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Success of the North East Wales Sand Lizard Project Continues with Further Re-introduction

At Talacre on the Flintshire coast, 65 sand lizards were released in September as part of a long-term conservation project to return this rare reptile to the sand dune system that stretches from Prestatyn to Talacre. Sand lizards became extinct along the North Wales coast in the mid-20th Century, but are being reintroduced to parts of their former range.

The North East Wales Sand Lizard Project is a partnership between Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Natural Resources Wales and dates back to 2003 when the first reintroductions of juvenile lizards were made at Presthaven Sands in Flintshire and the following year at Gronant Dunes in Denbighshire.

The latest juveniles to be released were bred in captivity by Chester Zoo and two independent breeders, Ray Lynch and Paul Hudson. Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils and volunteers monitor the lizard populations annually and management is carried out to ensure the habitat is in good condition for the lizards.

Lizzy Webster, Biodiversity Officer for Denbighshire County Council added, “We are keen to recruit as many volunteers as possible for both species monitoring and habitat management. Sand lizards are strictly protected by law so we need to ensure our volunteers are properly trained before they can undertake any surveys”.



If you are interested in getting involved, contact Lizzy on 01824 708263 or email elizabeth.webster@denbighshire.gov.uk

Big Dee Day-The Invasion

This June saw the first ever Big Dee Day – the Invasion being held across the river catchment from Snowdonia National Park, through North Wales and Cheshire, right to the Dee estuary. This sister event to the annual Big Dee Day river clean-up focussed on ridding the river catchment of invasive non-native species instead of litter. The event was launched as a way to raise awareness about invasive non-native species in the River Dee catchment, the problems they cause and how to control them.

Many organisations worked in partnership and across boundaries to ensure the event was a success. There were 17 practical events mainly targeting Himalayan balsam, which were attended by over 100 volunteers who spent around 700 hours controlling invasive non-native species over the two days of the event. There was also a Breakfast Launch which attracted local dignitaries and decision-makers, and public exhibitions at Ty Mawr Country Park.

You can download a Summary Report for more information here: <http://www.denbighshirecountryside.org.uk/himalayan-balsam-project/>.

The Big Dee Day-The Invasion is to be an annual event and will be taking place again next year on Friday 27 and Saturday 28 June 2014. Keep your eyes open for information in this newsletter and online closer to the time.



Tell Us What You Think!
We'd love to hear what you think about our newsletters. You can provide feedback via this short survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/Q99NJFL.

New Alien-Tracker Apps

Two brand new Smartphone apps have been developed by the Nature Locator team at the University of Bristol to track alien invaders in our seas and waterways. Following the success of the PlantTracker app since 2012, which enables easy reporting of invasive non-native aquatic plants, these new apps aim to do the same for these.

The SeaLife Tracker app is designed to monitor the status of marine invasive non-native species and climate change indicators by encouraging more reporting by divers, boat owners, fishermen and visitors to the coast. The AqualInvaders app seeks to determine the status of 26 aquatic non-native invasive species, such as American mink, zebra mussel and topmouth gudgeon.

Gathering more information about the spread of existing invasive non-native species and the arrival of additional species is vital in lessening their impacts on the environment and the economy, and protecting our native wildlife.

The two apps are free and available for iPhone and Android. The SeaLife Tracker can also be used online. For more information visit:

SeaLife Tracker: <http://naturelocator.org/sealife.html>
AqualInvaders: <http://naturelocator.org/aqualinvaders.html>



Above: slipper limpet, wireweed (photos courtesy of GB Non-Native Species Secretariat).



Above: this is how the apps will appear

Funding to Combat Invasive Weeds

The Dee Invasive Non-Native Species Project (DINNS Project) has been awarded £102,000 by the Welsh Government in order to deliver Phase 2 of the project.

