

# The Nature of our Village

## Report from August 2020 to October 2020

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An Otter eating a Lamprey, Tanybwllch, Penparcau.

### Introduction

Our project continues to help local people to enjoy nature throughout the continued restrictions of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Read on to find out how surveys are being shared online, how the appearance of an Otter has cheered us all up, and hear how a small wildlife pond has become a big success. We've got Wonderful Waxcaps and Dragons on the beach too!

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## **An Otter arrives!**

The most exciting visitor for many of our members has been a dog otter, who has been seen almost every day for weeks, working his way around the rock pools and shore line of our beach, as well as working his way up river to clean off the salt at the end of a day in the sea. This is a very uncommon sight for our area, as the most we can usually find is some spraint on a boulder to show they are here. That all changed though, and we got used to seeing socially distanced photographers hanging over the bridge to the beach, attempting to get a good shot with a telephoto lens.

One fascinating result of all this photography by our members and other wildlife enthusiasts has been that we have been able to keep an eye on what our Otter is eating. By far and away his most frequent meal has been the small green Shore Crabs, although he was once seen to take a Lamprey, as shown in our cover photo. At its height, local people were sharing Otter Shots 3 or 4 times a day, and he has certainly done his bit to bring our members together virtually, at a time when we must stay apart to keep each other safe.

## **Sharing Nature Together, and Apart.**

As of the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020, we are still running all the Nature of our Village surveys without the public being involved in group work. This has been the case since the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 when we had to change the way we share nature with people in order to keep us all safe through the Corona Virus Pandemic. Our usual field sessions rely on a group gathering closely together to observe finds, which makes it very hard to keep the regulation 2m away from others. We have been working on other ways to engage and support our members in their enjoyment of, and learning about, local wildlife. We have made use of local spaces where people can be at a safe distance to share the

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excitement of finds and to answer questions, to recommend good places to pond dip or find our superb range of butterfly species.

We have worked with a very skilled group of local wildlife photographers so that their images are now regularly shared with the group online, and have created a safe environment in our social media group for people to ask questions and share their own expertise. This warm and supportive atmosphere has been superb for learning and for sharing uplifting and inspiring images to keep us going as a group during the restrictions of Lockdown.

Thanks to P. T. our Vice County Recorder for Butterflies for sharing this lovely shot of a Comma butterfly with us.



The Comma butterfly basking in the sunshine on Pen Dinas

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## Wonderful Waxcaps

Waxcap mushrooms are usually small and jewel-coloured, and can be a sign that you are looking at a very good quality meadow for wildlife. On the west coast of Wales they can sometimes be found on the short-cropped coastal grasslands, the sort of place that our Chough like to feed from. The project was alerted by an older member that she had found some “interesting” mushrooms on a field grazed by horses back in 2017, and asked if we would like to take a look. We were amazed to find a very good selection of all sorts of Waxcap fungi on this meadow, everything from the chunky Meadow Waxcap to the delicate Golden Spindle, and including the rather rare Ballerina Waxcap. Waxcap communities get scores a bit like Top Trumps, and after some research, we now feel that we can show this particular meadow to be Locally Important, which has pleased the grazier. She noted “It’s great! It makes you keep your eye out and notice things I wouldn’t have noticed before.”



Meadow Coral, very pretty and also rare!

This piece of work led to a further and even more exciting discovery. At the far end of the village there is a cliff called Allt Wen (White Slope), which also has short-cropped grassland. A local fungi expert was kind enough to lead a socially distanced visit for the project officer to this location, and to pass on a great deal of her expertise in identifying a wide range of these beautiful species. We were amazed to find even more varieties, some of considerable rarity, like the Meadow Coral and the Citrine Waxcap. Using the same scoring system as before, we can now show that this small area of grassland is Regionally Important. Local people have been very excited about these finds, with one young person commenting on social media that “these Waxcaps are insaaaaane!” N.D. This is a compliment!



Golden-ringed Dragonfly in Penparcau, the UK’s longest dragonfly! Thanks for this photo to Maiisy Graham, one of our keen photographers.

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## **Pond Ponderings**

The results are in! Local volunteer MK has been working with the project officer to keep detailed records of the life that has been returning to our newly mended pond behind Morrisons. We have been remotely sharing our data and have worked with other local recorders from their photos (kindly shared with us), to come up with a complete species list for our dragonflies. We are astonished and over the moon to report that we now have 10 different species of dragonfly and damselfly using, and in some cases even breeding in what used to be a dried up muddy puddle. This is a huge success for us, and we couldn't be more pleased that our collective work with the local council and local pressure groups has paid off so spectacularly.

Species that can now find a home in our village include the Emperor Dragonfly, the Broad-bodied Chaser and the Large Red Damselfly, none of which could have managed to survive at this site if the pond had not been overhauled. The pond has also been a safer way for us to engage with members of the public during the Covid-19 restrictions, as it is fenced off. During surveys we have managed to talk at a safe distance with many members of the public, including older people and young children, about the joys of pond-dipping and what sort of wildlife they could see in their gardens if they make a little pond. We have had to be creative about how we keep the project fresh for local people, and seeing each other at a distance with wildlife to point to has been a great way to keep their interest going.

## **Dragon on the beach!**

A strange creature was discovered on Tanybwllch beach, dried out with its tail caught up amongst some of the seaweed in the strandline. Amazingly, it is a relative of the seahorse, known as the Greater Pipefish (*Syngnathus acus*). After this find was shared on social media it had 44 likes and some very interesting comments. One of our local fish experts wrote to us that "I have been snorkelling a lot off of the beaches around Aberystwyth in the past, and the gathering detached algae just past the wave zone is

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where all of the greater and snake pipefish hang out. It probably got washed onto the shore holding on to some detached wrack.” B.F. This sort of learned comment is a great help to us in understanding how some of our local wildlife ends up on the strandline, and is a learning opportunity for all of our 392 members. We were also told the story of another Pipefish washing up just along the coast at Borth, being put in the garden on display, only for the pet dog to eat it!



Greater Pipefish in the strandline at Tanybwllch beach

### **Training sessions**

All our training in the field is on hold until Covid restrictions are over, and we continue to signpost our members to the numerous free online training opportunities released by FSC and other conservation bodies, which are proving popular. The Project Officer has continued to take advantage of some superb free training online via Zoom, including the identification of Waxcap Fungi, Carrion Beetles, the amazing diversity of Flies, and the ecology of Octopuses. It has been extremely useful and feels like a real privilege to

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have access to some of the top experts in each field, where it is even possible to ask them questions at the end of the seminar.

Our members have continued to take part, and one noted: “It was really useful, gave me an idea of what to look out for.” (AD) The new, freely available and accessible training sessions are highly valued and we will continue to promote them to our members.

### **Taking Action for Nature**

As working with a group was not allowed under Lockdown rules, we carried out our vital habitat conservation work on Pen Dinas hillside with only one volunteer at a safe social distance. We managed to clear an area that our local reptiles rely on for basking, and this led to some great results in our September reptile survey.



Common Lizard basking in vegetation on Pen Dinas



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## **In other news**

There was a record-breaking count of Lizards in September 2020, with 63 Common Lizards being seen on one day on Pen Dinas hillside. This is almost exactly twice our previous record, which is fantastic news. We took to social media to share this exciting result with our members, writing “Hand clap to Ceredigion County Council for their management of the sides of this path, allowing the lizards plenty of room to sunbathe.” Our comments were shared and picked up on by the Council, who invited us to write a set of directions on how the paths should be managed in future for the benefit of these animals. This is a great feather in our cap, and we are so pleased to have been asked to advise on how some of the best habitat in our village could be treated to keep it in good shape for our lizards, as well as other wildlife.

We were also asked to provide advice on wildlife to a local Environment group, which will be through monthly meetings via Zoom. The organiser at the local Community Centre wrote “You will be part of making positive changes happen and you will actually make a difference to the place you live which will be of benefit to you and the community. Your advice on the wildlife will be so valuable to the environment group and I really appreciate that you are able to give us that. I am just so pleased we can have you on board in that capacity.” C.J.

## **Thanks to all our funders**

We’d like to express our thanks to all our funders, past and present, who have kindly agreed to provide funding for this project. We are sincerely grateful to all of you as we couldn’t do this vital work without you.

Chloe Griffiths - Penparcau Community Forum: The Nature of our Village Project



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