

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1867

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

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Cover photo. Autumn Mists and Cobwebs in Bute Park, Jane Williams

PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS

A great deal of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure that the Society works effectively. Our funds are in good order and events are being planned for the forthcoming seasons. The Council of the Society expressed its thanks to Brian the retiring editor of the newsletter. We now have a smooth hand over to Andy.

Every council meeting we receive reports from officers of the society. It was good to hear that membership had grown and arrangements are in hand regarding the annual student competition in the School of Biosciences. Hopefully we will learn more at a March event.

We are exploring the option of appearing at relevant events to celebrate the work and aims of the Society. We also are examining the proposed Action Plans for the River Ely and Nant Fawr corridors. Discussions are taking place with the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales to avoid a clash of meetings and topics. This is on-going. Also a representative of the society always attends to Cardiff Biodiversity Partnership meetings.

Please make full use of the Blog and the Web site. They are a fund of information and contains excellent material. The easy access to back copies of the newsletter is a wonderful resource.

I wonder if any one visited Pembrey Country Park recently? There were reports of Snow Buntings and an Arctic Skua. No such good fortune for me. I have never spotted much at Pembrey.

However from the kitchen table at home I witnessed a Sparrow hawk narrowly miss its dinner at the bird feeder. The Hawk must have turned almost a complete circle in a matter of inches. The Tits all managed to scatter into the Holly Tree and to safety. It was fantastic to observe how agile the predator can be.

Deadline for next newsletter 15th may 2012

Field Meetings Spring 2012

Saturday 25th February

Start time 10am

Ogmore

All day (packed lunch)

A geological walk led by Steve Howe up Pant Norton to Pant-y-slade then Ogmore-by-sea and back (around 4.5 miles, 7.2 kms). Part of the route is covered in Steve's book 'Walking the Rocks' co-authored with Geraint Owen and Tom Sharpe. Start at the free car park (NOTE: not Ogmore Beach car park) on the right hand side (alongside the river) of the B 4524 half-way between the Pelican Pub and Ogmore Beach (SS 8741 7625). Mobile on the day only 07847 5600027

Sunday 25th March

Start time 10am

Blaenavon

All day (packed lunch)

This will be an opportunity to see some fascinating man-made landscapes in the area above the World Heritage site led by Rhian Kendall of the British Geological Survey who will be able to explain how this landscape is a product of what is beneath our feet and also provide an insight into her own explorations beneath the hills in this area.

With fossil trees and caves amongst the coal and iron, the topics covered will be wide ranging. The walk will be of about 5 miles over fairly decent footpaths in the main and with an option to cut out 2 miles if the weather is inclement. A packed lunch is needed and there are only toilet facilities if the pub is open and that is not guaranteed at this time of year. Meet at Keepers Pond car park (SO 254 107) at 10:00 am. Mobile on the day only 07847 5600027

Saturday 28th April

Start time 10am

Parc Tredelerch

Half day

Cardiff Naturalists are helping out Cardiff City Council by surveying Parc Tredelerch for plants in particular but anything else we spot whilst we are there. Our September 2011 visit added a dozen or so new species. This visit aims to pick up some Spring flora and fauna. Distance 2-3 miles. All welcome whether experienced or new to wildlife. Meet at car park off Lamby Way (ST 2193 7838). Mobile on the day only 07847 5600027.

Sunday 13th May

Start time 11am

Note change from calendar

Roath Park

All day (packed lunch)

An opportunity to hone your tree recognition skills in the company of Tony Titchen. Roath Park is one of our finest arboreta with a host of champion trees. Distance 1-2 miles. Meet by the information booth by the entrance off Lake Road West at the south end of Roath Lake (ST 1851 7925). You can park along Lake Road West. Mobile on the day only 07847 5600027

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

Indoor Meetings Spring 2012

The last indoor meeting for the 2011-2012 season will be held on Tuesday 27 March with a talk by **Cameron Lewis (South Wales Trunk Road Agency)** on **Urban tree and woodland management**. The importance of trees and woodland in the urban environment and the pressures routinely faced in their successful establishment and management.

For those who didn't meet him Cameron joined us on the last Coryton Roundabout walk and told us some fascinating tales, including things you would not believe in terms of what people do when they see "free" firewood on the sides of a motorway !

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

Do you have an idea for a talk for the 2012/2013 season ?

Was there anything you particularly liked or anything you felt was missing from the programme?

Please let any of the council members know. We value your feedback.

Editorial

It's my first go at this job and I am sure that you'll find many mistakes.

