

Spring Newsletter 2026

Cylchlythyr y Gwanwyn 2026



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Welsh
Ornithological
Society



Cymdeithas
Adaryddol
Cymru

Chair's Welcome! Croeso'r Cadeirydd!

At last spring has arrived and even the occasional dreary day doesn't seem so bad. Whilst some birds have been singing for several weeks, this is really the time to get out and refamiliarise yourself with birdsong and await the arrival of the migratory songsters. Now is also the time to start preparing for the arrival of Swifts, one of the latest migrants to arrive. We know that the two main reasons for the decline in Swifts are the reduction in insect populations and the loss of nesting sites. We can of course, as individuals, highlight the plight of insects but we can also provide more specific help by supporting local Swift conservation projects or erecting nestboxes or inserting Swift bricks into our own properties if they are suitable.

At our last Council meeting, we voted in one of our longer-serving Council members, Mike Shewring, to be our Vice-Chair. This is an important role, supporting me as Chair and helping to lead and direct the society. Mike takes the lead on our grant's schemes, and he has summarised what grants awards are available later in the newsletter. WOS has several ambitions to help and campaign on behalf of specific bird conservation causes and encourage members to actively engage in surveys and projects. However, we are still without critical administrative support, and this is fundamental to the society delivering the aims which we know that you, the members, expect of us. If you are well organised and like to be at the heart of things, then you could become a key member of our team. We would welcome hearing from you because your help could really make a difference.

One key project on the horizon is Bird Atlas 2027 – 31. Whilst WOS is a small organisation, our reputation for action, delivery and working in collaboration has meant that we are delighted to be the Welsh partner in the next atlas. This is a project in which everyone in Wales, with an interest in wild birds, can take part. As time progresses, we will be highlighting how you can get involved in your local area, whatever your skill level. These are really exciting times to have an interest in birds.

And if you read my article in the last newsletter, you will know that I am doing the 200 Challenge again this year. I must admit that the awful weather in the first two months of 2026 didn't help and progress was slow, but I finally reached 100 species at the beginning of March. Highlights so far have been seeing some of the influx of Russian White-fronted Geese on my local patch, watching a Short-eared Owl in the evening sunlight on the Dee Estuary and seeing a Willow Tit on the feeders at Llyn Brenig whilst watching displaying Goshawks in the distance. I have missed a lot just due to lack of time, but all my trips out bring new observations and just re-emphasise the joy of being out in nature. Maybe you have some birdwatching stories that you would like to share. WOS is always keen to hear from members and short articles for this newsletter are always welcome.

Enjoy the spring and happy birdwatching.

Anne Brenchley chair@birds.wales

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Bird Atlas 2027 – 31 - the project of a generation

Now more than ever before we need to deliver a step change in the evidence base for bird conservation. The pressures on our land to meet the needs for homes, food and fuel while safeguarding biodiversity, not just for its own sake but as part of our future social and economic security have never been greater. The impacts of climate change are becoming more noticeable and our knowledge base needs to keep pace with such change.

Atlases are basically a collection of maps. An atlas can show not just the distribution and range of species but also, in many cases, some indication of abundance. Some population estimates are derived from atlas data. Across Britain, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, the first complete bird atlas was undertaken between 1968 and 1972, but it only showed the distribution of species in the breeding season. Since then, atlases have become more detailed and comprehensive and the task of gathering the information for the atlases more challenging.

The most recent Bird Atlas took place between 2007 and 2011 covering both the winter and breeding seasons and also providing information on relative abundance as well as distribution. This information is used extensively in decision-making, but it is now rapidly becoming out of date. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has been the lead organisation in planning and delivering bird atlas projects and ultimately publishing the results.

WOS is proud to announce that we will, for the first time, be part of the partnership which will deliver Bird Atlas 2027 - 31, and we want all of you, our members and other birders, to be part of that project. The partnership consists of the BTO, BirdWatch Ireland, RSPB and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, as well as WOS.

Here in Wales, we have ambitions to collect data at a local and all-Wales scale at a finer level of detail than elsewhere in Britain and Ireland, but to do that we will need hundreds, if not thousands of volunteers. We will provide more details of how you can help in future newsletters and through your local bird clubs, societies and groups but in the meantime please wish us luck with what will be the project of a generation.

Anne Brenchley



BTO CEO - Juliet Vickery and WOS Chair - Anne Brenchley signing the Atlas partnership agreement. Photo By Rachel Taylor.

NEWS

Conference 2026

Saturday 31 October – Aberystwyth University

WOS is happy to announce that this year's conference is being jointly organised by BTO Cymru Youth and WOS. Again, we are being hosted by Aberystwyth University, and the conference theme will be **MIGRATION**. Please put the date in your diary. More details will be publicised in the summer when priority booking for members will be open.

Do you know someone who deserves a WOS Lifetime Achievement Award

Nominations are being sought for the 2026 WOS Lifetime Achievement Award. The award recognises special people, who have devoted many years of their spare time to bird conservation by undertaking surveys, doing research projects, supporting bird clubs and societies or otherwise actively encouraging bird conservation work in Wales. The deadline for nominations is 30 June 2026. Details of the award and eligibility and a nomination form can be found on the WOS website - <https://birdsin.wales/lifetime-achievement-awards/>.

Notice to all Members

At the AGM held last year, it was agreed that the subscription rate for members was increased to £25.00 for up to two members living at the same address. Young birders, up to the age of 26, pay a subscription of £10.00.

Only around a third of members who have paid their subscription since 1st January 2026, have paid the new rate. This means I need to send a reminder asking for the top-up amount – an expensive and laborious task. I would be grateful if all members, whose subscription is coming up for renewal can check the amount that is being paid to WOS. This is particularly important for those who pay by Standing Order as any changes to these payments must be made by the bank account holder.

Alison Noble, Membership

Secretary - wosmembership@btinternet.com

Bird Sightings News

Mega Rare:

- Late news of an adult male Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) at Newport Wetlands, Gwent on October 15th 2025.

Rare:

- Baikal Teal (*Sibirionetta formosa*) with Eurasian Wigeon flock at Waungron, Glamorgan, from January 3rd 2026, to March 11th 2026.

