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Cover photo Primrose at Graig-Y-Nos by Margaret Samuel

Presidential Ramblings - May 2008

After a rather delayed start it appears that Spring is finally with us. Westwards from across the English Channel wafted the wholesome odour of German fields being freshly manured with the playful (and stockpiled because of ground frost) offerings from 25 million pigs heralding the start of the continental growing season.

Rather perversely, the opening months of the year appeared warmer than usual for us. At Kew Gardens, daffodils flowered in mid January, at least one week earlier than the previous year; but locally during the latter stages of April, hedgerows were not fully green and trees remained in tight leaf bud.

The global warming debate remains in full flow with reports of increasingly rapid ice melt in the Artic (WWF) but controversy remains as to the underlying cause. The eminent Dr Fred Singer, former professor and founder of the US Satellite Weather Service hotly disputes the degree of man's contribution. He cites an over reliance by the Non-governmental International Panel on Climate Change on computer models which are biased on "its chosen narrative" and which ignore or downplay "hugely important factors such as water vapour and solar activity”

Dr Singer warns that the greatest danger is in a worldwide shortage of food (made worse by the "crazed" rush to give over farmland to biofuels) because of comparatively small (upward) changes in global temperatures, leading to severe political unrest.

Whatever happens, we can only hope that some real science is done over time on the results and that we will never again face this sad situation. Roger Milton

Field Meetings June to August 2008

Wednesday June 11th — Coryton roundabout
Start time 6pm

A repeat of last year's well-attended tour of the Coryton roundabout (M4 Junction 32 and Grid Ref: ST 137/814) open to the general public and part of our contribution to Biodiversity week. Although we requested a 7pm start it has gone into the Cardiff City walks programme as a **6pm start** so leave plenty of time to get there with the rush hour traffic. Meet at the top of Longwood Drive near the Asda/Esso garage roundabout. Scheduled to last 2 hours but may overrun. Last year we found Common Spotted, Bee, Twayblade, Pyramidal and Southern Marsh orchids along with some unusual hybrids.

Saturday June 14th — Wenvoe
Start time 10am — Packed lunch

Our first visit to Wenvoe covering flora, birds and insects and in conjunction with the local Wildlife Trust group. The morning involves a short walk of around 1 mile to nearby hay meadows and woodland with adjacent quarry. Flowers should include plenty of orchids along with meadow plants such as Yellow Rattle. Ravens and Barn Owls nest nearby. After lunch we shall do a circular walk of 4 miles to the Salmon Leaps at Wrinstone with Emperor Dragonflies usually in attendance. For those not wishing to do the afternoon session, we will be back at the start at lunchtime. Meet by the Village Hall in the middle of Wenvoe, ST 122/729.

Wednesday June 25th — Hailey Park, Llandaff
Start time 6pm

Another first, this time to Hailey Park which is in Llandaff. A joint event with the Friends of Hailey Park and also open to the public, looking at the bird, plant and insect life of this extensive green patch in Cardiff. Meet at the bowling green pavilion which is at ST 14741/78929. There is limited on-street parking at Mary Street – the bowling green pavilion is the green building beyond the end of the road. Or public car park at bottom of Radyr Road, off Hazlehurst Road – from car park, pavilion is at far end of the rugby and football pitches. Cake and refreshments are available after the walk for £1.

Saturday June 28th — Oxwich Nature Reserve
Start time 10am — Packed lunch

A tour of Oxwich Nature Reserve on Gower led by Mary Lewis who leads botanical walks for both the Gower Society and Brecon Beacons Park Society. This is an all-day session so bring packed lunch but we are never far from the car park so those wishing to leave early can make their own way back. Oxwich is one of Britain's richest coastal habitats and is particularly popular with birdwatchers. Most of the day is spent walking on sand but we shall take the occasional path up through the woods. Meet at entrance to Oxwich Bay car park for which there is a charge.

Saturday July 12th
Start time 4pm

Barbecue at Cosmeston.

