

Wild North Wales

Winter 2022

The member magazine for North Wales Wildlife Trust

UNDERWATER WILDLIFE

Seal *of approval*

Why autumn and winter
are the seasons for seals

RESTORING
RESILIENCE

... to our North Wales
woodlands

HOME AND DECAY

The wildlife that thrives
in rotting wood



Ymddiriedolaeth Natur
Gogledd Cymru
North Wales
Wildlife Trust

Welcome ... to all our members!



As the next United Nations Biodiversity Conference draws near and the prognosis for the state of global biodiversity worsens, it's easy to lose faith in the importance of all we do at the local level. Indeed, as daily life seems to become even more uncertain, the importance of nature, for many, can start to take a back seat.

This, however, is exactly the right time to ramp up action for nature. Our commitment to increase the area of land in North Wales managed for nature is not 'nice to do' but essential. Our invitation to work hand-in-hand with others isn't a gesture of goodwill but a recognition of the importance of effective collaboration. Our target of supporting 1 in 4 people to take action for the environment isn't just a random figure: the science shows that if just one person in every four takes action, it can be enough to change the behaviour of the majority.

Now is exactly the time to act. Our health and wellbeing, our economy, our food, water and clean air are ultimately dependent on nature, and looking after nature on our own doorstep must be our first priority. If enough of us succeed in doing this then the future is entirely positive.

I hope you enjoy your copy of this magazine – it contains many great examples of action for wildlife; none of which would have happened without your support. Your membership is vital and really making a difference. Thank you.

Howard Davies
Chair, North Wales Wildlife Trust

Membership

As part of our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint, we haven't produced membership cards this year. But please tell us what you think – your opinion matters to us.



16



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OSTER CATCHERS © DAVID TIPUN 2020/VISION, SPRING MINING BEE © NWWT, ANN MCCARTER © NWWT, FIGHTING SEALS © THE BIG PICTURE, NATUREPL

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Wherever you are in the UK, your Wildlife Trust is standing up for wildlife and wild places in your area and bringing people closer to nature.

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6 ways to get involved with your local Wildlife Trust

Volunteer

Could you donate your skills and time to look after wildlife? A wide range of indoor and outdoor tasks need doing. northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteer

Campaigning

You can play a vital role in raising awareness, and lobbying, on local and national issues. northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/campaigns

Receive e-news

In a fast-changing world, receiving our weekly e-newsletter is more important than ever! Sign up today at northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/newsletter

Leave a legacy

Help protect local wildlife and wild places for future generations by leaving a gift in your Will. northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/legacy

Shop

Our online shop stocks a great range of nature-related items. All proceeds go to our conservation work. northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop

Events

We offer over 150 walks, talks and family-friendly events each year. Come and join us! northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/events

Your wild winter

The best of the season's wildlife and where to enjoy it in North Wales

WINTER SPECTACLE

Changing sands of time

The ever-changing tides and weather mean that no two visits to an estuary are ever the same. At high tide, wading birds gather in favoured locations, sometimes in very large and dense flocks which occasionally scatter into wonderful sky-patterns at the approach of a bird of prey. As the water recedes, they head to the tide line to find food, with the same large flocks soon distant and dispersed until, with the re-rising tide, they are gradually pushed back in to shore once more and return to their roosts.

The estuaries of North Wales are home to internationally important numbers of wading birds in the winter months. The most numerous on our shores are oystercatcher, curlew and redshank; with smaller numbers of dunlin, ringed plover and turnstone also feeding on the millions of tiny animals that live in the sand and mud. However, despite the abundance of food, living on an estuary is a harsh lifestyle – it's important that high-tide roosts are not disturbed so that the birds using them can save their energy to be used only when needed.

SEE THEM THIS WINTER

➤ Spinnies Aberogwen Nature Reserve

The estuary hide – one of three on site – offers views of the expansive Traeth Lafan and many thousands of wading birds.

➤ **Nantporth Nature Reserve** Beneath the woodland, on the banks of the Menai Strait, oystercatcher and redshank feed at the water's edge after high tide.

➤ **Traeth Glaslyn Nature Reserve** The expansive marsh and estuarine habitats are home to spectacular gatherings of waders in the winter; best experienced either side of high tide.

Oystercatchers

Thank you

You already support our estuarine habitats through your Wildlife Trust membership – as well as the hides which help people to view wildlife safely!

Adder



BRRR-umation!

Winter brings very different challenges for much of the UK's wildlife – temperatures are lower and food is often harder to find. Reptiles, in particular, all seem to vanish as the weather turns cold – they're ectothermic, which means that their body temperature is dependent on their environment. As it gets colder, they become more lethargic; less able to hunt; and enter 'brumation' in order to conserve energy and see them through until spring.

Although similarly characterised by extended periods of very minimal activity, brumation isn't true hibernation and is better thought of as a period of dormancy exhibited by both reptiles and amphibians in colder months. Other types of wildlife use alternative winter survival strategies – why not wrap up warm with a reference book and look up 'torpor', 'diapause' and (our personal favourite word) 'aestivation'?

Read more at

 wildlifetrusts.org/blog/hibernation-wildlifes-winter-survival-strategy

© JAMIE HALL

Colt's-foot



URBAN FIELDCRAFT

Scaly stems

Did you know that the disturbed ground often found in our gardens, parks and urban areas can be the perfect home for one of February's finest floral displays? The bright, yellow flowers of colt's-foot – held aloft on strange, woolly, scaly stems – appear long before the hoof-shaped leaves emerge from the ground; providing sunny colour for us to enjoy in even the bleakest of winter months. Alongside its commoner distant cousin, the dandelion, it also supplies a valuable source of nectar for early-emerging insects!

What it's not ...

Despite looking rather like a dandelion – and a bit like many other superficially similar flowers – colt's-foot can easily be told apart.

LOOK OUT FOR:

- **Flowers before leaves.** The two are rarely seen together, and this curious habit earned colt's-foot one of its early English names, 'son-before-father'.
- **Central floral disc.** Unlike dandelions, colt's-foot flower have a distinct, rounded centre to each flowerhead.
- **Heart-shaped leaves.** Once they appear, the leaves don't resemble those of dandelions at all – in fact, they are more easily confused with those of another early bloomer: butterbur!



SEE THIS

From brrr-umation to murmuration ... Look overhead at dawn or dusk for thousands of starlings flocking together to create mesmerising shapes in the sky.

SMELL THIS

Did you know that ladybirds can produce a foul scent when disturbed? Bear this in mind if you discover a huddle of native seven-spots or non-native harlequins overwintering indoors!

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Whooper Swan

Elegant and impressive, whooper swans arrive from the far north as autumn turns to winter.

Unlike our resident mute swans, whooper swans are scarce, seasonal visitors to Britain. Luckily for us, North Wales holds a couple of traditional wintering areas where small numbers may be seen between November and April. These two main haunts are the lowlands of central Anglesey and the Glaslyn Valley, near Porthmadog.

Named after their deep, bugle-like call, whooper swans differ from mute swans in their slimmer neck – usually held upright rather than curved – and their wedge-shaped, lemon-yellow and black bill. Bewick's swans are like a smaller version of whoopers, with a greater ratio of black to yellow on the bill. Up until the 1990s, Bewick's were also regular visitors to North Wales, but their wintering range has shifted eastwards and they're now rarely seen here.

Tough cookies

Whooper swans are hardy birds of the sub-Arctic – breeding mostly on boggy pools in taiga or semi-tundra habitats. At the northern edge of their range, they follow the retreating ice closely in spring. In autumn, as conditions harshen, whoopers that bred in Iceland and Scandinavia head south to Britain; a major undertaking for one of the world's heaviest flying birds. Witnessing them migrating in clean white formations, with their purposeful, straight-necked, straight-winged flight leaves an impression of powerful determination and endurance. Once here on their wintering grounds,



© JMARK THOMAS

whoopers feed mostly on aquatic vegetation in shallow water but, like geese, they can also graze on pasture or forage in arable areas. They will often be seen out on fields during the day, returning to roost on a lake or pool at dusk.

Swan song

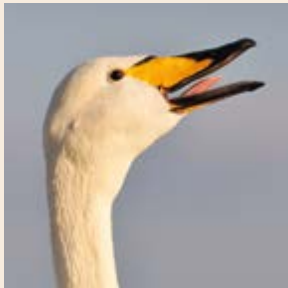
It's a very special mid-winter experience: a wetland at dawn under a big sky, with the light gradually coming up ... You stamp your feet in the cold; your breath steaming. The *tarth* (low-lying mist) hangs over stretches of open water. As low sun breaks through, you start to make out white shapes in the distance: long necks, a dab of yellow. The first tentative honks ring out ... They're whoopers!

