

# Wales Newsletter

February 2019, Issue 3

*“Welcome to our third newsletter. As the GWCT Wales team strengthens so does the number of events to help people understand the importance of the research being done across the UK to help boost biodiversity in our countryside. From the uplands to the sea GWCT have invested hugely in research over the past 80 years to evidence what is needed to increase our natural resources both now and in the future. We need to shout from the roof-tops about the invaluable work that has been done and what needs to be done, but in order to do this we need more support to keep funding these vital projects. If we are to have a voice in any countryside debate we need more members so that our independent work stands out. Please do let us know of any ideas or events, dinners that we should be organising or attending to help us grow membership support this year.”*

*Sue Evans*

Sue Evans  
GWCT Director of Wales



## BREXIT news

Our response to Welsh Government's 'Brexit and our land' consultation last October made the points that it needs to be simple, voluntary and highly inclusive. We suggested a light regulatory touch was the best way to include the widest possible farmer participation which would deliver 'better, bigger, more and joined' outcomes for nature, the environment and society.

Our proposals included a voluntary Foundation Scheme and a Universally Accessible Scheme, offering long and short-term options to support species and biodiversity. We would like to see a collaborative scheme supporting Farmer Clusters, rewarding all for landscape and catchment scale benefits to soil, water and wildlife.

We expressed concern that having two support schemes proposed by WG could produce unintended consequences, such as placing farming and food production into silos; creating confusion where overlapping benefits exist.

We urged the Welsh Government not to prioritise one public good over another and be prepared to consider how it will manage conflicting outcomes such as climate change versus biodiversity. For example, it may be easier to sequester carbon by planting trees on moorlands, but this has a detrimental effect on the habitats and species which are also valued."

We believe that the ending of the CAP provides an opportunity to re-invest in one of our most important national assets, our soils. With 80% of Wales managed for agriculture, incentivising conserving nutrients and reducing their losses and improving soil structure and water holding capacity should become part of a national agricultural strategy.

## NRW update

Former Welsh environment minister, Hannah Blythyn, cancelled her meeting with the GWCT after we published a poll which revealed 61% of the Welsh public thought she was wrong to end pheasant shooting on some of their land.

85% of those questioned felt the wider conservation, social and employment benefits

that stem from pheasant shooting were poorly understood by the public.

Here are some 'did you know' questions we asked.

- Grain put out by shoots for their pheasants also feeds many other species including: song thrush, blackbird and yellowhammer.
- Results from 458 shoots found that 96% of shot pheasants entered the food chain.
- Crops like kale are planted in small strips for pheasants to feed and shelter in. One study found these strips contained; 80 times more birds, 15 times more butterflies and 40 times more bumblebees than normal crops.
- Wildlife can thrive in woods that are well-managed. Shooting is an important motivator for both planting new woods and managing existing ones.
- How well do you think these wider conservation, social and employment benefits that stem from pheasant shooting are understood?
- WG ignored the conclusions of the NRW review and decided to ban pheasant shooting on its land. Do you feel this was right?

GWCT continue to communicate to AM's, Ministers, Welsh Government and NRW Officials to put the forward the evidence that shooting can deliver great net gain to biodiversity.



The Woodcock Network helps track migration.

## Raising the awareness of Woodcock in Wales

Woodcock have been a major focus of GWCT research for over 40 years and ringing as a means of gathering data on the species has been an important element. For many years the ringing of woodcock in the UK was restricted to the activities of just a few dedicated GWCT

scientists such as Dr Andrew Hoodless and his predecessor Dr Graham Harris. However due to the formation of the Woodcock Network by GWCT Ceredigion Chairman Owen Williams, the activity has become much more widespread with data coming from over 35 dedicated woodcock ringers across the UK.

"This is providing a high volume of valuable data to support GWCT research," according to Owen who believes that by giving woodcock ringing publicity amongst shooters and the bird ringing community it has encouraged many more to learn the techniques of catching them at night for ringing.

"With over 6,800 Facebook followers worldwide and our regular posts we are doing a lot to inform both shooters and ringers about the latest GWCT research," explains Owen, who was visited in Nov 2018 by a FB follower Yoshiya Odoya - a museum curator and bird ringer from Tokyo - who took up woodcock ringing after connecting with the social media site.

"To have people such as Yoshiya, and now others in Japan ringing the same species and contributing to our understanding of the species is very exciting," says Owen.

Greater international cooperation in woodcock research has been happening for a number of years, after French Game and Wildlife Department scientist, and pioneer of woodcock ringing, Yves Ferrand established the IUCN supported 'Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Group'. The GWCT and the Woodcock Network play a major role in this group which also includes scientists and ringers from France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, and Russia. Owen is also talking with a Danish ornithologist from the University of Aarhus about setting up a woodcock ringing programme in Denmark which is a major migratory stopover for many woodcock heading to overwinter away from their breeding grounds in Russia and Scandinavia.

