

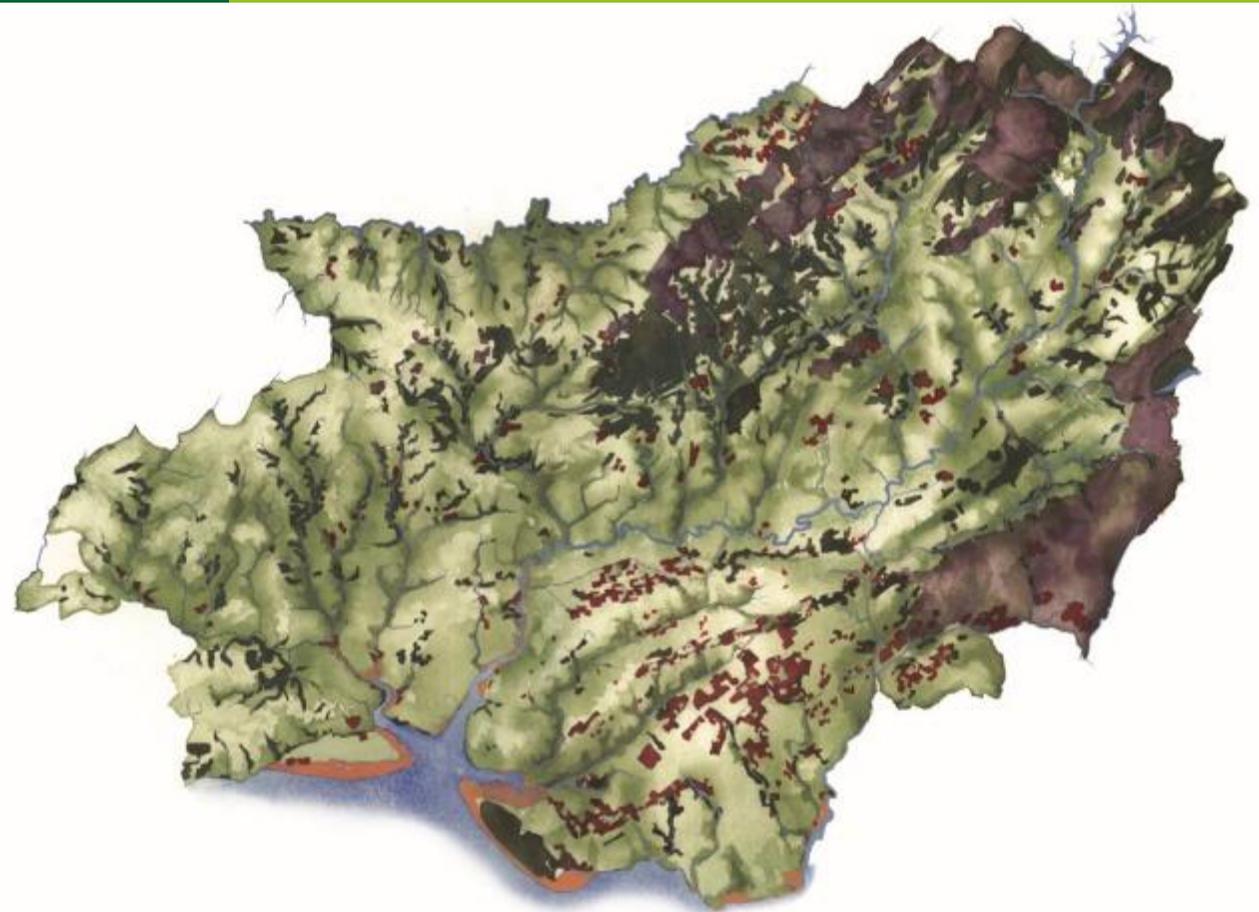
CARMARTHENSHIRE Nature Notes

Partneriaeth Natur
SIR GÂR • CARMARTHENSHIRE
Nature Partnership



OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022

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

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



© Arfon Williams

Crimson Speckled moth

Carmarthenshire has an active group of moth trappers and the late October record of the attractive Crimson Speckled moth (*Utetheisa pulchella*) proves that interesting species can turn up all year round. Persistence pays. This moth, trapped in the north of the county, was a new record for the county.

The Crimson Speckled is both common and widespread in Europe but only a sporadic migrant to the British Isles with very few records confined to southern counties and coastline. The moth occurs naturally in the Mediterranean and North Africa, and most immigrants are presumed to have originated there, typically arriving with plumes of warm air during the summer or autumn.



Coastal saltmarsh and mudflats

Along our coast in sheltered areas, tides move more gently in and out over expanses of fine mud. Covered at high tide and exposed during low tide, mudflats support a wealth of life - food for flocks of wading birds.

