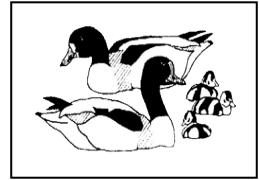


Newsletter



Issue 140

May 2016

Registered Charity No. 510146

Welcome to the May edition of the Newsletter. Its that time of the year again when the shifts change. Our overwintering friends are heading back home and we welcome our new arriving migrants for the summer.

There are a couple of issues to bring to your attention:

In the interests of keeping bird disturbance down to a minimum, especially either side of high water, would members please remember when driving down the Reserve road to try to keep their speed down to a bare minimum.

Secondly, if anyone is planning a group visit to the Reserve with members and friends, would they please liase with Julie Rogers in order that your plans don't clash with any groups that may have prebooked a visit.

Thank you.

As you will be aware the meeting point for the field trips is more often than not at The Spar, Queensferry. There is now a daily charge to park there and unfortunately most, if not all, council car parks now carry a charge. So if anybody has any suggestions as to where we could park for the field trips could they please contact Bill Dickinson on (07968438121).

Copy for the Newsletter is always very welcome. I am sure there are lots of members who have both general and specialist knowledge of all aspects of wildlife. Perhaps you would like to put pen to paper and share your knowlege or opinions or maybe recall a memorable experience for us all to enjoy.

Any members wishing to sell items of optical or photographic equipment are more than welcome to advertise them in the newsletter.

Alan Smethurst

Chairman's Report

Unfortunately this month I have some sad news to share with you all. Evelyn Roberts the wife of one of our founder members, Ray Roberts, passed away earlier this year after a long illness. Every time we sit on the seat on the roadside by the West hide, I'm sure she will be remembered.

Mary Wright, the wife of Fred Wright, passed away in March after a short illness. Fred and Mary were regular members of the Wednesday group and we will all miss the cakes that she baked and regularly brought to our meetings. She was so very knowledgeable of the wild flowers that are on the Reserve, that she not only led wild flower walks for us but has also recorded them all. Mary and Fred were also regular members of the Chester U3A group where she also led many wild flower walks.

On to some good news. We have taken delivery of two new picnic benches and these have been sited by the West hide and the Dee hide.

We have planted over 25 shrubs (predominately Rowan) on the northern embankment on the approach to the West hide and early indications are that most have taken.



Ian Spence has put in a report on the Twite ringing that has been carried out on the Reserve this year. A link to this report should be on our website.

Phil Hotchkiss (Chairman)

Field Trip

Llanfairfechan and The Spinnies 13th February 2016

The drive along the A55 gave misty views of the Welsh coast but on arriving at the promenade in Llanfairfechan, our first port of call, the mist had lifted giving good views of Puffin Island and Penmon Point beyond rough seas.

We, eight members, assembled on the promenade and the morning was spent viewing from Llanfairfechan promenade and Morfa Madryn. On the shoreline were flocks of Oystercatchers, a few Curlews, Turnstones and a solitary Redshank. The sea was very choppy, making it difficult to locate the birds as they rode the swells of the sea, there were a number of Great Crested Grebes, Common Scoters together with some distant and thus unidentifiable divers.

The promenade was followed by a walk to Morfa Madryn local nature reserve. The reserve is an important nesting site for Lapwing and attracts a good variety of birds all year round, however because of the time we only walked to the eastern end. We had good sightings of Widgeon, Teal, several Redshank and two Little Egrets. This reserve is well worth a longer visit. The return walk back to the promenade gave good close up views of Turnstones over the sea wall. Other notable sightings at Llanfairfechan were Common Buzzard, Raven and a flock of Meadow Pipits.

The group then made their way to The Spinnies nature reserve, Aberogwen, a mix of wetland and woodland adjacent to the Ogwen estuary and Traeth Lavan on the coastal plain of North Gwynedd. The reserve is managed by North Wales Wildlife Trust. Our visit coincided with one of their open days.



On the sea there were three, two male and one female, Eider ducks, Shelducks and over sixty Goldeneye, again on a very choppy sea. On the reserve there were Tits, Chaffinches, Greenfinches and a Nuthatch around the numerous feeders. A flock of Redshank were taking refuge from the windy shoreline by the edge of the pool, whilst above them in the trees sat seven Little Egrets. We were treated to the resident Kingfisher, but with only fleeting glimpses.

Unfortunately the Hawfinch that had been reported around the feeding station from the main hide was nowhere to be seen, we did however see a total of forty nine birds in the cold and windy conditions.

Bill Dickinson

The demise of the ash tree

The future for the ash tree looks bleak according to a survey by the British Ecological Society. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is native throughout much of the British Isles and is an important urban tree in our towns and cities. It is the second most abundant tree (after oak) in woodlands and outside of those woodlands there are some 2.2 million ash trees in Britain, and is one of our most common hedgerow species.

Ash has been thriving in Europe thanks, paradoxically, to air pollution. Nitrogen pollution has acted as a fertilizer and climate change has also tended to aid ash as it is drought tolerant, able to cope with lower rainfall and is sensitive to spring frosts and so benefits from the milder winter/spring.

