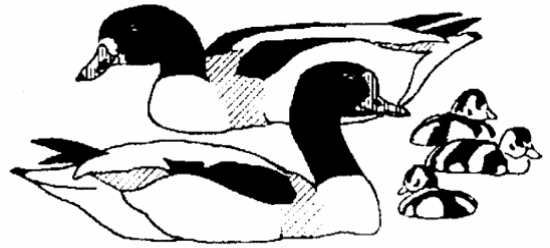


Newsletter



Issue 131

Apr 2013

Registered Charity No. 510146

Welcome to the April edition of the Newsletter and to Phil Hotchkiss as our new Chairman and the first of his reports.

As always a big thank you to all those who have contributed articles. I was wondering earlier that I might not have had enough material to fill it but it was actually the reverse and I've had to reduce the size of the quiz and have only been able to mention two of the indoor talks in order to make enough room! Thank you to all those who responded to my plea for assistance in packing the newsletter. It now means that it does not fall on the same people every time.

Don't forget the Bat night on the 14th May. Details can be found in the Programme card or on the website. Also, please note the password change to the Members area of the website. Details can be found on page six.

Chairman's Report

Dear members, I have a few big thanks to mention. It seems a long time ago now but thank you to all that braved the weather and managed to turn up on the Iolo night. And a big thank you to Iolo for putting on an interesting presentation, and staying back to help push cars in the snow. Another big thank you is to the 12 members that turned out to help on the maintenance day, helping in painting the fences, cutting back the moss on the edge of the road and cleaning out the hides. If any member would like to carry on cutting back the moss and grass encroaching along the road (it is overgrown by 2ft in places) please feel free to cut it back. If more members did 2 metres at a visit it will be done in no time, and it makes the road wider and looks more open.

To the member who thought it a good idea to stuff a crunchie wrapper and a spiral crisp packet in the slots of the picnic bench thank you, I don't know who you thought was going to move it, you could have stuffed it in your pocket just as easily. This is your reserve, you keep it tidy we do not have cleaners.

I would like to encourage all new and present members to get involved in the Society. The reserve is a nature reserve, and not just for birding so if any member has any expertise or interests in nature or have seen a good idea on other reserves and think it would be a good thing to do let us know. It is no good sitting at home thinking about it, let us know and get involved.

The new metal door to the middle hide is now fitted and the fence that blew down next to the visitor centre has been replaced. New steps by the west hide have been installed. Tree cutting back and thinning has been carried out to encourage new growth. Just some of the jobs carried out so far this year.

chair@deesidenaturalist.org.uk

Phil Hotchkiss Chairman

Obituary

It is with regret that I record the death of Hughie Williams. He lived at Glan Traeth farm for more than seventy years. The farm is just across the railway line toward the entrance to the Reserve.

In his lifetime he saw many changes and farmed sheep on the Reserve fields. As the years rolled by shepherding became difficult for him and some of his flocks suffered as a result. Notwithstanding he cared deeply for his charges. At one time he had two donkeys on the fields which began to look the worse for wear. We arranged for the donkeys to be transferred to a sanctuary. The sanctuary owner

duly arrived with his horsebox and Hughie loaded them in and as he did so cried like a baby. He was invited to see the donkeys two months later but he never took up the invitation.

Hughie loved his marshes and would often chat to members about "what's about" as he drove his tractor about the fields. It is fitting I suppose that one of his last requests was to have his ashes placed on the marshes he loved so much.

R A R

Indoor Talks

The 25th of January seems a long time ago now. But on that wintery night there was a full house for the anniversary talk by Iolo Williams. And we were not disappointed.

The lead up to it had been a bit of a worry as we had had to rent a projector because we had been advised that he still used slides. However, on the night he arrived with a memory stick in hand and told us that he had started to convert to the digital age. So with Carl's help in running the presentation on the PC we were treated to an incredibly interesting and amusing talk on the wildlife of Wales. Including his belief that the non-native Daffodils seen on the verges were 'vermin'.....

