



Gwent Wildlife Trust

Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gwent



WILD ABOUT GWENT

JULY 2016

Not all slugs are equal – the good, the bad and the slimy

Veronika Brannovic,
GWT Living Valleys Manager

With summer here, many of us will be thinking about all the lovely things we can grow in our gardens, allotments or perhaps on our balconies in the months ahead. Some nice crisp lettuce maybe or lovely sunflowers.



If you're like me, you sow a variety of seeds and nurture the tender shoots until they're ready to venture forth into the garden or containers outside. You check them every day, delighting in the almost imperceptible growth. Until, one morning, you wander out with your steaming mug of tea to find bare ground criss-crossed with sparkling trails of slime. Your heart sinks. All that effort wasted. How disappointing. Maybe you vow to wage war on the blighters (this is where we may differ)! Before you reach for the slug pellets though, read on to discover a little about them.

Part of my role at Gwent Wildlife Trust is to deliver talks on a range of topics. I regularly talk about gardening with wildlife and invariably end up talking about slugs. I realised I would need to do some research into the creatures so that I could advise people on the best way to cope with them without harming other wildlife. I discovered that there are quite a few different slugs out there and that not all slugs are equal.

There are over forty different species of slug in the UK, many of different shapes and sizes, with different habits and preferences. However, there are some common characteristics. For all slugs, drying out is the enemy, so they are more active in wet, warm weather and mainly feed at night.

A key difference for gardeners and growers, relates to what slugs eat. You may be surprised to discover that only a small number of slug species eat living vegetation. Many much prefer feeding on lichens, fungi and dead or decaying matter, helping recycle nutrients back into the soil. Often the larger, more obvious, slugs are not the culprits for damaging garden plants.

So, which species are the worst offenders?

- **Soil Slugs (*small Arion species*)** – A group of small, dark species no more than 5cm in length, with an obvious mucus pore at the end of the tail. They are rounded in cross-section, and brown to blue-black above with a yellow or orange sole. They can attack from all angles. At ground level they chomp through stems of young plants and leaves of vegetables; below ground, they attack root crops and flowering bulbs.
- **Netted Field slug (*Deroceras reticulatum*)** – A small slug, up to 5cm in length, usually white to pale buff in colour with flecks of dark pigment often making a fishnet pattern on the tail and body sides and a whitish sole. It is frequently found nestling among the leaves of lettuces and cabbages, but can attack from below ground too. It is considered one of the most serious plant pests of Europe, attacking and munching their way through plants indiscriminately.
- **Keeled slugs (*Tandonia species*)** – These have an obvious keel, usually a lighter yellow or orange in colour running the length of the tail. Species reach up to 3.5-7cm long and yellow-grey to brown in colour. When contracted, they curl into a C shape or a hump. These burrowing specialists attack most root crops, with potatoes being a particular favourite, but other root tubers and flowering bulbs are also on the menu.
- **Vulgar or Spanish Slug (*Arion vulgaris*)** – A large, heavy built slug, reaching up to 14cm. The skin is coarse and granular, usually a dirty orange or brown colour with a black rim around

Gwent Wildlife Trust, Seddon House, Dingestow, Monmouth NP25 4DY

Tel: 01600 740600 Email: info@gwentwildlife.org Web: www.gwentwildlife.org

Reg Charity No: 242619 Limited Liability Company No: 812535

Top left: Kingfisher (Andy Karran)

the breathing pore, obviously striped foot fringe and a dark sooty grey sole. This slug is a notorious pest throughout Europe, munching its way through a variety of plants, including roots and fruit near to the soil surface. This species is under recorded in the UK due to confusion with its three similar looking cousins (*A. flagellus*, *A. rufus*, *A. ater*). It is uncertain whether or not it is already established in Wales. The other species are considered much less of a pest and great composters, though they will attack tender plants and seedlings in the spring.

There are other often visible but blameless slugs. Head out at night and you are bound to bump into one of these:

- Leopard slugs (*Limax maximus*) – Strikingly patterned, large slugs of up to 15cm and important decomposers, whose food of choice is fungi and rotting plant material, although they are strongly attracted to pet food.
- Green Cellar Slug (*Limacus maculatus*) – Strongly nocturnal, with obvious green almost camouflage-like pattern all over the body, and blue-grey tentacles. Loves mould, algae, pet food and even damp

wallpaper. A good species to have in your compost heap, but has an unfortunate tendency to sneak into houses on the prowl for pet and stored foods.

- Shelled Slugs (*Testacella species*) – These are rare, subterranean slug species feeding on earthworms, but are occasionally found in gardens and allotments sheltering under plant pots or dug up. Unusual looking slugs, carrying a small remnant of a shell at their tail, they are usually a golden-yellow colour speckled with brown.

There are also several species of slugs you are unlikely to encounter in your garden, some of which are excellent indicators of ancient woodland habitat. Slugs truly do come in all varieties! If you are intrigued to know more, are interested in submitting records to help map slug distributions, or want to learn how to identify a wider range of slug species, the Field Studies Council publish an up-to-date pictorial key: *Slugs of Britain and Ireland* (2014).