This initiative has increased awareness of the importance of sustainable shooting amongst shooters in the UK with many now taking care not to overshoot in their area which is helping both our resident breeding population and our overwintering birds. It has also been a useful way to demonstrate to people outside shooting such as ringers that we are heavily invested in a healthy future for this much prized quarry species.

## Sustainable Management Schemes

We are working with a number of Welsh Government SMS projects throughout Wales which are all aimed at building resilience into our landscapes. All these are three-year, collaborative projects which are using a bottom up farmer-led approach. GWCT is working with four of these, two of which are concerned with heather restoration and bird species recovery, another is to extend the work of curlew country into Wales, another is wildfowl recovery. For more details visit [curlewcountry.org](http://curlewcountry.org)

There are 35 different SMS initiatives in Wales, all of which is to test new concepts to set future funding for farmers and landowners. Please get in touch if you have an idea to submit into an SMS which forms a farmer or shoot cluster.

The Sustainable Management Scheme is funded from the EU Rural Development Programme and aims to support collaborative landscape-scale projects delivering action that improves our natural resources in a way that delivers benefits to farm and rural businesses and rural communities.



GWCT is working on SMS projects to restore moorland.

## Cleaning up our rivers

GWCT are working with fishermen, farmers, the farming unions and others to clean up our rivers and remove the threat of agricultural pollution. Our Farmer Cluster approach is helping to get both sides working together and Sir Gareth Edwards addressed a large group of farmers at an NFU arranged meeting after we introduced him to their Environment and Rural Affairs advisor Rachel Lewis-Davies at our event at the Senedd last Spring. We're sit on the steering panel of Gelli Aur's exiting slurry de-watering project which has recently become operational and presents potential solution to slurry problems on dairy farms. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss and develop a collaborative group in your area.



Tractor muck spreading.

## Helping to count Welsh farmland birds

February sees a number of Big Farmland Bird Counts taking place across Wales including Clyro primary school children in Powys who helped local NFU member Rhodri Lewis identify the birds on his mixed farm.

### Dyffryn, near Cardiff

Creating a year-round habitat for birds was the message from GWCT Wales' advisor Matt Goodall.



Clyro primary school children bird counting

"There is so much that landowners, farmers and shoot managers could do to help birds through these bare months - known as the hungry gap," says Matt, pointing to mixed cover crops such as Kale and quinoa being an excellent feed source for many birds. In addition, feed hoppers or farmland bird feeders are critical in late winter and early spring especially for female birds if they are to breed successfully," he explains.

From redwings, to fieldfares, blue tits, long tailed tits, dunnocks, wrens, chaffinches, robins, and mallards, Dyffryn Springs provided a variety of habitats on the farm with a number of ponds, lakes, wood and cover crops to help bird numbers which have declined nationally.

"With Glastir - the Welsh agri-environment scheme - coming to an end soon there is an opportunity to improve conservation efforts across Wales and make it work better for farmers and wildlife," stresses Matt, who believes that future schemes must be inclusive, simple, provide effective subsidies and be flexible enough to suit individual farms.

"With no two farms the same, prescriptive schemes can make it difficult for some farmers to join," he says, stressing that greater participation of schemes will only happen if farmers have a say in what can be realistically achieved on their farms.

"They know better than anyone what the farm is suitable for and what wildlife used to be found there. There really is an opportunity to get it right by working with farmers; asking what they used to enjoy seeing and offering a helping hand.

### West Wales near Aberystwyth

Farmer and conservationist Terry Mills hosted a bird count at his farm in Crugas, near Swyddffynon in Ceredigion where over 30 species were seen – testimony to the fantastic efforts seen to reverse the decline in farmland birds.



Terry Mills hosted a bird count on his farm in Ceredigion.

From starlings to house sparrow, redwing and fieldfare - a tribute to the effort Terry Mills has put into improving habitat on his farm.

"Cruglas is a wonderful example of how, with a mix of tree planting, fencing and pond digging and supplementary feeding, the wildlife will return."

Thanks for NFU Cymru for sponsoring this year's count, President Minette Batters said: "It's becoming an important national event where thousands of farmers and growers around the country are able to take stock of and importantly, take pride in what they find on their land

"The NFU supports initiatives like the Big Farmland Bird Count as without sound management of the environment, enhancement of habitats, protection of wildlife and support for pollinators and soils, we do not have farming businesses."



GWCT Advisor Matt Goodall and North Wales Chairman Rupert Bevan

## We're calling for biodiversity support

GWCT Wales spreads its message with three dinners being held in Anglesey, Pwllheli and most recently Llandegla organised by Rupert Bevan and the North Wales committee.