Saturday July 26th — Croes Robert and Pentwyn Farm
Start time 10.30am — Packed lunch

These two nature reserves south of Monmouth are managed by Gwent Wildlife Trust who will be providing a warden to lead us round. We start at Pentwyn Farm which is a 27 acre reserve important for its 4 unimproved hay meadows (SSSI) with orchids and dormice. Then on to Croes Robert which is ancient semi-natural woodland supporting butterfly populations of White Letter Hairstreak, Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral. Croes Robert paths are steeper and occasionally uneven. Bring packed lunch. There are toilets at Pentwyn Farm. Car parking is limited at Croes Robert wood so please let Bruce know if you are bringing a car. Meet at Pentwyn Farm (Grid ref: SO 523095). Take B 4293 from Monmouth towards Trelleck; after 1 mile follow signs for Penallt – on entering village, park by the Bush Inn.

Saturday August 16th — Rockpool ramble, Oxwich
Start time 10.30am — Packed lunch

Back to Oxwich, Gower, but this time delving into the rockpools with Moreton Jenkins. A good day for all the family but children must be accompanied by an adult. Meet at entrance to Oxwich Bay car park for which there is a charge.

Footprints in the mud - Sully Island and Bendrick
22 March 2008

We had thought that Easter Saturday may be a quiet walk, especially with a somewhat poor weather forecast, but there were 27 members, 3 Dogs and our leader Tom Sharpe who set-off on what was going to be a fine adventure at 10 am for our walk. The start time was important as the causeway to Sully Island is only open 3 hours either side of low tide and we wanted to make the best of the time we had to make a thorough investigation of the geological features of the Island.

Before that we were taken to the foreshore just below Sully Sports and Leisure Club and the story began…

At Tom's first stop he showed us the causeway still covered in water, but explained that we would take some time getting there, because of the fun we were going to have on the way. Then he explained to the group the overall geological history of these Triassic (250-200 Million Year Old) rocks and the features you have to look out for when trying to identify Dinosaur track. Yes Dinosaurs.. !

fig1.–Dinosaur Track, Sully, 58mm lens cap for scale.

Suitably armed with information we fanned out as a group and were entertained as we spread out across the rocky foreshore and went a-hunting. It was not too long before everyone was spotting although the eye of faith was needed on some occasions.

As we looked at each one Tom explained to us all how the features were a "frozen moment in time" as even footprints separated by a few millimetres of rock could in fact be days, weeks, months or even years apart. There is simply no way of knowing. We discussed

the types of Dinosaurs that could possibly have formed these tracks and the evidence for size and speed that can be gained through complex calculations on the size of print and the spacing between.

As we moved along the beach various other geological features were pointed out including a number of faults and in particular the fault scarp that forms the ridge of hard rock that leads to the causeway being present.

<fig2. - Fault Scarp of Hard Sandstone, Sully Island Causeway

Carefully, we made our way over to the island and there we were able to look at the same age rocks, although here there are no confirmed footprints. A challenge was set and accepted and we once again fanned out. There were a number of calls, but in the end we had to accept defeat as we were unable even with the “eye of blind faith” to conclude that we’d found some more.

What we were able to see were more faults and on these occasions they were bigger and we could see more features including drag folding where the rocks were bent into the fault. The main fault was able to be seen to be of more than 10 feet with a broken zone in the middle

fig3.– Fault Zone on Sully Island

fig4.–Tom Sharpe explaining the Geology of Sully Island>

We were able to also see some more recent geological features as the Island is one of the best places in the UK for seeing frost heave structures. These are small up-folds in the upper layers of rock that are not seen in the lower layers. These are thought to be formed by ice expansion in the permafrost zone just at the head of the glaciers.

<Fig5 – frost heave structure

On the eastern end of Sully Island we were able to look at the Carboniferous Limestone and were treated to an in depth discussion on the occurrence of Galena (Lead Sulphide) that 2 of our members Dave Wellings and Linda Garfield have been studying for a number of years.

On returning to the landward side we inspected the remains that are thought by some to be the wreck of the SY Scotia. This was a ship used on the 1902 – 1904 Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, led by William Speirs Bruce. A debate ensued as to whether the remains were long enough to be the reputed ship and we came to a group conclusion that they were not. A little post event surfing by the author and Bruce McDonald shows an interesting mismatch of facts on various websites and journals. The website http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/apr2004.html shows some fine pictures of the ship and the massive framework on the ship and the website http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/scotia/gooant/gooant050101.htm describes the ship as “a three-masted wooden barque 42 metres (140 feet) long, with a beam of nine metres (29 feet), draft or depth 4.5 metres (15 feet) and a freight-carrying capacity of 357 tons.”