Mudflats can then become colonised by plants - first with species like the salt-tolerant Samphire and Sea Purslane and, as the habitat gets drier, the purple flowering Sea Aster and Sea Lavender. Sinuous creeks channel tidal sea water, which can flood the saltmarsh at high tide but then drain away rapidly as the tide drops.

As well as being a vital habitat for thousands of waders and waterfowl, saltmarsh is a natural coastal defence from erosion by waves. In addition saltmarshes are important for climate change. Its plants can capture and store carbon in both the plants and the sediment beneath, which can extend several metres deep. In fact a study carried out by [Manchester Metropolitan University](#) has concluded that a restored salt marsh in the UK sequestered the same amount of carbon in four years as more than a million newly-planted trees over a period of ten years.



© Lizzie Wilberforce



© Bruce Langridge

Fabulous fungi

This autumn has been fabulous for fungi. Neither plant nor animal, the 15,000 fungi species in the UK make up an entire kingdom of their own. Fungi can be found in a wide range of habitats and are a crucial part of any ecosystem because of their ability to digest organic matter and recycle nutrients. Here are just three that have been spotted this autumn.

The Olive Earthtongue (*Microglossum olivaceum*) is a small green/brown fungus. It can be hard to spot in the mossy unimproved grasslands in which they occur – often churchyards where grass has never had any fertilizer and the cuttings regularly removed. They are one of a whole suite of important grassland fungi which can be used as a measure of

The Fly Agaric fungus (*Amanita muscaria* - deadly poisonous) was traditionally used as an insecticide - the cap was broken up and sprinkled into saucers of milk. Today it is now known to contain ibotenic acid, which both attracts and kills flies. It is probably our most familiar toadstool, with a brilliant scarlet or orange cap covered with white, wart-like spots. These are remnants of the veil that covers the fungus when it emerges.

Lastly the Deathcap fungus (*Amanita phalloides*) - although it looks fairly inoffensive and similar to a number of edible mushrooms, it is also deadly poisonous. This photo is from the National Botanic Garden of Wales – a new record for them - but is it fairly common in most parts of the UK, found in mixed deciduous woods, particularly under oak and beech. It is a 'mycorrhizal fungi' and largely lives off the roots of trees, releasing nutrients back into the soil for reabsorption by plants, and therefore plays a vital role in the woodland ecosystem.



© Lizzie Wilberforce

Black bryony

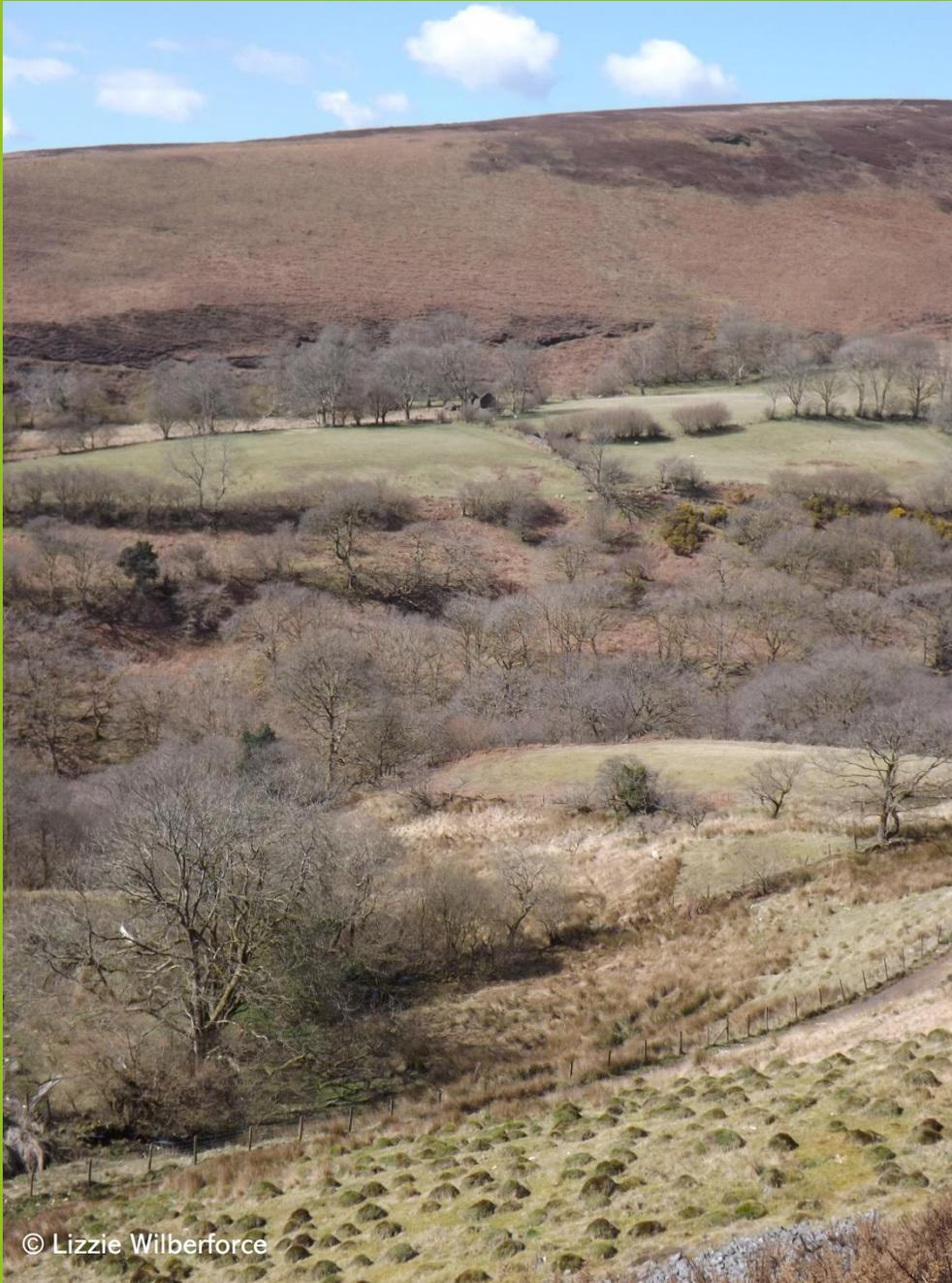
Black bryony (*Tamus communis*) is a twisting climbing plant of hedgerows and woodland edge plant that flowers between May and August. Its shiny red berries can be seen clearly in autumn and winter winding through vegetation. It is our only native member of the yam family growing from a tuber (a modified root that stores nutrients) under the soil. This tuber can be very large and is, like the rest of the plant, highly poisonous.



