



**NEWWILDLIFE**

# Wildlife Matters

**SPRING 2014**

**VOLUME 1, ISSUE 5**



Photos  
©Dave Hill

Welcome to the first Wildlife Matters of 2014! This is a bumper packed edition, with the introduction of two new staff members, an insight to the brilliant writings of our super blogger & volunteer Sarah; and our favourite pictures from winter and spring so far. What a strange warm and wet start to the year; we saw butterflies, bees and even birds interested in nests in February. We always love to hear about what you have seen, especially with pictures from the area. Hope to see you on the reserves soon!

## **BUTTERFLY UPDATE: RHYDYMWYN**

Brian and Sue are volunteer surveyors, and can regularly be seen walking the length of Rhydymwyn Valley Nature Reserve complete with binoculars, cameras and recording sheets! One of the first full surveys of the year was undertaken on Tuesday 15th April, and these were the results from them:

*"Sue and I undertook a full survey on 15.04.14 and whereas last year at week 3 we recorded just 7 butterflies, this afternoon we recorded 68, including a brimstone and several orange tips. We recorded nearly 10 times the number we saw this time week last year, absolutely wonderful."*

On the 22nd April, Brian and Sue saw 10 orange tips, 6 small tortoiseshell and 16 peacocks. It is brilliant to be getting so much data about the butterflies at Rhydymwyn, from two such enthusiastic people.

Brian and Sue will be leading a butterfly walk around Rhydymwyn on Sunday 27th July (see page 7 for details).



**A Dingy Skipper**

### **Inside this Issue:**

<i>Butterfly update</i>	<b>1</b>
<i>Introductions - Leah Williams</i>	<b>2</b>
<i>Community &amp; Education Officer and Volunteer Update</i>	<b>3</b>
<i>Senior Ranger Update</i>	<b>4</b>
<i>Introductions— Lucie Bernardova &amp; Lane End update</i>	<b>5</b>
<i>NEWWildlife Blog</i>	<b>6</b>
<i>Upcoming events</i>	<b>7</b>
<i>Winter/spring pics</i>	<b>8</b>

For more information on any of the information found in this leaflet please go to:

[www.newwildlife.org.uk](http://www.newwildlife.org.uk)

## INTRODUCTIONS: LEAH WILLIAMS CONSERVATION DIRECTOR

Dear All,

Hello and welcome to the Spring issue of Wildlife Matters!

Spring is definitely my favourite time of year. After the darkness and cold of winter, it's the season I most look forward to. It's a time of new beginnings and frenetic activity, not just in nature, but also at NEWW! A lot's been happening since the last issue!

Before I go on, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Leah Williams, and I have recently joined NEWW as Conservation Director. I am a proud North Walian, hailing from Meirionethshire, and having lived in Conwy County for the past 20 years. I have always been passionate about the natural world, and knew from early on that I wanted to embark upon a career in conservation. Before joining NEWW, I spent twelve years working on Anglesey managing a suite of nature reserves, and before that worked in environmental consultancy.

Some of my top priorities are engaging with NEWW's members and partners, and seeing how we can work collaboratively to support one another in ours aims. I will also be busy working with the Board of Trustees to put together a new business plan which will set out some of the ways in which we would like to see the charity develop going forward. One of the things I am particularly keen on is to foster greater links with the local community, especially with community groups, volunteers and local educational establishments.

Remani is currently on maternity leave following the arrival of the newest member of her family, a baby boy called Leo. Congratulations, Remani! Lucia is covering the Lane End post while Remani is on maternity leave. Along with Lucia, Karl, our Senior Ranger, and Kate, our Community Engagement and Education Officer, have been very busy, as you will see from this issue's updates.

We have been ably assisted by Cath and Mark of late, who have been helping us with the operational side of things. Thank you very much, Cath and Mark, for all your help!

As I sign off, I would like to say that I am delighted to have joined the team, and am looking forward to meeting and engaging with NEWW's members and partners, and to being a part of NEWW's exciting future.

