

Newsletter

8 PENTONVILLE

NEWPORT

SUMMER 1976

See below for

Why Wetlands?

some thoughts on Cosmeston Quarries

European Wetlands Year 1976 is the year when European governments are coming together to promote wetland conservation and designate wetlands of international importance, and when the Nature Conservancy Council, County Trusts and other conservation bodies are choosing important wetland sites for special study and the compilation of long-term management plans.

The choice of 1976 could scarcely have been more appropriate, although the choosers could not have guessed that we should all be so water conscious this year with the constant exhortations to conserve what little of this precious commodity we have left ourselves. Yet we who are deprived the free use of water have engineers and plumbers to pipe the life-giving fluid to where we most need it. What of our wildlife, which has no such assistance? The outlook for them is bleaker and is not likely to improve while planners live by slogans such as 'Wetlands are Wastelands' and believe these wetlands ripe for damming, draining, dumping and development - as holes to be filled in and flats to be tipped on.

They know, as we know, that water is the basis of all life on Planet Earth yet men short-sightedly persist in choosing just those places where it is most plentiful and nurtures the richest flora and fauna for all kinds of vandalism, both profligate and 'official.' The shiftless dump their old sofas in canals and rivers, industries pollute them and inadequate public sewage systems promote algal 'blooms' and squander the oxygen needed by fish. Llangorse Lake, formerly a little Heaven of flowers and birds where it was quiet delight to swim and picnic, is now a problem area of the first order through the over-use which destroys it for all.

Spent cars are driven into moorland pools and everything imaginable is dumped in quarry lakes which could fulfil the needs of so much life - not least those of human beings in heatwaves such as that of 1976. One has only to count the hundred or so cars lined up outside the Cosmeston Quarry Lakes just South of Cardiff - a potential country park area as yet unsigned and invisible from the highway - to realise how widely such wetlands are accepted as an asset by the public. The hundred or so humans splashing in the cool depths of a few handy corners do little to disturb the moorhens, swans and dabchicks, and more adventurous swimmers skulking along outside a bulrush fringe bright with flowers are escorted by the rattling wings of countless dragonflies and damselflies. China-mark moths reared among the rafts of flowering bistort and 5 different kinds of pondweed join the hots of butterflies sipping from the marginal blooms - each one dependent on the water of life cycled into the sugary nectar . . . When the temporary barricades of soil get flattened periodically, vehicles arrive towing power boats, which shatter the peace for all, douching both airborne and waterborne with diesel fumes. There is a place for such recreational activities, but planners and conservationists have to decide very carefully where such places are - and not jeopardise the survival of lesser creatures and the enjoyment of the many to satisfy the demands of the few.

Nearby Cadoxton Pond, Classic site for the beautiful pink flowering-rush, has disappeared beneath tons of Cardiff's rubbish, along with all the associated fish, frogs and pearly-shelled swan mussels. Grassy saltings East of Rhumney Mouth, where the Cardiff Naturalists' Society carried out a special study of life in brackish pools during the sixties, is going the same way. Garbage can be processed and recycled. Expensive? Perhaps. But we have some right to decide how we want our money spent.

The ancient farming pattern and reens of the Severnside Levels shared by Gwent and South Glamorgan are threatened with industrial development - the public enquiry as to the wisdom of such a course dragging on through the long drought of June and July 1976. This is not development of large concerns like Llanwern, which need the hundreds of acres of flat land so hard to come by in the Principality, but of smaller enterprises which would fit more snugly into some of Cardiff's derelict dockland or among the industrial relics of The Valleys. The concept of coastal belt being left for wildlife, including the roosting waders, kingfishers, herons, yellow wagtails and reed warblers, is fine, if the water table remains constant. But would it? One of the gems of the region is the Magor Nature Reserve. Long may it remain so.

Insidious encroachment of drainage schemes is no less of a menace than more obvious destruction by dumping. The famous bog at Trellech is no longer the way it was. As the sapling birches

and sallows suck the life-blood from the peat, the yellow sheets of asphodel persist but sundew and other delicacies are suffering on the drying mats of Sphagnum. The Gwent Trust is fortunate in having acquired the new potential of Henlly's Bog in which to conserve a 'bank' of our dwindling bogland assets.

Gwent, too, has some fine stretches of canal kept open for navigation, or only partially cleared and rich with flowers, birds and lesser creatures. The restoration of the fourteen locks at Rogerstone (and the Melin-Griffith pump in North Cardiff) are examples of what can be achieved in the joint interests of industrial archeology and wildlife by dedicated amateurs. A little local effort clearing farm ponds made redundant by the installation of drinking troughs will enhance the diversity of our countryside more effectively than almost any other conservation exercise. (Have you thought to let your scientific secretary know of any silted ponds which might be renovated in your area?)

If anyone doubts the linkage of wetlands and diversity, let him descend the Sugarloaf from the dry, impoverished mat-grass of the summit, through the monoculture of heather on the northern ridges and invasive sea of bracken on the foothills and disport himself in the water meadows about Fforest Coalpit below. Trout, frogs, shrimps and water beetles frolic in the Watercress beds of the stream; orchids crowd with ragged robin and bird's-foot trefoil among spearwort and mint and the whole flowery expanse is buzzing with butterflies on a summer day - meadow browns, common blues, tortoiseshells, skippers and fritillaries. Again, conservationists in their wisdom are declaring a nature reserve at Cwm Coed-y-Cerrig.

The campaigns of European Wetlands Year are not only for high level planners but aim to make the public aware of crucial conservation need. A Wetlands Year seminar on "Land Use and the Future of a Coastal Wetland; the Wentloog and Caldicot Levels," organised by the Welsh National Water Development Authority and Nature Conservancy Council. South Wales region, is to be held in Cardiff on Wednesday, 27th October, 1976, and the Gwent Trust for Nature Conservation will be amongst the delegates invited.

Mary E. Gillham

Newsletter Delivery

Response to my appeal to members to help with by-hand deliveries has been good. This will enable us to divert 20p of some of your subscriptions from the GPO to a more constructive use.

I should still be glad to hear from anyone who is willing to deliver Newsletters in Abergavenny and Monmouth.

Eileen Humphreys, Lower Coed Morgan, Near Abergavenny

Subscriptions

There appears to be some 40 members who have not yet paid their current subscription. As our financial year ends shortly, an early settlement would be greatly appreciated.

Why not take out a Bankers Order to avoid this oversight happening next year? Contact the Membership Secretary, Mr Arthur Davies, at 8 Pentonville, Newport, for details.

Please give us your co-operation and save unnecessary expenditure.