Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gogledd Cymru North Wales Wildlife Trust

Ymddiriedolaeth Natur De a Gorllewin Cymru Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales

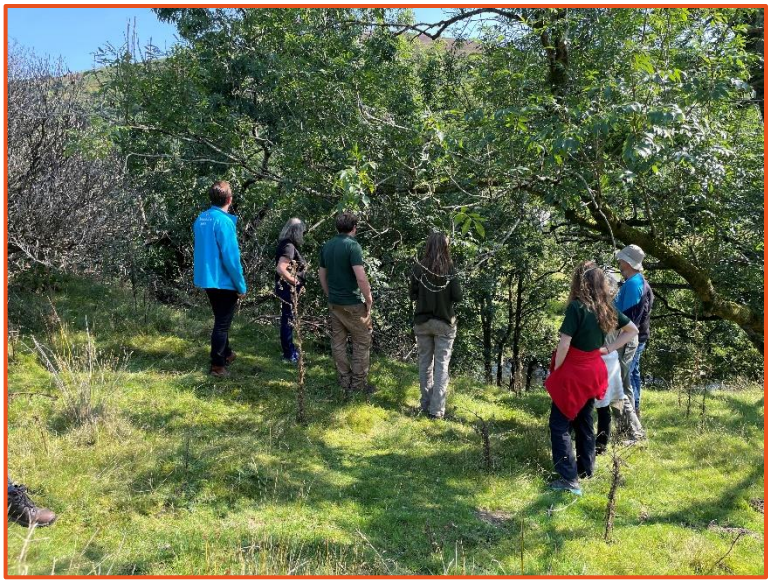
To improve dialogue between the Wales Resilient Ecological Network (WaREN) and its members we are sending out regular newsletters to share successes, challenges and opportunities, such as training. Check out our November newsletter which jam-packed with updates and articles from across Wales! We hope you enjoy reading and feel free to share with anyone you think might be interested – they can also join our Network by contacting Jess Minett.

November Newsletter

WaREN Update

At WaREN we've been busy running training sessions, working on the Local Action Group (LAG) toolkit and organising workshops, to name a few things! Now that our Ecosystem Invaders campaign has officially wrapped up for 2022 we are happy to confirm it was a great success! If you would like to find out more and hear about our campaign highs and lows then check out our new blog 'A Diary of a WaREN Project Officer'.

We recently took part in the Wales Biodiversity Partnership Conference. We ran a biosecurity workshop allowing participants to give feedback on our Welsh Biosecurity Strategy. The strategy has two main aims: 1) to improve the understanding of biosecurity, and 2) to improve the update of biosecurity measures across Wales. Thanks to those of you that participated for giving us constructive suggestions on how to help the strategy reach a wider audience. At the end of the session we asked would 'your organisation get involved with the Welsh biosecurity strategy?' and a resounding 82% of attendees said they would!



WaREN Project Officers also have teamed up with Celtic Rainforest Wales and the Local Environmental Record Centres to run training sessions across Wales. We ran four successful sessions focused on recording invasive species and managing invasive rhododendron. We are now organising future training for LAGs and volunteers tackling invasive species across Wales. If there is any training you think would benefit you or your LAG please do get in touch.

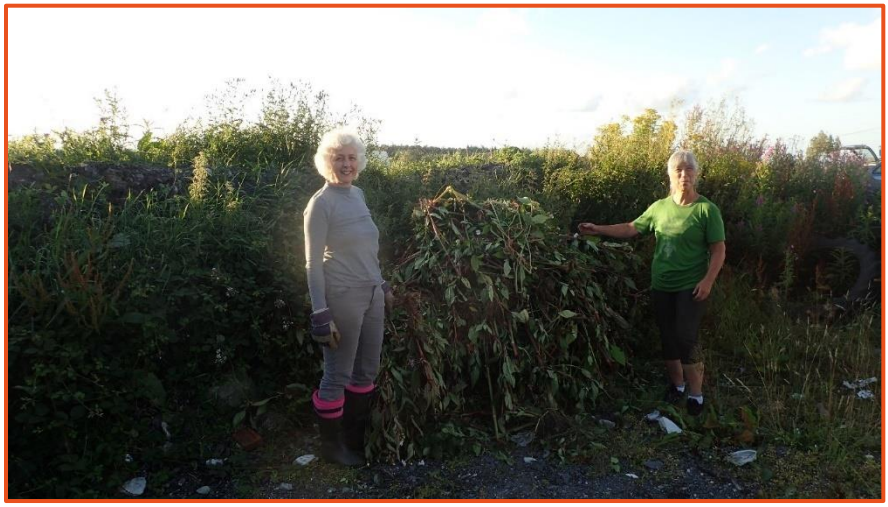
We are currently organising workshops for LAGs in Wales, which will take place February 2023. More details and registration for the Welsh LAG workshop will be available soon, so keep an eye on your inbox and we hope to see you there!