So what can you do to tackle the worst offenders? Some people chose to lay 'traps' of beer or scooped out half grapefruits, others take a torch and bucket into the garden at night to remove the offending creatures, but knowing which slugs to target will save you precious time. Another trick is to put out piles of comfrey leaves for slugs to shelter under, going through later to pick out the offenders. Barriers such as copper strips, ground up egg shells, or soot and ashes put on the soil around sensitive plants can also be a deterrent for the pest species.

It's important to remember that slugs are a vital component of the complex food web in gardens – which is why slug pellets don't just harm slugs. If you want to attract blackbirds, thrushes, slow worms, hedgehogs, toads and frogs to your patch, a healthy population of slugs will provide a vital food source. Even foxes and badgers have been known to indulge in a sluggy meal. Other fascinating insects also benefit from slugs being present, with one of the greatest but often overlooked predators of slugs being ground beetles, a form of natural pest control which in turn can be great prey for larger animals. By allowing a balance of slugs and their predators to develop, you will benefit from free, natural pest control as well as a wealth of interesting wildlife entering your garden.

There will be several slug and snail events in store at GWT sites this year. Imogen Cavadino, a TCV Natural Talent trainee based at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Cardiff will be looking specially at molluscs in all three of our Living Landscapes. Visit the GWT website for the latest event information.

Slug (Jane Corey)



Male toad (Mike Kilner)



Beach clean at Peterstone

Julian Vallance, GWT Press & Communications Officer

Volunteers and staff from local organisations came together to take part in the largest coordinated beach clean at Peterstone foreshore in Gwent in late April. While the stars of the day were undoubtedly the volunteers who covered more than a mile of shoreline, there was an abundance of far less glamorous visitors including car tyres, cool boxes, knives and bicycle wheels, but most frequently, plastic. The sheer amount of plastic bottles, caps and cotton buds found highlights the continuing problems that man-made litter causes to Welsh beaches, coastlines, seas and wildlife.



Photos by Julian Vallance



Marine litter is unattractive to any coastline and dangerous to wildlife. This danger is why fifty volunteers and staff from Gwent Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Wentloog Wildfowlers, Keep Wales Tidy and Newport City Council took on the challenge of clearing huge amounts of litter and debris from a section of Gwent coastline, monitoring the variety and density of materials found. Beach cleans are an effective way of clearing plastics, fishing gear and other marine litter from a shore. In the past ten years, beach cleans on the Peterstone foreshore have made a significant difference thanks to volunteers and the coordinated effort of

local organisations. Unfortunately the huge amount of litter that is still being found during the beach clean is a reminder of the responsibility and combined effort needed by all of us to prevent every day litter becoming marine litter.

Plastics litter is a relatively recent phenomenon, with potentially catastrophic ramifications for wildlife and people. Plastics can take hundreds of years to degrade, so plastic thrown directly into our oceans or flushed down our toilets in 2016 could be found on coastlines by our great-great-great grandchildren. It is estimated that there are over 2,000 items of rubbish per kilometre



Grass snake (Victoria Matthewson)

Photography Competition 2016

Now in its fourth year, we're holding our GWT Photography Competition for all you keen photographers out there. The rules are very straightforward – one photograph entry per person, taken at any time, but within the boundaries of Gwent.



Oxeye daisies (Blair Jones)



Sleepy rabbit (Andrea Plumbton)

The entry should have a theme of Living Landscapes or wildlife. We have two categories – the under 16s, and 16s and over. Please send your entries (less than 9Mb) to us at photocomp@gwentwildlife.org, between 15th August and 31st August 2016. Please include your full name, contact email address, date of birth if entering the under 16s and the location of your photograph. Full terms and conditions are on our website at www.gwentwildlife.org/how-you-can-help/photography-competition.



Ben Boylett

of beach, most of which is plastic. While plastics can take hundreds of years to degrade, they also pose a more immediate problem once they break down into smaller pieces. Much like shell and rock break down to form sand, plastic in the ocean is often broken down into small pieces, hard to spot with the naked eye, and easily ingested by sea birds and marine life and thereby gets into the food chain. In some parts of our seas, there are more micro plastic pieces than there is plankton and over 90% of Fulmar seabirds found dead in the North Sea had plastic in their stomachs.

Discarded fishing gear is another serious problem, as it continues to 'fish' as it floats on the ocean, often referred to as 'ghost fishing'. The most common outcomes of ghost fishing are death or serious injury due to entanglement or ingestion; from the smallest fish to the largest sharks, whales, dolphins, sea birds and sea turtles, discarded fishing gear can affect animals of all shapes and sizes.

The earth is populated by seven billion people today and it is expected that there will be 9.5 billion people by 2050; this means our use of plastic is set to vastly increase. The earth's surface consists of 72% of oceans and 70% of the oxygen production on earth is provided by our oceans. Humans have benefited from the oceans for thousands of years which supply us with food. It plays a critical role in removing carbon from the atmosphere and providing oxygen. The oceans regulate the Earth's climate and dominate the water cycle. Healthy and clean oceans mean a healthy and clean world. It is estimated that over one billion people worldwide rely on the sea as their main source of nutrition and thus the degradation of our seas is a serious threat to global food security. The continuous movement of the world's oceans means that litter that enters the ocean on one side of the world can make its way

to the other side in a relatively short time which means marine litter and pollution is not just an issue for Gwent, or even the UK, but for the whole planet.