For those who don't know already, I have for many years typed up the Programme cards and for all of those years Margaret Leishman has bravely tried (in vain I may add) to get all my commas and apostrophes in the right places and my over liberal use of Capital Letters. All I can say, is don't blame me. I waited for someone else to step forward so you get what you get when you let me take over.

On that, and breaking with another tradition of not "going off on one" at the first opportunity I have to comment further. Chris has said some kind words about the running of the society and the things we hope to do, but there is one thing we need to do all these things and it's volunteers. I never thought when I joined the CNS that we would have struggled to get someone willing to be our president as it is a honoured and enjoyable thing to do.

We have, no Vice President, committee members who have stayed loyal beyond their term and a field meetings secretary who has asked to be relieved and no-one has yet volunteered. We simply need new people and new ideas and I really hope that someone out there is wanting a new challenge because we need you.

On a positive note we were recently told by Elizabeth Cooling that she hoped to go travelling the world (many talks to come we hope) and we have been lucky enough to rapidly get a volunteer to take over as membership secretary in Danni Roberts. It would be wonderful to get all our outstanding posts filled. So please start a new year with some new feet forward and approach one of the council members to ask what you can do.

And finally on an even more positive note I sent an email asking for content for this newsletter and I got some which is a good start. One of the responses was such a good idea we've implemented it as you will see later...

But first here's what inspired that idea...

Garden Birds from 0 – 21 in 12 months

Phill Blanning & Linda Morris

We moved into our home in Morganstown, N. Cardiff in 2008. We border onto farmland and woodland, so thought it would be nice to try and encourage local birds into the garden.

We initially placed a couple of feeders in the garden, one with peanuts and the other with a general seed mix. After several months the only birds we were seeing were the odd Blackbird and Robin, neither on a regular basis. The peanuts were untouched and by now were developing a nice shade of '*Penicillin*' green!

Eventually we bought a bird table which seemed to entice a more regular attendance of Blackbirds and 'our' Robin, but still nothing coming to the peanuts. Our table had however been discovered by Wood Pigeons, which had the habit of landing on the table and devouring everything in sight! As time passed we began getting a more varied attendance. A Pied Wagtail began to visit daily in the winter, a Song Thrush, Blue and Great Tits, the occasional Wren and plenty of Magpies.

However we had spotted 'charms' of Goldfinches nearby and wanted to try and encourage these in. We therefore bought some of the definitive Goldfinch feed, Nyjer Seed. We hung up a filled feeder and waited, and waited! Eventually, in June last year a pair was spotted on our garden fence. One investigated the feeder but immediately flew off. But within days they were back and over a week the initial two became between 10 and 12. Indeed as the breeding season progressed we began to see family parties coming in, parents feeding youngsters on the fence and table. Indeed we also now had both Blue and Great Tits bringing in young and a pair of Blackbirds feeding a youngster. We even had a pair of the increasingly uncommon House Sparrow feeding fledglings.



Goldfinch

The downside to all this activity was the mess Goldfinches make; they are not the tidiest of feeders. We now had three Nyjer seed feeders and a nice crop of Nyjer seed seedlings beneath each one! We were therefore getting through a lot of seed, not surprisingly since on several occasions we have made counts of 18 or 19 Goldfinches in the garden at one time! We have now invested in a couple of Nyjer feeders with attached trays. This will hopefully reduce wastage and we have in fact seen them feeding happily on spilt seed in the trays.

At the time of writing, January 2012, 9 species of bird a day are regularly coming into the garden. Two of these are new ‘attendees’, a Coal Tit began visiting in mid December and in late December we were excited to see a Nuthatch coming to the Peanut feeder, he(?) is now visiting several times a day, taking a ‘two course’ meal. Peanuts then onto the table for mixed seed.

Also in mid-December our first Dunnock appeared, he lasted two days before what we assume was a Sparrowhawk was seen flying out of the garden holding something, presumably our Dunnock, in its talons.

Noted absentees are Greenfinches, we have seen them locally so they are around but to date do not seem to have found us. Our ambition now is to have a Great Spotted Woodpecker and maybe Bullfinches coming in, we know both species are resident locally so we’ll keep our fingers crossed!