The DINNS Project was initiated following the 2012 Welsh Dee Trust meeting on invasive species and a meeting of the project stakeholders held by the Welsh Dee Trust in spring 2012. The aim of the DINNS Project is to build upon work already being undertaken within the catchment to manage invasive non-native species, with particular focus on Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed, and to ensure all control and monitoring work is carried out in a strategic and co-ordinated manner.

A Strategic Action Plan has been produced which outlines the priorities for invasive non-native species management within the River Dee catchment. This plan has been used to identify projects

within the catchment and prioritise these projects. Phase 1 of the project received £30,000 from the Welsh Government's Local Environment Quality Tidy Towns fund which is funding ongoing control works on the Rivers Alyn, Ceiriog and Dee in 2013.

Phase 2 of the project is funded by the Welsh Government Resilient Ecosystems Fund and will fund control, surveying and awareness-raising in 2014. The project will also see the development of a Biosecurity Action Plan for the Dee catchment and a biosecurity workshop which will be held in early spring.

For more information on the DINNS Project please contact Lyn Byrne at North Wales Wildlife Trust:

LynByrne@wildlifetrustswales.org

Letting the Grass Grow at County Hall

County Hall in Mold is the hub of proceedings for Flintshire County Council. As such it is often the first impression that visitors have of the council. With this in mind, in 2012 a decision was made to use the grounds to demonstrate a commitment to biodiversity, by letting some of the grass grow long instead of regularly cutting it short, as has happened for many years. Interpretation panels have been provided to inform staff and visitors of the reasons for growing the grass long and its benefits to wildlife.

The area chosen to be managed for wildlife is sunny and sheltered, bordered by a wall and trees on two of three sides. Staff often go to eat lunch on the benches in the area and members of the public use it, as a public footpath runs through the centre. With the exception of some paths cut through the grass by the Grounds Maintenance team for access to the benches and footpath, the area was managed like a traditional hay meadow – even using the traditional technique of scything.

To successfully manage a meadow for biodiversity and to encourage wildflower growth the area only needs to be cut once or twice a year and the resulting cuttings need to be removed from the site. This is so that nutrients produced by the cuttings composting down do not leach back into the soil because wildflowers prefer nutrient poor soils. If soil is nutrient rich, vigorous grasses can take over preventing other species from growing and reproducing. Ideally an early cut would be taken but the bad weather early on this year prevented this from happening.



Scything workshop at County Hall

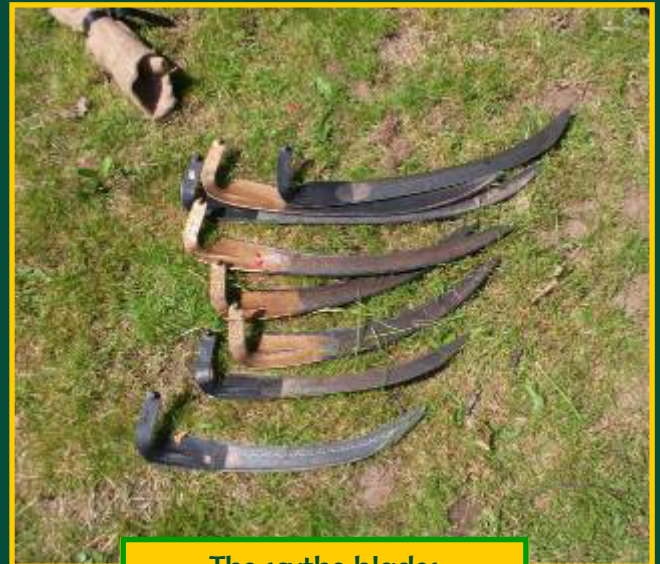
In order to raise awareness of the meadow management amongst staff who work in County Hall, two scythe workshops were delivered as part of the management of the area. Sion Jkinson of Campfire Cymru led the workshops, which were open to council staff and volunteers. Scything is a peaceful and almost meditative past time and an effective way of managing any area of grass or wildflowers; different blades can be bought to suit the material being cut and scythes are adjusted to fit each individual. To start the day Sion taught us how to attach the blade onto the snath (or handle to most people) and then adjust the handles to ensure the scythe is the right fit, before going on to maintaining the blade through the processes of sharpening and peening. Then we started to cut the grass! At first it wasn't as easy as it looks, the tip gets snagged in tussocks and it felt like the grass was being folded over rather than sliced. But after a few breaks to sharpen the blade and a bit more practice everyone was starting to feel like they were able to use a scythe relatively effectively and at the end of the day everyone commented on how much they had enjoyed the