Scarce:

- Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) at Llyn Brianne, Ceredigion, from December 30th 2025 to March 7th 2026.
- American Wigeon (*Mareca americana*) at Teifi Estuary, Ceredigion, from February 15th 2026 and still present at time of writing.
- Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) at Kidwelly Quay, Carmarthenshire, from January 14th 2026 and still present at time of writing.
- Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) at Fishguard, Pembrokeshire, from February 8th 2026 to March 11th 2026.
- Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) at Rhyl, Flintshire, from January 2nd 2026 and still present at time of writing.



Teifi Estuary American Wigeon (left) – David Clarke

Got an idea for our *Milvus* journal?

If you have an idea for an original research paper (up to 5000 words) or a short communication (up to 2500 words) for the journal, the editor, Dr Rachel Taylor, would be delighted to hear from you. Rachel is also keen to include more short articles which could be interesting notes, intriguing negative (or non-significant?) results; perhaps observations from local studies and certainly more pieces by citizen scientists. *Milvus* should be a journal that brings scientists, both professionals and citizen scientists, together through our shared interest in Welsh birds. Rachel and the Editorial Board are here to help and advise you through every step of the process. You can find out more about submissions to *Milvus* here:

www.birdsin.wales/milvus-submissions/

Rachel's email address is:

milvuseditor@birdsin.wales Bring us your best ideas!



New Northeast Wales Bird Recorder - Mike Pollard

Mike Pollard has taken on the role of Bird Recorder for Northeast Wales from Glenn Morris.

This recording area covers Flintshire and Denbighshire. Mike is keen to encourage anyone recording, studying or photographing birds in this area to get in touch with him as he is building up a contact list of those keen to keep in touch with bird recording in these counties. He would also welcome any articles about birds in this area (for example, species/site studies and site guides) and bird photographs taken locally during 2025 for possible inclusion in the 2025 Annual Report. If you would like to get in touch, please email newalesbirdrecords@outlook.com.

Articles for our Summer Newsletter

If you have any ideas for articles about birds or birding in your local area which you would like to bring to the attention of the wider birding in community in Wales, we'd love to hear from you.

They can be any length, from snippets of news to three-page articles and anything in between. Some images to accompany your piece would be very nice too. If you have any ideas, please drop Josh an email to:

newsletter@birdsin.wales.

Exciting Opportunities – WOS needs your help

Beyond our ongoing search for a Secretary, a role which is critical in the effective functioning of WOS as a bird conservation charity, other opportunities have arisen.

Our Membership Secretary is retiring!

After nine years of valiant service, our Membership Secretary, Alison Noble, is retiring. Alison has seen WOS grow in recent years and she has been the pivotal contact point between members and the society. Alison leaves us at the end of June, but she hopes to have a handover period before that time so that her successor can be helped to become familiar with the role. We are seeking someone highly organised, who can maintain a computer-based membership database, is confident with using email (including bulk emails) Microsoft Word and Excel and has knowledge of PayPal and Go Cardless or willing to learn.

WOS is seeking a Youth Member on Council

WOS is creating a new role on Council, that of a Youth Member. WOS is seeking a motivated and passionate young person (age range 18-25) to serve as Youth Representative on its Council. This is a meaningful role, placing a young voice at the very centre of the Society's decision-making. The Youth Representative ensures that the perspectives and interests of young people in Wales are embedded into how the Society operates.

As Youth Representative, you will attend and actively participate in all scheduled Council meetings (six per year), contributing to discussions on strategy, policy, conservation priorities, and Society business. You will represent the views and interests of young birders and naturalists across Wales, ensuring their perspectives help to inform Council decisions. You will champion initiatives that improve the Society's accessibility, relevance, and appeal to younger audiences.

We do not expect the youth representative to have any prior experience. What matters most is an open mind, a genuine interest in birds, wildlife, or the natural environment, and a real desire to help shape the Society's future. You will be comfortable sharing your views in a formal setting, willing to engage with the work of the Council, and able to commit time to Society business as needed. You should be a good listener who can fairly represent the breadth of young people's perspectives, not just your own.

This is an opportunity to gain direct experience of charity governance and conservation leadership. As well as developing skills in strategic thinking, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement.

If you are interested in this role and wish to know more then please do get in touch with the Chair – Anne Brenchley (woschair@gmail.com). The closing date for applications is 31 May 2026.

Monitoring Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Wales Using Passive Acoustic Recorders

An illustrated article By Stuart Keenor, Species Coordinator for Wales, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Network.



The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dryobates minor*) remains one of the UK's most elusive woodland birds, and its continuing decline makes targeted monitoring essential. In Wales, the species persists in small and scattered numbers, yet we continue to record birds sporadically across the country. These sightings strongly suggest that Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are still breeding here, albeit in low densities.

Those of you who subscribe to British Birds will recently have seen the new paper demonstrating just how effective passive acoustic monitoring is at detecting LSWs. Now is a great time to get to grips with the numbers and distribution of the species in Wales.

As part of my role as Species Coordinator for Wales with the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Network, I am coordinating an expanded monitoring effort planned for next year using passive acoustic recorders (PARs), usually called passive acoustic monitoring (PAM).

Why the Species Is Difficult to Survey

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is notoriously hard to detect. Its small, quiet foraging behaviour, and preference for the upper canopy all contribute to low encounter rates. Their characteristic drumming—a key signal for surveyors—occurs only during a brief window in early spring, further complicating manual surveys. For a species already present in very small numbers, traditional field methods often result in under-detection.

Why We Are Turning to Passive Acoustic Monitoring

Passive acoustic recorders offer an effective and non-intrusive method to improve detection rates. When deployed across suitable woodlands, the devices can continuously capture sound during peak drumming periods, often picking up short events that a human observer might easily miss.

Advantages include:

- Higher detection probability of brief drumming sequences.
- Continuous monitoring over many days, overcoming weather and scheduling constraints.
- Minimal disturbance to sensitive woodland sites.
- Long-term, reusable datasets that can be re-analysed as technology improves. Experience over the last two years shows that the recorders need to be deployed for around five days per site in good weather conditions to have a high chance of detecting LSWs.

This software has been developed by the Woodpecker Network and the BTO and is available on the BTO Acoustic Pipeline.



Survey Plans for 2026

This year's survey will focus on a network of Welsh woodlands selected for their structural suitability—mature deciduous stands, riparian corridors, and areas with historical or recent sporadic sightings. Passive recorders will be deployed at appropriate intervals, positioned around 1.5–2 m



high, and set to record throughout the core drumming period from late February to early April. Once retrieved, recordings will be processed using automated software trained to detect the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker's distinct drumming pattern. All detections will then undergo manual verification to ensure accuracy.