At the end it was snowing heavily but he still stayed behind to talk to members and even helped push their cars out of the car park.

In February Lyn Byrne from Wild Life Wales gave an excellent talk on Invasive Species. Apparently in 2010 it cost the taxpayer 1.7 billion pounds to deal with it! There isn't space to go through all of them here but a couple did surprise me. Firstly the Giant Hogweed which can produce up to 20,000 seeds and the Wels Catfish which has been known to feed on ducks! Further information regarding links to websites and organisations set up to monitor this will be available on our website in the near future.

Quiz

Cryptic quiz. (Thanks, again to Hazel Jones for these). All these animals have four legs. The numbers in brackets indicate the length of the word.

1. Sandy Golf Course (4)
2. Act silly (4)
3. Old Police Car (5)
4. Computer essential (5)
5. Two burning bright (5)
6. Purring from the Irish sea (4, 3)
7. Mud, Mud, glorious mud (12)
8. See you later (9)
9. Beat the hare (8)
10. Cornish Peninsular (6)
11. Royal toy vehicle (5)
12. Pink at the pictures (7)

General Knowledge:

- A. The Bootlace worm is the longest creature in the world. True or False?
- B. In Kenneth Grahame's Wind in the Willows what creature is Ratty?
- C. What colour are a Kingfishers legs?
- D. What is the hairy covering called found on a the antlers of deer?
- E. What is a young Llama called?
- F. Beetles belong to the Coleoptera order. True or False?
- G. What creature produces gossamer?
- H. From which tree do we get turpentine?
- I. What is another name for the Rowan Tree?

Society News

Elan Valley & Gigrin Farm, Rhayader 16th February 2013

The Society members met at the free car park, Queens Ferry, and headed off in a two car convoy towards Wrexham on the first leg of the day's field trip to the Elan Valley in Powys. The route for the journey would be to head for the western end of the Elan Valley at Devil's Bridge then take a slow drive eastwards along the valley to reach our destination of Gigrin Farm for 1pm.

I had explained that the bird of the day would be the red kite, *milvus milvus*, and any other birds would be a bonus.

From Wrexham we followed the A483 to pass Oswestry and Welshpool then on to Newtown. Here we turned on to the A489 then onto the A470 for Llangurig. At Llangurig the A44 would take us to the B4343 for Devil's Bridge.

The drive so far had taken nearly two hours so at Devil's Bridge we stopped to stretch our legs and talk through the next section of the route. Just past the Bridge there is a sharp hairpin bend onto the B5474 and then three miles further on was our intended lunch stop at The Arch, a picnic area managed by the Forestry Commission. The area surrounding the car park is screened by firs so as we enjoyed our sandwiches we watched for signs of birdlife. A few red kites circled high overhead whilst chaffinches and great tits flitted through the branches.



Moving on to the valley proper we stopped at a pull in beside the first of the old quarry workings. Previous visits had shown the craggy peaks, up to our left, to be one of the best in this area for peregrine falcon sightings.

We scoured the outcrops for some time without success then, as we were about to move off, a red kite came into view high up over one of the peaks. As we watched the small black dot of

a bird higher up became visible, within a few seconds the "dot", now somewhat closer, could be positively identified as a peregrine gliding with speed along the line of the peaks. As if one peregrine was not enough we soon noticed another following the same flight path as the first. The day was already a success.

We stopped a further three times along the length of the Elan Valley and at each stop we identified a different species, buzzard, raven and fieldfares.

At 1pm we turned into the drive way of Gigrin Farm and parked up. Gigrin Farm is well sign-posted and situated one mile out of Rhayader on the A479. There is a small fee for entrance to the farm and apart from the hides there are toilets, a small shop and an impressive red kite display area.