LAG/ Volunteer Effort

In it for the long-haul: Himalayan balsam removal

Since 2009 Coetir Mynydd has been attempting to remove all the Himalayan balsam from the environs of Mynydd Llandegai, working downhill from the watershed. We have been using GIS to record all the Himalayan balsam locations, and amounts picked. We also record the numbers of volunteers and hours spent. Mapping it like this is a fantastic way of visualising the progress we make each year and enables volunteers to 'home-in' on specific sites. It's great to see the 'red dots' on the map (representing sites with >50 plants) gradually reduce to yellow (<10 plants) and finally to grey (No more Himalayan balsam!).

We have been hand-picking (and occasionally strimming) every year for 13 years, and whilst we have been very successful in managing its spread, we are still possibly 4-5 years off complete removal.



We have found that clearance must be systematic - it is better to be persistent and concentrate on total removal at a site than partial clearance over a wider area.

Vigilance is required over long period – we are still visiting sites three or four year after the last plant was seen – only then do we feel confident it is under control.

If done well, Himalayan balsam-bashing can work! We have removed 15-20,000 plants and now (2022) almost 70% of our sites have been clear of Himalayan balsam for 3 years, and at most others there are fewer than 20 plants remaining. Hopefully not so many more visits until we pick the last one... 😉.

Management of Japanese Knotweed in the Garw Valley

Since 2017, Natural Resources Wales, Bridgend County Borough Council, Awen Cultural Trust, Garw Valley Community Council, Bridgend Valleys Railway Company, Keep Wales Tidy and Ogmore and Garw Valley Angling Associations have been working in partnership to deliver a programme of works to control and ultimately eradicate Japanese Knotweed from the Garw river corridor.

Japanese knotweed was introduced to the UK in the early 19th century as an ornamental plant. It is a perennial plant, growing each year from its extensive underground rhizomes, and spreads rapidly both by natural means and as a result of human activity. The plant forms dense stands, outcompeting our native vegetation and causing nuisance and structural damage.

Each year, members of the partnership have been eradicating Japanese Knotweed along the valley between the middle of August and the end of September each year, using an approved formulation of herbicide, suitable for treatment adjacent to the watercourses. All spraying has been carried out by qualified operators in suitable weather conditions and directly targeted stands of Knotweed.

As a result of this work, the amount of Japanese Knotweed in the valley has significantly reduced. By controlling the Japanese Knotweed growing along the river valley, we are improving and protecting the vegetated river corridor, making space for native plants, improving the habitat and connecting wildlife along the valley.

Have you Recorded it?

