





Front Cover Image : *Filago vulgaris* (Common Cudweed), Anglesey (v.c.52). Photo: Ian Bonner. See article on page 11.

1: Capitula of *Conyza floribunda* above, *C. sumatrensis* below. Photo: Barry Stewart. Inset: *C. floribunda* capitula squashed between finger and thumb to expose 5 lobes on central disc florets. Photo: Richard D.Pryce. See article on page 18.

2: *Aster* agg. (Michaelmas Daisy) in *Persicaria mitis* habitat along the River Wye. Photo: Andy Jones. See article on page 27.



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www.watsonia.org.uk/html/welsh_bulletin.html

All articles, news, photos, guest editorials and other items for inclusion in the June 2012 issue should be sent to an editor by the **1st May 2012**.

Please send any plants records to your Vice County Recorder (see BSBI Yearbook).

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Ratty's Tail *or* How Water Vole Habitat Mitigation near Llanelli has had spin-off benefits for the local flora

EXHIBIT
ARTICLE

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A poster comprising a series of Microsoft Powerpoint slides was displayed as follows.

After the Second World War, a large part of the Llanelli Levels landscape east of Llanelli was taken by the Trostre Steelworks. Over the last twenty years, the Levels grazing marshes have continued to be progressively swallowed up by the Welsh Wetlands Centre, the Jack Nicklaus golf-course, business parks, new roads and housing. This was well demonstrated by comparing the 1946 aerial photograph which shows the Levels to still consist primarily of grazing marsh fields, with the 2006 aerial photograph which shows the extent of recent development.

Conservation work undertaken at the Welsh Wetlands Centre has ensured that the last population of Water Voles in Carmarthenshire has not been exterminated despite habitat losses contributed to by the reduction of the Levels marshlands. On the contrary, the past few years have seen an expansion in the animals' range as a result of abandonment of grazing pending development, allowing the

growth of areas of rank and rushy grassland between the now-overgrown drainage ditches.

In recent years, Carmarthenshire County Council, as Local Planning Authority, has imposed (and continues to impose) conditions on consents for development schemes, requiring the provision of substantial areas of flood storage capacity, together with managed Water Vole habitat to mitigate for continuing habitat losses. This has resulted in the construction of a large wetland habitat area by Cuddy Group, a local civil-engineering contractor, an area for which the name, the "Cuddy Scrape", has been coined. This seasonally-wet depression and nearby areas have been subject to extensive earthworks to provide new and enhanced Water Vole habitat. Several pictures were shown of the recently created scrape and associated canals and ponds. The scrape has flooded several times during the year following its construction and, during 2011, remained largely devoid of vegetation over much of its area although relatively sparse, natural vegetation colonisation was evident towards mid-summer.

Expected colonists in this coastal, possibly slightly brackish environment included *Ranunculus sceleratus* (Celery-leaved Buttercup) and *Oenanthe lachenalii* (Parsley Water-dropwort) – but only one plant. Presumably also arrived from the nearby saltmarsh were the few plants of *Spergularia media* (Greater Sea-spurrey).

More characteristic of grazing marsh drainage ditches were the hundreds of plants of *Veronica catenata* (Pink Water-speedwell), their seed capsules frequently galled by the Nationally Notable weevil *Gymnetron villosulum*. Also a characteristic grazing marsh species is *Berula erecta* (Lesser Water-parsnip), two stands of which were established near the northern edge of the scrape. More unexpected were at

least six plants of *Myosoton aquaticum* (Water Chickweed), although several plants had been recorded on new road verges nearby in 2008. Of particular interest were the hundreds of plants of *Rorippa islandica* (Northern Yellow-cress), a new record for SS59 – the species continues its relentless colonisation of the county!

Finally, and an update to the AGM poster as they had not matured until late October, were several stands comprising of hundreds of plants of *Coryza floribunda* (named Asthmaweed or Horseweed in *Flora of North America*), a species apparently enjoying a population explosion in South Wales, extensively recorded in October and November 2011 (see article on page 21).

Vice-county 48, Merioneth 2011-2012

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Met Office statistics show that apart from those of February, May and June, all monthly rainfall averages in 2011 were well below normal. That explains our good luck in holding all six meetings of Merioneth Naturalists Group unaffected by rain! This was our second successful season, in which we made 16 new or updated hectad records. Altogether over 5000 records were added to the county database by all recorders during the year.

The only native first record for the county was *Carex x decolorans* [conf. M.J. Porter]. In 2002 Peter Benoit and I searched in vain for *Carex bigelowii* (Stiff Sedge), the rarer parent, on the summit ridge which had been grazed to billiard table smoothness. As a result of a changed grazing regime on the Berwyns NNR since then, it has now been recorded several times. With the consequent overlapping of range with that of *C. nigra* (Common Sedge), the hybrid has now been found there, at around 600 m. Mike Porter's comment on my specimens, however, was "...any record should make reference to the range of introgressed forms present. I don't think you need to do another visit ... but if you happened to be passing one day... (!)" – the rather anomalous intermediate forms were certainly not typical. Another 'first'

for the county was Arthur Chater's, who found *Geum macrophyllum* (Large-leaved Avens) near Pantperthog while revisiting a known site for *Lathraea clandestine* (Purple Toothwort). It is spreading in Cardiganshire (v.c.46), but this was its first recorded appearance in Merionethshire.

Merioneth Naturalists Group [Grwp Natur Meirionnydd] is comprised of a faithful band of supporters, several of whom are regular visitors to Wales rather than permanent residents, but we are always hoping to find more active botanists in the county. There are such huge swathes of countryside which need systematic recording. If you would be interested in having our programme for next year, please get in touch with either Sarah Stille mossysal@btinternet.com or Rod Gritten: grittenecology@yahoo.co.uk.

And please take special note of our new Merioneth Residential: 24th - 27th July, for three or four days of botanising based in the glorious countryside of the Mawddach Estuary, near Barmouth. Details will be in the 2012 BSBI Yearbook.