

the Bardsey Beacon

Issue 134 | May 2009

Editor's Blurb ...

Hello everyone (and goodbye!)

This is a real bumper issue and I think you'll find it packed full of interesting articles and information.

This will be my last issue. I've enjoyed my 18 months as Beacon Editor but finding enough time to fit everything in has always been a bit of a juggling act! Thanks to the Committee and all those who have sent compliments on my editing and to those who have sent in their contributions, comments and emails.

As some of you will know, I also edit and produce an e-magazine of my own called Nature Matters (www.naturematters.org.uk) which recently had an airing on the BBC when I was interviewed about 'green' programming - an exciting but nerve-wracking experience!

Jo Jones, who currently edits the junior newsletter 'Gannets', will be taking over as Beacon editor from the next issue.

Last weekend I took my mum for a trip to the Llyn. We decided to walk down to Porth Meuddwy and sat on a rock and watched Colin's boat come in, collect its passengers and cargo and go out again. We then continued onto Uwchmynydd and looked out over Bardsey. The island was bathed in sunlight and it looked close enough to touch! We could even make out the cattle and a lone walker on the north west corner!



Boathouse - Cafrn Photo: Mike Armitage

Best wishes and a fond farewell to you all! No doubt I will see some of you on the island in the future

Mike Armitage



The Bardsey Beacon is the newsletter of the Friends of Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory (Registered Charity No. 249790).

A member of the Bird Observatories Council.



Warden's Report

As usual my report in this spring edition of the 'Beacon' is fairly short, as having written up to the end of the 2008 in the last issue and the whole of spring will be written up in the next issue, I have little noteworthy news to report.

Emma, Connor and I spent the winter months on the mainland, primarily so that I could attend various meetings, we could get the dentist, doctors and optician appointments done, but also to give Connor a chance to spend time with his Grandparents and cousins. On leaving in December, we went straight to Southport to Emma's parents. We made our annual trip to Penkridge on 6 December for the BBFO meeting of Council, catching up with friends and discussing the year that had just passed and planning for 2009.

Having spent a few weeks in Southport we then went to Rotherham and Spent Christmas and New Year with my parents. Connor enjoyed himself and I would like to say thank you to all who sent greetings and gifts for us.

We left Rotherham on 7th January and headed back to Southport. I had another meeting [this time of the Bird Observatories Council (BOC)] to attend. This year the meeting was not held at a Bird Observatory as it usually is, but at Rhoscolyn on the Isle of Anglesey in Wales. We were fortunate enough to be able to use the facilities of one of our council members, Ian Wright (Outdoor Alternative). The meeting was attended by about 8 Observatories, and a presentation by Prof. Fred Cook about timed seawatching data was presented. The forthcoming book 'The Bird Observatories of the British Isles' was discussed as well as many other topics. The meeting ran from Friday to Sunday evening. Mike Archer drove from Sheffield to Southport to attend and we took both Mike and Richard Else (E!) to the meeting.

On 16th December I gave a talk to Southport RSPB members group. It was very well attended with 170 members turning out on a bitterly cold night. The large church hall on Lord Street in Southport was packed and there were some people standing at the back! The talk, as you may have guessed, was about Bardsey and its wildlife and birds. Hopefully we will get some visitors staying at the Obs. as a result.

On 17th January we were back down to Rhoscolyn to stay with Ian Wright and his family again. This time we were on a social visit. However, on the 18th I had a meeting in Cardiff and the Museum. The meeting was the AGM of the Welsh Records Panel. Emma dropped me off in the car park of a petrol station somewhere on Anglesey at 4am! So, I could get a lift down with some of the other panel members. After quite an exciting trip through the snow-covered mountains, we found our path blocked by an overturned lorry and had to make an hour's drive back and round through Dollegelau. On the way down we saw a Waxwing in a tree beside the road! We eventual got to Cardiff and met up with the rest of the Panel and did a little bit of birding before the meeting began. We 'dipped' the Lesser Scaup in Cardiff Bay, but did see Bearded Tit nearby. After the meeting we drove back to Anglesey, eventually getting into land and Margaret's house about 10.30pm – rather a long day! We spent a couple of days with Ian, mostly relaxing but working on a few bits of data during the time there and also going for another (albeit short) meeting with COFNOD, the North Wales Environmental Data group, to discuss Bardsey's huge data set we have now got digitised.

After our stay with Ian we visited a friend of Emma's in Brecon for a couple of days, went to see the Red Kites at Gigrin Farm feeding station (see our website www.wildlifeimages.eu for a slideshow of the day). We then went back to Rotherham as I had several meetings (some on the telephone) planned with Mike Archer regarding the BOC book. We were checking and editing the whole of the book, all the data fact and figures that had been written. One day our telephone meeting began at 8.30am and with a break for lunch and coffee we continued to 8pm! I think the telephone waves must have done some damage to my grey matter (well that's my excuse and I'm jolly well sticking to it!)

This winter there were many hundreds of Waxwings on the mainland and hopes were high for seeing some. Both Emma and I had been rather busy during the winter preparing the report to get it to the editor for early in the New Year, so we had little chance to go out birding (what's new!!). We did however try on four occasions to get to see the flock of Waxwings (200 or so) at RSPB old Moor (the reserve where I cut my birding teeth at a youth!) Alas, on each attempt we failed big time! We did manage to get to see Red Grouse when we took Connor and his cousins to Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales to see Wensleydale Cheese being made!