traditional meadow cutting experience, although the lack of cider at lunch time was noted!



Bailing using a hand bailer assembled by North Wales Wildlife Trust

After the workshop the grass needed to dry so that it could be bailed. Again we opted for the old fashioned technique of turning the grass by hand each day for three very warm days. On the third day we borrowed a hand bailer from North Wales Wildlife Trust to squash the grass into mini rectangular bales of hay which were taken home by the volunteers who helped cut and dry the grass. Before the workshops a survey was conducted of the area and 29 different species of grass and wildflowers were found, speckled wood and small copper butterflies have been spotted feeding there and also various bumblebees and other pollinators have been observed. If this management regimen is continued over the next few years it is hoped that the meadow will flourish and become a wildlife haven within the grounds of County Hall.



The scythe blades

Sion Jkinson is a distributor of Austrian scythes and is available for scythe workshops and tuition. Please contact him for more information at sion@campfirecymru.org.uk.

Calling all “Sea Watchers” in Wales

The Sea Watch Foundation, a nationwide charity studying whales, dolphins and porpoises, has launched a new initiative to monitor Welsh cetaceans with the help of volunteers; the Welsh Sea Watchers project.



The Welsh Sea Watchers Project, a scheme supported by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, aims to establish a reliable network of volunteers to monitor cetaceans and raise awareness for the amazing marine wildlife that can be found off the Welsh coast. Wales is an area particularly rich in cetacean sightings with one of only two resident populations of bottlenose dolphins in the UK found on its west coast. A further seven species of cetaceans are spotted off the Welsh coast on a regular basis, including harbour porpoise, Risso's dolphins, common dolphins, minke whales and even killer whales.

Now Sea Watch is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to get in touch and get involved.

There are lots of ways to volunteer; whether you want to conduct your own land based surveys, give talks and organise events for your local community, start a Twitter campaign to promote Sea Watch or visit schools to raise awareness for Welsh cetaceans and inspire future generations! No experience is necessary; all you need is a keen interest in cetaceans and conservation.



To find out more about the project and get involved or to arrange a talk or event, contact the Wales Development Officer, Katrin Lohrengel on katrin.lohrengel@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

Seen a dolphin? Submit your sighting online on the Sea Watch Foundation website (www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) or phone the sightings hotline on **01545 561227**.

Survey Reveals State of Welsh Orchard Habitat

Traditional orchards provide excellent conditions for wildlife to thrive and are home to at least 1800 species of wildlife. However, neglect, pressure from land development and changes to agricultural practices, including the use of pesticides and herbicides, led to an estimated 94% reduction in traditional orchard habitat in Wales during the last half of the 20th century.

Following the completion of a similar survey in England, The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) was commissioned by Countryside Council for Wales (now part of Natural Resources Wales) and funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to record and map the number and condition of traditional orchards in Wales. Analysis by PTES reveals that only 7% of Wales' remaining traditional orchards are in excellent condition, 58% good and 35% poor. In their previous study of English traditional orchards published in 2011, PTES announced a similar state of affairs.

Steve Oram, the Orchard Biodiversity Officer at PTES, who led the project says: "This is a brand new data set for Wales that will help people use and conserve our remaining traditional orchards. By producing local food and cider we can benefit woodpeckers, bullfinches and hundreds of other species associated with traditional orchards. If this habitat continues to disappear, we face losing not only all that wildlife but also rare fruit varieties, traditions, customs and knowledge."

