

September/October 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

Another tidy up at Morfa Berwig

Three televisions, tyres, a car battery, drainpipe, children's shoes and part of a microwave – all items collected by hardy volunteers helping to clean up the Morfa Berwig water vole site, an old fly tipping hotspot. Braving inclement weather, volunteers worked hard to help members of the Llanelli Water Vole Action Group clear the site at Morfa Berwig where conservation work for the rare water vole has been taking place for some time. Organised through the Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services' Green Days Environmental Volunteering project, tipped material that was damaging water vole habitat was cleared from ditches and reed beds on the site.

The clean up was part of Keep Wales Tidy's Tidy Towns Project, which is a three-year Welsh Assembly Government-funded initiative aimed at restoring pride in the aesthetic appearance of villages, towns and the countryside of Wales.

Ironically considerable effort must have gone in to dumping the material here when there are civic amenity sites close by. The project site, as well as important for its wildlife, is also now well used by local people through the path creation project. The efforts of volunteers are making a real difference on the site so hopefully this will discourage future tipping of material.

The recently completed path is being well used by local people. The benefits of being outdoors are well known and this path offers local people a chance to experience a range of habitats and the possibility of seeing some of Wales' rarest wildlife so close to Bynea.



Carmarthenshire Bird Club

Want to find when our winter migrants have been spotted in the county and where to see them? Then go to the Carmarthenshire Bird Club website and sign up to be sent bird sightings in the county. Records of redwings have already been posted by keen bird watchers and the site is a great way to find out more about birds in the county.



Clwb Adar Sir Gaerfyrddin
Carmarthenshire Bird Club

September/October 2008

Biodiversity News in Carmarthenshire

Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project volunteers survey Tywi Forest

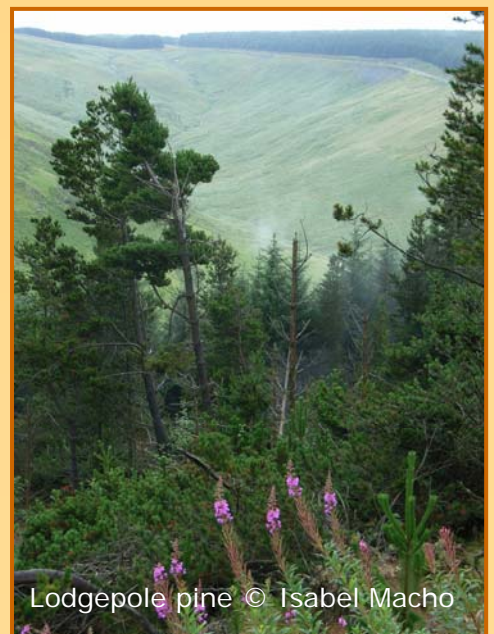
Fourteen members and volunteers of the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project helped out for a day to find out more about the habitat that red squirrels use within the forest. Reds are now restricted to coniferous forests in mid Wales – grey squirrels dominate the large-seeded broadleaved woodlands so reds have retreated into the conifer forests where they can survive on the smaller seeds of the conifer trees. However even though there are many thousands of acres of conifer trees, most of these are Sitka spruce, which the squirrels do not favour. Fortunately throughout the forest there are small areas planted with species that the squirrels prefer, e.g. lodgepole pine, Norway spruce and Japanese larch, which have larger seeds that the reds can eat. The Project has been fortunate to receive funding from CCW, which has enabled a number of short surveys of the forest, with mixed success. What was needed was a more systematic survey of the reds' preferred tree species. By looking for squirrel feeding signs, this would give us a better idea of where to survey in the future and allow an assessment of the health of the trees and whether they were coning or not. Further funding from the BBC has allowed the group to organise such a survey along with the production of a leaflet on red squirrels in mid Wales encouraging the sending in of records to the Project. There have been a number of records in areas in recent months from areas where no reds have been recorded for a number of years.

The group were provided with maps by the Forestry Commission and divided up into pairs to travel into the forest to find the larch and lodgepole pine stands. Because of the good turnout, areas of the forest were assessed from Strata Florida right down to Llyn Brianne reservoir.

The good news was that fresh squirrel feeding signs were found in almost every stand of suitable species surveyed. Eaten cones were found on the forest floor and dreys seen in the trees. What could not be established was whether these were feeding signs from red or grey squirrels, but the group is optimistic that these may well be reds. Further survey this winter will help establish this. Unfortunately greys have been trapped in the forest and this could have a detrimental effect on the reds, as in other areas reds have vanished within a number of years of the greys arrival.



Lodgepole pine cones © Isabel Macho



Lodgepole pine © Isabel Macho

September/October 2008

Biodiversity News in Carmarthenshire

If you go down to the woods today...

Eleven children from primary schools in Cil-y-Cwm and Cynghordy spent a rare sunny day this September with members of the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project learning about their local red squirrels.

Funded by Carmarthenshire County Council and led by Huw Denman, a local forest manager, and the Wildlife Trusts, the children explored some lodgepole pine plantation near their schools,

finding squirrel feeding signs and learning about the threats to red squirrels and how to protect them.

Great fun was had by all, and though no red squirrels were seen on the day, eleven more pairs of eyes are now on the lookout....



UK Biodiversity Conference in Aberystwyth

In September the UK Biodiversity Conference was held in Wales at Aberystwyth. It gave an opportunity for people working in nature conservation at all levels, from Government to volunteers, to come together to hear about projects and research focusing on conservation of biodiversity in the UK. A fieldtrip was also organised to the Dyfi Biosphere Reserve - a good reminder amongst all the talking of the benefits effects of *action* to undertake positive management for wildlife on an internationally important site. Presentations included talks on 'Living Landscapes' – landscape-scale conservation projects with widespread benefits for wildlife and people, updates from all the UK countries on their actions for biodiversity and how they are reviewing their biodiversity action plans, and how biodiversity action is being integrated into business management.

