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REGAINING PARADISE

Llanishen & Lisvane Reservoirs

John Muir



John Muir (1838–1914), the Scottish-born founder of the modern conservation movement, was a conservationist, writer, explorer and passionate advocate for wild places. He believed that nature had intrinsic value beyond its usefulness to people and that humans are part of nature, not separate from it.

Driven by curiosity and a love of the natural world, Muir spent much of his life exploring wild landscapes and documenting the relationships between plants, animals and their environments. He also believed that time spent in nature benefits both physical and mental wellbeing. Muir actively campaigned to protect wilderness from industrial development.

As early as 1876, he called for a federal forest conservation policy and became a leading voice for land preservation. His efforts helped secure protection for some of America's most important natural areas, including the establishment of Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks in 1890.

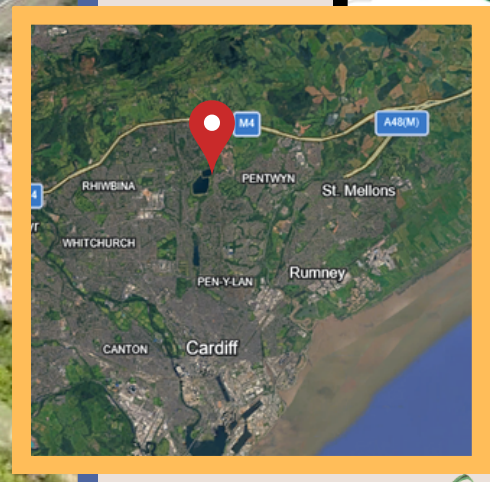
Muir's legacy continues through the John Muir Award, which encourages people to connect with and care for wild places through four challenges: Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share. The award inspires participants to experience nature, take practical action to protect it, and share their experiences with others, helping to create a lasting future for wild places and future generations (John Muir Trust, n.d.).

DISCOVER
The Site









Situated on the northern edge of Cardiff, the reservoirs form a peaceful pocket of nature surrounded by local neighbourhoods.

EXPLORE

Your Surroundings

As someone with fond childhood memories of the reservoirs, I felt it was a real loss that they closed before my own children were born. Since reopening, they've become a regular and cherished place for my whole family.

Being so familiar with Lisvane and Llanishen Reservoirs, I was curious to see whether completing the John Muir Award here would still teach me something new. Little did I know I was in for a surprise, discovering layers of history, conservation and wildlife I'd never noticed before — proving that even the most familiar places can reveal something new when you slow down and look with fresh eyes.

EXPLORE

Your Senses

When Nature Calls

Slow down for a moment and rest a while,
what you notice might spark a smile.
Take a deep breath in and look around,
way up high or down on the ground.
If you close your eyes,; what can you hear?.
Some sounds are far, others near.
Now stretch out your arms with gentle lift,
because the whole world is waiting at your fingertips.









DISCOVER

The History

Lisvane and Llanishen Reservoirs were built in the 19th century to supply Cardiff with clean drinking water after rapid coal-driven industrial growth overwhelmed the city's utilities, leading to outbreaks of diseases like typhoid and cholera from contaminated sources. Lisvane Reservoir was completed first in 1864–65, followed by Llanishen in 1884–86, which later became part of the Taf Fawr Scheme delivering millions of gallons of water daily to the city. Over time, their role shifted away from essential water infrastructure, and public access eventually ended in 2004. By 2013, after years of campaigning, the housing development was stopped and the reservoirs were eventually passed on to Welsh Water, who restored the site, refilled Llanishen Reservoir and invested in the ecological improvements. Today, the reservoirs serve as a nature-rich visitor attraction focused on wellbeing, biodiversity and outdoor recreation. (Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoir, 2023).

1864–65:
Lisvane Reservoir is built

1884–86:
Llanishen Reservoir is constructed

1960s–1970s:
Reservoirs are no longer Cardiff's main water source

1967–2004:
Site is only used for recreational purposes

2004:
Reservoirs are closed to the public

2004–2013:
Long community campaign prevents the site being developed for housing.

2016–2023:
Reservoirs are restored.

EXPLORE

Bird Watching

Lisvane and Llanishen Reservoirs are home to an impressive variety of birdlife thanks to their mix of woodland, grassland, and open water. Garden birds such as blue tits, great tits, robins, finches, and crows nest in the surrounding hedgerows.









A bird hide provides a quiet, safe space for watching and supporting breeding waterbirds



What type of bird is making all that noise?

