

Wild About Gwent

AUTUMN/WINTER 2025

MISSING LYNX
GWENT'S CURLEW
NOTICE OF AGM



Ymddiriedolaeth
Natur
Gwent
Wildlife Trust

Cylchgrawn yr Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gwent

WELCOME TO OUR AUTUMN/ WINTER ISSUE



As Autumn starts its colourful descent into winter, I am in reflective mode having been CEO for Gwent Wildlife Trust about a year now. How quickly and joyfully those 12 months have passed. I've visited 16 of the wondrous 28 nature reserves we look after, and over the summer months I have met many of the partners and

collaborators who are working alongside us for nature's recovery within Gwent and beyond with my fellow Wildlife Trusts in our Federation.

Right now I am leading the Trust through a Strategy 2030 refresh; our three goals of Nature Recovery, People taking Action and Nature-based Solutions still stand strong but there is much to do in influencing the political, economic and social landscapes, let alone the environmental landscape, especially in light of the impending Welsh Government elections next May.

Over the past few months we have been working hard in explaining to the media our position on solar farms on the Gwent Levels, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). We need renewable energy as part of the adaptation to climate change but not at the expense of special places for wildlife and people. Welsh Government planning guidance must be stronger on this if we are to protect the 12% of land in Wales that is designated as a SSSI.

The power of people and nature was drawn into sharp focus for me in September. I visited Peterstone Wentlooge's coastal nature reserve to thank the dozen or so volunteers who had turned out in damp, cold weather to litter-pick this important coastal saltmarsh. On my walk in, I was treated to a kingfisher flying along one of the reens, dazzling me with his handsome iridescent feathers of blue and orange. Volunteers – litter picking – wetland habitat – kingfisher – what a connection!

So it's clear that nature is for all seasons – get out and enjoy it whatever the weather, make your heart sing, fill your lungs with fresh air and clear your head for some wild encounters. I hope this edition of Wild About Gwent inspires you to do so. Enjoy!

Natalie
CEO

p.s. I hope to see many of you, recent or veteran supporters, at our AGM in November.



Above, read about the Missing Lynx project in a special feature starting on page 18, and left, discover the breeding sites of Curlew throughout Gwent on page 16.

Below, our cover this issue Fly agaric by Guy Edwardes /2020VISION.



GWENT WILDLIFE TRUST EDITORIAL TEAM & CONTRIBUTORS

Debbie Stenner (Editor), Ben Boylett, Caitlin Bucher-Flynn, Natasha Burgon, Natalie Buttriss, Thomas Campbell, Lois Holroyd, Andy Karran, Robert Magee, Joe Ryder, Charlotte Spring, Ian Thomas, Alice Rees.

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS / THANKS TO

Verity Picken, Ellen Winter, Dr Deborah Brady.



JOIN TEAM WILDER AT GWT!

To find out more about the work of GWT, become a member/volunteer, get involved in our events, read our latest blogs, and visit our website to see other updates. www.gwentwildlife.org

GET IN TOUCH WITH US:

Call us: 01600 740600
Email us: info@gwentwildlife.org
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YouTube: Gwent Wildlife Trust
LinkedIn: Gwent Wildlife Trust

GET ALL THE LATEST GWT NEWS

You can receive our monthly updates on all things wild and wonderful in Gwent by signing-up to our newsletter: www.gwentwildlife.org

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Blue Tit Silent Valley



OUR NEXT CHALLENGE

Helping Winter Wildlife

In the run up to this Christmas, we are excited to launch our next Big Give matched funding appeal, where every donation will be doubled (until we reach our target). That means your gift will go twice as far for nature. Our goal is to raise £25,000 between Tuesday 2nd and Tuesday 9th December 2025, and donations made online during this week will unlock match funding.

Winter is a season of survival. As frosts bite and daylight shortens, food becomes scarce and shelter harder to find. For creatures such as hedgehogs seeking safe places to hibernate, dormice curled away in leaf litter, or water voles clinging on in fragile wetlands, the colder months are full of challenges. Even our garden birds struggle as berries are stripped from hedgerows and insects vanish – a reminder that for much wildlife, winter can be the hardest test of all.

While winter is the more dormant season for trees and other wildlife, habitat management is crucial, so our nature reserves team are especially busy.



Rose Coppicing Llandegfedd

By supporting our Winter Wildlife Appeal, you will enable us to:

- Protect and restore winter habitats – from coppicing and orchard management to safeguarding hedgerows and wetlands, ensuring safe havens and reliable food for the months ahead.
- Deliver targeted conservation for vulnerable species – giving hedgehogs, dormice, and water voles the protection they need to survive the harshest season.
- Support vulnerable communities by providing opportunities for people to enjoy winter walks, wildlife gardening, and outdoor activities that boost wellbeing and combat isolation.
- Empower everyday action – helping people take small but meaningful steps,

from feeding garden birds to leaving leaf piles for insects and mammals, each act making a real difference for wildlife.

TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE

Support for our appeal in April has already made a lasting difference for Gwent's hidden havens through our local wildlife site project. With your support again this Christmas, we can help more people and wildlife through the winter, and build a wilder, more resilient Gwent for generations to come. Keep an eye on your emails, our website and social media as we will share more news on this exciting appeal in the coming months!

A HUGE THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS PLEDGE CHAMPIONS!

Before our Christmas Big Give appeal launched, we needed support from pledgers to help us unlock our total campaign target. Together, our amazing pledgers have this year committed **£6,250** towards our Christmas Appeal! Their generous support means we can unlock the full match funding potential of our campaign towards our target of £25,000! If you'd like to find out more about becoming a pledger for future appeals, please get in touch with Alice.ares@gwentwildlife.org



Water Vole



Hedgehog



Magor Marsh - Winter - Frozen Reen



Foreshore cleanup



Dormouse in box



Glow-worm discovered on a LWS near Monmouth in 2024

PROTECTING GWENT'S HIDDEN HAVENS – THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Back in April, you helped us raise an incredible **£15,025** through the **Big Give Green Match Fund appeal** to help connect and improve Local Wildlife Sites in the landscape. We are so grateful to everyone who donated, your generosity is already making a real difference for wildlife across Gwent.

Why Local Wildlife Sites matter

Gwent's species-rich meadows, woodlands, wetlands, and hedgerows are home to countless plants and animals. Yet many of these special places lack legal protection and are at risk from development and poor land management. Our Local Wildlife Site project works with landowners to identify wildlife rich hotspots. Once identified, we survey the site, advise the landowner on how to manage it best for wildlife, and we record and share the biodiversity data we collect with SEWBREC.

Thanks to your support, we are safeguarding habitats that might otherwise be overlooked and lost forever.

What we've achieved so far

Since April, you've helped deliver some important gains on over 100 hectares of land:

- 3 new Candidate Local Wildlife Sites identified (around 4 hectares).
- 6 existing LWS re-surveyed (11.5 hectares).
- 1 Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) upgraded to full LWS recognition (12 hectares).
- 7 additional sites (covering approximately 75 hectares) visited where we gave landowners advice on management for wildlife.

All sites surveyed so far have received advice, with detailed written reports being finalised this winter. This groundwork is crucial to ensuring long-term protection and better management of these special places.



AUTUMN AND WINTER TALKS THAT BRING NATURE CLOSER

Volunteers from our three local groups have been working hard over the summer to come up with this fascinating series of illustrated talks for us to enjoy over the autumn and winter.

You can find out more about these events on our website, (find the link to Events or What's On) or by getting in touch with our local group leads directly. We are also always keen to hear from anyone who would like to get more involved with their local group, volunteering to help out at talk evenings or in other ways.

Chepstow Local Group:

Hilary Lee 01291 689326,

Email: hilaryalee50@gmail.com

Usk Local Group:

Julie Carr 01291 671577 or 07905 010068,

Email: julie23carr@btinternet.com

Abergavenny Local Group:

Mary Barkham 0779 9540380

Email: Mbarkham@gwentwildlife.org

There is currently no pre-booking needed for local group talks, just turn up and pay cash on the door, please.

November

Wednesday 5th 7:30 PM at

Chepstow Leisure Centre, £3

Nature Recovery in the Wye Valley

National Landscape: Molly Boyce,
Wye Valley National Landscape Nature
Recovery Officer

Wednesday 12th 7:30 PM

at The Grange, Usk, £4

Horsehoe Bats: Dave Priddis,
Gloucestershire Bat Group

Also in November:

Saturday 15th 2.30pm at
the Memorial Hall, Usk

Gwent Wildlife Trust's AGM and Autumn Showcase: with a range of talks and displays about wildlife and conservation across Gwent. See back page for more details and booking!