A number of workshops were held which allowed attendees to discuss different topics. Some of the conclusions from the workshops were:

- Effective use of language and good communication is vital to get the biodiversity message across all sectors and to engage with the public. What can we learn from other sectors, e.g. advertising and marketing, to help get our biodiversity message across?
- We need to get people out into the natural environment for some 'real world learning'. We need an up-and-coming generation of new ecologists with a good knowledge of the natural environment to ensure that there is the expertise to continue the conservation work required to conserve our natural environment. We need more people getting involved in conservation: volunteers, recorders, activists.
- The importance of brownfield habitats was highlighted; they can some be some of the most ecologically rich sites in the country. Novel methods of habitats retention are required as these sites are generally targeted for development. The importance of these sites should be highlighted amongst fellow professionals, e.g. planners, economists and landscapes architects.

More about the conference can be seen on the Wales Biodiversity Partnership website: www.biodiversitywales.org.uk

September/October 2008

Biodiversity News in Carmarthenshire

The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark

(adapted from www.biodiversitybenchmark.org)



Every piece of land, however small or large - from the smallest gardens to large-scale landscape projects - can help conserve and enhance the UK's biodiversity, which as we all know is vital to our economy, health and well-being.

Every organisation that owns or uses land can play a part by managing their land with the environment in mind. If businesses are to become sustainable then biodiversity must become fully integrated into their environmental management systems such as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme. Government has issued advice on how to do this.

The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark is the first award for business to recognise continual biodiversity improvement. It was set up to support the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) to help increase the contribution that businesses can make towards enhancing biodiversity. It is the first award to recognise continual biodiversity improvement.

The Benchmark is a management process that enables any organisation which owns or manages land to assess its impact on the natural world, improve its contribution to the environment and demonstrate its commitment to biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Benchmark is flexible and adaptable so it can be applied to any organisation with land, from commercial enterprises and industries, to local authorities, utilities, the NHS, developers, charities, hotels and recreational/tourism facilities.

Even if an organisation does not own land but is responsible for land management, it is likely to be eligible to apply for the Biodiversity Benchmark.

The Biodiversity Benchmark complements existing environmental management systems and is easy to integrate with them. However, it has a single-minded focus on the management of land for the benefit of wildlife, people and the participating organisations themselves, in support of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Biodiversity Benchmark awards are issued for three categories:

Single site - where a single certificate is issued for a designated site; for example this could be an area of land around a Head Office.

Multiple sites - where all sites selected by the client organisation are visited and evaluated with individual certificates issued for each site that achieves the Biodiversity Benchmark standard. This could apply to a multiple retailer, in the process of enhancing land around their stores but not all sites are up to scratch.

Whole organisation - this is for an organisation with several sites who wishes to achieve the Biodiversity Benchmark 'across the board'. Initially a selection of the organisation's sites will be visited and assessed. During subsequent years, surveillance visits will be made to the remainder of the organisation's sites.

For more information visit www.biodiversitybenchmark.org

September/October 2008

Biodiversity News in Carmarthenshire

Search for Marsh Fritillary Butterflies at Caeau Ffos Fach

The recent poor summer weather seems to have taken its toll on the marsh fritillary butterfly population at Butterfly Conservation's reserve at Caeau Ffos Fach near Cross Hands. Volunteers enjoyed fine weather but little success recently, looking for the butterflies' larval webs. These are normally found associated with their foodplant the devil's bit scabious. Whether this will have a long-term adverse effect on this important population based around fields making up Caeau Mynydd Mawr Special Area of Conservation is yet to be seen. A small number of adults were seen earlier in the year during the flight period of the butterfly and maybe webs were missed. Other factors such as parasites knock back populations in other years and as the butterflies move around areas of suitable habitat, the population will hopefully bounce back.

However volunteers enjoyed seeing other wildlife in this fantastic marshy grassland habitat, now conservation grazed for some of the year by welsh black cattle. Since they started grazing the site the cattle have improved condition of the habitat considerably. Unlike sheep, which graze selectively avoiding the *Molinia* grass, the Welsh blacks eat everything making sure that the *Molinia* does not become too dominant and smother the other plants.

This *Molinia* or marshy grassland habitat is an important but increasingly rare habitat. Carmarthenshire is an important county for this habitat, much of it centred on the Cross Hands area. Development and changes in land management have meant that much of the habitat has been lost or is in poor condition and more is still under threat, along with the wildlife that depends on it and the character it gives the local landscape.

Lizards were seen along with orb web spiders and plenty of grasshoppers, which could be heard whilst walking through the site. One more interesting finds was the cocoon of the emperor moth, a species associated with this habitat. The tough papery cocoon has a closed circle of upward pointing spines around the narrow opening to prevent predators entering the cocoon. Even though the butterfly larvae were hard to find, there was plenty to see of the other wildlife to see in this rich habitat, so close to the industrial development of Cross Hands.



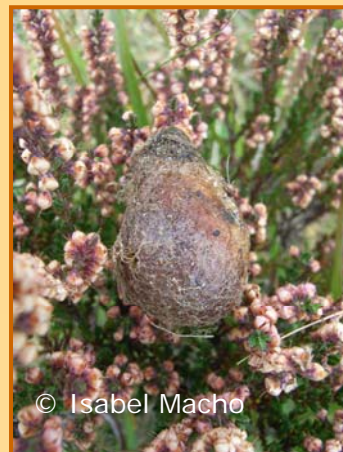
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Left. Devil's bit scabious.

Below. Grasshopper



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Right. Emperor moth cocoon.