



Issue 156

April 2022

Registered Charity No. 510146

Welcome to the April edition of the Newsletter.

Please don't forget to renew your membership for 2022. Anyone deciding not to renew, this will be their final Newsletter and they will be able to reclaim their key deposit from the Membership Secretary.

There are a substantial number of keys in circulation held by lapsed members, so it is being considered that we do a full key change in the near future. All current members would be issued with a replacement barrier/toilet/hide key to replace their existing one with the deposit transferring to the new one.

There have been reports of rare and scarce species seen at DNS appearing on social media and bird sighting forums recently. This information is to be kept within the Society in accordance with the agreement with our landlords, Uniper. A repeat of an incident some years ago when a rarity was broadcast, with twitchers from far and wide descended on the Reserve, entering illegally and causing a certain amount of damage, could result in us losing access to the site as this was a serious breach of the Power station safety protocol. Furthermore, it has been noted that at times there are more bodies on site than have signed in at the barrier. We stress that members **MUST** sign in and out when they are on site as once again this is a safety stipulation demanded by our landlord. Please remember that the site is closed from 16.00 hrs Monday until 6.00 hrs Tuesday every week for plant maintenance.

Our Chairperson, Phil Hotchkiss will be standing down at the next AGM so if any members feel they would like to come on to the committee and take over the position next year, please contact the Secretary.

***Improvements to the site this year will include:***

Repairs to the outflow and sluices at the middle and east hide lagoons  
Sprucing up the Field Centre toilet.

Repair to the Middle hide screen.

Painting of West hide screens (volunteers welcome).

Training West hide willows into a screen.

Many thanks to Ray Roberts, Bill Dickinson, Ron Plummer and Peter Haslem for their contributions to this edition.

*Alan Smethurst*

# *Around and about* – Coed-y-Felin

Coed -y- Felin (the mill wood) is a delightful woodland situated in a deep sided valley at Hendre on the A541 Mold to Denbigh road. It is a mixed deciduous woodland on limestone bedrock straddling a disused railway line from the 1950's. Tracks criss - cross the upper slopes of the wood to provide a short circular walk. The lower track which follows the line of the old railway is ideal for wheelchairs, having a good level surface, albeit a linear one. There is a small car park up the track opposite the Royal Oak Inn that gives access to the wheelchair friendly path (SJ 188677) whilst another larger car park is situated along the road to Hendre quarry, on the right travelling from Mold (SJ 197678).

Springtime finds the woodland floor awash with the colour of wood anemones, celandine and bluebell and summertime brings out the rare sparkling Depford pinks on the hay meadow ((difficult to spot). This species is only found in the wild in less than two dozen sites in the UK.



Coed-y-Felin is something of a hot spot for Pied Flycatchers who fly in from West Africa each year but lots of other woodland birds, Siskin, Jay, Redpoll, G S Woodpecker to name a few.



# Parkgate 4<sup>th</sup> Dec

It was a high tide on the Dee Estuary. The weather was chilly, showery, and blustery; low pressure and a north westerly wind! just right for allowing the tide to rise to its fullest.

The first thing that was noticed were the huge numbers of Lapwing – a red list bird – in the air, thousands of them, probably taking fright because of a hunting predator. They were so right; a female marsh Harrier (one of four) was quartering the marsh looking for a quick meal.

Following the Lapwing, hundreds of Pink Foot geese wheeled and circled in the air over the outer marsh, although it would have taken a sizeable bird of prey to catch one of these for its lunch.

Our party of avid bird watchers first headed towards the Wirral Way, looking over the back fields where there were a good number of Blackbirds and Redwings on the ground. In a tree towards the edge of the field a Sparrow hawk waited, and on the fence dividing the field a Kestrel was looking for an opportune moment. We walked up to Backford Hall and then on to the Wirral Way checking for any small birds or mixed flocks of Tits in the scrub and trees and accessed the footpath across Heswall golf course back to the marsh and the Old Baths car park.



After coffee and a few moments to warm up fingers and toes, we positioned ourselves on the edge of the marsh, scanning across towards the estuary checking out the bird life present. Many pairs of eyes and three telescopes helped pinpoint any activity. A flock of red breasted Mergansers flew out of the estuary just beyond the marsh. Good numbers of wildfowl were seen – including Shelduck, Mallard, lots of Pintail, Teal, and Shoveler. By now the tide was nearly in – always exciting to see – thousands of birds were in the air, and we had superb views of a male Hen Harrier right in front of us as he hunted across the water filled marsh. There were many little Egrets, and among them three great white Egrets stood head and shoulders above them. The occasional Snipe took to the air zig-zagging over the marsh before dropping down out of sight.

