Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

Newsletter #4: Spring 2020

# Species Champions

*Members of the Senedd standing up for threatened and at-risk species*

## Show us your best nature photos on Biodiversity Day!



This year, Biodiversity Day will have to be celebrated a little differently, but there's never been more reason to show our love for nature and wildlife.

Wales Environment Link is calling on our wonderful MS Species Champions to **tweet a photo of 'Biodiversity In My Back Yard'** on Friday 22nd May with the hash tag #BiodiversityInMyBackYard or #BIMBY! Whilst we can't visit our favourite beauty spots or National Parks, we can take a look in our own gardens or our local parks to see the nature right on our doorstep.

So please share with us all your flowers, bugs, trees, birds and moss - every part of biodiversity matters and the richer the diversity, the more resilient an ecosystem is. We can't wait to see them!



**Don't forget to tweet #BiodiversityInMyBackYard on Biodiversity Day, Friday 22nd May**

## Who are the Senedd's Species Champions?

Adder - Hefin David
Arctic Tern - Hannah Blythyn
Ash Tree - David Melding
Atlantic Puffin - Paul Davies
Atlantic Salmon - David Rees
Bilberry Bee - Leanne Wood
Black Oil Beetle - Rebecca Evans
Bottlenose Dolphin - Joyce Watson
Brown Trout - Kirsty Williams
Chough - Rhun ap Iorwerth
Common Toad - Jeremy Miles
Curlew - Mark Isherwood
Dormouse - Llŷr Gruffydd
European Eel - Dawn Bowden
Fen Raft Spider - Caroline Jones
Freshwater Pearl Mussel - Nick Ramsay
Greater Horseshoe - Angela Burns
Grey Seal - Dai Lloyd
Harbour Porpoise - Janet Finch-Saunders
Hedgehog - Lee Waters
High Brown Fritillary - Jane Hutt
Honeycomb Worm - Siân Gwenllian
Lapwing - Huw Irranca-Davies
Lesser Horseshoe Bat - Suzy Davies
Native Oyster - Julie James
Nightjar - Vikki Howells
Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Russell George
Pine Marten - Eluned Morgan
Red Squirrel - Darren Millar
Sewin - Elin Jones
Shelduck - Jayne Bryant
Small Blue Butterfly - Mike Hedges
Sphagnum Moss - Alun Davies
Swift - Jenny Rathbone
Twite - Siân Gwenllian
Water Vole - John Griffiths
Waxcap Mushroom - Julie Morgan
Welsh Daffodil - Vaughan Gething
Yellow Mayfly - Mohammad Asghar
Yellowhammer - Andrew RT Davies

Contributors: Liz Smith, WEL & Dai Rees, Butterfly Conservation.
Photo credits: Lyndsey Maiden (Bluebells, P3); Plantlife (Every Flower Counts, P2); Moth Atlas, Butterfly Conservation (P3); Liz Smith, WEL (all other images).

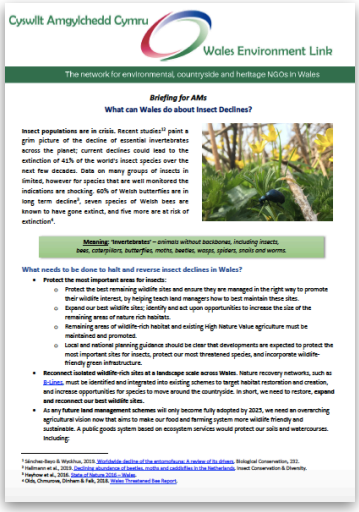
# How can we prevent an 'insect apocalypse'?




Dr Sarah Beynon giving her presentation at the CPG on Biodiversity

How can Wales tackle a global biodiversity issue? The Cross Party Group on Biodiversity met in October to discuss our dwindling insect populations and what we can do to revive them. We were delighted to welcome Dr Sarah Beynon from The Bug Farm, in Pembrokeshire, who talked about how her working farm ensures insects flourish as well as being used for research, education and supporting other farms with 'Dung Beetles Direct'. This ensures other agriculture can benefit from these amazing natural recyclers of waste.

We also heard from Clare Dinham at Buglife on the main drivers of decline and the crucial steps that need to be taken to reverse this. In Wales, the proposed public goods scheme for sustainable farming has significant potential to reward the steps farms take to increase insect populations. Salmon & Trout Conservation outlined the ways citizen science can record our riverflies and the way inverts can reveal our rivers' water quality. Presentations are online here.


Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru
Wales Environment Link
The network for environmental, countryside and heritage NGOs in Wales

*Briefing for AMs*

**What can Wales do about Insect Declines?**

**Insect populations are in crisis.** Recent studies[1] paint a grim picture of the decline of essential invertebrates across the planet; current declines could lead to the extinction of 41% of the world's insect species over the next few decades. Data on many groups of insects in limited, however for species that are well monitored the indications are shocking. 60% of Welsh butterflies are in long term decline[2], seven species of Welsh bees are known to have gone extinct, and five more are at risk of extinction[3].