Bird Species Recorded in the Garden 4.12.10 – 31.12.11

<u>Robin</u>	<u>Blackbird</u>	(<u>underlined species</u> = regular visitors)
<u>Blue Tit</u>	<u>Coal Tit</u>	
<u>Nuthatch</u>	<u>Chaffinch</u>	
<u>Goldfinch</u>	<u>Magpie</u>	
Wren	Jackdaw	
Carrion Crow	Garden Warbler	
Song Thrush	Great Tit	
Long Tailed Tit	Dunnock	
House Sparrow	<u>Wood Pigeon</u>	
Collared Dove	Pied Wagtail	
Sparrowhawk		



Who are you looking at ... said the blackbird

‘As a bird is known by its note, so is a man by his conversation’ *Chinese proverb*

Bird recording is a task that some members of ‘Cardiff Nats’ (CNS) carry out on a regular basis for organisations that monitor and analyse the health and behaviour of our UK bird populations. In the Journal of CNS of 1900, an article entitled ‘Notes on Ornithology’ describes 2 species new to the county, namely a White Stork and a Barbary Partridge. The fate of the latter was as follows “a fine example of this species was shot by Mr TR Thompson’s keepers on Sully Moors on October 10th 1900...there was no indication of it’s having been in captivity though the proximity to Barry Dock suggests the possibility of its having escaped from a ship.” It was later dissected.

Today things are a little different and this is where you come in! CNS wants to look at the birds that visit our gardens, mature or new, large or courtyard sized. How does the CNS membership encourage birds to come into the garden (or maybe not if the pesky wood pigeons eat what they shouldn’t!)? How do we do this and what works really well? Are we rewarded with nesting pairs? What type of garden supports this or are there natural predators such as next door’s new cat that have adversely affected our feathered visitors?

What is the point you ask? A valid question firstly, the objective is to map the birds that visit our gardens and identify factors that influence this. Secondly it is hoped this will generate material for the CNS Newsletter, bearing in mind our Editor’s January request for articles. Finally it is a potential project that welcomes and includes all CNS members – new members, families, older members who may be less mobile and less able to participate in field trips and those of us who have the most basic to encyclopaedic knowledge of birds. Common denominator? A love and enjoyment of our local wildlife.

People may ask how this stacks up against the RSPB Great Garden Birdwatch. Well, that is done over such a short time that many of us note that we miss our regular visitors when doing the count. It’s also a time before the nestlings are fledging and therefore it’s typically a minimum numbers not maximum numbers count.

Our plan to collect data across a whole weekend allows you to record just how many visitors you get, and also being a little later will hopefully allow us to get some records of swallows, martins and such.

What will CNS do with the information you now wonder! Well, the data returned which will be anonymous but postcode identifiable (only 1st 4 digits required) will be analysed and put into a format that if successful could be shared with a wider audience. If a meaningful picture is gained of what is going on with the birds in our own back yard, then it would be beneficial to repeat this exercise in the future.

Here's how it will work. The week-end of 21st/22nd of April 2012 (or a couple of days after if you are away), is designated for completion of the mainly tick box Questionnaire.

This has been sent out as a paper copy with this newsletter and be available in electronic form via the website

www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk/htmlfiles/survey2012.htm/

This must be returned by the end of April by post to
Terry Hoy, 4 Grange Avenue, Wenvoe, Cardiff CF5 6AR
or to survey@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk in electronic form.

Additional information might include any relevant bird behaviour associated with nesting, additional species seen in the near vicinity, or anything else you want to tell us.

GOOD LUCK, PLEASE TAKE PART
and show that CNS is still very much alive and kicking!



This survey is the brainchild of Linda Morris aided in organizing by Terry and Joyce Hoy. Council would like to thank them for this great idea and encourage everyone to participate

People at the recent talk on Birds and Climate change will have heard about the possible involvement of CNS in the next Iolo Williams TV Series which includes an episode on Bute Park. **Jane Williams** who sends us this report has already given us a snippet of recent events in the park which can be seen on the blog

<http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.com/2012/01/bute-park-goings-on.html>

Big Garden Birdwatch in Bute Park **on Saturday, 28 January 2012.**

The weekend of the 28/29th January marks the annual RSPB Garden Birdwatch, a vital tool for gathering information about changes in bird populations across the UK. As part of this nationwide scheme, two one-hour walks were organised by Friends of Bute Park on a sunny but bracingly cold day. Despite the very large numbers of people out enjoying the park there was still plenty of bird life to see and hear. For the Birdwatch, the Friends of Bute Park were joined by groups that included toddlers, teenagers, a keen photographer and couples. All were enthusiastic and surprised by the wealth of birds on their doorstep. Some of those in the two groups saw particular bird species for the first time.

