



Welcome to the August Newsletter.

Sadly, two of our members who were regular visitors to the Reserve have passed away in recent weeks: John McWah, and Kim Connelly.

There are no developments to report on the new power station project, but we will keep you all updated on any information as we receive it.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

*Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 2024 at 7.30pm  
Community Hall, Tuscan Way, Connah's  
Quay, CH5 4SA*

*Andy Davis will give a talk on  
'The birds of Iceland'  
Refreshments will be provided*

We have once again had reports of rarity sightings being posted on Social Media. We would ask all members to refrain from this practice as we do not wish to jeopardise the terms of our lease by encouraging large influxes of unauthorised entrants onto the site. Similarly, it has been noted that a number of members are not signing in at the barrier, which again is a condition of our lease on site safety grounds and could result in us having our tenancy terminated. You MUST sign in if you are on site.

The Avocets have once again nested on the ash pool island this year with two pair producing five chicks between them.

*Alan Smethurst*

### **\*\*\* PLEASE NOTE \*\*\***

The Field trip to RSPB Old Moor, Dearne Valley will now be on Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> November, not as previously advertised.

# Lake Vyrnwy April 27th

Lake Vyrnwy is a working farm, and the RSPB support farming activities that benefit farmland wildlife - including birds such as curlews. These vary from growing appropriate crops to managing river corridors, fencing woodlands and restoring walls and hedges. Dry heath on the reserve supports key breeding birds such as ring ouzels, curlews and red grouse. The RSPB use burning, mowing and grazing to maintain just the right mix of heather and grassland for these birds. They also cut back encroaching plantations and maintain the blanket bog by blocking up old drainage channels. Oak woodland on the reserve supports breeding birds such as pied flycatchers. The RSPB are also expanding the woodland by introducing more broad-leafed trees to neighbouring conifer plantations.

We met at the small car park next to the café and were fortunate to see a red kite as it passed over the car park.



We decided that we would visit the Coed y Capel hide before taking to the trails. In the hide there were a good number of woodland birds that included numerous siskins feeding on the feeders, also nuthatch, chaffinch, chiffchaff, great tit, willow tit and coal tit. The circular Wildlife Way through the forest gave us song thrush, pheasant, jay, goldfinch, buzzard, bullfinch and a calling cuckoo. We then dropped down to the dam wall, part of which was alongside of the river Vyrnwy, it afforded us with good views of tree creeper, blackcap, goldcrest and willow warbler. On climbing up the embankment onto the dam wall we were rewarded with a pair of pied flycatchers, which were flying in and out of the bushes and trees. Along the edge of the reservoir was a common sandpiper and over the water were several swallows.



After lunch we moved to Rhiwargor at the far end of the reservoir to the Centenary hide where we saw chiffchaff, willow tit, great spotted woodpecker, willow warbler, Canada goose and another pied flycatcher. From the hide we walked back to the cars via a farm trail along which we heard/saw chiffchaff, willow warbler, song thrush, grey wagtail and the last bird of the day a dipper shooting out from under the bridge and flying down the Afon Nadroedd.

Thanks to those that came along and enjoyed some of the close-up birds that we don't see every day.

*Bill Dickinson*

# Bird report Feb-May 2024

A wet winter followed by a wet spring has influenced the availability of food for our birds reliant on insect larvae to feed their young. The Ash pool water levels remained high covering the island and preventing our Black-headed gulls from nesting with only two pair producing young this year. Similarly, only two pair of Avocet successfully hatched chicks.

July is the start of a huge passage of migrating waders and the Reserve at Connah's Quay is used by thousands of Redshank, Black-tailed godwit and other waders as a vital stop off on their journey.