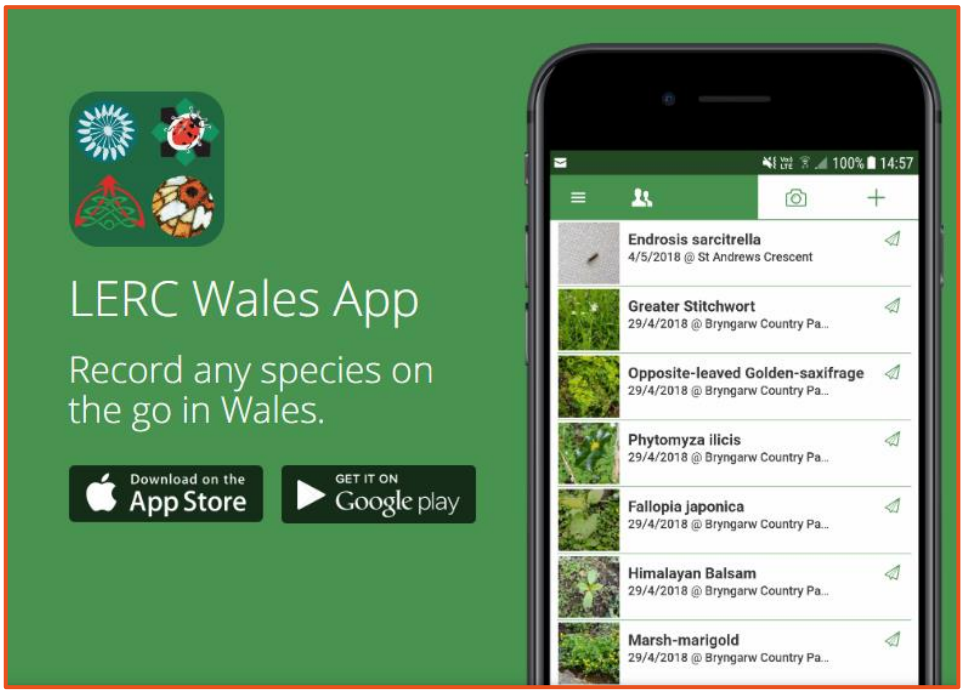
In order to tackle invasive species (INNS) we need to know where it is. Planned structured surveys can be complimented by ad-hoc or casual records of any INNS sightings. You don't need to be an 'expert' to record - anyone can make biological records - as long as you can confidently identify what it is you are recording.

Biological recording has been made much easier in recent years. There is a wide range of help available to identify or confirm species identification along with several recording websites and Apps. These enable anyone, not just the 'experts' to easily record an INNS or indeed any wildlife sighting and attach a photo.

As the Local Environmental Records Centre for the Brecon Beacons National Park and Powys, BIS, the Biodiversity Information Service, will receive any records you make in the Park. These are then mapped and can be seen by the BBNP INNS project team, enabling them to target action.

When making a biological record there are five pieces of information that are definitely needed. These are often described by the catchy tongue-twister – the What, Where, When and Who. That is only four you may ask. For the 'Where' a grid reference and location name are needed.

The LERC Wales App makes recording easy as the only information you need to add is the 'What', that is the species you want to record. Similarly, the BIS Wired website allows you to record online, adding the location details along with the species.



When adding a location, the App will often locate to 6 figure grid reference, representing a 100x100m square. For a more accurate location, especially of your INNS sighting, it's a good idea to use an 8 or 10 figure grid reference if possible, as this represents a 10x10m or 1x1m square respectively. A good way to do this is to use the map within the App or Wired, zooming in and tapping the desired location or by using one of the many grid reference finder apps and adding the grid reference manually within the LERC Wales App or BIS Wired.

A detailed location name can also be helpful, along with any optional additional information which you can add in the Comments section of the App or online recording sites. For example, the accessibility, the size of area your INNS covers, which river or canal bank it is on and if the land is private. All this will help an INNS project officer locate your sighting in future.

The ability to add a photo to your record has greatly increased the chances of your record being verified as correct and also provides useful information on the size of INNS plants and their extent. App and online records submitted in the old Vice County of Breconshire are seen by the Botany verifiers and a photo is of immense help to confirm your identification.

Along with INNS species the LERC Wales App and BIS Wired online can be used to record all species, helping us to put wildlife on the map. For more on wildlife recording visit 'Get Involved' section of the BIS website, www.bis.org.uk, and a link to our YouTube channel with clips and films on recording.

Ben Mullen (Biodiversity Information & Communications Officer) - BIS

Rhondda Cynon Taf – Invasive Species Work

Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Council have recently appointed a full time Invasive Species Officer, Dave Brown. Our main objective is managing our Japanese Knotweed Treatment Programme, we employ an external contractor and we also treat some sites in-house through either stem injection or spraying, this year we have treated approximately 400 sites, and are currently dealing with approximately 30 Legal claims against the Authority, with this number rising year on year.