Highlights included calling Goldcrests, flocks of Long Tailed Tits, Goldfinches, and a Nuthatch searching for insects in the crevices of a mature Oak. No less than seven Goosander and a Dipper were on the River Taff by Sophia Gardens. A large flock of Chaffinch were disturbed in a clearing and a pair of Mistle thrushes were identified in the collection of Rowan trees. The more experienced bird watchers were tested in trying to distinguish between various gulls in the fast moving flocks.

The group was led by an experienced birder who was able to identify many otherwise hidden birds by their song alone; inspiring several participants to study birds more closely.

A visiting Owl sanctuary was very popular with children who were particularly keen to hold the Owls and learn more about their needs.

The day was a reminder of just how rich Bute Park is in wildlife.

HUNTING ITALIANS

Words and Pictures by Bruce McDonald



Prospecting for wildflowers might seem an unlikely pursuit in mid-December but hunting we were and successful we were. I had been invited to join Tim Rich and Julian Woodman in a quest for Lords and Ladies near Dinas Powys. Tim is Head of Vascular Plants at the Welsh National Herbarium and has given a number of talks to Cardiff Nats. Julian is a Conservation Officer with CCW specialising in flora.

But to begin at the beginning. Lords and Ladies, *Arum maculatum*, also known as Cuckoo Pint or Jack in the Pulpit will be familiar to most with its distinctive and usually purple spadix, the fleshy spike, partially surrounded by a bract which is also often edged with purple. The leaves may be spotted. It is a common sight along country lanes in spring and will frequently pop up in gardens.

Then there is Italian Lords and Ladies, *Arum italicum*. Here the fleshy spike is pale yellow but there are two subspecies which you could come across. *Arum italicum*, *sb. sp.italicum*, is an alien import, popular with gardeners because of its distinctive cream-veined leaves which can occur as a garden escape. The other subspecies is a native and this is *Arum maculatum* *sb. sp. neglectum*, also with a yellow spadix but the bract is proportionately larger than the spike and often three times as long.

This is one of Britain's rare flowers, John Fisher in his book *A Colour Guide to Rare Flowers* noting '... it is found sparingly in the south ... as for instance near Dinas Powys'. It turns up in Cornwall infrequently but is common in the Scilly Isles, more so even than *maculatum*.



subspecies *italicum*

The photos give some clues as to the differences between the three. The subspecies *italicum* is very obviously different with its prominent veining but the other two show more subtle variation and to confuse matters further, hybrids between the two can occur.

Tim has summarised some of the key differences when comparing leaves and before flowering takes place. If the leaves are spotted it is *maculatum* but, of course, *maculatum* can also be unspotted. It can also be noted that a Mr Townsend from the Isle of Wight where it was quite well-established wrote to Miss Eleanor Vachell (see below) that they are just as likely to be spotted as *maculatum*. The leaves of *neglectum* are robust and with relatively long petioles, darker green and the veins somewhat paler.



maculatum



If you take the three ‘corners’ of *neglectum* they form what is nearer to an equilateral triangle whereas *maculatum* is longer down the midrib in relation to its width. *Neglectum* is also often waisted around mid-leaf and this shows up well in the photo.

subspecies *neglectum*

But why look for the plant in winter? *neglectum* has leaves fully expanded as early as November whereas *maculatum* does not normally show until February. Winter is also a good time to search for the plants as there is less competing ground flora to conceal them.

Our search started at Michaelston-le-Pit as it was here that I had found the subspecies *italicum* two years ago which is shown in the photo. There was no sign of this plant this time but the hedgerow had been dug up with associated extensive soil disturbance. However I suggested we look at a small patch of woodland where I had noticed some *arum* species earlier and within a minute Tim had identified a plant of *neglectum* shown in the photo below.

This then was a first; a new location for the plant and a good kilometre from its main base in Cwm George woods.

Moving on to Cwm George, many *neglectum* plants were found on the slopes below the hill fort.



new location for *neglectum*

There were also plenty of *maculatum* indicating that it might have been better to start searching in November as milder winters encourage earlier growth. The discovery of the rare *arum* at Michaelston suggests there could be other locations in the vicinity where it exists, waiting to be found. Mary Gilham recorded it both at Cwm George and Cwrt-yr-Ala in the 1960s. In addition to noting the particular features of *neglectum* referred to above, if you find a potential candidate, take a grid reference if you can, note the surrounding habitat and remove a leaf for DNA analysis which can be forwarded to Tim.

The original records for *neglectum* in Cwm George date back to the 1930's when a Cardiff Naturalists' Society member Miss Eleanor Vachell found it there. Tim has dug out Eleanor's lecture notes which describe the doubts and difficulties surrounding the find. For some time pheasants took great delight in pecking away at the young growth and making it impossible to confirm from the colour and shape of the spathe and spadix that it was *neglectum*.