As with all beach clean events that take place across Wales and the UK, the Peterstone beach clean is not just about clearing physical marine litter on the day but also raising awareness and promoting marine conservation issues throughout the community. Public litter, industrial waste, fishing litter or fly tipping are all serious issues. In the past few years, beach cleans have become more and more common place. As marine litter has increased, so too has people's awareness of the issues and dangers it poses to wildlife and ourselves. With this in mind, it is essential we identify simple steps and act on best practice to minimise marine litter and pollution for future generations. While coordinated beach cleans are effective, this can only ever be a short term fix; a far more sustainable and long-term solution is tackling the root problem of marine litter and pollution in order to safeguard our oceans for the future – one that requires us to work together, recycle and be accountable for what and how we discard our own litter.

By taking a few small, simple steps we can prevent plastics, fish netting and other dangerous materials and substances entering into the marine environment, such as

- Look at ingredients of your facial scrubs, tooth pastes, etc, as many still contain micro-plastic formulae (polyethylene or polythene (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA), nylon (*download the microbead app from www.beatthemicrobead.org*))
- Put face wipes, cotton buds and other toiletry products in the bin and not down the toilet to prevent them from entering the ocean or water ways



Ben Boylett



Julian Vallance



Ben Boylett

- Recycle plastics including plastic bottles, bags and packaging
- Don't drop cigarette butts on the beach or in the ocean as they contain harmful chemicals and take many years to degrade
- Dispose of unwanted fishing line and gear appropriately

Gwent Wildlife Trust would like to thank North Wales Wildlife Trust and Wildlife Trusts Wales for their help with this article and to the generosity of volunteers who help and have helped with the Peterstone beach clean.



Working on our coastline (Richard Bakere)

AGM Notice

This year's AGM will take place on Wednesday 21st September at 7pm in the Glen yr Afon House Hotel in Usk.

Everyone is welcome, but only members can vote. Do come along – this is your opportunity to see how we're doing and speak to staff and trustees who will be on hand throughout the evening. And following the business of the AGM, we're looking forward to welcoming Professor Sir John Lawton, author of Making Space for Nature, to talk about climate change and ecology.

A Little Help for Hafren

Richard Bakere, GWT Senior Reserves Officer

The Severn estuary is truly incredible, with the highest tidal range in Europe, the longest river in the UK and an area similar to some of our national parks, grasping its scale is a real challenge.

My niece once found it amazing that we had a picnic on an enchanted sandbar that lifted itself out of the sea and then dropped back

beneath the waves, but more amazing still is how the entire sea can disappear completely only to return six hours later forty feet higher. In such a dynamic place, the interactions of wildlife, tide and sediment are at the limits of human understanding.

Our ancestors realised the power of this water and immortalised it through the legends of Hafren (Sabrina) and Gwendolen. Today our 'advanced' civilisation still can't accurately model what's happening out in this truly wild landscape, but we all have the ability to

appreciate it. GWT volunteers worked with the Wentloog Wildfowlers, Keep Wales Tidy and Newport City Council again this April to remove some of the washed up rubbish along the foreshore – even one litter pick does make a difference.

I hope that soon the time when our waterways were used as a convenient dumping ground will be part of our past, and everyone will see the wonder of the unique wilderness at the end of our rivers.

GWT Staff News

This season has seen a huge number of changes in staff – we've had to say goodbye to our Usk to Wye Living Landscapes Manager, Andrew Nixon, who has moved onto pastures new in Herefordshire and our Press & Communications Officer, Julian Vallance who is looking to expand his horizons world-wide. We wish them both the best of luck. Sorrel Jones, our Senior Conservation Officer, is taking a twelve month sabbatical to take some time with her family, but will be back May 2017. By the time you read this, Alice Rees will have returned as Water Vole Project Officer from maternity and we'll say goodbye and thank you to Charlene Davies who held the fort while Alice was away.

We have recruited a new conservation grazing trainee, Clare Durose, who will join our Usk to Wye Living Landscapes Team to assist with our livestock and volunteer shepherds. She is studying for a BSc Honours in Wildlife Conservation

with Natural Resource Management at Harper Adams University.

The 'Learning Environments in Marine, Urban and Rural areas' (LEMUR) project is an accredited training scheme that offers a fast track route to developing the necessary skills and competency required to gain a professional post in nature conservation. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and run by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Ambios, this is the last year of the scheme in its current form. Lowri Watkins has joined the team for this nine month role and will be working mainly with the Gwent Levels Living Landscapes Team. In addition we have a new four month LEMUR trainee, Gareth Morgan, who started with GWT in May and will be working with Lowri and gaining knowledge from her own newly acquired skills.

