

GWENT RECORDERS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 9 November 2005

****BRIEF NOTE FROM THE NEW EDITORS****

Welcome to Issue 9 of the Gwent Recorder's Newsletter. As you should already know SEWBRc have taken over the future production and editing of the newsletter. For this edition we have kept to the same format as previous issues, but we would like to see the newsletter change in the future. Do you have any thoughts or ideas on how you would like to see the newsletter presented? Are there any topics you would like to see included, and/or others dropped? We want to hear from you. We want to know what you would like from the newsletter in the future.

We also want more articles from Recorders – it could be a list of species you have recently recorded, or an update of where you have been surveying in the last year. This is an opportunity to plug your favourite species or recording location, to raise awareness of the species that you record, and to communicate to a wide range of individuals about your hard work!

Please forward any comments, ideas, articles, events, species sightings etc to:

SEWBRc, 13 St Andrews Crescent, Cardiff, CF10 3DB. ☎ 029 2064 1110 ✉ info@sewbrec.org.uk.

1. Gwent Recorders' Forum Meeting February 2005

[Rebecca Davies]

The 5th meeting of the Forum took place on Saturday 12th February 2005 at the Glen yr Afon Hotel in Usk. Whilst it was well attended, it was noted that there were fewer recorders present than in previous years. Presentations were heard from Sgt Ian Guildford (The Role of Police Officers in Species and Habitat Protection), Adam Rowe (SEWBRc Update and the Recording Community), Erica Colkett (The Role of CCW in Species Protection), and Gemma Bodé (Wildlife Sites Project). At the meeting it was agreed that SEWBRc should take over the organisation of the Gwent Recorders' Forum and production of the Recorders' Newsletter. Within the species subgroups, projects were finalised for application to the Species Challenge Fund. Details on the location, date and agenda of the 6th Gwent Recorder's Forum Meeting will be distributed shortly. Any requests/suggestions for items to be included in the next meeting should be forwarded to SEWBRc – see contact details above.

2. SEWBReC Update

[David Slade]

- 2005 has been a particularly busy year for SEWBReC, beginning with the appointment of our third full time member of staff - Rebecca Davies formerly Newport County Council's LBAP officer.
- Other key areas of progress include:
 - Several *Data Exchange Agreements* have now been signed (including Monmouthshire Moth and Butterfly Group, and Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group).
 - Although Monmouthshire County Council is the only Unitary Authority to have a Service Level Agreement in place at the moment, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Blaenau-Gwent are all working towards one and Newport is still optimistic of securing some funding for us.
 - Since we began full operations on 1st August, we have had a continual stream of commercial enquiries.
 - We are due to begin screening planning applications for Monmouthshire County Council in the next few weeks.
- Our database now contains over 500,000 records, although only 75,000 of these are from Gwent - certain members of the Glamorgan Moth Recording Group being responsible for the huge number of records in the other part of our region. We do know that there are a number of key data sets that we currently lack, and we will be working towards gaining access to them over the next few months.
- The current top 10 most recorded species in Gwent are reproduced in the table below, highlighting the current state of our data holdings. This table should change considerably as our data coverage improves over the coming months.

Rank	Common Name	Scientific Name	Number of Records
1	Lesser Horseshoe Bat	Rhinolophus hipposideros	553
2	Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina	511
3	Yorkshire-Fog	Holcus lanatus	510
4	Sweet Vernal Grass	Anthoxanthum odoratum	447
5	Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae	428
6	Common Bent	Agrostis capillaris	387
7	Soft Rush	Juncus effusus	377
8	Ribwort Plantain	Plantago lanceolata	367
9	White Clover	Trifolium repens	359
10	Common Bird's-Foot-Trefoil	Lotus corniculatus	351

For further information on the work of SEWBReC, for advice and support on biological recording, or if you would like to forward any records to us, please get in touch – see contact details on page 1. You can also download a recording form at www.sewbrec.org.uk.

3. LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS (LBAPs)

3.1 Blaenau Gwent

- **Pond Audit**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council have embarked on a 3 year project to survey all the ponds in the County Borough area. Phase 1 was carried out last year and involved the location and mapping of over 225 ponds in the area together with a survey of over 50 ponds. A similar number of ponds have also been surveyed during this years Phase 2 of the Audit. Phase 3 involving the remaining ponds to be surveyed will finish next year.