Springdale flora in July



Thursday, 20th 7:30 PM at

the Methodist Church Hall, Abergavenny, £4

Grassland Fungi – A Focus on Waxcaps:

John and Marilyn Dunkelman,
Monmouthshire Meadows Group

December

Wednesday 10th 7:30 PM at

The Grange, Usk, £4

Wildlife Photographer in Spain: Chris
Hatch: County Bird Recorder and GWT
President

January 2026

Wednesday 7th 7:30pm at

Chepstow Leisure Centre, £3

Gwent's Butterflies: Andy Karran,
Evidence Manager at Gwent Wildlife Trust

Thursday 15th 7:30 PM at

the Methodist Church Hall, Abergavenny, £4

**Wetland Creation at River Meadow, a new
GWT Nature Reserve**

Wednesday 14th 7:30 PM at

The Grange, Usk, £4

Gwent's Spring Migrant Birds: Andy Karran,
Evidence Manager at Gwent Wildlife Trust

February

Wednesday 4th 7.30pm at

Chepstow Leisure Centre, £3

Dragonflies in Monmouthshire, Steve
Preddy Monmouthshire Vice-County
Dragonfly Recorder

Wednesday 11th 7:30 PM at

The Grange, Usk, £4

Wildflower Meadows: Dr Steph Tyler, GWT
Vice President and Monmouthshire
Meadows Group

Thursday 19th 7:30 PM at

the Methodist Church Hall, Abergavenny, £4

**Cradle for nature- trees as a tool for
restoration,** Jenny Knight

Common Blue





The Denny



Pink Ballerina Waxcap



Swift



Female Emperor Dragonfly

March

Wednesday 4th 7.30pm at
Chepstow Leisure Centre, £3
**The Denny - Monmouthshire's Special
Bird Island**, by Richard Clarke, Gwent
Ornithological Society and BTO rep for Gwent

Wednesday 11th 7:30 PM at
The Grange, Usk, £4
Understanding and conserving Swifts,
Mark Mogford, Swifts of Usk group

Thursday 19th 7:30 PM at
the Methodist Church Hall, Abergavenny, £4
**Panel discussion sharing positive action
for our local rivers**

May

**Chepstow Local Group's Annual Plant Sale
Saturday 16th May 2026**, 9.30am to 12.00
noon (approx.) at
Palmer Community Centre, Place de
Corneilles, Chepstow, NP16 5LH
Free entry. Café on site

The Gwent Wildlife Trust's Chepstow Group
are hosting their ever-popular Annual Grand
Plant Sale and Bazaar. All excellent value,
there will be a wide range of small shrubs
and perennial garden plants for sale, with
annuals and vegetable plants and
experienced gardeners on hand to advise!
Donations of plants are always welcome.

BOOSTING LOCAL ACTION FOR WILDLIFE!

We're really excited about providing
more opportunities to take action for
wildlife locally, with a new group now in
Abergavenny, building on the success of
the groups in Chepstow and Usk. We'd
love to develop more wildlife hubs like
these across Gwent, and recent support
from the National Lottery Community
Fund "Awards for All" programme is
making this possible. We're aiming to
establish new Local Wildlife Groups
across Gwent, so if there isn't already
one near you, we'd love to hear from you.

Each group acts as a focal point for
community action, offering talks,
workshops, and practical opportunities
that make it easier for people to connect
with nearby reserves and green spaces.

With support through to autumn
2026, our ambition is for these groups to
become self-sustaining, continuing to
inspire future generations and linking
into broader conservation programmes.

**If you'd like to find out more, contact
Alice at arees@gwentwildlife.org**



River meadow



Plant sale



Fledgling Barn Swallow



Above left, The Levellers on new bridge at Magor Marsh. Right, new grassland management machinery, Pentwyn.

Improvements for people and wildlife across our nature reserves

Our nature recovery officers have been busy all Summer making some tremendous improvements to our nature reserves.

Ben and the Gwent Levellers volunteer group, along with local grazier Des Williams, put in a mammoth effort to assemble and install a brand new footbridge at Magor Marsh in August. This is alongside the regular swan nesting spot so hopefully next year's cygnets approve too!

Nature Network Funds have funded investment in some new land management tools and machinery to help us more effectively manage our grassland sites for greatest wildlife gains.

Senior Conservation Grazing Officer Joe spent a hot day in June on what's known as the Frost fields part of Pentwyn SSSI

grassland. The bracken this season really raced ahead, so the help of the robo and trailed bracken basher was game-changing.

Joe put our new Rytec cut and collect through its paces, along with a robo flail and new 5ft wide bracken basher, which knocks the bracken down and part flails it. Joe then followed behind with the cut and collect flail to cut and remove the bracken from the fields to reduce regrowth.

Nature recovery officer Ben, Assistant NRO Izzi and Trainee Ellie installed a beautiful new bench in the orchard at Bridewell Common for everyone to enjoy the tranquility of this space. The bench features a plaque to a very special person, Pat Gorvin, one of the founding members of Gwent Wildlife Trust who left us a very transformative legacy which helped purchase Bridewell Common.

Eleanor O'Bryan – Trainee Nature Recovery Officer

Ellie O'Bryan joined us as our new Trainee Nature Recovery Officer at the start of

September and will be working with us for the next year. She joins us from Bristol Zoological Society and brings with her a wealth of experience from her Environmental Management and Sustainability degree at Plymouth University. Growing up in Newport she has already completed some exciting placements with RSPB Newport Wetlands and Salviato l'Orso in Italy. Ellie will be working across all of our nature reserves gaining experience and qualifications in practical land management and conservation. She can't wait to get stuck in and learn everything from chainsawing to dormouse surveying!

Ellie says "I am really looking forward to working across different habitats, from grasslands to woodlands and wetlands and getting to know all of the amazing wildlife and species we have here in Gwent. In just my first few weeks, I have already learnt so much, from practical land management techniques to dormouse and water vole surveying, as well as how to use new tools in the field. I am so excited to keep building on these skills and gain more hands-on experience in conservation work."

Our Nature Recovery work you're reading about here is being made possible by the Welsh Government's Nature Networks Fund, administered by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Izzi Speer – Assistant Nature Recovery Officer (Eastern Valleys)

Our Nature Recovery team expanded in September to include our new Assistant Nature Recovery Officer Izzi, who will be working on our Eastern Valleys reserves. Izzi grew up on the South Wales border, spending much of her childhood in the woodlands around the Wye Valley, enjoying nature. Having recently finished a conservation traineeship at Gloucestershire



Left, Izzi and Ellie on the bench at Bridewell Common in memory of Pat Gorvin. Right, Ellie O'Bryan dormouse monitoring.





Izzie Speer

Wildlife Trust in the Forest of Dean, she is looking forward to continuing to work on the nature reserves with us here in Gwent. She runs weekly practical volunteering opportunities for people to explore our beautiful reserves and help with our ongoing nature recovery work in the Eastern Valleys area.

Izzi brings with her a great level of practical experience and passion for nature and has already thrown herself into clearing fallen trees at Henllys Bog on her second day in the office!

VOLUNTEER WARDENS NEEDED

If you love wildlife and being outdoors in nature, and would like to help protect local habitats while supporting conservation efforts, please consider joining our team of volunteer wardens.

Gwent Wildlife Trust is fortunate to have an amazing network of volunteer wardens who help to monitor and care for our nature reserves. Our volunteer wardens make regular visits, playing a vital role as the 'eyes and ears' of the Nature Recovery team. Our small team who cover our 28 nature reserves across Gwent, spanning over 700 hectares, simply couldn't do without these brilliant volunteers.

We are now looking to recruit volunteer wardens for more of our Gwent Levels reserves. From reporting any issues to

their designated Nature Recovery Officer such as fallen trees or broken gates, our wardens can also be as hands on as they are keen to be, helping to keep pathways open in the summer and maintaining signs and benches.

We are currently in need of wardens for:

- **Barecroft Common, Magor**
- **Great Traston Meadows, nr Nash**
- **Bridewell Common, Magor**
- **Wyeswood Common, nr Monmouth**

Volunteering as a warden will give you the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of these places through the seasons whilst also playing an important role in helping to manage these special reserves for nature.

SHRILL CARDER BEE - FIRST AT BRIDEWELL COMMON!

This summer, we were thrilled to record our first Shrill Carder Bee (*bombus sylvarum*) at Bridewell Common nature reserve. This is one of Britain's rarest and most threatened bumblebees, now found only in a few areas in the UK, including the Gwent Levels, where we manage several important grassland sites to help them thrive.

Volunteers, Bob Roome and Rosie Saunders, spotted the queen bee foraging on a patch of red clover when they were carrying out their regular butterfly transect on the reserve. Some of the ways we help improve habitat for this special bee include taking seed-rich hay from more established Great Traston Meadow Nature Reserve to propel progression of wildflower species; consistent late summer cutting and grazing management, leaving some areas uncut for the bees' benefit and restoring the ditch and field margins characteristic of Gwent Levels grassland sites, which offer connectivity of habitat and good nesting sites.