Expected Benefits

By covering more sites over longer periods, passive acoustic monitoring is expected to provide a far clearer picture of where the species persists in Wales. Even low-density breeding populations should be detectable. The data will also highlight priority areas where habitat management, particularly the retention of standing deadwood—may support breeding success.

Conservation Importance

Understanding the current distribution of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Wales is vital for shaping conservation work over the coming decade. Integrating passive acoustic monitoring into long-term woodland survey programmes will help identify strongholds, reveal previously overlooked sites, and guide habitat improvement initiatives. As datasets grow, they will also feed into wider UK assessments and help strengthen the species' prospects.

Looking Ahead

Our priorities for this year and beyond include:

- Deploying PARs across a wider range of Welsh woodlands.
- Refining automated detection models for greater accuracy.
- Combining acoustic results with habitat mapping to predict occupancy.
- Engaging landowners, volunteers, and community groups in ongoing monitoring.

Contact

For anyone interested in taking part, seeking guidance, or wishing to share records, please feel free to get in touch:

Stuart Keenor.

Species Coordinator for Wales, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Network.

07720 654039.

Stuart_keenor@hotmail.com.



Gamebirds in the Countryside – What are the Issues?

WOS Trustee – Malcolm Smith looks at the issues that Gamebird releases pose to the environment around them and WOS’s stance on the subject.

Up to two million gamebirds – mainly Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges – are bred and released by shooting businesses every year in Wales, primarily in the lowlands. For some time, concerns have been raised about the impact that this activity might be having on our native species.

Research results have shown that released birds tend to cause negative effects on local ground flora, soils and some invertebrates, especially where Pheasant releases take place in woodlands. There is concern, too, about the potential effect of Gamebird releases on predator populations such as Fox numbers and the illegal killing of birds of prey to protect released birds. As yet, it is unknown as to whether any potential spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Flu (HPAF) in wild bird populations may be facilitated by gamebird releases, but that possibility is particularly disturbing.

But there are positives too. Management of habitats for releases in and around woodlands, planting game crops and copses, provision of gamebird food in intensive farmland otherwise unattractive to wild birds, and maintaining field margins, improves those habitats for a range of native wildlife.

Given the controversial nature of gamebird release activity, WOS has decided to publish its views of the activity in the form of a Position Statement. Based on the most up to date science and expert opinion, WOS intends taking a precautionary approach to this issue. Among other measures, we are supportive of Natural Resources Wales’s proposals for a gamebird release licensing system in Wales in order to regulate the industry and WOS wants to see enforcement of the legal requirement that all gamebird businesses with birds having outdoor access are included in the poultry register. The WOS Position Statement will be published on our website soon.



Pheasant at RSPB Ynys-hir - Josh Pedley

Six reasons why your bird monitoring counts

A wildlife record is only a record if it has a species name, date, precise location, ideally a count, and is available to someone who can use it as part of a wider assessment. Each year, sightings fail to become records because they go no further than social media or a blog.

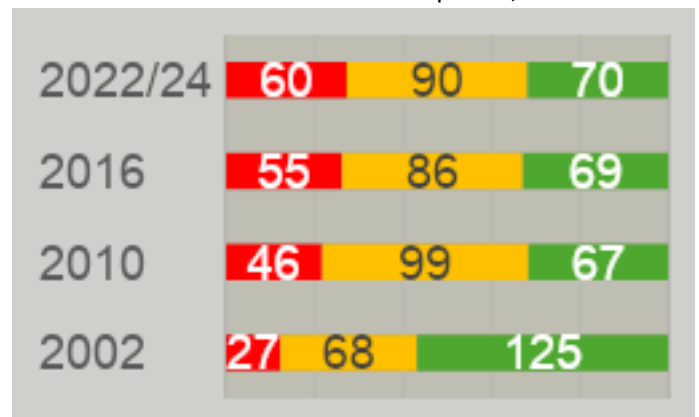
Richard Facey (Natural Resources Wales) and Julian Hughes (RSPB Cymru) summarise why counting birds is essential for conservation.

1. Setting conservation priorities

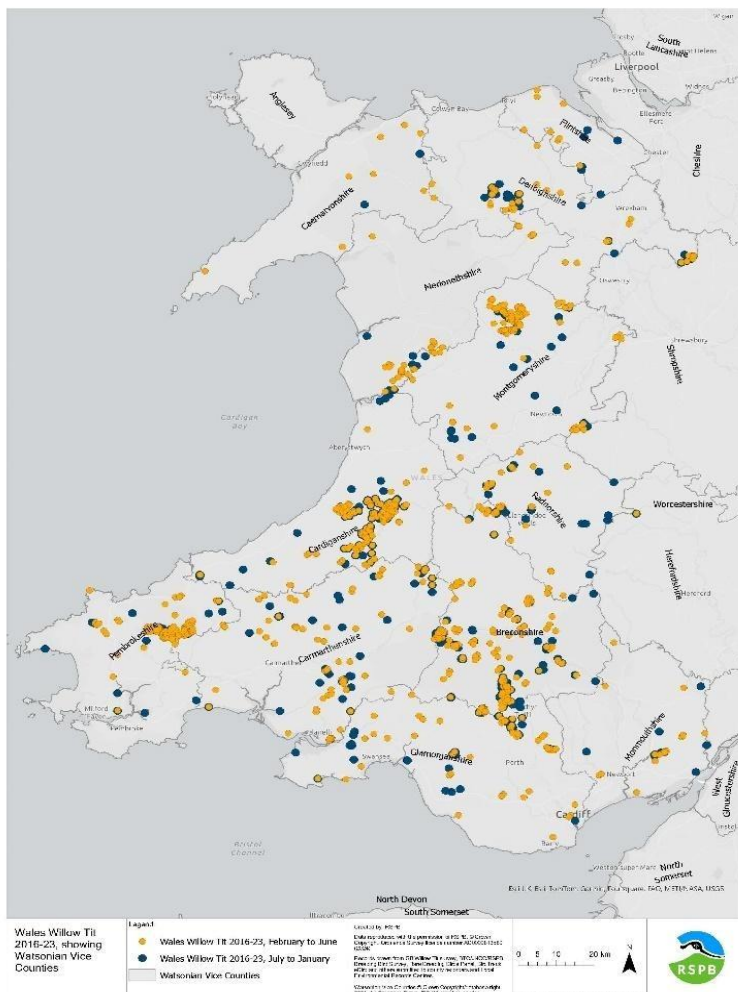
Wales is the only part of the UK to have its own Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCW), produced every six years by BTO Cymru, NRW, RSPB Cymru and WOS:

<https://tinyurl.com/BoCCW4>. Structured surveys, such as the Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and Atlases, are the bedrock of the assessment. For some scarcer species, such as wintering divers, passage seabirds and visitors such as Turtle Dove, we depend on records collated by WOS using records in BirdTrack, eBird and sent to county recorders.

