beetles

Earlier in the day, Bruce found metallic green beetles mating on a patch of garden Mint. Margaret's insect field guide enabled these spectacular beasts to be identified as *Chrysolina menthastri*. Also found on the mint patch were Spiked Shield-bugs and a small moth *Pyrausta aurata*. A large hoverfly which settled on the water pipeline was thought to be *Sericomyia silentis* and at

least 3 species of grasshopper were noted. Such a diversity of interesting insects found on a cool, dull day indicates the possibility of further finds in warmer conditions.



Harebell

Human influence in the valley is shown by many

garden escapes such as Buddleia, Cotoneaster, Privet, Montbretia, Dotted Loosestrife, Shasta Daisy and Lady's Mantle as well as the Mint referred to above.

I have not so far mentioned the fungi which, after consultation and subsequent visit by a more experienced mycologist, proved to be the most exciting finds of all. Under Larches there were many boletes – the yellow-capped ones were as we thought *Suillus grevillei* but the brown-capped ones with larger pores were the scarcer *Suillus tridentinus*. Also growing in the larch wood were several Blushers. Small but colourful waxcaps were spotted in short trackside turf. These have subsequently been determined as *Hygrocybe miniata*, *H. persistens*, *H. conica*, *H. cantharellus*, *H. insipida* and *H. coccinea*. Not far from a small waterfall, Rob spotted a couple of unusual waxcaps which were later identified from my photograph as the Red Data Book species *H. spadicea*,



Date-coloured Waxcaps

the Date-coloured Waxcap. The only other known site for this rare species in Glamorgan is in Bute Park! Unfortunately, when we took the expert to see it the following Thursday the 2 specimens had already shrivelled away.

The Rhondda Fach valley is obviously a favourite walk for many locals who enjoy its scenery and wildlife. One of them is Alcwyn, a friend of Bonny and Brian who they met as a regular sea swimmer at Barry and who we were all pleased to encounter on our walk. The Maerdy folk are lucky to have such an interesting site on their doorstep and must marvel at the transformation that has taken place since most traces of the pit were erased following its closure in 1990.

Linda Nottage
Photos by Linda Nottage

Caves and Waterfalls Walk 18th September 2010

When you plan a walk a year ahead with the aim of timing it to coincide with the best of the autumn colours and still have good weather you spend a year in anticipation. Luckily the weather obliged even if the colours were a little late this year and we had a wonderful start to our walk.

17 of us took the walk, we met in the Porth-yr-Ogof car park and began by looking at the main Porth-yr-Ogof entrance which was at fairly low water so some of our members were able to take the easy walk under the entrance arch where the river disappears from sight. Rhian led a few members into the entrance whilst I spoke outside. This is quite a difference from the societies' first description of visits to the caves in the transactions for 1870-71 (part III published 1872) when FG Evans reported, over fine wines in the dining room of Hensol Castle after a CNS field trip that :-

“Picnics are often held at this spot and after dinner, ladies and gentlemen think it is necessary to explore the caverns. The engineering difficulties of the enterprise are sufficient to call forth all the gallantry of the rougher sex; and in consequence of the perverse tendency of candles to premature and inconvenient extinction, the deficiency of headroom that brings crawling into requisition, and the trepidation that ladies naturally manifest when placed in position of novelty and some risk, of course the support of a strong arm is rendered inevitable.

This may be one of the cases in which novelists tell us that the emotions of years are crowded into moments, and we

cannot wonder that at such high pressure the assistance of an arm on a temporary emergency leads to the interchange of hearts for mutual support in the more permanent difficulties and trials of after-life.

In this sense wonderful as the cave in a geological point of view, it cannot be regarded as a matchless phenomenon. [laughter]"



Porth yr Ogof Exit

Once people (especially the ladies) had had time to recover from the shock of seeing a picture of me in a wetsuit (it's on the cover of the caver's guidebook to the site) we headed back uphill and across the limestone looking at a number of the other entrances and exits and at

the final exit pool that has unfortunately claimed so many lives

Back on the main path we headed south down the valley to see the waterfalls and made note of the various trees that we were passing with a number of members paying close attention to the Hazelnuts, especially our erstwhile president Roger who was teaching the younger members on the walk the easy way to get into them. It is easy to see sections where the river level has been stable for some time above a waterfall because the valley has been widened, especially on the down-dip side of any rock, and we were able to take a look at some river terracing formed in these wider sections. These wider

sections are often wet meadows and provide yet another diverse habitat in the area.



Afon Mellte - Dipper Country

The river changes nature depending on whether it is flowing on one of the hard sandstones that form the tops of the waterfall or cutting down more steeply into the shales. Overall it is excellent Dipper country and we were treated to wonderful views of one as

we went down the Afon Mellte

As the scenery deepens and you get closer to the waterfalls the whole environment becomes wetter, darker and the ferns and fungi abound. There was evidence that animals other than us are able to eat the fly agaric as the one we saw was well eaten, and to further that, amongst the damp leaf litter we found the probably culprit the common slug in the act of “matchmaking”



Fly Agaric

We soon came to the first of the waterfalls Sgwd Clun-gwyn (White Meadow Fall) where there is a good look at the falls



Mating Slugs



Sgwd Clun-gwyn



Sgwd Clun-gwyn 2

and we considered the various layers that show the influence of ice ages and faulting to create these structures.

During ice ages, the Vale of Neath was gouged out by glacial ice so that its floor is probably hundreds of metres lower than

it would have been. Water does not like to be above what is called the “Base Level” so it cuts down steeply and the river is rejuvenated. Down cutting is most prevalent where the bedrock is mudstone, whilst sandstone beds offer more resistance and is responsible for the flat areas of the rivers and the lips of the falls which in the most extreme cases can be tens of metres above the plunge pools. The fault lines cause steps in these two types of rocks and therefore the waterfalls are formed. They will eventually work their way upstream and regain a base level

After this geological interlude we went upwards and onwards towards the second of the falls on our walk. Working our way onwards at higher levels we can see the effect of commercial forestry above the valleys with sections of felling. As these are now done in smaller units they provide diversity of habitat rather than the monoculture of same aged trees that the former policy of clear felling produced.



Sgwd yr Pannwr

Finally arriving at Sgwd yr Pannwr (Fall of the Fuller) where, after lunch, we were entertained by a group of young adventurers leaping from within the fall to the plunge pool below.

We then retraced our steps along the level valleyside path back to Sgwd Isaf Clun-gwyn (Lower White Meadow Fall)

which is in many ways my favourite of the falls as when approached from below there is an increasing majesty as you see more and more of it. From here a short steep climb to a section where the mudstones and sandstones form a narrow path that needs care and on again back to Sgwd Clun-gwyn.

The steep climb that results takes you back to the forestry above and carries on back to the cave and the cars, just about beating the rain which gave us a few drops whilst walking and a drenching on the way home.

Andy Kendall

