

*CNS*



## **CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

Founded 1867

**NEWSLETTER NO 96**  
**December 2012**

Charity No 1092496

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

**LIST OF OFFICERS**  
**Immediate past President**

Roger Milton

**President**  
Christopher Franks

**Secretary**  
Mike Dean  
36 Rowan Way  
Cardiff CF14 0TD  
029 20756869  
[secretary@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:secretary@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

**Treasurer**  
Dr. Joan Andrews  
Rothbury Cottage Mill Road  
Dinas Powis, CF64 4BT  
[treasurer@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

**Indoor Meetings Secretary**  
Hilary Wicks  
029 20257012  
[indoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:indoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

**Membership Secretary**  
Danii Roberts  
17 Rose Street, Roath, Cardiff, CF24 3EA  
[membership@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:membership@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

**Field Meetings Secretary**  
Bruce McDonald  
5 Walson Close , Wenvoe  
[outdoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:outdoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

**Publicity & Newsletter**  
Andy Kendall  
Shenstone Ty'r Winch Road  
Old St Mellons Cardiff CF3 5UX  
Tel 029 20770707  
[info@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk](mailto:info@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk)

Cover: - Hypericum Fruits, Dyffryn Gardens, September 2012  
by Phill Blanning

## **PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS**

### **Chris Franks**

The Castle Martin Military range being located along a most glorious length of the Pembrokeshire coast is a strange mixture of quiet and noise.

Passing the range and looking across the bay from the coastal road and apart from the odd gull I could spot nothing of interest. Suddenly the noise from military training intruded on the peaceful scene. Over head Spotter helicopters all helping to destroy the tranquil scene. However, suddenly the noise startled a flock of over 50 curlews feeding on the cliff edge into flight. How could I miss such a number? When they settled down again the birds became almost invisible in the rough grass. Who would have thought that the noise of death and destruction would have had such a benefit!

I spent so much time viewing with my binoculars that I felt that the ‘chopers were starting to take an interest in me so we left for Angle and a gentle walk along the coast path.

Then off to Dale - a favourite picnic spot. The Gann estuary and the Pickleridge are always a delight. The usual but welcome birds were present so I wandered onto the beach where out of the corner of my eye I saw a curious movement around the boulders protecting the coast line. What was it? To my delight a beautiful stoat appeared dancing between gaps in the slabs of stone. He travelled the length of the beach passing me at close range. Such a near view was an unexpected pleasure.

All in all a very enjoyable few days in the west.

### **New Members**

The Society would like to welcome three recent new members, please look out for them at meetings and make an effort to say hello

Raj Chettri, Cardiff

Luke Giddings, Barry

Prof Mike Pearson, Cardiff

## **Field Meetings Spring 2013**

Please check the blog for any late changes to the programme  
Mobile on the day only 07847 5600027

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> January**  
**Start time 9am**

**Roath Park**  
**Packed lunch**

The new year starts with our annual birdwatch led by Rob and Linda Nottage. We shall be at Roath Park in the morning before heading on to a different location after lunch. Meet at Wild Gardens Road at the north end of Roath Park

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March**  
**Start time 12.30pm**

**Ffos y fran, Merthyr Tydfil**

We will meet at 12.30 in the main car park at Millar Argent's site at Ffos y Fran (SO 094 059, Postcode for Sat Nav CF48 4AE) and then proceed to their Education Centre for an introduction to the site and their work before then being taken down onto the site (about 13.15-13.30) once the site has stopped working where we will introduce to the geology, and you will have the chance to collect stunning fossil plants.

You will need a hard hat and fluorescent jacket/top for this excursion, and a hammer and chisel will be useful. There will some spares available on the day but if you have this equipment please bring it with you. We need to know numbers for this trip ahead of time as they will provide drivers to take us down into the site. Please contact Steve Howe (029 2057 3363 Steve.Howe@museumwales.ac.uk) or Andy Kendall

### **FUTURE FIELD TRIPS—some new and not on the card !**

21st April,	Cefn Onn with Tony Titchen
27th April,	Craig y Cilau with Jon Wohlgemuth
18th May,	Brynna Woods with Mark Steer
8th June,	Taff Fechan with WTSWW
20th July,	Rhoose Point with Rob and Linda Nottage
17th August,	Epynt with Rhian Kendall
7th September,	Wenvoe orchards with Bruce McDonald

## **Indoor Meetings Spring 2013**

The spring series of evening lectures for 2013 will follow as listed on the programme and the website .All meetings start at 7.30pm.

We will be beginning on **Monday 14th January** with a Members Evening, which is expected to be a cornucopia of fascinating topics as usual. Any members who have Natural holiday / interesting photographs to show on the evening. Please contact Andy Kendall before 7th January 2013.

The next meeting will be held on **Wednesday January 30th** with a talk by Gareth Stamp (Cardiff County Council Community Park Ranger. It will be an illustrated talk on

**The role of the Community Park Ranger team** in Cardiff's Parks and Open spaces. This talk details the wide responsibilities of the team from habitat management and biodiversity through to education, events and anti-social behaviour.

The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 12th February** with a talk by Mike Edwards (City Wildlife Care) on **The work of City Wildlife Care** about the hard work put into rescuing and caring for injured and orphaned wildlife in the south east area of Wales. A slide show of some of the animals we deal with on a daily basis along with some of the rare and strange creatures we get called to along with some entertaining rescue stories. (Editors note—including the jackdaw down our chimney!)

The meeting on **Thursday 21st February** is a talk by Dr. Al Venables on **The History and Natural History of the Ascension Island**. Ascension Island, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at Latitude 8° S, is the refuelling point on flights from the UK to the Falkland Islands. so many naturalists and tourists pass through but very few stop. This is a pity, as the island has an interesting history of occupation and a wealth of natural history interest. It is home to the largest breeding colony of Green Turtles in the Atlantic, has a number on interesting seabirds, including the endemic Ascension Frigate Bird and some 600,000 pairs of Sooty Terns. Land crabs abound and the vegetation has an interesting history. Apart from all this, the island has stark volcanic beauty.

This presentation will touch on all of the above and make you realise you need to go there. This is the second combined meeting with Cardiff Wildlife Trust (WTSWW) and WILDSOC (Student Wildlife Society Cardiff University)..

The meeting on **Monday 11th March** will be in two parts a talk by the student awarded the Cardiff Naturalists Bioscience Prize. There will be a second talk probably by a PHd student to be arranged.

The last indoor meeting for the session will be held on **Wednesday March 20th** with a talk By Professor Lynee Boddy on **The Hidden kingdom fungi in a changing world**.

Fungi are crucial to the functioning of terrestrial ecosystems: without them nutrients would not be available to allow continued plant growth. They are the main recyclers breaking down dead organic matter and releasing the nutrients that were locked within. Over 90% of plants have fungal association with their roots (mycorrhizas), which actually supply the plants with their nutrient and water requirements. 460 MYA, it was fungi that allowed plants to colonise land. The planet's biodiversity is being threatened by: changing land use, pollution: exchanger of organisms and atmospheric carbon dioxide. The talk concentrates on how these factors are affecting fungi, and why fungi are crucial to planet earth.

**All meetings will be held in Lecture Theatre Room 0023 Ground Floor (far end and left of the Café area) Metropolitan University Llandaff Campus, Western Ave Llandaff, Cardiff, not the room on the card**

## **Wildlife on our Doorstep (What's on Yours?)**

**Phill Blanning**

It's now four years since we moved into our new home in Morganstown and are still making and delighting in new discoveries.

We lie awake at night listening to Owls communicating then, in the daylight scan the skies for the Buzzards that are calling, especially in late summer when we often hear what we assume are the more juvenile birds calling at a higher pitch. We also occasionally see Peregrines that are apparently breeding in Radyr quarry, and this year on a couple of occasions glimpsed what we think was a Goshawk.

This year we've recorded two new species of bird visiting our garden, a brief visit from a Jay and for two days a pair of juvenile Whitethroats. These in addition to our more regular visitors, (see March 2012 Newsletter). We are still fascinated by our Goldfinches, social birds but argumentative at times on the Niger seed feeders. They will wait chattering away, on our rooftop TV aerial, sometimes 7 or 8 at once, waiting for us to return inside the house before they will come to the feeders, whereas the Blue and Great Tits are less bothered by our presence. Interestingly the Goldfinches have been bringing and feeding juveniles into the garden right into mid-September this year maybe a consequence of the unusually wet spring.



One summer one of our Fushia plants was supporting 5 or 6 Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillars, but we've never been lucky enough to see adults locally. The common land close to our house is home to 5 Spot Burnet Moths, the numbers emerging during our first summer were astronomical, but in

recent years have pegged back a little. It's also here that we've recorded 14 species of Butterfly: one memorable day a year or so ago we stumbled across a Common Blue 'roost', many grass stems supporting 2 or 3 individuals each.

We were delighted during our first year to find Common Spotted and Southern Marsh Orchids at this site, and have since discovered a ‘corner’ where there is a dense colony of beautiful hybrids. In the woods just above the Common Land we’ve found Broad Leaved Helleborine, and there is reputed to be Birds Nest Orchid here, but we’ve yet to find any! Between the woodland and Common Land is a sloping bank which holds Common Centaury and Eyebright, I search this bank each year hoping to find Ladies Tresses Orchid as it seems a prime habitat for it, but to no avail. However in some years there have been many Blackening Waxcaps, bright Orange or yellow before they begin to blacken.

On some adjacent farmland we’ve found more Waxcaps and collected edible Mushrooms. In a copse one year there were many Boletes, and in a cavity of a tree trunk a magnificent Chicken of the Woods.

