



Gwent Wildlife Trust

Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gwent



WILD ABOUT GWENT

JANUARY 2011

The Return of the Sundew

Rebecca Price, GWT Wildlife Projects Officer

Henllys Bog is one of GWT's smallest but most precious nature reserves. It is smaller than a tennis court in size but it is a real gem of a place, supporting over 70 plant species, some of which are found in few other places in Gwent.

It also happens to be my favourite GWT reserve. When asked why, it is a little hard to explain – but there's something about this hidden away, boggy little place, oozing with special plants that does it for me! So it was a pleasure in July to join the 'Henllys Bog Brisk Bog Trot', led by botanist Dave Green as part of GWT's events programme, and see if the special charm of the site would rub off on the other attendees.

As anticipated the site's orchid stars were out and about and ready to impress, and there were plenty of other

plants to enjoy at virtually every step. But while we all wowed at the marsh helleborines and fragrant orchids, practised how to decipher our flea and star sedges, and caught glimpses of the delicate, creeping bog pimpernel, there was a rather rarer carnivore about to be rediscovered in the bog.

Henllys Bog is home to two of the UK's carnivorous plants. The first, common butterwort, has been regularly observed on part of the site. It produces bright purple flowers and bright yellowish-green leaves, which feature numerous glands that secrete a sticky fluid which attracts insects. It is known as butterwort because it was thought to have magical properties and the juices from the leaves were rubbed onto cows' udders in order to protect the milk (and resulting butter) from evil influences.



Round leaved sundew

The second, round-leaved sundew, has been 'missing' for the past few years, but during the bog trot it was with great excitement that a couple of plants were found (in their historical location on site) discreetly hanging out amidst the boggy vegetation.

Continued on back page

Wildlife on the Brook

Richard Bakere, GWT Reserves Officer



BAE Systems staff (Sue Smith)

This summer, Gwent Wildlife Trust and BAE Systems worked together to help the wildlife of the Berthin Brook, near Usk. This beautiful stream is truly a great wildlife corridor forming a snaking ribbon of alder, hawthorn, hazel and oak linking the small woods to the west of Usk.

BAE Systems has been a supporter of the Trust for several years and has staff who are very keen on supporting wildlife in the area. This June, a band of 18 keen volunteers from BAE Systems' Glascoed site, under the guidance of GWT, worked to help the wildlife on this beautiful brook.

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Chaffinch (Ray Armstrong)

Information on forthcoming changes to Natural World

The winter issue of *Natural World* will be the final issue of the magazine in its current format. From Spring 2011 onwards UK news and features will be included in *Welsh Wildlife*. This follows trials with two Wildlife Trusts over the past 18 months where members have been sent an 'integrated' magazine combining local and national news and features.

The UK content will continue to be produced by the team that make *Natural World*. Members will be able to read about The Wildlife Trusts' work and the issues that are facing the UK's wildlife as they do now in *Natural World* – with a few less pages and no advertisements within the *Natural World* section.

Across the movement, these changes will enable The Wildlife Trusts to make significant savings. As an organisation with an ecological mission, we must lead by example and take steps to minimise our impact on the natural environment. These changes will cut our eco-footprint, saving CO₂ and paper each year, as well as cutting down on the number of delivery miles and CO₂ emissions produced through deliveries to Trusts.

Habitat Creation and Hebrideans at Wyeswood

Annette Murray, GWT Wyeswood
Common Officer

I am happy to report that this summer saw the fruits of GWT's labours to restore habitat at Wyeswood Common. Over 7,500 trees (7,552 to be exact, but who's counting?) were planted earlier this year to create more woodland and connect fragmented copses and hedgerow networks. The trees are establishing very well and so far the deer fencing has done its job (touch wood!). More trees are due to be planted in November.

Although not readily noticeable to the public, several field corners at Wyeswood have been fenced off with the intention that they be allowed to scrub over. I anticipate the scrub will come in quite quickly and provide valuable habitat for birds and small mammals in particular.

