WELSH WILDLIFE BREAKS: Autumn in the Dysynni Valley – a Myriad of Wildlife Habitats

Exploring the amazingly diverse habitats of the Dysynni Valley, from coastal lagoon to ancient crags and sessile oak woodlands to luckless mediaeval castles

This itinerary includes easy to moderate walking with frequent stops for wildlife-watching and photography. Some locations are better suited to drier weather, while some woodland sites are good at any time and others are tide-dependent. This itinerary therefore provides information about key locations in the Dysynni Valley without being specific about the order in which we visit them. This holiday can be arranged by request during Spring and Autumn for any length of time between 1 - 4 days. Week-long holidays can also be arranged including other nearby locations.

Foothills of Cadair Idris
The Ystradlyn Exhibition Centre is a wildlife haven in its own right, since rare Lesser Horseshoe bats (Rhinolophus hipposideros) use its roofspace for roosting and raising their young. The moisture in the wooded gorge above the Centre above is held there by the tree canopy, and it is home to many species of woodland birds. There are also ferns growing in the rocks and lichens on the trees. Dead trees deliberately left in this woodland provide homes for insects and fungi, and the bats hunt here for the many small insects that thrive in this type of humid environment.

In this lower part of the NNR there remains evidence of the ornamental gardens planted when the land was still part of the Idris family estate. American Redwood trees, one of the introduced species, are still present today. The small lake encourages other species of wildlife and treecreepers and nuthatches are common.

Talyllyn Lake

The Talyllyn Lake is about a mile and a quarter long. Talyllyn is world famous for its brown trout fishing and is well looked after by Head Ghillie, Phil Wood. The fish can be seen jumping for flies (or bread!), especially when the fry are numerous on a hot day in the summer. Talyllyn has also been the home to a family of four otters in recent years.
Dippers are often to be seen at both ends of the lake, and at the eastern end, there is a long-established heronry. Other notable birds to look out for are goosander, little grebe, great crested grebe, cormorants and reed bunting and sandpipers around the margins.

Coastal Lagoon and AberDysynni. Wildlife of the Coast.
We’ll start our journey at the large saltwater lagoon, Broadwater, close to where the Dysynni flows into the sea just north of Tywyn. Here is an excellent example of coastal heathland, with turf short-cropped by sheep and rabbits, and late low-growing wildflowers. We may see and hear meadow pipits, skylarks and corvids, including chough, probing deep into the turf for leatherjackets.

Broadwater itself is an excellent location for birdwatching any time of the year. Depending on the tide, it’s worth venturing out to AberDysynni where the river flows into the sea – we might see goosander, chough feeding on the short turf, or a marauding peregrine on the lookout for its next meal. This is also a good place for sea-watching, with the potential for eider, king eider and scoters. A small number of eider duck breed here, so we may still see some juveniles close into shore, and there will be waders probing in the rock pools too – ringed plover, oystercatchers, dunlin and redshank are all often seen here.

Craig yr Aderyn, Bird Rock. Upland Birds
Thousands of years ago, Craig yr Aderyn stood by the seashore with waves lapping at its base, nesting cormorants calling and wheeling out across the sea. As time passed, the sea receded, but long-memoried cormorants still fly up the valley for 4 miles to nest on this lofty rock. We’ll watch as the cormorants call and wheel out across the valley as they have for thousands of years.
We’ll stop here for a while, making the climb up to the top of the Craig through the ancient iron-age fort. En route we’ll see more pipits and maybe even stoats or weasels that live among the tumbled rocks at the base of the crag.

When we reach the top, we can stop to admire the panoramic views, before scrambling down a short way to sit just down from the cairn. This is a great place for a picnic lunch, but most importantly, this is our ‘bird’s eye view’ of the valley. We should be able to look down on cormorants, see ravens ‘kronking’ overhead and being mobbed by smaller birds. If we listen out, we may also hear chough approaching, with their beautiful vermilion curved scimitar bills, and maybe even hear a kestrel or peregrine calling.

**Trackways and Sessile Oak Woodland**

Descending from Craig yr Aderyn, and if you are still happy to walk, we can take the long route back to the valley, exploring the old tracks and lanes in the isolated hills between the Talyllyn and Dysynni valleys, peppered with active badger setts. Here is the haunt of redstarts in the stunted trees along the tiny lane – so we might be lucky enough to see some late chicks flickering their tails, just before heading off to warmer climes. This is also the haunt of hares, which although not abundant in the area can still be seen loping across the hill.

As we descend back to the winding road along the Dysynni Valley, we’re likely to hear mewing buzzards above – the young are particularly vocal at this time of year - and quite likely red kites, that nest in the Craig yr Aderyn area. Walking along the base of Craig yr Aderyn back to the car you’ll see pied wagtails that parade in their military precision along the dry stone walls and barn rooftops, and we can listen out for the tinkling calls of goldfinches that frequent the valley bottom and gather in bigger groups around now, forming “charms”.
Peniarth Estate and Pont y Garth

Back at the road we could strike out across the valley and walk along the banks of the Dysynni over to Pont y Garth and the imposing Peniarth woodland estate. Dippers frequent the fast-moving stretches of the Dysynni, but fly fast and low over the water, so we’ll need to keep our eyes peeled to see one. If we have time, we could walk a little way into the woodland estate, another area where brown hares are often to be seen, particularly in the evenings in open clearings, and often in the woodland itself.

Close by is new woodland, Coed Ysgubor Wen (White Barn Wood) planted by Coed Cadw, the Woodland Trust in Wales, on land purchased from the Peniarth Estate.

Castell y Bere

A short distance up the valley is the historic but luckless Castell y Bere, built by Llewellyn the Great, captured by Edward I and finally destroyed by Welsh forces all within the 13th century. We’ll climb up through more sessile woodland to its lofty heights and dominating presence over the valley. Looking back to Craig yr Aderyn, we may see cormorants flying up the valley to their roosts.

Close by at Llanfihangel y Pennant is the ruin of the home of Mary Jones, famous for her barefoot walk to Bala for a bible. In the upland valley close by, Nant yr Eira, is a small waterfall, an excellent site for spotting woodland birds.

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