

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1867

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Cover photo: Harlequin duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) by Paul Bowden (see page 5 and pages 12-14).

150 years of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society

Cardiff Naturalists' Society was founded in 1867, at the instigation of Robert Drane F.L.S. The first general meeting of the Society was held on 11 September 1867; with 24 original members attending, according to the minutes. The Society was the largest scientific society in Wales in 1905, when it urged the foundation of the National Museum in Cardiff (which became the Welsh capital in that year).

The year 2017 is therefore the 150th Anniversary of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society. To mark this anniversary, the Society will be holding a special public lecture on Thursday 5 October and curating an exhibition at The Cardiff Story in the old Cardiff Free Library building (the same building that hosted the Society's first ever meeting).

The special guest speaker at the public lecture will be Iolo Williams. The lecture ('An evening with Iolo Williams'), will be held in the Reardon Smith Lecture Theatre at the National Museum Cardiff. This occasion will also commemorate the life and work of Dr Mary Gillham.

The exhibition at The Cardiff Story will run from September 2017 for about two months. This exhibition will focus on the founding and the history of the Society. It is anticipated that there will be an opening event to which the CNS membership will be invited.

Further details of these events, along with spring/summer meetings during 2017, will be included in the next newsletter.

Deadline for items for next newsletter: Friday 24 March 2017.

SEASONS GREETINGS TO ALL CNS MEMBERS!

Cardiff Birdwatch 2017

Sunday 8 January

Meet 10am, Channel View, Cardiff

Our annual birdwatch, held in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust, starts at the Channel View Centre off Avondale Road, Grangetown, CF11 7HB. There is parking overlooking the River Taff. Rob and Linda Nottage will be leading this walk around Cardiff Bay which can continue into the afternoon if members wish. Bring a picnic lunch if you intend to stay.

Indoor Meetings 2017

All meetings start at 7.30pm in Room 0.23 (ground floor) of the Cardiff School of Management Building, Metropolitan University, Llandaff Campus, Western Avenue, Cardiff CF5 2YB - unless otherwise stated (*).

Monday 16 January

'Members' Evening'

CNS members' photos showing different countries and diverse habitats. Contact Hilary Wicks if you want to show photos on this evening.

Tuesday 24 January

Dr Christian Baars: 'Natural history collections in Welsh Museums'

The National Museum in Cardiff is by no means the only museum in Wales with a natural history collection. A large number of local museums across Wales care jointly for approximately 100,000 botanical, zoological and geological specimens. These include mummified cats, algal herbaria, coal and iron ore. Together, they form Wales' Distributed National Collection. This talk will introduce some of the curiosities from these collections, explain their historic significance, and outline why they are relevant and important to society today.

Thursday 2 February

Alan Bowring: 'Fforest Fawr Geopark - the first 480,000.011 years'

The western half of the Brecon Beacons National Park was designated a Geopark 11 years ago and boasts a record of earth history dating back 480 million years. A UNESCO landscape since 2015, it is famous not only for its old red sandstone and a spectacular glacial legacy, but also for its karst scenery and waterfalls. Then there is its contribution to making Wales the world's first industrial nation - impressive natural and cultural legacy worth celebrating.

Thursday 23 February

Dr Paul E. Bowden: 'Birding around the Arctic Circle'

This is a combined meeting with the Cardiff Group of the Wildlife Trust South West Wales and the student Wildlife Society at Cardiff University. Venue: Wallace Lecture Theatre, Main Building, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff (see pp. 10-13).

Tuesday 14 March

Phillip Blanning: 'Flora and Fauna of Northern Peru'

A presentation based on the wildlife encountered during a tour to northern Peru, from the Pacific coast to the Andes in August 2016 (see pp. 17-21).

Monday 27 March

Student Bursary award evening

Plus a second speaker to be arranged.

