Newsletter #3: Spring 2019

Species Champions

AMs standing up for threatened and at-risk species

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 - Eluned Morgan
Red Squirrel - Darren Millar
Salmon - David Rees
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

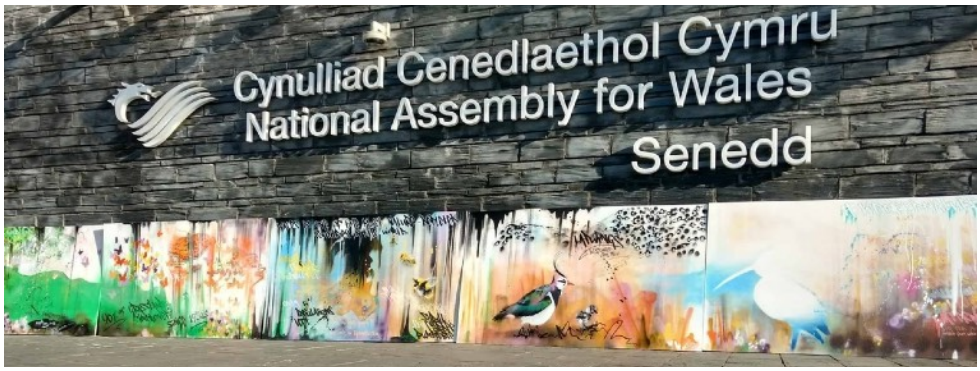
Thousands of people tell Welsh Government #WeNeedNature!



WEL members presenting the letter to Lesley Griffiths and Hannah Blythyn.

In the autumn, people expressed their fulsome support for the Welsh Government's proposed public goods model, as it could reverse Wales' significant biodiversity loss and restore nature for future generations. Through online e-actions, as well as individual responses from a range of stakeholders, the public endorsed the proposals in Brexit & Our Land. In October, Wales Environment Link reflected their views in an open letter to Ministers. Whilst work continues in more detail on a post-CAP policy, for when Wales leaves the European Union, eNGOs are optimistic that it can work for both people and wildlife. It is vital that we build resilience now - in the face of the accelerating challenges of climate change and the alarming loss of nature - and enable land managers to support nature.

Art boards showing species' decline from the State of Nature reports.



Contributors: Carly Jones, RSPB; Clare Dinham, Buglife; Liz Smith, WEL.; Richard Garner Williams, Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru; Sinead Lynch, Bumblebee Conservation. Photo credits: Liz Smith, WEL; Andy Hay, RSPB; Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru; Buglife Cymru.

New report highlights uncertain future for Wales' wild bees



Wales is home to nationally rare and threatened bee species and, for some, Wales supports the last known populations in the UK. Surrounded by sea on three sides, Wales has extensive and varied coastlines which are an extremely important habitat for many bee species, as well as a diversity of other invertebrates. Wild bees (and other pollinators) face many pressures in our modern landscapes, from habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, to pesticides and pollution, climate change, and disease. These pressures have caused severe declines in wild bee populations, raising concerns about the under-pollination of many wildflowers and food crops, and wider biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

In October 2018, Buglife Cymru launched the Wales Threatened Bees Report, the first report of its kind to examine the status and distribution of threatened bees in Wales. Alarmingly, the report has found that seven of our bees have gone extinct in Wales, and a further five are on the brink of extinction.

The report represents a call to arms to join Buglife Cymru in taking action to conserve these threatened species through partnership working, practical conservation projects and advocacy. Through our B-Lines Initiative, we are working with partners to reverse these declines and prevent further extinctions in Wales by connecting and restoring flower-rich habitats across the countryside. Further information about B-Lines and the Wales Threatened Bee Report can be found on the Buglife website.

Dawn Bowden AM, European Eel Champion, releasing eels at Cyfarthfa Castle. On the right are Tony Rees, South East Wales Rivers Trust; Dawn Bowden AM; Richard Garner Williams, S&TC Cymru; David Bunt, Sustainable Eel Group.





Welcoming David as our Salmon Champion



We're pleased to welcome David Rees AM as our new champion for the Atlantic salmon. With stocks in 21 of the 23 principal salmon rivers in Wales 'at risk' or 'probably at risk' of failing to reach their conservation limits, the need for a voice at the Senedd to defend the interests of this iconic species has never been greater. The salmon populations of rivers such as the Dee, Wye, Usk and Teifi are acknowledged to be of European significance and as a consequence are accorded protection as Special Areas of Conservation. Threats from climate change, agricultural pollution, commercial forestry, impoundment and abstraction are all taking their toll on salmon numbers, yet progress in tackling these problems is painfully slow. Our rivers are the salmon's natural nursery grounds and while they face many threats at sea, it is imperative that we protect them during their juvenile phase if we wish to see the species endure. As lead partners for the Atlantic salmon Species Champion initiative, Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru and Afonydd Cymru look forward to working with David to alert AMs, regulators, industry and the public alike to the changes that are required to ensure the survival of the salmon in Welsh rivers.

Species focus: Mark Isherwood's work to address Wales' curlew crisis



Mark Isherwood has been taking action to protect curlews in response to increasing concern for the species. The curlew is an iconic Welsh species that has significantly declined in numbers over the past few decades. The State of Birds in Wales 2018 partnership report described curlews as *"the most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK"*. Losses of curlews in Wales are more acute than elsewhere in the UK, as more than three-quarters of the Welsh population has disappeared over the last 25 years. With no suggestion that this trend will level out, concern for the species amongst environmental organisations is high. Gylfinir Cymru has convened to address the declines; Gylfinir Cymru is a collaborative initiative of 16 organisations interested in protecting the species.

Mark has been pushing for action to be taken for curlew by raising the importance of Glyfinir Cymru with Welsh Ministers, as well as hosting a curlew roundtable between representatives and the former Environment Minister, Hannah Blythyn. The event raised awareness of the plight of curlews amongst decision makers and highlighted how their conservation is aligned with the Environment Act.

As species champion, Mark has also spent time with RSPB Cymru, the National Trust and farmers to understand the drivers behind the loss of curlews. Mark visited Ysbyty Ifan where he discussed the outcomes of the SoNaRR report which highlights agricultural change as a key factor in the unsatisfactory state of our ecosystems. Whilst at Ysbyty Ifan, he was able to see first-hand the conservation measures that could help restore numbers of curlews including blocking upland ditches and introducing mixed cattle grazing regimes. Since his visit, Mark has been keen to raise in the Senedd how the proposed public goods scheme could enable farmers to do more for the species. In the spring, Mark hopes to host a Ministerial farm visit so that they can also see the conservation measures that could benefit curlews first hand.

WEL and RSPB Cymru would like to thank Mark for his efforts over the past few months to bring curlews back from the brink.

A tribute to Steffan Lewis, Shrill Carder Bee Champion

We were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Steffan Lewis AM. He was a wonderful person and a diligent AM who understood the significant impact Brexit would have on all policy, particularly our environment. Steffan was very engaged with WEL's Species Champion project – indeed, he enthusiastically accepted the role of Species Champion for the Shrill Carder Bee. Shortly after, he met with Sinead Lynch from Bumblebee Conservation Trust to discuss his role, what he could do to champion the bee, and what more should be done to support threatened species more generally. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and colleagues during this difficult time.

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.