

# CNS



## **CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

Founded 1867

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Charity No. 1092496

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**Cover photo: Rabbit in display case. National Museum Wales/Christian Baars  
(see Indoor Meetings, Tues 24 Jan 2017, page 5).**

## **Biosciences Prize 2016**



Poppy Mynard being presented with the Biosciences Prize 2016 by Andy Kendall at the CNS meeting on Monday 18 April 2016. The prize is awarded annually in the memory of Prof Ursula Henriques, for the best second-year field work project in the Biosciences Department, Cardiff University. After the presentation, Poppy talked about her project, entitled 'The diversity of wood decay fungi in Sabah, Malaysia.'

Photo by Mike Dean.

## **Indoor Meetings 2016/2017**

All meetings start at 7.30pm in Room 0.23 (ground floor) of the Cardiff School of Management Building, Metropolitan University, Llandaff Campus, Western Avenue, Cardiff CF5 2YB - unless otherwise stated (\*).

**2016**

### **Monday 10 October**

#### **AGM**

followed by

#### **Eirian Edwards: 'The Niagara Escarpment, the Bruce Peninsula (UNESCO Biosphere Reserve) and Georgian Bay'**

Starting at Niagara Falls (on the Canadian side), this talk will look at some of the plants associated with the globally-rare habitats found in Southern Ontario: along the Bruce Peninsula, Manitoulin Island and Georgian Bay. This includes the alvar habitat (limestone bedrock) associated with plants which rarely occur elsewhere, such as Manitoulin Gold.

### **Tuesday 25 October**

#### **Roger James: 'A lighter Shade of Green'**

A talk about the lighter side of conservation and natural history field work by Roger James, the President of the Gwent Wildlife Trust, who has been involved in many other aspects of natural history.

### **Thursday 10 November (\*)**

#### **Colin Cheesman: 'Plants on the Edge: Arable plants of Wales'**

This is a combined meeting with the Cardiff Group of the Wildlife Trust South West Wales and the student Wildlife Society at Cardiff University. Venue: Wallace Lecture Theatre, Main Building, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff.

## **Wednesday 23 November**

### **Dr Elizabeth Chadwick: 'Cardiff University Otter Project: Otters as sentinels for environmental health'**

The lecture will give a brief overview of our native otter, and the work carried out by the Cardiff University Otter Project in collecting, dissecting and archiving otters found dead in the UK, along with the associated research into freshwater contamination and disease.

## **Monday 12 December**

### **'Xmas Bash' with a photographic quiz by Linda and Rob Nottage: 'Wildlife Connections'**

Light-hearted start to our traditional festive sociable evening in the form of a photo quiz based on wildlife subjects, to both tickle the brain cells and amuse.

**2017**

## **Monday 16 January**

### **'Members' Evening'**

CNS members' photos showing different countries and diverse habitats. Contact Hilary Wicks if you want to show photos on this evening.

## **Tuesday 24 January**

### **Dr Christian Baars: 'Natural history collections in Welsh Museums'**

The National Museum in Cardiff is by no means the only museum in Wales with a natural history collection. A large number of local museums across Wales care jointly for approximately 100,000 botanical, zoological and geological specimens. These include mummified cats, algal herbaria, coal and iron ore. Together, they form Wales' Distributed National Collection. This talk will introduce some of the curiosities from these collections, explain their historic significance, and outline why they are relevant and important to society today.

## **Thursday 2 February**

**Alan Bowring: 'Fforest Fawr Geopark - the first 480,000.011 years'**

The western half of the Brecon Beacons National Park was designated a Geopark 11 years ago and boasts a record of earth history dating back 480 million years. A UNESCO landscape since 2015, it is famous not only for its old red sandstone and a spectacular glacial legacy, but also for its karst scenery and waterfalls. Then there is its contribution to making Wales the world's first industrial nation - impressive natural and cultural legacy worth celebrating.

## **Thursday 23 February (\*)**

**Speaker to be confirmed**

This is a combined meeting with the Cardiff Group of the Wildlife Trust South West Wales and the student Wildlife Society at Cardiff University. Venue: Wallace Lecture Theatre, Main Building, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff.

## **Tuesday 14 March**

**Phillip Blanning: 'Flora and Fauna of Northern Peru'**

A presentation about the wildlife encountered during a tour to northern Peru, from the Pacific coast to the Andes in August 2016.