Please look online for further information and additions to the CNS Meetings Programme:

<http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/p/programme.html>

Otters as sentinels for environmental health

On Wednesday 23 November 2016, Dr Elizabeth Chadwick talked to the Society about the work of the Cardiff University Otter Project, which she has managed for twelve years. The talk emphasised the otter's importance as an indicator species for the general health of river ecosystems, and as a charismatic umbrella species that provides a focus for education and freshwater habitat conservation.

The Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), one of 13 otter species worldwide, has a range extending across continental Europe, Russia, China, and parts of north Africa; though in modern times its populations have become fragmented. In the UK, populations dramatically declined between the 1950 and 1970s, with chemicals in the environment (e.g. PCBs and organochlorine pesticides) mainly to blame. However, this protected species has recovered in the UK, and its once-isolated UK populations are again interacting. Nevertheless, by nature it is non-social and lives at low densities, so it can be hard to spot in the countryside.

Dr Chadwick explained the different methods used to monitor otters. The main methods used by the Cardiff University Otter Project are the monitoring of spraint (faeces and scent gland secretions) and the post-mortem of dead otters (mainly roadkill reported by the public).

A study of the spraint otters deposit at prominent locations around their territories is revealing interesting information. The spraint contains 432 volatile chemicals, and its smell is unique to an individual. The components of the spraint marking also change with age, enabling adults and juveniles to be identified.

The Cardiff University Otter Project started collecting samples from dead otters in the 1990s, when it would process around 10 otters/year (this figure is now around 200/year due to the otter's recovery). This large sample bank now amounts to 3,000 specimens that can be used retrospectively for a wide range of interdisciplinary studies.



Dr Chadwick described some of the studies that Cardiff University and its collaborators have done with these samples. These include studies on the presence of chemical contaminants over time and the effectiveness of legislation (e.g. bans on pesticides and lead), parasites infecting otters, dietary studies from stomach contents (83% fish), and genetic studies over time as a more contiguous UK population re-established.

New areas of study include looking for the presence of micro-plastics and a new wave of emerging pollutants (e.g. pharmaceuticals).

Visit the project's website for further information:
www.otterproject.cf.ac.uk

The website tells you how to report dead otters.

Report and photo by Stephen Nottingham.

Llantrisant Common 24 July 2016

Report by Gill Barter

A small group of Cardiff Naturalists' Society members met at the Gwaun Ruperra Road car park on the northern edge of Llantrisant, only a short distance from the common. We were joined by two local residents, one of whom, David Barden, showed us several plants that we would probably not have seen without his help.

David also intrigued us by pointing out that Llantrisant Common has been managed in much the same way since the 14th Century, and so may well be an example of how more of the Welsh countryside used to look then. Much of the grassland is marshy, dominated by rushes or Purple Moor-grass / Glaswellt y gweunydd (*Molinia caerulea*) with a variety of flowers such as Devil's-bit Scabious / Tamaid y cythraul (*Succisa pratensis*) and Tormentil / Tresgl y moch (*Potentilla erecta*). In places the ground is very wet, with bog mosses / Mwsoglau'r gors (*Sphagnum* spp.), Star Sedge / Hesgen seraidd (*Carex echinata*) and Common Cottongrass / Plu'r gweunydd (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). There are also areas of drier grassland and bracken with streams, ditches and patches of scrub which all add to the variety.

The common is grazed by cattle and horses owned by the Freeman of Llantrisant. Unlike other commons, the rights to graze are not linked to farm holdings but instead are inherited. Rights can pass to the son of an enrolled Freeman or to the husband of a daughter of a Freeman but they must themselves enrol and if they do not, will not be able to exercise grazing rights or pass them on. The first Freeman are said to have been a troop of long-bowmen, rewarded by the Black Prince for their service at the battle of Crecy.

Llantrisant Common, together with a few adjacent fields, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for the variety and extent of its grassland. The Freeman also have rights over two smaller areas of common, one of which is the Graig overlooking the A4119 at Talbot Green.

We started with a short drive, taking the minor road towards Beddau instead of the main road that leads towards the Royal Mint. We parked on the roadside at a point near the centre of the common and from here followed a track for a short distance to the West.