The Shrill Carder Bee is named after the high-pitched buzz it makes when airborne. Once common in lowland Britain, it vanished from most places during the 20th century. It's now found in fragmented populations in pockets of Kent, Essex, Somerset, Wiltshire, and south and west Wales that include wetlands, dry grasslands, dunes and brownfield sites.

What these varied places have in common is that they are not intensively farmed. We have lost 98% of flower-rich meadows in England and Wales over the past century, drastically reducing habitats where the Shrill Carder Bee and other wildlife can thrive.

The shrill carder comes late to the season, with its queens not usually emerging from hibernation until May. Research suggests the bees do not forage as far from the nest as many other species, so it needs flower-rich habitats and undisturbed nesting grounds. It nests in rough, tussocky grassland, within clumps of grass or just below ground. Colonies are small, with only about 50 workers in a mature nest, and males and daughter queens emerge late, too, at the end of August or September. So, the species needs late-flowering plants – plentiful supplies of nectar in September – to ensure the next generation goes into hibernation well fed.



Above, Gwent Wildlife Trust Ecologist Lowri Watkins and Head of Nature Recovery Gemma Bodé spotted and photographed this Shrill Carder Bee at Bridewell Common a few days after the first recording.



Left, Cyfrif Mawr y Glöynnod Byw Gofalwyr Natur/
Nature Nurturers Big Butterfly Count. Right, Gwersylla
Gwyllt/Wild Camp Out.



YOUTH GROUP UPDATE

The summer was a busy period for our youth groups, marked by staff changes and a packed schedule. We said farewell to Petra Mitchard, a valued long-standing team member, who retired at the end of July. Her successor, Charlotte Beard, is already a familiar face to many, having volunteered with us for three years. Charlotte brings a strong background in nature-based learning, biodiversity surveys, and community-led environmental action. In 2023, she received GAVO Newport's Environmental Volunteer Award for her work with young people. We're delighted to welcome her to the team.

GWT now has three youth groups as we continue to build on our vision of young people working with nature and implementing nature-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.

This year's Wild Camp Out at Pentwyn Farm Nature Reserve was our largest yet, thanks to the addition of the new youth group. Over two nights, participants enjoyed hands-on activities including moth trapping,

bird ringing, and dormouse surveying. As well as enjoying evenings around the campfire and exploring the reserve's rich wildlife, they also contributed to habitat management by removing bracken and creating a new pond, supported by Conservation Grazing Officer Joe Ryder.

Nature Nurturers youth group activities over the spring and summer included bird nest box monitoring and creating bee towers from windowsills with holes drilled in them. They participated in the Big Butterfly Count at Central Valley Nature Reserve, conducting a bumblebee survey with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust at the Environmental Resource Centre, and a bat walk at Sirhowy Hill Woodlands in Tredegar.

The Wildlife Warriors also had much to do including water vole surveying at Magor Marsh, nature journaling in July and pond dipping with new staff member Charlotte. In September, Bridewell Common was selected as SEWReC's Square of the Month, prompting the Warriors to survey the

area with a particular focus on harvestmen, a selection of arachnids not previously recorded at the site.

The Pontypool Pioneers youth group is the latest addition to an inspiring new initiative delivered in partnership with Pontypool Community Council. The project, Pontypool Wild Spaces, is designed to transform urban green areas into thriving habitats for local wildlife – created by the community, for the community. At the heart of the project is a dedicated team of volunteers who help care for these spaces and work with staff to organise events to engage residents with Pontypool's rich natural heritage. The youth group has made an impressive start, taking the lead on the first wild space in Pontypool town centre. Their efforts have already included building a bee hotel, planting native wildflowers, removing litter, and managing hedgerows to support biodiversity.

To learn more about Pontypool Wild Spaces or to get involved with the youth group, visit: www.gwentwildlife.org/pontypool



Above, Adnabod Cacwn Gofalwyr Natur Nature Nurturers/Bumblebee Identification.



Left, Charlotte Beard. Above, Gwestai gwenyn ar gyfer Gofod Gwyllt Pont-y-pŵl/Bee hotels for Pontypool Wild Spaces.



Above left, Adeiladu Pwll/Pond creation. Above right, Trochi yn y Pwll Rhyfelwyr Gwyllt/Wildlife Warriors Pond Dipping.

DIWEDDARIAD Y GRWPIAU IEUENCTID

Roedd yr haf yn gyfnod prysur i'n grwpiau ieuencid ni, gyda newidiadau i'r staff ac amserlen lawn. Fe wnaethon ni ffarwelio â Petra Mitchard, aelod gwerthfawr o'r tîm ers amser maith, a ymddeolodd ar ddiwedd mis Gorffennaf. Mae ei holnydd, Charlotte Beard, yn wyneb cyfarwydd i lawer eisoes, ar ôl gwirfoddoli gyda ni am dair blynedd. Mae gan Charlotte gefndir cadarn mewn dysgu sy'n seiliedig ar natur, arolygon bioamrywiaeth, a gweithredu amgylcheddol dan arweiniad y gymuned. Yn 2023, derbyniodd Wobr Gwirfoddolwr Amgylcheddol GAVO Casnewydd am ei gwaith gyda phobl ifanc. Rydyn ni wrth ein bodd yn ei chroesawu hi i'r tîm.

Mae gan YNG dri grŵp ieuencid bellach wrth i ni barhau i adeiladu ar ein gweledigaeth o bobl ifanc yn gweithio gyda byd natur ac yn gweithredu atebion sy'n seiliedig ar natur i newid hinsawdd a cholli bioamrywiaeth.

Roedd ein Gwersyll Gwyllt ni eleni yng Ngwarchodfa Natur Fferm Pentwyn y mwyaf eto, diolch i ychwanegu'r grŵp ieuencid newydd. Dros ddwy noson, mwynhaodd y cyfranogwyr weithgareddau ymarferol, gan gynnwys dal gwyfynod, modrwyo adar ac arolygu pathewod. Yn ogystal â mwynhau nosweithiau o amgylch y tân gwersylla ac archwilio bywyd gwyllt cyfoethog y warchodfa, fe wnaethon nhw hefyd gyfrannu at reoli cynefinoedd drwy gael gwared ar redyn a chreu pwll newydd, gyda chefnogaeth y Swyddog Pori Cadwraeth, Joe Ryder.



Above, Pwll wedi'i orffen/Pond complete.

Roedd gweithgareddau'r grŵp ieuencid **Gofalwyr Natur** dros y gwanwyn a'r haf yn cynnwys monitro bocsys nythu adar a chreu tyrau gwenyn o siliau ffenestri gyda thyllau wedi'u drilio ynddyn nhw. Fe wnaethon nhw gymryd rhan yn y Cyfrif Glöynnod Byw Mawr yng Ngwarchodfa Natur Central Valley, cynnal arolwg cacwn gyda'r Ymddiriedolaeth Cadwraeth Cacwn yn y Ganolfan Adnoddau Amgylcheddol, a thaith gerdded ystlumod yng Nghoetiroedd Bryn Sirhywi yn Nhrefdegar.

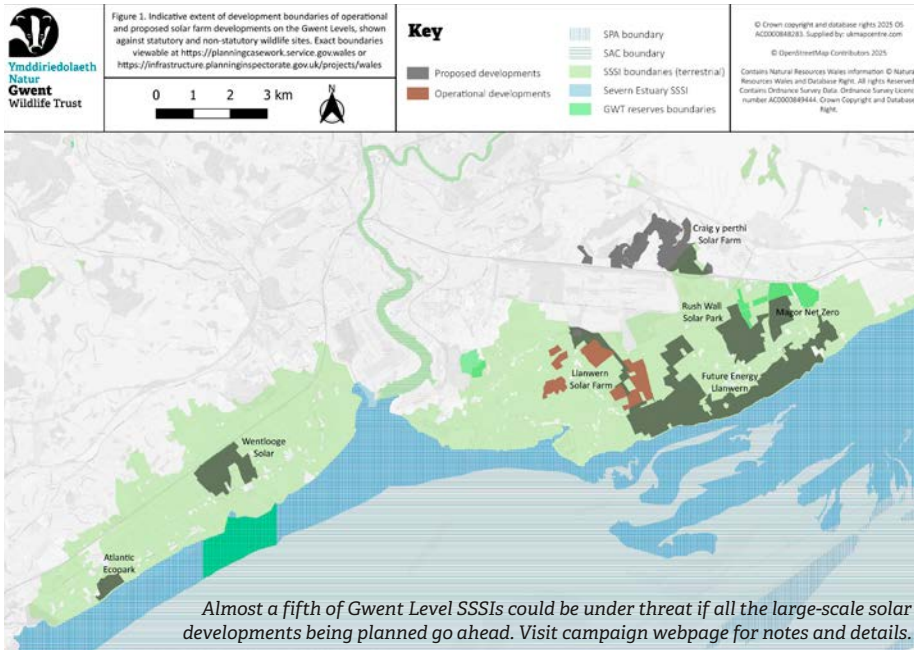
Roedd gan y **Rhyfelwyr Gwyllt** lawer i'w wneud hefyd, gan gynnwys arolygu llygod pengrwn y dŵr yng Nghors Magwyr, cadw dyddiaduron natur ym mis Gorffennaf ac archwilio pwll gyda'r aelod newydd o staff, Charlotte. Ym mis Medi, dewiswyd Tir Comin Bridewell fel Sgwâr y Mis SEWBRc, gan annog y grŵp i arolygu'r ardal gyda ffocws penodol ar garw'r gwellt, detholiad o arachnidau heb eu cofnodi o'r blaen ar y safle.

