CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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Cover photo Sanderling on the river Exe, by Graham Duff

PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS

With the end of our indoor meetings in sight we look forward to increasing the number of our field meetings into spring and summer. Despite the present damp and cold weather signs of spring are there - last weekend I joined some friends walking in the Ceiriog Valley near Llangollen, North Wales – the vast carpets of snowdrops in the valley were quite outstanding. Although considered a flower to bloom in February – monks called the snowdrop our lady of February and dedicated to the Virgin Mary – earlier flowering of snowdrops has been noted for a while. Although looking delicate and fragile as the flower rises between the long narrow leaves, snowdrops are designed to survive any icy blast of winter. The head of the flower droops with the outer leaves overhanging the more delicate parts and rain that touches the flower is thrown off. Its very fragility is its protection from damage by wind – the slender flower stalk turns its back to every blast and thus the flower can safely ride through the roughest of storms. Hence the snowdrop is usually considered the floral herald announcing the approach of spring.

Patricia Wood.

Field Meetings March to June 2006.

Sunday March 26th. — Chew Valley lake.
Start time 10.00am — Packed lunch.

Chew Valley lake is the largest artificial lake in south-west England and is internationally important for its populations of wintering wildfowl and waders. The surrounding reed beds are also the largest in the south-west. Take the B3114 south from Chew Stoke , bear left for West Harptree and head north-east on the A368. Parking at Herriott's Bridge.

Sunday April 9th . — Parc Penallta.
Start time 10.00 am. — Packed lunch.

Parc Penallta is Caerphilly's newest country park opened in July 2000. Carved from a former coal tip, Penallta offers spectacular views across the borough from the high point observatory. Simon Greenfield who led us on our visit to Caerphilly mountain will again be our guide. The site is steep in places and we will be walking for much of the day. Take the A469 to Ystrad Mynach then turn onto the A472 towards Nelson past the Beaches pub and then turn right along the road to Gelligaer past Penallta colliery. The park is on your left. Please meet in the car park SN 1395.

Saturday April 29th. Seashore Foray
Start time 11am. Point Eynon.
PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE FROM THAT IN THE PRINTED PROGRAMME.
Morton Jenkins who gave us such an excellent lecture last November and has led us on seashore visits in previous years has kindly agreed to lead us again. The date change is necessary due to tides which are much more favourable the week later – low tide is at about 1.00 pm. I would suggest arranging eating before or after as you'll be far too busy looking at all Morton will be showing you to have time to eat during the foray! Meet at Point Eynon carpark (charge may be payable) SS 4685

Saturday May 13th. Aberglasney Gardens.
Start time 10.00am. Packed lunch.
The story of Aberglasney spans many centuries, but its rescue from dereliction in the past few years is an episode more dramatic than any in its past. The garden is set to become one of the most exciting Jacobean garden restoration projects in the UK. Apart from the restored garden there are other areas which will be of interest to us and we will be shown around by our guide Graham Rankin. There are café facilities available. Meet at the Aberglasney carpark, off the A40 west of Llandeilo just south west of Llangethen SN 5722. There is an admission charge of £5.50 (group charge). We may go on to other sites in the Towy valley area if time allows.

Thursday May 25th. Hamadryad Reserve.
Start time 7.00 pm. Public walk
For our first public walk we will be returning to the Hamadryad reserve for an evening stroll through the park bordering the river Taff looking at

the flora and fauna, and out on to the wetland reserve on Cardiff Bay. Meet at the park entrance in Clarence Embankment road.

Sunday June 4th. Daneway Banks.
Start time 10.30 am. Packed lunch.
Daneway Banks is part of a complex of wildlife sites in the Frome Valley. The SSSI site is mainly oolitic limestone grassland although scrub, woodland and neutral grassland add to the site's diversity. There is an excellent invertebrate fauna including strong colonies of small blue, marbled white, green hairstreak, and if we are very lucky, we may see reintroduced large blue butterflies at the site. Dependant upon time we may also visit adjacent sites Siccaridge Wood – a beautiful wood which has fly and birds nest orchid, Roman snails and dormice; and/or Sapperton Valley a very pleasant canal side walk.
Take the A419 road. Approximately two miles east of Chalford turn towards Sapperton then Daneway. Meet at the carpark of the Daneway Inn, Daneway SO 9303– conveniently near to all three sites! - we will go on from there.

Sunday June 18th. Skomer Island.
Start time 8.00am. Packed lunch.
A combined trip with Cardiff RSPB local group so as before please either book with myself or Joy Lyman RSPB field meetings secretary. A booking form is included with this newsletter. The coach will be picking up outside the school in Penline Road in Whitchurch ONLY.

