

## **The Crannog - Ben Sands**

Hello, my name is Ben Sands, I am the Countryside Ranger for Parc Penallta. We are currently stood on the Crannog Island, which is part of the wetland area of the park. A Crannog itself is an artificial island created in a lake, usually used as a dwelling place. You find most of these in Ireland or in Scotland. They tend to date from around about the Iron Age through to the early medieval period.

Prior to the creation of this pond this would have been an open field at the foot of the old coal tip. The whole wetland area was created as a way of being the public into close contact with a habitat type that's found in the adjacent Nelson Bog, which is designated as a SSSI, but due to the nature of that area we can't really get public access into it, so by creating a manmade pond and putting an island and boardwalk in place that allows visitors access to a habitat that would otherwise go unseen.

The boardwalk itself was designed by a renowned Landscape Artist called Mick Petts. He has incorporated a number of pit props that reflect that mining heritage. I think the best time to explore this part of the park is early summer when the wildflowers are really starting to come out, you have got the Swallows coming back and they often sweep low over the pond to catch a drink of water. Sometimes in early summer, when the tadpoles have grown their legs and they are ready to leave the pond you'll see seas of small toads covering the paths surrounding the lake, as they will leave the pond to find an alternative place to live. Also, the reed beds start to come alive with dragonflies and damselflies, nearly emerged, and also some other migrant birds like the Reed warbler coming here looking for nesting spaces within the reed beds.

What you find with a wetland environment like this is that plant species very quickly colonise it and will spread out, reducing the amount of open water, and that gradually accelerates the drying up process until tree species get a chance to invade, and eventually the pond itself will be lost. So every year I will be putting on waders on and paddling out into the this pond and actually cutting back some of this vegetation to keep the balance of open water and reed bed to acceptable limits. That also gives us the chance to get some diversity into the plant structure, so different ages of reed bed stand and species composition as well, which all-in-all benefits the wildlife that comes in.