I have been particularly pleased and surprised at the success of seed trials on the reserve. Following the success of seed sown in October 2008, a larger plot was sown in October 2009. It has resulted in an abundance of yellow rattle but other flowers recorded included common knapweed, eye-bright, ox-eye daisy and red clover. Finer grasses such as crested dog's tail have also been noted and we even found a common spotted orchid in the field margin (which I suspect colonised naturally). Further seed has been sown on other fields on the Reserve as a comparison and I can't wait for next summer to see the results!

Last but by no means least, the Trust's flock of Hebridean sheep have flourished very well on Wyeswood over the summer. The lambs have grown strong and we were pleased that weaning them went



Wyeswood flock – still woolly



Shearing in process...

smoothly without too much distress to mothers or youngsters – or GWT staff! The adult ewes were put to the ram again in October so we can start all over again. The flock has been moved up to Pentwyn Farm where it will graze until the spring.

GWT is reviewing its plans for grazing Wyeswood and hopes to invest in more livestock in the future in order to exercise greater control over grazing pressure on their reserves. We have sold the winter grazing at Wyeswood to a local organic farmer, winter, hence all the recent new fencing that we hope will keep our visitors in!

What on earth happened?





Speedwell found on site (Sue Smith)



Removing balsam strands (Sue Smith)



Otter holt building (Sue Smith)



BAE Systems presentation (Sue Smith)

Continued from page 1 article 2

One group worked with Annette Murray on the continuing control of the invasive Himalayan balsam. This alien plant, with its explosive seed distribution, spreads rapidly along water courses forming dense stands that out-compete native species. Over time, this removes the naturally occurring plants that normally carpet the shaded edges of the stream. By pulling or cutting the balsam before it sets seed, dense stands (over a few years) can be removed. This is best achieved as part of a large scale control program.

A second group, led by Rebecca Price, explored the wildlife along the stream. The plant communities mirror the change in light levels along the stream banks, from dense shade to small sunny glades and provide a mosaic of habitats for wildlife. This benefits everything from the caddis fly larvae living in their tubes of glued sand under rocks in the stream bed to the chicks of the great spotted woodpecker growing rapidly in the trunk of an old alder on the bank.

A third group of volunteers worked with Richard Bakere on building a refuge for otters. Otters use many different locations, called holts, to lay up as they feed around their territory. One holt might be used for breeding, but most will be used as a safe place for resting, possibly when sleeping off a good meal. Otters will take advantage of natural shelter, be it the lifted roots of a fallen tree or a cave on the shoreline. If there is a lack of natural features, they will use artificial holts. The holt built by the team was placed on the bank above the flood height of the stream and has three entrances, ensuring that any animals using it for shelter will have a safe exit if surprised by a rival.

The partnership between BAE Systems and GWT was celebrated as William Graham, Welsh Assembly Member, pictured here accepting BAE Systems' Three Year Anniversary Letter, written by Iolo Williams and presented by Amy Mulkern, WTW.



Japanese Knotweed at Dan-y-Graig

■ Invaders from the east: a battle on the Dan-y-Graig reserve

Richard Bakere, GWT Reserves Officer

There is a plant which has no natural predators which can survive the harshest conditions, and will re-grow from an inch-long fragment. Japanese Knotweed has spread throughout the UK, often accidentally transferred through small fragments in discarded building or garden waste. Unfortunately, it is present on a few of the Gwent Wildlife Trust reserves. We are working to eradicate the plant from these small areas before it spreads. At present, we are winning this battle. The first great result has been eliminating this plant from the Dan-y-Graig reserve near Risca.

The only effective control available is through targeted application of a systemic herbicide. This is applied to the foliage while the plant is growing, and will then kill off the whole plant and root system. Extreme care should be taken with these products. If you are struggling with this plant, try to avoid cutting it back as the cut material in itself may inadvertently spread the problem. For more information on this or other invasive plants, the Centre for Environmental Hydrology (CEH) provides some good information sheets. These are freely available on their website: www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/documents/JapaneseKnotweed.pdf.

Gwent Ecology

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Hedgehog (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

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WILDLIFE WATCH

Wildlife Watch leaders run a programme of activities for children aged between 6 and 14. For further details, contact your most local group leader.

