



THE OBSERVER

SECOS Newsletter

Promoting and fostering an interest in ornithology by observation, research and record keeping

Short Weekend - West Wales - 12-13 June 2022

This Newsletter describes the SECOS Short Weekend trip to West Wales from 12th to 13th June 2022. A species list is shown on the last page.

Weather

Throughout the trip, the weather was characterised by sunny intervals, mild temperatures (13-16°) and gentle/moderate breezes (7-14 mph).

Day 1: Sunday 12th June

17 members (plus two non-member friends) travelled by car to West Wales.

Lake Vyrnwy RSPB



A 2-hour drive from home brought us to Lake Vyrnwy RSPB. The first challenge of the day was to operate the recently-installed car park pay station. The machine stubbornly refused to accept coins so, eventually, we gave up and used the honesty box instead. As we were leaving the car park, a ranger arrived to replace the machine's battery!

Lake Vyrnwy reservoir was built in the 1880s for Liverpool Corporation Waterworks to supply Liverpool with fresh water. It flooded the head of the River Vyrnwy and submerged the village of Llanwddyn. The

Lake Vyrnwy Nature Reserve and estate that surrounds the lake is jointly managed by the RSPB and the water company Hafren Dyfrdwy. The reserve is designated as a national nature reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area, and a Special Area of Conservation.

As we walked up the lane, several siskin were seen on the feeders, and a female bullfinch was spotted on the RSPB tent.

At the start of the dam wall, grey wagtails were seen on the grass below the wall. Small numbers of swallows, house martins and swifts were hunting in the area around the wall. We decided to follow the RSPB's Yellow trail.

At the far end of the wall, we descended the steps to the sculpture park. A garden warbler was heard singing in the meadow under the dam wall. We followed the path alongside the river, crossed the river via a white metal bridge, crossed a track and ascended a narrow footpath through woodland to another track. Few birds were seen but a willow warbler and a distant chiffchaff were heard singing. We continued to ascend along the Yellow trail, with mixed woodland on either side.

Where the path levelled off, a pipit was seen in a nearby tree. After a while, it flew down to the ground and then back to the tree. There was some debate about whether it was a tree pipit or a meadow pipit. The consensus was that the bird was a tree pipit, although it did not demonstrate the diagnostic song flight where it starts from a tree, climbs up, and then parachutes down to a different tree, so we could not be sure.

As a few leading birders started to descend a stony track, a sparrowhawk-like bird flew quickly across and over to a distant wood, where it disappeared from view. Janet's opinion was that it was too big for a sparrowhawk and that it was almost certainly a goshawk.

Carngafallt RSPB

After lunch, a two-hour drive southwards brought us to Carngafallt RSPB. The journey was mostly on minor roads through habitat consisting mainly of poor quality grass, very few trees, and lots of sheep and cattle grids. From a farming perspective, Richard identified the habitat as 'low-input upland pasture'. We parked at the Elan Valley visitor centre (a 5-minute walk from the reserve). Peter arranged 'afternoon tea' in the form of fancy cakes to celebrate Janet's birthday.

The Elan Valley contains a chain of 5 reservoirs, which were created by damming the Elan and Claerwen rivers. The reservoirs were built by Birmingham Corporation Water Department in the 19th century to provide drinking water for Birmingham. Water from the reservoirs is carried to Frankley Reservoir in Birmingham via the Elan aqueduct. Pumping is not required because the network drops 52 metres along its 73 miles length from its source to Frankley. The gradient maintains a flow of less than 2 miles per hour; water takes 1½-2 days to reach Birmingham.

To the north of the car park, there is a rocky outcrop where an adult and a juvenile raven were spotted, together with a red kite and a kestrel. Later in the day, a peregrine was also seen.

We walked back to the car park entrance and turned right across the River Elan via an iron bridge. We looked for dippers but were unlucky.

Initially, we followed the track alongside the river but soon started to ascend a winding track through mixed woodland containing ancient oak (Sessile Oak and Pedunculate Oak) alder, willow, larch, rowan, silver birch and conifers. A goldcrest was seen flitting in the lower branches of a conifer. A female pied flycatcher was observed in the vicinity of a nest box. The group retreated along the track and waited patiently. After a short while, the female entered the nest box and, later, the male did so too. A lucky few had a brief but clear view of a wood warbler among the leaves of an oak tree before it flew away. Later in the day, a few birders saw a stunning male redstart in the same area. Further up the track, a spotted flycatcher was showing well in a clearing. The bird flew between trees and, at one point, perched on the root ball of a large uprooted tree.

A few birders walked another 200 metres up the track and were rewarded with the sighting of a female redstart carrying food.

A 1½-hour drive to the northwest brought us to Aberystwyth. Again, the route was mostly on minor roads across upland pasture. Stonechat, wheatear, curlew, lapwing and meadow pipit were added to the day's list. We stayed at the Premier Inn Aberystwyth. After a pleasant dinner, and a listing of the day's birds, we retired for a good night's sleep.

