

# **CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

Founded 1867

**NEWSLETTER No. 111**

**September 2017**

Charity No. 1092496

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<http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.com>

Cover: Our original logo, used in the 1860s. A selection of invasive alien plants found on the Grangemoor Park walk (see pages 18-19). Photo: Andy Kendall.

This year, Cardiff Naturalists' Society (founded 1867) marks its 150th Anniversary. To celebrate, the Society is organising a series of events starting this autumn with an exhibition at the Cardiff Story Museum and a prestigious lecture with Iolo Williams.

## **Cardiff Naturalists' Society: The first 150 years!**

**Monday 4 September to Sunday 26 November  
2017**

An exhibition at The Cardiff Story Museum, The Old Library, The Hayes, Cardiff CF10 1BH

This exhibition reveals the rich history of the Society and the many things its members have contributed to the city of Cardiff, the wider South Wales area and, indeed, the whole of the UK. The exhibition will feature an Audio-Visual presentation, display panels and museum specimens.

Entry to the Cardiff Story is free. Its regular opening hours are:  
Monday - Sunday 10am – 4pm.

Further information can be found on the museum's website:  
<http://www.cardiffstory.com/>

Steve Howe, Andy Kendall and Mike Dean spent many hours doing research for this exhibition. Find out more of the stories they unearthed on Monday 11 August 2017, after our AGM (see page 5).

## **Prestigious Lecture: An Evening with Iolo Williams**

**7pm, Thursday 5 October 2017**

The Reardon Smith Lecture Theatre, National Museum Wales/Amgueddfa Cymru, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NP

A special event to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Cardiff Naturalists' Society. Tickets for the evening are priced at £12.00 for adults and £6.00 for children, with a special reception for Society members (see previous newsletter). There is also a chance to get books signed by Iolo Williams at the event.

Iolo Williams is a Welsh naturalist, broadcaster, public speaker and writer who's worked in conservation for over 30 years. He is a patron of several Welsh conservation organisations and is currently president of the Welsh Ornithological Society. He is widely known as a TV presenter, on shows such as *Springwatch*, *Wild Wales*, *Rugged Wales*, and *Great Welsh Parks*.

Tickets are on sale via Ticketline, by following the 'here' link on the National Museum Cardiff event page (<https://museum.wales/cardiff/whatson/9673/An-Evening-with-Iolo-Williams/>), or phone the Museum on 029 2023 0130.



*Iolo Williams*

## **Indoor Meetings 2017/2018**

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

### **AGM**

**Monday 11th September 2017**

(\* ) Change of room: Lecture Theatre 2, 1st Floor, School of Management, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Llandaff Campus, Western Avenue, Cardiff.

Our AGM is being held exactly 150 years to the day after the Society's very first meeting.

Followed by:

### **From Conversazione to Conservation**

**Andy Kendall and Mike Dean**

Researching our first 150 years. This will show some of the fascinating things we have found out, which did not make the public Cardiff Story Museum exhibition but are well worth sharing for entertainment and amusement.

### **Ecuador: Andes to Amazon**

**Monday 16th October 2017**

**Linda and Rob Nottage**

An account of the wildlife and scenery encountered on a journey from the peaks of the Andes to the Amazon basin. Expect to see and hear about Condors, Hummingbirds, Giant Otters, Macaws and some amazing insects.

## **Dyffryn Gardens (Outdoor Meeting)**

**Date and time TBC**

**Rory Ambrose**

A guided tour of the arboretum at Dyffryn Gardens led by Rory Ambrose, the National Trust's Arboriculturist at Dyffryn.

## **The Glamorgan Swift Project**

**Thursday 16th November 2017 (\*)**

**Alan Rosney**

Swift numbers have plummeted over the last 30 years. The Glamorgan Swift Project is looking at some of the factors that may have played their part in this decline, and the various initiatives that are being put in place to try and arrest the downward spiral.

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

## **Title TBC**

**Monday 27 or Wednesday 29 November 2017**

**Katie Mortimer-Jones**

## **A "Walk" around Parc Slip Nature Reserve**

**Monday 11th December 2017**

**Margaret and John Samuels**

A talk to bring people up-to-date with developments at Parc Slip in the last five years, accompanied by photographs of recent wildlife sightings.

