



# Living Churchyards



The Newsletter of Gwent's Living Churchyard Project

Issue 6, Autumn/Winter 2010

## Welcome to Issue 6 of Living Churchyards

*-care of Gwent's Living Churchyards Project and aimed at everyone involved in caring for the churchyards of Gwent, and interested in learning more about the wildlife they support.*

Sadly this is the last copy of Living Churchyards, as funding of the 3 year Living Churchyards Project comes to an end this December. But although we say good bye to the project, we hope that Gwent's churchyard wildlife will continue to thrive thanks to the work of everyone involved.

## Life of the Gwent Living Churchyards Project

Over the past 3 years, the project has worked to help local people learn more about the wildlife and history to which churchyards are home and join in helping record it, care for it and enjoy it!

\*Over **75 churchyards** have contacted us for advice.

\*25 churchyards and cemeteries have been supported more closely —**new data** on the species and habitats of these churchyards has been collected and basic **wildlife friendly care plans** developed.

\***Project talks and training** sessions have been attended by over 600 people. Highlights have included Fred Hageneder's talk on ancient yews at Bettws Newydd, hedgerow planting at St Peter's Pantside and the charismatic Ivan Pedley (British Lichen Society) inspiring us about lichens at St Teilo's, Llantilio Pertholey.

\*Local churchyard groups have organised **local churchyard open days and events** such as community 'rake and bakes', bug hunts and native bulb planting with school groups.

\***Over 10 small grant successes** and new and novel wildlife **interpretation** boards and leaflets.

It's hoped those churchyards we've worked most closely with will act as examples of good practice, for others wanting to know more about wildlife friendly care of churchyards.



The project has been possible thanks to the support of a variety of partners. Thanks are made to all our funders and those who've delivered training and talks, undertaken specialist surveys and awarded small grants to groups. But the biggest thanks go to all those enthusiastic, active individuals and groups associated with Gwent's churchyards, which have embraced 'Living Churchyards' and encouraged others to join them. Thank you!  
*Rebecca Price, Living Churchyards Project Officer (p/t)*

# Local Churchyards Update

A number of churchyards in Gwent are already managed with wildlife in mind, and more are starting on the journey. Here's a little of what's been happening locally recently.....

## 'Rake and Bakes'

The cutting and raking off of wildflower meadow areas in churchyards is an important part of caring for them. The offer of home made cakes helped encourage lots of raking at a number of Gwent's churchyards this summer.....



**St Michaels and All Angels, Lower Machen** used a rake and bake to launch their Living Churchyards project and celebrate funding from the Newport Community Fund 2010.

**St James, Rudry** combined raking, delicious cakes and children's activities (including burying a bucket for stag-beetles) at its annual rake and bake. St James churchyard supports over 40 different wildflowers. In the meadow this includes yarrow, field scabious and cuckoo flower.

## Fungi Galore!

Over 20 people joined Sheila and George Spence of the Gwent Fungus Group to learn more about the fantastic diversity of fungi at Newport City Council's Christchurch Cemetery. Species included pink waxcap a pretty, rather delicate fungus, characterised by its pink pointed cap and pure white stem, which until recently was on the Red Data List (a national list of rare fungi in need of protection).



## Discovering minibeasts in churchyards

There are thousands of species of invertebrates or 'minibeasts' in the UK, each with a host of different needs. Many have different requirements at different stages of their life cycle (for example a meadow brown butterfly may feed on grass but the adult will search for nectar).

To encourage everyone to take a closer look at what minibeasts find a home in our churchyards, local naturalist Mike Kilner kindly led a children's bug hunt at St Oudoceus Llandogo and shared his great enthusiasm for invertebrates at St Teilo's Churchyard Open day.

*"Please thank Mike and Petra for their wonderful bug hunt. The kids (and the big kids) were captivated. We even found out that we have a spider unique to our welsh yew tree!"*  
*Children's Workshop Team,  
Llandogo & Tintern Churches*

# Living Churchyards Trips & Training

Gwent's Living Churchyards Project can help with **money for training courses, walks & talks by local experts and churchyard events** to help you learn more about your churchyard's wildlife & heritage.

## Gwent Churchyard Conservation Day

### *A Day looking at the Wildlife & Heritage of Churchyards*

**Thursday 9th December 2010**

**10.00am—3.30pm**

**Monmouth Priory, central Monmouth**

- ★ A morning of talks, followed by a visit to Monmouth cemetery's recently restored chapel and its new interpretative materials
- ★ **FREE of charge. Complementary buffet lunch included.**

**Contributors include:** Geoff Brookes (author of 'Stories in Welsh Stone: The secrets within 15 Welsh Graves') local wildlife experts, representatives from local living churchyard groups and Rebecca Price (Gwent Living Churchyard Project Officer).

