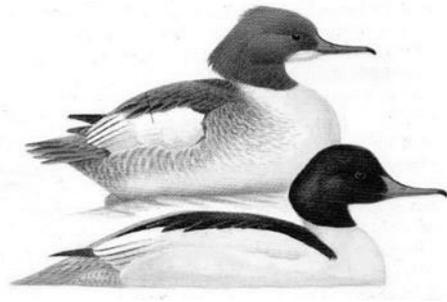


Goosanders

On the Sunday before Christmas the unrelenting rain eased for a while and there was even a suggestion of sunshine so we decided to go out for a walk. But where to go? The footpaths had all turned into quagmires. So we set off for the Wildlife Centre at Cilgerran – a combination of hard paths and a decent café seemed inviting.



As soon as we arrived we went down the river viewpoint as there is always a chance of an otter sighting there. Not today though – the Teifi, which at this point is usually well below the path, and fairly shallow, running steeply down over rocks and stones into the tidal estuary at Cardigan, was today a roaring, raging torrent and almost as high as the path we were viewing it from. It was also a deep reddish-brown colour.

So we were very surprised to see three Goosanders fishing, apparently with success, near the far bank. They were in a bit of an eddy but the current was still very fast. However, they were able to swim against it and repeatedly dived for fish, though how they could catch anything in the murk I can't imagine. There were two males and a female and in the sunshine they looked quite beautiful as they are very handsome ducks.

Goosanders are “sawbills” – they have serrated bills which enable them to hold the fish which they catch. The male has a dazzling white breast and flanks, often tinged with pink and when matched with a shining dark green head and red bill he is a very smart bird indeed. The female is grey with a reddish head and both birds have a shaggy crest. We do not often see them in this part of Pembrokeshire but there is a regular small wintering flock on the lily ponds at Bosherton, usually near the 8-arch bridge and also a few at Llys-y-fran. They breed on clean rivers with plentiful fish – they may well breed on the Teifi as they certainly breed on other similar rivers in Wales.

The Red-breasted Merganser is very closely related to the Goosander. The male is not quite so smart but the female is quite similar to a Goosander – we often see a Merganser in female/juvenile plumage at Pickleridge Pools during the winter.

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