

3rd April 2024

Huw Irranca-Davies,
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN



Dear Cabinet Secretary,
Sustainable Farming Scheme

The GWCT is a science-based conservation charity who work with farmers and other land managers to deliver biodiversity and environmental benefit. We are a unique ‘conservation’ charity as we deliver wildlife recovery alongside productive, profitable farming. The GWCT champions farmers as the solution and has scientifically researched and evidenced methods for recovering wildlife without overly impacting on farming practices and without impacting farms profitability. As such, we are trusted by the farming community and have excellent relationships with the FUW, NFU, TFA, NSA and other farming organisations. We are also registered to deliver advice and courses for farmers through Farming Connect.

Our demonstration farm at [GWCT The Allerton Project](#) under Dr Alastair Leake’s Directorship provided training in the last year for over 160 DEFRA staff members following visits from Janet Hughes in Defra (Programme Director for the Future Farming and Countryside Programme (FFCP)). Members of staff from Welsh Government and NRW have also visited.

Work at Allerton is conducted with partners support such as Nestle & Kellogg’s on [The Kellogg’s UK Origins Project](#) (made up of farmers producing grains for the Wrexham factory) and H2020 Climate Neutral Farms.

[AgriCapture CO2](#) on the five principles of regenerative agriculture an EU Horizon 2020 project consists of 14 consortium partners across 7 European countries running from 2021-2023. The aim is to develop and launch a commercial software platform that facilitates zero emission aspirations on a large scale, by empowering regenerative agriculture and measuring and monitoring resulting soil carbon sequestration via remote sensing (satellite observation) backed up by robust ground-truthing (soil sampling). AgriCapture’s vision is to develop a systematic, robust and flexible platform for quantifying and promoting soil carbon capture. It allows farmers and other landowners to become ‘carbon farmers’ and to enable them to engage in carbon trading utilising robust and reliable carbon credits demonstrating strong ‘additionality’ in agricultural practice – to ensure that positive climate outcomes are being achieved.

Through the Allerton Projects [GWCT Hedgerow Carbon Code](#) there is enormous potential to increase the carbon stored in hedges by gapping up holes, restoring relic hedgerows and allowing hedgerows to grow outwards and upwards. Indeed, their unique linear and three-dimensional structure make hedgerows well suited to carbon sequestration; doubling their height and width can quadruple the carbon stored.

Since 2014 the [Big Farmland Bird Count](#) (BFBC), promoted by the NFU, FUW, NSA and others, provides valuable data and feedback to the GWCT, NFU, as well as other organisations and policymakers, on the state and trends of farmland birds and the effectiveness of conservation measures. The BFBC is a fitting example of how citizen science can engage and empower farmers and land managers to make a real difference for wildlife on their farms.

In [GWCT’s submission to the SFS consultation](#) we make suggestions for better ways of working with farmers to produce multiple benefits. Our focus is on delivering biodiversity and other environmental benefits alongside current farming operations so that elements work within the existing farming system rather than

Patron: HM King Charles III

Chief Executive: Mrs Teresa Dent

CBE, FRAgS Executive: R. Draycott, PhD; S. Evans; A. Hoodless, PhD; A. Leake, PhD, FRAgS, FIAGR; R. Kennedy; J. Payne, MInstF; N.

Sheeran, ACMA, CGMA

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales under number 05579632, registered charity no: 1112023. Registered office: Burgate Manor, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF

instead of it.

In Wales our [European Innovation Project](#) included supplementary feeding and establishing wild bird seed mix cover crops for farmland birds on an upland sheep farm and a lowland organic dairy farm. The results were staggering, increasing wintering numbers by six-fold and doubling breeding bird numbers in the spring and summer. We have also developed the bottom-up farmer cluster concept in Wales through the Sustainable Management Schemes to bring farmers together at a landscape scale and all working towards common goals to achieve better biodiversity and improved eco-system services. Furthermore, we are currently leading the collaborative Wales-wide [Curlew Connections](#) project aiming to stem the decline of Welsh Curlew.

Another project involved mainly dairy farmers who were provided with a bird feed unit and seed over one winter which resulted in them focusing on wildlife conservation, many for the first time. It was great to see the enthusiasm with which this simple and easy to incorporate approach to increasing bird numbers on farm was welcomed, and how this started wider conversations about what else could work within their intensive farming systems. Our bottom-up approach assisting farmers to lead the process was also extended to collaborative projects. Again, farmers enthusiasm grew, and they wanted to continue with their landscape scale conservation work when the funding from the Sustainable Management Scheme sadly ended.

We approached Menter a Business in 2020 to point out that none of the 19 demonstration farms had any environmental focus and presented them with a model under which this could be incorporated, which they then adopted. We have come forwards with proposed Prepare and Plan (Wales approach to Test and Trials) projects since 2021. Though this never materialised, we still believe it is important to take farmers on a journey to demonstrate the way elements of a future scheme could work and we are still keen to assist, using data we have collected and trailing proposals for the new scheme.

We know that farmers are interested in improving the amount of wildlife on their farms, but we believe it must be done in conjunction with running a financially sustainable farming business and deliver multiple benefits. As farmers will tell you they cannot be green if they are in the red.

We would like to meet with you and if possible, invite you to see work done on farms to increase biodiversity and provide environmental benefits.

Yours sincerely



Sue Evans