But the best Fungi find of all was within an area of grassland used mainly by dog walkers. I entered into this field by accident 2 years ago from the woods thinking I was higher up. I first noticed Yellow Waxcaps alongside the path, and then as I looked further around the field I found several other species of Waxcap, including the green Parrot Waxcap. As well as these I’ve found both white and yellow spindles as well as Smokey Spindles, a Helvella species and even a species of Peziza, a fungus that looks like a piece of old leather!

Whilst on the subject of Fungi, during our second year we were amazed to find 6 or 7 specimens of Morel in our garden borders, no doubt the mycelia were imported in the bark the landscapers had used for mulch.

All this plus an abundance of Blackberries and Sloes during the autumn, I don’t think I want to live anywhere else at the moment!

**Late Update:** (4.11.12) We now have Greater Spotted Woodpeckers coming to our feeders. Not just one, we’ve managed to identify at least 3 individuals, 2 males and one possibly two females.



## Blaenavon revisited

### Linda and Rob Nottage

Rhian introduced us to an area we hadn't visited before when they led the Society's field trip to the post-industrial landscape in the hills to the north of Blaenavon in March. There's an account of that day's exploration in the June 2012 newsletter, number 94. At the time we thought it would be worth repaying the area a visit in summer to see what wildlife it supported then.

The many pools in hollows within the spoil tips and quarries encouraged us to think the area would be good for dragonflies, so we duly returned on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, a sunny but breezy day.



**Black Darter**



**Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**

We were pleased to find a good selection of dragonflies and damselflies in an environment quite different from sites we are familiar with. Highlights were

- 1 female Golden-ringed Dragonfly,
- 1 male Emperor Dragonfly (also at Keepers Pond),
- 2 Common Hawker,
- 1 Four-spotted Chaser,
- 1 newly emerged Common Darter,
- 1 Black Darter
- 1 male Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (at a Canada Tips pool).

Common Blue Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly and Emerald Damselfly were widespread in small numbers.

As well as scattered Small Heath butterflies, we found one Oak Eggar

caterpillar, 2 Green Tiger beetles and a very large Horsefly thought to be *Tabanus sudeticus* (Right).

We don't know if this area has been well studied in the past, but it would certainly repay further exploration in ideal weather conditions (not easy to get this summer!)



Without a GPS locator we found it difficult to identify the exact locations of the pools because the site is so disturbed by past workings.



**Are you on  
Facebook?**

Many of us are, some may be experts and others dragged on there by family members and never go near it, but now there is a reason to !

**We the CNS are now on facebook** and you are welcome to join our group. At present there are only 2 members, but we would love to have more, The group can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CardiffNaturalists/>

Why another on-line system you may ask. Well facebook is so simple to use it's being adopted by many organizations, and it has the benefits of being familiar to many people and also allowing features like group mailings and automatic invitations to events so if you join and used an electronic diary (outlook or google mail etc.) you can have the events go straight into your calendar.

It's also a means for sharing which it's all about so why not share with us and ask to be my friend

## **A(nother) Royal Jubilee Year**

### **Rob Nottage**

This year a series of events has marked the considerable achievement of our present Queen in completing 60 years as our monarch. It is a remarkable coincidence that the reign of the previous woman to hold that title, Victoria, also extended to a Diamond Jubilee Year in 1897. What is also remarkable is that the Cardiff Naturalists' Society was already a thriving organisation at that time, and indeed was celebrating 30 years existence following its formation in 1867.

The President of the Society for the session 1896/97 was Robert Drane, a fellow of the Linnaean Society and an eminent naturalist. He was one of the “founding fathers” of the CNS and it is perhaps strange that 30 years passed before he accepted the presidential honour. He lived on Queen Street where there is a plaque on the wall next to Starbucks commemorating his involvement in the establishment of the Society.

The newsletter you are reading now is the latest incarnation of a continuous series of publications by the Society which initially were in the form of annually produced “Transactions” which continued until the 100th volume in 1987. These consisted mainly of printed versions of the more notable lectures or papers presented at meetings.

So what do these “Transactions” tell us about the Society’s activities and the interests of its members back then? The 1896/97 version included these items:

Investigation on the Life History of the Salmon

The Geology of the Cowbridge District

Note on the Teeth of Diptera

Yes, flies have special organs which function as teeth

Note on Mole Cricket found on Ely Common

This is a large burrowing insect, with only 3 records from Glamorgan since, all probably accidentally introduced

Annual Meteorological Report

Compiled by Franklen Evans, a J.P. and surgeon, who collated rainfall data from over 30 local observers together with a personal account not only of the year’s weather but also wider aspects of its effect on life – Agriculture and Health – plus other physical phenomena - Earthquakes and Astronomical events.