We have also worked in Partnership with local volunteer groups and The Cwm Taf Nature Network in carrying out Balsam Bashes at some of the Councils Countryside sites, and plans are in place for this to continue next year involving local School's to raise awareness of Himalayan Balsam and other Invasive Species in the area.

We are compiling some in-house basic training for various departments in the Council, i.e. grass cutters, streetcare officers to raise awareness of Invasive Species of what to do and what not to do.

We are in the process of creating an Invasive Species information page on the Councils website with various info, images and advice to the general public. We also hope to have a section for members of the public to report Invasive Species issues directly to the Countryside section, this should be up and running early in the new year.

Dave Brown – RCT Invasive Species Officer

My experience with Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) in Clyne Valley Country Park

Clyne Valley Community Project is a volunteer organisation who helps look after Clyne Valley Country Park. We work closely with Swansea Council, who are the landowners. I took on the role of biodiversity coordinator in 2019 –I soon learned our chief curse is Japanese Knotweed, *Fallopia japonica.*

A large part of Clyne Valley was used as a landfill site until the 1980s and knotweed is present all along the edge of the old tip. It was a sad day when I saw knotweed had crossed the river onto the bank that had been full of bluebells and wood anemones in the spring. Hence, I was highly motivated when Council officers

asked if I could organise volunteers to map the location and extent of *Fallopia japonica* so they could organise an eradication programme.

It was not an easy task but drawing on a range of skills and experience, including Swansea University academics, we were able to train teams of volunteers to walk the 750 acres of Clyne Valley and record their sightings. Our records were digitised and summarised – the shocking total was 122 locations amounting to over 20 thousand square metres cover. This ranged from small, scattered outbreaks, to the expanse of the tip edge which was estimated by pacing the ground and comparing with Google Earth imagery.

It has been immensely rewarding to see contractors on site applying treatment and receiving feedback on our work. We look forward to monitoring the outcome over the next few years.

Sheila Brooks, www.facebook.com/clynevalley clynevalleycommunityproject.uk/

Research

Celtic Rainforests Wales: Rhododendron Management Guide

Based on over 30-years of experience in the management of *Rhododendron ponticum* in Eryri, the Celtic Rainforests Wales Project have produced a toolkit aimed at aiding and advising individuals or groups who wish to control the highly invasive plant. Intended for a range of audiences, from individual garden owners to organisation or partnerships who seek to eradicate the plant on a landscape scale, the toolkit aims to lead users through the process of delivering effective management including, identifying and ascertaining the scale of the issue, deciding on the best method and scale of control, it deals with issues relating to consents and health and safety, and helps guide decision making in relation to determining who undertakes the work and how to measure success. Currently available as a series of bilingual (Welsh and English) downloadable PDFs from the Celtic Rainforests Wales website, anyone interested in the toolkit, who seek further advice, or simply want to provide feedback on the toolkit can contact the Celtic Rainforests Project on post@celticrainforests.wales.

Black Mountains College

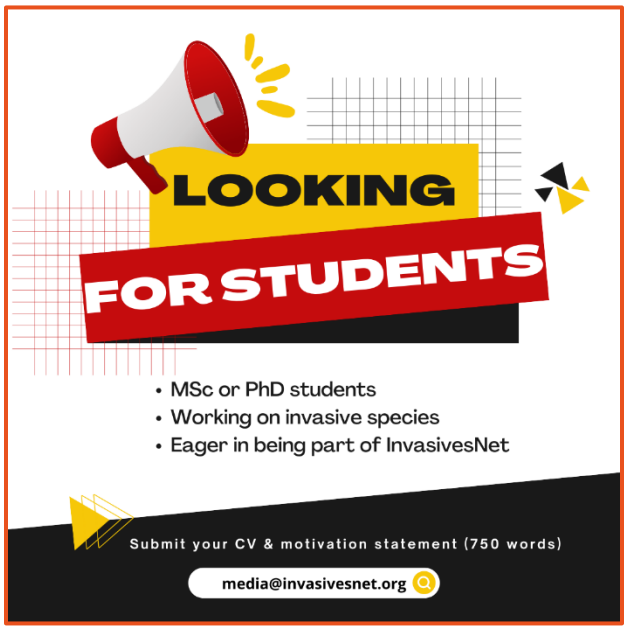
Working in conservation has often seen as a niche career path, the province of people who studied geography at GCSE and A Level and then Environmental Science at degree level. But these days, the saying goes, all jobs are climate jobs – or more accurately, climate and nature jobs since the crisis we face is not just about earth's climate, but the dawning realisation that we cannot go on as we have. In this critical moment, divisions between careers dissolve and sectors and worldviews collide. As the writer and visionary Colin Tudge has written, 'we must re-think everything in the light of everything else.' And so, for those that care about our natural world, conservation is not only about protecting specific areas its also