**BOOKING IS REQUIRED.** Contact: Rebecca Price email: [rprice@gwentwildlife.org](mailto:rprice@gwentwildlife.org) or telephone: 01600 740358

### **GREEN MAN St. Jerome's, Llangwm**

Who decided on this? Church stone  
uttering nature through a mouth  
stretched wide, oak leaves  
like unwieldy words, a head  
ugly with the pain of language.  
Unthinkable, any body to it,  
other than gravity of stone  
rooted in the spin of earth.  
Cromwell's men missed this church  
in its dip down the lane's dead-end.

They sacked the one they came to.  
Of that, nothing left but walls,  
the shapely dark of its yews.  
Whatever each soldier felt  
he's have, under orders, to break  
this rood screen too, leave nothing  
but knots and splinters, carvings  
burst to their inner fibres.  
Arts of one version of God  
reduced to matter, firewood.

Outside, the bare black branches  
are sharp, in spite of a wind  
made visible by snow:  
oak-buds in silent readiness,  
new trees preparing for roots.  
Awe, to know we can't break it,  
this world the builders lived in.  
Which holds us too, like leaves  
from a head whose meanings evade  
dying words, their fragile  
screens.

Anne Cluysenaar, Usk, author of  
*Batu-Angas: Envisioning Nature with  
Alfred Russel Wallace*, Seren, 2008.



# Wildlife Friendly Churchyard Management

## Reptiles

Churchyards provide an excellent refuge for reptiles, particularly slow worms and grass snakes, helping to serve their basic needs for shelter, warmth and food. Due to the cool British climate, reptiles spend most of the year in hibernation and their varied lifestyle demands several types of habitat throughout the year. A mosaic of short grassland, tall vegetation, and scrub can provide the perfect habitat to cater for these needs.

The UK supports 6 species of reptile: adder, slow worm, grass snake, smooth snake, common lizard and sand lizard, but the two you are most likely to see in a churchyard are:

**SLOW WORMS:** Although often mistaken for a snake, the slow worm is actually a legless lizard, distinguished by the presence of eyelids. Slow worms are beneficial as they eat pests including slugs and snails. This species can 'drop' its tail to escape predation when seized, a very interesting survival technique!

Throughout Britain you could expect to find the Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*) in areas of meadow and patchy scrubland that are well-drained and frost free. Compost heaps are also favourite spots; providing warmth, shelter, and various invertebrates for slow worms to feed on.

**GRASS SNAKES:** The Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*), is much more elusive. The warm days of summer will provide the opportunity for sighting the elusive grass snakes as females emerge from their overwinter hibernation spots, which can include compost heaps. The grass snake is not venomous and rarely bites. If you are lucky enough to have grass snakes in your churchyard they will be difficult to spot as they are incredibly quick and usually disappear before being spotted. They have, however, been known to 'play dead' when spotted!

### Looking after your grass snakes & slow worms

#### Grass Cutting

- \*Try and cut on cool days when reptiles are less active
- \*Check long grass for reptiles (and amphibians) before grass cutting. Avoid strimmer use if possible.

#### Encourage mosaics

- \*Try not to mow all areas at once so some refuge is left. Feeding areas, boltholes and hibernation sites ideally need to be connected by corridors of long grass, nettles, brambles etc so that animals can move around the churchyard while hidden from predators.

#### Artificial refuges

- \*Laying down sheets of corrugated iron or roofing felt in the sun surrounded by vegetation will attract reptiles seeking warmth and shelter.
- \*Slow worms will benefit from the cracks in dry stone walls and holes between graves. These will provide insect prey and provide shelter. South facing stones are good for basking.

#### Composting

- \*Grass snakes will travel quite a long way in search of suitable egg laying sites such as manure or compost heaps. They also provide good basking sites.
- \*Heaps should be in sun at least part of the day and beside an area of tall vegetation.
- \*Avoid clearing compost heaps in June to October when grass snake eggs are developing. Beware of hibernating slow worms and grass snakes in the winter.

### Slow Worm ID

- \*Grows to about 35cm in length.
- \*Has eyelids
- \*Male slow worms are grey, often with small blue spots, while the females are brown and black with a black line on her back.

### Grass Snake ID (photo below)

- \*Olive green body colour & round pupils
- \*Regular black barrings along the sides
- \*Distinctive yellow and black collar
- \*On the belly is a black and white chequered pattern
- \*Females can reach up to 1m in length, longer than the average 70cm long male.



Grass snake Photo by David Chamberlain

GLC Project supported by:

