



Gwent Wildlife Trust

Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gwent



WILD ABOUT GWENT

APRIL 2011

■ A Small, Cute 'Mouse' in a Big, Scary World

Keith Allen, Voluntary Warden, Gwent Wildlife Trust



Dormouse in its nest

Keith is now retired after a varied career which included the building and IT industries. He lives near Trellech. He is a Voluntary Warden with Gwent Wildlife Trust and an acknowledged local authority on dormice and their conservation.

Imagine... you're standing at one end of the main arena in the local county show. It's late at night and very dark. You're hungry. The food stall is at the other end of the site. The arena is full of monsters and it's not an option to go around as there are worse things beyond.

Continued on page 2

■ Muddy Study at Magor Marsh

Kathy Barclay, Magor Marsh Community Officer

Helen John and I have been working at Magor Marsh for four years and have established Magor Marsh as an important teaching resource in the area. Every child in Magor School comes to the marsh at least three times each year.

We have noticed how the children are really starting to feel at home on the marsh. They are always keen to share their knowledge with us and I was delighted last Sunday when I met one showing their parents around the reserve!

Over the last four years, over 8,000 other children have used this facility or GWT teachers to learn about the environment and we are now expanding into other areas. Last month, we hosted the first of four education days for home-educated children and their families. It was over-subscribed and many of them quickly booked onto the other courses! They were taught how to light fires safely and used their senses to explore the marsh.

Continued on page 3



Froggy Fun Day

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

Tel: 01600 740600 Fax: 01600 740299 Email: info@gwentwildlife.org Web: www.gwentwildlife.org

Reg Charity No: 242619 Limited Liability Company No: 812535



Croes Robert

■ Chepstow & Caldicot Local Group News

**Hilary Lee,
Chepstow &
Caldicot Local
Group Secretary**

The Chepstow & Caldicot Local Group has been delighted to fundraise for the popular Dormouse Project this year and has contributed over £1,700 in total! Boxes are now up in Cuhere Wood which will be carefully supervised and monitored over the summer.



Cuhere Wood

This year's fundraising efforts will be directed at Magor Marsh, and to start with, we aim to cover the cost of the new footbridge that GWT Reserves Officer, Richard, and his crew are going to install. We are also putting some money towards the mini orchard that has been planted. Doubtless other exciting initiatives will present themselves during the year.

As usual, our main fundraising activity will be the Grand Plant Sale & Bazaar, which will be held on Saturday 21st May at the Senior Citizens' Centre, Cormeilles Square, Chepstow, from 10am to 1pm. Do come along and see what a wide range of plants we can offer and, as ever, donations of plants are welcomed; ring Hilary on 01291 689326 if you would like to arrange collection.

We'll need plenty of plants this year, as we shall also be having plant stalls at Pentwyn Farm, on Saturday 18th June when the reserve is open for the National Gardens Scheme, at the Usk Open Gardens weekend on 25th and 26th June, as well as at Dingestow Court Open Day on Thursday 18th August! So please, keep them coming!

Article 1 continued from page 1

This isn't some footage from the latest video game: size for size, it is the predicament that faces a Hazel Dormouse every time it comes to a gateway in a hedge. In the hedge, it can stay above ground, within a dense mass of branches that provide a hiding place and an escape route. If the Dormouse is really lucky, there's a wooden gate it can run across (metal gates are too slippery but a bit of rope across the top can help), hopefully avoiding detection by the monsters – owls, stoats, even weasels. If it's unlucky, it has to go down to ground level where it is at even greater risk.

Thus it is no surprise that the three inch long (plus another three inches of furry tail) Dormouse is nocturnal. It usually travels less than 100 yards in a night, and no more than a mile in the whole of its three year lifespan. I say three years, but it's only active for half that time, as it hibernates from November to April – hence the 'dor' or 'sleep' in its name.

