

CARMARTHENSHIRE

Nature Notes

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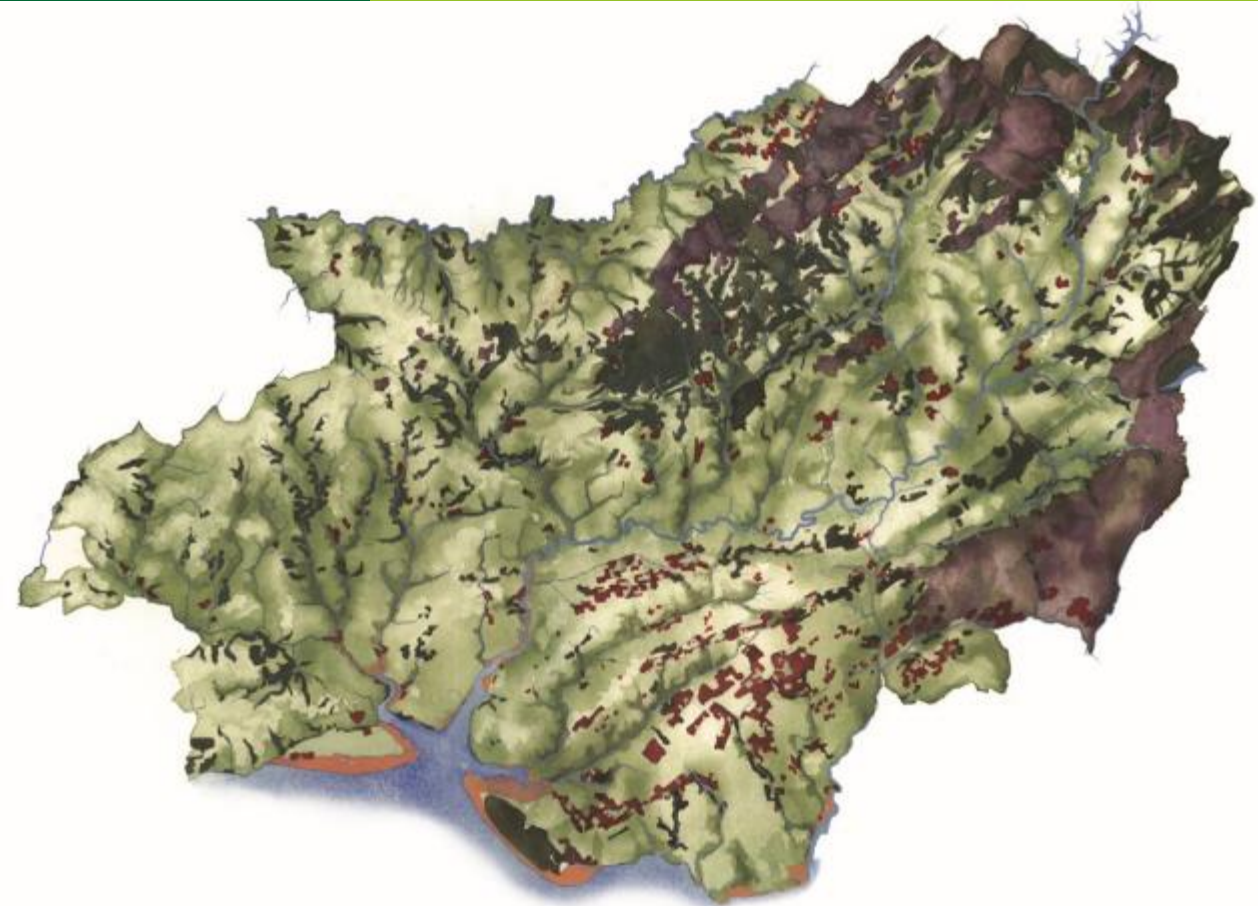


APRIL-JUNE 2024

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



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



Bloody-nosed Beetle

When threatened, the flightless Bloody-nosed Beetle (*Timarcha tenebricosa*) secretes a blood-red liquid from its mouth. The foul-tasting fluid is enough to put would-be predators off. This flightless beetle can be found on grassland and heathland, and along hedgerows and is often found slowly plodding along paths.

Adults feed on leaves of Lady's Bedstraw and related plants, and the larvae can be seen hanging from these species. Adults are mostly active at night.



Scarlet Tiger Moth caterpillar

The caterpillars of the Scarlet Tiger Moth (*Callimorpha dominula*) hatch in late summer. They then feed on a variety of plants, including Common Comfrey, Green Alkanet and Common Nettle. Spending the winter as a partially grown caterpillar, they emerge again in March to continue feeding – this is what we found here – a caterpillar feeding on Comfrey leaves. When they are fully fed by late spring, they pupate in a silken cocoon on the ground.

Caterpillars are black with tufts of black and white bristles. They have lines of yellow dashes and white dots running the length of the body. The distinctive adult moth can be seen between May and July. It likes damp grassland, coastal habitats and, occasionally, gardens. There are records for it throughout the county so keep an eye out.