- **Biodiversity Recording Postcards**

The Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership is in the process of producing a set of biodiversity postcards or biological recording cards on 6 priority species requiring action in the LBAP to find out more about their distribution and how they can be better protected through development control and targeting of resources. These include great crested newt, water vole, barn owl, swallow, adder and small pearl-bordered fritillary. The cards will be distributed to relevant organisations and local recorders in the New Year and will also be available to download from the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Website '*The Web of Life*', accessed through www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk. Recorders who are undertaking work in Blaenau Gwent are therefore requested to look out for these species when surveying or visiting Blaenau Gwent and to pass any records onto Deborah Beeson.

- **Badger Leaflet**

The Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership in conjunction with Gwent Badger Group has produced a '*Help Badgers in Blaenau Gwent*' leaflet. The aim is to promote awareness about this priority LBAP species and find out more about its distribution. Forms can be obtained from Deborah Beeson or can be downloaded from the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Website, '*The Web of Life*'. Recorders are requested to look out for signs of badgers (i.e. setts, sightings, road kills) when working on surveys or just visiting Blaenau Gwent and to send any records in to Deborah Beeson.

- **Ring Ouzel Survey**

The Ring Ouzel is a member of the thrush family and easily distinguished by a white bar on its chest and being somewhat greyer than a blackbird. The species is both a LBAP priority species and red-listed in Wales, and has declined rapidly at both a national and local level. Ecological Consultant Eric Hawkeswood, has been commissioned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to undertake a 2 year survey of Ring Ouzel at Trefil to confirm its status and put forward recommendations to ensure better protection of the species and its habitat. The survey commenced this year and will continue through the bird-nesting season next year. We are therefore keen to find potential volunteers (particularly good birders or people who regularly visit the area) that can help with the survey next year or provide useful information about the species. Please contact Deborah Beeson for more information.

- **SNAP Biodiversity Photographic Competition**

The aim of the competition is to raise awareness and appreciation of the importance of biodiversity through the use of photography. In addition to this, we can utilise the photographs for biological recording and publicity purposes. The profile of this competition is growing each year with increasing numbers of high quality entries. The competition runs from June to October each year with an award ceremony for prizes organised at the end of November. This year, the judging for the competition took place on the 21 October 2005 with the Award Ceremony planned for the 23rd November 2005. This year's guest speaker will be Roger James, Vice President of Gwent Wildlife Trust. The competition is open to local recorders to enter but there's one snag – photographs must be taken within the last year in Blaenau Gwent! Please contact Deborah Beeson for further information.

- **Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme (B.A.G.S.)**

The scheme is progressing well and is one of the key ways to implement targets within the LBAP. To date, 57 groups have received site visits and 11 grant applications have been approved. LBAP species benefiting include silurian moth, barn owl and lesser horseshoe bat. LBAP habitats benefiting include hedgerows, ponds, neutral grassland and wildlife habitats in gardens. Mel Stewart, the Biodiversity Project Assistant who administers the Scheme has offered more time to assist groups filling in forms and this seems to be working, however, we would like groups to focus in on more specific single habitat or species projects rather than very broad based projects. There is still a large amount of funding available, so if you have any ideas for projects in Blaenau Gwent, please get those proposals in! If the scheme meets the grant criteria, we can fund! Contact, Mel Stewart for further details.

- **BARS**

As you are aware, BARS is the national recording system of what biodiversity work is taking place across the country ensuring better monitoring of what biodiversity targets are being achieved. A letter has been sent by Deborah Beeson on behalf of all the South Wales LBAP Officers about difficulties with the system and the lack of training/support for officers and partners on how to use the system. CCW has since responded stating that they are looking into providing more support and training to roll out the system. A training event is currently being planned for the New Year for members of Greater Gwent Biodiversity Action Group. Gwent Recorders who will be using the system are also invited to attend, but places are limited. If interested please send your names and contact details (including email address) to Deborah Beeson before the 16th December 2005.

Contact: Deborah Beeson, Biodiversity Project Officer ☎ 01495 355702 ✉ deborah.beeson@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk, or Mel Stewart, Biodiversity Project Assistant ☎ 01495 356070 ✉ melanie.stewart@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.

3.2 Caerphilly

- **Species Surveys**

- Dormouse survey training event was held on Saturday 29th October with over 30 participants, including 15 volunteers.
- Otter survey training event planned for near future.