Nationally, Dormice are classified as rare, and most people will never see one. However, here in the woodlands and well-hedged fields in and around the lower Wye Valley, they are actually comparatively common. They turn up on the nut baskets of garden bird tables (but only around dusk and dawn) and regrettably frequently in the jaws of cats!

Between Chepstow and Monmouth are eight woodlands with nesting boxes placed for Dormice. These boxes are monitored monthly by a dedicated group of trained and licensed volunteers. Each Dormouse found is weighed and sexed, assessed for its breeding condition and carefully returned to the box. The data are recorded centrally by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES). The recording has been going on across England and Wales for 21 years now, showing only a slight (10%) decline in numbers. The decline might be much greater but for the work done by conservation bodies to encourage the planting and 'gapping up' of hedges, and the breeding of Dormice in captivity for release back into areas where they had become extinct.

Predators aren't the only problems. Not only have Grey Squirrels driven our native Reds out of lowland Britain, but their habit of eating hazel nuts before they are fully ripe deprives the Dormice of an essential high protein aid to fattening up before winter hibernation. The second is, predictably, us. The threat is not direct, but is the result of our farming, road building, house building and life style activities.

A few hundred years ago, Beavers cut down or 'coppiced' trees near river banks. They created young, dense woodlands where Dormice could thrive. When the Beavers died out, we took over, continuing to coppice woodlands for our own benefit, for charcoal, kindling, fencing and house-building materials, but still to the benefit of the Dormouse as well. However, that practice ended early in the



Sleepy dormouse



Dormouse-nibbled hazel nut shells

last century. Our BBQ charcoal comes from South America and everything from broom handles to bobbins are now made in large factories. So, Beavers are gone and coppiced woodlands are now rare. To try and help these ultra-cute creatures, Gwent Wildlife Trust coppices Croes Robert wood near Trellech, specifically for the Dormice, and sells the timber processed into charcoal for the BBQ.

Dormice also live in suitably thick hedgerows, and can cope in most woodlands, but in far fewer numbers than in coppiced woodland. Even these woodlands are often separated from each other, by wire fences rather than connecting hedges, thus the surviving Dormice live in isolated communities, at risk from genetic problems from inbreeding.

Our boxes aren't essential to the Dormice. In an ideal woodland, not only will there be a variety of food sources (like nectar from flowers, insects, blackberries, wild cherries, hazel nuts) but also thick patches of brambles or blackthorn and old tree stumps where the Dormouse can build its summer nest. In winter, the boxes are not used, because the dormice hibernate at ground level, relying on the earth to keep their temperature and humidity fairly constant, so that they stay asleep, in a state of suspended animation. A long cold winter like that just past is ideal, because they don't wake up until there is some food available. In mild winters, a Dormouse may wake on a warm February morning, and starve to death.

Dormice are beautiful little creatures. But they do need a bit of help from us if they are going to prosper. If you'd like to know a bit more about them and perhaps even get an up close and personal view, Gwent Wildlife Trust occasionally offers the public a chance to meet a Dormouse at the Croes Robert reserve. The next dates are July 2nd, September 10th, and October 29th.
Ring 01600 740600 to book your place.

Article 2 continued from page 1

Teacher training courses are also now well established here and at Ebbw Vale. We have 13 teachers this month learning about 'Muddy Maths'. We give them plenty of practical ways in which to teach their children in the outdoors. All our ideas are tried and tested on children that come here so we know which ones work.

Thanks to the continued support of Magor Churchmen, Magor and Undy Community Council, and Corder Lewis Solicitors, we are running our Wildlife Warriors youth club again on Tuesday nights. Tom Rugg, leader and local comprehensive school teacher, has planned a brilliant programme including bird ringing, hikes up the Skirrid mountain and greenwood craft. This programme is only possible because of the wonderful volunteer expertise that surrounds GWT. Paul Cawley, Natalie Waller, Mike Kilner, Caroline Williams and Denis Jackson all work together to make this a truly memorable experience.

