



NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2014

www.glamorganbirds.org.uk

Registered Charity 1129684

IN THIS EDITION

Page

Editorial notes	2
Recent sightings	3 - 4
Club news	4 - 5
Coity Wallia update	5
Reserve Spotlight - Taf Fechan	6
Trip reports	8 - 10
Kenfig walks/Indoor meetings	11
Cliff retires/ Book reviews	12
Confusing species - Scoters	13
BTO news	14 - 17
Future events/Contacts	18



Black Redstart at Dunraven © Paul Roberts

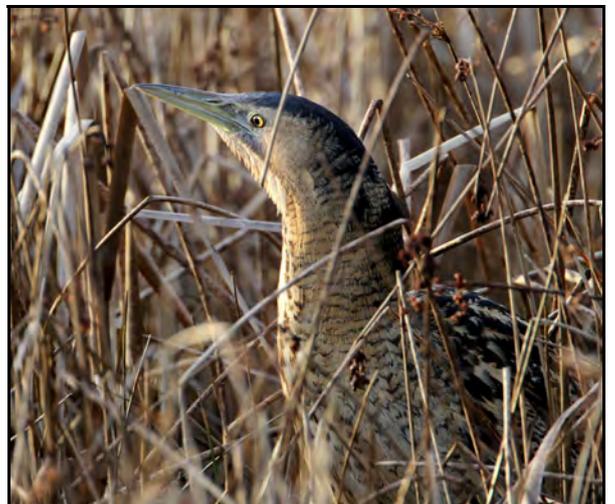


Turtle Dove at Cosmeston © John Wilson

SUBMISSION DEADLINE for the next newsletter is **Saturday 22nd March**



Long-billed Dowitcher at Rhaslas Pond © Paul Roberts



Bittern at Parc Slip © Jeff Slocombe

EDITORIAL NOTES

Happy New Year.

Winter has crept up on us. The leaves have fallen from the trees and the summer migrants are long gone. Now the winter visitors are making the most of our “mild” climate. Have you noticed the lack of winter thrushes this year? There are plenty of berries in the hedgerows — perhaps the continent has plenty of berries too. The BTO are currently running a winter thrush survey. If you would like to take part, give Wayne Morris or Daniel Jenkins-Jones a call and I’m sure they’ll be glad to accommodate you. (contact details at the end of BTO News).

I hope you’ve now received your 2012 Bird Report. John Wilson and the editorial team have once again spent hundreds of hours of work putting it together. The quality seems to get better and better. It is from your records that the Report is compiled. I think you know where I’m heading. Have you submitted your 2013 records yet? If you don’t usually submit records, why not start in 2014? Details on how to do it are included on the club website. (There is a “Records” tab at the top of the home page). Any record is valuable but particularly we would like breeding records. (The BTO Atlas use a three tier system - *Possible*, where a bird is seen in suitable habitat/singing/displaying, *Probable*, where birds are visiting a potential nest site, and *Confirmed*, where food is carried to a nest or fledglings are observed). Also don’t forget that we are always seeking good quality photographs, taken in Eastern Glamorgan, for the Report. Richard Smith is the photo editor. I’m sure he’ll advise on the size of image required etc.

Back in November, the BTO Bird Atlas 2007- 11 landed on my door mat (a very weighty tome). The result of four years survey work, it is a really impressive tome. 40,000 volunteers submitted records for the Atlas, this being perhaps one of the largest citizen science projects ever undertaken. Coming in at 780 pages, it provides masses of information about the state of both breeding and wintering birds in Britain and Ireland. It doesn’t always make easy reading, illustrating as it does, the contraction in range of certain species, such as Corn Buntings and Turtle Doves. This is starkly presented in map form. On the plus side however the spread of recent colonists, such as the Little Egrets, is also detailed. It is quite expensive (I got mine at the pre-publication price). If you can’t afford one, I’m sure that your local library would be able to get hold of a copy. (Perhaps it might be worth getting a copy for the GBC Library).

As our thoughts turn to spring, it’s time to think about cleaning out old bird boxes and erecting new ones. Thanks to a kind donation from Christian Pedersen of Topstak (suppliers of wood burning stoves etc., based in Cowbridge), we now have some timber to make boxes for schools etc. If you know of any schools, guide/scout groups and the like that would like to receive or make some boxes, please get in touch. Adrian Murch will be organising a bird-box making session at Kenfig in the near future. Keep your eyes on the club website, facebook or twitter for details.

Another firm that has helped the club recently is Copyprint of Treforest. Nick and his team print all our newsletters, as well as the annual Bird Report. I wasn’t in a position to post the Bird Report, however Copyprint stepped into the breach and completed the task for me. Thanks, Nick.

Alan Rosney

RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS

October 2013

Highlights: A Long-billed Dowitcher was a great find at Rhaslas Pond (8th-14th). The drake Lesser Scaup remained at Cardiff Bay. A Turtle Dove was at a private site in the Vale of Glamorgan. A Bearded Tit was found at Cosmeston. Snow Buntings were noted at Rumney Great Wharf (2) and Ogmore-by-Sea. Velvet Scoters were observed off Porthcawl and Rumney Great Wharf.

Kenfig: Most of the interest centred on the pool area, where Bittern (2), Red-breasted Merganser, Little Gull, Little Stint and Firecrest were all recorded.

Other Sites: Little Egrets were present on the River Taff in Cardiff, Radyr Floodplain and Ogmore Estuary. The autumn's first Brent Goose was at Aberthaw. Three Pintails, a Short-eared Owl and a Merlin were at Rhaslas Pond, with additional Merlins at Cwm Nash and Ogmore-by-Sea. A Hobby was seen at Pentrebach. A Little Stint turned up on a puddle at Cardiff Bay, a Green Sandpiper was at Llanishen Reservoir and Jack Snipe were observed at several sites, maximum three at Llanilid. The much heralded storm failed to materialise, although a few Arctic and Great Skuas were blown in at the time. Cardiff Bay held three Yellow-legged Gulls and a Little Gull. A Black Redstart was in a Porthcawl garden. A Cetti's Warbler at Parc Slip was the first site record. Firecrests graced Dunraven and Mynydd Bach, Nantyffyllon. Nine Choughs at Southerndown included the two resident colour-ringed individuals. Passage Crossbills were reported from several sites, most notably 22 over Merthyr Mawr Warren.

November 2013

Highlights: Noteworthy sightings from Kenfig comprised Richard's Pipit (over Sker, 13th), Snow Bunting, Siberian Chiffchaff, three Bitterns, two Slavonian Grebes and a Little Gull. Further Bitterns were found at Lamby Lake and Parc Slip. The Lesser Scaup returned to Cardiff Bay, with at least three Bearded Tits at the wetland reserve. Another Bearded Tit was at Cosmeston, where a Turtle Dove lingered. Reports of Cirl Bunting and Hoopoe came from Flatholm. Two Leach's Petrels were blown in at the mouth of the Ogmore Estuary and a Water Pipit was noted further upstream. A Barnacle Goose turned up with a small group of Brents at Aberthaw. A Woodlark was in fields at Lavernock. Great Grey Shrikes were found at Garwnant and Llanbradach. Bridgend and Llantrisant gardens hosted Yellow-browed Warblers. Up to 10 Hawfinches were at the traditional Fforestganol area, but one at Lisvane Reservoir was more unexpected.

Other Sites: Late records of summer visitors related to Swallow at Rumney Great Wharf, House Martin at Penarth, Wheatear at Nash Point and Ring Ouzel at Parc Slip. Little Egrets included three at Ogmore estuary and 10 at St Mellons, where a Hen Harrier was also seen. A Ruff was observed at Rumney Great Wharf. Green Sandpiper and Yellow-legged Gull occurred at Lisvane Reservoir. The expected late autumn passage of Woodpigeons saw an impressive movement of 90,000 in three hours over Canton and Leckwith (10th). A Willow Tit was at Tir Founder. Black Redstarts were located at Cardiff Bay, Splott, Nash Point and Dunraven.

December 2013

Highlights: The Lesser Scaup frequented both Cardiff Bay and Cosmeston, where a probable Ring-necked Duck was also briefly present. Bitterns were recorded at Kenfig (2+), Hendre Lake and Parc Slip. An Iceland Gull was at Lamby Tip, Cardiff. Ogmere Estuary held two Water Pipits. Bearded Tits lingered at Cardiff Bay and Cosmeston. A Siberian Chiffchaff - along with up to 10 of its commoner cousins - was at Kenfig Pool. A Great Northern Diver was on Llwyn-on Reservoir, while a Great Grey Shrike was in the nearby forestry clearfell. A Snow Bunting turned up at Newton Burrows.

Other Sites: Two Shags arrived at Ogmere-by-Sea. Little Egrets included 26 (coming to roost) at Hendre Lake, four at Ogmere Estuary and two at Rumney Great Wharf. A Barnacle Goose of unknown origin toured Ogmere Estuary, Cosmeston and Lisvane Reservoir. A notable count of 206 Mallards was made at Kenfig Pool. Hen Harriers comprised three at Llanilid and two at Cefn Hirgoed, although there could have been interchange between the sites. Green Sandpipers were at Hendre Lake and Ogmere Estuary. Three Jack Snipe were found at St George's, Vale of Glamorgan. Uncommon larids were made up of Yellow-legged Gulls at Cosmeston and Lisvane Reservoir, Little Gull at Gileston and Kittiwake at Ogmere Estuary. At least seven Short-eared Owls graced Rumney Great Wharf, with another two at Cefn Hirgoed. Away from their Kenfig stronghold, Cetti's Warblers were at Parc Slip and Cosmeston. A Willow Tit remained at Cardiff Bay. Hawfinches were regularly sighted at Fforest Ganol, with at least 12 present.

Paul Roberts

CLUB NEWS

Members' News

We have only one new member this time around - Gary Light from Pencoed. Welcome Gary. Disturbingly membership is some 10% down on previous years. Why? Is it the economic situation? Is the club not serving the bird watching community of the area? With the growth of the internet is the membership of clubs and societies declining in general?

Following a request from several members to publish the annual programme slightly earlier (to allow them to book days off etc.) John Wilson has decided to post the 2014 - 5 programme on the website. All members will of course still receive the card or e-version in spring as usual.

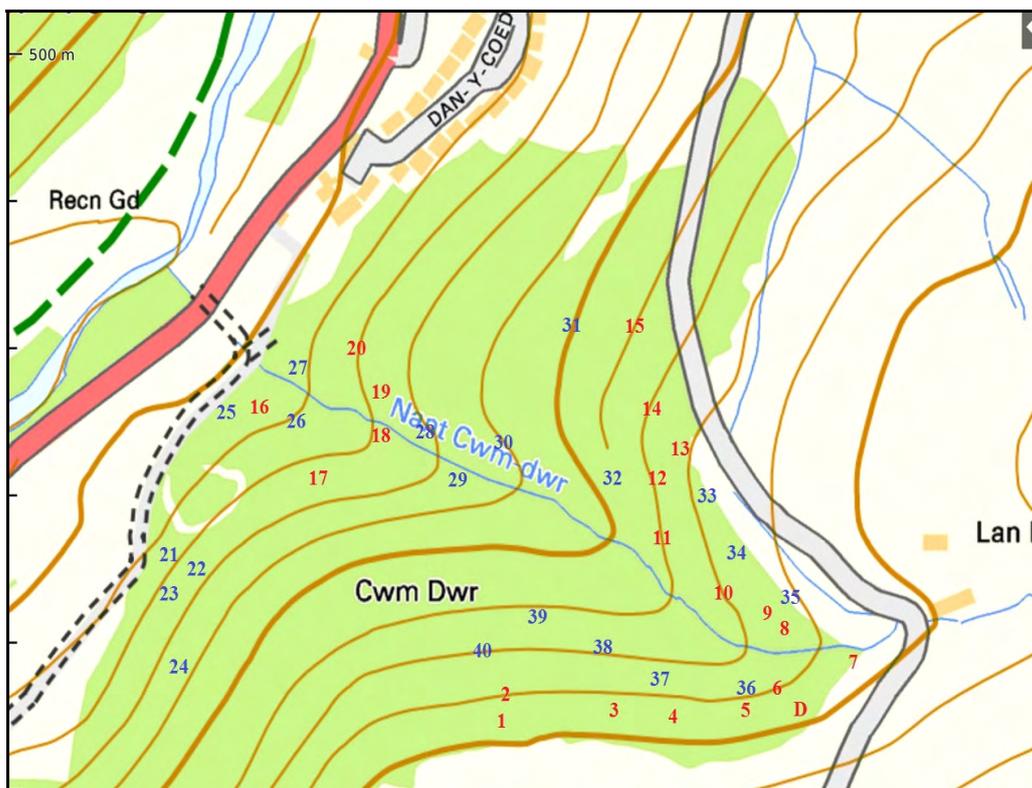
Committee News

- John Wilson and the team have once more put a lot of hard work in to the production of the Bird Report. It was delivered to the printers in mid-November, however there were some issues with stapling. In the end we had to opt for gluing the pages. Many thanks to Copyprint on Treforest Industrial Estate for printing the report and also for organising its posting. Apart from giving a free copy to all members, reports are provided to each of the County Ecologists in our recording area, the BTO, RSPB and the Natural History Museum. We are also legally obliged to send five copies to the National Libraries etc.
- The publication of the BTO Atlas prompted us to reconvene the local Atlas sub-committee. (More news on this in a later issue).

- Anne Wilson has at last completed the transfer of funds to the higher interest bond.
- Adrian Murch has ordered the seed for the Farmland Bird Project at Ty'-n-y-Caeau Farm and the ringers are back in action at the site

COITY WALLIA UPDATE

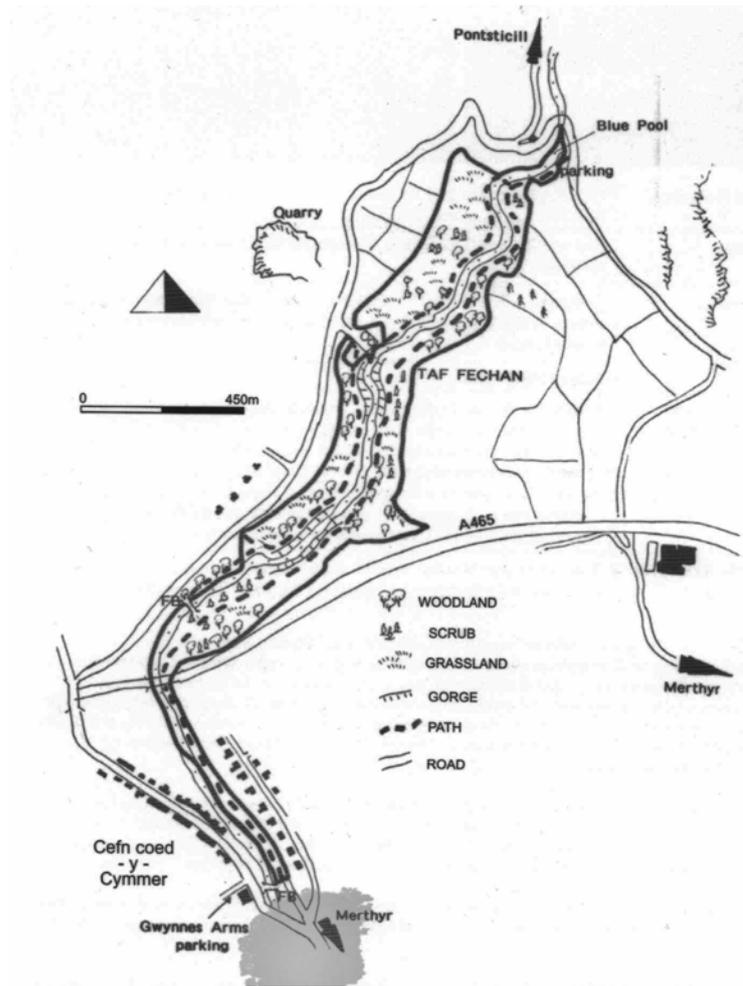
The remainder of the Coity Wallia bird box order was completed in October. Five volunteers (Adrian Murch, Howard Driver, Marlay John, Rod Haslam and myself) built 20 more boxes, complete with metal fronts (that is 40 in total). A work party consisting of Paul Roberts, John Wilson, Emma Douglas and myself (plus another chap whose name I didn't catch) erected them in Allt-y-Rhiw woods, Blackmill in mid November. Each box has been numbered and GPS co-ordinates recorded. We blocked up 20 of the boxes with sticks to give later nesting species a chance of using the boxes. The hope is that Pied Flycatchers will re-establish themselves here as they used to breed in these woods. It is great news that Emma has managed to recruit a local bird ringer to monitor the site. The following map shows the position of the boxes.



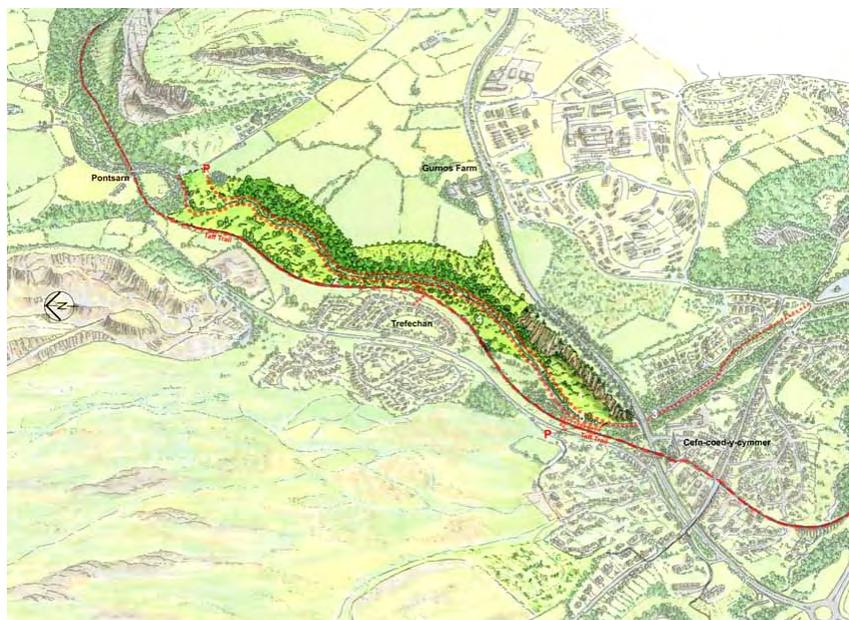
Paul Roberts was the chief scribe on the day. To map the location of the boxes he used an app call "GridpointGB" (only on iphone I believe) which enabled him to pin-point all the nest box locations. I own an android device and have recently downloaded a version called "Grid Reference - British Isles" which gives the grid square, a 10 figure grid reference for your location, plus accurate latitude and longitude figures. It will also toggle between maps and satellite images. This should prove valuable when submitting my records in future.

Alan Rosney

RESERVE SPOTLIGHT - TAF FECHAN



Note : The map is taken from the WTSWW Handbook of Nature Reserves. It is however slightly out of date. For example the reserve boundary is erroneously marked as including the leat and tramroad and parking is indicated at the old pub at the bottom of Cefn High Street which is somebody's front garden and definitely not a good place to park.