- Continuation of the great crested newt survey in March 2006.
- **Vote for a County Flower** – an article was included in *Newsline* the council's free newsletter in August, which is distributed to all households in the county to encourage them to vote online. The vote will be promoted with schools via the new *Green Link* newsletter and *Green Envelope* produced by the Education for Sustainable Development Officer. It is hoped that each school will submit a vote for their favourite flower from the list and that the children will also go home and vote individually. This should stimulate a good response to the poll for a possible spring or Wales Biodiversity Week launch in 2006.
- **Habitat Action Plans** – 5 additional plans to be produced this year are: Fen, Blanket bog/Lowland raised bog, Upland mixed ash woodland, Lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Common Land.
- **Management of hedgerows on highways** – an MSc Ecology dissertation was submitted to the University of Bristol at the end of September. Results showed that the majority of roadside hedgerows are species-rich, particularly those which also occur on Community Area boundaries. 15 priority hedgerows were selected for a trial management scheme recommended to the local authority. Management needs to improve the structure of the hedgerows, as well as the diversity in areas where the hedgerows have become gappy and require planting up. This can be achieved by allowing them to grow incrementally each year, depending on the width of the roadside verge (>2m) for highway visibility purposes. Recommendations made will be taken to the Highways dept. of council for further discussion and hopefully, eventual implementation.
- **BARS data entry** - a temporary member of CCBC staff was trained up in September to input priority Species Action Plans onto the system. No information on progress or implementation has been added as yet. A training day is going to be arranged for key partners to input data on implementation in the near future, but the way forward will need to be agreed by the partnership.
- **LBAP as SPG**: not much progress has been made since the LBAP was adopted in January this year, but there are plans to hold workshops for Development Control and Strategic Planning officers in the very near future, which will hopefully tie in with the launch of the *Think Wildlife* biodiversity and planning checklist. The aim is to show how the LBAP can be used in the planning application process, particularly in encouraging developers to be more proactive to achieve biodiversity enhancements, even in developments with minimal impact.
- **Biodiversity Conservation Programme** – continuation of habitat management tasks at Penallta Marsh (scrub clearance on rhos pasture) and Penallta Wetland (reedmace pull on reedbed). More practical conservation days planned this year as much work is required on Rudry Common too.

Contact: Melanie Sutherland ✉ sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk ☎ 01495 235253.

3.3 Cardiff

- January 2005 – the new Environmental Advice Team established consisting of 2 Tree Preservation Officers, 2 Ecologists – Matthew Harris and Laura Palmer, and a team leader – Vaughan Grantham.
- The LBAP forms an appendix of the Biodiversity SPG which has been approved for public consultation.

- 3 issues of the Biodiversity Bulletin have been published, with the latest (September) being distributed through libraries and leisure centres.
- Cardiff was the base for one of the programmes in the BBC's Iolo's Welsh Safari series. This highlighted the biodiversity of the city. Several Park Rangers, Vaughan Grantham and other local naturalists were involved in the broadcast.
- Wales Biodiversity Week – 7 events took place and the week was widely advertised. All events were well attended with between 20-50 people. WBW 2006 is already being planned so other organisations can advertise events in their own programmes.
- Surveys this year have included: Reptiles; Pipistrelle, Noctule and Daubenton's bats – with the Cardiff Bat Group for the BCT; Silver-washed Fritillaries; Dormice; Great Crested Newts. Training days were run for volunteers doing the SWF and Dormice surveys.
- Waxcap surveys will be taking place soon and a training day was held for volunteers on 22nd October. Survey sheets are being prepared for distribution to allotments, with an emphasis on reptiles and amphibians.
- A Hawfinch Project has been established with Cardiff and Caerphilly Biodiversity Partnerships, the Forestry Commission and the Glamorgan Bird Club. Preliminary surveys were done by volunteers indicating good areas of Hornbeam (a favoured habitat for Hawfinch) and a training day was held in Machen for further surveys covering the Caerphilly ridge and corridors into Cardiff. So far uptake of this survey has been excellent and 2 positive Hawfinch records have been received. The survey runs throughout the winter.
- The Cardiff Biodiversity Partnership/CC has negotiated works with the Forestry Commission to clear scrub from the Chalk Carpet site in the Taff Gorge.
- The annual SINC review is mostly done and there are no new SINC's so far this year. More sites will be considered for their Waxcap interest.
- The Cardiff HAPs and SAPs are all on the BARS system but only a few habitats/species have any status and trends data. This reflects the importance of baseline surveys to start with.
- Highlights – at the end of 2004 Cardiff Bay Wetlands played host to an African Spoonbill – origin unknown! We also held our share of Waxwings during the early 2005 invasion.

Contact: Laura Palmer ☎ (029) 2087 3268, ✉ LPalmer@cardiff.gov.uk.

