

Wildlife at St Madoc Centre 2015

Welcome to our fourth annual wildlife report – a digest of a year's work with local volunteers to monitor and encourage wildlife.



In 2015 we revised our wildlife recording methods, swapping pen and paper for smartphones. These are now an essential part of our field kit. In addition we now use SEWBRReCORD – the online wildlife records database for South Wales. It's very easy to use and anyone can contribute data. If you're not connected, now is the time!

FUNGI & PLANTS

Mild weather conditions in the autumn brought us a colourful range of fungi. The weird and wonderful diversity that turned up challenged our identification skills. A sixth waxcap species recorded for the first time, **Blackening Waxcap**, was found in the dunes and in front of The Manse. A second new species was our highlight, the stunning **Blue Roundhead** found growing on bark chippings.

Many specimens of the **Earthtongue** *Geoglossum cookeanum* were found particularly in the dunes including this very large one measuring 10cm, about 3cm longer than usual. Other species found included **Snowy Waxcap**, **Shaggy Inkcap**, **Meadow Coral** and a **Fairy Club**. In future we will certainly look out for the fifty or so species of fungus recorded here since 2009.



Blackening Waxcap



Blue Roundhead



Earthtongue



Wood Blewit

A search for the rare plant, **Hutchinsia**, revealed that there are more plants that we thought. It was first recorded in 2010. Like the fungus, **Winter Stalkball** and some red waxcap species, it is thriving on the more open, mossy, areas of the dunes. Care has been taken to pile Bracken elsewhere during the late summer cut to avoid suppressing these tiny, but beautiful plants.

Also in the fixed dunes (fixed by vegetation) it is heartening to see that areas cleared of Bracken have been grazed well by Rabbits and sheep. The short, cropped grass has been populated by large numbers of **Wood Blewit** (see left).

Our annual Bracken cut was extended to a fifth compartment this year. These areas will be checked for fungus species in 2016.

This summer was a great year for orchids. A huge number of **Pyramidal Orchids** appeared on our headland producing, with **Bloody Cranesbill** and **Bird's-foot Trefoil**, a rich carpet of pink and yellow.

To inform our visitors of the variety of wildlife to be found here we obtained funds from Environment Wales for five interpretation boards. These describe the dunes, ecology of wood piles, headland (calcareous grassland) and Gower Honey Co-operative's apiary located in our wood.



INSECTS

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

Reflecting the UK trend, 2015 was not a good year for butterflies. As in 2014, worryingly low numbers of **Common Blue** were recorded. Air temperatures throughout the spring and summer were low owing to strong, cold winds. As well as bringing the air temperature down these also had a drying effect, unusual for the spring at least. On many occasions temperatures barely reached the minimum requirement for walking a transect (13 to 16 degrees Celsius). This improved in July and August, but temperatures did not exceed approximately 25 degrees Celsius.

Annual maximum frequencies observed during surveys for a selection of species

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



The woodland part of our transect yields the lowest butterfly frequencies so extensive ride clearance of overhanging branches in our wood took place this winter in the hope that the extra sunlight and warmth will encourage the butterfly population.

There were two sightings of **Marbled White**. One butterfly was caught in a polytunnel and another was seen alighting on a small area of uncut meadow. Two **Dark Green Fritillaries** were seen, the first since 2012. These are rare sightings at St Madoc Centre as neither species is known to breed on our land; it is likely that they flew across from Whiteford Burrows National Nature Reserve. We plan to search for eggs in May 2016.

Also in our polytunnels, mining bees used **Jalapeno Chilli** leaves to make cells for their eggs in plant pots and a **Great Green Bush Cricket** took up residence consuming **Aubergines**.

Moths were trapped fortnightly throughout the summer. Many species reached adult stage later than usual, notably favourites such as **Buff Tip** and **Garden Tiger**. Low temperatures may account for this and the lack of hawkmoths which, being larger species, require warmer temperatures to fly. For the first time since 2012 no **Privet Hawkmoths** were trapped at St Madoc Centre but they were regularly trapped locally at Cwm Ivy and recorded under Butterfly Conservation's Garden Moth Scheme.

New moth species included **Large Wainscot**, **Shoulder-Striped Wainscot**, **Coxcomb Prominent** and **Feathered Thorn**. Moth data will be entered on to SEWBReCORD.

BIRDS

Bird surveys were made over a set route. Records were contributed to BirdTrack, the online records database run by the British Trust for Ornithology.

Two exciting records were made this year. In spring a female **Pied Flycatcher** was seen in our wood displaying its typical restless behaviour catching flies during a quiet moment between school groups. This is only our second record. The first was of a male seen in 2012. This bird has Red Status which means that it has suffered a severe decline in numbers and breeding range, but they are a common species of upland woodland in Wales.

It is fairly likely that Skylarks nested on our land this year. One or two singing males were seen over a period of several weeks doing songflights to attract a mate. At the end of summer several birds were flushed from our fields. It could be that the successful breeding years of 2013 and 2014 caused a dispersal of territorial males from Whiteford Burrows NNR. This is significant for St Madoc Centre as such obvious signs of breeding behaviour have not been observed here since the A Rocha survey of 2009. The Skylark also has Red Status.



Common Lizard

Refugia were inspected and reptile records contributed to Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.



Common Darters pairing

POND SURVEYS

Dragonfly and damselfly surveys took place and a Common Hawker was recorded for the first time. Results were recorded on SEWBRECORD.

In 2016 school pond dipping sessions using PondNet survey criteria will establish good data on species and abundance. This will indicate the health of the pond and contribute to UK data.

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 2015:

Mark Barber (Amphibian & Reptile Conservation), Steve Bolchover, Dave Bookless, Richard Chippendale, Alison Colebrook (Environment Wales), Colin Conroy, The Cutcliffe Family, Rob Colley (Glamorgan Bat Group), Jess Farr, Ali Grove (SMC Admin Ranger), Peter Hill (ARC), Nathan & Char Holland (SMC Education Rangers), Alison Holland (SMC Manager), Mo Hughes, Lyndon Jeffery (BTO Area Representative), Steve Jones, 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 (Education & Conservation Ranger), Sue Robbins, Hannah Shaw (Freshwater Habitats Trust), Barry Stewart, Peter Sturgess (A Rocha UK Area Conservation Advisor), Ian Tew, Daniel Warden. Eco-tribe, Info-Nation, I-Vol, SGI, Swansea Metropolitan University Conservation Volunteers, Morryston Comprehensive School, SEWBReC, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Western Bay Youth Justice & Early Intervention Service.

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