As the tide eventually reached the wall numerous short-tailed field voles and other small mammals were scrambling for safety on whatever was floating by as a rainbow illuminated the sky to the north.

A great morning's birding – the amazing sight and sounds of the marsh full of birds is so atmospheric and should not be missed.

This was the last outing of 2021 and an excellent conclusion to the Deeside Naturalist's field meetings for the year. I have enjoyed spotting and identifying the birds for our members and very much look forward to meeting more of you in this coming year.

*Bill Dickinson*



# Benmaddarch Bay 9<sup>th</sup> Jan

The group assembled at the Penrhos Coastal Park car park on a bright, cold and breezy morning. We began by looking over the bay, it was low water and the birds were distant, but numerous waders, Oyster Catcher, grey Plover, Dunlin and Redshank together with light bellied Brent geese, were on the sand banks. On the water we had Slavonian grebe, Great Northern diver, Red Throated diver great crested Grebe.

As we made our way along the causeway to the Inland Sea, just beyond the sea water gushing through the flume in the Stanley Embankment we saw a Shag, performing the clear leap as it dived. Point to note we had a Shag doing the same here, on a field meeting two years ago.



The Inland Sea had several great crested Grebes, red breasted Mergansers, Goldeneye and Slavonian Grebes. A flock of twenty grey Plover (look out for the black armpits) flew across the water and landed to our left. Around the cottages were the usual garden bird's great Tit, Chaffinch and Greenfinch etc.

After having lunch at the coastal park, during which we saw black Guillemot and a very close Mediterranean Gull, we made our way to the next venue, Holyhead Fish Dock. There had been reports of a black Guillemot showing well over the last few days, black it may be in its plumage in summer but in winter the bird is predominantly light grey with barring above. So, we were surprised to find one in near summer plumage. Also around the dock were red breasted Mergansers, great crested Grebes, Redshanks and Oystercatchers.



The New Harbour was our last stop in Holyhead and again we notched up red throated diver, shag, great Northern Diver and not only black Guillemot but also common Guillemot.

Our last stop of the day was RSPB Cors Ddyga. Just a short walk around this wetland reserve produced Teal, Wigeon, Snipe, Shoveler, Pochard, tufted Duck, Buzzard, an obliging Stonechat, marsh Harrier, black tailed Godwit, little Grebe and golden Plover. As we reached the car park we were in for the highlight of the day, whilst we didn't have the spectacular murmuration's that make the headlines, we were treated to a flypast of several thousands of Starlings on their way to roost within the reserve. Breath taking and what a splendid end to a very full day's birding.

I would like to thank all of those members that came along on this birding voyage of discovery, some fifty-four species were seen in total and to Steve Palin for his local knowledge.



*Bill Dickinson*

## 2021 Nest boxes

Due to an injury just at the wrong time of the year I was unable to do an egg/chick check in the spring of 2021, consequently the only data I have for this period is from evidence of box occupation when Betty Lee and myself carried out the winter cleaning and sterilising. Overall, this equates to an occupancy rate of 85%

**DNS Reserve**                      37 boxes.    30 occupied.    3 unhatched eggs.

### SURROUNDING FARMS

**Park Farm**                              6 boxes    5 occupied

**Top-y-Fron Hall**                    13 boxes    11 occupied    1 unhatched egg

**Oakenholt Farm**                    13 boxes    11 occupied (farmhouse box had 3 Blue tit chicks)

**Cheshire Farm**                    19 boxes    17 occupied    14 unhatched eggs    1 dead adult

**Oakenholt Papermill**            8 boxes    8 occupied    6 unhatched eggs    23 dead chicks \*\*

\*\* It looks like there have been very active predators on this site that have taken the parent birds with the mortality rate being far, far higher than elsewhere.

# History of DNS – part II

The west hide was now in the wrong position. The base of which can still be seen at the top of the track leading down to the hide. It was decided to build a new hide. But this time it would be a double decker. Plans were drawn up by Liverpool university and the members soon got to work building it and were delighted with the outcome.