3.4 Monmouthshire

- MCC endorsed the Monmouthshire LBAP in July after a comprehensive consultation period. It has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and has a chapter on Biodiversity and Development to support this. In order to carry out implementation, develop more action plans and provide guidance to development control; the Biodiversity Assistant post has been extended to the end of June 2006.
- The first draft of a turtle dove SAP has been written by the RSPB and the finished plan will be available for the relevant groups to use well in advance of the next turtle dove season. Several lepidoptera SAPs have been made available by the Caerphilly partnership (Mel Sutherland and Martin Anthoney). They are yet to

be adapted for Monmouthshire but will be in the second tranche. Bird SAPs produced by the GGBAG bird group will be adapted for Monmouthshire. Plans have been written for cormorant, hawfinch, red grouse, ring ouzel, grasshopper warbler, merlin and short-eared owl.

- The biodiversity partnership met for the third time in August, fourteen of the partners attended. Aims were to decide on immediate priorities, determine how to develop future action plans, focus implementation of actions in the Public Awareness Action Plan and decide on the host for the LBAP webpage. The meeting was preceded by a site visit to a site managed by the Usk Conservation and Environment Group.
- Local Agenda 21 Biodiversity grants have been very good this year. Projects have included: heathland restoration works, reedbed planting, habitat management for breeding lapwing, winter feeding crops for birds, veteran tree survey, dormouse box scheme, meadow management, botanical monitoring, hedgerow improvement. Unfortunately we had to turn a lot of projects down due to lack of money. We are working through the reserve list at the moment.
- Partners have been asked to submit information with regards to dormouse and species rich grassland projects. This was done by sending out a form to partners (designed by Laura Palmer of Cardiff Council) and examples of projects to guide filling in. This will facilitate adding progress reports to actions on BARS as well as the 2005 reporting form. So far, The Usk Conservation and Environment Group and MCC have been the only respondents.
- The partnership has decided to use the Monmouthshire Greenweb to host the LBAP. Sue Parkinson will provide training to enable the partnership manage the pages. Links will be made to all the partners that use greenweb.
- MCC is pleased to be working with GWT and the other local authorities in Gwent to implement actions in the lapwing SAP. This is a Gwent wide project involving all the partnerships (Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Newport and Caerphilly) to raise awareness for the farmland bird and brown hare as well as encouraging submitting records for the species.
- Gemma Bode and Rebecca Price of GWT have been identifying sites in Monmouthshire. First suite of sites (about 48) has been suggested and MCC is writing a report to accompany the South Wales Criteria as SPG to the UDP.
- A service Level Agreement with SEWBReC has been finalised and screening of planning applications has commenced.
- Pill farm Project - Physical Regeneration Fund money from WAG is being used to produce detailed proposals for sustainable improvements to the environment at three existing industrial estates at Caldicot. Part of this includes a landscape masterplan. A phase 1 habitat survey and management recommendations for key areas of the estates where Biodiversity benefits can be maximised will feed into the final landscape plan.

Contact: Kate Woolcock: ☎ 01633 644684 ✉ KateWoolcock@monmouthshire.gov.uk.

3.5 Newport

- First of all, I'd like to introduce myself as Newport's newest Biodiversity Officer, taking over from Abbie Lee who left earlier in the summer. I started off as an environmental consultant, based for 5 years in Cardiff, being mainly involved with habitat and protected species surveys, management plans and EIA work. Earlier this year, I went to New Zealand to work as a conservation volunteer, mainly in pest control and weed eradication. Now that I've readjusted to the cooler climate of Wales, I'm looking forward to working with all interested parties to promote Newport's biodiversity.
- Newport's LBAP is almost in its final form, but the target dates need to be revised as they are now out of date. I am working at present towards getting the key partners together to table and agree revised dates.
- In conjunction with the Natural History Museum and the Environment Agency, a Phase 2 pond survey was undertaken over the summer months. The results of the survey will be very useful as over 200 ponds were surveyed and will provide us with a basis to identify measures to improve the wildlife value of ponds within Newport.
- In partnership with Gwent Ornithological Society, Gwent Wildlife Trust, we are working towards setting up feeding stations and nest boxes for tree sparrows at a farm in Goldcliff where tree sparrows have been spotted in the past, and which was identified through our tree sparrow questionnaire sent out earlier this year.
- With funding from CCW, our Countryside and Grounds Maintenance teams are targeting six schools to bring their grounds into management for wildlife and will be providing information and advice on ecological issues to a further fourteen. Management is likely to include construction of school ponds and creation of wildflower meadows, and ideally we will be able to source and use at least some species of a local origin.
- Gwent Wildlife Trust is assisting in the production of postcards for brown hare and lapwing to raise awareness of these species within the Gwent area.
- A moth training night was held in association with Monmouthshire Moth and Butterfly Group on 20th August at the Fourteen Locks Centre. Our programme of training events, walks and talks will start again in spring of 2006 and if anyone would like assistance with running an event, then please get in touch with us.
- We were lucky enough to work alongside Capita Symonds to relocate a very large population (1000+) of smooth newts from a soon to be developed site at Crindau, in addition to slow worm, common frog and common toads. These have now found a welcoming home at Allt-yr-yn Local Nature Reserve and we will be working with Capita Symonds to set up a species specific management plan and to undertake surveys in 2006 and 2007.