Kind regards,

Leah Williams  
Conservation Director



## SENIOR RANGER UPDATE—KARL MARTIN

Winter was an unusually windy, mild and wet season, something I am sure you will all have been aware of.

We have been fortunate on our reserves of not having succumbed to too much storm damage from the winds with only the occasional branch down here and there.

The mild weather has probably had a beneficial effect on our wildlife. Usually badgers would have fattened up a bit for winter and then retired to their setts to have a lazy time for a while until the freeze passed. They still usually emerge in snowy weather but only if food is to be found and for toileting purposes.

This season though they have been very active throughout, taking advantage of the damp but unfrozen ground to still be able to find their favourite food – earthworms! Their latrine areas, often along territorial boundaries, have been well marked and full. Keep an eye out for them as you walk along hedgerows and woods and try to see if you can



identify what they have been eating. Similarly the rabbits on our reserves have been active throughout as they can easily find food. This, along with no snow covering the grass where the bank and field voles have been tunnelling have made it easier foraging for our foxes at this, usually hard, time of year. On a recent visit to our Glascoed reserve at St Asaph I

was rewarded with the sight of a foraging fox. Stealthily it crept amongst the tussocks, ears twitching and twisting from side to side as it intently listened out for any vole noises. Then both ears would focus on the sound as silently the fox crept closer and closer until with a high pounce it leapt up and crashed forepaws first to the ground, swiftly followed by a muzzle of sharp teeth! I never did see whether it caught anything but it repeated this many times and may have been swallowing small voles whole quickly.

Wonderfully the fox crept closer and closer and I remained as quiet as a church mouse, albeit a rather large one! Eventually the fox was about 3m away when with a sniff of the air it caught my scent. A wonderful few moments then passed as we looked at each other before the fox decided I was a slight threat and it slowly jogged away through the long grass and out of sight. Oh and where was my camera so that I could record this wonderful event? Left back in the van because it was raining and I didn't want to get it soaked!

The bird life on our reserves will be surviving remarkably well due to the weather. I've heard a lot of comments from people who feed their birds concerned about where they are. Well it's nothing to worry about, there appears to be an abundant supply of natural food available for them to eat and this means that they will stick to the natural food in preference to our artificial food. Our feeders at the office are remarkable quiet for this time of year although we have just started getting larger numbers of blue tits on them. Mostly we get just a few woodland birds and are occasionally graced by the presence of great spotted woodpeckers and bullfinches and WOW!! We've just

been awarded the fantastic sight of a male sparrowhawk who flew in and perched right outside the office on our storage container!

Life will shortly get very busy for our wildlife as the breeding season gets under way. Sow badgers will already be suckling their cubs underground whilst the boars may have been



evicted to another part of the sett or even to an outlier sett nearby. Watch out for birds starting to build their nests and displaying to their prospective mates, and keep an eye out of an evening for foraging bats. Amazingly on our Aberderfyn reserve near Wrexham at the end of February I saw a probable brimstone butterfly flying about. This was either very early or had over-wintered! I hope that means that we'll have a bumper year for butterflies!!

Karl Martin  
Senior Ranger



Brimstone © Butterfly Conservation

## INTRODUCTIONS: LUCIE BERNARDOVA

I originally come from the Czech Republic. I decided to make my dreams come true after many years in a variety of jobs that depended mostly on the country I was living in. I spent a magnificent time as a seasonal volunteer warden on the Isle of May in 2012.

Before starting my life in Wales, I completed my MSc Conservation and Biodiversity at the University of Leeds, as well as being a Voluntary Trainee Project Officer with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust at the same time. I am lucky enough to join NEWW until November 2014 to allow Remani Jones (Lane End Warden) to spend time with her new baby boy.

I am an adventurous lady, enjoying travelling and meeting strangers on the way. I love to get dirty while doing various DIY tasks; I like to ski and ice-skate, hill walking, going to the theatre, painting and bird ringing.



## LANE END RESERVES OFFICER UPDATE

As everyone has experienced, the weather during the winter was unpredictable. The storms damaged many trees in the northern part of the Knowle Hill reserve, that had to be felled. Many of the damaged trees were grey alder trees (*Alnus incana*). Grey alder is a very fast growing tree, often planted on reclamation sites because of its nitrogen fixing capability. The negatives are that grey alder outcompetes less dominant plants and trees. In this matter the storms have actually helped us to manage the woodland, and allowed more space for other species to take their place in the near future.



The brush that came from the trees was been utilized for dead hedge creation. Dead hedging has been used in the old days, and it is a great way to recycle old brush into important habitat for birds, amphibians and small mammals, as well as a quite fancy looking wind barrier.



The rain has caused incredible damage to the path on the Knowle Hill. We managed to resurface a part of the northern part of the track, thanks to the help of a strong volunteer, Adrian, and the Senior Ranger Karl. Yet there is much more to do over the next year.



We undertook two winter bird surveys throughout the winter. We have seen a number of birds, from the usual ones such as blue, great and long tailed tits and wood pigeons, but also a green finch, bullfinches, a jay, and a coal tit. The highlight was to see a treecreeper and a great spotted woodpecker around the wet woodland in Knowle Hill. I regularly disturbed a snipe during my visits to Lane End to monitor the water levels of ponds. Let's see which birds will use the reserves during the breeding season.

You are more than welcome to come along to the breeding bird surveys or butterfly surveys from May onwards at Knowle Hill.

## NEWWILDLIFE BLOG:

### HIDDEN KINGDOMS IN RHYDYMWYN – BY SARAH LEWIS

Sarah Lewis: [www.thesleepysparrow.blogspot.com](http://www.thesleepysparrow.blogspot.com)

Under a low, grey sky we acted out a scene from *Silent Witness* or one of those dark crime dramas on telly. Fifteen of us lined up, one meter apart and began making our way through the rough grass, parting the soggy tussocks with wet gloves, searching for signs like a police forensic team. Falling sleet and a raven's hollow 'kronk' added to the crime thriller atmosphere.



Thankfully we weren't searching for anything gruesome. Far from it; we were searching for the nests of the harvest mouse, a much under-recorded mammal, with only about 20 records in the last 20 years. Not because the mouse isn't around but because no one's been looking for it. That's why we were gathered on a finger-numbing day at N.E.W Wildlife's Rhydymwyn reserve, to learn what to look for, get searching and, most importantly, send in records.



Ceri from Natural Resources Wales brought in some nests to show us. Their non-breeding nests are like little woven golf balls and are either suspended from stems of tall vegetation or at ground level. The harvest mouse is Europe's smallest mammal, no bigger than a wine cork and weighing the same as a 20 pence piece (I love its Latin name; *Micromys minutus*). It is the only mouse that has a prehensile tail, ideal for clinging to stems of wheat and tall grasses.

Apparently it is best to look for nests in winter so as not to disturb their breeding and because nests are easier to find. We found vole nests, vole tunnels and lots of vole latrines but no harvest mouse nests, though someone did actually find a golf ball in the long grass! I read that you won't see an entrance hole in the nest as the mouse closes it up after entering. Sensible mouse, I thought, as the rain dripped off the end of my nose.



We scuttled back to the education room for hot chocolate and lunch. Inevitably, with a room full of wildlife enthusiasts, the conversation soon turned to poo; polecats, hedgehogs, otter and the need for more surveyors to collect records and send them in. Getting to know your patch is a good start, on a regular walk, you can notice all sorts of signs which all sorts of people will be interested in.



We headed back out into the cold, grey day and this time we swam through a field of shoulder-high, yellow-gold *reed canary grass*. But we found no nests as we breast-stroked through the reeds. Never mind. I for one enjoyed the chance to get down to vole level and delighted in a tiny glimpse of their lives. I have the feeling that from now on a stroll in the countryside will never be the same again.