More surprising though, is to find these articles:

German Popular Songs

Admiral Sir Thomas Button Kt of Cardiff

He attempted to find the Northwest Passage in the 1600s

“Mari Lwyd” and its Origin

A version of this traditional Christmas-time drama with Christian and pagan origins, involving a resident wearing a decorated horse’s head disguise and companions calling on public houses, is still enacted in Cowbridge

The “Transactions” also recorded Field Meetings, which were fewer than we enjoy today, but again seem an odd collection

May - Grangetown Gasworks

Conducted by the Cardiff Gaslight and Coke Company’s engineer

June -Annual Field Meeting (Ladies Day) – Goodrich Castle & Court

Ladies Day gave members the opportunity to bring their wives, etc along to what was apparently a major event in the social calendar. Usually the travel arrangements involved carriages, horse-drawn of course, and even special trains laid on with a supervising Stationmaster in attendance. Lunch and Tea were important parts of the proceedings, taken at a local hotel or at the premises of whichever land or property owner was being visited.

Sept – Caerphilly Castle

Afterwards entertained to tea by the President in the Great Hall, the exclusive use of which had been granted by Lord Bute.

But the major event of the year was the Public Lecture by the Norwegian Arctic Explorer Fridtjof Nansen. He spoke fluent English, and illustrated his lecture with Lantern Slides of photographs taken by himself, the only mishap being when the screen fell on his head!

The lecture was reported in a long article in the Western Mail which described Nansen as “a tall figure, with the face and hair and eyes of a Viking”. He was paid £90, the ticket sales made over £265, and the Society’s profit of £125 was invested in Barry Preference Stock.

As may be apparent from the above, the Society was a thriving and prominent organisation in the increasingly prosperous and expanding town of Cardiff, now with a population of around 170,000. It had prestige, locally, nationally and internationally and exchanged publications with organisations in Italy, Sweden, Australia, USA, and Canada. Its appeal was to a broad spectrum of interests, reflected in its Rules which stated

“That the objects of the Society shall be the practical study of Natural History, Geology, the Physical Sciences, Archaeology, Art, Literature, and other kindred subjects; and to assist in the development of the Cardiff Museum”.

This explains why some of the topics listed earlier were featured. Members had to be proposed and seconded and paid 10/6 p.a. (= £46 today), entitling them to a copy of the Transactions and free admission to meetings. Another Rule “That Ladies shall be eligible as members” is revealing. Out of a membership of 460 then, less than 10% were “Ladies”. Times have changed!

#### **Editors note**

Unfortunately the National Library of Wales has only digitised the transactions since 1900 so this is not available on-line <http://welshjournals.llgc.org.uk/browse/listissues/llgc-id:1373290>). The Museum has a copy and many members have copies so if you want to read it in full just ask

### **TRELAI PARK AND PLYMOUTH WOODS**

**Bruce McDonald**



Our mission was to get to grips with slugs and snails and we did, both metaphorically and often literally. Good weather but with a measure of residual dampness from previous rain made for ideal mollusc-hunting conditions and a respectable turn-out of members spent a productive day rummaging through the

undergrowth and exploring the trunks and branches to register a surprising 36 species with some new to this square kilometre.

Our leader for the day was Dr. Ben Rowson, Curator (Terrestrial Molluscs), National Museum of Wales and author of numerous articles on molluscs. Not only is Ben a leading light with UK molluscs but he is also one of the world's experts on African snails with specimens regularly posted to the museum from around the globe for identification.



***Helix lucorum***

Our first treat was to see the contents of a lunch-box container – the Turkish Snail, *Helix lucorum* – in good health and bidding for what might have been its second great escape. Found by Ben in the churchyard opposite Cardiff market and a first siting in Wales, Ben speculated that, as an edible snail, it might have escaped from the covered market nearby.

The chances of such a rarity being found by chance by one of the few people in Wales likely to recognise it seemed remote. But many members regularly pass through this area so keep a look-out for anymore and let Ben know, preferably with a live specimen. They are at least twice the size of a garden snail so are not easy to miss.

But first a word about Trelai Park. It was acquired by the City Council and designated a park in 1933 having been the location for the Welsh Grand National for many years. It also has a Roman Villa, just visible as a cordoned-off area. This was in use between the 2nd and 4th century AD.



***Volucella zonaria***

Despite containing a large number of football pitches it also has wooded areas, hedgerows and wilder areas where assorted fauna and flora can flourish. Linda Nottage noted a hoverfly, *Volucella zonaria*, parked helpfully on a Buddleia. We started with several slugs but a nice find, perched on some Dogwood was the snail *Zenobiella subrufescens* which we found again later in the woods.

On this initial foray most of the snails we found were posed on shrubs or some of the taller plants in the undergrowth. Ben pointed out the range of different ID tools at one's disposal which included size, colour and habitat. Three that can usually be found quickly are the Garden Snail, *Cornu aspersum* (confusingly in older books you will find it as *Helix aspersa*). This is not only common in gardens but increasingly widespread in the countryside. Then there are the two 'lipped banded' snails, the White Lipped, *Cepaea hortensis* and Brown Lipped *Cepaea nemoralis* which come in a range of colours and with and without bandings. For many, this is the limit of their ID capabilities but minimal effort will be swiftly repaid with other common species which are for the most part quite easy to identify.