Taf Fechan WTSWW Nature Reserve sits in a dramatic glacial valley north of Merthyr Tydfil, stretching from the industrial relics of the great Cyfarthfa Ironworks to the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

A circular walk through the reserve (4km) will take you up the east bank across a rich wildflower meadow enclosed by towering limestone cliffs, through a deep-cut river gorge with mature woodland pasture and dripping, bryophyte covered rock exposures. Travelling back down the west bank you will pass through a shady coppice (a sea of bluebells and wood anemone in spring), a sunny bank of heath with spectacular views over the valley, and past a ruined fuller's mill (pandy). At the southern end of the reserve a scheduled ancient monument tramway and leat links the reserve to Cyfarthfa Park and the remains of the huge blast furnaces, and to the north of the reserve the elegant Pontsarn Viaduct marks the start of the Brecon Beacons National Park, overlooked by the ruins of Morlais Castle on its roman hill fort. Apart from the beautiful scenery and considerable historical interest, the reserve has plenty to interest the bird watcher or general wildlife lover.

Dippers and Grey wagtail are numerous along the fast flowing rocky river, and Kingfisher, Grey Heron and Goosander are often sighted, taking advantage of the fish population that this healthy river supports. Brown trout spawn on the Taf Fechan, and in 2013 the South East Wales River's Trust installed a fish pass allowing Atlantic salmon to travel into the nature reserve, and beyond, for the first time in decades. Next autumn you may be treated to the sight of salmon leaping up the many natural weirs and cascades along Taf Fechan Nature Reserve's stretch of river.

The nature reserve's impressive crag of limestone quarry has plentiful cracks and entrances, and has become heavily vegetated over the years of disuse, providing roosting opportunities for a variety of bats and corvids. Various birds of prey can be observed hunting on the reserve and Taf Fechan volunteer group were "treated" to the sight of a Woodcock carcass being feasted upon by a Peregrine Falcon on the reserve's heathland. Sand Martins are nesting nearby and hawk insects over the waterways..

In the spring of 2012 a pair of Pied Flycatcher were seen tending a nest in Taf Fechan's sloping banks of woodland pasture below Gurnos Farm. The pair were using a nestbox put up by WTSWW to attract this very species to the reserve, since it had not been recorded there since 1969, despite the abundant suitable habitat. One of the reasons for this long gap in Pied Flycatcher sightings is their rarity, but another is the history of low levels of biodiversity recording in the area.

Thanks to a 3-year grant from Biffa Award, Taf Fechan Nature reserve is getting a lot more attention recently. Community engagement, habitat management, and access works are being carried out, as well as an increase in survey efforts by volunteers and students. Interesting finds in 2013 have included several larvae of the Starwort moth, a primarily coastal species recorded only once before in the vice county, found on Goldenrod by volunteers creating a reptile hibernacula. There are surely many more gems like this to discover on the reserve, so come along and see what you can find!



Artwork © Bronwen Thomas

*Carys Solman
Wildlife Trust Officer
Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales*

TRIP REPORTS

Cwm Nash – Thursday 10th October 2013

Ten participants set off from the field car park down the lane that leads to the Cwm. The wooded part of the valley was pretty quiet and the only bird of any real interest was a Tree-creeper. At the bottom where it opens out with banks of bracken and scrub either side, some patient scanning revealed lots of Chiffchaffs actively feeding, a female Reed Bunting, Linnet, a Blackcap, Great Spotted Woodpecker, a few Goldfinches and a Sparrowhawk, which flew across the top of the valley plus a lone Buzzard. A Rock Pipit was at the mouth of the stream by the beach. On the west cliff coast path the sunflower field and a mown grass field held around 40 Meadow Pipits, 20 Sky Larks around 100 Goldfinches. In addition there were 4 Stonechat, 4 Wheatear, and then to top it all, two Merlins appeared, one carrying prey inland and the other flying east along the coast. Also on the cliff top we had 4 Small Copper butterflies. Returning to the lower Cwm we scanned again and added some common birds including several Robins, Wren, and Dunnock, and also a number of Red Admirals. We dipped on Chough but Edna & Len Murley dropped in to Dunraven on their way back west and saw them there.

Dale & Marloes – Sunday 20th October 2013

Only eight for this trip – possibly due to the poor forecast, which as it happens didn't materialise, although it was very windy but more importantly the sun was out and the promised rain didn't arrive until late afternoon. The nice circular walk at Dale, by the Gann Estuary was pretty productive. The tide was in but falling as we walked around. Waders were the main attraction with 100+ Curlew, many Oystercatchers, 5 Ringed Plovers, 3 fly-by Grey Plover, a couple of very distant high flyers, picked up by yours truly, eventually gave themselves up as Golden Plover. Four Bar-tailed Godwit also gave good views. A Shag and Cormorant sat on a shoreline rock, giving a good size comparison. On the shallow pools there were a good number of Teal, a couple of Little Grebe, and Mute Swan, and Howard Driver had a brief view of 2 Bitterns dropping in to the distant reeds. A flock of Wigeon were farther up the estuary. A Heron and a couple of Little Egrets were also noted. Some cover farther round the walk only held a Chiffchaff and a couple of Robins, although the very strong wind wasn't good for passerine watching. Back at the car park we were able to sit in the sunshine on the sea wall to have our picnic. We then headed off to Marloes Mere and walked round to the coast-side hide. It seemed pretty quiet with just a flock of Teal present and hundreds of Gulls on nearby

fields. However a group of fly-over corvids turned out to be Choughs and these obligingly fed on a grassy bank not far away. However a group of fly-over corvids turned out to be Choughs and these obligingly fed on a grassy bank not far away. The reason for much alarm amongst the gulls and Teal soon became evident in the form of a Merlin, which made a rapid pass across the field on the other side of the mere, perched briefly on a clod of earth and then vanished. However I picked up a very distant, high bird which I called as Swallow [believe it or not], but then it's flight soon revealed its true ID was the Merlin again, this time engaging in a spectacular aerial chase of a luckless Meadow Pipit, which went on for quite some time – a fabulous exhibition to end the day. And end it did as our subsequent attempt to start a walk at Wooltack Point marked the arrival of some very heavy rain, so we called it a day.

John Wilson

P.S. The Meadow Pipit that was being pursued by the Merlin wasn't unlucky. It escaped by dropping like a stone. Ed.

Bridgwater Bay - Sunday 10th November 2013

Whilst waiting for the participants to gather at the meeting point, we were treated to a notable overhead passage of Wood Pigeons and Redwings. There were only nine club members for this trip, a pity, as it was a glorious sunny winter's day, with the prospect of some good birding. Bridgwater Bay/Stear Point is being developed by Natural England as a major "new" reserve. We began with a walk along the coastal path down to the mouth of the River Parrett. The main waders seen here were Grey Plover, Curlew, Lapwing and Dunlin and they were joined on the shoreline by hundreds of Shelduck. A flock of Golden Plover flew over our heads, flashing white in the bright sunshine. In the river were plenty of Wigeon and Pintail plus a lone Goldeneye. A good sighting was a couple of pale-bellied Brent Geese that floated past on the ebbing tide. There was a great commotion caused by a raptor (possibly a Goshawk but we couldn't get on to it).

