

CARMARTHENSHIRE

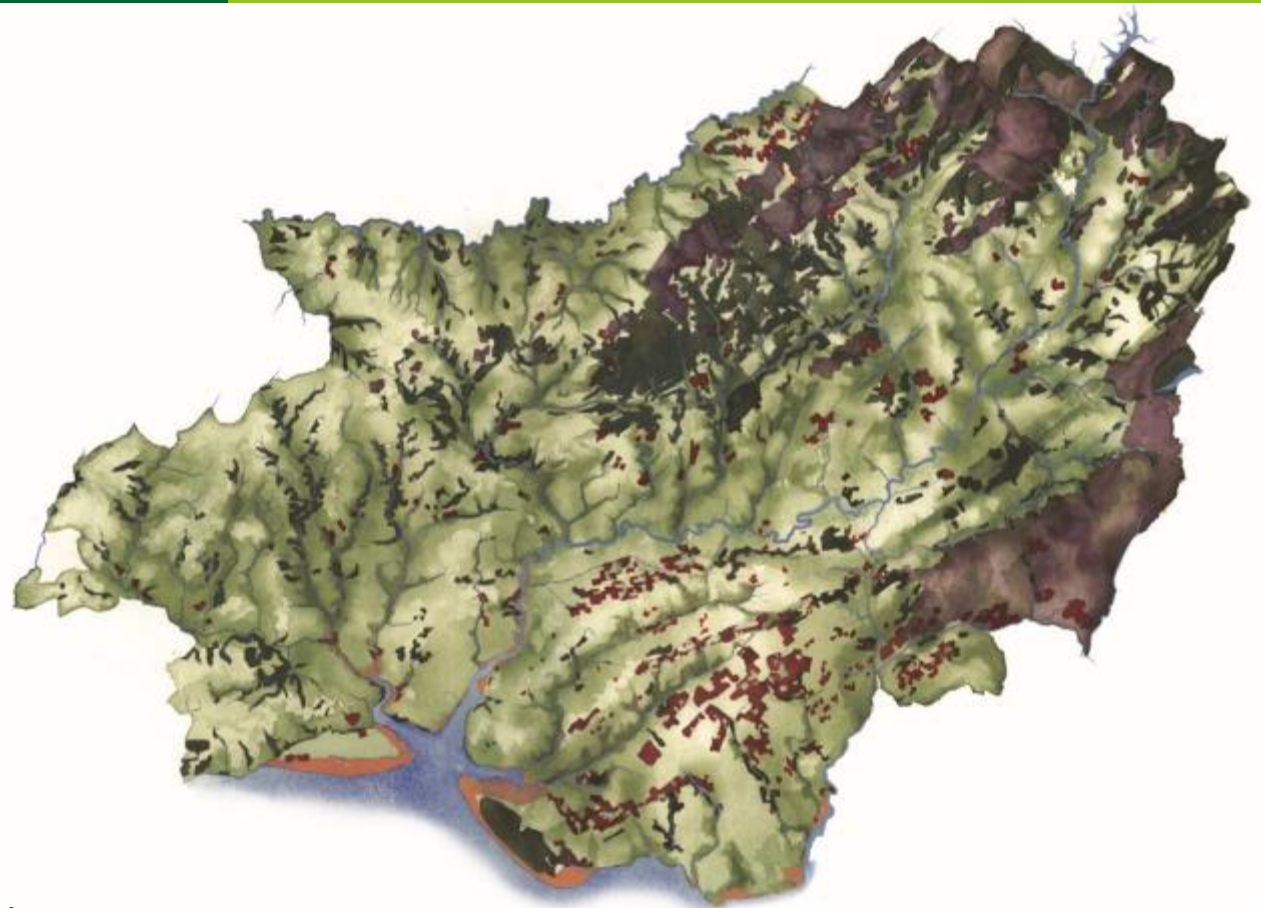
# Nature Notes

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2020

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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 then 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)





## Autumn leaves

Trees go into winter dormancy in a blaze of glory. Leaf colour comes from pigments. One of these, chlorophyll, gives leaves their green colour and helps trees obtain food through photosynthesis. Shorter days means less of the sunshine needed for photosynthesis and so chlorophyll is broken down, revealing other pigments, turning leaves red and yellow. Trees without leaves can preserve moisture and be better able to cope with winter storms. The leaves then provide vital nutrients when they break down in the soil.