We also rely on many of the volunteers for the planning and running of the fun days. The last one in February attracted over 140 people to Magor Marsh to learn about frogs and toads. The volunteers showed the children how to toast marshmallows and make froggy crafts. It was a great success and everyone enjoyed it and learnt about wildlife. Many of the visitors who came were members but there were plenty of new faces too.

Another new initiative was launched at the beginning of March – the Wildlife Wizards Quiz for primary schools. Ten teams have entered and the final will be hosted by our sponsors, Solutia, on May 10th. Thanks to Petra Maclver for instigating and piloting this last year and to all the volunteers involved now!



Muddy Maths at work



Magor Marsh (Jane Corey)

The Brown signs have now been erected and are paying dividends already. We had several visitors last month that saw them and came down to visit us. Potential new members to GWT... you never know!

If you want to find out more about education or community events at Magor Marsh contact Helen or Kathy on 01633 889048.

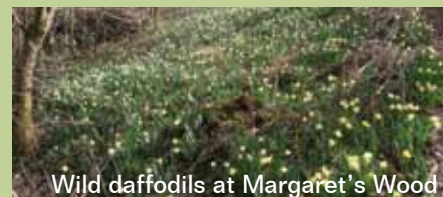


Swallow (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

Countdown to Spring! What to see on our Reserves

March

Lesser celandine is one of the first spring flowers – their yellow blooms start to appear early and carpet the woodland at *Springdale Farm*. The rare delicate wild daffodil can still be seen in an impressive display at *Margaret's Wood*. Early purple orchids are appearing on a number of reserves. Try looking out for them along the field edges at *New Grove Meadows*. At *Pentwyn Farm*, our tiny black Hebridean lambs will be out playing in the fields.



Wild daffodils at Margaret's Wood

April

Spring is in now well underway and the first cuckoos may



Cowslips

be heard calling at *Magor Marsh*. Look out for the first swallows and house martins amongst returning migrants. Cowslips are appearing on our grassland reserves such as *Brockwells Meadows* or *Lower Minnetts Field*, and in the wetter grass at *Solutia Meadows*, lady's smock and buttercups will start to appear.

May

The bluebells and other spring flowers are at their most impressive on our woodland reserves – try visiting the woods at *Prisk, Priory* or *Croes Robert Woods*.

Harrowing Work Indeed

Tim Green, Farm & Wildlife Development Officer

One of the less celebrated tasks of managing hay meadows is the annual spring chain harrowing that takes place once winter grazing has finished. The purpose of this work is to spread out the animal dung and molehills across the grass to promote grass growth and help stop damage to mowing equipment. The process has a narrow window between finishing grazing and the spring flowers especially cowslips. GWT was able to purchase a second-hand tractor-towed chain harrow last year from a local farmer which has been in use at Pentwyn Farm in the last couple of weeks.



Quad bike and chain harrow at New Grove Meadows



Lesser celandine

LOCAL GROUP CONTACTS

Abergavenny Local Group

Keith White 01873 852036
keith.white@tesco.net

Blaenau Gwent Local Group

Rodney Morris 01495 308056
remorris66@mailshack.com

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
coghlanrees@btinternet.com

Usk Local Group

Margaret Barford 01495 785530
mandpbarford@tiscali.co.uk

Wildlife in Newport Group

Roger James 01633 263374
smallranunculus@btinternet.com

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.

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.

April to June 2011

To book on any GWT event, contact GWT on 01600 740600 or info@gwentwildlife.org

■ APRIL 2011

Reptiles and Amphibians

Tutor: Aislinn Blackmore

Saturday 2nd April, 10am – 12pm
ERC, Ebbw Vale

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: FREE but donations welcome

Booking essential

The Work of Monmouthshire Meadow Group

Speaker: Dr Stephanie Tyler

Tuesday 5th April, 7.30pm

St Michael's Centre, Abergavenny

Contact: Abergavenny Local Group,

01873 852036. Cost: £1, children FREE

A Visit to the ERC and Silent Valley

Guide: Veronika Brannovic

Sunday 10th April, 1.30pm

Contact: Abergavenny Local Group,
01873 852036

Please advise Keith White,

keith.white@tesco.net, of your interest

ASAP so group arrangements can be made.

