

CARMARTHENSHIRE

Nature Notes

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Nature Partnership

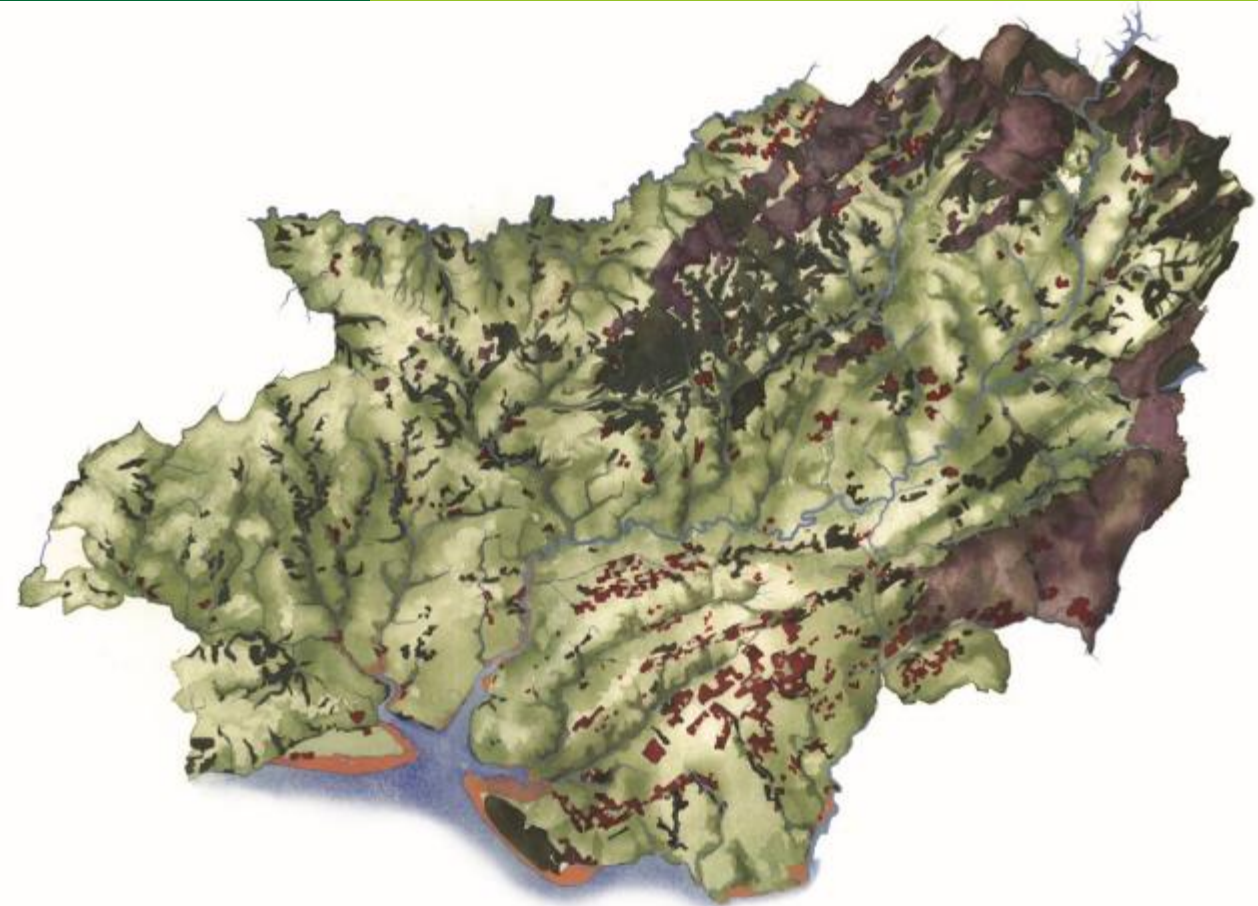


JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024

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



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



Diaea dorsata - spider

One of a group of wildlife enthusiasts who meet regularly in Brechfa spotted this spider, *Diaea dorsata*, at Keepers, in Brechfa Forest. It [occurs](#) mainly in woodlands and in the southern half of England, and not, according to current records, further west than the English/Welsh border, so this was a great find. As its body length is only 5 mm, it must be easily overlooked.

