

# Newsletter



Issue 135

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It's been a bit of a challenge to squeeze everything into this edition and there was no space left for a quiz this time. For those who have submitted photos for inclusion my apologies but there was not enough space for them in this edition. However, I will try to include them in the next one.

Next year will be my fifth as the Editor and I believe it will then be time for a change. Therefore we need a volunteer to take the role of Newsletter Editor during 2015. If anyone is interested please contact me by email at [editor@deesidenaturlists.org.uk](mailto:editor@deesidenaturlists.org.uk) or by phone 01244 831537.

From the next edition the publishing times for the Newsletter will change from Dec, Apr and Aug to Jan, May and Sep. This is to avoid the problems of compiling, printing and posting it between the AGM and Christmas.

Details of the website password change are on page 5 and the

password will continue to change every four months with the details being published in the Newsletter. Therefore, for future reference if you have not received a newsletter by the end of Jan, May or Sep, or at the latest by the first week of the following month then please let a member of the committee know.

I'm currently designing a new version of the website which is taking longer than I hoped but should be completed later this year. This one is designed to work better with smart phones and tablets and it will also be easier for you to see changes to the programme or notices that need to be read. For those who have sent in photos and other details then thank you and they will be included in the new site.

Sadly we have received news that one of the founder members of the Society Julian Weldrick has passed away and Glenn Morris has included his memories of him in the Reserve Report on page 5.

## Chairmans Report

Dear Members, I hope that you have all received your new keys by now and managed to get down to the reserve to try them out. Ongoing work due to be carried out is the coppicing of the goat willow under the power lines, this should start on 11th August. We plan to repaint the floor to the hides at some point and this will mean that they will be out of use while it dries (2 – 3 hours).

There has been some erosion to the bank due to the strong winds and tides, this has been inspected by *e.on*

and they are looking into it. Care is needed when using the bench as the edge is not visible on the right hand side; it has been taped off to show the edge.

We have had many new arrival this summer including cygnets, goslings, coots, fox cubs, oyster catchers, badgers, moorhens, these are a few of the one I have seen. If you see anything please record it on the sheets in the hides.

*Phil Hotchkiss*

# Members Events

National Trust Formby - 12<sup>th</sup> July

On a beautiful sunny day we arrived at the car park where we were met by Andrew Brockbank, the Countryside Manager for the National Trust at Formby, who gave us an introduction to the site before we set off on a guided walk around the various different areas and habitats. The Formby reserve holds SSSI, Ramsar and SAC designations and the intertidal area is a SPA.

The first area was the red squirrel wood and we were delighted to see them scampering up and down the trees. The Formby squirrels were severely affected by the squirrel pox in 2006 but the population has now recovered to about 80% of their number before the disease nearly wiped them out. Andrew reported that some work has been undertaken with the University of Liverpool and there is some evidence to show that some of the squirrels have developed antibodies to the pox which is good news as this will hopefully give them immunity in the future.



We then continued past the area where asparagus was grown before the land was acquired by the National Trust and the remnants of the mounds could still be seen. Asparagus has been grown here possibly since the 1600's and in its heyday in the 1900's was world renowned, the farmer Jimmy Lowe winning many awards for his asparagus. Although not grown on the reserve now asparagus can still be bought at Larkhill Farm nearby. However in this area we did see several wild flowers including Harebell, Ladies Bedstraw, Common Centaury and Creeping Willow as well as a left over Asparagus Fern! We then wandered into Vera's Grove, which was planted with native English black poplar trees many years ago. As these trees are under threat from erosion cuttings have been taken to try and preserve them. Other flowers seen during the visit included Viper's Bugloss, Common Storksbill, Birds' Foot Trefoil, Rest Harrow, Yarrow, Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon and Hound's Tongue. Being a warm and sunny day we saw many butterflies including Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Red Admiral and Peacock. Ragwort was the home to many

Cinnabar Moth caterpillars, at least 30 being seen on one small spray.

We did not see many birds on this trip but did see Jay and a small flock of Linnets. Andrew reported that there are nesting Whitethroats in the area. Sadly there are very few ground nesting birds as dogs are allowed on site. We walked over the dunes to the beach and Andrew invited us to explore a rock pool, however he then picked up a piece of the "rock" and crumbled it in his fingers. The area was a dumping ground a long time ago for tobacco waste, the tobacco having been used for the production of pesticides. It was amazing that when picking up the dark brown piece of "rock" and crumbling it in one's hand that the smell of the tobacco was still present after all that time! We also spotted a jellyfish nearby on the beach.