The Wentwood Forest

Speaker: Colin Titcombe

Tuesday 12th April, 7.30pm

The Ballroom, Glen yr Afon House Hotel, Usk

Contact: Usk Local Group, 01495 785530

Cost: £2, children FREE

A Beginner's Guide to Woodland Management

Tutor: Tim Green

Thursday 14th April, 10.30am – 3pm

Springdale Farm, near Usk

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £15 members, £22 non-members

Booking essential

Eggstravaganza

Tutors: Kathy Barclay & Helen John

Saturday 16th April, 12pm – 4pm

Magor Marsh, near Newport

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £1 children, adults FREE

No need to book

Basic Wildlife Photography

Tutor: Jeff Smith

Saturday 23rd April, 10.30am – 12.30pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale.

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: £5 members, £8 non-members

Booking essential

Sirhowy Valley Bat Walk

Tutor: Richard Poole

Friday 29th April, 7.45pm – 10pm

Sirhowy Valley Country Park, near Crosskeys

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

In association with the Valleys Bat Group

Cost: FREE

Booking essential

The History of Millstone Extraction

Tutor: Bob Trett

Saturday 30th April, 11am – 2.30pm

Pentwyn Farm and Prisk Wood, near Monmouth

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £5 – kindly subsidised by Overlooking the Wye

Booking essential



■ MAY 2011

The Art of Nest Finding

Tutor: Rodney Morris & Steve Carter

Sunday 8th May, 10am – 4pm

TBC, Ebbw Vale

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £5 members, £8 non-members

Booking essential

Be Nice to Nettles

Tutor: Veronika Brannovic

Saturday 14th May, 10am – 12pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: FREE but donations always welcome

No need to book

Introduction to Wildlife Gardening

Tutor: Veronika Brannovic

Wednesday 18th May, 10am – 3pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: £5 members, £8 non-members

Booking essential

Spring at Springdale

Tutor: Tim Green

Thursday 19th May, 1.30pm – 4pm

Springdale Farm, near Usk

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £3 members, £6 non-members

Booking essential

A Guided Walk around Craig y Cilau National Nature Reserve

Tutor: Dave Green

Saturday 21st May, 10am – 2pm

Llangattock Ridge, Crickhowell

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £3 members, £6 non-members

Booking essential

Chepstow Local Group Grand Plant Sale & Bazaar

Saturday 21st May, 10am – 1pm

Senior Citizens' Hall, Cormeilles Square, Chepstow.

FREE Admission. Offers of help and plants to Hilary Lee on 01291 689326

The Changing Scenery of Magor Marsh – Spring

Tutor: Paul Cawley

Sunday 22nd May, 2pm – 4.30pm

Magor Marsh

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £5 members, £8 non-members

Booking essential

Great Plant Sale

Host: Veronika Brannovic

Saturday 28th May, 10.30am – 2.30pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: FREE but donations always welcome

No need to book

Winged Wonders at the Marsh

Leaders: Kathy Barclay & Helen John

Saturday 28th May, 12pm – 4pm

Magor Marsh, near Newport

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £1 children, adults FREE

No need to book

■ JUNE 2011

A Visit to Sennybridge

Guide: TBA

Date: TBA (June)

Contact: Abergavenny Local Group, 01873 852036. Please advise Keith White, keith.white@tesco.net, of your interest ASAP so group arrangements can be made.