The vandals however were still about. On one occasion the sides of the wooden west hide were kicked in leaving just the vertical post. My faith in human nature was restored when a man knocked on my door to ask if he could repair the hide.

On another occasion a car was driven through the back of the hide. It was then reversed to finish up on the salt marsh where it was set alight.

Power Gen then offered to build a new double decker west hide which stands today, seemingly impregnable to vandals.



MP John Redwood planting saplings on the Reserve 1993



At this time the DNS committee thought about having a Field Studies Centre on the site. The adjacent Rockliff Hall, which had just been vacated by Ugandan Asians, was a long shot but the County Council who owned the building would not give consent. So, it was back to the committee.

Eventually it was decided to build a centre on top of one of the pile driven ash lagoon filters. It was built with the support of CEGB, grant aid and contributions from DNS. A CEGB bricklayer and joiner undertook such a large part of the work.

Later the Society commissioned staff from Merseyside County Museum to design the Centre display using information provided by the Society.

When the Centre was finished the late Duke of Edinburgh was invited to open the Centre which he did in 1983. After which, the chairman Oswald Davies presented him with an atomic ray proof glass paper weight inscribed with Shelduck!



The vandals still hadn't finished with us. The windows of the Centre were smashed, and the cupboards left in a sorry state on two occasions. Unbreakable glass was tried but the unbreakable glass, screwed to the frames was no problem for our vandals. They found that by hitting the glass with a large stone the glass would bend but not break and spring the screws from the frame. Hence the need for roller shutters.

Vandalism had been a major problem with hides being severely damaged many times. Nowadays the power station security staff (Uniper) have increased their brief to travel the reserve roads. This has brought enormous benefit to the Reserve. We thank them for their endeavour.

*What's next?*

Clearly the Reserve has had many ups and downs, but it has all been worth it. Particularly when our 500+ members can visit the Reserve to see some of the 247 species of birds recorded on the site. In excellent facilities.

Deeside Naturalists' Society is grateful to the various companies which have given so much support to this development. These include CEGB, National Power, PowerGen, Eon and now the incumbent Uniper.

Finally, when all this was going on the Society was designated as a charity by the Charity Commission with the following objectives: To stimulate interest in natural history and play a part in the conservation of flora and fauna on Deeside and the surrounding area. The DNS charity number is 510146.

*Ray Roberts*

# Counting birds

Bird counting in the garden is normally a very brief experience. I have just completed a count with the following results: House sparrow 12, Dunnock 2, Robin 2, Coal tit 1, Blue tit 1, Jackdaw 2, Magpie 1. Hardly inspiring but perhaps an overflying Buzzard and a Peregrine Falcon with two young about 200 yards away does add some lustre to the count. Mammals include a squirrel, a field mouse and a badger. An easy exercise in comparison to monitoring waders and wildfowl on the Reserve at Connah's Quay.

How do the bird counters manage to count the number of birds which roost in good numbers on the Reserve at high tide? My take on this would be first you need a telescope and a tachograph to record the numbers.

The roost will be on the Oakenholt marsh in an indeterminate shape. First identify the birds and then count the birds in the nearer front line of the roost. Then from the middle front line bird count a single line of birds to the back of the roost. The roost is the product of the two numbers. How accurate is the count? When I and three friends monitored wildfowl and wader counts on the Dee Estuary it sometimes happened that Oakenholt Marsh was counted from the west side and the high ground to the north of the marsh simultaneously. It was not unusual for the counts, from the different locations, to compare very favourably.

The accuracy of a count may be improved by turning the roost area into an imaginary rectangle, slotting the areas outside rectangle into the spaces inside the rectangle and count as before.

For some odd shapes the count is improved by undertaking more line counts, averaging them and multiplying by the number of birds in a single line across the roost.

Having gathered the counts for the UK estuaries the BTO publishes an annual report giving the numbers of wildfowl and waders recorded on the estuaries. I am always interested in the numbers of waders and wildfowl on the Dee Estuary and not often disappointed. The recent report shows the Dee Estuary to be fourth in the aggregate table coming in at 157,230 birds trailing the Wash with 397,258, the Ribble Estuary 191,485 and Morecambe Bay 191,293. The counts are five year means over years 2015/2016–2019/2020.

It is now clear why the Dee Estuary is recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Ramsar Site under the terms of the European convention and a Wetland of International Importance and finally a Special Protection Area. SPA.

