



New Bee for Cheshire

On April 13th 2012, during one of my visits to Willaston Meadow, I took some photographs of the various insects and flowers that can be found there. I downloaded the images to hard disk to look at later but it wasn't until early November, when I was preparing images for a slide show, that I noticed one of a bee, which I originally thought was the early mining bee *Andrena haemorrhoa*. However I decided to check and found that its shiny black abdomen with rows of white hairs on the first three segments plus black hairs on the legs meant it was something else.

A search on BWARS website www.bwars.com indicated *Andrena nitida*, one of around 60 species of mining bees found in Britain. I sent the photograph to Carl Clee at Liverpool World Museum and he confirmed that it is *A. nitida* and is the first record for Cheshire. It is a bee of open grassland with one generation a year and can be seen from April to June so keep a watch out for it.

Mike Griffiths



Andrena nitida. Photograph: Mike Griffiths

Fishing Fox

Tony Ormond is one of our excellent local birders, and a bird-ringer, who lives on Bidston Hill and regularly watches birds all over the Bidston Moss area. One day recently he was watching birds on the lake, with a long lens on his camera, when he spotted a fox on an old pallet, floating near the edge of the water. The fox proceeded to catch a fish and run off with it. Has anyone else met a fishing fox?



Fox fishing at Bidston Moss. Photograph: Tony Ormond

A Special Date For Your Diary

In 2013 New Ferry Butterfly Park had its most successful summer with 1,500 butterfly sightings and nearly 2,500 visitors.

We are delighted that Dame Lorna Muirhead, Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside, will open the new season at **New Ferry Butterfly Park Open Day on Sunday May 4th at 11 a.m.**

An ideal event for all the family with pond dipping, art trail, craft activities, face painting, cake sale, plant sale, woodland craft demonstration, new environmental games including 'Old MacDonald had a Butterfly Park', tombola, and barbecue.

11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Free admission.

Come by train or bus (to Bebington Station) or park in surrounding roads. Disabled parking only within the Park on this occasion.

Enlargement of Red Rocks Reserve

By the time you read this newsletter there may be work taking place to extend this Cheshire Wildlife Trust reserve by creating over 40 square metres of new pools and improving the existing wetland areas or 'slacks' within the reserve that natterjack toads favour. The reserve is also a key migration stopover point for birds arriving in the UK in spring and autumn, and boasts an impressive list of rarities, along with breeding species like skylarks and reed warblers.

To help maintain optimum conditions for all these species, some areas of soil and vegetation will be removed to expose the sand below, with typical dune plants like marram grass being reinstated to help reduce wind speed and trap sand within the dunes as would naturally occur. Invasive non-native species such as willowherb and an aggressive form of ground rose will also be controlled to limit their impact on more delicate native dune flora.

Matt Allmark, Reserves Officer with Cheshire Wildlife Trust will be overseeing the works and more information can be found at

www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/news/2014/01/29/new-home-natterjacks-wirral

Red Rocks - Natterjack Concerns

The news concerning the CWT work at Red Rocks should benefit the Natterjack toads as it appears that they have shifted their breeding site away from the fresh-water pools along the dunes to the saltmarsh. In May 2013, a few natterjack males were heard croaking in the saltmarsh and later strings of spawn were spotted but Wirral Ranger Lynne Greenstreet reported that there were no signs of toadlets in the following weeks.

Toadlets in saltmarsh pools are very vulnerable to disturbance by dogs, being swept away by the tide or drying out between tides. If the natterjack toadlets survive the early stages they may be trampled by unwary walkers when migrating to the dunes where they will spend their adult life except for breeding. So the move to the saltmarsh may not be a welcome one for the survival of the natterjack.

Any toadlets may be particularly at risk in July this summer when the Golf Championship takes place at Royal Liverpool Golf Course. In view of this event, if there are toadlets around, Lynne will be looking for volunteers willing to spend some hours at the reserve and adjacent dunes during the event. As was done during the 2006 Open, these 'wardens' will ensure that visitors to the dunes stay on the footpaths including, hopefully, the restored boardwalk.

Mathilde Baker-Schommer

Quiz Winner and Answers

The winner of the Wirral Wildlife Prize Quiz 2013 was Shirley Miller from Neston. We congratulate her on getting 100% in her entry. The "significant order" of the answers was reverse alphabetical order of the names of plants and animals (a).