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety Code.
It is useful to know who is coming on the trip especially if you are willing to give a lift to those without transport. Please contact me if you need a lift and hopefully I can arrange one. Contributions towards drivers' petrol is appreciated.

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CARDIFF BIRDWATCH 2006

This year our annual birdwatch was a joint event with the Cardiff Group of the Wildlife Trust. The bright, calm and frosty conditions tempted 26 members and friends to assemble in Wild Gardens Road at 9am for an anticlockwise amble around Roath Park Lake. We enjoyed good views of all the usual waterfowl including ornamental birds such as Black Swan, Red-breasted Goose, Ruddy Shelduck and Rosybill. The only wild ducks were flocks of diving Pochards and Tufted Ducks, plus displaying Mallards with one unprotected female being pursued by a mob of amorous drakes. There were scores of Mute Swans, modest numbers of Greylags and Canada Geese with one or two free-flying Barnacle Geese.

At least 10 Cormorants and 2 Grey Herons had taken up their usual stately poses in the trees on the islands at the northern end of the lake. There were a few Moorhens, plenty of Coot and several Little Grebes diving repeatedly here but only a single Great Crested Grebe was spotted in the deeper water nearer the dam. A couple of Common Gulls balanced on the floating boom together with several of the larger Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls but they were far outnumbered by the abundant Black-headed Gulls which responded quickly whenever food hand-outs were on offer. Apart from the ubiquitous Feral Pigeons, land birds seemed scarce. Goldcrests, Coal Tits, Pied Wagtails and Mistle Thrush were the most notable. A circuit of the Wild Gardens enabled all to hear and some to glimpse a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Winter Heliotrope was just coming into bloom among the fresh molehills.

Soon after 11am it was decided to drive to a second venue. A

reduced party duly regrouped in Longwood Drive for a tour of the Forest Farm Reserve. The frost had melted but it remained cold and dry until light rain started to fall as we returned to our cars about 2.45pm. A fallen Oak trunk near the start of the Glamorgan Canal sported several small brackets of Mazegill fungus. Other fungi seen on the circuit included the fulvous toadstools of Velvet Shank (on at least 3 trees) and the frilly brackets of Turkey-tail and Hairy Stereum. Small birds may already have had their fill from the many unofficial feeding stations beside the canal since they seemed less abundant than usual although all the expected woodland species were present as were several Grey Squirrels. A Grey Wagtail searching for morsels along the margins of the canal provided a splash of colour and some were lucky enough to glimpse Kingfisher and Water Rail. Siskins and a few Goldfinches fed acrobatically high in the Alders by the path but it was difficult to pick out their colours against the light.

An immaculate, fully-winged Wood Duck loafing in the canal with the

Mallards was a surprise to me although regulars had seen the bird for several weeks. It is a North American species which, like the closely-related oriental Mandarin, is often kept in wildfowl collections because of its beautiful plumage. It would be interesting to know the origins of

this tame individual. From the towpath we had heard drumming and finally, from the feeder channel we could see the Great Spotted Woodpecker making all the noise in a mature hedgerow tree. Graham managed to fix it in his telescope for all to view and reckoned there were 3 birds present, which would account for the persistent territorial activity.

We distributed ourselves between the two hides to enjoy our picnic lunches. No Snipe could be discerned but there were Herons and Moorhens. A Dabchick took exception to a female Mallard encroaching on its fishing grounds and stood upright in the water to perform a vigorous flapping display in order to drive the larger bird away. Good views were obtained of Bullfinches, Reed Buntings, Song Thrushes and a Water Rail among birds visiting the feeding station beside the Sand Martin bank. Amazingly, the pure white Chaffinch we noted last January has not been picked off by a predator and is still visiting with the "normal" finches. Two Redpolls and a Kingfisher were only fleeting visitors.

Refreshed, we made our way to the river, pausing to watch a handful of Redwings and Mistle Thrushes in the pasture. From the Radyr footbridge we had excellent views of a pair of Goosanders fishing in the Taff, another chance to see Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail and a Green Woodpecker with its distinctive undulating flight. Before we reached Radyr weir, a Dipper was spotted perching obligingly on a boulder in the river. As we made our way northwards along the Taff Trail, a Kingfisher again put in an appearance but didn't stay long enough on one perch for views through a 'scope. We hastened back to our cars as it started to spot with rain and dispersed well satisfied with our sighting of over 50 species of birds.