## **Monday 27 March**

**Student Bursary award evening**

Plus a second speaker to be arranged.

**Please look online for further information and additions to the CNS Meetings Programme:**

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

## **Unknown Wales Conference 2016**

Wildlife Trust South and West Wales inform us that the Unknown Wales Conference 2016 will be on Saturday 8 October in the National Museum in Cardiff. Information: <http://www.welshwildlife.org/events/unknown-wales-conference-2016/>



Manitoulin Gold (*Hymenoxys herbacea*). Photo by Eirian Edwards (see Indoor Meetings, Mon 10 Oct 2016, page 4).

**A note from The Treasurer**

“If any members have not paid last year’s subs (August 2015-July 2016), please could they do so. A form can be printed out from the website: <http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/p/join-us.html>

Deadline for items for next newsletter: Friday 2 December 2016



Photos: National Museum Wales/Christian Baars (see Indoor Meetings, page 5, Tues 24 Jan 2017).

## Cwm Nash

Tuesday 24 May 2016

About a dozen members met on a beautiful spring evening and walked the short distance from the car park to Blaen-y-Cwm in the upper part of Cwm Nash. The landowner and our host, Robert Hubbard, greeted us with a sprig of Purple Gromwell in a vase. This he had just picked from the garden, where a small clump has been established for decades. This plant is a speciality of the Heritage Coast and must have originally been brought to the garden from only a few miles away, but it does not grow wild in Cwm Nash. We were lucky, therefore, to see it in bloom – the flowers a glorious shade of deep blue.

We were too late, however, to admire the Cowslips on the lawns by the house but could see from the seed heads how many flowers there had been only two or three weeks ago. Most of the fruit trees had also finished flowering but we were struck by one tall tree, covered in white blossom, thought to have been planted as a pollinator.



Blaen-y-Cwm: A rare opportunity to visit this private garden at Cwm Nash.

After passing the tennis court lawn, we had good views of the small stream with its terraces of tufa that lime-rich water had deposited over the years. The woodland flora here included Dog's Mercury and Stinking Iris in flower. We then headed out of the garden towards the sea, first on a narrow path through tall scrub and then gradually out into the open.

From here we had excellent views of dense wind-pruned scrub on the opposite side of the cwm. Hawthorn was in full bloom and stood out among the other shrubs. Through binoculars we could see linnets and a whitethroat.

Reaching the coast we found the short cliff-top turf dominated by a variety of small yellow flowers! Most frequent were Bulbous Buttercup and Common Birds-foot-trefoil but among them a few plants of Common Rock-rose and Horseshoe Vetch. The latter has flowers very similar to Birds-foot-trefoil but quite different leaves.

A few other flowers provided an occasional contrast to the predominant yellow – Wild Carrot, Ground Ivy and Early Purple-orchid.

We spent some time enjoying the view of the Bristol Channel. Some of the group walked a little way along the coastal path, uphill, to appreciate the more extensive views. Perhaps the high spot of the evening was when two Choughs flew past, calling distinctively.

Some of us returned the way we had come and others, who preferred a change, walked back by way of the public footpath on the south eastern side of the stream. We met again in the garden to thank and say goodbye to our host, whose hospitality was much appreciated.

Report by Gill Barter.



Landowner Robert Hubbard and members of CNS at Blaen-y-Cwm.



Horseshoe vetch at Blaen-y-Cwm, Cwm Nash.

All Cwm Nash photos by Rob Nottage.

## Waterfall walk near Penderyn

On 14 May 2016, Steve Howe led a group of CNS members on a 'circular' walk.

Rob Nottage supplies the following species list, with an emphasis on the birds we saw and heard along the way:

### BIRDS

Cuckoo; Great Spotted Woodpecker; Swallow; Grey Wagtail; Pied Wagtail; Dipper; Wren; Robin (and nest of chicks probably this species); Mistle Thrush; Blackbird; Song Thrush; Redstart; Garden Warbler; Blackcap; Wood Warbler; Willow Warbler; Chiffchaff; Goldcrest; Spotted Flycatcher; Pied Flycatcher; Coal Tit; Blue Tit; Great Tit; Nuthatch; Tree Creeper; Magpie; Raven; Starling; Chaffinch; Siskin; Bullfinch

### MAMMALS

Rabbit; Grey Squirrel; Molehills

### INSECTS

Butterflies: Green-veined White; Orange Tip; Speckled Wood

Dor beetles





Waterfall walk photos by Stephen Nottingham.

