



Llythyr Newyddion Ionawr 2009/January Newsletter 2009

Help Carmarthenshire's Natural Environment make headlines!

Carmarthenshire's Community Strategy, which was published in 2004, is being revised this year. The Strategy brings together an agreed vision for the future of Carmarthenshire – one that the council, public and private sectors, voluntary and community sectors and the Welsh Assembly Government can help deliver by working together, planning together and doing together. It is the over-arching long-term plan for the area which should influence everything the partner organisations do. The Strategy has a number of 'pillars': Safer Communities, Lifelong Learning, Regeneration, Health and Well being and the Environment.



In revising the strategy the Partnership is keen that everyone has an opportunity to set the vision for 2020 and is conducting a series of consultation and engagement exercises to ensure that the public has an opportunity to express their viewpoints. One way is to imagine a local newspaper headlines in 2020 – how would you like to see the county then?

It is important that as many viewpoints as possible are received, including those on the environment. Many people regard their environment as the built environment around them and make comments about litter, dog fouling, chewing gum and vandalism. We need to make people more aware of the importance of our *natural* environment. It is important in any long-term vision for Carmarthenshire that the natural environment does not get left out – recycling, energy, transport are big issues (and rightly so) but Carmarthenshire's natural environment is threatened and must not be taken for granted.

So, imagine yourself in the year 2020. How do you want Carmarthenshire's natural environment to look and be regarded by everyone? Be bold, imaginative and creative. Forget about the boring and the ordinary – the Partnership wants big ideas, big ambition!

My headline: Biodiversity Officer takes early retirement – the county's natural environment is in good shape!!

Go to www.thecarmarthenshirepartnership.org.uk and fill out an online form.

RSPB's 30th Big Garden Birdwatch



The Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's biggest bird survey, providing the RSPB with a vital snapshot of the UK's birds each winter. All you need to do is watch your garden or local park for an hour on either Saturday 24 or Sunday 25 January 2009. Simply record the highest number of each species seen in your garden (not flying over) at any one time. Find out more at www.rspb.org.uk



Further studies of oyster catchers in Carmarthen Bay

Remember the 'yellow-breasted' oystercatchers last winter (January and August newsletters, 2008) when over 100 oystercatchers were dyed yellow as part of a joint tracking project between the Countryside Council for Wales and the British Trust for Ornithology?

This winter birdwatchers are being asked to keep an eye out for more yellow oystercatchers as the second phase of the project takes place. This year there are two types of marked birds: yellow-breasted and now yellow-vented (see photos). The yellow-vented oystercatchers were caught and marked at Whitford Point in mid-October, the yellow-breasted at Pembrey in mid-November.

The aim of the project is to learn more about the winter movements of the birds between the Burry Inlet and nearby areas, such as Carmarthen Bay and if there is a difference in their behaviour. The two groups have been marked on different parts of the body to allow them to be told apart.

All records of sightings should be e-mailed to niall.burton@bto.org or on 01842 750050, stating the location, time and date and whether the bird was marked on its breast or tail. The information gathered from sightings will be tied in with other detailed surveys, to gain an over-all picture of the birds' movements. Thanks to the help of the public, last year 60 sightings of the yellow oystercatchers were reported, in and around the Burry Inlet. The project also produced some unexpected results with a sighting at Dale in Pembrokeshire, over 65 km from the catching area. Last year's results showed most of the oystercatchers wintered in and around the Burry Inlet, although some did travel further. The information from the public was vital to understanding these movements.



Carmarthenshire Bird Club website – places to watch birds

The Carmarthenshire Bird Club's very useful website has recently added some pages highlighting over 30 sites in the county to go and do some bird watching. A wide range of habitats are listed including, woodland, wetlands and coastal sites. A description of the habitats is given, along with directions, facilities for visitors, tips for birding the site, best seasons, regular birds and scarce and rare birds. It's well worth checking out – remember if the site is good for birds it will be good for other wildlife as well! www.carmarthenshirebirds.co.uk



Butterfly Conservation volunteers have another busy winter!

Volunteers from Butterfly Conservation (BC) are continuing their sterling work surveying and monitoring for the brown hairstreak butterfly in the county. Building on a number of years' survey work, egg and habitat surveys of new sites continued with 154 eggs and 15,780 m of good condition habitat being newly identified.

These new finds are excellent but when looking at the annual transect surveys results were significantly down on 2007 and previous years, which probably reflects the poor summer weather in 2007.