Grŵp ieuencid **Arloeswyr Pont-y-pŵl** yw'r ychwanegiad diweddaraf at fenter

ysbrydoledig newydd sy'n cael ei chyflwyno mewn partneriaeth â Chyngor Cymuned Pont-y-pŵl. Mae'r prosiect, Gofod Gwyllt Pont-y-pŵl, wedi cael ei gynllunio i drawsnewid ardaloedd gwyrdd trefol yn gynefinoedd ffyniannus ar gyfer bywyd gwyllt lleol - wedi'u creu gan y gymuned, ar gyfer y gymuned.

Wrth galon y prosiect mae tîm ymroddedig o wirfoddolwyr sy'n helpu i ofalu am y llecynnau yma ac yn gweithio gyda staff i drefnu digwyddiadau i gael y trigolion i ymwneud â threftadaeth naturiol gyfoethog Pont-y-pŵl. Mae'r grŵp ieuencid wedi cael dechrau nodedig, gan gymryd yr awenau gyda'r gofod gwyllt cyntaf yng nghanol tref Pont-y-pŵl. Mae eu hymdrechion eisoes wedi cynnwys adeiladu gwesty gwenyn, plannu blodau gwyllt brodorol, cael gwared ar sbwriel, a rheoli gwrychoedd i gefnogi bioamrywiaeth.

I gael gwybod mwy am Ofod Gwyllt Pont-y-pŵl neu i gymryd rhan gyda'r grŵp ieuencid, ewch i: www.gwentwildlife.org/pontypool



extremely high bar against development proposals on SSSIs. There would have to be absolutely compelling reasons why it would need to be in an SSSI, and absolutely cannot be elsewhere in Wales.

The problem with it is, though, that the “wholly exceptional circumstances” policy doesn’t contain enough detail for it to work properly. We are seeing that developers are now trying to get their developments on SSSIs approved by arguing that, for example, a general need for the type of development they are proposing (economic development, energy etc) is a wholly exceptional circumstance. Thus, according to their logic, all development applications of this type, wherever they are in Wales are wholly exceptional – without exception, they are all exceptional!”

So whilst we keep organising, sharing knowledge, capacity and resources with other grassroots and conservation organisations – bolstered by campaign activists and other volunteers who share our aim of protecting nature – to respond to the threat of each of these individual developments, our primary aim is to get clarification of this aspect of planning policy.

Raising public awareness.

It’s technical, complex and some might consider dry, but really important to raise public awareness of this campaign and generate media interest. We need to get the message across to people across the UK or risk losing precious wildlife forever. We absolutely need renewable energy. Climate change is impacting the wildlife GWT works to conserve every day, and hugely threatens to undermine any gains we can make towards its recovery. There are many fantastic examples of solar schemes boosting biodiversity, when they are

IS THIS THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR OUR SSSIs IN WALES?

By Debbie Stenner, Head of Fundraising and Communications

For decades, as many readers will know, we have been defending Wales’ precious, irreplaceable Gwent Levels landscape from major developments which threaten to destroy it. It’s heartbreaking and exhausting to still be battling. In recent years, sadly, the threat is mostly from large-scale solar developments which, whilst important for our vital transition to renewal energy, must be put in the right place. You can’t destroy nature to save the environment any more than you can cut off your head to cure a headache. This article aims to update you on our campaign progress.

We’re working hard to respond to every new and returning application.

In February, the fourth year of ecological evidence following construction of the Llanwern solar farm, (the largest in the UK and currently only major built solar development on the Levels) was published. This evidence showed Lapwing, bats, Shirl Carder Bee and many other species populations have been destroyed or damaged.

In March, we gave evidence at the Craig y Perth development hearing. In June, we

gave evidence at the Wentloog Solar hearing. And right now, we’re preparing and responding to evidence related to Rushwall Solar development, which would abut Magor Marsh nature reserve.

At the same time, we’re pushing for crucial policy guidance to protect nature in Wales.

Planning Policy Wales 12 (the Welsh Government’s official land use planning policy document) states that “development in a SSSI, which is not necessary for its management, must be avoided as a matter of principle”. So far, so clear and logical. A second policy states that development can only take place on SSSIs in “wholly exceptional circumstances”. This is where it starts to get more complicated, but thankfully we have our volunteer planning and ecology expert, Mike Webb to explain:

“The planning system doesn’t ban things, (because it’s based on the weight given to differing issues – the environment, economy, transport etc.) But this sets an

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is an area of land that’s really important to our national, natural heritage because of the rare and important plants and animals that are found on them. These sites are considered to best represent their natural features are a representative sample of important habitats and have been protected, so that if ‘all else fails’ we still have these habitats.



Above, the Gwent Levels contain eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) designated for their biodiversity, particularly their rare aquatic plants and invertebrates. These man-made wetlands are also important habitats for other species, including the shill carder bee, water voles, and otters, as well as providing flood alleviation and carbon storage.

planned and designed with nature in mind. But sadly, this balance cannot be achieved on the fragile, complex wetland ecosystem of the Gwent Levels.

So if developments on SSSIs go ahead, we will not just lose our green heart, we are opening the floodgates to ecological collapse.

To keep informed about this campaign and how you can take action as it continues, visit www.gwentwildlife.org/savethewentlevels

PILL COMMUNITY GARDEN OPEN!

Over the past few months, our community organiser Charlotte has been busy working in Pillgwenlly alongside Newport City Council on their Local Places for Nature Project. After months of events, activities, meetings and conversations with the community and discussions with contractors, the new Pillgwenlly community garden is finally open to welcome people and wildlife alike.

This new space is not only a welcome benefit to nature and urban biodiversity but a space for the local community to spend time in too. The garden features raised beds, seating and native planting. As a soft opening for the space, we partnered with colleagues from The Newport Ship, and the Newport Transporter Bridge to add some local history into the space. Using relics and materials from the ship and bridge, families were invited to cast them into the concrete pathway throughout the garden. Children



also enjoyed casting their handprints in the stones too. This not only helped to connect residents with the space but gave them the opportunity to become a part of its history.

Over autumn, we have more events planned including a community tree planting day within the garden and a community bat walk in Pillgwenlly park. Charlotte is also in the garden every Wednesday morning trying to set up a community gardening group. If you are local to Pillgwenlly and would like to take part in any of these activities, please contact Charlotte at Cspring@gwentwildlife.org



Painting the community art mural

A Weekend of Art and Nature for All Ages

For the first time, we joined the fantastic Art in Penallt festival over the August Bank Holiday weekend, by hosting a series of family-friendly events at our Pentwyn Farm nature reserve.

We welcomed more than 150 visitors and held a number of well-attended nature-based workshops including a very popular sound bath, clay workshop, wildlife photography session, willow weaving and wreath making.

The feedback was very positive, and people of all ages enjoyed participating in our community event. One of the highlights was the huge 7m X 1.5m Community Wall Mural displayed in the barn. Almost everyone had a go at wildlife painting using brushes, or their hands and fingers. We will be hanging this beautiful community collaboration in Penallt Church over the autumn – if you can, please go and see it.

If you'd like to get involved with our Art in Penallt activities next year, whether to help out with setting up and on the day or delivering a workshop, I'd love to hear from you. Email Natasha: nburgon@gwentwildlife.org

NEWS

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Solar farms threaten rare wildlife, say campaigners



Natalie Buttriss of Gwent Wildlife Trust does not oppose solar but says species have been damaged

In September, BBC Wales and BBC Cymru aired interviews with Mike Webb and Natalie Buttriss across evening TV news, breakfast radio and online. In early October, Gemma (Bodé, Head of Nature Recovery) and I met reporters from the Daily Express at Magor and are currently awaiting publication.

