



Cyswllt Amgylchedd
Cymru | Wales
Environment Link

Species Champions

Standing up for nature in the Senedd

Who are the Champions?

Atlantic Puffin - Paul Davies
Arctic Tern - Hannah Blythyn
Basking Shark - Luke Fletcher
Black Oil Beetle - Rebecca Evans
Bottlenose Dolphin - Joyce Watson
Butterfly Orchids - Carolyn Thomas
Chough - Rhun ap Iorwerth
Clearwing Moth - Mabon ap Gwynfor
Common Dolphin - Sam Rowlands
Common Toad - Jeremy Miles
Curlew - Mark Isherwood
Dormouse - Peredur Owen Griffiths
European Eel - Dawn Bowden
Fen Raft Spider - Sioned Williams
Grey Seal - Sam Kurtz
Harbour Porpoise - Janet Finch-Saunders
Hedgehog - Lee Waters
High Brown Fritillary - Jane Hutt
Lesser Horseshoe Bat - Lesley Griffiths
Native Oyster - Julie James
Nightjar - Vikki Howells
Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Russell George
Pine Marten - Eluned Morgan
Pink Sea Fan - Jane Dodds
Red Squirrel - Darren Millar
Salmon - Huw Irranca-Davies

COP 15: What did countries agree to on nature?

The Minister for Climate Change went to Montreal in December to discuss how we reverse international declines in biodiversity.

By Liz Smith, Wales Environment Link



The much delayed COP conference (the 15th Conference of the Parties) agreed a historic international deal for nature, which included global commitments to:

- Conserving a minimum of 30% of our land and oceans by 2030, otherwise known as the '30 x 30' target
- Reducing to 'near zero' the loss of areas and ecosystems of high biodiversity importance
- Cut in half excessive and harmful nutrients, and therefore the overall risk posed by pesticides and chemicals
- Phase out or reform subsidies that harm biodiversity, whilst scaling up positive incentives that conserve or restore nature, or encourage sustainable use
- By 2030, mobilise at least \$200bn per year of biodiversity-related funding from public and private sources

Who are the Champions?

Sand Eel - Llŷr Gruffydd
 Sewin - Cefin Campbell
 Shelduck - Jayne Bryant
 Shriill Carder Bee - Delyth Jewell
 Small Blue Butterfly - Mike Hedges
 Starling - Vaughan Gething
 Swift - Jenny Rathbone
 Twite - Sian Gwenllian
 Water Vole - John Griffiths
 Waxcap Mushroom - Julie Morgan
 Yellow Mayfly - Natasha Asghar
 Yellowhammer - Laura Anne Jones

- Increase the flow of funding from developed to developing countries, to help them transition to sustainable economies
- Prevent the introduction of invasive species, that damage nature, by half
- Cut global food waste in half and reduce overconsumption and generating further, unnecessary waste
- Require large companies and financial institutions to monitor, assess and disclose their impact on biodiversity throughout their operations, supply chains and portfolios

The key will be in the commitments' implementation, and how each country embeds them in their day to day policy and legislation. The UK is the Member State, so the one who has to report back to the UN in future on progress, but they could ring-fence these to mere 'biodiversity plans'. We are pleased to see that, in Wales, the Minister has already committed in the Senedd to statutory nature targets, more investment in nature-based solutions, and - crucial for us following leaving the EU - a full environmental protection office to replace the Interim



The three key elements to reversing biodiversity loss in Wales

Assessor. This is vital for good governance and a gap that has been left in terms of oversight. Whilst England and Scotland already have their equivalent bodies set up and running, our arrangements remain 'interim'. We look forward to seeing primary legislation introduced, prior to the end of this term in 2026, to embed both nature targets and environmental governance.

All the relevant documents from COP can be found on [this page](#) or in more accessible language on the [UN Biodiversity Twitter page](#).



Out and about with North Wales' butterfly orchids

By **Lizzie Wilberforce, Plantlife Cymru**

Plantlife Cymru are delighted to be working with Carolyn Thomas, North Wales MS, as the new Butterfly Orchid Champion. Wales is home to two species of butterfly orchid; the Greater Butterfly Orchid, now classified as 'Near Threatened' on the Vascular Plant Red Data List, while the Lesser Butterfly Orchid is more at risk and classified as 'Vulnerable'.



In July, Carolyn and her aide, Dan Rose, visited Caeau Tan y Bwlch nature reserve along with Plantlife staffers Lizzie Wilberforce, Robbie Blackhall-Miles and Meg Griffiths, and North Wales Wildlife Trust staff, Adrian Lloyd-Jones and Rob Booth.

Caeau Tan y Bwlch is a spectacular Greater Butterfly Orchid site owned by Plantlife and managed on our behalf by North Wales Wildlife Trust. The SSSI species-rich hay meadows are perched on the steep hillsides of Clynog, and the annual Greater Butterfly Orchid count there topped 6,000 this June. We were fortunate to be visiting at the peak of orchid flowering, prior to the annual hay-cutting. We saw many orchids on the day, as well as the host of other spectacular flowering plants that this amazing nature reserve has in profusion as a result of its sympathetic

management.

Visiting the site gave us an opportunity to discuss both the orchids specifically, and what their status tells us about land use change in Wales. Not only are these species now scarce in themselves, but they also represent vanishing habitats that were once widespread – particularly species-rich permanent pastures, traditional hay meadows (with some remnants now in road verges) and ancient woodlands.

It was a great opportunity to discuss their conservation needs and the opportunities for us to work together to change their fortunes across Wales. High on the agenda was the new Sustainable Farming Scheme, and how we can make sure that it provides an informed, rewarding and positive route for farmers to protect, maintain and restore species-rich habitats. We also discussed the need for more formal recognition for our irreplaceable ancient meadows, and the importance of ecological expertise in land management decision making more generally. It was very useful to hear from Carolyn how the latest developments in the Senedd might provide opportunities to advocate for such positive changes.

A huge thank you to her for taking up the role - we look forward to working together to bring this iconic species and its grassland habitats back to the Welsh countryside.



How can the new farming scheme help revive species?

RSPB looks forward to the new Sustainable Farming Scheme as the Agriculture Bill goes through the Senedd.

By Hannah Woodall & Sian Shakespear, RSPB Cymru

The Agriculture Bill and Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) will replace decades of agricultural policies that have encouraged industrialisation of the landscape. Wales has this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure future Welsh agricultural policy performs as a framework for farmers and other land managers use public money to produce food sustainably and deliver for species.

“In our lifetimes, almost half our farmland birds, mammals, amphibians, insects and invertebrates have disappeared and now, 1 in 6 species are at risk of extinction”

Farming occupies approximately 90% of Wales and historic agricultural policies have inadvertently contributed to the loss of species in Wales. In our lifetimes, almost half our farmland birds, mammals, amphibians, insects and invertebrates have disappeared and now, 1 in 6 species are at risk of extinction. We need farming to produce our food, but we also need it to look after the ecosystems, on which species, we and future generations depend. Not only can we turn these catastrophic declines of nature around, we must.

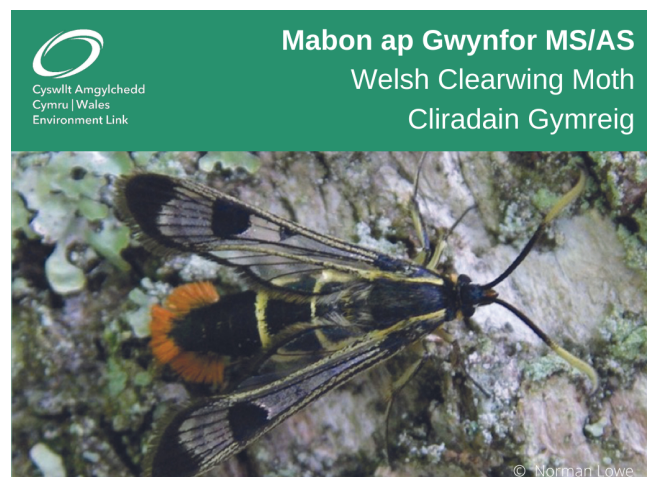
By adopting a proportion of the farm as habitat, nature will have a positive response. Therefore, it is encouraging to see the inclusion of habitat maintenance and creation within the SFS universal level. Ensuring we have a mix of the right habitat in the right places on the farm will make a vast and positive difference to nature, climate and the resilience of Welsh farming.

