



# Brandy Brook Camping Site

## *Wildlife Report*



***This report was prepared by Biodiversity Solutions and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority as part of the 'Naturally Connected' project. The project was funded by the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Fund.***

***This is a pilot project so we would love to receive your feedback on this information pack. You can send your comments to [sarahme@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](mailto:sarahme@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk) or leave your comments in the visitor book.***

## Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

Welcome to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park!

Pembrokeshire lies at the south west extreme of Wales and is surrounded on three sides by the sea. Pembrokeshire's marine and terrestrial environments are strongly influenced by the Gulf Stream and the National Park supports species found in both warmer, southern areas as well as those from colder, northern regions.

Pembrokeshire is internationally important for many of its coastal, marine and lowland heath habitat as well as ancient, semi-natural oak woodland in the North of the park. These habitats support some of our most iconic species including choughs, puffins and seals.

The high wildlife value of the Park is reflected by its nature conservation designations which include:

- 13 Special Areas of Conservation (3 Marine SACs overlap about 75% of the Park coastline and account for about 60% of the inshore area).
- 5 Special Protection Areas.
- 1 Marine Nature Reserve (Skomer) – one of three in the UK.
- 7 National Nature Reserves.
- 60 Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

With miles of rugged coastline, sandy beaches, farmland, valleys, hills and woodlands to explore, we hope this short guide will help you experience some of the fabulous wildlife our National Park has to offer.



## Brandy Brook Camping Site

Brandy Brook Campsite is a secluded charming site nestled in the steeply wooded valley of the Brandy Brook river. With no electrical hook-ups, no internet and no mobile signal it is the perfect retreat from the 21st century life, yet just 15 mins drive away from the bustle of the coast and the dramatic sweep of beach at Newgale.

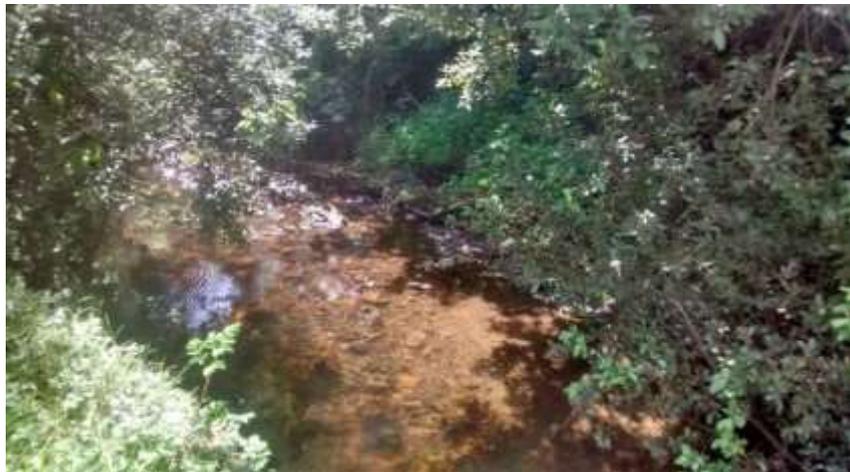
Five mown caravan and camping fields are divided by traditional Pembrokeshire hedgerows and lines of mature trees. Ancient broadleaved woodland cloaks the steeper slopes to the north and south, and the Brandy Brook winds its way through the length of the site passing through woodlands, wet meadows and lines of willow, oak and beech along its way.

The campsite has been in the family for over 50 years and the current owner Alys Daye has an annual David Bellamy Award in recognition of her efforts to promote wildlife on the site.

### 1 The Brandy Brook

The Brandy Brook river is thought to mark part of an historic boundary called the Landsker line which marked the boundary between the good agricultural lands in the south occupied by the Normans, from the higher poorer land occupied by the Welsh.

This fast flowing stream skirts the foot of Rhydaston Mountain, flowing swiftly on its clean gravel bed along the length of the campsite. The stream is well shaded by trees for much of its length but a search of the sunny pools in the river reveal it is teeming with brown



trout. Between October and January the trout spawn in the river gravels, creating nests called 'redds' in shallow fast flowing parts of the stream. Eventually the tiny fry emerge from the gravel turning into parr and finally becoming adult trout once they reach a year old.

Trout eat a variety of foods, but riverflies such as stoneflies, mayflies (opposite) and caddis flies are particularly important. Different species hatch sequentially though the year providing a continuous



Riverfly

supply of food for the fish throughout the season. The fly fisherman spends time crafting his fishing flies to mimic the emerging insects in order to trick the trout into biting his hook.

Adult trout are quite territorial and defend their favourite spots. Typically they will have a number of feeding 'lies' where they allow the river current to act as a conveyor belt for food. They simply face upstream and catch invertebrates as they drift past, thus expending as little energy as possible.

Otters are known to frequent the Brandy Brook, although they can be notoriously difficult to spot. The best times to see them tend to be dawn and dusk when things are quieter and there are less people around. When carrying out surveys for otters it is easier to look for 'spraint' (droppings) which are a dark tar like substance often with visible fish bones and a very distinctive sweet musky odour. They often leave these spraints in very specific areas to mark their



Otter. Mike Baker

territories for example on large prominent river rocks or under bridges.

Otters are our largest carnivore, mostly eating eels and fish, but they will take a variety of things that come their way including frogs, voles insects and birds. A single otter territory can be quite large, extending up to 25 miles and they use all kinds of habitats including ditches, wetlands, rivers, ponds and in Pembrokeshire they have also been recorded using the coast.



Dipper

Dippers with their smart white bibs can be seen bobbing on the rocks and moving downstream with their slow whirring flight. Grey wagtails can also be seen feeding on insects in and around the stream banks. Their bright yellow underside means they are more brightly coloured than their name suggests.

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## Wet Meadows

In the valley corridor there are open unmown areas of marsh on undrained land between the willows. In wet hollows and meadows throughout the valley the yellow flag iris flowers in early summer in a profusion of golden flowers amongst green sword-like leaves.



Flag Iris



**Meadowsweet**

By late summer the yellow of the iris gives way to the frothy creamy white flower of meadowsweet. In some parts of the country this flower is known as 'Courtship and Matrimony' – the sweet scent of the flowers represents the courtship and the carbolic soap like smell of the crushed leaves are said to represent the marriage. On warm days in summer these meadows are abuzz with insects such as hoverflies and bees.

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### **Woodland**

The campsite is nestled within a steep wooded valley. Much of the woodland on the steep land is 'Ancient Semi-natural Woodland', this definition is given to sites which are believed to have been continuously wooded since at least 1600, but possibly even longer.

Ancient woodlands are particularly special for wildlife because they contain old forest species such as lichens, ferns and mosses.

Early in the year woodlands here are carpeted with spring flowers, in particular bluebells.



**Bluebells**

There are a broad diversity of trees on site both in the woodlands and in the hedges around the campsite. These include oak, ash, horse chestnut, alder, rowan, hazel, sycamore, Willow and shrubs such as hawthorn, blackthorn and elder.

A small area of wet woodland can be found just over the trunk bridge. This area has an abundance of ferns including hart's tongue, hard fern, scaly male and broad buckler fern. Polypody and soft shield ferns grow as epiphytes on the branches of trees which gives them a leg-up into the canopy. Wet woodland specialists such as marsh marigold and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage can also be found.



**Hart's Tongue Fern**



**Marsh marigold**

## Caravan and Camping Fields

Each camping field boundary has mature trees and hedges, some of which are traditional Pembrokeshire hedgebanks. In the spring these banks flower in profusion flowers include violets, primroses and bluebells.

Hedgebanks are a traditional form of field boundary in this part of the world consisting of an earth bank topped with a hedge. Before fences were commonly used the hedges would have been regularly coppiced or laid to keep the bottom of the hedge thick enough to contain livestock.

Where field boundaries have remained unchanged for centuries these hedgebanks can be very ancient. Hedges provide little corridors of shelter connecting the woodlands on either side of the valley and also provide shelter, food and nesting habitat for birds.



Primroses



roosting areas for bats and birds.

There are many mature and some very old trees on site. The older trees in particular are valued not just for their age, but for the habitat they provide for other wildlife.

The older trees are dripping with lichens and ferns growing on their branches and full of cracks and holes which provide nesting and

Trees have varying lifespans, Willows and Alders might be considered old at 70, but this would be the first flush of youth for an oak tree which may live in excess of 300 years.

Most of the campsite grassland is mown to provide access for camping but the boundaries of the fields where the mower doesn't reach are attractive and full of variety including species like foxgloves, wood sage, violets, primroses, hedge parsley, woody nightshade and the intriguingly named enchanter's night-shade to name a few.

## 5 Birdlife

With such a wide variety of habitats Brandy Brook has a huge diversity of birdlife and the dawn chorus is only wake-up call you will need. The loud repetitive phrases of the song thrush echoes across the valley repeating their phrases over and over again. Not surprisingly farmland birds are common here including sparrow, dunnock, song-thrush, blackbird and chaffinch.

Woodland birds such as treecreeper and nuthatch are also present but may be a bit harder to spot. Treecreepers are small brown birds with curved bills, they are most often seen scurrying like mice up and down tree trunks and branches feeding on insects.



Treecreeper

Buzzards can be heard 'mewing' as they circle high on thermals above the valley along with the 'gronking' noise of ravens as they pass overhead.



Raven



Nuthatch



Song thrush

## 6 Bats

If the dawn chorus is spectacular then dusk is the preserve of the bats which can be seen feeding along the treelines, around field edges and across the marsh. Seven species of bat have been recorded in this area. Greater Horseshoe, common pipistrelle, whiskered and natterers bats are all known to breed nearby. Night roosts of soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats have also been found at farms nearby (night roosts are where bats rest up following their first feed at dusk). Noctule bats have also been recorded overhead, these bats are powerful flyers and often fly in the open above the tree canopy.

Pembrokeshire has an internationally important population of Greater Horseshoe bats. They are one of the UK's largest bats and one of only two species that roost hanging upside down have been known to live up to 30 years. These bats are rare in Britain and are

confined to South Wales and the South West of England. They are one of our largest bats which means they can tackle large prey items such as this cockchafer opposite.

Bats can easily be seen at dusk and dawn but the use of a bat detector which can translate their echolocation calls into the range of human hearing.



May bugs are a favourite food of greater horseshoe bats

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## Butterflies

Species such as the common blue, meadow brow and small copper can be found along the hedgerows, grass margins and meadows.

Speckled wood butterflies like the dappled shade of the woodland edge.

In late summer autumn, ivy flowers provide a late source of nectar for red admiral and peacock butterflies.



Common blue (top left), meadow brown (top right), Small Copper (bottom left), speckled wood (bottom right).

## Further Afield

### 1 Rhydnavaston Mountain

Rhydnavaston Mountain can be reached by taking the footpath up through the wonderful valley woodland. The woodlands are wonderful in spring with like pale yellow primroses, common violet, ground ivy and then swathes of bluebells and wild garlic. Honeysuckle weaves its way up the moss and lichen clad trees.

All the classic Pembrokeshire banks and hedges around this area are full of flowers, colour and wildlife. Even in winter hawthorn and elder berries the last of the fruit for blackbirds, song thrush and redwing.

During the summer the birdsong will be rich with woodland birds; great spotted woodpecker drumming into wood for insects, the harsh call of jays and the song of willow warblers, chiffchaff, blackcap, garden warblers and grasshopper warblers.

Because this area is less visited, with care here you can see some common and some more shy mammals such as rabbit, badger, stoat and grey squirrel. Hares and polecats have also been seen close to Rhydnavaston Mountain.



Footpath to Rhydnavaston mountain

### 2 Dudwell and Plumstone Mountain

Plumstone is a well known bird watching spot mainly because of the huge winter starling roost in the conifer woodland which also attracts birds of prey and especially buzzards, hen harriers, sparrowhawks and peregrines with an occasional record of a goshawk or red Kite.

This murmuration of starlings is well known for its regularity and numbers of swirling birds intersected by birds of prey cashing in on the bounty of birds. As you wait for the birds to arrive the first sign in the calls of the buzzards taking off in readiness for the feast and then the urgent rush as wave after wave of thousands of starlings fly in.

The common itself is home to yellowhammers (one of the few places they can be seen easily now in Pembrokeshire) and dartford warblers which have recently colonised the county. There are lots of other birds too: meadow pipits, reed buntings, stonechat, linnets, skylarks, yellowhammers, wrens and plenty of summer warblers especially



Yellowhammer

whitethroats at the scrubby edges. With such an abundance of small birds it is not surprising that cuckoos are also known to breed here.

In late summer and autumn the heathland flowers in a blaze of golden gorse and purple heather.

### 3 Newgale Marsh and Beach

Move down to the marsh area at Newgale and you may see two bird species that have spread from the Mediterranean and are now quite common in Pembrokeshire, the elegant snowy white, little egret and the Cettis warbler. More frequently though you will see grey heron, common snipe, dunlin, curlew, golden plover and lots of ducks especially mallard and



Newgale

wigeon.

Newgale marsh tends to flood each winter and this attracts lots of common snipe and ducks plus a host of gulls which at times can include some nice scarcer species like mediterranean gulls. The the flooded camp site area near the road is the best site in the county for water pipits.

Newgale Beach is a breathtaking sweep of sand, backed by a large shingle ridge. It's a good place to look for shells stranded by the tide. Look for oysters, auger shells, otter shells, sandgapers and razor shells.



Razorshell

Auger shell

Otter shell

Sand gaper

At the southern end of the beach there is an extensive boulder beach interlaced with pools which are ideal for exploring wildlife on the rocky shore. The boulders and rock pools are in the middle shore an area dominated by barnacles which makes these boulders look greyish brown. Barnacles stay shut tight when they are dry but as the sea covers them they open up and catch their food with



Rockpools

their hairy feet.

Rock pools are filled with colourful seaweeds such as serrated wrack, coral weed, carrageen and the encrusting pink red algae on the rocks. You can lift rocks gently to look for crabs, prawns and blennies, but remember to put the rocks back gently where you found them. The red jelly-like blobs are beadlet anemones which can be seen feeding in rock pools using their tentacles to sting their prey.

#### 4 Southwood Estate

To the south of Newgale village lies the Southwood Estate which is owned by the National Trust and offers a unique opportunity to explore a farm on the coast. The circular trails here offer sweeping coastal views and weave their way through farmland which is managed with wildlife in mind.

Oats are still grown here to help arable plants which are no longer a common sight in our countryside today such a corn marigold and weasels snout. The National Trust have also undertaken a programme of hedgerow restoration by planting thorn species on top of traditional Pembrokeshire hedgebanks.

As well as walking trails, the National Trust also hold events and open days at the farm and details can be found on their website.

#### 5 Newgale to Solva Coast

The coast path from Newgale to Solva offers a wonderful display of coastal wildflowers in the spring and summer. In spring carpets of squill turn the coast blue. You can also look out for the pink sea thrift, white sea campion and the yellow kidney vetch.



### Chough

This stretch of coast is also good for watching choughs. Chough can be seen here feeding in the short turf on the coastal slope. These glossy black birds are members of the crow family, their bright scarlet legs and curved red beaks make them easy to distinguish from other members of the family. Their beaks are perfectly designed to probe for bugs. They particularly enjoy foraging for ants in the numerous yellow meadow ant colonies within the grassland and dung beetles are a favoured food for fattening up young in the spring. Young chough initially have dark beaks and red legs, the red increases with age, you will see the difference in June when many choughs will be in family groups. One third of the Welsh chough population is found in Pembrokeshire.

You may also catch sight of one of our rarer butterflies, the small pearl bordered fritillary which breeds along this stretch of coast. It can be hard to distinguish from its larger relative, the dark green fritillary which also occurs here. The larvae of this butterfly feed on dog violet which occurs in the more bracken rich areas of the coast, flowering early before the bracken canopy closes over.



Small pearl-bordered fritillary

## Appendix 1 – Brandy Brook Species List

Recorded in September 2016

Common name	Scientific name
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Alexanders	<i>Smyrniolum olusatrum</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Broad Buckler Fern	<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Cocksfoot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>
Common Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Common Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>
Common Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>
Crested Dog's Tail	<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>
Enchanter's-nightshade	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>
Field Wood-rush	<i>Luzula campestris</i>
Fools Watercress	<i>Apium nodiflorum</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Germander Speedwell	<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>
Gold finch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>
Ground-ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>
Hard Fern	<i>Blechnum spicant</i>
Hart's-tongue	<i>Asplenium scolopendrium</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Hedge accentor or dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Herb-robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Horse Chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanus</i>
Jointed Rush	<i>Juncus articulatus</i>
Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
Male Fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>
Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>

Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europea</i>
Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage	<i>Chrysosplenium oppositifolium</i>
Perforate St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>
Polypody	<i>Polypodium [spp]</i>
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Red Fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>
Scaly Male Fern	<i>Dryopteris affinis</i>
Slender St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>
Soft Shield Fern	<i>Polystichum setiferum</i>
Soft-rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>
Treecreeper	<i>Cerethia familiaris</i>
Tufted Hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>
Upright Hedge-parsley	<i>Torilis japonica</i>
Violet	<i>Viola sp.</i>
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>
Wild Angelica	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>
Wood Sage	<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>
Yellow Iris	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>
Yorkshire Fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>