Abergavenny:

Bryn Probert 07845 991356
bryn.probert@gmail.com

Magor (between Chepstow & Newport):

Nic Hutchinson 01291 421568
rcornock@aol.com

For more information on our work tasks and any volunteering, see the **GWT Yearbook 2011** or go to www.gwentwildlife.org.

Roger Finn a Living Legacy

Denis Jackson, GWT People and Wildlife Manager

Sometimes, when we get busy here, things slip through the cracks. It doesn't happen very often but we are (mostly) human and can all make mistakes from time to time. One of those mistakes was Roger Finn. No, that came out badly. One of the mistakes was not including something in WAG about the contribution that Roger, who retired in March 2010, made to Gwent Wildlife Trust. That was a serious omission, and I can only put it down to the results of the party we had when he left! No, that sounds bad too... you know what I mean.

Roger joined the Trust on 8th May 2000, initially in the post of Grants Administrator but he quickly rose through to the post of Assistant Chief Executive, a role in which excelled for many years. It is fair to say that without the commitment, energy and enthusiasm that Roger brought to his work, Gwent Wildlife Trust would be much less of a force for good in the county than it is today. Of all his wide-ranging skills and talents, perhaps his most important was acquiring money through the development of projects so attractive to grant-giving bodies, they would sometimes be falling over each other to help support our work. Roger's skills with creative grant fundraising are legendary across the wildlife trust movement.

Over the four years I have been with the Trust, Roger has been a great support to me personally, helping me to understand how charity management works (very different in some ways to my commercial management background) and keeping me motivated (sometimes with beer after work!) when something was particularly bogging me down. It has been a pleasure



Roger Finn

to work with Roger and it's a privilege to be able to count him as a friend. Even now, retired for nearly a year, Roger is still helping, as a volunteer, to bring money through grant fundraising into the Trust and despite the bodily ravages of age, he continues to get out to help the reserve working parties on a regular basis.

I hope you have an enjoyable retirement, Rog. What you put into GWT, well over and above the call of duty, has made a real impact that will be sustained for many, many years. Finally, something that often gets forgotten at times like this is the great women behind most great men. Roger's wife, Sue, has also been and continues to be a great supporter of the Trust – not least by tolerating all those evenings and weekends Roger regularly worked to get those funding bids in on time! I don't believe for a moment that Sue was really as pleased to have him out of the house as she used to say she was!

From me personally, from all at GWT, and on behalf of all the tens of thousands of people and all the wildlife across the county who have benefited from his work, thank you Roger and thank you Sue! See you for a pint soon I hope.

Severn Barrage Plans Shelved

Gemma Bodé, GWT Conservation Manager

Gwent Wildlife Trust has welcomed the decision by the Government to shelve plans for the £20bn Cardiff-Weston Barrage in the Severn Estuary.

The proposed ten mile Severn Barrage was the most expensive and environmentally-damaging of the tidal projects put forward for the purpose of harnessing the Estuary's energy. The Severn Estuary is an internationally important site for wildlife and were the Severn Barrage to go ahead it would have seriously threatened this unique ecosystem and all the wildlife associated, including numerous bird species and two genetically distinct species of fish; the allis and twait shad.

While the Wildlife Trusts support the development of marine renewable technology, it must be the right technology in the right place. The Government must strive for a truly sustainable option for harnessing the tidal power of the Severn Estuary with minimal environmental impact. With this recent decision we hope they have a come a step closer to achieving this.

Saying 'NO' to the Badger Cull

Gabi Horup, GWT Conservation Officer

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has been consulting on proposed legislation for a massive cull of badgers as part of a programme to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle in an Intensive Action Area in a defined part of west Wales. DEFRA is carrying out a similar consultation in England. This could result in a mass cull of badgers, in selected areas of England and Wales in 2011.

GWT fully supports the WAG in its undertaking to eradicate bTB. However, GWT rejects the WAG proposal to cull badgers. Why? The most up-to-date scientific research and the leading experts state that the cull will not work, and could make the situation worse.