This summer, the Living Valleys Landscape team are joined by Candice Laroche and Phoebe Williams. Candice is a French engineering student, taking a five month internship to stay and work in the UK, and is surveying the key colonies of small pearl-bordered

triflora in Silent Valley to understand the condition of the metapopulation and habitat quality. Phoebe is a recent Exeter University Geography graduate and is on a six month training placement to gain experience with surveying and ID to allow her to pursue a career in conservation.

We are very sad to hear that Jessica Rabjohns has passed away. Jessica was a member of staff at GWT from 2002 to 2004 working as our Volunteering Support Officer and while at GWT, she developed the Green Key Project, a very successful project to help those people with mental health problems recover through the power of the natural environment at Magor Marsh. Jessica had a real passion for wildlife and was always ready to vociferously defend it wherever it had been wronged. She tended her gorgeous smallholding in a hidden corner of Penallt so well it was recognised as a Local Wildlife Site and both Jessica, and her husband Ian, presented their wonderful work at one of our landowner days. Our thoughts are with Ian and her family at this very sad time.

M4 Campaign – we urgently need your help to save the Gwent Levels & Magor Marsh Nature Reserve

Lindi Rich,
GWT Conservation Officer

This year, the Welsh Government consulted the public on its plans to directly and permanently damage four of the Gwent Levels Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) with the proposed M4 'Black Route' south of Newport. GWT has submitted a lengthy response opposing the plans. A number of other key conservation organisations have also opposed the plans including the RSPB, Friends of the Earth, the Woodland Trust, and Wildlife Trusts Wales. It is now looking increasingly likely the scheme will go to a Public Inquiry this autumn.

Unfortunately the proposed 'Black route' (also referred to in the consultation as the M4 CaN scheme) passes through part of our very own Magor Marsh Nature Reserve, the very first nature reserve owned by GWT; a section of the land will

be compulsorily purchased if the scheme gets the go ahead. We are extremely concerned that the motorway could also have a serious impact on water quality and quantity on the reserve, upsetting the delicate balance of reed, ditch and grazing marsh management needed on this site. The reserve would also inevitably be impacted by noise and air pollution from the proposed new motorway.

We now **urgently need your help**. The new assembly is taking shape and we need to make sure the new and re-elected assembly members (AM's) understand how strongly many of us feel about the need to protect these important wildlife sites. Key decisions are likely to be made in the assembly in the coming year and we need to try to stop plans for the 'Black Route' before it is too late.

We need as many of our members and supporters as possible to write to their AM's and object to the M4 'Black Route'. The letters should be sent by post or email as soon as possible. We have provided

a summary of some key points you could make in your objection. This is also available online (along with more detail) for you to copy and paste. It is always best if letters do not all say exactly the same thing, so if you are able to write your own letter or reword some of the points in the summary provided in the text box that would be advantageous in terms of impact. You can write to both your constituency and regional AM's – the more letters the better. Further assembly member details can be found on the Welsh Assembly website or

<http://senedd.assembly.wales/mgMemberIndex.aspx>

For letters by post,
write to your AM at:
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Constituency (or Regional member)	AM	Party	Email address
Monmouthshire	Nick Ramsay	Welsh Conservatives	Nicholas.Ramsay@assembly.wales
Torfaen	Lynne Neagle	Welsh Labour	Lynne.Neagle@assembly.wales
Newport East	John Griffiths	Welsh Labour	John.Griffiths@assembly.wales
Newport West	Jayne Bryant	Welsh Labour	Jayne.Bryant@assembly.wales
Blaenau Gwent	Alun Davies	Welsh Labour	Alun.Davies@assembly.wales
Caerphilly	Hefin David	Welsh Labour	Hefin.David@assembly.wales
Cardiff North	Julie Morgan	Welsh Labour	Julie.Morgan@assembly.wales
Cardiff Central	Jenny Rathbone	Welsh Labour	Jenny.Rathbone@assembly.wales
Cardiff South and Penarth	Vaughan Gething	Welsh Labour	Vaughan.Gething@assembly.wales
Pontypridd	Mick Antoniw	Welsh Labour	Mick.Antoniw@assembly.wales
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	Dawn Bowden	Welsh Labour	Dawn.Bowden@assembly.wales
Islwyn	Rhianon Passmore	Welsh Labour	Rhianon.Passmore@assembly.wales
South Wales East Regional Member	Mohammad Asghar (Oscar)	Welsh Conservatives	Mohammad.Asghar@assembly.wales
South Wales East Regional Member	David J Rowlands	UKIP	DavidJ.Rowlands@assembly.wales
South Wales East Regional Member	Mark Reckless	UKIP	Mark.Reckless@assembly.wales
South Wales East Regional Member	Steffan Lewis	Plaid Cymru	Steffan.Lewis@assembly.wales

Dear Assembly Member

M4 'Black Route'

I am writing to you because I strongly believe the proposed M4 'Black Route' around Newport should not go ahead.

The proposal would cause large scale damage to nationally important wildlife sites and protected species. A total of four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the Gwent Levels would be permanently damaged and the route crosses the River Usk, a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Gwent Wildlife Trust's Magor Marsh Nature Reserve would also be permanently damaged.