SEE THEM THIS WINTER

- **Traeth Glaslyn Nature Reserve** Whoopers can sometimes be seen on channels and pools amongst the saltmarsh – or on fields upriver towards Pont Croesor and Llanfrothen.
- **Llyn Alaw / Llyn Cefni / Cors Ddyg** These Anglesey sites are favourite whooper roosting areas at dawn or dusk. Farmland between Llangefni and Llanerchymedd is worth checking during the day.

Top tips DID YOU KNOW? ...

Whooper calls are a loud, trumpeting kloo-kloo-kloo! Bewick's give single or double calls, usually higher-pitched.



© FERGUS GILL

Whooper wing-beats

make a hissing sound; mute swans make a throbbing, musical note.



© DANNY GREEN 2020VISION

Clean white blobs in a distant field may not be sheep – they may be whooper swans!



© DEREK MOORE

RS Thomas was one of the 20th century's foremost poets. He was also an Anglican priest and avid birdwatcher, often considering how the two interconnected ('the deity has chosen to reveal himself to me via the world of nature').



BARN OWL © DEAN EADES

Barn Owl

i.
Mostly it is a pale
face hovering in the afterdraught
of the spirit, making both ends meet
on a scream. It is the breath
of the churchyard, the forming
of white frost in a believer,
when he would pray; it is soft
feathers camouflaging a machine.

It repeats itself year
after year in its offspring,
the staring pupils it teaches
its music to, that is the voice
of God in the darkness cursing himself
fiercely for his lack of love.

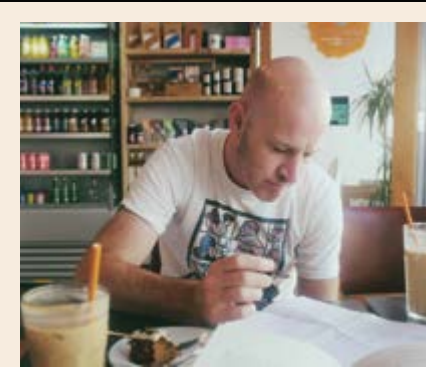
ii.
and there the owl happens
like white frost as
cruel and as silent
and the time on its
blank face is not
now so the dead
have nothing to go
by and are fast
or slow but never punctual
as the alarm is
over their bleached bones
of its night-strangled cry.

RS Thomas
from *The Way of It* (1977)
© RS Thomas Research Centre

Thomas uses sound
imagery throughout the
poem and provokes the reader
to question the different brains –
human and non-human – in which
the bird creates 'music', 'silence' or
'alarm'. It is not the owl's appearance
but its 'scream' that has the power
to bring the living world and
the divine into conflict.

The barn owl is the
sentient presence of the
graveyard – but is it just in its call that
it makes 'a believer' doubt themselves?
Or is there something in its predatory
behaviour – the 'cruel' inevitability that it will
render other animals into 'bleached bones' –
that evokes apprehension? Can God exist
if something so clinically designed for
'cruelty' can exist
simultaneously?

Which do
you think are the
most effective images in the
poem? Perhaps it's the haunting
appearance that led to barn owls
once being named 'ghost owls':
'white frost' that is 'repeat(ing) itself'
in different stanzas, or the clock
metaphor used to describe the
barn owl's facial disk ('time
on its blank face').



Glyn Edwards is a poet, teacher and PhD Researcher. His second book, *In Orbit*, will be published by Seren in early 2023.

Wild Words is seeking your poetic responses to Barn Owl, with the view to publishing a selection on our website and perhaps featuring one in the next edition of the magazine. Please send any poems that may have been summoned by the 'night-strangled cry' to glynfedwards@hotmail.com – we look forward to hearing from you!

The RS Thomas Research Centre at Bangor University is open to anyone interested in the poet, though they should contact Tony Brown or Jason Walford Davies to plan a visit. See rsthomas.bangor.ac.uk for more information.



David Oakes

@David_Oakes @doakesdoakes

Ancient trees

You start by entering your
postcode. A few moments later
you're rewarded with a map. Your
home at the epicentre, with every veteran,
ancient, and potentially superstar tree marked
accordingly, radiating outward from your
front door. This is the Ancient Tree Inventory.

My map shows the remains of the
medieval village of Marsden. My oldest
neighbour is Tree #158744 – simply "44" to
me. It's a pedunculate oak, over 6.5 metres
in girth and easily 500 years old. Maybe 600.
Maybe more... Chances are that it is the last
living survivor of long-lost Marsden.

Type in your postcode and you may
discover you live next to one of hundreds of
'celebri-trees': perhaps the Tolpuddle Martyrs'
sycamore that birthed the Trade Union
movement? Or maybe John Evelyn's black
mulberry, supposedly planted by Tsar Peter
I as an apology for his drunken antics! Who
knows what these trees really saw, but what's
important is that they remain.

A tree isn't just one organism, it's a
metropolis for life. My Marsden oak can
support well over 1,000 species: birds,
mammals, invertebrates, lichens, fungi,
bryophytes... Every nook of our nation's
biodiversity. In fact, the pedunculate oak
supports more unique species than any other
of our native trees. And the longer they stay
in the ground, the more interconnected they
become with the life they support. The late,
great, Oliver Rackham said: "Ten thousand
oaks of one hundred years are no substitute
for one five-hundred-year-old oak tree."

Our ancient trees are often found within
ancient forests that have existed since our
very first maps. Some could stretch back as

far as the last ice age. Ever since, they have
nurtured dense biological multi-species
interactions. Without them, we're just dusty
skeletons living in housing estates.

This summer, wildfires exacerbated by
human behaviour burned across the globe
and parts of the UK reached unprecedented
temperatures of over 40 degrees. Ironically,
the shade of a tree may be your best bet at
remaining cool. Through transpiration, the
area beneath a tree remains degrees cooler
than a similar area shaded by a man-made
structure. But even as the country cooked,
bulldozers were poised to tear down ancient
trees for the government's high speed rail link.

The Cubbington Pear Tree, #74902 on the
Ancient Tree Inventory, was voted the 2015
"Tree of the Year". Over 250 years old, it was
then the second oldest wild pear in the
country, possessing a girth of almost four
metres. Pear trees' fruit and blossom harbour
abundant mammal, bird, and invertebrate
life. This tree, and the biodiversity it homed,
was destroyed in October 2020 so that
Birmingham could become 12 minutes closer
to London. On the Ancient Tree Inventory,
the Cubbington Pear Tree is now simply
marked as "Lost".

Every tree lost is a blow to nature. Every
ancient tree lost expedites the collapse of our
nation's biodiversity. We have to protect these
ancient treasures.

Construction work for HS2 continues to damage
and destroy irreplaceable habitats. Find out more
and how you can help at

wildlifetrusts.org/hs2



**PUTTING TREES
ON THE MAP**

The Ancient Tree
Inventory is run by The
Woodland Trust and maps
over 180,000 of the oldest
and most important trees
in the UK. You can explore
the trees near you, or add
your own special trees, at
ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk

David Oakes is an actor,
podcaster, and ambassador
for The Wildlife Trusts. When
he's not on set or treading the
boards, he's out walking in a
glorious wild place talking to
experts about the natural world
and celebrating it in his podcast,
Trees A Crowd.

ILLUSTRATION © SEÁN RYAN / WWW.THESHAMANSHORSE.COM. DAVID OAKES HEADSHOT © GRAHAM MAKEPEACE-WARNE

Winter Wonders

Winter might seem a bad time to give birth in the wild but, as **Lisa Morgan** reveals, it's prime pupping season for grey seals.



Lisa Morgan has studied Pembrokeshire's grey seals for the past 20 years, including as warden of Ramsey and Grassholm Islands. She is now head of islands and living seas for the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.

The first newborn seal pup I ever saw was on the small island of Skokholm, off the Pembrokeshire coast. Cared for by The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, Skokholm lies two miles south of her more famous big sister, Skomer, and is not known for seals. Its red sandstone coastline may look beautiful, but it's exposed to the full force of the Atlantic Ocean. It can be an unforgiving place in an autumn storm. But through the drizzle and fog of that late afternoon in September, I was convinced there was something white on the beach below me.