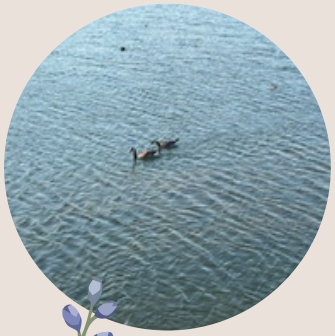
EXPLORE

Bird Watching

As well as familiar garden birds, the reservoirs attract a wide range of wildfowl, including grebes, ducks, swans, coots, and moorhens. Seasonal visitors such as kingfishers, herons, sand martins, swallows, and warblers add even more variety throughout the year.

On one of my recent visits, I was lucky enough to capture a heron patiently fishing for its dinner — a moment I'd never witnessed before and one that made the experience even more special.









EXPLORE

Insects

Insects are fundamental to a healthy ecosystem. They pollinate flowers, recycle nutrients, enrich the soil and help maintain the balance of the food web. Without them, many birds, amphibians and mammals would struggle to survive, and wildflowers would not thrive in the same way (Diaz *et al.*, 2018).

During my recent visits I was lucky enough to spot bees, butterflies, snails and even vibrant dragonflies making use of the wildflowers around the reservoirs. All of these small moments could easily have been missed if I hadn't slowed down to take notice.









EXPLORE

Plant life

The edges of the reservoirs and surrounding woodland are lined with classic British wildflowers. They don't just create a colourful, textured border — they play a vital role in supporting the ecosystems and habitats that sustain local wildlife and countless insect species.

Some of the wildflowers I've been able to identify include:

- Pink and white forms of Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)
- Bright yellow Ragwort (Jacobaea vulgaris)
- Creeping Thistle (Cirsium arvense)
- Verbena bonariensis

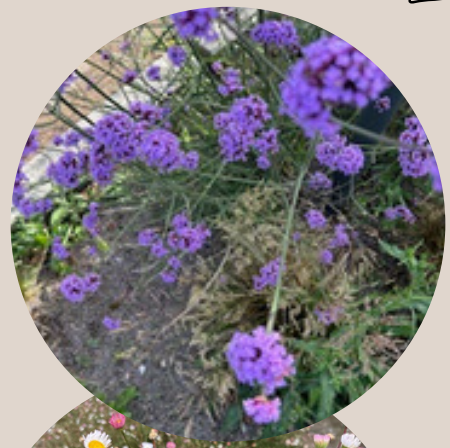












CONSERVE

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Lisvane and Llanishen Reservoirs have two designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), recognising their national ecological importance. Lisvane Reservoir is protected for its overwintering wildfowl, while the embankments around both reservoirs are valued for their exceptional grassland fungi, including up to 25 species of waxcaps.

Llanishen Reservoir and surrounding woodlands is also protected as a site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) due to it's large population of common toads and presence of locally rare water plants.

Conservation efforts and careful management - such as controlled mowing and limited disturbence help maintain these rare habitats.







There are a number of birds nesting at the moment on and around the reservoirs and even more ducklings trying to keep up with there mothers on the water.



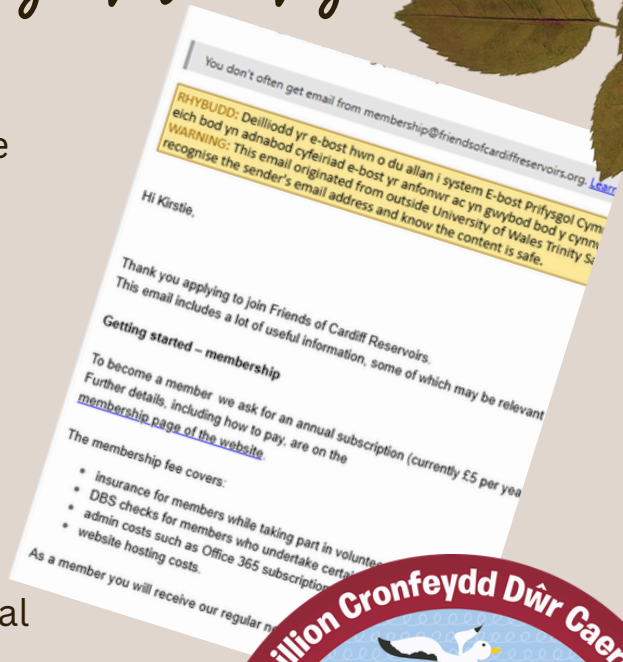


CONSERVE

Friends of the Reservoirs

As a way to support the conservation efforts at Lisvane and Llanishen Reservoirs, I've signed up as a volunteer with Friends of Cardiff Reservoirs.