The scheme will result in gross damage to protected and conservation priority species including European protected species such as Otter, Water Vole, Dormouse, Badger, bats including the rare Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Great Crested Newt, Barn Owl, wintering birds, freshwater and migratory fish, and the freshwater invertebrates and aquatic plants for which the Gwent Levels has been notified as SSSI.

A total of at least 125 hectares of SSSI habitats including grazing marsh and reedbed would be lost or permanently damaged. There would be permanent damage to nine Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC's).

The Gwent Levels has already suffered from a great deal of damage by development over the years and this is having a cumulative effect. The Welsh Government is taking no action to control it and instead is proposing more damage to this protected area.

I therefore reject and strongly oppose the M4 CaN 'Black Route' scheme. I would be glad to receive a response outlining your views on the matter.

Yours sincerely

On Being Charitable

2015 was a difficult year for UK charities – with an investigation into the tragic death of generous charitable donor, Olive Cooke. Official committees were disbanded and reformed and quick guidelines and new regulations were churned out to stop the deplorable behaviour of some charities and the companies they hired to raise funds.

For us, here at Gwent Wildlife Trust, it was particularly frustrating because our customer service attitudes have always been of the highest standard. We see our membership as our life blood both in terms of your kind donations, but also your practical and moral support – we can't continue without you – and as such, we hope to treat you with the greatest of care whilst maintaining our ability to fund raise. However, due to some unethical, sometimes illegal behaviour, all charities have been tarred with the same brush. And frustrating because the rules to stop such behaviour were already there and could have (and should have) been enforced.

Now GWT, along with many other small charities who depend on the ability to communicate effectively with supporters, finds itself in a very difficult position. The rules regarding communication, designed to reduce the number of asks, have been written in a way that make it increasingly difficult for us to communicate with you, our members, about anything.

Best practise dictates that we must now collect 'opt in' information individually for each media stream – that is to say – can we call you on the phone, can we email you, can we text you, and finally can we post to you? If you do not tick the box, then we can't. And whatever you have most recently told us, trumps what you may have asked for in the past. On one hand, this is quite laudable – we can be absolutely sure if you tick a particular box, then you are happy to be contacted in that way. The downside, however, is more complicated. Since implementing these changes in April, I've already had some members complain that they have not received a member eNewsletter in a while – it's because somewhere down the road this year, they unfortunately didn't tick the email box. They may not have realised that no tick in the box would stop the eNewsletters – perhaps thinking it applied to something else. And we can't think of a way to express this problem which wouldn't turn our forms into versions of Tolstoy's War and Peace.

We're trying to make it easier for you to communicate with us, not more difficult.

So we have decided to be pragmatic about it all. We are assuming, unless we hear explicitly otherwise, that if you are a member that you do want the magazines by post and if you've given us your email, our monthly eNewsletters and adhoc emails. This way, you can all continue to hear our news, on paper and electronically. You'll see our requests for financial support as a membership group, and can choose to act as individuals if there's something particular you'd like to support. Beyond that, if you don't tick the post or email boxes, we won't send you anything additional – such as a direct appeal letter or a personal email requesting donations.

If you don't tick the telephone box, then you can be assured we will never call you unless it's a direct message regarding the practical administration of your membership. However, we would put a plea to you at this point. **Please, please, please consider ticking the telephone and the post box.** Our policy is (and actually always has been) that we would only ever call a member to ask for a donation once every two years – not once a month, not once a quarter, not even once a year – but once every two years. Every time we have run a telephone upgrade campaign, we have raised between £5,000 and £8,000 – not just a one off, but annually going forward. Over a five year period, a single telephone upgrade campaign can be worth nearly £50,000. We work with specific, highly respected professionals to manage these calls on our behalf and it is our priority that if you are called, they establish that it is convenient for you, that you are happy to take the call and that under no circumstance, should there be any pressure to give. Each connected phone call costs us just £4.25, a cost easily covered by the results of the campaign. Being able to email you, being able to write to you and being able to call you just once in a while will make a massive financial difference to GWT and the work we do.

You should also know that we never have nor will we ever sell or even give away your data to any third parties.

For those of you that joined up before the regulations changed and who haven't filled a form in recently, say at an event or as part of an appeal, then we will continue to contact you as set out in your current preferences – you're always welcome to get in touch in the meantime to adjust them – please email Rachael on rdaniels@gwentwildlife.org.

Race for Wildlife

Our 2016 GWT Race for Wildlife was a tremendous success, raising over £3,500 for the wildlife in Gwent.

We had a huge amount of support on the day, so we owe thanks to the staff and volunteers, Chepstow Harriers, Linda and Sainsburys from Pontllanfraith, Severn Area Rescue Association, Undy Athletics Football Club, Eastman and all the runners and their families. We haven't picked a date yet for next year, but we'll keep you posted.

