

May 2008

Biodiversity News in Carmarthenshire

If you have any questions or would like to find out more about any of the items in this newsletter, then please contact Isabel Macho, Biodiversity Officer on 01267 224653 or IMacho@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Nobody spotted, or were too polite to tell me, the error last month – the newsletter was incorrectly titled March not April!

Amphibians visit local schools – Pat Gill

Amphibians were welcomed into the classrooms of two Carmarthenshire primary schools recently. Children at Ysgol Ffairfach and Ysgol Llanedi enjoyed seeing male and female newts and toads which were carefully brought from the wild for the day, before being returned to their pond. The children showed enthusiasm and some knowledge of our native amphibians and were very keen to see them all at close quarters. A pair of toads was one of the highlights of the visit with a photograph being shown of how the toads and other amphibians have to cross roads and the dangers involved.

The county's grass verges and hedgerows play an important part in providing a safer thoroughfare and refuge for frogs, toads and newts. Linking in with the National Curriculum, the pupils discussed the importance of these creatures in the environment and in protecting garden plants and vegetables by eating slugs. Both schools have vegetable and ornamental gardens, which the children look after. At the end of the visit the children watched while a tank of pond water, weed and frog spawn was set up for them all to observe the frog spawn's development into frogs. The children are monitoring the growth of the tadpoles and once fully developed, the frogs will be returned to their home pond.



Pair of toads on the road © B. Gill



Male toad in pond © B. Gill

Latest news of amphibian activity in the county

Records of first sightings of frog spawn vary across the county, with spawn being seen in late January at Four Roads, early February in Llanedi and late February in Brechfa. Toads were seen gathering in and around ponds in February in Llanedi and March in Brechfa. Any records of frog spawn or toad observations or any amphibian or reptile sightings in the county would be most welcome (date and grid reference please). Please send to the reptile and amphibian recorder for the county, Barney Gill: barney@bryntirion57.freeserve.co.uk and to Froglife: info@froglife.org.

With thanks to **BBC Wildlife Magazine** from which some of this information has been taken. Visit their website for more wildlife news: www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com

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Biodiversity at the National Botanic Garden of Wales by Alastair Hotchkiss



It's an exciting time to be involved with the biodiversity of the National Botanic Garden of Wales. With the Waun Las estate soon becoming a National Nature Reserve (NNR), and with summer just around the corner, there is much to look forward to.

There is also a lot to look back on. With all the past biodiversity survey work now recorded on our Recorder 6 biological database, we can now produce reports on the flora and fauna that have been accurately recorded here over the past 10–15 years. This has allowed the identification of protected, rare and threatened species, which have at some point been recorded at the gardens. So far over 1000 species of flora and fauna have been recorded within the gardens and estate, from wood anemone to wood mouse, from blackcap to blackening waxcap – but with many taxonomic groups yet to be surveyed, this number is probably just scratching the surface.

For the ornithologists amongst you, at least 59 species of bird have been spotted here, 15 of which are on the current UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) list. Amongst the 77 moth species recorded, five of them are BAP priority species. A total of 31 species of grassland fungi and 17 species of fern have been seen occurring here. Since 1997 we have totalled 323 species of lichen, moss and liverwort, nine of which are Nationally Scarce. On top of this, the previous National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey, in 1998, picked up 310 species of flowering plant and there are plans being made for another NVC this summer, 10 years on. It's all very encouraging.

Dormouse activity hasn't been recorded at the National Botanic Garden of Wales for over 10 years, so this year, we are managing and monitoring our woodlands for dormice. With the assistance and expertise of local enthusiast Dave Price, we have assembled and put up 90 dormouse boxes, and around 50 tubes. Many of the boxes were kindly donated by RSK Carter Ecological, and the tubes from Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust. Let's now hope for some positive results over the coming survey season. It's brilliant that we have this historical baseline of species to look back on, but with many of the surveys being from over 5 years ago, and with gaps in the records, both taxonomically and geographically, it is important that we continue the monitoring. Over the coming months, as well as surveying some invertebrate taxa, the Gardens would welcome others to come and survey the biodiversity here on the estate.

If **you** have an interest and experience in surveying a particular group, and would like to come down and exercise those ID skills, then we would absolutely love to hear from you. If you want to get in touch, to organise a survey, just drop me an email: SUser@gardenofwales.org.uk and we will get back to you soon.



Wood anemone © A. Hotchkiss 2008



Woodmouse © A. Hotchkiss 2008

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The Carmarthenshire Moth and Butterfly Group – taken from Butterfly Conservation Newsletter

A long awaited Lepidoptera group for the county was formed in 2006 - the Carmarthenshire Moth and Butterfly Group. The formation of the group had been discussed for several years, with the aim of promoting interest in the recording of moths and butterflies in Carmarthenshire. Funds from Butterfly Conservation for equipment have greatly helped and the group is now able to lend field guides and traps to keen beginners. We hope to encourage their interest and counteract the cost of starting to learn moth identification; which may sometimes prove prohibitive and off-putting.

The group hopes to hold monthly field meetings between April and September at different locations and there is a monthly bulletin (available via email) detailing highlights of records as well as articles on identification and distribution. There will also be a full Annual Report for group members. The group initially focused on encouraging moth recording but now hope to invigorate butterfly recording in the county. For more details contact: cwilliams.bcw@btconnect.com.