According to Dr Peter Thomas of Keele University, there is currently a two pronged attack on the species. The immediate and serious threat of the fungal 'ash dieback' disease and the potentially devastating influence of the Emerald Ash Borer which is spreading westward across Europe.



Ash dieback causes death of leaves, branches and eventually the whole tree. Caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, it was first seen in Eastern Europe in 1992 and in Britain in 2012. The disease now covers more than 2 million square kilometers stretching from Scandinavia to Italy. Worst case scenario assessment of dieback in Britain is 95% mortality of ash. Cloned trees give hope for resistance to the fungus, but would not protect from the Emerald Ash Borer beetle if it reaches Britain.

Like ash dieback disease, the emerald ash borer *Agrilus plantipennis* is native to Asia. It was accidentally introduced into North America in 2002 where it has killed millions of trees. Recorded in Moscow in 2003, they are spreading west and is believed to have reached Sweden. The adult beetles feed on ash leaves and do little damage, but the larvae bore under the bark and into the wood, killing the tree. The fear is that the beetle is set to become a bigger threat to ash than the dieback fungus.



What will we lose if the ash dies out? Firstly it would change the countryside and our biodiversity. Furthermore more than 1000 species are associated with ash including: 12 birds, 55 mammals, 78 vascular plants, 58 bryophytes, 68 fungi, 239 invertebrates and 548 lichen. Of these over a hundred species of lichens, fungi and insects are dependent upon the ash tree and are likely to decline or become extinct if we were to lose the ash tree. Ash seeds can form the majority of the diet for bullfinches.

Ash has been used in herbal medicine since the time of Hippocrates. Its leaves and bark have been used to treat rheumatism, inflammation, diarrhoea, dysentery, gout, gall stones and intestinal worms. Soluble glycosides from ash seeds and fruits can reduce blood glucose levels without significantly affecting insulin levels, so can be used to treat hypertension, obesity and diabetes.

So all in all the loss of the ash tree will have a significant effect on us, the countryside and our wildlife.

Alan Smethurst

Reserve Report Jan-May

January 1st is the day we bird listers wake up with a blank sheet and have to start 'ticking' all over again.

Our patch is Connah's Quay Reserve, Oakenholt marsh and Burton outer marsh (the Welsh bit).

It is still winter and we are keen to record our winter visitors before they leave for their spring breeding grounds.

The Reserve supported large numbers of Common Redshank, Lapwing, Curlew, Dunlin, Oyster Catcher, Shelduck, Teal and Widgeon. Star performers included regular sightings of Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Snipe and a Kingfisher. Particular mention must be made of the regular sightings of a large chunk of the UK population of Twite, a Reserve speciality.

The West hide also provided a good viewing platform to observe Oakenholt and Burton outer marshes. From here we saw and listed Short Eared Owls, Marsh Harriers, Hen Harriers, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Pink Footed Geese and Great White Egrets.

The Reserve has a huge advantage in that we observed sea birds on the Dee estuary at both high and low tide. Two hours before the high tide waders and wildfowl are pushed onto Oakenholt marsh. Such conditions provided entertainment in the form of masses of wheeling and swirling waders which included Common Redshank, Blacktailed Godwit, Knot and Dunlin in their hundreds. The waters also provided a platform for rafts of Northern Pintail, Teal and Widgeon with the supporting cast of Whooper, Mute and Bewick Swans.



*Little Auk photo by
Anthony Lovatt*

On the 10th January we were carrying out our monthly WeBs count when Sue spotted a bird that was outside our normal expectation. The sight of a **Little Auk** from the Middle hide sparked off a Twitch of local birders all keen to get a close look at this rare seafarer seeking refuge from 'battering' winds. The bird left the next day and hopefully made it back to its planned destination. A first sighting for the Reserve.

Other January records were Barnacled Geese, 23 Snipe, a flock of 60 Chaffinches, Grey and Golden Plover, 3 Hen Harriers, 2 Marsh Harriers and a Brent Goose.

On the 1st February a Greenland White fronted goose was picked out from among several hundred Pink footed Geese on Burton outer marsh. Other 'star performers' in February were a male Common Scoter, 3 female Scaup and a Slavonian Grebe spotted on the ebbing tide.

Pink Footed Geese numbers were 3000 plus forming a long line along the marsh just beyond the river line including 4 Brent Geese and our now occasional White Fronted Goose.

March into April is traditionally when we gradually say goodbye to our winter residents and say hello to our spring migrants, and so Whooper Swans, Pink Footed Geese, many waders and ducks returned to their breeding grounds.

However, spring is here and we had our first Chiffchaffs on 23rd March, Wheatears on 28th March but it was not until 9th April before we had our first Hirundines and we saw Sand Martins and Swallows hawking over the Ash pool. By the 10th April we had Chiffchaff calling around the Reserve and now joined by Willow Warblers.

Some of our winter birds are hanging on and 9 Twite and 200 Pintail were recorded on 10th April, and so by 15th April we had recorded 102 separate species on the patch including Common Redstart, Avocet and Little Ringed Plover.

