



Issue 169

AUGUST 2026

Registered Charity No. 510146

A warm welcome to our three new committee members, Janet and Keith Mills and Andrew Wallbank.

Sadly, Kay Mattocks has decided to discontinue her role as facilitator for DNS monthly art group due to diminishing numbers of attendees. This is due in the main part to the age demographic of the group making it difficult to attend for various reasons and the fact that there have been no new members joining for a significant time. Many thanks to Kay for taking up the reins of the group when Doreen Boswell moved down to Wiltshire.

The major jobs to be undertaken by Uniper, reinstating the island on the ash pool and the repair to the water level control sluices on the bunded pools will more than likely not take place until 2027. Consultations and approvals will be required with all the relevant stakeholders and conservation organisations prior to any work going ahead. A suitable timetable will also be required to minimise any detrimental impact on the wildlife on the Reserve.

Visitors to the site will notice that the gas plant is almost completely demolished now, preliminary work prior to the construction of the proposed new carbon capture plant.

As part of the improvements to the west hide car park the borders have been enhanced with a variety of wildflower seeds which have now matured. This has encouraged an upsurge in butterflies and dragonflies in the area. A really positive improvement to a previously rather barren area.

Our member's day will be on 15th August for 10.00am until 14.00pm and we look forward to seeing you there. Bring along the children and grandchildren and hopefully inspire the youngsters to get immersed in nature.

Notice Board

Free refreshments in
the Field Studies Centre

Guided wildlife walks to
see the
reserve habitat

Children's quizzes with
prizes for
completed entries

Meet with our friendly
team who will help with bird
spotting
and identification

Deeside Naturalists' Society



Member's Open Day



Connah's Quay Nature Reserve

15th August 2026

10:00 to 14:00

Discover which
moths are active
after dark

Purchase a copy of
'The birds of Connah's Quay Nature Re-
serve and Oakenholt Marsh 2nd Edition'
by Glenn Morris

Deeside Naturalists' Society invites members, their families and friends to an Open Day.

Explore the reserve, learn about its environment and birdlife, and connect with fellow nature enthusiasts.

The event coincides with a high summer tide (9.4m at 13:57), which will make for a spectacular sight as birds flock up and feed on the mudflats.

Recent improvements to the Reserve



Uniper have done extensive work on the West hide car park. The steps and handrails to the hide have been completely replaced and the screening replaced with an acoustic one. The car park surface has been built up and rolled along with a couple of sections of the disabled access path from the picnic bench.

A further flight of steps has been installed to the left-hand corner of the car park to facilitate maintenance access to UNIPER ONLY. Members are not to climb this flight of steps as it will disturb any birds that may be on the Ash pool.



The East hide has had a completely new roof fitted following the ingress of rainwater into the flat roof panels over recent months. The flagstone at the entrance has been reset to give a smooth disabled access into the hide



All the shelving on the viewing screen adjacent to the Field Study Centre have been renewed and weather sealed. The corrosion to the bottom of the East hide door has been addressed.

ESTUARY FEEDERS

Most wading birds are carnivorous, their staple diet is made up of juicy worms, flies, bivalves and small crustaceans. Over the years different shorebirds have evolved special features which help them to find their preferred food as easily as possible. Time spent unsuccessfully foraging is wasting precious energy – energy which they need to help them survive.

The bill shape of a shorebird governs the food which is available to them. From long, thin and curved to short and pointy, no two species have exactly the same bill shape, allowing them to exploit different food sources.

To minimise competition for food between individuals of the same species, females usually have slightly longer bills than the males, meaning there is plenty to go round for everyone!

Some species can even change the shape of their bill depending on what type of food they eat, due to their bills continuously growing. This is most apparent for oystercatchers. Feeding on worms within soft sediment will produce a more slender, pointier bill and those feeding on shellfish will develop a shorter flat-tipped bill, allowing them to hammer through the hard shells of their prey.