Day 2: Monday 13th June

Aberystwyth Seafront

After breakfast, we headed down to the Aberystwyth seafront. A few cormorants were swimming in the sea and an oystercatcher was perched on rocks at the end of the pier. On the horizon, with 'scopes we could just about make out some gannets diving into the sea. Ian and Lydia recorded common guillemot and shag. A red kite was spotted flying over the cliffs to the north of the town and we had an excellent view of a peregrine, which flew overhead towards the cliffs.

Ynys-hir RSPB



A 30-minute drive brought us to Ynys-hir RSPB, this time via 'normal' roads!

We decided to follow the Wetland trail. A Cetti's warbler was heard belting out its song. A medium-sized bird with a pale brown back was seen flying away across a marshy area. Initially, we thought it was probably a curlew but, eventually, it flew and it was identified as a mistle thrush. Later, several other mistle thrushes were seen or heard in the same

area. Male and female stonechats, and a whitethroat, were perched on the overhead wires. A reed bunting flew across the marsh, and blackcap and chiffchaff were heard singing. We stopped at a high point to look out over the estuary. Canada geese dominated and there was a small number of shelduck and a grey heron. A suicidal female pheasant was standing on the railway line.

A debate started about whether an object on a distant fence post was an osprey. We waited patiently for it to move. Eventually, a carrion crow landed on its 'head' so we concluded that it probably was not an osprey!

Further along the path, we stopped for lunch, during which we heard a sedge warbler singing and a grasshopper warbler reeling. Later, a group of inquisitive ponies walked out of a small wooded area to join us.

After lunch, we continued along the path to the Ynys Feurig hide, which gave good views across the estuary. Redshank, dunlin and little egret were added to the day's list. Part of the hide was cordoned off because swallows were nesting in the roof space; we were privileged to watch them flying in and out of the hide.

Further along the path, we walked across a boardwalk through a surreal area of wetland with many dead trees. A tree pipit was perched on one of these, and a siskin on another.

Where the path forked, we left the Wetland trail to climb the Woodland trail. Male and female pied flycatchers were seen at nest box 128. At the elevated Ynys-hir hide, we sat down for a welcome rest. The hide gave distant views across the estuary.

A short walk brought us back to the visitor centre, where we enjoyed another rest and a drink while watching blue tit, great tit, chaffinch and nuthatch on the feeders.



We left the reserve and travelled a few miles up the A487 where we stopped in a lay-by. A great white egret was seen on the estuary.

We pointed our 'scopes at the distant nesting platform at Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve and saw a pair of ospreys. A few members visited the Dyfi Wildlife Centre to get a better view. Live streaming has shown that there are 3 young birds in the nest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gj-oSLZQsWQ>

An oystercatcher was seen nesting on the ballast alongside the railway line to Aberystwyth, presumably because it is quite similar to its usual nesting environment. We were reminded of a Springwatch episode that featured a common sandpiper doing the same thing on the same railway line!

Llangollen

On our journey home we stopped for dinner at The Corn Mill in Llangollen. When we stepped inside, we could see old beams everywhere, and a water wheel behind the bar. With a riverside view, a lovely meal with good service, and great company, this was a perfect ending to our trip.

After dinner, a few members walked down to the bridge and were rewarded with a sighting of a dipper.

It was an enjoyable and productive trip. We saw all our ancient oak woodland target birds – pied flycatcher, redstart, spotted flycatcher and wood warbler – and recorded a total of 87 species.

Credits – Images & Narrative

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Ynys-hir Reserve Centre, John Firth, Geograph, Creative Commons License

Osprey's nest, Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve, Robin Drayton, Geograph, Creative Commons License

Narrative: Mike Tonks

Trip List



87 species were seen/heard during the trip.

Green text indicates 6 new species that have been added to the 2022 SECOS Field Trips Total, which is now at **161** species.

Canada Goose	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Great Tit	Blackbird
Shelduck	Common Guillemot	Skylark	Spotted Flycatcher
Shoveler	Gannet	Swallow	Robin
Wigeon	Cormorant	House Martin	Pied Flycatcher
Mallard	Shag	Cetti's Warbler	Redstart
Goosander	Grey Heron	Long-tailed Tit	Stonechat
Pheasant	Great White Egret	Wood Warbler	Wheatear
Swift	Little Egret	Willow Warbler	Dipper
Feral Pigeon	Osprey	Chiffchaff	House Sparrow
Woodpigeon	Goshawk	Sedge Warbler	Duncock
Collared Dove	Red Kite	Reed Warbler	Grey Wagtail
Moorhen	Buzzard	Grasshopper Warbler	Pied Wagtail
Little Grebe	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Blackcap	Meadow Pipit
Oystercatcher	Kestrel	Garden Warbler	Tree Pipit
Lapwing	Peregrine	Whitethroat	Chaffinch
Curlew	Jay	Goldcrest	Bullfinch
Dunlin	Magpie	Wren	Greenfinch
Snipe	Jackdaw	Nuthatch	Linnet
Redshank	Carrion Crow	Treecreeper	Goldfinch
Black-headed Gull	Raven	Starling	Siskin
Great Black-backed Gull	Coal Tit	Song Thrush	Reed Bunting
Herring Gull	Blue Tit	Mistle Thrush	