**Meaning:** *'invertebrates' – animals without backbones, including insects, bees, caterpillars, butterflies, moths, beetles, wasps, spiders, snails and worms.*

**What needs to be done to halt and reverse insect declines in Wales?**

- **Protect the most important areas for insects:**
  - Protect the best remaining wildlife sites and ensure they are managed in the right way to promote their wildlife interest, by helping teach land managers how to best maintain these sites.
  - Expand our best wildlife sites; identify and act upon opportunities to increase the size of the remaining areas of nature rich habitats.
  - Remaining areas of wildlife-rich habitat and existing High Nature Value agriculture must be maintained and promoted.
  - Local and national planning guidance should be clear that developments are expected to protect the most important sites for insects, protect our most threatened species, and incorporate wildlife-friendly green infrastructure.
- **Reconnect isolated wildlife-rich sites at a landscape scale across Wales.** Nature recovery networks, such as B-Lines, must be identified and integrated into existing schemes to target habitat restoration and creation, and increase opportunities for species to move around the countryside. In short, we need to restore, expand and reconnect our best wildlife sites.
- As any future land management schemes will only become fully adopted by 2025, we need an overarching agricultural vision now that aims to make our food and farming system more wildlife friendly and sustainable. A public goods system based on ecosystem services would protect our soils and watercourses. Including:

[1] Sánchez-Bayo & Wyckhuys, 2019. Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers. Biological Conservation, 232.
[2] Hallmann et al., 2019. Declining abundance of beetles, moths and caddisflies in the Netherlands. Insect Conservation & Diversity.
[3] Hayhow et al., 2016. State of Nature 2016 – Wales.
[4] Ollis, Ormerod, Dinham & Fab, 2016. Wales Threatened Bee Report.

Briefing available online here.

WEL is calling for action to be taken to protect insects' habitats, create nature recovery networks, implement biosecurity plans and drastically reduce pesticide use wherever possible. You can read more about our asks and insects' benefits' in our briefing.

## Make sure Every Flower Counts with Plantlife!

Plantlife are encouraging people to take part in their new citizen science project this year, from 23rd - 31st May, to count every flower in their lawn. They want to work out which wildflowers are most abundant and how much nectar they're producing for our pollinators.

It couldn't be easier to take part and the whole family can be involved! All you have to do is stop mowing the lawn in May, to let the smaller plants have a chance to get through (and in fact, we'd encourage everyone to mow less often to let these wildflowers bloom!) Then, measure out one metre square, and using Plantlife's recording and identification sheets, count how many there are of 26 common lawn flowers.



And it's as simple as that! Plantlife recommends doing a few squares to ensure accurate results. From people's data, Plantlife will then calculate a National Nectar Index to show how our lawns are helping our pollinators.

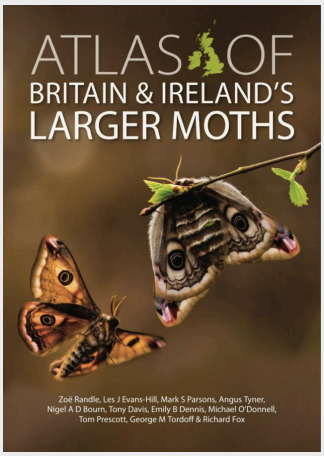
You can register to take part and find out more via the FAQs here.

## How well do you know moths?

The first ever atlas of larger moths of Britain and Ireland was recently published and it's an ideal time to learn about these less appreciated beautiful insects! It comprises over 25 million moth records from Butterfly Conservation's National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS) and the MothsIreland dataset. Butterfly Conservation are grateful to every single moth recorder who has submitted their sightings, as well as to those checking them in the County Moth Recorder network.

The atlas is beautifully illustrated with over 800 colour photographs and displays distribution maps showing current and historical records for 893 species. Distribution trends and abundance trends are presented along with the IUCN Red List status for Great Britain and for Ireland, so you can see which moths are the most at risk and need the most help to recover.

Phenology charts have been produced for 866 species, which provide some interesting insights into how some species are responding to climate change by changing their phenology, either by flying earlier in the year, or by having a second generation much further north than was possible in the 1970s.




With the ever changing climate and environmental conditions in Wales and wider, moths are incredibly important indicator species as well as being beautiful and mystifying. This book is an absolute treasure trove. We hope that it will be considered to be an essential addition to every moth enthusiast's personal library! You can buy it here.

## The State of Nature in Wales

The State of Nature 2019 report came out in October; it's available to download online and there's a brief summary for Wales. Of the 6,500 species assessed in Wales, 523 (8%) are currently threatened with extinction from the UK. 666 species (17%) being threatened with extinction from Wales, and another 73 (2%) have gone extinct already. It also found:

- A 52% decline in the abundance of butterflies since 1976.
- **46% of species are showing strong changes** in how they are distributed across regions.
- In good news, there's been an **increase in breeding birds** of 37% since 1994. This is driven by the recovery of a handful of species from very low numbers and colonising species. However, this does somewhat mask the fact that the **total number of breeding birds fell in the UK by 44 million between 1967 and 2009.**
- There also appears to be an increase in bat species' abundance, as seven Welsh mammals (the rabbit and six types of bat) are **43% higher** than in 1998.

There are many species at the brink of extinction, including those championed by MSs, which are all on a type of 'endangered' list.

We would urge you to keep up the good work and advocate in whatever way you can for their revival. The report isn't all bad news and there are many things that councils, citizens and businesses can do to help do their bit. **But it is vital it stays high on the agenda in Wales**, so that we can create new habitats, embed sustainability on land and sea, and halt pollution.

### *What is Wales Environment Link's Species Champion project?*

The Convention on Biological Diversity is an international agreement to conserve our wildlife with a target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020. Wales' approach to the sustainable management of natural resources through the ecosystem approach - as embedded in the Environment Act - necessitates protecting species from habitat loss, pollution and harmful developments. Species Champions are organised by WEL and our sister Links in the rest of the UK. Members of the Senedd - alongside MPs, MSPs and MLAs - are asked to lend political support to the protection of threatened wildlife. By signing up to be a Species Champion, MSs can learn from WEL members about the species, go on site visits to see where they're found in their constituency and learn about what needs to be done to halt their decline. The WEL members below are the ones who are directly involved with the project.