Many of our shorebirds use visual techniques when searching for food. Some, such as turnstones, are scavengers and use their short thick bill to bulldoze their way through seaweed in search of small crustaceans and other unsuspecting marine creatures. They will also scavenge the washed-up rotting seaweed high up on the beach searching for sandflies and their larvae.

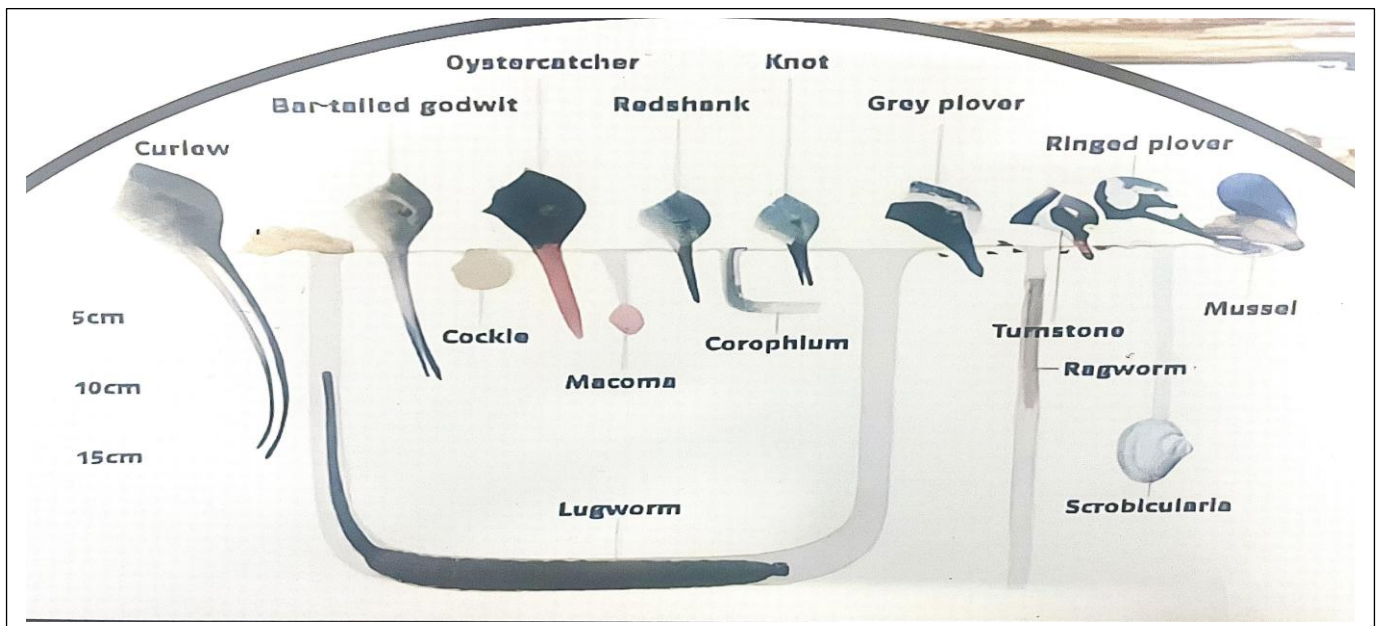
Sanderling are also visual foragers – they can be seen in groups running back and forth at the water's edge picking up small food particles deposited by the waves. Other species, such as knot, feed using touch – they generate pressure waves in the water in the sediment and, using special sensors in the tip of their bills, can detect where their unsuspecting prey item is from the rebound of the pressure wave.

Rockpools are a great place to find a tasty meal. Shrimp, crabs and fish are all on offer for longer-legged birds who can wade into the water to find them. Curlews have the perfect bill shape to catch crabs as the downward curve helps them to reach right under rocks and in crevices to find their food. Crabs are one of their favourites, and they tackle this meal by first pulling off their legs and claws and then gobbling the body down whole.

The muddy sediment, that is found on the Dee estuary is bursting with life, and the soft sediment means shorebirds which using probing as a foraging technique have easy access to this food supply. Curlew, redshank and oystercatcher can use their long bills to pull out worms buried deep in the mud, and in the case of bar-tailed godwits, they often feed in the sediment that is submerged by the sea! Curlew have an added advantage of having a curve in their bill, as this increases the surface area over which they can search for food. But for smaller waders, their shorter bill means they can't probe as deep into the sediment. So how can they get to the juicy worms living within the mud?

Ringed plovers have mastered a very clever technique to make the worms come to them! They rapidly vibrate their foot, causing the surrounding sediment to almost liquify, resulting in any prey items nearby simply floating to the surface! This is known as foot trembling – the shaking is so quick that you can hardly tell they are moving at all!

The length of time that shorebirds can spend foraging for food is determined by two main factors – daylight and the tide. In winter, daylight hours are short, so birds, especially those which use visual techniques, must spend as much time as possible feeding. A high tide in the middle of the day can reduce foraging time even further, and during this time birds must conserve their energy by resting



Moel Findeg & Bryn Alyn – 24th May

My first stab at organising a field trip began with the discovery that ‘What Three Words’ is much better than a postcode for identifying the meeting point, but all turned out well and our group of nine DNS members set off together at 9am to Bryn Alyn in perfect weather.

We soon found a singing Redstart and then three singing male Wood Warblers, our main target for the day, all in good voice and close to the track. I even managed to get a decent photo. We couldn’t find the Pied Flycatcher that was here a few weeks earlier and there was no sign yet of any Spotted Flycatchers. Near the end of the walk, it was a pleasure to see both Great Tit and Blue Tit visiting likely nests in exposed breeze blocks of an unfinished building.



At 10.30, we continued by car to our second location, Moel Findeg, and were lucky to find parking space for five cars on this Bank Holiday Sunday. We walked up past the grazing ponies to the pool, where we saw swallows, kestrel and buzzard and then returned from Flintshire into Denbighshire for the heathland, an unusual habitat of acid soil on top of limestone. Here the dominant species were Whitethroats and Meadow Pipits; we saw 3 of the latter, each one perched on top of a bush with a mouthful of food for its young, evidently waiting for danger to pass by.



The most-appreciated attraction of this leg of the walk, however, was the panoramic view of Nercwys Forest, across Bryn Alyn and over to the Clwydian hills to Moel Famau, Cilcain village and beyond. Many thanks to all the members who turned up.

Dr Glenn Morris

Around and about - *Aberduna*

Aberduna is a North Wales Wildlife Trust site situated less than half a mile walk from the village of Maeshafn, three miles from Mold, just off the A541 Mold to Denbigh road. It is a limestone grassland and woodland reserve overlooking the Clwydian range.



The grassland plant communities vary with changing soils. The limestone outcrops are colonised by rare wildflowers such as moonwort, common rock-rose, fragrant orchids, early-purple orchids and cowslips. In contrast, deeper, nutrient-rich soils (in the dips between the limestone outcrops) are home to knapweed, thistle species, bracken and gorse. The bracken and gorse are managed to produce a mixture of open grassland and scrub favoured by butterflies. Bracken is rolled in mid-summer and the grassland is grazed in the winter months to ensure the soils remain low in nutrients for rarer plants.

The birds found on the reserve reflect the variety of habitats and include breeding whitethroat and blackcap, over-wintering woodcock and the occasional peregrine falcon, which nest on the quarry 'cliffs'. In the centre of the reserve there are small field systems with characteristic, lichen-clad, dry stone walls and ancient hedges. The fields are nutrient-poor and grazed by sheep producing ideal conditions for the brightly coloured rare waxcap fungi which can be seen in the autumn. Here in the rare limestone pavement butterflies are abundant with 28 recorded species including the purple and white-letter hairstreak butterflies. Violets growing under bracken are the larval food plants of the pearl-bordered, small pearl-bordered and dark green fritillary butterflies. Dingy skipper, green hairstreak and northern brown argus butterflies occur on the grassland, together with many more common species

Much of the western boundary of the reserve is ash/oak woodland with an under-story of hazel, blackthorn and holly. On the woodland floor there is a rich array of mosses, ferns and plants including herb-paris and rare upland enchanter's-nightshade as well as 23 other plants, evidence of the woodland's ancient origins. Small 'glades' have been created along the public footpaths to benefit woodland insects and birds, they also offer stunning views over the Alyn Valley to Moel Famau.



Green fritillary



Enchanter's nightshade



Purple hairstreak

Bird Report

Black-headed gulls and Avocet did not nest on the Ash pool island this year, following breeding success since 2021. Common tern numbers trickled away as they failed to nest at the steel works. Thought to be due to predation, either by an Otter or Mink.

The newly planted wildflower borders around the west car park of black mustard, wild radish, swine cress and fat hen, has flowered and seeded successfully. This should provide winter feeding for finches including Linnet, Gold finches and dare I say ...Twite.

March.

40 Avocet, Cetti's warbler, 6 Stonechat, 4 Gadwall, 400 Wigeon, Chiffchaff, Meadow pipit, Merlin, Kestrel, Rooks, Jay, 1000 Pink-footed geese, Marsh harrier, 30 Curlew, Turnstone, 300 Black-tailed godwit, Spoonbill, Red kite, 180 Pintail, 2 Little ringed plover, 850 Knot, Snipe, Peregrine.

April.

Blackcap, House martin, Swallow, Sand martin, 6 Wheatear, 3 Willow warbler, Redstart, 3 Chiffchaff, 42 Avocet, Greenshank, Great-crested grebe, 1000 Black-tailed godwit, Whitethroat, Linnet, 15 Whimbrel, 9 Ringed plover, 3 Little ringed plover, Reed bunting, Mediterranean gull, Common sandpiper, Shoveler, Goosander, Tufted duck, 6 Redpoll.

May.

Lesser whitethroat, 6 Blackcap, 5 Stonechat, Snipe, Wheatear, Sandwich tern, 25 Whimbrel, 15 Common tern, Sedge warbler, Little grebe, Barnacle goose, Reed warbler, Mute swan, 100 Swift, 70 Avocet, Mandarin duck, Dunlin, Curlew.

June.

20 Lapwing, 65, Avocet, Teal, Tufted duck, Greylag geese, 4 Pink-footed geese, 36 Little egret, 600 Knot, Hobby, Oyster catcher and two young, 2 Grey wagtail, 1000 Shelduck, 3 Great white egret.

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

A couple of newspaper clippings from almost 50 years ago when kids could have fun without all the H & S and risk assessments! These were amongst some archive material kindly given to the Society by Colin Steward.

WILDLIFE RESERVE IDEA ATTRACTS TEENAGE AID



Ray Roberts, Chairman of the Deeside Naturalists' Society, pictured on Sunday receiving a cheque for £50 from pupils of Deeside High School.



GETTING down to the hard work of creating a reed bed at the reserve.

Armed with spades, 30 Deeside youngsters set to work on Sunday creating a reed bed at the wildlife reserve in Connah's Quay. The volunteers who were all pupils of Deeside High School decided to help after choosing The World Wildlife Fund as their charity for the year.

For some weeks now the youngsters have been organising a variety of events to raise money and on Sunday they presented £50 to Ray Roberts, Chairman of the Deeside Naturalists' Society to help towards the cost of building a Field Study Centre on the reserve.

For several hours the pupils planted reeds which is hoped will flourish into a bed to attract birds including sedge warblers.

"If these take, then this will be the only sizeable reed bed on this side of the Dee and the way these youngsters have helped is marvellous" said Mr. Roberts.

Alan Smethurst (Reported by Karen Garston, Chester Chronicle)

Digital Media

Web site: www.deenats.org.uk

Email address: webeditor@deenats.org.uk

Facebook: MEMBERS OF DEESIDE NATURALIST SOCIETY

If any members have any articles, memories, wildlife holidays they would like to share with the membership, please don't hesitate to contact me: editor@deenats.org.uk

Alan Smethurst