



Llythyr Newyddion Abril 2009/April Newsletter 2009

More habitat management at the Morfa Berwig water vole project site

The Environment Agency, key partners in the Llanelli Water Vole Action Group, have created three ponds at the Morfa Berwig water vole project site. This will provide valuable new habitat for the water vole population there and the use of the new habitat by the voles as it develops will be monitored. As the population here is thought to be fragmented from the main population on the other side of the A484 at Penclacwydd, the provision of new wetland habitat should help the population survive here. Led by the Environment Agency's Biodiversity Officers, their machine operators carefully created the ponds and formed banks using the excavated material. These banks, when they become vegetated, will be useful feeding habitat and hopefully used to create burrows by the voles.

In addition, using funding from the Countryside Council for Wales, a contractor undertook extensive scrub clearance on the site focusing on a field that had become dominated by bramble scrub that was smothering the grassland underneath. Areas of bramble were left for nesting birds and alongside the watercourse where it is known to be used by water voles during the winter. The contractor also opened a short length of path that had become overgrown improving the access to this field.

Training for Council Highways Officers

In March Officers from Carmarthenshire County Council Highways departments, who work in the Llanelli area, spent the morning with the council's Biodiversity Officer and EAW Biodiversity Officers looking at management of ditches where water voles may be present and best practice when undertaking work there. Sgt Ian Guildford also attended the session and explained to the officers the legislation protecting water voles and their habitat. After a session inside the group went out and looked at sites that the EAW manage to see first hand how ditch management is undertaken. Whilst out on site water voles were obviously about but managed to evade being seen with just the distinctive warning 'plop' noise being heard as they vanished into the water!



Above: Council officers looking at ditch management at Trostre.



Right: Newly created pond.



Above: Newly cleared habitat after scrub clearance.



Carmarthenshire moth report 2008

John Baker, the county moth recorder, has produced his annual report for 2008. This detailed report provides interesting information on the moths of Carmarthenshire and how they fared last year. Jon is supported by committed volunteers who take time to send their records to him and, in doing so, contribute to learning as much as we can about this important group of insects in the county.

In 2008 6481 records were submitted of 405 species. As with 2007 the poor summer weather had an adverse effect on our moths – they can cope with some bad weather but the long-term effects of a series of poor summers could be detrimental.

Five new species were recorded for the county, including the Kent Black Arches at the MoD Pendine, a nationally scarce species normally found on or near the coast of England from Devon to Norfolk.

It was a poor year for migrants, with even the commonest migrant, the SilverY being poorly recorded but a number of species broke records for their first sightings – 54 species out of 405 broke or equalled records for emergence. This continues the trend of recent years.

The report can be viewed on the Carmarthenshire Biodiversity Partnership website: www.carmarthenshirebiodiversity.co.uk



Kent Black Arches © J Baker



Ragwort – friend or foe?

April 23rd is Ragwort Awareness day but the information released that day will be focusing on the concerns of the horse owners who have concerns about animal welfare issues and the plant as it can be fatal to horses. Horses normally avoid eating the growing plant but cannot discriminate it when it is mixed up in hay.

However, although there are certainly issues with regard to the toxic ragwort (*Senecio jacobaeae*), it must be remembered that it is a native species that supports other native species. Many insects depend on ragwort either as a larval food plant or as a nectar source. The most well known is the cinnabar moth.

There is no evidence that ragwort is becoming more widespread but changes in land management may be making it more locally abundant and dominant in some pastures.

The plant is listed in the Weeds Act 1959 and action can be taken against landowners to prevent it spreading where it has become an issue.

A balanced, sensitive approach to ragwort control should be applied, giving full regard to animal welfare and to wildlife conservation. Good land management, where horses are



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present, through hand pulling or spot treatment should keep control of the species. However, where land is not grazed or used for hay, ragwort is part of a diverse plant community, has biodiversity benefits and should not be controlled.

A useful leaflet on which this item is based can be found at www.butterfly-conservation.org



Reptiles and amphibians in your garden

A national 'stock-take' of the reptiles and amphibians in the UK's gardens is being launched. Called *Reptiles and Amphibians in your Garden*, this national project is being undertaken by The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Froglife and The Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT). The survey aims to bring together an army of amateur wildlife watchers including birdwatchers, gardeners, hands-on conservation volunteers and the general public.

The results will contribute to knowledge of where frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards are found nationally and provide a unique insight into how important gardens are for their conservation.

This is the first time such a large-scale garden survey has been undertaken in the UK, and the results should be incredibly interesting, and have real significance for the future conservation of UK amphibians and reptiles.



So why not support the project with information from your garden? Results from the survey will be announced in spring 2010.

The results will also be used to understand how amphibian and reptile populations may be responding to a variety of threats, including habitat loss, disease and garden chemicals. Although people may think of amphibians and reptiles as creatures that occur only in the countryside, the 13 species native to Britain can all, to differing degrees, inhabit gardens. Some gardens can harbour hundreds of common frogs, and others can house large populations of slow-worms (a legless lizard). Grass snakes can also be prevalent in some urban areas, where they dip in and out of ponds looking for amphibian prey. Volunteers are needed to complete a simple recording form, marking off species they have seen and answering straightforward questions about their gardens, such as whether they have a pond, whether they use pesticides or whether or not they have a compost heap.

Amphibians and reptiles have declined primarily through loss of habitat associated with the intensification of agriculture and other land use changes such as building development and afforestation. Losses of ponds, hedgerows and rough grassland have reduced the habitat available to widespread species. The rare species have also suffered due to the loss of their specific habitats (heathland and coastal sand dunes) to building development. Fragmentation of habitat is a particular problem for a group of animals with limited abilities to move long distances.

For your 'Reptiles and Amphibians in your Garden' pack please call the BTO's Garden Ecology Team on 01842 750050 or email: gbw@bto.org





LBAP species No. 4 Golden Plover

Golden plovers (*Pluvialis apricaria*) are handsome waders with a beautiful plaintive call. Adult males have distinctive black bellies with contrasting gold-speckled upper parts. Their nest is a sparsely lined scrape on a bog hummock or grassland tussock on moorland. In spring and early summer they are solitary birds but by autumn they gather together to form large flocks, joined by birds from Iceland and Scandinavia. They grub for insects and worms. In Carmarthenshire golden plovers are rare breeders in upland areas, but good numbers pass through the county on passage with large numbers also winter around Carmarthen Bay. Carmarthen Bay coastal sites are noted for their high wintering numbers.

Overwintering numbers as high as c.14 000 have been recorded in a mass in one field at Ginst Point. Other coastal sites where the golden plovers have been recorded are Kidwelly and near Pembrey airfield. Upland sites where they may be seen during the breeding season include Garreg Lywd on the Black Mountain. Mynydd Llanfihangel rhos-y-corn, Mynydd Llanllwni and Mynydd Llanybydder are all sites where birds have been recorded gathered in the autumn.

Warmer weather affects plovers

The RSPB, Aberystwyth University, Newcastle University and the University of Manchester have undertaken research that has revealed that warm summers are dramatically reducing populations of cranefly (daddy long legs), which in turn is having a severe impact on the bird populations which rely on them for food. This key finding spells out for the first time how climate change may affect upland species like golden plover – perhaps pushing it towards local extinction by the end of the century.

Previous research has shown how changes in the timing of golden plover breeding as a result of increasing spring temperatures might affect their ability to match the spring emergence of their cranefly prey. The new research shows that much more severe are the effects of increasing late summer temperatures which kill the cranefly larvae in peatland soils as the surface dries out, resulting in a drop of up to 95% in numbers of adult craneflies emerging the following spring. With these craneflies providing a crucial food source for a wide range of upland birds like golden plover, this means starvation and death for many chicks.

If these trends continue, as predicted by current climate models, we would expect many plover populations, particularly in the south of their range where temperatures will be highest, to be increasingly likely to decline, or even face extinction.

However, now that these processes are understood, we now have the chance to respond. If good quality habitats for craneflies can be conserved then we can help the birds too.



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Living with Mammals Survey

Wildlife conservation charity, the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), is asking people to take part in their seventh annual survey of mammals in the urban environment; *Living with Mammals*.



Since 2003, *Living with Mammals* has asked volunteers to look out for mammals, and their signs, around their homes, places of work and recreational land. By continuing this work PTES can gain a better understanding of urban mammals and spot changes in their numbers.

Analysis of the first five years of data has shown that garden features such as berry- or seed-producing plants, or gardens with a shed, pond or woodpile support more mammals. Considering gardens make up between a third and a half of the green space in urban areas their significance for wildlife and biodiversity is clear. Almost half of Britain's terrestrial wild mammal species have been recorded in the survey, including 17 Species of Conservation Concern and seven priority species such as water voles, hedgehogs and otters.

Particularly encouraging were records of otters within the survey. Otters are good indicators of water quality in rivers and as the species increasingly makes use of urban waterways, they are becoming a flagship species in recognising the importance of the built environment in conservation.

PTES is now urging more people to get involved so they can achieve an even more robust set of results. The survey runs throughout April, May and June 2009 and PTES needs volunteers to look out for mammals in spare moments each week, at sites such as gardens, allotments, cemeteries and parks, whether you are walking the dog, getting a breath of fresh air from work or looking out of your kitchen window.

Why not take part in the survey, not only will be helping the conservation of mammals but you may surprise yourself with what you can see right on your doorstep. The presence of mammals so close to home is of enormous value and highlights how our urban green spaces blur the distinction between natural and built environments.

Wild mammals are often difficult to spot and looking for signs such as tracks and droppings is an alternative way to identify their presence. PTES is encouraging people to become animal detectives and to discover which animals share the environment around our homes and places of work. It is not difficult to identify hedgehogs from droppings, wood mice from stashes of hidden nuts, or tracks of deer or badger.

All those who contact PTES for a survey pack will receive an exclusive full-colour *Spotting Wild Mammals* booklet containing information of how to identify species and recognise the field signs that they leave behind.

Anyone interested in taking part should contact David Wembridge at PTES, either by phoning 020 7498 4533 or emailing LwM@ptes.org. Further information can be found on the website –

www.ptes.org/surveys