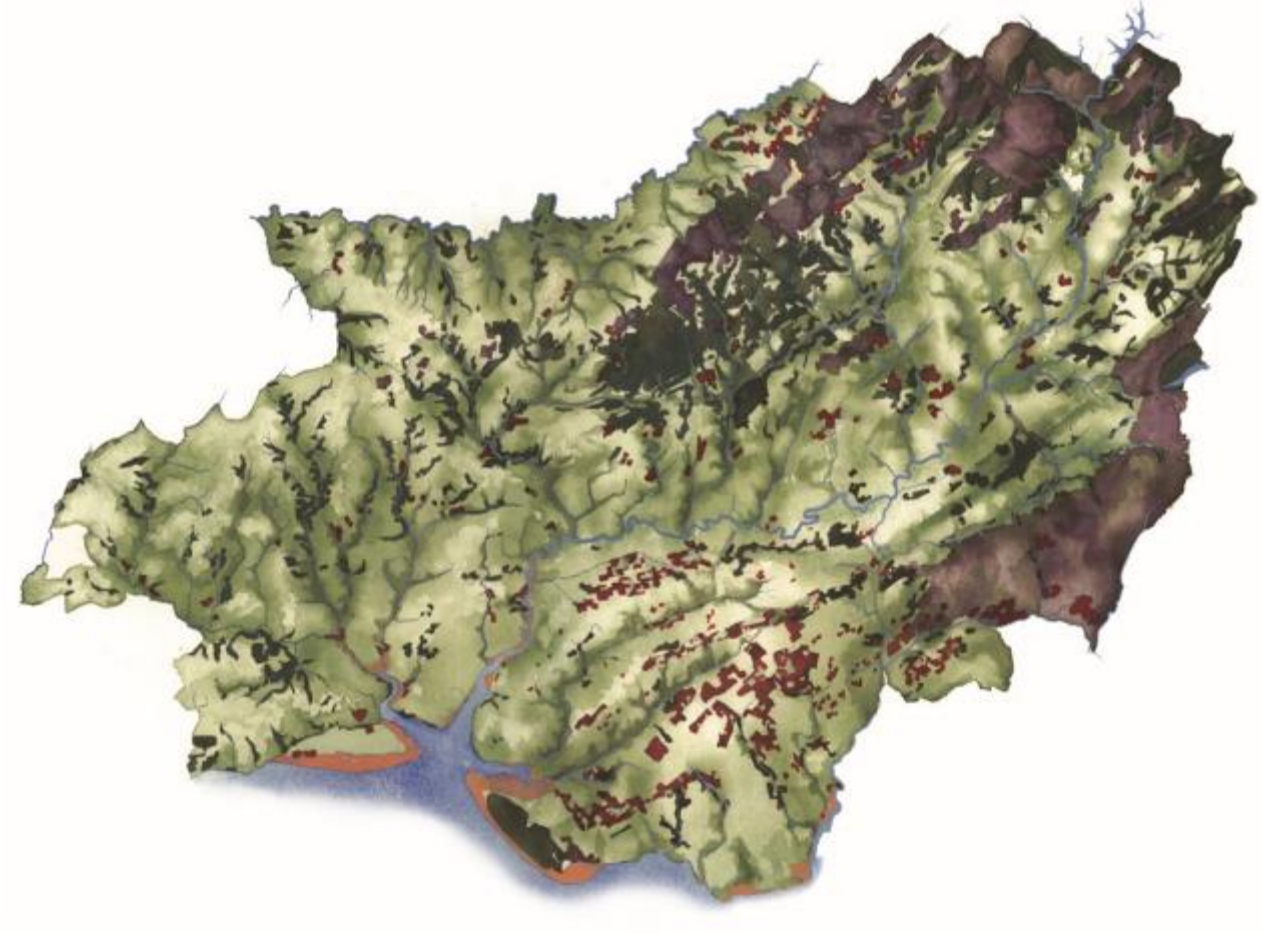
CARMARTHENSHIRE

Nature Notes

Partneriaeth Natur
SIR GÂR • CARMARTHENSHIRE
Nature Partnership

JANUARY-MARCH 2024

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 t read our Nature Recovery Plan:
carmarthenshire.gov.wales/biodiversity

Send your photos to: Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Maidenhair Spleenwort

Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) is a small, tufted fern, which can be found growing, like it is here, in walls across the county. These mimic the rocky places they grow in the wild.

A distinctive fern, Maidenhair Spleenwort has long fronds made up of short, round leaflets paired from a central black stem. The name for Spleenwort species is thought to arise because of the spleen-shaped spores on the underside of their leaves

Plants that grow in these types of places have to be resilient and adapted to growing with little soil to anchor themselves and few nutrients.