# Fourteen Locks & Allt-yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve

**Sunday 19 June 2016**

Half-a-dozen members of the Cardiff Naturalists had a wonderfully informative 3½-hour Sunday morning walk at Fourteen Locks and Allt-yr-Yn nature reserve. We were met at the Canal Centre by Roger James, the President of Gwent Wildlife Trust, who led the walk, ably assisted by his wife Julia.

Our first sighting was of a Grey Heron by the reservoir next to the centre, looking suspiciously like a decoy! A series of reservoirs by the working canal was essential for keeping the flight of fourteen locks topped up. Building the locks was the responsibility of engineer Thomas Dadford Jr (1761-1801), mostly through arduous manual labour. Forget images of narrow boats with pots of geraniums and dainty curtains. The craft used were covered only with tarpaulin, and the labourers camped out on the banks of the canal. I like the idea of the wives brewing weak beer to quench the workers' thirst and strong beer to help them forget their hard life! The restoration of the canal is underway but it is a lengthy and expensive project.

Yellow Water Lilies bloomed on the reservoir and Hemlock Water Dropwort abounded all along the waterway. This plant, and especially its roots, is extremely poisonous. It is believed to have been the agent of Socrates' demise. (A similar equally poisonous umbellifer, Hemlock, can be distinguished by its purple-spotted stems). We stopped at the first restored lock to admire the original mechanism. It was manufactured from cast iron and made to last.

Noting down all the flowering plants, insects and so on was keeping me very busy! There is so much to enjoy at this time of year that I'll only mention species of particular interest, but I'm happy to give anyone a more complete list with binomials.

Ivy-leaved Toadflax clothed the beautiful brick walls of a lock. Black Bryony scrambled up the hedgerow plants. When we spotted Nipplewort, an unassuming composite, Roger told us the origin of its name: it used to be used to treat mastitis in cows. The leaves also make a delicious salad addition to sandwiches. On a personal note, I was pleased to finally crack the difference between the two common wild roses: Dog Rose has pink or white flowers with the styles not joined whereas the Field Rose is always white with the styles joined in a column and an obviously knobby stigma.

By the former lockkeepers' cottage sprouted Maidenhair Spleenwort. The lock itself showed how neglect quickly gives way to successional vegetation. Once Alders gain hold the water is sucked up, and in 10-15 years the disused lock is overrun with vegetative growth. Roger pointed out the site of a lime kiln. Nearby was a fine stand of Ink Caps. The first of two Straw Dots was spotted: an unobtrusive moth easily disturbed during the day.

We passed under the M4. Unfortunately, today there was no otter spraint to examine. But our attention was soon caught by a stand of Gipsywort, a white-flowered labiate with deeply-toothed leaves found in wet places. Roger told us that itinerant fortune-tellers used to stain their skins with the plant juice to pass themselves off as Egyptians or Africans to lend credence to their tales! Some of us tested this by rubbing our hands with leaves: there was a definite a tanning effect!

Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) which we next found is a fern ally reproducing by spores. It grows by or in water (not to be confused with Maretail which produces petal-less pink flowers and grows in fast-flowing streams). The high silica content of the stems make them ideal for scouring pans. Horsetails are "living fossils", the only living genus of the class Equisetopsida which dominated the understory of late Palaeozoic forests.

After the delightful sight of Swallows and their youngsters flying overhead and perching on wires, our next treat was a visit to the Allt-yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve, one of many reserves managed by Gwent Wildlife Trust. Originally, it formed the grounds of a large house. These had become neglected for many years, until taken over by the Trust. Our first sighting was a Hornet. Equally exciting was a Broad-leaved Helleborine in bud, hiding in the vegetation.

The first pond used to be a lido, formed by the damming of the stream. An area next to it has been cleared and furnished with log benches, as a 'Forest School' for local children. Further through the woods we came to the second pond. This is a gloriously clear, unpolluted area of water. Apparently, fantastic numbers of Newts (Common and Palmate) live here together with Frogs and Toads.

We soon emerged at the bottom end of a sloping neutral hay meadow. This land has never been ploughed. First to amaze us was an impressive stand of hundreds of Common Spotted Orchids, forming a sea of flowers – white, pale pink and dark pink. Originally there were very few individuals but careful management has allowed an explosive increase up the hill. All the species common to neutral grassland were on display: Sweet Vernal Grass, Crested Dog's-tail, Cock's-foot, Lady's Bedstraw, Red Clover, Black Knapweed and Ox-eye Daisy, plus a great many more flowers including Yellow Rattle, a semi-parasitic annual. Here I identified my second moth of the day – another Straw Dot. There was great excitement when a member of the group discovered a specimen of Southern Marsh Orchid, new to this meadow, at the top of the hill. As we left the field, a Cardinal Beetle (below) was seen.



Drizzly rain started to fall, but luckily it came to nothing. A Spindle-Tree was pointed out with its give-away green shoots and small white flowers: we were too early for a sight of its bright coral-pink berries. We passed an old brick clay pit, from which in the past high-quality bricks were manufactured. Roger gave us a interesting fact about the nearby Snowberry shrubs: the berries of this alien species are particularly liked by pheasants! After crossing over a little hump-backed bridge which we'd passed by much earlier in the morning, we dipped under the M4 again and returned to the Centre car park. By now it was raining seriously, so after thanking Roger James and his wife for a thoroughly enjoyable walk we dispersed.

Report by Hilary Perry.



Orchids at Allt-yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve.

## Fourteen Locks & Allt-yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve

Bruce McDonald adds:

As we walked alongside the canal a number of flies were noted perching on the adjoining vegetation. The photo shows one example with clear venation and distinctive pterostigmata. This is likely to be the male of the Black Snipe-fly, *Chrysopilus cristatus*. It is possibly the most common of the 12 varieties of snipe-fly which are usually associated with damp meadows and woodland.



Black Snipe-fly.

All Fourteen Locks and Allt-yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve photos by Bruce McDonald.

## PONTYPOOL PARK

Sunday 10 July 2016

We were hoping for better weather on our return trip to Pontypool Park – our first trip being abandoned because of heavy rain. This time we were more fortunate.

The history of this park goes back as far as 1576 when Richard Hanbury came to Pontypool and started the family dynasty here. Over 100 years later Capel Hanbury bought a portion of land that was to become Pontypool Park. Then in 1694 Major John Hanbury built the first house which was subsequently added to and then completely re-worked in the early 1800s. Part of the house was demolished in 1872 and the Victorian extension added. Finally the park was transferred to the Local Authority in 1920. There is much to see in its 64 acres including ponds, an ice-house, Italian Gardens and higher up the Shell Grotto and, beyond that, the Folly.

Our first objective was to look at the specimen trees in the company of Tony Titchen and despite only walking a few hundred yards from the visitor centre we managed to cover a wide spectrum of different species. We started with *Robinia pseudoacacia*, named after Jean Robin who was arborist to the French King Henry III. The pods are poisonous and the commonly planted cultivar 'Frisia' never seems to produce flowers. Nearby were Scots Pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, characterised by very short needles – this was the subspecies *scotica*.

Next Tony talked us through the identifying characteristics of a Lime. It had pale undersides with the bracts on the fruit 'subtending'. This was the Silver Lime, *Tilia tomentosa*. Tony distinguished between 'sprouts' which emerge from the trunks of a tree and 'suckers' which appear from the ground. The flowers were attractive to bees but have been known to kill them.

Our next Lime had shiny leaves that were similarly coloured on both sides and this was *X euchlora*. It makes a good street tree and provides dense cover – one to stand under if it raining. A Norway Maple, *Acer platanoides*, provided an opportunity to use Tony's latex test. Remove a leaf and check to see if a milky substance emerges from the break. The Norway Maple does but Sycamore does not. This can be really useful as the leaves of these two can look very similar. Incidentally the Field Maple, *Acer campestre*, also exudes latex.

Next some oaks, where we had a Scarlet Oak, *Quercus coccinea*, juxtaposed with a Turkey Oak, *Quercus cerris* and a Red Oak, *Quercus rubra*. Tony's tip for the American Red Oaks is to hold a leaf to the sky – the vein clearly goes to the tip of the leaf. And finally a substantial Tibetan Cherry, *Prunus serrula*, and this was a Champion, one of several in the park.



After lunch a few of us headed off into the extensive grassy meadows with increasing amounts of sunshine encouraging a host of invertebrates to manifest themselves. Somewhat surprising was the number of Marbled White (*Melanargia galathe*) on display, matched by Ringlet (*Aphontopus hyperantus*), Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*), Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*) and assorted Skippers.

The oaks were sporting the usual collection of Marble Gall (*Andricus kollari*) and a few Artichoke or Hop Gall (*Andricus foecundatrix*), but more unusual was the gall shown in the image which was on the reverse of some leaves of a Purple Beech where the branches had fallen to the ground. Up in the tree it might not have been noticed. The gall is *Aceria nervisequa* and whilst not uncommon, when reported to SEWBREC it was the only record on the publicly-accessible database – one for members to look out for.



At the top is the Shell Grotto (see photos below), with great views over the surrounding countryside, but closed to the public—as it always seems to be whenever we visit.



Numerous grass-hoppers were disturbed as we walked through the long grass but we did manage to identify a Common Green Capsid (*Lygocoris pabulinus*) (photo below). A decent day of weather had guaranteed a good day out.

Report by Bruce McDonald.



Pontypool Park photos by Mike Dean and Bruce McDonald.





Figwort Sawflies (*Tenthredo scrophulariae*) mating (with Figwort Weevil below) on white Moth Mullein (*Verbascum blattaria*).



Red Underwing Moth (*Catocala nupta*).

Photos on this page by Mary Salter.



Female common hawker dragonfly (*Aeshna juncea*).  
Photo: Mary Salter.



The pond at Aberbargoed Grasslands (see page 26).  
Photo: Stephen Nottingham.

## Aberbargoed Grasslands

Saturday 4 June 2016

Around a dozen CNS members met at Aberbargoed grasslands to visit this 'urban' National Nature Reserve (NNR), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) of European importance. The flora-rich grasslands occupy a hillside above the valley town of Aberbargoed (next the tip).

Once assembled by the new Education Centre and pond, the warden Mark Allen gave an introductory talk. The reserve was established 10 years ago and comprises a mosaic of habitats over 73 ha, including marshy grassland, neutral and acid grasslands, and an area of ancient woodland. Above a former mine, Mark told us how the coal board had to fill in a series of bell pits that had formed ponds, after a horse had disappeared down one and died.

No less than 25 species of butterfly have been recorded at Aberbargoed Grasslands (out of a total of 59 UK species). The reserve is particularly important for marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*), one of Wales's rarest butterflies, which favours damp pastures where its larval food plant devil's bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) can be found. The silk webs spun by the larvae are counted in the autumn as a way of monitoring its population. The caterpillars overwinter buried in grass tussocks, emerging in spring to again feed on devil's bit scabious leaves. After pupation, the adults are on the wing for only around 4-8 days. Although a little overcast, we had great success in finding and photographing marsh fritillary, along with a number of other notable butterflies, such as the small pearl-bordered fritillary (*Boloria selene*), along with an elephant hawk moth and other insects.

Reserve management involves grazing using native breeds of cattle, and scrub and pond clearance by rangers and volunteers. Thus a spectacular community of grassland plants flourish, including purple moor grass and rush pasture. Masses of heath spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) were to be seen.

An autumn visit is best for seeing the fungi, for which this reserve is also of national importance, especially for waxcaps.

Report by Stephen Nottingham.

**Barbara Brown's Aberbargoed Grasslands species list:**

Common heath moth; Green dock beetle; Chaser dragonfly exuvia; Mother shipton moth; Small pearl-bordered fritillary; Marsh fritillary; Common frog; Diamond-back moth (*Plutella xylostella*); Common carder bumblebee; White-tailed bumblebee; Small elephant hawkmoth; Common green grasshopper; *Micropterix calthella* moth; *Scoparia ambigualis* moth; Small heath butterfly; *Glyphipterix thrasonella* moth; Snipe-fly; Brown silver line moth; *Pisaura mirabilis* spider and a *Sphaerophoria* spp. hoverfly. Further identifications being made for two hoverfly species, a fly, three spiders, a solitary wasp, a grasshopper and a moth.



Marsh fritillary photo by Stephen Nottingham.



Fungi photographed at Pontypool Park by Mike Dean  
(Outdoor Meeting 10 July 2016, see page 19).

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