Linda Nottage

COPY FOR JUNE NEWSLETTER BY 15th MAY PLEASE Ed.

Trip on the River Exe

After a rather unfortunate start – a smaller than ordered coach arrived for our journey to Devon- thanks again to Joan Andrews for driving to the venue and averting the crisis - we arrived in time to catch the boat for our trip along the River Exe from Exmouth to Topsham and back. Despite the luxury of heating on the lower deck many stayed up on the main deck for the duration of the journey which due to sunshine and no wind was quite tolerable for early February – thermals were a good idea though! The sun and therefore good light gave stunning views of the numerous birds seen and gave good photographic opportunities (Graham has already shown some images taken on this trip at our indoor meeting and no doubt has more to show).

The running commentary from Rod Lawrence ensured that no one needed to miss anything except if they were on the wrong side of the boat! Apart from the birds seen a female Atlantic grey seal was hauled out onto one of the sandbanks - also enjoying the sunshine it seemed. Rod Lawrence also included some geography and geology of the area in his commentary along with a few anecdotes!

Back on shore we decided to return to Topsham on the coach and many of us walked from the town along the river and down to Bowling Green marsh where there is a viewing platform and hide. Those who did get out to the hide were rewarded with excellent views of snipe and pintail – unfortunately the hoped for spoonbills were not seen.(Continued on page 10)

Many thanks to everyone who came along and my apologies for the lack of space in the smaller than expected coach!

Birds seen (thanks to Joy Lyman for the list and Graham for the pictures):-

River Exe

Mute swan	Canada goose	Brent goose
Shag	Cormorant	Little egret
Grey heron	Mallard	Shelduck
Teal	Wigeon	Goldeneye
Red breasted merganser	Great crested grebe	Lapwing
Oystercatcher	Dunlin	Grey plover
Golden plover	Sanderling	Redshank
Greenshank	Curlew	Avocet
Bar tailed godwit	Black tailed godwit	Turnstone
Starling	Common gull	Lesser black backed gull
Greater black backed gull	Crow	Pied wagtail

Bowling green marsh

Greylag goose	Pintail	Snipe
Coot	Moorhen	Greenfinch
Pochard	Blue tit	Shoveler
Blackbird	Wood pigeon	Robin
Dunnock	Magpie	

(birds listed here are only those not already seen on the Exe)

Patricia Wood.

WEATHER REPORT 2005

	MEAN TEMPERATURE			RAINFALL		BAROMETER	
MONTH	09.00GMT	MAX	MIN	TOTAL		RAIN-DAYS	MILLI-BARS
	^{0}C	^{0}C	^{0}C	INCHES	MM	0.1"OR MORE	
JANUARY	4.7	8.1	3.3	3.93	99.0	22	1025
FEBRUARY	2.8	6.6	2.0	2.38	58.5	14	1026
MARCH *	_	_	_	2.7	68.0	_	_
APRIL	9.3	13.5	6.6	3.87	96.0	18	1018
MAY	13.6	16.9	8.6	2.15	54.0	15	1021
JUNE	16.0	20.6	12.2	3.51	89.5	13	1025
JULY	18.1	22.2	14.1	4.76	119.0	16	1024
AUGUST	15.7	21.1	12.1	3.05	77.0	11	1025
SEPTEMBER	13.8	18.1	10.8	3.49	87.5	17	1018
OCTOBER	10.9	14.2	9.5	6.89	175.5	20	1006
NOVEMBER	4.5	8.0	2.7	5.87	149.0	18	1013
DECEMBER	5.2	8.0	2.4	5.19	130.5	11	1012
AVE'/TOTAL	10.4	14.4	7.7	47.79	1203.5	175	1019

*Only total rainfall figures available.

For much of the year we experienced the conditions which the forecasters referred to as quiet weather. There was a high incidence of overnight rain fall, Wind strengths were generally at the lowest end of the Beaufort scale and, except for the month of November, we were spared

other severe conditions such as fog, frost and snow.

Average readings for January were almost a repetition of those for the previous December. Overnight temperatures fell just below Zero on four occasions, and on the morning of the 13th the reading was to -0·5^0 C at 09·00 GMT. All other 09·00 GMT temperatures ranged between 1·0^{0}C and a balmy 10·0^{0}C on the 7th. Rainfall was generally in small amounts except for the 9th (0·97") and the 22nd (0.65").

February was the coldest month of the year but there were only two nights when the temperature dropped below zero. It was a fairly dry month with the lowest rainfall of the year except for May. The only thing I can say about March is that it was the fourth driest March since I started recordings in 1992.

