

Dolydd Gobaith, Pen-y-Garnedd, nr Llanfyllin 26/6/23

Organisers: Jane Hudson, Fran Holland, Liz Wilson

The weather was lovely for the outing to Dolydd Gobaith (a little North and West of Llanfyllin) - sunny spells and warm without being too hot. There was an excellent turnout with 35 members managing to find parking spaces! It was also beautifully clear, enabling the fabulous views over the Tanat Valley and towards the Berwyns to be enjoyed.

Dolydd Gobaith (Meadows of Hope) is a heritage project helping to restore precious upland habitat. Fferm Goedwig Gymunedol Dyffryn Tanat Valley Community Forest Farm Community Interest Company was established in September 2020 and the land was finally purchased in February 2021. The pastures will be allowed to regenerate, helping the seed bank within them re-populate the surrounding farmed landscape with long dormant wildlife. Widening existing hedgerows, adding new wooded areas whilst maintaining ancient pasture with regenerative grazing all contribute to this aim. There are orchards, with heritage species, and grazing management to favour wildlife and fungi. There are a variety of habitats - wetland, steep pasture, woodland, grove, clearing and meadow.

Will took us first to a private meadow behind the house to see the spectacular display of butterfly orchids. Bridget and Will know from the previous owner that the meadow has had no fertilisers, pesticides or improvements etc. for at least 120 years. When they purchased the meadow the grass was close cut and they decided not to mow and see what happened. In the first year there was 1 butterfly orchid and in the second 20+, the numbers growing from there. Will was apologetic that there weren't the thousands they saw last year but there were still several hundred and a sight to see.

The group then repaired to the picnic area on the edge of the meadows for our lunch. Will gave us a talk about his ethos and how things have progressed on the land. A grant was obtained from the National Lottery Heritage Fund which has been used to fence off the double width hedges which have been planted. The fences shield the hedges from grazing animals when they are on the land. Adjacent to the picnic area is a newly planted orchard of 300+ fruit and nut trees. Geese graze this area (and sometimes the orchid meadow) as they eat the long grasses and leave the flowering plants. The orchard is planted with cultivated varieties, the aim to determine which varieties thrive in the upland habitat. The trees were watered when initially planted but have not been watered since. A few have been lost but the majority are thriving despite last year's hot, dry summer and this year's dry spring.

Following lunch we were at liberty to roam freely throughout the 28 acres. Some people preferred not to walk too far and enjoyed the afore-mentioned fabulous views from the ridge at the top of the meadows. Several smaller groups happily wandered throughout the reserve enjoying all it had to offer. There are 2 ponds which have only been there for just over 12 months and it was amazing to see the wildlife which had already been attracted to them. The accessible pond (the other is fenced off) was alive with dragonflies. There were pairs of Emperor Dragonflies, Broad Bodied Chasers and Blue Damsel flies, the females of all species were laying eggs (ovipositing). The botany group were taken by surprise when an Emperor dragonfly 'buzzed' a pair of mating Ringlet butterflies in the grass, snatching one and flying off with it! A feast for the dragonfly, but it rather spoils the butterflies' fun!

The highlight for the botany group was finding Adder's-tongue fern in one of the meadows, no mean feat given that it is such a small plant to find in a large area.

Other projects under construction include a large Roundhouse in one of the meadows; the main structure is complete, with a green roof and filling in of the walls still to be completed. The intention is that this will be used as an outdoor classroom. A Bird Hide is to be erected near the ponds. Bridget and Will encourage visits from interested parties and there are regular volunteer days for any wanting to help.

All repaired to the Wynnstay Arms at Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant where a tasty afternoon tea was enjoyed in the beer garden. A day thoroughly enjoyed by all.