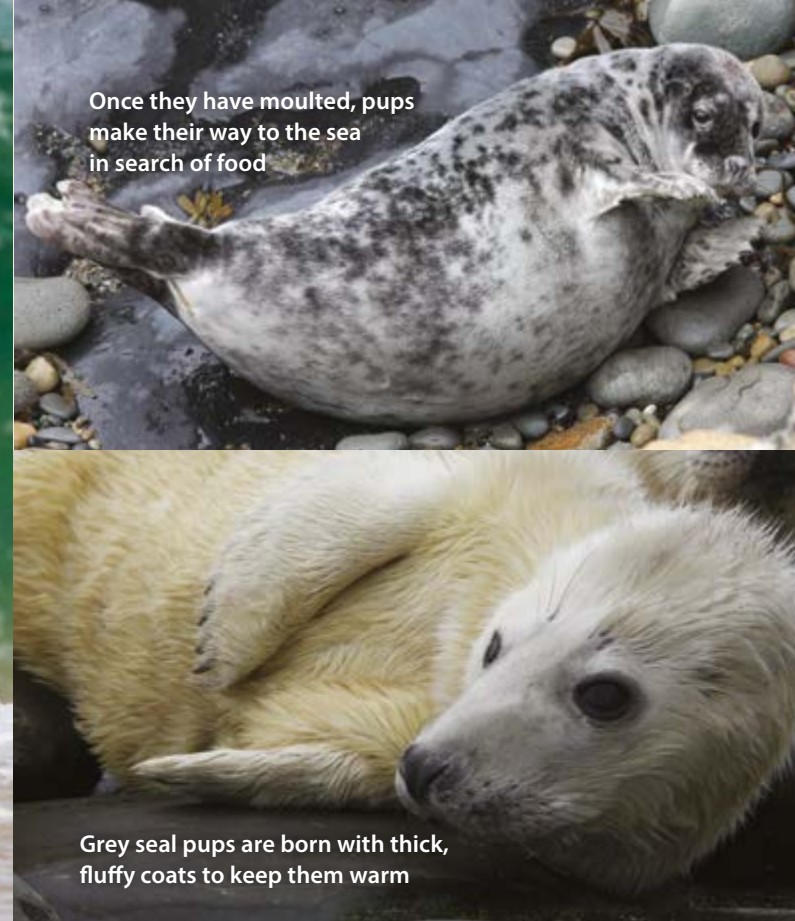
I was soaked to the skin, having slithered to the cliff edge on my belly. My binoculars were steamed up and useless. But sure enough, there was movement on the pebbles below me. Then, the now unmistakable cry of a pup, weak but determined, pierced the howl of the wind in my ears. I ran back to the cottage to tell the wardens. I was full of wonder and hope for the new life, born into the full force of the Pembrokeshire weather. I remember that feeling of elation as if it were yesterday, though over 20 years have passed. Despite having seen hundreds of births since, I still get the same tingle of emotions for each and every one.



Grey seal pups are born in winter when our weather is at its harshest



Bull seals will fight to control territories



Grey seal pups are born with thick, fluffy coats to keep them warm



Cow seals will stay with their pups for just 18 days

Why wait for cold weather?

Grey seals come ashore to give birth in autumn and winter, in a colony known as a rookery. The timing of the pupping season varies slightly around the UK. The Welsh rookeries are often the first to see pups, with the earliest arriving in August. There are and in southwest England, the season peaks in September and is largely over by October. In eastern England and Scotland, the season starts a little later and can extend into January or February.

Autumn and winter are known for their severe weather, so it seems like a strange time to give birth. It can certainly be hard to watch pups struggling to survive big seas and winter storms, exposed to the elements at the most vulnerable stage of their life. As recently as 2017, west Wales was pummeled by a relentless run of

There aren't many threats to young seals whilst they're at their rookeries... but one thing they are vulnerable to is disturbance.

exceptionally powerful storms. Storm Brian and Storm Ophelia struck at the peak of pupping season for Welsh grey seals, with devastating results. On some beaches, 90% of the pups were lost.

So why are grey seal pups born during one of the stormiest and most unpredictable times of year? It's all about the condition of the adults, especially

the females — called cows. Raising a pup is a big commitment in terms of energy. A cow seal will use up to 30,000 calories a day whilst suckling her single hungry pup. However, the real issue is that she has to do all of this whilst fasting! Females rarely stray far from their pup, so don't get to feed and top up their energy reserves. As the pups get fatter, the mothers get thinner. In fact, they can lose over a third of their body weight.

This is a strategy called 'capital breeding'. The cows rely on the energy that they collect and store before the breeding season starts. Summer brings calm conditions with plenty of prey, perfect for a seal to fatten up. By the end of the summer, the females are as fat and healthy as possible, so there's no better time to raise a pup.

Growing, growing, gone!

Seal pups don't spend long on land. Cows suckle their pup for an average of just 18 days. A healthy pup with an attentive mother should triple its birth weight in that time, gaining around two kilograms a day. They grow so quickly thanks to the rich, fatty milk of the cow seal — which is more like cream at an incredible 60% fat.



When the cow decides she's had enough and the pup is large enough, she abandons it and heads out to sea. The pup will remain in the rookery for a while, surviving on its fat reserves whilst it finishes moulting — pups are born with a fluffy white coat to keep them warm, but as they grow and build up a layer of insulating blubber, they shed their white fur for a darker coat. When hunger finally gets the best of it, the pup makes its way into the sea.

For a seal pup, feeding itself is all instinctive. It learns to find, catch, and eat food without any instruction or help from its mum. It's a tough challenge, and not all pups survive this vulnerable time. The mortality rate of pups in their first year can be pretty high, depending on how bad the sea conditions are that winter. The pups that do make it through their first year could go on to live for 25 to 35 years.

Beachmaster bulls

It's not just females that come ashore in autumn. Male seals, known as bulls, also haul themselves out at rookeries. They fight each other to hold territories, hoping to mate with the females within that territory. Females come into season 14 days after giving birth, so will still be suckling pups as males try to mate with them.

With bulls reaching two metres long and weighing over 230 kilograms, battles

can be brutal. They wrestle on the water's edge, biting each other on the thick skin around the neck, often drawing blood. Eventually the loser will retreat, chased into the water. The biggest bull seals will be the most successful, holding the best rookeries and mating with the most cows. They are called beachmasters. They hold their territory for as long as they can (usually around two weeks) before returning to the sea to feed. As with the females, they are fasting during this time so also lose a lot of weight.

“Despite having seen hundreds of births, I still get the same tingle of emotions for each one.”

Seal pregnancies last about nine months, but cow seals have the amazing ability to effectively pause their pregnancy. In a process called delayed implantation, the fertilized egg stops growing and doesn't implant on the uterus wall. A few months later, once the cow has had time to recover from the efforts of suckling a pup, the embryo implants in the wall and starts growing again. Around nine months later, the cow is ready to give birth.

Seal safety

There aren't many threats to young seals whilst they're at their rookeries, beyond the dangers of stormy weather and the occasional bull fight getting out of hand. But one thing they are vulnerable to is disturbance. Where possible, seals prefer places far from people. In Wales they often use pebbly, cliff-backed beaches that can only be reached from the sea. In the northeast of England and eastern Scotland many seals haul themselves up onto low, flat, grassy islands just off the coast. But if inaccessible spots aren't available, they will happily use more open areas. Some of the UK's biggest grey seal rookeries are on beaches in the east of England.

It's important to give seals some space. Spooking them by getting too close on foot, on the water with kayaks or paddleboards, or in the air with drones, can cause females to stampede into the water, putting pups at risk. In some cases, it can even lead to pups being abandoned. The seal season is one of our greatest wildlife spectacles, but it's one that's best enjoyed from a respectful distance.

Discover some of The Wildlife Trusts' top spots for seal watching at

[wildlifetrusts.org/seal-pups](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/seal-pups)

Rot Property

There's a busy market for deadwood dwellings!

Decaying trunks, rotting stumps, and fallen trees are all in hot demand. This prime real estate is home to a huge variety of wildlife. There's a fantastic range of properties in our deadwood portfolio, from the high-rise to the sprawling single-storey. These habitats all play an important role in the nutrient cycle, help to lock up carbon, and even improve the stability of our soils. Interested in seeing the particulars? Then let's go on a viewing and get to know the neighbourhood!

Chloë Edwards is director of nature recovery at Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Chloë is a deadwood enthusiast and loves marvelling at the life in the various deadwood features she's nurtured in her garden.

Family-friendly environment

Neighbourhoods rich in dead and decaying wood are home to incredibly diverse communities. Many of the residents are invertebrates and fungi that play an important role in breaking down wood. A lot of them are entirely dependent on dead or decaying wood for at least part of their life cycle — we call this saproxylic. Some of our most recognisable insects are saproxylic.