Nest Box Checking

Tutor: Denis Jackson & Rodney Morris

Saturday 4th OR Friday 10th June,

10am – 4pm

Llangattock, near Crickhowell

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £10 members, £15 non-members

Booking essential

Permaculture Basics

Tutor: Veronika Brannovic

Saturday 11th June, 10am – 3pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: £5 members, £8 non-members

Booking essential

Bumblebees for Beginners

Tutor: Marc Carlton

Saturday 11th June, 10.30am – 3pm

Pentwyn Farm, near Monmouth

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £10 members, £15 non-members

Booking essential

Meadow Plant Identification for Beginners

Tutor: Rebecca Price

Thursday 16th June, 10am – 1pm

Pentwyn Farm, near Monmouth

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £10 members, £15 non-members

Booking essential

Moth Trapping

Tutor: Rodney Morris

Friday 17th June, 8.30pm – 11pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale.

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £3 members, £6 non-members

Booking essential

National Garden Open Day

Host: Annette Murray

Saturday 18th June, 10am – 4pm

Pentwyn Farm, near Monmouth

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £3. Tea and coffee available

No need to book

Dry Stone Walling

Tutor: Terry Mead

Monday & Tuesday 20th & 21st June, 9.30am – 4.30pm

Pentwyn Farm, near Monmouth

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £50 members, £70 non-members

Booking essential

Bee Happy

Tutor: Veronika Brannovic

Saturday 25th June, 10am – 3pm

ERC, Ebbw Vale.

Contact: ERC, 01495 307525

Cost: FREE but donations always welcome

No need to book

Gardening for Wild Bees

Tutor: Marc Carlton

Saturday 25th June, 10.30am – 1pm

Seddon House, Dingestow, near Monmouth

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £3 members, £6 non-members

Booking essential

Usk Open Gardens Weekend

Saturday & Sunday 25th & 26th June,

10am – 5pm Contact: Chepstow Local

Group, 01291 689326

Chepstow Local Group will again be having

a stall in the Gardeners' Market on the

Memorial Field in Maryport Street.

A Guided Walk exploring a Maritime Environment

Tutor: Dave Green

Thursday 30th June, 10am – 2pm

Second Severn Crossing, near Chepstow

Contact: GWT, 01600 740600

Cost: £3 members, £6 non-members

Booking essential



Grass snake (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

■ New Record for Wyeswood Common!

Lauri MacLean, Reserves Manager

Those of you who have explored Wyeswood Common may have come across small sheets of corrugated iron lying in long grass in various locations across the reserve. If you do find them, please do not disturb them – they are not there by accident but are used to monitor the site for reptiles. The metal of the corrugated iron sheets heat up in the sun and provides ideal cosy refuges for snakes and lizards. Volunteers then regularly monitor what's hiding underneath – the sheets can also attract small mammals such as voles and shrews.

Rodney Bodé, who monitors the refugia on Wyeswood Common, has turned up trumps by finding the first confirmed record of a grass snake on site. Grass snakes are typically attracted to wet areas (and are particularly fond of frogs) so it was no surprise that this grass snake was found near one of the site's small ponds. This impressive, non venomous species is Britain's largest snake – the largest specimens can reach an amazing 1.9m in length – and can be identified by its characteristic yellow collar. Although known from the local area, where open compost heaps are occasionally used as a warm sites for laying eggs, this is the first confirmed record for Wyeswood Common.

■ Education Appeal

Our Education Appeal run last autumn has been very successful and thanks to the enormous generosity of our donors, we have raised over £10,000 to put towards our incredibly important education services in 2011. Thank you to all who donated, large or small – every donation is valued and helps.



Small Brindled Beauty (Linda Pullin)

Small but Beautiful

Gemma Bodé, Conservation Manager

There was great excitement in the village of Llandogo recently when one of our members, Linda Pullin, caught a moth in her moth trap that looked suspiciously like a moth not seen in Monmouthshire for over 30 years! Several photos were taken and once the county recorder Martin Anthony had a look he was able to confirm this was indeed a small brindled beauty (*Apocheima hispidaria*). This is a lovely looking moth and is an early spring species. The females are wingless and may be found on the trunks of trees with the moths' main food plant being oak. Many thanks to Linda for telling us about this fantastic record. If you see or hear anything interesting, please do get in touch with us on info@gwentwildlife.org or go to the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre, www.sewbrec.org.uk to log your find.