Connor and his two cousins at the Wensleydale cheese factory. Chloe (on the right) and Kelli (left)...oh and Wallace and Grommit!!!! See Chloe's poem and drawings in the 'Gannets' newsletter for younger readers.

Whilst we were in Rotherham I was planning the year's work for 2009 on the island, completing the annual returns for the BTO and finishing reports to CCW and JNCC. Emma and I had a weekend in North Norfolk where we saw Cattle Egret and a few other nice birds.

After sending another three weeks in Rotherham it was time to leave for more meetings in Wales. As we left my mum's house we were just on our way to the M1 when I saw a flock of Waxwings about ½ mile from the house!, eventually we had connected with some!

We arrived back in Southport on 19 February and dropped Connor with his gran and grandpa. We then drove the following morning to Bangor so I could attend the winter meeting of the Bardsey Scientific Committee. Again it was another productive and eventful meeting, but with a very relaxed atmosphere (rather unusual for meetings these days). We then drove down to Aberdaron to drop off some of our supplies we had been buying over the winter, with Colin, Christine and Earnest, ready for them to take over to the island when the weather allowed. That night Emma and I stayed in the new Travelodge in Porthmadog so we could attend the meeting of BBFO council the following day. We enjoyed a walk round the town at mid-night after having a super meal in the Ship inn in Edern just outside Aberdaron (try it the food is brill' and it is a very nice place and the staff are nice too!).

We set off on a glorious morning to Criccieth and met up with the 'rabble' there. Again it was good to see so many members of council we have now come to call our friends. Again the meeting was very productive and relaxed. Richard Williams (chairman of BITL) attended, as did our new(ish) President David Hawkins. After the meeting I was given my contract for another season and Both Richard Brown and Richard Else were reappointed in their respective posts as Assistant Warden and Manx Shearwater Research Assistant.

After the meeting we were then ready to head back to the island. We needed a little time to get the last of our shopping sorted and then we were off.....or not. Our planned date of 1st March was then pushed back to the 5th, the 8th, 10th....and then on 15th the weather calmed down and Richards E and B, Emma, Connor and I along with Liz James made the crossing from Aberdaron on a fairly calm sea.

Liz was coming to help with sorting the Obs ready for our first visitors just 20 Days later. In that time we had to clean the Obs, paint bits that needed painting, deal with the WALL OF DEATH!! and begin monitoring migration. I will not go into detail about the migration, as this will be covered in the next 'beacon'. Liz has written a full 'diary' account of the first three weeks back on the island, her time helping get the Obs ready.

In the third week Ian Wright and his daughter Jessica came along to help out. Ian and I set to gutting the library and giving it a face lift. New shelves, the same style as the ones in the office were made and fitted and the new Computer installed ready for the satellite internet access.

The satellite internet access has now been installed and is (almost) fully working. It has enabled us to check emails, order things online and, probably, most importantly to our members, update web page daily with news of sightings and pictures of the birds and other wildlife we have had on the island. The project has taken almost two years to get sorted, as planning and listed building consent were required. The large installation fee had been part-funded by CCW and the running cost, which is not cheap, is again part-funded by CCW. What this does mean is that if you have your own wireless enabled laptop and wish to check emails (assuming that your provider has a web-based checking facility) you can (for a small fee) be given the access code to log onto the network for either the day or the week. We do have a data download limit, so we are asking people who do use the system not to download large data files or watch youtube or listen to iTunes, etc. The system is working well at the moment and we will keep you informed on its performance. But all of you who have access to the internet and wish to keep up to date with the wildlife news from the island, can visit www.bbfo.blogspot.com or link through from the 'home page' of www.bbfo.org.uk. I do know some of our membership are looking at the news page several times each day, and on some days it is updated more than once, especial if we have some nice birds to show!!

Well, that is enough from me, I will leave some room for Liz James's mammoth piece and hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did. Remember to check the web and we look forward to seeing you on the island during the year.

Steve Stansfield

Secretary's Bit

Hello everyone.

Having just returned from a fine two and a bit weeks in Spain, I am reminded that time is due to submit my 'Secretary's Bit' for this edition of 'The Bardsey Beacon'.

The Observatory Council met again at the Marine Hotel in Criccieth on Saturday the 21st of February. We were pleased to welcome so many members of our Committee to this meeting, and to extend this welcome to Richard 'Dick' Williams, the Chairman of the Bardsey Island Trust, a good friend of the Observatory. The Chairman requested the meeting observe a minute's silence in memory of Simon Walker and George Evans who were both previous Wardens at the Obs.

The meeting followed it's usual pattern with the approval of the minutes of the previous meeting of Council. In response to the acceptance of the minutes, and under 'Matters Arising', Dai Stacey reported on his enquiries regarding the use of UV water filters and the battery power needed to run them efficiently. Those used on Skomer Island have the filters fitted to the water system before the storage system and that the Centre for Alternative Technology at Machynlleth have said that we have sufficient battery power so the system may require some adjustment?

The Chairman had again submitted a hard copy of his report and made reference to that report, expanding on items of importance that had moved forward since the previous meeting. The complaints from visitors both from the Observatory and the Trust regarding noise from the generator at the Observatory which, due to the additional appliances now in use at the Obs, have to run for longer periods on some days. Solar Panels are under consideration for use on the Island and may well be subject of on site tests in the near future. Wind turbines of a size that will not impose on the ambience of the Island may also be given trials. In the meantime, the Observatory will attempt to reduce both the running time of the generator and to muffle noise from the exhaust.