It took some 5 years and the use of wire netting to keep the pheasants out before it was finally confirmed. Eleanor went on to speculate as to why the birds constantly vandalised the plant and noted that the common *arum* 'contains a sort of farinaceous substance which becomes ... a nutritious article of diet'. Gerarde records (attributing it to Aristotle) that hibernating bears make a bee-line for it on awakening. In France it is called 'pain de lievre' or hare's bread suggesting they eat it as well.

Members visiting the National Botanic Garden of Wales in March may see Miss Vachell featured in a display of leading female botanists in Wales.

We hope to return to the topic in a future issue of the newsletter when we can describe how it looks in late spring and early summer with its yellow spike – that is, if the pheasants have not got there first.

Mary Gillham to be featured in Botanic Gardens exhibition

At the Christmas event we had in celebration of Mary's 90th Birthday, I was asked for copies of pictures of Mary for an exhibition in the Botanic Gardens of Wales.

Those who were there will note that none of the awful pictures I have of Mary were suitable and I made arrangements to get a better picture of her, which we did over Christmas.

The exhibition will be held in the Gallery at the Botanic Gardens (opposite the gift shop) for the month of March with the official opening on 1st of March with a special event on the 8th to coincide with International Womens' Day.

For more details see <http://www.gardenofwales.org.uk/whats-on/events/>

Cardiff Weather 2011

Stan Jones

There were further indicators of warmer conditions last year with mean temperatures continuing to rise. In particular average minimum temperatures showed an improvement of between 0.9°C and 2.7°C since the year 1992. On the other hand, daytime temperatures have made very little improvement during the same period. Total rainfall was 7.84" more than that of 2010 but 2011 was still the fourth driest year since 1992.

Early January was quite cold with minimum temperatures of 0.5°C on two occasions during the first eight days. Snow fell on the night of the 5th. This quickly turned to rain and daytime temperatures rose to double figures between the 11th and 16th. It was generally cold for the rest of the month with north-east winds, several minus overnight temperatures and frosty mornings.

Conditions improved in February with winds predominantly in the south-west. Rainfalls were mainly light and there was only one frosty morning.

March was the second driest month of the year in terms of total rainfall and number of rain days. On five occasions rain fell overnight. There were fine frosty mornings in the first two weeks but temperatures then improved and reached a maximum of 17°C on three consecutive days.

There were further improvements in April which was the driest month of the year and had the least number of rain days. There were eight days when the temperature reached 20°C or more and 24°C was recorded on two days.

May was not a particularly warm month with temperatures below 20°C on 23 days. The nights were cool and regularly dropped below 10°C. On May 5th rain fell for the first time since April 14th and for the rest of the month there were only 8 dry days.

This pattern continued into June and on 11th and 12th persistent heavy rain resulted in a total fall of 2.17". Temperatures of 29°C were recorded on the 3rd and 26th of the month and on most other days they were above 20°C.

July turned out to be the warmest month at 09:00 hours and overnight, and only just behind June for maximum temperatures. As for most other months the average barometer readings were well above 1000 millibars.

Temperatures started to fall in August but the rain persisted and there were more rain days than in July. On eight occasions the rain fell overnight after a fine day and overall there were 24 days when the temperature reached 20°C and above. The wettest day was the 25th which included a torrential thunderstorm.

September was the fourth wettest month with almost continuous rain days until the 16th. However, it was generally a mild month and only July had a higher minimum temperature.

October sprang a surprise with maximum temperatures of 25°C and 22.5°C on the 2nd and 3rd. Temperatures of that order are normally only associated with the high summer months. By contrast there was a minimum temperature of 3.5°C on the 19th.

Normal conditions returned in November but there were just a few days with light winds and 18 days when no wind was recorded at 09:00 hours.

During December there were only eight days with no rain and it turned out to be the wettest month of the year. So ended a mainly uneventful year of weather.

To summarise:

The lowest pressure at 0900 hours GMT was 987 millibars on December 13th and the highest was 1034 millibars on January 22nd. There was rain fall in excess of 1" on January 12th and 13th, June 12th and December 13th. Snow fell on January 6th and there was frost on January 19th and 22nd, February. 16th, March 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th and 14th and December 10th.