We made our way to the hide and sat watching the birds, red kites, buzzards and corvids, take up their perching order in readiness for feeding time at 2pm. Rather than birds perching on any available branch they grouped into small colonies, red kites in one tree or circling overhead, buzzards in another tree or on a fence post, corvids in yet another tree or squabbling in the grass at the edge of the field.



At two o'clock the farm tractor is driven into the field and the farmer unloads the trailer of meat off cuts onto the grass. Even before he has driven away the feeding frenzy starts. Corvids, buzzards and red kites descend in a melee of wings beaks and talons onto the free feast.

Continued on next page....

Society News

Elan Valley & Gigrin Farm, Rhayader 16th February 2013 Continued

The first "wave" of feeding is over within ten minutes and the field is clear of all but a few corvids. All is not done though; waiting about 15 minutes will see a second wave of red kites arrive. We were told that the first stage feeding sees the younger birds coming in for food, once they have gone the older birds that have been watching from height now descend and the melee starts again.

The feeding station is no more than 50 metres away from the hide but photography is almost impossible, birds are so quick to drop in, grab a morsel then swoop out that "stills" more often become "blurs", but it's a challenge trying for that "perfect shot".

Leaving Gigrin Farm we headed back into Rhaya-

der to join the A470 and our journey home.

The round trip covers 200 miles and will take a good 9 hours. The scenery along the Elan Valley is stunning at any time of year although the, sometimes single track, B4574 road can become very tricky in winter. Owls and hen harriers have also been seen along this route, but not on this occasion.

This is one of my favourite routes through the heart of Wales and I was glad to have shared the experience.

Many thanks to those who made the day very enjoyable.

Ron Plummer.

Southport 12 Mar 2013

The DNS Field Trip to Marshside, Southport proved to be winter bird watching at its very best. Crystal clear visibility, light winds, cold but not bitterly cold all contributed to a good and enjoyable day out. To go on a Tuesday was a departure from the usual weekend trips, it was done to catch a high tide and proved worthwhile. The sight and sound of thousands of Pink-footed Geese lifting en masse when disturbed by the tide was spectacular and memorable, the musical accompaniment of Skylarks added to the atmosphere.

On a more entertaining note the Avocets which exceeded 20 in number landing on the frozen ponds, a graceful approach followed by a crash landing and loss of dignity. A Teal stoically progressing over the ice, crashing through and then just sitting there. I would love to know what he was saying to himself. If that wasn't enough we could lift our eyes unto the hills, the Pennines covered in snow and bathed in bright sunshine.....

We joined in a game of 'Find the Spoonbill' which had been seen that very morning. A big white, bird easy to see. 'There it is!' - 'No that's an Egret!' 'There it is!' - 'No that's a shopping bag,

they give them free in England!' We never did find the alleged Spoonbill. The second hide produced good views of a variety of ducks in full breeding plumage and looking splendid, a variety of Gulls but few Waders. The sun had shifted to the west giving perfect light to the area.

Later we drove to the northern end of Marshside in a bid to find the Spoonbill and we were rewarded with the sight and sound of a large number of Widgeon flying in close to us and calling to keep in contact with each other. The Geese lifted again as if to bid us adieu.

The obligatory scan of Southport Maine Lake produced Dabchick, doing what Dabchick do and diving when you try to see them, or was somebody pulling my leg? Good conditions, a wide variety of birdlife, splendid scenery and excellent company made for a memorable day out. DNS Field Trips are fun, not serious. Do try one.

Bill Griffiths

Reserve Report Dec 2012 to March 2013

The winter has been characterized by large flocks of up to 1000 Wigeon, as usual, joined sometimes by a few Pintail. Pink-footed Geese have been visible in very large numbers across the river but crossed to the Reserve on two occasions: 600 on Jan 20th and 60 on Feb 28th. Two Brent Geese were present on Feb 10th. The highest count for Canada Geese was 1000 on Dec 6th and 30 Shoveler on the fly ash lagoon on Jan 20th was a record number for the Reserve. Whooper Swans crossed onto the river a couple of times from their hiding place behind the revetment and a single Bewick's Swan was seen on Jan 27th. 20 years ago, Bewicks were the norm for wild swans here. Whoopers became regular on the Reserve only 10 years ago and within 5 years had become by far the more common species.

