



Llythyr Newyddion Rhagfyr 2008/December Newsletter 2008

Tidy Towns Project – Daniel Snaith

The Tidy Towns Project began in April 2008, bringing together three projects that were being run by Keep Wales Tidy: Pride in Our Communities, Clean Rivers and Clean Coasts. Although these projects aimed to improve areas for wildlife through remedial cleansing project work, they didn't really have a focus on habitat improvement and biodiversity. Tidy Towns now does recognize that this is a very important topic and it is now included as one of the main aims of the project.

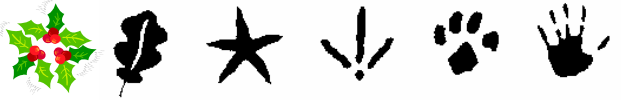


Some examples of habitat management and biodiversity work that come under the banner of Tidy Towns are removing litter and waste from wildlife areas. This not only enhances the habitat for species already there but also improves the chances of the recolonisation by other species. Although human enjoyment of these areas is encouraged, this must be 'controlled' to ensure wildlife can flourish. Footpaths, boardwalks and fencing can be installed to protect the more sensitive areas.

The habitat management promoted through the Tidy Towns Project will work towards a more biodiverse Wales, and the activities to achieve this would not be possible without the efforts of committed volunteers who give up their free time in order to help with ideas and provide practical assistance. A fantastic example of habitat improvement and enhancement for biodiversity is a group that cleared flytipped wood from a pond (thus encouraging wildlife to come back there). The wood was then stripped of its paint and varnish, piled up and left to create a mini habitat. It has now been colonized by different species of insect and fungi.

Tidy Towns is able to assist any community group or association in starting a project of their own and can provide financial assistance through the Keep Wales Tidy grants scheme. The money can cover insurance, tools, materials, refreshments and expenses. The project can also help communities develop community gardens/allotments, transform neglected public areas into community assets, remove litter/flytipping/graffiti from blackspots and also provide training for groups on a number of different subjects. Anyone wishing to get involved should contact Daniel Snaith on 07824 504805 or e-mail daniel.snaith@keepwalestidy.org





Red Kites

The Welsh Kite Trust is asking for records of red kite activity in south-east Carmarthenshire, i.e. south of Ammanford–Carmel–National Botanic Garden–Carmarthen, together with the Llansteffan peninsula area. It may be that kites are about to colonise this area and so any information on their presence in this area would be welcomed. Birds have been seen quite regularly in the Llannon area and just north of Llanelli and also in the Kidwelly area. If you see birds please contact Gwyn Roberts on gwyneddroboters@aol.com or 01639 830140.



© Welsh Kite Trust



Living Churchyards – managing a churchyard for wildlife – Lizzie Wilberforce

St Ishmael's church occupies a stunning position looking over the Tywi estuary near Ferryside and is surrounded by a good sized churchyard, often bathed in sunlight – a great location for a nature reserve. Father Richard, the congregation and the Parochial Church Council agreed to manage the churchyard for nature conservation, with the help of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. The work began in 2006 with volunteers from the church and local community. A new management plan was drawn up for the grassland to meet the needs of the church and to create a haven for wildlife.

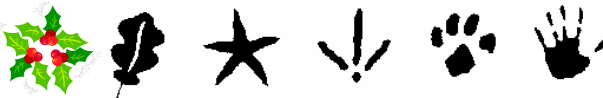
Well used areas are still kept neat and tidy, but away from footfall, meadow management techniques (of later cutting and removing arisings [cuttings]) are now allowing wild flowers to flourish, and butterflies and birds are benefitting as well. Eighty plant species have been recorded this year, and this summer a marbled white was seen in the wildflower area. There is plenty of work that can still be done, but good progress is already being seen transforming this haven into a 'Living Churchyard'.