The shifting sand dunes are a rare habitat and are a vital coastal defence at Formby. It is one of the most rapidly changing sections of coastline in England. Coastal erosion is a huge problem, the rate of loss being 4 metres a year on average. Due to the storms last winter 15 metres were lost with 10 of those being lost in one night! The Marram grass is precious to stabilising the dunes so visitors are encouraged to keep to the paths. Andrew also pointed out to us an arable weed called Fat Hen which was growing on the dunes.

We enjoyed our picnic lunch at Andrew's office some of us in the shade inside and some outside, continuing to enjoy the lovely sun and a cuppa which Andrew had very kindly made for us. After lunch we continued our walk passing the flock of sheep which the Trust have brought in to manage part of the grassland area. The flock is made up of Herdwick and Hebridean sheep.

We then went on to look at the pools which have been created by the Trust staff to help the breeding of the Natterjack toads however we did not see any toadlets.

## National Trust Formby - 12<sup>th</sup> July continued

Another highlight of a visit to Formby is the possibility of seeing the prehistoric footprints. These are not always visible depending on tide and weather conditions. Footprints which have been seen include human, Roe and Red Deer, Wild boar, Oystercatcher, Crane and Dog/Wolf. As it was unlikely that we would see them on the day of our visit, we opted to miss out this bit of the trip.



Although I have visited Formby before, this visit was made much more interesting by having Andrew to guide us around. Fine weather, good company, lovely flora, lots of butterflies, red squirrels and interesting landscape all made for a good day out. Unfortunately there were only 5 of us there to enjoy it. If you haven't been on a Field Trip before do give it a try and join us in future.

*Pauline Moulton*

## Moth Trapping - 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> May

After a hesitant start and mishaps with Moth traps this event avoided cancellation thanks to the generosity of Justin Williams North Wales Macro-moth Recorder.



Justin agreed to facilitate the event and loan his own moth traps. So grateful thanks to Justin for saving the day/event.

Further thanks go to Steve Palin who also stepped in at the last minute not only with his moth trap but also with the offer of assistance to set up the traps on the Friday night.

The setting up included a white bed sheet to either lure in more moths (or to frighten any one wandering around the reserve in the dead of night.)

Having set up three moth traps including additional bed sheets hung close to the traps both Justin and Steve courageously left me in charge.

Justin advised that the trap lights should be switched off and the traps covered at day break to stop any trapped creatures escaping. Being the middle of May daybreak is 5am. So at 5am I returned to the reserve to switch off the lights, cover the traps and collect any moths that were resting on the bed sheet. We were blessed with glorious weather that weekend so the trip to the reserve at 5am was magical and well worth the effort of getting out of bed. The reserve was full of birds singing and flitting around the bushes. The moth traps were covered and put out of the sun but only after a quick glance to see if

anything had been enticed into the traps. A few extras that had not quite made it into the traps were collected into containers (Aldi individual ice cream pots proved very useful!) I could then retire for a cup of coffee knowing that there were plenty of specimens to be examined later in the morning.

At 10 am the group assembled and the three traps were brought into the field study centre; with an air of mounting anticipation the contents were revealed. Each moth that was brought out had a different and fascinating name.

Some had to be put in containers for full identification

later. The task of keeping notes and track of what we had collected fell to me despite being very much a novice in moth identification. It was really nice to see the actual moths to match the wonderful names not just a picture in a book. Names such as Poplar Hawk-moth, Pebble Prominent, Mottled Pug and Dog's Tooth were being called around the room for me to record. At times they were literally flying round the room identified, all escapees were re-caught identified and released.

After verification of the recordings we had collected 34 different species 52 individual moths making the whole event worth getting up at 5am.

*Helen Simpson*



## Gowy Meadows - 15<sup>th</sup> June

The approach to this reserve is down a narrow tractor track opposite Thornton-le-Moors church. The first recce had been done in the New Year and it was definitely a wellington walk. The access to the reserve



was reviewed a further two times and due to the excessively wet weather this year the path remained muddy. A notice was put up on the Deeside Naturalists' web site warning that the trip may need to be changed if it was decided that the approach was too muddy.

Fortunately the sun shone for the preceding week and the path was dry enough to allow a fairly easy passage through on to the reserve. Having visited the reserve several times I was used to the Long Horned cattle that graze the reserve. Some of the party were not quite so sure that the cattle were friendly, but the cattle moved off and we were able to access the reserve via the public footpath which leads across the reserve to the Gowy river.

The sightings for the day were a mixture of flora and fauna as promised by the information boards at the entrance to the reserve. The expertise of the group was diverse and during the walk/ meander across the reserve we were able to identify 33 different birds, various wild flowers including Hemlock dropwort which is a poisonous

member of the umbelliferae (parsley and carrot) family, two beetles, four butterflies including a Small Skipper, and four dragonflies the most impressive being the Banded Demoiselle.