A Red Kite on March 29th was only the latest of 6 recent records for the Reserve, all of them in the last 10 years; this passage bird stayed only a few minutes before flying back towards the snow-covered Welsh hills.



We have had a fair number of Fieldfare and Redwing staying right into April and there was a brief passage in the fields of over 60 Meadow Pipits among the melting snow on March 31st.

Waxwings (13-23 birds) were seen only between Dec 16th and 23rd in this "invasion" winter. Although there were only a couple of Brambling rec-

ords, Twite have been occurring sporadically all winter. The Reserve did get a taste of the large flocks of finches in North Wales this winter and 1000 Chaffinches on Dec 5th was a record number for the Reserve.

Finally, the cold weather has enlivened the little pool in front of the Field Study Centre with a Snipe (below) on April 2nd.



STOP PRESS: A male Black Redstart was seen at the top end of the Nature Trail on April 6th, the first record for nearly 20 years. The first Chiffchaff arrived on April 7th, when there was still a flock of 50 Twite on the Reserve.



Glenn Morris, April 7th

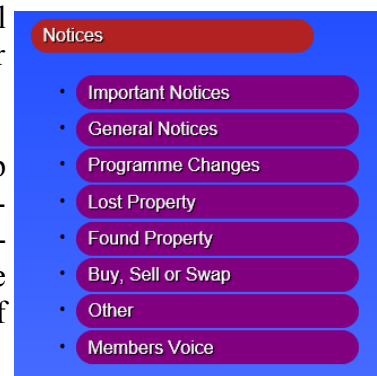
Website

Members who have visited the website recently will have noticed that it now has a new main menu page. This has been set up so that we can advise you when new notices or other information that you need to be aware of is available and the date they were last updated.

Also, over the last few weeks I've been putting together a new members area which will allow a greater degree of flexibility for future requirements or changes. The new design will be available sometime in May.



When entering the new area you will see a series of options. Clicking on anyone of them will take you to the relevant page, or area within a page.



To aid navigation the Website Map option lists all the main pages within the members area and underneath each option what can be found there. Clicking on anyone of

the options will take you to that area.

One new area is Members Voice. This is where you can have your comments, questions or ideas can be displayed. Please send any to the email address shown below.

Please Note: The password to the members area will change on the 11th May to:

User Name: **dnsuser** Password: **fct1901**

If anyone has any ideas for additional information they would like to see on the website please pass them to: editor@deesidenaturalists.org.uk

Bob Must

Programme for Field Trips

Trips meeting point will be on the programme - usually the Spar car park: 55 Station Road Queensferry CH5 1SU. All you have to do is join us and direct us to the site.

Trips are free, other than the cost of entry if applicable. Car sharing is available and bring friends. Contact trip leader for more information.

Bird and wildlife watching as a group is fun! Plus more eyes mean more things seen! We need ideas for the programme (2014). Suggestions and offers for the programme to:

Do you have favourite local places you go to watch wild life? Share it with others! Put your favourite place on the programme and the map!

Helen Simpson
Telephone: 07711964820
Email: hlnsimpson@gmail.com

Notices

Nature Trail

There will be restricted access on the Nature Trail from 2nd April continuing until mid June so that National Grid can carry out essential work. The pathway along the estuary side should be accessible so that members can walk the length of the area. Please follow all safety instructions. If you have any queries please contact me either by phone 01352 716273 or by email christine.hamer@tiscali.co.uk

Crassula

The Crassula (New Zealand Pygmy weed) that has invaded the Northern Marshy Grassland continues to pose a threat and e.on are continuing to work on a resolution. To avoid possible spread please do not walk on the Wetland Meadow Area and also keep to the designated footpaths, tracks and car parks on the reserve.

e.on

It has just been confirmed by e.on that Andy Black is taking over as our point of contact from Bill Smith. We'd like to thank Bill for all his support during the time he was acting as the liaison with us and say hello to Andy.