LOCAL GROUP CONTACTS

Abergavenny Local Group

Keith White 01873 852036
keith.white@tesco.net

Blaenau Gwent Local Group

Jeff Smith 01495 371423
jeff@marinestreet.fsnet.co.uk

Chepstow Local Group

Hilary Lee 01291 689326
hilary-lee@tiscali.co.uk

GWT Office

01600 740600
info@gwentwildlife.org

Monmouth Local Group

Alison Willott 01600 740286
alisonwillott@hotmail.com

Torfaen Local Group

Vicky Hannaford 01495 759139
v.hannaford@hotmail.co.uk

Usk Local Group

David Gale 01291 673141
david@gale4241.fsworld.co.uk

Wildlife in Newport Group

Roger James 01633 263374
smallranunculus@uwclub.net

Corporate Members

Platinum

Eastman
TATA Steel

Gold

Advanced Elastomer
Systems
General Dynamics
ABP

Silver

Pinnacle

Bronze

Ancre Hill
Estates
TriWall Europe
Frank Sutton
Mandarin Stone
Marshalls
Zokit



Brockwells Meadows' hedgelaying task

Ben Boylett, GWT Volunteer

During the wet winter months of 2015, I was a part of a small dedicated volunteer group assisting the Gwent Levels reserves officer to manage a section of hedgerow on the Brockwells Meadows reserve at Dewstow. Our task was to turn a fifty metre section of overgrown hedge (including many medium sized trees) into a laid hedgerow.

A hedgerow is used as a natural barrier for livestock as well as a habitat providing shelter for small mammals and birds, whereas a treeline is heavy with coverage at the canopy becoming open with poor growth at the bottom, losing the habitat and livestock-proof barrier benefits.

We firstly prepared the hedgerow for laying by cutting out and removing any dead material and bramble, effectively leaving a row of trees. Using bill hooks, we then reduced the thickness of the stems leaving a small section of living sapwood and bark allowing us to carefully lay them over. Laying stems in this fashion is referred to as a pleacher. We systematically laid the stems over one another starting from uphill, keeping the cut stems from bending further than the horizontal to keep the pleacher

species' lifecycle as the female Hornet Robberfly lays its eggs in animal dung. As these fields are grazed, this meant that to protect the freshly laid hedge from being damaged before regrowth, a fence had to be constructed.

Both sides of the hedge needed protection from the grazing animals, thus one hundred metres of fence was needed. The limestone-rich soil made for hard work when driving the straining posts in far enough to be secure, especially the monumental effort of digging to get the gate posts in. We then finished the fencing by stapling three strands of barbed wire to the posts under tension.



Hedgelaying preparation (Richard Bakere)



A good job well done (Diane Gillard)

alive. The laid material was securely fastened by the use of crooks, a type of stake made from the branches that were cut and removed prior to laying.

The Brockwells Meadows are of particular scientific interest as they host the Hornet Robberfly, listed as a priority species by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. These fields are managed with an annual hay cut and through the grazing of cattle; the cow pats are an important role in this

The final work task day saw our hard efforts being rewarded by clear blue skies (a rarity during this project) and several buzzards flying overhead. Not only was this a satisfying achievement finishing this project for all the volunteers involved, me included, but also importantly ensured the longevity of the hedgerow, revitalising a section of lost habitat. It will certainly be interesting to return to the reserve and see the hedgerow during the different seasons.

GWT Vice President Rodney Morris (1942 – 2016) – a tribute

It was with deep regret that we learned of the death of Rod Morris of Rassau, Ebbw Vale at the end of April. A Vice President of Gwent Wildlife Trust, he campaigned for many years for wildlife and was a tireless volunteer and advocate for nature. Rod was a person who was never afraid to speak his mind in defence of wildlife and was always willing to stand up and be counted. It's a great pity that there are not more like him. His death is a sad loss and wildlife in Gwent will be all the poorer for it. Rod was a gentle man and a gentleman, he will be missed by everyone who knew him and our condolences go out to wife Maureen and all his family. Here are just some of the comments that we have been sent.

Roger James, GWT President

Rod was a leading light in bird surveys, with a particular interest in Dippers and Grey Wagtails. He made and sited many bird boxes throughout the county. One of his greatest achievements was participation in an outreach programme visiting junior schools where, with a team of dedicated volunteers, he supervised children making bird boxes and teaching them basic ecology. This scheme continues to flourish and will be a lasting memorial to Rod.

In recent years, he developed a keen interest in moths, and ran a light trap in his Rassau garden. He recorded 289 species of macro-moths, including many important northern species such as Scarce Silver Y, Confused, and Small Autumnal Moth. He was proud that he recorded more Red Sword-grass at Rassau than all the other Gwent recorders combined, but the highlight was undoubtedly 24th June 2014, when a small brown moth which puzzled Rod was identified from his photo as The Silurian, a rare speciality of SE Wales. One-off records of the Silurian on other sites have usually been followed by discovery of a colony nearby, so if we could find the source of Rod's Silurian, his record might prove very important.

For a number of years, Rod suffered from a debilitating illness which he bore stoically but with increasing frustration as it curtailed his field work. However, one development gave him great satisfaction: Gwent Wildlife Trust's Environmental Resource Centre was

opened in Ebbw Vale in 2010 and with the help of lottery grants is transforming parts of the former Ebbw Vale steelworks into wildlife habitats. Thanks to Rod's pioneering work, moth trapping and butterfly transects are important aspects of the work.