## Fairy rings

Fairy rings are caused by an individual fungus growing underground. The fungus sprouts lots of small threads, called mycelium, which spread out from a central point looking for nutrients. Each year the mushrooms pop up out of the ground at the edge of the circle, creating the fairy ring. One of the largest rings ever found is in north-eastern France. It is thought to be about 600 metres in diameter and over 700 years old. We think this fungus is the Common funnel mushroom (*Clitocybe gibba*).



## Holly parachute fungus

The holly parachute fungus (*Marasmius hudsonii*) can be described in guides as rare but because of its tiny size (cap size 5 mm) it is likely not to be recorded very often. Shaped like a tiny, hairy parachute, you might need help to see it (and a better photo than this!) but why not stop and look on dead and damp holly leaves beneath a holly tree. It would be great to get more records of this elusive fungus.





## Winter hedgerows

In the winter hedges can reveal some secrets to us – bird nests from the previous summer and animal paths up the bank and through the hedge. Still hidden from us will be insects overwintering, both as adults and eggs - hidden in nooks, leaf litter or old hollow stalks. Dormice might even be hibernating at the base of the hedge.

Hedgerow management can have a big impact – berries and nuts that are found on uncut hedges can provide a vital food source for birds and small mammals. Extensive management of hedges can have an impact, for example, the decline of the brown hairstreak butterfly in parts of the county might be due to the loss of the overwintering eggs, which are laid on young blackthorn.





© Lisa Jones

## Meadow grasshopper

A bright reminder of summer, this uncommon pink meadow grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*) is the result of a genetic mutation called erythrism. Some experts believe pink versions of the grasshopper were much more common but the pink 'trait' was largely eradicated because these grasshoppers' pink hue makes them easier for predators to spot compared with the normal green/brown coloured insects.



## Take a closer look...

Given enough time Nature will establish itself almost anywhere. Here we have a mini ecosystem that has developed on the steel structure of an old Bailey bridge over the river Tywi. Lichens and mosses can grow on almost any sort of substrate because most can draw nutrients and get water from the surrounding environment, whether it's on bark, soil, decaying wood, rock or metal. Often they are the first colonizers of a new area. The fern has established its roots within the mosses.





## Lichens

The blanket of lichens and mosses on this hawthorn tells us a story about the tree. Lichens are sensitive to atmospheric pollutants and so the range of lichens means that the air must be fairly clean. Lichens grow very slowly so the tree must be quite old. Lichens are partnerships between at least two species, usually a fungus and an alga. The fungus provides a protective home for the alga and the alga produces food for the fungus - symbiosis.



## Dead wood

Saprophytic fungi live on dead organic matter. This bright yellow stags horn fungus (*Calocera viscosa*) is a wood-rotting fungus that is common on conifer stumps and fallen trunks. In a dank winter woodland it seems to glow as it is so brightly coloured!





© Colin Dalton

Short-eared owl



© Colin Dalton

Wigeon



## Winter on the coast

Now is a great time to wrap up warm and safely explore the wonderful coastline of Carmarthenshire – often at its best in winter. A wonderful place to visit is Pembrey Burrows and Saltings Local Nature Reserve, situated alongside the Pembrey Country Park. The dunes and marsh may appear bleak at this time of year but a stroll to explore the marsh and sand dunes often reveals some surprises.

Early mornings or mid to late afternoon are best to see short-eared owls, in good years there is usually at least one of these silent hunters floating over dunes and marsh, you will also hear the whistling calls of widgeon, hidden from view unless panicked by a passing hen harrier, another likely winter visitor.

After a spell of windy weather, the beach is often sculpted into incredibly delicate forms which resemble toadstools. At any point on the beach along the water's edge you will see sanderling, dunlin and of course oystercatchers; these birds will either be feeding in the short daylight hours or resting, so please don't disturb them.



*Left to right* - Fieldfare, redwing and blackbird © Adam Dare

## Winter arrivals

Each winter migrant birds such as redwing (*Turdus iliacus*) and fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*) arrive from northern Europe to take advantage of better winters in the UK. They can often be spotted feeding together in flocks in fields or on berry-laden trees or bushes in hedgerows, woodlands and parks. They will venture into gardens in severe winters.

Our native blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) are also joined in the winter by birds migrating from Scandinavia and northern Europe. Research has revealed that at least 12% of the blackbirds present in Britain and Ireland during the winter are immigrants. Some of these birds are only passing through, and will continue south to winter in Spain, France and Portugal.

Keep an eye on local worm-rich fields, berried-hedgerows and woodland canopies as well as keeping an eye to the skies in case a flock flies overhead.





## Winter

There is still plenty to see in Carmarthenshire during the winter months – we would love to see photos of what you see in your area



## Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership



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