April produced its usual crop of showers but daytime temperatures improved considerably, especially in the second half of the month. In the last twelve days maximum temperatures were 14·0^0 C or more on nine occasions, including 19·0^{0}C on the 29th and 21·0^{0}C on the 30th. The warm conditions continued into May but it became cooler with some cold winds during the second week. Thereafter temperatures increased and a very warm 25·5^0 C was recorded on the 27th.

June was generally fine but there were a few cool days early in the month. However on the 10th the temperature had reach 24·0 ^{0}C by 09·00 GMT and the maximum that day was 26·0^{0}C. The second half of the month was particularly warm and the highest temperature of the year, at 29·0^0 C was recorded on the 19th.

July was the warmest month overall but the first week was cool and showery. The second week was hot and dry with temperatures of 20·0^{0}C or more at 09·00 GMT and top temperatures between 25·0^{0}C and 28·5^{0}C During the remainder of the month there were 4·0"of rain spread over twelve days and maximum temperatures ranging from 13·5^{0}C to 24·5^{0}C.

August was a month of high pressure but no other dominating features. Daytime temperatures were quite warm reaching 24·0^{0}C four times and 25·0^{0}C on the 6th and for the most part minimum temperatures were above 12·5^{0}C.

September was mainly fine with average temperatures just a couple of degrees lower than those of August. Cooler conditions returned towards up the end of the month and the overnight temperature dropped to 5·0^{0}C on the 27th and 28th.

October was the wettest month of the year and the heaviest single fall

of rain of 1.17" was on the 24th. It was reported that the maximum temperature of 15.0^0 C on the 27th was the highest ever recorded for that date in Cardiff.

November was notable for the heavy frosts which were evident on the eleven mornings between the 13th and the 28th. During that time there were seven nights when the temperatures dropped below zero and two mornings when they were still below zero at 09.00 GMT .

December was a little less cold and the first of the month was the second wettest day of the year with a fall of 1.15".Minimum temperatures were below zero on three nights over the Christmas period and the coldest night of the year at -0.5^0 C was 26th December. Finally, the lowest pressure that I have ever recorded was on 2nd December when the glass fell to 970 millibars.

To summarise :-

The lowest pressure at 09.00 GMT was of 970 millibars on the 2nd December and the highest was 1041 millibars on the 8th and 9th February. Gales were noted on the 7th , 9th and 20th January.

There was fog on the 21st and 22nd November. Thunder was heard on the 19th April, 21st May, 21st 23rd and 28th June, 31st August and 10th September.

Rainfall in excess of 1" was recorded on the 24th October (1.17") and 1st December (1.15")

Frost was observed on the 23rd January. 1st, 14th, 15th, 23rd and 26th February. 13th, 15th—20th and 25th-28th November and 6th, 10th , and 17th December.

Snow fell on 22nd January 21st, 22nd February, 24th November and 29th December.

Stan Jones

More for Less

Unlike its larger counterparts, the lesser spotted woodpecker appears to be in decline. Comparatively little is known about this species, let alone what is causing or driving its putative decline. But help is on the way.

A pilot project is being run into the ecology and status of this little-studied woodpecker during 2006, to lead into a post graduate degree later in the year. Both projects will be supervised by Dr Dan Forman of the University of Wales Swansea. The pilot project will focus on Glamorgan's own population of this elusive species of woodpecker.

During the course of the pilot project, the presence or absence of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker will be established, in a number of woodlands throughout Glamorgan, by using a combination of call play back and silent transects. Where possible breeding will be confirmed and monitored to gain as much information as possible.

We would be grateful for any information you may have on the distribution and breeding of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker within the county. Both historical and contemporary information is welcomed.

Woodpeckers provide an essential supply of cavities each year, which are subsequently used by a variety of bird, bat, and invertebrate species. An important aspect of this project will be to look into the secondary use of woodpecker nests. We would welcome any help with the location and monitoring of old woodpecker nest, or casual observations relating to the reuse of this important resource.

If you would like to find out more about the project, or to provide information, then please contact Richard Facey at faceyrj@yahoo.co.uk or on 07890 123108.

Booking form for coach trip to Skomer Island

Please reserve me___ seats on the coach outing on Sunday June 20th 2006.
I enclose payment of _____ {£12 per person} made payable to Cardiff Naturalists' Society please.

Please note there will be an extra charge for the boat over to the island which will be collected on the day.

Name _____
Address_____
_____
_____
Telephone_____

Please return to :
Patricia Wood by June 10th 2006 please.

Places are on a first come first served basis. Please contact me if you require any further details etc as below.

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