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The fortune of Gronant's star bird is on the up

The little tern colony at Gronant Dunes benefitted from an increase in support from volunteer wardens this year, successfully raising a minimum of 77 young from 136 pairs – the best result since 2010. The birds have been struggling to raise enough chicks in recent years, trying to find a safe, suitable nest site free from human disturbance, high tides and natural predators.

The past success and growth of the colony has meant that it's now a compelling attraction to foxes and kestrels; they can be almost guaranteed a picnic at the beach in the summer. Limiting the amount of chicks the kestrel takes is where volunteer wardens proved invaluable this year, the losses were just 23 – the lowest in 4 years!

Volunteers and summer wardens do vital work



100 years ago little terns were reported to be "common on the coast; many breeding colonies on flat shores in all maritime states", but now Gronant is the only place in Wales where little terns nest. It is, however, also the most productive colony in the UK, continually growing year on year. With this in mind, we hope to attract little terns back to other sites in north east Wales in the coming years and to provide them with alternative places to nest, reducing the pressure at Gronant.

To achieve this we'll be asking local people to give wildlife some space on our beaches. By respecting any signs and fences during the summer months, nesting shorebirds like the little tern, oyster-catcher and ringed plover will be a lasting and valued feature of our coastline.

Also this year, a renewed attempt at colour-ringing little terns in the UK and Ireland has already come to fruition when a '2014' juvenile was discovered at the Hilbre Island Bird Observatory in the Dee Estuary. A bird sporting a green ring on its right leg, indicating that it was ringed in Kilcoole, Co Wicklow – that's 190km away! This further complicates the story of how little terns disperse around the Irish Sea, and also supports the suggestion that the Dee Estuary is an important migratory route for the species.

In the UK, the LIFE+ little tern Recovery Project – an EU funded national partnership between Denbighshire Council, the RSPB and 9 other partners – has trialled a colour-ringing programme in the south east of England and the Isle of Man this year, using yellow rings with black markings. Now that we know re-sighting colour-ringed little terns is possible, the project can be rolled out across the UK next year, including Gronant.

From this we hope to learn a great deal more about the species over the next 4 years of the LIFE+ project, and beyond.

Here's how you can help: we're asking for reports of little terns from around the Dee Estuary, particularly those with colour rings. Please email littleterns@denbighshire.gov.uk if you spot one, or to get involve with the project.



Little Tern

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/Q22NJFL.

Ringed plovers show penchant for Conwy's shores

Ringed plovers raised a family of chicks on one of the busiest beaches in Conwy again this year. Conwy County Borough Council fenced off a very busy area of the shingle on Pensarn Beach, near Abergele, allowing plovers to nest with a bit more peace and quiet. Despite cafés and noisy amusements within earshot and hungry gulls regularly patrolling for stolen chips or plover eggs, a pair of ringed plovers successfully raised 4 chicks to the fledging stage.

The project receives a lot of local support with regular reports coming in from members of the public on how the plovers are doing, even though the plovers are extremely well camouflaged, as you can see from the photo below! As members of the public become aware of the project at Pensarn Beach, they are increasingly sending in reports of nesting plovers on other busy beaches. This year, the Council also received reports of nesting pairs at West Shore beach in Llandudno and Morfa Conwy. In response to these reports the Council put up temporary signage informing beach users of the nests. Ringed plovers are one of the many species of principal importance for conservation in Wales which gives Councils a particular duty to give regard to this species in its activities under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.



Ringed Plover chick

Less of the lesser

Our lesser horseshoe bat numbers appear to be on the up. According to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), the long-term data for lesser horseshoe bats appears to show an overall, small, but significant increase in numbers. After such substantial and widespread losses across Europe only a few decades ago, this is great, but tentative news. In fact, general trends over the period from 1997 – 2013 for 11 of the 17 UK breeding bats show either no change or slight increases. The BCT suggest more sustained increases over an extended period of time would indicate that bats were making a recovery, after such devastating recent declines.

Wales is the Northern European stronghold for these truly remarkable animals. Lesser horseshoe bats (LHB) take their name from the horseshoe-shaped nose leaf, which surrounds the nostrils, helping them emit their echolocation calls, which they use to navigate and locate prey. Within roosts, LHBs prefer to hang freely, wrapped within their wings rather than roost in confined spaces. They like to forage for their midge, crane fly and mosquito prey in dark, wooded areas, regularly travelling 2-3km from their roost to feed. Like all other UK bats, they will use a variety of roosts throughout the year.



Lesser Horseshoe mothers with, attached, babies in a maternity roost

The mothers form summer, maternity roosts to develop the foetus and give birth to their single youngster in mid-June to mid-July. After using breeding roosts in Autumn, they use cold, humid hibernation roosts to survive the lack of insect prey over winter.