Neither of these match up to the mere 50 foot wreck we saw in front of us. So despite the same latter website http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/

scotia/gooant/gooant0606.htm also saying that "Parts of Scotia can still be seen on the beach at Sully Island," we are forced to conclude that these are not they, and maybe other reports that it founded on a sandbank in the channel are more reliable.

Back on dry land we were given the opportunity to extend the walk to Bendrick which as it was such a fine day most of us did indeed do. Here we were able to see a number of other footprints which may be Dinosaurs or may be other reptiles that lived alongside them as these were the very early days of the terrible lizards and at that time there were many other forms of reptiles that were not as massively successful.

<fig6.–Dinosaur or other reptile – the choice is yours…

We were also able to examine the so-called imbricated (stacked) rocks which were recently described by two geographers as part of the evidence of a tsunami in the channel, but are more likely to be a simple cliff collapse structure.

All in all a massively successful day and our thanks to an excellent leader.

And finally as in all good news stories … Coming soon… Walking the Rocks 2 – The Glamorgan Coast. This is a new book being worked on by the South Wales Geologists Association which will contain this walk so you can guide yourself. The book is planned to be published in 2009. For those interested Walking the Rocks 1 can still be purchased through the SWGA website at www.swga.org.uk. Also if you didn't join us and can't wait ….there is a download of a leaflet of the Bendrick section of the walk at http://www.swga.org.uk/htmfiles/walkspdf.htm

Andy Kendall

FIELD TRIP TO SOUTHGATE, GOWER.
March 29th, 2008

Cloudless blue sky at 6.30am suggested that our trip to Gower would be pleasant in contrast to dire warnings from the weathermen. Unfortunately the latter proved to be correct and as a small group plus Taff assembled at 10.30 the heavens opened and horizontal rain pursued us throughout the walk. The write-up which follows is therefore an amalgam of what we saw on the day and a trip made earlier in the week by some of the members.

From the National Trust car park at Southgate we made our way east along the cliffs from where on a good day there are clear views back towards Oxwich and the Old Red Sandstone spine of Cefn Bryn. The sward here is kept short by grazing sheep, good for the local Choughs which you would be unlucky not to see but not for flora which at first was non-existent. Beyond Hunts Farm we took the path out to the headland of Pwll Du which at 320 feet is the highest point on the Gower coast and is an anticline of Carboniferous Limestone. This stretch is good for Raven, Jackdaw and Chough whilst smaller denizens populate the sheltered ravines.

Our first stop was the Iron Age hill fort of High Pennard, excavated in 1939 which unearthed the remains of two buildings, a timber gateway and guard hut. Relics included a clay spindle-whorl used for weaving. Below the cliffs are two caves, Bacon Hole and Minchin Hole. The latter has revealed bones of bison, rhino, hyena, elephant and even lion. It was occupied in Roman times and then, intermittently, during the dark ages with finds including bronze brooches, bone spoons and 9th century silver coins much of which can be seen in Swansea museum.

A short distance beyond is one of the best sites to see Yellow Whitlow Grass. Many just head for Pennard Castle where it grows on the walls but on Pwll Du head it can be found in a more natural setting on the less accessible (to sheep!) cliffs. Described by John Fisher as a 'hedgehog of rigid, dark green, keeled leaves' the brilliant yellow flowers of this alpine are only found in the UK in the wild on the stretch of Gower from

Yellow Whitlow

Worms Head to Pwll Du. Reports of it growing on Gower date back to 1803 and March to early April is the best time to see it. Other flora included Lesser Celandine, Primrose, Dog Violet, Wall Pennywort, Common Whitlow Grass and Ground Ivy.

Having gained our spurs in the teeth of a gale which had forced even the Choughs to take shelter we moved on towards Gravesend and gazed down on a ring of stones in the small valley below to hear why this area is so called. On 28th November 1760 an Admiralty ship, the Caesar, under Captain Hood set off from Mumbles on a mission to press-gang local men. It was destined for Carmarthen Bay but a storm forced it to retreat back towards Mumbles. The pilot mistook Pwll Du head for Mumbles Head and the ship hit the rocks near the headland. The Captain and officers made it ashore to raise the alarm but around 68 press-ganged men were left behind, battened down under the hatches. The boat broke up and the following morning the bodies of the men were found scattered over the rocks. The circle of stones marks the site of the mass grave of these men. On a less sombre note this sheltered valley is good for wildlife – previously we had found the Violet Oil Beetle, *Meloe violaceous,* here.

