

CARMARTHENSHIRE

# Nature Notes

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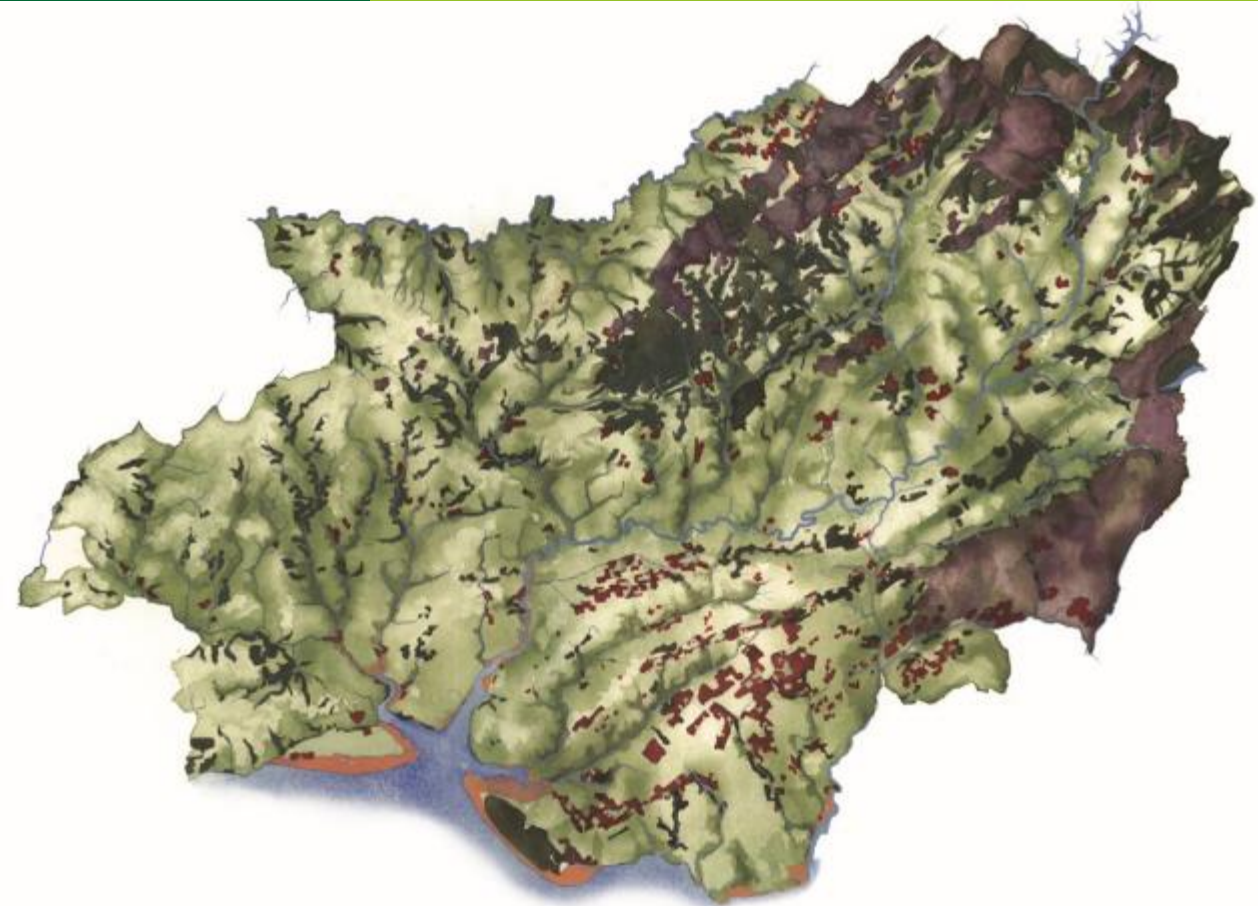


OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023

Carmarthenshire has some wonderful wildlife. These 'Nature Notes' are some highlights to encourage us all to take a closer look around us – even the common is special. Seen anything interesting – then why not send us a photo?



For more information about nature in the county the read our Nature Recovery Plan:  
[carmarthenshire.gov.wales/biodiversity](http://carmarthenshire.gov.wales/biodiversity)



Send your photos to: [Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)





## Angle Shades moth

The Angle Shades moth (*Phlogophora meticulosa*) is on the wing from May to October. It is also a migrant species, which flies over from the continent in periods of settled weather. This specimen is likely from a second brood. Its pinky-brown markings and scalloped wings give it excellent camouflage as a curled-up, dead leaf. Often found among the leaf litter, it folds its wings back to emphasise its camouflage. The adults feed on the flowers of Common Reed and grasses and the eat the leaves of a wide range of different plants including Nettles, Red Valerian, Dock, Bramble, Hazel and Oak.



## Flooding

When rain falls somewhere in the Tywi 'catchment' (the area of land that collects all the water that ends up in the river), the water moves downhill via streams and rivers to join the Tywi. A large amount can be retained by soils, which supports vegetation growth.

The Tywi after Llandovery meanders on a wide, active flood plain. River flooding is a natural process, essential to how the Tywi has developed its meandering form, slowly eroding and rebuilding a winding channel with oxbow lakes, river terraces and gravel 'shoals'.

Flooding, essential to stream health and structure, can become destructive to homes, businesses and infrastructure. [Natural flood management](#) works with nature to reduce the risk of flooding for communities. It uses various techniques to restore or mimic the natural functions of rivers, floodplains and the wider catchment. It aims to store water in the catchment and slow the rate at which water runs into rivers, to help reduce flooding downstream.





## Species-rich hedgerows

Carmarthenshire probably has one of the most complex networks of hedgerows of any part of Wales.

Hedgerows were created to demarcate land holdings, create stock barriers and provide shelter. Many surviving hedges are centuries old and across the county they are still maintained for agricultural purposes.

As long-established features in the landscape, often providing a route between other habitats, they can be extremely rich in terms of the wildlife they support. Across the UK, more than 600 plant, 1500 insects, 65 bird and 20 mammal species have been recorded to use hedgerow.

You could say they form one of our largest nature reserves.





## Alder Tongue Gall

*Taphrinaalni* is a fungal pathogen that causes Alder Tongue Gall, a chemically induced distortion of fresh female alder catkins. The Alder Tongue Gall is a strange but conspicuous tongue-like growth on the catkins, green at first, later turning yellow, orange, red or purple, and eventually brown or black. Once rare in the UK, alder tongue is spreading and is now quite common.

Alder cones may carry one gall or several, usually emerging from the same spot on the catkin. The galls mature on the catkins eventually releasing their spores into the wind to infect neighbouring trees.



## Fantastic Fungi

Fungi Day at the National Botanic Garden of Wales never disappoints, and this year was no different. Experts and visitors alike enjoyed the foray around the Gardens and identified species that demonstrate the diversity in the fungal world. **Earpick Fungus** (*Auriscalpium vulgare*), which almost always grows from pinecones has a distinctive kidney shaped cap covered in bristles.

More common is the **Crested Coral Fungus** (*Clavulina coralloides*) - often found in woodlands, with pointy tips to its branches.

[Woodland ecosystems](#) are a lot more than just their trees: they are complex worlds, with fungi playing a vital role within them. Fungi are the principal decomposers and also provide a vast underground supply and communications network. There is a lot more to learn, but while science learns more about how vital fungi are, we can continue to be amazed by the diversity of species all around us by taking a closer look when we are out and about.





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## Long-tailed Tit

The Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) is an attractive tiny bird. Its tail *is* long – longer in fact than its body!

They are sociable birds, and are most usually noticed in small, excitable flocks, roving through woods and hedgerows looking for insects and spiders, making a characteristic contact call.

At this time of year, to keep warm at night, they huddle together tightly to reduce heat loss. They may use nest boxes – so it might be worth keeping them up over winter if you see this bird in your garden.



## Leaf miners

A leaf miner is any one of numerous species of insects in which the larval stage lives in, and eats, the leaf tissue of plants. A common sight on a number species in the county, here are the distinctive, linear, 'mines' of a leaf miner in a Hogweed leaf, probably of a species in the *Phytomyza* genus of leaf miner flies.

These mines can be seen from May to November. The larvae develop inside the leaves of its host plant, making a conspicuous whitish mine. Some leaf miners pupate inside the leaf and eventually emerge from the surface of the leaf, while others exit the leaf to pupate on the surface of the leaf or drop to the ground and pupate in the litter or soil before emerging as adults.





## New Year Plant Hunt

In the middle of winter, a plant in flower is a lovely sight. This Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) plant was in flower in a local cemetery.

Normally the flower heads of Yarrow show a gradual transition from flower to seed head and the plant remains attractive well into the autumn. Here it was in flower in December!

Why not take a closer look in your local area over the New Year and see if there are any plants in flower? You might be surprised.

The Botanical Society of the British Isles runs a New Year Plant Hunt from 30<sup>th</sup> December 2023 to 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2024.

Records from this Hunt contribute to the understanding of how wild and naturalised plants across Britain and Ireland are responding to changes in autumn and winter weather patterns.

The Hunt is also a great excuse for a wintery walk over the Festive season!

[Join the New Year Plant Hunt – BSBI New Year Plant Hunt](#)



## Common Brittlestar

A relative of starfish the Common Brittlestar (*Ophiothrix fragilis*) is found all around our coast in rockpools and offshore to depths of 85 m and sometimes they can be found in dense congregations. They *are* brittle, shedding their thin arms if they are disturbed or threatened. On the seabed they raise their long legs into the water current to filter feed, catching plankton and detritus.

Brittlestars are eaten by starfish. To avoid being eaten, they hide but can also detect a type of chemical produced by their starfish predators and so will move away.





## Reed bed creation – give it time!

In 2010, funding allowed enhancement of the then, largely bare, banks of Delta Lakes in Llanelli for wildlife, including the rare water vole, signs of which were found there that year.

Pre-planted coir rolls were sited along the bank during the winter. The benefits were not immediately obvious and the following dry summer and grazing of the merging growth by fly-grazed ponies did not help. However, given time the marginal habitat has developed into excellent reed bed habitat, which has spread along the edge of the lake and, as well as providing excellent habitat for water voles, now can support a range species such as dragonflies and birds such as Reed Bunting and Cetti's Warbler.





## Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership



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