As mentioned previously the meadow is grazed by heritage species of Long Horned cattle and Hebridean sheep.

On completion of the walk some of the group decided to visit the upper reaches of the Gowy river by visiting another Cheshire Wild life Trust Reserve, Hockenhull Platts. This area had been the alternative venue if the Gowy meadows had been too muddy.

A pleasant time was spent following the foot path over the pack horse bridges seeing more of the same but adding kestrel to the list of birds seen for the day.



The day concluded with a visit to the Walk Mill near Hockenhull Platts. It is a working water mill that grinds its own flour, and bakes (very nice) cakes for the café.

*Helen Simpson*

## Dee Estuary Conservation Group

Meeting held 10th June.

The group is a representation of twenty four local and national organisations that have an interest in the Dee Estuary. The organisations represent both the Welsh and English sides of the river.

The main discussion of the meeting was around any projects or planning applications that were known about and was considered by those present that the DECG should maintain a close awareness of development proposals affecting the estuary, and act as a lobbying group. The Chairman cited 13 current proposed developments.

It was suggested that the group should also maintain an awareness of local Regulations and Designations (e.g. Cockling and Red Throated Divers)

The group should also promote Conservation and sustainable management of the estuary.

DECG will meet quarterly, Deeside Naturalists will aim to have representation at these meetings, should anyone wishes to pass information to DECG they can do this via the Deeside Naturalists Committee.

*Helen Simpson*

# Reserve Report

April - Jul

A new bird was added to the Reserve list on July 16<sup>th</sup> when a **Honey Buzzard** was seen crossing the bunded pools, chased by gulls, terns and egrets (S Skelton). A blue-phase **Snow Goose** was present in the Canada flock briefly in mid-June, very attractive though a likely escape (photo: 1 Snow + 3 Canada).

Successful nesting was recorded for oystercatcher (2 pairs),

mute swan, Canada geese (probably 2 pairs), shelduck, mallard, little grebe, moorhen, coot (2-3 pairs), whitethroat, chiffchaff, blackcap, wren, pied wagtail, blue tit, magpie, greenfinch, linnets and bullfinch (though no doubt other breeders went unrecorded).



At the time of writing, wader numbers are building up rapidly for the autumn migration, with over 1,000 redshank present on the bunded pools, plus 7-8 spotted redshank (partial summer plumage) and 10 greenshank.

The fly-ash lagoon still holds hundreds of mallard and Canada Geese and its reed-bed had a **Sedge Warbler** on July 28<sup>th</sup>. The lagoon has continued to get regular visits from a pair of **Little Ringed Plover** in July and had a **Grey Wagtail** on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

On a sad note, many of you will know that Julian Weldrick (JCW), one of the founder members of DNS, died on May 18<sup>th</sup> this year after a long fight against leukemia. When I last saw him on the Reserve about 7 years ago, he was quick to point out to me a tame Snow Bunting in the West Hide car park, knowing I could easily have missed it. I think that was the first time I'd seen him since the late 1980s, when he was still working as a sports journalist on Deeside. In those far-off days, 30 years ago, we would sometimes share the West Hide on a rising tide, often along with Geoff Robinson and Colin Bennett. I learnt a lot about identifying birds from all three of them, though I can never hope to match Julian's ID skills. Here's an old photo from Julian's own Photobucket website which shows him as many older DNS members, who knew him better than I did, will no doubt remember him: a gentleman among birders who has left only fond memories behind him.



*Glenn Morris*

## Web Site

[www.deesidenaturalists.org.uk](http://www.deesidenaturalists.org.uk)

The password to the members area will change over the weekend of 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> September. The new details are:

**User Name:**

**Password:**



# Digiscoping on the Cheep!

Over the past few years we've had several attempts at digiscoping using specialist kit involving bespoke cameras and adaptors. In 2009 we wrote an article on the use of the Minox DCM5 Digital Camera Module. Whilst these gave reasonable results the main difficulty was the time it took to switch between optical and digital – by which time the bird had usually flown!

What we needed was a rapid way of taking a picture that would not compromise the normal use of the scope. At the recent DNAT's trip to Aviemore we attended a talk on digiscoping in which the presenter



showed how this could be done using a simple compact digital camera. The crucial part of his talk was how to set up the camera to achieve optimal performance.

The guidelines below relate to our own set-up using a Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ30 camera and Swarovski HD80AT scope fitted with a wide-angle 25-50x eyepiece, but the same criteria can be applied to other camera / scope combinations.

