



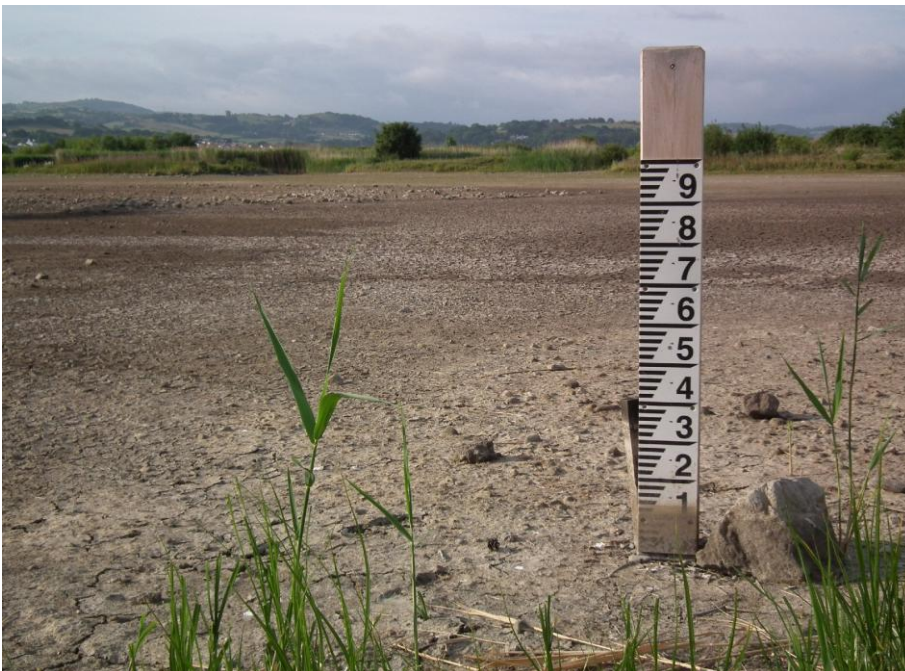
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miliwn o leisiau dros fyd natur



September 2011

Big changes to Conwy lagoons

One of the biggest changes to the reserve since its creation almost 20 years ago is set to take place this autumn, as one of the two main waterbodies at Conwy is turned from fresh water into saline lagoons. More news inside



The shallow lagoon in summer 2010. Our work last autumn ensured we didn't lose all the water in 2011, but the work planned this October will put more water in the lagoon than we've seen for years

In this issue...

- How we're trying to eradicate an evil weed
- What we found when we Bioblitzed the reserve
- Education success for Conwy
- How accessible is the reserve?



RSPB Conwy nature reserve, Llandudno Junction, Conwy LL31 9XZ.
Tel: 01492 584091 www.rspb.org.uk/conwy

Big changes to Conwy lagoons

Plans are being drawn up to tackle an invasive non-native plant at Conwy, which will see the shallow lagoon inundated with water from the estuary.

Marketed as Australian swamp stonecrop but also referred to as *Crassula helmsii*, this aquatic plant spreads rapidly through waterbodies and around the margins. At Conwy, we found *Crassula* in the shallow lagoon in summer 2009 and it has since spread to the deep lagoon.

Tackling it with herbicide and covering it with plastic to deny it daylight have been short-term measures, but now we're taking more drastic action, as the only proven way of eliminating it is with saltwater, as has been achieved successfully at our Old Hall Marshes reserve in Essex.



Bright green in colour, *Crassula helmsii* has stiff shoots and tiny leaves, with small white flowers on long stalks that float on the water. It grows in the muddy margins of ponds, and can quickly spread to form a carpet in shallow water. It requires just four hours of daylight a day, so can grow in winter when other plants die back. We're concerned about *Crassula* because it could smother the lagoons and reduce the feeding areas for waders. It takes only a small piece of *Crassula* to colonise a new area, and can be moved on the feet of birds and mammals, including people! We want to eliminate *Crassula* at Conwy so that it can't be spread to other sites.