## Indoor Meetings 2018

### Members' Evening

**Monday 15th January 2018**

CNS Members' photos showing different countries and diverse habitats. This is your chance to share your favourite wildlife photos. Please contact Hilary Wicks by December 2017 if you wish to contribute to the evening.

### Deserts and Dinosaurs in Wales

**Wednesday 24th January 2018**

**Cindy Howells**

The recent discovery of a totally new meat-eating dinosaur in the earliest Jurassic rocks near Penarth, South Wales, has helped fill a gap in the knowledge of the early evolution of these iconic creatures. This and other dinosaur discoveries from South Wales help us piece together the changing environment in which these reptiles lived and evolved.

### Saving near-extinct Birds – the inspiring story of the Seychelles

**Thursday 1st February 2018 (\*)**

**Al Venables**

As with many oceanic islands, the colonisation of the Seychelles by humans led to disastrous declines of endemic bird species as a result of habitat destruction and the introduction of predators such as rats, cats and dogs. This talk shows the range of birds and other wildlife that can be seen by a birder in the Seychelles and describes the recent successful programmes for saving several bird species that had become critically endangered. This is combined meeting with the Cardiff Group Wildlife Trust South and West Wales and Student Wildlife Society Cardiff University. Venue: Wallace Lecture Theatre, Main Building, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff.

## **A Saltmarsh Restoration Story**

**Monday 19th February 2018**

**Corrinne Benbow**

Cwm Ivy Marsh in north Gower is the site of the first saltmarsh restoration project in Wales. A real flagship site for the National Trust and a magnet for a diverse array of wildlife. This is the story of how this gem of a site has made the dramatic transition from poor quality, rush-dominated land back into a fully-functioning saltmarsh. This talk will give an overview of the origins of the project, the processing involved and the wonderful and prolific wildlife that inhabits the range of habitats to be found there.

## **Mary Gillham: A dedicated naturalist**

**Thursday 1st March 2018 (\*)**

**Al Reeve (Mary Gillham Archive Project)**

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

## **Bioscience Prize Student Bursary award evening**

**Monday 12th March 2018**

We present the annual Bioscience Prize in memory of Prof. Ursula Henriques and Dr Mary Gillham, for the best 2nd year fieldwork project in the Bioscience Dept. Cardiff University. A second speaker to be arranged.

**Please look online for the latest information and additions to the CNS Meetings Programme, including the annual Cardiff Birdwatch in Jan 2018:**

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

**Deadline for next newsletter: 1 December 2017**



*Cardiff Naturalists' on a field trip in a charabanc (CNS Archive)*



*Keeled*

*Rhose Point. Photo by Andy Kendall.*

*skimmer at*

## Rhoose Point Walk - 2nd July 2017

**Text and photos by Andy Kendall**

Our description was “A gentle amble, led by Linda and Rob Nottage, exploring in the vicinity of the most southerly mainland point of Wales. Its varied habitats support a range of butterflies and dragonflies with orchids among the flowers.”

Looking up some details online I found this: “About a mile east is Rhoose Point, where the cliffs have been breached by quarrying. The former quarries are now home to a housing estate and an attempt at a nature reserve, this giving easy access to the shore. The shore here is completely rocky and uninteresting” (<http://beachguide.wales/swalessomerset/fontygary.php>).

Well in my opinion the author of that piece has no vision, because it was a lovely walk and there were lots of interesting things to see. As the Vale of Glamorgan Council website says, habitats include lowland calcareous grasslands, reed beds and ponds, maritime cliff and slopes, and species-rich mixed scrub. We visited them all in a short and pleasant Sunday morning walk. The Council has produced a useful map of the site: [www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/enjoying/Parks-and-Gardens/Rhoose-Point.aspx](http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/enjoying/Parks-and-Gardens/Rhoose-Point.aspx)

Starting in the grasslands we were looking at Grass Vetchling and 6-Spot Burnet moth amongst the various grasses, and Large Skipper and Red Admiral around the Buddleja in the hedgerows. We then headed down to the coast, where a pillar of slate from north Wales has been planted where the old quarry walls have been breached to permit access to the beach.