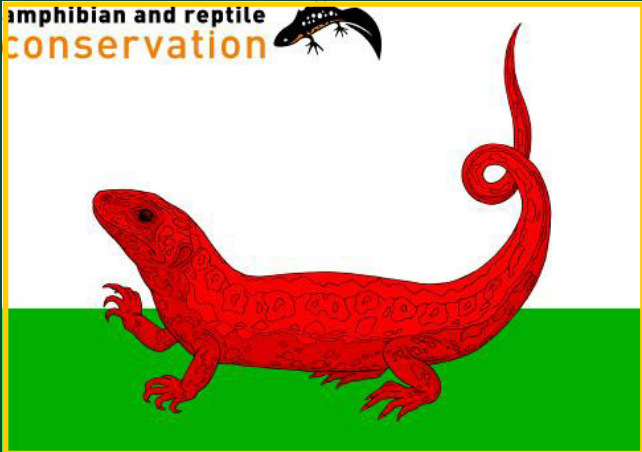
Hilary Miller, Natural Resources Wales, adds: "Traditional orchards often provide important areas for our wildlife and in particular pollinators such as bees and butterflies which have declined in recent years. Mapping out the orchards will help us to protect them and preserve local species of apple and other fruit which are an important part of our cultural heritage."

The year-long project in Wales has involved 120 local volunteers who have visited about 20% of the orchards, recording the species, age and condition of the fruit trees – and contributing some 123 volunteer days to the project. The owners of 145 orchards also responded to questionnaires, providing additional valuable information at a local level.



A new mobile app will make the task of adding sites and collecting data easier, and is open to anyone with access to a Smartphone. The *Traditional Orchard and Fruit Tree Survey* app can be downloaded for free from your usual sources.

amphibian and reptile
conservation



Your Real Welsh Dragons Need You!

**Have you seen a frog, toad, newt, lizard
or snake in Wales?**

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and your local records centre would like to know about you sighting. The common frogs and slow-worms in your garden are extremely under recorded and this information is vital to assist their conservation.

To submit your sighting and get involved with
ARC's work in Wales please visit
www.welshdragons.org.

Contact Us

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Tel: 01824 708263

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Tel: 01492 575123

Follow Us!

Like our North East Wales Biodiversity Network page on Facebook to be updated on biodiversity action in Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. Regular posts are uploaded to the site informing you of exciting news, events, photos and projects in the area. It is a quick, simple and free way to discover what biodiversity activities are taking place and what you could be involved with in your county.

We also have a Twitter account which similarly to Facebook, updates you with regular tweets on interesting Bionet news, successes and events.

So follow us now at :

Facebook: www.facebook.com/NEWBionet

Twitter: @newbionet



Events!

Some up-coming events over the winter.

Events for 2014 will be announced early in the year. Visit the Bionet Facebook page for more details or the websites of our four local authorities.

Friday 6 December

A Wonderful Welsh Winter

2pm – 6pm

Celebrate winter in Loggerheads Country Park with some festive tree dressing. Make a natural and colourful bird feeder in our craft room, enjoy your own winter stroll, then warm up in the Café and be inspired by our Christmas gifts in the Shop (open late till 7pm).

Sunday 8 December

Ty Mawr – Christmas Crackers

1.30 – 3.30pm

Get in the Christmas spirit by creating your own Festive crafts from recycled and natural materials at Ty Mawr Country Park, Wrexham (SJ283415)

All ages are welcome at a cost of £2

Saturday 18 January

Birds galore!

11.00am -1.30pm.

This event will be delivered through the medium of Welsh.

Easy walk to see the winter ducks and waders along the shore and Morfa Madryn reserve pools. This is a joint event with Gwynedd Council. Meet: Beach car park, Llanfair-fechan promenade.

Free event, but booking is essential. Contact Alun Jones on 01492 575200