Next we walked up part of the Parrett Trail to overlook some of the "new" areas being created. A couple of Peregrines and a Buzzard were observed sitting on fence posts. There was also a group of nine Roe Deer here. We had been told there was a Long-tailed Duck on a pool near Combwich. We decided to try and see it. En route we stopped off for another scan of the shoreline as more mud was exposed. John Wilson picked out a group of Black-tailed Godwits and John Duffy got us on to a Merlin, that was patrolling the shoreline. In Combwich we found the Long-tailed Duck pool, but there was no sign of the bird (which had apparently re-located to Cheddar Reservoir). We were pleased to find a couple of Scaup there however. As dusk fell we met a chap, who had just seen a Short-eared Owl tussling with a Marsh Harrier. Unfortunately we couldn't locate either of them. Our day list was 50 species. The warm temperatures meant that Red Admiral butterflies and Common Darter dragonflies were on the wing. This area is undoubtedly going to be a fantastic reserve once all the ground works have been completed - it's well worth a visit.

Ogmore by sea - 24th November 2013

Fifteen club members gathered in the car park at Ogmore on a cold but dry morning. A surprise sighting was of five dark-bellied Brent Geese that were heading down channel. Amongst the gulls on the rocks was a cracking adult Mediterranean Gull, allowing comparison with the accompanying Black-headed Gulls. Other birds seen here were at least five Turnstones. We scoured the rocks for over-wintering Purple Sandpipers but the presence of numerous anglers meant we weren't in luck.

However just as we about to leave this area, Clive Ellis spotted one in one a rock pool (there were possibly two here).

Our next port of call was the Ogmore river. As we arrived a Goosander headed off downstream. Only three Goldeneye were present with several Teal, Gadwall and Mallard. The only waders here were Curlew and Redshank. Other sightings here included Grey Heron, Little Egret, Grey Wagtail, Raven and Buzzard. Unfortunately there was no sign of the Water Pipit that had been frequenting the Portobello area the week before.

In Pant Norton the only bird of note was Stonechat so we decided to go to Dunraven in search of the Black Redstart that had been seen there, stopping off en route to dip on Little Owl in the ruined barn near the Ogmore Centre. Alas there was no sign of the Black Redstart, possibly due to the proximity of a young male Kestrel that seemed to be following us around. In the walled garden there were plenty of Blackbirds feeding on the windfall apples. In the hedgerow was a roaming flock of Long-tailed, Coal, Blue and Great Tits, together with a couple of Goldcrests.

Exminster - Saturday 14th December 2013

It was a pity that there were only six participants for this trip. (perhaps it was the Christmas shopping or the unpromising weather forecast). We got off to a great start with a group of seven Cirl Buntings at Broadsands. With them were Reed Bunting, Chaffinch and Robin. A strange call alerted us to a Woodcock which gave good views as it flew away. On the sea were a Great Northern Diver, two Red Throated Divers and a flock of Common Scoter. John Wilson also got us all on to fly-by Razorbill. Also in the bay were several Gannets and Fulmars. (We met a guy who had been watching an Otter on the rocks just before we arrived).

Our next port of call was Dawlish. From the sea wall a Great Crested Grebe was seen just off-shore. The wind was picking up, making sea watching increasingly difficult but we did find a sizeable group of Common Scoter. A couple of fly-by divers were hard to ID but we did get on to four Guillemots. From the hide we were treated to good views of the wader flock with Oystercatcher, Sanderling, Grey Plover, Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Turnstone and Ringed Plover present. As five of us were concentrating on a Slavonian Grebe, Matthew Binding was scanning through the Brent Goose flock and picked up a cracking Black Brant amongst them. There was a rather distant group of Red-breasted Mergansers in the bay. Unfortunately we didn't find the Bonaparte's Gull that was in the area.

Our last port of call was Powderham Corner. Unfortunately the tide was extremely high with little mud exposed. I did manage to get on to a group of eight Avocet flying on the other side of the estuary however. Our last bird was a "good un" as John Wilson spotted a Long-tailed Duck flying upstream. The group total was 64 species. A great day's birding (and no rain!)



One of the Cirl Buntings at Broadsands, taken by John Duff; through the telescope with his smartphone.

Alan Rosney

Monthly bird walks for beginners at Kenfig

This takes place every third Saturday of the month and is aimed at those who wish to improve their basic knowledge of birds and their habitat. We begin at the visitors' centre at 9 o'clock and are usually out for three hours. Attendance is free and is open to all. Where we go depends on the weather and where the birds of interest are but the winter walks are usually centred on the pool area. This time of year warm clothing is advised and suitable footwear is required, either wellington boots or walking boots. In general the walks are carried out at a steady pace but the ground can be uneven and there are times when we are required to cross stiles. If you have binoculars please bring them but if you haven't, don't worry we can usually arrange to borrow some. October and November saw the change from autumn into winter but because of the mild weather the influx of wintering birds was slow and bird numbers were quite low. Gadwall, Teal and Pochard were seen. A flock of Golden Plover flew over the dunes. Passerines seen, besides the usual tits and finches, included Goldcrest, Mistle Thrush and a Cetti's Warbler but the highlight was a Kingfisher, which delighted everyone by perching close to the hide. The bird associated with Kenfig pool in the winter is the Bittern. Those who attended the November walk were delighted when one flew from the block of reeds in front the hide across the pool into west bay. In all, 38 species were seen in October with 36 species seen or heard in November. John Wilson led the December walk. 32 species were logged, the highlights being 5 Bullfinches, 10 Linnets and a couple of Mistle Thrushes. On the pool were a second winter Mediterranean Gull, a Common Gull, plus Redshank, Pintail, Wigeon and Gadwall. The attendees were treated to mince pies thanks to Jean. Why not spend a Saturday morning, birding, in pleasant company? You will be most welcome.

Adrian Murch

INDOOR MEETINGS

Tuesday November 5th - Florida - Paul Bowden

Paul was our guest speaker for the second of our indoor meetings. He treated us to an HD presentation of a trip to Florida in November 2011. He began with some stunning footage of an American Kestrel. Later followed some brilliant views of members of the heron family, including Tricoloured, Yellow-crowned Night, Great Blue, plus four species of egret - Reddish, Snowy, Cattle and Great White. The wading bird theme continued with great views of a flock of at least 200 Glossy Ibises. It was not all bird related however, Paul added photos of butterflies, dragonflies and a snake to boot. All the attendees appreciated the hard work that Paul had put in to prepare his talk. A big thank you to Paul - his presentations are always of exceptional quality.