Moving into the modern age, the Observatory has researched the possibility of installing broadband facilities at the Observatory. A proposal put forward at the meeting received approval and I understand that the necessary components have been purchased and installed at 'Cristin'. The facility has also been made available for use at Ty Pellaf and has been supported both by CCW and the RSPB with the full agreement of the Bardsey Island Trust and gives the Island good communications with the 'Rest of the World'.

Good progress has been made towards translations of items appearing on our website into the Welsh language and vice versa, with Ann Owen Vaughan, Ian Wright and the Stacey's all providing items for our 'blog master' Bev Craddock, to enter into his 'Bardsey Blog' available on the internet.

The continuous job of maintaining the Observatory carries on with both the external and internal walls around the dining room area requiring urgent works. This work requires labour, materials and most of all, money, before any work can begin and the timescale for such works will be in the order of six months or more, beginning early in May and going through to end of September. The Observatory and the Trust will progress works as soon as possible but in the meantime, the inside walls of the dining area will receive a 'temporary' fix. Other works in hand include providing better drainage behind the Warden's accommodation and to improve the conditions on the pathway from the track up to 'Cristin' which can become difficult in wet weather.

The Secretary said that Mel Stacey had donated a 'nearly new' set of display boards to replace the old and very tatty set he uses on his display at the Midland Bird Fair. He asked that the Meeting give a vote of thanks to Mel, which was duly given.

The Treasurer submitted an interim report in which she said that considering the current economic climate, a prudent approach was necessary, but gave no immediate concern over the financial situation. Alicia, our Bookings Secretary, said that bookings for this year were 'similar to last year at this time' and that there had been no complaint regarding the increases in cost.

After this edition of the 'Beacon' our current Newsletter Editor, Mike Armitage, is standing down. We thank Mike for his good work during his time as Editor and are sorry to see him go. Nevertheless, a replacement has been found and we can look forward to receiving our 'Beacon' without any break in publication.

Steve Stansfield, our Warden, gave a shortened report, outlining the good work done by our staff on the island and referring to items in his report which appears in our 'Annual Report' which again is a very fine publication and well worthy of the praise it is receiving

Finally, thanks again for the support given by all members of Council and Friends of Bardsey to the Observatory.

Mike West

Remembering Simon and Oscar

During the latter part of 1989 we bade farewell to Paddy Jenks and Dave Okines as Warden and Assistant Warden and began the search for the difficult task of replacing them at the BTO Ringers Conference at Swanwick. The task was not an easy one as there were many candidates (in those days there were always loads of wannabe wardens) but the interviewing committee soon pinpointed a preferred option amongst the number of high calibre applicants. The candidate of choice was a certain Simon Walker but there was a big hurdle to overcome before we could whisk him off to Cristin. Simon had a Springer Spaniel called Oscar to which he was devoted and that there could be no possibility of him accepting the job without his four-legged friend. What to do? Our Council immediately contacted The Trust and the Stricks, the island's farmers, for permission for Oscar to be allowed to stay. Jane was concerned that a 'full-blown' male dog on the island might cause havoc with her two bitches. Finally Jane, in her fair-minded and sensible way, brought the negotiations to a swift conclusion. Oscar had 'the snip' and Simon became our new Warden.

All these goings on made a big impression on us. We, too, were dog owners and some years previously Jane had also granted permission for Meg, our Welsh Border Collie, to accompany us on our trips to Bardsey. The very fact that Simon was prepared to stand his ground in support of his pal Oscar made him an okay guy in our eyes. We couldn't wait to meet him.

We met Simon and Oscar in the spring of 1990. Our impressions of both man and dog were entirely favourable. Simon was even larger in life than we had been led to believe mainly due to his impressive physical appearance. Oscar on the other hand revealed himself to be the complete opposite of his genial master. Oscar was a master scrounger and there wasn't a visitor to the island who could resist his canine guile. He could effortlessly separate you from your last finger of Kit Kat or Hob Nob without batting an eyelid. Everyone loved him - even my dog Meg fell completely under his spell and was soon imitating many of Oscar's less endearing traits.

A thing which most impressed us about Simon was his generosity of spirit - and I'm not just referring to his famous home brew. Simon always ensured a warm welcome to any visitor to the Obs and I can remember many times when visitors on church retreat found themselves in physical rather than spiritual need. Simon's response was always to make them feel welcome and to give them a generous helping of his home-brewed ale.

Best of all though, were the times when Gwydion Morley entered into the scene. Kim Atkinson (the famous artist) and her partner Gwydion lived at Ty Bach and soon he and Simon became close friends and best rivals. Between them they soon instigated most of the entertainment on the island, most notably (for me) a darts competition where I actually got to the final only to be beaten by Allan Leitch after we'd both been stuck on double one for ten minutes in the final game. How brassed off was I when he was presented with the Tinfoil Cup! Soon though, all other forms of competition were put firmly in the shade as Simon and Gwydion went head-to-head ('scuse the pun) over who could brew the best home-brewed ale on the island. Soon there was hardly a wild hop to be found on the island as each of the contestants strove mightily to produce the perfect brew. Who won? We never found out, but I can tell you the island was never short of high quality beers in those days.

