

Alun & Chwiler e-newsletter - February 2017

CHWILER VALLEY REPTILE SURVEY 2016

Our native reptiles tend to be under-recorded compared to many other groups of animals. This certainly applies to large parts of the Living Landscape project area in the Chwiler Valley.



Grass snake (Dave Williams)

In particular there are few records of grass snakes which should be relatively common in wetter habitats along the river corridor. These harmless snakes can range over several kilometres in search of their prey (mainly amphibians) and suitable sites to lay their eggs (usually some form of rotting vegetation which provides a source of gentle heat).

In February this year, with the help of Amy Green and several volunteers I put out a total of 50 artificial refuges at 7 sites between Hendre and Bodfari, five of them privately-owned plus the Wildlife Trust's nature reserves of Y Ddol Uchaf and Coed y Felin. The refuges, a mixture of corrugated steel and other roofing materials) provide safe places for reptiles to shelter making them (in theory!) easier to find. Subsequently we checked the refuges on five visits between March and September. Some of the refuges were also checked on two of the sites by the relevant landowner.

Disappointingly, no grass snakes were found on any of the sites, although we did find several slow worms and one common lizard at Coed y Felin where both species were known to be present but rarely seen.

On a more positive note, several people encountered during the course of the survey were able to provide some valuable recent records of reptiles in the area. These included two grass snakes in the Ysceifiog area, one a sloughed skin found in a garden and the other, sadly, a road casualty. The most surprising was a common lizard that wandered into the shop at the fish farm in Bodfari, and was helpfully 'captured' on camera on a mobile phone. Another contact at the fish farm led to the finding of a slow worm nearby and also reports of a grass snake and an adder in a local garden.

Many thanks to those who took part in the survey or provided records. Any other records would be welcome. The current distribution of reptiles in the area can be found on the Wales Online Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles at: <http://arc.cofnod.org.uk/>

Mick Brummage



Mick Brummage

Living Landscapes

Living Landscapes is an ambitious vision for wildlife and people, and a new way of thinking about our natural environment. Our Living Landscape Schemes involve the creation of a network of wildlife habitats across large areas, resulting in a resilient 'Living Landscape' that people and wildlife can benefit from.

Volunteers Wanted!

Do you have an interest in creating a better environment for wildlife? To learn more about volunteering with the trust please contact Katy Haines- KatyHaines@wildlifetrustswales.org or 01248351541

SNAPSHOT



A new Tawny Owl box in Coed y Felin Nature Reserve thanks to donations from Fron Farm and time put in by our volunteers.

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Pond Life - Episode II The Competition



You may recall that John and I have been working hard with Amy Green on developing our land into a wildlife reserve. We have now moved our focus from the pond – which still has water in it I am glad to say! – to the care of the 180 meter hedge which we planted in 2008.

We had been advised that this mixed hedge could be laid when it was approximately 7 years old to give it more volume at the base thus providing improved habitat for the variety of birds and other wildlife that live in our reserve. This job takes place in winter when the hedge is dormant and birds aren't nesting. As our neighbour sometimes cuts the hedge as part of his usual hedge management regime the first job was to ask him to leave it to grow this year so that there would be enough material to lay. We strung 5 banners along the length of the hedge on his side as a reminder!

Meanwhile Amy received a request from Jim Kilpatrick from Denbighshire Countryside Service asking if anyone knew of a suitable hedge for his annual volunteer's hedge laying competition. We were delighted when he declared our hedge ideal for the project and in early December we had a number of small teams of volunteers working hard to win the prize. They each had a small stretch to work on and in all they managed to lay half the length of the hedge. The result was a lot of fun and a beautifully laid hedge of which we are really proud. In addition Jim kindly returned the following week and created a number of habitat piles with the 'waste' which is generated during hedge laying thus providing even more wildlife habitat.

John and Jenny Briggs

Bats in Winter



Lesser horseshoe bat - Sam Dyer

Bats are one of only 3 British mammals which are true hibernators, the others are Hazel Dormice and Hedgehogs. Hibernation is when an animal goes into a very deep 'sleep' so that they do not use as much energy as they would normally, it is a survival tactic used by various animals in temperate climates where food sources decrease over winter. Bats in the UK lower their body temperature, breathing rate and heart rate which means that they can live off the fat reserves that they built up in Autumn when their food source (insects) is abundant.

Over wintertime in the UK, bats hibernate in caves and old mines which have stable low temperatures and humid conditions. In North East Wales there are numerous systems of this ilk thanks to the natural geology and also a history of mining in the area. Clwyd Bat Group has been active for some 25+ years now and one of the most active seasons is Winter when they monitor the hibernating bat numbers! The bat group initially surveyed lots of different caves and mines in the old county of Clwyd to see where the bats were hibernating and since then have monitored as many as possible each year.

Going underground, getting muddy, squeezing through the odd narrow gap and counting bats is possibly not considered as being fun by many, but members of the bat group who help out enjoy the weekends and the data gained is very important in our understanding of the way bats behave and use the area. In fact finding bats in hibernation has been the way that we have found previously unrecorded species in the area such as Serotine bats and Greater Horseshoe bats. If anybody is interested in learning more about bats in the Clwyd area or joining the group they can be contacted by emailing clwydbatgroup@hotmail.co.uk

Amy Green