The larvae of the majestic stag beetle favour basement locations in underground deadwood, whilst black and yellow longhorn beetle larvae are long-term tenants of fallen branches, taking up to three years to leave their home as adults. Finding the ideal location for a young family is also high on the house-hunting agenda for the batman hoverfly. It seeks out rot holes in trees where wet, decaying wood makes an ideal nursery. Fungi that thrive in these locations range from the delicate stalks of candlesnuff fungus to the chunky chicken of the woods.

Location, location, location...

A third of all woodland birds nest in the hollows or cavities of dead trees. Great spotted woodpeckers drill their own holes, whilst nuthatches and tawny owls seek out existing gaps. Other birds of prey will use standing dead trees as a lookout post, or for somewhere to devour their prey.

Many of our bat species search for trees with lots of character (cavities, rot holes, fissures, and splits) in which to roost. Our biggest bat, the noctule, isn't put off by a pre-loved home. They often favour old woodpecker holes. The rare and elusive barbastelle bat, found only in woods with plenty of standing deadwood, often takes advantage of spaces behind lifted, flaky bark plates.


They are not alone in the vertebrate community in finding deadwood attractive. Through the seasons, many amphibians and reptiles will be taken with the charm of a log pile. Its amenities include shelter, a lookout point, somewhere to bed down, a sun lounger, and so many opportunities for eating out right on the doorstep — deadwood has it all!

On the water

It's not just land-lovers who appreciate deadwood. Fallen logs in rivers can provide the perfect refuge for fish and a whole host of aquatic invertebrates. They can also be a spraint spot for an otter, or a perch for a kingfisher. They even act as natural dams and can slow the flow of a river or stream, reducing erosion and holding water back in times of heavy rain, helping to make the landscape more resilient.

Your next move

With 13% of all plants and animals known in the UK directly dependent on deadwood habitats, it's a vital component of our landscapes. We must respect it, protect it, and seek to create more of it! Make a garden more appealing by creating a log pile. If you have a tree stump in the garden, leave it for your new wild neighbours to move into. Pop out the welcome mat and wait to see who turns up to the housewarming!

For tips on making a deadwood dwelling visit
 wildlifetrusts.org/log-shelter



Spring mining bee

It's the little things that count ...

Surrounded by human activity yet concealed behind a veil of trees, Marford Quarry is home to a huge variety of magnificent minibeasts – and much more besides!



Jordan Hurst

is our Reserves Officer for North-East Wales, working alongside Paul Furnborough. He's looking forward to having lots of mince pies this winter, but even more excited for spring to arrive!

Ruby-tailed wasp



Situated just north of Wrexham, Marford Quarry is a gem hiding in plain sight. The nature reserve is bounded by housing, a railway line and the busy A483 – and yet, upon entering, you'll find yourself transported to an unexpected oasis. This use of 'desert-y' language is deliberate – surrounded by shifting sand, you could easily be mistaken for thinking you were exploring the dunes of the Anglesey coast!

As its name suggests, Marford Quarry has an important industrial history. Sand and gravel were extracted from the site between 1927 and 1971, with the aggregate being used both in the construction of the Mersey Tunnel and as ballast on ships. In fact, it's thought that sand from Marford Quarry can be found as far afield as Staten Island, New York! The quarrying operations resulted in huge volumes of sand and gravel being moved around the site – and, when the quarry closed, grasses, scrubby plants and trees started to colonise these sandy pits and hillocks. The unusual assortment of loose, bare, sandy soil, shorter vegetation, herbaceous plants and trees soon made

the site a haven for invertebrates; and it was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1989. North Wales Wildlife Trust took on management of the site the very next year in order to secure its future.

Today, with assistance from Natural Resources Wales and local experts, we work to maintain areas of bare and partially vegetated ground and maximise the amount of standing dead wood we have on site. We rotavate large areas of sand using tractors and create south-facing, sunny slopes using excavators; whilst our dedicated volunteers cut back encroaching scrub and remove small saplings that would otherwise take over open areas. The groundworks are very visible, and often provoke questions from surprised visitors!

Such intervention may appear radical, but it has created more nesting opportunities for invertebrates – and resulted in more and more new species arriving. In fact, Marford Quarry is now thought to be one of the best sites in all of Wales for invertebrates, including 35 species of butterfly and over



Silver-washed fritillary

© DON SUTHERLAND



Shifting sands

© NWWT

170 species of bees, wasps and ants. The most notable minibeasts that thrive here are those which are sand-loving (psammophilic) and dead wood-loving (saproxyllic). From spring through to autumn, the reserve thrums with life as solitary insects busily feed, nest and find mates – and provide tasty meals for green and great spotted woodpeckers! Other feathered residents include buzzards and kestrels – often seen soaring over the quarry, on the lookout for the rabbits and other small mammals which make their home in the grassland and scrubby areas – and jays, using areas of bare ground as caches for their acorns.

On the quarry perimeter, remnants of ancient broadleaved woodland are indicative of how the area might have appeared prior to quarrying. Here, and in neighbouring Maes y Pant (run entirely by members of the local community), you can find many weird and wonderful fungi – including blushing brackets and birch

DID YOU KNOW The sand and gravel found at Marford Quarry was deposited in meltwater over **14,000 years ago** when two immense ice sheets collided – one from Snowdonia and the other from the Irish Sea!

Thank you

Your Wildlife Trust membership, alongside grant support, is allowing us to make Marford Quarry an even more spectacular place for wildlife and people alike.

polypores on the trees and candlesnuff fungus, earth stars and puffballs down on the ground. Meanwhile, in the main quarry basin, 'enclosure' fencing prevents rabbits from grazing away the growing stems of sprawling wild liquorice plants – not the edible kind! (Wild liquorice is normally found only in coastal areas, but also flourishes in Marford's sandy soils).

Marford Quarry's magnificent minibeasts – and the other wildlife found on site – are currently receiving a massive boost thanks to a grant funded by Welsh Government's Landfill Disposals Tax Communities Scheme, administered by Wales Council for Voluntary Action. Wildlife Trust staff, volunteers and contractors are working to make the nature reserve an even more enjoyable place for people to visit, with exciting events to get involved in and new interpretation showcasing some of the special species and habitats found here. In efforts to make the smallest creatures as visible as possible, there will even be some enormous wooden sculptures landing soon – watch out, Mothra!

Cynllun Cymunedau y Dreth Gwarediadau Tirilenwi

WcVA
CgGC

Landfill Disposals Tax Communities Scheme

PLAN YOUR VISIT

1 Marford Quarry

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Location: Marford, Wrexham, LL12 8TG

How to get there: 2.5 miles north northeast of Wrexham. Heading south into the village of Marford on the B5445, turn right onto Springfield Lane. There are spaces for six cars just beyond the railway bridge (SJ 365 563). To enter the reserve, walk back under the railway bridge and look for a public footpath sign and the reserve entrance.

Opening times: All day, every day.

Access: The site contains a network of paths over uneven ground with steep, gravelly slopes in places. Disabled parking and a wheelchair-friendly path are accessible with a Radar key from the entrance on Springfield Lane.

Phone: 01248 351541

Email: info@northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk

Website: northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/marford-quarry

TOP WILDLIFE TO SPOT

Jay: A colourful and charismatic member of the crow family, with brilliant blue wing patches. Look out for the small oak saplings shooting up from acorns that were originally stored by jays as food for the cold winter!

Green woodpecker: This colourful bird feeds on the many invertebrates found at Marford Quarry. Listen out for their loud, laughing call and look for their distinctive undulating flight.

Buzzard: The most frequently seen, medium-sized birds of prey, they can often be seen circling over Marford Quarry searching for small birds, mammals and even insects.