We looked at plants too, of course, especially noteworthy were Marsh Helleborine and Pyramidal Orchid. It was also a good day for insects in the less windy areas, with Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral and a very docile Keeled Skimmer dragonfly being seen, and the latter much photographed (see page 9).

After lunch, a number of us completed our visit with a walk around the lagoon and pools, which were teeming with minnows and where mute swan with cygnets were chased off by coot with nest-bound young. It was quite a sight, the smaller bird taking on the much larger potential aggressor. If you have not visited the reserve I would highly recommend it.





Eleanor Vachell (1879-1948) was the first female President of Cardiff Naturalists' Society. A botanist, particularly noted for her studies of the flora of Glamorgan, she assembled a large herbarium, which is now in the National Museum of Wales.



Colonel Harry Morrey Salmon (1892-1985) was a noted ornithologist and photographer of birds. He joined Cardiff Naturalists' Society in 1910 and contributed many ornithological records to the Society's *Transactions* over the years. This photo with his old plate camera was taken in 1981.

*Photos: CNS Archive*

**To learn more about the history of Cardiff Naturalists' Society, visit the exhibition at The Cardiff Story Museum between 4 Sept and 26 November 2017 (see page 3).**

# The British Swallowtail

**Text and photos by Linda Morris**

Sitting in traffic on the M25 on a hot Friday afternoon in mid June 2017 was made bearable by feelings of excitement and anticipation, as we were on our way to Norfolk to see one of Britain's rarest and most spectacular butterflies: the British subspecies of Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon britannicus*).

Butterfly Conservation describes this species as a large strong-flying butterfly with pale yellow wings with black veins and blue margins. It's a specialist of wet fenland and currently restricted to the Norfolk Broads where it flies over open fen vegetation, feeding mainly on purple flowers such as thistles and Ragged-Robin, whilst the caterpillars feed solely on Milk-parsley (*Peucedanum palustre*).

We spent the weekend with a small group from the company Greenwings, led by natural history writer and journalist Patrick Barkham, whose delightful book 'The Butterfly Isles', had kickstarted a desire in me to see and photograph increasingly unusual and beautiful butterflies. This book describes how he set out to spot every one of Britain's 59 native butterflies in one year. I won't tell you if he was successful, as the book is as lovely as it's author when we met him at our final destination of Wroxham over a very welcome ice-cold glass of cider.

Saturday morning (17 June) was bright and sunny as we headed down country lanes, and through pretty villages with thatched houses, to our first stop: RSPB Strumpshaw Fen. Before long, on a peripheral track around the reserve we saw a group ahead looking up and taking pictures of what could only have been a Swallowtail. The butterfly was quite high up on brambles, taller heads were in the way for getting reasonable pictures and it was moving constantly whilst nectaring. Still the pressure was off, we had actually seen our butterfly.



We continued a circuit of the Reserve with Swallowtails rapidly flying at intervals across the reed beds as temperatures increased, with regular sightings of Marsh Harriers. A sharp-eyed volunteer spotted a single Swallowtail caterpillar and also a tiny bulbous yellow egg on a Milk-parsley plant. As lunchtime approached we walked back across the water meadows past grazing Highland cattle and saw numerous dragonflies above the narrow drainage channels, including the rare and endangered Norfolk Hawker with its clear wings and distinctive green eyes. As I lagged behind the others looking at the Southern Marsh Orchids and Ragged-Robin, a single beautiful Swallowtail came down to nectar on the Ragged-Robin. Did it stay still for the perfect picture? Of course not; it was constantly on the move, from flower to flower, inconveniently angled usually with stems of grass waving across the view. The group had disappeared by then and I enjoyed the moment before being obliged to rush off and find them.

Our next stop was How Hill Nature Reserve at Ludham on the River Ant, a short drive away and another fen habitat for the Swallowtail with open water, grazing marshes and wet woodland. A small plane practiced acrobatics above us, looping the loop, the sound of a lazy summer's afternoon. We were all losing the will to live in the heat, and Swallowtails (17 on the day) weren't settling. Saturday evening we relaxed over dinner and were treated to an informal illustrated talk by Patrick on 'the Wonders of Butterflies' and how his father inspired his passion as a child.

Day 2 was a visit to Hickling Broad to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust Reserve where fast-flying Swallowtails and White Admiral were seen. An open boat expedition was taken around the narrow waterways on the broad where birds, dragonflies and butterflies were pointed out by Reserve Ranger Matt, whose depth of natural and local history knowledge and enthusiasm made the trip. The cool breeze, scenery and breaks to visit thatched hides only accessible by water were welcome interludes on a very hot day.



*Swallowtail caterpillar on Milk-parsley*

The afternoon found us at Catfield Fen, a Butterfly Conservation Reserve, deep in the fens. Here we boarded, somewhat precariously, a wide punt like boat used for weed cutting and habitat management on small waterways and drainage ditches. Our 'driver' was from Butterfly Conservation and a mine of information both past and present regarding historical management, and current plans for keeping the waterways open and healthy. Swallowtails flew along the banks above us and a lone swan with her 5 fluffy cygnets led us through the reed beds. At the end of the day our total day's count of Swallowtails was 38.

After a visit to Patrick's garden to investigate the night's catch in his moth trap on Monday morning, we said our goodbyes and dispersed. Phill and I returned to Howe Hill to try for some more pictures but the temperature was 32 C and we headed off south to visit a friend. A brilliant weekend, meeting some lovely people, all passionate about wildlife and particularly butterflies.



*Norfolk*

*Hawker*

# Aliens in Grangemoor Park - 16th July 2017

**Text and photo by Stephen Nottingham**

On a Sunday morning in July, Jeff Curtis led a group of Cardiff Naturalists to look for aliens. This walk, organised with SEWBReC's Mary Gillham Archive Project, retraced some of the pathways taken by Jeff and Mary Gillham when they led walks to discover and record incoming species in the Cardiff docks area, both before and after the extensive redevelopment. The aliens in question were invasive plant species, either exotics originating outside Britain or those not usually encountered in this part of the UK, which have opportunistically colonised the disturbed areas.

During the heyday of the docks, plant seed came in on ballast from overseas; while during the redevelopment, which included the covering of a closed landfill on former moorland at Grangemoor, soil was bought in from elsewhere in the UK. Together with natural seed dispersal methods, such as the wind, it has made this a good place to look for invasive alien plant species.

On our walk along the River Ely and around Grangemoor Park, we found many invaders that would have been familiar to Mary. Among the species originated from north America were some fine specimens of large-flowered evening-primrose (*Oenothera glazioviana*); while from continental Europe were plants such as French bartsia (*Odontites jaubertianus*).

The broad-leaved helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) may be a new record for Grangemoor Park; this orchid more typically inhabits woodlands. The annual mercury (*Mercurialis annua*) is an urban wasteland plant related to the dog mercury found in woodlands. Among the many specialists naturalised to urban wasteland, tips and docklands, were bristly oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), Canadian fleabane (*Erigeron Canadensis*) and hoary mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*).

Among the other plants of note were giant horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*), a very old lineage of plant that now invades damp wasteland, and marsh woundwort (*Stachys palustris*), a relic from when Grangemoor Park was moorland.

Jeff concluded that due to succession and the lack of management for conservation, the Grangemoor Park area now has a decreasing biodiversity. Areas of grassland where unusual plants had colonised, for example, are now becoming scrubland of lesser botanical interest.



*Evening primrose on waste ground along the River Ely*

## **Heath Park Woodlands – 28th July 2017**

**Text and photos by Andy Kendall**

Back in 1997, the then South Glamorgan County Council decided that it had no use for a patch of land in Cardiff: the woodlands on the eastern side of Heath Park. It was thought to be a valuable wildlife habitat, so there were a couple of important things to be done: 1) form a friends group to campaign for and look after the woods, and 2) find out what was there and what needed looking after.