The site figures justify our designations and help to ensure the Estuary against untoward development. Thanks to the counters.

*Ray Roberts*



# River Clwyd 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb

We met in the car park by the Bike Hub before heading out around Horton's Nose. Viewing over the beach we saw Oystercatchers along the shoreline with a few Curlews on the sand. In the pools were Redshank whilst in the rocks were several groups of Turnstones in very cryptic plumage. Looking out to sea in front of the wind turbines we noted small groups of common Scoters, closer in was a flock of three hundred Wigeon, showing brilliantly in the sunlight.

Walking around the point of Horton's Nose on the sand dunes were three meadow Pipits and two Skylarks, on the pontoons in the mouth of the river were a flock of a hundred roosting Turnstones.



Our next location was the adjacent Marine Lake which produced Lapwings, little Egret, great and lesser Black Backed gulls, red breasted Mergansers, little Grebe, grey Heron and Oystercatchers. From the river embankment on the western side of the lake we saw a flock of some eight hundred Lapwing take to the air but they were beyond the railway bridge, so we were unable to see what put them up.

For lunch we moved on to the Brickfield Pond. From the picnic benches we saw two goosanders float out from under the bushes surrounding the pond. At the start of our walk was a family feeding the "ducks" and it was a bit of a free-for-all with Mallards, Mute swans and Coots vying for the crumbs. Our target bird was the female Scaup, which I'm please to say had been spotted earlier, but a distant view. Other birds seen on the pond were red breasted Mergansers, great crested Grebe, Tufted ducks, and Moorhens. On moving to the far end of the pond we were rewarded with excellent views of the Scaup. Smaller birds in the bushes and trees included song Thrush, Goldfinches, great, blue and long-tailed Tits, on the roof of one of the adjacent buildings was a pied Wagtail.



The last move of the day was to the riverbank as the tide was receding and exposing large areas of mud. On the west bank were large flocks of Oystercatchers and Lapwing, with Starlings and Dunlins, together with a solitary little Egret. On the river were flotillas of Greylag geese, Shelduck and Wigeon. In the grass were more Wigeon, Curlews and a black-tailed Godwit. As the water level dropped further the waders descended onto the mud and began actively probing for a meal.

Canada and Greylag geese began to fly into the fields on the east bank and it was amongst these that we found our fiftieth and last bird of the day five white-fronted Geese.

A big thank you to all those that turned out and it was good to see some new faces.

*Bill Dickinson*

# Reserve Report Nov - Feb

It is that time of year when birders have to be careful what they report as breeding birds are at their most vulnerable.

As a society we also have a responsibility to our landlord Uniper and not to cause any situation that may affect the safe running of the power station. If we carelessly report sightings on social media, we may unwittingly cause situations of trespass, irresponsible parking and visits beyond our capacity to cope. Such a loss of control that threatens the running of the power station would lead to closing access to the reserve.

Standing rules are posted in each hide and on the DNS website for reference.

Your bird records may be reported on *Birdtrack* all we ask is you allow 14 days to lapse before doing so.

## ***Sightings.***

**November 2021:** Redwing, Fieldfare, Grey wagtail, 6 Red-legged partridge, 5 Whooper swans, 12 Greenshank, Avocet, 12 Spotted redshank, 1000 Knot, Grey plover, Kingfisher, Turnstone, 13 Little grebe, 3 Goosander, Bar-tailed godwit, 2000 Black-tailed godwit, 12 Great egret, 6000 Wigeon, 200 Teal, Snipe, 2000 Dunlin, 3000 Pintail, Merlin, Brambling, Bullfinch, Gadwall, Stonechat, Golden eye, 2000 Lapwing, 22 Twite, 15 Ringed plover, Jacksnipe, Hen harrier, Marsh harrier, 14 Shoveler.

**December 2021:** 25 Snipe, Avocet, Spotted redshank, Greenshank, 15 Stock dove, Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine, Tufted duck, 30 Shoveler, 600 Wigeon, 300 Teal, 20 Mute swan, Golden plover, 2 White-fronted geese, 3000 Pink-footed geese, 50 Woodpigeon, 40 Curlew.