The proposed Intensive Action Area in west Wales has highly permeable boundaries, with fragmented land ownership, which will reduce the effectiveness of the culling. The reduction in cattle herds with bTB is expected to be small, but the proposed cull will be very costly. The cull therefore

is not a cost effective solution as a control measure for combating bTB.

GWT acknowledges that bTB in cattle is a significant problem for farming in Wales, and that urgent action is required to combat the disease. The Wildlife Trusts, as stock owners and land managers, recognise the serious disruption and anxiety caused to farmers experiencing a herd breakdown. We particularly recognise the important role that the livestock industry can play in the environmentally-sensitive management of the countryside.

We believe that vaccination is a key tool in the eradication of bTB. We are very disappointed that, despite an increasing evidence base, the Minister is not proposing the use of vaccination.

For more information on why the science says that the badger cull will not work, see our website www.gwentwildlife.org/badgercull. For any further queries regarding the cull, please contact Gabi Horup on ghorup@gwentwildlife.org.

Badger (northeastwildlife.co.uk)



Promises Auction 2011

Denis Jackson, GWT People & Wildlife Manager

For those of you who are not on our eNewsletter list, we wanted to let you know about our exciting Promises Auction which we will be holding on Saturday 26th March 2011. It will be held in the Dingestow Village Hall, and ticket prices include dinner. Tickets will be on sale soon, but for now, we're asking if any one can donate any items that we could auction – it can be experiences, offers of help, expertise – anything legalish really. For more information, contact Gemma on gboode@gwentwildlife.org.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Hebridean lamb at Wyeswood (Annette Murray)

Gardening for Wildlife

Hilary Lee, GWT Member and Chepstow Local Group Volunteer

Fund-raising throughout the year by the Chepstow Local Group of GWT has resulted in the tremendous sum of £1,475 going towards the provision and monitoring of dormouse boxes as part of the Dormouse Project run by Jan Kinchington. Few people can resist the appeal of dormice! And it is such good news that the boxes are being well-used; it makes all our work worthwhile.

Most of the money raised by the Chepstow Group has come from plant sales held around the county; all plants are donated by well-wishers and enthusiastic gardeners, so all profits go directly to conservation work. We are already planning our plant sales for 2011, so please remember in the spring, any extra plants you can spare will be welcomed and put to good use. Ring Hilary on 01291 689326.

Volunteering for GWT

Val Jackson, GWT Volunteer Coordinator

Have you ever thought of giving some of your spare time for volunteering for us? You would be surprised at the range of activities that our volunteers get involved in – it is not all 'bracken-bashing' by any means!

We have an extensive range of roles that we need help with – to find out more, go to our website, www.gwentwildlife.org and click on the Volunteers tab. Then scroll down to the link 'latest list of volunteering opportunities' to look at the current Vacancies Bulletin. Of course, you could always give Val a ring (on 07807 318073) if you want to discuss any of the activities in more detail. Then, if you would like to register, just fill in the enrolment form (on the link 'How to be a volunteer') and return it to Val on vjackson@gwentwildlife.org.



Gwent Levellers at Magor Marsh
(Jane Smith-Haddon)

■ Gwent Levellers Volunteer Group

**Richard Bakere, GWT Reserves
Officer**

Deep in the undergrowth at Magor Marsh can be found a rare creature. Normally knee-deep in a ditch and half soaked with mud is a Gwent Leveller, one of a rare band of volunteers who work on the reserve every Wednesday. In the last two years this group has been instrumental in making a massive positive impact on the reserve.

The list of their achievements could fill the page. Let's focus on just one field; the Levellers started with clearing fallen trees from long forgotten fence lines, rebuilding new stock proof fencing, installing field gates, pollarding willows on the margins, clearing back some of the invading willow, and ended with shovelling tonnes of stone chippings into gateways.

This has allowed the reintroduction of stock to this field for the first time in many years. Two horses safely contained over the summer months could browse their way through the rich mixture of sedge, grass and herb species. This has allowed the field to develop the rich mosaic of habitats that make Magor Marsh such a special place. Next time you hear a rustling in the reed bed watch out for the Gwent Levellers... they don't bite.