Contact: Dolores Byrne ☎ 01633 232880 ✉ dolores.byrne@newport.gov.uk.

4. NEW WILDLIFE SITES SURVEYOR FOR GWT

[Rebecca Price]

Since joining Gwent Wildlife Trust in April as the Wildlife Sites Surveyor I've had a busy and enjoyable summer searching for surviving species-rich grasslands within both Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent and trying to navigate my way through some of the narrow and tricky lanes the county has to offer! I've been lucky that the sun has largely shone and some nice candidate Wildlife Sites have been discovered along with some enthusiastic responses from landowners. The project was supported by a variety of keen volunteers whose time and hard work were much appreciated.



Surveying has continued on from the work previously carried out by Gemma Bodé, and in Monmouthshire my efforts this year have largely focused on a stretch running north of Llanarth, through Llantilio Crossenny and part of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel towards Grosmont. As usual sites are targeted by having been previously highlighted in CCW's 1990 Phase 1 survey and the 1983 Grassland survey. Despite what is largely an intensively farmed area some nice species-rich meadows still remain including a lovely site that along with a whole range of

wildflowers included *Genista tinctoria*.

In Blaenau Gwent the project has focused on carrying out a Phase 1 survey of the North Sirhowy and Cwmtillery Valleys to try and identify and pockets of remaining rich lowland grassland. Both the areas were found to still have some nice areas of species-rich acid grassland and acidic flush. Within the North Sirhowy Valley the banks of the Shon-Sheffrey's Reservoir contained rich areas of neutral and marshy grassland, with *Sagina nodosa* recorded.

All too quickly the summer survey season has passed but I will be around to continue the search next year, in my new role as Gwent Grasslands Initiative Officer! The Project lasts until 2008 by which time we hope to have a comprehensive register of all grasslands of Wildlife Site quality in Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent.



For further information contact: Rebecca Price, Gwent Grasslands Initiative Officer

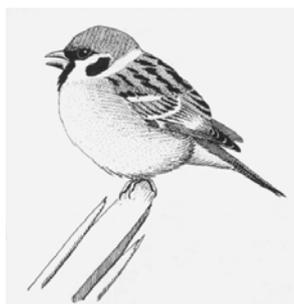
✉ rprice@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk

4. GWENT TREE SPARROW PROJECT LAUNCHED

[Richard Clarke]

Local wildlife groups and councils in Gwent have come together to double their efforts to help the nationally threatened Tree Sparrow.

Once common in the Gwent area, the Tree Sparrow is now a very scarce sight. Some 20-years ago, Tree Sparrows were fairly widespread especially on the Gwent Levels. Just 10-years ago there were still good size winter flocks to be seen but sadly that's no longer the case and today you would be hard pressed to spot a Tree Sparrow anywhere locally. The scale of the decline is alarming: the Gwent Ornithological Society during its breeding birds surveys between 1981-85 & 1998-2003 has recorded a reduction in the species' range of over 80%.



To help encourage Tree Sparrows back from the brink the Gwent Ornithological Society, local landowners, the Gwent Wildlife Trust, the Goldcliff Ringing Group, Welsh Water, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council have joined forces and launched the *Spot the Tree Sparrow Project*. The Countryside Council for Wales is providing funding towards the project under their Species Challenge Fund.

