Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

Species Champions

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

Diolch yn fawr, Species Champions of 2016-2021!

Wales Environment Link want to thank all Senedd Members who have stood up for nature these last five years.

You've been out and about on site visits with us to try find the species up close; you've brought up with Ministers the plight of those most at risk; you've put in written questions to dig into the detail as to why and how we can revive their habitats; and you've linked up with your local schools and gone out in the community to spread the word. You've been on toad patrols, bat watches, bird watching and some of you have even been on boats to help us find those most elusive seals and dolphins! Most importantly, **you've stood with us side-by-side to keep highlighting that the nature crisis is too important to ignore if we want to prevent more species dwindling or, even worse, going extinct.**

We will be re-lauching the project after the election, and inviting the newly and re-elected MSs to work with us again. The essence of biodiversity is ensuring a variety of life and recognising the inter-reliance between species. The project will continue to raise awareness of the moss and lichens capturing our carbon; the insects, bees and butterflies pollinating our world; the fish swimming in our seas; and the birds, bats, reptiles and other wild species sweeping our skies and forests - **the building blocks of a healthy ecosystem.** We hope that MSs will want to join the project again and we would welcome you sponsoring a different kind of species and learning about another area of biodiversity. But we know that some who feel they're still in the middle of initaitives to help their current one and would like to keep with it! So don't worry, we'll be sure to find out what MSs would like to do and we'll be in touch in June 2021 on this.

This newsletter is to highlight your experiences & share our favourite quotes. Please enjoy and if you had anything else you wanted to share, do get in touch with us or our member partners. Or **you can always tweet some of your favourite nature photos with #SpeciesChampion and tag @WalesLink so we can share with others.**

Thank you from us, and all of your species!

Bat Conservation Trust

COED CADW WOODLAND TRUST

amphibian and reptile conservation

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Afonydd Cymru AC Caring for Welsh Rivers

YMDDIRIEDOLAETHAU natur CYMRU WILDLIFE TRUSTS WALES

Butterfly Conservation Wales Gwarchod Glöynnod Byw Cymru
Saving butterflies, moths and our environment Yn achub glöynnod byw, gwyfynod a'n hamgylchedd ni

WDC WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION

Plantlife

rspb yn rhoi cartref i fyd natur giving nature a home

Freshwater Habitats Trust

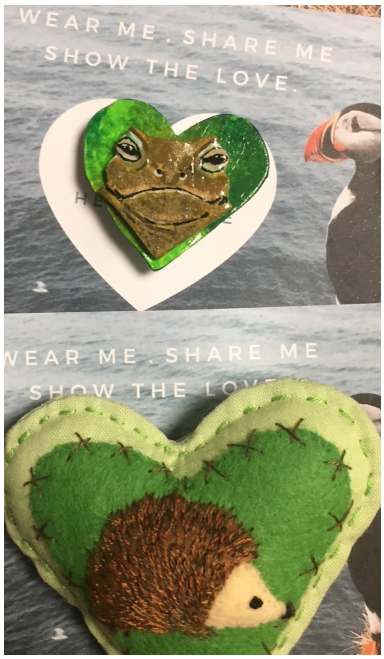
marine conservation society

buglife Cymru

Salmon & Trout Conservation · KEEPING OUR WATERS WILD · EST 1903

Showing the love for our species!

One of WEL's favourite memories is when we joined up with the Show the Love campaign and RSPB craftivists made beautiful handmade badges for all of our Champions! We've dotted some of the badges around quotes direct from you about your experiences.



Mike Hedges, Small Blue Butterfly Champion

"I am very pleased that the Environment (Wales) Act builds greater resilience into our ecosystems. Biodiversity underpins ecosystem resilience and the sustainable management of natural resources. Biodiversity and resilient ecosystems - with their suite of habitats and species - provide natural solutions that support human well-being as well as helping us to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. We need to protect and enhance our biodiversity for present and future generations and the Species Champions project helps us to do our part for and to focus on individual at-risk species that might become extinct if we don't help revive them."





