

# Gwent Wildlife Trust Wildlife Winners Update for 2011



## Wetland Wonders

Wetlands are one of our richest habitats and home to a host of rare and threatened wildlife. Some of the wildlife is easily spotted such as dragonflies that can be seen darting over the water but much of the wetland wildlife is hidden beneath the water surface.

This year the Trust has been working on two wetland sites on the **Gwent Levels** to improve the habitat for wildlife.



Bumblebee Conservation Trust

At **Solutia Meadows** the trial to try and diversify the marshy grassland has been very successful. Wild flower seed mix was collected from one of the more diverse areas of meadow and sown in one of the species poor areas. In the summer this led to a lovely display of hay rattle in particular. This was also a very good year for orchids with the beautiful flowers of the southern marsh orchid appearing across the site. Another speciality of the site is grass vetchling with its single bright pink flowers which has appeared in record numbers this year. Increasing numbers of wild flowers will be of particular benefit to the site's population of shrill carder bee – this rare and threatened species needs large areas of flower rich vegetation if it is to thrive.

We are also working with the Environment Agency to extend the area of the reserve through taking on the management of two further fields of grazing marsh habitat. Initial works such as cutting back scrub, fencing the site and putting in a new field gate have now been completed. A new wader scrape (seasonal wet area) has also been created to try and attract wading birds.



Gabi Horup



Pedropimentel.net

# Gwent Wildlife Trust

## Wildlife Winners

### Update

### 2011



At **Magor Marsh** volunteer groups have been busy with a host of habitat management activities. Wetlands show a natural tendency to turn gradually into woodland and if we are to keep these sites as wetlands, management is needed.

#### How do we manage Magor Marsh?

##### Coppicing

Coppicing is a traditional form of woodland management that involves cutting down trees to a stump from which long, straight stems then grow. In the past the stems were harvested for a number of uses and at Magor Marsh some stems are used for willow weaving. We coppice the wet woodland at Magor Marsh to prevent the woodland becoming too dominant and spreading into the open wetland areas.



##### Pollarding

Pollarding is cutting back trees to about head height and was traditionally used to produce thin stems (out of reach of any grazing livestock) for basket weaving or hurdles. Pollards are a typical feature of the Gwent Levels and are home to some special wildlife including the rare musk beetle. We have been pollarding back rows of willows by the reen (drainage ditch) margins – this helps reduce shading on the water, which benefits aquatic invertebrates, as well as prolonging the life of the trees.

##### Reed Beds

Reeds are a very special wildlife habitat and we have been working to spread the area of reed bed on the reserve. Cutting reed can help produce vigorous new growth and allows a range of different growth stages to appear in the reed bed.



[northeastwildlife.co.uk](http://northeastwildlife.co.uk)

##### Clearing Ditches.

The reens at Magor Marsh would gradually fill up with silt and vegetation if they were not regularly cleared. The ditches are cleared of silt on a long rotation using mechanical control but volunteers also help keep reens open by raking out aquatic vegetation.

##### Grazing

At Magor there are areas of wet grassland, hay meadow, sedge and rush which all need to be grazed to prevent them becoming invaded by scrub and drying out. This year we have increased the grazing pressure on some areas of the reserve using a mixture of ponies, horses and cattle and we can already see an increase in diversity in the fields.

##### The Wildlife

The sedge fields, which are now cut and grazed, were particularly impressive this year with masses of yellow flags and marsh marigolds. This has been a good year for sightings at Magor Marsh with kingfishers appearing regularly in and around the pond and otter spraints found by the reens. Cuckoos were heard calling in the spring and although rarely seen, Cetti's warbler, with its distinctive call, has been heard across the reserve. The elusive water rail has been glimpsed in the reed beds and a harvest mouse nest has been found in the hay meadows.