WEATHER REPORT 2011							
MONTH	MEAN TEMPERATURE			RAINFALL			BAROMETER
	0900 GMT	MAX	MIN	TOTAL		RAIN DAYS	MILLIBARS
	°C	°C	°C	INCHES	MM	0'1" or more	
JANUARY	4.5°	6.8°	2.7°	6.69	167.5	17	1016
FEBRUARY	7.2°	9.2°	5.6°	4.65	116.5	15	1009
MARCH	8.1°	12.3°	6.1°	1.13	28.5	9	1020
APRIL	13.5°	18.5°	9.5°	0.36	8.5	6	1020
MAY	14.7°	17.1°	10.7°	3.39	87.0	19	1017
JUNE	17.5°	23.8°	12.7°	5.01	124.0	13	1016
JULY	19.1°	23.3°	14.1°	3.91	99.5	14	1014
AUGUST	17.7°	21.3°	12.0°	3.52	89.0	18	1013
SEPTEMBER	16.0°	17.1°	13.6°	4.46	112.0	17	1004
OCTOBER	13.6°	16.8°	11.2°	3.54	89.0	12	1019
NOVEMBER	10.2°	12.9°	7.1°	4.14	104.5	16	1015
DECEMBER	6.7°	9.3°	4.4°	8.14	203.0	23	1011
	12.4°	15.7°	9.1°	48.94	1229.0	179	1014

Wildlife Gorge Trips

If you have not taken a boat ride down the Severn Gorge at Bristol why not consider this, particularly as the onboard commentary for the following trips will be provided by Ed Drewitt who is a bird expert with Bristol Naturalists' Society. This is what the boat company says:

‘Join us for a spectacular cruise down the magnificent Avon Gorge under the Suspension Bridge, with informative commentary throughout from local wildlife expert Ed Drewitt. We take you down the harbour, past the SS Great Britain and into the lock via the mighty lock gates which bring us out onto the Gorge. You will spot, redshank, wading birds, heron in their tree habitat, as we approach the famous horseshoe bend and Powder House, as well as peregrine falcon, crows and buzzards. The Gorge is lined with a mixture of ancient woodland and pasture with an abundance of flora and the cliffs are home to a host of unique plants.’

Sun 29th April	09.15	13.15
Sat 19th May	16.00	19.30
Sat 9th June	08.45	11.45 (Peregrine fledging time)
23rd Sept	09.45	13.15

The cost is Adult £19 per person / Concession (Senior / Student / Child) £17. All departures are from the Centre (by Cascade Steps) near the Bristol Hippodrome. If interested, book direct with the Bristol Ferry Boat Company, ring 0117 927 3416 (option 2) or go to www.bristolferry.com

Do we have your up to date email?

The mobile phone mentioned earlier is just one of the means we try and keep in touch, the website, the blog and emails are all used to make sure you have the latest news and reminders of events.

If you are not getting emails please drop me a line at info@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk and we'll add you to the list.

Alpine Flowers of Sichuan, Western China

Phill Blanning

In June 2011 I joined a two week tour to Sichuan Province in Western China. We flew into Chengdu in Sichuan, a city of 14 million people that from all the construction work going on is still rapidly expanding.

For the first couple of days we explored the side valleys of the Wolong Panda reserve and lower slopes of the Balang Shan Pass, driving along very deep rushing river valleys, crossed by precarious planked bridges that would have been condemned in the west!



Flowers were instant. A beautiful pink Gentian, (*Gentiana primulifolia*), the first of many species of Fumitory, (*Corydalis sp*) and Louseworts, (*Pedicularis sp*) and a stand of the giant Lily, *Cardiocrinum giganteum*. On the slopes of the Balang Shan we encountered *Primula sikkimensis* at the roadside and several other Primulas within 50 metres.

One of the reasons I joined this trip was to see the *Meconopsis* poppies, and there they were, yellow *M. integrifolia*, red *M. punicea* and the first of the blue poppies, *M. lancifolia*. Adding to this bounty was the lovely blue *Paraquilegia anemonoides* and the first of many orchids. *Cypripedium tibeticum* with its huge inflated purple ‘slippers’ was impressive, as was the lovely *Calanthe tricarinata*. Unexpected orchids were our own Frog Orchid and Fragrant Orchid plus our native Musk Orchid, a species I’d not seen at home but saw many times during the trip! Those first few days were breath-taking for the number of different plant species we encountered and the lack of effort needed to see them.



Cypripedium tibeticum

We eventually crossed the Balang Shan having spent several days acclimatising to the altitude and were now sleeping at over 3,000 metres. We were botanising daily at over 4,000 metres, up to a maximum altitude of 4,724 metres (or 15,500ft). Whilst feeling breathless at times, fortunately none of the group experienced altitude sickness.