The Project will build on existing work by the partners. Seven key sites have been selected on the Caldicot Levels and Usk valley areas and at each, winter feed and nest boxes for Tree Sparrows will be provided. Such measures are aimed at addressing the loss of winter stubble and other feeding opportunities lost due to changing agricultural practices and the shortage of suitable nesting sites. Key to the success of the project will be the support of volunteers. The partnership is keen to hear from anyone who might be able to help with feeding and monitoring at the key sites. **To register your interest in helping please contact surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk or Richard Clarke on 01633 615581.**

5. HELP SAVE THE ANCIENT TREES OF GWENT

[Steven Rogers]

The search is on to locate the oldest trees in Gwent and Gwent Wildlife Trust is looking for volunteers to help in the effort. Veteran trees may be centuries old and much bigger than an average tree. They can be so long lived they become ancient monuments in their localities and even live on in place names, as at Great Oak near Raglan. Royal Oak is a popular name for pubs, as is Chequers, the common name for the service tree. At Llantilio Crossenny there is an ancient oak in a cider orchard that is about 33 feet round and 10 feet across and is probably about 800 years old. It is still alive and producing new leaves every spring. Trees like this are some of the oldest living things on earth. Oaks, sweet chestnuts, yews and fruit trees can all live to a great age, sometimes developing huge, hollow, trunks.

The Gwent Wildlife Trust wants to find these old, gnarled and knotty veteran trees because they are some of the most important places for wildlife and are becoming very scarce. Owls, kestrels, woodpeckers, nuthatches and bees nest in holes and bats roost in hollow trees. Veteran trees support almost 2000 different tiny creatures like beetles, spiders and special flies.

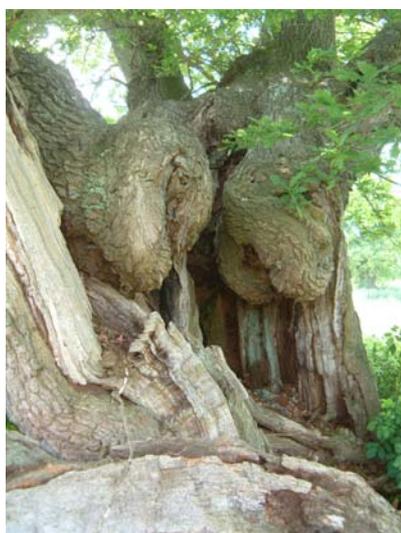
Churchyards are famous for their ancient yews, and at Bettws Newydd near Usk there is a huge tree. Oaks and chestnuts often survive in old parkland, and even when these trees start to die back and rot, they can last for

centuries. These rotting trees are still very important for wildlife and they harbour many of our rarest fungi, lichens, mosses and liverworts. There are spectacular bracket fungi and the Oyster mushrooms found on old beech trees are even good to eat.

Living history

Old trees become part of our history as boundary markers or marking the line of ancient cross country routes. A road up to the Black Mountains below Twyn y Gaer is lined with ancient beech trees that have horizontal trunks. When the trees were young they were laid, or pleached, to make a hedge alongside the old drove road and it is possible that these beeches are survivors of the ancient woodlands that used to cloak the hills of south east Wales.

Losing ancient trees



There is increasing concern as more and more veteran trees are being lost to new roads and building developments. In some cases, even though individual trees were protected during building work, they suffered premature death because the roots were damaged or paved over. Trees need good access to water and cannot survive when the surface water is drained away. On farmland there can be an unexpected loss of veteran trees when deep ploughing damages the roots.

Get involved!

Gwent Wildlife Trust is looking for people to record the veteran trees near where they live or get involved in surveying a wider area. The information will be shared with other organisations to support conservation and management of the trees so that future generations can continue to enjoy these important features of the landscape. **Recording forms can be downloaded from the GWT website <http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/gwent/> or contact Steve Rogers, GWT, Seddon House, Dingestow, Monmouth NP25 4DY. ☎ 01600 740358.**

6. GWENT WILDLIFE FORUM

[Julian Branscombe]

Gwent Wildlife Trust is organising a Conservation Forum on 11th November. Invitations have gone out to GWT trustees and local group committee members, along with representatives from the main conservation organisations and groups in Gwent. Solutia (UK) Ltd are hosting the event at their site in Newport, hence numbers are limited due to the tight restrictions on space at the venue. It promises to be a valuable day reviewing nature conservation successes in Gwent. General presentations will cover the work of Countryside Council for Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the South East Wales Biological Records Centre, along with the achievements of Local Biodiversity Action Plans. There are also two themed sessions. One on farming and wildlife will feature a perspective from a Llantony farmer, a presentation on the Assembly's support for wildlife-friendly farming, along with a presentation on the Gwent Grassland Initiative by Gemma Bodé, the Trust's Conservation Manager. The other themed session is on nature reserve management. Lauri MacLean, the Trust's Reserves Manager will speak on GWT's estate of 30

nature reserves. The history and archaeology of thirteen of those sites will be the subject of Bob Trett's presentation, following a contract he has recently undertaken for the Trust. Tony Pickup will then give an account of CCW's work at the Newport Wetlands. Jon Winder will describe the Woodland Trust's work in restoring ancient woodland sites which have been damaged by conifer planting, with is very topical given their recent acquisition at Wentwood Forest.