Since 1997 the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), a charity which aims to monitor and conserve UK bat populations, has coordinated a network of volunteer surveyors to count UK bat populations, including LHB maternity and hibernation roosts. Together, the various surveys make up the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP). The data, collected every year, provide the official population trend information produced by the JNCC, which is used to inform policy and conservation decisions.

Whether increasing bat numbers are due to climate change, European and UK legislation or conservation efforts on the ground, is not known. However, continued monitoring, habitat improvements and strengthened legislation can only improve numbers, so why not help? European bats are still suffering from a bad image, unlike those in the Caribbean or Far East, where bats are considered lucky. The more people that talk about bats, the better. Spread the word to be bat aware when doing work on your house, trees etc; seek advice if unsure. If you have a roost or know of one locally, you can join in on the NBMP counts or you can join your local bat group and head out summer or winter to learn more and help them carry out other types of surveys locally. Don't forget to look out for bat walks in next year's programmes of events and if you've already got the hang of it (pun!), maybe you can help or even lead one.

Second successful year on the Dee

Big Dee Day – The Invasion (BDDTI) came into being as a sister event of the annual Big Dee Day river clean-up. Instead of litter, the focus is on ridding the river catchment of invasive non-native species. The issues of invasive non-native species (INNS) are evident in many areas of the Dee catchment with species such as Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and Giant hogweed damaging biodiversity, bank stability and impacting on recreational activities. The development of a distinct task force involving large numbers of volunteers acting for one cause is key to their successful eradication. A dedicated event such as the BDDTI is, therefore, essential to the Dee catchment.



Keep Wales Tidy volunteers tackling Balsam at Swinchiard Brook in Flint



Volunteers trying out hand-pulling and scything at Ty Mawr Country Park

Now in its second year, the BDDTI involved activities throughout the month of July across the River Dee catchment from Snowdonia National Park, through North Wales and Cheshire, right to the Dee estuary. Due to the large catchment area local authorities, statutory agencies, Snowdonia National Park Authority, the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation organisations, community groups, angling clubs and others worked in partnership and across boundaries to ensure the event was a success. The BDDTI raises awareness about INNS, the problems they cause

and how people can get involved to control them in the Dee catchment.

Thanks to funding secured through the Dee Invasive Non-Native Species Project an official launch was held on the 27th June at Tŷ Mawr Country Park near Wrexham. The launch event was well attended by local councillors, the chair of Flintshire County Council, representatives of Natural Resources Wales, utility companies, angling clubs and conservation organisations.

The launch included a presentation on the INNS issues affecting the River Dee catchment along with input from local councillors on the success of their counties involvement in 2013. Attendees then took to the river bank to watch demonstrations of Japanese knotweed control and have a go at hand-pulling Himalayan balsam. The month of balsam-bashing activities launched on Saturday 28th, with a series of demonstrations, again at Ty Mawr. The public got the chance to see hand-pulling, scything, brush cutting and flail mowing in action, to tackle Himalayan balsam, as well as demonstrations of stem injection and spraying, to tackle Japanese knotweed.



Balsam bashing at Bala with Snowdonia National Park Authority and Snowdonia Society

The main focus of Big Dee Day – the Invasion was a series of events to control Himalayan balsam, one of the most problematic plants along the river. This plant lends itself to control by volunteers, as it has shallow roots and can be pulled up easily by hand. Volunteers (members of the public, corporate volunteers, angling clubs and community groups) attended 40 events from Snowdonia National Park down to Farndon in Cheshire, along with tackling the tributaries and coastal rivers of the Dee estuary. These events involved up to 400 volunteers, putting in up to 1680 volunteer hours. This wouldn't have been possible without the successful partnership-working between the several different organisations in North Wales and Cheshire who have been on board with the BDDTI since 2013. Keep posted for the Big Dee Day – The Invasion 2015 launching on Friday 26th June 2015 by going to www.dinns.org.uk or following us on Facebook or Twitter!



facebook.com/BigDeeDayTheInvasion



twitter.com/DINNSProject#BDDTI

In search of red heads

The Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) project has previously written articles for BIONET, for example our work on surveying for harvest mice, however, we have yet to highlight the work we have been doing on looking for and conserving red squirrels in NE Wales.