Hard at work (Jane Haddon-Smith)

■ Gwent's Living Churchyards

**Rebecca Price, GWT Wildlife
Projects' Officer**

The churchyard – 'God's Acre' – is one of the most enduring features of our landscape. Over the centuries, many churchyards have become sanctuaries for the living as well as the dead, where an abundance and diversity of indigenous and naturalised wildlife can flourish. Taken together, Gwent's churchyards make a significant area of land that has survived untouched by wider agricultural changes and development pressures.

Over the past three years, Gwent's Living Churchyards project has worked with individuals, groups and Local Authorities to inspire and educate about our rich churchyard heritage. The project has been a fantastic way of engaging local people with local wildlife in both urban and rural situations. Balancing the needs and expectations of visitors with the needs of wildlife can sometimes be a challenge but, when achieved, can have immense rewards for both.

The project has attracted interest from over 75 churchyards and cemeteries and staff have worked most closely with the target of 25 sites. New data on the species and habitats of these churchyards have been collected and wildlife friendly care plans developed. In some churchyards this has meant identifying

appropriate areas for trial wildflower meadow areas or leaving uncut margins, whilst in others creating reptile refuges, rebuilding stone walls, or in one case, building a new compost bin to replace an old pile located beneath a fantastic veteran yew tree.

A diverse series of talks and training sessions has been delivered, attended by over 600 people. Highlights have included Fred Hageneder's talk on ancient yews at Bettws Newydd, hedgerow planting at St Peter's, Panside and the charismatic Ivan Pedley (British Lichen Society) inspiring the people of St Teilo's, Llantilio Pertholey about churchyard lichens. In addition local groups have organised local churchyard open days and events such as community 'rake and bakes', bug hunts and native bulb planting with school groups. Such events provide the opportunity for local people to learn more about the wildlife and history to which their churchyard is home and join in helping record it, care for it and enjoy it.

Support has also been provided for small grant applications by churchyard groups to a variety of funding bodies. Over ten successful grant applications have been made including an artistic interpretation board to celebrate Bettws Newydd's famous yew trees, and fund strimmers and native spring bulbs at St Michael's, Tintern.

■ The Changing Faces of GWT

We have seen a lot of changes over the past year with our internal structure here at GWT. As detailed elsewhere, we said a sad goodbye to our assistant Chief Executive, Roger Finn, back in the spring. In the current financial climate, it has been decided that Roger will not (some would say, could not) be replaced. However, we were really pleased to have Leigh Danziger join the administration team as Administration Officer downstairs as Rachael Daniels went upstairs in her new role as Membership Development Officer.

There have been two new arrivals in the Conservation Department – Julie Smith has joined our team as our LEMUR apprentice and Alice Britt has taken on the GWT Orchards Project. We were also delighted

to welcome Gethin Jones to the world of wildlife (although probably not ready for bill hook swinging just yet) – our Conservation Officer, Sorrel Jones gave birth to him this summer. Congratulations to Sorrel and Chris. And while Sorrel has been getting to grips with motherhood, Gabi Horup, has been getting to grips with Sorrel's day job, during her maternity leave.

The way we approach our membership recruitment has changed this summer with a decision made to employ our own staff to recruit members, rather than rely on independent agencies, and Russell Johnson and Martyn Wright, both experienced recruiters, have hit the ground running.



Groeswen Chapel wall transformed from this...

The Gwent Living Churchyards project has attracted interest and support from churchyards across Gwent – there is certainly a demand for advice on ‘wildlife friendly’ churchyard management and, as the project approaches its end (this December), it continues to attract new interest. It is hoped the 25 key churchyards/cemeteries we have worked with will act as models of good practice, for those wanting to know more about the concept of Living Churchyards. One churchyard group already has a powerpoint presentation on their churchyard project which they have been giving to other churchyards locally.

Trip to Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol



...to this!

The project has been possible thanks to the support of a variety of partners. Thanks are due to all our funders and those who have delivered training and talks, undertaken specialist surveys and supported groups with grant awards. The biggest thanks go to those enthusiastic, active individuals and groups associated with Gwent's churchyards, which have embraced ‘Living Churchyards’ and encouraged others to join them.