We are sorry that we cannot provide an open invitation to the event, due to restrictions on numbers. However, there may be one or two places left, and the Recorders Newsletter will be out just in time for people to see if there are spaces. If you would like to come, please e-mail me on jbranscombe@gwentwildlife.cix.co.uk, or call me at the Trust office before 5pm on Wednesday 9th November. If the event is a success, we shall intend running it again next year, perhaps focussing on the field of environmental education.

7. LOCAL PEOPLE ACT AS PLANNING WATCHDOGS

[Steven Rogers]

Through a series of training courses offered by Gwent Wildlife Trust, local community groups will be able to learn how to respond to planning applications that could have detrimental effects on their local environment and its wildlife. The courses are designed to develop the skills of these groups so that they can provide planning officers with important information that might not otherwise come to their attention.



Tintern, Monmouthshire

Steven Rogers, Conservation Officer, says 'Gwent Wildlife Trust has a long standing relationship with the planners and we have worked together to modify plans so that developments can go ahead without damaging the wildlife. But, we cannot do it all ourselves and think community groups can provide vital help'.



Raglan, Monmouthshire

The planning training courses are supported by Awards for All Wales and Monmouthshire Rural Community Action who want to see local people becoming more involved in the decisions that affect their quality of life. "Richard Lewis of Rural Community Action says "We are keen to support training initiatives like this. The training will be relevant where there are threats not only to the environment but also to the social fabric of our villages and towns."

Courses will be held within Gwent, starting in Abergavenny at the end of October and continuing through the winter. **Interested groups or individuals can contact Steven Rogers at GWT ☎ 01600 740358.**

Abergavenny

Ty'r Morwydd House, Pen y pound, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, NP7 5WD

Session 1: 31 October 2005

Session 2: 7 November 2005

Caldicot

Caldicot Rugby Club, Longfellow Road, Caldicot

Session 1: 14 November 2005

Session 2: 21 November 2005

Usk

Usk Agricultural College, Room C3, Usk campus, The Rhadyr, Usk NP15 1XJ

Session 1: 30 January 2006

Session 2: 6 February 2006

Chepstow

Brockweir and Hewelfield Community Shop, Mill Hillo, Brockweir, Nr Chepstow, NP16 7NW

Session 1: 13 February 2006

Session 2: 20 February 2006

ALL SESSIONS ARE FROM 6.30 - 9.00 pm

8. MONMOUTHSHIRE TURTLE DOVE PROJECT

[Debbie Scott & Jerry Lewis]

The Turtle Dove used to be widespread in Wales in the 1970s but the population has fallen and the range has contracted since then. Regular breeding is now confined to young conifer plantations in a small part of Monmouthshire - estimated at 6 pairs in 2004.

Aim of the project

The project is a partnership between RSPB, Forestry Commission Wales and the Wye Valley AONB, and will run over 2 breeding seasons. The aim is to determine the population size of Turtle Doves in the Key Area in Monmouthshire in order to target FCW Forest Design Plans and to promote favourable management of farmland to private landowners. A supplementary feeding programme at two sites was also undertaken together with a study of foraging behaviour.

Survey

Fieldwork for this year's part of the project has now finished (16 1-km squares were surveyed) and preliminary results suggest that no more than 4 singing males were present in the core breeding area, although it is difficult to be certain due to the local movement of birds. After a slow start, surveyors reported numerous sightings in late June and early July but on many occasions, these were likely to be the same birds. Singing birds were recorded in 6 of the 16 squares surveyed. A co-ordinated survey of the 4 main occupied 1-km squares in early July located only a single purring bird. Of the 4 males that we think were present, we only know of one pair, we strongly suspect that they nested but have no evidence that they reared young.

Supplementary feeding

Corn was regularly scattered at two sites from May - July. No birds were observed feeding at one (although a bird was heard singing nearby in July), while at the other Turtle Doves were present on eleven of the twelve feeding watches (but only spending an average of three minutes feeding per visit). Eight other bird species were observed using the site, including Yellowhammers.

Foraging study

Birds were seen feeding on chicken feed in a private garden near Broad Meend and on food put out for Pheasants in Trelleck village. Due to the limitations of following birds in the plantation/rolling terrain we have little indication of the foraging behaviour, but the study did provide more information on the location and number of birds present.