With permission from the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and the Welsh Government, two huge pumps will fill the lagoon from pipes across the seawall from the coffee shop at the end of October. We'll have to close the estuary track for a few days while this operation is underway, but hope to keep all the hides open. We'll let visitors know of any closures in advance, via the [website](#) and [Twitter](#).

To eliminate *Crassula*, we'll keep water levels high and salty on the shallow lagoon for at least a year, which will mean some changes for wildlife. We've assessed the impacts on our key species, and expect that waders and most wildfowl will benefit. Some, such as shoveler, that prefer freshwater may not visit, but we may get more waders and perhaps ducks such as

pintail. Initially, the reeds may not like it either, but they'll be dying back for the winter soon and it's an impressively tough plant that is quite capable of growing in brackish conditions.

Once we have filled the shallow lagoon, we will have a better idea about whether it's feasible to fill the deep lagoon, but we'd have to empty out the freshwater first. The *Crassula* in the deep lagoon is above the waterline, so we can treat it with a herbicide until we decide whether flooding with seawater is possible. This means that we'll be keeping the water level in the deep lagoon at its current, reduced level for now

We have still to determine the long-term management of the lagoons. It has proved challenging to maintain water levels in recent years and the lagoons lack soil invertebrate food for waders. The initial flooding will help us to determine whether maintaining brackish conditions is the best option in the long-term, though it wouldn't be cheap as we would have to rely on pumps as the lagoons are three metres above the river.

We'll keep the blog updated with news of the work, and with such a significant change, it will be interesting to see the transformation in 2012.



Asiantaeth yr
Amgylchedd Cymru
Environment
Agency Wales

Our thanks to Environment Agency
Wales for funding this project



Events and activities throughout the autumn

Free walks and self-guided activities

Every Saturday morning

[Guided wildlife walk](#)

Every weekend in October and throughout half term

[DSI: Deadly Scene Investigation](#)

October

Saturday 1 October

[Teddy Bear's Picnic - fundraising dance in aid of the RSPB](#)

Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 October

[Binocular and telescope demonstrations](#)

Tuesday 25 October

[Muddy Puddle Club: Earth, wind and fire](#)

Wednesday 26 October

[Conwy Farmers' Market Pond-dip \(while you shop\)](#)

Saturday 29 October

[Feed the Birds Day at Conwy](#)

Sunday 30 October

[Pumpkin Bird Hunt \(2 to 8 year olds\)](#)

November

Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 November

[Binocular and telescope demonstrations](#)

Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 November

[Binocular and telescope demonstrations](#)

Sunday 27 November

[Tree Treasure Trail](#)

Wednesday 30 November

[Conwy Farmers' Market](#)

New reserve opens

[Burton Mere Wetlands](#)

With a brand new reception centre and a network of trails, the old Inner Marsh Farm reserve on the Dee Estuary has re-opened as Burton Mere Wetlands. It's just 5 minutes drive from the A550, between the A55 and M56. Pay it a visit!

A date... with nature

[Meet the RSPB at Glaslyn](#)

The ospreys may be in west Africa for the winter, after another successful breeding season, but activities at the Glaslyn site continue through the winter, with walks and events at weekends and in the school holidays. Phone 07921 284321 for details.



Reserve takes stock

Common Jellyspot, Hairy Curtain Crest and Nipplewort were just three strangely-named species of almost 500 discovered in a 24-hour counting blitz at Conwy nature reserve in early July. Experts joined with the eyes and ears of local people to find 484 different species in a snapshot audit of the reserve.

The 'Bioblitz' was organised by the RSPB and Cofnod, the environmental information service for North Wales. Among the highlights were a pair of six-belted clearwings, a yellow-and-black striped moth that looks like a wasp, that has not previously been recorded in North Wales west of Flintshire. *Bisporella scolochloae*, a tiny bright yellow cup fungus, found growing on reeds near the coffee shop is the first Welsh record, while a spider with only a scientific name *Enoplognatha latimana*, was also new to the reserve and was new to science as recently in 1982.

Nine of the 484 species are listed as priority species on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), and 47 are on Conwy County's Local BAP. Shaded broad-bar and garden tiger were among the other special moths found, while soprano pipistrelle and noctule were among the bats found, using sonic detectors.



Blackening waxcap is just one of the species of fungi you can find at Conwy in the autumn

Sarah Money, warden at Conwy, said "The bioblitz shows how rich the reserve is for all sorts of wildlife, not just birds, most of which have colonised in the last two decades. We now have more information to guide how we manage the habitats, to ensure that all sorts of wildlife benefits.

Roy Tapping, information service manager at Cofnod, said "Many local people came to discover what lives at RSPB Conwy, with youngsters especially captivated by the low-flying bats and by the spiders that live in the crevices of the buildings. It was a fun event, but that gave us more information than any previous Bioblitz we've helped to organise."

Almost a quarter of the species recorded were classified as new to the reserve, which has been created in the last 20 years after the A55 road tunnel was built. The complete list of species is published on the Cofnod [website](#).

If you have species identification expertise and would like to help discover more of the reserve's wildlife, please contact sarah.money@rspb.org.uk

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Recent sightings

It's been a superb autumn for visiting waders, and since it's not yet October, there's still time for a few more. The rarest bird was this **buff-breasted sandpiper**. It's a North American wader, and there used to be millions in the world, but now there may be as few as 16,000 pairs. They were at the brink of extinction by the 1920s after years of converting grassland to agriculture and then hunting, as Europeans headed west across North America. They're in better shape now, thanks to grassland reserves in the mid-West, but the habitat that's left is just a fraction of what it used to be.

So, although our buff-breasted sandpiper is not even classed as 'rare' by British standards (a dozen or more turn up on our shores each year), it's one of the most threatened species at a global level that we've had here.



Buff-breasted sandpiper (Justin Coates)



Grey phalarope (Greg Osborn)

The sandpiper was just one of many scarce waders here – in fact, this month has already seen several **spotted redshanks**, **little stint** and **ruffs**, and it's been one of the best autumns we can remember for **curlew sandpipers**. Last weekend saw our second **grey phalarope** in 12 months, a bird that should be out at sea as it migrates south from its Arctic breeding grounds. For up to date sightings visit our [Recent sightings](#) page.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the photographers who let us use their photos on the blog and e-newsletter, particularly regular visitors Adrian Foster and Dave Williams

Education success

Congratulations to the Field Teaching team at the Reserve who were recently awarded the Quality Badge for the second time, with an increased score. The Badge is an independently-assessed [scheme](#) that shows teachers and youth leaders that Conwy offers a high-standard programme for educational visits. If you're a teacher and would like to bring a group, contact [Charlie Stretton](#) for details.



Your pictures and your tweets

We get some great photos of the reserve and its wildlife on our [web community pages](#). Why not visit to see more, or register today and add to our picture portfolio?



Wheatear, by novice



Black-tailed godwits, by Puffin Man

It's also worth a look at the [Flickr](#) group set up by local photographers. Each month, we select a Photo of the Month from the images posted on both sites by visitors and announce the winner on our Twitter feed. August's winner was Rhys Thatcher for a great photo of a [redstart](#) posted to Flickr.



Unveiling new information panels, by Puffin Man

Tweet, tweet!

Follow us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) for all the latest reserve news



[@LlyrGruffydd](#)
Diolch i [@rspbconwy](#) am eu croeso!
Thanks for the welcome. Look forward to coming back with the family at half term!



[@charlieoak](#) Charlotte Teviotdale
Sat in cafe [@rspbconwy](#)
[#probablyoneofthebestcafes](#) in the world! Love this view!



[@babyniss](#) Jane McCarthy
The best place to be on a Sunday??
[@rspbconwy](#) that's where...



[@FalkirkBairn01](#) Alan Rogers
If Carlsberg made the best chocolate brownie in the world it still wouldn't be as good as those from the coffee shop [@rspbconwy](#)

Stepping up for nature



Sponsored walkers raised more than £1000 at an event organised by RSPB Conwy's Support Group as part of our Centenary celebrations. With a choice of the number of times you could walk around the reserve, some people got fully into the spirit, and we spotted a giant puffin, a penguin and a white rabbit strutting their stuff around the reserve's trails.