See www.gwentwildlife.org/livingchurchyards for more information or to download the latest edition of the Living Churchyards newsletter.

Rake & Bake' at St Michael's & All Angels (Lower Machen)



Spring flowers at St Michael's, Llantarnam

Book Offers

Naturalized Animals of Britain and Ireland

In a special offer for Gwent Wildlife Trust members, *The Naturalized Animals of Britain and Ireland* is available from New Holland Publishers, normal price £35.00, at just £17.50. Members of the Gwent Wildlife Trust can get this offer by entering NAOBI at the checkout.

Atlas of Rare Birds by Dominic Couzens

The book is an accessible, readable and visually appealing take on a serious subject of threatened birds and possible extinctions – a topic that is constantly in the news due to increasing concerns over climate change and habitat destruction. The atlas format shows the global nature of the problem and brings together the many strands of the concerted bird conservation effort that are taking place on every continent. It also lends an element of accessibility to the reader as many of the species featured can be watched on birding tours these days.

New Holland Publishers are offering a discount open to Gwent Wildlife Trust members. Go to their website, www.newhollandpublishers.com, and enter the code ‘GWT Atlas’ to get 20% off plus free P&P.

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We have three native species of sundew in the UK. These are not the tropical jungle plants most people associate with carnivorous plants but rather they are small, easily missed plants growing on wet heath lands and boggy areas. The sundew is so-called because of its rosette of leaves which are covered with a dewy substance that glistens in sunlight. Glands protrude from the surface of the leaf and at the end of each of these glands is a drop of sticky mucilage, which doubles as both lure and snare for insect prey. It is rather a nasty end that faces the insects that on being attracted by the shimmering leaves and sweet smelling nectar. They land and get stuck on the sticky nectar only to become even more trapped as they struggle to try and escape before the plant excretes its digestive enzymes!

Managing such a small and delicate site can be challenging, but the continued array of plants and this year's sundew sightings cannot fail to provide reassurance and encouragement. In particular the reserve has benefited from the hard work of the Communities Against Drugs (CAD) group. Over the last few years, under the guidance of GWT Reserves Officer, Richard Bakere, their efforts have included selectively removing some of the dominant purple moor grass tussocks, in turn opening up the vegetation a little and providing space for sundew to successfully grow.

It's great to have a positive sundew record for 2010 at Henllys Bog and hopefully we will spot it again next year – I will certainly be looking. It's just one of the stars of this



Fragrant orchid (Richard Bakere)

special site, the conservation value of which is reflected in its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and which is a tribute to the hard work of all those who look after it.

Henllys Bog is situated close to the village of Henllys, Torfaen, grid reference: ST 263926.

Corporate Members

Amy Mulkern, WTW Partnership & Development Manager

We have a thriving corporate membership drive going on at the moment and GWT would like to thank the following Welsh Wildlife Partners who continue to support us both financially and practically:

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Solutia

Silver

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Robert Davies Partnership

Tarmac

Bronze

AU Partnerships

DS Smith TriWall

Frank Sutton

Mandarin Stone

Marshalls



WAGTales

Did you know that in winter, during hibernation, a hedgehog's temperature drops from 35°C to just 10°C?

Autotomy is the name for the self amputation that lizards perform to fool their predators.



Common lizard (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

Great crested grebes will carry their chicks on their backs for up to three weeks!

The scientific name of the chaffinch is *Fringilla coelebs*. In latin, 'coelebs' means bachelor and they acquired this name because in winter, the females tend to migrate further than the males so that in some parts of northern Europe, chaffinch flocks can be male-only affairs.

Kestrels vision extends beyond ours into the ultra-violet. This helps them hunt because UV is reflected strongly by vole urine enable the bird to more effectively locate its prey.

Butterflies taste with their feet.



Common blue (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

The hat-thrower fungus, *Pilobolus crystallinus*, is also known as the Dung Cannon and it gets its name from its habit of firing spore capsules away from the parent where it lands on vegetation. Once eaten by a passing animal, the spores pass through the gut and emerge, in due course, in the dung where they grow and complete the life-cycle. The fungus grows no more than 5cm tall but can fire its spore cannon up to 2m.