Tuesday December 3rd - Video digiscoping - Mark Hipkin

Mark came to the meeting armed with several bits of kit, which he demonstrated to the audience. He began with an overview of digiscoping, describing how it has developed since its inception. He showed us some of the equipment that he has used to capture images and explained the pro and cons of various mounting brackets and attachments. Of course he entertained us with a series of video clips, mostly taken in his home patch of the Neath area. There were some stunning clips, especially of waders and seabirds. I especially enjoyed the shots of the Bairds' Sandpiper on West Angle beach. The advantage of video over stills was demonstrated with his film of a feeding frenzy in Oxwich Bay in 2012. You could appreciate both the number of birds and the various species involved. Many thanks to Mark for his presentation and congratulations on his appointment as the new Bird Recorder for West Glamorgan.

Alan Rosney

CLIFF RETIRES

News reached us recently that Cliff Woodhead, who has volunteered at Coed-y-Bedw WTSWW Reserve for over 25 years, has called it a day. Cliff has not only erected bird boxes but has regularly monitored them. Readers of the Bird Report will be well aware of his annual nest counts.

He began volunteering in 1985 after meeting the warden, Brian Stiles. His initial interest was the Pied Flycatcher, which then regularly nested in boxes in the reserve. He was present when David Attenborough planted a beech tree to commemorate the Wildlife Trust's purchase of Coed-y-Bedw from the Forestry Commission. He also aided Iolo Williams, who undertook some filming in the reserve.

There are over a hundred bird boxes on the reserve. Cliff has checked all of them fortnightly during the breeding season. You would often see him wandering around the reserve with a set of ladders. He would also block up some of the entrance holes early in spring to deter the resident tits from occupying all the boxes, thus giving migrants, such as Flycatchers the chance to nest. Sadly the Pied Flycatcher has suffered a marked decline, peaking at 20 pairs in 1989, reducing to 5 pairs in 2006, since when only 1 pair has bred. However Redstart nests have reached double figures, mainly in the Oaks on the adjoining hillside. The boxes have undoubtedly helped resident species such as Great Tit, Blue Tit and Nuthatch. He has also monitored other nesting birds such as Tawny Owl and Grey Wagtail. Cliff has recorded some real rarities in his time as warden, notably Golden Oriole and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The Cardiff Ringing Group has taken on the challenge of nest box monitoring. They've got a hard act to follow. Thanks Cliff, from all the bird-watching community.

Alan Rosney

BOOKS: TWO MINI REVIEWS

A Year on the Wing: Four Seasons in a Life with Birds by Tim Dee. First pub. 2013.
Deep Country: Five Years in the Welsh Hills by Neil Ansell. First pub. 2011.

Both are available second hand, in a variety of editions and at reasonable prices. Both have a similar structure, consolidating several years' experience into an annual, seasonal succession.

Dee's book is deliberately 'literary' and if you don't like verses and quotes from classic writers liberally sprinkled throughout your text, it's not for you. I found the patches of purple prose initially irritating but I decided to persevere. If you can stick with it, there is plenty of interesting observation and knowledge to be found. Some is gleaned from Dee's own international migrations, some from sources which range widely through time and geography.

Ansell's book could not be more of a stylistic contrast. The writing is straight-forward and easily digested but the impression it makes is as deep as the country it describes. Ansell spent 5 years in a remote part of mid-Wales in a dilapidated cottage with no electricity, deliberately turning his back on modern living and distancing himself from friends and family. The story sucks you in and the country and nature observation is superb. Like the best early naturalists and countrymen everywhere, Ansell learns about birds and animals from direct observation and shares it with his readers. Anyone with a feel for the rural parts of Wales will enjoy this.

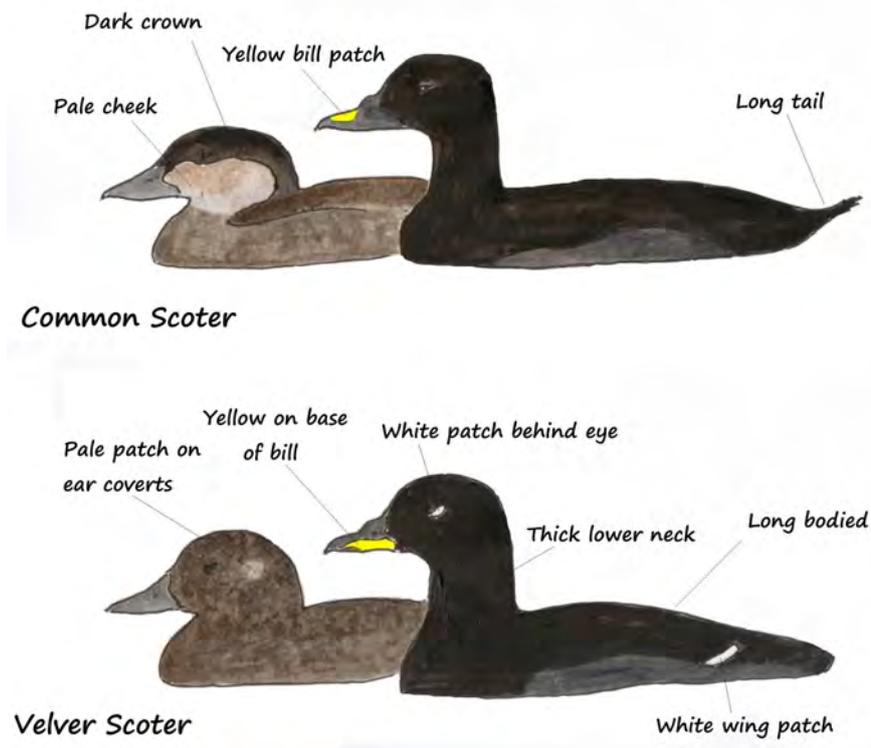
Paul Seligman

CONFUSION SPECIES – SCOTERS

Only two species of Scoter are likely to be encountered around our coasts – Common and Velvet. (Surf Scoter has occurred but is extremely rare). Scoters over-winter in Carmarthen Bay, often in large numbers. By far the majority are Commons but Velvets do occasionally turn up. Viewing is best by telescope and scanning can pay dividends, as flocks often dive together.

Males - In flight the males are quite easily distinguished. The white secondary feathers of the male Velvet stand out but Commons have pale primaries that can appear white, especially in bright light. On the water there are some differences that can separate the two. The white wing patch of the male Velvet can often be seen but is not always obvious. There is a small white patch behind the eye. First winter males do not have this however. The bill patterns are different. The amount of yellow can vary and the knob on the bill is often noticeable on the Common. The Velvet has a thicker neck but this feature is difficult to pick out, as both species tend to do a lot of neck stretching. The body shapes are different, the Velvet being larger and longer bodied. The tails of Commons are longer and more pointed. They also dive slightly differently, the Velvet seems to open its wings more on diving.