Then, as now, there was always good fun to be had on the island. One such incident concerned Richard Hesketh the Assistant warden in 1990. One day Simon and Richard had scrambled up the very precipitous slopes on the East Side from the Peregrines' nest, leaving behind three chicks with sparkling new anklets. Richard reached out for his coat, forgetting that he had left his binoculars wrapped inside it. Out rolled the binoculars whence they disappeared down the cliff and out of sight. Poor Richard was not a happy bunny (yes, we had them in those days) so next, a group went out on an optics search. When they had all assembled at the point of departure Richard announced "I know what I'll do," he said, "I'll roll my bag to see where the bins ended up." With that he launched his bag down the slope on a similar trajectory

as those taken by his binoculars. The group watched in stunned silence as the bag plunged hundreds of feet into the sea below. It was then that Simon realised that the bag contained his coat and started a wailing and a gnashing of teeth that could be heard on the mainland ensued along with hoots of laughter from the rest of the party! From that day forward the Assistant Warden always went under the unfortunate sobriquet of Cliff Richard!

Who could forget the day when some of the island's principals decided to cross the Bardsey Sound on a raft. I wonder how many glasses of Arthur's legendary gin and french they'd imbibed before they came up with that one! In the event, they constructed their own raft and they: Simon Walker, Gwydion Morley, Arthur Strick, Andy Watmough, Kevin Chivers and a very youthful Colin Evans rowed across to Aberdaron beach in two and three quarter hours. This fund-raising event made £500 for the Trust's Boat Appeal with £100 going to the Observatory. There was never a shortage of stunts in those days.

Simon reluctantly resigned his post as warden in 1991. He and Jan had both wanted to stay. We wanted them to stay but in the end things just didn't work out. Not long after, both Jane and Arthur and Gwydion and Kim followed suit and, for many an island visitor, a golden age had passed.

We remember Simon's island tenure with great affection. It was a wonderful time in both of our lives, coinciding with a settled island community, that made the island seem so vibrant and full of life.

Bob and Lis Normand

Volunteering on Bardsey Island – Ynys Enlli

Having retired from teaching, I am now free to spend more time on Bardsey Island and to help Steve, Emma and Connor Stansfield, the warden and his family, to prepare the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory for the year ahead.

Everything I'd need for at least three weeks had been packed, wrapped in waterproof bin bags and tied with rope, for over two weeks. At last after several delays, due to unfavourable weather and sea conditions, we were given the go ahead for Sunday March 15th. There were many memorable experiences:

Sunday 15th March.

Up at 5.30am, left Manchester at 7.15am. Arrived at 'Cwrt' Farm, Aberdaron at 12 noon. Steve and Emma still loading truck with supplies for several months – looked like moving house! Had nearly an hour to wait for second boat trip. Met kind hospitality of Gareth and Meriel Roberts – delicious free-range eggs for lunch. Joined by Assistant Wardens, Richard Brown and Richard Else [Rich B. and Rich E. for short], returning at same time. Sun shining, beautiful primroses and celandines in hedgerows along track down to beach. A brilliant start to the venture. Crossed Bardsey Sound in Ernest Evans's fishing boat with Colin Evans clutching a pet lamb for Rachel Porter at the farm.

Landed at Cafn, warmly greeted by the Porter family and Emyr. Transferred luggage to tractor and trailer for drive up to Cristin.

Surprised to find condition of building much better than expected. Obviously left in good condition in November. Porter family putting on the generator at intervals had helped. Glad they'd shifted the seventy-eight mice they'd trapped! South wall very damp, mould on dining room walls and staircase wall a big problem. South Double bedroom wall also very damp. Had to clean pantry and fridge before moving luggage in – took ages. Bleached kitchen work surfaces and ladies toilet. Cleaned oven hobs. Found bed



linen and pillows, sorted South Single bedroom out. Went to bed early, jiggered, but very glad to be back.

Monday 16th March.

Started sorting and washing entire contents of kitchen cupboards – pans, pans and more pans, old pans, new pans, ‘stuck on’ pans and battered loose-handled pans for recycling – big plates, small plates, sorted by pattern, all strategically replaced knowing only too well it won’t last! Had meeting after lunch. Steve listed both accommodation and birding related jobs to do. Many birds

expected soon. Mist nets needed. Challenge is to beat the record of ninety different species caught and ringed. Rich B. and Rich E. set a target of one hundred. Steve promised to eat his hat if they achieve it! [I hope he has an edible one – those two are very determined!]

Tuesday 17th March

Pots and pans washing continued, helped by Rich B. and Rich E. – standing at sink with one eye on Heligoland trap across garden, disappearing and reappearing with binoculars trained on some far distant bird. Over the radio you’d hear ‘-----Blue Tit at Ty Pellaf’ or ‘----- smart looking Black Redstart at -----’.

Wednesday 18th March

AM. – Washing up – Steve’s voice over the radio announced, ‘Hoopoe at lighthouse gate.’ Rich B. dashed off, getting there in time to photograph it through binoculars.

PM – Farmer Steve [Porter] radioed - ‘Pods of dolphins off the North End’. This instigated mad rush to climb onto garden wall clutching binoculars. Tried teetering around behind much taller Emma and Steve with one eye on seven foot drop to left but decided that frustrated, ‘binless’ Ben and Rachel Porter would make much better use of my binoculars than I. Their excitement and enthusiasm was infectious. They saw up to forty Bottle-nosed Dolphins and with just a little imagination I could see them, through their eyes too.



Thursday 19th March

Cleaned first of the two cookers – ugh –‘DIRTY!’ [As in film ‘Black Books’]. Made a vow to keep an eye on them whenever I stay. If everyone wiped them down after use it would help!

Friday 20th March

Farmer Steve called for help from Obs Steve – ‘Welsh Black cow stuck in mud at the North End.’ Everyone to the rescue. Emma told me of two other occasions when cows had died – they ate them – except the leg that had turned green! This poor cow was well and truly embedded up to its back. Several attempts to pull it out failed. Had to resort to digging. Rich B. worked really hard – looked as though about to suffer same fate at one stage! Everyone tried to do their bit – even six-year-old Connor, using his own initiative, quietly disappeared, fetching two more huge spades from

the Obs. Emyr came to do his bit – also tried to join the cow! Two hours later the cow was pulled free. She lay there during the final stages – eyes rolling back, white. Thought she was dying, was quite upset – knew I could not eat her! Emma massaged her hind legs. Must have helped, as with a few ‘Hup-hups’ of encouragement she got up, walked calmly over to a pile of hay and ate as though nothing had happened. Lovely united feeling – everyone on the island had pulled together – all delighted with result. Went back to finish cleaning kitchen.

Saturday 21st March

Next assignment – ‘The Office’. Kitchen – ok but ‘THE OFFICE’! Always kept out of there – sacred ground – full of scientific birding equipment, gadgets, and data, volume upon volume, file upon file of official documents, reports and records of every bird studied, caught and ringed on the island since 1953. Remembered time when did someone a favour, cleaning their flat in their absence and was blamed for years afterward for losing things! Have to be extra careful now. Rich E., only just returned from birding, appeared outside the window — drink in one hand, binoculars in the other, gazing seaward. A typical image I’ll always remember. Cleaned and polished without moving anything I didn’t have to. Made sure torch still plugged in to charger. Shouldn’t be any problems – looks much better. Had been very interesting job to do, appreciating the work documentation entails and some of the islands history in an old map and a copy of Susan Cowdy’s obituary. Ben Porter called out, ‘Jack Snipe in the ringing shed!’ Never heard of a Jack Snipe before – most beautiful little bird, starling-sized, dark stripe on head, highly striped black and tan back and pale underside with a longish beak.

Walked to Solfach with Connor. He took a short cut higher up than me and called down, ‘If my Granny was down there she’d keep away from that bull!’ Busy watching my feet on a very uneven track I hadn’t noticed a big black bull and two cows blocking the lane in front of me! Made what I thought may be the appropriate sort of noises and got past – phew! [Didn’t really think Farmer Steve would leave a dangerous bull roaming around]. Enjoyed a delicious tea with Steve, Emma and Connor. Emma and I washed up. Steve, still recovering from contracting bronchitis on the mainland sat on the floor to play with Connor and promptly fell asleep! No, you didn’t snore, Steve.

Sunday 22nd March

Really enjoyed feeding orphaned or rejected lambs with Rachel and Connor at Ty Pellaf Farm. Cleaned ringing hut with Rich E. Difficult job – it needs rebuilding. Phoned my daughter, Jo. Terribly upset about our aged cat who is very ill. Afraid vet may advise putting him to sleep. This is the one big drawback to being here. Really need to be with her – he’d meant a lot to her, especially during difficult times in the past. Feel guilty. Rich B. painted bedroom walls. Can clean them tomorrow.

Monday 23rd March

Bitterly cold, wild, windy day. Worked hard cleaning South bedrooms all day until 6pm. Tiny Georgian style windows time-consuming – used cotton buds to get into corners. Steve and Rich B. scraped paint off walls in dining room and staircase. Rich E. finished taking old shelves out of library ready for Ian Wright to make and fit new ones. Boot room now full of books.

Tuesday 24th March

Freezing cold, cloudy, windy weather. Ian and his daughter, Jessica meant to get here today but Ernest decided weather conditions not suitable. This means all work on the North ground floor is delayed - less than two weeks to arrival of first visitors. Steve and Rich B. dismayed – damp South wall they’d scraped and bleached yesterday has already re-grown four millimetres of fungus! Bleached it again. Fumes prevented eating in dining room. Blower heater on all afternoon and evening in desperation to dry it out. Dirt from wall all over everything, including my nice clean shiny ‘OFFICE’! – aaagh! Current state of affairs: Dining room – too unpleasant and uncomfortable to use, all three ground floor rooms in North wing in chaos and unusable. At least the bathroom is still respectable and warm – even thought of grabbing a chair and sitting in there with a book! Tension building!

PM – Had meeting in Steve and Emma’s ‘Barn’. Everyone’s innate sense of humour, the warmth of their

stove and cups of tea lifted spirits. Good to be included in meetings like this. Made to feel part of the team and my work appreciated. Jobs to be done reviewed and allocated. Emma and I to work on the gift shop next week. Rooms with beds made up to be ready for visitors by Friday 3rd April. Wind getting even wilder. Retreated to bed early with my electric blanket, glass of wine and a book – WARM at last!

Wednesday 25th March

Heard Manxies in the night – so glad they've started to return before I leave. Cleaned windows in North Double but now stuck until Rich B. finishes painting over old damp stains. Moved my things into South Double so Rich B. could deal with damp patch and touch up paintwork in South Single. Went up Pen Cristin to phone home, carried on to top of mountain – so beautiful up there! Enjoyed chatting with Emma about global warming and the destruction of the Rain Forests – she'd love to be able to do something about it.

South Double bedroom much damper than Single – clothes laid out on spare bed already feel damp. Put them in bed with me to keep them dry for tomorrow.

Thursday 26th March

Bitterly cold, windy, cloudy again. Very rough seas covering Carreg yr Honwy. Damp everywhere still a huge problem – fungus growing yet again! Steve is really concerned now – only eight days before the visitors arrive. Found dead mouse in trap in pantry – they don't like the cold either. Cleaned accessible parts of North Double – can't move huge heavy double bed.

PM – Had enjoyable change. Took Connor for a lesson on 'Directions'. Drew huge map on Solfach beach with sand castles for buildings. Both of us had great fun giving and receiving instructions to follow various routes around it. Phoned home – good news – the cat is much better and my youngest brother is to become a grandfather! Steve had put the blow heater on in my room, aimed at the damp wall – feels much warmer and dryer already.

Friday 27th March

More cleaning in North Double. Ian and Jessica can't come until Sunday now. Still treating damp in South rooms. Went with Emma to look at Rachel's artwork as she's taking her for GCSE Art. Brought back lots of memories for me in that area. She has been able to capture her interest in seals really well and has lots of good stuff to work on.

Saturday 28th March

More mould on South wall – now known as 'Wall of Death'. Work on damp patch in South Single revealed bad case of dry rot – long brown roots exposed, rest of growth explained to me – depressing. Cleaned all day – swept and mopped dining room, kitchen, pantry and office floors. Washed dining room table and benches again. Bitterly cold – 'Gennie' couldn't cope with running central heating and washing machine so heating went off. An evening of drinks, crisps, tasty seeds warmed in olive oil followed by orange matchsticks, served repeatedly, in rotation, by Connor, in the warmth and comfort of Steve and Emma's 'Barn' was very much appreciated.

Sunday 29th March

Ian and Jessica arrived at last. Met the boat at Cafn. Nice to see Colin Evans' boat on the sea again. Proud to show us the new ladder he'd designed, with handrails – disabled friendly, hoping to avoid using dinghies, which some people find difficult. It is brilliant.

Joined everyone for cups of tea at Steve and Emma's. The first mail since we'd come back to the island was delivered – it had come over with Colin as well. It was like Christmas in the 'Barn'. Jo's Mother's Day card finally arrived for me. Silly, but it was nice to see my name and the Bardsey Island address on the envelope – always feel I'm home here. Steve had painted the 'Wall of Death' with 'Obliterating Paint', provided by our landlord, the Bardsey Island Trust.

Monday 30th March

Lots to do but the Bird Observatory is here for the birds - sometimes need to put them first! Ian left his porridge cooking, disappearing to retrieve both male and female Blackcaps and a Chiffchaff from the Heligoland trap. Big ringing and photo shoot event. Emma caught a Stonechat on her way to putting on the generator – what a beautiful specimen! Needless to say there was a delay in the power going on. Emma and I cleaned the gift shop. Black and green mould covered display tables and shelves. Bleached them, cleaned units, swept and mopped floor twice. Emma cleaned and re-adjusted the Information display. Rich B. painted the kitchen window frame. Steve put a second coat of ‘Obliterating Paint’ on the ‘Wall of Death’. Rich E. painted the dining room door, fireplace and later applied a third coat of ‘Obliterating Paint’ to the ‘Wall of Death’ – but it’s still coming through in places. Ian and Steve now working flat out in the library.

Current state of affairs: Library – a carpenters’ workshop, South Double still damp, South Single still being painted by Rich B., wet paint on kitchen window frame – washing up piling up, dining room a no-go area – more wet paint, inaccessible common room looks as though a bomb has hit it and boot room still full of books. Only four days left! Went to bed early – thank goodness for that electric blanket and my book!

Tuesday 31st March

Gift shop still damp after cleaning. Cleaned bathroom window. Cleaned mould off gift shop display baskets – set out in sunny courtyard yard to dry. Wood and other materials for Connor’s new bedroom arrived by boat with Bevan Healey. Steve drove tractor and trailer, backing it skilfully into courtyard entrance. Everyone, including Connor, helped unload it. Ian and Steve still working on library. Steve gave up removing wood shavings from his hair and removed his hair instead. Thinks he looks like Harry Hill now – his idea, not mine – can’t stand Harry Hill. Never mind, it’ll grow.

Wednesday 1st April

Still dark fungus coming through ‘Wall of Death’. Cleaned South Single window. Helped Emma sort things for sale. Steve panicking about finishing by Friday – I can see why! Hens clucking madly – Steve put a freshly laid egg into my hand, still warm – I’d had lunch but I had to have another! Vacuumed South Single. Sorted BBFO clothing for sale – confusing number of different styles all in choices - Welsh/English, black/blue and several sizes.

Ian and Steve, concealing shorn head with woolly hat, finished fitting shelves. Needed help cleaning up the mess. Left Emma to finish gift shop, went to tackle library. Jess finished ironing sheets and making up beds.

Rich B. finished painting various bits that needed it and the loos. Rich E. painted black metal fence by courtyard. Both assistants found time to catch another Jack Snipe.

Thursday 2nd April

Up early to get on with cleaning library – washed fireplace, started on window. Stopped for coffee – the men used my polished windowsill for their cups! Took excuse to take mine outside. Broke to visit gift shop. Emma had finished the display, working until 10-30 last night. Looks really good. Couldn’t resist temptation – bought a ‘Hoodie’ – me with a Hoodie! Should prevent ‘Assistant Warden’s Ears I’d developed in the first week – chilblains – ear lobes still red, sore and swollen.

Started on common room. Furniture now outside being beaten. Sun shining so sat outside in comfy chairs – first time possible! Relaxed, enjoyed talking with Emma about King Arthur legends – could Bardsey have been Avalon? Old Welsh name sounds like it. Watched Ian pruning the Euonymous tree. Was against it, but it does look better and safer for building.

Cleaned common room window. Cleaned kitchen yet again. Rich B. and Rich E. caught fourth Jack Snipe – really pleased with themselves. Bitterly cold again out of the sun – ooooh that electric blanket!

Friday 3rd April

Awoke to foghorn, cold misty, grey day – didn't help with great sadness I feel on this last day here. Very busy, mad rush all around to finish. Seem to be repeating so much. All worked together to return books to library and sort out new rug to replace one we'd cleaned – Solfach Beach kept drifting out of it. Common room looked horrendous this morning but Steve sorted it - looks really good now. Jess lengthened curtains for boot room. Ian hung them on new track. Amazing what a difference that little touch makes. Walked to North End to phone Jo. Bitterly cold. It's warm in Manchester. Perhaps it's as well I'm going home – I am very tired and some bits of me are beginning to complain – but I'll miss this mystical place, that continues to have a hold on me and its people so very much.

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On Saturday 4th April my three weeks volunteering ended with fond farewells and profuse thank yous. I left 'Cristin' with Ian and Jess to board Colin's bright yellow Benlli III, via its new disabled friendly ladder aided by handrails. Everyone was very quiet as we sat watching the island until it slowly slipped from view.

It had been hard work but both interesting and rewarding. I now have a much better appreciation of all the hard work that must be completed every year by Steve and Emma. They were lucky this year to have two assistant wardens. It must be a daunting task to tackle this year after year, so many jobs like the 'Wall of Death' having to be repeated. I'd really enjoyed working as a team with like-minded people who appreciated what I did. There'd also been lots of fun and laughter, the opportunity to visit all my favourite parts of the island and I'd continued to learn more about birds. I can't wait to get back there in May.

Liz James

Obituary – George Henry Evans 1935-2008

George Evans was a former warden of BBFO from 1964 to 1970. We have to thank David Clugston for this comprehensive account below of George's life. In the early sixties David was Assistant Warden at the Observatory to the late Frank Clifton. I first met George in 1958 when we both went camping with 6 other young birdwatchers from Staffordshire and Birmingham on Walsey Hills overlooking Cley Marshes. He was well known in the Midlands as a very careful and accurate recorder of birds and his opinion was always highly respected. He was one of our early Bardsey wardens - he left his mark and will be remembered for his commitment to recording birds and helping others.

Bevan Craddock (Vice President and old friend of George)

George was born in Wales on 17th November 1935, but educated in Birmingham. Unfortunately for him this was disrupted due to family circumstances and he was taken into care. This was to have a strong bearing on his future life and moulded his views on people and authority. He served in the armed forces in Borneo and later in Libya during the Suez crisis, where an injury resulted in him spending his 21st birthday in hospital!

Through growing up in the Birmingham area and birding at Bartley Reservoir he made contact with a younger birdwatcher who turned out to be the now well-known TV presenter Bill Oddie. In his book "Gone Birding" (1983) he devotes several pages acknowledging the early help that George had given him with bird identification.

I first got to know him on Bardsey Island, North Wales in the mid-sixties where he was the Bird Observatory Warden from 1964 to 1970. His residence on this lovely island was an important

milestone in his life, as it was here that he met his wife Fran and where their first son Patrick spent his early years. Their shared love of birds and natural history brought them together and he often spoke to me with great affection of his time spent there. From Bardsey the family, which by now had grown with the birth of their second son Jeremy, moved to the Nature Reserve at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire and eventually to Scotland where he was employed as Warden at the Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve at St Abbs Head. He later moved to Edinburgh and latterly to Fife with his new partner Fiona. He finally set up home in Balmullo where it was but a short bus ride to the Fife Council Bird Hide in Guardbridge.

It was here that he was in his element birding for most of the day, often sitting in the right hand corner chair flanked by Eck, the acknowledged guardian of the hide. George was always pleased to welcome friends and visitors and was on hand to help with expert bird identification.

His single greatest interest was undoubtedly ornithology, but he was also a stamp collector, loved classical music, read widely and watched football. George was a very kind man who didn't put much value on material possessions. He could be stubborn at times; particularly if he thought he was right! He was also a creature of habit, a pipe-smoker and a campaigner for a number of causes.

He died at home on the 12th June 2008 and will be greatly missed by all his many friends, but mostly by his sons Jeremy and Patrick, his daughter-in-law Caroline and his adored granddaughter Sophia.

David Clugston

Electronic Beacon

Can we remind members that you can now opt to receive the Beacon electronically which would save the Observatory money in printing and postage and would allow you to view the photographs in colour. Requests to subscribe to this method should be sent to Bevan Craddock at web@bbfo.org.uk. As each Newsletter is published, once our Webmaster receives an electronic file from the editor, it will be uploaded to the BBFO website on a special page. Those who have requested not to receive it by post, will then be sent an email informing them of the website address where they can view or download the Beacon.

We were planning to send the Beacon as an attachment to an email but not everyone likes attachments so, for the time being, we will just be putting it on the web.

Addresses: Have we got it Right?

Please will you check the address on your envelope to see whether it is correct. Sometimes a typing error can occur (I'm not a real typist!) and occasionally someone's writing may be a little difficult to decipher. If there is a mistake, please contact me so that I can change things. My contact details appear at the end of the Beacon.

Alicia Normand

Booking News

There is not a great deal to report at this stage in the but if you are thinking of staying during the school holidays rooms are quite scarce now so please contact me quickly. There are still plenty of places in the Autumn - a great time to visit the Obs and witness the migration season.

