



Conservation Report

2025 - 2026



Conservation Report 2025 / 2026

Reporting Period: April 2025 – March 2026

Dear Supporter,

Changing our name from *Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC)* to *Wild Cymru* this year was not a decision taken lightly. We were very aware that, as *INCC*, we'd established a reputation as an independent nature conservation organisation that didn't hold back from holding power to account, that successfully delivered species recovery and habitat restoration projects and that we'd grown the loyal support of people like you. The reason for the name change is our motivation to deliver so much more for Welsh nature. To do that, we must broaden our appeal and reach new audiences and, despite our great affection for the name *INCC*, we think that *Wild Cymru* is a simpler and more accessible name and that it will help us do that.

Without doubt, I believe that realising our long-held ambition of establishing a Nature Investigations Unit is a significant milestone for nature conservation in Wales. It is a one of a kind here and it demonstrates our ambition to explore new and truly impactful ways of standing up for wildlife. The new team will uncover practices that are damaging nature and ask the questions that no one else will raise. I'm really looking forward to seeing what they'll uncover over the coming year.

Of course, alongside the above, *Wild Cymru* staff and volunteers continued to deliver important species and habitat projects at various sites across Wales, as well as at Llwyndewi, our nature reserve in Carmarthenshire. It is a pleasure to share news from these projects with you in this Report.

To maintain our independence and strengthen our voice we do not to accept government or statutory funding. This means we depend upon, and are very grateful for, the generosity of supporters, donors and volunteers like yourselves. 'Diolch i chi gyd'. Please help us by spreading the word about *Wild Cymru* and our journal, *Natur Cymru*.

Daniel Jenkins-Jones (Chair of Trustees)

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Who We Are and What We Stand For

Wild Cymru's Vision

A Wales with more wildlife in more places, created by a society that intrinsically values the natural world.

Wild Cymru's Mission

To be the unconstrained voice that Welsh wildlife needs, speaking out and putting the needs of wildlife first.

Trustees

 **Chairman:** Daniel Jenkins-Jones

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 **Assistant Reserve Warden**
Olivia Davies

 **Assistant Reserve Warden**
Matt Brown

 **Student Placement:**
Faith Campion

 **Communications Officer:**
Laurence Whitaker

 **Investigative Journalist:**
Helen Callaghan

Position in the Sector

Wild Cymru was founded in 2018 in response to the growing need for an independent nature conservation organisation able to speak out and challenge environmental decision makers to do more for wildlife.

Activities

 Species & habitat conservation

-  Research, surveys & monitoring
-  Habitat restoration & creation
-  Landowner advisory & support
-  Engagement & education
-  Advocacy, litigation & campaigns

Objectives

The objectives of Wild Cymru, as outlined in our governing document are:

-  To promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection, and improvement of the natural environment of Wales in such ways as the trustees think fit and including by advocacy, carrying out research and publishing the useful results thereof, and promoting biodiversity.
-  To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment of Wales by providing information and through raising awareness.

Wild Cymru - A New Name for a New Chapter

We have decided to change the name of the charity, and we're really excited about it. As of March 2026, Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru is now known as Wild Cymru.

The next chapter of Wild Cymru's journey is an exciting one. Whilst our ongoing work will remain as strong as ever, we want to go bigger. With the rebrand comes the launch of our new Nature Investigations Unit. This team will work tirelessly to uncover the hidden (and not-so-hidden) problems that wildlife in Wales faces daily. From mismanagement of natural resources to wildlife crime and persecution and many issues in between, Wild Cymru will be the voice that speaks out for nature where other voices fall short.

We still do not accept government funding. We are still determined to challenge those who would damage our natural world and hold them to account. We are still here to fight for a wilder Wales.

We believe that our new name will help us to bring together conservationists and the wider public in growing our ambitions and amplifying our voices. Wild Cymru is harder hitting, clearer, and more impactful which will help us to grow our audience and increase the support for nature among the Welsh public.

Natur Cymru magazine will remain very much the same as it has been: just a different logo on the front cover.

We couldn't have got this far without you, and we can't wait to take you along with us on the next part of our journey.

Business Plan

This business plan covers our priorities for the coming five years, and includes:

- Developing a Nature Investigations Unit
- Delivering and demonstrating best practice land management
- Species recovery

- Developing the reach and impact of Natur Cymru
- Supporting early career conservationists

We also have organisational development priorities which are to:

- Increase Wild Cymru's donor base and total annual donation value
- Review Board roles, training and succession planning
- Increase Wild Cymru's unrestricted reserves
- Grow Wild Cymru's public profile

Speaking out for wildlife through campaigning and challenging environmental decision makers is at the core of Wild Cymru's work.

Nature Investigations

To ensure that our campaigning has as much impact as possible we work closely with the environmental law firm Leigh Day. Legal challenges are becoming an increasingly necessary tool in the fight for a Wales with more wildlife.

Investigations Unit

Over the past two years Wild Cymru has been fundraising to create a Nature Investigations Unit. Thanks to the generous contribution of donors, grant giving trusts and supporters, Wild Cymru has been able to raise enough funds to create its Nature Investigations Unit.

The first to join the team was Laurence Whitaker in November 2025 as our new Communications Officer. Laurence has a background in broadcast radio and wildlife film making and production for BBC, Netflix and others. He will play a crucial role in developing Wild Cymru's reach and audience base so that investigations and other elements of our work can have a greater impact.



Laurence Whitaker, Wild Cymru's Communications Officer.

In February 2026 Helen Callaghan joined the team as our new Investigative Journalist. Helen has many years of experience as a reporter and broadcast journalist, working for outlets such as for ITV and BBC. Helen also has experience in research, print journalism and production.

With support from existing Wild Cymru staff, Helen and Laurence form the core of the Nature Investigations Unit.



Helen Callaghan, Wild Cymru's Investigative Journalist.

Over the next few years, we want to pioneer a fundamental shift in the nature conservation sector that will see greater emphasis being placed on holding environmental decision makers to account.

We want to achieve this by exposing and challenging attitudes, inaction, and decision making, where it has the potential to impact wildlife and nature conservation in Wales.

We have already interviewed the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales (Professor Lynda Warren) regarding her role in advising Welsh Ministers on environmental legislation.

Throughout 2026, the Investigations Unit will be investigating issues such as:

1. Wildfires and prescribed burns.
2. The role of Welsh Government underfunding and its impacts on nature recovery.
3. Conifer regeneration – who's responsible and what are the implications for wildlife.
4. Finding Wales's cleanest river.

Campaign Journalism

Our approach to investigations will be Campaign Journalism. Simply put, our campaigning journalism is advocacy for Welsh wildlife. It is not impartial, but it is underpinned by a public interest ethos.