Next step

Surveys and supplementary feeding will continue in 2006 (with an option of radio tracking to better understand the foraging behaviour). **If anyone has a record of Turtle Dove this summer please let either of us have the record (date, grid reference, behaviour) and if you wish to be involved next year please contact Debbie (debbie.scott@rspb.org.uk) or Jerry Lewis (JerryLewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk).**

9. SPECIES SITINGS

Ade Williams found a suspected polecat on 27 September 2005, on the A468 at Trecennydd, Caerphilly (roadkill). It weighed about 1lb 3/4oz-500g., approx body 13"- 33c, body inc tail 19"- 48c. Sadly, Ade also spotted another flattened polecat between the Penrhos and Trecennydd roundabouts (ST137867) on 06 October 2005. It weighed approximately 1 lb 4oz-582g, body 13 1/2"-34c, + tail 6"-15c.

10. EVENTS

- **Peregrines and Pigeons!**

11 November 2005

The facts about peregrine's diet and behaviour throughout the year in the Avon Gorge. A talk by John Tully.

Location: Lecture Theatre 4, UWIC, Cyncoed Campus, Cyncoed Road, Cardiff

Time: 7.30 pm **Cost:** £3 for adults. £2.50 for over 60s and £1 for under 16s

Contact: Cardiff and District Local Group: Tricia Wood ☎ 02920 701754.

- **The 5th NBN Conference for National Societies & Recording Schemes**

18 November 2005

Leader: National Biodiversity Network (NBN)

Agenda: *'Focus on Wildlife: current activities in societies and schemes'*.

The Conference is intended to give some of the various UK-wide recording schemes and societies an opportunity to show what they have been doing recently. There will also be demonstrations of Recorder 6, some information on the developing NBN Web-services, the Harlequin Ladybird Survey, the BRC Survey of Bryophytes of Arable Land, Adit's recording software, and possibly others.

Location: Flett Theatre, Natural History Museum, London

Cost: £15 per seat **Contact:** <http://www.nbn.org.uk>

- **National Tree Week** **23 November – 4 December 2005**
 National Tree Week is the Tree Council's festival to mark the start of the tree planting season and nationwide celebration of trees and woods. See www.treecouncil.org.uk for more details.

- **Birding down under: a tour of Australia** **2 December 2005**
 A local birdwatcher Paul Bowden talking on exotic locations. An audio-visual presentation which includes video clips.
Location: Lecture Theatre 4, UWIC, Cyncoed Campus, Cyncoed Road, Cardiff
Time: 7.30 pm **Cost:** £3 for adults. £2.50 for over 60s and £1 for under 16s
Contact: Cardiff and District Local Group: Tricia Wood ☎ 02920 701754.

- **1st International Recorder Conference, Luxembourg** **2-3 December 2005**

Leader: Luxembourg National Museum of Natural History

Agenda: *'Collating and managing natural science field and collection records in Europe'*. The conference will be of interest to: field recorders and recording scheme organisers across Europe; biological and geological museums looking for software to manage specimens, collections and field records; managers of biological records centres and geodiversity record centres; organisations charged with delivering biodiversity or earth sciences data and advice to planners, local and national governments. See website below for further details on the agenda.

Location: Old Abbey of Neumünster (*Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster*), Luxembourg-City

Cost: See www.symposium.lu/recorder **Contact:** www.symposium.lu/recorder

- **RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch** **28-29 January 2006**
 The 2006 Big Garden Birdwatch takes place at the end of January. All you need to do to take part is watch the birds in your garden or local park for an hour. For more information see www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/.

- **World Wetlands Day** **2 February 2006**
 See www.ramsar.org/ for more information

- **National Nest Box Week** **14 February 2006**
 This happens every year and is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. See www.bto.org/notices/nbw2005.htm for further information.

11. NEW PUBLICATIONS / WEBSITES OF INTEREST

- **New Natural History Museum Website**

On Friday 27th May 2005 the Natural History Museum officially launched its new website www.nhm.ac.uk.

- **The State of Britain's Mammals 2005 Report from The Mammals Trust UK now available**

'The State of Britain's Mammals 2005' covers the key themes of mammal conservation over the last year.

Among this year's most notable findings is the description of the water vole as *seriously* under threat. You can download a free copy of the report here www.mtuk.org/content/news/SOBM05report.pdf, or contact them on 020 7498 5262 for a hardcopy (£5).

- **The first report of the Tracking Mammals Partnership has been published**

Copies of *'UK Mammals: Species Status and Population Trends'* can be obtained from Natural History Book Services www.nhbs.com or can be downloaded free from the TMP website at www.trackingmammals.org.