Cuckoo-spit Common Froghopper

At this time of year, it's hard to avoid the frothy mass of bubbles (aka Cuckoo-spit) that appears on plant stems everywhere. This is actually the protective covering produced by the yellow-green nymphs of the tiny Common Froghopper (*Philaenus spumarius*) or Meadow Spittlebug. They make the bubbles (bio-foam) from the sap of the plant it is on. The adult froghoppers can vary greatly in colour – this is known as polymorphism. Froghoppers are widespread and common in the county.



Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage

In the spring the creeping perennial Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) can be found in bright mats of golden-green flowers in damp or wet habitats, e.g. on the edge of shady streams or in wet woodlands.

As its name suggests, it has paired, rounded, green leaves with small, flowers. The flowers' petals are, in fact, golden sepals and yellowish leaves. Sepals are modified leaves that protect the developing flower in its bud.



Yellow Meadow Ants

The Yellow Meadow Ant (*Lasius flavus*) is known for creating anthills in grassland habitats. They build a soil dome above the nest (which can extend a metre below the ground) to help regulate temperature and humidity. Like all ants, the Yellow Meadow Ant is social and forms colonies; the workers are mainly active underground – unless you disturb the nest when you can see them emerge to defend their colony. During summer, winged adults pair and mate, the females dispersing to form new colonies.



Male Spruce cones

In early spring look out for the male and female flowers (cones) on conifer trees. Here the pink immature male cones dangle on the ends of branches. These cones eventually swell with pollen and the gentlest breeze releases a cloud of yellow pollen into the air.



Green-veined White Butterfly

The widespread and common, Green-veined White Butterfly (*Pieris napi*) is a fairly small butterfly that is on the wing between April and October. It especially likes damp areas with lush vegetation and can be found in a wide variety of habitats, including hedgerows, woodland rides and meadows, as well as farmland, gardens and parks. Water-cress is a very common host plant for the butterfly. The foodplants of the caterpillars are members of the cabbage family, including Cuckooflower and Hedge Mustard – thankfully not our brassicas grown in the garden.



Lackey Moth Caterpillars

You may have spotted dense webs like these with a mass of caterpillars on them.

Found frequently on Blackthorn and Hawthorn, Lackey Moth caterpillars can be seen sitting on their web, if they have been left undisturbed.

Their hairy bodies help protect against predators. When fully grown they disperse to find a suitable place low down amongst plants to spin a cocoon and pupate.

The females lay a 'band' of eggs around twigs of the larval food plant and they overwinter before hatching in early April.



Green Longhorn Moth

The males of the Green Longhorn Moth (*Adela reaumurella*) have long, whitish antennae and bronzy forewings. The moths fly in the daytime from April to June, sometimes occurring in swarms in open areas such as woodland glades. If a female flies through the swarm, it is caught by a male and mating takes place in flight.

The caterpillars live among the fallen leaves of Birch and Oak trees and feed on leaf remains. They protect themselves in an oblong, brown 'case' structure of small pieces of fallen leaves. Here they pupate the following spring starting the cycle again.



Ramsons

In April and May, our ancient woodlands are awash with the white, starry flowers and smell of Ramsons or Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*). Millions of bulbs in one woodland can create stunning carpets of the plant.

Spending most of the year as a bulb underground, flowering early allows it to make the most of the sunlight reaching the woodland floor, before the canopy becomes too dense. The strong garlic smell can attract plenty of pollinating insects, including hoverflies, butterflies and longhorn beetles.

The second half of the Latin name, *ursinum*, refers to the fact that brown bears loved to eat the bulb. This also gave rise to two of its common names – Bear's Leek And Bear Garlic.



Saltmarsh

The Carmarthenshire coast and the Burry Inlet, supports the second largest continuous area of saltmarsh in the UK, only the Wash on the east coast of England having a larger area. The Tywi, Taf and Gwendraeth estuaries also hold significant areas of saltmarsh. Saltmarshes provide nurseries for fish, and a refuge wildfowl and waders. Specialist plants can quickly appear on new saltmarsh and are followed by a succession of other species, helping create the amazing habitat it is. Saltmarsh acts as a natural flooding buffer, reducing wave height and energy carried by waves.



Spiderlings

This ball of tiny yellow spiders in a grassland web, which scatter when disturbed are the quite harmless baby Garden Spiders (*Araneus diadematus*). In late summer or early autumn, the common Garden Spider lays from 300 to 800 yellow eggs that she cements together and covers in a dense layer of coarse protective yellow silk and detritus. When spring comes the following year, bundles of tiny yellow spiderlings emerge. They remain together until they have moulted and grown big enough to be independent.



Cottongrass

On a bright day in our uplands the fluffy heads of Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) blow in the breeze and can transform areas of boggy moorland.

A sedge (solid, triangular stems) rather than a grass, the plant is pollinated by the wind.

Cottongrass was used as a raw material for textiles in central Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Like *Sphagnum* moss, Cottongrass is a key peat-forming species.



Early Summer



Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership

