



Chair's Welcome! Croeso'r Cadeirydd!



Snow in November was a bit of a shock and suddenly after concerns about the lack of birds in the garden, birds seeking food were everywhere. However, close observation has revealed that few of the small birds are juveniles (birds born this year) which is maybe an indication of the poor breeding season. Have you spotted a similar trend in your area? It would be interesting to know whether this a more widespread experience.

The highlight of November was the WOS Annual conference at Aberystwyth. This year it was bigger and better than before and it was wonderful to see so many young faces, the next generation of birders and conservationists, in the audience. We focused on local projects involving volunteers which demonstrated how important it is to engage all birdwatchers in conservation projects. Everyone has something to contribute and we hope that you all can be encouraged to do something in 2025.

If you need some financial help to do so, WOS is keen to make a financial contribution to your projects. You'll find more information about how to apply for our various grants in the News section below.

You can read more about that wonderful day in Aberystwyth in this newsletter. Whilst we have received some very positive feedback from the conference, we cannot be complacent and there is always room for improvement. We welcome comments and if you'd be interested in helping with the conference planning and/or providing an extra pair of hands on the day we would love to hear from you. **News hot off the press: next year's WOS Conference will be held again at Aberystwyth on the slightly earlier date than usual of 25 October.** Pencil it in your diaries now!

One of the conference's sessions focused on raptors, and that's a theme that certainly continues in this newsletter. We have articles on Ospreys, Red Kites and we'll introduce you to Charlotte Griffiths, BTO Cymru's new raptor monitoring project, *Cudyll Cymru*, project lead. There's so much more to update you about too. Read on and enjoy!

I wish you all a relaxing festive season, whatever you are doing or wherever you are and please do not forget the birds. We have to hope that 2025 will be a turning point for our bird populations so as part of your New Year's resolutions do plan to do something for the birds, even if that is just recording the birds seen in your garden or local area. Everything helps.

Thank you so much for supporting WOS and *Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd dda* to you all!

Anne Brenchley
chair@birds.wales

Can you help WOS?

All WOS activities from the admin, to the website, to the communications, to the publications, to the grants, to the Conference are run entirely by a voluntary Council of individuals. This year's Conference was the biggest ever and proved the interest in, and the real need for an organisation like WOS. We must grow further to enable us to widen our engagement, to increase our conservation work and to bring more birders and bird groups together. But to do that we also have to widen our pool of volunteers. There are two practical ways you can do that:

1. **Becoming a trustee.** Several trustees are coming to the end of their terms next year and we are already one trustee short on the current Council. Becoming a trustee is a rewarding way of getting involved into all our activities and shaping the organisation moving forward. We do not ask for ornithological expertise necessarily, just interest and an appetite to get involved in some or all aspects of WOS work.



WOS's current trustees

2. **Becoming a WOS volunteer.** We also have specific areas where we are looking for help which don't entail becoming a trustee. Our Communications Group (which is responsible for this newsletter as well as communications, social media, website etc) and Conference Group (which plans and runs the Annual Conference) are always looking for additional capacity to deliver and improve their work. But there are also always additional roles to fill - on a short-term or longer-term basis. So, whether you are tech-savvy, feel you could help in widening our engagement, good at admin or just simply have some time you'd like to dedicate to help further our work then PLEASE let us know. We will ALWAYS have something for you to do!

Welsh birds need an organisation like WOS to help protect them, to study them and to raise interest in them. Birders and bird groups need an organisation that can represent and help bring them together. We need you to help achieve all that - and hopefully more. So, even if you only have **an hour or two a month to spare**, we'd be interested in hearing from you. For more information and a no obligation chat, please contact chair@birds.wales

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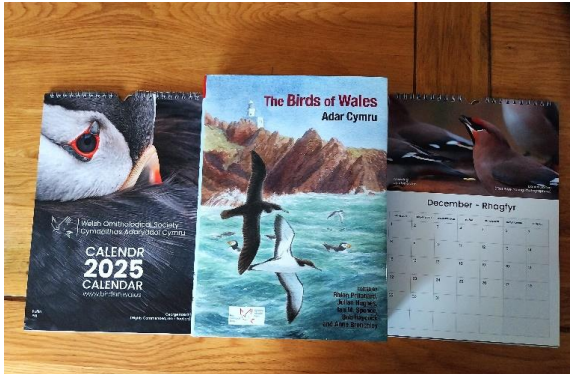
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News

The Birds of Wales/Adar Cymru and the 2025 Calendar – a New Year's present?



Our 2025 WOS Calendar has proved to be very popular. Filled with some of the best images from this year's WOS Photography Competition, it has already almost sold out. We only have six copies left in stock! Just as popular has been our *The Birds of Wales/Adar Cymru* 'sale'. We only have a dozen copies left of this beautiful and informative book which we published in 2021. Both the calendar and book would make a great late Christmas or New Year present for yourself or someone else! Order by contacting web@birdsin.wales. The book is a bargain at £20 + £9 p&p and the calendar is also great value at £7.50 + £2.50 p&p.

WOS Scarce and Rare Report, 2023 now online

We were delighted to publish Jon Green's 'Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales, 2023' (*Milvus Volume 3, issue 2*) a few days ago. This is an online only publication and is available to read and download from the *Milvus* section of our website: <https://birdsin.wales/scarce-and-rare-birds-in-wales/>

The report makes fascinating reading, with full details of six firsts for Wales, four of which were Nearctic warblers associated with the unprecedented landfall of Nearctic passerines in September 2023, plus Baikal Teal and Black-winged Kite. It also contains some great photos of course. A reminder that our annual Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales Report is available only to WOS members.

2023 Welsh Bird Report coming soon

Another benefit of being a WOS member is that you receive a copy of the Annual Welsh Bird Report. Its Editor, Julian Hughes, has just delivered the 2023 edition to the printers and, once the proofing and binding is complete, it should be dropping on your doormat with a nice big 'thud' sometime towards the end of January or early February.

WOS bursaries and awards for young birders

We received eight grant applications from young WOS members for a bursary to help them cover some of their travelling costs to get to our annual conference this year. We were only too pleased to award bursaries to all eight applicants.

As a Society, we are very keen to champion and encourage the next generation of conservationists. We have a Young Birder Membership category which is available to individuals up to the age of 25 for only £5 a year. This has been successful in attracting 35 new young members, but we would like more!

We also offer Young Conservationist Bursaries (up to £200) which provide a financial contribution towards the costs incurred while volunteering, or gaining experience, of studying or conserving birds in Wales and, finally, a Student Research Awards for undergraduates (£200) and post-graduates (£400) to recognise and promote the contribution made to Welsh ornithology by undergraduate and masters level students researching birds in Wales.

More info on all these funding opportunities can be found on our website at <https://birdsin.wales/grants-awards/> If you don't qualify for any yourself, please pass them on to a young person who does!

Deadlines imminent for WOS Funding

If you have an idea for project, or one that is already up and running, that will help the conservation or study of birds in Wales or will engage people in nature conservation we'd love to hear from you.

We offer both Project and Community Grants of up to £1000 (more in exceptional circumstances) with further continuation funding a possibility. The deadline for the next funding round is only days away: **31 December**. The deadline for the following round is **30 June 2025**.

You can find out more about both the project and community engagement funding opportunities and how to apply for them on our website www.birdsin.wales/grants-awards/

Also, please don't forget about our new, one off, **President's Special Award**. At £4,000 this is the largest single grant we have ever offered in our history. The closing date for applications for is **31 January, 2025**.

The criteria for this grant are the same as those for our current £1,000 Project Grant and Community Grants, so a great variety of projects are eligible for support. Our hope is that the additional funding will enable the creation of a more ambitious project.

If you're unsure whether your project fits the bill, or you'd like some advice about how to complete the application process, get in touch with us for a no obligation chat. We'd much prefer it if you did that rather than not submit a funding bid!

We can offer assistance with making an application, including advice and possibly an on-line workshop, although any assistance given by WOS will be on the understanding that such help does not guarantee a successful application. If you would like more information please register your interest by emailing: grants@birdsin.wales

Milvus news

You should have received your copy of the latest edition of our journal, *Milvus*, (Vol.3 Issue 1) in November. We hope you enjoyed reading it. We're already on the lookout for contributions for next year's journal.



The latest edition of Milvus

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!

Successful Swift Petition!

As publicised in our Summer and Autumn Newsletters, WOS was one of a number of conservation organisations who supported the Senedd petition calling on the Welsh Government to legislate to ensure Swift bricks are installed in all new buildings in Wales:

<https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/246264>

We're delighted that at its close, this petition received 10,934 signatures, which means that the Petitions Committee will now consider this for a debate. Let's hope they do more than debate it and bring in this essential piece of legislation.

Bardsey's 2025 Assistant Wardens

Many congratulations to Greg Lee and Ewan Turner who will be Bardsey Bird Observatory's new Assistant Wardens in 2025. Greg has been Assistant at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory while Ewan, who graduated with a Zoology degree from Aberystwyth University, was Bardsey's intern in 2024.

Ewan first visited the Bardsey Obs on one of its university weeks where he was sponsored by WOS, so we can probably claim to have played some part in this fabulous career move for Ewan!

The 2024 WOS Annual Conference – a record attendance and a great day

Many of the record 165 delegates said this was the best WOS annual conference they'd attended and there was a real buzz throughout the day, with excellent presentations, more exhibitors than ever before and great opportunities to chat, exchange information and make contacts.



The Conference delegates clearly enjoying one of the talks!

The Chair of WOS, Anne Brenchley, welcomed everyone and was then the first speaker, reporting on WOS' all-Wales Rook survey of 2022/23, which many of you may have taken part in, the full results of which were published in the latest edition of our journal, *Milvus*, which landed on your doorsteps a few weeks ago.

Anne was followed by Anya Wicikowski, a Conservation Officer with RSPB Cymru, who described the current status of Black Grouse – not a happy picture in recent years, so hopefully a new multi-partner recovery project can reverse the recent declines. Anya is always on the lookout for volunteers for the annual Black Grouse survey. If you'd like more into, please get in touch anya.wicikowski@rspb.org.uk



Rachel Taylor's beautiful stained-glass portrait of a Mute Swan

During the first tea break, there was a scramble for raffle tickets and the 'silent auction'. This year's prizes may have been our best ever. Top of the pile was a week's stay on Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island) kindly donated by the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory (<https://www.bbfo.org.uk/>), and a stunning portrait of a Mute Swan in stained-glass, created and donated by WOS trustee, Rachel Taylor (<http://delweddyfran.com/>). Award winning gin distillery, Dyfi Distillery, again kindly donated the prize for this year's 'silent auction' - a free tour of the distillery with some free drinks thrown in (<https://www.dyfidistillery.com>)! We'd like to say 'diolch' to everyone who very generously donated prizes again this year.

Suitably refreshed, delegates returned for the 'Birds of Prey session' which started with Dr Sophie-lee Williams talking about the well-researched plan to re-introduce White-tailed Eagles to south-east Wales and the Severn Estuary. Fingers crossed; the re-introduction may start in 2026.



Delegates meeting old, and making new friends, in the exhibitors' room during one of the breaks

The second presentation was from Charlotte Griffiths, the newly appointed BTO Cymru Raptor Monitoring Officer, outlining the long-term *Cudyll Cymru* project, designed to harness large numbers of volunteers in a citizen science programme to increase our knowledge of Wales' five most widespread raptor species. You'll find out more about Charlotte and the project later on in the newsletter.

WOS President, Iolo Williams, then presented our Lifetime Achievement Award to Andy King – a well-deserved recognition of many years of service to Brecknockshire birds, birders and national research. You can also find out more about Andy and the incredible work he's done over the years later in the newsletter. This was followed by presentations to the 2024 photo competition winners who'd made it to Aberystwyth: George Rossini, Sid Simmons, Karen Burns, Claire Stott, Daniel Gorton and William Lambourne.

We went off for the usual excellent Aberystwyth lunch and re-assembled for round-ups of 2024 news from BTO Cymru (Gethin Jenkins-Jones) and RSPB Cymru (Neil Lambert).



For the first time ever, we had a Conference Poet! Clare Donnison joined us and wrote a number of poems on her reflections on the day. You can follow Clare on social media on Instagram and 'X', both @DonnisonClare, where you can see her work. Here's the short poem (left) that she wrote before the Conference that heralded our first refreshments break!

The first afternoon session was devoted to wader studies: Daniel Jenkins-Jones spoke about a community project on wintering Green Sandpipers in the Ely valley and Paddy Jenks on the ringing and reporting of colour-ringed waders on the Gann estuary in Pembrokeshire, including the extraordinary sighting of a Curlew Sandpiper which had been ringed at the southernmost point of India.

Following the afternoon tea and coffee break, we moved in to the final session of the day, with two more community projects: Ben Stammers (North Wales Wildlife Trust) on saving Swifts and Samantha Kenyon on her nature-friendly farm and her work as a Curlew Project Officer in the Clwydians.

Iolo started to bring proceedings to an end by spending a quarter of an hour or so reflecting on the day. This included a call to arms for all of us to take action and do as much as we can to save nature: by signing petitions, getting involved in citizen science activities, campaigning and letting politicians know how we feel.



George Rossini, winner of our photo competition's Main Category, receiving his award from Iolo Williams.



Samantha Kenyon's talk on her conversion to nature-friendly farming proved very popular

Anne Brenchley then bade us all farewell, inviting us all to return to gather again at the 2025 annual conference.

We'd like to thank all our speakers who entertained us throughout the day; Aberystwyth University who did such a great job keeping us all fed and watered; the conference sponsors BSG Ecology (<https://bsg-ecology.com/>) and Gower Ornithological Society (<https://www.gowerbirds.org.uk/>); and, of course, all the delegates who joined us for this memorable day.

Diolch, thanks for coming and supporting WOS. **Welwn ni chi flyddyn nesaf! See you next year!**

WOS Lifetime Achievement Award winner 2024: Andy King

We're very grateful to those of you who nominated people for this year's Lifetime Achievement Award, all of whom scored very highly against the award's criteria. We were delighted to present the award this year to **Andy King**.

You may recall that Andy was mentioned in the *Thirty Years of BBS in Wales* article in our last newsletter. He is eighth in the UK's all-time list of the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey visits, having completed 215 in total . . . so far. This is the highest number of any surveyor in Wales and, over the full 30 years of BBS, he has covered 16 different survey squares. In his acceptance speech at the conference, Andy appealed for every one of us to take on at least one BBS square, so that we can improve our knowledge of the status of different bird species in Wales. Naturally, this is a view that WOS endorses! See the page 9 below for more information about next spring's BBS training events.



Andy King being presented with his Lifetime Achievement Award

Andy was nominated for the award by Keith Noble. This is Keith's citation:

"Andy King has been the Bird Recorder for Breconshire since 2006 and edited every annual Breconshire Bird Report, writing all the species accounts himself. These Reports benefit from Andy's exceptional knowledge of the county, its ecology and agriculture, and they are a good read.

Breconshire does not have a bird club, but sightings and pictures are shared on the Brecknockbirds website, set up when Andy became Recorder. He gives talks and leads walks including the popular New Year event at Llangorse Lake.

Andy is the BTO Rep for Breconshire, organising BBS, WeBS and other surveys, recruiting and training, and taking a full part himself. He covered more tetrads for the last Atlas than anyone else in the county, visiting some of the more remote areas.

A member of the national Rare Breeding Birds Panel, he monitors sensitive species, including raptors, Golden Plover and Dunlin. His passion for upland birds shows in the Peregrine species account which he wrote in *The Birds of Wales*. He works with local farmers to protect nesting Curlews and Lapwings. (Andy also surveys Dotterel, Purple Sandpiper and other species under licence in the Scottish Highlands).

He has been a member of Llangorse Ringing group for many years, fully involved in various projects including Constant Effort Survey and winter ringing in bird-friendly farm fields.

In 2023 Andy discovered a pair of Ospreys in the Usk Valley. He played a leading role in securing protection of the nest by the Welsh Government and setting up a monitoring Group".

The deadline for nomination for our 2025 award is 31 July. You can find out more the nomination process here: <https://birdsin.wales/lifetime-achievement-awards/>



Upcoming BTO Cymru training events for the 'Breeding Bird Survey'

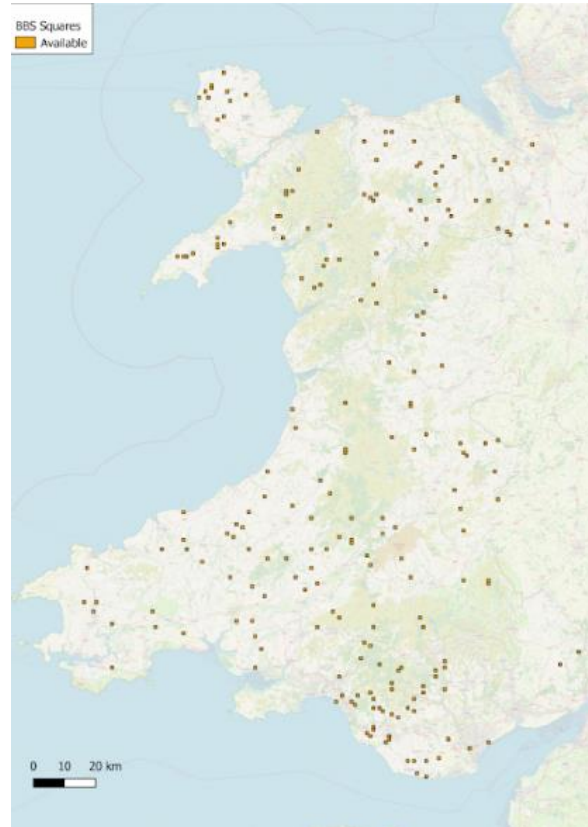
Have you ever considered participating in the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) but were unsure whether it was for you?

Well, spring planning is already underway at BTO Cymru, and several free BBS training dates are already in the calendar for 2025. If you can ID most of Wales' birds by sight and song, and fancy doing a bit for their conservation, then this is the survey for you. All that's required is two survey visits a year to your BBS site, each one lasting around 1.5 hours each.

You'll be making a really valuable contribution by joining the BBS team. This is one of our most important surveys, allowing us to track the changes of our breeding birds. You can find out more about the BBS here:

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey>

Below is the table of our spring events and, to the right is a map of 1-km squares where we need volunteers. Booking for these events will go live in the New Year, but if you'd like to express your interest before then, please email Gethin at BTO Cymru at gethin.jenkins-jones@bto.org We look forward to seeing you at one of these events!

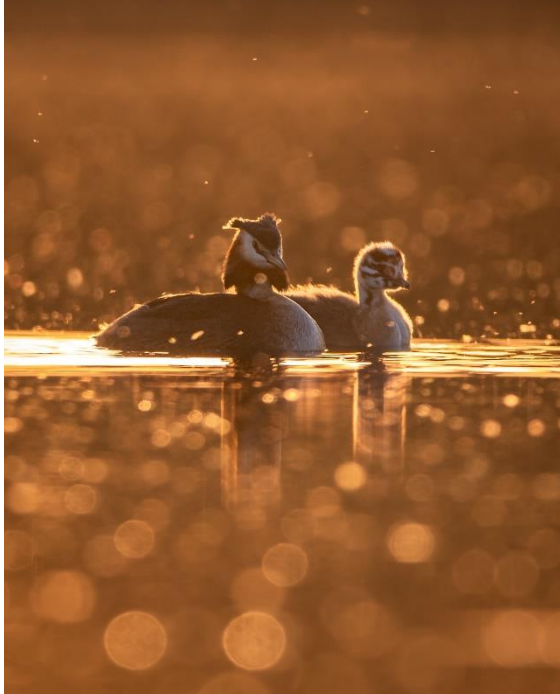


Region	Date	Location
Carmarthen	15/02	Welsh Botanical Gardens
Pembrokeshire	23/02	Narberth (room in Queens Hall)
Carmarthen	08/03	WWT Llanelli
Pembrokeshire	15/03	Wales Wildlife Centre
Ceredigion	16/03	RSPB Ynys Hir
Anglesey	22/03	RSPB Cors Ddyga
Meirionnydd	29/03	Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)
Montgomeryshire	05/04	Powis Castle (National Trust)
Radnorshire	06/04	Llandrindod Lake
Brecknockshire	12/04	Brecon (room in Gaer Museum)

2024 WOS Photo Competition – the biggest and best yet

The fifth year of the WOS photo competition generated a record 197 entries: 133 in the Main section, 45 of Flocks and 19 Young Photographers with six entries from under 10-year-olds.

101 different species were photographed and the most popular were, unsurprisingly, photos of Waxwings (12) and Starlings (9). It's unlikely there'll be so many Waxwing pictures in 2025!



The judges commented that the standard of photographs in the 'Main' and 'Young' competitions was excellent and it was very difficult to rank them, let alone pick out winners. The 'Flocks' entrants were, on the other hand, rather disappointing (the Starlings roosting under Aberystwyth pier should claim royalties!), but in all categories there were some absolutely cracking pictures that didn't even manage to make the shortlist: the three new photos at the top of the WOS website's Home Page 'slider' are all 2024 entries, but only one of these was a prize-winner.

Main Section

The overall winner of the Main Section was George Rossini, for his atmospheric and beautifully lit picture of a Great Crested Grebe and chick (left).

The judges commented: 'This is just all about the atmosphere . . . soft warm lighting and a nice subject' and 'A very atmospheric photo of a parent and youngster. The light is beautiful and image almost sparkles. It looks like the Grebes are floating on liquid gold. I also like the backlighting, helping the birds to stand out, and the way the birds are just above the centre adds to the depth of the image, with your eye working up the blurred foreground as if you are at eye level with them.' George was also Highly Commended for other photos: Dancing Grebes – a great shot of the weed dance – and a beautifully crafted head shot of a Puffin, which forms the cover of the 2025 calendar.

Second prize went to Richard Castell for his Black Grouse silhouetted against the sunrise (below).

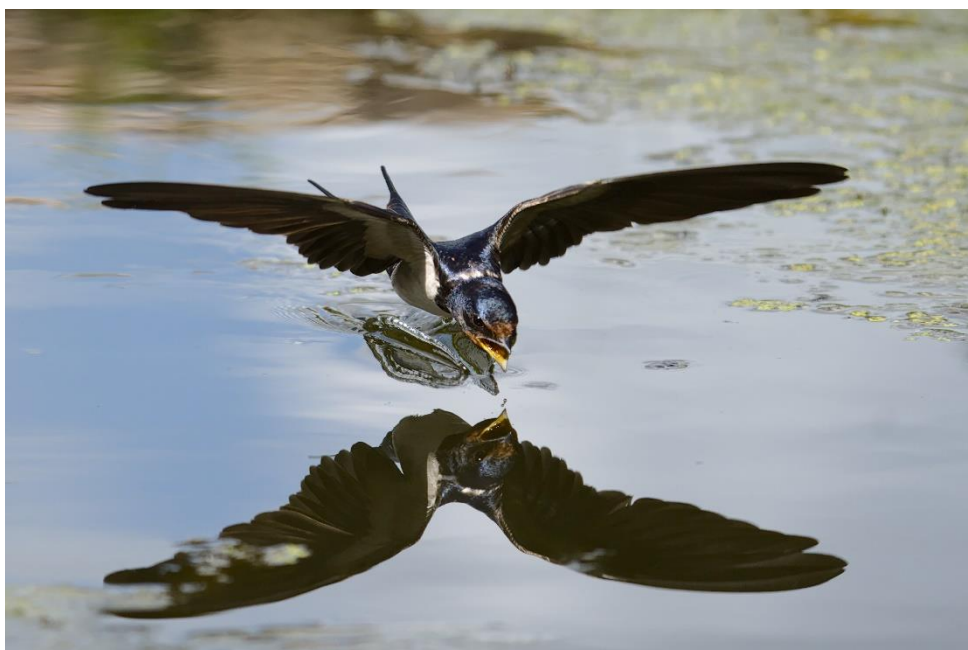


The judges said: 'This is an enigmatic image of a classic species of the Welsh uplands. The composition is great. The bird sits really nicely in the bottom right corner, and I love how much space there is around it, giving the impression of the vastness of the landscape within which it lives. The vibrant colours also work well, with the contrast of the light background and darker foreground giving the impression that the bird is in the shadow of a mountain. I also like how he's captured the behaviour of the bird, with it calling away into the habitat.'

Richard also won second prize in the Flocks section for his Waxwings at Halkyn Mountain (below) and was Highly Commended for his portrait of a Yellowhammer singing in flowering gorse. These three illustrate January, February and March in the calendar.



Sid Simmons won third prize for his delightfully reflective photo of a Swallow coming down to drink (below), where the judges commented: 'This is a really wonderful photo! I love the Swallow swooping down at the water, the clearness of the reflection and the way the light is bouncing off those beautiful blue feathers. Lovely.' Also, 'Well executed, a difficult shot to achieve and get nice and sharp.' Alun Lambert was also Highly Commended for his photo of a Kingfisher diving.



Although the judges felt the Flocks section was not as strong as in previous years, there were still some superb photographs: Karen Burns, a runner-up in previous years, finally clinched a winning photo with her unusual Aberystwyth Starling flock silhouetted against the moon (below).



‘Love this - we see so many Starling flock images, but this is special with the moon the primary focus of the shot. I really like this photo. I really enjoy how the birds are silhouetted against a clear blue sky with that lovely moon in the background - feels almost magical in a way’. Claire Stott took third place with another Aberystwyth Starling composition (see page 24), whilst Jeff Slocombe was Highly Commended for his cheeky take on ‘Flocks’ with a Shelduck and ducklings. Laura Murcott was Highly Commended for her peaceful and unusual photo of a Black Swan amongst a flock of Mute Swans.

Although there were only a few Young Photographer entries, the standard was very high indeed. Daniel Gorton’s three entries swept the board: his Waxwing (below) was accorded first prize and his Gronant Golden Plover won second prize.



His Dipper with food was Highly Commended – all three can be found in the calendar. On the Waxwing, the judges commented: 'I like how the photographer has focused on the head of one bird in a flock. Nicely exposed and lovely rich colours. Good composition with the focal bird slightly offset, and I like how the head neatly falls within an empty space in the background between two other birds. The face is very sharp, and the little water droplets add to the story of the flock coming down to drink.'



Of the Golden Plover (above) 'This is a very nice and subtle image - a little bit of action but you can almost hear the Goldie calling in the picture. Very nicely exposed, good composition and good technical skills shown getting the F-stop small so the bird is crisp and the background and foreground aren't. All in all, a winner for me'; 'Great photo! I love how you can see its tongue sticking out and some grains of sand sticking to the beak like it's just had a meal. I like how it's just one bird, with a pop of golden feathers against a stony background - stunning image, pin sharp, beautifully exposed, right down at the subject's level.' Third prize went to William Lambourne for a splendid portrait of a Spotted Flycatcher (below).



The judges' comments on this photo included: 'There's something really charming about this photo. I really enjoy how it's perched right on the end of this broken branch giving me some side-eye like it's keeping an eye on me. Nice and clear photo for being amongst leaves too. The bird and stick are nice

and sharp and I like the way they sit in the lighter parts of the background. The blurred background and green foliage in the foreground work well to add depth and creates the impression of the Spotted Flycatcher sat among clusters of green leaves in a broadleaf woodland, typical of encounters with this species. It could have been good to have the bird slightly more to the left and more empty space on the right to fit with the rule of thirds, but overall, a good image!

It was very encouraging to receive three entries from a 6-year-old and three from a 10-year-old.

Iolo Williams presented all those prize winners who could come to Conference with their vouchers and calendars and the volume of applause underlined how highly the audience rated their photographs.

In Introduction to 'Cudyll Cymru' and its Coordinator

*BTO Cymru recently launched 'Cudyll Cymru', an exciting new raptor monitoring project. Word on the street is that it is already proving very popular with a large number of birders already signed up for the project. **Charlotte Griffiths** is its coordinator and many of you may have met her at our recent conference. We wanted to know a little bit more about the project and Charlotte herself, so we sent her a few questions!*



What first sparked your interest in birds and natural history?

I was fortunate enough to grow up on the Welsh border alongside Peregrine falcons, which in the early 90s were still a rare and rather glamorous commodity. It's almost impossible not to be awestruck by the fastest animal on earth! By the mid-nineties, Buzzards had made their return and I felt as excited as if I were watching eagles! I'd definitely hold these two beautiful birds responsible for making me enraptured with raptors!

Where are your favourite places to watch birds/enjoy nature in Wales?

Despite my admitted bias, the Shropshire Welsh border is a truly stunning landscape and is generously endowed with many of the UK's raptors. So, it's here I spend almost all of my time, in the company of my German Shepherd, the mercurial Merlin. Llanymynech rocks, Rhydycroesau woodlands, Llanforda estate and Llechrydau are just a few of my favourite spots to enjoy nature's glory.

Please tell us a bit about your professional (and voluntary?) background before taking on your new role.

I've come to the BTO from the IT / Telecommunications sector, where I worked in technical marketing and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) strategy and implementation. On a brighter note, I've spent much of my free time over the years monitoring raptors as part of the Shropshire Raptor Study Group, under the stewardship of the infinitely knowledgeable Leo Smith.

You were the founder of ‘Raptor Dogs’ a project to tackle raptor persecution using forensic detection dogs. Could you tell us a little bit more about that please?

I have always been deeply affected by raptor persecution and, inspired by the super-senses of my amazing dog, Raptor Dogs was born. I partnered with a Welsh cadaver dog training company and the Spanish Guardia Civil, who have been successfully deploying detection dogs in cases of raptor persecution for the past decade. Unfortunately, the multi-agency funding fell at the last hurdle following the economic downturn of 2022, but we remain optimistic that this effective measure against persecution will one day be used as a standard policing tool across the UK.

Many congratulations on being appointed BTO Cymru’s Welsh Raptor Monitoring Coordinator. What will the job entail and what are your main priorities in your new role? What do you hope to achieve?

Thank you! My role will focus on leading the new BTO Welsh Raptor Monitoring Scheme, which was launched last October. Aside from designing and implementing a robust scientific survey, a key goal of the project is to recruit a diverse group of new monitors, equipping them with the skills and expertise needed to effectively gather data on raptors in Wales. The project aims to establish a cohesive, long-term study to fill the critical gap in data for five widespread raptor species in Wales: Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Red Kite, Kestrel and Raven. This information will be invaluable for shaping policy and guiding conservation efforts to ensure the future success of these remarkable birds.

Would it be fair to ask you whether you have a ‘favourite raptor’?! If you do, could you please explain why?

A near impossible question! Each one is somehow a favourite in its own right, but if I was really under the cosh to name one, I would probably choose the humble Buzzard. Undoubtedly unappreciated now it’s become so common, I can’t help but admire it’s all conquering revival from near extinction. The Buzzard really is a big beauty in all its different plumages, but I’ll admit to practically falling apart at the sight of pale morph....

Finally, is there anything that WOS members can do to help you in your role?

Yes! We would be thrilled if WOS members would join the scheme and volunteer to monitor raptors in their chosen patch of Wales. There will also be opportunities for members to share their expertise with new, less experienced monitors. We are strong proponents of handing down knowledge to new generations of raptor enthusiasts, ensuring valuable wisdom continues to contribute to the future prosperity of Welsh raptors.

Cudyll Cymru is a project which has been designed to be suitable for birders of all abilities. If you’re a beginner to birdwatching and bird surveys or an old hand, there are ways that you can contribute to this important project. If you’d like to know more about Cudyll Cymru and how to sign up to monitor some of our raptors, you can do so . . .

Yn Gymraeg (in Welsh) here: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/cudyll-cymru-cy> and in English here: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/cudyll-cymru>





Wanted: experienced fieldworkers to monitor Red Kite breeding populations

As well as BTO Cymru's Cudyll Cymru, there's another opportunity to get involved with monitoring Red Kites in 2025, albeit for much more experienced volunteers. Charlotte Griffiths has been in contact with the Welsh Kite Trust (WKT) about how each other's work can complement each other. Here, WKT trustee, **Leo Smith**, explains what the Trust is looking for.

While Red Kites were still rare, the Welsh Kite Trust attempted to monitor all breeding sites. When the success of conservation efforts made this impossible, in 2013, it was decided to monitor a sample. Nest finding, and checking outcomes, has been carried out continuously since 2014 in six 10km squares near Brecon, and in the northern part of Radnorshire (about 360 sq.kms.).

As the range and population has continued to expand, the Trust is keen to increase the number of sample surveys carried out each year. Although Kites are currently doing well, there is no guarantee that this will always be the case, and Avian Influenza is a current threat.

Volunteers would choose their own specific area, which might be a county or part county, or a discrete landscape feature, or one or more 10-km squares. Visits would be made in late March and the first half of April, to find nests and confirm that incubation has started, then again towards the end of June, to establish the outcome (including, if possible, a count of chicks about to fledge). Nest finding is best carried out by driving around the minor roads, and vantage point surveys, to observe pairs and displaying birds, then walking into the appropriate woodlands and copses to locate the nests. Once the nest is found, disturbance should be kept to a minimum, and usually only two visits are needed, one to confirm an occupied nest, and the other to establish the outcome.



A Schedule 1 license for nest monitoring, issued by the BTO on behalf of NRW is essential. The license does not convey permission to be on the land, so where appropriate landowner's permission should be obtained. If volunteers do not want to apply for their own licence, they can become an accredited agent on mine. Volunteers would need to enter their nest records online on the BTO website, and provide an annual monitoring report to be published on the WKT website. The Trust will pay expenses (mileage @ 45p/mile at present) up to a maximum of £500pa (Unless a more extensive project is agreed with Trustees), on receipt of a claim form with the monitoring report.

Volunteers would need to commit to carrying out the same survey over several years, to build up a good knowledge of the area and provide reasonable estimates of the number of pairs, their productivity and change over time. To volunteer, or obtain further information, please contact me, Leo Smith (WKT Trustee) at leo@leosmith.org.uk

My Bardsey Experience

Every year, to help cover their costs, WOS sponsors a student to stay on Bardsey during the Observatory's 'University Week'. This year, **Saffron Forrester** was the recipient of this sponsorship and, from her article below, she clearly had the time of her life.



Saffron helping with the Manx Shearwater ringing on Bardsey

Thanks to the Welsh Ornithological Society I was given the opportunity to spend a week on Bardsey Island, staying at the bird observatory during the summer. Bangor University's bird watching society had run trips in the past, but I wasn't able to make them so when a summer trip was announced, I applied immediately! And it's a good thing I did. The trip was open to students across the country interested in birdwatching and ornithology, so I am very happy to be one of the lucky few. As a whole, the trip was amazing! Jam-packed with bird watching and learning about how a bird observatory works while, without sounding too clichéd, making great friends.

For the first couple days, we'd spend hours wandering the island, unsure of the types of species we'd come across. Then once we'd settled, we would spend some days and nights monitoring and ringing Manx Shearwater chicks, endless hours of sea-watching including watching the Risso Dolphins and ending the week with a big bird race and a quiz. The island is a little off-grid with composting toilets and no signal but it's worth it.

However, this trip was more than that to me. When I arrived on Bardsey Island, I was naturally excited, but I didn't really know what to expect. I was only an amateur birdwatcher oblivious of how big of an impact the week would have on my life. My one goal was to see a Purple Sandpiper. Unfortunately, I didn't achieve that but instead I doubled my life list, learnt how to use a 'scope properly and had the chance to ring a number of birds I had never been so close to. Thanks to presentations, watching ringing demonstrations and spending so much time just outside while there, I learnt so much about bird ID using plumage and song. Most importantly, we were able to see the practical side of ornithology. My degree in Zoology with Ornithology can only teach me so much about the technical side but this experience has shown me so many options for what I can do during and after my studies. I left the island with memories I will never forget and skills I can carry forever and only improve on.

Bardsey Bird Observatory was truly a life-changing experience for me, and I would recommend it to anyone (in fact I do, to anyone that'll listen). I am so grateful to everyone that was on the island with me, to Steven Stansfield and the assistant wardens as well as the Welsh Ornithological Society for helping to fund the trip.



The students seawatching on Bardsey

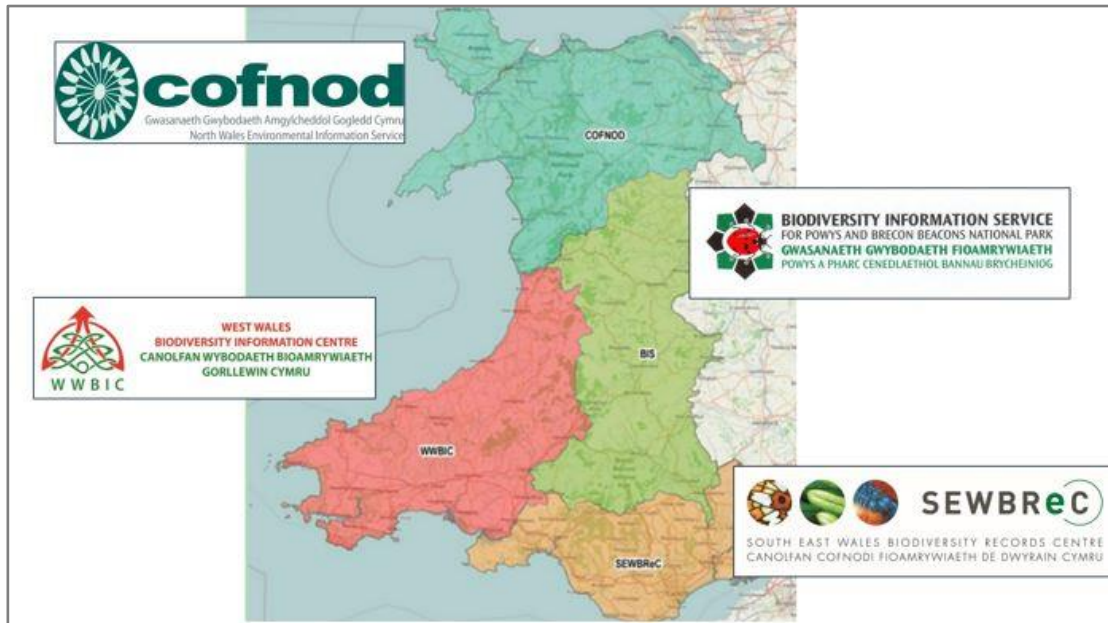
Bioblitz or Recording Day – what’s the difference?

*Many of us record plants and forms of wildlife other than birds. With the pressures ever increasing on our natural environment, it’s never been more important to record what we see and where. If you don’t already do so, perhaps this could be a New Year’s resolution? If this is new to you, a great way to get started and build confidence is to join an organised Bioblitz or a Recording Day. But what’s the difference between the two? We asked **Kate Smith, West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre.***

At their heart both events are about observing and recording wildlife on a particular day and collating and sharing the records generated. A bioblitz has a more public engagement focus whereas a recording day is more about detailed recording by experts.

What is a bioblitz?

BioBlitzes are arranged by various organisations. They are advertised publicly and held on publicly accessible land. The day has a structured itinerary of walks and talks. Experts lead walks and recording sessions focussing on specific taxonomic groups that anyone can join. Recording what species are seen is still very much the focus of the day and Local Environmental Record Centres (LERCs) are often responsible for collating and capturing all the records generated. A ‘live’ species list may be displayed so everyone taking part can see what’s been recorded. They are a great way to engage the public in recording and for beginners to spend time with experts.



A map of the areas covered by Wales’ four Local Environmental Record Centres (LERCs)

What is a Recording Day?

Recording Days are organised by LERCs for Vice County Recorders (local taxonomic experts) and other enthusiastic recorders who share records with or are affiliated to the LERC. LERC staff organise a site, usually private land, and invite recorders to attend. The day begins with a brief description of the site and its history from the landowner, but apart from that, has very little structure. The onus is

on recording and that is how attendees spend the day. Often moth traps will have been set the previous evening and the catches looked at during the day. LERC staff enjoy these days as much as anyone, a chance to get from behind the desk and visit some beautiful sites. It is a privilege to spend time with experts in the field and a fantastic opportunity to learn. Records from the day are collated and landowners are provided with a species list. All records generated from the day make a valuable addition to the species database.

If you are interested in hosting a recording day and own roughly 10 acres or more, anywhere in Wales, please get in touch for a chat: kate@westwalesbiodiversity.org.uk

More about LERCs

There are four Local Environmental Record Centres (LERCs) in Wales. All work closely together under the banner LERC Wales. Each LERC collates and manages a database of species information for their region and rely on the recording community, most of whom are volunteers, to share records.

Records from all four LERCs are combined in a shared database of more than 22 million records that can be viewed and queried via our web portal, Aderyn. Useful links:

- West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre (WWBIC) - <https://www.wwbic.org.uk/>
- Cofnod - <https://www.cofnod.org.uk/Home>
- South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) - <https://www.sewbrec.org.uk/>
- Biodiversity Information Service (BIS) - <https://www.bis.org.uk/>
- Aderyn - <https://aderyn.lercwales.org.uk/home>
- LERC Wales App - <https://www.wwbic.org.uk/wildlife-recording/lerc-wales-app/>

2024 – a breakaway year for Ospreys in Wales

The sight of Ospreys gracing our skies has been one of the birding and conservation highlights of the 21st century here in Wales. Since 2004, they've slowly spread to other parts of Wales and the dedication and hard work of the various groups who monitor and protect their nests over so many years is incredible. We contacted a number of them to get a picture of how Welsh Ospreys fared during the 2024 breeding season. Here are some of the stories they shared with us.

Headlines

2024 was the most successful year yet for Ospreys in Wales with a total of 26 chicks fledging from the 11 recorded breeding nests.

According to Emyr Evans, Dyfi Projects Manager at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust: "I think 2024 has been the breakaway year for Ospreys in Wales. I consider the population now sustainable, having reached escape velocity from a dispersal point of view. It took 20 years to get here, from the first successful pair in Welshpool in 2004, but Ospreys are now re-populating vast swathes of Wales, with just the very north and south left.

Wales continues to benefit from an increased productivity rate compared to nests in more normalised populations. Nest productivity in 2024 stands at 2.4 offspring, which is double the average in Scotland. Elevated productivity is a result of lower pressures such as competition for nesting sites, mates, food, predation etc. As we see the population grow over the next few years, no

doubt these very high productivity rates will come down, but at least we have them for now as the Welsh population is still in recovery mode.



The Class of 2024 - this year's chicks at Glaslyn

The Glaslyn nest near Porthmadog is the oldest nest in Wales and has been in continual use since 2004. The new unringed female, 'Elen', who replaced the legendary 'Mrs G' who'd nested annually at Glaslyn between 2004-2022 but failed to return in 2023, returned for her second breeding season. There she was reunited with her mate, 'Aran'. They successfully fledged three chicks.

There is a second nest in the Glaslyn Valley which is close to the Glaslyn Osprey Visitor Centre at Pont Croesor. The nest is managed by Friends of the Ospreys and has been active since 2021, when the current pair began breeding together. Although the pair here, the male Blue Z2/'Aeron' and the female Blue 014, raised three chicks successfully during 2023 only one chick was raised in 2024, which may have been down to the cold and wet weather conditions around the time of hatching. The single male chick was ringed by Emmanuel Jatta, a research assistant from Kartong Bird Observatory in The Gambia, who was visiting the UK as part of Dr Tim Mackrill's Osprey Leadership Foundation work in Africa.

At the **Dyfi** nest near Machynlleth, the regular pair (the female Blue 3J/'Telyn' and the unringed male 'Idris'), returned for their fifth breeding season together and raised three chicks.

It was a similar story at the **Clywedog** nest where Blue 5F (Rutland 2012) and her unringed mate 'Dylan', also returned for their fifth breeding season together, raising three chicks.

There's never a dull moment with Ospreys and it's worth reading Sarah Callon, the Breinig Osprey Project Officer's blog looking back at the season at **Llyn Brenig**
<https://tinyurl.com/bdhpc88n>

The pair there, Blue LJ2/Blue 372, successfully raised two chicks, but the drama of this year's season there was worthy of an episode of *Pobol y Cwm* or *Eastenders*!

There were two known pairs of Osprey present at nest sites in **Breconshire** during the 2024 breeding season, both nests having been observed during initial construction in 2023. These confirm a significant southward expansion of the species within Wales.



The pair at Llyn Brenig

At the site in the **Usk Valley at Talybont-On-Usk** a nestcam supplied by the Welsh Government allowed 24/7 observation and data collection by the new charity, Usk Valley Ospreys. The male arrived in early April and was joined by a female at the end of the month. Pair bonding commenced and all the behaviours associated with breeding were recorded. The lateness in the season of the

female's arrival and the new pairing were thought to have been contributory factors in their failure to produce eggs or young. Both birds migrated in the second week of September, having fiercely defended their nest all summer. There are high hopes that they will successfully rear young in 2025.

At the other site, on private land near **Builth Wells** a pair produced three chicks, one of which died not long after hatching. However, two chicks survived to fledge and migrate. Poor weather around hatching time may have contributed to chick loss, but having successfully raised two young it is highly likely that this pair will return in 2025.

Meanwhile at two new private nests in mid-Wales, Welsh-born half-brothers (same father) bred for the first time. Blue 550 (ringed at Clywedog in 2020) raised two chicks with an unidentified female.



One of Wales' newest pairs in the Usk Valley

Due to the nest being inaccessible it wasn't possible to ring these chicks. Blue 550 is the youngest of three males from the Clywedog nest which proves, according to Emyr Evans, that philopatry (the tendency for a species to return to or remain near a particular site or area) is a strong reproductive strategy in Ospreys. It will become more so as the Welsh population grows.

At another location his older brother Blue KA7 (Clywedog 2019) raised two chicks with Blue 469 (ringed in northern England in 2021). Blue 469 has a Welsh connection as she is a granddaughter of White YC (Glaslyn 2008).

Other highlights in Wales during 2024 were the resighting of two of the last brood produced by the original Glaslyn female 'Mrs G' in 2022. Blue 498 landed on his natal nest on May 1. He was also resighted at Llyn Brenig on June 26. Blue 497, Mrs G's 50th chick, intruded the Dyfi nest on June 19 and was also seen intruding at the Usk Valley Osprey nest on August 6. From the previous 12 Glaslyn born birds known to have returned to the UK as adults, only two of these had ever been resighted in Wales, so to have doubled the figure in one year was truly remarkable.

Another highlight was the first UK resighting of Blue KC6/'Teifi' (a Dyfi bird ringed in 2020). He had been resighted in Santander, northern Spain in 2022, but was not recorded in the UK until he landed on the Glaslyn nest on July 28. He remained around the Glaslyn area until the end of August.