Removing Ragwort at Llandegfedd

HELPING GWENT'S NATURE, ONE WILD HEALTH SESSION AT A TIME

By Caitlin Bucher-Flynn

*Red Kite spotting at Cwmtillery Lakes.*

Elysium Healthcare provide mental health and specialist care services to support people on their recovery journeys. Since joining the Wild Health project in 2022, people from their three hospitals have contributed over 1,400 volunteer hours to nature conservation, throwing themselves

into a wide range of hands-on activities — from riverfly monitoring and litter picking along our canals, to crafting bird feeders and planting trees across Gwent.

Their main focus site has been Llandegfedd Reservoir, where they've worked alongside Dŵr Cymru on a range of works to help vulnerable species repopulate the area. They've monitored hazel dormice using ink tunnels, coppiced woodland to improve habitat, and cleared encroaching scrub willow along the lakeshore to support Little Ringed Plovers. Over in the volunteer garden, they've installed insect hotels, created a wildlife pond, and transformed out-of-action canoes into planters bursting with pollinator-friendly perennials and fruit bushes — ready to be enjoyed by volunteers and other visitors.

Further south in Newport, Elysium teamed up with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust for a day of bee-spotting — learning how to catch and identify a variety of invertebrates, including the rare Shril Carder Bee, one of the UK's scarcest

*Vapourer Moth Caterpillar*

bumblebees. One participant, a keen wildlife photographer, captured some fantastic images from the day — including this striking shot of a Vapourer moth caterpillar.

And while conservation work can be tough and muddy, there's always the reward of a magical wildlife moment. On a health walk on the Bloreng, the group were treated to a rare sight — an adder slithering across the path in front of them. Not long after, down in Abergavenny, another group spotted an otter along the banks of the River Usk — a brief but unforgettable encounter.

A huge thank you to all the Elysium participants and staff for their energy, enthusiasm, and fantastic contribution to Gwent's wildlife. Your efforts are making a real difference — to nature, alongside the wellbeing of everyone involved.

Rendezvous With Raptors

By Ian Thomas, Senior Wild Health Officer



Whilst I've been out and about with our many Wild Health groups throughout the summer months, we have been enthralled to

encounter some of Wales' iconic raptors. We spotted Peregrine Falcons on several occasions in the upland areas that we walked, a real highlight to our day enjoying nature and being outdoors. This provided an ideal opportunity for the walk participants to learn about the many unique adaptations specific to this species. Learning about the wildlife we see on Wild Health sessions provides an important therapeutic benefit. The groups enjoyed learning about our raptors, (you could even say they were rapturous about it!) and keen to share their learning with others.

Malar stripe: A malar stripe is a dark marking on the cheek of some birds, particularly falcons, that extends downwards from the eye, acting like "natural sunglasses" to reduce glare and improve vision in bright sunlight. Malar stripes are more prominent in Peregrine Falcons living in areas with high solar radiation. It's somewhat similar to football players using eye-black to enhance their vision.

Nictitating membrane: A bird's nictitating membrane is its transparent, horizontal "third eyelid" that sweeps across the eye to keep it moist, clean of debris, and protected from hazards like dust and wind, all while allowing the bird to maintain its



Peregrine Falcon

vision. This semi-transparent membrane also protects the eye during high-speed activities, such as hunting, by acting like a built-in set of goggles.

Tomial tooth: A tomial tooth is not a real tooth, but a sharp projection on the edge of a bird's upper beak, commonly found in falcons, kites, and shrikes and functions like a pair of scissors to quickly dispatch prey by severing the spinal column.

We also enjoyed watching several Red Kite on our walks, gracefully soaring whilst scanning the landscape in search of tasty morsels. I explained how, after being driven almost to extinction in the 1970s, their widespread dispersal in recent decades has been phenomenal. Their population went up by 2,464% from 1995 – 2023 and there are around 4,400 pairs across Britain now.

And perhaps most rapturously of all, we discovered the Osprey! Their arrival in the Usk valley for the first time in over 200 years, has provided a wonderful opportunity for people who have never seen these magnificent birds before. So I organised sessions for several groups, including the 'Dicky Tickers', Mind Body and Soul and Mind Monmouthshire to provide participants with the chance to view them on the nest and in flight around the nest site. On a couple of occasions, we were welcomed by Usk Valley Osprey project volunteers, who helped us to view them through a scope, binoculars and a live camera feed, whilst learning about their diet, lifespan, wingspan and migratory patterns. We were also lucky enough to be there when the ringed chick 9K5 managed to leave the nest but didn't fully take off until later, (known as a partial fledge). Eventually if fledged (flew off) successfully. One participant in particular was truly inspired. Here's what Jason said:

Left, Dicky Tickers viewing the birds from the canal viewpoint. Right, Osprey Male, Monty, at Dyfi Estuary.



"On a walk earlier in the year with Wild Health we went to Talybont for a walk along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and we saw a pair of ospreys... the first time in over 240 years that a breeding pair had returned to the area. I used my laptop to watch the birds and their offspring. It was fascinating watching live pictures over a few months, until the youngster fledged and took to the sky a grown bird.

The computer was on continuously and it added a focus to the day.

I look forward to their return next year!"

Magpie Inkcap



Oyster mushroom



Drab Bonnet



Common Bonnet



Sulphur Tuft

Nature's Unseen Engineers

How fungi shape our world.

By Ellen Winter

If all fungi vanished overnight, first you might notice a shortage of tea, coffee, chocolate, wine or simply mushrooms on toast! Some would be grateful for no athlete's foot or dry rot, but fungi themselves are largely invisible. Over 15,000 species of fungi have been recorded in the UK, but less than a third are visible to the naked eye. We see products and effects, but we rarely notice the living beast.

The mushrooms and toadstools we see are fruitbodies, like apples. We rarely see the body of the fungus – the 'apple' tree. Years past, my walk to primary school took me along suburban verges lavished with eye-catching mushrooms. I was fascinated by bright white lawyers' wigs, spongy yellow boletes bruising blue when poked and translucent parasols appearing one day and gone the next, but fungi themselves hide all around – and inside – us!

CLOSER TO HUMANS THAN PLANTS

One reason fungi are largely invisible to us is the way they eat. Fungal structure consists of mycelium, a microscopic tangle of thread-like hyphae, or single celled fungi

like yeasts. Both live and feed inside material such as soil, wood, intestinal tract or petrol. Basically, anywhere they can get carbohydrates. Like animals, fungi absorb food from their environment, but animals digest and absorb nutrients internally, while fungi digest and absorb their food externally.

Only in 1969 were Fungi confirmed as separate from Plants – despite fungi being more closely related to animals. Fungi grow their structure from material more like our fingernails than plant cellulose.

FUNGI CHANGE THE WORLD

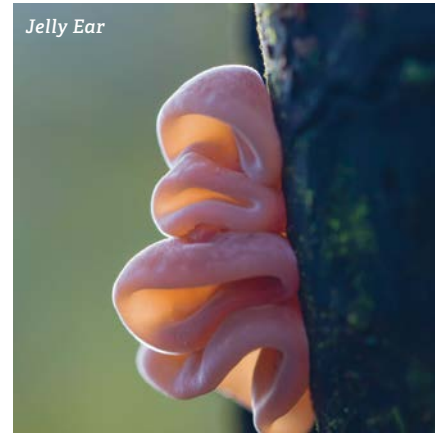
More recently, we've started to unravel the unseen ways that fungi modify the world. Fungi influence ecosystems through decomposition and soil structure. One



Parasol Mushroom



Chicken of the Woods



Jelly Ear



Fly Agaric



Horn of Plenty



Scarletina Bolete

recently recognised influence is the mutually beneficial relationship between plant roots and soil fungi.

Closer than hand in glove, mycorrhizal partnerships are so globally vital that if all fungi vanished overnight, 80% of plant species would immediately struggle to survive. These plants trade sugars from photosynthesis for water and essential minerals provided by soil fungal partners.

The increased harvesting power provided by mycorrhizal fungi helps crops and wild plants cope with extreme conditions, such as this year's drought. Ongoing research suggests plants can also biochemically communicate threats such as insect attacks to surrounding plants purely via soil fungal networks – sometimes called the 'wood wide web'.

THE UNSEEN COST

Being invisible comes at a cost. While 95% of approximately 6,640 global mammal species have been documented, only about 6.3% of an estimated 2.5 million fungal species have been named. And people don't love and protect what they don't know.

Even in the UK, one of the ecologically best documented countries in the world, fungi are under-recorded, and mushrooms are often casually picked or destroyed – something we've mostly learnt not to do with wildflowers.

The fungal kingdom is so understudied that UK firsts still turn up annually and keen novices can record rarities. Beginners are encouraged and there's always something new, even for experts. Fruitbodies are not

just found in autumn and winter, but can be found all year-round. So, if you spot an interesting mushroom or you'd like to learn from others, contact the team at Gwent Wildlife Trust on info@gwentwildlife.org and they will be able to point you towards your local fungus group.