about transforming our economy to less consumptive patterns. And for those that would seek a lucrative career, it is no longer possible to do without paying attention to planetary limits.

This means what we understand by education and basic skills need radical updating. Preparing people for this sustainable world where nature, rightly, is centre stage, requires a holistic education that combines critical ways of seeking and thinking with basic ecological and climate literacy alongside a grasp of theories of change, power dynamics and how the whole fits together. This is the essence of the new degree we have developed at Black Mountains College, https://systemschange.uk now recruiting for our first pioneer cohort to start in September 2023. If you know of anyone seeking to re-appraise their world view and grapple with the immense changes underway then please let them know.

INVASIVESNET

The International Association for Open Knowledge on Invasive Species (INVASIVESNET) is a bottom-up initiative created by concerned scientists aimed at developing a sustainable **global network of networks** on invasive species. The Association will be formed by linking interested stakeholders and their networks including scientists and citizens, international and national expert working groups and initiatives, database managers, editorial boards of thematic open access journals, interested environmental agencies, practitioners and managers, affected and responsible industries, non-governmental environment protection organizations and educational bodies. The association will work as a community of practice, allowing networking opportunities, knowledge sharing and learning for each participant. This will promote more coordinated and managed ways to co-operate and to openly communicate research results so that invasive species management can be more efficiently transferred among all levels.



Good news! Thanks to the donations of members, INVASIVESNET can offer membership for students! INVASIVESNET are looking for students eager in being part of the Network. Are you an MSc or PhD student working on invasive species and interested in being part of INVASIVESNET? Send your CV and a short motivation statement (750 words) to: media@invasivesnet.org.

Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions!

Four Rivers for LIFE

The largest conservation project to help restore wildlife on four important rivers in South Wales was launched on Friday 28th October 2022. The Natural Resources Wales (NRW) led 'Four Rivers for LIFE' Project will protect, enhance and help restore the Rivers Teifi, Tywi, Cleddau and Usk. An estimated 776km of river will be improved.

The project, supported by the EU's LIFE Programme with funding also provided by the Welsh Government and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, will see over £9 million injected into tackling urgent conservation challenges over the next five years. The project will focus on:

- Improving river habitats and conditions for migratory fish – most notably Atlantic salmon, sea and river lamprey, bullhead and shad. Otters and freshwater pearl mussels are set to benefit too.
- Re-naturalising sections of straightened rivers so that they meander once again. This will benefit wildlife as well as the communities that surround the rivers as slowing the flow can reduce flood risk downstream.
- Working with farmers to protect river corridors and reduce sediments and nutrients from entering rivers. This will have the added benefit of safeguarding important drinking water supplies.
- Reducing the impact of invasive non-native species in 180km of river. Species like Himalayan balsam, American skunk cabbage, Japanese knotweed, and Giant hogweed will be controlled.

Find out more about the project here.

Be Plant Wise

This Autumn we are reminding gardeners to dispose of their garden waste responsibly to avoid spreading invasive plants. Please help us spread the word! Find out more about how gardeners can help tackle invasive species here or check out our explainer video.

You can also help us raise awareness by checking out these free leaflets, posters and social media graphics from the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat.

Find out more about WaREN

The Wales Resilient Ecological Network (WaREN) Project is being delivered by North Wales Wildlife Trust and the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. WaREN is funded by the Welsh Government Sustainable Management Scheme until April 2023.