Found Property

A lady's dress ring found on the reserve. Please contact Joan on 01244 544941.

A small silver coloured key (Yale type- but has the name SILCA on the round part) has been found in the signing-in box. It is attached to a piece of string. If it belongs to you please contact the DNS Secretary Pauline Moulton at email secretary@deesidenaturalists.org.uk or phone 01244 313404.

A pair of binoculars and a flask on 9th April. Please contact John on 01352 732837 after 6.00pm

Wetland Bird Survey - Waterbirds in the UK 2010/11

The Waterbirds in the UK 2010/11 is now available for purchase. The 182 page report is a must for anyone interested in ornithology. The cover is designed by our own Thelma Sykes and the booklet goes on to identify the species and numbers of birds which can be found on the wetland sites throughout the country.

The report may be obtained from WeBS Office, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU UK. Mention that you are a member of DNS and enclose £10 which includes postage.

The full cost price for non members is in the order of £40. Purchasers will not only have a bargain price but a fascinating read.

R A R.

Anniversary Bird Race

As part of the various events being organised to mark the 50th anniversary of the North Wales Wildlife Trust is a 24 hr sponsored bird race. To find out further details visit www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org or contact Ben Stammers on 01248 351541.

Big Dee Day 28th - 29th June

Help tackle invasive non-native plants and animals, such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and Chinese mitten crab. Contact lbyrne@cheshirewt.org.uk, eric@record-lrc.co.uk or see our website for further details.

NEWWildlife 'Rhydymwyn Dawn Chorus Walk' 5th May

As part of the International Dawn Chorus Day 2013 NEWWildlife will be hosting the 'Rhydymwyn Dawn Chorus Walk'. Booking is essential. Contact Kate Wilson on 01352 742115 or email: volunteer@newwildlife.org.uk

Group Corner

DNS Photography Group

The group continues to attract around twenty members to meetings which take place on the second Wednesday of each month at 2pm in the Study Centre. Typically we look at different aspects of photography and weather permitting we have photography forays around the Reserve.

At our November meeting we welcomed Steve Dewsnap of Rockcliffe Raptors (www.rockclifferaptors.co.uk) who spoke about a Barn Owl, a Tawny Owl and a Kestrel which he brought for us to photograph in specially constructed naturalistic settings.

For information on the group please contact Carl Boswell on 01352 757309.

DNS Art Group

We are a small group of members who enjoy painting together each month. We paint in various mediums and gain stimulation and encouragement from each other.

If you would like to join us you would be most welcome. Our meetings are on the second Thursday of the month, from 1-30 until 3-30 pm.

Contact Doreen Boswell on 01352 757309



Wednesday Group

This group meets at the Field Study Centre on the first and the third Wednesday of the month between 1.00 – 3.00 pm. It is an informal gathering of members who usually have lunch and then go for a short ‘walk and talk’ on the reserve, before returning for a final cup of tea. Topics of discussion range from the flora and fauna found on the reserve to local, national and international issues.

There is a good mix of viewpoints, experiences and ages within the group, and at the end of the day we all go home still friends, having enjoyed each others company.

Answers to Quiz

A. True (it can grow up to 55 meters); B. Water Vole; C. Orange; D. A velvet; E. A Cria;
F. True; G. Spider; H. Pine; I. Mountain Ash; J. Wheat.

General Knowledge:

1. Lynx; 2. Goat; 3. Panda; 4. Mouse; 5. Tiger; 6. Manx cat; 7. Hippopotamus;
8. Alligator; 9. Tortoise; 10. Lizard; 11. Corgi; 12. Panther.

Cryptic Quiz: