



The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

North Ceredigion Group

Newsletter

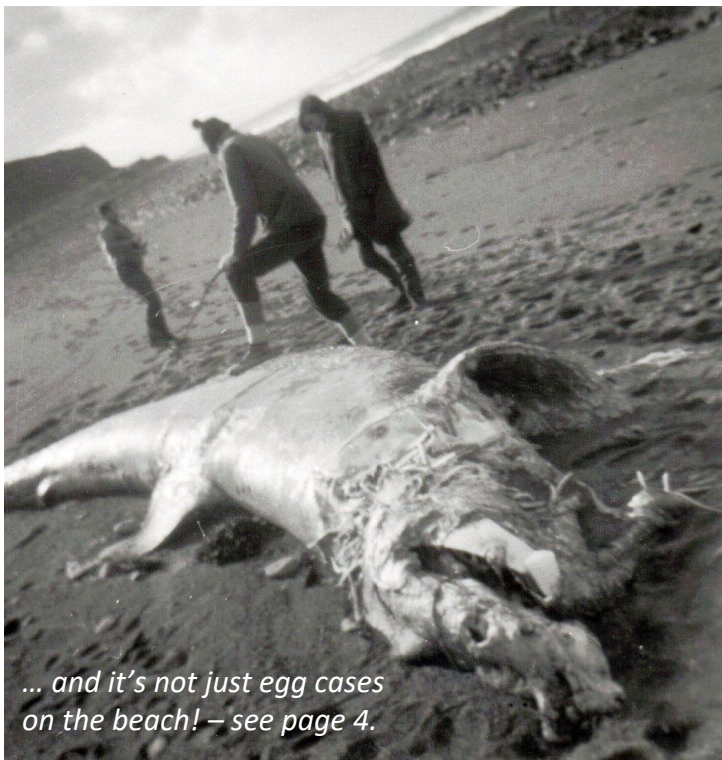
January 2018

1. Chairperson's Introduction

Happy New Year, I hope you were able to enjoy some wildlife spotting during the holiday period.

The resilience of nature is always something to marvel at. Following the devastating loss of grey seal pups on the Welsh islands by storm Brian, it was heartening to see a bumper year of the same species on the Norfolk coast at Christmas. Many of the breeding females there this year were tagged as abandoned pups that passed through a local rescue centre four years ago, following a tidal surge in the North Sea – what an encouragement to those volunteers.

Lizzie Wilberforce at our December meeting touched on the importance of long-term records and survey work, vital for monitoring the health of the environment. As a local Wildlife Trust group we have committed to collating and updating records of our local reserves. There are more details later in this newsletter (Item 5).



... and it's not just egg cases on the beach! – see page 4.

At the October meeting I took a poll of which of the Ceredigion reserves people had visited this year. Cwm Clettwr was top followed by Old Warren Hill and Penglanowen. Obviously, these are the closest to Aberystwyth but this year I intend to try and visit reserves further afield.

January is the month for the RSPB Garden Birdwatch. The value of citizen science should not be under-estimated, and I always enjoy the chance to learn and contribute to any studies I can fit in. For example, when I found egg cases on the beach strand line at the weekend, I could identify them and know which sharks are using Cardigan Bay as a nursery.

North Ceredigion Group – local contacts

Chairperson	Fiona Corke	01970 822078	fic5@aber.ac.uk
Secretary	Dave Purdon	01970 871012	dwp_taicanol@hotmail.com

2. North Ceredigion Group programme of meetings for winter 2018 (Ian Scott)

Indoor meetings are held in Theatre C22, Hugh Owen Building, Penglais Campus, Aberystwyth University:

Monday 5 February 2018, 7 pm. *Things that Slither and Crawl: Local Reptiles* by David Kirby (Local Member & Aberystwyth Resident).

Monday 5 March 2018, 7 pm. *Choughs in Wales* by Tony Cross (Mid-Wales Ringing Group).

No meeting in April as the lecture theatre is unavailable.

Monday 14 May 2018, 7 pm. AGM and Members Evening.

3. Aberystwyth Botanical Society meetings (Chloe Griffiths)

Please note that we now have some walks on Saturday as well as Sunday mornings, with either 10.00 or 10.30 starts – including some longer sessions needing a packed lunch, so do check the details of each walk individually.

For all the walks, please come prepared for whatever the weather may throw at us. You may want to bring a snack and a drink. Identification guides and a hand lens are always worth bringing if you have them, although members will always share with you. We encourage lift sharing, which is your own responsibility to make safe, and if you contact me with an offer of a lift, or a request for one, I will pass it on to our members. Children are welcome on most walks if under the care and attention of a responsible adult. Well-behaved dogs on leads are allowed at the discretion of the walk leader. For further details please get in touch via aberystwythbotanicalsociety@gmail.com.

Forthcoming field meetings are as follows:

- **Saturday 10 March**, 10 am – 2.30 pm (note longer session with break for lunch) *Mosses and Liverworts* with bryophyte expert Tom Ottley. Venue: to be confirmed. Bring a packed lunch. You will need a hand lens and field guide if possible.
- **Sunday 29 April**, 10 am *Following the New Aberystwyth Tree Trail* with Dafydd Fryer. Venue: meet at the new Skate Park opposite the Starling Cloud pub on Boulevard St Brieuç, Aberystwyth, SY23 3TL. This venue is a short walk from Aberystwyth train station and there are car parks at nearby supermarkets and on Boulevard St Brieuç.
- **Sunday 6 May**, 10 am *Exploring the Woodland Trust Site at Coed Geufron* with Adam Thorogood. Venue: Grid ref. SN601801. See the Woodland Trust website for directions and information about the site at <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/wood/5299/coed-geufron/>. Directions from the Parc y Llyn/Morrisons roundabout in Aberystwyth are to head uphill over the road bridge and take the first turn on your left into the estate. Continue up this road (Heol Tyn-y-fron) and eventually take the left-hand fork on to Gwel Afon. The woodland starts at the top of this road.
- **Saturday 9 June**, 10 am *Teifi Pools* with Andy Jones. Venue: Parking for 2-3 cars beside the minor road near Llyn Hir (Teifi Pools) SN791681 and for another few cars 150 m further on the roadside towards Llyn Egnant. The site has good populations of the internationally-rare Floating Water-plantain (*Luronium natans*) and Awlwort (*Subularia*

aquatica), the only submerged aquatic member of the cabbage family in Britain. There are also populations of the eccentric pteridophyte Common Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*) and perhaps its scarce relative Spring Quillwort (*I. echonospora*) - not to mention the possible hybrid *I. x hickeyi* - plus much else besides.

4. Group visit to the Cors Ian reserve in September. (Ruth Griffiths)

A group of seven people met at the entrance to the reserve at 10 am on a Sunday in September, making use of the excellent parking at the reserve. We were led on our walk by Em Foot of the Trust and Chloe Griffiths of the Botanical Society. The reserve covers just over 15 ha and is a mixture of marshland and drier, gorsey hillside. We spent over two hours walking through the area, stopping initially, at the entrance to look at the stable block which is being renovated. Em explained that the wooden structure was a nesting site for birds, such as swallows and tits and, hopefully, in the future will be a roosting site for bats.



A fungus gets its share of attention during the Cors Ian visit. (Photo Chloe Griffiths)

We then proceeded along the 'green lane', a designated footpath, which is a good area for three different types of fern. We then left the path and climbed up through an area of rough grassland and gorse (both Western and European) to the top of the hill. Here there are extensive views over the reserve and to the north of the county. Em pointed out that there had been an extensive gorse fire which had reduced the extent of the bushes. We returned downhill, past

the ruins of a small cottage, to reach the main marshland area of the reserve, dominated by *Molinia* and *Juncus*. We visited a small pond, one of several created by the Trust in 2006, and later moved to a larger pond, closer to the reserve entrance, which has a viewing platform.

Throughout the walk Em recorded the plants, insects, slugs and fungi that we had seen (helped by members of the group). Sadly, because of the time of year and lack of sunshine, not many flowers were out and there was not much insect activity. We did see some ragged robin, cinquefoil, marsh St. John's-wort and the ubiquitous ragwort! Species that were recorded for the first time at this reserve included parsley piert, branched bur-reed and also willow tit. It was a great morning out on a wonderful reserve.

5. What species are to be found on the Ceredigion reserves? Your chance to get involved.

People planning to visit our nature reserves often ask what species may be observed at the different locations but this information is often incomplete. There is a need for more regular surveys over a wide range of species that would contribute to a comprehensive database of the biodiversity present on each reserve. This would provide a valuable

resource for visitors and more importantly, in this period of rapid environmental change, would form a baseline to ascertain what is happening to the flora and fauna on the reserves.

Regular population surveys are currently undertaken for certain species such as dormice and marsh fritillary butterflies on particular reserves and in the past year we have also been trying to update the more general reserve records. Eight reserves have had bryophyte surveys; quadrat surveys were repeated at Caeau Llety Cybi; species lists were updated for Cwm Clettwr and Cors Ian; and a water vole survey was done by BASC at Llyn Eiddwen. Thank you to everyone who has helped with this. We have also commissioned invertebrate surveys for 2018 that will be funded from the Megan Jones Legacy.

However, there is always more that could be done and we would like to offer members a chance to get involved by carrying out surveys. Bird surveys would be a good starting point but offers for other animal or plant groups would also be welcome. Bird surveys would require the observer to walk around a chosen reserve on e.g. four occasions through the year, recording the species seen. Results would be submitted to our reserves officer Emily Foot who would enter them into a database that would be available on the Trust website.

If you would like to be involved, either with regular bird surveys or other types of survey, please contact Emily (e.foot@welshwildlife.org) indicating the group of animals or plants you wish to survey and your preferred reserve. A list of local reserves is available on the Wildlife Trust website (<https://www.welshwildlife.org/nature-reserves/information-on-ceredigion-nature-reserves/>). It is worth reminding members that whatever their reason for visiting any of the reserves, whether for a formal survey or casual stroll, Emily would be pleased to hear what you have seen; even those species that you may assume are too familiar to be worth reporting.

6. The Nature of our Village: Mermaid's purses, Portuguese Man o'War - and a basking shark! (Chloe Griffiths)

As many of you will know, mermaid's purses are the egg cases of sharks and rays, found washed up on our shores in great numbers after stormy weather. Each year our project runs regular strand line walks to collect them, often in somewhat challenging weather conditions! Tanybwllch beach has been very productive over the last couple of years and we have been able to find over 1500 nursehound egg cases, making it likely that this species is using Cardigan Bay as its nursery grounds. We share our data with the Shark Trust so that we can contribute to what is known nationally about this animal.

Whilst on the subject of sharks, we were amazed and delighted to receive a black and white photo from November 1969 of Tanybwllch beach, showing a stranded 6 metre long basking shark! The image (see page 1) was sent by Nigel Kelly, who was a student at the time, and he noted that he and his friends decided to name 'her' Matilda!

We have also been documenting the arrival, spread and decline of Portuguese Man o'War on Tanybwllch and nearby beaches. These fascinating creatures are not actually jellyfish, but siphonophores, colonial animals whose different parts (for stinging, eating, etc.) all work

together. They are more usually found in the warmer waters of the Indian Ocean and around Australia but it is thought that the combined effect of Storms Ophelia and Brian pushed them off course and right up on to the shores of west Wales. We made a peak count of 67 stranded individuals on Tanybwllch beach on 11 November but by 1 December only one desiccated individual remained.

If you would like to take part in any of our surveys, please get in touch via chloe.griffiths.ecology@gmail.com or <https://www.facebook.com/groups/829779180427287/>.

With thanks to our funders, The Nineveh Charitable Trust and D'Oyly Carte.

7. Penderi Cliffs Reserve (Fiona Corke)

There is an almost magical quality about this reserve on the coast between Aberystwyth and Llanrhystud. It is one for the reasonably agile, as it is accessed either from a public footpath which runs from a layby on the main road, or as a welcome diversion from the nearby coastal path. This section of the coastal path is favoured by choughs, those delightful red-beaked members of the corvid family.

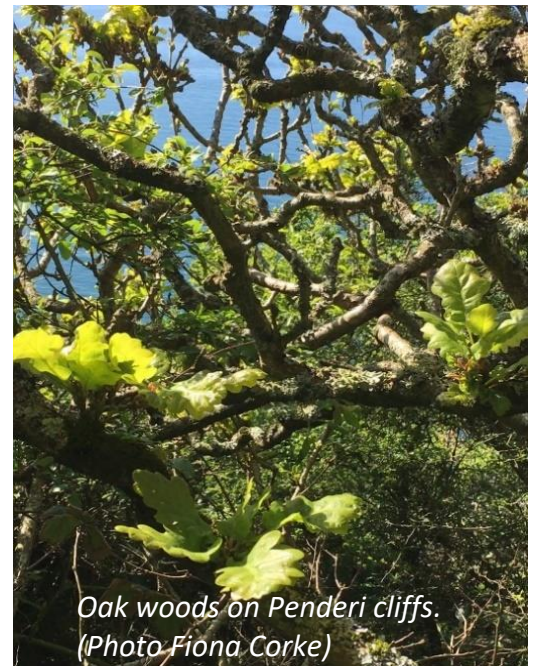
A stile over the wire fence leads down into the reserve, along a path through rough meadow with flowers including grass vetchling and ox-eye daisy. The high, steep west-facing cliff is the unlikely setting for a sessile oak woodland, which in spring is carpeted with woodland flowers including bluebells, dog's mercury, wood anemones, wood sorrel, red campion, violets and primroses. Due to the steep slope and prevailing westerly salt-laden winds the oak trees are severely dwarfed and contorted. Other trees include small-leaved lime, rowan, wych elm and spindle. The age of the oak trees is uncertain. It is really a woodland in miniature and well worth a visit.

A large colony of cormorants nest on a rock outcrop on the shore below, with their flask-like nests seemingly glued to the rocks. Other birds you can expect to see in the area of the reserve include peregrine, kestrel and smaller spring passerines such as whitethroat, wheatear, stonechat and linnet.

On returning to the coastal path the remains of a derelict building form a welcome place to sit and enjoy a flask of tea and absorb the sounds and sights of the natural world.

8. Emily Foot's update of work on the Ceredigion reserves

Since the end of the summer we've done a variety of jobs but it has included a lot of treepopping! The treepoppers have been used a lot on the willow at **Rhos Pil Bach** where we have mostly been removing stumps that have been cut before - more wrestling in the mud than popping! They have also been used at **Caeau Llety Cybi** to remove blackthorn



*Oak woods on Penderi cliffs.
(Photo Fiona Corke)*

from the meadow, at **Rhos Fullbrook, Rhos Glandenys** and **Coed Maidie B Goddard** to remove brambles, gorse and small trees. A group of volunteers from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust joined us for a muddy day of bramble removal at **Coed Maidie**.

We cut the rushes at **Rhos Glandenys**, the paths at **Penderi Cliffs**, the meadow at **Coed Maidie B Goddard**, the paths and glade at **Coed Penglanowen**, a couple of bramble patches in the bluebell areas at **Old Warren Hill** and the trackside brambles at **Rhos Pil Bach**.

The storms meant there were branches/trees to be cleared at **Rhos Glandenys, Coed Maidie, Cwm Clettwr** and **Rhos Fullbrook**. Tree contractors AMEY kindly gave us a hand at **Old Warren Hill** clearing a large hung up tree and a large trunk that had fallen on the fence.

Other jobs include mending gates at **Coed Maidie B Goddard** and **Coed Simdde Lwyd**; mending the information sign at **Old Warren Hill**; re-routing the stream at **Coed Penglanowen**, as well as digging a ditch to try and protect the path from flooding and deadwooding over the paths and road. The roadside trees at **Pant Da** had to be cut back and we had a joint work party at **Pengelli Forest** in Pembrokeshire cutting the holly that is taking over the understorey.

In September we did our annual marsh fritillary larval web surveys on our rhos pasture reserves: **Rhos Pil Bach, Rhos Glyn yr Helyg** and **Rhos Fullbrook**. Unfortunately it was not good news at **Fullbrook** or **Pil Bach** but numbers were good at **Glyn yr Helyg** and webs are still found across the whole reserve.

As a Christmas treat(!) we did some tree cutting at **Cwm Clettwr**, halo thinning the dense birch and willow around heather, oak, rowan and hazel trees. We also cut down some more western hemlock. We have continued our dormouse monitoring at **Cwm Clettwr** throughout 2017. They seemed to have had a pretty successful year, spreading further and using some of the new boxes put up last winter (as are the birds).

NB Dormice are protected and it is illegal to disturb them so please do not open any of the boxes. We have a licence to do so and results are submitted to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme.

Volunteer work parties are on Wednesdays and Thursdays. For more details, please contact Em on e.foot@welshwildlife.org or 07980 932 332.

Please bring suitable clothing, footwear & waterproofs that you do not mind getting dirty, work gloves if you have them and your lunch. Many of our reserves are very muddy and will require wellies. Hot drinks and biscuits will be provided for elevenses. Please notify Em beforehand if you intend to attend a workday so that she knows to inform you should there be last-minute changes of plan due to bad weather, etc.

Newsletter editor

Steve Cuttle (sputcutte@btinternet.com), with thanks to all contributors to this issue.

A note on data. *In order to be compliant with the GDPR (new legislation on data handling) we are letting you know that, if you have provided it, your email address is the only data that we hold on you, and it will only be used to contact you concerning matters of interest to the Wildlife Trust. You may ask us to delete your email address at any time.*