Chris Hatch, GWT Trustee & Ecologist

Rodney was instrumental in setting up the Barn Owl nesting box project in Blaenau Gwent which has been highly successful in increasing the number of breeding barn owls in the area. Although I and others helped with erecting the boxes, it was Rod who did much of the hard work in identifying suitable sites, contacting land owners and generally coordinating things. We also worked together in putting up Long-eared Owl nesting baskets throughout Blaenau Gwent. He also enjoyed filming and photographing wildlife and used this medium as a way of communicating his enthusiasm, particularly to young people. Over the years, he took several young aspiring naturalists under his wing and acted as a mentor, giving up a lot of his spare time to foster their interests.

Rod was outspoken on behalf of nature and regularly contacted local politicians to express concern and sometimes anger at some of the things he saw going on and at the continuing loss of biodiversity in Blaenau Gwent. He struggled hard to prevent the development of the Rhyd y Blew and Bryn Serth sites and desperately wanted them to be developed as urban nature reserves. Sadly, he did not succeed, but managed to win several other smaller battles in the area on behalf of wildlife.

Sadly, over the last few years, Rod's health deteriorated and he became frustrated at not being able to do the practical tasks he so enjoyed. He still took a keen interest in what was going on in the wildlife world however and was always willing to 'talk nature'. He remained passionate about the role of GWT and was proud to be a Vice-President.

Lee Parsons, GWT Volunteer

Rod was a former steelworker who, on becoming redundant following the closure of the works at Ebbw Vale, dedicated his spare time to creating a better environment for the wildlife within Blaenau Gwent and beyond. He was an active member of the

Rod Morris looking for dippers
(Lee Parsons)



Gwent Association of Voluntary
Organisations Environmental Volunteer of
the Year 2013 (Liesel Townley)

Gwent Wildlife Trust Blaenau Gwent Branch and was Chairman for many years.

Anyone who has met Rod would have been overcome with his infectious personality and passion for Wildlife; he did many video talks for GWT and many other local bodies, his passion was evident as his videos contained the time of recording, often at dawn whilst others slept.

Anyone who has ever visited a GWT reserve will have seen nest boxes erected around the sites: these are a Rod Morris Special – 6x1 tanalised wood with the entrance hole with square aluminium protector to stop predators. The number he made must run into thousands.

Rod possessed an excellent sense of humour and his car resembled those of many naturalists – containing ladders, nest boxes, saws, hammer, nails etc. On our first trip out with Rod, we were sitting in his old Sierra, he turned and said, "Can you believe I only had this valeted last week?"

He was his own man and was never happier on a day out than when he was climbing ladders to nest boxes or crossing rivers to check Dipper nests.

All Creatures Small & Small – Dragonflies and Damselflies

Andy Karran, GWT Local Wildlife Sites Officer

There are 57 different species (36 dragonfly and 21 damselfly) that have been recorded in the UK with new species turning up regularly as climate change coupled with the incredible long distance migrations that some species perform allow new species to reach our shores. Of these 57 species, an impressive 31 have been recorded in Gwent.

Thirty-one is a nice number of species to deal with as there is a good diversity, but the variety is not too intimidating. If trying to make an identification, the first thing to consider is whether it is a dragonfly or a damselfly. As a basic rule, damselflies are smaller; they rest with their wings folded along their backs (not spread out to the side), their eyes are separated and they have a weak fluttery flight (dragonflies are fast and purposeful). As always there are exceptions to the rules, but we won't worry about them for now.

Having decided whether you have a dragonfly or a damselfly, you can then try to identify it. With only twelve species of damselfly and nineteen species of dragonfly recorded in Gwent, this may be a relatively easy task. However there are a number of confusingly similar species for which certain small features need to be assessed. On top of this males and females are generally quite different and freshly emerged specimens (teneral) can be quite differently coloured also. This coupled with the fact that many species don't stay still for long adds to the challenge but makes it all the more fun.

Identification can be made easier by considering the time of year, the habitat they are in, and basic colour forms to narrow down to a few species. Reference to a good guide book can then help clinch the identification and fortunately, it is possible to ID all species without any need to resort to capturing them. Even if you can't identify them they are full of character and great to watch, patrolling their territories, fighting with each other and hunting down their prey, living up to their evocative names as 'hawkers', 'darters', 'chasers' and 'skimmers'.



Any waterbody, whether it is a small stream or garden pond, can attract dragon or damselflies and sometimes they can be stumbled across well away from waterbodies as many are powerful fliers. However in Gwent, we have a number of great sites for observing these species and if you are interested in learning more about them, it is worth visiting some of these sites during the spring and particularly summer. As they favour nice calm, sunny days, it is the perfect excuse to get out and about in our wonderful countryside.

Good sites to visit include:

- **Magor Marsh** – eighteen species have been recorded on this reserve alone. A trip to the site during fine weather any time from May to September should produce a number of species. If you want to see the reserves scarcest species, the Hairy Dragonfly, then you need to visit early in the season with May being the best month.