The event followed hot on the heels of *A Whirl on the Wild Side*, a rainforest-themed dance event in

Llandudno Junction, organized by Joy Vyner on behalf of the Support Group. More than 100 supporters came to show off their *Strictly* skills in a fun evening in June, raising £800 for the reserve and the RSPB's Harapan Rainforest project in Sumatra. In fact, it proved so popular that Joy is organising another fund-raising dance event in Llandudno Junction on [Saturday 1 October](#).

A huge thanks to all who donated, supported and organised these events



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Celebrating 100 years

We had a wild time at our birthday party recently, celebrating 100 years of RSPB Cymru, and it was great to meet so many E-news readers there.

TV naturalist Iolo Williams and Mayor of Conwy Mrs Anne Roberts cut the cake on Saturday afternoon, following some popular wildlife walks with Iolo. Sunday saw the first ever gathering of the four reserve managers since Conwy reserve was created, in a spirited 60-minute Bird Race ably assisted by Wildlife Explorer members from the reserve's group. They were joined by David Lindo, the Urban Birder, who launched his book at the reserve. Lots of bugs were hunted and the pond was dipped countless times, hundreds of children did our Birthday Bingo and clutched their goody bags with happy faces, and the barbecue was a big hit. Thanks to all who came, and especially all the stalls who supported the event. The Conwy Support Group raised £1000 towards Y Maes, our plans for an exciting new outdoor visitor area.

Our thanks to Alan Gray for the photos



Wildlife Explorers, ex-wardens and The Urban Birder prepare to BirdRace



Iolo Williams serves up the huge cake



There was a surprisingly long queue to throw sponges at reserve manager Julian...



Prizes for everyone (modesty prevents us from naming the BirdRace winners)

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How accessible is Conwy?

Phil Gatley is a volunteer at Conwy and membership secretary of [Birding for All](#), formerly the Disabled Birders Association. This is an abridged version of a blog he has recently written for [The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain](#).



“As a volunteer guide at RSPB Conwy I'm very keen to let people know what a fantastic amount of wildlife you can see in one place. Plus, as a wheelchair user I really want to show disabled people how easy it is to get around and enjoy a wonderful day, getting close to nature.

“Just turn off the A55 at j18, drive through the car park and you're in. The entrance to the centre is flat, the door is quite light and there are often Meet and Greet people who will open it. The counter is low so you never have that nightmare of having to reach up, or speaking to someone you can't see.

“When you leave the coffee shop, there are 3 paths to choose from. Left will take you past a wildlife garden, with beautiful flowers to attract insects, a stack of wood called Tiny Town which shows how insects can easily be given a home.

“The path to the right takes you down a little slope, onto a boardwalk. Along here is a screen which gives lovely views across a lagoon. There is a low viewing slot so everyone can enjoy the view. The paths to the first two hides are easy to walk or push along, flat and recently improved, so no pot-holes. The hides are both easily entered and the views are magnificent from either. The first, named Tal-y-

Fan, has had the window lowered in one side, allowing fantastic views of the birds, mountains and Conwy Castle.

“After this hide the paths become a little rougher but are still easily managed by a strong wheelchair user or one with a pusher. Benarth hide is up a fairly steep bank which unfortunately is unavoidable as the bank is actually the flood defence. If you do go in the hide there are low windows to once again enjoy the birds.

“If you want you can just retrace the route back to the centre but if you carry on please note you'll be at the end of the very busy car park (not the RSPB's) and the slope up from here is very steep and stony.

“The whole route is nearly 2 miles but there are lots of benches to sit, enjoy the birds, lovely views and hopefully on your visit, good Welsh weather. Also plenty of information points and at the weekend, volunteer guides which give you a great insight to what's around and how things change with the seasons.

“If you've been to other RSPB reserves, you'll find Conwy as good as any. If you're looking for a great day out in superb scenery, which gets you close to nature whilst still being safe and accessible, RSPB Conwy is just ideal.



The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way. Registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

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