The Kentish Snail, *Monacha cantiana*, a little smaller than the White Lipped, is spreading steadily across the country and can be found in most hedgerows often on taller plants such as Hogweed. Ben showed us how, with the aid of a normal hand lens you can see its heart beating – we had to admit it was the first time most of us had held a visible beating heart in our hands. The flush of pink towards the opening often gives this species away. Note also in the photo the large umbilicus – turning a snail over and checking whether the umbilicus is visible, concealed, partly-concealed, large or small is a useful diagnostic check.



**Kentish Snail**

Another common one that we have noticed on all our recent field trips but especially Parc Tredelerch is the Strawberry Snail, *Trichia striolata* with its prominent growth ridges. A clear lip at the entrance to the shell indicates it is an

adult. From here it starts to get trickier and a hand lens becomes invaluable. Moving from Trelai Park into Leckwith Woods Ben demonstrated the value of looking under stones where we found the Hairy Snail, *Trochulus hispidus* (aka *Trichia hispida*) with pronounced hairs when young but these do wear off. This also has a large umbilicus.



**Escargatoire**

Then the Garlic Glass Snail, *Oxychilus alliarius*, which with a bit of gentle manipulation gives of a clear whiff of garlic. The Copse Snail, *Arianta arbustorum*, a medium-sized and quite attractive species was foraging in the grass as we passed – such is the power of technology that you can watch one of these moving through the undergrowth on YouTube.

Next we moved onto the Clausilids, a group of snails also known as Door Snails. These prefer humidity and can often be found in or on damp walls and logs. The tower-shape of the shell enables them to secrete themselves in small cracks and the first one we found was down a hollow from a broken branch. They are hermaphrodites and tend to feed on algae.



**Clausilid on a branch**

Searching through a log pile of algae-rich old wood will often reap dividends. The name derives from the clausilium, a plate which closes off the shell and many of them are sinistral or left-handed.

They can also be enthusiastic tree-climbers and Ben showed us how to spot the unmistakeable profile of the projecting snail, usually pointing downwards on

the underside of the more horizontal branches. It was amazing how, once you got your eye in, you would see them everywhere although this was their ideal habitat; ancient woodland dark, damp and with much leaf litter and fallen branches well-covered with mosses and lichens. Size is a useful discriminant as the photo indicates with the larger *Clausilia bidentata* alongside the smaller *Clausilia laminata*. One Tree Snail that pops up quite regularly is *Balea heydeni* but modest in size at just 6-8 mmms.



**Mixed bidentata and laminata**

We tried hard to love the slugs as well that we encountered throughout the trip. Slugs certainly generate more drama than snails.

The Mail in July had a headline '**Invasion of the giant Spanish Slug**' referring to *Arion flagellus*, 'voracious alien creatures' that would 'overrun the country'. It should also be noted that the slug has been breeding here for 40 years and was first recorded in the 19th century. The Leopard Slug, *Limax maximus*, is fairly ubiquitous and we came across several whilst still in the park. They can occasionally be found in passionate embrace suspended by a thread of slime from a branch. The Great Grey Slug or Field Slug, *Deroceras reticulatum*, put in an appearance with a short keel at the back of the body along with the Black Slug, *Arion ater*. This and the Red Slug, *Arion rufus*, will sometimes adopt a rocking action when disturbed which they can maintain for some time.

We look forward to the publication of Ben's new book on slugs which will be coming out under the FSC aegis.

Photos by Bruce McDonald and Rob & Linda Nottage

Deadline for next newsletter 15th February 2013

Have you got a story or cover picture? Landscape format for the Front and  
Portrait for the back please

## **Membership Survey Results**

**Andy Kendall**

Many thanks to all who sent in responses to the membership survey in the last issue it's important that we hear what you want from the society so we can grow your interest, and through that our active membership

There isn't enough space here to go through every comment and suggestion, but a summary of your feedback is here and we will be taking action on some other aspects as the year continues

There was a wide spread of interest in topics with almost everything getting top marks from someone. UK Wildlife and Botany were your favorite topics, with Birds and Local sites coming next. Research talks were felt to be next, I was sad to see geology come at the bottom of your list I shall try harder to interest you in this fascinating topic

Council are reviewing the full feedback, but to amuse and inform you on some of the comments here is a selection.. Some positive, some humorous and some worrying for your consideration.