In this area, David showed us Cornish Moneywort / Ceinioglys (*Sibthorpia europaea*) which is a speciality of the common. In Britain it is restricted mainly to South West England and has just a few localities in South Wales. The plant that David showed us here was at the base of a small tree, creeping a little way up the trunk. This is not its typical habitat on Llantrisant Common as it is more likely to be found at the edge of ditches, a habitat also favoured by Ivy-leaved Bellflower / Clychlys Eiddew (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*).



Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*). Photo by Sue Westwood.

Ditch habitat favoured by Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*) and other characteristic plant species on Llantrisant Common. Photo by Sue Westwood.



Nearby was part of the course of an old railway line which crosses the common from north-west to south-east. Some of our group climbed the embankment and found the delicate Climbing Corydalis / Mwg y Ddaear Gafaelgar (*Corydalis claviculata*), which has only a few sites in Glamorgan.

We retraced our steps and crossed the lane to explore the eastern part of the common. Here there is an elevated area of drier grassland where Moonwort / Lloerlys (*Botrichium lunaria*) can be found.

Further on we came to wetter ground and at the edge of a ditch saw two other interesting fern species: Lemon-scented Fern / Marchredynen arogl-lemwn (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) and a single plant of Royal Fern / Rhedynen Gyfrdwy (*Osmunda regalis*). The latter is rare in eastern Glamorgan but does also grow near Llantrisant Common in a large pasture known as Y Gweira, a reserve of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.

A surprising find that David had made in the past was a small patch of Stemless Thistle / Ysgallen Ddigoes (*Cirsium acaule*) on a drier ridge. He re-found it to show us, and we speculated as to how it could have arrived here as it is more usually associated with short turf over limestone.

In the eastern part of the common the old railway runs through a cutting, crossed by a substantial metal bridge. We crossed this bridge and followed a path back towards Llantrisant. By this time a light drizzle became persistent rain, so we ended the meeting at lunchtime, leaving more to be explored on another day.



Lemon
scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*). Photo by Bronwen Thomas.

Birding around the Arctic Circle

Text and photos by Paul Bowden

This lecture [on Thursday 24 February 2017] will be based on visits to Iceland and Finland. Iceland lies astride the European and North American tectonic plates that are moving apart. It is geothermal with dramatic scenery and many volcanoes, but very little bird life in the winter. This gives way to an invasion of breeding birds to take advantage of the near 24 hour summer daylight. We saw a total of 69 bird species in May and recorded 50 species on video or as photographs. These included Barrow's Goldeneye (photo below), Harlequin Duck, Brunnich's Guillemot and Gyr Falcon. The northern parts of Finland are above the Arctic Circle, so a trip encompassing the whole of Finland provides birds from above and below it. Temperatures vary from 25°C in the south to 2°C in the north in June. Again many birds choose to breed in Finland and we saw 141 species in one week, obtaining video of 83 species. These included many interesting birds including Grey-headed Wagtail, Syke's Wagtail, Great Grey Owl, Pine Grosbeak, Red-flanked Bluetail and Siberian Jay. Interestingly, there was very little overlap between the birds seen in Iceland and Finland.



Barrow's
(*Bucephala*

goldeneye
islandica).



Black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*).



Icelandic landscape.



Slavonian grebe (*Podiceps auritus*).



Red-necked phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*).
Photos: Paul Bowden.



Photo
sawfish rostrum by Dr Christian Baars.

of

On Tuesday 24 January 2017, Dr Christian Baars will be talking to the Society about 'Natural history collections in Welsh Museums' (see page 4).

The Tremendous Oak

Bruce McDonald



Possibly the biggest or oldest oak in Wales? Whilst out walking near Cwmdy in the Brecons recently my walking colleague, Ian Moody, and I came across a large oak. Though the object of our outing was walking, we always keep an eye open for any wildlife of interest and have regularly recorded veteran trees which go onto the Ancient Tree Register managed by the Woodland Trust. Amazingly there may be little or no protection for some of our oldest living things, but there are calls for a specific National Tree Register for Wales. As the Woodland Trust comments:

“A national register will help to classify, celebrate, and protect each of Wales’ Trees of Special Interest for the rest of their days. It will also help landowners properly care for these incredible trees by allowing them to access more support through grants and specialist advice.

But the most important reason for a register is to celebrate these incredible and much-loved natural treasures!"

We have recorded 20 trees so far, but these have all been veterans. A veteran tree is one which is in its second or mature stage of its life, an ancient tree in its final stage. As a general guide any oak with a girth of more than 6 metres is a possible candidate for ancient. Our oak, immediately adjacent to a public footpath came in at 10.36 metres and exhibited many of the other characteristics of an ancient tree such as hollowed-out trunk and fallen branches. It was originally pollarded, often the case with many of our oldest oaks.

When we first reported it we did not know if it had been recorded previously, so the response from the Ancient Tree Register staff was encouraging:

"This is a most remarkable ancient oak you have recorded in the Brecon Beacons. What a great find and thanks for adding it to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory... Although the girth could be exaggerated by the trees condition, falling open, it still suggests this is one of the biggest and possibly oldest oaks in Wales."



Interestingly, whilst we were the first to record this tree we later came across an article in Broadleaf, the Woodland Trust magazine, which was about writer Horatio Clare ('Running for the Hills') where he said:

“... a slightly famous oak... It is the most extraordinary tree, partly for its position, high above the Cwmdru valley, with a view across the Brecon Beacons. My brother Alexander, my mother and I moved there after London, and the oak stands at the top of our lowest field so it was the first of our allies, the gatekeeper we passed on our way up the mountain. We used to speculate on whether it had seen the Romans build their camp, or the battles of Owain Glyndwr's rising, one of which took place in the valley. The great poet of Tretower, Henry Vaughan, would certainly have seen it when he lifted his eyes to the hills”.

So, if you know of any venerable trees it is worth checking if they are on the Register and, if not, making sure they are added so they will get the attention and protection they deserve.



Photos

of the

tremendous oak by Bruce McDonald and Roy Carr.

Recording ancient trees with the Woodland Trust:
<http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/project>

Flora and Fauna of Northern Peru

Photos by Phill Blanning

On Tuesday 14 March, Phill Blanning will talk to the Society about the wildlife he encountered during a tour of northern Peru, travelling from the Pacific coast to the Andes, in August 2016. These photographs (pages 19-21) are a taster of his illustrated presentation.



Glittering sapphire butterfly (*Lasaia agesilas*).



Graphic beauty butterfly (*Baeotus beotus*).

Following page:

Bomarea sp.

Peruvian pygmy owl (*Glaucidium peruanum*).

Photos from Peru by Phill Blanning.



The Mary Gillham Archive Project

Al Reeve, Project Officer

Over the course of 90 years Dr Mary Gillham, previous CNS President and long-term member, amassed a huge archive of notes, reports, articles, slides and photographs which amounts to around 150 000 wildlife records spanning over 70 years.

For the past year, the Mary Gillham Archive Project has been working through this huge wealth of cultural, historical and biological information to turn something that is essentially analogue (and inaccessible to the wider public) into something digital which can be used and browsed online by everyone.

In the first year, almost entirely through the efforts of volunteers, we mobilised around 65 000 wildlife records, scanned all 14 000 slides and held multiple outdoor events in sites where Mary previously worked. We also have a blog where you can follow the progress of the project (marygillhamarchiveproject.com). Nearly half of Mary's slides have been transcribed and can be viewed on Flickr (www.flickr.com/photos/marygillhamarchiveproject/albums).



Photo of

Mairead

Sutherland keeping cool: Mary Gillham/Mary Gillham Archive Project.

Despite these successes, there is still much more to do and we would relish the help of CNS members!

Mary was evidently a keen photographer and while a number of people in her photographs are named there are many who are not – we would love to attribute a name to each of the people and, even better, share them with the subjects themselves. Take a look at the 'People' album on Flickr or ask (Secretary) Mike Dean for a copy of the images and see who you recognise.



Photo of a group of extramural students in Ireland in 1979: Mary Gillham/
Mary Gillham Archive Project.

In early 2017 we will be attempting to capture people’s recollections of Mary and the work she was involved in. We would like to tell the story, not just of Mary’s life, but of the actions of the many environmental organisations she was involved in and the actions they took to preserve and protect the habitats of South Wales.

If you’d be willing to share a recollection, written or verbal, or if you can suggest someone we should talk to we would be very keen to hear from you. You can get in touch with the project through the CNS committee or through Al Reeve, the Project Officer of the Mary Gillham Archive (contact details page 26).



Photo of
Mary
Archive Project.

slide boxes:
Gillham

There is more than just wildlife notes in Mary's archive; we have documents and correspondence relating to proposed developments (such as the barrage, mine expansion, the spread of the M4 across South Wales); details about the designation of sites to be listed as SSSIs or protected as Nature Reserves; and descriptions of CNS visits through the years. If you are interested in this information or you would be interested in writing an article using it we will happily help you to make it happen.

We also hope to run a joint outdoor meeting with CNS in 2017, so keep an eye on the programme for details.

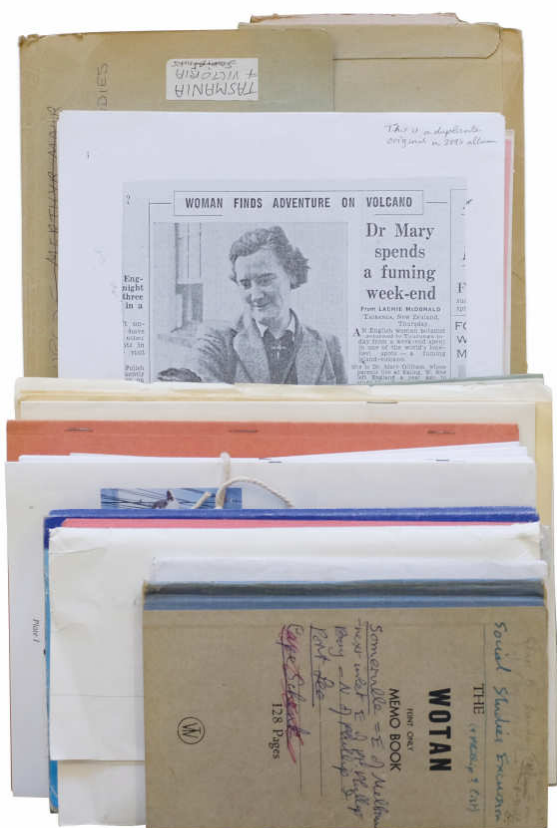


Photo of documents:
Gillham Archive Project.

Mary

On completion of the project in February 2018, the archive will be handed over to Glamorgan Archives for long-term storage and the photos and oral histories will be archived on the People's Collection Wales website (<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/>).

If you are interested in helping us to achieve our goal of celebrating the life's work of a dedicated naturalist, take a look at volunteering opportunities on our website (<https://marygillhamarchiveproject.com/volunteer/>) or email alan.reeve@sewbrec.org.uk



Photo of open binder: Mary Gillham Archive Project.

The Mary Gillham Archive Project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and managed by the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC)

Bruce McDonald notes:



In the article in the September 2016 newsletter about the visit to Pontypool Park, we identified this bug as the Common Capsid Bug. We have heard from Rob Nottage that this is *Closterotomus norwegica*, also known as the Potato Capsid. This can be distinguished by the two black dots on the pronotum.

Autumn colours near Radyr Weir. Photo by Stephen Nottingham.





Cornish Moneywort on Llantrisant Common (see pages 8-11). Photo by Sue Westwood.

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