Promises Auction 2011

As you know, we held our 2011 Promises Auction recently, which proved to be a roaring success. The evening went very smoothly, helped by the fine food supplied by Jane White Catering and once everyone was suitably fed and watered, we were entertained for the rest of the evening by professional auctioneer, Lyndon Trumper of J Straker, Chadwick & Sons, who convinced everyone to dig very deeply for all the wonderful and varied items kindly donated throughout the winter. Early estimates suggest that we have raised over £6,000.

A great many thanks are owed to the promise donors, the bidders and the staff and volunteers who helped make the evening such a success.

Of Soldier Flies and Snail Killing Flies...

Lauri MacLean, Reserves Manager

Magor Marsh is one of the Trust's most important reserves and much of the biodiversity value of the site lies in the huge diversity of insects and other invertebrates found in the reens (drainage ditches) and the diverse fen vegetation. In 2004/5, the reserve was surveyed by Dr Peter Kirby, a renowned invertebrate specialist. In September 2010, he returned to Magor to carry out a repeat survey.

The 2010 survey recorded a total of 522 invertebrate species, of which six are Red Data Book, 14 are Nationally Scarce, and 85 are considered to be of local distribution – comparable to the 2005 survey (587). The difference between the two surveys was largely attributable to the later date of terrestrial survey in 2010; many of the scarcer species captured in the 2004/5 survey are unlikely to be found in early September.

The reens are particularly interesting – a wide range of invertebrates are present, including aquatic species such as water beetles, species with flying adults, and reen-dependent larvae such as soldier flies, hover flies, snail-killing flies and dragonflies, and semi-aquatic species that depend on emergent vegetation, or the plants and damp ground at the reen margins.

There were a number of important finds including confirmation of the presence of the large and conspicuously marked ornate brigadier soldier fly and the spectacular great silver beetle – two of the site's special rarities. Another rarity, the predatory water beetle, *Hydaticus transversalis*, was also confirmed in the main reserve.

New finds included the Red Data Book diving beetle, *Dytiscus dimidiatus*, which was recorded from a reen in the main reserve, probably for the first time. This beetle is already known to be present in the Gwent Levels: a rather isolated outpost for a species largely confined to a small number of areas of old fenland and grazing marsh, and is a valuable member of the reserve's fauna.

In 2003, GWT extended the reserve by purchasing two further areas of grazing marsh. At the time of the first invertebrate survey, these fields held little invertebrate interest. By 2010, abundant tussocks of rushes are providing habitat for a far wider range of invertebrates than was possible before. Very large populations of short-winged cone head – a small, green bush cricket with a brown stripe along the



Azure damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*)



Great silver beetle

back and brown wings – and of the large four-spot orb-weaver spider were found – neither species is especially scarce, but large populations are always welcome.

The four-spot orb-weaver (*Araneus quadratus*) is a fairly common orb-weaver spider that is variable in appearance, ranging in colour from brown to bright orange or green, but they can be identified by the characteristic four white spots on the abdomen. This species builds its web close to the ground to catch jumping insects, including bush crickets. The female builds the more elaborate web, complete with a funnel-shaped retreat off to the side where she hides during bad weather!

A wader scrape dug in 2005 is now well-established, and although the scrape was entirely dry at the time of survey, uncommon species, including the Red Data Book snail-killing fly *Pteromicra leucopeza*, were recorded, suggesting that the scrape has settled well and is a valuable habitat feature for species other than waders!

