

Issue No. 52 November 2017

Changes to the Committee Margaret Bateman resigned from the Committee in November 2016 and was thanked for her support over many years.

The Committee is always pleased to welcome new members. The Support Group assists the Council on matters relating to the running of PNP and contributes voluntary help for maintenance work in the Parc. If you would like to be involved please come along to the AGM or contact the editor or any other Committee member.

Annual General Meeting This year's AGM will be held on Tuesday, 14 November in St Paul's Methodist Centre. The short business section will be followed by a talk by William Troughton entitled *Aberystwyth through Time*. If you value the Parc, please come along and support us. All welcome!

25 Year Anniversary of PNP June 2017 marked the 25th anniversary of PNP. We are planning to commemorate this with a guided 'Jubilee Walk' through the Parc in spring next year, possibly with a tree planting ceremony along the way.

Visitor Numbers (Len Kersley) The hidden counters that monitor visitor numbers in PNP clocked up a record total of just over 82k counts in 2016/17, an increase of 3.5k on the previous year, and contrasting with about 57k when monitoring on the three paths began in 2010/11. It is clear from the data that more students are using paths through our nature reserve for journeys between residences and town but numbers continue to be highest in May when many local residents come to enjoy the bluebell displays.

Tesco Bags of Help Award (Len Kersley) Our application to the Tesco Bags of Help Scheme resulted in wonderful support from the local community. During May and June, shoppers in our two Tesco stores voted us top of the three nominated community projects. The prize of £4000 is being used to rebuild the Main Path that gives access to the bluebell wood from Coopers Corner. The path had become very badly eroded by the deluge of water running down it in wet weather. Work started in mid-October under the supervision of Peter Drake, with volunteers helping to move about 10 tons of stones and sleepers to where they were needed along the main path. Eight drains have been constructed to divert the surface water and steps built on the previously very narrow section, where serious erosion had made walking quite

PARC NATUR PENGLAIS SUPPORT GROUP



Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, 14 November 2017, 7.30 pm

St Paul's Methodist Centre, Queens Road

Followed by a talk

'ABERYSTWYTH THROUGH TIME'

by

WILLIAM TROUGHTON

Curator

Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru National Library of Wales

All Welcome



Loading the barrow with stones for improving the main path up to the bluebell wood. (Photo David Kirby)

difficult. Higher up, the more limited erosion on the long straight path has been filled in with stones so that walking is now also much easier.

Other Path Improvements (Len Kersley) We were fortunate to secure a grant of £200 from the Cambrian News 10k Charity Fund, which was supplemented by a generous £1620 award from Aberystwyth Town Council for path improvements in the Parc. In August, volunteers supervised by Peter Drake, spent two days building about 25 steps up through the woodland at the new entrance to the PNP extension on Brynymor Road.

A team from the Ceredigion Rights of Way Volunteers then carried on for a further two days to remake the link path from Elysian Grove

to Coopers Corner that had become so badly eroded to be almost impassable. During the 4 days, 9 different people gave the magnificent total of 128 hours of volunteer effort. In addition, the work was completed in record time with the result that there are still sufficient funds left to repair the steps going up from Danycoed to the Principal's Gate. Peter Drake will be supervising students from the Aberystwyth Conservation Volunteers tackling this job on a Saturday during November.

Bird Nest Box Records for 2017 (Moira Convery & David Kirby) Monitoring of the nest boxes in the Parc showed that this had been another disappointing nesting season for the birds using the boxes. Although Blue Tits and Great Tits occupied 23 of the 28 boxes available, clutch sizes were low, possibly reflecting poor condition of the females at the beginning of the year. Average clutch sizes, as shown in the table, were slightly smaller than in 2016 but appreciably smaller than in earlier years when clutches of 9 or more were typical. Although two of this year's Blue Tit nests contained more than 10 eggs, the young failed to fledge successfully. In addition to the tits, a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were observed nesting in a hole in a nearby tree, where they raised two young.

	No. boxes occupied	Total no. of eggs	Average per nest	No. young fledged	No. young found dead
Blue Tit	18	79	4.4	45	9
Great Tit	5	31	6.2	20	3

The numbers in the table have to be minimum figures. If the eggs could not be counted, the number was estimated from the number of chicks seen. If at one visit there were chicks ready to fledge and then a lower number at the next visit, the missing chicks were assumed to have fledged.