Deptford Pink

There are only a few sites where the plant Deptford Pink (*Dianthus armeria*) is recorded in Carmarthenshire. With clusters of bright pink flowers, this rare plant prefers disturbed ground and open, well-lit conditions.

It is a priority and protected species in Wales. Under a special licence from Natural Resources Wales, seeds were taken from an existing population and sown at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. The Garden maintained the population of plants there until a suitable site was found where plugs could be planted by volunteers, who give up their time to help manage Local Nature Reserves in the county. The site will be monitored, and the ground kept open to give the plants the best chance to thrive.

Crusty lichens

Species in the *Pertusaria* group of lichens are widespread, with over 500 species recorded. They are commonly called wart lichens and on close inspection you can see the warty 'fruiting bodies' that holds the reproductive spores. This one was found on an old Ash tree. Species like these often need a microscope to identify them but one species- *Pertusaria amara* - can be identified by taste – a tiny amount on the tip of a finger is exceedingly bitter! Lichens are amazing – they have been attached to the outside of the International Space Station and survived in the vacuum of space, with no water, extreme temperatures and radiation and ultraviolet rays form the sun!

Scarlet Elf Cup Fungus

The brightly coloured Scarlet Elf Cup fungus (*Sarcoscypha* species) can be found in winter in damp, shady places in woodland with plenty of moss-covered fallen wood.

Fungi belong to their own kingdom and get their nutrients and energy from organic matter, rather than photosynthesis like most plants.

Elf cups actively shoot their spores into the air, rather than dropping them through pores or gills like many other fungi. A subtle change in temperature can trigger many thousands of spores into being shot from the inner surface of the cup by pneumatic action.

Weasel

This Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) was caught by a well-placed camera trap taking advantage of a good viewing point. Weasels are mustelids and related to Otters and Stoats, with long, slender bodies with a creamy front and short legs and tail.

Weasels are the UK's smallest carnivore and eat voles, mice and small birds and live in a range of habitats. Their young are called kits, and they can have up to two litters a year with three to six kits per litter. With a lifespan of approximately only 2 years, they can't hang around!

Great Diving Beetle

The Great Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*) *is* large - with larvae growing up to 60 mm in length, and adults smaller at generally 27–35 mm.

These common beetles live in still or slow-running freshwater. The male has shiny wing cases, while those of the female are finely grooved. It hunts a wide variety of prey and the first two pairs of legs of the male have suction cups, enabling them to securely grip on to their prey – and females!

They do fly, usually at night, using the reflection of moonlight to locate new water sources. This location method can sometimes cause them to land on wet roads – like this one here.

Footprints

These footprints across the mudflats along the coast at Llanelli are those of an Otter moving through its territory.

Otters use our coastline much more now and footprints are one way of identifying them.

Increasingly Otters use freshwater, brackish (slightly salty) *and* marine environments. Otters using the sea though must have access to fresh water for drinking and washing.

Colt's-foot

This bright flowering Colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*) is one of the earliest flowering plants - perfectly timed to offer nectar and pollen to queen bumblebees and other insects when they emerge after hibernation. Here it is growing in a pile of stone on a forestry track, and it is often found on sites where little else grows.

The flowers emerge before the leaves but close in the evening when few pollinators are on the wing.

Historically, Colt's-foot is sometimes called Coughwort as it was used as a remedy for coughs and colds.

Waxwing

Photographed from behind, this plump Waxwing (*Bombycilla* garrulus), which is slightly smaller than a Starling, allows us to see its amazing yellow, pink and white wing feathers and a yellow-tipped tail. Along with its prominent crest – it is a bit like the punk rocker of the bird world! This winter we have been lucky see Waxwings in the county. They do not breed in the UK but are occasional winter visitors from their breeding grounds in Scandinavia and Russia, migrating over to the UK when supplies of winter of berries are low. Large groups of Waxwings are called Irruptions.

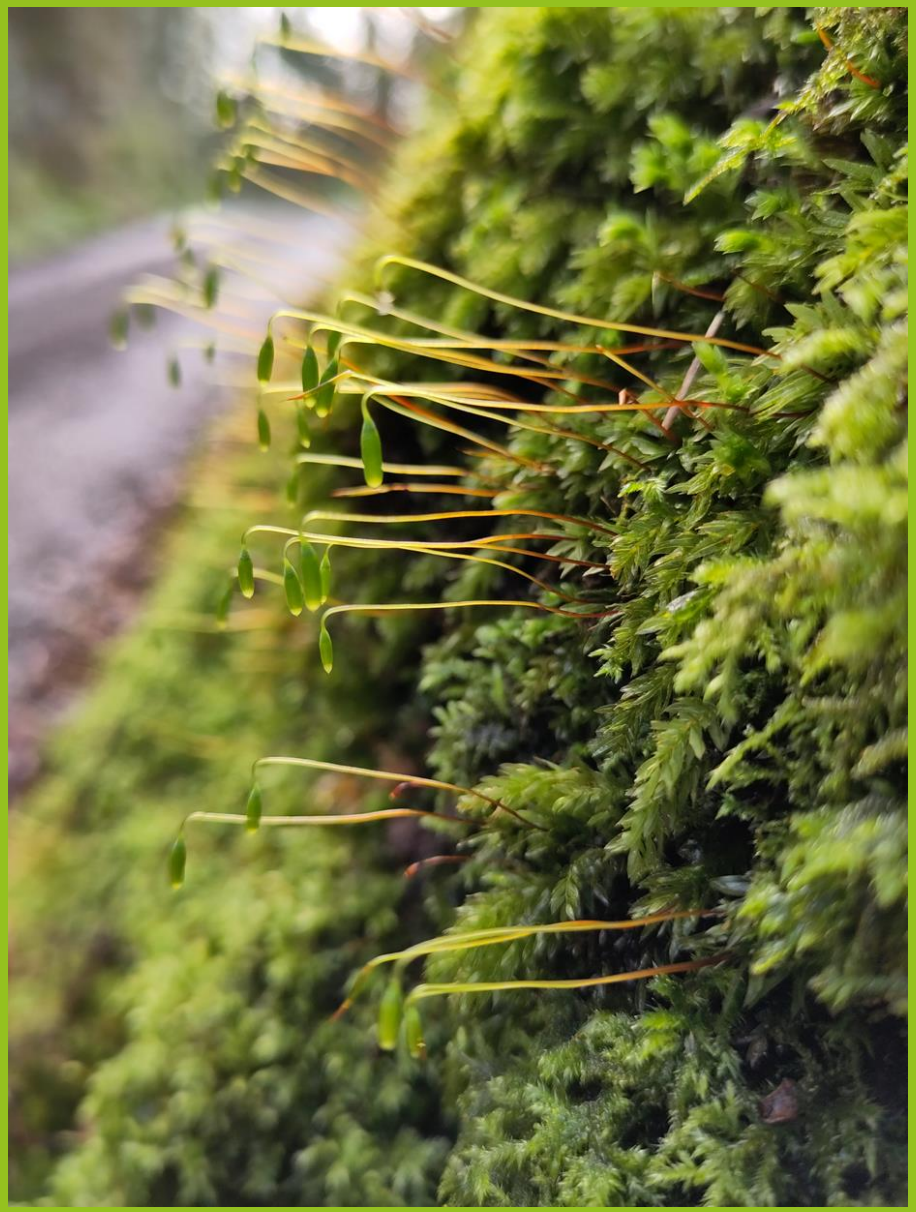
Hedge laying

Carmarthenshire probably has one of the most complex networks of hedgerows of any part of Wales. As long-established features in the landscape, they provide connectivity between other habitats, and can be extremely rich in terms of the wildlife they support – as a refuge and source of food.

Over-management by flailing to the same height each year degrades the hedge, so it is gappy at the base and provides little shelter for wildlife.

Hedge laying has been a way of managing our hedgerows for hundreds of years. It allows blossom and berries to form and the hedge to slowly and incrementally increase in size, keeping it in a healthy condition. A laid hedge encourages a stock-proof barrier and a dense habitat for wildlife, but most importantly it encourages new growth that starts a new life cycle of the hedge.

There are different styles of hedge laying across parts of the UK - more than 30 styles have been recorded. Each style has been developed over many years to cope with the climate of the area, different farming practices and the type of trees and shrubs that grow in the hedge.



Moss capsules

There are both male and female mosses. Male mosses produce ‘sperm’ that must come into contact with water or moisture in order to swim to the eggs and fertilise them. After fertilisation has been achieved, the egg will produce a capsule. The reproduction process is then repeated so the moss is able to multiply and spread and continues its life cycle.

The spores which moss relies on for reproduction are the equivalent to a flowering plant’s seed. Spores are single-celled and as the capsule ripens, they get released (sometimes in their millions) into the air and air movement blows them, hopefully to find sites with ample moisture which will allow them to grow.

Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership

Cyngor Sir Gâr Carmarthenshire County Council

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