BoCCW informs Welsh Government's "Section 7" list of species of principal importance; where effort is focused on species recovery; and setting the framework for NRW's General Licences that permit control of birds for conservation purpose.



The proportion of species on the Red List has increased each time that BoCC Wales has been published. The next is due in 2028.



2. Targeting conservation recovery

Records from multiple sources are used to plan interventions designed to turn around species of conservation concern. They have been used, for example, to inform Important Curlew Areas and understand the historic distribution of tern colonies. RSPB Cymru took this approach to identify potential Willow Tit 'hotspots' and hope to follow this up with volunteer-led surveys to assess abundance at sites across Wales, as a precursor to landscape recovery efforts.

Willow Tit sightings in Wales (2016-23) from multiple sources.

3. Protecting important sites

Saving birds means looking after the places they breed, rest and feed at different times of the year. *Ad hoc* records can be useful in identifying places that should be surveyed ahead of designation, such as the Mynyddoedd Llangynidr a Llangatwg, Cefn yr Ystrad a Chomin Merthyr SSSI that was notified for its *ffridd* assemblage of birds in 2025.

Bird monitoring, such as WeBS conducted on most of the larger estuaries and wetlands in Wales, enables us to know whether site protection is adequate and delivering results. For example, look at the WeBS Alerts for the four Special Protection Areas in Wales published in the *Welsh Bird Report 2024*.

Bird records submitted to BirdTrack, eBird and Local Environmental Records Centres are an important initial assessment of the likely impact of planned development, such as new housing or renewable energy project. NRW staff use the [LERC Aderyn](#) database, which also draws on verified BirdTrack and eBird records, so you need only enter your sightings in one place.

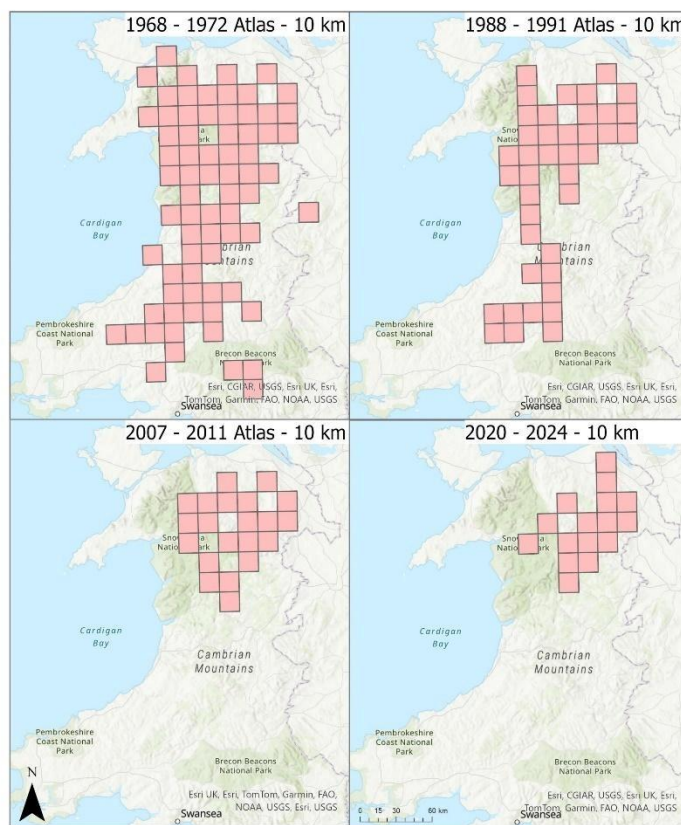
The 2026 Breeding Wader Survey, featured elsewhere in this newsletter, will provide valuable data on where tree-planting should and should not be permitted, and NRW has committed to using all records of breeding waders on Aderyn.

4. Do interventions work?

Long-term monitoring is essential to know when recovery effort needs to be stepped up. Annual lek monitoring of Black Grouse by volunteers in northeast Wales is co-ordinated by RSPB Cymru, NRW, Denbighshire National Landscape and Cofnod.

Efforts in the early 2000s, conservation action reversed the decline in numbers but not range. Changes were not embedded into land management in the way Black Grouse needed, especially to cope with a changing climate. This was detected thanks to the continuity of lek counts, now providing a catalyst for renewed energy and effort. RSPB has a Species Volunteer Network team of additional volunteers helping to keep the surveys going.

Species monitoring is critical to understanding the impact of efforts we make for nature recovery. Celtic Rainforests Wales is a major project led by Eryri National Park and involving woodland owners and managers of Western Atlantic Oakwoods, special places for lower plants, mammals and birds such as Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler. A major programme has removed invasive species and changed how woodlands are managed, including grazing by cattle. Bird counts in 2019 are being repeated this spring. EU LIFE funding was exceptional in enabling action and monitoring over 5+ years, but we know that is



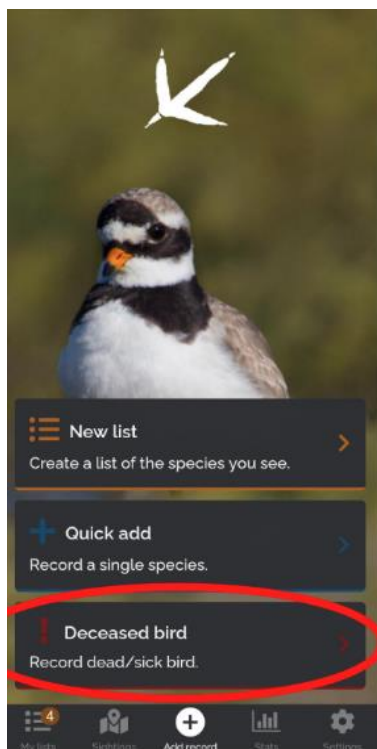
Change in distribution of Black Grouse during the breeding season (RSPB Cymru).

blink of an ecological eye. Resources are needed to recount the same sites over coming decades, to provide a living laboratory of woodland change.