- We are transparent about our advocacy and investigations.

- The information we use is accurate and based on verifiable sources.
- Comments (including opinions and analysis) espoused by Wild Cymru and others will be based on expertise or experience and honestly held on matters of public interest.
- We operate independently; free from Welsh Government, corporate or party-political affiliations.
- We are professional, courteous, and also robust where appropriate, in our dealings with people and organisations.

Adhering to this philosophy will help us to confidently defend the rigour and integrity of our journalism against any suggestion that our motives could be self-interested or vexatious. It will also help to defend against those who attempt to dismiss the journalism and its findings.

No More Wildfires

This spring has already seen another period of wildfires in Wales. The wetter February and March months meant that more burns were undertaken in April and even May in parts of Wales. These late fires would have had a huge impact on wildlife.

Wildfire is, unfortunately, an annual event that causes the loss of habitat and wildlife on a vast scale. Although direct arson and accidents are already known to be a big part of the problem, much less is known about legally permitted ‘prescribed burns’ that go wrong.

The Heather and Grass etc. Burning (Wales) Regulations 2008 and accompanying Code state that prescribed burning is permitted during daylight hours between 1st October – 31st March in upland areas, and 1st November – 15th March everywhere else. A burn plan is needed, and a template to fill in is available from the Welsh Government website. The plan should detail the targeted area, the

result wanted and where and when it is happening. Neighbours and fire and rescue services should be informed. Areas which can't be burnt should be mapped and fire breaks prepared.



Mountainside in the Amman Valley after a recent fire.

Farmers and land managers burn particular areas of terrain in order to improve grazing, manage certain plants, or remove flammable vegetation to reduce wildfire risk. For those who carry out prescribed burns in accordance with the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (Wales) Regulations 2008 and its accompanying Code, preparation, skill and experience are pre-requisites. But for those who do not comply, whether through ignorance or refusal to engage, there is very little in the current monitoring and regulatory system to stop them.

Wild Cymru outlined these concerns to the Independent Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales (IEPAW), and as a result of the submission, the IEPAW investigated, hosting an evidence-gathering session near Lake Vyrnwy in March.



Delegates at Lake Vyrnwy discussing the environmental impacts of grassland fires and potential changes to the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (Wales) Regulations 2008

That discussion contributed to the IEPAW's report on controlled burning, prepared for Welsh Government Ministers.

Species Recovery

Wild Cymru believes that restoring species (and populations of species) to the landscape is an important element of nature conservation action in Wales.

Restoring habitats is essential, but if we are to reverse declines in biodiversity, then we believe that more proactive and interventional conservation approaches are now required. Working at the landscape scale has always been an important aspect of how Wild Cymru delivers its practical nature conservation activities. We do this by identifying species that can act as flagships for their landscape and provide a means of encouraging local communities to be at the heart of conservation action.

Marsh Fritillary Population Reinforcement

Our Marsh Fritillary population restoration project is perhaps the best example of how we do this.

The Marsh Fritillary has undergone widespread declines across much of its natural range, including the UK.

The species is now one of the most threatened butterflies in Europe. Wales remains a relative stronghold for the Marsh Fritillary globally, but even here, population declines and local extinctions continue to occur.



Marsh Fritillary at Y Gweira 14/05/25

Our Marsh Fritillary reinforcement project has now been running for five years, having first reared caterpillars in captivity back in 2021.

The project is reinforcing a dwindling and vulnerable population of the butterfly in a landscape in South Wales, around the towns of Llantrisant and Tonyrefail, bringing them back so that they can repopulate Llantrisant Common and the rest of the landscape.

No caterpillars were collected in 2025 as we had sufficient numbers in

the rearing pens already from the 2024 cohort. The first butterfly recorded emerging in the rearing pens in 2025 was on the 5th May with a report of one seen on Llantrisant Common the day before.



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

Marsh Fritillary in the rearing pen
05/05/25.

During the late spring and summer of 2025, we continued to monitor the Marsh Fritillaries in the rearing pens and to a lesser extent on the Common. Fewer visits to the Common were possible in 2025 so the map below is probably not completely representative of their full distribution. However, it is encouraging to see how well-distributed they remain.



Locations of adult Marsh Fritillaries
seen on Llantrisant Common in 2025.

In early autumn 2025 more larvae were released onto the Common to continue bolstering the population.



Locations of Marsh Fritillary
caterpillars released on Llantrisant
Common in 2025.

Breeding Success

Due to time constraints and poor weather, a reduced number of larval web counts were carried out in August and September 2025. As a result, only a small number of webs were recorded, albeit widely distributed across the site, making any conclusions difficult to make this year.



Marsh Fritillary larval webs recorded at Llantrisant Common in autumn 2025.

As last year, the webs broadly correlated with where adults were seen earlier in the season.

The first larvae emerging from hibernation in the rearing pens were seen on the 3rd of February. In 2026

we will continue to rear them on, with larvae due to be released later in the year.

Habitat Restoration

In 2025 the habitat management undertaken in 2024 was continued. Areas previously cut were assessed to see how well they were recovering. It appeared that the vegetation structure is much improved following cutting so more areas were selected for 2025 (bearing in mind where larval webs had been found previously). Again, the cutting was concentrated on areas of rank Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and some large monoculture patches of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

As in 2024, the cutting was carried out by Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and should continue to allow more suitable and diverse habitat to develop. We will continue to revisit these sites and those cut in 2024 to assess how well they're developing. In areas where the structure is right for Marsh Fritillaries but there is a lack of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* (the Marsh Fritillary larval

food plant) we will consider spreading seed collected from Scabious plants elsewhere on the Common.



Cut and collect tracked machine in operation at Llantrisant Common. February 2026.

Water Vole Reintroduction River Thaw

In 2024 and 2025 Wild Cymru (working with local landowners and partner organisations) reintroduced over 170 Water Voles *Arvicola amphibius* to the River Thaw in the Vale of Glamorgan. The release of Water Voles followed several years of planning, habitat restoration, and American Mink *Neogale vison* control.

Water Voles were recorded in the Thaw valley until 2004, before they became extinct.

Although scrub encroachment and intensive agriculture have taken their toll on the riparian habitat of the River Thaw, it is thought that the main reason for the Water Voles extinction twenty years ago was the presence of American Mink.

Surveys undertaken in 2025 along the River Thaw and its tributaries showed that the Water Voles had spread along the river and now populate much of the lower and middle reaches of the river.