Recording in groups is a great way of improving knowledge, skills and confidence – and do a bit of socialising!

It was released back to Keeper's a couple of days later.



Late flowering verges

Later in the summer Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Rosebay Willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) can dominate some roadside verges. The profusion of cream- and pink-coloured flowers of these plants support an array of invertebrates and brighten our walks.

Queen Elizabeth I is reputed to have favoured Meadowsweet above all other. In Wales, according to folklore it was considered quite dangerous for anybody to fall asleep in a field where it is to be found in abundance.

Rosebay willowherb is able to colonise new areas because of its specially adapted seeds - fitted with tiny, cottony 'parachutes' they are able to disperse across long distances on the slightest breeze. Each plant can produce up to 80,000 seeds and the heat from fires and bonfires can help to germinate them.



Scorpion Fly

The Scorpion Fly (*Panorpa communis*) is not as fearsome as its name suggests. The sting-like tail are, in fact, the male claspers used for mating. It has a long, beak-like projection from its head that it uses to feed. It scavenges on dead insects and frequently steals the contents of spiders' webs.

Mating usually takes place at night and the male might be killed by the female – so a gift of a dead insect or mass of saliva often helps his cause!

Look for it in gardens, hedgerows and woods.



Fungus Fly

This wierd looking fly has been infected with the pathogenic fungus *Entomophthora muscae*. Once infected the fly dies in 5-7 days. At the end of its life the fly tends to crawl to a high point, straighten its hind legs and open its wings – like it has here, a behaviour that ensures that the fungal spores are dispersed as widely as possible.

It is widespread and fairly frequent in Britain, but still a bit of a shock to see!



Fasciation

Fasciation or cresting is caused when the apical meristem (growing tip) elongates perpendicular to the usual growth direction and results in flattening or contortion of the plant tissue. It can affect the stem, flower, roots or fruits. The term is derived from the Latin *fascis*, which means bundle.

There are multiple potential causes for this unusual phenomenon, including hormonal, genetic, bacterial, fungal, viral and environmental causes. Here it has affected a thistle flower - fascinating!



Common Shore Crab

This common crab is found around the shores of Britain and Ireland. Females can produce up to 185,000 eggs, and larvae develop offshore in several stages before their final moult to juvenile crabs in the intertidal zone. Young crabs live among seaweeds and seagrasses until they reach adulthood. The first pair of legs (pereopods) on the adult crabs have well developed pincers (chelae). Juveniles like the one shown here display a wide range of mottled patterns.