The answers to the questions were as follows:

1. The Diet of Worms.
2. Sea Wolf.
3. The sound of leather on willow.
4. Christopher Timothy (b).
5. The Order of the Thistle.
6. Botswana.
7. Nicola Sturgeon.
8. The Springboks.
9. Spongebob Squarepants.
10. Speedwell Cavern.
11. Guttersnipe (c).
12. Shoes and ships and sealing wax.
13. Robinson Crusoe.
14. Craven Arms.
15. Rabbit run.
16. Monty Python's Flying Circus.
17. The Potteries (a).
18. Fat owl of the Remove.
19. Majorca.
20. Octopussy.
21. Adrian Mole.
22. Mackerel sky.
23. Can you hear a lark.
24. Tie me kangaroo down, sport.
25. Jaywalking.
26. Honeysuckle Weeks.
27. Nathaniel Hawthorne.
28. Mohawks.
29. Shake, rattle and roll.
30. Knee high to a grasshopper.
31. Goldeneye.
32. Emulsion paint.
33. Helmand Province.
34. Dovedale.
35. Diversity.
36. The Midwich Cuckoos.
37. Crocodile shoes.
38. The Crab Nebula.
39. Coot Club.
40. Cloverleaf junction.
41. Cat on a hot tin roof.
42. The Carpathians.
43. Little Buttercup.
44. Barliman Butterbur.
45. Bluebell Railway.
46. Beethoven's (or Beethoven's) fifth symphony.
47. The biggest aspidistra (or aspidistra) in the world.
48. A spending (or a spending) spree.
49. Ashley Giles.
50. Adam Ant.

Notes:

(a) Questions 17 and 18 were inadvertently placed in the wrong order as "otter" should follow "owl" in reverse alphabetical order. The compiler apologises for this error.

(b) "Moth" was not accepted – out of order.

(c) "Rapsallion" was not accepted as "scallion" would be out of order.

Eric Thurston Award

Mathilde Baker-Schommer has been presented with the Eric Thurston Award in recognition of her contribution to the work of Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Mathilde has been part of Wirral Wildlife recording team for about 12 years, does bird and plant surveys on several sites each year, and for several years has helped with the formal monitoring on Thurston Common for National Trust each September.

She organises the Red Rocks wardening group, who visit the site and report on any problems. She is also one of our New Ferry Butterfly Park school visit leaders, and occasionally helps with other events there. Mathilde is also vice-chairman of Mersey Estuary Conservation Group. We are grateful for her continuing dedication to wildlife on Wirral.

Events Programme March - June 2014

Sunday 2nd March Cleaver Heath Workday

Meet Oldfield Road, Heswall at 10 a.m. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended, and volunteers should bring a packed lunch if staying for the whole session, which ends between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. Further details and directions from Mike Maher, email mj.maher@virgin.net or telephone 0151 342 4249.

Sunday 9th March Paths and Plug Planting New Ferry Butterfly Park Workday 9.30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Path maintenance and planting of Betony, Common Sorrel and Red Campion from seed collected at the park. No charge. Bring packed lunch. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. Public transport available - the Park is next to Bebington Train Station. Contact: Paul Loughnane by email jpl@liv.ac.uk or telephone 0151 645 8937.

Friday 14th March '2013 - A Shorebird Summer'

Room B, Heswall Hall, Heswall, 7.30 p.m. Tales and photographs from expeditions in Norway and Iceland to track waders that visit the Dee estuary. A talk by Matt Thomas, local Ranger and photographer. Admission £3. All welcome.

Friday 11th April 'Butterflies of the Peak District'

Room B, Heswall Hall, Heswall, 7.30 p.m. An illustrated talk by Tony Pioli. Admission £3. All welcome.

Sunday 13th April Open Day Preparation New Ferry Butterfly Park Workday 9.30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Preparation for the May open day. Take a look at the park from a new visitor's point of view and help with a general clear up of winter projects. No charge. Bring packed lunch. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. Contact details as for 9th March.

Saturday 26th April Removal of Non-Native Invasive Species Thornton Wood, Clatterbridge 9.30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Removal of ground flora invasives: three-cornered leek, the variegated yellow arch-angel and Spanish bluebell. No charge. Bring packed lunch. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. Meet at the layby where Thornton Common Road passes over the M53 (Grid Ref: SJ 328813). Contact: Paul Loughnane by email jpl@liv.ac.uk or telephone 0151 645 8937.

Sunday 4th May New Ferry Butterfly Park Open Day

See page 1

Saturday 10th May Rivacre Valley Walk.

Meet 2.30 p.m. in car park at Rivacre Valley Visitor Centre, Rivacre Road, Ellesmere Port. SJ384777, about a mile from Overpool railway station. For Sat-nav: adjacent house is CH66 1SS. Duration about 1.5 hours. Spring woodland walk to enjoy bluebells, and hear the birds sing. The walk is all on surfaced paths, but there are steep slopes. Adults and children over 5 welcome (under 16s must bring an adult with them).

Saturday 26th July Red Rocks: Sand, Mud and Mini-Beasts.

Meet 2.30 p.m. at west end of Stanley Road, Hoylake (SJ204883), about a mile from Hoylake railway station which also has buses stop nearby. Duration 1.5-2 hours. Family-friendly walk. See what is colonising the new land and pools - there just might be some baby natterjack toads. A walk of at least a mile on sand, so stout footwear needed. Adults and children over 5 welcome (under 16s must bring an adult with them).

Can You Help?

The committee is still short of two members. Would you be interested in a Fund Raising role or could you be a Talks Co-ordinator? For more information email info@wirralwildlife.org.uk or telephone Linda on 0151 342 1395.

Reading the Newsletter Online

We are very grateful to those many members who have agreed to read our newsletter online instead of taking a printed copy. This has enabled us to significantly reduce our printing and distribution costs and use more of the money we raise locally to support wildlife on Wirral. We would like as many people as possible to read the newsletter via our website www.wirralwildlife.org.uk

If you are reading this as a paper copy and have an email address, please seriously consider reading the newsletter online instead. Please send your name, postal address and email address to info@wirralwildlife.org.uk

When a new newsletter is published (3 times a year) we will send you an email to let you know it is available to read online. The online version contains extra articles and more colour photographs than we can publish in the printed version.

Thank you.

An overlooked special visitor?

The tale of a Buff-bellied Pipit, Siberian Chiffchaffs and a Northern Wheatear.

December 2013 saw a major tidal surge hit the River Dee. The tide was 1.5 metres higher than predicted. The Dee salt marshes were inundated and tide wrack, the general detritus from the marshes, was washed up on the edges of the marsh. There was a huge pile along Station Road next to Burton Marsh. The tide wrack contains lots of insects, their larvae and eggs and the piling together resulted in these all being available in the same place. The birds were quick to notice and soon this part of Burton was full of pipits, wagtails and many other species.

It did not take long for a local birder to find a Buff-bellied Pipit, a very rare bird probably from North America, and some Siberian Chiffchaffs and Burton filled up with twitchers. A Wheatear turned up that caused great excitement until they identified it as a Northern Wheatear, the species that passes through the Dee in spring and autumn, and the twitchers went back to the Buff-bellied Pipit and the Chiffchaffs.

However Northern Wheatears are supposed to be in sub-Saharan Africa at this time of year and this was probably the first Northern Wheatear ever to turn up on the Wirral in December. This was an event as rare as the arrival of the Buff-bellied Pipit. The photographs taken by Barry Barnacal show the bird. For the members of the Hilbre Bird Observatory this was a big event and the worldwide Wheatear network that they are part of was soon alerted to the bird's presence.



Northern Wheatear. Photograph: Barry Barnacal

The picture above confirms the identity of the bird as a Northern Wheatear. The tail pattern shows the dark tail band width is about a third of the length of the central feathers' dark part. The wear on the end of the tail feathers and the primary feathers along with the female type plumage suggests that the bird is in its first year of life. First winter Northern Wheatears cannot be sexed as they all have a female-type plumage.

The next issue was to consider what race of Northern Wheatear the bird was and hence where it had come from or was going to. In spring and autumn we get two races of Northern Wheatears, the nominate race which is coming to the UK to breed and the bigger Greenland race that is on its way to Iceland, Greenland or even northern Canada to breed. Greenland Wheatears are usually quite orange looking in the field and the picture shows the bird as quite pale with no orange colouration on the flanks. This means that the Burton bird is probably going to be either a nominate race bird or one of the southern European race *libanotica*. Separating these two races is probably impossible in the field when there is only one bird to look at.

However a Northern Wheatear on the Wirral in December is a very rare event and the intriguing possibility remains that the bird might have been a southern European bird, making it an event that may well have never happened before at any time of year.

I think the twitchers were studying the wrong bird.

John Elliott, Hilbre Bird Observatory

BEM for Secretary of New Ferry Butterfly Park

Paul Loughnane has been awarded a British Empire Medal in the New Year's Honours for services to nature conservation in Wirral. For the last 20 years, Paul has led the management work on New Ferry Butterfly Park. Without such management, the value of the Park to butterflies and bees would be much less than it now is. For at least 25 years Paul has been a key person in Wirral Countryside Volunteers, for much of that time serving as secretary and organising the various tasks undertaken by the group. Paul is an expert hedge-layer and scytheman, and skilled at other woodland conservation work such as coppicing and tree planting. His skills have benefited many sites across Wirral. Somehow he manages to do all this on top of a full-time job!

Charlotte Harris, CEO of Cheshire Wildlife Trust, said "We're thrilled to hear of Paul's richly deserved award after 25 years of dedication to wildlife across the Wirral. Volunteers are the bedrock of the conservation movement. The best results for wildlife can often be achieved when time is dedicated to understanding a site and its habitats. Paul's work demonstrates this superbly at New Ferry Butterfly Park with the continued successes there not only for biodiversity, but for involving the local community too. Paul's ongoing commitment to rural skills like hedgelaying and other crafts means that traditional methods of managing our countryside are being kept alive as well, an added bonus in our increasingly technological rural environment."