Check out our events listing for any upcoming fungi-themed activities near you: [gwentwildlife.org/events](https://www.gwentwildlife.org/events)

After studying zoology and mycology, Ellen Winter now monitors nature reserve health at Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.



Curlew photographed April 2025

Conservation in Action: Finding Gwent's Breeding Curlews

By Verity B Picken, Curlew Lead at
Gwent Ornithological Society

This year, my roundup of the Curlew breeding season in Gwent starts with some great news – 21 to 24 breeding pairs were found, which is two, perhaps three, more than in 2024! And that's not all: four nests were located – another increase over last year. Curlew nests are notoriously difficult to find so this was really exciting.

The range in the number of breeding pairs (21 – 24) allows for possible double counting. Curlews forage a considerable distance from the nest site – up to 5km away – and the off-duty parent will sometimes roost overnight at a distant water-body.

Two of the four nests discovered were on sites where Gwent Ornithological Society (GOS) shares the monitoring effort with Curlew Connections. (Curlew Connections Wales is a partnership project, funded by the Welsh Government and working with farmers, landowners and local communities to safeguard the Curlew.) Here, the nests were quickly fenced to protect the eggs from predation by foxes and badgers. Happily, this intervention paid off, as four eggs hatched at the Brynygwenin site and

two at Blaengavenny. Sadly, only one chick survived the vulnerable six-week period before fledging – the Brynygwenin chick was seen taking to the air but chick feathers were found at Blaengavenny, indicating predation.

Another two nests were found at Trellech but disappointingly these eggs were predated before the nests could be fenced. However, 2 or 3 tiny chicks were glimpsed crossing a farm track and chicks had clearly hatched at another, nearby site. Up to four pairs were present near Trellech, making it an important area for breeding Curlews.

At a new territory near Grosmont a well-grown chick and adult were watched regularly up until early July so it's possible that this chick, too, fledged.



Screenshot from video footage of works at Trefil



Curlew arrive at Trefil



Two chicks in a well-hidden nest.

Given that Curlews are slated to become extinct as a breeding species in Wales within the next 8 years can there be a more important survey than this?

Trefil was a star site: 5-7 pairs were recorded on the moorland and chick-guarding into July suggests several chicks fledged. Unfortunately, gas-line pipe repairs here and at Blaen Rhymney before the breeding season ended brought considerable disturbance.

Elsewhere, groundworks for a solar farm near Abertysswg caused a pair to abandon the site whilst two music festivals posed threats at Oldcastle and Penallt as they coincided with a particularly sensitive time for nesting. Fortunately, the outcry at Oldcastle forced the proposed festival to be moved elsewhere.

Three previously successful sites disappointed. Curlews appeared only fleetingly at Llanwenarth while the regular Markham pair disappeared in mid-April and the Newchurch pair in early June. Curlews at Llangybi and on Gelli-gaer Common also proved elusive.

Final count:
21-24 breeding pairs
4 nests
9-10 eggs hatched and at least one but probably more chicks fledged.

Gwent is not alone in facing this lack of fledging success. **Breeding Curlew, along with a number of other breeding waders in Wales, are in significant decline and need urgent help to aid recovery.** Based on expert opinion it is estimated that the total Welsh Curlew breeding population is

probably no more than 400 pairs. We know the key driver of population decline in this relatively long-lived bird is poor breeding success. It is widely accepted by scientists that the maintenance of a stable breeding Curlew population requires each breeding pair to produce 0.6 fledged chicks per year. It is thought that current productivity in Wales is only half of what is required, with some areas fledging no chicks at all in some years. Low productivity is predominantly driven by predation of eggs and chicks by meso-predators, such as Red Fox and Carrion Crow, and the switch from hay to silage where much earlier cutting dates mean insufficient time for young chicks to fledge¹.

Given that Curlews are slated to become extinct as a breeding species in Wales within the next 8 years can there be a more important survey than this?

I can't think of one. Every record you submit could lead to a new pair being found and protected.

I am extremely grateful to the farmers who allowed access to fields and the erection of electric fences around nests. I also appreciate the collaboration with South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) and Gwent Wildlife Trust for their help in producing field maps.

Finally, huge thanks to the many people who submitted sightings and to the dedicated surveyors who made regular monitoring visits. Your efforts are giving these amazing birds a fighting chance.

If you would like to get involved in Curlew conservation efforts, please email me at:

Curlew@gwentbirds.org.uk

Breeding Curlew sites monitored in Gwent, 2025

1. OLDCASTLE
2. BLAENGAVENNY
3. LLANWENARTH
4. BRYNGWENIN
5. TREFIL
6. GROSMONT
7. PENALLT
8. TRELLECH
9. NEWCHURCH
10. LLANGYBI
11. GELLI-GAER COMMON
12. MARKHAM
13. BLAEN RHYMNEY
14. WAUN-TYSSWG





Missing Lynx

Dr Deborah Brady introduces a secretive animal from the UK's past and the partnership project exploring its potential return.



Nature is like a puzzle. There are lots of different pieces, with such a wide variety of shapes, sizes and colours that it's hard to imagine them all merging. But

somehow, they do. They fit together seamlessly, creating something strong and spectacular: a healthy ecosystem. A community of animals, plants and other organisms interacting with each other and the landscape in which they live. Nature in balance.

Here in the UK, we have lots of wonderful wildlife. But some of the important pieces of that puzzle are missing. One of those pieces has a graceful, feline shape, with tufted ears and a short bob tail. It would once have sat within a mosaic of trees, never far from its preferred prey, roe deer. A missing link. The missing lynx.

LOST LYNX

Lynx are woodland cats. They're about the height of a Labrador, but lighter, with grey to golden-brown fur that can be plain or speckled with black markings. They are elusive, live in low densities and like to avoid people. They are most at home amongst the trees, with lots of understory plants to hide them as they hunt. Across most of Europe, their main prey is roe deer, though they also feed on other hoofed mammals like reindeer and chamois. Occasionally, they might eat smaller prey, such as rodents, hares, foxes and birds. They are most active between dusk and dawn. For thousands of years, lynx were a critical part of our ecosystems. As top carnivores, they would have helped regulate other animals like deer and foxes. The remains of their prey would have fed birds, beetles and other scavengers.

Lynx bones have been found in 32 cave sites across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These bones tell us lynx were still here when the Romans arrived and when Hadrian's wall was built. The most recent lynx bone found so far belonged to an animal that died around 1,500 years ago. But it's unlikely this was the last lynx. They're still mentioned in poems and other cultural evidence exists beyond that century, too. It's most likely that we lost our



lynx during the medieval period, around 800-1,000 years ago. They finally disappeared due to hunting and habitat loss.

Lynx faced similar issues across the rest of Europe. By the 20th century, they had been lost from many of the countries they once called home. However, in Europe, lynx are now making a comeback. Lynx have been reintroduced in countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Slovenia and Italy. Could they one day return to Britain, too?

"For thousands of years, lynx were a critical part of our ecosystems. As top carnivores, they would have helped regulate other animals like deer and foxes."

The Missing Lynx Project was formed to explore this question. It's led by The Lifescape Project supported closely by Northumberland Wildlife Trust and The Wildlife Trusts. The project is exploring the ecological, practical and social feasibility of reintroducing lynx. This is basically asking three key questions. Is there an area in Britain where lynx could live? How would bringing lynx back work (e.g. where would they come from)? And would local people accept lynx back in the landscape?

COULD LYNX LIVE IN BRITAIN?

The first step was to examine whether there was anywhere with the right habitat for lynx. To test this, the Lifescape Project followed a similar approach to that used in Germany, where lynx have been successfully reintroduced. This meant using advanced computer modelling techniques, drawing on the most recent and detailed data on lynx ecology and Britain's landscapes. Essentially, a virtual Britain was created in which simulated lynx could live. Knowledge from over 50 years of monitoring European lynx populations helped make the lynx behaviour as realistic as possible. Lynx reintroductions in different areas were tested using the model, under lots of different scenarios, and the outcomes studied.

This research found that if lynx were to be released in Northumberland, they could grow into a healthy population covering north-west Northumberland, the edge of Cumbria and the bordering areas of southern Scotland. This is currently the only area in England and Wales with the extensive forest habitats that lynx need.

HOW COULD WE BRING LYNX BACK?

Any species reintroduction is a complicated process. There are lots of practical elements to consider. These include finding the right place to get the lynx from, managing the translocation and release, and monitoring

lynx after they are released. The Missing Lynx Project is working closely with experts from across Europe to explore these elements. There are decades of experience to help guide the process.

HOW DO PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT LYNX?