However, if we are to restore rare and vulnerable species like the Curlew, Water Vole and the Welsh Clearwing, the key to achieving these objectives will be ensuring that farmers can work together. With this, the agricultural policies must ensure farmers are enabled to collaborate, and receive appropriate, ongoing advice and support to manage habitats for species, typically at the landscape scale. It is essential that Members of the Senedd continue to observe the value this type of working can deliver within a landscape




Cyswilt Amgylchedd
Cymru | Wales
Environment Link

Mark Isherwood MS/AS
Curlew
Gylfinir




Cyswilt Amgylchedd
Cymru | Wales
Environment Link

Mabon ap Gwynfor MS/AS
Welsh Clearwing Moth
Cliradain Gymreig

© Norman Lowe

and can therefore ensure Wales has an Agriculture Bill and SFS that guarantees the recovery of species. Here's more about two of our champions doing their part in ensuring that Welsh agricultural policies of the future deliver for species.



MABON AP GWYNFOR, WELSH CLEARWING MOTH CHAMPION

Mabon ap Gwynfor, Plaid Cymru MS for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, is an enthusiastic species champion who wants to further the awareness of the elusive day-flying Welsh Clearwing moth. He joined Butterfly Conservation at the RSPB Lake Vyrnwy site in July 2022 to wander amongst the scattered birch trees setting up lures, identifying emergence holes and spotting pupal cases. As a species threatened by habitat loss, changing land management and climate change, we discussed the benefits the new Welsh agricultural policies can bring species like the Welsh Clearwing - especially with the need for birch regeneration and a range of tree age classes.

Mabon suggested the need to engage the wider community on this species to ensure their populations are protected and expanded. Thank you to Mabon for his engagement on this fascinating and elusive species.

MARK ISHERWOOD, CURLEW CHAMPION

Mark Isherwood is a particularly passionate champion and is active in doing all he can to further curlew conservation in Wales. He attends Gylfinir Cymru meetings and grasps all the opportunities he can to give them support and promote their messages. He has twice visited the Cri'r Gylfinir / Curlew LIFE project near Ysbyty Ifan and Hiraethog - the second time was in June 2022 when he saw curlews busily warding potential predators off their nests and as their curlew chicks foraged for food. He also heard first-hand from Wil, one of the farmers in the project, on what he's doing to safeguard the curlews breeding on his land. Thank you to Mark and all he does for Curlew in Wales. [You can find out more about the Curlew LIFE project here.](#)



Save our Fish!

Our Salmon and Sewin Champions held a joint event in the Senedd on the decline of these fish populations in October.

By Liz Smith, Wales Environment Link

With the help of their species sponsors - Wild Fish, Afonydd Cymru and Wildlife Trusts Wales - Huw Irranca Davies and Cefin Campbell held a discussion with experts on why our salmon and sewin (also known as sea trout) are declining. You can see some highlights and clips of the event [on Twitter here](#).

Dr Nigel Milner and Professor Carlos Garcia de Leaniz outlined the causes of their declines, with habitat loss, river barriers and agricultural pollution all being significant factors. Whilst there is less we can do about factors limiting survival in the sea, we can do more to address problems in freshwater. For example, this recent editorial - '[Challenges and benefits of restoring river connectivity](#)' - sets out the benefits of dam removal. Back in May 2021, we took Huw and Cefin to see a fish barrier being removed within an Afonydd Cymru project in the River Honddu, piecing the river ecosystem back together.



At the event, we were pleased to be joined by Natural Resources Wales's (NRW) Principal Fisheries Advisor, Dr Ben Wilson, who outlined their [Action Plan for Salmon and Sea Trout](#), although, unfortunately, it's not having enough of an impact to reverse the rapid declines in these fish populations. Without a change in approach, we could quickly be facing extinction of these species. During our panel discussion, the anglers, conservationists and fishery owners in the audience emphasised their willingness to help and collaborate with all partners to turn this around.

More focus on developing and resourcing Catchment Partnerships - which result in more active management - was identified as a productive next step. NRW would then have more resources to focus on regulation, enforcement and preventing pollution, whilst

enabling delivery from partners already working within those catchments. In the meantime, NRW is progressing further in-depth, rapid analyses of existing stock data to try to identify what factors are having the most impact on the freshwater survival of salmon and sea trout.