5. Persuading policy changes

Restoring species at scale requires large-scale action to make land-management, such as farming and forestry, nature-friendly. Long-term monitoring data are an important part of making the case to politicians, industry and stakeholders, that public and private money should be spent on saving nature. Population trends, combined with an understanding of the drivers of change, are the litmus test of whether we are living sustainably.

6. Tracking changes in our birdlife



BirdTrack reports of dead or sick birds provide useful context, although birdwatchers are urged also to report likely HPAI victims to Defra on 03459 335577.

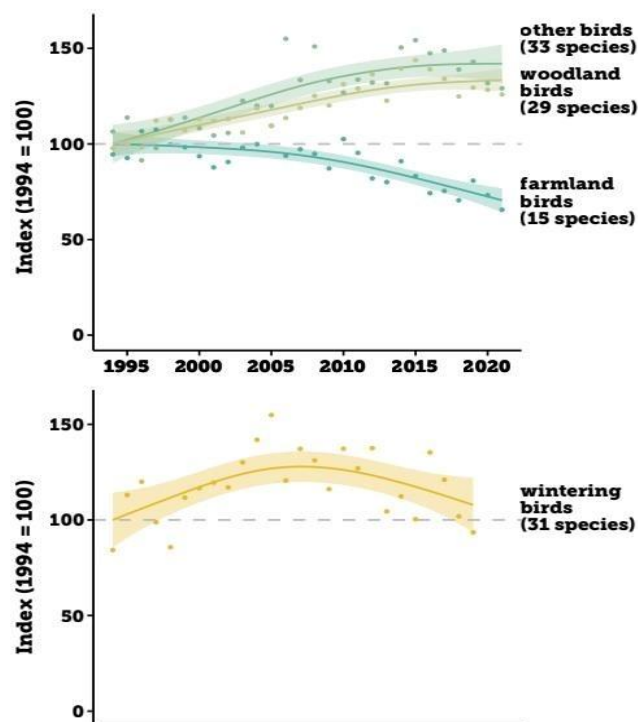
BirdTrack and eBird datasets are increasingly used to relate bird distribution to environmental changes, so every record you submit can contribute to such analyses. Complete Lists are valuable because they tell us what you didn't see or hear too. The expansion of non-native species, such as Ring-necked Parakeet, in Wales can – outside the forthcoming Bird Atlas – only be tracked through your casual records, and BirdTrack users are encouraged to report dead or sick birds to provide valuable context to measuring the impact of 'bird flu' on our wild populations.

So, what can I do?

If you have the skills and the opportunity to participate in a bird monitoring scheme annually, such as BBS or WeBS, please consider doing so.

bto.org/get-involved/volunteer is a great place to start. This is the single biggest contribution that many of us can make to helping birds in Wales.

Please use one of the recording platforms mentioned here to ensure your records are not lost in cyberspace. Please make an effort to record breeding evidence whenever possible, and in BirdTrack use the Pinpoint function to improve the accuracy of more interesting records. Enjoy your birding, we all do it for that reason (we hope!), but also know that your records can be valuable in helping to save the birds we love.



Indicators of change in bird abundance, from State of Nature in Wales 2023

30 plus years of monitoring Garden Birds

An article by Susan Jones, BTO Garden BirdWatch Supporter Development Officer.

The BTO Garden BirdWatch (GBW) is a year-round citizen science survey which asks participants to record birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, bumblebees, butterflies and dragonflies that visit their gardens. GBW Supporter Development Officer, Susan Jones, outlines below how you can get involved, and some of the key findings this 30-year survey has revealed.

The BTO Garden BirdWatch is focussed on getting citizens involved in science. Its year-round approach and long-term volunteer commitment delivers fine-scale information on both seasonal and longer-term patterns in garden use.

To take part in GBW, people simply register their garden via the BTO website (www.bto.org/gbw). Once registered, you can start recording the wildlife in your garden. The GBW week runs Sunday to Saturday, and participants are encouraged to, wherever possible, submit the maximum count for each species seen IN their garden each week (most flyovers don't count!). If supplementary food is provided, this can also be recorded.

The key to GBW is consistency, so how you monitor the birds in your garden doesn't matter, so long as you do it the same way each week. Some Garden BirdWatchers will have an allocated time every week where they will observe the comings and goings in their garden, while others glance out of a window every time they pass and record what they see.

The GBW survey has helped us understand the important role of gardens as habitats for wildlife, while also tracking how and why populations of garden birds and other wildlife are changing, and how we can help them.



Greenfinch, by Allan Drewitt / BTO

The widespread decline of Greenfinches, once a common garden bird, in the mid-2000s was first noticed by Garden BirdWatchers. This decline was linked to an emerging infectious disease called finch trichomonosis, which prompted a major effort to raise awareness of the importance of good bird feeder hygiene, encouraging those people who put food out for their garden birds to clean their feeders regularly. Finch trichomonosis continues to be monitored by Garden BirdWatchers, and the science teams at BTO are continuing to study how this disease spreads between individuals, so best-practice feeding advice can be refined.

And
Garden
BirdWatch

is not just about monitoring birds, and this has led to some interesting research highlighting the importance of gardens for species which are in serious decline elsewhere in the British landscape.

A paper published by BTO in 2023 showed that between 2007 and 2020, half of the butterfly species monitored by Garden BirdWatchers increased in their abundance in gardens. Butterfly data from GBW were compared with figures from the wider countryside, suggesting that some butterflies are faring better in gardens than elsewhere.



*Red Admiral, by Garden BirdWatch
Ambassador Josh Pedley*

Across Wales, the Blackbird remains the number one recorded species, being seen in 98.17% of participating gardens, followed closely by Robin (97.76%) and Blue Tit (96.54%). Other species making up the top ten species are Magpie (91.04%), Great Tit (90.63%), House Sparrow (89.82%), Dunnock (88.8%), Woodpigeon (86.97%), Wren (83.1%) and Coal Tit (81.47%). Thanks to the year-round monitoring of Garden BirdWatchers, we know that there are seasonal variations. For example, Siskins are most likely to be detected in the early spring, while Treecreepers visit gardens most frequently during the winter months.