Females – The females of both species are grey-brown in colour. The female Common reminds me of a Ruddy Duck. They have dark caps and pale cheek patches. The Velvet female is different. The head pattern is quite variable but pale patches can often be observed on the ear coverts and the lores.



The best place to see them is on the coasts of Carmarthen Bay, however they do sometimes venture further east. They can often be observed on Gower coasts. Scanning from Worm's Head can be worthwhile. On a GBC trip last winter, we saw five Velvet Scoters in Bluepool, Broughton. (Late news - a Velvet and a Surf Scoter were seen in Rhossili Bay in late December 2013).

Alan Rosney

BTO NEWS



Looking Back Over 2013

Membership and participation in surveys continues to grow. We now have over 160 members and a further 644 volunteers who have contributed to BTO surveys over the years. BirdTrack in particular shows some impressive figures, with over 190 volunteers contributing over 150,000 records in our region since its inception, with a number of recorders submitting over 10,000 records each.

Winter

Our year began with the core period of the Winter Thrushes Survey in full swing. We were delighted that 40 core squares were covered with a further 30 squares monitored over the full survey period running from October to April. As the year closes, we are once again in the middle of this two-year survey, which has already revealed some interesting results about the key habitats and food sources used by our passage and wintering thrush species

WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) too has a strong winter element, though it continues all year round. We have a great team of WeBS counters in East Glamorgan. In 2013, a total of 35 of us counted waterbirds at 33 different sites which vary in size from reens and farm pools to Cardiff Bay and the Rhymney Estuary.

Two new sites were counted in 2013: Sully Island and Hendre Lake. Lamby Tip Pool, which was counted in 2012, can no longer be counted due to access issues.

We said farewell to some long standing counters who 'retired' from WeBS this year. Marie Makepeace counted Caerphilly Castle Moat for 14 years and Margaret Morgan who, along with Graham Duff who sadly passed away in 2011, counted the birds on Roath Park Lake for over 10 years. Clive Ellis who counted Parc Tredlerech (Lamby Lake) and, more recently, Cors Crychudd Reen and Lamby Tip Pool also stood down at the end of 2012. We're all indebted and grateful to Marie, Margaret, Graham and Clive for collecting so much data about the waterbirds at these sites.

We welcomed some new volunteers too, namely Richard Facey, Rob Thomas and Heather Galliford. It was also great to welcome back Neville Davies who re-joined the team in March, taking on Caerphilly Castle Moat – a WeBS site he once covered many years ago. I'm also delighted to say that Parc Slip NR is now counted regularly for WeBS thanks to John and Margaret Samuel who volunteered for the survey towards the end of 2012. 2014 is already off to a great start with Carys Solman volunteering to count Cyfarthfa Park Lake – the first time this site has ever been counted for WeBS.

Although WeBS is about monitoring the populations of our more regularly occurring waterbirds, it is always nice when the odd local scarcity turns up during your count – and there were plenty of highlights for our counters during 2013.

A pair of breeding Tufted Duck at Michaelstone-le-pit Salmon Leaps was a nice record of a rare breeding species in Glamorgan. Bitterns were seen at Cosmeston, Kenfig and Parc Slip and a Black-necked Grebe was seen at Kenfig during the January and February counts. There was a maximum count of 32 Common Snipe and 9 Jack Snipe at Llanishen Reservoir, where a Water Rail was also seen – the 1st record at this site since 1976!

Nearby, a Green Sandpiper at Lisvane Reservoir was the first ever WeBS record there. Up to 5 Purple Sandpiper were seen at Ogmores Estuary. Undoubtedly, the wader highlight of the WeBS year was the Long-billed Dowitcher at Rhaslas Pond. This site, under threat from development, is counted for WeBS by Mike Hogan. His regular visits there have proven that Rhaslas is a fantastic place for migrating waders.

Counting gulls and terns is optional for WeBS, nevertheless some counters are more than happy to record them. A Yellow-legged Gull appeared during one count at Cosmeston and there were Mediterranean Gulls recorded at both Kenfig Pool and Ogmores Estuary. The latter site also had 3 Sandwich Terns in April and the gull highlight of the year: a Bonaparte's Gull which was present during every WeBS count between January and April!

Breeding Season

During the breeding season, volunteers monitored 35 1km for BBS (Breeding Bird Survey) locally, and the survey enjoyed its best ever season across Wales. This upturn is vital given this survey's importance in informing a number of key conservation reports.

In a similar vein, the NRS (Nest Record Scheme) had its greatest uplift in participation across the UK in Wales, and we both enjoyed the season, which as many of you will recall started at least a couple of weeks late after the poor weather of the spring. The survey marks its 75th year in 2014, and there's sure to be some interesting news to mark the event.

The Wales Chat Survey concluded in the summer with its second season of surveying. BTO now have sufficient data to analyse.

Four 1km squares were allocated for Woodcock Survey, but perhaps unsurprisingly no Woodcocks were observed.

WOS Conference

The Gwent Ornithological Society played host to the year's Welsh Ornithological Society conference in November. A number of enjoyable and informative talks were delivered, many of which held BTO survey work as a central theme from establishing population size and movements of Hawfinches through ringing, nest recording Honey-buzzards to the long-term importance that long-term datasets delivered by amateur WeBS counters help the conservation cause in the Severn Estuary or the Greenland White-fronted Goose on the Dyfi.

BTO Annual Conference

A packed weekend at Swanwick offered a varied palate of talks and meetings, from a second helping of Honey-buzzards, through Buzzard success in Northern Ireland, Sand Martin monitoring at home and Senegal, seabird feeding patterns off the Scottish coast, monitoring House Sparrows and Reed Warblers.

The back-drop of course, was the yet to be fully digested results delivered by the recently published national Bird Atlas. This remarkable publication will undoubtedly set the tone for future survey work and research over the next decade.

Coming Up

National Nest Box Week

The annual National Nest Box Week runs from 14-21 February and aims to encourage everyone to put up nest boxes in their local area in order to promote and enhance biodiversity and conservation of our breeding birds and wildlife.

There is evidence that shows availability of natural nesting sites is limiting some species, so erecting a nest box is a great way to help, whether it is in your garden or elsewhere. Remember to always get permission from the landowner when erecting a box. Building a nest box is not difficult, so why not give it a go this year? It could be a great way if starting out with the Nest Recording Scheme.

Early Bird Survey

Winter is not an easy time for birds. They need extra energy to keep warm, especially during long winter nights. To cope with this, they lay down extra fat reserves, though small birds quite often only lay down enough for a single night. Longer nights not only affect the amount of energy a bird uses, they also reduce the amount of time that birds can feed in. Birds, therefore, have to make the most of the daylight hours to replenish their energy reserves before it gets dark.