© Isabel Macho

Biodiversity leaflets – why re-invent the wheel!

The Vale of Glamorgan have produced a series of leaflets on 'making space for wildlife'. They are intended for schools, Community and Town Councils and members of the public to help enhance, create and manage areas for wildlife.

Creating a local wildlife area can be as large or small scale as you want and the *Make Space for Wildlife* leaflets are a great place to start. Each one has practical ideas from creating wildflower meadows to building bird boxes and homes for hedgehogs.

These leaflets are available on the Vale of Glamorgan website and are equally applicable to Carmarthenshire!

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/living/environment/biodiversity/make_space_for_wildlife.aspx



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National Dragonfly Atlas

The National Dragonfly Atlas Project will be launched in April 2008. The aim of this project is to update the known distribution of British dragonfly and damselfly species over the next 5 years, culminating in the publication of a new national atlas in 2013.

A new national atlas is urgently required. Climate change is contributing to increasingly earlier spring emergence and change in the range of a number of our species. In addition, new species are becoming established in Britain. We are living through a dynamic change in our dragonfly fauna and need to record this information, thereby providing evidence for future assessment of the impact climate change and other environmental factors are having on our dragonfly fauna. To succeed in this ambitious project good national coverage is needed. The more people that get involved, the more information on the status of our dragonfly and damselfly species can be gathered. This will not only allow the production of a high quality national atlas but also provide a good baseline of information that can be used for the future benefit of dragonfly conservation.



Hairy dragonfly © M. Clark

Some the details have yet to be finalised but recording needs lots of keen people, so please get in touch with the relevant vice county recorder/s now, to volunteer your time and enthusiasm and they will then be able to keep you informed.

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For more information please see: www.dragonflysoc.org.uk/nationalatlas.html

Greater Horseshoe Bat pictures – worth the wait!

Last month there was an item about greater horseshoe bats in Carmarthenshire – this month here are the wonderful photos of the species that were intended to accompany the item, taken by the author, Tom McOwat.



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April becomes May – signs of climate change on your doorstep

From the Woodland Trust website

Even the cold snaps can't put a stop to Mother Nature's early schedule. April is the new May, as this year's bizarre weather continues to bring sightings of species normally flowering in May like hawthorn and the oxeye daisy – both ahead of their traditional flowering dates – and swallows and swifts returning ahead of schedule.

To humans it seems like a cold start to the year, but the monthly temperatures have actually been slightly above the average.

The maytree, mayblossom and mayflower are all common vernacular names for the hawthorn, one of the best loved native British plants, but do those names need a re-think?

Research by the Woodland Trust going back decades points to changes in the plant's timings over the past 30 years, suggesting these days it could be more appropriate to call it an 'apriltree', aprilblossom or aprilflower.

Folklore says Hawthorn, common in hedges, scrub and woodland, is always late, rarely ever in flower by the first week of May, and such was the wait that villagers would linger on stories of early flowering bushes in order to rush for the first blossom of the year. Workers would also pick the leaves on their way to work to supplement their sandwiches, referring to it as bread and cheese.

Research from Nature's Calendar, the world's leading study into the timings of nature, also known as phenology, shows, however, that averages for the last 10 years have been in the middle of April, and this year confirms that trend with early sightings being recorded.

Climate change is affecting the timing of plants and wildlife, and over the past 30 years there has been a marked advancement of spring flowering species in line with annual temperatures.

An excellent example of this is hawthorn, which holds the clue to its historic flowering time in its many vernacular names. Commonly not seen until early May, over the past 30 years it has been edging its way into April.

Culturally and historically it is seen as signifying the start of summer, but thanks to the exceptionally mild start to the year we are experiencing, this summer signal is arriving weeks earlier than the 11 May average.

Hawthorn is surrounded by folklore and research is being carried out on its possible health benefits, including lowering blood pressure for heart related diseases and as a sedative. The blossom of hawthorn is also made into tea which is claimed to help the heart, circulation and cholesterol.

If you'd like to get involved with Nature's Calendar and provide data for real science, you can register at www.naturescalendar.org.uk and record your sightings.



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Tidy up at Morfa Berwig water vole site

A small group made a big difference at the Morfa Berwig water vole project site recently when they got together with keep Wales Tidy to clean up some of the rubbish that has been deposited at the site. Unfortunately some people seem to regard the site as a place where they can get rid of their rubbish and some of this ends up in the ditches polluting the watercourses there – habitat of the water vole. Over 3 hours a lot of rubbish was collected, including 5 car batteries and four tyres. Fortunately one volunteer had waders on and worked his way along one the ditches picking out litter. One plastic bottle had even been used as a latrine site by the water voles who have managed to live amongst the rubbish. Hopefully when the site is better used people will respect more and see it less as a place to dump rubbish.

Work has progressed slowly on the path project, being slowed down by the poor weather we have had. However work should be finished soon and the path through the site open for people to enjoy. Information panels explaining the biodiversity and land use history will be there for people to read and benches for people to stop and listen and watch the sights and sounds on site.