When I arrived home, I left my muddy boots and soggy coat on the step and, following the wisdom of the harvest mouse, closed the door tightly behind me. If you've enjoyed watching *Hidden Kingdoms* on BBC1, get involved in a harvest mouse survey and catch a glimpse of the hidden world down in the grass.

Surveyors are needed for the winter 2014 survey. See the Mammal Society's web site at; [www.mammal.org.uk/harvestmouse\\_survey](http://www.mammal.org.uk/harvestmouse_survey) and [www.miseproject.ie](http://www.miseproject.ie) Mammals in a Sustainable Environment and NEWWildlife are also on Facebook and Twitter.

## COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION UPDATE – KATE WILSON

### BASKETRY COURSE

We had a wonderful weekend course with basket maker, Caroline Gregson. There was a choice of making a traditional weaved or crazy weaved basket for those with a tough flare and a rebellious nature! Course participants had also brought in items from their gardens that we could use such as honeysuckle, Montbretia and ivy to add a homely touch and interesting textures. Caroline was very generous with her knowledge and techniques and we were all able to take home some wonderful looking baskets.



### VOLUNTEERING UPDATE

Our first session of the new year was to conduct winter bird surveys at Rhydymwyn, with some of our fabulous regular volunteers attending. Birds seen included blue tit, chaffinch, robin, wren, nuthatch, tree creeper, goldcrest, woodcock, redwing, great spotted woodpecker and eight snipe seen as well. We will be starting our breeding bird surveys in May.

Llysfasi College have been a great help to us, by helping to clear scrub and willow away from newt ponds at our Stryt Las reserve in Johnstown. They thoroughly enjoyed getting muddy, chopping trees and burning the brash (and toasting marshmallows!) They have also been helping at Rhydymwyn by clearing our heeling -in area for new trees, creating new habitat piles for newts and reptiles, and will receive their John Muir Awards at the end of their 4th session.

The John Muir Award is part of the John Muir Trust, *"It is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places. It encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment, in a spirit of fun, adventure and exploration."* ([www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org)) We have had three groups gain their John Muir Discovery Award with us by Exploring, Discovering, Conserve and Sharing a wide variety of

### BARN OWL PELLET DISSECTION COURSE

There are not many activities that can keep a room full of people so interested that they ignore chocolate biscuits... But teasing apart barn owl pellets with the hopes of finding harvest mouse bones is one of them! Run by the Mammals in a Sustainable (MISE) project and Mammal Monitoring Network (MaMoNet) and ourselves, ten of us spend the day dissecting barn owl pellets from across North and Mid Wales. Looking in pellets is another way to look at small mammal populations, especially when trying to find evidence of harvest mice, which are very under recorded. We became very good at telling common shrews from pygmy shrews and common vole from bank vole from their teeth; and we even found a whole bird leg! We hope to repeat this event again later in the year.



Small mammal skulls from the dissection course

activities on our nature reserves. The award is free and open to groups and individuals.

Volunteering coming up:

We will be conducting night time amphibian surveys during April and May, and welcome volunteers to come along and help look for frogs, toads and newts. A knowledge of newt ID would be useful, as it is likely we will see all three types of newts. Survey dates remaining are: 06.05.14—Wrexham sites, 08.05.14—Rhydymwyn, 15.05.14—Broughton and 20.05.14—Buckley sites.

Details of more volunteering activities can be found on the next page.

If you have not had a day out volunteering with us for a while, feel free to drop me a line, you will be most welcome! Volunteering with us does not have to be all about conservation tasks, we would also love to hear from you if you have an interest in helping with events, surveys, fundraising, writing funding bids, helping with school visits, becoming a trustee, photography, writing a blog, Welsh translations... the list is endless! Please do feel free to get in touch on [KWilson@newwildlife.org.uk](mailto:KWilson@newwildlife.org.uk), or check our website and Facebook for regular updates.



## UPCOMING EVENTS - RHYDYMWYN

- **Breeding bird survey, Thurs 8th May, 9.00am - 12pm.** *Join Kate for a walk around Rhydymwyn to explore which birds are breeding on the reserve.*
  - **Newt Survey, Thurs 08th May, 9.30pm til late!** *Join NEWWildlife staff and volunteers to conduct a survey of our ponds at Rhydymwyn looking for smooth, palmate and great crested newts. We provide high powered torches to look in the ponds and count the species we see. Please bring clean wellies, warm/waterproof clothing and a torch for walking between ponds.*
  - **Butterfly walk, Sunday 27th July, 2.00pm - 4.00pm.** *Join NEWWildlife and Brian and Sue Roberts from Butterfly Conservation North Wales for a walk around Rhydymwyn Valley Nature Reserve. Rhydymwyn had a fantastic year for butterflies last year, and on one particularly hot and sunny July day they had recorded 1050 butterflies, from 14 species during their latest survey.*
  - **Run Wild Club, Friday 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th August, 10.00am - 12.30pm.** *Summer holiday club – Let your children ‘run wild’ this summer at Rhydymwyn Valley Nature Reserve. We will be exploring the site in lots of ways including, wildlife walks, stories, games and other outdoor activities. Parental consent needed for unaccompanied children. Suitable for children between 5 – 11yrs.*
- Volunteering at Rhydymwyn will take place with Kate, contact: 01352 742115 or email: [KWilson@newwildlife.org.uk](mailto:KWilson@newwildlife.org.uk) to book a place or for more info.

## UPCOMING EVENTS - KNOWLE HILL, BUCKLEY

- **Breeding bird survey, Tues 6<sup>th</sup> May, 7.30am.** *Join Lucie for a walk around Knowle Hill to explore which birds are breeding on the reserve whilst learning more about local birds. Meet at the entrance to the reserve on Drury Lane opposite the lay-by from Mount Pleasant. Bring binoculars (although a couple will be available to borrow) and sturdy shoes.*
  - **Litter Pick & bird box erection, Tues 20<sup>th</sup> May, 10am.** *Join Lucie for a valuable litter picking day and make the site pleasant to look at. We will be also putting some more bird boxes up at the reserve. Meet Lucie in the front of the playground from the Acorn Close site.*
  - **Breeding bird survey, Tues 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 7.30am.** *Join Lucie for a walk around Knowle Hill to explore which birds are breeding on the reserve whilst learning more about local birds. Meet at the entrance to the reserve on Drury Lane opposite the lay-by from Mount Pleasant. Bring binoculars (although a couple will be available to borrow) and sturdy shoes.*
  - **Bracken Bashing, Tues 17<sup>th</sup> June, 10am.** *Join Lucie for annual bracken control with the aim of bringing back wildflowers. We will let our steam out while hitting bracken with sticks! Meet Lucie in the front of the playground from the Acorn Close site. Bring sturdy shoes.*
  - **Butterfly transect survey, Sat 21<sup>st</sup> June, 10am.** *Join Lucie for a leisurely stroll around the reserve to count butterflies. Please check with Lucie a few days before the date, as the event will be rescheduled in case of bad weather. Meet at the entrance to the reserve on Drury Lane opposite the lay-by from Mount Pleasant. Bring sturdy shoes.*
- Volunteering at Knowle Hill will take place on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month with Lucie, contact: 01352 742115 or email: [lbernardova@newwildlife.org.uk](mailto:lbernardova@newwildlife.org.uk) to book a place or for more information.



# PICTURES FROM SPRING 2014...



North East Wales Wildlife would like to pay special mention and thanks to our funders DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales who have made our courses and events possible.



**Cyfoeth  
Naturiol  
Cymru  
Natural  
Resources  
Wales**



**defra**  
Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

**North East Wales Wildlife, 17 Nant Alyn Rd, Rhydymwyn, Flintshire. CH7 5HQ. 01352 742115.  
Email: [KWilson@newwildlife.org.uk](mailto:KWilson@newwildlife.org.uk) or visit: [www.newwildlife.org.uk](http://www.newwildlife.org.uk)**