© Adam Dare

Willow tit

Wales is particularly important for resident UK Willow Tits (*Poecile montanus*). In Carmarthenshire, it occurs all year round at low densities. It is easily confused with the Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*); in fact in the UK they were not separated as different species until 1897. Willow Tits like damp scrubby woodland where rotten timber provides nesting sites. It is one of the fastest declining birds in the UK. Reasons for decline are uncertain but decline in wet woodland habitat and a decrease in its quality may allow other tit species to out compete it. One of the best sites to see it in Carmarthenshire is at Llyn Llech Owain Country Park where it regularly uses the bird feeding station there.



© Lizzie Wilberforce

Ffridd

Ffridd habitat spans the boundary between lowland and upland areas. It refers to the collection of habitats of the, often uncultivated, valley sides, the middle slopes between the upland farms, extensive conifer plantations or unenclosed common land and the valley bottoms. Ffridd is a complex mosaic of heath, bracken, woodland, acid grassland, old workings and wet flushes – important to a wide range of wildlife and excellent for habitat connectivity in the landscape. These habitats are traditionally grazed by sheep or cattle.. These valuable areas are threatened by changing agriculture and potentially inappropriate tree planting. As a habitat ffridd can cover fairly large areas and thus makes an important contribution to the Welsh landscape.



Wasp's nest

This Common Wasp's (*Vespula vulgaris*) nest has been active this summer under a work bench – safe and dry enough to support a nest. Wasps make their nests from chewed wood pulp and saliva, giving them attractive papery walls that build up during the summer. When a queen wasp emerges from hibernation she starts to build a nest and lays eggs into cells. The eggs hatch and grow to become the first worker wasps which, as adults continue building the nest. Colonies only last one year and once the new queens depart all the other wasps in the colony die.



Acorns

This acorn has been tucked away behind some bark in an old oak tree. This is known as 'caching', where animals store up food supplies in a safe place for later. Lots of birds, such as jays and nuthatches, and mammals such as mice and squirrels cache food for consumption at a later time when food may be scarce. It is a useful strategy to aid survival. Animals tend to have a large number of caches and have to remember where they are - and expect some losses when stores are stolen! In fact jays help with the natural regeneration of trees, through the germination of oak trees from acorns cached by the birds and never retrieved.



Murmurations

A 'murmuration' is the name given to the large groups of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) that flock together to roost through the winter months. Gathering in these huge numbers makes it difficult for predators to single out individual birds as prey. Also, in the cold of winter, the body heat from thousands of starlings close together will raise the surrounding air by a few degrees. This could be life or death during bitter cold winter nights. In the winter UK Starlings are joined by birds from Europe boosting their numbers significantly.

Roosts can be in reed beds, conifers scrub and manmade structure like piers. Birds gather together and swirl around before they roost for the night. Early evening, just before dusk, is the best time to see them.

We must not forget though that the UK Starling population has dropped by more than 80% in recent years. although still reasonably common it in Carmarthenshire, it is a Red listed bird of conservation concern in Wales.



Late evening autumn
sunshine



Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership

