

# NEWSLETTER 42 – WINTER 2021

## “Owl watch” by Frances Passey



When I was 'wardening' at Dolgoch in 2020, with no hostellers staying due to Covid-19, Colin told me that a barn owl had taken up residence in the 'bird box' at the top of the barn. We did see its silhouette one evening, perched on a branch of a tree near the log sheds.

Fast forward to early October this year. I was wardening again, this time with Marilyn, and this time we had some guests staying. I was reading through the warden's log book, and it seems that Cupid must have made a visit to the hostel, as a previous warden had written that there were now two owls. So after dusk, I went out and positioned myself in front of the log sheds at the end of the hostel. After a short while, an owl was seen exiting the hole in the wall, and then a few minutes later, returning. This happened a few times.

The next night, after dark, I went out and took up the same position. There was quite a bit of noise – a sort of snoring/wheezing noise – coming from inside the barn. Then after a while, three owls came out of the hole in the wall and flew off. But there was still the noise coming from the barn – so there must have been at least four owls! I guess it would be two parents and two owlets. After several minutes, two owls went back into the hole, and then there was a clattering noise just above my head to the right – another owl had landed on the roof of the log shed, just a few feet away from me! I stood as still and as quiet as I could, then after a few minutes it flew away.

The next morning I had the idea of putting some chairs into the two empty log sheds, then we could sit down, and be less conspicuous. We went out after dark, and there was a bit of activity and lots of noise from the surrounding trees. The snoring/wheezing noise from inside the barn was almost constant. Looking in the wildlife book in the hostel, it said that barn owls lay their eggs at different times, and they hatch in the order of being laid, so the first owlet could be about a week older than the last one to hatch. It seems as though this could be what was happening to the one(s) still in the barn, it/they weren't mature enough to fledge yet.

Then I thought I would try to get some photos! This proved quite difficult, aiming the camera at the hole in the wall in the dark. If the noise in the barn got louder, it meant that the owl was standing looking out the hole, and I managed to get this one picture, (see above) with at least some of the owl showing, from several attempts.

The one downside to the owls taking up residence in the barn is that the swallows have not been seen at the hostel this year! And the bonus of being out in the middle of nowhere in the dark, with no light pollution, is that one night there was a very good view of the Milky Way, and on two separate occasions, I saw a shooting star.

## Further restrictions on visiting the hostels

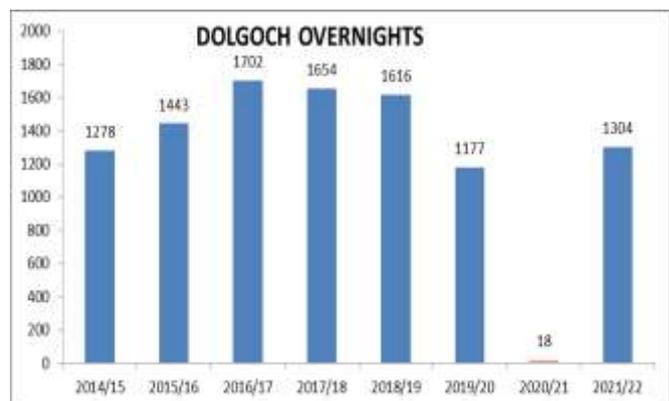
With temperatures dropping and the difficulties that this imposes on adequately ventilating the hostels, the Trustees have decided to restrict the numbers sharing the hostels. At Dolgoch, this means that we are only accepting single bookings. In addition, we are asking wardens to limit mixing with hostellers in the kitchen and common room and to make sure that hostellers are comfortable with any sharing that does take place. Bookings already made involving two bookings will of course be honoured. At Ty'n Cornel we have reverted to taking bookings only at weekends with the wardens occupying the hostel and doing necessary cleaning during the week.

## Dolgoch update

**Top marks and grateful thanks to NRW!** We are very fortunate at Dolgoch to be surrounded on all sides by land owned by Natural Resource Wales. Not only does this avoid the occasional sensitive discussion with local landowners that we experience at Ty'n Cornel but NRW have proved to be very supportive neighbours. Those who have visited Dolgoch in recent years will be aware that the large stand of larch on the west side of the track has been felled. In moving some of their felling equipment NRW damaged part of the bank alongside our track which resulted in blockage of a short section of the drainage ditch which runs the length of the track. When NRW were contacted about this they not only repaired the damaged section but cleared the whole length of the ditch and filled in the large number of pot holes along the track. Fortunately we had arranged for a delivery of 16 tonnes of crushed stone in the previous week intending to repair the potholes ourselves. As you can see in the pictures NRW sent some serious equipment along to do the job.



**Bookings** at Dolgoch have inevitably slowed as we move into winter but we have had two whole hostel bookings during Christmas to New Year. For the year as whole over we have over 1,300 bed nights. This makes the current year pretty respectable in the context of recent years and is even more remarkable in the context of Covid restrictions. We are also very fortunate to have had wardens for every week into January. Special thanks to Terry Burns for wardening at Christmas and New Year.



**“Wood work”**. In early November we arranged a mini work party to refill the two empty log stores. In previous years we would do this at a “normal work party” and have perhaps 5-6 people helping. Covid restrictions meant that we could only have 3 people staying in the hostel at any one time, one per dormitory, so there was a lot more work for those involved in the production line. Matt Scriven, a professional tree surgeon, made inroads into the huge timber stack and kept us supplied with plenty of raw materials, Simon Poulson, Andrew Phillips and Colin, did the splitting and “fed” Richard Ward with the logs for stacking. At the end of the 3 days we estimated that we shifted 16 cu m or about 8 tonnes of wood or 4,000 logs, all of which were carefully stacked by Richard. Hard work ! but it should keep Dolgoch supplied with logs until well into next year.



## Ty'n Cornel Update

The big news at Ty'n Cornel is that we have finally been given planning permission by the council for a shepherd's hut in the hostel garden as alternative, self-contained accommodation. We have now been able to get back to the shepherd's hut manufacturers, whose huts we looked at last year, for serious discussions. We are also trying to set up visits from several tradesmen to enable them to provide quotations for the site preparations and installation of services. It will all take time but it is certainly now looking very hopeful that we will be able to have the long-awaited shepherd's hut in use sometime in 2022. Photographic evidence has also emerged of a (tea) party recently held at Ty'n Cornel. However, as you can see “Covid rules were followed at all times”.



As at Dolgoch, bookings have now, as usual, slowed down for the winter, though we have one whole hostel booking between Christmas and New Year. There are already a few bookings for 2022. Our total number of overnights for 2021 comes to 528, which is quite satisfying considering that, in a normal year, we only manage somewhere in the region of 600 – 800. The hostel's capacity has been even more affected by Covid than at Dolgoch, due to the fact that there is no self-contained warden's accommodation. For most of the year, we have only allowed hostellers to book at weekends.

## Wardens training weekend arranged for the Spring

We have provisionally arranged a warden's training weekend for the weekend 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> April. We hope that this will operate as in previous years with attendees able to stay at Dolgoch overnight and visit Ty'n Cornel as a group. If this is not possible then we could consider involving other accommodation e.g. B&Bs. We could then schedule visits to the hostels. Due to the need for practical "hands on" warden training we do not think that Zoom training would work. If you have not already contacted Frances and would like to attend please contact Frances [frances.adelaidecottage@gmail.com](mailto:frances.adelaidecottage@gmail.com) .

We also plan to hold a Dolgoch work party in early March, 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>. Again we hope that attendees can stay at Dolgoch but if this is not possible we may extend the work party into mid week and stagger those attending. Anyone who would like to attend should contact Colin [huwscol@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:huwscol@hotmail.co.uk) .

### Still time to get your Christmas cards!

Pack of 5 cards – chose Dolgoch OR Ty'n Cornel	= £4
Pack of 10 cards – chose Dolgoch OR Ty'n Cornel	= £7.50
Pack of 10 cards (mixed) - 5x Dolgoch AND 5x Ty'n Cornel	= £7.50

Email order to: [janet.hollins@btinternet.com](mailto:janet.hollins@btinternet.com)

Phone order to: Janet Hollins on 01980 629259

*(Please include your delivery address and exact requirements with your order)*

If paying by cheque please make cheque payable to: Elenydd Wilderness Hostels and post to Dave Matthews , 198 Fidlas Road, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5LZ.

If paying by Bank Transfer make payment to: Sort Code: 404643 Account No: 51253182 and include reference 'Xmas & Surname' as appropriate.

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(On behalf of the Trustees)