© WTSWW



© WTSWW



Winter bird watching

The Carmarthenshire Bird Club sightings page is pretty busy at the moment. Records of arriving wintering waders and wildfowl are being regularly reported by keen members of the group out and about with their telescopes. It's one thing to see a few geese grazing in a field but how about the thought of see 300 newly arrived greylag geese having flown down from their summer breeding grounds in northern Europe. Carmarthenshire offers great opportunities to see these wintering birds so if you get a chance get your binoculars out and enjoy the chance to see a real seasonal spectacle. These birds have travelled many hundreds of miles to return to the UK each year, navigating their way often back to exactly the same site they overwintered at last year – quite a feat.

If you want to see migrant swans try looking over the River Tywi and adjacent pasture at Dryslwyn or Cilsan bridges of the A40 between Llandeilo and Nantgaredig. Bewick's and whooper swans have been reported there along with mute swans and grelag and Canada geese. Wigeon and water rails have also been spotted around here.

Kidwelly Quay is another hotspot – large numbers of lapwing, pintail and golden plover have been seen here on the coastal habitats reaching up the Tywi estuary.

Coed Bach near Kidwelly is best seen using powerful binoculars or telescope as the regularly flooded fields seen inland from Commissioners Bridge are not accessible. However this site is of great value to wintering birds for feeding and large numbers of a variety of species, including geese, waders and ducks have been reported here, e.g. grelag geese, gadwall, black-tailed godwit, mute swan, green sandpiper, teal, pintail, shoveler and lapwing.

Finally, one of the most accessible sites – and a good place to get a cuppa after a trip out to the bird hides – is the National Wetland Centre Wales at Penclacwydd. Here one of the more unusual birds to overwinter in Carmarthenshire can be seen – a spoonbill has been reported on the marsh scrapes there. Here also grey plovers, dunlin (300!), black-tailed godwit, lapwing (500!) and the unusual ruff have all been recorded.



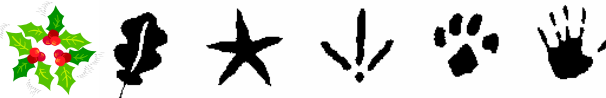
Whooper swans © D.Moore



Lapwings © B.Stewart



Coed Bach Marsh



Harlequins, hieroglyphics and oranges – or ladybirds in Carmarthenshire – Ian Morgan

Well, it's arrived – the Harlequin ladybird has turned up in Carmarthenshire. Whilst a gain of a new species of ladybird in the county may seem a cause for celebration, it is not so with this unwelcome, introduced and predatory Asian species. It was recorded in a light trap set out for moths at Pwll, just west of Llanelli one evening this summer, on the same night it was also recorded on Gower, indicating that there must have been an influx of this strongly dispersive species. Subsequently, two other records have come to light – at Llanelli and inland at Brechfa – the latter reported in a previous Carmarthenshire Biodiversity newsletter (July 2007). The spread of this species – it was first recorded in south-east England in September 2004 – is being charted by the Cambridge Ladybird Survey. Readers can visit their website as well as related sites such as one set up to monitor the spread of this ladybird www.ladybird-survey.org

There are actually over 40 species of ladybird (most of the UK species) known in Carmarthenshire and many are easy to identify – some like the 5-spot by simply counting the spots! Until the late 1980s the 5-spot was feared extinct in Britain, but in the spring of 1986 it was discovered on river shingle (its preferred habitat) at Llanwrda in the Tywi Valley; almost simultaneously it was found on a river near Aberystwyth in Ceredigion – not bad for a species that had last been seen in the Spey Valley in Scotland in 1953! Later, a record by the pioneer Carmarthenshire naturalist, Dafydd Davies of Rhandirmwyn, came to light – on the Bran near Cynghordy back in 1974. This species is best looked for on gorse, broom or other plants on shingly rivers in spring or summer.

Unlike the Harlequin, there are other more benign species that have colonised the county in recent years such as the beautiful cream-streaked ladybird, which occurs on pines, whilst others such as the orange ladybird (orange with ivory markings and attracted to kitchen lights!) have become more common. Back in the 1980s, the latter was very local, specialising on feeding on mildew under leaves of sycamores growing in damp woodland; now it is much more frequent.