The BTO Shortest Day Survey, run in association with BBC Radio 4, investigated the patterns behind birds arriving at garden bird feeders first thing on a winter's morning. Building on observations from the Shortest Day Survey, the Early Bird Survey will investigate what effect, if any, light and heat pollution have on the feeding patterns of birds during a cold winter's morning.

The survey will take place on 9 January 2014 (although to counter the effect of changing weather conditions, submissions from other days between the 6 and 12 January will be equally welcome) and requires people to get up just before dawn, watch their garden feeding stations and record what time they see the first 10 different species arriving; some additional information on the local environment will also be recorded.

Can you take part?

Information about all BTO surveys is available, <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys>. Finally, thanks to all GBC members who have contributed to BTO surveys past, present and we hope future! Good birding in 2014!

Wayne Morris
BTO Regional Representative in East Glamorgan
email: eastglambto@gmail.com

Daniel Jenkins-Jones
WeBS Local Organiser for East Glamorgan
email: eastglamwebs@gmail.com

<http://eastglambto.wordpress.com>

BTO Garden BirdWatch



Welcome to Bird Watch. I'm one of two volunteer Ambassadors for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch Scheme in South Wales.

Focus : Redwing

I'm writing this in November and today we had our first snow in Swansea (admittedly only a few flakes). Redwings are increasingly likely to visit our gardens during cold winters as hedgerows become stripped of autumn fruits and they struggle to find invertebrates in the frozen ground of rural fields. They can suffer high mortality rates during such cold and difficult conditions. Migrants from Iceland and Scandinavia, Redwings arrive into the UK in late October during the night. The birds we see in Wales are likely to be of Icelandic origin as these tend to winter further west. Redwings are often seen in flocks with other thrushes such as Song Thrush and Fieldfare, particularly in fields and open woodland. At night, several hundred may roost together in tall conifers calling to each other as they arrive; they quickly settle, however, unlike the much noisier Starling. Their call is a reedy 'tseep'. The Redwing is slightly smaller than a Song Thrush and can be recognised by the prominent white stripe above the eye and a less obvious one below the cheek. Despite its name, Redwings do not actually have red wings but rusty-red coloured flanks which are revealed as it beats its wings in flight, making identification fairly easy.

Did you know?

- The Redwing is the smallest of our European Thrushes.
- In just a few hours a flock of Redwings can strip a Cotoneaster of its berries.
- The Welsh name is Coch yr Adain.

How to attract them to your garden

Redwings tend only to venture into gardens during the coldest weather. They may be attracted by windfall apples or dried fruit. You may stand a greater chance of attracting them if you have trees or bushes with berries.

Conservation status: Amber due to their unfavourable conservation status in Europe.

Garden BirdWatch data show that the reporting rate of Redwing peaks in late December or early January and that they are more likely to use gardens during very cold weather. On average less than 10% of Garden Birdwatchers record this species but in the first few weeks of January 2010 this shot up to around 30% in Wales. This autumn has been a good one for berries, so perhaps natural food supplies will remain plentiful and I'll have to wait another year before we can record our first Redwing in our garden.

Make your garden count

If you enjoy watching birds and other creatures in your garden and want to help track their fortunes, then BTO Garden BirdWatch could be perfect for you. Please contact me for a free enquiry pack or to book a talk.

*Amanda Skull, Evenings and weekends only: 07952 758293 or 01792 891013
gbw@hiafi.co.uk www.bto.org/gbw Follow me on Twitter @amanda_skull*

FUTURE EVENTS

Field trips

Sunday 26th January	Whiteford Point
Thursday 6th February	Cardiff Bay & Cosmeston
Saturday 22nd February	Chew & Blagdon
Thursday 13th March	Forest of Dean*
Thursday 27th March	Kenfig & Sker
Sunday 13th April	Craig Cerrig Gleisiad

Contact John Wilson at least seven days before the due date. Departure times vary but John will be able to give information for each trip. These trips are suitable for birders of all levels.

* John Wilson isn't available for this one. Contact Adrian Murch if you are interested

Indoor meetings (note the change from the published programme)

Tuesday 7th January	Members' Own
Tuesday 4th February	Burma with John Wilson
Tuesday 4th March	ID night - rails and crakes
Tuesday 29th April	AGM & quiz

These are generally held on the first Tuesday of the month in the winter months - 7.45 p.m. in the Kenfig Nature Reserve's Visitor Centre. For details please contact Paul Denning, 01443 202607

Monthly walks - Kenfig NNR

These take place on the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Reserve Centre at 9 a.m. For details please contact David Carrington, 01656 743386

Monthly walks - Cosmeston Lakes and Lavernock Point

These take place on the second Saturday of each month. Meet in the car park at Cosmeston at 9.30 a.m. For details please contact John Wilson, 02920 339424

CONTACT DETAILS

* the @glamorganbirds e-mail addresses are not available at present - see the website for details

Chair	Secretary	Treasurer	Bird Report Editor/Field Trips
Adrian Murch 30, Lewis Avenue, Bridgend CF31 4JJ 01656 768155/0785156287	Martin Bailey-Wood 32, Lawrence Close, Bridgend CF31 1JY 01656 661169	Anne Wilson 122, Westbourne Road, Penarth VoG CF64 3HH 02920 339424	John Wilson 122, Westbourne Road, Penarth VoG CF64 3HH 02920 339424/07999801645
Membership Secretary/Newsletter	Indoor Meetings Organiser	Publicity Officer	Mapmate Hub
Alan Rosney 10, Parc-y-Nant, Nantgarw, RCT CF15 7TJ 01443841555/07906558489	Paul Denning 17, Maes Maelwg, Beddau, RCT CF38 2LD 01443 202607	Graham Powell 13, Clos Penglyn, Pencoed, Bridgend CF35 6NX 07414813853	David Carrington Kenfig National Nature Reserve Tonkenfig, Bridgend CF33 4PT 01656 743386
BTO Representative	BTO WeBS Organiser	Bird Recorder (East)/Chair of GRC	Bird Recorder (West)
Wayne Morris, 8, Hughes Street, Pen-y-Graig, RCT CF40 1LX 01443 430284 eastglambto@gmail.com	Daniel-Jenkins Jones 18, St. Margaret's Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 7AA 02920 621394 eastglamwebs@gmail.com	David Gilmore 116, Donald Street Cardiff CF24 4TN d.gilmore2@ntlworld.com	Rob Taylor 285, Llangyfelach Road, Brynhyfryd, Swansea SA5 9LB 01792 464780