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Newsletter Issue No. 55 November 2021

Annual General Meeting In view of the continuing risks from the Covid pandemic, there will be no AGM again this year. The existing Committee and Office Holders have agreed to remain in post until it is possible to hold a meeting in the usual way.

The Committee held a meeting at the Viewpoint in May 2021 and an indoor meeting in September, the first since February 2020. Jeff Saycell, Sports Facilities & University Grounds Manager, was co-opted to the Committee at the September meeting.

As no newsletter was produced last year, this issue includes some information that would have otherwise appeared in the November 2020 newsletter.

Use of the Parc During the Pandemic It was clear from the increased wear on the paths that more people than usual were using the Parc for exercise and relaxation during the lockdowns. Unfortunately, the County Council's data loggers that record footfall at the entrances to PNP were out of commission and were not repaired until May this year so we do not have a record of the actual numbers using the Parc during this time.



Artist Brian Swaddling and an arrangement of Camellia petals on a fallen tree in the Parc. (Photos Len Kersley)

Many of those who walked in the Parc will have enjoyed coming across a succession of artistic displays made from natural materials that appeared alongside the paths through the woodland. Many were composed of petals and leaves and were the work of the artist Brian Swaddling. Others have created installations using rocks and stones.

Project Funding Grants of £800 and £840 were received from Aberystwyth Town Council in May 2020 and May 2021 respectively to carry out maintenance work in the Parc (see page 2). Two grants were also received from the Ceredigion Local Nature Partnership. The first, of £663, was given in response to a request for funds to install bird nest boxes and bat boxes in the Bryn y Mor Wood area of the Parc. The second, of £216, was given for a further set of nest boxes to replace old boxes in the main area of the reserve that were no longer in a usable condition.

The Support Group also received a total of £65 from individuals in memory of relations who had enjoyed using the Parc during their lifetime.

Bird and Bat Boxes The ten bird nest boxes and six bat boxes funded by the Ceredigion Local Nature Partnership grant were installed in the PNP extension at Bryn y Mor in early March 2021. All the boxes were constructed by Peter Drake and installed by him with a little help from a few (socially-distanced) members of the Committee.



Bat boxes (foreground) and bird nest boxes ready for installation in the Bryn y Mor woodland. (Photo Len Kersley)

The bat boxes are of an approved design and have been constructed from locally-sourced, rough sawn, untreated Douglas Fir timber. The bird boxes have been made with relatively large entrance holes in the hope of attracting pied flycatchers to nest in them. The boxes were positioned with different aspects and densities of cover to give prospective tenants a wide range of choice, though the later-arriving migrant pied flycatchers may find local tits already in residence.

Moira Convery has been given a map of the locations so that she and her volunteers will be able to add data from these bird boxes to the superb records about the main PNP woodland that she has kept for the British Trust for Ornithology for so many years.

Bird Nest Box Records for 2021 It was a poor year for birds using the nest boxes in the main area of the Parc. This is typical of reports from elsewhere in the country. The poor weather at the start of the year reduced tit numbers and those that survived were in poor condition, resulting in fewer nesting attempts and smaller clutches. Oak trees were late coming into leaf so there were fewer caterpillars available at hatching and many of the chicks starved. Of the 28 nest boxes in the main part of the Parc, three contained nests that were abandoned before any eggs were laid, eight nests failed and two were predated at the egg stage (possibly by a weasel). Only seven boxes fledged young; with a total of 15 chicks from three great tit nests and 18 from four blue tit nests.

The nest boxes were not inspected in 2020 because of Covid restrictions but comparing this year's results with those from 2019, the number of great tits fledged was similar in both years, whereas blue tits fared considerably better in 2019 and produced 39 young.

Although the new boxes for the Parc Extension were not installed until just before the start of this year's nesting season, two were occupied by blue tits. One nest fledged five chicks and the other a single chick. Also, for the first time in the Parc, wrens utilised one of the boxes and raised six chicks.

(With thanks to Moira Convery)

Work Days and Maintenance in PNP Peter Drake and students from the Aberystwyth University Conservation Volunteers (ACV) carried out a gorse burn in the Quarry in February 2020. The Covid lockdown then limited the work that could be done by volunteers but in the autumn Peter Drake, working alone and after lots of risk assessment forms had been approved by the Council, put in eight new handrail posts at Cae Melyn and repaired or replaced a total of 11 steps there and at Danycoed. This year's Town Council grant will fund three work days by Peter and five student

volunteers (ACV) (as approved by Ceredigion CC) on three Saturdays from October to December to repair the step treads above Danycoed and renew the revetment near the Mathur bench.

Although organised work parties were not allowed during lockdown, several hundred hours of maintenance work were done unofficially last winter by private individuals. The work included improvements at the Bryn Road entrance, footpath maintenance in many places and clearing brambles alongside the main path. The latter was rewarded by an excellent display of bluebells this spring. The bramble-bashing will need to be repeated this winter to ensure that we have another good display of bluebells next spring. In August, volunteers also completed the resurfacing of the footpath at the western edge the Parc from Bryn y Mor to Bryn Road. This involved removal of the mud that had made walking difficult in wet weather and barrowing in more than 20 tonnes of stone scalplings to create a new all-weather surface.



Left: Aberystwyth Conservation Volunteers taking part in the gorse burn in the Quarry in February 2020. (Photo David Kirby)



Right: The footpath below the cycle barrier at Bryn y Mor after resurfacing. (Photo Len Kersley)

New Seating In May, the Support Group received a request for a new bench between the University entrance by the glasshouses and the entrance to PNP for those who found this uphill section of path tiring. As such a bench would be on University land, the request was forwarded to Jeff Saycell at the University, who promptly arranged for a bench to be installed by University staff in early June.

During the summer, Glenys Tyler, the widow of Bruce Tyler, a founder member of the PNP, offered to contribute a seat in his memory. The bench seat on the main path, close to the Principal's Gate, is almost beyond repair and it was suggested that it could be replaced by this new seat in memory of Bruce. Permission was sought from Ceredigion County Council, who have agreed to the replacement. Glenys has commissioned local craftsman Rhodri Morice to build a seat of appropriate design using oak timber and this will be erected by Peter Drake in the coming months.

More generally, it has been suggested that all the benches in the Parc could be kept in better condition and would last much longer if they received regular applications of linseed oil or similar preservative. This was a task that could be done by volunteers from the Support Group.

Tree Survey A condition survey of some of the trees was undertaken by Paul Evans (Ceredigion County Council) in September/October 2021. Trees were surveyed alongside the path network in the Parc and also along some of the site boundaries. Ash trees are not widespread in the woodland and those close to the paths are mainly to the north of the site and between the Principal's Gate and Beech Glade. Most of these trees did not show any serious signs of ash dieback disease and

the majority were in the Class 2 health category. This refers to a canopy leaf cover in the range of 51 to 75% and with the trees in fair to good condition. The trees need to be monitored on an annual basis. The Tree Council is a good source of information on ash dieback: see

www.treecouncil.org.uk/Ash-Dieback

No known major issues were recorded on trees of other species except for the standing deadwood or poor canopy condition that was noted with a small number of mature Sycamore and Wild Cherry trees. This may be as a result of a combination of dry summer conditions and squirrel damage, which was evident on some Sycamores. Squirrels are known to have a preference for the bark of these trees during the growing season. The photograph (right) shows one of the largest Ash trees in the Parc, which Paul describes as “a notable tree of some character”.



One of the largest Ash trees in the Parc. (Photo Paul Evans)

Future Use of Cae Brynhyfryd (Horse Field) This field, which adjoins the Parc Extension, is no longer being grazed and possible future uses are being considered as part of a review of the Local Development Plan. Options include housing development, a renewable energy project or incorporation into PNP for nature conservation and recreation. The Support Group has written to the Chief Executive of Ceredigion County Council supporting this latter option. It is understood that Natural Resources Wales are also likely to favour this option. The review of the Local Development Plan is currently on hold.

Access for All The Support Group has been considering how to provide wheelchair access to the main path through the Parc along to the Beech Glade and to make it easier for people with pushchairs. Options include improving the access from Pentre Jane Morgan, past the farmhouse, or from Penglais Road, past the University glasshouses, both of which would be the responsibility of the University. An alternative would be construction of a path directly into PNP from the Club House at Aberystwyth Golf Club.

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The newsletter will be available bilingually on the GAG website at <http://www.aber-gag.org.uk/> and via the PNP Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ParcNaturPenglais)