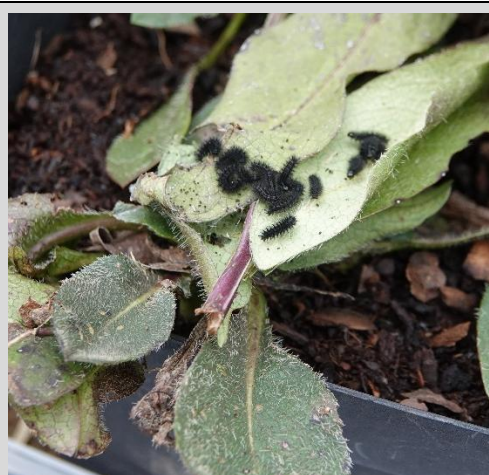
Water Vole feeding in wetland habitat in the Thaw valley.

The project will continue with habitat restoration and Mink control across the Thaw Valley and further reintroductions are planned in the future.

Marsh Fritillary Reintroduction in North Pembrokeshire

Wild Cymru have been working on an ambitious Marsh Fritillary reintroduction in North Pembrokeshire with Dr Beynon's Bug Farm.

Following a successful license application in 2025, Wild Cymru and Sarah Beynon's Bug Farm staff and volunteers have been able to collect 80 Marsh Fritillary caterpillars from the wild to be reared in captivity.



Marsh Fritillary caterpillars (collected from sites in Pembrokeshire) feeding inside their rearing pen.

The offspring from the 80 caterpillars will then form the basis of the rearing programme and the reintroduction. Caterpillars were collected from four different sites across Pembrokeshire and western Carmarthenshire.

At first the caterpillars are kept isolated from other collected populations. This is so staff can check the caterpillars for the parasitoid wasp *Cotesia bignelli*.



Cocoons of *C. bignelli* attached to Marsh Fritillary butterfly caterpillars. The wasp larvae burst out of the caterpillar in early spring, having spent the winter slowly eating away at the caterpillar's insides. Once emerged from a caterpillar, the wasp larva quickly spins protective cocoons, and the adult wasp emerges approximately 14 days later.

The wasp is incredibly rare as its only host species is the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. When wasps (larval cocoons) are found in the rearing pens they are removed and released back to the donor sites where their caterpillar host was collected from.

Saving our Upland Water Voles

In 2024, Wild Cymru began its ambitious Upland Water Vole Project, thanks to funding from the Pen Y Cymoedd Community Vision Fund.

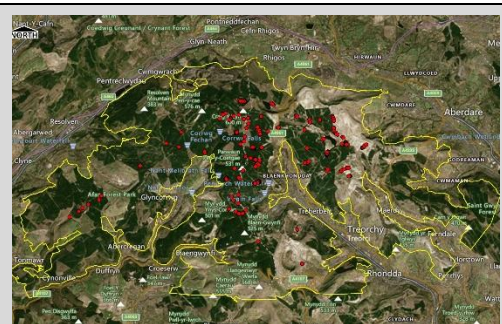


Water Vole. Photo: Tim Melling.

The project is located in the uplands of the Cynon, Rhondda, Neath, and Afan valleys, some of the last refuges for this rare and wonderful species

in Wales. The landscape is one of the last known locations for extant Water Vole populations in the whole of Glamorgan.

At the end of 2025 the Wild Cymru team had surveyed a total of 42 locations in the Glamorgan uplands and recorded 26 colonies.



Water Vole distribution in the Glamorgan uplands 2025.

Research and Genetics

When surveying for Water Voles in the project area we have been collecting droppings from latrines so that we can run a relatedness analysis test to determine how closely related the 26 Water Vole colonies are. To do this work we have teamed up with Aberystwyth University who are experts in the field of population genetics.

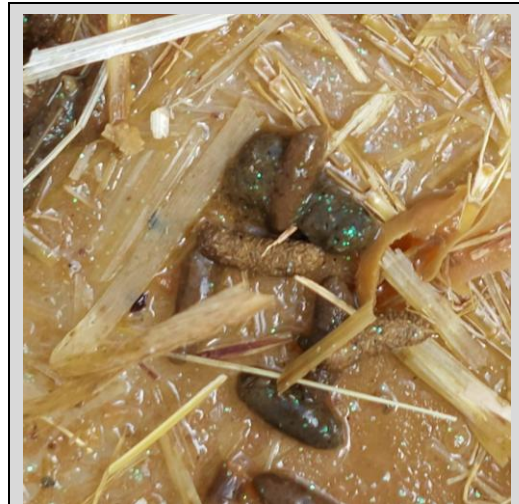


Water Vole dropping being collected for future genetic testing. Each collected dropping is given a three-digit reference number. A grid reference is then taken so that once we run the analysis we can tell where each dropping came from in the landscape.

Another research project we are undertaking in the project area involves trying to identify the size of a Water Vole's territory. Knowing the territory size of a Water Vole in the uplands of Glamorgan will give Wild Cymru an idea of how many Water Voles there are in a particular area.

To establish territory size we are using edible, biodegradable glitter. It is hoped that the edible glitter once ingested by the territory holding Water Vole will then be passed through the Water Vole's system so

that staff can find the glitter in the Water Vole's droppings over the following days.



Water Vole droppings showing green biodegradable glitter as part of initial trials with captive Water Voles.

Wild Cymru staff will then look for the glittery droppings along the ditch where they are found. Water Voles leave their droppings in distinct piles (latrines). These latrines are territory markers, and Water Voles go through a lot of effort to maintain their latrines to protect their territory.

By finding all the glittery latrines along the ditch and surrounding marshy areas we can build a better picture of the full extent of one Water Vole's territory.

The bait stations will be Wild Cymru's Burrow Cams which are artificial burrow systems with an entrance at one end and a camera at the other. This will be important in identifying what animals have taken the bait and whether more than one Water Vole is being attracted by the apple.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is an important part of the project and outside of the breeding season efforts focused on public events and training of volunteers.

Targeted training days were delivered for local community volunteers, Swansea City Council staff and freelance ecologists who had experience of lowland Water Vole surveying but limited exposure to upland survey methods.

The project has also supported two students from Cardiff University through practical field experience and mentoring. In addition, public talks and guided upland walks were delivered for Black Mountains College and Welcome to Our Woods in Treherbert, providing further

learning opportunities linked to upland conservation.



Wild Cymru staff undertaking training for Swansea City Council in survey skills for upland Water Voles.

Threats

A major part of the project has been identifying the threats facing Water Voles in upland environments. The Welsh uplands may be our best chance of preventing the Water Vole's extinction in Wales and it is crucial we know as much as we possibly can about the threats they face in these areas and what can be done to help them.

So far the project has highlighted three main areas of concern for Water Vole. These include:

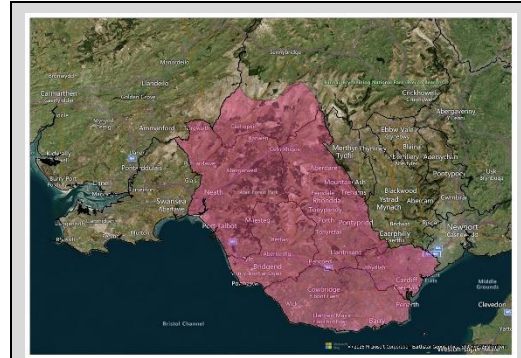
1. Infrastructure such as roads, buildings and hardstanding.
2. Conifer plantations and conifer regeneration.
3. The presence of American Mink.



American Mink. Photo: Tim Melling

SWAMP

The South Wales American Mink Partnership (SWAMP) was established by Wild Cymru in July 2025, with the aim of controlling American Mink in South Wales. The partnership is made up of various individuals and organisations including Wildlife Trusts, NRW, Local Authorities, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, Trunk Roads Agency and Rivers Trusts.



SWAMP area covering most of Glamorgan.

SWAMP was formed originally to help protect the Water Voles in the Glamorgan uplands, but it soon became apparent that if we are to protect the Water Voles, then we need to think much bigger and now the project covers six local authorities as well as part of the southern Bannau Brycheiniog National Park.

In November 2025, Wild Cymru was able to fund a Project Officer from the Waterlife Recovery Trust (WRT) to undertake American Mink control across the SWAMP area. American Mink are not just a threat to Water Voles, they predate on other small mammals, ground nesting and riverine birds, as well as reptiles, amphibians and fish.



American Mink carrying an Eel, taken at the Teifi Marshes, Ceredigion. Photo: Diane Willaims.

Over 70 Mink traps have been positioned across the SWAMP area to help control their numbers.

However, if we are to save the Water Vole from extinction we need to think and act even bigger. We need to eradicate American Mink from the whole of the UK, starting with Wales. There are currently some excellent projects happening across England, with large areas now Mink-free. The Water Voles and other wildlife are bouncing back, and there is no reason why we can't do that in Wales.

In February 2026, Wild Cymru started work writing the American Mink Eradication Strategy for Wales.



American Mink Eradication

A Strategy for Wales (2027 – 2033)



American Mink Eradication Strategy for Wales.

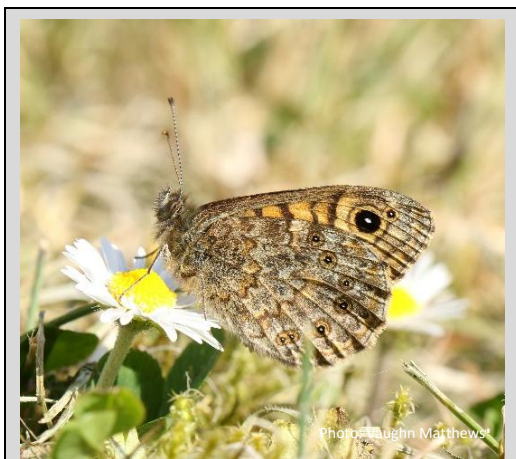
The strategy sets out the rationale for undertaking an all-Wales eradication of the American Mink, along with details on how it can be achieved.

Cefn Garthenor Species Survey

Since early 2021, Wild Cymru has been working closely with a Ceredigion landowner to help transform an 88 hectare sheep farm into a haven for wildlife. A baseline habitat survey of Cefn Garthenor

was initially undertaken to help inform future habitat creation and restoration plans.

Following on from the habitat mapping, a series of ecological surveys have been undertaken at Cefn Garthenor. These surveys will continue to help target restoration goals as well as help establish a long-term vision for the site, and how that vision can be achieved.



Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera* new to Cefn Garthenor 11/05/25

In the period April 2025 to March 2026 fewer surveys were carried out with the majority of time at the site concentrated on the Beaver enclosure.

After being released in the spring the two Beavers began by exploring their new surroundings. Cameras were installed around the enclosure so that their activity could be monitored. There was no guarantee that the pair would take to each other or the habitat.

Footage soon showed them spending time together and beginning to undertake typical habitat alterations. Trees were felled, ditches were blocked, widened and deepened, new routes were created to link ditches, and in amongst dense bramble and a naturally fallen conifer a lodge was being created.



Beaver dam and pond at Cefn Garthenor.

Beavers are well-known as ecosystem engineers but to see their work up close is very impressive. They have created terraced ponds

within what was previously damp woodland, creating new aquatic habitats and a lot of deadwood.

Video footage has also shown Otters using the Beavers' new wetland. Their work will be benefitting a wide range of taxa on site.

One of the concerns with a project of this type is that the Beavers stay where they are supposed to be. Therefore, we had to ensure that the specially designed Beaver fence did its job. The fence was walked almost daily by Jess who was a new addition to the team at Cefn Garthenor. Between these visits and the camera footage we could see that initially the Beavers explored these boundaries but then concentrated their activity where the habitat was more suitable.



The project is in its early stages but so far it seems to be going very well with the Beavers appearing healthy and very active. They also are often seen together so hopefully they might breed in the near future.



In May 2025 we again had a residential weekend with students from Bridgend College. The study trip is a great way to support early career conservationists as well as being able to undertake surveys and practical conservation work.

This year, with the help of the students we were able to dig a shallow linear pond for freshwater invertebrates and Water Voles at Cefn Garthenor. In addition to practical works we were also able to undertake annual vegetation monitoring of the meadows.



Digging of a linear pond at Cefn Garthenor.

Community Conservation in the Amman Valley

Wild Cymru has been working closely with landowners and communities in the Amman Valley, Carmarthenshire since 2018. Our focus has been on restoring species and habitats in the landscape, but importantly, also ensuring that local communities are at the heart of making it happen.

Over recent years Wild Cymru has been able to undertake a number of conservation initiatives, ranging from ecological monitoring to habitat creation and restoration. We are now working with numerous

landowners in the valley as well as local residents, communities, and businesses.

Wildlife Garden

The community wildlife garden is at the core of our work in the Amman Valley. It is a place for wildlife and people, supporting meadow and ponds alongside paths and benches.

In April 2025 we were able to add another small pond to the wildlife garden. The pond is now full of native pond plants and freshwater invertebrates, Palmate Newts and Common Toads.



New pond at the community wildlife garden in the Amman Valley.

Although a relatively small area, the wildlife garden needs lots of management, including cutting the meadow and preventing too much

scrub encroachment. Scrub is great for wildlife, so we want lots of it in the garden, but not so much that it starts to take over the meadow. Volunteer work parties are a great help. In Autumn 2025 we were happy to welcome volunteers from Bridgend College Conservation Volunteer group alongside our local volunteers to give the garden some much needed attention before the winter months. Plants were planted, paths maintained and meadow hay harvested.



Volunteers at the community wildlife garden taking a well-earned break.

Polytunnel

A major part of the wildlife garden is the polytunnel. The polytunnel is where Wild Cymru grows most of our Devil's-bit Scabious plants for Marsh Fritillary projects. Habitat restoration is essential to what Wild Cymru delivers and the polytunnel

is also the place where native plants are grown ready for restoration projects.

These plants include Small-flowered Catchfly *Silene gallica*, Deptford Pink *Dianthus armeria*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Red Campion *Silene dioica* and Ragged Robin *Silene flos-cuculi*.



Deptford Pink grown in the wildlife garden polytunnel.

The wildlife garden is also the base of running events and surveys, such as moth and bat surveys. Monthly newsletters are a way of informing

people of the wildlife to look out for in the valley, as well as tips and advice on encouraging more wildlife to the garden.

Pied Flycatcher Monitoring

The Pied Flycatcher is one of Wild Cymru's flagship species, with populations in the Amman Valley, Llwyndewi Nature Reserve and Cefn Garthenor.



Male Pied Flycatcher on a nest box at the Llwyndewi Nature Reserve.

Work began to help the species in the Amman Valley in 2019 when volunteers helped make and install 140 nest boxes. A further 500 boxes were installed in 2021 and 2022. Prior to Wild Cymru's involvement in the Amman Valley, no records of Pied Flycatcher had been made, and their distribution therefore was unknown.

2025 saw monitoring of the nest boxes taken to another level with the help and support of experienced and licensed local bird ringers. Unfortunately, the Pied Flycatcher population in the Amman Valley had a disappointing year, thought to be caused mainly by a short period of poor weather during the crucial chick feeding stage.

Early in the breeding season 25 Pied Flycatcher nests were recorded. However, over the following few weeks 11 of these were abandoned during the nest building stage. Three additional nests failed at the egg laying stage and a further two nests failed at the young chick stage. In total only 9 broods were thought to have fledged.

We will continue our monitoring and conservation effort for Pied Flycatchers in the Amman Valley and find new ways which we can support their numbers.



Adult male Pied Flycatcher being ringed under license. Photo: Ellyn Baker.

Barn Owl Monitoring

Over the past three years we have been monitoring twelve Barn Owl *Tyto alba* nest boxes in the valley.

The work is being done with the help and support of several landowners and volunteers, particularly Cedwyn and Dafydd who are both experienced and licensed to monitor and ring Barn Owls. 2025 was a

disappointing year for Barn Owls compared to previous years with only two nest boxes being occupied by the species. In total six owlets were ringed across the Amman Valley.



Barn Owl owlet just ringed in the Amman Valley.

One nest box was being occupied by a pair of Tawny Owls *Strix aluco* and their three owlets, which was a nice surprise.



Tawny Owl in Barn Owl nest box.

Many of the Barn Owl nest boxes are located on trees, and this year we found that several had been taken over by Grey Squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis*. To prevent this from being a regular event, we are planning on using used coffee grounds in the nest boxes to deter Squirrels. Squirrels (apparently) do not like the smell of coffee and avoid those areas. However, Barn Owls have a very poor sense of smell so should be unaffected by the coffee. With volunteers like Cedwyn and Dafydd we can monitor the Amman Valley Barn Owl population and better direct future conservation action.

Willow Tit Conservation Project

Towards the end of 2024, we were lucky enough to spot a lone Willow Tit at the Llwyndewi Nature Reserve. Willow Tits *Poecile montanus* are now the most threatened resident bird species in the UK. They are incredibly rare and it is thought that their population has declined by some 97% since the 1990s.



Photo: Jeff Slocombe

Willow Tit.

Seeing them at the nature reserve was a nice surprise. At the time we didn't know the status of the local population, or whether the nature reserve was part of a breeding territory.

Surveys undertaken in early 2025 revealed three Willow Tits at the nature reserve which represents a small and fragile population. However, a pair of Willow Tit bred at the nature reserve in 2025 and they managed to raise and fledge eight chicks, which was excellent news.



Willow Tit chicks in nest cavity at Llwyndewi Nature Reserve. Photo: Wild Horizons.

To help, we also installed 20 specialised nest boxes at the nature reserve to provide additional nesting opportunities.

There is still much debate about the effectiveness of nest boxes for Willow Tit, but we need to try. Although none of the boxes were used for nesting, they were investigated. Willow Tits nest in cavities inside deadwood. They need to excavate their own nest chamber every year. Therefore, the nest boxes are full of compacted sawdust to resemble deadwood.



Specialised Willow Tit nest box with long chamber filled with compacted sawdust and chips to resemble deadwood.

As well as monitoring we were also able to organise several volunteering events to help create and manage

Willow Tit habitat at the nature reserve.

Creating pools and scrapes in scrubby woodland provides additional foraging opportunities for Willow Tit, especially when they have young to feed.



Staff and volunteers blocking ditches in the woodland to create shallow scrapes.

As well as scrapes, volunteers were able to cut and install more standing deadwood to act as future Willow Tit nesting potential.

To create even more standing deadwood, some Willow trees were ring-barked, a process whereby the outer bark of the tree is complete removed, causing the tree above the cut line to slowly die and provide deadwood for invertebrates and

Willow Tits. As it's Willow, the tree below the cut line will coppice and regrow.



Standing deadwood and ring-barked Willow to provide future nesting habitat for Willow Tit at Llwyndewi.

Habitat Restoration

Wild Cymru believes that land management and habitat restoration are key to reversing the decline in biodiversity that Wales has witnessed over the past few decades.

Additionally, managing land increases Wild Cymru's knowledge and understanding of the issues at the heart of nature recovery in Wales, and lends more authority to our voice when advocating for wider land use change.

Vale Farm

Since 2023 Wild Cymru has been working on a mixed arable and cattle farm in the Vale of Glamorgan. We work closely with the tenant farmer to create a farm that is both financially viable and wildlife friendly.

Much of the work has focussed on the farm's arable habitat and creating wide margins of wildflower rich vegetation for insects and seed eating birds. A proportion of the margins are cultivated every year to create disturbed ground for annual

arable plants such as Fat Hen *Chenopodium album*.



Photo: Clive Hurford

Male Yellowhammer (winter).

Three of the large arable fields now have margins approximately 7m wide. These areas are crucial for wildlife, and they are playing an important role in supporting one of our flagship species at the Farm – the Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*.

Yellowhammers nest in the dense vegetation at the base of thick hedgerows. The grassy margins therefore provide the ideal nesting habitat for Yellowhammer and other farmland wildlife.

Three pairs of Yellowhammer were recorded in 2025, and it is hoped that more breeding territories can be supported in future years.