To recap, the Missing Lynx Project's research has shown that there's an area of northern England and southern Scotland that could support a healthy population of lynx. We also have lots of expertise from across Europe on how to manage the practicalities of a successful lynx reintroduction. But – crucially – a reintroduction could only take place if local people are accepting of the animal back in the landscape.

For more than a year, the project has been sharing its findings with people in the area identified by the modelling; opening discussions about lynx and providing a variety of opportunities for everyone to share their views. As part of this, a travelling Missing Lynx exhibition toured the area to bring the lynx to life. We welcomed almost 10,000 visitors across 15 venues, from village halls to agricultural colleges and at iconic local landmarks. The project has held meetings, hosted community workshops and conducted one-to-one interviews. We also held focus groups for people with shared interests in the area – there are groups for farming, forestry and business, as well as a Lynx Community Group with 117 members.

In addition to all of the face-to-face conversations, the project provided a questionnaire for people to record their views on lynx. We had responses from just over 1,000 people who live in the project region, with 72% of them supporting a lynx reintroduction there. The overall attitudes towards lynx were positive, but it's important to listen to the voices of those with concerns. Much can be learnt from how people live alongside lynx in Europe and the project's next step will be to keep working with local communities, exploring how a reintroduction project could be managed to maximise benefits and reduce risks. Together, with the acceptance of the local community, we can bring back our missing lynx.

Dr Deborah Brady is lead ecologist for The Lifescape Project and manages The Missing Lynx Project.



Lynx and kittens



PHOTO CREDITS: BERNDT FISCHER



"Bringing back lynx could benefit wildlife more widely – something that is sorely needed in this nature-depleted country. We have pushed many native species to extinction, and it makes sense to bring missing wildlife back where feasible. Bison and beavers have invigorated degraded habitats and this consultation shows there's now an opportunity for us to bring back lynx too."

Rob Stoneman, director of landscape recovery for The Wildlife Trusts

LYNX LIVED WILD
IN BRITAIN FOR
THOUSANDS OF
YEARS. THEY
WERE MOST LIKELY
LOST DURING THE
MEDIEVAL PERIOD,
AROUND
800
YEARS AGO

"The fact that 72% of respondents in the project region support a potential lynx reintroduction is hugely positive. Locals are proud that our region is a stronghold for threatened species such as red squirrels and water vole – so it's no surprise that they're in favour of bringing more back. The chances of ever seeing this beautiful creature are very rare, but communities have let us know that they recognise the benefits of restoring this beautiful animal."

Mike Pratt, chief executive officer of Northumberland Wildlife Trust

What are your views on lynx reintroduction? Let us know at missinglynxproject.org.uk/share-your-views



Concerns of risk to wildlife if planning laws weakened

Over this year, The Wildlife Trusts and other environmental organisations have become increasingly concerned about the risks to wildlife posed by potentially destructive rollbacks in environmental safeguards. In what felt like a twin attack on measures to help protect and restore wildlife in England, the UK Government has been considering big changes with new legislation related to the planning system. This includes a new Planning and Infrastructure Bill and a relaxing of Biodiversity Net Gain – a requirement on developers to leave nature in a better state than it was before.

Despite the Government promising a 'win-win' for development and the environment in the run up to the General Election, early readings of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill looked to strip away environmental protections and remove requirements for developers to avoid harming nature – breaking that promise. As concerns mounted, The Wildlife Trusts called on you, our supporters, to lend your voice. In what became our Broken Promises campaign, over 30,000 of you emailed your MP to ask for parts of the Bill to be withdrawn as environmentally unsafe and

to request that the UK Government stopped issuing incorrect statements about nature protections being a blocker to house building.

Thanks to your support, we have seen progress, with amendments to the Bill published by Ministers in mid-July that go a significant way to addressing our concerns. These amendments add new environmental safeguards to the proposed law and were published alongside a policy statement from the UK Government recognising nature protections are not a barrier to growth.

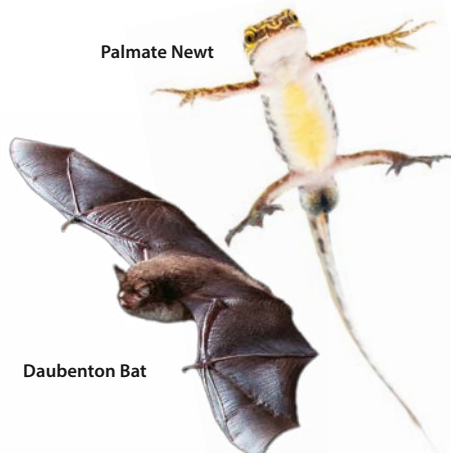
However, this does not mean the risk to wildlife has completely disappeared and so we will continue to work with parliamentary peers on the Bill, pressing for further assurances. We will also continue to stress to Government that fiddling with planning protections will not produce the economic

results they want. Nature is not a 'blocker' – it is the source of our security and prosperity.

In addition, proposals to weaken Biodiversity Net Gain still exist and would, if followed through, make this policy virtually meaningless – blasting a hole through one of the most important tools we have to halt nature loss. The proposal is to make small development sites exempt from the rules, which new research by eftec has shown could lead to 97% of planning applications escaping any Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.

Lots of evidence shows that investing in and avoiding harm to nature does more than just boost its recovery – multiple co-benefits exist including solutions to flooding and drought, improved health and well-being and making financial savings through supply chains. The same research from eftec also suggests that the proposed changes to Biodiversity Net Gain represent a potential loss of funding for nature's recovery equivalent to around £250 million a year. It makes no sense to deregulate and pull the rug from under investors in the green economy – and this is a case we will continue to make with politicians.

To keep up-to-date with the latest news around planning and development, in context of the environment take a look at The Wildlife Trusts' blogs on the subject: wildlifetrusts.org/blog/category/planning-and-development



Palmate Newt

Daubenton Bat

BAN BOTTOM TRAWLING IN PROTECTED SEAS NOW

Bottom trawling is destroying our seabed – and it's still happening inside Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This industrial fishing method drags heavy gear across the seafloor, smashing fragile habitats, releasing stored carbon and killing marine life on a massive scale. Then, of what's caught, over three quarters is simply thrown away.

Thanks to Ocean, Sir David Attenborough's latest BBC documentary, the public can now see the destruction caused. But the reality is worse: MPAs, meant to protect the seabed, are being trawled without repercussion. Out of sight cannot mean out of mind. The UK Government's recently

launched consultation looking at banning bottom trawling in 41 offshore MPAs. This is a crucial step – but only if swift action follows.

Partial or delayed protections won't save our seas. The Wildlife Trusts are calling for an immediate ban on bottom trawling in all seabed-protecting MPAs. We must protect entire areas, not just fragments, and finally stop industrial-scale damage in waters meant to be safe for nature.

Marine life can recover. Seabed habitats store carbon, support wildlife, and help secure sustainable fisheries. But only if we act now. In the words of Sir David Attenborough, "If we save the sea, we save our world."

Join us in telling Minister Hardy to ban bottom trawling in MPAs. The future of our seas depends on it.

wtru.st/Ban-Bottom-Trawling

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Once in a lifetime

When Peter McEvoy first stepped foot on 90-acres of farmland in County Fermanagh, he knew it was a special place: the last remnants of species-rich grassland and centuries-old woodland in Northern Ireland. Ulster Wildlife is now the proud new owner of Fedian Nature Reserve, brimming with wildflower meadows, bird-friendly hedgerows and ancient woodlands.

wtru.st/Safeguarding-nature



2 Cuckoo, cuckoo

Two cuckoos, named Arthur and Ashok, have been fitted with lightweight satellite tags to track their remarkable trans-Saharan migration. The cuckoos from Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Worlingham Marshes nature reserve will join over 100 others in the British Trust for Ornithology's long-running Cuckoo Tracking Project, to help understand the cuckoo population decline.

wtru.st/Cuckoos-tagged

3 Pine marten kits born

Devon and Somerset Wildlife Trusts are among those celebrating the birth of wild pine martens in a pioneering reintroduction project in the South-west of England. Recorded on site, exclusive footage shows the first kits born into the wild in Devon for more than a century.

wtru.st/Pine-marten-kits

Once common species, like tree sparrows are now red-listed



A decade of nature-friendly farming brings wildlife back

Rare birds, bees and butterflies are returning to farms across England thanks to a decade of nature-friendly farming. The Jordans Farm Partnership – a collaboration between The Wildlife Trusts, Jordans Cereals and LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) – has supported 27 farms since 2015 to create tailored conservation plans.

From planting hedgerows and wildflower margins to restoring ponds and improving habitat links, farmers have transformed

their land for wildlife. Over half have reported sightings of new or returning species – many of them rare or endangered.