Male Blackbird, by Garden BirdWatch Ambassador Josh Pedley

Garden BirdWatch is supported around the country by a network of local Ambassadors. These volunteers, who take part in the survey themselves, also help to promote it in their local communities. They are available to deliver talks, attend events or write pieces for local publications. In the Summer Newsletter, we will introduce you to our current Welsh Garden BirdWatch Ambassadors. If you are interested in contacting them about a promotional opportunity, or if you would like to join them as an Ambassador in your local area, please contact gbw@bto.org.



The 'Full Monty' Team of Claire (GBW), Tony (WeBS) and Margaret (RR) at the Berriew Show, by Warren Town.



If you would like to find out more about GBW, including how to sign up to our weekly newsletter, please visit www.bto.org/gbw.

Farming with Curlew in mind

An article by Bethan Beech.

I am very lucky to live on my husband's family farm in northeast Wales. We are sheep farmers who aim to both manage the land to rear lambs and improve the value of the farm for wildlife. Most of our fields are permanent pasture with managed hedgerows: whilst we are also fortunate to have two large blocks of broadleaved woodland and an area of parkland.

From 2000 onwards we have carefully managed a hay meadow through the Tir Gofal and then Glastir schemes to become an unimproved neutral grassland. We are beyond delighted that, since 2017, Curlew have begun nesting here and have returned every year since, fledging two chicks in 2023 and 2024. These agri-environment schemes funded the maintenance of the hay meadow on condition that mowing was delayed until after 15 July every year, which allows enough time for the Curlew chicks to fledge before the field is cut.



A Curlew on breeding ground – Josh Pedley

We lamb outdoors during early April and are privileged to experience the sight and sound of the Curlew in the valley as we manage the ewes. We heard the first Curlew back in our valley on Monday the 23rd of February this year, and we wait to see if “our” Curlew will return. The male Curlew was colour ringed by the BTO in 2019 and so we know it is the same male returning to the same field every year.

Let us hope the spring of 2026 is a good one for Curlew everywhere in Wales. The farming community is facing an uncertain time at the moment. Wholesale changes to replace all subsidy and agri-environment payment systems with one Sustainable Farming Scheme is making farmers look at their business in terms of both agricultural production and environmental value. We now have the opportunity to have a payment system for farmers in Wales that could lead the way in delivering for both biodiversity and food production.

A Vision That Took Flight – Glaslyn Ospreys

In 2025, Bywyd Gwylt Glaslyn Wildlife (BGGW) became an Affiliated member of WOS. An illustrated article by Gwenan Williams.

High above the beautiful Glaslyn Valley, near Porthmadog, in the shadow of the magnificent mountains of Eryri, each spring Ospreys circle gracefully over river and estuary. For thousands of visitors each year, this sight is unforgettable. But behind the drama of fishing dives and first flights is the story of BGGW or Gweilch Glaslyn Ospreys as it is commonly known, a charity dedicated to protecting Ospreys in the valley, established over 20 years ago in response to the return of a pair of breeding Ospreys to Wales. This small conservation charity has helped shape one of Wales's most recent wildlife success stories and has grown into one of our country's most recognised community-led Osprey projects.



Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) had been extinct as breeding birds in Wales

for centuries, victims of persecution and egg collection. Their gradual recovery in the Scottish Highlands during the mid-20th century offered hope - but a secure foothold in Wales was far from guaranteed. Into the burgeoning UK story of recovery, flew the Glaslyn pair, a Scottish male translocated to Rutland Waters in 1998, and a large, dark un-ringed female Osprey of unknown origin later named Mrs G. Though they were first spotted in the valley and estuary in 2003, the story began in earnest when they bred in a 90ft silver fir tree up the valley in 2004. Little did we know that their return would herald a turning point in Welsh conservation history and would open the door to Osprey recolonisation in Wales.



Ospreys are long-lived and do not start breeding until they are usually three or four years old; building a population in the Glaslyn valley would take time and patience. Dare we hope or dream. The breeding pair sparked concern and excitement in equal measure. Though ospreys are legally protected in the UK, active monitoring was essential.

Recognising both the conservation importance and public interest, local volunteers and conservationists, with initial support from the RSPB, came

together to monitor the breeding pair and protect the nest. The Gweilch Glaslyn Ospreys project was born! From those beginnings grew BGGW, a volunteer-led charity dedicated to safeguarding ospreys

and educating the public about their remarkable lives, welcoming thousands each year to its popular visitor centre. Two decades later, volunteers continue to spend long hours monitoring the birds during the breeding season at the Protection site, observing from a purpose-built cabin and hide, preventing disturbance, monitoring Osprey behaviour, recording nest intruders, and recording and collating vital breeding success data. Over the years, this careful stewardship has paid off and resulted in consistent fledging success at the Glaslyn site and has contributed substantially to the wider growth of the Welsh Osprey population.



One of the charity's greatest strengths is its ability to connect people with wildlife. Each spring and summer our visitor centre welcomes visitors from across the UK and beyond. Volunteers share their enthusiasm and knowledge with visitors, who through telescopes can watch the adult Ospreys bring in fish from the nearby estuary and see chicks grow from tiny hatchlings into powerful young migrants. 24/7 there is live streaming from the nest on screens at the visitor centre and online extending this experience worldwide. Thousands follow the birds, tracking arrival dates, egg-laying, hatch dates, feeding behaviour and fledging milestones. This engagement is not incidental — it is central to the charity's mission. By inspiring fascination and emotional connection, the project fosters long-term support for conservation, particularly among young visitors.

As an independent charity, BGGW relies on site and online donations and sales from a small cafe and gift shop at the visitor centre to sustain its work. It succeeds because of its strong volunteer base, giving their time throughout the breeding season. Their work includes helping staff the visitor centre, leading talks, giving community engagement presentations, managing social media updates and maintaining facilities and equipment. This community-led structure gives the project a distinctive character. Many volunteers have followed the same birds for years, building deep knowledge of individual Ospreys and their family histories.

Gweilch Glaslyn Ospreys is a symbol of what local initiative, scientific knowledge and public passion can achieve together. While rooted in the Glaslyn Valley, the charity is also part of the broader UK Osprey recovery efforts, where conservation programmes, - in England, Wales and Scotland – have established many breeding pairs. Much of this success comes from active nest protection, public engagement, sharing data and ring information to track birds as they disperse and establish new nests which in turn inspires new generations of birdwatchers and conservationists. Ospreys are now an important species for all of us in Wales, and we are very proud at Gweilch Glaslyn Ospreys that our conservation work has helped the recovery of such a magnificent and enigmatic bird.