Leanne Wood, Bilberry Bee Champion

"The Bilberry Bee feeds on the flowers of the bilberry (or wimberry as we call them locally) bushes which line the hills of the former coalfields. The conditions in the Rhondda are perfect for this rare and threatened bee as well as many other important species. While more people are appreciating local nature during lockdown, now is a good time to let more people know about the Bilberry Bee. Get ready to look out for them with their distinctive orange bum."



Rebecca Evans, Black Oil Beetle Champion

"Being the Species Champion for the Black Oil Beetle is fascinating – I have learnt just how critical Black Oil Beetles are to our local life cycles here in Gower, and how they are a good indicator of the health of our countryside. I especially enjoyed walking along the coast path with Buglife Cymru trying to spot one. Whilst the Black Oil Beetle eluded us that day – we were just at the very end of the season – I had some fascinating conversations and was inspired by everyone's passion for supporting and promoting biodiversity."

Janet Finch-Saunders, Harbour Porpoise Champion

"I was most delighted to have been the Senedd's Harbour Porpoise species champion. Despite being known (rather unflatteringly) as the puffing pig, it has been incredible learning about the fast and furious lives of these stocky creatures. Harbour porpoises are not only under threat from sea pollution, but have also suffered from boat collisions, underwater man-made noise, and accidental capture in fishing nets. With this knowledge, I was most pleased to ask serious questions of the Welsh Government over commercial fishing and bycatch, in an attempt to safeguard this species as they continue to frequent the North Wales coast."



Angela Burns, Greater Horseshoe Bat Champion

"Being appointed the Species Champion for the Greater Horseshoe Bat has been a highlight of my final term as a Member of the Senedd. I have huge affinity for them living as I did cheek by fly past in old house in Pembrokeshire. They have a strong social structure and are under extraordinary threats by loss of habitat. I've relished giving them a voice in the Welsh Parliament and despite standing down at the next election, my work as a Bat Champion will not end and I will continue to fight for these amazing creatures."





John Griffiths, Water Vole Champion

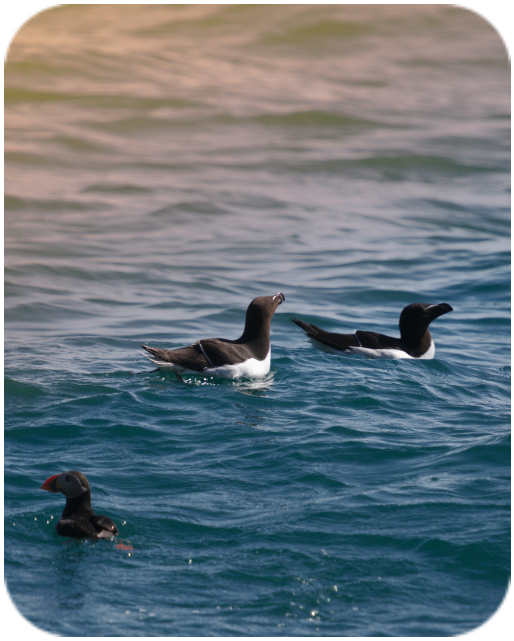
"I'm proud to be the Species Champion for Water Voles here in Wales.

Since the reintroduction of them at Magor Marsh, I know locals and especially our young children in schools, but also visitors to the area have come to see these fantastic creatures. We all benefit from a healthy and vibrant biodiversity and increasing Water Vole numbers on the Gwent Levels are all part of that process. There was a time in the early 2000s that they were becoming seemingly extinct but with the reintroduction programmes and teaching about them in schools, we can reverse that."



A Teal New Deal?

Joyce Watson, Bottlenose Dolphin Champion, called for a 'teal new deal' in her short debate in October 2020. She asked to write about how we could utilise such an idea to protect our seas and marine species.