**Seen talk elsewhere...** This is something we constantly worry about, and with more and more local wildlife and friends groups being formed in the area it's a constant worry we deal with. We try and get speakers 1st, but are not always able

**Alas too tired after a long Ramble...** All we can suggest is cutting it a little shorter, but well done on getting out there

**Prevented by a Septic Big Toe... ouch !**

**Newsletter good on the sites visited and things found, but needs more in depth articles like Bruce's on pears and lords and ladies/Research talks can be too technical...** Clearly there is a variety of depth people like, we try and have a varied program through the year, but we know that many people want to learn, we will try and ensure that there is a good balance

**Would like to learn more about surveying of local sites starting at a basic level and recording our findings.** Many of us have enjoyed the site surveys that we have done which are now in the BARS Scheme. The key is finding a project that needs doing and where people can feel they are adding value. If you know of a site that needs surveying why not ask us to help. If you know the paths the membership will be happy to help.

**I prefer outdoor meetings because they are 1) outdoors 2) Expert Led 3) more informal 4) more friendly (there is not really a friendly atmosphere at indoor meetings)...** That last comment really worried us as we've not felt that, but we know it can be intimidating when you are new. I know that I often have more time to talk before the meetings and enjoy it. If people can arrive a little earlier we can all get to know each other better. If you want people to know you the best way is to offer to talk or lead a walk. We have some ideas for the future so watch this space

**More Field trips in the Autumn Please...** We would love to, it's simply a problem of getting people to offer to lead walks—if you know a walk where there is some wonderful autumn colour or interesting fungi to be seen please suggest it

**I also feel daunted by trying to find the indoor meetings venue/I don't have my own transport and the event is too far from the train station in Cardiff. I could come to more events if the venue was within walking distance/Could we have a lifts scheme...** This came through as a common theme from a number of people. If you are someone who hasn't got the transport you need or is intimidated please get in touch with me. I can't guarantee to find someone every time, but what I can do is put out an email to everyone who I have contact details for to see if there is anyone coming from that area you could meet up with on a one off or regular basis. Please ask don't miss out.

Another aspect of this last point, and actually the first point as well is whether or not we should have more joint meetings with other groups like the recent meeting in the central university buildings with the student wildsoc and the Wildlife Trust Cardiff Group. The meeting was a success in terms of the number of people who were there (it really made me feel like I was at a meeting from 20 years ago when we used to get such attendance) and I know a few people took away copies of our program. We don't want to do so many that people feel that they are not getting value for their membership, but please send me an email or let one of the council members know what you thought of the event and whether we should do more

I have been asked whether we will be repeating this survey so that people can try and remember why they did or did not come to a meeting. The answer is yes as it is only with people's feedback that we can make sure that we are doing what people want

### **CNS have joined BARS**

To quote from their website “The Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) is a web based information system to support the conservation

community. It will help you find out where practical action is in place to benefit important habitats and species as well as generate summaries of the data. It also offers an efficient way for you to contribute information about your own biodiversity actions". It's basically a map you can use to search for sources of information about a site. <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/>

We have joined as a contributing organization and I am in the process of loading up our wildlife surveyed areas. I have stated with the main sites that we have visited many times, and will move onto information from our newsletters, However I know that many of us keep personal records and I suspect that there is a fantastic amount of information that never gets to the formal lists. If you have something you think could share to show what a great job we've been doing please let me know and I can set you up as a contributor so you can upload them.

In the mean time there is some fascinating information already on the website so why not dive in and take a look

### **Avian Pox in Great Tits**

**Linda Morris**

Avian Pox is a viral disease of wild birds, known to affect a wide range of species across the world. In many birds infections are mild and only rarely result in death. The disease is often transmitted by biting insects, such as mosquitoes but may also be spread through bird to bird contact or infected surfaces. Affected birds are seen to have lesions or large growths that can appear on the face or body, or can occur within the oral or respiratory cavities. The location & severity of the lesion affects the likelihood of mortality.

Over the last few years there have been increasing reports by the network of Garden Birdwatchers recording for the British Trust of Ornithology regarding Great Tits with large 'tumour-like' swellings. Similar swellings have occasionally been seen affecting House Sparrow, Woodpigeon



and Dunnock but these have been smaller and less severe. Since 2006 when the first case was reported in tits, more cases have been found in tits than in any other bird species. Great tits were found to be the most commonly affected tit species.

Two months ago I had never heard of Avian Pox and then a Great Tit appeared intermittently on our bird feeders in Cardiff, with a small round pinkish swelling under its body on the lateral side of the left leg. It appeared to perch, fly and feed normally. We went on holiday for 2 weeks and on our return saw our bird, with it's growth now the size of a crab-apple, and black at the bottom. Internet research and a trawl through Google images led us to believe this was Avian Pox. Birding friends who we mentioned this to, in case it was not uncommon had no answers. I emailed the RSPB sending this picture with a completed Garden Birds Health information form available on their website. I received a reply from a Wildlife Advisor at RSPB headquarters as follows .....

*'This rather aggressive strain of avian pox affecting tits, great tits in particular, is a new one to the UK, and we are, together with Institute of Zoology and Oxford University investigating the spread and intensity of the outbreaks, and trying to get a handle on how serious the virus may be or become to great tits. Reports like yours are very valuable for the research. Where you are in South Wales is well within the current distribution area for the virus, but you are not, at least yet, in one of the hotspots. As it happens, the research group I ( Kirsie Peck) am part of, will have three research papers published on the subject in the online journal PLOS ONE on 22nd November. If you get onto their website (<http://www.plosone.org/home.action>) and either have a look at the latest papers, or search for avian pox, you will be able to read all three of them. The one titled 'Emergence of a novel avian pox disease in British tit species' has plenty of information about the virus as well as distribution maps and hotspots.'*

Since then our bird has vanished, probably died but it highlights the need to keep bird tables and feeders regularly washed and disinfected, to help prevent diseases such as this. This is especially so after bouts of warm wet weather. Any experience of this can be reported back to Andy Kendall for Cardiff Naturalists website and please complete a Garden Birds Health form (<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/gardens-wildlife/garden-birds/disease/gbhi>) to aid future research.

### **Is there a Change to the Blog Address?**

The eagle eyed amongst you will have spotted in your browser that the URL

may be showing as <http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/> not as shown on the card and elsewhere <http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.com/>.

I haven't had a brainstorm. Google (who own Blogger) have implemented a feature that shows the correct country top level domain (.co.uk for UK, .fr for France, .de for Germany etc.) for the country you are connecting to the internet via. This means if your internet connection at work is sent somewhere else (mine at work goes to .nl for Netherlands) you will see that as well.

It all still works and you can still tell people the .com address

## **BEDWELLTY HOUSE, TREDEGAR**

### **Bruce McDonald**

In our ongoing mission 'to boldly go where no (CNS) man has gone before' our last field trip took us to Bedwellty Park in Tredegar on 30th September,. It is a little gem and for those who could not make it on the day, a visit is highly recommended, particularly if you combine it with a wander around Parc Bryn Bach, just a short distance away.

Our main purpose was to look at trees in the company of our regular dendrologist, Tony Titchen, but like all true eclectic Cardiff Nats' members we do like to take in the wider context. We assembled at Tredegar's notable Clock Tower dating from 1858 and funded from the proceeds of a bazaar. Reflecting the South Wales prominence of metal as a material in construction, it is made of cast iron and was manufactured by Charles Jordan of Newport.

The road downhill from here takes you straight into Bedwellty Park illustrating the importance of the house, now Grade II listed, and its grounds as the town grew up around it.



**The clock tower, Tredegar**

It was the Homfray dynasty of ironmasters that was behind the development. Francis Homfray, an established ironmaster from Shropshire had been brought

in to help resolve problems at Merthyr's Cyfarthfa ironworks and by the early 1800s his son, Samuel, had bought a small farm in the Sirhowy Valley on which he built Bedwellty House. His sons went on to develop the grounds and these gardens closely reflect the appearance they would have had 150 years ago.



**Bedwellty House**



**Naturally sculpted limestone**

availability of raw materials was crucial to the manufacturing process at this time and, in addition to the limestone referred to above, coal was another vital ingredient.

Hence it is fitting that Bedwellty has on display the claimed largest block of cut coal in the world which started out at 20 tons. Destined for the Great Exhibition of 1851 it failed to make it as the train on which it was travelling buckled the rails and a 5-ton piece fell off. The remaining 15 tons is still impressive, particularly when matched with a modest 2-ton block cut for the Festival of Britain some 100 years later.

Many of the original features of the garden have been restored such as the Ice

House dating from 1820 and the Long Shelter where we took our lunch in relative cover from the increasingly persistent rain. The Bandstand looked spick and span although dating from much later.

However, the main purpose of our visit was to look at the trees and in the relatively short time we were there we (or rather Tony) recorded an impressive 42 varieties. Amongst the first trees that we looked at were some Himalayan Birches, *Betula utilis*, but the very pale bark distinguished them as var. jacquemontii. Common Holly, *Ilex aquifolium*, may have introduced itself whereas more obviously planted varieties included the Highclere Holly, *Ilex x altaclarensis* and the Silver

### Right Ice House Below the park



Large pieces of cut coal



Hedgehog Holly, *Ilex aquifolium ferox argentea*.

We had three of the Limes that you are most likely to encounter. The Small-leaved Lime, *Tilia cordata*, was one of the main constituents of the wildwood of Northern Europe and coppiced stools are amongst Britain's



oldest trees. The leaves are, as you would expect, small, whereas with the Broad-leaved Lime, the leaves are about twice the size. The hybrid of these two, the Common Lime, *Tilia x europea*, is the most commonly planted lime on our streets with leaved midway in size between its parents.

### The Grotto and park

The mix of standard mature trees juxtaposed with specimen trees is very much a characteristic of Bedwellty. Sycamore, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, along with Horse Chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, and Spanish Chestnut, *Castanea sativa*, sit alongside Snakebark Maples, *Acer* sp., and Tibetan Cherries, *Prunus serrula*. Our now threatened Common Ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, stood at one end of the park not far from a Narrow-leaved Ash, *Fraxinus angustifolia*, and some way beyond was a Pendulous Ash, *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Pendula'. The almost obligatory Cedar of Lebanon, *Cedrus libani*, stood sentinel near the house just as it does at Insole Court in Cardiff.