Having worked our way to the road we called it a day and headed back to the car park but had the weather been kinder we had intended to have lunch down on Pwll Du beach. Nowadays this remote and isolated little beach with its handful of holiday cottages is a far cry from the 19th century when it supported one of the main limestone quarries on Gower, exporting the stone to North Devon. The rock strata dips seawards making it particularly convenient to quarry and the residual gullies are very obvious along with some remaining squared off chunks of stone. The prominent storm beach results in part from the smaller limestone pieces not considered worth loading. The Devon sailors would bring their boats into the bay – there would have been up to 30 at busy times –

Pwll Du Metal Rings

and moor them using the iron rings still visible on the rocks. The sea-cocks would be removed allowing the boat to fill with water and were then replaced so that at low tide the rocks being loaded into the boats would have less impact as they struck water. The sea-cocks were removed when loading was complete to let the water out and replaced so that the boat would re-float as the tide came in. It was thirsty work quarrying limestone and every one of the current holiday cottages was once a pub.

Pwll Du Winkle

The rock-pools of Pwll Du are worth investigating with Honeycomb worm clusters, *Sabellaria alveolata*, emerging at low tide. Variously-coloured Common Winkles – a yellow one shown in the photo – were abundant. From here the route would have been back through the Bishopston Valley with the path cutting through a riot of Wild Garlic, Primrose and Wood Anemone. Moschatel also puts in an occasional cameo appearance. For us, as we squelched back along the road, it was the lure of Southgate's excellent café that spurred us on but alas, to add insult to injury, when we got there the indoor part of the café was full and we had had enough fresh air for one day. Members attending the indoor meetings may have noticed Phil's photos of Autumn Ladies Tresses growing on these cliffs so we have an excuse to return in the Autumn when, hopefully, the weather will be kinder. Bruce McDonald

FIELD TRIP TO LONDON WETLANDS CENTRE
Sunday, April 6th.

Statue of Founder
Sir Peter Scott

After a thorough soaking on our previous trip to Southgate we were hopeful of a change in the weather on our joint expedition to the London Wetlands Centre with the RSPB. Well, it was different, as we headed through Wiltshire and Berkshire in blizzard conditions although Cardiff City supporters who were heading to Wembley for the FA cup semi-final seemed impervious to the cold as most were wearing T shirts. No doubt the favourable result kept them from acute hypothermia.

The London Wetlands Centre is located in Barnes, southwest London, and covers an impressive 43 hectares of what were previously reservoirs. In 2002 it was designated a SSSI supporting nationally important numbers of Gadwall and Shoveler. Near the entrance are the main buildings; shop, café, discovery centre (mainly for kids) and a cinema showing a film describing the background to the centre and wetlands in general. There is an optional tour which several of us took and this proved to be an excellent way of getting oriented. Our guide, Phillip Briggs, proved to be very knowledgeable about the centre, birds and other wildlife of which there is plenty on the site.

Fritillary

Our first port of call was to a hide which was unusual to the point of being unsettling firstly because it was very warm without the usual howling gale blowing through the arrow slits and secondly because there were huge clear windows giving an uninterrupted view over lagoons and marshes. Within minutes a good selection of wildfowl and waders had been ticked off and there was the incongruous sight of Sand Martins flying through the by now

thinning snowflakes. From there we walked through the wildlife gardens with a fine collection of flowering Fritillaries, *Fritillaria meleagris*. Other wildflowers in bloom noted as we wandered around included abundant Marsh Marigold, *Caltha palustris*, White Deadnettle, *Lamium album*, Cowslip, *Primula veris*, Cuckoo Flower, *Cardamine pratensis*, Red Deadnettle, *Lamium purpureum*, Coltsfoot, *Tussilago farfara* and Cow Parsley, *Anthriscus sylvestris*. Other wildlife to look out for later in the year include Marsh Frogs, Water Voles, Common Lizards, Slow Worms and Grass Snakes.