With spring migration in full flow we will be keeping our eyes and ears open for signs of returning Whimbrel, Yellow Wagtails, Sandpipers, Whinchat, Common Terns, Swifts and Reed Warblers, and almost certainly another 'star performer'.

Sue and Peter Haslem (Bird recorders for DNS and WeBs count)

Field Trip

Elan Valley & Gigrin Farm: 19th March 2016

The drive along the Elan Valley is one of my favourites and whenever I visit Gigrin Farm at Rhayadr I always make the effort to detour along the A44 towards Aberystwyth then turn onto the B4343 at Devil's Bridge. This route doubles back across the moors, past Cwmystwyth and the Elan reservoirs to enter Rhayadr from the west. Today was no exception.

From Queensferry to Gigrin Farm via this route the road journey will cover a distance of 110 miles and, unless one is lucky enough to find the tea shop at Woodlands Caravan Park open, there are no public toilets until Gigrin Farm. With this in mind I had arranged for a "comfort break" at the Tesco superstore in Newtown. As it happened this was not required but is worth remembering for the future.

Taking the A470 from Caersws then the A44 from Llangurig we left the traffic behind and by the time we turned onto the B4343 for Devil's Bridge there was not another vehicle in sight.

Just beyond Devil's Bridge the road takes a very sharp left bend and doubles back onto the moors. Our stop for lunch was to be at The Arches picnic area, just three miles along this road. Until recently the area had been heavily wooded but the view has now opened up thanks to the harvesting of nearly one square kilometre of pine to the south west.

Although there was very little wind the air was cold, which made standing in the open to scour the land for avian life a little unpleasant. The occasional Red Kite could be seen above the hilltops but as we drove further east these numbers increased.

Driving slowly and keeping our eyes peeled a sudden movement in the grass at the roadside made us stop, huddled down against a tussock was a young Merlin. It stared back at us for a few minutes then took flight.



Arriving at Gigrin Farm we had a quick look around the shop, a hot drink then made our way to the hides to wait and watch. At 2pm the tractor arrives with the bucket full of offal which is liberally distributed across the field. The sky above by this time is alive with well over 300 Red Kites screaming and diving in anticipation of their daily feed. Even before the farmer has left the birds are swooping down to gracefully snatch a morsel then soar away to eat on the wing.



Trying to take photos is a challenge, the birds are everywhere and fast moving. The one way I have found successful is to set your camera on multi shutter release then pick a bird, stay with it and "pan" your shot. Or you could just take photos of the individual birds as they sit in the trees. The spectacle lasts for about thirty minutes and the Red Kites move away to roost. Now is the time for the Corvids and Buzzards to make an entrance. Within an hour the field is bare and all is quiet, except for the loud "peeow" of the farm's resident Peacock.

Leaving the farm we turn left onto the A44 towards Crossgates where we head the cars north onto the A483 in the direction of home.

Within that magical hour during the feeding frenzy I took over 400 photos, more than half will be deleted but the remainder will be catalogued as a reminder of the day.

Thank you to the members who decided to enjoy the day with me.

Ron Plummer

Field Meetings 2016

Saturday 11th June.

RSPB, Bempton Cliffs. Yorkshire's premier sea cliff bird colony.

Please bring RSPB membership card.

Meet at the Spar car park at 8.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968 438 121 for more details.

Saturday 3rd September.

Frodsham and the Weaver Bend. Migrants and waders on the settling pools and the Weaver Bend.

Meet at the Spar car park at 9.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968 438 121 for more details.

Saturday 3rd December.

RSPB Conwy reserve and estuary. Short days and pre Christmas blues ! Waders, wildfowl and more. Please bring RSPB membership card. Meet at the Spar car park at 9.00am. Contact Bob Must 07712 713 397 for more details.

Bill Dickinson

Indoor Meetings 2016

Friday 16th September.

North Wales Police, Wildlife Protection & Rural Crime Team.

The work of the team including badger digging, bat disturbance, damage to SSSI's etc.

Friday 21st October.

Mandy Cartwright, Wepre Park Ranger.

A talk on the work and wildlife of Wepre Park including specimens and exhibits.

NB this talk will be held at the new Field Centre in Wepre Park and not in the usual venue.

Friday 18th November.

Paul Furnborough, N.E. Wales Wildlife.

The life and times of the Great Crested Newt.

Friday 9th December.

AGM

Damien Brady

Group Activities

Why not consider joining one of the Society's group activities

Art Group:

Every second Thursday of the month at 2.00pm
Contact: Doreen Boswell on 01352 757309

Photographic Group:

Every 2nd Wednesday of the month at 2.00pm
Contact: Carl Boswell on 01352 757309

Wednesday Group:

Every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 1.00pm

All activities are held at the Field Studies Centre

Website

The password for the members area will change on the weekend 14th/15th May

User Name	dnsuser
Password	yfh6347

Web site: www.deenats.org.uk

Please note the website Email address is now: webeditor@deenats.org.uk