Funding for Bird Conservation and Research in Wales — Have You Applied?

The Welsh Ornithological Society (WOS) offers a range of grants, bursaries and awards to support bird research, conservation, and community action across Wales — and WOS Council are keen to see more applications. If you have a project in mind, or know someone who does, now is the time to explore what's available.

Applications for 2026 are accepted in two rounds, with deadlines of 30 June and 31 December for all our standard grants.

Project Grants

WOS offers project grants to members wishing to carry out local or regional bird research or conservation studies. WOS offers Project Grants of up to £1000 towards projects that will be of benefit to birds in Wales. Priority will be given to species of conservation concern – e.g. BOCCC4 red or amber listed. These are specifically aimed at furthering knowledge of birds in Wales, whether through survey work, monitoring, or applied conservation. Full details, including eligibility criteria and application deadlines, can be found at birdsins.wales/small-grant-scheme/.



Community Grants

Community grants of up to £1,000 (or 75% of total project costs, whichever is smaller) are available to support habitat improvement projects that involve the local community. Projects funded in 2025 included a nest box scheme targeting red and amber-listed species in mid-Wales, and a swift nest box scheme in Carmarthenshire. The scope is broad — nest boxes, hedgerow creation, pond improvements, or community engagement around local bird conservation all qualify. Full details at birdsins.wales/community-grants-.

Young Conservationists' Bursaries

Established in memory of former WOS chairman Derek Moore, these bursaries offer grants of up to £200 to young people (up to age 26) to help cover costs associated with volunteering or gaining experience in bird conservation in Wales. Eligible activities include nature reserve management, survey work, ringing training courses, and attending Welsh-based conservation conferences — including a separate bursary stream to help cover the WOS Annual Conference fee and travel. Applicants must hold WOS Young Birder Membership. Deadlines for conference bursary applications due by 15 October. See birdsins.wales/wos-bursaries/.

Derek Moore Student Research Awards

These awards recognise the best undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations based on bird research carried out in Wales. The undergraduate prize is £200, and the postgraduate prize is £400, both including a conference fee waiver, travel support, and an invitation to present at the WOS

Annual Conference and submit to the society's journal *Milvus*. Applications for the 2026 awards open in May 2026, with a deadline of 1 July 2026. The 2025 postgraduate award was made to Fraser Masterson for his study of coexistence in diving seabirds — but WOS received no eligible submissions in 2022, 2023 or 2024. If you supervise students undertaking fieldwork in Wales, please do encourage them to apply. Details at birdsins.wales/student-research-awards/.

The President's Special Award — A Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity

We are delighted to announce a brand new, one-off grant: the President's Special Award. At approximately £3,000, this is the largest single grant WOS has ever offered, and we are looking for an ambitious project worthy of the occasion.

The award exists thanks to a remarkable act of generosity. Each year, WOS President Iolo Williams and wildlife photographer Gary Jones host a charity fundraising evening, with the proceeds going to a wildlife charity of Iolo's choice. In March 2024, at a packed event at Dewi Sant, Ewloe, some 300



wildlife enthusiasts raised an astonishing £4,000 — and Iolo chose WOS as the beneficiary. It is this windfall that WOS now wishes to put to work for the birds of Wales.

The eligibility criteria are the same as for our Project Grants and Community Grants, meaning a wide variety of projects can apply. The key difference is scale: we are hoping this additional funding will enable something genuinely ambitious — a project that might not otherwise be possible and that could leave a lasting legacy.

The award is not yet fully allocated. A £1,000 grant was made in the first round to the Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC) for a Willow Tit Habitat Improvement project at Llwyndewi Nature Reserve in Carmarthenshire, involving specialist nest boxes, targeted ring barking to increase standing deadwood, and the creation of new wetland scrapes and pools. This is precisely the kind of targeted, evidence-informed work the award was designed to support — and monitoring of the results could provide valuable lessons for Willow Tit conservation across Wales, a species that has suffered dramatic declines over the past thirty years.

The remaining funds will be awarded as part of the June 2026 application round. To apply, please use either the Project Grant or Community Grant application form, whichever is most appropriate to your project, but make sure to clearly state in your covering email that you wish to be considered for the President's Award funding pot.

WOS Council is also offering something unusual alongside this grant: practical assistance with the application process, including advice and potentially an online workshop. This support comes with no guarantee of success, but it is a genuine offer to help applicants put together the strongest possible case.

If you have a project idea — however embryonic — please don't hesitate. Email grants@birdsins.wales to register your interest and find out more.

This is a rare opportunity, and we would love to see it make a real difference to birds in Wales.

The 2026 WOS Photo Competition

Once again WOS will be running a photo competition in 2026. This will be the seventh year of the competition, and we expect a total of between 150 and 200 entries. If past years are anything to go by, shortlisting will be very difficult – Dave Parry’s great photo illustrating this article didn’t even make the shortlist in 2025.

Most of the rules and details are the same as in previous years, but there is one important change from the 2025 competition:

The mobile phone category did not produce any outstanding entries, so it will be replaced by a ‘Birds and People’ category. Entries for this section must include all (or part) of at least one bird and all (or part) of at least one person. Photos of birds in the hand displaying interesting plumage characteristics and photos of groups of birdwatchers will be particularly welcome.

The Main section – open to everyone, with first prize of a week’s accommodation on Bardsey Island (travel to Ynys Enlli not included). The second prize is £75 of NHBS vouchers, and the third prize is £50 of NHBS vouchers.

Birds and People section – open to everyone, with first prize of £75 of NHBS vouchers, second prize of £50 of NHBS vouchers and third prize of £40 of NHBS vouchers. This is a new idea – have a look at the website to see the sorts of pictures we’re looking for.

Young Photographers section – open to anyone 21 years old or under on 31st August 2026, with first, second and third prizes the same value as the Birds and People section. The closing date for all entries is midnight on 31st August.

Prize winners may be awarded a free place at the WOS Annual Conference in Aberystwyth on Saturday 31st October to collect their prize from Iolo Williams. You do not have to be a WOS member to enter.