GWCT Wales is calling for more people to support the good work being done in the Welsh countryside, which is losing biodiversity at an alarming rate.

Matt Goodall, GWCT advisor in Wales, gave a passionate plea at the recent GWCT Cymru North Wales dinner at The Grousemoor in Llandegla near Wrexham, on 9 February, where a five-course game dinner was beautifully presented.

"If we lose our vital tools in both game management and conservation, we will lose many of our iconic species such as the black grouse, the red grouse and waders," he stressed.

"But we can't take it for granted that these tools will be there in the future. There are some very strong opinions out there and getting our story over positively can be really challenging and that's why we need more members to support us."

"Today we need to be much more proactive and spell out the work being done that supports biodiversity and which goes hand in hand with a viable farming industry."

Richard Thomas will be hosting the Mostyn Hall supper on 14 March with guest speaker Dylan Roberts GWCT Head of Fisheries. To book online [www.gwct.org.uk/mostyn](http://www.gwct.org.uk/mostyn) or email Richard [richard@mostynstates.co.uk](mailto:richard@mostynstates.co.uk) for more information.

## New Appointment

Duncan Sinclair-Willis has joined the GWCT Cymru team as Membership Officer. A former gamekeeper on the Powys Moorland Partnership, who has worked on grouse moors in the Pennines, Scotland and a winner of the Purdey award for Game and Conservation, Duncan has delivered a number of passionate and articulate speeches to the public, Ministers and Welsh Government officials stressing the challenges faced on our Welsh moorlands today and spoke about the decline in our habitats that support a number of our iconic birds. Duncan will be travelling around Wales, promoting the GWCT and its work. Please contact him if you would like him to speak at an event. [dsinclairwillis@gwct.org.uk](mailto:dsinclairwillis@gwct.org.uk)



Membership Officer, Duncan Sinclair-Willis

## Who's who at GWCT Wales

Nick Williams, Chairman

Sue Evans, Director  
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Matt Goodall, Advisor  
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### Committee chairs in Wales

Roger Thomas - SE Wales

Rupert Bevan - North Wales

Julian Salmon - Mid Wales

Owen Williams - Mid Wales

## Events

### GWCT Woodcock and Sewin update

Thursday 28 March, 19:00  
The Ivy Bush Hotel in Carmarthen  
Free admission, booking required

An opportunity to hear and discuss the ground-breaking work that GWCT is doing on Wales' two most iconic migratory species, the Woodcock and the Sewin. Whether you shoot or fish or involved in any way in their management, this event is a must. Talks will include the satellite tagging of Woodcock in Wales by GWCT's Head of Wetland Research, Dr Andrew Hoodless and the work being done on Sewin at sea as part of our major EU project called SAMARCH [www.samarch.org](http://www.samarch.org) by our Head of Fisheries Dylan Roberts. You will also have the chance to listen and quiz Welsh sea trout expert Dr Graeme Harris who has spent most of his career dedicated to the study of Sewin.

The event is free, but spaces are limited so booking is a must. You can book either through the link [www.gwct.org.uk/woodcocktalks](http://www.gwct.org.uk/woodcocktalks) or by contacting Max Kendry on [mkendry@gwct.org.uk](mailto:mkendry@gwct.org.uk) or 01789 840348.

### "The Grouse Tour" All Wales Car Tour for Vehicles of Interest

Thursday 20 June, Lake Vyrnwy  
Please contact chairman Rupert Bevan on [rupertbevan@hotmail.com](mailto:rupertbevan@hotmail.com) for further details.

## Getting serious about soils

Soils and biodiversity seminar  
Thursday 9 May,  
Ty Newydd Farms, Trefnant, North Wales

Speakers to include Alastair Leake GWCT Director of Policy and the Allerton Project, Dave Parish Head of GWCT Scotland's Farm Research Team, Rufus Sage Head of Lowland Gamebird Research and others.

We will explore the potential to improve soils and biodiversity within more intensive farming businesses in Wales.

Dairy farmers tell us that they didn't enter into past agri-environment schemes as the schemes were too prescriptive and they didn't fit their intensive farming systems. The Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Report tells us that little was delivered on improving biodiversity and soils. GWCT research has provided many of the solutions to improving biodiversity in intensive farming systems and we continue to advocate simple, voluntary, and highly inclusive new schemes in the future. We will use the seminar to explore the potential for improved biodiversity and soils structures on more intensive Welsh farms and what incentives will be required.

### More events

There are events being held weekly in Wales, please have a look at our Wales events to find out what's coming your way at [www.gwct.org.uk/events](http://www.gwct.org.uk/events)



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