We were now finding lots more Primulas. Indeed in one damp roadside meadow we counted 8 species plus Globeflowers, and Marsh Marigolds, including our own *Caltha Palustris*. A plant we were finding on a daily basis was *Lilium lophophorum*, a beautiful short lily with pale yellow flowers. The *Corydalis* and *Pedicularis* numbers were also now rising rapidly.



Corydalis calcicola

Pedicularis siphonantha

Gentiana crassuloides

The finest 3 *Corydalis* were found growing on a steep scree slope seemingly in a nutrient free substrate, whereas the *Pedicularis* had their roots in a more favourable environment. However both genera were exhibiting a beautiful range of colours and forms. We were also daily seeing more ‘species’ of blue *Meconopsis*, although I was informed by the two professional botanists on the trip that there is a lot of disagreement as to how many different blue species there are. By now we had also seen several species of Gentian, mainly small prostrate blue ones which at times almost carpeted the ground, and were frequently providing nectar for butterflies.

Androsaces and *Saxifrages* were now regular ‘ticks’ and on cliff faces we often came across species of blue *Coralodiscus*, members of the *Gesneriaceae*, but once we reached the ‘Chinese’ Tibetan plateau one of the dominant and most obvious plants was the Rhubarb, *Rheum alexandrae*. Sometimes this covered acres with its sheathed yellow spikes. Interesting plants growing in the flood plain of a river were species of *Cremanthodium*, members of the daisy family with finely cut yellow petals hanging from the centre of the flower. This was a productive and colourful site providing several species of *Androsace*’s the lovely pinkie purple *Silene davidii* and a ‘vegetable sheep’ *Arenaria kansuensis*, amongst others. Nearby on roadside meadows were Iris’s, Geraniums and Incarvilleas, the latter sometimes in their hundreds. A bonus find was the Lady’s Tresses Orchid *Spiranthes sinensis* in full pink flower.

We were now at Kanding and drove up the Zhedou Shan Pass to look for the famed Black Primula. We stopped and our two drivers ran across the road and immediately found 12 plants in flower. The previous year’s trip had found only 2! Nearby were lots of *Iris chrysographes* and *Primula cockburniana* - a lovely orange flowered *Primula*. Amongst all this were large blue mats of a species of Bugle and a pink Fragrant Orchid.

As we began our two day return journey to Chengdu we began to see Lilies at the roadsides, *Lilium sargentiae*, *Lilium duchartrei*, *Lilium davidii*, *Lilium bachereanum* and others we were unable to immediately identify. We had previously seen *Lloydia tibetica* and the form *parva* of *Lloydia serotina*, our own native ‘Snowden Lily’.



Lilium davidii



Lilium duchartrei



Lloydia tibetica

Although the trip was primarily a wildflower tour we did also record many Bird and Butterfly species. We also took in a little culture by visiting a couple of Monastery's and marvelling at mountainsides colourfully decorated with prayer flags and Buddhist mantras carved into the hillsides in Tibetan script.



The trip however was not free of problems. Nearing the end of our tour in the town of Litang, we were told by the police to leave town the following morning. A 10 year old boy had been identified as a reincarnate Lama and was ceremonially being moved to Litang's giant Monastery that day, and for whatever reason they did not want us to witness any potential clashes that might occur between native Tibetans and the Chinese.

We finally arrived back in Chengdu and prepared for our flight home clutching our exquisitely boxed solar powered mini prayer wheels, a fitting reminder of progress versus tradition and a great adventure.

Do you have a good Cover Picture ?

We had a cracking cover picture from Jane Williams this edition and you can see that I've added one of my attempts on the back. What have you seen and captured that would be a good front or back cover picture ?

It would be nice if it related to an article, but if you just have a stunning wildlife or landscape picture you'd like to share, we'd like to make that happen ...

CARDIFF BIRDWATCH 8th January 2012

Linda Nottage

Sixteen members of CNS and the Wildlife Trust assembled in front of Channel View Leisure Centre at 9am. It had been and remained a particularly mild start to the New Year. Even at this relatively early hour rowers were out on the River Taff but causing little disturbance to the waterfowl and gulls.

We made our way in leisurely fashion across the Clarence Road Bridge and around the perimeter of Hamadryad Park where Joan explained that its name derives from a hospital ship for seamen which was moored nearby and the subsequent hospital built on the site. (See below for further information derived from Cardiff Library archives.)