We would like to thank the following people for helping us pull together this article: **Sarah Callon**, North and West Wales Wildlife Trust's Brenig Osprey Project Officer; **Heather Corfield** and **Gwenan Williams** of Bywyd Gwyllt Glaslyn Wildlife; **Emyr Evans**, Dyfi Projects Manager, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust and **Liz Jones**, Osprey Watch Lead, Usk Valley Ospreys.

When the 2025 breeding season kicks off, we strongly recommend you visit the various Osprey Project websites across Wales to keep up with each nest's progress and to find out about how you can visit those projects.

- Brenig Osprey Project: <https://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/days-out/ospreys-llyn-brenig>
- Bywyd Gwyllt Glaslyn Wildlife: <https://www.glaslynwildlife.co.uk/>
- Dyfi Osprey Project: <https://www.dyfiospreyproject.com/osprey-ecology>
- Friends of the Ospreys: <http://www.friendsoftheospreys.co.uk/>
- Usk Valley Ospreys: <https://www.uskvalleyospreys.org/>

The Dyfi Biosphere Swift Project



*Ben Stammers of the North West Wales Wildlife Trust gave a lovely talk at our annual conference celebrating work being done in communities to provide nestboxes for Swifts. The Dyfi Biosphere Swift Project is an excellent example of the kind of work that Ben described and they had a stand at the conference. We asked **Elfyn Pugh**, the project's volunteer coordinator, to tell us a bit more about their work.*

A Welsh summer without screaming parties of Common Swifts adorning our skies is unthinkable. But, as we know, these endearing and enchanting birds are in trouble. Since the mid-1990s there has been a staggering 76% decline in their population in Wales, and that is a great concern to conservationists. The reason for their decline is poorly understood but there are likely to be many factors involved. A major factor in their decline is the heavy use of agrochemicals and pesticides which is effectively killing off their food supply. Another factor is a loss of available nest sites which is a result of people taking steps to insulate and weatherproof their homes in recent years, inadvertently blocking those holes where Swifts have traditionally nested. We need to take collective action now to halt this decline.

Thousands of Swift boxes of various designs have been installed on properties in Britain and Europe with varying degrees of success. It is estimated that at least 300,000 boxes will have to be installed on properties in the UK to make any difference at all. That is certainly a mammoth task and even if that is achieved perhaps only 1 in 4 boxes will actually be taken up by Swifts. They are often taken up by species such as House Sparrows, Blue Tits, House Martins, Starlings or even colonies of bees!



Dyfi Biosphere Swift Project volunteers Elfyn Pugh and Ben Porter installing 'Impeckable' design Swift boxes on the Machynlleth Co-op store.

The Dyfi Biosphere Swift Project

The 'Dyfi Biosphere Swift Project' was set up in 2021 by a small group of concerned local individuals. It falls under the responsibility of Ecodyfi (now called 'Dyfi Biosphere') who administer the international UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere.

The project has received generous funding from the Garthgwynion Charities, the Margaret Owen Trust, Swift Conservation and Jonathan Pomroy. Donations have also been made by individuals and organisations such as the Machynlleth Rotary Club and the Garth Holiday Park. This has enabled the project to obtain materials to make and instal Swift boxes on properties in communities which lie within the Biosphere. To date 243 Swift boxes have been installed.

At the beginning of 2024 the project embarked on its most ambitious and innovative enterprise yet. Working in collaboration with the Co-op, 17 boxes of different designs, consisting of 32 separate nesting cavities, have been installed on its store in Machynlleth. It's believed that it's probably a 'first' for a Co-op in Wales and indeed the Machynlleth store may well be the most 'Swift friendly Co-op store in the UK'. The box installation scheme will no doubt generate conversation and debate about Swifts by local residents and visitors alike as the store stands in a prominent location in the town.



Project volunteer Ben Porter with a 6 chambered 'Impeckable' design apex Swift box which was installed on the Machynlleth Co-op store.

An important aspect of the Co-op Swift Box Project is as a 'showcase' for Swift conservation in mid Wales. We hope it will encourage schools to utilise it as an educational 'tool', as a platform to encourage children to discover more about the extraordinary lives of Swifts and the environmental challenges they face.

Swifts are fascinating birds, and we have an ethical duty to stop their decline in Wales and in the wider UK. We are doing our bit as a project. We are thankful to the Co-op, and especially the store manager Penny Colley, for supporting this scheme. They have set an example for other commercial businesses to follow. As the saying goes, we can all make a

difference. We can all be part of the solution.

It is essential for our conservation efforts to determine the true population of Swifts in Wales. You can help in this direction by becoming a 'citizen scientist' and download the RSPB's 'Swift Mapper' app. on your Apple or Android mobile device. The app. is available via the Apple store or Google Play. This will allow you to record when you see screaming parties of Swifts or better still actually locate an active Swift nest. This is an UK wide app. <https://www.swiftmapper.org.uk> I also suggest that you enter records of Swift nest sites with your Local Environmental Record Centre <https://www.alerc.org.uk>

If you are lucky enough to have Swifts nesting each summer on your property, then you are blessed beyond measure. Please do your utmost to protect them. If you haven't got Swifts nesting on your property and they are 'somewhere' in the vicinity then it might be beneficial to fit a Swift box or two to attract them. Various designs are available on the market from a number of on-line sources or, if you have DIY skills, you can make your own Swift box.

The decline of Swifts is mirrored by the reduction in their main food prey which is flying insects and airborne spiders. On that note you can help by setting an area aside in your garden, or indeed the whole garden, to plant a variety of wildflowers that will attract insects. It will look stunning from a colour perspective, and it will help other insectivorous birds, pollinating solitary bees and mammalian species such as Hedgehogs. We can help Swifts by beginning to learn more about them

and passing on that knowledge onto our children and our local communities. I hope that this article will somehow help you in that direction.



WOS Photo Competition 'Flocks' section: 3rd place - Starlings at Aberystwyth Pier by Claire Stott

And finally . . .

Many thanks for your continued support for WOS. Our membership is growing but we really do need more members and we need them quickly. This will ensure that our voice is louder and can be heard more clearly in the Senedd and elsewhere, and enable us to offer more and larger grants for conservation projects, community work and to support young conservationists in Wales. Can you please help us by telling your friends about WOS and the work we do and encourage them to become members? It would be wonderful if each member could help recruit another member. Now there's a challenge for 2025! Here's wishing you all a relaxing Christmas and New Year with family and friends and good birding in 2025. Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd dda i chi gyd!

WOS would like to thank all the photographers who kindly allowed us to use their images in this newsletter: Conference and Lifetime Achievement Award images pp5-8: Bob Haycock; Red Kie, p16: Wolfgang Eckert from Pixabay; Bardsey images p17, Steve Stansfield; Glaslyn Osprey Chicks p20, Tim Mackrill; Llyn Brenig Ospreys p20, Brenig Osprey Project; Usk Valley Ospreys p 21, Usk Valley Osprey Project; Dyfi Biosphere Swift Project images pp22-23, Elfyn Pugh.

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