THINGS TO DO

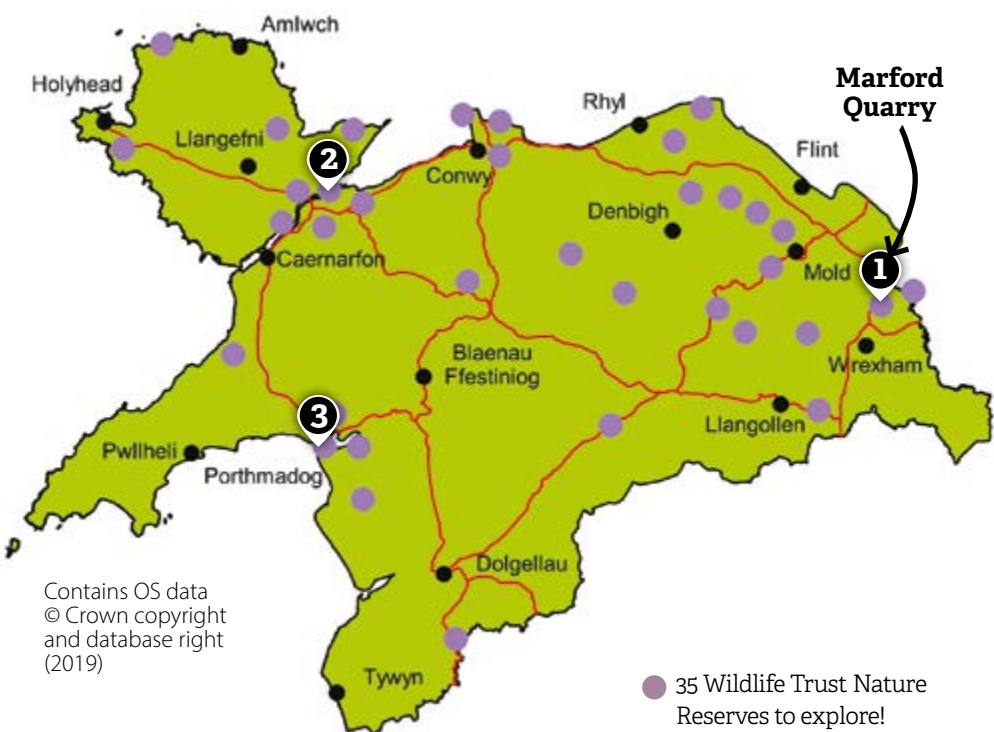
➤ **Go on a bug hunt!** We've given you a brief introduction, but there's lots more to see. Tell us what you find!

➤ Join us for one of the varied **events** we will be hosting at Marford Quarry over the coming months.

➤ **make your own** mini nature reserve at home! Leave cut dead wood on the ground and pile raked leaves and branches to provide some fantastic habitat for minibeasts in your garden.

© ANDREW MASON

More North Wales Wildlife Trust nature reserves for a great winter day out



PLAN YOUR VISIT

2 Nantporth

Why now?
Winter at Nantporth is a great time to see its history close-up. The footpath through the reserve follows the undulations of the former limestone quarry's spoil heaps and, with less foliage around to clothe them, the old workings can still be seen if you look carefully. Before the trees come fully into leaf, you can also enjoy great views of resident waders along the shore of the Menai Strait – or see how many corvids you can spot! Carrion crow, jay, magpie, raven, jackdaw and rook are all frequently seen here.



Know before you go
Location: Bangor
Open: All day, every day
Wildlife to spot: (in winter) corvids, oystercatcher, shelduck, little egret, red-breasted merganser, nuthatch, wren; (at other times of year) wood anemone, sanicle, primrose, gatekeeper, common twayblade, rare whitebeams (including one unique to this small stretch of coast)
Find out more: northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/nantporth

The lowdown
The Wales Coast Path leads you beneath an airy woodland canopy above a rich ground flora, racing to flower in spring before the trees fully awaken and cast them into summer shade. The rich diversity of tree species creates the perfect habitat for an array of woodland birds; including extended family groups of 10-20 long-tailed tits – listen out for their lively chattering! A lucky visitor may even catch a glimpse of a red squirrel, though you're more likely to come across the reserve's splendid array of snails, feeding on the algae and lichen that cover tree trunks and stones.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

3 Morfa Bychan


Why now?
The quieter winter months are a great time to appreciate the variety found within Morfa Bychan's complex sand dune system. Wrap up warm and you may be rewarded by the sight of hunting short-eared owl – and why not search the strandline for clues to the presence of offshore inhabitants, or see how many variations of banded snail you can find?

Know before you go
Location: Morfa Bychan, near Porthmadog
Open: All day, every day



Wildlife to spot: (in winter) short-eared owl, seabirds, strandline finds, banded snail shells; (at other times of year) marsh harrier, skylark, adder, burnet rose, stonechat, sea spurge, variegated horsetail, common lizard
Find out more: northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/morfa-bychan

The lowdown
As you walk inland from the shore at Morfa Bychan you can see new habitats being created with each step – over time, in-blown sand has become stabilised by vegetation; eventually even becoming fixed enough for trees to grow. Similarly, as the ground becomes more stable and the influence of salt diminishes, the plant communities change; creating six or seven different recognised habitats within the one reserve. Today's coastal developments mean that complete dune systems are becoming a rarer sight.

 Plan your next great day out from all our nature reserves at: northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/reserves

FOCUS ON... Agriculture (Wales) Bill

Take action
Your support for our campaign can make all the difference. Please contact your MS before 31 December 2022!



Putting nature first

Tell the Senedd you want to see laws that put nature first!
Did you know that almost 90% of the land in Wales is farmland? Or that Wales is one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world? Intensive farming is one of the factors that has contributed to this, but we know there are many farmers already helping nature – and more would if the right incentives were in place. It's critical that farmers are supported to manage land in a way that helps tackle both the climate and nature crises; and that farming continues to play its crucial role in supporting rural communities, Welsh culture and the Welsh language.



In the coming months, Welsh Government will be beginning to change the way that farming is funded across Wales through a new piece of law: the Agriculture (Wales) Bill. If a strong Bill is passed, farmers will be paid new, taxpayer-funded subsidies for something called a 'public good' – land that has a benefit to all people and not just the landowner. These benefits might include storing more carbon in peatbogs through making them wet again; planting more trees in the right places; or creating wetlands to help stop flooding. However, to make all of this happen, we need your help.

Your voice matters
We are asking you to write to your Member of the Senedd (MS) to ask for a Bill that is strong for nature and fair to our farmers for generations to come: a Bill that will put nature first and recognise farmers as the vital stewards of the land that they are. By recognising the importance of sustainable food; healthy, nature-rich habitats; and supporting our natural areas to do the best they can for climate and wildlife alike, we can make sure that nature also has a long-term home on farmed land across the length and breadth of Wales.

The Wildlife Trusts in Wales – in partnership with the RSPB, the Woodland Trust, WWF and Wales Environment Link – want to help as many people as possible to contact their MS. Together, we've developed an 'e-action' to make this easy – although, of course, you can still write to or email your MS through traditional channels. The link to use is below, but we need you to take action as soon as you can – and definitely before 31 December 2022. Together, we can make sure that the new Bill will:

- Restore and maintain farmland wildlife and the environment
- Significantly reduce harmful emissions that are contributing to climate change
- Stop using imported animal feeds linked to destroying the natural world overseas
- Develop opportunities to diversify food production for local markets
- Support community ownership, new entrants, better public access to the countryside and wider engagement in decisions about land use.

Don't delay – act today!
Our easy-to-use e-action form can be found at <https://bit.ly/3UoOchX>

Winter

Wildlife Gardening

Our gardens all but go to sleep in winter, as plants become dormant and most species are overwintering, but there are still ways to help your garden wildlife.

Hedgehogs and amphibians may be tucked beneath a large pile of leaves or in your compost heap, while insects may be sheltering beneath tree bark, in the folds of spent leaves and

seedheads, or amongst leaf litter. Avoid disturbing these habitats until mid-spring as any interruptions could cost valuable energy that isn't easy to replenish at this time of year; insects may also be vulnerable to fungal diseases if exposed to damp conditions.

Indeed, the best thing you can do for most wildlife at this time of year is to not garden at all! Leave plants in borders to rot down into themselves, avoid clearing leaf litter from your garden's edges (but do sweep leaves off paths and the lawn), and leave habitats such as log piles and compost heaps intact. If you have a meadow or other area of long grass, leave a 'buffer zone' uncut throughout winter, so caterpillars, beetles and other invertebrates can shelter in the thatch.

Of course, not all animals hibernate. Birds battle through the short days and cold nights, searching for food that's often hard to come by. If you have fruit trees, like crab apples, let windfall fruit remain on the


ground so thrushes such as redwings and fieldfares can help themselves. If the ground isn't frozen, you can add to your collection of fruit and berrying trees. Now's the time to buy bare-root trees and shrubs — hawthorn, rowan, holly, apples, crab apples, and pyracantha all produce fruit loved by birds, while birches and alder, along with plants such as *Verbena bonariensis*, lavender and teasels, offer seeds for a wide range of smaller species.

Filling supplementary feeders benefits smaller species like tits, which need to feed almost constantly in the daylight hours. Calorie-rich food such as fat balls, sunflower hearts and peanuts gives them the energy they need to shiver to keep warm at night. Leave scraps of seed at the back of borders for ground-feeding species like wrens. And don't forget water — not only do bird baths provide drinking

water, but by regularly topping up your bird bath you will also help birds to clean their feathers and regulate their temperature, vital on cold winter nights.

Do make sure you keep bird baths and feeders clean, as the number and variety of birds visiting them can spread diseases. Regular cleaning can help keep your garden birds healthy.

Get more wildlife-friendly gardening tips at

 wildlifetrusts.org/gardening



Kate Bradbury is passionate about wildlife-friendly gardening and the author of *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone* and *Everything* in association with The Wildlife Trusts.



Ann McCarter

Wildlife adventurer and Wildlife Trust supporter



I was born six months before the War, opposite an extremely noisy rookery and a bumpy lane that took us down to a canal. As a child, I vividly remember visiting St Abbs in Scotland – there were thousands of seabirds along the clifftops, of course, but what impressed me most was a small yellow bird: a yellowhammer, which my Dad said was saying ‘a little bit of bread and no cheese’ just to me. Later, I was pushed off to boarding school in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by acres of fields, the River Lune, countless birds and wild flowers and the rain slashing across the fells. When I subsequently went to University in Dublin, it was such a relief to be in a city small enough for the countryside to be within an easy bus journey – I’m definitely not a city person!

After David and I married, we holidayed in my family’s caravan on the inside edge of Morecombe Bay. There, we began to learn the waders at low tide, and when Leighton Moss opened (just a wooden hut at the time) we got more ‘into’ birds and tried to get there every weekend. They were still building the M6, so things were a bit fraught at the Lancaster end! We would often stay until 11 o’clock at night before tackling the motorway; and see roe deer in the woods – it was thrilling getting so close to things.

Soon, we started going on more exotic birding and wildlife holidays, and I’ve been lucky enough to visit a lot of places in the world. I once got left behind on Aldabra, north of Madagascar, in the middle of the Indian Ocean – the warden had been desperate to get home and there wasn’t room for both of us on our yacht, so I volunteered to stay behind until the supply boat came! I was there for about five or six weeks, getting to snorkel the second-largest coral atoll in the world – a truly terrific experience. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, diving then took over a bit – in the year 2000, when everybody thought that computers were going to go crazy, we retreated to the middle of the Pacific Ocean! I’m fortunate to have visited the Great Barrier Reef three times, as well as New Zealand, the Egyptian corals and most of South America on birding trips.

My first visit to Africa (I went with my Dad) became a major influence on a hobby

I came to practise in North Wales – and still would, if I could. A friend lent me his wife’s camera and long lens on the understanding that, when I came back, I would give a show to his film society. That started me off doing all sorts of slideshows for local groups; and I went to Crete for several years with a botanical specialist who taught me flower photography. I’ve now lived in North Wales for 58 years and practised all the techniques I was shown back at home, including during regular visits to what is now Minera Quarry Nature Reserve. Then, of course, it was still a working quarry – but there were still orchids as far as the eye could see, which David absolutely loved. This inspired me, seven or eight years ago, to suddenly let my lawn go – to my amazement, despite centuries of people cutting the lawn, up popped three common spotted-orchids that very first year!

David and I both knew how important it was – and is – to financially support wildlife and our local Wildlife Trust.

David and I both knew how important it was – and is – to financially support wildlife and our local Wildlife Trust. The plants and animals surrounding us need a healthy environment to live in; whilst we and the generations who will follow us need wild places to go, where we can all take a break from busy life and breathe in fresh air. Without these places and the wildlife that calls them home, we’d be in a right mess! To this end, we’ve been Wildlife Trust members for many years; David made a donation towards Minera Quarry and subsequently left a legacy; and I’ve pledged a gift to North Wales Wildlife Trust in my own Will. I know that I’ve been very fortunate in life; and consider it a privilege to know that my own passing will one day leave a unique, local, living legacy.

What will your legacy be? Visit northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/legacy to find out more.

Leave a legacy

Help protect local wildlife and wild places for future generations by leaving a gift in your Will.



David’s Legacy

Ann’s husband, David, was brought up in Shropshire. On becoming a doctor, he and Ann made their home in North Wales and –

when not taking care of the health of the local community – could be found recording badgers and bats, including a 200-strong roost of pipistrelles in their own home. However, David’s primary wildlife passions were birds and orchids, and such was his dedication to the latter that he gave a very substantial donation to North Wales Wildlife Trust to purchase and manage Minera Quarry as a nature reserve. Although David sadly died in 2017, his generosity continued with a further gift to the Trust in his Will – along with the fabulous collection of *New Naturalist* books on public display at our Bangor office. Thank you, David.

Did you know?

North Wales Wildlife Trust works with a number of partners who can help you create your **Will for free**. All free Wills are checked by a fully qualified UK solicitor and can be written online or at the office of a traditional solicitor.

“I am so grateful for this simple, fast, free Will service. It is a huge weight off my mind, and it is important to me that I could include a gift in my Will to help secure the future of wildlife in North Wales for future generations.” – Kirsty

If you have any questions about legacies or leaving a gift in your own Will, please contact our Legacy Development Officer, Mike, in complete confidence: mike.flaherty@northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk



© ANN MCCARTER

© NWWT MIKE FLAHERTY

Views towards the Clwydian range from
Graig Wylt Nature Reserve, near Ruthin

Restoring *resilience* to North Wales' woodlands

Thanks to The National Heritage Lottery Fund and National Lottery players, we are working to ensure that our woodlands can face the challenges of the future

They don't look well, do they? I'm sure you've seen them – those little blocks of woodland perched on a hillside or alone in a green-sea of prime agriculture land? Or those lines of hedgerow trees which have watched generations of people come and go, but now stand ageing and alone?

It's a sad fact that many of North Wales's wooded habitats really aren't very well – not so much true woodlands or hedges as mere collections of trees; with little chance of new trees surviving, whether destroyed by heavy grazing or shaded out by invasive rhododendron. Even our own nature reserves – amongst the best-managed woodland remnants in the region – face their long-term challenges. Big Pool Wood may be a wonderful place to walk and birdwatch but lies isolated on the coastal plain of Flintshire; whilst sea-level rise and coastal erosion threaten the ability of Nantporth (and its near-unique Menai Whitebeam) to naturally regenerate. If our woodlands are to survive and flourish in the face of a changing climate – and, amongst the trees, the bluebells and warblers; fritillaries and lichens – we need to increase our understanding

of what makes them tick and the conditions they will need. Thanks to The National Heritage Lottery Fund and National Lottery players, this is exactly what we've been doing – carrying out a health check across our woodland nature reserves. We've looked at the individual trees and other plants present, of course, but we've also tried to get a real picture of the state of each of the different layers within the woods. As though we were exploring a lost medieval mansion, we've wandered around the ground floor; looked up to the storey above; peered at the roof (the tree canopy); and, occasionally, glimpsed the cellar: the soil beneath. With ash die-back now so common across our sites, we are now typically felling ash trees while it is safe to do so – but we've been looking for opportunities to create standing and fallen deadwood with niches and crevices for bats, saproxylic beetles and other invertebrates to take up residence. However, our woodland nature reserves (even when combined with those owned by other environmental organisations) comprise a tiny fraction of the current and potential wooded habitat in North Wales. In order to truly



Chris Wynne
is the Wildlife Trust's Senior Reserves Manager and an amateur triathlete!



Jonathan Hulson
is the Wildlife Trust's Alun and Chwiler Living Landscape Manager and Pro Silva Representative of the Continuous Cover Forestry Group in the UK.

Rhinoceros beetles are well known for their unique shape and large size. This impressive insect is saproxylic, meaning that its adult or larval stage is dependent on dead or decaying wood.



© PHILIP PRECY



The pied flycatcher is a summer visitor, migrating here from West Africa to breed. Look for the small, black-and-white male bird in our woodlands such as at Coed Crafnant, Gwaith Powdwr and Coed Cilygroeslwyd – they'll frequently nip out from a perch to catch flying insects!

© RICHARD STEEL



- The total tree and woodland cover in Wales is just over 400,000 hectares – 19.4% of the land area. Only around 95,000 ha is considered Ancient Woodland: the sites of greatest conservation value.
- 9 of North Wales Wildlife Trust's 35 nature reserves could be considered as woods, with significant areas of woodland on a further 10 – all adding up to around 1/5 of our estate (160 ha).



increase nature's resilience, we need to help private landowners realise the potential of their woodlands, hedges and spaces where they could develop. We've been focussing our efforts on restoring the Alyn and Wheeler river valley in North-East Wales – a programme of work that we call our Alun & Chwiler Living Landscape. Here, this winter, we'll be supporting farmers and other private woodland owners with sensitive thinning and coppicing operations to

enhance ancient woodland ground flora; and showcasing mechanical wildlife hedgelaying as a sustainable long-term method of creating and managing wildlife-rich hedgerows. We also know that the resilience of our trees and woodlands and health of other habitats and species are interdependent, and are fortunate that the funding we've received has been sufficiently flexible to allow us to complete more wide-ranging work for wildlife. Along the Alyn and

... the resilience of our trees and woodlands and health of other habitats and species are interdependent



© NWWT



© ZSUZSANNA BIRD

Wild and ancient
High up on the side of its remote valley, Coed Crafnant's story is a long one, intertwined with the history of the other woodlands along the valley of the Afon Artro. There are chapters which could tell of dense woodland, of grazing pasture, of tanning and mining – but always, of course, of trees. Today, the woodland canopy of this wonderful North Wales Wildlife Trust nature reserve is dominated by oak, birch and ash – with the occasional rowan growing tall enough to join them. This canopy is punctuated by wind-torn spaces which each mirror a shattered tree decaying on the floor below. The rotting trunk rests on a carpet of mosses: one of the most amazing carpets you could ever see, made of rare silks and threads, intricately woven at a microscopic scale by tongue-twisting mosses such as *Harpalejeunea* and *Pseudomarsupidium*.

Wheeler river banks, for example, we're continuing to plant riparian trees such as alder, aspen and willow – valuable improvements to local biodiversity in their own right, but which also prevent soil erosion and help reduce water temperatures for young fish fry, especially brown trout. Meanwhile, our farm-based work, in partnership with the Welsh Dee Trust, has allowed us to identify pathways of rural diffuse pollution and prioritise locations for new tree planting, wetland creation and the over-sowing of herbal leys (complex mixtures of different species of grasses and wildflowers). This all helps to conserve our threatened freshwater biodiversity across the twin river catchments. Finally, we all know that, from small acorns, big oak trees grow. Although this phrase rather nicely sums up the inherent links between our nature reserves and the landscapes around them, it also (more literally) lies at the heart of our growing network of tree nurseries. These nurseries – at their most developed in the area immediately around Aberduna Nature Reserve – will provide a long-term supply and wide range of locally sourced trees; ensuring both the survival of key species such as the Menai Whitebeam and the

Spectacular discovery
The 'Spider Rowan' of Penycloddiau was discovered some years ago by the late Iff Simey, a key landowner in our Alun and Chwiler Living Landscape area. The tree grows like a spider, crawling over the outer ramparts of Penycloddiau Iron Age hillfort near Nannerch, and has a crown circumference of 61 metres! Due



© NWWT JONNY HULSON

to its sensitive location on the edge of a scheduled ancient monument, we invited Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory to help – and, after the assessment of the core dating evidence and historic mapping, we are confident that the tree is approaching 200 years old, making it a candidate for the oldest Rowan tree in Britain. In 2021, the tree won the 'Great Trees of Offa's Dyke' competition. Our staff are now working with Cadw to look at fencing options to protect the tree – and hopefully create new breeding habitat for conservation priority bird species such as ring ouzel and whinchat.

genetic resource provided by individual specimens such as the 'Spider Rowan' (see box). They are also key locations for shared training opportunities and experiences with partner organisations and local community groups – the sowing, potting on and rearing of young trees providing an often meditative, low-risk entry point into the wider world of conservation volunteering. We would be the first to admit that it is unrealistic to think that, in the matter of a year or two's-worth of project work, we'll have solved the problems facing our own woodlands – let alone those owned by others. However, these past couple of years have helped us learn valuable lessons and sown the seeds that will help us ensure that we can make these special habitats more resilient to the challenges they will unavoidably face. Only by meeting these challenges head on can we be sure that our woodlands will be there for future generations to enjoy.



WILD NEWS

All the latest regional and national news from The Wildlife Trusts



AVIAN FLU

The 'other' global pandemic


For many, a wonderful summer of sunny weather was blighted by the impact of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI or 'bird flu') on seabird colonies around the British Isles. Although Wales was spared the worst of it, the gannet colony at Grassholm was seriously affected, and it was with some relief that the tern colony at Cemlyn avoided the disease.

Attention is now focussing on the large gatherings of wintering birds seen around the Welsh coastline. A range of organisations are working to develop a national response plan for HPAI in wild birds, including representatives from Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts. Here in North Wales, we have issued specific instructions (based on DEFRA guidelines) to staff and volunteers on how to respond should they encounter dead birds, and update them regularly as part of our ongoing health and safety work.

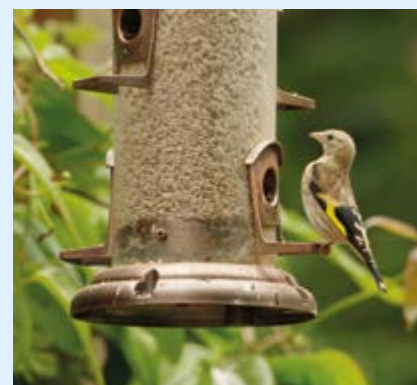
The Wildlife Trusts are extremely worried about the impact that this outbreak will have on our already threatened wild bird populations – at

Sadly, avian flu is just another symptom of an ailing ecosystem.

the very time when we need to focus on building resilience in vulnerable populations through species recovery and conservation measures. We're calling on the UK government to develop a meaningful national strategy that will help wild bird populations recover – and to invest time and money into understanding how to avoid similar tragedies in the future.

 The risk of humans contracting avian flu from wild birds is very low, but it's still recommended that sick or dead birds are not touched or picked up. Please report any discoveries of more than 1 dead bird of prey; 3 dead seabirds or wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or any 5 other birds to the DEFRA helpline (03459 33 55 77).

Birds can be infected with the avian influenza virus through contact with infected individual birds or waste products – and not all infected individuals will show any evidence of disease. The movement of poultry around the globe and natural wild bird movement (including migration) are the main causes of transmission.



It is currently recommended that garden bird feeders are cleaned weekly with an appropriate disinfectant – and that good personal hygiene should be followed whilst doing so.

© GILLIAN DAY



CORPORATE SUPPORT

Natural Partners: working for wildlife


Our Natural Partners come in many shapes and sizes but have one thing in common – a commitment to working in partnership with us to help nature's recovery in North Wales.

Albion Eco, who have been supplying water to local industry since 1999, have recently made a hugely significant investment in our Ddôl Uchaf Nature Reserve. In committing to support amounting to £25,000, they'll be helping us manage the site for its uncommon wildflowers, reptiles, amphibians and dormice; and enabling the first systematic monitoring programme in decades. David Knaggs, Managing Director, writes: "Having established protected areas and key wildlife sites alongside other community water zones, it seemed only natural that we should support North Wales Wildlife Trust in enhancing biodiversity and promoting opportunities for local people to enjoy wildlife and open



space. I am hoping that our financial support will lead to demonstrable benefits for some iconic species."

Meanwhile, our Woodlands for Water project team have been delighted to be working with Moel Famau Donkeys. Together, we've been able to plant silver birch, oak, rowan, hornbeam, hazel and Scots pine trees on their land in the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB – planting which will both help reduce flood risk along the River Alyn catchment and make their trail as attractive as possible to donkeys and people alike!

 Know a business who would be interested in our Natural Partners scheme? northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/corporate-support



RESERVES

As autumn approaches and bird migrations get under way, we often expect some interesting sightings from around our nature reserves. A recent osprey visit to Spinnies Aberogwen, near Bangor, was not that unusual – but what was different was the fact the un-ringed juvenile female stayed around for about a month, often feeding in the lagoons and regularly perching in full view of the hides or paths! She eventually moved on as the weather turned – we hope she has a successful flight south and returns in a couple of years to breed successfully in the UK ...

Together we're stronger

Our volunteers made a fantastic difference in 2022!

14,971

volunteer hours

given by our 400+ volunteers helping to care for our nature reserves
northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteer

30

surveys

to monitor our precious wildlife, including spotted rock-rose, marsh gentian and spiked speedwell

Thank you!

4

Vounteer of the Year awards

– see p. 30 for the full story!

3,000+

hours

spent keeping an eye on the Brenig Osprey Project nest site by our volunteer team



We bet you didn't know...

We were recently made aware of a wild discovery in a pond at Gwaith Powdwr Nature Reserve – a UK first! You won't be able to spot it, though: *Artodiscus saltans* is a micro-organism smaller than a strand of human hair ...



GIFT IDEAS

Have a 'wild' Christmas

Want to make your loved ones' Christmases a bit more 'wild' this year? North Wales Wildlife Trust has got you covered!