## **Bird Sightings.**

### *February*

Greenshank, Spotted redshank, Goosander, Bar-headed geese, Common sandpiper, Grey plover, three thousand Dunlin, 45 Pintail, 6 Siskin, Rock pipit, 18 Bar-tailed godwit, American wigeon (R Speechley), 9 Twite, Snipe, Redwing, Linnet, Stonechat, 48 Curlew, Cattle egret,

### *March*

Two Marsh harriers, two hundred and fifty Wigeon, four hundred Black-tailed godwit, Common sandpiper, 90 Curlew, 6 Whooper swans, 30 Avocet, three thousand Pink-footed geese, Mediterranean gull, Black swan, 5 Chiffchaff, 3 Barnacle geese, Merlin, 2 Little ringed plovers, Red kite, Wheatear, Whinchat.

### *April*

One hundred Common gulls, 10 Willow warblers, 8 Chiffchaff, 4 Common sandpipers, Common redstart, 12 Wheatear, 7 Gadwall, 48 Curlew, 4 Turnstone, 50 Knot, eight hundred Redshank, 20 Whimbrel, Common whitethroat, House martin, Sand martin, Swallow, Jay, Lesser whitethroat, Swift.

### *May*

Spoonbill, Little gull, Sandwich terns, Common terns, 10 Whimbrel, Sedge warbler, House sparrows, Ringed plover, 14 Curlew, Little grebe, 10 Tufted ducks, 2 Wigeon, Blackcap.

*Peter & Sue Haslem (recorders)*

# The Ubiquitous Slug

Love them or loathe them, slugs play an integral role in the management of the planet. They are all purpose reducers of detritus with them being omnivorous. They are partial to most things in their diet including dead animals, rotting vegetation and faeces which is all converted into useful plant nutrients. On the downside they can devastate crops with their slime trails, eggs and faecal paste.



There are thousands of species of slug worldwide and many in the UK including the black Arion Ater (opposite) who I suppose could be looked on as an old acquaintance when encountering them on the Welsh hills.

The largest UK slug is Limax Maximus (I'm sure there was a Gladiator by that name!) or Leopard slug or indeed Great grey slug. They can grow up to 20cms long and have dark spots against a grey body (below).

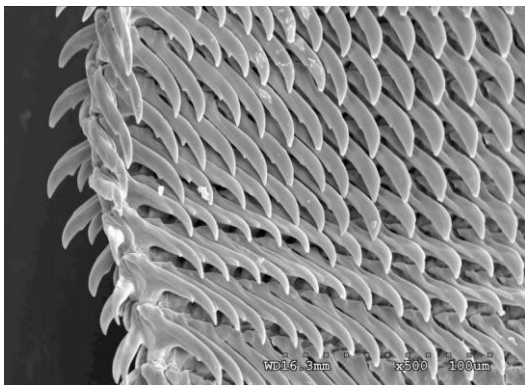
The two top tentacles house the eyes whilst the lower two facilitate smell which is how they find a mate from the pheromones released into the air and which is also present in the slime. They are of course hermaphrodites so that during mating sperm passes from each slug to the other allowing both to then reproduce. Although they are both capable of reproduction individually, they do need to mate for the process to begin.

A food source for many birds and mammals but with a sting in the tail. Domestic dogs and foxes are susceptible to contracting lung worm if ingested. The worm will migrate through the stomach wall and via the bloodstream end up in the lungs or heart to reproduce.

A slug's mouth has thousands of microscopic teeth that are set on a band (radula) which are used in a sawing motion to separate pieces of whatever food source they may be devouring.

They are 80-90% water and are only active when the temperature gets up to 5 degrees Celsius. Speed is not their forte either, clocking in at a disappointingly unimpressive 0.03km/hr.

It could be a little disconcerting that we humans share 70% of our DNA with slugs !



RADULA



LINUX MAXIMUS

One final fact about our slippery friends – they can't use the internet.  
They're totally reliant on 'Snail Mail' to communicate!



# Leighton Moss May 11th

Leighton Moss boasts the largest reed bed in north-west England and is home to a wide range of spectacular wildlife including otters, bearded tits, marsh harriers, egrets and red deer.