The charity works to protect and enhance the natural environment by conserving local habitats, supporting biodiversity and safeguarding the sites. They also promote public understanding of sustainable environmental management, encouraging people to learn about conservation, restoration and the ecological importance of the reservoirs through education, study and research (Friends of Cardiff Reservoirs, 2026).



You don't often get email from membership@friendsofcardiffreservoirs.org. Learn

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eich bod yn adnabod cyfeiriad e-bost yr anfonwr ac yn gwybod bod y cynn
WARNING: This email originated from outside University of Wales Trinity S
recognise the sender's email address and know the content is safe.

Hi Kirstie,

Thank you applying to join Friends of Cardiff Reservoirs.
This email includes a lot of useful information, some of which may be relevant

Getting started – membership

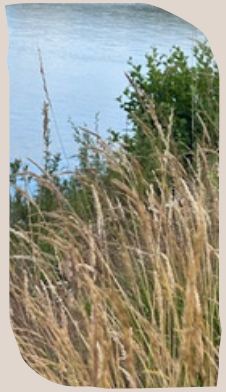
To become a member we ask for an annual subscription (currently £5 per yea
Further details, including how to pay, are on the
membership page of the website.

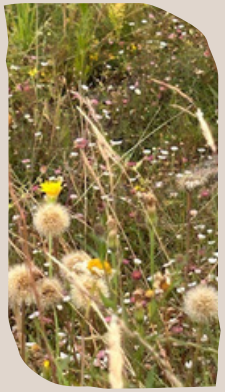
The membership fee covers:

- insurance for members while taking part in volunte
- DBS checks for members who undertake certa
- admin costs such as Office 365 subscription
- website hosting costs.

As a member you will receive our regular n









CONSERVE

Supporting Wildlife

Making a bird feeder was a fun and easy way to support local wildlife. By using simple materials we created a feeder that provides birds with an extra source of food. It was a hands-on activity that helped us feel more connected to the nature and showed how small actions can make a real difference for local bird species.











How to make a bird feeder:

You will need:

- An apple,
- Twigs,
- String,
- Seeds.

Instructions:

1.Tie the sticks in a cross with the sting.

2. Core the apple and pull sting through, then tie a loop at the top.

3. Press the seeds into the apple skin.

4. Hang in a tree in your garden or local area for birds to access.

5. BE creative

CONSERVE

Supporting Insects

Discovering how vital wildflowers are to healthy ecosystems really stood out to me. They provide essential food and shelter for countless insects, birds, and other wildlife, helping to support biodiversity all around the reservoirs. It's easy to see why wildflower meadows and gardens are becoming increasingly popular — they bring colour, life, and ecological value to any space.

CREATE YOUR OWN WILDFLOWER GARDEN		
STEP	**WHAT TO DO**	**WHY IT MATTERS**
Pick a site	Choose full sun (6-8 hours), well-drained soil and room to mow edges.	Sun drives bloom and seed: access makes care easier.
Set goals	Decide on a look: neat boarders, mini meadow or path-laced bed.	Goals guide seed mix, height and mowing style.
Choose a native seed	Buy a regional-fit mix with multiple bloom time and heights.	Natives fit local rain and heat and feed local insects.
Clean the soil	Remove turf and weeds: create a firm, bare surface.	Weed-free soil gives slow-growing forbs a fair start.
Time the sowing	Sow in autumn or early spring when soils are cool and moist.	Cool weather aids germination and reduces watering.
Sow shallow	Press onto the surface; do not bury fine seed.	Many wildflowers need light to sprout.
First-Year care	Mow high when weeds hit 6-8 inches; spot-pull tough ones.	Mowing favours seedlings and limits weed shade.
Long-Term care	Cut or mow once a year after seed drop; remove thatch.	Annual cuts reset the bed and keep vigour high.

(Gardening & Beyond, 2026)



SHARE

With family and friends

I chose to create my scrapbook as a digital version for two main reasons. First, it allowed me to include the digital recordings I captured during my visits — including a heron stalking and catching a fish, something I had never seen before and was excited to share.

Second, creating it digitally made it much easier to share with others. I've been able to share it with family and friends who live locally, as well as those who, like me, have fond childhood memories of the reservoirs but have since moved away and haven't visited yet.

I also included information on how to become a volunteer with Friends of Cardiff Reservoirs, so anyone inspired by the scrapbook can get involved in supporting the site.







Thank you