Whilst some species such as the common 7-spot, 10-spot and 2-spot are familiar garden ladybirds, others are more localised, like the hieroglyphic (which is found on areas with heather), the eyed ladybird (on pines) and the aptly-named water ladybird, which is typically found on areas of bulrushes (this species can be found hibernating in winter behind the leaf-sheaths of that plant).

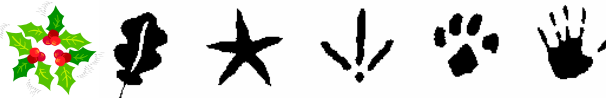
Ladybirds are a nice group to study and there are a range of books and charts available, so why not take up this group in 2009? For example, an inexpensive chart is published by the Field Studies Council (*A Guide to the Ladybirds of the British Isles* by Michael Majerus *et al.* 2006. £2.50) and the excellent *Ladybirds of Surrey* published by the Surrey Wildlife Trust which covers nearly all of our county's ladybirds in some detail. If you would like a brief summary of Carmarthenshire ladybirds is available via Isabel Macho, Biodiversity Officer (IMacho@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)



Eyed ladybird © Mike Majerus



Harlequin ladybirds © Mike Majerus



Notes on Carmarthenshire LBAP Species

This is the first in a new series which will look at species listed in the Carmarthenshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan, which is currently undergoing revision.

Number 1. Common Scoter

(with information extracted from the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries EMS website)

The common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) is one of our BAP species that unless you are lucky you may well never see. However it is one of our most important bird BAP species – so important in fact that its coastal waters habitat was designated in June 2003 as a ‘Special Protection Area’. Carmarthen Bay SPA was the first, and is still the only, fully marine SPA in the UK.

Common scoter have a global range extending from Iceland, Britain and Scandinavia eastwards across Siberia and arctic Russia to the Atlantic coast of North America. In Europe, the ducks migrate from summer breeding sites in Iceland, Scandinavia and arctic Russia as far south as the Iberian peninsula and occasionally North Africa, where they over-winter in flocks in shallow, sheltered waters. Carmarthen Bay is mainly used by the birds as a refuelling and rest stop in these migrations, but some birds may over-winter here. The males have plump jet black bodies and a bright ‘splash’ on the bill.

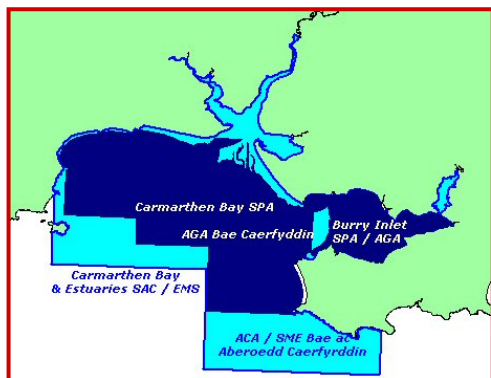
In the UK the common scoter is recognized as a nationally threatened species. More than 50% of the non-breeding population is found at fewer than ten sites and Carmarthen Bay is considered the most important.

Scoter feed by diving for shellfish and other invertebrate prey in sandy sediments and mostly in waters shallower than ten metres deep. High densities of easily accessible prey at shallow depth makes Carmarthen Bay important as an migratory and over-wintering site for scoter.

The distribution of scoter in the Bay at any time reflects the density of the food resources which are themselves very variable depending on how abundant and where the various prey species are from year to year. The most consistent feeding areas are offshore from Amroth and Pembrey Sands and, occasionally, Rhossili Bay.

The population was badly impacted by the Sea Empress oil spill in 1996. An estimated 4700 scoter were killed either directly, or indirectly from the pollution of food resources and poisoning of birds.

The recovery of over-wintering numbers was carefully monitored in Carmarthen Bay over the following years. After an initial decline, numbers recovered by 2002–03 to over 22,000, but worryingly appear to be declining again now. A recent report from the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust has shown that common scoter numbers wintering at Carmarthen Bay have dipped below 16,000 for the second consecutive year down from over 20,000 – the lowest since the years after the Sea Empress disaster. An aerial survey carried out by WWT earlier this year recorded just 13,100 birds. Close monitoring is required to establish why this is happening.



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