Arable field margins

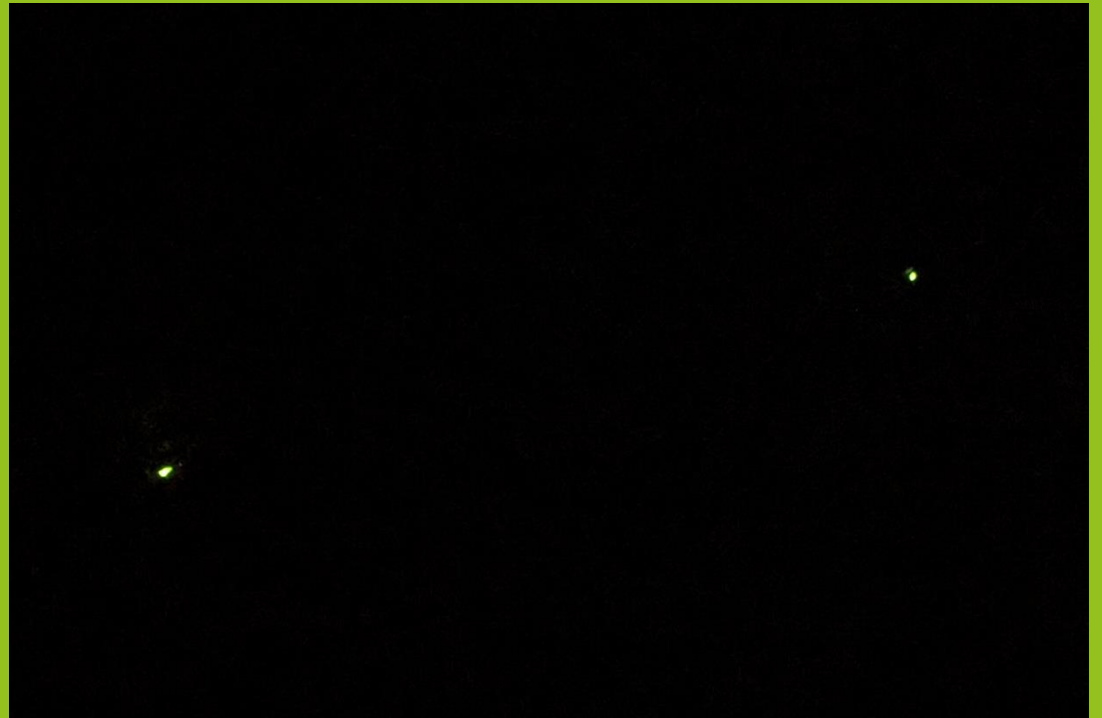
In the past, field margins supported a range of plants, and these less productive areas were an important habitat for small mammals, invertebrates and birds. These more natural edges can have benefits to the farm as well, encouraging insects like ladybirds, which prey on some crop pests. At present, there is very little arable habitat of note remaining in the county – in contrast to the past when every local farming community had its share of grain or root crops. This decline of arable farming, along with the disappearance of many associated ‘weed’ species and a decline of insect food have contributed to the massive decline of the Tree Sparrow (and other seed-eating birds such as Yellowhammer and Linnet). This photo was taken at the edge of a barley field in Pembrokeshire where a seed mix had been sown with arable-associated annual plants including Corn Marigolds (*Glebionis segetum*).



Dormouse

This Dormouse box was erected as part of a project to see if this elusive mammal could be recorded around the Lower Lliedi Reservoir. Records are known from the area. Boxes were erected in 2022 alongside the reservoir, which is now managed by Llanelli Rural Council. Ecologists did not record anything in 2023, but persistence pays and this year a Dormouse was recorded using a box.

Nest boxes may enhance an area for Dormice by increasing the number of nesting sites and boosting the local Dormouse density. Remember though you need to be specially trained and have a licence to monitor them.



Glow Worms

These are not stars in the night sky but the green glow of two Glow Worms (*Lampyris noctiluca* - in fact beetles not worms!) recorded this summer along a lane near Llanllawddog. It is only the adult females that glow – to attract a male. Once adults have mated the female's light 'goes out' and she lays her eggs and dies. Glow Worms are quite widespread but locally distributed in Wales and many populations are in decline.