A scattering of passerines in the riverside bushes included Blackbirds, Blue Tits and Goldfinches in the Alders. Robins sang and it was particularly heartening to hear several Song Thrushes (whose numbers have sadly declined) vigorously delivering their repeated melodies. A Cetti's Warbler called loudly and persistently from the fringing reed scrub but declined to offer even a glimpse. Richard Cowie was lucky enough to spot an elusive Water Rail at the Hamadryad inlet but the rest of us had to be content with Moorhens and Coots.

Overlooking the Cardiff Bay Wetland Reserve from the zigzag boardwalk, we could see a variety of waterfowl including a pair of Shelduck, 5 Great Crested Grebes and a handsome Grey Heron. Teal, quite close at first, took flight from cover revealing a flock of at least 30.

Mallards loafed around hoping for hand-outs and a family of Mute Swans patrolled the ditch but the most exciting find of the day was a Lesser Scaup associating with a party of Tufted Ducks near the St. David's Hotel. Good views were obtained through telescopes when its lack of a shaggy crest and vermiculated grey back easily distinguished it from the drake Tufties. Finer identification features including its pale grey bill with a black nail confirmed it to be a true Lesser Scaup rather than a lookalike hybrid. (Photo by Margaret Samuels).



Since it is a rare vagrant from North America, it seems likely that it is the same bird we saw during last January's birdwatch when we had much poorer view.

After everyone had a chance to admire this rare visitor, we retraced our steps. A Dunnock showed well and a mixed flock of Blue and Long-tailed Tits flitted across the path but a party of Linnets proved elusive.

Most of the group dispersed before lunch but, after a picnic, six stalwarts set off in the opposite direction around the Bay. Sheltered water near Prospect Place held a small party of Canada Geese which flew off honking. There was another family of Mute Swans and 2 female or immature Goldeneyes which dived repeatedly. A lone Great Crested Grebe took several attempts before finally swallowing a small fish – we presumed the fish was a stickleback or similar prey with spines getting caught in the Grebe's throat.

Blessed with much more sunshine than forecast, we enjoyed the flowering Gorse and almond-scented spikes of Winter Heliotrope. Two dozen queen Bumblebees had been tempted from hibernation: one was rescued from the path and deposited on a Red Clover flower.

We spent some time admiring the skills of canoeists on the white-water course before returning to our cars. At least 9 Little Grebes were fishing together in the lower Taff, part of a satisfying day's total of 38 bird species.

The Hamadryad was a hospital ship which served the seamen of Cardiff from the 1860s until 1905. The vessel, a man-of-war with 46 guns, had been built at Pembroke Dock in 1823 but was never put into service. Although she was subsequently taken to Devonport to be fitted out she was never completed and was towed to Cardiff in 1866 to be converted as a floating hospital, with room for 50 in-patients. The ship was moored at a site donated by the Marquess of Bute, to the west of the entrance to the Glamorganshire Canal. In 1904 a new seaman's hospital was built ashore to replace the ship, and also as a memorial to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.



The new Royal Hamadryad Hospital was formally opened on 29 June 1905 by the 4th Marquess of Bute. The redundant ship was towed to Bideford, Devon, to be broken up but the ship's bell and figurehead were preserved.

Picture of Hamadryad Hospital Ship, Cardiff Docks, 19th century
Courtesy of Cardiff Libraries & Information Service
<http://www.gtj.org.uk/en/small/item/GTJ69206/>

New CNS Mobile Phone

It's the 21st century... so as you read above, CNS has finally joined the 20th and has a mobile phone number that is intended to be used on the day of field meetings only to let us know if you are running late or call for more assistance if you are lost.

0784 756 000 27

If you ring it you should get a recorded message saying the phone will only be switched on for Field Trip days - people can still leave messages and Bruce (the current owner) will check periodically.

Parting Thoughts

The Winter will be over as you read this and we head into another spring with flowers bursting around us. This means we head into our field meetings season which is a great time to chat to members and get their thoughts on things

We have been talking in council about how we get more new members, and how we get people more involved and one of the things is the survey that has been described earlier and for which you will find a recording form enclosed with this newsletter

Another way for us to get more members is to have a presence at local events and we have been offered a place at the Unknown Wales event in May <http://www.welshwildlife.org/2012/unknown-wales-2012/> (Saturday the 19th May 2012 at the National Museum Wales from 10.00am until 4.00pm and is free to all.). We are looking into other events as well.

For that reason we are intending to purchase a set of display boards and have a ready made display available

Are you planning to go somewhere that CNS could be publicised?

Would you be able to man a stand for an hour or two ?

Do you have any ideas?

Please say something to one of the council members



Old Tree Druidstone Road, Old St Mellons
Photo By Andy Kendall

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