- **River Wye** – over twenty species have been recorded on the River Wye in Gwent. Particular attractions are the dancing shows of Banded & Beautiful Demoiselles (perhaps best seen in June) and scarce species such as Club-tailed Dragonfly and White Legged Damselfly which can be found in the vicinity of Monmouth, with the later of these being regularly seen on our Dixton Embankment Reserve in June. The River Usk is also a great site to explore.
- To see all the species Gwent has to offer, you will also need to venture into the uplands. Here in areas such as the moorland in the Heads of the Valleys area, there are networks of ponds that support many species such as Black Darter and Common Hawker which you are less likely to come across in the lowlands. These areas also represent the best localities to see our largest

Photographs



1. Broad Bodied Chaser – This species can be found at Magor Marsh; the females can look like huge bees
2. Common Darter – A common species that can be found in many localities. One of the last species on the wing, there were records for Christmas day in 2015
3. Golden Ringed Dragonfly – Our largest dragonfly, it favours small streams in the uplands and can be found at Silent Valley in the summer
4. Hairy Dragonfly – A fairly scarce species, it is one of the earliest species; May is the time to see it and Magor Marsh is a good site



5. Banded Demoiselle – These, and the closely related Beautiful Demoiselle, love slow moving rivers; the River Wye at Monmouth is a good place to see them
6. White Legged Damselfly – This scarce species also favours the River Wye and our Dixon Embankment reserve is a good place to see them in June
7. Large Red Damselfly – One of the earlier species it can be found in many localities

All photos by Andy Karran



dragonfly, the Golden Ringed, as it patrols along small hill streams. Our Silent Valley reserve is a good site for the Golden Ringed Dragonfly.

- At our Environmental Resource Centre near Ebbw Vale, we have already recorded eight different species in association with the Pumphouse Cooling Ponds, which is a good indication of the success of the great work being undertaken there to enhance the area for wildlife and shows that given a chance, these great insects will soon colonise areas.



For further information there is a great website called "Dragonfly Days ... for South Wales Dragonfly enthusiasts" (<http://www.dragonfly-days.co.uk/>). So get out there and see what you can find; we would love to hear from you if you find anything good on our reserves. You never know what might turn up – the only UK record of the Banded Darter came from Gwent in 1995!

The Living Levels

Gemma Bodé, GWT Director of Conservation

At the end of last year RSPB Cymru, along with GWT and ten other partnership organisations and local authorities in South-East Wales, were awarded an incredible £2.8 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to transform the Gwent Levels Landscape. The Living Levels Project aims to restore and protect the natural heritage of the Gwent Levels, reconnecting the community to the landscape to create a sustainable future for this fascinating part of the country



Above: Magor Marsh (Amanda Jones)

Magor Marsh rainbow (Richard Bakere)



The picturesque Gwent Levels is a patchwork of diverse wildlife havens sweeping the Severn Estuary coastline from Cardiff right across to Chepstow, encompassing the city of Newport in the middle. Much of the Levels are designated as a nationally important place for wildlife because of the rare aquatic plants and invertebrates that can be found in the complex ancient ditch network that ensures the whole area doesn't flood. Species found include lapwings, otters, water voles, the Great Silver Water Beetle and one of the UK's rarest bumblebees, the Shril Carder Bee. The area also hosts a number of specialist plants including Frogbit, Arrowhead and Wolffia – the smallest flowering plant in the world.

The Gwent Levels also have a captivating history having been reclaimed from the sea initially by the Romans, with settlement patterns across the whole area painting a fascinating picture of when and by whom the land was reclaimed in the thousands of years that followed. As a result, the Gwent Levels is a registered as a Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales, with many important finds over the years, including a 3rd century boat found near Magor, and Mesolithic footprints just off the foreshore at Goldcliff.

This huge wealth of heritage, however, does not prevent the threats to the landscape which includes encroaching development from Newport, lack of management of the ditch network, fly tipping, and the ever looming proposal for a new M4 relief road.

The Living Levels Project has an initial eighteen month development phase followed by a three and half year delivery phase, finishing in 2020. The Partnership has just recruited the first Living Levels team members: Alison Boyes, the Programme Manager and Gavin Jones, the Community

Gwent Levels landscape (Tony Pickup)



Officer, both based at the NRW Offices at Pye Corner. To help showcase the landscape and wildlife, the project aims to develop numerous activities that will increase people's awareness and engagement of the area's distinct features by working with volunteers, farmers and communities to collectively increase wildlife-friendly management and create new trails and interpretation. There will be plenty on offer for residents and visitors, from walking and cycling tours, wildlife monitoring, learning new heritage skills and helping to collect and celebrate the stories of the landscape.

First though, the Living Levels Partnership will work together to plan and develop a programme of activities that will involve a series of community engagement events to ensure the views and wishes of local people

are embedded into the heart of the project. Gwent Wildlife Trust are leading on several Projects within the scheme that include an Orchards and Community Enterprise Project, Natural Heritage Management Scheme and developing Outdoor Learning Resources.

To find out more about the Living Levels or if you'd like to volunteer, please contact Gemma Bodé on gbode@gwentwildlife.org.