Arable margins at the farm.

As well as farmland birds, the farm is also home to Otters which are regularly seen on wildlife cameras on the river that cuts through the farm. To explore the use of wildlife cameras as a tool for surveying, Wild Cymru has taken on a Cardiff University student for a 10-month placement based at the farm. Since September 2025, Faith Campion has been checking a number of cameras at the farm and recording what species has been seen where, along with details such as time and behaviour. The research will not only help us identify more of the wildlife using the farm, but it will give us an insight into how they use the farm as well.

Llwyndewi Nature Reserve

Protecting and managing land for nature is essential if we are to reverse the decline in biodiversity.

Following two years of collaborating with the Welsh mineral water company, Brecon Carreg, in 2024 Wild Cymru signed a long-term lease granting us management of around 65 hectares of their land. The company wanted to use their land to deliver more for biodiversity and the reserve, known as Llwyndewi after the farm that used to manage this land, is now officially Wild Cymru's first nature reserve.



Upland landscape at Llwyndewi.

The land is a wonderful mosaic of different upland habitats, from

marshy grasslands and meadows to Oak woodland and dense Bracken.

In 2025 we were delighted to be awarded a year's funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for work at the nature reserve. This development phase will hopefully lead to a 5-year funded delivery phase. The development phase mostly involves carrying out a suite of surveys to get baseline data on what species are present. This will direct a management plan which will then be acted upon in the delivery phase.

The surveys are mostly carried out by specialists and include aquatic plants and invertebrates, bats, fungi, bryophytes and higher plants amongst others. Much of the summer survey work will be carried out in 2026 but we have already had fungi surveys undertaken over the winter and breeding bird surveys began in March.

In addition to surveys, we will be carrying out feasibility studies for grazing the acid grassland and Beaver introduction.



Ballerina Waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis* found at several pastures throughout Llwyndewi.

We also received funding in 2025 to employ two students from Bridgend College over the summer; supporting early career conservationists being an important part of Wild Cymru's mission. The students cleared huge amounts of Himalayan Balsam as well as carrying out surveys and leading volunteer workparties.



Matt Brown and Liv Davies Assistant Nature Reserve Wardens 2025.

Volunteers in 2025 also helped dig two ponds and spread wildflower seed to boost floral diversity in one of the meadows. We also ran a workparty bracken bruising, helping decrease the dominance of the plant, which shades out other vegetation.

We were very excited to find out that a pair of Willow Tits, one of the site's most important residents, successfully reared a brood of 8 chicks having excavated a nest cavity in a dead willow. Further monitoring in 2026 will tell us if they breed again.

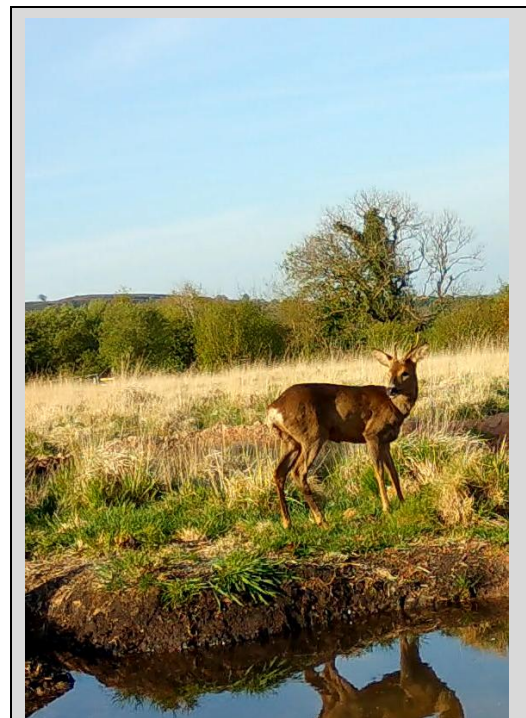


Photo: Jeff Slocombe

Willow Tits successfully bred in 2025.

Camera traps placed across the reserve have continued to provide us with records of wildlife that we haven't otherwise encountered.

These include Stoats *Mustela erminea*, Polecat *Mustela nivalis*, Fallow Deer *Dama dama* and Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*. Unfortunately, we also recorded American Mink *Neogale vison* at the reserve, so we have subsequently installed two Mink rafts as they are damaging to a range of native species.



Roe Deer at Llwyndewi Nature Reserve.

Supporting Early Career Conservationists

A priority for Wild Cymru, ever since we established in 2018, has been supporting early career nature conservationists. We have done this through providing various internships, volunteering positions, and training, as well as offering employment to early career conservationists when we can.

Assistant Officers

In June 2025, Wild Cymru were able to employ four new Officers, with thanks for support from the Moondance Foundation. Two of the officers helped support our upland Water Vole project in Glamorgan and another two were based at Llwyndewi Nature Reserve.

The posts were advertised to conservation students at Bridgend College. As well as providing paid employment to four of the candidates, the project also provided experience and feedback to students in terms of the application and interviewing process. In total, Wild Cymru interviewed ten students

from ten applications, eventually employing four.

The jobs, which were part-time covered a period of four months, between the end of College term and the beginning of the new academic year (June to September). This time period was specifically chosen to financially support students over the summer months and to provide them with essential skills and experience in the nature conservation sector.



Assistant Water Vole Officer, Freya Smith

"I have had a love for wildlife and the outdoors since I was a child. I grew up doing the big garden bird watches with my mum and spent most my holidays hiking in wilderness areas. So it's no surprise that by 13 I had already decided that I wanted to work in nature conservation.

Leaving school I pursued my passion by completing the level 3 Wildlife Conservation course at Bridgend College, moving on to the HND in Environmental Conservation.

Whilst studying both these courses I have learned a great deal about both the physical and theoretical aspects of wildlife conservation. Additionally, I have also learned a great deal as a member of the Bridgend College Conservation Volunteers, a group run by our lecturers to give further opportunities to students.

Many of these volunteering trips have been with Wild Cymru and so throughout the past three years I have been able to participate in a number of their projects including their Upland Water Vole project. This is why I was so elated when Wild Cymru provided students this incredible opportunity to join the team surveying these elusive creatures.

During the past three months I have gained multiple valuable skills: how to survey Water Voles in upland environments, how to identify field signs and how to differentiate from similar species. I was even able to get first aid and fundraising training.

Since upland Water Voles have had to adapt to a different habitat than those in lowland areas, this job has also provided a unique skill in being able to identify habitat preferences specific

to this environment. I also find working with an ongoing project exciting as I have been able to discover new information alongside the team, something I will definitely miss when this position ends. Collecting samples for eDNA analysis and reviewing camera trap videos are just a couple of these activities.

This job has been a valuable opportunity to work in a space where I feel able to ask for help and talk with all members of the group and as a young person soon to complete my degree, having this experience under my belt puts me in a stronger position when applying for future positions.

In the future I would like to work in upland areas as I have a keen interest in the species found there. I am especially interested in peat restoration and bryophytes and thanks to Wild Cymru and this opportunity I have developed a greater knowledge in this area."



Assistant Water Vole Officer, Laura Griffiths

“Having spent a decade working with children in schools and in hospitals, I felt ready for a new chapter. I have always had an affinity with nature from those early childhood experiences of falling in the reën by my house trying to catch a newt and making a homemade flower press out of stones, but I hadn’t really appreciated that there was an entire conservation sector out there. The more I researched career possibilities, the more I was sure this was the path for me.

Deciding to embark on a new career in conservation was a significant change, so I started by enrolling on a part-time HND in Environmental Conservation Management at Bridgend College.

I have learned an incredible amount so far from grassland and woodland management to fence construction surveying and hedgelaying, and I am only halfway through the course! The college also has a great conservation

volunteering programme to help develop those essential skills and regularly works in conjunction with Wild Cymru on projects.

As a result of this work with Wild Cymru, an incredible opportunity came up to apply for a summer internship as an Assistant Water Vole Officer, and I was lucky enough to get one of the positions. Over the summer, I have learned the protocol for surveying in what can be a very harsh environment, how to identify suitable upland Water Vole habitat and field signs, how to set up wildlife cameras to monitor the presence of the invasive and predatory American Mink, and how to collect, record, and store droppings for eDNA analysis. I have collaborated with colleagues from other organisations, represented Wild Cymru at a community nature event, and completed various training courses including outdoor first aid and fundraising.

However, most importantly, in a sector where it is well-known that jobs are extremely competitive, this post provided a much-needed opportunity for someone early in their career to gain new skills in that crucial first conservation role. It has also confirmed to me that I do indeed love wildlife surveying, and I plan to continue developing my knowledge of different wildlife species so that I can put it to good use in my next conservation role! “



**Assistant Nature Reserve Warden,
Matt Brown**

As soon as I get to Ammanford I can feel the stress falling from me. This is unusual as with previous jobs in other sectors the apprehension generally tends to build as I get closer. For me, working on the Llwyndewi Nature Reserve, part of the Brecon Carreg estate bordering Brecon and Carmarthenshire has felt more like a privilege than a chore.

The work has been varied although the summer has been spent primarily removing the ever-invasive Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* – a crucial task as the reserve contains the source of the Llwhwr river. With the help of steadfast volunteers and hard-working contractors we've managed to make a real impact. With continued monitoring and management over the coming years it should lead to its demise.

Managing the Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* has also vastly occupied our time. Although this species is

native, if left unchecked it can dominate wide swathes of land preventing other grasses and herbaceous plants from flourishing. The Bracken control has largely been successful due to some innovative techniques brought on by staff and students at Bridgend College - who have close ties with Wild Cymru; being a former student myself. This should hopefully lay the groundwork to invite more grasses, forbs and the like to set seed and restore the acid grassland to its former glory.

One of the long-term projects on the reserve has been the potential reintroduction of the White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* to the Llwhwr. Although by modern records it is undocumented in the area it is believed that the habitat would certainly have been conducive to their survival. Presently, we are at the feasibility stage, and this involves carrying out regular DNA checks on the river to ensure there are no diseases in the water which could prevent their continuation.

On a personal level I have really enjoyed my time at the reserve and working with the Wild Cymru team and their associated volunteers. I have learnt a great deal about what it takes to manage a nature reserve and will undoubtedly take this experience with me on the next stage of my journey. My contract for the summer is now over, and I will be attending the University of South Wales to

complete my BSc in Natural History in September. I have always enjoyed the diversity of roles within the conservation sector and although I am gearing myself up to pursue a career as a warden / ranger, I would dearly love to continue in academia and get the chance to apply my research in the field. A huge thank you to Rob, Vaughn and Lizzie for the amazing opportunity – I'm looking forward to seeing you down the line in whatever capacity that may hold."



**Assistant Nature Reserve Warden,
Liv Davies**

"Our planet is currently in a crisis. We are often able to remain ignorant to the crisis at hand, sheltered in quiet corners like Wales, surrounded by buzzing bees and singing birds, but it's happening and it is happening fast. Our planet has never experienced a species as destructive as the *Homo sapiens*, and without sounding too dramatic, our endless need for consumption, if left alone,

will be the end of us. Fast fashion, farming intensification, food waste and single use plastic are just a few of the many pressures that we push onto our precious floating rock. It is hence now, more than ever, very important that we come together and take action. Now, this does not mean that action needs to be massive, in fact small acts do all add up. For example, part of my job with Wild Cymru involves invasive species management - pulling up Himalayan Balsam, one plant at a time!

I am a young adult living in South Wales and I have been privileged enough to of grown up in the lush woods and valleys of South Wales, and so I have always had a deep connection to nature, and as I have grown older, I have learnt to understand the inherent and steadfast importance of nature, how we are nature and without its balance there would be no life, and yes, there would be no 'us'. I jump at any chance to work in conservation and so getting the job with Wild Cymru was right up my street and a true blessing. Here, I know I am making a difference, in a small way, but it is a step in the right direction. Wild Cymru's acquisition and conservation of the Llwyndewi reserve, where I am Nature Reserve Warden, is creating a space where nature can thrive and an eco-system can live in balance.

I believe that the key to saving our world really is the younger

generation. The younger generation are the future, as this is who will be inheriting this planet, that has been so stripped and punished for so many years. However, without understanding nature, why would people want to protect it? From personal experience, I believe that being introduced to wildlife and ecology from a young age is key to connecting people with the land, and therefore ensuring its future. Children who have grown up in cities, go to school in urban environments, come home to a house in an urban environment, grow up to go to work in an urban environment, are prone to living in an echo chamber of brick buildings and petrol fumes, and may never understand that trees can talk to each other through a mycorrhizal network of fungi within the soil, or that Buzzards mate for life, or that each bird has a different variety of songs that allow them to communicate to one another, and most important of all - that we are nature; and without it, we are nothing.

One of the most important steps we can take now is to connect young people with nature. We need to make it easier and more inviting for younger generations to get outside, get involved, and feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the natural world around them. Volunteering projects, like 'balsam bashing' or habitat restoration days, are not only a brilliant way to help

wildlife, but also to create meaningful experiences that stay with people for life. It's important that these opportunities are open to everyone from all ethnic and economic backgrounds. At the moment, there's still a lack of diversity in conservation spaces, and that needs to change. If we truly want to protect nature, we must ensure that everyone feels welcome in it. Nature should not be the preserve of a privileged few, it is open to all. Now more than ever, we need to work together, not in isolation. Social media can play a powerful role in this. It's one of the most effective tools we have to reach younger audiences and urban communities who may not have easy access to green spaces. But beyond just awareness, we need action; community events, inclusive outreach, and local partnerships that break down barriers and build lasting connections between people and place.

Amid a growing mental health crisis, it's easy to forget that our bodies and minds are wired for nature. We subconsciously crave birdsong, open skies and trees, many people don't even realise what's missing until they find it. That reconnection can be profoundly healing. Organisations like Wild Cymru are playing a role in this mission, not just by protecting wildlife, but by creating opportunities for young people to understand and support it. Our work is helping to grow a new generation

of conservationists who see the natural world not as something distant, but as something precious and worth fighting for. This is how change begins through action, inclusion, and shared purpose. And there's no time to waste."

Cefn Garthenor Residential

The three-day residential weekend at Cefn Garthenor is becoming an annual fixture. This year we were able to support a large number of students over the weekend who joined in with pond creation, habitat surveys, botanical surveys, and moth monitoring.



Botanical quadrat monitoring in one of the restored meadows at Cefn Garthenor.

Llwyndewi Residential

In addition to employing two new officers at the nature reserve in 2025, Wild Cymru were also able to organise two residential weekends for students. The first in April 2025 involved camping on the reserve during the evening and digging a large pond during the day. Students and staff worked together to dig a large pond in the marshy grassland to provide additional habitat for amphibians and freshwater invertebrates.



Students from Bridgend College digging a deep pond at Llwyndewi Nature Reserve.

Following the success of the first residential weekend at Llwyndewi, Wild Cymru organised a second three-day field trip in November

2025, again to dig a larger pond. Students stayed in a local Bunk House during the evening and spent the daylight hours digging an even larger pond.



Large pond created with the help of students from Bridgend College.

Species Monitoring using Wildlife Trail Cameras

In September 2025, Faith Campion joined the team from Cardiff University, as part of their year in industry programme.

Since joining the team in September, Faith has been monitoring the wildlife at the Vale Farm, Cefn Garthenor (Beaver enclosure), and Llwyndewi Nature Reserve. The monitoring has specifically taken the form of wildlife trail cameras.



Faith setting up a wildlife camera.

Wildlife seen on footage is identified and details taken on the animals' behaviours at the time, as well as the date and time of day. This is to build up a picture of how different species are using the three different sites.



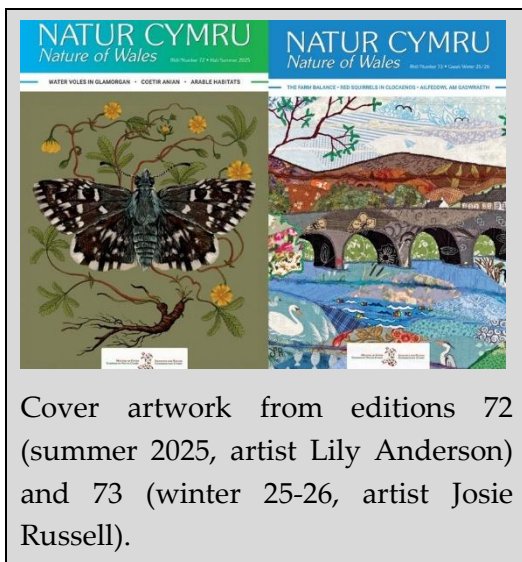
Grey Heron catching trout in the river.

Some of the species found on the trail camera have been quite unexpected and include a pair of Otters *Lutra lutra* and Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* at the Vale Farm, Polecat *Mustela putorius* at Cefn Garthenor and Fallow Deer at Llwyndewi.

Natur Cymru

In January 2026, *Natur Cymru* hit a milestone, celebrating its fifth anniversary since Wild Cymru took over its publication.

The magazine continues to grow steadily, with just under 4% net growth in subscribers over the last year, allowing us to keep pace with changes in the costs of production (printing and postage both having risen in the last twelve months). Our lapse rate over the last year was only 4.3%, very low when compared to media and publishing benchmarks. Many of our subscribers also add voluntary donations on top of their subscription payments. We are hugely grateful to all our readers.



We subtly changed our branding this year, as can be seen in the cover

images shown, moving away from the green-blue blended header that the magazine has used since its first edition, to a single-block colour. In future editions this colour will change to complement the artwork, giving the magazine a slightly more contemporary look.

We continue to be incredibly grateful for our knowledgeable and generous contributors, who allow us to publish such a wide range of content covering all areas of Wales and many different habitats, taxa and projects. We continue to focus on achieving balance across all these areas, and to maintain the gender balance that exists in our authorship as well.

We have also sought to extend our reach and impact this year by reviewing *Natur Cymru*'s social media use. We have officially stepped away from X, not posting on that platform anymore, though our profile remains visible. With a donation we also managed to secure advice from a communications consultant (Carys Comms) to improve our social media strategy.



During this, our first full year on Bluesky, our follower numbers grew - with the total now sitting at 283. This remains a modest number, but we get good interaction on this platform, particularly with our Welsh language good news content.

We also publish on Facebook (1750 followers) and LinkedIn (also a new platform for us: 344 followers). As well as factual wildlife copy, content generally focusses on environmental vacancies in Wales (particularly on LinkedIn) and direct promotion of the magazine and its content (all platforms).

Our thanks to our designer Louise Waring of AC9 Design, and our translator Haf Roberts.

Thank You

To achieve what we do for wildlife and nature conservation in Wales we rely on the kind and generous backing of donors, subscribers, supporters and volunteers. We are very grateful for all those individuals, organisations and foundations that support our work. Thank you.

We would like to especially thank The Waterloo Foundation for their ongoing support of the charity and our work.

Thanks also to the Garfield Weston Foundation, Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund, Oakdale Trust, Pobl Trust, Welsh Ornithological Society, Brecon Carreg, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and the Moondance Foundation for their generous contributions toward our various species and habitat conservation projects.

Wild Cymru would like to especially thank all the volunteers who have helped the charity to deliver nature conservation. We would like to

particularly thank Jan Slade, who does such an amazing job at managing the Wild Cymru wildlife garden in the Amman Valley. Also, Cary Growether and all at Llantrisant Town Trust. A special thank you also to Lyn Evans, Alex Godfrey, Robyn Seabrook and students at Bridgend College for their help and support with so many of our projects across Wales. All of the contributors to *Natur Cymru*, many of whom entirely volunteer their time and expertise.

Special thank you also to our Honorary President - Iolo Williams as well as Geoff Powell, Louise Waring, and Haf Roberts.