Male White-Headed Duck

There are hides all round the lagoons with one particularly impressive structure, the Peacock Tower, which is 3 stories high and offers 360 degree views. From here, many of the more unusual birds were spotted including Little Ringed Plover and Snipe. A full list of birds seen is given at the end. Another whole section is given over to World Wetlands and these featured amongst others the rare New Zealand Blue Duck, the Laysan Teal and the Ne-ne Goose. The White-faced Whistling Ducks were whistling for all they were worth and the endangered White-headed Ducks were performing their elaborate courtship rituals culminating in the climax pose shown in the photo. This is one of the rarest wildfowl in Eurasia and the only stiff-tail duck native to Europe and Asia.

Male Smew

By lunchtime the weather had improved and the sun broke through as people rushed to see the bits of the reserve they had missed. The tantalising call of a Firecrest stopped some in their tracks but the elusive bird refused to emerge from its dense thicket of conifers. Those who were visiting the Wetlands Centre for the first time were suitably impressed and our thanks go to Joy Lyman from the RSPB for organising what turned out to be an excellent trip.

Complete List of Bird Sightings

Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant,
Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose,
Canada Goose, Shelduck, Mallard,
Gadwall, Shoveler, Wigeon,
Teal, Pochard, Tufted Duck,
Ruddy Duck, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel,
Peregrine Falcon, Moorhen, Coot, Little Ringed Plover,
Lapwing, Redshank, Snipe, Black-Headed Gull,
Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-Backed Gull,
Great Black-Backed Gull, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon,
Ring-Necked Parakeet Green Woodpecker, Sand Martin,
Barn Swallow, House Martin, White/Pied Wagtail,
Grey Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock,
Robin, Wheatear, Song Thrush, Blackbird,
Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Great Tit,
Blue Tit, Long-Tailed Tit, Magpie,
Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow,
Starling, Chaffinch, Greenfinch.

Bruce McDonald and Joyce Hoy
Photos by Bruce McDonald

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FIELD TRIP TO CRAIG-Y-NOS
Sunday April 20th

Craig-Y-Nos Castle and Country Park

This country park lies at the top of the Swansea Valley and on an indifferent day weather-wise and in an area not noted for its wildlife rarities we were anticipating a pleasant if unspectacular day. Yet, within minutes of setting off into the park, our eagle-eyed members had spotted a weasel along with Great Spotted Woodpecker, Whitethroat and Tree Creeper. By lunchtime Firecrest, Dipper and Pied Flycatcher were added with the afternoon tossing in Kite and Wheatear. A total of 39 bird species were seen on the day – an impressive haul.

Craig-y-Nos country park was created from the grounds of Craig-y-Nos castle to where the world-famous opera singer, Adelina Patti, moved in 1878 and where she lived for 40 years with her second and third husbands. After a chequered career the castle is now a hotel but the grounds were turned into a country park in 1976 by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. We were given an introductory tour of the park by warden Ageliki Politis who pointed out the many species of specimen trees that had been planted. The flora was interesting but typical of a sheltered valley in this upland area surrounded by the impressive peaks of the Black Mountain. Pignut and Toothwort added some spice to the botanising and fossils were noted in the large limestone slabs in the river. Watercress was growing abundantly in the stream and Margaret reported that the 'craf' in the nearby village of Abercraf referred to watercress.

The size and variety of the trees along with ponds and river provide an attractive habitat for the many birds we saw with Dipper and Grey Wagtail close to the water, Pied Flycatcher flitting along the banks and Tree Creeper and Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers higher in the tree canopy. After lunch by the pond and a sample of Coltsfoot Rock, half the group set off to look for more birdlife and the rest headed off to

ascend the adjacent peak, the Cribarth, the Sleeping Giant mountain.

With Buzzard, Raven, Wheatear, Kite and Meadow Pipit to keep us company this was a geological tour following the route described in a leaflet by Geraint Owen of the University of Wales, Swansea. The trail starts alongside three large slabs of the local rocks, Carboniferous Limestone, Millstone Grit and Old Red Sandstone making comparison easier for the novice. An old tramway route takes you to some reconstructed Limekilns via limestone fossils including brachiopods, corals and crinoids and a magnifier helped us to identify ooids. A steady ascent then opened up views along this glacial valley with shake holes evident to the north, above Dan-yr-Ogof caves. Some limestone pavement marked the beginning of a flatter section with fine views across to Penwyllt quarry with the scarp and dip features of Millstone Grit to the right.