**January 2022:** 90 Pied wagtails, 11 Greenshank, 2500 Lapwings, 400 Black-tailed godwits, 1200 Black-headed gulls, 20 Common gulls, 26 Twite, Avocet, 10 Great egrets, Common sandpiper, 18 Snipe, Turnstone, 30 Whooper swans, 3 Brent geese, 80 Curlew, 5 Red-legged partridge, 10 Great black-backed gulls, 250 Pintail, 14 Moorhen, 22 Coot, 2 Great-spotted woodpeckers, 32 Greenfinch, 2000 Starlings, Ringed plover, Grey plover, 2 Red-breasted merganser, 5 Goosander, 1000 Dunlin.

**February 2022:** Twite, Greenshank, 20 Shoveler, 60 Pintail, 220 Wigeon, 100 Teal, 20 Linnet, Kingfisher, Common sandpiper, 150 Black-tailed godwit, 2 Barnacle geese, 12 Whooper swans, 19 Mute swans, Mediterranean gull, 7 Spotted redshank, 4 Reed bunting, Great crested grebe.

*Peter and Sue Haslem (recorders).*

# Gigrin Farm 19<sup>th</sup> March

It has been possibly ten years since the Society last visited Gigrin Farm, and much has changed since then. Where previously it was a case of “turn up and pay on the day” any visit now must be booked, and paid for, “online” in advance.

The Route also has changed, I can remember the journey to Newtown being slow, especially at weekends, so I had made allowances for this by deciding on an 08:00 start from Northop. I need not have bothered because there is now a by-pass around Newtown. This meant we arrived at Devil’s Bridge thirty minutes early.

Continuing along the Elan Valley we stopped for lunch beside the old mine workings but decided that, rather than being blown away in the wind, we would continue to our destination of Gigrin Farm.

At the farm we checked in and were given tickets to hide number 5. There was just enough time for lunch then it was away to take our seats in the hide overlooking the feeding grounds.

At 14:00 along came the owner with his tractor pulling a trailer full of meaty off-cuts, which he distributed across three areas of the field. He hardly had time to move the tractor away before the sky became a blur with red kites diving and swooping in from all angles to grab the morsels in their talons and turn away to eat on the wing.



Amongst the, more than two hundred, red kites we could identify at least five with colour coded tags. One bird especially stood out from the rest; it was leucistic. This bird has pale buff rather than the distinct red plumage and is thought to be only one of ten in the world.

For the next thirty minutes we sat and watched with awe. Cameras had been left to one side after the first few hectic minutes, there are only so many angles a red kite can be filmed from.

Once the larger chunks of food had been devoured the kites moved away to leave a raven, smaller corvids and a buzzard to fight for the scraps. Time also for us to move away, the show was over. At least for another day.

A few other species were seen throughout the day, including, stonechat, nuthatch, coal tit, jay and a suspected cuckoo.



*Ron Plummer*



# Field Events 2022

**Thursday 14 April, WORLDS END, LLANGOLLEN.** For black Grouse. Meet at grid reference SJ233484, World's End at 7.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

**Saturday 14 May, WHIXALL MOSS.** Raised peat bog SSSI with rare flora and fauna. Maybe a Hobby? Meet at Morris's bridge car park, Whixall at 10.30am Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details

**Saturday 27 August, FRODSHAM/WEAVER BEND.** Migrants and waders on the settling pools and the Weaver Bend. Meet at Brook Furlong (motorway bridge) Frodsham at 9.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

**Saturday 10 September, CONNAH'S QUAY RESERVE,** high tide watch, Members Day, Meet Field Study Centre at 9.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

**Sunday 16 October:** Field trip to **POINT OF AYR AND BIG POOL WOODS.** Coastal and woodland birds. Meet at the Station Road car park at 9.00 am. Contact Alan Smethurst 07896758222 for more details

**Saturday 12 November** Anglesey **MALTRAETH AND CORS DDYGA.** Meet at RSPB Cors Ddyga, grid ref: SH463725 at 9.30am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

**Saturday 10 December, GREENFIELD PARK AND DOCK.** Woodland and estuary birds. Meet at Greenfield Valley Park car park, off Greenfield Rd, at 9.00am. Contact Alan Smethurst 07896758222 for more details.

*Bill Dickinson*

## 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 in the Field Study Centre from 1-30 until 3-30 pm.

Contact Kay Mattocks on 01244 821810

## Digital media

Web site: [www.deenats.org.uk](http://www.deenats.org.uk)

Email address: [webeditor@deenats.org.uk](mailto:webeditor@deenats.org.uk)

Facebook: MEMBERS OF DEESIDE NATURALIST SOCIETY