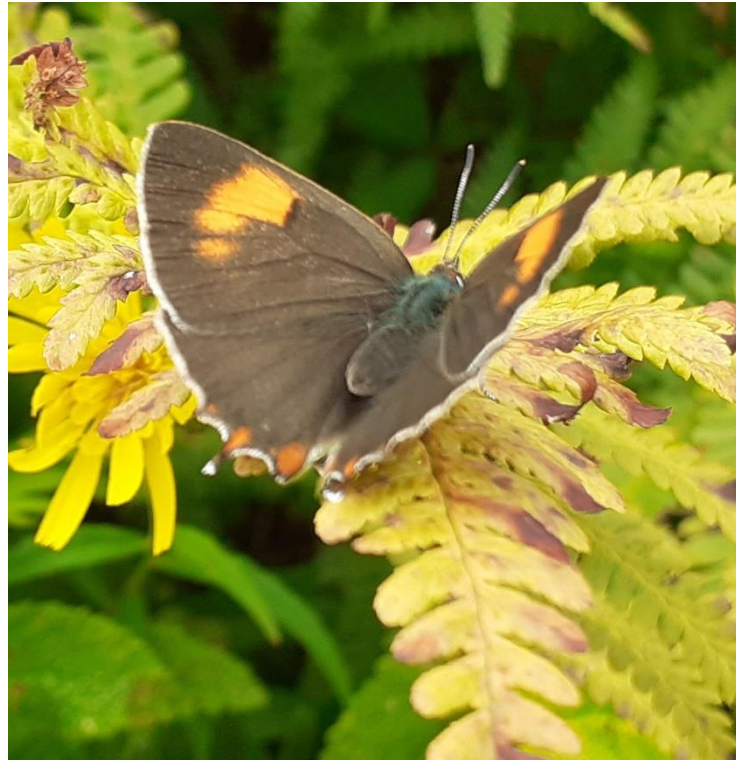
The hatched larvae remain as such for one or two summers and feed on small snails which they paralyse before sucking them empty. Not quite as appealing...



Carline Thistle

The Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) is found on dry, especially limestone, habitats – so in Carmarthenshire it favours the coast and the limestone ridge than runs through the county. Its distinctive flowerhead looks like it is dying when in fact they are in full flower. They are a nectar source for a variety of butterflies, including the Brimstone and Gatekeeper, and in this photo, a bumblebee.

The flowers expand and contract, depending on the weather, and were known to be used as barometers and pinned over front doors.



Brown Hairstreak Butterfly

The south-west of Wales including Carmarthenshire was once a hotspot for the Brown Hairstreak Butterfly (*Thecla betulae*). Now its main stronghold is in the Teifi valley where the Blackthorn hedgerows it uses to lay its eggs on (specifically the young growth) are not flailed so intensively as other areas in the county.

New populations still appear. Butterfly Conservation volunteers, working with landowners, allotment holders, the National Trust and the South Wales Trunk Road Agency, are working in the Llandeilo area to enhance suitable habitat and survey more hedgerows in the area.

This female was photographed soon after emerging in August.



Spotted Longhorn Beetle

This distinctive Spotted Longhorn Beetle (*Rutpela maculata*) with very long antennae is usually found along hedgerows and woodland margins where the adults are most often seen on Hawthorn or umbel flowers (like in this case). The larvae live in rotten wood for 2-3 years and emerge into adults in May. As adult beetles they only live for a few more weeks.



Wall Brown Butterfly

The Wall Brown Butterfly (*Lasiommata megera*) can be found in open, sunny places and it does tend to bask on walls rocks and stony places. It's one of many declining species in the county, most often seen along the coast these days, its range much reduced in the county.

Males patrol fast and low over the ground, seeking out females and its caterpillars feed on a variety of grasses, reminding us of the benefits leaving areas of longer grass in the land that we manage.



Rusty-back Fern

The Rusty-back Fern (*Asplenium ceterach*) has leathery frond with rust-coloured scales on the reverse. They can be found in limestone areas, rock crevices and stone walls. It is drought resistant and will curl its fronds inwards so that only the brownish surface is visible. It then revives when rehydrated by rain.

The Rustyback Fern has been used for medicinal purposes for centuries. It has been recorded in historical texts as a medicinal herb used by the ancient Greeks and Romans, who believed that it had healing properties for a variety of ailments.



Late summer



Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership

Butterfly Conservation Wales
 Gwarchod Glöynnod Byw Cymru

Botanical Society of the British Isles

buglife

Bumblebee Conservation Trust
 Ymddiriedolaeth Cadwraeth Cacwn

Clwb Adar Sir Gaerfyrddin
 Carmarthenshire Bird Club

Cyngor Sir Gâr Carmarthenshire County Council

Carmarthenshire Meadows Group

Grŵp Dolydd Sir Gaerfyrddin

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

Floodplain Meadows Partnership

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