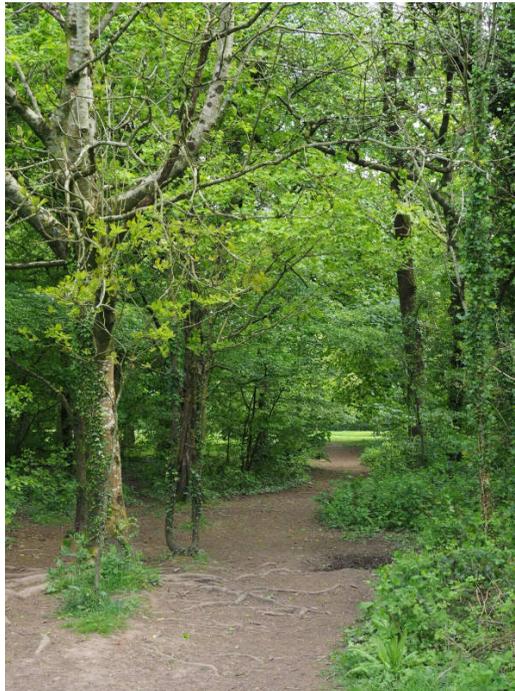
Steve Bool, a local resident who had a long relationship with the park, keen birder and our leader for this walk, was the driving force behind the first action. He created a group that Rhian and I were happy to be active members of for quite a few years, until we moved house. Rhian was running survey days for the Cardiff Naturalists' a couple of times a year at the time, so a logical thing to do was take a walk ourselves. The next thing we did was invite our good friend and local expert Dr Mary Gilliam to join us.

We did our first walk with Mary in July 1997 and went on to collect an excellent set of records for the park. We had support from Cardiff City Council, as it was then, who had offices in the park, including the office of their trees team. In due course, the park was saved.

A small group met for the evening walk, and the first comment from a couple of those present was that they did not know it was such a nice park. This echoes a feeling I often have that Cardiff has such a rich set of green spaces that some parks that would be notable in other places are not really highlighted in our city. We met by the model railway, where Heath House once stood. Steve gave us a general introduction to the park and the work of the friends group. There is an excellent account of the history of the park and gardens here: [www.cardiffparks.org.uk/otheropenspaces/heathpark/info/index.shtml](http://www.cardiffparks.org.uk/otheropenspaces/heathpark/info/index.shtml)

In summary, the modern Heath Park is a small remnant of the Great Heath, which was a large expanse of common land north of Cardiff, extending out to Llanishen and Rhiwbina. In the eighteenth century there was a racecourse on the part of the Great Heath approximately where Heath Park Avenue now is. The house and land were bought by Cardiff Council, and the house was rented by the Heath Citizens' Association for about 15 years until October 1964. Shortly after, the house was destroyed by fire, being finally demolished in 1980. The woodlands are part of the grounds of the house.

We headed off into the most eastern part of the woods where the friends group opened up a path with a small railway sleeper bridge across a small ditch that we remembered building back in about 1998. In this area, there are quite a number of large, straight Sycamore trees which I think are an excellent example of how trees will grow if developing close together and are able to form long straight trunks.



Just past this are a couple of areas where trees were felled by the council team supporting the friends group. It was interesting seeing how things had grown up again in the intervening years.

Moving on again, we came to the place where we had developed a small pond/wetland scrape, and thinned out Ash trees and put up bird boxes. There was not much water in the pond, but still plenty of mud despite the dry weather earlier in the month and plants such as Marsh Marigold and Pendulous Sedge were looking healthy. We saw a nice stand of bluebells, sadly not the native ones, but garden-escape Spanish Bluebells, most probably dumped by a resident of one of the local houses many years ago.

North of this is the quietest and least visited area of the park, where you are most likely to find a den created by local kids, an activity that those of us who grew up near woodlands will remember with some fondness; but in this location an eye needs to be kept out for rubbish or evidence of antisocial behaviour.



We next had a look at a number of areas where Japanese knotweed infestation had been rife in the 1990s, and where the friends group have been actively pulling and cutting it out. Sadly we did find a little still there and Steve noted the location for the next working weekend.

On the northern edge of the woodlands, in an area known as the glade, is the new large pond that has been created by the friends group. It was nice to see the Alders we had planted to extend the woodlands into the grass area of the park being used as a new boundary.

Our path then took us across the northern edge of the park where we were able to look across to some areas which have been protected from over-enthusiastic mowing by the parks department and are developing from their former grass monoculture into areas of increasing diversity.