Giant Polypore amongst trees

A selection of conifers balanced the deciduous planting amongst which we found the Weymouth Pine, *Pinus strobus*: the Western Red Cedar, *Thuja plicata*, and the Corsican Pine, *Pinus nigra* ssp. *laricio*.

With the rain settling in for the afternoon we called it a day but in the

knowledge that a return visit might allow us to add to our tally of tree species and varieties which have now been added to the local Council's records. Our thanks, as ever, to Tony for his usual mix of encyclopaedic knowledge and identification insights.

Photos by Bruce McDonald and Mike Dean

## **Apology**

### **Andy Kendall**

Many of you had problems with the last newsletter and we still believe some may not have received it. This was due to an unfortunate mix up with envelope sizing where 2 boxes that said they were the same sized actually turned out to be different.

The minor increase in size was enough for some eagle eyed posties to note that they should therefore have had large letter postage and therefore they were not willing to deliver them.

We managed to deal with the problem for a number of people who made contact through email and we also sent out an email apology, but I know that not all of you are on email so here is our apology again and if you still have not got (and still want) the last newsletter please get in touch with me

## **alt.cardiff**

A short article by a student journalist (Lucinda Reid) has been published about the society. A half hour discussion seems to have been boiled down to a sound bite, but she caught one quote I dangled as thought she would like it "Sure we all watch David Attenborough on the television, but by joining this society you will be able to identify the wildlife around you."

You can read the full article at <http://www.jomec.co.uk/altcardiff/?p=13592>

## **Member News**

We have been told that Hilary Wicks our indoor meetings secretary has had a fall and will hopefully be out of hospital by the time you read this, but off her feet for a couple of months. We wish her a speedy recovery

Do you have something to share? Please send me any news you would like to share

## **Autumn Colour, Home and Abroad**

**Andy Kendall**

Some of you will remember back many years ago when Rhian arranged for us a bus trip to Westonbirt Arboretum where we would have had a wonderful day if it had not been for the storm force winds battering the place. our bus driver was pleased we wanted to go home early because his wife had called as his garage roof had taken off

Well we've been meaning to go back for many years and this year finally made it across the border at the perfect time. As expected the colours were fabulous and here are a selection of the pictures I took that day.



**Sweet Chestnut, *Castanea sativa***

I knew Westonbirt had many foreign trees, but my fascination grew as I visited the Woodland Trust Tree Guide (<http://www.british-trees.com/treeguide>) to read up and label my pictures. One of the first was Sweet Chestnut, introduced to Britain over 2000 years ago, sweet chestnuts are often considered an 'honorary' native trees.

**European Larch, *Larix decidua***



The next "native" we got to was also an interloper being the European Larch, This species is the only deciduous conifer native to Europe and was introduced to Britain sometime around 1620 for its timber.



Of course we then went on into the National Acer collection where we expected to find many no natives, and indeed we did and into other areas of the park where a number of donations and other collections can be found.

It was a cold day and therefore I wasn't as careful with my notebook as I should have been, therefore these pictures can only be labelled "Acer". The colours were indeed wonderful and ranged from still green to these fantastic oranges and reds, with many shades in between



By pure chance the next Sunday was sunny as well, and for those of us not of a retired disposition that's generally something not to be missed. If you don't know Wentwood forest then the first place to go, especially at this time of year is Cadira Beeches (ST 422 948) where there are information boards at the car park. From here you can head east or west down easy paths with spectacular views of the trees in full golden leaf



These of course are truly native, well as native as anything can be counted as we were hearing about recently it was only 12,000 years ago that we had no trees and were covered in ice.



### Above, a quiet path to the east, and traffic to the west

Anyway if you don't want to head East or west you can just look upwards for some colour



or get up close and personal with the occasional leaf.

The Wentwood Forest is being developed to have less conifers and more broad leaved trees so in future years it can only get better



Acer Keys, Westonbirt Arboretum  
Photographed by Andy Kendall

Published by the Cardiff Naturalists Society © 2012

In contributing to the Cardiff Naturalists' Society Newsletter you agree to grant us a royalty-free, non-exclusive licence to publish and otherwise use the material through web as well as print publishing worldwide. This will be in the format of a pdf copy of the newsletter unless otherwise agreed with you. And may include the publishing of the material by the National Library of Wales who have requested permission to do so and are prohibited from altering the material in any way.

(See the **Newsletter Terms and Conditions on the Cardiff Naturalists' Society website** for the full terms of conditions.) It's important to note, however, that you still own the copyright to everything you contribute to CNS Newsletter and that if your images and/or text is accepted, we will endeavor to publish your name alongside it in the Newsletter and/or website wherever it is used