Panasonic cameras incorporate a setting called Intelligent Auto (iA), but you'll achieve much better results if you configure the camera manually, viz:-

- Set the camera to it's maximum resolution. We use 16:9 format as this displays full-screen on our computer monitor and TV. The picture size is 4320x2432 pixels. If you're happy with 4:3 format then the picture size is 4320x3240 pixels.
- Disable the flash.
- Turn the top dial to Aperture Priority and adjust the aperture to it's widest setting.
- Adjust the ISO to it's lowest setting.
- Set the camera to Macro mode.

These settings are stored for future use.

To take photographs, offer up the camera to the scope eyepiece having first focused the scope manually on the subject. You will notice some vignetting, which you can remove by judicious use of the zoom. (Note that in aperture mode the optical zoom is reduced to 3x, whereas when using iA it is 20x). Press the button slightly and the camera will focus, then press it fully to take a picture.

A few points to note:-

- The shutter speed is at the mercy of the available light, so shooting in bright sun is better than at dawn / dusk, to avoid camera shake, although the image stabiliser built into the camera is very good.
- In our case, the diameter of the barrel on the camera is about 1mm too large for the camera to fit snugly into the eyepiece of our scope, so we have to hold it and centralise it carefully, whilst watching the image on the camera display. We've found it best to screw out the eyecup slightly.



- We find that picture quality is generally better if we don't set the zoom on the scope eyepiece too high, as this reduces the light level and depth of field, which can make focusing difficult. You can always crop the image in the computer.

So, what are you waiting for?

*Bob and Betty Lee*

# Programme of Events

Unless otherwise stated, all indoor meetings will start at 7.30pm and be held at:  
Connah's Quay Community Centre, Tuscan Way off Chapel Street, Connah's Quay CH5 4DZ

## Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September

Mike Roberts

"Wildlife of the Isle of Avalon"

Herons, Bitternes and otters etc. of the Somerset Levels.

## Friday 17<sup>th</sup> October

John and Tracy Langley

"Bear Necessities"

To include polar bears, brown bears and birds of Northern Europe.

## Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November

Marek Borkowski

**Pole Position in Nature Protection**

This presentation will be given by Marek Borkowski who lives in North Eastern Poland. He owns and manages land in the Biebrza Marsh where he has set up reserves for endangered species. He has reintroduced Tarpan horses to the wild to preserve the biotype. His garden bird list includes Eagles, Osprey, Harriers, Hobby, Red and Black kites, 4 species of Flycatchers, Shrikes, Owls (8 species), Nutcracker, Penduline and bearded tits and many more!

The garden breeding list is even more impressive and includes Great Snipe, Aquatic, River, Savi's, Barred, Icterine and up to 20 species of Warbler, Corncrake, nearly all the European Woodpeckers, Hoopoe, Golden Oriole, Scarlet Rosefinch, Hawfinch, Blue throat and many more.

In addition to giving talks and lectures Marek runs a firm to organise wildlife watching trips in Poland, which was the first in post-communist Europe. He runs the Biebrza Wildlife Trust.

He has a busy schedule and we are fortunate that he is able to fit us into his UK lecture tour this year. Please come along and support this event, you will not be disappointed!

## Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December

Annual General Meeting - In recent years this event has been very poorly attended. Please come along to give the committee your support.

## Events On The Reserve

### Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> Sep

#### Moth Trapping

A follow up event to the May event to trap moths that fly later in the year.

Meet at 10am at the Field study centre (trapping over night of the 12th). All welcome.

For more information contact Helen Simpson 07711964820

### Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October

Maintenance Day

Meet: Field Studies Centre

Time to spruce up the reserve before the Open Day.

All members are welcome to help carry out maintenance jobs around the reserve.

### Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> October

#### Open Day

High Tide: 1:39pm (31.4ft (9.6m))

Time: 10am to 3pm

The reserve is open to the public. Volunteers are always required for various duties on the day.

Please contact Pauline Moulton if you can help. 01244 13404

Any changes to the programme will be posted on our website

[www.deesidenaturalists.org.uk](http://www.deesidenaturalists.org.uk)

## Field Trips

### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September Penmon Point, Anglesey**

For seabirds and possible seals and dolphins

Meet: Queensferry (Spar public car park) at 9am

Contact: Bill Griffiths 01244 815941

### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November Leighton Moss (RSPB) reserve and starling roost**

Meet: Queensferry (Spar public car park) at 11.30am

Contact: Helen Simpson 07711 964820

# Club 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.

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.

# Notices

## **Chinese Mitten Crab**

We have been asked to make all members aware of the threat of the Chinese Mitten Crab.

A poster showing details of the crab can be found on our website.

Sightings should be reported via:  
<http://mittencrabs.org.uk>  
or by phone to 0845 1306229

## **Iolo Williams**

Iolo Williams is appearing at Theatr Clwyd on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30pm.

Evening entitled Welsh Rarebit.  
£20 or £18 for concessions.

See Theatre Clwyd website for more details.