Eighty volunteer days were carried out during the 2007/08 survey season, which included undertaking management of scrub at four key sites to improve the habitat for the butterfly.

Work has expanded from survey and habitat management and last year time was put into sending letters to landowners giving management advice and suggestions re hedges in two important areas: Llanarthne – where the population may have become extinct and at Halfway – where an important new population was found. In addition a BC proposal was sent to WAG recommending limiting the frequency of hedge flailing under all WAG financial for agriculture, including cross compliance and agri-environment schemes.

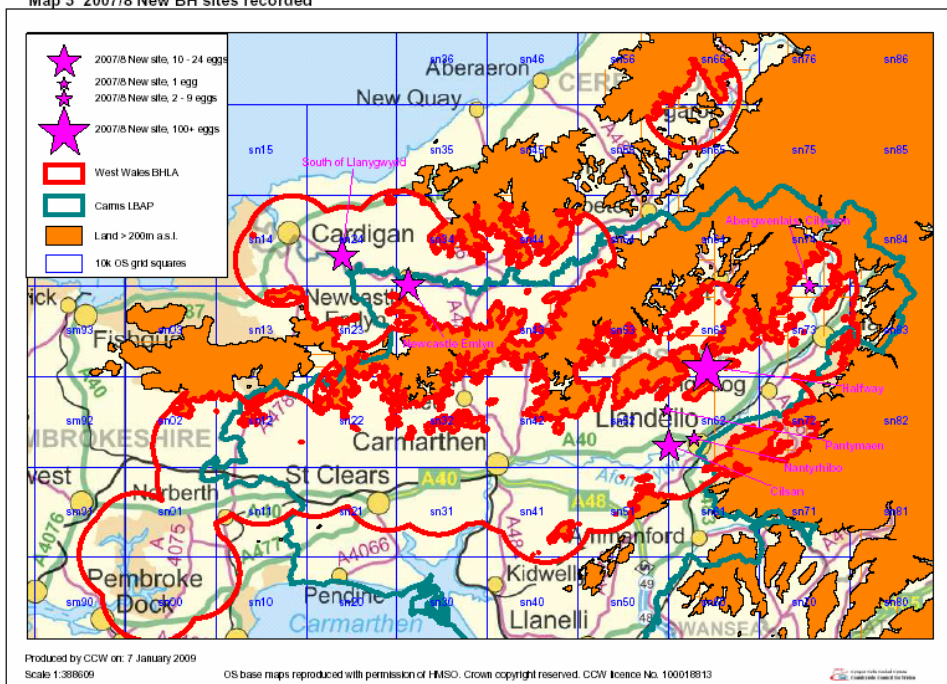
Good management practice for brown hairstreak habitat should include:

- targeting sites where it is practical to avoid nibbling by livestock,
- a 5-year rotation of scrub cutting,
- a 3- or 4-year rotation or hedge flailing,
- coppicing blackthorn to near ground level (and preventing stock access).

For 2009 further gaps in potential distribution in northern Carmarthenshire will be investigated. Within other areas of the county where there are any gaps in the survey record of suitable habitat, individual volunteers are encouraged to search for eggs to fill the gaps (see November 2008 newsletter).

The efforts of the Butterfly Conservation volunteers is to be commended. These work of these volunteers, led by Richard Smith (who works extremely hard to organise the survey days, analyse the data and produce the reports) has been the reason that we now know as much about the distribution and ecology of this rare species and shows how important volunteer effort can be in conservation.

Map 3 2007/8 New BH sites recorded





Carmarthenshire LBAP Review

The review Carmarthenshire LBAP is underway with a small working group having met at the beginning of December to decide the way forward. They will now meet monthly to discuss the plans before sending out for consultation.

It was agreed that our LBAP review would focus on local action agreed by the partnership. It would not include action towards habitat targets that is undertaken as part of the statutory organisations 'everyday work', e.g. SSSI work, Tir Gofal, BWW grants, etc. These actions will be entered and reported on separately by those statutory organisations and linked to action plans on the Carmarthenshire LBAP pages on BARS. There may be far fewer actions but it is intended that these will be focused, and potentially achievable over the duration of the BAP.

The Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) has drawn up nine habitat groupings it was agreed that the Carmarthenshire LBAP will follow these groupings. These are:

Woodland, Upland Habitats, Freshwater, Wetlands, Farmland, Lowland Grassland and Heathland, Brownfield/Urban, Coastal and Marine habitats and species.