Our online shop has lots of gift ideas for the festive season, including books, hats and scarfs, wildlife-themed models to build and ID guides to get you and



your family and friends that much closer to nature. Or why not consider one of our 'sponsor a species' packs? They're a great way of helping some of our most vulnerable wildlife without acquiring more seasonal 'stuff'. Finally, you could even give the 'gift that keeps on giving' this Christmas – a gift of North Wales Wildlife Trust membership!



Visit our website for giftideas: northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/christmas-gifts

REGIONAL

Stopping the spread

The invasion of non-native cotoneaster – escaping from our gardens to smother our wild landscapes – has contributed to the wider decline of 90% of Wales's semi-natural grasslands during the latter half of the twentieth century.

However, you – and your fellow gardeners – can help! Our plant swap scheme offers a £10 National Garden Gift Voucher in exchange for removing invasive cotoneaster from your garden. Not only will you be able to buy other pollinator-friendly plants, but you'll be actively protecting our limestone grasslands and their special species – including the beautiful silver-studded blue butterfly.



To find out more, visit northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/take-action/plant-swap-scheme

Three cheers for our volunteers!

Every year at our AGM and in this magazine, we pay tribute to volunteers who have made a particularly outstanding contribution to our work. We're incredibly grateful to all of you and wish we could single out everyone for individual mention!

This year, **Gold Badges** – the highest recognition we can bestow – were awarded to Richard and Janet Holland and Christine Meller for their long-standing volunteering at our Gwaith Powdwr Nature Reserve. Without their help, this former explosives factory would not have been transformed into the amazing haven for wildlife that it is today.



Our **Volunteers of the Year** are Dennis Prosser and Rowena Lovatt for their work on our nature reserves in north-east Wales and supporting our 'Woodlands for Water' project. They both volunteered over 250 hours of their valuable time and made a significant contribution to our work.



Ben Edwards has been recognised as our **Young Volunteer of the Year**. Ben started volunteering in summer 2021 and, from the very start, he rolled up his sleeves and got stuck in!

The **Volunteer Groups of the Year** were awarded to our wonderful seal monitors, who have been a visible presence at a seal haul located on the North Wales coast, and our Cors Goch Wednesday volunteers who meet every week, rain or shine, and get involved in all aspects of reserve management. Thank you one and all!

UK NEWS

UK UPDATE

Beavers are making a comeback across Britain

You made the government give a dam!

England has taken a few tentative steps towards seeing a return of beavers to the wild, following new legislation announced by Defra. The legislation will provide legal protections for beavers in England, making it an offence to deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or injure beavers, or damage their breeding sites or resting places, without holding the appropriate licence. The legislation is scheduled to come into force in the autumn.

These new protections could pave the way for beavers to be released into the wild in England under licence, finally making a widespread comeback after being hunted to extinction in the 16th century. This decision echoes the path taken in Scotland, where beavers were declared a European Protected Species in 2019, affording them similar protections to those proposed in England.

The legislation was initially due to be laid in parliament on the 19th of July, but the UK Government held it up at the last minute. Following outrage from nature charities and the wider public, including lots of Wildlife Trust supporters, the decision was reconsidered and the announcement made just a few days later.

Beavers are ecosystem engineers. Their actions create thriving and dynamic wetlands that bring a wealth of benefits to both nature and people, including playing a critical role in adapting to a changing climate. Long-term studies of beavers from the Scottish Beaver Trial and in enclosures in England have demonstrated the improvements they can bring to our rivers and wetlands, making it clear that beavers

belong in our landscape.

Commenting on the UK Government's decision, The Wildlife Trusts' chief executive Craig Bennett says: "The widespread return of wild beavers can be a game changer for restoring lost wetlands, benefitting all kinds of wildlife, and helping people by holding water back in the landscape, reducing the risk of wildfires and reducing the risk of flooding downstream. Bringing back wild beavers isn't just a dream, it is a critical part of addressing the climate and nature crises."

Whilst The Wildlife Trusts believe bringing back beavers is essential, reintroducing any ecosystem engineer is a delicate operation. Natural England is developing guidance on the management of beavers, setting out the actions that will or will not require a licence. We are urging the UK Government to support ambitious and carefully targeted reintroduction projects, reward landowners who make space for wetlands created by beavers, develop management systems that protect beavers and resolve issues effectively, and support local beaver management groups to deliver advice and assistance.

The news of this legislation came as Wildlife Trusts around England celebrated the birth of beaver kits at enclosed projects on nature reserves. The Welsh Beaver Project, led by Wildlife Trusts Wales, also saw its first kit born at an enclosure at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust's Cors Dyfi nature reserve.

Get the latest on our journey to bring beavers back to Britain at wildlifetrusts.org/saving-species/beavers

The beaver comeback

2001

Kent Wildlife Trust bring the first beavers back to Britain in an enclosure at Ham Fen.

2009

First beavers officially released into the wild by the Scottish Beaver Trial.

2014

Beavers discovered living wild on the River Otter in Devon. Devon Wildlife Trust begin England's first wild beaver trial.

2017

The Scottish Beaver Trial release more beavers to reinforce the population.

2019

Beavers designated a European Protected Species in Scotland.

2020

Beavers allowed to stay on the River Otter.

2021

Wildlife Trusts release a record number of beavers (17) into fenced areas across Britain.

2022

Legislation announced to make beavers a protected species in England.

Beavers in Wales

The Wildlife Trusts in Wales welcome the news the Eurasian beaver is now officially recognised as a native species in England. We hope to see beavers officially back in Wales soon! The Welsh Beaver Project recently held a series of consultation workshops on their beaver reintroduction proposals; whilst Natural Resources Wales will also run a national public consultation on the reintroduction of beavers in due course.



SWIMMING BEAVER © RUSSELL SAVORY; STANDING BEAVER © NICK UPTON

UK HIGHLIGHTS

UK UPDATE

Government off target

In 2020, the UK Government committed to protecting at least 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 – its 30x30 target. Two years on, nature campaigners are warning that little progress has been made towards this promise.

The 2022 Progress Report on 30x30 in England, published by Wildlife and Countryside Link, revealed that just 3.22% of England's land and 8% of the sea was effectively protected by 2022. This is only a 0.22% increase on the amount of land protected in 2021. Much greater progress is needed if the Government is to keep to the commitment of 30x30, yet plans for deregulation have risked sliding backwards.

Within weeks of Liz Truss becoming the UK's Prime Minister, the UK Government

made a string of announcements that threatened nature. This included a new bill that would allow them to reform and revoke hundreds of laws with their origins in EU policy, including many of our environmental regulations. Government also announced new investment zones, which could pave the way for developers to concrete over some of our most important wildlife sites.

The 2022 Progress Report argues that we need "designation, not deregulation". Although Liz Truss's term as Prime Minister has ended, it is essential that the UK Government returns to its commitment of protecting more land for nature, rather than continuing Truss's attack on it.



Wildfires are becoming more common due to climate change

Crisis calculations

The Wildlife Trusts have published a groundbreaking report examining the projected impacts of climate change on our nature reserves. It assesses the risks of a changing climate and what we need to do to help nature adapt. The report shows that extreme weather is already affecting many nature reserves through wildfires, flooding, and drought. Research

finds that by the 2050s, half of our nature reserves will have 30+ days of very high fire risk a year, and 55% will see nearby river flows drop by more than 30% during times of low flow. The report also shares innovative Wildlife Trust projects that aim to reduce the impacts on wildlife. Read the report at wtru.st/changing-nature

Discover how
The Wildlife Trusts
are helping
wildlife across
the UK



1 Chalk up a win

Two Hertfordshire chalk rivers have been given a makeover to combat low flows and climate change. Work on the rivers Ash and Quinn, led by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, included adding gravel to address historic dredging, and the creation of ponds and ditches to shelter wildlife. This will help the rivers cope with the pressures of climate change.

wtru.st/two-rivers



2 Pining for a comeback

Devon Wildlife Trust is part of a partnership that announced plans for a possible reintroduction of pine martens to the South West of England. The Two Moors Pine Marten Project is exploring the feasibility of bringing these once common mammals back to Exmoor and Dartmoor. At the same time, Kent and Sussex Wildlife Trusts are looking at returning pine martens to South East England.

wtru.st/two-moors-martens

3 A tree for all

Alderney Wildlife Trust has been working with the States of Alderney to give every resident a free native tree to plant this year. They can be planted in gardens or at organised sessions, allowing everyone to get involved. As a result, by spring there will be at least an additional 2,000 trees in the ground.

wtru.st/2000-trees