On arriving at the car park for the Morecambe and Allen hides it was a joy to step out of the car to the sound of blackbird, sedge warbler, willow warbler, wren and dunnock and the ever present, often heard seldom seen, cetti's warbler.

Before reaching the hides, we had picked up blackcap, swallow, chaffinch, chiffchaff, long tailed tit, willow warbler and goldfinch. From the hides the two main bodies of water held good numbers of breeding avocets, together with shelduck, shoveler and pochard. Waders included curlew, dunlin, oystercatchers, little egrets, redshank and black tailed godwits. On the south side of the pool from the Morecambe hide was a spoonbill. We were not expecting that!



We moved to the main reserve and visitor centre and around the Lilian, Jackson and Grisedale hides we saw a range of ducks; gadwall, shoveler, shelduck and tufted duck. A pair of great crested grebes had built a nest not far from the Lilian hide. Greylag geese were on the water minding their young families. We were treated to numerous sightings of marsh harriers, more males than females. We had our first sighting of an osprey which we were informed a pair are nesting at Foulshaw in the Lakes. Bitterns were present we could hear their "booming" calls from around the reserve.

From the viewing tower we could see the man-made osprey platform but it was occupied by a great black-back gull sitting on eggs, just as it had last year.

Back to the centre for lunch, where at the picnic spot we enjoyed watching the feeders, coal and willow tit, nuthatch and song thrush in the bushes behind the feeders.

Walking to the causeway we again heard sedge, willow warbler and the bitterns but no bearded tits. The huge expanse of water from the Causeway hide had only a few ducks, gadwall, tufted ducks. There was one solitary whooper swan, but a striking male marsh harrier flew from the far reed bed and did a food pass to his mate. After that entertainment we saw a bittern flying two hundred yards over open water at the far end of the lake.

On leaving the hide to make our way down to the lower hide. Walking along the path by the stream we had fleeting glimpses of bearded tits as they flew across the stream and disappeared into the reed bed.

On reaching the lower hide we were hoping to see the bittern, but it wasn't to be, we did, however, have another sighting of the osprey.

Other winged creatures seen were brimstone, speckled wood, orange-tip butterflies, poplar hawk-moth and four-spotted chaser.

What an end to an unbelievable day, well over sixty species seen. Spoonbill, marsh harriers, osprey, bittern, and bearded tits, great.

Thanks to all who joined me for a memorable day. *Bill Dickinson*

# The Fritillary Family

There are something like forty species of Fritillary butterflies in Europe. Here is a selection of some of our UK residents often hard to identify due to their similarity in appearance. Occasional visitors will of course always arrive from the Continent from time to time to grace our Southern counties.

## DARK GREEN FRITILLARY



*Male*



*Female*



*Underwing*

*This species is widespread through the UK, but scarcer in Ireland and its main food plant is Dog Violet.*

## HEATH FRITILLARY



*Male*



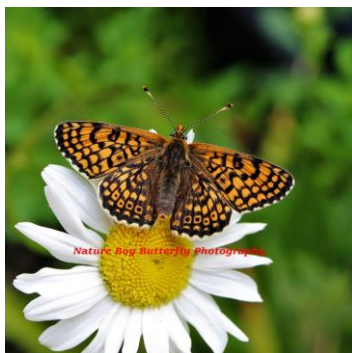
*Female*



*Underwing*

*One of our rarest butterflies, Heath Fritillaries are generally found in our more southern counties of Kent, Essex and Devon. Caterpillar food plants include Cow wheat, Foxglove and some Speedwells'.*

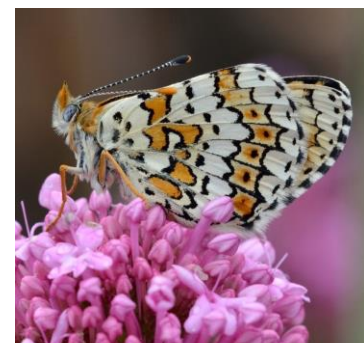
## GLANVILLE FRITILLARY



*Male*



*Female*



*Underwing*

*Another of our rare species restricted to the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands. Its caterpillar food plant is almost exclusively Ribwort plantain.*



## SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY



*Male*



*Female*



*Underwing*

*Predominantly found in the southern counties of England and Wales but with small local populations in Northern England. Its main food source is Dog Violet.*

## PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARY



*Male*



*Female*



*Underwing*

*Distribution is in the main Northern Scotland and Cumbria but with good populations in Devon and Cornwall and Southeast England. Food sources are: Heath Dog Violet and Marsh Violet.*

## MARSH FRITILLARY



*Male*

The male and female are almost identical, which can only make it harder when it comes to identification.

*Female*



*Underwing*

*The Marsh Fritillary is now concentrated on the western side of the UK with populations in Western Scotland, Southwest Wales and west of a line from Bristol to the Isle of Wight.*

## HIGH BROWN FRITILLARY



*Male*

The male and female are almost identical, which can only make it harder when it comes to identification.

*Female*



*Underwing*

*This is Britain's most threatened species of Fritillary, its strongholds being in the Morecambe Bay limestones and South Cumbria. Their food source is almost exclusively violet seedlings.*

# Llandegla forest June 20th

Coed Llandegla is situated on the Northwestern edge of Ruabon Moor and is a privately owned woodland planted in the 1970's, covering an area of some 2 ½ sq miles and consisting of predominantly Sitka Spruce with a small area of Larch.

Due to a specialised land management plan the resident population of Black Grouse is on the increase and a hide is situated adjacent to one of the lekking sites – but that's for another day.

On our approach to the area where the Nightjars frequent, we saw a good number of species including Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Song Thrush, Great Crested Grebe, Heron, Lesser Redpoll, Robin and Dunnock. A red grouse was heard but not seen.



We had sightings of two Nightjars in the cleared area, I would have liked more, but that is birding. The bad news for us birders is that a good number of trees have been harvested over the past eighteen months, giving the Nightjars a much-expanded area to nest but making them thinner on the ground so to speak.

Many thanks to the members who turned up for the evening and hopefully I'll do it again next year if you'll have me.

*Barry Lynes*



Reserve Rainbow -Dr Glenn Morris



# Point of Ayr & Gronant July 6th

After meeting up at Talacre we walked along the path on the sea wall to the RSPB's hide overlooking the salt marsh and the Dee Estuary. On the way out we were battered by the rain and a strong breeze so small birds were few in numbers: chiffchaff, goldfinch, stonechat and meadow pipit.



At the hide (it was a relief to get under cover) scoping over the marsh there were good numbers of lapwing, oyster catchers, curlews as well as redshank, knot, little terns and common terns. When scoping the shingle ridge, despite the electric fence, there were no breeding birds to be seen, I gather that they had been predated.

On the walk back we had at least twenty little egrets flying in and out of the gutters.

The Gronant dunes lie between Prestatyn and Talacre, the site is a good place for Orchids in summer with five species including swathes of Pyramidal Orchids. Other wildflowers include Sea Holly, Sea-lavender, Sea Purslane and Sea-spurrey.

As we approached the Prestatyn Gutter a stoat run across the path immediately in front of us, in the gutter was a little grebe and in the reeds a reed warbler.

Once at the small hide we had views over the shingle bank at the little tern colony. At the beginning of the breeding season there was a storm which covered the shingle in a layer of sand and all the eggs were covered and lost. Up to the time of our visit there had been some 160 chicks reared.



There were juvenile terns amongst the shingle and parents bringing in sand eels, on the shingle were several ringed plovers.

We finished the day off in sunshine with a stiff chilled breeze. Many thanks to those who came despite the wet morning conditions.

*Bill Dickinson*

# **Tales from an ancient birder**

## ***Introduction***

Born in 1940 in Liverpool but have lived in Wales since 1943. Left school in 1956 and held a number of jobs before embarking on a career in computing. First got interested in birdwatching in 1954 following a period as an egg collector. Before any threats of execution are made, this was before the 1954 act and “egging” was still legal and birds’ eggs could be legally purchased. I then started to take up birding as a hobby, my first binoculars being a pair of opera glasses given to me by a kindly farmer. These were soon replaced by a pair of ex naval 7 x 41 binoculars bought from the Exchange & Mart for the princely sum of £12.00. From then on, I never looked back, and I began what was to become the most wonderful hobby imaginable. What follows are my recollections of a number of events which go to underline my claim that birding as a hobby has few equals.

## ***Strange bird behaviour***

In 1989 together with my birding colleague, John Parkinson, we visited the Corbett tiger reserve near Ramnagar in Northern India. On one of our trips into the reserve we hired a jeep and driver for a day’s birdwatching in the park. In the afternoon we came to a standstill behind a tourist bus whose occupants were watching a small group of elephants where a young elephant was trying unsuccessfully to reach the leaves of a sapling. After a short while the matriarch of the group obviously having lost patience proceeded to tear the sapling out of the ground. While this was going on, I noticed that in a nearby tree a pair Great Hornbills behaving in a most peculiar way. They were repeatedly clambering up the tree and then allowing themselves to tumble down the tree in freefall. This looked to me to be a highly dangerous activity as the outstretched wings were hitting the branches of the tree. After about 10 minutes the party moved on. I was extremely puzzled by what I had seen, and it was only later that I realised what I had witnessed. Hornbills love fruit as part of their diet and particularly ripe fruit. Sometimes when ingested this ferments in the stomach producing alcohol. What I had seen was a pair drunken Great Hornbills. A great day birding!

## ***How lucky can you get***

In 1975 together with my lifelong birding colleague John Parkinson visited Cyprus hoping to see the tail end of the spring migration as well as the resident birds. Great birding had, a good time. One of our favourite birding spots was at Akrotiri near the RAF base. One of the reasons for this was it was a place where you could possibly see a Dead Sea Sparrow. On this occasion we were just generally birdwatching when Parky shouted for me to look to the east. John was so surprised at what he had seen that he was unable to find the name of the birds. Flying towards us were two Frigate Birds. The birds were flying at a height of about 10 feet above the marsh and flying directly towards us. As they got nearer, they suddenly started to climb rapidly, and we were then looking into the sun. The reason they changed altitude was because in their path were supporting wires for a number of large communication pylons. As we were now looking straight into the sun it was impossible to see any more distinguishing marks in an attempt to determine the race. Thinking about the route they had taken overland, a look at the map of Cyprus offers some clues. Because of its position at the southern tip of the island, Akrotiri sticks out into the Med. Any bird coasting from east to west could conceivably see the sea beyond the marshy area and a direct route would take them over the land. To my (now) regret we did not inform anyone of the sighting and believe that at the time this was quite a rare record for that part of the Mediterranean.

I have never had any doubt about what we saw that day and John and I subsequently came to grips with frigate birds in Mexico. Just another example of the wonderful hobby that is birdwatching.

### *It's not just birds*

From 1963 onwards together with my elder brother Ronald and other members of the Merseyside Ringing Group I paid an annual visit to Spurn Point, usually in the first week in October and always praying for easterly winds. Sometimes the visual migration was spectacular but when the wind blew westerly for some time Spurn was quiet whilst back home, we would miss the odd American wader and on one occasion a huge crash of Leach's Storm Petrels. At the time it was possible to drive from the entrance to the reserve all the way down to the point which housed the only permanently manned lifeboat station in the UK as well as a base for the Humber pilots. Roughly halfway down the track was an area called the Narrow Neck (the narrows) where the North Sea and the Humber estuary were less than 100 yards apart. This point became an excellent spot to observe visual migration and to facilitate this a somewhat rough breeze block open topped shelter had been built. At the time and for many years after a regular visitor to Spurn was an amazingly gifted birder called John Cudworth. John would stand in the shelter from first light and count the birds passing mainly from their calls. This was so frequent that the edifice became known as Cudworth's Castle. On one October afternoon (westerlies in charge) Ronald and I were loafing about in Cudworth's Castle when we noticed that a large fish(?) had become stuck in the mud of the Humber and marooned by the receding tide. Whatever it was was thrashing about in an attempt to free itself and being harassed by a number of Great Black-backed Gulls. We walked over to find what we believed to be either a dolphin or a porpoise. We immediately started to scoop water onto the animal, and it became very still. There was some evidence that the gulls had been pecking around the eyes. We decided to try to get some help and Ron set off for the Observatory while I kept the gulls away. I think people will find this rather fanciful but to this day I believe that the animal knew we were trying the help. At no time did it struggle even though previous to our arrival it had dug itself into the mud. Ron arrived back having tried to borrow a blanket from the warden- one Barry Spence. Not renowned for his kindly demeanour Barry refused. I had spotted a length of Corlene fishing net lying in the tide rack and with the help of a number of very willing Yorkshire birders who had come along to help we managed to load the animal onto the net. We then carried it across the road, through the sea buckthorn and were eventually able to get it to the water's edge.

We released the animal into the water, but it immediately rolled onto its side and was swept into one of the wooden tide breaks. After this had happened a number of times two of the birders waded into the North Sea and held it up until eventually it righted itself. What we did not know at the time was that apparently if the swim bladder gets full of air it has to eject this in order to swim properly. If it was not for the guys who waded into the sea, I think the animal would have perished. We subsequently found out that it was a white beaked dolphin quite a common inhabitant of the North Sea. Incidentally we were castigated for not informing the coastguard, a case of no-good turn goes unpunished.

Just a funny part of this adventure, was a comment passed that we should have called upon Geoff Neal - a regular visitor to Spurn and renowned for his gargantuan appetite to help, one wag said he would probably have eaten it. I told Geoff this and he laughed as only Geoff could.

*John Birch*



## Field Events 2024

**August Sat 17th, FRODSHAM/WEAVER BEND.** Migrants and waders on the settling pools and the Weaver Bend. Meet at Brook Furlong (motorway bridge) Frodsham at 9.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

**September Sat 21st, HILBRE ISLAND** over high tide, waders, terns and skuas. Meet at West Kirby Sailing Centre, Dee Lane (SJ213869) at 9.00 am. Contact Alan Smethurst 07896758222 for more details.

**October Sun 20th, WEPRE PARK,** Connah's Quay. Meet at 10.30am near the Visitor Centre, join Karen and Adrian for a FUNGI FORAY. We will hope to find a variety of different fungi and together try to identify as many as we can and learn a bit more about them. Contact Karen Garnett 07910 331502 for more details.

**November Sat 30th, RSPB OLD MOOR** Dearne Valley. A wildlife oasis in the heart of Yorkshire's industrial landscape. Bring RSPB membership cards. Meet at 10.00am at the reserve reception centre. Meet at the Tudor Rose for carshare at 8.00am Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

**December Sun 15th, BEDDMANARCH BAY AND INLAND SEA.** Beddmanarch Bay is a SSSI, the site comprises the area of coastal saltmarshes, mudflats, and shallow coastal water. The Inland Sea is adjacent to the bay but isolated by the A55. Meet Penrhos Coastal Park at 10.00am. Contact Bill Dickinson 07968438121 for more details.

*Bill Dickinson*

## DNS Art Group

We are a small group of members who enjoy painting together each month. We paint in various mediums and gain stimulation and encouragement from each other.

If you would like to join us, you would be most welcome. Our meetings are on the second Thursday

of the month in the Field Study Centre from 1-30 until 3-30 pm.

Contact Kay Mattocks on 01244 821810

## Digital Media

Web site: [www.deenats.org.uk](http://www.deenats.org.uk)

Email address: [webeditor@deenats.org.uk](mailto:webeditor@deenats.org.uk)

Facebook: MEMBERS OF DEESIDE NATURALIST SOCIETY