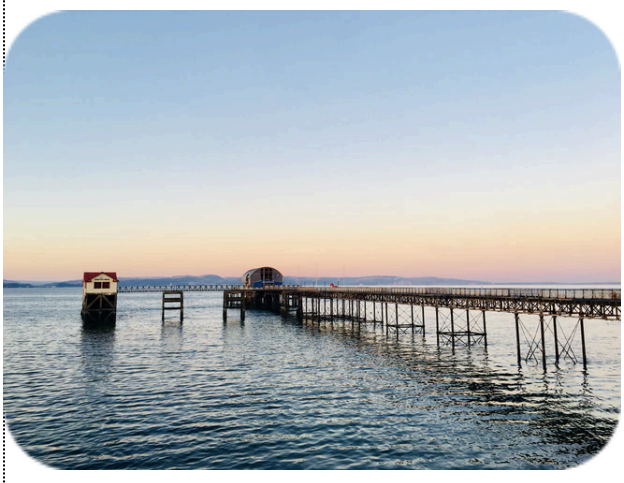


John F. Kennedy said we are tied to the ocean by the salt in our veins. As someone who has lived by the sea most of my life, I feel that connection. So it has been a special honour to champion the interests of Bottlenose Dolphins and the marine environment for the duration of this Welsh Parliament.

Over that time I have worked closely with Wales Environment Link to develop and promote policies that protect and enhance our seas, both through the Senedd's Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee and within Welsh Labour. Our collaboration culminated in my backbench debate last October, titled: *Broaden the spectrum: Adding blue to the green recovery.* In it I called for a 'Teal New Deal' for Wales, encompassing: sustainable fisheries; investment in renewables and marine energy zones; fully protected management of marine areas; and safeguarding the precious blue carbon in our vulnerable, valuable tidal habitats – the seagrass, saltmarsh and seaweed.

Our seas can often be 'out of sight, out of mind'. But as a politician representing the majority of our coastline, I am mindful of the fact that Wales' marine area is over a third larger than its land mass. So it is imperative that we – a peninsular nation – more than most think in terms of the blue-green environment.

The next Welsh Parliament will operate in a unique political environment, with the UK out of the European Union and focussed on the challenges and priorities of rebuilding the country after the coronavirus pandemic. But the natural environment – the challenges it faces – remain the same. So the next Welsh Government must respond with vigour to the climate emergency, pursue decarbonisation, manage our land and water for the benefit of our communities, and protect and enrich our natural resources. By doing so it can erect a progressive framework for Wales' post-Brexit, post-Covid-19 reconstruction.



The current Welsh Government has started that work. It is up to the next government to urgently translate commitments on paper into action for marine nature conservation. I would certainly support ambitious fixed commitments, like ensuring that at least 10% of Welsh waters are fully protected by 2030, for example. We should be fiercely ambitious to lead the UK on blue-green policies.

This past year we have all, I imagine, longed to be beside the sea, when we have been cooped up indoors. To pick up Kennedy's quote: "When we go back to the sea - whether it is to sail or to watch it - we are going back from whence we came." So let's commit to look after our marine areas better, now and for future generations. To borrow from another US president, let's make a Teal New Deal.

Photo of razorbills and puffin- Nicolas DC on Unsplash. Photo of Mumble pier - Vanessa Ferreira on Unsplash.

Dai Lloyd, Grey Seal Champion

"During my time as the Grey Seal Champion, I am pleased to have been able to attend a number of site visits down at Worm's Head in Rhossili to visit the seals in their natural state, and to have spoken of them during debates in the Senedd.

"I am particularly grateful to Gill Bell and Clare Reed of the Marine Conservation Society for supporting the site visits and my Senedd work on this agenda. We need to continue to raise awareness of the challenges facing such species, and do all that we can to protect them."







Darren Millar, Red Squirrel Champion

"Red squirrel conservation across Wales has come on leaps and bounds in recent years. As the red squirrel champion in the Senedd I have visited conservation efforts across Wales and met some wonderful and dedicated volunteers. It has been wonderful to have local constituency connections with red squirrel conservation through both the Welsh Mountain Zoo's captive breeding programme and the work of the Clocaenog Red Squirrels Trust. It's been a pleasure to work alongside these and the Red Squirrels Trust Wales to champion the cause of this super furry animal in the Senedd."