Across the western side of the woods we were able to look across to the stream that crosses the park. This has long suffered from pollution and it is thought that a lot of this comes from houses in the Heath area having their domestic waste pipes incorrectly fitted to the sewers instead of the foul water system. What is nice to see is the development of the trees and shrubs in this area which are now up to 20 or more feet high. When we started planting trees in this area this was a straight ditch across the park with grass right up to the edges and what we have now is an excellent wildlife corridor across the park.



From there we headed across the old pond in the park, where Great Crested Newt can be found and where the willows have been allowed to develop their weeping habit across the pond edges.

Finally, we took a look at some of the collection trees in this area, with the Blue Atlas Cedar, Wellingtonia and *Ginkgo biloba* still growing nicely. Steve was happy to show us a couple of trees that he had carried back in his car from the continent that were planted by the friends group, which are now 20-30 feet tall and well established.

Sadly we finished on a negative note. An excellent sculpture (photo below) that had been created in the park, but placed without suitable consideration of its location, was vandalised within a week and has been removed. However, the park is now protected, still has an active friends group, is a popular place to walk, and is increasing in diversity.

Overall our species list is: 128 plants, 22 birds, 13 insects, 10 fungi, 3 mammals, 3 amphibians, 2 molluscs and 1 fish species.

A full listing is available on our website ([www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](http://www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)) under Places to Go > Cardiff Parks.



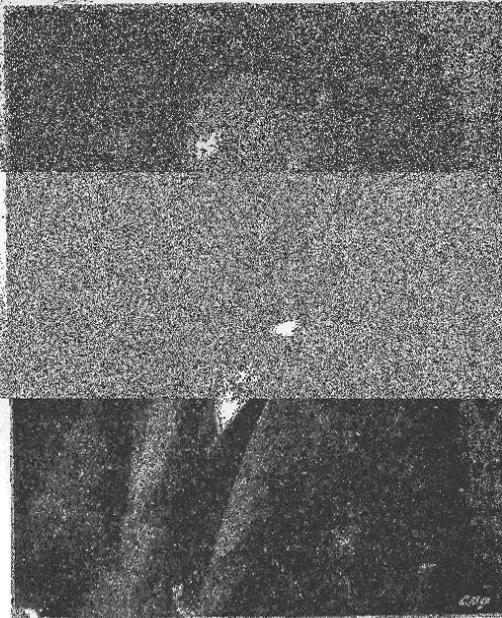
# PARK HALL, CARDIFF.

The Committee of the Cardiff Naturalists Society beg to announce that Mr.

## Winston Churchill.

THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 29th, 1900, at 8.

The Lecture will



Mr. J. J. NEALE (*President of the Cardiff Naturalists Society*), will preside.

Doors open at 7.30.

Lecture at 8.

Carriages at 9.45.

RESERVED SEATS—Balcony, Front Row, 7/6; (Other Seats in Balcony, 5/-; Area, 3/6; UNRESERVED SEATS, 2/-.

Plan of the Hall may be seen and Tickets obtained at Mr. Wm. Lewis's, Duke Street.

CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY.

PARK HALL, CARDIFF.

On SATURDAY FEB 25th 1897, at 7.30 p.m.,

# Dr. FRIDTJOF NANSEN

WILL GIVE A POPULAR ACCOUNT OF HIS  
RECENT EXPEDITION,

ENTITLED:

*'Across the Polar Region.'*

The Lecture will  
be illustrated  
by lantern  
photographs  
taken during the  
Expedition, and  
shown by the aid  
of overhead  
projector.



Talk will be  
given by  
DR. NANSEN'S  
first public  
appearance in  
Wales or the  
West of England.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY.

Balcony (front row), 5/-; other rows, 3/-; Area (front seats), 5/-; Middle Area, 3/- (All the above are numbered and reserved.) Unreserved Seats, 2/-; Admission, 1/-

Seats may be booked at Mr. W. Lewis's, Duke Street, Cardiff, on and after Monday, February 23rd, 1897.

Doors open at 7 o'clock.



Wild carrot. One of the species of Grangemoor Park (see pages 18-19). Photo: Andy Kendall.

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