Penwyllt Showing Bedding Planes

From here we followed a 19th century tramroad along the south-east side of the Cribarth ridge. At this time there were over 30 quarries on Cribarth. Looking back, the limestone beds of the ridge marked a clear anticline with a syncline in the valley to the north. We reached the trig point at 423 metres above sea level (1,387 feet) before returning via quartzite crags and lumpy ground where rottenstone was quarried. This porous limestone is still used as an abrasive for finishing wood and other materials and is softer than pumice. A steady descent brought us back to the country park and an opportunity to compare sightings on what had been a rewarding day's wildlife spotting.

Bruce McDonald
Photos by Bruce
Bird list compiled by Margaret Samuel

Mute Swan Mallard Buzzard
Meadow Pipit Moorhen Feral Pigeon Wood Pigeon
Green Woodpecker Great Spotted Woodpecker (Continued)

Swallow	Grey Wagtail	Pied Wagtail	Wren
Dunnock	Robin	Wheatear	Blackbird
Mistle Thrush	Whitethroat	Blackcap	Chiffchaff
Firecrest	Goldcrest	Pied Flycatcher	Long-tailed Tit
Coal Tit	Blue Tit	Great Tit	Nuthatch
Treecreeper	Magpie	Jackdaw	Crow
Raven	House Sparrow	Chaffinch	Greenfinch
Kite	Dipper		

Also a selection of photos and an anecdote by Margaret

Group at graig-y-nos

Small lake

cottage

watermill

castle

Marsh marigold

I got my Costa Rica book out and thought you might be interested in a paragraph about Madam Patti.

"The National Theatre in San Jose was funded by a coffee tax in the late 19th century when Opera star Adelina Patti evidently omitted the Costa Rica leg of her tour as there was not a venue she deemed sufficiently glorious. It opened in 1897 but Adelina Patti never visited it".
We were surprised at the Welsh connection when we visited Costa Rica, its certainly glorious now, everywhere was decked with gold leaf and beautiful paintings

Margaret Samuel

Field Trip Report
Bat Walk at Roath Park, Wednesday, April 30th

The weather had been damp during the afternoon and only a couple of Cardiff Nats members turned up to this joint bat walk around Roath Park with the Cardiff Bat Group. Fortunately there was a good turn-out from the Bat Group members who brought along a wide selection of bat detectors. Whilst it had stopped raining the weather was still decidedly cool as we had a brief introduction to British bat species and the use of bat detectors with recordings of the sounds we could be hearing with the detectors. For the first half-hour all was quiet although the resident swans, geese, ducks and gulls bickered and squabbled in the gathering dusk. Then, a faint series of clicks alerted us to the fact that the bats had decided to venture forth and before long we could both hear and see several bats flying over the water. Interestingly, these were mainly when the detectors were tuned to 55 kHz and the experts present confirmed these were '55' Pipistrelles which are known to have a preference for aquatic insects. Whilst Noctules did not put in an appearance, those present were sufficiently enthused to sign up for roost counts and bat surveys with the Bat Group during the coming months.

Bruce McDonald

NEWS FROM CARDIFF BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

At the mid-May meeting, concerns were expressed about disturbance to birds by the increasing numbers of dog-walkers at Lisvane Reservoir and the unauthorised access points they have created. (Although the vagrant Spotted Sandpiper seemed unfazed and stayed all winter until its spots developed.) There were also worries about possible disruption of roosting and feeding birds on the Severn Estuary if the proposed coastal path is not sympathetically designed.

The Environmental Advice Team at County Hall has produced a free, well-illustrated booklet to explain and celebrate the wonderful Biodiversity of Cardiff. Also free are handy glossy packs of six circular walks beside the river Taff which have been designed by County Council staff. Both these publications should be available at the Fete of the Earth on 7th June in The Friary which kicks off Cardiff's events for Wales Biodiversity Week. Members in the city may also wish to enter the Wildlife Garden class in July for Cardiff in Bloom.

The Environmental Team continue to develop projects and undertake regular monitoring to do their best for Cardiff's wildlife. All sighting of reptiles, Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies, Hawfinches, Pied Flycatchers or other unusual wildlife should be reported and any help you can give in looking for evidence of Dormice (ie distinctively nibbled hazelnuts) would be appreciated.