Species have been grouped in with habitats as far as possible as often the main action to conserve species is achieved through habitat management. However a number of species will have individual action plans: tree sparrow, nightjar, lapwing, water vole, grouped bat plan, hedgehog, otter, dormouse, red squirrel, marsh fritillary, brown hairstreak, small-flowered catchfly, deptford pink, barn owl (local priority).

The action plan will be entered and reported on in the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) website, which is available to all to view. The website is at <http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/>. You can look at the existing Carmarthenshire LBAP and others.

Habitat actions will look to do one or more of the following: maintain the extent of the habitat; improve its condition, restore or expand the habitat. For species actions will aim to expand the range of the population and/or increase the population numbers. Actions could include survey/monitoring, site management, planning, data collection, raising awareness.

There will be generic action plans for Education and Raising Awareness, Policy and Legislation and Data Collection and Management.

Nationally the WBP has formed 'ecosystems groups' and 'species expert groups' and information/guidance will be fed down to local partnerships which we can consider and incorporate/take on board as necessary.



Small-flowered catchfly
© Richard Pryce



Greater horseshoe bat © Tom McOwat



Tree sparrow © Mike Clark



LBAP habitat of the month: 1. Aquifer-fed naturally fluctuating water bodies

Aquifer-fed naturally fluctuating water bodies are temporary lakes, called turloughs and found in areas of carboniferous limestone. Turloughs have no visible inlet or outlet streams but are fed from groundwater. They are unique environments both in terms of the geology and the rare wildlife which they support. As they are fed from groundwater they regularly fill with water in winter and empty in the summer. In Carmarthenshire Pant-y-Llyn turlough can be found at the eastern end of Carmel Woods SAC and is the only example of a turlough in Wales. It is usually empty by June–July and fills again from October to December.



Because of the periodic filling with water vegetation is zoned around the turlough and specialist plants can be found here that can cope with variations in flooding. There is a clear sequence of moss, swamp plants and woody plant communities, which occupy different zones in the basin.

The turlough may not look that dramatic, despite its uniqueness in the country, but it is the habitat of a number of rare and highly specialised species. A minute species of moss has been identified there called *Ephemerum hibernicum*, which was confirmed at the time as the first non-Irish record of this species. It has subsequently been found by a reservoir in Monmouthshire and a lake in Portugal, but is otherwise restricted to a few sites in Ireland. It needs fluctuating water levels and lime-rich mud on which to grow, making Pant-y-llyn an ideal site for it. Despite its tiny size, there is little doubt that *E. hibernicum* is an extremely rare species - probably one of the rarest in Carmarthenshire.

The lake also holds one of three known Carmarthenshire populations of *Aphanorrhagma (Physcomitrella) patens*. This is another small, subtle moss that appears in late summer on neutral or lime-rich ground that has been flooded earlier in the season. It grows and produces spores in a matter of weeks, which has made it a perfect experimental organism for scientists. As a result, *Aphanorrhagma* is the most intensively studied of all moss species. A few plants from the Pant-y-llyn population were collected in 2005 and are being grown by scientists from Leeds University, who are studying DNA variation within the species.

The other bryophyte of interest at Pant-y-llyn is the large aquatic moss *Fontinalis antipyretica*, which grows in great hanging masses from overhanging trees that are flooded in winter but exposed in summer. *Fontinalis* is a common moss on Carmarthenshire's rivers, but is known from very few lakes in the county. Its habit of hanging from tree branches is also characteristic of turloughs in Ireland.



Aquifer-fed naturally fluctuating water bodies - continued

There is also a good range in aquatic invertebrates, including aquatic beetles and freshwater crustacean.

In the past Pant-y-Ilyn has been threatened by nearby quarrying activities but has been protected by inclusion in the National Nature Reserve. Today it remains vulnerable to actions that may alter the hydrology or water quality.

The turlough is surveyed and monitored by CCW. The site's uniqueness makes it very important that its characteristic ecology and hydrology is maintained.



Aphanorrhegma (Physcomitrella) patens
© Sam Bosanquet

Species monitoring of Welsh agri-environment schemes – from BCT news update

The Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned RSPB to lead a partnership of five voluntary sector organisations (RSPB, Bat Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife, Wildlife Trust Wales) to evaluate species delivery by Welsh agri-environment schemes. The monitoring package will provide the evidence needed by the Government to ensure that its agri-environment policy is evidence-based and providing value for money. This project will run for at least 3 years. For example the Bat Conservation Trust will be recruiting a team of field workers to undertake surveys to determine bat activity on farms signed up to agri-environment schemes and control farms not participating in agri-environment schemes.