Dr Kirby noted that many of the recent habitat works undertaken at Magor Marsh will benefit the fascinating invertebrate fauna of the site including having a rotational clearance of the reens and maintaining a good balance between wetland and woodland features. Pollards are one of the most importance features of the Levels habitat and have their own specialist fauna – the old pollards at Magor Marsh are maintained through regular cutting and there has also been recent work to create new pollards on site. Recent work creating small wetland features in the reed beds, cutting areas of reeds and creating cattle drinking bays along reed edges (creating areas of bare, muddy ground) all help maintain a diverse invertebrate fauna.

■ Dino Dash

Kathy Barclay, Magor Community Officer

The Magor Marsh Volunteers and staff had an amazing early Christmas present when Dino Dash from Wilkinsons appeared with twelve boxes of bird seed and fat balls. Everyone took away plenty to feed their birds and there were lots left over for the Magor Marsh feathered friends. As it turned out, it was a really cold spell the following week so it was much needed to help them survive.

GWT would like to thank the Wilkinsons Distribution depot and their staff for this and their other gifts of bird seed, bird feeders and stationery that have been delivered throughout this year. Wilkinsons tell us that these broken packets would otherwise go to landfill as they can't go on the shelves. Working together to distribute these seeds not only satisfies the birds but prevents unnecessary waste too!



Wilkinson helps out!

■ Welcome to the new People & Wildlife Project team

Veronika Brannovic, People & Wildlife Project Leader

GWT is pleased to welcome a new team of staff who will be delivering the People & Wildlife Project in Blaenau Gwent. Some of you may already know that I have been working on the project for almost two years as the Community Education Officer and have now taken on the role of project leader. Funding of over £700,000 has been secured from a number of sources, including the BIG Lottery, Silent Valley Environmental Trust, Valleys Regional Park and Communities First Outcome Fund, to deliver the project over the next three years.

Katie Rees will become the new Community Education Officer in mid April and is moving from York to Abergavenny. Anthony Cook is the new Administrative Officer and we also welcome Tom Eyles as the Reserves Officer, who will be taking responsibility for the Silent Valley Reserve in Cwm.



Bluebells at Prisk Wood

■ Gift Aid Letter

Denis Jackson, People & Wildlife Manager

Gift Aid is something both rare and precious. Rare? Well, when did you last get something from the government which costs you nothing and is of real value? Precious? It's precious because it means we can do more with the money you very kindly give us. For every £1 we get as a subscription from the tax-paying member, we get a further 25p in addition to your donation from the government – that's Gift Aid. So long as you pay more tax than the value of the gift aid, we can do this. It doesn't cost you anything and for GWT, these small amounts add up. In 2010, Gift Aid meant over £40,000 in additional income for us – that's a lot of extra reserve management, education visits for children and nesting boxes for wildlife.

I don't know about you but I feel it is my duty to extract this free money from the government – the wildlife of our county needs it more than they do, so, if we do not have a Gift Aid declaration from you on file, you'll be receiving a letter from us in the next few weeks, asking you to fill one in. If you pay enough income tax each year (that is to say for a member paying us £30 per year in subscriptions, have you paid at least £7.50 in income tax in the same year? – and it doesn't matter whether this is income from employment or a pension), fill in the form, return it to GWT and leave the rest to us.

If you don't pay enough income tax to allow us to claim it back from the Inland Revenue, then please mark the form where appropriate and return it to us in the Freepost envelope. This will mean we will not write to you again next year which will also save us a little money.

Please do take a moment to complete your Gift Aid declaration. It's not often our wildlife gets a boost from the Treasury and, in the current atmosphere of cuts and fiscal caution, I think it's great to know that your subscription can prise extra cash out of the Chancellor's tight little fist to help us take care of the wild things we all care about.

■ Wyeswood's Winter Woollies

Annette Murray, Wyeswood Common Officer

This winter at Wyeswood Common saw a significant achievement in the Project when the whole reserve was let out to a local organic sheep farmer for winter grazing. Although our small flock of Hebrideans has grazed selective parts of the reserve, we do not have the numbers to graze what is approximately 80 acres of grassland. Besides, our little Hebrideans are much smaller than more commercial breeds and don't eat as much nor tend to put on much weight. As a result, they have less overall impact on the grass than larger, more commercial breeds who quite simply eat more!