A list of vacancies appears on the web site but please contact me first, before you send a deposit, to ensure the situation has not altered since the last update because rooms appear unoccupied until I have received a deposit to secure a provisional booking.

Alicia Normand

Subs Renewals and Gift Aid

Thanks to all those of you who have paid your 2009 subscriptions by cheque or standing order. If you have not paid yet, please send me a cheque or download/request a standing order form. It help if as many people as possible pay by this method, as it saves on administration all round!

If you are a tax payer and have not completed a Gift Aid form, I'd be very grateful if you would consider doing so. It puts extra money into the Observatory funds without costing you a penny.

There's one more way in which you can help to raise money for the Observatory - by sending me your used stamps. Please leave a border around the edge of the stamps - 1 cm if possible - and post them off to me. I have some waiting to be turned into cash, but I need more before they can be collected.

Thanks to all Friends of Bardsey for your continued financial support.

Dianne Charles



Bird Feeding Station Update (part 2!)

In the last issue of the Beacon there was an article about the bird feeding station which has been built in the back garden of Cristin. Richard, with the help of Bob Normand, and Liz James built a bird table constructed from slate and willow sourced from the island. Richard Brown and Emyr Roberts (Trust Warden) made a stand for the feeders. There should have been a picture to accompany the article but due to a clerical error it was never published, so here is the photo of part of the feeding station, the bird table and its construction team.

Donations continue to come in, demonstrating a great enthusiasm. Many thanks again, all donations are helping to ensure that the feeders

are kept full through the season, and are much appreciated.

You may be interested to know that the Coal tit that was seen regularly on the feeders at the end of last year stayed at Cristin over the winter. Ben observed that it was nipping down to the farm where he had put food out for the birds, and returning with its meal up to the Obs! Upon our return to the island we filled up the feeders and put out the new ones, and within one hour it was back feeding on them! In late March when a couple of other Coal tits arrived on the island on their migration, it was hoped that it might stay and breed but it appeared to join them on their journey and left the island around that time.

List of species seen regularly on and around the feeders and bird table now includes: Robin, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Wren, Coal tit, Great tit, Blue tit, Long-tailed Tit, Dunnock, Blackbird, Blackcap, Redpoll and Moorhen. Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and several Spotted Flycatchers have been seen using it as a fly-catching post! And on the 20th May an Icterine Warbler was seen perched on the top! (It was subsequently trapped and ringed.)

Emma Stansfield

Exhibition of drawings, paintings and photography by Steve and Emma Stansfield

Along with your copy of the beacon, you will have received an invitation to our exhibition being held at the Pensychnant Nature Conservation Centre in the Conwy Valley. All are welcome and many of you may be interested in going along, as much of the work on show has been produced on Bardsey. The exhibition runs from 5th August to 27th September this year. Emma will be exhibiting for the first time in six years, showing work spanning a long time, many of the pieces have been painted whilst sitting on Solfach or Henllwyn, with sketchbook and telescope trained on whichever small bird happened to be foraging on the beach at the time – mostly oystercatchers and herring gulls as those of you who are able to visit the island will know! But occasionally a ringed plover or a whimbrel would pass by! This will be Steve's first major exhibition, showing wildlife and scenic photography from the island and beyond. Original works will be available for sale, prints (framed and unframed) and greetings cards will be available. A donation will be made to Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory and a percentage of sales will go to the Pensychnant Centre. There will also be work on show by Anglesey artist Philip Snow, and others. (Note: the dates on the invitation are slightly incorrect, the dates printed here are correct).

Exhibition runs from 5th August to 27th September 2009

Open: 11am - 5pm

Closed: Mondays and Tuesdays

Admission (includes house and reserve): £2, Children 50p

Pensychnant Nature Conservation Centre, at the top of the Sychnant Pass, Conwy, LL32 8BJ.

Warden: Julian Thompson

01492 592 595 / www.pensychnant.fsnet.co.uk

More information at: www.wildlifeimages.eu

Emma Stansfield

Mrs Warden

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Obs. Library



The library in Cristin now looks very smart with new shelving all the way around the walls that was fitted by Ian Wright and Steve, with the materials being donated by Mike Archer. It is about to be re-categorised by Dianne Barnard (a librarian) in the next few weeks. The new shelving means that we now have space to encompass more books. The library has had very few new books since the 1980s and the extra shelf space provides us with an opportunity to properly update it.

We have drawn up a list of new books that we feel would be an asset to visitors and staff, which includes for example: 'Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland', the new Helm identification Guide to 'Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America' and 'Flight Identification of European Seabirds'. We are looking for brand new, recently published books on all aspects of natural history, specifically relevant to the Island ('Les Oiseaux de Zaire' - nice though it is - is rarely used!). Although we do have access to reduced price books from Poyser publishers, many new books are quite expensive. Therefore, we are looking for contributions/funding towards this project. If anyone would like to donate a specific book they could contact us for details of the list. We think that in order to purchase around 40 new books we would need to raise around £1000. We would, therefore, welcome any suggestions of books to add to the list or fundraising ideas. All books will be stamped inside with 'Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory' and any books donated by individuals could be inscribed with their name and the date. It is hoped that a more complete and up to date library will be beneficial to Obs. staff and visitors and visitors to the other houses on the Island. It should facilitate research, enable the daily work of the Obs. to be improved and would provide an information resource and a useful reference point for visitors.

Emma Stansfield