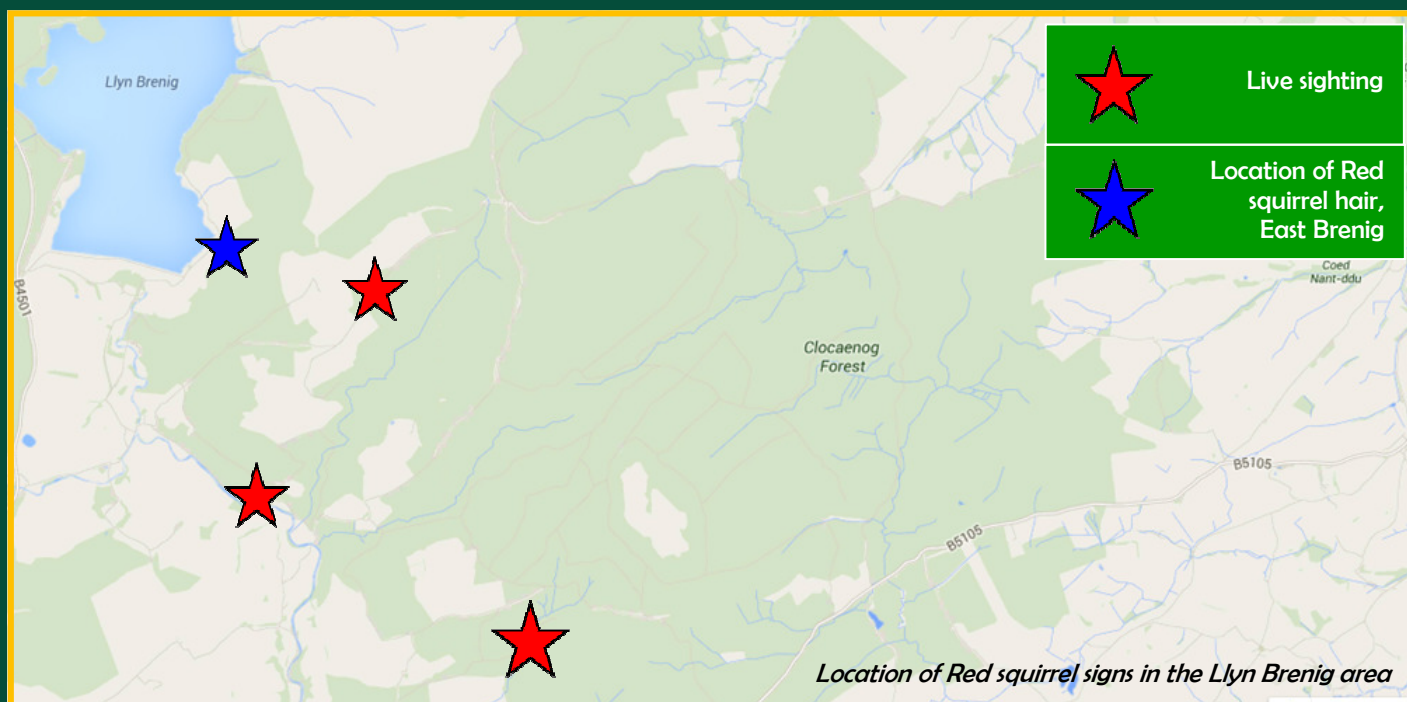
Thanks to a 6-month extension for the project, we have been able to build in some more work on this species in NE Wales, where a small population remains in Clocaenog forest and surrounding area. Some hair tube traps placed near Llyn Brenig by Dwr Cymru, proved the species' continued presence when a hair caught in the trap was analysed by MISE staff in Waterford Institute of Technology in Ireland, who tested its DNA. To our delight, it proved positive for red squirrel. Several live sightings in recent years, and sadly a recent road kill to the north of Llyn Brenig, further add to the evidence of their presence.

The native red squirrel population has been decimated in Wales by the introduced grey squirrel, which out-competes red squirrels for food. This results in reduced breeding success in the red population and a gradual replacement of

We are looking for volunteers to help with this scheme. Roles will include regular monitoring of the feeder boxes which will involve re-baiting, checking for hairs and checking the camera footage.

Another activity will involve controlling the grey squirrel population in the surrounding woodlands. This is crucial to the survival of our native red squirrels and has proved to be successful in NW England and at a sister-project in mid-Wales. Again, full training will be provided.

On a final note, the MISE project will end in June 2015 and we are exploring the idea of helping people to form a local mammal group in NE Wales with the aim that the group will continue to survey mammals once the project has ended. We can offer training, advice and resources. I am keen to hear from anyone who might be interested in discussing this or has further ideas or thoughts.



red squirrels by greys. The grey squirrel also carries a squirrel pox virus, from which the reds have no immunity. The virus causes lesions, similar to those on rabbits with myxomatosis and is almost always lethal to red squirrels, devastating populations.

Partners BASC (British Association for Shooting and Conservation) are working with MISE to help conserve the red squirrels and increase the population in this area. Our actions include adding to the nine red squirrel feeder boxes already in use in the forest and training trail cameras on them. By placing many more of these feeder boxes, we would hope to gain more evidence and perhaps get a better indication of numbers. The boxes, baited with whole hazelnuts, also have tape attached to trap hairs, which will be sent for DNA analysis and the camera footage will further add to evidence gathering.

So please do get in touch if you would like to be involved in the red squirrel project or forming a local mammal group.

Becky Clews-Roberts, MISE Project Officer

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The MISE project is a partnership project with The Vincent Wildlife Trust, Natural Resources Wales, and Snowdonia National Park Authority (Wales), and the Waterford Institute of Technology, Waterford County Council and the National Biodiversity Data Centre (Ireland). The project is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Ireland Wales Programme (INTERREG 4A) and is working with volunteers to survey a number of key mammal species across Wales and Ireland.

OPAL comes to Wales

Want to learn a bit more about your local environment, get out of the house, have fun and take part in an important national scientific survey?

The Open Air Laboratories, (OPAL), network is a National Lottery funded, UK-wide, citizen science initiative that allows you to get hands-on with nature, whatever your age, background or level of ability.

OPAL offers high quality, reusable resources, training and other support to enable community groups and individuals to carry out up to 6 different surveys using easy to identify indicator species.



Bug Count (finding and recording invertebrates)

Water Quality (looking at water clarity, and freshwater invertebrate)

Air Quality (using Lichens on trees as indicators of pollution).

Biodiversity (looking at life in hedgerows)

Soil Quality (using earthworm species as indicators)

Tree Health (the latest survey to be developed, in response to the latest threat of disease to oak and ash trees)

These surveys were developed by a number of organisations and universities, to enable the general public to gather data, which will be collated and will help produce a snapshot of the state of the environment in the UK,

and could also help demonstrate wider environmental variations, such as climate change or species adaptation:-

These surveys are suitable for all ages and abilities, and are designed to be easily repeatable, allowing groups to monitor the wildlife in their local area over a long period, or compare a number of sites within their local area.

OPAL in Wales is being run by a partnership between the North Wales Wildlife Trust, Cofnod (The North Wales Local Biological Records Centre), and the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, who employ a network of Community Scientists to work to support community groups in their regional area.



Volunteers taking part in the tree health survey

Iwan Edwards who is based at the North Wales Wildlife Trust offices in Mold will be happy to visit your group, to assist with OPAL in your local area, and is happy to work in either Welsh or English; the OPAL resources are available in either language.

Iwan can be contacted on 07584 311 583 or iwanedwards@wildlifetrustswales.org

More information can be found on our website www.opalexplournature.org

Ancient Tree Forum Wales

To all interested in ancient or veteran trees in Wales, you are invited to join like-minded people to form an Ancient Tree Forum for Wales. Whether your interest is specialised or general, whether you like taking photos of, recording associated species or features, surveying, or just standing in admiration or thought, you're welcome! We can make the group as informal as you like, and include a range of activities or just seek out fine trees. If interested, please contact: Tracey Lovering

t.lovering@btinternet.com.



Wintery wildlife watch

If you feel you need something to get you out on those chilly wintery days, as well as the brilliantly well-resourced and supported OPAL surveys, mentioned above, we've chosen a few other activities that might also take your fancy.

* Woodland Trust is brilliant for family activities all year round have a look at the following for their autumn and winter suggestions - www.naturedetectives.org.uk/autumn + www.naturedetectives.org.uk/winter

* RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch – is usually over the last weekend of January have a look out for information at – www.rspb.org.uk

* To help to combat Ash dieback, you can join in the survey of diseased and healthy Ash trees by tagging them and sending in photos of your tree for experts to track and assess - www.ashtag.org You can download an App to report diseased trees - www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert

* For any dead animals found on roads get as much information about what and where and send your info to the Cardiff University-based Project splatter - www.projectsplatter.co.uk

* On a stroll along the coast? Why not collect, ID and send in results of your shark eggcases/mermaid's purses any time of year to the Shark Trust's Great Eggcase Hunt - www.sharktrust.org/en/GEH_the_project

* You can acquire a survey square (issued in February) to find reptiles and amphibians for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation – www.narrs.org.uk/index.php

* Stood in some poo? If it's wild mammal poo then the Mammal Society would like to know, as well as any live sightings for their National Atlas - www.mammal.org.uk/nmap

* You might want to report a bird you've seen and you can do this using British Trust for Ornithology's Birdtrack - www.bto.org/birdtrack if you want to go further and survey a particular area for birds, including your own garden, the BTO have plenty of other surveys to get involved in. You just need to register and start spotting.

* There may be 650 species of seaweed along our UK coasts, but you only need to find 12 to take part in the Natural History Museum's Big Seaweed search - www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/british-natural-history/seaweeds-survey

* Spotted an owl pellet? The Mammal Society wants your regurgitations – www.mammal.org.uk/owl_pellet_survey

Continue the Conversation

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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