Grazing is one of the three major components planned for the early stages of the management of Wyeswood Common. Together with the other management tools of nutrient reduction through hay and silage cropping, and habitat reconstruction through tree planting and wild flower re-seeding, the objectives for restoring wildlife to Wyeswood Common are all being realised.

With the initial three-year phase of the Project coming to an end, this final stage is aimed at improving visitor access. We will be installing new interpretation panels and way-marked routes for Pentwyn Farm and Wyeswood Common, guiding visitors around the reserves and encouraging an appreciation for their value. Much work is also being done to restore the dry stone walls at the entrance to Pentwyn Farm which were sadly succumbing to ivy and bramble.

I look forward to reporting back in the near future when all these remaining plans for Wyeswood Common are complete!



Winter Woollies



Song thrush (northeastwildlife.co.uk)



Chiffchaff (northeastwildlife.co.uk)



Nightingale (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

Join the Early Birds

Spring brings with it a spellbinding natural symphony, and we can all embrace it by taking part in International Dawn Chorus Day on Sunday 1st May 2011. The dawn chorus is at its loudest the first hour after sunrise – around 5am – but it is well worth sacrificing a lie-in. Resident UK species like blackbird and song thrush can be heard, along with summer visitors including chiffchaff and nightingale.

Paul Wilkinson, head of Living Landscape for The Wildlife Trusts, said: "It's not often we are able to actually hear the startling variety of wildlife that surrounds us, and the trials it faces. The dawn chorus takes place as birds are singing to attract a mate, or to defend territory, with each day bringing a new struggle for survival. On International Dawn Chorus Day we can enjoy the sights and sounds of nature, but also take time to reflect on the role we can all play in protecting it. This might be through turning our own gardens into wildlife havens, helping to create A Living Landscape or by becoming a member of a local Wildlife Trust." To hear or download our most common dawn chorus participants, go to www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/birdsong.html.

WAGTales



Barn Owl (northeastwildlife.co.uk)

Barn owls (and others) can hunt by sound alone in complete darkness but they need, within the first 200 days or so of life, to calibrate their acoustic senses using visual clues. A calibrated barn owl has an accuracy of about one degree with sound alone whilst an uncalibrated owl can be 20 degrees or more out... that's a lot of ground error coming down on a 4cm long vole from 20m up.

Lambing has gone well again this season at Wyewood and here is a photo of our very latest arrival. More news about their progress to follow in the next edition.



Annette with her latest arrival (Andrew Green)

eNews

Don't forget that we pass on a lot of our latest news electronically these days. Our website, www.gwentwildlife.org, and our eNews are a great way to let our membership know the very latest information and in particular, inform you of news that may have a short time frame. Over 1,500 people now receive our monthly eNewsletter and have access to up to date news – if you would like to be one of them, please email Rachael on rdaniels@gwentwildlife.org. You can unsubscribe at any time – just let us know.

Corporate Members

Amy Mulkern

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:

Platinum

ArvinMeritor Ltd
BAE Systems
Caldicot & Wentlooge IDB
Orb Electrical Steels

Gold

Advanced Elastomer Systems
Solutia

Silver

Johnsey Estates
Robert Davies Partnership
Tarmac

Bronze

AU Partnerships
DS Smith TriWall
Frank Sutton
Mandarin Stone
Marshalls



Facebook, Twitter & YouTube

GWT are most definitely moving with the times and our Facebook and Twitter accounts are flourishing. We have over 600 followers on Facebook and over 400 on Twitter. These are other easy ways to keep up to date with the goings on here at GWT. Come along to the Facebook page and have a go at our famous 'Guess the Critter'. No prizes for the right answer other than the warm glow that comes with knowing you were right!

