Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru
Wales Environment Link

Newsletter #2: Summer 2018

Species Champions

AMs standing up for threatened and at-risk species

Showing the love for at-risk species



'Show the Love' badges made by RSPB activists for Species Champion AMs.







Wales Environment Link members were delighted to celebrate the 'Show the Love' campaign with our Species Champions back in February. The Climate Coalition asks people to make green hearts to show how much they care for the environment and to raise awareness of climate change. So many of our endangered species are at risk of climate change - with changing habitats, temperatures and seasons - RSPB asked their 'craftivisits' if they could create some badges for Species Champion AMs. They produced dozens of detailed and beautiful badges with the specific Welsh species on; we cannot thank them enough for their hard work.

All our Species Champion AMs at the time received a badge, either in person or via post. This was alongside several green hearts to Welsh Government Ministers to thank them for taking action on climate change with their carbon targets. Our species' habitats are being eroded by climate change and we need to take action.

Who are the Assembly's Species Champions?

Adder - Hefin David
Arctic Tern - Hannah Blythyn
Ash Tree - David Melding
Atlantic Puffin - Paul Davies
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 - Simon Thomas
Red Squirrel - Darren Millar
Sewin - Elin Jones
Shelduck - Jayne Bryant
Shrill Carder Bee - Steffan Lewis
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

Contributors: Jenny MacPherson, Vincent Wildlife Trust; Richard Garner Williams, Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru; Clare Dinham, Buglife; Liz Smith, WEL.
Photo credits: Liz Smith, WEL; Natasha Yorke-Edgell, RSPB. Vincent Wildlife Trust.

Full steam ahead for the new Pine Marten Den!



In June, the Pine Marten Champion - Simon Thomas AM - opened 'The Pine Marten Den', a new visitor information centre in Devil's Bridge. It was hosted by the Vale of Rheidol Railway whilst they also opened a new wheelchair accessible carriage. The Vincent Wildlife Trust works to restore pine martens in mid Wales and the new centre tells the story of the return of this native animal. At the new Den, visitors can find out more about them, walk pine marten trails and report sightings. It's housed in a restored weighbridge building and it's a wonderful addition to the Rheidol Railway.

Championing the European Eel & Yellow Mayfly

WEL are pleased to welcome two more AMs to the project. Dawn Bowden AM has chosen to join with Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru and Afonydd Cymru to act on behalf of the European Eel. This species is categorised by the IUCN as Critically Endangered in response to a decline over recent years of 90-95%. It is the only European fish that returns to the sea to reproduce, embarking on an epic 4,000-mile journey to its spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea. Eels constitute an important component of the diet of iconic species such as otters, ospreys and herons, while elvers (young eels) provide a significant source of food for many other species in the spring, a time when demands of the breeding season are at their height.

Mohammad Asghar AM steps forward to champion the Yellow Mayfly. It is thought to be declining across Europe, with the UK at the edge of its range. Its stronghold is the River Wye, but recent reports suggest it has once again been identified on the Usk. This species relies upon good water quality and it's believed to be adversely affected by low flows. As the adults of this species are attracted to light, the positioning of street lamps and such like in close proximity to river banks may also have a deteriorating effect on breeding populations. Mohammad will be advised on the many threats facing this rare species by lead organisations Buglife Cymru and Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru.

Species Champions taking visits with WEL members



Left to right: Paul Davies AM out on Skomer Island to see his species, the Atlantic Puffin; Lee Waters AM at Gower Bird Hospital, watching a hedgehog be tagged; Jane Hutt AM & Vaughan Gething AM, spotting Welsh daffodils in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Issue focus: Neonicotinoid pollution in Welsh freshwaters

Freshwater invertebrate populations represent an important part of the UK's biodiversity, providing valuable ecosystem services, recycling organic matter and keeping rivers clean. In addition, they provide essential food for fish and birds.

Aquatic insects are as vulnerable to neonicotinoid insecticides (or 'neonics') as bees and flying insects, yet have not received the same attention due to a lack of systematic monitoring. Whilst neonic pollution affects a wide range of freshwater invertebrates, mayflies, caddisflies, stoneflies and beetles tend to be most sensitive.

Under the EU Water Framework Directive Watch List initiative, the UK was required to introduce a pilot monitoring scheme for all five commonly used neonics: Imidacloprid, Clothianidin, Thiamethoxam, Acetamiprid and Thiacloprid. In 2016, 26 sites were sampled across the UK, with 16 in England, 4 in Scotland, 3 in Wales and 3 in Northern Ireland. Buglife undertook a full analysis of the results and it was clear that there is a very significant problem with neonicotinoid pollution. At the UK level, ***74% of sites monitored were contaminated with neonics; 8 rivers exceeded the chronic pollution limit and 2 exceeded the acute pollution limit.*** The rivers exceeding their limits were all in England, with a cluster in Eastern England where arable agriculture is prevalent.

In Wales, sampling of the Watch List chemicals was undertaken by Natural Resources Wales on the rivers Trothy, Mawddach and Towy. Of the 3 samples, neonics were only detected in the Trothy which was found to be polluted by both Clothianidin and Imidacloprid. We urgently need more comprehensive sampling to gain a better understanding of how neonicotinoids are impacting on our freshwaters in Wales.

Buglife produced a list of recommendations which was sent to all UK statutory agencies including Natural Resources Wales. NRW has stated it will continue to monitor neonicotinoids as part of the EQSD Watch List Programme; will participate in other programmes of work with other agencies; and will consider additional monitoring of some neonicotinoids to evaluate specific risks to Welsh freshwaters. The 'Neonicotinoid insecticides in British freshwaters' report can be downloaded here.

AMs with Species badges



Raising the plight of the curlew at the Hay Festival

At this year's Hay Festival, our Curlew Champion, Mark Isherwood, joined author and conservationist, Mary Colwell, and RSPB Director of Global Conservation, Martin Harper, on a panel. In light of Mary's new book 'Curlew Moon', which documents her 500 mile walk from the west coast of Ireland to eastern England, the panel discussed the huge challenges facing Curlew and highlighted the importance of getting the right policies and actions in place. There was agreement that we need to ensure farmers, land-managers, conservation organisations, statutory bodies and local communities are all on board if we are to prevent Curlew extinction in the UK by 2030. Getting our sustainable land management policy in Wales right post Brexit will be critical.

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. AMs - 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, AMs 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.