Red-listed birds like the tree sparrow, nightingale and goshawk have reappeared, alongside the rare meadow clary plant, found in just 26 UK sites. Other highlights include breeding stone curlew in Hampshire, scarce emerald damselfly in Suffolk and brown hare in Leicestershire.

This inspiring partnership shows what's possible when farming works hand-in-hand with nature – creating healthier landscapes for wildlife, farmers and future generations.



LASTING TRIBUTES IN SPECIAL PLACES

At Gwent Wildlife Trust, we feel honoured to help families create lasting tributes to loved ones. One way we're able to do this, is by offering a limited number of benches across our nature reserves to be dedicated in memory. These special places provide comfort and remembrance whilst donations in memory leave a lasting legacy by supporting our vital conservation work.

We appreciate all the many generous gifts received in memory of loved ones, which have enabled us to inspire action for nature and ensure its recovery now and in the future.

A special place for Jane at Magor Marsh
Earlier this year, Jane's family (members of the Magor community) made a generous



Above left, Robert and Sian Hopkins on their mother's memorial bench. Above, Jane Hopkins.

donation to Gwent Wildlife Trust to dedicate a memorial bench at Magor Marsh in her name. When they kindly agreed to meet with me, I was eager to learn more about the person whose life and love of nature would now be remembered in such a special way.

When I sat down with Jane's family, it quickly became clear how much she was loved. Again and again, her children Robert and Sian described her as selfless, generous, and full of energy. Jane loved to walk, often venturing farther with her son Robert, or taking shorter, gentler routes with her daughter Sian. Many of those walks led them to Magor Marsh, a place Jane held close to her heart.

For Jane, who was born in Lewisham and moved to Magor in 1988, the Marsh was a place to enjoy the swans gliding along the reeds, to pause at the pond, and to listen to the chorus of birdsong. Having a bench there now, in her memory, felt perfectly right.

Robert and Sian told me that Jane had asked for a simple unmarked cremation, so the family wanted something physical to remember her by. Her family reflected that a bench at Magor Marsh felt in keeping with her wishes – a physical memorial space to honour her memory, and something that others would enjoy. "She would have loved the thought that something in her name could also make life a little easier for other people," Robert reflected.

The family chose a peaceful spot with views across the reserve. They spoke warmly about how the Trust guided them in finding the most fitting location, one where Jane's love of nature and the Marsh's quiet beauty come together. Already, friends and family have visited, and the family expect it will continue to be a place where they can gather, remember, and feel close to her.

"It's perfect," said Sian. "A place that captures everything Mum loved - the stillness, the birds, the beauty of Magor Marsh."

For the family, the bench is both a comfort and a legacy. For visitors, it is a welcome place to rest, surrounded by the natural wonders Jane treasured.

To find out more about dedicating a bench, or other ways of giving in memory, get in touch with Alice.reees@gwentwildlife.org. Your gift can represent the legacy of your loved one, while protecting the wild spaces that matter so much.

In Memory

In very sad news to share, we lost some wonderful friends and champions for wildlife this summer. Margaret Durkin was a very longstanding supporter and volunteer on the Gwent Levels who sadly passed away in July. You can read Ben Boylett's tribute to Margaret on our website. Some of our longer-standing members will remember Alan Williams, who achieved a huge amount for conservation in his lifetime, including with Gwent Ornithological Society and Gwent Wildlife Trust. We also joined many local people in paying tribute to Cheryl Cummings, a much-loved supporter who generously inspired so many people to embrace nature in their gardens.



NOTICE OF OUR 62ND AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 62nd Annual General Meeting of Gwent Wildlife Trust Ltd will be held on Saturday 15th November 2025 at 2.30pm at the Usk Memorial Hall, Maryport Street, Usk, NP15 1AD. (Please note the venue and date change from previous years.)

Agenda and approximate timings:

2.30pm: Refreshments and displays of projects

3pm: Marc Leppard, Chair of Board of Trustees – official welcome, notices and thanks followed by formal AGM

3.15pm:

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2024 AGM and matters arising.
3. To receive the Trustees Annual Report of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2025.
4. To receive the Annual Accounts of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2025.
5. To re-appoint Menzies LP as auditors of the charity to hold office until the conclusion of the next General Meeting at which the accounts are laid before the charity.
6. Special Resolution – The members will be asked to consider and pass the following special resolution: That the governing document of Gwent Wildlife Trust Ltd dated 15/09/2021, be amended in accordance with the proposed changes set out in the document entitled "Special Resolution_Sep25" and that this revised governing document be adopted as the charity's new constitution
7. To re-elect Marc Leppard as Trustee
8. To introduce observer Trustees and the elected officers of the Board of Trustees as well as Patron, President/Vice Presidents

Members will be asked to vote to accept items 2 to 7.

4pm: Natalie Buttriss, CEO, welcome and introduces presentations (see back page for details)

4.45pm: Q&A chaired by Natalie Buttriss

5pm: Close.

By order of the Board, September 2025, Tim Rathbone, Company Secretary.

Notes: Papers for the AGM are linked on our website at www.gwentwildlife.org/agm and can be requested from the GWT office by calling 01600 740600 or emailing info@gwentwildlife.org.

If you are unable to attend and would like to send apologies please email these to Zoe Porter at zporter@gwentwildlife.org

LOOK OUT FOR THE 2024/25 ANNUAL REVIEW!

Your membership helps local nature, people and wildlife in many ways. We're currently putting together a review of the last year, to communicate the value your membership brings, including impact stories about how your support is:

- Providing better protected, connected, and managed areas for wildlife
- Increasing habitat connectivity in the landscape
- Boosting evidence-based conservation through citizen science
- Inspiring nature's future protectors
- Restoring river wildlife and
- Improving health and wellbeing through nature

This will be emailed out to members and featured on our website ahead of our AGM in November. If you are not online and would like us to print and post a copy, please let us know.

Minimum Fee Increase

As we wrote in the Spring-Summer Edition of Wild About Gwent, we haven't increased our minimum membership rates since 2015; but with the increases in our costs over that time, it is now necessary. We hope this small increase will be affordable for our members and know that you want to maximise your support for local conservation.

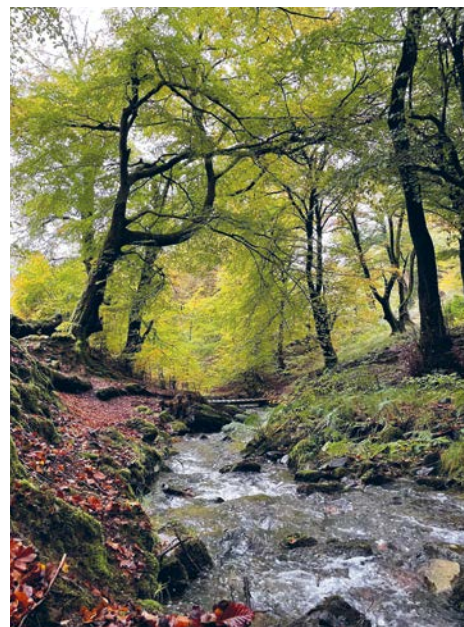
In April, we increased our Minimum Membership Donations for new members joining us in 2025 to:

Individual: £3.50 monthly or £42 per year

Joint: £4 monthly or £48 per year

Family: £5 monthly or £60 per year

Over the coming months, we're asking those members currently donating below the new minimum amounts if they are able to increase their donations. (For any Annual payers, the increase would take place at your next renewal date.) This will not be compulsory, members can opt out and continue donating as they have been. A high percentage of our existing members are already donating more than the new minimum amounts and this extra support is greatly appreciated.



With your support we can keep protecting and restoring wonderful wild places like Silent Valley Nature Reserve pictured above.

Anyone is welcome to contact Lois Holroyd (lholyd@gwentwildlife.org or 07769 245371) to discuss their membership, at any time.

Gwent Wildlife Trust's **62nd Annual General Meeting** Saturday, 15th November at 2.30pm

**You are warmly invited to attend
Gwent Wildlife Trust's 62nd Annual
General Meeting**

at Usk Memorial Hall, Maryport
Street, Usk, NP15 1AD.

After the AGM, Gwent Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers will present a tour around Gwent, from the city of Newport through the urban conurbations to Pontypool, into the Eastern Valleys and from Abergavenny to Usk, Monmouth and the lower Wye Valley, finishing on the Gwent Levels. You'll hear how people of all ages from diverse communities are helping some of Gwent's most threatened wildlife, as we share some fascinating wildlife discoveries.

Everyone welcome

TO BOOK YOUR PLACE:

Visit our website at
www.gwentwildlife.org/agm

Email us at info@gwentwildlife.org
or call 01600 740600



*Above, green hay
spreading at
Wyeswood. Right,
youth groups
harvest mice
surveys. Below
left, river clean up
Cwmbran. Below
right, installing
leaky dams Silent
Valley.*