Next steps are ongoing and NRW have confirmed that they will be reviewing the Plan of Action in 2023.

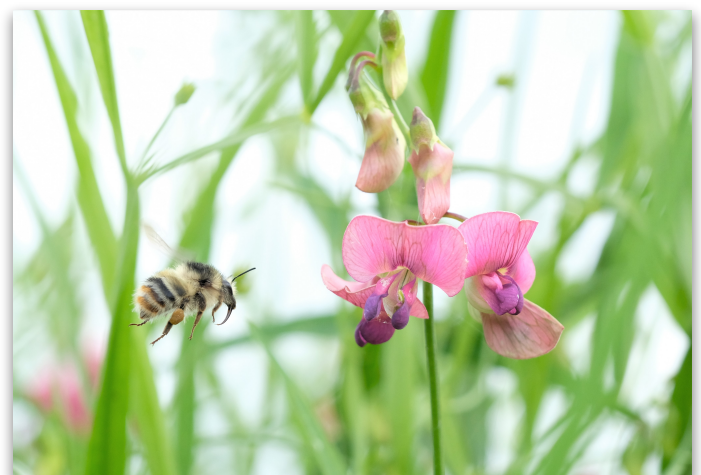


Buzzing around with Delyth!

By Darryl Cox, Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Delyth Jewell wasted no time in her first act as Species Champion for the Shril Carder Bee back in 2021, when she made an impassioned plea in the Senedd calling for Welsh Government to declare a nature emergency and to set legally binding nature recovery targets. Her calls were welcomed by Welsh Government, who agreed, making Wales one of the first countries in the world to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation for our natural world.

Following on from this, Delyth has taken time during subsequent summer recesses to visit Newport Wetlands with staff at Bumblebee Conservation Trust. These site visits gave Delyth the opportunity to see Shril Carder Bees, live in the fuzz, and to learn about the 10-year strategy to bring it back from the brink of extinction, the work required and the exciting projects in the pipeline.



At Bumblebee Conservation Trust, we have been impressed with the passion and curiosity Delyth has shown and we are so grateful to have a species champion with a genuine interest in learning about the impacts of pollinator declines and what needs to be done to help. In May 2022, Delyth used her slot in the Business Statement to raise awareness of [No Mow May](#), a Plantlife-led initiative, which aims to get everyone taking a simple action to help pollinators. Sometimes, the solutions really are in our own back gardens! She also used that moment to highlight the importance of big collaborative nature conservation projects like the upcoming Natur am Byth project to successful species conservation.

When asked what being a Species Champion means to her, Delyth said: "Being a species champion is both humbling and rewarding - it's opened my eyes up to how precious the beauty of our natural world and all our glorious species and habitats are. But it's also reinforced how precarious their survival is. I've long been a nature lover, but this role has deepened my resolve to protect and strengthen our natural environment. I'm honoured to be species champion for the Shrill Carder Bee - one of our most endangered bumblebees - and it's been such a joy to get to learn more about this phenomenal creature, and meeting other people who care about protecting it."

Already in 2023, spurred on by a [recent study](#) which indicated global pollinator declines contribute to 500,000 early deaths each year, Delyth again raised the issue of protecting pollinators in the Senedd, urging Welsh and UK Governments to prioritise pollinators through well-funded sustainable farming schemes and to tackle pesticide use.



WHAT IS THE SPECIES CHAMPION PROJECT?



Wales Environment Link works with our individual eNGO members to recruit Senedd Members as Species Champions, to sponsor at-risk wildlife. The species has to be usually found in their constituency and on some kind of endangered list, like Section 7 of the Environment Act or on an international Red List.

By signing up to be a Champion, MSs can learn about the species and what needs to be done to halt their decline. The members currently involved are: RSPB, Wildlife Trusts Wales, Wild Fish, Afonydd Cymru, Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Plantlife, Bat Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Marine Conservation Society and Whale and Dolphin Conservation.

Photo credits: Puffin, p1 by [James Armes](#) on [Unsplash](#); Orchid visit, p2 by [Lizzie Wilberforce](#); Mabon's visit, p5 by [Clare Williams](#); Curlew LIFE visit, p5 by [RSPB Cymru](#); Fish visit & event, p6-7 by [Liz Smith](#); Delyth's visit, p7-8 by [Claire Fidler](#).