Tree Graffiti on a Walk through PNP Woods (Christopher Allen) In September I volunteered to assist Eleri Phillips on a tour of PNP as part of her MA studies at the University, to observe and comment on the various tree carvings throughout the woods. Before starting our walk Eleri dutifully covered the required mandatory safety issues. She had prepared a series of questions to which my replies were then audio recorded. Did I consider the carvings objectionable? Do they

distract from the natural beauty of the woods? Do they endanger the trees and expose them to disease? As we passed through observing and enjoying the many shades of light through the canopies we talked about trees providing homes and support for all the woodland creatures and enjoyment to humans. We stopped and admired Lizzie's trees, now well established. Finally I wanted to show Eleri the two stone bridges spanning the ravine, with their inlaid stone plaques bearing the names 'Avarina' and 'Charles,' two children of the original owner of Penglais estate. When leaving the woods we came across recently painted graffiti, suggesting a dislike of the result of the recent American election. To conclude it was a most enjoyable experience to walk with Eleri and to see her commitment to the wellbeing of the environment. I hope our tour will contribute in some small way to her achieving her MA.

Gorse Clearance Work Day (Paul Evans) Peter Drake and the Aberystwyth Conservation Volunteers made good progress in early October clearing areas of gorse from part of the upper quarry area. This ongoing work helps to maintain a mosaic of open areas and vegetation cover beneficial to reptiles and insects. Some members of the Support Group and a large turn-out of volunteers from the ACV cleared a substantial area of the site. Many thanks for their efforts.



*Gorse clearance in the upper quarry area.
(Photo Katy Peat)*

Llais y Goedwig (Len Kersley) PNP was invited to take part in a survey for a report to the Welsh Government prepared by Llais y Goedwig, the Community Woodlands group. It transpired that our Support Group operates in a very different way from other groups who look after woodlands. We have excellent relations with Ceredigion Council, keep our administrative expenses to under £50 per year, and organise lots of practical volunteer help that is supervised by a contractor with appropriate insurance cover. As a result of the survey Len Kersley was invited to the Llais y Goedwig Annual Gathering in June, where his talk about how PNP operates stimulated much discussion about ways that other Community Woodland Groups in Wales might learn from our experience.

Reptile Survey (David Kirby) 2017 was the third year of the survey in the old quarry and new extension although 2015 might be considered to have been a pilot exercise. The aim was to establish which reptiles were present and estimate their density and to determine whether attempts to control gorse in the quarry were of benefit to the populations. The principal survey technique was the laying and subsequent examination of artificial refugia using corrugated metal or bitumen roofing sheets. Slowworms were the commonest reptiles seen with lesser numbers of common lizards but no snakes. Population density of the reptiles seen is almost impossible to assess as there is no method of persistent marking of individuals so that repeat observation of the same animals over the survey period was almost certain. The maximum number of reptiles seen on any one day was the best estimate of population density. Most animals seen were photographed and attempts made to determine sex and age, with some slowworms caught for weighing and more accurate measurement. The results will be reported to a national reptile survey database in due course.

This year 13 artificial refugia were placed in the Parc extension and 23 in the quarry. One 'natural' refugium under stones was also examined. The survey started on 25 March, when one vole and one male slowworm were observed, and finished on 6 October, with most tiles examined on 15 dates during this period. Almost all the slowworms and about half the lizards were found under refugia. Nearly all the other lizards were basking on top of the sheets. The most 'productive' tile yielded 51 slowworm observations and 7 lizards over the period with 7 slowworms on one occasion in May. The highlight of the year was finding a pair of mating lizards in early April. Newborn lizards and slowworms were also seen this year, confirming that we have breeding populations of both species.

PNP Management Plan, 2017 – 2022 (Paul Evans) Work is progressing to produce the fourth management plan for Parc Natur Penglais. The objectives of the plan are broadly the same as when Penglais was declared a Local Nature Reserve in 1995 and which are to:

- Improve facilities for people's quiet enjoyment of the site.
- Protect and encourage the ecological value of the native broadleaved woodland.
- Improve the landscape quality and maintain the wildlife interest of the quarry area.
- Improve access for the public.
- Encourage the involvement of local residents and groups in the site's management.
- Develop the educational resource of the site.

The plan will include the new extension and portion of land linking the Parc to Brynymor Road. A draft is to be circulated by the next AGM, seeking views and ideas from the Support Group.



View from the Parc extension looking north towards Constitution Hill. (Photo Paul Evans)

Editor: Steve Cuttle (e-mail spcuttle@btinternet.com)

With thanks to the 'postmen' for delivering the printed copies, Laurie Wright for putting the newsletter on the Greener Aberystwyth Group website and the PNP committee for their contributions and proofreading.

The web address for the PNP Facebook page is:

www.facebook.com/Parc-Natur-Penglais-917579081656878/timeline/

This newsletter will be available bilingually as a pdf file at <http://www.aber-gag.org.uk/>

With thanks to Jeff Smith for the Welsh translation.