How to enter

- Check through the requirements on the WOS website at <https://birdsin.wales/photo-competition/>
- Download an application form for each entry (Word and PDF versions available) from the website at <https://birdsin.wales/photo-competition/>.
- Email your photos, each accompanied by a separate entry form, to photocomp@birdsin.wales by midnight on 31st August 2026.

All entries will be acknowledged. Please make sure you follow the entry instructions.

Judging

For the 2026 competition we will welcome the same four shortlisting judges as in 2025. They will be responsible for shortlisting and the final decisions on winners will be made by WOS President, Iolo Williams.



Gower Bird Club Updates

New breeding species in East Glamorgan

Local birder, Allan Dowson, was rewarded for his regular visits to Hendre Lake, St Mellon's by the discovery of a breeding pair of Little Egrets there last year. This is the first breeding record of the species in the East Glamorgan recording region. Given Little Egrets' swift expansion across the UK over the last thirty years, and how familiar a sight they've become across southeast Wales, this is a long expected



and overdue addition to the local breeding species list. It ties in nicely with a recently published BTO study (<https://www.bto.org/our-work/news/press/egret-expectations>) which found that Little Egrets are breeding in Britain in higher numbers than thought. Until the 1980s, Little Egret was a genuine rarity in Britain, occurring only as an occasional vagrant from continental Europe. BTO researchers now conclude that the breeding population almost certainly exceeds 2,000 pairs.

New East Glamorgan Annual Bird Report Editor

The Glamorgan Bird Club (GBC) is pleased to announce that Dr Rob Thomas, formerly a Senior Lecturer at Cardiff University's School of Biosciences and RSPB Cymru's new Principal Conservation Scientist is East Glamorgan's new Annual Bird Report Editor. GBC would also like to extend its gratitude to his predecessor, Ceri Jones, for his three years as Editor.

Rob is a keen supporter of WOS. He is a regular attendee at our annual conferences, often driving a minibus full of Cardiff University students to enable them to attend our conferences too. He's also just joined WOS' Grants Panel. We wish him well in both his new roles with the RSPB, GBC and WOS.

East Glamorgan Bird Conference

Here's a date for your diary. The Glamorgan Bird Club is joining forces with the BTO to host the East Glamorgan Bird Conference on Saturday, 24 October at the Sport Wales National Centre in Cardiff. The event will feature the latest from local birding projects; it will celebrate local birders – past and present, as well as looking at what BTO surveys are telling us about East Glamorgan's bird populations and how we can all play a part in the 2027-31 BTO National Atlas. We'll publish more information about this event, including how to book your tickets, in our next newsletter.

BTO Youth in Nature Summit – The Welsh Highlights!

An illustrated article by Liliانا Tarrant Snedden – Wales BTO Youth Rep.

Despite taking place in the David Attenborough Building in Cambridge this year, the birds of Wales did feature in the BTO Youth in Nature Summit, alongside the attendance of multiple young people from across Wales and all Welsh BTO Youth Reps!

Taking place over a weekend in February, the Youth in Nature Summit was an inspiring and motivating celebration of young people in ornithology, conservation and the environmental sector. The varied programme showcased talks from eminent ornithological researchers, discussions of the use of artificial intelligence in conservation and plenty of opportunities to network with the many brilliant professionals and young people present.

The infamous Prof Tim Birkhead gave the plenary speech on day one, sharing a selection of the myriads of findings his research has revealed about the populations and behaviours of Skomer Island's Common Guillemots. The impacts of avian influenza were highlighted, with the average age of first breeding on the colonies now over a year younger, as more inexperienced birds fill the gaps left by individuals who succumbed to the disease.

Day one also saw fellow BTO Youth Rep for Glamorgan, Ciera Atkins, sharing her experiences within the ornithology sector on the 'Diversity in Conservation Panel'. Speaking from the heart, Ciera talked about creating a welcoming space for young women in birding through setting up her incredible 'Girls Go Birding' events series, and of how her own empowerment has come from continuing to be present within the community despite needing to overcome challenges.

It was also wonderful to have all the Wales BTO Youth Reps together in one place! With four of us now representing areas of South and North Wales, this is the highest number of BTO Youth Reps Wales has ever had.

Overall, this entirely youth-led Summit was a heartwarming and inspiring two days that left me feeling motivated to contribute to more research, keep working to expand the young ornithological community in Wales and of course to keep birding!

Note: The Summit was organised by the dedicated BTO Youth Advisory Panel in collaboration with the organisation Green Jobs for Nature, supported by the wonderful BTO Youth staff and assisted over the weekend by more than 20 Youth Reps from across the UK!





BTO Cymru Update



Upcoming BTO Cymru events

BTO Cymru will be running several online and in-person events across Wales this spring. If you'd like to get involved with some of our events, then be sure to sign-up to a session or two on our events page [here](#). Below is a summary of what's to come:

- Meet BTO Cymru (07/04)
- In-person Breeding Bird Survey Training
 - Ruthin (21/03)
 - Rhydymwyn (22/03)
 - Llandrindod Lake (28/03)
 - National Botanic Gardens (04/04)
- In-person ID training
 - Llandrindod (28/03)
- An Introduction to BTO surveys
 - Breeding Bird Survey (24/03)



RSPB Cymru Update



The next Welsh Government will be responsible for delivering on our international commitments to take urgent action to reverse biodiversity loss and put nature on a path to recovery by 2030.

We have produced our 'Priorities for Nature in Wales 2026-2030' manifesto, which sets out what is needed if we are to meet our international obligations for nature recovery.

Our key asks of the next Welsh Government are:

- Set ambitious targets to restore nature
- Ensure the best wildlife sites, on land and at sea, are well cared for
- Make sure planning and development help nature
- Support nature friendly farming to restore and look after nature

For full details of our manifesto asks, follow this link [Priorities for Nature in Wales 2026 - 2030](#).

Over the coming weeks, we'll be producing more information about how you can help keep nature high on the agenda in the lead up to the election.

And finally . . .

As ever, a massive thank you to everyone who contributed articles, news and photos to this edition of the newsletter and of course, you, the reader, for your continued support of WOS.

Happy birding and enjoy the Spring – The call of Chiffchaff awaits you on your next sunny day out.

Please follow us on our social media channels:



We're very grateful to our corporate sponsors for their support. Please visit their websites:

Natoura Voyage <https://natouravoyage.co.uk/> and BSG Ecology www.bsg-ecology.com/



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