

Wildlife at St Madoc Centre 2016

Welcome to our fifth annual wildlife report – a digest of a year’s work with local volunteers & staff to monitor and encourage wildlife.



It is now seven years since our management plan was published. 2017 will build on the last seven years of monitoring and habitat improvements leading to a new species survey in 2020. Conservation and environmental education are more important than ever before as we have walked into an era of unprecedented species loss and habitat decline both in the UK and globally.



Rowan counting birds at Whiteford NNR

BIRDS

In 2016 we extended our bird counts to include two Non-Estuarine Waterbird Surveys (NEWS) contributing to a UK survey for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The two 1km squares of coast nearest St Madoc Centre from Broughton Bay up to just short of Whiteford Lighthouse were covered one freezing cold February morning. Species and frequencies were recorded with details of various land and beach features.

Bird counts for 1km square Grid Ref: SS433948 to SS440963 (Cwm Ivy Tor to just short of Whiteford Lighthouse)

Species	Frequency	Comments
Brent Goose	175	Higher count than normal expected for this species
Common Scoter	8	
Dunlin	10	
Herring Gull	31	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	
Oystercatcher	444	
Redshank	5	
Sanderling	95	Higher count than normal expected for this species

Our usual weekly bird transects were completed over a set route and contributed to BirdTrack, the online database run by BTO.

In October three **Choughs** were seen on the headland feeding on **Garden Chafer** grubs. A huge ‘infestation’ of these grubs which eat roots, caused large brown patches to appear on the headland. Choughs and **Starlings** feasted on the grubs for several weeks. In addition the usually densely matted grass was efficiently scraped up probably by a visiting **Badger** also after grubs. It will be interesting to observe the condition of the grassland next year where the old thatch has been thinned out and blown away. Undergrazing is the main problem in this area so the Badgers have provided some welcome natural management which may encourage wild flowers and some of the finer grasses to flourish.



Garden Chafer grubs in their thousands



Brown patch created by grubs feeding on grass

In November we welcomed the return of a single **Black Redstart** seen near our buildings. The species was last seen at the centre in December 2011 when there were sometimes two individuals. This bird is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern; there are fewer than 100 breeding pairs in the UK.



Grass Snake

REPTILES

Several visits recording reptiles under refugia as well as some public wildlife events revealed a large number of **Grass Snakes**. Numbers have been increasing since the pond was created in the woodland. This summer ten individuals were recorded during our Wildlife Wander event in August.

Huge numbers of **Common Frogs** were also seen throughout the summer, usually hiding in grass about to be trimmed by the mower. Grass Snakes eat Frogs so it is encouraging to see that the addition of just one fairly small pond to the site in 2008 has had such a large impact.

Records were submitted to Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS

Weekly butterfly transects were made between April 1 and the last week of September. Records were sent to Butterfly Conservation.

2015 was generally a poor year for butterflies. The UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme Annual Report for 2015 stated that even widespread butterflies had a poor year although some species like **Brimstone** and **Marbled White** had their best years on record. We have yet to hear what the 2016 report will bring, but at St Madoc Centre counts of all butterfly species were distressingly low all summer and frequencies came far short of the figures that I would expect.

Annual maximum frequencies observed during surveys for a selection of species (the maximum number of individuals recorded on the transect on any day during monitoring season April to September)

Year	Common Blue	Wall	Grayling	Meadow Brown
2012	8	4	1	60
2013	84	2	4	72
2014	13	1	8	71
2015	6	0	2	55
2016	20	0	1	10



Common Blue

However there is some good news. In previous years single **Dark Green Fritillary** butterflies have occasionally been seen on the cliffs. A search for evidence of a population on site revealed a patch of **Violets** with partially eaten leaves. It is now almost certain that St Madoc Centre has its own breeding population.

Moth trapping took place during Spring and Summer. This year's new species to note is **Least Black Arches**, well-distributed in Wales, but locally common. The impressive **Privet Hawkmoth** made a welcome return after none came to the trap last year.

PLANTS & FUNGI



In May a search for rusts (a family of fungi) produced some interesting finds including this one (see left). This is **Campion Rust**, easy to spot as it turns the normally white anthers of **Red Campion** a maraune colour. Rusts we had not previously recorded were also found on **Bluebell**, **Common Nettle** and **Bramble**. We also have the very distinctive, bright orange **Burnet Rose Rust**. This has the grand Latin name of *Phragmidium rosae-pimpinellifoliae*.

Red Campion with Campion Rust

In October we found several waxcap species new to our species list. These are **Hygrocybe constrictospora**, a rare specialist of short coastal grasslands spotted near our firepit, **Persistent Waxcap** and *H. calciphila* on short limestone grassland at rock outcrops and **Dune Waxcap** on sand. This brings the total number of waxcap species at St Madoc Centre to ten. The site can be considered important in a county context for its waxcap diversity. Management to keep the grassland grazed short and freer from Bracken will help to maintain good conditions for grassland fungi.

Another dune specialist toadstool we found was the **Dune Cavalier**.

Fungi in general will benefit from ongoing Bracken management and shorter grass swards. In the absence of a more ideal grassland management, selective strimming in strategic areas is likely to have beneficial results.



Hygrocybe constrictospora

Our volunteers are very important to us. If you have a group or are an individual wanting to get involved at St Madoc Centre please do contact us.

Thanks to everyone who helped with our conservation work in 2016:

Mark Barber (Amphibian & Reptile Conservation), Steve Bolchover, Dave Bookless, Deborah Buijze, Colin Conroy, The Cutcliffe Family, Rob Colley (Glamorgan Bat Group), Abi Forsythe, Peter Hill (ARC), Nathan & Char Holland (SMC Education Rangers), Alison Holland (SMC Manager), Lyndon Jeffery (BTO Area Representative), Peter Kovacsi, Andy Lester (Conservation Director, A Rocha UK), Hannah Pearson (A Rocha UK), David & Liz O'Carroll (Gower Honey Co-operative), Mark Pavett (National Museum of Wales), Rowan Porteous (SMC Education & Conservation Ranger), Sue Robbins, Barry Stewart, Peter Sturgess (A Rocha UK Area Conservation Advisor), Daniel Warden.

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