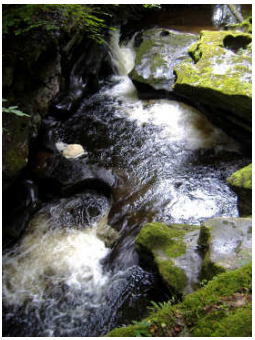
Linda Nottage

Copy for September Newsletter by
17th August please Ed.

Field Trip Report
Taff Fechan, Merthyr Tydfil. Saturday, May 3rd.

Cyfarthfa Castle

Possibly one of the nicest walks in South Wales and on a day which turned out much better than the forecast suggested, we were spoilt for both weather and wildlife. We headed off through the grounds of the castle, within 50 yards spotting a Nuthatch just a few yards to the side of the path and then a colourful spread of Cuckoo Flowers. From Cyfarthfa Castle our route quickly dropped us down to the riverbank of the Taff Fechan as we headed upstream towards the reserve. Accompanying us to our right was the watercourse, similar to a levada, which fed the lake in Cyfarthfa Castle and which also supplemented the water supply to the Crawshay ironworks. Several sections of the wall were covered in mosses and liverworts, from which we believed we could identify Dripwort, *Pellia epiphylla.* A large stand of Marsh Marigolds flourished in the dampness of the leaking watercourse.



Taff Fechan

Once in the reserve we met up with four members of the Merthyr Naturalists Group who were able to give us some updates on what had been happening there. The Taff Fechan Local Nature Reserve, also an SSSI, was established in 1975 and a clear path runs both sides of the river making a circular trail of around 3 miles. The limestone rocks through which the river runs, have been sculpted by the water to produce a landscape similar to the waterfalls around Ystradfellte and it was not long before the first Dipper put in an appearance. To our right was the Gurnos Quarry, from where horse-drawn wagons carried the limestone along a tramroad which we had walked along, the distinctive bedding stones for the rails still clearly evident. The woodland through which we were walking consisted of Ash, Birch, Beech and Oak along with an understorey of field Maple and Dogwood.

There was plenty of Spring colour with Lesser Celandine and Dog Violet on the way out, Primroses in their prime and Bluebells starting to show. In their early stages we also picked out Sanicle, Valerian and Woodruff. Further on, several of us noticed a large tree on the far bank with a prominent hole and passed on. It was Linda Nottage who drew our attention to the fact that the pale and barn-owl like head of a Tawny Owl chick was peering expectantly out whilst an adult slumbered in the background. The higher elevation of our path enabled us to look down into the hole, a sight that we all took advantage of as such opportunities are few and far between.

Peltigera horizontalis

Philopotamus montanus

As we progressed we found a brilliantly coloured Red Spider mite and a lichen that we tentatively identified as *Peltigera horizontalis.* An insect in the grass turned out to be *Philopotamus montanus*, one of the Caddis Flies and it is their aquatic larvae which are an important element in the underwater ecosystem and food source for both Trout and Dipper. Evidence of the industrial past was never far away as we stumbled across an old millstone by the riverbank. Lunch was taken overlooking Blue Pool or Pwll Glas although this may be a misnomer as a more likely explanation is that it was Glais, a young Salmon. From there we split up for a while, one group heading back down to the river for some more bird-watching, the others taking a short detour to see the unusual Meadow Saxifrage which appears to thrive in a nearby woodland.

Meadow Saxifrage

Having met up again we returned along the other bank noting the many Water Avens plants which preferred this damper bank. With the day getting progressively hotter, our route was mercifully shaded by woodland with the inevitable Speckled Wood butterflies in attendance. In the more open areas Orange Tips flitted past along with the odd Peacock and an early Green-veined White. Above our heads Buzzards were being heckled by various corvids but the local Peregrines failed to show. Green Woodpeckers yaffled somewhere in the trees. Further on, the ruins of an old mill, the Gurnos Mill, could be seen lurking alongside the river. This had once been a corn mill but was later converted into a Fulling Mill or 'Pandy' to produce flannel, much in demand in the valleys. From here, a wooden bridge brought us back across the river and thence to the castle where a refreshing cup of tea awaited.

Water Avens

Bruce McDonald
Photos by Bruce McDonald